"Good morning... young people. I am Mr Holmes and will be attempting to teach you some basic physics and chemistry this year. Mr McMullen will not be coming back to this school due to an unfortunate event involving heart failure and some ankle-deep water..."

Sherlock, while struggling with many inner demons, starts working as a science teacher. John, headmaster, encourages him to get to know his pupils, who turn out not to be as dull as he thought. Olivia, a girl suffering neglect and abuse, strikes a particular sentimental chord in his cold heart.
It was a warm September morning, a pleasant breeze drifting through the streets of north London. The sweet smell in the air came from fresh bread in the nearby bakery, coffee beans and fried bacon from the diner, the dust from the streets and late summer bloom.

"How'd you sleep?" John asked, looking at Sherlock who was walking next to him. His friend was looking grim. He was paler than normal and clearly wasn't eating enough. However, he appeared better than a couple of weeks ago, when Lestrade had banned him from the Yard. He'd done so after Sherlock solved a case at the expense of 3 of his officers. Two of them had been hospitalised, one of them had been sent straight to Molly Hooper.

Sherlock scowled at John but straightened his suit-clad shoulders. "I am not nervous to be in a room with a couple of empty headed children, John. I'm sure they will annoy me mostly, but at least it will be a distraction," he huffed.

Sherlock desperately needed this distraction; Mrs Hudson had threatened to end his lease on the flat if he didn't stop making such an awful racket at night. Not to mention the dangerous toxic
fumes that regularly invaded her flat.

John raised an eyebrow. "Of course you're not nervous. I was thinking about everything that has happened in the last month. You've had to deal with a lot and - I know we've talked about this - I want to make sure you're healthy. You've been abusing that violin every night in the past week."

Sherlock's head snapped in his direction. "Have you been discussing my mental state with Mrs Hudson?!" He said, raising his voice.

"Of course I have. Got to know you're not up to anything stupid", John said with a half smile.

"I am not capable of stupid," he snapped.

"If that were true, you would still be solving cases for Lestrade right now, wouldn't you?" John retorted.

Sherlock looked angrily at the trees lining the pavement but said nothing.

It had been extremely stupid. It had been the stupidest thing he had done in a long time. Now he was paying the price with a drastic and, in his opinion, rather degrading career switch. He told himself it was strictly temporary. Lestrade would come round.

Finally, the gates of St Francis came into view. It was a small secondary school where John had been appointed headmaster almost two years ago. Across the schoolyard lined with old trees, heavy with leaves, stood an old and rather pretty building, but the image was disturbed by the hoards of children running around and making excited noises.

John gave a satisfied sigh. "Well, anyway, as of today you will be in charge of teenagers, so try to behave as much like an adult as you can. Stick to the reading materials provided, and try not to humiliate them too much. Let me know how it goes."

With an encouraging pat on his shoulder, John set off towards the old brick building. He was completely at ease in his surroundings, greeting some parents and pupils on his way.

Sherlock didn't know what to expect exactly. His contact with teenagers had been quite minimal during the last fifteen years of his life. He only spoke to the streetwise ones in his homeless network when he needed them to look out for someone, or to the traumatised ones when he needed information on a crime scene. The ones running around in this schoolyard were excruciatingly loud, and he couldn't imagine being in a confined space with them for more than 5 minutes. However, Lestrade had called him for over a month, and this seemed like a better alternative to being bored out of his mind at home.

Olivia raced through the gates and brought her bicycle to a screeching halt just in front of the bike stalls. While locking it, she heard a familiar voice behind her.

"Liv!" Rose called out to her while she came running. The girls hugged and grinned at each other. Olivia felt happiness spread in her stomach as she listened to her best friend chattering away.

She took in her surroundings. It had been way too long since she had been here. The two months of summer holiday had gone by slowly for her. Now she was finally back for her third year and it felt like a comforting warm blanket was being wrapped around her.

After chatting about her holidays, Rose came with some interesting news.

"Did you know we have a new science teacher? McMullen had a heart attack in his backyard last
month and drowned in his grandchildren's kiddie pool!" Rose exclaimed excitedly, her dark curls bouncing.

"Is that true?" Olivia asked, more disturbed by her friend's curiosity for these morbid rumours than the death of her former teacher. McMullen had been the most boring man she had ever met. He mostly recited the textbook and sometimes he spoke so slow that he'd forget how his sentence had started. His face was blank and his voice was soft. It often took all her willpower to stay awake in his classes, and she knew her classmates had similar problems. Lucy had failed his class last year, but luckily had better marks in other subjects to make up for it.

"Lucy told me. She got it from Anthony… But anyway, they say this new guy is like 30 years younger than McMullen, so by definition he cannot be as boring", she said matter-of-factly, and Olivia smiled.

She loved seeing her best friend again. She and Rose had been inseparable from the first day they set foot on the grounds of St Francis. Olivia had been a lot shyer then and Rose's confidence made her come out of her shell. Rose had a good sense of humour and was quite intelligent, even though teachers often didn't agree with her.

They went inside the old building and walked towards the science classroom, a bright room with big windows and wooden panelling, which was already halfway filled with pupils. Their new teacher didn't look up when they entered. The man sat behind the desk at the front of the room, skimming their textbook, looking bored. He did indeed look much younger than most teachers.

They occupied their usual seats at the back of the class. Rose preferred to be sitting at the back so that if the lesson got too boring she could easily focus her attention on other things without getting caught.

Olivia straightened her brown plaited skirt as she sat down. It had taken her ages to iron it last night and she didn't want to undo her work so quickly. She greeted Anthony and Lucy sitting in front of her, who both looked tanned and slightly less excited to be back at school. Olivia felt a giddiness spread in her stomach, so happy was she to be surrounded by people again.

Her summer had been lonely. Her dad had spent the entirety of it inside the house, watching telly, lying in bed, staring out in front of him. He said he was too tired to take her anywhere and she was not allowed to venture out by herself, which made for an extremely dull summer. A couple of times she had convinced him to let her go to a museum. Both times he had sat in a café nearby, waiting for her to come out.

At exactly 08.30, the man at the front of the class stood up and gazed at the 23 pupils. Olivia noticed he was somewhere in his mid thirties, tall, dark curly hair, handsome, although not in a conventional way. He wore a black tailored suit with an off-white shirt. He looked posh but wore no tie as was customary for teachers. Slowly, the chattering in the class died down and when he had most of their attention he started speaking.

"Good morning... young people. I am Mr Holmes and will be attempting to teach you some basic physics and chemistry this year." As he turned to write his name on the blackboard, he went on "Mr McMullen will not be coming back to this school due to an unfortunate event involving heart failure and some ankle-deep water..."

"Told you!" Rose elbowed Olivia in the ribs, grinning. Olivia winced and then smiled. She couldn't help but think that what Mr Holmes had just told them was probably against protocol.

Mr Holmes swiftly turned back to the class and focused his piercing eyes at Rose, who instantly
straightened in her seat. Then he returned his attention to the entire class.

"Some rules before we start. Don't speak when I'm speaking. You may address me as Mr Holmes or sir. Raise your hand if you have a question. Try to keep the number of stupid questions to a minimum. I don't enjoy wasting time on explaining the self-explanatory. If you're late, don't bore me with excuses. I will let you in or I won't, depending on my mood."

Rose and Olivia exchanged glances. This man clearly knew how to keep control of his class. His deep voice had a natural authority to it that made her want to pay attention.

"I will now take attendance." Mr Holmes sat down. His back was straight as a candle as he picked up their list of names.

"Mr Andrews?" His blue eyes flicked through the room.

"Present" a hand shot up somewhere in the middle of the class.

"Mr Ashworth?"

"Here!"

"Don't shout at me." He snapped, "I might be geriatric from your point of view, but I can hear every whisper in this room." At this point some of the pupils started shifting uncomfortably in their seats.

Sherlock tried not to be too direct (i.e. rude) during the lesson. He also tried to turn off the deducing part of his brain, preferring not to know what these children were up to outside of his class. Everything went to his satisfaction: attentive faces directed at him and no questions at all (although that might have been because they were too terrified to raise their hand).

He got distracted when a pupil came in about 20 minutes into the lesson. The boy, Billy Mitchell, was out of breath and looked at his teacher defensively, opening his mouth to give him an excuse for being late. But Sherlock just glanced at him with an annoyed look on his face.

"Mr Mitchell, take a seat and try not to be late again. I will not let you in next time," he spat. As he turned back to the blackboard in order to continue explaining a formula, he noticed a slight limp as the boy walked to an empty seat. Immediately his mind came up with 16 possibly incriminating explanations for that physical anomaly. But he stopped himself, rubbed his temple for a moment with the side of his hand and began where he left off. Pupils continued scribbling nervously to keep up.

The only one who dared to ask a question was Joan Davies, a girl with braided hair sitting in the front row. The rest of the class sighed as she raised her hand, clearly used to her eagerness. She spoke with the superior arrogance Sherlock used himself so often during cases. His immediate reaction was to shoot her confidence.

"Stupid question. I'd be inclined to let you reread the chapter in the textbook." Then he saw how her arrogant façade dropped instantly and realised this probably wasn't the most professional way to deal with confident pupils.

"However, from the blank faces of your classmates I infer that more people are struggling", he said, and proceeded to explain the matter in the most simplified way he could think of.

During his explanation, he noticed that quite a few of their faces suddenly lit up, eyes big, and they
started to scribble down whatever had been illuminated in their head. Sherlock knew that they had suddenly grasped the knowledge and experienced a strange feeling of satisfaction.

He gave the class some exercises to do, sat back in his chair and picked up a newspaper. He was happy to shut out their stares for a while and went through the crime reports of the day, although his ears remained alert to whatever went on in the room.

Billy, who had sat down next to Eric, was not in the mood to concentrate. He was still a bit shocked by Mr Holmes’ reaction. Any other teacher would have asked for a note from his parents for being that late or have sent him to detention immediately. Mr Holmes did not seem to care about his reason or whether he could prove it. Now his new teacher had completely closed himself off from the class and was engrossed in a newspaper, ignoring the few hands that were hesitantly raised for questions.

Eric was watching with fascination. Billy could practically see him plot how he could sabotage their new professor, who was way too confident for Eric’s taste.

Suddenly, Mr Holmes snorted.

"Idiots", he said and licked his finger to turn the page.

"This guy is a total nutcase", Eric whispered. "Completely mental, I tell you."

"I have no more mental issues than your gambling father, Mr Walker, so don't worry", came a rumbling voice from behind the newspaper.

Everybody looked up. Eric's face turned red as he stared angrily ahead, but said nothing. The tension in the room eased again as people concentrated on their work.

After a few minutes, Olivia felt a nudge from Rose. The note that was passed in front of her already had Anthony’s, Rose’s, and Lucy’s handwriting on it.

[A] HOW did he know that?!

[R] Knows Eric's family?

[A] Unlikely. It's mean to call him out in public like that though... Maybe it's not even true!

[L] If it weren't true Eric would definitely have said so. Anyway, I knew.

[R] Lucy, you told me, Olivia, Peter and a bunch of other people the moment you heard about Eric's dad! Are you sure you weren't the one who told Holmes? [Smiley face]

[L] Ha-Ha no! I've not had a friendly gossip chat with Holmes! I sure wouldn't mind though.... [wink]

[R] Oh God. Lu has found a new victim...

Olivia couldn't suppress a smile while she read her friends' discussion. She was biting on the end of her pen to think what she'd write, when a sudden presence startled her. When she looked up, Mr Holmes was towering over her with a predatory look in his eyes. He snatched the note from her desk, and silently read the paper.

Olivia felt the blood rise to her cheeks and had no idea what to say. She felt the others nervously alternating their glances between her and Mr Holmes, whose eyebrows had risen a little while he
was reading. When he finished, he rested his eyes on Olivia again.

"Miss Edwards, is it? I would advise you not to partake in this discussion and continue with your work."

She gave a quick nod.

"How do you know it's not her handwriting?" Rose blurted out.

"Because Miss Edwards' handwriting is right in front of me in her notes", he snapped. Then he turned his attention to the rest of them.

"For your information, I don't care whether you can or cannot suppress the urge to communicate during my class, but if you cannot, please make sure the discussion is at least intellectually challenging. I hope you can do better than this."

He leisurely walked back to the front of the classroom, on his way dropping the note on Anthony's desk. Anthony gave a puzzled look. Surely none of his handwriting had been visible on his desk. How had he known he had started writing the note? This only added to the mystery that was forming around Mr Holmes, and of course it asked for more notepaper discussions.

Lucy finally relaxed when her teacher resumed his place behind his desk. She truly hoped that Holmes had not identified her handwriting as well. They didn't dare speak or write to each other again during that class.

Eventually, Sherlock started picking pupils to read out their answers. Every wrong answer received a sneer or ridicule, but he was quite pleasantly surprised that the majority of them were correct.

Still, when the bell sounded to mark the end of class, everyone was a bit relieved.

"Read whatever is on the schedule for Thursday. I will bring a practical example then. This stuff is already boring me," the pupils heard their teacher mumble as they left the classroom.

Sherlock waited to leave the room as he felt the vibrations of corridors being stamped by hundreds of young people.

At lunchtime John introduced Sherlock to the rest of the staff in the teacher's lounge. His reputation had obviously preceded him.

Sally Donovan, who taught English, gave him a disapproving look. Sherlock could see that she thought he was dangerous and didn't understand why John, as head of school, would let him be around any children at all. Anderson, Maths, gave him a short handshake and a fake smile.

Sherlock knew that John had had to defend the decision to have him replace McMullen. Although it had been kind of John to stand up for him, Sherlock didn't care at all what they thought and hoped that any teamwork could be kept to a minimum.

Mary, John's wife who worked as a biology teacher and was the school nurse, was the only other staff member openly approving John's decision. She gave Sherlock a warm smile before she dug into her sandwich.

"How are you getting on with the kids?" she asked

"I was not aware that I needed to get on with them. I explain things and they listen. Aside from that they do not interest me", Sherlock said as he poured himself some coffee.
"Not up to you your usual standard of company then?"

"How could they be, with *people like that* clogging their minds with nonsense?!” his head jerked in the direction of Anderson and Donovan. Mary chuckled.

"Oh Sherlock, they are nice kids. Well, most of them anyway. You should get to know them a little. Might make things less boring for you actually."

"The day I need children to keep myself from getting bored, my life will not be worth living,” he said defensively.
A practical lesson

Chapter Summary

Sherlock decides to deviate from the curriculum.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Sherlock stood at the window, drawing the heavy curtains together to let minimal light inside. Behind him, the classroom started filling up with group 3B. He had gotten a bit more used to the loud stupidity of the teenagers that surrounded him everywhere in this place and he now felt less crowded by them. During the last couple of days he'd learned that he could indeed force some knowledge into their little brains, and that this actually made him curious to try a more interesting method.

Call it a human experiment of some sort.

When he turned his icy stare towards the class the murmuring died instantly.

"Very good. As you know, irrelevant gabbing should be kept to a minimum in this room." He started slowly pacing behind his desk and let his penetrating gaze wander over their faces.

'So clueless. How do they keep themselves alive?'

"For today, you've read chapter 3 & 4. If you haven't, please keep your mouth shut for the coming two hours." [Nervous glances and shuffling in chairs]

"I've brought an example to show you how scientific knowledge can help us solve real life problems. Today we will be delving into some simple forensic science."

Joan raised her hand in the semi-dark.

"Miss Davies?" he said without looking.

"Shouldn't you take attendance?" she asked.

Sherlock stopped pacing and looked at her. The room was suddenly very silent.

"Today we are missing Miss Rose Edeson and Mr Billy Mitchell. I refuse to go through the tedious process of reading your names every time, so I've decided to remember them." He straightened his back to resume his pacing.

"Most new teachers don't remember our names until the Christmas holidays."

Sherlock looked at her again and he could not suppress the urge to show off.

"Well, that's probably because my mind is capable of a lot more than that of the average St Francis teacher." He looked the blond, posh-looking girl over. "Give me a couple of seconds and I can tell you where you went on holiday, what you had for breakfast this morning, if you've done your
homework, what pets you have, what your parents were arguing about last night, and I can tell if you're lying to me when I ask you if I. Am. Correct." Sherlock was now about 2 feet away from Joan's desk, bending forward a little. She looked up at him with a terrified expression but didn't speak. Too intimidated. "However, most of that information is completely irrelevant and dull, so I won't… unless you make it necessary."

"If you could do all that, you wouldn't be a teacher here", came a voice from the back of the room. It was Anthony, who was sitting in Rose's seat, next to Olivia.

Olivia saw Mr Holmes look at her neighbour with an intimidatingly stoic expression. Anthony stared back, daring him to reply. Everybody held his or her breath for a moment.

"Let's start class." Sherlock said eventually. Olivia relaxed.

He walked towards the middle of the room and turned on the projector. The first picture that came up on the wall was a page from a police report.

"Female. 37 years old. Found in her house in Sussex", his baritone voice sounded official.

He switched the slides and the image of a freezer appeared, filled with a woman, her white frosty limbs folded neatly over her body. Her dead eyes were staring up at the camera. Several pupils gasped or looked away.

"Don't worry, she was not related to any of you. I checked."

"You can't show us this! We are underage and it is confidential information!" Joan exclaimed, her earlier fright completely forgotten.

Sherlock let out an exasperated sigh. "If you can't handle it you are free to leave, Miss Davies. But you won't, because you are too curious to see where this is going. So shut up and observe."

He waited, and Joan looked angry but shut up and turned back to the screen.

For the next 20 minutes he let the class study several pieces of information that had been critical in the discovery of the killer, like her medicine cabinet, the autopsy report, pictures of the house, the lab results, and a transcript of an interview with the husband.

"Rose would have been thrilled by this", Anthony whispered to Olivia. She nodded with a smile. Rose loved solving mysteries, but usually had to imagine them herself, as nothing exiting went on at school most of the time.

"Pity she has the flu, but at least now I get to sit next to you," he told her with a grin. Olivia blushed and looked at her notebook, in which she was diligently writing her observations.

"You shouldn't make him angry, you know," she whispered

"Holmes? I think he's a lot less scary than he looks," Anthony said with confidence in an attempt to impress her.

"It's Mr Holmes to you Wilding. Stop flirting with Miss Edwards and try to keep your mind focused for more than 10 seconds. And I am much more dangerous than I look" Mr Holmes spoke from a few rows in front of them, looking straight ahead of him. Anthony startled.

"I've already solved it, sir." Anthony defended himself.
Sherlock turned towards them. "Have you? Enlighten me, then."

"Ehm, well…” He proceeded to hesitantly relay his findings and suspicions. Many of his peers did not agree with him and a heated discussion ensued as to how the murder occurred and why.

Although it was a relatively simple case, hardly even a two in the Sherlockian crime complexity rating system, Sherlock felt quite satisfied about some of the theories he heard. More than he expected from their age. After a while the noise became too much to bear for his ears and he decided an intervention was necessary.

He quieted them down and calmly explained that the woman had been an addict, and that the bottles of medication in the bathroom had actually been hers, even though her husband's name was on them. He had been afraid of her and helped feed her addiction by getting the prescriptions, many of them for medication that could have severe side effects. One day the woman had attacked him and he'd shot her out of self-defence.

"Then why didn't he tell the police? He was not really guilty right?” Lucy asked.

"As I recall, he said he was afraid because he'd helped his wife get the drugs, which is illegal. Also, he apparently loved her so much that he felt guilty and didn't want to let go of her, so he made sure she stayed in the house. I couldn't tell you why someone would care so much for their abuser, but apparently it happens."

He was silent for a while so they could gather their thoughts and take notes. Then he continued.

"This was a relatively dull incident. I thought it would be best to start off with something graspable. Next time, when we discuss chemicals, I will bring something more interesting. Class dismissed."

"THAT... was the coolest class I have ever had" said Lucy as they walked down the corridor towards their lockers.

"Definitely. This guy is wicked. I wonder how he got all those files" Anthony mused.

"I want to know where he got those sexy eyes," Lucy continued with a dreamy look. "He's the hottest teacher we have! Don't you think?" she said, looking at Olivia expectantly.

"He's handsome, you're right" She said. "But I also get the feeling that he doesn't give a damn about our opinion of him."

"Strangely, that makes him even more attractive" Lucy said thoughtfully.

"Donovan is by far the hottest teacher!" Anthony interfered.

"I think every guy and Rose agree with you on that one" Lucy giggled.

Rose was gay, and although she didn't have a girlfriend everybody in the school knew that. She often joined Anthony in conversations about women he found beautiful. Some of the pupils teased her about it or called her names in the street, but she shrugged everything off and they usually they left her alone quite quickly. Olivia admired her for not letting any of it get to her. She sometimes stood up for Peter when he was being bullied, but didn't how she would react if the name-calling would be directed at her.

"I have to get to my meeting with Burke" she said.
"Shall I walk you to his office?" Anthony asked innocently.

"No, don't be silly, it takes like 1 minute. See you tomorrow!" And she was on her way, leaving a disappointed Anthony and an amused Lucy behind.

She knew Anthony fancied her, he made that quite clear, and she was flattered. He was good looking and a friend. He'd joined their class at the start of last year, but they had only really been friends since a couple of weeks after her mother died in February. He had come up to her one time after school to ask how she was feeling, and when they got talking he'd told her that his father had died three years ago and he had felt really lonely and angry for a long time after that. She liked him and he made her laugh.

It was only towards the summer holiday that he'd started innocently flirting with her, which she thought was flattering. She enjoyed his attention more and more but was not sure of her feelings towards him, just like she wasn't sure about any of her feelings lately. Her mood changed from one minute to the next and she sometimes cried for no reason at all, or spent days in bed feeling extremely tired. She felt great when she was with Anthony, but she wasn't sure if that was just because he made her forget about other things. That's why she hadn't really responded to his advances so far. She'd hate to ruin their friendship.

Olivia was not very eager to see Mr Burke. He was her tutor at the school. In their first year every pupil at the school got appointed a tutor who would monitor their progress and attendance, and who could assist them in any academic decisions. Their tutor was also the person they could go to if you had any personal problems. They would be the first person to try and sort out the issue, talk to their parents, or put the pupil into contact with a professional service.

A couple of other people from 3B also had Burke as their tutor. Nobody liked him very much. He was a huge and intimidating figure, and very matter-of-fact. Not particularly someone who you'd want to chat to about your personal problems.

Burke had made an appointment with her because he needed to know how she was doing after the summer. It was protocol for a tutor to regularly check up on pupils after a tragic event like a death or a divorce. He said he cared, but she had only had three appointments with him, one of which he had forgotten about. She had waited for an hour at his office until Ms Donovan found her and told her Burke had already left.

Mr Watson's talks with her had been very helpful, though. He didn't make appointments, but he regularly asked how she was doing when he saw her, and had sat down with her in his office a couple of times with tea and biscuits. He was always kind and understanding, and had made sure she could retake some exams she had failed. Once, when she told him she had trouble sleeping, he'd taken her to see Mrs Watson (who would always let you call her Mary when you were in her office). Mary had been very kind and had given her Melatonin pills that she said would help her fall asleep at night. They had helped a little.

While she was thinking this, Mr Watson actually appeared in the hallway. His face was scrunched in an angry expression and he was walking in her direction in a fast pace. His face softened when he greeted her, but he quickly walked past her as if on an important mission.

It only took 15 minutes for John to show up in his classroom. He was fuming with anger.

Sherlock was reading the day's newspaper, his legs stretched and crossed with his feet on his desk.

"What the hell Sherlock! I told you to stick to the curriculum!" he fused. "I cannot let you traumatis these kids, or worse, have their parents gang up on me!"
Sherlock slowly put the paper down. "I was just giving an example of how science can be put to use in everyday life."

"Everyday life according to your life! How many of these kids do you think are used to seeing dead bodies? This school should be a safe place, Sherlock. Somewhere they can be sure they won't be confronted with violence, in whatever shape or form." John breathed heavily through his nose.

"Calm down John. They seemed very interested. Nobody fainted." Sherlock said nonchalantly. His impossibly relaxed attitude made John even angrier, his face turned a brighter shade of red and he started pacing.

Sherlock peered at him. "Is it really such a big problem? Just tell the angry parents to call me with their complaints."

"You have no idea how important this is, do you? Remember what this school was like two years ago, when I arrived?"

"I had never been here until a couple of weeks ago John."

John ignored him. "This used to be a deeply religious school Sherlock. The first thing they taught their pupils was to fear God. It was common to use extreme forms of discipline, punishment with rulers, bible class everyday, and absolutely nobody encouraged those kids to explore the world or think for themselves. The council let me have this job because there was nobody else and because they needed more schools open to non-religious children. So when I came in and started changing the curriculum and made sure that everything religious was non-compulsory, half the parents moved their kids to a different school within a week. I received anonymous letters telling me I was Satan! It was a bloody struggle to keep the place open and to gain some level of trust from these people. Many of them were terrified that if their children had any fun at school they would immediately turn into addicts and criminals. I worked very, very hard to create a school with small classes, good teachers, where pupils are encouraged to be curious with every safety precaution in place. They now actually get to learn about modern Art and history that doesn't stop at the enlightenment period. I managed to get sex education to be approved by the board of studies only recently."

"It seems that my purely scientific and secular teaching practices fit right into your approach!" Sherlock said cheerfully.

John sighed, his anger ebbing away a little. "Sherlock, I'm sure you can make them want to learn science. But I need them to be in a safe environment. When word gets out that pupils here are examining dead bodies my days here will be numbered and I'm not finished here yet. I'm happy that you are trying to engage them. But please think before you march in here with all kinds of gruesome stories. Many of them have enough of those things to deal with as it is." He sat down on one of the front row desks with his palms leaning on it on either side.

There was thoughtful expression on Sherlock's face. "I think I understand. What kind of things do they have to deal with exactly?" he was curious to know.

"You don't know?" John's eyebrows rose "Haven't you deduced the life of every single one of your pupils by now?"

"I try to block that out. I don't care to know what they do outside of the classroom. It's irrelevant to me teaching them things." Sherlock huffed.

"It is absolutely relevant Sherlock! The school needs to support them, not just educationally, but
personally. If somebody's parents are getting a divorce we need to know. If they are bullied we need to know. If they are ill we need to know. If they are in any way unsafe we should know. This way we can make them at least feel safe when they are here, and possibly help them get through with whatever they need to get through if their parents can't provide that for them."

"Don't be ridiculous, John. This is a school, not an orphanage. I am not a social worker nor a substitute parent!"

John was getting agitated again. "Of course you aren't. I wouldn't expect that of you. But if you see or hear things that seem wrong or alarming for a teenager, or if their behaviour changes suddenly, or if their grades go down, we should try to find out why. And they should feel safe enough to trust us with the truth. Because if something is wrong, and they can't speak about it at home and we ignore the signs, they are very much alone. And they are too young to sort things out themselves, even though some of them try."

"You are very sentimental about this" Sherlock said as he took his shoes off the desk.

"Yes, Sherlock I am. Because I have met enough people in my life who have been failed by everyone around them, and it never ends very well for these people. Especially when they're young it can make such a difference whether people listen or not" he said this as he watched Sherlock make the connection to himself and smirk.

John sighed. "A girl died, alright. She jumped off Waterloo Bridge, just a month after I started working here. She'd been through a lot of abuse at home, and she had apparently trusted nobody at school enough to tell. Nobody had cared enough to ask, even when her grades had started slipping and she often didn't show up for classes. They punished her many times, but never asked what was going on at home. They just assumed she was skipping class to be with a boy, until they found her body in the Thames. I know the school is not completely responsible for what happens to pupils, but we are at least partly responsible, and we can actually play a big role in getting appropriate help if necessary. They can't learn much if they have too many other things to worry about."

They sat quietly for a while. John was wondering if his little speech had affected Sherlock at all. At least the man looked a little bit more concerned now, hands steepled against his chin and looking ahead.

"So, do you know what is going on with them right now?" Sherlock asked.

"Some of them, yes. Although I'm sure there are quite a few who stay silent, or whose parents don't inform us. But I'm not telling you anything. I know you love the sound of your own voice, but try to listen to them for a bit. You will find out what interests them, and maybe they won't turn out to be as unintelligent as you assume. Your deductions might help you enjoy teaching them, maybe even respect them."

"Well John, I didn't know you cared about them so much, but I'm starting to understand why you are such a popular figure here." He looked thoughtful. "I guess I can adjust my lesson plans to be a bit more age appropriate."

"You have lesson plans?" John was shocked.

"They are in my head. But hey are plans, for lessons. So yes."

John smiled at him and got up. "Great, make sure you also test them regularly. We want to know if they are remembering anything, and if there are any up- or downward trends. If things go well, you might get to take over some of Mary's biology classes."
"Would that involve me giving sex ed? Because I don't think—"

John chuckled at the thought and Sherlock's worried expression. "I see your point. We'll figure something out... I'll see you tomorrow then." And he left.

Sherlock remained thoughtful. He hadn't considered the function of a school to be more than teaching. He didn't remember anyone at school ever asking him how he was doing when he was a pupil. He also couldn't imagine that any pupil would ever want to talk about personal things with a teacher, but decided to be more observant from now on.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please review!

Next chapter: how does Sherlock get through his lonely nights?
Distraction

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock found to his own surprise that he didn't really mind teaching. He got through the first two weeks of classes without any major problems. He stuck loosely to the curriculum, with some adaptations and extra examples, which he retrieved from the collection of case files he kept at home. He did separate the extreme gore from the photo's he showed in class. The pupils had been relatively well behaved and attentive. They seemed to understand that telling their parents about the crime scenes they examined at school could put a stop to the fun, so John had only received one or two phone calls.

No, it was not the teaching that bothered him.

It was the complete silence he received from Lestrade. The knowledge that he might have screwed up definitely this time. The idea that he might not be a consulting detective ever again. He had let his arrogance become a weakness, and it had gotten in the way of his rational thinking. He had acted in such an uncalculated way that several other people had paid the price. He had been so eager to get to the mysterious Moriarty, so overconfident, and so out of control, that he basically provided the professor with some extra victims on the way. Sherlock Holmes felt extremely frustrated, and guilty. Guilt was not an emotion he dealt with easily.

The trouble in his head had started when John and Mary got married, about a year after they'd met at St Francis. John moved out of the flat, and Sherlock did not want anyone else to fill the empty space he left behind. Sherlock was happy for John, and got on well with Mary, but they had their own life. Sherlock started to feel lonely. He had been alone before meeting John, but it hadn't bothered him as much then.

Of course he didn't tell John this. It would only make things awkward and it would come across as if Sherlock wanted his friend for himself. He knew how much John loved Mary and had no wish to separate them, nor any illusion that he could. So, Sherlock continued living alone, and slowly slipped down a corridor in his mind that led him to dark places. The need to eat seemed irrelevant, the need to sleep even more so. He kept chasing, hunting, on a constant high of adrenaline until he felt his body give way to exhaustion. This happened a couple of times, until the dark voice in his head whispered a simple solution.

It took another two months for him to actually cave, but when he did there seemed to be no turning back. Cocaine gave him the ability to go on longer and work faster. It fuelled his body for the chase, but it also fuelled his arrogance, his manipulative tendency, and his carelessness for others. He was able to hide it from John and Lestrade, and kept on going.

One night he set out alone to an address in east London, not wanting to wait for Lestrade to get a warrant. He knew this was the place. And he knew they didn't have much time before Moriarty had his men clean out the house and all evidence would be removed. He just wanted to know who this man was. He just wanted to know whom he was up against. And he desperately wanted to show that he could beat him. When Sherlock walked into the house he immediately got stabbed in the arm with a needle, and passed out within seconds, not seeing anyone. Unfortunately, someone at the office had noticed him leave and Greg had no choice but to go after him. The officers walked into an ambush and three of them got hit, one of them in the head.
When they found him, Sherlock had been brought to the hospital, where they detected many more chemicals in his blood than the ones in the needle. He couldn't really care that much at first, but slowly realised the implications of his actions as people came to see him.

Obviously Mycroft was livid and had the flat searched where they found a variety of narcotics that had not even been hidden very well. It was the only time he had seen his brother completely lose it, yelling at him at his hospital bed. Lestrade visited him and told him that he wished that the self-destructive game Sherlock was playing had been his own death instead of that of one of his officers, and that he would never let him anywhere near an investigation ever again. Both men had only shown anger, but Sherlock knew that they were also incredibly hurt and disappointed in him.

John had been his usual caring self. He had been angry, but even more worried about his apparently not so brilliant and dangerously thin friend, and had slept in a chair in his room until Sherlock regained consciousness. Of course he'd asked him why he did it, why he didn't tell him, and what was bothering him to become so self-destructive. Sherlock did not answer them directly but promised John he'd stay away from drugs, and he meant it.

But when he was alone in 221B, playing the violin, reading, experimenting, and attempting not to smoke he could feel the pull of the demons in his head. Tempting him, teasing him. He'd tried everything. He had even brought home a stranger a few times, but the distraction of sex never lasted for more than a couple of hours (of course there was also the problem of getting them out of the flat again afterwards).

This weekend he had done a couple of experiments on some human eyeballs (thankfully Molly still –although now more reluctantly- allowed him in the lab), prepared the practical examples he needed for his classes the coming week, and made corrections to the entire Encyclopaedia Britannica. And he was bored. Extremely bored.

It was Sunday afternoon and he had just opened the windows to let some smoke clear out of the apartment (eyeballs on fire). The warm summer breeze drifted inside. Disappointed with the results of the experiment he dragged himself to the living room and sat down in his armchair, back straight, muscles tense, looking stoically ahead but desperately trying to fight the urge to scream. He scratched his forearm, exposed by the rolled up sleeve of his silk black shirt. His eyes drifted to the experiment, to the stairs that lead to what was formerly John's room, to the refrigerator, which contained only some milk and several body parts, to the bottle of disinfectant on the kitchen table.

Something switched in his brain and suddenly he'd given in. Mrs Hudson's lock was easy to pick and he'd know exactly where to look.

The bottle of whiskey found in her apartment had been expensive and sealed. Two hours later it was half empty beside him as he was sitting on the floor with his back leaning against his armchair. Not sorry at all.

The living room was blurry around him. Very intresting... experiment. Blurry vision, light headed, hhhheavey limbs, no fffeelings at all.... should write this down

After several attempts he managed to get up and stumbled into the kitchen, grasping the bottle loosely in his hand. He swore he'd left the notebook on the table. After stumbling around for about 10 minutes, bumping into kitchen cabinets, he gave up and sat down at the table. The drink had tasted horrible when he took his first shot, but now tasted rather nice. His mind was nice and quiet, and he happily pored himself another in a mug he couldn't remember for what experiment it had served.

He wouldn't be able to remember the rest of the night.
Next chapter: A hate crime at school leaves one pupil in hospital, one in shock, and Sherlock mad as hell.
"Sweetheart, I will drive you to school myself if I have to, but you are going."

Peter's mum looked at him concernedly. He had hardly touched his breakfast and felt his throat clench at the thought of school. He'd do anything for one day without school. One day without his peers.

Last year had been hell, with boys like Eric yelling obscenities at him every day, following him everywhere he went. Once they had put a gay magazine in his locker, which had fallen out when he opened it, making known to the entire school something he had only just started to figure out himself.

This year something had changed. The boys in his class had grown two inches over the summer, and were constantly talking about girls. The bullying had started again almost immediately in the first week. Their behaviour towards him had become more aggressive. They pushed him in the corridors, sneaked up on him to shout in his ears, and threatened to beat him up after school. He was certain that one of these days they would pounce.

He had told his mother some of the things that had happened last year, and she had been horrified that her little boy was being bullied. Mr Watson had been called and he had talked to the boys in question. The name-calling stopped for about three weeks and then slowly picked up again. Peter had seen the hurt in his mother's eyes when he told her the first time, and decided never to do that to her again, so he didn't tell anyone.

He knew she suspected it; when he stayed so silent, hardly ate, had a bad temper or made up excuses to stay at home. She asked him if he was alright, but he could hear in her voice that she wished for him to say that he was. He knew she loved him no matter his sexual orientation, and that she would try to keep him safe. But he also knew she was terrified. Terrified of what the neighbours might think, terrified what would happen to him, and terrified of having to stand up for him. So he didn't say anything.

Peter refused the ride to school and walked by himself. Sometimes Olivia would join him, because they lived in the same street, but she had friends like Rose and Anthony who offered much more cheerful company. They were all nice to him, but he was still a bit shy to engage with the group.

He looked at her house, a small building from which the paint was starting to peel, and the lawn desperately needed mowing, but it was quiet inside. Olivia was always friendly to him. When he got called names at school she'd even tried to tell the boys off a few times. Her presence had helped a bit last year, but these days it didn't matter if she was there or not. He continued to school by himself.

Just before he got to the safety of the building, he heard a bicycle behind him. He turned around, thinking it might be Olivia, but it was Eric Walker. Eric leaned forward on his bike and grinned at him.

"Time for some fun with Garrison!", he yelled at his mates, who were right behind him.

Within seconds, Peter found himself surrounded by five boys, almost all taller and stronger than
him, throwing insults. One of them was Billy, who was in his class like Eric. He didn't recognise
the three others. His muscles froze and he looked and the tiled ground, not knowing what to do.
Eric, circling around them on his bike, ordered his friends to bring Peter behind the storage shed. Peter felt them grab him by the shoulders and drag him forward.

Eric dropped his bike and continued giving commands. He was like a small manic dictator who had found a black sheep. The power high was visible in his gleaming eyes. Within minutes, all Peter's books were strewn on the grass behind the shed. They shouted obscenities in his face and asked him if he got hard watching them in the changing room after gym class.

When Peter refused to show any sign of upset, an impatient one got angry and punched him in the eye. He couldn't help the tears starting to stream down his face then. This got Eric excited and he punched him in the ribs hard, knocking the air out of him. When the toppled over and fell on the grass several shoes started kicking him, and they felt like hammers on his flesh. A couple of kicks hit his head. Peter had never felt such pain in his life, and finally started pleading for them to stop.

Then he heard someone yell and the kicking stopped.

Peter opened his eyes to see Olivia standing a couple of meters away, looking at him with a horrified expression.

"Come to rescue him then, Olive?" Eric said, grinning.

"Stop it, you're hurting him!" she yelled as she ran towards Peter.

Before Olivia reached him two of the boys grabbed her and she fought back, kicking and punching around her, until she felt a sharp pain in her head and fell onto her knees. One of them had punched her and cut her brow.

"You won't get away with this!" she cried. The boys had a proper hold of her now and she couldn't move.

"Shut up, little bitch!" yelled Eric "We'll show you what we will do to you next time you try to fight us. Pin him down!"

Two of them held Olivia in place against the wall. The other two held Peter against the ground. Eric told them to stretch one of his arms out, and got back on his bicycle. Laughing, he rode over Peter's arm.

Peter screamed as he felt something snap in his arm, but didn't have the strength to break free. He heard their voices around and above him.

He heard Olivia cry and the boy's laugh.

"Wait! I will do his stomach next!" Eric's manic voice echoed in his head…

Sherlock got out of the cab in front of the school gates. He was late and hung-over so had decided against walking the three miles from his house.
The aspirin was doing its job relatively well, but he still felt an ache in his body and the urge to curl up in a corner somewhere. He was absolutely not looking forward to spending the day in a room with overactive adolescents, but he did realise that this was not a job he could do only when he felt like it, so he prepared himself for a painful day.

He walked across the schoolyard and snapped out of his sleepy thoughts when he heard sounds. They were very clear sounds of physical pain mixed in with manic laughter. It sent a shiver down his spine and he fell into a run towards the shed. What he saw when he came around the corner immediately made him forget his own self-inflicted physical discomfort. He assessed the situation.

Peter was being held down to the ground and was screaming hysterically. He was bleeding from his face and his body was covered in dust and red marks.

Olivia was sat on her knees and held down by her arms and hair. Tears streamed down her face and mixed with blood from her forehead. No sign of severe injuries.

Eric was on his bike coming towards Peter, yelling like a hooligan.

None of them seemed to have noticed him yet. It took Sherlock one second to jump into action.

Olivia felt the wooden shed shake as Eric's body was rammed into it.

The two boys immediately released her and she scrambled up. Next to her, the tall dark figure of Mr Holmes pinned Eric to the wall. Olivia couldn't move, only stare at the raging man, shocked by the sudden turn of events.

"I'm a dangerous man Mr Walker. And you've just made me very angry." Sherlock growled, his face about two inches from Eric's. He continued to say things to Eric, whose face was turning bright red, but it was too soft for Olivia to make out. She turned to look at Peter, who lay abandoned on the grass. She quickly knelt beside him too see if he was bleeding anywhere severe. He didn't seem to be, but he was only half conscious and she started panicking. She knew that people could bleed internally, or die from swelling in the brain.

Suddenly Mr Holmes was kneeling beside Peter as well, checking his pulse and his breathing. "Peter, can you hear me?" no response.

Then he looked intently at Olivia. It seemed as if he wanted to say something but then looked around. To their surprise, Billy was still there, staring wide-eyed at Peter.

"Billy!" Mr Holmes barked at him "Go and find Mr Watson, and tell him to call an ambulance. NOW!"

For a moment Billy stood frozen on the spot, staring at the still boy on the ground. But then he turned and ran towards the school.

Olivia watched as he entered the building and then turned back towards her friend, who was now completely unconscious.

"They kicked him in the head", she told him and he could see she was panicking.

"It will be alright. They're on their way. Mr Watson's a doctor." Sherlock said calmly.

She looked at him as if she didn't understand what he was saying, but nodded.

It took only two minutes before Sherlock saw the familiar figure of John exit the school and run
towards them, with Mary in his stride, and he felt a little relieved. When they reached them they took over and began checking Peter's vitals.

Sherlock leaned back and watched John's calm trained movements. He knew John must be extremely worried, but was in auto-mode right now and did exactly what had to be done. Then Sherlock remembered to check on the girl. Olivia was standing at Peter's feet now, and seemed to be in shock. He stood up and held her by the shoulders, turning her away from her friend. He felt her body trembling.

"Olivia, he will be alright", he said, hoping to get through to her. She looked up at him and he saw that she desperately wanted to believe him. The sight of Peter was terrible though, and he could understand that she didn't entirely believe him.

Then they heard the ambulance arrive and Sherlock gently pushed Olivia so that they would not be in the way of the medics. They watched how Peter was lifted onto a stretcher and into the vehicle.

Suddenly Sherlock felt Olivia grasp his hand tightly. She was looking at the ambulance intently. He wasn't sure if he should have let her stay to watch but it was too late now. He felt her shiver and was prompted by his own knowledge of emergencies. She would let go of his hand long enough to let him put his jacket on her. The warmth of the fabric brought Olivia back to reality a bit and when she thought about what had actually happened during the past 30 minutes she felt the tears come again. At that moment she didn't care that the hand she was grasping belonged to someone she hardly knew, his calmness steadied her.

John had climbed into the back of the ambulance with Peter. As it drove away, Mary walked towards them, assessing the state of Olivia. She had a small cut and a bruise above her brow, her knees were chafed and the skirt of her uniform was dirty. She was crying and looked afraid, gripping Sherlock's hand tightly.

"Olivia, are you alright?" Mary asked, touching her lightly on the shoulder.

She got a quick nod in return although the girl did not look her in the eye.

"Did they hurt you anywhere else aside from your head?"

At this point Sherlock felt stupid for not thinking about that. He was immensely relieved when the girl gave a hesitant shake of her head.

"Do you want to come inside? We'll take a look at that cut", Mary said.

Olivia nodded, but did not start walking or let go of Sherlock, so he held her hand all the way to Mary's exam room.

"John will call Peter's parents from the hospital. I told him we would call Olivia's father. Will you do that Sherlock? Then I can take care of this young lady."

Sherlock left them and called Olivia's father from John's office.

When the parent arrived he basically stormed into Mary's office, looking very concerned. Mr Edwards hugged his daughter, -who had thankfully stopped crying- and Sherlock detected the faint smell of alcohol. Then he realised it could possibly be his own breath that he smelled, and was too tired to investigate further.

"Have you told them who did this to you dear? They should be shot if you ask me!" Mr Edwards said as he took the unfamiliar jacket off his daughter and put it on a chair.
"We know exactly who did this Mr Edwards. But we will need Olivia to tell us what happened as well." Sherlock explained

"But not right now", Mary cut in "Take Olivia home. She can stay at home tomorrow if she wants, to recover for a bit. We will arrange a meeting with Mr Watson later this week." Mary said kindly

Mr Edwards nodded, thanked them, and left quickly with his daughter pressed tightly against his side.

Sherlock sat with his elbows on his knees, rubbing his eyes with his palms. His headache had come back with force.

"Tell John to call me at home, will you Mary? He has to expel these kids with immediate effect."

Then he got up and left.

~

John spent the morning in the hospital making sure Peter would be alright. Then he went to St Francis to find the boys responsible and called their parents to come and pick them up. The day went by in a blur and before he knew it, it was 5 pm and Mary said she was going home, asking him if he'd remembered to call Sherlock, which he hadn't. John decided he needed some air and walked all the way to Baker street, where hadn't been in a while.

"Sherlock?" John called, while he walked up the stairs to 221B and pushed the door open.

"I thought I'd-..." he shut up when he observed the state of Sherlock's living room.

Chapter End Notes

Next up... what does John find in 221b?
"I thought I'd…" he gasped when he observed the state of Sherlock's living room.

It was an absolute mess. Not the normal Sherlock mess of cluttering books and experiments, although they were still there. There was another layer of messiness of someone who had clearly stopped caring. There were everyday things like dirty mugs, old take-out containers, papers, and clothes -that John knew were not all Sherlock's- strewn all around and there was a strong smell of cigarettes and chemicals. John noticed the nearly empty bottle of whiskey on the coffee table.

Sherlock himself was lying on the sofa looking miserable. One arm was hanging towards the floor, the other across his face.

John silently cursed himself for not having visited his friend in over five weeks.

"Jesus Sherlock. I thought you were doing better than this. You were even putting on some weight."

Sherlock lifted his arm an inch from his face and peered at John through the gap that appeared.

"How d'you get in?" he asked.

"Mrs Hudson let me in. Hasn't she been in here once in a while?" John asked. He grabbed the Whiskey bottle and walked into the kitchen to empty it in the sink. Sherlock scowled at him.

"She refuses to clean."

"I can imagine why she would." John walked back across the room to open the windows.

"The smell in here Sherlock. What are you taking these days, besides cigarettes?"

"How is Peter doing?" Sherlock sat up and massaged his temples.

"Do not try to change the subject. As if you really care." John said angrily.

"Only some liquor, and just to get through weekends. Don't worry, I am perfectly capable of moderating myself," Sherlock said, as images of that very morning floated through his mind. He had woken up in his own bathtub with a throbbing head, his shirt and trousers unbuttoned and a painful cigarette burn on his arm. He had hardly any recollection of the previous evening.

John raised his eyebrows. "The state of the flat suggests otherwise. Look, Sherlock. If you're depressed, tell me. We can try to do something about that- whose is this?"

He held up a small piece of clothing consisting of some string and lacy fabric.

Sherlock frowned "Well, it's obviously not mine is it. And I don't think Mrs Hudson weirs things like that anymore." He couldn't resist adding that last bit just to see John cringe as the image flashed through his mind. He let the thong fall on the sofa next to Sherlock and sighed. He looked tired.
"Whatever you're up to over here, just please refrain from snorting or injecting things into your body. I can't babysit you all the time and Mycroft does not seem to be very vigilant these days. He wouldn't even have let you come this far if he knew."

"Mycroft doesn't care", Sherlock snapped as John picked up a stack of books from his armchair and sat down.

"Of course he does. He's just angry, like Lestrade. And they have every reason to be."

Sherlock gave a short but exasperated sigh. "Look, John, I am not depressed. Bored, yes, but not depressed. And I haven't used anything. Well, nothing with an "A" classification anyway. So don't worry, I just need some time." Sherlock found it irritating to have John investigate his mental state, but at the same time it was reassuring to know he had one person who still cared.

"Well, I refuse to be worried about you constantly, so please let me know if you need help. And just to warn you; if I ever, ever, notice that you are high around my pupils..."

"Speaking of the pupils. How's Peter and have you expelled those little rats yet?"

"Peter is doing well under the circumstances. He has a concussion, a tare in his right upper arm muscle, some bruised ribs and severe bruising on his upper body and face, so it will mostly be a matter of rest. What I'm more worried about is the mental damage they caused him. He was terrified when he woke up."

"I guess it could be traumatic for a teenager to experience a hate crime like that. Go on."

John swallowed and looked at the window for a moment. He couldn't stand the fact that such a thing had happened under his supervision.

"As for the perpetrators you mentioned. That will not be as simple of course. I can suspend them temporarily, but as much as I'd like to kick them out, I will have to follow protocol."

"Bollocks! This surely must be more than enough to get rid of them instantly!" Sherlock exclaimed.

"I'm glad you care Sherlock. I'm guessing it will be enough for Eric, when we have statements from everybody involved, which will take time. But the decision is not mine alone. I will have to put it to the board of directors. They are reasonable people, so don't worry. I'll see you tomorrow."

With that, John got up and left him in his mess.

Sherlock remained on the sofa and looked at the state of the flat. He realised what it must have looked like to John. If a stranger had a look, they would guess there were at least 5 addicts living in here.

_Better tidy up a bit._

Sherlock had felt better after John's visit. He cleaned the flat, threw out everything that wasn't his, and ordered an actual dinner. He wrote a statement for John to use as evidence for the investigation of the incident. Then he had gone to bed early and actually slept continuously until 7 am.

The night's sleep gave him a boost of energy and he arrived at school early looking bright and smelling fresh. The air was still warm in late summer, so he didn't have to wear his coat yet. Sherlock was eager to gather the evidence from yesterday's crime, draw out some confessions, and see some expulsions happen.
What he didn't expect was what actually happened, which was that no pupils would get expelled, but a teacher would be sacked.

When he came to John's office he could see through the window that Eric and his parents were already there. John had invited them early so that they would be able to come and go without a couple hundred pupils staring at them. John gestured he could come in. Eric's parents turned their heads as he entered.

"This is Sherlock Holmes, the teacher I told you about. He interrupted the boys yesterday. Sherlock, this is Mr and Mrs Walker." Sherlock nodded at them but they glared back as if he was the devil himself. He sat down on a chair by the side of John's desk, facing the two adults and Eric, who just looked angrily at his feet.

John was as calm and diplomatic as the Queen.

"We've just been discussing yesterday’s events. Up until now, Eric denies beating or kicking Peter or running him over with his bike."

"And he's accusing you of assault!" Mr Walker added to Sherlock. "You hit him against a wall and punched him! He's got the bruise to prove it."

"And he grabbed my throat!" Eric whined, fake tears appearing in his eyes.

"I admit I held your son against the shed to prevent him from seriously harming another pupil, yes. If my actions have left a mark, he must have been struggling too hard." Sherlock explained with a stone face. "I did not… grab his throat."

There was some arguing from Eric, but he could not prove his allegations, so John made a decision.

"Mr and Mrs Walker, thank you for coming in. I will have to collect statements from everyone else involved, and discuss this with the Board. Until there is a decision, your son is suspended from this school. I do have to warn you that Eric's behaviour seems to be out of control and he is putting other pupils at risk, so be prepared for a negative outcome."

Mr and Mrs Walker were shocked to hear this and started arguing again, but John ushered them out the door.

Just after they left, Mr Burke came running into John's office.

"Alex, did you get my message? We had an early meeting with Eric and his parents", John said.

"I just heard this morning, sorry I'm late." Alexander Burke looked worried and a bit dishevelled from his hasty trip to school. He was a big man in his fifty's, balding and wearing glasses.

"Bloody mess isn't it? Just awful. Which other kids were involved?" he asked hesitantly.

"Sit down. I'll put up to speed before Billy and his parents arrive. Sherlock, I think it might be better if you don't sit in with the rest of the boys. They might be prepared to talk more if you're not there scowling at them," John said as he motioned Burke to sit down.

"Probably." Sherlock got up and John walked with him to into the waiting area. He leaned against the desk of his secretary, who wasn't in yet.

"You know, this is going to be a-…" John stopped when he saw Olivia shuffle in the hallway. She looked unsure whether to come in.
"Miss Edwards, I didn't think you’d be in today. Didn't Mary tell you stay home and rest for a bit?"

Olivia didn't know what to say. "I… I just- I wanted to see my friends", she said, which wasn't a lie.

Then she noticed Mr Burke through the office window and Sherlock could see a slight panic in her eyes.

"We are having some chats with the boys who were involved yesterday, so maybe you want to go to your classroom? What do you start with today? Art?" John asked.

Olivia thought about Mr Burke and figured she should say something. She looked up at the two men and swallowed, not knowing how to start. Mr Watson was leaning against the desk and Mr Holmes stood there with his arms crossed over his chest, waiting for her to speak. They suddenly seemed quite intimidating.

"Yes, well… could I just ask whether-…" She started but was interrupted by Mr Watson.

"If you want to have a chat, we could do that later. I am a bit busy at the moment. Mr Burke is waiting for me."

Olivia frowned but nodded.

"Alright, I'll see you later, then. Sherlock, later." He said and went into his office and closed the door.

Olivia looked at Mr Holmes, who was staring at her in a rather unpleasantly piercing way. She decided to turn and walk out before her cheeks turned red.

During a free period, Sherlock went to John's office to see how the meetings had gone. Not great as it turned out. The boys admitted to hitting Peter but only because Peter had started the fight, they said. None of them dared to say that Eric was the one driving over the boy's arm. They also didn't refute Eric's allegation against Sherlock, except for Billy Mitchell. All of them had been suspended temporarily. John said he would take Olivia's statement tomorrow. He gave Sherlock copies of the statements he collected so far and said he was unsure where it would lead.

The day had started so well, and Sherlock had been certain it was just a matter of days before they got Eric expelled. Now he was sitting in his empty classroom bristling with anger as he read through page after page of excuses and downright lies. He sat with one elbow on the desk with his hand in his hair, the other resting on his knee.

"Oh for fuck sake!" he said loudly, just as he heard the door creak open.

He looked up and saw Olivia standing in the doorway, looking surprised at such an outburst of foul language from her teacher.

"My apologies, Miss Edwards. I didn't realise you were here." He closed the folder holding the statements. John's words about responsibility for his pupils shot through his mind, and he decided maybe this was the moment to start being more observative.

He looked at her properly as she approached him and let his mind deduce; 14 years old, 4.88 feet, lost a parent, her mother obviously, no pets, intelligence slightly above average, does her own laundry, trouble sleeping, but somehow less tired than this morning…

He stopped himself when she spoke. "Has Mr Watson finished all the meetings?"
"For today he has. He would like to see you tomorrow. He will call your father about that."

"I don't know if he can come." She said while she stopped beside Sherlock's desk. "Did Mr Burke attend the meetings?" She continued. Her eyes looked worried and focused momentarily on the file in front of him.

"Only Billy's. He's his mentor. Why?" Sherlock questioned as he sat up straight. He became more and more aware that this girl had something important to say.

Olivia took a deep, slightly shaky, breath. Not sure how to start, standing there, confidence dissolving. She had no idea how Mr Holmes would react.

"I knew Peter was being bullied," She said softly "and I didn't help him." The second part of that sentence came out squeaky through her clenched throat.

Sherlock watched her and panicked a little when he saw tears brim her eyes. He got up and grabbed a chair that was standing underneath the blackboard and set it down at the corner of his desk next to him.

"Tell me." He said in the calmest voice he could manage.

She sat down. Her voice came back so she continued and Sherlock listened.

"Peter was being bullied last year. I walk to school with him sometimes so I know that they shouted at him and teased him because he's gay. It stopped for a while after Mr Watson spoke to them, but that didn't last very long. After the holidays it was much worse. They were following him, pushing him, and telling him they were going to beat him up." Her voice cracked and the tears started rolling down her cheeks as she looked down at her knees.

Sherlock didn't know what do to comfort her, so he just said "Go on."

Olivia drew another hitched breath. "T-two weeks ago he- he told me he was a-a-fraid of them. That he knew they were s-serious… but that he didn't want to tell a-anyone. So, I told Mr Burke, because he is my mentor and Eric's and I thought- I thought that he would do something." Her questioning eyes moved up to Sherlock's face, which was frowning at her words.

"That sounds like a reasonable expectation," he said encouragingly and she wiped her tears away with the back of her hand.

"But he told me that Peter was not his pupil, that Mr Watson had already dealt with this issue before the holidays, and that if Peter was scared he should go and talk to his own mentor, Ms Donovan."

"So he did nothing?" Mr Holmes sat back in his chair with his elbows on the armrests, hands steepled with his fingertips touching his lips. She saw his deep blue eyes worry. They focused on her again when she spoke.

"No! He just said it was not h-his problem, or my problem, and… that it would be better for me to stay away from people who are getting bullied, because then I might get bullied as well." Sherlock knew she was not lying. He could hear the anger in her voice and felt his own at the thought that if he had been present at this conversation he would have punched this man. But he focused his attention to the girl in front of him, who was looking miserable.

"Did you tell anyone else?" he asked, and regretted this question immediately.
Her eyes welled up again and she started sobbing now.

"No! I didn't tell anyone else because th-the o-only one I wanted to tell was Mr W-Watson, and M-
mr Burke told me not to bother h-him with this because he already knew about Peter. I-I know Mr Watson is friends with Mr Burke be-cause they're always h-having lunch togetherandIthought i-it would annoy him. So I didn't! And now I know it was stupid! Because now Peter is in h-hospital," she cried.

Sherlock fumbled in his pocket for a handkerchief and held it out to her. She took it and dried her eyes and nose. Then she felt his warm hands take hold of the shaking one in her lap. When she looked up she saw that he had leant forward and was looking at her. The few lines in his face told her he was seriously concerned.

Sherlock didn't know how to do this, but he tried.

"Olivia, it seems to me like you did the right thing and it is Mr Burke who's the stupid one here. You tried to help your friend, which is very admirable, but there is only so much you could do."

She was silent, not fully agreeing with him but not knowing how to explain how responsible she felt.

"I think Mr Watson would like to know about this. Shall we go and talk to him?" Sherlock said this in his friendliest voice, but half of his brain was furiously thinking about how to punish Alex slowly and painfully.

Olivia sniffed. "Don't you think Mr Watson is busy? He might not like to hear this. Maybe its better if I tell him tomorrow at the meeting."

"Absolutely not. He will make time for this. And I cannot imagine him ever being angry with you. Come on, if we wait longer it will be lunchtime and I prefer not to elbow my way to his office."

With that he stood up and Olivia had no choice but to follow him.

John was sitting at his desk rubbing his eyes while he tried to put something on paper for the board of directors. Something had gone wrong at his school, very wrong. He didn't understand why nobody had seen this coming. Peter had been at school every day, and Sally hadn't noticed anything. Somebody should have seen warning signs. He felt awful that Peter hadn't trusted anyone to tell that he was being harassed. He was wondering if any of his efforts from the past two years had made a difference, when he heard his secretary's slightly annoying voice.

"Mr Watson is busy and will only book an appointment if you wish to see him." Ms Stevenson told Sherlock sternly.

"It's urgent." Sherlock said through clenched teeth, not wanting to be rude when there was a trembling 14 year old at his side.

Ms Stevenson looked up and her eyes went to the clearly very upset girl. Then they returned to her desk full of papers.

"I can't let you in. Mr Watson has important things to take care of. You can leave a message if you want to."

"You can tell Mr Watson to take his head out of his-", Sherlock cut off his sentence when John's door opened and his head appeared.

"Out of my what?" He asked amused, but then noticed Olivia by Sherlock's side. "No, don't finish
"Miss Edwards needs some of your time. Now." Sherlock said with a meaningful look. His left hand was on Olivia's shoulder. She was trembling a little and her eyes were red from crying. Her breath hitched in her chest.

"Oh dear", John said and his face softened with concern. "Of course, come in. Could you bring us some tea Ms Stevenson?" he asked as he opened the door properly. Sherlock shot a deadly stare at John's secretary before he walked in, gently pushing Olivia in front of him.

"Come and sit." John had a sofa and some chairs around a coffee table in the corner of his office, which he used for long meetings or when he wanted people to feel at ease.

He sat next to Olivia on the sofa and Sherlock took a seat in a chair on her other side. John turned to her. "Do you want to tell me what is upsetting you? I can at least tell you that Peter is going to be okay. They will be keeping him in the hospital for a couple of days as a precaution, but he will be fine."

This did not have the intended soothing effect he had hoped for, and Olivia started sobbing again. She buried her face in her hands. John scooted over to her a little and stroked his hand over her back in a soothing manner.

"Do you think Mr Holmes can tell me what's wrong?" She nodded without looking up. John looked at Sherlock while kept rubbing her back. Sherlock suddenly didn't understand why he and Mary had no children yet.

Sherlock told him everything Olivia had said, during which some of his own anger seemed to transfer to John. They hardly noticed the tea tray appear on the table in front of them. John actually let out a "Jesus", when Sherlock quoted Mr Burke's words exactly like he had heard them from Olivia.

Then Olivia turned to John. "I ne-needed to tell some-one because y-you always tell us about what t-todo when there's bullying. But I-I didn't tell the r-right person and they got to Peter. AndI cahan't e-even visithim in the hospital b-because my dad won't let me go." The last couple of words were muttered into John's shirt as he put his arm around her shoulders in a hug.

Sherlock watched as John sighed deeply and tried to soothe the girl in his arms. He was feeling many things at the same time. He was happy he had taken Olivia to John because he seemed to know exactly what to do, he was furious with Burke for screwing things up so badly, he felt pity for Olivia for feeling so guilty for something she didn't do, and there was a nagging feeling of concern in the back of his mind that he couldn't quite place. In other words, a completely new experience for Sherlock to have so many feelings about people he hardly knew. John must feel like this everyday. He should be exhausted.

John gently pushed Olivia back and sat up a little bit so he could see her face. He sighed again with a furrowed brow.

"What Mr Burke said and did was against all guidelines for this school and also morally wrong. He knowingly let a pupil remain in a harmful situation and gave you some very stupid advice. I don't want you to think that you did anything wrong. I'm sorry you didn't feel like you could come to me, but I'm proud of you for telling Mr Holmes." This seemed to ease Olivia's mind a little and she stopped crying.

"I will have to talk to Mr Burke about this", he said carefully and she looked up at him, alarmed.
"What will you tell him?" she asked.

"I don't know yet", John said. He did know, but did not want to swear in front of her.

"Will he still be my mentor? He won't want to cast me in the school play anymore will he?"

John eyebrows raised "Of course we will find another mentor for you, until we have, you can always come to me, or Mr Holmes of course" his eyes flickered towards Sherlock, who was surprised to notice that this responsibility didn't bother him at all. "And honestly, I'm not sure Mr Burke is the right person to direct the play", John said mischievously.

"But he's teaches theatre!"

"I know, don't tell anyone yet"

She wiped her eyes again and actually smiled a little bit now. John pulled her just a bit closer again and spoke softly. "Do you want to take a rest in room 221?" she nodded. "Good, I'll give you the key." He stood up and went to his desk. He came back and handed it to her.

"There you go. Will you be all right by yourself?"

She nodded.

"Good. I will come and check on you later, after I talk to some people."

He went to the door to let her out. When she stood up she looked back at Sherlock "Thank you Mr Holmes", she said softly. Sherlock gave her a nod and an almost-smile.

When John closed the door again he leaned against it heavily. "God DAMNIT! What the fuck did he think he was doing! If he does not have some miraculous explanation for this I will fire him on the fucking spot. I have never heard Olivia Edwards tell a lie Sherlock, and I sure don't believe she would falsely accuse him of this."

"She's telling the truth John."

John opened the door again and asked Ms Stevenson to find Mr Burke and bring him to his office.

"What's room 221?" Sherlock asked from his chair as John walked back in. His eyes were narrowed.

"You'll find out soon enough. I let several pupils use it", John smiled a little at Sherlock's annoyed face for not knowing something.

Sherlock got up to leave.

"Maybe its best if you stay actually. Might need a witness…" John said.

"Olivia."

Olivia slowly woke up from a deep sleep and opened her eyes. She had fallen asleep almost immediately, so relieved that she had gotten everything off her chest and to have a good cry. Mr Watson always made it easy for her to open up.

Now he was standing over her with a tender smile on his face.

"You should wake up now. Classes are over and I'm sure your father wants you to come home."
She sat up on the sofa and blinked a couple of times to focus. Behind Mr Watson stood Rose with a worried look in her eyes.

Rose hadn't seen Olivia since before the incident, and had walked into John's office asking where she was. John hadn't let her go to 221 right then, but decided to take her with him after classes.

Rose sat down next to Olivia and hugged her tightly. "Alright Liv?"

Olivia nodded and smiled; she felt much better and was glad to see her friend again.

Rose was happy to see that her best friend was fine and decided she could be cheerful. "John fired Burke!" she said excitedly.

"Its Mr Watson, Rose", John corrected her but sounded amused.

Olivia's eyes grew big as she looked at the smiling man. "Really? Because of what I said?"

"No, because of what he said. And for neglecting to protect a pupil." He sat down on the coffee table in front of the girls and looked serious again.

"Olivia, tomorrow I want you to come in so we can write down everything you've told me, and anything you would like to add. I tried to phone your father this afternoon, but he didn't pick up, so could you give him this letter when you get home? He might want to be there." He handed her an envelope.

Olivia's face fell, thinking about what she would say the next day if she showed up alone. "I will."

"Good, good. Come on then ladies. Time to go. Rose will walk you home."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for the kudos! <3
"Olivia!"

Olivia stopped in her stride and looked around. Anthony was running towards her from a side street, excited to see her for the first time after he'd heard what happened to Peter. He skidded to a stop just in front of her and she felt butterflies in her stomach.

He looked absolutely stunning. A tall young man, a bit older than the rest of the class because he'd failed too many classes the year after his father had passed away. His skin was still tanned from the holidays, his dark hair was always a mess and he was usually smiling. He wore his school uniform in a casual way, usually on the edge of what was acceptable to Mr Watson; his shirt untucked, two buttons undone, and his tie loose around his neck. He was a little out of breath and his brown eyes were sparkling.

"How are you? I tried to find you yesterday but Mr Watson said you were sleeping."

Olivia was quite glad Mr Watson hadn't brought Anthony with him as well as Rose to wake her yesterday. She'd probably looked a mess.

"I know. Somehow I sleep better at school than at home", she laughed and he grinned at her. They continued walking towards the school.

"I heard Burke got fired. I do hope the school play is still on. He would have given you the lead you know."

"I don't think so. I don't think he'd want me to be in it at all. I sort of got him fired."
He gaped at her. "No Way!"

She looked at him and smiled at his expression. "He was ignoring Eric's bullying."

She startled as Anthony put a hand on her shoulder and kissed her cheek softly.

"Well done", he said and she blushed.

The rest of the way to school she let him hold her hand.

~

She'd almost forgotten what she was meant to do during the first period until they walked through the door. She said goodbye to Anthony and walked towards Mr Watson's office. Her nerves started rising a little. Ms Stevenson glared at her but told her to go through immediately, so she quietly opened the door.

Mr Watson greeted her from behind his desk and told her to take a seat. He looked tired, but gave her a welcoming smile.

"Did your father not want to join us?" he asked with an eyebrow raised.

"He is a bit preoccupied," she replied quickly.

"Ah, did he go back to work then?"

"No." her voice had risen a bit. When he kept looking at her expectantly she continued "He is eh… the doctor said he might be depressed."

John looked worried. "Is he at home now?"

She nodded "He's very tired. But it will be fine. He is taking medication now. He says he trusts you enough to handle it." It all came out a bit hurried.

It wasn't a lie; she knew she wouldn't be able to lie to Mr Watson if he questioned her, so she'd decided to tell half of the truth.

The full story was that her dad was still in bed and passed out on booze from the night before.

When Rose had dropped Olivia off at home he had been cooking her dinner, singing along loudly to some rock song on the radio. He was in a great mood, but she saw his eyes were foggy. He had probably been drinking since noon, had a nap, and woken up feeling much better, only to grab another beer to quench his thirst. He got through the day with ups and downs, either desperately trying to forget her mother, or at other times staring at her picture, smelling her clothes in the closet (which hang there exactly like they had when she died), or crying in bed.

He was very happy to see her and gave her a tight hug. He smelled like alcohol, sweat, and her mother's perfume, but she didn't comment. He asked about her day and she told him about Mr Burke. For some reason her eyes didn't even well up this time. He applauded her for her bravery and told her he was very proud.

She pretended to like the plate of lukewarm beans, overcooked rice and a burned burger that he
Anything could tip him over from manic happiness to wallowing sadness, so she tiptoed her way around him when he was happy, and comforted him when he was sad. After dinner she washed the dishes and tidied the kitchen while he watched the news. When she was done she remembered the envelope from Mr Watson that was still in her bag.

She walked into the living room and handed it to him. "I have to give my statement tomorrow morning. You could come with me…" she said as he started reading.

On the one hand she really didn't want her father to come to school. He was in a terrible state and would probably not be sober in the morning. She didn't want people to know about his drinking. On the other hand she did want him there. She wanted him to make her feel protected. She longed for him to tell her what to do, to support her and to tell her she was doing alright. She was nearing adulthood and was more independent than many of her classmates, but still desperately needed the one parent she had left to act like one. However, most of the time she was the one taking care of him. The only rule he had given her was not to leave home except when it was completely necessary, like when she needed to go to school. Therefore she always declined invitations from her friends, which was terribly difficult, but she understood her father's fear.

While he read the letter she saw the energy slowly leave her father's body and her heart sank.

"Sweetheart I… you know it’s difficult for me to…" he sighed, not knowing how to explain.

"You came to school on Monday", she reminded him.

"I know. That was different. I was… my head was a bit clearer then. I will come to that play you were talking about. I promise," he said.

"I Just told you that there would not be a play. Mr Burke was fired today."

"Olivia, stop nagging! You are so smart; you will be fine by yourself. If you want I'll phone Mr Watson to hear how it went. Now please let me watch telly." He continued watching the screen, where a daily game show had started.

Olivia spent the rest of the evening in her room, catching up on the homework she'd missed. Tomorrow it would be Mr Holmes' class again, and she wanted to be prepared. Her appreciation for him had doubled because of everything he'd done for her since Monday. Besides, Mr Watson seemed to know him very well, which she considered a good sign.

She smiled as she remembered Lucy's remarks about him. Mr Holmes was handsome, mysterious, and extremely intelligent. He always looked so confident in his tailored suits, and his blue eyes felt like daggers when he was actually interested in you. With one look, he could make Olivia sit up straight and double check whether she was reading the right page, written everything down he'd said, and had truly answered the questions from the blackboard to the best of her ability. She'd noticed that even Rose paid attention to him. Most teachers had to repeat their instructions 5 times before the majority of the class even considered following them.

She had also noticed his graceful movements and wondered if he was gay. Rose said he was definitely bisexual, although she had guessed wrong before, and once told her that those labels were complete bullocks anyway.

Olivia had not really considered her sexuality that much. She knew she probably liked boys, but most of the time their immaturity disgusted her. Last year was a boy who tried to kiss her. It was
her birthday and her parents had let her throw a party for her classmates at the weekend, with music. Her parents had stayed upstairs to let them have fun, but would have been near if something had gone wrong.

Olivia liked dancing and had been doing so with Rose and Lucy, when Steve had come and danced with her. He was her classmates' cousin, who had brought him along and she didn't mind it. Later, when she was in the backyard to get some more drinks from the shed, he tried to talk her into kissing him. She'd smelled his deodorant as he stood in front of her and said she didn't want to. She was backed up against the house and in a panic had closed her eyes. When he moved his head forward she turned her face away so his kiss landed in her neck. The feeling had sent bad shivers down her spine. Then she had pushed him away and ran inside. Lucy told her later that boys tend to do that a lot. Rose had yelled at Steve and told their classmate to take him and leave. Her parents hadn't heard anything due to the music, but she had talked about it with her mother the next day.

Her mother, Isabel, had always been extremely honest with her, and had explained to her many things about men, although mostly when to stay away from them. She was forever grateful to her mother for explaining many things, like how periods worked (she'd been completely alone when that had happened for the first time), how to measure her bra size (even though see hadn't yet needed one at the time), and basically how to take care of herself, whether it was hygiene, cooking, or money (she knew all the codes to their accounts, which she used only when necessary).

Sometimes she wondered if her mother had known, but that was impossible.

When Olivia was done with her homework she went downstairs to check up on him. He was sleeping on the couch, with a glass in his hand and a half empty bottle of vodka on the coffee table. She turned off the telly and shook his shoulder to wake him. He grumbled something she couldn't understand and opened his eyes. They were red and didn't seem to register her presence.

"Come on dad. Time to go to bed."

It was difficult, but she helped him up and he leaned on her heavily as she led him to the stairs.

"Oliv-Oliviea", he mumbled "Iluvyou... Ilyouandyr mther equally."

"Just one more step. That's it.
When he was close enough she gently pushed him in the right direction and let him fall on the mattress. She took of his shoes and placed them neatly under the bed. When she moved to pull the sheets over him he grabbed her arm.

"Olivia... I'm s srry... Plse stay frabit." She saw the tears in his eyes and knew how alone he felt. So she sat down and let him pull her against him. His arms hugged her tightly and she felt his body shake. He kept apologizing for everything in his hoarse voice. She tried to say it was ok, but she
didn't believe herself when she said it. Lying still she waited until his breathing calmed down and slow down to a steady rhythm. Then she pried herself out of his strong grip around her waist, got up and pulled the sheets over him. He never talked about these kind of moments afterwards, and she wasn't even sure he remembered them.

She changed into her pyjamas in her own bedroom, brushed her teeth, washed her face at the sink and crawled into bed. It would take her ages to fall asleep. Sometimes she hated her father for sleeping so much while she was the one who was supposed to go to school and concentrate for 5 days a week. She needed sleep. Instead she lay awake at night, thinking about what it would be like if her mother was still alive. How she would sit on the edge of her bed and stroke her long hair, tell her stories about work, or about when she was younger and aspired to be a famous performer one day. Or sometimes, on bad nights, Olivia thought about how she would have said goodbye to her mother if she'd had the chance.

Isabel had been to a nightclub where she performed as a singer (something she did besides her day job at the coffee house). On her way home, two men had attempted to mug her. When she tried to fight them off, one of them repeatedly stabbed her in the chest. She lost a lot of blood and died three days later from her wounds, without having regained consciousness.

Olivia's father had been very calm from the moment they called from the hospital that night. He had taken Olivia to the hospital to see her, knowing that there was big chance his wife wouldn't survive. They'd stayed with her until she died. Olivia helped him make arrangements for the funeral, which had been 5 days later.

He'd kept it together until most of the guests had left after the funeral. Then he had literally broken down in a corner and hadn't stopped crying. They had to carry him to bed.

Her father had stayed in bed for about a month, only getting up to eat or use the bathroom. Thankfully Olivia's uncle, who they normally only saw on birthdays and funerals, agreed to look after her. He took her to school and spoke to Mr Watson, explaining the situation. He cooked and helped with the rest of the household, and tried to coax her dad out of bed. The day her father did get up, her uncle went back to Bristol, and she had only seen him twice since.

It was difficult at first, but she got used to being by herself, doing groceries, cleaning regularly, making sure the bills were paid, doing her homework without being told to. She didn't feel like she couldn't handle it, but knew that if any kind of officials or social services would come to visit, there was a good chance they would ring some alarm bells, and she didn't know what would happen then. Her father needed her and she needed him, so she kept going.

Olivia thought carefully about what she told anyone about her home life. Even Rose didn't know everything. Thankfully her friends left it alone most of the time, knowing by now that they wouldn't get many answers.

Mr Watson believed her today as well, and didn't probe any further. She was a bit ashamed to betray his trust in her like that, even though she hadn't technically lied. Her father did get a prescription for anti-depressants recently, but they were not supposed to be combined with alcohol. She wasn't sure whether the combination didn't affect him, or if he wasn't taking his pills.

She told Mr Watson what had happened, from when school had begun, to last Monday when Peter was attacked. She was surprisingly calm and didn't cry, which she was relieved about. There had been enough crying yesterday. Mr Watson asked her some specific questions about which of the boys had kicked Peter, and who had hurt his arm. He also asked about what Mr Holmes had done when he discovered them, and she told him he had stopped Eric from riding his bike over Peter's stomach, and pushed him to the wall, shouting some things she couldn't remember.
"Did Mr Holmes, at any time, grab Eric by his throat?"

Olivia thought for a moment. She couldn't really remember how he had grabbed Eric, but it had been quite aggressive. She saw Mr Watson's kind but worried eyes looking at her.

"No. No he didn't."

After that, Mr Watson had shown her what he'd written down so she could check if anything was missing.

"Are you going to expel them?" she asked when they were finished.

Mr Watson leaned his chin on his palm.

"I don't know yet. I have to give a recommendation to the board of directors. They will make an official decision, and even then, the parents can still appeal that decision."

He sat back in his chair and looked at her over his desk. "What do you think should happen to them, Olivia?"

She was surprised at this question, but thought about it. After a couple of seconds, she spoke.

"I think Billy should be allowed to stay. I think he is just afraid of Eric. I didn't see him kick Peter. He held me but I didn't see him hurt anyone. The other three boys I don't know very well. They were all very aggressive. But I don't want them not to be able to go to school! They should be punished, though…"

"What about Eric?" John asked, impressed by her kindness.

It was silent for a bit.

"Eric scares me," she stated, looking at John with a frown.

John felt an unpleasant tug in his stomach when she said it.

That's all I need to know.

"Thank you, Olivia."

Chapter End Notes

Do let me know what you think!

The next chapter will explore some of Sherlock's sexual preferences.
The rest of the week was relatively uneventful for Sherlock. John had gathered all the statements, including Peter's, and set up a meeting with the board. Theatre classes were cancelled until John had time to hire a new teacher. Alexander Burke's mentor pupils were temporarily appointed to Mary, and life resumed as normal.

Sherlock's pupils had gotten more used to his manner of teaching, which consisted of detailed explanations of the material, exasperated sighs as he noticed that they had no clue what he was talking about, followed by a (for him) painfully slow and simplified explanation. People dared to ask questions depending on his mood, which was completely unpredictable. One moment he might be happily drawling on about some chemical reaction, patiently listening as students read out their answers to him, and the next moment he might be nervously pacing and impatient for them to get what he meant. Or he would be drawn into himself, ignoring them, seemingly wishing them to disappear. The clever kids kept their mouth shut at such times, the not so clever ones risked to be ridiculed without mercy.

Something they could always depend on was a tiny insight into his exceptional brain through the examples he brought, which usually ended with him describing how he had solved a case. Writing notes to each other in class was dangerous, because before they realised it his quick fingers would have snatched it from their desk. He would read it silently and comment on the stupidity of the content or the spelling mistakes.

Sherlock was surprised to notice how many of the notes he intercepted, even among the youngest pupils, had a sexual content. He could hardly remember what his peers had talked about when he was their age, because he had never listened to them. It disturbed him that people as young as 13 were already so drawn toward sex.

Sometimes he found he was the subject of the discussion, and it became quite clear to him that many of the girls considered him to be 'cute'. He could and would not imagine that they would actually think about him in such ways, so he ignored it completely. He focused on his teaching, which he felt he was truly getting the hang of.

Far too soon it was Friday afternoon and the students hurried out to enjoy their weekend. Sherlock wanted to say goodbye to John, who was fast asleep with his face planted on his desk when Sherlock stuck his head around. The youth in him would not waist such an opportunity. He walked in quietly, picked up a ruler and slammed it into the wood next to John's head. John jumped and looked confused for a second, until he caught Sherlock's eye and they both broke out in laughter.

"May I remind you that I have the authority to sack you Sherlock Holmes?"

"You wouldn't. I'm being way too nice to your beloved pupils." Sherlock replied as he leaned against a bookshelf.

"Yes, I guess you are. I'm hearing good things about you professor Holmes. They actually seem to like you and are terrified of you at the same time. Well done." John grinned. "I hope you'll stay for a while."
"It seems that I do too," Sherlock said thoughtfully. It gave John a reassuring feeling that his friend could thrive in more environments than just the criminal underworld, and he might actually be happy here at school.

John let out a yawn.

"Well, I know what you will be doing this weekend." Sherlock smiled.

"Yes, it has been a hell of a week. Mary has also been quite tired lately, so hopefully I won't be in bed all alone," he said with a cheeky smile.

They exited the building together and said goodbye. Sherlock was in a good mood and came home to a tidy apartment. After having cleaned on Monday evening Mrs Hudson was once again willing to come up to bring him tea and have a chat once in a while. He had some of her biscuits for dinner and watched a stupid quiz show on TV. Deciding there was too much stupidity projected into the room he turned it off and picked up a book, because he didn't feel like starting a new experiment.

Around 10 pm he dozed off on the sofa. When he awoke again in the middle of the night he decided his bed would be a more comfortable place to resume unconsciousness. Half drowsing, he pushed the book from where it lay in his lap. It fell on the floor with a thud. He shuffled into the bathroom to relieve himself, brushed his teeth in the dark, not wanting to wake himself up completely. Still breathing slowly and with his eyes half closed he moved into his bedroom, the only place in the flat that was not cluttered with books and experiments. He sighed as he opened the buttons of his white shirt one by one, the cold air on his bare chest feeling quite pleasant. He undid his trousers and let them fall in a puddle at his already bare feet. Without contemplation he slid his pants down his legs and crawled into bed nude, the soft sheets brushing against him as he cocooned into them, falling back into a deep sleep, unsuspecting what would greet him there.

Soft warm hands were touching, tickling, stroking. Her voice was deep and warm, but harsh and sharp when she wanted it to be. Her blood red lips were caressing his neck, his shoulders, and the inside of his wrist. They sucked on his fingers and bit his earlobe.

He felt her hands everywhere as the sheets entangled him. His lean body twisted and turned, trying to get away from her, pushing himself against her. Her laugh rings in his ears, knowing he can't resist her.

Sherlock woke late in the morning with a full erection straining against the sheets. He couldn't remember what he'd dreamt, but knew it was about her. He stretched himself and groaned into his pillow as he turned onto his stomach. It happened once in a while. Not very regularly, but often enough for him to know that there was no escaping it. He'd try, of course, desiring to maintain some control over his body. So he untangled himself from the sheets and tried to calm his thoughts before taking a cold shower.

Before meeting Irene, he hardly ever had urges like this. He'd orgasm only when it became uncomfortable or kept him from concentrating on a case. It was a biological thing that happened a couple of times a year, and hardly any thoughts came into his mind when he would finally masturbate in the shower (because that was the cleanest place to do it).

There was nothing in particular that would turn him on. Besides some fumbling in college he had no experience with sex, and he absolutely didn't mind. He didn't like it when other people touched him, especially strangers, and so he was perfectly fine with taking care of himself when his body demanded it.

Irene had seen him as a challenge, of course: virginal but mysterious, naïve but extremely
intelligent. She had teased him and plagued him and tempted him. Hoping to find the button that would turn him on. Her public displays of seduction turned John on without her even trying. He’d often excused himself when she came to their flat.

Sherlock had been able to ignore her advances, her displays, her hands on his bum, and her fingernails digging into his skin in passing. But it turned out that all it would take was her lips on his.

Kissing is usually associated with sentiment and romance, so it hadn't occurred to her that that was a place to start with a man like Sherlock. And aside from that, he hadn't even let her come close enough. When she did though, a whole new world was opened for Sherlock, which he would come to love and hate simultaneously.

One afternoon she visited him while he was working on a case. She was wearing a dark brown skirt with a sheer white blouse, no bra. Her stockinged feet in black high heels looked extremely sexy as she moved through the room. The hazy late afternoon sun softened her features.

Sherlock sat in his armchair sifting through police reports that were strewn all around. His hair was messy, jacket cast aside on his desk and the sleeves of his white shirt rolled up to his elbows. Irene sat on John's chair (who was on a date) and tried to distract him. She couldn't sit still, complained, sighed, moaned, told him what she wanted to do to him and that it was making her wet thinking about it. He didn't even look up.

Then she had silently sneaked up on him. When he felt her proximity and finally shot up an irritated glance to see what she was doing, her lips brushed against his and it was as if an electric current was sent through his entire body.

Suddenly all his muscles were tense and his senses heightened. His heartbeat quickened and he practically felt his own pupils dilate. He could only gaze as her lips crept into a smile, knowing she got him. She took the file he had been reading out of his hands and let it fall to the floor. She leaned towards him and brushed her lips against his a second time, careful not to lose whatever it was that she'd gained. With one knee on the chair between his legs she stared into his eyes and licked his bottom lip with the tip of her tongue.

That was the last drop he needed. He pulled her roughly towards him so she straddled his lap and slid his tongue into her mouth. There was nothing romantic about the kiss. It was driven by pure lust.

She started moving her hips against him experimentally, to see if he would respond. He did, and a long awaited excitement spread through her. He started moaning into her mouth. She moved towards his neck to give him more air to make sounds. Her lips kissed his collarbone and she bit down to hear him hiss through his teeth.

Sherlock had the strangest feeling; the desire to let another person take control over his body, something that had never happened before. His lips felt as if everything they touched was slightly charged, making the sensation ten times as strong. He kissed the skin just below her jawline and she moaned for him, her back arched and her hips pushed forward into the hardness in his trousers. Irene started undoing the buttons on her blouse and revealed her breasts. She let a nipple caress his lips. The hard bud pressed into his soft flesh and it almost made him come then and there. He didn't even realise she was unbuttoning his shirt. He kissed her nipple and when she pressed harder he licked the dark areola. He heard her sharp intake of breath and gripped her sides hard to grind her into his now straining erection.

By then they were both panting and already hovering on the edge. Irene knew they wouldn't make
it even halfway to the bedroom, so she moved up a bit to remove her underwear from underneath her skirt. His strained breath warmed her collarbone and she felt his hands stroke the backs of her thighs upwards. The moment the small piece of black fabric hit the floor, she grabbed his right hand moved it between her legs. Sherlock could feel the heat before he even touched her. When he did, she gripped his shoulders and squirmed. They looked into each other's eyes as he let a finger slide slowly through her folds towards her clit. She gasped against his neck as he stroked her, and for a moment she was completely lost. The fingers of the man she had desired for so long touching her was almost too much to bear. After a few minutes he added another finger and moved them to her opening. He dipped them inside her exploringly and she let out a moan. Then he pushed them in her completely and she started to move against his hand with short circular motions. She didn't know that he actually had some experience with this particular part, although he hadn't gotten such a strong reaction before.

Irene regained some control and unbuttoned Sherlock's black trousers. She felt victorious when she freed his cock from the constraining fabric. He was beautiful: long, thick and already glistening. She let her fingertips stroke his head, mimicking what he had done to her a few moments earlier. The noise he made was something between a moan and a growl, after which he reclaimed her mouth. Sherlock felt her fingers slide over him and he lost the capability to think straight.

While stroking his tongue with hers, she positioned herself above him. He let his fingers slide out of her and held his cock so she could lower herself down. His facial expression was complete ecstasy as he held his breath and let his eyes close. Slowly she started moving. Carefully, but it still didn't take more than two minutes for both of them to climax. She kissed him and his hips moved upwards, driving him deeper. His muscles spasmed as he came, and she let herself go as well. Finally releasing the long built up tension in her body.

They hadn't spoken a single word the entire time. Too busy exploring the other, or too amazed by the pleasure of it. Sherlock had been too stunned by his own arousal to utter anything intelligible. He had never experienced such a need for someone's body before. Her kiss had taken him completely by surprise. Irene had discovered a weakness he didn't even know he had, and continued to explore his sexuality with renewed excitement.

Irene had activated his sexual prowess and now he had to deal with erections much more often, like today. They gave him a bad temper. It reminded him that he was human like everyone else, and could get aroused by the most ridiculously simple things.

He still didn't particularly enjoy touching himself but had found that other ways to take care of his needs also had their downsides. He noticed that taking a stranger home made him feel disgusted, thinking he could still smell them on him for days afterwards.

So today he took a cold shower, knowing that he would at least get rid of it for a while. The morning he spent stalking around the flat, slamming doors and unable to concentrate on any experiment. He felt angry with everybody, especially Lestrade for being able to ignore him for so long. John had advised him to leave the DI alone, but Sherlock could not stop himself from calling in angrily about the serial killer case they were reporting on BBC news. It was like drunk dialling but different.

Eventually he decided to go for a long walk around London. The fresh air and physical exercise seemed to help and after an hour or so he ended up sitting on a bench on the Southbank smoking a cigarette and watching boats full of tourists. About 50 meters to his right was a skating park, and he heard a vaguely familiar voice. Looking over, he saw that it was Anthony Wilding, one of his 3B pupils, with some friends he didn't recognise. That seemed like a good time to leave, so he took another drag from his cigarette and got up.
As he walked away he could feel Anthony's stare in his back, but didn't turn to look. He was not in the mood for small talk, and definitely not with a schoolboy. Somehow it still disturbed him that outside of the school these children had lives, and that they were actually living in the same world he was. He considered John to be quite foolish for thinking he could protect them in any way. Sherlock was familiar with the current crime statistics and didn't understand why anyone would even want to put a child into the world. However, at the same time he envied John for having so much faith in humankind, and admired him for putting so much effort into saving it.

When he got back to Baker Street it was already late. He spent the rest of the evening reading the most boring book he could find, and was confident that the 'problem' of this morning had been averted.

Of course it hadn't.

When he woke up the next morning he cursed, feeling his once again hard shaft pressed between his belly and the mattress, a friction he couldn't deny made him wish for Irene's lips. With an exasperated sigh he turned himself over.

They had spent several weeks together, and Irene's desire to explore his sexuality seemed insatiable. Because of her explorations, he knew now exactly what aroused him the most. The annoying thing was that he didn't have any of it available right now. His hand snaked down underneath the covers, his cock stiffening even more in anticipation.

He thought about Irene and how she had done everything to find out what would make him beg. She found out that not only her lips turned him on, but also his own.

The one and only time she had succeeded to make him beg for mercy was when she had blindfolded him and tied down by his wrists to her bed. She had teased his lips with unknown objects and body parts. He explored each object with his mouth while she whispered how she would use them to pleasure herself. A vibrator had been one of them.

Stroking himself, Sherlock remembered in sharp detail how her nipple pressed against his mouth and he had felt it grow hard as she flicked it with his tongue. She hissed in his ear what she was going to do with her mouth when she ran out of items to feed him with.

Sherlock moaned.

He felt her mouth sucking on two of his fingers. She hadn't touched him below the navel yet, but the sensory deprivation encouraged him to imagine she was sucking him there.

_You like that don't you?_

_Do you want to taste me?_

"Oh God yes." Sherlock's hand moved faster now.

She was above him and his now expert tongue stroked her in the exact way he knew would make her come hard. Her moans sounded in his ears.

Only when she was completely satisfied she removed his blindfold.

_Well done. I think you deserve to see this._

He was impatient. The muscles in his arms stood out from straining against the ropes that tied him down.
"Touch me. Please. Irene" Sherlock's back arched now and his head throw back in the pillows as he jerked his hips.

Her red lips moved downwards across his chest, passed his bellybutton to brush his cock. He was harder than ever and when she finally touched him a gulf of pleasure crashed through his body. Her tongue stroked the sensitive head excruciatingly softly and he begged for her to make him come.

"Irene! I need to… please."

She finally took his entire length into her mouth and increased her rhythm. Sherlock imagined how her lips moved up and down his cock as he moved. A sheen of sweat formed on his torso. Irene caressed him and sucked on him. Letting out a groan he came almost as forcefully in his hand as he had in her mouth that day.

Sherlock continued breathing hard for while. Growing soft in his hand he felt the stickiness on his belly. It was just over four years ago, at the end of the summer, that Irene had blindfolded him. They had spent hot days exploring every part of each other, and Sherlock had actually found out he could make her beg for him as well. Irene was determined to try everything with him. It was her experiment, leading from interesting moments in public spaces like clubs and theatres, to her daring him to kiss another man. He knew he could turn her on by trying new things, so he didn't tell her he'd already kissed several men during his years in college.

Even now kissing remained his biggest trigger, although strangers could never excite him as much as Irene did. John was the only other non-stranger he'd tried it on, but he kept that far in the back of his mind on moments like this. It felt wrong towards Mary to get off on memories of John, and he could manage without.

Sherlock finally got up from his bed to take a shower. He felt much better when he finished, and the rest of the day he spent buried in old case files, assembling the pictures he considered safe enough for his pupils to see without spoiling their innocent minds. Although of course, he knew there was a high probability that they were not as innocent as John thought.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a bit different from the previous ones. Let me know what you think of it!
Olivia stood at her locker, trying to fit in the many books she'd carried to school that morning. She hadn't been able to catch up with her homework. She'd tried to tidy the house a little bit, getting rid of empty bottles, cleaning and making sure there was enough food in the house. When she had gone out for the shopping her dad asked her to get him some vodka, not remembering she was not nearly old enough to do that. He'd still have to go out on his own for that. It hurt to know that he was that far gone, to ask her to do something like that.

On Sunday, Peter had rung their doorbell to tell her he was coming back to school. She had not been able to let him inside because her dad was on the sofa, and it had felt terribly wrong to blow him off like that. She hoped Peter didn't think she wanted nothing to do with him. It had been quite awkward until he had finally said "see you tomorrow", and left her standing on the doorstep.

Her dad had started his pills, and she suspected that he was not reacting well to the medicine in combination with alcohol. His mood had been all over the place, from extreme sadness to extreme happiness to extremely grumpy. She just stayed quiet and tried not to counter anything he said to avoid upsetting him. When he said he still missed her mother just as much as the day she died, she said "me too". When he told her that her mother had been the most beautiful woman in the world, she said "yes she was". When he argued that his sadness only showed how much he had loved her mother, Olivia said "of course dad". And it went on and on, until he was ready for her to help him to bed, after which she lay awake for hours.

Everything and everyone raced through her mind.

Her thoughts went from Peter, who she hoped wasn't angry with her, to Eric, who she wondered would be expelled because of what she said about him, to her father, who she was afraid was never going to cope with his loss, to Lucy, who she still needed to buy a present for, and to Anthony, who had told her the other day that he really wanted to kiss her, which made her nervous and excited at the same time.

And finally she thought of Mr Holmes, who seemed to know everything about everyone, which worried her. He might discuss her situation with Mr Watson, which would undoubtedly lead to more questioning. At the same time she had the urge to tell Mr Holmes everything, because his penetrating blue eyes told her he already knew. However, she was terrified of what would happen if she did, so she decided to fight that urge at all times. It exhausted her, trying to balance so many things at once. It didn't bide well for her attentiveness in class.

She slammed the palm of her hand against her locker in an angry attempt to see if it would stay shut. It didn't, and she cursed under her breath.

"Go wash your mouth, Miss Edwards", a deep baritone echoed through the hallway behind her. She turned around abruptly and saw it was Mr Holmes who was on his way to the science room. He'd said it in his stride and was already with his back towards her when he added, "And don't try to force too many books into a small space. They don't appreciate it."

Olivia watched him with her mouth half open as he walked away from her. Her cheeks flushed a bit. Her professor walked with such confidence and his movements were always incredibly calculated. The morning sunlight was streaming through his dark curls that ended at the pale skin
of his elegant neck. She found it quite fascinating to watch.

"Admiring Holmes' bum?" said an amused voice. Once again Olivia turned quickly to see who was talking to her. Rose was leaning with one elbow on the locker door that refused to close and had a mischievous smile on her face, which made her blush even more.

"No! He was talking to me. How was your weekend?" She said.

"Lucky you... It was fine, watched some movies with Lucy. Yesterday visited Cambridge with my parents. Anyway, I hear Peter's back, did you see him?"

"Yes, he came to tell me yesterday. He looks alright, he still has some stitches in his forehead." As Olivia said it, Peter, Lucy and Anthony appeared from around the corner. Anthony kissed Olivia's cheek and Lucy whistled for them through her teeth. Olivia didn't understand why everyone needed to make her blush today.

As they walked to class her friends chatted about their weekends. Lucy's parents had taken her to see a horse they wanted to buy her for her birthday. They were upper class people and lived in Hampstead, close to the park where she would be able to ride it. Lucy was over the moon and told them they should go ride together sometime soon.

In the meantime Anthony had managed to close Olivia's locker properly and handed her the key.

"You won't get me anywhere near a horse." he said. "But speaking of birthday presents, I saw Holmes yesterday at Southbank." He grinned.

"I would LOVE for him to be my birthday present! Does he look as hot on Sundays as on weekdays?" Lucy joked.

"I guess you would find him hot no matter what. He was just smoking a cigarette on a bench. Walked away before I could say hi. Not that I would have, he looked extremely grumpy."

"Was he alone?" Lucy interrogated.

"Yep"

"Interesting..."

Rose sighed at Lucy's dreamy look.

"How was your weekend Liv?"

"It was fine. Come on, we're going to be late for class if we don't hurry up", she said.

They had just taken their seats when Mr Holmes started speaking in his authoritarian tone of voice. He was obviously in a bad mood.

"Right. Class. I have some announcements before we start. First of all, Mr Garrison is back with us. Still recovering from his concussion, so I'm told. So try to contain your urge to shout. It will be greatly appreciated."

Peter sank down in his chair, trying to become invisible.

"Second, there will be an exam at the end of this week."

Instantly a worried murmur rose from the group and people started to protest.
"There is a reason why I made the 'no shouting' announcement before I told you about the exam." Mr Holmes sighed. "I need to assess whether you're underdeveloped brains are grasping any of the information I've given you during the past few weeks. It will put Mr Watson's mind at ease. The questions will be quite straightforward, covering all the materials you've read so far, and if you study there is no reason you should fail. Today's class we will use to revise, however boring that may sound, so use it to ask questions. On this occasion I will consider answering the stupid ones as well."

His attitude did not encourage them to ask questions, though. Olivia was very glad that science was one of the few subjects she had kept up with during the past few weeks.

~

After classes on Monday, Sherlock went to John's office. Ms Stevenson had, to his horror, approached him in the corridor and told him he was expected in John's office at 4 pm. Sherlock found it shocking that John, supposedly his best friend, would send his evil secretary to order him around. He was planning to go to his office only to tell him what a wanker he was and that he shouldn't expect anyone to respond positively to such an offensive approach.

To his surprise, both John and Mary were waiting for him when he arrived. They were smiling manically and Sherlock became a bit hesitant about his intended rant. John asked him to sit on the sofa. He himself sat on the armrest of Mary's chair.

"Right, Sherlock. How shall I say this…” Mary smiled up at him fondly. Encouraging him to go on.

"Mary's pregnant", John let out a deep breath, obviously happy to have said it. But his big news was met with an expressionless face.

"Right."

"Right?"

"Well, it was fairly obvious John. You cannot possibly expect me to be surprised."

"Don't tell us you knew this." John was too happy to be annoyed, but had hoped for a little bit more than total indifference from his friend.

"Mary's lunch has doubled in size over the last couple of weeks. She's been feeling tired, and a month ago you two were-"

"We get it! No need to explain." Mary cut in. "We were just wondering if you would be willing to take on some of my workload. It will give me some rest and I'll have time to enjoy the pregnancy."

"Can't imagine your state to be a very pleasant experience, but you've probably read about it. Anyway, yes I would, as long as I don't have to deal with sick teenagers. I am not a nurse."

John smiled. "Great! You can take on some of Mary's classes, and I would like to appoint the mentor pupils from Burke to you, if you don't mind. There are about ten of them. You seem to have a good influence, and you handled the situation with Peter last week very professionally, so I think it shouldn't have to be a problem."

Sherlock looked doubtful.

"Does that mean I'd have to talk to them?"
"A bit more than that, actually. It means that you will have to get to know them. You will have to monitor their progress and steer them in the right direction. Most important, you will have to show some interest when they have problems."

Sherlock looked alarmed, but not completely horrified, so John continued.

"It also means that you would have more hours at school. You would get an office, and have office hours. It will be quite a responsibility, because I will trust you to look out for them for me. It turns out that McMullen did more work than I realised, so I will be busy as well. And hiring a good theatre professor turns out to be more difficult than I thought."

"I think I can manage it."

"That's a relief Sherlock, but I need to know that you will be fully committed to this. I don't want you to quit after two weeks because you're tired of listening to them. The pupils need a reliable person to go to, who treats them with respect and makes time for them. So if you're not completely sure I can try to squeeze them in with other mentor groups."

"No John, I am perfectly capable. To my own amazement, I am rather enjoying teaching at this establishment. The youths aren't so bad either, as long as they don't have too much sugar."

John beamed at him and looked a little relieved. "Thank you Sherlock, it will take a load off my mind. We will discuss the details later this week and get you settled into McMullen's old office."

They got up and Sherlock was already at the door when he turned around to them.

"John, Mary…"

They looked up.

"Congratulations. It's a very lucky baby." Sherlock said with a slight smile in the corner of his mouth. Then he left.

John cleared his throat and Mary's eyes actually welled up a little bit as they looked at each other.

"Do you think it's the right decision?" John asked her.

"I've got a feeling Sherlock will do brilliantly," she said.

~

On Wednesday Sherlock got the key to his new office and the key to the storage room in case he wanted to change the furniture. It was a relatively small office on the first floor, but it had a big window overlooking the schoolyard. There was a desk, a bookcase, and some chairs, but most of it was not up to his standards.

Sherlock went up to the second floor to see what was in the storage room. The room turned out to be number 221, a disused classroom close to the staircase. He wondered why John had sent Olivia to such a strange place to have a rest. He tried to unlock the door, but it was already open.

Half of room 221 was filled with old furniture. Desks, tables, chairs, and a couple of blackboards were piled on top of each other, forming a big mountain that in some places reached the ceiling. Two big sofas and a coffee table occupied the other side of the room.

Three pupils looked up as he came in. They were reading, and looked completely at peace as the
afternoon sun put them in a pleasant soft light. They didn't move at all when they noticed him.

"Hello Mr Holmes. Do you need something?" Rose asked, sounding like she was running the shop.

Rose was sat on the sofa to the right, her back against the armrest and her legs stretched out in front of her, crossed at the ankles. On the other couch against the far wall in the corner was Lucy, who had her knees drawn up to her and was snuggled comfortably in the cushions. Next to her, with her legs up over the backrest and her back resting on the seat, head almost completely upside down, was Olivia, holding a book in her hands. Her long brown hair fell in waves of brown and gold towards the floor as she looked at him with interest. Her skirt had fallen down a couple of inches, revealing her knees and a few inches of her thighs.

Sherlock somehow couldn't stop his gaze from lingering for a moment. He felt a slight tug in his lower abdomen and wondered if this would generally be considered an erotic sight. He could see the soft little golden hairs on her legs as the sun lit them up.

Olivia watched Mr Holmes' eyes linger on her thighs and she felt a rapid heat spread through her, brought forth by both embarrassment and excitement. Self-consciously she pulled at her skirt a bit and closed the gap between her legs, but it didn't really help cover them.

"Aren't you supposed to be in class?" Sherlock asked them, looking sharply at Lucy. His demeanour was snappy as usual and his voice didn't betray anything.

"No, Mr Watson fired our theatre teacher. We're studying here during class hours until he finds a new one," Lucy said happily.

Sherlock stood in the middle of the room; arms folded across his chest, observing them with narrowed eyes. He was completely focused again and not letting their innocent appearance fool him so easily. He was used to seeing them in class and in comparison they looked suspiciously relaxed, but he couldn't find anything incriminating on them.

"Did Mr Watson give you permission to be here alone?"

"He gave me the key," said Olivia, still upside down.

"We are studying for the exam," Lucy said.

A silence fell and the girls looked up at him expectantly while he considered what to do.

"As you are here, you can help me get some of this stuff to my office," he said merrily.

They looked at him as if he was mad.

"Us?" Lucy asked. "Better ask some of the boys downstairs. They are built for that kind of thing."

"You will be perfectly fine, Miss Griffin. You are capable of riding a horse, so you can move a desk."

"How do you know I ride a horse?" Lucy gasped.

"I would think us being prepared for our science exam has a higher priority than you having furniture, don't you think, sir?" Rose interjected.

"Did Mr Watson give you McMullen's office?" Olivia asked thoughtfully "Why is that?"

None of them had made any move to get up.
Sherlock sighed, getting impatient now.

"Yes, I will be in McMullen's old office, Miss Edwards. There is horsehair on your blouse Miss garrison, and a mark from where it bit you in the arm three or four days ago. And Miss Edeson, me having furniture in my office is vital to your exam results, as I will not be able to mark anything if I don't have a desk. So if you would be so kind to drag yourself from that sofa, I might not mention your attitude to Mr Watson when I go and ask him what he was thinking, giving you a key to this place."

He looked right into her eyes as Olivia swung her legs down and twisted her body so that she could get up. "You don't seem to think we are trustworthy, sir." She said innocently, now leaning her hip against a wooden desk, her hair in a wild mess around her face.

Sherlock was surprised by her boldness and wondered where it came from so suddenly. He narrowed his eyes at her. "You haven't done anything to gain my trust, Miss Edwards."

This was absolutely not true. Olivia had impressed him with her loyalty towards Peter, by speaking out about her own mentor, and her kindness in her statement about the incident. He wouldn't want to give her too much acknowledgement, however, as she suddenly seemed to be so self-assured.

He broke their eye contact. "You can start right now." He removed his jacket from his shoulders and started rolling up the cuffs of his shirt.

Seeing the well-built man do this, Lucy got up immediately to help. Rose sighed in exasperation, but didn't feel like studying on her own, so she got up to help as well.

It took some time to move things out of the way to get to the items their teacher wanted to have. Of course, Sherlock had taste so he picked the heaviest oak desk and a huge armchair. On the way to his office, Lucy was chattering to him non-stop about her new horse, about the exam and about her birthday. Olivia could see the patience draining from her professor's eyes as he was forced to listen to her over the desk. Rose noticed it, too.

"When you were a detective," she started while she pushed the armchair forward without being able to see where she was going, "did you ever catch murderers who killed teenagers?"

"I did."

"Do you have a better understanding of their motives since working here?" she asked, grinning.

He didn't answer, but Olivia saw the corner of his mouth curl upwards for a moment.

When they had managed to drag the heavy items to his office one floor below, Lucy and Rose were promptly ordered to take the old desk, which thankfully was a lot lighter, back to 221. "Rude", Rose muttered under her breath as they walked out with it.

Olivia was about to follow them outside, when Sherlock asked her to stay behind for a moment. Had her heart rate not already been fast from the physical effort of moving the desk, it would have increased right then. She stepped back into his office. It was a bit dark as the curtains were drawn halfway.

"Sit", he said, so she let herself slide down into the armchair, which had been left close to the door, and wondered what this was about.

Sherlock observed how Olivia's entire presence changed from a confident and comfortable young woman, to a rather frightened looking girl in too large a chair. He sat down on a chair in front of
her, hoping to appear less intimidating. It took a while before he spoke.

"Does Mr Watson give you that key often?"

"Sometimes."

"When?"

His eyes were grey in the low lighting of the office and he was observing her with interest. A chill went down her spine. She was afraid that she would have to lie and that he would know immediately.

"When I'm tired, or upset." she almost whispered while avoiding eye contact.

"How often does that happen?" He asked, struggling not to sound impatient.

"Maybe once or twice a week." No lies yet.

"And what makes you tired?" He saw her visibly shrink.

"Sometimes I can't sleep at night," her voice was already beginning to shake.

"Alright, that happens to me too," he said kindly. "And what upsets you?"

Suddenly she looked up. Her eyes flashed brown and green as they met his and he detected some panic in them. She kept her lips pressed tightly together.

"Is it your dad's depression?"

"Why do I have to tell you?" Her voice had regained some confidence.

Sherlock's eyebrows rose for a moment.

"Fair enough. Mr Watson has asked me to take on Mr Burke's pupils, so I will be your mentor from now on. I won't force you to tell me anything you don't want to, but I need to know if you are fine."

"What about Mrs Watson?"

"I note your disappointment at not having her as your mentor, but Mrs Watson is taking on less work, for personal reasons."

"Is she pregnant?"

"Why do you think that?" Sherlock was intrigued now.

"Because Rose guessed it. She says they are touching each other all the time, and that he looks happy even though he's very tired."

"Very good observation, although I cannot confirm or deny her conclusion. Now, will you tell me what's upsetting you?" As he said it he saw her panic again, and Sherlock knew it was too forceful.

"No." she said, shaking her head slowly. And then, more quietly, "There is nothing to tell, really."

He sighed and leaned back in his chair before looking up again. "That will not make this easier, Olivia. You will need to trust me a little."

"You haven't earned my trust, sir." She said, and she moved to get up.
Sherlock had no reply to that, so he let her go without a word, watching her walk out the door.

Olivia didn't know how quickly she could get out of that office. When she closed the door behind her she took a deep and unsteady breath. She thought she had avoided his question by asking about Mary, but he wasn't thrown off track easily. She didn't know if she had just made it worse by being cheeky.

As she walked through the corridor Olivia thought about how she would cope with him as her mentor. Mr Holmes was undoubtedly the most attractive man she had ever met, sending shivers down her spine whenever he decided to cast a glance in her direction. Lucy would probably be jealous of her and Rose, who had also been one of Burke's pupils. At the same time he formed a threat. He looked at her in such an observant way sometimes, she was afraid it would just be a matter of time before social services appeared on her doorstep. She would have to be very careful.

Sherlock sat in his darkened office, staring ahead of him and thinking about the girl whose kindness and loyalty reminded him of his best friend.

He had never particularly desired anyone's trust before, but for some reason he desperately wanted Olivia's.

Chapter End Notes

Your comments are very encouraging!
Thanks so much for all the kudos and comments over the past week!

This chapter contains a bit of Johnlock because it's hard to resist.

"Why did you give me all the deranged ones?" Sherlock exclaimed while slouched on the sofa in John's office, skimming through the personal files of his brand new mentor pupils. He had an office now, but the small room was still empty and boring, so he had opted for John's.

"Your group is not more or less intelligent or troubled than any other. And if you could hide your disappointment when you talk to them, that would be great." John said, staring at the document in front of him. "And there are some above average one's there, look at Olivia's marks. Rose's might be even better."

"I admit they show signs of some intelligence, which means they could do much better than this."

"Well, Rose's marks are already up compared to last year. Olivia has a lot going on. You've read her file, haven't you?"

"I have. Tragic family death, incompetent father, marks dropped quite a bit last year… She has more going on than what is in her file though." Sherlock mumbled.

John looked up from his work. "What do you mean, more going on?"

"I suspect her father is more than a little depressed. I expect she's protecting him. She got rather defensive when I questioned her about it."

"Don't tell me you interrogated a pupil, Sherlock!" John looked particularly worried now.

"It's what I do," Sherlock said innocently as he looked up at John.

"No it's not, not anymore. She hardly knows you, you must have terrified her." John said harshly.

"Don't worry, St. Watson-of-all-troubled-teenagers, she just told me she wasn't ready to talk to me yet."

"Do you think she needs help?"

"John, pay attention. I said stop worrying. I'll get it out of her."

"Just be careful, then."

"Hmmm. I believe your approach is too soft. Ran into a couple of them in room 221, lounging around like they owned the place. I strongly advise you not to let them spend hours in there without supervision."

"Every pupil I give that key has to agree to certain conditions. Besides, I do check on them from time to time," John said defensively.
"You are so ignorant, John. A private room at school is the perfect environment for all kinds of disruptive behaviour. One moment you will be just a little too busy to check on them, the next they will be pregnant and injecting heroine into their-..."

"Well, as opposed to you, Sherlock, I actually have some trust in my pupils. Their stupidity doesn't reach as low as yours does on occasion." John snapped.

Sherlock scowled.

"Alright, but don't say I haven't warned you. This Wilding fellow has been clung to Olivia like a bee on honey lately."

John couldn't deny that, he tapped the end of his pen on his desk in a fast rhythm. It was good that Sherlock had started to care for at least one of them.

"I'm glad you're so protective of her, but I think she is capable of making her own decisions in that respect. Anthony is not the type to take advantage, anyway."

In the back of his mind John couldn't fully believe that he was gossiping about the love life of a teenage girl with Sherlock Holmes.

"I'm keeping an eye on him," Sherlock grumbled dangerously, his eyes narrowing at the though of the boy.

It was quiet for a while, and John returned his attention to reading a report about new government regulations and funding for secondary schools. He was trying to calculate how it might be possibly to fit in more lecture hours using the limited number of teachers he had, when Sherlock's voice interrupted him with a question once again.

"Why 221?"

John sighed. "What?"

Sherlock had slouched even more now, resting his chin on his chest to be able to read the file that he held up on his stomach. His feet, crossed at the ankles, rested on the coffee table.

"Why choose 221 to be the recovery and lounge area for deranged pupils?"

"They are not deranged," John said, raising his finger at him as a warning. "And it's just the room that was available at the time."

"Hmmm, sure," Sherlock hummed.

"According to my theory, it was an unconscious attempt of yours at recapturing better times. You know, when you lived with me."

John scowled. "Seriously Sherlock, you make a horrible psychiatrist."

"No shame in it John, longing back for the best period of your life."

"No offense, but the better times for me started when Mary came into my life. There were countless times when I was ready to move out of that flat to get away from your bloody absurd lifestyle."

"But you didn't! You loved it. Room 221 is simply sentiment." He said it with a satisfied smile.
"Yeah, you said something about my love for danger, being chased by criminals, being strapped to bombs or locked in sewers, just before I punched you in the face that time, remember?"

"Of course I remember. And that was just before we did that other thing, suggesting to me that you wanted nothing more but to stay, actually."

Sherlock picked up another file from the pile beside him and pretended to read with interest.

John's face turned red at the memory. Oh, how Sherlock's tongue is his mouth had turned him on at the time.

"Yes, well… that was just that moment."

"Three moments, if I recall correctly."

~

Of course Sherlock bloody Holmes recalled correctly.

John had always found Sherlock attractive, but considered himself straight and didn't particularly desire anything more than friendship. It was well known that Sherlock was bisexual, because, to Sherlock's annoyance, Irene had been unable to keep her mouth shut about her explorations. She'd paid someone to kiss him at a party, to see how Sherlock would react, as an experiment. The detective had seen it coming from miles away, but played along with her game because he had enjoyed the man's company. That was, until the guy had tried to touch his groin, and was promptly shoved aside by the part of Sherlock that had an aversion for being touched by strangers.

There had been three moments in which the consulting detective and his blogger had suddenly become more than friends or colleagues. They were hot, hurried, outburst of energy, that had all occurred after solving particularly difficult cases.

The first time had been after the case of the murdered surgeon, in which John's medical knowledge had been of particular good use. Sherlock had not commented on John's intelligent revelations, and it had been no surprise. However, when they arrived back at Baker Street that night, Sherlock grabbed him by his shoulders and pressed him against the wall in the dark corridor. Without warning he had claimed John's mouth. It took John a couple of seconds, but then he had responded by opening his mouth for Sherlock's tongue. The exploration lasted about 10 seconds until the taller man had pulled back.

"Well done today, John," he had said, slightly out of breath, before disappearing into his bedroom and shutting the door.

For a moment John had panicked, having no idea what triggered this outburst and no idea what Sherlock wanted exactly. The kiss had been good, but had been too fast to fully realise what was going on. Besides, John was afraid something awkward like this could ruin their friendship.

To his relief, it didn't. The next day they had gotten up, drank tea, went to the yard to provide some evidence for Lestrade to write up, and went home again. Nothing happened and nothing was said about the night before. Sherlock was just Sherlock, and John didn't ask any questions.

The second time they kissed was after a case involving a member of a gentlemen's club that Mycroft frequented. It was the kind of club where men would drink, smoke and engage in intellectual conversations. They had spent a night mingling, something Sherlock did expertly, to identify any enemies of the victim. His posh background came in handy and he let it show through in every gracious gesture, every pompously old fashioned word. John had observed Sherlock with
interest as the man smoked a cigar and pretended to know the prime minister's name (another one of those normally 'irrelevant' pieces of information).

When they got home they were both unsteady on their feet from the whiskey and relieved to be back in the place where they could relax. Sherlock had commented on how good John looked in a tuxedo, and John had said something about Sherlock sucking on a cigar. Before he knew it their mouths were entwined in a drunken adventure against the kitchen counter.

As far as he could remember, nothing else happened. He could remember wanking off to the thought of the detective the next morning, though.

~

John's attention snapped back to the current conversation.

"And you think that 221 means that I want to go back to that? Because I don't, Sherlock, I thought you knew that."

"I do know that, and I understand perfectly well that you are happy living with Mary. The only thing I'm suggesting is that it's not just me who longs for a case, a chase, a good old murder mystery to solve."

John saw his friend's mind wander to dream nostalgically about crime scenes, and sighed.

"No mate. You need to realise that that time is over. The number 221 is not a clue that I want to get back into battling the criminal underworld with you. The pupils are your mysteries now, and they need your attention. So go sulk in your own office, I actually have work to do."

When Sherlock finally left him alone, however, John had difficulty concentrating on his work. He couldn't help but think about the third and last time something happened between them, which was after a case for which Sherlock had almost died.

The detective had been particularly keen on finding a man who was slaughtering young people, mostly women, with a sword. It had been a particularly dangerous chase that reached its climax in an old abandoned warehouse. John had just been able to prevent his best friend from getting his throat cut, by shooting the serial killer right between the eyes. Sherlock had been stoic during the ordeal, calmly telling John to shoot without a hint of fear in his features. However, when the man fell to the ground, leaving Sherlock standing, he lost control of the pumped up adrenaline in his body. He had grabbed John's shoulder and his body had trembled. John had no sympathy though, and had punched Sherlock for his complete and utter stupidity, getting himself in such danger. It was one of the few times Sherlock admitted he had been a tiny bit stupid.

When they got home, the detective was calm once again, but John was still on a high from killing, which made him extremely confident. The lack of sex in John's life in the 4 months previous added to his decision not to suppress the sudden impulse. He walked into the hallway between the kitchen and Sherlock's bedroom and intercepted him as he came out of the bathroom. The full lips of his friend smiled in surprise but responded to him almost instantly.

That time it hadn't stopped at a kiss. John's initiative suggested to Sherlock that he actually wanted some physical contact with the other man, and the erection pressing against his thigh confirmed this. The moment Sherlock rubbed John with the palm of his hand, he had complete power over him. John was lost in the feeling of the man's tongue against his as his trousers magically came
undone and were slid down his hips. Sherlock's lips moved to brush his jaw as his hand slid into his boxers and started stroking him.

"Oh fuck, Sherlock," John had whimpered at the delicious feeling of another person's fingers on his sensitive flesh. He was too worked up to worry about it when a few moments later Sherlock moved down and he realised what was about to happen.

It was as if Sherlock was trying to overpower him with his mouth, as it moved fast over his now throbbing erection. John's mind had gone blank and he could only stand still and let it happen. The strokes were forceful and it didn't take long before he let out a loud moan, wrapped up in the ecstasy of his orgasm.

When he was finished, Sherlock sat on the floor and leaned his back against the wall, catching his breath. John pulled his boxers up and let himself slide down to sit next to him.

"Jesus," he muttered in a daze.

John realised that he hadn't paid any attention to Sherlock's arousal, so he turned his body slightly towards him, his dark curls where sticking slightly to the sweaty skin of his temple.

"Do you want me to-"

"No, don't, it's fine." Sherlock said quickly and told him with a wave of his arm that he really didn't want John's hesitantly approaching hand to touch him. It made John wonder if he had enjoyed the experience at all.

They sat in silence for a short moment, until the detective spoke in a bright voice.

"Well, better get on with the case."

With that, he got himself up and walked into the living room, leaving John behind on the floor. The whole encounter had not taken more than 8 minutes.

John couldn't believe Sherlock, and considered trying to talk to him about whatever strange experiment this was. But then he saw him happily pacing the living room, gathering pictures of a supposed assistant to the man John had shot a couple of hours earlier, pinning them to the wall above the sofa. Nothing about his manner could betray what had just happened. John sighed in confusion and decided to go and take a shower instead.

He never truly found out what it had meant to Sherlock. He suspected it was a combination of his curiosity about John's sexuality, a rush of adrenaline, and possibly a need for human contact, which he hardly ever accepted.

Whatever it was, he was glad it had not changed their friendship. Sherlock had accepted Mary gracefully into their life, and had never suggested he was looking for anything more intimate than friendship with John.

John's conception of his own sexuality had changed, though, and he noticed that he was attracted to other men sometimes, as he was to women. However, Mary was all he needed, and she knew everything about him there was to know. She had smiled when he told her about the strange sexual encounters, but had also warned that if something like that were to happen again, Sherlock's days would be numbered.

John was happy to enjoy the excitement Sherlock brought into his life in a platonic way. Right
now though, the old memory of that hurried, heated moment with Sherlock's mouth caused a familiar rush of blood to John's groin. He got up, stuck his head around the door to check if everything was quiet, and walked out into the corridor, hoping to God that he would find Mary alone.
On Friday afternoon class 3B wrote their first exam for Mr Holmes. Everybody had been extremely nervous and studied deep into the night, terrified of his high expectations and scathing criticism.

People kept shifting in their seats, sweating and mumbling to themselves while they scribbled or simply stared blankly at their answering paper.

Sherlock sat at his desk and watched the classroom closely. The pupils had by now understood, that anything they did in this class would be noticed immediately, irrespective of whether Mr Holmes was looking in their direction or not. Therefore, none of them dared to cheat, which made for a very boring exercise for Sherlock's brain.

As he sat silently at the front of the room, Sherlock decided to deduce his pupils. It was the perfect moment, because they were not paying attention to him and he could observe them in a stressful situation, too occupied to repress unwanted facial expressions, ticks, and insecurities.

He noticed how some pupils did not appear stressed at all, and he easily determined the causes for it. Emma, who sat slouched in her chair and was playing carelessly with her pen, didn't care about her marks and therefore the exam didn't bother her. Harry had been stressed when he started, but realised that he couldn't answer the questions. He was leaning forward on the desk, his face buried
in his crossed arms. Dave was grinning at the exam paper. High.

Sherlock made mental notes to talk to them, however dreadful the prospect.

His gaze drifted to Olivia, who was squinting at the paper, rubbing her eyes while she read the questions. She looked particularly tired today and he wondered what had kept her awake last night. It didn't bode well for her test score.

Olivia had some trouble concentrating on the questions, but was relatively sure about her answers. She wrote down whatever she could remember from Mr Holmes’ examples in her notes, and hoped for the best.

She finished a bit earlier than her friends and decided to sneak off before anyone could ask her to come and hang out with them somewhere.

She got up to put the exam on Mr Holmes' desk and when she got there, he all but snatched it out of her hands to place on the pile in front of him. Sometimes Olivia was convinced that somebody with such impatience could never be a good teacher. However, there were moments in class when he explained complex theories with so much conviction and clarity that he wrapped each and every one of them around his finger, ready to soak up more knowledge.

She slung her bag over her shoulder, completely oblivious to the blue-eyed gaze that followed her to the door.

Studying for the exam had taken up all of her time this week, and last night her father had been extremely hard to deal with. He'd gotten upset because he had run out of beer, and she had to take him to the shop in the middle of the night to get some. Olivia would rather have gone alone, but they would have asked for her identification. Her father had been talking loudly and bumped into almost everything in the narrow isles of the 24 hour corner shop. At the counter she had had to enter his pin number because he'd forgotten. The elderly man at the cash register had frowned in disgust as she supported her mumbling father to the exit. It had been extremely embarrassing and when they got home it was already 1 am.

Olivia felt her limbs become heavy as the adrenaline from the exam left her body. She walked through the echoing hallways to 221, hoping to catch some hours of sleep before they would close the building for the weekend. She closed the door behind her, drew the curtains, and laid herself down on a sofa. The cushions were old, but soft and deep, and it took only two minutes for her now relaxed mind to sink into a deep sleep.

Sherlock had the exams marked within an hour after the last depressed pupil had left the room, curious to see if anything had stuck in their heads. As it turned out, most of 3B had passed the exam, although many answers were so poorly structured that Sherlock had urges to use curse words in his feedback.

He managed to contain himself and when he was finished he went to see if John was still in his office, quite excited to show him the positive results, even though he'd never admit to that.

As he approached, he noticed that John was speaking angrily to someone on the phone. When he finished the call the headmaster slammed a fist into his desk in fury.

"How the fuck did this happen?" John stood up and ran a hand through his short hair.

Sherlock looked at him and waited for an explanation.
"The board has decided not to expel Eric Walker. They ignored my advice and all evidence that the kid is a danger to the other pupils. They just don't understand that I am responsible for solving this mess. I have to put Eric back into a classroom with his bloody victim! God, I wouldn't be surprised if Peter moves to a different school. He's a good student! He deserves some peace. I tell you, someone is pulling strings here. I can't fucking believe it."

"Want me to find out who's doing the pulling?" Sherlock asked. A quick phone call to these board members would do the trick. He hated seeing John angry like this, tense shoulders and clenched jaw.

"Ah thanks but no, Sherlock. I have to solve this mess. Better not get involved. I'm afraid we'll have to accept it, but one incident and I'll show him the door again."

While John stayed in his office to call Peter's parents, Sherlock offered to check if the building was empty before they locked up and left.

As he walked through the school, it was dark and quiet, aside from the sound of his polished shoes on the floor. It felt strange for the space that was normally so alive with young people to be so silent. The dark corridors reminded him of the time he almost swallowed a possibly lethal pill from a cabbie years ago. I was the first time John had saved his life and the first time he'd heard the name Moriarty pass someone's lips. Both had happened many times after. More than he would have liked. The professor who had beat him. The one who had conveniently made use of Sherlock's inside demons, luring him into addiction and self-destruction. The chase seemed so far away now, but he couldn't help think about it every day, knowing that the man was alive and walking around freely.

It made his own jaw clench and his fingers itch.

He found Olivia in the darkened storage room, curled up on the sofa and fast asleep. He approached her carefully, not to startle her. She was resting on her side, facing the room, knees drawn up towards her chest, one hand underneath her head and one lying against her collarbone. Her face had a pained expression and he saw her eyebrows move from time to time, but her breathing was deep and slow.

The peaceful sight of her caused the anger he'd felt from his memory of Moriarty to fade away. He was doing better now. He hadn't used in months. There was no Moriarty to chase. John hadn't had to save his life for a while, and he was actually learning to connect to people.

"Olivia."

"Olivia, wake up."

Olivia felt a warm hand on her shoulder, gently rocking her out of her sleep. She desperately didn't want to wake up from that peaceful world, and buried her face in the warm cushion with an agitated moan.

"Come on, open your eyes."

When the realization struck her that it was not Mr Watson's voice calling her, she tensed instantly. Turning her head back to its original position, she saw professor Holmes through her eyelashes, sitting on the coffee table in front of her. He was leaning slightly forward, resting his elbows on his knees. The room was still dark and there was nobody else with him.

Still in a drowsy state, her brain linked the sound of his voice to that of a cello as the deep tones
vibrated through her head.

Slowly she focused and could make out words.

"You will have to get up at some point, or do you want to spend the weekend here?" His tone was impatient but a little amused.

She stretched her limbs with a yawn and opened her eyes properly to find him curiously observing her. She was too sleepy to really care what he saw, though. She pushed herself up to a sitting position, not knowing whether she should be embarrassed or not.

Seeing that she was slightly more conscious, Sherlock stood up and held out a hand. Olivia grasped it to be pulled up, but she did not offer any resistance and when she got to her feet, softly bumped into his chest. Her head lolled and landed against the soft fabric of his shirt and his arm found its way around her shoulders to steady her. She picked up the smell of soap, chalk, and cigarettes. It felt so comfortable and warm that she closed her eyes and almost fell back asleep as she stood there.

When he spoke she could feel the vibrations of his chest against her ear.

"Olivia."

She mumbled something about a cello Sherlock couldn't understand. He looked down and saw her eyes close again.

A strange sensation took hold of him. The fact that she didn't feel the need to wake up convinced him that she felt quite comfortable in his arms. He felt pride at winning at least part of her trust. What was strange was that he noticed he didn't mind her closeness. There was none of that itchy agitation he felt when most people touched him. No sudden need to walk away. He actually had to suppress the urge to press her against him tighter.

Instead, he smiled.

"Seriously, I'm not carrying you."

She sighed and lifted her head up from his chest to balance herself on her feet.

"Good."

Sherlock took hold of her arm to make sure she wouldn't stumble, and they walked downstairs.

John had just finished his call when they passed his office. He saw Olivia with messy hair, looking a bit dazed, and knew all too well where Sherlock had found her. Usually it was him who woke her up before he left for home. He noticed that it happened more often these days, compared to before the holidays, and made a mental note to try and reach her father again.

"Thanks, Sherlock. Olivia, is everything alright?" he asked as he locked the door to his office.

"Yes, fine," she said as she stifled another yawn.

"Good. Now go and get your coat. I'm locking up. Do you need a ride home?"

Olivia's eyes opened a bit wider and she froze for a moment. Then she said, "No thank you, I like walking. It's not far."

She turned around to get her coat, regrettably leaving the warmth of Mr Holmes' side.
"Should we tell her about Eric?" Sherlock wondered when she was gone.

"Peter didn't take it too well. It might be better to prepare her before she's confronted with the boys on Monday", John agreed.

However, before they could warn Olivia about anything, they heard the door at the front entrance shut and saw the girl wrapped up in her coat walking quickly towards the gate, into the windy street.

"Too late", Sherlock said with a shrug of his shoulders. "I'll take that ride, though."

~

Olivia spent most of that Saturday in bed. Normally she would get up around 9 am, shower, make some breakfast, do the dishes, tidy up the house, do the laundry, buy as many groceries she could carry to last the week, and cook dinner. Sundays she tried to reserve for homework as much as she could.

But today she just needed sleep. The week's events had been more tiring than ever, with too many things to worry about and too many things to be excited about.

She cocooned in her sheets and closed herself off from the outside world. The warm, soft fabric reminded her of Mr Holmes’ chest. Even though she had been half asleep, she could remember his steady breathing, the warmth of his body around her, and his calm voice that had hummed gently to her. She blushed at the thought that she might have said things to him in her sleep. She was not even sure.

Mr Holmes was still a complete mystery. Very often he was strict and harsh to his pupils, annoyed about every mistake they made and making very clear that their brain cells were nothing more than sawdust compared to his. In those moments he was like an eagle spreading its wings, high in the air, aiming for defenceless—and often actually trembling—prey.

At other times he seemed to enjoy their company, smiling when they tried to counter his arguments in class, or making jokes (usually at the expense of Mr Anderson, which nobody minded). It was only a few times that she had seen him act truly kind and gentle, and that was when he was alone with her. It made her want to trust him.

However, she wondered if his kindness was genuine, or if it was just because he was supposed to keep an eye on her, especially now he was her mentor. She didn't want to lie to herself and create a false sense of safety. There was absolutely no doubt in her mind that he would tell on her if he got too close to the truth.

Still, she felt a thrill when she thought about his gaze on her legs when he had come to get his furniture. It was that certain look men sometimes have when a woman catches their attention. That look she recognized from her dad when her mother had worn one of those pretty dresses for her evening job. Her mother's dresses were never very short or very tight, but they had shown her figure. She was a folk singer, so she fitted her clothes to that genre, often wearing earthy colours or flowery prints. She'd looked beautiful in whatever she wore, but her dad had always seemed to touch and kiss her more when she put on a dress like that.

Anthony got the same look when she smiled at him, or just before he kissed her cheek, which happened quite often now. His stares excited her and raised her curiosity about what would happen if she kissed him properly.
Nevertheless, when that tall man with those scrutinizing eyes had looked at her in *that* way, it had sent a shiver down her spine that instantly hardened her nipples. It had never happened to her before, and when he'd asked her to stay in his office half an hour later, she hadn't felt it again.

Ultimately she decided it would probably not be wise to consider her teacher in such a sensual light, and that Anthony was a much safer and uncomplicated person to focus her attentions on.

She dozed in bed like this for hours, while she heard her father stumble about downstairs, having to take care of his own breakfast, trying to find his shoes, going to the corner shop, coming back with several bottles, switching on the telly.

Sometime in the afternoon Olivia felt her stomach start to grumble and decided it was time to get up. She tiptoed to the bathroom and carefully locked the door. Earlier that week, her father had suddenly appeared in the doorway while she was showering. He had stared at her, probably unaware he was doing so. Immediately she'd had tried to cover herself and yelled at him to go away, but it had taken him a while to realise that he was doing something inappropriate. He'd looked embarrassed, apologised, and had hurriedly left.

Her dad didn't mention his transgression later, but she noticed that he was embarrassed so decided not to confront him. She did feel entitled to a bit of privacy, so from then on reminded herself to always lock the bathroom door.

~

On Monday she felt a little bit more energised from all the sleep she had had, and walked to school with a very quiet Peter. His shoulders were slumped and he didn't take his eyes off his feet. After some probing on her part he told her that Mr Watson had called to say that Eric had not been expelled and that all of the boys who attacked him would be back at school today. Peter was visibly afraid.

Olivia couldn't believe it. Mr Watson had basically promised not to let Eric come back to school when she had talked to him. Immediately, many questions popped up in her mind. Would they be in their class again? Had Eric learned anything from his suspension, or only that he could actually get away with terrorising his peers? Would he go after Peter the moment he saw him? She knew Peter was worrying about the same things.

When they arrived at school, Ms Donovan, Peter's mentor, approached him and asked him to come with her for a chat. He gladly did, anything to postpone his confrontation with Eric.

Olivia was met by a chaste kiss on the cheek from Anthony. He looked handsome as ever and they held hands as they walked to class. She figured that all their classmates would think that she was his girlfriend by now. It wasn't actually clear to her if that was the case, but she didn't mind the thought.

As they entered the classroom she immediately spotted Billy and Eric sitting in the front row. Billy looked at his desk and seemingly did his best to disappear in his seat. Eric eyed her with a smug, arrogant expression, indicating that nothing had changed about his attitude. Her eyes flicked from Billy, to Eric, to Mr Holmes, who was sitting behind his desk with his arms crossed over his chest, sporting a positively murderous expression.

Sherlock felt disgusted that he couldn't simply refuse to teach specimens like Eric Walker, and couldn't bear to watch Olivia's face as she noticed Peter's assaulter.

He'd been able to turn his anger over the board's decision into something productive this weekend.
He had asked John for the key to the school and moved some stuff into his new office. Most of the things he didn't really need at school, but which made it feel like it was his office and helped him think. In other words, his office now was a tiny version of 221B Baker Street's sitting room, including books, rug, armchair, and skull.

The activity had also given him some inspiration for a new experiment, prompting him to call Molly on Sunday. It had taken a long phone conversation and many promises to persuade her to give him a severed arm. Molly Hooper was not as love-struck with him as she used to be, but she still had weak spots.

Another long weekend survived.

~

Olivia didn't realise that that she had been holding Anthony's hand the whole time, until she let go of it as she got to her desk. She sat down next to Rose, who was staring at the back of Eric's head and had a similarly hateful expression on her face as Mr Holmes.

The class started with Holmes handing them back their marked exams. Nobody had expected him to have them marked this quickly, and the room tensed immediately as the pupils mentally prepared for a disappointment. Mr Holmes passed the tables, dropping the sheets of paper without saying a word. As they read their results one by one, the tension eased a bit, because most people had passed.

Olivia was satisfied with her B mark, but after reading his comments she was less so. Almost every answer had grammatical or structural corrections that didn't all count for the result, but made the whole thing look like a failure. He wrote things like "Absolutely ridiculous", "WRONG", and "Have you even read the question??"

Lucy, sitting in front of her, chuckled. She turned around and showed Olivia a comment that simply said "BORING" in angry red letters.

However, all four of them had passed, and Rose had even managed to get an A-, the highest mark in the class.

The rest of the time was spent asking questions about the exam. Some pupils tried to get Sherlock to change his mind about their mark by arguing for the brilliance of their theories, which only made him grumpy. Towards the end of the class he threatened to lower their mark if they didn't stop bothering him with nonsense.

"Keep the noise to a minimum when you leave" he snapped at them when time was up. He was about to ask Billy Mitchell to stay behind to have a chat about his absences, but noticed that the boy had already sprinted out the door. Sherlock resolved to approach him at a later time.

After class, Olivia, Peter and Rose were at the lockers to exchange their science books for English, when Billy came up to them. He was hesitant, fumbling with his hands and not looking them in the eye. They waited for him to start speaking, which he was hardly able to do.

"Hi. Ehm… I… I just… I didn't mean to… I'm sorry for…" he mumbled. "…didn't want anyone to get hurt… I'm sorry." He glanced up to see their reaction and was relieved to see neutral faces instead of hateful ones.

"Thanks," Peter said.

"Maybe it's better not to listen to everything Eric says," Rose suggested with an edge to her voice.
Olivia saw the boy panic a little.

"At least you're sorry," she said to him.

He nodded remorsefully. "I am. I swear."

As he said it, Eric's loud voice disturbed their conversation and Billy visibly winced.

"What the fuck are you doing, talking to these fags?"

Eric was walking towards them with broadened shoulders and an intimidatingly angry face. He resembled a big aggressive dog zoning in on a cat. When he reached them he gave Billy a hard punch in the shoulder. The smaller boy was almost blown to the ground and whimpered in pain.

"Don't ever talk to them again. Or I'll tell your dad you're one of them, got it?"

Billy quickly nodded and didn't dare look at any of them as he followed his best friend around the corner.

The next day it became clear exactly what kind of impossible position Billy was in.

~

Olivia and Rose were hurrying to their maths class on the first floor, when they saw Eric kicking a door, which was shaking in its hinges. It was the broom closet next to the boys' toilets.

"You are so dead Mitchell!" He kept kicking and hitting the door with flat hands, causing a racket. "Do you always screw over your friends? Do you think your dad will keep you alive when he hears what I have to say? Might as well tell him that his son is a fucking gay, too!"

As there continued to be no answer to his abuse, Eric gave one last kick against the door and stormed off in the direction of the stairs.

Olivia and Rose approached the broom closet and knocked softly. The only thing that betrayed Billy's presence behind it was the sob he wasn't able to silence. Olivia tried to sound as gentle as possible when she spoke.

"Billy?"

Silence.

"Are you alright?"

No response.

"This is Olivia and Rose, can we come in? Eric's left."

After a while, the door opened slightly. Billy had removed the broom from under the door handle, which he had put there to barricade himself against the raging Eric. He was sitting on the floor, cross-legged with his back against the wall.

He didn't look up but Olivia could see he was crying. She stepped into the small, dark space to sit down next to him while Rose stayed at the door. It smelled of dust and detergent.

"Why is Eric so angry with you?" she asked.
When Billy spoke his voice sounded choked.

"He found out I said some things in my… my statement for Mr W-Watson about him and Holmes."

"Well… was it true?"

"What?" He rubbed his red eyes with the palms of his hands.

"What you said, was it the truth?"

"Yes."

"Then you shouldn't be in any trouble. You can go and talk to Mr Watson if you like. He's nice."

Billy shook his head furiously.

"No! You don't get it. Our dads are friends. They told us what we were supposed to say to Mr Watson."

"They told you to lie??"  

Billy nodded and Olivia didn't know what to say. It was unbelievable to her that a parent would tell their child to lie about something so important. She lied for her dad, but he never told her to do so.

It was silent for a little while.

"If Eric tells my dad all those things, he'll kill me."

Olivia frowned, again not able to believe that a parent could do such a thing.

"I'm sure he won't."

She saw him look away and shake his head.

"You don't know that."

"What do you mean?"

Billy buried his face in his hands and whispered something that made the hairs on Olivia's neck rise.

Sherlock was at his desk, marking essays written by class 5A. Not the brainiest of groups, it became apparent. It exasperated him to think that all these people would be released into society soon. He would recommend 24-hour supervision, based on what some of them had written. His comments were getting more and more rude as he worked his way through the pile. He was relieved to hear someone knock at his door, hoping to be provided with some distraction.

He was surprised to see Rose appear in the doorway. She looked relieved to find him in his office.

"Miss Edeson."

"Sir, could you help? We ehm… we found Billy Mitchell in a broom closet. I think he needs help. You're his mentor, so I thought-"

"Does he need medical attention?" Sherlock interrupted while getting up.

"No, just… something's wrong… with his dad."
While Rose took him to the aforementioned broom closet, she gave him a short recap of what had happened.

Sherlock had gone through Mr Burke's notes on Billy. He had recorded an increasing number of absences of the boy. Burke had not, however, asked Billy about it, called his parents, or raised the issue with John, which even Sherlock knew was lazy.

He regretted not talking to Billy yesterday. The boy had moved with difficulty and he could tell there was something wrong with him. He shouldn't have let him go that easily.

When he opened the door to the closet, he saw Olivia sitting next to Billy on the floor, squeezed in between lots of cleaning supplies. She was sitting with her knees drawn up, stroking his arm as his shoulders shook from crying.

Olivia saw Mr Holmes' tall, silhouetted frame appear as the light fell in. She expected him to tell them to get up and come to his office, but he surprised her once again.

"May I come in?" he asked.

Billy didn't respond, and Olivia didn't think it was up to her to answer. Sherlock didn't wait and stepped inside to sit down opposite them, folding his legs in the tiny space that was still available between Billy, Olivia and the cleaning supplies. He felt ridiculously big for the closet, but guessed that it would be easier to get Billy to talk in this self-created safe place than it would be in his office.

He let his eyes get accustomed to the dark and observed that Billy was not the only one crying. Olivia too, had tears running down her face.

"Why are you crying?" he asked, not able to disguise his surprise.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I feel sad for Billy."

Sherlock nodded. He knew people did that sometimes; cry for other people's pain. He figured you'd be crying all the time if you let yourself feel so much. Still, he knew he needed to try and imagine what Billy must be thinking if he wanted to get through to him.

"Billy."

Billy looked up, and saw that the person calling his name was not the angry man who had been scowling at him in class yesterday, but the face of someone who was genuinely interested in why he was crying.

"You know that Mr Burke was fired, and that I am your mentor now."

Billy swallowed and nodded.

"I would like to know what's upsetting you."

The boy looked at a bucket that was standing in the corner, avoiding Holmes' gaze.

Sherlock could see from Olivia's face that Billy had told her something, but it would be wrong to ask her to speak for him.

"Olivia. You and Rose should go to your class. If they ask why you're late, refer them to me."

She nodded and got up and smoothed out her skirt, careful not to step on anyone as she made her
way to the door. She was well aware of the battle that Billy was fighting right now. He had been trying to cover up the evidence for God knew how long that it would be extremely hard to give it up so suddenly. He desperately wanted help but was afraid of what would happen to his family.

As they made their way to class Olivia hoped that Mr Holmes would treat Billy just as kindly as he had treated her.

~

"Can you tell me why you don't come to school very often?"

"I get ill," the boy squeaked in the semi-dark.

"Yes, most of the times you were absent your mother has called in sick for you. But you're not really ill, are you?"

Sherlock saw how the boy dreaded what was coming. Everything about his body language confirmed his previous suspicions.

"Look, Billy, I think I know… what is happening to you. I know you are in pain right at this moment."

Billy looked as if he was about to bolt for the door.

"You don't have to tell me everything. I just need to know for certain who it is… Your dad right?"

Sherlock tilted his head and traced a finger through the dust on the floor, trying to ease the tension.

"I-I can't…" Billy couldn't get the words out, and Sherlock saw tears form in his eyes again. He knew he needed to be careful.

"You must be frightened of him, which I understand. Can you tell me how often it happens?"

"W-weekends… mostly." Billy shut his eyes tightly, hugging his knees with his arms, wishing he could stop time so this wouldn't have to happen. He wanted to speak, but his father's hands had silenced him.

Sherlock rested the back of his head against the cold wall.

"Does your mother know about what he does?"

"Y-yes butsh-she…you can't-… he will…h-hurt her."

"I understand. So he hurts the both of you?"

Billy was crying properly now, scared to death, unable to answer his question.

For a while it was quiet in the small room, only Billy's hitched breathing breaking the silence once in a while. Sherlock watched the dust particles dance in the narrow beam of light that came through the crack in the door. He tried to think of a way to get the information he needed.

"Can I see your right arm?" he finally asked.

The boy looked up at him again, and for a moment Sherlock expected him to run. But it turned out to have been the right question.
Billy slowly unbuttoned the cuff of his shirt, and started rolling up his sleeve. It turned out that it was easier for him to show than tell.

Underneath the white fabric, his skin was torn in several places, he had bruises on his wrists and two marks which, as far as Sherlock could see in the low lighting, had the shape of cigar burns. He didn't want to imagine what the rest of the boy's body looked like, and cursed himself for not deducing this the first time Billy had walked into class with that limp.

His mind started racing. The next step was to make sure more people knew about this. Gather evidence. He needed to get him out of this closet.

"That looks painful, Billy. I think it would be good if Mrs Watson looked at those cuts for you."

Billy looked hesitant. "Are you going to tell anyone?"

"I have to, Billy. And even if I didn't have to... we will make sure this doesn't happen again."

"No you can't! Please don't. My dad won't stop. Ever." The boy was practically begging him and Sherlock felt a strange sadness spread in his stomach.

"Of course we can make him stop. And stop him from hurting your mum, too. We should do that, don't you think?"

Deep down, Billy knew that this was the only right thing to do, and for the first time there was a grownup offering to help him. While part of his brain was screaming no, he nodded yes to Mr Holmes, who promptly helped him up.

He brought Billy to Mary's office before he could change his mind. She took him into the exam room and was extremely gentle with him.

While she started to examine the boy's arms, Sherlock left and went to find John, who basically lost it when he heard.

"I've spoken to that man multiple times! He even came to the last soccer tournament to fucking cheer for the boy. I bloody never noticed a thing! How did... I can't... Jesus Christ." John ranted while he paced his office.

"It's another case in which Burke failed, John, not you. You can't know everything about everyone. People lie. All the time."

John wanted to see Billy, so they went back to Mary's office. They stepped in just as she was finished the examination. She told the boy to get dressed and wait in the exam room for a moment. When she came into the office her calm exterior faded and she looked as if she was about to cry.

"How bad is it?" John asked. His voice strained a bit.

"Oh John, he-... his whole body is covered in bruises and burns. His father has been using hard objects to beat him with. We should take him to hospital."

Again, Sherlock felt his own sadness for the boy in his stomach, but tried to concentrate on his hatred for Mr Mitchell instead.

He turned to John.

"You have to call Lestrade. They will need to take pictures of his injuries. He can't go home either,
not until they've arrested the father." He rattled to him as he was preparing to leave.

"Sherlock-..." John tried.

"You should ask him if you can reach his mother somewhere without her husband knowing. I will go to their house and confront the man."

John stopped and grabbed Sherlock's arm to get his full attention.

"Sherlock, no. I need to handle this and you need to stay here. You will have to trust the police to arrest him. You've done brilliantly, thank you, but this is where it ends for now. I appreciate you wanting to help, I really do."

He paused and looked him in the eye.

"I get the feeling that part of you just wants to run into danger. I'm not letting you take that risk. You're doing really well here, and I need you to keep doing that."

Sherlock was ready to snap something rude back and storm out, but realised his friend was partly right, so he controlled himself and just nodded.

"Good, I'll call in to let you know what's going on. You have two other classes to teach. Also, I need you to take over and show a new staff member around, if you don't mind. Finally found a theatre teacher. His name's Richard Brook and he'll be here at 4 pm."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
More chapters coming soon.
Sherlock understood why John didn't let him come along. Billy needed reliable people to handle this, not somebody looking for an adrenaline rush, and he knew that at the moment he was more looking for the latter than the first. It would be unfair to the kid. So, he decided not to be difficult and give the new bloke the bloody tour.

When Sherlock went to fetch him, about 15 minutes after 4pm, he was seated in the little waiting area with Ms Stevenson. The rather young man in a nice suit gave him a friendly smile. He got up and extended his hand.

"Hi, you must be Sherlock Holmes. Richard Brook. Nice to meet you."

Sherlock shook his hand firmly and sized him up.

Irish, 32 years old, gay, professor, expensive car, two cats, single, Bee Gees fan, highly intelligent, and rather attractive, if one believes in conventional standards of beauty.

"John told me he had to accompany one of the pupils to hospital. Very tragic", Richard said in an Irish drawl.

"Yes, it certainly is." Sherlock started walking along the corridor.

"He's one of your mentor pupils, isn't he? Must really have some trust in you to open up like that," Richard said to his back as he followed.

Sherlock looked back at him. "Did John tell you all of that?"

"Oh yes, he speaks about you a lot. The times we've met, he did. You must be good friends." Richard had caught up and said it with the slightest twinkle in his eyes.

"Yes."

Sherlock led the slightly shorter man through the school and showed him the essential rooms including the big theatre room, a place he'd only been once himself when John had given him a tour. Richard seemed rather indifferent to the space but kept asking Sherlock questions about the pupils, his teaching methods, his previous work. Sherlock answered politely but minimally. He knew better than to open up to strangers, especially intelligent ones. It irritated him that the man was so completely comfortable and relaxed in his surroundings; something Sherlock still couldn't completely manage after two months.

He could see why John had hired Richard, though. He was gentle, kind, and intelligent and seemed to know a lot about kids. The slight quirk of his mouth created a constant dreamy smile on his face, which Sherlock guessed would make him very approachable for the pupils.

Lastly, he showed Jim his office, which was a smaller and a couple of doors from his own.
"Lovely. Thank you so much, Sherlock. 'Twas a pleasure to meet you. Looking forward to seeing a lot more of you", Richard said with a genuine smile.

Sherlock straightened his shoulders.

"Right."

He gave a curt nod and walked out.

The man elicited a strange feeling in Sherlock. Richard had a pleasant demeanour, very well versed, attractive, one might say, but he could sense a hidden agenda.

Later, when he was back in his own office, he came to the realisation that Brook had been flirting with him.

~

"Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Lu-and-Lihiv. Happy birthday to yooouuu!"

Together, Lucy and Olivia blew out the single candle their friends had stuck into the pink frosted cupcake. They had gathered with Rose, Anthony and Peter in room 221 before classes started, to celebrate Lucy's birthday, which was today, and Olivia's, which would be on Saturday. Both of them turned fifteen.

Lucy's mum had baked cupcakes for her daughter to share, and Rose had brought the candle. Now they were happily squeezed together on the sofas, discussing Lucy's party, which would be happening on Saturday night.

"My parents have booked a long weekend away to Mallorca, and completely trust me and Dylan to behave until they get back," she grinned. "We've been stacking up booze in his room since the holidays!"

Anthony smiled. "You two are wicked, and I like it. Nobody else’s parents would leave them alone long enough to do something like this, yours are so bloody easy!"

"My dad thinks that buying me a horse will keep the boys away for another 5 years. Obviously he's wrong," Lucy said with a grin.

Olivia sat there listening happily, eating her pink-frosted cupcake, with Anthony pressed closely against her side. It was fun sharing Lucy's anticipation about the party, but she also knew she wouldn't be able to go. Her father would never let her go out alone at night.

Rose frowned at Lucy. "What will your parents do when they find out? They're bound to notice something, aren't they?"

"They're not very keen on details. And if they do find out we had a party, we will make sure they don't find out about the alcohol. I don't think they will punish us just for inviting friends. Provided we don't set anything on fire," she giggled.

They noticed somebody fumble with the lock. Mr Watson's voice could be heard through the door. "In here you'll find everything we have in terms of furniture. Let me know if you need anything else. Office equipment or the like."

"Thanks John, I really appreciate it," said a man with a strong Irish accent. The door opened and a
good-looking gentleman came in. His eyebrows raised in surprise when he noticed the group of pupils.

He smiled.

"Oh hello. Am I interrupting a party?"

He didn't seem suspicious at all as to what they were doing. They were suspicious as to why he was there, though.

Five pairs of eyes narrowed at him.

"Hello to you. Are you our new teacher?" Lucy asked.

"I am indeed. Richard Brook, pleasure to meet you. I've been told this is the place to be for furniture, and celebrations, apparently. Good to know."

He got a few hesitant smiles at that.

"We're in class 3B," said Olivia.

"Ah, great! Wednesdays and Fridays, I believe? I won't start teaching until next week, but make sure you have done the scheduled reading by then." He smiled and winked at Olivia, who tensed for a moment as she thought about the pile of reading she had neglected over past couple of weeks.

Rose, pokerfaced, was the next one to speak.

"Well Mr Brook, it's nice to meet you too. Just to make some things clear in advance: yes, this is the place to be for furniture, but we don't do moving. We are busy."

Mr Brook had a glint in his eye as he listened to Rose. "Oh don't you worry young lady! I wasn't planning to use you as my slaves, just because I have the power to fail you", he chuckled.

"Will you be directing the school play?" Peter asked.

"As a matter of fact I will. I'll let you vote on which play you will perform, and we will discuss that in class at some point. But I believe there is the Christmas performance we have to worry about first, though."

Mr Brook turned and looked at the chaotic pile of abandoned furniture for a moment.

"I'll help you." Anthony said, and went over to him.

"Lovely, thank you." Richard beamed at him.

Together they started carrying a desk out of the room.

When they were gone, Lucy whistled through her teeth. "I just discovered I LOVE Irish accents."

"Gay," Rose drawled, settling back into the sofa.

"No! Don't spoil it! Let me admire him in peace," Lucy complained.

"Oh God please, he could not be more obviously gay. Peter should be the one to get all excited."

Peter, who was sat next to her, blushed.
"And, by the way," Rose went on, "You can still admire him in peace. There's just no chance that he will try to 'abuse his position of power' with you, as you –disturbingly- seem to fantasize about”.

"You've been wrong before!" Lucy went on.

"That was before John got off with Mary! And I still think he's bi," she huffed.

"Yes, just like Donovan is bi, and Holmes is bi, and every other person you can't figure out, is bi."

"They are! And Holmes is… complicated. He doesn't comply to institutionalised categories of sexual orientation, which is quite admirable."

"Your opinion of him seems to have altered very quickly since last week. I clearly remember you calling him a tosser. Could it have something to do with the A he gave you on the exam?" Lucy mocked.

"How do you know all that, anyway? He might be married," Peter wondered.

"He doesn't wear a ring," Olivia contributed unexpectedly.

Three heads turned towards her.

"Well someone has been paying attention", Rose said, smiling wickedly.

Olivia blushed. "Don't look at me like that, most people think he's… nice looking," she defended herself.

"And what is happening between you and Anthony these days?" Rose asked.

Olivia was thankful for the change of subject.

"Nothing really. He says he wants to kiss me, though," she said thoughtfully.

"Do you want to?" Rose was studying her intently.

"I think so. I just don't know when or where, or how," she sighed.

"It's not very complicated Liv. Just stick your tongue in his mouth and he'll be happy. You're fifteen already, you should get some experience before boys start asking for more than kisses", Lucy said and stuck out her tongue.

Olivia laughed. "Stop it! I'm sure it will happen soon. Anthony has been very sweet."

They were laughing at Lucy's imitation of Anthony gaping at Olivia when the door opened forcefully and Mr Holmes strode into the room.

They're laughs faded.

Olivia noticed that his aristocratic features gave him a regal look when he was angry. A shiver ran down her spine.

She saw his eyes drift over the cakes and the candle on the coffee table.

"You are 15 minutes late to class. Don't you have a watch?"

No one dared to reply.
He jerked his head as a sign for them to come with him, seemingly uninterested as to what they had been doing.

They started getting up and gathering their belongings.

"We weren't looking at the time, sorry sir!" Lucy said cheerfully as she approached him with the box of cupcakes.

"It's mine and Olivia's birthday this week, so my mum made these. Would you like one?" she held them up to him.

Most pupils would not have dared approach Mr Holmes like that when he was in such a foul mood.

The tall man looked down at Lucy's smiling face and then into the box. He grimaced at the alarming shade of pink icing.

"No. Now get to biology quickly or I will take a point off your next exam marks. Try not to poison yourselves with that on the way".

They moved passed him to get to the door quickly. He took another look at Lucy from behind and snapped "And just because it happens to be your birthday, Miss Griffin, it doesn't mean you are relieved from having to comply to the dress rules of this school."

The birthday girl looked over her shoulder innocently, but then sighed dramatically and unfolded her skirt at the waist to lengthen it.

As Olivia walked towards Mr Holmes to get through the door, she looked up at him and her eyes met his icy stare for a second. She quickly averted her gaze. As she passed him, she felt him follow closely behind and the touch of his fingers on her lower back. His hand lingered there for a few seconds, giving her goose bumps.

Even though he had hardly touched her, she could feel the warmth of his hand on her back long after she had sat down in biology class.

~

As promised, on Thursday Sherlock had prepared another of his practical examples for class 3B. He was just about to show the police report when someone knocked at the door.

"What do you want?" he snapped as Richard Brook entered the room, his hands held up as if to apologise for intruding.

"Good morning! Mr Holmes, if you don't mind, I would love to sit in on your class. From what I've heard it can be very impressive and I thought I might be inspired by your teaching methods. I'd understand if you prefer me to leave. Some teacher's get uncomfortable when observed by their peers". Richard gave him a warm smile.

Sherlock peered at him for a moment. He had some nerve, that man. It was clever to ask this in front of his entire class. Refusing would definitely make him look either rude or insecure compared to the already popular Mr Brook. Normally he didn't care at all what the pupils might think of him, but he felt a strange competitiveness towards Richard. The only course of action was to let him watch.

"Sit at the back, don't interrupt."
"Thanks! I'm sure observing you will be very inspiring."

There were a few giggles at that comment, which died out immediately as Sherlock cleared his throat.

Richard greeted some of the pupils he'd already met as he went to find a seat in the back row.

"Mr Garrison, turn down the lights."

Sherlock returned to the projector to start the slides when someone else interrupted him.

"Why hasn't Billy been at school since Monday first period?" It was Joan who had asked, and she seemed to have asked something the entire class was curious about.

"Eric Walker is still here, so why not him?"

Sherlock had not expected such an interest in the boy from the other pupils, but figured he would need to give some sort of explanation for their classmate's sudden disappearance.

"Billy's absence has nothing to do with what happened here at school. It’s a personal issue and he will be back as soon as possible," he said, hoping they would accept it.

"What's wrong, then?"

He sighed. "Stop being nosy, Miss Davies. Trust me that the situation is under control. You can ask Billy himself when he gets back. Or maybe you shouldn't, come to think of it. Anyway, Let's get started."

Billy and his mother had been told to stay at home for a while. His father had lost it completely when they had come to arrest him. He had threatened to kill his wife. He was locked up and the investigation was running. Billy refused to leave his mother's side and they had agreed that he could stay home for a while, until things calmed down.

Olivia and Rose kept their mouths shut. They hadn't told anyone about what Billy had said in the broom closet, knowing he wouldn't want them to. Olivia knew what it was like when everyone knew about your personal tragedy, and she was happy that people didn't give her those pitiful looks anymore, like they had when she had first returned to school. She tried not to show her grief in public, so that it wouldn't be the first thing they thought about when they saw her. She imagined Billy wanted the same.

However, Olivia was completely unprepared for what she would be confronted with today.

Sherlock started the projector and switched it to the first image. The now familiar form of a police report was shown.

"Woman, mid thirties, stabbed to death...."

That was all she heard. All other noises in the room faded away as she stared at the image. For a moment she was afraid a picture of her mother would appear, covering the entire wall. Her heart started beating furiously in her chest and her lips pressed together.

The picture that appeared was not of her mother. Even though the woman's face wasn't visible she knew immediately that it was not. She let out a gasp of air, hardly audibly through the chatter that had erupted in the classroom.
Sherlock showed the type of knife that was used to cause the wound pattern on the woman. He let them figure out how it was possible that the victim had lost hardly any blood.

Olivia didn't pay any attention. All she saw was her mother. The stab wounds on this woman were ugly and brutal, with ragged skin at the edges, as if someone had turned the blade while pulling it out. Never had she seen her mother's wounds. Her father hadn't let her. She had no idea of what it had looked like, and had kept an undamaged version of her mother in her memory. Until today.

She imagined the knife slicing through skin, through her lungs, coughing up blood. Her shoulders started trembling as she stared at the image that had reappeared on the wall for the class to examine. She didn't notice Rose raising her hand, or Mr Holmes approaching her desk. The hand on her shoulder pulled her from her panicked visions.

She startled and looked up. His face was hazy and that was when she realised her tears.

Sherlock had known when he saw how Olivia's eyes fixated on the image and Rose's expression of warning as she raised her hand. He hadn't known before. It was not stated in her file and he cursed himself for not asking anyone. He also cursed the fact that Richard Brook was watching so closely.

"Do you want to go outside?" he asked softly. Olivia nodded.

He let her gather her things and followed her through the door, which he closed, ignoring the excited chatter of the class.

"Olivia- look at me for a moment- I'm sorry this happened. I should have known about your mother."

She didn't respond to him, just looked at the wall.

"Will you wait for me in 221?" he asked, and he saw her head bob in a tiny nod. Then she quickly turned away from him and literally ran towards the staircase.

Sherlock refused to look at Richard when he re-entered the room, but felt his inquisitive gaze. He continued what was left of the lesson, but was second-guessing whether he should just leave and see if Olivia was alright. He had not meant to upset her in any way, but it surprised him that it bothered him so much. Normally he was unsympathetic to anyone who couldn't handle a relatively 'normal' crime scene such as this, especially without the scent. He had a suspicion that his current uncertainty had something to do with sentiment, or even worse, empathy.

He was the first to leave when the bell finally rang. Leaping up the stairs, hoping to somehow reverse the events of the last hour.

He still had the key of room 221 John had given him, and although he wasn't sure it was allowed, used it to lock the door behind him, suspecting there would be worried classmates looking to see Olivia. He wanted her to himself for a moment.

She was sitting on the sofa with her legs drawn up, fumbling with a handkerchief. Her eyes were swollen and red, and he felt another pang of guilt in his stomach as she glared at him. Silently, he sat down next to her.

"Did Mr Watson not tell you?" Her voice sounded a bit raw from crying.

"He didn't, and somehow the details also didn't make it into your file, which I have read, of course. Did Mr Burke not know?"
"Never asked me."

Sherlock sat down next to her.

"Well… I would say that he screwed up, but I didn't ask either, did I?"

"You mean you screwed up?" her mouth formed a tiny smile at that.

"I'm afraid I'll have to admit to that."

She was quiet while she thought.

"You were very nice to Billy, so I think that makes up for it," she decided. He didn't say anything but she saw he was relieved to be forgiven.

For a while they sat together in silence, and her thoughts drifted back to the stabbed woman.

"I didn't know it looked like that," she said, without looking at him. "I never saw it".

"It doesn't always look like that… Would you rather not know?"

"I don't know. I want to understand what happened to her. I just--…" her voice broke "…I don't want to forget the way she was... before."

She turned her head towards him now, resting it on her knees. He was leaning with his side against the backrest, his body turned towards her.

"You want a pleasant memory of your mother. I guess that is perfectly understandable. I'm sorry I ruined it."

"Do you have any pictures of her?"

She nodded. "She was very beautiful..." Her breath hitched and new tears started coming, which she tried to get rid of by rubbing her eyes with her palm.

"I can imagine she was."

He could imagine. Olivia's features were lovely, and he knew she didn't get them from her father. He had a sudden urge to run his hands through her hair. It was remarkable how she elicited these urges in him. It was a bit like how a good song would make you want to tap your fingers.

There was another silence before her soft voice cut through the dry air in the room.

"I wish she wasn't dead."

Even though she stated the obvious, her hardly audible whisper reached right into him and made him wish the same. He stretched out his arm and moved his head to beckon her towards him and to his surprise, she did.

Olivia put her trust in him completely. She shifted her legs underneath her and scooted over so that her side was resting against him. His arm fell around her shoulder protectively. Carefully, she placed her head on his chest.

"Sometimes I cry a lot. I'm sorry," she sniffed.

He shushed her, to let her know he didn't mind. He couldn't help it now and let his hand stroke her
hair. It felt soft and ticklish between his fingers. The soothing gesture calmed her, and once again she was astonished that her teacher could be so kind and patient. She listened to his heartbeat for a while, until her eyes slowly closed.

Sherlock enjoyed the feeling of being able to soothe another human being and felt her breathing slow down until she was asleep. The warmth of her body and the soft cushions felt rather comfortable, and slowly followed her into unconsciousness.

He never heard the key turn in the lock, nor the footsteps coming towards them. He never felt the fingertips trace along his exposed neck, and his brain didn't register the soft chuckle in his ear.

"She's weakened you, Sherlock Holmes. And I am going to see you dance."
First kiss

What John found when he unlocked the door to 221 would be forever engraved in his mind.

Sherlock was asleep, leaning heavily in the backrest of the couch, his head lolled a bit to the side and his arm was wrapped around Olivia, who was snuggled into a tiny ball next to him. His left hand was resting securely on her upper arm.

John couldn't believe that this was the same Sherlock who cringed when people touched him, who mocked every kind of sentiment, and who had refused, just weeks before, to engage with any pupil outside the classroom.

He knew his friend had been trying harder after the incident with Peter. His help to Billy was an indication that Sherlock was doing rather well. John, however, had no idea that he had managed to gain Olivia's trust so completely. Of course, he wouldn't describe this as the most professional way to deal with upset pupils, but it made him feel very proud. And it also made him melt a bit inside.

He stood there for a while, knowing he would have to wake them up but hesitant to disturb them. Both had classes to attend and John was quite certain that if anyone discovered them like this, there would be questions.

"Being indecisive, John?" Sherlock's deep sleepy voice startled him.

"I was just thinking that you should get your arse off that sofa, Mr Holmes. Did something happen during your class? Someone told me there was a disturbance."

Sherlock finally opened his eyes. "Let me guess… Richard Brook told you he was very concerned?"

"Uh no… he just told me you might need help in here. What happened?"

"I might have made a misjudgement as to what is appropriate for 15 year olds to see." Sherlock said, trying to look innocent.

"What did you show?"

"A stabbed woman."

John eye roll was spectacular. "Oh for f-…"

"For your information" Sherlock cut in, raising his right hand. "I didn't know how Olivia's mother died. You could have given me a heads up, you know."

"It's not in her file?"

"Only something vague about a mugging. Burke apparently didn't even ask her."

Just as John wanted to curse Burke for his seemingly endless list of fuck-ups, Olivia stirred.

She heard two familiar voices, and slowly let go of the comfort of her dream. Upon opening her eyes she realised that Mr Holmes' warm chest had not been a dream, and quickly looked up at Mr Watson, who was standing in front of them.

Even though the man next to her made absolutely no move to separate himself from her, she sat up
so that she wasn't touching his chest anymore. Her body immediately missed the warmth of his. Mr Holmes felt her unease and removed his arm from around her shoulders. Her eyes scanned John's face, uncertain if what they had done was wrong.

The headmaster's face was as friendly as ever.

"Are you feeling better Olivia? I understand you had quite a fright", he asked gently.

"Yes. It was just… I was just upset because of my mum."

"That's alright. I've told Mr Holmes off. Let me know if he needs to be punished."

Sherlock scowled at this.

She smiled slightly. "That's okay, I think he's learned his lesson."

"Is it still difficult for you to sleep at night?" John enquired.

Olivia's guard went up and her eyes skirted away from his face, at the same time carefully avoiding the dissecting stare of Mr Holmes.

"Sometimes. But I'm fine," she answered minimally. She knew this wasn't very helpful to Mr Watson, but she was tired of answering questions about how she was feeling. It was hard work to twist the truth without lying.

John looked at her for a moment, deep in thought. Then he said, "Well, off you go then. Next class starts in 10 minutes."

Olivia got up, quickly grabbed her bag and didn't look around as she left the room.

When she had disappeared, the room remained silent until John cleared his throat meaningfully.

Sherlock looked up at him, expecting some sort of lecture, but John just looked at him expectantly.

"You too, Sherlock."

Right then, Sherlock remembered his own timetable.

"Ah."

He jumped up and walked out without another word.

~

On Friday afternoon, Olivia was standing at her locker when first a frightening and then a quite wonderful thing happened.

She was one of the last to leave, so the hallway was relatively quiet. Fumbling with the books in her bag, she didn't notice Eric Walker sneak up behind her. She let out a yelp when both his hands suddenly slammed into the grey metal locker beside her head and she was pushed forward. His grinning face was just inches away when she quickly turned around.

"Hello Olive. Didn't you like seeing your dead mum yesterday? We all really enjoyed those pictures, you know."

Olivia froze.
"What do you want?" she snapped, her eyes narrowing at him.

"I just want to know if Mr Holmes made it all better for you after class. He ran out before any of us could get up. He must have been very worried. You know what, I think maybe he showed those pictures on purpose because he wanted to get you alone."

"Shut up Eric. You're not making any sense."

"Oh yes of course, you have Anthony to comfort you. Has he got into your pants yet? I bet he has."

Olivia started to panic, being trapped between the lockers and Eric's body. His scent was unpleasant and he was too close. She tried to push him back, but he was too strong.

Suddenly his now whispering voice tickled her ear.

"Just so you know. If you ever say anything to Watson about me again, I will tell everybody that Holmes is fucking you. And I will make sure others will back me up on that."

Olivia was shocked for a moment, but gave him a smirk. Not for one moment could she believe that Eric could pull that off. Nobody in the entire school would believe him if he came up with something as ridiculous as that.

Noting she was not impressed by his threat, Eric violently slammed his hand into the locker right next to her face.

"Calm down Mr Walker, I'm sure that was rather uncalled for."

Eric quickly turned around to see Mr Brook standing not far from them. The man stood nonchalantly with his hands in his pockets and didn't show any sign of anger or distress.

"Are you alright sweetheart?"

He seemed genuinely concerned as he looked at Olivia, who was still with her back against the lockers. She nodded.

"Mr Walker, you'd better hurry along. Mr Watson will be very cross if he hears you are upsetting your classmates. Again."

Eric grumpily picked up his bag and walked away, not giving her another look.

Mr Brook gave Olivia a smile and a wink, and continued in the same direction.

Angrily Olivia continued to sort out the books she would need in order to catch up on her homework over the weekend. She was mumbling to herself when suddenly another person was standing next to her.

"I can't understand a word you're saying", Anthony said.

She looked up into his amused eyes and smiled back.

"Sorry, I was just thinking which books to take home. How are you?"

She closed her locker and set her bag down at her feet, playing with the locker key in her hand.

"I'm great. Hey... I was just wondering... Are you coming to Lucy's party tomorrow?" He looked hopeful, but she saw that he was expecting a negative answer, because she always said no.
"I… My dad… he won't let me go out. He's a bit… anxious," she said hesitantly.

"Oh. Does he ever let you go out?"

"Well, sometimes, when he's feeling well enough…"

Anthony didn't push or pry.

"That's a shame. It's going to be fun… It would be more fun if you were there, of course."

Olivia's cheeks flushed at that. She hated the fact that she blushed so rapidly, her body betraying her emotions.

"I was hoping to congratulate you on your birthday tomorrow," he said. "But maybe you'll let me do it now?" He asked it very innocently, but with a twinkle in his eyes.

Olivia's heart rate increased rapidly while she interpreted his words. She didn't know what to answer, because he didn't specify exactly how he wanted to congratulate her.

"You're being very vague."

He laughed at that and looked down at the floor while he ran a hand through his hair.

"Uhm sorry, I'm just nervous." Then he looked into her eyes and asked, "Can I kiss you?"

While the adrenaline rushed through her body she nodded, and he smiled in relief. Then he slowly leaned closer to touch his lips to hers.

She tried to concentrate on what she was feeling. Just like her, he wasn't very experienced, but he tried to be very gentle. Her hand rested on his chest and she could feel his heart race. After a few moments she felt his tongue probe into her mouth and she touched it experimentally with hers. It felt wet but interesting. Her response encouraged him and he kissed her deeper, while his right hand came up to stroke her hair.

His lips and tongue didn't feel exceptionally pleasant or unpleasant to her. It was mostly just wet. It was the fact that she was doing this at all with him that excited her. It was unbelievable for her that after everything that had happened, with her father so desperate to keep her inside the house, after so many times of having to say no to invitations, somebody like Anthony would still be interested in her. But now he was kissing her in the middle of the hallway, and it made her happy. It would get better with experience anyway, she assumed.

As they were still kissing, her mind wandered off and she wished she could tell Rose about this moment, but she had an entire weekend to get through before she would be able to. At least her birthday might make time go quicker, she thought.

Sherlock had tried to stretch his working day as long as possible, rewriting assignments, reading files for the third time, reordering his bookshelf, but couldn't make up any more excuses to delay his journey home. The emptiness of the two days off was demoralising, and he was already bored thinking about it.

The corridors were empty as he made his way to the exit, and he tried to think of new ways to guilt trip Molly into giving him a fresh liver to play with. When he turned a corner he noticed two pupils in an intimate embrace and stopped in his tracks.
For a moment he feverishly considered his options, while trying not to look at Olivia and Anthony in their too public display of affection. His first urge was to break them apart, yell at them, and forbid them from coming within 10 feet of each other for the rest of the year. Then again, he had no idea whether John allowed this kind of thing at his school. Sherlock remembered boys getting punished with a ruler for looking at pictures of girls when he was still in school, although he never did himself. He usually got the ruler for very different behaviour.

After his first urge to violently intervene subsided, he just wanted to walk away and delete this disturbing image from his mind immediately. But Sherlock didn't move, his mind still reeling from the shock at his own indecision. Since when did he care so much? Why did he feel so aggressive towards the boy? And why was she bloody kissing him?

He had been standing there for a couple of seconds, completely undecided and trying to think of other ways to get out of the building, when the two pupils broke apart. The smile that she gave Anthony was genuine, he involuntarily noted. Their hands entwined as they walked away together.

"Sherlock!" John's voice came from his left. "Glad you're still here. I need to ask you something you won't like."

"In that case I do not have time to chat. Have a nice weekend," he said, but didn't walk away. Still a bit unsettled by what he had just witnessed he secretly thanked his friend for distracting him.

John scowled at him and continued.

"You know about the trip, right?"

"What trip?"

"It was in the St Francis newsletter last week."

Sherlock raised his eyebrows at him, and John realised he probably didn't know there was a newsletter and would never read it anyway.

"Mary's not coming, so I need you to be there."

Sherlock eyed him with suspicion now.

"For supervision", John clarified, and was met with a way too quick "No".

"You have to. I need you."

"To which museum are you taking them? The National Gallery? Does the school have enough funds to cover the damage they will do?"

"South Downs…" John said hesitantly.

"What?"

"South Downs. It's kind of an outdoorsy thing. Only two days."

Sherlock looked at John as if he was mad. John could see the bus ride and the screaming hoards of pupils running around in nature pass before the man's eyes, and feared he'd gone about this the wrong way.

"No. Absolutely no way. Not in a million years," Demonstratively, Sherlock started walking towards the exit, but the headmaster followed.
John silently cursed. He knew he shouldn't have gone with honesty, but it was too late to tell Sherlock they were going to the museum of pathology to trick him into getting on the bus.

"Come on Sherlock, it'll be healthy! Breathe some fresh air, get some exercise."

"John, that's a two hour bus ride! There will be casualties before we even get there! And then there's the park, how are you going to keep them from wandering off-" Sherlock realised he was arguing for the wrong side and stopped himself.

"That's exactly why I need you, Sherlock. They need guidance. If we lose one, you can find them! There will be lots of adventure, possibly even danger. Remember the hound at Dartmoor?"

Sherlock was silent for a while; angry at John but remembering the great time he'd had at Dartmoor, scaring John shitless.

"I call shotgun," he snapped and pushed the door open to march outside.

John beamed, happy not to have told Sherlock the activities program yet. He'd need to keep it from him until there was no way back.

As he watched the tall man cross the schoolyard with long strides, he remembered something and yelled, hoping Sherlock was still within hearing reach.

"Mycroft tells you to call him back! He says it's a matter of national importance!"

He was met with a childish V sign over a dark coated shoulder.
"Gooooooodmorning! This is Capital radio and if you're still in bed trying to wake up after a wild night, we are here to give your weekend the perfect start! This is Bob Dylan with *Just Like a Woman*!

Olivia listened to the tunes of the song while her body took time to wake up properly. Today was the first birthday she would spend without her mother. She tried not to think of her last birthday, when her parents had taken her to a restaurant with a live band. Her mother knew the band members and had asked them to sing her happy birthday. They had given her the bicycle, because she was finally allowed to go to school by herself. The day after that she had had the party with her friends.

Today, the house was silent. Her father was still asleep. Olivia knew she shouldn't expect much from him, but secretly hoped that he had thought of her.

She got up, took a shower and wrapped a towel around her body. Then she thought about what to wear. It felt wrong to put on the faded jeans and T-shirt that she normally wore on the weekends to do the housework. After checking whether her dad was really still sleeping, she opened the closet in his bedroom, where all of her mother's clothes were still neatly folded on the shelves. She always wanted to try them on, and a few times she had, when her dad was passed out downstairs. She figured he couldn't get angry with her for wearing them on her birthday.

She let her hands caress some of the beautiful coloured fabrics and picked a green dress that was medium length and had a couple of buttons at the front. It was her favourite. Her mother had worn it on her birthday last year. She also picked a bra from the drawer, curious to see if it would fit her. The calm snoring that came from the bed told her she had loads of time to put it back if it didn't.

Silently, she patted back to her own bedroom and started trying things on. The blue bra she had picked out was too big, but she didn't care. Then she put on the dress and looked at herself in the mirror. It was made of a thin soft fabric. Its short sleeves covered her shoulders and it reached to just above her knees. A bit longer than it had on her mother. She could easily button up the front and it swayed around her legs. Watching herself in the mirror for a while, she realised that she was beginning to look very much like her mother.

Smiling, she went downstairs to make breakfast. She put on an apron while she made pancakes, so as not to get anything on the dress. The tea was steaming as she finished setting the full table for breakfast. Satisfied, she went up to wake her dad.

He was still fast asleep when she peered over him, and groaned when she pushed his shoulder.

"Dad, wake up."

He didn't open his eyes and buried his face in his pillow. She noticed the hair on the back of his head was getting thinner.

"I've made pancakes for breakfast," she continued, shaking him.

Annoyed, he shook her off without opening his eyes. "I'm not hungry sweetheart. I need some more sleep. I'll have some later." His breath stank of alcohol.

"But dad! I-..."
"For God's sake Olivia! Leave me alone!" he groaned.

She stood at his bedside for a couple of minutes, but eventually went back downstairs. She ate her pancake alone at the kitchen table, sipping her tea while she listened for any sound from upstairs. Then she sat on the couch for a while, reading a book. Her disappointment grew every minute her father didn't get himself up. She hadn't really expected a present, or a cake. She had not expected him to do anything. But him staying in bed like this, completely ignoring her, hurt. It made it clear how utterly alone she really was.

For a moment, around noon, she felt tears rise, but she refused to let herself cry. *I am not a child anymore. He is ill. I don't need a birthday. I have to get myself together.*

So she got herself together, cleaning breakfast from the kitchen table, packing the leftover pancakes in some Tupperware, collecting empty bottles, doing the laundry, cleaning the bathroom, and vacuuming. She did the chores with a sad feeling in her stomach, but her emotion made her more vigorous than ever, cleaning every little nook and edge that she would usually neglect a bit.

Around 4 pm, finally heavy footsteps on the stairs. She was in the kitchen, cleaning one of the cupboards. When she turned around, he was staring at her from the doorway.

"Hi dad."

"Jesus. Olivia!" his breathing was quick and he had gone completely pale. "Why the hell are you wearing that?!"

She just stood there, not knowing what to answer. He seemed shocked, not really angry.

"I- I just thought that… I wanted… I wanted to look nice. For my birthday," she stammered.

The realisation in his eyes was painful to watch.

"Oh my God, your birthday…" he whispered. He quickly walked towards her and pulled her into a tight hug. "Oh God, I'm so sorry. I can't believe I just…"

Again, Olivia fought the tears that were forming in her eyes, but this time wasn't able to hold them back as he held her.

He held her for a while and then stepped back to look at her again. "Look at you. You are the spitting image of you mother. I'm sorry I reacted like that. You just gave me a start. That dress….. God, she wore that on your last birthday, remember?"

Tears were streaming down his face while he spoke. Olivia nodded and drew a deep breath.

"She looked so beautiful…" his face had a pained expression while he thought about his wife on that day. Then he hugged his daughter again. He hadn't realised that she had grown so much already.

"I don't even have a cake, or a present. I am so sorry sweetheart."

"It's okay," she mumbled into his chest.

After they had both calmed down they had some tea. Later, they watched TV on the couch together, his left arm around her shoulders, his right hand holding a glass of vodka. He suggested they order some food in and Olivia paid for pizza with his credit card.
She saw his gaze on her several times, and knew he was thinking about her mum, which made her regret the dress a little bit. It was not her intention to upset him.

However, during the evening, he slipped back into his personal darkness, spoke less and less, and was downing his drinks faster than she had ever seen him do before. It made her angry that he would do this today, but in her head she defended him, by telling herself he had a lot of memories to deal with on this day and that she should not have worn her mother's dress without asking.

Around 10 pm he was so far gone that he couldn't follow the conversations on the television programme anymore, and asked her to help him to bed.

He was sitting on the edge, watching her take off his shoes.

"Goditsa- amazing, how much you lookliker…" his breath hitched. She felt his hand stroke her head uncoordinatedly. When she finished she quickly threw his shoes aside, and got up.

"Come-ere." He grabbed her hand and pulled her towards him. He took her face in his hands and kissed her cheek. She reclined a little but he didn't notice anything, his hold surprisingly strong on her. He put his hands around her waist, as he often did when he wanted her to lie next to him. Pulling her against him, he lay down and buried his face in her neck. His left arm moved up so that her chest and shoulder was trapped as well, keeping her still against him. Olivia shut her eyes tightly, feeling constricted and awkward.

"Dad, please. Go to sleep." But he was crying again.

"Lovyou." 

"Love you too, dad." 

"Yourall I hav- livia. Please don't leavme." 

Her whole body tensed.

"I won't," she said, thinking about what he would need to hear to calm down.

"Promsme, youll neeverever never leave me. I ne-eedyou." His breath was warm against her skin and she grimaced at the smell.

"I promise." 

This seemed to relax him a bit.

"Yourmygirl. Youll stayere witme forever," he sighed.

After that, he slept within seconds. When Olivia wriggled herself out of his grasp, she had to calm herself down. The thought of this; taking care of him, bringing him to bed, clinging to her, not being able to see her friends, forever, made her panic. Would this really go on forever? Would she be stuck in here for years and years until he died and she was alone?

She had considered this situation to be temporary, expecting him to recover at some point. He would have to recover at some point. That was the whole idea: you are really sad for while, and then you go on living. This was not living. She knew as much from hearing her friends talk about going out, having fun, exploring new things together. For the past seven months she had kept social services at bay, so that he had the time to get himself together. It was breaking her slowly. She couldn't go on like this. It felt like being a prisoner of his sadness, pretending to be the stronger one.
of them, and it wasn't fair.

The thought that this was going to be her life forever didn't let her go as she stared at his sleeping form. She needed to do something, anything, to get away.

Eventually the urge to escape won from the instinct to take care for him. Olivia wiped the tears from her eyes and walked out of the bedroom. She grabbed her bag from her room and slipped on her shoes. Silently she descended the stairs, grabbed her coat, and without properly considering the repercussion of what she was doing, she walked out the door.

Her bicycle was parked against the side of the house, having been there ever since she'd gotten a flat tire a couple of weeks ago. She slung her bag over her shoulder and got on, not caring about the tire, just wanting to get out of there fast.

The street was quiet, and the adrenaline rush of breaking the rules, of being freed from the suffocating dullness of the house, rushed her forward.

It was a couple of miles to Hampstead, and Olivia paddled as fast as she could, but started to regret her rash decision to cycle. The flat tire caused a lot of resistance and made her movements extremely laboured. Her mother's dress was almost getting caught in the rear wheel. At some point, when she was halfway through Hampstead Heath, the rubber of her front tire snapped and the metal of her wheel caught the ground. She could just about jump off before the wheel stopped abruptly.

She stood there in the middle of the huge park, catching her breath for a moment before she put the useless thing at the side of the road, not bothering to lock it. She continued on foot and although it wasn't very cold yet, she was glad to be wearing her coat. The early October air was chilly on her bare legs though, so she kept walking quickly through the dark.

Walking calmed her down a bit, and it cleared her mind enough to notice the possible danger she put herself in, walking alone through a park at night. However, there was no turning back now, so she kept on going, keeping herself from looking at the darkness between the trees and imagining what could be waiting there.
Olivia sighed in relief when she reached the edge of the park 20 minutes later and stepped into the relative safety of the streetlights. From here she could already hear faint sounds of a stereo player. A couple of turns later, the huge white house came within sight, and she smiled as she saw people dancing in the living room.

"Which do you prefer, rum or coke?"

"What?" Rose asked.

"I mean-" Lucy laughed loudly "…which do you prefer, rum and coke… or rum and orange juice?"

They were standing in the kitchen of Maison de la Griffin -as Anthony had named it- and were deciding on what to poor themselves next. The loud beat of a popular disco song came from the living room and people were dancing everywhere.

Lucy's brother Dylan was in the highest grade at St Francis and had invited a huge number of pupils from the school, but also some people he knew from rugby and from their neighbourhood. Together with Lucy's friends, the house was packed with people from approximately age 14 to 23. Many of them had brought their own booze and some of the older partygoers were smoking joints.

Lucy and Rose were enjoying themselves at by trying new combinations of drinks and dancing together. Anthony was having a great time feeling exceptionally cool drinking beers with guys much older than he was. He kept Peter in tow, who was always a bit shy. However, Peter seemed to feel at ease among these friendly and outgoing people, which was an accomplishment in itself.

"I'm going fooooo… rum…. with rum!" Rose yelled over the music. They both couldn't stop laughing at their own stupid jokes. Lucy could hardly keep the bottle steady as she poured them the drinks.

"Are you taking it easy, little sister?" Dylan said as he walked into the kitchen with Sarah, his girlfriend.

"Yes big brother. Everything is under control!" she laughed as the rim of the glass overflowed.

"How the hell did you get so much alcohol together without your parents noticing?" Anthony wondered aloud as he sat down on one of the barstools.

"As I told you, Ant. My parents are exceptionally dim. In the head." Lucy said while she tapped the side of her head with a finger.

"Don't they ever go into your room?"

"Not his. Not anymore!" she laughed again, pointing at her brother.

Dylan smiled and explained as he fiddled with the shoulder strap of Sarah's dress. "Our mother sometimes tells the maid to clean our rooms. But I told her that I didn't want her to stumble upon the stack of porn I keep there. She was so shocked, she won't send anyone in there ever again!"
"It's interesting how brutal honesty can be the key to people backing off," Rose said thoughtfully as she sipped from her drink.

"I do it all the time!" Sarah said. "Whenever I want to skip P.E. I just tell Simmons that I'm on my period. He never dares to say no when you tell him that."

They were talking about which other teachers at St Francis could be intimidated using this technique, when Lucy distantly heard the doorbell ring through the music. She got up, skipped through to the corridor — stopped when she almost skipped into the staircase — to open the door.

"Look who's here!" Lucy yelled as she walked back into the kitchen. Rose jumped up when she saw her best friend following her. Olivia looked a bit lost, walking into such cheerfulness after her lonely day, and she was still shivering from the cold night air.

"Liv! You're here!"

"Hi!" Olivia said and smiled as she spotted more familiar faces at the kitchen table.

"Are you okay?" Rose asked as she hugged her.

"I'm fine. Great, actually."

"Oh! It's your birthday!" Lucy exclaimed, surprised to remember. Immediately they all started singing for her, and Anthony came forward to give her a quick kiss. It was almost overwhelming to be welcomed so warmly, but Olivia had no time to think about that as she got a drink pushed into her hands to join in with the toast.

"I thought you wouldn't come." Rose said, when things had calmed down a bit.

"Changed my mind. What's in this drink?" Olivia grimaced as she tasted the rum.

"Didn't your dad forbid you to go out?"

Olivia shrugged her shoulders.

"He will be worried. Maybe you should call to tell him where you are," Rose went on.

She sighed. "No he won't. He is passed out in bed from booze and anti-depressants, and he won't notice I'm gone until tomorrow afternoon," she blurted out.

Rose looked a bit shocked at Olivia's openness, but didn't comment any further. This honesty thing truly works, she thought.

Lucy introduced Olivia to everyone who happened to be in the kitchen at that time, and to the great variety of bottles that stood on the counter. "When you finish that rum, I will make you a 'Richard Brook'. It's a cocktail. Rose and I invented it an hour ago, and you can be our first test subject!"

"I did not agree on that name!" Rose inserted to prevent misunderstanding.

Olivia had minimal experience with alcohol. Her mother had let her taste some wine a few times, and she had tasted a little bit of vodka once from one of her dad's almost empty bottles. She laughed with her friends and agreed to be their test subject, even though the stuff tasted horrible. The decision not to care anymore, in combination with the alcohol, caused her to experience a strange type of calmness, and she enjoyed every moment of it.

After a while, Anthony asked if she want to dance. She let him guide her towards the living room,
where more people were dancing and some people were smoking on the sofas. Anthony turned out to be a reasonable dancer, even though he was a bit drunk. He held her close to him as she swayed her hips to the music in the cloudy room. His lips brushed her neck softly and he told her she looked extremely sexy in that dress, which gave her goose bumps and made her want to kiss him again.

She didn't want to do it with everybody watching though, so after a couple of songs she grabbed Anthony's hand and pulled him into the hallway. Neither of them knew their way around the house so she randomly picked a door and they ended up in an office. The drinks made her bold and the dress made her feel sexy.

Anthony was pleasantly surprised at Olivia's boldness and got quite excited when the door closed behind them. Her brown eyes looked at him differently now, compared to the day before, at the lockers at school. Then they had been questioning, excited and a little nervous. Right now he looked in her eyes and saw only excitement.

He pushed her lightly so she stood with her back against the big wooden door and before she realised it, his lips were pressing against hers. She opened her mouth to let his tongue inside. It felt good to feel him close to her like that. One of his hands was rubbing her side and the other was stroking her neck.

Olivia was surprised at how well she could sense what the boy was feeling while he kissed her. She could feel he wanted to please her, but also that he was very unsure about how far he should try to go. She wasn't even sure how far she wanted him to go, because all of it was new.

Closing her eyes, Olivia concentrated on the way his mouth and hands felt on her body. The room swayed around her and his fingers gave her skin a pleasant tingle through the green fabric. Very, very quickly, her mind wandered to Mr Holmes and his penetrating gaze. Even though it was a short moment, a shudder went down her spine. For the first time in her life she felt very aroused in the presence of another person. She tried to force the mature man out of her mind, knowing she should focus on Anthony.

She pulled him closer and felt how tense his body was under her touch. Her movements encouraged him to slide his right hand up, so that it cupped her breast over the soft fabric of her dress. Again Mr Holmes succeeded to sneak his way into Olivia's head, and for a moment she felt as if it was his hand touching her breast.

This caused a moan to escape from her mouth, sending a jolt of electricity through Anthony. He started fervently rubbing his hand over her breast and she felt his erection pressing against her hipbone.

Although quite curious about Anthony's physical reaction, Olivia knew she would have to choose soon between stopping, and possibly touching him. His hand was now sort of kneading her breast, and it started feeling a lot less pleasant.

Carefully, she pushed him back a little to make him stop. His eyes looked hazy when he looked at her. His breathing was quick and heavy.

"We should stop," she told him decisively.

The disappointment was evident on his face. "Didn't you like it?" he asked.

"Yes I did. I just… I don't want to do anything else." For a moment she was afraid that he wouldn't be dismissed so easily, but then realised Anthony was always nice and gentle to her.
"Oh… alright. We could just continue doing… this." he gestured between them. "If you want."

"I'd rather go back."

Anthony nodded and soulfully followed her back into the dancing bustle of the party.

In the living room, Lucy, Rose, Peter, Dylan and a couple of friends of his were now occupying a sofa and some pillows on the floor. Although she had enjoyed the private moment with Anthony, Olivia was glad to be back with her girlfriends.

"Birthday girl should have some, too!" said Dylan as he motioned them to join them.

Olivia sat down on the couch and snuggled in between Rose and Lucy. "What are we doing?" she asked.

"This, birthday girl, is a vaporiser. And it gives you the best feeling in the world. But it's innocent, like you," the older boy said.

Lucy set out to explain. "This thing just evaporates… vaporises the oily thingy that is in the herb. And the steam will make you laugh. A LOT." She already broke out in giggles and Olivia laughed at her.

"You have already had some I guess? Well, no thank you. I don't think I should do alcohol and drugs for the first time on the same night." Then she got up again. "But I will have another rum and coke."

Even though Olivia was smart enough not to try the vaporiser right then, the rest of the night became a complete blur. One moment she was dancing with Anthony, the next Rose had snatched her away and was twirling her around. They started making stranger combinations of drinks, a game that was eventually abandoned because they could find nobody who wanted to try vodka, white wine, cranberry juice and milk together, on the rocks. At some point Anthony had to go home, and he kissed her again. Much later, when most people had left, Olivia found herself leaning against the wall in the shower with all her clothes on, hardly feeling the water and laughing at Lucy, who attempted to wash her hair with shaving cream. The night had a number of black outs, but what she remembered the next day was that she had felt incredibly happy.

~

"Oohoo! Sherlock!"

Mrs Hudson pushed the door to 221B open with her foot. She was holding a tray with tea and biscuits, looking for her favourite detective. She had agreed to bring Sherlock his tea again after he had cleaned up the flat so nicely. His behaviour since the incident that summer had been quite difficult for her to deal with, because she had always regarded him in the most positive light (rudeness aside). Seeing him at his worst had frightened her a bit, and the constant sound of his violin at night had been breaking her up. After she had found a naked woman on the sofa once, she decided it was better for her not to come up anymore, to Sherlock's great annoyance.

Then John had given him a teaching position at his school, and he seemed to slowly crawl out of his depression. The work gave him something to latch onto and the pupils seemed to have a good influence on him. Even his night-time violin sessions decreased in frequency. Then one day he cleaned the flat and came to tell her that all reasons for her not to come up anymore had been resolved, and that he expected tea again, which she offered him happily.

However, sometimes his unhappy moods came back. This weekend he'd been at it again and she
had listened to him pacing around above her head all Saturday, sometimes interrupted by a thump when he dramatically flopped down on the sofa. The violin kept playing for hours and hours, until she had had to come up and sternly tell him to go to bed or that she would call Mycroft. Her warning was met with a childish retort, but seemed to help in the end.

It was already 1 pm when she heard him get up on Sunday, and ascended the stairs with her tray.

"Oh well done! You've started a new experiment," she said cheerfully while putting the tea tray down on the kitchen table, after shoving some equipment to the side.

"No reason for applause. I have no results as of yet," he grumbled as he poured some liquid into another liquid, and nothing happened. He gave an annoyed grumble and took of his gloves to pick up his steaming teacup.

"How are you feeling dear? You were awfully loud last night. Something going on with John?" she asked while he sat down at the table.

"Bored."

"Oh rubbish. You have enough to keep yourself occupied. I noticed Molly has given you a whole jar of thumbs. How are things going at school? John said I should come and see the Christmas performance."

"It's early October."

"I know, but I think it will be lovely. Now tell me, how do you like being a teacher? John says the pupils have a good influence on you."

"Some of them are tolerable."

"He said you helped a boy who has an aggressive father. That's very heroic of you."

"Hardly, I just got him talking."

Sherlock stared out of the window as he blew into his cup.

"What's bothering you, Sherlock? You know I can always tell when something's bothering you."

Sherlock caught her worried expression and sighed, knowing she was right.

"I can't get everyone to talk to me."

"Someone in particular?"

"One of them. She's… her mother died, but something else is bothering her. I don't know exactly what's going on, though. She's become quite good at covering up."

"Oh Sherlock!" Mrs Hudson exclaimed. "They really have changed you, haven't they?"

Sherlock huffed. "No they haven't. I'm just annoyed that I don't have all the data I need, that's all. She doesn't have many people to help her."

"Of course dear," Mrs Hudson said with a knowing smile. "I'm sure she's very pretty as well?"

Sherlock's head shot up and he narrowed his eyes at her. "I refuse to respond to such a question."
Mrs Hudson smiled knowingly. Even though Sherlock hardly ever developed relationships with people, she knew him well enough to recognise it when he liked someone.

"Don't worry dear. Do you think she likes you?"

"I insistently ask you to discontinue talking to me."

"I myself had an affair with a professor once when I was in college. Lovely man. We used to sneak into an empty office during lunch break. Taught me a lot about-"

"Mrs Hudson! I have absolutely no intention of having relations with a pupil who is half my age. So please do not tell me about your sexual escapades."

"Of course dear. I'm glad to see that you care about her so much."

"I don't-…"

At that moment, the phone rang and Mrs Hudson got up. "I will leave you to it, then. I'm sure she will confide in you sometime. Just be patient," she said as she picked up the tray and left.

Sherlock took the call.

"Yes."

"Sherlock. Hi."

"Hello John, what do you want?"

"I just got a call from Mr Edwards, Olivia's dad. He can't find her."

"Did he sound sober to you?"

"What? I don't know, he was panicking. I thought you might know where she is?"

Sherlock panicked for a second.

"Are you asking if she's with me? Because that is-…"

"No, I was going to ask you if you had any ideas. She seems to trust you, so…"

"Oh, well. I believe the Griffin's are you're best bet. I heard something about a gathering of people at their place."

"A party, you mean?"

"If that's what you want to call it."

"Right. OK, I'll try Lucy then. Thanks."

John hung up and Sherlock cursed. He wondered if it was really that obvious Olivia had such an effect on him, and if she really trusted him as much as John thought.

~

Olivia woke up in Lucy's soft big bed with Rose next to her. She was wearing unfamiliar shorts and a T-shirt, presumably borrowed from Lucy after their shower. Her head felt heavy and her mouth was dry, but she smiled. She had slept extremely well.
"Good morning", Rose said sleepily.

"Morning."

They lay there for a while, silently smiling at each other.

"I don't think I have ever had so much fun in one night," Olivia said. Rose was very happy to hear that. She seemed fine, but she knew there was a reason her friend had turned up at the party without permission.

"How was your birthday yesterday? At home, I mean."

Olivia's face fell as the memory of the previous day flooded back into her mind.

"He forgot."

"No! That's awful!"

"And then he got drunk, and really sad."

"Oh Liv…" Rose pulled her into a hug and she noticed Olivia's suddenly unsteady breathing.

"And he said I had to stay with him, because he's so lonely. I just needed to get out of there."

Olivia closed her eyes and a few tears fell down her cheeks. Rose rubbed a hand over her back to soothe her until she calmed.

After a while, they said goodbye to the warm bed and Olivia went to look for her dress, which she found in Lucy's (personal) bathroom.

The mess in the living room made her gasp. Bottles, cans, cups, bags of crisps, several items of clothing, and quite some stuff they had used for the vaporiser covered all surfaces, including Lucy, who was asleep on the sofa with a boy Olivia didn't recognize. She wondered how far she had gone with him, or if they'd just fallen asleep together.

She noticed that not many people had stayed over. There was only Sarah, Rose, Olivia, and the boy on the sofa who turned out to be one of the neighbours. He left as soon as he could, hoping his parents hadn't woken up yet.

When Olivia automatically started gathering empty bottles, Lucy frowned. "Olivia, please don't do that. You're making me feel bad for not cleaning. Let's go outside and lie in the sun for a while." So they spent the next two hours lying on a sheet in the backyard, relaxing in the afternoon sun. The sun was still quite sharp for this time of year and it made them sleepy.

They only woke when Dylan came to ask if they wanted a second go at the vaporiser, because he was going to turn it on for him and Sarah. They followed him inside, even though Olivia wasn't sure whether she would to join in.

They just came through the big garden doors when the phone rang. Lucy skipped to where it was and picked up cheerfully.

"Griffin residence!"

Her eyes went wide for a moment and everyone went silent.

"Mr Watson! How's your weekend?"
Rose mouthed "what the fuck?!" to Lucy.

"Yes, I'm great. Enjoying the weekend," she made a face to them meaning "I don't know!" Then she glanced at Olivia, who stood frozen in the living room, knowing very well that this was about her.

"Olivia! Oh ehm..." she looked at Olivia to tell her what to say. Part of Olivia didn't want her friend have to lie for her, but at that moment she could only shake her head.

"Olivia is not here," Lucy said, sounding completely natural.

"Yes Mr Watson, of course, you too. Bye."

Just after she laid down the phone, Lucy clasped her hand in front of her mouth.

"What did he say?" Rose asked worriedly.

Lucy turned to Olivia. "Your dad called Watson to say he didn't know where you were. And he said he'd heard that there was a party here this weekend, so he called to check if you were here. And to tell you to call home if I see you."

Rose looked at Olivia. "Do you think you should call home?"

Olivia avoided her eyes and started walking towards the coffee table, where vaporiser stood.

"Let's try this thing. I'm ready."

The others didn't question her, and Dylan, who had already prepared, let Olivia take the first drag. She was careful and didn't inhale very deeply, but when she saw the others suck the steam through the tube she got the idea. Slowly but surely she forgot about the phone call, and about the fear that her father would turn up at the house. Her limbs got a bit heavier, her vision of the room became a bit less sharp, and her movements got slower.

Her thoughts seemed to get incoherent as well. One thing turned into something else in her head and she connected ideas that, when sober, probably wouldn't make any sense. She didn't care though, and she had fun listening to Rose telling a completely fictional story about what the Queen would be doing right now. "I tell you, she is taking yoga classes."

At some point, Olivia started laughing and was unable to stop for about 10 minutes.

After about an hour, when the effects of the THC in their blood had ebbed away a bit, Lucy suggested they take a bath.

"I haven't had a wash since yesterday morning, and I feel disgusting."

"Yes you have. You had a shower last night," Olivia said.

"Well, I can't remember that so it doesn't count. We can use mum's bathroom!" She ran upstairs to prepare the bath, and Rose and Olivia followed.

Olivia put her clothes in the washing machine to clean while the three of them soaked in the immense round tub of Lucy's mother. It was a deep, Jacuzzi style bath, where they could sit on a little ledge in the water.

"Who was that boy sleeping with you this morning?" Olivia asked Lucy, as she enjoyed the tingling feeling of the hot water on her skin.
"Oh that was Timmy, known him for years. He's cute, don't you think?"

"I guess. Did he kiss you?"

"Oh yes, he's a very good kisser. And, you know…" She played with the foam that was in front of her.

"What?" Rose asked. Her eyes narrowed at Lucy. "Did you let him get in your pants?"

"And he let me get into his pants. Hands only, mind you! He was quite good at it."

"Did you get him off?" Rose asked, still sounding a bit shocked.

"Yes." Lucy grinned. "Got to make use of the time your parents aren't watching."

"As we are on the topic of privacy, Olivia. Tell us, what happened between you and Anthony last night in my mum's office?" Lucy asked.

"We kissed. But we did that on Friday already, too."

Lucy whistled and excitedly started asking questions. She told them about Friday afternoon, and about last night, about how she liked it but that it was a bit too much at some point. She told them how he and rubbed her breast so hard it almost hurt.

"Inexperience, obviously. Tell him next time, if you want him to improve," Rose said. "Women are better kissers than men, anyway," she added.

"How would you know? You've never kissed a guy!" Lucy exclaimed.

"Maybe I have." Rose smiled mysteriously.

"What! When? Who? Why didn't you tell us?"

"Because it was nothing! Just an experiment."

"Who was it then?" Olivia was curious now.

"OK. Don't get all excited, because it was really nothing," Rose began. "One day before the summer holidays, Peter and I were waiting at the coffee shop for Olivia, to go to Camden. But Olivia didn't show up because her dad had suddenly decided she couldn't go. So, we decided to go anyway. While we were walking, Peter told me he thought he was gay, and he wanted to know how I knew I was. So I explained to him that I just knew, but if he wanted, we could try something and see if he felt anything. So we kissed, somewhere in Regents park."

Lucy gaped at her. "Oh-My-God. That is so… I don't know, interesting?"

"We kissed for a while, and we both didn't feel anything, so that's when he definitely knew he was gay. Funny, right?"

"That was very nice of you," said Olivia.

"Well, it wasn't completely altruistic. I just wanted to have done it once. Never have to do it again," she chuckled. "But, if you are ever in doubt, I'm at your service for an experiment."

"Maybe I'd like to try."
Olivia said it before she knew she even wanted to. Lucy's mouth fell open once more.

"I don't have any experience, with anything, so I might as well take the opportunity." Olivia defended.

"But I thought you liked Anthony, and I've seen you look at Holmes." Rose said cautiously.

"I know. But that doesn't mean I can't like women, right? If you don't want to it's fine. It's just that you said-..." she clumsily tried to take back her words.

However, Rose was already beside her. She looked a little flushed and excited as she turned her body and took hold of Olivia's shoulder to steady herself in the water.

"Don't worry about it."

Olivia closed her eyes and felt Rose's soft lips on hers. She started very slow, testing to see how comfortable Olivia really was with this, but found that she responded quite willingly. After a while Rose started using her tongue and enjoyed the intimate feeling.

Lucy was watching them with curiosity.

Olivia felt a little overwhelmed by Rose. She was extremely soft, including her breasts, which were pressed gently against her side in the warm water. The vaporised substance, which was still lingering in her blood, made everything feel like a dream. Rose kept one hand on her shoulder to keep herself in place, and used the other to caress Olivia's side. Her tongue explored her mouth without any need to hurry.

Just like the night before, images started flashing through Olivia's head. They were first showing Rose and her soft body, then Anthony's arousal pressed against her, and finally turned into her mysterious science teacher. This made her want to press herself against Rose more tightly and she moaned softly.

Right then, the bathroom door opened and Sarah walked in. The girls broke apart quickly and looked in her direction.

"Oh sorry, I see I'm interrupting something." She smiled. "I just wanted to know if you want any Chinese food. Dylan is ordering some and though it would be best if he didn't go in here. He was probably right," she chuckled.

"Thanks Sarah. Yes we would like some," Lucy said and Sarah left again quickly.

Lucy burst out laughing. "Well, that was interesting! I hope that clarified some things for you. I should probably go downstairs though..." She got out of the tub, wrapped a towel around her and left to get dressed.

Rose looked at Olivia and they both grinned.

"What did you think?" Rose asked tentatively. "You're a very good kisser."

Olivia blushed. "You are much better than Anthony... and I felt a similar reaction, actually."

"Do you think you might like both?"

"I don't know. I've never had feelings for a girl, and you're my best friend. It's actually more confusing now."
Rose was pretty sure Olivia wasn't attracted to her, she had put that out of her mind quite soon after they had met. She truly valued their friendship and was happy to be able to talk to her about every crush she had, like Sally Donovan. Olivia was a bit slower with these things, but it was fun helping her discover her sexuality.

"Did you think about Anthony when I kissed you?" Rose asked it without any jealousy in her voice, which put Olivia's mind at ease.

"Ehm.. for a moment, yes."

"What do you mean? What else did you think about?"

Olivia hesitated. She knew Rose was aware of her admiration for Mr Holmes, but this went a little bit further than that.

"I'm not sure if it's appropriate. It's stupid."

Rose eyes lit up in curiosity. "Now you have to tell me."

"He just pops up in my mind! I can't help it!" Olivia sunk down under water for a moment in embarrassment.

"Is it a certain extremely intelligent, mysterious, sexy science professor, who makes you squirm by just looking at you?" Rose asked when she came back up.

With her face shielded by her hands, Olivia nodded. She heard Rose let out a cry of joy and splashed the foam in front of her.

"Liv! Even though he is completely out of bounds in reality, he is probably the best crush you could have! It shows you have good taste, and there is nothing wrong with exploring your sexuality by thinking of him." Rose splashed some water at her and Olivia finally showed her blushing face.

"You should know how many times I have thought about Sally to get off. It just makes it feel so much better somehow."

"I've never… you know." Olivia mumbled.

"What? Never touched yourself or never thought about him when you did it?"

"The first."

Rose was quiet for a moment.

"Really?"

Olivia nodded again, now even more embarrassed.

Rose just looked thoughtfully at her friend, who had just turned out to be much more innocent than she thought.

"Well, there's nothing wrong with that, but I would advise you to try it. You know, before you let anyone else touch you. Could be useful to know what happens. It feels really good."

"Alright. But Rose…"

"Hmm?"
"Don't tell anyone. About Mr Holmes."
"Miss Griffin, lengthen your skirt. Miss Edeson, get rid of those earrings. Miss Edwards, come with me."

Mr Watson was barking at them at the entrance of the building as they walked in—a little too late on Monday morning. He looked grumpy and his normal gentle demeanour was nowhere to be found.

As Olivia meekly followed him to his office, reality set in. She had stayed away from home for over 24 hours, and her dad still had no clue where she was. He had probably been calling Mr Watson all day yesterday. She had kissed a boy, kissed a girl, got drunk, and got high, for the first time, all in one weekend.

They'd had dinner last night and stayed up again until early in the morning, finishing the last weed, which was still lingering in her head a tiny little bit at the moment, preventing her from getting nervous about Mr Watson's obvious frustration. They had fallen asleep on Lucy's bed and woken up a tad too late to properly get ready for school. She had put on her dress, which was at least clean, and they had run out without breakfast. Olivia was carrying her schoolbag, but no uniform, books or homework.

"Sit down, Olivia." Mr Watson gestured at the chair on front of his desk as he sat himself down.

She obeyed and waited for him to speak, which took a while. As he observed her through narrowed but somewhat worried eyes, she didn't want to know what he was thinking. He was breathing through his nose and tapping the end of his pen on the wooden desk.

"So, why are you not wearing your uniform?" he finally asked.

"Didn't bring it," she answered, trying not to get distracted by the tapping pen in his hand.

"Should I understand from that answer, and the state of you, that you have not been home since sometime Saturday night?" she could hear the frustration in his voice and didn’t dare to look up.

She nodded.

"Do you have any idea how worried your father is about you? He called me yesterday in a panic to tell me you had left the house while he was asleep. And I assume that at this moment he is still unaware that you have turned up at school. Where did you stay?"

She shrugged her shoulders and played with a lock of hair.

"Don't give me silence, Olivia. Tell me where you were." his voice sounded almost exasperated.

"Lucy's."

"Lucy Griffin's place? Right, I'll have to have a chat with her as well, then." He sighed, remembering the cheerful voice with which the girl had answered the phone.

"Are you going to tell me why you left home in the middle of the night?"

She shrugged her shoulders again, but when she saw his frowning face she hurriedly thought of a reply.
"I wanted to go to the party."

John sat back in his chair and looked at the teenager sitting in front of him. He felt as if she was slipping out of his fingers. When her mother had died Olivia had been very open with him and let him help her any way he could, but after a while she had started closing off. He felt as if she only told him what she thought he wanted to hear; "I miss my mum." "I can't sleep." "I feel sorry for my dad." All things he could understand and possibly help her with, but he still didn't know what it was like for her at home. He didn't know exactly how her father was coping, because he never picked up their phone and never came to parent evenings at school. Now Olivia had run away for some reason, only to turn up at school looking like she had a very wild weekend.

John realised that showing his frustration and anger would be completely counter-productive.

"How was the party?"

She looked at him suspiciously.

"Did you have fun?"

No answer.

"Look Olivia, let me be honest. I can see you're not in the mood for talking. But I need to know three things. Please just answer me straight, alright?"

She nodded hesitantly, knowing that there would be no turning back, whatever she answered.

"Did something happen at home for you to want to leave so suddenly?"

She shook her head. "No." Just no. Nothing specific happened. He only said a few things, nothing for Mr Watson to worry about.

"Did you take anything? Alcohol or drugs?"

Deep breath.

"No."

That was quite easy. Another first: lying to Mr Watson.

He nodded and then tilted his head, slightly hesitant with his last question.

"Did you… heck- did you have sexual relations, with anyone?"

She stayed silent. Shocked by his question.

"Because in that case I can let Mary run some tests."

Why does he think that is any of his business? Why does he want to know?

"I do not have to answer that question." It came out hurriedly and a bit angry.

Mr Watson looked at her for a moment, surprised.

"No. No you don't. You're right. It would be great if you did, though. You're worrying me."

A couple of months ago Olivia would have answered him in a heartbeat, glad to know that any
adult wished to protect her in some way. But over the past few weeks, something had changed, making her feel less like a child. It felt wrong for him to question her about such private matters, and it angered her that he thought he could decide if she needed any tests.

"If I think I need any tests I will go to Mary myself. That's not your decision," she said.

"OK, it's not my decision. I just want to help you, Olivia. If there is anything bothering you, please tell me." She could hear the frustration in his voice again.

"There is nothing to say. I'm tired of you questioning me, Mr Watson." Olivia felt that if he kept going, she might yell at him. However, his concerned expression made her feel a bit guilty, because she knew he was one of the few people she could trust and it was painful to disappoint him.

"Can I go now?" she said in a small voice.

He sighed, knowing he wasn't getting anywhere.

"I'm going to take you to your classroom. After that, I will call your father to tell him you're here. I will discuss with him whether he will come and pick you up."

She cringed but nodded. The thought of her dad coming to the school was horrifying, especially as he was probably upset and drunk.

Sherlock, in the middle of explaining a scientific theory on the blackboard, turned smoothly towards the door of the classroom as it opened. For a moment he froze, the piece of chalk forgotten in his hand, seeing Olivia in something that was definitely not her uniform. The light made her long hair shine and her eyes sparkle at him. She didn't say anything, but looked ridiculously beautiful as she walked towards the back row and sat down.

Then Sherlock noticed John motioning at him at the door, and was annoyed that he'd let himself get distracted. Approaching John, he told the class to read while he was outside.

In the corridor, with the door carefully shut, John explained the situation to him.

"I seriously don't know what to do anymore, Sherlock. I can tell she's lying to me. She has never lied to me before. Evaded answering my questions, yes, but never lied. I have the feeling something might have happened over the weekend. She seems different… changed."

"Maybe fifteen's a magic number?" Sherlock asked innocently.

John clenched his fists in frustration.

"Sherlock! Come on! I need you to talk to her."

"Well, what am I supposed to say?"

John just looked at him for a moment.

"I don't care what you say. I need you to be Sherlock Holmes. Olivia is your case."

"Also, when you've finished with this class, tell Lucy Griffin to come see me."

Sherlock frowned as John turned and walked away. To him, Olivia looked perfectly fine. Although
possibly a bit tired, she actually seemed a little better than before the weekend. Less tense. The fact
that she refused to answer John's questions didn't alarm him much. He knew very well how tiring
and invasive John's anxiety over other people's well-being could be. Still, he was curious about
what caused the change and thought it wouldn't hurt either of them to have a chat.

Sherlock glanced at the back row a couple of times during the rest of the lesson while he drawled
on about a topic he actually found too boring to teach, but which was on the national curriculum
and apparently supposed to be common knowledge among adults. Olivia sat there looking ahead,
without books or a pen to write things down. She always took notes, but it didn't seem to bother her
not to do so right now. Her whole body looked so much more relaxed than she had last week, when
he had sat on the couch with her in 221. The dress she was wearing gave her a much more feminine
look than the boring school uniform, and the colour went perfectly with her eyes. The collar of her
dress was rather low cut and the top button was undone, showing her collarbones and a little bit of
cleavage. Her skin was sun-kissed, and she looked like she had just come form a long day at the
beach. Her hair was wilder than usual, not having been brushed for several days. It waved over her
shoulders and he could remember the softness of it between his fingers.

He saw how Anthony wasn't able keep his eyes off her either and couldn't help but jealously
wonder what he had already seen of her. It occurred to him that the boy must have also been at the
Griffin house as well, and suddenly he couldn't wait for the class to end.

"Alright, class dismissed. You know what to do for next time. Edwards and Griffin, stay behind,"
he drawled, cleaning the chalk from the board in slow waving movements.

Olivia and Lucy looked at each other, and cautiously walked towards his desk.

Mr Holmes didn't turn around as he spoke. "Miss Griffin, you are to go and see Mr Watson in his
office."

Lucy groaned in disappointment, but went on her way. Olivia watched her go, feeling partly
responsible for getting her friend into trouble. She didn't notice Mr Holmes turn around to face her.

"Miss Edwards, come with me," he said and promptly walked out the door in long strides.

She hung her bag over her shoulder and hurriedly followed him to his office, where he told her to
sit in the big armchair that was now standing in the corner between the side of his desk and his
bookcase. His office was interesting, and the skull that sat on the windowsill momentarily
distracted her, only to be startled again by his proximity. Sherlock pulled up his desk chair so that
there was nothing but a small amount of space in between them, sat down, leaned back, legs
crossed, and peered at her from behind his steepled fingers. Without saying anything, he let his
mind do what it did best.

"Are you going to interrogate me, like Mr Watson?" she asked calmly.

She sat there, knees slightly apart, back straight, and he suddenly noticed that she wasn't wearing a
bra, which slightly brought his thoughts off track. He hated the fact that she had such strong
effect on his rational thinking. But he wouldn't be Sherlock Holmes if he were not able to
successfully repress these emotions within seconds.

"I hear you gave the man quite a retort. Gained some bravery over the weekend?" He mocked.

Her eyes narrowed at him.

"Who says I wasn't brave before the weekend."
"Were you? How?" His deep voice resonated, daring her. He put one elbow on the side of his desk and rested his chin on his knuckles, while he observed her with inexplicably bright blue eyes. The sun that came through the window softened his pale skin.

He looked absolutely beautiful, but Olivia was annoyed by his mocking expression, and felt a strong desire to wipe it off his face.

"I took care of my dad," she blurted out. She thought about what she said only after she had spoken the words, hoping they were vague enough.

He was silent for a moment. His expression had most definitely changed, but she wasn't sure it was to her advantage. He suddenly looked utterly concentrated on her.

"You did indeed…. You took care of everything so he could sit at home and cry about your mother. I also have a suspicion he developed quite a drinking habit."

With that sentence he noticed that her body completely tensed up, making her collarbones stand out a bit more against her skin. He sat up, knowing he had struck a chord, and subsequently decided to strike it some more.

"You cook, clean, pick up his mess, pay the bills, do the shopping, and stay at home to make sure he knows you are there for him. You even have to take him up to bed at night because he can't get himself upstairs."

Olivia felt her throat clench. With her lips pressed together she was looking out the window; trying not to hear him pick her secrets apart.

"Your body language tells me I'm right." A little bit of smugness resonated in his voice.

"Do you stay with him until he falls asleep?"

She closed her eyes.

"Stop it," she said angrily. Tears were burning in the corners of her eyes. "He cares about me." She managed no more than a whisper now.

"I wouldn't suggest otherwise, but he's weak."

She opened her eyes again but kept her mouth shut.

"You need to survive, so you take care of him. You've done quite well so far, for a 14 year old."

She was not sure whether to take that as a compliment or an insult.

"When you walked into my classroom this morning, you were not surviving. You were living. This is a remarkable change, Olivia."

"I just needed to be away for a bit," she defended, trying desperately to avoid his piercing eyes.

"That's not the whole truth, is it?"

She felt like a deer in the headlights as she glanced up at him for a second.

"You are slipping back into survival mode."

"Pity." He threw the word at her like a dagger.
She couldn't stand his scrutinizing gaze and looked down at her knees.

"I believe you made a decision this weekend. Something must have happened. Did he forget your birthday? Something worse?"

No answer.

"Whatever it was, you decided not to live your life for him any longer. Which I would consider quite brave indeed."

Her gaze found his again, encouraged by his words.

"He said..." she caught herself before she said something stupid.

"What did he say?" His words had softened now, almost sounded caring.

"Did you realise he wasn't going to get sober anytime soon?"

"Did you decide you didn't want to be a slave? Very understandable, if you ask me."

Olivia was shocked at how spot on his deductions were, but she didn't want him to know.

"I'm not his... he just wants my mother back-"

She stopped herself again. This was thin ice and she knew it somehow. The way her father had looked at her in the shower that time, or the moment when he had noticed her wearing her mother's clothes, and the way he pressed himself against her in his bed. She knew it wasn't completely normal. She knew he just loved her very much and felt lonely, but it made her feel uneasy, and she knew that if she mentioned things like that, it would alarm people.

Mr Holmes was looking at the wall now, his gaze seemed distant.

"I just wanted to get away from all of it, just for a little while. And I knew everyone would be at Lucy's," she added.

Her voice pulled Sherlock back into the present. He stood up swiftly and started slowly pacing the Persian rug in front of her.

"So you got there, somehow. Ah, your bicycle, of course. And everyone was nice to you, I presume, having a good time. Making you feel a bit careless, perhaps?"

He tried to fish for information, but saw that she knew what he was trying to do.

"You are interrogating me. Should I ask for a lawyer?" she asked, glad that they weren't on the topic of her dad anymore.

"If you're honest, I will consider representing you," he huffed, still pacing.

"I'm also assuming there was a lot of alcohol, and a lot of young men who would do anything to get you to come upstairs with them. Do you understand why Mr Watson is a bit worried?"

"It's none of his business," she blurted out.

"He is trying to help you. He feels responsible."

"I don't need help. Nothing happened."
Mr Holmes said nothing but suddenly strode towards her chair, towering over her for a moment. His proximity sent shivers down her spine.

He crouched down a little so that he was at eye level with her and she retreated against the backrest, her heartbeat quickening. He was close enough for her to feel the warmth of his body.

"It's easy to detect what people have consumed when you look close enough. Your eyes tell me..." he peered into her eyes and she felt the room start to spin. She dared herself to look straight back, drawn towards the crystal shimmer in the blue orbs "...that you definitely had something illegal in the past 24 hours."

His face came a bit closer and Olivia had the urge to touch his lips. He sniffed. "I can still smell some horribly sweet alcoholic concoction on your breath".

She could feel her heart start to pound in her chest when he moved his face to her neck and breathed in deeply, smelling her hair.

"Marijuana... Really, Olivia?" He actually sounded surprised now.

Sherlock noticed her skin flush at this deduction, but she didn't seem extremely embarrassed. He was curious to see what would happen to her body if she were.

"Furthermore..." He lowered his voice intentionally, staying close to her face. "...I can see that you are not, at present, wearing a bra, which you normally do. This indicates you shed it in a different room than you slept and/or didn't see it in your hurry to get dressed this morning. Not sure if this is a positive or a negative deduction, but an interesting one none the less."

The mentioning of her bra made Olivia suddenly aware of how much of her breasts was visible from his position (he was still hovering over her), and instantly felt her nipples harden.

Sherlock saw it, too, and he felt hot blood rush towards his groin. Swiftly, he sat back down in his chair, legs crossed and silently cursing his own body. Sitting down didn't help much though, as he could still observe the hardened buds press slightly against the thin fabric of her dress. The sight sent distracting images through his brain, depicting several things he could do with them.

Olivia suddenly realised that she was exciting him just as much as he was making her squirm and she felt heat pool between her legs. She inhaled deeply through her nose, causing her lungs to expand and pushing her breasts outward for a moment. As she exhaled, she saw his eyes close and wondered if she was having such an effect that he had to calm himself.

"Almost nothing happened," she said, a bit more confident now and wanting more of a reaction out of him. "It was just an experiment."

"What was?"

"Kissing."

Sherlock felt a familiar tug in his lower abdomen.

"To test what, exactly?" His low voice now sounded strained to her.

"To see if I like girls ... as well as boys."

She'd expected some sort of reaction to that statement, maybe shock or anger, but Mr Holmes didn't bat an eyelash.
"I see, so you happily gathered some data while you could."

"It was mostly just kissing… nothing to worry about."

She looked at him innocently and Sherlock repressed the urge to demand more detailed information. He wanted to know exactly what she meant by "mostly", but knew it wasn't any of his business. And as long as it was Anthony and Rose (of course it had been Rose), there was no immediate danger to her.

In any case he needed to calm himself for a moment before he could end the conversation and get up. His deductions might be considered unethical already, risking her noticing his semi-erection was definitely out of the question.

"Well, I guess that as your mentor I should give you advice of some sort."

His words eased the sexual tension in the room, and Olivia smiled involuntarily at the thought of Mr Holmes giving her teenage advice.

His foot tapped against his desk in an irritated rhythm, until he spoke.

"I am going to tell what I believe Mr Watson would tell you, which is that there is nothing wrong with experimenting, as long is it's with people you trust and as long as it's not illegal."

She nodded.

"So promise to lay off the narcotic substances from now on, will you?"

"Promise."

"Good. We should go and see if Mr Watson was able to speak to your father."

The mention of her father felt like a punch in her stomach.

~

Mr Watson had not been able to reach her dad and asked Mr Holmes to take her home. She couldn't attend more classes without her uniform anyway, so it was best that they got her back to him as soon as possible.

"Take my car," he said and handed Sherlock the keys. John gave him a look that said "I want to know exactly what you know when you get back."

Olivia followed him across the schoolyard to the parking lot. At some point halfway he stopped abruptly, almost making her bump into him.

"Get your bicycle. We should put it in the car."

She had completely forgotten about it.

"I ehm… It's not here."

He frowned "Where is it?"

She looked at her feet.

"Hampstead Heath."
For a moment he was thinking. She could feel his gaze on her head.

"You left it there on Saturday night?"

She nodded.

"Are you completely out of your mind?"

She looked up and him and saw his disbelieving expression.

"It broke down! I had no choice…"

"You had the choice to cycle around the bloody park instead of through it," he said angrily, and started walking again. "You walked through an immensely big park, on your own, in the middle of the night. There is a difference between bravery and plain stupidity, Olivia."

Olivia did feel a bit stupid, but for some reason it felt reassuring that Mr Holmes got upset about her being in danger. His tall frame reached the shiny blue car and opened the passenger door to let her in. When he got in the driver's seat, his knees were almost touching the steering wheel. He huffed, mumbled something about having short friends, and slid his chair back before he started the engine and drove them out of the parking lot.

She told him the address and they drove silently towards her house. It wasn't a long drive, but long enough for her to come up with every possible scenario for what was about to happen. Her hand started gripping the leather seat as they got closer and Sherlock could hear her breathing quicken slightly. He knew she was scared, but wasn't sure for what exactly. Embarrassment? Rage? Disappointment?

He pulled up to the old house, switched off the engine and shifted sideways a little so he could look at her properly. She looked absolutely terrified now. Extremely tense and nothing like the daring young woman in his office.

"Ready?" he asked.

She swallowed and stared at her knees.

"You know… I can go by myself. You don't have to come inside… or anything."

It dawned on Sherlock that she might be just as scared of his reaction as of her father's.

"Actually, I'd like to speak with him."

Her lips pressed together and her knuckles had turned white from grasping the edge of her seat.

"Shall we go and see if he's in?" he asked gently.

She gave a small nod.

Sherlock followed Olivia towards the door. She had a key, but rang the doorbell, to give her father time to get up from wherever he was laying. When there was no movement behind the door for a full two minutes, she assumed he was unconscious.

Just as she was about grab her bag to look for her key, they heard stumbling footsteps in the little hall.
Revelations

When her father's head appeared from the creak in the door, Olivia immediately knew how far gone he was. His bloodshot eyes and uncoordinated movements would make sure that Mr Holmes would notice it, too, she thought.

"Olivia!" he exclaimed in what seemed like relief mixed with desperation, and he grasped for her with shaking hands.

Her dress almost tore as he pulled her towards him by her collar, and the moment he let go of the doorframe he sunk to his knees. He had not shaved in about a week, had not changed his clothes since Saturday, and smelled of sweat and alcohol.

Sherlock's left hand twitched as he watched.

"You're OK. God, you're OK," he gasped as the tears streamed down his face. His arms wrapped tightly around her as he cried, laying his head on her collarbone. Her arms were trapped by her side, but she turned her face slightly away from his breath.

Sherlock winced at the pathetic outburst of sentiment and felt like pulling her away from him. Olivia recoiled slightly at her father's touch and anger started building in his stomach, but he remained silent.

After about a minute she started pushing at him softly.

"Dad. We should go inside. This is Mr Holmes, my teacher."

Mr Edwards looked up slowly and his eyes widened, as if he first spotted the tall figure standing behind his daughter, giving him an ice-cold stare. He nodded, and with Olivia's help got up to stumble back inside. She had trouble letting him walk in a remotely straight line towards the living room, and he bumped into several pieces of furniture. Sherlock followed quietly and closed the door after him.

His eyes immediately started darting around the interior of the house, which clearly needed maintenance done, just like the outside. His hyper alert brain registered the paint that was peeling from door frames, the stains in the carpet, the unopened mail on the kitchen table, and the empty beer bottles that littered the floor.

Olivia's father asked if she was alright, to which she answered meekly. Sherlock got a painfully clear notion of what Olivia's life was like every day when she left St Francis. Even though he'd already suspected something like this, it was depressing to see how the girl had completely taken on the role of her father's caretaker, stepping back into it instantly and without effort.

"Olivia."

She looked around at him, still holding the trembling man by his arm.

"I need to have a word with your father in private."

She nodded and carefully let go of the hunched man, who was leaning heavily on a cabinet. If Mr Holmes felt any pity, which she hoped was not the case, he didn't let it show. "Sorry for the mess," she said and passed him quickly to go to the kitchen.
Sherlock stood in the living room for a moment, taking in the unorganised chaos of dirty glasses, used tissues, old newspapers, and food wrappings. Then he turned his gaze to the pitiful excuse for a father who was attempting to keep himself upright. Mr Edwards reminded him of people he knew when he was still using regularly. The trembling hands, the messy beards, the stains in their trousers, the filthy smell… a mere shadow of the person they had once been. A shadow Olivia undoubtedly clung to in the hope that she might help him get better, sacrificing herself in the process.

He approached and grabbed the man, who he already started to hate, by his shoulders. Before Mr Edwards could react he was pushed against the wall and a hand on his jaw forced him to look into a pair of angry grey eyes.

"Listen to me carefully. I know you're just an idiot who can't get over his wife's death, but it's not just your life you're throwing away. Right now, Olivia would be better off with no parents at all than with you, even though she loves you too much to realise that." Sherlock's voice quivered in rage and disgust.

Mr Edwards breathed heavily, panicking at the thought of social services knocking at his door to take his dear child away.

"Please, d-don't take her from me. Sh- she's all I h-have," he pleaded.

"Exactly. And she is not going to clean up your mess forever. Actually, she decided to stop doing that 36 hours ago, and look where you are." The man started to wheeze a little under the force of Sherlock's grip.

"Let me tell you this. You are going to let her go to school and let her see her mates. And if I notice that she has had to lift one finger for you again, I will personally make your life a living hell. So I order you not to touch the booze again for as long as she lives here. If you love her, that is."

The hissing threats emanating from Sherlock's teeth sounded terrifying.

"Y-yes. Of course. I will. I promise. Please don't take her away!"

"Then get yourself together and be a bloody father."

Sherlock let him go, to which the man collapsed in a heap on the floor, his chest heaving and eyes tearing.

"You have one chance."

He took one more disgusted look at him, stepped over his limp form, and walked towards the kitchen, tugging at the lapels of his jacket and twisting his neck both ways, easing the tension in his muscles.

Olivia was making an attempt at clearing up the kitchen, not being able to sit and wait while the house was filthy and Mr Holmes was inside it. She heard muffled voices from the living room, but could not make out what was being said. The fact that someone from the outside was actually seeing her father in such a state made her heart beat in her throat. It could mean the end of everything. He might be so disgusted that he'll tell her to get right back into the car, to hand her over to the authorities immediately.

She was about halfway through cleaning a pile of dirty dishes when he strode into the kitchen. His expression was worried and serious as he leaned with his back against the kitchen counter, next to her. She stopped scrubbing and turned to him. He looked a bit out of place among the grubby
furniture, with his aristocratic features and his long dark coat, hands crossed in front of his chest.

"Olivia." He sighed.

"Did you tell him about… what I did?"

"No, that's up to you. I've just tried to make him understand that he needs to change things, but I expect it won't be easy for him."

She nodded in understanding.

"He has been trying. I swear." She tried to defend him.

Sherlock decided he should be at eyelevel for what he was going to say next, so he motioned her to sit down and pulled up a chair for himself. He could see the anxiety in her face and he couldn't suppress a pang of empathy.

"I was just wondering… not so long ago, you told me you didn't trust me."

She didn't say anything, just looked at him with questioning eyes, her hands resting in her lap.

"I know that my… mood, might suggest otherwise at times, but you can trust me. You should realise that."

She still didn't reply, uncertain and not wanting to lie to him.

"I will have to talk to Mr Watson about your father's… habit, and he will decide to contact social services or not."

"Do you think he will?"

"I do."

He saw tears well up in her eyes and her breathing become unsteady.

"I'm sure they have your best interest at heart, just like Mr Watson and I."

"What if… what if they say I can't stay here?" her voice broke into a sob and she bit her lip to repress more of them.

"I think they will try and help you to stay with your dad if that is truly what you wish, but Mr Watson knows more about these type of people than I do. It would be better if you talk to him tomorrow."

She nodded, wiping her tears away with her palm. The genuine worry emanating from his posture caused her to want to try to ease Sherlock's mind.

"He's never beat me, you know," she said.

"I know." Sherlock paused as he tried to think of something nice to say. "He promised to get rid of all the alcohol. Maybe you can help him do that."

"Yes." Her voice sounded a bit strained.

"Will you be alright on your own with him?"
"I'll be fine."

"Good," he said, not convinced. He was apprehensive to leave her behind with a grown man who couldn't even walk properly.

"Look, if anything bad happens, dial this number." He took out a pen from his pocket and fumbled around for a piece of paper. Finally he just wrote on a five-pound note. "I will probably be here faster than the police. But if I don't pick up, try them." He handed her the note.

"Thank you," she said in a small voice, turning it over in her fingers. Sherlock could hear the tremor in her voice and knew it wasn't likely she would dial the number.

It took him a while to make a move and get up from the old creaky chair. He walked towards the door to be on his way, but turned around on the step. "Use the number. Even if you're not sure."

She nodded, and watched the man walk out. She stayed seated at the table until well after she heard Mr Watson's blue car drive away. Then she slowly got up to see if her dad was still conscious.

~

Mr Edwards was extremely pleased to have Olivia back, and seemed to genuinely understand that he needed to kick his drinking habit. Around 4 pm he woke up, took a shower and went to do groceries. He cooked her a meal, not once asking where she had been, just telling her over and over how happy he was that she was back safely. He wasn't even angry when she told him about her bicycle.

Olivia was happy to be able to quietly catch up on some homework in her room that evening, without having her ears constantly tuned to what he was doing downstairs. She had hope that he would keep his promise, and that nobody would be able to find a reason to remove her from the house. She changed into her pyjamas and laid down on her bed, reading and scribbling down mathematical equations for Mr Anderson.

After a while, however, she lost focus and her mind started wandering back to everything that had happened over the weekend. The sensation of alcohol in her blood while she danced with Rose, the incredible laughter they'd shared in the living room after breathing in steam from the vaporiser, the powerful feeling she'd had as Anthony's arousal pushed against her when they kissed. Her scribbling hand slowed as the soft fabric of her sheets reminded her of kissing Rose in the bathtub. The soft breasts pressed against her and the gentle exploration of her mouth had felt so different from Anthony's eager groping. Rose's words still rung in her head, telling her to explore herself before she let anyone else do it.

Olivia turned herself on her back, carefully pushing her text and notebook towards the side of her bed. She had never really known what to do with her own body. There was a tickling sensation sometimes when she washed herself in the shower, but had never been curious enough to explore further.

Now, she let her head rest back onto her pillow, relaxing her muscles while she slowly pushed her hand down the waistband of her pants. Her fingers hesitantly stroked along the extremely soft skin of her folds for a while before they slowly found their way between them. When her fingertips brushed her clitoris, she gasped at the electric tingling sensation. Her thoughts almost automatically went to the most arousing thing she knew, which was the man who had stood bent over her in his office earlier that day.

The thought of his gaze fixated on her hardened nipples sent a surge of pleasure through her body.
and she moaned softly. When she moved her fingers again they were slickened by wetness. Her eyes closed and her back arched involuntarily as her strokes became a little quicker. She could see his face inches from her as he inhaled and told her exactly what he knew she had done. In her imagination, she did kiss his full lips, and he instantly responded to her, as if it was what he had been waiting for.

His tongue was gentle in its exploration of her mouth, but his hands betrayed lust as he snaked one into her dress to fondle her breast. Olivia moaned softly now, her left hand cupping her own breast, pretending it were his elegant long fingers rubbing small circles over her nipple. Her breath started to quicken and shallow.

It didn't take very long for Olivia to feel the heat spread from her frantically moving fingers through the rest of her body and her legs started to tremble. When her very first climax arrived, she gasped and then quickly bit her lower lip to prevent herself from crying out. The pleasure that crashed over her took her by surprise and sent a forceful shudder through her body.

The spasms subsided after what seemed like minutes, and it took a while for her to catch her breath. She lay staring at the ceiling in amazement for a while before she freed her hand from her moist pants. She had had no idea that she could feel like this, and felt like she had been let in on some grand secret most of her classmates had known about for ages. It also raised many questions in her mind. The next half hour she occupied herself with thoughts about how exactly men masturbated, if it felt the same for them, and how it would feel if someone else did it to her. However, her muscles were now completely relaxed and she fell asleep before she was able to finish her maths.

When Mr Edwards came up to check on his daughter she was fast asleep. He looked at her unconscious figure for a while and with remorse thought about how mature she had had to be for him in the past few months, taking care of him like a toddler. With tears in his eyes and trembling hands he removed the books from her bed and put them on her desk. When he drew the blankets over her body he leaned down and kissed her hair, taking in her scent. It was difficult for him to tear himself away from her, but eventually he went to his own bedroom, remembering to set the alarm so he could wake her for school in the morning.
Coping methods

The following few weeks passed relatively quietly for both Olivia and Sherlock. Mr Edwards managed to remain sober and fixed his daughter's bicycle. He made sure she didn't spend her time cleaning or worrying over groceries, and even tried to help her with her homework when he noticed she was struggling.

Social services came for a visit to their house about a week after Mr Holmes scared the shit out of him. The lady had smiled kindly and asked him some questions, to which he could answer that everything was fine now he was sober again. She gave him some information on local support group meetings and advised him to attend.

She had also asked Olivia some questions in private, mostly about what she did after school and if she felt stressed about anything. Then she had said she would discuss some things with Mr Watson before she made a decision on how they would proceed. They hadn't heard back from her yet.

Her father made an effort and went to the meetings, which gave him a lot of courage. It made him realise he was not the only one who was struggling to get through the day. Although it was sometimes hard to listen to other people's traumas, they gave him two fixed moments in the week that he could work towards, feeling proud every time he could walk in and tell them he still hadn't touched a drop.

He was even able to let Olivia go and see her friends on weekends without getting completely miserable. She had to be home by 11 pm and was of course not allowed to drink anything. Olivia took the opportunity and spent her Saturdays with Rose and Lucy, which gave her an immense feeling of freedom. She kept her promise not to use any substances, thinking it was only fair as her father was making such an effort. It was an amazing feeling to spend time with her friends again out of school, and it made her feel so much closer to them.

Mr Edwards didn't know that a couple of times, instead of visiting her girlfriends, she met Anthony. They would go see a movie or walk around the city. Always in public places so kissing was as far as they went, which was fine with her. She didn't feel ready to go any further yet, not wanting to give herself over or lose control over what happened to her body. She was still tentatively exploring it by herself. Anthony sometimes got a bit impatient but kept his hands to himself when she told him to.

Her happiness was visibly noticeable, and she rarely came to ask the key to 221 anymore, which put Mr Watson's mind at ease. Twice, Mr Holmes asked her how she was doing, but didn't ask her to come to his office anymore. It even felt as if he was ignoring her, and she wondered in disappointment if the sexual tension that day in his office had been imagined. She was limited to watching him pace in front of the blackboard and thinking about him when she was alone.

Sherlock saw no reason to interrogate his pupil again. He knew he had to keep his distance in order to avoid any ethical transgressions. This was one of the few cases he in which did actually worry about crossing lines. His imagination had run a bit wild, and it disturbed him to know that he of all people could be so aroused by a girl her age. He refused to let her enter any erotic territory in his head again, although she made it hard for him to focus sometimes in class. When she sat silently, her eyes following him, her legs slightly apart as they were so often, it was simply too easy for him to imagine her soft lips touching his. It was alarming. He tried to look at her as little as possible.

Sherlock also found it hard to console his attraction to the girl with the feeling that he needed to protect her. How could she ever trust him if he kept thinking about her in such carnal ways? How
could he take himself seriously as a teacher who had sent bloody social services after her father, when he had to do everything possible to keep his mind from imagining her nipples harden underneath his fingertips? Even though she had shown clear signs of arousal in response to his teasing, he suspected the line between sexual exploration and irreparable damage was thin.

Then there was the boy, Anthony Wilding, who couldn't keep his hands off her. He was always close to Olivia, touching her, trying to kiss her in the corridors, and it sparked a jealousy in Sherlock that he had never experienced before. Although Anthony seemed relatively nice for a boy his age, Sherlock had fantasies that involved strapping his hands behind his back and locking him in the broom closet until Christmas.

While Olivia seemed to be doing much better, looking healthy and hardly sleeping at school anymore, Sherlock was coping less well. Everything irritated him, sleeping was a chore, and increasingly he felt the need to conduct dangerous experiments or numb his mind with whiskey, sometimes at the same time. The only times he got truly excited was when he could let the pupils do chemical experiments, which were bound to end with somebody losing their eyebrows and therefore only allowed to happen when the curriculum obligated it (On days like those, John made up ridiculous excuses to stop by his classroom to check up on the damage).

John and Mary noticed the change in his mood and physique. He was even paler than usual, rings around his eyes started showing, and Mary suspected he was losing weight again. After many motherly remarks about his health he promised to let her check him over during a free period. They had even contacted Mycroft. An official looking letter with a royal stamp was hand delivered to 221B Baker Street. It said: "You lost. Now get over it, little brother." It was his way of telling Sherlock he was once again considered a member of the Holmes family. He wasn't planning on using this privileged position in the near or distant future though.

Besides teaching and monitoring his pupils' progress with difficult exams, he tried to bury himself in other work. Burke had obviously not kept his files up to date, or remotely listened to his pupils. So besides with Billy Mitchell, who had come back to school, Sherlock had a chat with all of them to make sure they were not in any danger or being too self-destructive. It was terribly dull to constantly pretend he was interested in their illnesses, their interests, their love lives, their worries about college, or their rebellion against parents. The older they got, the more they lied, and the more mercilessly he picked them apart.

~

"Olivia, come! We're doing an experiment!"

Rose was standing by the door to the changing rooms, waving her over excitedly. Olivia walked to the changing room, dragging her gym bag along for another excruciating double rugby training, the only physical exercise Simmons considered a proper sport. Rose explained to her the genius plan.

"Sir, we're very sorry but we can't do P.E. today."

Roy Simmons, standing at the edge of the rugby field where several pupils were already warming up, looked up from his lesson plan at the three young ladies in front of him. He was a fit man in his forties, who took pride in his appearance and disciplined lifestyle. Teaching P.E. was something he enjoyed, especially because kids were so honest compared to adults. He liked them and he liked to think they appreciated his teaching. He wasn't however, very adapted to the open sexuality of the young girls. He'd been married for over twenty years and still looked away when his wife changed into her pyjamas before going to sleep. At least, that's what the rumours were after Mr Holmes
deduced him once.

Rose, who had been talking, looked genuinely regretful.

"Why do think you can't join in?" he asked.

"Because we're on our periods." Lucy replied.

Simmons blushed instantly.

"W-what... a-all three o-of you?" he stammered.

"Yes sir. It is perfectly normal that when girls spend a lot of time together, their menstrual cycles will synchronise. And we have been spending a lot of time together lately."

"Well I-I... I don't know w-whether..."

"Of course you wouldn't." Olivia said in her sweetest voice. "You're not the kind of man who would poke his nose into women's issues." She stepped forward and laid a warm hand on his tanned arm. "But our bodies are just very sensitive."

They could see his resolve weaken as he looked into her innocent eyes.

"Besides, things would become a bloody mess if we were to run around right now," Rose said stone-faced. Olivia had to hold her breath not to laugh.

"Oh dear. Yes, alright, just... go and do whatever it is you need to do!" there was a slight panic in his voice.

"Thanks for understanding sir. You're our favourite teacher!" Lucy said cheerfully as they walked away.

When the changing room door shut behind them, they burst out laughing.

"The look on his face! Priceless..." Lucy sighed as she wiped her eyes. "Sarah was right. This totally works."

"Maybe we should ask Mary for some tampons, just to make it more credible?" Rose said, and they set off to the nurse's office.

When they arrived at her door, Rose didn't knock. She just pushed through, like she had many times before, and realised her mistake too late.

As they followed her inside, Olivia almost stopped breathing and Lucy whistled through her teeth.

Mary was just putting away her stethoscope, in conversation with none other than Mr Holmes. He was sitting on the edge of the exam table, his dark purple shirt still open, showing his slim but toned chest. There was a screen, but Mary hadn't bothered closing it, not expecting people to just walk in. Rose giggled at her friends' reactions.

"Ladies, calm down. Let Mr Holmes get dressed without people ogling him." Mary said. She smiled slightly, because Sherlock had this peculiar attractiveness and it was funny to see how girls their age were already very much aware of it. She wondered how aware Sherlock was of the fact.

Olivia's eyes were transfixed on his chest. His creamy skin looked so incredibly soft and she could imagine trailing her fingers through the little curled hairs. The long fingers slowly but gracefully
worked his buttons, and her gaze fluttered towards his face, where she found his shocking blue eyes gazing straight back. Oh.

She blushed and closed her eyes for a moment, trying to focus on what was being said.

"Shouldn't you be in P.E. right now?" Mary asked, while she took down a couple of notes on Sherlock's general condition.

"We need tampons," Lucy said bluntly.

"Simmons let us go because we're on our period," Rose explained.

Mary smirked. "Really? All three of you. Interesting."

Sherlock was back on his feet, putting his jacket on, and gave them each a short glance. He raised one suspicious eyebrow.

"No you're not," he said, without any sign of discomfiture over the topic.

"How the f—" Rose's words were cut short by a stern warning from Mary.

He was about to walk out, but she called him back.

"Wait a minute, Sherlock. I must press you to eat more. You've lost weight and your blood sugar level is on the low side."

"Of course, Mary."

Olivia immediately gave him a worried look, but instantly forgot about Mary's words when he gave her a wink. She had trouble keeping her breathing calm.

After he left there was a moment of silence in which Mary eyed the three girls.

"So, if you don't need tampons, what are you really here for?"

Lucy quickly thought of the second thing she would ever visit Mary for.

"The pill," she blurted out.

A couple of days later, Richard Brook came walking into Sherlock's office, nonchalantly looking around the cluttered chaos and asking him questions. The man had made himself obnoxiously popular in record time, engaging the pupils in animated classes and extracurricular activities like a school paper and, of course, the Christmas performance. He had the magical ability to make the pupils want to work for him, and to make Sherlock want to punch him.

However, his intelligence was intriguing, as he was the only other teacher that didn't bore him to death. Therefore Sherlock decided to tolerate the man on his territory.

"They talk about you, you know," Richard said as he took a pack of cigarettes out of his grey pinstripe suit jacket. He'd sat himself down in the armchair in the corner.

Sherlock turned his chair towards him and narrowed his eyes.

"Whom do you refer to as 'they'"
"The pupils, of course," Richard said as he leaned forward and offered the other man a smoke.

"Ah, them." Sherlock took the cigarette between his lips (his desire for cigarettes had increased dramatically over the past few weeks) and let Brook light it for him.

"You've gotten yourself quite infamous."

"Well, they need something to talk about, I guess. Not much going on in their lives." He took a nice long drag of nicotine.

Richard chuckled. "Not all of them are bored, though."

Sherlock's eyebrows rose, waiting for him to explain, whilst letting the smoke flow quietly out of his nostrils. To a stranger, the two suited men might have looked like philosophers, sitting in a shady room full of books, talking and smoking.

"John told me what room 221 is used for."

"Ah, St Francis himself. Can't say I agree with his soft methods."

"Of course, you prefer the harsh method of cuddling them when they cry." Richard said amusedly. Sherlock remembered John saying something about Richard the day he fell asleep with Olivia in 221, but didn't know what the man had seen. He decided not to respond.

Richard gauged Sherlock's reaction through the thick cloud of smoke that was forming.

"It looked utterly adorable. But don't worry, I won't tell anyone you have a heart," he chuckled in his high-pitched voice. "Olivia Edwards is one of the best pupils in my class. Lovely singing voice… Didn't her mother pass away earlier this year? I heard something about a visit from social services."

"Did she confide in you?" Sherlock's cigarette was balancing loosely between his fingers, forgotten for a moment. The thought of Olivia opening up to Richard bothered him more than he wanted to acknowledge.

"Not in detail. But she seems so eager to please and tell people exactly what they want to hear. I just wondered if she's coping as well as she appears to be."

Sherlock was hesitant to speak about Olivia's private life with others, but Richard's voice and body language expressed genuine concern, and it wouldn't hurt having another person look out for her. He couldn't make his jealousy more important than her welfare.

"Her father's an alcoholic. Quit last month. It's still hard to tell if he'll keep it up."

"Hmm… it is easy to slip back into old habits, isn't it?"

Sherlock looked at him sharply.

"I tried to quit several times. But it's just too good, don't you think?" Richard said amusedly as he took another drag from his cigarette and blew a smoke ring.

Sherlock relaxed again.

"True." The orange tip glowed as he sucked air through his own. He felt Richard's eyes on him as if they were burning through his clothes.
"You're doing quite well yourself, in terms of popularity. I bet you let them fuck around with costumes and props all day," he mocked.

"Fucking around with props is more fun than you think, Sherlock." Richard said with a wink.

Sherlock pretended not to see it. Brook was a handsome man, but he had other things… people on his mind.

"Speaking of fun, John and I are going for drinks tonight. He needs some time off worrying about everybody. You should join us."

"No thank you. I've got more useful things to do than be social," Sherlock drawled.

"Of course you do! So stupid of me."

However, Sherlock could see the man knew he was lying. You'd rather get drunk on your own, his eyes said.

Richard stood up and put his cigarette out in the crystal -notstolenfromthepalace-ashtray on Sherlock's desk.

"Well, I guess we'll see each other on the bus then, won't we?"

"What bus?"

"The school trip is this Saturday. Fun fun fun!" He said as he walked out of the office.

Sherlock closed his eyes and let his head fall back, groaning as he remember the weekend of hell that lay ahead.
"Okay! Let's do this in an orderly fashion please. One by one."

It was Saturday morning and John was standing next to the school bus, shouting out names of the 3rd year pupils, to make sure they didn't leave anyone behind. The driver was standing next to him, finishing his last cigarette before starting the two-hour drive to Amberley, South Downs National Park. As their names were called, the hyperactive teenagers jumped into the bus to find a seat, arguing who got to sit next to whom.

"Garrison!"

"John, I can't come. Mycroft has this matter of national importance he needs me for."

"Bullocks Sherlock. Your brother has called me several times over the past few weeks asking about you. You haven't called him back once. Now stop fussing and get on the bus."

Sherlock was talking in John's ear, using his friend to shield himself from the beam of energy coming from the pupils.

"I was thinking. Maybe it's wise to bring an extra car. You know, just in case one of them needs to go home unexpectedly."

"You're not driving my car, Sherlock. Get on the bus. Griffin!"

"Oh come on. It's a proper plan. Safety first and all that?"

"Don't worry sweet pea, they'll get tired soon," Mary told him lovingly and squeezed his arm. She'd come along to see them off. "And anyway, you can sit in front, facing away from them."

"Don't call me that when there's other people around!" Sherlock whispered angrily. "And obviously. I called shotgun three days ago."

Mary chuckled at this reminder of how big of a child Sherlock could be. But he was not whining over nothing, she knew. He always had trouble with social gatherings. People crowded him and smothered him with information, even though they didn't mean to. The reason he learned to cope with the school was that he had control over his classroom and could create a barrier between them, picking out only the information he actually wished to know. That would prove to be much more difficult this weekend, and he knew it. She pulled him in a warm hug.

"Before you know it, it'll be time to go home and you'll regret you can't stay any longer."

Sherlock frowned suspiciously. "Are you practicing motherhood on me?"

"You're the closest thing I have to a kid!"

Before Sherlock could give her a scolding, John intervened.

"You need to board the bus now so I can peacefully kiss my wife goodbye. If you don't, I will make them sing songs the entire way. Mitchell!"

Sherlock grumbled and stepped around John to get on the bus.

"And I told you to wear sensible clothing!" John said, noticing Sherlock's suit.
"It's in my bag. I'm reserving it for when we reach the more excruciating circles of hell."

Sherlock entered the already humming vehicle and sat himself down at the window seat in the front row, ignoring pupils who greeted him. He was dreading this. Two days with 50 people in the middle of nowhere. Not good. On top of that, he'd have to watch Anthony Wilding's manic happy gob the whole time, still completely dazed with Au d'Olivia.

He completely ignored Sally Donovan, who gave him the same treatment, and Richard Brook, who cheerfully hopped on the bus in full hiking gear and a warm hat. Sherlock could see the man wink at him in the reflection of the window. John asked Sally and Richard to sit in the back and keep an eye on things at that end.

Thankfully, John needed to be close to the front in order to address the pupils, so he came to sit next to Sherlock as the bus set off.

The trip started with Emma realising she'd forgotten her bag from her dad's car, so they had to turn back after 10 minutes. After that was sorted, Sherlock cringed increasingly as John was kept busy managing the screaming, preventing pupils from eating all their packed food within the first half hour, handing out bags to the ill ones, and intervening in an almost fistfight.

"Sherlock, I need you to do a check," John said after about half an hour as they sat down again, already looking exhausted.

"He's 48 years old and sober. Studied to become a vet but never finished his degree, hates his current job. Involved in a bad marriage but trying to patch things up with his wife, mostly for the sake of their daughter. He's addicted to nicotine and wine gums and dreading this trip just as much as I am. But as I said, most importantly, he's sober."

"Jeez, Sherlock. At least lower your voice. And I didn't mean the driver," John whispered.

"I meant the pupils. I need to know if any of them have alcohol or drugs with them. I don't want to have to worry about that."

"Then you should have stayed at home," Sherlock said, but he got out of his seat and put on his most dangerously authoritative expression.

The first excitement for the trip had worn off a little bit and the pupils were calming down. Sherlock didn't mind talking to them now, as long he was in control. Slowly, he made his way along the aisle and scanned the kids to his left and right. The predatory expression on his face was well known to them by now, and Sherlock could tell exactly which ones were hiding something illegal, mostly by the way they tried to avoid his gaze.

It turned out that four pupils had brought alcohol and two brought drugs. Lucy Griffin was one of the culprits. Vodka, he deduced. She tried to get away with it by flirting with him, which was, of course, no use at all.

When he came to the back of the bus he scanned the back seat, where Richard and Sally were bunched up with three pupils. Sally was looking much more annoyed than when she had entered the bus, and Sherlock restrained himself, not voicing his knowledge of her failed flirting attempt with Richard, who was playing a card game with Eric Walker.

"I'm teaching Eric to play poker. Care to join us?"

"Wouldn't want to lower your confidence," Sherlock said before he turned around and made his way back to the front. He felt little nauseated from walking around, so when he sat back down he
tried to move as little as possible.

"Danny, Lucy, Patrick, Dave, Emma and Hugh's bags need to be emptied on arrival. I expect most of the incriminating items to be in the loading space right now."

"Patrick? Damn it. I confiscated a pack of cigarettes from him the other day."

"Prepare for something worse this time."

Sherlock felt his stomach contract a little bit and took a deep, slow breath. He crossed his legs and grabbed the armrests tightly, sitting ramrod straight while focusing on anything but the moving landscape as they sped along the A3.

"Feeling ill?" John asked.

"I'm fine."

As he said it, a loud whooping noise came from somewhere in the middle of the bus. Sherlock closed his eyes, trying to block out the sensory stimulation.

"I'm not getting up again," he added, but John was already moving in the direction on the sound.

When a couple of minutes later he came back with Olivia trailing behind him, Sherlock looked up and frowned.

"What's going on?"

"I've told Olivia to sit with you. I'll be over there." He jerked his head to indicate the seat that was now empty somewhere in middle of the bus.

"Why?" Sherlock kept a tight hold on the armrests.

John hesitated. "Inappropriate behaviour," he huffed.

"Great."

John moved back to sit next to Anthony. It was better to have somebody in the middle anyway, he thought, and didn't want to do that to Sherlock.

Olivia sat down in her newly assigned seat and Sherlock refused to look at her.

"Hi."

"Hi," he replied to her reflection in the window.

She looked nice in jeans and a well fitting jumper. It was the second time he saw her in something else than her school uniform. Her hair was down, as usual, and she looked much happier than a couple of weeks ago. Unfortunately, this also increased her attractiveness by… about a third of what it already was, Sherlock judged.

"You look very pale."

"I'm fine. You look… different." His long fingered hand came free from the armrest for a moment, making a gesture to indicate her figure.

"My dad let me buy some new clothes for the trip."
"Guilt trip."
"Sorry?"
"Never mind."

It was unnerving to see her stare at him like she was.

"Are you going to be sick?"

"Of course not," he snapped, finally turning his head towards her.

"Besides, you do not have the right to be nosy. What on earth did you inappropriately do for John to punish you?"

She blushed.

Sherlock realised she had been kissing skater boy. He tried not to envision it, but failed.

"Still experimenting? I'd have thought you had come to the conclusion by now that the boy-…" He cut himself off as he felt his stomach clench in protest.

Olivia didn't respond, but just gazed happily out the window.

"Did you have something for breakfast this morning?" she asked.

"No, why?"

"Then that's probably why you're feeling ill."

"I'm not feeling-…" Sherlock had to steady his breathing to subdue the need to vomit.

Olivia fumbled around in her backpack and took out a lunchbox.

"Would you like a sandwich? It'll make you feel better."

Sherlock knew it probably would be better to give his stomach something else to do than yell at him to get off the bus. They were only halfway to South Downs and he absolutely refused to vomit in front of 50 pupils. She smiled as he took a sandwich. It had cheese and cucumber on it and he munched slowly. It was actually pretty good.

When he finished he put his arm back on the armrest, but quickly removed it when his fingers came into contact with her hand.

During the rest of the journey he felt a bit better and tried to close his eyes while Olivia read a book, but it was difficult to relax or concentrate while sitting next to each other. Sherlock kept quietly observing the way her hair fell in front of her eyes and the way she kept putting it back behind her ear. Even though she didn't look up, he noted that she didn't turn the page either, her eyes scanning the same sentence over and over again.

A couple of miles from Amberley, John came up to the front to give instructions about what would happen upon arrival. Pupils would have to take their bags from the luggage hold, and take their keys to the rooms in groups of six (no mixed gender groups).

"And I want you to be back at the entrance of the hostel no later than 11 am so that we can start the hike. Make sure to wrap up warmly!"
Before John could turn away to talk to the driver, Sherlock snatched the programme from his fingers. As he read, Olivia and John watched his eyes widen and his face go even paler.

"John. Just know that I will be as far away from these activities as I can."

"Which is not very far, I can tell you."

"Trust exercises? Collaboration? Confidence building? These are key ingredients for disaster."

"No, they're supposed to make the pupils get to know each other better. You don't necessarily have to join in, but at least give them some support."

"Archery, John!"

But John was already with his back to him, denying him the chance to argue. A wrinkle had appeared between Sherlock's eyebrows.

"I'd quite like to learn archery," Olivia said after a couple of minutes.

"I'll make sure to be far out of range when you do."

~

The hostel was a lovely old building at the edge of the tiny village, close to the woods. Sherlock was glad to be out of the bus with his feet on solid ground, even though his suit didn't keep out the cold wind. While John confiscated prohibited substances from the identified pupils, Sherlock walked into the building to interrogate the owner.

When he came back to hand out keys to the rooms, there was a lot of discussion among the pupils about who would share a room together, slowing the process down a lot. They ignored his impatient sighs, until eventually he threatened he would divide the groups himself, which magically resolved all disagreements.

As everyone explored the hostel and the surrounding grounds, Sherlock went to his room to change into 'sensible' clothing. Immediately the warmth of thick fabric made him more comfortable, although he realised that his jeans and hoodie also made him look dreadfully young. He would just have to show them he still had the same authority, even without the expensive suit.

The first activity on the programme was a 3-mile hike to the lake. In groups, the pupils had to navigate through the woods and arrive there within two hours. Sally and Richard would walk together slowly, so that they could keep an eye out for any pupils trailing behind. John and Sherlock drove to the lake in the bus to await them.

There was excited chatter among the children, as most of them couldn't wait to go on an adventure, or just couldn't wait to be out of sight of their teachers. Olivia formed a group with Rose, Anthony, Lucy, Peter, who knew how to use a map and a compass, Billy, who was very happy to be back at school and had decided he didn't like Eric anymore, and a boy named Patrick, who Lucy had bonded with rather quickly during the bag search. They were all wrapped up according to Mr Watson's orders, but soon coats were opened and hats were discarded, because the walking generated enough body heat.

The air was cold and fresh, but the warm red and gold colours of the trees were enchanting, especially for those who never really left London. They navigated quite well along their own assigned route and the other groups were out of sight within 20 minutes. Rose, Peter and Billy were actually having fun together, running around, and searching for the little stream they were
supposed to cross at some point according to the map they had been given.

Anthony and Olivia walked hand in hand, fingers entwined, and he pointed out the birds of which his father had taught him the names. She just smiled and enjoyed her surroundings, and was relieved to feel the tension from the bus ride float away from her. It had been rather thrilling to sit next to Mr Holmes, but also terrifying because it had been pretty clear he didn't want to be there at all.

After a while, they reached a dip in the land and crossed the small stream, by stepping from rock to rock. Patrick lifted Lucy off the ground, playfully pretending to throw her into the water while she shrieked and clung to him.

"If I'm going in, I'm taking you with me!" her laugh echoed through the trees, startling the birds.

"No! I can't get wet!"

"Why not? Don't tell me you can't swim!"

He stepped onto the riverbed on the other side and put her down.

"I can swim, but I have valuable goods to protect. Mr Watson only found my cigarettes." he grinned mischievously.

~

John watched Sherlock shiver. He was sitting on one of the picnic tables at the edge of the huge lake, hunched up with his deep blue hoodie covering most of his curls, elbows resting on his knees, smoking a cigarette. The man looked like an unruly and rather tall teenager.

"Go and wait in the bus if you're so cold."

"Can't smoke in there. Here comes the first group, anyway." He gave a nod in the direction of the treeline, from which a couple of eager pupils were already emerging.

Over the next half hour, the other groups appeared from the woods and gathered at the side of the lake, ready to go for lunch. When Richard and Sally arrived, John started to rock nervously back and forth on his heels, peering intently at the woods. He was missing part of his flock.

"We're missing a group," he said.

"Correction: You're missing a group," Sherlock added.

"Strange, we didn't see or hear anyone, and were walking really slowly," Sally said.

"I could do without them for a while actually."

"Three out of seven of them are your mentor pupils, Sherlock."

"Does that make me responsible for their disappearance?"

"No, but I am making you responsible for their reappearance. I want you and Richard to go and look for them."

"You're going all Captain Watson on me, John. Calm down. They'll turn up within the next ten minutes, I swear." He just kept sitting on the table, peering at the treeline.
John frowned unhappily, but agreed to wait ten more minutes, which felt like an hour. Richard assured him that they were all intelligent young people who would not just disappear, which only made him more concerned.

"Ok, that's it," he said when the ten minutes were over. "I'll take the others back to the village, you two go and find them."

Sherlock groaned soundlessly. He absolutely did not feel like venturing into the woods in the company of Richard Brook, but realised that this was exactly the type of thing John wanted him to come along for. Besides, there could actually be something wrong, which was a promise for some excitement. However, he did already have a hunch as to what was taking the missing pupils so long.

They took the route and started tracing it back in the direction of the village. Thankfully, the physical movement warmed Sherlock's body pleasantly, and the trees protected them from the wind. Richard questioned him about the Hound at Dartmoor, apparently having read up on his case history. He even asked how he stole his brother's identity to get into the research facility, apparently aware of his role in the government.

"What do you know about my brother?" he snapped.

"Oh absolutely nothing. John just mentioned him in passing."

Sherlock was about to scold him for being so irritatingly curious, but froze. Behind a dead tree trunk in a heap of leaves were Olivia and Anthony, completely engrossed in a kiss. Olivia's coat was open and with indignation Sherlock watched the boy's hands move underneath her jumper. For a couple of seconds, his detached composure faltered, and he kept staring intently, fists clenched in anger. The couple startled as Richard politely cleared his throat.

Olivia felt her cheeks burn as she saw the two men standing less than 50 feet away, getting a full view of what they had been doing. She pushed Anthony's hands out from underneath her clothes and gave him a warning look. Mr Brook seemed strangely amused, but in contrast Mr Holmes' face was like a threatening dark sky of thunder. She was relieved when he turned away from them and walked in the direction of the others.

Sherlock distracted himself from the insulting couple by following the cheerful voices he could hear from behind a closely gathered group of trees. Of the four pupils hastily getting up from their circle when he came in sight, he could instantly tell that two were high. Lucy and Patrick were giggling hysterically, while Billy, number three, still lay in the soft leaves, completely oblivious to what was happening. Sherlock ordered Rose and Peter to help him up, while he approached Patrick. Apparently John had missed something when checking the boy's possessions. He was often dim like that.

Recognising the hazy expression on his and Lucy's face, he asked, "What did you use?"

"Nothing sir. We're just high on life!" The boy's giggling stopped when he registered Sherlock's expression.

"Hand it over now, and I might convince Mr Watson not to expel you," he growled.

Reluctantly, Patrick pulled a small plastic bag of hash out of his back pocket and handed it to Sherlock. As they were all standing now, he quickly checked their pupils to see who should be punished. Rose and Peter were sober. They struggled to guide Billy back to the path, where Richard was waiting with the other two, still smiling as if nothing was out of the ordinary.
Sherlock strode towards Olivia and without a word took her chin between his fingers, forcing her to look up at him. She blushed again. He did the same, but in a rougher manner, to Anthony. Neither showed signs of drugs, but the leaves in their hair were enough to reignite his anger.

Olivia was startled by the fire in Mr Holmes' eyes. It was not controlled, like his usual irritation. He almost looked hurt and why ever that was, it made her desperately want to make it right. However, he stalked ahead with Rose, Peter and Billy, obviously not wanting to be near her. The rest of the group set out after him.

Her distress must have been visible on her face, because Mr Brook came to walk beside her.

"Anthony, could you go ahead and see if Lucy and Patrick are alright? Thanks," he said.

"Are you alright dear?" he asked Olivia. "You seem a tad upset."

"I'm fine…"

"Are you sure? Anthony didn't… do something without your consent, did he?"

She smiled slightly at his concern.

"No. Anthony wouldn't do that."

"I expected as such. He's a pleasant boy."

She nodded, and her eyes lingered on Mr Holmes, who was already stalking far ahead of them.

"Is it really that bad? What we were doing?"

Mr Brook seemed a little taken aback by her direct question.

"Well… it's not something the school would encourage you to do, especially during school activities. But it was fairly innocent I guess. Nothing of lasting consequence, if you know what I mean," he chuckled.

"Mr Holmes is angry."

"Oh well. You can't blame him for wanting to protect his favourite pupil, can you?"

Olivia looked up, surprised.

"Really?"

"Well I guess I wouldn't know. But he always gets very protective when we speak of you."

"He talks about me?"

"If he were a talkative man I believe he would."

"He's often in a bad mood, but he has also been really nice to me. I don't want him to be angry."

Mr brook's face lit up. "In that case, maybe you should let him know how grateful you are. Do something nice for him."

"Like what?"

"I'm sure you can think of something he'd appreciate."
When the odd group of hikers got back to the hostel, John met them at the door. He let out a sigh of relief when he certified that nobody was hurt. The three stoners were banned from all further activities, but the measure didn't seem to make much of an impression on them. Olivia avoided any eye contact and waited for either Brook or Holmes to tell Mr Watson about her and Anthony's most recent incident, but it didn't happen. Thinking it best not to have any of them call her father about this, she made a silent promise not to kiss Anthony on school grounds (or trips) again. Pity, she thought, just when his skills were improving.

"Everyone's in the dining hall. Go and eat something quickly before we set off again. Sherlock, are you eating?" John asked as he saw his friend linger at the door, looking indifferent to the safe return, or maybe just bored.

"No, going to out fetch more cigarettes."

Before John could protest and make him feel guilty about destroying his lungs or for ditching him, the man had turned his back and walked off into the village.

The rest of the afternoon, while he and the other teachers took the group horse riding, John didn't see Sherlock once. While leaning against the fence watching the teenagers attempt to steer the animals in any direction other than the tasty grass, he wondered what was going through Sherlock's head. Apparently he didn't take his job very seriously and thought he could just bunk off, leaving the others to deal with the overexcited, loud, hormonal, and unpredictable group of minors. Did being his boss give him any authority over his friend? Probably none at all.

When they got back at the end of the day, the big terrace in the backyard of the hostel was used to have dinner. Richard taught a group of interested pupils to build a safe campfire, after which they roasted sausages, buns and marshmallows above the flames. By the time Sherlock came wandering around the hostel building, looking like a delinquent, they had already finished most of the food.
The lean man squeezed himself next to John on one of the big tree trunks that served as benches. His jeans were dirty with, as far as John could detect, mud, and although it was hardly noticeable, he was shivering.

Richard walked up and set a paper plate next to him. "I had them roast a hotdog for you."

Sherlock gave a small nod in acknowledgement but didn't make any indication that he was going to eat it. He just looked and frowned.

"So much for being a responsible headmaster. Where are the greens, John?"

He leaned towards the fire and lit himself a cigarette on the closest flame. John was about to feel guilty for neglecting to force any vegetables on the pupils, but then realised his friend was mocking him. He appreciated that Sherlock was acting somewhat social again and smirked.

"Found a kiosk, then?"

"Nope. You've picked a terribly unsuitable village. Got them off an old lady."

John frowned.

"Didn't think you'd be desperate enough to rob a nan. Did you turn yourself in?"

"Don't be absurd. She was merely expressing her eternal gratitude for my assistance in a case."

"What was the case?"

"Helped her dig up a grave."

"Excuse me?"

Sherlock went on stoically. "She told me she suspected her husband wasn't in his grave. After considering the evidence I was 87% certain she was right."

"So you dug him up."

"No no. Like I said, he wasn't there. Something to do with a diamond he swallowed on his deathbed. They arrested his brother an hour ago. He took a long drag from the cigarette and his eyelids closed halfway in bliss.

"Well, sounds like you had fun."

"Got me through the day."

It was getting dark. They watched the kids mess about with marshmallows until John thought it was enough and frankly getting a bit dangerous. He got up from his comfortable seat by the fire and ordered them to clean up and go inside. It was good to see that he at least still had authority over his pupils as they started picking up their mess. He would talk to Sherlock tomorrow.

Sherlock remained sitting on the tree by the fire and watched the bustle inside the building. Lights switching on and off, sounds of chatter, laughter, singing even, and games. He was glad John left him alone, knowing the man hadn't appreciated his absence. There were simply too many of them. He needed some time alone to process all the social interaction and quiet his mind. It was calming to watch the flames crackle and bite into the wood. Throwing on a couple more logs and taking a bite from the hotdog, he revelled in the radiating warmth and pushed the hood back, exposing his messy curls. The entire day passed through his mind and he made an attempt at searching for
feelings to find out why the kissing between Anthony and Olivia bothered him so much, but he had trouble understanding it. She was brilliant, but too young, too innocent, and too much his pupil for him to feel something as ludicrous as jealousy.

After a while, he noticed that the lights in most of the windows in the building had disappeared and everything had gone quiet. He checked his watch. He'd been sitting there for three hours. Reluctant to leave the warmth of the fire, he stared at it some more, phasing out a little until he heard the backdoor shut and soft footsteps come towards him. Without looking, he knew exactly who it was.

"Shouldn't you be in bed by now?"

"Ehm… I just thought you might be thirsty."

The sound of her gentle voice made his insides glow even warmer.

She put the two mugs she was holding next to him on the wood and sat down. The steaming tea looked incredibly inviting. Sherlock couldn't remember when he'd last had something to drink. He didn't say anything, but picked one up and cradled it with his sleeves over his hands, so as not to burn them.

Until now, Olivia had never realised how clothing could change someone's appearance so much. He looked almost ten years younger in his casual clothes, and his face was rather relaxed. As he stared at the flames, his eyes sparkled a strange ocean blue.

She thought about what to say, and regretted not thinking this through earlier, when she was nervously scuttling around in the kitchen, trying not to make any noise. The rest had gone to bed and she had told them she was going to take a shower, hoping they'd be asleep when she returned. Him sitting alone at the fire had seemed like the perfect opportunity to find out whether he was still angry. How she would go about it hadn't crossed her mind yet, though.

Thankfully, he spoke before she made a fool of herself.

"I gather the horse riding was as dull as it sounded?"

"Oh yes. They are so used to following each other around, that's all they want to do." While she said it, she pulled her legs up and wrapped her arms around her knees, a position that was becoming quite familiar to him now.

"Nobody fell off, then?"

She shook her head.

"Dull indeed."

He watched her shiver and scooted over so that his side was touching hers, giving her some of his body heat. She didn't shy away.

"What did you do this afternoon?"

"Oh, I needed to clear my head, delete some useless memories."

She frowned but didn't ask what he meant by that.

"Did you… delete what happened during the hike?"

"I didn't. Need to know how angry I have to be next time." The way he said it didn't sound exactly
angry to Olivia, but a bit dangerous nonetheless.

"Sorry. It's just... we are... you know."

Sherlock didn't know, but kept silent.

"You really don't like Anthony, do you?" she asked.

"You really do, don't you?"

Olivia smiled. In the warm orange light it was difficult to tell whether or not she was blushing as well.

"He's nice, really. I like... being with him."

Sherlock huffed. "Well, if you're still experimenting with your attraction to the male and/or female gender, I can tell you it's not very difficult to figure out people's preferences."

She frowned, confused.

"Even if they don't know themselves?"

"Especially then! When you don't know it, it's almost impossible to hide it."

Curious now, she continued. "Okay well, what about Lucy?"

"Straight."

"Rose?"

"Gay."

"Anthony?"

"Anthony's sexual preference is you, which will remain so for the next couple of years, I would guess. So you'd better be honest with him now and tell him you don't actually fancy him, assuming you don't want to break his heart, that is."

"I-..."

"And you are straight, although I guess there is nothing wrong with curiosity. Is that enough information for you?"

She noticed the amusement in his voice and decided not to be shocked by this invasive analysis.

"Rose can guess it, too."

"Ah, Miss Edeson, knower of all secret love lives, if I correctly interpreted the notes I intercepted. Tell me, has she deduced mine yet?"

He said it looking down at her with a wink, and Olivia blushed. She felt like he was testing her in some weird way, and decided on impulse to test him back.

"She says you and Mr Brook... like each other."

Her heart was beating faster now, wondering if he would tell her off for saying such a thing, and a little bit scared that he might answer confirmatively. Instead he just looked thoughtfully at the
flames.
"Hmmm… She's only half correct on that one, I'm afraid."
He tilted his head and looked down to watch her process his words.
"Oh!"
"Right."
"She says Mr Watson is bisexual."
"He is." Sherlock caught himself too late and cursed in his head.
Olivia couldn't suppress a grin.
"I assume it is no use telling you that information is classified?"
"She will be very pleased to know." Olivia chuckled. She saw his eyes narrow at her but his mouth was smiling.
They quietly sipped their tea for a while. When she finished her cup, she put it down to her other side. After a moment's hesitation Sherlock felt her rest her head softly against his shoulder. Affection took hold of his body, and he wondered how the feeling had become so much stronger since less than four weeks ago, when she had fallen asleep with him on the sofa.
"Have social services contacted you again?"
He was almost sorry he asked, because he could feel the girl tense up immediately.
"No they haven't. They said they might, just to check up on us. I hope they don't visit while I'm not home."
"Why, is he drinking?" There was only the slightest hostile edge in his tone.
"No! No he isn't," she said hurriedly. "He is doing great. No drinking. I just want to be there… to see their reaction."
Sherlock nodded in understanding. She wanted to keep control over the situation, like she had so desperately done before anyone else got involved.
"He's doing all the cleaning and cooking, and groceries, and he even helps me with my homework sometimes. He brought me to school this morning to wave me off."
"I saw."
He was happy that the man was keeping his promise. Olivia looked much more healthy. Right now, in the orange glow of the fire, she looked absolutely stunning. He let his eyes close for a moment, enjoying the warm weight of her head against the top of his arm. He was considering putting it around her when she spoke again.
"I sometimes think about when my mum died… isn't it weird that I never saw her wounds?"
"They generally try to avoid exposing children to stab wounds, especially when it involves a relative."
"I wish I had seen them. I keep thinking of the picture of that lady."

Sherlock sighed deeply but patiently. "Like I explained before, those were exceptionally nasty wounds which I should not have shown you. So please forget about that. Your mother's were probably hardly visible."

"Are you just saying that to make me feel better?"

"Possibly."

Olivia considered her words for a moment before she spoke again.

"For a person who tends to dislike people, you're really very sweet."

To this, Sherlock Holmes had no reply whatsoever.

It was quiet again for a couple of minutes, in which Olivia revelled in the feeling of the soft but surprisingly muscled upper arm against which her head and shoulder were resting. In contrast with the rather tense bus ride, it felt incredibly safe and pleasant to sit with him like this. She relaxed into his arm.

After a while he nudged her softly with his elbow.

"I can see your eyes closing. You should go to bed."

Olivia squirmed and sat upright, blinking slowly. When she looked up at Mr Holmes, the corners of his mouth betrayed a hint of a smile. She remembered Mr Brook's words from earlier that day.

Sherlock had returned his gaze to the fire, missing her comfortable warmth against his side, but suddenly noticed the girl's proximity. As he turned his face to see what she was doing, a kiss, one that was probably meant for his cheek, landed on the corner of his mouth. It was only a moment until she backed away again, blushing.

Her mouth opened to say something, but she quickly picked up their empty mugs and walked away, disappearing from the circle of light. He sat there, frozen like a statue, his mind reeling in an attempt to process what had just happened. The touch had been soft and lasted only about half a second, but his skin was still tingling. He waited for a couple of minutes, smoking his last cigarette -was it seriously already the last one?- letting his heart rate slow down before finally getting up to go inside.

The movement made him aware that his body was tired, his back was cold, and that he was rather dirty from the grave digging. While attempting to retrospectively deduce Olivia's intentions for giving him that kiss, he peeled off his clothes and stepped into the tiny shower cabin that adjoined his room. The water took a little while to warm up, but it cleared his head a little so he could think properly again.

They had been talking about Anthony, kissing, sexual preferences, her mother, she had called him sweet… As the water trickled pleasantly down his neck and torso, the very clear sensation of her lips on his skin came back, and the full realisation of it sent pleasant shivers through his entire body. He moaned softly, and then cursed under his breath as he felt something flaccid rapidly grow towards something he didn't want to deal with. During the rare occasions he had sought physical release in the past couple of weeks he had stubbornly managed to keep Olivia out of his thoughts. Therefore it seemed ridiculous to him that he would get so incredibly aroused by an innocent gesture like that. He didn't want to do that to her, he didn't want to do it here, but his lower body enthusiastically disagreed.
A couple of minutes later he was leaning with his arm against the cold wall, his back still slightly arched from an ecstatic Olivia dominated orgasm. The touch of her lips was still lingering in all the places he had imagined it to be stimulating, which was basically everywhere. When his breathing had sufficiently slowed down, he washed away the evidence of his transgression from his skin and from the tiles. Ten minutes later he fell asleep, cursing his own body.

The next morning at breakfast Olivia didn't dare look at Mr Holmes, who was sipping his coffee while Mr Watson made attempts to push food onto his plate (okay, maybe she did steal a couple of glances). She didn't know why she had felt so courageous at the campfire, and was extremely embarrassed. It was probably because he had been so sweet to her, it had been so relaxed, and his casual clothes had made him seem much less intimidating. But kissing him on the lips had not been her intention. She had been so scared of his reaction that she had left as quickly as she could, adrenaline pumping through her veins. Now she had no clue whether he was annoyed, disgusted, or just indifferent to her clumsy display of affection. She sure as hell wasn't going to ask. What if he told Mr Watson? What if he told her father? It left her with a stressed feeling in her stomach.

It was a sunny day and he had changed his clothes back to the beautiful tailored suits he always wore, making it difficult not to stare. He mostly ignored her during the day's activities, but seemed to be in a much better mood.

First, they went abseiling from a cliff, which was completely new and terrifying for many of the pupils, and some of them outright refused to descend. Mr Holmes encouraged them by promising to give them their most recent exam marks when they reached the bottom. They were all in his head. Olivia was too full of adrenaline to pay attention to the way he told her the mark. She only remembered that it was an A.

During their final and long awaited activity, archery, he actually joined in, putting a big smile on Mr Watson's face. This smile cross-dissolved into a rather vocal expression of desperation and rage when a rather expertly aimed arrow was shot into a tree, a couple of inches from Mr Brook's head.

As they boarded the bus to go back home, Olivia rebuffed Anthony and went to sit next to Rose, the only person she trusted enough to keep her secret.

"I have to tell you something," she whispered.

Rose's head snapped towards her. "Don't tell me you and Anthony… because that is going bloody fast, Liv."

"No! No, that's not it."

First, she told Rose about what Mr Holmes had said about Mr Watson, and she grinned widely, clapping her hands.

"I knew it!"

When she whispered to her about the rest of her conversation with him, including the kiss, Rose gaped at her.

"You kissed him."

"Yes! It was supposed to be on the cheek, but he turned towards me."

"You kissed Holmes. The most unsociable person we know."
"He's not that bad."

"The man who you have secretly fancied since the start of term."

"Rose, cut it out! I know who he is."

"What did he say? Did he kiss you back?"

"Nothing, and it wasn't like that. I just walked away. He probably thinks it was awkward and weird, like it was!"

"Probably fantasizing about you right now," Rose said while she peered over the seats to the front, where some black curls were visible over the edge of his backrest.

Olivia pulled at the back of her jumper. "Sit down! You're supposed to tell me what to do. Friend advice and everything."

Rose couldn't stop grinning and Olivia sighed, but secretly Rose's excitement was affecting her. It was rather tempting to think he had liked it, even if it was just a fantasy. She let her thoughts wander back to the impossibly velvety texture of his lips.

"Well, I guess now it is his turn to act. He won't show any of his feelings in public though, so just wait until you're alone with him again. And tell me everything that happens, of course." Rose turned to see her friend with a dreamy look on her face, not listening to a word she was saying.
"Oh f...!" Olivia jumped out of bed when she noticed the time. She was definitely going to be late for school. With nervous uncoordinated fingers she managed to get dressed into her tights, skirt, shirt and jumper that made up her school uniform quickly. Stuffing her books and homework into her bag, she jumped down the stairs, slipped into her boots, grabbed her coat and ran out into the cold air.

It was halfway through November now, and still dark at this time of day. Olivia hated having to get up in the dark, but also loved the festive atmosphere that always took hold of the city. Today she didn't notice the cold at all as her mind started to worry about other things.

As she cycled to school along the slippery road she wondered why her father had not woken her. He had been cheerfully opening her curtains every morning since he had stopped drinking, telling her to get ready for the day while he went downstairs to prepare breakfast. He even kissed her goodbye, like a real parent. She had begun to depend on his cheerful voice waking her on time and was annoyed at him for not doing so, especially today.

Monday morning was Mr Holmes' class, and he was always vicious with latecomers. Sometimes he let pupils inside, humiliated them, and just ignored them the rest of the time. Other times he let them wait standing out in the corridor for the entire lesson, which was quite humiliating. It was, however, a rather effective technique, because nobody dared to be late for his class.

It had been a week since the embarrassing incident at the campfire, and he had hardly spoken one word to her. Back to his tailored dressed and impossible self, a thick wall of superiority around him kept pupils at bay.

Only once had he addressed her during class. He had and asked a question to which she had not known the answer, and was pretty sure most of her classmates didn't either. She suspected it was something that should be taught in the fifth year. He had scolded her anyway, scowling, telling her he should reconsider the high marks she'd been getting of late.

Her cheeks had burned and she'd convinced herself it was proof that he was revolted by her invasion of his personal space. Her tardiness today would be another insult to his authority, and fear took hold of her insides as she threw her bike down in the shed beside the playground and beheld the old stone building.

The school was already quiet when Olivia entered, pupils silently listening to their teachers' instructions. Thankfully, Mr Watson was not observing the door and she slipped inside undetected, panting slightly from the cycling. She threw her coat on her locker in passing and secured her bag around her shoulder. As she approached the science classroom her pace slowed, nervous for the icy stare that would undoubtedly fall upon her the moment her knuckles touched the door.

"It is as simple as that, Miss Davies. I advise anyone who was wondering the same thing to read
Olivia heard his muffled voice and watched his straight posture through the glass in the door. She noticed his fingers gesture, irritated. Her heart picked up its pace and she hesitated to knock as she saw his facial expression, which predicted heavy clouds and rain.

The angry lines in his face didn't fade when he abruptly turned on his heel and looked straight at her, as if he already knew she was standing there. Her heart stopped for a second. His face didn't betray any emotion as he stalked towards the door. Towering over her he opened it, taking in her appearance.

"Punctuality, Miss Edwards, is the smallest act of politeness to consider, don't you think?"

His voice made her quiver with anxiety, but she knew better than to bore him with an explanation for why she was late. He probably already knew anyway.

"I'm very sorry sir," she said, looking past his arm at the window in an attempt to hide her emotions.

For a couple of seconds he just stood there, a few inches from her, his eyes scrutinizing intently. Then he stepped aside a fraction, just enough to let her slip past him.

"Sit down and try not to disturb the class again," he barked.

Olivia passed him quickly as he shut the door again with a bang, almost catching her skirt between it. She all but ran to her seat, finding Rose looking at her with a hint of pity. In an attempt to hide the tears that were brimming her eyes, she let her hair fall down her face and fumbled in her bag for her textbook. He loathed her. She was absolutely sure of it.

Mr Holmes ignored her for the rest of the class, and she did her best to keep up with his two-hour lecture on covalent molecular bonding.

When he was finished, he turned around and asked if anyone had a question. Nobody dared to raise a hand.

"Good. Now, out of my sight. I need to think and you're putting me off."

Dismissed, many relieved sighs could be heard as they all got up to leave.

"Jesus," Rose murmured, stuffing her books into her black schoolbag angrily. "The man needs to get laid or something. He's insufferable."

"Sorry," she said when she saw Olivia's frown.

She tried to get herself out of that room as quickly as possible, following Rose down to the front to the door. But the sound of his voice gripped her before she could get away.

"Olivia."

He didn't even raise his voice, or tell her to stay behind, simply saying her name was enough for her to know she what he expected. As the last pupils ran out of the room, he graciously gestured for her to take the seat he pulled up. Dropping her bag on a front row desk, she kept standing.
Mr Holmes leaned back in his chair, head cocked and a pen held between two fingers. He looked like he hadn't slept at all. His eyes were a bit darker and his hair was more unruly than usual.

"I'm trying to quit," he said in answer to her stare. Then, without giving her time to ponder what precisely he was quitting from, he started his interrogation.

"Tell me. How is your father doing?"

"Fine."

"Fine, sir," she quickly corrected herself.

Even though everything actually was fine, his questions made her nervous. She unconsciously fumbled with the hem of her jumper.

"Have social services visited?"

"No, they called and said there was no need, because he is sober and going to meetings, so…"

"That's good news then. Decided to celebrate by getting some extra sleep this morning?"

Although his words conveyed an interest in her welfare, the tone of his voice and his raised eyebrow did not make her feel like she had one ounce of his sympathy.

"N-no, I… I didn't wake up. I mean… I didn't set my alarm," she stammered.

"Well, for your own benefit, muster the strength to remember. You know what will happen if you are late to my class again."

"The corridor, I know."

The way she said it made it sound like some evil physical punishment from a Roald Dahl story. His features softened a tiny bit.

When he remained silent, she assumed he was finished and picked up her bag again. She turned to walk away, glad to be able get out of there.

Mr Holmes rubbed his face with his left hand and leaned forward to rest his elbow on his desk, looking tired.

"Olivia."

Although it sounded less controlling than before, her name rumbling in his throat made her stop in her tracks again.

"You still have my phone number in your possession, don't you?"

She nodded, but couldn't think of any situation in which she would even consider calling him.

"Good, good," he said, nodding slowly. His blue eyes strayed away from her onto the plain wall and suddenly he seemed deep in thought. Olivia didn't think he even noticed her close the door behind her.

~

Jeremy Edwards opened his eyes and whimpered at the incredible pain soaring through his head.
The room started spinning as he sat up, making him nauseous. He hadn't heard Olivia leave that morning and hoped she had gotten to school on time by herself.

The memory of the previous two days came back to him and he groaned to himself. Disappointment, anxiety, and shame crashed through his brain right down towards his stomach at the thought of what he'd allowed to happen. Slowly, he got himself out of bed and started stumbling to the bathroom.

It had been a special meeting for him on Saturday, because he had dared to share in front of the group for the first time. They had asked him to do it a couple of times before, but he had refused, not comfortable to speak about himself in front of strangers just yet. Slowly he had gotten used to the meetings and familiarised himself with the regular faces, until he felt secure enough to stand in front of them.

He had introduced himself, even though most of them knew his name by now, and continued telling his story and talked about the day-to-day problems he faced. Although he was quite nervous in the beginning, it felt great to let out his insecurities, fears, his depressed thoughts, and his fear of screwing up. Most of the people watching him listened attentively and quite a few of them nodded encouragingly at his words. It was a great moment.

One of them actually grinned at him.

It was Jim, an average bloke, normal height, young, lean body, dark hair, and a friendly face. As Jeremy talked, he smiled like he was happy for him, proud, even though they barely knew each other. The two times they talked Jim had been a very attentive listener and asked a few questions about Jeremy's family, but hadn't talked about his own home life. Jeremy had thought he was a bit shy, but as he watched him now he seemed anything but. He was relaxing in his chair, sipping from a bottle of coke. At some point the man raised his drink at him with a sparkle in his eye, as if he was making a silent toast.

When the meeting ended he didn't spot him again.

Jeremy spent the afternoon trying to get some stains out of the carpet in the living room. It felt like he had made progress that day and felt proud of himself. He knew he had almost completely screwed up with Olivia, and wasn't about to let it happen again. She was an intelligent and beautiful girl, who could grow up to be anything she wanted, and a little parental support was the least he could provide her. He had to consider her as a young girl who needed his guidance, not a women who existed to take care of him. He lost sight of this distinction when he was intoxicated, he realised that now. She might act mature and look all grown up in his wife's clothes, but she wasn't -and would never be- Isabel.

It was not until late the next day that he was reminded of Jim from AA, when Olivia was upstairs doing her homework and the doorbell rang. When he answered it, a broad shouldered deliveryman with a baseball cap greeted him and pushed a heavy box into his arms. Without asking for a signature, he left, all within a couple of seconds, leaving him confused in the doorway.

He went back inside and set the box on the kitchen table. Inside it were six bottles of coca cola, and a note.

"Treat yourself."

No name or address.

Of course the image of Jim sipping that bottle popped up in his mind. Could it be anyone else? He
was a friendly guy, but this was unexpected. Should he take this as some sort of message? How the heck did the guy know where he lived?

He considered the possibility that this was some sort of attempt at dealing. He had heard of drug dealers visiting AA groups just to look for customers. Turning over the box and feeling along its walls, he couldn't find any indication of hidden drugs or anything. He examined a bottle, but it seemed new, lid unopened, straight from the factory. Eventually, he just put the box on the floor next to the fridge, uncertain what to do with it.

For 3 long hours he succeeded to ignore the mysterious box, but caved about 15 minutes after Olivia had gone to bed. He didn't even like coke that much, but he was curious. He would just take one sip to know if the content was really what it said on the bottle. If it was, he would simply drink it and thank Jim at the next meeting. If it wasn't, he would flush all of them. And punch him.

The glass clinked seductively as he took one bottle out. The liquid looked like coke, smelled like coke, and tasted like coke. However, after he took that first sip, a strange euphoric effect almost immediately took hold of his brain. It only took two bottles to knock him out for the next sixteen hours.

When he woke up on Monday afternoon, Jeremy could only make it to the bathroom just in time before leaving horribly smelling evidence on the carpet. In the hours after his first vomit, the hangover and the familiar craving for more overshadowed the guilt for what he had done. When eventually he had recovered enough to think again, he hid the four remaining bottles underneath the sofa in the living room, knowing Olivia hardly ever sat there, and made sure dinner was ready when she got home from school.

He convinced himself that if he would only drink *whateveritwas* after dinner, and only one bottle per evening, he could easily control his behaviour, and when the bottles were gone he would simply stop.

He didn't consider the possibility that the deliveryman would come back.

Sherlock had just dozed off where he was sprawled on the sofa when the sharp noise of the phone ringing registered in his brain. For a moment he contemplated not picking up, but he was desperate for some distraction with the long weekend looming ahead. It could be Mycroft, but it could also be John, or even better, a client.

Slowly, he opened his eyes, got up and rubbed the sleep from his face as he walked into the hallway. When he said his name he heard a relieved outburst of breath on the other side and in an instant he was fully awake. A worried knot tied itself around his stomach.

"Olivia?"

"I'm s-sorry to b-other you. It's j-just…ehm…"


"Where are you?"

"I'm-m on O-xford Street."

*She's been crying.*

"Are you hurt?"
"Maybe I sh-shouldn't have-"

*Cold. Very upset.*

"Are you inside a booth? Stay there. I'll be there within 10 minutes. Black cab. Don't get out till you see me."

She told him her exact location and it took only 5 seconds for Sherlock to slam the phone down, shed his dressing gown and take the stairs three at a time, grabbing the Belstaff coat on his way.

~

It was almost two weeks after he had forgotten to wake her that Olivia knew for certain her father had relapsed. There had been moments when she had noticed his speech was different, his mood changing rapidly, or that he was a bit absent, but it wasn't like his previous drunken behaviour and she couldn't find any alcohol anywhere. Besides, he was still doing all the cooking, cleaning, and groceries, so she hadn't confronted him.

When she got home from school on Friday afternoon he was making a racket in the kitchen. Pots, pans and cooking ingredients were strewn all around the place, and he was frantically looking for something.

"Hi dad, what's wrong?"

He didn't look up but proceeded to empty out cabinets as if his life depended on it.

"I can't find the fucking slicing knife! Where the hell is it?!"

The anger in his voice made Olivia take a step back. She had never heard him swear in her life.

"Isn't it in the usual drawer?"

"No. No. No. It's not THERE!" He slammed his fist into one of the cabinets and cringed in pain. Olivia rushed towards him to see if he was all right.

"Don't do that! You've hurt yourself," she said as she took his hand to examine it.

The physical touch caught his attention and he finally looked at her. His eyes had a strange glaze over them.

"H-have you been drinking?" Her alarmed voice reached right through his anger and touched the shame he had worked so hard to ignore.

"Oh God, sweetheart no. I just… it was only a little bit, not even a real drink. I swear I'm fine. Nothing to worry about. Don't be upset. I just need to… I'm so sorry."

He kept apologising while he held on to her shoulders.

"Dad!"

"It won't interfere with anything, I swear. I just need this, Olivia. You need to understand that. It's helping me."

She shook her head, tears brimming her eyes.

"No it's not. It's hurting us."
She turned harshly out of his grasp and started looking around for a bottle, a box of pills, anything she could think of that might have gotten him into this frantic state.

"No it isn't sweetheart. I need you to trust me, for once," he pleaded. He followed her to the living room where she started removing the cushions from the couch; desperately searching for something she could flush down the toilet and make it go away.

"Just tell me where it is! We need to get rid of it dad!"

As she reached the end of the couch where he usually sat, he grabbed her arm hard, pulling her towards him and forcing her to look at his face.

"How the hell would you know? I'm doing the bloody housework aren't I? Haven't I been taking care of you? Well?!"

"But it'll get worse…” she choked. His anger faltered for a moment.

"No sweetie, no! It won't…” He knelt down and started kissing her face. "I can't tell you enough how grateful I am for all the things you've done. But you need to understand that I can handle the situation now. I'm just taking some medication. It'll be fine." He wrapped his arms around her and squeezed her to him.

"But what if social services-"

"I've spoken to them already, they say its fine as long as I don't take too much…”

"Y-you're lying to mme," she cried. "You promised to stop." She hit him on his back in frustration. Her refusal to trust him snapped a chord. He stopped hugging her and grabbed her wrists forcefully.

"Listen to me Olivia Edwards. I'm your father and you will damn well believe what I say. You are going to go to your room and I don't want to hear you until I say so, do you understand?" His voice quivered in rage.

"You can't tell me to go to my room! You're the one who is screwing everything up! It's not fair!"

Olivia wasn't prepared to deal with his addiction again, let alone with his anger. It took some strength to tear him away from her, twisting her wrists so he was forced to let go. Before he could grab her again she ran through the hall into the front yard without looking back at him.

"Don't talk to me like that! Where do you think you're going?"

Within a second she was on her bike, heart beating rapidly, ready to push into the road. However, just as she was about to set off she felt a tug as his hands grabbed it at the back.

The unbalanced bicycle caused his feet to lose their grip on the icy path, and he toppled over, crashing down and taking his daughter with him. With a smack, they both landed on the ice that had formed on the stones. Olivia felt a sharp pain in her face, her sober mind gave her the advantage and she was quicker to get up.

She decided to make a run for it.
Finally, stuff happens!

Olivia hadn't planned on calling Mr Holmes when she was running down the street, hearing her dad's angry yelling grow softer behind her. It had already gone dark, the temperature had dropped to just below zero degrees, and she was glad she still had her coat on. Her gloves and hat were still lying where she'd dropped them on the kitchen table though, so she wiped her tears away and stuffed her hands deep into her pockets, thinking of a warm place to go as the adrenaline rush faded.

The shops on Oxford Street promised warmth and distraction. Christmas was only a month away and every window display was dominated by impressive decorations. Hoards of people rushed by her, hurriedly doing some shopping before heading home for dinner.

It was only when she looked at one of the displays and saw her reflection in the window that she noticed the lower half of her face was covered in blood. The adrenaline in her veins hadn't made her aware of her nose bleeding. There was no pain, but the sticky red liquid was already soaking the front of her coat. The awful sight of her own state almost made her cry again, but realising she had to take care of herself, she took some deep breaths and entered a drugstore to find something to
wipe her face with. The lady behind the counter rushed towards her, not to ask what was wrong, it
turned out, but to briskly tell her to get out of her store, basically pushing her back outside, saying
something about frightening other customers.

For a moment Olivia stood on the sidewalk, thinking whether she should ruin her coat even more
and wipe it with her sleeve. She felt lucky when a young woman walking past took pity on her and
handed her a pack of tissues. It took a while before no blood appeared on the paper and she was
satisfied. At least she didn't look like a girl from a horror movie anymore. She turned her collar up
and thought about her possibilities, which weren't very many.

It was certain that Rose's or Lucy's parents would call her father and drive her home immediately
when they noticed how concerned he was. Mr Watson's phone number was in her wallet in her bag
at home. She didn't know the number of the uncle in Bristol either. Mr Holmes' number was in her
bag as well, but she had looked at the piece of paper so often that she knew it by heart. His
behaviour in the past few weeks had been so insulting though. She would rather die than call him.
There was literally nowhere to go.

She continued looking at the shops, wandering inside, watching other people do their Christmas
shopping and enjoyed the warmth, until she was asked to leave again on account of the closing
time. Wandering around for another two hours, looking at the displays in the windows, the cold
wind sliced through her clothes fast, and her stomach started grumbling painfully.

Eventually, she walked into a side street, next to one of the big department stores and stopped.
With her back leaned against the wall and her hands cramped from the cold, the tears started
coming.

"Hi there sweetie. Why are you crying?" A middle-aged man had noticed her tears and was
approaching her.

"Can I help you? Do you need to call someone?" His grey eyes expressed concern and Olivia had
no idea what to say to him. Her mother's endless warnings about talking to strange men whirled
through her head. Should she yell at him? He was polite and he seemed genuinely concerned,
though. Should she accept that she needed any help she could get? How could she ever know
whom to trust?

The man was close now and her lifted a hand to touch her shoulder.

"Did someone hurt you? I can take you to your home if you want."

She flinched and backed away from him. "Stay away from me! I don't need any help!"

Running away from him she could hear him yell.

"Be careful then! You'll freeze if you stay out in this cold!"

She'd found a phone booth and with trembling fingers she had dialled, using one of the few loose
coins in her pocket, and willed him to pick up. Being ready to die before calling her teacher
because he was jerk sounded a bit ridiculous now.

Waiting in the booth for him, she watched her own breath evaporate in small clouds. His voice had
sounded worried through the phone, or had it been angry? She was too cold to worry about what he
would do. She was just grateful when within less than 10 minutes a black cab came to a halt at the
sidewalk. When he stepped out, his icy blue stare looked warm compared to how she was feeling.
Even just the sight of his familiar tall figure with his long dark coat comforted her.
As she went outside and approached the car, he simply held the door open and helped her get inside. She shifted over to the other side to make space for him, but her muscles were sore and stiff from the cold. When he got in he wrapped his coat around her shoulders and said to the cabbie: "Baker Street."

Then, he turned towards her.

"I di-dn't n-notice a-anything before," she stammered before he could say something. Her teeth chattered.

"Why did you let yourself get all hypothermic before calling me?" he said as he frowned over her cramped up body.

She shrugged her shoulders and avoided his stare. He felt her tremble as he drew her gently against his side, abandoning the keepingmydistance strategy for the moment, hoping to warm her up as quickly as possible.

It was long past peak hour and the cab stopped at number 221 within a few minutes. Sherlock paid the cabbie and helped Olivia out of the car. He quickly unlocked the door and led her up the stairs towards his flat. Mrs Hudson, who heard Sherlock come back with a visitor, stuck her head out into the hallway to see who it was. "Tea, Mrs Hudson!" Sherlock called out from the top of the stairs without looking back, familiar with her curiosity for his guests.

A couple of inches of the Belstaff coat dragged over the rug as Olivia stepped inside flat B, her big brown eyes taking in her surroundings. It felt surreal to Sherlock that she was in his home. He didn't like mixing his private world with that of the school, but he wouldn't ever turn Olivia away, however disagreeable it might be. He was suddenly very glad he kept it relatively tidy these days. Well, clean at least.

He stalked to the fireplace he hardly ever used in order to generate some heat in the room. It started crackling relatively quickly. When he got up and turned around he found her watching him, still standing in the middle of the room, trembling with her hands completely covered by the sleeves of his coat. She seemed to relax a little as the fire suggested he wasn't going to make her leave soon.

Sherlock walked over to her and gently removed his heavy coat from her shoulders. After throwing it on a chair, he hesitated for a moment whether to take her coat as well.

That's when he noticed the blood.

The Belstaff had concealed most of the stains when they were in the cab, but now he could see the crimson that had leaked on hers, faint stains of which could still be seen on the skin of her neck. Automatically his hand shot forward to lift her chin so he could inspect it more closely.

"What's this? You said you weren't hurt."

"It was just a random nose bleed," she said in a small voice, and he didn't comment further. Olivia was relieved to notice that he wasn't as menacing to her like he was in class. He wore the same severe frown, but his movements and touches were light and gentle.

"Take off your coat," he commanded.

She obeyed and he threw it on top of his own before leading her into the kitchen. He flicked on the light, revealing a cluttered mess that vaguely resembled a laboratory. The furniture looked a bit old, but as he rummaged through a cabinet, Olivia noticed that the test tubes and glass equipment on the table was well kept and clean. There was no sign of food or cooking whatsoever.
When he had found what he was looking for, he turned, and his eyes fell onto her jumper, which also displayed several deep red stains at the collar.

Impatiently, he gestured for her to take it off as well. She drew the soft fabric over her shoulders and head, leaving shivering her in her white buttoned up shirt. Even though her body was still almost completely covered, she felt exposed to his penetrating gaze. Satisfied, he turned to the tap and soaked the washing cloth he had been holding.

She almost flinched when he came back and raised it to her face, but it was warm and soft. He was careful not to touch her nose, but she could feel the strength in his hands. Even though he probably didn't mean it to be particularly pleasurable, having someone strong and protective take care of her like that felt incredibly soothing.

"Top buttons," he murmured when he got to her neck, and she managed to get two of them open, exposing the skin on her throat and collarbones. Her body tensed as his gentle strokes washed away the blood that had gathered at the edges of her clothing. If she hadn't been this cold, or upset, she'd definitely be aroused.

Olivia was unable to meet his eyes for too long, and gazed up. A big jar on top of the fridge came into view and her eyes widened.

"A-are those eyes?"

He didn't reply, just concentrated on washing her.

When the dried blood was gone, his fingers carefully turned her head side to side to check for any type of damage. Satisfied that there were no injuries, he let go and handed her a towel to dry herself.

"Sit by the fire, you're freezing."

Olivia sat down and scooted close to the fire, slowly regaining some feeling in her limbs. The radiating heat felt so good that she took her shoes off to warm her feet as well, hoping he wouldn't consider it to be ill mannered.

The sitting room reminded her of children's stories, where a wise old person would live in a cluttered house, offering refuge or advice to the young protagonist. The number of books that surrounded her was impressive, and the various objects perched on shelves raised a lot of questions, many of which she wouldn't dare ask.

Olivia started as she noticed him, standing against the wall in the entrance to the kitchen, with his arms crossed over his chest, observing from a distance.

He moved to open the door when footsteps could be heard on the stairs.

"I assumed it was just for two, but if you need-… Oh hello."

For a moment, Olivia wondered if the old lady that entered the living room with a tea tray was Mr Holmes' mother.

"Mrs Hudson, Olivia. Olivia, Mrs Hudson."

"Lovely to meet you dear," she said with a warm smile as she set the tray down on the coffee table. She looked quite old but her hands were steady, pouring her a cup of tea. "It's good to see that Sherlock's having visitors again, makes him keep the place tidy. Please have a biscuit. You look
like you could use some sugar."

Olivia caught Mr Holmes' eye-roll from the corner of her eye. She picked up a biscuit.

"Are you the housekeeper?"

Mrs Hudson chuckled.

"No my dear. I am Sherlock's landlady, but he conveniently forgets the difference regularly."

While she was distracted, Mr Holmes had slipped out the door, leaving her alone with the old lady. Through Mrs Hudson's chatter she could hear him talk on the phone in the hallway and her face fell, worried it was her father on the other side.

Mrs Hudson noticed her change of mood.

"It's good of you to come here, dear. I'm sure he'll help you with whatever it is you're struggling with," she said. "He might seem a bit grumpy at times, and his manners are appalling, but he's a good young man really. He has a heart of gold, although he'll never admit it."

Olivia gave a strained smile and picked up the steaming cup of tea that had been set in front of her. At that moment, Mr Holmes stepped back into the room.

"Thank you Mrs Hudson, now go back to your knitting, that scarf you were making looked lovely," he said, impatiently rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet.

She glowed a little at his compliment. "Oh, you noticed? Of course you did. I thought it would go very well with your eyes."

"And it's already freezing outside. No time to waste. Off you go." He basically pushed her out the door, and Olivia sympathised with Mrs Hudson's feelings about his manners.

When Mrs Hudson was gone, he paced the living room for a bit, deep in thought, while she sipped her tea. Finally he sat down in the armchair opposite her, undoing the button on his jacket before proceeding to stare. Her presence in his home was becoming to feel less foreign to him. Her shivering was getting less and she seemed quite comfortable, sipping her tea, although a bit weary about the proceedings from now, he deduced.

"Did you call him?" she asked softly.

"I decided it would be better to let Mr Watson know where you are. I've told him to go and visit your father right away."

"Oh…"

"Don't worry about that right now. I’d like to know what happened," he said, as if it was that simple.

She swallowed as she thought of her dad, who she was about to betray once again to somebody who she had only known a couple of months. She tried to think of how to explain what happened.

"Well?" Sherlock frowned slightly, all but tapping the armrest with his fingertips.

"It's not something horrible. I shouldn't have run away."

"It was enough to upset you."
She nodded, looked away, and carefully cradled the warm teacup in her hands.

"He was upset when I got home. He was angry because wanted something he couldn't find. I don't remember what. He wasn't making any sense and his eyes looked really strange, really big. When I asked about it he admitted he was… he had taken something. But I don't know what. I looked but there was nothing there that I could have flushed away."

Mr Holmes' features had softened again, like she noticed happened more often.

"Did he say anything to you?"

"Just that… he needed it. He said it was medication but I didn't believe him. We got into a row."
Her voice almost disappeared as she remembered his angry voice calling after her down the street. Olivia felt the tears in her throat, but refused to let them take her voice completely.

"He said that it was helping him and that it wouldn't change anything."

She looked up at Mr Holmes who was silent. His eyes were following her every gesture, expression, and draw of breath.

"Maybe it was too hard for him to stop so suddenly. He had to do so many things at home too. Maybe-"

"Hold it there," Sherlock interrupted. "Are you blaming yourself for his relapse?"

"No I just… what if I'd done the groceries at least, or cooked for him-"

Sherlock had now actually started tapping the armrest with his hand. "Oh stop it! I can't listen to you utter such nonsense. You're cleverer than that. He is not the victim of the fact that he has a child to take care of. He's a grown man for Christ's sake. It's his own decision to intoxicate himself." There was nothing left of the softness now, only anger in his face.

Olivia knew he was right, but it bothered her that someone spoke like that about her father.

"But he lost his wife!"

"And he will lose his daughter if he keeps this up."

She opened her mouth to counter him, but couldn't find anything to say. She knew she was making excuses for her dad, justifying his behaviour, but Mr Holmes' harsh words were painful. A couple of tears were making their way down her cheeks.

"Did he beat you? Your nosebleed was not random and your left cheek is red," he said accusingly, leaning forward from his seat.

She shook her head quickly. "No, we slipped on the ice by our front door. It was an accident."

They were silent for few minutes while Sherlock envisioned the tumble on the slippery stones in front of her house. His insides boiled in rage as he thought of the man who had too much control over Olivia's life and so little over his own. Frowning at the fireplace, he fantasised about hearing the man's skull crack on those same icy stones. His thoughts were consumed by his anger until he heard her breath hitch.

She was curled up in the corner of the sofa now, her feet folded underneath her, and her face buried in her arms. Sherlock didn't completely understand her weeping, but the sight made him desperate
to make it right, to ease her sadness. He couldn't leave her sitting there like that. But what the hell was he supposed to do?

Finally he decided to act on instinct and got up to sit next to her on the edge of the sofa. When he stroked her hair she looked up and her red, tear-streaked face became visible.

"Is there something else you want to tell me?" he asked as he pulled his hand away, regaining his distance.

She inhaled deeply through her trembling mouth in an attempt to calm herself.

"I'm scared they will put me in foster care."

"You still want to live with your father?"

She nodded, lips pressed together. Her voice was gone.

Why she would want to live with such a weak excuse for a father was beyond him, but he tried not to show his incomprehension. He couldn't exactly say he knew what it was like to have a close family connection, especially with his father. What he did know was that he wanted her to be able to decide what happened to her life.

"If that's your choice I will try to do everything I can to make it happen."

He wasn't lying. If there was something he hated, it was people making decisions for others who were perfectly capable of making them themselves. He would help her stay with her father, provided she was safe.

His words seemed to calm her down a bit. She was wiping her face with her sleeves.

"You're warm now. Get some rest," he said as he got up.

Olivia nodded, stretched her legs on the sofa and laid her head on the armrest, making herself comfortable. He had shown her a glimpse of his old, kinder demeanour, giving her hope that he would not act like a jerk forever. Her longing for his safe and warm body to touch hers almost made her ask if he would hold her, but she didn't dare to. She just caught the sensation of a blanket being draped over her before drifting off to sleep.

Sherlock stood at the opposite side of the room, next to the door, biting his thumbnail with a frown. He figured Olivia must be tired after running away, freezing herself and crying so much. Even now, while she was sleeping, the urge to touch her was ridiculously strong. It was good that he'd kept his distance all these weeks.

"She is lovely, isn't she?" a voice next to him said, making him jump.

"Mrs Hudson!" he whisper-yelled. "I told you to go downstairs!"

"I think she likes you just as much as you like her, Sherlock. You must have done something very right. I'm sure you can both use some comfort. Don't be so scared of her, mister. Do you think she would like something to eat?"

Sherlock stared at her with big eyes. Having no idea how to respond to the first four sentences, he focused on the last. He hadn't crossed his mind to offer her something to eat. "Yes. Yes, she must be hungry."
Mrs Hudson made a satisfied humming sound and went downstairs to rummage through her kitchen, knowing Sherlock wouldn't have much to eat, let alone something you'd offer a guest without them leaving very quickly.

~

Olivia woke up to a delicious smell filling her nostrils. Opening her eyes, she noticed the big bowl of steaming lentil and tomato soup on the coffee table in front of her. Next to it was a plate with several slices of buttered toast. Her stomach woke up to the smell and growled.

Sitting up, she felt her sore muscles protest. She noticed she was alone, which was rather relaxing. It gave her time to think and observe the strange room a bit more while she ate. There were boxes with what looked like police files on the floor next to his desk. She recognised the typing from the images that had been projected on their classroom wall so often. In the bookcase were some foreign objects that looked like they came straight out of the British museum. She wouldn't be surprised if they did. On the stove in the kitchen there was now something blue bubbling slowly in one of the glass beakers. She hoped the vapour coming off it was not as toxic as it looked.

Suddenly, he stepped into the kitchen from a side door. He'd shed his jacket, showing a white shirt and rolled up sleeves. He turned off the stove.

"I would have let you eat at the table, but it's occupied," he said awkwardly, while taking a sample from the liquid to his microscope.

Olivia smiled. Somehow it was reassuring that he was being himself. Maybe this was the moment to ask him a burning question she had been carrying for weeks. It was quiet for a couple of minutes while he peered into his microscope and she gathered the courage to start the conversation.

"Are you still angry?"

He looked up from his lens, noting her sudden nervousness.

"About what?"

"A-about, what I did… at the campfire."

*She thought he was angry? About that?*

"Why would you think that angered me?"

She stared back at him for a moment, not believing he was making her explain this.

Then she shrugged her shoulders, trying to look anywhere but at him. "I don't know… Because you ignore me, but singled me out in class. And I think you knew I didn't know the answer. And because you said you were going to reconsider my marks. And because you… you don't look at me. And-"

"Alright! I get it," he said agitatedly.

As Sherlock hovered above his microscope, he realised that distancing himself so much might have come across the wrong way. He hadn't known she attached so much value to these simple things. It had absolutely not been his intention upset or scare her, just to detach himself from any emotions he had towards her. This had been working pretty well for him until she had called him this afternoon.
Telling her exactly what the touch of her lips had done to him crossed his mind, but there were infinite reasons not to. The first and foremost being that he didn't want to terrify her. He didn't want to confuse her either, but decided to stay vague.

"I'm not angry. It's unfortunate you should think so."

Slight relief, but confusion could be seen in her face.

He looked back into the lens as he continued. "I would like to know, however, why you thought it was necessary to… do that." He drew the last word out so that there was no mistake as to what he was referring to.

Olivia blushed furiously now, but thought it best to talk to him. Maybe he would reveal some of his own feelings for once.

"You were angry about me and Anthony. I just thought I'd do something nice, to show—because I appreciate what you did… for me."

Abruptly he straightened up and walked across the room, stepping over the coffee table and ending up on the sofa about two inches away from where she was sitting, looking at her with an unmistakably horrified expression.

"In absolutely no way… are you indebted to me, do you understand?"

She nodded. His eyes had an urgency she hadn't seen before.

"And you sure as hell do not have to show me any gratitude. And definitely not… like that."

For a moment, while their eyes met, Olivia could see him worry about possibly making her think she had some sort of obligation towards him. Still, something in them gave her the feeling that he wouldn't object to intimacy.

"I know I don't have to," she said in a whisper. Without thinking, her hand slipped towards his that was lying on his leg, grasping it lightly. He responded by lifting his hand a fraction so that her fingers could curl around it.

"Good."

There was a moment of silence, in which Olivia revelled in the warmth of his touch.

"So, you're not angry at all?" she asked after a while.

He shifted his body more towards her and lifted his free hand to hold it under her chin once again. Any doubt that might have shown in his gaze before had disappeared now, only his mature and slightly mischievous self left behind.

"I don't see any reason why I should be."

His thumb remained at her chin while the rest of his fingers traced her throat, where he could see goose bumps appear and feel her pulse elevating to an alarming rhythm.

"Turn around." His deep voice vibrated softly in the air, but the serious expression on his face didn't give her a clue about his intentions.

He pushed her shoulders so that she was sitting with her back to him, and started lazily running his fingers through her hair. Her eyes closed instantly.
They opened again as his hands moved to stroke the tense muscles in her shoulders. *Oh.* The touch was warm and tickling, sending signals through her body to prepare for something pleasant.

Sherlock moved her hair to the front, so that her shoulders were more accessible, and continued stroking, feeling the small curves and indents of her neck and collarbones. He knew this was too rapidly arousing him, and moved back to her shoulders, massaging them gently through her shirt. He could feel her relax underneath his fingers and rock a little bit with his movements.

After a few minutes of gentle rubbing she started massaging deeper, hoping it would loosen her muscles without causing pain. When he ran his thumbs along the top of her spine, the softest whimpering moan escaped her throat, which halted him for a moment.

To his astonishment, she opened three more buttons on her shirt and without looking back she pushed the fabric a couple of inches off her shoulders, giving him access to her bare skin. Sherlock hesitated, thought about stopping, about telling her that this was going too far, but his hands only wanted to make her feel good. Was that so wrong?

Apparently she though he was waiting for something, because hesitantly, she also pushed her bra straps off her shoulders, joining the other fabric at the top of her arms. Sherlock had never seen such a beautiful human thing in his life. She tilted her head and his fingers softly stroked from just underneath her ear down to her shoulder.

"Are you cold?" he asked as he dug his fingers into her nude flesh.

"No." Her voice was unsteady, but he deduced that for once it wasn't because she was upset.

He could feel her tense muscles and worked them with his hands, in the strong but gentle manner she was getting used to. Her eyes closed in pleasure. Sherlock was close enough to take in her scent, a mixture of rain, London streets, a tinge of perspiration, and her shampoo. He closed his eyes as well, focusing on the softness of her skin.

They opened abruptly when she let out a soft moan. The sound of her voice responding to his touch spread warmth through his lower body. He let go of his restraint a tiny bit and slowly lowered his head down to plant a light kiss on top of her shoulder. He wanted to gauge her reaction, but she was completely still for a moment. He just watched the side of her face, flushed from the heat.

Then, she opened her eyes and turned her body around face him. Her hair flowed generously down her front, but didn't completely shield the top of her left nipple, which her state of half undress left exposed. Blood surged towards his lap. Sherlock averted his gaze quickly, uncertain whether she was aware of what he could see, and because he needed to repress the urge to stroke the dark circle of particularly sensitive skin.

When he met her gaze, Olivia didn't seem to know or care about her decency.

Sitting down, their difference in height was minimised, and putting a warm hand on his collarbone, she moved closer. Their lips touching seemed rather inevitable to her now, as they were breathing each other in, and Olivia could feel her heart-rate quicken. She could feel her hands tremble in anticipation. Suddenly she realised he wasn't going to kiss her. He was restraining himself, determined not to do anything she didn't absolutely want to happen. How could he still doubt whether she wanted this?

She desperately wanted to saturate her longing for him. She longed to finally feel those full velvety lips touch hers. She needed to know whether his tongue was skilled in comparison to Anthony's. Intoxicated by his scent, his massaging hands, his deep voice, and his sinfully dark eyes, she
He remained still when she kissed him, but she could feel the fast beat of his heart under her hand. Olivia could hardly believe that the man who had been so mean to her, was actually just afraid of coming too close. He didn't shy away either, and when she applied more pressure something seemed to switch on inside him and he responded. His lips were even softer than she had remembered from that one swift touch weeks ago, and they started gently moving against hers.

It was so incredibly different from what kissing Anthony felt like. Mr Holmes' lips were fuller, patient, and the mere fact that he was doing it with her set her body on fire. He nipped gently at her lower lip, slow and inquisitive. She opened her mouth a bit more and he responded immediately, his tongue confidently sliding against hers, tasting her.

As they explored the soft wetness of each other's mouth, his right hand stroked her back. He used it to hold her steady while he tipped her backwards, so that she was lying on the sofa and he was able lean over her. His positioning himself above her and the lustful gleam in his eyes made her squirm, even more so when she felt him plant his knee in between her legs for support.

Olivia traced her fingers through the thick waves of dark curls at the back of his head and he let out a rumbling sound of appreciation against her lips. The idea that she was arousing him was turning her on so much, she needed more friction. The only thing she could feel on her body was his bare forearm pressing against her shoulder, from where his left hand was resting on the sofa, keeping him steady above her. She opened her eyes for a moment to peek down and see what he was doing with the other, and whimpered.

His right hand was hovering about an inch above her half exposed breast, as if he was about to cup it. However, he didn't touch her. His thumb was moving, stroking the air above her now hard nipple. He was restraining himself with every part of his being. The sight made her almost feel it, but her whimpering wasn't able to persuade him, although it made his movements of his tongue slightly less coordinated. Olivia desperately arched her body upwards, but he anticipated her move and was quick enough to get his hand out of the way. However, her hipbone did bump into his groin, where it met the heat of his straining erection.

The unexpected touch caused him to moan, but he didn't respond to her obvious desperation to be touched. Instead, he kissed the corner of her mouth, wet lips tracing down to her neck, licking and kissing the skin he admired so much.

Just as he dipped his tongue into the hollow above her collarbone, they heard the front door open. Sherlock froze, trying to hear what was happening at the base of the staircase. It was difficult to concentrate with Olivia's heavy breathing next to him.

"Oh John, it's lovely to see you! How's Mary doing?" He could hear John answer politely, and the sound of his voice fully switched Sherlock's mind into full power. He could hear Mrs Hudson firing more questions at his friend. Thank you Mrs Hudson.

Quickly, he jumped to his feet.

"Get dressed," he told her, while doing up one of the buttons of his shirt that had come undone.

Olivia sat up and looked at him, standing in the middle of the living room, facing away from her while she got dressed. The wall had gone up once again and an anxious feeling spread in her stomach, driving away all that was left of her arousal. She quickly closed the top buttons of her shirt and smoothed her skirt.
Then Mr Watson came through the door, looking like he'd had a really really long day, but greeted them warmly. He hardly paid attention to Sherlock after that, who was standing to the side, stone-faced with his hands in his pockets. Mr Watson went to sit in his armchair facing Olivia. The concerned and grave expression directed at her rushed back her memory of the afternoon. She could almost feel her ribs tighten around her lungs.
Sherlock stood in the doorway with his hands in his pockets, frowning at the snowflakes through which the figures of John and Olivia had disappeared, on their way to his car, which he'd been able to park in the next street.

Sitting on his sofa, she had been quite anxious about what John had to say; afraid he might tell her she was not going home again. Thankfully John had been his kind and patient self. After fussing over the blood stains on her jumper and making sure she was not hurt, he calmly explained to her what had occurred after he'd received Sherlock's phone call.

John had been to see Mr Edwards, who was extremely upset and ashamed of his actions, and had agreed to let Olivia stay with John and Mary for the night so he could sober up in solitude. John would bring Olivia home the next day, if she agreed stay with them in the first place. Sherlock noted how John didn't comment on what Mr Edwards had consumed to get into this state – something Olivia hadn't been able to identify – and stored it in his mind to ask John in private later.

Sherlock kept his distance, standing in the background, letting the headmaster take control. It was difficult to think properly while his body and brain were still whizzing with endorphins and adrenaline. He couldn't imagine what Olivia was feeling, going from a heated kiss with a man twice her age, to a dead serious conversation with her headmaster about her depressed and alcoholic father within 5 minutes. As far as he could tell, she wasn't thinking about their kiss anymore. Her body tense, he could see she was biting the inside of her cheek. Her eyes were focused intently on the man who seemed to have the most control over her life right now.

Olivia had asked a number of times how long she would stay with John and Mary, when she would be able to go home, and who would bring her home, and if it was truly and completely up to her to do so. It was obvious that she was afraid that if this happened, it would be the first step towards amore permanent separation from her father, and was attempting to ensure herself that John would never lie to her.

Finally, after John reminded her gently that there was a clear reason she left home that afternoon, she had agreed to stay with John and Mary for the night on the condition he would drive her home first thing in the morning.

When they left, it was around 11 pm, pitch black and snowing outside.

Sherlock was at the same time relieved and extremely wary to let her out of his sight. Relieved because he was completely confused about his own actions that evening, and had no idea how to deal with the multitude of feelings running through his mind and body. He was wary because he could tell she was still scared, and somehow he wished to believe he could take care of her just as well as John could. However, he realised that that simply wasn't true. She needed a parent, not an emotionally unstable fake teacher with inappropriate sentiments.

As he let them out she said goodnight at the doorway, giving him a quick, nervous smile. He dreaded the conversation he would have to have with her later.

Now he was standing in the freezing cold, in the middle of a failing attempt to analyse the tsunami of feelings that was thundering through his head.

"Difficult, isn't it, dear?" Mrs Hudson had entered the little hallway and was observing him with knowing eyes.
"What is?" he said, still staring at the falling snowflakes.

She shrugged lightly. "Letting people come close to you."

At this, he abruptly turned around.

"Once again, you're being delusional."

Sherlock swiftly brushed passed her, determinedly making his way back up the stairs to the B flat, leaving the snow to blow into the hall. Mrs Hudson quickly moved to close the door while she heard him scurry upstairs.

"I binned the ones that were under the cushions of your armchair!" She called after him without any regret in her voice.

A couple of profanities made their way downstairs and she winced. However, 10 minutes later, when she shed her dressing gown and got under the covers, the calm sound of his violin vibrated through the ceiling and a content smile spread across the landlady's face.

~

As agreed, Social Services visited Olivia and her dad that Monday, shuffling in with important looking files. The entire Sunday had been spent tidying and cleaning the house, until Olivia was satisfied that it looked normal. But the sparkling tabletops did not make their visitors less concerned about Jeremy's relapse. They - two women this time - sat down with them around the kitchen table and told her father he needed to get one on one therapy, to which he agreed remorsefully.

Because there had been no direct danger to Olivia, they didn't engage the police, but assigned them a social worker who would stop by regularly to see how things were going. Olivia was told to call this person when she felt unsafe or thought that things were going downhill.

Her father swore on the bible, on his life, on his deceased wife, that there were no longer any intoxicating substances in the house, and they left.

When Olivia got back to school on Monday after lunch – Mr Holmes had grudgingly agreed with Mr Watson that she could miss his class to be at home for Social services visit – her friends found her at her locker.

Anthony greeted her with a kiss on her cheek, which still made Olivia blush. His public admiration for her was not something she was used to, and she wondered what other pupils might be thinking when they saw it. She had not had any time to worry about what her kiss with Mr Holmes meant for her relationship with the sweet boy, and didn't really want to.

"I've missed you. How was your weekend?" Anthony asked.

She gave him a feeble smile. "Had an appointment this morning. It was fine. Yours?"

Anthony didn't ask further and he started talking about his weekend's skateboarding adventures while they all walked to Ms Donovan's class.

What worried Olivia were Rose's observant eyes. Her expression told her that she knew something had happened over the weekend and was concernedly looking for clues. Inspired by Mr Holmes' classes, she had been developing quite an eye for detail and was already quite accurate in guessing the reasons for classmates who were late. She would certainly be guessing about Olivia's
adventures. With her thoughts far away, she sat down next to her friend.

"Alright, take out your notebooks. You're already divided into two's so we don't need any drama over that," Ms Donovan started.

The visit that morning had eased Olivia's mind quite a bit about her father, which left more space for her thoughts to wander back to the kiss with Mr Holmes. It had been the most exciting thing she had ever done in her life, kissing him, and her heart rate sped up when she thought about it. He had been so gentle but so expertly passionate at the same time, even while holding himself back. Flushed, she thought of the moment her hip had made contact with the firmness in his trousers. Right then, he had really desired her, and the idea made her body tingle all over.

"We've already discussed some of Shakespeare's most famous work. I want you to go to the library and explore what else he's written. At the end of next class you will have to give me the name of your work of choice."

He had held up his act of indifference afterwards, but she knew that that had been mostly for Mr Watson. She could feel his eyes on her back when she left his doorstep all the way to where they turned the corner of the street.

It was probably a good thing they had been interrupted, she thought now, because in that heated moment she would have given him permission to do anything he wanted. If he had taken the opportunity to undress her and satisfy himself, she would have been too aroused to try and stop him. Even though she would have been scared any other time.

"Could everyone pay careful attention, because I'm going to explain the assignment."

It hadn't happened, but maybe he hadn't wanted to scare her away. Being a mature man she assumed he would not want to wait long. As she heard the sounds of the classroom continue in the background, her stomach clenched in anxiety at the thought of what she had gotten herself into.

"No, don't panic" -she thought to herself- "it's not like he will have the opportunity to do that anytime soon, and I can ask Rose about it."

Olivia knew only the basics, told to her by her mother one time, and had picked up a few remarks from conversations between classmates during lunch breaks, remarks that had mostly baffled her. She figured that Rose probably knew much more about sex, or at least it seemed like she did.

While Ms Donovan lectured on excitedly about their Shakespeare assignment, a cultural project she had developed together with Mr Brook, Olivia continued her attempt to make sense of the new developments in her life.

~

At a grubby community centre in north London one man violently shoved another, slightly thinner man, into a wall.

"What the hell do you think you're doing??" the first growled.

"Excuse me?"

"I've got a family to provide for, and I'm trying my fucking hardest to do that. Why the fuck do you have to spoil it?"

"I didn't spoil anything, Jeremy. I simply gave you a way to cope, out of the kindness of my heart."
The man grinned.

"Cut the bullshit! It's not a gift and you know it. Are you consciously trying to ruin peoples lives?" he sounded more desperate than angry now.

"When I give a gift I ask nothing in return. Half the room in there today is getting by solely with my help. It gets them through their miserable day, my friend. It's your own choice to use it and your own fault if you can't dose it properly. I can see that you're on it right now. That's not very smart of you. So what exactly are you accusing me of?"

Stunned, Jeremy let go of the other's collar and caught his breath.

"I got into trouble."

"Did they find it?" Jim did not sound worried, but rather cold and dangerous now.

"No, no, just... my daughter ran away. Social Services are putting me in some sort of program. I didn't tell them anything."

"Well, nothing to worry about then, is there? Just don't offer them a coke when they visit," he grinned.

~

John respectfully knocked on Sherlock's office door on Wednesday morning. He was greeted with a low rumble that he recognised as "If you must". The man was sitting behind his desk, scribbling notes in a book he didn't recognise. It didn't look like anything to do with his teaching.

Thinking about the many things he still had to do this week, John quickly got to the point.

"Sherlock, I need your marks."

He raised an eyebrow. "Was I supposed to take an exam?"

"Ha-ha… no. Your pupils' science, chemistry and biology marks up until now. You need to register them so administration doesn't get everything in one bulk before the start of the holidays."

Sherlock looked up into the face of his best friend, who seemed to have gained a few extra wrinkles over the weekend.

"You look awful, John."

John's posture softened a bit at Sherlock's pathetic attempt at enquiring about his well-being.

"Oh, it's just end of the year stress. Last exams, all these marks need to be registered, the Christmas performance needs to be organised, and Mary is having these hormonal mood swings. Seriously, one moment she wants nothing but have sex and the next moment she is terribly upset about something she can't explain to me." John sighed deeply. "She's decided to take her leave from January, so I also have to hire a temporary nurse."

Sherlock looked at him pensively.

"That all sounds horrific. Now, what were you here for?"

"The marks, Sherlock! You have 4 classes with an average of 20 pupils in them, and each pupil should have at least 2 marks per subject by now. That's almost 500 marks you were supposed to
hand in two days ago. Where are they?"

Sherlock creaked open the mental door to his 'assessment room', noted the uncoordinated mess of numbers and surnames, and quickly shut it again. He nonchalantly rolled the pen he was holding through his fingers.

"Had you informed me about this deadline, I might have considered it."

John traced a finger through the layer of dust on one of Sherlock's shelves. After being subjected to a tirade about misplaced items, the cleaning staff refused to go in here. Typical.

"Ms Stevenson put the memo in everyone's pigeonhole, so you must know."

"In everyone's what?"

"The pigeonholes, post boxes, you know, where teachers get their mail."

"And where is my pigeonhole… supposed to be located?"

John stared for a moment, realisation spreading through his brain.

"Are you… are you telling me you have never seen your pigeonhole?"

"You never told me I had one!" Sherlock huffed. "And this is starting to sound like a very disturbing sex talk."

"Jesus, come with me." As Sherlock, surprisingly obediently, got up, John grabbed his arm and started dragging him out of his office along the corridor.

"Are you taking me to the nurse's office?"

John would have laughed if he wasn't panicking about all the work Sherlock had probably been unaware of he was supposed to do for the past 3 months. He cursed himself for not keeping a closer eye on Sherlock's administration, which was apparently non-existent.

They reached the main stairwell at the front of the building, at the bottom of which a wall was decorated with about thirty boxes with teachers’ names on them. For a moment, they stared at one box on the bottom-right that said 'Mr S. Holmes' and was bulging with paper. It looked like people had just started leaving Sherlock's mail in a pile on the floor when the box had reached its limit.

"Well, it seems like you've got some catching up to do. I wonder why Ms Stevenson never informed me about this."

"You mean your secretary who loathes me?" Sherlock asked as he started gathering 3 month's worth of memo's, newsletters, brochures, invitations for meetings, love notes from pupils, and homework that some of them had been too scared to hand to him in person, from the box and the floor.

"She doesn't. She just dislikes chaos. And don't you dare throw it all in the bin without reading, you need to be informed."

Then, more pleadingly, "Please Sherlock, we'll all be in trouble if those marks are not in by the end of the day." John turned around and headed back to his office.

~
There was a soft knock on the door and a loud "No! Take your problems elsewhere. I've got no
time to listen to adolescent drivel about dead pets, cheating boyfriends, divorcing pare-"

Mr Holmes stopped talking when Olivia hesitantly stepped inside his office. He was sitting on the
floor with his back against the wall, sleeves rolled up, and his hair was a mess. Spread around him
was a sea of paper.

"I've got no pets, Anthony is quite reliable, and my parents can't really get divorced, can they?"

"I see somebody is feeling cheeky today," he said, pretending to read one of the many papers that
were strewn around him on the floor.

Olivia smiled at the chaos in the office, quite like the mess at his home. She hopped up to sit on the
desk, setting a lunchbox next to her.

"You found your post box, then?" she asked inconspicuously.

He finally looked up. "You knew about this?" he asked accusingly.

"Of course, everyone does."

"And might you know why I wasn't informed?"

She drew her shoulders up in a shrug. "I guess… it was interesting to see how long it would take
you to find out. Mr Anderson and Ms Donovan joke about it in class sometimes. Mr Anderson
even used it once. He made us calculate how long it would take, with the average amount of paper
that is dropped in the post box per day, for yours to overflow."

Sherlock huffed. "I'm glad I could be of service to fill his undoubtedly unimaginative classes."

Olivia shifted on the desk, neatening her skirt and slightly nervous to see whether he would let her
stay or not. He hadn't said a word to her over the past two days, and was back to scanning the
documents now.

"I brought you some sandwiches."

"I don't eat when I'm working."

She let a silence fall, but tried again.

"Have you marked the essays we wrote last week?"

"Yes, they're next to you." He waved his hand in her direction. "Don't look."

Of course she looked. There was a pile of paper on the desk, the first page she noticed was filled
with scribbled red ink and had a big angry "D" written in the top corner.

"What did I get?"

"A B. And don't think I'm going to raise that… for any reason."

It was silent for a few minutes, while Sherlock continued sifting through his mail on the floor, and
Olivia sat on his desk, swinging her legs, quietly observing him.

"You're distracting me."
She looked up. "I'm sorry." She stopped swinging her legs, ignorant to what part of her was distracting him exactly, but secretly glad she had his attention.

Sherlock realised he had once again ignored her in class and was probably acting like a jerk again, but this time it wasn't to avoid any emotion towards her. He needed to avoid the unwanted erotic imagery in his head while he lectured. Every memory of Friday night, including the sound of her whimpering and the feeling of her soft lips, was stored in a room in his mind palace that was very badly isolated. Her sound, touch, and smell were seeping through the creaks of his palace towards his frontal cortex, which he needed for rational thinking. On top of everything, Mrs Hudson's tight regime on his tobacco consumption prevented him from lighting a cigarette to calm down and make it go away.

Eventually Sherlock sighed, leaned his head against the wall and put an invitational hand next to him on the floor. Her eyes focused on him attentively, but she didn't move.

"Do you need a written invitation?" he snapped.

Within six seconds she was nestled closely beside him and he could take in her live scent. He sighed deeply as her body warmed his side. For a moment, neither of them spoke, getting used to each other's presence again.

"My dad is getting more therapy," she said.

"I heard." He smelled her hair.

"The people from Social Services seemed really nice."

"Good." His eyes closed as he revelled in her warm presence.

"They didn't even talk about me moving away."

"Hmmm." Sherlock frowned. He wasn't sure if he considered this a good thing.

"Jo- Mr Watson says that Mrs Hudson is coming to see the Christmas performance. It will be nice if she's there."

At the thought of Mrs Hudson they were both vividly reminded of 221B, the fire crackling, the warm sofa… and a tense silence fell.

Nervously, Olivia continued. "Mr Brook has asked me to do a song on my own. I haven't picked it yet and I'm even not sure whether I can accompany myself on the-"

"Olivia."

At the sound of her name coming from his lips, she stopped and twisted her upper body a little so she could look up to his serious face.

"I would like to be informed about any regrets you have regarding… what happened while you were in my home."

The question stunned her for a minute, then it made her blush.

"No I… I didn't mind. I liked… what happened," she directed at the pile of paper beside his knee. His face did not betray any emotion. He looked away.
"That's... fortunate. However, you must understand that it was a terrible transgression on my part, and I will make sure it doesn't happen again."

Although he was selfish enough not to look at her face while he said it, he could feel her disappointment.

All Sherlock wanted was to let it happen again, and again, and again, but over the course of several hours, while he had played his violin deep into the night, his blasted mind had calculated no less than 136 reasons not to. The most prominent one being that Olivia had no idea who he was, namely an utterly selfish sociopath who had let innocent people get hurt to satisfy his own curiosities.

"But why?"

"Because you can't possibly know what you want."

He cursed himself for letting it happen in the first place, as it was a thousand times more difficult to abstain from something once you've experienced how good it is. He was still knee-deep in self-pitying thoughts when she moved once more.

Olivia sat up, turned and shifted to sit with her legs folded beneath her, facing him. Her jumper was slightly crumpled from her previous position. She had an utterly serious and determined look on her face.

"Well, I'm sorry I made you do something you didn't really want to do." She said, and Sherlock's eyes snapped towards her face.

"What on earth makes you think that? Nobody in the world can make me do something I do not wi-
"

As he said it, Sherlock realised his stupidity, his patronising, and his underestimation of her. She had cleverly made clear that he was being a twat for making decisions for her.

"I think you're the one who doesn't know what they want... sir."

He almost laughed at her daring comment, but the need to think was greater, so his hands steepled to his face, fingertips touching his lips.

There she sat, waiting patiently for his reply. Her confidence surprised him. Then again, she had been bold in showing her feelings more than once before. She had basically initiated their kiss. Was he underestimating her maturity?

As the seconds ticked by however, her confidence visibly faded, turning into the uneasy expectation that he would tell her to leave.

When his hands finally lowered, the right one reached to her and long fingers softly stroked the inside of her exposed forearm, which made her pulse quicken. The feeling of her heartbeat through her soft skin made it through the small crack in Sherlock's discipline. It didn't cloud his mind. He made a conscious decision. When he spoke, his voice was deeper and darker than before.

"I know what I want."

Taking her hand and pulling her closer to him, he looked deeply into her eyes.

"Tell me to stop when you wish for it to stop."
Olivia was lost in his blue orbs, slightly narrowed by his intent stare, and she nodded meekly. The next moment his strong hands had grabbed her and she was pulled into his lap.

She hadn't had the chance to speak to Rose about Mr Holmes, and was still completely clueless about what she could expect. Right now, however, the excitement of being wanted by this man drowned out her doubts.

For the first time, Sherlock took complete control, starting by caressing her neck with his full lips. Tipping her head back, Olivia gave him access of her skin. She closed her eyes and focused on what he was doing, feeling his fingers press into her side. Her heart was beating fast and the delicious excitement she had felt in her belly since Friday night spread outwards through her body. When the tip of his tongue stroked her collarbone, goose bumps appeared, making her skin even more sensitive.

His dark curls caused a tickling sensation on her cheek as he made his way up towards her mouth. A low content rumbling resonated from his chest as their lips met.

This time Sherlock wasn't as hesitant as before. He let her scent and the touch of her skin take over his thoughts as he brushed her lips rather impatiently with his tongue, silently asking for hers. She responded by opening her mouth and letting him inside.

Not having to support himself with his hands this time, he started stroking her hair. His thumb softly rubbed circles on her temple while he danced with her tongue. It felt like her head was being engulfed by him. Attempting to find some stability, she moved her left hand up to the back of his neck, where her fingers snaked through his thick soft curls.

The kiss was passionate but languid, both of them more aware of what they were doing, and determined to remember every single sensation. She laid her hand on his stomach, enjoying the warmth she felt through his shirt, and his breathing pattern, which had sped up significantly. Sherlock was completely occupied with exploring her mouth and finding a way underneath her jumper with one hand. Therefore did not fully notice the blood rushing downwards.

Olivia did notice it against her thigh, but paid more attention to his hand that was rubbing her back and pressing her against him.

After a few minutes they broke apart, her eyes remained closed for a moment, ignoring that it was over. When she did catch up with reality and her eyes opened, the sight of him almost made her shudder. Those dark eyes shining at her with arousal, combined with his messy hair and his lips that were fuller and darker than usual, was something she didn't want to forget.

Sherlock shifted her slightly off his lap in an attempt to give his erection some space in his trousers. Following his movements Olivia looked down and noticed it. Her hand moved an inch down from his sternum and stopped just above his navel, uncertain as to what he expected of her.

As she was beginning to panic in the face of something so unknown to her, Mr Holmes took her hesitant hand in his and moved it up to his chest, absentmindedly caressing her palm while he stared at the wall opposite.

"I need you to help me," he said.

Olivia's mind quickly tried to figure out whether he was referring to something sexual or not, not wanting to appear ignorant. But there were no clues. Did he want her to touch him? Did he expect her to undo his trousers? How was she supposed to…?
Before she could act on her thoughts or gather the courage to ask him, he had already let go of her hand and was pushing himself up to stand.

He looked down at the chaos of paper.

"In here should be some sort of form for me to fill in marks. You might know what it looks like. I need to get the marks to John in order to avoid him from having a heart attack, apparently."

"You never wrote them down?"

"Didn't see the need," he mumbled as he pushed some papers aside with the point of his shoe.

"But you let us keep our marked exams. How will you fill in the marks now?"

He stopped to look at her challengingly. "Are you underestimating my brain capacity, Miss Edwards?"

Olivia recognised the smile right underneath the surface. Did he really have all the numbers in his head, or was he just going to make them up? She considered him capable of both.

"No sir. I'll help."

Olivia smiled and sat on her knees to look through the mess for the form. Her worries from moments ago completely forgotten.
"Do you have a picture?" Jim asked.

A nod, a smile. A thumb stroking over her small face.

"She's beautiful."

The answer to some of Olivia's questions was Rose, the most non-judgemental, intelligent and kind person she knew. She had thought long and hard about whether or not to tell her best friend about what had happened, weighing the pros and cons, and figured in the end that she simply needed somebody to talk to.

However, the exam stress made it difficult to find a good time to talk. It was only a little over week until the Christmas Holidays and there were many things begging for their attention. There was always something to write, or something to look up in the library, or to discuss in their study group, before doing anything else. Mr Watson walked the corridors and shooed them to the stud area whenever he saw pupils hanging out and relaxing, probably hoping he'd increase the school's average before he had to face the critics on parent-teacher night in January.

Then there was Mr Brook who wanted them to practise extra hours after school for the performance, which was to be on the last Friday night before Christmas. He had his musicians practising, art class pupils painting a décor, and had taken Eric under his wing, teaching him all the technical aspects of the stage. Brook kept everyone busy when they thought they could relax.

During lunch breaks Olivia sat with her friends either in the canteen or in room 221, and Anthony was always there. Often he held her hand, and a few times he made an attempt at a kiss. She held him off, saying she was not in the mood because of the exams, but she felt a tiny pang of guilt when she did it, knowing there were many more reasons she was holding back. He accepted it without questioning though.

It wasn't until Thursday that Olivia finally found a time and place to talk with her friend without any other people around. The last class had been cancelled because Mr Anderson was ill, giving them some time to breathe. They sat on the couch in room 221, an oasis of peace and quiet within the busy school building, studying for their Geography exam, when Olivia realised this was probably one of her few chances.

While they were chatting about the usefulness of their knowledge of the movements of tectonic plates in their future lives, and eating chocolate to soften the agony, Olivia suddenly changed the subject and started talking about what had happened the Friday before.

In a timespan of 10 minutes she spilled everything, relief spreading through her chest as she got the words out. Rose's exclamations went from angry at her father's behaviour, to excited at hearing about the interior of Mr Holmes' flat, to complete shock at what came after.

Olivia smiled a bit as her friend's dark brown eyes looked at her in awe, knowing that a seemingly innocent and unreachable fantasy had suddenly turned into a serious and very real thing.
Rose had not considered it in any way likely that Olivia's feelings would be reciprocated. Not because she wasn't attractive -Rose had always found Olivia attractive- but because he was her teacher and so detached and nasty to everybody, she couldn't completely picture him being intimate with anyone, besides possibly in a very carnal way.

Rose got more worried when she realised that Holmes was probably not so disciplined as his straight posture and sharply ironed suits suggested. The man with eyes made of ice actually had feelings. Rather strong feelings by the sound of it.

"Did he try to do anything else with you? You should be careful not to make him think he can take advantage."

Olivia thought about that for a moment, and concluded she probably had made him think that, but he still hadn't tried. She frowned.

"No, he didn't try anything. Maybe he doesn't even want to?"

Rose snorted. "Yes of course, he is a man with a beautiful girl throwing herself in his arms and he doesn't want to do anything other than kiss her," she said sarcastically.

"Did he get hard?"

Olivia nodded, partly embarrassed and partly proud.

"In that case he might be more selfless than he appears." Rose said thoughtfully.

"But what do I do when he does… you know… want more?" said Olivia nervously, forgetting the melting piece of chocolate she was holding.

"Do you want more?"

"I have no idea…"

"Well, I guess you need to think about that. And you could start taking those pills Mary gave us a while back. You know, as a precaution. I can give you mine as well."

"Thanks. But Rose… do you know what I'm supposed to do to him… with my hands?"

"I'm not sure. I heard they like to be stroked down there."

"And… the other thing?"

"God, I don't know Liv. Not exactly my area, you know."

Rose looked at her utterly innocent and lost friend who was now licking melted chocolate off her fingers, and suddenly felt a bit sad. Olivia might be intelligent and quite mature when it came to certain things, like caring about others, but she was incredibly naive and maybe even a bit isolated when it came to sex.

Sometimes Lucy would joke about certain things, sexual things, and Rose could see that Olivia didn't completely get it. She had spent the past year inside that old decaying house with her dad while she and the others had gone out and discovered new things at party's, swimming pools, and even the occasional pub. But as far as she knew none of them had actually had sex. It was likely that Olivia would not even know what was about to happen until it happened.
The idea of that tall dark man hovering over her like a predator, doing things she might not be completely ready to do, was like something you imagined when you read about some horrible crime in the newspaper.

Rose sighed deeply.

"Liv. Are you sure you want this?"

"I don't know what I want," she said hesitantly, "but maybe that's just because I've never tried it."

～

"Dad?"
"Dad?"
"Daaaad!"

Mr Edwards came running down the stairs, his face tense with worry.

"Hi sweetheart, something the matter?"

She was just putting her bag down and taking off her coat. Her cheeks were red from the cold.

"No, I didn't see you."

He kissed her on her forehead.

"Oh I was just fixing the bathroom door. Works perfectly now." He smiled.

"How was school?"

Olivia told him about her exams and about the extra practicing with Mr Brook for the performance. "You're coming to see it, aren't you?"

"Of course I'll come! Wouldn't want to miss my daughter making her musical debut now would I?"

The joy was visible on her face. She gave him a loving peck on the cheek.

"Let me know if you need any help," he said as he watched her make her way up the stairs.

Once he heard Olivia's bedroom door shut, Jeremy sank down on a kitchen chair. He took a deep breath and rubbed his eyes with his thumbs, hands shaking.

～

**Sunday evening 11 pm.**

Not being able to concentrate on her work any longer, Olivia let herself fall back onto her duvet.

Aside from a trip to Oxford Street with her dad on Saturday to buy some new clothes for her performance, she had worked the entire weekend, only coming downstairs for a quick bite now and then, determined to show that she was bright enough to pass every subject with decent marks.

She tried to convince herself that her drive to study was only derived from her motivation to learn, and not at all from a desire to impress a certain person, but didn't succeed. All she wanted was for him to know that she was doing well, having enough time to focus on her schoolwork. She wanted
him to realise that she was intelligent, that not as dim as he had declared her entire class to be
during several class discussions. Most of all, she wanted him to see her as an equal, somebody who
he did not need to protect from her peers, from her dad, or from himself.

Her father had bought her the midnight blue dress she liked, which reached from below her
collarbone to just above her knees, a couple of inches shorter than her school uniform. The neckline
was wide, almost exposing her shoulders. She believed it made her look more mature, and could
not wait for him to see it. At the same time she wondered if he even cared one bit about what she
wore. He didn't seem the type to admit it, anyway.

Due to all the stress, Olivia hadn't been able to process everything that happened fully. The fight
with her dad, the time spent at Mr Holmes and then at Mr and Mrs Watson's house, it all was a bit
of a blur. She had no idea how her childish fantasy about him had suddenly turned into snogging
him in his office, at the risk of being caught. She had no idea what would happen if anyone found
out, but didn't feel like considering it in detail. What she knew was that she wanted him to touch
her, kiss her, and whisper to her with that impossibly deep voice.

She wondered how long it would take before he really touched her, underneath her clothes. Of
course he would know exactly what to do, and he would definitely be gentle with her, she decided.
Would he put his fingers inside her? The thought of it sent a hot jolt through her lower body.

Slowly, half dreaming, she slid her hand down her skirt, thinking of that low voice that sometimes
felt similar to a touch. The humming sounds coming from his warm chest could be so comforting,
but also so incredibly arousing.

But even now, thinking of him, as moisture coated her fingers and her breathing became shallower,
she wasn't able to keep her heavy eyelids from closing. She realised how tired she actually was
after a week of almost non-stop studying.

She sighed, and her fingers moved a little slower. Laying comfortably on her back her head tilted to
the side and her eyes heavy lidded, she slowly withdrew her hand, fingers tracing a little glistening
thread across her abdomen.

*I'll do it later*, she thought, and fell asleep within seconds.

~

"Morning," John grunted while he walked into the teachers lounge and let himself fall into an
armchair.

"I am not ready to start this week," he moaned. Around them, several other teachers were trying to
close their eyes for five more minutes before heading off to face their pupils. Some of them were in
the middle of marking essays and exams; others were still drilling their pupils about exceptions to
grammar rules, deforestation, British colonialism.

"Well, it's your school. Just tell everybody to go home." Sherlock turned around from the coffee
machine and put a steaming cup in front of John, who looked at him in shock.

"Sherlock! You've never made me a drink, ever. What's going on?"

Sherlock shrugged. "I'm just a nice person, John, I thought you knew that."

John picked up the cup and eyed it suspiciously. "It's not drugged is it?"

"As much as the bags under your eyes are begging me to, Mary is still here and she might make an
attempt at my life."

"She could, you know." John murmured as he took a sip.

"I have no doubt at all."

John looked at his friend who was leaning against the counter where the coffee machine stood. He was glad that everything between them was normal. The months of him being in charge of their daily life had not diminished the strength of their friendship. He had to admit that might be because Sherlock steadfastly refused to acknowledge him as his boss.

What pleased John even more was that teaching had actually done the man some good. He seemed to get more sleep these days, as far as Mrs Hudson could tell him, and he had gained at least four much needed pounds. He was more socially aware, at least when it came to the pupils. All the marks for his classes – which were well above average – had been dropped onto his desk only a couple of hours after the deadline. Come to think of it, he hadn't seen him smoke in two weeks. Who knew that kids would be the ones to turn him around?

"What are you ogling me for?"

Well, maybe not completely.

"You look good Sherlock. Healthy, almost."

Before Sherlock had a chance to give a sigh and an eye-roll at this comment, the singing tones of Richard Brook's voice approached them.

"Gooooood morning!" the chirpy voice sounded through the lounge. "Everybody ready for the final week?"

Even John seemed to cringe a little. Sherlock kept his back to the man in the hope of going unnoticed.

"Sherlock!"

Sherlock internally sighed and turned around. His face betraying nothing.

"I wanted to ask you a favour. Do you have a moment?"

Knowing what was coming, John got up quickly and made his excuse to leave, heading for the quiet of his office.

Richard put on his friendliest face.

"As you know, we are preparing a Christmas musical night, and I am short of some musicians."

"No."

Undeterred, Richard went on. "John told me that you are an exquisite violinist! Wouldn't it be great to show the par-"

"Not interested." Sherlock started making his way to the exit, but was intercepted just before he reached the door.

"At least consider it, darling. Everyone would love to hear you play, especially me."
"I don't play for people." Sherlock spat out the last word as if he was talking about some vermin.

Richard sighed in defeat, but his smile still didn't falter. Sherlock fought the impulse to step back when the man ran a hand along his arm, feeling his bicep.

"John is right you know. You do look ravishing."

Without comment, Sherlock brusquely pushed his way passed the slightly shorter man, not looking back when he heard an amused chuckle.

On his way to class, where 25 nervous pupils would be sweating over his exam questions in 10 minutes, Sherlock pondered his own reaction to Richard Brook's advances. The man always found a way to make him uncomfortable, often getting Sherlock to flee from his presence. It annoyed him that such an ordinary man could affect him in any way.

Brook was not unattractive, Sherlock had realised that from the beginning. There was nothing about homoerotic advances themselves that made Sherlock uncomfortable. Whenever something like that happened he always either ignored it, made a rude deduction that would scare them off, or, as had happened on a few occasions when he was depressed, taken them to 221B. The latter usually ended with him taking frequent showers the next day.

These were all clueless persons though. People who he would never show any of his true self to. Richard Brook, on the other hand, seemed to know more about Sherlock than he would voluntarily let on. Those bright eyes observing him, reading him, made him feel like there was more to the man than what met the eye. The way he had mentioned Olivia a few times was alarming, and Sherlock thought it best to avoid the man as much as possible.

Olivia.

Olivia Edwards.

The strange girl whose lips seemed to have bewitched him.

He looked forward to watching her frown over her exam paper for the next two hours.

~

On Thursday, most of the exams and essays had been handed in, and there was only the performance to stress about. This meant that the pupils had absolutely no interest whatsoever in learning anything, and most teachers did something fun during class to keep them from falling asleep.

That morning in front of the coffee machine, Mary had handed Sherlock a video with some documentary about rainforests to show during his biology class, and he had been deeply offended. Sherlock was convinced that he would be interesting enough to keep his adolescent audience interested and alert with a lecture on the effects of penicillin on the human body.

It took 15 minutes for him to order somebody to get the TV.

~

Olivia watched from her seat at the back of the class how Mr Holmes pushed the video in the player. He rather angrily punched the play button and ordered Billy to turn down the light.

She loved watching him talk, so happily convinced of his own brilliance and so passionate about
topics that he had chosen himself. Today, however, she was glad when he caved and let them watch something they would not be tested on later. The stress of exams had left her tired and unable to concentrate for more than five minutes. Also, now there was no need to take notes and she could shamelessly watch the object of her desire mope around at the front of the room.

As the film started, he sat down at his desk and started reading essays that had to be marked before Friday afternoon. Within seconds he was completely concentrated and oblivious to his surroundings. She imagined he didn't even know what he had just put on and would not even notice if it was a cartoon.

But with Mr Holmes, one could never assume he wasn't aware of everything. She was leaning forward with an elbow on her desk, her chin on her hand, when suddenly he lifted his gaze from the paper and looked straight into her staring eyes. She blushed slightly but didn't avert her gaze, thinking how beautiful he looked in the soft bluish light coming from the TV. After a few seconds, he returned to his marking as if nothing happened.

Olivia had woken up on Monday, shamefully remembering how she had fallen asleep the night before. Her father had been in her room to close her curtains and cover her with her duvet, and she hoped to God her previous activities had not been noticeable. In any case she did not have time for those kind of things again after that, only tightening the tension in her body. Now, having finished all the exams and watching him like this, the tingling feeling between her legs returned with full force.

Glancing around her, she saw that Rose and Lucy were absorbed in the TV screen, and Anthony was lying with his head in his arms on his desk, possibly asleep.

She shifted in her seat, causing a tiny amount of friction between her thighs, where there rush of blood made everything highly sensitive.

A deep sigh.

His eyes flashed up, focusing on her again. His pupils were matching the soft sound to her facial expression.

Out of frustration, Olivia started biting on the end of her pencil, like she often did when she was thinking. The soft wood denting between her teeth didn't distract from the rest of her body.

He was staring at his work again, his face stern as always, his black curls shining blue in the light of the screen.

She sat up, her back resting against the chair. Millimetre by millimetre, she parted her legs. The pencil was forgotten for a moment as she held it in her lap and watched him, wondering when he would look up again. He might never.

When he did, though, his gaze landed straight on the gap between her legs, and it lingered for three whole seconds. Olivia almost shuddered. He probably couldn't see anything, but she fully realised what she was doing was extremely indecent. She could feel herself getting wet.

Did he realise that she was doing this for him? Did it arouse him?

Olivia thought for a moment about what she would do next, as many options that sped by in her head she would never dare to do. Feeling the skin on her thigh tingle, she reached out with her pencil and slowly pushed the end into the soft plain of the inside of her thigh, rubbing it up and down for a moment, right when he decided to glance up again.
The look he gave her caused a similar jolt of electricity as when she imagined his hands on her. He seemed transfixed. There was no expression on his face, but his jaw was slack behind his closed lips and his eyes were burning into her skin. Cheekily, she pushed the pencil up, slowly scratching an imaginative itch beneath the hem of her skirt.

A deep breath under that perfectly ironed shirt. He quickly looked away.

Intoxicated by the sudden feeling of power, Olivia almost let out a giggle. However, she did not dare to open her legs any wider, as he would likely be able to see right up her skirt if she did. Crossing her legs, she squirmed and bit her lower lip.

He was now looking down again at his desk, his jaw now tightly clenched. Olivia couldn't be sure, but it seemed like he shifted slightly in his seat.

She stared at him for a while longer, but he didn't look up again. Neither of them noticed the time, until the class started to mumble.

"Sir, the movie's finished." Joan said urgently.

Mr Holmes looked up at them, frowning, straightening his back.

"Right, fine," he spat. "Miss Davies, take care of the TV set and get that despicable video back to Mrs Watson. The rest of you, bugger off. I'm sure Mr Brook will be much happier to see your faces right now."

Excitedly, they buggered off.

"You've got all the notes right, but frankly it sounds a bit cramped. You should relax more, let it flow."

"I'm trying. It's getting better."

"No, it's getting faster. It's like you're trying to get it over with rather than enjoying it. Try again."

Olivia sighed and started from the beginning, anxiously glancing up at Mr Brook to see if he was smiling encouragingly or shaking his head.

He had been practicing with everyone over the past few weeks, very intent on making this a high quality performance. She guessed he wanted to prove his competence to the school and the parents, making a good first impression on them. Today, the day before the big day, he'd asked Olivia to stay after class, to practise a little more.

She hadn't really felt like it, but it was probably necessary. Anthony had offered to wait for her so that they could walk home together, but she had told him he should go home. He had looked utterly defeated.

Now she was trying to concentrate, sitting with Mr Brook on the small stage in the theatre room and he wasn't satisfied, staring intently at her moving fingers. It didn't do much for her confidence.

Her upward glances at his face caused her to miss a note. Making a frustrated sound, she stopped.

"I can't do it. It won't be any good."

"Of course you can." He sighed and silently caught her gaze. "I'm sorry for being a bit harsh. I
"But it's fine, I just… my dad is coming to see me and…"

"And you want him to be proud of you?"

She nodded, slightly embarrassed at his honest guess.

"I'm sure he is already proud. Is he doing better these days?"

She nodded again. "Yes, he's going to meetings and we have a social worker who will come to see us regularly."

Mr Brook smiled. "Well that's great news!"

"And he has been sober for a while now. He's doing really well."

"I'm sure he is."

Then his smile faded. "Olivia, just to let you know, even though I'm only here three days a week, you can always talk to me if you have any problems. You know that, right?"

"I know. Thank you."

"So, no need to look so serious. Let me see a smile on that pretty face of yours."

Olivia tried furiously not to blush, but smiled.

It was silent while Mr Brook observed her for a while.

"Much better. Now, keep practicing for tomorrow. I won't stay here and bother you with my comments anymore."

With that, he stood up and picked up his suit jacket from a chair.

"Just remember to relax, ok?"

He walked out, leaving Olivia alone with her guitar. Dutifully, she continued practicing, trying to remember Mr Brook's advice. She found that it was easier to relax when he wasn't there looking at her the whole time. She played the song a few more times from beginning to end, but still found herself making mistakes.

After twenty minutes she stopped, sighed, and contemplated whether to go home or stay and practise some more. The decision, however, was made for her.

"I think you've got it now," a low and slightly impatient voice came from somewhere in the dark at the side of the stage, startling her.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Watching you."

Her eyes searched the darkness, trying to make out where he was hiding exactly, but couldn't see him. How long had he been there?

"Put the guitar down and come here."
Without thinking, she placed the instrument on her chair and walked towards the darkness. As she stepped between the curtains and pieces of décor that stood by the side of the stage, she saw him sitting on a similar wooden chair as the one she'd been sitting on. He had one leg crossed over the other and his hands were resting on his abdomen, fingers entwined. His dangerously dark eyes watched her as he was leaning back.

He hadn't spoken to her after the day she had found him on the floor of his office in the midst of pieces of paper, but had winked at her once when he walked into the library where she was studying with her classmates. She somehow knew it was a way of letting her know everything was fine.

Now, while she stood before him, unsure of what to do, she had his full attention and there was nobody around to hide from. He uncrossed his legs and stuck out his hand, inviting her to come sit in his lap. Automatically, her legs obeyed him, taking the remaining steps and bending so that she landed sideways on his thighs.

Feeling the warmth of his body, she was torn between curling up against him and falling asleep in his arms, or to press her lips against his. He snaked his arms around her waist and took her in.

"Who does he think he is, telling you to smile," he grumbled.

Was he jealous?

"He was just being nice," she said, but his comment made her chest flutter.

"Brook is taking this whole performance ridiculously seriously." He sounded a bit jealous.

"But it is serious. Everyone will be there."

"No one important," he huffed.

"You don't think parents are important?"

"Never particularly saw the use of them, nevertheless they seem to be controlling this place."

Annoyed, he blew some air against her hair as some strands were tickling his cheek.

"My dad will be there, Mr Watson will be there, you…” she realised too late that she didn't even know if he would attend.

"Yes I will be attending, I'm afraid John has pressed the matter rather viciously."

Satisfied, she settled her shoulder against his chest.

"Have you finished all your work? No exam tomorrow?"

"No, everything's done."

"And you thought that was a good excuse to stop paying attention in my class?"

She blushed.

"It was a boring documentary."

"It was very unacceptable behaviour, Miss Edwards. I shall make it a rule that there will be no pencil biting or thigh flashing in my classroom."
"I didn't expect you to be so easily distracted, sir," she said cheekily.

Her thoughts faded as she felt his lips in her neck. "You've been tempting me, Miss Edwards," he rumbled against her skin. The vibrations from his throat went straight through her, waking up something that had gone back to sleep a few hours earlier.

"Very tempting."

Slowly he traced her jaw with his lips towards her mouth, taking her into a hungry kiss. His tongue pushed in without asking and explored the roof of her mouth, after which it dipped down into the hollow underneath her tongue. She tried to keep up with him. While she kept one hand on his shoulder to steady herself, the other was quickly buried in his irresistibly soft curls. His full lips pressed against hers as if he wanted to bury himself in her.

The only sound amid the dark space filled with props was that of their mouths moving together. Sherlock playfully explored her mouth, sometimes astounding her with moves she hadn't even considered before, like softly biting her lower lip.

She shivered and broke the kiss when she felt his hand creeping upwards on the outside of her thigh, disappearing underneath her skirt. Holding her breath as it continued until he almost reached her bum, caressing her skin so softly it gave her goose bumps. The feeling of his hand in such an intimate place caused her mouth to open in astonishment, and he observed her reaction with fascination.

Gently, he pushed her up and off his lap, forcing her to stand on her legs that now seemed to be made out of jelly. He followed, dipping down to claim her mouth once again. Olivia put her arms around his neck and felt herself slowly be pushed backwards, his hands on her hips, eventually coming to a halt with her back against the dark stone wall. He was so calm, yet so hungry.

When he broke the kiss to look at her for a moment, His skin radiant and his pupils taking over the colour of his eyes, the thought crossed her mind that if the devil were to be a man, he might look like Mr Holmes. The thought slipped away again when he approached once more, his tongue slithering across her lips.

Suddenly, she felt his knee nudging itself between her legs, working them open without effort. His thigh pushing against her surprised her. She didn't know exactly where this was going, but was suddenly hyperaware that they were not in his office, but in somebody else's classroom.

"What if somebody comes in?" she breathed against his cheek.

"The door is locked."

For a few seconds, Sherlock watched to see if this knowledge would scare her, but she nodded and reached up, urging him to continue the kiss.

Olivia felt Mr Holmes thigh giving increasingly more pressure between her legs, until it was firmly planted against her pants. Her skirt hitched up and crumpled around her hips.

She grabbed his shoulder to hold onto something as he began subtly moving his hips, causing his leg to rub against her while he kept delving into her mouth. She let out a surprised whimper when she felt the friction he was causing.

"Does that feel good?" he breathed against her neck.

Her lips slightly parted, she nodded desperately.
His breathing was laboured and his eyes were dark, so much more hungry than the two times they had kissed before. One of his hands was on her bum, pressing her into him, the other one her side, his thumb brushing the side of her breast.

The friction of his hard muscle between her legs simply felt too good. Her body was in need of release. The weeks of studying, thinking of him without having the time or energy to bring herself to orgasm caused her to melt at his overwhelming touch.

Involuntarily, her hips jerked, pressing herself even more against him. He moaned and she could feel her own moisture spreading there, soaking her pants, making everything feel even better. In the haze of arousal she held onto the lapel of his jacket with one hand, while the other felt the tense shape of his side, clutching onto it when he made an exceptionally erratic movement. Both their breaths were heavy, loud in their ears but muffled by the curtains that surrounded them.

"God I want to taste you," his shuddering voice sounded against her ear.

Olivia's eyes shot up, shocked. Somehow she knew he meant tasting her down there. Did people really do that? If she had not been on the verge of coming, she would have blushed furiously at his statement. Now, she could only feel his hands on her skin, his voice in her ears, and his leg rubbing against her most sensitive spot. The scent of sweat and arousal filled the air around them.

Her breath started to come out in short pants.

He could feel that she was close.

"Come for me, Olivia."

It was as if his words pushed a release button. Suddenly, her muscles convulsed and pleasure ripped through her entire body. She held on to his shirt for dear life while her back arched and she let out a surprised moan into his chest.

"Yes, very good."

His arms around her held her up while she came down from an extremely forceful orgasm. He kissed her tenderly on her neck and ear, letting her breathing calm down. If it hadn't been for his soothing gestures, Olivia would have died of embarrassment. It had not occurred to her that she could come because of such an act, and it had taken her by surprise.

For a moment, she avoided his searching lips.

"Something wrong?"

It took her a moment to find words.

"Was... was that supposed to happen?"

His eyebrows rose high as he looked at her.

"It was bloody well my intention," he said blatantly.

Slowly he urged her to sit down, as he noticed she was trembling. Lowering himself down next to her on the floor, he suddenly realised something.

"Had you experienced orgasm before?" he asked.

Olivia was slightly stunned by his bluntness, but nodded.
"I just didn't know it was possible… like this."

He didn't say anything, but smiled. You could even say his expression was… warm. It encouraged her to lean into his side a bit more, resting her head on his chest.

Sherlock enjoyed the moment of quietness, and silently praised himself that he had just made her come without using his hands. The wet patch in his trousers was the delightful evidence of his capabilities. After a minute though, he felt her body tense ever so slightly. Her hand that was perched on his bent knee slid down to about half way his thigh. He couldn't see it, but knew that her eyes were on the bulge that was clearly visible beneath the fabric of his trousers. Involuntarily he felt it twitch.

Her small hand slid two inches lower, but stopped again.

He wouldn't have let it go that far anyway, but seeing her uncertainty was enough for Sherlock to know that they wouldn't be doing anything even close to that any time soon.

He grasped her hand.

"Ignore it."

She looked up at him. "But y-"

"I said ignore it."

Olivia nodded, blushing, and her mind spinning with questions she didn't dare to ask him.

Her face fell into something he vaguely recognised as confusion and… disappointment?

"What now?"

"I thought… I thought that men wanted that kind of thing."

Sherlock sighed, straightened up and took her chin in his fingers to force her to look at his face.

"Let me make two things very clear to you, Olivia. First, you are too young to have to worry about men's penises. I even wonder if you have any idea what 'that kind of thing', you are referring to, is. Second, unlike some men, I am perfectly capable of containing my urges around you and taking care of them myself. So please don't worry about what I might want, agreed?"

Her big brown eyes told him that he might have upset her with his speech, but she nodded quickly and he let go of her chin. Not long after he felt her relax again next to him, her cheek resting comfortably on his chest.

For a while, Sherlock indulged, dreadfully aware of the looming Christmas holidays.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading this far, and to everyone who have left kudos and comments!
Stage fright

Olivia’s dad woke up with a pounding headache. It had been a terrible week for him because Olivia was so occupied by school, exams, and her music. Not because he needed attention, but because it had given him the opportunity to get high without her noticing. Two days ago he had decided to stop, and told Jim he would kill him if he found another special delivery on his doorstep. Surprisingly Jim had agreed, and now the withdrawal symptoms had started kicking in. He felt like he had been run over by a truck. It was late morning when he managed to get downstairs, long after Olivia had left for school. As he walked into the kitchen, he noticed a red box in the table with a ribbon around out. Smiling, he approached it, assuming it was an early Christmas present from his daughter. When he opened the little card attached to it, his heart sank.

Dear Jeremy,

You’ve been doing so well, I thought you deserved a present.

Merry Christmas,

Jim

~

"Sherlock, could you show Mrs Hudson to her seat please? She's in the front row. I have to go ask Richard if there are any changes in the program."

Sherlock's eyebrows shot up.

"I'm not her errand boy."

"And she is not your housekeeper, but she makes you tea, doesn't she?"

Sherlock sighed and detached himself from the wall he'd been leaning against. The canteen was bustling with people. As the actual theatre room was too small to accommodate the approximately 200 parents that had decided to show up, this room had been given a transformation. The stage was set up at the back of the room, next to the kitchen, which was being used as a dressing room. They had put up curtains and lots of Christmas decorations, making the big and usually plain looking room look quite cosy.

It didn't do anything to get Sherlock out of his bad mood though. If anything, the crowd of excited parents made him feel like telling John he was going out for a cigarette, never to return. However - he was reluctant to admit- he didn't want to miss Olivia’s performance.

As John strode away through the crowd on his mission to find Richard, Sherlock watched Mrs Hudson chat animatedly with Mary. He could tell she was delighted to be invited as a guest of honour at the St Francis Christmas performance. The elderly lady did not have any children but adored them. Sherlock was often conveniently used as a surrogate child, which didn't bother him as long as it regularly got him tea and home-baked biscuits. She also spent afternoons at the zoo with her sister's grandchildren, but that didn't happen very often. It had been a good move by John to invite her to see, what he often called 'his kids'.

"I can't believe Sherlock spends his days here! It's so… joyful."
“Yes, it is sometimes hard to believe, but he seems to have acclimatized.” Mary was standing with a stack of programs in one hand and the other on her now quite visibly protruding belly. She had been tired lately, but tonight she was beaming. Much like John who, every time he looked at her, couldn't hide his pride and excitement.

After being introduced to both Lucy's and Emma's parents by their overexcited children, Sherlock was now on edge, ready to disappear when another such encounter seemed imminent.

"Enough chatting Mrs Hudson, I've been tasked to show you your seat for this dreadful evening."

"Wait a moment, dear. I see a friend of yours."

Sherlock frowned, but then he spotted Olivia and Rose walking towards them, both not smiling.

"Oh my word! Olivia, you look like a real lady in that dress! I cannot wait to see your performance!” Mrs Hudson exclaimed.

Sherlock noticed her dress too, the blue of which matched so well with her hair. It would have made her look older if she hadn't had such a lost look on her face.

The girl managed a smile. "Thank you Mrs Hudson. It's nice to see you again."

When she looked Sherlock in the eye he knew exactly what was on her mind.

"Have you seen my dad?"

With difficulty, Sherlock swallowed the "No and he won't show up so stop wishing it" that came to his lips first, and managed a "Not yet" against his better judgment.

"He should be here by now.” Olivia looked around, her mouth tight with worry, and started walking in the direction of the entrance to continue her search, completely oblivious to how incredibly beautiful she looked.

Olivia wandered around with Rose, looking for that familiar round face. A wide variety of emotions were coursing through her. She was incredibly nervous to perform, excited and slightly embarrassed to see Mr Holmes again after what happened the day before, and utterly disappointed to come to the realisation that her dad might actually not come to see her. Searching for him in the crowd kept her from losing hope, until Mr Brook intercepted them and ushered them backstage.

"What are you two looking so lost for? We need to start soon!"

"Make sure you are ready when I call your name, we can't keep the audience waiting!” he said as he gathered his performers in the semi-dark backstage area.

Olivia pulled on Mr Brook's the jacket sleeve and he turned to face her.

"My dad's not here," she said with a slight panic in her voice.

"Oh, well I'm sure he'll be here shortly."

"But what if he isn't?"

Mr Brook sighed impatiently but there was compassion in his eyes.

"Look, Olivia. I'm terribly sorry but I have a show to run. I really don't have time for this right now. Either he shows up or he doesn't. There's nothing we can do about it."
She nodded, her lips pressed together.

"And there are many other people who are here to see you. I'm very proud of you, alright?"

He squeezed her shoulder and walked off to talk to Mr Watson who was standing in the corner mumbling to himself as he was rehearsing his introduction.

Anthony was watching a group of girls practice the choreography they had prepared, and Olivia noticed Joan Davies smiling at him as she exaggerated her dance moves. However, the moment he got sight of Olivia, Anthony got up and came towards her.

Sympathetically, the boy threw his arms around her and gave her a kiss.

"I'm sure he just got stuck in traffic or something. He'd never miss this."

She nodded, but wasn't completely convinced.

Suddenly they heard the mumbling of the audience die down and Mr Watson's voice through the microphone, thanking everybody for coming, Mr Brook for all the preparations, and all the pupils for working so hard on it.

Then Mr Brook walked onto the stage, announcing the first act, which was Lucy, Rose and Emma, singing Aretha Franklin. Next was George, a first year, who blew the crowd away with an exceptional performance on his xylophone. After that came Joan's dance group, and so forth.

All the while, Olivia stood behind the curtains beside the stage in the dark, peeking through in order to search the audience. With every moment she couldn't see him, and with every successful performance happening on stage, Olivia's confidence faded. Would he really not show up? Would he just leave her here to do this on her own? Maybe this was all just one big mistake. She wasn't even that good. Just because her mum could play and sing so well didn't mean she had any talent. And why on earth had she ever agreed to do a solo?

Gradually, Olivia's breathing became more irregular and her bottom lip started to tremble.

~

After four acts, Sherlock started seriously considering making his escape.

Aside from the horrifying experience of watching and listening to these teenagers perform, their personal lives were being thrust at Sherlock like a friend wanting you to hold their new-born (he would really have to avoid John and Mary for at least a few months after the little monster came out). Divorce, illness, jealousy, addiction, affairs, love… he wondered why not more of these children were failing badly.

Incomprehensibly, next to him John was beaming at the stage, his chest swelling with pride at every round of applause. Ridiculous idiot.

Then there was the social awkwardness of so many people looking at him. He could tell many of the pupils had told their parents about their brilliant (or mental, depending on the pupil) science teacher. Sherlock had no clue as to how to respond to these looks and it was getting on his nerves.

And if this misery wasn't enough, he felt the pressure on his bladder urge him to find a loo.

But when he saw Olivia looking through the small slit in the curtains, her scared eyes desperately searching for that one specific face, he couldn't move. Although he didn't fully grasp why it was so
important that he was there, he found he did not want to upset her more by leaving as well.

About ten acts in, Richard set a chair in the middle of the stage and announced Miss Olivia Edwards, who would be accompanying herself on guitar. Sherlock only just caught himself before he blurted out "Well finally".

She had been crying, he could see that immediately, but her brown eyes were no longer desperately searching the audience. She seemed to have accepted the fact that the one man she was looking for would not show up.

Sitting down on the chair, she set her guitar on her leg. For a moment, her eyes closed, gathering her courage, willing her hand to stop trembling. Then she looked at the audience, which had gone extremely quiet at the sight of her, and undoubtedly saw Mrs Hudson and Mary smiling at her from the first row. Subsequently her eyes shot up to the back of the room, knowing she would find him there.

Sherlock could feel John next to him give an encouraging smile. When her gaze fell upon himself he gave her a small nod; silently telling her it was all right.

Olivia took a very deep breath and started playing. Her voice started out sweet and a bit unsteady, the sound of her guitar a bit strained. Her eyes, slightly red, looked up to her audience from time to time, but mostly at the floor in front of her.

As he watched her face in the warm light and her lips move in front of the microphone, Sherlock felt a tug in his stomach. It was interesting how all these feelings clouded his mind when it came to this ordinary girl. Whether it was curiosity, attraction, annoyance, affection, or protectiveness, there was always something that kept her in his head.

What on earth did she have that made her so bloody attractive to him? Sherlock encountered loads of people who might be considered good-looking, and it never bothered him. No, it was definitely not that. She wasn't exceptionally bright, either. Possibly above average, but nothing he would have taken note of otherwise. Furthermore she was particularly naïve and hopelessly sensitive to certain topics and imagery. In all, she was nothing special and quite inconvenient for him. Definitely nothing Sherlock Holmes would miss during two weeks of holidays.

As the song progressed, she became more confident, and Sherlock could even hear some anger in her voice.

*She is rather resilient though, and quite funny when in the right mood. Her lips are incredibly soft...*

Vividly he remembered the way she had shaken in his arms, the scent of her aroused body, the sound of her erratic breaths as she came...

Sherlock abruptly stopped his strain of thought.

"What song is this?" he asked John to distract himself.

"It's one of Paul McCartney's I believe." John whispered.

"Who?"

"You have *got* to be kidding me."
Relief spread on Olivia's face as she received an enthusiastic applause. Even though he didn't clap, Sherlock could feel a tiny bit of pride stir in his chest, but of course didn't let it swell into anything substantial.

Satisfied with his own endurance, he left the noise of the dining hall behind him and walked through a corridor to find a loo that was quiet. He unzipped and gave a quiet sigh as he relieved his bladder.

"I need to talk to you."

In shock, Sherlock almost turned around in a swivel, and could only just stop himself from soiling the floor.

"Jesus, Miss Edeson. You could have waited and harassed me in the corridor," he said as he finished and quickly made himself decent. She was standing against the wall next to the door, arms demonstratively crossed in front of her.

"Oh it doesn't matter. I'm not into men anyway."

As he washed his hands he retorted into the mirror. "I'd gathered that. This is more a matter of basic decency, I would say."

"Exactly."

Impatiently wiping his hands with a paper towel, he scowled at her.

"I assumed she had told you something."

"Deduced it, did you?"

She was about an inch shorter than Olivia and just as bright, but more assertive and temperamental. She would be a good addition to Lestrade's team someday, he reckoned.

"Your attempts at murdering me with your stare this past week hardly require deduction."

Rose narrowed her eyes at him and he continued.

"Precisely like that. Now, either you are here to demand me to discontinue whatever you think I am doing with your friend, to ask if my intentions are honourable, or to blackmail me into giving you higher marks. However, you probably know I would never take any commands from you, and you are already the at top of your class."

He waited.

Obviously Rose now felt much less confident but kept her back straight and her chin up. His stance changed slightly to less annoyed.

"Tell me."

Rose's mouth opened and closed a few times before she finally spoke.

"Olivia has no idea what she's getting herself into."

It was easy to see the worry in her face. Unfortunately, the answer he snapped at her was so ambiguous that it wouldn't ease her mind at all.
"I don't think you have a clue as to what she is getting into either, and I don't see how it is any of your business. As for Olivia, I am not in the habit of making decisions for other people. Now, get out of here, Rose. People might think something unsuitable was going on."

On his way back to the dining hall, Sherlock angrily considered his lack of preparedness. Rose had been eyeballing him all week, and he knew that she knew. She was rather fond of Olivia, and it was only a matter of time before she would make a move to protect her best friend.

The most annoying thing about it was that he would not even have been able to answer her question as to his intentions. Were they honourable? What was considered honourable anyway? He knew what he wanted, and hurting her was not it. But he wasn't sure if being with her was. He had never been in a proper relationship. What he had with Irene was never a relationship. It was an experiment. An enjoyable one, considering it did not involve too many emotions. She sometimes infuriated him, yes. But that had been so much easier than what Olivia was doing to him now, and he wasn't sure if he wanted that.

The thought that what he was doing was incredibly selfish popped up in his head, but was shoved back deep in his mind palace before it could settle. He took a deep breath before stepping back into the cafeteria.

~

Thankfully most of the parents didn't stay for long after the show. There was music and some drinks and snacks for the pupils, as a way of a Christmas party. The mulled wine was meant for the teachers, but nobody was watching it closely, meaning that there already a few pupils a bit unsteady on their feet.

John and Richard were speaking ecstatically about all the positive reactions they had received throughout the evening, while drinking from a bottle of whiskey one of the parents had brought as a thank you.

As he scanned the dancing pupils, Sherlock noticed that Mr Walker was talking to Emma. The boy seemed less angry lately, a bit social even. He hated to admit that Mr Brook was having a favourable influence.

Mr Wilding and Miss Davies were dancing rather close to each other, and that Olivia was alone, sitting on the first row of chairs.

Sherlock unhurriedly crossed the room and sat down, thinking that as her mentor, nobody would find it strange that he would have a talk with her.

"Still crying?" The undertone in his voice added: "because if you are, you're a moron."

"No." She said defensively, not looking at him.

"Good, because he's not worth it."

She shrugged.

"He really doesn't like crowds."

Sherlock rolled his eyes at her obvious attempt at lying to herself.

Observing her, he noticed the strands of hair that had escaped their band, and that were now brushing the skin of her neck and collarbone. The blue fabric of her dress looked extremely soft
and Sherlock wanted to touch it.

He wanted to say something like this: "I know you cried before being called on stage and I appreciate the fact that you went on anyway, even though it wouldn't have mattered to anyone if you hadn't. You were much better than any of the others and I even listened to the words."

Instead he said something more close to his character.

"John is very proud of you."

She snorted at the incredible awkwardness of his words. Her eyes were less sad when she finally looked up at him.

"Mr Watson is proud of everyone."

The implied "What about you?" Made Sherlock highly uncomfortable, so he decided to change the topic.

"It's a pity. Looking at your marks I was under the impression that your father was improving."

Her eyebrows shot up. "What?"

"I tried to mark you down, and I did find some answers lacking depth on your biology exam, but I couldn't do much else that give you an A for science. Your other marks were also quite respectable. Therefore, it seems you've had time to study, which means he's keeping his promise."

"You know all my marks?"

"I inquired with some of your other teachers, yes."

She looked at him incredulously.

He shrugged. "Alright, I might have nicked them from John's office."

She smiled. The change of emotion on her face caused something to unwind in Sherlock's stomach.

"He is doing much better. He's always cooking and cleaning and even fixing things. Something must have happened tonight so that he couldn't come."

Sherlock looked down at her pensively. Had they been alone he would probably have kissed her then, but he was painfully aware that they weren't. From the corner of his eye he spotted Mary looking at them.

"I suggest you go and get some wine and dance, because your friends have downed most of it already and must be wondering where you are."

This time, the smile she gave him was warm.

"Wouldn't you like some wine?"

He leaned away from her and stretched his neck that had gone stiff from watching the stage. "No. In approximately 20 minutes, John is going to ask me to drive his car because he's feeling nauseous."

Slightly cheered up, she took his advice and stood up. Watching her walk towards the incredibly unattractive crowd of young people, Sherlock hardly realised that Mary was sitting down next to
"How is she doing?" she asked.

"Miss Edwards is fine."

"Pity her dad didn't show up. It was good for her to know that you were here."

"She puts too much importance on the entire thing."

"It was nice for her to have you here, though."

"Again, overestimated."

"I think she has a bit of a crush on you, Sherlock."

Sherlock stared ahead, impenetrable walls keeping his feelings out of her sight. "Her mistake."

"A mistake easily made by a teenager."

Mary sighed. "Just be careful, OK?"

With a pat on his knee she got up and walked over to some of the lingering parents.

~

"Sherlock, could you please-"

"Drive Mrs Hudson home? Yes. Go home John. There is a cab waiting outside for you and Mary."

Sherlock said as he stepped inside, blowing out his last breath of smoke inside the building. It was now close to midnight, and easy to miss the last tube.

"Thanks mate. Appreciate it."

John was standing in the hall, held tightly by a sober Mary.

"Remember, Christmas at our place this year! You are cordially invited and expected to show up AND engage in pleasant conversation with people."

"Well, lets take it step by step. Just show up and then we'll see." Mary said amusedly.

They stumbled outside. A few seconds later John came back in, holding onto the doorpost. "And Olivia as well, she needs to be brought home."

"Fine, now go John. Mary is waiting for you."

"Right, Mary!" He turned and ran out again into the dark schoolyard.

Mrs Hudson insisted she sit in the backseat, while Olivia sat next to Sherlock in the front of John's car. During the ride, Sherlock wanted to threaten the old woman with walking if she didn't shut up, but knew he could never do that.

"Don't you think Olivia looked lovely tonight, Sherlock? And your singing was wonderful dear!" she babbled.

"John is doing such a wonderful job with this school. Mary looks radiant, doesn't she? I think she
looks radiant. Such a lucky child that is."

As they listened to the tipsy landlady, Sherlock caught Olivia's smile in the corner of his eye. Involuntarily, the corner of his mouth twitched.

The rest of the evening she had spent with her friends. Anthony had slow danced with her and Sherlock had carefully avoided any confrontation with Richard, who had winked at him from across the room. It was nice to drive away from there, although he dreaded the coming two weeks.

When they reached Olivia's street, Sherlock searched for a light coming from her house. He couldn't find any.

"Are you sure Sherlock shouldn't walk you to the door, dear?"

"No it's fine Mrs Hudson, my dad is at home."

"Well then, have a lovely Christmas. I hope to see you in the new year!"

"Thank you, same to you." Olivia started getting up.

Sherlock hadn't said anything.

She put one knee on her seat and stretched up so she could kiss his cheek. The unexpected public show of affection made him go completely rigid, his hands gripping the steering wheel tightly.

"Merry Christmas," she said softly, and stepped outside.

Sherlock didn't look, but could hear a soft chuckle from the back seat.

"We'll wait until you're safely inside, dear."

They watched as Olivia got out of the car and crossed the street.

"Such a sweetheart. You could have said goodbye to her you know."

Sherlock didn't respond as he watched Olivia search for her keys. There was no light coming from the kitchen window. When she finally found them somewhere at the bottom of her bag, she opened the door and was touched by a low light coming from somewhere deeper inside the house. He fought the urge to get out and get her back to spend Christmas at Baker Street, with him. Now he had to go to John and Mary's, where there would undoubtedly be way too many people to annoy him. She would be here.

He could just make out the faded little painting of a lighthouse that hung in the hallway before the door closed again.

Olivia smiled to herself as she hung her coat on the hook in the corridor. Mr Holmes had been sweet in his own weird way. He hadn't told her he liked her singing, or that he would miss her, or even Merry Christmas, but everything was implied, which was enough for her. She was sure Mrs Hudson would not be shocked by her kiss on his cheek. She chuckled also at the thought that he had been taken by surprise.

"Dad?" Olivia called.

"Are you still awake?"

She stepped into the living room and the smile left her face. The slightly orange light of only one
lamp threw shadows on the floor. Her father was sitting on the couch, unseeingly staring at the wall.

"Dad?"

The sound of her voice finally made its way to the man's brain and he looked up at her with wide eyes.

"I've just come back from the performance."

His hazy eyes told her it was wrong, but what rooted her to the spot were his ghostly stare and the shaky word that came from his mouth.

"Isabel."
"Merry Christmas!"

Greg let Mary kiss him on both cheeks as he stepped inside. He brushed the snowflakes off his shoulders, grinning. It was nice to see his friends again. For the past six months he had seen John and Mary way too little. Unfortunately it was a consequence of avoiding Sherlock. Tonight he would see the man for the first time since the catastrophe last summer, and he was ready for it. Whatever the bastard would throw at him, he wouldn't be affected, he was convinced he had distanced himself enough now.

"Hello mate."

Giving John a friendly handshake and firm pat on the shoulder, he took off his coat and stepped into their cozy living room where Mary pushed a glass of wine into his hand.

Molly Hooper was already there, as well as an unfamiliar man, who he assumed was the colleague John had mentioned on the phone. The man introduced himself with a warm smile as Richard. Mrs Hudson was spending Christmas at her sister's. There was no sign of Sherlock.

"We've got a roast and potatoes in the oven. The rest is finished. We just have some time to chat before dinner," Mary said.

"Don't forget the cranberry sauce! My own recipe. I'll go and see if it's ready," John said proudly, walking into the kitchen.
"Yes dear, well done." Behind John's back, Mary signalled something that would cause all of them to politely refuse John's addition to the meal.

"I'll see if he needs any help." Taking a sip of his wine, Greg followed John into the small but tastefully decorated kitchen.

"I'm glad you came, Greg," John said while he stirred the syrupy liquid in the pan. "We'd have understood if... you know."

Greg nodded. "How is he?"

"Good, actually, it seems. He's still himself, of course, but he's pretty good at teaching and he's healthy. Although I suspect he still sends you anonymous tips on cases."

"Anonymous my arse. I always know it's him when there are at least three insults crammed in one sentence. He just can't help himself."

John grinned. "But you still follow his leads, don't you?"

"Yeah... I do." Greg sighed.

John chuckled while he tried to scrape some burnt cranberry from the bottom of the pan.

"The git is hard to ignore, I know all about it." Then he straightened his back and looked serious. "Greg, you should know... he feels guilt. He might not say it, and he might do everything to hide it, but I've noticed. Teaching might have done him some good but, he was really out of it for a while."

"Can I assume you're chatting about our handsome science teacher?" Richard said as he came into the kitchen.

"Ah Richard. You met Greg Lestrade?"

"Yes of course, the DI."

"Richard seems to have a thing for insufferable gits," John explained.

"I haven't been able to charm him yet. Only makes him uncomfortable."

Lestrade's eyes widened at Richard. "Sherlock? Really?"

"Does that bother you, Detective Inspector?"

"No, not at all. I welcome everything that makes Sherlock uncomfortable." He grinned.

The front door slammed.

"Speak of the devil. Excuse me for a sec," John said, and he left the kitchen.

John didn't say anything as he entered the little hall where Sherlock was shedding his coat. He just smiled.

"Well, I'm here." Sherlock shrugged, as if he'd come for some sort of detention.

"Merry Christmas."

It was clear that he was dreading this.
"I can't stay very long. Stuff to do."

John decided it was better not to pressure him.

"Sure, just have some food. We've got good wine."

Sherlock let himself be kissed by Mary and Molly. When he noticed Richard and Lestrade standing in the entrance to the kitchen, he froze for about half a second, but nodded at them.

"Lestrade."

"Sherlock."

Thankfully he didn't have to talk to anyone as Mary announced that dinner was ready. Dinner was more like a feast, with the most delicious looking dishes covering the huge dining table. Sherlock sat next to John, with Richard to his left and Molly opposite. The atmosphere was still a bit tense, until John expectantly passed the cranberry sauce around to go with the meat.

There were no takers, until Sherlock spooned some of it on the side of his plate. Molly tried to catch his eye to warn him, but Sherlock refused to look up.

"So how do you find working for John, Richard?" Greg asked.

Richard exchanged a glance with John. "Well, you know, it's not everything, but you have to make due."

John sniggered.

"No, but seriously, he's a great boss."

"Good GOD, what the hell is this?" Sherlock interrupted the conversation as he spat a bite out into his napkin. "I would think you'd find a more subtle way if you want to get rid of me."

John's face fell in disappointment.

"What's wrong with it?"

Sherlock downed his glass of wine in order to get rid of the horrible sour and coal taste in his mouth. He made a hand gesture for John to try for himself.

John scooped a little of the thick black liquid onto a piece of meat and stuck it in his mouth. Within three seconds he was gagging above the sink.

At this time, Mary was already crying with laughter, soon followed by Molly, Greg, Richard, and John himself. Sherlock handed him the bottle of wine to wash it away.

From then on, things were much more relaxed. Thankfully the rest of the food was absolutely delicious, and Sherlock actually enjoyed himself. During dessert Greg even talked about his latest case, which Sherlock solved two minutes into the conversation.

When Greg stopped and went: "Of course... Jesus, why didn't I see that?" Richard smiled and gave Sherlock's thigh a quick squeeze underneath the table.

"You're really a genius, aren't you?"

Abruptly, Sherlock cleared his throat and got up to go to the loo. When he was out of sight, Greg
burst out in a new fit of laughter. A socially uncomfortable Sherlock was still one of the funniest things in the world. Richard grinned.

The few minutes of solitude Sherlock used to evaluate his state of mind.

It had been two days since he last saw Olivia. He could basically still feel the sensation of her lips on his cheek. Or was that the wine's doing? No, he also remembered her face when he'd sat down next to her, still a little red from crying. He remembered Anthony, who for some reason made his blood boil both when he kissed Olivia and when he paid more attention to Joan Davies. He reminded himself to ask her what she was still doing with the boy, although he knew he didn't have the right to tell her to ignore him.

He had kept busy experimenting on a spleen, and yes, he had smoked three cigarettes, as well as dealt with a number of persistent erections. In all, he had managed, but the boredom was imminent, as was the craving.

This evening had been dreaded, but it turned out to be less awful to see Greg again than he had anticipated. It was annoying to have Richard there, though, but the wine helped with that. He was already swaying lightly.

When he returned from the loo, the rest had moved back to the living room to let the enormous amount food settle. He went to sit next to Mary, who was sitting on the couch, smiling excitedly. Leaning towards him, she said: "Don't you like Richard?"

"What?"

"He's flirting with you… Could be a good holiday distraction, don't you think?"

Sherlock's eyes widened. "Absolutely not."

"Anyway, what are you grinning about?"

"It's moving."

Seeing his vacant expression, she added, "The baby."

"Oh! Well… good to know it's alive in there," he said awkwardly.

Mary ignored his completely inappropriate comment.

"Do you want to feel it?"

"What? No! Why would I want-" but Mary had already grabbed his hand and put it on her belly. The alcohol made him slower, and before he could pull away, a tiny bump touched his palm. He froze.

For a moment, Sherlock was completely still, unaware of his own amazed face.

"I wish I had a camera right now." John said as he watched Sherlock flinch slightly at another kick, but not take his hand away.

After a few moments, Sherlock snapped out of it and withdrew. He cleared his throat.

"That's… I… do you have anything stronger, John?"

"We could start on the whiskey I brought along," Richard immediately suggested.
Two hours, one bottle of Kilbeggan, several of Greg's anecdotes, and three announcements from Sherlock that he was really leaving, later, most of the company was properly drunk. Greg sounded like his tongue had swollen to double its size, Molly's face was bright red, Sherlock couldn't sit still, and John had fallen asleep in his chair.

"Don't think just cause I'm playing cluedo with you means that I forgive you, Ssherl," Greg laughed at his own version of Sherlock's name.

"Fine. I didn't ask for it."

Richard was the only one whose speech had not been affected. "I'd like to know what for. What did Sherlock do, Greg?" he enquired.

"Fucking got one of mine killed by a bloody psychopath."

"It was Moriarty who had him killed, if I remember correctly," Sherlock huffed.

"And you who bloody led him to the guy!"

"Who's Moriarty?"

"A mysterious criminal and the centre of Sherlock's obsession."

"I'm not obsessed! He's obsessed with me." Sherlock pouted.

John had been sound asleep during their conversation, but woke up with a start when he heard his wife's voice.

"Alright, I'm going to drive Molly home," Mary said. "Anyone else need a ride?"

"Maybe I should go swell." Lestrade got to his feet with difficulty. Just before stepping outside, Greg turned to Sherlock, who was standing by the window.

The hand on his shoulder brought the tall man back to the present.

"Sherlock."

"Greg."

"Just call me next time you have something to add to a case, right? The anonymous tips are getting a bit ridiculous."

To Sherlock's surprise, Lestrade shook his hand.

"Still married?" Sherlock asked, looking at the other man's ring.

"Oh sod off, Holmes." Lestrade walked out the door.

Mary gave John, who was now in the kitchen attempting to scrape out the burnt sauce from the pan, a kiss.

"Bye darling, please leave the cleaning for tomorrow. And you two, don't even think about getting home by yourself," she warned the other two men. "We'll call you a cab later."

When silence returned to the house, John let himself fall back into his chair and put one hand on his forehead. "I swore I wouldn't do this anymore after last Friday," he groaned.
"Well, old habits are hard to kick." Richard offered.

"Speaking of which, be back in a minute," Sherlock mumbled and got up to go outside.

"Sherlllock! You quit!"

Sherlock waved his hand and mumbled something incomprehensible before he disappeared outside into the garden. It had been a while since he'd consumed this much alcohol. Shakily, he managed to light one in the cold breeze and took a long, satisfying drag. It had been a nice evening. Not too many emotions, a bit of laughing, lots of booze. Greg was talking to him, which made him feel better than he cared to admit.

He shivered. To think that some people had to be outside tonight in this weather. He should give Billy something for Christmas. Small chance he'd see him though. They hadn't spoken in months.

Sherlock threw his cigarette bud on the floor and ground it into the snow with his shoe. Then he turned to go back inside. Obviously his mind was quite cloudy because he hadn't noticed anyone coming out. Suddenly he could feel the warmth of a body against his back. Swiveling around, he was faced with Richard, whose face was only a few inches away from his.

"Wh-

The brush of lips against his caught him completely off guard. He grabbed the lapels of the man's jacket and pushed, but the strength in his arms had mostly disappeared.

"I heard that this is the tactic to be used on you, Sherlock." Richard breathed on him. "Tell me, are your lips the most sensitive part of your body?"

"Ah…"

The tingling sensation of Richard's open mouth against his lips was extremely powerful. Involuntarily, his eyes closed.

"Seems she was right."

With that, the mouth on his surged forward and a tongue was pushed in. Sherlock couldn't stop it, and honestly he didn't try very hard. Richard was a rather good kisser, lapping at his tongue, biting softly in his lower lip. Unwillingly, a low moan erupted from his throat. He could feel the man chuckle.

Sherlock shuddered. Was Mary right? Could he just use Richard as distraction for these empty winter days? He was rather handsome… and willing. Did he want this?

Within about 30 seconds, Sherlock's lips were swollen and red, his eyes dark, and his hair tousled. As Richard backed away a few inches he grinned. "What a sight. Pity I had to get you this drunk to stop resisting me."

The idea that Richard had gotten him drunk on purpose did not appeal to Sherlock at all. How dare he suggest that anyone could manipulate him like that.

"Let's see what else I can do with you."

Hips were thrust forward and grindeded into Sherlock's, pushing him back into the closed door.

"Oh."
"Stop."
"Look at you. You don't want me to stop at all."

Sherlock hadn't even noticed that he was already half hard, and growing, as he was being treated to a pleasant friction.

With difficulty, Sherlock managed to push Richard away from him. He kept leaning against the door, catching his breath.

"What's wrong? I thought you were into this kind of thing."

"What thing?" Sherlock asked angrily.

Richard had approached again, whispering into his ear. "You know, taking men home, letting them kiss you, sucking them off."

"John told me a few things."

Sherlock shook his head.

"Don't worry darling. He's asleep."

"What the hell do you want from me?"

Richard's words were long and drawn out like licorice. "I want to see you come undone, Sherlock Holmes. I want to hear you beg for it. For me."

A hand slid down and started massaging Sherlock's abdomen through his shirt, just above his belt. Sherlock pushed his hand away.

"I don't beg. And definitely not for you."

"Oh right, I forgot, you like them younger now, don't you?"

"You know absolutely nothing," Sherlock said through clenched teeth.

"Don't I?"

"Fuck off."

Sherlock wiped at his mouth with the back of his hand, threw the door open and walked back into the living room. Thankfully, Richard didn't follow him. When he heard the gate in the garden open and shut, he sighed in relief. He was too drunk to deal with this. What had Richard said? What did he know? It was too hazy in his head to find his voice back. He shouldn't have drunk so much. Slowly, he let his body sink into the couch and his heavy eyelids closed.

~

It was about 6 am when Mycroft Holmes' car pulled up through the wet snow at 221 Baker Street. It was still quite dark outside, but he could make out a figure in front of the door. He sighed. He really didn't feel like dealing with one of his brother's homeless friends.

John had told him Sherlock was doing better these days. Not so much drinking, less smoking, more eating and sleeping. Working normal hours. He hadn't spoken to him in over five months, in part because he was still pissed off, partly because it was just inconvenient to deal with his brother
when the man was intoxicated. Now it was Christmas, and mummy had been very disappointed not to see her youngest son at dinner last night. That, and there was new information on Moriarty. The latter information he intended to keep to himself until he had verified Sherlock's physical and mental state.

Anthea briefly looked up from her phone. "Do you want me to come with you?"

"No thank you Anthea. I can handle my little brother, stubborn as he may be."

Mycroft placed a shiny black shoe in the snow, and got out. The figure by the door hadn't moved. It seemed to be a woman.

As he came closer, dipping the pointy end of his umbrella into the snow every other step, he noticed it was more a girl than a woman. She was easily two heads shorter than he was, and had to reach quite far to ring the doorbell, which she had been doing for a while.

He cleared his throat. The sound made her abruptly turn around to him. Her coat hung open and he could see she was wearing old jeans and a t-shirt. Her hair had partly fallen out of her messy ponytail. She was looking up at him with wide eyes. Frightened eyes. Eyes that had not slept for quite some time. The dark circles around them stood in stark contrast with her pale skin.

Mycroft towered over her like a lion.

"Looking for Sherlock Holmes, I presume?"

It took a couple of seconds for her to give a nervous nod. Probably a junkie of some sort, he thought. Not somebody his brother needed to associate himself with.

"Mr Holmes is very busy, I'm afraid."

She looked as if she didn't understand. The only thing that came from her mouth were puffs of condensed air.

"He's on a case. Won't be back for days, possibly weeks. I recommend you to find somebody more suitable and less preoccupied to deal with your problems."

Her eyes shifted from side to side, confused as to what to do. For a moment, it seemed like she was about to protest, but Mycroft did not feel like arguing.

"Run along now, girl. I'm starting to doubt whether you even understand English."

Slowly, she started to move, walking past him on the low slippery steps.

"Careful not to fall, my dear."

She tugged on her coat and kept head down as she walked along the sidewalk, picking up her speed, to disappear around the corner. Mycroft sighed and took the key to 221b from his pocket.

"Make it stop! John!"

Sherlock turned onto his stomach and covered his head with his arms.

The phone kept ringing until John stumbled into the living room in his pyjamas and clumsily
picked it up.

"Hello?" he said through a yawn.

After a very short conversation John put the phone back down and turned to Sherlock who was still on the couch.

"Your brother is at Baker Street. Wants to talk to you."

"I'm busy," came from underneath the black curls, his words muffled by the pillow.

Mary appeared in the living room, still half asleep.

Sherlock and John had both been unconscious in the living room when she got back the night before, but she hadn't let them sleep like that. John had been sent to bed and Sherlock had been given some sheets and a pillow. He'd managed to take his shoes off, but had been mumbling incoherently about Richard. She had never seen Sherlock that drunk and it had been extremely entertaining to listen to him while she helped him out of his jacket.

"Whodoese thinkeis?"

"Who?"

"Ynow, Brook."

"Thinksecan just… woo me with some kissing? Hpffft."

"Does he?"

"And my mouth feelsall weird now."

"Must be his stubble."

"I'm noteven into penises… nottat the moment anyway."

"Well, make sure to tell him that when you see him. Goodnight, Sherlock."

"Night."

The urge either to give him a kiss on his head or to burst out in laughter was strong. She did the latter, but only after having entered the bedroom.

Now it was five hours later and there was a big black car waiting outside for the hung-over man.

"Why? Why? Why does he do this NOW?"

"I don't know, but he says the safety of Britain depends on it."

"He always says that."

The phone rang again, John picked up.

"He says he knows you haven't moved yet."

"Tell him I'm otherwise engaged."

John listened again for a few seconds.
"He says to tell you there is new information on Moriarty."

Sherlock’s entire frame froze.

~

"Sherlock, Sherlock, Sherlock."

Sherlock sat in his armchair, his eyes were half closed in an attempt not to jump up and strangle his brother. He had only been in the same room with him for three minutes, but it was already hard to keep his temper under control.

"Mycroft, tell me what you want, or leave."

"From John I heard you were doing much better these days. Not sure if I agree." Mycroft was slowly pacing the room, sticking the sharp point of his umbrella into the carpet. "But I doubt you care about my opinion on that matter."

"You know I don't care about your opinion."

"Mummy sends her love."

Sherlock didn't react.

"They are spending Christmas at home this year. Hoping to see their youngest son."

Sherlock shrugged.

"She demands that you call her. Today."

"What? Why today? I'll do it next week."

"Because it's Christmas now."

Sherlock moved to get up.

"Right, I'm going to take a shower to give you time to think. When I come back you should either be gone, or tell me whatever you want to say. Don't waste my time with trivia."

"He's back, Sherlock."

Sherlock turned to him.

"What do you know?"

"There has been movement in his network in England."

"Movement." Sherlock scowled.

"Money transactions, suspicious containers being shipped, an attempt to infiltrate my office."

"Any familiar faces?"

"Nobody we know, but I know it's him. It can only be him."

"You're going on a hunch? That is ridiculous, even for you. I'm appalled."
"We're in the middle of gathering data, but you know him, Sherlock. I need you to take a look at what we have so far."

Sherlock, now truly infuriated, started yelling. "I know him? How the fuck did you come to that conclusion?! I fell into his trap and took three bloody cops with me you imbecile! I don't know anything more about Moriarty than any of your government experts. So go work on your own pitiful deduction skills and stop wasting my time."

Mycroft looked at his brother, whose eyes were shooting fire and chest was heaving. He merely raised his eyebrows.

"I see that your mental state is not as stable as John described. Maybe it is better to keep you out of the investigation for now."

"Good, so you can stop bothering me. Get out."

"Leave!"

Mycroft sighed in disdain, took one long look at his brother and sneered: "Clean up your act, Sherlock. This is embarrassing." Then he left.

Still seething, Sherlock tore the phone from its handle and dialled.

"Hello?" Her voice was sleepy.

"Molly."

"Sherlock, it's seven in the morning! On Christmas day!"

"I know… I just… I need you."

There was a silence on the other end, only her light breathing. Sherlock knew he would get what he needed to make him feel better.
Readjustment

Chapter Notes

I'm very sorry for the long wait in between chapters. I've been crazy busy recently, but I'm still (slowly) writing so don't worry.

And thanks so much for the encouraging comments!

The schoolyard was only just starting to flood with children, all heavily wrapped in winter clothes to face the stormy weather. Sherlock felt an excited tug in his stomach and a simultaneous heavy feeling in his heart as he spotted Olivia coming through the gate on her red bicycle. She locked it with the others onto the rack, and made her way to the entrance of the old building. He could see her hair was wet from the rain as she kept her shoulders hunched, protecting her face and neck from the cold.

Halfway she was joined by Anthony, pushing himself forward on his skateboard and Sherlock felt a fury flare up in his chest. What the hell was she still doing with that little shit? First reaction passed, he grudgingly reminded himself that she had absolutely no obligations towards him. She could do whatever she wanted because whatever was happening between him and her, he told himself, was not a relationship, it was not a commitment or exclusive, and he'd given her no reason to think so. It was only a couple of kisses for Christ sake.

Richard made his way to the front of his mind, but he refused to feel guilty about that… incident. The man had basically forced himself on him. Yes, he'd allowed it for a moment, but that had more to do with confusion and fleeting curiosity than actual interest.

He'd been counting the days, escaping into experiments, books, and more alcohol than he wished to admit, but now he was back and could hear the noise in the corridors, he longed for solitude and the burnt chemical scent of his home.

Home, where at the moment, if one cared to try, an entire human body could be assembled from the parts he kept in the fridge and freezer.

It hadn't been as easy to manipulate Molly into supplying him as he expected. She had been hesitant and only after he mentioned his drug cravings she had been convinced he really needed the distraction. She'd met him at St Bart's about an hour after their phone conversation and her eyes showed mostly concern for him. He had experienced an inconvenient pang of guilt for using her once again. Maybe becoming a teacher had truly changed him.

Had it?

Of course not.

The girl in the red coat, on the other hand…

During the days of burning, cutting, whipping, microwaving, and chemically treating a plethora of human remains, it became painfully clear that he'd grown more attached to her than he previously thought. Even the experiments couldn't keep the alarming feeling of missing her at bay.
Yes, she was lovely and turned him on incredibly, and he knew he felt some sort of affection for her; but he hadn't expected to actually miss her presence that much. Sherlock was very much devoted to his independence, and this level of attachment was not good. Not good at all.

Then there was the whole Mycroft disturbance. Even with the supposed news of Moriarty, Sherlock had absolutely no inclination to help his brother. Why would he? There was no concrete evidence, there were no crime scenes to visit, and it would mean seeing Mycroft more than minimally necessary.

Also, maybe he did not completely trust himself to chase the mysterious criminal mastermind once again. It was possible he would become too focused (or in John's words “obsessed”) and fall into some trap, and it made his stomach clench (in John's words “anxious”). Of course, this last part of his self-analysis was stuffed down deeply into the back of his mind palace, behind a dusty cupboard containing childhood board game rules.

Long fingers rubbed through dark curls as he turned away from the window. Maybe his life needed a bit more reflection, but now was not the time. He took a deep breath, mentally preparing himself for the sea of teenagers once again.

---

Olivia walked into the school building, quickly shedding her soaked coat.

Although the hall and corridors looked exactly the same, it was a new year and a fresh start. The cosiness of Christmas was over. From here, pupils would start getting excited about Valentine's day, look forward to the spring weather, audition for the school play, and begin to consider which subjects they would drop or continue in their next year. Olivia was looking ahead, just like the others.

Because everything was fine.

Many things had changed for the better since the summer holidays. Her dad had picked up his life and turned into a real stay at home dad. He had even remembered to give her a Christmas present last week. Furthermore, she had Mr Holmes who she could talk to now - at school at least. There was absolutely nothing to worry about.

After hanging up her coat she started to get all her books sorted. She had taken most of them home two weeks ago with the vague idea that she could do some studying, which of course had not happened. She dropped her heavy bag on the floor to put back the ones she didn't need today.

Anthony was standing next to her, in the still peacefully quiet corridor.

"You look tired."

"I'm fine. Everything's fine. Too many late nights."

They both smiled knowingly.

He came closer and wrapped his arms around her in a hug. It felt nice to have such human uncomplicated contact. His warm body felt normal and grounding. When he let go, she saw Lucy and Rose coming up to them.

"Hiya! How's things?" Lucy asked.
"Lucy has news!" Rose interrupted, grinning.

"What is it?" Olivia raised her eyebrows expectantly.

Lucy looked slightly embarrassed at Rose's exclamation but at the same time very pleased.

"Tim and I… you know." There was absolutely no need to be more specific.

"What? Your neighbour? When?"

"Last Friday night. After you left. His parents were out," she said triumphantly.

"How was it?"

Lucy's eyes lit up with the memory. "It was super romantic. He had lit candles everywhere, and we had some wine. And then, we just did it."

For a fraction of a second, Olivia caught Anthony's eye, but looked away immediately. She could almost hear what he was thinking.

Slowly, the corridor started filling up with other pupils. The group walked to their classroom while continuing in a whisper.

"Did it hurt?" Olivia asked.

"Only a little at first, but it was over quickly."

"Tell them about what happened," Rose urged her.

Lucy sighed and gave an eye-roll. "He hadn't taken much care when placing the candles. When he was, you know… finished, we noticed that the curtain was on fire."

Rose snorted in laughter.

"So we had to put it out quickly, and some neighbours were already at the door. Everyone saw him in front of the window, jumping up and down frantically, naked. I escaped through the back door."

Olivia couldn't contain her laughter either.

Lucy's story had distracted her, and suddenly she found herself walking into Mr Holmes' side, who was distributing books in their classroom.

"I'm sorry," she blurted out.

His eyebrows raised.

"I'm sorry sir," she said hastily.

"Good morning, Miss Edwards."

"Good morning sir. How was your Christmas?" She didn't completely succeed in keeping her voice steady.

"Elevating" he said sarcastically. Then he gave her a wink.

Before she could blush he turned to address the group.
"Good morning. You're early, which means you can put one of these on each desk." He dropped a huge stack of new exercise books in Rose's arms, who mumbled something rude under her breath which he pretended not to hear.

Together they did as they were told, dropping books on desks, row after row. Lucy went on, whispering.

"At least I'm the first of us to have done it. Now I can be your expert advisor."

Olivia kept avoiding Anthony's gaze as she felt it on her. Anthony didn't feel the furious glare that was shot at him from the front of the room.

"Have you seen him after?" Rose asked Lucy.

"No, he's too embarrassed to look at me."

While he paced around the classroom Mr Holmes explained that from now on everyone needed to hand in the homework made in their new exercise books each week because Mr Watson had gotten upset about the fact that he had not recorded at all whether his pupils were doing any of it.

"I look forward to using up many red pens," he said with a cruel smile.

To be watching him again, with his graceful, sometimes eccentric movements through the classroom, his seemingly all-observing eyes swooping over them, returned the feeling of longing in Olivia to be close to him. It had been dormant for a while, gone to sleep when she realised she didn't really have a place in his life outside of school. Being dismissed like that on his doorstep had made that quite clear, and she had spent the remaining days of her holiday burying the urge to go back to his house and tell him everything. He wouldn't have been able to help her.

Now, almost two weeks later, she told herself that there really wasn't anything to tell. She obviously had been dramatically overreacting to a minor incident. Everything was fine.

The holidays had made her reconsider her decision to break up with Anthony. He really was very sweet and reminded her of all the reasons they had become friends in the first place. They had talked a lot. Most of the time, he asked her how she was feeling, and if she was happy, and if the nearing anniversary of her mum's death bothered her.

After Christmas, the majority of her free days had been spent at either Lucy's or Rose's, usually with Anthony hanging around as well. She'd played the guitar for them that she had gotten for Christmas, they had watched movies, secretly gone out to dance, and smoked marijuana twice with Lucy's brother. All of these activities and minimal parental supervision had formed a perfect environment for other adolescent explorations.

Whenever he got the chance, Anthony embraced her and kissed her tenderly. He was getting better and better at it and although it didn't give her that tingling, fluttery, burning excitement that Mr Holmes gave her, it felt good, comfortable. She started to question the reason why a mere wink from Mr Holmes made her forget about this boy so easily. The times the man had given her his full attention could be counted on one hand.

Anthony was quite consistently eager in his attention towards her.

On the last Thursday, Olivia had been able to stay at Lucy's a little longer than usual due to her dad's AA meeting, and Anthony had asked her. They had been kissing for a bit in the same office as a few months ago at Lucy's birthday party. He had drawn back, slightly panting with flushed cheeks, and his questioning eyes already told her what he wanted.
"Would you… could we- I'm so…"

"I don't want to," se had said quickly.

"Why? Please Olivia, I want it so bad. It's hurting."

Her heart started hammering in her chest. Slowly, she shook her head.

He pulled a very desperate face. Leaning close with his forehead on her shoulder he whispered something.

"I… I can do it myself… while we're kissing? You feel so good."

Her eyes big, Olivia found herself nodding. When he hastily started unzipping his trousers, she was slightly worried as to what she had agreed to, but was also fascinated by what happened. Anthony continued kissing her feverishly, a new urgency in his movements. While her gaze fluttered down, his astonishingly skilled hands answered some of the most embarrassing questions she'd had about men.

Olivia held on to his shoulders, afraid his trembling body might collapse. When his uncoordinated kisses stopped, she listened to his heavy breathing and the sound of his right hand, the fingers of his left grabbing her waist. It didn't take long until with a broken gasp something white spurted out of him and he did collapse, sinking back into the sofa, all tension seeping from his body.

She remembered how some of Anthony's semen had ended up on her jumper, shimmering in the low light of the room. Sitting there next to him, she'd studied the way it changed colour as it dried, until he opened his eyes again. Noticing the soiled fabric, he'd been so embarrassed, quickly running to the toilet to get something to clean it up with.

After that they'd gone back to the living room to join the others for Psycho.

Although they hadn't spoken about it again, Olivia was slightly worried that agreeing to this was the start of more persistent urging from his side, which is why Lucy's story caused her to avoid his gaze for the rest of the class.

She remembered the way Mr Holmes had dismissed her when she had hesitantly suggested to touch him. Was it because he knew she wouldn't know what to do? Because he knew she wouldn't be any good?

Amidst all the confusing thoughts whirling through her head, she hoped the dark haired man would pay her a little more attention the first day back at school, maybe even ask her to stay after class.

Unfortunately he did nothing of the sort. She was one of the last to leave when he was already deeply engrossed in his newspaper.

~

"Are you going to be okay taking the tube home on your own?"

"Yes Mr Watson. I do it every day."

John looked at the little 12 year old in front of him and a feeling of endearment rose up inside him. They were sitting in Mary's office, who had started her maternity leave.

"I know you do, I'm just thinking you might still be a bit disoriented."
"I'm fine."

John frowned. "Strangely, it seems that you are."

After discovering the damage that had been done to little Harry's desk and surrounding area (Sherlock had made only a very faint attempt at cleaning it up) he had checked the boy over, expecting to find something, but apart from some small first-degree burns on his forehead, scorch marks for eyebrows, and a big chunk of his hair missing, he was miraculously unscathed.

"Mr Holmes gave me an A for my experiment!" the boy beamed.

"I'm sure he did. Now, I think you shouldn't keep your mum waiting." John's thoughts ran back to the hysteric screaming on the phone. "I'm sure she'll be happy to see you're fine. Maybe you should repeat that to her a few times."

The boy hopped off the chair, picked up his rucksack, and followed John out of his office, skipping beside him through the corridor.

"Mr Holmes said that next week we're going to cover hydrogen derox- deroxipe."

"Peroxide? I'm afraid he was mistaken about that." John grumbled.

His face fell only a little.

After watching Harry walk across the schoolyard and concluding that he really wasn't swaying on his legs, John went inside to check if the school was insured for this type of thing.

~

Sherlock was sitting in the left corner of the brown sofa, the fine black fabric of his suit a stark contrast to the worn leather. He was staring out of the window, deeply lost in his mind palace. One leg was crossed over the other, his left arm stretched out on the backrest. The elbow of his right arm leant on the armrest, hand towards his mouth as if he was about to say something.

Next to him laid Olivia, curled up in a tiny ball except for one leg that languidly stretched out, almost touching the other end of the sofa. Her hair, which she must have wiped out of her face, laid spread like a halo around her resting head. The late afternoon sunlight lit up parts of his pale skin and strands of her hair.

The sound of the shutter caught Sherlock's attention.

"John?"

"Sorry. Testing," he said as he held up his new camera. "Didn't mean to sneak up on you, but you were quite far away."

"What do you need a camera for?"

"I am going to raise a child soon."

Sherlock stared, expression vacant.

"Does that misery need to be recorded?"

"Yes, I am quite convinced that my baby's childhood will not be as miserable as yours was. Besides, I need to collect evidence of the devastation you leave behind every time you use the
chemistry room."

Although his eyebrows rose there was not a hint of guilt in his response. "I thought you wouldn't find out for at least a few days."

"There was a pretty big red flag walking around with a burnt face."

"Harry's fine."

"Sherlock" John was getting angry now.

"I only turned my head for one minute", Sherlock offered in defence.

"He could have lost an eye, or worse!"

"He didn't though."

"Fine. You can deal with his parents next week."

"What's next week?" Sherlock asked, alarmed.

"Parent-teacher evening. Read your mail."

Sherlock took a moment to process what sounded like his worst nightmare, while John looked at the sleeping girl.

"Why is Olivia sleeping on the first day of term?"

Sherlock glanced down to his side.

"I haven't asked yet."

John nodded. "What about you?"

"This room is good for thinking. When I'm in my office people disturb me."

"You mean Richard? Mary told me about that." A grin spread over John’s face.

"Did you see him again?"

"Obviously not."

"He told me he tried to call you but you never pick up."

"I may have disconnected the phone."

"Did you see anyone in the past 12 days?"

"No need. I was busy." Avoiding eye contact.

"Sherlock… are you alright?"

"I'm fine."

John observed his quiet friend for a few moments before turning back to the door.

"Please wake her up before the next class starts. She really needs to go to Maths."
Olivia woke to an awful sound.

A loud ringing that sounded more like home than like school.

When she opened her eyes she noticed the kitchen timer on the coffee table that had ticked its way down to zero. Next to it stood a brown bag and a note. It contained the elegant scribbling that she knew so well in red, but was now written in black.

"Eat the sandwich, go to Anderson's class, and let me know why you were catching up on sleep. I deduced you had a rather recalcitrant week (obvious from the notes Miss Griffin was passing and the way Mr Wilding was regarding you during class), but if that is the only reason you are missing class time that is simply stupid and I will not endorse it. Answer at your earliest convenience."

Olivia couldn't help but blush at the man's indignant words, and was already busy constructing an answer to his question in her head while she started eating.
Gregory Lestrade listened to the sound of his own shoes as it echoed through the long corridors. It was nine o’ clock on a Tuesday morning, and the halls were empty. *What a beautiful old building,* he mused, *with so much history within its walls.*

As a younger officer he'd stopped by St Francis quite regularly, when it was still a strictly catholic school. The teachers had been at a loss sometimes as to how to handle aggressive or disobedient pupils. He'd often pick them up drinking in a pub or shoplifting in the neighbourhood.

He remembered being here almost three years ago, when that young girl had seen no other way out than to throw herself into the Thames. The teachers here had not been particularly helpful to the investigation. They had been able to meticulously recount all the times she had skipped classes or otherwise disobeyed her superiors but had had no idea about her life outside of school grounds. After some prying, they had grudgingly admitted that they had not once had an actual two-sided conversation with her nor encouraged her to confide in them about personal problems.

What a relief that John Watson had been allowed to take over and rewrite almost every single school policy. Within a year of John’s leadership, bullying, drug use, petty theft, and even domestic violence incidents had decreased in the area. Largely, Greg assumed, due to the school’s effort to talk to its pupils and the maintenance of good ties with professional support services. He was confident that a tragic death like the one three years ago would not reoccur.

What was it again? Right, left, and another left?

John had reluctantly given him the number of the room he could find Sherlock in. He wasn't happy with what Greg was going to ask of him, but knew it was Sherlock's choice to make.

Right, this should be the corridor. And then that door at the end on the right side.

To his surprise he wasn't the only one aiming for the science classroom. A girl in a red coat and wild hair came sprinting past without even noticing him and came to an abrupt halt next to the wooden door, chest heaving from her run. Carefully she stepped forward to peek through the glass window frame, obviously hoping not to be noticed.

"Late?"

She looked up at him with big eyes. He received a nod before she peered back into the classroom, prompting Greg to glance through the glass as well.

The sight in front of him was at the same time extraordinary and completely familiar. Sherlock standing and talking in front of people, people who were actually listening, sort of anyway, was quite alien. Sherlock talking and gesturing as if he was the centre of the universe however, made him smile. The arrogant git.

He could imagine the mad genius to be quite intimidating for a teenager.
"Shouldn't you go inside?" he asked.

She grimaced. "Uhm… he might make me stand outside for the rest of the class. That's what he does to latecomers."

"Not the first time then eh?" he smiled amicably.

Her hair swayed as she shook her head. Greg didn't know why at the time, but he got a strange uncertain feeling in his spine. He couldn't take his eyes off her.

"Well, I need to talk to him, out here, so he'll be distracted. Maybe he won't notice if you go and sit down."

She snorted, not believing him for one second. "Yeah, sure."

Apparently he had heard them talk, because suddenly Sherlock was right on the other side of the glass, already opening the door.

"Edwards. Late. Again," he said and a raised an eyebrow.

"Sherlock, we need to talk," Greg cut in when the girl didn't reply.

"I'm busy."

He noticed how Sherlock opened the door a fraction wider so that the girl could silently slip through underneath his raised arm.

"Sorry to disturb your class- hey, isn't that the Louise Armitage case?" he eyed the projection on the blackboard and raised his voice, making sure the pupils, who were now extremely attentive and focused on the doorway, could hear him. "I was wondering where that case file had gone! When did you nick it from our archives?"

Sherlock now had a venomous expression on his face and was making the gap in the door as small as possible.

"Get your arse out here or I'll tell your pupils you're a fake who just copies everything from me. Not to speak of the visit my officers will be paying your house to retrieve everything obtained illegally from the office and Bart's," Greg hissed at him.

Quickly, but with a facial expression of an overdramatic teenager, Sherlock slipped out into the corridor and shut the door tightly behind him.

"Why are you disturbing these people's education? Their time with me is extremely valuable to them."

He had almost forgotten how infuriatingly cocky Sherlock could be.

"Valuable enough to be thirty minutes late," he mocked.

Sherlock's face fell almost invisibly.

"Well, that's Olivia… she's…"

"She's what? Problems at home?"

A pale hand carded through thick curls.
"Never mind. We have it under control."

"I see."

He sighed, still overthinking the way he should approach this, while Sherlock gave him an impatient eye roll.

"Well, I guess you know exactly why I'm here."

In the afternoon, Sherlock sprawled in his big armchair, enjoying the quiet of his office. It was one of the few places in this building he could let his mind categorise, reorganise or delete all the new information that piled up throughout the day. Even here other people who worked for John (the word colleagues sounded too alien) and the occasional brave pupil disturbed him, but right now it was lunchtime and they were all occupied with fuelling their transport.

He was satisfied with his smoke and the events of that morning swirling around in his brain to analyse.

First of all, he hadn't received a reply to the note he left Olivia the previous afternoon. A rather rude silence, he considered, but not that dissimilar to his frequent disregard for John's well meant probing. Maybe she was upset with him. When he hadn't acknowledged her on Monday, she'd been quite visibly unsettled.

Then there was this morning. She'd been over half an hour late. Had Lestrade not been there he'd have let her stand in the corridor.

Lestrade.

Moriarty.

Drugs.

Puzzle.

Temptation.

His train of thought was abruptly broken off by a knock. A recognisable set of knuckles.

"Come."

The door open and closed with a barely audible squeak.

"I'm busy."

"I know."

Olivia walked towards him without hesitation, though. The second person to rudely ignore his statement today. This annoyance was driven from his mind when she climbed into his lap.

She placed herself sideways on his thighs and wrapped her arms around his neck. His body betrayed him, tensing up when he felt her nose and lips press into his skin just underneath his jaw, breathing in deeply. He stroked her back with his left hand and felt her relax.
"What's the matter?"

The tickling brush of her eyebrows under his ear told him she was frowning.

"Nothing."

He let a deep sigh escape.

"You've been sleeping at school again, you were late this morning -to my class no less-, and you've never leapt into my arms like that without being explicitly invited."

She let out a puff of air against his neck, which almost made him shiver, and then set back a little so she could talk to him.

"I've just missed you."

Her eyes trailed down his chest.

"I was late this morning because I told my dad he doesn't have to wake me anymore like I'm a pre-schooler, and then I forgot to set my alarm."

"Clever. And how is he doing?"

She started fiddling with a button on his shirt.

"Fine. Our social worker is coming to see us this afternoon, but I think it's hardly necessary. And I slept yesterday during lunch because I haven't slept enough during the holidays."

"And that is because?"

"Because I was at Lucy's a lot."

"Lucy Griffin, who recently had her first sexual encounter, she has been shouting from the rooftops."

Olivia's cheeks turned a delightful shade of pink. Oh how Sherlock loved making people uncomfortable.

"It was quite a big deal for her."

"Well, I guess for her tossing someone off in three seconds is a big deal."

The shock on her face told him he might have been too explicit. But the increasing pinkness of her cheeks suggested there was more for him to find out. He took a drag from his almost forgotten cigarette and blew the smoke upwards to avoid her face.

"I presume young, handsome, and stupid made a move on you?"

Her eyes suddenly shifted to everywhere but his.

Sherlock smirked. "So he has."

His button was currently getting some rough treatment.

"It wasn't... it was not... it was basically just kissing."

"Basically?"
Definitely avoiding eye contact.

"Should I investigate and make a deduction myself as to what that means, or are you going to tell me?"

She dared to look up at him for a moment. "You won't be mad?"

"Not at you."

"He didn't do anything you know. He's not a bad person."

"So you've told me before."

"He just... did what you just said. To himself. While we were kissing."

A dark coiling anger rose in Sherlock's stomach, but he suppressed it and kept his face entirely neutral.

"But he wanted more, didn't he?"

"Yes, but I said no! And he didn't insist."

"Hmmm."

"What?"

"I am considering Mr Wilding's marks."

"You said you wouldn't be angry!"

His long fingers pushed the cigarette bud into an ashtray that was balancing on the windowsill.

"I'm not. Only marginally jealous."

The corners of her mouth twitched at that. Pleased, then. He thought it best not to tell her he was livid at Anthony, because his reasons were utterly irrational.

Then she looked serious again and stopped interfering with the button.

"What about you? I'm sure you have been up to no good either."

"Really? What makes you think that?"

So apparently he wasn't flawless in her eyes. This was new.

"Because that man who wanted to speak to you this morning was from the police. He wasn't in uniform but I saw he was carrying a gun and he recognised the picture of that dead woman."

"Could also have been the murderer of Louise Armitage, but fair enough, you deduced correctly."

"What did he want to talk to you about?"

"He wanted me to help him with something."

Her eyes questioned him, waiting for more information.

He lowered his voice a bit. "Something secret."
She frowned in thought, but then seemed to accept that he wouldn't tell her more. He let his fingers trail through her hair and could tell she liked the touch. It was quiet for a while as she contemplated something else, but he couldn't tell what.

"What about Mr Brook?"

It was difficult for him to hide his surprise.

"What about him?"

"I saw you talk with him in between classes."

"You've been observing me. Intriguing."

"He smiled at you and he touched your waist."

She mimicked what she'd seen by brushing his shirt with her fingers in the same spot. A surge of pride went through him for her careful observations. However, he had to think about a response. Honesty might be the best course of action.

Leaning in a little bit, lowered his voice. "Alright I'll tell you. But do not breathe a word of this to anyone."

She nodded quickly. Obviously both curious and apprehensive to find out exactly what was going between him and Richard.

"This Christmas, Mr Brook thought it was a good idea to get me drunk and very inappropriately proposition me. I thought I'd made it quite clear to him that evening that I didn't appreciate his advances, but he still considers it a personal victory that he got as far as he did. In my defence, it was a particularly strong whiskey."

She was suspiciously quiet.

"You shouldn't feel threatened. Just like I don't feel threatened by that snobbish boyfriend of yours."

Eventually, a small smile crept onto her face. She lifted herself a few inches and crossed one leg over his, straddling him. Sherlock felt a tug of anticipation in his lower belly.

Those lips. Those ridiculously soft and sensual lips approached his, like it was the most natural thing in the world. At first it was just a brush that made him shiver. Feeling the need to hide how much it did to him, he pressed against them. Less than a second later her tongue gently tickled his lips and he let her in. What started as a soft exploration after a long time of separation turned into something quite heated very quickly.

In what was either a right or a very wrong move (he couldn't tell), he slid his hands to her backside and pulled her hips against his, creating a wonderful friction. A few weeks earlier he had been worried for her to feel him this intimately, but he had the idea that she wasn't alarmed by his erect state at all. He moved away from her mouth and started kissing along her jaw to her ear, making a deep humming sound when she shifted her hips.

Encouraged by his sounds, she experimentally rubbed against him. A shuddering breath escaped him and he moved back to reclaim her mouth, pushing his tongue in to dance. Kissing Olivia was glorious. It was hot. It was overwhelming. So much so that he almost forgot where they were. His mind came up with all sorts of images of what he wanted to do to her, of what he wanted her to do.
Her hips moved slowly but rhythmically, causing a delicious warm sensation in his groin. He imagined her like this, straddling him, and slowly unbuttoning her blouse, revealing more and more soft skin underneath. Those nipples he had wanted to take into his mouth from the moment she had sat half undressed on his sofa. His careful memorisation of that dark areola peaking out from white fabric had been very distracting ever since.

Unexpectedly Sherlock felt the beginnings of orgasm spreading a familiar heat through his lower body and he quickly pushed her hips back, creating a few inches of space between them. She looked at him quizzically.

"Let's not make a mess, shall we?"

She inhaled sharply, realising what was happening. Her eyes trailed downwards, past the rapid rising and falling of his chest, down to where his erection was straining against his trousers.

Before he was rational enough to stop her, a single finger was caressing, tracing the outline. Sherlock let her explore, watching her intently and enjoying the faint pleasure of one finger pad through two layers of fabric.

From her expression Sherlock could read surprise, arousal, a bit of self-consciousness, and what seemed to be curiosity.

It was highly erotic but fine until oh… she reached the head, where the sensitive glans were pushed against wet fabric. The touch of her hand almost made him explode right then and there.

"Jesus!"

He grabbed her hand and pulled it away.

"That's… very sensitive," he tried to explain.

At that moment, the bell rang, signalling the start of afternoon classes. He slid his hands into her hair and kissed her once more, which she interpreted correctly as an au revoir. English Literature with Ms Donovan was next for her. Watching her grab her bag and walk out, he contemplated whether to finish himself off before going as well. It would only take a moment. A few strokes would be enough.

But soon his own thoughts sounded ridiculous to him. Not long ago he could ignore these urges for ages before they started distracting him or threatened to become publicly indecent. He should be able to get through a few more hours without his body controlling him. Taking deep breaths, he calmed himself using mental images of Mycroft in a sauna, and slowly felt himself soften. The small wet patch wasn't visible on his black suit, but he made sure his jacket was buttoned before he stepped out into the corridor, just to be safe.

A double class with a group of thirty first years was exactly what he needed.

~

Despite having waited for over an hour, the sound of the ringing doorbell startled Olivia. Quickly, she looked around, making sure everything looked normal.

"Stay here, I'll get it."
Her father walked into the hall and there was a soft creak of the door as it opened. He was sober, like he now usually was during the day. Some greetings were exchanged. Olivia willed her hands to stop shaking. When her dad returned to the living room with the social worker he looked at her fondly.

"You know my little girl, Olivia." He said it with warmth and pride in his voice.

She shot out of her chair and extended her hand. The man in front of her was the same one they had met once in the Social Services office. He and a woman had done a short intake, mostly asking about the events that had lead them there and what their current situation was. This guy had been extremely nice to them. He wasn't very tall and he was always smiling. His shoulder length hair was bound in a ponytail and his kind blue eyes sparkled. What was his name again?

"Olivia, it's great to see you again. I'm Sebastian, remember? But you can call me Seb. Don't tell anyone I said that" he winked. She couldn't help but smile nervously.

Sebastian placed his bag on the floor next to the couch and surveyed the living room while Jeremy stood uncomfortably by the door, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

"Maybe Olivia can put the kettle on, and you can show me around the house?" he said while he continued to peer out into the backyard.

"Of course, of course" Jeremy said.

"I'd like a coffee with milk, please. Can you do that Olivia?"

"Yes"

"Great. Well, let's start upstairs, shall we?"

While Sebastian followed her father upstairs, Olivia went into the kitchen and took a deep breath. She was glad to have something to do.

Everything was going well so far. He seemed nice. Her dad had said he would want to get to know them a little better and have a chat, so that he had an idea of their home situation before accompanying him to parent-teacher evening later in the week.

She stirred the instant coffee into the hot water and poured some milk, not long before she heard their voices return.

"That's a very nice bathroom. It seems like you've been managing the household very well, and that combined with your therapy almost makes me unnecessary!" Sebastian joked. Jeremy laughed, completely at ease now.

Sebastian continued on a more serious note. "But seriously, Jeremy, there are things we can work on, and I would like to talk to Olivia to find out if she has any suggestions."

He nodded tensely. "I will leave you to it, then" he said and picked up his mug to go to the living room.

Due to her nerves, Olivia didn't realise she was alone with Sebastian until he told her to take a seat at the table. It reminded her a little of the way Mr Holmes had sat down with her a few months ago, when he gave her his phone number.

She fumbled with the towel she had used to clean the countertop.
"No need to be nervous, love. I'm only here to help, remember?"

Olivia stared at the man's rough hands and the part of a tattoo that was just visible from under his shirtsleeve.

"I have some questions I want to ask you because it's our first proper meeting. Just so that I get a sense of who you are and what troubles you, alright? It's completely confidential."

She nodded and he took a few sheets of paper and a pen from his bag.

"Feel free to ask me questions as well ok?"

The click of his pen distracted her.

"Let's start with school. How do you feel that's going?"

She refocused and cleared her throat. "Very well."

"I do need a little bit more information," he chuckled "are you satisfied with your marks?"

"Yes, I studied very hard for my exams before Christmas. Mr Watson said I'm at the top of my class."

"Oh well done! What are your favourite subjects then?"

Olivia felt her cheeks flush a bit.

"Theatre and science."

He started writing.

"And your science teacher is also your mentor, I was told."

"Mr Holmes, yes. He teaches science, chemistry, and biology"

"Well, he must be doing something right then, isn't he?"

She nodded.

"Do you feel like you can talk to him when there are any problems at home?"

"Yes."

"That's good to hear." He jotted something down on his paper.

"But if he teaches so many subjects he is probably also be very busy, isn't he?"

"I guess."

"Does it ever occur that you need someone to talk to but he doesn't have time for you?"

"Sometimes. But in that case I can always talk to Mr Watson, or Mr Brook."

He nodded while writing.

"What about socially? Do you have friends at school?"
"Yes. Rose is my best friend, but we are always in a group."

"Do they know about your parents?"

"Yes, almost everything."

"Any young men in the picture? I'm sure there must be someone who has fallen for those pretty brown eyes." He winked at her again.

She was fully blushing now.

"Come on, I won't tell your dad I promise."

Eyes fixed on the table, she nodded.

"I thought so." He grinned.

"Well, I hope he treats you right. Otherwise just point him out to me." This was said with a wink once again and Olivia was amazed that there was no interrogation to follow. Slightly relieved, she continued answering his questions about getting to and from school, how much time she spent on homework, and at what time she usually went to bed. Everything went well until he got to her father.

"Do you think your father is doing well?"

"Yes"

"Can you describe for me the relationship you have with him? What he means to you?"

"He's my dad. He's just there. We have a normal relationship. We're fine… like any family."

"And I think you've told my colleagues before that you'd like to keep living here with him?"

"I do."

"Does he support you? I mean does he cook, help you with your homework, that sort of thing?"

"Yes." Her eyes focused on the table.

"Anything that goes less well?"

She took a deep breath.

"We are a bit tight on money. Lately."

"How do you notice this? Do you not get pocket money?"

"I checked the account."

"Why? Do you feel responsible for that?"

She shrugged. "I guess."

"Don't do that. Money is your dad's business. I will discuss it with him and see how the situation is. He already told me he might be going back to work so that would solve a lot of problems. Besides, I saw a brand new guitar in your room, so it cannot be that bad can it? Maybe he should make sure you cannot access the account, just so you don't worry about it."
Olivia didn't reply. She hadn't had pocket money in two months and calculated that her father was spending twenty per cent more than what was coming in. If this continued, they would be broke within a few months. The only reason she hadn't returned the guitar to the shop was that he'd be devastated.

Maybe she should explain the severity of the problem more accurately to Sebastian. Before she could, his next question startled her.

"Do you ever notice he's intoxicated?"
A pause.
"No."
"Do you ever find drugs or alcohol in the house?"
Fists clenching.
"No."
"Is there anything else that your father does that you think he shouldn't do, or that is abnormal?"
"Mhm." She shook her head to make up for her inability to speak, but he didn't accept her answer. Tenderly, he reached out to pat her hand.

"Olivia, I'm sorry to ask all these personal questions, but I want you to trust me. You won't get in trouble if you admit something is not perfect. I won't be telling any authorities because I am the authority that's supposed to help you. And I'm not out to point a finger or try and separate you. I'm here to help him improve. For that I need complete honesty from you, do you understand?"

She nodded, her jaw tight.

"I can sense there is something more bothering you, and lying will only work against you in the end. So, is there anything you want to tell me?"

"I feel… I mean I think…"

"Yes?"

"Sometimes…he..he gets upset, because he thinks about my mum."

She could immediately feel the hollow eyes staring, the alcoholic breath against her skin.

"Why do you think that?"

"Be-cause… he gets sad, and lonely."

"And what happens then?"

His body against hers, his big hands holding her arms, clinging to her.

No. Breathe. I need to tell him.

"He cries. And then I help him to bed."

"Does he treat you badly when that happens?"
"N-no… just differently."

"Can you be more specific? Does he say things to you?"

She shook her head.

"He just ehm… sometimes he calls me Isabel. That's my mum's name."

His eyes narrowed slightly and his head tilted, completely focused.

"Anything else?"

Her breathing was constricted as she whispered.

"He… sometimes he holds me… touches my… my chest, and he kisses me on my mouth."

Her confession finally made tears spill over her eyelashes and fall down her cheeks.

Sebastian didn't seem shocked but wasn't writing anymore either. He just nodded seriously and waited a minute to respond. Eventually he drew a deep breath and sat up straight.

"I see. And is he sober when he does that?"

"I.. I don't think so."

She waited for the impact. The anger. The shock. The disgust. The concern. Nothing prepared her for the reaction he gave after a moment of deep thought.

"Well… I think your father is very confused, and we definitely need to work on this and on his substance abuse. He loves you very much. He misses your mother, which is very normal. His behaviour sounds more to me like he is panicking rather than anything sexual, if that is what you're implying."

He pressed his lips together in a compassionate expression.

"You might not want to hear this, but he needs loyalty and support and you are the only person who can give him that right now."

"But w-"

"Have you told him you want to leave?"

"N-no."

"But you have been leaving the house a lot lately, he told me. You ran away a few times as well, didn't you?"

"Yes, but-"

He held up his hand.

"Do you think that it's possible that that has contributed to his anxiety? That he is scared of being completely alone, of losing his daughter as well as his wife?"

Her mouth opened and closed, incapable of forming words. She knew this was a big fear of him, but that didn't mean he could…
"Listen. I don't want you to worry too much about this. His behaviour might seem inappropriate, but I think you need to understand that he is a bit confused."

He went on.

"You are very lucky you know. I come to many homes where mums and dads are not so nice to their children. He's trying very hard."

His thumb was stroking her wrist rhythmically while he talked to her.

"I'm here because I don't want you to worry. I will talk to him about the money, about his drinking, and maybe we can set up some rules for you so that he feels a bit more in control. Now go start on your homework so I can have a chat with him, ok?"

He gave her another pat on the hand before he got up and walked into the corridor.

Olivia hadn't heard the man's last comment. She was processing the completely unexpected reaction she just witnessed. She hadn't considered it that way before. The things her dad did when he was drunk were abnormal, she had thought. Mr Holmes and Mr Watson had been so concerned about her, especially when it came to sexual behaviour.

But was this really sexual behaviour? Parents weren't supposed to touch you like that, right? Had anyone ever said this explicitly? She couldn't remember. Was all this more normal when there was such grief to be dealt with?

Confused, she leaned her head in her hands, trying to make sense of all the whirling thoughts.

The night she had come home from the performance at school, he had been so far away. Somehow, he thought she was her mother. When she helped him to bed he had no strength to actually pin her down, but let his hands roam free over her torso while moaning softly. She hadn't fought it. Her muscles simply hadn't wanted to comply with her brain.

The next day he gave no sign of remembering what had happened and they didn't discuss it. She assumed this was an incident and nothing more than a weird intoxicated mistake, until something similar happened a few days later on Christmas Eve.

He had been on something again but had still been very conscious. This time started to kiss her neck while she was doing the dishes. It had been different than the previous times. He wasn't upset or crying, nor were they in the bedroom. It made her feel anxious and unsafe, knowing that these things could happen at any time, not only when he was too drunk to think properly.

That is was the reason she hardly slept that night and had sneaked out of the house before sunrise. She was panicking and the only one she thought about talking to had been Mr Holmes, but she didn't even get a glimpse of him when she arrived at his house. 221b Baker Street turned out to be a closed fort, where only posh men with umbrellas could enter.

After that, it was easier to try and forget her dad as much as possible by hiding away at her friends. She tried to tell herself everything was fine to supress the feeling of panic, but very time he reached for his specially delivered bottles of coke (she had put two and two together by now) her heart couldn't stop racing, hyper aware of where he was and what he was doing. It didn't happen every day, but sometimes he just got into a state. It was as if he was experiencing a different time. He would look at her like he used to look at her mother, make remarks about her appearance, the maintenance of the house or maybe starting a savings account for some reason. Things he would say to her.
Every time he pressed her against him in a hug, or let a hand slide over her bum, or kissed her on the mouth made her want to run away as fast as possible. But apparently her running off was the cause of this in the first place.

Her dad had never been violent with her, and now she realised maybe he had not even been particularly sexual. Mr Holmes had told her that touching, even ‘tossing someone off’ didn't even count as a sexual encounter. She was probably being completely naïve and oversensitive.

Olivia didn't know whether to be angry or relieved now. It didn't feel fair that somebody would be allowed to do things to her she didn't want. On the other hand it apparently wasn't all as serious as she had thought.

Confused but resigned, she got up and headed upstairs to do her homework.
The front door of the prestigious mansion opened before Sherlock's finger reached the doorbell. Of course, he was waiting. The butler took their coats with a neutral expression, giving no sign of recognition or distaste, even though Sherlock recognised him from times in his life the man had every reason to be disgusted. Mycroft selected his staff on discretion.

The old and richly decorated hall would have made John laugh, he figured. He had asked him to come, but all he got was a look of concern and a shake. John obviously thought it was a bit not good, but his worries were completely misplaced. He only went to take a look and to give his insight, not to participate in the chase.

Lestrade looked as if he’d been here too often to even spare a glance to the Picasso on the wall, which suddenly made Sherlock wonder how long this operation had already been running.

"Little brother, how delightful to see you again. So soon, at that." Giving Lestrade a nod Mycroft descended the stairs in a tuxedo, apparently in the middle of some sort of decadent soiree. Sherlock ignored his mocking tone and stuck his hands in his pockets.

"Couldn't let you grope around in the dark for too long. Not with a dangerous killer on the loose", Sherlock rebuffed.

"So you've finally seen the light and recognised Moriarty is once again at large in England."

The words "I told you so" hung in the air, but they were beneath either of their dignity.

Sherlock didn’t twitch. "Lestrade gave me some interesting details from the case. Ones you obviously failed to identify as crucial. But never mind, where is it?"

Mycroft lead them to a door, which opened to a little space directly followed by another door with a coded lock. Before he entered the code, Mycroft paused and turned around.

"Did John not care to join you tonight?"

"He had other plans."

Clearly not believing him, Mycroft made a hand gesture.

"Turn."

Sherlock complied, although he found it utterly ridiculous. He would be able to figure out the code within minutes if he tried.

There were eight beeps, followed by a click and the sound of a heavy metal door opening.

"Welcome to HQ of operation Lazarus."

The introduction was rather dramatic, but the room they stepped into was not particularly impressive. There were several people at desks, all deeply buried in paperwork, maps and what appeared to be phone tapping. Lestrade greeted the officers while Sherlock gazed at the wooden walls from which old masterpieces had been removed and dozens of headshots were lined up, some of whom Sherlock vaguely connected to separate crimes from the past. He’d have to take a closer look.
"Lestrade will fill you in on what we've gathered so far", Mycroft said.

As Sherlock walked through the room his eyes darted between newspaper articles, case files, medical records, psych assessments, audio recordings, photographs, all screaming for his attention simultaneously. In his mind palace old dusty doors were involuntarily thrown open with loud bangs, and he felt the detective part of his brain awaken. It filled him with excitement and a tinge of something less pleasant he couldn't identify right then. He turned back to face his brother.

"I need time."

"Of course. But before you start, let me clarify some ground rules. If John doesn't want to assist you he doesn't need to know anything. You keep your mouth shut to him and everyone else. Anything you do related to this case happens exclusively in this room. You will not take any physical information with you, ever, and you do not partake in any missions. These are non-negotiable."

Sherlock narrowed his eyes and took a step forward.

"You don't trust that I'm clean", he said accusingly.

Mycroft was far from intimidated.

"Oh I know you are clean, dear brother. What I don't know is how quickly you will slip back into your obsession and relapse, and by extension, compromise the investigation." He said it without blinking.

Sherlock's chin rose. He understood now. Mycroft didn't think he was ready for this. He was merely using him to get ahead in the game, whatever the consequences for him might be. But Sherlock had given up his privileged family ties to Mycroft last summer. He didn't care about his brother's cold bloodedness; he just wanted to understand Moriarty.

"Time to play, blood."

~

"I still have trouble believing Holmes is human enough to have orgasms."

Rose was lying on her bed, arms folded behind her head in a sea of curls.

"He didn't actually have one," Olivia said in between spoons of ice cream.

At least I think so, she thought. It was Friday night and she had just had the most amazing meal in her entire life. Being a chef, Rose's mum had made everything from scratch, including the pecan caramel passion fruit ice cream that was now sliding down Olivia’s throat. They had retreated to Rose's bedroom and she told her about the kiss in his office a few days ago.

"But I mean now we have evidence he can actually have one. I bet he thinks of you when he wanks", Rose said casually.

"You are way too fascinated by this for someone who doesn't even like men. It sounds like some sort of experiment," said Olivia, although the thought of him doing that while thinking of her
caused an excited heat to rise up in her belly. How had she not even thought of that?

Rose's eyes twinkled at her star scattered ceiling. "It would be interesting if you could give some more details next time, too bad he always keeps his trousers on."

"Rose!" Olivia almost threw her spoon across the bed to her laughing friend. Sometimes she couldn't believe how frank Rose spoke about everything, although her family gave a clue. They were always so warm and open to each other that it wouldn't surprise her if these subjects crossed the dinner table at times. Whether it was due to their mixed Surinam and English background she didn't know, but they always gave her such a welcoming feeling. It was wonderful and torturous at the same time.

"Did you know Peter kissed Billy the other day?" Rose asked with a grin.

"What! Billy?"

Satisfied with the shocked reaction, Rose explained how the two boys had become quite close over Christmas and that Billy had told Peter he thought he was gay and they kissed, and now they are sort of a couple, but that they didn't want anyone to know because Billy is still afraid of what his other friends will think of it because Peter still gets degrading remarks thrown at him sometimes. If anyone would know about these kinds of things it was Rose.

Olivia thought about Billy and Peter and hoped that they would be able to finish secondary school without being subjected to more bullying. Maybe she would tell Mr Holmes and he could do something about it.

"Has Lucy seen Tim after what happened?" she asked.

"No she hasn't. He's been hiding from her. But I think she was planning to go see him tonight. I'll call her tomorrow." After a moment's thought she added. "I think Eric has a crush on her as well but she ignores him."

"Have you noticed Joan likes Anthony?"

"Yes…” Rose tilted her head towards her friend. "I don't know if you know how you feel about him these days, but it seems like he enjoys her flirting."

Olivia felt a small stab of betrayal at the thought of him preferring Joan Davies over her. Then she felt another and slightly bigger stab at the thought she was the one doing the betraying.

She didn't have long to think it over because the door to Rose's room opened and her parents came in, wearing their coats.

"Dearests. We have to go. I'm curious as to what your teachers have to say."

"Only good things of course," Rose said while batting her eyelashes innocently.

Mr Edeson grinned and leaned over to give his daughter a hug.

"Have a nice evening, honey."

Mrs Edeson gave her daughter a big kiss on the cheek.

"There is still some roti in the fridge if you're hungry. Don't open the door to strangers!"

"Yes mum."
Mrs Edeson then turned to Olivia and gave her a kiss as well.

"There is also more ice cream if you like," she winked.

Then they left and Rose asked which movie she wanted to watch.

For a moment Olivia was overwhelmed by the normality of it all.

~

John checked his watch for the hundredth time and sighed. He knew it was a bad idea for Sherlock to help Mycroft and Lestrade. Not only because there was a risk he would fall back into his addiction to the chase, to feeling superior, to things he didn't even want to think about. It was also the fact that inherently it would interfere with his teaching. Like tonight.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder. It was a young man with a small ponytail and a friendly smile.

"Good evening. I'm Sebastian. I'm accompanying Mr Edwards. We spoke on the phone a few days ago?"

"Yes. Yes! John Watson, nice to meet you."

The smile grew wider. "I was just wondering when Mr Holmes will be available? Jeremy is doing great, but it's also quite nerve wrecking for him to be here. We didn't expect to wait this long. He must be dealing with something more important I guess?"

He was obviously probing. John glanced over to where Olivia's father was sitting along with the other parents who were scheduled to meet Sherlock. He definitely looked on edge. Unfortunately they would have to wait.

"I expect him to collect you any moment now. Please take a seat." He smiled and hoped it was convincing.

The fucking twat.

Sherlock finally showed up an hour late, dropped off by one of Mycroft's expensive black vehicles. He walked into the building still somewhere deep inside his mind palace, only noticing John's presence when he was grabbed by the lapels of his coat and pulled towards his office.

A bit not good Sherlock deduced from John's expression.

"I cannot believe this, Sherlock. These people have been waiting for ages!"

"I'm sure you've kept them well nourished and warm." He tried a smile but soon realised his comment was not appreciated.

John finally released his coat.

"What did you do, anyway?" he huffed.

"Why, do you want to join?"
"No. I want to know if I need to start looking for a new science teacher."

"Of course not. Don't be daft. I intend to finish this case after school hours. Don't worry one bit, John. We might catch him within a few days."

John looked at his friend's excited face and sighed again. He knew that expression so well, and it usually predicted something dangerous. There was a familiar pull of danger in his stomach that had always kept him close behind Sherlock, but he knew he couldn't give into it. Mary would kill him.

He nodded to the door of Sherlock's office.

"Emma's parents are already waiting inside. Tell them about her progress and answer any questions they have, kindly and without giving any confidential information about other pupils of course. They get ten minutes and not one more, because otherwise you'll be here over the weekend."

Sherlock nodded and finally focused on the task ahead. John could see him straighten his back and put on a carefully composed expression before entering.

"You get the next couple in fifteen minutes," he called after him.

John walked back towards the cafeteria and took a deep breath. Things were back under control, for now. The school was already quieting down; other mentors having finished their round of Q and A, but John's head was whirling with thoughts.

This was exactly what he had been afraid of. Something more exciting had come up and Sherlock was distracted, the pupils probably already far at the back of his mind. What was he going to do if this got worse? Would Sherlock quit? Would he have to fire him eventually?

John felt a stone sink in his stomach thinking of losing Sherlock as a teacher. He'd done surprisingly well, maintaining the right amount of authority while fascinates the pupils with experiments and cases, and getting their average marks up with almost ten per cent. On top of losing that would be the added pressure of filling his post as soon as possible. He hadn't even hired a temporary nurse yet. And with the baby expected in three months he needed the school's affairs to be as stable as possible.

Much more than for the pupils though, John didn't want Sherlock to leave for himself. It was fun to have his genius friend around. He enjoyed seeing him every day, like he used to, and being his boss had not jeopardised their friendship like he'd feared beforehand. This was a stable environment for Sherlock where John could keep an eye on him.

It had been awful during the past few years to watch from the sidelines while Sherlock lost himself to the work. Not caring about anything else. Not taking care of himself. The feelings of worry and longing to participate John had kept suppressed, knowing he had his own cases to deal with and expecting that Mycroft and Lestrade would keep a close eye on him. When it all went wrong, with the cocaine and all the filth that came with it, John berated himself for not having interfered.

Now Mycroft, apparently completely without moral compass, was dragging him into it once again. The Moriarty case no less, to which Sherlock had no resistance. He didn't want to lose the genius to those wild goose chases without being able to follow him.
Sherlock raked his hands through his hair, clenching his jaws tightly. This was by far the most horrifying thing John had ever made him do. He had been relatively stoic during his meeting with Emma's parents, telling them exactly her marks for each subject, how many times she had been absent without a note, the percentage of time she had not paid attention in his class, and the disconnections between the sides of her brain he'd deduced from her exam answers, probably due to bad parenting. They had kept their cool and asked lots of stupid questions to which he answered as short as possible. Eventually, desperate for something to let them sleep at night, they had asked if there was anything positive he could tell them about their daughter. He'd quickly made something up about social intelligence and taking care of others, which was probably half true.

He did something similar with Billy's mother, but by the third couple he'd made up a rule that every stupid question would lose them one minute of their time. Whatever information these parents were able to get, it provided them insight into the lives of their children who were being supervised by this sadistic, according to some, man every day. It would definitely make them more understanding when they came home crying.

The evening dragged on and around 10 pm, he desperately wanted to take a moment to delete a bunch of information because his brain needed some space. Unfortunately the last parent, Mr Edwards, was already knocking on his door.

He came into the darkened office with some guy whose appearance alone annoyed Sherlock. One of those hip young people who tried to appeal to kids so that they would be more inclined to listen to their crap. He'd known a few of those in his time.

He gestured them to sit down, scrutinising Edwards as he moved. Jeremy appeared significantly healthier than when he'd last seen him. His eyes were clear, he seemed very present, and he'd lost a bit of weight. There were no signs of neglect or alcohol use to be found on his shirt, cuffs, trousers or shoes. Still, he seemed way too nervous.

"I think this should be a two-sided interview, as you are probably curious to know how things are going for Olivia at home," Sebastian said. The look he received from Sherlock made him swallow. "But maybe you should start."

Sherlock uncrossed his legs and opened Olivia's file that lay on his desk, even though he knew every comma in it. He had learned tonight that parents liked things that were written down, instead of just believing his words, even though they should be able to guess he was the one writing these things down in the first place.

"Your daughter has performed very well during the past exam period. She's improved her marks for almost every subject. I would say she is one of my most intelligent pupils at this school and I'm sure that is a quality she has from her mother. I would like some clarification as to why she is still not sleeping enough at night." He steepled his fingers in front of his chin and emphasized his words with a cold and slightly psychotic stare.

"Ah, a bit of a night owl, my girl," Jeremy said with a fond smile, apparently oblivious to Sherlock's hostile body language.

Sebastian immediately took over. "We've spoken about this, and I believe she's been out and about a lot during the holidays. In addition to her normal sleeping problems this has taken a toll. Together Jeremy and I have made a list of rules for Olivia to bring some more structure into her life. Jeremy will discuss them with her over the weekend. We would appreciate if you could inform us on any irregular behaviour here at school."

Sherlock nodded slowly.
"Sober?" he asked, watching Jeremy intently.

His eyes widened, and he it took him a second to answer. "Yes."

"He's doing extremely well, aren't you Jeremy? How many days is it now?"

"Thirty eight."

Before Jeremy had a clue what was going on, he was hanging across the desk, his collar in the iron grip of Sherlock's fingers and those unearthly pale blue eyes close, much too close.

The hissing in his ear was soft but threatening. "I know you are lying. Remember what I told you when you where too wasted to stand up in your own house. I will make your life a living hell. One sound from her about you and I will come to your house at night, I will feed you so much liquor that you pass out, and then I will make sure you die choking on your own vomit."

"Y-yes."

Jeremy was released and he dropped back into his chair like a quivering bag of potatoes. Next to him, Sebastian continued as if nothing had happened and smiled once again.

"I am very glad to hear Olivia is doing well at school and I have full confidence that everything will be completely back to normal soon, for both of them."

"And this is supposed to happen under your supervision?" Sherlock asked with disdain. He was still panting.

"Oh I don't see myself as a supervisor, Mr Holmes. I like to think of it more as a… cooperation."

Sherlock wanted to vomit now.

"I think we are done here."

"Oh wait. There is one other thing. Would it be possible to speak with Mr Brook? I understand he teaches theatre and Olivia told me that is her favourite class," Sebastian asked. "John Watson told me you could arrange this?"

For a moment Sherlock didn't respond. Theatre is her favourite class?

*John told him he could arrange this? Was this some sort of perverted joke?*

"Wait here."

Sherlock stepped out of his office and quickly walked towards Richard's, which was only a few doors away. His door was locked. Gone, then. He was about to turn back but stopped on a hunch. Richard might be entertaining the parents in his classroom, where he could show them things the pupils were working on. He'd mentioned something about giving examples to parents earlier that week. He walked a little further to the theatre room. It was unlocked and he stepped inside, something he immediately regretted.

Richard was definitely entertaining. He was pushing a half naked man against the wall who had his tongue buried deep down his throat. Their bodies were flush against each other, grinding desperately. From Sherlock position he had a view from the side, convenient for a good view of what was happening. Richard's hands were stroking the guy's stomach and chest underneath his crumpled shirt. A hand disappeared between their bodies and the man threw his head back,
moaning in pleasure. It looked feverish, dangerous, and hot.

Sherlock assessed his own physical reaction to the semi-public gay sex-scene, something not out of his range of turn-ons.

The kiss being broken, Richard opened his eyes and immediately noticed Sherlock in the doorway, arms crossed in front of his chest and leaning against the frame. Richard smiled, but it took him another suspicious two seconds to separate himself from the other man.

He took a few steps forward, his shirt and hair all messed up and wicked. The air smelled like sweat and sex.

"Did you want me, Sherlock?" he drawled dangerously.

Sherlock now recognised the other man, who obviously didn't want to be noticed. He was unfamiliar, but his features and ginger hair left no doubt that it was little Harry's father. A quick assessment told him that he was closeted and playing the good husband at home, but tonight found himself trapped in Richard Brook's persuasive web of seduction. He felt a twinge of sympathy.

His attention was drawn back to Richard, whose smouldering eyes told him he was enjoying having an audience.

"Edwards' father wants to see you." Sherlock's voice was steady and his face neutral.

"Ah, eh… well, could you tell him I'm occupied? It would be hardly appropriate for him to see me like this." His eyes flickered down towards the front of his trousers, obviously hoping Sherlock's gaze would follow. "I'd be happy to give him a call next week though."

Sherlock stepped out of the room but left the door open on purpose. As he walked back to his office he chuckled. His own physical reaction was nil, zero, nothing. It had definitely been the alcohol that had tempted him to let Richard have his way that night.
Mud

With difficulty, Olivia bent down to put on her trousers and winced as the muscles in her back refused to stretch with her. She hadn't expected that one night of sleeping on the floor would make her body ache like this.

Around her, the other girls from her class complained about the rain as they changed into their sports clothes. She watched their young bodies be uncovered and covered again, wondering how they could seem so confident and happy, while everything was obviously so screwed up. Why were they whining about the bloody rain, anyway? Its not like they were made of sugar. Joan and another girl named Susan were whispering in a corner, shooting quick glances in her direction and bursting out in giggles.

She ignored them and tried to focus on Lucy, who was telling about her most recent adventures with her boyfriend while changing.

"He told me he was afraid I didn't like him anymore after what happened. He was so happy I called him, and we had the most amazingly romantic night. You should have been there! Oh no, actually you shouldn't have been there." She giggled and the other girls laughed and Olivia zoned out again.

It was almost a week after parent-teacher night and it had been a tough one. Her father and Sebastian had picked her up from Rose's and when Sebastian had dropped them off at home it was already 11 pm. The first thing her dad had done was grab a coke from the fridge and Olivia had fled to her bedroom.

The next day he had sat her down at the kitchen table with a stern face, telling her that they needed more structure in their life. It would be good for the both of them, he said. He'd given her a nine point list, written in handwriting that was not his own. Most of the rules related to her social life, limiting her freedom to see her friends after school and on the weekends. Only once a week was she allowed to go to a friend's house. No sleepovers. No theatres or cinemas. No boys, either. She was too young to be involved in a relationship, he'd said. He had also asked her if there already was a boy she was seeing, and hadn't believed her when she said no. He had tried to remain calm but the corner of his right eye had twitched and his jaw clenched. She was afraid of this man who tried to discipline her, but had kept her mouth shut until he stopped repeating the question.

The next few days had been extremely tense. Her father had been waiting for her to break the rules, and Olivia had been silently contemplating whether to do so and how she would escape the house if she dared. Eventually she realized she wasn't able to. Scared of what he would do if she tried to leave, scared of what Sebastian would write down in her file when he would come by on Wednesday. It put her on edge, interrupted her sleep, and made her extremely impatient with people in general.

Strangely, Anthony seemed distracted as well, not looking at her during class anymore. He didn't try to kiss her in the morning. When she spoke to him he seemed to be sad, but when she asked what was wrong he said there was nothing. Olivia didn't have the energy to ask further.

She hadn't seen Mr Holmes again. Not in private anyway, and during class she could tell he was distracted, because he wasn't listening to their private conversations and the focus of his eyes was absent. When they were working, he just stared out the window or straight ahead, fingertips brushing his lips.

She thought about the things he'd told her in his office. Things she only realised later were
important. He had kissed Mr Brook, or at least, let Mr Brook kiss him at some sort of Christmas party. Why were they celebrating Christmas together? Were they friends outside of work? Why hadn’t he been home the next day? The man in the suit said he was working on a case, but was that even true? What did he do when he was not at school?

He was a mystery. A mystery that kept getting more confusing to her.

And then on Wednesday, without explanation, Mr Anderson was suddenly teaching chemistry class.

When she got home that day, tired and worried about what had happened to Mr Holmes, Sebastian was there. The tension in the house suggested there had been an argument of some sort, but nothing was said openly.

That evening her father had pressed himself against her while she was getting a glass from the cupboard. She had felt his breath damp against her ear. "Why don't you sleep in my room tonight?" he had whispered. She had struggled her way out of his grasp, run upstairs without looking back. In her room she had laid down with her duvet on the floor against the door of her room, wanting to know immediately if he tried to come in during the night. Her hammering heart kept her eyes wide open.

After all of this, the rain felt like a release. She bound her hair together in a ponytail while she walked out of the changing room onto the field, brimming with bad energy.

Mr Simmons had scheduled rugby training and started by having them run five times around the field. The rain had turned the grass into a muddy pool and soon her legs were splattered with grey. Running felt good, it cleared her head, and the rain muffled the sound of her peers.

After a brief reminder of the rules and dividing the teams, Mr Simmons blew his whistle to start the rugby match. Anthony was as usual one of the most enthusiastic players, running and throwing and bracing his body for impact. Billy, Lucy, Rose, and Eric were all fighting for dominance. Olivia didn't pay much attention, running a bit and trying block people until Joan purposely bumped into her. The ball wasn't even anywhere near them. Angrily, Olivia watched her run away and laugh, trying to catch Anthony's attention.

Suddenly, Olivia didn't feel like playing anymore. The anger, fear and frustration that had been building up were making its way to the surface, boosting her energy. She ran to the other side of the field, where Joan was now trying to get away with the ball she had just been passed by Anthony. Olivia ran as fast as she could and crashed fully into her without slowing down, extracting a squeal of pain from Joan. Billy came by and quickly snatched the ball from Joan's hands. But Joan's attention didn't return to the match.

"What the hell are you touching me for, Edwards?" she hissed.

"I'm just playing the game," she answered, still a little out of breath.

"Well, I don't appreciate being groped!"

"What are you talking about? I tackled you." This was an unexpected turn Joan had taken.

"No you didn't. You just wanted to feel me up. I know what you are."

Anthony had noticed their arguing and was now approaching.

"That I'm what?" Olivia asked.
"Tell her Anthony." Joan said. She crossed her arms in front of her chest, too impatient to wait for Anthony. "He's been telling me how upset he is and I can't stand watching this anymore. Gone on. Ask her if it's true."

Mr Simmons was squinting his eyes at them from his dry place in the dugout across the field, trying to figure out why a few of his pupils were completely ignoring the game.

Uncomfortable but clearly determined to get this cleared up; Anthony took a breath and looked at Olivia.

"I heard… I heard you and Rose are uhm… seeing each other."

"What? That's ridiculous!"

They had to speak up to make themselves understandable through the crashing rain. Rose had noticed the little group as well and joined to hear what was going on, holding her jacket above her head.

"So you two didn't kiss at Lucy's party?" Anthony asked.

Olivia was stunned for a moment. So that was why Anthony had been so distant. This was far from what she'd expected to hear. Had he seen them? No that was impossible. Somebody must have talked about it.

Joan looked triumphant at her silence, and Rose averted her eyes, not knowing if she should answer for Olivia.

"I… we did. But that was months ago," she finally said.

"So the fact that we were already in a relationship didn't mean anything to you?" Anthony's face looked like he was about to cry, but she couldn't see tears because of the rain.

"It did! It does! With Rose… it was just to try… It didn't mean anything!"

Rose tried to calm him down. "Seriously Anthony, we were just-"

"Shut up! Keep out of this," he yelled at the imagined thief of his girlfriend.

"So you're saying that it was just a bit of fun? That you never did it again?"

"Yes! That's exactly what it was."

"Ha! Well, Joan saw you two kiss after the Christmas party at school," he said accusingly.

Furious, Olivia turned to Joan.

"Liar!" she yelled.

Joan stepped forward so that they were almost touching. She was an inch taller than Olivia and smirked at her.

"Unfortunately I'm not. Is this why you won't let him touch you?" Her words were matched by the challenging look in her eyes. Go on, they said, try and talk your way out of this one.

Olivia's eyes flicked to Anthony. He'd been talking to Joan a lot more than she'd realised.
"I'm not gay."

"Really? Why are you always with Rose, then? I heard you were at her place last Friday night."

Joan was pushing her backwards by walking forward, showing she was dominant.

"We're friends!"

"Yeah, I think nobody believes that anymore. Did she go down on you?"

"No."

Joan kept walking forward. She hardly stopped speaking to wait for Olivia's answers.

"Did you like it? I bet you are turned on right now, aren't you?"

"No. Stop it!"

"I don't even want to know what you think about when we are in the changing rooms. It's disgusting."

Olivia gave her a push on her shoulders, willing her to stop advancing. She was rewarded with a sharp push back.

"Don't you dare touch me, faggot!"

Olivia wasn't aware of her surroundings anymore. In her rage she was completely focused on Joan. She longed to hurt this girl with every fibre of her being. Shoving her hard, Joan almost toppled over and screamed. She launched back and grabbed a handful of Olivia's hair, dragging her to the ground. Olivia was vaguely aware of Rose pulling on Joan's arm, but more so of the cold mud seeping through her clothes. Joan persisted, straddling her and pushing her head down to the wet ground. While rain pricked in her eyes, Olivia kicked, punched and slapped, sometimes hitting air, sometimes flesh. For some reason, Rose had disappeared again.

Everything around her was a swirl of grey and green and Joan's long hair and sharp pain and Olivia managed to push hard so that she could get up. When she did, she landed a fist in Joan's face. Joan was crying and screaming and hitting back. Olivia was hardly aware of her own screaming, Rose's shouting, or the excited yelling of her gathering classmates. Everything needed to come out, and Joan was her target. She didn't even feel the girl's fingernails scratch or the fist hitting her mouth.

Then suddenly, a loud voice broke the cloud in her head. Mr Simmons, finally out of his shelter, threw himself between them and grabbed their arms to keep them apart. Olivia wasn't finished and fought against his grip, trying to kick Joan but kicking Simmons instead.

"You girls will discontinue this right now!" Mr Simmons yelled.

Olivia finally stopped moving, due to exhaustion and due to the fact that she realised the entire class was staring at her. Rose and Anthony were also quite muddy, obviously having participated in the fight at some point. She also became aware of the cold, the dirt covering her, and the burning pain in her face and several other parts of her body.

~
Sherlock was putting stacks of exam paper on his desk at the front of the classroom when he heard the door behind him open. He looked around.

"Morning, John."

John was looking at him with an alarming smile on his face. Shouldn't he be annoyed with him for not showing up yesterday? He straightened and took a better look at his friend.

"I see you didn't get round to ironing your shirt. You also had takeout last night." Sherlock frowned. "Did you and Mary…"

John winced. "Yes, we had a bit of a domestic. Nothing to worry about though. We're fine now." His face relaxed and Sherlock immediately knew they'd had make up sex this morning. John's sex life was always incredibly easy to deduce from his frown and the degree of tension in his shoulders.

"I just got a call."

Sherlock threw him an exasperated look.

"Tell Mycroft to-"

"No," John cut him off. "Emma's mother called me. You probably know why."

Sherlock narrowed his eyes. This could still go both ways.

"Cancer? I'm 98 per cent sure it's cancer."

"It is."

"Knew it!" He said triumphantly.

"Sherlock, please don't celebrate somebody's possibly fatal illness."

"But I was right! And he's not terminal."

"Of course you were right. You might have handled it a little differently though. Scribbling: "Tell your father to see a doctor" on the back of a pupil's essay is not really how to go about it."

"I was busy," he pouted.

"Yes well, her mother called. She wishes me to convey her and her husbands sincerest gratitude for your… advice."

"Hmm."

"And they've invited you over to their place for dinner."

John reveled at the sight of Sherlock's panicky face. He felt like a parent announcing to their child they were going to see the dentist. Sherlock's eyes narrowed.

"That's why you were smiling! You did tell her I wouldn't, didn't you?"

"I wouldn't dare speak for you, Mr Holmes."

Sherlock didn't reply. He just stared at the wall for a minute while John sat on one of the desks.

"Are you alright?"
"Fine."

The half smile he got told John Sherlock was trying to put his mind at ease. His eyes appeared a bit hollow and he looked paler than usual, the first signs of Sherlock working 24/7.

"Do you need some time off, for the investigation?"

Sherlock's eyes closed and he rubbed his face roughly.

"No," he mumbled, "Yesterday was just. There was a new lead in…” He stopped himself, remembering Mycroft's rules. He dropped his hands.

"Are you sure you don't want to assist me? I could use somebody who actually has a clue what they're doing."

John smiled at the compliment.

"Thanks, but no. I have a lot going on here. And the baby… Got to be a bit responsible."

Sherlock rolled his eyes. He'd almost forgotten about the baby, but now remembered the tiny kicks he'd felt with his hand pressed against Mary's belly. It was silent for a while as they both considered the reality of baby Watson, until Sherlock took a few steps toward John and attempted to say something.

It took him a few tries of opening and closing his mouth, but he finally decided on how to start.

"John I know… that you are worried… about Moriarty. Moriarty and I. You probably think I'm stupid enough to pull something like last summer. I'm not. This is just something I need to do. And I won't pretend this is not utterly selfish of me, because it is, but he is a real threat. His network… it's vast, and dangerous, and the drug they've developed is popping up everywhere. It's killing kids, John, kids taking adult doses in playgrounds. I just want you to know that I'm not planning on leaving here, I'm not planning on neglecting my teaching, and I'm not planning on relapsing."

"You better not," John said, his voice emotional.

Sherlock cleared his throat.

"And I wanted to say uhm… for the past four months I… I realize I haven't made your job particularly easy. And I never got round to telling you…"

John couldn't watch it anymore.

"I know," he said and got up. He wrapped his arms firmly around Sherlock's taller but thinner frame, and pressed himself tightly against that stupid genius who for a few seconds was too stunned to respond. Then John felt long arms slip around his shoulders.

"Thank you."

His otherwise deep voice was broken and John knew this was one of those rare moments he was allowed to see Sherlock's vulnerability. He held on to his friend and decided he should use this moment.

"Sherlock, can you promise me that if… if you feel like you might relapse, you will come to me?" he said to his shoulder.

Sherlock took a moment to think before he answered. "Yes."
He could feel John relax.

"Even if it's the middle of the night and I haven't slept because the baby is keeping me and Mary up, you should come to me, alright?"

Sherlock nodded, his cheek moving against John's hair.

Then, the conversation having come to an end, their hug became slightly awkward. Sherlock imagined what anyone would think if they saw them like this.

John squeezed Sherlock's flank experimentally. "Right now I want to get some food in you. I get the feeling you haven't been eating again."

Sherlock threw his head back and groaned in exasperation, but let John grab his hand and pull him into the corridor, smiling.

"I don't have much time," John said while they walked through the main corridor, "but we can get some soup in the cafeteria. It's still early so it won't be crowded."

The scent of food already drifted into their nostrils when a door opened to the right, and Mr Simmons came in, soaking wet with four pupils in tow and visibly relieved to see them. They left a trail of mud, grass, and water on the linoleum floor.

With one look John assessed the situation and covered his eyes with his hand. A low groan escaped him.

"Ha, John!" Simmons said, "I'm glad you're here. I've got four pupils for you. They might need some first aid but mostly they need a good talking to, preferably also detention. Miss Edwards and Miss Davies found it necessary to start a fight in the middle of a rugby match. Mr Wilding and Miss Edeson decided to join in."

He let go of Joan and Olivia's arms and did a step back. Sherlock noticed that Olivia didn't dare meet his eyes.

"I trust they are in good hands. You probably know better what to do with them than I do." Simmons turned around and sprinted towards the door to the playing fields, quickly removing himself from the situation.

"Do you want me to handle this?" Sherlock asked John, to the dismay of Joan and Anthony.

"Would you? Please? I'm happy to disinfect them and talk to the parents, but just… could you please find out what happened?"

Sherlock kept his face neutral and nodded.

John sighed in relief. "Thanks mate. Let me know how it goes. We'll have lunch tomorrow."

Sherlock made himself listen to twenty minutes of arguing between three angry teenagers. They were all dripping mud onto the floor and chairs, but that didn't matter because he'd taken them to Anderson's classroom. Sherlock was sitting laid back in the Math teacher's chair, which was
surprisingly comfortable. Joan was most vocal in her accusations, with support from Anthony. Olivia was quietly staring at the wall, refusing to defend herself against allegations of cheating and using violence, and ignoring sneering remarks about her sexual orientation. Rose was defending both of them like a lion.

"I didn't want this to end in a fight, but Joan was just helping me. And I felt super betrayed!" Anthony complained.

"We told you, it was only once! And we were high for god's sake!" Rose bellowed at him, and his eyes widened at her admission in the presence of a teacher.

"Oh as if he didn't know already!" she exclaimed with a wild hand gesture at Sherlock.

Sherlock did know. He knew most of the things that had happened in this group of pupils since the start of the school year. He could easily discern the bullshit from the truth to patch together what he thought was an accurate account of the story.

What did not become clear to him was why something as insignificant as a boyfriend had ended in a physical fight between the girls. A fight it seemed, in which Olivia had been the most aggressive. She and Joan were covered from head to toe in filth and scratches. Joan had received a blow to her eye and sported some swollen skin on her cheekbone. He suspected there were more bruised areas under the layer of mud and clothes. Olivia had some blood on her face, which he wasn't sure came from her nose or her mouth. Her hair was grey with mud and her ponytail had become almost completely undone. She looked nothing like the innocent girl he had met at the end of the summer.

"And then she even tried to kick me again when Mr Simmons was there!" Joan's sharp voice brought him back to the conversation.

"Olivia, any comment?" Sherlock tried.

She didn't move or say anything, but kept staring at the wall, shivering lightly. He figured they must all be freezing.

"Right. Does any of you feel dizzy, have any significant bleeding or experience nausea or neck pain?"

"I have neck pain and I feel dizzy. I think it's from the blow to my head," Joan's voice broke while she said it.

"Alright, don't move too much. I will take you to Mr Watson. The rest of you are going straight to the showers. You will hear your punishment later."

Anthony was out the door before he'd finished his sentence.

Olivia watched as Mr Holmes took Joan by her elbow and helped her up. She fought the urge to jump up and push him away so she could start the fight all over again.

"I'm so cold," Joan said with a small, shivering voice. As they walked away, Mr Holmes laid a hand on her back, just above her shoulder blades. The tiny gesture made Olivia want to cry and scream. Instead she balled her hands into fists and shut her eyes.

Rose was silent when they walked back to the changing rooms together. The rooms were empty, as their class had already finished and were now having lunch. For Olivia it was a relief. It would have been even better if Rose hadn't been there either.
She stood in the corner of the big joined shower space, letting the hot water wash away the filth. It felt comforting, like a hug. Slowly, she felt the tears come up from her belly up to her eyes, blocking her view, blocking her nose and constricting her breathing. After a few minutes of keeping it in, she couldn't help but gasp. The sound was amplified by the tiled walls.

"Olivia?" Rose took a few hesitant steps towards her in the heavily steaming room.

"Do you want to talk?" Rose thought about putting her hand on Olivia's shoulder, but her friend was completely drawn in on herself. Her shoulders hunched, arms tightly wrapped around her body, eyes closed, facing the wall. It didn't seem wise to touch her.

Olivia's voice was a whisper. "No. Please leave me alone for a bit."

"Alright."

Quietly, Rose stepped out of the showers and grabbed a towel from the shelf to dry with. Her school uniform felt cosy and warm compared to cold tiled room with the storm still blazing outside. Her hair still wet, she slung her schoolbag over her shoulder and opened the door to the corridor, only to find Mr Holmes standing there.

This was as close to nervous she had ever seen him. He was standing with his hands in his pockets by the window, but turned immediately when he heard the door open. Although his ruffled hair and tired face may have contributed to it, he looked worried. He gave her a questioning look when Olivia did not appear to be following.

"She's still in the shower. She told me to go but I don't think she's completely ok."

Rose knew her friend was absolutely not ok.

"What happened with her?"

"I'm not sure. Joan was being a bully, saying Olivia and I… that we were a couple, mocking her. I think it was only because she wants Anthony, though. Olivia just lost it. I would like to say it was completely self-defence, but… it really wasn't."

"I know." Sherlock thought of John's shocked face seeing the damage to Joan. Even though the fifteen year-old had been whining, it was not completely without reason.

"But don't blame her for everything!" Rose warned. "Joan was sitting on top of her most of the time. I think Jo- Mr Watson should see Olivia as well. Just in case."

Sherlock frowned. "Is she still bleeding?"

Rose didn't know and shrugged. She could see he wanted to go and check, but wasn't sure of himself.

"I think you should go inside," she said.

Immediately he stepped forward, wanting to run in but restrained himself and knocked first. There was no answer. Slowly he pulled the door open, hoping she would tell him if he should stop.

"Olivia?"

No answer, the showers were still running. Carefully he walked through the changing room to where he heard the cascading water. He distantly remembered this space from when John had
given him a tour at the beginning of the year. It looked utterly depressing.

He gave a knock on the door to the showers. No answer.

He opened it a few centimetres without looking inside. A cloud of steam blew into his face.

"Olivia?"

He could hear her sniffling. The echo of the tiles made it difficult, but he was quite sure she was sitting on the floor. God how he wished he had listened to more carefully John's babbling about comforting people. What on earth should he say? His urge was to go in and see what was going on, but he guessed that that was probably not the gentleman way to go about this. He eyed the shelf of towels next to the showers.

"You should be clean now. Do you need a towel?"

Again, there was no answer.

"I'll just wait out here then."

Sitting down on one of the cold wooden benches that lined the walls, he put a towel next to him. He had been carefully hiding his emotions since Simmons had come into the corridor and he'd seen Olivia covered in mud and blood. He wanted to check her body for injuries and interrogate her for information. Physically, she was probably going to be fine, but he wasn't sure what was going on in her head. Had she become harder to read? She'd definitely become a better liar over the past few months. He mentally scolded himself for not paying enough attention lately.

Thankfully it didn't take long for the door to the showers to open. Her fingers appeared where she gripped the door and her voice came out a bit raw.

"Yes."

"What?"

"Yes, I need a towel."

He got up and put it in her extended hand, after which the door closed again for a minute or two. Then she came out, having it wrapped tightly around her. The colder air immediately made her shiver.

"Better get dressed quickly," he said.

She walked to the place where her bag and clothes laid in a pile on the bench and then looked around at Sherlock again, but he was already standing with his back to her, hands in his pockets, looking inconspicuous. She dropped the towel and stepped into her pants, wincing silently as she pulled them to her hips. Her bra was next and proved to be more difficult. A hiss escaped her when she pulled the straps over her shoulders and stretched her muscles.

"Better get dressed quickly," he said.

She walked to the place where her bag and clothes laid in a pile on the bench and then looked around at Sherlock again, but he was already standing with his back to her, hands in his pockets, looking inconspicuous. She dropped the towel and stepped into her pants, wincing silently as she pulled them to her hips. Her bra was next and proved to be more difficult. A hiss escaped her when she pulled the straps over her shoulders and stretched her muscles.

Sherlock immediately had the impulse to turn and look, but caught himself just in time.

"It's ok. You can look", she said.

He did, and immediately his eyes scanned her body for damage. The source of her pain was quickly found. A huge bruise on her ribs clearly put there by a bony knee. Further there was some broken skin on her shins and knees, quite a few fingernail scratches on her neck and collarbone, a
slightly swollen nose and a cut lip.

"You've stopped bleeding."

A hand went to her face and she turned towards the mirror, her eyes widening at her own reflection.

"I didn't even know I was bleeding. I didn't feel it hurt."

He stood behind her and their eyes met in the mirror.

"That's the adrenaline."

She leaned back into him experimentally but he didn't respond, hesitant to suggest she was arousing him when there was something upsetting her.

"Are you angry?" she asked.

He ignored her question and laid his warm hands on her shoulders, pulling her closer to his chest. He wished he could take his shirt off and really feel her against him. One hand slid down, brushing across the white fabric of her bra towards her ribs and lightly he traced his fingers over the bruise. It was still red now but would turn a dark shade of purple soon he guessed.

His head dipped so he could whisper into her ear. "A training in self defence wouldn't be out of order."

Her shivering told him that she needed to get dressed though, so he picked up her top and held it over her head so she could slip her arms and head in. Then he sat down, allowing her the space to dress herself.

Watching her soft skin disappear underneath cotton and wool, Sherlock was having difficulty placing the information on Olivia's near naked body in his mind palace, unable to decide if it was purely medical concern or also arousal mixing into the memory.

With Irene, he'd been able to keep her criminal activities neatly separated from the sex, accessing one door to figure out what she was smuggling across the border, and a completely different one to bring her screaming to the edge of orgasm. He realised his relationship with Olivia was completely different and much more complicated. He pushed the problem aside as something he would figure out later.

When Olivia was finished and wrapped warmly in her jumper she picked up her bag to make her leave. Sherlock cleared his throat meaningfully, causing her to turn.

"You didn't think you were going to get away with this by showing me a **bruise**, did you?"

She swallowed but didn't speak. He tapped the wood beside him.

"Sit."

She did, her heart suddenly hammering in her chest.

"Am I supposed to keep asking you how things are going at home? Because frankly, I'm starting to find it tedious."

She looked at him, eyes wide, trying to figure out what he wanted to hear.
"I don't know."

"I do. I want you to tell me what is going on, why you are so defiant and why you thought it necessary to beat up another pupil. I know Joan Davies get's on your nerves, and that for some strange reason you still want Anthony Wilding to be yours. However I also get the idea that this was not about either of them. So if anything is frustrating you, you should tell me, because although I might be able to deduce a lot, I'm not a bloody mind reader."

His tone made her anxious. It was dangerous and impatient. What she really wanted was to let the tears behind her eyes come out and hope he would hold her in his arms for a bit. However it seemed like that would only make him sigh and scold her childishness, so she swallowed her tears and thought of what to tell him.

"I'm just confused," she said in a small voice.

He waited while she played with the metal buckle of her bag.

"I can't do anything for myself because my dad won't let me go out because Sebastian made this list of rules I have to follow. And it's as if he has complete control over us now because he can report whatever he wants on us."

"And my dad says I can't see Anthony anymore because I'm too young to have a boyfriend. And now Joan is saying I can't see him because I'm a lesbian. And I don't even know if I love him but he was my friend and the only normal thing I had in my life and now he's breaking up with me! And I can't even tell you about this because you are never here!"

That stung a little.

"Do you want him?"

"No. Yes. No… I just… I just want to feel normal."

"You think you're not normal?"

"No! I don't know what's normal. I don't know what I want. I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I don't know what I'm supposed to like or dislike. And I feel like if I don't make up my mind… ev-everyone else w-will move on with-out me."

She stopped playing with the buckle and wiped at her eyes with her sleeve.

"You're confused about sex or your sexual orientation?" Sherlock's icy voice had melted into something more understanding.

"Everything."

He thought for a moment on how to reply to this, and eventually went with something based on his own experience.

"Well, I don't know if this will put your mind at ease, but you're not supposed to want, or do, or like anything. The only thing you need to do is feel what you want, what you desire. If anyone tells you to want something else they're wrong. That's what I've always done."

"You don't care what people think of you?" she sniffed.

"I guess I don't. It makes things a lot easier."
"Have you ever been bullied?"

"People have tried."

There was a meaningful silence in which Olivia imagined him as a teenager, being ambushed in an alley and deducing his way out of it, letting the hurtful comments wash off him as he walked away. She gave him a watery smile.

"I think Rose is a bit like you," she said.

That made him smirk, but she was probably right. Then he leaned toward her an inch or two, and looked at her seriously.

"You can ask me about it if you like."

He knew she had been thinking about it and he watched her cheeks pink with the realisation that he knew.

"Have you... have you been with men?"

"A few, although I haven't managed much more than one time encounters. I tend not to like them so much the next day, and that is usually mutual. Not counting John, of course."

"Mr Watson?"

"That's the one."

"You were in a relationship with Mr Watson?!"

She was close to gaping at him, and he relished the sight.

He gave a deep chuckle. "Wouldn't call it that. It happened only a few times and we were both a trembling mess. It was for the best it didn't continue. Mary is a much more suitable partner for him."

"Are you still attracted to him?"

"In a way, sometimes. He's the best person I know," he said honestly.

After seeing her face fall, he added "But don't you worry about that. I prefer him as my friend."

"You're the best person I know." It came out without thinking and she immediately lowered her eyes.

It took him a moment to find a reply. "I'm not, trust me. Not by far." Looking back into his eyes she saw a strange sadness she'd never seen before, but it was quickly replaced by something else.

Something dangerous.

"I am the sexiest person you know though," he said with a seductive smile and leaned forward to kiss her, which she happily allowed.

Unable to ignore it anymore, Sherlock sought the hem of her shirt and pushed his hand underneath, longing to feel the almost velvet touch of her naked skin. He hummed against her lips in appreciation. His hand slid over her stomach, carefully avoiding the bruise, until the tips of his fingers brushed against the underside of her bra. Her whimpering sounded like a symphony to
him. *Would she mind if I...* he thought.

Right when his fingers crept into her bra to explore, she froze. Her mouth was no longer trying to capture his tongue and her whimpers had ceased. Sherlock wanted to reverse his actions, thinking he had gone too far, until he heard the faint sounds of footsteps in the corridor.

Olivia was used to the room and to the sound of Simmons at the other side of the door, always spurring them to stop chatting and hurry up. Therefore she had picked up the sound a few seconds earlier than he had. Quickly, he pulled Olivia's shirt and jumper down and stood up.

When Joan came into the dressing room, still covered in mud and now sporting a few bandages, she saw her classmate sit on the bench, listening to a scolding from her mentor.

"Are you even allowed to be here?" she asked suspiciously.

"Are you even allowed to be here, *Mr Holmes*. And no, I am not, but considering what you two did today you don't really have the moral high ground now do you? Sit down."

Joan was stunned and sat.

"What I was saying, is that there is no excuse for fighting for whatever reason. And you, Miss Davies, have no right to judge anyone on his or her sexual preferences. Bullying will not be tolerated at this school. You are both to report to the janitor every morning at 07.30 to help with... whatever she feels like not doing herself, for the next two weeks. We will, of course, also have to inform your parents."

Seeing their distraught faces, he added, "Be thankful because I didn't even make you shake hands and if Mr Watson was handing out punishment he would have suspended you."

"Now, Miss Davies, you're starting to smell, so go take a shower. Miss Edwards, it's your turn to see Dr Watson."

Then he straightened his jacket and walked out of the changing room, leaving the two girls behind on the bench.

Olivia took a moment to settle her mind. It was remarkable how that man could switch roles so quickly and seamlessly. He took her breath away.

Joan's sneering voice brought her back to the room.

"Move, Edwards, or are you hoping I'll take my clothes off in front of you?"

Olivia grabbed her bag and hurried out.

~

"Hop onto the table for me please. It's only your ribs, isn't it?"

"Yes."

John stood next to her while she got on, just in case it hurt too much and needed help. She looked better than Joan in terms of injuries, but John knew he needed to be careful. When she was seated,
with her legs hanging over the side, he stood in front of her.

"Ok, let me take a look at that bruise first, and then I'll disinfect your lip and those scratches."

I should really hire a nurse, John thought. It didn't feel right to be examining pupils and to be their head of school at the same time. Right now however, there was no other option available. He gave her a smile that he hoped didn't show his worry about her.

"Could you lift your shirt a little bit for me?"

Without hesitation she revealed the bruised area for him and he gently pressed his fingers, examining the three ribs one by one. While he did so, he kept an eye of her face, which frowned and tensed at the second one.

"Does that hurt?"

She nodded.

"What about here?" He pressed lightly on the one below.

Another flinch and a nod.

*Two out of three, then.*

"Alright, I'm going to listen to your breathing."

He pulled her shirt down, picked up his stethoscope and placed it at the top of her breast.

"Can you breathe deeply three times?"

He watched her ribs move while he listened.

"Congrats, nothing broken, but you bruised two ribs. I'll give you some painkillers for that."

She let her shirt down and he turned to get some antiseptic and bandages.

"Your lip looks pretty clean but I'm going to treat it anyway to be sure. Just don't talk or move your head ok?"

He cleaned up the cut and put a small patch on it to prevent it from opening too much. Then he moved on to her neck. The deepest scratches were at the back, where Joan seemed to have tried to grab onto her with her nails, leaving little half-moon dents. He leaned Olivia's head forward so he could reach it more easily, creating a strange type of embrace. She found his gentle touch and careful explanations comforting.

"This might sting a bit."

She didn't flinch when he started disinfecting the scratches.

"I hope you had a good chat with Mr Holmes. I trust he told you that engaging in physical violence at this school is completely unacceptable. I would have you suspended if it wasn't for the fact that Joan was being so homophobic. I will call your father this afternoon to tell him what happened though."

"Do you really have to?" Olivia asked in a small voice.
John leaned back a bit and looked at her sad expression. It was hard for him to believe this girl could be violent.

"I do."

He regarded her downcast eyes for a moment.

"Olivia, look at me." She did. "I know it's not easy to feel like you're different than other people. They might try to hurt you when you're vulnerable. I want you to promise that you won't try to resolve it this way ever again. It doesn't work in your favour. And if you ever have a problem or questions about this kind of thing, you can always tell me. Understood?"

She nodded, and he leaned forward again to continue. He dabbed while he continued softly talking. She relaxed and now fully rested her head on his shoulder.

"Mr Holmes has more experience with these sort of things than I do, actually, or Mr Brook, but if you want to talk you can always come by and we'll sit down and have a cuppa." He grabbed a bandage and placed it over a particularly deep scratch. "That's one of the perks of being the head, you get tea and biscuits whenever you want."

Finished, John tugged her shirt back over her shoulder and smiled.

"All done. You can p-"

Olivia had fallen asleep, with her head still resting on his shoulder.

For a moment John was stunned, but then slowly raised his arms and wrapped them around her in a protective hug.
Emma stared at her mentor sitting to the side of the classroom, having dragged a chair there, as he was not the one teaching this time. Mr Holmes and Mr Watson had initiated cooperation with New Scotland Yard to teach them about safety. All third year pupils, about fifty of them, would get a one day training on how to make sure they knew how to be safe in a town full of pickpockets, illegal cab drivers, street harassers, and assassins (that last example came from Mr Holmes and was quickly dismissed by Mr Watson, kicking their teacher subtly in the leg).

Some guy who introduced himself as Detective Inspector Lestrade from Scotland Yard had started a lecture about the work of the police and basic laws when you are out on the street. Mr Holmes had already interrupted three times, obviously dissatisfied with Lestrade's lecture and the fact that it was not he standing in front of the class flaunting his knowledge.

The brilliance of Mr Holmes was something Emma had never truly believed in. His arrogance was unmistakable, yes, but the cases he brought to class could have been prepared easily, and the personal stuff he said to intimidate them could have come from their records or whatever he heard from other teachers. He was a manipulative, authoritarian, power hungry asshole if you asked her.

If you asked her a week ago, that is.

Now, he was suddenly the man who had saved her father's life, sort of. They had not noticed any symptoms aside for his fatigue lately. They hadn't even sought anything behind the headaches. However, during her parents' ten-minute conversation with him, Mr Holmes had deduced that her father was seriously ill. Her parents had found the note a bit strange, but had decided he should see their GP just to be sure. The growth in his head was on the verge of being too big to operate on. It was a complicated procedure and he might still not make it out of the operating room, but his chances would have been much lower had they discovered it later, likely after he would have collapsed. The doctor had started him on chemotherapy to downsize the tumour and put him on a waiting list for the operation.

She had still cringed when she heard her mother talk to Mr Watson on the phone about inviting Mr Holmes over for dinner.

However, Mr Holmes had not tried to shock her, or boasted about how he figured it out just by a quick glance, and was not taking public credit. He even completely ignored the fact that Emma had barely been to school for a week. When she came in this morning, he hadn't acknowledged her, but after a few minutes had come to her desk and wordlessly handed her last week's exam results. There were a few short comments scrawled on her paper in his hurried but readable handwriting.

The first, at the top, next to her D-, said: "Re-sit next week."

The second she found later, as it was on the back. It said: "I don't do dinners."

And right underneath:

"Dr Ian Fielding, brain surgeon, St. Bartholomew's hospital. Mention my name."

She felt a strange desire to hug that frightening man. She might have done it had he not been looking so broody.
Jeremy woke up with a headache. Again.

It was around 10 a.m. when he managed to get up and stumble downstairs to get breakfast. Olivia had long gone to school. He felt a twinge of guilt thinking about the days he had been sober and able to cook her breakfast and wave her off.

He wanted to be a good father, he really desperately did. He wanted to care for Olivia and make her love him. He wanted to get clean, get a job and live like normal people did, planning for the future and everything. He hadn't been able to think more than two days ahead since Isabel died. Almost a year ago now, and he hadn't spent a minute not thinking of her. If she was still somewhere up there, looking down on him, she would be so disappointed, he thought, and a deep sense of shame settled among the sadness and despair in his stomach.

Olivia was the most important thing in the world. She was bright and kind and lovely and absolutely perfect. She was the only reason he wasn't alone, or dead right now. He would marry her if he could.

And still Jeremy didn't seem to be able to be a father to her. Sebastian helped, of course, taking him to her school, compiling the list of rules, talking to the bank about his mortgage.

Jeremy was abruptly torn from his thoughts when he entered the kitchen and saw Jim standing by the stove, flipping what looked like French toast in a pan.

"Morning Jeremy! How're you?" he asked with a wide smile.

"Uh… good. Fine. What are you doing here?"

Jeremy hadn't seen Jim in a while, but as the deliveries had continued it was not a surprise he’d turned up again. It was just not in the way he’d expected.

"Making you breakfast, obviously."

"How did you get in?"

"Through the bathroom window", Jim said with a wink. "No of course not. I borrowed the key from Seb."

"Seb? Sebastian??"

"That’s the one."

Jeremy remembered how Sebastian had suggested he take a copy of the house keys, just in case. It’d seemed like a good idea at the time.

Jim opened a few cabinets in search of plates.

"You know Sebastian?"

"Yes. Pretty well, actually. He didn’t tell you?"

Why would Seb just hand out their keys to people he hardly knew?
“You’re probably wondering why Seb gave me your keys.”

Jim had now located the plates and popped some toast on one. He set it on the table and patted a chair for Jeremy to sit down.

“I’m going to take that silence as a yes. I asked for the keys because I needed to talk to you and you haven’t been showing up for AA meetings. Makes it a little hard to run into you.”

Jeremy sat down but didn’t touch the food. “What do you want?”

“Well, to be very blunt: your money. It’s time to pay me for all the sugar I’ve been providing you with.”

“I thought that was a gift”, Jeremy lied.

“Are you really that naïve? People don’t give you drugs for free Jeremy. Well, maybe the first time to get you hooked, but then you have to pay for them just like anything.”

"I appreciate your… gifts. I really do. But I have a daughter to take care of."

"How much do you have?"

"I… I don't know exactly. But I need my money Jim."

Jim's expression shifted from warm to cold within a second. His voice was cold too when he spoke.

"That's not what I expected from you, Jeremy. I thought we were friends."

"We are! I just… look, I haven't been working for a year now and I have-"

"You have a little girl to take care of! You don't need to inform me of that fact! I know what she looks like, and I know where she goes to school. And I am very much aware of how much you love her. A little too much, right?"

Jeremy's heart was hammering in his throat.

"That's not…that's not true."

"Seb has told me enough to know what you would like to do with her. I would only have to tell him to make him file an urgent report. He's been so nice to you so far hasn't he? Why do think that is? Do you think he's oblivious to your trembling hands? The way you look at her? The way you talk about her? The way she cringes when you touch her?"

Jeremy couldn't speak. He couldn't process the idea that he knew, that Sebastian knew.

"She doesn't cringe when I touch her."

"Keep telling yourself that while I call Seb. He's not that dim you see. He likes manipulating people just as much as I do. We just chose a different branch of work. He so enjoys watching things escalate. I'm sure you are giving him a good show. But I can tell you that if I tell him he needs to put a stop to it, he will. And I might just take her as payment."

Jeremy was trembling now, his eyes wide and mouth halfway open. Blind panic filled his head as Jim's words made his entire world crumble. He was exactly where Jim wanted him to be.

The master manipulator's eyes softened.
"Jeremy, you should know that I don't care what you do with your daughter. I was hoping I wouldn't even have to bring it up. I won't tell anybody about your perversions if I don't have to. And I can make sure Seb doesn't either. You just need to help me out here, mate. You have exactly 3463 pounds in your account, and I'm sure you have some loving family members left who can loan you some more. Five thousand by Thursday. I know you can do that."

It was silent for a few moments before Jeremy regained control over his face and was able to reply.

"I-I-I'll try."

"Oh and of course my deliveries will not be coming for free anymore. Can't afford to fund your habits any longer. Two hundred pounds per delivery. That's the price for my closest friends."

Jeremy could only nod.

"See you on Thursday. I'll know where to find you."

Jim winked at him, smiled, and walked out, leaving Jeremy in shock.

~

"Mrs Hudson!" Sherlock bellowed in the general direction of the stairs.

"Christ Sherlock. Are you trying to damage my eardrums? At least avert the mouthpiece when you're verbally abusing your housekeeper," Mycroft moaned on the other end of the line.

"Landlady. You wished to talk to me so you shall have to put up with everything that comes out of my mouth. Mrs Hudson!" A wince could be heard through the phone.

"Sherlock I need you to bring back every piece of evidence you have in that flat. Right now."

"I work better from home. Your people are distracting and compromising my investigation."

"They are not compromising your investigation because it isn't your investigation. You will bring back those files or I will send a team to fetch them. I might ask them to search the place for more than just files."

Sherlock growled childishly into the phone as Mrs Hudson appeared in the doorway.

"You wouldn't."

"Sherlock dear, you don't have to shout at me. I'm sure the whole street can hear you. And what are you doing to that telephone? You'll pull it right off the wall if you're not careful."

Sherlock was standing on the sofa in front of his new evidence wall, the normally curly string of the telephone stretched to its limits from the wall to his ear.

"Of course I would, little brother. I will keep doing it as long as you keep compromising the safety of this country, your behaviour is erratic, and you haven't given me one proper lead to find Moriarty."

He could hear Mycroft's grin as no reply came to his mind.
"The evidence, or I will take you off the case," Mycroft said haughtily.

Sherlock released the phone from his hand, letting it fly across the room and slam into the wall as the string curled up.

"Sherlock!" Mrs Hudson covered her mouth with a hand at the sound. "Think of the neighbours!"

"Tea Mrs Hudson. Tea is needed." Sherlock said resolutely and stepped off the sofa to face her. "Or coffee might be better actually."

"Only if you sit properly on a chair and calm down." She walked into the kitchen, muttering angrily and putting the kettle on while Sherlock sank down into his armchair, leaned his head back and rubbed his eyes.

Mrs Hudson knew very well that Sherlock did not need her to make him coffee. He was like a child, really. She did it anyway because the boy obviously needed to get something off his chest.

Sherlock sat a little straighter as a few minutes later Mrs Hudson set his cup down in front of him and sat down in John's old chair.

"So, tell me what's bothering you. I can see you haven't slept," she said as she eyed the darkness under his eyes.

"Sleep is overestimated."

He thought of yesterday evening's obsessive attempt at finding a pattern in all the evidence that had been accumulated about Moriarty's network. The annoying part was that almost all of the evidence came from the very end of the drug chain, namely the increasing number of deaths due to overdoses across the country on his trademark drug. It was a dangerous mixture of highly addictive chemicals that went around under the name "M" (which Sherlock found annoyingly cliché) and within the last three months it had spread over the country like a disease, affecting young and old. He guessed it was a matter of time before one of his pupils got their hands on it.

Sherlock had spent hours going over the files with Lestrade, and then more hours by himself after Lestrade had fallen asleep, without result. He'd been tempted to call John, but it was the middle of the night and from experience he knew it wouldn't be appreciated if he wasn't at least relapsing or severely injured. So he'd stuffed all the most significant evidence in a box and taken it home. It had been surprisingly easy, but putting up the pictures and maps in his living room had not helped his mind to make sense of them.

"I bet you haven't had a proper meal in a while either."

Sherlock thought of what constituted a proper meal. Most of his intake these days was coffee, cigarettes, tea and the odd biscuit. He was about to say he had soup with John the other day, but realised that was over a week ago and they actually hadn't had the soup, they'd just had the plan. So he shrugged his shoulders, picked up his coffee and eyed his evidence wall angrily.

"I need to figure this out Mrs Hudson. Maybe all those months of teaching have affected my brain."

"Oh I'm sure they have."

Sherlock snapped his head in her direction. He hadn't actually believed his brain capacity had declined, why would she say that?

"How is my dear Olivia doing these days?" she took a sip of her tea.
Oh… right.

"She's… well. Her father's getting help from social services, and I believe her sleeping pattern has improved considerably…"

Mrs Hudson raised her eyebrows but didn't comment on the low standard he was setting for his own sleeping habits. Instead she went for a more distressing topic.

"What about you and her?"

The ambiguity of the question was irritating, but Sherlock knew she was merely giving him a chance to talk without necessarily invading his privacy.

For a minute or two, the only sound in the room was the clock and the spoons in their cups while he thought of an answer.

"I've been a bit preoccupied lately…" he frowned.

"It's distracting… she's distracting. I can't have that at the moment."

Now the Moriarty case was getting more pressing, he spent every free minute on it, and many of his not so free minutes. His ears were not tuned to his class anymore as the pupils worked on assignments. He didn't hear who fancied whom or who was jealous of what. He hadn't even noticed the change in relationship between Billy and Peter until Olivia mentioned something a week later.

She'd been able to sneak into his office on Friday, rambling on about trivial things, and he'd almost snapped at her to stop because he needed to think. Then his office phone rang and he got into a discussion with Lestrade about a dead soldier whose stash was found hidden inside his gun. He'd basically ignored her the rest of the lunch break while he tried to convince the DI to search the man's home another time because he felt they were missing something. Lestrade had refused to do so without a solid reason. Olivia had just sat in his armchair patiently waiting. When she got up and tried to kiss him before leaving to go to her next class he had turned his head away.

Mrs Hudson looked at him with suspicion.

"You're afraid her closeness will prevent you from finding this fellow?"

Sherlock cringed at her use of the word 'fellow' to describe the most dangerous criminal in the country, but he didn't comment.

"I'm quite certain that when… there is intimacy… she impairs my ability to think, yes."

*She doesn't know how the touch of her lips makes me forget everything except her, or how it makes my skin feel too hot, or how my brain floods with simply ridiculous imagery…*

"And you feel guilty for it," Mrs Hudson said matter-of-factly.

The landlady did not specify which of the many layers of his guilt she was addressing, leaving him free to choose the easiest one to deny.

"Why should I feel guilty? It's a matter of national security. She just has to understand that and get over it."

"But she hasn't even complained about it, has she?"

Sherlock thought about that for a moment. Olivia hadn't complained once. Was she so used to
being ignored it was normal to her? Did she not feel entitled to his attention at all? A painful stab hit him between the ribs.

The elderly lady gave him a knowing look. "Well, it's almost Valentine's day, the perfect opportunity to make it up to her." She smiled and stood up, careful not to bother her hip too much, and gathered the cups to go and rinse them, leaving Sherlock to brood over his own problems.

~

Olivia felt rested. For the first time in a long time she was sleeping eight hours a night and had no trouble concentrating during the day. It was the pills Mr Watson had given her that were helping her sleep. According to the guidelines on the packaging she was supposed to take one in the morning and one in the evening. He had warned that drowsiness could be a side effect and to tell him if it was bothering her. When she found out how sleepy they made her she had started taking both of them in the evening. It caused some discomfort during the day, as her bruised ribs were not healed yet, but she considered the nights were worth it. Mr Watson didn't need to know.

The past week and a half had been quiet, with her father in a pondering mood, going to all his meetings. She got home from school, did her homework for science and biology (because it was more important to please Mr Holmes than any other teacher) and ate in silence with her dad. He usually asked her to do the dishes because that's what Sebastian had put in the rules, just like not going out and not listening to 'rebellious' music. Even though her dad couldn't possibly enforce that last rule, she only listened to her mum's old tapes these days. He always took a bottle of coke to the living room and put on the 8 o'clock news. When she was done with the dishes, Olivia silently went upstairs, washed her face, brushed her teeth, after which the painkillers helped her into dreamless sleep.

She tried not to think of the chair she silently placed under her door handle every night before she got under the covers. It was only precaution anyway…

Every morning her alarm went off at 6am, before her dad would get up and so she could be on time for her detention with the janitor, Mrs Pipkins. Mrs Pipkins was a fat and chatty lady who was always pleasant to her and set her to work somewhere far away from Joan, usually involving scrubbing at something that hadn't been cleaned in a hundred years. It wasn't terrible and gave her mind time to drift away and daydream about Mr Holmes.

If she had her work done on time, which she usually had, Mrs Pipkins would invite her for a cup of tea in her tiny office/storage space before classes started. Rose would come by to get her on her way to class and let Olivia copy the homework she hadn't done. Nobody had a reason to talk to her or bother her about anything she was supposed to do, and it almost made her social life bearable.

She looked forward to the self-defence class because it was different from anything they ever did at school. What she had not expected to find was the deeply erotic sight of Mr Holmes lying on the floor, or how he used his sinewy body and surprisingly muscled arms to deflect and restrain his opponent. He and DI Lestrade had obviously dared each other to a fight and Mr Holmes was doing quite well, until he locked eyes with Olivia. DI Lestrade took that moment to push him over on his stomach and push his arms against his back with a victorious grin.

Mr Holmes' shirt was perfectly cut and as he stood up Olivia could see the fading dark spots where he had sweat through it. The curls in his neck were damp and there was a little more colour in his
cheeks than usual. Olivia forgot the rest of the world for a moment while she sat on that bench watching him talk to the DI. She hardly noticed Mr Simmons bringing in the last stranded pupils from the corridor and sit down.

DI Lestrade started by showing them a few defence techniques with Mr Watson playing the attacker. This demonstration was first met with wide grins because Mr Watson was by far the least dangerous person they knew, and then with wide eyes as Mr Watson went into army mode and suddenly looked much more frightening as he attacked, using his short but strong body with deadly precision.

Then the DI told them to make couples and come stand on the mats.

"No mixed couples of course", Mr Watson said as Joan and Anthony were already standing on the mat with their hands entwined. Joan rolled her eyes and giggled, and Olivia wanted to vomit.

Rose steered her to a far corner of the room to practise and they laughed as they pretended to knee each other. Seeing Joan claiming Anthony like that was annoying, but Olivia was not upset about it anymore. The boy was obviously happy to get the attention, and probably enjoying all the sex he was getting. She didn't know if she should've given into him, but she was glad she hadn't.

What Olivia did miss was having people around her. Anthony obviously didn't hang out with their group as much anymore, Lucy was busy with her boyfriend, Peter and Billy were always together (and taking advantage of the same-sex couple rule Mr Watson insisted on), and Mr Holmes was ignoring her.

"Promise you won't go all mental on Joan again. I don't want to have to clean up the blood," Rose said, drawing her away from her sad thoughts.

Olivia gave a tight smile. Thankfully she could still count on her best friend.

~

At the end of the day, Olivia's spirits were quite high. She wasn't exhausted like she usually was at this time, the self-defence practice had turned out to actually be quite fun. They'd practiced different types of attacks and defences, kicking shins, dropping to the floor, and punching spines as attackers bent over from faked pain in groins. It would all be different if there were a real attacker and real punching, but Lestrade said it would help to create the muscle memory so that at least they wouldn't freeze should the situation occur. Mr Lestrade had complimented her elbow punch, and Mr Holmes had smiled at her from across the room. Twice.

As she opened her locker, she immediately noticed the unfamiliar item on top of her notebooks. It was another book, wrapped in brown paper. There was a note on top.

"This is not an Valentine's gift because I refuse to participate in that commercial nonsense. This is purely for informative purposes. Of course, if you choose to use it differently, I will be the last to judge." SH

On the back of the note, it said: "And do not keep this note for nostalgic reasons, I fully expect you to destroy it the first chance you get, which is just after you've read it."

His words made her smile. She loved the way he could sound annoyed and humorous at the same
time. Curious, she tore the paper off the book and frowned at the title. It was called *Little Birds*.

She opened it at random and experimentally read a page. Her face flushed at the explicit words being thrown at her. Despite her shock at having such an inappropriate book in her possession, in her hands, at school, a hot feeling spread in her abdomen.

"Olivia."

The sound came from so close that it almost gave her a heart attack. With a snap she closed the book and pushed it into her bag. Mr Brook was standing next to her, smiling.

"I wanted to remind you that the auditions for the end of year play are coming up. I'd really like to see you in it," he said with a hopeful voice, apparently unaware of the nature of the book she had been holding. She'd definitely get into trouble if anyone at school caught her with it. Overcoming the shock of seeing him, she concentrated on what he was asking.

"Uhm, I don't know Mr Brook. I don't think my performance at Christmas went very well. I don't think I like being on stage very much."

He dipped his head and looked at her kindly. "My dear, you have no idea how proud I was when you got onto that stage at Christmas. I know your father wasn't there and that upset you, but everyone was really impressed with what you did. I think you are very talented and I'd hate not to have you in the play." The enthusiasm in his eyes was contagious and Olivia remembered that she had been excited about this play earlier in the year. It might be an opportunity to have fun after school hours with classmates.

"You really think I'm good?"

"Olivia… I would never lie to you, you know that. I've been a bit busy lately, but I can schedule some extra practice for you if you like."

"Wouldn't that be unfair to the others?"

Mr Brook raised a finger to his lips. "If you won't tell them I won't either."

Olivia nodded in consent.

"Perfect!"

With a wink and a smile he left her to put on her coat and face the cold February air, the gift in her bag momentarily forgotten.
"Make sure you get all the corners dear, those are the dirtiest."

"Yes Mrs Pipkins."

"Are you sure you're alright? You look a bit pale." One of the woman's bushy eyebrows lifted suspiciously.

"Oh yes I'm fine, don't worry."

Olivia smiled and the lady nodded.

"Well, let me know when you're finished with the second floor. We'll have a cuppa and I might even have a biscuit or two stashed away." She winked. "And happy Valentine's Day!" Then she walked away, her shoes giving little squeaky sounds with each step.

Oh right, Olivia thought, it's Thursday, Valentine's today. She sat the bucket of soapy water down and it sloshed a bit over the side. She dipped the mop into the bucket and started pushing it over the linoleum floor. The air immediately filled with the penetrative scent of chemical eucalyptus.

She didn't know why she was feeling so weak. Yesterday she'd felt fine. Tired but fine. She'd foregone the painkillers for once and devoured Mr Holmes' book in one long night with a torch under the covers, being alternatively shocked, amazed and aroused by it. *Little Birds* was a collection of short stories, each one revealing a new type of erotic encounter. The characters discovered pleasures and perversions that made her want to put the book away and at the same time thrust her hand between her legs. She had fallen asleep at 4am, completely exhausted and slightly overwhelmed by the flood of information.

Last night she had reread some of the stories, now more prepared and interested in the details. She tried to figure out if Mr Holmes had read them and if this meant he wanted to do all these things with her. Was this just a way to educate her? Or was it his way of saying it was time she grew up? That her innocence was getting dull? He had even refused to kiss her goodbye last week. What did he mean by that? Was he getting off with someone else?

He was always talking to Mr Lestrade these days… or was she now being completely paranoid?

So far she had not gone much further with Mr Holmes than she had with Anthony. Anthony… who was now with Joan, for the same reason Mr Holmes was probably going to lose interest. Because how incredibly hot he might be, she was scared.

The constant clenching of her chest that had been there for months felt a bit heavier. There just seemed no way to win, like the ground had started falling away all around her and she could not escape, only watch it happen.

Maybe she could ask Mr Holmes if he wanted to touch himself, like Anthony had done. Maybe that would buy her time.

Time for what?
Her lips pressed together, she wiped some sweat off her forehead. Cleaning the floor was heavier work than she had anticipated. Breathing deeply a couple of times, she picked up the bucket and moved it a few steps further down the corridor. When she put it down, the metal end of the handle caught her skirt and tore it.

She inspected the torn fabric -luckily not very obvious due to the plaits- and saw that it would prove difficult to mend.

"Damn it."

"Don't curse Liv. It doesn't suit you."

As she looked up, she saw Peter and Billy coming down the corridor, holding hands.

"Good morning."

"Took us a while to find you. Mrs Pipkins didn't want us to disturb your work."

"She takes floors very seriously."

They smiled. Peter did the talking and Billy looked very distracted, only paying attention to the hand firmly grasping his.

"We were wondering if you could help us out."

"Of course. How?"

"Well, ehm… Billy doesn't have a key to 221 anymore, and it's locked… and we were hoping to… well, you know, be alone for a bit, because it's Valentine's Day and everything."

Peter was blushing now and Olivia couldn't help but notice how utterly happy they looked together, absolutely glowing in each other's company.

"It's just that we can't really be together at his house, and my-"

"No you don't have to explain. You can have my key. Just a sec," Olivia said as she walked over to where she had left her bag in the windowsill. A sudden light-headedness flooded her for a moment and she had to steady herself by placing a hand against the wall until it passed.

"Are you ill?" Peter asked, looking concerned as she separated the key from her keychain.

"No, I'm fine, really." She smiled again and handed him the key to their moment of privacy. "Have fun."

He couldn't suppress a grin and took hold of Billy's hand once again. Together they walked down the corridor to their unique moment of privacy in the still quiet school.

As their footsteps echoed away, her eyes crossed the door to Mr Holmes' office, but she knew it would be empty. With a sigh, she picked up the mop and continued her work.

Lestrade realised just in time what was about to happen. It would have ended quite dramatically had he not been in time. It would have probably ended with somebody needing stitches or worse.
They were in Mycroft's headquarters and Sherlock was ranting at one of the investigators. The two had been getting on each other's nerves from the beginning and the lack of progress in the case put everyone increasingly on edge. Sherlock was just the first one to go over it.

Greg hadn't heard exactly, but the man had said something about Sherlock going back to his kids experiment because he was useless here. His feet had been just fast enough to get across the room and grab the detective's arm before he punched.

"Sherlock calm down! Bloody hell!"

Thankfully he did seem to get through to the man and there was no further attempt at violence. Still, Lestrade shoed the investigator and his colleagues out so that Sherlock could rant without an audience.

"They don't understand Greg! I need to visit crime scenes! I need more data!"

"You're not allowed to go. Mycroft gave strict orders. You know he'll throw you off the case if you do. You already pissed him off the other day with your burglary."

Sherlock ignored him and started pacing the office like a tiger in captivity, scrunching his face and rubbing his temples. He let out something between a shout and a cry. His eyes were frantic, blue, searching orbs.

"Tell me again," he said.

"Oh Jesus no, we've done this so many times," Greg moaned. Silently he was getting slightly worried about Sherlock's behaviour.

"Tell me again!"

With a sigh, the DI leaned back against the edge of a desk and started recounting the basic facts.

"We have a few nondescript phone calls between some of Moriarty's old acquaintances. Not traceable. No news of the man himself."

Sherlock nodded.

"God, sometimes I think it might not be him at all."

Sherlock raised his hand theatrically as if to hurt Lestrade from a distance.

"Talk about the deaths," he said with a threatening voice.

Lestrade focused.

"There have been seventy three known cases across England."

"Yes" The pacing continued.

"All overdosed using the same drug, known as M."

"Yes"

"No cases abroad."

"An irregular group of people. Not all typical addicts. All ages, all walks of life. Completely
Sherlock pointed a frantic finger at him. "No no no not random. It can't be random."

"What if it is random? People take drugs. This is a dangerous variety. People die. There isn't a pattern."

"As I told you, it can't be!" Sherlock hit a desk with his fist. "This is Moriarty. Nothing is random."

Greg sighed. "Well, that's all we know."

"You are completely useless!" Sherlock said furiously, continuing his restless circle around the office.

Lestrade pressed his fingers to his tired eyes. "God I wish John was here. He always has this magical patience with you."

Suddenly, Sherlock stopped dead in his tracks and Lestrade caught a murmured "John" coming from his lips as he peered at the pictures of the dead.

"John, John, of course it is…"

Right then, the detective disappeared into the great halls of his mind palace. He stopped moving completely, and slowly lifted his fingers to his lips. His eyes, however, rapidly moved from left to right.

With a hopeful feeling Greg sat down to watch.

Olivia leaned against the wall and peered at what she had done so far. It was a pitiful result. She was only halfway through the corridor, the floor didn't appear any cleaner, and it had taken her a full hour. It probably had something to do with her shaking hands, her aching head, and the fact that she could hear the blood rushing in her ears. Here and there a black spot danced across her field of vision.

Then she saw Mr Brook coming around the corner. He had given her an extra acting lesson on Tuesday, practicing a scene from his modern version of Anthony and Cleopatra. He had been very excited about it and had shown her the designs for the stage that he had Eric draw for him. It was beautiful and got her more excited about being in his play.

"Good morning Mr Brook."

"Hello Olivia. I was going to ask if you feel like having a cup of tea, but you look like you are going to faint."

A cool hand was rested on her forehead a few seconds.

"You're burning up my dear. Do you feel faint?"

She nodded, only half aware that there was a fuss being made over her. She didn't want to have the flu. The light-headedness had been relatively easy to ignore, but not being able to keep standing
without holding on to something might pose a problem for staying at school.

"Any nausea?"

She shook her head.

"Ok, stay here, don't move. I'll ask Mr Holmes to call your dad. He must have the number."

Olivia didn't have the energy to tell him that Mr Holmes wasn't there. She just closed her eyes for a moment.

What felt like only one second later, both Mr Brook and Mr Watson were peering at her. Again, a hand on her forehead, and one checking her pulse.

"Yep, you definitely have a fever," Mr Watson said. "Do you think you can walk a bit?"

She nodded and felt a hand on each side holding her arms as she let go of the wall. They started slowly walking down the corridor and when Mr Watson said she should lay on the sofa in 221 to wait for her dad, an alarm went off in the back of her head. It took about ten seconds before she realised why this was not a good idea at all. Unfortunately by that time they were already dangerously close to the storage room.

"No. We can't… I don't want to wait there."

"Why not?" Mr Watson raised his eyebrows.

Her mind wasn't exactly helping her come up with an excuse. It felt like wading knee-deep through mud.

"I just don't want… please don't go in there," she tried, attempting to give a meaningful stare that would make Mr Watson understand that there was something private going on and that he should completely ignore it.

Of course he'd never ignore it.

He stepped towards the door while Mr Brook stayed close to Olivia in case she fainted.

Olivia felt like she should do something, grab the key from Mr Watson's hands or scream, but for some reason she couldn't move. What if they were really…? What if they were expelled for indecency? It would be her fault. Billy's mum would be furious and she didn't even know her son was in love with a boy.

She watched Mr Watson's calm movements as he opened the door and stepped inside. A few shocked sounds came from the room, followed by Mr Watson shifting his gaze to the floor.

"Mr Watson!" she heard Peter shriek, "We… I'm so sorry. We weren't-.."

Mr Watson turned back and walked out into the corridor. "Keep your explanations for later. Make yourself decent." He looked very much annoyed.

Olivia regained her voice. "Please don't be angry with them Mr Watson. I lent them the key because they don't have anywhere to be alone, and it's Valentine's Day and-"

Peter came out of the room in haste, fully dressed. "This is entirely my fault! Olivia was just being nice, and I totally talked Billy into it. He didn't really do anything. Please don't call his mum."
Billy also stepped out into the corridor, his face as red as could be. He didn't say anything.

Mr Watson sighed deeply. "Everyone to my office."

When they got to his office, Mr Brook quickly excused himself, as class was about to start. They were told to sit down on the sofa while Mr Watson sat opposite them on an armchair. He told his secretary he didn't wish to be disturbed. He didn't offer them tea.

For a moment he just looked at them with a serious expression.

"When I put those sofas in that room almost two years ago, I meant 221 to be a place for some pupils to rest, to study, to talk, not a place to nourish sexual relationships."

"We understand but-"

Mr Watson raised his hand. "No Peter, let me finish. I get that it is difficult for you to find a safe and private place to be together but that happens to many kids your age. Also those that are in heterosexual relationships. I will not allow this school to be used for those purposes. It's against the rules. I don't care what you do, but please… please do it outside the school grounds."

They nodded meekly.

"Good, because this is not something I want to catch you doing again."

"Please don't call my mum, Mr Watson." Billy whispered. His cheeks were wet with tears and his mouth was quivering.

Mr Watson's expression turned from stern into compassionate like melting snow.

"She doesn't know about your relationship with Peter, I gather?"

The tearful boy shook his head. "She’ll be so upset".

The headmaster took a deep breath and thought for a moment.

"Alright, I have a compromise. I have to call her to tell her about the incident, that's my responsibility. But… I do not have to tell her with whom it happened."

Billy visibly relaxed. "Thank you Mr Watson."

"But I do expect she will be asking you about it, and I advise you to tell her the truth, because I have never seen a case in which parents did not find out about something like this eventually."

Billy nodded.

"And if you want, we can tell her together, or if she's upset I can ask her to come by so we can talk about it. It's up to you. Think about it."

Then John got up and told the boys to go to class.

"So we don't have detention?" Peter asked.

"No, I think you've been scared enough."

Relieved, the boys left the office.
Olivia stayed behind, slouching on the sofa and ready to fall asleep.

Mr Watson let the new nurse, Mrs Brown, check her blood pressure and temperature while he called her dad. She was a robust lady with firm hands and a no-nonsense attitude, probably very capable but lacking the warmth John and Mary always brought to their work. Olivia's fever was at 39.8 °C, which made the wrinkles in the lady's forehead a bit more pronounced. After giving her some water and aspirin, she left.

Olivia looked at the key that was lying on his desk.

"You're not getting that back. You disappointed me and you haven't been using it lately, so let's see how things go without." It was clearly not a suggestion.

Then he asked about her ribs and whether the painkillers were helping. Olivia remembered how few pills were still left.

"Could I have some more?" she asked.

Mr Watson frowned. "I don't think so. Those ribs should be well on the way to recovery. Do they still feel sore?"

"A bit."

"Well, that's natural. I'm not giving you more powerful medication just because you're uncomfortable. If you still feel them a week from now you should visit Mrs Brown and she will take a look."

She nodded quietly, hoping her question had not alarmed him.

It took her dad a full hour to get to school. In the meantime Mr Watson had sat at his desk, working, while Olivia sat quietly on the sofa with her glass of water. When Mr Edwards arrived he was very worried, fussing over her and draping his coat around her, making her feel as if she was suffocating.

"I'm sorry for making you wait Mr Watson. I had a visitor," he said apologetically.

Then he noticed the tare in his daughter's skirt. He reached for the fabric but Olivia grabbed it and held her skirt close.

"Olivia, what did you do? Do you think I have a money tree in the backyard? These uniforms are expensive! You should be more careful."

"I tore it on the cleaning bucket. Sorry."

"We do have a small fund for school necessities, Mr Edwards," Mr Watson interjected. "If you have difficulty paying for her uniform we can help you."

Mr Edwards laughed it off. "No, no John, thank you but I can manage my own finances. I'm just trying to teach my child to take care of her things, that's all."

They took the bus.

At home, her dad took her coat and even with her half lidded eyes Olivia noticed his hands were trembling. As she glanced in the direction of the living room, she noticed that the round coffee table had been knocked over, the lamp shattered on the floor. There might have been more damage
but she couldn't see as he pushed her towards the stairs.

"What happened to the living room?"

"Oh nothing. Accident. Don't worry about it."

He helped her up the stairs, laid her in bed and took off her shoes while he whispered soothing words.

"Lay down. I will get you some water and medicine."

She listened to him rummage around in the kitchen downstairs. She was glad to be in bed, to be able to close her eyes and soothe her headache.

Suddenly he was back in her room. "Here you go. Made you some tea with sugar. I already put the tablets in."

She took the mug and it was already drinking temperature.

"Mr Watson already gave me some medication," she said weakly.

"Oh it will be fine. It's just for the fever. What are these?" He was looking at the pills on her bedside table.

"Painkillers, for my ribs."

She was a bit anxious to mention her ribs. Her fight with Joan had not gone down well with her father and Sebastian. During his visit last Friday Seb had said her father should not let her go to friends after school anymore, but after he left she had begged her father to reconsider. She only had one evening a week as it was. Grudgingly he had agreed with the condition she would not break any rules again.

"You should take some of those as well then." He grabbed the package and took two pills out.

"I don't think I'm supposed to combin-"

"Just take them."

He gently pushed the pills between her lips one by one and she swallowed.

~

"So, if you separate the cases where there was no known drug habit from the ones who had been using regularly, you can see that in twenty two cases the overdose was completely unexpected. All family members had no idea and were shocked to find out that it was caused by drugs."

"Yes, so? That doesn't mean anything. Now you're just inventing patterns yourself", Greg replied.

Sherlock was standing in front of a big map of England. He had resurfaced from the depths of his mind palace and Greg was waiting for the big breakthrough to come from his mouth. Up until now all he’d said was pretty useless. And Greg was getting impatient.
Sherlock continued. "Keep your thoughts to yourself until you have something useful to contribute. I've read all of their case files, and each and every one of these people is a reference to me, Greg. They either have an academic connection, like this chemistry scholar, a professional connection, such as this pathologist, or a personal one." He held up the file of the soldier.

"Oh bullshit, Sherlock. You always think serial killers are in love with you. You're not the centre of his universe, you know. If you would reread the fifty other files you would find a connection to you in each of them if that's what you wanted to see."

Sherlock ignored him. "Now, if you look at their locations, you can see that the fifty one addicts, the blue pins, are mostly concentrated in cities and poorer areas, like you would expect. But if you take the twenty one unexpected overdoses, the red pins, you can see that they are quite evenly distributed over the southern part of England, cities and villages. Rich and poor areas."

Greg was worried that Sherlock had suffered some sort of brain damage. "I hate to say it, but this is still completely useless. Of course the ones who aren't addicts will geographically differ from the ones who are."

A deep and impatient sigh and the bouncing of a knee. "I'm not finished. Let me add the final variable. These are ordered chronologically, aren't they?"

Sherlock didn't wait for a reply and picked up the top file on the stack, read, and jotted down a date next to a red pin somewhere near Ipswich. He continued silently, picking up the files and adding dates to pins, his movements no longer frantic, but composed and concentrated.

As Lestrade watched him work, he slowly realized what was happening. Sherlock was moving around the map, the dates appearing one after the other. What had started in Ipswich three months ago, had moved to Peterborough, Birmingham, Hereford, Newport, Salisbury, South Downs National Park, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Southend-on-Sea, Braintree, Bedford, Oxford, Basingstoke, and onwards, in a huge spiral, like a serpent curling itself around its prey.

Lestrade felt a chill run down his spine.

"We need to call Mycroft."

~

John opened his eyes and noticed he had missed three questions in the game show they'd been watching. He sat up and reached for his tea.

"You alright love?"

"Yes, I'm fine."

He smiled at Mary and their baby that was still safely inside her. They were on the sofa after dinner, watching crap telly and cuddling.

"Oh I almost forgot. Sherlock called while you were in the shower. He said he's found a pattern. He won't be coming in tomorrow."

John sighed. "Let's hope this whole Moriarty case will be over soon. It's all he can think of."
"Are you worried about him?"

"Sometimes. I do believe he's learnt from last summer. But Mycroft is pushing him and I don't like it."

"Do you secretly wish you could work on the case with him?"

It took a few heartbeats for John to answer.

"Yes," he said quietly.

Mary nudged his cheek with her nose and he turned his face so she could kiss him. They kissed languidly for a few minutes until John settled his head on her breast and they continued watching the telly. When the contestant had lost his prize by making a bad choice just before the end, John switched it off.

"Sometimes I wonder why parents are so much more difficult than children. You want to help them do the right thing, teach their children right and wrong, and then they screw it all up again."

Mary frowned. "What happened?"

He told her about Billy's fear of his mother's judgement and about finding the boys in 221.

"What were they doing?"

"There were some hands down pants but nothing too serious."

"Two young people making love. Imagine the horror," she chuckled.

"It's a school, Mary, not a shady nightclub."

"And you never did such thing at school did you?"

John smiled. Mary knew about him getting caught with a girl in the changing rooms once. His parents had been disappointed, the head of school furious.

"Have they had sex ed class? Seems like its already long overdue with this group."

"No. Somehow I don't feel comfortable letting Sherlock do that. I don't think he wants to, either."

"He would describe it so technically they would be put off sex for years."

John chuckled, set his tea back down and cuddled up against his wife, stroking her big belly. She was seven months pregnant now and he couldn't wait to meet his child. It would be the most perfect human being on earth. He whispered with his eyes fixed on the warm bump in which the baby was sleeping.

"Our baby is going to be loved no matter what."

"And it will never feel like it can't tell us absolutely everything." He thought of Olivia, never willing to show her deepest inner feelings or thoughts.

"And it will never be judged by us." He thought of Joan Davies, who was constantly being pressured by her parents to get top marks for every single subject.

Slowly, Mary fingers crept into his hair, soothingly stroking him.
"And it will never be bullied." Peter in a hospital bed, his face torn up and his body bruised.

"And it will never feel pain." Billy, curled up in some big house, trying to avoid the blows form his father.

"And it will never take drugs." Sherlock, comatose on the sofa of 221B.

His eyes were filled with tears now.

"And it will never be hurt by anyone." He sniffed.

Mary knew exactly all the people her husband was thinking of.

"And then it will never have lived, my dear."

Her soft lips pressed onto his head. "But you and I will give it the best chance a child could ever have."

~

"You should drink the rest of your tea. You need stay hydrated," his voice came from beside her bed.

Olivia lifted the mug to her lips again but she could hardly hold it. The room was spinning and her dad had blurred a bit at the edges. His hand came up to help her drain the last of the tea and he set the mug down on the bedside table.

"Sssshhhh. You're alright."

His hands came back to help her out of her jumper. It was tugged over her chest and shoulders, and then it was off. He folded it neatly and placed it on the chair. Then he started unbuttoning her shirt, barely touching her. She just wanted to sleep and didn't care that she was still wearing her uniform, but didn't have the energy to protest, until his fingers reached under her skirt to tug at her tights.

Her eyes widened and she started squirming. Why were her arms so heavy? She wanted him to stop but had no strength to do so.

"Dad? I don't need… no… I want to sleep."

Her feet touched cold air.

"Yes honey. You can go to sleep. Don't worry." His voice was low and soft.

The skin on her stomach was suddenly also cold. Why hadn't she seen this coming? Why had she taken those pills? From his touch on her soft stomach she noticed the trembling of his fingers again and she continued to fight to stay awake. All the little hairs on her body stood up, her muscles tensed, her entire being hyper alert of his touch.

He didn't speak to her anymore, didn't look at her face.

Olivia started crying.
Chapter End Notes

Thank so much to everyone who has kept reading! The comments and kudos mean a lot!

Just to warn you, this fic will get darker and darker before Olivia and Sherlock will get a break.

Updates are quite irregular but will happen.
There were no tares in her clothing, no bruises, no scratches, no stains, and no physical pain. Only the vague memory of his hushed voice and his clammy hands on her stomach before everything went black.

The combination of pills knocked her out for the night and most of the next day. The long shower afterwards didn't feel like it was cleaning her at all and it had her stand under the hot spray for ages, staring at the tiles.

The rest of the weekend she tried to occupy herself in her barricaded room. He knocked on her door, asking if she wanted something to eat. It seemed like ages before he finally gave up.

~

John and Mary were having a lazy Sunday napping, browsing through new parents magazines, making very satisfying (but careful) love, walking through the park, and drinking tea. They were sitting in the kitchen having a late home-ordered Chinese dinner, chatting softly about unimportant things, when the bell rang and Sherlock let himself in five seconds later. He was all tousled curls and swishing dark coat as usual.

"Hi Sherlock," Mary said.

"Why didn't you open the door?" he asked agitatedly, walking to the kitchen window and casting a quick glance into the street.

"If you'd have been able to wait five more seconds I would have. Try it next time. We could have been having sex."

"Surely not at this time of day John. At this time you're either hungry, having dinner, or napping after dinner." Sherlock said while peering at the cars parked nearby. He ignored his friend's huff and walked back to the dining table.

"John, do you still have your gun?" he saked.

"Yes… you're not borrowing it."

"I don't intend to. Where is it?"

"Bedroom."

"Loaded?"

"Yes."

"Good."
Sherlock finally relaxed a little bit.

"Lovely to see you love. Do you want some Chinese food?" Mary asked.

John cut in. "Wait, what the hell is going on Sherlock?"

"No thanks," Sherlock replied to Mary, but pulled up a chair anyway.

He looked like he could use some nutrients. And some sleep. Not even to mention soap.

Over the next hour he proceeded to tell John and Mary about the newfound information in the Moriarty case, occasionally taking questions and taking tiny bites of the food Mary had shoveled onto a plate for him. John grew concerned by the things he said, his eyes training on Sherlock and the wrinkles between his eyebrows appearing. Mary took his hand underneath the table.

"So he's moving in our direction?"

"Towards London, yes. Mycroft didn’t want me to bother you with this, but I… thought you might want to know when to move to a safe house. We can roughly predict the location of the next victim, so we'll know when-"

John firmly put the fork, which he hadn't been using for a few minutes, down on his plate.

"I'm not hiding for that bastard", he said firmly.

After a moment Sherlock continued. "That's what I thought you would say. And we don't even know whether Moriarty will target you. Mycroft's increasing your surveillance status from orange to red to be sure."

"Oh… good to know."

Normally, this would be the moment Sherlock said he had work to do and leave in the same dramatic flourish he had arrived, but he sat at the table and stole a few more bites.

After dinner, when Sherlock sat awkwardly in the living room, Mary firmly told him go upstairs and take a shower, because he was not going to sleep in their guest bedroom in his state. To John's surprise, he heard Sherlock's footsteps disappear upstairs and a few moments later the sound of running water.

He stopped scrubbing the plate he was holding and let out a puff of air, astonished once again by his wife's person reading skills.

"He always runs off again. Why would he stay now?"

Mary smiled and wrapped her arms around her husband, their baby snugly in between them.

"He wants to be with his family."

~

"So, I know that this was probably not what you were expecting from your very first sex ed class, but by law I wasn't allowed to show you anything more realistic."
Some of the pupils were still shaking with laughter after having seen a condom being rolled over a banana, others were quiet, and some were hiding their faces in embarrassment.

John had asked Mary to give the sex ed talk during Sherlock's Monday morning class so that he could go home and change his clothes. For the moment there were no new leads in the Moriarty case, so he would come and teach the rest of the day.

It was not allowed to show the pupils something remotely close to the real thing (most schools used short videos of the birds and the bees, containing strong warning about trying it yourself), so she had to improvise. She was happy to have at least a mixed class.

She'd started by drawing some pictures of male and female reproductive systems on the blackboard. It was all pretty schematic, but enough to provoke serious embarrassment.

Her talk about menstrual cycles and sperm production was received with big eyes and shocked faces, but her frank and informal way of explaining seemed to work to make them relax after a while.

"I will make sure nurse Brown has condoms in her office that you can take if you think you might need them. Please don't tell your parents about that."

Mary walked around the desk and sat on top of it.

"For the girls, we are not officially allowed to give you contraceptive pills, but as I said, the nurse's office holds many secrets. Please make sure you use protection, because you can get ill or pregnant or both. If you experience any of the symptoms that we discussed and are written in the hand-out I gave you, please see the nurse."

She knew for a fact that at least three of the girls in this class were on the pill, and that none of their parents knew about it.

"Does anyone have any questions?"

Peter hesitantly raised his hand. "Can you get an STD from kissing someone?"

There were some knowing laughs, and Billy buried his face in his arms in embarrassment.

"Does anyone know the answer to that? Joan?"

"You can get herpes if the other person has a cold sore," Joan said without looking at Peter.

"That's right. Sometimes Hepatitis B or Syphilis can be transmitted, but it is less common."

"If you have more private questions or want to get tested for STDs, please come to John or visit the nurse. They won't let you get tested at the hospital without your parents request, but as I said, please ask one of us. More questions?"

"What if a guy doesn't want to wear a condom?" Lucy Griffin was asking.

"Anyone?" Mary asked the room.

"Then he's stupid and you shouldn't sleep with him," Emma said.

This earned a few chuckles. Lucy gave Emma an irritated stare, but then seemed to realise that her classmate was probably right.
"Mr Watson didn't use one, did he Mrs?" someone at the back of the room said.

More people started sniggering and Mary smiled. She was happy to notice that most of the pupils were getting a bit more comfortable with the topic.

"He had my explicit permission not to", she smiled.

"This makes me think of something else though. When someone wants to engage in sexual activity with you, when are they allowed to do so?"

The pupils went a bit quiet.

"Olivia maybe? Any idea?"

Olivia looked like a dear in the headlights, obviously not as comfortable as most of the other pupils.

“What would need to happen first, do you think?” Mary encouraged.

Olivia pressed her lips together tightly and shook her head.

Rose raised her hand.

"Rose?"

"It should happen only when you give your consent."

"Exactly. If you say no and they do it anyway, they're breaking the law. And if you're not sure the other person wants to, you ask. This counts for both boys and girls, understood?"

~

It was around 11 a.m. when Sherlock came into the classroom looking well rested and well fed. There was little bit more colour in his cheeks than the night before. He looked around and raised an eyebrow at the drawings on the blackboard.

"Concerns? These can hardly be more traumatising than the crime scene photographs you show them," Mary said from behind the desk. The kids had left for their next class.

"Oh no. I know enough about these people's private lives to know that this was much needed information. How did it go?" He rested his backside on one of the front row desks, much like John often did during their classroom conversations.

"There was some initial embarrassment, but I think they were quite delighted with the fact that they got straightforward information about this topic. I know many of their parents are too embarrassed and terrified that they will suddenly start having sex with everyone."

"I wouldn't be surprised. They can hardly talk about anything else."

"The one that surprised me slightly was Olivia, actually."

Sherlock cleared his throat and tried to sound casual. "Why's that?"
"She was very quiet. She didn't show any amusement when the others did. She didn't seem to know that you need two consenting people to have sex. And when the bell rang she literally sprinted out the door."

"Oh."

Sherlock had to look at the floor for a moment to process this.

"Do you know if she's ok? I can imagine that she misses her mother even more when it comes to getting advice on things like these. She's been so isolated for the past year."

Sherlock looked at her and saw genuine concern in Mary's eyes.

"I talk to her. I mean I give… we've talked about things."

"She trusts you Sherlock, and I am very glad that you are being so patient and sweet with her. On the other hand I also know that when you're fifteen and infatuated with a teacher, you're not going to want to tell him all about your insecurities or ask him embarrassing questions about sex."

"I- cannot argue with that theory."

"Keep an eye on her, please?"

"I'm her mentor. Of course I will."

As Mary got up and left, Sherlock pulled out the nearest chair and sat down. He scratched his fingers through his hair and wondered how much exactly Olivia wasn't telling him.

~

"Lift up your shirt."

Trying to keep her fingers from trembling, Olivia did, exposing her stomach. Everything inside her screamed no, but she told herself it was worth it. Now nurse Brown only needed to believe her.

It was Wednesday, and after another night of wakefulness, she had gathered up the courage to see the nurse because she was out of painkillers and the bruises on her ribs were rapidly fading. She wasn't the only one visiting the nurse in the past two days. After that horrible sex ed class, quite a few of her classmates had gone for contraceptives or blood tests. She'd found Mary's lecture interesting but it had been awful to hear her classmates talk about their incredibly normal explorations of touching and kissing and relationships. Almost everything said in that class confirmed that she was abnormal, and that everything that was happening was wrong. Very, very wrong. What she didn't know was how to make it right.

The woman's fingers pressed lightly on the now not so bruised area and Olivia concentrated on what she needed to do. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to keep her father out of her head.

"Does that hurt?"

Olivia hissed. "Yes! A lot."

The woman straightened and frowned.
"It's a bit strange. They seem to have healed nicely. The bruising is almost completely gone. Are you sure it's the same type of pain from before?"

She nodded.

"Hmmm." Nurse Brown pulled a contemplative face, making the dark hairs on her upper lip stand out of a moment.

"Get dressed." She turned around and walked back to her desk. Olivia prayed that it was to write her a prescription.

As she pulled her jumper over her head, she noticed the box of condoms sitting on top of one of the cupboards. Mary had strategically positioned it there so that pupils could take them behind the privacy of the screen. Quickly, Olivia grabbed a handful of them and stuffed them into her bag before stepping out into the office with a too fast heartbeat.

Nurse Brown was writing something on a notepad. "Your ribs aren't supposed to hurt like this at this point, so I'm writing you a referral. It's for an X-ray."

"But I don't need an X-ray. I just need those pills Mr Watson gave me."

The woman looked up and shook her head. "Frankly I'm not comfortable giving you such strong medication while we don't even know what's wrong with you. Please give this to your parents so they can take you to the hospital. You can have some aspirin in the meantime." She held out the slip of paper and Olivia took it.

"But they will hurt until I have time to go and get the X-ray."

"Then you should make sure you get it done as soon as possible."

Olivia regarded the nurse, sitting behind her desk with her arms crossed in front of her chest, and knew she was not going to change her mind.

"Do you want to get a second opinion from Mr Watson? He's very busy but I can ask for him."

"No! No I… I have to go to Mr Brook's class."

With a sigh she slung her backpack over her shoulder and quickly walked out of the office.

~

"The people who will be playing Anthony and Cleopatra are Eric and Olivia," Mr Brook beamed to the assembled group of pupils who had auditioned for the play. "The rest of you don't worry, there are enough other parts to play. Our first rehearsal will be next week. Take some time to read the script so that you know what other part you might want to play."

There were quite a few disappointed faces, but none as grave as Eric's. While most pupils grabbed their bag and left, Eric decided to launch an attack.

"Mr Brook! How could you give that part to her? Joan and Lucy were both better than her!"

Olivia made an attempt to leave quietly.
"That's not up to you Mr Walker. Olivia, stay for a moment."

"I know, but this is just not fair! I can't pretend to be in love with a lesbian!"

Suddenly Mr Brook's voice became rather vicious. "Eric! Remember what we agreed. Control and patience." Then he leaned so close to Eric that Olivia couldn't make out what was being said, but Eric quieted down and left.

When Mr Brook turned around to face her, his eyes were kind once again.

"Forgive me Olivia. I've been tutoring Eric but he still has some anger issues. I'm sure he'll come round though. Have a seat."

He removed some props and costumes from two chairs and pulled them up. Olivia wondered what this was about, especially when the man put his hands on his thighs and looked at her with a pitying expression.

"Now, I just wanted to ask you how you're doing, Olivia."

She stopped breathing for half a second.

"I'm fine."

"Of course you'd say that, wouldn't you?" He sighed heavily. Even while she was looking at her knees she could feel his shining dark eyes observing.

"Let me be honest with you. He wouldn't want me to say this, but Sherlock, I mean Mr Holmes, doesn't have much time for you at the moment, so I volunteered to keep an eye on you."

This made her look up.

"Why?"

"Well, because this must be a difficult time for you because today a year ago your mother passed away didn't she? And Mr Holmes is very busy being a detective these days and he wants to make sure someone is looking after you. It’s very nice of him."

Something painful clenched in Olivia's chest.

"So here I am, checking if you're ok. Am I doing it right?" he winked. "But without kidding, I really do hope you're well. I can imagine your dad might be a bit upset today."

"He is, but he'll be fine."

"Of course. He has such a lovely girl to take care of him I can’t imagine he’d be sad for too long."

She gave half a smile. It was nice of Mr Brook to talk to her, even though it was a bit uncomfortable. Her dad had already been crying that morning when she walked into the kitchen to grab a piece of toast. She had only just been able to avoid a hug.

"Are you planning on doing anything special today to commemorate your mother?"

"My dad said he is cooking her favourite dinner tonight."

That wasn't a lie. In her mind he was busy setting a table for two, with fancy plates and wineglasses and candles, like he used to do for her mother on Valentine's day.
"Oh that's a lovely way to remember her." Mr. Brook put his hand on hers and squeezed gently. "I want you to know that I'm thinking of her as well."

His empathy and kindness made her eyes well up. She didn't want him to notice so she withdrew her hand from his grasp and picked up her bag.

"Thank you Mr Brook. I have to go now. My friends are waiting for me."

"Of course. You shouldn't keep them waiting. Just let me know if you've got anything on your mind, alright?"

She nodded and gave him a watery smile before walking away.

~

"What will it be; "The Godfather" or "A Clockwork Orange"?" Lucy asked. She was sitting on top of the backrest of the park bench, popping her chewing gum and stroking Tim's hair. Olivia, Rose, Peter, Billy, and Emma all occupied the bench in one way or another, chewing gum and munching on crisps and generally being bored.

"Godfather," said Billy.

"A Clockwork Orange," said Rose.

"I get to choose the movie because my dad is getting his brain scooped out tomorrow, AND I have this!" Triumphantly Emma held up a little plastic bag of weed. She'd gotten it from Patrick who hadn't stopped smoking it after their school trip to South Downs.

They had few hours to spare before the movie started, and it was spent mostly in the park, smoking, eating junk food, and laughing at each other's stupid jokes.

"What did you mean about your dad and his brain?" Olivia asked Emma when they were sitting together on the bench, alternatively taking drags from a clumsily rolled joint. She felt completely relaxed and couldn't stop smiling. The others were running around among the trees, playing a type of tag with strange made-up rules.

"Well, you know about this brain tumour that he has right? He's going to the hospital to get it taken out. It's pretty risky but we got the best surgeon in town thanks to Mr Holmes."

Olivia almost dropped the joint. "Mr Holmes?"

"Yeah, he was the one who noticed there was something wrong with my dad in the first place, and then he gave us the name of this doctor. He owes him a favour or something."

"That's… nice of him."

Emma hummed in agreement, got up and ran to the small merry-go-round in the sad children's playground. She jumped onto it a pushed on the ground with one leg to make it spin.

"Come on, you should try this!"

Olivia didn't feel like staying behind on the bench alone, so she carefully laid down the still
smouldering cigarette and followed Emma. Once she got onto the platform and leaned against the bar the other girl pushed hard and the grass and trees started spinning around her. Her head felt like it was floating and her hands didn't feel the cold of metal they were holding behind her back. Her stomach did a turn when Emma made the thing go even faster and the trees became whirls of dark browns and greens.

Olivia's entire life faded into the background, as if only the here and now existed. It made everything that was happening feel like a dream, and the things she was doing completely irrelevant and unreal. Only the rush of air against her face, the moving scenery, and Emma’s happy laughter entered her brain. Experimentally, she let go of the metal bar with one hand, lifting it in the air. When she felt like she was steady enough, she released her other hand.

"You're flying!" Emma exclaimed. And that was exactly how it felt. Olivia couldn't stop the wide grin on her face.

Suddenly the structure shook as Emma kicked the ground a few more times and for a moment Olivia could feel her imbalance and thought she might fall. But before the thought manifested itself enough to send fear down her spine, Rose was beside her. A warm arm wrapped around her waist and Olivia kept her arms out, pretending to fly.

"I'm so sorry Liv. I forgot about your mother… it's today right?" Rose had to raise her voice as the others also jumped on and yelled in excitement.

"It's fine Rose! It's absolutely fine. I don't even feel it right now!"

For a while they were a spinning mess of hats and coats and laughter, completely oblivious to passers by or possibly attracting attention. When Emma finally stopped pushing the merry-go-round and everyone was completely disoriented, they sat on the grass for a while before they could stand normally. That's when Rose suggested that they go and see the Godfather after all, because A Clockwork Orange might be a bit too grim for their mood.

"I can't come with you. I don't have any money," Olivia confessed.

Lucy huffed. "Oh, don't worry about that! We'll get you in without a ticket. Tim does it all the time."

Tim nodded proudly.

That is when Olivia completely let go of the knowledge that there was a dinner waiting for her, and how she ended up sneaking into a side door of the cinema, following Tim through the dark rows of seats towards her friends. Between the drug that was running through her veins, the sounds of Billy and Peter kiss in the row behind her, and Lucy and Tim's constant commentary on the actors' performances, she hardly followed the plot of the movie. About halfway through she entwined her fingers with Rose's, laid her head on her friend's shoulder, and closed her eyes. The only thing she felt was the incredible happiness for not being at home tonight.

Chapter End Notes

I personally loved writing this chapter even though there is no interaction between Sherlock and Olivia. Hope you enjoyed it!
"What now?!" Greg moaned as he heard reserved but determined knock on the door.

It opened about three inches and a calm voice spoke to him, the person in question keeping conveniently out of flying-object range.

"There is a Mr Holmes on the phone sir."

"I told you no visits or phone calls. Is that so much to ask for?"

He didn't get much sleep these days, dividing his time between Scotland Yard and the Moriarty case for Mycroft, scrambling to get some time in between with his wife and kids. On a quiet afternoon like this he permitted himself a short nap in the office, trusting that the man on the other side of the door would guard it for him.

"It seems to be a rather pressing matter sir."

Greg sighed. Willikins had been doing his best to let him have his afternoon nap and succeeding quite well, as most people around the office were familiar the hidden depths of his assistant and avoided pissing him off at all costs. The Holmeses on the other hand, wouldn't be intimidated.

"Which Holmes is it?"

"The more respectable one." Willikins always had had distaste for Sherlock's rudeness and never made much effort to disguise it.

"Alright then, put him through", Greg said with a sigh.

The door closed and his phone rang. Greg took his feet off his desk and picked up.

"Mycroft. What's up?" He enjoyed using informalities with Mycroft Holmes, knowing it would irritate him. With a man like this it was the small victories that kept his authority bearable.

"Detective Inspector, I expect you in my office within the hour. It seems like we can add another red pin to my brother's map."

"Oh… that's sooner than expected."

"Indeed it is. You wouldn't mind picking up Sherlock on your way would you?"

When Greg put the phone down, Willikins was already walking in with his coat.

"Have a splendid evening sir."

Greg could never really tell whether the man was being sarcastic or not.
As he drove onto the darkened schoolyard he was happy to see the lights were still on. He'd called John to make sure Sherlock was still in. Apparently he was due for a physical check-up that afternoon.

John was making his last round through the school and pointed him in the right direction, saying they’d just finished.

When Greg got closer to the nurses office he could hear a voice that definitely did not belong to Sherlock. Peeking around the corner, he could see that it was Richard's. He was standing a bit too close to Sherlock, who was doing up his last shirt button and reaching for his jacket at the same time.

"Is that all? You're 'worried' about her because she went out with her friends? Because someone died a year ago? Please don't waste my time Richard. I'm her mentor. I don't need to know everything she does out of school hours." Sherlock said.

"Hmmm. She didn't say anything to you? I assumed she'd share everything, knowing how close you two are."

Richard came closer, almost touching Sherlock's cheek, his mouth close to his ear. Sherlock's hands clench into fists and Greg could almost see him squirm.

"Tell me. Has she started fighting you yet?"

Greg got an unpleasant feeling in his stomach and decided that he should make his presence known before Sherlock could punch Richard in the face. He cleared his throat and the two men snapped their heads towards him.

"Hi Richard, sorry to interrupt. Sherlock…” he gestured with a nod to the corridor that Sherlock should come with him. Normally this blatant command would have raised some resistance within the genius, but not now, when it offered him a narrow escape from getting himself fired for using violence against a colleague.

Sherlock seemed to be fuming within the walls of his mind palace, following Greg outside while completely absorbed in his own tormented world. He got into the car without question, and stared blindly ahead biting his thumbnail as they drove.

After a few minutes curiosity got the better of Greg.

"So, one of your pupils misbehaving?"

Sherlock finally snapped out of his troubled dream-state.

"What?"

"Richard. What was he talking about?"

"He's just jealous of anyone who gets my attention after I rejected him at Christmas" Sherlock said with a dismissive waive.
"Alright, so who is getting your attention? He was referring to a specific pupil."

Sherlock sighed dramatically as if Greg was asking him for his life story. He leaned back and settled into his seat.

"Olivia, she's in my mentor group. She's gone off with some friends while she wasn't supposed to. She's bright enough to take care of herself though. Now where are we going? Why did I agree to get into this car?"

Greg smirked. This was obviously as much as Sherlock would say about the matter although his hurried speech suggested he was at least a little bit worried.

~

The moment they stopped in front of Mycroft's building, Sherlock jumped out of the car and stalked to the door. It slammed closed before Greg could make it inside. When he finally got to the office, having been let in by one of the staff, Mycroft was sitting at his desk, looking grim and a bit tired, although his desk was as tidy as usual.

"Greg, Sherlock, good of you to arrive so promptly. The latest victim seems a bit out of place. We haven't been able to fit her in with the rest of the victims who had a link to you, but I am hoping you can shed some light on that."

"Alright, tell me." Sherlock said as he started pacing the office like a boxer before a fight, possibly to show Lestrade how extremely focused and ready he was. The next 30 seconds would completely disprove that though.

Mycroft opened the file.

"The latest 'irregular' overdose victim is a teenage girl, approximately 14 years of age. Found with the needle still attached to her arm," he announced.

From the place he had taken next to the big Victorian window, Greg watched Sherlock. It was fascinating to see those already pale cheeks drain from all colour and those normally piercing eyes searching to find a point of focus. The man held onto the mantelpiece for a few seconds before he was able to form words.

"Name?" It came out choked.

Mycroft raised an eyebrow. "We haven't been able to identify her yet-"

Sherlock stuck out his hand in a desperately demanding gesture. "Photographs. Give them to me."

Mycroft picked up the file and passed it to Sherlock's trembling fingers, not understanding why his brother was so affected.

Greg also wondered what caused Sherlock to be so visibly distressed. His eyebrows were reaching for each other, only separated by creases in his forehead. His eyes were over focused, bordering on frantic. Every muscle in his body was tensed up. What exactly made him care so much? He’d dealt with several dead children in previous cases. Did he know who the victim was? His brilliant mind would have come up with dozens of possibilities by now, but something told Greg Sherlock was
only thinking of one.

Within seconds of grabbing the file the pages were scanned and Sherlock's shoulders visibly relaxed, his breathing calmer. He stretched his neck once and refocused on reading the file, finally able to regain his composure somewhat.

After a minute or two he snapped it closed and passed the paper to Greg. The pictures on the first page were of a teenage girl, with long light brown hair.

A quick read over the details told him that the girl had been found in Reigate, alone in an alley next to some bins. She'd had nothing on her except for the school uniform she was wearing.

Sherlock sat down in one of the luxurious armchairs while Greg's brain put two and two together.

"But this is… this is Olivia."

Sherlock didn't look at either of them.

"Olivia? Mycroft enquired, obviously annoyed that he was missing information.

"Well, it isn't her, but she looks a lot like her. She's a pupil at St Francis, one of Sherlock's mentees. She ran off today apparently."

Mycroft rolled his eyes at the ceiling. "And following his own theory I can conclude that this child has some significance to my brother?"

Sherlock gave Mycroft a scowl, which was received with a thoughtful expression.

"I do recall a girl like this outside your door on one occasion. I wonder if it was she. I sent her away assuming she was one of your homeless friends. She looked like she'd not had access to a bath in a while and didn't appear to understand all that much of what I was saying."

Sherlock's expression was absolutely thunderous.

"You dismissed her", he growled.

"I didn't think a child like that could be of any importance to you, but the distress in your voice tells me you actually care for her." Mycroft's disapproval was tangible.

For the second time in an hour Lestrade feared Sherlock would become violent. His long and normally so elegant fingers were gripping the armrests of the ridiculous chair so hard that his knuckles turned white. Greg knew he'd better keep his mouth shut this time. It wasn't good to be caught in between the brothers, not to say dangerous.

"When?"

"Christmas Day, if I remember correctly."

Of course he remembered correctly.

"Did she tell you why she was there?"

"She didn't say much at all, but it hardly matters, does it? It was months ago and I'm sure that whatever it was has already been resolved. Although I do suggest that in the future you don’t disclose your personal address to your pupils. Now I suggest we get back to more pressing matters such as finding new leads to our serial killer."
To Greg’s relief Sherlock took a few deep breaths and calmed himself.

They proceeded to analyse the case and Sherlock managed to regain his focus. He demanded to be more involved with the fieldwork and surprisingly, Mycroft agreed.

Lestrade called his wife to tell her he wouldn't be coming home that any time soon.

~

It was 8am when Greg parked his car outside a pharmacy in Notting Hill and rubbed his tired eyes for a moment. It had been an exhausting all-nighter with Mycroft. Only Mycroft, because Sherlock had been forced to leave around midnight. The detective had smelled blood on the dead girl's neighbour, and had continued interrogating him in a way that Lestrade feared could be considered assault and a lot of work for Mycroft if the man decided to press charges. He suspected Sherlock hadn't actually smelled blood but that he was frustrated that he didn't. The man didn't know anything and it frustrated him so much he lost control. His departure had been accompanied with lots of shouting and a near fistfight with his brother.

Because Mycroft didn't want to involve too many other investigators for security reasons, it was taking ages to track down all persons related to the victim and find leads in the new information. It would have been much faster with Sherlock, but after taking evidence home last week and his behaviour with the suspect Mycroft wasn't going to let him back in anytime soon. This was more than a cooling down period and it was probably for the best, Greg considered, because Sherlock wasn't himself. Or at least he wasn't in control of himself.

Shivering, Greg got out of his car and crossed the road to enter the warmth of the store, hoping they would have his wife's antidepressants in stock. Even though she said she could do without them, she didn't want to take any risks now their marriage was on the mend (at least that's how he interpreted the smile he received from her last weekend).

He got a number and as he waited his turn to go up to the counter, he caught sight of a familiar head of unruly hazelnut hair in the corner of the store.

Frowning, he tried to think of a reason why one of Sherlock's pupils, and especially Olivia, would be alone in this part of town at this time of morning. Had she seriously been out all night?

For a moment, he observed her from the parallel isle as she was obviously looking for something. Her lips were mumbling the names of the medication she was looking at. She was wearing her uniform but it looked like it could do with a bit of ironing.

He wondered how she was holding up, knowing a little bit about her family situation and having gained more insight into how much she depended on the support at school. Her mentor was getting less dependable by the day and John was quite distracted by his unborn child. She was about the same age as one of Greg's own daughters and he couldn't imagine what it would be like to lose a parent at that age, still so young and innocent and—what the hell was she doing?

The boxes of pills she had been holding disappeared straight into her backpack. Greg was so surprised that she almost beat him to the exit.

He stuck out his arm and leaned against the doorpost to block her way.
"Olivia, good morning. What are you doing all the way in Notting Hill? I thought you lived quite close to school."

Her big brown eyes widened as she recognised him and her mouth opened long before any words crossed her lips.

"I - I was at a sleepover."

"Oh, your dad must be very easy going to let you go on a sleepover on a school night."

"Yes, I guess."

"What I don't understand is why you are busy stealing medication rather than on your way to class, which starts in -let me see- 18 minutes."

Out of the corner of his eye he could see the pharmacist looking up, alarmed.

"I'm not… I mean… I am on my way," she stammered "I just needed something but I couldn't find it."

She tried leaning in a little to see if he might step aside so they could at least go outside, but Greg didn't move an inch and his features turned a little stern.

This girl was becoming more intriguing to Greg by the hour. When he first met her all those weeks ago when she was running to class she had appeared terrified of Sherlock, but John had mentioned in passing that Sherlock more than anyone had been able to get through to her, enabling them to arrange appropriate professional help for her and her dad. She trusted her self-centred sociopathic science teacher enough to tell him about her father's drinking problem and even knew where to find him out of school. Yesterday, Richard had been talking about her, although Greg hadn't caught quite enough of the conversation to know why Sherlock was so pissed off. Then he had almost had a heart attack when the possibility arose that Olivia might be the latest Moriarty victim, even though the chances were very slim according to his own theory. And now he found her miles away from home, stealing medication and lying her arse off to none other than a Detective Inspector.

"Olivia, I want to have a look in your bag."

"What's going on sir?" the pharmacist had left his spot at the counter and come to stand next to them. "Is she stealing?"

"Hello sir." Greg flashed his badge. "I can't draw any conclusions until I've inspected her backpack," he said with a pleasant smile.

The man huffed. "I can't believe the age of kids stealing these days. Don't they have any other place to be? Didn't your parents tell you not to steal?"

"But I didn't do anything. I swear." Olivia's voice was soft and desperate and directed at the floor.

"Well, then you won't mind showing me, won't you?" his asking hand hovered calmly in the air between them.

Quickly Olivia let her eyes shift from side to side, searching for an escape. Lestrade let out a burst of air through his nose as he followed her gaze.

"Running away right now would be the most stupid thing you could do. The chance of you being faster than me is non-existent and I know your name and where you go to school. Moreover,
attempting escape would make this a much more grave offence."

With a quivering breath, Olivia let her backpack down from her shoulder and handed it over to his much bigger hands. It didn't take more than a two seconds for the white boxes of sleeping pills to surface.

"Those are the strongest ones we have without prescription. I'm not even allowed to sell that many at once!" The pharmacist exclaimed as he took the five white boxes from Lestrade. "You are much more deceitful than you look, young lady. I don't even want to know what you were up to with these things!"

"I'm sorry," she said in a squeaky voice.

"Well that's not enough! I expect there will be consequences for this, officer."

Lestrade turned to him. "Detective Inspector. I will make sure appropriate disciplinary measures are taken. If you wish to press charges, make sure to call this number." He handed him his card. "For now she is coming with me."

He took Olivia's arm and directed her out the door and across the street. At his car he released her and opened the door to the passenger seat. Her eyes peered at him as if he was going to imprison her for the rest of her life.

"Come on, get in, or do I need to handcuff you?"

She swallowed, got in and he took his place on the other side.

"Seatbelt. Good."

"Aren't you going to read me my rights?"

Greg chuckled. "I see that you paid attention during my lecture, but no. I would have arrested you if you'd tried to run though. What's your address?"

She looked at him and he could see the wheels of her brain whirring behind her frightened eyes. Her lips remained pressed tightly together, probably afraid of what her father would say when he found out.

He sighed impatiently. "Ok, fine. I'm driving you to school, I'll write out a warning, and then I'm going to call your father and have a word. I'm sure Sherlock has all the contact details. He should be there by now."

Olivia remained silent and gazed out of the window.

"How were you going to get to school anyway? If you don't have money for those pills I doubt you have any for a bus."

He dropped a brown paper lunch bag in her lap.

"Walk," she said.

Mr Lestrade nodded to the road. "Excellent idea. Get everyone nice and worried until you turn up at school two hours late." He glanced at her. "Now please stop crying and eat that sandwich."

The girl wiped her eyes with her sleeve and did what he asked.
During the car ride to school Greg gave Olivia a speech on how different things were when he was her age and how young people these days have no respect for authority. He kept it mild, because in the back of his mind he knew that the girl's actions were driven by something. Children didn't just go stealing because they felt like it, especially not medication. He thought about the worry in Sherlock's eyes the day before and the dead girl in Reigate. Sherlock had been afraid, even if it was just for a moment, that it was Olivia. It had completely shaken him up.

Arriving at school late, the police car went relatively unnoticed and Olivia ran inside, to the familiar safe haven of the building. When Greg stepped inside Sherlock was just on his way from his post box to his office and Olivia almost bumped into him. A worried frown appeared as he noticed her obvious state of disarray, her red eyes, and the DI following in her wake.

"Lestrade. What's going on? Is she… did something happen with…" He asked.

Again, that same concern on his face. Greg only ever remembered it from when John had been kidnapped once a few years ago.

"Nah don't worry. I caught her stealing while I was on my way home. Thought you might have her dad's phone number."

The frown changed from worried to annoyed. "Stealing what?" Grey eyes shifted to Olivia, who kept her gaze on the floor.

"Pills. Look, I'm fine with her staying at school. That's where she needs to be after all. But I need to inform her dad."

"John will have the number. Miss Edwards, wait in my office", Sherlock said.

She looked up at him with pleading eyes. "But d--"

"No." He cut her off without mercy. "My office. Now."

That command could not be ignored, and with drooping shoulders the girl made her way to the stairs, leaving Greg alone with Sherlock.

"So… how are you holding up?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean your brother kicking you out last night. I'm surprised you're even here."

Sherlock gave him an eye roll. "You assumed I would intoxicate myself with drink or worse. If you must know I did have a brandy or two, but I'm not bothered. Mycroft made a stupid mistake last night. Hardly anything for me to feel bad about."

"A mistake? You had your hand around the man's neck! Any sensible person would have gotten you out of there."

"I hardly squeezed! He didn't even pass out."
Jesus, the man really thinks he's above everything, Lestrade thought.

"Mycroft will soon enough realise that he needs me. I'll be expecting his phone call within a week."

With that, Sherlock smiled his disturbing Sherlock smile and preceded him to John's office.

~

While Sherlock left to go and have a word with Olivia, Greg sat in John's office to phone her father. John had given an exasperated sigh and a "not again!" when he told him about what had happened. Apparently Olivia had stayed away from home before; once after a party on her birthday, and once after a fight with her dad. There had also been an incident of physical violence against another pupil recently, although that had followed after heavy provocation. Her school file had become rather thick since the start of the year, and John warned him that there was a good chance Mr Edwards wouldn't pick up the phone.

Therefore Greg didn't expect much when he dialled the number.

"Edwards residence how can I help you?" a crisp voice sounded from the other side.

"Good morning. Detective Inspector Lestrade from Scotland Yard speaking. Is this Jeremy Edwards?"

There was a short pause.

"No I'm sorry. This is Sebastian Moran. I am the social worker assigned to Jeremy and Olivia. Jeremy phoned me and I came over as soon as possible. Do you have news of Olivia?"

"Can you put him on? I'd rather speak to the man himself." Greg scratched his eyebrow. He really wanted to go home and sleep.

"I'm afraid Jeremy's a bit upset right now. Have you found her? Is she alright?"

"She's fine. She went out with some friends and stayed over. Unfortunately I caught her in the act of stealing from a pharmacy this morning. I'm giving her a warning."

There was some murmuring on the other side.

"Jeremy is very happy to hear that she isn't hurt and apologises for her behaviour. She's never done such a thing before."

"As far as you know she hasn't. But she has run away from home before hasn't she? Can you shed any light on the reason for it this time?"

"Ah, I'm afraid her dad isn't the most joyful person to be around these days, with the anniversary of his wife's death and his antidepressants not quite helping as much as we’d hoped. I assume she didn't want to be reminded of her mother as much as he likes to. It's quite common coping behaviour for teenagers. I'm here helping them as much as possible, but you know she is still a teenager. Can we come and pick her up?"

"I've taken her to school so I recommend that you let her finish her lessons first, but it's probably a good idea not to let her go home by herself. I will leave some papers for Jeremy with Mr Watson,
"so please check whether she has them with her when you come."

"Of course. Thank you very much for your trouble, detective inspector. We really appreciate it."

Lestrade said goodbye and felt a bit more confident Olivia would be taken care of at home as well as at school. He had a little chat with John to tell him about Sherlock's situation and prepare him for some bad moods. Because Sherlock could act as aloof as he wanted, Greg wasn't fooled.

Now he was ready to update Olivia and then finally go home.

He hurried up the steps to the right floor and approached Sherlock's office. He assumed he hadn't sent her to class yet, and the distressed young voice coming from beyond the door confirmed he hadn't. However, the words Greg caught in those few seconds had him stop dead in his tracks.

"Why are you being so cruel to me?"

There was a silence. Greg leaned in a little bit, very conscious of eavesdropping on his friend for the second time in two days, but at the same time hoping to hear a bit better. When Sherlock's voice reached him it sounded pained and guilty.

"I'm cruel when I'm afraid, Olivia. ...It's a defence mechanism of sorts."

Greg's mouth fell slightly open. Was Sherlock admitting a fault?

"What are you afraid of then?"

There was a soft sound of someone sitting down.

"Losing you. Damaging you. Changing you. I'm afraid of what other people might do to you."

Greg's blood turned cold.

Richard Brook's words of the day before worked their way to front of Greg's mind.

"I assumed she'd share everything, knowing how close you two are."

It was one thing to notice that Sherlock cared about someone, a whole other thing to hear him admit it so openly... and so intimately.

Sherlock's voice reached his ears again.

"I'm so sorry you thought you had to protect yourself from me."

Protect herself... Jesus fucking Christ...

"Tell me. Has she started fighting you yet?"

Richard’s words now gained a completely different meaning that Greg had trouble accepting.

There was whispering from the other side of the door. Gentle, soft whispering in a baritone voice, and then silence.

That was the moment Greg decided it was enough and reached for the door handle.

Chapter End Notes
Thanks again for reading!
Discipline

Chapter Summary

Recap: Lestrade is about to walk in on Sherlock and Olivia. I'm so sorry for leaving it there for so long!

Olivia was trembling as she sat waiting for him. She could be sure he was angry. But how angry? Would Lestrade tell him everything? Would he just know everything? She had nipped into the bathroom to splash her face with water and tidy her hair so that it wasn't sticking out in every direction. She hoped she might look a little more presentable or, at least not like she had not been home. Sleeping with Billy in his tiny bed had crumpled her clothes and she hadn't had the chance to freshen up that morning. She'd had to climb out of his bedroom window and down a tree (leaving stains on her sleeves) so that his mum wouldn't notice her presence, although she suspected Billy wouldn't really mind if she had.

As she sat on the wooden chair in front of Mr Holmes' desk she tried to straighten her skirt and comb some more tangles out of her still damp hair. The skull on the shelf that normally fascinated her now seemed to be staring at her accusingly.

Thankfully Mr Lestrade didn't know about the joint she smoked the previous night, or about sneaking into the cinema, or the bus ride without a ticket.

He might know though. He would probably know after one glance.

She couldn't get her knee to stop bouncing.

When the door finally opened she let out a breath she didn't know she was holding. She turned her head, trying to follow the sound of his shoes on the wooden floor. He didn't sit down at his desk but walked up from behind and remained next to her chair, towering over her with his hands in his pockets. His body was still, but his face was a mix of anger and a ghost of worry and then some more anger. Without a word said the air in the room felt too thick to breathe.

"Let's establish the facts."

Even his breathing sounded frustrated and it was difficult to endure his deducing gaze.

"You did not return home after leaving school yesterday. I can see from your clothes that you spent some time in a park," he unceremoniously bent over and sniffed her hair "...smoking weed. Again. You spent the night in Notting Hill, quite far from anywhere you know, and was caught this morning stealing rather heavy medication. Please correct me if I'm wrong."

Silently she waited for him to continue. Somehow it felt a hundred times worse to make him so angry now compared to the first time she left home to go to Lucy's party. That was before anything had ever happened between them, before his approval started to mean so much. So so much.

Instead he was looking down at her with his frowning eyebrows and she was afraid to raise her gaze from her lap.

"Please tell me now if you've been the victim of a crime."
She shook her head, hoping that would be enough. She could have made something up, but Mr
Holmes would have seen straight through it. Her fingers continued nervously fumbling with her
shirtsleeve, which she noticed wasn't as white anymore as it used to be. It reminded her of the rest
of her body and made her long for a shower.

One pale hand came out of his pocket and he leaned his fingertips on the shiny wood of the desk.
Now he had no reason left to go easy on her.

"Look at me and tell me what you did last night."

Quivering, she lifted her face up to him and gave him a shortened version of the events of the
previous evening, as free from tears as she could manage.

Sherlock slowly walked around his desk and sat down while she spoke. Watching her over the tips
of his fingers he was filled with a feeling of dread. It was becoming so obvious to him that Olivia
was changing. She had been changing for a while; he just hadn't consciously noticed it yet. She
was no longer the honest, innocent and uncorrupted girl he had met all those months ago. At the
time he thought her incapable of lying, of hiding things from him. Now she was able to lie anytime
it suited her, the marihuana was no longer experimental, and other people seemed to know more
about her private life than he did.

Just like so many things did these days, it bothered him. And it bothered him even more that her
eyes betrayed her fear of his reaction. It was clear that she didn't feel like speaking freely with him,
otherwise she would have done so before and there would have been no need to be picked up by
Lestrade for shoplifting.

When she stopped speaking he couldn't suppress his innate urge to turn something frustrating into
something destructive. Even her pleading eyes couldn't stop him.

"One by one incredibly thoughtless decisions followed by major stupidity. All because it's exactly
one year ago that your mum was stabbed. It's pathetic."

Olivia had to hold her breath to keep from crying at that. Anger bubbled up to her mouth.

"That's a very mean thing to say."

He was surprised she managed to get it out.

"I'm a mean person. You should know that by now."

"I told you the truth! That’s what you asked for."

He straightened his back and walked to the window, where he glared at the bare trees outside. She
waited.

"You were at my home" he said. "At Christmas. You were at my door."

"You weren't in I think."

He didn't turn around.

"Why were you there?" he said to the waving branches. It was as if he was asking himself rather
than asking her. There was a small hope rising that he might take pity on her, but there was no way
she was going to tell him the truth right now.
"I don't know. Wanted to wish you a Merry Christmas."

A faint sad smile appeared on his face and he turned to face her.

"You're lying. Again."

As she shook her head in denial, the smile disappeared. He gestured to her bag.

"Empty your bag. On here." His fingers tapped the desk impatiently.

"Are you serious?"

*Is he really going to treat me like a child?*

"No I'm joking. Now do it."

Apparently he was, and maybe she deserved it. He got up again and paced around while she lifted her bag from its place at her feet. With another wave of tears trying to make its way out, she turned it over above his desk. Four books, two pencils, a variety of elastic bands, two tampons, a crumbled eraser, a few scribbled notes, and five condoms toppled onto the dark wood. Her heart was thumping dangerously fast and her face was turning red. She didn't dare look at him.

Taking his time, he reviewed the mess, pushing a few things around. He picked up one of the bright wrappers to examine it for a while. Then he unceremoniously dropped it back onto the heap of her belongings.

Sherlock wanted to hurt something.

"Good to know you learned something from Mary's lecture. Did these come in handy last night?"

She shook her head in disbelief.

"Did the boy finally get his way?"

More tears spilled out onto her cheeks at his venomous words.

"No! Y-you're not supposed to be like this!"

He put his hands on the desk and loomed over her. She startled when he started speaking and there was only viciousness in his face.

"Oh really? What am I supposed to be like then? Tell me. What do you want me to be? Do you want me to play daddy and give a speech about right and wrong? Would you like me to demand to know where the hell you slept last night? To have endless patience with you? To punish you? Or do you want me to be your boyfriend? To give you a hug and tell you it's all going to be fine? Tell me because I have no idea what the hell you want from me!" The last sentence was accompanied by his flat hand hitting the desk in frustration.

For a moment she stared at him, completely baffled.

"I don't know… you're not being either."

This made him shut up for a moment. His lips were still pressed into a thin line but his eyes told her she might have gotten through to his deeply buried humanity. He took a few steps back into the room and she used the space to get up from her chair. She desperately wanted to see that awful expression disappear from his face.
Olivia took a deep breath.

"I didn't want to go home after school because my father was there trying to keep my mother alive with some awkward dinner and I didn't want to spend the day like that. I did some stupid things because it's been a year since she died and it still feels like it happened last week, even though I have trouble remembering what she looked like and sounded like and I have to keep looking at her picture to make sure I don’t forget. I wish she wasn't dead even though I know it's a stupid fantasy and I can't sleep because I'm constantly worried that my dad will go insane because the grief is killing him inside. And I'm really sorry about the pills. I just wanted to be able to sleep at night because I can no longer do it at school. I didn't tell you about it because I didn't want to worry you, but that sounds really stupid now. You don't seem to care anyway."

Sherlock's eyes closed, but opened as soon as her voice broke the silence again.

"Mary told us that if we were to... to try things we should be prepared. And you shouldn't be judging that! Especially you. And I didn't even use any of them ever and you didn't even think about yourself instead of Anthony, who I haven't even spoken to since we fought. You gave me a book about sex. Is it so strange that I thought…"

She didn’t know how to finish that sentence. “I don’t know what you want from me and it’s scary sometimes. And now you're punishing me for not knowing what to do."

She stopped speaking for a moment to calm her own breathing and wipe her tears away.

"Why are you being so cruel to me?"

Her voice died away. Sherlock he rubbed his face and took a few deep breaths to help him process the shame, fear, love, and immense guilt he was feeling. All his anger had drained from him.

Because it was clear she was right. How could he blame her for anything?

Her words had left him with his defences down. His left hand tightened into a fist as he tried to find the right words.

"I'm cruel when I'm afraid, Olivia. It's a... defence mechanism of sorts."

He maintained his distance, scared he would not be able to control his urge to pull her to him and never let her go.

"What are you afraid of?"

*Oh God, she's already forgiving me.*

He let himself down in the armchair.

"I'm afraid of what people might do to you."

"I'm afraid I'll damage you. I fear that I'll change you… It seems inevitable that I'll lose you… or that I already have and I didn't see it."

He rested his elbows on his knees and although he made an effort to hide the tears that were threatening to spill out by burying his face in his hands, she knew. This wonderful girl didn't fully understand, but she sensed what he needed. He felt her sit down next to him on the armrest and her tentative fingers seeking out his, teasing his hands away from his face.
Sherlock didn't want anything more than to feel her warm skin. This incredible being that even after all he had done trusted him like this. He traced his thumb over the palm of her hand and shifted closer to her.

"I'm so sorry you thought you had to protect yourself from me."

"I just thought that... when you asked... I would be ready," she whispered.

He looked up at her.

"But I don't think I am... ready", she whispered.

He kissed her cheeks, tasting the salt of her tears on his lips.

"I know... I know."

As he pulled her closer he continued to murmur apologies in her hair.

The kiss that eventually followed was comforting and full of relief. They were finding each other again after being held apart for weeks. Sherlock felt his muscles relax as he absorbed her scent and the softness of her lips.

~

What Greg Lestrade saw initially confused him and then infuriated him.

Sherlock was sitting in the big armchair in the corner, his eyes were closed face tilted upwards. On the armrest was Olivia, leaning down. Her right hand rested on his heart and was covered by his left hand, pressing it against him. Their lips were locked in a chaste kiss. The scene was so quiet and peaceful that Greg's mind had to catch up for a moment before bombarding him with everything that was wrong with it.

It only took a second before they broke apart. Olivia jumped off the armrest and removed herself from him so quickly that her lower back bumped into the antique desk, where the contents of her bag still lay in a heap. She looked terrified at Greg.

"Greg." Sherlock got to his feet and started towards him, his hand raised defensively, as if to say "don't freak out".

"Mhm." Greg hummed dismissively, shaking his head. "No. You don't get to say anything right now Sherlock. What the f-... You don't get to say anything brilliant to make me believe that this is in any way ok."

Sherlock opened his mouth to say something.

"Get out", Greg hissed.

"Outside Sherlock." The quivering rage in Greg's voice made Sherlock shut his mouth.

"You are going to wait outside while Olivia and I have a chat. Right now this is my office, and if you don't do exactly as I say I will call a team to arrest you right now."
Behind him Olivia clasped a hand to her mouth.

Sherlock swallowed, his eyes flickered to Olivia, and then he nodded and walked out, closing the door stiffly behind him.

He hoped she would tell Greg the truth.

Lestrade would be quick enough to know if she was lying and the truth could never be worse than the things he was currently undoubtedly imagining.

Sherlock rubbed his hands through his hair and swore uncharacteristically under his breath. He couldn't believe how fast everything had fallen apart in the last 24 hours. It was as if a whole crowd of people suddenly knew about his heart's desires, with far reaching consequences.

Richard knew, that was clear. It was only a matter of time before he got bored with teasing and told someone.

Moriarty knew. He’d made that very clear with his most recent victim. The investigation was continuing without him at the moment, and he was not nearly as sure when Mycroft would let him back in as he had told Greg so confidently yesterday.

Greg knew.

He walked to the window in the corridor, not wanting to catch what was being said inside his office. Not his office anymore. It all depended on what Greg made of his crime.

Sherlock had tried to convince himself that he had gotten used to her, that he just liked having her around, that she aroused him, that he felt protective of her because she relied on him. But the idea that she could have been Moriarty's victim had completely messed with his head. It had made him desperate and reckless and out of control. It wasn't merely his always reliable selfishness that wanted her at his disposal. There was an inexplicable desire to make her happy and keep her safe.

It was a desire he hadn't even come close to fulfilling.

Last night, curled up on the sofa with a bottle of brandy, he had tried to make sense of his feelings. It was something he preferred not to do too often, but the circumstances, namely his own disturbed reaction in Mycroft's office, urged him to find out what the hell was wrong with him.

He had honestly not been prepared for what the search through his mind palace would show him.

Olivia was everywhere. She had escaped out of the heavy doors to the room he had designated for her and sneaked into almost every single space he opened. She was reading a book in the library and smiled up at him as he stumbled inside (the brandy). She sat in the dining room eating a sandwich and kindly pushed the plate towards him as he stared. She was in the classroom looking dreamily out of the window to the sunny sky. She was in John's room watching one of those horrible game shows with him. She was asleep in the middle of his big bed underneath silk covers. And she was looking up at him in a darkened corridor, the needle still sticking out of her arm.

Every room he went into, he wanted to stay.

Sherlock had always wondered whether he'd been in love with John once, but had never been completely sure. He still wasn't, but at least now he knew that it could not have been more than a crush on a person he already loved. What he felt for Olivia was much more urgent, burning, an unavoidable.

His own dependence on it sickened him.
He didn't know how many pupils or minutes had passed when the sound of the door made him jump.

Greg nodded at him to come inside.

Immediately Sherlock's eyes sought out Olivia, who looked tired and worried, but not overly upset, which he considered a good sign.

"Is there a place for Olivia to wait while we talk?" Greg asked.

Sherlock reached for his keys in his jacket pocket and handed them to her.

The way his fingers brushed hers as she took them was reassuring, but he felt Greg's eyes burn.

"Will you wait in 221?" he asked.

She nodded.

Sherlock gave her a look that he hoped said that it was going to be all right, even though it wasn't. He took a seat in his own chair and tried to calm his thoughts.

Thankfully Greg seemed a bit calmer now, but not less pissed off.

"Tell me. Everything."

"I doubt you will understand.-"  
"Jesus Christ Sherlock. Tell me now or I swear I will break your fucking neck."

Not so calm either, then.

Sherlock cleared his throat.

"We've kissed. A few times. It was consensual."

Greg's eyes spat fire. "Consensual? What the hell are you talking about? She's fifteen and you're her teacher, you absolute moron!"

"I'm aware that it might seem like manipulation, but-"

"Even if it wasn't!" Greg raised an accusatory finger at Sherlock. "Even if she threw herself at you, even if she walked into your office and took her clothes off and literally asked you for it, you are supposed to keep your bloody hands off!"

The finger lowered, but the tension remained.

"I thought sexual urges were the one thing I didn't have to worry about when it comes to keeping you out of jail."

"They're not."

Greg's eyebrows rose in disagreement.

"It's complicated…" Sherlock started, but didn't know how to continue.

"That is the worst defence I have ever heard from you, Sherlock. What were you even thinking? That if you don't get naked it doesn't count? That it won't affect her? That the bloody rules don't
count for you?"

Sherlock shook his head. His lips were pressed together in what one could interpret as either anger or self-loathing.

"I have no intention of lying to you, Greg. I just… I don't fully understand it either."

“So you’re always the clever one, but now suddenly you’re confused? Though shit because you need to tell me a damn good story for me not to report you.”

Sherlock’s eyebrows rose. "You're not arresting me?"

Greg winced, being reminded of what the law required him to do.

"I'm giving you a chance to explain what is going on in your insane head."

"Why?"

"Because I'm pretty sure that if you lose this job you are going to be dead within six months."

Greg rubbed his face with his left hand.

"And for some fucked up reason Olivia just spent twenty minutes trying to convince me that she seduced you, begging me not to arrest you."

There was a shadow of a wry smile on Greg's face, but it faded fast.

"And although I know you were not seduced by a fifteen year-old, she assured me you never touched her, and it is impossible for me to believe that you would molest a child. Because despite the fact that you're the most destructive person I know, I like to think there is some human part of you that keeps you from crossing certain lines. And now I want you to prove me right. For one fucking time in your life."

Sherlock looked intensely at Lestrade for a while, trying to find the words to explain what Olivia meant to him. Talking about his feelings was not something he was good at. Feverishly he attempted to find the right words.

"Olivia and I… I didn't know it could be this… intense."

"So you find her attractive."

Sherlock's eyes widened. "That's not the point! I would never…" He made a frustrated sound in his throat. "Look, I've never had any problem withholding… but with her… she's in my head and I can't get her out. And I know I have to ignore it… but I've been too bloody selfish to do so."

"She has put such undivided trust in me. I don't know how it's possible but she has. And I have never had any intention to break that trust…"

"You have", Greg pointed out. “She might not see it that way but you have.”

Sherlock swallowed and nodded. His next sentence came out less incoherent but more tentative. "I know… it seems different to you but for the past three months I feel like all I have been doing is hold back. I’ve never consciously pushed her into doing things or in any way suggested that she was obliged or that it would affect her marks. I know it’s wrong Greg. It just feels like there’s some sort of connection and I… nobody has ever made me feel this."
Greg was very well aware of Sherlock’s acting skills. He’d seen him in action many times in front of witnesses, suspects, police officers, Mycroft. Somehow he knew that this was not an act. Sherlock was completely out of his depth. He wasn't used to this at all. What Greg saw was a man who was trying to make sense of emotions, made some very fucked up decisions in the process, and was scrambling to hold on to his sanity.

It didn’t excuse anything, but at least it made him believe that Sherlock was telling the truth.

“Don’t you think you’ve unconsciously pushed her into things?” Greg asked.

Sherlock grimaced.

"Today she told me she’d been carrying around condoms. Just because she thought she needed to be prepared in case I wanted more. I don’t. I mean I would never have done that. There’s just no way for me to prove that to you."

For a while they sat in silence, overthinking the situation.

"Sherlock…"

Sherlock looked up, his eyes bloodshot and tired.

"She's a girl. A damaged one. She's basically only got half a parent left. I can imagine she'd grasp any chance of getting a parental figure to give her his undivided attention. I've seen it happen before."

Sherlock's eyes narrowed at him, but he didn't retort.

"Have you never considered that she might be craving your attention for that reason? You have to admit that you can't protect her or help her while you are involved like this. It can only be damaging for her."

"Do you think I've traumatised her?" His voice was tinged with fear.

"I think that if what I just suggested is true, you've been teaching her that protection can be gained by giving romantic or sexual attention, and I don't think you want to be responsible for that."

"Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Sherlock?"

It took a moment for the man's eyes to focus on him again.

"Have you not thought about what your influence on her is?"

Sherlock shook his head, shamefully realising that he had not.

“You need to take a step back and let other people take care of her. People who I can trust will keep it professional.”

“She might need me.”

“She most definitely will not.”
Olivia was still crying silently when Greg gently nudged her to take a seat in the car. He figured it was best to take her home after this whole mess. He helped her put her seatbelt on because she didn't have much use for her shaking hands.

He and Sherlock had gone to the room where Olivia was waiting and told her that there would be no physical contact between them and that they should never be alone together.

This was not what had caused the outburst of grief, as it was somewhat anticipated and maybe even more lenient than she had expected. It had been Sherlock's words that set her off. He had stood there, carefully keeping his distance, and explained that he had made a grave mistake to get involved with her like this, that he should not have insinuated that they had a relationship of any kind, and that he would request John to find her a different mentor.

To Olivia it could only have felt like betrayal, especially because he made no attempt to comfort her in any way, afraid to touch her. He just listened to her crying, the muscles in his face tensed up as if he was actually holding back tears himself, silently pleading with Greg to give them some privacy.

Of course that had been out of the question.

After a few minutes of standing there helplessly, Sherlock had simply turned around and walked out.

Greg had sat Olivia down for a bit, given her some water to drink, and brought her to his car. Fortunately he now had the address, and didn't need to raise any alarms with John about the whole situation. John would know one day, but right now it could only escalate things. Greg knew that not telling him was wrong, but also that telling him would mean the end of Sherlock's life on so many levels.

"I spoke to your social worker, Sebastian?" Greg said as he drove out of the schoolyard.

"He said your dad is quite upset, but that he's at home to help you. I will give them a letter about what happened this morning. As long as the pharmacist doesn't contact me I won't be bothering you further. Just don't let me hear about you nicking anything ever again alright?"

He could tell she was hardly listening.

It was already nearing lunchtime by the time they stopped in front of her house.

Greg sighed, thinking he needed to say something in the privacy of the car.

"Olivia."

This time she did look at him.

"I understand this must be hard for you, but I promise it's for the best. Mr Holmes made huge mistake to start this kind of thing with you."

"I told you I kissed him first", she said.

"That might be so, but he never should have kissed you back. Someone would have found out
about it at some point, so you're probably lucky it was me. And you should understand that I'm bending the law to even let him continue teaching. So just see him as your teacher from now on, all right? Don't expect anything more."

With her eyes drifting back out of the window, she slowly nodded.

"Good girl. Maybe it's better to spend some more time with your family, eh? I'm sure your dad will he happy to see you home."

~

With a start, Olivia's eyes opened wide.

It was the sound of footsteps outside her door that had alerted her. There had been a dream but she forgot about it the moment she realised what woke her up. The sun had set, so she must have been sleeping for at least four hours. Rubbing her hand over her eyes she tried to fight off the fogginess in her head and focused on what was happening.

There had been a row when she got home.

The footsteps on the landing were undoubtedly her dad's, trailing around somewhat aimlessly.

Had Sebastian gone?

Sebastian. She didn't understand why someone from Social Services would be encouraging the use of violence. Surely he was supposed to be there for her protection.

He had opened the door even before she had had the chance to look for her keys. With an anticipating smile and bright eyes he'd held her wrist and led her to the living room without a word. He dad was sitting there, with red-rimmed eyes and a clenching jaw. As if rehearsed, Sebastian had retreated and Jeremy had stood up, reciting some lines about there being consequences to her actions. Before she had been able to say anything he had hit her square in the face with a flat hand.

"Dad what are you doing?!"

"Don’t let her talk back to you Jeremy”, Seb had said calmly, and Olivia had received another slap in the face.

What followed was a physical struggle between father and daughter as he tried to get her up the stairs and she did everything to get back to the front door. Seb followed, with a big grin on his face, and told Jeremy he was doing well. Together, with the aid of a chokehold, they had managed to get her upstairs and locked in her bedroom.

Maybe it was some sort of last resort policy? For children on which normal parenting didn't work. If she was honest with herself she knew that there was some reason for concern. Staying away from home, theft, being uncooperative and even hitting and biting her father when he grabbed her. She didn't really know why she had done all those things. She just wanted to be left alone.

The sound of his footsteps was more determined now. A muffled curse could be heard together with the scrape of the chair as he bumped into it. There was a metal sound of the door handle
coming free as the wood was set aside, and Olivia's heartbeat went mad. There was just enough time to roll onto her right side, facing away from the door, pretending to be asleep.

"Olivia?"

She knew him so well it was easy to know he was intoxicated by the sound of his socked feet on the carpet. He was the person she knew best and at the same time she didn’t know him at all. She kept herself as still as possible, depriving her lungs of oxygen trying to keep her breathing slow.

"Olivia."

There was a trembling in his voice and she felt the mattress dip behind her.

"I'm sorry."

Olivia closed her eyes tightly, trying to calm herself as she felt him come closer, focusing on the tingling she could still feel in the skin of her cheek.

"You don’t deserve to be treated like that. It's just… you know you can't do all those things…”

She could smell him now. The heat of his body radiated through her clothes.

"Are you awake?"

She wanted to get up and run, but her muscles were tight and frozen.

"Hey."

His hand stroked her arm in hopeful silence for a while, troubling the tiny hairs on her skin. He was waiting for her to respond. She couldn't. The softness of his touch suggested so many other things that it made her nauseous.

"You know there must be consequences for your actions. You were lying and stealing, and you slept at a boy's house. That's what the policeman said."

Olivia didn’t speak.

"I can't imagine what you do when you're out at night. You went to the cinema, right?"

She couldn't stop her breath from shuddering as his hand stopped stroking and reached over, seeking out softer flesh. His fingers were surprisingly steady and three of her blouse buttons opened within a few seconds.

"Who were you with?"

His breath on the exposed skin of her neck sent terrified shivers along her spine.

"Did you kiss him in the back row? In the dark?"

Her body curled in on itself, trying but failing to move away from his groping hands. The mattress moved again as he sat up and loomed over her, his knees planted against her back. She tried not to think about what he was doing.

"I bet you did. Willingly."

"Did you let him touch you? Like this?"
His fingers snaked into her bra. It was still a soft touch, but it made it feel all the more disgusting.

"Or did you let him under your skirt?"

"Did it make you wet?"

There was the sound of coarse fabric behind her and in her first deliberate movement since he came in she brought her hands to her ears and pressed hard. Curled up with her eyes shut tightly she could now only hear very faint sounds and feel his moving hand on her skin.

She tried to think of something else, anything else not to feel him move rhythmically behind her. Her automatic escape was Mr. Holmes, but the thought of him actually caused a sob to reach her throat. Desperately she thought of Rose. Of the evening on her bed talking and watching films while their parents were at school. She longed for that safe place now.

After what seemed like an eternity the movement of the bed stopped, and a little bit later she felt him step off, her mattress turning back to normal. She kept her deaf and blind foetal position for a while longer, wanting to make sure he was really gone before she uncurled limbs and opened her eyes. The room was dark.

Slowly, her muscles aching with tension, she got up and peered into the corridor. It was quiet. A few quick steps took her to the bathroom, where she immediately locked the door and turned on the light. Quietly and methodically she undressed, avoiding her own reflection in the mirror above the sink. When she came to unzip her skirt her hand touched wetness on the back of the fabric, but she wiped her fingers and threw the garment in the hamper with the rest of her clothes, refusing to think about what it was.

Her entire body felt like it was caked in grime, and she started washing herself determinedly under hot beams of water, continuing until her skin was red and felt raw. Then she dried herself, put on her somewhat too small pyjamas and used the same chair that they had to lock her up to lock herself in, before crawling back into bed, closing her eyes and attempting not to think or feel anything at all.
"Remember now, we do not want to do anything to make Mr Watson worry."

"No, because everything's just fine."

"Listen to me, you little shit."

Sebastian turned and grabbed her painfully by the shoulders.

"A lot is at stake here. If Watson thinks you are not coping at home he will request a meeting with my manager. These people are all protocol fetishist who don't have a clue about real life and will not hesitate to put you in foster care. And if you want to ever pass any A-levels you do NOT want to be in foster care."

Olivia looked at him without emotion. "Because it can be so much worse than this?"

Sebastian's hand shot out and smacked her on the side of the head. Not hard enough to leave a mark, but hard enough for a good warning.

"Don't fucking give me that", he said. Grabbing her by her jumper he forced her to look him in the eye. "You might not realise it, but I am keeping your family together. Your father loves you, alright. Do you want him to go to prison?"

"No."

"Exactly. That is why you are gonna shut up and sit there and don't open your mouth until you are asked a question. And if you say anything that could jeopardise my position or your father's, I will make sure you'll regret it. Understood?"

Olivia nodded.

"Ok, now get your dad out of the car."

While Sebastian lit a cigarette, Olivia turned back to the car.

---

John took them to an empty classroom, because having all of them in his office would get a bit cramped. They were having a sort of emergency meeting for Olivia after an incident a week before. Sherlock had not wanted to be there but John had forced him, arguing that although he was officially no longer her mentor, no replacement had been decided on yet and he knew most about
her. Eventually he’d accepted even though he wasn’t sure if it’d violate his agreement with Greg.

When he thought about that whole situation now he found it all utterly humiliating.

The way Lestrade had taken them apart to be interrogated, forced him to say how he felt about her, and then imposed these ridiculous rules. He still hadn't figured out how he was able to help her now. Olivia hated him for offering no resistance to Lestrade, for walking away from her. He hadn't been able to stay in the same room then, and now she avoided being in one with him as much as she could. She refused to look at him, talk to him, or participate in class. When he asked her how she was doing she gave the shortest answer possible, usually something like "fine", and walked away with hunched shoulders and downcast eyes. She was letting him feel what it is like to be rejected.

Lestrade's words still rang loudly in his ears anytime he thought of her, and the infuriating part was that they were true.

"I can imagine she'd grasp any chance of getting a parental figure to give her his undivided attention."

It had all started with her confiding in him about her father. She'd run away from home straight into his arms, upset and confused, and he'd selfishly accepted what she offered him.

"…you've been teaching her that protection can be gained by giving sexual attention…"

She had been carrying condoms with her in case he would have demanded more from her, even though she was terrified of it.

She was damaged, and he'd done it himself.

John had accepted his request to ease his workload, based on the argument that he wasn’t currently capable of much sympathy for anyone, but had found it strange that Sherlock insisted he no longer be Olivia’s mentor. He’d ensured John that Olivia trusted no one and that he was no longer able to help her. A couple of weeks passed during which John had tried to find a new mentor for her, but she never showed up to discuss it with him.

"Isn't it nice to see where Olivia has class Jeremy?" Sebastian said as he dropped a paper file onto a desk.

Jeremy nodded and gave half a nervous smile. Sherlock suppressed the urge to scowl.

"Apologies that we couldn't do this earlier. We had some things to deal with and Jeremy and Olivia are not the only family I have under my wing." Sebastian smiled as he sat down.

John and Sherlock didn't look at each other but they both knew Olivia's father was on something. His movements were sluggish, he didn't say more than half a sentence at a time, and his eyes were unfocused.

Sherlock's attention didn't stay on him though. He could not resist looking at Olivia, who obviously noticed his analysing gaze. She sat up a little straighter, and avoided looking him in the eye. Her clothes were clean and ironed, and she seemed rested, although nervous. She stared at the desk with a blank face.

John cleared his throat and started.

"I called you in to discuss Olivia's progress at school, and a few incidents that have happened
recently," he looked at Olivia. "Because I am worried that if you continue like this you will not make it to the next year."

He glanced at Jeremy and Sebastian and opened her school file.

"I will sum up some of the incidents that concern me. Olivia was involved in a physical fight with a classmate. Last month she was caught stealing. A few days ago she got into an argument with a teacher, walked out of class, and had what seemed like a panic attack."

Sherlock didn’t know the details because Olivia wouldn’t talk to him, but apparently Anderson had said something discriminatory during class, which had led to protest from Rose, who had been sent to detention. Olivia had tried to get to her friend, was stopped by Anderson, and had a complete breakdown leading to a broken window and hyperventilation. When John had tried to calm her down she had begged him not to touch her. The idea gave Sherlock chills.

John sighed. "Now, I am not saying these incidents were all your fault, Olivia. I know that in some cases there was heavy provocation, which is the reason I have not expelled you, but I am worried about your behaviour towards staff and other pupils."

Olivia gave a short nod in understanding.

"Finally, there is the matter of schoolwork. I must admit that over the past two months Mr Holmes has had less time to monitor his pupils, which is why your incomplete and forged homework assignments went unnoticed for a while. On the other hand we can see that you cleverly ensured that any work for his classes was completed to keep up a façade for him. This is absolutely unacceptable and therefore I want someone to monitor you more closely. As Mr Holmes is currently unable to do this, I am looking for a different mentor."

John turned to Jeremy and Sebastian.

"Now I would like to hear about your current home situation. Is there anything that might be contributing to her recent behaviour? Is she getting enough sleep? Enough time to do her homework?"

Sebastian inclined his head towards Jeremy.

"I uhm… I- there is… are some things we're working… I mean Sebastian is helping us with. We… Olivia…" he stopped and looked pleadingly to Sebastian.

"May I explain, Mr Watson? Jeremy is on rather strong anti-depressants at the moment and I want to make sure his situation is explained as clearly as possible so as not to disadvantage him."

John nodded, pen poised on his notebook. "Go ahead."

"First of all, the medication is making Jeremy very tired, which means he is currently not capable of helping Olivia with her homework. I am a social worker, not a tutor, and I can't be there every day, as you might understand. We set out some new rules and routines for Olivia a while ago, and although there has been some improvement, she has moments when she wants to rebel a little bit. Don't you, sweetheart?"

He gave her a friendly pat on the shoulder.

Sherlock observed, but registered no reaction from her.

"Second, it seems that due to Jeremy's long term unemployment, there are some… financial issues
to take care of, which is making it hard for him to give Olivia a very comfortable lifestyle. The stress he is having regarding this issue is quite demanding. We are working with other services to manage this situation, however I believe that it is taking some toll on Olivia as well."

John nodded and opened his mouth to speak, but Sebastian continued. Olivia kept staring at the window.

"But more importantly, Mr Watson, I suggest we do not only evaluate Olivia's home life, but also the care that she is receiving here, at school, as it is after all the place where she is supposed to learn things."

"I agree that it is important to-" John began.

"Because I have been quite baffled by what I heard about the way Olivia has been treated at this school."

Sherlock sensed John tense up slightly next to him. His back straightened even more than it usually did, and his eyes narrowed the tiniest bit. Olivia turned her head toward Sebastian, looking confused.

"I mean, I should have known something was wrong when Mr Holmes here lost it when we met him on parent-teacher night, but I gave him a chance. Now I wonder if I should have advised Jeremy to take her to a different school immediately."

"Excuse me?" John said, casting a questioning glance at Sherlock.

"Oh yes, your friend here grabbed Jeremy by the throat and threatened him. I agree that he has his problems but that is no way for a teacher to behave."

John shut his gaping mouth and looked at Sherlock.

Sherlock cleared his throat. “I may have treated him in a slightly… rough manner when I noticed Jeremy wasn’t sober at the parent-teacher meeting” he confessed. “But I’m no longer her mentor so there’s no chance it’ll happen again.”

“We will talk about this”, John warned, before turning his attention back to Sebastian, who continued.

“Olivia has been yelled at and bullied by her classmates for 'being gay'. Like you mentioned, she was publically humiliated by her maths teacher last week causing a panic attack. I believe that the real reason she is not doing well is because she is afraid, Mr Watson, afraid of what might happen each day as she goes to school. I swear Jeremy has had to threaten her with punishment to get her to set a foot out the door in the morning.”

John took a deep breath. “Yes, there has been some bullying, which we are working hard to stop, and like I said this is the reason I haven’t punished Olivia for some of her aggressive outbursts and misbehaviour. Mr Anderson has received an official warning for his behaviour last week, but I find it hard to believe that any pupil here is afraid of going to school. Olivia?”

Olivia was paying full attention now, and nervously glanced from Sebastian to John. Sherlock had the suspicion that she was deciding whether to upset John or infuriate her social worker for not agreeing.

“Uhm… I… I don’t uhm…”
“The only person who has been supportive and understanding is that theatre teacher, Mr Brook” Sebastian announced before Olivia could get a full sentence out.

A shockwave passed through Sherlock’s body at the mention of Richard.

"Brook?" he snapped.

"Yes, Mr Brook, who encouraged Olivia to join the school play and seems to be connecting with her very well. She's told me he is a very good listener, and I believe he would be a good mentor for her."

"Mentor?" Sherlock growled.

"Yes." Sebastian addressed John. "You made the wise decision for Olivia to switch mentors, and Mr. Brook could be a good replacement. He has been very kind and Olivia truly enjoys the rehearsals for his play. She trusts him. He'd be perfect."

Sherlock looked at Olivia, who was back to staring at the desk between them.

John intervened. "I’m happy to discuss the matter with Mr. Brook, although he is not officially taking any mentees."

"Olivia? You'd feel better if Mr Brook was your mentor, wouldn't you?" Sebastian asked.

"Olivia you don't have to answer that question right now. We can talk about it later if you like" John said.

After a few seconds Olivia spoke.

"I would like Mr Brook to be my mentor… please."

~~~

"What will happen now?" Rose asked before taking a big bite out of her sandwich. It was homemade falafel and Olivia was still chewing on her borrowed bite of it.

They were walking along the trees on the edge of the schoolyard, talking and watching their peers from a distance. Everyone was outside for their lunch break, playing games and enjoying the hesitant spring sunshine.

"John said I wouldn't be expelled because Anderson didn't follow the rules", Olivia replied.

"Hmmm. John's reasonable. He asked me what happened. You'll be fine." Rose licked a bit of sauce from the corner of her mouth.

"You didn't bring lunch?"

"Nah…"

"What about the homework?"

"Mr Brook will tutor me to get back on track."
"That's nice of him."

It was nice to be outside getting fresh air. Olivia thought with longing about the time when she was completely relaxed and at ease in that old brick building, safe and supported by friends and teachers. Things had changed, obviously, and her safe place wasn't so safe anymore. Lectures were often uncomfortable; watching Anthony and Joan sit together displaying their affection for each other, or Eric giving snide remarks on whatever he imagined was going on between her and Rose. But still it was a hundred times better than being at home.

"He's also going to be my mentor."

Rose looked at her. Her eyes searching her friend's face for any emotion.

Mr Holmes hadn't said anything when she'd confirmed Sebastian's statement. Maybe he was jealous that Mr. Brook was taking his place. Maybe he was relieved. Either way, she had agreed because officially she needed to have a mentor and Mr. Holmes was out of the question.

He had tried to talk to her a few times, but it was awkward. He asked how she was doing and refused to believe her when she said she was fine, although he didn't say it. He would look at her with a frown, as if he wanted to pry her brain open to see inside. It made her palms sweat.

He took care not to touch her. Once after class he actually reached out but drew back at two inches from her shoulder. She often had to work hard to stop herself from clinging to him and burying her face in his shirt, hungry for his arms around her. But the outcome would either be his rejection, taking her by the shoulders and pushing her away gently but oh so painfully, or her confession, which she absolutely did not feel ready for.

She had contemplated it, but was certain that if he knew everything her life would be over. He would do everything in order for her not to set one foot in that house again, and maybe even hurt her dad. He would be angry and he would be disgusted by the idea. If his opinion of her were not already ruined, this would definitely do it.

Besides, she wasn't sure what power Sebastian would gain if her father were to be exposed like that. He was clever enough to make them believe he didn't know anything about the visits to her bedroom. With his falsely kind smile and friendly posture. He was a dangerous man. She knew that now.

She also knew that Sebastian didn't only revel in directing her father to punish her, he enjoyed the other things as well.

Once she had heard him ask her dad what he had done to her, extracting details that made Olivia shiver and feel the urge to vomit. Her father was afraid of Seb, and confessed, and cried, and asked for forgiveness, which he received. A few times she had had the feeling that when he was in her room, Sebastian was watching from the doorway. But having her eyes closed tightly and hearing only the drum of her own frantically beating heart, she couldn't be sure, and didn't want to be.

When it became Sebastian's word against hers she knew she would lose.

So she remained quiet, adhered to the rules, made sure her uniform was clean every day, and stayed as far away from those deducing blue eyes as possible, afraid of what they might see.

Mr Brook was far less concerned with her home life. He'd taken her in with open arms and let her focus on the play, one of the few things that made her forget her life for a while. Neither Anthony nor Eric dared being mean to her when Mr Brook was around.
They walked around the school building and sat down on a bench for the rest of their lunch break. Rose offered Olivia half of her sandwich.

~~~

John rubbed his hands together in the fresh spring morning. It was early on Saturday, and he thought regretfully of Mary in their warm bed, which he left less than an hour ago.

"Any specific reason you wanted to meet at the park? I could do with a cuppa, you know."

Sherlock's face didn't move but his eyes were busy searching some invisible target among the trees.

"You didn't sleep."

"Not much, no. Mary felt some cramps and we were worried she might be really early, but it was a false alarm. Couldn't get back to sleep again though."

John couldn't find any sign of acknowledgement of his story, but that was rather normal with Sherlock. A few seconds later a frown appeared.

"So you're really going to go through with this whole baby thing then?"

It took a moment for the wires in John's brain to come back to life.

"Are you serious?"

The outrage in John's voice made Sherlock aware that he may have said something a bit not good, and he finally turned his head, although his face was still a question mark.

"If we were not sure we wanted a baby we wouldn't have tried, Sherlock. Mary wouldn't have stopped using contraceptive pills, we wouldn't have had sex three times a day, we wouldn't have told everyone when we knew it was happening, Mary wouldn't have stopped working, and I would certainly not have gone to those breathing classes. The baby is healthy and it has arms and legs and toes and a heartbeat and everything. So stop hoping that it might magically disappear because it won't."

John’s face had turned a bit red from his rant.

"I'm not!" Sherlock said in defence. His voice was softer when he continued.

"I just hadn't particularly considered the whole… process, that's all."

"Well, the baby is due in a few weeks, and you are expected to come and see it and tell us it's the best baby in the world. Just so you know."

John could see Sherlock’s serious frown that usually meant he was making a mental note.

It was quiet for a few minutes, both men absorbed by their own thoughts until John shifted and looked at him.

"So… is that bloke over the there the reason you're here?" He nodded in the direction of a bulky man, casually feeding some geese.
"No, that's one of Mycroft's men trying to look casual while keeping an eye on me. Although he's obviously sent his worst man."

"Why is he sending spies?"

"They are supposed to be making sure I am not pursuing Moriarty by myself."

"Are you?"

"I prefer not to answer that question here. Not with that guy eavesdropping." He said the last words loud enough for Mycroft's spy to look embarrassed.

"Have Mycroft and Lestrade discovered anything new?" John continued in a hushed voice.

"From the lack of phone calls I'm getting and Lestrade's early nights in I've deduced that there have been no new leads. It must be driving Mycroft insane." His emphasis on the last word clearly reflected how pleased Sherlock was about that.

"Or it is going so well that they're figuring it out themselves."

Sherlock gave John a look of indignation.

"What are you doing here, anyway?"

"Wh- you asked me to come here!"

Sherlock huffed. "Well I wouldn't have if I knew you were going to be this irritating."

John sighed and ignored Sherlock's rudeness. "Just tell me why I'm here."

"We're on a case."

This lifted John's spirits slightly.

"Ok. What are we looking for?" He rubbed his cold hands on his jeans and looked around.

"Male of Indian origin in his early seventies, probably accompanied by a Latin American woman in her mid-sixties. Did you bring your camera?"

"Yes."

John took the camera, which Sherlock had requested on the phone, from his bag. There were still a few shots left on the film. The rest was full of pictures he took of Mary and her growing belly.

For a while he watched Sherlock watching the park. His pale blue eyes alert, but completely oblivious to being observed himself. He looked paler, as if he was not sleeping enough.

"Sherlock, do you remember why I wanted to come see you?"

There was no reaction.

"I need to make sure y-"

"Here they are", Sherlock said, his hand gesturing impatiently for John.

Indeed, two people came walking along the path towards them. Their fingers entwined and their bodies close together.
"Wait… isn't that Mr Chatterjee from the shop?"

"Well done John, I'm glad your observation skills haven't deteriorated too far. It is indeed Mr Chatterjee, who has recently been making efforts to court Mrs Hudson. She has been to dinner with him exactly three times, and the frequency with which she drops his name is increasing by the day."

John snapped a picture.

"They're dating?"

"If that's what you'd call uselessly staring at each other and her laughing at his every stupid joke, then yes."

"And you are trying to prove he's cheating?"

"Not me, John, you. Come on, gather evidence, they're embracing now."

Feeling a bit ridiculous, John raised the camera and took a few more shots.

"Good man, now get them developed as soon as possible. Mrs Hudson is planning to see him tonight. An unmarked envelope through the letterbox would do."

"Or you could just tell her."

Sherlock grimaced. "I'm not particularly… in her good graces at the moment."

John imagined Sherlock sneaking in corners and hiding behind menus, spoiling Mrs Hudson's romantic encounters.

"Right."

"He… what are you doing?" Sherlock's grimace turned into a scowl in John's direction.

"Taking a picture of you. The film isn't full yet. It would be a waste."

John snapped a few shots of Sherlock.

Sherlock cleared his throat and sat uncomfortably straight.

"Right. Well. Now it's full. Go and get it developed", said Sherlock at the sound of the film rewinding inside the camera.

Sherlock was already moving to get up, but John put a hand on his arm.

"Not so fast. I still need to talk to you."

The tall man sat himself back down on the bench, clearly annoyed that he was not fooling John.

John sighed.

"I want to say sorry about the other day. It was… maybe I shouldn't have agreed so quickly on Brook. Although it was Olivia's choice in the end."

Sherlock didn't look at him. His lips parted for a second but he didn't make a sound. He looked hurt, and a pang of guilt was felt in John's chest.
"I don't trust Brook. I told you that."

"I know that, but you have never been able to provide me with any evidence to get rid of him, except an attempt to kiss you when we were all drunk. And physically threatening a parent Sherlock… many people would have fired you for that."

"He deserved it."

"I'm sure he did, but…"

"He's a.. a useless fucking alcoholic."

John winced. It was never pleasant to hear Sherlock swear.

"True…"

"And he doesn't care about her."

"I don't think that's the case."

Sherlock let out a puff of air through his nose. "If he cared one bit he'd stop drinking and take some interest in her."

"Sebastian says he's doing pretty well; going to meetings and sticking to routines and stuff", John said.

"I don't trust Sebastian. And he hasn't stopped drinking."

"He's an addict. You know how hard it is to stop."

Sherlock shrugged his shoulders. "I did it, didn't I?"

"And have you been behaving perfectly since then?"

Sherlock let out a frustrated breath and looked the other way.

"I thought so. It's a process. It takes time."

"Olivia doesn't have time. She needs to pass her exams."

John sighed.

"It would be great if she could. But I won't push for her to be taken into care. It might only make things worse for her."

To John’s surprise, Sherlock nodded.

"And to be honest… I'm not sure if you are the best judge on what's best for her right now. She doesn't seem to have been talking to you recently. I was a bit surprised by that. She seemed to be so fond of you."

Sherlock scratched at some peeling paint on the wooden bench.

"…I've been a bit of a dick."

"Most probably."
Sherlock shot him an offended look.
"Ok, that was low, sorry. But you have to admit it comes quite naturally to you."
"Usually I just don't care. This time… I didn't mean to."

John smiled.
"Not being her mentor doesn't mean you can't still talk to her you know. Maybe even apologise?"

Sherlock nodded.
"Besides school, are you coping… with everything?" John asked.
"What am I supposed to cope with?"
"The fact that Moriarty is circling London murdering people that resemble ones you know? That Mycroft has decided to keep you in the dark and doesn't seem to be changing his mind? The fact that nobody has a clue how to find this psycho? And maybe even the fact that Mary and I are quite occupied with having a baby and you feel like you can't talk to me?"
"You spoke to Lestrade."
"He told me you might be somewhat upset, yes."
"He should mind his own business."
"He's being a friend. And considering he has witnessed you at your worst, I take his word for it when he says I need to keep an eye on you."
"I'm fine." Sherlock shrugged.
"You've lost weight."
"Not a lot."
"No, but it's usually not a good sign for you. You haven't had cases… besides this undoubtedly thrilling one, so there is no reason you should skip meals."
"Who are you, the body police?"
"I'm your friend, and your doctor. Will you come to dinner at ours this evening?"

Sherlock gave a deep sigh but didn't roll his eyes. John didn't know if that was a good sign or not.
"Fine."

When Sherlock got home about half an hour later, Mrs Hudson was not there. He walked up the stairs, a bit more slowly than usual, and noticed he'd left his own door unlocked. Sighing, he entered, and locked the door behind him. The Belstaff together with his jacket easily slid from his shoulders and landed on his chair. He walked to the sofa and pushed some folders and books from it's soft leather surface onto the floor, where they landed on a layer of dust, scribbled post-its, cigarette boxes, an half empty pack of crisps, pencils, mugs, and more paper files. He sat down, rumbled through the stuff on the floor and fished out a cigarette. He lighted it on the Benson burner that was currently occupying the coffee table together with an experiment he wasn't sure of why he started it. There was only the motion of his hand, wrist, and lungs, smoking up until the filter while
his brain set itself to work on an interesting puzzle: Richard Brook.

~~~

It was April and the first hints of spring life presented themselves. The air was softer and the scent of budding flowers drifted in the air. The kids at school had shed their woolly hats and scarves and were slowly getting excited about sports games, final exams, holiday plans, and, of course, the school play.

Mr Brook had involved pupils from year 2 and 3 in the school play and since the Easter holidays held rehearsals twice a week, once with the entire cast (in the PE room to have enough space) and once with only the main actors. After Eric had gotten over his first shock and annoyance of having to act with Olivia, he dutifully learned his lines and everybody was quite impressed by his acting skills. He seemed to have grown up a little since Mr Brook had taken him under his wing.

"Do you think Eric looks older now?" Lucy mused while the girls sat on the wooden chairs in the back, watching him rehearse a fight scene with a boy from the 2nd year, Mr Brook dancing around them giving directions. Eric's movements were confident and he was quick, probably from all the practice of beating people up, Olivia mused. Still, she had to give him credit for the change. He had lost his leading position in the group of bullies in favour of being tutored by Mr Brook and participating in the play. He was even minimally polite to her.

"You mean since he's lost weight and stuff?" Rose asked.

"Yeah I guess. And he's being nicer to people."

"Maybe… a bit. Don't buy it completely though. I've never seen anyone change so much so quickly", Rose said.

"That's because Mr Brook is a good influence."

"You don't seriously fancy him do you?"

"Who, Eric or Mr Brook?" Lucy smiled mischievously.

Rose snorted in laughter. It seemed Lucy was never shy of fancying people, even though she had been stuck to Tim like glue outside school hours.

For a few minutes they watched in silence as the boys attempted to "kill" each other on stage. It was amazing to see how Mr Brook directed Eric. A mere click of his fingers or a movement of his eyes adjusted the boy's posture and timing, almost like a dance. Olivia wondered what it would be like to trust somebody so fully to be able to just let go and be guided like that. It made her feel strangely jealous.

"Mary will be having her baby soon", Rose announced. "Her due date is in a couple of weeks."

"I wouldn't want to be in her shoes," Lucy said. "I don't think I could deal with all the pain and the blood."

Rose paled raised her eyebrows at Lucy.
"What do you mean blood?" Olivia asked.

Lucy's back straightened as she lifted her chin and explained. "Well, the baby will probably be covered in blood and slimy stuff, but it also needs to come out, which means lots of things sort of… rip."

Olivia grimaced and Rose let out a disgusted noise.

Lucy, encouraged by their shocked reactions, continued. "If she doesn't open up enough by herself or if the baby's head is too big, they might take some scissors and-…"

Olivia slapped her hands over her ears while Rose tried to cover Lucy's mouth, laughing.

When it was clear Lucy got the message Rose sat back down in her own seat. "Well, let's hope that the baby doesn't come too soon because John is great these days. He's completely distracted. He even let me in without a note the other day when I was late. Just had to ask about Mary."

"Oh don't worry, he will probably be even more distracted afterwards" Lucy grinned.

Olivia smiled at her friends and for a moment imagined Mr Watson with a tiny baby in his arms.

"Right. Who wants to rehearse lines with me?"

~~~

Sherlock was standing in Brook’s office, alone. He’d picked the lock in a personal record time and felt a tinge of nostalgia at snooping around somewhere uninvited. Richard was teaching a class and wouldn’t be back for a while, so Sherlock took his time to observe his surroundings, careful not to move anything.

The room was quite similar to his office, with an assortment of furniture assembled from room 221. It was also irritatingly tidy. There was a big bookcase filled with plays and theatre related works. Sherlock picked a few of them up and leafed through, finding a note or comment here and there in what seemed like Richard’s handwriting. One had a message on the first page, definitely not in Richard’s handwriting, that said “To James”. It was a volume of the Grimm brothers fairytales.

Snapping the book shut, Sherlock put it back and moved to the desk. It was clean of papers, except an old tin box, which was empty, and a diary. The diary was the academic type, starting in August, going all the way to the end of the next year. It was used, obviously handled a lot, and some pages were loose. It was filled with perfectly normal teacher-like notes such as “Call Timmy’s mum”, “Marks class 2c due”, and “Extra rehearsal Eric”. His handwriting was neat and italic, written with precision. Checking the schedule for the coming days, Sherlock was annoyed to see “Tutoring session Olivia” set for Thursday.

He carefully placed the diary exactly as he had found it on the desk and tested the desk drawers. Both were locked. Using his pin he had the first one open in seconds. Inside were several folders with homework assignments and lists of marks. There was a separate folder with Olivia’s name on it, probably because she was now under his supervision. Although it was not exactly what he’d come here to find, he picked it up anyway. The first pages were her marks for all subjects so far, which didn’t look good. She was failing almost everything except theatre. Even with her high scores from the winter she wouldn’t average high enough to pass if she continued like this. There
were a couple of pages of notes from incidents, the majority of which he’d written himself. At the back, though, there were some pages he didn’t recognize. They were medical notes written by John, and by nurse Brown, detailing Olivia’s injuries after the fight with Joan. In no circumstance should Richard even have access to these. Sherlock’s heart started beating faster as he smelled blood. Right then, he heard footsteps approach in the corridor and he stepped from behind the desk to stand beside the door. The footsteps halted and someone seemed to test whether the door was locked or not. It opened, hiding Sherlock from view for a moment.

“When you intend to break into someone’s office it is good practice to watch the area for a while before you go in.”

“Jesus Christ!” Rose exclaimed as she spun around.

Sherlock stepped out. “What are you doing here?”

“Nothing. What are you doing here? You almost gave me heart attack”

“Nothing.”

“You’re spying, aren’t you?” she asked.

Sherlock shrugged. “I find investigating a more appropriate term. Not that it’s any of your concern. Go back to your class.”

“I don’t have class right now. Are you looking for dirt on Mr Brook because you’re jealous that he’s now Olivia’s mentor?”

“That’s ridiculous.”

“Indeed it is.”

“Oh don’t try to be clever.”

“Can’t help it. Is that her file?”

Sherlock was reminded of Olivia’s medical file in his hands and pushed it back into the folder. “Yes.”

Rose stared at it for a moment but didn’t ask to see it.

Sherlock placed the folder back into the drawer and sighed. “Look. I am here for my own reasons you don’t need to know about. You need to get out of here before you get expelled. I know you worry about her. I do as well. But let me handle it.”

“I want to help. I don’t trust him.”

“But why?” he asked, hoping that she would have a more rational reason for her distrust.

“I don’t know. Just a feeling.”

Sherlock raised an eyebrow.

“Ok alright, because Eric has changed since Brook has been tutoring him. He does everything Brook says, everything, without even blinking. Most people find it funny, but when you watch him he is like a robot. My classmates think that Eric just adores Mr Brook, but to me it looks like fear. And sometimes he breaks out in a sweat just like that, or his hands shake. It creeps me out and I
don’t want Olivia to…”

“Alright”, Sherlock held up his hand. “Let’s agree on this: you will keep out of this. Don’t go sneaking around anymore. Don’t do anything stupid. But tell me if you see something alarming.”

Rose rolled her eyes. “Sounds exciting. And what are you going to do?”

“Sneak around.”

Rose sighed but nodded. She turned to leave but just before opening the door she looked back. He was already back to searching the desk drawers.

“Mr Holmes?”

“What?” he looked up.

“Please don’t abandon her.”
The four hours a week Olivia spent in rehearsal were basically all she had to feel normal. She could either talk with her friends about random things, or concentrate on acting, which she felt she was getting better and better at. Mr Brook was a very good teacher. He ensured she got the right encouragement and always made sure all his pupils had fun, letting them come up with lots of creative ideas, many of which ended up in the play. That, plus the chocolate bourbon creams he often brought along, made him the favourite teacher of many.

As her mentor he was kind and considerate and didn't get upset when she failed a test. He was there if she decided she wanted to talk to him, but didn't push her in any way. It made her feel at ease and took some of the pressure off her schoolwork.

In classes Olivia had difficulty concentrating and found that she really didn't care anymore whether Mr Anderson got angry or not, whether Mr Holmes would notice when she hadn't done her homework, or if Mr Watson found out that she had stolen medication from the nurse's office.

It had been easy enough to do after observing at what time the nurse went for lunch every day. She hadn’t even felt guilty about it. The sleeping problem was solved for at least a month so she didn’t have to look like a zombie at school. It meant that the main physical sign of her private life was dealt with, and the minor ones were getting easier to hide with practice. The flinching, which had started to happen anytime a man came close to touching her, was now nothing more than a tightness in her shoulders that lasted less than a second. Keeping the flares of anger under control was just a matter of keeping her mouth shut and her eyes fixed on a neutral spot.
When rehearsals were over she walked home through a blossoming London, a liberty that Seb only permitted because he didn't have the time to drive her and her dad was not in a condition to do so. During the walk she took the longest route and slowed down when home came in sight.

Seb was there half the time, coming up with more rules every day. She hadn't even been shocked when he told her she would need permission to shower for longer than 5 minutes a day. He had taken the key of the bathroom with the threat that either of them would come in if she stayed under longer, ripping away every hint of privacy she had left. Her father said it had to do with the high water bill he couldn't afford.

Sadism.

It was what got Seb off, she figured. He loved watching her, telling her things he knew would frighten her, such as that maybe she should move to another school, or that maybe she shouldn't go to school at all once she turned sixteen so she could take care of Jeremy full-time. Sometimes he would corner her in the kitchen, whispering and coming close and watching her crumble with fear before turning away with a wide grin, sky high on his power trip.

The thing she found that helped was zoning out, going to into robot mode when she stepped into the house. She did everything mechanically; eating, listening to Seb's lectures, getting dressed, cleaning, and waiting in the dark in her room at night, hoping sleep would come before the sound of her dad stumbled upstairs. It was the only way she got through the approximately 14 hours she was stuck at home every day, by letting her head filter out almost every single input and by medicating herself into the night. When she would wake up she wouldn't remember what had been for dinner the evening before, and shutting the door behind her at seven in the morning was a relief.

It worked like this, but deep inside she knew she would not be able to keep it up. The summer holidays were only a few months away and there was no way she would survive them. It had taken her some time to get to the conclusion, but it was clear to her that both her living with her father and involving any authorities were not possible. Sebastian would try to keep her home and let her father continue the touching, the kissing, the groping, and the things she could not admit to herself in broad daylight. Telling Mr Holmes or Mr Watson would mean police investigations and she had no doubt Sebastian would do anything to discredit her.

The problem now was to decide on her alternative, a step for which she had not yet mustered the strength.

~~~

While nature awakened and grew in strength, Sherlock's physical and mental health declined.

Mrs Hudson was still annoyed about her ruined romantic endeavours with Mr Chatterjee, Molly refused to let him into the lab on Lestrade's orders, and that man was being annoyingly good at ignoring him.

Even though he was crawling out of his skin of boredom, Sherlock would rather relapse than seek out his brother. Mycroft was silently making a point, while sending his minions to keep an eye out in case Sherlock got himself into trouble.
This meant he had very few activities to distract him. He experimented of course, driving Mrs Hudson even further up the walls with toxic fumes and flammable 'incidents'. He consumed increasing amounts of alcohol, convincing himself that it didn't count as a relapse if it wasn't inhaled, sniffed, or injected.

Of course he could speak to John, but knowing his best friend was either at school, frantically trying to sort out marks and 'bad news meetings' before the end of the school year, or at home with Mary, checking her and the baby's vitals every five minutes, he'd rather not waste time on that.

His best distraction had been his research on Brook, but he had hit dead end after dead end with that. So far he had searched Brook’s office and classroom but found no evidence to present to John to convince him to fire the guy. Moreover, he actually did seem to be doing well regarding Olivia. She was still failing, but she seemed healthy and rested, less angry. There had been no further incidents indicating panic or aggression since Brook had taken over, which only corroborated Lestrade’s theory that it was Sherlock who had been the bad influence on her.

The DI's insights had made him feel inconveniently guilty. As much as Sherlock had tried to deny it, the man's words had turned Olivia into a victimized child; one that he had personally damaged. He found it simultaneously confusing and fascinating to notice that this realisation had changed his sentiment for her. What used to be a mix of adrenaline, fascination, and attraction when he found himself alone with her was nowoverpowered by frustration and protectiveness. Not to mention the guilt.

Sherlock stood in the schoolyard smoking a cigarette and studying the weeds growing in between the stones. He was contemplating what to do with his weekend now that most kids had gone home.

There was a "tsk tsk" from the doorway. John stepped outside, clearly on his way home. His face was a mix of exasperation and worry.

Sherlock leaned against the wall, frowning at the tips of his shoes for a moment.

"What are you pouting over?"

"Olivia is going to fail this year."

John nodded understandingly. "Most probably."

"You're aware?"

"I might be a bit preoccupied but I'm not blind, Sherlock. I always have meetings with each mentor to discuss their pupils. I've been trying to get a hold of you to schedule something, but it seems ambushing you is a better strategy. How long have you not slept, by the way?"

Sherlock ignored that last part. "So you had this meeting- and Brook really doesn't care if she passes?"

"Of course he does, but he thinks -and I agree- that Olivia has had enough on her plate this year. Now she has finally found something she is passionate about, and we're not going to take that away from her to study 15 hours a day in order to maybe narrowly pass her exams. Next year she can make a fresh start and regain some confidence in her studies. Right now she needs to relax, which seems to happen during rehearsals."

"I could have made her pass. And she could have done the play next year."

John smiled. "Yes you could have. You could have put her on a gruelling tutoring schedule
everyday, telling her how much better she needs to be and she would have hated you by the time
summer comes."

Sherlock sighed, acknowledging John's point.

"But nobody questions why her marks are so low."

"From what Brook tells me she just needs something to rebuild her confidence and find some joy at
school. Taking the pressure off her course work is already helping to solve her sleeping problems.
Her father is not completely stable but the social worker is there almost every day to help. Richard
said he would speak to them again soon to discuss Olivia's options for next year. For now she will
do the school play—which I still expect you to attend by the way—and she will then have a whole
summer to relax. I will advise Jeremy about options for therapy, which could be beneficial to her.
By the time she comes back to school I hope she will be feeling better. She basically lost almost all
parental support in one year, which is extremely tough. I'm amazed at how resilient she's been,
actually."

Sherlock sniffed. He could not disagree that Olivia was remarkably strong.

"You're letting Brook do all of it", he said accusingly.

A hint of compassion passed John's face, but he looked resolved.

"He's her mentor now. There are certain boundaries you have to respect. It's now Richard's job to
monitor her progress, not yours."

"I don't trust him and I don't trust Sebastian Moran."

John looked alarmed. "Has she spoken to you about Sebastian?"

"No." Sherlock scuffed his right foot against a patch of grass.

Sherlock opened his mouth but John continued. "My child is going to be born any day now,
Sherlock. I don't think you will ever understand how much attention that requires. And I will be
away from school more once he or she is here. I'm happy Olivia feels comfortable with Richard
and he seems to have things under control. And you've not been able to give me one good reason to
distrust him or Sebastian. So if you want to get their backgrounds checked by Mycroft, be my
guest. But don't come to me on a hunch. You don't do hunches."

Sherlock considered telling him about the medical records he'd found in Olivia's file, but it would
mean admitting he'd searched Richard's office and the information wasn't enough to incriminate
him. It could easily be flipped around considering the folder itself had come from Sherlock when it
was decided he should no longer be involved.

For a while John looked out over the schoolyard while Sherlock smoked. The question with which
Sherlock broke the silence both surprised and pleased John.

"How is Mary?"

"She's… big. And round. And she hates being pregnant. There are loads of… uncomfortable side
effects that I won't bore you with."

"Appreciated."

"Neither of us can wait for it to be over. It's not ideal like this, towards the end of the school year."
But I've given Sally Donovan some of my workload, which is a relief. And I can't wait to meet my child." John beamed.

"Excellent. Did I tell you my middle names?"

"Several times." John smiled strangely at his friend, a smile Sherlock didn't fully recognise.

"What? You wouldn't want to give him an average name."

John started walking away. That strange grin still plastered across his face.

"Or her. I have to go. Eat something Sherlock. Please?" he said before turning towards the car park.

~~~

"Wrong."

"Feckin' hell!" Lestrade could only just suppress the urge to jump. "You wanker." The DI was on his lunch break, chasing a lead on a hunch. He had just radioed the office, asking for a search warrant for the old Victorian house behind him when the familiar rumbling voice appeared an inch from his ear.

Sherlock couldn't avoid looking smug.

"You know you shouldn't make an officer jump, we have dangerous reflexes."

"Yours must have worn out then."

"Twat."

It was a Tuesday afternoon and it was raining cats and dogs. One of those days with rolling clouds that made it feel like the sun had set already. Neither of them were the type to carry an umbrella.

"Let's go inside, I'm getting soaked", Sherlock said, shifting impatiently back and forth on his heels.

"I was just about to-"

"I know, and it would take too long for your mentally challenged officers to find the door of New Scotland Yard. He might be dead by the time they manage to get here." Sherlock stepped up to the front door and tested the lock.

"Stop that. What do you mean he would be dead? How do you even know who I'm looking for?"

"Martin van Elsen, 6 years old, son of Hans and Julia van Elsen, a banker and an art dealer, disappeared this morning. No note, no call, no demand for ransom. The kidnapper aims to give the boy a peaceful death by letting the kitchen fill with carbon monoxide. Knowing he left the building fifteen minutes ago, we should not wait for a warrant or backup, especially not if you wish to keep your job." The consulting detective held up a pin in his leather clad hand.

Lestrade let out a groan. "Do it quickly. But I swear… if this is one of your horrible jokes I will rip you to shreds".
“Wrong, again.” Sherlock said triumphantly as he wriggled the pin around inside the lock. "If I'm joking you would still need me to actually locate the boy afterward."

Within seconds they were inside, their footsteps heavy on the old oak floor. Sherlock appeared not to be joking as he tightly held his scarf to his mouth and nose. Lestrade pulled up his collar to do the same. At least Sherlock was smart enough to stay behind him as they searched the dark house, throwing open windows as they went. Surely, in the kitchen an ancient gas stove was audibly leaking, and little Martin was tie-wrapped to the sink.

The plastic was visibly digging into his wrists, but he was already unconscious.

Sherlock switched off the gas and knocked out a window while Lestrade checked the kid's vitals. The relaxation of the DI's shoulder muscles told Sherlock that the boy was alive.

All was fine then.

He picked the lock of the back door to let some more fresh air into the kitchen. Lestrade cut the child loose, picked him up and sat down on the step outside into the garden. His little legs flailed about as he was hoisted up onto Lestrade's thigh, holding his head and carefully checking the eye response. Sherlock was happy he didn't have to deal with 6 year olds. They were so… miniature and had no capacity for logical thought. He truly wondered why the parents were so desperate to get him back.

Although now he wasn't completely sure what to do with himself.

"I'm glad you had the sense to listen to me. It only pr-"

"Fuck off Sherlock."

Sherlock frowned, unsure why Lestrade was suddenly in such a bad mood. The kid was alive, wasn't it? It was definitely squirming now.

"I still need t-"

"Shut up or I'll punch that smirk off your face," the DI said aggressively.

Still met with a blank face, Lestrade let out a frustrated growl. "You knew the killer left fifteen minutes ago. You saw him leave. You were here and you knew the kid was dying. And you WAITED FOR ME TO TURN UP. He could just as well be dead by now! And for what, so you had a chance to show off? Because God forbid Sherlock Holmes perform any trick without an audience."

Greg was sure the veins in his neck were showing, but he didn't care. The boy stirred in his arms and let out a sob, responding to their rumbling angry voices.

Sherlock huffed, his collar turned up against the rain. Without the adrenaline rushing through him, Greg suddenly noticed how awful his friend looked with his hair wet and in a coat that seemed too big.

Sherlock huffed. "It's not a trick. I knew where you were and how long it would take you to drive here. I calculated the time it would take for a space that size to fill up, combined with the age of the victim… I knew how much time there was."

"If you ever have to defend yourself in front of a jury, Sherlock…"
"You'd lose merely because they'd despise you," Greg thought but didn't say.

"Then I hope the majority of that jury understands basic chemistry," the man spat back at him.

"It's not about the bloody science of it. You deduced the method this guy would use to kill and you deduced that he had not hurt the kid in any other way. Are you really too arrogant to understand that you could have been wrong? That you might not have all the variables? Or that you might just be a couple minutes off?"

Sirens could be heard approaching. The boy sobbed again and tried to pull himself out of Lestrade's grip, looking rather pale.

"It doesn't matter. I was right. And he's fine."

Sherlock pulled a cigarette out of his coat pocket and reached for a lighter.

"Are you fucking kidding me?! You want to blow us all up?" Lestrade bellowed.

"I'm outside."

Still Sherlock pocketed the cigarette, looking slightly guilty but not much.

Martin convulsed and vomited. Greg held him so that most of it at least landed on the grass and not on him, and shot Sherlock an angry glare.

Sherlock grimaced. "If he can vomit he'll be fine."

Police could be heard inside the apartment and a few seconds later a young officer stepped outside, returning her gun to its holster. "With all due respect Detective Inspector, you could be heard yelling from the street. I suggest I take the boy to be checked by the medical team so you can… sort this out." She gave Sherlock a disdainful glance.

"Good thinking sergeant Llewly."

Lestrade stood up and carefully handed the child over, who seemed relieved to be taken away from the two angry men. Sherlock was about to make a snide remark when Greg turned back to him, still looking murderous.

"Do you think I'm too thick to understand that this whole display is you trying to get back in 'the game'? As if I would ever let you?"

The younger man squared his shoulders and lifted his chin as if to compose himself. His gaze flicked back to the broken kitchen window.

"Arrest the mother. No self-respecting murderer would leave his victim while still alive and risk interference. She wanted him to die painlessly. The kid obviously knew too much about her affair with the drugs baron."

"What?"

"You didn't see her shoes?"

"Her shoes- you followed me this morning?" Greg asked but was not surprised. Then he realised something. "Aren't you supposed to be at work?"

Sherlock let out a bark. "They don't need me. I'm not wasting my time in that god-awful place
while I can do actual work. If you won't let me on the case then I don't know why I just broke into this house for you. And you know I can find Moriarty."

Lestrade groaned at the mention of Moriarty.

"Do you think I doubt that you can't solve the case? Of course you can bloody solve it. And you will be certain to leave a trail of destruction behind you. It's not your talent that's the problem Sherlock, it is your lack of basic human understanding of what's right and what's wrong!"

The tall man gave him a deadly stare, but he had never looked so small. Lestrade didn't feel like holding back now. It felt great bringing Sherlock's ego down a notch.

"And aside from your screwed up moral compass, you can't even take care of yourself Sherlock. You don't eat unless John shoves it into your mouth and you don't know when you need to sleep. And you are risking losing your job because Richard is everyone's favourite teacher now and because Olivia made the wise decision not to talk to you anymore? You drop everything you've built up because you're jealous and immature. I actually wonder who is more of a child, Olivia or you."

Sherlock had already left. The slamming of the front door could be heard all the way in the garden.

"Hello?"

"You're not John."

"Um no", the female voice on the other side said. "…this is Janine, Mary's friend. Uhm… I'm at their place to pick up some things to bring to the hospital. Who is this?"

"Sherlock."

"Oh right, John's detective friend… Well, they were very well prepared, but her water broke while they were at the gynaecologists waiting room, so that was convenient, but they need their bags. You know, fresh set of clothes, toothbrushes and such."

"What is the room number?"

"I don't think they have one yet. Mary's just in phase one and after the delivery she'll be moved again."

"Oh."

"Can I give them a message?"

"No need… thank you."

"If I were you I'd try calling Bart's tomorrow morning. They'll be able to give you the room number then."

"Fine."

"Have a lovely ev-"

~~~
"Dad?"

"What is it my dear?"

Jeremy was sitting at the kitchen table bent over some paperwork. He was wearing the same shirt as yesterday and his hair was a mess. The circles under his eyes had darkened and etched themselves on his face over the past few months to the point they might never leave again.

He did seem sober, however.

Looking up, he noticed his daughter frowning at her hands, her jaw tight. She was standing on the other side of the kitchen, with her back against the counter.

"What's wrong?"

She looked at him then.

"I just… do you know how long Seb is staying… with us?" Jeremy took a deep breath at the question.

"I mean… he's not… I don't think social workers usually spend so much time at people's houses. And he yells."

Her whispering words pulled at something in Jeremy's heart.

"Listen Olivia, I know… Seb is not particularly… easy to be around. He is hard on both of us and he can be a bit… aggressive in his approach. But you have to understand that changing social workers is very difficult. I mean, he would be upset, we would have to request to be assigned to someone else… they would need a good reason to go through all that trouble for us."

Her lips slightly trembled.

"But he scares me." It came out all squeaky.

Jeremy sighed.

"Has he ever hurt you? You need to understand that he is only trying to help us get better. He helps remind you of your homework, he brought some routine into our lives, some rules to keep us organised, and he got me new medication that keeps me more alert over the anti-depressants. And look," Jeremy gestured at the documents in front of him, "he even lent me money to get back on track with the bills."

Olivia remembered the mess in the living room a few months ago and new layer of dread settled in her stomach. "You borrowed money from him?"

"Oh honey… I shouldn't have told you that. I'm sorry. Don't worry about it. I'll make sure we get by. But Seb will be with us for a while."

Olivia could not hold back the tears any longer. They were barrelling thick and hot down her cheeks, accelerated by her shaking shoulders. She covered her face with her hands. She kept them there as she heard the scraping of his chair on the tiles and his heavy footsteps coming towards her. Eventually his arms encircled her until his hands rested on her back, rubbing comfortingly up and down.
Olivia didn't move an inch except for the sobs that wrecked her body.

"Shhhhhh. It will be okay." He soothed. "It's all going to be okay. I will talk to Seb and see how we can maybe give you some more space."

For a while they stood there, Olivia with her arms clenched in front of her and he with his arms around her. Even though it felt like a fatherly hug and reminded her of before her mother died, she could not relax into it.

He kept mumbling soothing words and stroking her gently, and kept it going while he kissed the top of her head, the warmth of his lips leaving an uneasy tingling on her scalp.

"Don't cry."

His lips planted soft kisses on her temple, her cheek. His body was leaning over and his head tilted to the side to reach. Olivia felt her muscles freeze familiarly. It always happened when he touched her like that, and it usually helped her retreat into her own mind, blocking out sound and images. It usually happened in her dark bedroom while she had her back to him, and mostly she managed to pretend nothing had happened when the dent in her mattress disappeared and silence surrounded her. But this was different. This was intimate. This was in the kitchen where the light was too bright and his face was in front of hers and she could not pretend to be asleep.

Olivia squeezed her eyes shut as his mouth touched hers. "I love you", he whispered against her cramped lips. It was as if he was playing pretend, she thought. He administered kisses to her closed mouth, his saliva wetting her face. He was like a kid practicing on a doll. Except that he wasn't a kid and he was working from memory.

A car honking outside made him pause, and Olivia finally felt her limbs move. He didn't stop her from pushing his arms away and it was surprisingly easy to walk away.

Jesus, I could have done that earlier, she thought while she ran up the dusty staircase. In the bathroom, she washed her face at the sink and wiped her mouth till it was red. Holding onto the sink, she focused on the layer of dust that had gathered on the white stone. She had stopped cleaning the house and it had gotten dirty over the past few weeks. On a subconscious level she had always expected the day would come again when Mr Holmes or Mr Watson would visit. Maybe because they were curious, or worried, or needed to speak to her father. But Mr Holmes didn't love her anymore, and Mr Watson did not have the time. There was no point in cleaning.

Then she noticed the loose strand of short dark hair curled up against the side of the sink and it made a shiver go up her spine. Just in time she shifted to the toilet and landed on her knees, gripping the seat tightly.

Twenty minutes later, when the retching had finally subsided, she was exhausted enough to curl up in bed and fall asleep almost immediately.

~~~

10 p.m.

Sherlock walked the streets of London like a prowling leopard; stalking fast along the pavement with his collar turned up, his eyes still sharp despite the five fingers of whiskey at home, scanning
the doors of bars and clubs.

John was busy. At the hospital. Mary was having John's baby.

It was fine. He would have time again tomorrow.

Right now he just needed a distraction. Just for tonight. He'd stay out a couple of hours, get his mind off things, go to sleep, and then this horrible day would be over.

He tugged his collar a bit tighter—it had stopped raining but it was still water cold outside- and walked on. London's clubs were still the same as six years ago, when he frequented them in his capacity as consulting addict. There were still queues of shivering young women outside in short skirts and bare legs, there were still bulky bouncers at the doors (some of them even seemed to remember him, mostly eying him with suspicion), and the music was still too loud to have a normal conversation. Sherlock decided to enter a mainstream club he'd hardly ever been to before.

Even here were still low-level dealers ordering expensive champagne at the tables in the back.

Sherlock had never been a dealer, mind you.

He had been expert at telling who would rip you off, who had meddled with the product, and who had money they didn't want anyone to know about. Sherlock in his mid-twenties would pick out the somewhat trustworthy ones and help them with their deals. In return he received any drug he asked for, and he didn't ask for much. Only whatever covered his personal use. The jobs brought him to the deepest underground crime circles of London and to the most secret rooms harbouring hidden pleasures. It had kept him occupied.

Tonight, however, he was not even scratching the surface of this tantalising underground network. He only observed them from his role as posh lonely Londoner looking for a good time. He stood at the bar on the side of the dance floor, sipping something ghastly that was said to contain 50% alcohol, watching the crowd move to the beat of a song he vaguely recognised from John's car radio. It didn't take long before a girl came to stand next to him at the bar, smiling. Her hair was long and blonde and fell down to the top of her bum, just where her soft skin was visible between her skirt and her top. Sherlock didn't smile back but let his eyes wander her body. 25, PhD student, biology, broke up with her boyfriend two weeks ago. Looking for a distraction, just like he was.

She ordered two cocktails and handed one to Sherlock. "I'm not a patient person", she said, leaning close to him, and held up her drink. He smiled and let his condensed glass touch hers. They spoke a few sentences while they drank, but she was mostly busy touching him, stroking his arm, his hip, his abdomen. He let his voice go lower than normal, and rumbled something in her ear about her skirt. Her body shivered and moments later he had his tongue in her mouth and her leg was planted between his.

She asked him to dance with her, but he declined. This was not what he needed. It was too early, too soon, to safe. He needed something else, worse? No not worse. Different. Something in which he could lose control. He downed his drink and excused himself.

Stepping outside he could feel the effect of the alcohol pleasantly dulling his senses. It must be around midnight now, he judged from the number of students outside, stumbling their way to catch the last tube. The next club he entered was only a few streets away. The bass could be heard from outside and the crowd was very different from the previous place. Sherlock ignored the queue of mostly pumped up men outside and was granted access by a bouncer he'd always liked back in the day. Down the stairs he passed by the cloakroom, where he deposited his coat and jacket, and then walked into the mass of writhing arms and hips and torsos. This was the kind of place he longed
for: filled with people on all kinds of edges, and mostly anonymous. Nobody here would blame him for not following social convention, for being rude, for being himself.

He made his way to the bar and ordered a drink, downed it and ordered another, which he took to the side of the room. It always took a moment to get used to the loud noise pounding his eardrums and the flashing lights making his eyes squint. The smoke that used to make his eyes water was no longer there, the smell of sweat all the more obvious.

"You alright mate?" a voice to his left sounded. The man... boy – he could not be more than twenty- was leaning with his elbow against the wall just above Sherlock's shoulder. He was grinning and his eyes showed tell-tale signs of heroin use.

"Fine."

"I think you could use another one of those." The guy gestured to Sherlock's almost empty glass.

Sherlock rolled his eyes, making no attempt to be polite. He threw back the rest of his drink, swallowed, set the glass down, and walked into the mass of dancing people with as much arrogance as his loose muscles could still muster. Once out of sight of the boy, he let himself be moved by the crowd, the music having a particularly seductive swing to it. He moved for a while, with different people, alone, and he was forgetting, finally.

His (howmanieth?) drink had lots of ice in it. Would he even know how to order such a thing? Oh, right, the boxer in the tight T-shirt had asked for it. That's why he had two of them. Making his way back through the crowd it took him a while to locate the guy, partly because there were so many people trying to distract him and partly because he was so easily distracted. Once he was spotted the boxer smiled and pulled Sherlock closer. They were of similar height, but Dan, if he remembered correctly, was a lot more muscular and sported a fading bruise on his cheekbone. Sherlock could basically trace his abs through his shirt, and a thrill ran down his spine at the idea of the strength of his counterpart. Dan held his cold glass against Sherlock's cheek and some drops trickled down his neck, mixing with sweat. Sherlock ran his tongue along the glass while keeping his eyes fixed on Dan, whose mouth opened in a moan.

They drank, and danced, and drank, and Sherlock actually enjoyed the feeling of the other man's sweaty hands on his ass. Dan commented on Sherlock's hips, or rather, the way they moved, laughing when he received an extra seductive slide for his compliment. Suddenly lips were pressed against Sherlock's mouth, and strong fingers snaked under his shirt, holding onto his sides, sliding along his moist skin.

Sherlock's hair was sticking to his forehead and he could feel beads of sweat running down his back. In any other situation he would be desperate for a shower and a fresh suit, but not here. Here everything was dirty and sticky and he revelled in it. He threw his head back and deleted all the other people in the room.

They played; grabbing and shoving each other from side to side, not to hurt but as a show of power. Making each other wince with their teeth and moan with their hips to the rhythm of the music.

"God I want you", Dan groaned into Sherlock's ear, palming the obvious bulge in his trousers. Sherlock closed his eyes and nodded. He let the bulkier man shove people aside as they moved to the back, the fog in Sherlock's head was perfectly pleasant. Thick enough to not worry about... well, whatever it was that made him start drinking, but not enough to feel ill.

A door opened, and they entered a brightly lit space that hurt his eyes. Squinting, he recognised it as the men's room. Through the haze the noticed the greyish tiles and the man standing at the
latrines to the left. The man zipped up and hardly gave them a glance as he disappeared back into the noise behind the door.

"In here."

Sherlock stumbled into a cubicle and pulled Dan with him, the door banging against the frame. They didn't waste time. Two of Sherlock's buttons popped off, bouncing away on the floor as hands roamed his chest. Tongues fought for dominance, and although Sherlock was a good match, he knew that in a real fight he would not stand a chance against the other, especially not now. The idea was dangerous and it turned him on even more.

After fumbling with his belt for a bit, Dan growled in frustration and pulled Sherlock zipper down, reaching into his pants and pulling out his cock. Sherlock shuddered, closing his eyes to enjoy the sensation of a calloused hand on his warm hard flesh. Dan sought his lips again and he opened wide, letting his mouth be ravaged.

The hand gave him a few tantalising strokes. He had been waiting for this. The drinking, the dancing, it was all to prepare him for this moment of complete distraction. Abandon. Possible destruction.

"Oh god, you're leaking".

Sherlock choked as he felt a thumb rub along his wet glans. Suddenly Dan was on his knees on the cold filthy floor and took Sherlock almost entirely in his mouth. His cheeks hollowed and the warm, wet, spongy feel of it made Sherlock gasp. His breaths came hard and fast as he leaned his head back against the wall. His left hand held on to Dan's hair and his right to the door handle. He couldn't help but thrust his hips and Dan didn't seem to mind, moaning around him.

For a few minutes Sherlock was gone. His eyes closed, mouth open, and focused on the tongue sliding along his shaft. The man with his mouth on him, what was his name again?, was good at it. The moan he let out was drowned out by the sound of the music as the door to the men's room opened and closed.

Nobody was crowding Sherlock's face anymore and there was cold air in the room. Despite the pleasure spreading through his groin he became more aware of his surroundings. He kept his eyes closed, but he could hear the drum of the music getting louder and fading again. He could smell the mix of sweat, urine, and bleach. He could hear voices, and something banging against a cubicle wall a couple of feet away. The one in the other corner then, most likely. Opening his eyes everything was blurry but he could see the door to their cubicle was ajar. Nobody in the room was paying them any mind.

"Hey, what's wrong? Not your thing?" Dan asked from waist-level.

Looking down he could see the guy had unfastened his jeans and was fisting his erection, still sucking on Sherlock's now only half hard cock.

"Keep going", Sherlock said, accentuating his words with a little thrust.

"Oh come on. I'm not resuscitating your dick". Dan got back up to his feet and pulled his jeans up a little. "I know what will help". He grinned and pulled out a clear little plastic bag out of his pocket. He stepped out into the main space, which now only contained a couple snogging against the opposite wall. Sherlock could still hear the pounding against the wall a few cubicles down from him, but his eyes were on the little bag that was now being tipped over on the side of the sink, its contents landing in a little heap. His heart was suddenly pounding in his chest and his hands were
sweating. He could hear Dan sucking it up through his nostril and he could see him shiver. He could almost feel the sensation himself.

"Oh god that's good. Take some. I swear it'll get you hard again."

Sherlock kept his jaw tight. He was still stuck to the wall inside the cubicle. Dan stepped back in with a grin, holding up the bag in front of his face.

"No!"

Dan shrugged and shoved the bag back into his pocket. Sherlock had the urge to either wrench it from him or to run.

"Killjoy. I thought you wanted this."

His heavy scent crowded him again as his neck was covered in wet kisses.

"Is there something else that can help? Do you want me to fuck you? I'd love to have your pretty arse spread open for me", he moaned to his skin.

Sherlock shook his head.

"For fuck sake man! How do you want me to get off?"

The shouting was overwhelming his senses so Sherlock kissed him, snaking his hand in between them. Anything to keep him busy right now and for Dan to just shut up. The man moaned and urged him on, and came 30 seconds later. Sherlock wiped his hand on jeans and shoved his own now completely flaccid penis back into his pants and zipped up. Wiping the sweat off his forehead with his sleeve he took one more look at the guy, who was now leaning over the toilet and peeing with terrible aim. He didn't even notice Sherlock walk out.

~~~

3 am

Greg was woken up by his phone ringing.

He had been sleeping on the sofa anyway, so he was able to stumble up and pick up within three rings, hoping his wife had not been disturbed.

"Yeah." He listened to the message and groaned. "I don't care. Let him sleep it off in a cell, or a park."

"No… yes that's true. No I don't. Fine. Alright. See you later."

He rubbed his face and turned to get dressed, but Catherine was standing in the bedroom doorway.

"Serious?"

"I… don't know yet. Gotta take a look."

She nodded and walked back towards the bed. By the time Greg was dressed and said goodbye she
was already back asleep, or pretending to be.

It was 3.36 am when he pulled up in front of Mycroft's house, office, headquarters, whatever. It was a ridiculously big building in Whitehall, which he had come to know quite well during the Moriarty investigation. It had been a few months now since he had last been there.

Mycroft opened the door himself. Despite the hour he was impeccably dressed in a suit and tie.

"Detective Inspector. Good of you to come. I apologise. Normally John would be here, but for obvious reasons I did not bother him tonight."

Greg nodded and followed Sherlock's older brother into the library.

If the sight of Sherlock would have been comical had it not been so sad. The man had been half sitting and half lying on an armchair while reaching for the open bottle of expensive looking scotch on the coffee table. A few seconds after the two older men came in, he lost balance and toppled over onto the plush carpet.

Completely oblivious to who was watching him, he crawled up onto his knees, grabbed the bottle, and used the back of the chair to lift himself up to a standing position. A drop of amber liquid trickled down his chin as he took a swig from the bottle.

Mycroft cleared his throat loudly and Sherlock snapped his face towards the sounds wildly. His eyes widened upon seeing his brother and remembering what he came here for.

"Mycroft! I need a- a word." Sherlock wiped his chin with his sleeve and staggered back a few steps until he found the support of the mantelpiece.

"I think you need more than a word, Sherlock."

"Listen Mycroft. Listen." He waved the bottle. "YOU... are ruining my life. Andats... unacceptable."

"And how exactly am I doing that, dear brother?" Mycroft said calmly. "You seem to be doing an adequate job of it yourself." He walked further into the room and sat in one of the big armchairs facing Sherlock. He looked dangerous. Greg kept standing a few feet behind the armchair, thinking this was a conversation he didn't really want to get involved in.

"How? How? You don't let me arm myself against a mass murderer! You rather let people die than give up your stupid game. I can catch him. I know his mind", Sherlock said, putting emphasis on "mind" by pointing to his temple with the pinkie of the hand holding the bottle. Greg recognised the hint of a lisp Sherlock used to get when he was high. A speech impairment he'd gotten rid off in his youth, he once told him.

"Sherlock, if you actually knew Moriarty he would not still be a problem in the first place. And even if you do, sooner or later you'll be off your mind on something vile and he will beat you, again", Mycroft spat.

"If you lemme back on the case I wouldn't HAVE TO BE OFF MY MIND! Do you have ANY idea how fucked up tis for you to have me wait patiently, knowing thata highly intelligent psychopath is circlingground, killing people that look like...like..." Scotch was spilling on the floor.

There was tremor in Mycroft's voice when he spoke next. "I know exactly what it's like to have to helplessly watch my loved ones slowly be destroyed, Sherlock."
Sherlock broke eye contact and raised the bottle back to his lips.

"Could you please stop poisoning yourself for just ONE MINUTE!" Mycroft shouted.

Greg was shocked. He'd never heard Mycroft raise his voice once. Sherlock was obviously also taken aback. He'd lowered the bottle and was staring at his older brother.

"Sit down."

Slightly swaying but still clutching the half empty bottle with white knuckles, Sherlock got back to the armchair he had originally occupied and dropped down into it.

"I did not intend to share the following information with you because I believe your ignorance is possibly helping keep Moriarty satisfied, but currently this is the best option I can think of." He left a dramatic silence. "From the moment I took you off the case there has not been one single orchestrated death related to Moriarty's drug."

Greg could see the wheels of Sherlock's mind turning. His lips were pressed tightly together.

"There have been the usual overdoses we've seen before, of course, but no murders."

"None that you've been able to identify, y'mean."

Greg took a step forward. "Sherlock, it's true. Everything stopped the moment you were denied access", he confirmed.

"Moriarty was playing a game and he obviously only wants to play it with you. As long as you refuse… or are prevented from challenging him, he's not interested. I'd like to keep it that way."

"He's not gone, Mycroft. If I beat him then we'll all be rid of him forever."

"And you would be willing to risk the lives of your friends and your pupils for that? Without even knowing you will succeed?"

"I'm smarter than you, Mycroft. I'll catch him."

"You've failed before. And I will not stand by and let you destroy the lives of others. John has a newborn for God's sake. You're doing enough damage to yourself."

Sherlock was rolling his eyes like a teenager.

"You're pathetic Mycroft. All of this is coming from sentiment."

"Something you possess quite a lot of, little brother. And it seems to be both your strength and your weakness. It gives Moriarty an unfortunate amount of leverage, but at the same, time John and Lestrade's loyalty to you have kept me from forcing you into a rehabilitation clinic more than once. They are much more patient with you than I am." He turned to Greg. "Detective Inspector, I believe my little brother might have… made some regrettable choices tonight, possibly with lasting consequences. I trust you to make sure he gets home safely and doesn't choke on his own vomit tonight."

"What are you on about, lasting consequences? Were you following me?"

"I don't watch surveillance material if I don't have to, Sherlock. It's tedious."

Sherlock gave him a challenging look. "You don't kn-"
But Mycroft cut him off. "What you did tonight is written in your staggering walk, the redness of your eyes, the missing buttons from your shirt, and the stains of bodily fluids on the front of your trousers. Please spare yourself the humiliation of making me recount your evening in detail. I feel like I've gone ten years back in time."

Sober he would never have given Mycroft the satisfaction, but Sherlock frowned and looked down at his front.

His brother sighed.

"Let's go Sherlock", Greg said and extended a hand, but Sherlock only had eyes for his brother.

"No! Mycroft! I need access to your files. We need to know evrything there's to know about Richard Brook and Sebastian Moran."

Mycroft sighed and stepped out of the room. "I think we all know that I am not going to give you access to anything. Goodnight Sherlock"

"So, from now on I want you to stop bothering me at crime scenes. You're not on the Moriarty case because there is no case, and you're not on any other case because you're… I don't even know what you are Sherlock. An addict? A sociopath? Self-destructive? Mentally unstable?"

"No need to go on."

They were in 221b's bathroom after Greg drove him home from Mycroft's.

"Well, apparently you've not learned from the first hundred times."

Sherlock huffed as he made an attempt at taking off his jacket while Greg watched. It got stuck around his elbow.

"What brought this on Sherlock? Something must have happened to make you go out to intoxicate yourself and do… well whatever it is you did. Is it Olivia?"

"What? Why would I care about that- her?" Sherlock was still stuck at the elbow and Greg held his sleeve so he could shrug the jacket off.

"Because the last time we had a proper conversation about it you basically said you loved her."

"Yes… well. You shouldn't have been so stupid as to blieve me. Course I don't. Maybe you should leave now Lestrade. I can get myself into bed."

Greg noticed Sherlock was getting paler and holding on tightly to the sink. A sheen of sweat on his forehead told him enough.

"You're nauseous aren't you?"

"I'm fine. Just go away", Sherlock said as he closed his eyes, breathing deeply.

A few minutes later Sherlock was flushing the toilet and getting back on his feet while trying to hide his embarrassment. He was trembling from head to toe and white as a sheet. Greg poured him a glass of water.

"Why are you even here? I thought you said I was a child and that I should leave you alone."

His skin was pale, his eyes sunken, and his suit trousers were too loose. It was difficult not to feel a
pang of sympathy for the lost man who currently looked more like a boy.

"Look, Sherlock. Just because I think you're an absolute moron and don't want to work with you it doesn't mean I want you wandering the streets in this state. I do hate being your nurse. And I'm only doing this once because John isn't here." He handed Sherlock the water.

"What on earth have you been up to tonight? I absolutely do not want details, but just tell me… did you do anything… risky?"

"Not your business."

"I know, but I want to save you the humiliation of Molly asking you this. So, did you use a condom or not?"

Sherlock gave a small shake of his head without looking Lestrade in the eye. Greg sighed.

"I will call Molly first thing in the morning to tell her she can expect you in the lab. You will let her take urine and blood samples without protest. I will ask her to check for any type of drug and STD possible."

This time Sherlock nodded. "Can you… can you not tell John?"

"Nice try."

Now it was really time for Sherlock to get to bed so that Greg could go home and get a few more hours of sleep. Greg didn't try to hide the shock he felt as Sherlock unbuttoned his clothes with shaking hands. Every rib was visible and his shoulder blades and hipbones stood out a little too distinctively, and Greg made a mental note to ask Molly to check for any other deficiencies in his blood. There were scratches and other unidentifiable marks on his upper body and buttocks, and Greg had to bite back several burning questions. Even in his choice of sexual partners Sherlock seemed to be destructive.

Silently, he helped Sherlock into the shower and found him a towel. When he got out he looked a little bit more present, but his eyes were redder than before. Greg knew better than to try and engage Sherlock into more conversation, but sincerely hoped John would have some time to spare for his friend in the coming days.

~~~

Sherlock startled awake. After realising his body hurt basically everywhere, he realised that the phone was ringing. It was 10 am. He didn't want to get up but the stupid noise didn't stop. Stumbling into the sitting room in his pants he grabbed the phone and had to lean against the wall to make the dizzy spell fade.

"Good morning Sherlock."

"John." His voice was raspy, but that didn't seem to worry John.

"How are you feeling?"

"Crap."
"Not unexpected. I heard you had a bit of a shit night last night." There was not a hint of accusation in his voice.

"Depends on how one looks at it."

"Very funny. Hey, I heard you're stopping by at Bart's today and I would like you to come say hi."

Sherlock just breathed.

"Mary's in room 346."

"The delivery…"

"Went very well. It took a solid 9 hours, but both mother and child are doing marvellous." He could basically hear John's grin through the phone.

"His name is Hamish and I would like you to meet him, Sherlock."
Hamish

Chapter Summary

Sherlock holds a baby.

“Remember when you told me you were pregnant?”

John was nestled next to Mary in her hospital bed with his head on her shoulder and his eyes on his new-born child. Hamish was contently sleeping in his mother’s arms, and Mary had her eyes closed but only because the feeling of her two favourite people tightly against her was so lovely.

“Of course I do. You cried”, she said, smiling.

John chuckled and kissed her neck. After a while he said “Thank you… for giving me this”.

“Pleasure’s all mine, my dear. And the pain, by the way.”

John winced. It had been a long delivery and even though he’d witnessed quite a few in his life he still couldn’t quite imagine the pain.

“Completely worth it though”, she said.

John lifted his head and Mary kissed him.

“Sorry I…”

They both looked up at the sound and caught sight of a black coat bouncing back into the corridor. A mumbled “I’ll come back in a week or so”, could be heard from outside.

“Sherlock, get back in here” John said, sitting up.

Sherlock stepped back inside but looked at them wearily, obviously uncomfortable with the intimacy he just witnessed. John noticed his friend had made an effort to appear as normal as possible, clean-shaven and his hair tidy. However he could see the rough night in his red eyes and tense shoulders. His sleeve was still rolled up from when Molly had taken blood samples (quite a few of them, as instructed). She’d given him a blue band-aid, which he was distractedly picking at.

John knew very well that Sherlock wasn’t fine like he said he was. He was having a lot of difficulty coping with his continuous exclusion from Scotland Yard, the unsolved Moriarty case, and the fact that he and Mary were starting a family. It bothered John to see his friend like this, but it couldn’t dim his mood today. Besides, he and Mary had hatched a little plan.

Mary beckoned him to her with her head. “Here.”

Sherlock laid his coat over the top of a chair and approached them. She checked that Hamish’ face could be seen clearly in the bundle of blankets.
“This is Hamish.”
Sherlock stared blankly at the little bundle.

“Hm…”

“What do you think?” she said in a serious tone.
Sherlock frowned and lifted the blanket a bit from Hamish’ head with one finger.

“Looks a bit… red. And bald.”

“I know. I’m thinking of returning him.”
Sherlock’s eyebrows shot up, but when he saw Mary’s grin he rolled his eyes.

“Well, it seems healthy. John?”

John smiled.

“He’s very healthy, and the redness will fade.”
Sherlock stepped back again, bouncing a little on his heels.

“Good. Congratulations. I will leave you to-“

“Oh no no no please don’t leave yet”, Mary protested. “I’m dying to take a shower and John really needs a coffee. Would you be a dear and just keep an eye on Hamish for a few minutes?”
Sherlock took a step back towards the door. “I shall get you some coffee.”

“No, please Sherlock” John cut in “I need to stretch my legs and get out for a bit. Have a seat. Here.” He patted the chair closest to the bed.

Eyes flicking from left to right in a moment’s hesitation. “Alright.”
Sherlock sat down gingerly in the chair his friend pointed at. John carefully carried Hamish from Mary’s arms to Sherlock, whose eyes widened at the realization of actually having to hold the child.

“You didn’t say-“

But John pressed Hamish to Sherlock’s chest.

“Here, be careful to support his head.” He stepped back.

“But…”

It was clear from Sherlock’s inability to talk his way out of this how tired he was.

“It’ll only be 10 minutes Sherlock. I’m close by. Thank you so much”, said Mary, who eased herself down from the bed and disappeared into the small bathroom.

With Hamish’ head securely resting in the crook of Sherlock’s right arm and his body on his left, John stroked his head.
“Thanks mate.”

And then John was gone. And Sherlock was alone with a baby.

A tiny, sleeping baby.
Its eyes were squeezed shut and it was breathing peacefully. It was a warm weight in Sherlock’s arms.

After the first few anxious minutes waiting for Hamish to realize he was in the arms of a completely incompetent adult and would start to scream, Sherlock slowly relaxed. He sat back in his chair, held the baby closely to him and waited for Mary or John to return, whoever was done first.

His thoughts drifted off to the night before. He didn’t understand what Mycroft and Lestrade were so upset about. He hadn’t used after all, and drinking was his own business. Yes, maybe getting off with a stranger without using protection wasn’t the best idea, but the guy seemed healthy enough... Nothing to worry about. Absolutely nothing for them to worry about…

Annoyingly he could feel a flicker of anxiety in his abdomen at the thought.

In his arms, the little one had started to stir, making soft squeaky noises.

Sherlock looked down, straight into two bright blue eyes observing him.

When John returned to the room about 15 minutes later with two steaming cups, he found Sherlock staring in concentration at Hamish. He had his feet on the metal edge of Mary’s hospital bed, and the baby was lying back on the top of his thighs, making content noises.

When Sherlock noticed him, he held up his right hand a few inches, showing him the tight grasp Hamish had on his little finger.

“Look”.

“I see he already likes you”, John said, smiling. He sat down next to Sherlock but didn’t make a move to take Hamish back, just enjoyed his coffee.

Then Mary opened the door of the bathroom. The lock opened with a loud clicking sound and Hamish flung his little arms out in a startled reflex and started to cry.

“Oh”. Sherlock lifted Hamish to his chest protectively, with both hands supporting his little body.

“Was that me? Sorry!” Mary said as she walked back to the bed, looking clean and in fresh pyjamas. She also did not make a move to take Hamish back, so Sherlock held him. By now he was completely relaxed and Hamish settled down again.

“How was it?”

“Fine. He’s surprisingly good company for someone whose mind is pretty much blank. I have good hopes that he might not grow up to be an idiot.”

“I’m glad you like him. And I feel so much better after that shower.”
“You know you should keep track of his developments to make sure he’s progressing properly”, Sherlock said thoughtfully.

“They have specialized doctors for this Sherlock” John said.

“I’m sure they have, but you are not going to rely on them are you? We could use my microscope to examine samples of his-”

“I don’t think that’s necessary my dear”, Mary said, smiling. She shared a meaningful look with John that Sherlock completely missed because he was trying too look up Hamish little nose.

“Speaking of samples, did you keep the placenta?”

“Sherlock!”

He looked up at John’s exclamation. “Not good?”

“Not good.”

“Oh.”

Hamish had fallen asleep once more against Sherlock’s chest. He didn’t seem to mind at all.

Mary was back in bed and John cleared his throat. “Sherlock, there is something Mary and I want to ask you.”

“Hm?” Sherlock looked up once again.

John sought Mary’s gaze for a moment and cleared his throat.

“We would like you to be Hamish’s official guardian.”

Sherlock’s eyes grew bigger. “Wh…uhm… how do you mean?”

“We would like for you to be involved in his life, as you would naturally be, but we also want you to be his guardian, in the event something were to happen to us. It would be included in our will.”

“But… I’m…” Sherlock let out a breath. “I’m the most irresponsible person you know”, he said incredulously.

“You know that’s not true” John opposed.

“I didn’t even think you would let me hold it… him.”

“Oh Sherlock”, Mary said. “Of course we would.”

John shifted in his seat, placed a hand on Sherlock’s elbow, and waited till Sherlock met his gaze

“You’re my best friend, remember? I would trust you with my life, and with that of my son.”

“John! I drink! I don’t know how to eat properly. I’m self-destructive!” Sherlock whisper-yelled.

“You have been the most responsible, patient, and respectful mentor to my pupils, and you’ve never done anything self-destructive while they were in your care.”

Rubbing the bridge of his nose with his free hand, Sherlock went on.
“I have sex with strangers.”

“All something you would never do while Hamish is in your care, would you?”

“Of course not!”

“There you go.”

“But… what if I’m… last night I… it might.”

John fumbled in his pocket and took out a piece of paper and handed it to Sherlock.

“It didn’t. Molly already examined your blood. It’s fine, except for some iron deficiency, which can easily be fixed by eating a bit more meat and vegetables.”

“You read it.” Sherlock stated blankly.

John’s expression turned a bit defensive. “Of course I did. Just like you and your brother have read my complete medical history file and my army records.”

Sherlock huffed but read the results, Hamish still comfortably sleeping in the crook of his arm. Indeed his test results were surprisingly good, all considering. Nothing some hearty meals from Mrs. Hudson couldn’t fix.

John went on. “Neither Mary or I have much family left and out of our friends we trust you the most. We don’t expect you to know exactly how to care for a baby, or how to raise a child. We don’t even expect you to take any responsibility as long as we are here. The only thing we want from you is to be there, to get to know him, and to learn bloody fast in case we stop being able to care for him.”

“And you are certain you would want me to be the sole carer of your child” Sherlock stated with a furrowed brow.

“Yes. But if you don’t want to, we fully respect yo-“

“No I…that sounds… reasonable. Besides, you cannot possibly trust anyone else to provide him with adequate protection.”

John grinned, “Good”. Then his smile disappeared “And if you’re ever drunk, high, or having sex with strangers while in charge of Hamish, I will come back to haunt you, Sherlock Holmes.”

The corner of Sherlock’s mouth twitched.

“I could teach him the science of deduction.”

“I’m sure he will be delighted.”

“And after school, I could take him to Bart’s, if Molly-”

“Absolutely no chance.”

~~~
Sherlock wouldn’t admit it to anyone, but the fact that John and Mary had invited him into their family and given him so much trust sparked a renewed lust for life in him. After the hospital he went home, took a shower, ate the caloric meal Mrs Hudson brought up for him, and slept until the next morning. In the following week he did some research on babies and childrearing and pestered John and Mary about optimizing early brain development.

At school he used Mary’s biology class to teach the pupils about brain development from the womb to adulthood, and dealt with their eager questions in his own Sherlockian manner.

It was Thursday morning and the pupils had been listening raptly to him for 20 minutes, longer than they were usually able to keep quiet.

“Did Mary have her baby, then?” Lucy asked when he left a pause.

“Mrs Watson. And yes, she did, last week. We’ll now move to the next hand-out I gave you on cognitive development in toddlers.”

“Is it a boy or a girl?”

“A boy. Although I don’t see how that’s relevant. Now read the hand-out in front of you and-”

“How is she doing?” Rose interrupted.

“Oh uhm… fine I guess. Can you stop being annoying and get back to the subject please? Thanks.”

“But sir! We want to know about the baby. Did you visit?”

Accompanying an exasperated sigh with an eye roll, Sherlock leaned against his desk and crossed his arms in front of his chest.

“If you think information about Mr and Mrs Watson’s child is more useful to you than brain development, fine. It’s small, round, pink, fits the definition of cute, and is incapable of anything other than eating, crying, and defecating. Try and use that information answering your exam questions three weeks from now.”

“What’s his name?” Emma asked, undisturbed by Sherlock’s annoyance.

“Hamish. Mr Watson’s middle name. Don’t tell him I told you.”

“Do they let you near him?”

Anthony’s question was met with giggles from his peers, but their teacher was not paying attention. Sherlock was looking at the door where, once again, Olivia’s frame was visible, waiting to go inside but hesitant to knock and draw attention to herself.

Opening the door, the class now silent, Sherlock let a sharped gaze take in her appearance. Upset but trying to hide it. Uniform not ironed today. No morning shower either. Biting her thumbnail and resolutely not meeting his gaze.

“Take a seat”, he said, stepping aside.

Admittedly, he wouldn’t have let any other pupil get away with being 30 minutes late, especially as it was the second time in as many weeks, but it felt wrong to be hard on her. Even though she infuriatingly refused to provide any information about her personal life, he still believed something was wrong.
Without a word or glance she walked to the middle of the classroom and sat down next to Rose.

As soon as the pupils had his attention back, more questions came.

“When is Mr Watson coming back to school?”

Sherlock sighed. “I don’t know, but probably too soon for his own good.”

~~~

As it turned out, John was back two weeks later, looking like he’d been to hell and back. Little Hamish was not much of a sleeper, as it turned out.

He and Sherlock were in Sherlock’s office to discuss his mentor pupils and their marks. It was two days since his return and John was already weary of his own office, where Ms Stevenson was overgenerous with health and parenting advice, and Sally Donovan took every opportunity to complain about the state of the school’s administrative records. Honestly it was a bit of a mess, but he just couldn’t deal with it right now. Therefore Sherlock’s cramped office space was a welcome cocoon of peace and quiet, save from the man himself, providing a minimal summary of the behaviour and progress of each of his mentees.

Sherlock was sitting in his chair with his feet up on his desk. A folder, containing an actual written report, rested in his lap.

“Billy is doing well considering his mother is struggling to make ends meet and has started working evenings. I believe having the company of Peter as opposed to Eric and his pets has greatly enhanced his eagerness to learn. His marks have gone up with an average of 10% over the past 3 months”.

John nodded approvingly.

“Emma has improved her attendance in class, but is still too worried about her father.” Seeing John raise an eyebrow, he added “…which is completely understandable.”

“Her marks are on the low side for someone with her IQ level, but that’s due mostly to the amount of marijuana she has been smoking lately.”

John frowned. “Have you asked her about it?”

“I have. She claims the amount she consumes is negligible, but I’ve told her I’d give Lestrade a call if I notice she continues.”

“Oh come on. That’s way too drastic. You should always call the mother first. As if a detective inspector would be interested in such a thing.”

“That’s exactly what she said. Apparently she’s sharp enough to see through my threat, so maybe there’s not much to worry about.”

“Just keep an eye on her. Ask if she wants to speak to a counsellor.”

Sherlock made a face of distaste, but didn’t protest.
When they were done John convinced Sherlock to join him for lunch in the cafeteria. As Sherlock was locking his office, John spotted Olivia standing at the end of the corridor. The afternoon light lit up her face and it was clear she had not expected John to be there. She stood there frozen for a moment, looking at them, her hands clutching at her schoolbag as other pupils passed her on their way downstairs. When Sherlock turned and saw her, he immediately said her name. This seemed to snap her out of her head and she took a few steps back, before turning and walking away.

“Have you spoken to her recently?” John asked, frowning.

Sherlock tapped his keys in his palm. “No. She seems to be paying more attention in class, but she’s been late a few times recently.”

“Really? Richard didn’t mention that when I asked about her yesterday.”

“Well, I’d tell you he’s a criminal, but I can’t prove it so what’s the point” Sherlock said tersely.

~~~

“John, how delightful to hear from you”, sounded the cold voice of Mycroft Holmes.

“Hi Mycroft. I have a favour to ask.”

“If it’s for my little brother I’m afraid I must decline. He’s been quite a nuisance lately and I refuse to let him think there are no consequences to his actions.”

“How pedagogical of you. But I’m not asking for Sherlock, I’m asking for me.”

“In that case, fire away.”

Rubbing the bridge of his nose, John fired away.

“I need everything there is to know about Richard Brook, who is currently under my employment, and Sebastian Moran, employed by Social Services and assigned to the household of Jeremy and Olivia Edwards.”
Olivia

Chapter Summary

The night of the school play. Olivia commences her plan and Sherlock finally comprehends.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I sincerely hope I do not have to repeat this, Eric”, Olivia heard Mr. Brook say as she stepped into the theatre room. Her teacher and peer were in the back of the room, behind the podium, where Mr. Brook had a desk. Treading carefully, she kept to the shadows but came a bit closer. Her teacher sounded not just angry but vicious.

“It has taken months to train you. I’ve spent a lot of energy, and time, teaching you, protecting you, making sure you passed your exams. And now I expect you to do this in return. You knew this was coming and agreed to it, and now you need to push through, just for tonight. So don’t even think of disappointing me because you know what will happen if you do.”

“Y-yes sir”, Eric sounded as if he was crying.

“Good. Now, you know what to do. Go home and prepare yourself and make sure you remember all the steps, and all your lines. Just like we discussed. And I don’t want to hear one more word of complaint.”

“Yes sir”.

“Good. Now get out of here.”

“Yes sir.”

She’d never heard Mr. Brook so angry before and it was quite terrifying to think that the easy-going man who everyone liked could be this way. Neither had she ever seen Eric cry. Olivia held her breath as Eric passed her on his way out. Thankfully he was too preoccupied to notice her in the shadows. The door closed behind Eric and Olivia’s heart made a leap when Mr. Brook addressed her directly.

“Come out Olivia”, he didn’t sound so livid anymore, but more annoyed.

Trembling, she stepped out of the shadows of the set, to the light that fell in a pool around his desk.

“I’m sorry for listening sir. It’s just… you were arguing and it seemed…. a bad time to interrupt.”

Mr. Brook rubbed a hand over his face and sighed. He looked tired, distracted, leaning on his desk.

“True, Olivia. It was a bad time to interrupt. You could have simply waited outside though.”

“I’m sorry”.

“It’s fine. It’s fine. I just needed to remind Eric that this play is very important. He’s nervous is
all.” Brook smiled but the wrinkles didn’t reach his eyes.

“Yes.”

“Why are you here?”

Reminded of her own purpose she felt even more nervous. She took a tiny step forward. “I need… My dad doesn’t believe me about the extra dress rehearsal this afternoon, and he’s asked that you call to confirm that I’m not, you know… running off with friends.”

“Oh. Right. Well, I’ll do that in a bit. I just need to get this sorted.” He gestured vaguely to his desk, which was a chaos of several envelopes and piles of banknotes. It was the money that had been raised with the ticket sales for the play.

Refocusing from the desk to her teacher, Olivia decided that regardless of his bad mood, she needed to try this now, today, or otherwise it might be too late.

“Do you have a moment now? I just need to ehm… I would like to talk about my dad.”

Licking his lips, Brook frowned agitatedly. He still seemed distracted.

“What do you need to say? Is he not coming to this play either?”

His insensitive words slightly stung, but she swallowed and willed herself to do this. She straightened and clenched her hands into fists by her side.

“He actually says he will, but I don’t care about that anymore. I was just wondering whether…. whether you know what would happen if I asked to be put in foster care”.

It came out a bit shakily, but finally she had his full attention.

“Why, what’s happening?”

“Nothing. I mean… things haven’t improved since Sebastian came. It’s gotten worse… in a way. I’m not allowed anything anymore and he only encourages my dad’s behaviour.”

Mr. Brook crossed his arms in front of his chest. He seemed taller somehow. “You’re upset because he enforces rules now, while before you were able to do as you pleased?”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying.”

“Then what are you saying Olivia? Because I don’t have time for guessing your problems right now.”

Deep breath. “What my father does, -what Sebastian does-… it hurts. They hurt me. I just hoped that maybe there is someone I could talk to. Like a counsellor, or someone who knows how foster care works.”

Mr. Brook only sighed. “Look Olivia, you’re making it very hard for me to do anything for you because you’re not actually explaining what is wrong. If you want we can talk about it, or I can talk to Sebastian, but please, after the play. If there is nothing acutely putting you in danger… let’s talk next week.”

She took a step forward. “No, please! I don’t want you to tell Sebastian. I want to talk to someone else. I will ask Mr. Watson if you don’t have time.”
“Fine. But know that without being able to explain what your actual problem is, Mr. Watson will think you are just asking for attention. You don’t want to give him more work than he already has. Talk to me once this –he gestured to the props around them- is over. And please don’t be late for rehearsal this afternoon.” He turned his back to her and started gathering the money on his desk into a tin, chucking the coins in noisily.

Olivia repressed the urge to scream as she walked out. How many times had she lied to pretend everything was fine? How many times had they pressed her to admit something was wrong? Told her she could talk to them? Now she finally wanted help and her request was dismissed. Had she lost the opportunity to complain after denying help for so long? Did he actually think she was just an attention-seeking teenager? Why was it so difficult to breathe?

Refusing to let it get to her, she took a few deep breaths and accepted that she was alone, and that she needed to handle this herself. At least now she had an idea where to start.

~~~

“John. What a pleasure.” Mycroft sounded tired and not at all pleased with being disturbed.

John didn’t care.

“Mycroft, I just wondered whether you found anything. On Moran or Brook, I mean.”

“Right, I would have sent you the files directly, but I’ve been incredibly busy and if I’m honest there’s nothing interesting to read, really.” A shuffle of paper could be heard from the other side. “Moran was born in Manchester, lived in Australia from the age of 16 until he returned to England last year. He has no criminal record, no family, no hobbies to speak of, and he only started working for social services last summer. Feedback on his work has been positive…” Mycroft’s voice trailed off as if he was reading.

“Right. What about Brook?”

Another shuffle of papers.

“Richard Brook is from Dublin, moved to London to launch his acting career, but has been rather unsuccessful for the past 12 years, working mostly with children and in small productions. He started teaching drama two years ago, but I’m sure you’ve read that on his CV. No criminal record. Was married for 3 years but lost his wife. That’s just before he started teaching.” Mycroft just sounded bored now.

“Ok. Alright.”

“The only notable similarity between the two – if that’s what you were looking for – is that neither currently has living relatives.”

“That’s… thanks, Mycroft” John said, although it was of no help at all.

“John, I can assure that if there was something more incriminating to be found on either of these men, my people would have found it, so please just enjoy your little… gathering tonight.”

“You know about the play? Are we being monitored?” John asked suspiciously.
“Only Sherlock. For his own safety. There have been… developments. But don’t worry. Nothing suggests that you or your family will be targeted, Dr. Watson. I do however need to know where my brother is at all times, just as a precaution.”

“So there have been new murders, then?”

“There have indeed. And I ask you to keep my little brother blissfully unaware of this fact. His involvement could be disastrous.”

John let out a tired huff. “So after months of nothing, Moriarty is killing again, in a plot that will obviously end with Sherlock caught in some sort of sick game –because you know that’s what Moriarty’s after-, and you’re not telling him.”

Mycroft sighed impatiently. “As long as Sherlock doesn’t know Moriarty is trying to lure him in, if he’s unaware that the game –as he so enjoys calling it- is on, he won’t play, which is exactly what is needed. So you just focus on your job, headmaster Watson, and I’ll stick to mine.”

“Mycroft. If Sherlock doesn’t come to Moriarty, Moriarty is going to come to Sherlock. You know that.”

“We’ll stop him before he can. I need your word, John.”

“Fine”, John managed through gritted teeth.

“Splendid. Now don’t let me detain you.”

~~~

The cafeteria was a hub of activity. The doors were still closed and no parents had arrived yet, but pupils were busy changing, rehearsing their lines, adding the final touches to decorations, and sound checking. Many of them had been working towards this moment for months and the atmosphere was nervous but excited. Sherlock was physically present as John had requested, but made sure he wasn’t roped into any task. He stood in the middle of the hall and watched Mary be surrounded by pupils who wanted to fawn over Hamish. It was a bit early to bring him to school, Sherlock thought, but everyone was coming to the play so nobody was able to babysit. That, and of course they desperately wanted to show him off. Sherlock kept an eye on them, but Hamish seemed to enjoy the attention, so there was no immediate need for crowd control. Eventually his mind drifted elsewhere.

After seeing Olivia in the corridor a few days ago she had avoided him just like she had before, but for some reason he felt uneasy about it. She never voluntarily came to see him these days, but it had seemed like she’d needed something. John had made it very clear to him that it was Richard’s job to deal with her. Richard, of course, claimed that Olivia was confiding in him, that he had it all under control, and that he didn’t want to break Olivia’s trust by discussing things with other teachers. It was frustrating to the point that Sherlock feared he would snap if the man spoke to him like that again.

Sherlock was disturbed from his thoughts by Mary. Somehow she had shaken off the crowd of pupils and Hamish was frowning and making distressed baby noises in her arms. They both watched him squirm.
“Did you tell your class about Hamish?” Mary asked.

“No”, he said with an air of indifference.

“Interesting. They seem to know quite a lot.”

“I might have answered some of their questions, but purely to stop them from nagging me.”

“You boasted about him, didn’t you?”

“He’s an exceptional baby.”

Mary smiled at him warmly and after a moment she said, “I’m glad you’re his guardian, Sherlock.”

This was of course an outrageously sentimental statement, which made Sherlock very uncomfortable, which he suspected was exactly Mary’s intention. He countered it with a comforting statement of fact.

“He’s upset.”

“I was just on my way to feed him. Say goodbye to Uncle Sherlock, Hame” she said cheerfully, and carried the little bundle in the direction of John’s office. It wasn’t as if the baby could say goodbye, or as if he knew who his Uncle Sherlock was, so Sherlock found the warm feeling in his stomach slightly disconcerting.

Just when he thought he would be left alone long enough to go and enjoy a cigarette and his own rational thoughts for a while, he was alerted by Rose Edeson’s concerned face. She looked tense, her hands pulling on the seam of her jumper.

“Sh- Mr. Holmes?”

“Tell me”, he said, although his tone of voice was all but inviting.

She courageously continued. “Have you seen Olivia?”

That question managed to get his full attention. “What’s wrong?”

“Well, she left to go home early this afternoon. She said she needed to change her clothes for the play and that she’d be back. Now it’s almost seven thirty and she still hasn’t come back.”

Sherlock’s stomach clenched.

Rose went on. “And… and Mr. Brook says the money raised with ticket sales has disappeared. I would never accuse Olivia, but…” Enough could be read on Rose’s face.

“Did she tell you she had plans to run away? Did she tell you about anything upsetting her?”

“No. She told me everything was fine at home. She was excited about the play.”

With Rose trailing behind him, Sherlock found John in the corridor who was busy giving a pep talk to one of the pupils dressed as a pyramid.

“Your parents are already proud of you. There’s no need to worry. You did well on your tests, Ms. Donovan told me, so you just need to focus on your lines. It’s just like-”

“John.” Sherlock’s tone of voice was enough to make John quickly turn around.
“What’s wrong?”

“Olivia hasn’t returned after going home to get changed this afternoon. The money from ticket sales is gone. I need your car keys,” Sherlock snapped, hoping John was quick enough to follow his line of thinking independently.

“Wait, are you saying Olivia has something to do with the money?”

Oh come on John.

“If she has, she’s not coming back to school. I need to find her.”

“Sherlock, maybe it’s better if you stay here. Let someone else go”, John countered while avoiding eye contact.

“Why? What’s- Oh…”

John sighed as he saw Sherlock deduce him. Shit.

He raised his hand in warning. “Let’s say there have been new developments, ok? And you should keep your head down. But be alert.”

“Sherlock always keeps his head down, don’t you darling?” Richard said with a suggestive wink as he approached. “Good to see you here Sherlock. I’m sure you’ll enjoy tonight. I swear you won’t regret it”, he drawled, while chewing on a piece of gum and smiling.

“I won’t be staying”, Sherlock grumbled, already furious at those jaws mauling the chewing gum. Oh how much he would give to punch that… him.

“Have you seen Olivia, Richard?” John asked.

“Olivia? Not yet. I’m sure she’ll be here soon.”

“But the play starts in thirty minutes. She should have been here an hour ago.”

“Yes. It’s a very important night for her”. Richard seemed quite unbothered by the whole affair.

“Rose told me you’re missing money from ticket sales”, Sherlock intervened.

Brook’s face went a bit sad, his modelled eyebrows pointing upwards in the middle. “Yes. It’s very unfortunate. Almost a thousand pounds. I’m sure it’ll turn up though.”

“Could she have known where you keep the money?”

“Who?”

“Olivia! For God’s sake.” Sherlock could hardly contain himself and felt himself take a step forward, but no, too many witnesses.

“Oh! Let me think. Actually, yes. Yesterday she came to see me while I was counting the money. The tin was on my desk.”

“Did you see her today?”

“Yes, we had a last rehearsal this morning. Oh and I also ran into her around lunchtime, but she was in a hurry.”
Sherlock turned toward John. “Give me your car keys”. He’d meant for it to be a demand but it came out more like pleading.

John hesitated.

“She’s running away from home and if Moriarty is planning to target people I actually... know, she would be the easiest target.”

“Should I call her father?” John asked.

“No. If she’s running from him we don’t want him to know. I’ll find her.”

“Who is Moriarty?” Rose asked, clearly worried, but Mr. Holmes had already grabbed the keys from John’s outstretched hand and was running towards the exit.

“Good luck”, Mr. Brook called after him.

The sun was setting, and the parking lot was slowly filling up with arriving parents. When Sherlock reached John’s car he heard running footsteps behind him. Rose stopped beside him.

“I want to come with you”, she said, a bit out of breath.

“Not happening. I don’t know what I’ll find.” He opened the door to the driver’s seat but stilled as she continued.

“I’m her best friend! I could help you find her. Please? I feel like I’ve let her down.”

Sherlock stood there, with his hands leaning on top of the car, the keys clenched in his right hand and his eyes trained on the blue paint.

He cleared his throat.

“Me too.”

A few seconds later he turned to her and aimed for his most patient voice possible.

“Rose, I know you want to help her, but I can’t bring you. It may not be safe. Stay here and keep your eyes open. If Olivia shows up, make sure she’s ok and don’t let her out of your sight.”

He didn’t wait for Rose to answer and got into the car.

As her teacher drove off at about triple the speed limit, Rose felt completely helpless. Although she understood that he couldn’t bring a pupil on a mission like this one, it was horrible to think that her best friend was suffering and she could do nothing to help her. Knowing now that the chance of Olivia showing up at school was basically non-existent, she reluctantly made her way back to the building.

Olivia was either on the run with, apparently, the threat of some sort of criminal looming over her, or trapped in a house with a man would might be a psychopath, or at least mentally unstable. In either case she was alone. What the hell had happened that had caused her best friend to favour running away over talking to someone? She’d seemed quiet but relatively normal lately. Not as angry as before. However, she hadn’t been allowed to join them for outings after school and had spent all her free time at home. Maybe she’d just given up.
A wave of guilt washed over Rose as she thought about her duty as a best friend. She should have known something was wrong. She should have asked more questions, or spoken to Mr. Holmes.

As she approached the main entrance, Rose noticed Mr. Brook standing in the doorway, smiling and waving her over. She increased her pace and vowed she would never let her friend down like this again. She’d make it up to her.

Still chewing his gum, Mr. Brook held the door open for her to enter.

“You ready?”

~~~

Stealing the money had been surprisingly easy. Just when everyone had headed to the cafeteria for lunch, she’d crept into the theatre room, where the money tin was still on Mr. Brook’s desk in the back. She didn’t even have to distract him because he wasn’t there. It was an old rusty tin, like one you would expect to hold a treasure. Peeking inside, she almost gasped at the thick stack of banknotes and coins. Freedom was close.

Sneaking through the corridor while the other pupils were having lunch, she left a letter in Mr. Holmes’ office, hiding it between his books so that he wouldn’t find it anytime soon. Silently she said goodbye to the room, and by extension to him. He’d read it maybe in a few days, a few weeks, or months, even, but by then she would have gotten far enough. She went to the cafeteria, lied to Rose that she was going home to get some clothes for tonight, hugged her goodbye, and that was that. Although the hug had been a bit tighter than was usual for them, Olivia refused to think of the possibility that she might never come back to this place, or see her best friend, again.

It was the perfect night to do it. Everyone would be at school, hopefully even her dad. He thought she was at school, while Mr. brook thought she was at home getting ready. If her father didn’t go, which was likely, he would at least not notice for a while. Not until John called him this evening to ask why she hadn’t showed up. The money would help her get pretty far away quickly, Maybe Scotland first. Then, if the money was enough, she could get on an airplane somewhere. The thought filled her with both relief and despair.

When she opened the front door it became apparent that maybe things would not go as easy as she’d hoped. Her father was crying hysterically. He looked like he had after her mother’s funeral, completely broken. Frozen in the kitchen doorway she watched him point his finger at her. In front of him on the table was the backpack she’d filled the day before with clothes, food, and whatever change she had found in the corners of her room. She thought she had hidden it properly.

“Y-You’re leaving me?”

After a few seconds of shock she managed to speak.

“No. No! I was going to use that in the play! Remember the play? You were coming to watch it tonight” she tried to convince him.

The breath of Sebastian on her neck made her jump. “Liar”, he said.

Stepping further into the kitchen to avoid his presence, she clutched her schoolbag.
Sebastian rested his hands in his sides. He didn’t seem angry, but all the more dangerous. “Your mentor called. He says you stole money from him.”

“Mr. Brook?”

How the hell was that possible? The man had joyfully waved her goodbye less than an hour ago. Even if he found out the money was gone, how could he be so sure it had been her?

“Yes. He’s very disappointed in you.” Sebastian loomed over her and she was reminded of his strong grip and hard knuckles. “And so is he.” He gestured toward her father.

“I-I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Really? Empty your bag.”

It was like a déjà vu. Except this time the contents of her bag were way more serious and they would be judged by people much less forgiving. Shaking, she overturned her bag on the table. She should have hidden the money, she realized now. She could have buried it somewhere and come back for it. But that was hindsight. The tin fell on the table with a metallic jingle of coins. Her father started crying again.

“How could you do this to me?” he choked.

“I can’t do this anymore”, she said through gritted teeth. “I can’t pretend anymore that everything is fine.” And then, after a deep breath, she said “I won’t let you touch me anymore.”

Sebastian shook his head and huffed dismissively. “You should have thought of that before. Don’t think you have any say in the matter now. You planned to run away from the one person that loves you most in the world and stole a load of money and you’re trying to convince us that Jeremy is the bad guy? He has been trying to save your relationship, but all you do is run. I think you need a reminder of your duties in this household.”

Olivia felt a trickle of ice run down her spine at Sebastian’s words.

“You are insane”, she spat at him, and ran.

“Isabel!” Jeremy stood up but was too unsteady on his feet to actually go after her.

“I think your wife needs to be thought a lesson,” Sebastian said, and grinned.

Olivia, desperate, had made a snap decision. Sebastian could do anything to her, or rather, make her father do anything to her. This was her only chance. Sprinting out of the kitchen, she ran through the corridor, into the living room, found to her relief that the door to the garden was unlocked, and ran outside. The gate at the back of the garden would lead her to an alleyway, from which she could reach the next block, where an abundance of shrubs and bushes would help her hide. She had used them many times as a child when playing hide-and-seek with her friends. Sebastian would need to rummage through people’s front yards in order to find her. It would attract attention. Anyone’s attention would do.

She never made it out of the gate.
“How many?”

“Twenty-three so far, all about two streets away from each other. They’re clearly following Sherlock’s pattern, but much more condensed now. I’ve instructed officers on the lookout in all the calculated spots leading towards the school.”

Greg and Mycroft were standing in their operation headquarters, looking at the wall of pictures. What had once been a map of England, and where Sherlock had added the first red pins according to the victims’ circumstances and date of passing, was now a wall of pictures with hardly any London still visible. The red pins had continued the circling route, placed closer together towards the middle, which they had calculated would be St. Francis.

“Excellent.” Mycroft didn’t sound like he thought it excellent at all.

“I think we should tell Sherlock what’s coming.”

“No.”

“He won’t be able to-”

“It won’t come that far.”

“How can you be so sure? We haven’t been able to stop him until now. We’re always too late because...”

“Because what?” Mycroft hissed. “Because my brother isn’t there to show off? To put everyone in danger without a second thought? No Greg, this time I’m doing it without him.”

“You’re using him as bait! You can’t do that without his knowledge.”

“Sherlock won’t mind. He loves danger.”

“Yes he does. And you know what he loves even more? John, and Mary, and those children you’re leaving in the line of fire. He’d never agree to that.”

“Sometimes decisions need to be made for him. I’m only doing this to save lives, Greg.”

Sherlock entered Olivia’s street, his knuckles turned white from gripping the steering wheel. The houses were quiet and the smell of blossoming trees drifted in the air. It was absurdly peaceful. Parking haphazardly in the street, he approached the house.

The front door was closed but not locked, so he slipped inside soundlessly. He remembered the little painting of the lighthouse in the corridor. It was no longer hanging straight, as if someone had grazed the wall on the way through. The living room was empty, and nothing seemed amiss besides the fact that the door to the garden was open, softly creaking as it was pushed softly in the breeze. However, there was still enough light outside to see that the garden was empty. The kitchen
was empty as well, if you didn’t count the pile of belongings on the table, which were obviously Olivia’s. The open doors, the lack of noise, and the mess told him she hadn’t managed to execute her plan. It also told him that he was likely walking into a crime scene. His heart was thumping in his chest at the thought of what might have happened.

Creeping upstairs, he winced as one of the steps creaked. No reaction came though. He reached the top of the stairs and instantly had a good view of what must be Olivia’s bedroom. The walls were painted a joyful yellow and decorated with posters and pictures. Her guitar was carefully propped up in the corner. There were signs of a struggle in the tousled duvet on the bed and the toppled chair on the floor. Sherlock’s heart raced. How on earth had he been this stupid? This blind?

No. Focus.

A few steps forward. Check under the bed, in the closets. Nothing. Except for several dresses that were obviously not hers.

The next room he passed was the bathroom. The sight nauseated him. The door of the bathroom had been blocked with a chair, but it hadn’t held. Someone had opened the door with force, breaking one of the chair’s legs. Inside the tiled room, some products had been knocked over, but there was no further damage. What made Sherlock feel sick was the blood. There was blood on the door -obvious fingerprints-, on the floor and in the bathtub. Most of it had been smeared out, as if someone had sat in it for a while.

Someone alive.

Sherlock actually shivered. This wasn’t some crime scene Lestrade had given him access to, with a victim he didn’t particularly care about. This was Olivia. This was personal. This made his stomach protest and his heart race. This was definitely something he shouldn’t be doing alone. And yet he was.

*She’s alive. There wasn’t enough blood. She’s alive. She’s alive.*

That was the thought he kept in his head as he moved toward the last room, the door of which was half open. It was her father’s bedroom. The light switch did nothing and the semidarkness made it difficult to see details, but one thing was clear.

Jeremy Edwards was dead.

The way his upper body slumped and blood was spattered against the wall behind his head, obviously caused by the gun still loosely held in his hand. The sight of the smaller body next to him made Sherlock gasp for breath.

She was lying on her side next to her father, not touching him except for one hand tangled in the front of his vest. She was barefooted, wearing her school uniform skirt and a white top that would normally be covered by a blouse. Sherlock’s eyes adjusting, he could see there was blood on her shirt and her hands. It looked like a scene from one of those bad horror movies John sometimes watched. Approaching, Sherlock searched desperately for the rise and fall of her chest.

When he finally found it it was such a relief that all he could do was sink to his knees next to her. He took her wrist to feel her pulse, which was clearly present. Her fingers were bleeding and her shoulder was red. She’d broken out of the bathroom.

She stirred from his touch. As she lifted her head he could see she had been bleeding from a cut in her forehead and from her nose. No heavier wounds visible. He wanted to speak, but the sight of
the dead body next to her caused her to gasp before he could.

“Olivia.”

She didn’t appear to notice him as she grasped her father’s vest tightly with two hands and started crying and murmuring.

“Olivia. Come, please. There’s nothing to be done.”

He didn’t understand why she was so desperately holding onto this man. With some hesitation he laid his hand on her shoulder, her cold skin made him wonder how long she had been lying here. She stopped making sounds but her shoulders still shook.

After a while Sherlock managed to turn her away from the dead body, facing him. She seemed to recognise him.

“Do you think you can walk?” he asked gently.

She wasn’t capable of answering him, so he assumed she couldn’t walk either. It would not be good to keep her in this room, he decided, so he carefully picked her up with one arm under her legs and one under her back and carried her downstairs. She didn’t protest. Seating her at the kitchen table, he confirmed that yes, she was able to sit up and move her limbs, although her right shoulder was sore. Busying himself cleared his mind of some of the emotion and had a calming effect. When he poured her a glass of water his hands didn’t shake anymore. Olivia stared at nothing while he made an attempt to clean her face with a towel. He noticed it was not only blood but also dirt and bits of grass on her skin. It reminded him of the incident with Peter in the schoolyard all those months ago.

He sat down in front of her.

“Did your… did he hurt you anywhere else?”

Her eyes focused on him, but were flooded with tears once more.

“Yes” she whispered, her voice raw. “Many times.”

Sherlock felt like his lungs wouldn’t cooperate, nor his brain. It was short-circuiting, desperately searching his memories for clues to this… but her voice brought him back to the present.

“Why weren’t you there?” she asked in a small but accusing voice.

“Why didn’t you come?” Her hand, balled in a fist, found his chest. He couldn’t tell if she was crying or hyperventilating.

“I didn’t know” he whispered, ashamed.

“Why didn’t you know?”

She hit his chest again, harder this time.

“Why didn’t you figure it out?”

“I’m sorry” he finally managed.

“Why didn’t you just know?”
Grasping onto his shirt, she let him draw her to him.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry” he said, and he kept saying it as he stroked her hair.

He wanted to say that he was here now, that she was safe, and that it was over, but he knew that those words would sound like an insult after what he had already let her go through. All he could do was hold her and apologise while she cried.

After a while she seemed to calm down. His body heat had stopped her shivering and her breathing was regular.

“Olivia. I need you to tell me something.”

“Was Sebastian part of it?”

She nodded.

“He was here. Today. He had the gun.”

He didn’t want to ask further right now. At least it was clear Sebastian would need to be chased down.

“I was going to run away you know. I had a plan. I took the money from Mr. Brook but he found out. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. Nobody is angry with you.”

For a few minutes he held her like that, slowly stroking her hair, until she was more calm.

“I need to use the telephone.”

Thankfully she nodded in comprehension, so he slowly separated her from him and went to find the phone in the living room. First he dialled the emergency number, and then John, who instantly agreed to meet them at the hospital.

“What’s going to happen now?” Olivia asked when he re-entered the kitchen.

“An ambulance is coming to take you to hospital. The doctors will want to check you over. John and Mary are coming there as well. The police will investigate the house and you may not be able to return here anytime soon. Or at all.”

She nodded.

“Do you want to put on some more clothes? You’re cold.”

Olivia picked up a pair of jeans and a jumper from the mess on the kitchen table and laid them on a chair. To Sherlock’s dismay, the next thing she picked up were a pair of knickers, drawing it up under her skirt. Sherlock wished Jeremy were still alive so that he could kill him.

Her trembling damaged hands had difficulty putting on socks, so he helped her, trying to ignore the blood rushing in his ears.

“A-are you coming? To the hospital?” she asked hesitantly.

He looked up while still holding her foot. “I won’t leave you again until you want me to, alright?”
She nodded tightly.

“I was going to escape”, she said again. “I was going to run away. I left a note in your office.”

Sitting next to her he held her close until he could hear the sirens.

At the hospital a doctor Turner was waiting for them. She seemed competent enough, but the way Olivia held on to Sherlock’s coat told him he should come with her into the exam room. She didn’t let go of him until he helped her onto the examination table.

“Can you tell me what happened to you Olivia?” the Dr. Turner asked in a kind voice. She was in her early forties with red hair and freckles.

In what was probably only an honest reply, Olivia shook her head. Her hands were clenched in the paper that covered the bench and she was trembling again.

“That’s alright. I can see that you have a cut and some bruising on your face, which we’ll clean up. Do you think there is anything else I need to look at? Anything that could maybe help the police understand what happened, for example?”

Olivia looked at Sherlock. “Would I need to undress?”

Sherlock nodded. “Yes. We need to make sure you’re ok… physically. If you think you can do it.” He didn’t say that it would be important to have this evidence for when Sebastian was caught. He also didn’t say Sebastian would never make it to prison because Sherlock would kill him before the police could even get to him. His thoughts came back to the room as he felt Olivia grab his sleeve. She was looking at her lap and he understood that she was waiting for his help.

He cleared his throat and looked at the Doctor. “I think Olivia may be a victim of sexual abuse. An exam would be appropriate.”

To her credit, Dr. Turner didn’t flinch. She nodded to Sherlock and sought Olivia’s gaze.

“Olivia, is Mr. Holmes right?”

A nod.

“And did any of this happen today as well?”

“Yes.”

“Alright. Thank you for telling me. We should make sure you get all the medical attention you need. You have to understand that this will involve an internal examination. It might be upsetting, but I promise I will do everything to make it as least uncomfortable for you as possible. If you need me to stop, just say the word and I’ll stop. I’ll also have to take some samples and I’ll ask you some questions that you can just answer with “yes” or “no”. The results of the exam will be given as evidence to the police.”

Olivia nodded bravely.

Dr. Turner continued. “Now, normally I don’t allow anyone else to be present for an exam like this, but if you need Mr. Holmes to stay I can make an exception. Otherwise he will be waiting just outside the door. Is it ok if we ask him to step out for a moment?”
Olivia hesitated, but nodded.

He gave a nod in return and said quietly: “I’ll wait right outside. Tell the doctor if you need me to come back.”

“Ok.”

With difficulty, Sherlock let go of her hand, stepped outside and closed the door. He let out a shaky breath. Olivia had been hoping for him to deduce it. And he’d failed her miserably.

Just as he leaned against the wall and was overcome by feelings of guilt and anger, John and Mary came around the corner. Neither was carrying Hamish.

“Sherlock! How is she?” Mary immediately wanted to know.

“She’s… I don’t know” Sherlock rubbed his face. “She has a few cuts and bruises but…”

“What?”

“They’ve been… abusing her. Exam is underway.”

“Jesus fucking Christ.” John rubbed his face and looked as if he was about to punch the wall.

“I hereby offer you my resignation, effective immediately”, Sherlock said.

“This isn’t your fault, Sherlock” Mary intervened.

“I let it happen.”

“We all did”, John managed.

Sherlock paced, gesturing wildly as he spoke. “She was running away. She’d packed her bag, stolen money. Why would she do that without speaking to someone? We could have helped.”

“We can’t pretend to know what she was thinking.”

“But something went wrong. There’s something she said…”

His mind racing, Sherlock found the memories he was looking for and let them play in his head. Olivia telling him that Richard had known about the money, assumingly he was the one who informed her father. Everything was so much more clear in his head now.

It’s a very important night for her.

“What is it?” John asked.

Sherlock inhaled sharply. “She did speak to someone.”

Brook is Moriarty.

Don’t tell John.
Sherlock started walking toward the exit. “Mary, John, please stay with Olivia, make sure she’s
safe. I need to go do something.”

“What’s going on? Where are you going?”

Sherlock was already retreating. “Don’t worry. I’ll sort it out. Just… stay here. Don’t leave her
alone. Please. Tell her I’m sorry.”

From then on he was running.

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter to go for this story!
Recap:
Olivia tried to run away but was caught by Moran and her dad. Jeremy Edwards is dead. Sherlock finally found Olivia and took her to hospital, only to leave her after a phone call from Moriarty.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

As Sherlock jumped into the car he’d ‘borrowed’ the thought came to him that John and Mary would be furious when they found out he’d left them in the dark while the life of their child, and that of many others, was at stake. But the certainty that they would follow him and put themselves in danger made him not regret it. Stealing car keys from a random doctor was probably also a bad idea but he couldn’t care less at the moment.

The parking lot of St. Francis was still half full, indicating that quite a few parents and pupils were inside. The building was dark and quiet, but there was light coming from the cafeteria-made-theatre, so he headed in that direction. While he ran it disconcerted him that his own footsteps were the only sound to be heard.

Pushing through the doors to the cafeteria, immediately the thick nauseating smell of fear in the room hit him. A group of wide, scared eyes were set on him, following his every step, but nobody uttered a sound. They were all holding their breaths. The pupils, parents, and teachers unlucky enough to have been on time for the play were all assembled on the stage at the end of the room. Instantly he spotted Mrs. Hudson amongst them, holding the little bundle that was Hamish closely to her chest. Her gaze found his and it was scared but determined. Rose, Lucy, and Anthony were holding hands, gripping each other tightly. Nobody spoke, and that was because Eric, the boy who had blossomed under Richard Brook’s tutelage and had been doing well even in Sherlock’s class, was on stage with them and had a gun pointed at the group. As he walked, Sherlock noticed the fear in the boy’s eyes. His hands were shaking and his irises were almost black. He was obviously under the influence of a drug. Sherlock could see beads of sweat running down his temple in the stage light.

“Eric, put the g-” he started in as calm a voice he could muster, but was immediately interrupted by a noise coming from the sound system.

“No Sherlock” a familiar sing-song voice boomed down at them. “I can’t allow you to talk him. Eric knows there’s no way out. I just wanted you to see what a lovely cast we have for tonight’s show. Aren’t they doing wonderfully? I reserved the best part for you though. As the hero of the story you may save the lives of all those innocent people”, it sounded excitedly.

Instead of going after Olivia, Moriarty had used her as a diversion. He’d known Sherlock would go after her, giving him the time to set everything up for the big finale. The feeling of being caught like a rat in some sick experiment crept up on Sherlock. Except this wasn’t scientific. This was very, very personal.
“Come and find me, Sherlock.”

Sherlock knew exactly where to find him. With one last look at the hostages, most of whom looked devastated to realise he was actually leaving them alone with the boy with the gun, he turned, pushed back through the big double doors, and headed upstairs. Taking the steps two at a time, his footsteps uncomfortably loud in the silenced building, he reached the 2nd floor and approached room 221 less than a minute later. When he opened the door he steeled himself, but Moriarty appeared unarmed. He wasn’t even trying to maintain a strategic position, leisurely pacing on top of a big old oak desk in the middle of the room, his polished shoes tapping playfully on the wood.

Sherlock stepped inside and considered the man in front of him; the man who had successfully misled him for months. Everything about him seemed different, relaxed, as if the personage of Brook had been constricting him and he was finally free to show who he really was. He was wearing a suit as he had as Richard, but this one was perfectly tailored with expensive navy fabric, something that would not have been believable as a teacher. He’d often winked or smiled at Sherlock, but now his expression was unveiled fascination. Fascination no doubt for the look on Sherlock’s face, knowing he’d been utterly fooled.

Moriarty made a childish sound of exasperation. “That took you aaages! I was getting bored of waiting for you. But hey… I bet you just needed a moment to say goodbye to someone.” He winked, and elegantly jumped off the desk to the floor.

Sherlock didn’t reply, trying to determine how to handle the flamboyant mastermind. He had waited for this moment for a very long time. Ever since he heard the name Moriarty for the first time years ago he’d considered him a puzzle, a game, a big fun challenge. When Moriarty dared him to play, Sherlock had eagerly jumped in, treasuring the distraction of someone as clever as he was, at the expense of everything.

This, however, didn’t feel like a game anymore. Moriarty had carefully spun his web, surrounding him and restricting him. He was forced to play with the highest stakes imaginable.

The criminal stood before him with his hands in his pockets and now focused intensely on Sherlock.

“You look like you’ve been through hell, my dear detective. All desperate and sweaty. You must be torturing yourself right now.” Raising his hands to his head he rubbed his hair in a dramatic display of fake desperation. “How could I have let this happen? How could I not have seen this coming??” he cried out, and laughed.

Then, more serious, he asked: “Can you imagine what could have been prevented had you been a bit quicker?”

Sherlock didn’t want to imagine. He needed to focus on the most silent way of killing the high-pitched, arrogant, revolting, blatant psychopath without his undoubtedly numerous employees noticing.

Moriarty smirked as if he knew what Sherlock was thinking, but continued his train of thought. “I might not have gotten Eric to play hostage. He had doubts even yesterday you know. I managed to convince him that there was no way out.”

Sherlock desperately wanted to find a scathing remark, but he couldn’t find one. The idea that Richard Brook had been able to groom the teenager for months, manipulating him into thinking he was appreciated, worth the attention, and finally psychologically coerced into pointing a gun at his peers. Sherlock felt sick knowing he’d been right on top of it and had not been able to deduce him,
just like Olivia.

“Had you found me earlier, maybe not so many people would have overdosed on my little concoction. I was happy when you found my pattern by the way. But that was merely a distraction, something to ruffle your feathers. It helped get that annoying git of a brother to back off of you.”

A spike of anger rose in Sherlock as he realized how much of his own behavior had been predicted and even influenced by this man.

“You quickly lost all your credit with Mycroft, meaning a laughable level of surveillance, and no background checks on demand, until John asked, of course.”

“John?” Another thing he hadn’t noticed.

“Oh yes. Don’t you know he always believes in you? It’s adorable. Finally curiosity got the better of him and he called Mycroft for background checks on Richard Brook and Sebastian Moran. Unfortunately your brother’s employees aren’t as trustworthy as he thinks they are. Consequently, your dear John swallowed all the bullshit Mycroft unknowingly fed him. Oh Man, I love my job” Moriarty said giddily, almost jumping with excitement.

“Yes, I can see you don’t understand. Mycroft knows this is the end of the trail. He had the entire premises surrounded earlier this evening, but he has absolutely no idea I was already inside, nor that his entire sniper team is working for me.”

“And the trail of murder is finishing tonight”, Sherlock whispered.

“Well done!” Moriarty cried out in delight. “The Edwards residence was the second to last stop, although that wasn’t technically murder so it doesn’t fit perfectly in your theory. More like assisted suicide. A kindness, really. Plus, the victim wasn’t particularly innocent, was he.” The wink that followed was full of delight.

Sherlock didn’t want him to speak about Jeremy Edwards. He didn’t want to know the details of what happened to Olivia and he didn’t want to know how easily it could have been prevented. His hands were clenched in trembling fists of rage. It was as if Moriarty was reading his mind.

“Now that we’re on the topic, you may want to know that if little Miss Edwards had trusted you enough, Sebastian would have been replaced with an actual social worker. But she didn’t trust you to confess her dark secret. Oh no.”

Moriarty stepped forward, closed in as if not wanting to miss any micro expression on Sherlock’s face.

“Was that because maybe she was just a little bit afraid of you, Sherlock? Had you been a little bit too selfish with her? Did she know that if she told you her daddy had been touching her, you would not be outraged, but jealous?”

Sherlock felt the red veil cloud his mind. He lunged for Moriarty, grabbed him by the throat and pressed him against the wall.

The psychopath just grinned. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you. Eric is about to shoot someone and you are the only one who can stop him.”


“He will continue shooting until you’ve submitted to me”, Moriarty gasped, but did not struggle.
His face turned a satisfying shade of purple as Sherlock squeezed his neck.

“I’ll kill you and stop him before that happens.”

“He’ll shoot you the moment you step into that room. If he doesn’t, my people will”, he squeaked.

Sherlock pressed a little harder.

“You can make him stop.”

“Never”, Moriarty choked.

Sherlock pushed away and let his tormenter, his enemy, his undeniable hostage taker sink to the floor. With a frustrated shout, he punched the wall.

“What do you want from me?!!” he yelled and started pacing the room like a caged tiger.

“Tell me…” Jim breathed heavily and leaned against the wall, red-faced but still smiling.

Sherlock paced, trying desperately to think of another way out of this. He couldn’t escape and find back up. It would take too long. He couldn’t hear any sirens outside. If he managed to kill Moriarty he was still surrounded by his people, who wouldn’t hesitate for a moment to clear all the evidence, including the kids downstairs. Jim’s now hoarse voice derailed his thoughts once again.

“…was she hurt? I want to know how you found her. What state she was in. Did she cry for her daddy or for you? Come on, I want the juicy details!” his speech was manic and his eyes were popping.

“Shut up!”

Sherlock shouted.

Jim calmed down a bit and stood back up while Sherlock pointed a finger at him, almost ready to attack again.

“She told you.”

Jim grinned triumphantly. “Yesterday she asked me for my help. She finally trusted me more than you.”

Sherlock turned to him. “And you immediately broke that trust, didn’t you?”

“The expression of betrayal was so striking on her face I wish I’d taken a photo. In the end she was desperate to tell someone. She didn’t really want to run, she wanted someone to help her. And her final attempt was this lovely note she left in your office.”

Taking a folded and slightly wrinkled note out of his inside pocket, Moriarty read aloud “Dear Mr Holmes…” “Funny, I figured you’d have told her to call you Sherlock at some point.” “I’m sorry for my behaviour and my grades and for stealing the money, but it was all I could do.” Jim touched his palm to his chest. “That’s adorable. You managed to let her think that she was the one to let you down.” “I’m afraid my dad wants me to be my mum because he misses her too much. I don’t want to be, even though Sebastian says it’s the right thing to do for him.” “Oh I have to say that was a nice touch on Seb’s part”. Moriarty continued reading “I need to leave now. I want you to know I will be fine once I do. Please don’t look for me. Yours, Olivia”.

Moriarty looked up again to be moved by Sherlock’s reaction. “Beautiful. It’s always so fascinating to see your mind shut down when your feelings take over”, he whispered.
Sherlock had stopped pacing. He hadn’t felt the tears start to run down his cheeks.

Moriarty’s eyes narrowed at him. “It was a pleasure to see you, the great Sherlock Holmes, fall in love. But to see your heart break has been even more thrilling. Thank you for that. It’s a pity it turned you into an imbecile who forgot to look at what was right in front of him,” he sneered.

Sherlock took a step back towards his archenemy, suddenly needing to know more. “Jeremy Edwards”.

Jim shrugged. “Never met anyone easier to manipulate.”

“You supplied him with narcotics.”

“Once he was hooked it was only a matter of encouraging the fantasies that were already swimming around in his head. I still think I overpaid Seb for that job.”

“You got him addicted in order to get Moran involved.”

“Oh don’t be silly. I got him addicted to get you involved, you idiot. Once Olivia was pushed to her limits, I knew she would seek the care of her handsome new mentor. At first I was going to make her jump off a bridge to shake your confidence a bit, but then you got so attached. It’s so much more fun when sentiment is involved, don’t you think? When I realised your attachment to her went a bit further than just offering a shoulder to cry on, you naughty man, I saw a chance to properly mess with your head.”

“And Moran was there to traumatisse. To inflict as much damage as possible by… by-”

“He merely had to show daddy how to discipline his daughter… and how to hold her down.”

Sherlock could feel the bile rise up to his throat while Moriarty smiled in satisfaction. He almost reached for the man’s throat again.

The master criminal changed to a more serious tone. “Tell me Sherlock. How many lives do I have to destroy for you to relapse?”

He was suddenly holding a syringe between his thumb and forefinger. Sherlock hadn’t even seen where he took it from. “I have to say I’m impressed. I thought it would have happened weeks ago. Voluntarily.”

“No.” Sherlock involuntarily took a step back.

“Don’t be difficult. It’s almost time. If I don’t take you ‘home’, so to speak, within the next two minutes, Eric is going to start pulling the trigger. He’s not a very good shot, so someone might get hurt.”

“He’s not a killer.”

“How would you know that? He obviously has a tendency for violence, as you have witnessed, and I’ve been training him quite well. Then of course there’s the added fact that he has an unpleasant mixture of substances running through his veins, and I may have told him I’d kill his mother if he doesn’t play by the rules. Now here you go. You know how it works.”

He tried pushing the needle into Sherlock’s hands, but Sherlock didn’t take it.

“No? Fine. There’s only one minute left now. I wonder whom he’ll pick first. What do you think?
We can make a bet!” Jim’s eyes lit up and he almost jumped in delight.

“He can still kill them even if I do this.”

“Thirty seconds. That would be boring. No audience. Besides, you know it’s just you I want. Now chop chop. It’s an ugly cocktail but I promise it won’t kill you.”

He pressed the syringe to Sherlock’s chest. “You know you want to.”

Sherlock wondered how a complete stranger had gotten to know his deepest feelings and desires, had been able to learn his weak spots so perfectly, all without him even noticing. He’d been utterly fooled. Remembering his brother’s analysis that all Moriarty wanted was to be chased by him and knowing that he couldn’t catch him, Sherlock took a decision.

“No. I won’t play your game.” He let the syringe fall to the floor, his heartbeat pounding frantically.

Moriarty smiled and counted down. “Five, four, three, two… one.”

Nothing. For the next four blissful seconds, nothing happened, and Sherlock almost felt relieved. Moriarty’s face was expressionless.

Then the sound of a gunshot ripped through the building and a shock went through Sherlock’s body. Jim started laughing. The horrified screams from downstairs left no doubt that someone had been hit.

“Oh. That was number one. I bet he went for Lucy Griffin first. She’s been ignoring him, you see.”

Sherlock was shaking.

“Did that shock you? Apologies. It’s very simple, darling. One minute from now, Eric will shoot two more people, a minute after that three, and so on and so forth. If you kill me or keep standing here, paralysed as you are, they will all die. All you need to do is let yourself go. Give in to your darkest desire. The solution has never been as simple.”

The screaming from downstairs continued, but Jim ignored it, stepping closer.

“I’ve been waiting for this moment, Sherlock. And yes, I know I could have done this months ago, but it was so much fun to watch you give in to sentiment and then to take it all away from you. To watch you crumble like that was just glorious.”

Jim picked up the needle from the floor, dusted it off, took off the cap, and theatrically ticked against the glass to let out any air. “You know what she said when she came to see me yesterday?” he said as he crowded Sherlock and put up a whiny voice. “Mr. Brook, daddy and Sebastian are hurting me.”

Clenching his jaw tightly, Sherlock took off his jacket and let it fall to the floor. There were no options left. No way out.

“You know I get this shiver down my spine when I crush someone’s hopes? It’s delicious.”

“Ten seconds left now. Your sleeve.”

Sherlock pulled up his sleeve and took a deep breath through his nose.

“Good boy. Just relax. I will take good care of you.”
Sherlock pressed his lips together tightly.

A tiny pinprick…

and it was like sinking into a warm bath.

Chapter End Notes

NOT THE END!

Congratulations on getting through 39 chapters of hurt and misery! As this story is getting so long, I decided to divide it into two parts, and… the first chapter of Little Devils II will probably have been posted before you read this! I promise that although part two will contain enough drama, there will be hope for Olivia and Sherlock.

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