Docendo Discimus

by Jen (ConsultingWriters)

Summary

*James Bond is the teacher of Defence Against the Dark Arts. Q is the new Transfiguration teacher. They are absolutely in love.*

Q is beginning teaching at Hogwarts, with the backdrop of You-Know-Who soon to return. Harry Potter is attempting an illicit relationship, Bond is lying, and Q's entire world is a secret. The Holmes brothers are on the run, and Raoul Silva is far from benign.

Or: The Order of the Phoenix, with bonus Holmes boys and a pair of not-quite secret agents.

Notes

Docendo Discimus - *we learn through teaching.*
Most aspects are canon compliant, BUT: DADA is not a cursed position, and the Arithmancy teacher has been replaced entirely.

This is entirely shipimpala's fault (again!) - http://shipimpala.tumblr.com/tagged/hp!00q. These are the guilty gifsets. I couldn't resist! Hope you like it. Jen.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Q twined around Bond’s body, nuzzling into his neck; he didn’t feel when Bond tugged away, although his thin form curved in his sleep, seeking further contact. “James?” he called out sleepily, rubbing his eyes in a childish gesture, fists loosely balled up.

“Morning,” James called back; Q blinked blearily, grappling for his glasses as he looked over at Bond. It was too early. Definitely too early. Not to mention that this was going to be one hell of a day as it was.

“Mm,” Q groaned, running hands through his absurdly bouffant hair; it refused to sit flat, no matter what he did to it, spells and potions alike doing nothing whatsoever. “Good morning, James. What time is it?”

“Time for breakfast, love,” James replied, eyebrow raised at the state of his mostly-naked boyfriend, twisted in the sheets, smiling wonkily through a slight squint as though Bond was the beautiful sight in the world. Bond scooped his wand off the sink and flicked it at the curtains, letting them fly open; he placed it back on the sink, returning his attention to shaving. There were potions that could stop him needing to shave; even Muggles had more advanced methods than soap and razor.

Bond liked it regardless. It was nice to have some semblance of tradition, almost, something that wasn’t wholly magic. In any case – when it came to sharp things near his face and throat, Bond trusted his own hands more than any magic.

The first day back of a new year. Bond was accustomed to it, Q far less so; this would be his first year as a teacher, returning to Hogwarts after only a handful of years away. Q could have worked in the Ministry easily, but had never found his niche and despised the bureaucracy; a few years had passed, working a dead-end job in Diagon Alley, before he applied for the post of Transfiguration professor.

He had met James just over two years earlier. A summer’s evening in Flourish and Blotts – a world of books, spells, theories, ideas – and in walked Bond. Q knew of him; he had replaced Q’s own Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, who had left to become a correspondent for the Daily Prophet the same year Q had left.

Bond had walked in, asked for several weighty tomes on various facets of Defensive Magic, several new releases that Q thought quite highly of. It was during payment that Bond smiled, and slid a slip of paper over with his address, saying “Just in case,” in a tone Q fell in love with almost instantly.

Q sent Scamander, his owl, barely a day later. Bond replied, and they met over Firewhiskey a few days later. “Bond. James Bond,” James had said, extending a hand. Q smiled at the odd formality, shaking back with a dip of his head.

“Q,” he said simply; Bond’s expression quirked, and Q laughed lightly. “My grandparents had a hand in naming me, and they wanted something traditional,” Q said, with a thin smirk. No amount of probing could get Q to tell Bond his full name. He just known as Q, would be known as Professor Q when he taught; his whole past, like his name, remained shrouded in mystery.

Q’s appointment in Hogwarts was one of the best moments of Bond’s life to date. They had barely managed to see one another over term-time, meeting on the safe ground of Hogsmeade when Q could get time off work, and Bond wasn’t shepherding young wizards and witches back
and forth; the idea of him living there, having so much more time - it was brilliant.

“James?” Q mumbled, as he sat up properly in bed; he stretched in tandem with his cat, Whisp, the latter mewing softly as she proceeded to spring onto the bed. Whisp had been with Q from the moment he finished Hogwarts and moved out; a slim little thing, part Metamorphmagus; Q could read her mood by the colour of her fur, today a soft, peaceful grey. “Tell me you have some Felix in there, or I swear…”

Bond ambled out the bathroom, towel slung around his waist, hair still damp from the shower; he ran his wand over it, taking mere seconds to dry into neat blond strands. “You don’t need it,” he said firmly. “Come on. They won’t eat you.”

“They could set Hinkypunks on me,” Q griped, referring to an infamous prank his own year had played on Professor Trelawney up in Divination. Q had had mild reservations over it, even then; now he was in the position of professor, it was a frankly terrifying prospect. He hated Hinkypunks. Whisp mewed in sympathy, little head nudging Q’s palm. “I’m only a few years older than them, they’ll take the piss…”

Bond laughed, scooping the worried young man into his arms. “Q. Calm down. It'll be fine,” he said calmly, pressing a soft kiss to his forehead. “Let’s get you something to eat, hmm? Pumpkin juice, some fruit, Merlin forbid. Oh, and I have a present for you,” Bond continued, flicking his wand; a cupboard drew sprang open, a soft accio sending a slim package flying towards them. Bond caught it deftly, presented it to Q.

Q raised an eyebrow, unwrapping it manually; Q was only twenty, had only spent three years with freedom to use magic as he wanted, whenever he wanted. It took a while for it to become habit; Bond used magic for practically everything, these days. It didn’t matter: Bond was finding it ridiculously endearing, seeing Q rip open the packing like an excitable Muggle.

Inside was an Everlasting Sugar Quill. They were quite difficult to get hold of; they weren’t widely distributed yet, and relatively expensive as compared to the normal and Deluxe versions. Bond had spent a long while tracking one down, for Q's notorious sweet tooth. He could suck on the end of it for as long as he liked, get his sugar fix, and nobody would be any the wiser.

“Thank you,” Q laughed, tugging it out the box and giving it an experimental lick; his smile was smug, ridiculously contented. As he placed it back, Bond watched his expression close in again on itself, forehead contracting. “James, I’m worried.”

“Are you going to be like this all day?” Bond asked wearily; if he’d known, he would have made them travel in on the Hogwarts Express that day, rather than getting there early. He’d thought being in Hogwarts before it was throttled with students would be helpful. “Calm down. Really. You know nothing much happens at the feast, anyway.”

Q nodded, padding towards the bathroom, abandoning sheets; Bond watched appreciatively. Q noticed, and arched an eyebrow cheekily, twisting so Bond got a decent view. “Enjoying yourself?” he asked, winking. Bond unapologetically nodded, eliciting a tinkling laugh from his lover, smothered as Bond covered Q’s lips with his own.

It would be alright.

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Q couldn’t help but blanch at the sheer volume of students in the Great Hall. It was very different, being a professor; as a student, it was possible to vanish into the melee. Now, Q was completely exposed, sat with the other teachers who were invariably twice his age, and far more experienced.
“This will not end well,” Q murmured to James, ducking as an enchanted candle soared a little too close to his head. “They’re definitely going to set Hinkypunks on me, and probably the Weasley twins too, just out of pure sadism…”

“You’re being ridiculous,” Bond breathed back, hand brushing Q’s; they didn’t want to be too open about their relationship – no need to cause undue gossip – but Q needed support in that moment, so Bond supplied it regardless. Nobody seemed to care, in any case.

Q was a very interesting shade of faded green by the time Professor Dumbledore introduced him as the new Tranfiguration professor; Q stood, gave a small wave with as much confidence as he could muster, and retreated again, a hail of polite applause echoing around him. He could hold his own in duels, was a very accomplished wizard; yet place him in a room full of teenagers and adolescents, and all his confidence evaporated near-instantly.

He was replacing Professor McGonagall as Tranfiguration teacher, while she took over History of Magic: Professor Binns had, to universal shock, decided to go on sabbatical. It had been pointed out that he was dead, but apparently, that wasn’t about to deter him.

Professor McGonagall had an extensive knowledge of History of Magic, and was infinitely more interesting – and observant – than Binns had been. Given the modern developments in Transfiguration in the previous decade, Dumbledore decided that her replacement should be younger, on the cutting edge of magic; Q had managed an excellent interview, demonstrating extensive knowledge of Transfiguration as a branch of magic, and a keen interest in magical developments.

He was offered the job on the spot.

Thankfully, Dumbledore didn’t make too much of Q’s introduction. He was named, gestured at, and allowed to sit down again almost instantly, praying for the ground to open as every eye landed on him.

“Well done,” Bond muttered to him, over the applause; Q flushed very delicately, making Bond grin outright. When all this was done, they could return to the peace of Bond’s rooms; Q had introduced himself to all the teachers throughout the day, culminating in a final meeting with Minerva. She had remained the Deputy Headmistress despite changing subjects, was responsible for staff and student welfare.

Q had said nothing about James whatsoever, quite carefully, quite deliberately. Yet at the end of their interview: “You can move into James’s rooms permanently, the house elves are happy to transfer your belongings; you’re not some student in an illicit relationship, Professor Q.”

Q was relatively certain he’d blushed all the way to his toes, but he was hardly going to check. He needed to source some kind of potion that would stop him ever blushing again, it was getting ridiculous.

The feast went without hitches; the Sorting came and went, a collection of students all bandying together looking about as frightened as Q felt. Merlin, he remembered his Sorting, filed neatly away in Ravenclaw, wanting the ground to open then as now, as he sat in front of a room full of strangers and was openly labelled a geek. Bond was, of course, a born and bred Gryffindor; all pride and arrogance and unswerving loyalty.

Q smiled as he thought of an eleven-year-old Bond, strutting to the chair, smiling a slightly more naïve smile than Q had ever seen. He could envisage Bond meeting the other Gryffindors, unfazed, confident and strong and electrically alive. The thought was strangely welcome.
The feast ended at a respectable hour, as always; the teachers waited for the students to vacate the Hall before following suit. The teachers had their own celebration, a self-congratulation for getting through the week, on the Friday evening – for now, everybody dispersed, preparing for their first classes in the morning.

Bond was caught up speaking to Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher; Q watched for a brief moment, ambling out of the familiar Hall towards his rooms. Unlike his fellow professors, who preferred disappearing through the doors behind their High Table, Q liked the scenic tour; the sight of the Entrance Hall, utilising his long-held knowledge of passages and passwords and corridors. Hogwarts was one of the most tangibly magic places in the world, and Q wanted to revel in every inch of the place.

“Good evening,” drawled a voice behind him, entirely recognisable. Q turned, feeling a slight shudder of dislike creep down his spine.

Professor Silva – Raoul – had been Q’s Arithmancy teacher when he was at Hogwarts. Then, as now, Q found him an exceptionally unpleasant, slimy human being; his hand, reaching to the small of Q’s back, made Q jump.

Q nodded, pulled away from anywhere near Silva, hand twitching over his wand spasmodically. There were too many rumours about Silva – problems with students, inappropriate behaviour, blatant favouritism, general lack of professionalism. His predecessor had left Hogwarts in odd circumstances, Silva’s appointment more due to a lack of competition than anything in his favour.

True, he was excellent at Arithmancy – something they had in common. Q had always found the subject appallingly easy, the boredom making him complacent. Silva had taken an interest, given him extra work, allowed him to work on side-projects and greatly helped his development in the subject. They had been close, in a way, and only age and distance had made him start to understand precisely how uncomfortable a fact that was/

“A good appointment, Albus chose you well,” Silva purred, still too close, apparently unconcerned with notions of personal space. “I look forward to seeing you in action, my dear Q.”

Q couldn’t help the somewhat reflexive snipe in his answer: “Not ‘yours’, but thank you for the sentiment,” he replied, tone sharp but managing to stay polite, avoiding too-blatant antagonism.

“Clever boy,” Silva murmured - a favourite nickname of his, spanning back to Q’s first Arithmancy classes - and, with smile spreading like an oil slick, wiggled his fingers in a quiet farewell as he sauntered away.

“Creep,” muttered a painting of a 16th Century nun, named Matilda, if Q recalled correctly; he hadn’t spent as much time lingering in this part of the school, was less familiar with the paintings. Matilda was quite young, and due to the position of her picture so close to Great Hall, was up to date with slang, colloquialisms and - most vitally - gossip.

Q didn’t care much about the latter, as he watched Silva slither away from whence he came. “Tell me about it,” he muttered to Matilda, who tutted disconsolately, shaking her head.

“Not to worry,” she said, tone businesslike. “I’ll get the word out, keep an eye on him for you. If he tries anything out of line, you’ll be the first to know.”

Q smiled; many of the portraits had been onside for a while now, his all-seeing allies around the school. Even the paintings that didn’t know him well knew of him. “If there’s ever anything I can do for you…” he offered; he had helped out a few portraits over the years. Distractions for Vanessa on the ninth floor to steal mead from the vicars on the third, mending their frames, tiny
fixes in paintwork; as his magic improved, he was able to help further. By the time he had left Hogwarts, the paintings adored him.

Matilda raised a hand, curtailing his speech. “Run along, your gentlemen friend will be waiting on you,” she said, only the vaguest smile playing the corner of her painted expression. Q chuckled slightly; only the portraits and ghosts ever referred to Bond as a ‘gentleman-friend’. It was nice, in an odd way; it felt comfortable, accepted.

Q traipsed up to his and Bond’s rooms, saluting the Bloody Baron when he passed, keeping a very wary ear out for Peeves. Peeves was lethal enough at the best of times; Q, a very young new teacher, would be his ideal target.

The portrait over his and Bond’s rooms greeted him delightedly. “Hello there, dear,” the motherly-looking woman trilled; her name was Beth, her portrait only a couple of hundred years old. She leaned forward, making her head disproportionately large in the foreground; a flaw of her artist, most likely “How was it, hmm?”

Q shrugged. “Could have been worse,” he said, quite honestly. It was his first classes that would be the real test. “Docendo discimus, by the way. Has Whisp been alright?”

“Haven’t heard a peep. James is already in there,” she smiled, with a lascivious wink that a woman technically several hundred years old should not have pulled off. Q shook his head slightly, dislodging the image as he stepped into his and James’s rooms.

Whisp gave a loud, emphatic miaow the moment she saw him. “Yes, I know,” Q smirked, as the cat circled his ankles; he looked up at Bond, lying over the bed, reading glasses perched on his nose as he skimmed through a book on magical theory. “Hello there, professor.”

“Hello indeed,” Bond replied with a wry smirk. “What took you so long? Trick staircase?”

Q raised an eyebrow. “I only left a couple of years ago, there’s not much can fool me,” he told Bond with mock strictness, elegant finger tapping him gently on the tip of his nose. “No. Ran into Silva.”

Bond’s expression clouded. Q’s dislike of Silva was matched – if not entirely surpassed – by Bond. Bond detested the man, deemed him untrustworthy and arrogant; Q happened to agree. “What happened?” Bond asked quietly, coldly.

Q shrugged. “Nothing. Just unpleasant. Congratulated me in on the job in his usual inimitable manner,” he explained, nose slightly wrinkled with disdain. “It’s unpleasant, but benign. Matilda’s put out a watch around the portraits, they’ll keep an eye on things.”

“Remind me again why the portraits love you?” Bond asked with quiet curiosity; Q scooped up Whisp, stroking the cat’s head lightly, his smile innocent and soft.

“Hmm?” Q asked, distracted. “Oh. That. I don’t know, really…. Whisp, retract the claws, there you go, better… I got lost at one point, started talking to Miss Otterworth, on the second floor – you know, the one with all the rhododendrons? Then there was a Peeves-related incident…”

“… isn’t there always…”

“… and Sir Cadogan, the witch from the Astronomy tower, they helped… I just, I don’t know,” Q shrugged. Still cradling Whisp in one arm, he Summoned the cat food, pouring it with a wand flick; his aim was still a little off in charmwork, cat food spilling across the floor. Q cursed quietly, shifting the pieces of cat food individually back into the bowl, gently placing Whisp in front of it.
“They’re all trapped in their paintings. I think after several hundred years, the same voices must get boring too. Aguamenti,” he muttered at Whisp’s water bowl; there was another cursing invocation of Merlin’s beard, before Q cast a quick scourgify to mop up the spill. “I never saw a reason not to.”

Bond couldn’t help but smile; Q truly had no conception of his own uniqueness. With the exception of the slightly batty, nobody took the time to speak to the portraits, notice the house elves; Q was a long way from ‘batty’, He simply saw the world in a different way, and didn’t care what anybody thought of that.

“So. What’s your first class?” Bond asked; they had both received their timetables earlier that day, but in the chaos of preparations for the year, hadn’t really considered them in detail.

Q tugged it out of his pocket. “Gryffindor and Slytherin, third years,” he read, with a sinking feeling in his stomach. Oh, Merlin’s pants, that was unfortunate.

Bond winced in sympathy. Gryffindor and Slytherin in a shared class was bad enough; it added insult to injury that they were third years. The thirds were top of the lower school, and believed themselves invincible – their final year before the work influx of OWLS began in earnest. Plus, most of them had just hit teenagedom, and were consequently hormonal nightmares.

“I don’t know who you upset to deserve that,” Bond commented; he took a glance at his own, already making notes over it to indicate which would be the more difficult classes, which were comparatively easier. His opening lesson was a dream: “I’ve got a sixth year NEWT class, mostly Hufflepuffs in this set.”

Q gave an exaggerated moan, tapping the timetable with his wand as though it could change the inevitable. All he managed to do was change the font to something horribly reminiscent of Muggle ‘Comic Sans’, turn it neon pink, and slightly singe the corner.

He dumped the wand and timetable both on the table above Whisp; they could be dealt with in the morning. Bond watched with quiet amusement as Q crossed to the four-poster bed and collapsed forward, face first, with a muffled, resigned moan of what sounded distinctly like hinkypunks.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Shipimpala, you are still a living god. Really guys, go look at the gifsets.

Q begins to settle in to his role, and other matters begin to unravel... and by the way, trying to get Hagrid's voice correct is surprisingly tricky! Hopefully I've done it correctly, but oh my god. Have also bastardised some Latin, for spell-related purposes; I haven't done Latin for years, so if the endings are inaccurate, don't shoot me please.

For the record: Whisp is named after Kennilworthy Whisp, author of "Quidditch Through the Ages". Scamander is from Newt Scamander's "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them". They were both released as companion mini-books several years ago for comic relief; I loved them, stole the names for sentimental reasons.

The third years were nowhere near as bad as Q had suspected, and there were no Hinkypunks in sight.

Q had taken over a classroom of his own; Minerva still preferred her own classroom, so History of Magic had been relocated. Q, therefore, took over an abandoned classroom on the fourth floor, only a few corridors over from Flitwick, in Charms.

A deliberately spacious room; a side-cupboard held a small menagerie of rodents for various levels of Transfiguration, tended by Hagrid, who took care of all creatures on the grounds. “I nev’r knew yeh were with Professor Bond,” he said, with a nudged elbow that nearly knocked Q over. “Shoulda notic’d afore now.”

Q, trying to catch his breath again, just nodded, smiled, shrugged; Hagrid shot him a sympathetic smile. “Firs’ class?” he asked, large hand reaching out to pat Q’s arm. “Don’ you fret, jus’ be yerself.”

“That’s what I’m worried about,” Q said, very quietly. Bond had tried to ply him with excessive quantities of pumpkin juice, even offering Q some Butterbeer, or even some of Madam Rosmerta’s Mead – the most intoxicating substance Q had ever come across – to calm him down.

Really, the only thing that could make this situation worse was attempting to conduct it while drunk. Bond settled for surreptitiously spiking Q’s pumpkin juice with a Calming Draft, and hoped that would be sufficient.

“Settle down, everybody,” Q said simply, watching the teens split off into factions, as they always did. Some of the students were vaguely recognisable; Q had been in his seventh year when these students began. Q had never been a very noticeable figure in Hogwarts, and didn’t want to be; he won awards for his casting, but was otherwise near-invisible.

He didn't recognise anyone of the handful of Gryffindors, who congregated themselves on the left. The Slytherins segregated themselves on the right hand side, a motley crew; the usual handful of thugs flanked the deviously intelligent ones, who settled smugly, watching Q with un-tempered
scepticism.

Nobody was paying any real attention. Q tilted his head to one side, glancing up at the chandelier above the classroom; he took a breath, murmuring a delicate, trilling incantation.

The entire class fell silent as the room became utterly awash with butterflies; the metal of the chandelier seemed to melt, fragments mutating into bronze and gunmetal-coloured butterflies, in a storm of motion for a suspended moment.

Q smiled softly at the sight, not watching his class, quiet and contemplative. He had their attention now; he lifted his wand, a deft swirl pushing the butterflies back up towards where the chandelier had been, two sharper motions and a murmured *reficio* turning the butterflies back to brass and wrought metal.

“Are you all quite finished?” he asked lightly; the class was utterly silent, stunned. It was a piece of masterly Transfiguration; trying to reform multiple creatures back to a single item was exceptionally advanced. Nobody said a word. “Good. Now. My name is Professor Q, I will be teaching you this year, as I’m sure you have gathered. I would like a demonstration of your current capabilities. Snufflifors should do it, I don’t mind what books you use.”

Nobody moved.

“Now, if you would,” Q said, with a slight edge of anger to his tone; the reaction was immediate. Q couldn’t help but smirk at the number of students who glanced upwards at the chandelier, as though expecting it to disintegrate again.

This, this was manageable. The class wound up, the year showing a great variety of skills; a young Slytherin boy showed himself to be surprisingly adept, while another Gryffindor girl managed to Transfigure – and indeed Untransfigure – her textbook, with only the slightest growth of fur to show for it.

He awarded Miss Erith, and Mr Rivers, fifteen points each for their constituent Houses. He set them all work to explore, and research, Animagi; Q spent a few minutes at the end of the class fixing the various abominable Transfigurative disasters – his favourite being a mouse that quoted Bathilda Bagshot, from one of the Gryffindors – before letting them go.

“Ha,” he said exhaustedly to himself, and started preparing for his next class.

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Q got himself into the Great Hall for dinner, by that point completely knackered. Classes had gone reasonably well, on the whole, and Q was fairly confident that he’d made a good impression on the students. Hopefully enough that they wouldn’t try to actively undermine him, either.

Bond was late, dealing with a problem in an earlier class. An unruly Boggart, by all accounts; Q spent an absentminded moment wondering what it was that Bond feared, before entering a discussion on the merits of different broomsticks with Madam Hooch. Rolanda was an intimidating witch to those who didn’t know her, but had something of a soft spot for Q.

He could feel Silva watching him, dark eyes settled on the back of his head, lingering.

Madam Hooch had to leave after ten minutes or so; there were Quidditch problems already, House teams getting very territorial over the pitch. Q had always enjoyed Quidditch, although not at active participant himself; Bond had been Keeper and Captain, in his day – Q had only seen him fly once, but he had been truly excellent.
In her place, Q tried – and failed – to open a conversation with Severus Snape. Snape had been Q’s Potions master when he attended Hogwarts, but given that Q had little to no natural talent for Potions, Snape consequently had (and apparently still) loathed him. His OWL had come back with an Outstanding, but that was more due to constant work than any natural aptitude.

Snape was, to Q, a very frightening human being. To Bond, he was the epitome of everything Dark; triggering Bond to rant about Snape was one of Q’s more enjoyable pastimes.

When Q attempted to open a conversation, Snape just sent him a look of absolute, raw contempt. Q sank back again, focusing his interests on a cream cake, prodding at it absentmindedly.

“I heard about your demonstration,” Minerva told him, seating herself in Madame Hooch’s vacated chair, serving herself soup from a deep dish in the centre of the table. “You had quite the effect on the third years.”

Q had no idea how to react, so he shrugged. “It made them stop talking,” he explained; the cream cake finally gave up under the prodding onslaught, sogging cream out over the plate. Behind Minerva, Severus stood, striding out into the Great Hall towards a congregation of students.

Q felt, rather than saw, the hourglass of rubies shift – Severus taxed all of them ten or so points apiece, Q sighing at Snape’s predictable habit of being unreasonably harsh towards non-Slytherin. Quite why the man taught was beyond Q’s understanding, given that he seemed to hate every single possible aspect of doing so.

Bond, meanwhile, yanked a chair from the other end of the table, scraping it loudly before throwing himself into it, next to Q. “Bad day?” Q said, with a faint smirk. He exchanged a look with Minerva, who just raised a subtle, mocking eyebrow at Q.

“Apparently, in the current climate, Boggarts are a bad idea,” Bond said angrily, stabbing violently at a chicken leg. “Class full of hysterical kids with their own brand of You-Know-Who floating around, they all start shrieking, and I’m dealing with my own worst bloody fears while they’re all sobbing. The class then descended into a collection of over whether or not You-Know-Who even is back. Nightmare of a day.”

Q placed a hand over Bond’s, exchanging a quiet smirk with Minerva. “I’m sorry,” he said soothingly, gently rubbing a thumb over the back of Bond’s hand. “Easy lesson on Acromantula coming up, I’m guessing.”

“Third years,” Bond muttered like a curse. “Any Firewhiskey around?”

“Not at the table,” Minerva burred at him, standing elegantly; Q watched her and Bond exchange rather weighty glances, confusion lining his face for a long moment as Minerva left again, barely minutes after appearing.

Q watched Bond for a moment. “What was…?”

Bond simply shook his head, effectively ending that line of conversation. Q logged it somewhere at the back of his mind for further analysis, further investigation; he had noticed little moments, several of the teachers exchanging looks, subtle nods. Q knew people, could read people; there was something happening amongst the staff, something he didn’t yet understand.

Something that Bond wasn’t telling him.

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Q met Harry Potter the next day.
The fifth years were all in various stages of mild-to-severe panic, given that they were in the OWL year. Q was given exactly ten seconds of peace before being accosted by Hermione Granger, who started bleating in a way that could only be described as manic, about Tranfiguring vertebrates, the likelihood of any human transfiguration in the practical assessment, and asking if she could get every practical past paper on the subject.

Q had been warned about Miss Granger. Seeing her in the flesh was quite another matter; she was dramatically overenthusiastic, to the point of being a touch frightening.

To be honest, Q had been her, once, albeit a far quieter version. He didn’t mind. He found himself quite fond of her, could see her being an excellent protégée. “I will find you every piece of information you could possibly need. Beyond that, I would seriously suggest you calm down, or you will burn out long before the exams themselves. Settle down, if you would.”

Hermione smiled, nodded, bushy hair bobbing with the movement. “Thank you, Professor.”

Q raised an eyebrow, nodded at the spare seat next to a kid that could only be a Weasley, bright ginger hair and freckled complexion self-explanatory. Next to him was Harry Potter, a young man trying exceptionally hard to not shoot glances at the Slytherin across the room.

Intriguingly, the Slytherin was just about failing not to shoot glances straight back.

Q smirked to himself. “Alright,” he said loudly, a quiet falling over the room. “Who knows anything about the Gemino spell?”

Granger and a few others lifted their hands. Q nodded. Not exactly what he had been hoping for.

“Did anybody read their textbooks, or were you expecting to be mysteriously able to perform OWL-level magic without study?” he asked rhetorically. Thankfully, nobody decided it would be clever to reply; the Slytherin Harry Potter had been looking at seemed on the verge, so Q quickly moved on.

He Summoned a collection of goblets, letting them settle on each desk, one for each person. He took one for himself, examining the battered metal; metal was easiest to replicate, when starting out. “The aim is to create a second, precise replica of the goblet in front of you,” he explained; a soft murmur of geminio, and a second goblet appeared in midair.

Q watched it contemplatively, a slight rotation of his wand keeping it airborne, circling. “The copies will be tangible, precise. They will also vanish, after a certain point; you cannot bring items into being and expect them to remain there. The atoms can’t hold the energy. Gradually, the energy fades,” Q continued, letting the bonds weaken, the energy held in the spell trickling away, his final words uttered as the item vanished: “and the replicated item simply disappears.”

The class seemed mostly interested. Miss Granger watched with absolutely rapt attention, her wandless hands already shadowing the movements he’d made. Mr Potter was scribbling in a notebook, Weasley gazing out the window towards the Quidditch pitch vacantly.

“Find Geminio in your textbooks, read it carefully; if you do not understand how the item is formed, you are unlikely to be able to channel your magic into creating a duplicate. When you feel you have some understanding, attempt the spell for me.”

Q leaned back against his desk, and watched the class.

Naturally, the arrogant types tried it far too early; a boy, apparently a Mr Thomas, came managed to explode his goblet in spectacular style, spraying shards of metal shrapnel across the classroom.
Q caught the half-exploded goblet in a type of bubble, a tricky little charm Flitwick had taught Q in his NEWT year; letting it down once the shrapnel had stilled, he muttered *reparo*, and told Mr Thomas to be slightly less enthusiastic with his wand movements.

“… don’t know why we’re listening to him, barely out of Hogwarts…”

“… my father is outraged, we should have *experienced* teachers, and not one that’s only been hired because of a relationship with…”

Q sighed to himself. He had rather seen this coming, but it didn’t stop the experience being somewhat unpleasant.

Standing in front of the Slytherin’s desk, he looked down at the very *singular* goblet, that showed no signs of being replicated in the near future. “Mr…?”

“Malfoy,” the kid retorted, all smug smirk and slicked-back blond hair. Ah. Well, that explained matters. His father probably *was* outraged, complaining to Board of Governors, picking holes in Q’s aptitude wherever he could. He would need to be careful, with this one.

“Ah. Mr Malfoy. I’m assuming, given that your conversation has very little to do with the class at hand, that you are capable of demonstrating the spell to the class?” he asked mildly.

Across the room, Harry Potter had started staring unashamedly, forgetting that his wand was still in his hand; the metal started to glow faintly. Q could see Miss Granger correct the mistake out the corner of his eye, and made a mental note to award her several house points simply for making his life easier.

Mr Malfoy, meanwhile, had gone faintly red. Q stood patiently, expression non-confrontational, merely waiting.

The attempt was laughable; the goblet split messily in half, one half taking inadvertent flight. Nobody of the Slytherins dared laugh; the Gryffindors, however, all started hooting. Humiliating Draco Malfoy was always a fun experience for them, given his propensity for arrogance.

“That’s quite enough,” Q said waringly, letting silence fall as he reconstructed the goblet. “Now, Mr Malfoy. I would suggest concentrating a little more, if you would be so kind. It would be rather a pity if you were to fail your OWL on a spell like this, would it not?”

When he recounted the story in the staffroom later that day, he practically received a standing ovation.

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Q pretended not to notice. In doing so, everything became unavoidably obvious.

Bond was hiding something. Evidently something large, something important, and something which involved quite a large circuit of people: the teachers, almost of all of them, and many more outside of Hogwarts. The owls were evidence enough of that; Bond’s owl, Myrmidon, was almost never at Hogwarts.

The world was turning to hell. Almost everybody was aware, on some level, that You-Know-Who was waiting in the shadows, mustering his forces; the Triwizard Tournament had made that patently clear. The media tried to quash it, but there was no denying that things were happening. Dark forces were stirring.

“James, why won’t you tell me?” Q asked quietly, one night. He knew Bond was awake; he was
a snorer, when truly asleep. Whenever Bond was entirely quiet, he was thinking about something, outside of Q’s reach.

Bond’s hand reached out blindly, finding Q. “I can’t,” he said plainly, and refused to further elaborate on the matter.

The first week passed pleasantly enough: Q settled into a routine, adapting to teaching without too much difficulty. His students varied from truly brilliant – Hermione Granger being a true, shining example – and disastrous, in the case of the hapless Neville Longbottom. Q had found an odd fondness for the fifth years and first years, who were probably the better of the various years across Hogwarts. The seventh years were arrogant and hysterical over their NEWTs, the thirds were just hell to discipline, the seconds just proving a little uninspiring.

Halfway through the second week, the change that had been looming on the horizon suddenly settled with a horrible, spine-crawling giggle.

Q dozily settled at breakfast in the morning, craving tea. He was one of very few in the school who liked, or drank tea; the House Elves were more than happy to supply him regardless.

He cradled his Earl Grey, watching the new arrival out of the corner of his eye. The whole school had been told to come to the Great Hall that morning, and he could only surmise it had something to do with the toad-like, pink woman sitting next to Dumbledore. Silva sat on her other side, the pair exchanging obsequious conversation that Q couldn’t quite hear.

Bond was unnaturally still next to him, body drawn taught with tension. Minerva looked like she was being force-fed Flobberworms, although her gaze never once flicked to the woman. Dumbledore seemed quite collected, amicably passing around toast and marmalade to the teachers around him, including the pink toad woman with the repulsive laugh.

The owls flitted around in circles; Q’s Daily Prophet came within inches of his breakfast, his hand darting out with frightening speed to thwart it mid-fall. MINISTRY SEEKS EDUC…

Q’s eyes narrowed, flipping it open just as Dumbledore stood; he abandoned the Prophet as silence washing out over the hall. “Thank you all for your attendance this morning; I know you will all be very busy with your new homework assignments,” Dumbledore said, voice carrying easily over the hall, blue eyes twinkling over his half-moon glasses. “Now, as some of you may know already, the Ministry of Magic recently passed Educational Decree Twenty-Three. Miss Dolores Umbridge will be joining us here at Hogwarts, in the role of Hogwarts High Inquisitor. She will be monitoring classes, and…”

“Hem hem.”

Q blinked, raised an eyebrow, as the ridiculously pink woman coughed emphatically, interrupting Dumbledore for the first time in Q’s memory. Dumbledore glanced at her very briefly, before settling back in his seat, rapt with attention.

“It is a pleasure to be back in Hogwarts,” the woman trilled, her voice more irritating than her cardigan which really, was quite an achievement. “It has been so very long since I was last here. I am very much looking forward to meeting you all in person. Now. The Ministry of Magic has always considered…”

Q listened, dread coiling in the pit of his stomach. The Ministry of Magic, essentially placing their very own spy within Hogwarts; Q glanced over the Daily Prophet while Umbridge reached
monotony, his body beginning to echo Bond's, fear climbing up his spine.

This was not good.

Chapter End Notes

Teehee. Hang on to your wands, ladies and gentlemen.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Hello! Umbridge is a truly horrible character... anyway. Thank you to the (surprisingly large) number of people who are enjoying this - I hope you continue to!

As always, for shipimpala, and her amazing gifsets - hope this improves your day, my dear. Jen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There was a certain degree of tense discomfort that came with the sudden emergence of Dolores Umbridge. The woman was poisonous, unpleasant in a very visceral sense. The duplicity was startling; the childish, frilly laugh that was utterly mirthless, entirely calculating.

Transfiguration was spared an inspection for the day. Q, instead, found himself watching the burgeoning romance between Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter with immense interest. They seemed so implausible, as far as couples went; the diehard Gryffindor, the boy who had seen the return of You-Know-Who, pairing himself off with a Pureblood Slytherin.

They passed notes, hilariously unsubtle; Q let them get a few through, before asking for spell demonstrations. They both simmered down; Potter demonstrated a fairly good Geminio transfiguration on another goblet – there were two, although the second was a little misshapen – and Malfoy’s was nigh on perfect. He awarded Slytherin five points for the demonstration, and let them continue pretending to be subtle from opposite ends of the room.

If it progressed any further, Q was resolved to have a quiet word on the subject, probably with Potter. It wasn’t necessarily tactful, starting a relationship of that nature in the current climate. Q was worried enough about himself and Bond, given Umbridge’s notoriously intolerant stand on deviances of species and sexuality.

He had voiced his concerns to James in the quiet safety of their room, body twined around Bond’s, staring into the darkness while Whisp slept happily on top of them both.

Bond pressed kisses to his dark hair, and promised that they would be alright. Q wanted, very badly, to believe him. Bond was still refusing to tell Q about whatever he was hiding.

Q was finding it difficult to sleep.

The class assessments didn’t begin until nearly two weeks after Umbridge’s appointment; she spent the time prior to that scouting corridors, preying on inadvertent students for comments, ostensibly getting a ‘feel’ for the environment.

When they finally began, Flitwick was the first victim; a class of his first thing in the morning began with Umbridge in the corner, with a clipboard. She intended to assess the teachers across the different year groups, to compile an ‘accurate portrait’ of teaching style and efficiency.

The teachers – barring Silva, who quietly purred that she was finally addressing the teaching issues in Hogwarts – all discussed in low, angry tones.
Q asked Filius quietly, when there was some relative peace in the staff room, what had gone on; apparently Umbridge had been unpleasant, but basically benign. A few students were questioned, but that was about it. Q felt an honest surge of true relief; Flitwick, at his size, slotted neatly into Umbridge’s intolerances. If he had survived, Q mused, he would have no problems.

The paperwork began to mount, meanwhile. He had four classes a day, on average, all producing homework and spells and essays; he found himself marking at every possible occasion, sucking the end of his sugar quill as he corrected basic mistakes like spelling, and more complex errors of magical theory.

Thankfully, he had followed an extremely good professor; McGonagall had taught her years well, meaning there were no worrying deficits in knowledge or understanding. The first years – most of whom were still vaguely frightened to be holding their own wands, let alone use them – were the greatest challenge, and yet one of Q’s favourite classes. Introducing eleven-year-olds to magic for the first time. Dazzling them, and yet enticing them, showing them a world. It was the best part of teaching.

In fairness, it was not all perfect; the Weasley twins were clearly up to something, and were traditionally a nightmare to teach. They were barely three years younger than him, in their final year, and really didn’t care for classes.

To be quite honest, the fact that they were quiet during his class was more frightening than if they’d exploded tadpoles. Q found himself just waiting for them to try something.

Bond just laughed. “They’re taking pity on you, Q,” he said honestly, when Q mentioned it; Bond was at their desk, spreading papers, planning lessons for the coming day. “The Weasley twins are mischief-makers, but wouldn’t harm anyone. Undermining you at this stage would just be cruel. They’ll wait until you’re strong enough. Then you’re in trouble.”

“Do they… in your classes?”

Bond smirked, nodded. “Firecrackers today; I jinxed them, caused one hell of an explosion. Clever bit of Charming, that,” he said, shaking his head at the memory. “For two that haven’t concentrated in lessons for as long as I’ve known them, they are surprisingly adept with some aspects of magic.”

“Not Transfiguration,” Q noted with quiet irony, petting Whisp absentmindedly. “They’re doing NEWTs, supposedly, and can barely Transfigure a teacup.”

“I doubt they’re the type to need much Transfiguration,” Bond pointed out, swearing slightly under his breath as he scribbled out a note. “I think they’ve got plans elsewhere. And if I’m not very much mistaken, they’re going to be rather successful.”

“Oh?”

Bond turned away from his papers for a moment, twisting over to look at Q with a mildly concerned expression. “The firecrackers, some of what they’re working with – it requires money, and they seem to have it. I think they’ve got a loan from somewhere. They’ve never been reticent about their desire to open a joke shop. I expect they’ll spend the year testing their products in their ideal target environment, and open once they’ve finished here.”

“I suppose,” Q said, nodding as he thought it through; the Weasley twins were doing a relatively poor job of hiding the beetle eyes, spleens, various rare potions ingredients, not to mention a decent amount of Zonko’s products that he had seen them dismembering under their desks. Some of it was still in his desk, having been confiscated. “That Umbridge woman has started
assessments, by the way. Do you know when yours is?"

Bond shook his head, expression contracting in disgust. “Nothing yet, but I believe Minerva is being targeted tomorrow. Umbridge should not be in the school, the Ministry’s put pressure on Dumbledore – and of course, sent the most objectionable woman in the Ministry. Utterly repulsive woman. The anti-werewolf legislation she’s passed… it’s disgusting, I have friends whose lives are being ruined.”

“You know werewolves?” Q asked, interest piqued. “Who?”

Bond glanced up, expression curious. “You must know of Remus Lupin?” he asked; Remus had taught Ancient Runes, on recommendation from Dumbledore himself. Bond knew he would have preferred Defence Against the Dark Arts, but Lupin badly needed a job, and he had taken Runes to NEWT-level.

Honestly, Bond had been fond of him, werewolf or not. It was an illness, and with Wolfsbane, perfectly manageable. Bond had been livid when Lupin resigned.

Q had never met the man, had finished at Hogwarts before Lupin started. Naturally, he knew the stories – along with the chaos of rumours around Sirius Black, and Dementor attacks – but didn’t personally know the man. The legislation however was disgusting, outright bigotry.

“Poor man,” Q murmured, annotating one of Miss Granger’s essays on the energy displacements required to maintain a replicated object indefinitely, other hand still curled in Whisp’s fur. Her fur was, today, a sleek black; the cat had picked up on the aura around the school, mimicking it in the darkness of her shape.

Bond nodded. “Indeed,” he said quietly, not seeming to notice Q’s eyes linger on him.

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Q wheeled around from Luna, taking in the sight of Dolores Umbridge, perched on a stool in the corner of the room. “… hello,” he said uncomfortably, rather alarmed at how in the hell he hadn’t noticed her come in.

Her smile was like molten treacle, contorting her already amphibious expression. “I do hope you received my note, detailing the date and time of your inspection?” she said breathily, giving Q an almost irrepressible urge to jinx her on the spot. He had received no such note. He had a subtle, crawling sensation that she had intentionally not sent him one.

Q smiled regardless. “Not as such, but you are, of course, welcome,” he said benevolently, before
turning to his class. “Simmer down, everybody. Now. I’m expecting a full house of essays on the basic three subcategories of cross-species Transfiguration – if you could retrieve them for me?”

The class all stirred. Q Summoned the scrolls in an easy movement, capturing the lot mid-flight and directing them into a stack on his desk. “You will receive your marks next lesson. As for the practical application, could you – Mr Williams – retrieve the box of snails currently beneath your desk, and distribute one to each member of the class. Don’t look so alarmed; invertebrates of that size are hardly likely to eat you now, are they Miss Waters?”

Q smiled, settling the class, hyper-aware of the scribbling in the background. He briefly set them the task of changing the snails into slugs, and allowed them to attempt practical application.

“You are a new member of staff, yes?” Umbridge trilled by Q’s ear; he turned to her, fixing an almost-genuine smile in place.

“Indeed,” he confirmed, keeping an eye on the class; Ravenclaws were just gifts to teach, given that they were studious academics – or at least, visionary human beings. Those with minds a step different from the norm. Most were making valiant attempts to will a snail shell out of being, and even intermittently succeeding.

The Hufflepuffs lacked some concentration, but had willpower in spades. A blonde girl tearfully stared at her snail for a moment, before taking a breath; Q watched, not listening to Umbridge bleating, as she cast a perfect spell over her snail, the shell dissolving in an instant. It reformed again after only a brief second, but it was the best effort Q had seen thus far.

“Take ten for Hufflepuff,” Q nodded at the girl in question, who blushed, and beamed outright. Q returned his attention to an affronted-looking Umbridge. “Yes?”

“You are very young for the role, are you not?” Umbridge asked rhetorically, her smile patronising; apparently, being young meant Q was treated with the same condescending disdain as the various students Umbridge met.

Q pretended to consider the question for a moment. “Respectfully, I believe Professor Dumbledore disagrees,” he said simply.

“Don’t you think you’re a little… inexperienced?” Umbridge probed, almost pouting, treating him like a dog that had managed to do tricks above its station. Q half-expected her to pat him on the head, just because she felt she could.

“I applied for the job, amidst strong competition,” Q said, despising that he needed to justify himself to this repulsive woman. “I was hired, because I am exceptionally good with magic,” he said, fervently hoping that would be the end of it as he returned his attention to the class. He spent a few minutes walking along the desks, pointing out quiet corrections, chastising those that seemed adamant on not concentrating.

“Hem hem.”

Q twisted back on his heel, the smile turning from saccharine to serial killer. “Yes?” he asked pointedly, somewhat irritated at not being allowed to actually teach his class, but being interrupted every few minutes.

Umbridge’s voice dropped in volume, but not in pitch, the words travelling over the room quite effectively as she asked: “I understand that you and, ahem, Professor James Bond have something of an association?” she enquired sweetly. Q abruptly thought of poison ivy, strangling the host plant, for reasons he would examine later.
“I cannot see how that is even faintly relevant to my teaching capabilities,” Q noted with a distinct coldness; in the corner of his eye, he noticed a snail start to exponentially expand. He twisted away from Umbridge with a quiet *reducio*, restoring order before returning his attention.

“Anything further?”

“Don’t you think,” she pressed on, clipboard held tightly to her chest like a child. “That you are showing something of a poor influence? A young, inexperienced wizard, in a… *relationship*,” she managed, saying the word like it was acid on her tongue. “… with an older, *male* professor?”

Q flushed with anger, shock nearly robbing him of words for an awful second. “Any concerns you have as to my conduct outside of teaching hours can be discussed outside of teaching hours,” Q said, only barely keeping control of himself, glancing out as his classroom, the students not bothering to pretend they weren’t listening.

The gossip was a low, flat murmur, beginning to gain texture. “I sincerely hope your discussions are being limited to *wandwork*,” Q said sharply, enforcing a newfound silence over the classroom.

Umbridge smirked, as the bell rang overhead; she tottered out before anybody else, Q’s class filtering slowly, glances thrown in his direction as the gossip restarted.

Luna watched him, owlish eyes blinking. Barely fourteen years old, with the emotional maturity of somebody twice her age. She lifted two fingers to her lips, before laying them against her heart; a sign of love, of support. A sign, in the wizarding world, of acceptance.

She was gone before Q could think of any form of response.

- “What in *Merlin’s name* is the cat doing outside?!” Bond asked incredulously, indicating towards the closed portrait hole to their rooms; outside was waiting a fat, orange monstrosity. From at his feet, Whisp gave a plaintive *miaow*, as though she had been somehow wronged, staring out towards the portrait.

Q looked up distractedly from the rolls of parchment he’d been collecting from students throughout the day, and shrugged. “Miss Granger’s feline effort,” he said with a vague shrug. “Crookshanks, I think he’s called. Whisp’s taken a liking, but I’m adamant that we don’t let other animals in here, it’ll get out of hand.”

Bond couldn’t help but agree. Q liked creatures, as a general rule, but he could only feasibly take care of so many. Bond watched Q for a moment, the young man wrapped up in marking, face lined with something more serious than schoolwork. He hadn’t turned up to dinner, although the plate next to him indicated that he was hungry, had cheated and asked the House Elves – he’d avoided dinner, for some reason.

“What’s wrong?” Bond asked, voice holding a firmness that brooked no contradictions on Q’s part.

Q glanced up, shrugged, already beginning to fracture. Bond was by his side in an instant, fingers tucking strands of black hair out of the slightly glossy, perfect emerald of Q’s eyes. “What happened?” Bond repeated, gentler now, tugging the quill from Q’s hand and setting it on the bedside table by the ink.

Bond noticed the slight shake in Q’s hand; the young man had been seriously unsettled by something. “Umbridge,” he explained simply. “Had my first assessment class. She didn’t warn me, proceeded to try and humiliate me in front of my class, and… it would seem that she is
distinctly not supportive of our relationship,” Q completed, hiccupping for breath as he finally allowed himself to collapse. “I know it’s ridiculous, she can’t do anything on the grounds of our being together, but really, I thought the world had moved on a bit.”

Q shook slightly, anger and upset displaced into his body. Bond wrapped strong, confident arms around him; it was the action Q needed, finally letting himself cry. Bond shushed him gently, cradling the young man as he cried. “I’ve got you,” he murmured. “Q, it’ll be alright.”

It was wrong, immensely irritating, that Umbridge could get under his skin so effectively – yet she did, utterly did. The Ministry were not being rational, or reasonable; Potter’s trial, over the summer, had become legendary. The Wizengamot were utterly unnecessary in such a simple case of underage magic. The Ministry had taken over the Daily Prophet – removing all free speech from regular media, barring the laughable contribution of the Quibbler – and were known to have hands in the Wizarding radio.

Hogwarts had been a free space. With every passing day, it seemed less so.

The tapping at the window made them both jump; Q tugged away from Bond abruptly, Bond already reaching for his wand as he looked around. An owl was perched on the exterior sill, looking as arrogantly aloof as Q knew the sender to be.

“Ah,” Q said simply, taking a steadying breath, opening the window to invite the owl in while forcing himself to calm down. “Of course. He always has impeccable timing, don’t know how he manages it…”

Bond watched, curious, as Q extracted the letter from the tawny owl, Summoning a treat from a pile by Scamander’s cage. “Who…?”

Q waved him quiet, scanning through the latter; Bond’s interest became thoroughly piqued at the eye roll, the vague sigh. “Do you have any plans for tomorrow night?” Q asked, shaking his head slightly at the letter.

“Why?”

Q waved the parchment at Bond. “My brother’s invited us for dinner,” he said wearily. “For the sake of both of our sanities, I think it’s probably best we agreed.”

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think! Thanks for reading :) Jen.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I went in a slightly unexpected direction, but I Bondlocked. Enjoy!! Thank you again to the wonderful people who've been enjoying this, commenting etc. Shipimpala is still a glorious creature. Just sayin'.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bond blinked. “Your brother? The Squib?”

Q sighed, rolling his eyes as he sat down at the desk, cursing as he tried to find a spare piece of parchment; for Bond’s sake, he also quickly moved all the scrolls off the bed, into a rather messy pile in front of his bedside table. “He’s not a Squib,” Q corrected, finally finding a scrap of parchment and penning a reply. “He’s…“ he paused, concentrating on writing, trying to work out how to phrase it. “…a non-practising wizard. Magically adept, technically speaking, but refused to study magic.”

“Why?” Bond asked, utterly perturbed. Q stood, attaching his note to Sherlock’s owl’s leg, letting Darwin fly back to London.

Q crossed over to the bed, throwing himself into it dramatically. “He wanted to be unique in the majority, not commonplace in the minority, if I remember correctly,” Q quoted, looking up at the ceiling. “Mycroft overshadowed him by a massive degree, even at that age, and Sherlock likes Muggles. The Muggle world is empirical and logical; magic comes from something which is, in itself, intangible. All ‘magic’ is simply there, cannot be quantified. You either possess it, or you do not. Sherlock dislikes that.”

“He didn’t want to feel as thought he had to do anything?” Bond theorised; Q glanced over, nodded.

“Fiercely independent, ridiculously clever,” Q sighed. “Our parents were beyond livid, practically disowned him on the spot. Bad idea, only made him more stubborn than ever. He moved into Mycroft’s flat when he was eleven, rather than going to Hogwarts. Went to Muggle schools instead.”

The Holmes family were legendary, in the wizarding world. One of the few true Pureblood families, with a reputation for extraordinary wizardry. Bond understood completely why Q had chosen to cloak his identity; he wanted a life on his own terms, not clouded by his family lineage.

The youngest three of the Holmes family were renowned, as much as their predecessors. The youngest vanished, Bond being one of few who knew where. The second child became a Muggle. The eldest was the infamous Mycroft Holmes; ostensibly a minor player in the Ministry of Magic, and indeed British Government, he was actually the central correspondent between the Muggle and Wizarding worlds. He knew every aspect of both governments, but mostly existed on the Muggle side.

“Can Sherlock do any magic?” Bond asked curiously, reaching an arm around Q, holding him close.
Q thought about it for a moment. “He refuses to use a wand, so he can’t channel it,” he explained carefully, trying to find how to describe it. “He does have some… traits, however. He tries to deny them. I personally think some of his hyper-observation, deductive reasoning, is borne out of misplaced magic. I don’t know of any other cases like Sherlock – he certainly succeeded in being ‘unique’.”

Yes, Bond thought to himself. Unique is certainly one word for it.

“What in the blazes do you mean? Your brother, Q, is a… a what?”

“A wizard,” Sherlock said drily, his attentions diverted to rosining his violin bow; he examined the fine horsehair critically, pressing a forefinger against the strings to check the tautness. “His lover, too. They both teach magic to young witches and wizards, and they’re coming to dinner.”

“Your brother’s a wizard… this is, this is too much, Sherlock,” John said fretfully, pacing up and down 221B in a way that elicited a condescending sigh from his flatmate.

Sherlock pressed the bow to the strings, a patch of white deposited along them; with his finger, Sherlock rubbed the residual rosin along the strings themselves. He had always found it improved the friction, created a sharper edge to the staccato of his playing. “I don’t quite see your concern,” he told John, as the man collapsed into an armchair. “Oh. Naturally, you are not to say a word to anybody outside this room,” he warned. “I’ve already distressed Mycroft enough by telling you.”

John looked up to Sherlock, expression mildly shocked. “I may not be a genius, but I have figured out that not many people know about… magic,” he said, still getting his head around the idea, even with Sherlock having exhaustively explained the existence of a wizarding world before adding that his brother was a member.

“Just confirming,” Sherlock said flippantly, twisting the violin to rest, familiarly, under his chin. He drew a long, mournful minim from the hollow instrument, eyes shutting briefly as his soul bent toward music. “I would rather hate for Mycroft to have to Obliviate my closest associate.”

“Obliv…”

John was halfway through speaking, Sherlock about to begin playing, when there was a rap on the window. “I think I’m hallucinating an anthropomorphic owl,” John said faintly. Sherlock, naturally, crossed to the window, ignoring John entirely.

John watched in vague, unfocused horror and confusion as Sherlock tugged a note off the owl’s leg, fed it a treat from in his pocket, and let it fly away. “That’s Darwin, my owl,” he said, by way of an explanation, reading the note. “Excellent. Q’s confirmed.” Sherlock looked up, and, in the same tone of dispassion: “You’re still panicking.”

“Are you magic?” John asked, his voice high-pitched.

Sherlock drew out languid, edged notes, tending to E-minor; some part of him was melancholic, then. Interesting. He liked the violin, used it as a way of finding what he was feeling when the rationality outweighed the rest. “Technically speaking, I could be,” Sherlock said casually. “More importantly – and another reason to be wary – Mycroft is, of course, a wizard.”

John briefly looked like he wanted to pass out, or cry. Instead, he did as he always did – took the presented information, sat quietly with a cup of tea, listened to Sherlock create symphonies on the violin without really trying, and waited for his brain to wrap around whatever the hell was going on.
“Albus knows we’re offsite for the evening, but discretion has been advised given Umbridge’s… James, what on earth are you wearing?” Q asked, looking Bond up and down.

The man was dressed in a suit, looking utterly divine, but a little implausible. Q had never seen Bond in a suit in his life; the man was always in robes of some description, or casual clothes underneath. Formal Muggle wear was certainly not on the agenda. “Says the man dressed in… I don’t actually know what to call that setup,” Bond smirked, looking Q up and down.

“I’ve half-lived in the Muggle world for years, with Sherlock being how he is – I think I know how to dress,” Q said primly, fidgeting with the cuffs of his mustard-yellow cardigan. “As I was saying – discretion. Everything’s being monitored at the moment, so Floo Network’s out. We’re Apparating. There’s a secret passage I know from my school days, it’s still active. I wouldn’t put it past other students to have found it though, so if you’d kindly Disillusion us both?”

Bond nodded, pulling his wand out from inside his jacket pocket, rapping it sharply over Q’s head, repeating the action to himself. Q had never been quite so adept with concealment charms; Bond’s held better, generally, and were overall more effective. It wouldn’t be enough to keep them invisible, but they would be harder to spot, and generally far less obvious.

They moved quickly and quietly through the building, Q guiding Bond towards a statue of a humpbacked witch. “Dissendium,” Q whispered, tapping the witch; the passage opened up in front of them, inviting them.

About halfway through, Q stopped them. “This should do it,” he said, and grabbed Bond’s hand; Bond had never been to 221B, couldn’t Apparate himself. “Sorry, I know you hate side-along.”

Bond shook his head, eyes closed. “Just get on with it?” he asked wearily, as the ground disappeared from under him, Q’s hand tightly wrapped around his.

“Ah,” Sherlock said simply. “That’ll be them.”

As though on cue, as though Sherlock was psychic, somebody tapped on the door. Not the external door, but the internal, somehow having bypassed the stairs. John stood on instinct to welcome in the guests, while Sherlock remained harpooned in his chair; with a roll of his eyes, John went to answer the door.

Q looked at the man in the doorway with some curiosity. “You must be John Watson,” he said, extending a hand; Bond watched Q for a moment, struck by the ease of which he adapted to Muggle customs like hand-shaking. “I’m Q, and this is my partner, James.”

“A pleasure,” Bond smiled, also shaking John’s hand; he knew Muggle traditions as well as anybody, as somebody who had extensive experience after a long period working in the Ministry.

Sherlock hadn’t moved from his chair, Q walking round and whacking his brother round the back of the head. “Rude bastard, I haven’t seen you in months and this is how you behave when I finally arrive?” Q asked rhetorically.

Sherlock, reluctantly, moved to standing, sighing elaborately. “If you’d bothered to visit me sooner…”

“You know I couldn’t,” Q protested hotly. “After… the incident at school, things at my end…”
“He knows,” Sherlock interrupted, nodding at John, who was watching Q and James with slight nervousness. Distracted, Q raised a questioning eyebrow, and Sherlock just shrugged: “I told him, Mycroft intervened on my behalf. Couldn’t have his younger brother breaking the Statute of Secrecy now, could he? I may not practise, but I’m still subject to your laws. The gossip would sink him.”

Keen to avoid another row about Mycroft’s character flaws, Q returned to the previous subject. “As I was saying. You-Know-Who’s return caused havoc, I couldn’t have got here if I tried. And things are not… ideal, at Hogwarts.”

John, in the background, sat down heavily on the sofa. Bond picked his way towards the kitchen, casually glancing around the flat while the two Holmeses stood, half-glaring at one another. “Something changed,” Sherlock observed, scanning over Q. “Silva ruffling your feathers?”

Q raised an eyebrow. “Impressively, it’s more sinister than Silva,” he said quietly; before Sherlock could reply, Q pitched forward, hugging his elder brother.

John’s jaw literally dropped.

Sherlock’s expression was that of an adult, dealing with a sticky child around their ankles; patronisingly affectionate, but wary of keeping sticky fingers off fabric. Q was content enough; Sherlock was truly appalling at human interactions, but he tolerated Q. A luxury not afforded to most, and quite enough to live on.

“We seem to have a lot to discuss,” Sherlock said simply, his tone a little warmer, more concerned, than was normal for him. “Let’s eat.”

- Overall, the evening was lovely.

Sherlock, predictably, waved off Umbridge as a malicious bitch with little actual power; Sherlock’s argument was that while Dumbledore ran Hogwarts, and men like Mycroft were involved in the Ministry, nothing severely untoward would happen. Baiting Umbridge was obviously suicidal, but if they kept their heads down, Sherlock believed there would be no problems.

Bond agreed with the assessment wholeheartedly. Q conceded defeat, albeit with some reservations; he couldn’t shake the uncomfortable feeling that there were worse things at play. They had needed to sneak out the castle like errant children, for Merlin’s sake; the vitriolic unpleasantness of the woman was certainly making life harder, if nothing else.

Q and Bond also found themselves rather fond of John Watson. While the man was clearly seriously struggling with magic as a general concept, he accepted Bond and Q quite happily. Bond explained at one stage that they were barred from doing magic in front of Muggles; John just shrugged, and asked if he would ever be able to see magic in practise. Out of interest.

Sherlock promised to take him to Diagon Alley.

From the way John’s eyes lit up, Q got a little more of an idea as to why anybody would volunteer to live with Sherlock long-term.

From Sherlock bothering to promise in the first place, Q realised that, perhaps, the feelings were reciprocated. His big brother had, perhaps, found somebody at last.
Excellent.

They Apparated back into the hidden corridor towards Hogsmeade – landing a few metres apart from one another – Bond already having cast Disillusionment charms, while still at Sherlock’s. They moved quickly towards the exit, Q pushing open the entrance and sliding out, Bond following.

A movement, at the far end of the corridor. “Go on, I’ll be a moment,” Q whispered, beckoning Bond up the stairs; Bond’s eyes narrowed quizzically, Q shooing him off.

Q moved quickly, quietly down the corridor. The room at the end had a slightly ajar door; Q flattened himself behind it, glancing quickly through the crack to see Potter and Malfoy. He sighed slightly.

Malfoy pulled his robes over his head, darting out of the classroom without seeing a Disillusioned Q behind the door. Potter waited, presumably intending to put a good distance between himself and Malfoy before starting the journey back.

When Q next looked, Potter had vanished.

There were very few ways in which that possible. Potter was not a very highly adept wizard, for all his qualities.

The door creaked slightly.

Q’s arm shot out, hand clasping over the surprisingly solid patch of air that was trying to exit the classroom. He pushed Potter back into the classroom, yanking off the Invisibility Cloak in a single, confident motion.

Potter looked utterly terrified, gratifyingly enough.

“You, Potter, have you completely lost all of your intelligence?” Q asked sharply, hitting himself with his own wand, lifting the Disillusionment charm; Potter visibly relaxed when he saw who it was. “You should not be out of your dormitory at this time of night, and certainly not in the company of a classmate you profess to hate. I know full well that you and Mr Malfoy have been on the cusp of a liaison since the term began – others are, hopefully, less enlightened.”

“Professor…”

“Don’t insult my intelligence by attempting to deny it,” Q said sharply; Potter’s eyes widened faintly behind his glasses. “You and Mr Malfoy would do well to be discrete,” Q continued, softening his voice slightly. “It would be… unwise, to antagonise certain parties. You, Mr Potter, are already in a difficult situation.”

“But… you and Professor Bond…”

Q raised an eyebrow. “How many teachers have you seen requiring a Disillusionment charm to navigate freely through Hogwarts?” Q asked quietly, in a tone that made it quite evident that Potter was not to repeat a word.

“But you’re…”

Q blinked. “Potter, try not to be naïve,” he said flatly. “The Ministry are attempting to take de facto control of Hogwarts – kindly consider the repercussions for yourself.”

“You won’t tell anybody, about me and Draco?” Potter asked, in a steady voice. The boy was
clearly accustomed to being caught in a variety of compromising scenarios; his past was
dlegendary, a string of misdemeanours spanning years.

The sigh was weighty, Q’s gaze heavy. “Potter, the Ministry are already dragging your name
through the mud, and the world requires the name Harry Potter. When You Know Who returns -
\textit{yes} Potter, I believe you – you will be needed. I will not speak of this to anybody…”

Potter attempted to interject, Q holding up a hand to still him.

“… but understand this: you both have a great deal to lose. Mr Malfoy’s family would not take
kindly to it, to put things mildly. The Ministry do not need further ammunition as far as you’re
concerned. If you are prepared to risk so much, make sure it’s worth it, yes?”

Q kept steady eye contact with Potter, holding him in place. “Professor,” Potter murmured,
abruptly looking at the floor. “I think it may be. He’s an arrogant git, but I…”

Q’s thin smile was almost hidden, certainly unintentional. He had felt exactly the same about
Bond, in the beginning. An arrogant, entitled, ridiculous human being – yet compelling, in the
most immediate and brilliant of senses; Q had fallen quite completely for Bond, very quickly, in
spite of everything. He could understand the duality of it; to intermittently hate somebody, yet love
them regardless.

“… I know, Potter,” Q interrupted, not unkindly. “Now. I would \textit{strongly} advise returning to your
dormitory, post-haste. A sublime Cloak you have there too; do take care of it.”

“You’re not giving me detention, or anything?” Potter asked nervously, almost disbelieving.

“I can if you’d like?” Q offered, with a wry smile. “All I ask is that you can duplicate a goblet by
next class, and it doesn’t transpire that you’ve spent \textit{all} of your time with Mr Malfoy.”

Q smiled wryly as Potter nodded, disappeared under his Cloak, and headed back towards the
Gryffindor common room.

- 

Bond was already falling asleep by the time Q got back, happily curled under the duvet, waiting
for his lover to return. “Umbridge is coming into my class,” Bond groaned. “I swear, that woman
says a word about you, and I will not be held responsible for my actions… What were you
doing?”

“Talked to Harry Potter, about his burgeoning relationship with Draco Malfoy,” Q explained,
leaving off his trousers. “Apparently, they’ve taken to meeting in secret in an abandoned
classroom. Endearing, possibly, but not the most intelligent thing in the world…”

“For Merlin’s sake, Q. You have enough to worry about,” Bond said, his expression slightly
worried, craning up to look at his lover as he unbuttoned his shirt.

Q shrugged. “He doesn’t understand his relative importance,” he mused, sliding into the bed next
to Bond. “It’s curious. Not to mention that Lucius Malfoy would, I feel, literally kill if he knew
what his son was up to.”

“Get some sleep,” Bond said, curving an arm around his lover, as Q pulled off his glasses and
placed them on the bedside table. “I’ll keep an eye out too. Stop worrying so much, hmm? He’s
got away with everything for years…”

“…Has an Invisibility Cloak…”
“… that explains a lot,” Bond snorted, kissing Q’s curly hair gently. “Either way. It’s late, and I have a lesson first thing. Switch off that brain of yours.”

Q smiled, nuzzled slightly into Bond’s side. “Sleep well,” he murmured, as Bond’s heartbeat lulled him into sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think! Thank y'all for reading. Jen.
Chapter Notes

The term ‘rollercoaster’ was never more literally applied. Have taken some dialogue verbatim from the book, you’ll see why. Hope you enjoy, guys! Thank you to everybody reading and enjoying :D Jen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bond walked into his classroom to find Professor Umbridge, already waiting. There were no desks out; he had left them all to the sides, given that his lessons had a predominantly practical theme. Professor Umbridge didn’t say a word, just watched with condescending amusement, clearing her throat intermittently without speaking. Bond duly ignored her.

The class filtered in through various stages; Miss Granger was one of the earliest, along with Miss Patil and Miss Abbott – the girl a spitting image of her aunt, whom Bond had known several years previously. Last were Potter and Weasley, unsurprisingly, followed by a ruffled-looking Dean Thomas.

“Before we start, can I have your essays on Stunning spells,” Bond said firmly; there was a pause for motion, before Bond Summoned the collection towards him. “For the record, Mr Corner, that is in no sense a foot and a half. Unless the contents are breathtakingly profound – and pithy – you will be rewriting it.”

“Hem hem,” came a predictable cough from behind Bond. Bond took a shallow breath, turned to Umbridge with a querying expression. “I hope you got the note, detailing the date and time of your inspection?” she trilled at him.

Bond looked her over, looked at his class. “Surely the answer to that is patently obvious?” he returned drily, before turning back to his class. “Pairing off, everybody. I want to see your progress.”

“Hem hem.” A little more emphatic, this time. Bond still refused to actually speak to her, raising an eyebrow again as he swivelled to face her. “Forgive me,” she said, giggling for some obscure reason, “but do you really think it, ahem, prudent, to allow the students to practise dangerous spells?”

Bond blinked.

“Yes,” he said flatly, and turned back to the class; he waved his wand, the floor becoming springier for when students inevitably hit it. “Alright – when you’re ready,” he called.

“AHEM AHEM.”

Bond held up a hand. The class were beginning to stir now, everybody getting tense as they watched the unfolding intrigue between Professor Bond, and Umbridge. “I am attempting to teach my class,” Bond said levelly. “If you have concerns, we can discuss them afterwards.”

“The Ministry…”
“Have published their doctrine on Dark Arts teaching, I’m aware,” Bond interjected, cutting her off mid-sentence; her mouth hung slightly agape, the bullfrog impression somewhat heightened. “I disagree with the standpoint. As stated – I would welcome a discussion on teaching methods after my class.”

“It is highly irresponsible to be teaching impressionable young witches and wizards,” Umbridge began, voice high-pitched with self-righteous indignation, “to fear Dark attacks every other day.”

“We don’t,” interrupted a loud voice from the classroom; Mr Potter, naturally. Bond restrained himself from anger with some difficulty. It was not Potter’s fault, after all.

“Do not interrupt, Mr Potter,” Umbridge trilled. “Now. I don’t mean to criticise the way things have been run in this school…”

Bond managed to contain his derisive snort. His class, however, illustrated that they were still damned teenagers by all making their contempt vocal. “That’s quite enough,” Bond said, his tone still velvety calm, feeling the anger rise like bile in his throat. He felt a sudden surge of sympathy for Q, who had needed to put up with the woman after far less teaching experience and corresponding confidence. “Miss Umbridge. My teaching style is suited to real-world application of defensive spellwork…”

“The Ministry believes that theoretical knowledge should be more than sufficient in the application of spells prior to examinations,” Umbridge said, still sounding disgustingly self-satisfied.

Dean Thomas piped up. Bond’s hand clenched spasmodically on his wand. “So what if we need to use defensive spells in the real world?” he called out, looking confused, curious, a little angry.

Bond looked briefly skywards, praying for enough self-control to get through this abortive lesson.

“Law-abiding citizens need not live in fear of attack by Dark forces…”

“… so Lord Voldemort isn’t somebody to be afraid of, then?” Potter asked in a mocking, angry, semi-rhetorical fashion. Bond winced slightly at the name, while his class responded with everything from little screams to near passing-out.

“Potter, enough.” Bond told him, tone dangerous.

“I’ll handle this, Professor,” Umbridge interjected, her voice losing a little of the sweetness, ignoring the tension emanating off Bond in waves. “Ten points from Gryffindor, Mr Potter. Now – you have all been informed that a certain… Dark wizard has returned from the dead. This is a lie.”

“It is NOT a lie!” Potter interjected, while Granger tried pointlessly to calm him down. Bond had to restrain himself from objection with difficulty; Umbridge was toeing the Ministry line, and it was so painfully, lethally wrong. “I saw him, I fought him!”

“Detention, Mr Potter,” Umbridge snapped; Bond indicated with silent gestures that his class should all settle down, while attention remained raptly on the warring parties of Umbridge and Potter. “Tomorrow evening, five o’clock. Once again: this is a lie. The Ministry of Magic guarantees protection from magical attack…”

“This is beside the point,” Bond interjected, trying to steer the conversation back into the realms of something faintly sane; he turned on Umbridge, expression guardedly livid. “There has been quite enough disturbance in my class for one day, and I am perfectly capable of disciplining students myself. Potter, that is enough from you too.”
Bond was exceptionally unaccustomed to acting as any form of mediator. That went some way to explaining why Potter blankly ignored Bond, and shot his words at Umbridge like a well-placed curse. “So, according to you, Cedric Diggory dropped dead of his own accord, did he?”

“It was a tragic accident…”

“It was murder. Voldemort killed him, and you know it,” Potter said sharply.

The class was long past the point of having any active interest in anything beyond the events playing out in front of them. Bond was reminded of Muggle soap operas, Q watching one once when they accidently stumbled across a Muggle television set in a shop off Diagon Alley, entranced by the melodrama and ridiculousness of people when forced into stressful scenarios.

“Potter, that is enough. Class, you are all dismissed – this is a farce. Potter, in my office, now,” Bond said lividly, while Umbridge went the colour of rice pudding. “I will deal with this myself, Dolores,” he said, the name acidic on his tongue. Potter grabbed his bags, his expression martyred as he moved into Bond’s office.

Umbridge managed a disgustingly honeyed smile. “I will be seeing Potter for detention for the duration of this week,” she said, clearing her throat, pulling a piece of parchment out of her pocket. “This arrived this morning,” she continued before Bond could object, handing the parchment to Bond for his perusal.

*Educational Decree Twenty-Four*

Bond read it quickly; in practise, it gave Umbridge the power to discipline students as she saw fit, given that she was becoming an ‘integral’ part of how Hogwarts was run. Bond couldn’t say he was surprised; students had been acting out in many of the lessons Umbridge had inspected. This was, quite honestly, expected.

“I’ll inform Potter,” he said simply, returning the paper to her with his expression still intentionally unfathomable. “I assume you will be inspecting my teaching further, given today’s incident.”

“Yes,” she murmured, staring oddly, eyes bulging faintly while her sickening smile remained painted. “I should think so.”

She parted with a little giggle, playful, completely bizarre in the context.

Bond watched her go, and went into his office to have short, sharp words with Mr Potter.

-Q had a slightly later start than Bond; his first class wasn’t until mid-morning, affording him time to sleep in, and mark a handful more essays.

By the time his class filtered in, the stories had crystallised to legend. Apparently, while Mr Potter understood the concept of ‘laying low’ in the context of his relationship with Malfoy, he had no such compunctions when it came to his opinion of Umbridge, and indeed You-Know-Who.

The conversation simply didn’t stop; Q ended up docking House points from half the class, threatening detentions when nothing stopped. “…reckons he fought You-Know-You…” “…pur-lease…” “…the Ministry has the right idea…”

Q finished the lesson frustrated, worried. It didn’t exactly sound as though the lesson had been a success for James; if the sixth-years Q was currently teaching had already heard the rumours, it was big, potentially with worrying repercussions.
Bond, meanwhile, was **beyond** livid.

“Apparently, the Ministry believes that Defence Against the Dark Arts teaching should involve *no practical magical application,*” he spat, cornering Q in his classroom after his lesson.

Q’s forehead contracted in confusion. “But…”

“I know,” Bond hissed. “Potter then decided to indulge in an outright row. Umbridge is now disciplining *my* students in *my* classroom, for telling the truth about You-Know-Who. My competence, my authority, even my damned *teaching style* have been undermined…”

“Calm down,” Q advised in a low voice, looking past Bond to the closed classroom door; given how things were at present, stray conversation in the wrong places could be dangerous. Q didn’t wish to risk such discussions outside their rooms.

Bond breathed out a long, shuddering sigh, forehead resting on Q’s; he cupped Bond’s face in his hands, kissed him softly. “Dumbledore runs teaching in this school, not the Ministry. You’re an excellent teacher.”

Bond nodded, sighing slightly. “I worry for the students,” he said, voice low.

“Not right now,” Q said with a little more urgency, kissing him again. “You have another class,” he said gently, pushing Bond away from him very slightly. “Go. We can talk more later. Try not to kill her, hmm?” he coaxed, as Bond strode towards the door, robes billowing behind him. He smiled once at Q, nodded, expression still angry and troubled as he left.

- 

Q had mostly stopped turning up to Great Hall for meals. There was only so much he could put up with, usually; Umbridge’s *hem hem* sounded whenever he and Bond so much as looked at one another, and Silva took every opportunity to stare consistently at Q, unnerving him.

He turned up that evening for dinner though, mostly because he wanted to gauge how the rest of the school was responding. He settled next to Grubbly-Plank, the weight of Silva’s eyes on him, Umbridge’s ridiculous, trilling voice carrying over the table, Dumbledore absent.

“What’re you doing down here?” Bond asked curiously, as Q reached out for beef bourguignon, dolloping a ladleful onto his plate.

Q glanced at him, his smile almost tentative. “Testing the waters,” he said simply, quietly. Bond nodded. The news had hit the rest of the school in waves throughout the day: Educational Decree Twenty-Four, as Bond had seen in his own class. Another Ministry initiative to undermine the status quo in Hogwarts. Q had come to Great Hall to get a feel for the atmosphere, see how everybody was handling the news.

The Houses were all in separate camps. The Gryffindors seemed mostly sullen and disconsolate, while the Slytherins wore self-satisfied smirks that Q found repulsive. The Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs were split, but universally, they continued to glance up to the teacher’s table, and towards Potter, on the Gryffindor table.

Potter, flanked by Granger and Weasley, vanished quickly from the Hall; Q couldn’t really blame him, given the number of eyes that kept finding him. Harry flashed a single look to the Slytherin table; Q didn’t need to follow his gaze to know he was watching Malfoy.

The blond boy didn’t react. He held Harry’s gaze for a long second, before breaking off, returning
to laughter with the students around him. Potter hesitated for a fractional second, before continuing on his trajectory out of the Great Hall.

“Q?” Bond asked, reclaiming Q’s attention; Q glanced back, Bond and – curiously - Pomona Sprout both watching him.

He smiled, forking a chunk of beef. “Sorry, completely glazed over,” he said comfortably, ignoring Bond’s expression of mild concern. “What was that?”

Pomona grinned at him. Q had always liked her; she was motherly, had always been quietly concerned over Q’s quietness when he had been a student, businesslike but kind. Another point in her favour: when Silva had been particularly unnerving in Q’s seventh year, making comments that bordered on explicitly provocative, she had noticed – and dressed Silva down, categorically, over appropriate behaviour around students.

Q still owed her, and knew it. He listened carefully to her comments over her own inspection – which sounded like one of very few to have gone without a single damn hitch – and fell into a complex discussion with her and Bond over hellebore seeds and their use in wand care. Q’s was pristine – he swore by a particular potion of his own creation, that conditioned his birch and unicorn tail wand perfectly, maintaining the flexibility without compromising on power. Wand care was a dying art, but one that Q personally invested in.

It was surprisingly pleasant, to spend some more time with the other teachers. Q had become quite isolated; term was stressful, Umbridge more so. He had forgotten how Hogwarts felt, the size and scope of it all, all held under the ceiling that today promised the shine of a waxing moon, through clouds.

Minerva joined the conversation too, after a while. She was visibly fond of Q, in a way that could have passed for alarming; Professor McGonagall did not do fond, as a rule. Yet Q had been one of her best students, historically, and had admirably filled her shoes in Transfiguration; Q smiled, accepting that he had a rather formidable witch on side, should anything go wrong.

Actually, Q was blessed with a lot of staff members being very keen on him. The old guard knew he was a mature, dedicated student when it came to aspects of magic; not to mention that they all, almost unanimously, had something of a protective streak concerning one of the youngest staff members in Hogwarts's history.

They also all fostered a quiet hope, concerning Q and Bond. They were something of a novelty; their relationship was something still not fully accepted in wizarding or Muggle communities, and certainly not in a school environment. They stood for something, whether they wished to or not, and several members of staff understood the importance of that.

Q and Bond retired quite late, after what turned out to be a very enjoyable evening. Umbridge disappeared early amidst sycophantic trills and giggles, Silva waving after her in a way that was disturbing, and pseudo-flirtatious. He, too, retired shortly afterwards.

And so the evening passed as Minerva made dry, sarcastic asides to Q, Pomona laughing infectiously, Bond and Filius discussing some anachronistic aspect of lost magics, Q getting drawn unintentionally in a discussion with Charity Burbage over wizarding integration with Muggles; Q guarded his anonymity, never mentioning Sherlock, but nevertheless found it easy enough to argue in favour of Muggle-wizard integration.

It was dizzying, and one of the best evenings Q had spent since joining the Hogwarts staff.

They tumbled back into their rooms, Beth giving Q another rather suggestive wink as Bond
tugged him through the portrait hole; no sooner had the door closed, than Bond was kissing him. Q smiled and kissed him back, Whisp mewing around his feet, Q’s blood pounding with adrenaline and excitement and enjoyment.

“I love you,” Bond growled in his ear, tongue darting out to trace the shell of Q’s ear, the younger man shivering with anticipation.

They fell sideways into the bed, robes discarded, Q gasping lightly, Bond punctuating with lower moans. Whisp tactfully vanished for a while, letting Q and Bond escape.

Beth, in the morning, smirked as Q stepped out of the portrait hole. “Somebody had a good night,” she teased. Q blinked, heat flooding into his cheeks as he thought about it. He opened his mouth, about to say something, anything. “Don’t you worry, my husband was a screamer.”

“… ah,” Q managed, mouth hanging open. He had no idea, absolutely no idea, how to respond to that. He disappeared quickly, chasing Bond down to the Great Hall for breakfast.

Q was spreading jam liberally over his toast when Scamander flew in with the rest of the morning post, Bond’s hand shooting up to catch the thick letter which soared towards his lover. “Wow, didn’t see that at all,” Q said, sucking the jam off his fingers as Bond handed it to him.

Bond was still half-watching as Q’s expression froze slightly, looking at the writing. He stashed the letter into his robes without opening it, returning too much attention to the toast, overcompensating. “Tell you later,” he muttered to Bond, who happily declined to say another word on the subject, and ignored Silva’s curious, mocking gaze.

They were unable to talk about it until lunchtime. Q tracked down Bond in the Defence Against the Dark Arts office, looking quietly stressed, in the way Bond could recognise better than most.

“I got a letter from Mycroft,” he said, voice slightly tighter than Bond was used to hearing. “It’s cryptic, he wants me to meet him in Hogsmeade.”

“And the problem being…?”

“Mycroft doesn’t come to Hogwarts, or anywhere around,” Q said, voice tightening ever further. “Certainly not in secret. Something’s wrong, enough for him to be meeting me in secret and I don’t know why. This is Mycroft, he isn’t reticent for anybody.”

“Q, shh. It’ll be alright. We’ll meet him, find out what’s going on,” Bond soothed, wrapping Q in a tight hug. “Stop panicking, yes? It won’t help.”

“I’m not panicking,” Q said petulantly.

Bond smiled, dropped a soft kiss onto Q’s lips, feeling Q relax slightly under his hands. “Liar,” he mocked lovingly, brushing hair behind Q’s ear. “I assume he’s aiming for the weekend?”

Q nodded; it was a Hogsmeade weekend, so he was planning to head down anyway. Bond kept his hands wrapped around Q, hands linked against his lower back while Q’s hands hooked around his neck, over his shoulder. “Just a few days,” Bond soothed, kissing Q’s neck gently. “It’ll be alright.”

Chapter End Notes
Let me know any thoughts, it's an unending pleasure to hear what you think. Jen.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Q has an exceptionally bad time this chapter. Be warned. Oh, and I created another spell out of abortive Latin.

Thank you, as always, to those reading and enjoying. Jen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The weekend found Q – dressed in as many layers as he could fit onto his frame – heading down to Hogsmeade, with Bond. He missed being able to hold Bond’s hand as they walked down. Only a little thing, irrelevant in practise, but missed regardless.

“Hog’s Head,” he muttered to Bond, keeping his robes tight around him at the wind stabbed into him violently. It wasn’t snowing, but the wind was brutal.

Bond watched; Q was terrible with weather extremes, had been for as long as Bond had known him. He tugged out his wand from an interior pocket. “Let me try something,” he told Q, the younger man stopping, shivering. Bond pulled the coat away from Q’s body slightly – Q protesting softly – before tapping it, muttering “calesco” under his breath. “You might want to get your wand out; I have no idea how far that’ll spread,” Bond warned.

Q obliged, tugging his wand out; he suddenly shuddered with pleasure. “Where did you learn that?” he asked, as the coat warmed up around him. “That’s brilliant.”

“Aurora was using it,” Bond shrugged; Professor Sinestra was a lovely woman, very gentle, sharply intelligent and very good for innovative spells. “At least it works.”

Q hummed happily, thanking Bond as they trudged past the Three Broomsticks, on to the dingy-looking Hogs Head. Q abruptly muttered finite incantatum at his coat; apparently, it just continued to heat on, inexorably, until it became too hot to touch. Still, at least he was warm.

“Drinks?” Bond asked; Q scanned the pub, finding what he was looking for after a moment. Q nodded absentmindedly, letting Bond order as he slid into the booth opposite a hooded man, drinking a simple cup of tea. Q could just see the handle of a Malacca wood umbrella, hooked over the edge of the table.

Mycroft looked at his younger brother, not smiling. “Hello Q,” Mycroft said softly, voice the usual elastic mockery, perfect diction. “I must apologise for the clandestine nature of this meeting. Unfortunately, certain matters have arisen that require my immediate disappearance. Do speak to Sherlock for me, won’t you? I’d visit in person, but I would be very much surprised if the Ministry have not begun monitoring him by now.”

Q didn’t ask whether he himself was being monitored; the entirely of Hogwarts was being watched, and Q knew it. “Mycroft, what’s happened?” he asked with quiet urgency, Mycroft’s vaguely mocking smile remaining intact.

“The Ministry have deemed me a threat,” Mycroft explained softly, watching Q’s expression. “I have – quite vocally – disagreed with some of their more recent movements. I have been widely
discredited, which will culminate in my denouncement in tomorrow’s Prophet. I will be long gone by then, I have no wish to remain here. Our entire family will be targeted; I do not know if I can keep your identity safe, Q, beware of that.”

“Duly noted. Sherlock?”

“Will need to go through with his disappearing act,” Mycroft said, almost reluctantly; Q’s face contorted in a move of quiet sadness. Sherlock loved his life, much though he enjoyed railing otherwise. It was, however, the only way Sherlock had a hope in hell of surviving without being killed or Obliviated.

Q’s face suddenly paled. “He told John,” he realised, eyes widening. Mycroft nodded.

“Already considered; I have some remaining friends who will orchestrate a disappearance for him, too. He will be safe. If we’re fortunate, we will also reunite him with Sherlock,” Mycroft said, looking at a pocket watch with sudden concern. “I must be gone.”

“Myc…”

“I will contact if I am able,” Mycroft said, reaching out a hand briefly; Q grasped it, clinging on to a last piece of his brother. “Be safe, brother mine.”

He was gone by the time Bond sat down with the drinks, looking mildly perturbed at the distinct lack of Mycroft. Q watched the door swing shut, chest contracting as he considered the very real possibility of not seeing his brother for a very long time. If the Ministry ever got hold of him, he would potentially never see Mycroft again.

“What…?”

“He’s going into hiding, the Ministry finally turned on him. I need to contact Sherlock. Without Mycroft’s protection …”

“I can send my Patronus, it’ll be safer than going in person,” he interjected quietly, not seeming overwhelmingly surprised that the Ministry was falling to pieces. “Nobody in Hogwarts has seen it, they shouldn’t be able to connect it back to us. You can’t risk your identity, not now.”

Q nodded; he conjured a disposable cup, given that he wasn’t supposed to take the tall glass tumbler out of the Hog’s Head. He transferred the spiked hot pumpkin juice Bond had bought for him into the disposable cup, clutching it between his hands as they stepped back out into the cold. Mycroft had long since Apparated, no trace of him in the wind-swept streets as they trailed towards the Shrieking Shack, the quietest place in the vicinity.

“What do you want me to say?”

Q sighed. “It has happened. John is safe. Go now,” he murmured, eyes shut, repeating the words as though they had been chosen and practised – which, quite possibly, they had been.

Sherlock was a blood traitor, far worse than the Weasleys. Not merely a Muggle-lover, but somebody who had eschewed the wizarding world entirely; there had been arguments through the Ministry, through the higher realms of magic, arguing that Sherlock should have been taken in years previously. A Pureblood with latent magic, never taught to channel it, roaming the Muggle world and betraying their secrets.

Mycroft had kept him safe. Q was pretty certain Sherlock had only limited appreciation of quite how much Mycroft had done for him; either way, Sherlock knew enough to heed the warning, when it came.
Bond didn’t reply. He and Q walked a little further, before Bond flattened himself by a tree near the Shack. Q stood on guard, as Bond murmured *expecto patronum*; a lion shot out of the end of his wand, taking Q slightly aback with the sheer bloody size of it.

It watched Bond for a moment; Bond closed his eyes, the lion taking a step forward and vanishing. “It has happened. John is safe. Go now,” Bond said firmly, authoritatively, a thin swirl of his wand ending the spell as he opened his eyes again.

“He’ll listen,” Q said, more to comfort himself than anything else. He looked frightened, fragile, in a way that was heartbreaking to witness.

Bond stowed his wand in a pocket, tucked both hands under Q’s chin; lifting his head slightly, he dropped a soft kiss onto his lover’s lips. “He’ll be fine,” Bond soothed, thumb running over his temples gently. “He has a way out, yes?”

Q nodded, falling forward into Bond’s arms. “John will be devastated,” he murmured enigmatically, and let Bond take care of him.

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The next morning, every paper in Britain – the Daily Prophet included – ran stories on the death of Sherlock Holmes, in tandem with the disappearance of Mycroft Holmes.

“Mycroft taught him enough to stage a convincing suicide. Magical officials will look him over, declare him dead. There are contacts enough to keep him safe from there, provided he can be subtle,” Q explained emotionlessly, tapped out of fear or anger or upset.

Q had now lost both his siblings.

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Q was in a free period, juggling reams of essays, when Potter appeared outside the staffroom like the proverbial impending storm, clutching a rather lovely snow white owl. He was just leaving, papers compressed into his briefcase, when he practically ran into the teen.

“Potter, what are you doing outside of lessons?” Q asked wearily, staring at the young man.

Potter didn’t seem concerned. “I was looking for Professor Grubbly-Plank. My owl…”

“Looks like an attack,” purred an unpleasant voice from behind them; Q felt the now-familiar shudder of dread, as Silva extended a hand for the bird. Potter relinquished her without question, Silva cooing as he looked her over, the owl gazing balefully around. “Wilhelmina is a little occupied, at present. I shall ensure she looks over your owl, Mr Potter. How far did she travel?”

Potter’s eyes were bottle-green behind his glasses, watching his owl with obvious concern. “Thank you,” he replied, with sincere gratitude. Silva smiled slowly, his gaze lingering over the boy, as he hesitated obviously over his answer. “London, I think.”

There was something in Silva’s expression that boded ill, although Q couldn’t imagine what; Q thought of his own communications, being unable to even speak to his siblings, and wondered just how much trouble young Mr Potter had managed to get himself involved with that required such ambiguity. The boy’s life thrummed with secrets.

Silva nodded, the genial smile still in place as he turned, gaze lingering over Q for a predatory moment. “Potter’s letter,” Q said simply, not reacting to his gaze.
Q waited until Silva was long gone to turn on Potter. “Again, Mr Potter; discretion is the better part of valour,” he said simply. “Communications in Hogwarts are being monitored. Be wary, won’t you?”

With that, he turned on his heel, stalking towards his classroom to prepare for a sixth year lecture on human transfiguration.

The news spread around the staff like wildfire.

Professor Trelawney – an entirely batty woman by all accounts, and only vaguely prophetic, if at all – had been put on probation, from her role as Divination teacher.

The Ministry were taking charge of Hogwarts, using Umbridge as a proxy. Q just about survived another inspection in one of his classes, thankfully one that didn’t involved any of the fifth years, and waited to find out what would happen next.

“She monitored another of mine,” Bond reported a few days later, not looking delighted. “A lecture on werewolves, easy lesson, and she was evidently delighted at the lack of a practical component.”

There was something else there too, something Bond couldn’t explain. Umbridge had responded oddly to the class content, with a peculiar series of jibes on the safety of the students that hadn’t sat quite right.

Bond sent out feelers, spoke to other teachers, trying to understand what was happening. Whispers were soaring in from contacts around the Ministry; the axe was about to fall.

It fell.

Q climbed into his and Bond’s rooms, to find almost all of Bond’s clothing temporarily airborne, heading inexorably towards a large travelling case. Half the room was already stripped, various bits of Bond’s possessions vanished. Whisp curled up in the centre of the bed, mewing plaintively as she watched.

“James?” Q asked, mouth dry, his stomach contracting slightly as he tried to understand. “What’s going on?”

Bond turned to him, his expression curiously shattered. He conducted his belongings into the case, leaning back to aim through to the bathroom. He didn’t speak, didn’t explain.

“James,” Q repeated, terror clouding his throat.

Bond’s voice was calm and businesslike, shutting his case with an elegant flick, finally turning to Q. “I received an early warning that Umbridge will be attempting to not only remove me from my role here, but also arrest me for improper use of magic on, and in front of, underage wizards,” Bond explained simply.

“Arrest you?” Q echoed, the bottom falling out of his stomach. “But…”

“This has been planned for a while,” Bond continued, pulling an antique Sneakoscope towards
him and wrapping it carefully in a pair of old robes, placing it in his main case. “The Ministry wants Umbridge teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts, not me, and they needed a good enough reason to remove me from Hogwarts. Dumbledore would never have acceded to me being fired, no matter how hard the Ministry pushed, but he can’t fight if it’s a legal matter. This has been planned for months, I just can’t believe how long it took me to work it out.”

Q looked around the room, at the packed cases, and already knew; he closed his eyes for a moment, pain rendering him speechless. “You’re leaving,” he managed breathlessly.

Bond’s arms were warm, wrapping around him, Q rendered immobile with shock. He let himself sink into the comfort of it; Bond’s scent was familiar, his grip strong. “I’m so sorry,” he whispered to Q, lips against Q’s ear as he rocked the younger man slightly, kissing his neck gently.

Q could feel everything in his world shattering, in slow motion.

“If you run, they’ll throw you in Azkaban,” Q murmured, feeling dizzy. “Is this…?”

Bond pulled Q off him, holding his face carefully to maintain eye contact. “I promise to tell you everything,” he said firmly, ice blue eyes boring into the younger man. “Everything. You deserved to know a long time ago, and I’m sorry – hang on for me, Q, please?”

Q nodded mutely. Bond watched him for a long moment, before releasing him, closing his cases. “How’re you getting out?” Q asked dully.

“Dumbledore is a great wizard, and knows Hogwarts better than any,” Bond replied, giving Whisp a cursory stroke goodbye as he looked around the room for anything important he may have left behind. “He has a way out, if I move quickly. If this had come out in another hour or so, I may not have had time before they came for me.”

Q was past the point of speech. He didn’t want to be left alone. He didn’t want to be here, without James, with no idea where his partner was, if he was safe, the Ministry prepared to pounce on him.

It was too much, all at once, and Q had no concept of how to handle it.

Bond held onto him again, kissing him, Q still frozen in place. Too much. Please, too much.

“I love you,” Bond said steadily, forehead contracting in a way that told Q he was inches from breaking himself. “I’ll see you soon, my Q, I promise.”

Q nodded. “Love you,” he murmured, staring unseeingly, shaking very slightly as Bond shifted the cases to the portrait hole, and Q narrowly restrained himself from begging Bond to stay, please, he had to stay.

“Be safe,” Bond told him. He pulled Q’s head down slightly he could press a final kiss to his forehead, tender and intimate, a promise that he would be back. He opened the portrait hole, and
stepped out in the corridor, his cases following.

Q didn’t manage to take a single step. He collapsed where he stood at the foot of their empty bed, shaking violently until he regained enough sensation to simply cry.

Chapter End Notes

It is always darkest before the dawn. Not to mention that Q is damn stubborn, and won't let this happen without a fight. Thank you for reading! I always love hearing your thoughts, if you have the time/inclination. Jen.
It was simple stubbornness that brought Q down to breakfast the next morning, after about two hours of sleep, and some very deft human transfiguration to conceal the red-rimmed eyes and puffiness of somebody emotionally destroyed.

He was disappointed at the lack of smugness he felt at Umbridge’s expression. She had to know, by now, that Bond had left; while the announcement that Bond was wanted by the Ministry hadn’t reached most people’s ears yet, Umbridge had been personally invested in his removal and arrest. Seeing Q, she looked momentarily thwarted, as though she had expected Q to buckle in Bond’s absence.

Students ate their breakfasts merrily, completely oblivious. Umbridge’s expression turned nastier, watching Q unashamedly as he sipped at a cup of tea, eyes not quite managing to focus.

Minerva placed a comforting hand on his shoulder as she sat, an unusual gesture for her; Q looked up, not very surprised that she knew. “He’s safe,” she muttered, almost inaudibly, as she sat next to him and reached for pumpkin juice.

Well. If nothing else, he had an ally in Minerva; she was a stupendously capable witch, and Q trusted her beyond anyone but Dumbledore himself.

The post came; the Daily Prophet ran a story on use of magic around underage wizards – with an accompanying picture of Bond, sending a sharp stab under Q’s ribs – and little else of note. As the last owls left, Q found a small tube of parchment, his initial written in green ink; an invitation to dinner in Dumbledore’s office.

Q glanced at it, nodding slightly to himself. He had no need of replying; an invitation to Dumbledore’s office was not something one ignored. Either way, it was Q’s best hope of getting answers.

In the interim, Q needed to get through the day as best he could.

Q headed out through the front of the hall, rather than risk running into Umbridge or Silva – neither of whom he could cope with in close proximity at that moment.

“Q,” called a voice from one of the paintings; Q turned, managing a false twitch of a smile at Matilda while students watched him curiously. The nun smiled sympathetically, as Q stood in front of her painting, hands in his pockets. “Beth spread the word about your James. I just want you to know that we’re behind you. You’ll always be safe in Hogwarts.”

Q blinked, stunned.

It was momentous. The portraits could only do limited amounts, but they had eyes and ears
everywhere. They knew the secret passages, they knew where to hide, where to run. “Thank you,” Q said, with real sincerity. “As always, if I can return the favour, I will.”

“You’ve got enough to worry about,” Matilda told him firmly. “Now off you trot, you have classes to teach.”

Q could have hugged her. If she’d not been paint on canvas. Instead, he thanked her again; he straightened up properly, took a breath. He was a professor, at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. He was stronger than this.

He had a fourth year class first, thankfully not a complex lesson; at the end of it, Luna Lovegood hung back, smiling sadly at him. Q had no idea how she’d found out. To be honest, Q wouldn’t have been surprised if she didn’t know anything, but rather had a superhuman ability to tune into other people’s thoughts and emotions.

As Q watched, she Charmed a piece of parchment, creating an origami-esque paper bird; it animated itself, soaring towards Q and landing on his desk. Q nodded his appreciation and gave her fifteen points for Ravenclaw – it was an excellent piece of charmwork – and smiled at her as best he could, knowing it was hollow.

It was a long day. The first Q had spent in Hogwarts without Bond. He found himself barely speaking, his mind concentrating solely on his lessons, correcting spellwork and explaining movements and expressions in a quiet, near monotone voice.

He dismissed his final class of the day – second years, working on turning buttons into beetles – and headed towards Dumbledore’s office. He hadn’t been there since his interview, several months previously. “Cockroach cluster,” he said to the gargoyle standing guard; it leapt back, allowing Q entrance to the rotating staircase up to Dumbledore’s office.

Q tapped on Dumbledore’s door. “Come in,” the Headmaster called; Q pushed the door open, stepping into the open space of Dumbledore’s office.

Dumbledore was sat behind his desk on a tall-backed chair, dressed in deep purple robes, smiling gently at Q as he stepped into the room, shutting the door behind him. His desk was clear, barring a few plates of what looked suspiciously like curry; Q blinked. The House Elves rarely served curry, it was a little too international, but it was one of Q’s passions when he was with Sherlock.

It occurred to him a second later that Dumbledore probably knew that. The remembrance of Sherlock sent Q into a mental tailspin that culminated once again in the thought of James, and he sat down in the empty chair quickly.

“The past few days have been exceptionally trying,” Dumbledore said gently, ignoring the dishes for a moment, thankfully deciding to cut directly to the chase. “James is safe, as are your siblings. Mycroft and Sherlock are, as you know, nigh on untraceable when they wish to be. John Watson has also been moved to a safe location.”

Q’s expression was harsh, cold. “People keep repeating the word ‘safe’ with various degrees of emphasis,” he told Dumbledore, his levels of respect gradually falling to pieces. “I want to know where my family, and my partner, are.”

Dumbledore’s expression was soft, sympathetic. “Your brothers have their own methods. I daresay Sherlock has been lost to the depths of the Muggle underworld, while Mycroft will have contacts locked into the Fidelius charm,” he explained, not saying anything particularly novel.

“You’re in contact with James,” Q stated, his body still humming with tension. “I need to
understand what’s going on, Professor Dumbledore…”

“‘Albus,’” Dumbledore correctly mildly; Q broke off mid-sentence, blinking. He had never called Dumbledore ‘Albus’ before; all the teachers did, hell, even James did. Q just found it too weird. “You’re a colleague now, no need to stand on ceremony.”

“… Albus,” Q amended, shaking his head slightly at the surrealism of it all, keeping concentrated on the only point that mattered. “Please. I deserve to know.”

Dumbledore’s wizened, elegant fingers pulled back, settling in his lap. The curry lay, utterly ignored, as he asked: “What do you know of the Order of the Phoenix?”

Q had a class of seventh years first thing the next morning, including the inimitable Weasley twins – both of whom were on strike, now that the news about Bond had spread. They had adored Bond. For now they were silent, nodded to Q when he walked in, perfect unison, the slightest curl of a smile on both of their twin expressions.

The swell of gossip was near overwhelming, to start off with; Q could hear it, everybody exchanging gossip about Bond, whether he’d been right, whether he should be arrested or not, tracked down, sent to Azkaban. He ignored it all, a sense like somebody was needling with vertebrae in his lower back, the pain becoming incrementally greater as they found further ways through.

“Not really important right now, ladies and gents,” Fred called out, across the class; Q thanked Merlin for emotional maturity, as the class of seventeen-year-olds simmered right down again the moment their peers pointed out their flaws.

The lesson moved on without undue trouble, Q essentially delegating aspects of damage control to Fred and George. “We’re behind you, sir,” George said surreptitiously, as he packed away his books. Q should probably have objected to his students being so bold, but he was barely three years older than them; it was curiously nice, having support from people who were near enough his peers.

The Weasley twins were also Bond’s protégées, more or less. He had supported them since they were young wizards, exploring magic, finding new ways to develop their skills outside the constraints of formal education. True, they hadn’t concentrated on actual lessons for most of their lives; they were talented wizards nonetheless, and Bond had seen that.

The pair had a propensity for chaos. Now they’d been triggered, they unapologetically created as much devastation as they physically could, everywhere they went.

Q had to concede that the skiving snackboxes were an incredible innovation. A fusion of potion-making and spellwork that was truly, honestly impressive. Q saw the first of them three days after Bond left; a student, vomiting profusely into a bucket. As Q watched, he saw a blue tablet in the student’s hands; between heaves, she stuffed it into her mouth, swallowed.

The vomiting stopped, and the girl settled back, looking slightly pale but otherwise none the worse for wear. “Care to tell me what that was?” Q asked, looking her up and down. She blinked in wide-eyed terror, shook her head.

Q rolled his eyes, and asked Vanessa – a portrait of a witch on the ninth floor – if she knew what was going on. She spoke to the Fat Lady, who asked Valeria – who had a portrait in Gryffindor tower – whether she knew anything. Sir Cadogan got the message to Q, in his usual, inimitably
over-enthusiastic manner.

Skiving snackboxes. Q would have been livid, had it not been for the fact that they were never used in his classes, and Umbridge – a week after starting her tenure as Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher – still had no idea what they were.

Every breath of Q missed Bond. It became an ache, a pulsing fact that he couldn’t remove.

He was at the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix. Dumbledore had explained the Order, its initiatives and its history; created to fight Voldemort, at the core of it. Bond had been one of the younger members of the Order, when it first formed; he had been reabsorbed into it immediately after the events of the Triwizard Tournament, one of the highest-placed members of the group.

Q took the news surprisingly well, despite the understanding that he had been systematically lied to. Secrets, lies, were something of a necessity.

Yet – Bond was alive, and in a place even You-Know-Who couldn’t reach. Dumbledore was the Secret Keeper, and primary protector; there was nowhere safer in the world.

So was John Watson, a fact Q was finding very difficult to accept. John was a lovely man, but would be monumentally out of his depth, if trapped inside a single – fully magic – house for an indefinite period of time.

Over dinner, Umbridge smiled in a way that made Q feel faintly homicidal; he returned to his age-old habit of counting days to the end of term. Hogwarts felt stiflingly oppressive.

To Q’s slight heartbreak, he distantly could see the deterioration of Potter and Malfoy’s relationship. The school was in disarray, trust was nonexistent. Q and Bond’s situation was indicative of what could happen if Umbridge took a dislike to somebody; Potter and Malfoy, it seemed, didn’t dare risk it.

It was infuriating. Not only had Umbridge torn Q and Bond apart, she’d managed to inadvertently stifled another burgeoning romance. It may Q utterly, dangerously angry to think about.

Potter became surly, defensive. Q tried to help, to coax the boy back into rationality and common sense; instead, Potter ignored all advise, and acquired ceaseless, back-to-back detentions with Umbridge. To Q’s utter repulsion, the woman used forms of detention that equated to a form of torture; Potter’s writing hand was rendered near enough unusable after a week or two.

Q silently slid Miss Granger a vial of chopped Murtlap tentacles one class, didn’t wait to see her reaction or if she understood. Either way, Potter turned up the next day with the cuts a little less raw, and nobody spoke a word on the subject.

Umbridge’s classes, meanwhile, became the stuff of legend. Students had spent three years with Bond – by all accounts, a superb teacher – and were now being patronised, barred from using magic, and acutely aware that they were likely to fail their OWLs given an utter lack of practical spell application in the Ministry syllabus. Q heard the stories with palpable disbelief.

Ultimately, Q just tried to stay out of everybody’s way. The staff rallied around him, but it could only go so far; he was unable to contact his family or partner, left in utter isolation with only other people’s word that they were safe.

The single spark of light was that his classes continued, unmolested by Umbridge. Now that Bond was gone, the woman seemed to have lost interest in Q entirely; this fact alone kept Q in Hogwarts. He was able to teach.
A fortnight or so later, and Q had finished for the day. He dispatched a class of first-years with a decent amount of homework, and the threat of dire consequences should they fail to practise their spellwork. He carted various pieces of marking and books into his office, his desk surprisingly empty; most of his time was now devoted to his classes, minimal socialisation or distractions.

When term ended, he would be fully indoctrinated into the Order. While in Hogwarts, with the Ministry choking them, it was impossible to allow Q in; the walls had ears, after all.

Three weeks, now. Just three weeks.

A sharp series of taps on his door; Q didn’t look up, calling for whoever it was to enter before really thinking about it.

“Hello Q,” Silva purred, closing the door with an uncomfortably ominous click. Q glanced around at him, eyes flicking past Silva to his only exit.

Q watched him coolly, shifting closer to the desk; he’d left his wand lying there for a moment as he manually arranged parts of his office, now just out of reach. Silva watched him with curious interest, his own steps more confidence, feline in elegance as he flicked his own wand at Q’s, knocking it out of the way and off the far edge of the desk. An active act of aggression, leaving Q unarmed.

Abrupt fear kept Q pinned like a rabbit in proverbial headlights, Silva taking casual steps closer, Q backing himself against the wall; a hand shot out, caging Q in place. “Not such a clever boy, are we, Mr Holmes?”

The fear turned ice cold, and stabbed.

“Sorry?” Q asked, body and voice betraying nothing. “I don’t…”

Silva tutted condescendingly, drawing his wand along Q’s arm; Q’s hand darted upwards to stop him, aware that he could do little without his own wand. Silva moved too-quickly, drawing a circle midair to loop about Q’s left wrist. The other, Silva grasped in his free hand, pinning it against the wall.

To Q’s horror, his circled hand froze in place. As he glanced down in shock, the sensation started spreading along Q’s arm, creeping along his veins like a form of anaesthetic. “Listen carefully,” Silva said, some of the playfulness sliding out of his tone. “I know who you are, Q. Don’t you think the Ministry would enjoy playing with you, hmm? Brother of a blood traitor, of a discredited Ministry agent…”

“You’ve made your point,” Q said tensely, trying to make his arm move, Silva’s grip bruising on his other hand. He couldn’t quite get himself to breathe properly. “What do you want?” he managed, through fragmented breaths.

Silva’s body was a little too close for Q’s liking, his breath warm, smelling of treacle and aniseed. “I can be… convinced, shall we say, to keep your identity a secret,” he murmured, his body leaning into Q’s. “I merely require your cooperation.”

Q’s mind jumped to the most obvious, and least pleasant, conclusion; he tried to wrench his hand away, Silva laughing genially. “Dear boy, do hush,” he soothed mockingly, his actions juxtaposing violently as his wand jabbed into the hollow of Q’s throat. Q fell still.

“Cooperation on what?” Q asked sharply, jaw locked and tense.

Silva’s smile was a jagged knife. “Why, dear Q, don’t look so suspicious,” he teased, trailing the
wand tip over Q’s bottom lip. He pulled away, placing a slightly more respectable distance between them. “Merely information. Dumbledore has plans, and I wish to know what they are.”

Q’s heart beat frantically against his sternum. “I don’t have any information,” he half-lied; he knew of the Order, yes, but had no idea where they were or how they operated.

“I’d suggest acquiring some then,” Silva said, without smiling. He suddenly darted in closer, Q’s head cracking against the wall as he tried to get back, Silva’s face millimetres from his own.

He breathed as steadily as he could manage, frightened, lividly angry, wishing he could get hold of his goddamn wand and Oblivate the repulsive man, just out of sheer spite.

Silva stayed too close, breath tickling Q’s lips. “Don’t disappoint me,” Silva murmured; he didn’t need to complete the threat. The Ministry would have him in seconds, if Silva decided to reveal his identity.

“How did you find out?” Q asked, voice split open; Silva just laughed, condescending, and shook his head at Q’s naivety in bothering to ask.

Q was released, Silva sauntering to the door. “If you speak to anybody of this, believe me, I will too,” he promised, smiling as he casually threatened the very last of Q’s world, and left him alone.

Honestly, Q was just too tired to care. The pressing concern was how in the hell Silva had found out in the first place; Q had carefully dissociated himself from the Holmes name since joining Hogwarts at the age of eleven. Almost nobody in the wizarding world knew who he was, Mycroft had been extraordinarily diligent in respecting Q’s wish to be utterly anonymous.

Q scooped his wand off the floor quickly, shutting the door with a quick flick. “Colloportus,” he muttered, just because he could, the door sealing with a click and a slight squelching noise, keeping him tucked away from the rest of the world.

Chapter End Notes

I haven't been this geeky over Harry Potter in years. Guys, guys, I've regressed five years of my life!

Anyway. Your comments and thoughts are ever appreciated, thank you for reading!

Jen.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes


See the end of the chapter for more notes

Q was having tea with Professor McGonagall. It wasn’t the most unusual of events; she’d invited him to her office after the end of classes, a few days after Bond left. Now, a few evenings a week found Q in her office, with truly excellent tea and bowls of ginger newts and chocolate buttons.

Minerva couldn’t make tea, but that was alright. She supplied the tea bags, drank something Q didn’t examine too closely, and they talked about magic and life, avoiding topics of too-high contention. It was nice to forget, for a time.

The news came via Filius. Q was biting the head off a chocolate frog while Minerva had a small tirade over her third-year students when there was a light tap on the door; Filius walked into Minerva’s office confidently and hopped up into one of her spare chairs. “Well. Potter’s done it again.”

“What has he done?” Minerva replied, in the weary tone of one who’d spent far too many years dealing with the boy.

Filius reached for a ginger newt, nibbling on the legs. “A practical defence against the dark arts group,” he told them. “Fletcher heard. They formed it in the Hog’s Head, of all places.”

“And Dolores…”

“She knows,” Filius replied darkly, reaching into his pocket to hand over a piece of paper, with the words Educational Decree Twenty-Five, which outlined that in practise, all organised groups in the entire school had been disbanded.

Minerva was incensed, for no other reason then that Gryffindor stood a good chance of winning the Quidditch Cup that year – or would have, if they hadn’t been disbanded until further notice. Q read the decree with a troubled expression, sipping intermittently at his tea. “Potter, and who else?” he asked after a moment,

“Probably the usual collection,” Minerva burred, shaking her head a little; Q snorted. The tales of the hellish trinity of Potter, Weasley and Granger were legend among the staff; naturally, if Potter had done something, they were with him. In the case of something like this, they were probably behind it. It sounded like Miss Granger’s type of initiative, rather than Potter's, although Q didn’t doubt that Potter and Weasley had agreed with little to no persuasion.

Q continued asking occasional, quiet questions as he finished off his tea; Filius and Minerve were exchanging Potter-related anecdotes, and Q needed to get back to his rooms and complete the stacks of marking he had for various classes. He had never been a particularly social creature, after all.

He made his excuses, thanked Minerva for the tea, and started winding his way back to his rooms. Silva lingered in his consciousness, an unshakable presence; since seeing him the previous day, Q
had begun to grow increasingly paranoid. Silva’s power rested in threat and implication, but it was more than enough; anything Silva could do paled in comparison to what the Ministry would do if they traced the final Holmes.

There was little to be done. Silva knew who he was, and would use that information long before Dumbledore or anybody else could reach him; he was the type of man who would possess safeguards, in the event of something happening to him. Q had few options but to do as asked, in a way that caused the least possible amount of harm, and as delayed as he could feasibly push it.

The school thrummed with energy, activity. It was perilously close to Christmas; the weather had turned from cold to freezing, with accompanying drifts of snow as November drew to a close.

Quidditch took up a decent proportion of the school’s energies. Traditionally, the first match of the Quidditch season took place at the end of November, the last major school event before Christmas itself. Bond was the only reason Q really took an interest, the week passing in a haze as he organised work for his students over the Christmas holidays.

The weekend brought him – and almost all the student and staff body – down to the Quidditch pitch. Q murmured ‘calesco’ at his robes to warm up, wishing he could have been there with James; he would commentate, as he did on the couple of matches they’d seen – Bond was a lifelong supporter of the Appleby Arrows – with his arms wrapped about Q’s waist, pointing out manoeuvres and ploys, practically pre-empting the team movements while Q sighed, barely listening, smiling at the feel of Bond’s warmth and the soft murmur in his ear.

This was somewhat different. The players were obviously less experienced than in professional matches – although fairly good, all the same – and the general catcalling was far worse. The Slytherins had taken it upon themselves to begin a chant that was outright bullying three of the Gryffindor team members, with particular impact on Ron Weasley.

Minerva was palpably furious, Snape smiling in that obsequious way he had. Umbridge was sat bolt-upright, hands crossed in her lap, a silly, almost drugged smile plastered across her face as she watched the match with satisfaction, almost waiting for something to happen.

“Good day, Q,” Silva smiled at him, as Q entered the box; he nodded a return, hurriedly found a seat next to Pomona, who merely raised an eyebrow. Q didn’t respond, asked her about the state of her fanged geraniums; suitably deflected, Q was subjected to a short but informative rant on the relative state of plants in hostile climates while waiting for the match to start.

When it did, it lasted a monumentally short amount of time. The Slytherins made mincemeat of Ron Weasley – underpinned by truly hilarious commentary from Lee Jordan, a seventh year Bond had been quite fond of – and Potter dived for the Snitch within ten minutes, catching it easily.

Q couldn’t tell what happened, couldn’t hear. He saw Potter and Malfoy engage in a standoff, both looking hurt and defensive and utterly livid, Potter holding back one of the Weasley twins before abruptly letting go to pounce on Malfoy.

“Shit,” Q murmured in shock, as Madam Hooch intervened. He quickly got up, hoping to beat the other teachers to find Potter – he was the only one who knew, and consequently, one of few who could understand.

Minerva got there first. Potter and George Weasley stood in front of her, the latter looking purely angry, Potter looking quietly damaged in a way that was excruciating to see; Q fell back, flattened into a corner by her office, listening in. He didn’t see Umbridge approach, jumped violently when she made her presence known. Q himself remained out of sight, listening in.
The silence that followed Umbridge’s pronouncement of their banning from Quidditch was unbelievable. The repulsive woman slid out – actually singing to herself, in her nasal tones – leaving Minerva to quietly dismiss them.

Q waited for Potter to emerge, with George Weasley; Minerva closed her door, giving Q the chance to collar Potter without being noticed. “May I have a word?” Q asked Potter specifically; the boy’s lips thinned, waving off George to follow Q down the corridor towards an empty classroom.

He ushered Potter in, shut the door, cast an Imperturbable Charm on the door for safety. The boy stared at the floor mutely. “What happened?” Q asked quietly, indicating for Potter to take a seat while he himself pulled a chair opposite.

Potter was stonily silent for a long moment.

“Potter, I have no intention of telling anybody about your dalliances with Mr Malfoy. But please remember that you are on dangerous enough ground as it is, right now. Your practical Dark Arts group…”

“You know about that?” Potter asked, green eyes glinting in alarm.

Q just sighed slightly. “Everybody knows, Potter. To your credit, I don’t believe anybody has yet worked out how you’re keeping it running, nor where you’re meeting – truly, that is an achievement. If Umbridge were to find out, however…”

Potter nodded quickly, not meeting Q’s eye. Q allowed the sentence to trail off, watching Potter closely, waiting for him to finally explain.

“Draco’s father would have been furious,” Potter admitted finally, pushing errant hair out of his eyes. “He said we couldn’t keep… Professor, I really like him… after Professor Bond left, too, it was… Hermione, she worked it out, and she was worried because of the Ministry and Draco’s father, and Ron would kill me if he knew…”

“Slow down,” Q said, tone as placatory as he could manage. Potter took a deep breath, not looking very in control; it was easy to forget that the boy was barely fifteen, trying to live through things that grown wizards would struggle with. “Potter, I understand. Distressing though it is to admit, I think Mr Malfoy may have been right – this is not a safe climate for a relationship. In a handful of years, once you are out of the immediate surveillance of the Ministry…”

“You hypocrite,” Potter cried. “You and Professor Bond…”

“I haven’t seen, spoken to, nor heard from my partner – who is currently running from a potential stint in Azkaban – for a number of weeks,” Q said quietly, with a hidden type of steely anger that Potter didn’t try to provoke. “I have had intermittent assurances of his safety, nothing more. The Ministry found a premise on which to remove him, and have done so very effectively – I would have willingly desisted in our relationship, to keep him safely in Hogwarts.”

It was surprisingly open. Q had barely spoken of how it felt to lose Bond to Minerva, to Dumbledore; Potter needed to understand, though. He needed somebody to explain that sometimes, it was better to exercise prudence. It was all very well, standing up for beliefs – but at the age of fifteen, with the wizarding world literally mounting smear campaigns, the place Potter considered home being infiltrated by those who would seek to hurt him – it was best, ultimately, to wait.

Not a simple option, not an easy option. Merely the only one available.
“I…” Potter started, trying to find words, his expression speaking volumes.

“I know,” Q murmured, feeling horribly sad for the boy. “If it is worth it, it will survive being waited for. When Mr Malfoy is no longer under his father’s thumb, can choose his own life – you can but hope he will choose you. He cares for you too, very deeply.”

Potter let out a slightly derisive snort. “You don’t know that.”

“People say the worst things when they’re hurting,” Q explained simply; he’d worked out what must have happened on the pitch. A defensive Malfoy, trying to make himself and everybody around him believe he hated Potter, had said unforgivable things. Malfoy had made the hardest decision possible; Q felt a rush of sympathy towards the acerbic young man, forced to give up something precious for the sake of his family.

He dismissed Potter with a sigh, the boy trailing slightly, Q struck with the appalling sense of how much that one boy had lost, and all at the hands of those driven by fear.

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Nowhere did Christmas like Hogwarts.

Regardless of the rest of the world, there was something magic about Christmas; magic in the old sense, of something that couldn’t be understood but was beautiful nonetheless, something that transcended the mundane world and felt like a pure escape.

Snow fell outside and from the Great Hall ceiling, monstrously large trees appearing; Q helped decorate them, spent an evening with Filius, an evening that felt like the one he’d spent with Bond before everything had gone wrong, laughing honestly and winding up in a pseudo-battle with several of the staff and Prefects against Peeves, baubles and tinsel everywhere.

Christmas was an infectious, wonderful period. True, classes continued as normal – Q beginning to ladle homework onto the students unapologetically – but apart from anything else, it was nearly the end of term. When term ended, Q would be brought to the Order of the Phoenix Headquarters, finally shown everything, allowed to be a part of it.

More importantly, he’d see James.

The ghosts sang carols at all hours of the day and night, the building hummed with activity. Q treated the younger years to some Christmas-related Transfiguration – buttons into baubles, string into tinsel, just little party tricks they could use – and impressed the importance of OWL and NEWT practise onto the upper years.

Potter’s little spell group was evidently getting on nicely: judging by the overall quality of wandwork – which was helped by practise in every discipline of magic – they were working hard. Q would have loved to have seen them in action, but really, it was their secret to keep. He – like the rest of the staff body – feigned ignorance, while Umbridge fervently tried to investigate what they were doing, and how.

Silva cornered Q again, the portraits unable to warn him in time; Q remained still, calm. He was so close to the end of term, now. Out of Hogwarts, free to find help from somebody like Bond, work out how to fight back.

“Your brothers,” Silva murmured, Q very still, cagily watching him as the man lingered in the doorway of his classroom. Q fought the urge to run into his office, and slam the door shut. “They are still on the run, no?”
“I’m not doing this,” Q told him, voice faintly tense. “I don’t have anything of interest. If you’re working for the Ministry, you already know they’re monitoring communications. You know as much as I do, probably more, so get out.”

Silva smiled faintly, unnervingly. “You think me very stupid, don’t you?” he asked gently, not unkindly. Q didn’t know how to respond to that, so didn’t. “The holidays approach, hmm? Am I to believe you will make no attempt to see your dear beloved again?”

Q had never wanted to hurt somebody so badly. The tone was mocking, condescending, treating Q like little more than an errant child. “It makes little difference what you choose to believe,” Q said steadily. “I don’t have anything to offer you. Expose me, if you like, I don’t see that it would be of help.”

“I’ll give it time, little Q,” Silva purred, predatory, unnerving. “Next term, hmm?”

Q didn’t reply, Silva laughing softly to himself at Q’s expression as he sidled out.

It was two days before the end of term when everything erupted over Potter, over the Weasley family. Nobody knew quite what had happened. Stories came in sporadic bursts; Potter had a vision, started screaming in the Gryffindor tower in the middle of the night. Minerva had accompanied them to Dumbledore’s – Albus’s – office, and from there they had vanished from the building.

Q didn’t know anything had happened until he reached the staff room in the middle of the day, to find Minerva looking immensely stressed as she spoke to Severus. The latter shot Q a lethal glare when spotted – the man’s hatred of Bond had translated onto Q, in his absence – and lowered their voices considerably. They cut off all conversation at the sight of Silva, whom everybody knew was in league with Umbridge.

“What happened?” Q asked Minerva later, murmuring in the middle of a corridor, away from prying ears.

Minerva filled him in hushed tones, both horribly aware of possible listeners; Arthur Weasley, member of the Order, had been seriously injured somewhere in the Ministry on an assignment for them. Q nodded, hand covering his mouth, shocked, pathetically grateful that it hadn’t been Bond and hating himself a little for thinking that way.

The Weasley family and Potter were absent; Miss Granger was left behind, looking tearful and tense. Q couldn’t help but wonder how much she’d been told; she got herself through the lesson admirably, accepting the work to hand to Potter and Weasley when she inevitably saw them.

“Miss Granger,” Q called after her; Hermione lingered back, looking politely curious. Q handed over one of his own spellbooks, a limited edition copy of Transfiguration and Cultural Differences. “Have a look at that. For extra credit, I would be interested in reading your thoughts; it is unlikely to specifically come up in the OWL examination, but you would do well to reference it in the context of a larger essay.

She accepted the book with sheer reverence, making Q smile; the girl had a healthy respect for books. “Thank you, Professor,” she grinned, head bobbing as she examined the blurb, ran fingers across the cover. “Merry Christmas, by the way.”

“And to you,” Q nodded back, letting her disappear back into the rest of the school.
The final day of term. Q had a seventh-year mixed class – the classes weren’t divided into houses past OWLS, given that many people dropped various ones – and two fourth-year classes. Overall, a relatively easy day. The seventh-year class felt odd without the Weasley twins, as did the fourth-year class. Luna Lovegood gave him a pair of Spectrespecs, for reasons best known to herself, which Q accepted and slightly snorted at later.

He reported to Dumbledore’s office the moment term ended, dressed in Muggle clothing, as asked. When he got there, he found Severus speaking to Dumbledore, sounding a little agitated at something or other. “Ah, welcome,” Albus said genially, welcoming Q inside, Snape glaring outright. “Severus will be accompanying you to the Order’s location, where I believe provisions have been put in place for you to stay over Christmas if you so wish.”

Q blinked slightly. While Snape had not been in any way allied to Umbridge, he couldn’t help but find it peculiar that he was in the Order; Bond spoke of him like he had been heavily involved in Dark magic for most of his life.

He nodded regardless, confirmed that his cases were waiting downstairs, tried for a smile at Severus and gave up that idea quite quickly when he saw Severus’s expression.

Albus dismissed them politely. “I will be there in a few days, I have some matters to attend to first,” he explained calmly. “The others will doubtless explain more to you, Q. I hope that is adequate?”

“More than adequate,” Q assured, following Severus out the door. The man was taciturn and almost petulant, refusing to speak to Q in the slightest as they retrieved their belongings, making their way out of the castle grounds; outside, Severus pulled off his cloak, revealing Muggle garb underneath. He looked hilariously uncomfortable.

Snape held out his wand hand; the purple Knight Bus appeared a moment later, an experience Q had never managed to get used to, even after several years using the damn thing. To his amusement, Hermione Granger was already sat on the bus, blinking in surprise at the sight of her two Professors.

If it hadn’t been for Q, Snape would have Apparated. He found this whole affair with public transport immensely irritating.

They were headed to somewhere in Islington, to Q’s vague confusion. He didn’t query it. Snape handed him a piece of paper, told him in his usual, drawlingly low tone to memorise, and return it. Q obediently did so.

Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place.

They got out in tandem with Miss Granger, who watched with curiosity as the teachers went in the same direction as her. They walked for a handful of minutes, Whisp mewling plaintively in his cat basket; while the rest of his bags had gone on without him, Q had insisted on looking after Whisp himself. She had turned petulantly ginger, sulking at being removed from Hogwarts; Q just rather hoped she had the intelligence to remain one colour for as long as they were in the Muggle world.

Q repeated the address in his head, smiling slight as a building appeared from nowhere, between two established houses. He’d never seen a protected house before, couldn’t help but find it remarkable. “Wow,” he murmured to himself, sighing. He shifted his grip on Whisp’s case as Miss Granger silently led the way to the door, glancing at Snape intermittently with vague nervousness.
The corridor was pitch black, and immediately rent with sounds of a woman shrieking; Snape rolled his eyes, casting a sudden, violent spell at the portrait in question, who was shrieking something about Mudbloods and shame and curses and Merlin alone knew what else. Whisp yowled in abrupt terror, shifting to an antagonistic lime green at the noise.

Silence fell. A friendly-looking woman who could only be a Weasley beckoned them closer, down some steps into a slightly better-lit kitchen. Snape arrogantly ignored any greetings while Granger immediately went to Ron Weasley’s side, the pair speaking in frenzied, quick voices.

Q placed Whisp’s cage down carefully, a microsecond before strong arms wrapped around him. Q closed his eyes, curling his head to rest on the other man’s shoulder, arms snaking to pull him in closer, as though he could adhere himself there, warmth wrapping around his body, keeping him protected, safe.

“James,” he breathed, as kisses sank over his temple, the top of his head, clinging onto one another in the middle of somebody’s kitchen without giving a damn who was watching.

Chapter End Notes

Cheers for reading, guys!

A quick note: I’ve been updating pretty regularly since this began - real life is beginning to invade a little, so all production is slowing. More will come, keep an eye out, but it may not be as regular. You never know, I may manage it anyway.

Thank you again to the many people who are commenting, enjoying etc etc. It means the world. Jen.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Christmas! In April! (why not...)

A happy chapter, guys, because you all deserve it. Thank you, as ever, for reading/commenting etc etc :) Jen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They remained entwined for a handful of minutes, simply indulging in their reunion; those congregating in the kitchen were all concerned with their own lives, didn’t interrupt. “How’re you doing?” Bond rumbled in Q’s ear. Q let out a fragmented sigh, clinging more firmly.

“I’m fine,” he replied simply, hoping to capture the immediate sensations of relief, finally having true confirmation that he was alive, that he was safe.

They didn’t hear the kitchen door open. “Hello,” said an impressed-sounding, almost happy voice from behind them; Q turned, taking in the peculiar sight of John Watson – an archetypical Muggle – standing in the middle of a wizarding kitchen. There were pans washing themselves in the far corner, for Merlin’s sake – one of the saucepans also seemed to be having a water fight with a tea-towel – and yet John seemed entirely unperturbed.

Q grinned, extending a hand while Bond’s arms remained at his waist, keeping contact; John took the extended palm, looking Q up and down, glancing over to Bond and smirking slightly at the older man’s expression of unmitigated happiness. “I’d completely forgotten you were staying here,” Q admitted, retreating back into Bond’s loose embrace. “How have you been? Have you heard from Sherlock?”

John’s expression fell a little, a subtle shift. He nodded slightly. “Only sporadic, but he’s alive, he’s safe. There’s been no sign of Mycroft, he’s completely gone.”

“We’d know if anything had happened,” Bond added soothingly. “He was part of the Order too; we’re hoping he’ll come here eventually, he knows this building is protected.”

Q laced his hands with Bond’s, drinking in the sheer feel of him, the warmth, touch, the soft purr of his voice. They’d been apart before, naturally, but never under such circumstances; it felt like they hadn’t seen one another in forever, rather than just a couple of months. “I’ll try and get an owl out to him,” Q mused aloud; now they were out of Hogwarts, communications would be far freer. “And Sherlock…”

“I’ll show you later. You’ll probably want to catch up on the Order stuff,” John suggested, shooting Bond a quick, relatively suggestive glance.

Bond held Q fractionally tighter, lips moving to his ear. “I missed you,” he murmured, Q still attached to him unapologetically. Bond’s voice became louder. “Introductions: this is Molly Weasley, her husband Arthur’s currently in St Mungo’s, I’ll explain that in a minute.”

“Pleasure to meet you, dear,” she smiled, bustling closer. “You look half-starved, poor boy. Worse than Harry.”
“I’m fine, I assure you,” Q replied; Molly raised a faintly critical eyebrow, and Q could literally read her plots to get him better-fed. Given his expression, Bond would probably be supporting her in said endeavours; the last couple of months, with accompanying stress, had not been kind on Q’s eating habits.

Q’s eyes flicked over the kitchen. Severus, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, John – and Q suddenly landed on a figure in the corner, who was terrifyingly recognisable. “Merlin’s…” he swore abruptly, jumping as he put a name to a face, and realised a mass-murderer was sitting in the kitchen with them.

The man in question just looked vaguely amused. “Pleasure to meet you,” he smirked, standing from his place by the table. “Sirius Black.”

“Oh,” Q managed, remaining very still, somewhat irritated by the feel of Bond’s body shaking with suppressed laughter. “I’m assuming there’s some sort of explanation to go with this?”

Bond stilled himself enough to manage an attempt at an explanation. “Sirius…”

“I didn’t kill anybody,” Black interjected succinctly. “I was framed. I am by no means what the Prophet would have you believe.”

Severus – from his position at the end of the table – gave a slightly disparaging snort; Q glanced between him and Black, quickly establishing that there was no love lost there. Severus was outright glaring with hatred, and every glance from Black was pure contempt. It probably could have passed for amusing, if Q wasn’t trying to realign everything he knew to be true concerning one of the most reviled men of recent years. Dumbledore clearly trusted him, or he wouldn’t be here, so Q decided it was probably best to go along with it for the time being.

“Okay,” Q repeated, somewhat helped by Bond’s continued hold on him. He would get the full story out of him in a little while. “I’m Q.”

Black winked roguishly, causing Bond to grip Q fractionally tighter; Black laughed, making him look half his age. “Don’t you worry Bond, not my type,” he grinned, Bond laughing behind him while Q stayed relatively quiet, letting himself readapt.

“Do you know Potter?” Severus drawled, cutting over the laughter; Ron flushed all the way to his hairline, pulling Miss Granger out with him as fast as he humanly could. “Don’t look so alarmed,” Severus shot at Black.

Black plastered a slightly cocky smile over his face, arms crossed. “As if you could ‘alarm’ me,” he returned easily; Molly, in the corner, just rolled her eyes at the pair of them.

“Come on, I’ll show you around,” Bond murmured to Q, while Black and Severus threw quips at one another like well-aimed Stunners.

The house was dark, had a general air of unkemptness. Bond indicated for them to remain very silent on the landing – probably something to do with the screaming woman in the portrait – before padding around the various rooms. Being a magic-laced house, there was far more space than Q had initially believed; himself included, there were now thirteen people – fourteen, when Arthur returned – living in Twelve, Grimmauld Place, and there was still a spare bedroom.

Essentially, the place had wound up filled with Weasleys, given what had happened to the patriarch of the rather large family. Bond and Black – who Q was still having difficulty thinking about on a first-name basis – were both under technical house arrest, given that the Ministry had orders out to get them both into Azkaban.
Bond showed Q into the room he’d been living in; meticulously tidy, as Bond’s living spaces always were, very little to identify it as Bond’s.

Q shut the door, and all but threw himself at Bond, kissing him with everything he had. Bond returned it like Q was his oxygen, pulling back long enough to quickly grab his wand, casting an Imperturbable Charm at the door.

“Extendable Ears,” Bond said, by way of explanation. Q neither knew nor cared what they were supposed to be. Bond’s arms laced around him, lifting him up, the pair collapsing back on the bed and allowing themselves to forget the previous weeks, if only for a little while.

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Grimmauld Place was quickly turning into one of Q’s favourite places in the world.

After a handful of days, it became clear that the place was a hub for Order-related activity, while also harbouring a collection of teenagers. Q found himself immediately growing close to Remus Lupin, an understatedly brilliant man who was frequently around the Order; he hadn’t been able to get any work, with his ‘condition’, and was thus mostly trying to make ends meet working for the Order. He and Q had a fair amount in common; quiet types, harbouring secrets, and with a relatively similar sense of humour.

Meanwhile, Bond and Sirius had formed an immensely close friendship; that, if nothing else, had helped Q adapt to the strange fact that Sirius Black was not, in fact, a mass murdering psychopath.

Q could imagine them as teenagers – they had only been a handful of years apart, in Hogwarts – playing pranks, irritating teachers, earning more detentions than anybody knew possible.

When he and Bond tumbled back out of their room, as composed as they could manage, they were confronted with Sirius, ranting about Snape and Potter and Occlumency. Bond joined Sirius’s side instantly, arguing that somebody who was so clearly biased against Potter should not be teaching him, and that Legimency was a more useful skill regardless.

Q focused his attentions on Harry himself. The boy seemed more troubled than Q had ever seen him; by all reports, he had been asleep, when he suddenly had a vision of Arthur Weasley’s attack from the perspective of You-Know-Who’s own snake.

It was alarming, certainly. Occlumency seemed like a rather intelligent solution, but trying to convey that to either of the righteousness angry men pontificating in the kitchen seemed like a less than good idea.

Q sought out Potter, tapping lightly on his door.

“Professor,” Potter said in alarm, stepping back from his case as though scalded.

It was patently obvious that Potter was inches away from running; Q gave the room a cursory glance, returning attention to Potter with a sympathetic expression. “Running away is often a good solution, I’ve found,” he murmured sarcastically, as Potter’s mouth set in a thin line.

“You don’t understand,” the teenager retorted, making no move to continue packing. “I could hurt someone, I…”

He was interrupted by a portrait, of all things. “I have a message from Dumbledore, for Harry Potter,” the man drawled; Q’s eyes narrowed.

A flash of recognition: “Hang on – you must be Phineas Nigellus?” Q asked curiously; the ex Headmaster swivelled to Q, his expression deeply unimpressed as he gave a languid nod. Q had
never met any of the Headteacher paintings, they were all arranged in Dumbledore’s office; he
smiled genially, Nigellus rolling his eyes.

“Stay where you are.”

Both Q and Potter remained entirely in place. “Yes?” Potter asked, with a dash of sarcasm.

“Imbecile,” the man muttered. “That’s the message: stay where you are.”

“Clever man, Dumbledore,” Q murmured, glancing to Potter, who looked utterly furious,
thwarted. Nigellus simply rolled his eyes, stalking out of the painting. “Potter, you need to believe
in him. He knows far more than any of the rest of us, in particular concerning You-Know-Who.”

“Why doesn’t he just tell me?” Potter demanded, betraying his age; Q listened to the young man’s
impassioned, slightly self-righteous rant, and nodded gently, sympathetic. Q couldn’t honestly
begin to imagine how it felt, knowing one was seeing the visions and perspective of Lord
Voldemort in his sleep.

Q sighed a little. “Trust him,” he advised, knowing Potter would. “I know you dislike Professor
Snape, too…” Q was cut off by another attempt at a rant; Q held up a hand, waited for Potter to
sheepishly trail to a stop. “I know. But I’m afraid I support Dumbledore wholeheartedly in this,
and you would do well to afford him the same degree of trust as he does you.”

Potter looked absolutely and entirely stunned, by the mere implication that Dumbledore trusted
him – something that really, was evident to almost anybody.

Q ambled away without a further word, returning to the kitchen to find Miss Granger and Remus
discussing werewolf legislation and management, while Sirius, Bond and Tonks levitated
increasingly small items from one end of the room to the other, and John tapped away on a laptop
that seemed to be holding most of the other adolescents around the table entirely rapt.

“What are you doing?” Q asked curiously, looking over John’s shoulder to see the man doing
nothing more exciting than browsing Facebook. It took him a moment to realise that he was
genuinely in a room full of teenagers who had absolutely no idea what the Internet was.

The Muggle world was surprisingly progressive.

“Just contacting my sister,” John explained, nodding at the screen. “Obviously can’t come for
Christmas, so the whole family’s up in arms… reckon they think it’s to do with Sherlock, as far as
they’re concerned I still think he’s dead.”

It was weird, actually, hearing Sherlock spoken about so openly. Q was used to concealing every
aspect of Sherlock’s existence – partially to protect himself – and now, the secret was spreading.
The Order all knew, and while they supposedly protected their own, it was difficult to keep on
remembering that when Q was inches away from being re-labelled as a Holmes when he
desperately didn’t want to be.

Q shook the concerns to one side, nodding. “Anything more from Sherlock?” he asked, the
question standing a chance of a genuine answer for the first time in weeks.

Sherlock Holmes was, after all, brilliant. He had found a way of communicating that flummoxed
all magic, sidestepping the pretentions of magic and sailing straight under the wire.

John had shown Q one of his letters; anonymous, easily passed off as somebody else’s,
distinguished only by John’s name in a familiar font, the ‘J’ curling distinctively.
A few lines about nothing in particular, general British small talk about the weather, no personality; Q glanced over it, raising an eyebrow. “James?” John asked, holding out the paper; Bond tugged out his wand, tapping the paper gently.

Q watched with outright horror as Bond cast calesco on it.

It didn’t catch fire – the spell was in no sense incendiary, merely temperature – but began to warm gradually. As it did so, words began to darken on the back, distinctly clear and very legible. When the lines of writing were clear, Bond waved off the spell. “How…?”

“Lemon juice,” John explained, with a small smile. “Heat it, it darkens. Muggle trick. Your spells don’t catch it, it has no magical properties.”

Q was very impressed; he knew Sherlock was good, but hadn’t appreciated just how good he could be with non-magic tricks. He tugged the paper off John, scanning it through with wide eyes.

**John. Am safe. No sign of Mycroft. Bond’s worries are unfounded. Contact when Q is there. Will be relocating soon, do not worry if reply delayed. Will be in touch over Christmas. SH.**

Sherlock’s customarily short, succinct style; he was appalling at letter-writing, much preferred his Muggle communication devices, but they weren’t necessarily safe from Wizarding surveillance.

True to his word, Sherlock didn’t make any contact for a few days. Q replied with John – an exercise in lemon juice, and a bastardised nib – telling him he was safely installed for the holidays, and missed him. Q confirmed, too, that there had been no sign of Mycroft since he’d disappeared.

In the midst of everything, Christmas crept onwards. The house became abruptly a lot noisier, when Arthur Weasley realised that John was a *Muggle army doctor* - said in reverential tones, through wide eyes – and would therefore be best placed to assist in his partially-healed recovery via Muggle methods. Arthur got himself discharged from Mungo’s early, and returned to Grimmauld Place a few days before Christmas.

St Mungo’s were terrible with Muggle treatments, it transpired. While Arthur took potions for the venom that dissolved the stitches, John dealt with everything else, more than willing to do something useful after a while stagnating on the internet with a load of wizards for company.

Arthur fell in love with John on the spot. They hadn’t met previously, given that the Weasleys had still inhabited the Burrow, but it became very quickly evident that he was not planning on letting a real life Muggle go in a hurry. John put up with him remarkably well, while Q just snorted with laughter, and draped tinsel over cabinets with languid wand waves while Sirius and Bond belted out ‘Rudolph the Red-Nosed Red Cap” at the top of their lungs, Lupin shooting them disapproving looks and pretending not to laugh.

Christmas turned out surprisingly well. Molly gave everybody knitwear; Bond opened a navy blue jumper that worked surprisingly well with his skin tone, while Q found a lovely green cardigan that would fit under his robes, and would doubtless be very warm. For John’s efforts working on her moronically Muggle-obsessed husband, Molly worked for two days solid creating a brown cable-knit jumper, which he faithfully pulled on the moment it was out of the wrapping.

There were lower points; Percy Weasley’s absence, which reduced Molly to tears. The stirrings from further off in the Order, like Kingsley Shacklebolt’s report that the Ministry were mustering to undermine Dumbledore. Stories creeping in from all fronts, signalling that the world was still moving outside the microcosm of Grimmauld Place.

“It’s stifling,” Bond had murmured, the night of Christmas Eve; both had been rather drunk on
Sirius’s very much not-child-friendly eggnog, and Bond had finally told the full truth. Grimmauld Place was claustrophobic, a mausoleum to a long-dead family that reminded Bond of his own, a place in need of repair and life, draining it out of the long-term occupants. Sirius made for an excellent house guest, but before the Weasleys had arrived, the house had been nigh on dead for over a month.

Q had nuzzled into Bond’s chest, dropping an apologetic kiss on his sternum. In the darkness, he had spoken of what Hogwarts had become. A shell of itself, dying incrementally, throttled from the inside this time.

He didn’t talk about Silva. True, he needed to, but he hadn’t wanted to cloud the short amount of time he had. Bond was prone to kneejerk reactions, would respond very badly to the idea of Silva harassing or blackmailing him. Q kept carefully quiet, storing the information for another time, letting Christmas break in the morning with explosive crackers and all forms of magic.

The days on and around Christmas were addictive and perfect, drawing to a close in a haze of alcohol and chocolate each evening. By Boxing Day, John had drunk most of the Firewhiskey in the house; he’d only recently discovered the stuff and loved it, and discovered that the Weasley twins’ tricks would keep him merrily occupied for weeks, plus were hilarious when he was drunk.

The students kept themselves to themselves a little more, partially because Molly refused to let them get drunk with the other adults. After the twins spiked Ginny’s drink with a love potion that made her adore Bond, Molly sent everybody to bed, whipping up an antidote for her daughter who continued to stare longingly at her old Professor.

The adults all settled in the kitchen, exchanging stories and jokes until the small hours of the morning. Sherlock dutifully managed to get a letter to John and Q on Christmas Day, and while there was no word from Mycroft, Q still waited for the moment when he’d finally decide to come to Grimmauld Place. It was safe, one of the safest places in the world, and it would be an unspeakable comfort to have Mycroft back.

When they all turned off to bed, Q and Bond blocked out sound and light through every door and window, cast spells on every hinge in the bed and made the floor slightly springy, before diving on one another. Clothes scattered in every direction, the pair winding up screaming out one another’s names to the winter-black night, taking every moment they could before term began again.

Chapter End Notes

Your thoughts and comments are ever appreciated. I shall update as soon as I'm able! Thank you guys, so much. Jen.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Thank you, again, to the glorious people who are reading, commenting, enjoying this fic. I love you all. Shipimpala, you especially, this is still all your fault!! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Term beckoned with appalling immediacy, the thought making Q feel immensely depressed. That, in itself, was upsetting; Q had loved Hogwarts, before, when he was with James and they were looking at the start of a year, with excitement and magic and none of the chaos of Hogwarts as it had become.

A new year broke with excitement and Firewhiskey and nettle wine and all manner of fireworks. Quite literally, in the case of what the Weasley twins managed to produce; nobody was quite sure how they had the money, but they were creating some very high-end, professional-looking tricks and potions. Like the skiving snackboxes, they were retail quality, if the twins had so wanted.

Everybody wound up kissing at midnight, on New Year’s itself. It was a Muggle tradition, but John had mentioned it in passing and Arthur – now becoming better-acquainted with the foreign art of The Internet – researched it. He then insisted that he and Molly kiss at midnight. The idea spread like wildfire.

Q was used to the tradition; Sherlock had introduced the idea years previously, once he’d spent time in a Muggle school, knew how it all worked. When Q was about thirteen, he decided to spend New Year with Sherlock and Mycroft, rather than his parents; Sherlock explained the entire tradition, and a young Q had become rather enamoured with the idea.

Now, he was able to wind his body against Bond’s, kissing him with a reverential passion. Around them, everybody had paired off; Molly and Arthur, of course. Tonks and Remus – something that made Q smile faintly to himself, the pair breaking off to smile in a way that spoke of shock, awe, and a gentle type of want that brought Remus’s fingers to trace Tonk’s cheekbones, eyes wide, wondrous.

Sirius decided to kiss John. John had enough time to look very alarmed, Sirius breaking off with a cascading laugh as John blinked slightly. “Still not gay,” he said pointlessly, Sirius just raising an eyebrow in blanket disbelief. Everybody knew that John would last approximately twenty seconds in Sherlock’s presence before kissing him senseless, if given half the chance.

Of the teenagers, Granger and Weasley managed a small tentative type of kiss. The youngest Weasley, their sister, kissed Potter; Q noted it with vague interest, as Potter’s expression closed in on itself and Q thought sadly of Mr Malfoy, somewhere at home, with a family of Death Eaters who would never understand.

Q couldn’t help but feel a tremendous degree of pity. Malfoy’s decisions were not his own, in a similar way to Potter’s; they both suffered through the weight of expectations, being dragged in whatever direction was expected of them. Both boys had long since ceased to have any true autonomy.

There was nothing to be done; Q had his own problems to work though, given the immediate
threat of Silva on the horizon.

It was with a decent degree of reluctance that Q finally discussed, with Bond, what had happened with Silva.

The pair were about to attend an Order meeting downstairs, when Q realised that – of all moments – this was the one. The Order stood a chance of helping, after all, if he asked now.

Bond’s jaw clenched to a thin line of anger, fingers clenching, skin white and taut. “How does he know who you are?” he asked, in a voice stretched to breaking point, and Q shook his head, wishing he had the faintest idea. “And he wants information on Dumbledore?”

Q nodded, hating the flat anger he’d inspired in Bond’s expression; Silva was not worth the energy, not worth hating so passionately. Bond reached for him, dragging him out the door and downstairs to the kitchen; overhead, Extendable Ears were dangling absurdly, Bond casting a quick jinx on them to make them explode dramatically.

The yell of protest from the children upstairs, and the screeching from Sirius’s mother, were half-smothered by the kitchen door. Sirius shot him a vaguely aggravated look; Bond opened the door, letting through a wall of sound. He cast a single, livid spell at the screaming one, the curtain shutting with a deafening bang, Bond slamming the kitchen door behind him.

Q let out a soft sigh, flushing slightly under the weight of so many eyes. Bond was in the worst mood most had ever seen from him, after all.

“What do we know about Raoul Silva?” Bond asked, voice a whiplash, throwing himself in the free chair next to Sirius. Q padded after him, installing himself in the one next to that. Whisp mewled around their feet, jumping up in Bond’s lap; he rolled his eyes at the thing, clearly not in the mood to be nice to small, furry animals.

Q leaned over, retrieving the deeply violet cat from Bond’s lap, stroking gently through her fur.

It was only a small gathering, as far as the Order meetings went. Q had been present for a handful that had all the Order members, from Minerva and Filius through to the lesser known agents like Dedalus Diggle, an exceptionally annoying man who spent half his time bleating about Potter, and very little else.

This meeting consisted of Sirius, Tonks, Lupin, John, the Weasley parents, Mundungus Fletcher, Hestia Jones. Nobody else was able to make it; Dumbledore was frequently absent, while the other members were busy in their jobs, or quieter work for the Order.

“… based on Harry’s visions, Dumbledore is still keen on infiltrating the Department of Mysteries…” Lupin had been saying, tone calm and measured, breaking off at Bond’s abrupt entrance.

“Silva,” Bond snapped again, Q letting out an absentminded hush to placate him a little.

“Nasty bloke,” Fletcher wheezed from the sidelines. “Nearly got me done for some fenced…”

“We don’t need to hear about your criminality,” Molly snapped at him; Q found it relatively funny these days, how Molly and Mundungus entirely failed to get through a conversation without the former biting his head off about something or other. She turned to Bond, ginger hair bouncing around her face. “Why?”

Q distracted himself by boiling the kettle, waving his wand at said kettle; he hated levitation, his aim was always off, and he very nearly managed to spill water everywhere. Molly intervened – Q
mouthing a thanks – while Bond ranted through everything Q had recounted.

Everybody was silent for a moment. “He isn’t known as a Ministry or You-Know-Who ally,” Hestia said carefully, watching Q with an expression like sympathy. “I’d assume he’s working for personal gain.”

“How gaining what?” Q asked quietly, letting Molly wave his tea into existence. He tugged the fridge door open with a wand wave, the milk soaring into Bond’s hand as Molly levitated his tea over to the table. “Thank you,” he said aloud to Molly, before twisting back. “I don’t have anything he could want.”

Sirius gave a low snarl. “He knows Bond will be working on our side,” he said, tone territorial, ever the canine. “It would be assumed that you’d hide with Bond, if you could. You’ve been off radar for a couple of weeks, he’ll know.”

“They all know,” Lupin pointed out mildly. “They just don’t know what to do about it, about any of us.”

Tonks – her hair a deep violet at that moment, Whisp’s the precise same shade – spoke in her usual confident tones. “Silva won’t do anything to physically harm you inside Hogwarts grounds, it isn’t worth the risk,” she told them, glancing at Remus for the briefest of moments, before returning her attention to Q. “Can we feed a false story?”

“What charges?” Q asked, eyebrows furrowing slightly, dropping Whisp with a slight hiss as she stropped her claws on his lap.

Tonks looked over Q apologetically, shrugging slightly. “Misuse of magic, in Sherlock’s case,” she explained, as Whisp leapt onto her lap; the two Metamorphmagi got on surprisingly well, Whisp spent half her life imitating Tonk’s hair these days. “Simple anti-Ministry treachery in Mycroft’s, I’m not sure anybody quite knows, but they want him locked away for as long as possible.”

“He’s an exceptional wizard,” Remus commented quietly. “If he’s not with the Ministry, he’s against them. Your whole family,” he continued, glancing at Q, “are legend, of course.”

Q just rolled his eyes slightly, feeling very tired. Yes. He had an extraordinary, lethal family. The wizard who opted to be a Muggle – a move which had caused controversy for as long as Q could remember – and the wizard who had half-run the Ministry, the voice in everybody’s ear, the shadow in each corridor. The terrifying concept of somebody who knew everything.

Like he had when he was barely ten years old, he passionately wished that his brothers weren’t extraordinary, or lethal. Then – as now – he found himself a pseudonym, curled up under it to protect from the world that would expect things from him, treat him differently.

“What are we going to actually do?” Molly asked fretfully, watching Q – as always – like a spare son she needed to look after. She did that with almost everybody who was lonely or overly skinny, drew them close and cared for them; a woman with a lot of love to give, Q thought
quietly.

Tonks kept watching him carefully, expression conflicted. “We need to find out how he knew,” she said, glancing around the table briefly. “The Ministry has no idea, there are only rumours of another Holmes. Silva knowing…”

“My family, Dumbledore himself, and now the Order, know who I am.” Q said quietly, everybody’s attention immediately focused with utter intensity. “I have been Q since before I started school. I don’t exist on any records as a Holmes.”

Mycroft had been ruthlessly thorough. When Q announced what he wanted to do, Mycroft organised everything; the youngest Holmes brother ceased to exist entirely. Dumbledore was contacted, and he happily agreed to let Q be known as Q, with no links to the Holmes family. He was estranged from any ties, obligations. His peers, teachers, all found it bizarre; they had no choice but to go along with it, once it became clear that Q was giving away nothing.

It had become easier over time. It stopped being such a novelty. He was just Q, and everybody could cope with that.

“I can start looking into that.” Remus suggested, watching Bond’s furiously closed-off expression. “Somebody must know something. As to what we do to placate him…”

Bond kept his fingers linked with Q’s, looking around the room of Order members. “We feed Silva false stories,” he confirmed, looking at Q briefly for confirmation.

It could work. Of course it could work. Q just wasn’t sure if it actually would, in practise. If Silva sensed a lie, Q honestly didn’t know what would happen. “If something goes wrong, you’ll need to be able to leave Hogwarts at a moment’s notice.” Hestia told him, Q nodding in agreement; he could go whatever way Bond managed to get out, quickly and quietly, and get to Grimmauld Place as soon as possible.

Q sipped his tea, Bond’s hand in his, an unspoken confirmation of safety.

Q left as late as he physically could. He wanted every second he could with James, eked out his time in Grimmauld Place to an absurd extent. Once inside Hogwarts grounds, communications would clamp down again; judging by what had happened when Sirius attempted to contact Potter the previous term, even the Floo network was being monitored.

Leaving Bond was hard. Q only did so because he could still be of help in Hogwarts; there were generations of young witches and wizards, who would need guidance from somebody other than the likes of Umbridge or Silva.

Q took the Knight Bus again. He could have Apparated to the gates, but Potter and his friends needed an escort. The group split on the bus, most of the seats taken; Tonks, disguised as an austere-looking elderly woman, ushered the Weasley twins and their sister to the back of the bus, while Q remained with Potter, Ron and Miss Granger.

Stan Shunpike seemed curiously familiar with Potter; Q listened with faint interest, not overly surprised to hear they were being bumped up the queue by request from another passenger: Potter’s presence scared people, the Prophet almost solely responsible for it.

They stumbled off the bus, a congregation of mostly Weasleys. Tonks bid them a goodbye, Q taking a quick moment to address Potter; he and Remus had been talking that morning, were in absolute agreement: “Professor Snape is a great Occlumens, and can be trusted,” Q told Potter
Potter nodded, a little stiffly, and went to rejoin his friends. Q levitated the collection of bags, sending them on ahead and trudging through the excruciating cold to get to the school itself.

Q went straight to his rooms, feeling horrendously lonely. Whisp had moved into Grimmauld Place for the time being, given that Q wasn’t honestly comfortable keeping her in Hogwarts. Scamander was still a constant, hooting plaintively in the corner. It wasn’t right.

“I miss them too,” Q told him sadly, falling backwards onto the four-poster, staring blankly at the ceiling.

- -

Term kicked into gear quickly and efficiently, and Q lost himself in work. Mock OWL and NEWT examinations, marking, lesson plans. Tea with Minerva as usual some evenings a week, mostly keeping himself to himself, avoiding Silva with help from the various portraits.

A week or so, and it was manageable. Q began to believe he would make it through the term.

Silva tapped on his office door, and Q’s blood ran cold. “How can I help?” he asked, tension rendering him a taught bowstring, scanning the man in front of him.

A soft chuckle, fingers reaching out to him once again; when Q shuffled back, Silva’s eyebrow raised curiously. “So how is dear James?” he asked in a low purr.

Q felt abruptly, inexplicably angry. Silva had no damn right to do this, make him risk everything he had. “Why are you doing this?” he asked flatly, eyes narrowing. “You’re not a Death Eater, you don’t have the Mark. So what are you? An admirer, a sympathiser…”

“You assume I have some interest in You-Know-Who,” Silva pointed out, his smile truly unnerving.

Q’s eyebrows contracted slightly, almost confused. “You want to know…”

“Information is power, sweet boy,” Silva crooned, grabbing Q around the back of his neck, his eyes widening in abrupt shock as he was jerked forward. He strained to stay back, Silva’s lips, skin, far too close. “I know you have information, and I want it. Wars are won by those balancing power, who have the data that can keep everything tightly strung. Tension. Knowing which strings will dance.”

Q’s jaw tightened, eyebrow raised. “How poetic,” he noted drily, before letting out a barely audible sigh. “I don’t have much,” he said softly. “Names?”

Silva quirked his head slightly to one side. “It will have to do, for now,” he murmured, still not releasing the younger man. Q rattled off the names of Order members that were already known, avoiding mentions of Sirius, the Weasleys. None of the children were mentioned either.

Q was practically thrown backwards, staggering slightly to stay balanced. “You’ll need to do better than that, or I will have to find other ways to keep you occupied,” Silva told him with a thin, unpleasant smile.

“I’ll do what I can,” Q returned, eyes still a little wide, a little sharp.

“Have a little look at the Prophet for me, in the morning,” he told Q softly, his accent almost liltingly smooth. “Tell me what you think, hmm?”
A sensation of severe foreboding crept up Q’s spine. “What…?”

Silva disappeared almost instantly. Q spent one moment in frozen, quiet fear; Silva’s words boded badly.

Q snapped his fingers loudly, deliberately; a moment later, and a house elf appeared. “Master Q, sir,” the elf said delightedly, oversized ears flopping around his head, eyes like tennis balls.

“Hello Dobby,” Q smiled; he had met the enthusiastic elf for a brief time, given that Dobby was a house elf who desperately craved contact. He was always the first to appear when anybody in the castle needed help, was known to have been hired by Dumbledore himself, for a genuine wage. Q found him charming, in a weird way.

Dobby smiled up at Q. “Dobby looked after Master Q’s owl,” he said helpfully, hoisting himself onto a chair, more on a level with Q. “Master Q’s cat…”

“She’s not around any more,” Q admitted sadly, thinking fondly of his chameleon cat, his Whisp. “Dobby, can you get me some lemon juice? Just on its own, on my desk.”

Dobby blinked a moment, surprised, but concealing it well. “Of course Dobby can,” he said happily. “Dobby will have it waiting. Would Master Q like some tea?”

Q smiled sideways; Dobby was perhaps the only person, other than James himself, that could make good tea. “Definitely,” he confirmed, knowing that Dobby would bring cakes and all sorts. Hopefully some chocolate cream cakes, actually.

Dobby disappeared with a loud crack, and Q headed back up to his room to pen a letter to Grimmauld Place, wondering what in the hell would be in the Prophet the next morning.

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The newspaper landed on the end of Q’s bed. He hadn’t been planning on going down to breakfast; the thump of the paper woke him up, grappling for it and his glasses in tandem, holding the paper close to his face when he knocked his glasses off the edge of the bedside table.

**MASS BREAKOUT FROM AZKABAN**

Q stopped breathing.

Chapter End Notes

Your comments are always adored, I shriek delightedly and fall off surfaces. Not even kidding. Ask Lex.

Thank you for reading! Jen.
Breakfast was a tense, strung-out affair. The teachers were all talking in low voices, or reading the Prophet. Q settled by Minerva and Albus, drawn into a frantic, strangled conversation over where they were hiding, what they were planning.

Dumbledore opened the paper to a later page, wordlessly handing it to Q, correctly realising that the man hadn’t seen the later articles. The chaos of the front page had swallowed everything else.

The death of Broderick Bode. Q knew from Order meetings that Bode had been one of their own, on a quiet basis, working in the Department of Mysteries. Dead, now. Throttled by a potted plant in St Mungo’s. An outright murder of one of the Order.

Death Eaters were now loose in the world at large. Q stabbed at scrambled egg with a curiously bleak expression, while the image of Bellatrix Lestrange laughed up at him, black eyes a heartbeat away from Sirius’s.

There was no word from James, or Grimmauld Place as a whole. Naturally, Q now had no way of contacting Sherlock, no way of knowing if his brother was even aware of what had happened overnight. Mycroft would know, because the man damn well knew everything.

Worryingly, Silva had known. Before the news struck, before it even happened. A man with no ties, no affiliations. Q found himself studying Silva’s wrist, expecting to see the Mark, more discomfited by its absence than anything else; the man even made a show of rolling his sleeves up, as though showing off that he wasn’t ostensibly connected to Dark forces.

And yet, he had to be.

Q shivered faintly to himself. He had sent Scamander with a letter – ostensibly to the Weasleys, who would redirect it to Grimmauld Place - the moment he saw, mainly to chase up contact with Sherlock. Mycroft was a lost cause, having not been seen or heard from in nearly three months, but Sherlock was still just about contactable. He needed to know as a point of urgency.

Hopefully, somebody in the Order would be able to work out who in the hell Silva was, too, that he knew so much.

Silva settled in to eat with Umbridge – distracting her from the poisonous glares she was insistently sending Q, Minerva and Dumbledore from down the table – and Q took that as his cue to leave. He wasn’t sure he could handle much more of Silva, given how things were.

His first class was almost unmanageable. Everybody was too concerned, too frightened, to be even vaguely sensible. By the time he had the fifth years, it became evident that, to add insult to injury, Hagrid had been put on probation by Umbridge. It was far from a surprise, but unpleasant nonetheless; Hagrid was only being targeted because of his lineage.

The teachers and students alike were becoming frantic. The breakout threw into focus everything that Dumbledore and Potter had been claiming throughout the previous six months or so; You-Know-Who was back, had orchestrated the Azkaban breakout. In short, they finally believed what they’d been told for months.

The Ministry whipped back with another Educational Decree, this time barring them from giving
students ‘any information that is not strictly related to the subjects they are paid to teach’. It was such a transparent ploy it was actively embarrassing, and only served to double the number of rumours that were whipping round.

Several students became noticeably withdrawn. Longbottom – who had been a hopeless Transfigurist from the outset – became infinitely worse, now he was the subject of gossip and rumours that were everywhere. Anybody whose family had ever been touched by Death Eaters became sudden focal points.

Bond’s parents had been lost to a Death Eater raid, when he was eleven. Q tried to offer as much sympathy as he was able, in the single missive he was able to get through castle security. January passed very quickly, given the amount of work Q was juggling trying to get the various different years ready for exams, while also keeping himself very busy with assisting other teachers, managing detentions, trying to talk Miss Granger down off her self-imposed ledge of panic over OWLs, finding ever more inventive ways to keep in touch with Bond, and running away from Silva.

He managed nearly two full weeks without incident.

Q was pinned in the corner of his empty classroom, Silva’s wand flicking absentmindedly to one side and shutting the door on them; he moved with graceful speed to arrest Q’s movements, hand darting to trap the younger man’s wrist. “I don’t have anything,” Q repeated, as emphatically as he could, thinking of anything he could say to distract, deflect.

“How are you keeping in contact with your brother?” Silva asked in a low purr, wand dangling eloquently at Q’s temple; he leaned in, palm flat against Q’s chest, sliding across his torso towards his wand. He plucked it out with two fingers, letting it hang loose. “We shan’t be needing this right now,” he murmured, placing it out of Q’s reach.

Q felt his body simmer with anger, recoiling from the warmth of Silva’s hand, his heavy presence. “I told you, I…”

A sharp jab of Silva’s wand. “Silencio,” he said simply, very calmly, letting out a softly delighted laugh as Q tried to speak, managing nothing, mouth moving in a horrible parody.

Everything stilled, Q watching his assailant with livid, wary silence.

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benevolent.”

Silva released him. Q straightened up through sheer pride, rolling his shoulders a little. He nodded once, sharply, and Silva was still laughing as he sauntered away again, pale robes swirling about his feet, leaving Q to recollect himself as best he could.

-

February was warmer, and dumped rain in obscene quantities. Q was asked to monitor student behaviour down in Hogsmeade, when it came to the weekend of Valentine’s Day; he swallowed down the faint upset that came with being surrounded by such gaudy, ostentatious Valentine’s arrangements, and did as asked.

Potter was up to something. As was Granger. Neither were subtle, and Rita Skeeter was a relatively obvious presence. Q wasn’t sure how in the name of Merlin they were going to get the article published – and really, Skeeter’s presence could only mean one thing – but clearly, they had some type of plan. Luna sat with them, somewhat perversely, stirring her drink with the expression of somebody not even faintly interested in the rest of the world.

Q spent the time in the Three Broomsticks, drinking occasional Butterbeers, glancing up from his copy of *Transfiguration Weekly* to scan over the pub. Mostly, it consisted of teenage couples, doing things that were just a little distasteful in public. Skeeter’s acid green Quick-Quotes was happily in action, while Skeeter wore an expression like she had been forced to eat a live Flobberworm.

Otherwise, it was a quiet day. Almost everybody in the village was with somebody; the rest of the student body busied themselves with work, with friends. A few brave gangs of singletons ventured into Honeydukes, but beat a hasty retreat in the chaos of Valentine’s gnomes, chocolate hearts, heart-shaped confetti.

Q let Hogsmeade slide out of his mind the moment he got back; he marked paper after paper, practised ever more complex spells in his rooms to pass the time. Yet more time passing without Bond, moving closer to his deadline with Silva, and it felt increasingly like everything would fall at once, when it inevitably did.

Of course: a handful of days later, all hell broke loose.

Q had a letter from Grimmauld Place, a few cursory lines; *calesco* revealed that Sherlock had reported himself as safe, there were no confirmed sightings of any escaped Death Eaters, and Q needed to read the Quibbler post-haste.

The last point was a definite surprise. Q took a few moments of sheer confusion, before remembering Granger and Potter – and, of course, Luna Lovegood. Q hadn’t made the connection before; Xenophilius Lovegood, editor of the Quibbler. Luna was his daughter.

It made a fair deal of sense, correlating the contents of the Quibbler with the dreamy, slightly bizarre persona of Luna. Q shook his head slightly, wondering how and where he would ever get hold of one.

He didn’t need to wait long. His first class was fourth years; Luna smiled up at him, handing him a blank piece of paper with a slightly wonky smile. Q accepted it, waving his wand over it after the class had ended, eagerly reading through Potter’s expose on You-Know-Who’s return.

Well.

It was tactless, inflammatory, and Umbridge would probably try to assassinate Potter out of sheer
fury. It was extraordinary, reading it through, seeing Potter’s own words over what had to have been one of the most hellish nights of his life.

Q laughed slightly, erasing the text the moment he was done for safety’s sake. Naturally, another Educational Decree had cropped up; it was wise to keep it hidden.

The staff discussed it in low voices, mostly concerned with Potter’s safety in the light of such an interview. Umbridge had turned noticeably crazier than usual, striding around the school like a madwoman, trying to track down errant copies of the Quibbler which naturally, everybody had read by lunchtime.

Potter sat at the Gryffindor table, surrounded by friends, people calling over to him to congratulate him and state their allegiances in varyingly formal tones. Q restored the fifty points Umbridge had docked Potter that morning in the space of two lessons; looking at the hourglass, the other teachers had done exactly the same. Gryffindor shot up in house points in no time at all, entirely due to Potter’s actions, placing them firmly in the lead for the first time all year.

On the Slytherin table, Malfoy kept glancing up at Potter, his expression curiously conflicted. Q watched him sadly for a moment, aware that there was nothing anybody could do for him: Potter had named his father as a Death Eater. He, and his friends, were being directly linked to You-Know-Who.

Potter didn’t look up once. Malfoy eventually gave up.

The Quibbler became the main talking point of the school. Q, in his meetings with Minerva in her rooms, found himself discussing how the spell worked, the tragedy of Diggory’s pointless murder, the role of somebody as apathetic as Wormtail in such an important event.

On the downside, communications in and out of the school became truly impossible. Umbridge was paranoid that Potter would do another interview, that yet more anti-Ministry propaganda would be spread around the Wizarding world, and she clamped down on absolutely everything, using all the power she humanly could.

Sybill’s dismissal was consequently unsurprising, in a similar way to Hagrid’s probation. Umbridge targeted the weaker teachers, exercising power and influence, determined to be more in control than Dumbledore was. Q knew from the Order meetings that the Ministry were eagerly awaiting a chance to remove Dumbledore; it was only a matter of time, now.

Especially given Firenze.

Q found him extraordinary. Centaurs were legendarily isolated, moving in their herds, refusing contact with wizards; the fact of having a true centaur, living and working in Hogwarts, was extraordinary.

The excitement died back, of course, days spinning past in an unerring haze of parchment and ink and marking and spells, and fixing botched attempts at simple Transfigurations.

Three weeks passed.

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Q tapped lightly on Silva’s door, acutely aware that he was entering the lion’s den, and Bond would probably kill him if he knew how stupid he was being. He shivered slightly at Silva’s trilled come in, the usual tone, seeping and repulsive, coaxing him regardless.

He kept his fingers tightly around his wand. There was no way in hell he was remaining
defenceless, not when he was in Silva’s territory anyway.

The room was precisely how Q remembered it from his student days. Posters and slogans of arithmaticians, Muggle mathematicians, juxtaposing the facts of numbers with the incongruities of magic; Q had always found it an incredible subject, probably his favourite. All magic is extraordinary, but there is a complex simplicity to arithmancy that always kept Q entangled.

“It has been a little while, no?” Silva commented, indicating the spare chair. “I am consistent, here. Important to be consistent.”

Q sat gingerly, feeling immensely uncomfortable. “What, exactly, do you wish to know?”

“Where is Mycroft Holmes?”

At least he wasn’t trying to be subtle, Q mused wearily. “I have no idea,” Q said honestly. “No contact in several months. Ditto Sherlock.”

“Do not lie to me,” Silva said patiently, smiling genially as though Q was a particularly naïve child. “Sherlock is known to have attempted contact with John Watson, their owls were tracked.”

Q hid his smile easily; owls were often tracked, entirely by accident. John and Sherlock had been regularly using Sherlock’s owl, Darwin – and if the Ministry had somehow found the few scribbled lines, they would track Darwin for further missives. Apparently, they had failed to find Sherlock’s hidden messages, which was a distinct relief.

When it became probable that owls were being traced, John had suggested that they use Muggle post, instead of owls. Royal Mail were inefficient, but at least they were not tracked by wizards; John supplied a decoy address, and Order members arrived intermittently to an abandoned house to pick up the various letters.

Last Q had heard – nearly two weeks ago, now – Muggle post was becoming the most efficient way for the Order to get messages to one another. Neither the Ministry, nor the Death Eaters, would condescend to think about Muggle methods of communication; John was the link, that made the Order realise they could use a side-along world to their advantage.

“Coded,” Q said immediately. “Certain words and phrases, we made them up as children, it’s just a way of knowing he’s still alive. How do you know who I am?”

Silva’s smile turned a little colder. “You’re testing my patience,” he said warningly, making Q’s stomach twist uncomfortably. “You do not know Sherlock’s location, correct?”

Q nodded once, curtly, tired of being polite. “As to Order movements, most of it is ears-only,” he muttered, before something in his stomach convulsed painfully. He looked up at Silva sharply, aware of his mistake, horrendously aware of his mistake.

Fuck, Q thought simply, as Silva smiled like a leech. At no stage had either party mentioned that Dumbledore had reformed the Order of the Phoenix; Q had agreed that Dumbledore had plans, released the most obvious names of those closely associated with Dumbledore – but the Order itself had remained guarded. The Order meant true organisation.

“The Order of the Phoenix,” he purred, eyes boring into Q, playful and cruel, exploiting the smallest slip. “Well, well. Dumbledore is a naughty boy, isn’t he?”

Q’s jaw remained set, expression otherwise as neutral as he could manage. “Can I go?” he asked coldly.
Silva’s mouth twitched. “I will require more information, of course,” he said smoothly, molten caramel. Q’s gaze sharpened a little further, Silva’s eyebrow quiring elegantly. “Levels of mobilisation, how organised this little collection is. You have two weeks this time, little Q. Now go run, tell dear James all about what the nasty man said, hmm?”

“You know full well I can’t, with security as it is,” Q muttered pointlessly, eyes shutting slightly, furious with himself for having said a word.

Silva reached forward, patted Q’s hand condescendingly. “My dear boy, I’m sure you’ll find a way,” he murmured happily, and waved Q away.

Chapter End Notes

I'm spending my days buried in HP5 again. I'm past the point of regretting it, really. Thank you guys for this, for all your support, because oh my lord, I'm drowning in crossovers and love it. Your comments, et cetera, make me immensely happy :) Thank you, every single one of you.

Yes, it's a beautiful day, so my author's notes are effusively happy. Bad days are improved by words and sunshine. This is a life truism, as far as I'm concerned.

Existentialism over, back to usual scheduled programming. My apologies for that. Jen.
Chapter Notes

A little bit of violence in this chapter, but really, quite mild in the scheme of things.

My usual thanks to shipimpala for her wonderful gifsets (http://shipimpala.tumblr.com/tagged/hp!00q) and to miho for her cover (http://archiveofourown.org/works/7276) and now, also, to CrossroadProphet, for a Moriarty-orientated spinoff set in this 'verse (http://archiveofourown.org/works/779571)! Awesome, guys, I'm delighted you're enjoying it so much.

To the (surprisingly large) number of people following - I hope you're still enjoying it. Take care guys. Jen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What do you know about Harry Potter’s little Defence Against the Dark Arts group?” Silva asked, his smile poison, nearly making Q upset his tea.

He glanced up at Silva, feigning perfectly modulated confusion. “What group?” he asked, brows furrowed, eyes almost transparently green and innocently wide.

They needed protection. If it was the only thing Q could do, he would offer those seeking refuge from Umbridge his protection.

Silva raised an eyebrow, as though contemplating just how far he was prepared to believe. Q stared straight back, as steady as he could manage, pulse jumping uncomfortably in his throat as he looked at Silva and prayed, quite insistently, that he would let the topic lie.

To his immense relief, Silva leaned back slightly, nodding his head in faint agreement. Q didn’t waste his breath asking how or what Silva knew, when the man would never deign to tell him either way.

Q sipped his tea, watched Silva very carefully, waiting.

Silence reigned for a long while, Q negotiating with the mounting feeling of dread that settled in his stomach. “Is that it, or...?”

“If you are unable to supply me with information, I will require something more from you,” Silva interrupted calmly, with a lilting smile. “Nothing sordid, do calm yourself,” he said genially, as Q turned a little white, reminded unpleasantly of the first time he’d had this conversation. “Your time.”

Q’s eyes narrowed. “What do you mean?” he asked quietly, confused.

Silva spread his hands, indicated around them. “You are an amusing little pastime, you know,” he said, like some peculiar form of compliment. Q raised an eyebrow a little. “I like having you around. Dinner, Q.”
“I’m not going to leave Bond,” he said flatly, making Silva’s smile evolve ever further.

“I didn’t ask you to,” he purred, glancing Q over. “Just dinner. No tricks.”

Q didn’t believe it in the slightest, but he had limited available options. “Okay,” he murmured quietly, unable to see many options; he could not risk the Order, and was giving away what was potentially very little in exchange for his safety. It merely meant putting up with Silva, a little more.

Silva sipped his tea, and Q quietly fretted about how in the hell Bond would respond to this little revelation.

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Everything Q was worried about, every trouble, every fleeting concern – spanning from the uncertain fate of his siblings to just whether Bond was safe – faded into utter insignificance on an evening at the start of April, a day that had promised to be relatively average.

Q had spent the morning teaching, exhausted. His dinners with Silva tended to go on late into the night, until Silva finally conceded boredom and allowed Q to escape back up his rooms, curling up in his bed feeling oddly dirty about it all. Silva had pulled back to nothing more than implication and vague sexual suggestion, but given the duress involved with the whole proceedings, Q was honestly feeling distinctly unnerved.

Unfortunately, Q had been placed on night patrol. The teachers went on rotation, stalking the corridors for out-of-bed students, skipping out on all of their own sleep or work to prowl through the night. Following a late dinner with Silva, Q was honestly dreading it; on the upside, he didn’t have any lessons the following day, so could take the day to rest and recalibrate.

Or so he had believed, at any rate.

Q heard a commotion a few corridors along, while he ambled through the seventh floor, chatting to Tobin – a lovely young wizard from a seventeenth century portrait, who was having gender identity issues after four hundred years of living on a wall. Q listened, speaking in soft tones when he could; Tobin climbed through other frames, trekking along with Q across fields and rooms and castle battlements,

The noise honestly sounded like a rampaging hoard. Most likely, it was.

Quickly, Q darted along the corridor, seeing people burst out of all corners, coming in his direction. It could only be one thing, given the cross-section of students: Umbridge had finally found Potter’s group.

“Tobin, a passage,” he said sharply; Tobin ran forward, popping a portrait of a very affronted wizard forward so Q could wrench it open. “Granger, over here,” he called, calling to the first person he could see.

Miss Granger clearly hadn’t seen him, glancing around with absolute terror before she recognised Q. She lingered in a moment of justified fear, but ran towards him anyway, seeing the open portrait. “Granger, over here,” he called, calling to the first person he could see.

Miss Granger clearly hadn’t seen him, glancing around with absolute terror before she recognised Q. She lingered in a moment of justified fear, but ran towards him anyway, seeing the open portrait. “Here,” she called back some others, voice echoing out; at least three Weasleys, Miss Lovegood, Mr Longbottom. They all stalled for a second when they saw Q, but at Miss Granger’s assurance, kept going.

Q heard Umbridge long before seeing her, thankfully. Miss Granger et al dove into the portrait hole, Q shutting it quickly and throwing a quick thanks to Tobin, feeling faintly apologetic as Miss Chang nearly tripped over her own feet when she saw him, skidding the opposite direction.
Q ran down the corridor towards the last source of noise, deliberately ignoring any pounding footsteps from those still running away, abruptly hearing a garbled, triumphant yell. “Hey Professor – PROFESSOR! I’ve got one!”

Umbridge appeared in tandem with Q; she glanced her fellow professor up and down disdainfully, before rounding on Potter. “Fifty points to Slytherin, Draco,” she trilled.

Potter got to his feet, very carefully not looking at Malfoy.

Love could be so very cruel, Q thought sadly, as Malfoy’s expression remained calculatedly jubilant, and Potter stared at his feet with a slight deadness in his expression. “What’s going on?” Q asked Umbridge directly; she didn’t so much as spare him a further glance.

“Justice,” she said, with an immensely arrogant satisfaction, hauling Potter off to Dumbledore’s office.

Q was left alone with Malfoy, who watched him defiantly. The pair had never shared a proper conversation; everything had been conducted via Potter. Q was, honestly, past the point of caring.

“That was immensely cruel,” he told Malfoy quietly.

The boy glanced at Q like he had grown another head. “I…”

“He cared for you a great deal,” Q said simply, glancing down at the young wizard; Malfoy stared back, an inhuman shade of white, tinged with a near-green of utter nausea. “That little demonstration was unnecessary, and self-serving.”

Malfoy’s mouth opened and closed again, rendered genuinely speechless. Q couldn’t bring himself to find any true satisfaction, walking away, leaving the teenager behind to contemplate what he had just done.

In the interim, Q could see little he could do; he would not be welcome in Dumbledore’s office, not if Umbridge was busy yelling about clandestine Dark Arts groups. Albus would doubtlessly find some excuse to spare Potter the wrath of the Ministry, but Q could do little to assist in that venture.

Instead, he traced the other group members, who were potentially still vulnerable. He ducked down the passage Tobin had found, winding up eventually on the third floor; a useful cut-through, actually, and one Q hadn’t known about.

Mr Longbottom gave a sudden scream when he saw Q coming; to his interest, Q found himself the focus of about six people’s wands, all at once. None of them had dared leave the passage yet. “Jinxing me would not be a good idea,” Q pointed out calmly.

Everybody’s wands lowered.

“Professor,” Miss Granger said breathlessly. “We were just…”

Q held up a hand. “How did it get discovered?” he asked quietly, looking over the people congregated by the exit. “Well??”

Miss Granger seemed the only person not paralysed, and thus able to explain. “If somebody snitched, we’ll know,” she managed, glancing around at her fellows. “I don’t know how else she could have found out.”
“How did you know?” one of the Weasley twins asked, sounding suspicious; Q just raised an eyebrow at the absurdity of that question. The Order all knew, had known for a long while.

Q sighed slightly, shaking his head; he leaned forward, tapping Mr Longbottom over the head with his wand and muttering a Disillusionment charm. “Back to your dormitories, directly,” he told them all firmly. “Did Umbridge, or those Slytherins, see you at all?”

Granger shook her head, mimicked by the others around. “Good,” Q noted quietly, and gestured to Longbottom. “Go now. I’m sure Miss Granger can lift a Disillusionment charm?” he asked; she returned a slightly tremulous nod, and Mr Longbottom fell out the portrait hole with all the subtlety of a rhinoceros.

Luna smiled gracefully at him. “Thank you,” she said gently, such a kind voice; she was an entirely guileless human being, the type to genuinely wish others well. Q utterly adored her.

“You’re welcome. Can you lift the charm on your own?” he asked her, while the others milled about, looking faintly awkward; nobody knew how to adequately respond to Luna. Nobody ever did.

Luna shook her head. At least, Q thought, she wasn’t the type to mind that few knew how to speak to her. “It’ll fade away,” she smiled dreamily, making a little surprised noise at the feeling creeping down her spine when Q cast it. “Thank you, professor,” she smiled, and slipped out into the corridor.

In all honesty, she probably shouldn’t have been drifting around the school with a Disillusionment charm, which was definitely detectable. But then, of all students, Luna was most likely to not be questioned over it.

Q looked over the four remaining students. The Weasleys all wore identically defiant expressions, while Granger was just carefully wary. “I would strongly suggest being far more careful about who you trust,” he told them simply. Q didn’t allow them a chance to respond. “Now – Miss Granger, Miss Weasley, you both go now. Miss Granger, lift the charms as soon as you are able, it would be inconvenient to explain otherwise.”

He tapped Granger over the head, while she in turn tapped Miss Weasley; a good charm, actually, although imperfect. “Thank you,” Granger said quickly, bushy hair pushed into her face as she shimmied out of the portrait hole, followed by the youngest Weasley.

Q waited a moment for the pair to get some distance, feeling his thoughts drift; whatever was happening to Potter now, it was all made more poignantly painful through Malfoy’s actions. A fine little mess.

“Everything alright, professor?” Fred Weasley asked curiously.

Q turned back to them, smiling slightly. “We will go out together; if anybody asks, I caught you vandalising Umbridge’s notices,” he said firmly, and pushed the twins out of the portrait without a further syllable. Q slithered out a second later, thanking the slightly irate portrait of a witch named Ethel, and shooing the twins down the corridor.

It was easy enough to let the twins peel off to the Gryffindor common room after a while; Q sighed slightly, twisting around to return back to his own rooms, awaiting news of what had happened.

“I’m sorry, he made me tell!” cheeped a voice by Q’s ear; he turned, confused to find Tobin, on quite entirely the wrong floor. “I’m sorry!”
Q opened his mouth to ask who, what, any number of pertinent questions.

The hand on his shoulder distracted him from everything. A solid presence, easily pulling his slim body around; Silva was truly, entirely furious. It blazed in his eyes, his expression, every part of him thrumming with tension.

Swearwords blossomed in the back of Q’s head as he was wrenched forward, guided down various corridors, already aware of where they were most likely going; Q’s jaw tightened, Silva grunting a password Q couldn’t quite catch before being chucked bodily into his private rooms.

“I told you not to lie,” Silva warned, entire body practically vibrating with anger. “You knew about the group, and you lied to me.”

Q’s mouth felt curiously dry as he picked himself up, going for his wand; it was out of his hands in a heartbeat, flying into Silva’s grip. A moment or two after that, Silva had muttered incarcerous; a few deft flicks of his wand, and ropes had laced over and around Q’s body, attaching him to the end of the four-poster bed.

This was escalating very quickly, and Q was unarmed. He tried to struggle, succeeded in making the ropes clamp down harder around him; through sheer force of will, he made his body completely relax. “I knew of it, yes,” Q said softly, shutting his eyes as Silva hit him hard around the face, glasses flying off.

A measured exhale, danger making everything a little too tense. “And what else have you lied about, hmm?” Silva asked, dropping to his knees, angling his body too close, far too close.

“Let me go,” Q said softly, with as much control as he could manage. “You can’t do anything here, not in Hogwarts. I had to lie, they’re children, and I had no proof.”

Silva’s expression was all teeth, an animal response. He stood back a little, twirling his wand in long fingers, expression contemplative. “I cannot abide liars,” he purred softly, as Q tried to modulate his breathing. “Terrible little creatures.”

Q took a breath, utterly unprepared for Silva to quietly murmur crucio.

It only lasted a couple of seconds, but those two seconds were sheer, horrific agony; it felt like needles entering every inch of him, excoriating pain that he had no possibility of understanding or internalising. Q didn’t have time to voice a scream, just choked on an inhale as he tried to ride it out, each microsecond spilling out into an eternity with the worst pain Q had ever experienced.

It stopped, more abruptly than it had begun, all-encompassing.

“Merlin’s…” he managed, head hanging, breathing harshly.

Silva crouched in front of him, fingers stretching out. “It would be best for us both if you told the truth, little Q,” he murmured, tracing along Q’s pink lips, the flush in his cheeks. “This is your punishment. Do remember this, won’t you?”

Another murmur, and Q’s body crumpled inwards a second time, keening as he tried not to outright scream, not to give Silva the satisfaction. He supposed he should not have been surprised; in a world where teenagers wrote lines in their own blood, lying probably was feasibly punished with torture.

He giggled slightly, disconnectedly, terrified but not wanting to admit it.

“Next time, you will tell me the truth,” Silva told him, and Q nodded as best he could; the ropes
unravelled around, letting him collapse, boneless. Silva caught him, curled him up tightly with a soothing hush. “You cannot lie to me, dear boy,” he murmured, and Q’s body vibrated with naked shock.

A chaste brush of lips, and Silva stood. Q pulled himself up, standing straight, everything in a suspended state of calm while he tried to work out what in the hell had just happened.

“I’ll be seeing you soon,” Silva promised.

Q nodded slightly. He accepted his wand without a murmur, getting out of the room before anything further happened.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for reading! Any comments are always gratefully received. Have a lovely day!

Oh, also - I promise the Holmes brothers will all be returning, at a later stage. I have plans. Be very afraid. Jen.
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Q fights back, ladies and gentlemen.

My love, as always, to shipimpala - she started it!! Jen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The signs appeared in the morning. Educational Decree Number Twenty-Eight.

_Dolores Jane Umbridge (High Inquisitor) has replaced Albus Dumbledore as Head of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry._

Of all possible outcomes, Q truly hadn’t thought it was possible. Dumbledore cared about Hogwarts more than was honestly believable; he was the protector, the champion for the students, the dependable factor that everybody unanimously relied upon.

Q read the announcements, and felt something snap in the back of his head, some anger, utter _fury_, rising to an inexorably peak. There is a point of ‘too much’ for everybody, and Q knew – with a sick sense of certainty – that he was inches away from his.

Silva looked truly, crawlingly delighted over breakfast; he and Umbridge spoke in their trilling tones, bouncing off one another, Umbridge giggling while Silva smiled like an unpleasant reptile. Students hummed with activity, with noise; the Slytherin table were smug and settled, the other houses wrought with tension as they tried to consider the full repercussions of Dumbledore’s loss.

Q stared at his toast blankly. Minerva was trying to speak to him, her voice a soft burr; she was as astute woman, could easily see that there was something more in Q’s silence.

The Crucius curse was agonising at the time; it also left its marks, an insistent ache for the next day or so, pain intermittently jerking through the nerves from the impact point. Q couldn’t forget, he couldn’t allow himself to forget; nobody could see, nobody could tell, but Q had been tortured the previous night, while Dumbledore escaped the castle.

Umbridge wasted no time in setting down her rules, establishing herself as Headmistress. The charming Inquisitorial Squad began running – a de facto collection of miniature spies, predictably all Slytherin – and the entire school had the air of being run by particularly virulent cockroaches.

The residual pain through Q’s body throbbed, constant. Anger continued to climb, rising up Q’s spine in increments, making him feel almost dizzy.

Ultimately, the Weasley twins set him off.

Q stood still, watching the mess of fireworks. Pyrotechnically brilliant, bright and alive and sparkling, throwing shivers of light across every corridor, celebratory in their defiance. They were a cry for freedom. Hogwarts had survived before without Dumbledore, and it would again, would unite and fight back.

Umbridge ran around in circles, yelling at Filch, while Q remained just out of sight. Each spell she
cast seemed to be making the volume of fireworks increase exponentially; Q was relatively certain he knew a few little bits of trickery that would easily remove the lot, but had absolutely no interest in assisting the woman who had removed Bond from the school.

The lights burned his eyes, and Q knew.

Finding Potter was embarrassingly easy, merely a case of asking the nearby portraits; they all gestured in the same direction, towards a concealed door behind a tapestry, halfway down the corridor.

Q tugged open the door easily, to find the Weasley twins, and Potter. They all, impressively, looked far from frightened; the Weasleys wore twin smirks, a spark in their eyes that showed a complete lack of any remorse. Potter just looked studiously defiant.

“Superb,” Q said simply to the twins, who nodded their gratitude. They exchanged glances quickly, clearly very surprised, but not exactly about to argue the point.

Q turned to Potter, expression turning a little more serious. “The Room of Requirement is blocked, yes?”

Potter nodded, evidently confused. “I…”

“I will be sourcing a new location for your Defence Against the Dark Arts meetings. I would like to see you in my office this evening,” he told Potter firmly. He glanced to the two Weasleys, casting them a small smile. “You two have quite enough to be getting on with, I assume?”

George grinned, exchanging another look with Fred. “Thank you, professor,” they said, in absolute unison, identically delighted tones of voice.

Q raised an eyebrow, shaking his head at the distant but distinct sounds of Umbridge cursing colourfully, in a way that truly did not befit any form of teacher. “Long live the Headmistress,” he noted ironically, moving back to the door.

“Vanish them,” Fred called after him helpfully, just as Q closed them back into their hiding place.

Q was still laughing as he reached his office, grinning out at the collection of sparks and coloured lights he could still see, and somehow imagined would persist. He deliberately cast Vanishing spells out of his window, catching various ones, imagining a hydra as everything exploded in infinite kaleidoscopes.

Sourcing a classroom – like tracking down hidden students – was made incalculably easier with portraits on side. Q was adamant that it needed to be a room with an as-yet unknown secret passage; that way, the students could have an easy escape route, if anybody attempted to walk in on the sessions.

Of course, it would be impossible to reassemble the whole of Potter’s Dark Arts group. Umbridge had found a list of their names, had punished them all, with or without due cause. It seemed like most of the school had wound up with blood streaming from their wrists.

In any case, they would all be warier now, and Q could understand that. A few would manage it, however – if nobody else, Miss Granger would bite his arm off for the opportunity of somewhere to practise pre-OWLS. Without a decent bit of practise, she could miss her well-deserved Outstanding mark.
“Nice dress,” Q noted to Tobin, who blushed, straightening his hem. “Are you alright?”

Tobin shrugged a little, lopsided. “I think I’ve found a place. You know. For your, erm, thing. S’on the sixth floor, I think it could work,” he said, almost anxiously. Q’s eyes widened.

“Show me.”

- 

It was a perfect room. Decently sized, a good way away from the main thoroughfares through the school – and had a secret passage that even Filch knew nothing of.

Said passage was behind a large woman named Janet. Q bribed her with cake from the Fat Lady, and some of Vanessa’s wine on the third floor, and she agreed to allow students to use the secret passage, which would take them out behind a statue nearly four floors below. Theoretically speaking, it would be impossible to track down any students in the room, if they had enough warning to hide.

Getting warning to those in the room was a simple case of having somebody prepared to warn. Tobin, racked with guilt that no words would assuage, was first in line. Sir Cadogan was appallingly overenthusiastic, leading to Q gently turning down his offers of assistance, gainfully employing him at the opposite end of the castle in the hope of him being well out of the way.

To Q’s unending shock, the ghosts became involved. It was easy to forget how much the ghosts saw. All were disgusted by Umbridge, desperately wanted Dumbledore back; Nearly Headless Nick – or Sir Nicholas, as Q more tactfully referred to him – agreed to help, with further assistance from a handful of other long-deceased beings, all of whom were entirely in favour of defying Umbridge by any means necessary.

Potter arrived in Q’s office as he had asked; his expression turned from caged to utterly shocked, but agreed to the use of the classroom for OWL practise without hesitation.

“I need not remind you that this is exceptionally dangerous,” Q told him, with quiet emphasis. “Do not disappoint me, in whom you select to join you. No more than five students at a time. I will speak to some others myself; you are certainly not the only ones who have wanted this kind of opportunity.”

Potter nodded. “Sir… are you sure…”

Q just raised an eyebrow. “ Entirely certain. Not a word of this to anyone, you understand?”

A little, quick nod, and Potter retreated from Q’s office, scurrying off to tell his various friends.

- 

The next evening, at precisely six o’clock, Potter arrived with Miss Granger, Mr Weasley, and Mr Longbottom. “You should all be capable of Stunning spells, yes?” Q asked; he paired them off, and observed them in turn, feeling a sense of something like calm through his body as he finally did something affirmative, in defying the Ministry under their spies’ noses.

Naturally, it was difficult. Imperfect. Q spoke to various students privately, gauged how responsible they would be, offered them the chance to be tutored in practical Defence Against the Dark Arts. The youngest Weasley, Miss Lovegood, Mr Creevey – all in the same year – appeared for a session a few days later.

Q was half-drowning in work, and loved it. The Weasley twins caused merry chaos around the
school, while Q conducted his clandestine meetings, concealed from absolutely everybody.

What was more, the Weasleys were kind enough to warn him advance, whenever they were about to unleash something. He avoided a decent number of semi-catastrophes as a result.

Silva was an unpleasant constant. Q’s Dark Arts tutoring sessions usually happened directly after classes ended; a few hours later, the students would disappear through the secret passage one by one, and Q would wend his way to Silva’s office with tangible reluctance.

It was mostly a strange collection of pseudo-dates. Silva would sit him down with food from the House Elves, ply him with alcohol, forcing Q to re-experience daily the festering sensation in his stomach that came with being so intimate with a man like Silva.

He drank the wine, ate the food. Escaped when he was able, to mark papers and plan lessons, before collapsing into bed and sleeping like a dead porlock.

-

Easter was coming.

A little while of freedom; Q could head back to Grimmauld Place for the holiday, spend time with Bond again, finally try to talk through what in the hell was going on with Silva and Umbridge, all of Q’s personal machinations.

The final day of term was gloriously exciting; Q was ready to get home, having not had a single word from Bond in a month or so. He had grown used to the absence, but it still ached, and the concept of being finally reunited was immensely welcome.

Q didn’t even bother packing more than a small case. He would need to be back at Hogwarts after a week or so anyway, to prepare for the OWL and NEWT student exams, set the end of year exams across the rest of the school, negotiate around Silva.

Hogwarts didn’t allow Q much scope to practise Apparation, especially anything precise; he wound up a little further up the street than he had intended, but still in Grimmauld Place. He grinned at the sight of the house, letting him in through the open door, the screechings of the long-dead Mrs Black a welcoming peal.

Immediately, Bond’s arms were around him. Q melted into him, head against his shoulder, tension draining as he took refuge from the storm. “Missed you,” he murmured, remaining immobile in the hall, Sirius dealing with Mrs Black while Bond ignored the rest of the world to take care of Q.

Whisp circled Q’s feet, his favourite shade of ginger-streaked gray, making him almost laugh with sheer relief. He was safe, here. He could talk freely and laugh, not be afraid.

“Tell me everything,” Bond murmured in his ear, low and inviting, familiar. Q nodded his agreement, let Bond lead him into the kitchen.

Everybody was gratifyingly pleased to see him. John gave him a quick hug, Sirius grinned. The rest of the Order were busy in various places, but it was far from a bad collection of people to be greeted by; Bond kept his body pressed tight to Q’s, as they started exchanging stories, everything settling as Q drank in every aspect of being so close to Bond, erasing all memory of Silva.

Q didn’t tell Bond what Silva was doing. It would cause unnecessary upset, when there was nothing to be done; Silva was causing no permanent damage, and his secrets remained safe.

Yet – Bond noticed something was wrong. Somehow, in the course of the previous few weeks,
something had changed; his young lover was less comfortable with Bond’s small touches, flinched a little at louder noises. He seemed scared, in a way Bond was unaccustomed to seeing.

Bond asked, and Q denied everything. He was getting rather used to doing that.

Mycroft was still absent, and there had only been one scrawled note from Sherlock for two months. The fate of Q’s sibling had settled back to a dull throbbing, a memory he couldn’t escape. His brothers were not always emotionally adept, but family meant more to them than anything, always had; he missed them with every breath, feared for their safety.

Q curled against Bond’s side in the few evenings they had, laughing in the right places, feigning a happiness that was partially manufactured. He didn’t want to go back.

The summer term promised OWL examinations, more work than Q knew what to do with, more sessions with his rebelling core of students, and Silva.

Q had barely stepped into the building when a second-year came, with a handwritten message; Q was required in Silva’s rooms, immediately. The numb sensation was relatively familiar, as Q trudged heavily past the Arithmancy and Ancient Runes classrooms, tapping gently on Silva’s door.

“Welcome back, dear Q,” he purred, with the predatory smile Q was used to.

Q glanced at him. Blinked languidly. “What do you want?” he asked flatly, feeling very tired. He missed Grimmauld Place, missed Bond. Missed John Watson – who was still eccentrically Muggle in his mannerisms – and Sirius, who had a wicked sense of humour. It had become home, and Q knew he would not see it for another three months or so.

“How is Professor Bond?” Silva asked, with an edge Q almost recognised. An approximation of jealousy.

Q took a slightly deeper breath than usual, forcing himself to relax. “I’m not going to tell you anything,” he said firmly, flatly. Silva knew that, of course he knew that. He hadn’t bothered to ask a damn thing in weeks, knowing that Q would not – or could not – speak.

“Silencio,” Silva said sharply, jaw set with anger. Q didn’t even try to go for his wand. It would achieve nothing.

The most terrifying aspect was that Q simply had no idea what Silva’s motivations were, any longer. He wanted information, wanted Q. Worked out of misguided jealousy and outright anger. Honestly, Q was beginning to wonder if Silva actually wanted anything definite.

Pain sparked, electric, through Q’s body. His body convulsed in a silent scream, and some, more coherent part of him noted that this was probably inevitable, no matter what he said, judging by the other man’s expression.

Silva was enjoying himself, and that was the most terrifying concept of all.
awesome. I love you all.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

This chapter is pretty dark, you have been warned!

Thank you, once again, to shipimpala (who is now responsible for 2/5 of my most popular works on this site... I owe you a lot, darling) and to everybody who’s reading and enjoying this. Jen.

Janet – the portrait guarding Q’s new classroom – continued to watch with an obvious expression of disapproval. Bribed or not, she would be in a good deal of trouble herself, should anybody catch the new student classes Q was running for Defence Against the Dark Arts.

A week or so into the new term, and Q had set Potter, Weasley, Granger and Longbottom onto a Boggart. They had met them before, under Bond’s tutelage, but usually with far more people – making it considerably easier to confuse said Boggart – rather than in a confined space. Only four students, and one teacher, was a far more intensive environment in which to work on a Boggart. In their OWL examination, they could be facing a Boggart entirely alone.

Potter had just made a Dementor trip up on its robes, when Tobin appeared in the bottom-hand corner of Janet’s portrait, wearing a shell-pink dress that really brought out the colour of his eyes. “Tobin. What...?”

“Silva,” he panted simply.

The colour drained from Q’s expression. “Everybody out,” he commanded loudly; everybody retreated from the Boggart that instant, looking to Q as he wrenched open Janet’s portrait. “Go, back to your dormitories, do not delay.”

To Q’s immense relief, everybody did precisely as they were told; Potter was the last to leave, looking around at Q with confusion in his eyes for one moment, before the portrait closed.

Janet’s lips pursed in a way that told Q he had very nearly cut it too fine. “I know,” he muttered to her, pushing his glasses out of the way to pinch the bridge of his nose.

“Know what, dear boy?” intoned a voice from the doorway; Q swallowed slightly, body feeling very ungainly as he twisted to face Silva.

Silva, intriguingly, was not looking at Q. “Well, well,” he purred. “That is interesting.”

Q followed his line of sight, feeling something like bile rise in his throat.

The Boggart had been alone with Q for a moment, had taken on the shape of Q’s worst fear. Silva. Silva's precise doppelganger, the two reflected absolutely as they closed in on a now distinctly frightened Q.

“Stop it,” Q managed, as one Silva’s hand gently tugged his wand from his grip – and Q could have cried, for no other reason than not having the ability to fight back – and the other slid a hand
around his waist, too intimate, too much.

Silva’s smile was all treacle. Too-sweet, black, impossible to remove; his counterpart’s lips pressed over the back of Q’s neck, breathing his hair, grip steady and firm as he explored Q’s body. The realisation of Q’s worst fears, the single thing he was truly terrified of.

“Please, get rid of him,” Q pleaded; his terror was mounting now, the Boggart feeding off him alone, not even bothering with Silva now it had a victim who was running on pure fear, breathing it and thrumming with it, every nerve on fire.

The true Silva’s fingers brushed over Q’s cheek, a satisfied glint obvious as he watched his Boggart self at work: a flick of tongue over Q’s earlobe, and Q gave an abrupt, stifled sob. “I will make him stop,” Silva purred, Q’s eyes snapping upwards, pupils hugely dilated and shaking, just shaking. “Tell me who was in here with you. I heard voices.”

Q shook his head half-frantically. “I was talking to the portraits,” he said quickly, trying to manoeuvre himself out of the Boggart’s grip, panic making his throat close up. “Please, get him off me,” he begged again, reduced to this, reduced to near-enough sobbing in a closed room with two versions of a man he abhorred and a painting watching with undisguised horror at Q’s humiliation.

Silva noticed; a deft wave of his wand, and Janet had a bag over her head. “Alone at last,” he grinned, all teeth, and Q near enough collapsed. His legs were refusing to respond properly, the Boggart augmenting his fears physically and mentally, playing with his perceptions and defying all logic until all he had left was fear; his head hurt, everything whiting and blurring.

He hit the ground hard, knees cracking on the floor, the Boggart-Silva’s body pressed flush against him. “Please,” Q all but screamed, Silva watching, waiting for him to tell a truth that he would never admit to. “It was just the paintings, I thought I could handle the Boggart but I was having trouble, and…”

“And I’m certain that you have no idea where Potter and his friends are this evening?” Silva mused aloud, as Q fought back tears, refusing to cry in front of either bloody version of Silva.

Q shook his head. “I don’t know,” he lied, voice laced with desperation.

Boggart-Silva’s hands went from firm to bruising, keeping Q firmly in place; he scrabbled against the floor, feet and legs flailing, already knowing what Silva do, the Boggart in his head, in his head, and pain exploded over his chest and Q screamed, voice almost hollow, fire coursing like acid through his veins as he bucked in a grip that was gouging holes in his body, and the pain was everywhere and refused to stop –

It stopped.

It was very difficult to breathe, all of a sudden.

Q fell forward, Silva’s hands gone. He twisted around to see where he was gone, eyes widening at the sight of Professor Snape; Q prayed for a long, weary moment that Severus hadn’t seen, before there was a cry of Riddikulus! and Snape was wearing a dress.

It was looking increasingly possible that somewhere along the line, Q had lost his sanity.

“Professor?”

A concerned voice, female, gentle. Q was still trembling, pain and shock and anguish, trying to make his thoughts ordered, closing his eyes briefly to blot everything out and make the world stop
tilting to either side.

“Professor, are you alright?”

Q opened his eyes again.

Granger was crouched next to him, hair flying in all directions, expression concerned and scared. Beyond her was Longbottom, flanked by Weasley, both manoeuvring the Boggart – now in no way resembling Silva – into a chest of drawers. Q debated helping, but honestly wasn’t convinced that he would able to stand quite yet.

“Can someone… my wand, if you would,” Q asked, voice rasping a little.

Potter got there first, handing Q’s wand over, Q trying not to slump exhaustedly as he desperately wanted to. The ache in his chest throbbed with every heartbeat, small electric shocks, a small wince with the too-rapid palpitations.

Q flicked his wand upwards, pulling a nail out of the floorboards. With a deft circle of his wand, a mug formed on the floor instead of the nail, making him smile faintly as he glanced over the emblazoned ‘Q’. Sherlock had given him a ‘Q’ mug as a birthday present, when he was eleven, newly christened and going off to live as just Q. No Holmes addendum, no background, no anything.

Honestly, Q missed that time more than he knew possible.

Trying to aim a jet of water into said mug was pretty much impossible, with his hand shaking so much; Granger took over, murmuring *aguamenti*, voice hushed. They were all very quiet.

Q took long sips from the mug, still not saying anything for a moment, not looking around. It was relatively obvious, but he didn’t want to think about anything just yet, not while everything was still hurting and he couldn’t stop the half-memory of Silva’s hands tracking over his body in a manner that was all suggestive if not patently obvious, while another watched and smiled that repulsive smile.

Until his heartbeat had returned to something like normal, Q had no interest in dealing with the students. They would survive for a little while longer without his input.

In any case, it was nice to know that they could *definitely* all handle Boggarts.

Really, with the way the room kept spinning, Q was pleasantly surprised that he hadn’t thrown up yet.

When the shaking had stopped, and Q could actually breathe properly, he dared to look around properly.

Silva was draped across the floor like a broken doll. Weasley stood overhead, looking a ginger Grim Reaper, wand drawn threateningly. Potter looked torn between righteous anger and repulsion. Longbottom looked truly *livid*, and it took Q a moment to remember the story of Alice and Frank Longbottom. The Crucciatus Curse meant more to Neville Longbottom than to anybody else present.

Granger was still next to him, expression kind, but neutral. Q couldn’t help but be pathetically grateful for that: the last thing he wanted was distressing quantities of sympathy.

“I take it you can all handle Boggarts, and offensive jinxes,” Q managed, his smile near enough meeting his eyes.
Potter was the first to manage a question. “What was he…?” he tried, trailing off. It was probably quite difficult, trying to work out how to ask a teacher why he was allowing himself to be sexually harassed – and really, today’s events near enough constituted assault – and tortured by another teacher.

Q slowly, tentatively, picked himself up. He kept the mug close to his chest, draining it, waving his wand again to let the mug fall back into a nail which he let fall to the floor, bouncing, clinking. “Oh, Janet,” he muttered, and quickly waved his wand at Janet’s painting; the bag vanished, and the woman began clucking about all manner of things, all about Silva, while Q closed his eyes for a brief moment as he took in the gravity of Silva unconscious in the middle of a classroom.

“You should have returned to your dormitories,” Q noted softly, far from angry.

Granger piped up, sounding surprisingly together. “Harry saw that your Boggart was Professor Silva, and we knew he was coming, so…” she trailed off, not looking very apologetic. “Sir… he was… that… he was torturing you.”

Q took a breath, exhaling as steadily as he could. “Yes, I’m aware,” he replied quietly. “He has leverage over me, unfortunately. So much so that I have been unable to fight back, without risking all I have.”

“Your identity,” Granger realised aloud; Q glanced at her, smiling slightly. She was very, very bright, that girl. “So… he wanted…”

“Information,” Q replied, deciding it was probably best to omit any further discussions of the sexual element. They had all seen, to whatever extent, but Q had absolutely no interest in telling four teenagers that Silva had a sexual interest in him. This entire scenario was quite humiliating enough as it was. “Did he see you?” Longbottom’s jaw was set firmly. “He shouldn’t have done, sir,” he replied quickly. “Harry and I, sir, we jinxed him at the same time, I don’t think he turned around…”

“In either case, this is still a precarious situation,” Q murmured. “What spells?”

“I Stunned him, sir,” Longbottom replied quickly.

Potter glanced up; he had been curiously quiet, expression near apologetic when he met Q’s gaze. “Disarmed him,” he replied, glancing at the prostate form of another teacher.

Q smiled slightly: “You’re making quite the habit of cursing teachers,” he teased without energy, walking with bizarre calm to Silva’s side, so tired. “In any case. This event never happened, do you all understand?”

The four exchanged quick, surreptitious glances. “Sir…”

“I will be moderating Professor Silva’s memory,” Q explained to them, before they could continue bleating about something or other, another noise to add to the whine that lived in the back of Q’s skull.

Potter and Weasley looked frankly alarmed at the prospect. “Won’t that be very obvious, sir?” Weasley suggested, head tilted slightly in sheer curiosity.

Q opened his mouth, smiling slightly as Granger beat him to an explanation. “Obliviating doesn’t just mean taking all a person’s memories,” she said, in that self-satisfied tone she got when she knew something nobody else did. “It’s a very complicated charm. You can take ten minutes, or an
hour, or a day. Really good casters only take really specific events or information…”

“There is an entire department of Obliviators in the Ministry of Magic, and only very few Muggles with their entire lives erased,” Q commented drily, letting out a slow breath. “I am not an Obliviator, but I am adept enough to manage only the last ten, maybe fifteen minutes or so.”

It was difficult, very difficult, to make his mind entirely clear, and the low hum of gossip from the four students was rather distracting. “Quiet, if you would,” he asked sharply, more sharply than he intended, keeping his breath steady as he murmured Obliviate.

A feeling of immense quiet, immense calm, a slight tingle in Q’s fingers; he took a breath, exhaled slowly. It had worked, of that he was relatively certain.

“I’ll tell him I was doing Stunning spell practise, and it misfired,” Potter suggested. “Then you don’t have to explain why he’s unconscious. I’ll say you were never here.”

“No – I need to stay, bring him round, tell him I caught you in here,” Q said with a sigh. “He came because he was certain that he could find me here, and even without the past ten minutes, the thought process will still exist.”

Potter nodded, expression set, very solid. “He’ll haul you in for Umbridge’s detentions,” Q pointed out quietly, apologetically; Potter raised an eyebrow, holding up his hand defiantly, the white scars glistening in the bright classroom light. The stoicism was endearing, but Q knew better: being accustomed to pain does not change that it hurts.

Q took a step forward, grabbed Potter’s hand. Torpens, he muttered, waving his wand over the hand; it glowed lilac for a moment, returned to normal. “That should numb the pain. Take note of that spell, all four of you. It will wear off in a few hours,” Q explained. “Thank you, Potter. The rest of you, out. Now. Back to dormitories. Oh, and twenty-five points to each of you for intervening, five off each of you for ignoring my previous instructions. Go.”

Thankfully, they all scurried without a further word. Q breathed out quietly. “I’d better bring him round,” Q mumbled, skin crawling at the thought of Silva being conscious again.

“Professor,” Potter said quietly, before Q cast anything. “He’ll do it again, won’t he?”

Q lowered his wand a moment, eyes closing as though in pain. “ Possibly,” he conceded softly. “Likely, in fact. He has an unhealthy interest in me, which I cannot do a thing about. Grateful though I am for your actions today, it will not change him, nor the situation as a whole.”

“But…”

“I would prefer not to talk about it any longer,” Q asked, eyes shutting for a brief moment, dreaming of Bond. “All I ask is that you do not discuss this with anybody. It will achieve nothing. That includes all Order members. Make sure the others know: if this gets out, I will personally put you in detention for the rest of your natural life.”

“Sir…”

“Hush now, Potter,” Q said, smiling very faintly, wand hovering over Silva’s body. “Enervate.”

Silva gave a deep groan, and opened his eyes.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay, ladies and gents! As some may know, I’ve been on hiatus from all 
fic (here and tumblr) but poked my head briefly above the parapets to offer this 
chapter! Hopefully, it's worth the wait.

Beta'd by my darling Lex, who is also now responsible for several conceptual 
aspects. She's a terrible influence. Jen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Silva bought the story, to Q’s undying relief. Potter was put into detention for a month, and the 
entire student body knew torpens in the space of three days. Umbridge lost a little more power, 
her torture ceasing to be anything of the sort. It was an annoyance, and scarred, but it was no 
longer painful.

The school was taking back power, and it was inspiring to see; the Weasley twins stage-managed 
chaos, the teachers took subtler routes, the student body all just ceased to deal with the absurdities 
of a regime that intended to change them into Ministry – or worse, Dark – puppets.

Q gained some reprieve from Silva in the run-up to OWLs; neither could afford the time, despite 
Silva’s best efforts. The sheer quantities of work Q was trying to juggle made his head spin, but he 
had a good dozen students from various years practising Defence Against the Dark Arts, and he 
considered that more of a priority than near-redundant exams.

The Weasleys caused the final slew of rebellion. Hiding the Dark Arts groups ceased to be 
challenging; the various, multitudinous forms of disaster springing up around the building kept 
Umbridge and her sympathisers more than occupied. The portable swamp was something Q 
considered one of the best pieces of magic he had ever seen.

It was amazing how many of Potter’s friends abruptly found themselves in need of assistance, of 
input, of Q’s help, of anything at all that kept him busy – and, more notably, a very long way from 
Silva.

Miss Granger, too, managed a subtle form of brilliance that took Q’s breath away. She was the 
only one of Potter’s friends taking Arithmancy – and thus, was absolutely key in keeping Silva 
occupied. She had seen the man torture another professor, somebody she respected and admired – 
and yet intentionally spent as much time around him as possible. Q kept a careful watch for her 
safety, understandably so, ensuring that Silva’s interests did not deflect onto somebody he should 
be keeping safe.

Perhaps Miss Granger believed that students were exempt. In fairness, she could not have known 
how early Silva’s obsession had begun. Nobody had known. The implications and absurdities and 
brushes and smiles started gradually; by the time Q left Hogwarts, he had known very well what 
Silva wanted from him.

He had done nothing, until Q was on his own. Even now, he was taking his time, eking out 
moment by moment until the inevitable, and Q knew that. He was far from naive.
Not long now, and he would have freedom. The term was coming close, so bloody close, almost within touching distance now, and Q closed his eyes and dreamt of Bond, and waited.

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Silva smiled at him, all teeth, over breakfast.

Q mostly ignored him; he was trying to be unnerving, and while it was annoyingly effective, Q really could not be bothered with negotiating around him. Exams had begun; Q had several students in their written Transfiguration NEWT examinations in the morning, and was holding another session for the OWL Defence Against the Dark Arts students that evening.

The Prophet nearly knocked over his tea, which would have been rather distressing; Q grabbed at it wearily, mostly curious at to what garbage the Prophet had decided to plaster over the front page that morning.

_Magical Deviant and Fugitive, Sherlock Holmes, Apprehended_

The colour drained from Q’s face, as he glanced over a picture of his elder brother, looking thin and tired and _feral_ as he was carted away by Ministry officials. The article was predictably nondescript, but it had brought the Holmes family back into the foreground of Magical attention, once again.

Sherlock renouncing his magic at the age of eleven had caused a media furore; now, specialists argued that somebody with latent magical capabilities, and no training, was potentially breaking the Statute of Secrecy. John was mentioned, as a Muggle who had been unnecessarily introduced to the Magical world, and was clearly being sheltered by Holmesian sympathisers.

Mycroft was predictably dragged into the article too, denouncements on his associations with the Muggle world, the perversion of a highly capable wizard – with a ‘Troubled Family’ – being so linked to Muggles.

Q struggled against severe nausea, as he read testimonies from St Mungo’s specialists, other Ministry spokespeople, declaring that it was likely that Sherlock suffered from some hitherto unknown psychiatric disorder. Given _reports from his dysfunctional lifetime in the Muggle world, it is clear that those with Magical potential cannot coexist with Muggles._

With a few sharp lines of bigotry, the Prophet was needling its way into general consciousnesses, expressing – in kinder words – that Muggles and Wizards were distinctly different. Really, it was only to be another half-step, to begin suggestions of Wizarding superiority.

Sherlock was in the centre, and in the hands of Ministry of Magic.

Silva had not ceased grinning.

Q left the table in a swirl of dark robes, immediately going to find Minerva; she was the best contact, in terms of getting through to Grimmauld Place, finding out what the Order was doing and how in the _hell_ they’d managed to take Sherlock, where Mycroft was, if James was alright or if even _that_ had gone wrong because honestly, nothing would surprise Q any more.

Sherlock lived on being undetectable, untraceable. He was _good at it_. He could navigate the Muggle world far better than any wizard, and would never leave traces.

There had to be some kind of mistake.

One look at Minerva confirmed that no, there was no mistake at all. The Ministry had managed to
track Sherlock down through a single flaw, just a little lapse in concentration; Mycroft had supposedly been spotted at the same time, trying to rescue his brother before it became too late.

“I’m going to Grimmauld Place tonight. I’ll be back in the morning,” Q told her, his voice a terrifying monotone. It was probably ridiculous, trying to get out of Hogwarts in the middle of term when anybody could catch him, when it would not help anything.

To be honest, Q wanted to go just to see Bond, if nothing else. To be held, for however short a time, by somebody who loved him and would look after him. “I’ll distract her,” Minerva told him, in her low burr.

Q shook his head. “I need you to find some way to divert Silva,” he said, rather hoping she would not enquire too closely. “He’s… expecting me, this evening. Find any excuse, please, just don’t let him release any information that will go outside the castle.”

Minerva was a wonderfully pragmatic type of woman. She dutifully didn’t ask, or object; she nodded, mind already working. “I’m taking it he is not an ally?” she asked carefully, tactfully.

Q snorted, shaking his head a little. “A long way from it,” he confessed, an odd freedom coming with being able to reveal something. “If you want to Confund him, to make your story more viable, I wouldn’t argue. For example.”

Minerva laughed; a lovely, genuine sound. “I can manage that,” she smiled. “Go, Q. Send those at the Order my regards.”

A slight nod, and Q slid out of the door.

Getting out of the castle was an unequivocal nightmare, with matters under Umbridge’s control; the corridors were patrolled by teachers, volunteering students, anybody who wished to meddle or cause chaos. Thankfully, Peeves had fallen on the side of the Weasley twins rather than Umbridge, which was usually a guarantee of some type of distraction when one tried to travel through the castle.

Q opted to mimic what he had done before, in terms of getting through the secret passage, and Apparating from there; he had no opportunity to warn Grimmauld Place, so was rather hoping they would not Stun him on sight.

Really, Potter’s nifty Invisibility Cloak would have been invaluable; Q was left using Disillusionment Charms, which had ever been Bond’s speciality. If anybody noticed him, he would be ripped apart – there was no good excuse for Disillusioning oneself within the castle.

A distraction was needed.

Q collared a passing second-year Gryffindor, handing him a small, handwritten note for Miss Granger; the child nodded, wending his way through the castle towards the Gryffindor tower, brow knotted with concentration. Q relaxed in his office, door locked, waiting for her to arrive.

She tapped lightly on the door; Q muttered *alohomora*, the door clicking open to allow Granger in. “Professor?” she asked curiously. “You wanted to see me?”

“Take a seat,” Q said kindly, gesturing; he moved behind her to the door, murmuring *hominum revelio*; students in the corridor, but nobody of note in the vicinity. He stepped back inside, closing the door. “My apologies, one can never be too careful,” he noted lightly.

Miss Granger watched him for a moment, cheeks slightly flushed with something approaching embarrassment; Q was abruptly reminded that she had been party to his torture, and knew his
name. She knew, in practice, what it meant that Sherlock had been captured.

“I need your assistance, and preferably that of Mr Potter, and Mr Weasley,” he explained calmly.
“As I am certain you are aware, Sherlock Holmes was taken into Ministry custody at some point in the past few days, the Prophet reported it this morning. You, and your friends, are some of a select handful who know my true identity, and thus the importance of this development; I would therefore be immensely appreciative of some form of distraction, allowing me to reach the secret passage behind the humpbacked witch. I know you’re aware of which passage I refer to.”

Granger thought for a moment, forehead crumpled as she considered. “We can do that,” she agreed, after a moment. Q nodded his gratitude. “Sir… I’m sorry. About your brothers. I read about Sherlock Holmes, and I wanted you to know that I disagree with the Ministry. Mycroft Holmes too, he’s a great wizard, should have had an Order of Merlin if my research…”

“Thank you, Miss Granger,” Q interjected softly, cutting off her tirade as she began to grow increasingly feverous. “Your support is appreciated, of course. I would ask that you remain safe, in this. If you believe that you – or your friends – could be harmed, then you abort, yes?”

Miss Granger smiled in a way Q entirely recognised; she would agree to everything Q said, certainly. She would abide by very little. Granger was clever enough to know what mattered most, and selfless enough to prioritise somebody else.

“Thank you,” he said quietly, dipping his head in gratitude. “This evening, after dinner, if you would?”

“Oh,” Q murmured. “That is superb.”

Wand out, sentence repeated, and ink blossomed the Hogwarts castle open to him. Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs. Honestly, Q had not the faintest idea who they were, but judging by the map, he was about to owe them a fair deal – and, like the Cloak, it explained a lot about how Potter navigated the castle so well.

One day, Q would understand. For now, he was quite content to use the resources available to him.

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It had to be said: Granger’s distraction was excellent.

Over dinner, a small kerfuffle occurred on the Slytherin table; apparently, certain Inquisitorial Squad members had gone missing. Umbridge smiled sweetly, like a jagged knife, and Q couldn’t help but smirk; it had begun, if he was not very much mistaken.

Q prepared himself to leave the castle. He had no way of knowing if the distraction was working
or not, and could not spare the time to check; he Disillusioned himself, and made his way out as confidently as he could manage. Impressively, he encountered absolutely nobody. The map helped considerably, of course, as he made his way through side-corridors and occasionally, passages not even on the map. Q couldn’t help but take some smug joy at that.

The witch obligingly shifted to allow him through after a murmur of Dissendium, and Q spent a moment remembering being here, with Bond in a suit, waiting to see Sherlock in 221B. He missed Sherlock, and honestly, was more frightened than he wanted to admit for his brother’s safety.

Q trekked along the passage, estimating when he would be out of the perimeter of Hogwarts protection. Pausing, he took a deep breath, and Disapparated.

He was aiming for precisely the doorstep of Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place. To his mild surprise, he actually managed it. A few sharp knocks on the door, and he let himself in; the door was predictably unlocked – there was no point in locking it. Those who knew about Grimmauld Place were either welcome, or were hardly likely to be deterred by a locked door.

It was always surreal, to be met by two figures with outstretched wands. “It’s me, Q,” Q said quickly, sharply, glancing between Bond and Sirius. He was all but whispering; Mrs Black hadn’t woken, through more luck than judgement, and it would be nice if she remained quiet. “Q. Ask me anything.”

“Your real name,” Bond growled, looking terrifying, Q’s heartbeat quick in his throat as he watched his partner, his Bond, demonstrating his background in Magical Defence; Bond had been involved in a branch of the Auror department at the Ministry before finally finding his true calling in teaching. He never spoke about that period of his life, and Q didn’t press the point.

Still. Bond had once taken down a Chimera. Q did not exactly want to engage him in a duel.

Q raised an eyebrow. “Nice try, James. You know I don’t tell anybody my name.”

“Our first kiss?”

“Florean Fortescue’s Ice Cream Parlour. You bought me a sundae the size of my head, I got cream on my nose, you licked it off and then kissed me,” Q told him, looking steadily at his partner. “I can’t remember the exact flavour, but there was caramel involved.”

Sirius buckled first, bursting into laughter. “Smooth, Bond,” he said with a smirk. “Ice cream?”

Mrs Black burst into life on hearing her erstwhile son; Sirius swore, Bond rolling his eyes as they turned on the portrait. Q grabbed at the curtains, Bond moving behind to help; the warmth, proximity, made Q feel slightly light-headed. It had been far too long, and nobody had been this close to him other than Silva.

The portrait snapped shut. Bond grabbed Q by the elbow, dragging him into the kitchen. “What in the hell are you doing here?” he asked sharply, blue eyes dark with worry. “Are you alright?”

“They got Sherlock,” Q said softly, simply.

Bond nodded. He opened his arms, pulled Q in, held him.

For the first time in weeks, Q could honestly say he felt safe. He cradled his head in the dip of Bond’s shoulder, breathing against his neck, warm and protected with the indent of Bond’s wand against his back, still gripped tightly. He shut his eyes a moment, not caring in the slightest that he could feel eyes on him, nor that every one of his reunions with Bond were happening in the kitchen of Grimmauld Place these days.
Bond kissed the top of his head, nuzzling slightly into his hair. “I’m sorry,” he murmured. “Q, you shouldn’t be here,” he said gently. “Hogwarts…”

“I need you, James, and I don’t actually give a fuck about the rest of it right now,” Q told him, voice very steady, almost too steady. “My brother has been taken by the Ministry of Magic, and I’m dealing with too much right now to…”

“What aren’t you telling me?” Bond interrupted, pulling Q’s chin up to meet his eyes; Q flinched back very slightly, almost unnoticeably. Silva would do that, coax his head up, and it was becoming difficult to dissociate memories from people. Bond, meanwhile, looked outright horrified. “Q, you tell me what’s going on. Now.”

Q shot him a very soft smile, and curled himself back around Bond’s torso. “I’m okay,” he lied, closing his eyes again for another luxurious moment.

There would be no point in telling Bond. He would panic, potentially refuse to allow Q back into the school – and in the height of OWL and NEWT exams, with Umbridge in charge, Q did not want that. Silva was less prevalent now with the amount of work they both had, and Q was coping, just about. He could keep going. Another few weeks, and he could hide in Grimmauld Place with James, find some way of getting Sherlock back, do something.

“I didn’t ask if you were okay,” Bond pointed out. “I asked what’s going on. You’ve not been yourself in a long while. I’m worried, Q.”

“I know,” Q replied, deeply apologetic. “Oh Merlin, I’ve missed you.”

Bond kissed his forehead, tip of his nose, his lips; Q could have cried, returning the kiss with everything he had, everything he refused to give Silva, days and weeks. “I love you,” Bond murmured in his ear, so quiet, something only they shared.

The kitchen door opened, and Q smiled, twisting his lips to Bond’s ear. “I love you, too,” he replied, feeling dizzy and pained and horribly tired. “Fuck, James. I’m scared.”

“Fuck?”

“Muggle word,” Q snorted, pulling back, laughing, like he had somehow forgotten how. Bond seemed a touch distracted, glancing behind Q’s head, grip loosening very slightly. “What?”

Bond glanced to Q with a slightly mischievous smile, and nodded behind him at the new arrival. Q’s eyes narrowed fractionally, turning in the loose rope of Bond’s arms to look into the doorway.

He had a moment of utter speechlessness.

“Mycroft.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!! I will update as soon as I can. Take care. I’d love to know what you guys think, as ever, comments make me an excitable child (and may coerce me into once again emerging from the depths of my hiatus...) hehe. You love me really.
Jen.
Alrighty, then.

I have officially come off hiatus. Meaning, in practise, that updates will be once again frequent and regular (before Real Life invaded, I was managing every three/four days).

I would just like to say a massive thank-you to all of those who are reading, commenting, et cetera. This now has over 350 subscribers, which is by far the most I've ever had on a single work, and I'm immensely honoured by it. I hope you all continue to enjoy.

Take care, all of you, and thank you for your patience. Jen.

Nearly eight months had passed since Q had seen his eldest brother. Mycroft Holmes, thirty-two years old, and a truly brilliant wizard. Member of the Wizengamot, and – as Miss Granger had noted – should have received an Order of Merlin for his work with Muggles several years ago.

Sirius made a pointed comment about Oedipus, upon seeing Bond and Mycroft in the same room – and rightly so. The men were the same age, Mycroft just managing to fall a year ahead by virtue of a fortuitous August birthday to Bond’s September.

Bond threw a jinx at Sirius, easily deflected; John gave an irritable yelp as he ducked out of the way of the rebounded spell, rolling his eyes at the ridiculousness of the pair of them. He was more than accustomed to their joint habits of breaking everything in the vicinity, but it was still exceptionally annoying when really, all he wanted was a decent cup of tea and they kept shattering the kettle.

Mycroft remained in the doorway, watching his youngest brother. Q all but flung himself forward, practically knocking him off his feet; a slight chuckle of laughter, and Mycroft patted his brother gently on the back. They never hugged. The Holmes boys did not do physical intimacy, as a rule.

Sherlock and Mycroft had always made an exception for Q. Q mattered too much.

“Calm yourself, Q,” Mycroft murmured, in the tone Q was so used to; slightly condescending, mocking, absurdly arrogant and wholly, ridiculously Mycroft. “I am quite alright. May I speak to you in private?”

Q pulled back, nodding, glancing over every inch of his brother. The absurd idiot was still in formal robes, for god’s sake, looking impeccable and utterly incongruous in the dusky surroundings of Grimmauld Place. “Sherlock?”

“In a moment,” Mycroft assured him, glancing over the room. “Excuse us, gentlemen.”

“Tea?” John suggested; Mycroft smiled genially, inclining his head in an elegant nod. Q restrained a snort with difficulty; Mycroft’s pretentions were perfectly fine almost anywhere else, but with
Bond and Sirius casting random spells around the kitchen with a Muggle at the table, it just seemed a little silly.

Q smiled quickly at Bond, and followed his brother out of the kitchen; they headed up to a spare room, one that had been commandeered by the Weasley twins over Christmas. Tactfully, Mycroft had ignored the leftover boxes.

Mycroft shut the door behind him, and turned on Q. “What has been happening in my absence?” he asked simply, calmly, an edge of steel in his tone that made Q wince a little.

When Q and Sherlock were younger, Mycroft had taught them both Occlumency. Sherlock had agreed, mostly because he knew he was very vulnerable, and liked the idea of mental defences. Q, because nobody had let him say no.

The Holmes brothers thus had very established mental defences. It was a small comfort; the Ministry would need a very talented Legimens to get through Sherlock’s defences, created when he was a child and carefully tended. Mycroft was the only person who knew how to get into Sherlock’s head, and Sherlock had never quite stopped resenting him for it.

Irritatingly, he also knew how to get into Q’s. Mycroft was a truly spectacular Legimens, after all, and Q’s defences had never quite equalled Mycroft’s mind estate, or Sherlock’s palace.

“I’m…”

“If you say you are fine, little brother, I will do as I must to get the details from you,” Mycroft informed him. “You are bearing hallmarks of certain unpleasantries, evident even in your interactions with Mr Bond. As it is clear you do not wish to tell me, I will do as I must to ensure that you are safe from harm.”

Q rolled his eyes; Mycroft really failed to understand the concept of privacy, or secrecy. As far as Mycroft’s binary mind was concerned, Q was concealing information about something causing him harm; Mycroft’s duty, or so he felt, was to protect his siblings. If he needed the information, he would take it.

Honestly, Q had learned not to mind. Sherlock, less so. “Mycroft…” he whined; he really, honestly did not want Mycroft seeing.

Mycroft raised an eyebrow, lifted his wand. “Legimens,” he muttered, and slid into Q’s head.

-“Not such a clever boy, are we, Mr Holmes?” fear turning ice cold, stabbing, “Dear boy, do hush,” mocking sounds, actions juxtaposing, wand jabbed in Q’s throat, “How are you keeping in contact with your brother?” low purr, wand at Q’s temple, palm flat against Q’s chest, sliding across his torso, warm lips, pressed to his, Q slamming hands into Silva, dislodging him, trying to duck away, hand caught in his hair, wrenching him upright, incarcerous, ropes laced over and around, crumpling inwards, keening, pain sparking, electric, Silva’s smile, lips pressed over Q’s neck, breathing him, grip firm, from firm to bruising, scrabbling against the floor, feet and legs flailing, already knowing, in his head, in his head, pain exploding over his chest and screaming, hollow, fire like acid, gouging holes, pain everywhere and refusing to stop –

-“There was no bloody need for that,” Q gasped, feeling abruptly exhausted, head throbbing.

Mycroft’s jaw had turned very tight, very hard. “You should have informed somebody about this
a long time previously,” he murmured slowly, as Q tried to keep himself upright; he had always hated Mycroft reading him, it was an exceptionally horrible event overall. “There are certain measures we can take…”

“Nobody can know,” Q pointed out, very accurately. “Mycroft, if we intervene, he just needs to get one owl out of the school, and that’s it. I’ll have to leave Hogwarts, and essentially go on the run, like you have. I have no interest. I have students, my Defence group…”

Mycroft smiled slightly. “I heard about that, yes,” he said smoothly, shaking his head a little. “I must concede that I have never been angrier, or prouder, of you.”

Q blinked. “Sorry?”

“A brave, and altogether inspired, idea,” Mycroft continued, ignoring how wide Q’s eyes had gone. “I would like to be able to object, but I fear I cannot. I was concerned for your welfare upon hearing of it, certainly; given what I have just witnessed, the point seems relatively moot. You’ve upgraded, by the way. Your mind bungalow…”

“It is not a bungalow. It was never a bungalow. Sherlock just called it that,” Q objected hotly; when Mycroft had first taught them Occlumency, he had also taught them memory storage techniques. Q’s had been very small, very understated, and Sherlock – in all his childish cruelty – named it Q’s mind bungalow. “It’s a town house.”

“Cottage,” Mycroft returned, with a shadow of a smile.

“Town house,” Q insisted, feeling six years old all over again. “It has an attic, for Merlin’s sake. It has stairs. Bungalows do not have stairs. Therefore, it’s a town house.”

Mycroft was near enough smiling, almost genuinely; Q had not seen his brother smile like that since they were far younger, since long before Mycroft had grown work-obsessed. After Sherlock moved out of Mycroft’s flat to live alone in the Muggle world, Mycroft had begun to steadily drown himself in work, while Q had been left near enough without an eldest brother. It was only now that Q could really get a grip on just how much he had missed Mycroft. Idiot though he was, of course.

“Sherlock?” Q asked softly, vulnerably.

Mycroft sobered in an instant, straightening a little. “I have spent the last eight months in pursuit,” he explained, eyeline falling lower, where he would usually be holding his umbrella; he seemed oddly lost, without it. “I intended to bring him here, for obvious reasons. However, he is adept with the Muggle world in a way I had not foreseen; I resorted to Muggle tracking means, given that Wizarding ones were insufficient. He knew more, was far faster.”

Q couldn’t help but smile, a very little; leave it to Sherlock, to flummox all wizards in such a way. He probably just used the Tube, for the most part, which would have been ample to confuse most wizards. “What happened?”

“He was using owls, intermittently,” Mycroft explained. “A single report of a domesticated owl in a Muggle location, south of the Muggle city of Barcelona; I was tuned into wizarding frequencies, moved in tandem with them. I was, unfortunately, a moment too late; I Disapparated with barely an instant to spare. Sherlock had already been Stunned.”

Q nodded slowly. “He’s… they won’t kill him, presumably?”

“The Unspeakables have him. Thus, they could be doing near enough anything,” Mycroft
explained simply. “I am already constructing ideas. Fear not, Q; we shall have Sherlock back, before long.”

It had been months. Really, Q had no compunctions about pulling his brother into another hug; Mycroft rolled his eyes, deftly tried to unglue his youngest brother from his front. “Now, now. Don’t be absurd.”

“I’m not,” Q returned shortly. “You could have been dead, Myc. I was bloody worried. You couldn’t have sent word?! Sherlock managed.”

“If Sherlock had realised a wizard was so closely on his tail, he would have been long-gone before I could do a thing,” Mycroft returned, with just the slightest shadow of defensiveness; Q smiled. Only he and Sherlock could make Mycroft defensive. It was always a moment to be cherished. “Go, talk to Bond. He has missed you far too much. I will not insist that you tell him of Silva’s actions; it is your decision, although do please decide intelligently.”

“Telling him will not help,” Q pointed out. “Even you…”

“Over the space of our brief conversation, I have already considered a number of ways to assist you before term ends,” Mycroft interjected sharply. “I’m certain that Bond could do similarly. You do not give him nearly enough credit. I must concede, on that note: I am delighted by your association with him.”

Really, this conversation was turning flatly surreal. “You don’t like anybody I’m even faintly ‘associated with’,” Q pointed out, with some confusion. “I mean… James? You’re okay with him?”

“An excellent wizard. We knew one another in Hogwarts, on a passing basis; I was Head Boy, he was quite a known character of the Gryffindors,” Mycroft mused, looking a little pensive; he abruptly smiled, looking rather satisfied with himself. “I confiscated his broom, once.”

“What?!”

“I will get in touch with some of my remaining sympathisers,” Mycroft expressed aloud, ignoring Q’s question. “You will not be touched by Raoul Silva again, I can assure you of that. It is a pleasure seeing you again, little brother. Be safe, won’t you?”

Q, naturally, could not quite believe it would be that simple. Mycroft ushered him out regardless, pushed him back into the kitchen to be met by Bond; without a second of hesitation, he was back in Bond’s arms, and smiled with the naivety of a child at the sheer joy of being so.

Bond’s breath was hot, suggestive, in his ear. “All alright?” he asked gently. “You look a bit pale.”

It was easy to smile, with Bond. There was an immediate something, a trust, that came with being close to him. “I’m fine,” Q said softly. “I will tell you, James, I promise. I just can’t, at the moment. Mycroft apparently has it in hand. It’s just… I don’t want to worry you.”

Q was spun around to face his lover, feeling oddly breathless at the intensity of his gaze. “Q,” Bond told him sharply. “Tell me. I want to help. I know something’s been wrong for a while…”

“James, please,” Q asked softly. “Trust me.”

Sirius, in the background, had an eyebrow arched in a way that told everybody he wouldn’t listen to word Q said, if he were in Bond’s position. Q gritted his teeth slightly. “Don’t look at me like that,” he said waspishly. “I’m capable of taking care of myself.”
Bond moved his lips to Q’s ear, warm and gentle. “I know you are. It doesn’t mean I don’t want to help. Please, talk to me.”

Q curled his body over Bond’s front, head cradled, feeling terribly young. His chest still ached, a low thrum of pain on each inhale, straining his ribs – and it had been too long. Bond needed to know, Q knew that, but if he could spare his lover a little more pain than he would.

“Mycroft…”

“We all have contacts, Q, and ways of getting things done if we need to,” Bond informed him, a little more sharply than necessary. “For Merlin’s sake, you look like hell, quite frankly.”

“We deserve to know,” John said from the table, jaw set in a way similar to James’s: pure, military-esque stubbornness. His voice was oddly rasping, and Q winced slightly as he thought about how this was playing out for John: a man displaced from his world, with his closest friend taken by a hostile force that he stood no hope of fighting against.

Q glanced between them, feeling abruptly irritated by all of them; they needed to understand. Honestly, Q found it immensely unlikely that even Mycroft would be able to do anything, and Q trusted Mycroft above and beyond almost anybody else. Mycroft had kept his identity and self hidden since he was eleven years old; Q owed him more than he could express, and while a younger Q had believed Mycroft capable of anything, he could not hold that illusion any longer.

Bond had, apparently, finally lost his patience. Q found himself yanked out of the room by his wrist, bundled down the corridor and into the large room that held the Black family tapestry. Q afforded it a brief glance, scanning over the names and faces, the links through to his own family; the Holmeses were Pureblood, linked to the Blacks through many distant generations.

He stared at it until Bond finally tugged him to look around, suppressing the urge to cringe back a little; he was accustomed to Silva’s more violent motions, felt a little shiver of dislike at the anger living under Bond’s skin. Misdirected, but still present.

“James…”

“You’re lying to me,” Bond told him sharply. “I don’t know why, but I’m not happy, Q. Hogwarts or not, I’m not letting you go back until you’ve told me.”

Q’s spine rolled with anger. “I am not a child, James, you do not make those kinds of decisions for me. If it was something you could help with, do you not think I’d have told you? Fuck, I hate this, I hate this. Mycroft just forced his way into my head, so he can spew platitudes about the ‘help’ he can give me, and it’s crap, you realise that? I…”

Q trailed off, looking at Bond’s expression.

He had expected Bond to get angry. Maybe shout back, maybe remain stoically furious in a way that bubbled and simmered and was altogether unpleasant to be in the face of.

The slight smile, playing in the corners of Bond’s mouth, was wholly unexpected.

“What?” Q snapped.

Bond just shrugged slightly, sideways. “I’d forgotten how many Muggle curses you know,” he said simply. “It’s impressive.”

Q choked on a laugh, hating the way he started to dissolve into tears. His James Bond. Mycroft
would argue, Sherlock would be difficult, anybody else would be confrontational or angry and Q simply didn’t – couldn’t – respond to that.

Bond knew that getting Q to talk meant getting under his skin, beneath the façade. Laughter or tears, whatever was required to stop Q from shutting him out. Bond knew.

Q’s knees went from under him, and he let out a sharp, broken noise when Bond’s arms caught him before he hit the floor. He keeled forward, falling into Bond’s embrace, body tightly knotted against his lover as he sobbed pathetically, a terrified child finally afforded comfort.

Bond brushed kisses to Q’s temple, waited for him to calm a little. “My Q,” he murmured softly, grip a shadow too tight, possessive without being constricting. “Talk to me, love.”

Q leaned against him, into him.

He deserved to know.

“Silva,” Q said clearly, quietly, a gunshot in quiet. Bond’s arms reflexively closed tighter, and all the will to keep fighting left Q in a short, startled rush.

He buried his face in Bond’s shoulder, and began to speak.

Chapter End Notes

(a fun fact: I did not intend for Q to tell Bond/Mycroft at this stage. Lex - my partner - returned from her own hiatus a little while ago. We RP’d sections of dialogue etc., and it became obvious that he would tell at this stage, despite my best intentions to the contrary.

In short, Lex is magic, and makes me better. This story always has, and always will be, for her.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Here you are, guys! Hope you enjoy. Jen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bond surpassed livid, and shifted to incandescence in the short space of Q’s narration. Q had literally never seen his lover so angry. He was all but bubbling, holding onto Q like he was some sort of lifebelt, fingers contracting with fury in sporadic bursts.

“I’ll kill him,” Bond told him, with breathtaking quiet. “I will destroy that man for this.”

Q shook his head slightly. “Don’t do anything rash,” he sighed. “Silva is well connected, and anyway, he’ll be sequestered in Hogwarts for a few weeks…”

Bond’s gaze snapped to Q mercilessly, blue eyes on fire. “I was intending to go to Hogwarts and kill him there,” he announced, with something like calm, something that tried very hard to be calm but failed spectacularly. “He tortured you.”

“I noticed,” Q parried softly, raising an eyebrow. “James, please. This has been unpleasant enough. I will not lose you too. I will be alright. It’s only a few weeks, and its exams anyway…”

“You’re going back?” Bond asked politely, dangerously.

“I can shout at you again if you’d like,” Q quipped, a little sharper than he intended. “Of course I’m going back. I have students who need me, you know that.”

Bond couldn’t help but smile a little. His Q: all angry and angular and a little childish and utterly beautiful and entirely whole, in spite of everything. Of course he would go back to Hogwarts, with Silva still there; he would fight back, of course he would. His Q, the strongest man he would ever know.

“You have to promise me you’ll be safe,” Bond told him firmly. “If he attacks you again, you jinx the bastard, and get help. I swear, Sirius will help me make him disappear, between us we have this dealt with…”

Q’s laugh was a little snotty, a little throttled, but nonetheless present. “I don’t doubt it,” he smiled. Merlin, but he loved James so much, enough to make him feel slightly heady in the face of his passion. Being loved by Bond was an extraordinary enough experience without moments like this, demonstrations of how far Bond would go for him, and feeling utterly overwhelmed by it and rather liking it.

Bond kissed him, and Q relaxed a little further, bent his body in against Bond’s and truly calmed. “I’ll speak to Mycroft, too,” Bond noted to himself, to Q. “True, it’s difficult to do too much, but Mycroft has a lot of leverage. I like that man.”

Q blinked, shook his head slightly as though dislodging the thought itself. “That’s still a little surreal, I have to admit,” he said, abruptly recalling his conversation with Mycroft. “Honestly,
James: did he really confiscate your broom?"

Bond took a moment, eyes narrowing as he thought. They abruptly widened. “Merlin, I’d forgotten. Bastard,” he said, with a snort of laughter. “I was getting mud on the Entrance Hall floor, October, high season for Quidditch… that twat, I am definitely having a word with him.”

He trailed off, looking over Q, tracing the lines of Q’s face with soft fingers as Q watched him. “I’m sorry,” he murmured, so quietly. Q opened his mouth, about to ask what for, what in the hell Bond could think he needed to be sorry for; Bond cut over him. “I should have protected you.”

Q rolled his eyes. “Don’t be stupid,” he told Bond gently, but very firmly. “I should have told you sooner. Just, please James, don’t go after him or anything like that. Please. Promise me. Apart from anything else, you are not allowed to rob me of the chance of cursing the bastard myself.”

“Okay,” Bond replied, with tangible reluctance. “I’m telling you now – if I see him again, if he hurts you again, all bets are off.”

“James…”

“No. This stops here and now,” Bond announced, looking very intent on the matter. “I will kill him.”

Q pecked Bond’s lips gently, and nodded a little. “Alright,” he conceded, with a slight smile of his own. “To be honest, I’m almost out of the will to stop you.”

Bond kissed him again, passionate and firm and honest. “I love you so much,” he admitted quietly, pulling back, smiling slightly as he glanced over his young lover. “Come on. John and Sirius need to be told, John especially. He’s not doing too well.”

It was a little saddening to hear, but unsurprising. Being thrown into a world he could never hope to be a part of was hard enough; alone, and with the possibility that his closest friend in the world was in enemy hands. “Let’s go,” Q agreed, and slid his hand into Bond’s. “Thank you, James. I am sorry, about not… I just…”

“I know,” Bond interjected, and smiled in a way that forgave everything. “I still wish you’d told me.”

Q nodded, kept his body tacked close to his lover’s, allowed himself to be led away.

Several hours later, he made it back to Hogwarts. Sirius had been up in arms, and John had quietly but insistentely looked over Q for signs of physical stress on the heart or vital organs. He had been a little unhappy by the obvious sensitivity over Q’s chest – and Bond had been all but _snarling_ - but Q apparently was, for now at least, alright.

Naturally, everybody in Grimmauld Place had sworn to keep the news entirely private; even the rest of the Order would remain ignorant, as far as possible. It ensured that nothing of it could leak out to Silva.

John was the one to broach the subject: the only way Silva could possibly know was through a leak in Order security. One of the few who knew Q’s identity had leaked it out to Silva, for whatever reason.

Nobody wanted it to be true, but there were few other possibilities. Those in Grimmauld Place that night were sworn to absolute secrecy, and Q returned to Hogwarts feeling truly happy again, five in the morning, ready to teach in a handful of hours and entirely free of the lie that had sustained him for months.
There seemed minimal point in trying to sleep for all of two hours; instead, Q headed back to his room as quietly as possible, prepared to just get a few piles of marking done before he had to handle the second-year Transfiguration end of year exams.

Despite being catatonically tired, it was a rather successful day. Minerva winked at him – always an odd experience – upon seeing him at breakfast. Silva’s unnerving grin somehow seemed to have lost its impact; the sensation of light, of freedom, refused to fade quite yet. Silva did not notice, or perhaps simply didn’t comment; Q couldn’t bring himself to mind, either way.

Q breathed, days trickling by.

The Transfiguration OWLs wound up being excellent, as a general standard; Q could honestly say he was very proud of his class. Longbottom managed to Transfigure a pincushion into a passable hedgehog, while Miss Granger excelled outright at all areas of her exam. If she did not achieve an Outstanding, there was no justice – not to mention that her general Defensive magic had come on leaps and bounds by virtue of the extra sessions Q was running.

Umbridge lurked around the school with her Inquisitorial Squad minions – highly evocative of a toad surrounded by directionless tadpoles – and tried to make life unpleasant. Mostly, she succeeded, but with torpens in general circulation, and infinite ways the students and teachers continually found to torment her, the unpleasantness was devoid of sting.

Q still had his usual evenings of tea with Minerva; she had come to learn what his favourite types of tea were, and as time had passed, even come to brew a decent enough pot herself. Q was no closer to finding out what she drank and, as always, deigned it sensible not to ask.

They talked a little, about various things. Minerva had no idea about everything that had occurred with Silva – those in Grimmauld Place had kept their word – but they had enough conversation concerning the exams. Minerva, of course, had a vested interest in the state of her old Transfiguration students; Q happily relayed back how well everybody had done thus far, and the pair compared notes on the exam content and usual marking.

That was, until they heard a noise from outside.

Minerva was up in a heartbeat, Q close behind her. “Shit,” Minerva said succinctly – the very first time Q had ever heard her swear – and disappeared out of her office door.

Q followed, naturally. He had only caught a glimpse: Hagrid, being hounded by Umbridge and other Ministry officials, spells glancing off Hagrid and his hut, the night lit with colours.

The air was freezing outside. Q and Minerva ran in tandem, wands out, as jets of red light span through the empty air, cobwebbing through the darkness. “Reasonable be damned, yeh won' take me like this, Dawlish!” Hagrid yelled, as Q cast a displaced Shield Charm to knock a Stunning Spell away from the damn dog.

The Ministry officials seemed to turn as one organism, Minerva shouting, trying to communicate with Umbridge as they continued to run to Hagrid’s defence.

Which was, of course, the moment that Q watched Minerva McGonagall be targeted with at least three Stunners; neither party had time to respond, before Minerva crumpled in a heap on the damp grass.

It took a fair amount to make Q angry. Jinxing a brilliant witch, multiple times, without even a syllable of warning, was Q’s limit.
“You bastards,” he yelled, invoking Sherlock’s old Muggle curses in purely instinctive fury, throwing off jinxes while Hagrid bellowed at a volume that stood to split eardrums. “You utter fucks, you don’t jinx people without warning, you fucking cowards.”

Q was an excellent wizard. Honestly though, his speciality was not in duelling, and certainly not against multiple combatants. In his peripheral vision, he could see Hagrid hoist Fang on his back, running towards the gates; he shot off spell after spell, aiming mostly for Umbridge, pouring months of anger and hate and pain into it, keeping enough control to stick to non-dangerous spells.

He already knew he would lose. He fought anyway.

Q was screaming, anger making him dizzy, cackling when he heard Umbridge shriek at one stage. There was a sudden rush of cold night air as his Shield Charm shattered; he tried to throw up a new one, and a spell landed underneath, knocking his balance, making him stumble.

In the microseconds of time he had left, he threw his wand to one side to make sure he didn’t land on it, quickly noting where it had fell in case nobody bothered to pick it up for him.

Q obediently collapsed when a number of spells of various shades and various intensities landed at various points on his anatomy.

It was fair to say that every inch of Q’s body ached.

“Ow,” he mumbled, eyes closed, twitching his fingers and hands and arms and different bits in order, seeing which bits did or did not work. Interestingly, everything seemed to be just about intact – just aching, very badly, as though he’d gone running for some inexplicable and probably Mycroft-related reason, and wound up in bed as a result. “Myc, you idiot, m’gonna kill you,” he told his brother, assuming said idiot would be there.

“Mycroft is definitely an idiot, but I don’t think killing him would help,” a low, gravelled voice noted, and Q’s eyes flew open.

It was ridiculous, how quickly and easily he smiled. Everything lit up instantly, and Bond smiled back, with a raised eyebrow that indicated that maybe Bond was not wholly impressed with Q’s recent behaviour and Q couldn’t remember why, so he decided not to worry about it.

“What happened?” Q asked, trying to sit up, groaning expansively at the effort it took.

It wasn’t Bond who answered. “You got hit with a lot of spells,” John Watson told him, looking sincerely unimpressed, but somehow also worried; Q whined as a very cold stethoscope – something he at least recognised, from Sherlock’s youth – was placed in the centre of his chest. “But: you’re not dead.”

“I gathered,” Q parried, looking back at Bond, blinking as he tried to focus past the pulsing headache. “Merlin, my head hurts.”

“You got something to the head, possibly a Stunner, but impossible to tell,” John said, sounding immensely displeased with Q; he leaned in, checking Q’s pupil dilation, probing the impact point with very little in the way of bedside manner. ”In any case: you bloody bet your head hurts, and will for a while.”

Bond leaned forward, pressed a kiss to the centre of his forehead as though he could heal the pain beneath. “You took on a full Ministry dispatch team on your own,” Bond murmured, sounding
both impressed and annoyed and a little bit jealous. “Well done.”

“How’s Minerva? How are you here?”

John and Bond exchanged brief glances. “Minerva’s in St Mungo’s,” Bond replied, with anger bubbling under his breath. “They hit her with four Stunners, to the chest – she’s a great witch, but she can’t take that sort of thing. You’re lucky. John’s been studying Magical medicine since he got here, so we took you here instead.”

Q looked at John, honestly impressed. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

John just shrugged, looking immensely unfazed, as though it was perfectly normal for a Muggle to be conversant in Magical remedies for the effects of a number of unidentified spells. “Sirius did the spellwork, obviously. Most of it's herbs, very like Muggle medicines.”

Q blinked. “You learnt Potions? Herbology?” he asked slowly, shaking his head with disbelief when John just shrugged again. “I can see why Sherlock likes you.”

It was upsetting, seeing how fast John’s expression fell the moment Sherlock was mentioned. Q reached out a hand, attempting to be comforting, able to empathise in a few others possibly could.

Q wrenched his hand away as through scalded.

“Q?” Bond asked urgently, as Q contracted into himself, hands flying to his head. “Q.”

The young man shook violently, trembling, skin draining of colour almost immediately. John panicked; he grabbed at various potions he had around, looking for Muggle remedies. The impact of a spell directly to the human skull was not something very often examined; without the data, John was improvising.

“James,” Q keened, fingers knotting in his hair. “James, my head.”

Bond’s jaw had taken on a terribly tense angle, reaching for his young lover, trying to understand, trying to work out what in the hell was going on. “Q, talk to me,” he ordered, as best he could. “Q.”

Bond and John watched in absolute horror as Q continued to shake, clawing at his skull as though he could somehow scratch through, into his brain, extract whatever was hurting and make it stop.

It stopped.

Q carefully, tentatively, unfurled.

“Are you alright?” Bond asked, tone a little curt with worry, taught to snapping. John reached out, feeling for Q’s pulse, his temperature, and Q didn’t even glance at him. He kept his eyes fixed on some distant point, something nobody else could see.

He nodded, very slightly. “I know how Silva found out who I was,” he murmured.

The reaction was instant; the tension in Bond’s body literally jumped, while John stilled abruptly, too abruptly to be natural.

Q let out a short little laugh, half-swallowed, not waiting to be prompted. “I told him.”
All will be explained, ehehe. HOORAY THINGS ARE KICKING OFF. Jen.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Lots happening. Hooray! Serious Holmesian melancholia/backstory (with bonus ACD reference), and HP5 plot.

Thank you again to the massed happy people enjoying this fic, it means the world. Jen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nobody really knew how to respond.

Bond blinked. He and John exchanged curious, faintly concerned glances. “Sorry?”

Q was visibly winding himself into a panic as they watched; John, who was beginning to wonder if the world was conspiring to make his life harder, started trying to get the younger man to calm down. “Fuck, fucking hell. He… when I was younger, I had extra classes, extension ones, I took my OWL early and… fuck. He waited years.”

Bond knelt down in front of him, taking Q’s hands in his, Q shaking horribly. “You need to explain,” he said levelly, firmly. He reached out, cupping Q’s chin, thumb running up to his cheekbone. “I don’t understand.”

Somehow, that seemed to impact more than anything else. “Silva,” Q said simply, twitching a little as pain spiked, hit again and again. “I can’t… I can’t concentrate on it, any of it. Is Mycroft here?”

John moved to the door; Q finally noticed that he was in one of the upstairs bedrooms, the one he had shared with Bond. “Mycroft,” John bellowed out of the door; again, a little odd. Nobody yelled for Mycroft. Mycroft lived in the Diogenes, with padded floors and absolute silence, with people who knew of him but never saw him. He was the archetypical puppet-master.

More impressively, he actually appeared.

“My, something’s happening, I need your help,” Q said, as quickly as he could; Mycroft raised an eyebrow, nodded, and all but yanked Bond out of the way as he pulled out his wand. Q nodded, squeezed his eyes shut.

“Legimins.”

- 

A low hum. Calm, absolute calm. Snow outside and fire in the grate and arithmancy problems strewn across the desk and Silva smiling and extending a hand and Q watching, curious, and feeling evenings slide out.

“Chocolate?”

- 

“He used Veritaserum,” Mycroft said immediately, when he pulled out of Q’s mind; Q watched
his brother, still shaking, simply uncertain. Mycroft, for a moment, knew more of Q’s past than Q did. The memories were too unstable for Q to focus on, obscured by a further charm, the grease on the lens.

Bond moved back to Q’s side; Q shuffled back into Bond’s arms, letting Bond cage him safely in. “And?” Q prompted, as Mycroft recollected his composure, and John looked to be dealing very well with the amount of sheer magic happening. He didn’t even ask for clarification on Veritaserum, which was a decent reflection of how much research he had done.

“You had extra-curricular lessons with him for your early OWL examination, yes?” Mycroft confirmed, waiting for Q’s expected nod. “He gave you chocolates, spiked with Veritaserum, and asked you who you were. Afterwards, he simply Obliviated you.”

Q let out a slow exhale, his heart beating somewhere in his throat and lurching out of his mouth. “What else?” he asked quietly, devastatingly. “He could have been modifying my memory for years, and I couldn’t know. Merlin, fuck, I just…”

Mycroft held up a hand, and Q – as he always did when Mycroft did that – calmed down. “Obliviating a mind too frequently leaves scars both internal and external,” he told Q quietly. “It would have become evident quite quickly, if you had been subject to further attacks. I can explore in more detail if you wish, but I am inclined to believe this was an isolated incident.”

Bond’s grip around Q was tight, almost bruising, keeping Q locked in place as the younger man sat, stunned. “I can’t quite remember it,” he murmured, and glanced back up at Mycroft. “A pensieve? Would that help?”

“It is your decision,” Mycroft told him, looking a little concerned. “The memory may only partially instate. If you wish to search for other embedded memories, that may be a preferable option than myself, although potentially less effective.”

Q nodded, not bothering to try extracting himself from Bond’s iron grip. “Is there one here?” he asked, eyes darting; John had averted his eyes, was clearly struggling with immense anger at everything he had heard. “I want to.”

It was easy enough to yell for Sirius; he told them of the pensieve in the top room, almost unused. Q was welcome to take it over if he so wanted, along with Bond, and they had Sirius’s assurance that he wouldn’t go nosing about in it. Q nodded gratefully, and pulled Bond upstairs with him.

The pensieve sat in the far corner of an old, musty master bedroom. Q let Bond’s hand fall away, crossing closer to it, entranced by the age of it; Mycroft had a pensieve from an early age, but his had been shiny and new. This was ancient, filled with old secrets and mysteries, and Q couldn’t help but be a little entranced by it.

“How does somebody your age know how to use a pensieve?” Bond asked from behind him; Q turned, a small smile playing in the corners of his mouth.

He pulled out his wand, gently probed the surface of the swimming liquid; entirely clear. The memories once kept in it had long since been removed, stored somewhere, a series of bottles detailing memories of a life. “Mycroft taught us, Sherlock and I,” Q explained, hesitating a moment. “Sherlock… he and Mycroft, they use it to clear out their heads.”

Bond, unseen, raised an eyebrow. “What do you…?”

“Sherlock was always more addicted to it,” Q continued, cutting over his lover. “Called it ‘clearing out the attic’. He’d run to Mycroft, get him to take away all the information Sherlock
deemed superfluous. Removed all of his memory of the solar system at one stage, if I recall correctly.”

It was, quite possibly, the single most bizarre use for a pensieve Bond had ever heard. “They’re supposed to be for painful memories, things that…”

Q twisted around, shot Bond a curious glance. “You’ve met my family,” he stated. “Honestly, are you that surprised?”

Bond had to concede that no, he wasn’t. Sherlock and Mycroft, removing the information they did not require, made a strange degree of sense; Bond also made a mental note to not bother nosing in Mycroft’s pensieve, unless he wanted Muggle science lessons.

“They use it for emotional ones too,” Q said abruptly, breaking Bond from his thoughts. “I think… I think they both used it too early. When they were too young, I mean. So they never… learnt, never really felt. I mean Mycroft, apparently he was pretty much born without connecting, but Sherlock does. He doesn’t want to, but does, and I think the mucking about with his memories was to do with it.”

“It doesn’t make the memories vanish…”

“… but it makes them impossible to find,” Q completed, glancing worriedly at Bond. “I hated the thing. It felt weird. I wanted to keep everything, even the bad things, not be a bloody robot like Sherlock was for a bit. He made Mycroft take out everything, became addicted to it. When Mycroft refused, he found coke, something to make him stop feeling or thinking again…”

Bond had the abrupt sensation that he was learning more about Q’s family then he had ever expected, more than Q had ever been comfortable expressing before. He moved closer, gently placing a hand on the small of his back, close but not oppressively so. “You don’t have to do this,” he reminded his lover, as Q ran out of air, his long monologue stringing to a halt.

“I do,” Q replied quietly, sagging into Bond’s touch. “I have to understand, James.”

Q looked horribly lost, for a moment, in a way that made Bond feel physically pained; he leaned forward, pressed a kiss to his forehead. “I love you,” he said, just because, just to see Q’s answering smile.

“Love you too,” Q murmured.

Bond took that as he cue to step back, and paid close attention as his Q lifted his wand to his temple, resting it there for a short moment. Pulling away, Bond watched the thin thread of memory with fascination; many wizards didn’t bother with pensives, most had no idea how to use them. Q, extracting a memory with such ease, had seen it done far too many times.

After the fractured tale of his elder siblings, Bond was only beginning to grasp how hard it was for Q to use the pensieve. The silken thread snapped off the end of the wand, sliding into the clear liquid below, staining it a light, pearlescent blue.

“Are you alright?” Bond asked; Q glanced back, twitched out a smile, nodded. “Find anything else?”

Q shrugged. “Seems clear. I really don’t want to ask Mycroft,” he admitted, looking very hesitant. “He’s… I know he cares, but he’s not very deft. It’s not nice, having your brother going through your memories and thoughts.”

“I can imagine,” Bond returned, in a low tone; he had seemed a bit discomfited from the outset
with the idea of Mycroft using Legimens on his younger sibling, and was definitely happier with the pensieve. “Do you mind if I have a look?”

Q shrugged, stepping back a little. Bond moved to his side, hand sliding around Q’s waist in a familiarly intimate gesture as they both glanced into the bowl of fluid, slightly entranced by the shapes the memory made within. “Ready?” Q asked.

Bond nodded, hand sliding down over Q’s lower back, jumping to link fingers their fingers together; Q glanced into the pensieve, exhaled slowly, and the pair dove forward into the blue liquid.

“Chocolate?”

Q staggered back, all but falling into Bond’s arms as he wrenched himself away. “Okay,” he panted. “I’m okay. Merlin. Merlin, James, he modified my memory.”

“I’ve got you,” Bond murmured, arms twining around his young love. “Q, that’s all, that’s all he did. You have this, now, a clear memory – he could go to Azkaban for this, and for what happened with the Boggart.”

Bond’s arms instinctively tightened, at Q’s involuntarily shudder. “I’m so angry,” Q breathed. “That… I just want to kill him.”

There was no point in speaking, so Bond didn’t try. He waited for Q to calm down a little instead; his fists were clenched to the point of whitened knuckles, gradually relaxing, entire body following with him. Eventually, Q was all but propped up on Bond, seeming mostly exhausted.

“We will fix this,” Bond promised, pressing a kiss to the top of Q’s head. They could use the evidence to get him imprisoned or – quite honestly – Bond would delightedly go and jinx him into oblivion. Dumbledore’s return would equally mean a way of adequately handling Silva.

Q nodded, pulled away from Bond a little. “I’m bloody tired,” he murmured; Bond kissed Q again, gently, lovingly, and took him to their bedroom to get some sleep.

At eleven o’clock that evening, Q was woken rather abruptly by Sirius downstairs, yelling for Bond.

“Oh, for the love of Merlin…” Bond groaned, turning onto his side, looking out towards the door; there were lights shining beneath, too many for the hour of the night.

Q blinked, grappling for his glasses on the side table; he’d been asleep for most of the day, in the end. Bond was out of bed like a shot, grabbing his trousers, a shirt that hung off his shoulders, wand in hand. Q took a moment longer, mostly due to the fact that his brain honestly felt like it was trying to force its way out of his skull, and was now pounding unpleasantly.

Q was still hopping with one trouser-leg still not on, when he heard the conversation outside.

Something serious had happened to Harry Potter, and some of his friends. The Order had been contacted. Beyond that, nobody was certain.
Mrs Black was shrieking, as was Sirius; his worry was tangible and horrific, the battle of somebody close to losing his godson, the lifeline that had tethered him post-Azkaban. Bond whipped his wand in a frantic motion, his robes flying closer, using his wand to do up the buttons on his shirt, his robes.

Q followed close behind; a little bit of messy wandwork left his robe stuck over his head for a bit, an awkward wiggle getting them on properly. He scooted down the stairs after Bond, as he was yanked into the kitchen by Sirius. Tonks, Remus, and a host of other Ministry members were coming through the front door; Remus cast an irritated spell at Mrs Black, causing a deafening crack that made her finally fall silent.

Tonks tried to hold the door open, accidently let go of it, nearly letting it fall into Q’s face. Shacklebolt – the only other person who seemed to have arrived – managed a quick charm to keep it open long enough for Q to slip through.

“Harry Potter, and a group of his friends, have gone to the Department of Mysteries,” Mycroft explained calmly, glancing around the room; John was still fully-dressed, had been on guard downstairs when the message came through from Hogwarts. Snape had explained everything to him, and he had – of course – immediately relayed it onto Mycroft.

Sirius, meanwhile, was all but seething in the corner, Remus watching his old friend with something close to fear. “He believes that Sirius is being held there by You-Know-Who. It’s a trap, we’re almost certain Death Eaters have been planted there.”

Bond raised an eyebrow. “We’re all going to the Ministry?”

Shacklebolt nodded gravely. “Severus contacted us all, individually,” he rumbled. “He believes – correctly – that Mr Potter and his companions are in very serious danger. Dolores Umbridge has been taken care of, by his report, so we have no fears. Dumbledore trusts Severus; I believe he knows more than we are able.”

Sirius lost his temper, striding to the door. “Sirius, you can’t,” Tonks attempted; Sirius whirled on her lividly, wand poised, unintentionally threatening.

“He is my godson,” he snapped. “Try and stop me. Anybody else?”

Nobody dared say a word. Sirius yanked a pot of Floo Powder out of a cupboard, examining it with mild distaste; it looked a little damp. “Let me go first,” Remus said calmly. “You haven’t been in the Ministry for a long time, Sirius. We need to go together, or we can’t form any defence for them.”

Sirius conceded defeat, handed the pot over, jaw still terrifyingly tight.

Q’s glasses reflected the abrupt flash of green light; he had always hated Floo Powder, sighed slightly at the thought of travelling by the stuff.

“You’re not going,” Bond told him when he saw his partner’s expression, sounding almost shocked that Q would consider it. “Q, you’re only here because somebody jinxed you senseless, and your head…”

Q stared at Bond, waited for him to stop talking, as Sirius – then Tonks – vanished in flashes of green. Eventually, he spoke, very calmly. “You can’t stop me, James, and you won’t,” he stated; Mycroft, in the background, didn’t bother to suppress a smirk. Holmesian stubbornness was quite a formidable thing.

Bond shook his head slightly, visibly worried. “I’m not happy,” he warned, as Mycroft’s calm,
clear voice stated the Ministry of Magic, and he too flashed green, and vanished.

“I didn’t ask you to be,” Q smiled, ushering Bond towards the fireplace. “You first, I’ll be along in a moment.”

For a moment, Bond’s eyes lingered, traced, as though mapping every part of his lover. “I love you,” he said, as though he was caught by surprise by it, by the intensity of it. The pride, of seeing Q adamantly going, despite not needing to, despite knowing he was likely to encounter Death Eaters and all manner of nastiness, while injured. Seeing Q’s determination, and hating it, and loving it all the same.

Q smiled, returning the sentiment as Bond stepped into the grate. “The Ministry of Magic,” he said firmly, casting the powder at his feet; green flames erupted, and Bond was gone.

All the Order members had gone, Q left alone with the one person everybody always forgot: Doctor John Watson. He would stay behind, ready to handle whatever came. Forced to do the single thing he hated most in the world – nothing.

“Give him this,” John asked, handing over something heavy, wrapped in a cloth. Q unwound it, finding a Muggle handgun inside. “He’ll understand. If he doesn’t, well…”

Q smiled faintly, crookedly. “I expect he will,” he said softly, placing the firearm inside his robes, the feeling oddly heavy and very surreal to be carrying into a Wizarding stronghold. “I’m sorry, John.”

John shrugged, his expression a little rueful. “I used to be a soldier,” he said simply, and Q could abruptly see it. The stiffness in posture whenever there was stress, the little indications of somebody accustomed to tension, accustomed to the anger and pain and revenge and callousness of combat. The calm that had spread across his features, at the approach of all the above.

Sherlock truly had found somebody unique. Q could imagine them together, solving crimes across London, and felt an abruptly strong surge of affection for John. “Mycroft and I…”

“I know,” John interrupted, before Q could get close to the end of the sentence. “Go, Q.”

Q’s gaze lingered for a fractionally longer second, taking in the uniqueness of this particular Muggle. Everything he had done, experienced, above and beyond every other Muggle in the world. Most would have coped very poorly. Not so John Watson.

There was no time for further thoughts. Q pinched himself some Floo Powder, took a breath.

“The Ministry of Magic,” he said clearly, and threw the powder at his feet.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, as always, for reading and sticking with me. As you can imagine, a lot is happening next chapter; I'll update as soon as I humanly can.

Your thoughts, comments, general hatred at me for my cliffhangers; all are gratefully received, cherished, and bounced over with the frenetic excitement of a child on Christmas Day. If you have the time, please feel free!

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Hello again, you charming people. You all know what's coming. Be very afraid. I adore you all for your continued support and enthusiasm for this fic! I hope it continues to satisfy.

Thank you to Lex, for some conceptual aspects of this chapter. Jen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Q managed the trip quite easily; the Ministry had a lovely selection of grates to choose from, so Q merely took a step forward, tumbling out to find Bond directly in front of him, waiting with an almost-teasing smile as Q coughed a little on the thick smoke Floo Powder always created.

They ran to the lift, with the rest of the Order waiting; it was one hell of a surreal journey, with that many people raring for a fight, all in a confined space with enough tension to turn the air electric. Remus was still watching Sirius with compressed worry, Tonks watching Remus in turn, Shacklebolt eerily silent, Mycroft breathing out hums under his breath, Q and Bond’s fingers linked carefully as they reached the Department of Mysteries.

Sirius and Remus were out of the lift like shots, racing towards the dark door of the Department antechamber; Bond was almost keeping pace, before he realised that Q was lingering, had slipped out of his grasp.

Bond twisted around, seeing his lover hang back with Mycroft while the rest of the Order moved forward and out.

“I’m sorry,” Q mouthed, as Tonks glanced back at Bond and Q, eyebrow raised; Bond shooed her off, looking at them both.

Bond took a handful of steps forward, kissed Q quickly. “Be safe,” he said firmly, scanning Q’s expression. Q nodded, hating the worry he could see in Bond’s eye. “Look after him,” Bond told Mycroft, a little coldly; the corner of Mycroft’s mouth twitched in a faint smile of approval, and he nodded.

Q watched Bond go after the other Order members for a heartbeat or so, turned back to Mycroft. “Do you know where he’ll be?” Q asked quietly, feeling abruptly alone. The Holmes brothers, isolated even amongst their own kind; it seemed somehow apt.

Wordlessly, Mycroft led Q forward, through the same door the others had vanished into. Several doors had emblazoned crosses, others ajar, screaming coming through various ones, the walls spinning, everything spinning; Q blinked, and Mycroft simply breathed.

All calmed, and Mycroft seemed to know precisely where to go, without direction. He had never been an Unspeakable, but Mycroft knew things, had always known things. Everything had gone through Mycroft Holmes, before he had been deposed, and it was enough.

Q heard a strangled cry from another door, glanced back to look, torn between directions. Crashes, shouts, spells bouncing across walls and ceilings and people and desks.
Somewhere, Bond was fighting Death Eaters.

“Q, check the doors,” Mycroft said sharply; Q made his choice, followed him into a small antechamber, dark stone, damp and slightly slimy. All of the doors were open in various places, the further rooms all the same dark stone, sparse and empty and somehow forbidding. “Q, Doors,” Mycroft reiterated; Q did as told, throwing open door after door, Mycroft doing the precise same. It became very quickly obvious that they were holding cells of some description, magically reinforced, and Mycroft had evidently assumed Sherlock would be here.

At a loss for further ideas, Q raised his wand. “Hominum revelio,” he mumbled, glancing around for any signs; nothing happened.

Mycroft spared a moment, in his relatively frantic searching, to shoot Q a patronising look. “Not in here, for spells of that manner,” he said condescendingly, and returned to his looks through the last door or two, lingering in the penultimate.

Q growled slightly. There was no way he could have known that; the Department of Mysteries was a law unto itself. “Where is he?” Q asked irritably.

Another moment, and Mycroft let out a sharp growl, still staring into the penultimate room. “Not here, apparently,” he hissed, analysing everything at a speed only Mycroft, and occasionally Sherlock, could manage. “He’s been moved, not voluntarily. Recently.”

There was no time; Q turned to see Mycroft disappearing out, followed on his heels as best he could.

Instantly, there were spells flying everywhere. A masked Death Eater attempted – and failed – to curse Mycroft, met with a pair of Stunners from the Holmes brothers; the Death Eater in question was thrown a number of feet through a still-open door as the walls started to spin around them, Q and Mycroft in mirrored fighting stances as everything stilled once again.

One of the doors, still half-open, slammed fully outwards with an abrupt dart of light; Mycroft threw up a Shield Charm, followed by a further Stunning Spell, shooting jet after jet as his expression stilled and solidified, the epitome of calm as he entered the room.

Q had noticed the next-door room, meanwhile, and the unmistakeable ginger, freckled figure of Ron Weasley; the boy was screaming, panicking, loops of what looked uncannily like human brains constricting his chest. He was barely coherent, giggling pathetically. “Lo Professor,” he managed, and toppled over.

There were no other Death Eaters in the room. A broken tank, sluggishly bleeding green liquid. Hermione Granger and Luna Lovegood, both unconscious. Ginny Weasley, terrifyingly pale, evidently in a fair amount of pain. No Death Eaters, Mycroft was fighting in the next room along, and Q knew he couldn’t leave the students alone.

“Are you alright?” Q asked Ginny quickly; she nodded tightly, glancing briefly at her ankle. Q had spent a childhood with Sherlock and Mycroft. Sherlock had a worrying habit of breaking various bits of his anatomy; Q had watched Mycroft fix bones since they were children, was more than able to help Ginny, to a degree. He didn’t know any spells strong enough to fully anaesthetise, but it would be passable for the time being. Her expression visibly relaxed as the spell curved around the joint carefully.

Q spent another moment or two looking over the other children; Hermione was not doing well, Q didn’t even recognise the curse, and she was refusing to regain consciousness. Luna would similarly be alright, but both would probably require a stint in Mungo’s to properly heal. “They’re
“Alright,” he told Ginny, the only one left who was still conscious and coherent.

“Q,” somebody yelled; Q paled, ran for the door, almost tripping over his own feet in his haste.

“Professor?”

Q glanced back, Ginny’s eyes large but steady. “Stay here, defend them if you can,” he told Ginny quickly; she nodded, still clutching onto her wand, the lone protector of a handful of her friends, all schoolchildren.

He closed the door, hating that he needed to leave her behind. “Colloportus,” he managed, the door glowing obediently, the few behind it safe for at least a short while.

The walls spun again, and Q all but fell over, trying to keep track of the ajar door through which he could still hear a melee of screaming. He slammed through; a flash of light came for him, and he threw up a Shield Charm instantly, the jet of green ricocheting back and off a wall.

It took a moment to truly understand, to see everything.

So many figures, all cloaked, most masked. Macnair, one of the few unmasked Death Eaters, duelling Remus with force enough to singe air. Shacklebolt and Tonks, with cloaked figures of their own, the former fighting with a refined calm whilst Tonks was showier, somehow brighter. Bond, Sirius and Mycroft, all focusing their efforts on a manically beautiful Bellatrix Lestrange. A handful or so of Death Eaters congregated around, little more than occupational annoyances, shooting curses left and right whenever the mood took them; Sirius covered Bond and Mycroft, Shielding and jinxing anything in the vicinity that moved.

At the opposite end of the room, Neville Longbottom looked like he had just been tortured, blood dripping from a potentially broken nose, Harry Potter sheltering the former with his own body and casting intermittent spells, apparently trying a duel with Lucius Malfoy.

It was almost possible to miss it.

Somewhere, in the flashes of light, the slight distortion of smoke, the central piece of a single arch, tattered cloth hanging in front of it, eerie in an unquantifiable type of way, instinctive.

In front of it, dangling upside down by his ankles and entirely unconscious, was Sherlock Holmes.

Abruptly, it made sense that so many people were attacking Bellatrix. Mycroft’s expression – feral anger, a complete abandonment of any of his characteristic control – became justified.

Q honestly felt white hot and immediate fury render everything else irrelevant.

With a quick series of spells, Q deflected control of his brother’s body onto his own wand while the previous caster was occupied; Bellatrix glanced to him for a heartbeat, angry and terrible, and Mycroft looked over in time to see Q turn Sherlock the right way up again, lay him onto the stone floor in front of the archway as carefully as he could.

Mycroft abandoned the assault on Bellatrix, moving faster than Q had ever seen from him to Sherlock’s side; Sirius took his place by Bond, and the pair threw curses out and forward, bouncing to and fro from Bellatrix who laughed like it was the last moment of the world, hair falling in her face as she malevolently continued throwing out green and red and infinite coloured spells, James and Sirius working in a terrifying counterpoint, almost outdoing her, the three dancing to an unheard rhythm.

“Enervate,” Q rasped at Sherlock, trying to find a pulse, shaking too hard to feel it properly. Q
was far too concerned with Sherlock to notice anything; he glanced up, trying to find his elder brother, sheltering himself from the various spells, trying to do too many things at once.

Mycroft threw off a jinx directed at his younger siblings, and in doing so, missed the chance to defend himself. He collapsed instantly, in tandem with Sherlock’s eyes shuttering open.

“Fuck,” Sherlock managed in a rasp, as the sky above him lit with fireworks, and Q screamed at the sight of his eldest brother – whom he had once believed untouchable – lying motionless a few feet away. Somewhere, in the distance, he could hear Malfoy crying out; a ghost-like figure had inexplicably appeared by a stone bench, Longbottom and Potter watching reverently, Longbottom resolutely bleeding.

Q established that Sherlock was conscious, alive, close enough to being well; a couple of masked Death Eaters seemed to have noticed that there were two reduced threats in the centre of the room. Those not already engaged by Order members rounded on Q, and his almost-Muggle sibling; Q found himself throwing off everything he could, terrified at the assault, trying to defend Sherlock as much as himself.

“Sherlock, get Mycroft’s wand,” he screamed over the noise; Sherlock dived forward, covered by Q’s Shields, holding the wand like it was an armed nuclear explosive.

There was too much, too many spells, they were outnumbered and completely overwhelmed. “What do I do?” Sherlock bellowed; somewhere at the back of Q’s head, he registered that it was probably the first time he had ever heard Sherlock concede that he had no idea what to do in a given situation.

“Fucking wave it,” Q yelled, honestly desperate, hoping the gamble would pay off because he was running out of time, he was simply not a good enough dueller to defend himself and Sherlock against two highly skilled assailants, although he was doing his best and honestly had never cast so quickly in his life but it wasn’t enough, he was ducking and diving and missing by inches.

Q’s Shield Charm shattered, somebody yelled “Dumbledore,” Q listened to Sirius Black laughing like a teenager, and Sherlock Holmes used a wand for the very first time in his life.

Emotional extremes are the single easiest way to make anybody without training betray wizarding aptitude.

The resulting explosion would have levelled any other building.

The Order members were defended by nothing less than Dumbledore himself, who threw out a volley of defensive spells in a piece of truly masterly wandwork. The unprotected Death Eaters were thrown into walls, resulting a number of unconscious and very crumpled heaps at various intervals around the room.

It took a moment to realise that the screaming behind him had not stopped.

Everything else was breathtakingly still – the calm after the storm – other than a child’s cry, a truly shattered sound.

Harry Potter, trapped by Remus’s arms. He was trying to fight his way out towards the arch where, only a moment ago, Sirius and Bond had been fighting Bellatrix.

Q couldn’t see either of them.

Sherlock was bent over Mycroft’s body, fingers at the latter’s throat, glancing to Q with a bloodless expression.
The air was ringing with the after-effects of Sherlock’s explosive ‘spell’, the release of magic after so many years of disuse. Sherlock himself looked like he was about to pass out, and only now could Q take a second to realise that he was frighteningly thin, visibly unwell.

“Sirius,” Potter continued to cry, and Q understood that Harry had led his friends on a fool’s errand, duelled Malfoy – the father of the boy he thought he loved – and watched the only near parental figure he had die.

Bellatrix had vanished, and Q was breathing too-heavily, his own heartbeat ringing in his ears as Harry broke away, sprinted for the door, and Q couldn’t see Dumbledore anywhere but he had to be there, somewhere, because everybody was still in motion somewhere despite the quiet.

“James?” Q managed, fingers clenching around the handle of his wand, choking slightly on his own breath, looking to the archway where he had last seen his partner, throwing off jinxes with Sirius. Sirius, whom Harry was screaming for, looking through the arch into the infinite nothing that was rumoured to linger behind that thin piece of cloth, blocked off from the living.

Q looked to his siblings – Mycroft unnaturally still, Sherlock swaying slightly where he knelt – and back to the empty archway, the voices behind creeping up in volume now there was quiet.

He shook his head just once, in sheer disbelief, and felt his legs go from under him.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah... so Lex nearly throttled me when she saw where I ended this chapter...

I'll update soon! Thank you for reading :)
For a curious moment, everything suspended completely.

Q could hear nothing but his own, over-loud breathing, harsh and clouded in on itself. The room seemed to almost echo from the after effects of spells and screams and shouts, and it took a moment for Q to fully understand, for his brain to actually catch up a little.

He gave himself a brief mental inventory, decided he was not too badly hurt. The Death Eaters were mostly at the base of the walls from where Sherlock's earlier explosion had hit them, the other Order members just about collected; Remus was barely together, Tonks extending a tentative hand, attempting contact. Remus had, after all, lost Sirius before. Never like this.

“Q?” Sherlock asked, voice inches from snapping; Q glanced over from his vague assessments of the room, Sherlock's voice sounding very distant. He shrugged, hoping that would do in lieu of any other response; Sherlock seemed suitably mollified, stumbling away from him and Mycroft with his jaw white with tension, leaving his younger brother to all but hyperventilate in the middle of the room.

The veil swayed gently, hypnotically.

“James,” Q breathed, inaudible, staring at the stone archway.

There was no time to do anything intelligent. Sherlock's spell had knocked the Death Eaters sideways, but they were mostly conscious and picking themselves up off the floor by increments; Macnair reached standing, and Kingsley found himself once again engaged in a duel. Dumbledore was in motion, casting spells with inspirational ease, binding the Death Eaters that were slower on the uptake.

Q stayed still, the epicentre, barely breathing, and the noise built again with incredible speed and gravity.

There was an abrupt, furious cry.

The Order worked as best they could, barred by a single impediment that nobody could have possibly foreseen.

Sherlock had stood, leaving his brothers, and walked towards a Death Eater, who was stirring weakly at the foot of the far wall. Masked, but Sherlock had kept note of the wizard who had cursed Mycroft; his brother's wand remained clasped in Sherlock’s thin fingers, knuckles white around the base as he abruptly lifted it, and shot out a white, compressed burst of pure magic, a shout ripping painfully from his lips.
After that, Sherlock entirely lost control.

At age eleven, he had chosen to never use or channel his magic. The choice was what mattered; the magic lived under his skin, seeping out whenever necessary, but his decision was manageable. His mind subconsciously controlled his magic, prevented the potential chaos of untempered energy bursting out him, uncontrollable.

Dumbledore knew, better than anyone, that losing control of magic could be lethal. Ariana had been that; a young girl, traumatised out of using magic, too damaged to exert any of her own control. Anger, fear, pain: all translated into explosions of magic, strong enough to kill their mother, cause her to slowly devolve, self-destruct in front of his eyes.

Sherlock was doing precisely the same in front of them, an angry and terrified child in the body of an older man, channelling every part of magic he had ever possessed into destroying those who threatened, who hurt, his family.

It was breathtaking, and absolutely terrifying.

Q hit the floor, trying to avoid the explosions that rocked the earth, crawling over to Mycroft’s body with his torso inches from the floor. “Enervate,” he rasped; nothing happened. Mycroft stayed utterly still and Q mimicked the stillness for his own protection, trying to call out in a room so loud he couldn’t hear his own voice.

Sherlock screamed, whole body shaking with the exertion, Dumbledore’s terrible and steady voice somewhere in the background. Q arced his form over Mycroft’s; everybody, Death Eater and Order alike, was trying to defend themselves against Sherlock. The original battle had been temporarily stalled.

He was untouchable. Magic cloaked him, absorbing every spell that came near him, throwing off pseudo-spells of his own that were little more than raw power. The more spells that came near him, the angrier Sherlock became, emotion overriding sense for one of the few times of his life, and the awful and brilliant figure whirled with motion, light, magic seeming to erupt through every pore of his skin, the tips of his fingers, borne out on his cries.

Mycroft’s wand had dropped to the floor, as though escaping the creature who had been wielding it; it was not the practised wizard the wand was accustomed to, but a being entirely composed of, and dominated by, loose magic. It seemed to run away of its own volition.

“Sherlock,” Q called, wincing as Kingsley took an errant bolt of light to the chest, crumpling instantly. “Sherlock, you have to calm down, please.”

Q watched with horror at the force of it all, wondering if Sherlock could feel it daily, if this was just a release of something that had always been there. Wizards were supposed to use their magic, after all. Sherlock had always told him it was simple, not working magic. But then, Sherlock had ever been an exemplary liar.

For a short second, Sherlock’s gaze landed on his younger brother. “Go,” he yelled, fingers grappling at his head, arms, stomach as though he could hold it all in like that, compress inwards until there was nothing left and he could prevent harm coming to his brother. “Go, Q.”

Q had no intention of going anywhere, not with Mycroft undefended, with Sherlock out of control.

Mycroft’s body was abruptly enveloped in a viscous, translucent blue. It shone slightly, glistened
in the uncertain light, a cocoon for the eldest Holmes brother.

Q sought the caster frantically; Dumbledore, who winked at Q in a way that somehow managed to be playful despite the context. Instantly, Dumbledore turned his attention back to Sherlock, but it was enough for Q to understand that he could – and should – run now. Sherlock was being dealt with, Mycroft looked after.

As it was, Q remained crouched for a moment, thinking, wondering if he could find some way of communicating with whatever was left of Sherlock.

The Browning weighed heavily in his pocket. Q grappled for it; when Sherlock had calmed, he would need something of the Muggle world to anchor him back again. In any case, Q had promised John Watson that he would give it to Sherlock, and intended to follow through on said promise.

Sherlock was fighting himself, and losing, and Q would not let it happen if he could help it.

He took a single glance at the military-issue Browning in his brother’s hand, and gasped in a way that seemed rather unlike Sherlock. “John,” he said, abruptly very quiet, and looked – properly looked - at his brother.

In one motion, Sherlock contracted entirely in on himself, the magic in turn forced into the confined space of his form. In all his life, Q had never heard anybody scream like that.

Around, the Order were cursing, jinxing, winding up all the Death Eaters in a neatly encircled heap while trying to avoid Sherlock. Sherlock himself was a curious centrepiece, no longer illuminated, trembling like a violin string as he reined himself back.

Sherlock fell to the ground, retching painfully, blood lacing bile.

Q looked to Dumbledore; he waved Q forward, brow contracted with worry, but allowing it nonetheless. Q slid to the floor by his brother, reaching out, the Muggle weapon placed inches away should he choose to reach for it.

“Sherlock?” Q asked; the noise was diminishing faster now, the Death Eaters universally conceding defeat, another lull now that Sherlock was not an active threat. Bellatrix was the only notably absent party of the Death Eaters, Q could only assume she had escaped by now.

Sherlock turned to Q with a faintly manic expression, feral like the photograph Q had seen weeks previously. “You’re alright?” he asked roughly; Q nodded slightly, Sherlock practically rocking where he sat, inadvertent tears falling down his cheeks in a way that was instinctively, horribly wrong. Sherlock Holmes did not cry.

“Dumbledore will look after Mycroft, we need you out of here,” Q tried to coax; if he could get Sherlock to Grimmauld Place, they could be safe for a while, try and calm him down enough to avoid any further problems.

To Q’s utter confusion, Sherlock shook his head. “Not until I can handle it,” he breathed, eyes pinched shut, fists tightly knotted; it was not over. Sherlock’s control was merely borrowed, and he knew it. He stared at his younger brother. “I’m not safe. You should be with Bond, surely?”

The name sent a stab of something white-hot through Q’s chest. In the chaos of Sherlock’s catastrophe, there had been no time to establish what had happened; Bond had not been seen. All Q had was the memory of he and Sirius by the veil, and her laughing, green light and curses flying across the room, and the pair of them vanishing before he could turn around.
Q shook his head slightly, spasmodically, grief rendering him speechless.

Sherlock raised an eyebrow. “He is somewhere in the Ministry, correct? In pursuit of a child who looks uncannily like Harry Potter?”

Q inhaled so sharply he got dizzy. “You saw him go?”

“Yes,” Sherlock agreed, managing – despite being desperately pale, almost feverish – to be utterly condescending. “Go, Q. There is assistance enough for me here.”

It took no further encouragement. Q ran out, trapped in the semicircle and diving towards another door, flying out into the corridor and wending his way through the Ministry. There was no sound, no anything; Q worked his way upwards manually, seeing occasional evidence of curses and damage to passing offices. The place was unbelievably quiet, compared to the volume downstairs; this was the resulting carnage, while the war was waged elsewhere.

Near the Apparation Offices, Q heard noises again; cries, shrieks, mostly female and indisputably Bellatrix. She kaleidoscoped sound, the easiest way to trace into the central Atrium.

“You need to really mean them,” she taunted somebody, unseen; Q looked carefully, and found Potter behind a statue of a centaur.

He crouched with his wand in hand, looking up sharply when he noticed a figure in the doorway.

Q caught his eyes, and in that moment, knew there was no chance of getting him away. Potter was clouded so far over with anger, with pain, that coherency had entirely gone. He looked away an instant later, having rightly established that Q was not a threat.

There was no sign, anywhere, of Bond.

“Your dear old mate Voldemort knows it’s gone!” Potter yelled, making Q roll his eyes at the sheer bloody stupidity, and wince slightly at the use of the name. “He’s not going to be...”

Q cast a Stunner, in tandem with another bolt of light from the opposite end of the room; Q glanced over, distracted by whoever had cast the other spell.

“No,” somebody yelled, and Q saw two jets of light.

The first, emerald-green jet sailed past by a millimetre, as Q was hit with a spell that made him fly, airborne for a handful of surreal seconds before crunching, paper-like, into one of the ceiling-high columns of the Atrium.

Q slid down, discarded.

The pain was unlike the Cruciatus curse. That pain had a beginning and end, was unbearable, but the main agony ended. This was constant, something that speared through Q’s body and kept him there, a mere spectator.

Potter was clutching his forehead, and Q had no real thought other than the pain that seemed to have no focus, no single point to identify.

Voldemort appeared in the centre of the hall.

“Oh fuck,” Q breathed, mouthed, vision blurring and mouth tasting a little rusty. His fingers remained around his wand; he tried to lift it, found his arm was really not as coordinated as he would have liked. Voldemort was talking to Potter alone, ignoring Q, whom he clearly considered
Voldemort raised his wand, and tried to cast a Killing Curse on Potter.

Q responded as best he could, trying to curse You-Know-Who himself, and really, Q couldn’t quite believe what he was doing.

A red jet caught him mid-word. Q’s wand flew from his fingers, skittering over the polished floor, and he was knocked sideways; Q realised a heartbeat later that he was not going to be able to prop himself back up. It had to be broken bones, something, and pain continued to hammer into him with merciless precision.

Bellatrix lost interest, turning to her master, pleading desperately for her safety and for his love; Q realised he had probably just avoided death through Bellatrix’s own self-interest. Luck did not even begin to cover it.

Q’s wand was only a few feet away. He tried to move, and pain rendered him motionless once again, paralysed, instead watching the unfolding spectacle of Dumbledore and Lord Voldemort duelling in the middle of the Ministry for Magic Atrium.

Bellatrix should have taken the more intelligent option, and vanished. She had, however, noticed something she could play with.

From the opposite end of the room, somebody was cross-jinxing, their spells lost in the melee of motion between Voldemort and Dumbledore. Separate battles raged in unison, and Q kept track of neither, given that Bellatrix Lestrange was possibly the best caster of the Cruciuatus Curse Q had yet encountered.

Every few moments, Bellatrix broke off to deflect another spell, another jinx. Dumbledore either didn’t notice, or was simply too challenged by Voldemort to help; Q slid into a numb space, wondering if death felt like this. A disconnection from reality, from time or space or perspective, the physical body going through whatever it needed while the mind soared, free.

Q blinked away tears, half-seeing Voldemort cocooned in what looked like molten glass, lifted from the fountain below while his body screamed and his mind floated elsewhere, simply unable to connect.

Bellatrix was trying to prove her worth to Voldemort via torture, Q mused in his moments of real scope, and otherwise sobbed pathetically on the polished glass of the Atrium floor while Bellatrix continued to cast Cruciuatus whenever she wasn’t otherwise occupied, and Q understood how people could lose their sanity, could lose everything they were under an onslaught like this.

Eventually, even the screaming stopped. Q flinched with each burst that hit, writhed helplessly, too exhausted to make sound form.

For the first time in his life, Q knew what it meant to truly wish for death. He closed his eyes and thought of Bond, his James. Of ice cream and warmth and Whisp around their ankles, of sharing infinite space with another person, of dinner with Sherlock and drinks with Mycroft, of never quite being home without James being there. The steady circle of his arms, the unique smell just beneath his ear that Q would bury his nose in, of casting spells and laughing as they broke things and fixed them and exchanged ideas and concepts under a blue sky.

Q half-smiled.

The Atrium seemed to have too many people, and Q could see You-Know-Who through the blur. His glasses had gone, Q honestly had no idea where to. Snakes seemed to remain afterglows in
the dim light, shouts and cries and *seize him*, and Q’s face split into a true smile as he caught a flash of bright, ice blue.

Everything turned white.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry, I'm absolutely horrible, and cannot be trusting with cliffhangers. Lex has moved onto sobbing, and plying me with various bits of chocolate and favours. It's been an interesting week.

Thank you guys, as always, for reading.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

I have a feeling this will be the penultimate chapter, ladies and gents. Thank you all, as always, for your amazing support. I hope you continue to enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Being alive came as a bit of a surprise, overall.

Q could see light beyond his closed eyelids, the slight brightening, a guard against a world outside. All attention clarified on what he could see, simply for want of anything else, a need to not sense anything on or around his body. Everything was blurred, distorted around the edges, thoughts treacly and difficult to grasp, sliding out from between his fingers.

Trying to move made every single muscle in Q’s body feel like it was splitting open, knives spearing every joint and keeping him very firmly in place. To his deep embarrassment, he also realised that the low moaning was him.

“Q?”

A warm hand on his cheek, cradling his chin, fingers stretching up to brush the farthest tips of his eyelashes. The smell was the immediate trigger; heat and cinnamon and chilli and molten caramel, the depth, encroaching lava, pouring over Q’s body and keeping him warm. A teenage Q had been in a potions class, Snape brewing a cauldron of Amortensia for the seventh years, and it smelt exactly like that. Everybody had spent the day comparing notes, curious and intrigued and giggling like children, enticed by the idea of love.

Bond, five years later, had smelt precisely the same.

Q forced his eyes open, just to check, to make sure.

Bond smiled like a sunrise, and Q didn’t give a damn about what had happened or why it had happened, or anything in between. He was safe. Bond, his James, was safe.

With that came a terrible recollection of darkness, of more pain than it was possible to survive, screaming, You-Know-Who himself and the intoxicating horror of a million spells streaking through the blackness, and an arch, veil swinging hypnotically, terror. Sheer terror.

“You alright?” Q asked, tried to ask. His voice didn’t seem to be carrying much.

The hand remained in place, tender, gentle, stroking along his temple. “Very much so. Unlike you,” Bond continued, pointing out the latter fact with a slight note of annoyance. “I told you to stay safe, Q.”

Q, for his part, just continued to stare. “I thought you were dead,” he managed and – again to acute embarrassment – he felt himself start to cry.

Bond moved immensely quickly; Q reached out like a small child, almost shaking with relief as he was drawn in, sheltered. The movement made him whimper softly in pain, the contact of Bond’s
arm utterly painless, but every twitch of muscle somehow agonising. “I’m here,” Bond told him gently, kissing his forehead carefully, lovingly. “I’m so sorry, Q. I tried to protect you...”

“Don’t be a twat.” Q interrupted, with definite irritation. “L... James, I’m sorry to ask, but what happened? I don’t remember very much. Fuck. Fuck. My brothers, what happened with them?! Are they alright? Mycroft...”

Bond pressed a single finger to Q’s lips, and he obediently fell very silent.

“Calm down,” Bond told him gently. “Mycroft and Sherlock are alive. Mycroft is here, St Mungo’s. Sherlock is at HQ, we had to get him away from the Ministry after they saw what he was capable of. Technically now in hiding.”

“Did I miss the reunion?” Q asked, feeling truly bereft; the promise of Sherlock and John seeing one another again had been one of the highlights of the past few months.

Bond grinned, a satisfied thing that spread across his entire face. “Oh yes. John punched him.”

“Punched him?!”

“Then proceeded to kiss him in the middle of the kitchen. Sherlock panicked, his magic was still unstable, knocked John halfway across the room – Molly intervened, thankfully, so no long-term harm done – and now they’ve reached a middle ground where they don’t discuss it, and probably won’t until Sherlock stops electrocuting everything in the vicinity the moment he emotes.”

Q smirked; sounded about right, for his brother. “How bad is it?”

Bond raised an eyebrow. “For you? Mycroft? Sherlock...?”

“What was Mycroft hit with, I never saw,” Q asked, briefly recalling his brother motionless, unnaturally motionless. “I mean, is he...?"

“Very much alive,” Bond said, with a tone that implied that perhaps Mycroft was not the best of patients in Mungo’s. “Nobody knows what the curse was, probably a Death Eater creation – nobody’s seen the like since last time You-Know-Who was in power. At the moment... partially paralysed, but his mind’s still unfortunately intact.”

Q restrained a smile with amused difficulty. “Unfortunately?”

“Unable to move, very much able to scare other people into moving.” Bond noted dryly. “Everybody’s waiting for him to be discharged, the Healers included. Speaking of moving...”

“Not even a little bit,” Q said immediately. There was no way in hell he would be able to stand yet, let alone walk, given that his heartbeat was hurting. “James, what actually happened to me?”

Bond seemed to still, abruptly, a tightness visible in his jaw, his posture. “I tried to prevent a Killing Curse hitting you. I was... everything was moving very fast, I didn’t even consciously cast it. The impact caused a severe spinal injury, and on top of that, you were severely tortured. I... Bellatrix Lestrange was intending to kill you, when she finally deigned to. I tried to deflect her, I’m sorry, but that prolonged a period without any pause...”

Q had gone very slightly white. “James, what’s happened to me?” he asked, something like devastation in his voice. Bond didn’t speak for a moment. “James.”

“Nobody’s quite sure yet,” Bond murmured, his voice as placatory as possible; Q tried to reach out, increasingly panicked by the lack of motion in his body, the pain. “The Healers noticed that
you’re having serious muscle spasms, it could affect your wandwork. Other than that, it’s... Cruciatu
us curses always leave residual pain, and it’s impossible to know how bad it will be for you, but everybody is relatively certain...”

Bond trailed off, given that Q could find no other feasible response than to giggle. “So... it’s going to hurt, potentially a lot, but I’m not... my mind’s alright, memory, those tend to go and I don’t... that’s all alright”

“You’re fine,” Bond said with a slight smile, evidently a little worried by Q’s laughter, but deciding not to delve into it. “Hopefully the spasms will die back, or they’ll find some way of...”

Q shook his head, melding into the sheets, tired but wholly, utterly intact. “In other news: You-Know-Who?”

“Definitely back. Dumbledore’s back, too. It’s a stalemate, for a while,” Bond explained carefully, hand trailing over Q’s side, fingers twisting together. Q tapped his fingers in an erratic rhythm, glancing back up at Bond, back at the sheets, fidgeting. “You’re restless.”

“When are they letting me out?”

Bond snorted. “Well done, you lasted exactly five minutes,” he laughed, while Q looked vaguely aggrieved. “Soon, Q. I pity anybody who tries to keep you longer than necessary. Anyway, you’ll want to go back to Hogwarts for the last couple of days?”

Q couldn’t help but grin with a type of anticipation; the final feast at Hogwarts was always brilliant, and honestly, he couldn’t imagine missing it. Incapacitated or not, he would find a way to be in Hogwarts – and anyway, half of his belongings were still there. “Are you able to come?” Q asked tentatively; the fact that Bond was in St Mungo’s at all, without being arrested, seemed promising.

The response was immediate, and more defensive than Q could have predicted. “I’m not leaving you alone in any building with Silva ever again,” Bond announced, almost grandiose in his apparent fury. “He’ll be dealt with, as soon as you’ve properly testified to the Ministry. Dumbledore is livid, and Minerva’s giving evidence if she can, not to mention that Potter...”

It was almost too much to handle, all at once; Q held up a hand, trying to quell the rush of words, shut Bond up for a moment. Silva was the least of his worries just then, which was definitely a nice feeling, and definitely not maintainable, and Q was happy to just think about whether or not he’d be able to walk for the time being rather than thinking about goddamn Silva.

Bond, thankfully, quieted.

“Are you ok?” Q asked, over the silence, quiet and vulnerable.

He breathed out lightly as Bond kissed his forehead. “I’m fine,” Bond told Q carefully, and let Q all but pass out.

- Everybody at the Order gave him a standing ovation.

Except Sherlock, but Sherlock would never give anybody a standing ovation.

Q was being helped by Bond, propped up on him, smiling and blushing a truly impressive shade of pink. “I didn’t do anything,” he mumbled at Bond, who rolled his eyes, and tried to quiet everybody else down. “This is silly, James, I didn’t even do anything...”
“You calmed me down,” Sherlock said in his familiar, velvet-low voice. A moment later, Q was encountered with the truly bizarre circumstance of Sherlock – who never did voluntary physical contact – hugging him.

It was weird, but Q was never going to argue.

Mycroft, meanwhile, was standing proudly in the corner, propped up on his version of Bond: his umbrella. He smiled genially, inclining his head towards Q in a way that was evidently intended to be respectful.

Q was released by Sherlock, who looked vaguely nauseated, and placed back in Bond’s arms. “Need to sit,” Q mumbled, despising that he was in such a mess that he literally couldn’t stay standing for longer than a handful of minutes.

To his credit, Bond was glorious about it. He composed a chair out of air, helping Q settle into it with minimal fuss.

“You’re up and about,” Q smirked at Mycroft, his hand still knotted with Bond’s.

The man raised an eyebrow, moving to Q’s side with surprising dexterity for somebody who was clearly struggling to put one foot in front of another, for very different reasons to Q. “Yes, the Healers wanted to keep me longer, but I convinced them that it would be best if I was released.”

Q grinned, nodded. “Sherlock?”

Sherlock glanced over; he’d disappeared to the far end of the room, busy talking to John with a flippant arrogance that Q recognised from their childhood, adulthood, all the bits in between. “Yes?” he said, with a faint drawl.

Q glanced over him, a little anxious. “Are you alright?”

“When am I not?” Sherlock asked, with all seriousness. “I do have some problems with magical outbursts, when overly emotional, but thankfully that is a relatively rare occurrence.”

“I would advise not angering him,” Mycroft interjected lightly, ignoring the petulant glare Sherlock shot him; in his defence, Sherlock had the capacity to kill people without trying very hard – and very few people could get him as angry as his brothers could.

Q glanced behind, to John; he looked oddly sad, in a gentle way, the way only John could. “John?”

He managed a perfect, false smile, and Q didn’t press the matter.

The time came later, much later, when John was looking over Q. He had been briefed on what to look out for medically, had done truly exceptional amounts of research on the subject of the Cruciatus curse, and the effect it could have on a human body. John sat Q down on his bed, Bond hovering in the middle distance before being sent off on a pointless errand downstairs, and Q was left alone with John for the first time all day.

“Sirius,” he said simply. Q nodded; it had been easy enough to forget about Sirius, in the chaos of everything else that had been happening. Honestly, Q hadn’t even known Sirius that well. John’s reminder had the additional impact of making Q realise that he hadn’t asked James, at all, how he was dealing with the loss of somebody he had grown quite close to.

Q nodded, offered sympathy which really, was all he could possibly do. “And Sherlock refuses to
discuss emotion,” John continued. “Especially... under the circumstances, I mean. He hates emoting at the best of times, and the possibility of killing people isn’t helping.”

There was a slight laugh in his words, but it still seemed a little forced. Q couldn’t find anything to say, and in either case, he was too exhausted to make most sentences form. The ache that he had felt when Silva had been cursing him had been augmented to a terrifying degree, enough to make every heartbeat, every muscle, ache in a way that sunk into his body and refused to shift.

John noticed, and handed over a potion in what looked like a Muggle thermos flask. “Did you...?”

“Yep,” John replied easily. “Molly helped with the wandwork aspects, but most of it’s like cooking, to be honest. Just with weirder ingredients. You get used to that, living with Sherlock.”

Q snorted, wincing at the pain that ran through his abdomen. Sherlock had always been terrible, in terms of socially unacceptable substances to keep in a single kitchen; Q had a strangled memory of being thirteen, and finding a spleen, and hoped that was an inaccurate memory.

Downing the potion in one go was relatively easy, and he commented vaguely at the fact it was actually edible, and waited for the predictable anaesthesia to reach him. “Got any I can steal for tomorrow?” he asked optimistically. “I need to go into Hogwarts, get my stuff if nothing else, and the Mungos lot didn’t give me anything that keeps me upright...”

“I have morphine?” John suggested, with a wry smile.

Q’s mouth thinned to a single line, eyes dark.

Sherlock had been addicted to morphine, and cocaine, for a long while. Q had been fourteen, and angry, and scared. Sherlock had been nineteen, in Muggle hospital, a shadow of himself, equally angry and far more scared than Q could know.

It was Q’s holiday from Hogwarts, Sherlock’s from Cambridge. Sherlock had been staying in Mycroft’s Muggle flat for a little while, when it became very obvious that somewhere, the brother Mycroft and Q had once known was a long way gone. When Sherlock decided to not eat for the third day running, and was beginning to be actively frightening for Q to be around, Mycroft intervened.

Sherlock was forced into hospital in the middle of the day, Q left alone to read through various Magical tomes that Mycroft had scattered around the flat. Boredom hit, eventually, and Q entered the hallowed sanctum of Sherlock’s bedroom.

Mycroft had come home from the hospital, to find his other sibling on Sherlock’s bed, almost catatonic.

Truly, Q was convinced that Mycroft had never forgiven him. In addition, Q had a crippling terror of Muggle drugs. “I’ll be fine. Sherlock’s...”

John shook his head quickly. “I know he has in the past, but no. He has no access,” John assured him; Q nodded, glancing out to the door, eyes barely focusing through simply exhaustion. “I’ll get something together for you, but really, I wouldn’t recommend being out too long, you’re in no state...”

“I have to,” Q told him firmly. “I just... please. I need to.”

Another slight, sad smile. “I know that tone of voice,” John said, a little teasingly, before sighing sharply. “Well. I’ll tell James you’re alright, full bill of health, as long as you don’t push it. Deal?”
Q grinned outright. “Thank you, John.”

John shook his head in playful exasperation, and left Q alone. It only took another moment for Bond to appear in the doorway, endearingly worried, immediately scooping Q into his arms and practically forming an exoskeleton. “John tells me you’re all clear.”

“Yep,” Q trilled, nuzzling slightly into Bond’s neck.

“He’s a shit liar.”

Q glanced up; Bond didn’t look angry, not really, but he didn’t look delighted either. “I’m sorry, but you can’t make me stay back, it’s the last day of term and it’s my first year teaching, and I need to pick up my stuff, and I want to see Dumbledore, and if I’m going to have to testify about Silva soon... I’m not trying to...”

Bond sighed slowly, clearly trying to keep control of his nonexistent patience. “I’m going with you,” he told Q, again, about the fortieth time he’d reiterated the same point; if Q hadn’t been busy yawning, he would have argued back.

Instead, Bond dropped light kisses over his head, in his hair, and Q breathed in Bond again and again, the aliveness of his James Bond, who Death Eaters and Ministry minions and all hell could not destroy. James was there, James was his, and Q refused to lose him.

Q didn’t so much as fidget. He stayed still, and fell asleep in Bond’s arms.

Chapter End Notes

(Silva is coming back imminently, in case y'all were wondering).

Thank you for reading!! Any thoughts et cetera would be immensely welcome, as ever. Take care now :) Jen.
Thank you so much to everybody who has continued to support and enjoy this fic. I've had more comments than I knew possible, and people contacting on tumblr, rec'cing, the works. It's a tremendous honour, and I'm just very glad you've enjoyed.

As far as this chapter goes, I've tried to emulate JKR - in that the endings of HP books are always optimistic. So despite my established penchant for cliffhangers, I have restrained myself. Mostly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Q let out a small, snuffling sound, and woke up.

“James?” he asked blearily, glancing around for his errant partner, invoking various Merlin-related curses as he tried to move. “James?”

Eloquent silence. Q grumbled to himself, gritting his teeth as he awkwardly sat upright, hand extending to grab his glasses and wand – in that order – trying to place the wrong item on his face and extending his glasses out in front of him as though it would do anything. A quick swap around, and Q blinked awkwardly while trying to see his partner.

The door opened, and Q came very close to an instinctive jinx before realising it was Bond. “Morning,” he smiled.

Bond crossed to the bed, settling on the edge. “Morning. How’re you feeling?”

“Like I’ve been hit with a series of Unforgivable curses, thanks,” Q returned, still smiling; there was no point dwelling on the less palatable aspects. It was easier, simpler, to just let it become a mockery. It had happened, certainly, but was now past. “I could do with a hand getting up, actually. Also, whatever that spell was with the clothes and stuff...”

In other circumstances, whatever Bond managed to do to his clothing would have been extremely arousing. As it was, Q had asked – more than once – why in the name of all things magic Bond hadn’t decided to use it before.

Q merely had to stand, and Bond – with a deft wave of his wand, and an expression that made Q’s mouth go dry – could manipulate his clothing on and off his body.

Bond helped Q sit, stand. He stood very still, as Bond cast the spell; clothes flew onto his body from around the room, and the moment Bond was in range, Q was kissing him. “Q. Q, if you want to go, we need to go now.”

Ignoring him was not a real option; Q let out a small whine of disapproval when Bond moved away, grappling to get him back. “I don’t see that two minutes...”

Bond snorted. “It’s never ‘two minutes’ with you. Come on, breakfast,” he coaxed, extending an arm like a true gentlemen to help Q along. “John should have some potions ready for you. He’s been up all night, please be grateful.”
Q yawned, waving a disconsolate hand. “I’m always grateful,” he muttered truthfully; mornings were proving to be particularly bad for him, until the moment John handed over his potions. Q had stopped bothering with the stuff from St Mungo’s.

John and Remus were sat at the table, speaking in low voices while Molly remained at the stove, cooking something that smelled promisingly like scrambled eggs. Sherlock was at the far end of the table, buried in a laptop and shooting occasional, ferocious glances at everybody in the vicinity; he hated being surrounded by magic, hated that he was so tangibly magic. Q could practically smell the energy rolling off him, while Sherlock tried desperately to disappear into Muggle technology and remain there indefinitely.

“Morning,” John managed absentmindedly; he moved to get up, intercepted by Remus sending a couple of flasks flying in Q’s direction. Thankfully, Bond had far better reflexes than Q; he snatched them out of air, handing the darker blue one to Q. “Thanks, both of you. Q – the lighter one’s for when you need it. Last ditch though, won’t last more than an hour or so.”

Q nodded, drinking quickly, letting out an open sigh as pain drained from most of his body; he lifted himself off Bond, finally, and walked under his own steam to the table. He toppled into a chair, about to Summon himself some toast when Molly poured an entire frying pan of eggs onto a plate and magicked it in front of him.

Bond snorted, rearranging his features a half-second later. “Molly,” Q tried. “I...”

“Don’t be silly, dear, I won’t hear a word of it,” she told him, before he’d managed to get as much as a word out.

Remus ran a hand through his hair, looking remarkably tired; Q wondered, absently, whether it was near the full moon. “I’ll make the arrangements,” he muttered to John, nodded briefly at Q, and landed on Bond. “Sirius’s funeral. No body, but we’re going to hold a service, just a quiet thing for the Order who... well, those who knew, really. He was never the type for...”

“Pretension, yeah,” Bond completed, nodding. “Thank you, Remus.”

With tattered robes around his shoulders, and an expression of pure heaviness, Remus simply shrugged. “You’ll be back tonight?” he asked; Bond nodded.

The plan was to head into Hogwarts for the day, try and get through the Feast, and then come home at whatever absurd time of night everything wrapped up at. Q wanted to speak to a few teachers – and students, although he hadn’t told Bond everything on that score just yet – before term officially ended.

The last time Q had seen Hogwarts, it had been an oppressive atmosphere, running on general wariness and fear.

Now, the place was like Q remembered from his time there. The corridors rang with true laughter, students were not frightened, and Q managed to tell off a handful of second-year Ravenclaws for running in the corridors within the space of about thirty seconds.

News travelled quickly; students began congregating to see Bond and Q, both back on Hogwarts grounds. The Slytherins shot them dark looks – most of them having been stripped of Inquisitorial Squad positions mere days previously – and the other houses crowded around delightedly, all baying for stories from both teachers.

Bond unashamedly held onto Q, for both their benefits. Q smiled, a little shyly, and between them managed to disperse most students. “Good morning, gentlemen,” burred a voice from behind
them; Q twisted awkwardly, finding Minerva. “A pleasure to see you both. Professor Q, you’re looking spectacularly unwell.”

Q snorted. “And you, Minerva,” he returned easily; after her stint in St Mungo’s, she was looking a little thinner than Q remembered, moved with the same caution Q recognised in himself. “Are you…”

“We’ll catch up properly after the Feast,” she said, before Q had managed to get a word out; Bond smirked, and Q blushed as he regressed to a first year once again. “For now: I’ve had a word with Albus. Silva has vanished, he fled the castle two nights ago…”

Bond’s grip tightened incrementally, Q’s expression contracting a little. “Nobody thought to warn me?” he asked, a careful rhetorical question. “I… alright. That’s fine. I’m not leaving London for a while anyway, so…”

“Also, if you could have a word with Mr Potter, I think it would best for all of us,” she said, voice dropping to a fraction of her usual volume. “Concerning one Mr Malfoy? Potter appears to trust you, on this matter.”

Q blinked; Minerva was one hell of an astute woman, so much so it was actively alarming. “How many… who actually knows about…”

Minerva grasped Q’s hand, making the younger man trail off. She watched him for a moment in silent appraisal, before looking back to Bond. “He requires care, James,” she said firmly, making Q blush again; Minerva had been surprisingly maternal towards him, in her inimitable fashion, ever since Q had joined Hogwarts. To his dying breath, Q would feel slightly indebted towards the woman. “Even the strongest of us do.”

On that enigmatic note, Minerva broke off to shout at a host of fourth-years, who were busy attempting to Levitate cakes into one another’s mouths, causing them to mostly bounce off and spread icing across the lawns.

Collecting Q’s possessions was easy enough; mostly, Q was just intent on reclaiming his Everlasting Sugar Quill, and make sure the cat food he had in the wardrobe didn’t go nasty over the holidays. Bond stood by, essentially doing the packing, given that Q couldn’t help the muscle tremors that made his already occasionally messy spellwork quite considerably messier.

Next was the formidable trapse up to Dumbledore’s office; Q grit his teeth, under Bond’s watchful eye, and carefully concealed every hint of potentially being in pain.

At the end of the corridor, Q spotted Potter and his friends, in a little knot, displaced from everybody else. “Give me a moment?” he asked Bond optimistically; Bond watched him for a moment with an expression of pure, simple scepticism. “I’ll meet you in Albus’s office? I’ll be fine, James. Really.”

Bond rolled his eyes, but nodded. “Don’t be too long,” he warned, and let Q go to do something he was, ultimately, good at. Q adored teaching, for so many reasons, and part of it was because of the chance to help young, impressionable wizards.

Especially those who were uncertain, and required help.

Potter peeled off from his group, grinning at the sight of Q. “Are you alright, Professor?” he asked, unsubtly looking over Q for injuries.

“Nothing that won’t heal,” Q replied, his arm twitching as though to try and prove him otherwise. He glanced around the corridor, finding an empty space and guiding Potter inside. “Now,” he
began, the door shut, Potter looking defiant and worried in equal measure. “Are you alright?”

Potter looked utterly, completely sideswiped. “... what?”

“You have had something of a trying year,” Q pointed out patiently. “There is nothing I can say that will help your grief, and I expect others are doing an exceptional job without my interference. I... Harry, Lucius Malfoy was at the Ministry. I understand he has also been arrested...”

Potter had gone very white-lipped, voice tight and full of shards. “I don’t want to talk about it, Professor,” he said, as politely as he was able. “Draco’s father...”

“Is not him,” Q interjected, with quiet gravity. “One’s family does change who you are, nor should it affect how you think about somebody. My family are a living example, as I’m sure you have been informed by now; Miss Granger is very conversant on them. Your life, even, is indicative. It always struck me as cruel, that you were brought up with Muggles.”

Potter’s eyes narrowed. “Why?”

Q smiled slightly. “You never knew what it would be like. I did. I hid everything I was to avoid it, as best I could, because I never wanted to deal with any form of legacy. You and I are similar, in that regard, although I would never pretend to understand your burdens. Anyway,” Q said abruptly, returning to subject. “This is all beside the point: Mr Malfoy.”

It was difficult to watch Potter, in that moment. There was a guilt, sadness, living so obviously in him. “I can’t,” he said quietly, glancing up at Q. “Nobody knows I’m... and not with Draco, they’d kill me, and...”

Q held up a hand, before Potter wound himself up too far. “That,” he said softly. “Is a very different issue. Try not to blame Mr Malfoy for problems beyond his control, it would be unfair. His family are known Dark supporters, his father arrested for quite horrible crimes – he has enough to be dealing with.”

“Professor... what do I do?” Potter asked quietly, hair falling in his face.

Outside, children were shrieking; the last day of term was traditionally pandemonium, and after a year of absolute repression in anything even vaguely resembling fun, the students were retaliating in full force. “Speak to your friends,” Q said eventually. “Miss Granger, and Mr Weasley. I believe they would be better placed to advise you. I can help if you wish, but friends tend to be good source of wisdom.”

Potter smiled, an sad little thing that didn’t quite reach anywhere. “Thank you, Professor,” he said simply.

Q smiled, nodded. “You know, I think by this stage you may as well call me Q, unless I’m actually teaching you,” he suggested; Potter looked a little comforted by that, a level of formality removed. “Go. I’m sure you have things to be getting on with, and I certainly do.”

“Prof... Q, sorry. What happened to Professor Silva?”

Q paused a moment; the mere name inspired a creeping, unpleasant sensation in the base of his spine. “That remains to be seen,” he said honestly. “He has, for the moment at least, disappeared. I suppose that isn’t surprising.”

Potter shook his head, a type of righteous anger blazing that made Q feel a surge of true fondness. The young man headed for the door, stopping for a moment to glance back at his teacher. “I’m glad Professor Bond’s back,” he said, with absolute sincerity, and disappeared into the corridor.
By the time Q got up to Dumbledore’s office, he was seriously contemplating John’s emergency last-minute potion. The last few steps had been pushing the bounds of what Q was capable of, quite honestly; he muttered ‘sugar mice’ at the gargoyle, whose expression became sympathetic for half a second before returning to solid stone.

He found several people in the office, bouncing words off one another. “It appears that Silva has joined the Death Eaters,” Bond spat at Q; feeling like somebody had hit him hard around the head, Q all but fell into a chair that managed to appear inches in front of him.

“Good afternoon, Q,” Albus said lightly, the spark in his blue eyes oddly muted. “I hope you are a little better?”

Q nodded, shrugging slightly. “It’s an improving trend,” he murmured, glancing to Bond, who was striding around looking absolutely livid at the world in general. “Sorry – Silva’s with the Death Eaters?”

Albus nodded gravely, looking stern and apologetic in equal measure. “The Ministry refused to allow his incarceration without due evidence; your testimony was missing, and the only other who had seen true evidence was your brother,” he explained. “Mycroft spoke to me at the earliest possible convenience, given his own injuries: by that point, Silva had already made plans to leave Hogwarts.”

“How do we know he’s with the Death Eaters?” Q asked quietly.

Bond just turned his palms skywards in a gesture of simply not caring how, while Albus’s mouth crinkled in a smile. “It is astonishing,” he said lightly, “how far, and how fast, information can travel. Voldemort has not been precisely subtle with his new colleague.”

Q winced slightly at the use of You-Know-Who’s name, but otherwise found himself empty of further response. Silva belonged there, with the Death Eaters, in the company of others like him. The enemy was, at least, all in one place. “My identity?”

Albus looked at Q for a moment, the odd half-familiar expression of being deconstructed with a glance. “It is what you might call a known secret,” he told Q eventually, Bond now silent, watching them carefully. “Naturally, the Order knows, as do Voldemort and his followers. At present, there is no use in revealing you to the Ministry; if I were to guess – and I flatter myself that my guesses are usually accurate – they are waiting for an opportune moment. The Death Eaters are conflicted over your family. Sherlock is the highest form of blood traitor, yet Mycroft – a Pureblood Slytherin, do not forget, as well as a truly gifted wizard – is one they would wish to recruit.”

Q blinked for a moment. Honestly, it hadn’t occurred to him that the Death Eaters would want to recruit Mycroft. It was true, that his eldest brother was less concerned with ‘good’ and ‘evil’; he had forever orientated himself to the winning side, slid up the Ministry ranks with unbelievable ease. Ambitious, certainly cunning, and extended his trust to only a select handful.

In short, ideal Death Eater material.

It was all a bit of a bloody mess, really.

“Q,” Albus asked, his voice surprisingly gentle. “Mycroft had allied himself firmly with the Order, and I believe him. As to your relative safeties, Sherlock is remaining with the Order and John Watson, and Mycroft is remaining with Hogwarts for the time being.”
Bond looked far more alarmed than Q, hilariously enough. “What?”

Albus ignored the question entirely. “We also appear to have lost an Arithmancy teacher. I would like to offer you the position. You have been an exemplary Transfiguration teacher, but I realise that your true passion has ever been in Arithmancy. Not to mention that Minerva is getting rather jealous.”

“Yes,” Q replied, almost stuttering in an attempt to get the word out. “Yes. Definitely. If you’re sure...”

“You were the best Arithmancist this school had ever seen,” Albus pointed out. “I have no doubt you would be a tremendous asset.”

Q glanced at Bond, grinning outright, ridiculously excited. “Is Professor Binns back, then?” he asked, trying to reorganise the roles in his head, with one missing position springing to mind.

Albus shook his head, and Q was confused for precisely four seconds.

“Oh, Merlin,” he breathed. “Only Mycroft would take the most boring teaching role in the entire school. It is, isn’t it? Mycroft?”

Nobody knew how old Albus was. Certainly, he was too old to be able to pull off an expression like an excitable child who had just pulled a successful prank. “Indeed. Mycroft will become our History of Magic professor, and Minerva move back to Transfiguration. I do hope you haven’t done any lasting damage to her office.”

Q shook his head, unable to construct an adequately sarcastic response. Bond slid up next to him, his warm fingers twining with Q’s, quietly sympathetic while barely containing his laughter.

“Thank you,” Q managed after a moment, belatedly.

Albus nodded. “You are quite welcome, Q. Now: I’m sure you both have things to be getting along with, yes?” he suggested, with a rather cheeky sideways glance at Bond which Q entirely failed to understand, glancing between them with vague confusion. “I shall see you both at the Feast.”

Bond’s grip tightened around Q’s hand, and gently pulled him away.

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The Feast was, as expected, brilliant. The Hall was festooned with crimson garlands – Minerva and Bond made many Gryffindor-related toasts, while Q laughed and Snape looked like he was chewing lemons – and the students spent the entire evening laughing and casting and simply celebrating.

Umbridge was gone, as was Silva. Dumbledore was back as Headmaster, and three of Hogwarts’ favourite teachers were back.

Afterwards, Q collapsed onto their bed in Grimmauld Place, absolutely shattered. He had resorted to John’s final potion at the last possible minute, pushed his body far further than he should have done, and regretted not a moment of it. Honestly, a decent amount of Firewhiskey, and whatever it was Hagrid kept in his hipflask, had definitely contributed to Q’s relative lack of physical pain.

Bond fell into bed with him, looking beautiful and proud and perfect, simply perfect.

“Thank you,” Q said happily, reaching up a hand to brush Bond’s face, gentle and loving and
almost wondering, at how his James was still there, how, after all the absurdities and madness and magic, he could still be there, watching him like he was the only thing in the world.

Q smiled into his kiss, keeping close, so close.

Bond’s eyes were light, the way Q remembered from an evening in Flourish and Blotts, when a name and a promise had been enough to send Q rushing to find Scamander, the same lightness from a day with caramel on his fingers and sweetness on his tongue and Bond, his James Bond, everywhere. Everywhere.

“You know,” Bond began, fingers pushing strands of Q’s hair out of his face, examining closer. “I was thinking...”

“... always a worry...”

“... when You-Know-Who last came to power... it’s a case of priorities, of knowing what your priorities are...”

Q raised an eyebrow. “I think you missed something pertinent in that sentence,” he pointed out cheekily; Bond rolled his eyes, kissed him to silence any further speech.

“Q, I could have lost you,” Bond told him, and – for a horrible moment – seemed vulnerable. It didn’t suit him, Q’s mood sobering in tandem with Bond’s expression, worry making his heart beat louder. “I don’t want to waste any time I have with you. Until You-Know-Who is brought down again...”

Q could almost see where the speech was going, but was torn between disbelief, and simply not wanting to jinx it.

“Marry me.”

For several moments, Q was rendered speechless.

“I...”

Bond continued to watch him, expression carefully neutral. Q looked back, barely breathing, hoping he hadn’t misheard and wondering if he was losing his grasp on sanity because really, James Bond could not have just asked to marry him.

Wordlessly, Q nodded.

Movement managed to somehow make words start, and Q could barely breathe, yesyesyesyesyesyesyesyesyes, Bond laughing and kissing him, and making a low comment about the necessity of rings, and Q a long way past the point of caring. Death Eaters and You-Know-Who and everything else could wait, just for a bit, along with Sherlock sulking in the kitchen and Mycroft looking unbearably smug about his teaching role, along with worries about the years to come, and the Order and safety and Hogwarts.

He had James, and that was enough.

Chapter End Notes

After four months or so, we are at an end. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for
reading!

The sequel, Alea Iacta Est, can be found in the series-linky-thingy at the bottom of the page. (Yes, eloquence has flown out of the window in dramatic style. Forgive me!)

Your thoughts and comments are always wonderful, if you are so inclined.


End Notes

For my Lex.

Continued in "Alea Iacta Est", and "Memento Vivere".

Works inspired by this one:

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