Shaped to an Ignoble Form

by An_Author

Summary

Hands have not been idle while Sherlock was away. Dealing with crime rings and syndicates is now all in a day's work to Byrns. After O'Rourke's betrayal, Shannon decides to make her way back to London only to find that Sherlock has already come back from the dead. The memories of those people she holds dear are still lost and if she wants them to remember, it is up to her to convince them to not only believe in a truth which they don't know- but she must also have their trust for such an endeavor to be successful.

The clock is running against her, though. The Syndicate has come to collect their due: Shannon and the Geist program that is locked away in her mind. Can she, potentially without the aid of those that she holds dear, put The Syndicate to its end and still be able to lead a life that includes her freedom?

With movement in the dark, Shannon needs the Sherlock she remembers if there is any chance that they survive in the end.

(Congruent with Series 3 & 4)
Shannon sat in a chair reading when the cameraman entered the room, filming. She looked up, puzzled.

“Oh, hello. I didn’t realize that we were doing this now. Okay. No, it’s fine. Ready?”

She cleared her throat and set her book down on the floor. She leaned forward onto her knees and spoke with her voice both clear and calm.

“Hello there; you might not know who I am and that’s alright. I’m going to preface that this may seem a little bizarre, but there are a set of rules in place. If it seems vague by what I am revealing there is a reason.

I know that you can’t always tell a lot about a person by watching a video – so I’m going to tell you a little about myself. I finished doing some traveling around the world. These places included Morocco, Turkey, Panama, Norway, Croatia, Spain, and Bhutan. Not that they matter completely. But more recently, I was in the US working on finding some people.

I say that with a certain air of normalcy…but I guess this is where I tell you that I am, more or less, a secret agent. Christ, that sounds so cliché. I’m not, really; but in a sick and twisted sense I am. It’s complicated and I don’t have enough time to tell you about it. That defeats the purpose of this video message. I’m getting ahead of myself, sorry.

After the Fall, I hung around London for a while to make sure that John wasn’t self-destructing. Sherlock was off doing sleuth-y, aloof things with trying to track down Moriarty’s ring to ensure everyone’s safety. My bit, however, was a little more complex. Sherlock and I had discussed beforehand what his plans were and how, together, we could try to bring the crime ring down. Moriarty’s web would be, more or less, disabled.

My job was to push the ring up from the depths of the darkness. Now that the boss was gone his allies would begin to disappear. My task was to bring them to the light so that they could be spotted by a very careful eye. It was to look like ignorance or sloppiness on the crooks’ part. Not to gloat, but I did a pretty fine at job at that.

At one point, I had to make my way back London under one of my assumed aliases and had a meeting with Mycroft Holmes. Sherlock didn’t need my assistance and it would behoove all parties involved if I followed a lead that was part of an up and coming crime syndicate. They had been testing boundaries now that most of Moriarty’s heavy hitters were dealt with and out of the way. Mycroft, for once, agreed with me and I left that night with a small stash of new passports with new aliases.

I went to Norway first and dissolved that group in a week. It was child’s play, really. I was confused as to why these people were supposed to be the new face of bad when they broke so quickly. It wasn’t until I was in Turkey that I realized that Norway was a test dummy; bait. The rest of the syndicate now knew that someone other than Sherlock was moving about – and he wasn’t interested in them. I couldn’t be sure what was or wasn’t leaked by Jim Moriarty at any given time to his web of contacts. I knew, however, that there wasn’t any surveillance done in Norway; so my face was still anonymous. With any luck, the group was now assuming that Sherlock had turned focus and that they would be looking for a man instead of a woman.

By the time I got back to the States, my presence in the syndicate was intact and all of the gaps and holes needed to erase myself were in place. I had created a single word that would be broadcast

Tanzania
on their phones to every single member who’d seen me and within an hour, I’d be gone. It’d get sent after I finished. But I had business to attend to. Sean O’Rourke: a member of Boston’s finest. He’d been my friend and guided me through hardship and he had worked for Moriarty.

I left him blatant clues to come out from his hiding place and find me. Of course he took the bait. I’m a big prize. He – misjudged.

I had evidence; he knew that when we met. He knew he was done. Killing him would have been too easy. I gave him a chance. Should he come down from that mountain, he’d be tailed. I suppose he will expect it if he survives my camp. I don’t much care.

With my survival, I knew that Sean would report back to whoever is in the shadows that I was alive and that meant that Sherlock was still breathing. It was time to come back and try to finish what I started. I can’t do it alone, though. John – he’s not been doing so bad. I’m actually happy for him. He deserves to be happy. Knowing Sherlock, though, I hope he doesn’t screw that meeting up. John’ll beat him. Deservedly so. Oh God, Sherlock’s going to mess it up. Fantastic. Glad I’ve missed that.

I’m supposed to give Mycroft a notice when I am planning on coming back, but plans change and he wasn’t in his office when I called and I do hate leaving messages.

You probably know this by now, but that’s fine. Why am I doing this? Why am I taking the time to ensure that you hear from me what you already know? It’s honesty. I’m not lying to you. I’ve got work to do and I’m coming back. This is to aide you should the worst happen.”

Shuffling and steps occur off camera and another person enters the room out of sight.

“Kivuli, it is time,” says a new voice with a heavy accent. “Your plane will be leaving soon. And there is word from London. De upelelezi lives. It is time for you to go. You have done all dat you can here.”

She nodded and stood up slowly, brushing off her dark jeans before looking back to the camera to finish. “If you have this, it’s for good reason. There is a chance that I may not get out of this alive. The problem being that there’s something else moving out there and I can’t see it. That’s part of the reason I’m coming back. I need you, Sherlock. I can’t see it. I’ve been staring at the chessboard for so long and I’ve grown blind.

Sherlock, if you’re seeing this, it’s for one reason. I need you to trust me. And I need you to do so now, tonight…whatever night this is. If you don’t, there’s a high probability that I’ll disappear and not by my own volition. There’s a chance that tonight, I’ll be killed; removed from the equation. If that happens, you need to know…”

The video stopped. She nodded in approval to the other men in the room. “I am sorry, Kivuli, der is not more memory on dis drive.”

“It’s fine, Abasi, I understand. It’ll work. It should definitely peak his interest, to say the least. Burn it onto the drive and give it to me. I’ve got work to do. Darweshi,” stated looking to the camera man, “Help me get ready for the flight. Abasi’s right. It’s time that I came out of hiding.”
Sherlock had been around for a small amount of time and the frenzy from the press was as strong as ever. “The Great Detective Back from the Dead!” could be read in any variation in papers, tabloids, blogs, and journals. He was a celebrity.

Shannon had been paying to rent a small room weekly to ensure that her transition would be as seamless as possible. I can’t just randomly pop in and say, “Hi guys! You don’t remember me but we were besties!!” That’s a great way for me to get sectioned. That’s all I’d need – get thrown into a psychiatric hospital and then try to manage my way out of that. I mean, I could do it. It’d be difficult. Actually, I should try that sometime as an exercise…

She had been walking around parts of London doing surveillance so as to monitor the habits of her friends. Mrs. Hudson still took her faithful trip to the store every three days. Shannon was becoming a common body to see at the store and it wasn’t unnatural for them to keep running into each other.

The older woman was trying to reach something off of one of the upper shelves when Shannon walked over to her and grabbed it down. “Here you are,” she smiled warmly.

“Oh, I’m sorry to trouble you. Thank you!”

“Don’t apologize,” Shannon chuckled, “I’ve got long arms. At least I can use them for something.”

Mrs. Hudson smiled, “Well, thank you, Miss…”

“Shannon, my name’s Shannon.” Shannon then turned timid for a moment, “Can I ask you a question – and if you don’t know it’s okay. I’m new around here.”

“Well, of course, dear – your accent gives you away, you know.”

“Right now I’m renting per week with no real security into my lease. Do you know of anywhere around here that’s letting? I just started looking this week. I’ve been asking everyone that I talk to,” she pleaded with her eyes. Come on, I know you want to take the bait.

Mrs. Hudson pondered a moment, “Actually, I – I’m a landlady. I own a nice little property. Private rooms, shared bath though…I know you Americans aren’t too fond of that; nice big kitchen and common area.”

Shannon quickly clasped her hands together, “You have to have been sent by my angel. That sounds absolutely lovely! I’m not being too forward, am I? Oh, God, I sound so desperate.”

“Well,” Mrs. Hudson beamed, “That’s what a new place can do for you. I tell you what, are you free this afternoon? The vacancy is a little place accessible from the first floor; I could show it to you.”

“I can’t believe this; yes! I would absolutely love to see it!” she exclaimed. She pulled a piece of paper from her backpack and wrote her mobile number on it. “Here, this is my number. I can furnish recommendations; background checks…whatever you need!”

The landlady nodded quickly, “Come ‘round about four, dearie – 221 Baker Street.”

Excellent. Three weeks hovering about has paid off faster than I imagined. Bonus. I’ve had time
to set my cover with the syndicate and I can get a move on and start working everyone back into the equation. Christ, I’ve missed them all. I don’t know if I can ever express to them how much I actually need them. Or have missed them. I’m ready to move forward. Somehow. Anyway that I can.

First though, let’s get ready and go over to Baker Street. Dodging John will be easy enough and Sherlock – well, that’ll be something.

Shannon casually made her way towards Baker Street. *Home*. She knocked politely on the door and the kind woman answered, “Oh good! I was about to call you to make sure you were coming!”

“Sorry,” she apologized, “The tube was late. Hammond.”

“Sorry?” she queried, puzzled.

“Oh – nothing, sorry. Slip of the tongue,” Shannon smirked. “It’s been a long day.”

Mrs. Hudson nodded nervously, “Right, come in, come in. Take a look about and then I can talk to you about price.” Shannon smiled warmly and entered. “Just give me a minute or two, dear – I need to get some of my aspirin. I’ve got a terrible headache setting in.”

“Take your time, ma’am. I’ll stay right here.” She grinned mischievously to herself. *One down and six to go.*
Late November

It had been a long day at work; even longer considering that he had been out the night before with Sherlock. His friend was on the case and was trying to find out exactly who had put John in the pyre. It had only been a few weeks since then, but John was still leery about the whole situation.

Mary:

I’ve just left work. I’m on my way home.

John was walking casually home from the clinic when he got a text from Mary. She’d been on an earlier shift than he that day, so she was, more than likely, already home.

John:

John, before we go to dinner, hop over to Baker Street. There’s a surprise!

His mind began to buzz. A surprise? What could she have that’d be a surprise at Baker Street? Sherlock isn’t there. He’s been texting me off and on all day begging me to meet up with him around town. He shrugged it off. No sense worrying about it until I get there. Sherlock, however – that man’s another story. I’m going to have to try and deal with all of that soon. He strolled home, dropped off his things and then went out towards Baker Street.

Upon walking in, he heard women laughing upstairs. Odd. When he crested the top of the stairs he saw Mary sitting at the small table near the window with another woman. She was stocky in frame with brown hair and her voice seemed very familiar. Oh yes, I remember her.

“Samantha Grant! How wonderful to see you!” John gave a broad smile as he entered the room.

The young woman turned quickly in surprise but her smile faltered for a moment before she leapt from her chair to hug him. “Doctor John Watson – look at you! You look fantastic. And, I believe there are congratulations in order!”

Mary smiled warmly and motioned to a seat for John to sit. “Mrs. Hudson called me to have me come over.”

John was puzzled, “But I don’t – how did you know to come here?”

“Oh,” Shannon replied, “Well, Mrs. Hudson is –“
Mary interjected, “She’s going to be moving somewhere in London and ran into Mrs. Hudson – so she was brought here for a bit.”

“Ace. That’s wonderful! How have you been? Mary – I guess you two made introductions already?”

“Oh yes, we did, mildly.”

Shannon nodded in agreement, “Oh yes. As for me, I did some traveling in Europe, Africa and Asia; then I headed back towards home to take care of a few things. I appreciate the emails and letters I got while I was traveling. I’m sorry I couldn’t always write back to you.”

“Nah, it’s alright,” he grinned, “Traveling and all that. You were busy. And probably broke.”

She nodded solemnly and looked to Mary who was smiling knowingly. “John – look, there’s something that I want to ask you. But only after I’ve told you a story, alright?”

John looked between the two women on either side of him with a suspicious grin. “Okay…but it’s not my birthday.”

“John,” Mary warned playfully as she smacked his arm. “It’s not that kind of question – not that you’d get that kind of birthday anyway.”

The pair laughed but Shannon’s face was still. “About five months before Sherlock Holmes fell…you guys took a case that involved bringing a victim and witness from Boston here to London.”

John shook his head playfully, “Nope. I don’t think that’s possible; I remember all of them. I blog about them.”


“When she got here, Mycroft had her housed in 221C so that both you and his brother could watch over her while you were trying to solve the case. In the investigation, however,” she continued with more resolve, “Complications arose. With matters like betrayal and treason, the case exploded and became linked to the other case that you two had been working on: Moriarty. And Diaxus.”

John’s face lost its mirth. “Diazus - What? Mary… This isn’t funny, Shannon.”

Shannon’s face brightened, “What did you call me?”

John shook his head in confusion, “Sorry, Sam. I meant to call you Sam.”

“But you called me Shannon. John, listen,” she begged as he began to stand, “The person from the case was found to be a trained super-agent from their subconscious since they were a child – they were the strongest and most potent weapon that could bring down governments without any evidence whatsoever.”

“This isn’t funny. I’m done listening. I can’t believe this,” John fully stood and grumbled, “You’re telling me that there was some person here and I don’t remember? That’s rich and convenient, don’t you think? You’re a reporter, aren’t you?”

Mary sat quietly as Shannon pressed further. “John Hamish Watson, you listen to me,” Shannon growled as she moved to stand toe-to-toe with him. “My name isn’t Samantha Grant; it’s Shannon Byrns. I gave you an alias after the fall because I wasn’t sure of the danger and I couldn’t abandon
you! You’re like family to me! Listen: you and I used to argue about bread all of the time. I always brought home the wrong bread, almost every week and you used to yell at me, and I’d yell back…and…and…Sherlock would have to come separate us to keep you and me from killing each other. Or there was the one time you took me out to dinner when I had just moved here hoping Sherlock wouldn’t find us at the Italian place so that you could get to know me for who I was rather than what he saw. You crushed my trumpet and wanted to pay for it; but I told you not to. When I had to wipe your memory, you told me I was going to fail because you could never forget family…John, please! I’m sorry that I had to do it. It was that or letting Moriarty kill both of you. I’m so sorry.”

His face was stern. All three persons in the flat turned to hear someone coming up the stairs. Mrs. Hudson came in blustering, “Is everything alright? Oh, John, aren’t you glad that Shannon’s back?”

John looked to Shannon and then to Mary. “I think you should listen, dear – she seems to be telling the truth,” Mary guided.

“That’s because she’s a compulsive liar,” John sneered at Shannon.

“John, look,” Mary soothed as she handed him Shannon’s phone. “Look at this.”

Shannon had tears welling in her eyes, “Not yet, Mrs. Hudson – I’m letting him decide.”

“But Shannon,” Mrs. Hudson pleaded. “John, you need to remember! The three of you were so close!”

John sighed exasperatedly. “I can’t honestly believe all of this. Do – do you all realize how insane you are? And Mary – really?” Mary’s eyes and genuine smile made John reconsider and look at the phone. On the screen was a paused video that was dated within the time frame the liar had depicted.

The good doctor looked up at Shannon with guarded eyes. “John, I’m not asking you to jump head first and accept everything that I’ve said; I’m – I’m not asking for you to believe. Just watch the video…and – and if you’re not convinced, I’ll walk out that door and you’ll never see me again. But, if you have faith in me – faith and trust in that dysfunctional family you see on that screen… I’ll ask you a question and that’s it. You have nothing to lose.” Shannon’s face was desperate; pleading. Please, John – please. I need you. I need you so that I can help Sherlock. Please. John, believe me. Please.

This is unbelievable. I feel like this is all a dream. Sam is saying her name is Shannon Byrns. Mrs. Hudson is trapped in her game. And now – now she expects me to trust her? What’s worse is that she’s got Mary enraptured by this bollocks. I did call her Shannon on accident – but why? And it’s true: I have nothing to lose. So I might as well humor them all to get us on with our lives. John frowned and pressed play after moving his eyes down to the small screen.

There was Mrs. Hudson in her flat cooking tea, more than likely, for them. “And here, ladies and gentlemen, is the infamous Mrs. Hudson. Without her, I’m pretty sure the boys, Sherlock especially, would be constantly crabby.” That’s Sam’s – I mean Shannon’s voice.

Mrs. Hudson smiled humbly, “Oh, Shannon, you stop. I’m just the landlady.”
“Just the landlady? Lies. All lies. Here, let me help. What can I do?” She had set the phone down on the counter, propped up on something out of sight.

“Be a dear, Shannon: take this upstairs.”

“You’re eating with us, right? I mean, I can only take so much testosterone a day. Sometimes it’s nice to have civilized, female conversation.” Shannon came into shot looking a little less tired and worn. She’s aged some since then…I can see it in the eyes.

“I suppose, if it’s not intruding, dear.”

She took the large tray and walked away and up the stairs. She returned and took the last tray out of Mrs. Hudson’s hands. “Nope. No, no, no: you cooked, and you do not need to be carrying this up those stairs. No buts, Mrs. Hudson.”

Shannon smiled and turned out of sight with the last tray of food. “That girl. God love her. Oh!” she noticed the phone and grabbed it before heading upstairs.

In the flat’s common space, Shannon was at work unloading the food and putting out place settings.

“Shannon, when are the boys due back?” Shannon turned and smiled.

“Mrs. Hudson, that is for me to capture all of you on, not me. Give it here,” she laughed. When the older woman protested jovially, Shannon let her keep it. “Soon. John texted me and said they were about five minutes away. Ten minutes ago.” She walked out of sight and returned from the kitchen with bottles of beer and wine.

The sound of the door opening caught both Shannon’s and Mrs. Hudson’s attention as the camera panned towards the sound. Sherlock Holmes walked through briskly. “Mrs. Hudson, have you prepared another one of your Sunday roasts? You know I don’t work and eat. It takes too much energy.”

“Typical Sherlock,” Watson thought aloud. Shannon seemingly grew hopeful at his response.

“Sherlock, I’m not going to tolerate you being an ass tonight. So be nice…er. And you will be eating. Suck it up. Did…” she looked around, “Did you leave John to pay for the cab, again? You’re such a twat sometimes.” John laughed heartily at Shannon’s indifference of Holmes’ antics.

Sherlock quirked an eyebrow at her as he shed his coat, “John’s the one the carries the money.”

She smirked and lightly punched him in the arm, “Now that’s a lie, Mr. Holmes.” John walked into the room and the camera panned to him. “John!” she announced enthusiastically. “You know, you can force him to pay up from time to time.” They hugged warmly.

John grinned, “Yes, well, being a dick is part of his description.”

“I’m right here, you know,” Sherlock groaned. “If the two of you persist on being so familial, do it elsewhere. It makes me ill.”

Shannon stuck her tongue out playfully. “Bite me. You’re just jealous that he hugs me and not you.”

“Really, dears,” Mrs. Hudson chastised, “The three of you – you’re letting your food get cold.
For goodness sake, eat up!” The landlady now cameraman, moved to the table while the boys sat down obediently.

“Boys, beer or wine?” Shannon asked standing between them.

“Beer for me, thanks,” John offered. “By chance, you have any more of that porter?”

“Which, the Breckenridge or the other?”

“The other one; it was quite nice.”

“Sure, I can go downstairs and grab a bottle. Sherlock?”

He rolled his eyes, “If I’m being subjected to eat, wine will do.”

She stopped and raised her eyebrows as she placed a hand on her hip. “Ahem.”

Surprised and slightly embarrassed, the detective added quickly, “Please and thank you. I’m sorry.”

“Thank you,” she responded kindly, “Of course.”

John’s mouth fell. “Impossible.” There was no way before the jump that he was this humble or emotional.

Shannon lowered her eyes and smiled. Please, John; for me. I miss you all.

“And for the lady of the house, Mrs. Hudson, what can I get you this evening? Oh, you can put that down now – I think it’s run long enough,” she motioned to her phone.

Mrs. Hudson’s voice sounded cheery and full as she gleamed, “But, look at the three of you. Together. I’m so glad. It does my heart good, you know – to know that you’re looked after by each other.” She choked back some tears, more than likely. “It’s just you make each other better—”

Shannon set down Sherlock’s glass of wine promptly, “Oh, Mrs. Hudson; it’s alright.” She nudged Sherlock’s arm with her hip. When he looked up at her, she motioned with her eyes towards the older woman and Sherlock offered a handkerchief from his jacket pocket.

Holmes looked up to her slightly annoyed and she beamed a warm smile to him. When she turned to run downstairs, Sherlock flashed a small, brief smile – just for a moment...if it hadn’t been on camera, he would have denied it. “Something like that, Mrs. Hudson. If you’d pass the roast potatoes, please.” He looked directly at the camera and gave a quick flash of traditional Holmes charm.

The video stopped, paused on Sherlock’s face. There was something in his eyes that grabbed John’s full attention. There is a certain clarity there; there is no way you could dupe Sherlock Holmes into being that kind and/or genuine. Ever. There would be seething hatred there. But there isn’t. Christ, does he actually care? He does. I’ve seen that look before. This woman...we were all so familiar...and the video.

He met her eyes and could see some tears running down her cheeks. “John, I know that it’s hard to put faith into something that you don’t remember or think that you know. But, I knew that if you
couldn’t have faith in me that you could have faith in him. You know that he’s not lying to you there.

“Please believe me – if there was any way I could have made this any easier, I would have. But
John, he was going to kill you, Mrs. Hudson, Sherlock, and Greg. I couldn’t…I wouldn’t let him
do that. Your forgetting me is the best I could do and it’s continuously eating me alive because I
have nothing. You all were my family and you’re gone and now I have nothing.

“There’s an inane drive to protect you. All of you,” she looked quickly around the room, “Because
you’re all my family. And I will die to protect you.”

Mrs. Hudson was tearing up, “John – you have to remember. Something. Anything.”

His mind was buzzing. A million questions were pressing his mind and it was almost as if some
long forgotten memory was pushing through. He could barely make it out. It was right there. If
only he could just reach it. He was missing something.

“What is this? What’s the question?” John asked quickly rubbing his temples.

She smiled weakly, “It’s the memories pushing through. The door word for you was ‘Diaxus’.
That’s why I said it. I needed to see if there was any shred of me in your mind. And I am. The
question is this: you don’t have to believe in me…but do you believe what you saw? Do you
believe Sherlock?”

There was mild strain etched on his face. He paused and looked at Mary before groaning in pain,
“I do. I believe it. I believe in Sherlock. I always have. I believe in you. Just like I did then.
What’s the key to the door?”

Shannon stood calmly and her voice rang out clearly. “Jot down torn chaos.” As soon as the
words left her mouth, she ran quickly to John’s side as he began to sway off balance. “There you
eased him carefully into his chair.

Hundreds of memories came rushing into his mind faster than he could comprehend. All of those
memories; all those emotions were flooding his mind and body. Mary was by his side holding his

John slowly succumbed to the dark that was enclosing in around him and drifted into sound sleep.
Shannon stood up and roughly wiped her face. She placed a reassuring hand on Mary’s shoulder
and gently said, “He will be fine, dear. I half expected him to pass out faster than that. If this is
any indication of what it’s going to be like for Sherlock, it’s going to be a battle.” Mary looked up
at her and nodded. “Mary…thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Mrs. Hudson, come with me. Let’s give him some time and space. Do you mind if I make us
some tea downstairs? I think a nice cuppa would do just fine right about now,” Shannon soothed,
guiding the woman by the elbow out of the common room.

The door was closed quietly behind them and they moved to Mrs. Hudson’s apartment. Mary ran
her fingers through John’s hair soothingly, “You needed this, John – I can see plain as day that you
need this. It’s alright, darling. I’m here.”
John blinked groggily as he sat up in his chair while stretching his neck out. His left hand twitched nervously for a moment in panic. Mary looked up from her spot on the couch and walked briskly to his side. “John, you alright? You passed out from the stress, I think.”

He took a deep breath and furrowed his brow while he rubbed his neck. “How long have I been out?”

“An hour. At the most. She figured that it was best for your body to play catch up.”

“Shannon…” he whispered. “Oh my God. Shannon. I remember… I remember that night on her phone…and the bread! And – oh God, I crunched her trumpet. There was the Italian bistro – all of it. I re…I remember all of it.” His eyes widened as he looked to his fiancée. “I remember when she had to wipe our memories. She was crying. Oh, God is she alright?”

“She’s fine,” Mary smiled. “She’s downstairs with Mrs. Hudson making some tea. Give her some time, John. She’s hurting, too.” Confusion splayed across his face. “Think about it. For her to come out of hiding now…she’d have needed a propellant. What would have forced her out now?”

“Andy – oh no.”

She gasped, “Who?”

“Andy,” John stammered, “He’s a bloke back in the States. After her brother and all that, and then losing us – all that she would have had was him. He must be dead. God. What have I missed? In all this time…what…what have I missed?”

Shannon was standing quietly in the doorway of the kitchen to the stairs holding a tray of mugs of tea. “It’s all very boring, Watson. Trust me;” she uttered hoarsely. She entered the room and placed the tray on the end table next to his chair. “These two are for you guys. And there’s some Tylenol there if you need it, John.” She grabbed her mug and curled herself up in Sherlock’s chair.

“Shannon, I’m sorry.”

“For what? Forgetting? That was part of the plan, John. You had to forget or else you were a target,” she stated plainly as she blew onto her tea.

“Don’t.”

She looked up quickly with her eyes, “What?”

“Don’t start getting cold. Not like him. Not like this.”

Mary sat on the arm of his chair in quiet awe that they were picking up right where they had undoubtedly left off. “Sorry, reintroductions,” Shannon quipped. “Mary, I’m Shannon Byrns. I am the most deadly secret weapon on the planet save for nuclear weapons – at this point. Mostly. Long story short: I was conditioned to infiltrate governments and organizations, destroy them, and walk out of the wreckage with no one knowing who or what I am with no evidence in my wake.”

“Right,” she breathed heavily. “That’s terrifying to think about. You’re like a living, breathing Clancy novel.”

Awake; Awake!
“Yeah,” she nodded with a sarcastic smirk, “You could say that. At the end, I figured out what needed to happen and I couldn’t be in the equation. All my possibilities had to be accounted for. I could kill myself; but I like living. I could put myself in a coma; risk having Moriarty’s network kill me when John wasn’t looking. Or, I could use the techniques I’ve been trained to use…and not trained in the traditional sense…and fulfill Moriarty’s plan and erase myself from their memories and move on.”

“What was the catch,” she inquired.

Shannon stretched stiffly in the chair. She sighed and looked between them, “Had the programming worked like Moriarty wanted, I’d have gone to some location somewhere for the next step. Having not done it, they’d have realized it and I knew that I was being watched.”

“And Andy?” John interjected.

“Gone,” she breathed, “To save me.”

John frowned. “O’Rourke?”

“Done. He was the mole. After him, I came here as quick as I could. I caught wind right before the plane took off that Sherlock was back. I’ve been hiding out, timing myself so that nothing went wrong. And, Mary, might I saw you’re lovely.”

She grinned, “Thank you. I’m – I’m sorry about your friend.”

“Thank you,” the young woman nodded. “I appreciate it. Now, if you’d please, not a word to Sherlock. I have to figure out when best to corner him. If you don’t mind, Mary, I’d like to pose as an old childhood friend of yours. I have something to do before I go. He’s going to ask who was here.”

“Of course. That’s not a problem.”

Shannon stood up and walked down the hall to Sherlock’s room, stood in the doorway, and then walked back. She replaced the mug back in the tray and stood in the middle of the floor. Her eyes were bright and calm; her voice clear, “Please, doesn’t tell him that I’ve been here. He’ll know someone’s been here.”

“How?” Mary asked gleefully.

Shannon smiled, “You’ll see. But, for now – I have to leave. I expect him to be home soon. I’ve rented a small room for a week or so. It’ll do until I’m ready to move back in.”

“You lived here? With them?”

Shannon nodded as she gathered her coat, “Downstairs, 221C. It’s not much, but it is and was home. And Mrs. Hudson’s going to let it to me again. I’ll start sending some boxes of stuff in a day or so. It’ll get him ticking.”

“Shannon,” John stood up quickly and moved to her side, “I’ve missed you – and I’m glad that you came back.”

“Thank you,” she hugged the doctor warmly. “But I couldn’t have come back without you believing. So, thank you. Mary, you got a keeper here. Congratulations again on your engagement.”
The young woman took off down the stairs, stopped by Mrs. Hudson’s room, and then left Baker Street.

John looked over to Mary, beaming. “I wouldn’t have wanted to believe if it weren’t for you, you know.”

“Come on,” she laughed, “We both know it was those baby blue eyes on that video that swayed you.”

John shook his head playfully, “Oh no. It was all you. You had faith in her. Why?”

“She was calm and sensible about it all. It’s hard to fake the genuine care she was showing. Then she showed me the video and I knew that what I was watching was something real. You guys… you were your own perfect, dysfunctional family. I couldn’t deny you that. I just couldn’t.”

John’s smile broadened. “So, to dinner?”

The pair grabbed their things and left to go to their dinner date. As they walked down the street, they passed Sherlock.

“Off to dinner, again?”

“That’s something that normal people do, Sherlock,” John chastised.

Mary enjoyed their banter. It was amusing to her. “Are you hungry?”

“No, working – I don’t like to eat when I work.”

“Right then, we’re off.”

Sherlock raised a questioning eyebrow and turned on his heel to go back to the flat. When he got into the flat he immediately noticed the tray with three mugs on it. Upon inspection, the one in the back had been John’s based on what was left in the mug, the one beside it: Mary’s, but the third… that was different. No honey, no sugar, or cream – just straight tea.

_Hmm. No lipstick stains, interesting depression in my chair, no fibers or hair that I can see; that smell…perfume and it’s not Mary’s. What is that?_

_The base note is definitely a vanilla of sorts. And I believe I detect…orange blossom. Interesting, I wonder which perfume it is?_

“Mrs. Hudson!” Sherlock hollered.

The kind lady appeared after a moment and stood in the doorway, “What is it dear, what’s wrong?”

“There was a woman here – not long ago; while John and Mary were here. Did you notice who it was?”

“Oh, she was such a nice girl. Friend of Mary’s I think. They met up and John offered some tea; is everything alright?”

He frowned in thought, “I know that perfume. Somewhere. Thank you, out. I need to think.”

“Alright, Sherlock, alright. It is nice to have you back.”

He sat down in his chair and closed his eyes as he began to sift through his mind palace. He recognized the smell and if he recognized it, then it would have to be logged away in here.
Almost three hours later, John returned back to Baker Street after taking Mary home. When he entered, Sherlock was sitting silently in his chair, raking his mind for answers. John’s smile was smug as he went and sat in his chair to wait for his friend to open his eyes.

“You’re late. I asked for a pen.”

“Wasn’t here, not my problem.” Sherlock opened his eyes and looked puzzled. “What’s wrong with you, Mycroft come and take your toys away again?”

He plainly stated, “There was a woman here earlier and I recognize the perfume. However, I cannot find it. I don’t know why.”

John gave a skeptical nod, “Right. Well, if that’s all…then I’m going to go home to bed. I’ve got an early day tomorrow.”

“What do you know, John?” he asked.

“Know? What do you mean?”

“The woman that was here, what do you know?”

“Oh,” he sighed, “Her. Uh, well…light brown eyes…brown hair, maybe 5’8”, nice girl. Friend of Mary’s from way back, I think. Why?”

“Her name?”

John hesitated for a moment, “Shannon, I think. I believe she said that her name was Shannon.”

He pondered a moment. “Nope, never mind. That doesn’t help. Goodnight, John.”

The good doctor took his leave as Sherlock sat with his fingers steepled under his chin, deep in thought. *Interesting.*

The next morning a lorry was idling outside the flat. Sherlock woke from the noise and went to look out the window. Intrigued, he grabbed his robe and made his way down the steps outside to find Mrs. Hudson directing the workmen. “Good morning, Sherlock – oh, will you be careful with those things, please?”

“Are you moving?”

“No. I’ve let out the basement apartment. The new lodger will be here later this week – they asked if they could move their things in here ahead of time.”

“Really. That’s odd, don’t you think?”

“Well, no, not really – they checked out and everything.”

He looked skeptical. “Is that so?”

“Yes, even by your standards.”

“We’ll see.”
“They might be stopping by later, be nice, Sherlock – I could do with having another body in the place.”

“I’ll be my charming self, Mrs. Hudson,” he gleamed, “Honestly.” He moved back into the house and rolled his eyes. Fantastic. What superb specimen is moving in and how long do they plan on staying? I should find a way to drive them out.

Shannon walked about Scotland Yard and waited for her turn to see Lestrade. “Byrns. You can go and see the Inspector now.”

She got up and made her way to his office. Greg had his hair cut shorter and he looked happier than he had a few months ago from her surveillance. “Hello, sir, my name is Byrns.”

“Yes, I can see that. As you know, my department is quite busy – how can I help you today?”

She huffed, “Greg – you know what – I’m not giving you the option. I miss you. Phoenix rises at dawn.”

He grabbed at his head, “Christ – my head. Oh – damn it…” he looked up at her and squinted. “Shannon? Oh my God, Shannon? It’s you!” He leapt from his chair and ran to her. Greg’s hug enveloped her as he lifted her off of the ground. She wrapped her arms around him to return the warm embrace and smiled. “Where have you been? AND WHY DID YOU LEAVE?”

He put her down on the floor and held her by her shoulders. Shannon thought a moment and let out a heavy sigh. “Alright, I’ll tell you. But you might as well get Donovan and Anderson in here. I don’t want to keep retelling this.” Her phone buzzed to alert her to a message. She read it and groaned, “If we could hurry, that’d be best.”
The calculating woman sat quietly in the Stranger’s Room of the Diogenes Club waiting for the men to come and collect her. As she was escorted through the building, she remained silent until she heard the door click closed behind. “You rang, Mycroft?”

“Shannon, come in and sit. Please, I insist.”

“No need to be congenial. What do you need?”

“You always assume that I need or want something when I ask to see you. Why is that?”

“Let’s call it intuition.”

He cocked his head to the side, “I see that you’re moving back into Baker Street.”

“How observant,” she muttered scathingly.

He ignored her comment and continued, “I would hope that there shan’t be any issues to arise.”

Her eyes scrutinized his body language. “Mycroft, if there’s something that you’d like to get off your chest, please do so. You’re not great at being subtle. And for that matter, we should be honest with each other at this point. I did extend you a professional courtesy, as you may recall,” she stated with an air of superiority.

“Just because of that, I don’t believe…”

“Mycroft.”

“…Fine then. And yes, I appreciate it. I know that in his own way that Sherlock was fond of you. It almost compromised everything that we had set in motion. Only upon reflection did you come back and unlock my memories.”

“A year later, mind you; so that you could suffer for a while.”

“Clearly.”

“I’m on a schedule so if you could hurry this up, that’d be fantastic. I’m sure your brother is already sifting through my things.”

“Have it your way. Do not compromise my brother. If you feel that, at any time, you will cloud his skill and judgment do remove yourself. He needs clarity.”

She shook her head in abhorrence and locked eyes with the man across the desk, “No. He needs family. That’s his clarity. You’re just too blind to see it. Anything else?”

“You’re talking about emotional mistakes.”

“It’s better to have lived than to have died before death, Mycroft.” She stood up and moved to the door, “Goodnight, Mycroft. I’m sure we’ll be in touch.”
The door closed behind her and the Ice Man covered his face with his hands. “What a joy to have you back in town.”

Tired and frustrated, Shannon silently walked into Baker Street and noticed that a light was on in her apartment. She unclasped the knife she now kept at the small of her back to lose it from its sheath. As she pushed through the door she saw a mess of dark curls, long limbs, and strong shoulders carefully reapplying tape to a box. Shannon couldn’t help the bright grin that graced her face. *Ever the detective.*

“You know, I’m sure that’s breaking a law somehow.” She had caught him by surprise.

He gave a slow turn and stood upright, “I’m an inspector. There was an issue with your packages in transit.”

“Liar,” she replied. A look of surprise brushed across his features. "I know who you are. You won’t find anything very telling in this round of stuff, Mr. Holmes. Though, if you try sifting through everything tomorrow you might get lucky!” she jeered. “Shannon Byrns. Pleasure.”

He sniffed the air and met her gaze, “You’re Mary’s friend and you’re moving in here. Interesting.”

“I didn’t realize that you lived here, honestly. I’ve been living abroad and have found that work’s brought me to London for a time. I won’t be a hassle to you, surely. Mrs. Hudson has already filled me in on your quirks. I’m not bothered.”

“Uh-huh,” he sized her up, trying to find something. He could see her trying to figure him out.

She crossed her arms and leaned on the doorframe. “Find anything interesting, or should I just tell you where I’ve been?”

He shook his head in surprise. Buh…but how – how would you know w-what…”

“Don’t stammer, it’s not your style, I’m sure. Feel free to go through the boxes and leave them open when you do. It’ll make them easier to unpack later. Hungry? I’m going to make something to eat. Oh – wait – you don’t eat when you’re working, do you? Lame.”

She walked up the stairs and disappeared to the kitchen. He heard her shuffling around, opening cabinets and drawers as he stood still – confused.

I’m never puzzled like this. What is this? Is this how ordinary people feel? This is awful.

Holmes ascended the stairs and found her cooking at the stove and humming quietly to herself. He blinked a few times in comprehension while he listened to her tune. “Mahler.”

“Very good,” she cooed, “Go on.”

“It’s a mixture, isn’t it? I hear number eight and parts of ten in there.”

“Very good, sir, quite good. Are you a Mahler fan or just of music instead?”

“I lean towards the German composers. There’s something in the music that grabs hold of the listener’s attention.”

She nodded knowingly as she finished cooking her pasta dinner. After passing him, she sat quietly at the kitchen table to begin eating. She looked up to him and quirked an eyebrow, “I like a little bit
of everything. Last time I played, I did Firebird and the Faust Overture.”

“Stravinsky and Wagner. That is a little heavy for the average listener, is it not?”

She grinned after taking a bite. “You didn’t ask me what I play,” she responded smugly.

“Based on the scarring and slight depression of the cupid’s bow, I’d have to say that you play high brass. However, the calluses on your fingertips are indicative that you’ve picked up a sting instrument recently: more than likely the viola. There are calluses on the palms of your hands the correspond with those of a percussionist; and yet, the slight puffiness in your lips and the light indentation on your neck say that you’ve started playing the tenor saxophone.”

Shannon swallowed her food and sat back in her chair, folding her arms across her stomach. “Is that all, Mr. Holmes? Any music teacher might be able to notice that.” She finished off the last few bites, cleaned her dish, and grabbed a bottle of cider from the fridge before moving to lean on the doorframe to the stairs. “Anything else, Mr. Holmes, or do I have your permission to leave?”

The detective squinted as he scrutinized her. “I feel that the level of comfortableness with me that you exude is also indicative that you feel that you know me, but I know for a fact that we’ve not met.”

“You sure?”

“Very.”

“I don’t think you are.”

“Nope,” he articulated the ‘p’, “I believe not.”

“No, I don’t think so.”

He smirked at her challenge, “I have a unique way of storing information, including the faces of people I have seen. You’re not there.”

“Maybe you’re not looking hard enough. You know, sometimes people and names can open doors to new rooms and experiences that you never knew existed,” she quipped haughtily. “Night-night, Sherlock Holmes; thank you for letting me use the kitchen.”

He frowned. It’s impossible. There’s no feasible way that I could have not logged any interactions with her. She is enigmatic. Perhaps there is a riddle in what she’s said. I should do well to think about this.

Early the next morning, Sherlock sat still in his chair barely noticing idling lorry that brought the next wave of boxes to the new lodger’s flat. He was continuously searching through every inch of his mind palace to find some shred of information about Shannon Byrns and yet – there was none to be found. Nothing. Not even the perfume. I know that I recognize it. But HOW can I not place it?

Sherlock didn’t notice that time had been passing so quickly, or that Mrs. Hudson had come and gone twice with the post and tea.

“Sherlock?” she asked as she was leaving the room the second time. “Sherlock, can you hear me?”

He snapped his head in the direction of the voice, “Your prattling, woman, is breaking my
concentration!”

Her head pulled back in surprise. She stammered, “I-I was just making sure you were alright. You’ve been sitting like that all day.”

Lazily, he looked to his watch and noted that it was nine in the evening. “I’m fine, Mrs. Hudson. No need to worry.”

With a quick nod, the landlady left to her flat and grabbed her phone. She punched in the number that was hanging on her fridge quickly. “Shannon? Oh goodness, I’m not – not trying to be a bother...Right. It’s just – Sherlock...well, no...he’s just been sat there all day, Shannon...No, I don’t think he’s moved. At all...right. Just – will you come see him tomorrow? I don’t know if his mind can take this...of course. I think you’re right, you should bring John...of course, dear. Goodnight.”

The following morning John entered the common room with groceries and stopped in his tracks. “Oh. Right. You’ve met Shannon, then?”

“Shut up, John. I’m thinking.”

Shannon followed close behind carrying the remaining grocery items. “Oh for God’s sake. Still?”

Sherlock eyed the pair of them suspiciously. “You seem familiar with John.”

“No shit,” she groaned when she moved to the kitchen. “Sherlock, Christ – you are thick sometimes.”

“Shannon,” John hissed. “Come on!”

His eyes bounced between them, “I’ve figured it out.”

“Well, praise Jesus, he thinks he’s figured it out. Please, do tell; I’m all ears,” she jabbed. *Come on, take the bait. Do it. You can’t help yourself.*

“For God’s sake, Shannon, give the man a chance!”

“You know John from somewhere, more than likely within the past five years and you’ve moved in here to try and take advantage of the current situation. You’re bright, I’ll give you that – but you can’t keep up with me.”

She situated her hands on her hips, “Really? Come on, Sherlock. You’re better than this. Get with the Diaxus program. I can’t keep feeding you hints.”

“Wh...what are you talking about,” he stammered. His mild headache was becoming more aggressive.

“Easy, Shannon.”

“Your head hurts, doesn’t it? See, you know in your gut beyond all doubt that you’ve met me. Your olfactory memory is astounding. I knew that all I had to do was walk around the flat to peak your interest.”
Sherlock blinked quickly, “And how were you able to come to that conclusion?”

“I know that you didn’t sleep last night. I didn’t expect you to considering that I am bothering you. It’s not an easy answer. Your eyes are watering mildly which occurs usually when the pain is toward the front of your head. Verbally you aren’t on your game. Shame, really. These are all common signs towards headaches and more importantly, migraines. I should know. If you don’t believe me, ask John.”

_She’s good. Oh, she’s very good. Not as good as me – but she’s something interesting, isn’t she? She keeps challenging me and commanding my respect. “Who the hell are you?”_

She frowned and gave a quick sigh before kneeling beside him, “You’re still charming, I see. Look – I know that you have no reason to believe anything that I have to say. That’s why John’s here. I’m going to begin by telling you a story.”

John eventually moved to his chair as Shannon recounted her story to him. Sherlock remained silent through her tale and observed her hand gestures when she emote certain points with emphasis. When she finished he moved his hands to the base of his chin and stared to the ceiling.

Shannon, by this time, was sitting with her legs propped up on her knees. John was on the edge of his seat, impatient. His anxiety got to him before it got to Shannon, “Well? Do you have anything to say? At all?”

“I’m thinking, John.”

Shannon continued to sit in silence while John grew edgier. “Do you understand that for her to come back here, now – there’s something out there?”

“And you remember all of these things?” he asked curtly.

“Absolutely.”

He pondered in silence for a moment. “You realize that with your proposed idea of memory wiping, it is also completely probable that you are capable of implementing memories?” he questioned meeting her gaze.

“I do.”

“Sherlock. Come on! How can you not even be interested?” John groaned.

“Proof, John. I need some proof. And that video isn’t going to do it – fairly easy to fabricate with someone that has your set of skills.”

Shannon looked around the room for something – anything – that could possibly make him believe what she was saying. _Idea. Oh, Christ, I hope this works._

Shannon shot to her feet and extended him her hand. “Stand up. Come on. Up.”

With an eye roll Sherlock heaved to his feet. _Humouring her? Intersting. “I hope that you can live up to your ‘hype’, Miss Byrns. I’m growing weary of your games.”_

She took him to the center of the open floor and began to circle him. She touched a spot on his left arm through the fabric of his shirt, a spot on either side of his throat, once on his right shoulder blade, once on the small of his back, and finally right above his inner left brow. “How about that? Does that work for you?” His head moved to the side. “Oh come on, that last one should have been
the icing on the cake.”

*My birthmarks? His eyes widened, “Oh. Oh…I see! Right, because you would know that.”*

*He’s not convinced. He’s mocking me. Christ. “I apologize in advance.”*

“For what?”

“This,” she huffed as she swung at him and made contact with his gut. Sherlock countered by moving forward towards her with a solid punch. Shannon spun about, offset his balance, and rolled his arm away from her. He then attempted to trip her by placing his foot behind her heel – but the move was anticipated and she dodged out of his way. Sherlock spun about to catch her next attack; yet again, she was not where he predicted. She tripped him, causing him to fall face first to the floor. The next thing he felt were her knees digging into his shoulder blades.

John stood in astonishment. *I’d never really got to see the two of them fight on the mats. She’s incredible – and Sherlock…well, he’s going to be surly. “Enough, both of you!”*

Shannon sat patiently on her friend’s back as he tried to flip her to get free. “It’s not going to work, Holmes. Sorry.”

“How,” he growled, “Could you have anticipated every single move?! HOW?!! I demand an answer.”

“Then tap out, genius,” she chided him as if he were five. He conceded and tapped the floor. Gingerly, Shannon stood up whilst taking care not to step on him. “Because,” she huffed, “Sherlock, you threw the exact same moves you did the first time we fought right here, in this room. I remembered. So I took extra care to miss them and pin you as quickly as possible.”

He stood quickly and adjusted his shirt. “I don’t remember any such event,” he spat. “So obviously it didn’t happen. This is all an elaborate ruse. Honestly. You silly people and fantasies.”

“But you knew,” she breathed heavily, “That first clue. The different places on you?”

“Of course. I know my own self, thank you. It wasn’t that hard to figure out.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, folks, your critiques are well appreciated. Any and all comments get individual responses from me.

I hope you guys like what’s been presented thusly- I'm currently five chapters ahead in writing, and the story will be taking a turn like Wings to the Fractured Mind (number 2 in the series) soon.

You guys have a good Friday. Also, I'll try to update a chapter every Friday.

You guys are the best.

(Also, I know these chapters have been on the short side; I promise the upcoming ones are longer.)
The Shock

She threw her hands up in the air in distress. “I can’t help you unless you have a little damn faith in me. Christ, I should have known that this was going to be a bear to get you to trust me again. Even after I’ve given you the door word, you’re suppressing the memories that are trying to come back! You,” she grumbled with a finger in his face, “are an asshole for leading me to believe that this was all for the best.”

“Me?”

John’s mouth fell, “Him?”

“Yes, of course him!” she gasped for breath. “I knew that this was to happen and had been preparing for it subtly over time. But the know-it-all had to notice that I was having second thoughts. No. ‘You have to go through with it for any certainty for the plan to work’. I can’t believe that I let you talk me back into doing all this!”

Sherlock looked down at her puzzled. She’s emotional? For what purpose? She could be an excellent actress; and yet, I find that I have no reason to doubt this outburst.

“I needed you!” she yelled. A hush fell over the room. Then she whispered hoarsely, “I. Needed. You. And you weren’t there. You forced me to leave you both when I needed you the most.” She moved toward the door and spun around, “But, here I am! And you know why, Sherlock Holmes? Do you know why I flew all the way back over here? Because I knew that you were going to get into some trouble and I will not let anything happen to either of you!”

He blinked a few times at the sheer raw power behind her to help try and digest what he had heard. There is something there, I can feel it. It’s just out of reach. If there’s a door…then there’s a key. A key…words. Words and names. That’s the key. He stood tall and cleared his throat, “Shannon, what’s the key? What words – what name…where did you go?”

John sighed in relief. Finally, he caved. He had to have realized that she was genuine. “Thank God, Sherlock. I was about ready to hit you myself.”

The detective gave a low chuckle before turning to the woman in the room. “There’s only so much that I can almost grab – that means there’s a door. Where did you put it?”

“Past any room you’ve ever entered,” she voiced with confidence. “It had to be hard to find.”

He closed his eyes and began searching. Past any room I’ve ever entered. The limits of my memory? Where? This is vast. If only I could see it. Where? Did I miss it? Wait…that…at the end. What is that. A giant door? Look at it – ironwood. Intriguing. “An ironwood door, perhaps? Really big, probably incapable of opening as there’s not a door knob and only a keyhole.”

Relief flooded her face. I could bloody kiss you, Holmes. “Yes.”

“The key, then…if you please.”

Her voice sounded distinctly resonant as she spoke, “Alive obit mocks hell’s hero.”

Sherlock watched as the door opened and memories rushed him like a tidal wave. How could I have missed all of this?!
John leaned forward to catch Sherlock’s torso as he swayed back and forth. “Shannon, help me get him to bed.”

Moving forward to shoulder Holmes, the pair of them dragged him back to his bed. Shannon swung his feet up onto the mattress and covered him with his duvet.

“Come on, give him some time,” John assured, “It worked for me; it’s got to work for him. Hopefully, he comes around quick.”

“No,” she responded distractedly, “I – I’m going to stay here. I’ll grab some pillows and camp out here, just in case. You head to work. I’ll be here. Go on.”

His demeanor shifted to that of gratefulness. Oh, Shannon – you have no idea how glad I am that you are back in our lives. I wish I could express to you how happy this makes me; and how fortunate I am to have a friend like you. Especially now that I’ve moved out of Baker Street.

“Alright then,” he voiced quietly, “I’ll make you some breakfast before I go. Get your pillows and such.”

She nodded quickly and ran downstairs to her apartment to grab pillows, her duvet, and her tablet. She returned to the detective’s room to make herself comfortable. She threw the duvet on the floor between the right side of his bed and the small dresser, tossed her pillows on top of the blanket, and moved back into the kitchen where John was finishing making breakfast.

“Thank you,” she uttered calmly, “You know, for all of this.”

“Shannon, it’s just breakfast,” he grinned as he ate some toast.

She flashed him a jovial, but knowing look. “John.”

“I know – but thank you for not giving up on us. You know – we’re thick and all.”

She laughed loudly and fully for the first time in longer than she could remember. “That’s what you have Mary for now. Hey,” she smiled, “If you two don’t have anything to do one night this week – dinner here? I’ll cook. I promise. I won’t let Sherlock help.”

“I think I could be swayed to eat your cooking again,” he jabbed. “I’ll see what she says. I’m off. Feel free to call if anything changes for the worse.”

“I will, thanks. I’ll call you after you’re done to let you know his progress anyway.”

She waved him off and started to eat her breakfast until she realized her apprehensiveness was causing her to lose her appetite. She couldn’t help but feel guilty about the strain that the unlocking was placing on their minds. We had assumed that Sherlock’s would mind would be the least affected; but what if it’s the opposite? What if it has become so taxing on him that he fractures? I would never be able to forgive myself. And, for that matter – would I be able to reset him back? If he’s not himself, would I be able to find the memories and hide them? Shannon’s subconscious was smothering her making her feel both insecure and exasperated. Fed up with herself, she carried the plate into Sherlock’s room and set it on his nightstand in the event she got hungry later. She nestled herself into her makeshift alcove and got to work on her tablet as Sherlock slept soundly beside her.

Around 4:30 that afternoon, her phone buzzed angrily to bring her back to reality.
Shannon:

Hey, Shannon, it’s John. I got your new number from Mrs. Hudson. How’s he doing?

John:

He’s still sleeping. He had a bad dreaming spell not too long ago. You want me to text or call when he finally wakes up?

Shannon:

If you don’t mind. Have a rest, Shannon. You looked knackered this morning.

“Always the watchful doctor,” she mumbled. Her eyes crested the top of his bed while she peeked to check on the detective. He’s fine, he’s been asleep for almost eight hours; I deserve a nap. The musician leaned her head against the side of the bed only to fall fast asleep a few minutes later.

The great detective’s eyes opened slowly; he took note that he had been moved into his room. His mind felt lethargic. It’s more than possible that this is due to the large influx of memories. Memories. Oh. OH! It worked! I can remember! Ah – wait – I can only remember pieces of them. Interesting. She really is clever. A small smile spread across his lips as he sat upright. The sound of deep breathing caught his attention to his left. There she was: curled up against the side of his bed with a tablet tossed aside. He stretched to the ceiling after sliding out of bed. Food. She didn’t eat? She was concerned. He leaned over her, picked her up, and placed her on his bed; going to the living room to give his renewed memories time to sink in.

John:

Sleeping until eight this evening proved helpful. Memories are beginning to come back.

-SH
Sherlock:

Glad that you’re awake.
Is Shannon alright?
She was worried.
Oh, and here’s her new mobile number:

John:

She’s asleep. And fine.
I’ll be speaking with her when she wakes up.
-SH

Sherlock promptly pocketed his phone, traded his robe for his jacket, and made his way out into the night. *She should, I would think, sleep through the night based on where she was in her sleep cycle. I will endeavor to discover what I’ve missed in her absence tomorrow. For now, I have some more snooping to do. Why was John targeted? Who is the new player sitting at the table?*

Shannon Byrns:

You’re asleep.
I stepped out for work.
I will be back in an hour.
-SH

Shannon’s phone buzzed angrily beside her but she didn’t stir. She lay there in the stillness and wasn’t bothered by Mrs. Hudson checking in on her. The kind landlady took the plate off of Sherlock’s side table and tucked her in. “Oh, Shannon,” she whispered with a broad smile, “I am so glad you came back. Honestly. He needs you around.”

She woke up some time later to realize she was in Sherlock’s bed and looked to her phone. *He undoubtedly put me in here. I’m tucked in? Mrs. Hudson. How kind. *Shannon stretched lazily and shimmied out of the bed. She entered the kitchen, reheated her plate from breakfast and ate. After, she observed how Sherlock’s thoughts were scattered about on papers and photographs here and there on tables and the wall. What have you got yourself into? He left all this out. Of course I have to snoop.*

Sherlock arrived home an hour later than he anticipated, but nonetheless, his outing had proved to be eventful. He had gained valuable information from his street crews about the current happenings of the city. Upon entering the common room Shannon was sitting quietly in the couch listening to something tranquil with her head on the back cushion. *Italian, most likely. I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s Vivaldi or Haydn. *He tiptoed through the common area, took of his coat and jacket, and began to make his way to his room.
“You’re late, as usual,” Shannon uttered into the silence. She pulled on the ear bud cord and dislodged it from her left ear. “How was business?”

He turned and scoffed, “Wonderful. I don’t need a nanny.”

Shannon scrunched her face and kept her eyes shut as she jabbed back, “No need to be testy. I was just asking.”

“I am fully capable of taking care of myself, contrary to what you seem to think.”

“Oh, you are an absolute annoyance.”

Shannon lazily lifted her head and opened her eyes. “Don’t be rude, Holmes.”

“Rude,” he seethed; hands clasped behind his back, “I’m rude? You’re the one that came waltzing back here hoping that you would be welcomed back here with open arms.” He turned his back on her and groaned, “It appears domesticity is running rampant lately.”

Shannon groaned in exasperation, “I’m not arguing with you. Not right now and not like this. So you can stop pushing my buttons. I learned plenty of patience while I was away.”

The detective spun on his heel and his lips pulled downward into a malicious frown. “Was this what you were expecting? Allow me to apologize for letting your hopes plummet through the floor,” Sherlock sneered. All these memories…they don’t entirely make sense. Enemy? Ally? What are you?

Shannon stood up silently and stood before him in her pajamas and robe defenseless. She sighed, “Go ahead, smart guy, please. Take your shot. I won’t retaliate. Whatever you feel that you need to do. I hoped that the transition would be seamless as it has been for everyone else. I also knew there was a chance it was going to be rocky considering how your mind is so vast. I’m willing to be patient.”

His hard face softened with her kind statement. “Shannon – I know you – but – I…I don’t completely remember how and why I know you.”

“I know,” she nodded gently, “And that’s okay, Sherlock. I have to hold on to you believing and knowing again.” She stood up on her toes and placed a kiss on his forehead before turning to go downstairs to her room.

Sherlock was still and astonished. Here she is, vulnerable and exposed, and she’s willing to be patient? What is her end game? He retreated to his room and made ready for bed. As he got under his covers he could faintly smell her perfume lingering on his pillow. “Addict – Dior,” he whispered to himself with a sarcastic smile, “The base note is of bourbon vanilla, the heart note smells of Sambac Jasmine, and the top note are that of orange blossom and mandarin leaf; together they create a unique oriental essence while, as the business calls it, a lusciously warm eau de parfum.” He chuckled quietly to himself. I remember investigating it once she told me what she wore on occasion. Interesting. She still wears Addict.
Shannon met up with Mary on the nurse’s lunch hour at work while John was out on his day off with Sherlock. Mary looked up at Shannon with a warm smile and said, “I know it’ll turn around soon. You’ve been a great help, Shannon.”

The brunette took a long draw from her beer and shook her head slowly. She swallowed hard and said, “I don’t know, Mary. It’s been over two months now. Almost three! God knows how long this is going to take and ‘if’ he gets all of his memory back…”

“Yeah, but,” she interjected, “He seems to be getting more comfortable with having you around!”

“No, not really,” Shannon replied. “It’s not quite the same. He’s tolerating my cohabitation. That’s about the extent of it. See, I think he views me as a solved case. He remembers the parameters of the case file.”

“ – and, I’m guessing, he remembers the solving of your case.”

“Exactly.”

Mary pondered for a few moments before exclaiming, “Just try and jog his memory, Shannon!”

“I’ve tried,” she stated with a new solemnity in her voice. “Every time we get somewhere, I end up taking twenty steps backwards. It’s almost as if his subconscious is fighting me.”

“That’s because he’s always fighting everyone, Shannon. I think the wedding is bothering him.”

“It is, but it isn’t – if that makes any sense. Mycroft isn’t helping, I’m sure.” She heard her phone buzz on the table and glanced at the screen. “Speak of the devil. I’m sure his ears were burning.” She quickly pressed ‘ignore’.

“Is that really going to work?” Mary chuckled.

Shannon smirked, “No – more than likely not. I’m sure he’s going to…” her phone rang again and she hit ‘ignore’ again. “…now try and find another number to call me with.” Mary’s phone rang and she clicked ‘decline’. “Sorry for being so glum, anyway – how are wedding things coming along?”

“Oh, you know, slow and sure. Sherlock’s being a help. I’m slightly surprised –“

“I’m not,” Shannon interjected.

“ –but he’s told me he’ll help out with the guest list if I’d like it.”

“You know, Mary, if you do that you’re in for the most boring wedding or one of the more unique.” Shannon laughed heartily and Mary joined her.

“I wish you would let me – us – invite you to the wedding. It’s later this spring!”

“I know, Mary; and I appreciate it. I tell you what – ask me the month before. If my case is
wrapped up by then, I will most definitely go. Otherwise I have to work; and we can’t have both super-minds at the same magnificent wedding. What if the baddies bombed it? Who would seek vengeance?”

Mary was laughing until tears started to stream from her eyes, “Honestly, Shannon!”

“But really, Mary – come on. Besides, Sherlock has to experience people en mass without safety blankets,” she retorted. Mary dabbed her eyes dry as her smile became a permanent fixture on her face. “Sometimes you have to grow up.”

Mary nodded quickly and stood up, “Come on, up. I have to get back to work. Thank you for the meal. I should think I’ll be over later today to pick up my child from day nursery so that he can go home and have tea.”

“You two are always welcome. Pending how long they’re out playing, I can manage tea at Baker Street if that interests you; let me know,” she beamed while she stood up to hug the petite blonde. Mary grabbed her jumper and dashed. Shannon took care of the check and then dialed her phone.

“Hello, Anthea.”

“Miss…Byrns. How did you get this number? Sherlock?”


There was a slight pause and shuffle before Mycroft’s dulcet tones came onto the mobile speaker, “You’re resourceful, aren’t you? Now you find the time to speak with me?”

“I was busy. Contrary to what you believe, Mister Holmes, you do not run my life.”

“On the contrary,” he chided.

Shannon interrupted curtly, “No, nothing on the contrary. I don’t think I’ll ever know what you’ve done to keep Sherlock under your thumb for so long; but it doesn’t work with me. Remember the reason we are even having this conversation, Mycroft.”

“…yes, well, I would have easily brought myself out of your little memory lapse.”

“I doubt that; not with the issues your brother is exhibiting. Moving on. I doubt that you called me for my conversation,” she spat.

“Quite. Though I do enjoy our charming talks I was more interested in knowing where you are with regards to the case you’re currently working concerning Etchya's crime syndicate.”

“I’m working it,” she grumbled, “I don’t know what to tell you. It takes time. I’ve got to build myself into the network and create holes so I can get out cleanly. Stop bothering me. This doesn’t concern you. Stop trying to put your nose where it doesn’t belong and leave that piece of cake alone.”

“Now, Shannon!” he objected, but she couldn’t hear him as she hung up. Shannon was amused with herself as she walked out into the city. *Try as he may, Mycroft doesn’t own me. I also don’t know why he keeps pushing into my business. He should be busy moving his cameras around instead of bothering me. Speaking of business – I need to head back and rest. I’ve got a long night ahead of me if I’m going to go out tonight and work.* She stifled a yawn and made her way back to Baker Street.
'You know that with the behaviors he exhibits, he’s never going to remember what friendship the pair of you had.'

‘That’s not a fair statement, Matt. And why has my subconscious decided that you are the one to challenge me in my dreams? You haven’t been around for years. I have no unsettled guilt concerning you.’

‘No, but I do represent a manner of contention that you have between yourself as emotion and as soldier. Your psyche has framed all of that into me.’

‘Boring.’

‘Excuse me?’

‘Boring. I already knew that. Why did I have to put myself through that boring ramble. Christ. Subconscious, can we get with the program, please?’

‘You having lucid dreams all the time takes the fun out of dreamscapes,’ Matt seethed.

Shannon’s text notification pulled her angrily from her dream.

Shannon:

John is on his way home for tea.
No more playing with the other kids.

Mary:

Do I need to scold the other kid when he gets home?

Shannon:

No, ha ha, I think they played nicely today. No toys need taken away. Have a good run tonight. Stay safe. Play nicely.

Mary:

Yes, mom. You two have a good night. That’s an order.
Shannon rolled off of the couch and to the floor with a less than graceful thud. Standing took concentrated effort in her grogginess but she made her way to the kitchen to start making herself something for tea so that she could make her way out into the evening bustle.

Sherlock strode through the door not long after his roommate had begun cooking. She was humming along to a tune playing on her mp3 player and he found it obnoxious. After a day well done and John going home to Mary, all he wanted was quiet. He stood in the doorway listening to her voice jump around between melodies and harmonies to create some unique voicing.

“I can’t say that your choice of linear voicing would be optimal for a singer,” he stated plainly.

She continued to cook with her back to him and smirked, “Does it bother you that it’s not linear?”

“Not entirely.”

“I can hear all of the layering and how all of the harmonies fit and move within each other. I’ve been listening to this composer since I woke up. It’s giving me a frame of mood for work tonight,” she offered in honesty. “For example, this piece has the traditional eight-part vocal arrangement; however the composer’s writing throws in some quintal harmonies, dissonance, a spin on traditional chord progressions and presto. It’s something of his own. It’s giving me mindset. Don’t keep pestering if you don’t want to help. Also, are you hungry?”

“Yes,” he said quickly. *Music. Her gift, if you can call it that, was music. I had forgotten. She doesn’t sing or play now. Investigation is needed. Listen, do you hear that? She’s not just spewing musical terminology at me to shut me up – she was being honest. “What are you listening to?”

“Eric Whitacre – though I don’t know if you know who he is. If you don’t, I’m not offended.”

He nodded, “He conducted at the Barbican back in…2010 I believe. He’s a composer in residence at Cambridge, if I do recall.”

“He might very well be,” Shannon conceded, “I haven’t kept up with the world, really, since I started working. Anyway, the whole conglomerate gives me some color clarity.”

“Synaesthesia. I remember,” he uttered reminiscently. “You had different playlists cataloged by color.”

Shannon turned around and handed Sherlock a full plate, “Good. Anything to drink?”

He was puzzled, “You’re not thrilled I remembered something? Tea.”

“Were you expecting a reaction?” she asked flatly as she put the kettle on to boil. “I told you, I’m willing to be patient. Either you will remember or you won’t – I’m not going to attempt to guilt you with my emotional responses when you do or don’t remember.”

She walked to the table in the common room and set his tea down at his usual seat. The detective looked at her skeptically, “How political of you.”

“Don’t. Do not start this again,” she groaned.

“I’m not starting anything. You’ve been here now for a little over eleven weeks and you haven’t eluded to anything of our alleged past with the exception of the day that you reactivated my memories. It’s just peculiar, don’t you agree, that you wouldn’t try to get your ‘friend’ to remember such a thing?” He took a quick bite of his food and waited for her rebuttal.
Shannon downed a large gulp of gin and grimaced, “God I hate gin.” She looked back up at the detective with a trivial wave of annoyance. “Like I said nearly every week since, I can’t help you with that. Your rules. You have to remember what it was like to trust me as a friend. I am not allowed to guide you to that.”

“That doesn’t sound like me,” he chided after taking a bite of his roast.

“Yes it does,” she interjected, “Need I remind you about Lazarus and keeping John, Mrs. Hudson, and the Yard out of the loop. Stop justifying yourself.” She inhaled the last of her plate and drank the last of her large glass of gin.

“You obviously dislike gin; why drink it? Oh – work?”

“Yes. I’ve got to smell the part, too, you know. Now; if you’ll excuse me, I’m late and need to get ready. Bringing down a small illegal arms ring is going to take some preparation.”

Shannon stood up and retreated to her room downstairs to get ready for her night. Sherlock sat to himself for a time. She’s always talking about work – what exactly does she consider work? He heard the front door open and close and heard his phone sound for a text message.

Sherlock Holmes:

There’s a present for you sitting on my desk. I left the door unlocked. I’d prefer if you open in tonight.

Shannon Byrns:

I should hope it’s not an exploding device. Mrs Hudson would not approve of such behaviour.
-SH

Sherlock Holmes:

Says the man that’s shot holes in her wall with a pistol.

A chuckle rumbled low in his chest. She has a sense of humour. Still, after all this time she has been waiting for me to remember everything, though I cannot, and she has the sense for humour? Why? And for what purpose would she leave me a present – oh, unless it would be indicative to her work this evening. Is she really that clever?

He made his way downstairs and opened the door to her flat. The room had been painted fairly recently in a light grey and the furniture there was muted in colour. Her ceiling was painted black, Something to ask about at a later time, and beside the fireplace was her desk with a single lamp on.
A simple USB drive with a gift tag attached to it. He lifted it slowly off the table and flipped the gift tag over:

*Sternberg’s Triangular Theory: \( I+C = \text{your password. Enjoy.} \)*

“Sternberg: an American psychologist – he researched human intelligence using a more cognitive approach. But his model for measuring intelligence was the triarchic theory. Think – triangular theory,” he muttered to himself while he exited to go to his computer.

He plugged in the drive and was prompted to enter a password. Sherlock opened his web browser and looked up his subject and groaned, “Oh how unfortunate. It’s the triangular theory of love. Of course it is. She’d know that this would revolt me.

“Let’s see: he decrees that there are only three components to love- intimacy, passion, and commitment and all three have determining factors. Blah blah blah. Obviously those are the ‘I’ and ‘C’,” he continued to speed through the article, “Ah. There we have it.”

He opened up the password prompt and typed COMPANIONATE. He found on the drive a video file, opened it, and watched as Shannon sat on a couch in some rundown house.

“Hello there; you might not know who I am and that’s alright. I’m going to preface that this may seem a little bizarre, but there are a set of rules in place. If it seems vague by what I am revealing there is a reason…

He listened and watched analytically to take in every clue he could find. *For God’s sake, what were you doing in Tanzania? If memory serves, which it does, he’s calling you Shadow. You haven’t talked much about what you had been doing prior to coming back to London but – this proves that you’ve been busy.*

The clip cuts out and he freezes. “What!” He grumbles to himself about her being overly dramatic before the screen lights up again to reveal the last part of the video was taken recently in her room.

“Hello, Sherlock. I know that the password probably irks you but it was chosen for a reason. I’ve left this little tid bit of information for you because no one really knows what I’ve been doing with work. Not even your brother. I’m sure he’ll tell you it was all part of the plan and whatnot – but it wasn’t. He called me a loose cannon on more than one occasion.

“Anyway – I’m going off to play a cartel princess tonight. There is a very slight chance I will die tonight, as with any other job I’ve done. The catch this time around is that I’m going to be meeting up with a group that I haven’t had experience with before. I didn’t intend for all that to be super dramatic – but I feel that you should know my reasoning for all this. It’s to protect you all. That’s why I’ve been out until five or so in the morning working. I’m not doing it for any other motive. I don’t know what I have to do to impress you or to prove that I’m who I say I am – but I still go out on my leads every evening and work.

“If you’re bored, I’ll be at this address,” she flashed a piece of paper at the camera, “Otherwise. Hopefully, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

*John:*

*Shannon’s gone out to work again. She’s a bit of a showman.*  
-SH
Sherlock:

I’ve been home literally for an hour. No.

John:

I didn’t imply anything with that text.
-SH

Sherlock:

Yes you did. The answer’s no. If you are worried about her, go. I don’t know what she’s into. Suck it up. She’s our friend.

John:

You’re not helping the situation.
-SH

Fed up and bored, Sherlock grabbed his coat and made his way out into the quieting city to go see exactly what type of mischief the annoyance had gotten herself into.

An old abandoned warehouse looked as if it was a relic from something post-apocalyptic. Broken and shattered windows littered its walls. All was dark except a few gleams of light from within. Shannon stood in one of the large, innermost rooms with a henchman beside her and a group of thugs in front of her.

“Now you all know the drill and I’m sure you’ve got your orders. Don’t fuck this up. Again…” she spat. Her henchman to her left nodded his head. He was a brutishly large and tall man named Tiny. He was Shannon’s muscle, provided to her by the head of the cartel, Milo Etchya. Tiny was from one of the US east coast rings and was sent to London to ensure his shipment could get in unscathed by his highest earner, Smoke, Or so he thinks.

“…Or so help me God, I’ll put every single one of you fuckers down before you know what’s hit ya.”

“Listen here, bitch,” one of the thugs growled. He had a thick Scottish accent.

Tiny cracked his neck to the side and looked down at his boss with a knowing smirk. Shannon opened her eyes slowly and popped her gum. “I’m sorry, was that ‘Bitch’ that I heard?” She took a few steps towards the thug and her wooden heels echoed in the large, vacant room. “Tiny, is that… is that what I just heard?”

Tiny nodded knowingly, “Why, yes, ma’am.”
“And, do you know who the fuck I am, Tiny?”

“Smoke, the boss’s highest-grossing revenue member within our ranks. You’re in and out before anyone can see you. They can only smell the smoke from the fire after it’s burning.”

“That’s right,” she sneered, “That’s who I thought I was.”

She turned back to the thugs and landed her fist into the mouthy one’s solar plexus. “Oh, I’m sorry Angus MacFuck-up. Can’t you say anything now?” The Scottish man clung to his chest, gasping for breath. “You see,” she seethed as she kicked the man while he was on the floor, “I wouldn’t have to be in this fucking country if you jack-offs hadn’t screwed the last shipment up.”

She walked back to her spot and spun around quickly, “The boss has sent me to clean up your mess because he’s pissed. I clean up your mess; I get to sit at the table. Now, you’re all going to be good little boys and you’re going to do what I say.”

The Scotsman stood up behind her and withdrew a knife. Shannon pulled her pistol from inside her jacket, turned, and shot him in the knee. “And he wants it done cleanly; which is keeping me from lodging the next bullet into your thick skull.” She gazed back up at the mob. “Any questions?” The group of thugs looked up at her and puffed their chests out. A collective ‘No’ was answered.

“Tiny, have someone put him somewhere else. His blood is offending me.”


Shannon saw a shadow move ahead and she walked with heavy steps, pushing past her goons, into the chasm, “You know – hiding in the shadows doesn’t help your case any at this point. I know you’re down there.”

The men all turned to see her staring at something in the dark.

“A little boring, this, don’t you think? Hiding out in an old abandoned and condemned warehouse. Rather cliché,” came a dark voice. Sherlock emerged from the shadows and moseyed into the light.

“Who the fuck are you?” she spat. “Boys, anyone want to tell me who the fuck this is?” she queried as she turned to her men.

One of the British men stepped forward. “That’s Sherlock Holmes, Smoke. He’s a super detective. Works with the cops.”

“Really,” she groaned. “I thought this was going to be simple. Well, Mr. Holmes, you’re cramping my style. Your timing is impeccable.”

“Never was one to care about style. What is this. Drugs? Money laundering? Oh, let me guess.”

“Please,” Shannon smirked.

*Brute force, she’s armed, big American is armed, one other thug with a pistol; goons and thugs without firearms: four knives, two clubs, one set of brass knuckles, not including who may already be at the drop zone – Interesting. Traces of grease and gunpowder; mid – to – upper level thugs. Idiots. “Gun runners, ooh. I haven’t dealt with those in ages. Though, England was probably not the best country to run in and out of. We have laws things about that.”*

“I’ll deal with you later. You don’t know who the fuck you’re dealing with,” she snapped.
“Oh no, I heard, Smoke; looking to move up. You’re wrong. I just don’t care.” He smirked manically and stepped closer to whisper, “Are you alright? Once for yes.”

She blinked once and turned around to face her men to blink twice. “You two – names. Now.”

“Joey.” “Callum.”

“Right,” she said, “Take him somewhere quiet. Keep him there. I’m going to enjoy killing him. Adding him to the tally will make Milo happy. I have a deal to settle. Don’t damage the goods.”

They nodded and stepped forward as she walked away with the rest of the men. “Oh, and Mr. Holmes, don’t fight it. It’ll only make it worse. Gentlemen, downstairs to the loading dock.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes but let his captors usher him into a secluded room on the floor below. They stood guard at the door. “She’s got balls. Can’t imagine what she’s gonna do to you.”

“Honestly, if anything she’s going to commend me for dealing with two idiots such as yourselves,” he stated with a grin. “As if only the pair of you could hold me.”

“What?” Callum asked with quirked brow. “I don’t think we said you could talk.”

Sherlock punched him in the throat and cracked his face off of his knee before reaching to disable the other man, Joey. He didn’t count on the first man grabbing his face and smashing him into the wall. His vision began to blur and ringing filled his ears. Luckily his instincts took over and he incapacitated his aggressor. The detective touched his fingers to his temple and looked to see blood. Brilliant. Genius detective is injured by an imbecile. Stand up. Oh – nope – not yet. Sit back down. Control your breathing to regulate the heart and blood flow. God knows what she has got herself into.

Sherlock sat for a moment, not realizing that the moment was turning into minutes and he nodded off.

“Well, what took you so long?” a voice echoed from his subconscious. It was familiar. He looked around in the reaches of his mind and noted his was in a small room with two chairs. It was bright and white.

“I took too long? I’m unconscious. I am known to sleep when a case isn’t pressing. Why haven’t you presented yourself before now?” Sherlock quipped annoyed as he looked at the other person, which was himself.

His subconscious shrugged, “It wasn’t as important as it is now.”

“Who are you,” Sherlock asked quickly. “I’m busy.”

“Right, of course you are,” his twin chuckled, “That’s why you’re sleeping. I’m you. I’m the ‘you’ that remembers what it was like to have Shannon as a trusted friend. I am, more or less, your repressed memories of that time.”

“Then why aren’t you just a stack of information for me to sift through in my mind palace?”

“Because, as a fail-safe, I was put in motion should you keep shirking away from the memories. So let’s discuss why you keep shying away.”

Sherlock frowned, “I’m not shying away. I just don’t remember fully.”
“That’s a lie,” his subconscious crossed his arms, “If I can remember, then you can also. What are you afraid of?”

“I’m not afraid, and if you were really me, then you would know the answer.”

The mirrored Holmes nodded, “Well, that is true. And since I’m not you, I don’t know. I’m actually just a representation of what you used to be – constructed when your memories were removed.”

“Shannon.”

“Yes,” he acknowledged. “I was designed by Shannon to represent you as she saw you. Charm and all.”

“Then how can I trust you if you are not me?”

“Here,” the twin pulled a box from his coat, “I know you’re approaching her tentatively because you don’t want to risk the experiencing pain that you’ve already given John. I understand; even when I was implemented. You know what this is, correct?”

Sherlock nodded and looked back towards his reflection’s face to find it had shifted into Shannon. “Yes. It’s a symbol.”

“Very good. I have to give it to you. You have the option to either pocket it and keep memories repressed; or, you can open it and accept your memories. I can’t keep holding on to it for you,” she stated with a touch of somberness to her voice. “You have to consciously decide now.”

“Why now,” he questioned looking about the large, white room in his mind. “Why this very night out of every night that you’ve been here?”

Shannon thought for a moment and looked about, “Deduce. You tell me. I’m just a copy – a plant in your subconscious. I’m your ideal projection of me. Tell me.”

“SHERLOCK HOLMES,” he heard from back in reality. It was Shannon’s voice and there was a hint of danger to her tone.

“You need me to wake up,” he stated plainly, “Because you trust me to help you.”

“Sounds like it. I’d hurry though. That tone of voice doesn’t get used often.” Suddenly the finale from Bruckner’s Eighth Symphony began to fill his mind.

“Bruckner. How typical.”

“I thought so. And that means you thought so. Because, I’m really only a projection of me…of you…of me – in your mind.”

He frowned, “That’s imbecilic.”

“Maybe,” she grinned, “But you and I both know that it’s your subconscious that’s making me say it. So maybe you do miss me…or…her.” Shannon turned around and left him by himself to contemplate the small box in his hands that was wrapped intricately in tapes and twine.

“SHERLOCK!” reality rang in his ears. “Where are you!?”

“Shannon,” he whispered to himself. “Wake up…Shannon needs you to be on task.” He began tearing at the box in a frenzy to open it. “Come on, you idiot. Wake up! Get out of your subconscious. Wake up!” He ripped the lid off the box and felt a rush of what was presumably
emotional and psychological connections flood his body. “Friendship? Oh, this is disgusting.”
Wake up, you moron. Get up. Shannon’s alone with a bunch of arms traders. GET UP. She’s in danger.

“Shannon!” the detective stammered as his eyes shot open. “Where…Think.” He stood up quickly, ignoring the throbbing in his head and noted that both of his captors were still in the room with him and unconscious. He threw the door open and let his nose guide him.

She was wearing her perfume. I can find her. Think. What else was she wearing? Oh yes, utility belts outfitted for knives. They are crisscrossed on her torso under her leather jacket, of course. She’s obviously picked up knife-throwing in her absence. She’s wearing sensible shoes – that’s a mild advantage for her. Slight pronounced heel; steel toed. She’s got something in her hair that can be used as a pick if need be. Now – where have you gone to?

Shannon stood at the loading dock with a hand on her hip and tapping her toe impatiently for the truck to arrive for inspection. The men were growing restless behind her.

I can’t believe I let Mycroft convince me to give him these runners. She heaved a heavy sigh. I won’t get any of the credit either. What an ass. Speaking of – where is Sherlock. I could only run through the building once without giving myself away. Where is he?

“So – Smoke,” one of the more alpha Brits ventured, “Let’s say that you fail at this drop or something goes bad and you die. What’s boss going to do about that?”

Shannon looked to Tiny quickly, blinked, and turned her face placid as she slowly unbuttoned her jacket. Her body guard unclasped his gun holster. “I would think, pending the circumstances and validation; two outcomes. Promotion. And Demotion. Fairly sequentially, too.”

The hair on the back of her neck began to stand on end when he spoke, “See, I’m Andrew.”

“Of course you are,” she sneered with her back to him.

He ignored the interruption, “And Angus MacFuck-up, as you put it, was my right hand man. I run this ring here. So you’re on my turf and you’re a little too comfortable. The boss has never sent an American emissary before.”

“Shame,” she mumbled thoughtfully, “With as big of a fuck up as this operation is – he should have sent me ages ago. Too bad your right hand man was too dumb to keep his damn mouth shut.”

Tiny turned towards Andrew slowly and his eyes flashed. That’s all that she needed. She knew there was a gun on her. “And you aren’t going to be missed. Either of you. With you gone, the boss is going to promote. Especially with the sad story about how we tried to save you.”

“Put the gun down,” she snarled, “Or you won’t be walking out of here. Killing me is a death sentence as far as Etchya’s concerned.”

“Say that to my face so I can see the fear in your eyes as I pull the trigger.”

She turned quickly and threw one of her knives into his shoulder and turned his gun on him. She
quickly disassembled it and held the clip. Andrew clutched his shoulder and writhed in pain on his knees. She walked around him, casually loosening one bullet at a time from the clip and leaving it in her wake. “Etchya will be pleased to hear how well his men listen to those he puts in authoritative positions.”

Andrew stood up and smirked, “Then I guess we should kill you anyway. Boys.”


Shannon opened her eyes slowly and exhaled loudly. Tiny put bullets in two men that had guns, Thankfully, and she threw knives at knees and shoulders. Incapacitate, maim…don’t kill anyone. Try not to kill anyone.

Sherlock heard the sounds of squealing tires and gunfire from the floor below him. Damn it, for God’s sake you were unconscious too long. MOVE! He jumped the stairs a landing at a time in his fervor to get to the action. Two more shots fired. Five shots total – none of them sound as if they’ve come from her gun. Her gun has a suppressor on it. Possibly from her hired gun. Left or right. Think. What did you see on the way in? There was a turn-around – left. Through the corridors and judging by the number echo and then judging how sound reflects off of surfaces...sixty yards.

When he entered the dock, Shannon had a bloodied blade in one hand and a clean one in the other. Her hair was disheveled and there were abrasions on her hands and face. Dust covered spots on her jeans indicated that she’d been on the ground at some point. There was some swelling around her eye and her nose was bleeding.

Tiny was on the ground, clutching his side and fading quickly. Three men were circling her; including presumably, the leader of the gang. He was bleeding from his shoulder. Sherlock ducked into the shadows quickly and began to weave in and out of the light to aid his musician.


She began to hum to herself and Andrew heard her. His snide grin and hate-filled tone echoed, “You think this is all a game? I can’t wait to put you down.”

“Focus, Andrew. I’m focused. Music gives me focus. Not necessarily what I’d have chosen…but let’s go. We’ll end this right now,” she spat blood from her mouth.

Andrew motioned for one of his lackeys to go first and Shannon waited patiently. He swung broadly at her with his club. She narrowly dodged it and threw her knee into his exposed side as she sliced open his back. She spun around to kick at the second man and was surprised when her ankle was grabbed and she was flipped to the ground. Stunned, she flailed wildly in circles with her knives to keep her aggressors at an arms distance. She attempted to stand and took a kick to the face. Well, my nose had started to stop bleeding. Thanks.

A gunshot sounded and everyone froze. The man with the club fell to his knees clutching his abdomen. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Tiny’s arm fall to the ground and the pistol drop
out of his grasp. Her vision started to blur and she heard him rasp, “Every one of them.” A sickening sound came from the large man as he began to drown in his own blood. He coughed, gasped, and then was still.

Shannon stood and spun around quickly and knocked out the second man with a well-placed elbow to the neck.

“DOWN!” Sherlock bellowed.

Shannon ducked as fast as she could, but she felt Andrew’s knife splice her shoulder open. She hissed and dug her knife into his knee. Andrew bellowed in anguish before turning to her again to embed his knife in her flesh.


She crawled weakly with her fingers outstretched, desperately feeling her way in the darkness for her friend.

“Get up!” she was commanded. Someone grabbed her arm roughly and was dragging her upward. “I said get up.”

“Come on, move! We need to get you out of here. Get up, Shannon. I need you to stand,” Sherlock growled.

She heard the underlying worry in his voice. It’s him. Christ. This has got to be bad. “Front pocket – j-j-j-ack-et…” she stammered.

He pulled her arm over his neck and with his free hand, fished out whatever she wanted him to get from her pocket. “It’s your mobile.”

“Droid,” it chirped an acknowledging tone to them, “Call John Watson.” It beeped happily again.

“Please enter or say the password.”

She wanted to fall asleep. Her ears were ringing and pain was radiating in her back and face. “Two – t-t-two - .... One… b- bake…”

“Please try again.”

Sherlock yelled at the small device, “Two-two-one Baker Street.” The phone sounded another cheery melody and proceeded to call John. The detective put the mobile to his ear and tried to get Shannon to walk. It was proving to be a challenge.


“John,” Sherlock spoke. That was all that needed to be said. John was already alert and sitting upright in his bed, startling Mary awake.

“Sherlock, what’s happened? Where are you?”
Sherlock groaned as he put her phone between his teeth and picked her up to carry her. He dropped the phone onto her chest and spoke to it, “We’re heading to Baker Street now – she’s in need of a doctor. She took on a gun running cartel on her own. I’m going to try and stop the bleeding as soon as I can.”

“Go to Bart’s. I can do more for her there. Mary,” he stated quickly, “Hurry, Sherlock.” He hung up and Shannon’s eyes fluttered open.

“Droid, call Mycroft Emergency.”

“Calling.”

“Droid. Speaker phone.”

The phone rang three times before he picked up. Sherlock was now on the street and making his way westward. A cool tone came over the speaker, “Is it done?”

“I need picked up. There were problems,” she wheezed.

“Is it done?”

“Yes, asswipe. Pick up. Now. My location. I need to go to Saint Bart’s.”

“Is my brother with you?”

Sherlock looked down his nose at her and shook his head. She closed her eyes and winced when Sherlock shifted her in his arms, “Does it fucking sound like your brother’s with me?”

There was a small pause and a few clicks of a mouse were heard, “Who do you suppose is carrying you?”

She snarled, “Pick us up. Or so help me, not even Sherlock Holmes will be able to help you remember who you are.”

“Let this be a lesson to all parties involved,” Mycroft cooed. “Your pickup is on its way. Brother, head down the next street then, take a left and go to the abandoned lot.” He hung up and her phone beeped.

“Stay awake,” Sherlock snapped. “You need to stay conscious.”

She rolled her eyes and hissed, “And when have you felt this bad without some painkillers?”

He ignored her comment and took the left as Mycroft instructed and began to search for the abandoned lot. Helicopter. Wonderful. “John will most assuredly make an attempt on my life if you die.”

“Hmph,” she snorted as her eyes closed, “He might anyway.”

“I said stay awake!” he bellowed as he jostled her around.

“Fuck you!” she snarled as new waves of pain radiated down her spine. The helicopter was off in the distance. “Sorry.”

“I accept your apology for being an idiot in thinking that you could take this yourself,” he seethed. His eyes, however, gave way to the slight worry he was experiencing.
“Good. He’s calculated my injuries and blood loss. He’s concerned. Greaaaaat - I’m going to die.
“Ha,” she laughed. “No.”

“Excuse me? No? What do you mean by ‘no’?”

She grinned and closed her eyes, “I was apologizing,” she swallowed hard, “For getting my blood on your favorite purple shirt.”

“Mary,” John warned. She sat up quickly for his tone was dire. “Hurry, Sherlock.” John tossed the phone onto the duvet. He was already out of bed and dressing. “I have to go to Bart’s. It’s Shannon.”

“I’m going with you,” she affirmed, grabbing clothes and stuffing them into a bag. “What’s wrong?”

John jumped into a pair of jeans and slipped on his shoes, “She tried to take on gun runners by herself. I don’t know how bad this is going to be.”

“Oh no. Get the car. I’m coming!” She started stuffing odds and ends they were missing and quickly followed him down to their transport. The pair sped off in the dark to Bart’s while John placed a call into Molly.

“Hello, John. I was just leaving – so tell Sherlock ‘no’.”

He frowned, “If it were a normal circumstance, I understand and I would. But you and I know he’d just break in. It’s Shannon. She’s hurt. Mary and I are on our way over right now.”

“Shannon? What’s happened? What does she need?”

“Sherlock said blood loss, get some bags ready. I don’t know what we’re walking into.”

“Okay. I’ve got access to a secluded lab. Card access only. No windows. It’ll work. I’ll start moving things.”

“Molly Hooper, I could kiss you. We owe you. On our way.”

“John,” Mary stated concerned, “Bart’s doesn’t have an Emergency Department.”

“No, not a full department,” he acknowledged, “But it’ll have you, me, and Molly. And God willing, that will be enough.”

The helicopter landed in Bart’s car park and Shannon was quickly unloaded onto a stretcher and wheeled inside to Molly. Mycroft’s men said nothing and returned to the chopper, passing Mary and John; Sherlock at their heels. The three of them ran to catch up to Molly who was sprinting down the hall with Shannon to the abandoned room. “In here! Quick!”

She swiped her card for access and promptly shut the door behind them. Mary looked at Sherlock in disbelief, “Are you bleeding?” John was scrubbing up quickly and Mary was following suit.

“No, it’s hers.”

“Jesus,” John cried out when he looked at Shannon.
Her face was scraped up, but that was the least of her worries. Her eye was swollen shut and the swelling on the side of her face was an indicator that her cheekbone may be fractured. The front of her grey shirt was soaked in blood and blood was caked onto her face and neck. Mary began to gently clean Shannon’s face. The poor girl looked pitiful in such a state.

He carefully peeled her knife utility vest off and cut away her shirt so that he could get a better look at what he had to deal with. Mary helped him roll her onto her side and he examined her back. There was a laceration on her shoulder and across her back, but the issue was he broken blade under her left shoulder blade. Bruising was already forming in patches all over her skin.

John’s face fell. “I need x-rays. It could be near her lung or her heart.”

“We can’t,” Molly stated, “No one knows she’s here. No one knows we’re here.”

Sherlock peered about the room and found an old sonogram machine. “Use this. It’s the best we’ve got.” Mary nodded in agreement.

They peered at the screen and scrutinized the light and shadows. Mary piped up, “I think it’s safe enough to pull out, but it’s going to hurt like hell.”

Molly winced, “I don’t have anything here for pain. Sorry. I could make something…I do have a lab next door.”

Shannon chuckled, “Well, look at you all. Together and over me. It’s – it’s touching. I’ll be fine.”

“Shut up,” Sherlock hissed.

“You’re no fun,” she groaned. She tilted her head up and squinted against the light, “Come on, Doctor Watson. I need patched up. Get me some blood and let’s do this.”

John knelt beside her to be at eye level, “Shannon – I don’t have anything to dull the pain. There’s a chance that I won’t be able to stop the bleeding.” He looked at Mary because she had been checking the patient’s pulse and shook her head solemnly. “There’s a chance that you could die.”

“I know,” she nodded and rolled completely onto her stomach. She growled in pain and gave her arm to Mary. She cleaned it and started an IV and readied more bags of blood. “It’s okay. He knows who I am,” she sighed.

Sherlock looked to Molly, “Eventually she will pass out from the pain. Don’t worry.”

“Sherlock,” she hushed him. “Stop it. She’s dying.”

“No, Molly. She’s too stubborn to die this way.”

Mary locked eyes with him. She knows that I’m worried. And now she knows that I remember. “Ready, dear?”

Shannon nodded and bit onto the sleeve of her jacket. John began suturing the lacerations first. She would wince and gasp in pain as the needle would dig into her skin.

“Pressure there,” John commanded and Mary moved into action. Molly began to monitor Shannon’s pulse while Mary worked. “Sherlock, I need you to get a sponge and wipe up her blood…Sherlock!”

The detective snapped back to reality, shed his coat, and moved to help. John looked to his tray of
tools, “Christ – the Foerster clamp. How did you get one of these?”

Molly’s eyes darted about, “I had to grab what I could in a short amount of time!” She handed it to John with a set of forceps she placed within his reach.

“Alright, everyone, I’m going to try and get the blade out. If she starts to bleed, I’ll need to find the bleed and clamp it, stitch it, and continue. Shannon?”

“Peachy.”

“Breathe.”

She took a few deep breaths and exhaled as John dug the forceps into her wound and grasped the blade. He gently pulled it towards the opening and she began to bleed. Sherlock wiped the blood out of John’s way and he began to work again. Shannon bit hard and growled. Her breathing became erratic and ultimately, she became unconscious.

John grabbed one of the clamps and caught the blade and was able to carefully guide the metal out and drop it onto the table. “Mary, pressure. Keep pressure. Shannon? Shannon?!”

Chapter End Notes

March 21, 2014
Happy Friday, everyone. I do apologize about not updating last week: I'd been battling the flu for a while and was in bed for most of the week. All better now!

I solemnly promise to try and update every Friday, if not definitely every other Friday. Critiques and such are always welcome.

**To those of you who are reading, for the next work in this series, I'm considering adding a character that one of you will design. I think it'd be a cool addition to adding to the story line. Start formulating a character in your minds.

There are some parameters, though: No love interest in Sherlock. (As it stands, Shannon and Sherlock aren't in love.) Any other character is fair game - but Sherlock can't reciprocate the love back to someone because he doesn't necessarily know how or want to. (I'm keeping this from the original Doyle stories. It's what makes Sherlock a part of who he is.)

Think about it, and I'll let you know within the next chapter or two what I have planned.

Have a fantastic day!
In and Out

Later that night...

Molly looked up, “She’s stable.”

“Patch her up, John. We can take her to Baker Street to recuperate.”

John glared as he was stitching her up, “You are a complete and utter dick.” Mary smirked. “Do you realize that she could have died?!”

“Of course I do; now, tend to your patient. I’ll go to Baker Street to prepare,” he grabbed his coat and walked out of the room.

“If she wakes up and you’re not here, she’s going to make your life a living hell.”

“I can count on it,” he jabbed before closing the door behind him.

Mary nodded and ran up after him to find Sherlock standing stagnant in the hallway. She moved beside him and spoke quietly, “You know that I can tell when you’re lying. And I’m guessing that she can, too. So why are you running away?”

“I’m not – ” he paused to look down at her. “It’s not running away. She almost died to prove a point and not just to me – but to Mycroft. She’s had to deal with my skepticism and mistrust for three months; and yet, she was patient and acknowledging of my repressed memories. She never took her frustration out on me. There are other things that she and I will have to discuss, but the least I can do is prepare a recovery room and give her some semblance of safety. Something is at play here and she has been very quiet about it.”

“Okay,” she ceded. “I’ll tell John. One of us will call you when we leave.”

Sherlock gave a brief nod and strode out of the hospital to hail a cab. “221 Baker Street. And if you take the next right, it will be faster.”

“It’s fine,” Mary reassured as Molly let her back into the room. “He’s genuinely going to set up Baker Street so that he can keep an eye on her.”

“Really?” Molly queried a little louder than she hoped. “That’s almost kind.”

“Sherlock’s almost a human being,” John retorted as he finished the last stitch. “He knows that she’d plot against him as soon as she was able. It’s preemptive warfare.”

Mary shushed him and looked to Shannon when he began bandaging her. “How is she?”

He nodded nervously, “She should be fine. I’ve stopped the bleeding on her external injuries and now I just have to clean her face up a bit. I can prod about to see if she’s broken anything – but with her unconscious that might not be as helpful. I can always bring her to an emergency room for x-rays tomorrow.”

Molly gave a weak smile, “She’s really strong. Shannon was always the one that made me laugh
when Sherlock would – well, you know how he gets. She kept him in his place. On his toes. She was the grey area between him and John. Shannon related to both of them and all that.”

“She is strong,” John heaved a heavy sigh as he rubbed his face roughly, “I’ll give her that. I don’t know what routine she’s been on lately, but had her heart not been as strong; I doubt that she’d have survived.”

The three rolled Shannon onto her side and John took care of her face. Mary held her hand as John worked and whispered, “You are insane – you know that?” Shannon’s eyes fluttered. “Mad. The boys want you to pull through. Wake up. It’s time to move.”

Shannon slept for an hour and kept replaying what Mary had whispered over and over in her mind. Finally, her eyes opened and she hollered in pain, “Jesus. Christ.” She hissed, “Damn it, John. I didn’t say ‘Kill me’.”

He smirked, “Good to see your spirit’s the same. We have to get you to Baker Street.”

“I need to get up?”

“Yes.”

“Fuck.”

Sherlock bustled around the flat after he moved furniture about and dismissed Mrs. Hudson, twice. The third time she came upstairs she intended to be stern while saying, “Sherlock Holmes, it is a quarter after three in the morning! What on earth are you doing?!”

He stopped, spun on his heel, and grabbed the older woman by the shoulders. His voice boomed, “Shannon has been injured and is with John presently. I have been sent here to move things about because she has to recover here.” She gasped. “Now, if you do not mind,” he yelled, “Help, or OUT!” Mrs. Hudson left in a flurry and retreated back to her flat. Agitated, Sherlock stormed into the bathroom to shower and change before Shannon was brought home. This shirt is a mess. Her blood is caked onto me. He ripped the shirt off and threw it angrily to the ground and turned on the hot water. I wish I could have remembered everything before tonight had transpired. Now my body is flooded with worry and I dislike it. He grumbled to himself and stepped into the water. For God’s sake, Shannon. You’re so clever on occasion. What were you thinking?

Sherlock sat patiently in his chair. It had been over an hour since he’d moved the furniture. Sitting now was better than pacing. The last thing I need is Mrs. Hudson coming back up her and meddling. His phone buzzed and he all too quickly put it to his ear, “John.”

“We’re outside. Give us a hand – we need to be gentle. She’s exhausted. It took us half an hour to get her in the car,” he breathed a sigh of relief as the good doctor stared up at the window.

Sherlock tossed his phone onto the chair and took off down the stairs. He flung to door open with a tremendous force that it bounced off the wall; I don’t care. It’s a door. It can be replaced. John and Mary were gently coaxing and easing Shannon out of the back seat. She was in a hospital gown with her jacket draped over her torso and she was groggy. Pain killers? Oh, what do you have in your system?

“Move,” he commanded. He leaned into the back seat and picked her up roughly, repositioned her in his arms; then made his way into Baker Street and up the stairs.
John and Mary followed quickly in tow and looked in a mild state of awe at Sherlock’s handiwork. Shannon’s mattress lay in the middle of the floor with the chairs pushed to the edges of the room. A makeshift IV pole constructed out of fireplace pokers and a broom stood at the head of her bed. The kitchen was set up as a mild trauma procedure room and an array of supplies were visible. He placed her on the mattress and propped her up onto her side. Mary beamed a warm smile while John stood silent, mouth agape.

“I can’t believe you,” John seethed. “She has been trying so hard for months to let you remember…and you knew all this bloody time?”

His nose crinkled in confusion, “What are you talking about? I saved her life!”

The doctor inhaled sharply and paused. “I’m going to hit him.”

“No you’re not,” Mary comforted. “Easy, John.”

John glared up at Sherlock and dug a finger into his chest, “Shannon was waiting for any indication that you remembered. You’ve made her miserable for three months! It’s bad enough I was out of the loop for your drama parade – but now you went and did it to her?”

“Ooooooh,” Sherlock smiled manically, “No – John, I remembered everything to its fullest extent tonight. I took a blow to the head. I’m fine though, thank you so much for your concern.”


“Yes,” he quipped, “She’ll sleep most of the day tomorrow. I’ll be by to check on her and bring the next dosage. When she wakes up, I want to check for broken bones. Sherlock, listen to me: I want you to leave her be. She needs to sleep. I don’t know what all she’s been through and neither do you. Get some rest before you interrogate her.” He turned to walk away, stopped and spun around, “And make her breakfast later.” John stomped down the stairs and waited for Mary in the car.

Sherlock’s puzzled expression made Mary chuckle, “He’ll be fine. He realized on the drive over that tomorrow is a long shift for him. His alarm’s going to go off in two hours. I’ll talk to him. Get some sleep.” She hugged him and skipped down the stairs quietly closing the door behind her.

The detective stood in silent contemplation beside Shannon’s bed before moving towards his room. He felt Shannon grab his trouser leg causing him to glance down at her. “Please tell me they’ve gone,” she whispered; her voice hoarse.

“They have,” he nodded. “You’re supposed to be sleeping.”

She shrugged and yawned lazily. “Breakthrough pain,” she groaned. She pulled the sleeve of her hospital gown up to reveal a patch. “Fentanyl, I think. And they gave me a dose of codeine before we left. I woke up when John started getting loud.”

She let go of his leg and he squatted down beside her, “You’re an imbecile.”

“Sherlock, I’m injured.”

“An idiot.”

She sighed and gave a lazy smile, “I’m drugged, exhausted, and sore. Either take a seat and talk to me or go to bed. Those are your options.”

“It would be thrilling to hear what you have to say,” he placated.
Shannon rolled her eyes and shimmied over to give him space to sit beside her. “Sit. I’m not yelling to you if you sit over there,” she motioned towards his chair. In a flourish of exasperation the detective sat beside her and frowned. “Don’t look too enthused, Mr. Holmes.”

“You’re wasting time. I suppose it would be best if you start from the beginning with the gaps that I can only surmise what had happened.”

“Of course. Please,” she offered.

“When did you release Mycroft?”

She yawned. “Just shy of a year after your death. You were well on your way and I had set all my pieces in motion. I was approached by a front man for the gun runners after he had observed some of my fighting skills. I sized up the situation and created another alias on the spot. An opportunity presented itself and that syndicate became my side project.”

He nodded and added, “And somehow, my brother found out and wanted in on the disassembling because it was a threat to England’s security.”

“Exactly.” She yawned again, “The group had been trying to move into England for years; the new boss, Milo Etchya, was getting arms in to every country he thought of. It was almost as if he was daring someone to stop him.”

“We can’t necessarily have any more illegal arms running about the country – we’d turn into Americans. Heathens.”

She snorted and clutched her side, “Oh, God that hurts, you bastard.” His grin didn’t make her believe he was sorry. “But…yeah – last night was child’s play. It was a tagged shipment. Each of guns had a tracker on it so that Etchya could follow the gun movement in Britain. I had put a silent ping in the tracker’s programming that would send information to Mycroft.”

“He would only be interested if high-grade weaponry was being trafficked.” Shannon averted her eyes and went silent. “Rocketry.” She continued to look away. “Explosives.” She frowned. “Oh, but of course: Radioactive materials.”

“Etchya got a hold of weapon’s grade cobalt. Cobalt-Sixty, to be precise. I’m sure you heard about the Mexican health scare this past December. The IAEA was all a-flutter when it was found and stated that the hijackers were possibly fatally exposed. I know, through certain channels…”

“Not all of it was recovered,” Sherlock interjected.

“Exactly,” she groaned as she stretched. “He’s got a bit of it stashed somewhere. If he got his hands on other nuclear material, he could make what’s called a ‘dirty bomb’. He’d be able to radioactively ‘salt the earth’…wherever it was launched. Or, he could sell it. Either way, the small time arms dealer moved up in the world a few months ago.

“Mycroft is worried. Rightly so. Before the truck sped off tonight, I snapped a few pictures and took a reading. He’ll be wanting those – and I’ll have to call Etchya soon. I need to tell him what happened…Thanks…”

The detective sat deep in thought for a while as he digested everything that she had said. Shannon’s been chasing nuclear weapons. For Mycroft. His entire range of employees and he has her doing his work for him. She will need tests done, of course, to ensure that no exposure has occurred.

“Shannon, what else has have you been doing? Why were you in Tanzania?” There was silence. “Shannon?”
The battered woman was sound asleep and her fingers were wrapped tightly around the fabric of his trouser leg. He groaned loudly and tried to free himself to no avail. After fifteen minutes of trying to get free and not waking her, Sherlock resided to staying put beside her to rest. He stuffed one of the extra pillows under his head and contemplated again. Her soft, rhythmic breathing began to give him some sense of tranquility until right about the time the sun began to rise—Sherlock Holmes fell asleep.

John was already at work when Mary headed out the door. She had left a little earlier than normal because she was going to swing by Baker Street to check on Shannon. The poor thing—she was a mess last night. Thank God she’s going to pull through. I’ll have to check her bandages before I leave. If they’re a mess; I’ll wake her up.

She knocked on the door and waited patiently for Mrs. Hudson. “Hello, Mary—I think they’re asleep. There hasn’t been any noise from upstairs yet this morning.”

Mary chuckled, “Or she’s asleep after killing him…Only one way to tell.” The petite blond tiptoed up the stairs, peered into the common area, and froze. Shannon had her head on his shoulder with her good arm draped across his torso. Sherlock’s face was turned away towards the kitchen and he was holding her arm. He looks so peaceful and precious. Shame that he’s such a tit sometimes.

Shannon heaved a heavy sigh and yawned. “Not. A. Word. Mary,” she mumbled groggily. “I was distressed.”

“I’m more surprised with him,” she whispered, kneeling down to look at the wounded’s bandages.

Shannon smirked and said, “He’ll never admit it, but he missed me. I cause all sorts of trouble.”

“I’m taking a picture,” Mary gleamed as she pulled her phone from her pocket. “For blackmail purposes.”

“Don’t show it to John,” she stated, keeping her eyes closed, “That’s all Sherlock would need.”

The camera sounded the closing of the shutter, the phone was pocketed, and Mary stood up. “I’ll come by after work with John to check on you,” she continued quietly, “Your bandages look okay for now. Get some rest.” She left in silence to go to work.

Shannon nodded, yawned, and began to doze off again. Later she felt Sherlock’s chest rise sharply under her head. She couldn’t tell how much time had passed, but Mary had been gone for a while. His voice rumbled through his chest, “Mary was here.”

“Yep,” she mumbled.

“You were awake?”

“She wanted to check my dressings.”

“They’ve not been changed.”

“No—she said that John would be over after work.” She gingerly lifted herself off of him and moved the pillows around to prop herself up on her side. “It was only for a moment and then she was gone.”

Sherlock looked down at her with skepticism and stretched loudly. “I’m supposed to feed you.”
“Please don’t,” Shannon begged. “If I’m hungry, I’ll cook. Your cooking was awful last time. I’m still tired. I may nod off again.”

He stood up slowly and moved stiffly into the kitchen to find a tray of tea on the table. He poured himself a cup and looked over to the wounded warrior to ask if she wanted some; however, she was already fast asleep with her back to him. *Make breakfast – nope – too late for breakfast. Make yourself dinner and contact Mycroft. There’s much to discuss.*
Shannon’s eyes slowly opened to an obnoxiously bright room. *Christ almighty – it’s so bright. He opened the curtains. That bastard. I’m going to kill him.* She stretched apprehensively and forced herself up. It took a great deal of effort to just get to sitting on her knees – *this is ridiculous.* With a few quick, reassuring breaths she heaved herself to her feet and stood still. An awful throb rattled in her mind and she pressed her fingertips gingerly to her temples. Slow, steady steps were taken toward the kitchen and then to the refrigerator. With a great pull the door opened to reveal half a bottle of wine and a cold pack. *Marvelous. Simply stunning. He’s hopped off and gone who knows where and he didn’t leave me anything to eat. I’m really going to kill him.*

Shannon turned and looked about; on the table was her mobile. *And unscathed. Wonderful.* She limped forward and grabbed the device and began sifting through her missed messages.

**Shannon Byrns:**

_I had some matters that needed taking care of. There will be food when I arrive back to Baker Street._

-SH

**Shannon:**

_Shannon, it’s Mary. I got your number from John. I’ve been sent home early today. I’m bringing bandages and tea._

**Shannon:**

_Mary’s got the rest of the day off. She’s going to stop by and check on you._

_I hope Sherlock hasn’t been a prat._

_Call me if you need anything._

_I’ll be stopping by after work._

**Annoyance:**

_I hope that I don’t have to wait too long for you to decide that the matters of national security are dire enough to get them to my office._

-MH
“I’m glad that you’re so concerned for my wellbeing, jackass,” she spat. The clock on her phone said it was half past five – in the evening. Jeez…I didn’t think I was out all day. But I’m still tired. Oi.

Dickhead:

You’re not ignorant to the extent of my injuries. If you want your intel, then you’re coming to Baker Street. And you can kiss my ass.

Shannon meandered back to the living room and made her way down to her mattress with caution. Her hospital gown fluttered as she flopped onto the fluffy pillow-top. She pulled her duvet up and over her head to hide the sunlight. Her phone blared angrily at her. She pulled it closer to her and put it to her ear.

“What do you want?” she groaned.

“Pleasant as ever, Miss Byrns. Your companion is making his way homeward; walking. I however, am on my way to that stagnant domicile to pick up the package. I should be there before he returns.”

“Go to hell.”

He seethed, “Charming, Miss Byrns.”

She waited patiently for any one of her babysitters to show up as she grumbled to herself. She couldn’t tell exactly how much time had passed considering that she had nodded off here and there; but she heard the door open and sure steps coming up the stairs.

“Well, isn’t this splendid?” an icy voice proclaimed.

Shannon’s arm slithered out from under the covers and left an expectant palm face up. “Mycroft: your mobile, if you please,” her muffled voice commanded. He stood there in silence and she groaned, “Now, or I will erase it and you can forget Etchya.”

Mycroft withdrew his mobile from his jacket pocket in exasperation and handed it to her. “I hope that this proves to be worth the effort, Miss Byrns.”

Her arm slinked back under the covers and she synced the two mobiles together for the data transfer. The images and readings were packaged in encrypted wrapping paper on his phone when she returned it back to him. “Go away,” she yawned from underneath the blanket.

Mycroft leaned over and ripped the blanket off of her. “Oh, do get up. There’s more to discuss.”

Shannon curled tightly around herself from the small burst of air and the flashing light. She glanced up and squinted, “Is that so? Go away, Mycroft. I’m tired. Please don’t bother me.”
“My baby brother has taken great interest, suddenly, in your work and what you did while you were away,” he began as he righted himself. “I can’t help but wonder what exactly transpired at that warehouse.”

“Mycroft, I have no idea what happened. I pulled him out of the equation so he could manage it – and then I went down and he got me out of there. What – what is so unfathomable about that?” her voice strained. Shannon exerted herself in an attempt to stand. She stumbled and resigned to sitting on her knees, looking up at Mycroft who had made no effort to assist her. Jackass.

The Ice Man’s eyes were still, “From what I have detected, Sherlock now has full recollection of the extent of your…relationship, such that it is.”

“I know,” she huffed. Shannon was lightheaded and a migraine was starting. “Call it intuition; however I don’t know what bothers you so much about me being his friend.”

“My brother,” he seethed, “Doesn’t have friends or bother with distractions in any capacity. He is always looking for that next thrill from a case.”

“John’s his friend; and, I know he doesn’t bother with distractions. Why he keeps bothering with you is a mystery,” she objected.

“Make no mistake, Shannon,” he stung, “If I find that you begin to hinder Sherlock’s process, I will make you disappear.”

Sherlock entered Baker Street in silence having seen Mycroft’s car and heard his brother’s frigid tones from the landing. He peeked up the stairwell and heard Shannon’s seething tone. He ascended the steps without sounding any of the creaks on the boards.

He observed Shannon trying to stand, then stagger to her feet and sigh, “Mycroft, your intimidation, if that’s what you can call it, doesn’t faze me. I have, for as long as I’ve known him, had his friendship and trust at the base of everything that I’ve done. Do not make the mistake and tempt me to embarrass you. I asked you to take your information and leave. If you’re here to continue harassing me, get out. Baker Street is going to get full very shortly.”

“Embarrass me? Honestly. I could have you disappear and he would never be able to find you.”

She steadied herself and invaded his personal space, “And I could make you the biggest imbecile that government has ever seen. Stop threatening me. Now, leave – me – alone.”

“Out,” Sherlock’s bass-baritone voice boomed. “It is high time that you left, Mycroft.”

Startled, Mycroft turned slowly, checked his pocket watch, and looked at his brother. “You’re early.”

“She asked you to leave at least twice; goodbye, brother.” Sherlock tightened his grip on the paper bag that held their tea for the evening.

Mycroft looked down to his brother’s bag as he passed, “How sweet, you brought her food. It’s disgustingly against the grain for you, isn’t it? Shannon, we will be in touch.” The elder Holmes left in a flurry of pomp.

“Are you alright?” Sherlock asked quickly. Elevated pulse, pale complexion, dilated pupils; shortness of breath. “Shannon.”
Shannon’s legs gave out from underneath her and she fell into a heap on her mattress. “I’m fine, Sherlock – thank you. I’m just a little out of breath. I might have a fractured rib,” she admitted as she gingerly pressed onto her side. “Also, Mary is on her way and John will be stopping by after work.”

“It could have been assumed as much; I picked up food for tea on the way.”

“You went to see your brother,” she muttered. “It was so kind of him to stop by and bother.”

Sherlock placed the takeaway bag on the table and could see her bandages through the gap in the back of the hospital gown. She was bleeding through.

“What,” she asked concerned. “And before you ask, you stopped moving and your breathing hitched. What?”

He grinned. *She’s still clever.* “You’re bleeding through the bandages on the stab wound. It needs dealt with.”

“Fine, but hurry up. I’m hungry.” Sherlock shed his coat and jacket, rolled his sleeves as he entered the kitchen, and returned with a small armful of supplies.

He peeled the tape and gauze off of her shoulder and observed that she had ripped some of the stitches. “This wound is magnificent,” he uttered aloud.

“Now what,” she groaned.

“You pulled a few stitches. John’s work is slipping,” he jabbed mercurially.

She rolled her eyes, “Sherlock.”

“I can take care of it now or you can wait for John.”

“I trust you,” she sighed. “Get on with it. I can’t feel it anyway.”

Mary walked into Baker Street to see the consulting detective sewing into Shannon’s shoulder and she hollered, “SHERLOCK! What are you doing?”

Shannon looked up and snorted, “I wanted the scar to be a lightning bolt instead.”

“She ripped her stitches,” Sherlock stated plainly.

“You’re no fun,” she groaned.

Mary stood there stunned. “I can’t believe you two!”

“Mary,” Shannon said with mirth, “This is a prime, distilled form of our dysfunctional relationship. More or less.”

The nurse quickly walked around to see the detective’s work. “I’m pleasantly impressed. Not bad, Sherlock.”

“Is it a smiley-face? That was my first request,” Shannon laughed again.

Sherlock jabbed her back with the needle to prove a point, “Stop moving.”
“Ow, bastard.” Shannon hissed, “Uh oh – he’s using the stern voice.”

Mary’s eyes bounced between the pair and they lit up. “Right – you two have fun. I left tea on the table. John will be here in an hour or so.”

“Thank you, dear; we’re having lots of tea,” Shannon smiled. “Mr. Grumpy-pants is all serious and ignoring your presence. But I appreciate you.”

Mary oversaw him finish the stitching and reapply new bandages. “What did you slip her?” she whispered into his ear.

“A little concoction, she’ll be fine. It doesn’t interfere with what she has in her system.”

“I was apparently too tense for him to stitch me effectively,” Shannon added. “I noticed it in my Coke.” She leaned back towards Mary to whisper, “He didn’t think I’d notice.”

“Right,” she smiled. “I’m going to go. Sherlock, do be nice.”

“I just re-stitched your fiancé’s handiwork. I’m fairly certain that this qualifies as my being nice.”

Mary ruffled his hair, waved at Shannon, and left Baker Street. Sherlock shed his gloves and washed his hands before dishing out their tea. Shannon had moseyed into John’s chair and sat cross-legged, slowly stuffing her face with chips, burgers, and curry. Sherlock was working at the kitchen table, occasionally taking bites of his food. While Shannon had zoned out and was eating on autopilot; he took advantage of the time to catch up on comparing splinter samples from different types of bullets against concrete.

It was dark out by the time John shouted up the stairs that he was in. His quick steps echoed off the narrow hallway until he entered the common area. Sherlock noted that John was home and that he was more than likely checking on Shannon – there was no reason for him to stop his observations.


He sighed, “She finished eating about twenty minutes ago. She’s quite asleep again.”

“Mary said that you dosed her.”

“Twice, yes.”

His eyes widened in rage, “Sherlock! Do you have any idea what you have done to her?”

“Of course. I excel in chemistry, remember? You gave her codeine and fentanyl; I gave her something to relax her and then make her sleep. She was in pain. According to you, she needs to rest, and I’m sure that Mary informed you that I had to re-stitch her,” he was matter-of-fact without looking up from his microscope.

John blinked a few times to process what he said and frowned, “Yes, because someone was being a prat. I have to check on the gashes in her back. Shannon? I know; he’s a prick, come on – wakeup.”

Her eyes opened one at a time and her brow furrowed. “I’m sleepy, Doctor Watson. Go away.”

“I know. I need to look at your back and check for broken bones,” he reassured.

She squinted in thought, trying to comprehend everything in her drugged fog. “Oh right… ribs
maybe. Check.”

John carefully stood her up and prodded about. *It’s more than possible that she’s fractured a rib. I’ll have to order her an x-ray. Wonderful. What a mess. The swelling in her eye looks like it’s at its peak so that should start to look better. Thank God her nose isn’t broken. There’s a few mild abrasions on the right side of her face...those are fine. And her back... Well, the lacerations aren’t as deep as I had originally thought. Those should heal nicely. Alright. “Shannon, I’m going to start poking around, okay? If it hurts, let me know.”*

“John, I can’t feel anything. Ow!” she cried out. She threw a sloppy punch at John, missed, fell to the floor, and rolled over laughing.

The good doctor grinned and checked to make sure her stitches were intact. Sherlock sighed and glared over at the pair of them. “Do shut up. I’m working.”

Her laughter roared louder and Mrs. Hudson came running upstairs. “Is she alright?” she asked alarmed.

Tears started flooding her eyes and her face reddened. John stood and shook his head with a smile, “I think that she’ll be fine. I’m going home.”

“What?” Sherlock almost shouted in alarm. “You aren’t honestly leaving me here alone with *that*!” he pointed to the laughing woman on the floor.

“Yes, Sherlock, I am. I’m going home. I’m having tea. Then I’m going to go to bed. You drugged her. I’m not entertaining her to please you. Deal with it; no offense, Shannon,” she clutched at her aching sides still laughing, “Goodnight Shannon, Sherlock; Mrs. Hudson – best of luck to you.”

John ran from Baker Street and headed home. Sherlock scowled at Shannon, who only continued to laugh manically. Mrs. Hudson gave up reasoning with her and retreated back downstairs when Sherlock locked himself in his room.

After her laughter had finally subsided it grew eerily quiet in the flat. Sherlock, frustrated, punched his pillow and leapt from his bed to go check her. When he flung the door open, Shannon lay still at the other end of the hall. “Shannon,” his voice was stern. She didn’t respond. “Shannon?” he said louder as he ran down the hall to her. “Shannon, damn it!” he yelled. He rolled her over and realized that she was fast asleep and rolled his eyes again. He picked her up and rudely tossed her back onto her mattress and covered her with the duvet.

He stopped and pondered, “The key. Oh, yes!” *Are you really that intelligent to have hidden the key in plain sight all this time? I know that your mind is more vast than most – but did you really do a puzzle?*

“What are you going on about?” she groaned as she woke.

“The key – my key...to my memories is an anagram.” Her stare was blank from being rudely awoken. “Alive obit: Obliviate. Mocks hell’s hero: Sherlock Holmes. Shannon Byrns, you are good.”

She smiled, “The key’s always been your name. And John’s was ‘jot down torn chaos’.”

“Doctor John Watson.” A broad smile spread across his face. “Well, Miss Byrns, I do have to say that I’m glad that you’re bright.” He began moving towards his microscope.

Shannon sighed and rolled herself into the blanket. “Thank you. You were missed all this time.”
He stopped in his tracks and looked down at her over his shoulder. *If you weren't so injured, this conversation would be going very differently. There's also a spectacular chance that you will not remember any of this anyhow.* His voice was quiet and he pressed his lips together in what could almost be a reassuring frown. “I’m glad that you’re still here.” He paused and then went back to his microscope to finish his work before he would retire for the night.
Continued Business

In the following days, John had taken Shannon for x-rays to find that she lucked out: no broken bones. She did however have some severe bruising on the greater extent of her body. She began to get stir crazy after three weeks of being holed up in Baker Street. She had pick-pocketed Sherlock’s wallet in his sleep and took the membership card to the Leisure Center over on Seymour Place. One morning Sherlock was called by Lestrade to aid in a case and he left early.

Finally. Time to get back to work. She dressed carefully in layers, grabbed her mp3 player, keys, and phone; and then she proceeded to make her way to the center. When she entered, she flashed the card to the desk clerk and made her way to the gym first. The beige walls and bright florescent lights were a sight for sore eyes. She made her way to an open treadmill, started up, and hopped on. Easy there, killer. Take it easy first. See how your legs handle everything. Remember, you’ve been doped up – you might not know you hurt your legs.

The young woman started off slow at a walking pace for twenty minutes before gradually picking up the pace. No pain. No stress. Bonus. Pretty soon, she had set herself up for distance running and plugged her ears into music. A cover of Jackson’s Smooth Criminal synced perfectly with each step that she took and she continued with that playlist so as to get her instructions for her movements.

Different tempos mean different speeds, different keys mean different running styles. Oh great, backwards now. She spun around and proceeded to run on the balls of her feet backwards for the duration of Aretha Frankilin’s Think. When an hour solid had passed, one of the staff members approached her to make sure she was alright. She nodded and stopped the machine, “Damn, just shy of seven miles. Yes, I’m fine, thank you.” Her body was craving more oxygen and to breathe heavily but she controlled the mechanics of breathing and forced herself to slow down and breathe deeply. She moved to one of the mats and sat quietly.

“You sure you’re alright?” he asked, skeptically. “You’re breathing is rather erratic.”

Shannon glared up at him from her seat, “Listen, kid.” She drew in a long, slow breath before stating, “If I can do this work-out in a village in the middle of nowhere on my own; I’m pretty sure I can manage with gym equipment. I mean, I did in the ocean, so I’m sure this and the pool will be cake.”

Firmly put in his place, the young staff member left her alone for the remainder of her time. Shannon stretched and reignited the stiff muscles in all of her limbs. Come on – you can do this. Let’s go. Once her breathing had settled and her heart rate evened out, she stood up and made her way to the pool. One of the ladies in the locker room was nice enough to assist her in taping plastic over her bandages to make them waterproof.

“God knows that John’ll kill me if I mess those up again,” she mumbled. She gently slipped into the water, finished stretching, and then began to do her laps.

Sherlock had finished working with Lestrade and was making his way to Baker Street. He paused at a cash point to be sure he had money for the week’s work and noticed his wallet was blatantly out of place. “You didn’t even try to hide it,” he cried out. He turned around and ventured toward the Leisure center. If I have to intervene again, I will certainly kill her. He withdrew his mobile and
“Mary, Shannon’s gone to the Leisure Center. I know you said that you may be nearby today – if you can get there before I do; make sure that she’s alive so that I can kill her.”

“Sherlock, I’m sure she’s fine…but I’m on my way.”

He snarled, “She’s not fine. I’m not sure that she’s fully recovered yet. Her wounds need more time.”

“It’s been three weeks! She’s stir crazy. Just calm down; I’m on my way there.”

“Taxi!” he hailed.

Brisk steps sounded from a hallway while Shannon reclined on one of the chairs in the health suite. She had just been in the sauna and was cooling down. “Mary,” she whispered, “I suppose my babysitter realized that I stole his membership card?”

“Shannon,” she chastised, “He’s worried.”

She leaned upwards onto her elbows and furrowed her brow. “Why? Because of something his brother said. I don’t know what was said, though I can infer; but I don’t care. I was doing this after I met him and after he faked his death. I dare him to tell me ‘no’.”

The tiny blonde shook her head, “Come on, give him a break. As odd as it is, he doesn’t want to see you get hurt.”

“No, Mary,” she spat. “I don’t know what Mycroft told Sherlock to make him leery about me leaving Baker Street. I don’t care. I can take care of myself; I did so for the past two years. Sherlock shouldn’t be protecting me from Mycroft. It should be the other way around – and Mycroft knows that.”

“Stop,” Sherlock barked. “Enough. You are coming with me to Baker Street. Now.” Shannon’s eyes shot upward while her head slowly turned to her head to the deep voice at the door. “I said now.”

“Excuse me,” Shannon snarled, “Since when have you ever told me what to do? In any type of capacity?”

“Since we became, as you call it, friends. Gather your things and get up.”

She stood up and crossed her arms, “I will not let you micromanage my life because of what he said. If I have to pay him a visit today, I will.”

“This is not up for discussion,” he seethed, “Gather your things. Now.”

“Jesus Christ; don’t you see what’s happening? At all? Sherlock…Stop and think. Come on.”

Mary’s eyes bounced between her two friends and she took a step back. Instead of interfering, she thought it best to leave. Her back was turned when she heard muted shuffling and quick breaths. She spun around to see Sherlock and Shannon fighting with their eyes locked on each other.

“BOTH OF YOU STOP THIS!” Mary yelled. Shannon and Sherlock continued fighting; deflecting blows, and circling each other. Sherlock put space between them to try and assess the situation;
but Shannon followed, stayed close, and kept a hold of him with her hand on his nape. With mild alarm and warning bells going off in her head, Mary ran to put herself between them. Shannon noticed that Sherlock’s guard immediately fell due to the new and ‘safe’ body between them.

Mary’s eyes locked into Shannon and she watched, as if it we slow motion, as Shannon jumped and kicked Sherlock over her head; landing perfectly on her feet. He staggered backward and fell onto one of the recliners. Shannon snorted with a nod, collected her things, and moved toward the locker room to change.

The petite woman leaned to whisper in Sherlock’s ear, “Yeah, I think she’s fine, Sherlock.”

“That smile – I want to wipe it right off your face. I don’t care that you were trying to prove a point.”

“Of course she is,” he wiped his lip roughly to check for blood. “I just had to prove to her that she’s alright. She’s been moping around Baker Street. I wanted to take her on a case tonight and I needed to be sure she was on form.”

In a flurry of annoyance, her hands sat on her hips, “So you were just testing her?”

“Exactly.” Mary laughed loudly and uncontrollably. “What?” She continued to laugh and left, cackling as she went.

Shannon waited for Sherlock in the lobby. He came scuttling about flustered and annoyed pushing the door violently. “Easy there, killer. How’s your face? Did I pass your little test?”

“It’s fine,” he looked down at her.

“More or less – you were going to be taken out of the entire equation and sent somewhere out east. It would be more dangerous than the cartel.”

She shrugged on her leather jacket, “Too bad I’m not his puppet. I only take jobs that I want. If they come my way. Besides, he wouldn’t come after me anyway.”

Sherlock quirked an eyebrow. “Oh, of course.” He has a door word already implanted in his mind. What would that entail?

“Exactly.” They waited at one of the crosswalks when she re-shouldered her bag and squinted in concentration. “I wasn’t entirely upset that Mycroft was threatening me that day at the flat – I was surprised. But I don’t understand what made him throw caution to the wind so precipitously to chance my temper.”

“That’s a conversation for another time. John, however, will be ‘in’ tonight. Up for a case?”

She eyed him skeptically, “What? Asking me out on a case without your boyfriend knowing? I don’t know what to say.”

Annoyed, Sherlock ignored her comment and said with dull tones, “If you’re not up for it, that’s fine.”

“Don’t play that game,” she chided, “It’s not becoming. Anyway, you know that I’m bored. What did you have in mind? You obviously wanted to be sure that I could fight if necessary.”
“Obviously.”

“Yeah, alright. I’ll go.”

He smirked, “It could be dangerous. It could be boring.”

“I’ll take the chance,” she laughed. They made a right onto Baker Street and continued. “When do you reckon that we’ll be going out?”

“A few hours, I would think. That should give you ample time to get ready. It’s nothing too dangerous; but I wanted to be sure that you are capable of defending yourself if the occasion should arise.”

“How kind.”

“What were you doing in Tanzania?”

“Now? You’re going to ask me about that now?”

His drew in his brow and frowned, “Why not? Is there a time table to when I can ask you questions?”

“No, Sherlock.” She unlocked the door and moved inside, “It’s just that’s for another conversation. I’m not in the mood to discuss it just yet and seeing as it doesn’t immediately pertain to anything; I won’t divulge.”

“Alright then,” he chirped as he tossed his coat to the chair back. “Go and get ready. We’ll be interviewing a witness…”

“I need be able to fight because you’re going to interview a witness?”

“…that is considered unstable.”

“Oh, great. Nothing says friendship like an interview with a possible psychotic. Where are we going?” His stood silent. “Sherlock,” she articulated sternly.

“Bethlehem Royal.”

“Oh, alright.” She went down to her room to grab her shower caddy and towel. “Are you fucking kidding me,” she yelled from her room. Sherlock’s eyes lit up and his wide smile splayed across his features.

*Oh, she figured it out. How lovely.*

“Sherlock Holmes, you fucking piece of shit. You’re taking me to a psych hospital!” she stormed up the steps. “I hate you sometimes.” She stomped into the bathroom, slammed the door, and began to run water for the shower. She returned to the detective clad in a towel to find him smirking. “Wipe that grin off your face. If I have to save you from a patient tonight, I just might let them have you.”

In a huff, Shannon turned about and walked back to the bathroom. “You could do, but you honestly wouldn’t let them do any serious harm,” he jabbed. When the bang from the door slamming shut had sounded, he grabbed a paper and sat in his chair. *This should prove to be interesting.*
Shannon stood beside the sitting detective as he interviewed one of the members of staff. She was bored already and the pair had only been in the hospital for ten minutes.

“…and you’re very sure that the patient never left his bed?”

“Positive, Mr. Holmes; we have it on video. The kid never left all night. We don’t know how the other patient ended up in another room beat up.”

“So you’ve kept the two of them separated because they have been showing signs of aggression towards each other,” Shannon summarized. “What caused the first outburst?”

“Who’s she? I thought Doctor Watson was coming with you.”

“I’m the muscle,” Shannon replied curtly.

The orderly looked up at woman with a questioning gaze. Sherlock interjected, “Anything you would say to me, you can say to this woman. I trust that you understand that you are to answer any questions that she asks you.”

He nodded and added, “We think it started over their free time. We aren’t one hundred percent sure. We observed the two patients being aggressive with each other and have done our best to keep them apart.”

Shannon crossed her arms and frowned. Her voice was stern as she said, “You said that there’s video…I’d like to see it. Mr. Holmes will more than likely get to the bottom of the situation amidst my perusal. If you don’t mind.”

“Well,” the nervous man began. He green eyes darted back and forth between the consulting duo and he had wrung his hands. “My superior doesn’t know that I called you.”

“I don’t see the problem. Get it done,” Shannon retorted.

Sherlock flashed a quick grin with his eyes at her and returned his gaze to the staff member. “I concur. Let’s go. She’ll view the footage. I’d like to speak with the victim if possible, first.”

Shannon nodded and left the small office to find the security feeds while Sherlock and the staff member, Jeff, went in the opposite direction.

She knocked on one of the other office doors and played up the kind, bumbling assistant persona. “Oh, hello. Mr. Holmes sent me down here to watch last night’s footage, if you don’t mind.”

“We’re not supposed to let anyone in here, miss,” the staff member replied. She had short, red hair and bright blue eye shadow.

“Oh – right,” she breathed crestfallen. “I just don’t know how he does it. He always gets all the information that he needs. I…I’ll never get that good.”

The woman looked about quickly, “Oh, come on in. What do you need to see?”

After fast-forwarding through the majority of the footage, Shannon was shown the section of time needed for the investigation. “Yes, there, thank you. Could you rewind it a bit?” The older woman indulged and went backwards, “There. And play.” She scrutinized the recording. The feed almost looked as if it were perfect. Too perfect. “Backwards again, if you please.”

“What are you looking for, my dear?”
“I think,” she said softly as she bit her bottom lip in concentration, “That the feed has been tampered with. It almost doesn’t match.”

“Oh my god, really?”

“There!” she exclaimed pausing between two frames of feed. “The color is off just slight enough. Do you see? The frame on the right is a little too rich to have been recorded by that particular camera. It’s been enhanced. Almost perfectly. But the following frames… the only thing that changes… is the time stamp.” She stood up and ran her hands through her mess of hair. “Someone went through a lot of trouble to hide that. Ms. Dawn, I’d like to see reports of your staff, please.”

“Oh dear, yes of course, right this way.”

Shannon examined files and reports from newspapers on her mobile. She jotted down notes onto a piece of paper, thanked the woman, and made her way down to Sherlock. He stood in the hallway with some of the staff lined up before him. He was going on about his deductions when Shannon slipped the piece of paper in his hand. His sideways glance was enough confirmation that he knew what the paper was.

“This paper my partner has given me has the proof required to condemn one of you. Abuse of power and resources in a hospital is unacceptable.” Shannon moved partway down the hall and slipped out of sight. Sherlock blocked the other end and began accusing one of the nurses with rigging the video feed.

“And what would my motive have been for that, Mr. Holmes? What proof do you have?”

He shrugged, “The patient suffers from self-harm tendencies and you allowed it to happen knowingly. The feed was altered so that you could claim innocence. I can only guess that your motive is personal, more than likely from a sibling having had been in school with the patient. It was easy for you, then, to automatically shirk the blame to the aggressive patient.” He opened the paper in his hand and read aloud, “Joy Burke: sister of Amanda Burke – (dated patient one extensively and has since been admitted for clinical depression). It’s best if you just come with us and await the authorities to question you fully.”

“NO!” she yelled and she took off down the hall. Shannon jumped from wherever she had been hiding and threw the nurse on her back.

Sherlock’s smug voice rang down the hallway, “I’m sorry; I forgot to mention that Shannon’s very territorial when it comes to the welfare of children. She was a teacher.”

The musician snorted in a huff, stood up, and allowed the staff members to take their coworker away.

“See,” Sherlock admitted, “It’s a good thing you were on par today.”

“Is the kid alright?”

He walked past her, “What was that?”

“I asked if the kid was alright,” she grumbled as she snatched his elbow.

He looked down and then back at her, “He will be fine. The doctor is tending to him as we speak.”

Spinning on her heel in an about face, she made her way in the opposite direction of her partner to find the doctor.
“Is he alright? I mean, I know that I’m not family and I’m not an official anything – but is he going to be alright?” her eyes begged for an answer.

The doctor nodded, “Without saying anything pertinent to the patient; yes – he will be fine. It’s not the worst that I’ve seen.”

“Can I speak to him?”

“I advise against it. He’s resting.”

“That’s fine – I understand. Just let him know when he wakes up… He always matters; no matter what happens he will matter.”

Sherlock overheard her conversation and stood still, quiet. When she moved he scuttled outside to get to the car before her. She came down the steps and looked up at her friend. “I know you were listening.”

“Caring doesn’t help.”

“No, but it doesn’t hurt, either. Stop it.”

He sighed as he got behind the wheel, “Shannon – do you know him? Do you know what he’s been through?”

Shannon crossed her arms and sunk into the seat. A sideways glare accompanied the sharp edge of her voice as she said, “Say that your entire life you are told that you don’t matter and you end up with a psychosis like any of those kids. It could be learned or something that you develop…but the point is at some point, you then feel as if you don’t matter at all. It doesn’t matter the psychosis. Every kid in that building matters. Someone like Burke does more than anger me.”

He went to counter her argument but thought it best to remain silent.

“Sherlock, you have a support group around you should you need it. And I can infer that your parents care for your well-being also. Some of those kids don’t have either of those luxuries – just the staff that takes care of them. That, at times, is truly being alone. And not by choice. You at times choose isolation for your own purposes. That’s fine. But they may not have.”

The pair drove in silence the rest of the way homeward. Shannon retreated back to her room and didn’t venture out the rest of the night. Sherlock logged the interaction in the back of his mind to bring up when she wasn’t as moody and continued about his business.
“I can’t bloody see it!” the detective shouted. His cup was launched across the room in agitation. John lunged across the sitting room and nabbed the tea cup midair.

“Sherlock!” he scolded flatly. “You’re reading too much into it.”

The dark haired man spun on his heel and placed splayed fingers on his waist in exasperation. His voice was edgy as he spoke, “Shannon isn’t one for just mentioning something like that without it being pressing. It goes further than her being so protective,” he gestured air quotes wildly, “of children. I don’t buy it. She’s hiding something!”

The cup was placed on the table with caution as John walked over to his friend’s papers. “Notes? You’re taking notes…on her? Honestly?”

“Yes, John, of course I’m taking notes. She’s not been the same since she has come back to England. Something is amiss. There are a few persons that might be have information on her escapade,” he seethed.

“You’re not asking Mycroft…”

Sherlock scoffed, “I can’t believe you’d think it.” He spun about and began pacing. There was a long pause before he chortled, “I’ll be stealing it from him.”

John stood with folded arms across his chest as he was increasingly annoyed by his friend’s antics. “Sherlock…” he began.

The detective launched himself over the coffee table and landed with grace back first on the couch. He pressed his fingers together under his chin and pondered aloud, “What is it that you’re trying to hide?”

“No wonder she’s mad with you,” the soldier’s head shook in sympathy, “If you keep questioning everything she does and says like you are now, I’d hate you, too.”

“Come on, John, you just ignored me,” Sherlock interjected. “Regardless, she’s hiding something and I’d say it is in plain sight.” He closed his eyes in thought.

“Hang on, did you do this shite to me?” John asked curiously.

He huffed, “Keep up, John. Let’s focus: I’ve already gone through and snooped in her room and she’s left no clues there. There’s nothing on her laptop – though she hasn’t left her mobile alone long enough for me to see if there’s anything on it. But…her finances don’t come to Baker Street. I could look for clues as to where she’s getting her money and, moreover, where it’s going.”

Neither of the boys had heard Shannon creep up the steps, nor did they notice as she leaned her shoulder onto the doorframe as Sherlock concluded his oration.
“I think that’s quite enough,” she quipped sharply. “You, both of you, are done prying.”

“Shannon!” John gasped. “I didn’t do –“

“Enough.” Her voice was adamant and reproaching.

When she had turned back to move down the stairs, John glared down at his friend who had opened one eye to peek around. “Good, she’s gone. As I was saying…”

“That’s it, Sherlock. Now she’s mad at me. Thank you. So much,” he huffed as he stormed down the stairs.

“What?” the detective asked the air, nothing short of bewildered. “Silly people with your tiny minds.”

The detective sat in silence and methodically reviewed all of his conversations with Shannon in hopes of finding the evidence he required. *Everything that she says is said with intent. What are you hiding?*

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*The Eleventh of August*

Shannon sat in contemplative silence with her eyes closed as she listened to the waltz that Sherlock had penned. He was dancing about the room testing the pacing; but she paid him no heed. *Yellow. It’s such a soft yellow. Very well done; a couple things here and there I’ll ask about – but not bad, Sherlock. Not bad.* She was so enveloped in her thoughts that she didn’t hear the door open.

Sherlock’s resonant voice cut through the music, “Shut up, Mrs. Hudson.”

“I haven’t said a word!” she replied aghast.

The musician’s eyes shot open in surprise while she surveyed the room. Her trumpet still sat beside her with one of her silent mutes wedged into the bell. The pair of them had been comparing musical lines back and forth while he was composing. *I mean, it’s mine – but the trumpet really isn’t ‘mine’. It’s making due for now: it’s battered and bruised, but it suits my needs and itch to play. I need to start scavenging for a new trumpet. It’s been too long since I had great metal in my hands.*

The pair bickered back and forth as Sherlock became more annoyed with their landlady.

“You bring me tea in the morning?” he asked as he sat down in his chair.

Shannon smiled and accepted a cup from Mrs. Hudson, “Obviously.”

As Mrs. Hudson poured another cup she added, “Well, where did you think it came from?”

“I dunno – I just thought it sort of happened,” he scoffed.

“Your mother has a lot to answer for,” she quipped.
Shannon smirked as Sherlock added, “Hmm, I know. I have a list – Mycroft has a file.”

Shannon snorted tea into her nose as she tried to stifle a laugh. Sherlock’s sideways glare made her laugh even harder as she walked into the kitchen to grab a towel to dry her blouse with. She heard the two idly chit chat in the living room. Sherlock’s tone hinted that he was slightly uncomfortable and annoyed when she reentered the room drier than when she left it.

“Hmm,” he grumbled, “Anyway, you’ve got things to do.”

“No not really – I’ve got plenty of time to…”

He snapped, “Biscuits!”

The older woman quickly moved to the door and said, “I really am going to have a word with your mother.”

“You can if you like – she understands very little,” he replied offhandedly.

“I’ll talk to him, Mrs. Hudson – don’t worry.”

Sherlock closed the door and behind her and ignored Shannon’s reproachful glare. “Sherlock.”

Her gaze followed his to find it rested upon John’s chair. “Right then,” he said as he walked through the kitchen, shedding his robe, “Into battle.”

Shannon peeked around the corner of the hallway and asked, “You and I need to have a chat about how you treat that woman.”

“Please stop nagging me like a mother does a child,” he seethed. He tossed his off-white shirt out of eye shot and pulled up the grey trousers. She walked down the hallway with quick steps and made her way into his room. He shrugged on the suit shirt and stood still. The whole ordeal was now becoming more present. He was surprised when he was drawn back to reality to find Shannon buttoning his shirt for him. His gaze traveled down to her hands followed by a frown, “I am fully capable of dressing myself; I am not incapable.”

“I know,” she said lightly, “This is me helping since I’m not going to the wedding. As soon as you’re off to the wedding; I’m heading up to Manchester. I will have my phone on me if you need assistance. But I will not be getting you out of this wedding. It’s too important to them.”

As she buttoned his collar, he tucked the hem on his shirt into his trousers. She pulled the tie off the hanger while he turned is collar up so that she could put a decent knot at his throat.

“You could come with me,” he whined solemnly.

She looked up quickly and went back to her work, “You know why I can’t go. It’s the last phase…”

“…of the syndicate ring before it collapses, I know. I can’t help but feel that you did this on purpose.”

“Oh, of course I did. Just to spite you,” she snipped.

He heaved a heavy sigh as she turned down his collar and handed him his vest. “Weddings are dull.”
Shannon stood with her hands on her hips, “Says you! Weddings can be fun, you know.”

“I doubt it.”

“No, Sherlock, I’m serious. There’s the ceremony, yes – that can sometimes be dull. But then you get food, fun, and there’s often dancing! It’s sometimes one of the few places where ‘adults’ can let loose. Give them my love since I cannot be there. I’m just sorry that I have to miss it.”

He nodded slowly, buttoning his vest. *She’s concerned for me – I can hear it. She doesn’t want me to feel isolated at this wedding. Companionate love – oh, rubbish. “Do you have everything that you need for tonight’s job?”*

“I do,” she nodded, holding his jacket open for him to slip in to. “And I have your pistol packed into my bag as you asked; I’ll be wearing the new holster you requested that I buy. Plus I’ll have my throwing knives – don’t worry. After this is done, your brother will be leaving me alone for a while. I’m exhausted – if he wanted this so badly, he should have had one of his lackeys do it for him.”

His eyebrows furrowed and his mouth pulled into a small frown, “I only suggested it because of what happened a few months back. And I concur, Mycroft has taken the lazy route in getting you to finish his work.”

“You didn’t ask, Sherlock: you demanded it and I humored you. I understand and it’s okay.” She adjusted his breast pocket napkin and stepped back. “There, You’re done. John asked that I make sure you were fit to go. I told him that you would have been fine. It’s for John and Mary, after all.”

Upon exiting, Sherlock followed her into the sitting room. Shannon was putting her trumpet back into its case when Sherlock cleared his throat. “I heard you follow me out here, Sherlock, you don’t have to announce that you’re here.” She stood up and turned to find Sherlock had his arms clasped behind his back. Her head shifted to the side as she asked skeptically, “Whaaaaat?”

“Do you know how to dance?”

“I do,” she answered cautiously.

“Then dance with me,” he stated as if it were something commonplace for them.

She turned her head to the other side, “May I ask why?”

He rolled his eyes and extended his hand to her, “I enjoy it and always have – and since you seem to like dancing and will not be at the wedding, consider it pity.”

“Oh, thanks,” she replied with cynicism in her voice. She stepped forward and took his hand and the pair began dancing in small circles around the room to the music that was now playing. She let him lead simply because she knew that it would help him in a way. *He is a spectacular dancer. Sherlock Holmes likes to dance. Thank God he was giving John lessons. I gave up. He was awful. I tried.*

“And, in the event that the worst is to happen today – I can say that I danced with you once.”

She stopped mid-step and backed out of his grasp, “Sherlock, don’t, please.” She looked up at him and his face showed he was troubled.

His mouth twitched to the side in apprehension, “You had me thinking.”
She took a step forward and they began to dance again, “That’s dangerous. I apologize.”

“The password to your USB drive…the password was ‘companionate’. It’s a classification of love based off of Sternberg’s *Triangular Theory of Love*. I read the theory when you slept. You took a chance hoping that I would be baited by that before I had all of my memories back.”

“It was all that I could do. I figured that if I did die you would at least then know how I viewed our relationship. There are three components. Intimacy, which includes feeling of attachment and a bond. Passion includes sexual attraction…”

“…and commitment encompasses loyalty in the short and long term. Yes, I read it. But of all the classifications you chose companionate.”

“I did.”

He began to recite the definition as if he were reading it off of a page. “Companionate love is non-passionate, yet intimate and is can be considered stronger that friendship because of the added element of long-term commitment. Strong, lasting affection and commitment remain, as it does in long-term marriages where passion is no longer a necessary element. It can be a love between people who have a strong, close, and often platonic friendship.”

“Thanks – I know all of that. I did read up on it to make it the password, you know.”

His left eyebrow shot upward, “I will be calling you at some point today. I will get bored.”

“That’s fine,” she continued. *Why bring any of that up if you were just going to go back to regular conversation? You didn’t do it just because you could; there’s always a reason.* The song stopped and they parted, “What’s going on in your head, Sherlock?”

He gave a polite smile and made his way to the door, “Please come back alive.”

*Oh Christ, is Sherlock…he’s afraid to be alone again. Oh, no I wouldn’t do that to you.*

“By all means necessary; even if that means that you have to kill someone to protect yourself – I ask that you come back to Baker Street alive and not in a body bag,” he breathed and slowly descended the stairs.

*Wait, Sherlock – this isn’t going to be that bad. I’m just going to Manchester to enact the memory protocol and disappear. Your concern makes me want to cry. I know that you don’t do that sort of thing; and that’s fine – but Sherlock…*  

“Of course; I will come back to Baker Street. I will always come back to Baker Street as long as I can help it.”

He paused as she spoke, then continued out the door to hail a cab. She made quick work of suiting up for her night so that she could get from Baker Street Station to London Euston with her finally destination at Manchester Piccadilly. Her backpack was hoisted onto her shoulders and she stepped out under the sunny sky and made her way to work. *Sun. That’s so wonderful – it’s not sunny enough in this country. The sun really shows off so much of this country’s beauty. And John and Mary deserve sun on their wedding.*

It was dark when her phone started buzzing. The musician was fairly unscathed, considering that tonight could have gone poorly. Etchya came to England to meet with her and the head of one of his rings to discuss cargo movement, plans, and failures. Shannon had blasted some Wagner over
the speakers and sent it as a multimedia message in texts to everyone coupled with her voice saying
the key word. All of her injuries were self-inflicted to an extent: she had tripped over her own feet,
fell, and scraped her knee.

Mycroft’s men were on their way to the drop site to collect his prize. Etchya and his goons will be
caught in a compromising situation that will surely lead to jail time. Bonus points for me.

Fairly unscathed. Now. Who’s this… Sherlock!

“You made it to the end of the night before calling me; I’m proud of you,” her voice brimmed with
pride.

His voice, however, was more sullen, “Mocking me at this hour? How kind of you.”

“No!” she replied quickly, “No, Sherlock; I am honestly proud of you.”

“Oh… – how was wiping yourself out of memory again?”

She could hear some underlying tone in his voice, “Fine. I’m on my way home. Are you alright?”

“I’ll see you at home then, Shannon,” he said quietly.

“Sherlock,” she interjected, “I could use some sanity in my life.” He paused on the other end of the
line and waited for her to continue, “I can tell by the slight variation of timbre in your voice that
something happened at the wedding. Tell me about it. I’m about the board the train, so it’ll be two
hours or so until I get home. But – tell me about your day. How did the speech go?” Her voice was
kind; yet tired. This case she had been working on Mycroft’s behalf was taxing. She was
exhausted. Maybe if I can get him to focus on talking to me, it’ll help.

“There was a wedding, food, dancing, and tradition,” he retorted smugly.

“Oh… wow… I never would have guessed. Anything else?” she probed.

“…and attempted murder on Major Sholto.”

“Really?!” she exclaimed a little too loudly on the platform.

Her enthusiasm made him smile, “Of course. You always tell me that you can notice when I’m
lying.”

“I want to hear about it, obviously. So go on. I’ll plug in my ear buds so that I don’t have to keep
this thing next to my ear…one second.” There was some crackle from her messing about, “Okay
– there. Also, before you get started, you’ll be happy to know I didn’t have to use the pistol or a
single knife tonight.”

“That is promising news. They still made me read the telegrams.”

“Remind me what telegrams are? I’m American and therefore a heathen.”

“Messages to the happy couple from guests that couldn’t make it to the ceremony or reception. It
was appalling. Honestly – just because it’s a socially-deemed ‘happy’ occasion does not commend
the use of fluffy words in every. Single. Sentence.”

Shannon laughed quietly, her voice beginning to grow rough from tiredness. “I’m sorry that you
had to read them. I’m sure you did fine, though. I didn’t get any SOS texts about your speech; so
I’m assuming that it was a great success.”
“I suppose so; I don’t entire know why people were so weepy.”

“You made people cry? Sherlock.”

“No, no – John said I didn’t mess it up. He even gave me a hug when I finished.”

She boarded the train and found her seat, leaned onto the window with her head propped up on her arm and smiled. “You wouldn’t let me help with the speech; nor would you let me hear it. Will you tell me what it was?”

He groaned to himself, “Honestly, you are incorrigible.”

“Please? You know that John’s not going to tell me the whole thing if I ask.”

Sherlock paused a moment, “That is true. Fine. I’ll humour you. So first it was the telegrams and I got through those as quickly as possible. Then I began with ‘When John first broached the subject of being best man, I was confused…’.”

She blinked on occasion in comprehension as she listened intently to his voice. It, in its own way, was kind of soothing to her and hearing him go through the day’s happenings was a stress reliever. He recounted every last detail to her and she was enthralled. Occasionally she would interrupt and ask questions so as to connect any points she may have missed. He was patient with her and continued with his tale until she was less than twenty minutes from London.

“You left the party early, I’m assuming,” she added after he had finished.

“Correct. I’ve just walked into Baker Street. There is takeaway in the fridge if you are interested. Mary had me purchase it earlier in the event you returned late.”

“Thank you. And what about Janine? The bridesmaid?” she asked in earnest.

“That’s for later. You and I will have to talk about that when you’re not so groggy; possibly tomorrow’s conversation.”

“Agreed,” she yawned. It was close to eleven thirty and she had been up since three that morning. “Also, if you’re going to bed, can you leave out the med kit?”


“I’m fine, Sherlock. I just decided to be overly graceful and fell, skinning my knee. I just want to clean it before I collapse into a minor hibernation.”

“Fine,” he responded.

“Sherlock, we’re approaching London Euston. I’ll be grabbing a cab and should be home within the hour.”

“Whenever you wake tomorrow, we will discuss the next case that I’ll be working on. I will require your assistance and your silence.”

She huffed a quick ‘Sure’ as she was jostled about in the crowd. “Sherlock, I’ve got to cut this call off. I can barely hear you over the noise. I will see you when I get home. If you are tired, then go to bed and I’ll talk with you tomorrow.”

“That’s fine,” he stated.
“And thank you for humouring me. I appreciate it.” The screen was tapped with her thumb to end the call and Shannon made her way to the street. She walked about for a while before she was able to hail a taxi; and soon she was on her way home. She paid the driver and dragged herself from the back seat.

It was quiet in Baker Street. Mrs. Hudson was no doubt asleep at this point and it was silent upstairs. Shannon opened the door to her apartment and found that Sherlock had left peroxide and bandages underneath her lit desk lamp. With her knee then cleaned and having changed for bed, the exhausted woman crawled into bed.

“Dear bed, I missed you. You’re so fluffy. Thank God. I plan on sleeping until noon,” she buried her face into her pillows in the dark. She sighed in delightful exhaustion.

BZZZT. BZZZT.

Bright light flooded her room from her phone’s screen. “Why-y-y-y-y…” she whined loudly; ineptly reaching for her phone. “I swear to God – someone’s going to die.”

BZZZT. BZZZT.

The phone was brought to her ear without looking at the caller id. “He-hello?” her gruff voice croaked out.

“Oh, sorry…,” Molly’s timid voice came through the speaker. “Shannon, I know you’ve been busy…I didn’t mean to wake you.”

If there was anyone that I could forgive for calling me at this very second, it would of course be you, Molly. Of course it is.

“No…no; it’s alright. Are you okay?” the grogginess in her voice was apparent. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m fine…but…I’m worried about Sherlock.”

Christ, again? But you’re engaged to Tom. Jesus. “Okay, okay, I’m up; what’s going on?”

“Well, when he finished playing the song for their first dance tonight; he flubbed up a bit.”

“Okaaay,” she added. If this is what I think it’s about – this ought to be interesting to dance around.

Molly continued, “He said something like ‘I swear I will always be there for all three of you’. Then he added I meant two of you and then asked the DJ to start the music. Shannon, he’s not taking it well.”

“Right. I’m really tired, Molly, so how is this evidence he’s not taking it well?”

She paused for a moment, “He’s still including himself in their family! Shannon – I think he’s taking this pretty hard right now. He’s not doing well. And he left early! I saw him. He was sad. He never realizes that I can see him when he’s sad.”

“Okay. Okay…I’ll talk to him tomorrow. You know, it’s more than possible in his mind that he threw himself in that equation because he wanted them to know that he’s not planning on ostracizing the pair of them now that they’re married. But if it’ll make you feel better, I’ll talk to him tomorrow about it,” she yawned.

“I guess, okay…thanks…”

“How’s Tom?”
“Oh, I don’t…things are fine.”

“Molly,” she warned. “I know he’s told you that I’m an excellent lie detector. Try again.”

“We got into a fight after we got back. I told him I didn’t like the way he spoke to Sherlock during the speech.”

“I heard, I got the quick version,” she lied.

Molly sighed, “What I said was blown was out of proportion. He’s sleeping on the couch right now. I – I just…”

The tired woman sat up and ran her fingers through her hair, “I tell you what, how about you and I get dinner in a few days. Or catch a movie. Something where it’s just us. If you want to talk, you can – if not; then it’s something fun to do.”

“Okay, yeah… I would like that. I’m sorry to wake you. Really… I hope you get some sleep. I’m really sorry.”

“Molly – it’s okay, you are worried. I’ll talk to him tomorrow and if there’s any cause for alarm, I’ll call you; okay? It’ll be fine. It’s okay.”

“Okay, goodnight.”

She clicked her mobile on mute and tossed it roughly onto her stand. “Anything else? Anyone?” she asked the dark out of spite. “No? Can I sleep now? Is that fine with you, Universe?”

Exhausted and irked, she tossed and turned as she tried to sleep. Mary’s pregnant. I’m so happy for her and John. With Molly verifying, albeit unintentionally, what Sherlock had hinted to cements my theory: he’s willing to do whatever it takes to keep them safe. Sherlock now, more than ever, has a weak spot. Everyone does; I do. Of course I do. It’s Sherlock, unfortunately. It’s the only thing that Mycroft and I have in common at all times. Actually – that’s something that I’ll need to work on: I’ll have to make it appear as if he doesn’t matter at all. At least to everyone else; what happens here doesn’t matter. I am not letting anyone else try and pry my family away from me… whatever the reason.

Damn it, Shannon, you’re trying to sleep, not solve your personal and worldly dilemmas. Christ.

Disgusted, the covers jumped off of her body and she padded across her room to grab her trumpet out of its bag. Her Best Brass practice mute was gently wedged into her bell and she lay with her back flush against the floor. With closed eyes and a slow, deep breath lodged in her lungs; the cool metal was brought to her lips and she exhaled. To anyone else, it sounded like a trumpet had been stepped on and thrown into a fairly soundproof box; however, the mute she was using dampened the sound so tremendously, she often practiced at all hours of the night and not a single person knew or stirred from sleep.

What sounded like comical, whispering blats of sound were expertly hiding the perfect tones that the musician was searching for. The added resistance from the mute was great for building her endurance considering that she hadn’t played extensively for some time. I’ve been doing a lot of this lately: practicing when I can’t sleep. I’m training myself to not sleep again. Shame, really – I seem to have a lot of great late night practice sessions. Ah well. Now that I’m warmed-up…let’s see…Oh, I know. Jazz. I haven’t done any jazz in ages. I remember Chet Baker’s But Not for Me, but I’m not in the mood…OH! Yessssss. Brubeck – Take Five. Oh yeheheheessssssss. Ba doo ba doo doobie di da doo dooo, doobie dah doo, bah dah da doo…
She hummed the theme to herself for a moment or two and found that her fingers were automatically depressing the valves that needed to move so that the correct pitches sounded. She heard the rhythm section in her head, played along for some time, and then began to improvise. 

*I have needed an outlet for so long. Oh – it’s so wonderful to live again.*

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay, everyone. Real life creeped up on me.

I'm going back to England in a few weeks for some family stuff, but I promise to have an update for you on my return!
Stiff and self-loathing, Shannon hobbled into the common area with her hand positioned on the
back of her hip. Sherlock eyed her quickly, assessed her situation, and went back to drinking his tea
before tossing another paper onto her pile.

“Another near sleepless night for you,” he said; his voice plain as he stated his observation.
"You're up late, even for you."

She roughly and none-too-gracefully fell onto her chair and glared at him while reaching for the
toast. “Yes, thank you; how’d you sleep, your excellency?”

“Honestly, you're going to be rude at this hour? It’s ten in the morning,” he scoffed.

“Christ,” she groaned, slumping over the table, “I’ve only slept for three hours.”

His eyebrows shot up in surprise, “Well, maybe you shouldn’t have been playing jazz all night."

“You know, just because I ended with jazz – which you couldn’t hear by the way – doesn’t mean I
started on jazz.”

He tossed his head to the side in annoyance, “You’ve got a decent wear and pressure mark on your
lips still, and they’re fairly swollen. Indicative you had your mute in and were playing in your
upper register. The only time you really do that is when you’re practicing jazz.”

“Can we keep the informal deductions of housemates on a timed basis – say, starting at eleven
from now on? Hmm?” she jabbed playfully.

Sherlock smirked before taking a sip of his tea. “If you insist.”

Lacking social grace, the musician began shoveling food aimlessly into her mouth and gulped
down some of her coffee. “Now that I’m fed and less likely to hit you if you’re going to be a git,
what did you want to talk about?”

The detective’s playful demeanor dissipated as he wiped his napkin across his mouth. “What do
you know of Charles Augustus Magnussen, Shannon?”

Her lips turned downward to flash a small frown as she combed her memory for anything on the
subject. “Not much really. I know that he’s in the news business – he’s got his own building here
in London…other than that; I have to say I’m ignorant in the matter. Why?”

“Lady Elizabeth Smallwood came by here recently today while you were sleeping. Magnussen
apparently tried to put pressure on her for some reason by stating he had, in his possession, letters
that are lascivious in nature with regards to her husband.”

“He’s not only in news, but he’s into the game of leverage? That’s not surprising,” she said with an
eye roll. “But, I highly doubt that you’d be telling me all of this if there wasn’t something
incredibly stupid involved.”

He heaved an annoyed sigh and tilted his head slightly to the left, “Being in the news, it would be a
fantastic addition to his list if he could grab hold of Sherlock Holmes, the great detective: a drug addict...”

“Absolutely not,” she fired back in an instant. “And that’s that.”

“Let me finish, Shannon. I would dilute the dosage to something incredibly mild and implant myself in a den somewhere. It would make for a great story for Magnussen to get his hands on. I would be able to bring him down for the criminal that he is,” Sherlock stated.

Her limbs crossed the front of her torso and her face reflected the angry melancholy that she felt coursing through her veins. “No, Sherlock.”

“I’m not asking,” he insisted as his voice went flat, “I was informing you of my intent. Something must be done about Magnussen; Mycroft has been idle and I know that once I am able to catch his attention I can bring him down. In his home he has vaults of information that he keeps on everyone of any particular usefulness or influence. It’s called Appledore.”

“I don’t care,” she snapped. “He could call it Mordor or Hogwarts: I don’t care. You cannot do this to yourself. What if addiction sets back in? Hmm? Have you not thought of that?”

“My constitution for the case is stronger than the desire for a high, thank you.”

There was an inkling of satisfaction in the tone of his voice that she was able to dissect from his statement. “You’re one of the best actors I’ve ever met; what makes you think that I’d believe you?”

“Trust,” he voiced monotone.

Shannon snorted. “You and I both know that to get to something that you or I needed, we would be perfectly and ethically ‘fine’ acting…or lying. I trust you as much as you trust me. But I follow your lead a little less blindly than he does.”

The detective’s mood soured. “I wasn’t asking for your permission, Miss Byrns,” Sherlock snarled, “Everything is already in place. I’ve been working on it for some time and now fortuitous circumstances have arisen. Janine, the bridesmaid, is Magnussen’s personal assistant. I couldn’t have wished for a better way in to that office!”

“You were up all night planning; that’s how you knew I was playing, you dick.”

“Yes, but that’s not the point. I have it all mapped out; start to finish. With Smallwood propelling me forward to the case, that maniac won’t be able to stay in business. I’ll be able to get into Appledore and take down Magnussen.” His eyes brimmed with excitement while his partner’s reflected fire. “Imagine – all of the information that he has stored there!”

“Stop it, Sherlock. You realize that not only do you have repercussions from this endeavor; I’m going to be here! John is going to come snooping about eventually. Stop. Don’t get ahead of yourself.”

He smirked, “That’s taken care of. Especially now that you’ve healed from the gun runners and the Etchya case is finished, you can be utilized outside of London.”

Her eyes widened and her breathing became shallow. Stop, calm down – he didn’t mean to say it like that. You’re not a soldier or an object to him. You’re his friend; as fucked up as that is. He didn’t mean to imply that he’s utilizing me. Calm down. Slow down your heart rate; kill the adrenaline. Nope – fuck it. I’m pissed off.
She swung her arm wide and tried to make contact with his face. He grabbed her wrist and kept her open palm from making contact with his left cheek. “Stop.”

“Let go of me,” she hissed. “I can’t believe this is what you want to suggest as a possible in to a case! You would have me ignore the fact that you’d be on drugs. Diluted or not, you could risk getting back to the high and addicted. Again.”

Calculating eyes examined her features in great detail before the voice to them hissed, “I’m a little better than that now, thank you.” Disgusted, he threw her hand to the table; then proceeded to recline back in the chair. “I didn’t realize that you, who claim to know me well enough, would have so little faith in me.”

“Oh, that’s rich. This, coming from you, after I just said that you and I would use each other and be okay with the fact if it was for the betterment of a case,” she spat. She folded her hands into her lap to try and restrain herself from actually hitting him.

“It’s already taken care of,” he replied.

“Come on, Sherlock!”

“I said it’s done. You’ll be going to Scotland to teach at the University of Glasglow. You start on Tuesday. You’ll be teaching master classes or something along those lines. You’ll be gone for over a month. You say that you like to teach – so teach. On the mantle are your tickets – you leave today.”

Her arms crossed angrily across her torso and her face contorted into a snarl. “Fine.”

Sherlock’s eyebrow shot upwards in skepticism. “That’s it? Good. Well then, I’m glad that this is resolved.”

“Oh no – we aren’t done here, Sherlock. You are going to answer my questions. Why, when you concocted this idea, didn’t you tell me? Hm? Why is it that now that you have a means to use and get rid of me that you decided it’s a good time to let me know I’m going to Scotland? How long have you been thinking about this?” her voice cracked.

“Well, actually…”

“Shut up – I’m not done,” she barked a sharp reprimand. “Pretend, for a moment, that I was John. Would you have told him? Have you told him? Will you tell him? For God’s sake! Is being my friend or, at the least, taking my time mean so damn little to you that you couldn’t have spared a single moment to let me in on the game? You know full well that I would have gotten over it in a day or two and been willing to help you.”

With vacant expression, the detective sat there in silence waiting for her to finish.

“You may not consider me a friend, Sherlock Holmes, but at the very least I’m a confidant. Why do you do this shit to me? To me and John? Jesus Christ, Sherlock – you infuriate the hell out of me.”

“I don’t tell you these things because they aren’t pertinent at the time I come up with them. And, based on your emotional reaction – do you think it would have differed had I told you then versus now?”

“Yes!” she hollered while standing up. The chair fell over backwards with a loud thud. “Damn it! Do you understand that, for God knows what reason, I will do whatever I can to help you? This
country – this government…it would be razed to the ground before I betray you. Why? You’re an asshole, insensitive, condescending, and ignorant! But here I am to help and this is what I get to work with.”

“I do believe that Mycroft would stop you before you could destroy his precious government,” he chortled.

Her face grew sterner with each wave of his laughter, “It’s not funny. I am not afraid of your brother at all. His threats are all empty. He knows that if prompted and tempted that I would make him the largest laughingstock of governmental history. He wouldn’t be able to stop me, Sherlock; and you know that you wouldn’t be able to either. I prefer to fight as a good guy. So stop laughing.”

Sherlock’s mirth dissolved and he stared out the window deep in thought. He heaved a heavy and lazy sigh before looking back to her, “Your terms?”

“You’re going to call me every two days. I don’t care when in that time period, but it’ll be every two days. And not texting – you will call. If you do not; not only will I make it so that you’ll never be able to get close to Magnussen again, but I will tell your brother exactly what you’ve been doing,” the musician commanded. Her voice was empty and icy. It didn’t settle well with her normal demeanor.

Sherlock’s mouth gaped in protest, “I am not a child!”

“No, you’re not. But I’m treating you the same courtesy you treated me by not telling me what was going on. Now you have to deal with ultimatums.”

“I cannot begin to try and keep cover if I have to keep checking in with a babysitter,” he seethed.

“You’re clever. Figure it out. But I swear that I will dissolve this case in front of you if you don’t follow through.”

He began to pout and scowl, “Great. Parameters. Fantastic. That’s wonderful for trying to create a backstory. Anything else?”

Shannon stomped over to the mantle and grabbed the train tickets she spotted in an abrupt flourish. Storming back to where he had been sitting, she leaned down to his ear and whispered, “If you test anything other than trace – I will beat it out of you. You’ll never touch it again. Am I understood?”

The detective stared straight ahead and his lip curled into a snarl as he muttered a quick, “Fine.”

Sherlock’s eyes didn’t follow her as she barreled down the stairs to pack. He swallowed a heavy gulp of his tea and glared down at his breakfast. How does she expect me to work with this kind of restraint? Honestly. She infuriates me. She’s obstinate and stifling. He heard the door to her room open and shut and then, the slamming of the front door.

Sherlock flinched lightly from the sound. Oh, and now she’s being testy.

He continued to sit there in silence and deep in thought for quite some time until he was interrupted by Lestrade standing in his sitting room.

“…Sherlock, have you heard a word that I’ve said?” he groaned.
The dark haired man inhaled sharply and looked up at the officer, “Lestrade? Good – you’re here. I want you to arrest Shannon.”

“Arrest her? For what? I wasn’t even talking about that!”

He stood up and began to pace about the area, “She’s being a nuisance. I’m sure that you can find some reason to arrest her. Make one up.”

“If this is because you two had a domestic; I don’t want to know. Where is she?”

“Scotland. She is teaching at the University of Glasgow. Some sort of master class series.”

Lestrade looked down at the table and saw her half eaten breakfast. “Left in a hurry?”

“She got up late.”

“Uh huh.” He paced about and passed a rough hand through his hair. “Listen. Did you hear a word that I said earlier?”

“No – was it important?”

The detective moved to the doorway, “Apparently not if it didn’t catch your attention. I’ll figure it out.”

“Good…we can’t have The Yard knowing that I do the majority of the thinking for you.”

“Don’t make her angry,” Lestrade warned as he turned toward the stairs. “I wouldn’t want her as an enemy.”

Greg left in silence. Sherlock looked to his watch and noted it was after seven; went to his room, dressed, and then made his way out into the city. Now, where to first?

Her fingers moved expertly across her mobile screen when she was sending out a mass text to those that mattered, but Shannon was distracted.

Sherlock Holmes; John; Mary; Molly; Greg Lestrade; Mrs. Hudson; Dickhead

This is a mass text, and sorry to those of you who happen to be indisposed right now…
I got a teaching job for the next few weeks doing masterclasses at the University of Glasgow.
I’ll be home periodically; but I won’t be around as much. Sorry for the late notice. It was spur of the moment.
-Shannon

Annoyance:
How wonderful. The wedding not sitting well with you either? Sympathy pains? Tut tut.
-MH

Dickhead:

How is it that you respond so quickly to my messages, Mycroft? Are you always waiting for them? That’s so sweet and disturbing of you.

Annoyance:

Hardly.
-MH

Dickhead:

Then leave me be. It didn’t need a reply, jackass. I really don’t want to start my trip with you as a ‘Debbie-Downer’. Go away.

Annoyance:

Who’s watching my baby brother if the Watson’s are away?
-MH

Dickhead:

Considering that he’s an adult, intelligent, and a pain in the ass? You. He’s your responsibility because he’s your brother.
Bye, Mycroft.

Her lips curled into a soft frown and she heaved a weighty sigh. The train approached the station at London Euston with a groan and she shouldered her bag. I just need to hate him right now. That’s all. At its halt, the doors opened and she made her way to the first class car. At least he had the forethought at the time to get me a first class ticket when he ordered it. The jackass. I wish I could disbelieve that he’d do something like this; but it is Sherlock.
Her bag was safely stowed away and she made her way to her seat in silence. The car was quiet and she was able to sit and breathe. Her agitation was beginning to dissolve as she was settling into the chair.

Byrns:

*You do know he gets to all of us, right? It’s not just you. So what did he do this time?*

Lestrade:

*Ha. No, I know that. It’s fine – I just had applied for this gig a while ago and didn’t hear about it until the day before the wedding. It’s part of the reason I couldn’t go.*

Lestrade:

*And to answer your question, he’s just being his charming, prattish self.*

Byrns:

*Right. Not surprised. I stopped by earlier and he was more distant than normal. Let me know when you’re back in London … we’ll talk.*

The train heaved and sped northward. Her mind began to quiet, relishing in the lack of company. *Damn it, Sherlock.* She sulked and tried to doze off. Her eyes began to grow heavy and a warm, welcome heaviness settled over her chest.

“Miss… Miss? Your ticket please,” the coachman asked kindly.

Shannon was thrown from the comfort of sleep back to reality as she began to fumble with her pocket to get the ticket. “Sorry. I must have dozed off. Here you are.”

The coachman looked over the ticket, stamped it, returned it and smiled, “Thank you; enjoy the
rest of your trip to Glasgow. If you missed the last announcement, there will be a trolley coming through shortly.”

“Thank you,” she replied before nestling back into her seat. Groggily she glanced at her watch and noted she’d only been on the train for two hours. Her anger at Sherlock had begun to dissipate. *To be fair, I would have done the same thing…I just wish he would have told me. Wait. No – fair is fair. I did do the same thing back with Moriarty and saving the boys. It’s just not as fun now.*

She sulked a moment or two more before grabbing her mobile and staring at the messages section. She tried typing out a short message to the detective before she decided against it and stowed her phone away.

“Damn it.”

Chapter End Notes

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Sorry it's been so long, everyone.
I am back from England and will be doing some serious writing here soon!
It was a cute little B&B just under half an hour from Glasgow. The owners had done well with the upkeep and décor: it was light and airy inside with wonderful mod-cons. The room she was to stay in was in exceptional order with large windows and gorgeous bedding.

“Now, young lady,” the woman answered, “If you should need anything, my husband and I will be here the whole day your first night in. That way you can get settled.” Her accent was thick and wonderful – and very Scottish. Jennifer was a stout woman with pale blue eyes, a round face, and dark hair with strays of grey peeking through. Her husband, Joe, was tall and lanky in stature. His face was hard with dark eyes, but his disposition was that of the stereotypical ‘cool uncle’.

“No problem, dearie. That’s fine. Now, the gentleman that made your reservation said you’ll be working at the University, yeah?”

“Jen, please. My mother calls me Jennifer,” she shivers. “I always feel like I’m in trouble when people say Jennifer.” Her hearty laugh rang through the room.

Shannon smirked, “Of course. I want to preface that I may get a phone call later tonight or tomorrow, and I apologize now if it wakes you. A friend of mine is… well, he’s changing his work schedule and will be working nights.”

“Thank you, Jennifer,” Shannon replied.

“Jen, please. My mother calls me Jennifer,” she shivers. “I always feel like I’m in trouble when people say Jennifer.” Her hearty laugh rang through the room.

Shannon smiled, “Of course. I want to preface that I may get a phone call later tonight or tomorrow, and I apologize now if it wakes you. A friend of mine is… well, he’s changing his work schedule and will be working nights.”

“No problem, dearie. That’s fine. Now, the gentleman that made your reservation said you’ll be working at the University, yeah?”

“Yes, hopefully daylight hours – I haven’t really gotten into all of it. It was kind of thrown on my last minute.”

Joe walked into the landing and smiled, “Your bag’s upstairs. Would you like me to take your other bag up?”

“No, thank you. It’s a trumpet, so it’s light enough.”

“You didn’t realize you were going to be teaching?” Jen asked with a quizzical brow. “But this reservation was made weeks ago.”

Shannon laughed, “Yeah – that’s because the guy who was supposed to be teaching got sick. I’m the replacement. Hopefully they like me. It was really last minute.”

Jen waved it off with a smile and motioned upstairs, “Go check your room out. Also, there’s a festival about the village tonight if you’re interested. Something small we do just about every year… It’s got some great food and such if you want to get out.”

“Thank you both for being so nice to me. I’ll do my best to not be any sort of bother!” she sighed. Shannon nodded, made her way up the narrow steps, and found her room. It was quaint and neat. There was ocean blues everywhere with stark white accents and linens for contrast. It’ll work. I’ll just pretend that I’m at the beach. A very cold…Scottish…beach… I’m sleepy.
Her phone buzzed angrily for her attention. She looked at the time on her bright screen and made a mental note that she’d been out for the better part of almost two hours. Whether I was sleeping or zoning out is another discussion.

“Hello?”

“Shannon! I’m glad I caught you! Is this a bad time?”

“No, Molly,” she sighed, “It’s not. I just took a nap and woke up, what’s up?”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

She shook her head in silent frustration, “Why are you sorry? I woke up before you called. It’s cool.” It’s just a small lie. “Are you alright?”

“Tom and I had a fight. About what happened at the wedding.”

“Are you alright?”

She gave a nervous chuckle, “Oh yes, I’m fine. It’s just – he said that; well he just said mean things to me. And I did the same.”

Shannon pinched the bridge of her nose. “Molly…”

“But what if he’s not for me? I can’t honestly be with someone that can’t accept my friends!”

“Molly…” she groaned.

The timid girl continued without hesitation, “…and if he can’t accept you all, he can’t accept me, and then what am I supposed to do?”

“MOLLY!” Shannon growled into the receiver, “Calm down!”

“Sorry – I just…sorry…” the timid woman immediately recoiled.

She took a breath, “Listen – people fight, squabble; disagree – it’s what we do. What matters is how you continue from this point right now. So just be calm, think, and talk about it. Do not go to bed tonight angry. Now, I want you to hang up and go for a walk. Get some of that energy out of you; I can hear it. Go on. You can call me tomorrow.”

“But…Shannon…” she grumbled.

“No,” she retorted motherly. “You heard me, young lady. March. Go on!” Shannon promptly hung up the phone and went down stairs. Joe was in the kitchen working on dinner.

“Question for you, sir: Which way is the festival?”

His eyes were brimming with mirth and his voice was warm as he said, “Out the front door, go up the next street. You best cut through the car park next to the shop. Make a right and keep going. You can’t miss it!”

“Fantastic. I think I’ll be out tonight. I want to get a feel for everything while I’m here. If you leave me a plate, I can heat it up. I don’t want to be too much trouble for you.”
“No trouble at all, dearie. Go explore. Have fun!”

Shannon ran back upstairs, shoved her wallet into her backpack and pocketed her phone. With her bag then shrugged onto her shoulders, she made her way out the door and into the village. The grey clouds in the sky was slowly gaining a gradient of pastels from the sun’s decent to the horizon.

*Dont go to bed angry. Pfft. I’m great at giving advice to other people – but, honestly…if she had to deal with him like I do – I mean honestly. Twat.*

She looked at the various booths that were set up along the street. The people were warm and kind and she bought a few knick knacks to give to friends back at Baker Street. But the food – that was what she fell for. *Probably for the best; my stomach’s been growling at me for a few hours. I could probably take a good stab at eating a moose. In its entirety. I’d probably get sick. But hey. A moose.*

*BZZZTT. BZZZTT. BZZZTT. BZZZTT.*

“What is this? Magic hour?” she asked herself as she unsheathed her phone and placed it to her ear. The vendor handed her a deep-fried sausage and some chips. “Hello?”

“You’re positively a pain.”

“Oh. It’s you.”

“Who did you think it would be,” the baritone voice rumbled through the speaker. “Who would possibly be calling you?”

“Oh, the whole four plus hours of the train ride was fine; yes, the B&B will be fine, thanks,” she seethed.

“Good. Glad you covered that; wasn’t interested…”

Shannon growled and hung up on him. *Nope. Absolutely not. This is not how this is going.*

*BZZZTT. BZZZTT. BZZZTT. BZZZTT.*

“Sherlock.”

“You hung up on me.”

She took a bite of her chips, “Astute of you.”

“I am having one of those instances in society called ‘conversation’. Stop being rude.”

“Rude?” she choked. She began to cough and sputter, “Me? *cough* Are you kidding? *cough* You must be joking!”

“Instead of choking on the fair food, you should try taking a sip of water or controlling your breathing.”

Upon hearing a snort in the background, Shannon scowled and hung up on him again.
Sherlock peeled his mobile from his ear and looked at it in disbelief. “She’s hung up on me for the second time. You honestly expect me to call her again?” he queried with an annoyed shock in his voice. “She’s being volatile and highly unreceptive to your idea.”

Lestrade sat on the couch with his face in his hands while doing his best to stifle his laughter.

“And now you’re laughing? I don’t know why you find this endeavor to be so humorous unless that was your intention from the start,” the detective bristled.

The inspector looked up and shook his head, “Now hold on a minute, Sherlock. You called me over here because you thought on what I had said a few hours ago and wanted my advice. I gave it to you. You need to apologize to her for whatever it is you’ve done. Even if you think you haven’t done anything, you know full well that she wouldn’t be acting this way if you hadn’t.”

The dark haired man stood staring out the window, flipping his mobile nonchalantly in his hand. “She’s a teacher. You would think that she would be ecstatic at the opportunity.”

Greg stood up and walked over to his accomplice and patted his shoulder. “Try again. This time, just start with ‘I’m sorry’ and see how that goes. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I do have work to do.”

“No. You and I both know that I’ve done it for you. File’s on the kitchen table: it’s annoyingly mundane and simple.”

Greg sighed and scooped up the files on his way out, “Call her back, Sherlock. Seriously.”

BZZZTT. BZZZTT. BZZZTT. BZZZTT.

“For fuck’s sake, Sherlock – what part of you being a dick and my hanging up did you not understand!?”

“I’m sorry.”

“If you…”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, Sherlock, you’re not!” she snarled.

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t keep repeating it and hoping that you’ll get the desired outcome. That’s not how apologies work, remember? John socked you a few times over the course of that night.” Sherlock was silent on the other end. She took the opportunity to continue, “You’re using my absence as a means to an end for your cover, so don’t pretend that you’re sorry.”

“I am. Sorry.”

“Who came and told you to apologize? Was it Mrs. Hudson?”

“What? No, she’s out for the evening. I won’t be seeing her much over the next week,” he offered casually.

She pondered a moment and smirked, “Lestrade told you to be nice to me, didn’t he?”
“And how did you come to that conclusion?”

“He texted me when I was on the train, more or less…and I’m pretty sure that was him that snorted in the background.”

He groaned, “I am sorry that I’ve upset you.”

“Sherlock, you know that I wish I could believe that, right?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Then you know why I’m cross with you.”

“Yes,” he allowed.

She stopped at one of the nearby benches, sat, and continued to much on her food. “You also know that I won’t be mad at you for long, yes?”

“Correct.”

She squinted in curiosity, “Then why call me at all? Lestrade, right?”

“Obviously.”

“I’m glad we’ve had this chat. I’m sure you’ve got something far more important than talking to me to do.” He began to speak, hesitated, and grew silent. “…Sherlock?”

“Well, no, actually, I’ve done my work for the night. I’m staying here at Baker Street until tomorrow. Then I’ll be hitting the streets. There’s a few dens around that I’ll be palling around in,” he chuckled in a poor attempt to lighten the conversation.

Shannon tossed the last of her food into the bin and ran a clean hand through her hair. “I meant every word that I said.”

“I know.”

“Every two days.”

“Two days,” he agreed.

She gazed up to the darkening sky, “Please, if not for me because you may not care, then for John: be careful.”

Slightly embarrassed – Embarrassed, by her? What is this? – Sherlock stared down to the street below. He noticed that he was pouting some and that he felt, as some could describe, disappointment in himself.

“Sherlock, please.”

His voice was quiet and low, “John aside: I would do that for you. I will.”

She closed her eyes and held her breath. This moment, here, as far away as he is, is the closest I may ever get to the Sherlock that resides within Sherlock Holmes. I feel it as if he were here sitting with me on this bench. This moment here is the Sherlock that’s not a part of Mycroft’s molding. And as quick as its inception to this conversation – it’s gone.

“Thank you. I start tomorrow.”
“Yes, you should go back to the B&B and rest. I suspect that if you get up at seven you will get to
the University with plenty of time to acclimate yourself before meeting with the head of the
department,” he responded methodically.

She stood up and walked towards her temporary home. Perhaps trying to distance myself will help
ease any guilt I’ve got. She yawned, “Goodnight, Holmes.”

“Shannon.”

The detective ended the conversation and pocketed his phone before sitting in silence for the
remainder of the evening.
I should probably play some tonight, for I’m sure time for that will be sparse in the near future.

Nope. I still feel guilt. Thanks for that, Sherlock.

Shannon spent the rest of her walk in contemplative silence. She entered the B&B, waved at the
owners and moseyed up the narrow stairs to her room. She perched herself in the chair and stared
far off into her own world while she began to wrestle with her conscience. It’s not as if I have done
anything similar…more or less. Besides, he’s an adult. And he’s older than me. Not to mention
that he attempts to be smarter than me always. She grumbled to herself before showering and
readying for bed. It’s just that I’m so much better at this – and he knows it. Why won’t he let me
work?

Damn it, Sherlock; why? Why wouldn’t you let me do this?

Chapter End Notes

To one and all, I LIIIIIVE. *sits up like Frankenstein*

I'm terribly sorry about the time between posts. Between real life and my computer
dying, it's been kind of hectic here at the Author Abode. I'm sketching out the next set
of chapter and hope to start updating again with some sort of normalcy. To those of
you that have stopped by regularly since it's creation, (and those of you that have
joined recently,) thank you for taking the time to read! And welcome to this little
fragment in my mind's creativity.

In the next few months, I'm going to be going back through the story that's already
been posted and start editing it. I wrote so much of this first three stories in haste
(because they came from a series of dreams and I didn't want to lose anything, to be
honest,) that I wasn't nearly thorough enough with typos, etc.

As always, your thoughts and comments are appreciated. Hopefully, I'll catch you all
with an update far sooner than this past.

-A
Grey light softly filtered through the sheer curtains of her room. It was sometime before seven, for her alarm had not yet sounded. Shannon stirred and woke, quietly padding about her room and dressing for the day.

*I have no idea what they expect from me at this camp thing. I don’t even know what I’m supposed to be teaching…or doing. Wouldn’t it be a kick in the nuts if Sherlock has me working as a babysitter or as someone working desk. I mean – there’s nothing wrong with that… It’s just that’d be my luck: promised gold and given pyrite.*

Shannon made her way to the university, checked in with staff, and found that she was to be teaching a class once a day on integrating percussion into the general music scene. *Fabulous. Let’s hope I paid attention in school. Dave. I should call him.*

Her class met at eleven, (right before their midday meal,) and she successfully managed to dodge a bullet. She and her students played introductory games so as to get to know one another and find their strengths and weaknesses before they delved into the unit. During her meal hour, Shannon dialed a memorized number into her phone and listened intently to the ring as she waited.

“*Hello?*”

“Dave.”

“Shannon?! Oh my God! You haven’t called me in forever! How’ve you been?”

“Not bad; better, I guess. You know, after all that happened. Did some traveling.”

Dave replied, “Yeah, you said that before you went off a year or so ago. Where’d you go? Shame you couldn’t have been in London for more than a few hours with your connecting flight.”

“I know,” she lied. Her mind flashed back to spending time with him in London and then having to wipe herself from him and his students. “There was just no way that I was going to be able to swing that.”

“As far as where? Oh, I don’t know. A little here, there; everywhere. I was in the Nordic countries for a while…I went back to Morocco, visited Eastern Europe…you know. A little bit of everywhere. You?”

“Well, I lived in London for that stint – but I’ve moved back home and all that. Family issues and all. But, yeah, gigging a lot, working on making a private studio. So yeah – all’s good, I think.”

“I have a question for you, then,” she chuckled. The two old friends spent nearly the entire hour talking about the class she was doing and repertoire she could put in front of her students.

When she ended the call, she put her head in her hands and realized she had begun to cry. *Why? Why is this bugging me? I don’t understand. Why? I’m not sad, at least I don’t think I am. And I’m not overly ecstatic either. WHAT?*

After she had calmed down some, food was had, she helped out in other classes, and then the day was done. She returned back to her sanctuary at the B & B and waited. If this was how the rest of
the summer was going to go, she was going to be miserable. *It’s a shame, really, because this used to be my passion. I lived and breathed this. It was what I lived for. But now? I guess tomorrow is another day.*

Day two followed in similar fashion: Get up, go to school, meet with staff, meet with students, teach lesson, help out in other classes, meet with staff again, go home, eat, play trumpet, study music literature, eat tea… She felt as if this was already exceedingly repetitive.

Shannon waited, however, for her phone to ring. Anything. Something. Even if it were a three second call, it was acceptable. *But maybe I’m waiting for it to not ring...just so that I can go back home.*

She was in the middle of reading over some musical scores when her phone buzzed with a call. The number was blocked. *Well, there’s a surprise.*

“Hello?”

“Shannon Byrns,” an eerie voice sighed over the phone.

Her features hardened as she listened for anything and everything that could identify her caller, “She’s outside right now, who’s calling? I’ll go get her.”

“Oh, no,” the male voice chirped, “Not to worry. Just an old friend of hers. She and I know a man called Milo. Milo Etchya. Just wanted her to know I was in the area.”

“Milo? Okay. And your name?”

The call terminated immediately. She tried to recall if she heard anything in the background but it was silent. There was nothing. No birds, bells, cars…nothing. *Damn it. And I don’t recognize the voice. This could make Scotland interesting.*

Shannon had spent most of the night deep in thought mentally preparing herself should she have to fight. “There,” she muttered triumphantly, “The room’s set. I’ve got stuff stashed everywhere. Now… what to do? I could read. Practice? Meditate – that sounds good.”

Breathing deeply, she began to clear her mind and focus on her own quiet energy. It was soothing and reassuring. She felt grounded and connected to everything around her and for a moment she had forgotten what a cacophony her life had become.

*BZZZT. BZZZT. BZZZT. BZZZT.*

She was startled back to reality by the sound and reached instinctively for her phone. The caller had their number blocked. *Great. Again?*

“Hello?”

“Don’t feign surprise.”

She sighed, “Jesus. It’s just you.”

“Just me? What kind of greeting is that? What happened?” Sherlock grumbled.

“The reassuring kind,” she responded as she stood up. “It’s nothing I can’t handle. I’ll be fine.”
His voice grew quiet and dark, “I didn’t send you there to be in danger; what happened?”

“There was a caller. It was a blocked number, so I thought it was you. I answered and he knew my name. He kind of…sighed it. Like he was almost gleeful it was me. But all he said was that he knew Etchya and wanted me to know he was in the area.”

“Did you...” he started.

“Of course. I told them I was outside and I could go get ‘me’ if they wanted. I asked for a name and they hung up.”

He was silent for a moment before continuing, “Tell me more.”

She thought hard and recalled as much as she could about the speaker. “He was breathy – creepy-like. And way too happy. But I didn’t hear anything in the background. Not a TV, radio, boat, bird; nothing.”

“Everywhere that I’m thinking of you’ve more than already considered, so we shall do our best to skip that part of the conversation,” he yawned.

“Exactly,” she agreed. “How are you?”

“Fine.”

“Sherlock.”

“I’m fine.”

“Sherlock!” she said more sternly.

“Shannon,” he groaned, “I am fine. I will be sleeping on a bench tonight. No, you do not get to know where. I’ve met with a dealer and I’ve begun buying off of him. Everything is going according to plan; but if this is to continue, I demand that you not pry so much as to possibly blow my cover.”

She looked at her watch and groaned. “It’s four in the morning. Get some sleep and do take care, do you hear me? It’s not all a barrel of laughs up here either. And I demand you be in one piece when I get back. Understood?”

“Quite.”

The silence in her room was deafening to her. She felt as if her mind was traveling at the speed of light. Every idea that presented itself concerning her caller was immediately replaced by another, more sinister than the one before. She was alone for the first time in a long while – more alone than when Sherlock was ‘dead’.

The days followed in similar fashion – she went to work, came home and practiced, walked around the village, and on even days – waited for Sherlock to call. It was all rather boring.

As she would venture out on her walks, Shannon began to create maps in her head of Erskine. It reminded her, in a lot of ways, where she grew up; specifically the people. There’s something to be said when you ‘click’ with people.
The walk along the River Cylde and subsequent bike rides to venture further out into the area brought her to some lovely cottages near the Kilpatrick Hills. It was beautiful. *I could do with staying here a while. Now, to bike back.* She noticed that, upon reentering the village, Shannon began to get an eerie feeling that she was being watched. It wasn’t something that she hadn’t thought of, considering the phone call from two weeks prior: if anything, it was confirming her suspicions.

On her return back to the B&B, she had wound around side streets, car parks and such before entering the premises silently. Jen was happily watering some flowers when she noticed Shannon standing in the room.

“Hello, dear, everything alright? You gave me a bit of a start there!”

“I’m sorry,” she said with sincerity, “I didn’t mean to do that. I had a question for you, though; and I don’t want to cause any offence.”

“Yes, go right ahead, dearie.”

“I’ve been having some problems sleeping; I want to say it’s probably the noise outside. And that’s not your fault,” she quickly interjected. Jen’s smile waivered a moment, “I’d want you to keep the payment you have for my stay; but would you hate me terribly if I slept elsewhere? I’m sorry. That sounds so rude.”

Jen thought for a moment and smiled again, “Dearie, it’s alright. I’m not offended. I’m sorry that you haven’t been sleeping. But you do whatever it is that you have to do. We’ll refund…”

“You certainly will not,” Shannon interrupted playfully stern. “You’re going to keep that payment, in full. No questions! I’m the one who has the issue here and you, my good lady, are not going to get a different answer from me on this one.”

Jen laughed heartily as Shannon continued, “Besides, if I could sleep here, I would. I like this place quite a bit, you know.”

“If that’s the case, then the least I can do is have the husband take your things up to wherever you’re going. You just let us know when,” she smiled and went back to her business.

Shannon quickly scaled the steps and sat at the desk in her room, called the cottage, and booked the smallest one for herself. She may have name dropped here and there; but Mycroft would probably only know when he noticed a deduction on his bank statement. *Minor details. I’m sure he won’t be too upset, considering that Sherlock has probably done far worse.*

The couple aided her in moving all of her belongings to the cottage. The new accommodations were quiet and secluded enough that Shannon could oversee everything and do her best to watch all that would come her way. She stood out on the hill; her gaze soaking in all that lay before her. *Yes. This’ll do nicely.*

A few weeks had gone by and her routine was constant: she made sure not to deviate so as to cover all bases. And she knew it for a fact: *I am being watched.*
Her calls from Sherlock were always erratic anymore; and incredibly short. In their agreement, it was never really stipulated how long the phone call had to be. His past four calls were less than ten seconds long in total.

*I suppose, to be fair, that’s because I never really got that far into my ultimatum…well, that was silly. Besides, he knows that I can handle myself. Honestly; I’m not a baby. I did pretty fine without him all that time prior to his ‘revival’. He can deal with it.*

Shannon had begun to keep a log for when she noticed things out of place in her cottage, or if certain faces were new and/or became increasingly familiar. She would jot down other notes and random thoughts in the event it would help trigger a memory later. Her book never left her side, for it was always in her bag.

Peers and students at the University believed that those sheets were covered with staves and secret melodies that one day would come to light. *That’s fine with me. They can believe whatever it is they like. That just makes all of this easier, I suppose.*

She had written in her journal that she was near positive about being followed and left evidence of someone having been in her cottage when she hadn’t been there. That night, after work, Shannon took her written pages and sent them to Baker Street under Sherlock’s attention and a separate letter to Mycroft.

*It’s time.*

Her walk home had been delayed a few hours and dusk had already begun to fill the sky. She had nothing on her person: no identification, money, or her journal. Her mild apprehension was gone and she strolled down streets and roads that she had surveyed in the weeks passed. Her jewelry clinked lightly as her frame moved through the impending dark. Her shadow figure was near.

Shannon stopped a mile or so from her cottage and sighed, “I suppose you’re ready now, aren’t you?”

A lighthearted chuckle echoed behind her. “Perhaps.”

There was a small, resounding ‘pop’ followed by intense pain. *That’s amusing. A taser? Ha. Don’t taze me, bro. It’s funny in a way.* Shannon passed out and fell into a deep sleep from whatever the attacker dosed her with after he had approached her twitching body.

*Wonderful. I can’t wait to meet my new shadow – time to go to work.*

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for bearing with me, one and all. Bless all of you.
That’s what I said,” Molly stressed. “I haven’t been able to get in contact with her. Last I talked to her was almost three weeks now. It’s as if she fell off the planet. Oh God…you do know who I’m talking about, right?!”

Greg gave an exasperated sigh, “Yes, yes; I know who you’re talking about. Now, hold up a minute…you mean just like that and she’s gone? Not a word to anyone? She usually tells at least one person where she’s off too.”

Molly’s voice grew agitated with nervousness, “Exactly. I can’t get a hold of her at all and she never ignores my texts or calls…usually I get a ring or a text in a day at most. Greg, I’m worried. And, it doesn’t help that Sherlock’s gone off the map as well, so there was no way to see if Sherlock knows anything. Mary said that she had mentioned work, but that was the day of the wedding…that’s why she wasn’t there!”

Greg paced in his office wearily. There’s no way that they both would go off and do something without cluing Molly in. At least one of them would have said something. “Alright. I’ll make a few calls and see what I can find.”

“Thank you. It’s just –“ she faltered.

“I know, Molly. We’ll find her.” When she had hung up, he moseyed to his desk and looked up the number for the university.

After a few hours of digging and setting aside his case load during that time; he had nothing. “She didn’t call and didn’t show. We called the B&B and they forwarded us to the cottage she’s renting, but there wasn’t any answer. We called her residence in London and were told that she was still here in Scotland. After 24 hours, we filed a missing persons report. Is this serious? Is everything alright?”

“I’ve been investigating from her homestead here in London and I am to follow up with Glasgow. Thank you for your time.”

Shannon, what in the name of Christ are you up to?

Three Days Later

“…and that’s all I’ve got,” Lestrade quipped hotly. “So unless you’ve got something else that I haven’t thought of, I’m all ears, John!”

John grew stern over the phone. He had been waiting for some time for Greg to finish his tirade; he was upset that not only could they not get ahold of Shannon, but Sherlock was taking all of this rather hard and not responding to the phone. “Alright, al-alright, Greg. I’ll make a call or two, but I’m not cancelling my plans. I can’t. And see if you can get ahold of Sherlock.”

He hung up his mobile and gazed upon the device in agitation. She can take care of herself. She can take care of herself. She’s just as capable as either of us. Where in the hell is Sherlock?
Mary chimed in from the other room “Who was that, then?”


“I hope not,” she laughed lightly. “What’s he up to now?”

“I don’t know, Mrs Watson. I’m not too bothered by it right now.”

Molly’s apprehension grew with each passing day that she heard nothing from Shannon. Sherlock wasn’t answering his mobile, which wasn’t far from being normal when he had his bouts of being antisocial. But Shannon? This isn’t like her. I mean, since memory wipe thing. She wouldn’t do that again…would she? But I remember her…Greg remembers her… so that’s not it. Where is she?

_The Ninth of September_

Her lips were cracked and swollen. She could feel how swollen her face had become. _Repeated beatings? More than likely._ She cautiously shimmied herself around to get a feel for her surroundings. She was held semi-suspended in the air. She could feel the blood pooling in her face from gravity. _Wristst are tied with two kinds of knots, a mix of rope, cable, and wire. Interesting. Blindfolded? Yes, blindfolded. Knees are resting on the floor, legs tied backward, arms outstretched. Gag. Yes, tastes of blood and cotton. And someone who handled it recently was wearing lotion. Nice stuff, too. She flexed her fingers and winced. Lovely. I have broken fingers. At least three. Damn it._

Shannon’s ears picked another person breathing in her room. It was becoming louder; deeper: _Someone is asleep. Too bad I can’t move, yet._

Time passed in agony. The longer that she was awake, the more encompassing her pain became. She quickly aware of how tired her limbs were from the position she was held in. The back of her right hand was cold. As she flexed into a fist, she felt a mild discomfort and realized that she was hooked up into an IV of some sort. She quickly relaxed her hand and body as she heard her counterpart stir in their sleep.

_Focus,_ she thought angrily to herself, _Calm your damn self. Regulate. Pretend to be asleep. Keep going!_

Shannon went from appearing physically agitated to appearing as if she were in a coma. The other body in the room stirred enough to wake and she heard a quick rustle that must have been the person looking in her general direction to see if she was awake. _Yeah, yeah, fuck you, asshole._

The steps beside her weren’t overly heavy and had a fairly decent gait to them. – _maybe 165 pounds…you’re a spry thing, aren’t you?_ The IV bag was squeezed beside her and the line was checked. Shannon’s hand was checked and the other person grabbed her hair close to the scalp so as to lift her face up.

I soft but disgusted snort was heard and Shannon felt the air brush past her face. There was a brief moment of silence before her captor walked away, dug into a cloth something and tapped on a hard
A phone? Please be a phone. Ninety-nine percent sure it’s a phone.

“Yeah, it’s me,” came a tenor voice from her kidnapper. “I need to talk to the boss.” Shannon thought that she could detect a woman’s voice on the other end of the line. “No, she’s out…cold.” There was a quick jab of words from the higher voice on the phone. “Well, no. You don’t understand what happened. She fought back. …No! That’s what I’m saying,” he hissed. “She fought the taser. …Yes. I hit her with it and she came up swinging when I went to put her into the car.”

Shannon’s ear strained to try and discern what the other voice was saying. Try as she might, however, it just wasn’t working. There was an increasing ringing in her ears that began to throb throughout her entire body. Her chest felt tight. I wonder, is that from my ‘Jesus Hanging off the Cross’ posture or what was in that IV bag? Oh, Christ. Her mind raced. I need to cough. No. Stop. Body, you listen to me...we absolutely cannot cough right now. Stop.

Shit.

Her body wretched violently around in the air as she coughed. Her gag was making it impossible for her to get enough air. She was sure that her nose was broken: she couldn’t breathe. She was going to die.

“Hang on a sec,” the kidnapper muttered into the phone. “SHIT. Hang on, you dumb bitch. Fucking....JESUS!”

The gag fell from her face and she gulped in as much air as she could before her body convulsed with violent coughing. She felt her chest and throat rattle in protest and her face burned in exertion. After the spell had quelled itself, she opted for pretending to pass out from the episode; hoping beyond hope that the man in front of her would by it.

Her head violently fell back down to hang at her chest. Her shoulders felt as if their muscles were slowly ripping away from her bones, but she dare not move.

“Yeah. No…it’s fine. She was trying to cough and the gag...WHAT DID YOU WANT ME TO DO ABOUT IT? Of course I gagged her! You want everyone to hear her? You know what, tell the Boss that when they come to collect that they can yell at me then.” He paused and turned away from her, “She’s passed out again. No, she’s not broken. Her body might be. Yes. Of course. I’ll aim to start extraction in the next hour. Yes. Shall I keep a record?”

His voice conveyed that Shannon was not a person, but rather a thing that could be discarded. He listened to his orders and matter-of-factly retorted, “And if she breaks? Understood. Yes. I do – no remains. Got it.”

Fucking wonderful, Shannon. Way to go. You just had to go and do something utterly imbecilic to show off and now, unless you can figure a way to slip these bindings to get your blindfold off in the next hour, you, dumbshit, are fucked.

Greg walked around her room at the B&B and surveyed what was before him. “You’re sure that no one else has been in this room,” he asked the lady abruptly.

“It’s just like I said,” her burr growing fierce. “She was here, asked if she could go to a cottage up a bit because of the noise and told me that I was to keep the sale. I don’t know what else to tell
you!” Jen was perturbed by the Inspector poking about. “It didn’t feel right to let the room out, just in case she were to come back. Now, if ye like, my husband can take you up to where he dropped her off.”

“Yes, thank you,” Greg replied quickly. “Shall we?”

As he walked up to her cabin, Greg’s stomach began to churn. What if she’s not here? Oh God, what if something’s happened to her? His phone’s ring interrupted his thoughts and brought him crashing hard back to reality.

“Lestrade,” he answered. “Can this wait? I’m in the middle of something.”

“Yes, I know,” replied a cool voice. “This is Mycroft Holmes. I have in my possession a letter from Shannon Byrns. Since it is instrumental to your case, I will read an excerpt of it to you: “If, at any point, my friendship with your brother has meant anything to you, (and this includes those nights I babysat him,) then I need you to look into me. Right now. Call me. See if I answer. If not, look for me.

“I feel that, while I have been up here teaching, that someone has followed me. Someone from Matt’s past. If I am correct, then I have dropped this letter in the post because I now know for certain this to be true.

“I have mailed my journal chronicling this endeavor to Baker Street. There is relevant data there, including a password to activate a monitoring chip I had implanted into my shoe in the event I were to be taken.”

“Detective Inspector, as you know who I am, no doubt from my baby brother, you will understand that Ms. Byrns has, in her possession, very discreet and condemning information in her mind. If that were to get out, we are talking about a new type of warfare that the world isn’t ready for.”

Greg’s heart stopped – he was sure of it. So it’s true. All of that conspiracy theory mumbo jumbo that she talked about. It was real. “I’ll find her. Where’s your brother?”

“That,” Mycroft scoffed, “Is the question of the hour, isn’t it? Sherlock would surely be there if he cared, hmm?”

Greg cursed under his breath. “I’m in Scotland, I’ll send my team over.”

“Don’t trouble yourself, Detective Inspector. I’ve already sent for the journal. I will be activating her beacon within the hour. At that, I expect that you’ll be able to finish the rest.”

Chapter End Notes

I know it’s been forever. I’ve been staring at these pages for quite some time, trying to figure out how best to continue.

I’m going to ride this plot wave through and see it to the end.

Hold on tight.
-A
Animus: The Heart

The Tenth of September

Greg paced about and waited for Mycroft’s call. She most definitely isn’t fine. Christ. If anything’s happened to her, I’ll rip him to pieces. That was assuming that he’d be able to find Sherlock – wherever he was.

Mycroft punched in the code to the application she had installed on his phone. It pinged her location and within ten minutes, he had the first glimpse of where she was. He put his phone to his ear, “Sergeant, get your team together. Now. The coordinates have been sent. Retrieve her alive at all costs.”

Shannon felt her shoe hum near inaudibly under her toes. Thank fucking Christ. It’s about time. She had nearly managed to wrench a hand free from its bindings. The bad part about that was that she was fairly certain that she had broken her thumb to do so. In fact, there was no true way for her to know if she was in bad shape. She couldn’t feel anything. A mix of sweat and blood trickled down her arms. Almost there…

The door flung open and Shannon heard her captor pushing a large wheeled something towards her. “Morning, Precious,” he said, chipper as a lark. “Welcome to the fun house!”

She lifted her head and felt him unknot the blindfold. Her eyes protested at the light. She was overly sensitive and couldn’t focus on anything.

“Ah, that,” he cooed. “That cocktail that you’ve been taking for the past three days does wonders. Homemade recipe. Little bit for the eyes, little bit for the muscles, little bit for making pain worse…it’s lovely. And you’ve got three days of it in your system. Now. You and I have some work to do.”

He leaned down into her face and kissed her hard. “I’ll make you my bitch yet.”

Angry, tired, and feeling as if her body were on fire, Shannon commanded her body to exert force. She slipped out of her restrain and grabbed at her captor’s throat. She applied pressure to it. Nope. Thumb’s not broken. “You’ve made me very upset. Undo the other binding, or I will forcibly rip your trachea out of its resting place,” she spat.

She didn’t realize her own strength. He pulled at her arm with one hand and punched her with the other, but she refused to let go. Her body felt numb suddenly and she could no longer feel the pain. With a slight jerk, she brought him closer to her and wrapped her free arm around his neck. Come on, Shannon. You can do this. Don’t get tired now! She cheered herself on through his struggle.

His body soon grew slack and she felt him lose consciousness. She dropped him in a heap on the floor and collapsed against her bindings, still suspended in the air. She was exhausted and no
doubt she had ingested more of that IV cocktail from her exertions. Flashes of her abuse at this man’s hands danced before her eyes. She may not have been able to defend herself, or have been conscious – but that didn’t stop him from beating and torturing her. Oh…I hope he didn’t mess up my lip. I would eventually like to play trumpet again…wait…what?

She already had an issue with focusing on anything, but now the room was swimming. Perhaps, if she just took a small nap…it would be fine. Someone was looking for her. Her hope rose in her chest. Her heart beat a little more soundly. I wonder if Sherlock got the journal.

Some time later, men dressed in black combat gear carrying guns stormed into the room. They found her captor beginning to stir from his slumber and found their target hanging from a rig that looked as if it could have been out of a Saw movie. The cart beside her had medical instruments, a laptop, and syringes. Whatever had been in store for her was over now.

“Get her down, now!” one of the men bellowed. “Check for a pulse! And this bastard, get him up and into the van. He’s to be taken for questioning.”

The commanding officer grabbed his camera and redirected his mic. “Highlander to The Tower. Target acquired.”

Mycroft stood behind his chair watching the feed unfold on his computer. His forearms rested heavily on the chair back.

“She’s alive.”

Mycroft heaved a heavy sigh. British security. The Empire is safe. His phone buzzed angrily at him and saw that ‘Doctor Watson’ appeared in the caller id.

“Doctor, now is not really a good time for your call.”

“It’s Sherlock.”

Mycroft could hear the subtle and quiet alarm in John’s voice. He swallowed quickly and cordially replied, “And?”

“I found him in a drug den. I’m standing outside of St. Barts. He’s with Molly Hooper right now. God help him when Shannon finds out, if I don’t kill him first.”

“Thank you, Doctor Watson. I’ll be in touch shortly,” Mycroft hung up the phone. He breathed slowly before speaking to his commanding officer in Scotland. “Fly her to The Tower. Immediatey. Follow plan Gamma. Await further instructions.”

“Yes, sir,” the man replied over his comm. “Plan Gamma. Let’s move.”

Mycroft shook his head and made his way to Baker Street. Yes. God willing, she would die on the way here so that Sherlock wouldn’t have to die by her hand instead.

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“What case could possibly justify this?”

Mycroft turned about into the kitchen and looked to those who had been snooping for drugs. Very plainly and firmly, he began, “That name you think you may have just heard; you were mistaken. If you ever mention that name in this room, in this context, I guarantee on behalf of the British Security Services that materials will be found on your computer hard drives resulting in your immediate incarceration. Don’t reply, just look frightened and scuttle.” As soon as they departed, he turned to John and said, “I hope I won’t have to threaten you as well.”

“Well, I think we’d both find that embarrassing.” John chortled. Sherlock snorted off the cuff and looked to his brother’s vacant expression.

“Magnussen is not your business.”

~~~

Once Mycroft left the premises, he received a text that the team had made incredible time on the jet and had touched down at the airfield. She would be taken by chopper to the hospital.

*The Tower:*

*She’s not doing well. We had to stabilize her midflight. Her heart stopped.*

-Commander

Mycroft left in a hurry and went straight to the hospital.

~~~

“Because I do. Right, I’ll see you tonight. I’ve got some shopping to do,” Sherlock announced quickly.

John quirked a stern eyebrow, “What’s tonight?”

As he was heading to the landing, Sherlock replied, “I’ll text instructions.”

“Yeah, I’ll text you if I’m available.”

“You are; I checked!” he hollered up the stairs.

They both exited 221 Baker Street. John noticed that Sherlock was in an obvious hurry.

“Don’t bring a gun.”

“Why would I bring a gun?” he asked, exasperated.

“…or a knife or a tire lever; probably best not to do any arm-spraining but we’ll see how the night goes.”
“You’re just assuming I’m coming along?” Watson quipped.

“Time you got out of the house, John. You’ve put on seven pounds since you got married and the cycling isn’t doing it.”

“It’s actually four pounds.”

“Mary and I think seven. See you later.” The taxi cab drove off, leaving John to make his way home before their adventure.

Sherlock’s phone pinged at him amicably.

_Blood:_

You need to get to the hospital.
I’m sending you the address now.
-MH

_Brother Mine:_

I’m busy. Working.
Bye-bye.
-SH

_Blood:_

It’s important.
Confidential enough that I will
not text or call you about the details.
-MH.

_Brother Mine:_

Much to do.
Bye-bye.
-SH

Mycroft sighed in agitation whilst sitting in the back of the car. How could he not realize that this was about her? Oh...yes. _Magnussen. He’s blind to everything else but Magnussen. Well, that will give her time to recover some before she gets back to work._

~~~
Shannon’s body was wheeled in through a back entrance and the staff was paid to be discreet. She was to have no file remain in the hospital on record. A gaggle of nurses and doctors flocked to her side as vitals were taken.

“What happened?!” asked a nurse. Shannon’s wounds were ghastly. Her face was swollen and nearly unrecognizable. She had broken ribs, _two_ broken fingers, a dislocated knee, electrical burns to her stomach, contusions on her back, and her shoulders were hyper-extended.

“Get her back together,” Mycroft stated. “Quick as you can. She’s very important to certain people. Your discretion in the matter will be amply rewarded. Should you fail to use that discretion, I can personally see to each and every one of you never setting foot in any hospital ever again; even for your own care.”

The doctor and his staff nodded and got to work.

Little did she know that in the room beside her, Sherlock was fighting for his life. Both of their hearts flat lined within moments of each other. Mycroft stood between the threshold of both rooms. He was torn between family and duty. _Which did he care about more?_

For the first time in quite some time, panic flooded his body. Sherlock and Shannon: dead by their own selfish recklessness on the same day.

“Stupid. Both of you. Stupid, bumbling babies; not a care for your responsibilities. Sensless!” he cried out.

Sherlock’s heart beat an unsteady rhythm. Mycroft turned and looked on, helpless. His brother was fighting for his life. _Too idiotic or stubborn to die_. Once Sherlock’s heart returned to a safer rhythm, Mycroft focused his attention to Shannon.

He entered the room despite the protests of the staff, leaned to her ear, and whispered, “You can’t die. Sherlock’s beside you fighting for his life. He’s going to need you. Fight, you bloody bastard. Fight!”

“Oh no. Sherlock. Did he OD? Is that why Mycroft is here? Did Mycroft have to find me because Sherlock was incapable? I swear to fucking God, I’m going to kill him!”

Her heart skipped a beat and the monitor chirped in response.

“That’s it, old girl. Fight. As much as I will never admit it to your face, he needs you. Now FIGHT!” he whispered coarsely.
I gave you one fucking job. One job with this God-damned Magnussen case.

*beep*

What happened to you, you fucking moron?

*beep*

Why can’t anyone just let me go? Why can’t I just be allowed to die?

*beep – beep*

“I hate you. Sherlock Holmes, I hate you!” her mind screamed.

*beep – beep, beep – beep*

No I don’t. I need to concede that. I hate that I’ve grown attached. I hate that he...that Sherlock, is my weakness.

Her chest heaved upward with immense strain, but her vitals were coming back up. Mycroft collapsed absent-mindedly into the chair behind him.

“Interesting,” he though aloud, “You would do anything for my brother. Just like Doctor Watson. How fortunate that you should be on our side, merely because of him.”

One of the doctors approached while wiping sweat from his brow. “Sir,” he stated, “They are both stable at the moment. Your brother will continue to be monitored closely. What would you have us do with her?”

Mycroft thought carefully for a moment before answering softly, “Doctor, I’ve seen something that I cannot thoroughly explain tonight. I could venture a guess or two, but for now, I’ll reserve judgement. Put them in rooms side by side. Have her monitored, but again; no file is to be kept on her.”

“Understood,” the doctor replied. “I’m putting her into a coma. The extent of her injuries still need to be assessed and until that point, I’m not even sure that she will recover.”

Mycroft nodded silently and looked on as both teams prepped their patients for their next step toward recovery. “Fools,” he whispered under his breath. “Damn, fools.”

Sherlock came to, albeit incoherently, the next day. He heard Mary telling him not to tell John. *John. I’ve got to wake up, John needs me…*

As Mary was leaving, she heard Mycroft’s voice coming from the room beside her and peeked around the corner. The gasped silently at the form lying in the bed. Mycroft was leaving to attend other pressing matters and Mary took the opportunity to slip in.

She looked at the woman lying on the bed and she felt a pang of regret. “All this time with Magnussen,” she chided herself softly, “And no one was there for you when you needed it.” Mary gingerly picked up her chart and began reading off her vitals and ailments.

“You poor girl. Induced coma? Oh dear…” Mary gave a full stop and felt her breath hitch in her throat. Her eyes reread the line twice to make sure that she wasn’t imagining things considering
how yesterday’s events with shooting Sherlock went.

:: Potential brain damage. See CT scan summary. ::

*Brain damage? My God, what did you get in to, Shannon?*

Mary went to leave, but then turned around slowly and sat down in the chair nearest the bed. She took Shannon’s hand and held it. Shannon’s monitors whirred quietly in the background. She had splints on her left hand, robe burns on her wrists, bruises, burns, scrapes, and lacerations on sections of her skin. Her chart read off a pain-killing cocktail that would put a whole mule team to sleep. *Jesus.*

Mary gingerly lifted Shannon’s hand and kissed the back of it. “If anyone is going to listen to me, it would be you. You understand. This life, you see. Shannon,” she choked, “I’ve done some terrible things in my life. I’ve gone and done terrible things yesterday. When you wake up… Sherlock is in the room beside you. “I am confessing to you that I did it. I shot Sherlock.”

Shannon’s heart monitor spiked momentarily before settling back to a slightly elevated level. Mary shed a tear and wiped it away quickly.

“But listen, I’m telling you this because I had to do it to save his life! Do you hear me? It was the only way that I could save him!”

Mary looked to the wounded woman’s closed eyes and then to the heart monitor and watched as her heart rate lowered itself back down and remained steady.

“You would have done the same thing, Shannon. I can’t bear for John to know what I’ve done because I’m afraid I will lose him. He was the only good thing to come into my life and then I met Sherlock and you. It’s Magnussen, you see…that’s why it had to happen. The boys showed up. I had to make a decision. I promise you, that if it could have been different…” she trailed off.

“Shannon, please, wake up,” she whispered. Mary kissed her hand and left the room to go and find John.
Sophus: The Mind

The Eighteenth of September

Janine left Sherlock’s room to go to her next news interview and Mycroft waltzed in. Sherlock groaned, “I just turned down my morphine so that I could focus.”

“Brother, we need to have a discussion.”

Annoyed, he quipped sarcastically, “I can’t move; so I am, *unbearably*, at your mercy.”

Mycroft’s eyes grew stern and his voice snapped, “While you’ve been chasing after Magnussen – when, I might add, I explicitly told you to leave him – you’ve lost sight of something.”

Sherlock eyed him skeptically. “I highly doubt that I’ve missed anything. Except getting shot. That wasn’t calculated.”

“Really,” Mycroft seethed. “Can you walk? Honestly? I have something to show you.”

“If I go, will you leave me in peace to recover?”

“Yes,” Mycroft agreed. “You have my word.”

Sherlock draped his feet over the side of the bed and he gripped shakily onto the IV pole. “And, how far are we going? I don’t want to pull any stitches. Counteractive to healing, you see.”

“Just to the next room. If you will?” Mycroft gestured out the door.

Scowling, Sherlock hobbled across the floor, into the hallway, and opened the door beside him. He kept his eyes on the floor to keep from falling. It was his anchor point. When he looked up, however, he saw a body lying in ruin in a hospital bed.

“And?” Sherlock retorted smugly. “What brings me into this cheery room?”

Mycroft crossed his arms and flared his nostrils, “Look. See.”

The detective took a few steps forward and finally saw what he couldn’t see from the doorway. “Shannon…” his voice cracked.

Suddenly his deductive powers went into overdrive. From the machines that were monitoring her, to those that were keeping her alive, to her charts and then finally to her. He finally saw her. Why didn’t you call me?!

Sherlock sat in the chair beside her with his hands clenching the side of the bed. His knuckles were white and he felt anger boiling in his stomach. “What happened?” he growled.

“She was being followed.”

“Yes, I know that; she had told me. I was to call her every two days to check in with her as part of an arrangement,” he spat. His voice was tense and he was beginning to shake.

“Ah,” Mycroft stated as realization dawned on him. “She knew about all of this…the drugs.”
Sherlock’s rage was nearly at a tipping point. Tersely, he said, “Yes.”

“We don’t know how long he had her or if he got anything out of her. Her captor wouldn’t speak up and she hasn’t woken up from her induced coma. I am currently employing creative techniques to pull information from him.

“She should have been awake two days ago. From her chart, you can gather that she was tortured and beaten. The doctors aren’t sure if she will have brain damage or not. She won’t wake up.”

Suddenly, the great detective’s anger turned to guilt. *I was so focused on Janine and using her to get into Magnussen’s office that I didn’t check in. I didn’t call.*

He placed his head in his hands and sat in silence.

“Little brother, I want you to listen to me. I will only say this once and if you are ever to bring it up again, I shall deny in ever having said it.

“This woman humoured you and did as you asked. She went to Glasgow so that you could ‘work’, as you call it. Whatever deal you struck with her, whatever arrangement you had, it nearly cost her her life AND cost the world what’s locked inside her mind. She protects the world around us by being on our side. Why? Why would she do that, Sherlock, hmm?”


“You. You, little brother, are the reason that she’s on our side. Whatever bond she has with you is what keeps her grounded to the light. Do you realize how easily she could have tipped into the dark after your ‘fall’? Did you think, for one brief moment, that she was an asset to you because of who and what she is?”

“Of course,” he lied poorly. *Why didn’t you come home early?*

Mycroft’s voice lost any softness it had and turned to steel, “I watched both of you die on operating tables within seconds of each other. She was there, in the room beside you, and had been fighting for her life for hours. Hours before you came in. I do not know, nor care to know what brought you back, Sherlock. The point is that you are here. But, do you know what brought her back?”

Sherlock turned his head as if he were a whipped dog. His vacant expression, used only to deter Mycroft from reading his feelings, angered his older brother. He waited for Mycroft to stop, however his elder endured, “I told her you were fighting for your life next door.” Mycroft gathered his coat and umbrella, sniffed audibly in dissatisfaction, and left.

Cautiously, Sherlock reached for her hand and clasped it between his palms. Outside of the gentle mechanizations and beeps from her medical equipment, there wasn’t another sound except his ragged breathing. He brought her hand to his face and held it for a moment before speaking. *What am I supposed to say?*

“Shannon,” he faltered. He turned away from her and felt cold. *Could be the IV…but not likely.* “Shannon, I’ve looked at your chart and some of the injuries that I can see; and,” he paused, “there’s no reason that you shouldn’t wake up. You’ve been through quite a few ordeals that have made you into the human that you are. I know that you could get through this.”

Her heart rate rose for a brief moment. He looked to an absent spot on her blanket and continued, “I don’t know what to say to you. You and John aren’t here to correct me on the niceties in situations like this. I was so concerned with the case and Janine that I missed one of the most obvious clues: you needed my help. And after everything…I got myself shot in the end, if it helps…”
He chuckled quietly in macabre humor. He felt her hand flex between his palms and watched in interest as her fingers did their best to wrap around his hand. Eyes darted to her face and he could see that she was awake.

“Shannon!” he exclaimed.

“Don’t speak,” she croaked. “Water…” He carefully held her cup close enough so that she could drink from it. “I wanted to die, you know.”

Now on alert, Sherlock turned and faced her with a furrowed brow. “Die? From the torture, obviously.”

“Don’t speak,” the injured reiterated sternly. “I am tired, Sherlock. I am tired of this. Is this supposed to be my life from now on? Hmm?”

She wheezed and tried to sit up with no avail. “I remember getting here. It’s hazy…but I remember. I felt them doing compressions and shocking me. But I was tired. I wanted to give in. And then your brother showed up. He said that you were dying beside me…I went in to overdrive. Because I am angry with you.”

Sherlock nodded and leaned back in his chair. “You have rights to be,” he stated plainly. I imagine that you will be collecting on the drug level section of our agreement as soon as you’re able.

Her voice cracked and her eyes welled with tears, “Where were you?”

Ah. Yes. My mended heart. It’s breaking. Again. “Here, working the case.”

She warily wiped her eyes with her more damaged hand and looked over to the consulting detective, “Is this case worth more satisfaction than mine?”

“You know that’s not fair,” he replied taken aback. “That’s not what it is at all. Magnussen preys on the different and exploits them. He’s a bully and he needs to be dealt with!”

She nodded and scrutinized his face for signs of deceit. “Fine,” she countered when she found he was being honest, “We will continue this discussion later. Mary came to visit me.”

Shannon cleared her throat and immediately moved to business, “We need to discuss.”

“Why are you doing this,” Sherlock asked indignantly, “when we should be talking about how we are to solve your case?”

“I don’t want to,” she muttered heatedly.

Sherlock threw his hands in the air in frustration, “I’ve been shot – you died twice! What…is it not convenient to you right now? Look at you! I didn’t recognize you when I walked in; I couldn’t immediately tell it was you in this bed!”

“We don’t have time…and that was probably due to your morphine,” she sniped cruelly.

“Time?! That’s what you’re worried about?” he fumed. He turned to his IV pole and tapped the morphine level down to zero. She wants me to feel the pain? Fine.

“Sherlock Holmes,” she roared, “You will listen to me!” Her battered face shook in rage and her heart monitor sounded an alarm.

A nurse walked in and Shannon waved them off, “Please tell the doctor to come in after my guest
leaves.”

She swallowed hard as the staff member left to fetch the doctor and turned towards him, “Mary came to me some time ago…I don’t know when. But she talked to me…told me things. Confessed as to why she did it. Sherlock, if she is who she says she is – how is she any different from me?”

Sherlock made note to speak, but reconsidered. “Explain…and for the record,” he whispered, “You and I have been here just over a week.”

“Sherlock, your brother lured me from the dead because you need my help. You are my John Watson. I would do nearly anything within my power to help you. Maybe not now, in this state, but – in general.

“Don’t you see?” she continued, “We all balance each other out. It’s a sensitive scale. Think about before the ‘fall’ and tell me that Mary isn’t like me. …tell me that what Mary’s going through isn’t echoing some case from the past where a client turns out to be a secret government project and it went wrong.”

Sherlock sat quietly and looked up at his friend, “I’m sorry.”

Blinking slowly, a weak smile crossed her lips, “I’m sure you will be.”

“Listen,” she held his hand, “You have to try and fix this. For John. For Mary. And you need to start today.”

“What are you saying?” he asked inquisitively. “Oh!”

“I’m asking, that if you ever viewed me as a friend in any capacity, that you take Mary’s case and you solve it. Please,” she implored.

“Of course,” he leaned forward and brushed his thumb over her fingers.

*I am her John Watson. That was unexpected. I never thought that I would be someone else’s point of pressure aside from Mycroft’s.*

“Another favor,” she asked mid-yawn.

“You have a few favors coming your way as is,” he responded with a break of emotion that had been welling within him.

“Before you go, will you stay until I fall back asleep? It’s a reassuring, sentimental reason, purely.”

“Yes, I will.”

Sherlock helped prop her onto her side so that she could be more comfortable. Through the back of her gown, he could see despicable bruising and felt a pang of guilt. Dutifully, Sherlock Holmes stayed at her bedside holding her hand until she fell back asleep. Once gentle snoring could be heard and her hand slacked against his own, Sherlock made his way back to his room and sat down gingerly on his bed while he contemplated his next move. When he emerged from his thoughts, the sun was beginning to set.

“...if you ever viewed me as a friend…” her voice rang out like a bell in his ears. Shannon’s broken voice rang out clearly in the recesses of his mind while it worked quickly to piece together all the events that had happened.

“So,” he pondered aloud, “I’m saving the Watsons now, am I? There’s work to be done.”
Sherlock made his way back to Shannon’s room. He stood there, silently over her and watched her sleep a moment. He soothingly brushed her hair out of her face with his fingers. *That’s why you have your hair back all of the time, isn’t it? You hate feeling your hair in your face.*

“Shannon,” his low voice rumbled deep within his chest. “I’m leaving you to save the Watsons. I can assume that I’ll be brought back here at some point if I rip my stitches in the process. I won’t be gone long. I’m coming back for you. You and I have work to do. I swear it.” He bent down and kissed the crown of her forehead before heading back to his room.

The nurse in the doorway only saw the last moment of Sherlock’s oration and stood slightly taken aback at this show of tenderness.

Sherlock stiffened and shuffled past her to get back to his room, “Yes, yes, I know…I’m going back to my bed. See?”

Nurse Baas followed him into his room to make sure he got back into bed. “So you know her? The patient next door?”

Sherlock glowered at his temporary hindrance from leaving, “Yes. Intimately. I am her best friend.”

“Huh,” Baas nodded in acknowledgement, “We didn’t know that you had a heart.” She turned about to check his IV and then made her way about the room.

“Come again?” he asked in mild astonishment.

“Your brother, he said that you didn’t have a heart. I guess he was talking about her next door.”

His teeth on edge, Sherlock retorted, “I guess that means that I don’t. Mycroft’s never wrong.”

“Bah,” the plump woman shrugged, “I don’t believe that.”

“You don’t? Should I give you explicit examples that would reinforce my brother’s claim?”

She crossed her arms in the doorway on the way out, “No. But you do, in your own way I guess, care about what happens to her.”

The nurse disappeared to go about her rounds before Sherlock was finally able to sneak out the window after his deft hands removed the needle from his IV.

John and Greg made their way up the stairs to the patient’s room. While Greg was happy that Sherlock had been found, Mycroft let him know that the patient next door was their missing American friend.

*Do not exert her. Her body is damaged. Do not let Doctor Watson know that she’s there.*”

Mycroft’s warning was clear and indicated she had been through hell. When they reached Sherlock’s room, he was gone – the window open. It was all rather cliché.

Before turning to follow John, Lestrade quickly popped his head into Shannon’s room to see if she was still there. Forced to do a double take, Greg understood why she hadn’t followed Sherlock. She was destroyed. Her sleeping form stirred from the commotion in the hall and Greg took his leave to catch up with John.

“What?” John asked as Lestrade went down the stairs beside him. “What’s in the other room?”
Greg shrugged nonchalantly. “Nothing, just making sure he wasn’t snooping next door.”
I’ll be back, Shannon. I’m so sorry that I couldn’t get to you fast enough. Someone needs to be with her…Molly. Mycroft said nothing about Molly.

On their way to check Sherlock’s hiding places in London, Greg shot off a message to the quiet woman.

*Molly Hooper:*

Are you able to do a favor for me?
I can explain it all when I return.
Sherlock left the hospital without being discharged.
John and I are out looking for him.

*Greg Lestrade:*

He just left?
I’ve got another hour and a half of work to go yet, but I can help afterwards if you need it, yeah.

*Molly Hooper:*

It’s not that, though we will probably stop to see you. There’s a patient in the hospital that you should see.

*Greg Lestrade:*

Okay…so I should head to the morgue? Does this patient have something to do with Sherlock?

*Molly Hooper:*

Room 217. After your shift, will you go?

*Greg Lestrade:*

Sure…I don’t know why, though.

After an evening of trying to find where Sherlock was hiding in London, Molly finished up her work and made her way towards the other hospital. She carried her bag up the stairs, idly bouncing off her hip and first found an empty room with a few police officers in it. *Sherlock’s*
room...2...1...6...? So...then, 217? Oh God, is it Sherlock?! She hurried past the door into the next room. “Sherlock?” she asked the darkened room.


“Ah. That bad, huh...?”

“Shannon! Oh my God!”

“I was afraid of that.” Hooper bolted to her bedside and stood in silence, morose. “Hey now,” Shannon soothed, “I hear if it weren’t for you, I may not have been found.”

“What?” Molly choked, wiping away the tears from her eyes. “What do you mean?”

Shannon chuckled low in her chest. “I’m saying that your phone call to Greg when I disappeared is what sparked everything.” Her guest sniffed loudly. “If I gather correctly, Mycroft’s men found me, but had Greg not started snooping about in Glasgow, I may not have been found. So I have you to thank for that. Molly Hooper, thank you for saving my life.”

The small woman stood dumbfounded. Shannon motioned for her to sit on the edge of the bed and had grabbed her hand. I saved her?

“Shannon, I didn’t save you. Those people did...all I did was call Greg after I called Sherlock... and Mrs. Hudson…and texted John a bit vaguely...”

Nodding, Shannon shifted her weight to get comfortable. “The point, Molly, is that you didn’t give up on me. You didn’t forget about me.”

“I already did that once,” she blurted out quickly. The shadow of hurt flashed across the patient’s face. “Sorry...”

“I deserved it,” she admitted. “Good for you. How did you know that I was here? From what I’ve gathered, Mycroft has kept it hush-hush. And now that Sherlock’s out...”

“You knew Sherlock would get out? Do you know where he is?!”

“No, I don’t. He’s working. For me.”

Molly’s head cocked to the side, “For you?”

“I had another case I needed him to work on. It is important. He’ll be fine.”

Molly bristled, “Shannon, he was shot a week ago!”

“And I was beaten and drugged! Why are we talking about our issues?”

“If he bleeds out,” she warned.

“He won’t. He’s too smart to do that. Be in pain, yes. Bleed out, not likely”

“Shannon...”

The recovering body shrugged in indifference, “He swore it to me.”

She cleared her throat to initiate a change in conversation. Molly covered her mouth in thought and locked eyes with her friend. “Now, Molly, tell me what I missed. Tell me what you know; I have
some catching up to do.”
Shannon was taken to have to have a series of tests run due to her being awake. After a few hours of only half listening to the doctors, nurses, and orderlies, she gathered that she was, unfortunately, just going to have to take time and heal. Marvelous. “Do I get pain management with this, or do I have to suffer once I am able to leave?”

She was cautiously making her was back to her room when she heard raised voices from down the hall. “Where. Is. She?!”

“Mr. Holmes, you need to calm down. We cannot discuss other patients with you, even if there was a patient next door!” the nurse snapped.

“She was there when I left yesterday and now she’s not in the room. Her bed has been changed and there’s no evidence of her!”

“Sir, I’m going to ask you one last time to calm down.”

Shannon peered around the door to see Sherlock sitting up in his bed, furious. How endearing.

Sherlock narrowed his eyes, his voice threatening, “If I find that anything has happened to her, I swear that I will bring this ENTIRE HOSPITAL DOWN!”

“Nurse! Bring me the diazepam!”

“He’ll like it too much,” Shannon chided jovially from the door. “I’ll take care of it, thank you.”

“And where the hell have you been?!” he bellowed.

Shannon looked to the staff, “Thank you all for seeing to him. I’ll ensure he’s not an issue for the rest of his stay. You have my word. And, as a reminder, Mycroft and I thank you for your discretion.” Her eyes fell on the disgruntled patient and she smirked.

The staff nodded and left quietly. Shannon hobbled over to the chair and sat down in a huff.

“Tests, to answer your question. And apparently, initial observation thinks that I lucked out on the brain damage front.

“As you may have guessed, I’m here as an invisible guest. I’ve gathered that Mycroft wants no record of my being here. Especially since you’re an idiot,” she jabbed. “And you could have perfectly concluded where I was!”

“An idiot, oh please,” he seethed, “Do go on.”

Shannon shrugged and grabbed the gelatin cup off of his tray. “Magnussen.” She quickly inhaled the lime gelatin and replaced the empty cup back on his tray.

“Ah. Yes. Him.”

It made sense. If Magnussen knew about her, if he were able to find something against her and to apply his kind of pressure on her – Mycroft would have to be involved. Mycroft would not allow
such an asset to be added to Magnussen’s arsenal.

“Satisfied?” she quipped looking over to him. She labored to stand up and held on to the side of his bed for balance.

He grabbed at her forearm to prevent her from falling. “For now,” he looked her over. She was healing at least. She’d get her strength back soon enough. “You need to sit.”

She sat on the side of his bed and gathered herself. “Good.”

Before he could realize it, she had pivoted on her spot and punched his left arm.

“What was that for?! I’m recovering from being shot!” he growled when she put her hands up in surrender.

Shannon stared down her nose. “You tested more than trace.”

Don’t argue with her. She’s still strong enough in this condition. Not that you couldn’t take your own shot at her. She’s already calculated where to hit you next if you retaliate.

He shimmied over in his bed and looked to the space left. “Until you make your way back to your room, you should probably rest.”

“Sherlock,” she goaded as she climbed up, “Are you being compassionate?”

“It’s the morphine. Don’t get used to it.”

She settled down against his shoulder after having nabbed his spare blanket. “Won’t your girlfriend be upset to find me here?”

“Who? Oh. Janine. You’ve watched the daytime news then?”

She scoffed, “Give me some credit. No. I assumed. It’s the bruising.”

“What bruising?”

“You neck and shoulder. They’re nearly gone now; but I can see them. Really dived into your work, did you?”

He huffed in annoyance, “Does it make you feel jealousy?”

“No,” she shrugged, “You were working. I can see some part of you is fond of her in some way. Anyway it’s your business.”

“She did get me into his office.”

“Sherlock,” she groaned closing her eyes, “Stop talking.”

He glanced down at her and chuckled, “Jealousy doesn’t suit you.”

“Do you want hit again?” she stifled a yawn none-too-lady-like.

“It is humorous to watch.” He braced for her next attack and took a loud ‘thwack’ to the shoulder. “Get some sleep, Ms. Byrns. I need you in top shape soon as you can.”

A faux scowl adorned her face and she shoved him over to the edge of his bed. “Sir, yessir.”
Around lunch time, John’s phone buzzed angrily.

John:

_I have something to take your mind off_  
of your present predicament.  
Come by the hospital at once.  
-SH

Sherlock:

_Piss off. And stop using_  
your phone in the hospital!

John:

_For her sake._  
-SH

John:

_And bring that takeaway she likes_  
_from down the street of the flat._  
-SH

There was only one person that Sherlock described as such for Chinese takeaway: Shannon. Sherlock never remembered or cared to remember what she liked. Guiltily, he gathered that he hadn’t really given her much thought since the wedding. She hadn’t called him; and, as far as he knew, she hadn’t called Mary either. Mary would have brought it up. He hadn’t really thought about her until Greg had called asking questions.  
*Would she? Would she have told you? I mean, look at what you just found out about the woman that you married. Well, it will have to wait until after work. I can’t leave early. It’ll be good to see her. I can fill her in on all the shit that Sherlock had been up to. No doubt he has filled her in on how my life’s going at the moment.*

John’s gait was brisk as he went to get the Chinese food and then made his way to the hospital. The doctor smuggled the food into his bag and made his way upstairs. He found his way back to Sherlock’s room and cracked the door open. Courtesy of Mycroft, the normal rules and protocol of the hospital were turned upside-down in this corner of the world.

The blinds were drawn and there was no way of peeking in. He opened the door abruptly,  
“Alright, Sherlock, if this is another one of your ruddy games, I swear – to – God that I…”
Piercing blue eyes snapped up at the door in warning before looking back down to the sleeping form that had neatly tucked itself around him.

John stopped immediately and took time to take in what he was seeing. *Sherlock…has Shannon… curled up beside him and he’s cradling her against him…Oh my God. Shannon!* 

John’s steps were hurried as he crossed the room to her side of the bed, having deposited the food onto the bedside table. His voice was rough as he whispered, “What the hell happened to her!?"

“Oh, I’m fine. I was shot a week ago and brought back here in the early hours of the morning. My arm is completely asleep and in pain because she won’t wake up and leave,” he chided. “Thanks for asking.”

John’s face soured. “Tell me what happened before I knock you off of your bed and destroy your morphine machine.”

“She hasn’t spoken of it yet,” Sherlock mumbled. “Mycroft said that she was taken.”

John’s hands clenched open and closed angrily at his side, “How is she?”

“Her chart’s in the next room. She’s been in here since late morning. I couldn’t wake her,” he scowled.

“Wouldn’t. The correct word in that sentence is ‘wouldn’t wake her’,” Shannon uttered sleepily as she stretched her legs. “What time is it?”

John checked his watch and smiled at the sound of her voice, “It’s after seven.”

“Hmm,” she hummed with a lazy grin. “I’m going back to my room.” She sniffed the air, “Is that Dragon & Phoenix?”

“Yes,” John replied quickly before the detective could. “I brought it for you.”

Shannon grabbed the bag and kissed John on the cheek. “Thanks for thinking of me. Come over once you two have talked for a bit. I’m in the next room. “Sherlock, if you upset him, I’m tagging you in the gut the next time I see you, clear?”

He grimaced, “Yes.”

Shannon grabbed her IV pole to begin her shuffling journey next door with her takeaway prize in hand. “Play nicely, both of you.”

John turned to Sherlock and growled, “You’re going to tell me everything…” he faltered. “…everything that you know concerning what happened to her. Now.”

“Shannon and I had been keeping correspondence back and forth when I started palling around in dens again. I had sent her to Glasgow so that if Magnussen came prodding, she wouldn’t be here.”

John sat down in the chair, furious. He refused to look at his _friend_ and eyes bore straight ahead while Sherlock orated.

“…she fought me, of course, and set terms that were thoroughly too strict for me to be able to do my work effectively. I had to call her every two days to check in, of course. Somehow she found out I tested higher than trace when you took me to St. Bart’s, so I’ll be paying for that in due time,” he rolled his eyes.
“A few days into her stay in Glasgow, I called to check in and she told me that someone had called her mobile stating that a friend of Etchya’s was looking for her. She stated that she could get ‘Shannon’, of course, feigning to be a friend – but the point of the call was to let her know that someone had come to Glasgow to find her. By this time, I had just started my undercover work, and she had assured me that she would be able to take care of herself.

“Then, I realized that I had Janine: I had a way to Magnussen and I became solely focused on that task that…”

John’s eyes veered to Sherlock’s still form. “You forgot about her?!”

“It was momentarily and for no more than nine days,” he explained.

“NINE DAYS!” John yelled as he bolted upright. “YOU LEFT HER ALONE WITH THEM FOR NINE DAYS?! YOU’RE TELLING ME THAT YOU FORGOT TO CHECK IN WITH HER FOUR TIMES?!”

“Momentarily,” he repeated. “A lapse of memory.”

“ARE YOU – YOU – INSUFFERABLE, NARCISSISTIC – ASS!”

Sherlock turned his head to Watson’s direction, “Less than twenty-four hours and your attitude towards me has been at catastrophically low levels twice now. That’s a feat, is it not?”

John’s arm pulled back to slug that smirking, stupid face his friend was displaying.

“John, with me.” He spun around and saw Shannon leaning heavily on the door frame out of breath. “Now, soldier.”

Her eyes began to grow wide and she clutched at the doorframe. “Now, please – I think I’m passing out…” Her body began to sway to and fro. This was a bad idea. God. My heart…is…am I having a heart attack? Is this what they’re like? Wait – no…is this a stoke? Think, genius.

John lunged for her as she began to fall and proceeded to guide her gently to the floor. Sherlock sprang forward like a loosed arrow, clutching his side as his feet hit the floor.

“Ring for the nurses on your remote, Sherlock!” the doctor barked. “I need help in here!”

Mycroft’s medical staff dutifully heeded both Sherlock’s ring and John’s bellow down the hallway. Soon, a plethora of staff appeared and began working on Shannon. Sherlock stood in a haze of morphine and confusion. She’s fine. She was just here. She’s been fine all this time. There are numerous medicinal and physical reasons that can explain why she lost consciousness. It’s now a matter of determining the correct one. Wait – John’s voice. He’s alarmed…why?

“…her pulse. It’s getting weaker!” John announced to the team.

“Get her into the operating room – she’s hemorrhaging,” the doctor announced. He turned to the nurse, “Get Dr. Riggs out of bed and scrubbed. Immediately.”

John was pushed back towards Sherlock and they stood in shocked silence as they watched Shannon whisked away to an operating room.

“John,” Sherlock conceded quickly.

With a quick nod and dash to the door, “Right.”
“Bring her back.” Sherlock was left to stand alone in his room in silence. *You cannot die yet.* Intrigue, however, did get the best of him and he walked into Shannon’s room. It was twice the size of his; easily. *Mycroft wanted no one else in here with her and made arrangements as such.* He peered about her room to look for something – anything, that may be askew. He looked at her IV line and noticed it was not compromised. His gaze traveled up to the saline bag where he gave it a slight squeeze. *THERE! Look closely. Something is swirling in there. It didn’t all combine together.*

He scrambled to his room and grabbed his phone.

*John:*

*IV Bag. There’s more than saline in that bag.*

- *SH*

He looked at the message and felt his rage boiling over again. He ran to catch up to the gurney that was to take her towards Operating. “Shannon!” he hollered. “Hey!” he tapped her face to force her to focus. “Come on, there you are! Who came into the room?”

“What?”

“Who touched your IV bag?!” The doctor looked alarmed. “Look, Sherlock Holmes is upstairs looking about and there’s no one else that could do better. He’s found something in your saline bag. Who came in?”

She clutched at her rib cage, back arched and face red from every muscle contracting at once. “The orderly!” she screamed. The group continued down a long corridor, shouting for everyone to stand aside. “John –”

“I’m right here,” he soothed as he held her hand.

Her eyes were clear and he had no doubt that she wasn’t with him in that moment. “I’m dying...I’m going to die.”

Doctor Watson sat in the waiting room, numb. His best friend had been shout a week ago – by his wife, who turned out to be some sort of former ex-CIA operative, and the only other person he trusted with his life was in surgery. His phone kept going off; no doubt that Sherlock was trying to get his attention.

His world was in disarray. *How is that any different than it used to be? Because I wanted to settle down...to begin a different part of my life...? Of course, I couldn’t have ‘normal’, that would be decent of the universe.*

Strain etched into his features, his head hung low over his knees as he waited. And waited. No one came to seek him out – which was not an overly great sign. She had been in surgery for three
hours.

“John?” a familiar voice rang in the hall. “John!”

He shot up out of his seat to find Lestrade jogging down the hall toward him, “Greg!”

“Sherlock texted me. Also stating you were ignoring him – for obvious reasons – and that you might need help.”

John crossed his arms and squared himself off to deliver news, “They thought she was hemorrhaging – she’s been in surgery for three hours now.”

He nodded solemnly and bobbed his head down the hallway, “Go home. I took time off for the next two days. I had some time owed to me. I’ll stay here.”

“You’re sure?” he queried, rubbing the nape of his neck roughly. “I know that she wanted to talk –”

Greg patted reassuringly on the back, “I’ll call you when she wakes up. She’ll make it through this. She’s too stubborn to go now.”

Home. To Mary. Perhaps it best if I just go to Baker Street for now. “I’ll be at Baker Street. Let me know if there’s any change. I’ll let the head nurse know you’re staying for her on my way out.”

Greg sat dutifully in the waiting room and rubbed his face. He was tired. It had been a trying two days. His watch said it was 10:30. The night was dragging. Hell, it’s been a trying two weeks if you include trying to get her back. His eyes blurred wearily as he reclined back. It’s been hell.

The Twentieth of September

“…Inspector?” he felt his shoulder shake.

His eyes popped open with a jolt. “I’m Lestrade, yes?”

The nurse patted his shoulder, “Sorry to disturb you – Doctor Watson had said you were here for the patient in surgery with Doctor Riggs, correct?”

“Yes, sorry. Didn’t mean to doze off. How is she?” his voice eager as he shook off his grogginess.

“She’s just come out of surgery and they are taking her to recovery now,” she stated. He looked to his watch: 12:47am Christ. Five hours… He didn’t hear the doctor approach.

“Are you Mr. Lestrade?” a doctor asked curtly.

He nodded, “Detective Inspector Lestrade, yes sir. How is she?”

“I’m Doctor Riggs, I was her attending surgeon. Follow me. Do you know if she has a next of kin?”
Greg stopped in the hallway feeling ice coat his stomach, “Why?”

“Follow me,” the surgeon urged. “We can’t speak here.”

Greg followed in silence as the surgeon guided the pair of them to Shannon’s isolated room. It was in the quietest section of the hospital and there was hardly any staff in the halls. Doctor Riggs ushered Greg inside to find Shannon fast asleep, and Sherlock Holmes sitting at her bedside.

“Good,” the doctor began, “You’re here, too. It saves me from having to say this twice.”

“Where’s John?” Sherlock asked without turning around from his chair.


Sherlock turned slowly in his chair to face the pair, “How is she?”

“Whatever was in her system is out now. Under Mr. Mycroft Holmes’ suggestion and your reveal to something having been in her saline bag, she’s been given a complete transfusion after we were able to stop the bleeding,” he disclosed. Forty-five percent of her body is covered in contusions or bruising and her ribs have hairline fractures in them. Whatever, or whomever, did this to her was angry. Judging by the wounds on her hands and arms, we are fairly certain that she put up a fight.”

Greg looked on at the patient with somberness taking over his demeanor. The surgeon’s voice was viciously sobering.

He continued, “Some of her blood has been sent off for analysis to see exactly what kind of drugs were flooding her system. Now, before I give her anything that will help stave off infection: do either of you know if she has any allergies?”

Greg felt helpless and shrugged. “I – I don’t know. She was always healthy… I – Jesus Christ…”

“Penicillin,” Sherlock muttered as he wracked his brain. “And…Sulfa.”

“You’re sure?” the surgeon pressed.

The detective dived deeper into his mind palace to check, “Yes. They will kill her.”

“Good. Since your brother has her as an ‘Invisible Patient’, I have no medical history to go off of. We’ll get her on antibiotics to fight off any infection and start adding a pain regimen to her daily fluids.”

Lestrade cleared his throat to help fight the urge to scream. “I’m going to politely suggest she have someone in here with her at all times, ‘round the clock.”

“I agree,” the surgeon replied. “I can call Mr. Holmes and have it arranged within the…”

“I’ll do it,” Sherlock quipped. “Move my bed up here. Have it so that if anyone comes into this room they have to walk past me first.”

“Sherlock, look at you!” Greg chided.

“Precisely,” he offered. “Who’s going to pass me first, hmm?”

“Fine,” the surgeon scoffed.

“You can’t leave until discharged,” Greg snapped.
“Of course.”

“Now,” the surgeon coughed. “Does she have a next of kin?”

“No,” Sherlock replied. “She does not.”

“We,” Greg stressed, “are her next of kin: Sherlock Holmes, Greg Lestrade, Molly Hooper, and John Watson. We are her family.”

“Look, I need to be frank,” Riggs stated apprehensively, “with the injuries that she sustained to bring her here, plus the ones that had healed or scarred from previous encounters…she’s a bloody mess. Did you know someone did backwoods surgery on her at some point in the past year because something had pierced her spleen? Someone went in and did a hack job of fixing it!”

Lestrade looked back to her sleeping form in horror. Riggs continued, “Or, that she very nearly was paralyzed from blunt force trauma to the small of her back? Her L1, L2, and L3 vertebrae show signs of healed trauma; her abdominal cavity seems like it’s been in a perpetual state of healing for months, AND she’s been in knife attacks. Have you seen her shoulder?!

“I don’t know, nor do I want to know why she’s in here. But, my profession aside, you…you are her family? Wow. I have half a mind to put her in a coma so that you can’t get her to do anything foolish until she heals.”

The surgeon stormed off in disgust to leave the detective and detective inspector alone with his patient.

“Is it true,” Greg’s voice crackled, “…is it true that all of that’s happened to her?”

“I suppose so,” he offered. “I wasn’t there for all of it. If the doctor says so, then I would say we should trust his medical examination.”

Lestrade marched across the room and grabbed him by the scruff of his gown, “YOU KNEW ABOUT SOME OF IT?”

“Yes, she and I got into altercations with targets before – as to the shoulder, yes, I knew about that as well.”

“GET UP,” he shouted. Lestrade reached for his cuffs and snatched Sherlock’s arms behind him.

“Why am I being arrested? What crime have I committed?” Holmes quipped.

“YOU’RE NOT, YOU SOD,” Greg shouted. “IT’S MAKING ME FEEL BETTER! Now sit down!”

Sherlock landed with a soft fwop in his chair and scowled up at his assailant. “I was shot last week!”

“Shuddup!” Greg snapped. “Just sit there.”

“OH SHUT UP, BOTH OF YOU!” Shannon howled. “JEEZUS CHRIIIIST!” Both men were wide eyed at the force of her voice. “I left you alone for how long and you’re going at each other like dogs!”

Greg turned on his heel to face her, hands on his waist, “You were in surgery for five hours!”

“Five hours, really?” she chirped. “Hmm,” her eyebrows popped up in recognition of her
achievement.

“It’s not funny,” Lestrade boomed, “You nearly died…again!”

She shrugged nonchalantly, “It seems to be my specialty lately. Now, what’s with the yelling?”

“He just put me in handcuffs without reason,” Holmes griped.

“Greg?”

“He’s in cuffs because it’s making me feel better. I just had to sit through a lecture from your surgeon about the extent of your injuries; past and present!” he offered in rebuttal.

“Fair enough,” she conceded. “Let him sit there, then.”

“You can’t be serious,” Holmes seethed. “I’m the one that found your IV bag had been tampered with.”

Lestrade groaned, “Oh, is this a contest? Because I’m pretty sure that I was the one that got my arse up to Scotland to get her out of the mess that YOU put her in!”


“How are you feeling?” Greg asked sympathetically.

She sighed, “Like I had someone playing whack-a-mole with my guts for five hours. That reminds me, Greg, come here.” Greg walked over beside her. “Closer.”

She pulled his tie down to bring him closer and kissed him. Sherlock’s sideways glance widened in mild astonishment. Lestrade stood up, dumbfounded and stunned. “Thanks.”

“Are you making a habit if kissing the entire network of people that you frequently associate with?” Sherlock jabbed.

Shannon met his glare with a challenging raise oh her eyebrow, “If that follows your train of thought; there was you and John, now Greg… I just have Molly left – and considering my condition at present; I don’t feel like indulging anyone’s potential fantasies.”

“I’ll – I’ll just – be going then…” his breathless voice murmured. “Yeah…let – let me know if you need anything…”

“The cuffs?” Sherlock whined as Lestrade walked toward the door.

“Leave them,” Shannon smirked. “He can suffer a while longer.”

Greg either didn’t hear or ignored what was going on as he made his way to leave. She smiled and settled back down into her bed. “So nice of them to give me all these extra pillows.”

Annoyance was radiating off of her friend’s body. “Shut up, Sherlock; I’m more injured than you are.”

“I’ll just remain silent then. Seems like no one is interested in what I have to say, or do – for that matter.”

“Oh stop sulking. You’re not going to stay like that. You could slip them. Break your thumbs.”
He frowned, “I’d rather not. I will need dexterity once I get out of here. Broken thumbs do me no use in lock-picking.”

“Lock-picking? For what?” she exclaimed.

He smirked, “Ask your boyfriend.”

“What, Lestrade? Please,” she scoffed. “Greg’s my friend. I gave him something he wanted as a ‘thank you’ for helping to rescue me. More than I can say for you, sir. You didn’t check in for nine and a half days. Don’t worry, I checked my phone when I went back to my room prior to surgery… But back to your previous point: was that a pang of jealousy you tried to shrug off?”

Rolled eyes conveyed their exasperation, “Decidedly not.”

“And lock-picking?”

“Someone is going to have go and interrogate your captor and orderly; you think Lestrade’s team is doing a bang up job of it? You’re not going to be going anywhere for at least another week.”

She chuckled to then clutch at her side, “My hero. And here I was going to send someone else.”

“Who?”

“John. I figured that Mycroft was keeping them, in which case – yes, I’d send you with no questions…but if they’re with Lestrade… that’s different.”

He delicately stood up and paced the room, “Where’s my bed?!”

“Calm down, and let me get you out of the cuffs,” she soothed.

“And, pray-tell, how are you getting me out of these with what you have in this room? You may be good, Shannon; but you aren’t that good.”

A sly grin splayed against her lips. “Do give me some credit,” her voice silky. She held up between her fingers a keycard and keys. “I was working.” She grimaced abruptly from the pinching in her gut and motioned for him to spin around so that she could undo his cuffs.

He caught her contagious smile, “Why, Ms. Byrns, I do like your work.”

“I’m sure you do,” she submitted, “but I think I’m done working for a while. My head is killing me.” She upped the dosage on her morphine and drifted off to sleep. “Do let me know how it goes, Sherlock.”

John Watson:

When you’re off work, would you stop by?

Shannon Byrns:

Of course. I’ll be over around 18:00. Is Sherlock with you?
John Watson:

Unfortunately. He may be sleeping soon.

Wonderful: I could slip in and out without him noticing

True to his word, the good doctor made his way to the hospital to meet up with Shannon. He was shown to her new room by the head nurse. Upon entry, he noted that Sherlock was wide awake in his bed and Shannon was snoring softly.

“For Christ’s sake,” he mumbled.

“He’s not in the room, John, so you might as well come in.”

John sulked over to Sherlock and scrutinized the proximity of their beds. Less than a foot was between them. “Did...DID YOU HANDCUFF YOURSELF TO HER?”

“Yes, clearly it makes sense. To get to her, her next attacker; should they come after her here again, would have to get through me first,” he stated blankly.

John ran a hand through his hair, “You’re insane. Absolutely insane!

“I don’t want to be near you right now; let alone talk to you! Do you understand that I’m angry?”

“That is a visual observation that I made, yes.”

“God. Why. WHY ARE YOU SUCH A PAIN IN MY ASS?”

Eyes squinted in calculation at John Watson. What did I do?

“Look, she texted me that she wanted to talk. Lestrade let me know she was awake this morning – and that’s it. Not a word from you, all day!”

“Nope,” he punctuated with a loud ‘p’.

“Nope? Nope?! What do you mean, nope?”

Sherlock rolled his eyes, “I texted you. Obviously. She’s been in and out of consciousness all day and in no ability to text.”

“I hate you.”

“That may be,” he huffed, “But, Doctor Watson, we have work for you.”

“We?” he seethed.

“Yes,” he nodded as if it were obvious. “Shannon and I need you to do some work.”

“No!” John snapped. “You! YOU have work that you want me to do. I refuse to listen to –”

Sherlock flipped up the keycard. “Aren’t you going to ask?”

“No,” he placed his hands up in the air, “I want nothing to do with you stealing Mycroft’s…”
“It’s Lestrade’s, actually,” Sherlock offered. “And I didn’t steal it.”

Arms crossed in annoyance, John took the bait. “Did it just fall into your lap then, on ‘accident’?” he seethed.

“Of course not,” Sherlock looked offended. “Shannon nicked it when she kissed him this morning. She’s also the one that pickpocketed his keys for the handcuffs.”

Mouth agape and hand flexing in agitation, he pointed an accusatory finger at Holmes, “The three of us are having a talk once you’re both home about pickpocketing! AND WHY DO YOU HAVE GREG’S KEYCARD?”

“It’s obvious,” Sherlock gloated.

“No it isn’t, and I swear to God that I’m going to slap that smile off your face!”

“Do it,” Shannon goaded sleepily. “If you knock him unconscious so that he shuts up, I’ll buy you dinner for a week.” She shifted in discomfort with her right arm outstretched to reach Sherlock and nodded back off to sleep.

“Lestrade took the day off to be on call in the event Shannon would need him. He won’t be in the office.”

John stood in an agitated silence, processing what was being asked of him.

“John, how would you like to interrogate her captor and the orderly that did this to her?”

The night crew was busy working at their desks when John slipped in. Alright. I’m in. Now, if I fake being lost…Sherlock said that I would have to go near the interrogation rooms to leave if I turn down this hallway and stay towards the interior…Thanks to Mycroft, Thing One is in room seven and Thing Two is in room twelve.

John wandered around with purpose to ensure he was in the hallway he needed and found room seven. He slipped in quietly and stood, back against the door while he waited. …three…two…one…done. The red light on the camera flicked off. Thank you, Sherlock, you prat.

“I already messaged my brother and told him that I would be investigating the orderly and abductor. They are being held in rooms seven and twelve at police headquarters until Mycroft’s appropriate man is able to fly in from Johannesburg. I’m sure he has his reasons for using mediocre security; but that’s not my concern presently. Now, if you give me a laptop, I know that I’ll be able to get to their camera feed. It’s child’s play. I will be able to kill the feed for approximately seven minutes in each room without causing issue. I’ll have to kill feeds in other rooms intermittently, but that’s of no consequence.”

“You’re serious,” John fussed. “You want me to interrogate her assailants.”

“Well, I should be the one doing it; but Shannon believes that you’ll suffice.”

“You mean she believes that I can do it.”

“If that makes you feel more inclined to do the job, yes!” he smiled with faux enthusiasm. “Keep
your phone recording the entire conversation. When finished with perpetrator number two, wander aimlessly in the hallway stating that you got lost while try to return Lestrade’s keycard.”

Watson walked over to the chair opposite the terrified orderly and sat down with brashness. “You know who I am?”

“No,” the young man offered. He wasn’t bad looking. Brown eyes, black hair, and lightly built. No tattoos, no piercings...hmm. “Are you supposed to be the good cop?”

“Not tonight,” John fumed, voice low. “You know why I’m here?”

“Someone thinks I tried to kill one of the patients, but I’m innocent!”

“Shut up. Shut. Up. I am here – because that woman, that patient – is my friend. She is a better person than I am. She’s more forgiving than I am.” Rage was boiling in his voice. “And no one knows that I’m here.”

Back in the hospital, Sherlock rolled his eyes as he turned up the volume to his laptop. Right. Ridiculous. He began recording a copy to his hard drive.

“I swear; I don’t know anything!”

John reached across the table and slammed the orderly’s head into the table, “What was that?”

“Oww,” he cried out, “I don’t know anything!”

“One more time?” John repeated smugly and banged the young man’s face off the table.

“ALRIGHT!” he yelped. “I THINK YOU BROKE MY NOSE!”

John reached across and grabbed his nose, “Nope, don’t think so. Talk.”

“Right,” he pushed away from the table. “There was this guy that came around to the hospital a month or so ago. He gave me a picture. It was her.”

“Keep talking, or I can learn to dribble your head off the table.”

“Look...so, this guy,” he stammered, “told me that his sister was missing and needed her medication. Said she was a junkie. He gave us some fliers to keep in the personnel rooms, locker rooms, all with her picture on it – you know...so that we could identify her.
“So I saw her in passing going down the hallway to her room and remembered the flyer. So I went and called her brother.”

“Brother?”

“Yeah – the guy who handed out the flyers. I let him know that she was there. That’s it.”

John frowned, “Then how did you get placed in her room?”

“I came in to check that she was in the right room. That’s it. I swear to God! I didn’t touch her!”

“You’re a fucking idiot,” John snapped. “Do you realize how many ethical rules and how many laws you broke? That girl was invisible. If anyone asked, no one was to know that she was there! What did he offer you?”
“Oh my God.”


“Nothing! I swear it! He said that he only wanted a call to know she was alive!”

“And you called!”

“Yeah, look I know it was wrong – but the man looked like she would be the death of ‘im when he came in. I remember that feeling! My brother was an addict. I would have killed to know when he went into hospital. But no one called. Never! And they found him dead!”

That’s it. Whomever has been preying on Shannon has been surveying the land for months. They know she’s here. They know that she’s careful. He’s using strategic people to find her. And why hospitals? Ah – that makes perfect sense. Look at her line of work.

Sherlock’s eyes lingered over Shannon’s slumbering frame before turning his attention back to his monitor. Time to move along, Watson.

John stood up and drew a pointed finger in the orderly’s direction, “There are consequences for what you’ve done. Know that.” John slipped out the door, heaved a steadying breath, and inaudibly made his way to room twelve.

Around the corner…ten…eleven…there: twelve.

He entered silently and waited for the red camera light.

“Who are you?” the detainee queried. “I was my representation.”

The boring red eye closed. There we are.

“Yes, yes, we know,” John lied. “I’m just here to listen; just in case you have anything that you want to say.” He moved about the cramped room with relative ease. “I’m surprised, given the circumstances, that they brought you here and not to a military installation.”

“That’s because they’ve got nothing. It’s a hoax. They’re trying to pin me for some government muck-about.”

John nodded knowingly before throwing his fist into the man’s jaw. “Let’s start with your name.”

“Wha – ” he spat onto the desk. “Ah, I see. Well, well – you must be the doctor…and you can call me Max.”

John’s mind stiffened but did his best to show no outwardly indication that he was alert, “Who, me? No. I’m pissed off. Nice to meet you.”

“Yeah, you’re the doctor, alright; that military step you got – that posture. It all makes sense. What – she wasn’t able to come visit herself. Shame,” his voice dripping with contempt. John threw another punch towards the man’s face. “We can do this all night, Doc.”

“Just tell me why, Max,” John huffed in resentment. “Why did you torture her? Why does her body look the way it does?”
“That’s what you’re here for? Because I *hurt* her? HA!” the handcuffed gentleman sniggered. “If she wasn’t dead, that’s the least of her worries.”

Dr. Watson leaned across the table, “What are you talking about?”

Max leaned comfortably back in his chair, “What did she think was going to happen, hmm? All those little threads that she left dangling? Never completely finishing any of her ‘tasks’ to try and figure out the greatest riddle: Who is behind Geist? “Honestly, didn’t you, Doctor, even with the mental capacity that you have, ever wonder why she left so much undone? Why she never completed a, quote, *mission* from start to finish?”

A sharp chill split John in two. *She did leave a lot unturned. She never did find all those attackers from Tesco…Did she ever way what happened with Lisa, the handler? Sean O’Rourke…she let him live – or so she thinks she did. She did say that she left him up there to see if he could survive. But what else was she up to after the fall?*

“There,” Max’s smug grin was proudly displayed on his face, “My work here is done.”

John’s eyes flicked upward, “How do you figure?”

The captor tilted his head, “Doubt. You’re going to begin to doubt everything that you had with her; every conversation, every glance, every laugh – every memory.”

John glared from his chair, “No. Never. I’ll never doubt those memories. That would dishonor her memory.”

“That’s what I thought,” Max chuckled. “She didn’t survive. It’s not surprising,” his pride blooming, “she took it like a champ, I’ll give her that. And three days’ worth of drugs coursing through those veins. Mmm…child’s play.”

“And Etchya? The orderly?”

“Means to an end. Bait, if you will. And the orderly? Reasonably innocent and collateral damage: he was another means to an end. I’ve been patrolling this bloody island for quite some time,” he snorted, “looking for any sign of her. We knew that she was here, but we had no idea that she had been so busy slinking around. Etchya was the bait. We knew that she would be sent after him. He had nuclear grade weaponry. Mycroft Holmes wouldn’t be able to resist it if she had allied with him.”

Fury. That’s what this is. *It’s not anger. It’s not just rage. It’s fury. After all that’s happened in the past month…after everything…and this man…this animal: he was taking joy from her pain. AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS? SHANNON…Jesus Christ.*

Sherlock was yelling at his laptop, “HE THINKS SHE’S DEAD, JOHN. JOHN!” With swift fingers and texting mastery, Sherlock sent off his text to Watson

*John:*

*He thinks she’s dead.*  
*Do not give it away.*  
*No matter what.*
John peered at his phone quickly before pocketing it back into his jacket. “She was a better human being than the rest of us – she...she was better!”

“She might have been, but she’s not now. I guess her constitution wasn’t as strong as the boss was anticipating. Boss thought she was so clever – but; if she was so clever, how did I catch her?”

John snapped, “Did you think that she let you catch her? You are detained now, you see.”

Max shrugged nonchalantly. “It doesn’t matter now; she’s been taken care of. And the Boss will see me out of here shortly. Don’t you worry. But hey, tell your partner that I must thank him for not checking up on her. That was kind of him.”

John checked the time and got up, “I will be seeing you again. Don’t you worry.”

“I can’t wait. And I won’t be cuffed next time. It’s too bad that she’s dead; you should have asked her about Morocco, or Croatia...hell, you should have asked her about Tanzania...tsk – tsk – tsk; she was a busy girl while she was away. Bye-bye, Doctor – tell both of the Holmes’ that I my Boss sends their regards.”

As John exited, he saw the shading of a tattoo on Max’s forearm. Oh my God: he was at the Tesco when Shannon was attacked. Jesus.

Regaining his composure, the door clicked shut and John wandered the halls aimlessly. He finally ran into someone, “I’m sorry – I’m a friend of Greg Lestrade’s. He left this at the hospital today. I got turned around looking for his office...could...could you let him know that John Watson dropped it off?”

“Sure thing. Right this way, Dr. Watson.”

“You know me?”

“I know of you,” the older woman chortled. “Usually that Sherlock Holmes character is with you.”


“Here we are, up to the next floor. You were off by one. Would you like me to take you the rest of the way?”

“No wonder, geez – these long days are really messing with me. I was off by an entire floor. Wow, sorry.”

“Don’t worry yourself,” she stated, “it happens to the new bloods all the time. Have a good night, Dr. Watson.”

Sherlock’s mind buzzed at light speed, processing as much information into his mind palace so that it would not be lost. But there, in the pit of his stomach were the sharp pangs or regret. I shouldn’t have left her on her own as I did, regardless of how capable she is.

He sat still, staring out into the blank space of the room as he was deep in his thoughts. He felt pressure on his left hand and looked down to see that Shannon was gently squeezing his hand.
Sherlock felt a lump in his throat as he croaked, “Shannon, I –”

“I know,” her voice warm. “I know.”

“I should have known; I should have seen it.”

“I don’t blame you, Sherlock. I don’t. I had every chance at coming home early. And I stayed,” she affirmed.

He shook his head, “You stayed because I told you to.”

She chuckled, “And when have I ever listened to you without making up my own mind first, hmm?”

“I’m sorry, Shannon.”

“Sherlock Holmes, I may be pretty banged up –”

“…that’s an understatement…” he interjected.

“…but my point is that I knew all of this was a possibility while I was up there. This wasn’t a surprise. Am I happy that it happened? Fucking of course not. But I knew the risks in not coming home. I knew. It was the only way…”

Disbelief washed over his face, “You cannot be serious.”

“…it was the only way I could feasibly bring him and the Boss out of the dark. I had tried just about everything else. But…this way…it’s all out in the open.”

“Don’t tell John,” he warned briefly. “While your logic can’t be argued with; John will not appreciate your reasoning.”

“No shit, Sherlock.”

He was pensive. “We need to get you on the mend; the sooner the better.”

Byrns squinted in scrutiny, “…why…outside of obvious reasons? What happened?”

“John just finished up with your captor.”

“Is he still alive?”

“Yes, he is.”


He nodded, “We let him infer that you died.”

“Ah,” she sighed knowingly. “So I’ve died. Beautiful.”

“Shannon,” he warned.

“Don’t worry yourself,” she huffed as she shifted in her bed. “I’m not going to do anything mischievous, rash or calculated, for quite some time.”

The pair sat in comfortable silence until she heard soft, rhythmic breathing to indicate her friend had fallen asleep, despite his best efforts. Shannon gazed up toward the ceiling, deep in thought.

She barely felt the hot tears begin to stream down her face. She covered her mouth with her wounded hand to muffle her quiet sobs. She did her best not to cry all this time. She wouldn’t want him to know.

He can’t know. I wasn’t ready. I wasn’t strong enough. I wasn’t. I just wasn’t enough. I am terrified. Oh, God in heaven, I am afraid. I am not okay.
...Later that Evening...

John Watson:

Hey. Just woke up.
Why don’t you head home?
It’s late. You probably need some
rest after everything. I can see you
tomorrow.

Shannon placed her phone back on her bedside table. Her face still felt puffy from crying and she didn’t want anyone to know that she was trying to wrest her demons.

“Oh, well – I’m here now,” John whispered while standing in the doorway. “I made better time on the way back than I thought.” He pocketed his phone in his jacket and quietly entered the room.

She nodded quickly and with a subtle, deft movement, wiped away the remaining tears from her chin and neck. “Since you’re here, might as well come on in. Before you sit down, if you reach under his pillow, you’ll find the keys to the handcuffs. Would you mind?”

John’s hand darted under Sherlock’s pillow to retrieve the keys for her freedom. The detective mumbled in his sleep as John walked around to the cuffs and released her wrist. “Better?”

“Much, thank you,” she admitted. A smile adorned her face as she heard the click of the cuffs’ locking mechanism clasp to Sherlock’s bed frame. “John…” she jabbed playfully.

“It makes me feel better,” he shrugged. “He deserves some annoyance his way.”

She felt that John was scrutinizing the features of her face. She turned away as best that she could, but he did not relent. “Shannon, what’s wrong?”

“I’m fine,” she whispered. Shannon grabbed her privacy curtain to shield her roommate from the sound of conversation. It wasn’t much, but still.

John clicked on her bed light and frowned. “You’ve been crying. Don’t do this. Not to me.”

“What?” her voice cracked.

“This. Don’t shut me out. I just went to the station to talk to the men that did this to you. Don’t you dare do this to me.”

She crossed her arms in defiance. God damn it, John Watson.

“So,” he offered her his hand as he sat down beside her, “tell me what happened. That animal said that you’ve done things…but I want to hear whatever it may be from you…because I trust you.”

She frowned and tried to speak, but her voice wouldn’t sound. After clearing her throat a few times and fighting back the dam of tears, she began, “I’m not good enough.”
“What?” John’s sharp whisper cut through her. “No, that’s not it. Go back. I deserve to know. Tell me: what happened…start with Etchya, alright?”

Sherlock floated towards consciousness, hearing the voices of John and Shannon. They were doing their best to speak quietly, but his proximity to them made even the quietest of voices sound normal. He lounged in his bed, listening.

“It’s a little more than that. Geez, where do I start?”

“Okay, let’s start after The Fall, then. Tell me,” he squeezed her good hand reassuringly. “All of it; I’m here.”

“Okay. Well…,” she sighed, “after I wiped myself from Mycroft, I stuck around London to make sure that you were as whole as to expected. I wasn’t ever far away. Usually across the street or down a block; but I made note that you weren’t coming out of Baker Street. You weren’t okay… so I made the decision that your second day out of that flat, I was going to ‘run’ into you. You remember the Samantha Grant bit?”

“Yes, I do. Quite convincing,” he smiled.

“I had a hotel room that looked worse than the flat does when Sherlock’s working a case and making connections. You know, the string pinned to the wall and all…I wanted to make sure that Moriarty was really dead; and, if there was another fish out in the sea that they came looking for me. But I was missing something.

“I kept mild tabs on Sherlock – at least until we both left the country; it was more difficult after that. Once he left, I knew that no one was going to be looking for him; and no one was really going to be looking for me.

“I had a lead that I stole from Mycroft’s office about a group that was making waves in Tangier. They were moving something big across the northern coast of Africa to Tangier so that it could be snuck into Gibraltar. As you know, Gibraltar is British territory; I suppose that lead came across Mycroft’s desk because it was only a matter of time before it got closer to home. I met up with a group of mercenaries and immersed myself. Norway was first. I wanted to know what was so bad that Mycroft was interested enough to want something done but not desperate enough to send his brother. I started digging and found that there where whispers among the group of an operative they were waiting for. I was worried. Had I miscalculated? Had I played into someone’s hands by doing exactly what they thought that I would do?

John leaned back in his chair and nodded as he followed her story.

“Those whispers became more like grievances because they felt that their employer didn’t trust them to accomplish their task. When we got to Gibraltar, it turned to shit. There was a fight among them; I don’t even really know what happened – I woke up and found one of the men crawling into my tent to tell me to get to Turkey. His name was Bakar…he was sweet on me, to put it lightly. I was the only girl in the crew and made him think we went way back.

“Bakar told me that Nikola – he was more or less the leader – had tried to double cross the group in order to extort more money from the employer. There were arguments and people were killed. Bakar was wounded and wanted me to get to an old acquaintance: they would ensure that if Nikola got away, the rest of them would be avenged. I stayed with him until he died; it was a collapsed lung. I don’t know how it all went down, but as I left to get onto the passenger ferry to Spain, there were bodies everywhere. I never found out what that shipment was… Other things happened, but they aren’t important.”
“So – you didn’t kill anyone in Morocco?”

“No,” she confirmed with a heavy sigh. “I didn’t – it was a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. And the shipment, whatever it was, never made it. That was one of the reasons I thought there was anarchy among the ranks: the shipment never showed up.

“I made a pit-stop in Seville, outfitted myself with a modest apartment, secured some funds; a passport…and then I left for Turkey. I left whispers all over the place stating that someone was looking for Derya and that the inquiring body would be in Istanbul.

“She found me. Derya was the name her friends called her. I wasn’t a friend, so I should have called her Ece. I was jumped, knocked unconscious, and woke tied up in a basement. It was very Jason Bourne. It ends up that we became friendly and she taught me a few tricks. She was a thief, see; she was a master at being silent and disappearing. And she was a strong woman; very beautiful. She was in her late 40s; but her age said nothing of her ability. She was very much at the top of her game.”

“You realize that you are Jason Bourne, or James Bond…right? No one really believes any of this stuff exists,” John murmured.

“Yeah, well, I wish it didn’t,” she conceded. “Long story short, Derya was able to find the shipment and sent me off on a wild goose chase that led me to planting myself within Etchya’s ring. It was the same everywhere I went until I got to Panama. I had been collapsing his business as I went, different cells were falling apart due to inner turmoil. I made it so that they were fighting amongst themselves. Derya kept in contact with me; feeding me information about the shipment as she got whispers.

“Then one day Derya called. She was frantic. I could tell that grabbing everything that she could to haul out.

“She said, ‘They found me. Somehow, those bastards were able to find me. Don’t tell me where you are over the phone. Listen to me; I’ll find you at the oak grove near Epidaurum. When you hang up, destroy your phone. You must go. Now. They are going to be looking for you. Go, Yavrum. Go, now’.”

“Yavrum? What does that mean,” he queried.

“It’s…I guess it translates to Darling in Turkish. I was her protégé…and she became quiet territorial and protective of me.”

“Did…did you…I mean…are you…” John was trying to ask delicately.

She squinted at him, “Did I what?”

“Are you gay?” John blurted.

“Would that change anything?” she popped her eyebrows up and winced in pain.

He shook his head, “No – I was just trying to say – you know, that…it’s fine.”

She giggled, “No, John. I’m not. She wasn’t protective of me for that reason. Now, if you can keep me from laughing, my innards would greatly appreciate it.

“So I left. I was collapsing an offshore bank in Panama…personal vendetta. I went to my bungalow there to collect my paperwork and set the rest ablaze. I flew to the Caribbean for week to get my bearings and work on her puzzle. I didn’t know of anywhere called Epidaurum.”
“But you figured it out,” Sherlock finally spoke from behind the curtain. “You seemingly did quite well without us in your absenteeism.”

She sighed, “How long have you been listening?”

Holmes whipped the curtain back and realized his hand was cuffed to the bed, “Long enough. Why did you do this to me?”

“I did,” John chuffed.

“Ah,” Sherlock conceded. “I should have guessed as much. Please, continue.”

She heaved a heavy sigh and took a moment to breathe before the persisted. “You’re right. I figured it out. I left two weeks later and made my way to Croatia. Back in the seventh century, refugees from Epidaurum fled to an island called Laus. Over the centuries, Laus evolved into Dubrovnik. And, roughly translated, Dubrovnik means ‘oak grove’. I wandered around for weeks, dropping hints that I was looking for Ece.

“She revealed herself to me while I was sitting at a café in the Strada. She looked horrible; it was obvious that she hadn’t been sleeping.

“‘Yavrum,’ she said, ‘I cannot stay long. There is a man named Milo Etchya that is moving the mysterious shipment around the world. It appears that he knows someone is looking for his merchandise. I strongly encourage you to take care.’

‘Ece, what happened?’

‘You’ve learned well, Yavrum, but I got sloppy – I left too much of a trace and he sent some of his people after me. They know that I have a student; they will start looking for you if they are not already. But…I have my doubts about him.’ She slipped me a manila envelope that was stuffed with photographs and papers.

‘What do you mean, specifically? What happened?’

“She shrugged at me, ‘It is what they said while they were looking for me. They mentioned that Etchya was going to have to tell their boss that they couldn’t find me or my partner. If you are going to continue down this path, I will not be able to go with you. I need to do honor by Bakar. I’ve tracked Nikola to Serbia.’

‘So – this is where you leave me?’

‘Only if you wish it so. You can accompany me and throw that envelope into a fire; or, you can open it. The decision is yours.’

“I wanted so badly to go to Serbia because I knew that Sherlock was going to be in Serbia; all of my intel was saying such. I knew that if I stayed there long enough, I would run into him; I wanted so badly to see you,” she admitted thoughtfully. “I wanted to know that you were okay. I had heard that Moriarty’s web was dissolving in Amsterdam and Brussels. Whispers came to me from Tibet and New Delhi, but I had no solid proof that they were you, really.”

John glanced over at Holmes, who was sitting up in his bed with his fingers steepled under his chin. Watson cleared his throat, “So far, it sounds like you were fairly unscathed through all of this.”

“I made my decision and Derya and I parted,” she continued, “So that was what I did during 2012.
“At the beginning of 2013, I went back to the US to find the mole. It ended up being O’Rourke; and you know how that panned out. I lost Andy. But, O’Rourke is alive. He’s under constant surveillance by a group that I hired. Sean knows he’s being watched. He knows that I’m angry. What he doesn’t know is that he’s more useful alive. I planted a few protocols into his mind before I left the country. He texts an anonymous number without realizing every time he is given orders by the group I call the Syndicate.

“In August, I made my way to Tanzania by way of London first. I reopened Mycroft’s memories to gather information on you,” she said looking at Sherlock. “I hadn’t heard anything about you for some time. Once his memory came back to him, I let him know of my involvement with the Syndicate. I let him know that I was heading to Tanzania to tie up some loose ends and that I would be going to look for you next.”

Dr. Watson heard the edge in her voice growing more sharp. *Tanzania*. What happened in Tanzania? “Shannon, I’m right here – we’re both right here. No one’s getting to you with us here.”

Sherlock looked over to her and could see that she was having difficulty proceeding, “Shannon, if you’ll continue.”

She cleared her throat again. *Christ…here goes nothing.* “I went to Tanzania to complete my implant into the Syndicate. It was…complicated,” she faltered. “They found Derya after she had killed Nikola. She was sloppy and had lingered too long in Serbia hoping that I would come and seek her out. To test my loyalty and pass the official initiation as my alias, Smoke, I was to eliminate her.”

Sherlock nodded, “But you didn’t go through with it.”

“No,” she acknowledged. “I made it seem as if killing her was counteractive against some larger framework. Everything was going smoothly until one of the goons ignored my instructions and tried to stab her. I came between her and the blade, one of the hits ultimately pierced my spleen. I was hit in the back with something. I don’t know what. But as I went down, I shouted to activate my protocols and it all fell quiet.

“Two of my men, Abasi and Darweshi, got me to safety despite my protests for them to get Derya as well. Darweshi was as close to a doctor as I am, but we knew that if I didn’t get patched up, I wasn’t going to survive. I instructed that Derya could help, so Abasi ran to get her. Abasi had been gone for some time, so Darweshi had begun medieval surgery to try and stop the bleeding. I woke up the next day to find my stomach was stitched closed and Abasi had returned. He brought me Derya’s body…”

“Jesus Christ,” John choked. “You could have died!”

“Abasi had carried her all the way to the safe house. He expressed to her that I had sent him to save her and bring her from harm; but she laughed at him. She had told him that she was ready to die.

When they reached us, Darweshi had already stopped the bleeding. Derya guided him with patching my spleen and stitching the holes in my gut. I was sedated. From what I understand, it was amazing that I woke up. They had guessed on dosage.

“When I finally did wake, my men were taking care to clean Derya’s body. She had died from her wounds while I slept. They both told me that they hadn’t realized she was injured because she refused to tell them so. When they finally realized she was injured; it was too late.

“She did, however, have Darweshi record her final moments for me and I was able to hear her words. I still have it saved on my laptop. I haven’t listened to it yet; but Abasi told me that it had
to deal with Etchya and that she heard whispers about a ghost and guess that it was me.”

John patted her leg. “Are you alright?”

She wiped her face. “I will be. One day. Maybe.
“She was the closest thing to a confidant that I had for almost two years – I was wounded… physically and personally. They managed to take away the one person who had done their best to keep me grounded. She had been my teacher and friend…and like that, she was gone… The next few weeks were dark for me. Had it not been for Abasi and Darweshi, I more than likely would have fallen to the dark.”

“Then I suppose we should thank them,” Sherlock replied.

She sighed, “I had been informed that Mycroft had gone to retrieve an asset, you, in Serbia; so I made that video you watched so that I could get you to remember me somehow. They both prepped me to have me fly back to England. The day that I was getting ready to leave, someone came to the airport from the Syndicate. Abasi shielded my body from gunfire and died. Darweshi got me here and I had Mycroft hide him. He is one of my contacts that lets me know what leads I should follow when I’m stuck.

“Somehow, the Syndicate knew that I was active and not responding; but Etchya was none the wiser.”

“So – where does that leave us?” John asked overwhelmed.

“Tell him about last December,” Sherlock prodded.

“December? As in this past? …that’s…that’s when you moved back in; right?”

“Yes,” she affirmed. “But in December, the IAEA became involved in a health scare over in Mexico. A radioactive material was stolen by some men trying to hijack a van. Specifically, it was Cobalt-Sixty. The hijackers were exposed and suffered from their exposure. The problem was that not all of it was recovered and it had Etchya’s signature all over it. He was getting desperate.

“Mycroft pulled me into his office not long after I had moved back in. He threatened to do something about my closeness to you and we discussed Etchya. He couldn’t officially send anyone after Etchya because it would raise too many flags with other nations.”

“So he sent you sniffing?” Sherlock asked, angry.

“Yes,” Shannon answered. “In the grand scheme of everything, I am no one.”

“Like hell you’re not,” John replied, testy. “You are someone to me. To him –even with as much as I want to punch him in the face right now.”

“Thank you, John; can we get back to the story?” Sherlock quipped sarcastically.

Shannon swallowed and continued. “I don’t exist, per se. My existence was quietly done away with while I was out and about. Between me and Mycroft, there’s not a shred of federal paperwork anywhere with my identity on it. I have disappeared. Shannon Byrns, for all that anyone could know, is an alias.

“In any case, at the end of February this year, I was sent to put trackers on Etchya’s shipment of radioactive materials so that Mycroft could see where they were going. The whole community knew that they were a hot commodity; it had only been missing for two months and authorities were actively looking for it. That’s why,” she paused for breath, “You found Mycroft with me at
Baker Street after you brought me home from Bart’s; post knife attack.”

“Jesus Christ, Shannon. Both of you! You were exposed to that – that …”

“Just me,” she assured. “The truck was already gone when Sherlock got there. It was lead lined; there wasn’t any bleed out. I snuck into the truck and placed the trackers. I made sure to do it before I thought he’d show up. I wasn’t going to play with his life.”

Sherlock looked over at her. His face gave way to confusion, hurt, and lamentation. She knew…she had known that I would come and yet…You idiot.

“You’re an imbecile,” Sherlock snapped.

SHERLOCK!” John barked. “Excuse me?” she asked at the same time.

He articulated every word curtly, “You: Shannon Byrns – you’re a bloody idiot. How could you possibly assume that it was fine for you to take all of this on as if it were your job?”

“Last I checked, I was pretty sure that the Home Office was signing my paychecks,” she sneered. “Where do you get off with this holier than thou attitude, hmm? Might I casually remind you, Sherlock, that you’re the one that had me go to Scotland in the first place!”

“But, like you said,” he was quick to rebuttal, “‘when have I ever listened to you without making up my own mind first’…that’s what you said, wasn’t it? Do you realize the kind of jeopardy you put yourself in at Mycroft’s expense…at our expense? You’re not talking about solving cases or petty crimes – you were into radioactive arms dealing. That’s something completely different.”

“He has a point, Shannon,” the good doctor agreed.

She felt her nostrils flare in anger, “You have to be kidding me? After all of this? Are you fucking serious? No – there’s no way. I have to be dreaming right now. Because…because my best friend wouldn’t be trying to chastise me for doing my job. He wouldn’t shove this pile of fucking guilt at me right now when I am in this condition; regardless of how much of a fucking prat he is! Need I remind you about why you were in Serbia in the first place?!

“And you!” she pointed at John as her voice reached hysterics. “You – you’re a fucking hypocrite!”

“Me! What are you talking about!? I just…”

“You listen to me! You’re sitting here on your high horse listening to my war stories about what I went through when I lost you both…” her voice began to fade from strain and from her recent surgery. The dam of tears that had been kept at bay broke. “…and you sit there wishing that it could have been different or wishing that you could have been there to help me…but you sat there. You listened to what I had to say… You’re going to side with him and expose your hypocrisy? When you won’t listen to what Mary has to say about what she may have been through? Spare me your criticisms, both of you!

“I am doing this job because there is no one else. It’s just me!” she cried. “I never wanted any of this. I never wanted this debacle that’s going on up in my mind. I never wanted it! You think it’s something I want?”

“It’s something that you need,” Sherlock stated plainly. “I get highs from cases, John gets highs from danger, and you – you get highs from using Geist protocols to execute plans.”
Shannon stopped to process what he had said. *He has a point, you know.*

Sherlock continued, “…and like all addicts, there will come a point where it goes too far.”

“That’s rich, coming from you,” she seethed.

John stood up, paced the room, and kicked the wall. “Sherlock Holmes, don’t you start!”

“What? Not good?”

“Definitely not,” John countered. “You’re the biggest addict here. You spin these webs enough to get us to do what you like – and then make damning reveals that leave the rest of us broken!”

“So now you’re siding with her?”

“I’m right here, Sherlock,” she groaned.

With John on a war path and Sherlock arguing for the sake of logic; both of the men that she cared about were bickering with each other. Their voices proceeded to sound louder. *Jesus Christ. I can’t think!*

Shannon slammed her good hand into her bed’s tray with a resounding crack. Holmes and Watson stopped immediately and looked over to her in alarm.

“Enough!” she spat, voice cackling and hoarse.

Both men looked to each other and then back at her; John rather sheepish and Sherlock skeptical.

“It’s done,” she coughed. “What’s done is done. I made decisions that I may not entirely be proud of in order to complete my job to protect people. People that I care about.” She glared at both of them; fire in her eyes. “After what I had to do to protect you from Moriarty, after Derya; after coming back to this damn country to be here with you – don’t you dare guilt me for doing what I thought was right.”

John stared at the floor while his temper cooled and Sherlock looked on at his hospital roommate. “Shannon, I know that you feel invincible, but…”

“You know how I feel? Do you?”

“Sherlock, leave her be,” John cautioned.

Water began to cascade down her face again, “I was terrified. I am petrified. When I finally came to in that bunker – or wherever I was – I thought that I was going to die. And that for all the worry and care that I have for you…all the weight I put into our relationships…no one was looking for me. I hoped beyond all things I can comprehend that one of you…one of you would have felt that I needed you.

“And John; I can’t even blame you – because it was your wedding…but you know who did miss me? You know who did realize there was something wrong? Molly Hooper. Greg Lestrade. Christ – Mycroft Holmes even realized it. She sniffed and wiped her puffy face of her tears, “I thought we…us three…I thought we were better than that.”

Watson looked up, placed his hands on his waist, and sighed. “Well, I’m glad you’re not dead. I don’t have anyone else that could so effectively rip my heart out and make me wish they’d do it again so that they wouldn’t feel bad.”
She could tell that he was trying to be comforting and apologetic. “Yes, John. You do.” She rolled away from them as best she could and stuffed her hands under her pillow. “Do what you must. I’m tired.”

Sherlock analyzed everything that had transpired that evening before saying in the quiet, “If you think I’m going anywhere, you’re mistaken.”

“Me either,” John agreed.

She looked over her shoulder, dejected.

Holmes persisted, “If you think that this disagreement on how you view your safety or how you conduct your business would deter us from keeping you around; you know nothing.”

“Shannon – I can only imagine what you went through. I’ve felt your isolation, I have felt your stress in war, and I have felt your fear when you think the floor has given way under you,” John soothed, “but I’ll be damned if I give up on you. You are our friend. Stubborn, bull-headed that you may be… We should have been there.”

“I’m sorry,” she apologized. “I’m tired.”

Sherlock smirked, “Yes, definitely the drugs you’re on. You’re never this irritable. Ever.”

She drifted off to sleep shortly after, exhausted from everything that had transpired in the past thirty-six hours. *You’re safe. They’ve got you.*
Shannon woke first as grey light filtered in through the soft curtain of her hospital room. She was stiff and felt throbbing in her stomach. *Ah…my morphine was turned down. Probably John. That’s to be expected, I guess. At least I’m alive.* Her knee was stiff and she flexed it with care. *That’ll heal fine. No real damage…at least it had been dislocated before…if that’s a plus.*

She situated herself in her bed and found that her roommate’s bed had been pushed away slightly and John was sitting asleep in a chair between them. As best that she could, she lifted herself up in the bed so that she could sit. One of her monitors blinked angrily in alarm. *Great.*

A recognizable face walked in carrying a chart at her side. The nurse, Charlie, made her way to Shannon’s bedside. “How are you feeling?” she asked in the quiet.

“Well, yes,” Charlie replied. “But, I think that Dr. Riggs, since he’s your surgeon and physician right now, is going to want to talk to you. I’ll call him as soon as a leave to let him know that you’re awake. Just…take it easy. You have quite a bit of stitch work that he’ll be rather upset about if you rip any of it.”

“Ah. So is that why I feel this great?” she quipped in dark humor.

“Yes, ma’am. Can I get some more water…or ice?”

“Of course. We’ll bring some around shortly. Sit tight,” Charlie resounded calmly as she left.

Watson and Holmes were both snoring softly. John’s head rolled against his chest and Sherlock had turned his face away from the filtered sunlight. *I remember these days; finding them in the common room of the flat and both asleep in their chairs after having been out all night. I’d find them in the morning, cover them with blankets, and start making breakfast.*

Lost in her thoughts, she didn’t hear Dr. Riggs walk in. She snapped to after he came into focus and blinked. “Doctor.”

“Miss Byrns, how are you feeling?”

“Alive, thank you.”

“We were able to relocate your knee back into position. The reduction was fairly simple. You’re lucky – most of the time ligaments tear when the knee dislocates, but you managed to get away with severe sprains.”
“Ah,” she observed, “That’s because it’s been dislocated before. I was younger when it happened in university. That’s how I knew that it would be possible to put it back as long as I was found fast enough.”

He nodded knowingly, “Is that why I can see that you moved your knee already? If you manage to slip your splint again, I’m casting your leg. That joint can’t bend for about six weeks, understood?”

“Yes. I’ll need some crutches or something.”

“Fine, fine…we can make that happen. Now, you and I need to discuss your surgery,” he led. She nodded and watched him pull up a chair to her bedside. “We can talk here or I can have you taken to a private room; it’s your choice.”

She glanced over and smirked, “They’re asleep. I think my privacy, such that it is, is safe.”

“Before I get into it, you should be able to take your finger splints off in four weeks. If you want to play it safe, leave them on until you take your leg splint off. Now, your face if healing rather well. You do have a hairline fracture in the right zygomatic bone.”

She winced and thought for a moment, “Jaw? No, that’s the mandible…”

“Your cheekbone,” the doctor added. “Be careful; if you take another hit it could become worse. Part of your face could flatten, your jaw may not open as much as it should, or you can rupture the blood vessels in your eyes. Please, watch your face. Your abrasions will need cleaned as normal to prevent infection. I can, if you like, put you in contact with a plastic surgeon that’s good with patients that have facial scarring should you find that it is an issue.”

She nodded and waited for him to continue.

“Your abdomen, however, is another story. Your hemorrhage was a grade four…which means that you bled out quite a lot. I did not catch it when you came in last week because I didn’t have a need to open you up. The short way to the end of it is that blood was pooling in your abdominal cavity. We aren’t one hundred percent sure why; other than it may have been whatever was in your IV. The results should be coming back shortly.

“I was able to clamp the main bleed, but there’s no assurance that I can give you in saying that it won’t happen again. There is blunt force trauma all around your torso. If I had to guess, I would say whatever was in that bag made everything worse.”

She thought carefully, wracking her brain for anything that might have been helpful. “Would it have been warfarin? Or anything like that?”

“It’s possible,” he agreed. “Mr. Holmes’ men took the sample; I assume you will be hearing from them shortly. I am going to have you subject to periodic ultrasounds to see how things are every few hours.

“Now, while I was in there, I did see previous repair done to your spleen. Care to elaborate?”

“It was emergency surgery done in the bush,” she stated plainly. “It had to happen or I would have died.”

“I see.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes, there is. Miss Byrns, while I was looking for the bleed, I had to dig around a bit…”
“So that’s why I feel like a scrambled egg,” she joked.

“…Miss Byrns, listen to me. What lower abdominal trauma have you had in the past?”

She squinted in calculation while trying to figure out where he was going with this, “Doctor Riggs, be blunt. I mean, I had been in a knife fight and got sliced open; which I ’m sure you saw the scar. Other than that, I’m not sure that I know what you’re asking.”

“When did you have a hysterectomy and why?”

*What…what are you talking about? No – it’s not possible. There’s no way… “Ex…excuse me?”*

“You didn’t know?”

Her head shook sluggishly back and forth as her clouded mind ran in thousands of directions, “You’re sure?”

“Regretfully, yes,” he conveyed. “Do you know when it may have happened?”

*Oh yes, I know when it happened. It all makes sense now…Morocco. “It would have been around two years ago…Jesus Christ.”*

“I found scarring on your abdominal wall. Do you know what happened?”

She looked over to Sherlock and John and their forms still were asleep.

“Doctor Riggs, this conversation stays strictly between us. Those two…they can never know. Do I have your professional oath that I have my privacy?” she asked with her voice falling lower to the point it was nearly a whisper.

“Of course. Always.”

“Has Mycroft explained to you anything about what I do?”

“No. He has not.”

She sighed, “Unfortunately, this is going to sound very bizarre to you then. My job…is in the protection of…puppies.”

“Puppies?” he reiterated, skeptical.

“Yes. ‘Puppies’,” she said with air quotes. “And I travel the world to protect puppies from abusers.”

He nodded, “Continue.”

“When I went with the RSPCA to check on some puppies…one of the abusers attacked me. I woke up a week later and my coworker told me that I had lucked out; that it was just a slice and I’d survive. The problem was that the abuser was one of my coworkers, too.”

Riggs furrowed a brow in frustration and listened intently. “I’m following so far. But…”

“One day, at work, my coworkers realized that I didn’t have my period and hadn’t for some time. I told them that I was pregnant with the hopes that they would leave me alone. Some of my coworkers were happy. Others were angry.”
“Were you pregnant?”

“It was possible,” she said without feeling. “I had an IUD in place, but at the time and considering the timeframe, it was possible. Highly improbable though it may be; there was a possibility.”

_Sherlock and I had tested our attraction theory a few months before the fall. It would have been… one…two…three and a half? Three and a half months at the time…

“Before you follow up with your next question, it would have been three and a half months.”

“…if you were pregnant?”

“Yes.”

“And you wouldn’t have thought much of it because of the IUD.”

“I had occasional bleeding and spotting here and there during this time frame, but often that happened when a large amount of stress was on my plate. I didn’t think it was outside of the normal state of things. Then after the knife fight, I assumed it was stress,” she whispered quickly as Sherlock stirred.

Riggs waited to be sure that Sherlock was still asleep before continuing, “I’m sorry that you found out this way, if it’s any consolation. There’s no way to know if you were genuinely pregnant.”

“Thank you, Doctor,” her voice emotionless. “I appreciate all that you do in the endeavor to keep me alive.”

“The nurses will be coming around with breakfast shortly; your medication will be with it. If you need me, please have the nurses call.”

He exited the room in silence, shut the door behind him, and left Shannon to her thoughts. _Those animals gave me a hysterectomy… I…I’m never going to have children? Perhaps that’s for the best. What child would want to grow up in a world where I’m their mother and could jeopardize their life on a daily basis just by existing? Regardless. I want to know. I need to know. I need to see Mycroft as soon as possible._

John surfaced from sleep first and stretched in his chair. He squinted against the light, blinking furiously in Shannon’s direction. She was eating breakfast and passed her tray toward him, “Here…eat something. You look like you should be in this bed.”

He snorted in sardonic amusement and ate the other half of her breakfast. _When did I eat last? It’s been at least an entire day. Maybe two…

“Thank you,” he mumbled as he inhaled the food. “‘ow ar’ yoo fee’in dooday?”

“Well, it’s not yesterday anymore, so that’s a blessing,” she offered.

‘ow ‘ong,” he swallowed his food, “have you been awake?”

She chuckled, “Hour? Hour and a half? I dunno. Not very long. Long enough to have the nurse check on me and for me to finally meet up with Dr. Riggs to discuss my surgery.”

“Ah, how’d that go?”

“Worse than expected,” she said offhand. “But it is what it is. I have to take it easy. My splints can come off in six weeks.”
“I assumed as much,” John replied knowingly. “How are you holding up?”

“I’ll live, I promise you,” she yawned. “I’m not dead yet.”

She grabbed her phone off her tray and texted Mycroft.

Dickhead:

I need to see my file ASAP.

“Why are you using your mobile in the hospital?” John asked exasperated.

“It’s important, John. And at this point, if it shorts one of my machines, maybe it’s doing me a favor, eh?”

“That’s not funny,” he smirked.

Annoyance:

Are you genuinely awake?
Or has my brother stolen
your mobile phone
-MH

Dickhead:

You're a dick. Bring
my file here. Today.

Annoyance:

I'm afraid that I cannot
do that. Protocols, you see.
-MH

Dickhead:

Just like the protocols in
this hospital, eh? I'm looking for something
specific. You can be in the
room while I read it for all
I care. Bring the Goddamned
file, Mycroft. Now.
“Sherlock, wake up,” she barked.

He sat upright with a start and clutched his side, “What?!”

“You brother is on his way,” she gave as a warning.

“You couldn’t have let me sleep through that?” he muttered.

“You need to eat. Step to,” she ordered.

John laughed. Sherlock looked down to his wrist, “Why am I still handcuffed to this bed?!”

Mycroft appeared within the hour with an umbrella in one hand and a moderately sized packet in the other. John had since left, at Shannon’s bequest, to go home, shower, and change.

The elder of the two Holmes strode to Shannon’s bed and put the packet on her bed. “Is everything in there?” she asked, skeptical.

“Everything that we have on you, yes,” Mycroft acknowledged. “Though, I’m not sure what you could possibly need to know that’s in here that you don’t already know yourself.”

Sherlock looked across the small void with intrigue in his eyes. Mycroft was aware of the odd silence and opened his mouth to ask when Shannon beat him to it. “I told Sherlock that if his kept his mouth shut while you were here, I would get him a body from a morgue that has a unique cause of death for him to investigate and take notes on, thank you,” she chirped while sliding the packet’s contents into her hand.

She quickly thumbed through the folder of paper work, looking for a very specific piece of paper. *Where is my physical form?*

“Well, baby brother, if I had only known that throwing a cadaver at you from time to time would have won me your silence, I would have done so much earlier in our relationship,” he quipped.

“Shut up, Mycroft,” she warned. “I may be injured, but notice he’s cuffed to his bed and I am not. I will not allow you to insult him like this. I’m still very able to kick you out of this room.”

“I doubt that, Miss Byrns. You’d need crutches to walk me out of here,” he cooed antagonizing her.

She shrugged and flipped through more paperwork. “I don’t need to walk if I’m using your head as a baseball and my crutch as a bat,” she offered. Sherlock smirked and went back to his work on his laptop.

*There!* She flipped past the two papers that were in her way and found her physical report. Before she had started to enact her Ghost process on everyone in London, Mycroft and the Home Office...
insisted that Shannon have a complete physical done so that they could have a base line on her. At least that’s what they said. I think that they wanted to have my entire body surveyed just in case I became an enemy of the realm.

It doesn’t matter. This is what I need. Her eyes scanned the recorded information as quickly as possible. Ah yes, the clinical evaluation.

Head, face, neck: Normal
Sinuses: Abnormal: Sign of Puncture Procedure
Mouth & throat: Abnormal: Tonsillectomy, Adenoidectomy
Ears & drums: Abnormal: Perforations in both ears
Eyes: Normal
Heart: Normal: Note – Incredibly strong due to athletics and conditioning
Cardiovascular: Normal
Respiratory: Normal
Extremities: Normal: Note – Knee damage in left, possible dislocation.
Body marks: Normal: Note – scaring on body correlates to previous encounters mentioned in memo.
Neurologic: Abnormal: Note – see redacted information; form RI-42
Psychiatric: Abnormal: Note – see redacted information; form RI-42
Endocrine: Normal
Pelvic: Normal: Note – see redacted information; form RI-42

She searched through the file to find this RI-42 form, but could not find it. “Mycroft,” she asked while flipping through more pages, “where is the RI-42?”

Mycroft’s eyes bounced from Sherlock to her and he quirked an eyebrow upward. “It’s redacted information. It wouldn’t be in your file.”

“I need to see it,” she stressed.

Sherlock grew curious but kept quiet in order to humor her. Mycroft lifted his chin and looked down his nose at her, “Miss Byrns, it’s redacted for a reason. It’s been removed for your safety should you be compromised.”

Sherlock snapped, “Mycroft!”

“Ah, didn’t think you could do it, Sherlock,” he chirped.

“Where is the form?” Sherlock growled.

Shannon had swung her legs off the bed and grabbed her crutches. She hobbled defiantly toward Mycroft. “WHERE IS IT?” she bellowed. She took another menacing step in his direction.

“It’s been removed and put into another department somewhere. After it is redacted, I do not ask where it’s gone unless it is a matter of national security,” he retorted taking a step backwards.

“Shannon,” Sherlock warned quickly after seeing the rage in her eyes. “Look at me.” Her head snapped in his direction. “Whatever it is that you need to find, I will help you with it, but you cannot kill Mycroft.”
“Thank you, Sherlock,” the elder Holmes breathed.

“You might pull your stitches,” Sherlock added. “Stop what you’re doing and get back into bed. Now!”

Mycroft’s face fell and was unamused. “Thank you for considering my welfare, brother,” he sniped.

“Mycroft, leave. Get out. Leave the hospital and do not call for her unless she does so first. Now!” he barked.

Mycroft nodded abruptly, grabbed the folder off of her bed and left. Shannon made it to the chair, collapsed into it, and buried her face in her hand.

“Shannon.” He didn’t have to say anything else. She tossed him the keys to the handcuffs, waited for him to free himself, and stared at the wall.

“What are you looking for?” he asked. What would have been so important that you would threaten Mycroft…like this? I mean, I can guess; however…

“I can’t tell you,” her voice was flat. “I…just can’t.”

“Right then,” he cracked his knuckles and then rotated his newly freed wrist. “The game is on. Let’s get to work, shall we?”

She turned to stare at him as he opened new windows on his laptop. “Sherlock, what are you doing?”

“I’m going to find the RI-42; it’s not solely just for you, you know,” he quipped. It is. She knows that you’re lying. “…I haven’t bothered him at this level for quite some time. Now that I’m not dead…again…I’d like to make myself a problem.”

“Sherlock…should you find it, please – don’t read it.”

“Are you going to help or are you going to sit there in self-loathing? Get up. Go walk. Get out of this room. You’re hindering my process,” he jabbed.

She heaved a heavy sigh and got up with some effort. She grabbed her IV pole with one hand and a crutch in the other. She made her way out of the room and took a lap around the quiet floor. God damn it, Sherlock Holmes.

The Twenty-first of September

“It was Pradaxa,” Doctor Riggs announced to her. Sherlock barely looked over as he scanned his computer screen.

“He’s fine,” Shannon assured. “You’re sure?”

The doctor nodded, “Yes…did Mr. Holmes not tell you?”

“No,” Sherlock chuckled low in his chest. “My brother isn’t going to be visiting Shannon any time soon.”
“Anyway, Pradaxa. It’s an anticoagulant that’s supposed to prevent strokes.”

“Ah,” she remembered, “I saw adverts for it when I was in The States. We do that over there…”

Sherlock went back to busying himself on the computer. Riggs continued, “We shouldn’t have done the transfusion, it was rather dicey considering that there’s an antidote for the Pradaxa…but we didn’t know what was going on. But it’s out of your system now. Whatever was built up has been burned off by your body – your recovery will progress much faster now.”

“Great,” she mumbled.

“Don’t sound so thrilled,” Riggs retorted, “And I expect you to make three laps around the floor today.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” she begrudging.

“I will have the nurse stop by in the next two hours to see if you’ve left for your first walk,” Riggs warned. He left Shannon to grumble obscenities under her breath.

Sherlock swiveled in his bed to face her, “Well, aren’t you going to ask?”

“What?”

“About the progress?”

“Sure…”

He was pleased with himself, shuffled over with his laptop to sit on the bottom section of her bed. He crossed his legs and spun the laptop to face her. “There was a log kept!”

She looked up over her book that Molly had brought her last night. *Thank God for Molly Hooper.*

“That’s it?”

“Do you realize how many hours of cross-referencing and digging this took?!” he blasted.

She shrugged, “About twenty-three?”

“Your sarcasm and observational skills are astounding today. You should try upping your morphine. You might enjoy it.”


She swung her legs off the bed, grabbed her crutches, and tugged on his sleeve. “Let’s go!”

“I’m not leaving, I have work to do,” he chided.

She crossed her arms and gave a mocking huff, “Oh, I’m sorry, I thought you were going to protect me while I was recovering. That’s what you said, wasn’t it?”

“I loathe you,” Sherlock groaned as she pulled him off the bed.

“I need walked. Pretend I’m Lassie.”

“Here girl, who wants to go for a walk?” he teased.
She frowned, “On second thought, don’t pretend I’m Lassie.”

“Come along, Byrns. Let’s go walking,” he sighed as he opened the door for her. She shuffled past and waited for him to catch up.

*You should see how she’s feeling…that is the common etiquette to use in this situation. John would agree.* “Shannon,” he straightened up as he walked, “how are you feeling?”

Shannon looked sideways at him as she did her best to use her crutches without compromising her abdomen. “Are you being congenial now?”

“It’s a fair question, you must admit,” he replied.

“I do,” she allowed. The pair continued to shuffle slowly down the hall. “Riggs seems to think that I’m going to recover faster than anticipated, given how my face and back are healing so nicely.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

“Ah, that.”

“Shannon.”

“I’ll be okay,” she heaved a heavy sigh.

He matched her side glance and raised an eyebrow. “Do you – want to…”

“Talk? No, not right now.” Sherlock gave a small, subtle nod and looked straight ahead. “Sherlock, I want you to know that I truly appreciate what you have done and what you’re doing. I just…Riggs gave me a talking to yesterday about the extent of my injuries. It was sobering.”

He stopped in the hallway and looked at her. *I’ve seen her everyday – but…now I see her. She’s tired. Obviously. Her face is healing – but there is something that she’s learned that’s causing her stress. What is it? I’ve seen her fight; I’ve watched her take down a group of gun runners…what has her so spooked? What in her physical would have been redacted by Mycroft? Does it have to do with her mind? It’s possible. It could show how Geist is affecting the way the hemispheres of the brain work. Further research would need to be conducted.*

He heard her voice sinking into his subconscious, “Sherlock, come back.”

“Hmm?”

“You were lost in your thoughts,” she said with a reassuring smile. “Don’t worry, I didn’t say anything important.” She patted him on the shoulder. “Come on, one more lap to go.”
The Thirtieth of September

“Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you are released from the hospital. I released you days ago. You are free to go. SO WHY ARE YOU STILL IN MY HOSPITAL?” Doctor Riggs snarled.

Sherlock folded his morning paper down to look up at the surgeon from his seat. “Because I love you, obviously,” he leered.

Since being discharged four days ago, Sherlock had wreaked havoc on two floors solving small, little issues that he found on a whim.

Dr. Riggs, exasperated, threatened, “I’ll have you removed!”

“You can try, but you will find that if I call my older brother, he will be more of an issue for you than I am.”

“This…this is extortion! With my place of business.”

“Ooh, you’re quick,” he chortled.

Shannon glared at Holmes from her bed, “I’m sorry, Dr. Riggs. I don’t like being smothered as much as you do but I don’t have an option here. I’m stuck in this bed until you discharge me. It doesn’t look like you’ll be rid of him yet.”

“How are you feeling,” Dr. Riggs asked honestly. “Are your headaches any better? How about your ribs? And the knee?”

“Enough,” she smiled. “Do you want me out of here?”

Riggs eyed Holmes wearily, “Only if you feel up to it, in all honesty. As your surgeon and doctor, I would advise that stay for another day. You’re healing quite well, but you still may need some supervision.”

“That’s fine, Doc – I feel well enough to go. Anything about the abdominal incision?” she glanced over at the detective who had resumed reading his paper.

“Keep it dry, keep it clean; and don’t overdo it. Your abdomen is still tender. Don’t rip your stitches. They’ll come out on their own in another two to three weeks. Everything else,” he gestured wildly, “I’m sure you already know how to take care of those issues. Before you leave, I want to get another scan of your brain and another of your abdomen.”

“Why?” Sherlock drew the single word out unnecessarily.

“Precautions,” Dr. Riggs admitted. “There was a chance of brain damage at the initial observation. I’d like a second scan to compare should any issues ever arise. It’s been two weeks since your last scan.”

She nodded, “Alright.”

“Now, do you need a prescription for Vicodin, Codeine, or any other pain management? I’m only
“Yes,” Sherlock chirped.

She smirked, but shook her head. “No, I’ll be fine. Thank you. I’ll live.”

“I’ll send a nurse to escort you to imaging after you’re ready.” Dr Riggs grabbed his clipboard and left the room, quietly shutting the door behind him.

Shannon looked over at Sherlock, “Did you really think I was going to bring Vicodin or Codeine into the flat? Honestly.”

“It was worth a try,” he admitted with a smug grin. “There’s always the off chance you weren’t paying attention.”

“I can’t tell if I should be amused or offended; thanks, Sherlock.”

“Which reminds me,” he pulled a packet from his coat. “This is yours.” He handed her a white envelope that had no discernible markings on it.

She furrowed her brow and took the envelope from his reaching arm. Sherlock settled back into the guest chair and grabbed the newspaper to read.

Shannon stared at the envelope and looked up to Sherlock as she sat up in her bed. “Is…is this…?”

“Yep.”

“How did you,” she breathed, stunned.

“Best not ask,” Sherlock offered without looking up from the column he was reading. “Mycroft may come asking about it. Though…he will probably want to know who impersonated him to gain clearance…”

She opened the flap and slid out the contents. The small packet of papers was neatly folded and aside from the text on the page, there was no contextual clues to offer where these papers had come from. Gingerly she unfolded them and began to read.

RI-42

Patient: 00231179-254-678144
Date: 23 April 2012

Below is redacted information from physical examination.

**Neurologic:**
Note – No neurological damage discovered. Patient exhibits neuroenhancement without any pharmalogical agents. Patient has not been subjected to BMI (brain-machine interfaces) or tDCS (transcranial direct current stimulation) in the past two years to their knowledge. Patient exhibits higher levels of cognitive, motor, and affective abilities. The patient is capable of showing a wide
range of emotion and utilizes social skills and empathy. Note that patient is able to “turn off” empathy at will. Patient states that if needed, they are able to disassociate themselves with empathetic tendencies in order to perform certain tasks.

**Psychiatric:**
Note – Patient has developed a version of “Self-Enhancement” to cope with the progression of their condition. They patient is able to balance the Above- average Effect, the Illusions of Control, and Unrealistic Optimism; the patient’s ability to do so puts them in the top four percentile of achievers in this spectrum. However, due to the patient’s intellect and how they internalize the events that they see and experience.

The patient is able differ their influence of culture. There is no evidence to suggest that the patient has had Eastern influence in their upbringing. The patient does not seem to be cognizant of the effect; but rather has begun to do so automatically and subconsciously. This may be due in part to the Cognitive Load that the patient is able to undertake.

**Pelvic:**
Note – Patient has admitted to having recent sexual encounters; however, withholds the name of said partner(s). Patient has provided information concerning birth control.

She has provided past history and stated that an IUD has been in place for ten months. Patient submitted to pregnancy tests: both methods used in event of a false positive.

**Analysis**
Urine Sample: Inconclusive - Positive
Blood Sample: Inconclusive - Negative

Conclusion: - Patient will need to have obstetric ultrasonography on next visit to confirm. At this time; patient is assumed to not be pregnant. Next visit to be scheduled in two weeks’ time to confirm analysis.

Quantitative blood test used has a threshold of 25 mIU/mL.
Urine test used has a threshold of 10 mIU/mL.

--Urine test is more sensitive than blood test administered. Obstetric ultrasonography and/or blood (serum beta with 1 mIU/mL threshold [most sensitive]) will be conducted to confirm early prognosis.

Shannon was numb. *It was early. I would have only been a month at most at the time…but… Inconclusive? And at the second visit, I was too busy trying to Geist myself from everyone here. Jesus Christ.*

That means…Mycrof. *He saw this. He would have known that…that there was a chance… Damn it. There’s nothing here about the second visit.*

Sherlock studied her mannerisms as she finished reading. *You’ve found what you needed. What in particular would have you acting as such?*

She stuffed the papers back into the envelope and reached out for Sherlock. “Burn it.”

“Did you read everything?”

Her gaze far away and not meeting his eyes, she stated, “I don’t need to. Burn it. Now. I know
that you have a lighter in your right breast pocket.”

He grabbed the envelope and nodded. “Usually, you are correct. Today, however, I do not have it and would need to take it to be incinerated. I do know where the incinerator is; if you permit me.”

“Fine. Get rid of it.”

He stood up, snatched the envelope from her outstretched hand, and briskly made his way out the door. “I hope that the government will never need this should you decide to switch sides. Mycroft would be rather sore about it.”

“Let him,” she scoffed. “He can come after me if he chooses to do so.”

Sherlock’s mind was on alert and left with the envelope in hand to deposit it in the incinerator.

Shannon grabbed her cellphone and typed in her speed dial 6.

“We need to talk.”

“You do have to stop beckoning like this, Miss Byrns.”

She sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose, “I am not trying to start a fight today, Mycroft. But so help me, I will if I have to. You and I both know the consequences and fallout that would occur if that were to happen. Now, after all the work that I have done for you and for the Crown, I would like you to extend some professional courtesy my way; a retroactive *Quid pro quo*.”

“If you insist. You are becoming a thorn in my side, Miss Byrns. And I can see that you enlisted Sherlock to do some digging where he’s not supposed to.”

“I did no such thing,” she scoffed. “What your brother decides to do of his own volition is not my concern while I’m stuck here in the hospital.”

“Hmm, I’m sure,” he replied coolly. “Now, what is it that I can assist you with today?”

She was calm and collected, having removed emotion from her voice. “I know that you saw the redacted information from the RI-42…”

“Of course, but I don’t understand…” he interrupted.

 “…that’s not why I’ve called. I need to know the results from the second exam that was conducted with your physician.”

Mycroft paused for a moment, “It would have been in your file. I did not have the second examination redacted.”

“Mycroft, it wasn’t in the file,” she replied quickly. “Look.”

She heard Mycroft wheel out from behind his desk and move to another room. “If you would indulge me a moment,” he asked as she waited. “Here we are. Now, this ridiculousness about your exam will be resolved momentarily.”

She waited. “*Miss Byrns*?”

“Mr. Holmes.”

“The second examination’s results are not in your file. I do, however, have a note from the
attending physician that states where I should look for the information. Shall I tell you or should I
tell Sherlock so that he can do your snooping for you?” his voice snarky.

“I would like to know where to look, thank you. I’m to be released shortly.”

“It came to be in the care of the Ministry of Defense. It’s been sent to Seahawk.”

She sighed, “Now pretend I’m a moron and don’t know where that is.”

“It’s kept at RNAS Culdrose in Helston. It’s the largest helicopter base in Europe. It houses
helicopter squadrons, search and rescue, and…”

“Diver training for the Royal Navy,” she added. “I’ve heard of it before. Why was it sent to
Cornwall?”

“You would have to ask the physician. Unfortunately, he suffered a heart attack last year and did not survive. Now, if there is nothing else?”

“Why didn’t you tell me about what was redacted?” she asked plainly.

“Potential leverage should the occasion ever rise that you would be against the realm. It’s all a
matter of priority, Miss Byrns; and my priority is to protect the commonwealth at all costs,” he
stated in honesty. “You understand.”

“Completely,” she acknowledged. “Goodbye, Mycroft.”

“Miss Byrns.”

Without missing a beat, she hung up and dialed a second number. She waited as it was rerouted a
few times until finally there was the familiar dial tone that she’d come to love.

“Dank you for calling Upelelezi. ‘Ow ken I ‘elp you?”

“Yes, I am in need of retrieval. Something of mine is lost and I need to have it.”

“Yes, yes. Of course. And de urgency wit which you need dis item?”

“Grave urgency. It is a paper of a personal nature.”

“Unda-stood. And do ye know where dis item was last?”

“Helston, Cornwall. At an airport of sorts.”

“And de plane?”

“It reminded me of a sea hawk.”

“Dat one? Yes, yes, I do t’ink dat I will be able to help you.”

“Wonderful. I knew you were the man for the job.”

“Consider it done. Shall I call you when de item is in my possession?”

“Please. I will stop by your store when you have it.”
“Of course, Kivuli. I will leave at once. Do you have a confirmation number?”

“Yes, I do,” she paused remembering the confidential information. “It was on the RI-42 form you handed last I was in England.”

“Of course. Will you read de numbers for me, Kivuli?”

“00231179-254-678144,” she replied slowly. “Shall I repeat it for you?”

“No, the confirmation number is good. I shall get on this today. Thank you for choosing Upelilezi; we appreciate your continued trust and business.”

The phone went dead.

There. I can’t be in two places at once. But Darweshi, on the other hand… Thank God for small favors. The day that I have to say goodbye to him will be the day I walk away from this job in its entirety.

Sherlock reappeared some time later after Shannon had her cranial and abdominal scans. “Did you get lost?”

“No,” he replied matter-of-factly, “I wandered around aimlessly because you have been boring and then I solved a nurse’s dilemma as to where her boyfriend had been hiding her money.”

“Uh huh,” her face showing signs on skepticism. “Oh, and thank you for grabbing my clothes yesterday. It’s nice to be in something other than a hospital gown.”

“Your constant moping was becoming taxing. I assumed that it would only be a matter of time before you were released. The IV was taken out last week and you have only been under observation for some time,” he offered.

“True. But it’s still appreciated. I do, however, need assistance. I’m having problems finding the sleeves of my jumper.”

Sherlock rounded the privacy curtain and found that Shannon had been fairly successful at dressing herself, with the exception of her left sock, left shoe, and zip-up jumper. “Did you dress yourself?”

“I had help,” she admitted, “But I thought I could get the last of it and sent Charlie away. That was a mistake.”

“Charlie?” he inquired as he slipped her sock over her foot.

“The nurse? Charlie? She’s been coming in here nearly every day to check on us? Ringing a bell?”

He shrugged. “No, is that important?”

“She only changed your dressings, mine, and would occasionally give you more morphine,” she winced as he jarred on her shoe.

“Ah. Yes. Her. Why didn’t you just say the nurse who brought the morphine?”

She sighed, “Silly me.”
Sherlock grabbed her jumper, guided her arms through the sleeves, and slipped it over her shoulders. “What other business do you have in the hospital?”

She shrugged as she pocketed her cellphone. “I need you to carry my things; other than that, I’m free to go.”

Holmes’ face fell in annoyance as she looked over to her cards, balloons, and vase of flowers. Greg, Molly, John, and Mrs. Hudson had all sent cards and balloons. Mary sent the flowers. Shannon had kept the card with her in the event John were to get angry about it. “You musn’t be serious.”

“Very. I’m still on crutches. Will you grab my things?” she asked.

“Where’s Lestrade? He’s good at carrying things such as –”

She grew stern, “He’s at work and already sent me his apologies at not being here for check out. Sherlock, grab the damn vase and balloons; I can stuff the cards in the jumper. Jesus.”

Begrudged, Sherlock did as asked. When the pair reached outer lobby of the hospital, Sally Donovan was leaning casually against her car. “Not a word. Lestrade sent me over here to take you home. I feel it’s a misuse of funds…”

“Thank you,” Shannon offered. “If you can keep civil, I’ll pass it along to Greg. Sherlock, that goes for you, too.”

The car ride was achieved in silence. Neither party spoke to each other and the two intellectuals were soon standing outside of Baker Street.

She leaned into the car window and gave a small smile, "Thanks, Donovan. Truly. I appreciate it, regardless of what's happened in the past."

"Careful," Donovan smirked, "We can't be too friendly if you keep hanging around him." Donovan left just as quickly as she had dropped them off and disappeared around the corner.

Shannon snuck her phone out and took a photo of Sherlock holding her plants and balloons and fired it off to John. *He'll appreciate that.*

Mrs. Hudson heard the door being fiddled with and opened it briskly. “Sherlock, what on earth!”

“Hello there, Mrs. Hudson,” Shannon smiled warmly. “It’s wonderful to be home.”

“SHANNON?! Oh goodness, come in, come in. You’re going to get sick in your condition out on the street! Sherlock, why didn’t you bring her in faster?”

Shannon hobbled her way over the threshold and playfully jabbed Sherlock in the arm, “Yeah, what took you so long?”

“Can’t wait for your leg to heal so you can go out and do things,” he chided.

“I’m sure you can,” she jeered while she slowly made her way up to the staircase. “Until that point, I’m home now; so you don’t have to baby sit me anymore.”

“Thank God,” Sherlock exhaled in relief. He dropped her flowers and balloons off her room and exited out the front door.

“Oh, dear,” Mrs. Hudson observed. “He could have at least stayed with you for a while!”
Shannon laughed as she reached her laptop, “Oh no, Mrs. Hudson. It’s quite alright. Imagine being stuck with Sherlock Holmes in a confined room for nearly two weeks. We are very much ready for time apart. I’m sure one of us would have killed each other.”

“Well, if you say so,” she replied concerned. “Now if you need anything, dear, I’ll be downstairs until three; and then I’m going out for bridge.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Hudson. I appreciate it. For now, though, I’m going to sit here on this couch and relish in the fact that I am not in a hospital.” She plopped down without grace onto the couch, laptop in hand, and smiled. “It’s good to be home.”

Mrs. Hudson returned her smile and headed down the stairs to her kitchen. Shannon grabbed her phone and texted an invitation out as an invitation to come to a quiet flat. *Let’s see if they come.*

Sherlock burst through the doors to Molly’s laboratory and stood toe to toe with the woman. Surprised, Molly let out a small yelp and jumped with a fright from her microscope. “Sherlock! You gave me such a fright. What are you doing here?”

“Molly, I need information.”

Her eyes shifted back and forth, “Well, it’s not like you’re going to ask to use my lab anyway.”

“…From you,” he replied curtly.

“Me? What do you need from me?” she squeaked?

He clasped his hands behind his back and raised an eyebrow, “I don’t know yet. But I’m sure that of anyone, you would more than likely be the one to know some secrets…”

“Secrets?” she queried. “Me?”

“…about Shannon Byrns,” he added. “She’s on a warpath to find some information from her physical. I need to know everything that you know about her. Now.”

“Sherlock, I’m not going to just tell you things! She’s my friend! Things are sometimes said in confidence. Even if she said anything, I doubt whatever it is you’re looking for…would…would even be remotely important!” Molly asserted by putting her foot down.

Impressive. Having Shannon around has boosted your confidence, Miss Hooper. “Now Molly. I have a feeling that she may become self-destructive.”

“No. Not until I see her,” she snapped.

“Molly Hooper, I don’t have time for petty games and trivial frivolities…” he snapped.

She snapped right back, “Then make the time, Sherlock Holmes!” He leaned back in light surprise from her tone, but stood his ground. “This is Shannon you’re taking about. *MAKE TIME!*

Shannon didn’t open her eyes as her guest stood on the landing. She smirked, “I’m not sleeping. Come in. It’s just me and Mrs. Hudson, I promise.”

Mary walked into the living room and sat at the other end of the couch. *She’s on guard. Probably*
smart. She doesn’t really know me. I don’t really know her, either, to be fair. But – she did save Sherlock’s life, in a way.

They sat in tense silence before Shannon opened her eyes and spoke. “I know that you saved his life. Thank you.”

Mary nodded, “It was what I could do in the situation to try and save John and Sherlock.”

Shannon reciprocated her nod and continued, “Mary, you realize that I have every reason in the world to make you disappear, right? You can’t think you have been ignored from programming, right?”

She felt Mary stiffen subtly. “I have been quite careful to take counter-measures against it.”

She laughed heartily, “I’m sure you have.” Shannon cleared her throat as she sat up and wiped a laughter-induced tear from her eye. “But that’s not how this works. You’ve not had training for anything like me because ‘I don’t exist’. Come now. Before we can talk as friends again, we need to talk business.”

Mary’s eyes flashed. “Fine. You first.”

“Listen to me very carefully.” Shannon’s voice dripped with malice, “If I find that, by the end of our conversation, that you ever intended to do harm to either of them, I will make you forget everything about London except that there was someone here that you loved and that you will never see them again. I will plant melancholy so deeply into your psyche that you will never claw your way out of it unless I want you to. If you so much as look at anyone that I give a shit about the wrong way, I will be sure that you are the second person whose life I take. Do I make myself clear?”

“Crystal.”

“Good. Now, you already have processes of Geist in action. I would have to modify them slightly because when they were implanted, I was unaware that you were pregnant; but that’s a simple three-minute go.

“Now, explain.”

Mary took a deep breath and folded her hands in her lap. “For the record,” she looked Shannon in the eye, “You are terrifying. Whatever it is that you are – whatever lab cooked you up – it should have never happened; you are dangerous. Do they even realize what’s lying below the surface in that mind of yours? Are they aware that you can change lives because of a vendetta?”

Shannon remained still as Mary finished her jabbing questions. She reached for her coffee and sipped delicately from the cup.

“I have no doubt that Sherlock has clued you in to how Magnussen operates, yes?” Shannon’s head bowed in answer. “At the wedding, Sherlock was reading telegrams. One in particular made me feel ill. ‘Oodles of love and heaps of good wishes from CAM; wish your family could have seen this’. CAM?”


“In an instant, I knew that he would willingly tear my world apart and tell John everything that I had ever done. Somehow, he found out that I was truly happy and was now compromised. While John was at work or he was off doing errands, I was constantly doing research. I had to have something on Magnussen that would give me leverage. Anything. But I found nothing. I did,
however, have Janine,” Mary stated calmly. “And, I knew that was my way in, regardless of how. What I didn’t account for was that Sherlock was after him as well.”

“I’m assuming, Mary, that Magnussen knows about details in your dossier that should remain in the shadows? Former CIA or MI-6 sort of deal, right? You don’t get that good with a pistol and silencer or have the gear you were wearing by just taking it up as a hobby,” Shannon retorted smugly.

“Yes,” Mary conceded.

“You don’t need to tell me. I don’t want to know. Continue.”

Mary cocked her head to the side in question, “You don’t?”

“No; now, if you please?”

“Magnussen knows what I’ve done in my past and why I would be hiding and running from it. I was going to eliminate him. That’s what people in my old line of work do. What he has on me would put me in prison, Shannon.

“When Sherlock showed up, I had Magnussen on his knees, begging. And I was going to do it. But then Sherlock walked in, waving his mind’s ego around…but he was now a witness to a potential murder. I had to knock Sherlock out of the picture for the sake of not making John a suspect in a murder. It was a calculation that I took instant care to make as accurate as possible. “I hit Magnussen with my gun to incapacitate him and dialed for the ambulance. The rest, I am sure, Sherlock has told you.”

Shannon sighed heavily, “Of course.”

“I love John. You have no reason to believe me; but I assure you – I never wanted him to know about this. Any of this. I gave him the USB drive that houses all of my personnel files on it. I left it up to him. If he loves me, he won’t open it.”

“I know. And I know that you didn’t. That’s why, for the sake of openness, I told John everything about my two years without them. Everything. I was cross with him, I’ll admit; he was forgiving of my circumstances whilst condemning yours…

“Mary, I understand. Christ, I have my own cross to bear right now and Sherlock more than likely has his hands digging in to it.”

“What do you mean, you know?”

She crossed her arms as Mary situated herself to face Shannon better on the couch, “Who do you think told Sherlock to save the Watsons? He would have come to the conclusion eventually, but I gave him the push he needed.”

“You?! But, he nearly died again from the internal bleeding!” Mary gasped.

“Nearly, yes. And then I was stuck in a hospital room with him for almost two and a half weeks. He and I have an unusual understanding of each other’s drive and abilities. I warned him to come back alive.”

“You couldn’t possibly have known that I…”

“No, I didn’t,” Shannon admitted politely. “But, when we first met, I was not hiding and you were. I wanted to have my friends back in my life and you took a chance on a wild story…for what? Laughs? No. You and I both know that there is an understanding about our backgrounds.
You think that I wouldn’t be going to prison for all of the things I did while I was out and about? Or that I shouldn’t go to prison for putting a bullet in the man that killed my brother?

“No, Mary. There was a shade of sympathy and empathy that let you believe that what I had to say was true. Be honest, it didn’t take much convincing.”

“So here we are: two products of the state; both hiding from who we really are,” Mary shrugged. “What now?”

“Stand up,” Shannon commanded as she heaved herself to her feet. Mary did as she was told and looked up at the injured woman. “Give me one reason why I don’t put you in a hole somewhere and leave you to wonder who you are?”

“Because I want a chance to love John…to live this life I have…to be free from what I was made to do and to be here, now; as I am…” Mary retorted quickly.

Shannon smile was subtle. “Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Okay. Would you like something to eat? I’m starving. Though, I can’t be held accountable for what is in the fridge. It may require us going and getting something to eat.” Shannon huffed her way into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator door, “Yep. Out. Definitely out. Grab your coat. Let’s go.”

“Just like that?” Mary asked skeptically. “You and I are going out?”

“Well...yeah. If you like,” Shannon labored down the stairs. “I can’t really be out by myself right now, anyway.”

Her voice was breathless and tears welled in her eyes, “Why?”

Shannon waited until she had made it to the bottom of the landing, “Because I heard you. I heard you while I was in my coma. Mary, I know the strain and dismay in your voice because it is an echo of my own. I know.

She cleared her throat as she shouldered on her jumper, “So, are you coming?”

“Yeah, alright. Pizza?”

“Ok, God yes. Pizza. A whole pizza. Come on, I know just where to go.”

Later that evening, Shannon was sitting in John’s chair with her leg propped up on a dining room chair when Sherlock arrived home. He noted that her jumper was in a different place on the banister from where he left it and made his way up the stairs noisily.

“Shh,” she hushed crossly, “Mrs. Hudson is going to bed. Be respectful.”

“You. Went. Out!!” he pulsed each word.

“Yes.”

“Alone?”

“Of course not, I had the next best thing to you out with me; I’m not a moron,” she chided.
“John?”

She laughed in jest, “Mary.”

His breath hitched in his throat. _Ah. That happened sooner than I anticipated._ “And, is she alive?”

“Of course she is,” she furrowed her brow at him. “Why wouldn’t she be?”

“Let me rephrase: does she know who we all are?”

“Yes,” she groaned. “We had a discussion. I trust her.”

“You do?”

“Yes, don’t you?”

Sherlock crossed the room to sit in his chair and analyze her, “Yes, I do. She shot me to save me.”

Shannon mocked him in exasperation, “Great. Can we move on now that you and I are in agreement?”

“Yes, let’s.”

She went back to reading her book as he looked over her features. “Stop it,” she warned.

“What?” he taunted.

“This,” she quipped with a flourish of her injured hand. “Whatever this is that you’re trying to look for. I’m not in the mood to be the subject of your ‘deductions’ tonight.”

He scowled, “Whatever it is that you’re hiding from me, I will find it.”

“I’m sure you will,” she added as she turned the page, “But why can’t you trust me to tell you in my own time?”

“It’s something that you’re after with some urgency. Mycroft stated that you called this afternoon looking for more information.”

She snapped her book shut and looked into his eyes, “Yes, I did. It’s personal, Sherlock. Let. It. Be.”

He shrugged, “I’ll figure it out before you decide to tell me.”

“Good for you,” she groaned, “Please, for the love of God, don’t be like this while I’m unable to move around so freely. I will club you with my crutches without hesitation.” She opened her book and went back to reading.

“I doubt that.” He stood up and meandered into the kitchen. “Ah, yes. The shopping.” _Hospital food has been sub-par, even for my eating habits._

“Open the fridge, you moron,” she scolded. He mimicked her jab as he opened the door and saw a nice selection of groceries had been purchased. “Open the red box.”

He grabbed the parcel from the fridge and placed it precariously on the counter. _She could be trying to sabotage me if she feels that I have been investigating her. Or it could be the corpse she_
promised. Or sadly, food. Interesting that these are the three possibilities that come to mind.

With a flick of his wrist, the box popped open to reveal its contents: chicken curry. *How could she have possibly known that this was...a favorite of mine? How would she have known? I eat breakfast when able, but most of the time if I do have to eat, it’s sandwiches and the sort...*

He looked to the back of her head barely poking above the back of John’s chair before back to his dinner. “I know things,” she murmured.

Sherlock reheated his meal and sat at the table in the common room to eat. The pair sat in comfortable silence as she began to recant her visit with Mary. She had been quiet for some time when Sherlock finished eating. He nudged her awake, helped her up, and guided her to his bed. She collapsed clumsily and rolled herself in blankets before Sherlock could take her sweater from her. Before he exited his room, he had heard gentle snoring coming from her bundled form. Sherlock closed the door quietly and made his way downstairs to her room to sleep. *Tomorrow, Miss Byrns, I’m taking my bed back; I don’t care how tired you are. Honestly.* He heard her voice in his head saying, *Is that compassion, Sherlock?* He rolled his eyes as shoved a hand beneath his head and pillow.

*Oh shut up. And stay out of my mind.*
The First of October

Sherlock Holmes rolled over in his twilight of sleep. He could faintly smell notes from her perfume that she hadn’t worn in some time; it was embedded into the linen of her pillows. *Addict. How apt.*

He stretched lazily under her grey duvet and propped open a single eye. Light was filtering in, giving this room an ethereal feel to it. *I could still be dreaming. That is all within the realm of possibility. However, considering the sensory development I am experiencing, I would have to say that I am awake.*

As he sat upright and looked around at his surroundings, he took into account of where everything in her room was placed. Everything had been frozen in time since the day after the wedding. She was angry at him at the time. *And look at the events that led us here. Hmph.*

He had been lost in his thoughts when he could begin to smell food being cooked. *Who’s cooking?* Sherlock quickly threw his clothes on from the previous night and left to go upstairs.

When he entered the side door to the kitchen, he found his roommate unaware that she had an audience.

Shannon was working quickly and exhibiting her advanced knife skills as she prepped the rest of the meal. Somewhere, she had acquired some noise cancelling headphones and was surrounding herself in music.

*When was the last time I saw her do this? If anything, she played some before the wedding…but was that it? Has that been it? Did she play while she was in Scotland? She had been listening to Mahler when she moved back in…but…is that it? Music is one of her passions, or at least it used to be…has that gone since Geist has become more active?* Quietly, Sherlock sat at the table and sat in a reverent silence watching her work.

It had been quite some time since she had immersed herself in music. She used certain groupings of songs to catalogue her information with her synesthesia. *But in all fairness, outside of playing, I haven’t dived in. I’m afraid, aren’t I? What if there’s a song somewhere that I haven’t accounted for that will set me off? Then what? Who’s going to put me down? Mycroft? John? No…it would be Sherlock. But this music…this selection…moving through every color and being enveloped by sound – the continuous release of endorphins and the goosebumps… I… I think I feel… That’s it: I can feel. Everything’s heightened and yet…it’s still. I’m here. I’m alive. And God damn it, I’m going to make myself one hell of a breakfast.*

With breakfast now cooking away in both the oven and on the stovetop, she took time to start brewing some rather strong coffee. She could smell dimly over all the other aromas of the kitchen, soap. Not just any; it was Sherlock’s. He was up. *Better add some more coffee. It’s not like we won’t be without food. I am making eggs…and bacon…and sausages…and toast…and mushrooms…and hash… Nope. I am not apologizing.*

She added more coffee to the filter and stood still. The song that serenaded her mind brought her a moment of pause. With closed eyes, she let the emotion wash over her. When it ended she realized that she had been tapping the notes on the countertop as if she was playing the trumpet. *My stuff…it’s all still in Scotland…or in an evidence locker. What a shame.* A brief melancholy came to her while she contemplated where her trumpet had ended up.
Sherlock came to lean backward against the counter to her left and waited for her to open her eyes. She depressed the side button on her phone and a smirk appeared on her face. “How long have you been in here?”

“You were chopping mushrooms. Just before the potatoes met their demise in the skillet,” he offered.

She opened her eyes and looked to her roommate with a side glance, “And you didn’t say anything? No remarks?”

“No,” he shrugged. “But you are preparing breakfast. I felt it best not to disturb you.”

She snorted in amusement and elicited a grin from her friend. “That’s good, at least you’re getting fed out of it.”

“And that, unless you did so while you were on the run for two years, the last time that you let yourself get immersed in music like that was before the Geist Fall, right?”

She turned to face him and didn’t remove her headphones. There was a soft melody playing in the background in her ears. “Yes, it’s been a while.”

“Fear?”

“I think so,” she nodded. She turned down the heat and crossed her arms against her torso. “Who was going to stop me while I was away? Mycroft? John; you? No. No one would have been around; I ducked out of it all to be safe. There is an endless supply of potential triggers out there.”

“Your logic is fairly sound in that regard.”

“Gee, thanks for that,” she mocked in jest.

He eyed her cautiously, “So why now?”

“I…” she sighed, “…didn’t feel anything. I felt hollow. So…I…I needed to be sure that I could still feel what music used to do to me. You know…before all of this. I just needed something…” Her voice caught in her throat.

“But the important thing is breakfast,” he deflected on her behalf.

“Yes, of course. Breakfast. I made quite a bit – I hope that you’re hungry.” He nodded before pushing off the edge of the counter to saunter into the common room. She called over her shoulder, “The paper is on the left of the table if you’re interested.”

“I see it,” he acknowledged as he went to the table. “When did you go out to get the paper?”

“Early. You were snoring,” she jabbed.

He scoffed and crinkled his nose up, “I do not snore.”

“You do,” she reminded him as she took the bacon and sausages out of the oven. “When you’re in a deep enough sleep, you do snore softly. Nearly everyone does. I do from time to time.”

“Sure you don’t; I wouldn’t know,” she chided as she began plating. “Then if that wasn’t you snoring from the other side of my door – so who…who was sleeping in my room?”
He rolled his eyes and blatantly lied, “No idea.”

She entered the common room with two plates and set them on the table, “Uh huh.”

“Where’s the coffee?” he asked without looking up from the paper. Shannon left and then returned with a cup of coffee. He reached his hand out onto the table but could not feel where his cup lay.

“Oh, did you want some?” she laughed. “It’s in the kitchen. Go and get it yourself.”

Holmes gave a taunting glare from over the newspaper before folding it and leaving the table for the kitchen. He returned with a kettle filled with coffee and his cup for the morning. “Are you happy now?”

“Yes, I am,” she smiled. “I’m more injured than you are. And I’ll take a warm up before you sit back down.”

He raised an eyebrow in exasperation before pouring more coffee into her cup. With the kettle in the center of the table, Sherlock sat back down to read the paper while he ate as Shannon continued to listen to the music in her headphones and read the news from her phone.

Sherlock snuck a glance at her as he turned the page. She was in tune with the music playing in her ears as she bobbed gently in time with whatever the song du jour was. Another small grin was displayed on his face as he went back to reading. Normalcy. That hasn’t happened in a while for either of us; such that normalcy is by our definition. Though boring and absolutely distasteful…it will do for today. Yes. That will do. For today.

“I saw that,” Shannon responded, mirth in her eyes. “You smiled.”

Sherlock looked atop his paper again and frowned, “I did no such thing.”

“You are a horrible liar.”

“Many of the perpetrators I have apprehended would disagree with you,” he stated plainly with his baritone voice reverberating through the table.

She shrugged and scrolled further down the news feed before replying with, “You’re a horrible liar to me.”

“I’ll have to work on that; we can’t have you blowing my cover all the time because you know when I’m not telling the truth,” he scoffed.

She laughed and looked up to make eye contact, “Oh, well, excuse me. Of course. Can’t have that.”

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“I’m not going to dignify anymore of this conversation with my replies,” he retorted.

“Okay, okay, Mr. Grouch,” she conceded. “Regardless,” she mumbled with her mouth full of bacon, “I’m going out today. I can’t stay cooped up here for five more weeks. I’ll murder you if I do.”

Holmes had finished his paper with a quick fold and tossed it aside before eyeing up his roommate. “And where are you planning on going?”

“I dunno. Maybe the Leisure Center? I haven’t been there in a while. I could use a swim.”

Sherlock crossed his arms and his voice was stern. “The surgeon told you not to get your incision
“That’s why,” she replied matter-of-factly, “You’re going to tape me up to make it waterproof. Don’t worry. I’ve done it tons of times. I bought tape and plastic while I was out yesterday.” Sherlock frowned. “Look, either help me or I’ll do it myself and risk missing a spot. I’m not staying here today. I need to get out and I need to move. Water gives me the least resistance; you know that.”

“Where are the supplies?”

“Under the table in the kitchen, if you’d please?”

Sherlock got up and grabbed the bag of medical supplies Shannon had purchased and returned. He knelt beside her chair and rummaged through the bag to grab what was required. “Stand up, Shannon.”

She obliged and lifted her shirt up to the edge of her ribs, “Thank you. Try and make it as watertight as possible, yeah?”

Sherlock got to work by taping layers of plastic around her torso in increasing sizes to help great multiple barriers. He finished by wrapping tape completely around her torso twice to give the apparatus some strength.

She looked down to him and his handiwork, nodding in approval. “That’ll do pig, that’ll do.”

“Did you make a reference to me being a pig?”

“It’s from a movie, Sherlock…never mind. Thank you. I’ll be off after I finish my coffee and get dressed.”

He stood and bowed his head in agreement. “As you say. Do you still have my membership card?”

“Yes, it’s in my wallet. I never got rid of it.”

He sat back down and sipped his coffee, “Your sentiment is showing.”

She shrugged. “It happens. Yours was showing while you were reading the paper.”

Shannon gulped down the last of her coffee and made her way downstairs to change. Before she left, she hollered up the stairway, “Don’t leave the food out all day. Put it in the fridge if you’re done with it. I’ll do the dishes when I get back.”

The door closed behind her and Sherlock watched as she made her way down the street from the window. She waved as she hailed a cab to make her journey easier. Holmes stared down at the world below as his thumb expertly pressed the screen of his phone.

He held the phone to his ear and listened to the dial tone before a female voice spoke politely, “Mr. Holmes, how can I help you?”

“I need information that you can acquire on my behalf.”

“Shall I inform Mr. Mycroft Holmes about your inquiry?”

Sherlock’s face didn’t emote much as his eyes scanned the street. “No, Anthea, do not.”
“Very good, Mr. Holmes. Will this endeavor even up my debt to you and your skills?”

His voice rumbled in his chest, “I would think so; yes.”

“If you don’t mind, Mr. Holmes, what can I trace for you?”

He withdrew a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket that had evidence of fire damage around the edges. He unfurled the paper and held it to the light. “I’m looking for a secondary RI-42.”

“And the seventeen-digit number?”

“00231179-254-678144.”

Anthea was silent as she wrote down the information on her notepad. She cleared her throat and asked, “And may I have the date of the original RI-42?”

“23-04-2012.”

“Thank you, Mr. Holmes. And if your brother is to inquire?”

Sherlock closed his eyes, “I trust that you will be able to think of a believable cover story.”

“Is there anything else, Mr. Holmes?”

“That will be all. Call me as soon as you have the information.” Anthea terminated the call and Sherlock pocketed his phone, having turned back to face the room and opened his eyes. I had to. Shannon…why are you after this information?
And the Argonauts

Shannon eased herself gingerly into the pool and began to do calisthenics and stretches to find exactly which muscles were going to protest. After a good half an hour, she felt safe enough to start doing some laps. At any sign of strain or extreme fatigue, you need to stop. Yeah. Got it.

Her knee ached and throbbed, but she swam with the brace on to limit the range of motion from her knee. The smell of chlorine was cleansing in a way. It’s sterile smelling…and it’s erasing the hospital that’s been permeating from my skin.

After seven lengths, Shannon stopped and held onto the wall mildly winded. “Jesus.” I’m really banged up from this.

“Why don’t you take your brace off?” asked the man in the lane next to her. He was of a medium build with sandy blonde hair and brown eyes. “Wouldn’t that be easier?”

She panted and stretched her shoulders out. “Normally, yes. My leg’s recovering from being dislocated.”

“Oh, wow; shit! How long ago did you do that?”

She thought for a moment and answered, “About three weeks? So I’ve got another three weeks to go before I can take it off. It’s waterproof, so I figured I’d best swim with it on. Nice to meet you, I’m Claire.”

“Claire? Nice to meet you. Jayson. Do you live ‘round here?” he asked as he extended his hand for a handshake. She took it and her eyes followed the tattoo sleeve up his arm to his collarbone.

She smiled and tossed her goggles up onto the deck, “Just in the neighborhood. I’m in town for business.”

“Would…would you –” he stammered before flashing a smile. “Would you like to get some tea…or coffee – or something…after this?”

Shannon’s eyes lit up and she mirrored his smile, “I suppose. You’ll need to give me extra time to change.” Her eyes quickly scanned over Jayson and the tattoos that dotted his arms. One tattoo in particular caught her eye that resided on his wrist. It was a black lion breaking through chains of fire. That tattoo…it’s familiar… She swam over to the ladder and struggled out of the pool. “I’ll meet you at the door? There’s a place we can get coffee on Baker Street, half a block up from Melcombe. They have a nice selection of tea and coffee.”

“Ta. Great. Yeah!” he cheered. “I’ll see you at the door.”

Shannon headed to the locker room and snagged her phone from its hiding place. She knew that

Sherlock Holmes:

Interesting turn of events.

Shannon Byrns:
I doubt that.
-SH

Sherlock Holmes:

I found the man with the tattoo from Tesco when I came here to see you the first time.

Shannon Byrns:

Is it Christmas?
-SH

Sherlock Holmes:

Soon enough.
Saint Espresso down the street.
Ten minutes.

Sherlock felt a wide smile etch across his face as he stood up to collect his things. Leave it to her. Injured, healing, but ever vigilant. This also begs the question: Has she been followed all this time and now they are trying to strike while she isn’t at her optimum capacity? This is possible and highly probable. Coat shouldered on and scarf wrapped about his neck, Sherlock set off down the street to find a vantage point at the coffee shop. Shannon, be smart about this.

Shannon and Jayson walked into the shop, chatting amicably about their day jobs and work. He was an accountant for one of the bank headquarters at Canary Wharf. Claire was a personal assistant for a director that was filming out at Pinewood Studios and Uxbridge. She couldn’t divulge too many details without having her job be at risk; which was a perfect work story.

There was a large window next to the door with a sleek table that lined it. Shannon wobbled over to an empty seat and waited for her new acquaintance to return. In the corner was a low sitting two-top with a gentleman reading the daily paper and outside at the café tables, three people were enjoying their drinks and pastries. Excellent. Perfect cover.

Jayson sat down and slipped out of his jacket to drape it over the chairback. The industrial lights glowed warmly above their heads as one of the workers brought over their order. The city bustled outside the window and pedestrians walked with purpose up and down the street.

“So yeah,” Shannon chuckled. “I can’t really divulge too much about the job due to gag orders and contracts – but you’ll see the movie next fall most likely…you know…as long as shooting stays on schedule.”

“Oh yeah? That’s rather exciting, isn’t it?” Jayson replied earnestly.
Shannon sipped her latte while she nodded carefully. “It can be, yeah. I haven’t been in the industry long – but…you know. I’m adjusting. What about you? Is life exciting as an accountant in London?”

Jayson smiled for a moment as he rolled his shirtsleeves up. “It has its advantages. Running into you was one of them, Claire.”

Her internal warning was going off, “Yeah?” She took a deep breath and looked at his wrist and motioned with her head, “So – that tattoo…I like it. It’s edgy. Where’d you get it? I think I want to get a tattoo.”

“Oh, that?” he peered downward, “I got it when I was in college – before uni. A bunch of my friends and I got the same thing while I was looking for my half-sister that I’ve never met.”

“Wow. That’s crazy! What’s her name?”

“Shannon. She’s special – and from what I hear, she’s mega bright. I’m so close to finding her.”

Shannon felt a shiver down her spine, “I guess we should cut the crap then, shall we?”

Her acquaintance stared intently out the window, “It was the tattoo; wasn’t it?”

“Yes, it was,” she admitted. “That comes with being mega bright.”

“Alright then; I assume that I’m trapped here – that you have some sort of plan in motion?”

“You could say that,” she allowed. “You won’t be leaving here out of custody.”

He nodded and glanced to her on his right. “You are one hell of a fighter.”

“I’m flattered.”

“I’m serious,” he added, “And that was before you were ‘activated’. Both of those boys were in the hospital for a month.”

Shannon tipped her cup delicately to her lips before placing the cup back on its saucer with a soft clink. “Might I inquire about the candidness and niceties?”

“I’m tired; I’m done,” he sighed heavily. “I’ve been doing dirty work for The Boss since I was twelve. I’m ready for all of it to be over. Regardless of the outcome – I just don’t want to do it anymore.”

Shannon snorted through her nose. “Forgive me if I seem skeptical.”

“You found me first. I’ve been hiding since we came to collect you and failed – failure usually means termination…of the permanent variety. What have I left to lose?”

She crossed her arms, “Entrapment.”

“Ah, yes. Well, I have no doubt that you have improved in skill as a human lie detector. Ask any question; if I have the answer, I will give it.”

“We shall see. I will be turning you over to the appropriate authorities; you realize.”

“I assumed,” he said. “Twenty questions.”
She grabbed her phone and dialed Mycroft, “I have someone that you are going to want to interrogate.”

“Is that so, Ms. Byrns? And who may that be? Your long-lost blanket?”

“The gentleman with the tattoo from Tesco. My location is activated from my phone. You have ten minutes or I hand him over to Scotland Yard.”

“And why would you do that?”

“To make you fill out paperwork,” she quipped. “Chop-chop.” She terminated the call and gave a side glance to the tattooed gentleman to her left. “Before we begin, you’re going to want me to send out a text.”

“Oh? And why is that?” he questioned in earnest.

Shannon opened the app and selected the recipient. “Because, they know that I’m here with you.”

“Ah. It makes sense. I would expect you to keep secondary plans in motion for such reasons.”

_Sherlock Holmes:

_Do not interfere.
He doesn’t realize that you’re here.
I’ll use John’s phrase in conversation
if there is cause for alarm._

“Twenty questions, was it?” she asked, placing her phone screen-side down upon the table. “You have ten minutes…let’s make it ten questions.”

“So be it. I’ll let you ask first.”

“How long have you and your compatriots been following me?”

He sighed whilst leaning backwards in his chair. “Honestly, I hadn’t given two shits about you until after your brother was removed. I was assigned to follow from a distance the week that you shot Tony – the guy who killed Matt. Your brother had been the golden ticket for years; we had been watching him for the better part of seven years or so.

“My turn,” he conceded. “When did you notice your activation?”

She was silent in contemplation, then cleared her throat to say, “Maybe two days after Matt had died. It didn’t take long in the grand timeline of it all. I feel… I feel as if his death was the trigger.

“When did the project first take shape?”

“We; and I use that term loosely, recruited your brother within months of his enrollment by the government. From what they had said, he was bright – tons of accolades – and the lure of money and power can sway just about anyone. You were young – maybe three at the time when he first started putting snippets in your brain.

“How many cells have you dissolved?”

“Twenty-four, so far. I got busy after Holmes jumped off the roof.” She took a healthy sip of her
coffee, enjoying the wonderful roasted flavor as Jayson whistled in astonishment. “Jim is the Boss, isn’t he?”

“You already know that answer. And the Boss is dead,” Jayson added. “That doesn’t mean that his plans aren’t still in motion. Now, where is he?”

“Be more specific,” Shannon encouraged. “There are a lot of he’s in my life.”

“Sherlock Holmes.”

She nodded, “Ah. Yes. Him. He’s not too far off. It’s a perk of our friendship – he’s just as interested as I am. Mycroft, however, doesn’t care for my digging.”

“He shouldn’t,” Jayson furrowed his brow. “You’re on his payroll now. And you’re a ‘British Citizen’. There are things about your brother that he wants to remain hidden. Mycroft took an interest in your brother’s work. Assuming that he would use it for the security of Britain, of course.”

“It makes sense, knowing Mycroft. Do you know what was in the shipment that was supposed to make berth in Morocco back in 2012?” Shannon sipped from her cup, leaning casually on her elbows as she waited for an answer.

“No. Though, there is a select handful that would know the particulars of that cargo – we tried to get more careful after you left Morocco. No one knew where you were until you had left. I got to hear a great deal about how you had turned into a ghost over many nights spent in the pub. How many people have you killed since Tony?”

“One. He killed my friend, Andy. I have not intended to kill anyone else. I make a point to maim rather than kill. What do you know about Max?”

“Max?”

“The man that held me captive and tortured me. That one.”

Jayson grunted in acknowledgment. “Max, is it? Is that what he called himself? Ha. No, his name Brent. Or, at least that’s what Jim called him. He has a brand on his ribs. He got caught stealing from one of Moriarty’s subcontractors in Africa. He let them brand him as a thief rather than kill him. Brent was very loyal after that.

“Brent is often called in when too many of ‘us’ fail. You could say that his ethical code is shrouded. He doesn’t see it so much as good or bad; rather more like do or don’t. If he has a job to do, he does it until completion or his death. So, if you met Brent – you better hope that he’s dead, because he will always be looking for you.” Jayson stretched as he watched three black, unmarked SUVs line the street outside the shop. “How badly do you want answers?”

“Well,” she began. Mycroft’s men exited the car and were walking towards the door.

Jayson interrupted and spoke with fervor, “Think before you answer. The answers that you are looking for are going to bring you a world of pain. Should I never see you again, you should know that Jim knew about you & Sherlock. He knew that it was inevitable. He was excited by it. You were his Christmas puppy. You were shiny and new and something that could do tricks.

“The answers about Matt, Brent, Jim – you…they will bring your world crashing down on you.”

“Yes,” she whispered. “I need to know.”

“If you ever see me again, then we shall discuss in great lengths everything that I know and have
learned about you in the past two years. But now, it appears that my chauffeurs have arrived.” He stood up, gathered his jacket, and walked to the door.

“How do I know this isn’t an activation?” she inquired flatly.

Jayson shrugged as one of the agents opened the door. “That’s question number eleven, Miss Byrns. To answer, I suppose I can: you don’t.” He nodded and inhaled sharply through his nose before setting off into the SUV. The door closed quietly behind him and the convoy left as quickly as it had arrived.

She sat in ambivalent silence for some time. The rustling of a newspaper from the corner brought her back to reality as the gentleman had stood up and was walking behind her. “Let’s go home,” she sighed.

Sherlock stood still beside her as she labored to stand up from the chair. “We can stay a moment if you need,” he offered.

She shook her head and shouldered her bag. “No; I’m ready to go home. Thank you for being here. Truly.”

“Of course. Shall we?” he gestured to the door. He walked ahead of her so as to hold the door and the pair made their way back towards 221 Baker Street.
The pair moved leisurely, lost in their own thoughts. When they had reached their doorstep, Sherlock was stood on the stoop unlocking the door as he stated, “I’m still working your case.”

“What?” she asked.

The door flung open and they walked into the landing. “I said,” he pulled at his scarf before tossing it on the bannister, “that I am still working your case. Granted, it’s been a while – but it’s not something that I haven’t given thought to.”

Shannon opened the door to her room and tossed her bag onto the floor. She crossed the threshold, chuckling. “To be fair, Sherlock, I did make you forget that I existed for…what? 2010…2011… and I didn’t come back until you did….? Four years? It’s not as if you could have given it much thought.” Shannon reached into her dresser for a new shirt and placed it neatly on the dresser-top. She had lifted the side of her shirt and began to precariously tear at the tape around her torso.

Sherlock, agitated that she may pull her stitches, entered her room without permission. “Stop. Just – stop. You’re bound to pull your stitches out. With the pull from the tape and the manner with which you are pulling at the tape, you would more than likely pull seven or so.”

“And I thought that you cared.”

“Nope,” he punctuated as he began to peel the tape off methodically. “I have enough going on in my mind at the moment without having to worry about tuning Mrs. Hudson, John, and Molly out; going on about how I just let you rip your stitches out.”

She stood still as he made quick work of the surgical tape and plastic. When he was nearly done, she cleared her throat and asked somberly, “Do you feel that he was truthful?” A far-away, pensive expression rested on her face.

Sherlock paused his ministrations as his mind recalled every detail that he had overheard in the café. He went back to work as he answered, “I believe the question that you should ask is ‘what if his answers were the truth?’.”

The last tape fragment lifted from her skin and the ball of plastic and tape was tossed into the bin. When Sherlock turned around, she had already swapped her shirt. “I suppose that also needs examination,” she replied. “But isn’t that much more of a double-edged sword? Either the answers are the truth or I am to assume that they are – both paths lead to different ends.”

“I don’t believe there are different ends,” he quipped while walking up the stairs to the flat. “There is truth. There is fact. Everything else is inconsequential.”

She lagged behind him up the stairwell as she queried, “Everything else isn’t inconsequential though, Sherlock. Not everything, right? Without influence from outside oneself, then development cannot happen – without it, the item in question is a stagnant machine.”

“Are you bringing this up for some semblance of validation or is there another reason; perhaps your own fear that you may not want to know some of those answers?”

Shannon plopped heavily onto the couch and scowled at the floor. “I don’t know, Sherlock.” She paused to gather her thoughts. “I haven’t had this kind of information thrown at me in such volume since we were doing the hypnosis sessions years ago… My mind is conflicted. Which item do I
focus on? What is most pressing that needs my direct attention first? Because right now, I have three things that need to be done simultaneously."

“Conveniently,” he chimed in with sarcasm, “You happen to know some very capable people that can assist in those matters. Hello there.”

“Oh no. Nope. Absolutely not. I am not having you going through those affairs right now. Not a chance!” her voice flat.

“Why not?” he quipped with a crinkle in his nose. “I know you just as well as you know me. We both have our secrets. You and I are completely capable of keeping this within the professional boundaries that we set.”

“Absolutely not. As is stands,” she snapped, “you already have two or three people looking into that paper I told you to burn, don’t you?”

“I do not.”

“Oh really? Include yourself in that number of people!” She was growing agitated with his probing conversation.

He looked down and locked eyes with her. “Alright, yes,” he conceded. “There is myself and one other person – but what could potentially be so catastrophic that you wouldn’t want anyone – even me – to know? What are you hiding?”

“See, this is exactly my point,” she strained. “You simply cannot let me figure this out on my own because you want to know the answer and I won’t tell you!”

Sherlock rested his hands on his waist and grew stern. What gain could she possible get from challenging me on this? With an accusatory finger pointed at her, he replied, “Of course I want to know the answers! How much, honestly, have you kept locked away in that mind from me?”

Shannon stood up, took two steps toward him and dug her finger into his chest. “EXCUSE ME?! What have I kept locked away from you? You’re the one with a damn mind palace! I have told you everything,” she sniped. “Everything! And all of it was in due course. And, while we’re at it, where were you? Huh? Why didn’t you call like you promised that you would?”

Is that what this is about? Because I didn’t follow through – because you were taken? Sherlock paced around the room quickly before coming back to stand before her with an elevated tone, “Everything? Have you? And how long would it have been before you had told me about what you had done while I was away?”

“Jesus Christ, Sherlock. Is this what this is about? Hmm? You’re mad that I opened up to John about something first?” she groaned.

“No, it isn’t, and don’t try to spin it that way either. You and I are both too clever for that!”

Neither one of noticed that Mrs. Hudson was in the doorway. “Are you both fighting, already?”

“Yes, Mrs. Hudson,” Shannon panted, “I’m afraid so. I don’t know why we’ve decided that this is the day…but apparently that what we’re doing.”

“Please, do keep in mind the neighbors,” she stressed in an anxious tone.

“Mrs. Hudson, do shut up!” Sherlock bellowed as he looked in her direction.
CRACK!
Before Sherlock could react, Shannon had taken her good hand and made swift contact with his face. He took a step back, stunned, before looking back at Shannon. Her face was red in fury and a vein pulsed notably in her temple. “Don’t you ever use that tone with her unless she is in mortal peril,” she growled.

Taken aback, Mrs. Hudson gave out a small shriek and took off down the steps. She went into her kitchen, grabbed her mobile, and phoned John.

‘Mrs. Hudson, now really isn’t a good time…’

“John! It’s Shannon and Sherlock!”

‘What’s happened to her?’

“They’re having a domestic upstairs and she just hit him!”

‘He probably deserved it,’ he chuffed.

She looked up the stairs as their voices escalated in volume, “Can’t you hear them?”

‘Mrs. Hudson, if he wants to poke at her… that’s his business. It’s his own fault when she’s had enough, much like I have!’

“John, how can you say that?!” she cried into the receiver. “John, she’s still not well and…the stitches!”

He sighed over the phone, ‘I’ll be there as quick as I can. Not for him. But for her. And for you.’

When she hung up, she heard Sherlock growling back at Byrns, “THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT I WAS IMPLYING!”

Shannon stood fixed to her spot, rolled her eyes, and motioned as she scathingly said, “Oh, that’s it. Let me have it. Please tell me how all of this is my fault! Obviously. COMPLETELY MY FAULT. I can take it. Let’s go, tough guy.”

Sherlock’s knuckles were white as he gripped the back of his chair. “Placing your parameters on me while I was working was counteractive to doing the work in the first place! So yes, you could argue that, in an attempt to humour you, this,” he gestured to her and her injuries, “all occurred!”

“Right,” she snarled, “While we’re at it, let’s blame the crucifixion of Christ on me, too. Because retroactively, those were all things that were within my control!”

“Don’t be stupid!” he shouted.

“YOU’RE BEING STUPID! IT’S NOT BECOMING OF YOU, HOLMES!”

“This is typical Shannon Byrns behaviour,” he seethed.

“Oh really. Do divulge, since you know me so much better than I know myself.”

He smacked the back with a resounding POP. “Deflective, baiting behaviour to skew judgement away from topics that you do not want to discuss.”

She threw her hands up in the air, “That’s what people do when they don’t want to talk about shit, Sherlock!”
“Not. You. And. Me,” he verbally punched each word.

“Please,” she grumbled. “Not us? Really? That’s what you’re going to rebuttal with.”

He closed his eyes and breathed slowly in through his nose before orating rapidly, “You want my help – and then you don’t. You want to have answers but you are not willing to divulge a part of the story so that I can help you. Do you understand how infuriating that is?” He pretended to hold something in front of him, “Right now, you are all: ‘Here’s a case, Sherlock! But wait, I can’t tell you any who, what, when, where, and why’s – but I want your help’!”

“You are insufferable,” she howled. “‘I’m so smart that I’ll figure everything out and if you don’t let me figure everything out I’m going to throw a tantrum. Wahhhhh!’” Shannon pretended to cry.

John walked into the flat to meet Mrs. Hudson at the bottom of the stairs. She was peering up and flinched when Sherlock’s voice boomed. “Oh, John – thank goodness you’re here!”

“Uh – how long have they been at it?”

“They’ve been like this for twenty-five minutes! It’s some of the most civil arguing I’ve ever heard... But, John, the neighbors!”

“Honestly? Jesus. Alright, Mrs. Hudson. I’ll go sort it out.”
“You are being utterly ridiculous,” she yelled. “I didn’t mean anything by it when I talked about Janine! NOTHING! It was a damn observation!”

Holmes squinted in analysis, “You don’t ever say ANYTHING without having an underlying reason. You want an observation? Observation: Asking if that man from the café was telling the truth is showing your insecurity in regards to whatever mystery you are withholding!”

“ARE YOU BOTH QUITE FINISHED?!” John hollered from the doorway. “Jesus. You, quite literally, just got out of the hospital yesterday,” John snapped at Shannon. “And you, you bloody lunatic, shouldn’t provoke her!”

“He started this entire thing,” she screeched. “He won’t leave well enough alone and has to snoop into all of my affairs!”

“Shannon has a secret that she’s hiding that could, potentially, change everything!”

John crossed his arms, “Seriously, this is why I’m over here? Because you two can’t seem to talk things out?! YOU’VE BEEN HOME FOR TWO DAYS! You know what? Sod this. Scream it at each other at the same time.”

Shannon stewed and stared up at the ceiling as she moved to the kitchen entryway.

“I hate you, sometimes,” Shannon seethed.

Sherlock returned with a steely stare, “That’s a relief.”

“Shut it, both of you. I can’t believe that I have to be here and moderate you two. So when I count to three, you both are going to just shout whatever it is that you’re mad about at the same time so that I can move on with my night. I can’t be the only one here that is capable of acting like an adult. So… One –“ John called out.

“This is utterly juvenile,” Sherlock quipped with a roll of his eyes.

“Look who’s talking,” Shannon snapped.

“ – two –“

Shannon shook her head and closed her eyes while Sherlock stared down at his chair. “…three.”

“I FAILED TO KEEP YOU SAFE!”

“I’M NOT ABLE TO HAVE CHILDREN!”


“I said that I failed to keep her safe. I’m the reason that she went to Scotland–“

John raised a hand to silence Holmes and looked over to Byrns, who had the crown of her head against the doorway. Her hands rested on either side of the wall and the strong façade she had put up came crumbling down.

Sherlock quickly processed what he had heard and looked critically looked her over, “What?”
Byrns swallowed hard to try and kill the sand that was filling her mouth. “I said,” she choked, “that I am not able to have children.”

John’s eyebrows knitted together as he systematically digested the new information.

“Couldn’t leave well enough alone, could you?” she snarled to Sherlock. “You have to have all the answers.”

He opened his mouth to speak, but thought better of it. John’s voice broke the silence first. “When – when did this happen? I mean – does this have to do with you starting Geist…or?”

“No. It was a hysterectomy,” she sighed as she turned around and gradually slid down the wall.

“When,” Sherlock mustered shamefacedly. He leaned forward onto the back of his chair and lifted his head up to look at her. *She looks more broken than she had in the hospital. Well done, Holmes.*

She propped her elbow on her knee and motioned a shrug with her hand. “I think… Well, that’s the ting. After your fall, I went to Morocco for a month to follow a lead before I went to Norway. “While I was there, I started palling around with some mercenaries – the same ones that I met up with after Norway. Now, I had told them, as a joke, that maybe I was pregnant and maybe I wasn’t. Either way, I was an asset to the group. “There was a fight between me and a group of mercs in a warehouse. It was a knife fight and I was grossly ill-prepared. So I took a hit to the stomach. I knew I was losing a lot of blood…and I passed out.”

“Shannon,” John lamented. “Jesus.”

A heavy sigh escaped her lips, “Well, wouldn’t you know that when I woke up a week later, my pals were telling me that I was lucky to be alive…that they had thought I was a goner. Some of the pals were happy I was alive…others, not so much. Nikola, in particular, wasn’t happy, but hey…there you go.”

“Christ…” John breathed.

Sherlock sat warily in his chair, with elbows on his knees and the heels of his hands pressing into his temples. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

“Why? You’re kidding me, right?” she laughed without mirth. “Why? Oh, I don’t know – because you were ‘dead’, John, Molly; even Mrs. Hudson didn’t know that I fucking existed!”

Sherlock tilted his head upward, “I meant since your return.”

John looked down at Shannon and sat down beside her. “Shannon, you could have told us this; you know that, right?”

“Because I didn’t realize it had happened… I genuinely thought that it was just a nasty knife fight. That was until two weeks ago, when the good doctor was going over my injury list and he wanted to know why I was missing some organs and didn’t have a major surgery noted in my file. And, if you present item one and item two together…” her voice cracked.

Holmes gradually sat upright in his chair and met her gaze, “Were you pregnant?”

Shannon unclasped her hands and plopped them into her lap, “I don’t know.”

John frowned in thought before speaking, “Shannon, this is horrible and we can help you find the
men that did this.”

“I already did, John. I didn’t even realize it at the time – you know – how ironic it was that I had made them turn on each other when I was collapsing their cell. No idea. None. Smart, intellectual me...didn’t even see it. Not one bit...because I had assumed that my birth control or the stress was keeping me from having a period. You know, since we’re speaking candidly,” she added without ceasing Sherlock’s eye contact.

He’s worked it out. He knows now. Sherlock knows.

“It’s funny,” she continued, “in a macabre sense of the word. I was Schrödinger’s cat: both pregnant and not pregnant at the same time.

“That’s what the form is supposed to tell me...”

“What form?” John interjected

“It’s a form from her clinical evaluation with MI-6 before Mycroft put her on payroll. It contains redacted information,” Sherlock answered, articulating each word with care. “Did he see this form?”

“No,” she replied. “It was moved to another location for the sake of security. Though, I can hypothesize Moriarty saw it before it was moved to its current location because he knew of its contents… and why some of my answers were stated as such. And I don’t want either of you to speak of it to anyone. Not Mary, not Molly – no one.”

Sherlock frowned as his eyes bored holes into the fireplace. Without comment, he bolted upright, collected his coat and left Baker Street slamming the door behind him.

John sat with her in silence for some time before his hoarse whisper echoed in her ear. “Would it... had you...” he paused to find some kinder way to say what he wanted to know. “Would it have been...”

“If I was, yes,” she disclosed into the quiet flat while the pair sat staring at the failing light though the windows. “If I was, yes; it would have been.”

That Evening

John returned with Chinese food in hand, and plenty of it. “I ordered a bit of everything. I figured that it was needed...considering.”

“Thanks,” she croaked as she helped him un-bag the food. “I’m sorry that you got involved in this.”

“Why? I’m not. Mrs. Hudson asked that I come over because she was afraid you’d pull your stitches. Frankly, I’m surprised that you didn’t,” he offered. “Besides, Sherlock probably deserved some of that wrath of yours. He can be quite a prat.”

She chuckled, “Yeah, well – I haven’t been a peach either. I – I don’t know how I feel. It’s kind of hollow in here.” She pointed to her chest, “Pretty sure I don’t have a soul.”

“You are one of the most caring people that I’ve ever met,” John chided. “So you stop all of that, right now.”

“I dunno,” she shrugged. “It’s this... plus some other things going on in my head... I just dunno.”
“I won’t let you have any of the takeaway if you keep this up,” John warned.

Shannon smirked and dug out silverware from the drawer. “Did you get the curry, too?”

“Yeah,” John nodded as he reached for some plates, “I did. Not that he deserves it.”

The pair ate at the sitting room table and conversed amicably throughout the evening while waiting for Sherlock to return. He refused to respond to both their calls and texts. He did not want to be found.

“You don’t think he’ll relapse, do you?” John verbalized as he did the washing up.

Shannon dried the plate in her hand. “No,” she declared, “he wants clarity right now. Too much is on the line with Magnussen being the little shit that he is.”

John nodded and pursed his lips in thought. “Not on your case?”


John shrugged, “I can… I mean – I have been.”

“John, you should go home. At least be at home with her. I know that you’re angry. I understand why – but you should go home. If anything, sleep on the sofa. If it results in a fight, you can always come back here,” she advised.

“And what about you? Are you going to be alright?”

“I think so,” she pronounced adamantly with a gleam in her eye. “I mean, it’s not as if I’m going to go out with my cape to fight crime tonight. Not without Robin by my side.”

John gave a weak smile before frowning. He began clenching his hands. “Shannon.”

“Hey,” she grabbed him by the shoulders to bring him closer and hugged him tightly. “We know that the world sucks. There’s so much shit out there – but we have to get through it at some point before we can see what else the world has to offer. I know that it sucks. Trust me. You and I are the reigning champs of ‘The World Has a Cruel Sense of Humour’ game.”

“God, that’s the truth,” he exclaimed.

“Regardless of what’s going on in our own personal… crap…” she pulled away to hold his face, “You are still one of my dearest friends and I would do anything for you. Anything. But I’m not going to get in the middle of you and Mary because that’s up to you.”

“Thank you. You’re the first person that isn’t telling me what to do,” he whispered.

She kissed his forehead and walked him to the stairs. “You’re welcome. We’ve had enough intervening forces in our lives. If it’s meant to work out, it will. If not, it won’t. I will still love you as my friend all the same. I am here for you.”

“As much as I am going to regret saying this,” John disclosed, “just don’t kill him when he gets back.” Shannon tilted her head to the side in uncertainty before he continued saying, “You and I both know Sherlock Holmes. But right now, I don’t know what’s going through his mind… do you? Just – be you… like you are now. He’s going to need the woman that we love as our friend. Not the scary ‘I’m going to wipe your memories’ Shannon.”

“Thanks for that,” she goaded.
“I’m just reminding you of what an ass he is. And how daunting you can be. But he’s our friend.” John grabbed his coat and quietly walked into the night to head back home.

Shannon sighed as Mrs. Hudson came to check the door. “Was that John, dear?”

“Yes, it was. I sent him home.”

“He’s been sleeping here for two weeks,” she replied.

Shannon nodded, “I figured. It was time for him to go home. He knows that. Mrs. Hudson, I –“

“Don’t you worry about anything, my dear; I’ve had my fair share of fighting,” she stated as she scaled the stairs. “I was worried that it would boil over and I’d be visiting you in the hospital again after you just got home. Or that you’d break his arms and legs…”

Mrs. Hudson grabbed her into a warm embrace that Shannon returned happily. “Oh, Mrs. Hudson, you are a wonderful woman. I’m having a drink – would you like one, too?”

Mrs. Hudson wiped a stray tear from her eye, “Yes, I think I would.”

“Come on then,” Shannon ushered her into the sitting room, “I learned how to make a mean Painkiller while I was away.”

“Is that the orange juice one?”

“That’s my girl,” Shannon laughed as she pulled her rum down from its hiding spot. “Yes, it is.”

Hours had passed since Mrs. Hudson had gone off to bed. She sat in Sherlock’s chair practicing silent reflection as the fire glow warmed the features of the room and rain tapped on the window panes. She drummed her forefinger absentmindedly on her lower lip before taking another sip of her whiskey and soda. She heard the light rustle of the door and quiet steps approaching from the stairs.  

*It has to be somewhere around three in the morning – he’s been gone for nearly nine hours.*

Sherlock emerged from the shadows, soaked through and water dripping from his hair. He noiselessly shed his coat and scarf off to the side. Shannon poured another whiskey and soda into the spare glass and offered it to him with an outstretched hand. He glanced down at it skeptically; she then gently shook the glass in enticement and he plucked it from her hand.

He slumped into John’s chair and stretched his arms off the sides of the chair and legs out onto the floor. His head leaned backwards onto the headrest as he took a sip. “The Dewar’s?”

She nodded as she took another sip, “The 15-Year-Old bottle. That’s why there’s only a splash of soda. I felt that this was appropriate.”

His voice rumbled in his chest in agreement, as he again sipped from his glass.

Shannon looked over to the fire for a moment of consideration before asking, “Is he breathing?”

“Oh,” Sherlock replied. “What makes you think I went to see him?”

“Because I know you,” she spoke in a frank tone. “And I know that you were angry. And you smell of the Diogenes Club.”
“I was not angry. But yes, I did go to see Mycroft.”

She chortled in exasperation, “And now you’re trying to lie to me. Tsk tsk.”

He heaved a weighted sigh and looked to the fire. “There were questions that needed answered.”

Shannon looked over to see examine his features. He was distant, somewhere in the vast recesses of his mind.

“Sherlock, look at me,” she asked sympathetically. When he didn’t move, she repeated herself. “Sherlock Holmes, look at me.”

His head turned slowly to look at her. “And I want those answers more than you. That’s why Darweshi is on his way to Cornwall.”

“Cornwall? Ah yes – Culdrose. Mycroft had mentioned it,” his eyebrows lifted upwards as he recalled their conversation.

“It went that well, did it?”

He shrugged, took a sip, and replied, “He won’t be writing me a Christmas card this year…if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Does he ever write you a Christmas card?” she asked with genuine curiosity.

He chuckled; his voice light with mirth, “No. He’s not prone to brotherly affection, thankfully.”

“Thank God,” she agreed, leaning over to toast Sherlock with a clink of glasses.

“I sent Anthea after the information,” he admitted while settling back into the chair.

Shannon felt engrossed by that information. “Mycroft’s assistant? Really?” He looked over to Shannon who gave a praising look and said, “Nicely done.”

“Do you wish to know what we spoke of?”

She shook her head mildly side to side. “I’m sure that the subject matter was more eloquently said by you than if it I had done it,” she declared. “Along with a healthy helping of insults and threats.”

He smiled, “And you’re sure of that?”

“Fairly,” she added. “I do know you.”

Sherlock looked back toward the fire as Shannon got up from his chair. She took her empty glass to the kitchen and returned with a dry towel, tossing it on Sherlock’s lap as she stood beside the chair. “I know you…the same way I know that you occasionally drink whiskey and soda, or brandy when you feel ill, and that you prefer the taste of French, burgundy wines over beer.”

He looked up to her, with a mix of mild astonishment and awareness washing over his face. “Shannon…”

“Don’t. Please… I should never have hit you.” She took the empty glass from his hand, went to the kitchen and placed it next to others that would be washed in the morning.

When she returned to the chair in the sitting room, Sherlock had stood and was towel-drying his hair. “Sherlock, I have not let my emotions fester in such a way that I become explosive in years… And you did not deserve the fallout.” She shook her head in disgrace. “You had every
reason to be prodding into my life considering out history – or even lack of…
“I’ve just been a mess for so long; and…”

“Yes you do not need to apologize to me,” he added self-consciously.

“Yes I do. Sherlock – please – I am so…so sorry.”

He cleared his throat uncomfortably before replying, saying, “You should know that…that by you deflecting from me… it – it doesn’t change how I hold you in my mind or – or with what regard I view you. You had every reason to be angry at me.” Sherlock looked up from an inane spot on the red carpet to meet her gaze. “And – and that if you will permit me…I would like to continue to have the privilege to call you my friend.”

Shannon felt her voice hitch in her throat. How badly did I wound the great Sherlock Holmes?

“No – no. I must. I cannot fathom what you have experienced as of late…I am not capable of doing so. I can see the pain and loss radiating from you.” He began to gesture points with his hands as he spoke, “I discovered, on my walk, that I do not lament you feeling as you do…so much as I feel your pain and loss with you. I am feeling, at this moment, your pain and your loss as if it were my own. This experience…it is not something that I am well-versed in; however, if it will earn both my person and my mind a place back into your graces, I am willing to venture down that path. And for all that I have done, I am sorry that I abandoned you.”

His normally stoic features were easily reflecting the discomfort and inexperience Holmes had in expressing himself as such. There was no more than a foot of space between while they stood stationary in the middle of the room.

Tears welled in her eyes. She knew that if she were to blink, water would stream down her face. “Sherlock Holmes…”

“Shannon Byrns: I am regretful that The Fall happened as it did, I am remorseful that I wasn’t able to support you in your travels while I was away; I am sorry for sending you away and not upholding my end of our bargain…I am, truly and humbly, sorry.”

Oh Lord. No – no…don’t cry…damn it. A single tear broke free and fell down her cheek leaving a hot streak in its wake. “Sherlock Holmes, before I accept your apology, may I ask you a question?”

He nodded, uneasy from her leading tone, “Of course.”

“Did you call John for help?” she inquired with a raspy voice, wiping the tears from her eyes and face with her sleeve.

He stared at her blankly, then answered, “Yes, I did.”

She gave a small, wry smile, “And which parts were John?”

Glancing down at her, unsure if she was being critical, he replied, “The end. That was John. He expressed that I apologize almost to a point of groveling… Though he stressed that if I groveled that you would more than likely toss me out of the flat.”

“So, the beginning bit and that bunch in the middle?” she asked.

His face expressed some alarm, “That was me.”
She grabbed him by his shoulders, drew him to her, and enveloped him into a hug that he was not fully expecting. Perplexed, Sherlock looked down at her while she was hugging him and asked, “Was it okay? Did I do something wrong…”

“Just shut up,” she commanded.

He paused a moment in deliberation, subsequently returning the embrace that his friend had begun. “It was alright?”

“Yes, it was,” she mumbled into his shirt. “It was. Do you want me to text John and let him know that you’re allowed to stay in the flat?”

“No, he will have been able to deduce that, if I didn’t succeed, I would be looking for another place to sleep this evening,” he retorted plainly.

She pulled back from the embrace, then nabbed a spare chair and pillow to prop her leg up before slumping back into her previous spot. “Your tenacity for solving puzzles is not to be viewed as an ill-conceived trait. Don’t ever think that.”

He frowned while stretching, “It seems that every time that you and I quarrel, I manage to examine every trait that you have in your crosshairs.”

She shook her head, “I suppose that I should be honored, since I’m sure that doesn’t happen often between you and your brother.”

“No, it doesn’t – not like this,” he replied. Holmes noted that she had wiped her face again to free it of residual tears.

Shannon pulled at the Velcro on her leg brace to free her leg from its constraints. Sherlock nodded and made his way down the hall to his room. He changed into dry clothes before returning to the sitting room to observe Shannon looking back into the fire. He padded over to the couch and lifted the blankets off the back, nabbing one for her and another for himself.

He plopped the second blanket in her lap, settled back into John’s chair, and draped his blanket over his legs.

She asked as she unfolded her throw, “How long were you walking?”

He blinked absently a few times before saying, “Hours. Most of the night – I was with Mycroft for two hours – more or less.”

Shannon nodded in sympathy. “At least you got to go walking when you found out,” she countered jovially. “I was stuck in a hospital bed for another two weeks with you in the room.”

“That’s not something to laugh at, Shannon,” he chided. “You were nearly killed to slake someone’s desire for power.”

“Sherlock, either I laugh about it – or – I blow from internalizing like I did earlier. Which would you choose, hmm? And for that matter, which of my near-death experiencing were you referring?” her voice, tired, rumbled low in her throat.

He steepled his hands under his chin in contemplation before saying, “You have a point.”

“Look,” she offered as she smoothed the throw over her legs, “I don’t even know if I wanted children in my future. Think about it – look at the war Mary is in right now: She tried to get out of
the game and lead a normal life with the white picket fence…only have it come around a bite her in
the ass. I am far less of a human being than she is and she’s going to have a baby with John.
Could I possibly be that normal and that far removed from all of this? With everything that’s up
here?” she tapped her temple in quick succession for effect. “I am angry and confused, and
irrational, and furious, and malevolent about what happened to me…”

Holmes sat motionless as his friend opened the door to her mind for him to pass through. Your
emotion is your greatest asset, isn’t it?

“…but there is also relief and doubt, and shame – someone who knows nothing about me had to
tell me a story about my own body. I already worry about my mind and now – I need to worry
about what is done to me in other forms of warfare.”

She felt his eyes scrutinizing over her as he committed this conversation to memory. If she had
been anyone else, it would have been eerie and discomforting. If I was anyone else and didn’t
know him.

“I have,” she muttered quietly, “tried so very hard not to doubt what I am doing – what I have
done… what I need to do… And yet – here I am, sitting in 221 Baker Street with Sherlock Holmes;
discussing my current state of insecurity and doubt.”

“What is it that you doubt, exactly,” his baritone voice rumbled in his chest. “Have you examined
those factors?”

“Everything,” she whispered. “Logically, I can guess that Moriarty did see my RI-42 and that the
physician had it moved to Culdrose as a secondary form of defense. I can also then assume that the
physician had some dirt that Moriarty exploited to gain access to the files. The heart attack could
have been purely coincidental; but there are fewer of those in this industry than not.”

Sherlock contemplated her assumptions and agreed. “It’s possible – though there is nothing now
that we can do to prevent what has already happened in the past.”

“Exactly. He would have known that you and I had slept together due to either sheer chemistry or
possible pre-Geist programming. That leaves me with two main outcomes because the
mercenaries were Moriarty’s. One: I wasn’t pregnant but he didn’t want the possible added
distraction to me or…”

“Two:” he supplemented, “You were pregnant and he didn’t want the possible distraction from his
work that you were supposed to be doing. Either avenue would leave us in the predicament and
state of ineptitude we find ourselves in now considering that you were never working for him.”

She rubbed her face brusquely to fight off the ebbing invitation of sleep. “Like I said: Schrodinger.”

Holmes’ nostrils flared in resentment. “Earlier…I said that I wasn’t angry. That admission was
nothing but the truth.” Shannon sat with her hands clasped over her stomach as he briefly exposed
the heart that he so frequently ignored. “It was not anger – but a muddle of guilt, self-loathing, and
a blind wrath that I have experienced seldom in my life.

“I came to the conclusion while walking through the veins of London that I can only function
accurately if I assume that there was not a pregnancy. I lament any offense that might cause
you…”

“No,” she interrupted, brisk. “It’s the way that I am trying to move past what has happened. I
must assume that it’s only an injury. Otherwise – I will collapse into myself – and I cannot let the
Syndicate or Moriarty have the satisfaction of breaking me.”
He continued, “Unless he knew that you weren’t working for him. Then it would be a direct attack to you and would then ripple to me – unless…”

“He was clever,” she countered. “Brilliant, even.” Shannon watched as his eyes minutely flashed a scowl before returning back to his complacent and analytical stare while she continued, “But even he wasn’t that good nor was he that thorough. There would have been a whisper of it somewhere and I would have heard it. He was genuinely expecting you to die on that roof, Sherlock. I know this because I can feel it in the reaches of my mind that it was to be fact.”

He leaned backward into the chairback in contemplation. “Sherlock, it never became fact because…”

“I lived.” She frowned and nodded in admission to his deduction. “My death would have been your activation to begin your work for him.”

“Yes,” she said breathless. “I came to the conclusion and reasoning the day I left London. It was a weight that I didn’t realize I was carrying…”

And even at the end of it all, James Moriarty hoped that a friend that I held in close confidence would destroy everything in the event of my death. That’s ingenious and malevolent.

“…and as I sat in that hotel room, I realized that had been what I was missing: Me. That I was supposed to make his pawns move. I was supposed to take over the organization as his successor. That was my purpose as far as he was concerned: to perfect the chaos that he wrought.”

He cleared his throat, “And because you did not take up the throne, his kingdom began to unravel.”

She concurred, “Precisely. It then makes sense as to why his organization began to dissolve while you were away and I was tracking The Syndicate.”

Holmes next disclosed, “This would also mean that The Syndicate rose to power because you did not become Moriarty’s ‘heir’. They would have then been aware that whomever was to be the new kingpin was in fact razing their organization to the ground.”

“It figures,” she agreed.

Sherlock stared off into the fire for some time in reflection. Shannon closed her eyes to digest the new insights that she and her partner had gathered through their conversation. I need some music to process all of this. But it’s downstairs… He should get some sleep. He is tired, and God knows what is in store this week.

She had no idea how much time had passed before Sherlock’s voice shattered the silence. “But I’m not tired,” he resounded lowly.

The fatigue in his voice matched her own as she replied, “You should try and sleep, Holmes.”

I haven’t said a word…and how did he know that’s what I was thinking?

“As should you,” he countered. “Have you been sleeping?”

“No. I was focusing on and digesting our conversation.”

“Hmm,” he grumbled. “Had you stopped talking?”

“I did.”

“You should sleep – or something. John and Mary will not take kindly to you having to go back to
the hospital for ignoring the physician’s orders.”

“Forgive me. As weary as I am,” she declared into the quiet room, “I am not tired.”

“Nor am I.”

The pair sat in amicable stillness until the beams of moonlight began to disappear from London’s sky. Her thoughts raced from one alternative to the next, hoping that each eventuality was not indicative of the path she was facing.

With golden light beginning to filter through the curtains behind her and the crackling of the fire dying down, she could faintly hear Sherlock’s rhythmic breathing to indicate he had fallen asleep. His head leaned heavily to the side on the chairback. Clumsily, she stood and reached over to shift his blanket to cover his torso and shoulders. As silent as she could muster, Shannon made her way to the kitchen and began to brew coffee. The kitchen clock read 7:13 as the final scoop of grounds was added.

Well – I’m sure this will catch up with me later today. I’m going to sleep wonderfully when all of this adrenaline burns off. But for now, coffee will have to do. Lestrade will be here in a couple of hours. I have to act somewhat like a sane human being. Jesus Christ – what a day.

London was waking up from its slumber as 221 Baker Street had begun to heal its wounds from the previous night.
Rekindling Embers

The Second of October

Persistent knocking thumped from behind the door to 221 Baker Street. Mrs. Hudson opened the door hastily to reveal Lestrade on her stoop.

“Greg? Have you come to see Sherlock for help with a case?” she asked.

He gave a polite smile and shook his head. “No, not today, Mrs. Hudson. I’m here to see Shannon.”

She let him pass through into the house and turned to face him, “Did John tell you about their scuffle? It was one for the books.”

“Scuffle?” he questioned. “No one told me about a scuffle. What happened? Is everyone alright?”

“Oh,” Mrs. Hudson’s voice echoed with guilt. “Well, no one’s in the hospital. One of them is up and about. I was able to smell coffee earlier.”

“Uh huh. Well, I can talk to them about it if you like. I brought her breakfast; she was going to fill me in on everything that’s happened. Mycroft Holmes left me in the dark and wouldn’t say much,” he added.

“That’s because he’s a…well, never-mind,” Mrs. Hudson caught herself. “Go on ahead up, Greg. I’m off to do my shopping. I may be back before you leave.”

“Ta,” Greg smiled. “I’ll leave them in one piece.”

She exited the residence and Greg made his way up the stairs to find Shannon sitting on the couch with her injured leg propped up on the coffee table. “Morning,” she chirped without looking at him. “You’re late.” Greg sighed with a smirk and tossed a paper bag at her that she caught with her bad hand. “I didn’t even look, come on; aren’t you even a little impressed?” she joked.

Greg smirked and nodded, “Maybe a little. I brought you some breakfast; thought that you might be hungry.”

“Oh, definitely, thanks!” she grinned. “So, where do you want to start?”

“Well…let’s start with why you went to Scotland in the first place.”

“Alright, as promised.”

Over the next two hours, Shannon was happy to munch on half of her bear claw while she retold events; omitting incriminating certain aspects of Sherlock investigating Magnussen.

Sherlock stirred in his sleep, finally bringing awareness that he had been on the opposite side of the room. Greg looked puzzled and pointed at Holmes, “Has he been there this whole time?”

“Yep.”

“In John’s chair?”
“Yep.”

Confused, he looked back at Shannon, “Why?”

“Because that’s where he fell asleep this morning.”

“Right,” Greg allowed disapprovingly. “And why is he in John’s chair sleeping?”

Shannon, exasperated, set the bag and its remaining contents on the coffee table and faced him, “Because I was sitting in his chair.”

“Alright, Shannon. That’s enough. What happened last night? Mrs. Hudson said that you were fighting.”

“We were,” she confessed frankly. “We worked it out. Not to keep you in the dark, but it’s just something that he and I are working through right now. It’ll be fine as soon as we wrap up this puzzle we’re working on. I promise.”

Greg looked unconvinced, “I would really like to believe that…”

“You should,” Sherlock grumbled as he stretched. “Shannon has never lied to you before; to the best of my knowledge. Have you?”

“No, not that I can think of…” she offered. Shannon nabbed the bag and threw it over to Sherlock. “Breakfast.” He squinted in the light and caught the bag to find half of a bear claw. He inhaled it and looked about. “Coffee’s in the kitchen,” she added.

Greg threw his hands up, “That’s it. This is too bizarre for me. I’m leaving.”

“What, you don’t want to know any of the nifty Mycroft secrets that I have?”

Greg paused for a moment to only hear Sherlock’s voice from the kitchen, “If telling any of them would warrant him paying a visit to Baker Street, I must advise against it. He isn’t going to be coming here without a firing squad for some time.”


“The both of you…” he breathed. “Nuts.” He took his leave shut the door behind him.

“How long had you been humoring him,” Sherlock asked, returning to sit in his chair.

Shannon picked up the paper and walked it over to him, “Couple hours, or so. He wanted to know what has been going on. I left out the parts concerning Magnussen on your behalf.”

“That was forward thinking of you,” he replied, taking the paper from her hand. “Is Scotland Yard satisfied now?”

Shannon tilted her head to the side abruptly, “Scotland Yard?”

“Yes,” he added, “I presume that’s why he was here.”

Shannon laughed, “No. I’m afraid not. But Greg Lestrade, as our friend, is satisfied.”

“Ah,” he quipped unenthusiastically, scanning the columns. Shannon limped back to the couch and started to reapply her brace. She then made her was downstairs and began to get changed.
Sherlock had read through the articles quickly, committed them to memory, and sat quietly. Shannon made some noise downstairs that ended with a loud *THUD*. “I’m fine, thank you,” she hollered up the stairs.

“That’s good,” Holmes replied. “Can’t have you winding back up at the hospital again. I imagine that Mary will be quite cross about it.”

Shannon heaved herself up after tripping over herself. “I’m going out. I have some work to do.”

“Work in your current state would only result in more injury,” he chastised.

She shrugged on her fitted pea coat and rested her hands on her waist, “Then I guess you better get dressed. Come on. I’m off to Marsham Street. I’ll walk. You should be able to catch up easily.”

Her rolled his eyes in annoyance, threw his robe off and went to get dressed.

Shannon closed the door behind her, took her mobile out of her pocket and dialed a memorized number as she walked down Baker Street.

“Hello?”

“Up for a little adventure today? I know that you aren’t working.”

“I don’t want to know how you know that. I’d like to get out – where to?”

“We’re going to the Home Office on Marsham, Dr. Watson. I want to speak with our detainee that had kept me chained up in a basement.”

“Are you up to that?”

“See you in half an hour, John.” A determined smile was displayed on her lips. *I’ve had enough of the games.*

After a small journey, Holmes and Byrns stood before the Home Office as John got out of his cab. “Ready?” John asked.

Sherlock grinned, “Definitely.”

“Just like old times, gentlemen,” she agreed, hearing the anticipation and giddiness in their voices. “Let’s get to work.”

Shannon had done all the talking to get to the containment room that Brent was in until his isolation cell was ready at prison. Not a single person asked about clearances or batted an eye at her. John eyed each employee skeptically. “Shannon…?”

Nonchalant, she answered, “Don’t worry. I’ve been in and out of here enough that they don’t even care anymore.”

“And the cameras?” Sherlock asked.

She tapped her coat lapel with delicate care. “Disabling chip sown into the seam. It’s something I nicked while I was away, working. I tapped into the AV systems before I returned, installed a little
backdoor, and added proximity sensors all over the place.”

“That’s amazing,” John gasped. “And when did you do all of this?” Sherlock grinned again.

“Uh…before Sherlock got all of his memories back? I had some free time…and I got bored.”

Delight dripped from Holmes’ voice, “And I’m sure that my brother has no idea about that endeavor?”

“None, so far to the best of my knowledge. He had me in and out of here for jobs and files – most of these people just recognize me as a woman at a higher pay grade and clearance. No one really talks to me…though I will say I had to threaten a handful when I first started…and put in some Geist doors in the event something went to shit,” she admitted.

They made it to the interior of the building and entered an elevator. Shannon depressed the 2 and 3 buttons, resulting in a pleasant DING as the doors closed. “Going down.”

“Down?” John asked. “There’s not a down, is there?”

Sherlock peered down at John’s quizzical face, “Of course there is.”

The doors opened, the trio exited, and a guard stopped them from continuing through the checkpoint. She pulled a card out of her pockets, flashed it to the officer and slid it through an ID slot. “If you wish, I can call your superior to verify.”

“No, ma’am, that won’t be necessary. Your clearance passed the screening. How may I assist you today?” he asked.

“You had a prisoner brought here in the past three weeks for attempted murder on an agent. I will be conducting part of his interrogation today.”

“And them?” the guard asked, eyeing the duo.

“There’s no one with me, what are you talking about? Not a single person to be my friend.” she quoted sternly.

Perception covered his face, “Sorry, ma’am; my mistake. You will find him in room two. If you require anything, there is a panel on the outside of the door…”

“Thank you, Simon. That will be all.”

“Ma’am.”

The three of them passed through the checkpoint as Simon, the guard, sat back down at his desk. “What favor did you do in order to get that can of security flaw?” Sherlock asked.

“I didn’t.”

John piped up when they rounded the corner, “What? But he saw us!”

“No, he didn’t,” she offered. “Geist says that he didn’t.”

John halted in place, dumbfounded. When he had composed, he moved to catch up, “That’s terrifying, Shannon. Thank God you’re on our side.”
At their destination’s door panel, Shannon punched in a code and waited for the door to unlock. Byrns, Holmes, and Watson filed into the room and closed the door behind them.

Brent looked up from the bed in his cell and smiled. “Well, well, well, look at you. I forgot what you looked like without being all banged up.”

“Brent, how good to see you again.”

Sherlock felt disgust rising in his throat. *So, this is the man that tortured her.*

Brent sneered, “You weren’t able to beat me on your own so you brought the wonder twins with you? Shame.”

“Oh, they aren’t for me,” Shannon sniped. “They’re here for you.” Brent’s eyes lost their mirth. “They’re here so that I don’t kill you.”

John clenched his hands, fuming in anger. “And don’t think for one second that either one of us would be upset about you suffering,” John warned, his voice shaking.

The detective observed that Brent was chained at the ankle to the wall and that there was a white, tiled line halfway across the room as a boundary. He quipped, “It must really burn you to be tethered here, knowing that your work will not get finished.”

“You must be the detective,” he cooed. “It doesn’t bother me that I’m here. I knew that this would be where I end up. At least here I am alive…though, I don’t know if I can say the same for her.”

John looked to her and frowned. He turned back to Brent and started to throw a punch aimed at Brent’s face. Shannon grabbed his arm and pulled, “That’s enough.”

Shannon grabbed the spare chair, sat down, and said, “Gentlemen, outside, if you please. And turn to the right. You will find what you’re looking for.”

“Indeed,” Sherlock answered. The pair exited the room with scowls and followed her advice. To the right was a separate room that had a closed AV feed into that room. They sat in the chairs and watched on six screens the conversation unfold.

“Let’s start,” she said coolly. Brent nodded in polite agreement.

“You assume that I’m going to merely spill my guts to you; it doesn’t work like that,” he cooed.

She shrugged, “It does, actually. You will abide by my rules, or I move toward warfare.”

Brent mocked her with a pout. “Aww…did someone get hit on the head too hard? Did you forget how this works?”

“Fine. Your choice.” She stood up and exited the room to use the panel. “Simon, I would like you to fetch my ‘equipment,’ please.”

Shannon turned back around and closed the door. She took her seat again and waited. “I did get hit a few times, so says the physician. Potential brain damage, even. But for now, I am of sound mind. And I am very aware.”

“Shame. You can move closer, you know. We already share an intimate bond in a manner of speaking,” he soothed.
“It’s probably not in your best interest if I get any closer. I may have recovering injuries, but do not doubt my ability to do my job.”

“I’m counting on it,” he replied. “Do you remember my phone call?”

“Vividly,” she answered plainly. “Who is she?”

“So you were awake…wonderful. She is running the Syndicate and what’s left or Moriarty’s operation because our new boss never showed,” he churned with malice. “A little birdie told me that was supposed to be you.”

John’s mouth fell, aghast. “Sherlock?”

“Shh,” he reprimanded. “She’ll speak to you about it later.”

“But Sherlock…”

“Quiet; she’s entering the next phase of questioning.”

“What can I say,” she chuckled. “I like to keep people guessing. Besides, what’s the fun in following plans?”

“Everything,” Brent charmed. “You were very difficult to find. I spent months tracking you and your movements in and out of London. And then, just my luck; you were sent without your backup dancers to Scotland. Imagine my gaiety on the first train to Glasgow.”

She sighed, bored, “I’m sure it was like you losing your virginity: super exciting with poor and underwhelming performance.”

Brent’s eyes turned to slits before he jumped up and leapt forward. He reached for her and found that he was half a foot short of her. All the while, Shannon hadn’t flinched. “You see,” she began, “you were sloppy. You called me and dropped Etchya’s name: mistake number one. Mistake number two: you followed me around for weeks to the point of predictability. Boring. Number three: You kept me locked in that room far too long; I became aware.

“Blindfolded, I could tell that you were six feet tall, light on your feet; gangly even… That you have a cat, you don’t eat enough foods with iron, and that you broke leg when you were ten.”

“I was eleven,” he corrected begrudgingly. “All of that while blindfolded, I find that hard to believe.”

She leaned back and shrugged, “It doesn’t matter if you believe me or not. I don’t care. I have questions.” She heard a quick knock on the other side of the door and smirked. “You can give me answers or I can let one of your demons into the room.”

“I don’t have ‘demons’,” he chortled. “You can do your worst.”

“Hmm,” she retorted. “Interesting. You see, your pulse has quickened; and though the temperature in this room has remained annoyingly constant, you are sweating. Progressively, the tick in your left pink has grown worse the longer I have sat here without showing much emotion and your eyes don’t hold contact with me for very long. That is either indicative that you’re very good, or, very worried.”
Holmes’ eyes darted between the different camera angles on the monitors. *Watch carefully…this is almost too easy. He could be laying a trap for her right now.*

“Aren’t you worried,” Brent replied, “about being here alone with me. I do have some of your programming at my disposal.”

“No, I’m not. You would have already started implementing some of the protocols the minute that I walked through the door,” she added.

He chuckled, “What makes you think that I haven’t?”

Without showing a change in her demeanor, her mind went into overdrive processing their conversation so far with pockets of information residing dormant in her mind. Lost in her thoughts, she didn’t hear him humming. When she realized that the noise in the room was coming from him, she stood up knocking her chair backwards. Migraine like pain bulleted through her skull.

“SHERLOCK!”

While watching the feed, John noticed that Shannon’s injured hand would twitch anytime that Brent spoke to her. “She doesn’t do that, does she? Not usually.”

Sherlock scrutinized the live footage and saw Byrn’s eyes grow vacant. *No…* “John, we have to stop him!” he bellowed, leaping from the screens and retracing their steps. He tried to get into the room, but it was locked. Simon stood nearby, alarmed at the sudden intrusion. “Open the door or we are all dead!”

“Who are you?” he asked, reaching for his sidearm. “You don’t have clearance to be down here!”

He rolled his eyes, “Brilliant, okay…I’m Sherlock Holmes, this is Doctor Watson – and in there is my brother’s MI6 agent interrogating the prisoner. Open the door!”

John had already leapt into action and was in the process of disabling the officer. Sherlock closed his eyes in an attempt to better recall the passcode Shannon had punched in. On the second try, the door unlocked and John ripped the door wide open. The soundproofing was nullified the moment the door opened; Shannon’s pained cries boomed through the empty hallways. John launched forward to Brent and he threw a well-executed punch to Brent’s jaw. A sickening crack echoed in the room.

Brent’s humming turned into groans of agony. John stood over him with clenched fists, “Not another sound from you or I will break every bone in your body, twice.”

Sherlock was kneeling down beside Shannon, covering her hands on her head to try and force her to look at him. “Shannon, you need to calm down; listen to my voice… You need to tune out everything that you’ve just heard and listen!”

Tears streamed down her face and her voice was raw. *Oh my God…the pain…I can't stand it. If I just…give in…it'll stop…*

A look of desperation flashed across her face that caused alarm to sound in Sherlock’s voice, “Don’t you dare. Don’t you dare give in to this. You’re so much stronger that back then. Fight
John turned to find Shannon curled on the floor, eyes showing panic. “Sherlock, what do we do?”

Is that Sherlock and John? What’s happening? This pain…it’s…oh no…he is trying to activate a pocket …no. No, he can’t. I won’t let him. I need to get to sleep. That can stop it, I think. How… how am I going to do this? Oh my God… here goes nothing.

“Hit me,” she growled in between wails of pain. “HIT ME!” Without another instruction, Sherlock slapped Shannon hard. She bounced back upright and grabbed him by the lapels of his jacket. “HIT. ME.”

He shoved her down and punched her square on the side of her face. She fell into a crumpled heap on the floor. Sherlock panted heavily and looked over at John. Brent moaned from his place on the floor, breaking their concentration. John peered down and sneered, “If anything’s happened to her…”

“My job’s done,” he groaned. “And I think that you broke my jaw.”

“You will unfortunately survive,” Sherlock feigned concern. “John, if you would?”

“Gladly,” he replied before throwing another punch to render Brent unconscious.

“We need to get her out of here,” Sherlock quipped. “We need to try and wake her up. Let’s get her out into the AV room.”

They both carried her through the hallway and set her gently onto the floor. John reached into his pocket and produced two capsules of smelling salts. “When did you start carrying those,” Holmes asked.

“Since she told me that we were coming here,” he replied. “I wasn’t sure what we might need.” He cracked them open under her nose. “Come on then, wake up.”

Her eyes shot open, she inhaled roughly, and started sputtering. She grabbed at her side with an emphatic hiss.

Sherlock surveyed her mannerisms intently, “I’m waiting.” John sat breathless in anticipation.

She gingerly touched the side of her face that would no doubt bruise soon, “I believe in Sherlock Holmes. AND JESUS…it took you long enough! What did I have to do, spell it for you?”

John sighed and sat backward onto the floor as Holmes asserted, “She’s fine.”

“Yeah, I know,” she chided. “That’s why you two came with me…or did you not figure that out?”

“It was a possibility that he would try and trap you,” Sherlock retorted, stern. “But it wasn’t a guarantee!”

“Yes, it was,” she replied. “Of course, it was. When I was captured, he was talking to someone about activating something…remember?”

“That does not mean that you act as bait,” John reproached. “You could have let us in on the plot!”

“Somehow,” she continued, “he would have figured it out. I couldn’t chance it.”

“And how long were you planning this?” Sherlock criticized.
“Since you fell asleep this morning? Maybe a little after that…not sure. I didn’t get any sleep, Sherlock,” she reminded. “Sound familiar?”

“Oh God,” John realized. “Did you two…are you…? SHERLOCK, SHE HAS STITCHES!”

His look of bewilderment added to the immediate laughter coming from her. It was loud and raucous, and her face went red in exertion.

“Are we what?!” Sherlock exclaimed.

Shannon pointed at him with her injured hand and roared backward. “No!” she cried out, wiping tears of joy from her eyes. “Oh…my…God… No,” she gasped. “John, no! We aren’t sleeping together. OH…Jesus.”

Relief flooded John like a wave. “Oh, thank God.”

“Now that that irrelevant information is out of the way, we need to come up with a game plan.”

She gingerly stood up and braced herself against the wall. “Easy. I go back in,” she coughed while her laughing spell finished.

“You can’t be serious,” John replied flatly. “After what just happened! I don’t have any more smelling salts; and, what if something else takes hold?”

“It won’t,” she countered.

“Sherlock, some reason would be nice!”

“If we did indeed stop the process from happening and it’s not possible for it to restart,” he added looking to her.

“It cannot,” she said plainly. “As far as I know, nothing is shifting around up there in my mind.”

Holmes continued, “Then I don’t see any reason to not continue, so long as that you are able. This may be the only chance that we get to interrogate him.”

“Exactly. So, let’s start again. Stay here,” she commanded as she went back to the cell. “WHO KNOCKED SIMON UNCONSCIOUS?”

“John,” Sherlock confessed unapologetically.

“Jesus, both of you. Stay in there and shut the door. He’s going to be perplexed when he wakes up.”

“And when he does?” John asked.

She opened the door to Brent’s cell and shrugged, “I’ll take care of it.” She paused and had a thought, deciding it best to leave the door open. Once inside the cell she righted her chair and sat in wait for Brent to regain consciousness.

Sherlock and John sat in a tense silence waiting for the interrogation to continue. John, terse, spoke first, “This is ridiculous. And you know it.”

“Shannon Byrns requires answers and we both know that this man has a handful of them. What,
are we supposed to just let him rot away with all the information that he has?” he responded hotly.

“You just punched her so that she wouldn’t enact some rampage …thing! Do you understand that having her here could get her killed?”

Sherlock frowned and turned to look at John square on. “How is that different from when you lived at the flat, or when she was on her own, or – or when she’s going to have a mind of her own to do whatever it is that she likes? You and I cannot control her no more than we can control the weather. All we can do is prepare for it and continue on with the ebbing flow of life!”

John squinted and firmly said, “Does this have anything to do with her possibly having been pregnant?”

Offended, Holmes snapped back, “Does it? Because your actions are showing that you’d care to handle her with kit gloves as opposed to treating her the same way that you always have!”

“Yes, Sherlock,” he nipped in response, “because it’s a sober realization of her fragility! I don’t expect you to get it because you aren’t in love with anyone…but if something like that had happened to Mary, I would kill the person that did it to her!”

“So, does this mean that you and Mary are on the mend?”

“Jesus...” Watson protested. “That's not it at all! Look...you have to have realized that if she was pregnant...”

“Stop,” Sherlock ordered with his open hand. “She and I both agree that it does no one any aid to think about this situation in ‘ifs’. Doing so would result in complete introspective isolation. This is a case that we,” he motioned between them, “are helping her to solve. We must remove emotion from it in order to get to the facts as quickly as possible.”

John crossed himself in disbelief and opposition, “You both deserve each other, truly. You two are going to put me to an early grave.”

“Don’t be so hard on yourself, John. You look fine. The stress from today maybe managed to take three hours off of your life. You look fine.”

Shannon checked her watch: it had been three minutes since Brenton began to come out of unconsciousness. She sat quietly in her chair massaging her leg when Brent got up and sat on the edge of his bed.

“Good morning,” she seethed. “You’ve been unconscious for five minutes and seventeen seconds. We have work to do.”

Brent pulled on his chain and tried to frown, wincing. “I’m still detained.”

“Of course you are,” she chided mercilessly. “I’m not going to just allow you to have freedom; that’s asinine.” He looked past her and saw black shoes and legs in the doorway. She turned her head to follow his line of sight and smiled, “I was bored and there were people in my way.”

Brent was skeptical. “Forgive me, but; there’s only one way that I am allowed to believe that you have adapted to your new directive.”

“I’m sure there is,” she whined. “Let’s get a move on. There’s work to be done.”
“‘The darker the night, the brighter the stars; the deeper the grief, the closer is God…’” he mumbled through his broken jaw.

Shannon’s face showed annoyance while her mind combed information methodically. She heaved a sigh and answered, “‘When reason fails, the devil helps.’“

Brent’s eyes flashed satisfaction while he sat backwards on the bed. “Then it’s done.”

“And since you are now closer to me, your God; let’s get something straight. You will answer all of them truthfully, for I’ll know if you don’t.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he stammered. “Anything.”

“Shall we begin?” her voice dripped with ice.
Over the next ten minutes, Brent spilled all matters of information about the current state of the Syndicate network, the temporary hierarchy, and where present locations were. Shannon was certain that he hadn’t stopped once to breathe.

Once he had finished, she cleared her throat and smirked. “Is that all, Brent?”

“Yes,” he uttered breathless. “It is, I swear it.”

“Good,” she quipped while hearing Simon stir in the hallway. She rubbed her knee and sighed, “Simon, are you awake yet?” There was a groan, some grumbling, and shuffling as the feet in the doorway moved. “Simon?” Brent’s face froze.

“Ma’am. Just getting up. The intruders?”

“Taken care of, Simon. Not to worry. Take a moment; and, once you’ve righted yourself, I need the guest in room five, please,” she retorted calmly.

“Of course,” Simon groaned as he shuffled off.

Her gaze slowly came back to Brent and his face showed echoes of confusion. “Am I to be freed?”

“Un-regrettably, no, you are not. Having you out in the world while I’m doing my work will not be tolerated.”

He voiced his malcontent, “But, I was told that, after your activation, I was to be freed to escort you to your next meeting in York.”

She frowned in thought before her shoulders bounced in a heavy shrug. “Why? Sherlock Holmes can easily fill your place should he keep his head down and out of view.”

He frowned, “I can see that you still hold some attachment to him due to proximity, but I assure you that it will pass. Besides, without me, it will be harder for you to get through in your injured condition.”

“I doubt that,” she chided. “You’ve been very forthcoming with information. But you’re not necessary.”

“Yes, I am,” he growled. “Your programming should tell you so!”

“Oh, it should, shouldn’t it?” She gestured with her head to the camera as Simon entered the room.

Simon cleared his throat, “The guest is preparing and will be here momentarily.”

“Thank you. Now, Simon, I want you to go back to your post. There’s no one with me, what are you talking about? Not a single person to be my friend,” she answered warmly.

“Yes, ma’am, back to my post.”

Brent’s jaw dropped in amazement with a grimace. “You are good at what you do.”

“Of course,” she replied nonchalantly. “That’s part of what you all did to me.”
Quiet footsteps from both sides of the hallway merged together in the doorway. Brent’s eyes shot up and something akin to horror flashed in his eyes. She pivoted in her chair to find John, Sherlock, and her guest standing behind her.

“From my research,” Shannon retorted smugly, “you’ve been to Malawi. And, it just so happens that Kafele and you know each other; isn’t that right?”

Brent went pale and his skin was clammy. “Perhaps.”

John cleared his throat and interjected, “Am I missing something? Sherlock?”

Sherlock gazed intently at Shannon, who was now standing and shaking hands with Kafele. 5’11”, calluses indicate frequent gun use, likes to bake. Has been frequenting restaurants in Soho since arrival to London three weeks ago, regularly walks four miles, and most definitely knows Brent. “Shannon…” Sherlock warned.

“Brent: I must thank you for all the information that you have given me. However, in my research while I was in the hospital; I came to find that there was a man looking for you because of a messy murder that occurred a few years ago. I reached out and it turns out that we both have you in common.”

“It’s not possible…” Brent yelled through the pain of his jaw.

“Probable…it isn’t probable that I’d slip the programming leash; yet, not impossible. It’s something that I’ve been working on and, thanks to you, I can see that my instinct was correct. “You aren’t coming with me because I simply do not need you. There is no programming in effect. I can, if I calm myself enough, comb through the information that should have taken hold. But there’s no ill effect to me. And, as I’ve stated, you were freely giving me information that I’m sure Mr. Holmes has committed to memory.”

“Verbatim,” Sherlock replied.

Shannon threw her hands up and shrugged, “Sorry, Brent. But you tagging along is counterproductive to my end game. You want me to take up my place running the company… I’m going to burn it to the ground.”

“But – but –“ Brent stammered. “But what about all that I did to you? Don’t you want to get even?”

She turned to face the men and patted Kafele on the shoulder. “With some introspection and meditation, I have come to realize that my killing you would more than likely enact some programming. If it didn’t, I would not recover adequately. “Kafele, however, has no problem giving you what’s owed. From what I understand, you raped his daughter several times before you killed her.”

John piped up, “You can’t be serious. You’re going to leave him here? With this man?”

Shannon’s eyes were cold. “Would you rather I do it and let my emotion get involved?”

“Of course not,” John argued. “But there has to be another way!”

Sherlock went to speak, but she threw a finger up to silence him. “Not. A. Word. Out and into the hallway without a sound. Now. Both of you.”

She turned and whispered to Kafele, “You have twenty minutes. Break him; do not kill him. No
matter what. You and I will need him alive if the Syndicate is to fall.”

Kafele, a broad shouldered and proud man nodded with a sneer. “Unfortunate and upsetting as that is to me, you are correct,” he allowed stiffly. “He will be kept alive. You have done a great service to me by finding this man.”

“If he dies, you will be removed from the equation. Once you are done, return to room five.”

She turned and hobbled out of the room and met Simon at his post with Sherlock and John in tow. “Simon, I need the recordings from today. Now. And this,” she added, handing him a CD, “is what you are to override with. It’s the tolling of the bells.”

He nodded, emotionless, and did as told. She was brought the day’s recordings on a CD stood back at his post. “There’s no one with me, what are you talking about? Not a single person to be my friend.”

“That’s alright,” John assured.

She motioned for the boys to be silent, and they retreated into the elevator. When the doors closed, she exhaled and staggered backward against the elevator wall. John turned to catch her while Sherlock looked on, puzzled. “It’s alright,” John assured.

Shannon was breathing heavily and her hands were shaking. She felt numb while all of her adrenaline was flowing freely in her veins. Sherlock pressed the Emergency Stop button at John’s direction and the elevator bounced to a halt. John grabbed her wrist and his eyes widened. “You need to calm down. Right now. Your heart is going berserk! Calm down or you’re going to hyperventilate.” Sherlock’s brow furrowed and looked to John. “It’s close to a hundred sixty… Shannon! Calm down. You’re fine. You’re safe. We’ve got you.”

“John, get her ready to move; this elevator can’t be stagnant for much longer without causing alarm. Remember where we are,” Sherlock warned abruptly.

John did some breathing exercises with her to calm her down as quickly as possible; but in all honesty, he was afraid that she was going fall unconscious. “Shannon, listen to me,” he warmly reassured her while gently squeezing her hands. “I know what you’re feeling. I know, trust me. You need to get up and we need to get to Baker Street. I can’t do much for you here. I need you to go a bit further.”

Shannon nodded and fumbled her way to standing, looking dazed. Sherlock enacted the elevator into motion once more and got them to the ground floor. I wonder if this is residual from negating her programming. It’s possible. Though, judging by her reactions, this is something new…or something that has been kept hidden.

The elevator doors opened to brighter lights and the three began to make their way out toward the street. Sherlock jogged ahead to signal a cab to get them home as quickly as possible.

In truth, when Shannon was listening to Brent after he came to, anger and resentment was boiling over inside of her mind. But now, she sat there on the couch at Baker Street with a blanket wrapped around her shoulders; numb. The numbness took over her body when Kafele, Sherlock, and John appeared. After that, everything was kind of a blur. She saw things in flashes as if she were watching everything occur as an outsider. I can’t let him get to me…Not like this.
Sherlock was busy doing research in the kitchen and Molly, who had been called in transit to Baker Street, sat beside Shannon. She was doing her best to console Shannon as best that she could, but Molly knew that the interaction was more than likely irritating Sherlock. John was downstairs and both his and Mrs. Hudson’s voice could be heard traveling up the stairwell.

Shannon peered around as she was becoming more grounded. Her heart no longer felt as if it were going to leap out of her chest. Without any warning, she leaned her head down onto Molly’s shoulder and curled her legs up onto the couch. “Thank you,” she whispered.

There was a small, audible pause from the kitchen when Shannon had whispered. Sherlock listened intently and got back to work. *It’s taken her long enough. Though, the next time she endeavors something like this, I will need an entire work-up beforehand.*


“I don’t think so, Molly,” the injured woman replied bluntly. “He did this to me. He’s why I was in the hospital.”

“Yeah…but you’re – you’re okay now,” she offered in rebuttal. “You’re getting better.”

“Am I?” she questioned honestly.

“I think so.”

“Molly, I wanted to harm him. Me. I want make him suffer worse than he’s done to me. And if he would die in the process…”

“…Shannon…that’s – that’s not okay,” Molly stammered.

Sherlock was quickly out of his chair and into the common room. “Molly, it’s time that you leave.”

“Okay. But Shannon…”

“John will sort her. Out, Molly.”

Molly gingerly stood up and Shannon pivoted onto her other hip so that she could use the armrest as a pillow. Molly left as told and in a flurry of questioning. At the foot of the stairs she saw John and made quick comments about Shannon talking. John nodded, “She’s been through a lot recently. I think her brain is finally catching up with her. She’s healing. Thank you for coming over to calm her down, Molly.”

“John, you didn’t hear what she just said…about – about who did that to her…”

The doctor looked up the stairs with his face giving way to worry. “Thank you, Molly. I’ll go up in a moment. Mrs. Hudson and I are making a tray up for her so that she can relax and get some sleep. I’ll call you to let you know how she’s doing.”

Sherlock stood beside the couch and stared down at his friend. “Are you broken?” he asked bluntly.

“I don’t know,” she replied with a glare upwards. “Am I?”

“I’ll rephrase the question then: are you still Shannon Byrns… one who laments having to take life
and at all costs tries to not have casualties when working?”

“I would think…” she started.

“Do not lie to me,” he warned with a low tone. “I heard what you said to Molly. Tell me, with nothing but honesty: did this halt in programming change anything in your ethical values?”

Her gaze lowered and found an arbitrary spot on the mantle to stare at. “No, it did not.”

He nodded abruptly, moved to the chair near the doorway, and sat down. He rested his chin on his folded hands and waited for her to continue.

She continued to stare forward. “Sherlock, I became overwhelmed by my emotions. I was numb. I don’t remember most of what happened after you three came into the room. I want him to suffer for what he did to me.”

“What purpose would that serve you?” he probed.

“Vengeance. Anger. Rage. Pain. …it would all come out of me.”

He closed his eyes and said, “But you also came to the conclusion that doing so could unlock some other part of your mind. So why do you allow it to continue to affect you?”

“It’s my emotions,” she uttered straightforwardly. “He started pushing just the right places. It’s not necessarily pressure points that would cause me to self-sacrifice… But…”

His eyes opened and he studied her. *She is sound. Though, she is letting her emotions overrule her usual logical demeanor.* “Continue.”

“But with the pain that I went through… the recovery that I’m still going through… An eye for an eye sounds like a fantastic philosophy to live by,” she finalized.

He squinted in analysis. “That’s not who you are.”

John was coming up the stairs, balancing the contents on a tray the entire way up. “I know. At times it’s a damn shame,” she whispered.

He blinked in surprise as what she had just said echoed in his mind. *She wishes, that just once, she could slip her ethical leash because her emotions are raging inside of her. I can’t imagine the scale with which her emotions are battling against her unbiased, logical nature. To add, I should hope that’s nothing that I have to experience because I am more logically-minded than she is.*

“I’ve brought up a tray for tea,” John announced. “Mrs. Hudson will be joining us.”

“Clean off the table and pull it out from the other desk. I’ll cap the end with the spare chair, Sherlock,” Shannon commanded. He looked puzzled with a furrowed brow. “Sherlock. Table. Clear it. Now.”

He begrudgingly hoisted himself out of the chair and did as told. *Why? Ah yes. She’s burrowed her way into my life and if I don’t do so, I won’t hear the end of it. And, I find that I care for her in a similar fashion comparable to John and Mrs. Hudson. She is hurting. It’s best that I not provoke her further.*

After some maneuvering and shuffling, the four of them sat at the table and began to eat their meal for tea. Shannon opened up some while she was eating, but it was not to the extent that she had
just divulged to Sherlock. After their meal and amicable conversation, John checked Shannon’s vitals; and, once convinced that she wasn’t going to have a stroke, made his way back home.

Mrs. Hudson offered to do the washing, but Shannon prohibited her from doing so. “You made the meal, absolutely not, Mrs. Hudson. I’ll bring your tray and dishes down later. Off you go. And thank you.”

“But, dear,” she argued, “you look like you should have a rest…and that new mark on your face is ghastly!”

“Yes, well, I’m well enough to do the dishes, Mrs. Hudson. Thank you.”

Shannon took her leave to the kitchen and Mrs. Hudson ushered Sherlock to follow his friend with a violent bob of her head. He rolled his eyes and walked into the kitchen.

“I am here to be of help, or something,” he offered in annoyance.

She chuckled half-heartedly. “Did she urge you in here?”

“Yes,” he answered, “but if I consider the trauma that you’ve experienced the past forty-eight hours; I am expected to help you with this task, am I not?”

Shannon nodded, “Society says so, yes. However, I will not hold you to convention because, let’s be honest…that’s not who we are.”

He grabbed the drying towel and waited for her to finish washing some of the dishes. Part way through, he looked her over and said, “I am sorry.”

“For what,” she asked without taking her attention off of the current dish. “You have done nothing to warrant apologizing.”

“I disagree. The swelling and initial bruising to your cheek is my doing,” Holmes muttered.

“True,” she allowed. “But I asked you to do it to for the greater good. So…I feel that negates you having to apologize.”

He frowned. “I find that wanting to do so goes back to our discussion from last night. I do not know how, but I feel as if I am mirroring your uncertainty and agitation. I am sorry that you feel as such and there is nothing I can do to assist you through it…simply put, I don’t know if I know how to assist you through this. It is foreign to me.”

She handed him the last dish and rinsed her hands. “If it puts you at ease, I don’t know how you could help outside of what you are already endeavoring to do so with my case; nor do I know how to help myself. It’s something that I’m going to have to work through, I suppose.”

“Shannon.”

“Yes?”

“You aren’t alone in this. You do realize that, correct? John and I… we… and I am…”

“Yes, I do,” she replied. She looked up into his face that easily indicated his inexperience in dealing with these types of situations. “You are doing a good job, Sherlock Holmes.” She leaned forward and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a date with some ice, acetaminophen, and my bed. It’s been a
long day and there’s still work to be done. I’ll be downstairs doing some research if you need me for any reason. I need to think.”

Shannon collected the dry dishes into a stack with her acquired ice pack from the freezer and made her way downstairs. Mrs. Hudson could be heard making a fuss over her tenant bringing the dishes down to her kitchen. Shannon talked with her for a while before going into her room and gently shutting the door.

She booted up her laptop and began her search into the information that Brent wonderfully gave up earlier that afternoon. She had troubles opening her bottle of acetaminophen, but thought nothing of it. I am still getting over today. What is wrong with me? I’ve been through worse! Get it together, Shannon. I mean, damn. After enough of an effort she was able to nab three tablets and down them quickly.

The brunette looked up to see her reflection in the mirror for the first time since she had been home. Jesus Christ. “Ghastly,” as Mrs. Hudson put it doesn’t even begin to describe … that…thing…in the mirror.

Slowly, the woman leaned in to closer examine her features. She began with her face; prodding with care around her fresh and healing wounds. Her right eye had shadows of what was left of bruising from the initial torture and her left eye was swollen with broken blood vessels in the white of it. Nice one, Sherlock. Most of her scrapes and cuts had healed nicely. The two fingers on her left hand were still in splints, her wrists still bore evidence of bindings, and her shoulders ached. With great concentration, she lifted the hem of her shirt, tucked it under the strap of her bra, and looked herself over. Bruising was still visible on her left side where, presumably, her ribs had been broken; and, her back was littered with more bruises. Her stomach bore burns in the process of healing: grossly discolored and disfigured. A tear from each eye cascaded quickly down her face and landed with barely audible plops on the tabletop below.

Shannon looked downward and lifted her hands up into view. They had tremors, which, regardless of how she tried, would not stop. On impulse she typed a message into her phone:

Sherlock Holmes:

Hewlop.

She sat on the floor at the foot of her bed and waited. A moment passed and she heard the audible buzz from his phone. There was a cease in movement, some shuffling, and then sure steps on the stair.

Her door drifted open in silence and Sherlock Holmes stood in the doorway. Quickly, he spotted her on the floor and took quiet steps into the room. His red robe flowed around him as he walked. He looks almost regal. “It is rather infrequent that you send a text with so blatant an error. Explain why I am down here?”

“My hands,” she choked out.

He crouched down to examine them, but she had them wrapped around her sides. Matter-of-factly, he stated, “I need to see them if I am to diagnose the issue and solve the problem.”

With a delicate pull, Sherlock had coaxed her hands from their hiding places and watched as they
twitched and rattled from her wrist. He analyzed the size and frequency of the tremor and attributed it to the trauma she had experienced as of late. *It is more than possible all that she has experienced is catching up to her at this moment because she saw Brent again today.*

She cried, “They won’t stop.”

“No,” he replied, “they won’t. Not today.”

“I know,” she said through hot tears. “I can’t stop crying.”

“Probably not. Not today.”

“I saw.”

He moved to sit beside her and leant back against the bed. “Will you tell me what you saw,” he asked gently. “Take your time and break it into pieces.” *She may be exhibiting signs of Post-Traumatic Stress or something akin to it. John would be more suited to diagnose and assist in these matters. Though, if one considers the frequency, severity, and timing of the trauma that she has experienced, it is worth noting that it wasn’t until recently that these emotions and symptoms have become apparent. I shall be looking into the matter further later.*

“She. I saw me. I finally see what all of you have been looking at since I woke up. I can see how broken I have been,” she coughed, nodding her head at the mirror on the wall.

Sherlock’s head snapped to the side and then returned to stare at his friend beside him. “Ah. I see. John had told me to cover your mirror; I thought it trivial. However, I find that I regret not doing so.”

Shannon shook her head and wiped her eyes dry with her forearm. “How bad was it? How damaged was I when you first saw me? And – and don’t lie.”

He cleared his throat and tried to state plainly, “I did not recognize you in the bed when I first woke up. It was the eighteenth of September.”

“I’m sorry that you remember it so vividly,” her voice vacant.

“Let me finish. Mycroft took me into the room beside mine and showed me how careless I had been and, I felt and heard screaming from within my mind as my composure began to break…” She leaned warily against his side to find comfort with her healing injuries. He did not move nor reposition himself away from her.

“He did tell me, however, that he told you as you were dying on the table, that I was fighting for my life and that made something within you claw your way back to the living.”

“Yours was John, wasn’t it,” she asked in an affirmation. “I would assume that your drive to protect John from harm would push you to lengths that you never knew you could reach.”

He nodded. “I have not yet told anyone that information.”

“I know you.”

“I find this to be true,” he allowed. “As more time passes, Shannon Byrns, I find that you have managed to weave your way in our lives that you are both vigilant in observation and sure in your care of us all.” He noted, as they were talking, that the shaking in her hands had begun to diminish.

“Can I tell you something,” she asked quietly, “without you getting angry with me?”
He looked down at her, “I can guarantee nothing. But I will endeavor to listen as intently as you do when I am speaking.”

She cleared her throat and began, “You claim, frequently, that you don’t feel emotion; which is why John and I compliment you so well. But, you do…”

He grumbled low in his chest, but waited for her to continue.

“In your own way, Sherlock; you do. I believe it to be essential to the man that you are today. It is greatly reserved; but…as you have said…you have felt as if you are experiencing my emotions akin to them being your own.

“You’ve just said that John was the driving force to bring you out of shock…worry…anger…the need to protect… Those are some of your virtues…not your handicaps. Similarly, you are sitting here – with me – and you are being kind and gentle with my issues. You will strive to go nearly any length when those you hold closest to you are either in danger or falling to pieces.”

“John assures me that this is what friends do. The pair of you have been educating me on social courtesy and cues since you both began living here” he retorted smugly.

“That’s not just it, is it. Sherlock, if anything…being around John has made you more human; and even still…better for it.”

He felt a growing sense of self and humility welling within him. “Thank you,” he whispered back.

“You’re welcome.”

“Shannon, the tremors may be induced from your trauma induced by Brent,” he began politely. “If you consider what you have gone through at his hand; and the fact that you were not in control of it, it’s more than possible that your mind is trying to process these events.”

“It had crossed my mind,” she offered in honesty. “But they have stopped for now, at least.”

They sat in comfortable silence for some time before Shannon’s voice interrupted. “John may be what keeps you grounded…” He gave her a tired side glance and waited. “…and that’s good. That’s fine. But…you are that person for me. I never intended it to be that way…but…you are.”

“Then you should know that you are not broken. You may be bruised…but not broken. By what you had stated earlier, you are implying that you are defective and are no longer able to hold yourself to the tasks you are presented. I imagine that this may come to a shock to you, but in the time that I have known you…not once have you been broken. Bruised; imperfect: yes. But that means that you are capable of healing and continuing with your way. Do not forget that, regardless of how that idiot has made you feel.”

He nodded again and the pair sat for the remainder of the night in silence until she had finally nodded off to sleep. Without waking her, he reached for her laptop and began to do research in her stead. Even if it were out of convention for him, he would do this kindness for her now. The candor she had used this evening was revealing to how her mind had been working as of late. It gave insight where he needed it and made note that in the next day or so; he would ask her to speak with John.

*Until then, she is going to need schematics of warehouses in York, aliases; as well as entry and exit strategies. If she plans on seeing this to the end, so will I. I took her case years ago. I intend to finish it.*
Days passed. Sherlock took on more of Shannon’s work load in order for her to heal properly. When he wasn’t endeavoring to find a means to put Magnussen away for good, he was out on the street: finding out information on the Syndicate’s movement, habits, and business transactions. He had employed Bill Wiggins to produce a compound that Shannon would be able to take to calm down in high stressor situations for when she would be out and back at work. He would present it to her to use if she felt that she needed it and leave it to be her choice.

“Sure,” Wiggins shrugged. “I can make or find somethin’. Easy enough. I have a knack for such things.”

“There are parameters,” Sherlock added with a steely gaze. “It must be non-habit forming. It must not damage organs; and it must not be a beta blocker.”

Wiggins whistled. “That’s a tall order, Mr. Holmes. I can see what’s out and about on the street. Do some research. I’ve got a few people I can call.”

“Good. Do it.”

“Yes sir, o’ course. I’ll use your particulars for dosing information. You’re six foot or so, by my guess.”

Sherlock peered up from his chair. “This is not for me.”

“Ah. Doctor Watson, then? I mean… I reckon he’s been going through a hard time with the Mrs. and all.”

“No. Bill, it is for Miss Byrns, downstairs.”

“Her?” he articulated. “She’s the sane one out of the three of you. What does she need that for?”

Sherlock sighed in frustration, “It doesn’t concern you. Find it. And if you cannot, find someone who can make it. Go!”

Wiggins slid down the stairs as if he were a puppy experiencing stairs for the first time. Shannon opened her door and watched as the lanky man straightened himself out before continuing toward the front door.

“Afternoon, Bill. Off to do more work for Sherlock?”

Bill looked her over skeptically and answered with mysticism, “Maybe I am. Maybe I’m not. What’s it to you?”

She shrugged and started making her way up the stairs, “You are. It’s not my business. But if you are going to try the cloak and dagger routine, you are definitely going to need to improve your poker face. Off you go. Have a good day. Come ‘round later in the week; I have a job for you.”

He beamed, “You? You have a job…for me? Really?”

Shannon nodded, “Yeah. You’re good at what you do, Bill. I have a use for you, if you don’t mind. Now…go do Sherlock’s work. Come back at the end of the week. We’ll discuss it more then.” With a renewed sense of purpose, Bill Wiggins made his way out into the busy London
streets.

Byrns entered the common room and found her friend gesturing at nothing as he sat idle on the floor. *Ah... mind palace. I wonder what he’s looking for.* She sat in John’s chair and began to use her laptop for research. *He’s been a rather big help as of late. Most of the information that I have about York has come from him or his sources. In fact, I don’t feel that I’ve done hardly anything in this endeavor. He’s treating it as if it were a case; and I am grateful for that.*

On the side table, there was an envelope that had come in the post. It was addressed to the tenant in 221C. *That’s me. I wonder what kind of junk mail this is.* She opened it quickly and unfolded the letter. It was handwritten on a nice parchment paper and the penmanship was impeccably neat. It was dated two weeks ago and the paper had some perfume to it. There were notes of sable or sandalwood in it.

Her eyes began to digest the writing from the page:

22<sup>nd</sup> September

*Ghost,*

*It has come to my attention that you have, in either your or the British government’s custody, a crucial member to our operations abroad. I am writing to you in the off chance that your letters are not intercepted so readily as your digital media.*

*We are well aware of the unsavory acts that have occurred at your expense in an effort to right you back on course. He is, for lack of better explanation, a necessary evil to the work that we do to ensure survival in this dark time. Ensure his survival and return him to the fold so that you may call on his talents in the future.*

*This letter should find you both preparing for the Gala Saturday, November fifteenth. The particulars are listed at the bottom of this letter. You will find that two rooms have been attained for the pair of you at The Grand Hotel & Spa upon arrival on the fourteenth. Everything that you will need will be in your room upon arrival, including appropriate attire to choose from.*

*Your integration into the firm is greatly anticipated. I have ensured that all ranking members of our firm to be in attendance for the gala. You will have information to disperse to all in regards to what your predecessor had left.*

*It is with great humility and purpose that I step aside in order for our organization to grow to its fullest potential.*

*The Grand Hotel & Spa, York*
*Station Rise*

*Signed your humble assistant,*

|-- The Jarl--

Byrns’ body was still. She examined the paper for any traces of information that was available to
the naked eye. Blonde hair at the crease, minor discoloration toward the end of the note... potentially oils from skin of the forearm; and the nature of the handwriting: it’s small. That could be an indicator that they focus more on a single activity and ignore outside influences. There’s an odd left slant and the baseline is askew.

“Sherlock,” she called out while he was still working. “Sherlock…it’s time to come back. We have work to do.”

Cranky that he was pulled out of his memories so soon, he frowned and sniped, “What could possibly warrant that intrusion?”

She flashed her letter and took it into the kitchen to be placed under the microscope. Holmes was in tow and sat down at the scope and began analyzing what he could see.

For the next forty-five minutes, he observed and she took notes. Afterward, they took samples of the paper and began their own experiments. By late afternoon, the pair of them had a handful of data from the paper’s analysis.

“You’ll need to go, obviously,” Sherlock stated from the kitchen chair. “By the tone and writing analysis that I’ve done, I’d have to say that the author has little to hide.”

She groaned while leaning backward on the counter’s edge. “Obviously. That gives me shy of a month to get everything in order. I mean, I’ve had shorter deadlines. And they’re expecting Brent…”

“That settles it,” he retorted smugly.

“Settles what?” she asked blankly.

He began to staunchly defend his assertion, “I’m going with you. I am the most suitable candidate. We have similar height, though I do have more of a build than he does; I am sure that with adequate adjustments and proper attire all of this could work in your best interest.”

She blinked once, then twice, and chuckled, “Of course you’re going. I’m still recovering. I’m going to need help.”

“Right. Now, I will need to acquire a wig or two because my hair is too dark. Something dark blonde with some minor alterations should do the trick…” she watched as he began pacing around the kitchen while listing equipment and supplies that he deemed immediately necessary. “…why? Why are you doing that?”

She had been smirking at her friend’s antics; but looked up confused, “I’m not doing anything!”

“You were smiling. Why are you smiling? I have said nothing that would be considered amusing,” he complained.

“Oh, that,” she admitted. “It’s just you being your charming self, Sherlock.”

“Meaning?”

“Really? You don’t know?” she smirked deviously at his blank face. “The game is on.”

Holmes smiled and clapped loudly, “Finally! There’s work to be done.”
Later that week, Bill returned to Baker Street with a list in hand for Sherlock. The list contained prescriptions that could potentially assist Shannon’s anxiety; along with their chemical properties.

He had been instructed that the door was open and that he was to come directly upstairs to the common area. Upon doing so, he found the flat covered with papers, brochures, and notes covering nearly the entire floor. He peered around the corner and began to take a step inward.

“If you move a muscle more, you will be dropped so quickly you won’t know how to breathe…” a low voice came from above him.

He slowly looked up to find Shannon was suspended from the ceiling. “What are you doing up there? How did you get up there?”

“Sherlock,” she sighed. “I was put up here because I moved some of the papers on accident. So, if you don’t have a death wish…don’t…move…the…papers…”

He chuckled, “What, did he finally get the best of you?”

“No,” she answered. She continued, “He waited until I went to sleep. I’m pretty sure that he put Di-phell…no…Diphen…”

“Diphenhydramine,” Sherlock corrected loudly from the kitchen. “It’s completely legal and found in shops.” Wiggins took two steps backward and entered the kitchen through the side door. “It only took seven tablets instead of two…”

“I heard that,” she grumbled. “Let me down. I have to use the loo!”

He corrected her, “No you don’t. You haven’t had anything to warrant the need to use it. You woke up two hours ago and haven’t drank anything.

“Wiggins, good. Do you have what I asked you to find?”

“Here you are, Shezza. It’s a list of six drugs and three natural remedies that may work. I, uh, included their chemical properties for you.”

“And as for my specifications?” he pressed.

Wiggins pointed to the list, “Each one of those meets or exceeds your requirements.”

“Good. Out.”

Wiggins hesitated, “Uh…”

“You’re still here,” Sherlock remarked while scanning his list.

Shannon grumbled, “He and I have some business, thank you! Now get me down!”

With a heavy eye roll, Holmes hoisted himself up and nabbed the knife on the side table before entering the common area. With a quick swipe, Shannon plummeted to the floor and bounced with a loud THUD after her bindings were severed.

She rolled over, a scowl on her face, and shoved herself as best she could to her feet. “I am going to murder you.”

“That’d be quite an endeavor. I couldn’t even murder myself,” he chortled.

Unamused, Shannon punched him in the arm, grabbed Wiggins by the elbow, and left to go
downstairs. Once in the safety of her room, she stretched as best that she could and sat down at her desk. “As you may recall, Bill, I have work for you.”

“I recall you mentioning it, yes,” he recalled.

She continued, “Good. I need information on a group of people that are staying in Birmingham and Brighton. They are going to be traveling to York in about a month or so.”

“Well,” he exhaled, “That will take a bit of leg work.”

“Fine. It’ll be covered.”

He nodded, “I’m sure that Mr. Holmes would cover any expenditures that I and my associates may wrack up…”

“Mr. Holmes?” her voice high in disbelief.

“Well…yes…I mean…isn’t he paying for it?”

She laughed. Not one of those timid sort of giggles or guffaws; but rather a loud, hearty, room-encompassing laugh that caused the other Baker Street inhabitants to smile.

She inhaled sharply between laughs, “I – you – woooooo. Okay little man…” She wiped the tear from the corner of her eye and stood. “Look, I’ve just texted you a list and written down a secondary list of people that I need particulars on. Habits, preferences; everything.”

“And for the record,” she added as he had turned to leave, “I pay for my rent here and at seven other flats around London; as well as property around the world. I’m pretty sure that I can handle whatever you and your team can accrue. I didn’t just sit around and twiddle my thumbs while I was away. I may not be intellectually blessed in all matters of the world, but my financial knowledge and practice is astounding. Now…off you pop, Bill.”

Bill left in a hurry. She chuckled and returned to her room to get ready for the day.

She dialed an intricate set of numbers and listened to the phone ring. “Talk.”

“This is a courtesy call. Did you find everything that you were looking for on your recent trip to London?” she asked as if she were a concierge assistant.

A deep voice cleared on the other end. “Yes. The trip to London was most enlightening.”

“And,” she continued, “your guide; was he adequate? Informative? Would you recommend him to others?”

“Yes. I would have to say yes. I would recommend him highly to anyone that will need to speak with him again. His existence proves to be an immeasurable asset to you.”

“Thank you, sir,” she replied. “Should you find your travels bring you back to England, please keep us in mind.”

After she looked presentable, she called up the stairwell, “I’m going out. You know, if you’re paying attention.”

She moved to the front door and shouted up the stairs again, “And if you drug me like that again, I swear to God, I’ll make you shit yourself for three weeks!”

Holmes chuckled and made a mental note to check any and all things he may ingest for the next
five days for being laced with laxatives.

The Fourteenth of November

Through rigorous practice, meticulous planning, and time for Shannon to heal, Holmes was on his way to York via train. Shannon, however, was driving. She had been mum as to the kind of car that she was going to be driving, but knowing her new attitude as of late at the thought that her personal hell could come to an end…she was recharged.

In the month since, she had been going to see a therapist under the guide of a battered single mother. She was going twice a week and was making steady progress. Her tremors were already becoming less noticeable; in part, due to being in proximity to Sherlock and John recently. Also, Shannon had been prescribed, (through encouragement from Sherlock calling her doctor,) medication to help the anxiety should she notice an attack coming.

He remembered a conversation that they had a few weeks ago as the train was beginning its approach to the station.

“It’s the last one, Sherlock. I’m done. I’m retiring after this is over. I don’t want to do this anymore…I never did.”

He analyzed her voice and features carefully. “Are you sure? Is that what you truly want?”

“I already sent your brother and MI-6 my resignation to go into effect in January. No more. I’ve already got plenty of scars; both physical and psychological,” she stated. “I don’t need a slew more.”

“You’re hooked and you know it. What would you do in lieu of being a ‘secret agent’, Miss Byrns?”

She thought for a moment and shrugged. “I’ve got a friend. If he needs my help, I’d help him with his business.”

Sherlock pondered for a moment, “And does this ‘friend’ of yours have a reputable business? Is it some place where, in your endeavor to find freedom, you would consider yourself occupied and sated?”

“I think I could manage,” she added.

He committed that conversation to memory because he knew that after York, she would be free of the Syndicate. That’s something that she has craved for years.

They had agreed to go separately in the event he was being followed. He was to meet her at The Grand. Conveniently, the hotel was no more than a three-minute walk from the station. He shouldered his bag on the station platform and began his pre-directed route to the covered twelve blocks. He arrived to the front desk and stated his identity, handed his identification over, and waited.

The concierge looked up from her screen. “It states that you have reserved two rooms. Did the other guest accompany you?”
“She should have arrived already. Has she not?”

He did, however, hear a car approach from outside and have the keys given to the valet with a few words of caution and threat thrown his way. Soon heels were heard clicking off the black and white stone floor. He glanced over his shoulder to see that Shannon was standing behind him.

“This is the other guest. Shall we continue?” he offered as emotionlessly as possible.

“Yes, sir, of course. I have a note here with your reservation that she is to take the penthouse and you are to have a junior suite; are those still your required accommodations?” she asked.

Shannon smirked and pocketed her valet ticket. She lifted the sunglasses from her eyes and set them atop the crown of her head. “That’ll do just fine, my dear. I apologize for my compatriot, he’s had a long day.”

The concierge nodded and continued her work. She motioned for the bellhop after she had finished and he came to collect their bags. Shannon took the stairs in order to use her knee more now that the brace was off while Sherlock followed the bellhop. By the time that Sherlock was left at his room with his things, Shannon had met the bellhop at her door. She gave him a tip and continued into the room. She looked about and chuckled.

*Sherlock Holmes:*

*My room. It’s pink.*

*Shannon Byrns:*

*If the accents in your room are the same as mine, it more of a dark magenta.*

-SH

*Sherlock Holmes:*

*Alright, smart guy. Room 501. Let’s go.*

He locked his effects in the safe and made his way to her room. He knocked to find that she had already begun opening closets to find the gear that was promised…as well as a few additions of her own. Bill Wiggins had watched the hotel for three weeks: he watched people come and go and kept a list of those who would frequent the establishment and not work there. Bill and his associates created an entire photographic list of people that would come in and out.

In that time, Shannon had Bill sneak into the hotel and plant equipment for her arrival. Surveillance equipment had been set up in the hallway and Wiggins had placed a goody-bag in one of the closets.
“You look ridiculous,” she laughed, pointing to his hair. “Please…for the love of God, take that wig off!”

“There’s nothing wrong with it,” he scoffed.

“Aside from it makes you look hysterical.”

He gently slid the wig and cap off, and ran a hand through his dark hair. “It’s all part of the disguise. You must get over these laughing fits every time that I wear it if we endeavor to make it to this Gala.

“Now, we need to find information about where the Gala is and when you need arrive.”

The pair began scouring the penthouse for any shred of information that they could find. “Here,” Sherlock announced as he opened one of the closet doors. “I would assume that this is what you are looking for, yes?”

She followed the sound of his voice to his location and looked at the array of clothes, shoes, jewelry, and files. “So it would seem,” she replied.

“There’s work to be done. I’ll take half of the files and you can take the other half. That way, the information can be digested and analyzed quickly.”

She nodded, “Agreed. Divide and concur. Let’s get to work.”

Later that evening, Shannon left while Sherlock was absorbing as much information as possible. There was a Chinese restaurant down George Hudson Street and she had decided that was going to be adequate enough for tea.

More than likely, he’s not going to notice that I’m gone. Plus, at least he will have a fake me to talk to. I drew my face on some paper and taped it to some towels on the chair. It’s not as if any of my input is going to help him at all right now.

Shannon paid for their meals and made her way back toward the restaurant. She stopped outside the front door and waited. She felt, somewhere in the back of her mind, that this is what she was supposed to do. I wonder…is this part of the programming that never took hold?

She had been there for ten minutes before a stranger approached her. The light was beginning to fade into an orange haze. She placed the food with care on the ground and nodded to the new body beside her. Shannon thought for a moment and said quietly, “ ‘Ride, boldly ride’.”

“ ‘If you seek El dorado.’ I thought that was you. There’s a certain way that you carry yourself.”

Shannon looked him over and recognized him from one of the photographs that Wiggins had presented her. He called himself Michelangelo. His accent placed him somewhere in southern Italy; but that could easily be faked as she had done so numerous times while abroad. He was an older gentleman with pale green eyes and his silver hair captured the light of the setting sun.

“Michelangelo, I presume? You’re the architect,” she responded, alert to her surroundings.

He smiled, “I see that you’ve done your homework, Fantasma. Some here call me The Architect. That may have been my job at some point. But now that you are here; you will be guiding us to our new purpose. Whether that is to continue as we have or to remodel out design; that is of your doing.”
Shannon’s head bobbed in time with someone’s music in a passing car. “And you seem like such a kind man,” she said smugly.

He shook his head side to side, clucking his tongue. “No, no, no…Fantasma. Appearances are always deceiving.”

“Though this is true, I tend to be more upfront in presenting myself. But I wonder, as The Architect, what would you have me do to our company,” she pushed in questioning.

He crossed his arms and revealed a similar tattoo that Jayson had on his forearm. “I am not to question.”

She glared, “Humor me. What would you do to our operations, hmm? This may be the last time that you are allowed to speak so frankly to me. After tomorrow, things may change.”

He sensed the ice in her voice and the malice behind her words. He stammered over himself, “You – you’re more... You’re more than we’ve prepared for. When she said that we were sending The Inquisitor after you… I spoke against it…”

*The Inquisitor? Ah...yes. Brent. Obviously.*

“…and that was after The Argonauts were sent. God help us, should anyone betray you,” he made the sign of the cross.

*And by The Argonauts, he must mean Jayson and his posse. So the nicknames are a real thing. Great.*

She rolled her eyes and allowed her uncivil tone to continue while she played the part of Ghost. “Tell me everything about The Jarl. Now.”

He gasped, “Surely you have met The Jarl by now, have you not?”

“No to my knowledge,” she replied coolly, “Unless they were hiding their identity from me. Now. Or, I can make you disappear before tomorrow. You should see what I’ve done to The Inquisitor when he annoyed me.”

“Of course, my lady. Shall we find somewhere else to speak? Being out in the open in such a manner could result in sabotage.”

“Follow me. Room 403. Now. You will walk ten paces in front of me. Keep pace or I will erase you.”

He walked in front of her and she activated a protocol on her phone by typing in a code at the lock screen. It sent Sherlock a message to get to his room as quickly as possible and ready it for an interrogation. Of sorts.

*Sherlock Holmes:*

*Prisoner in custody. Get to your room. Grab the grey bag on my bed. Now.*
His eyes scanned the image twice. *How is it that she’s been here less than twenty-four hours and she has someone in her possession that could be helpful to the case? She is infuriating at times. However, I was getting bored.*

Sherlock arrived after Shannon and Michelangelo were already in the room. Michelangelo’s face was dazed and he didn’t register that the new man in the room wasn’t Brent.

“Inquisitor,” he chastised, “you have gone too far. Her ferocity is too great. If you thought that things with you and The King were strenuous, imagine what you have put yourself in for now. You went too far, Brent.”

“Inquisitor,” Shannon called to Sherlock, “How nice of you to join us. Have a seat. The Architect was just telling me about how tense things were between you and The King. Now that The King is dead, you must be so relieved.” She texted something quickly and motioned with a finger to her lips that he was to turn his phone on silent.

He did so and looked at his message:

*Sherlock Holmes:*

*He’s been programmed to hear Brent’s voice and see his face instead of yours. It’s a long story. I’ll tell you about it tonight.*

*We have work to do.*

He nodded and assumed the role he was to play, “I’m not too worried. She hasn’t killed me yet.”

“Nonsense,” the Italian huffed. “She has more than any right to do so if you have done anything to her.”

“That’s beyond true,” Shannon stated with a far-off look to her eye. “For now, it is in my interests that he lives.”

“You are more gracious than The King,” Michelangelo replied. “But his time has gone and yours is rising. What can I construct for you, my lady?”

Sherlock snarled, “Don’t lie to her. She’ll know if you are.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. The King kept me around for my honesty and my talent,” he huffed back. “Some of us are talented in ways you could never dream of, you animal.”

“Michelangelo,” she soothed with a hand on his shoulder. “I need to know about the hierarchy that I am inheriting. Unfortunately, some of my initial memories and programming are incomplete. This is in part to when I was captive to Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes. You see my dilemma, of course.”

“Yes, my lady,” he replied in a sigh. “I will build bridges in your mind where you need them.”
“I have some photographs of those that I have seen since. I am discovering that my kingdom is in shambles.”

“Yes,” he replied honestly. “The younger Holmes faking his death was not accounted for in The King’s plans. In his absence, Holmes began closing many of our operations around the globe. At times, it felt as if he were in two places at once. However, our intelligence kept us informed that you spent a great deal of time in Turkey.”

“Yes,” she allowed with a wary glance to Sherlock. “I had skills that I needed to learn. I am not taking this Kingdom without knowing the work, you see. Any good ruler must understand his people.”

Sherlock nodded and kept an eye on the elder man in the chair. He ripped the sheet from the bed and tacked it to the wall. He withdrew a marker from his coat pocket and waited.

Shannon handed the stack of photographs to Michelangelo and asked kindly, “Now, old man, I know that The Jarl has been my stand-in, tell me, who is under them? Start at the top and work your way down.” Sherlock wrote ‘The Jarl’ at the top of the sheet.

The Architect gave her two of the photographs, “Then, my lady, we start with these two: The Cardinal and The Bishop.”

So the night went into the wee hours of the morning. Sherlock had an entire web of the current hierarchy mapped out and stapled photographs to each of the titles. He made mental notes about each one as The Architect rambled on and on about jobs, purpose, and such. He also knew that she would be up all night and day tomorrow unless she forcibly got sleep. He took the liberty to put sleep aids in her tea that she drank during the interrogation session.

“Take this to my room, Sherlock. All of it. I’ll be up momentarily.”

He looked confused, “And why are you shooing me away now? Are you going to erase this conversation from him?”

“I don’t want you to see this,” she pleaded. “I won’t keep you from staying. It’s – It’s not something that I relish doing.”

He bristled, “I told you that I was going to help you see this to the end. This is part of it.”

“If there was ever a time that I wanted you to listen to me, now is that time. Sherlock, please. I don’t like this and I don’t want you to see what happens. You won’t like it.”

“Mary said something similar to John, as I recall, and I promised you that I would see this with you to the end. This will change nothing between us,” he reassured.

“You won’t leave?”

“No,” he replied.

Shannon, begrudged, sighed and leaned into whisper into Michelangelo’s ear. Her eyes conveyed a certain sadness as she continued through her work. As time passed a more vacant expression overcame the Architect’s face until his eyes were far away.

Somewhere in his mind, an alarm went off to signal how truly powerful she was. Mycroft has
every reason to want to keep her under his rein. She at least has her ethics and morals behind her. Otherwise, we would be on opposite sides as Moriarty intended.

At the end of her oration, Michelangelo got up and left the room in silence. Shannon sat in dejection and scowled at Sherlock Holmes. “Are you satisfied? It’s not glorious. It doesn’t border the sublime. It is heartless. It is an invasion. And it is not something that I relish doing because of who I am. I am not this. I am more than some governmental R&D that went wrong…”

“Not once did I ever suggest it,” he replied with an outstretched hand. “You persistently remind me that ‘you know me’, and I believe that we both can agree that the statement is true.”

She grabbed it and was hoisted to her feet. “Your point?”

“The point is that there was a fragment of you that I did not know. You have kept it hidden. But,” he paused, “You left me with a choice; and, as evident, I chose to stay. Because…now…I know you.”

He collected their information and folded it neatly to take it up to the penthouse. She led them in silence up to her room and Sherlock placed their web of individuals on the floor. She unloaded their now cold Chinese food and gave him his carton. She stared at the sheet with fatigued eyes and did her best to take mental snapshots. She sat on the floor and began to doze off while she ate.

“Go to bed,” Sherlock commanded firmly.

“No, I’m fine. I can be up a while longer,” she mumbled while she repositioned herself.

“Come on,” he urged as he stood from his spot on the floor. “You need to rest.”

“My constitution is just as good as yours,” she whined.

“Of course it is,” he jabbed. “Up you are, my lady.”

She glowered up at him as he began to pull at her arms. “Excuse you, your majesty. None of that ‘my lady’ business.”

He put his hands in his waist and raised his eyebrows in mock frustration. “You are no good to us if you aren’t on pointe tomorrow. Go. Bed. Now.”

Shannon whined again, “No, there’s work to be done. I have work to do.”

“Right,” he proclaimed. “Here we go.” He bent down and scooped her up and over his shoulder. She didn’t put up much of a fight. “You need to rest.”

“But the work…”

“I will take care of the work,” he urged with exasperation in his tone. He flopped her onto the sectional near her room and slipped off her shoes. “That’s part of the reason you brought me, is it not? I have the same mental capacities as you do.”

“That’s the first time you’ve said we’re equals in that regard,” she slurred. She was rough in rubbing her face and stared down at Holmes placing her shoes neatly by the doorway. “Do you really think that or are you being kind?”

He paused, straightened upright, and clasped his hands behind her back as he faced her. “I do…genuinely…believe that your mental faculties could rival mine with the correct fine-tuning.”
She sat upright with little grace and blurted out, “Bring the web in here. I can study it here!”

With a frown, Sherlock did as directed and brought the map into the small corner of the penthouse. He moved the petite coffee table off to the side and sat down beside her, analyzing every intricate piece of the web. She managed to right and prop herself up so that she wouldn’t fall over. Holmes would occasionally shoot a side glance in her direction and observe her doing her best to stay awake.

“Did – did you…drug me…again?” she murmured.

“I did,” he offered in honesty. “I know you. You wouldn’t have slept tonight otherwise.”

She sighed, “I guess.”

“Get some sleep, Shannon. You can trust me to learn this through the night.”

“I know,” her voice low and eyelids heavy. She leaned dangerously from side to side before slumping onto his shoulder.

With another eyeroll, Sherlock moved her so that she slept on a pillow that was balanced on his leg to allow him better view of the web. He created links to each person and delved into the finite observations from their photographs. Rhythmic and shallow breathing began to sound like a far-off tide coming in. *There’s no chance of moving without waking her. As John can attest, one does not wake her up in the middle of sleep unless you want some sort of physical consequence. Stay put. I could use rest in the event that we have to do running tomorrow. Yes. Rest.*

He laid his head backward onto the numerous pillows behind him and rested his hand on her shoulder. “We should rest. Tomorrow is the main event.”
“Go downstairs and get the car,” she called from her bathroom.

Sherlock, growing impatient, leaned backward on the maroon couch in agony, “Is this what it’s like for normal people? It’s been days since you started getting ready!”

“It’s been less than an hour,” she asserted. “Go get the car if you are really that sore about it. I’m not going to take more than ten minutes.”

Surrendering to her directive and desperately seeking refuge from his boredom, he bounced back, “Where is the valet ticket?”

“On the side table beside the front door,” she answered. “You better not be this miserable when we get there; I swear!”

He shot upright, collected the ticket, and left.

“Finally,” she groaned. “Now I can finish getting ready.”

Earlier, Shannon had awoken to an odd sense of calm. She checked her watch to find that it had gone nine. *Huh. Where is…oh. That explains it. He’s asleep.* At some point he had shifted and landed on top of her side, with his head resting neatly on her arm. *He’s going to be irritable when he wakes…how did he sleep like that? That looks painful.*

She slid out from under his torso and stretched. She had taken up doing some mild yoga again as part of her healing regimen. Her routine was not disturbed for the better part of an hour and a half until snores could be heard from the other end of the penthouse.

She loaded the Nespresso machine, nabbed a bag of cookies, and started packing her duffel bag. *There’s work to do.* With the coffee machine on, Shannon left in silence with her bag in tow to go prepare for this evening.

The Gala was to be held at King’s Manor. It was in the center of the city and had been built as housing for abbots. Byrns was able to download various floorplans from the internet and study them as she walked. She donned a dark wig, sweats, and a long sleeve shirt. With thick rimmed sunglasses, Shannon didn’t look anything like herself. *Padding my bra and hips may be helping some. It certainly has helped with the amount of doubletakes I’ve been getting.*

Upon arrival she began to strategically place equipment and gear while appreciating the beauty of architecture. It was no surprise to her that this would be the battleground for tonight. No one wanted to be in the light of London because of the Holmes brothers.

Someone in the web had to know of her likes and preferences. Old buildings with immeasurable amounts of history: they were like a drug for her. She would, if the time permitted, sit in the silence and listen to how buildings would live and breathe; drinking in the smell and feel as she went. She had done so countless times while she had been abroad. Somewhere along the way, the Syndicate had realized this. *Possibly in Turkey: The Architect did state that they had intelligence from when I was there…or maybe in Tangier when I went to the Kasbah Museum. I love museums. I want to go to a museum…*

She managed to do her task without any distractions or interference from those working the
grounds. After she had finished she made her way back to the hotel to find Sherlock just waking up. She took her headphones off and powered down her phone.

“What a surprise; you're still here,” Sherlock muttered as he stretched.

“Sleep well?”

His eyebrows popped upward in surprise. “Oddly enough, yes. I feel invigorated. Is that coffee?”

“Yes, knock yourself out. I’m showering. I’ve had a busy morning already,” she replied, nabbing her makeup kit.

“It’s a bit early, isn’t it?”

She popped her head out of the bathroom, “No. I have a process. Don’t mess with it.” She pointed directly at him, “I’m serious. I have a way that I get ready. If you’re going to meddle and throw me off, go to your room.”

Showing mock offense, Sherlock drunk his coffee and gestured with his free hand for her to get on with her routine.

“Your wig is where you left it,” she called. “And before you say anything, you’re wearing the charcoal suit that I left out for you. And everything with it. No questions.”

Sherlock walked to the bed and found his attire for the evening lying out neatly. She had picked out his watch, cufflinks; tie. Every detail was instrumental and meticulous in crafting him into Brent. Not bad, Miss Byrns. Not bad at all.

Sherlock Holmes stood in silence as he glanced at his watch and waited for her car to show. Ten minutes, was it? That time is almost up. The sun had set and the last waves of purple sky were giving way to the midnight blue of the early night. He heard a familiar gait in the lobby, heels clicking in time to someone that was 5’8”, solid build; and, with a slight weakness in the left leg. The steps stopped at his side. “You were almost late,” he chortled before shooting her a disapproving glance.

Upon doing so, he immediately took a second look at the figure in front of him and his head slowly turned to meet where his eyes had rested. A sharp intake of air and a quick succession of blinks gave him time to process what he saw.

Her hair was done up in an elegant bun. The simplicity in her look ended there. Her dress was the color of red wine at dusk. The bodice had a simple v-neck and ruching gathering at her left hip. A slit from her left, mid-thigh ran its way down to the hem. Thin straps cascaded over her shoulders and attached to the low-cut back. The skirt of the dress bunched at her lower spine and created ripples and folds that caught waves of light. She was slightly taller than him at present. Indicative that she’s wearing four or five inch heels.

Shannon had golden bracelets on her left wrist and a cuff on her right bicep. A teardrop necklace filled the gap at her sternum and flowed over her shoulders and down into curved waves; giving the appearance of a waterfall of gold down her back.

Her makeup was done in a fashion to draw attention to her eyes in shades of red and gold. It made her eyes seem simultaneously bright and foreboding.

“That bad, hmm?” she breathed into the cool air.
He shook his head quickly. “No – no, that’s not it…”

She turned to face him and her features softened, “I don’t recall Moriarty wearing much red. I figured it would set me apart.”

“It’s just,” he replied breathless, “you look…”

“Out of place? Is it really that bad?” she interrupted.

“…as if you were striving to be a goddess,” he concluded. “A Roman would have been praying to you in a temple. I’ve not seen you in formal wear; not really; you didn’t go to the wedding.”

She flashed a humble smile. “I had to get used to dressing outside of my comfort zone. My swimmer shoulders make it difficult at times to find dresses that fit appropriately. I brought this one with me… the others that were here didn’t suit my tastes.”

“The ensemble…it’s – its,” he stumbled over his words as the car rounded the corner.

“Too much?” she attempted to finish his sentence.

“Exquisite,” he finished. Uncharacteristically sheepish, he fidgeted where he stood. ”You will surely catch the attention of every eye at the Gala; it should make your job easier.”

“Thank you,” she bowed. “You’re easy to look at in the suit. I hemmed it a bit while you slept so that it was more tailored. That wig though…”

“The wig stays. It’s part of the disguise,” he reminded.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. That makeup and wig’s off-putting; just be glad that I know it’s you under there.”

A pearled, dark red Audi R8 stopped and the valet exited the car. “Honestly,” Sherlock tutted. She shrugged, “It was picked for a reason. And don’t you use that tone with me, sir.”

“And why not,” he scoffed as they walked to the car.

“You’re driving.”

A block from their destination, Shannon exhaled loudly twice and got herself into character. She took the melatonin Sherlock had in his outstretched hand and swallowed them in a large gulp. “It should help some,” he stated. “From what I’ve observed, it’s helped in your sparring sessions.”

“I don’t need it right now,” she retorted.

“Right, of course, you’re right; those mild hand tremors are a figment of my imagination,” he reprimanded.

“Meh meh meh meh meh,” she mocked.

“You said so yourself,” he argued. “You need to be on your game if we are making it out of here alive.”

At the King’s Manor, Sherlock kept his head angled downward and opened her car door. She took
his offered hand and stepped out onto the gravel. She left him to follow in her wake while the
dress billowed gently as she walked. Doors were opened for her and she took sure steps toward the
Huntingdon Room.

Thunderous applause greeted her after she crossed the threshold. She persisted through and made
her way to the front of the crowd. Sherlock stayed to the back so that he was out of her light. It
was less attention brought to him. The Architect had mentioned some of Brent mannerisms and
tendencies which had come in handy. Sherlock assumed them with relative ease and settled into
his character nicely.

The Cardinal clinked his glass to gather the room’s attention. All eyes turned to him. *Stick to the
plan. Stick to the plan. She’s running the show. Stick to the plan...or she’ll kill you. Perhaps
literally. Let her do her job.* The constant reminding was done in an effort for him to try and not
show off.

“For too long, we have been a body without a mind; a church without its Holy Father. After the
passing of The King, we assumed that the succession would be seamless. As you all know, it has
not. In fact, it has been far from simple.
“Firstly, our leader went silent. Without completed protocols, the new head of our state followed
The King’s directive and traveled the world, planting seeds for our expanding empire.
Simultaneously, factions of our ring were dismantled. It was not until his return that we realized
this was the work of Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes.
“The King, believing to have trapped the younger to his death; did not anticipate his survival. This
is something that our new King has not overestimated.”

There were nods and agreements from the men and women in the room. The champagne flowed
freely and a glass was in every person’s hand.

“For that, I can say that I am grateful that The Jarl took over some of the duties in the new King’s
stead. The Jarl, who shall be joining us soon, took matters into their hands when all seemed lost.
Most of our workforce was toppled, shipments were missing, and generally speaking, we began to
fall apart.
“But tonight, she is here. And she will be enlightening us with her new reign. As The King said,
she will illuminate and enhance the entity that we are.”

Shannon regulated her breathing to keep her heart from racing. Everyone that The Architect spoke
of was present; all except for The Jarl. Sherlock met her gaze for a moment as he drifted into the
shadows. He mouthed *Be careful* and then disappeared into the crowd.

“Speech! SPEECH!” the crowd chanted.

Shannon gestured for them to quiet down and took the center of the floor.

“Had I known what kind of crown I was inheriting, I may have jumped off the roof myself,” she
laughed. The room took the cue and chuckled in response.

“He’s right, you know. The King is gone. The King is dead. But, that doesn’t mean that our
operations are in the slightest, right?” she jeered the crowd. Cheers and whistles were heard from
the mass and she continued. “Now, you must forgive me, this once, for the gaps in my memories.
Doing Jim’s work for years did give me a few head injuries and, it didn’t help that I was stuck at
the mercy of Sherlock Holmes for so long. He did try, in vain, to keep me from becoming what I
am.”

Sherlock grew still at her tone. *This isn’t what we went over...this isn’t part of the plan that we*
discussed.

“In fact, one of you sent The Inquisitor for me. And I can assure you that not a single person in this room would elect to trade places with him at this moment. And where is The Jarl? If I am supposed to address my minions of darkness,” chuckling murmured through the crowd, “where is my interim?”

The doors opened and an older woman with greying, blond hair, blue eyes, and a strong frame entered the room. She wore a navy dress and silver rings. The room fell silent while she walked across the room toward Shannon.

Shannon made her face placid but inside she felt cold. *She’s supposed to be dead. She’s supposed to be dead. I went to her funeral.*

It didn’t take Sherlock more than a moment to see that Shannon was alert and angry. Or that their body types and builds were similar.

“My darling, forgive me. I was tying up some matters on your behalf.”

“Faked your death, did you…something that you and the younger Holmes have in common,” Shannon replied congenially. “So…you’re The Jarl.”

“Of course,” her strong voice retorted.

“You’ve missed me telling the congregation that there are lapses in my programming; but The Architect has assured me that he can mend those holes,” Shannon spat. “And I do not enjoy repeating myself.”

“Forgive me,” she curtsied gently. “I would think that you would be happy that you had someone like me on your side; but perhaps I am mistaken.”

Sherlock’s eyes widened in understanding and he found the he had been holding his breath. *Shannon coming here was a mistake.*
“Tonight just keeps getting better and better,” Shannon announced loudly, eyeing the other woman. “It appears that my mother is alive and well. Here, I thought I buried her ten or so years ago.”

Shannon laughed and pretended to take a drink of her champagne. The others followed her cue and drank more.

"Her mother! No...Byrns said that both of her parents died in a car crash not long after she finished public school. It’s probable, considering that her brother was the one that implemented the programming into her mind in the first place... Sherlock’s bright eyes pierced through the shadows and began analyzing everything that he could about her.

“Now that I have all of my fold, much like The Cardinal’s reference to you all being without a Holy Father...now’s the time where I preach my gospel, isn’t it?”

Her mother grabbed a flute from a tray and stood off to the side and listened intently. Sherlock knew that with this kind of disruption, she was more than likely to go further off-script in order for easy extraction.

Shannon eyed her mother with malcontent and a nerve jumped in her face. It almost turned into a sneer, “Drink.”

“Why?” her mother questioned, obtuse.

Shannon took a step and bellowed, “BECAUSE I GAVE YOU AND ORDER!” She rolled her head and gestured wildly to the rest of the crowd, “Because I am here. Libations for all; or, are you not obedient to me?” Her voice turned childish, “Do you miss widdle Jim-Jim? D’awww.”

The web grew silent and attentive. Shannon was doing her best to emulate Jim's flamboyant antics when he spoke to a crowd. The Bishop and The Cardinal looked to each other and then to The Jarl, almost urging her to do as she was told.

Shannon took a few more steps and leaned in to whisper in her mother’s ear, “Margaret, make no mistake: if you challenge me just once, I will break you. This is my kingdom. Now drink it. All of it. And bow to show me your loyalty.”

Margaret’s eyes sharpened into slits. Malice radiated from her while she drank the champagne and proceeded to then bow.


Her mother glared upward and proceeded to get on her knees and bow further. “Lower.”

When Margaret’s head rested on the cold floor, Shannon glared at the captive audience and shouted, “WELL?”

With immediacy, the men and women in the room got on their knees and bowed. Shannon picked up the toe of her shoe and placed it precariously on her mother’s skull. “One little push,” she announced, “And I could stomp the life out of you. All of you!”
Sherlock looked up from his spot on the floor in alarm. Her behavior and tone sent every alarm in his mind off. *She may kill her.*

Shannon clipped her mother’s face with her heel and made her way to the chair that was set presumably for her. “Now, Jim was The King. I am harder, better, faster; stronger than he was and I have twice the intellect.

“I am not your King. I’m not your Queen. I’ll damned if I am going to be your Emperor or Empress. No,” her movements serpentine, “I am God. And I see in my children LOYALTY THAT CAN BE BOUGHT!” she finished with a bellow.

“Now, if you wish to stay at my table; there are no questions when you are told to do something. Or, simply, I will remove you. Get up.”

The assemblage was none-too-graceful getting up and an aura of fear a trepidation rippled across the room. Margaret wiped the small trickle of blood from her forehead with a waiter’s napkin, glaring daggers at her daughter.

“But what kind of God am I if I don’t give my followers a gift…hmm? What if I told you…that I have Sherlock Holmes?” The crowd was silent, giving her a cue to continue. “But wait, you all know that. I have been living at Baker Street for a year… But what if I tell you that I have him in this very city?”

Murmurs reverberated through the room while Margaret saw fealty begin to shift from her to her daughter.

“And, what if I told you that I have the great detective, Sherlock Holmes, in this very room? Isn’t that right, Inquisitor?” she snapped.

*What is she doing…this is not the plan. Not the plan! Think Sherlock, how are you going to get yourself out of this? Fifty seven people, three exits, plus the windows, no reachable fire alarms within twenty five paces…*

“Bring him to me,” Shannon commanded. With a bit of a fight, Sherlock was dragged to the front of the room where The Scholar ripped his wig and prosthetics off him to reveal his identity.

“You see, this *man*, tried to coerce me. If I brought him here and handed all of you over I would only get twenty years of prison time. Not that I couldn’t get out earlier,” she laughed; as did her minions. “And I thought, well, that’s not very nice. I haven’t even met you all yet. Here he is: The Great Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective.”

Margaret stiffened. “You could easily be playing the double agent.”

Shannon rolled her eyes and whispered, “Say that again?”

“I said that you could be fooling us. Why would you willingly bring the man who sent The King to his grave here?”

Without hesitation, Shannon revealed a firearm from her leg holster and fired it at her mother without looking. When she did turn her head after Margaret was a crumpled heap on the floor, she chastised herself. “Damn, I was an inch too high. I wanted to shatter your kneecap, not hit your thigh. Tsk tsk tsk.

“Your next outburst, mother, will be to your ankle of the same leg. The next: your other knee. There’s a pattern, don’t you see? Suffering, but ultimately enduring through even though one may be damaged.

“The pain will start radiating shortly.”
The Scholar stepped forward to look over The Jarl’s injuries. “She won’t bleed out with this wound,” he announced.

“If I wanted her to bleed out,” Shannon reprimanded, “I would have aimed higher. Leave her.”

The Scholar did as commanded and fell back in line. Margaret pulled herself to sitting upright, clutching her leg. “You are not my daughter!”

“You’re right, Mommy Dearest, I am not. I am better than her,” she fumed. “I think I’ll keep him and get rid of you; he’s been more loyal,” she bellowed while pointing at Holmes.

“I know all about the pair of you. The King kept me well informed!” Margaret spat at the floor.

“Children,” she motioned to her flock with the gun still in hand, “Mummy here is referring to the fact that the detective and I slept together on more than one occasion…you know, back when I was a more wholesome individual.” Her laugh was heartless. Fiendish grins were visible on her followers’ faces. “And, I must admit, ladies…he is good.”

The women laughed and eyed Holmes like a slab of meat. “Why shouldn’t I keep him? I can program the detective to see and hear whatever it is that I like, isn’t that right, mother?”

“Shannon, please,” Sherlock declared emotionally. “Stop this. Stop it. Stop it now!”

“No, no I don’t think so,” she spun about childishly. “I’m not done just yet. I’ve got loads more to do.”

What is she playing at? Is she with me? Or…I couldn’t have missed… No. She’s with me.

“My minions of darkness, before we embark on the main theme of the night, how many of you have children? Come on now, raise your hands high…one, two, three – seven…most of you! Lovely. And, can I assume that you love your children?”

Very cautious and reserved yesses emitted from the hall. “Good. Mother, explain to them why I am the heir.”

Margaret’s face turned to stone, “Because The King chose you.”

“Now, now. We both know that’s not what I meant,” she chided her as if Margaret were a child and put another bullet, as promised, through her ankle.

“When you’re done bellowing about, tell my kingdom how I am the way that I am,” she guided maliciously. Shannon took a seat and ordered The Scholar to bring Sherlock onto the seat near her. Her pistol was then fixed to him. “Promise you won’t move?”

“I promise,” he scowled.

“Good boy; mother, my new friends are waiting. More drinks!”

The Bishop gave her a linen napkin to wrap her wounds with. “As many of you know, I have worked for various ‘Companies’ in my lifetime; easily finding the best at each turn,” Margaret snarled.

“There came a time where I was acquired by The King and was known to all of you as The American. Not long into my residency, I realized I was pregnant again.

“My son, Matthew, was older and this pregnancy was unexpected. Nonetheless, the child was born and that child is the ‘God’ you see before you.
“Matthew, however, was recruited by Jim not long after he left school. Once initiated, I revealed my true self to him. We moved closer to his employer with the government so that he could begin his trials with soldiers and still have him close enough by for orders.”

Shannon eyes would have bored holes through Margaret had they been able. “Continue, the story’s about to get good.”

“I see that this pocket of information opened recently. Then I must assume that my death isn’t far behind,” Margaret conceded.

“What’s a little honesty going to do to you now, mother,” Shannon roared. “Continue.”

“Matthew expressed that he had been working trials to create a mentally perfect soldier, but he determined that the subjects were too old at the start of the trials. I suggested that we begin implementing protocols and programming into his sister. She was five or so at the time, very gifted, and was ahead of most children her age. At first, Matthew protests; but once I revealed that I had been doing the cognitive study with her for months, he too began his trials.

“We built her mind, brick by brick, to become the weapon that you see before you. Her mind has certain factors locked away while others are allowed more freedoms. She can choose when to show empathy and mercy. It is something that has been programmed to be switched off at her whim. She will not feel regret unless she doesn’t achieve something that she wants nor will she keep any friendships. Her mind was molded to be a perfect blend of soldier, agent, and weapon.”

“Tell them about how I buried you,” she added. “You’ll love this part. And make sure you drink, it will numb the blow a bit.”

The room looked horrified at their God and at what The Jarl, their most trusted member, had done to her own daughter. The waiters brought around more drinks and ensured that any who had an empty glass now had a fresh one in hand.

Margaret, stern and emotionless, continued, “My husband was a loving man. He adored her. However, he began snooping into the work that Matthew and I were doing. During an argument in the car, I forced him to drive into a tree. I got out, strapped him in, and coaxed the car to catch fire. I had stashed another body nearby that had identical dental work put in. Thus, faking my death.”

“I spent the next few years sending out fragments of information to all potential buyers about Shannon. But The King seemed the most interested and had limitless resources. He asked if it were possible to ‘Speed up production,’ as it were.

“That is when Matthew became known as Judas. He betrayal and death would be the catalyst that would send this creature on its journey to become what it is today. He knew the risks. He knew that it may have potentially led to his death. And still, he did as he was ordered!”

Shannon stood up and walked about. “See? The Jarl…The King’s most trusted advisor? Bah. I can’t have her working for me. What she is neglecting to tell you is that she lusted for more power. If she gave both me and my sibling as offerings to Jim Moriarty…oooh,” she shivered, “Then she was in business. She would be irreplaceable. As long as I didn’t come traipsing about, she would remain as interim me.”

Margaret’s face turned to stone. “You were never my child.”

“Apparently,” Shannon’s replied condescendingly. “My children, don’t you see why I – why I just can’t keep her around? She’s bounced her loyalty around for years to those who have power. She forcibly got my brother to be some sort of human sacrifice, and she’s mad that I’ve shown up…”
Mother may I?
“Swear fealty to me, and bygones can be bygones.”

“No,” The Jarl sniped. “You are not what I molded.”

“I told you,” Shannon replied with a devious grin, “I’m better.”
“And you lot? Do you swear to me? To do as I tell you or should I put a bullet in your knees for starters?”

The crowd slowly got back down on their knees and waited. “Good boys and girls.”

She spun around and faced Sherlock. “Don’t think I’ve forgotten about you, Mr. Holmes,” she goaded. “Never in a million years. Now, do you swear to me, hmm?”

He thought for a moment, cleared his throat, and spoke, “I swear to Shannon Byrns. I believe in her.”

“That’s what I thought,” she smiled. “And you’ve done such a nice job at keeping quiet and not moving. Better than dear, old Margaret, anyway.”

Shannon began moving to the individuals in the crowd and greeting them. She would whisper into their ears, smile, and then move on to the next. After forty-five minutes of this odd ritual, Sherlock felt as if his mind was hit with a baseball bat.

**OH! GOD! She is clever. Cleverer than her mother, Moriarty…every single person in this room. God, this must be what a normal person feels like when they finally understand. How unbearable!**

She walked back to the front of the room and asked them all to return to their seats at the dining tables. Every single person, aside from Sherlock and Margaret did as asked.

“Quick as you can, drink the two flutes of champagne on the table. Now.” Sherlock watched in amazement as her commands were obeyed. “Sit there; converse with your table until I count to three,” she added with a calm, soothing voice.

Shannon walked to the back of the room, peered out the doors, and trotted back to the front. Margaret was shouting to members of the room; no one was listening.

“I did not expect to see you here,” Shannon snapped. “I can totally see the deranged psychopath that you are…but Jesus fucking Christ…why?”

Sherlock felt some of her façade come down as Shannon questioned her mother. The role that she had been playing was breaking to pieces.

“Why? Isn’t it obvious? Is it not clear enough for you?” Margaret chided. “My greatest project and you do not see the answer most plainly obvious…
“I am a career criminal, darling. This is what I do. I become better. I achieve more. And when I’ve done it; I rule it.”

“So…the memories that I do have…of you…” she led.

“Implants,” Margaret shrugged. “Your brother did his best to try and make you feel as if you had a happy childhood. I did most of the construction; he did the embellishments. I knew, that regardless of where you would end up; I would be able to activate pockets of information and bring you back to me.”
Shannon stood within an arm’s reach of Sherlock. *At least I’m not dealing with this shit show alone.*

“To what end,” Sherlock interjected, “would you use your daughter? She is blood.”

Margaret showed disgust. “You have a repulsive attachment to her. A bond. I do not; blood or no. She is an asset. She is nothing more; nothing less.”

“How can you presume such things,” his voice hostile. “She is your daughter. Say it!”

“Sherlock,” resolution in her voice, “in a world of normalcy, we do not conform, do we? She does not either.”

Venom clung to his words, “That woman did this to you. Not just aiding to form you into the creature that you are…but everything that you have mended from. She sent Brent after you! Judging by the evidence, she didn’t want you to survive.”

“After the damage she has done?! She is damaged. The only reason that she was brought here is because the web decided on it against my wishes,” she bit darkly.

Shannon went to rebuttal, but Sherlock had jumped to her side and yelled, “She is not damaged. You should be observant enough to recognize that!”

She dug into Sherlock’s coat pocket to produce a set of handcuffs. She handed them to him and motioned for him to do the honors of securing her.

“And how do you plan on leaving here? There are protocols in place in the event tonight doesn’t go according to plan,” she spoke quickly as if she were hunted prey. “There’s a group at the Bridgewater that is waiting to hear from me; there’s a protocol for this type of incident!”

Shannon put her hands on her waist, “Do you honestly believe that I have taken none of that into consideration?”

“It would have been nice to stick to the plan,” Sherlock shot off in a cheeky remark.

“That was your plan. Your plan wouldn’t have worked. This is my plan. This is what I do,” she reminded him. “I have taken precautions. Though, I won’t tell you what those may be. That takes the fun out of it.”

“I simply cannot understand how you are her offspring,” Holmes quipped with a sardonic smile. “Margaret, your breathing lowers the room’s IQ by the minutes. Try and keep up.”

Shannon smiled. “You did say that we could do with a case that would do us a nice cheering up.”

“You’ve gone insane in an effort to break your programming,” Margaret justified. “Your sentiment is a defect.”

Disdain radiated from Byrns. “A defect? Sentiment? You believe that, do you? It’s in my experience that those without it are found on the losing side.”

Sherlock halted a moment and looked at Shannon over his shoulder. At one time, he had said the opposite Irene Adler. Her sentiment is what came to her being on the losing side. *But this…this is different. She’s stating that her sentiment is what helps her… What is she sentimental about?*

“You see, Sherlock,” she pointed at her mother, “when you describe yourself to someone that
doesn’t know you…the person you draw up…it’s her. No heart. No attachments. No emotion. Nothing. Just a mind.”

As Sherlock bent down to cuff her, Margaret grabbed the pistol from Sherlock’s waist and pointed it at him. “You forget, child; that I raised you. And I know what weaknesses you picked up from your father. Sympathy and bonds being chief among them.”

Shannon turned in mild alarm, “He can take care of himself. I know he can. I trust that he can.”

“If she truly cared for you,” Margaret sneered, “would she gamble your life like this?”

Sherlock’s eyes narrowed in anger, “I’ve done so with hers. It would only be fair.”

“Of course you have,” Margaret smiled, “That’s what she’s there for.”

“Make no mistake,” Sherlock’s voice like ice, “I will do what is necessary to ensure her survival. And I know that she has done the same for me.”

“Then she’s disillusioned you, my boy. She’s been molded for that. It is all part of her game.”

“Thank you, Sherlock.” Shannon walked a step closer and heard the hammer pull back on Sherlock’s pistol. “Would you deny me the one person in the world that I relate to?”

He slowly raised his hands upwards and backed away while Margaret replied, “Does this boy give you solace? Does he give you some semblance of peace?”

“Yes,” she answered in honesty. “He is important to me.”

“Was he as important to you before your physical with MI-6?”

Shannon’s eyes conveyed her indignation. “Yes. So…it was you, wasn’t it?”

“Of course it was me, child,” Margaret laughed manically. “James informed me of your potential predicament. I ordered it to be dealt with. You’ll thank me later. A child sired by the pair of you? Disastrous.”

Shades of resentment and wrath burned in Holmes’ eyes. “You may think you are as great as James Moriarty; but you will never realize that you’ve been no more than a puppet. You can’t be greater than him because you simply cannot amount to anything. You, Margaret, are nothing.”

“Sherlock, do you trust me?”

“Yes,” he replied without hesitation.

“Completely?”

“…as much as I trust John, yes.”

She looked to her mother, “Then shoot him.”

Sherlock looked over his shoulder and looked for some indication that she had a plan.

“Don’t think that I won’t, child. I know what weight of importance you have given him in your life. You can’t see it, but I am better than even the pair of you,” she barked.

“Sherlock, did you hear the hammer?” Shannon asked quickly.
He nodded with his hands still up, “Yes, I am aware…”

“No, you listened to it. Did you hear it?” she asked again.

He thought back to the sound and realized it was lower than it should have been. “Mother, I would love to chat, but I have work to do. My conscience is keeping me from killing you. I have morals and ethics; traits that my father held in high regard. Ones that you are not apparently graced with. Get on with it already.”

Margaret, in her fury, pulled the trigger and blinked when the hammer snapped forward. *Click.* *Click click click.*

“There are two possible ways that you could have realized it wasn’t loaded,” Shannon shook her head disapprovingly.

“The sound of the hammer being pulled backward is pitched too low when the chamber is empty,” Sherlock responded informatively.

“And if you did as much work as is implied by your rank and status, you would have felt that the pistol wasn’t nearly heavy enough because the clip is empty,” Shannon quipped.

Holmes looked over his shoulder again and lowered his hands, “She’s not very good at this, is she?”

“Afraid not. Sherlock, mother needs a nap. See to that, would you?”

“Gladly,” he quipped. He drew back and landed a perfectly executed punch to knock Margaret unconscious; then, he handcuffed her. Shannon had moved to the other end of the room and was digging behind a table. He jogged to her location and looked about. “What now, mastermind? There’s seven guards outside and we can’t exactly stroll back to the car.”

“We aren’t taking the car,” she stated neutrally. “The car is part of the plan. I told you, I was busy this morning. Aha! There it is!”

She stood back up, smug. “A detonator?”

“Don’t worry,” she consoled while depressing the button. A fireball shot into the sky.

“Was that your car?” he asked in annoyance.

“Of course not!” she scoffed. “It was The Corporal’s. I…borrowed it…” he shot her a disapproving look.

“I took into account of the car position and the magnitude from the explosives so that it wouldn’t damage the Manor. Honestly. Just look at the history here! Besides, the University would be exceptionally cross if I damaged their infrastructure.”

Impressed, Sherlock smirked. “Do I get to blow anything up or is that just for you?”

“Here,” she handed him another remote that had eight switches. “You’ll figure it out. Come along, Holmes. You can take lead when we’re in London. Out here, I’m the boss.”

“Ma’am,” he mocked.

Shannon knelt and undid her heels, tossing them out and across the hall. Four throwing knives appeared in her left hand. *That makes sense. She never takes that long to get ready to go*
She was securing her weaponry.

“Maim, injure; don’t kill anyone,” she reminded herself. “There’s a vantage point about fifteen paces at the two o’clock position. Get there. The switches are labeled.”

He nodded as they walked briskly toward the exit. “We have ten minutes at most until the police are on premises.”

“Now listen to me,” she commanded. “As soon as you have cleared the switches, you need to run to the hotel. There’s a secondary disguise for you at the vantage point.”

“Who is coming to your big bash,” he asked. “Oh, you can’t be serious…”

She sighed in exasperation, “Unfortunately, yes. He wants this cleaned up near as much as I do considering the hell that Jim caused. The Ice Man commeth.”

“You left out my involvement, I presume?”

“Of course. I’m not going to sit through one of his lectures if it can be helped. Besides, he and I are barely on speaking terms right now. Considering the past two months, your presence would more than likely cause him to blow a gasket.”

Slightly vengeful, Sherlock asked, “Are you sure I can’t stay? Mycroft losing control are moments that I live for.”

“No. Promise me you’ll book it. Straight there. Change in transit.”

“Fine. Whatever. Now what, you’re going to be some sacrifice?”

“No exactly. Go. Now!”

He ran and followed her directions completely. He was wedged between some gardening caddy and a large planter. Barefoot, Shannon made her way into the courtyard and peered about. She subdued the first two goons with relative ease. Two down, five to go; right…breathe. Get to work.

“You have every chance to leave and run,” she called out to the thugs that were closing in on her. “You know what I can do. Take that as a warning.”

“Five against one,” one of the more brutish men sniggered. “Shouldn’t be so bad.”

Shannon rolled her head and bounced on the balls of her feet. “One!” she shouted.

Sherlock threw the switch and watched as a plate shot up from the ground, rocketing one of the goons upward and down with a dense THUD.

“THERE’S SOMEONE HELPING HER! FIND THEM!” shouted the older of the four conscious men.

The youngest made it his mission to leave and find her assistant. With a quick scan, he found the culprit and charged. Sherlock tossed the remote to the side and intercepted the first punch thrown.
at his face.

One down, I have three.  Nope, make that two now…and Sherlock has one.  GOD DAMN IT.  
THAT WAS MY KNEE!  She growled in agitation and dug one of her blades into the side of the 
man’s knee.  A quick reverse kick rendered the man unconscious.  With a lopsided dodge, she 
narrowly missed the burst of gunshots from her last attacker.  A lunge forward, as step to the side, 
and a slice across the strap rendered the assault weapon free from in used.  A few deflections and 
baiting moves allowed her to release the clip and empty any bullets from the chamber.  She tossed 
the bullets off to the side and took a cheap shot to the stomach.

“Oof,” she gasped.  “That was low.”

“The Jarl said that you’d betray us.”

“Well, she is my mother…so there’s that,” she spat.

“FIVE!” she bellowed while blocking her next attack.

Sherlock had his attacker in a headlock and reached for the remote.  “FIIIIIIIIVE!” she shouted 
again.

“I’m busy!” he yelled while reaching for the remote.  A kidney punch from his assailant prompted 
him to let go, shove his body toward the remote and throw the switch.

Another burst of gas caused some smoke and debris to fly into view.

“Everything!  Switch the rest,” he heard through the smoke.

He did so quickly and there was a symphony of percussive sounds reverberating in the small 
courtyard, including a set of fireworks shooting into the sky.  The younger man lunged again at 
Holmes, but he used the remote as a weapon and made contact with the side of his face.  The man 
fell to the ground and was unconscious before impact.

“Shannon!” Sherlock yelled into the smoke.

“You know what to do,” she grunted between punches.  “Get moving!”

“Shannon,” he yelled again in alarm.

“I’m fine, go!”

Doing as asked, he grabbed the bag and ran for the hotel.  His disguise included trainers, a hoodie, 
and ballcap.  He changed into the shoes first and added the other items of clothing as he walked.


He ran back and joined the group of spectators that had shown up outside the police tape.  Find 
her, Sherlock Holmes.  You need to bring her home.  He observed a mix of police and suits 
rounding up the members of Moriarty’s web and putting them in large box trucks.  They should enjoy how passive they are.  Shannon’s programming is working spectacularly.

He moved around with the waves of onlookers to draw as little attention to himself as possible.  
When he was close to the nerve center of the operation, he could hear an agent speaking to his 
brother on the phone.

“That’s exactly it, sir:  she disappeared.  She’s not at the rendezvous point as scripted.”
“Find her. She is necessary for the completion of this operation.”

“Yes, sir. Right away.”

Remember. Something was said and Shannon knew that this wasn’t going to be completely over. Wait. Bridgewater. There! Margaret said something about Bridgewater and an abort protocol. She’s back in the Manor.

Light of foot and moving with mastery, Sherlock made his way back inside the Manor and searched for Shannon. Margaret was still immobile on the floor, though now conscious.

“She wouldn’t. She didn’t do it.”

Sherlock peered about in the dimly lit room and eyed Shannon’s mother suspiciously. “Of course she didn’t,” he spat.

“Why,” she groaned in disbelief. “That is what she’s been molded to do.”

“Why? Why didn’t she kill you? Are you, honestly, that imbecilic that you cannot understand how she would let you live after everything that you have done to her?

“She is more than you could have imagined her to be because you lack imagination. She is like a trained assassin that I cannot but think what kind of criminal she may have become had she not fought to be a defender of those in need and in peril,” he pronounced articulately with disdain in his voice.

Margaret laughed, “You think that – that she is good because of her fight? Is that what you think?”

“You have been as blind as a mole; but I suppose it’s better that you learn some semblance of wisdom now rather than later,” he reproached.

“A coincidence that you learn a lesson none to dissimilar to my own, then,” Margaret conceded devilishly. “She’s not going to make it in time if she can’t get out of the city.”

His mind raced back to the maps he had been studying leading up to their outing. There’s two car parks in walking distance of the Manor. The one north is too small; and not necessarily going to be stocked well enough. West.

“There’s nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact,” he quipped as he turned his back on her, “And you have clearly underestimated Shannon. It’s obvious that she wants you to fall. What is not so obvious to you is that she has not needed you to feel a sense of purpose. You should realize that violence recoils upon the violent and the schemer falls into a pit which they have dug for another. Enjoy whatever prison my brother puts you in.”

He ran out and bolted toward the car park to the west. There were some of Margaret’s men waiting around the perimeter. He was calculating the various ways that he could obtain entrance and search.

He took the most direct route which entailed taking out some of the men one at a time. All was going according to plan until he was spotted and a fight ensued. Sherlock Holmes was well versed in self-defense and fighting in various styles. It was, with relative ease, that he was able to subdue his attackers. The final of the set, he settled a well-placed hook into his face.

The sound of screeching tires and the sense of impending injury overcame the normally astute detective. He turned toward the drifting car as it came to a halt. “I thought I told you to go back to the hotel,” the driver snapped.
“You took your time,” he panted. “And what’s with the choice of car lately?”

Shannon opened the passenger door, “Get in.” He slid into the passenger seat and she sped off. “What? I need cars that can perform. The Audi was for show. And it was borrowed. This is a Mazda MX-5. It can get to sixty-two miles an hour in seven seconds and tops off at a hundred thirty-five miles an hour. “We are definitely having a talk about following directions when we get home.”

“That’s coming from the person that didn’t follow the plan for tonight’s endeavor,” he argued.

“Hang on,” she warned as the car lurched forward. Once she had adjusted to the new speed, she peered over and punched him in the arm. “You came up with a plan. Your plan. I listened to it,” she punched his arm again. “That was not the plan. This is my shit show. My plan. You have not been following the plan.”

“It’s important in the art of detection to be able to recognize…” he began to lecture.

She groaned, “Yes – yes, I know: finding the necessary and vital facts. That’s not always as neat and simple in this line of work.”

“At these speeds, you’re going to make it to Leeds in half an hour.”

“Not with all this traffic,” she grumbled. “Quiet. You’re not here.” She voice dialed Mycroft and waited for his annoyed tones to fill the car.

“Miss Byrns, you have a knack for causing disruptions where there needn’t be,” he drilled.

“Change of plans. I need the A64 completely cleared.”

“And why is that?”

“You’ll find The Jarl on the floor of the Huntingdon Room. You’ll be pleased to have captured her. However, she did let slip that there were protocols in place should she not contact a group in Leeds. If this is to end tonight then you will do as I say,” she barked. “I need to get to Leeds in fifteen minutes. Clear the road.”

“Authorities are clearing the road for you as we speak. Now; that I have your attention,” he led, “there are some bodyguards here that state there were two assailants.”

“Glad they thought that I was that great. Looks like I’m completely on the mend.”

He tutted her condescendingly, “My brother is not with you, is he?”

She groaned, “Of course not, bye Mycroft. I’ll be in touch when I’m done. Meet me in Leeds.”

The call ended and Sherlock looked over at her, “Well?”

“Well what? He’s going to get everyone off of the road and I’m going to be able to make it to the Bridgewater building in twenty minutes.”

“A plan? Certainly you have some sort of idea of what you are going to do once you get to the Bridgewater building.”

“I was going to be taking a page from your book: observe the details, use the data, and then sieve through to find the pertinent pieces.”
“That’s one of the few sensible things that you have said since we got here,” he grinned. He pulled out his mobile and began researching the building. “Thirty-two floors, construction began in 2004…”

“I wasn’t even at university yet,” she scoffed. “Feel old yet, Sherlock?”

He ignored her comment, “…two of the floors are for parking. It’s both residential and an office skyscraper. Using resident look up and cross-referencing that with your list before we left Baker Street…twenty-ninth floor.”

“Good. We’ll be there in ten minutes.”

“Have you considered…”

“More than likely,” she replied, intent on the road. “For the record, that’s what it feels like to be a ‘normal’ person when you’re in the room.”

“Then you understand…”

“…completely.”

“Should you…”

“…I trust you to handle my affairs.”

He nodded, “Perhaps I should take you on more cases. You talk less than John.”

“You’d miss him too much,” she quipped. “You can’t honestly tell me anything different.”

“They are expecting a child. It’s the end.”

She rolled her eyes and checked her speedometer. 112 miles an hour. Fantastic. And not a soul on the road. “Don’t be so dramatic. No it’s not. It’s a new chapter.”

“It complicates things,” he responded.

“IT?” she reprimanded. “IT is a child. That child is John and Mary’s baby. Sherlock, Jesus Christ.”

“Be quiet. You cannot do this for the remaining ten minutes while I have no means of escape.”

She shot a quick glare, “There’s the door. You could jump.”
Upon entry to the building, the pair stood side by side in the elevator. She reached behind her back and produced a clip for his pistol, handed it to him, and then withdrew another set of throwing knives that had been hidden on her right thigh.

“Ready?” she asked.

He readied his pistol and made sure a round was in the chamber, “As much as you are, I’d presume by your elevated heart rate and giddiness.”

“I promise that I’m bringing you home,” she asserted.

His face was stern, “Making such a statement isn’t very helpful to our current situation.

“I mean it,” she emphasized with a furrowed brow. “I am getting you home.”

He noted a small tremor in her left hand.

She followed his gaze, flexed her hand, and said, “It’s fine.”

He shed the hoodie and adjusted his suit jacket, ignoring her comment. “You said that you tailored this?”

“I did; and I made a few alterations.”

“Something in the weight of it,” he bounced on his toes in the elevator.

“There’s a layer of Kevlar between the lining and the suit. It’s not going to stop a bullet…but it’s going to help you against blades,” she stated factually.

“Rather industrious. I may keep the suit for such occasions.”

She shrugged and adjusted her dress, “Keep it then. Use it for special occasions.”

The elevator let out a pleasant DING and opened on the twenty-seventh floor. The pair stood disheveled in the middle of the elevator floor. The pair of women in the hallway sized up the duo inside and looked to each other with skepticism.

“Sorry ladies. Going up,” Shannon quipped.

“Is that Sherlock Holmes,” one of the women gasped.

Shannon laughed and pressed the door closed button, “Not a chance.”

He gave a furtive side glance to her. “That’s all we need is for your brother to know that you were with me. I am not dealing with that, thank you.”

The door opened to the penthouse and Shannon exited first with a commanding, confident gait.

“Evening, gentlemen,” she greeted sweetly. “The Jarl sends her regards. I’m the Ghost. This can go two ways: the easy way…where we all have a fabulous time…” The gentlemen withdrew batons and pistols. “…or we can do things your way.”

She flipped the skirt of her dress behind her leg and started pointing at each of the men in the
room. “One, two, three…four? Only four? I had more than that in York.”

Sherlock appeared from around the corner fashioning his pistol at one of the men with a gun, “You could have at least given her a challenge.”

The front-most man stepped forward. He wasn’t a bad looking man: there were some scars along his jawline, he had a medium build, and salt and pepper hair. “I’m The Spear. They’re here so that I don’t hurt you.”

“Really,” Shannon scoffed with a determined grin. “You know why he’s here?” she gestured to Sherlock.

“Because you need the help?” The Spear laughed.

“I’m here so that she doesn’t kill you,” Sherlock replied smugly.

Her heart was beginning to race. She breathed out in meditation and shifted her weight onto her back leg. “The Spear, huh?” Shannon stated. “Nice to meet you. I’m God.” The other men in the room looked unsettled. “And as your God, what makes you think that you can stop me when the rest failed?”

The Spear took two steps forward to separate himself from his counterparts. “I trained The Inquisitor. The Jarl felt that, if there was anyone to keep you from destroying everything that we’ve striven for…it would be me.”

Shannon’s left hand twitched in agitation. “Lovely. So your student’s handiwork landed me in the hospital for a month.”

“Shannon,” Sherlock warned. “Do not do anything rash. Think this through. See and observe.”

*Rage. This is rage. Everything that has happened and…and…now? After all of this time and every single instance that has lead me here…and this…how...how am I supposed to survive? Or…am I supposed to survive…*

She looked at The Spear and took Sherlock’s directive to heart: *Tendon damage in right hand, predominantly left handed, doesn’t like guns, has a cat, recovering from addiction to pain medication, womanizer, power seeker, and drinks heavily.*

*Bingo.*

She stood tall and walked over to the decanter set that she spied on the way in. “Fine, fine. We can do what needs to be done in a moment. I need a drink.”

Holmes stared at her, inquisitive. “It’s fine. We’re in the middle of bringing down the Syndicate and you want a drink. It’s completely fine.”

She scowled at him. “Then don’t have one!”

She poured herself and her opponent a drink. After the pour, she offered the second glass to The Spear. He cautiously took the glass and watched as she sipped first.

“Bourbon,” she announced. “Very nice. It’s been a rough day and if I’m to die today; then I would like the drink I earned from earlier.”

The Spear nodded. “You are more reasonable and personable than The King was; I’ll give you
that. He never quite grasped the simpler comforts…he was always above,” he divulged.

Byrns bobbed her head in agreement and took another step closer to her opponent. “I have a proposition for you,” she whispered.

“SHANNON, DON’T!” Sherlock bellowed.

The Spear grinned maliciously. “I can make no guarantees, but, I’m intrigued.”

“The Syndicate is broken. It’s in pieces and it is currently being rounded up in York. You could swear fealty to me and be a part of the new form that I have in store. All in a rather lofty position as well. You, by claiming my offer, would be getting a hefty promotion,” Shannon baited.

He stroked his chin and sipped from his glass. “And what else? You’re a very beautiful, stunning woman. You could use a man like me on your arm,” he gushed.

“Shannon, you can’t be serious,” Sherlock stated in agitation.

Shannon placed a hand on The Spear’s shoulder and walked in a circle around him. “Very,” she admitted silkily.

“Sorry mate,” The Spear grinned, “God likes who God likes. And it ain’t you.”

Shannon grabbed his glass with her free hand, flashing a smile. “If anyone,” she said sweetly, “It would most definitely be him out of the men in this room. And that’s with the man on the left being gay.”

“Wha –?” he gasped.

Shannon used the two heavy rocks glasses and slammed them on either side of The Spear’s face. One of them shattered and got glass in his eye. She threw the intact glass at one of the men with a gun. Sherlock fired a well-aimed shot into the hand of the other gun wielder. He ran forward and grabbed the third man, throwing him to the ground.

As if it were an eloquent ballet, Shannon and Sherlock fed off each other’s energy and movement. Together, they were a double-edged sword that cut through their opponents with ease. When the last body guard fell unconscious, the Baker Street duo stopped and surveyed the room. On a side table, there was a laptop with a running timer on it.

“Seven minutes to spare,” Shannon announced out of breath.

Sherlock nodded and looked to the other window that was open, “Do you know the code?”

“Nope, but that’s what we are here for…sooo…seven minutes Sherlock.”

They both crowded the laptop screen and looked at previous encoded messages. They talked out their thought process and spent a minute arguing.

With two minutes left, she grabbed him by the shoulder and tossed him backward. “You need to go. Mycroft. Take the car. Leave.”

“Have you cracked the code?” he scoffed.

“GO! God damn it, Sherlock; you need to leave! Go!” she shouted.

She typed into the computer and sent the message out to the masses. Sherlock had already made
his way down in the elevator. He fired off a text to Shannon in an effort to help her with his cover should Mycroft warrant any evidence.

Shannon Byrns:

I have been talking to you
for two hours about a case.
You are not at Baker Street.
I’ve looked.
Inconsiderate.
-SH

When Shannon was ushered out of the building, she was carrying the laptop and throwing knives. Paramedics wrapped a blanket around her shoulders and gave her some slippers to wear on her feet. She was scraped and bruised; but it was one of her more clean endeavors.

“Here,” she shoved the laptop into Mycroft’s chest. “I sent off a message to the masses announcing my reign. Everything should be to your standard.”

“How is your car?” he quipped with a skeptical eye. “Such a car like that missing at the scene of the crime is rather indicative that you had a partner.”

In a perfect deadpan, she fished her phone from her cleavage and produced a series of text messages from Sherlock. Mycroft scanned them, but didn’t buy that the evidence was genuine.

“What do you want from me, Mycroft? Honestly!”

“If my brother was indeed here, you will be sure that I will be making a stop to that dank domicile that the pair of you consider a home with the ramifications for your actions,” he looked down his nose at her.

“That’s sweet. You’re so very welcome. I risked body and mind for this venture and this is how I’m repaid. Go to hell,” she seethed. “I’m done. No more. I will send out texts and messages after the fall commands are put into place…but that where I draw the line.”

He quirked an eyebrow, “I could say that this business arrangement has been a pleasure to have; but you and I both know that would be a farce.”

“Yes, well, let’s not then, shall we? Goodbye, Mycroft.”

“And where are you going,” he challenged coolly.

“It’s two in the morning,” she quipped while walking away. “I have a Penthouse waiting for me in York.”

She hopped in a car that had a driver and spoke quickly. “That’s my car,” he asserted in a raised tone.

“Thank you for stating the obvious,” she hollered from the window as Mycroft Holmes watched Shannon being driven away in his car.

He turned to one of his commanding officers with a look of disgust. “The philosopher that prefers
to be a detective; and, the weapon that prefers to be a shield. What might we deduce about the pair of them?"

“They’re insane?” the officer stated offhand before going back to his duties.

“Quite possibly,” Mycroft answered.

Shannon was dropped off at The Grand and entered the lobby. The concierge’s face was startled by her disheveled appearance.

“It was a long night,” Shannon replied with a nod. She pulled out a hundred pound note that she had nicked from one of the goons. “Here you are. I’ll be extending our stay until the afternoon. If you require another installment, call the penthouse.”

She padded over barefoot to the elevator and casually walked inside. Her hands had been shaking and she pressed them against the elevator wall. *It’s done. You’re done until it’s time to flip the switch. Relax.*

She heard the familiar sound of arrival and the doors opened. Tired, sore, and in need of a shower, she dragged herself to her room. She checked her phone to find that Sherlock had texted her while she had been in transit.

*Shannon Byrns:*

*If all has gone according to your plan, then you should be one your way back to York.*

-SH

*I have a plan. It’s in motion, but you would prove instrumental.*

-SH

*There are cold packs in the fridge.*

-SH

*I have left out the medical supplies should you require them.*

-SH
She tossed her mobile onto the bed and shuffled into the bathroom, turned on the shower, and shed her jewelry. Steam had begun to billow over the glass and she walked into the shower still dressed. She leaned against the stone wall and slid down to the floor. Something could be said for the feeling of hot water while sitting on the shower floor.

She had taken her hair out of the bun and pushed the hair back from her face. Noiseless, Sherlock entered the bathroom and stood on the other side of the glass.

“I gather by how silently you returned that there were no further incidents,” he quipped.

“Yep,” she replied, leaning her head backward.

“You do realize that the normal protocol of showering does mean that you shed clothes before entering.”

“Yep.”

He opened the door and looked down at her. Most of the dirt had washed away; what was left was her fresh fight wounds.

Holmes saw her split knuckles and gathered that the hadn’t broken any bones. She gave him her right hand and pointed at the third knuckle. “Pretty sure there’s something in there; look at how the dexterity is free toward the outer metacarpophalangeal, but the inner two are stiffer.”

He sat down next to her in the shower, examined her hand, and said nothing. After a time they looked at each other and started to laugh.

“You just took down the Syndicate, this is not the time for laughing,” he grinned. Shannon had an outburst of a laughing fit and he echoed her mirth. “You should keep the dress. It has versatility.”

She let out an obnoxious snort in response.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“Of course,” she replied. “Are you?”

He quirked an eyebrow, “What do you mean?”

“Well, you did just punch my mother in the face.” Their laughter boomed in the shower.

“She really isn’t a nice woman,” he remarked.

“No, she isn’t.”

“And alive.”

She nodded, “Unfortunately.”

“You’re taking all of this better than expected,” he commented. “The observations that I’ve made on you prove that you are making progress…or something”

“That’s good.”

“I am going to need your help to finish up a case,” he stated.

“Alright,” she said while the warm water fell down comfortably.
“May be dangerous.”

“Ooh.”

“It may involve treason.”

She smiled, “Only treason? Wow. That’s a bonus for me. Usually I’m breaking a dozen laws.”

“You may need to be drugged again,” he commented thoughtfully.

“How kind of you to let me know that I’m being drugged this time.”

“Are you interested?”

“Absolutely.”

Deviously, he grinned again and said, “How does Christmas dinner with my family sound?”
Exhale

The Twenty-fourth of November

“Thank you, Darweshi, for looking for that information. And you are certain?” Shannon’s voice echoed in the landing outside the kitchen. “…yes. No, I appreciate it. Thank you. Call me when you return to London.” She hung up and reentered the kitchen with her phone pocketed. “Sorry about that, where were we?” She nodded in apology to Holmes and Wiggins.

Sherlock didn’t look up from his measurements, “You volunteering to be a part of the drugged party as part of the plan.”

“…and you’re sure that no harm will come to Mary and the baby?” Shannon questioned in anxiousness.

“Pretty sure,” Wiggins replied.

“PRETTY SURE?!” she snapped, grabbing him by the scruff of his jacket and lifting him up against the wall. “Pretty sure isn’t good enough. You better be pretty damn positive about how safe this thing will be!”

Sherlock looked up from his experiment and chemicals on the kitchen table, “Wiggins, you should probably infer that she will kill you should anything happen to Mary. Know that whatever is left of your corpse, should the worst happen, will come to me after she’s done with you.

“Also, don’t antagonize her. She’s been rather civil to live with as of late.”

Wiggins eyed Shannon as she dropped him back down to the floor. “Sherlock,” she warned gravely. “You’re the graduated chemist.”

“You’re right. This won’t affect the child. It was part of the requirement. And why does it bother you so much now? Hmm? It didn’t last week.”

“That was before you told me John and Mary would be joining us. I know that you have some concept of why I’m agitated about this,” she responded in exasperation with a knowing gaze.

His eyes, piercing and observant, noted her agitation and blinked. He lifted his goggles from his face, “I want nothing to happen to Mary or the child. I assure you.”

“Promise me,” she snapped. “Promise me, Sherlock.”

“Will it help?”

Wiggins watched as sparks shot from Shannon toward the consulting detective. I will never understand why they live together. They’re mad, they are.

“Yes,” she snapped.

He sighed in annoyance, “I promise, no harm to Mary and the baby.”

Shannon turned on her heel and dug a finger into Wiggins’ chest. His eyes widened in surprise, “Anything happens to her or the baby…you better pray that I don’t wake up from being drugged. Now get to work. You have a month.”

Sherlock replaced his goggles and gave a quick nod, “Goodbye, Bill.”
Wiggins shot out of Baker Street as quickly as his feet could take him. *And I thought she was the sane one? What was I thinking.*

“You made your point,” Sherlock uttered, plain.

“Since when do you second guess your chemistry skills,” she asked as she folded her arms across her torso.

He glanced up at her again, this time with a shade of alarm and said, “Since I’m drugging my friend’s wife and unborn child. I thought that you would approve.”

“I do…it’s just – it’s just that this would have been easier if she wasn’t coming. Also, aren’t you drugging your parents as well?”

“Yes, I am. You should also know that there’s a greater reason for Mary attending. My mother is already in a mood because I’m bringing you and the Watsons…you know…doing whatever it is that mothers do,” he waved the subject off.

She frowned and walked over to the fridge. She sighed, “If I open this, is there going to be a head in there?”

“No, but there is a brain in a container that can’t be disturbed,” he claimed unapologetically.

Her head dropped down, she did an about-face on her heel, and left the kitchen saying, “Why do I even bother…”

“What did Darweshi tell you on the phone,” he inquired.

She paused, “He’s coming back to London. The file wasn’t at Culdrose. He’s going to do more research.”

She went into the common room and sat in John’s chair, reading the paper. Sherlock was droning on and on about the chemical properties of whatever compound he was working on and how it would show him another facet of wood being charred by an accelerant.

*Blah, blah, blah, blah.*

She placed her headphones over her ears and turned on her playlist labeled *Purple*. She found that, when she needed to process and digest information for the past few months, she would listen to this playlist to help her give order to her life.

She closed her eyes and found herself in a meditative trance without the boundaries of time. She was at peace and was able to organize her life.

Sherlock had moved to his chair and was throwing balls of paper at Shannon. After the sixth throw, she ripped her headphones off and snarled at him, “What are you doing?”

He was stern and displeased, “Have you not been listening to anything that I’ve said in the past three hours?”

“Wait…what time is it?!?”

He looked at his watch, and replied, “It’s just gone five.”

“Shit…I have to go,” she panted, flying down the stairs.
“Again? You had to go somewhere last week.” He didn’t move from his chair. “Do the shopping while you’re out,” he hollered.

“You do it! I’m busy!” she shouted before the front door slammed and she was off sprinting down the street.

Sherlock snorted and went back to cataloging his earlier experiments. How does she plan to be well versed in chemistry if she’s not paying attention?

The First of December

John had come over to Baker Street after doing a half day at work. Shannon was cleaning up the flat and making an attempt to make it a little bit more festive. Sherlock, however, was whining and protesting.

“It’s just some garland,” she defended. “God knows what you would do to a tree.”

“Now that I’m not here, he’d probably set it on fire,” John offered.

She nodded and placed her hands on her hips, “Well, he has been doing experiments with fire accelerants as of late.”

“God, this is going to be agony,” Sherlock groaned like a wounded animal. “And you both are going to spend Christmas at the Holmes’ stead.”

“We should get you a festive jumper,” Shannon goaded.

Sherlock’s head snapped in her direction, “Most assuredly not.” John’s smile and approving gaze at Byrns was telling enough. Sherlock looked at John and said tersely, “No.”

“With bells!” she proclaimed with faux enthusiasm.

“Don’t you bring anything of the sort into this flat,” he commanded as he sat up from the couch.

“It’s fine, Sherlock,” John soothed. “One of us will disarm you and the other can put you into the jumper. Do you have a preference?”

His face contorted into a brooding, dour expression, “You might as well make the jumper a straight-jacket if you expect me to stay in it.”

“That can be arranged,” John quipped.

Shannon, laughing from picking on Sherlock, checked her watch and got up from her spot on the floor. “Sorry to cut this short, boys. I’ve got somewhere to be.”

“Honestly?” John asked as she started down the stairs. “Sherlock, where’s she going?”

“I don’t know, she has a thing,” he articulated crisply.

John was curious. “Is it her counseling?”

“No, that’s on Thursdays or something. I don’t know. It’s not important so long as she goes.”

John frowned and realized that asking for any more information from Holmes was pointless. He
grabbed his coat and effects, and followed Shannon out into London.

John followed Shannon from Baker Street Station to the Edgeware Road stop from the next car. She quickly left the station. Shannon briskly walked down the street and he wasn’t far behind. From afar he watched as she ducked into an old church near The Tower. He waited five minutes before walking in and hiding in an alcove.

“Alright everyone, thank you for coming to rehearsal. I’m glad that you’re all here; we have our first performance in two weeks, and then we have our secondary set to be performed after the holidays through the month of January.

“We do have some new faces here, and I would like to thank you all for sticking with us, despite the hectic, busy time of year we find ourselves in. Now…how about a warm-up and we’ll get right into the thick of it,” an elderly man announced.

John peered around and saw a group of people arranged for a rehearsal. Shannon was there, just off of center, wearing a wig and jacket. A wig? I can see straight through that disguise easily. Who is she trying to hide from?

He remained hidden and listened for a time as the group rehearsed. The conductor paused the group and said, “Now, we’re going to rehearse ‘Black is the Color’ ladies and gentlemen. Our exchange student is here with us and we only have her for tonight before she has finals at University. She’ll not be with us next week.”

There was an excited murmur from the group as they shifted about and grabbed music from their folders. A tuning note from a pitch pipe sounded quietly and a soloist began singing. That is beautiful. Amazing…who is that? John looked around the corner and saw that the soloist was Shannon. He made an audible gasp and basked in the reverence of sound that was coming from the ensemble. I never knew that she could sing. I know that she plays…but singing? God, is this where she’s been sneaking off to?

He sat in down in the very back of the church, hidden by one of the large stone columns and listened. He wasn’t merely hearing sound reverberating in the church, but he was enveloped by it and was moved.

Shannon had told him that she had a job a few weeks back that involved her going to York. He had protested, stating that she had just got better; but she convinced him that this job was of the utmost importance. When she had come home, she was quiet and spoke to John more about what she remembered happening at Brent’s hands. She confided that she was going to see her counselor as often as was asked of her, but she wasn’t sure if it would ultimately help her.

I wonder, John pondered, if what she needed was this. After all, music has been something that has given her solace for years. Perhaps this was the best medicine the world can give her.

After she had finished singing whatever song she was the soloist in, John quietly left the church and headed home. He stuffed his hands into his jacket and felt the pen drive. Damn. Damn it all.

The Ninth of December

Three women sat at a café table waiting for their meals to arrive. It was a ten-minute walk for Molly down to Cannon Street. She didn’t mind the walk. It gave her a breath of air from her normal duties in the morgue. Hooper, Watson, and Byrns had all planned to get lunch together and enjoy some much-needed time with each other.
“How are you feeling?” Shannon asked Mary after taking a sip of water.

“Well enough; the baby’s kicking enough to keep me awake all night,” Mary admitted with a gentle rub to her stomach.

Molly’s normally nervous eyes were calm and relaxed. She smiled, “Do you know yet…if it’s a boy or a girl?”

“No, not yet,” she replied. “Though, I was hoping that John would want to be there, you know…”

Molly looked over at Shannon as their plates were set onto the table. She thought for a moment, then ventured, “Couldn’t you – couldn’t you talk to John, Shannon? He’s not mad at you…”

Shannon looked up from her sandwich and replied, “He’s not mad at you, either. John has to come to the realization on his own. Regardless of how painful it is for the rest of us…sorry, Mary.”

“No, no…you’re right. This is something he needs to figure out on his own or there will be no coming back from it,” Mary agreed before eating some of her chicken and lime soup.

Shannon rolled her shoulders backwards because they were stiff and gave an involuntary wince at the sharp pain that followed.

Molly saw the pain and asked, “Haven’t your shoulders recovered by now? If not, you may have done some ligament damage.”

“Oh no, I’m fine,” she replied reassuringly. “Bad habits.”

Mary immediately picked up on what Shannon was trying to dodge. “Haven’t your shoulders recovered by now? If not, you may have done some ligament damage.”

“When?” Molly replied while taking a bite of her wrap.

Mary gave her best disapproving mom stare and waited. “It written all over your skin,” Mary added. “Now, come on…out with it. What were you doing and when?”

She looked at Mary and Molly, side by side, and asked, “Try not to be cross with me…”

“Do you think this is a game,” Molly asserted herself. “Risking your life all the time like that? You just got out of hospital!”

“Molly,” Mary calmed. “Let’s listen first. If she’s done something as foolish as Sherlock had, I’m sure she’d let you slap her to feel better.”

Shannon gave a look of displeasure and began, “Alright…so in early October, I got a letter in the post from someone in the Syndicate with a code name: The Jarl. Now, Sherlock had been helping me after the information I coaxed out of Brent…the guy who tortured me…proved to be rather valuable.”

Molly stared at Shannon with wide eyes and sat incredibly still. “Is – is he alive?”

Mary replied, “Of course he is. Shannon makes a point to not kill anyone.” She looked to Shannon with an apologetic grimace, “Sorry, I looked at your file…”

“It’s fine,” Shannon waved her off. “Anyway: the letter was an invitation to a Gala in York to meet Moriarty’s web of trusted confidants on November fourteenth. Sherlock agreed to help, and we began researching everything that we could get our hands on; and, I sent Wiggins and his crew to go out and do some reconnaissance for me.”
“Smart,” Mary replied thoughtfully.

Molly leaned forward, “So what happened then?”

“Well, Sherlock agreed to go with me and assist.”


On Mary’s lips was a knowing grin, “Yeah, it’s a big case that he wants solved. He’d do anything to go.”

Shannon chuckled, “Exactly. So, I let Sherlock know that I had put in my resignation with MI-6 and sent another copy off to Mycroft. After this job was completed, I was done and ‘retired’. I would have taken down the most illicit, international crime ring to date. I’d like to not have Brent-like events on a regular basis.

“November comes, we have all the intel from Brent and Wiggins, and by happenstance, I meet up with a man who calls himself The Architect. Sweet man… come to find out later that he was seeking me out originally because he wanted out of the Syndicate…but I had a job for him.”

“He had information,” Molly replied.

Mary looked to her side with a smile, “Very good, Molly! Obviously…that went over well.”

Over the next half an hour, Shannon told her captivated audience about the events that followed. Both women gasped when she brought up her mother, and the subsequent events that followed in Leeds.

“But, in order for you to have control in such a grand scale…you would have had to have been feeding them protocols for months,” Mary thought aloud. “And as far as I can tell, that wasn’t happening.”

“Not unless…” Molly began. She frowned, “How would you get your hands on such a thing?”

Shannon, smug, explained, “Wiggins has a knack for chemistry. I had Sherlock double check all of the calculations; but in order for me to do a quick turn around…I realized that I was going to need an advantage. I recalled a pocket of information in my mind about IPSP…uh…inhibitory postsynaptic potential. There’s ways that you can… sway the mind’s inhibitions.”

Molly’s agitation hadn’t changed. “There are studies,” Molly interrupted, “where the ventral tegmental area is meddled with and causes your natural dopamine receptors to act differently.”

“Yes,” Shannon stated plainly. “Long story short, I drugged them; albeit mildly, through their champagne in order to make them more perceptive to suggestion.”

“You can’t do that,” Molly replied, her voice thin. “Shannon, that’s wrong.”

Mary looked to Molly and defended, “But don’t you see…no one was hurt, no one was killed, and Shannon has the Syndicate in the cross-hairs. They’re going to fall apart.”

“Molly, look…I did what I had to do. I want out. I don’t want the life that they keep perpetuating for me…I want to wake up one morning and think, ‘Wow…I am alive…and free’,” Shannon defended. “I never want to do that ever again. Never. I am not proud of it.”

Sheepish, Molly looked up from her plate and asked, “You promise…you promise that you’ll never do that again.”

Mary tapped her finger on the table and asked, “So what was it that you sent out on the wire? What did you send that kept them all on your side?”

“Ah,” Shannon leaned backward. “That. I figured that there was only one thing that would make the transition seamless.

‘Did you miss me?’”

The Twenty-fifth of December

“Lovely when you bring your friends round,” Mycroft quipped in satire.

Mrs. Holmes put both her glass and foot down, “Stop it, you. Somebody’s put a bullet in my boy and if I ever find out who, I shall turn absolutely monstrous.

“Ah. This was for Mary. I’ll be back in a minute,” she responded as she left.

Sherlock lowered his hand to look at his watch before refolding them. Seven minutes.

“I could imply that Shannon is the one what shot you,” Mycroft goaded with a look to his left. “She’ll forever be suspicious of you.”

“No she wouldn’t. Your mother likes me,” Shannon asserted while reading an identical paper to the one in Sherlock’s lap.

“Does she?” Sherlock asked with an uninterested tone.

“She does. She thinks that I stimulate Sherlock’s thought process,” Shannon chuffed. “I’ve also told her that he was instrumental to my recovery.”

Mycroft’s glare was cold and he rolled his eyes. “Why are you here?”

“I asked our mother if I could bring her; I let Shannon talk to her on the phone…I couldn’t be bothered. They talked for a while…conversing or something. John seems to think that it’s a courtesy to do,” he replied, his voice low.

“You father adores me, too; good luck throwing me out in the cold, Mycroft,” she gloated. “So stop being such a tit.”

Mycroft stood abruptly, “I simply cannot stay in this house a moment longer. I’m going out. Sherlock?”

Shannon nodded in subtlety and watched as Sherlock followed his older brother out toward the garden. Wiggins looked at Shannon and handed her a glass. “Here’s yours. Mr. Holmes had me add half of a gram to yours, just to be safe. He feels that if you wake up after his brother, it’d be for the best.”

With a nod, she downed the drink in three large gulps. “When I start to go down, will you ease me into the chair if I’m not there by then?”

“O’ course,” he responded kindly.

“Are you sure…about Mary and the baby?” she tersely asked.
Wiggins helped her into one of the kitchen chairs, “With my life.”

“You’re a good man, Bill. I hope that this is all worth it in the end,” she patted his shoulder.

“I’m still curious, though. He’s hardly your usual kind of puzzle. Why do you...hate him?” Mycroft asked in genuine curiosity.

Sherlock turned back to face his brother, “Because he attacks people who are different and preys on their secrets. Why don’t you?”

“He never causes too much damage to anyone important; he’s far too intelligent for that. He’s a businessman, that’s all; and occasionally useful to us. A necessary evil...not a dragon for you to slay,” he replied, taking another drag from his cigarette.

He moved beside Mycroft and asked, “A dragon slayer...is that what you think of me?”

“No,” he smiled. “It’s what you think of yourself.”

Mrs. Holmes voice interrupted their tranquility, “Are you two smoking?!?”

Simultaneously, they spun about and hid their cigarettes behind their backs.

“NO!”

“IT WAS MYCROFT!”

Mycroft meandered toward the door and turned around, “I have, by the way, a job offer I should like you to decline.”

With some skepticism, Sherlock answered, “I decline your kind offer.”

“I shall pass on your regrets.”

“What was it?” the younger queried.

“MI6. They want to place you back into Eastern Europe; an undercover assignment that would prove fatal to you in, I think, about six months.”

Surprised, Sherlock pressed his brother, “Then why don’t you want me to take it?”

“It’s tempting. But on balance you have more utility closer to home.”

“Utility? How do I have utility?”

“Here be dragons.” He looked at his cigarette, frowned, and coughed. “This isn’t agreeing with me. I’m going in.”

Sherlock jested, “You need low tar. You still smoke like a beginner.”

Mycroft had turned back to the house, paused, and spoke out of character. “Also, your loss would break my heart.”

The detective choked and sputtered, glaring at his brother’s back. “What the hell am I supposed to say to that?!?”
“Merry Christmas,” he retorted.

Sherlock gazed on, skeptical. “You hate Christmas.”

“Yes,” he pretends to look confused. “Perhaps there was something in the punch.”

“Clearly. Go and have some more.”

Groggy and on a mission, Shannon walked past Mycroft with relative ease. She stopped next to Sherlock and grabbed his elbow to balance herself. “Half a gram extra? Really?”

“I thought it was necessary. Should you have to get bloodwork done, you will have a higher concentration in your sample. It would clear you with Mycroft.”

“Thank you,” she yawned.

“You need to get inside; I am not carrying you into the house.”

She chuckled. “I’m going. I wanted to let you know that I got your mother set up. Bill should be taking care of your brother now. I’ll be sitting at the table with them.”

“Good.”

“Sherlock,” she yawned again as the pair turned to go into the house. “Will you do me a favor?”

His demeanor was quiet and almost at peace. This is how I get ready to slay dragons. “It depends.”

He pulled out her chair at the table and pushed her in after she was sitting. “Will – will you not do anything rash? Please…”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t take a page out of my book. Follow your code. I want…”

“I know.”

“No!” she grumbled with her head on the table. “Stay safe.”

The door to the sitting room opened and Sherlock walked in briskly.

“Don’t drink Mary’s tea. Oh…or the punch.”

He walked around the house, checking the vitals of his family. He double checked the time on the kitchen clock and was satisfied with his timing.

“Sherlock?” John asked before coming into the kitchen. “Did you just drug my pregnant wife?”

“Don’t worry,” he assured while checking Mycroft’s breathing. “Wiggins is an excellent chemist.”

Bill nodded, “I calculated your wife’s dose myself. Won’t affect the little one. I’ll keep an eye on her.”

John looked at Shannon slumped over the table and stared at Sherlock in disbelief. “What the hell have you done?”

He took a second to collect himself and stated, “A deal with the devil.”
The sun had started to set when The Holmes family started coming to. Wiggins aided Mr. & Mrs. Holmes first and got them upright and into the sitting room with some tea. Mycroft came to on his own and looked over the table to see that Shannon was still asleep. *Sherlock, what are you doing… and with the laptop?*

Wiggins returned to the kitchen to check on Mycroft and Shannon. He saw that the brother was awake and moved toward Shannon. “Tell me,” Mycroft growled while trying to stand, “where he has gone and I’ll not throw you into prison.”

Bill checked Shannon’s pulse and looked over to Mycroft. “Mr. Holmes, she needs to wake up.”

“Where?!” he spat, slamming his hand on the table.

“Where else would he go and leave ‘er behind?” he pointed to Shannon. “He’s keeping her out of it. He said that he’s got a dragon to slay.”

Mycroft took off with his mobile to his ear. Bill left Shannon momentarily to bring Mary something to eat.

“Where did they go?” Mary asked, shaking off the sedative.

“They?”

She ran a hand through her hair and adjusted her shawl. “The three musketeers. Where are they?”

Bill looked back toward the kitchen and frowned, “Miss Byrns is still here. She didn’t wake up yet.”

Mary heaved herself to her feet in alarm and followed Bill into the Kitchen. “Shannon? Shannon. Wake-up, darling.”

“Mr. Holmes had me give her an extra half of a gram to ensure that she woke up last…but she should have been up by now,” he replied.

“What did you bring with you,” Mary asked bluntly. “Get your kit.”

Bill returned with a bag of vials and syringes. Mary blinked the names into focus and looked at a bottle of pills.

“Ritalin?”

“I have clients that buy it during finals,” he offered.

“Grind these up and put them into this adrenaline, now!”

Wiggins did as she said and argued, “That could kill her! Mr. Holmes said…”

“Sod what Sherlock said,” Mary barked. “She needs to wake up and get to the boys. They don’t know what they’re walking in to.”

Bill mixed the concoction together and put it into a syringe. “How much are you going to give her?”

She tapped the barrel and forced the air out. “Just a bit.”
Within moments, Shannon, shot up like a rocket and gasped as if she were Frankenstein’s monster. “Shit!” Shannon gasped.

“Jesus!” Mary cried out simultaneously.

Wiggins slid over to Shannon and restrained her in the chair. “You need to calm down. Your brain is going to be on fire and your heart is going to be racing.”

“Shannon, control your breathing,” Mary commanded. “Or you are going to be in some serious trouble.”

“John and Sherlock?” Byrns panted.

“Gone,” Wiggins replied.

“How long?”

“Hours,” he answered.

She placed her palms on her temples and stood up, “I need to go. I need to make sure they’re okay. Magnussen doesn’t know about me.” Bill wouldn’t budge. “Let me go!”

Mary pulled at Bill and snapped, “Let her go, Bill!”

He shook his head, “Sorry, Miss Byrns. Mr. Holmes’ orders: You need to stay here and look after Mary and his parents.”

“What?” Shannon was confused. “No, I need to go and help them.”

“No, Miss Byrns. You’re not.”
Margaret

The Twenty-seventh of December

Shannon stood in the Cabinet Office at 70 Whitehall and listened to Mycroft, Sir Edwin, and Lady Smallwood discuss what was to happen to Sherlock.

“Don’t be absurd. I am not given to outbursts of brotherly compassion,” the elder Holmes brother rolled his eyes. “You know what happened to the other one.”

Shannon made a note to dig into any files that she could find about his remark. Sir Edwin gave a look of discomfort.

“In any event, there is no prison in which we could incarcerate Sherlock without causing a riot on a daily basis. The alternative, however, would require your approval,” Mycroft looked to Lady Smallwood.

She replied, “Hardly merciful, Mr. Holmes.”

“Regrettably, Lady Smallwood, my brother is a murderer.”

Shannon took a step from her place against the window. “No. You can’t do that!” Mycroft shot her a silencing glare. She didn’t take heed. “Your brother did all of this because you wouldn’t help him. You could have avoided this entire debacle if you had listened.”

Lady Smallwood retorted coolly, “Miss Byrns, you are here as a courtesy. You have been instrumental in work with Sherlock Holmes and your data that resides in his file will remain ‘Classified’. You are not here as an acting party and if you have another outburst, I will have you removed.”

“Don’t bother, I’m leaving.” Shannon sniped. She walked over to Mycroft and invaded his personal space. “Don’t you dare ask me to do anything else for you or your God-damned country.” She spat on his shoes and stormed out of the office.

Byrns went home to Baker Street and ran up the stairs. She grabbed some of her things and headed back out to where Sherlock was being kept. It had been noted that Mycroft had put her best friend in solitary confinement. It’s a good thing that I still have clearances.

“I’m here to see the detainee in cell four-eight-nine,” she stated.

The guard looked at her, skeptical. “I’ve been informed no one is to see him. Not even you.”

She slipped him a hundred pound note and her eyes bored into his soul. “Do it. You still owe me for that side job I did for you in Barcelona.”

The guard grimaced and gave her a badge. “Don’t sign in. Just go. You’ve got half an hour.”

Sherlock was sitting pensive and silent in a chair while staring at a wall. The guard opened his cell and she stepped in. There were two chairs, a bunk, and facilities to relieve himself. It was immensely bare and she knew that the lack of stimuli was tearing away at him. She stood off to the side and waited for him to come back to reality.
Only Sherlock’s eyes moved in her direction. His folded hands did not move from their resting place at his chin. “I am sorry,” he rasped.

“Damn it, Sherlock, you’re in solitary,” she sighed before sinking onto his cot.

He was defeated and his eyes showed signs of tears. “I am. Sorry.”

She ran a hand through her hair and rested her chin on her opposite fist. She slunk onto the floor and sat at his feet. “Sherlock, please talk to me.”

“What will that do?” he asked as he moved his hands to the arm rests. “I am what they say that I am.”

She looked desperate, “Do you think so little of me that this would change how I think of you? After everything that I’ve been through, both with and without you…did it matter with me? “Sherlock, tell me what happened.”

“You read the file today at the Cabinet Office. I can smell Lady Smallwood’s perfume on your clothes.”

She looked to the floor. “No I didn’t. I got there late so that I wouldn’t hear it. I am here, now, because I want you to tell me what happened. That file is already tainted by bureaucratic nonsense.”

“It doesn’t matter,” he whispered.

“It does!” she smacked the floor. “Be Sherlock Holmes. Tell me what happened.”

He returned to stare off at the wall. Fed up with his behavior, Shannon got up and grabbed the spare chair and placed it in the middle of the floor.

“Sit,” she huffed.

He glanced over at her and looked at the new sitting room set up. “Why?”

She reiterated herself, curt. “Sit.” When he refused to move, she grabbed him by the arm and dragged him to the new chair.

“What are you, right now?”

“A murderer. The failed consulting detective. In solitary confinement…”

She sat in his chair and retorted, “No. Right now. The way this room is set up. What are you?”

Shannon Byrns…why…? I know what you’re endeavoring to do…but…

Brimming with patience, she quoted John. “With you sitting there, ‘That’s where they sit’. Right now, you’re a client. This is where you sit. This is when you talk. And I will listen. I will listen to your story.”

He leaned back in indignity and rested his arms on his knees. “Shannon, please.”

“Stop,” she commanded. “You are my best friend. There are people here that love and care about you. You killed a man. So have I.”

“I recall…”
“Hush. You made a calculated decision. It was the most logical and permanent way to protect the Watsons. I know that you are fighting yourself about this. I am not saying that what happened wasn’t wrong…but Sherlock, I know what you are going through right now.”

“Does it go away?” he asked as his defenses lessened.

She shook her head and wiped away a tear. “No. But it’s something that I live with. I do not let it define me. I do not let it rule my existence.” He nodded. “Now. Are you ready?”

He cleared his throat and leaned back in the chair. “Where would you like me to begin?”

“Start with what you and Mycroft discussed out in the garden and walk me through the end of the night. I am not here to judge you,” she added. “I am going to listen to the details and reduce them to logic.”

When he finished speaking, Shannon wiped stray tears from her cheeks and cleared her throat. Christ. Sherlock…

“There you have it,” he resounded calmly. “That is why my brother pulled you into the Office today.”

“You can’t go,” she asserted. “You cannot go to Eastern Europe, Sherlock; it would kill you!”

He shrugged, “That’s what Mycroft meant by it being ‘fatal’.”

“Sherlock! Stop it.”

His eyes were tired. “What would you have me do?”

“I don’t know at the moment; I’m not thinking rationally right now because my emotions are skyrocketing! But you can’t go!”

“You’ll find that my brother is going to get his way,” he admitted plainly.

“What am I going to do?”

“What?”

She stood up and paced the cell. “If you’re gone… what am I going to do... Sherlock…”

He looked over his shoulder at her, “You will continue to live. Baker Street would be yours should Mrs. Hudson allow you to renew your lease. You would become a guardian for the people that are different; those that the evil of the world tend to prey on. Or don’t. You have your freedom.”

“When?”

“It will no doubt be soon. Mycroft wants the east cleaned up rather quickly.”

“Sherlock,” she croaked.

“Do not argue. This is what I am to do. If I am as clever as you lead me to believe, I will return to Baker Street.”

She picked up her feet to sit cross-legged on the chair and put her head in her hands. “He’s never
wrong. Mycroft’s never wrong about these things,” she whispered solemnly.

His face was placid and calm. “I know that, too.”

*The Twenty-ninth of December*

The air was heavy in the cellblock. Shannon followed the veteran guard before her with no more than three feet between them.

“I don’t know what all you plan to get from her. She hasn’t been talking in complete sentences in weeks,” the guard quipped in agitation.

Shannon raised an eyebrow, annoyed. “Look, Captain Taylor, I appreciate the insight to the inmate’s antics as of late. But I have something that she’s been waiting for.”

“And what’s that?”

Shannon waited for the next door to be open. “Me.”

“Yeah, right,” he frowned. “You’ve got twenty minutes. Now, you’ll need to be searched before going in to speak with her.”

“I understand,” she replied.

The Captain continued, “Please hold out your arms and spread your legs.” Shannon did as instructed knowing that the pat down was to keep anything from getting to the prisoners. “You are going to need to leave your jumper with us. There’s metal on it that could be stripped off.”

“Of course.”

“When you enter, go directly to the table. If you get up, do not step off of the yellow tiles. Do not pass anything to the inmate without verifying with the guard stationed outside. Do not take anything from the inmate. The entire conversation will be recorded. Do you understand the rules for your meeting?”

“Yes, sir, I do.”

“Your time begins after I close the door. Do you have any questions?” he asked while holding the door handle into the meeting room.

“No. Thank you.”

He opened the door to a bright, white room that had a floor partially covered in mustard yellow tiles. Margaret Byrns was sitting at the table in the dead center of the room. A chain linked her ankles and wrists to the wall.

Her expression had been blank until Shannon sat in the opposite chair; immediately, Margaret lit up.

“Well, well, well…what brings you to my humble home?”

“Margaret. I need to speak with you.”
“Of course; that’s why you’re here. Unless, you have come to release me?”

Shannon shook her head with a sardonic chuckle, “Still thinking about yourself, I see.”

Margaret frowned and her eyes narrowed into slits, “Then what good are you?”

She folded her arms and leaned back in the metal chair. “I’m good enough to fight for those that genuinely need help. I am…” she paused and caught herself. “What I am doesn’t matter to this conversation. I have questions and I want to see if you have answers.”

“Do you? Sure of that, are you? Perhaps I don’t feel like being chatty today,” she quipped, snarky.

“Then you can go back to mumbling to yourself unintelligibly until that becomes a reality,” Shannon fired back. “Personally, I could make that happen for you rather quickly; but I think I’d rather you suffer a while first.”

“That detective. He killed all of your potential. You were full of so much promise when Matt died…you could have been untouchable,” she whispered.

“That detective is the best friend that I have in this world. I am aware of what I could have been. Did it ever occur to you that I had the potential to do as I pleased? As you say, I was already gifted as a child.” Shannon leaned forward on to the table, “Or did you not put that into your calculations?”

Her mother’s mouth twitched in agitation. “What is it that you want?”

“The man that took Matt and had Tony kill him…that was Brent, wasn’t it?” she asked emotionlessly.

Margaret nodded and yawned, “Yes. It was.”

“How long has O’Rourke been on the payroll?”

“Who? Is this one of your pets?”

Shannon shrugged, “He may be too small of a fish for you. He was the policeman from Boston…never mind.”

“Careful: you’re burning precious time with me. How’s The Handler?”

“Lisa?” Shannon’s voice showed mild surprise. “She’s living a new life with no recollection of who she was.”

“You remodeled her mind then? What did it feel like?”

“Remodeled? Like she’s a house? No. That’s not how it works.”

Margaret’s brow furrowed in confusion, “But that’s how it is supposed…”

“No,” Shannon asserted. “I hide memories and put them just out of reach. I make suggestions; the mind fills in the gaps.”

“No! That’s not what was supposed to happen!” her mother gasped.

“At least I can continue my streak of being a disappointment to you.” Shannon sighed, “I’m sure
that you know why I’m here.”

“I would assume that you didn’t find anything in Cornwall,” Margaret beamed, smug.

Shannon groaned, “I knew it. I fucking knew it.”

“Language,” her mother whined. “I can tell you what was on that piece of paper that you seek for a price.”

“Of course there’s a price,” she scowled.

“You would need to give up your friendship with the detective. That man is hindering your ability. He stifles it and forces you to curb your intellect. In fact, you would have to leave England in its entirety…never to speak to any of them again,” she recounted quickly as if reading a wikipage.

Shannon looked at her watch: *two minutes left.* “Etchya is in custody. You are going to be entombed here. The Syndicate will fall to ruin.”

“Or, you can grasp your throne…”

“Enough!” Shannon barked. The guard outside stirred, peered in, and nodded before returning to her post. “Regardless of the programming or protocols, or – or whatever it is you want to call it; *I*, as in me; myself, don’t want anything to do with it or you! I don’t look to find the weak and exploit them…I want to help them. You never accounted for how great of an impact Dad was to me. You were blind to that.”

“Perhaps,” she mused. “Perhaps not. What do you say of my offer?”

Shannon stood and backed away from the table, “I will not give them up. Not again.”

“You may have been pregnant,” Margaret baited.

“I may not have been. But it changes nothing.”

“And what of Sherlock Holmes? Wouldn’t it change him to find out that *he* was the father…if you were carrying his child?”

Shannon halted mid-step, looked to the ceiling, and bit her lip in resentment. “What of Sherlock Holmes…what of him… Well, Margaret, he does know that he may have been the father. We had been conducting an experiment and it is all possible that I could have been pregnant. “The point, Margaret, is that our time is up. From this discussion, I know that you will not have any other answers that I may need.”

“Are you sure?”

Shannon knocked on the door and waited for the guard to open the door, “Undoubtedly. You’ve given me far more information than you anticipated. You haven’t the facts or truth. You only have a fanciful dream that I will do as you ask. As you said, I am not your daughter; you are not my mother. This is the last time that you will ever see me. Enjoy solitary confinement for the rest of your days.”

“Shannon. Shannon!” Margaret yelled as the younger woman crossed the threshold and three guards entered in her stead.
“Come along, time to go back to your room,” the female guard coaxed roughly. “Your daughter is gone. Back to the hole for you.”

Margaret bellowed again, “SHANNON!”

Byrns collected her jumper and followed Captain Taylor back through the labyrinth of corridors toward the entrance. “Captain, two copies of today’s discussion will need to be sent to the following addresses,” Shannon voiced matter-of-factly. She handed him a small note with Mycroft’s home and 221C Baker Street.

“I’ll see to it,” he answered. “Daughter?” he asked in skepticism.

She shouldered her coat and wrapped her scarf around her neck. Byrns eyed him apologetically, “I didn’t get to choose who my biological family was in the womb.”

“Something you and Mr. Holmes have in common,” he quipped. “I’ll get these copies out by end of day. Good day, ma’am.”

New Year’s Eve

Shannon had been sitting in her room in a stunned hush. Sherlock was taken to the airfield to go east. She felt as if her mind was splitting in half and there was no medication that would relieve her. He had given her an envelope to open after he was gone. She held it between her fingers; numb. She thought back to hours earlier when Mycroft brought his brother to Baker Street to gather some of his things.

“Shannon Byrns,” he said, “It has been a privilege.”

She put her hands on her waist, upset. “Has it? It seems that you’ve had nothing but trouble since I came along.”

“Trouble? I wouldn’t say that.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“You continuously remind me, when you see that it is most pertinent, that John has made me a better detective. But, he has said the same.” She frowned while he continued. “Your efforts have not gone unnoticed.

“If it were not for both John Watson and Shannon Byrns, I doubt that I would be the detective that I am today. You have forced me to see the world that I perceive more acutely. For that, thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Take care of them, Shannon. For what it is worth, I am glad to have known you,” he finished before being escorted out of the flat.

Mrs. Hudson was vacuuming upstairs when there was a sudden shriek. Without hesitation Shannon shot from her room and ran up the stairs. “Mrs. Hudson!” she yelled.

When she cleared the landing and grabbed the elderly landlady by the shoulders. She was pointing
at the TV, calling out unintelligibly. Shannon saw what caused the woman to act so: Jim Moriarty was on the television repeating, “Did you miss me? Did you miss me?”

She tried changing the channel, but it was on every station. Shannon grabbed her ringing phone from her pocket and pressed it to her ear. “Greg?”

“Are you seeing this? He’s dead! Tell me that he’s dead.”

Her mind raced. “I saw him…on the roof!” Didn’t I?

“What are we going to do? I thought that you took over his operations and you were dissolving them!”

“I did!” she shouted. “Greg…I don’t know what this is. This – this isn’t in my memories.” She stared back at the TV while consoling Mrs. Hudson. “Get to Baker Street. I don’t know what this is.”

Shannon sat in her room on the phone with Lady Smallwood. She was doing her best to speak as frankly as possible.

“Have you seen it?”

“Yes.”

“Then you know why we are having this conversation.”

“Yes, I do.”

“I am at the Cabinet Office, be here in two hours. Do not speak to the younger Holmes; not a word. Do not be late.”

She hung up and threw her phone across her bedroom before fishing a case out from under her bed. God damn it.
“With Moriarty’s potential return, that means that the work you have done for the Syndicate is null,” Sir Edwin chastised. “It’s as if we have gone nowhere at all.”

Shannon stared out the window. “Ask Margaret…The Jarl. She was Jim Moriarty’s best buddy. Or if you don’t want to do it, I’ll beat it out of her. But I did just tell her the other day that she was never going to see me again…”

“That is unwise,” Lady Smallwood replied. “Your mother has proven to be fractured. She doesn’t speak hardly at all; and when she does, she is raving about your shortcomings.”

“Good ol’ mom,” cynicism oozing from her voice. “No one in the arsenal that I’ve handed you knows anything?”

“Nothing,” Smallwood said abrupt. “After his broadcast, the Syndicate went silent. We sent out your message stating that all was going according to plan. The Architect said that you would have his full support.”

Sir Edwin moved a file across the table toward Mycroft. “There is still the matter of work to be done in Eastern Europe.”

Mycroft peered down at the file and snubbed it. “Yes; this is true. But Magnussen’s death was caused by a trigger-happy man, not Sherlock Holmes.”

“That doesn’t change that the work still needs to be done and that Sherlock Holmes is the best candidate,” Sir Edwin retorted. “After all of this is done, he will need to go east. He needs to atone for this mess.”

“I’ll go,” Shannon stated quickly.

Lady Smallwood’s gaze shifted to Byrns who was still gazing out the window. “Do you understand the gravity of what you’re volunteering for?”

She nodded. “Yes. Six months, right, Mycroft?”

He grimaced. “It would be less if you go in his stead. He has history there. You do not.”

“I’ll worry about that. Your concern is noted.”

Sir Edwin leaned forward, “You turned in your retirement, as I recall; not that we had much choice in the matter.”

Shannon peered over her shoulder at the three sitting at the table. “I said I’ll go. You need Sherlock here. It only makes the most logical sense.”

“Falling on your sword again, Miss Byrns,” Mycroft spoke kindly.

She turned and folded her arms. “I told you that I would do anything to garner his safety. He’s my friend. I wish you could understand that.”
Lady Smallwood grabbed the file and made a note, “We would need you to leave…”

“No,” Shannon stopped her. “I’ll leave after Mary Watson delivers her daughter.”

“Now wait a minute,” Edwin blustered.

“That’s the condition. I’ll go without a fuss after. Until then, I follow my routine as normal. It will give me time to get things in order. I’ll need to progressively make myself sparse at Baker Street.” She moved toward the door, “I’m sure you’ll be in touch.”

Mycroft stood and fastened his jacket button. “Excuse her. Her sentiment, as you can see, has polluted my brother in similar fashion. She will, however, do as she says. I have found that when my brother is involved, Miss Byrns will self-sacrifice greater than some martyrs.”

Rosie’s Baptism

Shannon sat in the church pew behind Greg while the baptism was going on. It was beautiful, aside from Sherlock being his supercharged self. When Siri began talking from Sherlock’s phone, Shannon leaned over, ripped it from behind his back and silenced his phone. When he turned to protest, she pocketed it in her bra and pointed to the Watsons with a reproachful glare.

He flashed an apologetic smile and focused on the rest of the ceremony. Mary gave a nod in thanks before the vicar continued. With the ceremony’s conclusion, those in attendance smashed together for a photograph. Shannon had volunteered to take the pictures. Look at them all. God I’m going to miss them.

“Shannon, you’re as much a part of this group; come on,” Greg called out from the side.

“No, no,” she declined. “This is about you all; I’m here to take photographs.”


Lament weighed heavily on her heart as she did what she was asked. Sherlock made room for her to stand beside him. He counted in his head the countdown for the timer. Fourteen, thirteen, twelve…I could grab my phone. He stealthily fished his hand around her shoulder to try and grab it from its prison.

“Sherlock, put your hand down or I will double you over. That’s implying I’d tag you in the balls,” she threatened through her smile.

“Right,” he scowled.

“Don’t frown,” she added. “It’s for the Watsons.”

His phone buzzed in an unremitting fashion against her skin. He was clearly tweeting the entire world. What would I have done with my life without Sherlock Holmes?

Shannon sighed and looked toward the camera. Sherlock noted the weight and tone of her sigh. What’s wrong with her?

The photographs were taken and there was a small gettogether at the back of the church. Mary let Shannon hold Rosie as she went to take care of some things with the vicar. Greg walked up to
Shannon and asked, “So, do they know yet?”

Shannon whispered, “No. I’m just going to leave. It’ll be easier that way.”

“Easier for who…you? I think you should tell them,” he begged.

Shannon bounced Rosie gently in her arms. “I can’t. I have to go. You promised me that you’d take care of things if…”

“Yeah…yeah…I know. It’s just…Shannon, don’t go.”

Mary returned and took her daughter from Shannon. “She’s sound asleep, Mary.”

“Thank goodness,” she smiled. “Shannon always manages to put her to sleep. Watch it…I may hire you full time.”

The Watsons stood talking to their guests while Shannon and Greg looked on. “I have my last concert tomorrow. I’m leaving after that.”

“You should tell them,” he offered one last time.

“I should. But I can’t.”

The Next Day

The day after the christening, Mary was going to be going out with one of their neighbors, Anna. She was a bright, bubbly woman that made people smile around her. It’s nice that John offered to stay with Rosie.

“Alright, my darling. What do you have planned for me tonight?” Mary asked with a smile.

Anna hugged her tightly and they walked toward the station. “Well, I was thinking manicures, some tea…and then there’s a really wonderful group I want you to hear. What do you think?”

“Sounds lovely. Lead the way!”

The women had their manicures done and made their way towards the center of London for tea. They sat talking and catching up for a while. Suddenly, Anna jumped up and pulled at Mary. “Come on! We’re going to be late. I completely lost track of the time!”

Mary and Anna walked briskly to the church. It was near the Tower and was named the oldest church in the City of London. As they entered, you could hear a selection of music receive applause. They snuck in as inconspicuously as possible. The concert was nearly over, but Mary humored her friend and stayed. She did have an hour before she needed to be home. Anna smiled and squeezed Mary’s hand, “This song – you’ll love it; it’s the last one. I heard them practicing the other day and this soloist…God. She’ll make you cry!”

Mary watched as the solo singer walked to the microphone. She was sporting a cute black bob and donned a similar uniform to those around her. Her eyes immediately snapped to the singer’s face to find brown eyes, a square face, and familiar faded scars: It was Shannon.

The orator spoke of some traditional Scottish song that made its way to the Appalachian Mountains of North America during the time of the colonies and how it had been covered numerous times over time. She vaguely heard that recently, it was covered by Nina Simone and that more people
were going to folk songs due to their harmonious nature—but that’s where she stopped listening to the speech. This woman was most definitely Shannon; without doubt. She couldn’t believe her eyes. *Is this where she’s been going all this time to hide?*

Mary had been deep in her thoughts by the time the orator had finished giving the introduction. The group stood still as Shannon began to sing the opening solo with raw energy and a smooth, chocolate tone that sent chills down Mary’s spine.

“**Black is the color of my true love’s hair**  
*his face so soft and wondrous fair,*  
*the purest eyes and the strongest hands;*  
*I love the ground whereon he stands—*  
*I love the ground whereon he stands.*  
**Black is the color of my true love’s hair,**  
of my true love’s hair.”

The choir behind her entered with sounds both pure and ethereal. It was quiet, as if the whole group was whispering to each audience member’s soul. In pairs, each member of the choir joined, staggering their entrances until the chords boomed in the ceiling of the cathedral and it resounded as if it were a cry out to God.

Shannon’s features were calm and her eyes told of being elsewhere. Mary was under the same spell as everyone else sitting in the pews. *Where did this come from? I’ve never heard her sing before...have I?* Her friend’s features hardened and what could only be grief washed over Shannon’s face as she inhaled for her next entrance.

“**Oh, I love my love**  
*and well he knows.*  
*I love the ground on where he goes*  
*and still I hope that the time will come—*  
*still I hope that the time will come*  
*when he and I will be as one—*  
*when he and I will be...as one.*  
**So, black is the color of my true love’s hair.”**

Mary felt morose and she wanted to feel that way. The emotion from Shannon’s voice was mesmerizing and intoxicating. It was forcing every single person to look inward to their own pain. *Good lord, she is good.* Mrs. Watson shot a quick glance to the other patrons to see tears freefalling down faces in homage to the sounds enchanting the stone walls.

Shannon stepped backwards into the choir and lead the group into a reprise of the first verse, embellishing her part atop the voices behind her.

“**Black is the color of my true love’s hair.**  
*His face so soft and wondrous fair,*  
*the purest eyes and the strongest hands.*  
*I love the ground whereon he stands.*  
*I love the ground whereon he stands.*  
**Black...is the color...of my true love’s...hair.”**

Mary Watson witnessed, with sudden empathy, as Shannon sang the last lines of the song that she was stricken with an awareness of the song’s lyrics. Shannon’s face reflected confusion, admission, and anguish. *My God. She never realized that she loved Sherlock...she never saw it. Oh no, the poor girl.*
The final, solemn chord rang out in a deafening whisper that shook souls awake. It wasn’t until the notes had dissipated in the church that the crowd roared to life; applauding and wiping back hot tears. Mary dabbed her sleeve at her eyes to catch the stray signs of crying and tugged on Anna’s jacket, saying, “I need to go. I’m sorry to dash. John and the baby…you know…”

“Yeah, definitely,” Anna agreed. “See you tomorrow, yeah?”

Mrs. Watson bolted out the door and banked around the side of the cathedral to wait for Shannon to exit. The crowd left in waves to give way to performers straggling out after. Mary saw the soloist stand idly on the sidewalk as she typed into her phone.

“Do you have time to talk?” Mary asked intently.

Shannon stiffened, turned, and saw her friend leaning casually on the fence. “Of course,” she offered coolly.

“Don’t do that,” Mary petitioned. “Please. I didn’t…it’s not what you think.”

Shannon looked at her watch and nodded. “Fine. There’s a Starbucks down the way that’s open late. It’s a five-minute walk. Come along,” she encouraged as she pulled her black wig from atop her head. Shannon pulled out the pins and ran her hand through her hair as they strolled.

Mary walked up to stand by Shannon’s side and the pair made their way in the cool air towards the coffee shop in silence. When they entered the shop, Mary paid for the both drinks and noted that there was nowhere to sit.

“If you don’t mind,” Shannon began, “I could use a walk. We could take the drinks and walk towards St. Paul’s station.”

Mary nodded in agreement, considering that each of them could take the underground toward home relatively easily. “Sure.”

They had walked for nearly ten minutes before Shannon broke the silence. “What brought you to the church?”

“A neighbor had heard a choir practicing earlier this week and decided that we needed to see it. But we were late. So… Anna and I only saw the last bit. I swear to you that I had no idea that you would be there,” Mary replied after drinking some of her tea.

Shannon replied, “Ah, yes. That makes sense then.” At least she’s telling me the truth.

“How long have you been doing this?”

“Doing what?” Shannon asked.

“Going out to do this…how long?”

“Oh. Well…since November? Maybe? I had seen a flyer and called to inquire about the group. I told them that I was an exchange student. That way, if I left suddenly, it’d make sense to them, you know?”

Mary gave an approving glance, “I do. But you’re not leaving anytime soon; right? Tell me you’re not.”

She shrugged. “I am going to be leaving soon, though, Mary. Someone has to go east for MI-6.”
“What?!” she exclaimed as they made a left onto Cannon Street. “Why?”

Shannon gave a cynical laugh, “Her Majesty’s Government needs someone to pay the penance owed for Magnussen’s death. Considering that England needs Sherlock Holmes right now… no one is lamenting sending me in his stead. Somebody has to go get the job done.”

Mary stopped abruptly and scrutinized Shannon from head to toe. *My God, she’s not lying. She is leaving. “Did you tell Sherlock or John?” They are going to be furious! Hell, I’m angry at her!*

“No. And I haven’t erased their memories either… it’d be nice to be remembered if I don’t come back…you know – those sentimental reasons and such. There is a great chance of my person not returning…at least from what I’ve inferred from Mycroft and Sherlock,” she said plainly.

Mary shook her head angrily, “You can’t go! Sherlock, John, and I …we need you!” *How can she possibly be alright with all of this?!!*

“No, Mary,” she lamented, “you don’t. You want me here because I am safe and comfortable. That’s all. None of you need me, truly.” Shannon gave a weak reassuring smile and turned to continue down the street.

“Did it honestly take you this long?” Mary called from her place on the sidewalk.

Byrns stopped, revolved around, and tilted her head in puzzlement. “Did what, Mary?”

Mary walked forward and caught up to her friend’s stationary spot. She sighed and looked into Shannon’s eyes, asking, “Did it really take you this long to realize that you love Sherlock Holmes?”

Shannon’s voice implied surprise. “Oh?”

“I saw it,” Mary replied, “plain as day on your face as you sang. You had no idea until tonight… that you are in love him… did you? Even when I’ve seen it expressed hundreds of times in your own way since the day I met you.”

Shannon blinked and her voice was emotionless, “No, I am not in love with Holmes. Never in all the years that we both inhabit this planet. Not the way that you imply.”

“So, you’re not even going to do anything with it?” Mary uttered, bewildered.

“You know Sherlock Holmes,” Byrns replied. “Almost as well as I do. I will raze nations to help him if he would ask me to do it… I will always answer his call. I will always have his back. But this conversation goes no further. What is happening to my mind and my emotions must be left to decay. Nothing is to happen by it. “I am not in love with him.”

Mary stomped her foot in defiance, “Damn it, Shannon. You are! You can’t do this. You cannot leave like this. I don’t care how you do it… but he deserves to know! You may not be in love with him; but you do love him!”

“Know what?” Shannon bit her words. “That I, to my misfortune, love a man that is both my mirror and foil… that I would topple governments for him, or that I’m leaving? What I may feel for Sherlock…it’s not the same thing that you feel for John. It’s…different. This conversation is over. And don’t you breathe a word of it to him, either.”

“You’re joking…”
“I am not,” she responded with ice in her voice. “It is a distraction that he doesn’t need nor want right now. He is looking for the big bad that’s lurking in the shadows. So, we carry on, admirably, as our roles indicate that we should. Nothing has changed. I leave tonight to go east and do MI6’s bidding. This conversation dies here; and, if I am to die while I am doing this mission, it is not to brought up again in my death.”

“And why not?” Mary chided. “It could work in its own way, you know that.”

Shannon turned away and said over her shoulder with notes of sorrow, “Because this…whatever it is that you think we have, would kill us.”

Mary stood, transfixed to the pavement while Shannon walked away silently into the night.

Chapter End Notes

If it isn't overly noticeable, I have a knack for music. Most of each of these stories have been written to specific music, much like Shannon's playlists for synaesthesia.

The following cover was what inspired this and the next chapter. You know, sonorities make us feel things sometimes.

Enjoy.

https://youtu.be/3dXKxmLUl54
Black is the Color of my True Love's Hair
Kaplan & Hollens
Shannon had walked on in silence as she packed her emotions away into the recesses of her mind. The cool, London air nipped at her face to give her a moment of sobering reality. *I may not come home this time…ah…yes. Home.* And in sudden realization, London seemed a jewel in sparkling radiance. *Home.*

*I’ve not realized that this has become my home. It’s a shame. I would have done so much… But I am not afforded such luxuries in this life, am I? No, I suppose not. I got comfortable…wanting something that I am not supposed to have: freedom. I’ve not had that in years.*

She boarded the underground train and waited for her stop at Baker Street. Solace was found in having anonymity among the people of London. Their steps, so brisk and determined to get to wherever they needed to be, it was endearing. *If I never make it to Baker Street…does that mean that I don’t have to leave?*

Everyone had cleared from the station and she continued her solitary journey to the flat. She had turned the corner from Marylebone Road onto Baker Street to find Sherlock Holmes sprinting down the sidewalk. He had stopped at the sight of her and analyzed that she wouldn’t try avoiding him. Holmes strode with rapid steps to close the distance between them. Shannon walked somberly toward home knowing that inevitably, she would meet up with him.

*Imbecile! How can she possibly go east after everything that’s happened so far? This is absurd!* Hues of infuriation reflected off his face and his aggravation was apparent in his voice, “Are you mad?! Truly?! You have done some idiotic things in your time, but this? Simply moronic!”

Sherlock Holmes had stopped directly in front of her, purposely blocking her path. “Mary phoned then?” Shannon asked casually. “So much for her keeping her mouth shut. No Christmas card for her this year.”

“Of course she phoned!” he snapped. “She damn well knew that this would warrant a discussion. You were only planning to leave without any indication. You do realize that I observed your decreased time at home, yes? Thinking otherwise would insult my intellect.”

She shrugged, “It isn’t up for discussion, Holmes. Now, if you'll excuse me.” She brushed passed him and continued for home.

He snagged her arm and pulled her back. “It certainly is! I know that you’re aware of awaits you should you go to Serbia; I told you.”

“More than likely, death,” her voice was placid. “If I am lucky and my abilities are better than I believe them to be, then I will be returning. However, if you consider the gravity of the mission and the probability – there will be a twenty-seven percent chance of returning.”

“Oh no, don’t you dare,” he growled. “Do not use my words and try to comfort me with them; it will do no such thing. With all that you have heard me say about that mission and what it could entail…why would you risk it?”

She asked, “Piss off, Sherlock.”

“Piss off? That’s a tad childish, even for you. You wouldn’t tell me because, here we are, having another argument. Though, I suppose the street is better than the flat; Mrs. Hudson isn’t going to be coming ‘round to bother”
“Let go of me, Sherlock Holmes,” she spat with venom. “You will not like the outcome otherwise.”

He released her arm in alarm and shook his head in disbelief. “Tell me!”

Shannon’s voice rang out abruptly, “No.” She shoved her shoulder through him and made way back to the flat. Sherlock stood, bewildered, for a moment before storming after her.

He jogged to ahead to block her from entering the flat, declaring, “You are not coming into Baker Street until you tell me what the hell is going on in that convoluted mind.”

“No,” she reiterated.

He glared, “Now.” Shannon went to grab at the door knob only to have Sherlock smack her hand away, “Now, Shannon.”

“I am not having this discussion on the street, Holmes.”

He crossed his arms in defiance, “It is, and always has been, Sherlock. You can tell me why you’ve begun to disassociate yourself from me unless you want me to start deducing you on the spot.”

“Work it out; I know that you can,” she goaded. “Or…are you not smart enough to do so now that you’re trying to solve that Thatcher case? You’re getting sluggish, Holmes.”

“Stop it,” he spat. “Just stop it, right now. That’s it. I’m texting John. You tend to listen to him more than me when you are being irrational.”

“Is that supposed to make me quiver?” she sneered icily. “I didn’t realize John wore the pants in this relationship.”

Sherlock’s agitation swiftly turned to anger. Shannon watched as his emotions seeped from the cracks around his proverbially caged heart. *You’ll need to break him. To the point that he may never trust you again: are you ready to do this…again?*

“Shannon Byrns,” he seethed as he fired a text off to John. “You will not bait me like this and expect to have any kind of expected civility in our conversation.”

“Good,” she grinned darkly. “What good has ever come from civility?”

*Oh, this is her way of being kind. Tsk tsk.* “Shannon, come inside so that we can talk about this,” he groaned trying to bring his emotions under rein. He opened the door and motioned inward.

She shrugged, “I don’t need to go into the flat. I only want to go in for the sake of sentimentality. It is not necessary.”

“Mrs. Hudson!” the detective called in loudly. “Mrs. Hudson, Shannon needs you.”

Shannon glared daggers at him before the kind landlady peeked her head out of the doorway. “Shannon, dear, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing, Mrs. Hudson. He is trying to start an argument; that’s all.”

“Mrs. Hudson, did you know that Shannon is planning on leaving the country tomorrow morning?” Aghast, Mrs. Hudson stepped onto the stoop and folded her arms, “Is that true? Shannon? It’s not
true, is it?"

*Sherlock, why are you doing this to me?* “Yes, Mrs. Hudson,” she offered in typical honesty. “Someone has to. Mycroft was going to send Sherlock on this mission; but, we find that the world needs Sherlock Holmes right now because there is another *villain* afoot. Therefore, I am going in his stead.”

“Shannon,” she pleaded, “you can’t possibly go! Not now! Sherlock is going to need you!”

Sherlock’s eyes, which had been critically analyzing her body language, snapped to hers in an attempt to read them. She had put up all forms of emotional and psychological resistance as a matter of diversion.

“He will be fine; just as he was after the Fall. England needs Sherlock Holmes, not Shannon Byrns.”

Sherlock barked, “Did she also tell you that it’s a one-way ticket because of the amount of danger she will be placing herself in?” He had taken three steps toward her in a preemptive attempt to grab her should she bolt.

Mrs. Hudson’s audible gasp could be heard from behind Sherlock, who was blocking Shannon’s view. She crossed her arms, took a long, deliberate inhale through her nose and added, “Did he tell you that he was supposed to take the same trip as penance for Magnussen, or did the great detective *selectively* leave that information unsaid?”

The landlady’s eyes bounced back and forth between her two tenants as the energy coming from them became palpable. “Both of you, stop this!” she cried. “Shannon! Sherlock! Stop it, this instant!”

“You think you can change my mind?” she taunted.

His face tilted down to her as his hands were put into the air in a sign of trust. “You can’t run from this, Shannon. You know that.”

*If I can get closer…*

*If only you knew, Sherlock.* A small smile and chuckle escaped from her lips while she looked to the pavement. Before she spoke, she raised her head to make eye contact, knowing full well that Sherlock was going to reach for and try to subdue her. “I guess we’ll see which of us is faster.”

Sherlock heard a cab come to a halt a little way up the street and then heard John shout, “Shannon, don’t!”

In that moment of distraction, Sherlock lunged forward to grab Shannon’s arm. He knew that she was waiting for him; but had not anticipated her pulling him toward her and placing a well-executed uppercut into his stomach. John ran toward a winded Sherlock as Shannon sprinted down the road.

“Sherlock!” John gasped and Shannon rounded onto Park. Holmes stood up, shook off the stun, and bolted down the street. John followed, calling behind him, “Mrs. Hudson, call Mary!”

By the time the Baker Street Boys had made it to Park, Shannon was gone. Sherlock took off and continued, making a turn toward Ivor. John surveyed the empty streets and waited for Sherlock to reappear. “She’s gone. It looked as if she was going toward Hyde Park.”

“Go,” John agreed. “I’ll stay back, just in case she returns. You have your mobile?”
“In my coat pocket,” he huffed before darting down Melcombe Street towards Hyde Park.

John walked back to the flat as an idea crossed his mind. He made his way toward Regent’s Park. He sprinted across the walking bridge into the park and followed the trail up to the Open Air Theatre. Once there, he found that the door had been jarred open. Cautiously, he snuck in through the gap, peering around the dark theatre.

Ahead, he saw Shannon sitting quietly staring up into the sky. “How did you know,” she asked defeated.

“Because,” John began, “you’re my friend.”

She smirked, “I should have tried harder.”

“I’m glad that you didn’t,” he replied. “Shannon… why? Will you tell me why?”

Shannon turned and watched as John moseyed his way to sit next to her. “Did she not tell you?”

“No, she didn’t. And I don’t want her to; I want you to tell me,” he confided, sitting down beside her.

“Hmpf,” she snorted. “It’s not really that simple.”

John squinted in agitation, “Are you saying that I’m not clever enough, because – because that’s not going to stop me from putting you in your place!”

She gazed at him, confusion on her face, “No. It’s not. Not at all.”

“So what then? Are you trying to kill him? Trying to make him go insane?”

“No, it’s nothing like that.”

John snapped, “Then what the bloody hell is it?!”

She looked back up to the sky and sighed in defeat. “A thought came to mind this evening; one that will have severe consequences to me.”

“You mean, on top of you going on Mycroft’s suicide mission,” he glowered.

Shannon nodded, “Yes.”

Watson clasped his hands together and leaned forward on his knees. “Can I tell you a secret, Shannon, before you tell me?”

“Sure,” she allowed.

“When you first got here, Sherlock and I had a small bet concerning you. See, we rated your case and your complexity before he met you and once I had talked to you in the car. Sherlock, in his typical way, gathered that you would be a six. But after talking to you in the car, I texted him and said that you were easily a nine,” he began.

“I’m flattered,” she interjected.

“Shut up,” he commanded sternly. “I’m not done.”

She gave a repentant smile and sat back, folding her hands into her lap.
“You and Sherlock danced around each other fluidly; to the point that I should have seen it…even as unobservant as I am,” he chuckled. “But I didn’t and that’s fine. Things may be different now had I noticed…but that’s the past.

“You never strung him along. Not once. And after your ‘experiment’, you both acted as if nothing had changed. I couldn’t understand…and I don’t. But it works. Even with the slightest chance of pregnancy…it still works. Then there was all that time you were preparing us for your departure and doing everything in your power to save his life…and mine.”

John pivoted in his chair to face her and grabbed her hand, giving it a gentle squeeze. Shannon looked down at their joined hands, unaware that a tear had begun to fall down her cheek.

“Then you came back for us, and everything that’s happened – you always had his back. You, Shannon Byrns, had his back. Even when you had no reason to believe that sod would get his memories back, you were there. You were there during the times that he was too much of a dick for me to talk to. You didn’t give up then.

“And you know what else I watched? I watched him fight hard to return the favor to you, continuously. He followed you to Etchya’s meeting and he brought you home, beaten; and, we patched you up.

“Mycroft was thrown out of the flat for instigating you. Christ, you got him ready for my wedding and then went to close down a Syndicate cell. And who, do you reckon, was the person he called that night?”

More tears fell down off of her jaw while she refused to look at Dr. Watson. He continued, “Granted, he sent you off to Scotland; and I can assure you that he beats himself up about it on a regular basis.

“Shannon, you didn’t see him once he knew you were in the hospital. If vengeful murder wasn’t in his M.O., it seemed as if it soon would be.

“You came home and I thought that, for sure, I was going to be sending him back to the hospital because you were going to kill him. Then you dropped the bombshell about Morocco and your hysterectomy…

“What I’m saying is – is that…it’s okay. I’m saying that even if you didn’t realize it until now, or that he doesn’t realize it either… a blind man would see that you care for him…maybe even love him. And that’s okay. Because in a bizarre way, it fits. And you’re not the only one smitten by Holmes. ‘Black is the color of my true love’s hair’.”

She looked up at John, eyes red; tears freefalling leaving hot streaks in their wake. “What? How?”

John shrugged, “I followed you to practice one night and hid near the door. You were being secretive and I was worried. For the record, your voice is lovely.”

“John Watson, what did I do to deserve a friend like you?” she asked, crying.

He grabbed her shoulders and pulled her into a reassuring embrace, “I don’t know yet. I was about to ask you the same. Now, will you tell me what the hell is going on?”

Shannon sobbed into his shoulder and answered, “I’m going east for Mycroft…they were planning on sending him after he finishes this big case. I will probably not come back…and I realized tonight that after everything I have done – that I may love Sherlock Holmes for no other purpose other than I do because of his stupid face and his stupid…stupidness.”

“Shannon,” he soothed. “He does have a stupid face,” he chuckled. “But, Christ…but why are you going…?”

She pulled back and wiped her face, “Because I love Mary…I love you, I love Molly, Greg…and I
apparently love him... Because if I don’t go; they will send him or lock him away after he solves this case. I would sacrifice everything if it meant that I am can protect all of you... That’s just who I am. The world needs Sherlock Holmes. It doesn’t need me.”

Awareness flooded every fiber of his being and he felt alert. He grimaced, “You can’t honestly think that.”

“I know it,” she replied. “He and I are supposed to be fighting opposite in the cosmic battle of good and evil. The scale is tipped heavily in his favor. Because of this, I must go. If I don’t... John... he will be locked away where we won’t be able to find him for decades.”

John sat powerless while her reason tolled like a bell in his mind. He wrapped an arm around her and she rested her head on his shoulder. “You must suffer me to go my own dark way,” Shannon quoted.

John gave another reassuring squeeze, “Don’t you believe, ever...not even for one second, that you are either Jekyll or Hyde.”

“No,” she agreed. “I am both.”

They sat in the quiet night for a time before John asked, “When do you leave?”

“In a few hours.”

“Then, I’ll sit here with you until then,” he replied, hitting ignore on his mobile in regards to Sherlock’s call.

She crossed her arms and tucked her leg underneath her, “You’re not selling me out?”

“No,” he ran a hand over her hair, “No. Tonight, you and I are going to sit here. Sobering in the dark.”

Mary, holding Rosie on her hip, paced in the flat of 221 Baker Street as Mrs. Hudson sat fidgeting on the couch. The front door below slammed and Sherlock Holmes braced his hands on the wall after snappily removing his gloves. Sherlock trod up the steps to the flat and to find the two women with eager eyes on him. He frowned, blinked, then shook his head.

He walked to his room to fetch a robe in solemnity. Upon his return, he asked, “John?”

“Not back yet,” Mary replied. “Do you think he found her?”

Sherlock went to the window, clasped his hands behind him and peered onto the street below. “Yes.”

“Then he’ll bring her home!” Mrs. Hudson exclaimed.

Holmes’ lips frowned again. “I do not believe so, Mrs. Hudson.”

Mary looked to the landlady and agreed, “Shannon doesn’t want to be found right now. If John’s with her, it’s because she’s letting him stay with her.”

“I don’t understand,” Mrs. Hudson protested. “Why wouldn’t she want to be here? And before she’s leaving, no less?”
Sherlock’s hands separated and the left instinctively reached for his violin. Mary hushed Rosie before whispering, “It’s complicated.” She made a directing nod toward Sherlock. Mrs. Hudson nodded in recognition and kept silent.

John entered the flat, quietly and took his daughter from Mary. Her eyes wide, she asked, “Shannon?”

John shook his head while saying, “Gone. She left to go complete her assignment.”

Sherlock’s fingers had plucked the strings before his hand fell to rest back at his side. Mrs. Hudson gave out a small snifflle. Mary took the baby from John and whispered, “Talk to him. I’ll be in the car.”

Mrs. Hudson got up and saw Mary out. John stood in the middle of the room, hands tensing in anticipation. “When?” Holmes queried, emotionless.

“An hour ago.”

“And it took you an hour to let me know that she was leaving?”

John glared up at him, “No. It took me an hour to digest what she said. I felt like I was breaking, Sherlock. I couldn’t move.”

Sherlock gradually turned to face his best friend, “John. I need you to tell me what she said. There is time to prevent her from making an inglorious mistake.”

“She’s doing this,” John’s voice cracked, “for you. Again.”

“What are you talking about?”


He took a moment to process and went to speak, but John interrupted, “You, Sherlock Holmes, are blind. Blind in ways that I can’t fathom, as you’re the most observant man I’ve ever met. Tell me, right now, why she would risk her life…for…you,” he snapped.

John’s frustration broke the dam in his mind. “Magnussen.”

“Well, glad you came to that. Bit too late, I might add,” John reprimanded. “As she said, ‘Someone has to pay the pound of silver’.” Watson shook his head in disgust and disappointment. “Why she chose us, I will never understand. We’re not worthy of her. Not with the way you treat her. Or your brother, for that matter. You better pray,” John whispered hoarsely, digging a finger into Sherlock’s chest, “that she comes home. Because if she doesn’t, I don’t know if I’ll be able to forgive you for it.”

John about-faced and stormed down the steps to leave his best friend in a whirlwind of questioning and disillusionment. He withdrew his buzzing phone and pressed it to his ear.

“You are making a mistake,” he stated, with his voice barely above a whisper.

“You’ve made it abundantly clear, Sherlock. It doesn’t change what I am doing.”

“I can meet you there.”

“You will do no such thing. You need to stay in London and deal with the case.”
“Why are you refusing help? Why are you running away like this? Tell me.”

“Sherlock, it’s better this way.”

He rolled his eyes and spun about. “Shannon, be logical. This is a suicide mission; even for you. Mycroft told me that I would have six months. You would have less time than that.”

“About three to three and a half, I would guess. Your brother said something similar. But that didn’t stop you from getting on the plane.”

“That’s different,” he argued. “I was being sent into exile.”

She scoffed, “With the chance of that being permanent. Arguing this aspect of your point is moot.”

“Agreed. You are not willing to see reason.”

“Not willing to see reason, are you serious? Sherlock Holmes, you know what? I’m not arguing with you. I am going. I’m on the plane and I’m about to take off. I don’t want to argue with you if this is going to be the last time I talk to my best friend.”

“Then do not argue with me, Shannon Byrns. Your life doesn’t equate in value to Magnussen’s. You can’t believe that to be true. Just because I…no. You wouldn’t…”

She heaved a heavy sigh, “Rethink that observation.”

“You’re an idiot.”

“That may be,” she replied with a weighted voice. “But I’m an idiot that happens to be your friend.”

He slammed his hand off of the table, “You are not thinking this through!”

“Hey. Don’t break the table!”

“Sorry,” he uttered with sincerity and a frown.

“Can I tell you something…before I go?” she asked kindly.

His frown remained in place. “Of course.”

“If you remember from when I first came to London, I was trying to piece my life back together after Matt’s death,” she began. “At the time I wasn’t concerned so much for my freedom as I was to understand what happened to him.”

“Yes, I recall. You were much moodier then,” he baited while eliciting a laugh from her.

“Well, we know that my mother and brother are psychopaths and that my father’s dead. So it’s not like I’m doing them any favors any time soon. Do you remember…what I said when you and John asked why I was pushing so hard?”

He nodded and replied, “Yes. You said that you would do anything for your family.”

“That’s it.” She persisted, “I was blind to what I was seeing, Sherlock. I saw but wasn’t observing.”

He leaned backward against the window pane. “That’s uncharacteristic of you.”
Her voice was pinched and indicating to him that she was pained. “We are not, by definition, perfect. We fight. We have our own way of protecting each other. But that’s what family does.”

“That’s a certainty. Though, one could argue that your brother was the lesser of the two evils considering that he tried to implant cordial memories for you,” he offered.

“I’m not talking about them. I’m talking about us: John, Mary, Rosie, Molly; Mrs. Hudson…I would do anything for my family.”

He lowered his eyes to the floor, “I see.”

“Yes, you do. But you don’t get it. Not yet.”

“You’re implying that I am part of your family?”

“I’m endeavoring for you to understand, yes. Of course you are. Just as much as they are. This is me, being me…I’m protecting my family. And if I never get to tell you… or – or you never had the chance to know it, now you do. You are my family; and you always will be. Goodbye, Sherlock.”

“Shannon. Stop!” he barked into the phone as the line went silent. The phone dropped from his hand onto the floor with a dull thud.

Shannon stared at the back of the seat while fury ebbed at her. She screamed and began punching the seat in front of her, the strap securing her to her seat not budging. One of Mycroft’s men looked down his nose at her and seethed, “Are you finished?”

Back at Baker Street, Sherlock threw a chair at the opposite wall and yelled. He began to throw about everything in reach that wasn’t bolted to the floor. Mrs. Hudson hurried back up the stairs and watched as her tenant tore the common room apart. The landlady gazed on with helplessness as his emotions boiled over. Once he had finished and sunk to the floor, she took cautious steps into the common room and bent down beside him. Her voice was soothing and sympathetic as she draped an arm around his shoulders, “Oh, Sherlock.”
Reprisal

Serbia: Some Time Later

Wait for it. Prepare. Exhale. It’s coming. THWACK! Air evaporated from her lungs. A stunning blow rendered her lungs temporarily useless as she felt her throat close off. She clawed desperately at nothing to get air into her body.

The old machine factory was a relic from the cold war: massive machinery cast devious shadows onto the corrugated steel walls. The only light inside the warehouse was coming from a series of large candles strewn all over the premises. The victim was tied up to a large, rusted pipe with her bare back facing the cold air.

“Now,” a nasally woman gloated in a heavy accent. “Are you ready to submit? Are you ready to tell the truth?”

The captive gulped air back into her lungs and panted. Regulate that pain. Channel it; don’t allow it to take over your mind. You must stay focused.

Blood ebbed from her mouth and she spit it off to the side on the concrete floor. Her eyes floated upward into a malicious sneer. She nipped in Serbian, “Is that it? That’s all? What a shame. I was just beginning to enjoy myself, Irina. If you think that after all of the other trials that I’ve been through to prove my loyalty…what makes you think that you can make it disappear?”

“Come now, Anastasija,” Irina’s nasal voice grated. “You and I both know that you stole money from the club. Just like we both know that you have been doing your best to get to Stefan’s bed since you showed up. Stop your charade.”

Anastasija shrugged. “He and I have a genuine connection.”

Another slap from the wide, studded-leather belt slammed into her back. Her muscles constricted around her torso and air vanished from her lungs again. “Keep it up, Ana.”

A high-pitched giggle came from Anastasija. “Well, where is he? Have I passed this test? Have I shown that I’m loyal after seven hours of this?”

“Yes,” a deep voice came from one of the shadowed corners. “You have not wavered, not once, Ana.” A steely pair of blue eyes leaned forward out of the darkness. “You are truly one of my best girls.”

Anastasija sighed. “Thank you,” she breathed as she relaxed against the pipe.

Stefan was a squarely built man. He looked more like a solid wall than a person. His dark brown hair was kept neatly parted to the side and his beard did well to hide most of his emotions in the darkness of the abandoned factory. “Potrebna si mi. You know that. I need you. Untie her. Now.”

Anastasija was immediately freed and then collapsed onto the floor in a heap. Her muscles protested when she attempted to stand. She used her arms to help her scale the pipe upwards to a standing position. Still with nothing on her torso, she turned around and took unsteady steps toward Stefan. He accepted her with open arms and covered her with his large suit jacket.

As he had draped the jacket across her back, he noted that she was bleeding. “I told you,” Stefan’s
voice boomed, “that she was not to bleed. Did you not listen?”

“Mili, I will heal. Please. I only want to leave. You know that I am loyal, don’t you?” Anastasija pleaded.

He gently pushed her behind him and turned to face her, “Of course, voljena. You are loyal to me. More loyal than my men here before me.”

Irina squared her stance and stated, “I did as you asked, Stefan. I had them test her. She lasted seven hours…longer than any other person that you’ve put to the test.”

Stefan nodded and peered around the room at his five other men. “Come,” he coaxed. “Come to me.”

Anastasija took a few steps backward and waited. Oh no. Please…no. “Stefan?”

He turned back to face her again and replied, “Voljena, they have drawn blood from you. That is unacceptable. You…my most loyal and favorite…I cannot allow such a thing to go unpunished.”

She nodded and looked to Irina, “She did as you asked. I hold nothing ill against her.”

“Are you sure, draga? None?” he asked plainly.

“Yes, I am sure,” she answered with wide eyes.

“Irina, step aside.”

Irina did as commanded by her boss and waited. He withdrew his firearm and fired off five quick shots at the men standing close to him. Their bodies fell to the ground in a muffled series of thuds. Irina gazed on horrified but silent while Anastasija’s face hardened.

“Perhaps,” she added, “we will find you better men from Pirot. These men from Belgrade have disappointed you for some time.”

He gave a flash of a smile and nodded, “This, voljena, is why you are my favorite. You understand business. Come, I will take care of your back. Irina, find me men…men that can follow orders.”

“Yes, Stefan. I will see it done,” Irina asserted before moving to her car. She left quickly and only her tail lights could be seen in the dark.

Anastasija’s legs gave out from under her while the pair was walking to his car. He bent down and picked her up from the ground. “It is alright, voljena. I will protect you so long as you remain loyal to me.”

“That is something I can do for you,” she sighed weakly. “I am sorry that you must see me in such a state.”

“You are strong,” he commented with an appreciative gaze. “You will heal and be stronger. I do not doubt it.”

She smiled back and leaned into his shoulder, “Neither do I.”

The pair returned to his estate and he ushered her inside. Stefan took care of the few wounds she had on her back and bandaged them accordingly. He guided her to a bedroom and stood in the doorway. “Take these,” he said, offering her pills from his hand. “They will help you to sleep. I
have work to do. I will come to you once I have finished.”

She nodded and took what was offered to her. “Thank you, Stefan. I will be here.”

The door closed behind her and Anastasija let out a loud groan. Wincing, she made her way toward the bed and stripped down to nothing. She shimmied under the covers and rolled onto her stomach. *Best not get any blood on the sheets.* She broke one of the pills in half and took it with the glass of water on the night stand. *Oh, not water. Vodka. Ah well.*

Ana closed her eyes and drifted off somewhere in the realm of sleep knowing that Stefan would return eventually.

Some time had passed when Stefan quietly opened the bedroom door and crept inside. Delicate, golden light draped over the room from the tiffany lamp on the night stand. Ana had left the light on for him and it gave him the opportunity to see how many of the pills she had taken. *Only half? My darling, the lightweight. She did drink the glass of vodka though. She’s so peaceful when she sleeps. And beautiful.*

He looked over her bruised, yet toned figure; radiant, copper hair tumbled down from her head and he admired her form from the curve of her neck to the indentation at the small of her back; she was perfection to him. Similarly, he shed his clothes and crawled into the bed beside her. A large, heavy arm draped over the small of her back as he sunk into a deep sleep.

His breathing became rhythmic and shallow when Anastasija snapped her eyes open. She stretched lazily and fished her phone off of the side table. *4:42 AM Lovely.* She placed the phone back on the table to charge and nestled back into her pillows. “Simply, lovely.”

Late that morning, Anastasija stretched lazily under the covers; pushing herself up to look about. She squinted in the soft light and found Stefan gazing admirably at her. “Morning,” he smirked.

Sher gingerly ran a hand through her hair and plopped back onto the plush pillows, “What time is it?”

“Close to ten thirty, my dove. How are you feeling?” he asked with genuine concern. “I am sorry that you had to go through that atrocity last night.”

“Did I break?”

He beamed, “No, you did not.”

“Then do not be sorry, Stefan. You needed to know that I was loyal to you. And now you know,” she soothed. “If ever, you must test my loyalty, do so. I will do whatever I must to pass your tests.”

He walked to the side of the bed and sat on the edge. “This I now know. You have passed every test that has been given to you. I am sorry that I have doubted you. Last year, we had a man break into one of our competition’s bunkers and left without a trace. We could not take any chances.”

Anastasija smiled, “I understand. What do you have planned today?”

“Today, I am going to the club to ensure that business continues as normal. And…” he led with a gleam in his eye, “…I am going to announce your promotion as my right hand.”
“Don’t go yet,” she whined. “Stay here for a while.”

“You are too injured for that, draga,” he sniggered.

“Fine,” she replied in mock dejection. “Your loss. I feel fine.” She sat up onto her knees and wrapped the bedsheet around herself. “Trust me, I’ve had worse.”

He wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her into his lap. “However long this lasts between us, I am glad, Anastasija, that you are now mine.”

“As am I,” she winked. She straddled his lap and wrapped her legs around his waist. Her arms hooked around his neck and she pulled herself closer to him. Anastasija rested her head in the crook of his neck and whispered, “‘Satan has his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and detested’.”

Stefan’s face fell placid, “Yes.”

She cleared her throat and spoke with a clear, American accent, “Alright Stefan. I’ll be plugging in some wild sex fantasy of yours here. But first, we need to figure out what you’re going to be doing today. So tell me.”

He replied in English with a heavy accent, “I am planning to announce Anastasija as my right hand. She will be able to take over some of the operations and become more involved with the business. She has proven her loyalty.”

She smirked. “Good. And the Syndicate? Moriarty’s web?”

“Dissolved. There was fighting amongst the ranks of those left. It has made room for those of us with strength to push forward and gain power.”

“Wonderful. Here’s is your objective for the day,” she stated before giving him a list of things to accomplish. She finished by implanting a sexual memory of the tryst he wished that they just had. “Now, sit on the side of the bed and button your shirt starting from the bottom. Come back in three…two…one…”

She nestled into her pillows and gave the appearance to be asleep again. Stefan peered over his shoulder with a haughty expression. “Sleep, darling. I am off to the club.”

Once the doors closed behind him, Anastasija grabbed her mobile and dialed a memorized number.

“Dank you for calling Upelelezi. ‘Ow ken I ‘elp you?”

“Can you tell me the latest new item from the baker?”

“I ken ask de baker what de specialty is.”

“That would be wonderful, thank you.”

“Kivuli, is dere anything else dat I ken do for you?”

“No, that’s it. I’m hoping to be home soon.”

“Dat would be wondaful, Kivuli. Feel free to return as quick as you like.”

Shannon Byrns swung her legs over the side of the bed with the bed sheet wrapped around her and walked to the opposite side of the room. She booted on Stefan’s laptop and set up programs to run
London

Lady Smallwood passed a file to Sir Edwin and stated, “It appears that she’s still alive.”

Edwin opened the file and pulled his head back in astonishment at the amount of information that was presented. His prolonged perusal through the pages indicated just how effective Shannon Byrns had been in Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia. She had established an extensive network of spies that were spreading across borders. She anticipated having Albania, Greece, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Moldova in her network in two weeks. There were dossiers on leaders of gangs, gun-runners, drug kingpins, and human traffickers. MI6 had a wide selection of targets that they could hone in on with ease.

“God. We hadn’t heard anything from her in so long…I thought that she was dead…and now all this? Could it be a red herring?”

Mycroft peered down at the file after Edwin handed it to him. “No, it’s her. There’s a cipher. She used the keys on a keyboard. Q becomes A, W becomes B; and so on. It’s not overly difficult.”

“What makes you so sure that it’s her?” Smallwood queried, leaning forward in earnest.

He wrote on a separate paper the message and passed it down the table.

Edwin and Smallwood looked down at the lined paper:

_Frosty the Snowman--- fuck you._
_I hope that this is worth it._
_Have you told the philosopher who pushed me down the rabbit hole?

“Goodness,” Lady Smallwood breathed. “She does harbor some resentment for you, Mycroft.”

“Yes,” he agreed, disgusted. “She does have a vulgar tongue, but one can’t argue with her results: clean and thorough.”

Sir Edwin cocked his head to the side and asked, “Didn’t you say that she’d be dead in less than six months? She’s doing quite well for herself.”

Mycroft agreed, “Quite. God help us should she come back to England.”

“Her passport could be denied easily,” Smallwood interjected.

Sir Edwin frowned. “What makes you think that she needs her passport to get back into this country?”

“And your brother, how is he,” she asked with genuine intrigue.

Mycroft sighed, “Off the rails, I’m afraid. He has fixated on Culverton Smith and…”

His phone beeped an alarm with a text.

MH:
SH is hospitalized.
Details to follow.
JW is present.

“Excuse me, I have serious matters to attend to,” Mycroft bowed before leaving. After he was out of earshot, he called his source for more information. “Yes, send the car. Now. I will be going to Baker Street. Patch to the hospital. Page John Watson.”

He waited a moment and heard the line pick up, “Hello, Mycroft.”

“There’s a car downstairs,” he ordered John before hanging up abruptly.

He thought for a moment, rubbing his face with his hand. In an odd break of restraint, he smacked the seat of his car and growled, “Damn!” He grabbed his mobile and fired of a text.

Retrieve the shield.
-MH

Shannon had Stefan, Irina, and his henchmen tied up and was in the process of removing herself from their memories. Getting them all tied down was the tricky part, though she did manage to break Irina’s nose in the process. I’ll have to add some little snippet in there about that…I’m thinking something happened in Pirot. That’ll work. Blood dripped down Shannon’s arm from where she was nicked with a knife. She surveyed the damage and realized that she could stitch it herself once she was done.

A second phone that was kept in her front pocket buzzed loudly. Surprised, she stopped her work and looked down. Why…why is it…?

“We will find you, traitor; and we will kill you,” Irina threatened.

“You already tried.” She removed the device and saw that the number was restricted. “Yes?”

“Proceed to extraction point echo. You are re-tasked. You have eighteen hours to get there. Dispose of your device,” an anonymous voice instructed.

The call terminated and Shannon felt as if her knees would give way out from under her. Re-tasked? What does that mean? Am…am I going home? Focus. Get the job done. She executed the removal protocols neatly, destroyed all evidence of her presence, and packed. She ran down the road on foot for ten minutes before ducking onto a footpath. A twenty-minute walk brought her to a modest house where an older woman was sweeping her porch.

“Mila,” Shannon called out. “I must leave. Take this,” she handed her a disposable phone and a thick envelope. “When you need me, call; there is only one number programmed into it.”

“Sweet angel, why do you go now? You are needed here,” she pleaded.

Shannon’s voice cracked, “I must help others. I can’t really talk about it right now; but, I will. Hide the envelope and use it as you need. If you find that you need more, call me. Do not hesitate. I will do my best to get you out of here as soon as I can.” Mila screeched at the contents
of the envelope. “There’s about five thousand pounds there. It should help.”

Mila reached forward and hugged Shannon. She winced from her healing injuries, but returned a warm embrace all the same. “Go with God, my child.”

“I’ll try my best. But I have to leave now. I’m sorry that I didn’t have more time…”

The older woman shooed her off the step. “Go. Go on! Be safe. Be well!”

Byrns waved and jogged back toward the road where a car was waiting to take her into Belgrade. She used the towels the driver brought to clean up the caked blood from her arm and hand while en route to the airport.

She boarded the private jet and an attendant offered to take her bag. “No, I’ve got it. Thanks,” she eyed him cautiously. She sat in the plush seat and felt her back being set ablaze.

“Miss Byrns, my name is Rodger. I’ll be attending to you on this flight. Is there anything I can get you?” a kind attendant introduced himself.

She hissed in pain and leaned forward, “Ice. Lots of it in bags. And something to stitch my arm with.”

Puzzled at the request, he conceded, “Yes, ma’am.”

He moved toward the back of the plane and she called over her shoulder, “And where are we going?”

He stopped and answered, “To London, Miss Byrns. You’re returning to London.”

“We’ll be making our decent soon in an hour, Miss Byrns,” Rodger announced as the last piece of gauze was wrapped around her bicep. “Is there anyone that you would like for me to call?”

“Yes…I need you to call Detective Inspector Greg Lestrade at Scotland Yard. Thank you,” she stated before settling back onto her fresh bags of ice. “His mobile, if you please. I can give you the number if necessary.”

“No need, ma’am. You’ll be able to take it on the phone in the arm rest. It will flash green when it is ringing. Is there anything else that I can do for you?”

“No, thank you Rodger. Your help is greatly appreciated.”

Shannon waited for the light to flash before picking up the receiver. “Hello?”

“Hello, yes, is this Lestrade?”

“This is Detective Inspector Lestrade, who’s this?”

“Greg…”

“Look, I already asked you once and it’s three in the bloody morning…”

“I’m coming home.”
There was silence on the other end of the line. Byrns waited in apprehension for him to speak again. “Oh my God. You’re alive.”

Byrns felt wind rush back into her body because she hadn’t realized that she was holding her breath, “Yeah…I’m alive. I’ll be coming into London City Airport in an hour. Are you able to give me a ride?”

“Young – yeah I’ll come get you. Everyone has to be thrilled you’re home!”

“I haven’t told anyone else…” she confessed solemnly. “I’ll explain once we meet up. It’s – it’s complicated.”

“Yeah, alright. You said an hour, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you need anything?”

She gave a small chuckle, “Can you bring a pillow with you? Trust me.”

“Yeah, okay. I’ll be there.”

”Thank you…and sorry about the time…I didn’t really get a chance to…uh…plan.”

“I’ll see you when you land.”

She hung up the phone and felt a radiating pain coming from her arm due to the topical analgesic wearing off. Rodger returned to her side and quietly informed her that Mr. Holmes was now waiting on the line for her to take another call.

“Tell him I’m…oh, I don’t know. Make something up. I’m not speaking to him,” she mumbled.

Rodger gave a knowing nod and returned to his station. “Mr. Holmes, she is currently indisposed… No, sir, I will not wake her. …Yes, she did require medical attention…ice and stitches. …Then, sir, you’ll need to find someone else on board to wake her because since dozing off, she’s thrashed about from nightmares. …Very good, sir, I shall tell her when we land.” He hung up and moved toward the other end of the plane.

“Rodger,” Shannon sighed in relief as he walked by, “You’re a legend. Thank you.”

“You are most welcome, Miss Byrns.” He paused and asked, “You do know that I would have hired a car for you to take you back to Baker Street, yes?”

She smiled while leaning her head back onto the headrest, “I do. But I’m not going back to Baker Street. I need to talk with Lestrade.”

“Very good, ma’am.”
4:30 AM

Greg did his best to rub the sleep from his face. Well...I was only asleep two hours. A sole passenger walked toward him with a shouldered bag. That can’t be her...that hair...

She lifted her sunglasses from her face and smirked, “Before you say anything…”

Greg pulled her close for a hug and wrapped his arms around her. She gave out a small hiss; then immediately was shoved backward, “Sorry – didn’t realize that I grabbed you that tight.”

“You didn’t;” she assured, “I’m a bit sore. That’s all.”

He bobbed his head, “Yeah. Sorry. Let’s get you home.”

Shannon looked sheepish, “Uh…we’re not going to Baker Street.” They walked toward his car. “You’ve been checking in on my property in Stratford, right?”

“Yeah,” he replied.

“Then that’s where we’re going.”

While abroad after Sherlock’s fall, Shannon had purchased property in different parts of town to use for storage or as safe houses. The Stratford House was quaint and occupied a corner lot with a small front garden. There was a long corridor on the ground floor with a guest room on the left and a bathroom in the back. Up the stairs, the kitchen and the master could be found and onto the top-most floor was a living room. Greg followed her up the stairs to the living room. It was modestly decorated and gave the appearance that is was actively lived in.

Shannon sat in one of the chairs in the living room with her bag at her feet; Greg ventured upstairs with two mugs of tea. He passed her a mug and sat opposite her on the couch. She took a few sips and curled her legs underneath herself, “Ta.”

“I hope that stopping by every few weeks wasn’t an issue,” she stated. “I needed someone to be in and out of here. I didn’t want squatters showing up. There’s a lot of good stuff down in the second bedroom. Also, thanks for bringing me here. I need gather myself before I go and find out what the hell is going on.”

He sat holding his cup between his knees. “Shannon…before you say anything…you should know that things changed while you were away…”

Knowing eyes bored holes into the opposite wall before her lips drew another sip of tea, “I would imagine so; drastic enough to have my biggest fan withdraw me from a death sentence. What shit did he get into?”

“Sorry? What?”

Byrns tilted her head to the side and sighed. She recited quickly without taking a breath, “Your posture is telling me that you are apprehensive about divulging the information that you are about to give; the diction you are using with the phonemes indicate that you are breaking news of a
fatality. It’s something that I’ve observed you doing to families that you are preparing for bad news. Your tone is identical to the one that you use to inform others about a death…then with your leading statement that things changed while I was away are all poignant indicators that someone, mutual to us, has passed away. Hence my question: What happened?” Shoulders slumped; face sullen – Greg…what the hell happened?

“After you left, as I understand it, Sherlock was working that Thatchers case. It involved someone from Mycroft’s office…” She listened as Lestrade did his best to be delicate and explain what had happened. “Shannon, are you alright?”

“Yeah. Fine,” she drew sharply; her words bitter. “I’m preparing myself for any number of scenarios that Sherlock would go to at length to complete a case. All of them are not ending well for him at present…”

He frowned, “I don’t believe that for a second.”

“Astute of you, Lestrade,” she replied.

“Still like him, I see,” Greg grumbled. “Look, I have to get to work…and you – you should hear it from him, I suppose. I don’t know everything…I just saw the aftermath…”

He’s dallying. What could be so bad that he wouldn’t want to tell me himself? With his distance and willingness to move away from this conversation I can assume that there are two potential outcomes: One – Sherlock has resolved his issues and the problem was negligible… Or, Sherlock was self-destructing for due to a catastrophe.

He stood up and picked cup up from its spot on the floor. “Call me, Shannon. I’m serious. You need anything. Give me a call. I’ll get here as soon as I can.”

“Yeah, alright,” she mumbled. “I’ll head to Baker Street after I finish my tea and shower, promise. Just know…the longer it takes for all this to come to light, the angrier I will get.”

“I know,” his features fell before he turned toward the stairs.

*Mid-Morning*

Not a single floorboard had creaked in alarm while she crept up the stairwell and made her way to sit on the couch. Mrs. Hudson was already out doing her shopping; that meant that that Sherlock was still asleep. *He had never been an early riser, per se. It’s approaching ten, though…he should be up soon. So…that gives me twenty minutes to decompress…to try and get my bearings.* With an awkward shuffle and shift Byrns sat cross-legged and covered her head with her sweatshirt’s hood. *Think. Observe. Relax. Analyze. Infer.*

Heavy air filtered through her nostrils as her lungs expanded languorously and her eyes scanned the room with precision. *He’s had things tacked up here; photos, evidence…whatever it may have been, he had information scattered about this room so that he could see everything at all times.* *There are residual tape marks and pin holes in the wall above the mantle. The coffee table had a photograph that was missed from Sherlock’s purge. A man: full, lined face with a well-practiced smile. He looks familiar. The flat is cleaner than normal: Sherlock’s cleaned more completely after Mrs. Hudson had gone through. There’s something – something’s amiss. What am I missing?*

Soft rustling echoed in the hall from the detective’s room to indicate he was awake. *Ah, he can*
smell the soap that I used in the shower. He knows that he has a guest – he’s looking for his gun. I would hope that he would do his best to be prepared.

The door opened with barely a click and the delicate sounds of bare feet padding down the hall in caution were scarcely audible. The hammer sounded as it was pulled backward and Holmes rounded the corner. His voice, rough from waking, slipped out as a snarl, “I suggest that you identify yourself if you wish to leave this domicile in your entirety.” The hooded figure’s head barely moved in his direction. “Take down your hood, slowly, or I will be forced to remove you from the premises.”

“You’re phone isn’t in either of your robe pockets and Mrs. Hudson isn’t home because she’s out doing her shopping. You aren’t really on your game, are you,” her voice rumbled from under the hood. She slowly lifted her hands up to the rough seam around her face and pushed the fabric backward. “You also should have surmised as much that considering whatever shit you got yourself into as of late that this meeting would inevitably happen.”

“I could have shot you,” he grumbled as the safety was switched back into place. “And what are you doing sitting here in silence? Don’t you want to know how I knew…”

“It was the soap and the aftermath of me removing all of the temporary dye from my hair,” she offered with stern affirmation and a hard eye. “I got in this morning and needed to remove Serbia from my skin.”

“Ah,” he sympathized. “Are – are you…alright?”

Shannon’s head was bowed downward when her eyes shot upward in a scowl to give a glimpse of the anger and pain she was suppressing within her. “No. I am not.”

Molly, John, and Sherlock had gone to the cake place yesterday and John’s bequest after…the conversation. The conversation where John had divulged that he still saw Mary and that he wasn’t the man that everyone thought that he was. The conversation where it’s not okay; but, it is what it is. Now another friend was before him, expressing that they were not okay and he was at a loss.

“…what I meant was…” he sputtered.

“Stop,” she stung. “You look terrible.”

He placed the gun on the table and looked down at his person: he was wearing his pajama trousers and his blue robe; nothing more. “It’s not as bad as it looks.”

“Right,” she seethed, “You’ve lost too much weight; which leads me to believe that you were using again…you’ve got a bunch of bruising on your torso and face, your skin in discolored, there’s a subconjunctival hemorrhage in your left eye, you haven’t shaved…and this flat is spotless.”

“…Shannon…”

“…spotless,” she proceeded to speak over him, “which means that this place was a disaster not too long ago if you went through and sterilized it after Mrs. Hudson had gone through and cleaned it.” Homes shifted uncomfortably to his other leg and grimaced. “So, Sherlock Holmes,” she paused to control her rising temper, “you are going to sit and explain to me why your brother had to swallow his pride and raze the work I had been doing in order to bring me home. What…happened?” The sharpness in her voice matched her temper.

“What do you know?” he queried with care sitting with care in his chair. “Did you have any information about what was happening here while you were in Serbia?”
She inhaled quickly through her nose and furrowed her brow. “Nothing. I had sent out probes; but, little information was able to reach me considering where I was and what I had delved into.”

“I see. Then I regret that this conversation will be none too pleasant for you, Shannon.”

“Lestrade collected me from the airport and subconsciously gave away information. I do not need to delve into the evidence he presented, do I?”

“No.”

“Good. Now, you are going to sit there and explain…everything…including why you were using again, or so help me, I will beat it out of you. You promised me that this wouldn’t happen again,” she breathed, devastated, “And you will tell me who.”

Holmes quavered in his chair with a grimace. “The last case that I was working was to bring down Culverton Smith. He was a serial killer; I knew it and had to convince the rest of the world that he was. He confessed to John and me that H.H. Holmes was his favorite serial killer.”

“Interesting and disturbing,” she interjected. “He had the Murder Castle in Chicago, yes? Confessed to over twenty murders when he was arrested. Though, he claimed to have killed around two hundred. I assume that this confession of Smith’s was baiting you in some way if not a great insight?”

“Yes,” uneasiness ebbed from his voice. “I was using. The creature that you see before is on the road to recovery…it wasn’t so when all of this was transpiring. I was spiraling out of control…he was baiting me all the while, I was endeavoring to become his next victim.”

“Obviously. And who put you onto this case?”

He thought for a moment before answering honestly, “Mary.”

“Continue.”

“John intervened, of course; to the point of physical injury towards my person…but I became a patient in Smith’s hospital. I have inferred that when I was unconscious, Mycroft called the hospital to speak with John…also lining up in your timeline for your retrieval.”

“Convenient for you that your brother is as powerful as he is that he can retrieve an asset so readily, isn’t it?” she grumbled before slumping backward into the couch. “Am I supposed to be your baby sitter now?” The lines on his face formed into a frown. She peered about and sighed, “Something’s amiss in the flat. Something – something is out of place.”

He turned to look at her for the first time since the retelling and pointed out, “As you stated, the flat has been cleaned and you have been gone for some time.” She looks like hell. Her eyes look swollen…had she been crying earlier? Does she know? No…she knows…but she doesn’t know who or when. She knows that someone’s gone. God…how am I going to do this?

“No…not that,” she disclosed in curiosity. “But, I’ll figure it out. Something’s off. Continue, if you would.”

A hand roughly came down over his face and rubbed his eyes. “I woke to a gloved Culverton Smith in my room making idle chit chat. I suppose that’s what he likes to do with his victims…talk to them…ask them how they feel.”

There. In his voice…there’s – there’s something there that he’s not telling me. Something vital.
Something significant in the conversation or in the reasoning… “Stop.” He halted mid-breath and made eye contact with her. “What did you discuss? Be thorough.”

She knows you, you prat. You couldn’t bypass that conversation from her. “He told me that I wanted this. That I wanted to die and asked why. I expressed that I had my own reasons…but that I didn’t want to actually die. He made sure to have me repeat that phrase,” he gulped the lump in his throat back down, “…‘I don’t want to die’.”

Shannon’s face was placid but her emotions were wrestling with her mind. Something provoked him to go to these lengths…to risk his life…and not just Mary setting him onto a case. There’s no way. Whatever happened prior…that’s what sparked the powder keg. Christ. I could have been home… I could have helped to prevent so much of this. “Sherlock…I am sorry to make you recount all of this…I am,” her voice cracked, “but I’m trying to understand…he could have adjusted your drip and made it look like an accident with equipment. Malpractice happens all the time…”

“Yes – yes, of course,” he agreed. Blue eyes fell onto the rug before continuing, “He proceeded to suffocate me. John and an officer broke down the door to get in, to which Smith defended that he was helping me because I went into distress…but…I got my confession.”

“You recorded it?”

“He, of course, searched my clothing and took the three devices that were in my pockets and found the three recorders…but he hadn’t searched John’s cane. I put one of your old devices in it and turned it over to Lestrade,” he sighed. “From what Lestrade has said, Smith wouldn’t shut up about it. He feels that it’s therapeutic and a better way for him to reach another rung in the ladder of fame.”

“I’m going to go on a limb and infer that, with H. H. Holmes being his favorite serial killer, he’d somehow had secret rooms in the hospital? I figured out that he was the guy on the tele that was in advertising and donating money everywhere…” she offered.

“Correct.”

The sound of sure steps on the stairs drifted upward to the sitting room. Shannon turned and saw sandy blonde hair and eyes that were a mix of grey, blue, and brown. John.

John entered the kitchen without taking note of the person in the room with Sherlock. “I’m surprised that you’re awake at this hour… I brought you something to eat for later since you cannot sustain on cake alone. I’m also going to be here until Molly shows up make sure you can’t get any sweeties.”

“John…you need to leave,” Sherlock warned, his eyes wide in alarm.

“Leave? I just bloody got here. I know you’re going to be insufferable due to withdrawal; but Jesus…” he stumbled after a few steps into the sitting area when he saw Shannon sitting on the couch.

“Shannon. Oh my God. You’re home,” John gasped. “Oh, God…you’re home!” He trotted over to her as she struggled to stand up and embraced her quickly.

Sherlock bowed his head in anticipation and closed his eyes. And here it is. He stood and turned to face his friends and waited.

He watched as the genuine smile that pleasantly graced her features vanished. Her eyes, which had just held joy, became despondent. She pushed back from John and fell backward over the coffee
table, upsetting the chessboard and books.

“Shannon?” John offered a helping hand, “Jesus, sorry. Are you alright?”

“You need to leave,” she blurted as she swatted his hand away. “Now. Go down to my room, leave the flat; I don’t care. You can’t be here right now.” Her eyes darted to meet with the detective’s. No. Please…God no.

Confused, John turned to Sherlock with a quizzical look. “Alright…I’ll go…downstairs…”

Sherlock approached John and led him gently toward the doorway, “I think that would be best…I will explain later.”

“No… please…God no.”

Really? Or are you going to leave me to figure it out on my own, as per usual?” he jabbed scathingly.

“No – no, I will fill you in. Close the door behind you,” the detective assured. Shannon was stood with her back to both men and gazed out the window.

As asked, John shut the door behind him and slowly made his way downstairs. When he went to round the bannister he paused and listened. What are they…Oh God…she doesn’t know. John silently crept back up the steps.

Holmes moved to stand by Byrns’ side in silence and glanced down at her: hot tears streamed down her face and her cheeks were flushed red. “When,” she clipped through grated teeth.

He sighed and confessed, “Not long after you left. When I solved the Thatchers case.”

“No,” she bleated. “N-n-no… I don’t believe you. No! It can’t be! No! Sherlock…” her mind reeled as grief twisted her face. She brought her hands to cover her face to stifle her sobs so that John could not hear.

“I texted the Watson’s to meet me at the aquarium to oust the perpetrator. Mary met me there first while John found someone to watch Rosie. It was Vivian from Mycroft’s office, you see…she was the one that used AGRA as her private assassination unit.”

Shannon’s fists then began to beat against his chest in fury and lamentation, and she cried, “Stop! Stop talking!”

Sherlock wrapped his arms around her and pulled her closer to him. She sobbed into his shoulder while he continued, “Vivian pulled a gun on me when Mycroft and Lestrade showed and she shot at me. Mary…” he choked, “Mary jumped in front of me.” A stray tear cascaded down his cheek and he pressed his lips together to fight back the emotional pain that was welling within. “That’s why – why I spiraled out of control…why I started using again. Mary left me a note, of sorts…put myself through hell because she knew John would – would hate me for what may have happened. Mary was the one that put me onto Smith so that I could save John. And I was willing to die for it…for him…and for what I had done.”

“That’s what Mycroft hadn’t understood when he recalled you home – that it was all because Mary asked me to; because I owed it to her for all that she had done.”

Byrns’ sobbing was uncontrollable and she wrapped her arms around his neck. Sherlock’s hand
cradled the back of her head and looked toward a creaking sound to his right. There stood Dr. Watson in silence, clenching and unclenching his hand. His eyes were glassy; it was evident that he was fighting back tears from agony.

John was immobile; transfixed to his spot while Sherlock did his best to console Shannon. Her sobs resounded in the quiet flat and the three friends were left to face the reopened wound of grief until their tears and sobs were reduced to silence.
Companionate

Mrs. Hudson puttered about in the kitchen as she made tea for her current and former tenants. Watson sat next to Byrns on the couch in an amicable daze. She was keenly aware that her body was accurately displaying the emptiness that she felt. Sherlock emerged from his room dressed for the day and switched to his beige robe. Noting the silence from the couch, he popped into the kitchen in an effort to postpone the uncomfortable dialogue that was to follow.

“It’s so wonderful that she’s home; but, she looks awful,” Mrs. Hudson interrupted his thoughts.

“Hmm?”

She paused her ministrations with the kettle and looked up to him, “You can see it in her eyes… something happened to her while she was gone. Then her finding out about Mary today…”

Sherlock recalled that she had appeared to be crying before he found her. *I assumed it was because she knew that someone had died. I didn’t dwell long on the notion that something had happened prior to her return.* “Well, yes.”

“Oh, Sherlock,” she begged, “be kind to her. Be gentle.”

His arms crossed his torso and he whispered, “You’re asking me not to be myself around the one person that demands that I act as much like myself as possible. She will be furious.”

Steam wisped above the mug rim as Mrs. Hudson passed Sherlock some tea. “That’s not it. I’m asking you to treat her the way you always treat her. Don’t coddle her and don’t make her feel like she’s worthless. She needs you right now, Sherlock.” She peered around the door frame and sighed, “I’m afraid that she might be broken.”

*Broken? How could she be broken? Shannon is resilient, steadfast, and prevailing in all that she does. What does Mrs. Hudson see that is not obvious to me? Or – or is it that the news of Mary’s death has pushed her to a point where even Mrs. Hudson can be unsettled by her lack of emotional restraint?*

It took his mind a moment to jolt back to reality; Mrs. Hudson was already serving tea to John and Shannon. *You need to move. Move your feet and walk into that room. Now.*

John watched as Sherlock entered the room as if walking on eggshells: even though that the two of them had reconciled some yesterday, Shannon’s return had the potential to leave old wounds incredibly raw. The kind land lady sat down in the chair nearest the doorway and the detective grabbed a chair from the table to form a conversing circle. However, no one spoke and there was scarce a breath to be heard.

Shannon’s eyes blankly bored forward toward the fireplace, her face still puffy from her crying. John cleared his throat uneasily and broke the awkward silence, “Shannon…how did – how did you know…”

“Can you ask that question later?” her voice hoarse and emotionless. “Please…just…not now.”

Watson pursed his lips for a moment and continued, “You should know…that – that I don’t blame him anymore.” Shannon heaved a weighted sigh and cradled her warm mug between her hands. “I don’t. No one could make Mary do anything that she didn’t want to do…and – and I blamed him. I hated him for her death because he had made a vow…but Mary chose to save him.”
Her eyes shifted to the detective’s face to note that he was sullen, refusing to meet hers and his eyes rested on the floor. A flicker of pity burned in her stomach before the bottomless pit returned, making her feel a sense of disparaging despair. “Mm-hmm.”

“I’m – I’m going to be angry for a while. I miss her. I did things that I regret…but, Shannon… Shannon?” his voice showing mild alarm.

“I’m listening,” she replied automatically, “I just need some time…” A sheen of sweat covered her skin and her breathing was becoming shallow. John’s keen eye noticed that something was very amiss with Shannon and that she was ill.

Sherlock’s attention turned toward his friends on the couch while Mrs. Hudson got up and to fuss over Shannon. “What do you need, John?” she asked.

“Grab my bag,” he instructed the elder woman, “Get the cuff and stethoscope out of it so I can check her blood pressure. Sherlock, I need you over here on the other side of her. She’s swaying a bit.” The detective moved to sit on the other side of Shannon and braced posture with his arm and shoulder.

“Shannon, are you feeling alright? Are you feeling dizzy?”

“A little,” she yawned. “And I have a migraine, I think. Stop making a fuss, I can go downstairs and grab my medication; it’s fine.”

“Alright,” John soothed, “I just want to take your blood pressure first, okay?”

“No – no, I am fine,” Shannon asserted. Upon an attempt to stand, she had nearly lost her balance and fallen into the coffee table. Sherlock wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her back down onto the couch.

“Nope, sit here and don’t move,” the detective commanded. Mrs. Hudson returned with John’s equipment flustered and worried.

“Lift up your sleeve, Shannon, please,” John asked, stern.

“I’m fine,” she growled. “In the grand scheme of shit that this family has been through, I am fine.”

John’s eyes grew cold and his resolve steeled, “Lift up your sleeve or we’ll do it for you.”

Shannon’s eyes slowly drifted to meet John’s gaze and her voice was icy. “That would certainly be an endeavor for the pair of you.”

Annoyed and flooded with curious concern, Sherlock gripped the fabric from her sweatshirt back and ripped it up and over her head before she had a chance to react. Her shirt, missing sleeves on either side, was well-worn and thinning in places. John slipped the cuff around her arm and began to inflate and depressed the chestpiece onto her skin. She remained still as John checked her over, but her gaze moved to Sherlock who, to her dismay, was observing the new battle scars that were newly visible. She watched as his eyes darted to a spot on the back of her shoulder.

“Before you start,” she warned.

Sherlock interrupted her with a stern, “Don’t.” Anger in his eyes mirrored the rage she felt in the recesses of her mind earlier on the plane.

“One fifty-six over ninety-seven,” John announced as the remaining air was released through the valve. “I’ve never known your blood pressure to be that high at rest. Shannon, I used to take your
blood pressure after you’d been swimming or sparring for hours...and you’d register around ninety-three over sixty-five…”

“I said that I’m fine.”

Sherlock squinted in exasperation, “Sleep deprivation, chiefly, I would say...among other things.”

Shannon’s posture deflated and she held her head between her hands, “Of course, sleep deprivation: that’s been my life for months. Just – just leave me be, stop fussing; I’ll be fine.”

John attempted to smooth the situation over, “Shannon, if there’s something else going on…”

“No!” she bellowed, causing everyone in the room to jump and send Mrs. Hudson scuttling down the stairs. “Why are you both fussing over me? Why? Mary’s…” John frowned and looked to the floor. “There are more important things in this world to be concerned with than my health,” she continued with her grief flowing freely. “I know that I’m not well. I’ve not been well for a while and when I am ready, we can discuss it!”

“Focusing on you allows for a diversion from…”

“SHUT IT, SHERLOCK!” she yelled, tears falling from her eyes again. “My suffering doesn’t compare...it doesn’t. She’s…Christ…”

John reached for her hand, grasped it firmly, and choked out, “I know. I miss her, too.”

After moments of silence, the back of her arm roughly drifted down her face to erase any evidence of her cries and she cleared her throat to gain composure. “I do genuinely have a migraine; I’m going to go downstairs and get my medication from my room. If you’ll excuse me.”

She roughly stood up and staggered her way to the stairwell only to lean heavily on the bannister on the way down. When she heard someone behind her stand, she barked over her shoulder, “I got it. Don’t.”

Now standing, Sherlock looked down to John with his lips compressed into a disapproving line. “She has small, red stippling on her arms and legs,” he asserted in a hoarse whisper.

John matched his tone, “Petechiae? I mean, there’s a number of reasons for that to develop...if that’s what you’ve seen.”

He nodded, “Malnutrition? I doubt that she has taken care of herself while she was away. I know that I made every effort to do so, but unfortunately there were long periods of time where that wasn’t an option.”

John nodded, “Perhaps. The high blood pressure ranks in with the sleeplessness that she’s mentioned...but I wonder…”

“Hmm?”

“Was she moody like this when you came out here this morning?”

Sherlock idly walked around the flat with his hands on his waist. “She was. Considering her intellect and ability to deduct nearly as well as I can, it’s not surprising that her emotions aren’t tethered down. She told me that Lestrade picked her up from the airport and she was acutely aware that someone had passed away without her knowledge.” John nodded and got up to replace his tools back into his bag. “If you then couple that interaction with sleep deprivation, potential
malnutrition, and whatever she had experienced while abroad...I can’t say that I wouldn’t have acted much different.”

“I have to go to the office for a bit, but I’ll be able to come back after I pick Rosie up.” John’s worry heavy in his words, “Without being an utter cock, try and figure her out. Concerning our discussion yesterday, now may be a good time to tell her about ‘it’. You know what I’m talking about, don’t give me that look. Besides, Molly will be here in five minutes. I know that you won’t get into anything in five minutes.”

“Oh, really? What makes you so sure?”

A smug grin was splayed across his face, “Shannon’s home. She’ll kill you first.” He shouldered his bag and made his way downstairs. “Shannon, I’m going to the office. Sherlock’s upstairs still and Molly will be here in five minutes, yeah?”

“Fine,” she hollered up the stairs.

“I’m going to bring Rosie around tonight, you gonna be home?”

Her voice softened, “I’d like that.”

Sherlock withdrew his phone from his pocket and sent of a message.

Shannon Byrns:

*Come back upstairs. Now.*

-SH

Her phone, which she had left in her room at Baker Street for the duration of her absence, buzzed amicably on her desk. She rolled off of her bed and dragged herself to it, read the message, and sighed.

Sherlock Holmes:

*Can’t it wait? Migraine.*

Sherannon Byrns:

*Now, before Molly gets here.*

-SH

*God damn it. Damn it, damn him, damn everything. Damn. He knows. I know that he saw. I was trying so very hard to make this manageable; but Christ. Now we’re going to fight.*

With heavy steps, she heaved herself upward as quickly as possible to the common area. Sherlock was standing near the window plucking violin strings to a Bach cantata. She flopped into John’s chair and waited for verbal blows to begin.
They resided in their respected places until Molly arrived, to which Sherlock convinced her that, with Shannon home, she wasn’t needed today because he knew that Shannon would make his life intolerable. After a brief interlude and the promise of lunch with the prodigal traveler, Molly left quietly.

Shannon was curled in John’s chair with book three of *The Republic* by Plato. Sherlock was sitting across in his chair, staring intently at her in scrutiny. “You’re a damned fool,” he announced.

With an acknowledging nod, she continued to read from her book. “You would know.”

“How long have you been…” he began to ask as he moved toward the kitchen.

“Four days after I left,” she replied, unmoved. Her response prompted Sherlock to grab the shoulder of her shirt and peel it backward, revealing a clear, square, plastic patch stuck to her skin.

“Dizziness, you’ve lost weight, your migraines have flared, you’ve had difficulty sleeping…you can’t fool an addict,” he sniped, throwing the cloth in his hands down. “Fentanyl seems a bit beneath you, don’t you think?”

She lifted her head up and without looking at him, replied, “To me, yes; but to Anastasija the junkie, it’s not.”

“Unbelievable. You preach sobriety and here you are, high as a god damned kite,” he snarled.

She slammed the book shut and shot upwards from the chair, “Not that it’s any of your fucking business, Sherlock, but I’m not that high.” A muscle in her face twitched to give appearance that she was snarling like a dog. “I’m weaning myself off it. I switch to forty-five milligrams of morphine tomorrow. Not that you care; I would think that you’ll try to snoop through my things to create a stash for yourself. You don’t know what I had to go through. Did it not even occur to you that might be the reason for it, hmm?”

Sherlock’s steely gaze didn’t falter. “Of course, it did.”

“Yeah, of course it did,” she mocked. “Smart Sherlock, always on top of everything.” She paced around the room, manic before squaring up with him and glaring him down. “Do you want to know what I thought when I stepped on that plane? You want to know what the first thing that came to my mind was? ‘Don’t be dead. Don’t let him be dead’.” Sherlock’s features softened. “You, you idiot. I begged whatever higher power there might be in this universe to not take you away from this world. I begged; something akin to a prayer that you would be here, alive when I returned.”

Humility crept into his cheeks, an emotion that had been recurring since she had returned from Serbia. “You do not need to justify your emotions or actions to me, Shannon. If you think that this addiction that you face would change anything in the way that I see you, you are wrong. I simply needed to be sure that you were still the friend that left us that day and that you didn’t bring the job home with you.”

Her powerful stance slackened and she leaned her hip onto the back of the chair. “I don’t think that I brought it back with me. I won’t know for sure for a while, I suppose. I’m…I’m not okay, Sherlock. I’m not. And I’m afraid that my moodiness will only get worse in the coming days. If I follow the recommended dosages, I should be able to drop the dosage by fifteen milligrams every three days until it gets to zero. But I expect, considering how long I have been in constant use, that I will be unbearable.”

“I don’t wish to divulge my past actions today…but – but I promise, I will tell you when I’m
ready. I’m just…not – not okay. And that being said, I need you to do a favor for me.”

His eyes widened, “Yes?”

“I know that you have Bengay or some other kind of muscle cream in the bathroom…would you mind fetching it? I’ll take the patch off,” she offered in compromise. He left to grab the cream and found her folding the patch onto itself before tossing it into the kitchen trash. She grabbed the bottom hem of her shirt and began to lift upwards. “Don’t get too excited there, Sherlock. I’m not going to jump your bones.”

He inhaled in surprise when he saw the extent of bruising that covered her sides and back that had been hidden by her shirt. She leaned over the back of John’s chair so that he could see the extent of her injuries. “The pattern…studded leather?”

She shrugged before peering over her shoulder, “I suppose so. I was chained to machinery piping and couldn’t see anything.”

He spread cream across sensitive skin that elicited a hiss from her. “Was torture a regular part of your routine?”

“Occasionally, it wasn’t anything I couldn’t power through,” she affirmed. “I’ve had worse.” Another frown graced the detective’s face as he did his best to cover most of the bruising. “Stop that.”

Her command pulled him out of his ministrations, “Stop what?”

“You’re frowning.”

He cleared his throat, “It appears that I’ve been doing a lot of that today. I’ll make more of an effort to be happier.”

“There’s nothing that you could have done,” she explained. “I made the decision to go. I did. Not you.”

He paused and looked off to the side, “I should have stopped you from leaving.”

Shannon turned to face him, pulled her shirt down and crossed her arms. “There was nothing that you could have done to stop me. I had made my decision when you were in solitary. Mycroft could have stopped me…well, he could have tried. You and I both know that he preferred my person going so that you could be here.”

“There is. I do have something in my arsenal that would have given me enough time to trade places with you on that tarmac before you had boarded the plane,” he proclaimed in earnest.

She squinted in analysis looking for any shred of doubt in his words, “Bullshit.”

“The night you left, I tore this place to pieces. Everything was turned over and I threw furniture at the wall.” She recalled punching the back of the plane seat until she tired herself out. “I then had the privilege of sitting in the destruction I had wrought. Coincidentally enough, I identified it as symbolism: the conflict that I had been battling against for so long was brought out of me and into a physical form. Mrs. Hudson, of course, came upstairs, observed the damage, and was sympathetic. I recall asking myself why she was sympathetic instead of furious. I had just destroyed the flat. It looked as if the place had been ransacked.”

“I’m sorry,” she offered in reprieve. “It wasn’t my intention to make you angry.”
He drew a long breath in through his nose and entered the kitchen to make a new pot of tea for the pair of them. He spoke clearly as he worked, “You know that those we surround ourselves with have the ability to see clearly as you and I do; they, from time to time, are able to make sound deductions with evidence that is presented, yes?”

“Yes, I do,” she agreed, following him into the kitchen to sit at the table. “Which is probably the reason you have tolerated them for this long, to be fair,” she added thoughtfully. Sherlock ignored her comment and moved to pouring them each a fresh mug of tea. He put a small chunk of brown sugar in her cup and stirred before adding milk to his. When handed her mug, she looked down and smirked, “You’ve paid attention.”

“’Course I have,” he retorted. “It’s because I know you.” He placed a gentle hand on her shoulder and sipped from his cup. “In the time I have known you, you have fought your way through adversity and insurmountable odds.” Her head bowed. “And because of this, I know that whatever demons you were fighting abroad will be dealt with deftly because I trust in your abilities.”

“You’re deviating from a previous point, sir. You were talking about our friends having moments of clarity and then you proceeded to switch gears on me and started talking about our relationship.”

“They are connected,” he advised. “In a momentary lapse in emotional control, Mrs. Hudson observed my regret, self-contempt, and powerless control of the situation. One of the few people that I cared most about in the world was aboard a plane to go on a mission that I was to accept as penance. Our landlady helped me up and sent me to bed.”

Shannon sipped from her cup, “Were you surprised by her kindness? I’m not. She’s quite a lady if you take the time to know her.”

“Stop, please, and let me finish,” he asserted with an edge to his tone. Her eyes shot upward in surprise and nodded for him to continue. He moved to stand on the opposite side of the table and carried on, “Before I shut my door, Mrs. Hudson said, ‘I know how you feel, Sherlock. I love her, too’.” He paused and looked over to her. “As you know, I view love as chemistry: it’s simple and destructive. Adler made a point to exploit that in me, guided me to show off in such a way that I was oblivious and it made me, for a moment, feel special.”

“Y – essss…I’m aware of Irene Adler. We’ve discussed her and I applaud her ability to make you uncomfortable. Not that it’s not entirely a good or bad thing, but she was an important milestone in your life,” she said, slightly confused by the direction of the conversation.

“Back when you were still trying to re-open my memories when you returned, you left a USB drive on your desk that was password protected. The password was chosen in regards to Sternberg’s
Triangular Theory. Your choice was the combination of two points of the triangle: Intimacy and Commitment.”

“Yes,” she breathed.

“That combination is Companinate Love: an intimate, non-passionate type of love that is stronger than friendship because of long-term commitment, ideally shared between family members or close friends who have a platonic but strong friendship.”

She chuckled, “You looked that up on Wikipedia, didn’t you?”

“I’m simply quoting you,” he continued, “I understand because I know you. I know that you have done everything that you have because you care for me more than you should. It was Mrs. Hudson’s small quip that managed to shift my perspective on us. I didn’t tear that room apart because you were leaving.”

“Well, you have my attention,” she quipped. “Don’t leave this conversation open-ended, all sorts of things could be inferred,” she jabbed with a smirk.

Annoyed, Sherlock swallowed the apprehension that had been rising in his throat. “I lashed out because I knew that I couldn’t possibly bear your loss should you not return to Baker Street. I understand why you would leave on a suicide mission; because – because I find that I would do the same for you.

When I realized that my kidneys were beginning to fail, I knew that you would be upset that I hadn’t thought up some more clever way to get John back. Then when Smith was attempting to murder me, I didn’t want to die in that hospital for a number of reasons, you and John being chief among them. So, yes, I understand now with full clarity what it is that you do and have done for me and – and I would do anything to save you, too.”

Shannon nodded an inhaled sharply before blowing her air out in low whistle. “That’s – that’s a lot.”

He grimaced when she gave a different reaction than he had anticipated, “Um, yes, well. That’s it. John and I had numerous lengthy discussions that, should you return, I inform you of that realization. He reminded me today that you should know. There you have it.”

Mrs. Hudson’s voice interrupted with a small cough, “That’s as close to an ‘I love you’ that you may get, my dear.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Hudson,” Shannon groaned. “Anything I can do for you?”

“No dear, just checking on you to make sure that you hadn’t killed him yet,” she offered.

Shannon leaned backward on the dining room chair, “Thank you. I didn’t hear you creep up the stair. I’ll be down momentarily to help with this evening’s tea. I’m sure he hasn’t been much help.”

“That’s it? Nothing else?”

“Mrs. Hudson,” Shannon warned with a disapproving glance. “If you please, downstairs?” The older woman shuffled down the steps quickly. Shannon waited until the faint click of her door closing could be heard.

“I know that this is more than likely not how you envisioned the dialogue going.” He was in agony because he couldn’t gauge her reaction accurately. “And to be fair, this is going better than I envisioned this conversation going.”
“Really?” he queried perplexed. “Through the numerous versions I had run through in my mind, this seemed the most logically forward of the set that would grant both of us an out should the need arise…”

“Sherlock,” she began with another sigh, “Both you and your brother seem to feel that having these types of connections make you inferior or inadequate simply because they can, on occasion, make you feel shades of sadness, confusion, and anxiety. These are all emotions that no one relishes in feeling more than absolutely necessary. But – but I also find that there are moments that make those connections worthwhile because they connect us to our humanity. To know your humanity helps you to know the person you are trying to find, be it your friend, a lost child, or a perpetrator. That’s the determining factor that has aided me in everything that I’ve done since becoming whatever the hell it is that I am.”

The detective shifted uncomfortably from leg to leg as she spoke, astonished that she could speak so well considering that she was medically high. Note to self, she’s weaning herself off more fentanyl than I have attempted. Take notes at a later time.

“When you gave your speech at the wedding, you mentioned that you and Mary were the two people that loved John the most in all of the world. I believe that. Your dialogue gave me the hope that you would recognize that your sentiment, your devotion; your love for your friends was an asset to you one day.”

“I recall having a conversation with Mycroft involving sentiment.”

Her eyebrows lifted in surprise, “Really? And how’d that go?”

“I had told him that I was looking for a favor to find out about who had been after Mary. He then asked in sentiment was talking to which I responded ‘No; it’s me’. He felt that it was difficult to tell the difference as of late.”

“That’s our fault,” she remarked. “It appears that you’ve been hanging out with the wrong crowd: we’ve been a horrible influence on you.”

He chuckled, “So it would seem. Not that I’m complaining. Creating strife for my older brother has been a meticulous hobby.” His smile dimmed and again, he looked sheepish. “I’m sorry,” he whispered in the quietness of the flat, “that I was blind to see what was so blatantly obvious. I’m sorry that I didn’t admit it to myself sooner that I do care about what happens to you. There are very few people in the world that tolerate me enough to allow me to be called a friend; and you are very high on that list.”

The distance between the pair closed as Shannon took long stride toward him. Her arms wrapped around his torso and rested the crown of her head on his shoulder. Acutely aware of the injuries to her back, Sherlock wrapped one arm around her shoulders and the other hand cradled the back of her head. “I’ll take that,” her voice muffled by the lapel of his robe.

“Promise me something,” his voice low.

“What is it?”

“The next time you go to do something as idiotic as take my place on a suicide mission, you discuss it with me first? As your friend, I am duty bound to sway you from making incredibly ludicrous decisions.”

She gave a weak laugh and nodded into his shoulder, “Sure, I can manage that.” He dropped his
hands to fetch something from his pocket, but Shannon ignored it. Christ. He at least acknowledges that I’m on the family list. Thank. God.

A series of small clicks were audible and she felt pressure on her wrist. She pulled her head back and lifted her arm up to find that she was handcuffed to her best friend. “Are you kidding me?”

“Not at all,” he scoffed. “You’re going through withdrawal. As first-timer going through the process, you’re going to find that you may wander downstairs to your pack of pills or patches and you could take just one…what hurt could it do? As you agreed, I am duty bound to sway you from making ludicrous decisions. Besides, now we can hang out more for the next week or so without being separated.”

“So…was all of this an act?” she blurted.

“No, it wasn’t. Like I said, this wasn’t exactly how I imagined this conversation going.”

She dropped her cuffed hand and placed her free one on her hip in contempt, “This’s going to be hell for us both, you realize that, right? We nearly killed each other in the hospital.”

“Yes, well…it’s for your benefit.”

“You know what, forget it. I take back all those nice things I said. You’re an ass.”

He chuckled and grabbed the two cups of tea from the kitchen table and led them to the couch. “John was calling me a cock the other day; I suppose that’s progress in a way.”

She scowled sinking into the couch, “I hate you.”

Triumphant, Sherlock grinned, “No you don’t.”

“Yes. Yes, I do. I’m going back to Serbia as soon as we’re separated. This – this is – this is worse.”

“You’re being over dramatic.”

She gawked, “Says the biggest diva out of all of us! Where’s my phone?”

“You left it in the kitchen,” he proclaimed sitting next to her with the paper.

“Can we go get it?” she protested.

“Nope.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re only going to use it to send out an SOS to anyone who will listen. If you are desperate enough, you’d send a message to my brother and I really don’t relish the thought of him coming over today,” he reasoned. “It’s your fault that you left it there in the first place.”

The pair heard it buzz on the table and rattle some of the glass beakers from his experiments. “But there’s a message!”

“There’s only a handful of people that would message you right now and half of them live in this flat. Now, if you will stop complaining, here’s your tea.”

“I hate you,” she grumbled under her breath before cautiously taking her hot cup of tea from the
He expertly flicked the paper open and began reading, “We’re family. It’s a requirement for you to hate each other at some point.”

“I take back all those things I said in the kitchen.”

“No, you don’t.”

“By the way, Happy Belated Birthday…and I hate you.”

“I hate you, too.”
I'm Adjusting

When shades of grey began to grace the sky and purples streaked the canvas sky like a glorious watercolour painting, John entered the door to Baker Street with Rosie on his hip and her bag on the other. “Hello?” he called up.

Mrs. Hudson flew into view and scooped Rosie away from her father, laughing. “Oh, John. You must go upstairs,” her giggling ensued. “Just – just go upstairs and see.”

With a concerned grin he asked, “Are you okay with Rosie?”

“Oh yes, of course,” she responded in mirth, “we’ll be right behind you in a moment, won’t we my dear?”

John scaled the stairs and found Shannon and Sherlock both sitting on opposite ends of the couch with their arms outstretched in the middle joined together by handcuffs. Sherlock sat nearest the window with his free hand propping up his head, aggravation splayed on his face. His counterpart’s face, however, showed nothing other than triumph. She sat with her left arm outstretched, phone in hand scanning whatever webpage she had landed on.

“Evening,” she quipped with a sarcastic smile.

John stood in a mild stupor. “Uh…what…”

“This is probably not what you expected to come home to,” she grinned.

“Uh, no – no, I would have to say it wasn’t… Is – is that Sherlock’s phone?” he smirked.

She looked up from the screen and nodded, “It’s a sore subject; both literally and figuratively speaking.”

John looked to the detective when he answered, “She kicked me in the ribs.”

“You handcuffed me,” she retorted. “Did you bring Rosie?”

“Yes,” he replied, “Yes I did. Mrs. Hudson’s bringing her up in a moment. She called earlier to say that she had cooked tea for us all.”

Shannon turned to Sherlock with a placating glance. “Jailer, do I get to have free time since the baby’s here?”

“I’m still at a loss,” John proclaimed. “Why are you handcuffed to him?”

“Shannon’s addicted to fentanyl,” he retorted factually.

She rolled her eyes, “Was. Was addicted. I’m weaning myself off it: it was part of my cover in Serbia. I was doing this on my own prior to my recall…so if I am willingly detoxifying my life on my own, does that mean I’m an addict?”

“Yes,” Sherlock shot a reproachful glare, “Because John’s made that statement about me.”

“Well, you’re different,” she countered.

“So that’s what was wrong with you earlier?” John asked mouth agape.
She nodded, “Unfortunately. I assure you that I am sober presently and Sherlock has charged himself with ensuring my sobriety. I don’t think it’s necessary because I don’t want to be on fentanyl; it clouds my ability to think clearly. I’d rather have my faculties.”

“Both of you,” John went on, “You’re both two sides of the same coin.”

“We are aware,” Sherlock agreed. “That was discussed in your absence.”

“Really?” John blurted. “And… and you’re… okay?”

“Okay enough, though I’d rather not be handcuffed to him,” she answered. “Sherlock? Please? An extension of trust?” He frowned. “If it makes you feel better, I won’t leave this room.”

Watson watched as Sherlock made the calculated decision to let her free and did so. “John,” she moved to stand before him, “I don’t want the fentanyl… I don’t want it. I don’t crave it. I’m weaning myself off of it so that I don’t get the shakes. That’s all. I swear it to you.”

“If you a lying to me, you will find that I am a far less agreeable man as of late,” he warned.

“I won’t disappoint you… or your daughter. You have my word,” she declared, firm and with resolve.

John smiled and hugged her, “I’m counting on you.”

“I know,” she replied. “Besides, our favorite pain in the ass is babysitting me for a change.”

“I can hear you,” Sherlock warned.

Mrs. Hudson entered the room with a fussing Rosie in her arms. “Shannon, would you like to take her? I need to finish tea…”

Shannon looked to John for permission before reaching for his daughter. With a gentle nod, Shannon soon had the beautiful child in her arms. “Hello, my darling; hello, my sweet girl. Do you remember me, hmm? I’m sorry that I was away so long…” she cooed.

John moved toward Sherlock and watched his friend interact with his daughter. “So… you two talked?”

“Yes,” he affirmed. “I was able to make my viewpoint known in as auspicious a way as possible. She understands.”

“Uh-huh,” John gawked. “And have you given thought to what I said yesterday about her?”

“I brought it up that we text from time to time. She seemed to be unfazed by the news other than to bounce about the kitchen stating that she knew that Adler was alive.”

“And how are we feeling?”

He pouted, “I don’t understand your question.”

“Adler. She texts you and is interested in you. Now, Shannon’s back from the abyss and your feelings toward her are complicated to say the least. Do you see where I’m going with this?”

“If you are presuming that I would pit them against one another to figure which has more meaning or utility to me, I would not.”

John grimaced, “Maybe don’t say utility around Shannon. She’d make sure to give you food
poisoning or something in retaliation.”

“Noted,” Sherlock continued.

Rosie was soon still in Shannon’s care and had ceased crying. Shannon walked around the room with gentle steps while Rosie’s inquisitive eyes scanned across everything in sight. Watson looked up at his best friend and noticed he wore a nearly dismissible smirk and smiling eyes. John crossed his arms and looked back at his blissful daughter. “I saw that.”


Chuffed with himself, John persisted, “That evidence of the emotion that you just felt.”

“And what do you think that you observed?” he queried.

“A moment of relief; happiness, even. You’re glad she’s home.”

Sherlock stifled a yawn, “Of course I am. She’s back where she belongs: here at Baker Street.”

“You’ve missed her.”

His voice grew quieter, “Yes. I did.”

“Do you think that she means it,” he added, “That she’s willingly getting clean?”

He shrugged, “I have no reason to doubt her. She’s always been vocal about my intermittent sobriety; she’s even been critical of taking her migraine medication too frequently. I have to then infer that whatever happened in Serbia caused her to ignore her sense of self-preservation.”

“Would you like to see your godfather, hmm? Would you like that?” Shannon asked while moving toward Holmes. “I thought so; here you are, sweetheart.” She passed baby Watson to him and looked at him in earnest, “I need to use the loo. Do you want John to go check to make sure that there isn’t anything in there that I can get in to?”

“There’s nothing,” he affirmed. “You won’t find anything in there.”

John nodded, “Besides, I trust you.”

“Thanks.”

“Mrs. Hudson will more than likely want your help downstairs when you’re done,” Sherlock announced.

“You’re taking that chance?” her skepticism getting the best of her.

“I am. Off you go.”

Once Shannon was out of earshot, John turned and asked, “You’re going to handcuff yourself to her after tea, aren’t you?”

“Oh, yes. Also, as a note of caution, should you go to hug her again, be wary of her back. She was beaten recently and her back is covered in bruises with the possibility of contusions.”

“Christ…and she still wants to get off the fentanyl?”

Sherlock nodded while Rosie grabbed at his lapel. “It would seem that way.”
After tea, John was in the kitchen doing the dishes with Mrs. Hudson while speaking idly about work and the relief brought with Shannon’s return. Sherlock sat on one end of the couch observing Shannon’s demeanor with his goddaughter. Rosamund was showing signs of fatigue but was having trouble getting comfortable in Shannon’s grasp.

“If I may,” he offered in a whisper.

Shannon peered over, “Yeah, anything…do you want her?”

“Though I do not mind, no; she seems more comfortable with you. I did observe that she likes to sleep on John’s chest from time to time when she’s irritable,” he offered.

She puzzled, “You mean have her on top of me so that she’s flat?”

“Exactly. Here, lean this way and prop your legs over the opposite arm.”

Suspicious, she quipped an eyebrow. “Oh really,” her voice flat.

“Look, either you do what I say and she goes straight to sleep or she’s going to wake up and start crying. It’s not a sound I would like to hear at the moment,” he replied, sharp.

“Fine,” she agreed before shifting with her position and bracing the delicate bundle in her arms. She rested her head on Sherlock’s leg and swung one of her legs onto the opposite armrest. She adjusted Rosie onto her torso and watched as her limbs relaxed, her distresses lessened, and her breathing relaxed. Shannon ran a hand through her soft hair and leaned up enough to place a kiss on her forehead. The repeated motion of her hand running over Rosie’s head began to lull the babe to sleep.

“You’re welcome,” Sherlock gloated.

Shannon groaned. “Yeah, yeah…whatever.”

“How does your back feel?” he asked with concern. “Are you in pain?”

“Yes, but it doesn’t matter. I’ll survive,” she whispered mid-yawned.

Sherlock rested his head on his clenched fist and copied her yawn. “Well, that’s good to know. You do look tired. Do you want me to take her so that you can get some rest?”

“No,” she answered, “I don’t want her to wake up. She’s nearly asleep.”

“You will be soon if you aren’t careful,” he warned.

She shrugged with another yawn before she stretched her free arm out toward the coffee table. “I won’t fall asleep.”

His chuckle rumbled low in his chest, “Sure you won’t.”

“It’s like I said, John, now that Shannon’s back I feel that there’s this extra weight that’s lifted…and I don’t mean to sound rude in regard to Mary,” she consoled. “I miss her, a lot.”

“No, no; I understand where you’re coming from. Mary’s gone and I am going to do my best to
come to terms over that; but, Shannon being home…it’s – it’s like a light’s breaking up the dark or – or the weight that’s been pulling me down has lessened. I know that. I’m glad that’s back. She makes us better,” he confided. “She makes him better.”

“Yes, I agree. I know that you’re in mourning over Mary; but – but if she’s here, you don’t have to have the sole worry of his well-being anymore. If you ask her, John…if you ask her to help you, you know that girl will move heaven and earth for you, right?” she disclosed with a reassuring look.

John paused and thought about what Mrs. Hudson had said, drying his hands with the damp towel. “No, I know,” he assured, “I’m glad that she’s back. This group could use some grounding. That’s what she’s good at.”

The pair walked two feet into the sitting area and froze. Oh. My. God. I didn’t think he’d take that conversation to heart so quickly. “Am – am I seeing this?”

“Oh, John, I can’t believe it!” she gasped.

Sherlock Holmes sat, head propped up on his fist, with Shannon using his leg as a pillow. She was cradling the back of Rosamund’s head to her shoulder while Sherlock’s free hand was bracing Rosie’s back. All of them quiet, at peace, and fast asleep.

John puffed air through his nose in a macabre recognition of the scene he saw before them. Mrs. Hudson’s eyes shifted in his direction. “What?”

“Look at them,” he stated sadly. “There was a chance that this could have been their life, you know? We may never know if she was going to have a child or not but Sherlock was willing to do whatever necessary for her. Still is, I guess. In another life, perhaps Shannon and Sherlock would have had a kid and we all would have had such different lives.”

“Oh, John,” Mrs. Hudson lamented with a gently squeeze to his arm. “Wouldn’t it be nice to live in a place where the ‘What ifs’ could come true.”

“Hmm, yes,” he agreed.

She continued, “If you want to stay the night, the crib that Shannon had set up in your old room is still there. Otherwise, I can help you gather your things to get ready to leave.”

“No,” he said running a hand through his hair. “I’ll stick around a bit. If she wakes up, then we’ll head home. Otherwise, I’ll stay the night.”

John tended to the fireplace when his daughter stirred, her round face still at peace in sleep. “Shhh, it’s okay, Rosie. It’s okay. I’ve got you,” Shannon cooed.

He turned on his knee and smiled, “You always had a knack for getting her to sleep.” With a quick hand wipe to the sides of his jumper, John moved to sit on the edge of the coffee table. “Mary always tried to get you to babysit before you left.”

“I remember,” she reminisced. “I came to call a few times.”

“You did, yes. God, she was always sound asleep when we’d come home. And she’d sleep through most of the night.”

“To be honest, I think it’s my sparkling personality,” she offered. “I don’t know what I do
differently that you don’t do.” He chuckled. “Though I will let you know that she is starting to stir. She’s been opening and clutching her hands around the fabric of my shirt since she coughed.”

“Oh, want me to take her?”

Shannon smiled and then opened her eyes, “That’s up to you, dear. I can keep her if you want for the night. I can put the crib here in the living room and sleep here on the couch. Judging by how he’s been twitching in his sleep I would think he’s going to be seeking his bed soon enough. He’s not comfortable sitting like this on the couch.”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Absolutely,” she pronounced.

He wrung his hands and said, “Do you find times…where…you miss what could have been this?”

She sighed and nodded knowingly, “Meaning do I wish that I had the life that’s pictured right now on this couch?”

“Yes,” he replied. “You and him, whatever it is…it works. I think it would have reined him in some.”

“It might have done,” she divulged. “But I can’t lament over what wasn’t. I can’t. It would send me down a hole that I don’t think that I’d be able to dig myself out of, nor would you be able to get me out of it. I am more than happy to help you however I can because you are my friend.”

“Do I wish for what you see here? I don’t know. I think society programs us all to want some semblance of this in our lives…some form of contentment. I find it in other things.”

“Such as?”

“Helping those I care about, living this life with them…that’s what give me solace. I do stupid things and put myself in danger, but it’s so that I know that those I care about are safe,” she revealed.

A grunt came from the back of his throat. “Mary would have said something similar.”

“She may have at one time,” Shannon responded quietly. “But, John…” she paused when she saw tears welling in his eyes. “You and this child were everything to her. Everything. We talked, you know. About our lives and how they weren’t as perfect as we’d hoped.”

“She told you how to get better at your jobs,” he asserted.

“No!” she blurted. “God, no – no… Before Magnussen, I had gone out to lunch with Molly and Mary had asked if she could tag along. She noticed that I had been busy, namely with the work that he and I did in Leeds.”

“Oh, really?”

She nodded and ran her hand through Rosie’s hair again. “Yeah. She made sure to point it out in front of Molly, too. I can assure you that I’ve been on the cranky side of Molly Hooper and it’s not one that I intend to repeat any time soon. But what I’m trying to get at was that she wasn’t telling me how to do my job better, she was constantly reminding me to leave it behind me; to focus on what really mattered. She was the sound of reason telling me to focus on my family. You guys are my family.” He wiped his eyes and cleared his throat. “Now, dad, I think you need your baby girl,” she offered.
John nodded, stood, and gently scooped his daughter up from her place on Shannon’s torso. “Thank you, Shannon. I really mean it. Thank you; I’m glad that you’re home.”

“So am I.” The emptiness that she had felt for the past few weeks had begun to dissipate.

Rosie began to fuss in John’s arms. He turned in the doorway back to Shannon, “Do you mind holding her while I go get us set up?”

“Not at all,” she replied. She gingerly inched herself up off the couch as her face scrunched into a wince. Once she got to John, he transferred Rosie back to her and she walked around the flat with her as he went to get dressed. John’s daughter looked more angelic in the firelight. “I’ll do whatever I can to keep you safe, kiddo. Whatever it takes, okay? I know that promises don’t do much good; nor do vows…but I swear on everything that I value in this world, I will protect you even if it kills me.”

“As do I,” Sherlock’s groggy voice interrupted her thoughts. He stood stiffly, joints creaking as he became upright. “I am her godfather after all.”

“Do you mean it?” Her voice was hard and her posture stiffened. He was taken aback by her probing question. “I’m serious, Sherlock. Do you mean what you’ve said; do you understand the gravity of it?”

Is she serious right now? Why would she question me concerning this? “Yes, I do.”

“She can’t protect herself; she can’t argue with you right now because she’s a child. You’re telling me that you’re willing to put her needs and her safety above your own or your willingness to show off...or – or any case that you may face?” she explained. “Because I will hold you accountable if you fail to do so. Now, I’m going to ask you again, do you mean it?”

“Yes,” he replied with immediacy. “With Mary’s death, she gave my life a value that leaves me indebted. Doing what is in my power to protect her for John’s sake is the least that I can do to try and begin to pay what I owe to the Watson’s.”

“Promise me,” she ordered. He must know that I’m not taking this lightly. This isn’t some flying fancy. “You keep in mind what you and I discussed earlier today and if you are serious, then you promise me that you’ll do what’s necessary.”

Without missing a beat, Sherlock’s resolve strengthened, “I give you my word and my promise.”

John returned in their moment of tension to retrieve his daughter. Shannon and John then walked to his room to put Rosie down for the night. “You alright? It seemed uh, tense, in there.”

“It’s fine, don’t worry. We both just agreed on something, that’s all,” she assured.

“Right,” he brushed off. “Can I ask you now...”

“What’s that?”

“How did you know...it was Mary...you know...before you were told,” he grimaced.

“Ah, that,” her tone grew morose. “It’s nothing flashy or spectacular.”

“You told him that something seemed out of place,” he prompted. “Is it something that I should have recognized?”
“More than likely not,” she offered. “You’ve become blind to it, in a way; and I don’t mean to make that sound placating…now that I’ve said it,” she apologized. “But, if you want to know, I will tell you. But I offer caution: you may not like the answer. The answer may hurt.”

_Do I want to know? _I mean…if it was something blatantly obvious, I don’t think she’d guard it so much…but she’s intuitive and maybe it’s something that I can change so that Mary doesn’t fade away so quickly… “Please.”_

“Her perfume,” she answered from the doorway. “I knew that the place had been cleaned…but there are underlying notes of perfume and smell that linger in the fabric, paper, and wood.” Though his outward appearance was stoic, internally he was shattering to pieces and she could see it in his eyes. “Before I left I committed every sense I could offer memorizing the details of this flat. And I’m glad that I did: when things were dark and horrible, I let my mind wander to this place.”

“I digress. Her perfume was fainter than I had ever experienced it in the flat. And then—when you hugged me—I couldn’t smell enough of it on your jumper. Sorry.”

“Well, I asked,” he grumbled.

She turned back into the room and said, “John…I dunno. I don’t know where I was going with that. I’m sorry. Get some sleep, yeah? Goodnight.”

“Hey, Shannon…I can tell, you know,” his eyes kind and his words a reassurance. “In your eyes, I can see it because, I’ve dealt with it. And as much as I don’t like talking about it to others, I do. Sherlock helped, in an odd way…to help me cope with it…”

“And what’s that?” she inquired, turning back toward the hallway.

“War.”

Heavy steps sounded on the stairs after she had closed the door behind her. She descended into the basement, the damp and dark enveloping her like an old friend. The droning hum from the dehumidifier that Mrs. Hudson had installed ensured that the bedroom wasn’t entirely silent. _It’s going to take time to get used to the quiet again. Take it one day at a time._ Her fingertips brushed across her desk and skidded lightly while she moved. The walls were light grey to allow keep the room brighter considering it was the basement room. Her furniture was still precisely where she had left it. _Mrs. Hudson’s been dusting. I’ll have to thank her later._ She collected her pajamas, towels, and shower basket in her arms and meandered back upstairs. The clock signaled that it had just passed nine thirty and 221B Baker Street was quieting down for the evening. Shannon hopped into the shower and turned handle toward _Hot_. Steam began to fill the small space quickly before she stepped into the water, eliciting a hiss as the water stream hit her back. The additional pressure against her mending muscles was painful but she knew that she’d be aching in the morning if she didn’t do her version of heat therapy tonight. Her limbs stretched languorously and her muscles ripped under the warm water. Her injuries protested under their new intrusion to their healing process, but she didn’t care. She closed her eyes and saw flashes of memories from Serbia flicker into view. She gasped and stood straight in a start and rubbed her face quickly. “Get it together, Shannon. Not now.” _Please. Not now. I don’t want to revisit that…please…no._

Her hand gripped the faucet and turned the dial off. Her towel, though soft enough in its own right, felt like sandpaper against her skin while she dried. In a demonstration of effort and restraint, she slipped a clean tank top over her head and shoulders without growling and crying out. A quick dry and ruffle of her hair left it askew, stringy, and sticking to her face. _At least the brown’s closer to my normal color. That copper was awful._ The bathroom door swung open abruptly and the residual steam billowed out into the hallway. Her tentative steps out of the bathroom made her feel like Frankenstein’s monster. _Yeah. I am the monster, though._
“You were in there for a time,” a baritone voice stated. His fatigue and residual exhaustion from the Culverton Smith case was threading through the timbre in his speech. She plopped her things near the doorway by the stairs and padded over to sit in John’s chair by the fire. The warmth felt wonderful against her skin and she stretched again. The fire’s shadows made her features and movements seem feline in its orange glow.

“Yeah. I needed it, you know, being sore and all,” her voice coarse and heavy.

“Yes, I deduced that. Tomorrow, how do you plan on spending your forty-five milligrams of morphine? I am only asking so that I can help you should you get antsy.”

Her head bobbed thoughtfully while she yawned and shut her eyes. “I have ten milligram capsules of Kadian, which for your inexperienced knowledge is an extended-release morphine sulfate. I have the twenty-five page report on it from the U.S. FDA should you not believe me. I guess, now that I think about it, I’m going to forty milligrams. I’ll take twenty at breakfast and twenty at tea.”

“I see,” concern in his voice. “And I’m sure that you read, as in most morphine sulfates, there’s increased risk for those who have had previous head injury, yes?” Her demeanor didn’t change. She realizes that it could potentially elevate CO$_2$ retention in her skull.

“Convenient that I have a doctor, a specialist registrar from the morgue, and a nursing detective to watch over me here at home rather than abroad and on the job,” she jabbed playfully.

“I fear you’re not taking this seriously,” he grumbled. Sherlock leaned forward onto his knees. “You could have adverse reactions to the morphine.”

She sighed, furrowed browns knitting together. “I could have been beaten to death while I was away, not recovered from the hypothermia, or – or caught tetanus from the nail that sliced my foot open…”

“Stop!” he snapped. “Hypothermia? Again? Are you mad!? Are you listening to me?!” he grabbed at her calf and shook firmly. He was surprised when she yelped and jumped backward out of the chair.

Shannon’s eyes were saucers reflecting pain and surprise. “I was bloody listening to you, Sherlock! I always fucking listen to you even when no one else is! What the hell did you do that for?” she squawked.

Shifting to concern rather than annoyance he stood and took a step in her direction. She hobbled backward in response. “What is wrong with your leg? What did you do?”

“I’m fine. I will be fine,” she protested. She limped over to the couch and wrapped herself in the blanket that had been resting on its back. “I’m fine,” her reiteration doing its best to convince the pair of them that she meant it.

Look at him. He’s a human lie detector. You think that you’re able to fool him? Yeah right. He’s going to find out one way or another; and that includes giving you a physical in your sleep. Would he do that? Nope…wait…yeah…yeah he probably would considering what’s lurking in my mind… God damn it. He’s going to keep pressing, you know. Might as well let him see it. It’s not like it’s anything bad…ish.

He watched the cogs in her mind whirl quickly during the second before she looked up at him. “You know how this is going to end, I can see that you do. Now, I’m going to ask ‘nicely’ one more time because you’re my friend. What happened?”
“Do not get angry,” she warned. “I want you to approach this as…a…uh…study in the healing properties of skin.”

“That’s a stretch.” Don’t get angry? Does she assume that I get angry all of the time because she should know that simply isn’t the case. I keep my emotions under control because… Blank. It was if there had been a momentary blip in a movie or cable feed. That’s what he had just experienced.

Shannon slowly rolled her trouser leg up for him to see the damage that had been done. The side of her calf had been sliced open in a series of lines and curves that it was in the second main stage of healing: tissue re-growth. “Turn your leg.” She pivoted on the cushion to display her wound more clearly and switched on the lamp in the corner.

He could make out single word that had been carved into her healing skin: мој

“It wasn’t just the beating and the drugs,” she began. She unfurled the fabric back down her leg and brushed nervous hands over her knees. “There were other things… Things that I’m not ready to discuss yet because they’re too painful. Things that – that even your brother’s not aware of.”

His uncanny silence urged her to press on. “I meant it, I’m not okay. But, I think that, after time, I will be better than I am now… This…this carcass that hangs off my bones feels as if it is breaking.”

He ran a hand over his mouth and clasped his hands behind his back. “Considering the extent of your injuries, do you think it wise to remove pain medication from your daily regimen? Do you understand the amount of pain that will be coming to you once the narcotic is out of your system?”

“It’s part of the human experience,” she reminded.

“Do you have any other injuries that you would like to bring to my attention?”

She smirked, “As macabre as this is going to sound, none that are pressing enough to warrant immediate explanations.”

Sherlock spun on his heel and moved back to his chair and took residence there. He pressed his fingertips together under his nose and went silent. She didn’t know how much time they spent in the quiet with nothing but occasional snapping from the fire, but he had interjected, “You will explain it and be honest about it? And you will explain the brand on your leg?”

“Yes, I will,” her voice heavy with sleep. She had shoved pillows under her head and was nearly unconscious.

“Alright, let’s go,” he said. Sherlock lifted himself out of his chair and walked across to her.

“No,” she whined. “I don’t want to go anywhere. I want to sleep here,” she whined.

“You need supervision for multiple reasons,” he reasoned. He leant down and gingerly lifted her off the couch minding her known injuries as best that he could. “I hope that your resolve is stronger than mine, truly. However, it is in my experience that most people are not able to meet their own expectation in that matter.”

Shannon didn’t fight but insisted on groaning and whining the entire time he walked down to his room. She was placed on one side on his bed and given a separate blanket to use in addition to the throw she had wrapped around her shoulders. “I’ll surprise you then,” she mumbled before cocooning herself like a fluffy burrito.

“You certainly have succeeded in that endeavor so far today.”
She wiggled an arm out from under her covers and flopped it across the bed without grace. “There.”

“What?” he puzzled.

She nuzzled into her pillow, “I may be exhausted, but I’m not stupid. That’s for my not getting up in the middle of the night, if you like.”

He frowned. “Get some sleep. I’ll be here in this room and John is in his room. You’re safe again.”

There was no argument, no witty comeback; not even angst was emitting from the burrito blanket on the bed. Soft snoring could be heard in moments before her arm went slack.

Sherlock rested his head on the headboard and committed the events of the day to his mind palace in the room he had dedicated to Shannon’s conversations and information. In that room, he placed a transcription of their conversations neatly into a folder. He annotated the transcription in its margins and the notes into a folder. He peered around at the growing collection of information gathered in his mind. Everything was neatly organized and there was an index off to the side that held cards with key-words and the cabinet that they could be found in.

“She’s growing quite a collection in this room,” he observed out loud.

“Yes, it does.” He turned around and to see her looking healthier and stronger than she did at present. She wore a tailored blouse similar in color to the Leeds dress, dark jeans, her favorite pair of brown riding boots and a navy cropped jacket. “Interesting, though, that you’ve catalogued everything in this room so carefully.”

“Of course, I am,” his projection of Shannon offered from behind him. “It only makes sense. You have rooms here dedicated to each of your friends and family.”

“Is it? I have it hidden from you now so that you are not able to wipe these memories from me again,” he replied coolly.

She crossed her arms and pulled her lips to the side in thought. “But if this projection of Shannon can be here in this room with you, is your room truly safe?”

“Yes,” he argued, “Because you’re a projection of her. I know where it is. She doesn’t. It’s not in any place that she would think to look.”

She nodded. “I understand completely. I’m a part of your mind.” She looked down at herself and gave a smug grin, “Your idea of me looks good. Thanks. Very tailored. Spot on.”

He shook his head in surprise, “Why does that matter?”

“It matters,” she brushed off the lapels of her jacket, “Because it matters to you. You care, presumably, that I get back to this point so that you know that I’m okay.”

He slipped the folder into the drawer and briskly shut the drawer, logging her conversation away. The room shook and there was a faint sound overtaking the normally quiet palace. Shannon nodded again knowingly. “Ah. Yes. We knew that was bound to happen tonight.”

“We?”

“Of course, we. She knew just as much as you did that this could happen. She has been away for
a while and there’s damage done that you’re not aware of,” she retorted robotically. “You were paying attention, obviously, but I would hope that your conscious mind is a little quicker than your subconscious.”

He rolled his eyes and began walking out into the hallway. “Wonderful to know that my projection of you is placating in here as well.”

She followed him, “Of course I am. You find those moments important. She’s telling you to be better.”

The mind palace rumbled again and he nearly lost his footing. “What is going on?”

“Think,” she replied. “It’s what you do. And this projection likes it when you do so.”

“Oh, shut up,” he retorted. “It’s Shannon.”

“I’m here.”

“No, not you…the real Shannon. Something’s wrong,” he announced. He began jogging down the hallway toward the stair to come out of his memory device.

“Very good,” she replied, keeping up with him. “What is wrong? Think it through. What are you walking in to? Formulate a hypothesis.”

The pair were running as quickly as they could. “Night terrors,” he huffed. “She’s crying in her sleep.”

“Listen to the pitch,” he projection cautioned. “Does that sound like crying?”

“Screaming…”

“Very good,” Shannon grabbed his arm and spun him around. “Problem: You know that this is going to take too long to retrace your steps completely.”

“Solution: I need an ulterior way to get out of here quickly. There needs to be an emergency exit; but, I can’t have one on this floor because of the age of the memories.”

She kissed him on the cheek, “Wish granted. Now: save me.” Shannon reeled backward in a spin and landed a kick square to his jaw.

He felt the layers began to peel back as he moved faster toward lucidity.
The Queen of Connacht

His eyes opened with a start and he pivoted to his left to find her fighting the cuff on her right wrist. He began to unbundle her from her blankets, but her screams became more frantic. “Shannon, you need to wake up. You are dreaming! WAKE UP! You’re safe!”

Her eyes were open, but she wasn’t awake. He heard John stirring from his room while he removed the last of the blankets. She shoved and protested his efforts to calm her screaming, “I DID NOTHING!”

John’s frantic steps led to him tripping in the hallway before bursting into Sherlock’s room. “What in God’s name…” he panted.

Sherlock drew an arm of steel across her torso and pulled her to sit flush against him. “Get her awake!”

“Shannon. Shannon, wake up!” Nothing. John took the glass of water from the side table and threw it in her face, “Come on, Shannon. You’re fine.”

She gasped in the shock being brought into consciousness. John leaned heavily on the edge of Sherlock’s mattress and panted in an effort to control the adrenaline now coursing through his veins. Shannon, out of breath and frantic, looked around at her surroundings and took note that it was still dark, John was beside her, and Sherlock was behind her.

“You’re okay,” John huffed, standing upright and placed his hands on his waist. “You’re okay now. You’re okay.”

“You were screaming in your sleep,” Sherlock offered in solace. “You weren’t waking up despite my best efforts.”

“I’m – I’m sorry,” she coughed. “I didn’t mean…”

“It’s alright,” John soothed. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” she quick replied. “Yeah, I’m sorry. Go back to bed. I didn’t wake Rosie, did I?”

“No…no she was still sleeping,” he replied. John stood in the doorway and peered back, “You sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah. I’m fine. See you in the morning. I’ll make breakfast to make up for this,” she offered in consolidation.

“Alright. Sherlock?”

His head bobbed, “Fine, thank you, John.”

“Right, it’s three in the morning. Get some sleep, Shannon.” John had the door click closed behind him and made his way back to his room.

She sighed and let her head fall backward onto Sherlock’s shoulder. She used her free hand to wipe the rest of the water from her face. “I’m sorry, did you get any of the water?”

“Some,” he replied. “I’ve had worse.”
Calm flooded her body and her exhaustion began to set in again. “Sorry that I woke you.”

“I was in my mind palace cataloguing today’s events,” he said. She leaned forward and rolled back over to her side of the bed. “You said, ‘I did nothing’,” he stated plainly. “Do you know what that means?”

Her movement froze and she felt a cold sweat wash over her skin. “Yes.”

“Is it something that you wish to discuss?”

“No,” her tone abrupt. “But we will, soon, I would think. Get some sleep.” She flopped onto the mattress and stuffed his spare pillow under her head.

Sherlock watched her still form sink into the blankets. He pulled the duvet over his shoulder and maneuvered so that his back was to her. She had done the same, allowing for each of their restrained arms to pool toward the center of the bed. He was nearly asleep when he heard gentle humming from behind him. Knowing that Shannon’s voice was hoarse and that she had a knack for singing different parts of music as she saw fit rather than sticking to linear motion, he could see the shell of the song at hand.

Its musicality was haunting and not like anything he had recalled her exposing his mind to previously. *Music still brings you solace. Good. She must think that I’m asleep. She’s singing quietly now.* Shannon’s voice was barely a whisper occasionally cutting into silence in her effort to not wake him. *Shame that I’m awake.*

Her diction, meaning this crispness of the syllables and vowel sounds, was impeccable. *Is – is that Icelandic? When did she learn Icelandic? Did she learn the language or is it simply a song that she’d learned and can reiterate without flaws?*

“Heyr, himna smiður, hvers skáldið biður.
Komi mjúk til mín miskunnin þín.
Því heit eg á þíg, þú hefur skaptan mig.
Eg er þrællinn þinn, þú ert drottinn minn.

Guð, heit eg á þíg, að þú græðir mig.
Minnst þú, mildingur, mín, mest þurfum þín.
Ryð þú, röðla gramur, ríklyndur og framur, hölðs hverri sorg úr hjartaborg.

Gæt þú, mildingur, mín, mest þurfum þín, helzt hverja stund á hölda grund.
Send þú, meyjar mögur, málsfénin fögur, öll er hjálp af þér, í hjarta mér.”

By the last stanza, he had noted the strain in her voice indicating that she had been crying. His mind shouted for him to remain still and not bother her because she was beginning to skip words and mumble them together: gradually she had lulled herself back to sleep. Not long after, Sherlock drifted into the blackness of slumber.

Pastel gold shimmered through the bedroom windows nudging the detective to the world of the living. The faint smell of tea and toast wafted through the air in waves. He stretched his limbs across the cool bed sheets in preparation to get out of bed. *Cool sheets?* “Damn.” He lifted his hand up and saw that Shannon had slipped out of her cuff and was no longer in his care.
He rolled off his bed with a dull thud and scrambled toward the door. He bolted down the hall and saw John’s back sitting at the table. “John, there’s a situation.”

Watson turned in his chair alarmed. “What are you on about?”

“Shannon’s not…” he faltered when Shannon came into view carrying a mug and plate of toast from the kitchen.

“…attached to you? Yeah, I know,” he laughed. “Hasn’t been for a few hours.”

“You were out. I tried to wake you at one point; but nope…so I took matters into my own hands,” she offered in a shrug, biting into her toast.

“I didn’t know you could slip cuffs,” John stated with a devilish smirk. Rosie sat comfortably in his lap clanking a spoon off the table.

She sipped her tea and her eyes were filled with mirth. “Oh. You know. Spoilers.”

“Right. Erm, Sherlock,” John asked, “Are you going to stand there all morning or are you going to sit and have breakfast?” Shannon followed John’s line of sight and gave Sherlock an inquisitive look.

He rounded into the kitchen, made himself a cuppa, grabbed toast, and moved to the table. “To answer your question,” Shannon began, “John has my pills. I felt that it best for both our sakes that these pills not be on the premises. You’re worried my constitution isn’t strong enough; and you’re a sporadic drug addict who is coming off a nasty bender.”

“You haven’t taken any pills yet,” his eyes suspicious.

“Nope,” John replied. “I counted the pills and she let me go through her things. They’re all here. And, while I’ve got them out,” he popped the lid off and pulled two pills into his palm. “Twenty milligrams, milady.”

“You’re so kind,” she placated. “I can’t wait to be done with these.” Sherlock munched quietly on his toast. “And I think I’m going to go swimming today.”

“You’ll metabolize the narcotics at a faster rate,” Sherlock informed.

John’s response was a frown that Shannon found comical. “I don’t care,” she chuckled. “I’m going swimming. I need to. You can follow me or not, I don’t care. I refuse to stay cooped up in this flat during the length of my recovery and stabilization. Problem?” she scoffed.

Dr. Watson’s face said everything that was going through his mind: Go ahead, Sherlock. Tell her that she can’t. She’ll be more than happy to put you in your place. He looked to Sherlock with the expression adorned on his face and waited. “Well? I think she’s going to swim today, don’t you? You’re recovering from the drugs and kidney failure; it’s not like you’re in any place to stop her.”

Sherlock refused to emote when he heard the clink of silverware on a plate. Shannon had dropped her knife in a moment of bewilderment. “Kidney failure?!”

John sat back and watched his best friend’s discomfort and emotionlessness take over. “You – you didn’t know?”

Shannon wiped her mouth with her napkin and threw down onto the tabletop while radiating attitude. “No, he conveniently left that part of the conversation out yesterday.”
“I did not, you weren’t listening,” Sherlock replied. “I told you that they were beginning to fail.”

“Alright, I’ll give you that. The beginning stages are different then right out failure,” she stressed.

“Does it make a difference?” he questioned, biting into his toast.

She glared for a time, then got up from the table and left breakfast to go downstairs. John leaned back in his chair to listen for the front door. “Ah, yep. There it is: you’ve managed to make her upset enough in two days that she’s stormed out to get away from you. Just like old times.”

“Me? What did I do?” he gaped.

You’re the single smartest and dumbest man I know. “Seriously? She cares about you. She cares about what happens to you and your wellbeing. You weren’t completely honest with her and now she’s mad,” John informed. “If you were planning on her talking to us about what happened in Serbia any time soon, then you’ve messed that up.”

“Not honest? No, she’s misinterpreted: what I said was that when I realized that my kidneys were failing, she’d have been angry with me.”

John blinked repeatedly while his mind did its best to comprehend what was just said. “You know what, I need to drop Rosie off and get to work.”

“Me? You’re not going to help me with this? I don’t know what she wants or what’s going on in her mind. You can’t expect me to delve into that on my own!”

“No. No – no…that’s exactly what you’re going to do. She’s annoyed with you. Not me. You fix it.” He gathered Rosie into his arms and nabbed his bag. “Don’t let her be pissed at you long.”

The Watsons left Baker Street and Sherlock watched from the window as they disappeared into the crowd.

“Miss Byrns? Pleasure to see you,” Rachel, the attendant greeted jovially. “It’s been a while. How are you? Were you away on business?”

“I’m doing well, dear! It’s great to see you! Yes, I was away for business setting up a new office. I’m just glad to be back home,” Shannon said with a kind smile.

“Still using Mr. Holmes’ pass?”

“Of course not,” she joked with an obvious wink and sarcastic tone. “That’s completely against policy. I wouldn’t dream of doing that.”

Rachel’s laugh was soft and light like petals drifting on spring winds. “The pool’s free. Go on!”

Shannon changed quickly and taped her leg with waterproofing. Her joints creaked and cracked during her stretches before she eased her way down the ladder. The heated water initially felt cool against her skin while she acclimated. It took no time for her to begin finding a rhythm: her laps began to blur together and she was darting like a bullet. Water skimmered over her rippled muscles, water splashed away from her hands, and her measured breaths created a symphony of tranquility. Nothing could touch her in this pool: not Sherlock, not morphine, not Mycroft; not Serbia. Nothing. Nothing. There is something ethereal about being in the water. She can be placid or a tempest. Symbolically she’s the sign of life but she’s more than happy to take it. Oh. That’s quite good. And with that…that’s length sixty-eight. I’m done. I don’t want to push it. I ache. An ache
that I’ve missed; I’ll admit. I just needed the quiet. I needed the water…I needed to know that I can…that I still got it.

So, let’s see. This is a twenty-five meter pool; so if I do the math…that’s close to seventeen hundred yards…a mile? I did a mile? Jesus. And my time? She reached up onto the pool deck and grabbed her phone. She tapped the stopwatch and gazed at the large blinking numbers: 22:03

I thought I was in the pool longer. I’m not going to push it today. No. That’s…that’s good. Get your ass out of the pool, girl. Let’s go. Up the ladder. There you go. Fight that fire in your blood. I’m tired. But you knew that you’d be tired. That’s a really great time. Better than you’ve done in a while. Christ…why did I do this? Oh. I was angry. Was I angry?

No. More hurt than anything. Does it matter, really? You’re letting your emotions get the best of you. He still landed himself in the hospital regardless of it being the beginning stages or full-fledged kidney failure. And he said ‘kidneys’. They both were compromised. Was his selective vocabulary chosen to make me feel more at ease that Culverton Smith nearly killed him?

What would Mary have done now? You know that answer. She’d tell you to calm down and not be rash. With that look…you know…the one that says she’d back me up if I went to get even. God, my legs…how am I standing in the shower without falling? Will? Strength? Doesn’t feel like I have much left.

But I protect my family. That’s what I do…what I try to do…that’s what I am. I’m not an instrument of destruction like my mother intended…I’m a protector. I would rather suffer a thousand deaths than be the cause of any more. That settles it. I know what I’m doing with my afternoon.

She finished readying herself and dressed carefully. She shouldered her gym bag, lowered her aviator sunglasses to the bridge of her nose, and popped in her earbuds connected to her phone. Rachel waved Shannon off, “See you later this week?”

“Definitely. I’m getting back into my old routine. I’ll be in Friday; you working?”

“Yeah, morning shift, though,” Rachel answered thoughtfully.

“I’ll see you not long after you open up,” Shannon informed. “See you.”

She hailed a cabbie and slipped into the back seat, “Westminster Station, if you please. And if you go down The Mall at St. James Park, it’ll be a little faster this time of day. I’ll give you an extra fiver if you can get me there in twenty minutes. It’ll be an extra tenner if it’s closer to fifteen.”

The cabbie smirked, “I’ll do my best and we’ll see where we get.”

Shannon handed the cabbie his fair, tip, and an additional ten pound note. “Nicely done. Almost seventeen minutes. I’m impressed. You have a good day.”

“I’m around Lisson Grove and Paddington quite a bit. You ever need anything, here’s my card,” he offered. “I’ll get you where you need to go.”

“Thanks, mate,” she replied taking the card and stuffing it into her pocket. “I appreciate it.”

She turned and walked up the Victoria Embankment toward the corner of Richmond Terrace. A blackish-grey triangle with silver, capital letters greeted her at her destination. NEW SCOTLAND
Soon she was in Greg’s office sitting idly in one of his guest chairs. She heard a young man’s voice from the office. “Oh, Detective Inspector!”

“What, I’m off to lunch,” he protested. “Isn’t there someone else that you can ask?”

The young man stammered, “That’s just it, sir…there’s a woman sitting in your office that said she had an appointment with you.”

“I don’t have any appointments, and I surely wouldn’t schedule them when there’s free food in the breakroom today,” Greg argued.

“She insisted, was very distraught…”

Greg groaned, “Two minutes. If I don’t know who she is, you’re getting my filing for the week.”

“Yes, sir.”

Greg opened his door abruptly. “Sorry to keep you waiting, I didn’t realize that I had an appointment today.”

“You didn’t,” Shannon informed.

“Shannon. Jesus, I thought I had a victim in here.”

She chuckled, “No, sorry. I’m sure this is your time to eat. I can walk with you, if you like.”

“Sure, what brings you to my office?”

She stood and steadied her posture. “I want to see Culverton Smith.”

He nearly tripped in surprise. “You what?”

“You heard me,” she stated. “I’d like to see him.”

“I can’t do that. You know that.”

“Doesn’t keep me from asking,” she offered.

“Why, you going to force me to let you see him?” he growled.

Shannon snarled back, “I wouldn’t do that.”

“Well, I don’t know what you would or wouldn’t do since you’ve come back.”

“Wow, now that’s low,” she snapped. “I wouldn’t do that to you.”

“Didn’t keep you from erasing yourself the first time.”

“Jesus, Greg. What the hell is wrong with you?”

“My job’s already under scrutiny because of him, and now you’re asking me to break procedure for you, too. Why do you even want to see him, huh? He’s confessing and won’t shut up about it,” Greg groaned.

She took two steps toward him and threw her bag on the floor. “Because I want to see him, Greg.”
“If this has to do with Sherlock sending you here…”

“He doesn’t know that I’m here,” she bit and watched realization flood his eyes. “Look, you owe me nothing…nothing. I merely want to speak with him and I swear to you that I won’t blow your case.”

“You do know that I want justice for Sherlock, right? But I have to consider justice for all of his other victims, too, yeah?”

She nodded firmly. “Of course I do. I just want to see him. I just want to talk to him. That’s all.”

Lestrade’s displeasure was oozing from every grumble and sigh that he uttered. He grabbed a piece of paper and a pen, and started scribbling on the paper. “As you know, I can’t allow you to tamper with this investigation. There’s are numerous victims and the caseload is rather large.” He finished and handed her the note. “So, I suggest that you clear off.”

Her features became stoic. “I understand completely, Detective Inspector.”

“Good,” he announced loudly. Any members of staff that may have been eavesdropping would know no differently. He then whispered, “Make sure he knows.”

Shannon leaned into his ear and replied smoothly, “Smith will never want to be in the general public’s population again. You have my word.”

“Now if you’ll excuse me,” he gave a nod to the paper, “I’m late. Thank you for coming in to see me.” Greg left quickly, leaving someone else in the office to show her out. She opened the paper and found the information she had sought: Smith’s location.

Shannon had changed into a disguise, aiming to be a fangirl rather than her normal, radiant self. The used the black, bob-cut wig, a denim jacket and some khaki capris for a costume; adding some blue contact lenses and made her make-up flamboyant.

The officer looked her over, eyes switching between her I.D. and her face. “His…niece?”

“Yeth,” she wheezed with a little slobber falling from the corner of her mouth from her implied lisp. “Uncle Cully.”

“And you’re Maeve Smith…how are you related?”

She took a large gulp of air and spoke, spittle flying as she went, “Well, you thee, righ’, my grandma had a couthin, and then they both had kidth and kidth, right? Tho I guethh that really maketh uth like, third or fourth couthinth, I dunno…but he’th family and my uncle wantth me to make thure that he’th okay, righ’…becautje my uncle doethn’ have any kidth…” She leaned forward and covered the side of her mouth, “…that’th cause he’th gay…AND…”

“Alright! Just stop talking,” the officer ordered. “Here’s your ID. Sign in here. Do you know the rules?”

“Oh yeth,” she chirped. “I read the ruleth theven timeth before I got here on the buth!”

“Yeah, right,” he dismissed. “Here’s your badge. You’re allowed to have twenty minutes with him because of how high profile his case is. Do you understand?”
“Yeth.”

He buzzed her in and showed her where to wait. Soon, Culverton Smith sat on the other side of their table in the visitor’s room. He was chained to his chair and warned to behave himself by the corrections officer.

Once they were alone, Culverton looked her over with a quirked eyebrow and a salacious smirk. “Now that we’re alone, my dear, mind telling me who you are? I don’t have a niece named Maeve.”

“I juth-t had to thee you,” she wheezed in excitement.

He flashed a knowing smile, “Ah, I see. You’re a fan.”

“You could thay that,” she grinned, bobbing her head down meekly.

“Ah, lovely. You’re the first to get in to see me. Well done on you,” he praised. “So, to what do I owe this lovely conversation with my biggest fan?”

“I – I juth-t…I…” she stammered.

“It’s alright, my dear,” he cooed. “You’ll find that you’re quite safe here.”

Her body moved to sit upright and tilted her head from shoulder to shoulder, her spine cracking providing delicious relief. “Let’s be frank, Mr. Smith,” she began. She threw away her lisp and wiped her mouth on the back of her hand. She pulled makeup wipes out of her denim pocket and began to wipe away her disguise.

“I don’t think they would allow conjugal visits,” he chuckled. “But I’m willing to see what you have to offer.”

She rolled her eyes and in one final stroke, had the last of the makeup removed. “Don’t be crude.”

“Ooh! AND feisty. I like you.”

She replaced the wipe back in her pocket, clasped her hands and rested them on the tabletop. “Mr. Smith, do you know what the name Maeve means?”

“No,” he shimmied on the chair in glee. “Are you going to tell me?”

“It’s the anglicized version of Méabh in modern Irish; or, if you prefer, Medb in old Irish.”

He licked his lips, “So you’re an Irish girl, are you?”

“Will you shut up,” she barked. “If you were paying attention to my diction and dialect, you would know that’s not necessarily the case.”

“Now, in the Ulster Cycle of mythology, Medb was the queen on Connacht. She was a cunning Warrior Queen, if you will. Her father had married her off to Conchobar; but he was an ass and he leaves him. She was then installed as a Queen of Connacht. She loved many after Conchobar and with her next husband had a daughter, and the seven sons that she named Maine.”

He was enamored, “Is that so? Go on.”

“She still hated the man who had done her wrong, Conchobar…the ex-husband. So, she goes and asks an old druid one day if he knows which one of her sons could kill Conchobar. He replied, ‘The one named Maine’.”
“While this is fascinating, I don’t understand why you came all this way to tell me a story.”

“You see, my name isn’t Maeve…but I very much am the Warrior Queen. I have lots of ‘friends’ named Maine. They would do things that I ask because you’ve slighted me. But, my name…my real name…comes from the Irish goddess who was the possessor of wisdom. If you combine them, I am one very foreboding son of a bitch,” she snarled.

Smith pulled back from the table, confusion washing down his features. “I don’t…understand…”

“Try to,” she bit. “A disguise is incredibly convincing so long as you are expecting and wanting to see someone in particular. You? I fed off your vanity. So vain for such a little man. God knows that you needed all the help that you could get to murder those people.”

“Stop it,” he snapped.

“Hell, if they were drugged enough that they couldn’t put up much of a fight, then ninety percent of the work was already done. So really, can’t you only claim a tenth of the people you killed? Shame.”

“I said stop it!”

In an instant, Shannon was behind Smith and had sharpened piece of plastic at his neck. “If you make any noise, I will make this look like a suicide: you were so remorseful and couldn’t cope with the weight of your sins.” He gulped and gave a subtle nod in acknowledgement. “Good boy. Now, to the point.”

“I’m a fan, but not of yours. You hurt someone very dear to me and a handful of other people. You allowed your vanity and your arrogance to get in the way of murdering him.”

“…Holmes…Homes sent you!” he whispered.

“Oh no, darling,” venom dripped off her words, “He didn’t send me. I am here of my own volition. In fact, he would have vehemently argued for my not being here because of the situation you and I find ourselves in.” Sweat trickled down his neck and his face flushed. “He is dear to me. And, it is my job to remove problematic people from view in this world. I’ve toppled mafias, crime syndicates, and dictators. You would be easy to dismiss and not be missed, I assure you.”

“I’ll leave you with his: I am just as intelligent as Sherlock Holmes and far less forgiving. Especially for transgressions committed against the people that I care about… The people I would go to hell for…I would die for.”

“If you ever breathe free air again, I will be there and you will not have your freedom for long before I put you in a hole that you’ll never get out of. You will not be remembered, you will not be missed; you wouldn’t be a thought on the minds of anyone. You would be a random Wikipedia page that someone accidentally found and just as easily dismissed.”

“He is under my protection. I will defend his life at all costs.”

“He – he still has his life,” Smith reminded with another large gulp.

“He does. But I’m here and he’s not. So…darling…let’s have a kiss before I go,” she seethed. She placed her tongue on his cheek, awkwardly licking up his face.

She pulled the blade from his throat and moved toward the door. “I’ve tasted greatness…men that will be remembered,” she spat onto the floor. “And you taste like fear and you are sorely lacking.”

Smith faced forward in a stupor. He heard the knock on the door and he heard the mysterious woman leave. “Alright, Smith, let’s go,” the officer ordered. “Now.”
“She – she – she…” he stammered.

“Alright, let’s go.”

Shannon grabbed her I.D. from the first officer and left. It didn’t completely fill the void that she felt, but it was a start. *I think that’s enough for one day. I need to rest.*
Sherlock was sat in the brown, leather chair of the Stranger’s Room. Mycroft was two minutes later than his punctual self would normally allow. He observed the fresh newspaper on the desk with a clean cup and saucer. *He hasn’t been here yet today.* *Interesting.* Sherlock heard the door open and Mycroft’s long strides toward his chair.

“Brother mine, to what do I owe this visit,” Mycroft stated as he stood at his desk, fingers splayed over the wooden surface.

“Oh, I think that you know why I’m here,” he replied. The only indication he gave to acknowledge his brother’s presence was a quirk of his eyebrow.

Mycroft’s displeasure and irritation for the subject was apparent. “Look at that; you’re looking better than you had done in the past weeks.” He sat in his chair and continued their verbal chess match saying, “I would say that her retrieval was imperative, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes, I would.”

“But,” Mycroft led.

Sherlock drew a sharp breath, “But, as you imply, she has been brought back to Baker Street for my immediate recovery.”

“Of course,” he frowned. “Get to the point, Sherlock. I do not enjoy this conversational chess match you’re playing.”

“Do you intend to send her back out into the field after I have recovered?”

“That is the business of my office and that of the Commonwealth. She rescinded her retirement to play the martyr.”

The younger’s tone showed a slight edge, “We both know that you were all too happy to say no to that proposition: someone as intelligent as I am with a specialized skill set that’s willing to do the work no one else in your arsenal would do voluntarily? That’s Christmas for you.”

“Sherlock,” he warned, “Do not forget that I brought you your goldfish when you were bored and that she has, twice now of her own volition, chosen to do tasks that you disagree with.”

His pupils turned to pinpoints in anger. “She is not, nor has she been, a goldfish in this equation. She is my friend. You wouldn’t have upgraded her surveillance level had you not thought she was beneficial to my wellbeing. It was easy enough to find out that you had done so years ago.”

“What kind type of ordeal did she go through in Serbia?”

Mycroft leaned back into his chair. “Now, now, brother; that’s simply not true at all. Have you forgotten that you were bored once after the Alder debacle and requested that she be flown here from Boston so that you were *entertained*? Do not lecture me on the civil niceties that you are seemingly growing fonder of the longer that the pair of you are in proximity to each other.”

“Mycroft, your conversation bores me. Tell me what happened. Now.”

“That’s classified, I’m afraid. You’re not permitted to look at that file,” the elder chastised.
“Do you really think that threat will prevent me from finding it? I am asking nicely,” Sherlock grumbled.

Mycroft moved forward and propped his elbows on the desk. His voice rang out in mild surprise, “Nicely? Nicely? When was the last time that you played your games ‘nicely’? Sherlock, I really do not have time for this elementary game of yours. See yourself out, will you?”

Sherlock stood, draped his coat over his arm, and turned back to his older brother. “I suspect that you will enjoy the paper this afternoon…page seven, I think.”

Mycroft placed a cordial but false smile to adorn his face. “Why would you think so?”

“I would think page seven will pique your interest. Good bye, Mycroft.”

Sherlock left the Diogenes Club quietly and headed out into the city. Mycroft picked up his paper and opened it to page seven. Mycroft scanned through the International News section until his eyes found what Sherlock had wanted him to see:

SERBIA – Human and drug trafficker Stefan Kasun was found dead in his club earlier this week. Sources say that Kasun was strangled and then shot nine times. Officials suspect foul play; his former associates are under investigation and remain at large.

Mycroft’s cool eyes read the passage once more before he reached for his phone. He dialed a memorized extension and waited for the dial tone to cease. “Send a car for Miss Shannon Byrns. Use destination ‘L’. Use force if necessary.”

Shannon was walking along Baker Street when a dark colored sedan pulled up to the curb beside her. Her head tilted downward and without moving her head to the side, she peered out of the side of her ye as far as possible to take note of the vehicle. Government car. Ah yes, Mycroft wants to see me, I’m sure. I wonder what has spurred this meeting into fruition.

She stopped, turned around, and watched three men step out onto the sidewalk. Escorts? Now that’s new.

“Miss Byrns,” a familiar face said. “Mr. Holmes would like to speak with you.”

Shannon racked her brain until she was able to place his face, “Jeremiah. How nice to see you; last I saw you, you were on the plane bringing me over from Boston years ago.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he answered.

Shannon looked him over quickly and found information that she was looking for. “How’s the wife, the baby, and your new cat?”

Her observations startled Jeremiah’s compatriots, but he did not waiver. “They’re well, ma’am. We got the kitten three weeks ago.”

“Thought so. It’s the claw marks and the fine fur that you missed on your jacket. Now, I don’t feel like talking to Mycroft today. If you don’t mind, I’m nearly back to 221B and would really like to rest.”

The burlier of the two men stepped forward with a menacing frown. She looked him over before looking up to his eyes. Previously broken right hand twice, has broken left wrist once, his nose has been broken and has recently finished healing from another fracture. Calluses on his hands
indicate that he enjoys gardening. Six foot, four inches; two hundred seventy-five pounds: muscle. Plan of defense: exploit weakened bone and muscle structure. Potentially swings wide left hook. “He insists.”


The other escort also stepped forward. “Miss Byrns, we have been given authorization to remove you from the premises if necessary.

Six foot, two hundred five pounds. Practices Aikido. Weakness detected in right ankle, knee, and hip. Loves painting models, broke up with boyfriend five months ago; still grieving.

“That’d be utterly stupid on your part.”

“Marcus,” Jeremiah snapped. “Look, Miss Byrns, Mr. Holmes has ordered that you come in for questioning.”

“Do you know why?” she queried with a tilt of her head.

“Yes, ma’am,” he replied. Her vacant expression hinted to him that she had no idea what was going on. “Please, will you come with me? It’s urgent.”

She gave a firm nod and re-shouldered her bag. “Fine. But, Jeremiah, if your men put their hands on me, they will learn.”

Dillan and Marcus peered over to each other with skepticism in their eyes. Jeremiah nodded and opened the car door with a gentlemanly gesture. “Of course, ma’am. If you would?”

Shannon’s eyes bounced between the three men sent to fetch her. Her heart wasn’t racing, her mind wasn’t muddled, and the fire that normally burned in her gut was quelled. I’m…I’m okay. It’s alright. Mycroft wants to chat. You’re fine. She ducked into the car and was soon on her way.

Shannon and her escorts were stopped at the entrance to the abandoned warehouse by another of Mycroft’s men. He held out his hand and said, “Jeremiah, by orders of Mr. Holmes, you are to return to the car. Please turn around and enter the vehicle.” Jeremiah frowned in surprise stood rooted to the ground. “Now, please.”

“And what about Marcus and Dillan,” Jeremiah queried. “Are they allowed to enter freely?”

“Mr. Holmes has asked that they escort her into the warehouse. Return to the car.”

Shannon placed a gentle, reassuring hand on Jeremiah’s forearm. “It’s alright, Jeremiah. Thank you for always being such a gentleman. Go home to your wife and baby, my boy. You’ve nothing to worry about.”

Begrudged, Jeremiah did as instructed and was sent away. Shannon, Marcus, and Dillan walked up a flight of stairs and toward the center of the large, vacated floor. Mycroft stood on the catwalk at the end of the room, leaning heavily on his umbrella.

“Miss Byrns, welcome back to England,” he hailed from his lofty position.

She looked up to express her boredom. “Frosty! How are you? Glad that we had this chat. I’ll be
on my way home.”

“Stop where you are,” he commanded. “I must say that I am growing tired of the nonchalance and childishness that you exhibit every single time that we speak. Will you grow up?!” he snapped.

Shannon planted her feet and threw her hands on her waist. “Grow up? Really, Mycroft. You must be joking: I was just doing your dirty work in Serbia and you’re chastising me because I utilize my humor as a coping mechanism? I must say, you wouldn’t’ be saying that to me if we were on the same level, talking face to face.”

“Perhaps,” he waved her off. “Do you know what I found in the paper this afternoon?” he opened.

“Oh…God…no…say it isn’t so…did your favorite bakery burn down? Someone talked at the Diogenes Club and started a war? I got it,” she chastised. “Did someone find your sense of humor?”

Holmes slammed his umbrella down onto the perforated metal walkway for an echoing crash akin to a gun going off. He glared down at Shannon who hadn’t flinched away at the sound. “Miss Byrns, you’ve tested my patience. Gentlemen,” he alerted. “You may begin.”

Shannon felt Dillan’s hand crash down on her shoulder and Marcus grabbed the back of her neck. “Mycroft,” her tone deadly, “You know what’s about to happen. Why would you do this?”

“It’s a test, Miss Byrns. Do not fail,” he warned.

She unshouldered her bag and fell to the floor. She pivoted onto her hip and unclasped her bag’s strap while sweeping Dillan’s legs out from under him with her good leg. Marcus stomped onto her injured calf which elicited a guttural growl from Shannon.

Dillan rolled over and grabbed her by the jacket and dragged her across the floor toward him. At her destination, she flew a kick over her head and made contact with his face before following her momentum to rolling backward onto her feet. She launched an expert, palmed strike to Dillan’s face and rendered him unconscious.

Marcus flew in from her right grabbing her midsection in a tackle. She redirected their momentum and threw Marcus back onto the ground. She backed away from him and pocketed her shoulder strap. “You know, for practicing Aikido, you’re not really utilizing momentum very well,” she panted.

He staggered as he stood. “How could you possibly know that,” he growled. “I’ve never met you before.”

She shrugged, “It’s what I do. Sherlock’s my best friend, you know.”

“Christ,” he lamented.

“Did your boss not explain that to you?” she exclaimed. “Mycroft, shame on you! Your people need all the help that they can get.”

“I’m not going to go easy on you,” Marcus sniped. “My job is to take you down.”

“That’ll be quite a feat. Good luck on that,” she commented honestly. “You’re not bad, man. But I may break you if you don’t tap out when the time comes.”

He circled her, “How is that?”
“You’ll see.”

When he had begun to circle behind her, she jumped to perform a reverse roundhouse kick and clipped his arm. He followed her movement and tried to throw her to the ground, but Shannon rolled across the floor and hopped back onto her feet.

Marcus knew that she’d be able to throw him with any of the Aikido he had learned. *She’s studied and, though I don’t like it, she’s better than I am. I wonder how she is with fighting…* He walked toward her and rounded a kick to her hip and followed through with punch.

“Really now,” she panted. “Aikido’s not working for you so you’re going to throw it away?” He threw a backhanded punch wide and she intercepted it. With fluidity, she put one hand on his wrist and the other on his elbow. “Iikyō: Number one.” Then she torqued his elbow backward so that it bent and said, “Nikyō: Number two,” a seamless transition and she had him in a wristlock, “Sankyō: Number three.” Shannon proceeded to dig her knuckles into his radial nerve and announced, “Yonkyō: Number four…and my personal favorite…Kotegaeshi.” She pressed her thumb into his palm and wrapped her fingers around the back of his hand and turned his wrist outward. She knew that if he fought it, the pain would be immense and in retrospect, she had done all of this in less than twenty seconds. She was using his body’s momentum to throw him around like a rag doll.

She landed an immobilizing punch to his side and pulled her shoulder strap from her pocket. The nylon was wrapped around his wrist and pulled backward. Before Marcus could react, she swept his legs, pinned him face-down to the floor, dug her knee into his back, and began to pull up on the strap. *The tendons in his elbow and shoulder should be burning right about……now.*

He yelled and grimaced as she applied gentle pressure to his back and arm. “Stop! STOP!”

“You know what you have to do,” she reminded him. Her hair was sticking in strings to her face and she felt as if her shirt was soaked from sweat. Marcus quickly tapped the floor and Shannon relented her assault. She hopped off his back and backed into the wall which she leant on heavily and panted.

She threw her head back to rest on the window while leaving a wary eye on Marcus and said, “Yield and overcome;
Bend and be straight;
Empty and be full;
Wear out and be new;
Have little and gain;
Have much and be confused.
Therefore wise men embrace the one and set an example to all.
No putting on a display, they shine forth.
Not justifying themselves, they are distinguished.
Not boasting, they receive recognition.
Not bragging, they never falter.
They do not quarrel, so no one quarrels with them.
Therefore the ancients say, ‘Yield and overcome’.”

“Who the hell said that,” Marcus groaned during his attempt to stand.

“Lao Tzu. Chapter twenty-two of the Tao Te Ching. My old martial arts instructor made us recite it every class. Your mind is too busy when you’re fighting. It’s getting in the way. Let the artform do the work for you,” she offered.
She walked over to where her strap, picked it off the ground, attached it to her bag, and shouldered it. She waited, hands on her waist, for Mycroft to come to terms with the fight. To her lack of surprise, he had been silent through the whole ordeal.

Marcus, sore and humbled, bowed reverently in her direction. “Your style of fighting is mixed martial arts, correct?”

She wiped her face on her shoulder, “Yes. More or less. I’d learned Aikido, Judo, grappling, and Tae Kwon Do as a kid. I don’t have all the belts, I assure you, but I still work on honing my skills as best I can to defend myself. But the other form…well, I’m still learning.”

Mycroft cleared his throat and Shannon pointed up to him on the catwalk. “I know, too much leg work for you. But the next time you feel like throwing one of these soirees, I’m kicking your arse,” she proclaimed. “Oh, and Dillan is going to need some ice. Take him to get checked…I may have dislocated his jaw.”

“You didn’t kill them,” Mycroft observed aloud in a whisper. His mind computed the data he had just seen and processed it against the information from earlier.

Shannon threw her hands in the air and walked in a small circle, exasperated and exhausted. “Of course I fucking didn’t, you idiot! That’s not what I do!”

He looked down his nose at her and asked, “What happened to Stefan Kasun?”

“Well,” she began, helping Marcus get Dillan to a sitting position. “I had him and a handful of his compadres tied up for removal protocols when you had your contact call me for extraction. I left them there, tied up, in the club, and left,” she added with a sarcastic tone. Marcus agreed that Dillan would need to get his jaw checked as well as a scan for a concussion.

“You’re sure?” he placated.

“Jesus, Mycroft,” she spun around, brows knitted together in anger. “What more do you want from me? I did everything that you lot asked me to do…and then some! I followed the same creed since I came back: injure or maim; do not kill. Why?”

“You said that there was another style of martial arts that you were learning. For your file, what is it?” he queried coolly. She rolled her eyes and began to stride across the floor to leave. “Miss Byrns?”

“Baritsu,” she replied without missing a step.

Marcus turned in her direction and asked, “Who’s your teacher?”

She smirked as she nearly crossed the threshold to the stairs. “Mycroft knows. It’s Sherlock Holmes.”

Shannon had dropped her bag off in her room, changed into cleaner, more comfortable clothes, and plodded up the stairs. Once the couch came into view, she took three steps and flopped onto it. Her heavy sigh was enough for Sherlock to realize she’s come back.

“You were gone for hours,” he observed with a quick glance at his watch. She turned her head to face him and mumbled through the pillow, “You went out. I didn’t see you at the Centre. You know, if we’re just stating observations.”
“I went and spoke with my brother,” he offered. “I felt the desire to annoy him.”

“Really? Me too, though I was collected in a car.”

“No,” he clicked his tongue, “I went to the Diogenes Club - ”

“Will you grab me a bandage?” she interjected. He tossed an unopened box at her. She didn’t aim to catch it, so it bounced off her back and onto the floor. “Thanks.”

“Your knuckles are red and swollen, you had a slight limp in your leg, and you have debris in your hair. Care to explain?”

She inched herself upward to sitting and yawned. “Mycroft.”

“Hardly,” he replied. “He knows not to fight you; doesn’t like the extra exertion of energy.”

“True. Thought that doesn’t keep him from sending some of his employees after me,” she offered. “I didn’t hurt them that bad, I promise.”

“Ah.”

She ripped open the package and took out a stack of bandages to use on her calf. “Mm-hmm.”

“Mm-hmm? What do you mean ‘Mm-hmm’?” he quirked an eyebrow.

“Exactly that. Shit,” she hissed after applying salve to the reopened wound. “You aren’t surprised that your brother would do such a thing. So now I have inferred that when you went and spoke to your brother, my person was discussed to some degree. Therefore…Mm-hmm.” She finished applying the band-aids and got up to throw away the wrappers. “I’m not mad, Sherlock…I don’t think. But a heads up would have been nice.”

“Kasun was found dead earlier this week,” he informed. His eyes scanned over every detail of her physical response to the information he had just presented. First there were shades of confusion and then the dawning or realization.

“I didn’t do it,” she replied quietly from the kitchen. She grabbed a glass of water and returned to gingerly sit in John’s chair. She sipped quietly and stared at the red carpet while he sat opposite.

“I know that,” he replied. “Regardless of what happened abroad, I doubt that you would have been pushed so far as to forget the moral code that you have set in place for yourself.”

“And you didn’t ask me how I knew it was Kasun,” he added.

She looked up and shrugged, “Based on the injuries that you know I have, the timeline, and location, it’s not difficult to suss out.”

“Why didn’t you tell your brother? You know…that you knew I didn’t do it.”

“Outside of knowing you and the limits that you will push yourself to, I have no concrete evidence to present him. That’s what he is looking for. I assumed that he would have some sort of test for you; I didn’t expect him to act on it so quickly.”

“What, if I may ask, was your ‘test’?”

She drew a gulp of water, rested it on the side table, and leaned forward. “It started on the way back here, I guess. He sent Jeremiah, who was on the plane when I was picked up in Boston, and two others. I’ve had far worse odds and faired decent enough…but Jeremiah asked nicely and I went.”
“We ended up at some old factory warehouse in the middle of nowhere. To be fair, I wasn’t paying attention…but I was calm. I wasn’t angry, the adrenaline wasn’t surging…everything felt copasetic. I didn’t, you know, I wasn’t worrying.”

Sherlock listened with avid attention and processed the details of her ordeal. *He could have just as easily handed her a firearm and told her to kill either of the men ordered to restrain her…what is at play here…why the game?*

“Did you ever feel the rush you used to get when you would spar,” he asked plainly.

“No,” she replied. “It was as if I could see most of everything in slow motion and that I was able to react faster because of it. I don’t know. Perhaps it’s the narcotics.”

“Perhaps,” Sherlock allowed. “Or perhaps something in Serbia allowed you to unlock another section of programming for you to use in your arsenal.”

She pondered a moment before answering, “As much as I’d like to say that you’re wrong, that’s a logical possibility.”

“How was your other visit,” Sherlock asked with an edge in his voice.

Shannon’s eyes locked with his and she answered, “Damn it, Lestrade. Fine. He’s aware that my best friend is under my protection and God help him should he ever do anything else that I find distasteful.”

“The case is already weak as is from possible entrapment; you may have just cost Scotland Yard the case,” he informed critically. “Though I appreciate the sentiment that would cause you to do something so rash…”

She raised a hand that signaled him to stop. He eyed her critically and she replied, “If you understand the sentiment, then you do not need to finish that sentence. Now, stand up and follow me.”

Curious, Sherlock did as he was told and followed her down the hall. She opened the water closet door and motioned inside. Sherlock stepped in and was puzzled. “Your point?”

“You look like hell. Road to recovery is to try and be more like yourself. Shave off the scruff and don’t come out of here until it’s done. I’ll figure out what we’re having for tea in the meantime,” she offered. “And don’t give me that face.”

“What face,” he groaned.

“The one where you’re annoyed, dejected, and cross with me.”

“I can’t see my face, now can I?” he said in rebuttal.

She pointed past his ear, “Well, lucky for you, there’s a mirror right there. Now, get moving: Sherlock Holmes needs to get back to work.” Shannon turned and entered the kitchen to figure out their meal for the evening.
Ripples

A Few Days Later

Baker Street was alive again: potential clients were walking in to seek the aid of Sherlock Holmes to solve all their dilemmas. John would pop round to give Shannon her morphine, and she had already begun to decrease her dosage to the next level a day early. Life, as best it could, was giving order to the members of 221B Baker Street.

Shannon had taken over most of the kitchen duties since her return; Sherlock’s cooking (or what he called cooking,) were atrocities at times. He didn’t eat much nor did he eat three meals a day very frequently, but when he did have time to grab eat something other than a sandwich, he was glad to have her prowess at his disposal.

Doctor Watson had mentioned that he intended to go back and see his therapist at Shannon’s behest. In turn, John was pleased with her progress toward sobriety. He did, however, worry about the frequency of her headaches and migraines.

After work, he’d made the effort to stop at Baker Street to check on her. Sherlock had texted him in the early afternoon and stated that he’d not seen or heard from Shannon despite his periodic texts inquiring for her assistance.

Sherlock was out and Mrs. Hudson was cleaning her flat. John stepped gently onto the stairs toward the basement and tapped on the door barely making a sound. A muffled groan could be heard on the other side of the door. “Shannon, it’s me. I’m coming in, alright?” A careful twist of the knob and a push revealed that Shannon had covered her window with a blanket to darken her room.

After the dark, the first thing that he noticed was the unique smell that was permeating from an oil diffuser next to her bed. Usually, the spices from her perfume and soap lingered in the air, but he could smell Eucalyptus and something else.

“Shannon…I’m not going to turn on the light. But - but where are you?”

Her arm slithered out from under the bed and gave a feeble wave. “Shh. Please,” she whispered.

He saw the movement in the dim light and knelt beside her bed. “I have your evening’s dose,” he said low. “Do you want it now or…”

“On the side table,” her voice croaked.

“Are you using aromatherapy? Didn’t think you were in to that,” John asked kindly.

She sighed, “It’s bad. I was willing to try anything…so I put all four oils together hoping it might help. Supposedly they help with this kind of thing.”

“Four?”

“Uh, yeah…eucalyptus, lavender, peppermint and rosemary. Figured what harm could it do…but – but my mind…..”

With some coaxing, John managed to usher Shannon out from under her bed to being on it. She felt her stomach rising in her throat, reached for her rubbish bin, and proceeded to get sick. John
reached out a hand to place on her back, but he reconsidered and sat beside her. “Better out than in,” he sympathized.

She pointed weakly to her desk and choked out, “Second drawer. Grab it.”

John moved to her desk, opened the drawer and found a syringe in its sterilized packaging and two bottles taped together with a dosage card. *Ketorlac + Hydroxyzine.*

“Shannon,” John grumbled, “Ketorlac is a narcotic. Are you serious?”

“I’ve not touched it,” she snapped, her hands shooting to her temple with a wince. “Take the damn morphine from me, I don’t care,” she cried out. “I need the injection. John, please. I’m dying.” Hot tears streamed down her face and she coiled in agony before burying her head under her pillow.

She heard the plastic strip away from itself as he opened the syringe packet and proceed to fill the barrel with the two medications. His steps were cannon fire, exploding with every movement in her ears. She felt him pull at the hip hem of her shorts and a cool swipe from the alcohol pad before the prick of the needle. John sat beside her, the pair of them enveloped by the dark and the silence.

“Thank you,” she mumbled from under her pillow.

“How are you feeling,” his voice quiet, “and don’t lie to me. I’m a doctor.”

She huffed a laugh and straightened her body out. “I went from a ten on the pain scale to an eight already. So, that’s progress,” she murmured after emerging from under her pillow.

“Are you alright?” he queried. His face was placid, but she could feel the concern radiating off him.

“I will be; better at least. Rosie?”

“I’m going to go get her after I leave. Molly has her.”

“Good,” she sighed. “Thank you. Go. I’ll be good.”

“You’re sure,” he fretted. “I can stay a while longer.”

“No. I’ve had this injection before. I’ll open up in the next ten minutes or so. Go, get your daughter and enjoy your night. You don’t need to be taking care of me,” she commented, her voice raspy; riddled with exhaustion.

“Tired?”

“Yeah,” she admitted. “Haven’t slept in thirty-six hours or so. Just – just don’t…just don’t tell Sherlock that I’m having an episode. I’m know that he’ll be able to figure out…but…just pretend that – that I’m not here.”

“You know that he’ll be unbearable.”

“Yes. But that – that’s something that I’m willing…to…willing to deal with.”

John’s eyes squinted in scrutiny, “Shannon…what – what’s going on?”

Her brows knit together and she closed her eyes again. “Dunno. It’s been like this since Scotland,
“I guess.”

“I guess.” he breathed. “You need to get checked.” Her palms covered hollow of each eye and her voice grumbled while she sighed. The proximity to Shannon allowed John to see the healed scars that dotted her skin. Her face showed fading scarring from abrasions and her cheek fracture, and were barely noticeable. But, he’d seen both sets of those wounds fresh and knew where they resided on her flesh as if they were bleeding now. Her arms showed more signs of scrapes and healed knife wounds; her bare shoulders had silvered, scarred skin in neat lines. He had since seen the extent of her injuries from Serbia and knew that sooner or later, her body was going to give out on her.

“What?” she croaked without moving.

John was brought back to reality, startled, and said, “You heard me.” He watched her chest barely rise and fall in respiration, but he also knew that when she was doing her damnedest to regulate her pain Shannon would breathe shallow.

“No. That thought you just had: your mind is screaming and I can hear it,” she replied. He huffed and solitary laugh and rolled his eyes. “And don’t roll your eyes at me.”

Air passed through his nose loudly, “I’m worried.”

“Of course, you are,” she observed casually. A gentle smirk passed across her lips, “You’re my doctor.”

“And as your doctor…”

“…and friend,” she interjected.

“…you are killing yourself. You need to stop. This thing…this job…it’s not worth your life,” he lamented. “You should tell Sherlock and Mycroft…”

“No. That’s the end of that,” she sniped, her whisper hoarse. “I will deal with it.”

“Fine,” he grumbled. He gingerly rose from the edge of her bed and walked toward her door.

“John?” she called out.

“Hmm?” he turned, surprised at the gentleness in her voice.

She pointed to the side table, “Take the morphine. I don’t want it.”

Sherlock Holmes’ clear blue eyes adjusted quickly to the dark of Baker Street. It was late and darkness had blanketed the sky for hours. At Shannon’s behest, he had begun to see clients again and was making an effort to get London running through his veins again. He sniffed quickly and sensed a series of aromatherapy oils that lingered in the hallway. Shannon. She’s home.

He stood in the quiet of the hall and heard Mrs. Hudson stir in her sleep and settle back into her bed. A moment’s hesitation flashed across his mind before he turned right and opened the basement door. A hand pushed her door open slowly and silently to bring Shannon in view. She was in bed, back facing the door, bundled in her bed sheet and throw. Her branded leg peered out from under the blankets and dangled close to falling off the side of the bed. Shannon’s light,
golden brown hair tumbled down her neck and pooled onto the pillow. *She’ll want to get her hair cut shorter soon. She does not like it longer than her shoulders. Stop, Sherlock. You went down this road once…*

He did not realize that his feet had carried him to the center of her room, nor did he realize how long he had been there. She heaved a long, luxurious sigh and breathed, “When were you in a Catholic church this evening?”

“Hmm,” he observed, “I’m surprised you can smell anything with the amount of oil lingering in the air.”

Her shoulder bunched up in a nonchalant shrug. “I’d recognize that incense anywhere. I think it’s lovely.”

“The frankincense and myrrh. Makes sense considering the spice one detects in your soap and perfume,” he offered.

“Huh,” realization rising in her voice, “I guess that does make sense.”

“Is there a reason that you ignored my messages today,” he asked, peeling his dark blue coat off and draping it over his forearm. “I could have used your assistance with a case that proved to be…”

“Sorry, I was indisposed earlier; it couldn’t be helped,” she stretched languorously like a cat. “Tell me about this case you are working. You were only on the case for eight hours or so at most in one considers the timestamp from your messages.”

“Your choice of aromatherapy oils is interesting,” he added with a skeptical brow, ignoring her comment. “Anything that you’d like to share?”

“I thought it would help me feel better,” she replied plainly with a deep yawn. “It did, some, I suppose; even if it were induced from the placebo effect.”

“Anything else,” he led.

She tucked the blanket under her chin, “I told you: I’ll tell you when I’m ready.”

“You did,” he replied as his eyes took stock of her room.

“Sherlock,” she yawned again, her voice laden with sleep.

*That voice, darker and more raw than the one after she’s been awake for hours… Visions from their past, together, flashed before his eyes. Stop it. Now.*

“…it’s two in the morning. Go get some sleep. I’ve already been dosed for the evening and I’m tired. It was a long day,” she mumbled. “I’ll see you when you wake up, yeah?”

His head twisted to the side in acknowledgement and he took his leave of her room. As he ascended the stairs to his room, he began to reason with himself in response to his memories pounding at the proverbial door he had kept them behind.

*I have not dwelled much on those memories and experiences since they occurred. And yet, here I am reviewing them in explicit detail and I do not understand what has caused this to happen. Was it her voice? Would that timbre elicit these memories that I have kept away? Could It not have been what I saw? Most of that time and those memories occurred within the*
walls of her room in seclusion. Or is it something more; potentially a combination of all of those instances combined with the awareness of her...

These memories must return to where they had been hidden. They are an added distraction that I have analyzed and utilized in the most scientific of ways.

To his exasperation, those memories, and the emotions and feelings that came with them, made sure to dance across his mind’s eye until dawn.

“Now choose, voljena,” Stefan’s voice was emotionless. “Show me.”

“I – I can’t do that, Mili…” she stammered. “I’ll support you and have your back… but…my son! I – I just…I just can’t!” Shannon’s voice, rather Anastasija’s voice, quaked with the impending doom she knew to be around the corner.

“So be it,” he bowed. “Come, voljena. Stand beside me and see your power at work.”

The grey ceiling immediately came into focus, chills reverberated down her spine; a cold sweat soaked through her shirt and sheets. “Fuck,” she panted in between deep, heavy breaths. Her core curled upward and she wrapped her arms around her legs, resting her forehead on her knees. “God damn it.”

She peered over to her clock and squinted in the dimness: 5:06
Well, I’m up now.

The pads of her feet touched the cool floor and sent shocks of reality to her brain. After a moment, her legs permitted her to stand and change into a clean set of clothes. She nabbed her oversized, grey hoodie and a pair of green and white striped athletic shorts. She tiptoed up the steps and turned on the kettle for tea. She reached for the brown sugar and placed a small lump of it in the bottom of her cup and waited for the tea to finish steeping. You are safe…you do realize that, right? “Yeah,” she whispered into the sleepy flat, “I may be… but I have to find a way to live with what happened.

Her fingers wrapped around the body of her mug and a pleasant numbness crept through her fingers. The warming sensation traveled up her arms and the first sip lolled about her tongue, covering her mouth like a blanket. Each sip peeled back a layer of uneasiness and soon she felt more like herself again.

Below the floor, Shannon could hear Mrs. Hudson stirring and getting ready for her day. She smiled at the simplicity of life at Baker Street. Simple? When has this place been simple? But in her mind, it was: everything within its walls belonged here. Every inch of wallpaper, the floorboards that would creak, the smell of smoke and chemicals wafting from the kitchen, and the inhabitants all seemed to belong to this place.

Gentle puttering from the kitchen brought her back to the present. Shannon peered out the window to the street below as London began to wake from its slumber. Her roommate followed her gaze from over her shoulder and sipped from his cup. “Nightmare?” he asked in more of a confirmation of thought.
“Mm-hmm,” she answered. “I woke up before it got too bad this time.” She peered over her shoulder and noted how close Sherlock was standing behind her. “What brings you out of your cave this early in the morning?”

He ran a hand through his dark curls and yawned. “My mind insisted that sleep not be a part of my evening.”

She scrutinized his expression and her voice carried an air of skepticism, “Riiiight.”

He reflected her facial expression back to her and asked, “What?”

“Nothing,” her brows lifting upward in mirth. His features fell and he attempted to guard his emotions. “Just – nothing.”

“Are you up to assist on the present case?”

She turned back to the street and nodded. Her tea coated her throat and she felt more like herself. “I suppose that I could manage that,” she replied thoughtfully. “What’s the case?”

“A woman is claiming that her house is haunted. The poltergeist is harassing her and her mother,” he informed.

She finished her tea with a loud gulp and moved to the kitchen brushing past his arm. “Makes sense as to why you were snooping about a church then.”

“Snooping?” he scoffed. “Is that all you think that I do, that I ‘snoop’?”

“Of course not,” she apologized. “Turn of phrase, Sherlock. What took you to a church?”

“Apparently, the ghost has followed the pair to their church and had threatened to bring them to the afterlife early.”

She returned emptyhanded and stood beside him. “Angsty parishioner…or neighbor?”

“More than likely. I broke into the church,” she shot a reproachful glare, “to sweep for devices that could be used to add to their paranoia.”

“Any sound devices? People are creatures of habit and don’t usually stray too far from their favorite pews.”

“As I thought,” he smirked, “but no, there was not. I did, however, find a small projector was mounted under the choir loft and when on, pointed toward the panes of glass nearest where I believe the women would sit.”

“Interesting. And the cable leads? Where did they go?”

“Out into a corner of the breezeway. It’s isolated and the connection is behind some large floral arrangements…”

“Easy enough for someone to hide behind, yes?”

He nodded and lowered himself into his chair, “Easily.”

“Did you, by chance,” she asked sitting opposite him, “already check their residence for similar tech?”
“That’s what I’m endeavoring to do today. Your presence would allow for thorough investigation of the premises,” he replied after finishing his tea.

Her mind began formulating various ways that she could distract Sherlock’s clients so that he could look for evidence to bring the ghost to light. “I’ll go as an assistant. It’ll be easier if you call them today and inform them that I’ll be visiting.”

“If you insist,” he said. “I prefer to text.”

“I’m aware. However, you know that they’ve already seen and heard you, therefore a call would be best. Call around ten that I’ll be stopping by, give them a description so that they’re aware. I’ll make up a reason once I’m there and can assess,” she formulated.

A pleasant and admiring grin pulled at the corner of Sherlock’s mouth. “You assume that you’re going to be the one talking with the clients? And if I was planning on having you look for evidence?”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” she sussed. “Why would you send me to look for evidence when you’ve clearly already seen the style of electronics in use? And, clearly, I have better people skills.”

“Very good,” his voice dripping with glee. “Just making sure that you’re on your toes.”

She rolled her eyes and crossed her arms. “Tch,” she clicked her tongue in displeasure. “Honestly. After everything that I’ve done, you still find the need to test me.”

“Not so much a need,” he replied. “It’s more rewarding to see that your mind works so similarly.”

She smirked and stretched to the ceiling as she stood. “Careful, Sherlock; if I didn’t know any better, I’d think that you missed me. Your sentiment is showing again.”

He shrugged and he reached over the arm of his chair to reveal his violin. It rested on his leg as he plucked idly at the strings. “It’s me. You make sure to remind me that my sentiment and emotions are very much a part of me.”

“Good,” her arms fell to her sides. “I’m showering. Make yourself useful and cook breakfast. While I’m downstairs, I’ll see if Mrs. Hudson is up and would like to join us.”

His expression remained placid but his eyes gave her a friendly challenge; the corners of his eyes creasing lightly. “Useful? I was under the impression that I was banned from the kitchen considering your hostile takeover of kitchen duties.”

“You’re exaggerating with it being hostile,” she agreed with a turn to the stairs. “Left to your own devices, we’d eat nothing but sandwiches and toast. Ghastly. There’s fresh sausages in there and a carton of mushrooms. Get to it. I didn’t really have time to eat yesterday and I’m famished.”

“I’m in the middle of a case, I’m not hungry,” he jabbed after she disappeared around the corner.

“Then don’t eat,” she offered. “Why would you have breakfast if you weren’t hungry?”

Sherlock’s head snapped in her direction as the uncanny sense of déjà vu appeared in his mind. He recalled a conversation with Irene here in this very spot, where she had asked him to dinner. *I said that I wasn’t hungry. Why would I want to have dinner if I wasn’t hungry? Ah yes. I knew why then…but now…now I wonder if I understand.*

The Great Detective waited for Shannon’s sure steps in the hall and the rush of water to indicate
that she was indisposed before he stood up and made way for the kitchen. He opened the door to
the fridge and withdrew the contents that Shannon had mentioned. It was an act that he’d had not
given a great deal of thought to. There were often times where John would eat or need to eat in
order to be calm or more level and Sherlock would sit there and discuss cases with him. It was a
necessary accommodation to ensure that Dr. Watson was ‘okay’. And true, more than not, the
thrill and constitution of a case was usually enough to sustain him through to its resolution. Had
that been what Adler had seen?

*Let’s have breakfast…even though I’m not hungry.*
Shannon entered the kitchen in her robe, still towel drying her hair; Mrs. Hudson stared at Sherlock’s back suspiciously. “Sherlock, what are you doing?” the landlady asked.

“Breakfast.” His voice showed no emotion and he did not turn around to face his audience.

Shannon paused her ministrations on her hair, “Wait, are you serious?”

“Yes,” he replied. “This is what you said that I was to do while you were in the shower.”

“Yeah,” she agreed, “But I didn’t think that you were going to actually make breakfast. I was expecting to still have to make it when I got out.”

He huffed, “Well, it’s done. Eat it if you want. You told me to do something and I did it.”

Mrs. Hudson’s head moved in Shannon’s direction with a look of surprise and wariness. “Well, thank you, Sherlock, dear. That was very kind of you to make breakfast.”

“It’s simple, really,” he explained while pouring another cup of tea. “You all work optimally when you are fed; I do not have the same needs when working.”

Shannon began to dry her hair again and shrugged, “Thanks.”


Mrs. Hudson and Shannon gossiped their way through their meal while Sherlock sat quietly reading the news from his mobile. Occasionally, Shannon would steal a glance at her best friend and find him deeply entrenched in a story before snorting at either the simplicity of the potential mystery or sheer boredom. His eyes appeared more piercing from the phone’s white back-light. She didn’t know why; there was nothing overly remarkable about this precise moment, but she knew that it would be a vivid memory that she would be able to recall in exquisite detail: The timbre of Mrs. Hudson’s mellow tones would hum in the background, the soft patter of a gentle rain on the panes of glass, the way that the greyed light colored everything in the room in a blanket of ethereal splendor, the smell of tea and breakfast hanging heavily in the air with a hint of smoke and old books, the coolness of the floor under her bare feet, Sherlock’s stoic features etched expertly on his face as if he were chiseled from marble; and the feeling akin to contentment.

It was a fleeting moment at best, but she knew that this memory would never leave her. Why?

“…and that’s when I realized that she had been cheating when we were playing Bridge,” Mrs. Hudson concluded.

“Dreadful,” Shannon replied with a small smile. “Simply dreadful. How could she have thought that no one would notice? Least of all you.”

“That’s what I told her,” she gasped. Her voice grew louder and higher in inflection. “But would she listen to me? No. Noooo; ‘course not.”

Holmes flashed a glanced at Byrns, wondering if she’d finished eating yet and to observe her behaviour. She appeared to be happy which, he thought to himself, he was glad of. Perhaps she is adjusting back to Baker Street after all. Good. With whatever is still moving in the dark, I will
“When did you learn Icelandic?” he asked quickly.

“Hmm?” the ladies answered in unison. Shannon wiped her mouth with her napkin and placed it on the table.

“So you were awake,” she jabbed. After the briefest of moments, Shannon replied, “I don’t know Icelandic.”

Mrs. Hudson looked at her watch and stood, “I’m going to be late, dear. I’m out with the ladies this morning.”

The land lady had placed her hands on Shannon’s shoulders and gave a light squeeze. Shannon reached up and patted her hand. “Thanks for coming up for breakfast.”

“You’re such a dear, Shannon. Thank you!” she fluttered and took her leave.

Shannon turned to Sherlock and waited for him to continue. “It’s something that I learned in school a long while ago.”

“So I’ve gathered,” his tone plain. “Your diction was impeccable for a while. What was it precisely?”

“It’s a hymn,” she began. “If God were real, what would you pray to him for?”

“I dunno,” he offered in nonchalance. “Less idiots in the world?”

Her chuckle gave way to another smile that framed her face. “Well, you might. But...sometimes there are other things that you may pray for.”

“Such as?”

“Help,” she replied. Shannon collected the dishes from the morning meal and took them to the sink. She returned with the teapot and filled both of their cups. “Sometimes, the world is too overbearing or overwhelming. People pray to God to ease their burden.”

“But you don’t believe in God,” his face stern. “Do you?”

“I was raised Catholic,” she offered. “I was given that doctrine as a child and have moved more toward logic than reverent mysticism, I suppose. It doesn’t mean that the music created to demonstrate awe and splendor of their religious figure isn’t any less beautiful.”

Shannon scrolled down the screen of her phone and a sound from her throat signaled that she’d found what she was looking for. “Ah. Yes. Here we go; a translation.”

“In the first stanza, you are asking God to grant mercy to you, the wordsmith, because you are his slave and He is your Lord.”

Sherlock scoffed, but listened intently as she continued.

“God, I call on thee to heal me. Mild King, please remember me, because we need thee. Drive out, O King, generous and great, every human sorrow from the citadel of my heart.”

“Then he asks that Christ protect him throughout all the time spent in the world of men...that every single endeavor be cleansed and Christ’s help impart on his heart.”

He cleared his throat in a nod and said, “I see.”

“Regardless of there being a God or not, I find that it and Chesnokov’s Salvation is Created bring
me a type of solace when I am suffering. Both are rather heavy, musically…but they weigh heavily against what one may consider to be my soul and begin to strip away the melancholy that sits there. It’s a sadness that I am happy to feel,” she explained with a touch to her chest. “If you’ve not noticed, there are a very few select songs that I will listen to oblivion to correct how I feel.”

“And this was spurred to mind because you feel as if you are broken? Truly?” he asked in confirmation.

“Yes,” she begrudged, hushed. Shannon grabbed her cup and moved toward the stair. “We have work to do; call your client and inform her that I’ll be round in the next hour or so. I’m going to get dressed.” She took her leave and went about her business.

Shannon was already seated in the women’s living room and was taking down statements. “I’m interning with Mr. Holmes,” she stated, warmness beaming from her eyes. “One of my first tasks is to make sure that I document as much of your statement as possible to corroborate against what he already knows. If I do well enough, I may be able to work for him!”

Sherlock took the opportunity to scan the house for any clues that would lead to the culprit. He had found wireless speakers, transmitters, and other projectors stashed throughout the house. Shannon sent out a warning text that her interview was quickly coming to a close and Sherlock silently exited through the garden door.

She met up with him a block down the street and handed him her notepad. “For you, just in case.”

“I won’t need that,” he replied. “I found the equipment as suspected; there were fingerprints on the lens of one of the projectors…”

“It’s the brother,” she informed with a smirk.

“The brother?” he repeated. “And what evidence do you have to support your theory?”

“It’s in the notes, Sherlock. Though, I gather you would have figured it out just as quickly had you been sitting where I had been. There are plenty of indicators.”

“She never mentioned a brother,” he proclaimed as the pair walked back toward the main road.

She shrugged and shoved her hands in her pockets. “Well, when we get home, read the notes and tell me if I’m wrong.”

“I intend to,” his wide grin and smug attitude radiating.

Once the pair were in a cab and headed back to Baker Street, Shannon was gazing out the window in silent contemplation. Sherlock scrolled through his phone and fired off a text to his blogger.

John:

Shannon solved the ‘Ghost’ case in three hours.

-SH
Sherlock:

Are you surprised?

John:

No. She can be keenly observant. What time do you plan to come to the flat for her dosing?
-SH

Sherlock:

Does she want them? She didn’t take them this morning.

Sherlock pocketed his phone and eyed Shannon up and down. She drew a long breath and crossed her arms. “I’ve had a thought.”

He portrayed faux enthusiasm and jabbed, “Oh, good. This should be interesting.”

“I think I know how I’m going to tell you about Serbia. And we can do that tonight, if you wish.”

“What motive do you have for this sudden reveal?”

She withdrew her cellphone and responded, terse. “Transparency.”

John Watson:

Would you mind coming over today? I want you to be here when Serbia is discussed.

Shannon Byrns:

I can do that. You sure that this is what you want?

John Watson:

I’m tired, John. And you should know.

Shannon Byrns:
Then I will be there. I’ll call when
I’m about ready to leave the office.

The Baker Street Boys sat in their respective chairs and waited for Shannon to reappear from her room. John looked over at Sherlock whose thumb and forefinger propped up his head while his other three fingers repeatedly brushed the flesh at the base of his thumb.

“Nervous,” John asked. He knew that in part, he was hoping that Sherlock would be able to give him some sort of comfort of knowledge that what was about to happen would not be that bad.

“Of course not,” Sherlock replied. “What is there to be fearful of? Shannon plans to recount her experience in Serbia.”

John nodded knowingly and argued, “Yeah…but I can see that you’re worried.”

“Nonsense. I’m anticipating the information that we are about to have at our disposal.”

“Uh-huh,” John said in disbelief. “Nothing to do with how we feel about her.”

Sherlock’s eyes darted to meet his friend’s. John was displaying his knowing smirk and his eyes demonstrated a deeper understanding to how people function; more so than Sherlock did. “John, I don’t understand.”

“I know you don’t, not really.” John crossed himself and stared off to the side. “One day you might. For her.”

Shannon’s light steps reverberated up the stairwell, heralding her appearance. In her hands, she held an external hard drive and placed it on the chair used for a potential client not two hours prior. She made an uncomfortable sound in her throat and threw her hands on her waist, shifting her weight from leg to leg. Her hazel-brown eyes did not look at either man as she spoke. “You should know by now that I care deeply for you both. This,” she pointed to the device on the chair, “will tell you what happened in Serbia. You will be confronted with things that are…uncomfortable.”

Sherlock’s keen eye analyzed her features and he stated, “You won’t be joining us.”

“No,” she replied, staring at the floor. “No, I’ve lived it once and I don’t want to be here for the retelling. I’m going to go for a long walk. If you would be kind enough to let me know when you’ve finished, I’d be grateful.”

“I – I hope that…you will understand me better…that – that you will still want to know me…after.” She turned on her heel and as quickly as she’d appeared, she disappeared into the darkening streets of London.
Sherlock reached for his laptop and plugged the hard drive in and opened the folder that contained a series of files numbered with an entry number and the date. He highlighted the files and placed them in a queue for his media player.

John looked apprehensively to Sherlock and said, “Whatever happens; we need to do our best and be there for her. Understood?”

“Indeed,” he agreed before pressing play.

Entry No. 1 – 03:41, Day One

Shannon was in a small, dimly-lit room and sat at a small desk and looked the laptop she had been using for this mission. She was dressed in her clothes from the night that she left. She was tired, angry, and defeated.

“I’ve decided that I’m going to keep a log of this endeavor because, should anything happen, I want there to be more than just the written account; more than what’s got a red stamp on the folder. I want there to be me…I want you to know that I am not simply a machine that has been put to task. I feel that…if you are able to – to see what happens to me…I don’t know…that you’ll care for what might have happened to me.”

“If you are privy to such, you will know what my name is. If you do not, you may call me Anastasija. I must say that the dossier given to me on my mark is rather vague and bare. I need data...data, data, data…I cannot make bricks without clay. Hats off to you, Frosty: you’ve clearly outdone yourself.”

“All I know, really, is that this man,” she showed the dossier folder in her hand before removing it out of shot, “is a Serbian human and drug trafficker. It appears he likes to peddle narcotics, specifically. Other than that, I’m not entirely sure as to why I have been put to this task. I am sure there are clearly other qualified individuals that could be completing this mission. But I am here. I have a job to do. I gave my word that I would do this.” Her shoulders slumped forward after heaving a weighted sigh.

“You should know that I came here, willingly; albeit begrudgingly. I will protect them, I will defend them; I will give shelter to those who need it so long as my mind and body are able.”

“That being said, I will get to work later this morning; I have recon to do considering that Frosty didn’t give me much to go on. I’m guessing that this will be more painful than anticipated. I could have interpreted his silence in objections as glee for my being here. So it goes.”

Entry No. 2 – 23:17, Day One

“The easiest way for me to get to Stefan is through the club. I have two days to prepare my cover and alias in its entirety for authentication purposes. I will have to go in and falsify records, but I have someone that will do that for me. He’s not here; but they are someone that I trust, abstractly, to work on tasks I ask to be done.”

“Darweshi,” Sherlock interrupted the stream. “That’s the only way she would have been able to
covertly do all that she intends to do.” John nodded in agreement and they continued to watch Shannon catalogue her mission.

“I’ll need to make myself visible and present to the women who work his club. There’s prostitution, but from my investigation today; it’s more of a legitimate business than the other goings on that take place there. Point of entry will be Anya. She appears psychologically weaker than her counterparts and will be easily influenced and susceptible to suggestion. Poor girl. She is at the lower end of the work force; but I observed her completing a transaction with the doorman where a packet was passed to her. She’s using.”

“At the moment, I feel as if the world is spinning under my feet. I usually have more time to prepare; but I suppose that I didn’t take that time because I was relishing the life I had before all of this came to pass. I worry: I feel that this place may be where I die if I do not tread carefully.”

Entry No. 3 – 1:17, Day Five

Her hair was now died copper in color with streaks of dark red. Dark, smudged eye makeup and lipstick did not hide her split lip and the blackeye that was soon to appear around her right orbital socket.

“I’ve bought patches off the doorman and implanted memories of being a regular buyer to both him and Anya. In other news, the doorman’s partner, Mikhail, has a sluggish backhand.” She touched her lip gingerly and spit out blood to the side of the camera.

“I watched it happen as if it were slow motion; but Anastasija has been battered most of her life and feels that it’s something that can’t be helped. She, masochistically, craves it. It will serve well should I be able to get close enough to his boss. It took every restraint I have to take the hit and not defend myself.”

“The doorman who deals, is Gregory. Gregory apologized so that he doesn’t lose my business. I told him that it was okay. I’d be back later. Also, I’ve learned Serbian in a day. It’s very improper, but it’ll do.”

“I’ve convinced Anya,” she continued, wiping off her makeup with a damp towel, “to take me to see her boss at the start of her next shift. Serge, one of the managers, is looking for new girls to work. Excellent timing for me. I’ve also started wearing the Fentanyl patches. It will bode well to convince the powers that be that I am who I say that I am if I’m an addict. I only need to be near the boss for ten minutes; I’ve got the essential programming necessary for my implementation down to that time frame. It’ll be brutal and tedious, but I can do it.”

As she used a ginger touch against her lip, blood ebbed from it again. “Damn,” she hissed as droplets fell onto the desk. “I think I should be able to sleep for about four hours before I need to double up on the drugs. I need to build up a tolerance as quickly as possible. I hope that I get an objective soon; or I will bring down everything around this man’s ears.”

Entry No. 4 – 13:31, Day Eight

“I have my meeting with Stefan today; or I will force it to be so. I’m now working the bar. Stefan has a number two named Irina. She’s a cruel looking woman close to my age. She is taller than I, and potentially just as strong. You don’t become what she is without having something that spurs you forward as such.” A sardonic chuckle resonated in her throat, “I mean, that’s how I’ve
survived earlier points in my life.”

“...I’ve added a sub-file with a dossier about her that I will update as more pertinent information comes forward. She’s got a long face and her nose looks as to have been broken multiple times; and Christ: her voice. It’s absolutely nauseating and nasal. I laughed the first time that she spoke, involuntary. She reached across the bar and slammed my head off the bar top. It was worth it. It proved that she doesn’t tolerate disloyalty or disrespect.”

Her head tilted to and from, eliciting a quiet series of cracks that seemed to grant her some relief. “I’m at a higher dose of narcotics at present and find that it leaves me with difficulty to concentrate unless I stay on top of my thoughts at all times. I don’t know how he does it; but, perhaps it doesn’t affect him in such a manner. I need to constantly be at my best to combat the haze induced by the Fentanyl.”

Entry No. 5 – 04:06, Day Nine

John gasped quickly at Shannon’s new appearance, noticing that a lump had caught in his throat. His eyes darted to Sherlock for some reaction; but his eyes were piercing into the screen and his features stoic.

Her left cheek was swollen, addinh to the lump that had grown on her forehead. Coupled with her split lip and black eye, Shannon looked dreadful. Her shirt sleeve was torn and there were red marks that ran down her bicep.

“Do you like my uniform? Hmphf. Being a battered victim isn’t in my nature, but taking the beatings as they come is how I will survive this. I should think that as long as I don’t get any more concussions, I would be fine. Serge got angry at Anya’s inability to please a customer. I was closest and was throttled across the room like a rag doll. I’ve had worse; I’ll survive this.”

“I’ve planted Stefan’s memories and he should be calling me in five hours. I added a periodic desire to be in contact with me after he told me that he thought I had a nice ass.” She peered over her shoulder and smirked, “I mean, I guess I do; I’ve not really had anyone comment on it as such, but he knows what he likes.”

“Irina, however, is suspicious, and rightly so. She has a rare intuitiveness that has permitted her to survive in this world for so long. She argued with Stefan in front of me for a time when he introduced me to her as a girl he knew in his teens. She was not happy; he’d never spoke of me before. He justified that he had not thought he should ever see me again. I will have to tread carefully with her as to not raise much suspicion if I hope to live long.”

“As the bartender, I am off limits as a ‘working girl’,” her voice cracked and a sardonic tone prevailed. “Not that Gregory and Mikhail weren’t hoping as such. I suppose I have to dash hopes and dreams as they come; but now that I may have Stefan’s attention, I imagine that their outlook and behavior toward me should change.”

“I miss home. I miss the books, the smell of smoke and ash, I miss the streets; and most of all I miss them.”
Entry No. 6 – 21:17, Day Fourteen

She looked pale; dark circles had formulated under her eyes. Her bruises had begun to heal and were an awful, off-yellow.

“I’m not overly hungry anymore; I’m consumed by my work and survival. Stefan has been asking for me more readily and I fear that if I do not go and see him every time he calls, someone else will get hurt. The man is a powder keg waiting to blow. Soon enough, I’m sure I will bear witness to what sets him off.”

“The last of the memories have been planted into every single person that has been to the club since my arrival, including Irina. I’m exhausted: every single time that I have to do these implants or…or whatever…I feel as if they take a piece of me with them. Navigating memories that already exist and modifying them is incredibly delicate and tedious. I don’t know how else to put it…but…I’m tired. I hope that…well…I – I just hope.”

“Irina put me to a test of sorts today: I was tripped and called a whoring bitch while she kicked me wherever she was able for a good hour. Thankfully, she missed my face; but it fucking feels like she broke my ribs.”

Shannon gingerly stood and lifted her shirt to show off her abdomen to the camera. “This bitch doesn’t play around…look at this! I’m bruising already. Christ…hopefully I don’t have any contusions…”

“Irina can’t stand me; and that makes her more acute of my movement in the club. I will need to find a way to be more passive around her. I wish nothing more than to put that witch in her place. Alas…that’s not my job right now.”

“I’ve begun collecting information about other members operating in the dark out here…hopefully Frosty will enjoy that present once it reaches homeward.”

Entry No. 7 – 02:06, Day Seventeen

Evidence of malnutrition, lack of sleep, and drug-induced weight loss were visible in her face even at an early stage. She grimaced at the light being thrown into her eyes from the laptop screen and pulled her robe over her shoulders tightly.

Sherlock noted red marks at her throat, skittish behavior, and tears had been freshly wiped from her eyes.

“I’m still alive, as you can see…though…I – I barely made it out tonight. Had I been anyone else…any one of the other girls…I might be dead.”

“I have been working later shifts at Stefan’s request so that he is able to see me. I am, after all, his property in his eyes. The outfits he has me wearing to work, as you say, leave nothing to the imagination…which is why he felt entitled to me tonight.”

Sherlock’s fingertips dug into the armrests, knuckles whitening under strain. John paused the video and waited. “Sherlock,” he warned, “we agreed: whatever happened, we need to be there for her.”

“I am aware,” his words abrupt.

The good doctor paused a moment to collect his thoughts and spoke carefully, “If you lose your temper over this, how will that help her?”
“Play the footage, John. Now.”

“He waited until I had to go into the cellar and followed me downstairs. I knew he was there; it’s my job to know. He slipped a hand around my torso and pulled me to him, complimenting me on finding time for us to be alone. Every warning bell in my mind was going off…I knew what was coming. I prepared for it.”

“Stefan tried to make advances as best he could considering his inebriation from a business meeting’s libations. He was sloppy, and stupid…fucking strong,” her voice cracked as a hand gently rubbed the irritated skin around her neck.

“When his advances were thrown off, he grew angry and grabbed my throat, pushing me over onto one of the liquor cabinets. His free hand had already loosened his trousers and was prying my left leg open. Had I been any of the other girls…I would have been raped today and more than likely killed. But I was able to hoarsely call out an emergency command and he stopped, waiting for my direction.”

“I was now confronted with a personal dilemma: Do I take vengeance and ensure that he never does this again to other women or do I continue as planned with the mission? Why not both? Who is here to tell me what I can and cannot do to this animal, hmm?” she queried, eyes dark. “Why should I continue to battle the devil in my mind against the morality of my soul?”

She paused to gather herself and wiped away the newly accrued tears. “No matter. I implanted the memory of rape into his mind; it makes me more obedient and pliable in his eyes. The last memory that he will have thought to have happened will be of me groveling, apologizing, and begging for him to love me. How twisted is that? You must admit, I am a damn good story teller.”

“In other news, when out for lunch today, I met a young, orphaned boy named Luka. He’s nine, or so he thinks. I caught him trying to pickpocket me after having watched him do the same feat to at least ten other people. I fed him and gave him a job to do. We’ll see if he comes back tomorrow.”

Sherlock slowly released the air he had been holding captive in his lungs and relaxed his fingers. He hadn’t fully realized that he had quit breathing.

**Entry No. 8 – 04:56, Day Twenty-three**

Shannon looked visibly pained and reached for something off camera. Once found she turned her attention to the screen. “Whelp… Luka came back; that’s the name of the child that I spoke of last entry. We have a bargain: he gets to pretend to be my son if I can smuggle him out of the country. Shouldn’t he be hard; I have access to some of the best forgers in the world…but that I would use them for myself…I’m just stating an obvious fact. He’s a sweet kid and I would, if I’m able, like to give him a better life.”

“So yes, I unfortunately had to implant some memories into this kid, which broke my heart…I don’t think that I’ll ever truly forgive myself for doing this to a child…but it was to ensure his survival in all of this…he needed those memories if he were ever asked…and it has bridged the trust connection much faster.”

“Hmm…what is it they say about good intentions? Aren’t I the damned fool…”

She leant forward again and reached out of camera shot and brought a bag of ice into view. “Irina found me today,” she hissed as the ice was placed on her knee. “She doesn’t like how close I have become with Stefan. I did plan to implement a protocol into her mind today, but she decided to have girl time with me.”
Her knee, swollen and bloody, came into view. “Beat the sides of my knee some of my bar tools as I was strapped down to a chair. I was told that if I called out for Stefan, she would land the corkscrew into my jugular. She wasn’t lying. She has been his enforcer for how long? Thirteen years, I think. Shit. My knee is on fire…and that’s with the patches and everything else I’m on. Hopefully no permanent damage has been done; it is, after all, my good knee.”

Her head snapped back and she stared at the ceiling, “Update on that, I suppose: I’m on far more fentanyl than I am comfortable with. The migraines have doubled in occurrences, but that aids to my ‘withdrawal’ symptoms. I am finding that I have to pay attention more to my train of thought as it keeps jumping around. I am not sure if this is a side effect of the drugs or the migraines…when…I survive…I should get examined. There are no guarantees. Not here. The pain is unbearable. My heart…it is heavy.”

“Sherlock,” John interrupted the video. “I think we should stop. She’s obviously not herself and it seems as if she’s starting to lose track of time.”

“That can happen on these types of missions,” he recounted with a subtle tap to his temple. “What one is willing to put the mind and body through can justify a means to an end, if you will.”

John scoffed loudly, “You are full of shit!”

“Did you…I – I am full of shit?”

“Yes, spouting that doctrine horseshit in an effort to cover up the damage that these things do to you. You are my best friend, Sherlock; I am aware when you lie to me!”

“Debatable,” Sherlock quipped with a thoughtful glance upwards.

“We should respect her, and – and not watch the rest of this. I do not want to watch her fall down the rabbit hole that she’s managed to climb out of.”

Sherlock leant backward in his chair in a huff and replied, “She wants us to watch this so that we don’t ask any more questions than necessary, John. If we prod at her one day, out of curiosity, and it’s a question that could have been answered with this footage, what do you surmise will be her reaction? What, do you gather, do you think that she would do in Byrns fashion after she realizes that we did not do as she tasked before the pair of us?”

“You constantly remind me to stay away from that side of her every time I am in the muck of it, and here you are enticing the idea of putting not just yourself; but myself there as well in the future.”


Entry No. 9 – 13:22

John’s breath hitched in his throat: her features were more gaunt and sullen; eyes bloodshot. Streaks of mud and dust lined her face. Her sleeves were ripped at the shoulder and there was evidence that she had been crying, again.

“I don’t even know what day it is…my burner phone is currently at the bottom of a lake and…it’s just not been a priority since my arrival back here,” she croaked and a shaky hand ran fingers through her hair. “Everything – everything that happened…it’s my fault. All of it.”

She sighed and stared at the bottom of the camera. “Three…no…four days after the last entry,
Stefan and his band of merry men decided that we were to go camping. I had to bring Luka with me...my son. We traveled for three or so hours northeast...I think. I don’t know. The extra drugs that have been pumped into my system lately are blurring my days together. I am using any higher faculties that I possess to try and keep conscious as long as possible...but even then, my constitution is only so high...”

Shannon wiped a stray tear from her cheek. “So we went, a large number of us, to this place in the middle of nowhere. There was revelry, so to speak. I mean, as much as Stefan and his men would enjoy to have.”

Sherlock leaned forward and scrutinized the video before him. Her mannerisms were erratic; her breathing shallow. It was apparent that she was doing her best to make cohesive conversation, meaning that she had far more than just narcotics in her bloodstream. The pain conveyed by her eyes was more than enough evidence to suggest that she was getting migraines on this mission; and there was something else. She is in hell.

“Like I said, I don’t know how many days we were there before...” She wrung her fingers together nervously and she refused to look up from the desk; her voice crackled, “I was able to walk...just. Whether at Stefan’s behest or out of sheer hatred, Irina kept giving me consumables when I was conscious. Not everything was laced...but enough of it was for Luka to shake me out of a stupor one morning to tell me that he’d not eaten in two days; that Stefan’s men threatened to shoot him if he took anything without my being there...”

“I got up as quick as I could, but the room was spinning and Stefan grabbed at me from the bed... he told me to stay put; that he ordered me back to his bed. But I couldn’t. Luka needed me. I needed to take care of him because he’d become my responsibility...I’d become his ‘mother’. And this kid looks up to me.”

Sherlock’s eyes bored into the screen. The odd combination of vulnerability and anger that Shannon’s pain was able to stir in him was rising from the pit in his stomach. He did his best to quiet his rage and watched to the video.

“...I – I could hear... screaming...and I tried to get up...but the fentanyl and whatever else...I just...I kept falling over. I started crawling towards the sound but...I couldn’t move fast enough...”

She paused, tears falling from her cheeks. “Next I remember, Stefan has me standing up...his arms wrapped around me possessively...telling me that – that I have to choose. I don’t fully understand, I mean; the fucking world is just coming back into focus. So, he – he puts a gun in my hands and repeats, ‘Now choose, voljena... Show me’. I have no idea what’s happening, but a part of me realizes that – that it had something to do with the child I’ve been protecting.”

“So...I...uh...told him,” she sniffed, “that I’d give him my support and have his back but – but I wouldn’t choose to hurt my son. He pulled me closer to him; Christ...I can still feel his tongue on my neck and...Jesus.” Her body convulsed into a shudder, “I watched as three of his men came around the corner of a cabin with girls he had managed to snatch up. They were thrown into a ravine with Luka...and...”

“He said, ‘See your power at work’. And I watched as his men and Irina opened fire on them all in the ravine. And – and all that I could do...all that I was able to muster...was a ‘Please, no’.”

Her fist slammed onto the desk, showcasing the fresh wounds to her knuckles. “I’ve crumbled empires...fought my way through The Syndicate...and now...I can’t do fucking shit because I can’t
John covered his mouth with his hands in horror. He knew her erratic behavior and conversation was coming to a dangerous conclusion. “Oh my God,” he gasped.

“That child,” she snarled, “was shot today because I couldn’t be better. I wasn’t enough. I hurt him…me. I put him in danger. How in the name of God could I have put a child in harm’s way? What kind of monster am I? What circle of hell is reserved for me?” Her body deflated, slumped backward into her chair.

“It was cold out, wherever we were…snow was on the ground,” she recanted more calmly than she had done previously. “They picked up the bodies and threw them into the lake…Stefan asked if I was his…and I croaked a yes. Irina’s voice was slick and told me that I’d have another test tomorrow now that my old son was out of the way. When I asked her why he had to be killed, she told me that Stefan didn’t want any competition for his own children…and they left me on the lake bank. Once alone…I dove into the water…I could barely breathe…the water was like – like electricity…I had been shocked into submission. But – but I had to go deeper; I commanded every fiber of my being to dive toward the shapes at the bottom…and I finally grabbed some fabric. It’s comforting, you see…the stillness… before you drown…It’s so quiet and the burning in your lungs or the fire in your blood could go away if one would just…let go. But somewhere in my subconscious I clawed my way up for air with me clutching onto this body I’d raised from the deep.”

“I don’t remember getting onto the embankment. I don’t remember resuscitating the boy. I don’t fully remember nearly blowing my cover by crying and speaking in English.”

“I do remember grabbing Mikail and promising to give him money if he took Luka away somewhere safe. I remember him agreeing because he owed me a favor after I helped his brother move up on a transplant list. I remember Mikhail wrapping his jacket around that boy and carrying him off to one of the cars and driving away.”

“I remember hearing music in my mind, and I thought that I was done…finally. That my time had been spent in such a way that my energies were spent and I was to fade back into the universe. The music...” she paused again, eyes closed with fresh tears falling. “The way those chords moved and resolved…I remember…I remember thinking that if this was the end…if this was – was my time… and this was the knell to warn me of my death…then I would go to it. I would die in music, of all things. And then…nothing.”

“I awoke, later this morning, in Stefan’s bed, where he chastised me for diving into the water after my son, who was dead and at the lake bottom. Mikhail had driven into town to get me medicine and fluids because I ‘over did it’. But I knew…Mikhail had stowed Luka somewhere safe and I was suffering the effects of hypothermia.”

“Stefan, knowing that I was unable to do much else other than lie in my weakened state, told me that he wanted me to bear him children and that we should start now.”

“In hindsight, I perhaps should have made his drive to have me in his life weaker; but it’s a consequence I now have to live with.”

“He whispered quietly that I would have to pass a test later today and that we should begin our lives together now…today…that I was to give up the hovel I lived in and move into his home with him…that I would be queen of his empire. And then he forced himself on me, and I can now claim that I have been raped. I could do nothing to defend myself. I was sedated and restrained. Afterward, he told me that he’d had me periodically while I was in and out of consciousness. Lucky me.”

“The macabre sense of irony is that it was in the line of duty, you might say…and could be argued as an act of volition in itself...”

“If I knew going into this mission, that I would be tortured or killed; that I knew the worst of things
could happen to my person and I still took this job, regardless...was I still raped? Will Frosty look at it that way? Does it matter?” she shrugged, distant. “I don’t think it does.”

She looked square into the camera, “I got what was wanted, the perfect placement for an untraceable mole. I doubt my counterpart could have done it much better; though...I would hope their results would vary greatly from mine. Luckily for those at home, I am unable to bear children; so I’ll not be having any spawn to siphon off benefits from the government should I return.”

“Take it. Take all of it,” she sniped at the camera, venom dripping from her words. “Take this fucking empire of dirt. Have all of it. Have I turned into the thing that I was so afraid of becoming at your behest to save him? Am I now the monster I so desperately tried to bury? How much more must I bear for your ineptitude in power? What else must I give in order to - to - to have the right to be me? To be free? When do I get to live?” She was nearly shouting at the camera, enraged. Fire burned behind her eyes as she finished with a feral-like growl while throwing her lamp across the room.

“Shut it off,” John whispered, harsh. “Sherlock, for God’s sake, shut the damn thing off. I don’t want to see any more of this. No – no more ...” John got up and stormed out of the flat and left Sherlock alone. He knew that rage; he’d felt it before. He was at a loss: he knew all the clinical ways in which she could be healed but this was different. He was, for one of the few times in his life, at a loss.

Sherlock Holmes did not know how he was to feel or what he was to do.
Let's Play 'Drug Dealer'

It had been well over an hour since she’d left Baker Street. The half of a pint of golden lager passed by her lips with ease before she placed her glass down with a dull thud. The bartender looked over and she nodded, “I’ll take a scotch before I square up.”

“You sure, miss?” he asked in mild concern.

“Positive,” she nodded in affirmation. “I’ll be fine. I’ve not far to go. Neat, thank you.”

The bartender shrugged and reached up for a rocks glass before dispensing the liquor. When he placed the glass before her, she handed him money and watched her sip the shot neatly, eyes closed.

“Rough day?” he asked congenially for the sake of conversation.

“You could say that,” she nodded. “It’s got the potential to get rough once I leave and head home. Flat-mate isn’t going to be too happy with me...in a way.”

The bartender bristled with concern, “Not that it’s my business, but is everything okay?”

She opened her eyes slowly and peered over at the greying man before her wiping out a pint glass. “It’s not anything I can’t handle,” she chortled. “You know how it is.”

“You say that,” he replied, skeptical, “But you’ve been coming here to The Globe for what…three years or so? You’ll come here in long spurts and then be gone without a word for months or longer…is it your job?”

“Yeah, it has me travel a lot. So when I get home, there’s usually a lot of baggage, and not just the luggage that I have to deal with. Tonight’s the night that I get to deal with it all. I’m just procrastinating.”

“Ah,” he nodded, “If that’s what you want to call it…we can do that.”

She sipped her drink and eyed him over the glass rim, “Oh? You think that it’s different?”

“Oh, I do.”

“Hm,” she chuckled. “You might be right. What is it that you think you know?”

He replaced the clean glass on the shelf and smirked, “I know that you only come in here after seven and that you sit at that table in the corner facing toward the door; and, if that table’s taken you stand as close to the bar as possible without hovering.”

“Oh, I do.”

“You might be right. What is it that you think you know?”

She let the last swish of rum dance on her tongue while he continued, “You’re polite and never cause a fuss with anyone in here, ever. You straighten the chairs as you go by if someone’s left them out, and you cross the street here when you leave and walk up towards Baker Street Station. After you round the building’s edge I don’t know where you go…you always leave a fiver, no matter how small your bill is. You smile at the people who don’t think anyone can see them before
you leave.”

She stood still a moment and swallowed. “Very astute.”

“I’m the bartender. It’s part of the job,” he smiled warmly. “And,” he added, “I know that those two blokes down the way care about your wellbeing.”

She quirked an eyebrow, “Oh really? And how do you know that?”

“They both phone to make sure that you get home alright when they know you’re here,” he answered kindly.

She placed a ten-pound note on the bar top and smiled, “Thank you, Jack.”

“You’ve never used my name before,” he observed. “Not that I can recall.”

“It’s part of the job,” she smiled shouldering her way into her jumper. “I see people.” She straightened the chairs as she walked past towards the door, crossed the street, and rounded the building’s corner so that she could walk past Baker Street Station to go home. The sun had just set completely and the velvet blue of night was moving across the sky. *Time to face my dragons.*

He heard the door open quietly downstairs and a light rustle on the stair, but he didn’t stir from his chair or take his eyes off the inane spot on John’s chair. She stood leaning on the doorframe, casually staring down at the floor after silently treading the stairs. “How far?” her soft voice sounding like a canon in the silence.

“How far?” he replied.

She nodded, “Ah. Yes. That.”

Shannon headed into the kitchen and poured a glass of red wine and glass of rum and returned to the detective. “Here,” she offered the wine, “You’ll probably want this, considering.”

His intent gaze finally broken, he looked to her eyes and reached for the wine glass. She turned and motioned towards John’s chair, “May I?”

“Of course,” he replied with a nod. The luxurious wine trickled down his throat at the first sip. *She chose well.*

“Where is John?”

“He left about forty-five minute ago. I doubt that he will return tonight. He was distraught,” Sherlock recanted. “He told me to turn off the video after the entry we had just watched.”

“You’re only missing the last two more, and they are very tame in comparison. You do understand why I have hesitated to bring this up, yes?”

His eyebrows knit together creating a crinkle in his nose, “Did you think that I wouldn’t grasp the concept that – that I’m not capable?”

“No – no that’s not what I meant,” she retracted. “What I mean is…that…I – I’m broken. I’m not…at my best, you know. Not anymore. You could give me all sorts of tests or chances…but – but I’m not good enough; not like I was…and that’s why I didn’t want to talk about it.”

His expression remained unaltered. “You must be joking.”
“Excuse me?” she took a sip of her drink, an eyebrow shot up.

“What is it that you expected after showing us this, hmm?” his voice resonated through the air. “That John and I would – would change how we view you? How we feel about your being here?”

She pulled her head back, her eyes peered out from under heavy lids. “Yes.”

“Why? Explain that logic to me,” he bit.

“Don’t you snap at me,” she retorted placidly. “I know that if I don’t have utility, then I am of no use. If I am broken, then I am at the mercy of your pity; and we both have seen the pity shown by your family before.”

“That’s an absolute absurdity,” he countered. “Utility? That’s all you truly believe that you offer?”

She shrugged, nestling into the chair, “Isn’t that all that I am? An extra mind? An extra fighter; another semi-competent investigator? If I am not able to execute the task before me, then do I not have any remaining utility?”

“God,” he groaned. “You are absolutely insufferable when you’re like this.” He drained his glass and stood up, plopping the glassware onto the mantle.

Shannon remained unfazed but allowed her eyes to track his movement in the room. “I know what you’re endeavoring to do, Sherlock.”

“How can you,” he seethed with a glare over his shoulder, “If you’re so broken? An idiot wouldn’t be able to figure it out.”

“I never said I was an idiot; at least not at the moment,” she replied. “You presumed to think so.”

His hands rested at his waist, shoulders squared off in defiance. “Oh, of course; if there’s blame to throw, now’s the time.”

“Sherlock, you can’t bait me into this fight,” she sighed. “I’ve already had this conversation thousands of times in my head. I’m ready for it.”

“I’ve had it with your to and fro attitude, Shannon. This is ridiculous. You go from sliding back into life here hoping that it can be seamless, to traversing into oblivion where you feel that I’d be so much better without you here!” he growled. “Either you want to be here or you don’t; but you cannot keep playing both sides of this coin. Either you will fight to be here or you will be coward and leave; but figure it out. I…”

She raised a hand to interrupt. “I?”

“Sorry?” he heaved breathless.

“You said, ‘I’. ‘…that I’d be so much…”

“So?”

She stood up and squared her shoulders to his, “No. Why, suddenly, is it I instead of we? It’s always been we because you include John in this all the time.”

“I just,” he ran a hand through his hair. “You are infuriating.”

“No; don’t. Tell me.” She dug a finger into his chest, “Or are you incapable?”
His lips pressed together into a thin line and his finger pointed at the laptop. “All of that happened because I didn’t… And – and you just stand here as if everything is fine!”

She squinted and turned her head, “So… you’re upset with me because I’m not more of a mess?”

“How can you stand there and not be repulsed by me or hate my being here?”

“Oh, I see. Let me spin this back onto you: did you think that after what happened I wouldn’t want to be here?”

“Considering the trauma that you have endured…”

“I’m going to interrupt you.”

“If I were to consider every trauma that I have experienced since meeting you, I would have, by your logic, fled eons ago. But I am still here. I left to protect you the only way that I knew that I could. I haven’t come terms with it all yet and I still have nightmares. But I don’t – I don’t think that I could genuinely hate you. I mean, I know that I say I do from time to time when you’re being a prat but… Sherlock, I don’t hate you.”

“That doesn’t make any logical sense. One could infer that you could be suffering from Stockholm syndrome.”

“Do you want me to go away?”

“Don’t be imbecilic.”

She crossed her arms in a huff. “Then that’s that, yes; are we done?”

“No, not by a long shot.”

“Can we be done with this today?”

He exhaled quickly, “Yes, thank God.”

“Good: grab your coat. We’re going out.”

He cocked his head to the side and looked at her with skepticism. “And where are we going.”

“Trust me and come with me, please,” she held out his jacket to him.

He reached out for his coat and the pair of them hurried down the steps. Neither one spoke hardly at all, not even after they had taken the tube from Baker Street to Barbican Station. Once they had crossed the A1, Sherlock reached for her wrist and spun her to face him.

“Why are we here?”

She blinked quickly and looked around, “Isn’t it obvious?”

“Yes, of course it is,” he chided, “But why are we here?”

“Trust me.”

He shoved his hands into his jacket pockets. “I do trust you, however – “

“Good,” her voice bright, “Then let’s go.”
He followed her around the compound until the entrance to the theatre appeared. He held the door open for her, which gave him time to observe the people around them. “Sherlock, let’s go,” she urged.

They had taken their seats just as the concert was about to start; some Mendehlson and Brahms played, then a featured soloist walked out and bowed.

“I know how much you like German music; but that’s not what’s the feature tonight,” she nudged.

He rolled his eyes, “Please tell me that this isn’t Vivaldi.”

“It’s not.”

“Then there’s still hope.” The opening theme enveloped the theatre, reminiscent of something Beethoven would have written. Within moments, he had identified what piece was being performed: Paganini’s Violin Concerto Number Four.

When the soloist’s bow glided across the strings at her entrance, Sherlock’s head leaned into Shannon’s ear. “How did you know that this was being performed before I did?”

Her eyes were closed but a pleasant smile emerged on her lips, “You’ve been busy.”

He settled back into his seat, eyes intent on the performers before him. Say what you would of Sherlock Holmes and the arts, but he would if the opportunity presented itself, speak on Paganini for hours.

“I’ve never played Paganini while you’ve been home,” he whispered.

She shrugged, “Should we leave, then?” Her voice and grin became childish with a nudge of her elbow into his side.

“Hmpf.”

“That’s what I thought,” her voice low. “Now hush.” She nestled herself into the plush seat and draped her trench coat over her body.

The soloist’s cadenza entered effortlessly, shades of a Spanish-style composition embellished by insane bow speed on chords and arpeggios, double stops, thirty-second notes, and left hand plucking had left Sherlock Holmes entranced. A soft chuckle rumbled in Shannon’s chest: Like I wouldn’t know. It’s not as if he hasn’t tried practicing some of these techniques before. And look at him, entranced. Though, I wonder if the soloist is good enough for his taste.

The second movement began softly, swelled, and diminished before the brass entered. The violin entered in on a wave of woe as the first note lingered in the air, a sigh from Paganini to his audience.

Sherlock heard a noise come from his right, distracting him for a moment: she had tears rolling down her face.

“Shannon?”

“F-sharp minor,” her voice a whisper, “Lovely, isn’t it?”

“Might I ask you a question?”

“Always.”
“What does this movement look like?”

She hesitated, “Are you sure you want me to tell you? It won’t distract you?”

“I’m intrigued.”

She leaned her head onto his shoulder. When he scoffed, she defended herself, “It’s less of a distraction. Now, do you want to know or not?”

“Fine. Begin.”

“Close your eyes,” she instructed. “Imagine a black, three-dimensional space. In the center of it, there is a light, gold like a solitary candle…those arpeggios,” she motioned with her hand, “are strokes of purple watercolor in motion. The orchestra are shades of red watercolor; constantly moving and blending on the canvas. The flute and oboe…a line of molten gold that comes in and out of focus. The brass, ah yes…” she sighed, “dark orange. Do you see? And Paganini…light turned into an oil paint; at times bright and at others, dim. The canvas should be moving…of sorts…as if it were breathing with each phrase.”

In his mind’s eye did it’s best to create what was explained to him. The creation before him swirled in and out of focus, at her instruction: his mind commanding different musical parts to act as different brushstrokes.

“Hm,” he squinted.

She lifted her head off his shoulder and listened intently as the movement was about to enter the coda. “Hm?”

“I see why you like the cosmos,” a lilt in his voice. “It looks like something from the stars.”

This man. I swear to Christ…he has no idea…I don’t know why…or how…but…that was sweet…or – or kind.

“Did I do it wrong?” his question dragged her out of her mind.

“No,” her eyebrows lifted, “No…that was right. That’s close to what I saw. Very much.”

He nodded. “Interesting.”

The third movement opened with trumpets before the violinist took over, far more cheery than the previous movement. He sat motionless, both his eyes and mind absorbing every ounce of sound and technique he could focus on. She tapped her foot in time with the beat, eyes closed and intent on the dance of colors that swarmed her vision.

Once the concerto had finished the hall applauded and those that knew of the skill required for the concerto were the first to stand in ovation of the evening’s featured soloist. Sherlock felt recharged, the evening’s music having washed away the unnecessary from his mind giving him a fresh slate to work from.

Shannon slid her trench coat over her shoulders and leisurely strolled out of the theatre while the thunderous applause still boomed. Her fingers expertly typed out a text in explanation.

Sherlock Holmes:
I have to meet up with a contact tonight. It seems that there’s no rest for the wicked.

Shannon Byrns:

Do you require assistance?

-SH

Sherlock Holmes:

No. Should be uneventful.
Just getting some information.
Don’t intentionally wait up for me.

She hailed a cab to take her to down to Thornton Heath. Once inside and in motion, she dialed a memorized number and listened patiently to the dial tone. A faint click was the only indication she had that the line had been connected.

“I’m on my way.”

“And de baker?”

“I can make no promises,” she brushed her coat aimlessly with her hand. “But the baker should be going back to his shop.”

“Den I should tell you dat dhere is more den jus’ de file.”

The American stared longingly out the cab window as drizzle began to fall. “So much for a quiet night. Does it require a costume change?”

“Yes.”

“Would it behoove me to just go to the information and grab the file later?”

“Dat is up to you, Kivuli. But I do have your…baking supplies. Dey came in today.”

A flash of teeth could be seen from under her smile, “Then I’m definitely coming by. I’ll be there soon.”

Darweshi had a modest home that was sparsely furnished. It was impeccably neat, but only the necessities were visible. “If you aren’t making enough,” Shannon offered, “I can increase my rate for the work you do for me. It’s not like you aren’t worth every bit of it.”

“No,” he stopped her with his hand. “What you pay is plenty, Kivuli. Dhere is no argument dhere.”

“Change of subject: where have you been?”
He squinted, “What do you mean?”

*Sharp haircut, minor swelling in left arm from vaccinations, scratch on neck that is nearly healed; bruised wrist.*

“I called you a few days ago and it was the first time that you didn’t answer. So what have you been up to?”

“Ah,” he lifted a box down from the closet shelf. “I…heh heh…met someone. I ‘ave been busy, yes?” He peered over his shoulder with a gleam in his eye.

She grinned, “Good for you. Happy?”

“Happier.”

“Alright, I’ll forgive you this time. So, Sensei…what have you got for me?”

He set the box on the floor and passed her the folder from his couch, “Elenore Martin, goes by de name ‘Ella. She has de information. She is de cousin of one of de men dat is try to cause you trouble.”

She scanned through the file and made mental notes about her target. “Makes sense. What’s the angle?”

Darweshi’s innocent smile turned devilish. “You are her…how you say…type.”

“Hmpf,” she chuckled. “So just be myself then?”

“I would say yes…more…eh…what is word for animal?”

She paused and racked her brain, “Primal?”

“Dat is word. Yes.”

She walked over to the closet and looked at the various articles of clothing he had unboxed for her. “Then let’s say a prayer for the wicked in the night and get to work,” her hand stopped on a black tailored suit jacket and black, leather leggings. “Yes. That will do. Very nice.”

“You sure dat dis outfit…wit dhoes,” he gestured to her ensemble on the hangers, “is de one?”

“You said to be me. So…tonight…I’ll be the devil. And tonight the devil wears leather leggings.”

He nodded approvingly, “Here. You ‘ave VIP table eleven, she and her friends ‘ave tables seven and ten. You will be close to dem.”

“And how much did this set me back?” she asked while doing her hair.

“Thirteen hundred.”

She choked, “Are you serious?! I mean, Jesus, I know I’ve got money from work, but Darweshi!”

“It is important dat she notices you are powerful. Both in look and in money. You will have plenty of spirits to shower her with, and her favorite, champagne.”

She pursed her lips with a sigh and shook her head. “Whatever you say, you’re the boss tonight.”
It was Saturday night at the Ministry of Sound and its crowd was moving to the music the DJ was spinning. Strobes, lasers, gels, fog, and confetti cannons all added to the ambiance of night club. The American smiled at her surroundings and slid into being an abstract part of herself.

A touch of an elbow and question to a staff member got Shannon directed to the VIP area after getting both a double take and a once over. Well, I guess I legitimately still got it. Dressed to kill, her black suit was tailored to flatter her frame in every way possible and she had elected to ditch the collared shirt for a black bandeau that exposed her midriff. A gold chain with a gold spike plunged between her breasts and gold cuff links gleamed on her sleeves. Her strappy stilettos glittered with gold and easily made her close to six feet tall. Her makeup was simple: black winged eyeliner, gold highlighter; red lipstick.

She checked in and moved to her VIP table with clubbers sneaking glances as she walked by. The bartender readied her order and she went and sat at her table. Her VIP package included three bottles of vodka, a magnum bottle of champagne, and a variety of mixers. Not necessarily happy with her basket, she took the bottles of vodka to the bar and asked the bartender to swap them out.

“Sorry, that’s not what we do here.”

She flashed three hundred pounds onto the bar top, “Then let me make a donation to your tip jar.”

The bartender looked about and put his hand on top of the notes, “What do you want?”

“Bottle of bourbon, dealer’s choice. And two rocks glasses. Though, the better the bottle, the higher chance of an extra hundred showing up later.” He nodded and pulled a bottle down from the shelf, rang it up, and put the glasses and liquor on the bar.

“Oh,” she gawked at the label. “Very nice. As promised,” she smiled and slipped another hundred onto the bar.

She retreated back to her table and waited for her mark to show up. The bourbon poured beautifully into her glass, the dark amber refracting the ambient colors of the room. Electing to drink it neat, this bourbon needed no help to flourish or taste better. Ooh...I may have to put this on my Christmas list.

Interrupted from her thoughts, a VIP slid beside her and looked her over. “Haven’t see you round here before.”

Without wavering her gaze, she eyed the drink in its glass and smirked, “And you know everyone that buys a table?”

“No,” the man smiled in an attempt to be suave. “Just that you’re hot, and it looks like you’re alone. I came by to keep you company.”

“Lucky me,” she swirled the bourbon over her tongue.

He grabbed the bottle of bourbon and read the label, “How’d you get this?”

“Look,” she pivoted to face him, her arm resting on the back of the booth. “We can agree that I’m not interested and I swear to Christ that if you break that bottle of bourbon, I will make your night miserable. Put it down and go back to your table.”

“Oh, I like ‘em feisty!” his voice excited.

She grinned, “You have no idea. I’ll count to three. One.” Instead of taking the hint, and obviously inebriated, he sat like an expectant puppy for a treat. “Two. Well, can’t say that I didn’t warn you.
Three.”

She lifted her foot into the seat and brought down the spike of her shoe onto his groin with a less than subtle push. He squeaked out in shock and pain. “You…fucking…”

“Finish that statement and I’ll be sure that you won’t be using your dick for quite a while. Understand?” He nodded quickly. “It’s not you. It’s me. You’re not my type. I like mine a little smarter. Now, when I lift my foot up, are you going to be good and toddle back to wherever you came from?” His head bobbed in agreement. “Good.” She slid her foot back down onto the floor and watched as he scampered back to the other side of the room.

After an hour, her mark showed up in a large posse of ten or so people that took up two of the larger tables. She’d drank near a third of the bourbon in the time she’d been waiting and had enjoyed people watching.

“I need a drink!” one of the women shouted. “I’m so hot. These DJs are fire.”

“Yeah,” a friend agreed. “Get the bartender.”

“How’s my makeup?” someone asked.

“Here, lemme touch up your highlight.”

Shannon topped off her glass of bourbon and uncorked her champagne. She held the bottle by the neck in her left and her glass in the right while walking over to the other table.

‘scuse me. I have this bottle of champagne and no one to share it with and was wondering if you’d like a drink.”

One of the men laughed, “Sorry, love, but I’m taken. And gay. That’s two strikes for you.”

“Oh,” Shannon smiled, “I wasn’t talking to you.” Her eyes shifted to the woman sitting beside him on the end. “I was talking to you.”

She had long blonde hair and dark brown eyes. Her attire for the evening consisted of a pair of leggings, boots, and a blue and white striped, tube top. “Do I know you?”

“No,” Shannon’s eyes gave her a once over, “But I saw you on the floor and you’re hard to forget.”

The mark laughed and eyed up their visitor. “And let’s say I want a drink? Where do I have to go to get one?”

“I’m at the table behind here. Invitation stands,” she smiled as she backed away, her hips swaying seductively as she walked.

“What’s your name?”

Shannon thought for a moment, and with a gleam in her eye said, “Lucy.” Lucy…Lucifer…To-may-to; to-mah-to.

Upon her return, she replaced the champagne back into the ice and drank from her glass. After two minutes and numerous glances over the booth from the table she visited, Shannon began to count.

“Five…four…three…two…one…”

“Lucy, was it?”
Shannon looked up with a grin while she slid over in the booth to accommodate her guest, “Yeah. That’s right. And what should I call you?”

“Ella.”

“Pleasure,” she gushed as her guest sat down. Shannon poured a glass of champagne and handed it over.

Ella sipped and eyed Shannon, “I’ve not seen you in here before. And we’re here nearly every weekend.”

“Just got back into the swing of things,” she smiled. “I’ve been away for a while and decided to come back for a bit.”

“You travel?”


The pair sat and gabbed for hours while liquid libations flowed freely. She had nearly all the information from Ella concerning her cousin. Shannon flirted relentlessly with Ella and was making way.

An unexpected double tap on her shoulder caused her to shoo the intrusion away. “Piss off.

“Not exactly a calm night for you, now is it?” a deep baritone voice cut through the sound.

Shit. Damn it all to hell. Think…think, think, think…Bingo! Shannon whipped around and stared up at the consulting detective.

“Lucy, who’s this guy?” Ella asked defensively.

Shannon bristled, “This is my Uncle Sherlock.”

“Uncle?” he guffawed.

Shannon leaned into Ella’s ear, “He tries to be the cool uncle. I’m staying in one of the flats he owns in town.”

“Oh. Wait…Sherlock…as in Sherlock Holmes?”

“Yeah,” she whispered. “Same one.”

“Oh. My. God. I need to have my picture taken with you!” Ella squealed.

Sherlock’s eyes shot daggers at Shannon, “You need to go home, now.”

“Come on, Uncle Sherlock, take a picture with her! Please?”

“You haven’t been back for a solid two weeks and already you’re off doing God knows what!” he played along.

She could hear the blatant subtext in his voice. “Fine. I get it. Can I just finish my drink?”

“Please? And a photo?” Ella begged.
“Fine,” his voice sharp.

He took a selfie with Ella, she finished her last glass of bourbon, and Sherlock made his way toward the exit.

Ella grabbed Shannon’s wrist and pulled her back to her, “Call me?”

“Hmm,” Shannon smiled. “A beautiful girl’s asking me to call her? I don’t have your number.”

Ella withdrew from her bra a slip of paper and slipped it into Shannon’s breast pocket. “Now you do.” She threaded her hands into Shannon’s hair and proceeded to kiss her.

Surprised and winded, Shannon gasped, “Wow.”

“See you soon.”

Shannon stumbled to the doorway where Sherlock was waiting having witnessed the spectacle before him. Interesting.

“Shannon,” he began with a guiding hand at the small of her back.

“No,” she corrected. “Not yet. And move your hand up…if they’re going to believe you’re my uncle, you need to follow through. She’s going to follow me out to see me in a different shade of light.”

“Oh? That spectacle wasn’t enough?” his voice snide.

She grinned devilishly. “Vanity, Sherlock. She’ll want to make sure I’m still good looking in regular light.”

“Lucy!” a voice shouted once the cool, London air enveloped them.

Shannon spun around and looked for the voice, knowingly finding Ella standing there. “Ella!”

“You’ll call me, yeah?”

“Can’t say no to a pretty face,” her voice dripping with honey. That’s the fucking truth.

Ella smiled sheepishly. “Alright…see you,” she waved before turning back into the club.

Shannon turned around to begin to walk and ran square into Sherlock. “What?”

“What were you doing?”

“Getting information.”

His eyes cast suspicion over her. “To the unobservant, it seemed as if it were more than that.”

The bother he was causing made her face fall flat. “I am not gay. You would be the one to know.”

“No, no…It’s fine. Whatever. It’s…all. You know. Fine.” She clicked her tongue and began walking in the opposite direction. “Where are you going?”

“Make a deduction or go home,” she shouted over her shoulder.

The detective grumbled in exasperation and quickened his pace to catch up with her. “You have a flat in Walworth?”
“I do.”

“And one in Stratford.”

“Yes.”

“How many other properties do you own?”

“A handful.” She slackened her pace to a stroll and allowed for the pair of them to talk more amicably.

“Are they all safehouses?”

She smirked, “No. I let out most of them through a third party. Anonymous…fairly. And discreet. Helps me have a legitimate source of income.”

“How far?”

“Only ten or so minutes. It’s near Nursery Row Park. Come along.”

After five minutes, their pace slowed again. He shot a side glance to her feet, “If you hadn’t worn them, you wouldn’t be in pain.”

“Wow,” her voice sarcastic. “I would never have guessed. It’s like you know that heels hurt!”

“Judging by the pace we are now walking, it’s going to take an additional thirteen minutes to get to your flat.”

“I’m not taking them off and walking barefoot. I’ll be lucky and end up with glass or tetanus and we both know I’ve been incident free as of late,” she jabbed.

“For God’s sake, stop. Give me your arm,” he commanded.

“What are you doing?” she queried as he draped her arm over his shoulder. “Sherlock! Wha-!”

He bent over, swept her legs with his free hand and began to carry her. “Even with the added weight, and figuring that I will need to pause for a moment to readjust, we will be to your flat in six minutes. Seven if you don’t stop trying to break free.”

She stilled herself and pouted. “I can walk.”

“Yes, I know you can,” his voice firm. “But you were taking far too long and there are things I wish to discuss with you and would prefer to do so where ears are not so prevalent.”

She sighed as he walked. “Fine.”

“Thank you.”

His jacket was warm against her lower back. Gazing ahead she spied a group of people walking and trying her best to not look like an abductee, she wrapped her other arm around his neck and rested her head on his shoulder.

“Very good,” he quipped.

The pedestrian couple looked at Sherlock and the woman made an audible sound of approval and smacked the arm of the man she was walking with. “Why don’t you ever carry me home, eh?”
Shannon smirked. “You can stop that,” he observed. “Don’t get used to it.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she feigned surprise. “Exactly how many times have you caught me when I’ve fallen? Or carried me when I couldn’t walk?”

He pondered a moment, “Eleven.”

“I wasn’t actually counting…that was more rhetorical.”

“Oh.”

“Did you actually count?”

“…Maybe…give or take.”

“Am I that much of a burden? Jesus. Put me down.”

“No, no…stop that. I will drop you if you don’t stop!” She struggled to reach the ground. “Fine. Fine!. As always, your way.” He loosened his grip from beneath her and plopped her onto the pavement.

“You ass,” she rubbed her backside as she stood back up.

“I told you what would happen if you didn’t stay still. And we’re here.”

Her eyes narrowed while she fished her key from her pocket. She opened the door and crossed the threshold to find Sherlock still standing on the landing. “What, do you need an invitation?”

“I half expected you to slam the door in my face.”

Air passed through her nostrils in a huff. “I can be cold to you, sure; but I’m not that heartless. Come on. You did carry me halfway home.”

His coat slid off his shoulders and was placed neatly over the bannister with his scarf. She had already made free from her high heels and was sighing, content, with her feet flat on the floor. She padded away from the entry to the back of the house after plugging in her phone to charge.

“How?” she offered, putting popcorn into the microwave. “It’ll take a moment, but, I’ll share if you want some. Also, there’s port in the cabinet if you want.”

“What,” he asked taking stock of her outfit, “Are you wearing?” He grabbed a glass and poured himself a heavy portion of port.

“This?” she looked down at her ensemble. “This was my disguise tonight. The devilish place in my mind was inspiration. Appropriate, no?” Shannon took the time to pour her own drink, this time rum, into a rocks glass. She turned about on the spot to show off her outfit.

He blinked slowly. “Your scars are nearly invisible.”

“Makeup.”

“You took a risk flirting with that woman.”

“She’s twenty-one. A bit young for me, actually. And not my type. Not that much of a risk.”

“Your informant, I’d deduce, is Darweshi.”
“Yes.”

“What information could be so vital that you would risk sleeping with someone who is not of your sexual preference?”

She snorted into her glass and wiped the spillage from her lip. “You’re kidding me, right? After what you watched today?”

“No. I know that you did those things to protect us. I know that. You’ve made that abundantly clear. What I’m saying is…what new problem are you facing that you haven’t discussed?”

“I already gave you the answer. And it’s nothing I can’t handle.”

His eyes bounced around her face doing his best to read her, but her outfit was proving to be a distraction to him. What would be most pressing to her right now that doesn’t concern mine or the Watsons’ personal safety? Are those trousers meant to be form fitting? Molly has been quiet and Mrs. Hudson’s enemies are in Florida. Why a bandeau? Where’s the rest of it? Why not a shirt? Lestrade is…well…again, amazing no one has killed him yet. But if you consider the variables…wait…no. Today. What was it about today? Yes.

“Oh!” his eyes lit up. “That explains it!”

She had a handful of popcorn in her mouth and she replied with a muffled, “Whuh?”

“Oh, you are brilliant! Luminous, even!”

“Yeah…didn’t we already establish that…a long time ago?”

He grinned, “It’s the boy.”

Shannon stared blankly, “Of course it’s the boy.”

“What do you mean, ‘Of course it’s the boy’? How long has this been in motion?” he shed his jacket and began rolling his sleeves up. “Oh…since you got back.”

“Before I got back. He’s alive.”

His hands rested on his waist, “Then the gunshot wound…”

“Wounds, actually,” she corrected. “He was miserable. But I kept him hidden with a grandmother whose son and family were killed by Kasun. She took care of him during his recovery. I paid her as much as I could without drawing attention to myself, of course. Before I left, I gave her an envelope of about five thousand pounds to start the last phase of the process.”

“Your mark this evening seems to be a bit lacking in the department of immigration.”

She leaned backward onto the counter’s ledge. “Correct. Grotesquely lacking. Her cousin however…” His eyes lifted up in realization. “…is Luka’s visa case worker.”

He blinked a few times to process the information, his mouth formed into a thin line, “Gathering information to pressure the cousin if you needed to. If I caused any issue tonight, interrupting you…”

She shook her head. “No. You did not. I was at the point where I had gathered all the information that I needed. I hadn’t expected you to be there, is all and I didn’t want to blow my cover in the event that I must extrapolate more information from her.”
“Originally Darweshi had messaged you saying that he had files for you, but once he realized that Ella frequented the nightclub, he saw an opportunity for you to obtain more information from her.”

“Very good,” her hands rested on the counter’s edge.

“And you did all this yourself?”

She sniffed loudly, “I had help.”

“I mean the house.”

“Oh, yes,” her eyes darted around. “I decorated it. I haven’t let it out yet. Probably will though. I want to update the electrical…just haven’t bothered to get around to it.”

“In an offering of transparency, I feel it necessary to inform you that your costume is causing a distraction.” He finished his glass of port and placed the empty glass on the counter.

She crossed her arms and looked over at him skeptically. “You can’t be serious. This?”

He tilted his head to the side in acknowledgement. “It is true for whatever internal reason. The night that I came back from the church, I came to see that you were well, as you recall.”

“I do.”

He pressed on, hands on his waist when he wasn’t gesturing about to emphasize his point. “You noted the next morning that I was up earlier than normal after I had asked you if you had been pulled from sleep due to a nightmare. I omitted something from my explanation.”

She set her glass down and popped up an eyebrow. “Obviously.”

“It’s not that my mind insisted that sleep not be a part of my evening,” he turned his back to her. “It’s that you determined that I not sleep. I had, for reasons I cannot wholly fathom, thought of you for the rest of the night…”

 “…Sherlock…”

 “…memories of which you understand are difficult for me to articulate because I am incapable of doing so. In light of the information that I have learned of today, I believe it customary that I owe you an apology…I think.” He turned to face her, puzzled.

Shannon took a moment to gather her thoughts, doing everything in her power to calm the whirlwind he stirred up in her mind. “I’m…going to say this as carefully and I suppose, bluntly as possible given our nature and our circumstance. Is that a fair prelude to what I am about to say?”

“Of course,” his reply quick. “Anything more would uncharacteristic.”

“Right,” she frowned with another pause. “You’re asking me to forgive you, I think, because you thought about encounters…we have had…in the past…once I came home. …And now you feel a…pang of guilt? That since I was raped…that you shouldn’t…think or remember those things?”

“Yes, I suppose that could be one way of articulating it.”

“Hmm.” She hopped to sit on the counter.

“Is that all you’re going to say on the matter?”
“Sherlock,” she looked to the floor, “You know that I am attracted to you in a way, right?”

“Yes, as was concluded in the experiment.”

She bit the inside of her cheek. “Superficially, you’re not bad to look at: you’re fit, strong, and your eyes are stunning.”

“Intriguing.”

“Intrinsically though, I find that if I set aside your intellect you have traits that I admire and value. Your tenacity, your dedication to what you put your mind to, your voracious appetite for knowledge…your loyalty to those you care about.”

“Sherlock, you’re a good man. Despite everything you may feel, despite the callousness and cold vacuum you call your heart…I know that it is what drives you,” she looked up, brows furrowed. “If one were to strip away every layer of varnish, the masterpiece beneath is more beautiful and pure, however fragile and exposed.”

His features softened. “If we are being frank; and I believe that we are, it doesn’t matter what you have done, what you are doing, or more than likely what trouble you could do. I find that I have fallen to be an addict myself, you see?”

“To dangerous situations, yes.”

“Nope; no…not that. Whatever this is,” her finger bounced between the pair of them, “Is now what drives me in everything that I do. There’s a status quo between us, at least in my mind. Anyway, you know that Baker Street’s a home of addicts.”

“Mrs. Hudson is addicted to reconciling for her sins earlier in her life, John is addicted to things dangerous, you are addicted to solving crimes in lieu of getting high through other means,” her voice stopped. “And I am addicted to everything that is and ever was Sherlock Holmes.”

The detective remained still, his mind processing her conversation as quickly as possible. “But…why?”

“Don’t know,” her voice almost a whisper. “Could be left over programming from Moriarty so that I could fixate on you as he did; but, I think it’s because of who you are; that you’re my best friend more so.”

Shannon cleared her throat and sat upright, “When things get bad and I don’t know how much more of the shit I can take…your voice pops into my head and tells me to stop sniveling.” He chuckled, a quick flash of a grin appeared. “But that voice also reminds me of how clever I am and how I always have home at Baker Street. Ever since this all started years ago, I didn’t have a home until I arrived.”

“I know that I will have sentimental bad days and you may not understand me or how I’m coping with those days. I’m asking, Sherlock Holmes, that you be patient with me. I am fractured. I don’t really know how much more my mind or body could take, nor do I know if I will ever make enough strides to heal.”

“So when you ask me about forgiving you, I must in turn ask you to forgive me because, just like any addict…I can hide the addiction well and that, if you feel that my being in proximity to you would be detrimental to your process now that you know this that you cut me out of your life now so that I might have a chance to survive without my best friend.”

“Sherlock, I can’t explain why. I don’t know if I could do so if I had all eternity at my disposal…but I would burn the world for you if you asked. Your brother knows this and uses it to his advantage. You matter to me in ways that words cannot describe.”

“There is nothing to forgive.”

“Two-two-one Baker Street: home of addicts, doers of good, and occasionally we solve the
“That’s good,” she chirped. “You should put that on a sign out front.” She hopped off the counter and walked out to the sitting area to check her phone. “I can call a cab to take us back to Baker Street if you’re ready. I have some flats in the closet I can put on.”

He stood in the kitchen doorway as if his mind had stalled and he’d forgotten what he was to do. His fingers drummed idly on his waist as he swayed back and forth, but she knew that his mind was racing a thousand miles a minute.

“Sherlock?”

*What would she do if she were me in this situation? Act on impulse? No. She’d do whatever was in her power to help. But does helping her legitimately aid her? Hmm. Would she even be willing to test this theory? Of course she would. It’s me asking…well, directing her toward the answer.* As if pulled from a trance, “Hmm? What?”

“Cab? Do you…want me to call? Or… was there more you wished to discuss?”

“Ah, yes. One last detail,” he informed making strides across the room. He picked up her mobile out of her hand and silenced it. “If I thought that I could help you…that I could…heal…you, in a manner of speaking…would you let me?”

“Of course,” her response quick.

“Without knowing what it could be?”

“Of course,” she repeated.

There was a sharp intake of air, “Even if it could, potentially, make things worse?”

Puzzled, she gazed up at his face. “I trust you.”

“You don’t know what the side effects could be.”

“No,” she realized, “But…you would be…”

He silenced her train of thought, brushing his lips against hers in a light kiss. She grabbed at the center of his shirt when he pulled back.

“What…are you doing?” she asked breathless.

He swallowed hard. “If you allow it; enabling your addiction. You are the addict; I am your dealer.”

“Why? Why would you do that?” her brows knit together.

“Because,” he realized she was slowly pulling him closer to her. “It could help you heal. Ignore the status quo. Put everything else but right now on mute. Let go of what you have pent up. Help me to help you.”

Shannon closed her eyes to think. “What you’re asking me to do isn’t smart.”

He shrugged, snaking his hands onto her waist. “Very rarely, I find, do things such as this occur for smart reasons. I am taking a calculated risk.”
“Why,” her voice firm, her eyes visible under heavy lids.

“You need me to,” his voice had gone dark. “You would offer the same thing if our roles were reversed.”

“No,” she shook her head, “Don’t think so. No, I wouldn’t’ enable you.”

He rolled his eyes, “Not with chemicals, but with a case. You would. You can’t stand there and tell me any different. You made me shave and get back to work on your arrival.”

“So – so what: you’re going enable me and anytime that I start falling apart, your going to medicate me?”

“Don’t be preposterous. Not every time, no. I wouldn’t enable you that much.”

“Pfft. Yes you would,” she argued as he took a step forward. “This isn’t how things are done in the world.”

A brief frown in thought passed over his mouth before he looked back down at her. “And what, Shannon Byrns, in our lives has ever truly made sense to the rest of the world; not that it matters.”

She stared at his chest. “Sherlock, you are asking me to allow you to whore yourself out to me. I can’t let you…”

“Mixed messages, I’ll grant you, but you have always done everything to help me. Guided me when I was fumbling in the fog, removing the virus in the data, and bringing luminescence to specters in the dark…if you want this, I will do this for you.”

“I will not pressure you into this. You have to make the decision for yourself.”

“Are you fucking serious?” her fingertips pushed into his torso through the fabric of his purple shirt. “You’re going to lay all of that on the table and finish with the damn escape rope?” her eyes growing angry.

“If I make this decision, I’m taking advantage of your current state to sate whatever my body is doing. If you make this decision, you are realizing that you are just like me…and that you need a fix that will endeavor to help you.”

“But you need to choose.”

Shannon shoved her shoulder into him in an effort to get past him. “Ridiculous!”

Puzzlement adorned his face as he quipped with attitude, “Sorry?”

“I can’t have you whored out to me because I’m fucked up, Sherlock…you fucking shit!” she moved toward the stairwell.

“Oh, so, now you’re going to attempt to take the moral high ground over this? You know I’m right, don’t you?” his voice stern. “Why is it that you are incapable of helping yourself?”

“Myself?” she snapped, leaning over the bannister. “Jesus Christ! There you go, it’s all me now, isn’t it?”

“No! It’s not! The quicker that you see reason, the sooner you will be able to move on with your life,” he stomped after her.

Shannon stood at the top of the steps staring down at him, “You seem to think that I enjoy my
eternal world of chaos.” She tapped her temple, “It’s always whirling around in here. It’s seldom quiet and hundred of scenarios and possibilities are always running in the background. Always.”

With caution he reached for her wrist from his spot on the stair, “You know that in various ways I quiet your mind.”

“Yeah…Well maybe I should try…” she tried to think quickly. “Fucking…meditation! Maybe I should do more of that before I dive into your god damned theory,” she pulled her hand away

“You’re flustered, it’s apparent by the way you’re grasping for words when they usually come so readily for you. Your face is flushed, your pulse has quickened, pupils dilated…and now you’re beginning to panic because you feel that you’ve lost control.”

“Stop it,” she warned.

He moved up a step, “You’ve done this. Not I.”

“You laid out a verbal trap for me and I fell into it, I’m still clever…Sherlock…”

“What’s it like, hmm? Not having control of this situation? Knowing that your subconscious had already made your decision seven minutes ago after you replied ‘Of course’?”

“Shut up.”

“You chose to have me follow you here after the club. You expected me to come up the stair to argue with you. Otherwise you could have walked to the door and shown me out. You know that I would have obliged. But you’ve already thought of that.”

“Why?”

His grin devilish, “Because you’re intelligent.” He reached the step below Shannon, eyelevel with her. “Now, are you going to stand by the decision that you’ve made or am I going back to Baker Street without you this evening?”

_God damn it, Sherlock Holmes. God. Fucking. Damn it._

“Yes,” she croaked.

His eyes intent on her, “Yes? Yes, what? That answer could be ambiguous. You’ll need to do better than that.” _Just one last push…_

“I need my dealer.”
No Wealth, No Ruin

The Next Day

Shannon sat on the edge of a chair in the waiting room reading the news on her phone; Sherlock beside her observing the people around him in a mental exercise. No one in the waiting room proved to be much of a challenge for him and he leaned back to sulk.

“Bored?”

“Unbelievably so; I should have listened to greater reason about how dull this would be.”

She looked up from her phone and peered about, eyes finally setting on a middle aged woman in the corner. “Not even her?”

He followed her gaze and leaned in to whisper, “Married, has a cat and a dog, not sleeping well indicative of stress; more than likely for the reason she is sitting here. Right handed and is a secretary, has rosacea and her hair has already begun to grey.”

Shannon nodded. “Stress isn’t caused by this place: she has a heart condition.”

“Oh?”

“Sharpen the focus just a tad, Sherlock. You’ll see it,” she smirked before going back to her phone.

He huffed a chuckle, “You’re learning.”

“I have an excellent teacher,” she scrolled.

He turned his observational prowess onto her and changed the subject. “You’re uncomfortable.”

“Yes.” Shannon confirmed.

“I gather that it’s not nerves, you seem to be rather calm.”

“Nope. It’s this dress you picked out.”

The side of his mouth turned up. “It was picked based off of the data given to me. If one considers his preferences and how he…”

“Sherlock, I know. I just feel like I’m going to rip a seam open. It’s a bit tight.”

“You appear to be breathing fine.”

“I’m not talking about around my rib cage,” she replied with a strong side eye.

“Oh. Yes,” he glanced quickly at her hip before meeting her eye. “I’ll not apologize for your choice of costume before it potentially gets you the leverage required.”

“You’re so kind.”

A short man with auburn hair opened the side door and looked at his roster. “Makayla Reynolds?”
She stood carefully and smoothed out her light grey dress. “Should you require my assistance,” he began.

She looked down over her glasses. “You’ll be fetched, I assure you.”

Her head turned back toward the man who called, adjusted her fake spectacles, and strode forward towards a small consultation room. The dress Sherlock had picked out earlier had sleeves that came to her elbow, a low scoop neckline, and a skirt that stopped above her knee. All of which was exceedingly form fitting and left very little to the imagination. Her additions to his choice of costume were a pair of square black frames, simple makeup, nylon stockings with a visible hem on the back of her legs, and plain black pumps. The whole ensemble was logged in her brain as *sexy librarian chic.*

“So, explain to me why you are interfering with our agency?” Stephen Smithson asked upon opening the door to the interview room. “As you know, we are overloaded and you are keeping me from my work.”


“Ooh,” she squinted. “I’ll make you pay for that.”

“I am here because the child in question already has a family lined up for him and all of the paperwork has gone through. My client wants to know what the hold up is? They have already done all the necessary trainings and have completed the interviews and home visits. Your office is wasting time.”

“Erm…yes,” he looked over the file. “I just inherited this file, to be honest. The previous case worker was overloaded and I am still acquainting myself with its particulars.” He looked over the table and saw extended fingertips cascading a beat repetitively. He cleared his throat awkwardly. “I don’t feel comfortable releasing this child if I haven’t met the intended parent…you see…erm…”

She arched an eyebrow. “Erm…yes. So, that’s…why…”

“You are wasting my client’s time; the child’s time. Most of all, you are now wasting my time,” her voice flat. “What are you going to do about that? Should you be taught a lesson?”

“Erm…well, I could…”

“I’m waiting,” she continued. “Have you forgotten how to talk?”

“Well, no…but…”

“Can I be blunt, Mr. Smithson, off the record?”

“Erm…yes…”

She blinked slowly, eyes intent on her prey, “You are going to get this paperwork pushed through this week. You are going to do this because I’m telling you to do so. You obviously want a promotion and I’m sure that doing this case its due would provide you with that commendation. And then, you are going to call me tonight.” She took out a napkin from her purse and wrote a phone number on it, sliding it with her middle finger. “Because I can tell that you want something
different than what your girlfriend can offer you.”

“I would never…!”

She blinked again, “Of course not. You’ve only been staring at my cleavage for the past three minutes and I can tell that, once I get up, someone else might be rising to the occasion once you see how tight this skirt is.” The corner of her mouth inched upward into a sly smirk.

Stephen stammered over himself. “Bu-but…the man! There was a-a-a man out in the waiting room with – with you!”

She shrugged, stood up, and draped her suit jacket off her forearm. “He does what I tell him to. You could get orders too, if you wanted them bad enough. I’m ready for this interview to be over.”

He sat there gob-smacked. “That means you’re opening the door, Mr. Smithson.”

He jumped up, cracking his knee off the table, and scurried to open the door. “Right, of course.”

Brown eyes gave his body a languorous once over, “Good boy.” Her head twitched in approval, “Keep in touch.”

Sherlock Holmes sat in the waiting area in absolute anguish: there were far too many people around and he had made an effort to be on his best behavior for the sake of the mission. He could hear Shannon’s footsteps before he could see her and found that she had a case worker in tow. She motioned the detective with her eyes and he readily removed himself from his chair. Shannon wrote a signature quickly on the sign out sheet and didn’t look up at either man. “Eyes down. I didn’t give you permission to look at me,” she commanded dryly.

Sherlock looked to the case worker who was doing as told. He heard her chuckle. “I didn’t give you permission either.”

He averted his eyes down to the floor and caught onto her act quickly. “Sorry, ma’am. It won’t happen again.”

“See that it doesn’t,” she replied as she returned her visitors badge. She turned to Smithson and patted him gently on the face. “I’ll be waiting for your call.”

Her head turned toward the taller of two men and she snapped her fingers, “Let’s go. I have a schedule to keep.”

“Of course, ma’am,” Sherlock replied, staring at the floor. He shuffled to the door and held it open as Shannon’s determined gait crossed the threshold, following behind her.

Once the reached the outside world, the pair of them looked to each other and started laughing. Shannon slipped on her jacket and Sherlock adjusted his coat collar back to its usually position. “Did you let him talk? You were only gone for seven minutes.” He offered her the crook of his elbow which she threaded her arm through; her hand rested amicably on his bicep.

She shrugged, white teeth glimmered in the sun. “I can do a lot in seven minutes. And no, not really. I did take the focus off of Luka’s case…though I’m hoping that doing so will make him push the case through a bit faster.”

The pair began walking down London’s crowded sidewalk during lunch hour. “Yes; though you probably should have spent more time on the boy’s case.”

“Didn’t need to,” she offered as they crossed the street. “After his mild power play, he had no interest in talking about the Luka’s case file. Ten points to Ravenclaw for outfit choice.”
“Ravenclaw?”

“It’s a Harry Potter thing…they’re the smart ones…never mind. Good job, Sherlock.”

“Hmm.” The pair continued to walk.

“Ooh, do you smell that?” she stopped them both. “I smell fries…er, chips.”

He lifted his nose to the air and inhaled deeply. “Yes, so do I.”

Her free hand patted her jacket pocket to ensure that she had her wallet. “Hungry?”

“Starving, actually.”

“Let’s get something to eat. Chip shop?”

“Splendid.”

After a ride back to Baker Street, the pair were now sitting at the smaller table in the kitchen eating their chips, a bottle of vinegar and salt shaker sat between them.

“Can I…”

Sherlock didn’t look up from his chips and replied, “Yes.”

Mildly annoyed and aware that he probably knew where their conversation had been going, she stabbed some of his chips and ate them. Perplexed, his eyes shot up at her. “You didn’t let me finish,” she offered.

He sighed heavily and stabbed fries from her portion and ate them, “Fine. You were saying?”

“Can I ask about the scars on your left shoulder; when did you get those? They’re new…well, newer.” She leaned back waiting for a response.

Her eyes were intent but relayed to him an inquisitive kindness that he had come to know well. “Serbia.”

She nodded, “Hmm. I don’t believe you and I ever talked about Serbia. To be fair, it was before I came back the first time.”

He swallowed and set his fork down, his eyes analyzing her face. “Do you wish to know?”

Shannon shook her head, “Only if you want to tell me. Do not feel obligated that you have to.”

“Torture.”

She blinked and the side of her mouth twitched, “I am sorry.”

His eyes searched the invisible catalogue of memories and he sighed again. “Prior to my return, I was captured in Serbia after running through a forest. I was unarmed and shot at, you see; it was in my best interest to let them take me and I would figure out my next move once I was removed from the elements.” She nodded in agreement. “I had been detained up in a bunker, chained, arms outstretched for some time while I was beaten with a variety of devices. My torturer was quite fond of his fist; however, when he grew tired of its repetitiveness, he would use other tools. I had broken
in earlier, as it were, to finish up the last strand of Moriarty’s web. The exit wasn’t as clean as I would have liked.”

“I recall your brother mentioning it once a while ago.”

“I had observed details about my torturer’s life that leant his susceptible mind to me and caused him to run home and check in on his wife, who more than likely was having an affair with the coffin maker that lived next door.” She waited for him to continue in his own time. “The other man in the room had been watching for the near entirety of my interrogation. I do recall feeling exhausted over all of the pain and wanting to sleep. But my mind was doing its best to calculate my next course of action: I needed him to come into the light so that I could observe him; he’d been in the shadows.”

“Was it Mycroft?”

“Yes,” his brow furrowed. “How did you come to that conclusion? I gave no evidence to any inclination as such.”

Her voice was kind, “During one of our lovely chats; he slipped that he got you out of Serbia and by the tone of his voice, I gathered that he had gotten his hands a bit dirty. Then, if I consider how much he doesn’t like being out in the field and sending others to do legwork on his behalf…”

“You’re good,” he smirked.

“Thank you,” she chirped, her eyes smiling. “It’s taken some practice, but I’m getting there.”

“When I learned of your torture,” he continued, “I felt that I had to take responsibility as if I were the man who had done those things to you. I was subjected to hours. You were subjected to days and weeks. Your constitution to beat whatever has you in its grasp far exceeds what I believe I would be willing to endure.”

She finished eating and tossed her empty cup into the rubbish before putting the salt and vinegar away. “Sherlock, you can’t compare one pain to another; nor can we compare our vices or agonies to one another’s. We both, for our own reasons, put ourselves through hellish and garish situations for the sake of its end, whatever that may be.”

“That’s rather poetic of you.”

She placed a finger to her lip thoughtfully, “Yes. I should probably write that down and publish it as a proverb. It’ll be all over social media.”

He nodded, “And unthoughtfully misused on a regular basis.”

“Hmm, better not, then.”

“Probably not.”

Mrs. Hudson puttered up the steps, “Shannon? Are you in?”

“Yes, Mrs. Hudson. In the kitchen.”

She rounded the entry way with a padded envelope outstretched in her hand, “Courier just delivered this for you, dear…said it was important.”

With the small parcel in hand, she examined the simple scrawl on the address label and shrugged.
“I don’t remember ordering anything…and I send my mail to a post box; it’s not supposed to come here.”
She reached inside and withdrew a small box that she proceeded to free of giftwrap.

The object revealed to be a framed shadowbox that had a small moth pinned to an orange background. On the front pane of glass was an inscription etched into it. “Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?”

“Say that again?” Sherlock’s attention snapped to the present from his meal.

Her brow furrowed, “I mean, I know my Latin isn’t that great…look: Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?”

“Who sent you this?” he stood and snatched the box from her hands, examining its features and contents.

“Don’t know,” she puzzled. “There’s no return address on it. Ink’s common enough from a ballpoint pen…nothing spectacular about the packaging. Why?”

No fingerprints, simple plywood frame, all materials readily available for purchase at any shop with the exception of the moth…
“Do you know what this is?” he pointed inside the box.

She looked into the box, her lips pressed into a firm line. “It’s a moth. We had them all the time growing up.”

His head twitched at her statement, “This particular moth?”

“I mean, yeah, I think so. Pretty sure. It looks like a moth. They were everywhere.”

Mrs. Hudson’s eyes moved between the pair as they stood at the kitchen table. “What is it, Sherlock? What’ve you noticed?”

“Observing and connecting points of information across time.”
“I have often wondered where, specifically, Shannon grew up; it is a bit of a mystery as she is able to mold her diction to her surroundings near seamlessly, like a linguistic chameleon. This moth, in particular, is Acronicta americana americana, specifically found in North America, east of the Rocky Mountains. Though that still covers a substantial amount of ground and if I eliminate that Shannon isn’t from Massachusetts considering she was only living in Boston and never acquired the accent, I can firmly narrow down the potential states that she was raised in to a small number out of the entire eastern portion of the country.”

Shannon crossed her arms, head tilted to the side. “Go on then. Narrow it down.”

“Based on certain dialect patterns, I would say that you grew up in one of three states: New York, Maryland, or West Virginia.”

She snorted. “Nope. Good guess though.” He deflated some and began to reexamine the box. “I’m sure you’ll get it eventually. Now, back to the package. The translation, if you would be so kind?”

“Who will guard the guards themselves?”
“What…isn’t that Socrates or,” she drifted off.

“Plato,” he replied, gravel in the edges of his voice. “You read Plato any time that you can. The
moth can be found where you grew up. This box was specifically made for you.”

“Is it really,” Mrs. Hudson hushed. “Why would someone send her a dead bug in a box?”

“It’s a message,” he replied. “A message intended for her to understand. Different animals, insects included, have been used throughout time to represent certain things: both good and evil.”

“Which is it?” the landlady’s voice rising in anxiousness.

“Don’t know,” he frowned. “I need information.”

“The Latin inscription is most definitely a nod to Shannon’s ability to guard and protect those that she holds close to her, indicative that the sender knows her personally or is acquainted with her file.”

He handed Shannon the box for her to examine, which she placed gingerly on the table and scrutinized every inch of it.

Once she felt that she had enough information at hand, Shannon’s eyes drifted upward as she recalled information stored away in her mind and she closed her eyes.

“What’s she doing?” Mrs. Hudson whispered into Sherlock’s ear.

He moved out to his chair in the sitting room, sat, and steepled his hands under his chin. “She’s accessing certain portions of her memory that she’s locked away from her childhood.”

“Oh my, really?”

He nodded, “Yes. After the wonderful confrontation we had with her dead mother, she thought it best that those memories be kept away as she wasn’t truly able to know if they were fact or fiction.”

“Like your mind palace?”

He bit his bottom lip, “Something like that, I suppose. I helped her learn a few techniques that aided in cataloguing those memories. Now we shall see if she’s able to recall them.”

“Shouldn’t you sit her down or something? You’re always sitting when you do these funny things.”

“No,” he replied, having observed that her hip rested on the edge of the counter. “She prefers to stand. Moving her now might cause a hitch in her process.”

“Oh dear. Should I help her with something?”

“Tea, Mrs. Hudson. All ends well with tea.”

Twenty minutes had passed before her eyes opened again with a frustrated growl escaping from her throat. Sherlock was walking around the flat in his beige dressing gown, violin at his neck, plucking the strings to a tune he had been practicing. She looked about to regain her bearings and rubbed her face.

“And how was that?” he asked without turning around.

“Rough,” she replied. “Not the process getting to them…but sifting through it all…things I didn’t want to revisit, specifically.”
“Do you have data to add?”

“Possibly.”

“Good,” he chirped, placing his violin down and hopping into his chair. “Let’s get to work.”

She moved to sit opposite him, cracking her knuckles as she descended into the plush chair. “There was a memory,” she began, her face scrunching in discomfort. “…stories…that Matt told me when I was younger. They were about butterflies, I think; but, one of them I distinctly remember him saying it was moth. It’s like the memory is a book on a shelf. Every time I would go to grab it off the shelf my hand would pass through the spine. And, every single time that happened, I got flashes of sight…but, they were over in fractions of a second that I couldn’t process anything other than light.”

“Hypnosis?”

“I think it would be best. I know, somehow,” her hands gestured wildly, “that it was meant to sound like mythology…but…as I got older, I realized certain things didn’t add up, I guess. That, it seemed too broad a story; like too many myths were blended into one thing.”

“It could cause you pain.”

“I trust you.”

“A flood gate of suppressed memories, no longer dammed in your mind, rushing through your consciousness.”

Shannon swallowed and leaned back into the chair, eyes closed. “I trust you.”

Sherlock nodded and proceeded to bring Shannon into a calm, dream-like state. Once he was certain that her subconscious was open, he began their investigation by turning on his recorder.

“Hello, Shannon. Do you know who I am?”

“Yes. I do.”

He leaned forward, “Good. I need information.”

“You’re one of the cleverest men in the world; you can find information readily.”

The detective frowned. “Let me clarify: I need a memory from you. It’s a story.”

“I like stories.”

“I know you do,” he pressed. “That’s why you have a wall of books downstairs in your room. It’s why I know that you donate large sums of money to projects that bring books to children.”

“Can you go to the shelves in your mind where you’ve placed stories that you’ve heard?”

“Yes, I’m there.”

“I’m looking for a story that your brother told you, one about a moth.”

She winced, “I don’t want to deal with Matt.”

“I’m here, Shannon. I won’t let him trouble you.”
Shannon sighed, her head turning to the side as if glancing over something without her eyes opening. “It’s dark here. Like…a vast cave and only dying embers light the room. It’s difficult to see.”

“I’m sure you have it memorized. Reach out. Grab it for me.”

“Why?”

“I need it.”

“No.”

Annoyed with the development, he racked his brain for a solution that wouldn’t harm her mentally. “I need it because I’m in trouble.”

Her head drifted back in his direction, “Will it help you?”

“I believe so.”

“It’s going to cause trouble,” she warned.

His eyes widened in delight, “I hope so.”

“Shall I read it to you?”

“Please; be clear and do not skip anything.”

“If you’re sure.
‘There was, once, a moth with that flew out from its home every night in search of knowledge. It’s winds and body were grey so that it was able to hide in gravel of on trees so that it couldn’t be caught by the scary bat that prowled at night.’
‘But the moth was always searching for more knowledge and knew that it would never get caught. One day, it came to a library where there were books and books for the moth to read. The librarian was a rabbit, and the rabbit said, “Be careful, little moth. Too much knowledge can change you. Your wings will go black and you will not be able to hide from the bat anymore.”’
‘But the little moth didn’t listen. It’s appetite was voracious. Every night, the little moth was beckoned by the light from the library to read as much as it could.’
‘The moth noticed, one day, that it’s wings and body had turned black. Frightened, the little moth went to the library where the rabbit said, “No! No! You can’t come here. You’re a bad moth. You bring death! Out! Never come back here again!”
The little moth, sad, flew away and landed on a tree where a bat had been hiding. “No one likes me,” little moth cried.
“It’s because you’re different,” the bat whispered from a tall tree branch.
The little moth thought that the tree was talking to it. “But I’m just a little moth!”
“No, no,” the bat replied, “You are a special moth…a rare moth. Black moths like you are fortune tellers.”
“Really?” little moth sniffled.
“Oh yes,” the sly bat grinned. “If you go back towards the light and wait there by the door, it means that someone is going to die.”
“But that’s not very nice,” little moth said. “I don’t want anyone to get hurt.”
“Don’t you see, everyone goes away in the end. It’s the best fortune you can tell. It’s a law of nature, tiny, black moth. It gives comfort and balance.”
“Oh,” little moth thought. “Does it help others?”
“Yes. Go on. Fly to the candle. You love the light, don’t you?”
“I do like the light,” little moth admitted.
“You’re hypnotized by it, aren’t you?”
Little moth said, “Sometimes. The light makes me feel real.”
“Good. Go to it. Show me.”
‘Little moth flew to the candle by the door and rested on the wall beside it, basking in the warmth and glow of the flame. Little moth didn’t realize that it was no longer hidden on the grey wall like it used to be, and the sly bat swooped down from its branch and ate up little moth. Little moth did tell the future...its own future.
‘After that day, all the other little moths knew to stay away from the knowledge that would turn themselves black as night and that the light, no matter how beautiful, would betray them in the end.’”

She sat incredibly still after she finished the story and waited. Sherlock spoke quietly, “Shannon, are you the moth or the bat?”

Her head rolled to the side and she yawned. “It’s a story.”

“It’s important in helping me. Think. Matt told you this story for a reason...for you to remember. Think!”

“I don’t want to,” she sniveled. “I just want to be free.”

His lips pressed together, fingertips lightly pressing into his temples. “For me, it is important.”

She sighed, “I am both. I am both. I am both.” Shannon kept repeating the phrase in the same monotone voice.

His voice grew overtop hers. “Shannon, I’m going to count backwards from five. When I get to one, you’re going to wake up fully rested and alert, and come back to me here at Baker Street. Five...four...you’re waking up now...three...two...one.”

Shannon inhaled sharply when her eyes opened to focus on Sherlock. “Well?”

“Your subconscious is an interesting place.”

She huffed with a grin, “You’re one to talk. I’ve been in some of your mind’s rooms. Whew... there’s some interesting things there.” He rolled his eyes. “So, what do you think?”

He stopped the recorder and sat back, “I think you’re right in assuming it’s a mix of mythology and symbolism, blended together.”

“It’s a warning.”

“Yes.”

“Danger’s coming.”

“Most definitely.”

“The game is on.”

“Isn’t it wonderful?”
“But why would a box with a moth be a warning?” John asked over Shannon’s shoulder as she added the final touches to a counterfeit ID badge she needed.

“It’s a culmination of things,” she offered. “I had to look some of them up, actually. So, in some instances, people believe that moths represent your own metamorphosis; that you’re able to handle any personal situations. Well, we all know that I can handle them about as well as a bull in a china shop, so that’s not necessarily me.”

John smirked and went back to reading consultation emails on his laptop. “Fair enough.”

“But, if I were to look outside that scope, we know moths are nocturnal and that’s when I do the majority of my work. Many cultures symbolize moth as a figurehead for death. I have killed someone; and, it could also herald my intended death. They also camouflage themselves for survival,” she paused.

“Something that you do to survive out in the field,” John realized.

“Nice one, John. And finally, moths are drawn to and physically attracted to light. Just as I am here to my life at 221b Baker Street. If I then consider the color it’s tacked to, orange, being psychologically associated with fire, energy, and caution with the Latin quote, someone is sending me a pretty poetic warning.”

“Wouldn’t it be grand if there wasn’t so much cloak and dagger?” he chortled.

“If wishes were fishes,” she tapped the Enter key twice. “There. Done.”

John looked up, “And what’s that for?”

“Gets me into Mycroft’s office whenever I want. Or any office, really. Primarily his office. I think one day I’m going to glue all his things to the ceiling for fun.”

His eyes smiled and he went back to reading. “And Luka? Any luck on him?”

“Oh, yes. Didn’t I tell you? His case worker called last night; said he’d be here in two to three weeks.”

“That’s – that’s amazing! Where’s he going to be?”

“Uhm, my old friend, Dave, is going to take him.”

John looked up, puzzled. “You’re not?”

“No, I can’t. If there’s danger to me, he’d be in the line of fire. I can’t do that, but John…you gotta meet this kid. He’s great. He’s funny, wicked smart; oh man. Already speaks two and a half languages, very street smart. And he’s a beautiful child: green eyes with splatters of the ocean in them, hair like sun shining though dark amber and a smile gentler than moonlight.”

He chuckled and went back to reading, “You’re attached.”

“Oh, you have no idea. I’d take him in a heartbeat, but I can’t risk his safety,” she took a moment to reminisce. “He’s such a good kid.”
“Plans for tonight?”

She sifted through the day’s mail and found another package, “I do now. I got another envelope. You going to see your therapist tomorrow?”

“Erm, yeah. Another envelope?”

“Yeah.”

John moved to stand next to her as she carefully removed another small shadow box and its frame painted black. Shannon carefully turned it and examined its contents: there was a white horse reared with both of its front legs in the air, a small noose made of cord, and a lock of hair.

“What the…?”

She cleared her throat, “There was a legend I heard growing up when I went on a school trip to Gettysburg…that if a commemorative statue with a horse was rearing…it – it meant that the rider died from battle wounds or in battle…”

“You went on a school trip to Gettysburg?” he piped up.

“Shh, don’t tell Sherlock, you just got a clue to where I grew up,” she smiled. “Now…the noose is a bit self-explanatory. But the hair…I would need to open the box to process it.”

“Look, there,” he pointed to the top of the glass. “Sum quod eris. Hang on. I know that one.”

“You do?”

“Yeah…I saw it on the way to Sherlock’s grave a lot and I looked it up. It means I am what you will be.”

“I’m going to the library to do some research, don’t wait up; and for the love of God, don’t tell Sherlock where I’ve scampered off to. I’m a big girl and can take care of myself.”

“Right, so…what state is Gettysburg in?”

“Bye, John, I have to do some homework. As to your questions, I will tell you, there are clues in my books if you know where to look down in my room.”
No Silver, No Gold

Two Nights Ago

Sherlock’s hands pulled the back of her legs to wrap them about his waist as she moved her arms around his neck, the warmth of her bare midriff ebbing through the fabric of his shirt. He crashed his lips against hers and struggled up the last stair. Delicate waves of her perfume filled his senses; he felt her hands fasten themselves at his nape.

“Left,” she rasped in a gasp for air.

Taking her direction, Sherlock pushed the door open with her back and they entered a bedroom. Once he had perched her atop the dresser, she quickly unfastened the buttons of his shirt while he helped her to shed the suit jacket from her torso.

She could smell the tobacco and cherrywood from the flat on him mingling with the layers of London’s air. Muscles about his shoulders jumped under her fingertips when she pushed his shirt off his torso to give her an adequate view of the hells he had been through since last they had seen each other.

He lifted her off the dresser and sat on the bed with her in his lap. The detective could see the pulse point at her throat beating wildly under her skin and was fleetingly mesmerized by her straightened hair ghosting across her collarbone.

Her voice, dark and breathy, rattled from her chest, “Last chance. Do you want me to stop?”

“No,” he said, and his hand moved to rest on her hip. “No, I don’t.”

In that moment she intended to take her time, to savor the high that comes from being with Sherlock. She was fractured from all of the subtle and not-so-subtle warfare her mind and body had endured for years. If he was truly going to heal her like he said he intended to, every piece of her would need to be sealed back together.

However, she felt the pressure in his fingertips as they dug into her hip and the quickness with which he unfastened her bandeau in the back, readily maneuvering them into a different position. And it was in this new moment that she knew that they both needed something akin to violence.

“So be it,” she growled.

She shimmied out of her leggings that he readily threw off to the side while Shannon made quick work of his belt and trousers. When he came to her she groaned in relief.

Her nails grated down his torso and for an instant, he thought of how dead Kasun would have been had she not been drugged. Shannon, in any state, is a wildfire spinning out of control within a tornado, contained within the most fragile, glass shell imaginable. She would have killed him and not hesitated. How much pressure does the glass take on before it breaks…?

“Don’t think. Turn it off,” she commanded.

He made the decision to listen to her and let her turn his mind off from being Sherlock Holmes so that he was able to be Sherlock. And their rage, anguish, and pain collided together like a volcano meeting the sea until the tempest finally subsided; raw destruction left in its wake.
Awoken by the sound of rustling nearby, Sherlock outstretched his arm to find Shannon was missing from the bed and standing at the window with the sheet wrapped about her. “Are you alright?”

She glanced over her shoulder before settling back to her view outside. “Eventually, perhaps.” “The world has such a clouded view of what it really is.”

“Yes it does,” he wrapped the throw around his waist and stood behind her. “How else would it function if it didn’t realize the cesspool that it truly is?”

“Hmm,” the sound resonated low in her throat. “I suppose.”

Sherlock took a moment to peer around the room and saw underneath the windowsill a violin. “Pre-planning?”

She snorted. “No,” she lifted the violin by the scroll. “I was practicing some. When I get overwhelmed and don’t wish to bother any of you, I come here to play and practice. The room across the hall has a nice handful of instruments that I’ve saved from pawn shops and estate sales. Darweshi saved a handful while I was away, this violin being one of them.”

His fished for her left hand and observed her fingertips. “No callouses. You haven’t been practicing enough.”

She turned her hand some more and showed her pinky, “No, but I did rip this finger open on the E string. Strings were never my strong suit.”

“Then why pick it back up again?”

“Makes me feel human to play. I spent so many hours of my life agonizing for the musical divine…even now, I don’t think that I’m capable of giving it all up. If not for that, then the simple reason of habits, I guess.”

He took the violin as she handed it to him. “You should build up a studio again.”

She could smell the rosin wafting off the bow as he examined it in the moonlight. “Maybe one day. If normalcy ever comes back to my life.”

He turned to look down at her, “And what, to you, is normalcy?”

“Fewer nightmares, routine, not having the constant threat of my deployment to wherever your brother beckons; that sort of normalcy.”

He plucked at the strings, “Then you need to endeavor to start the routine.”

“Well, gee. Thank you, I’ll get right on that.” She turned to face him, “I am working on it. Truly. I’m just slow at sorting the mess in my head.”

He blinked a few times, his eyes appearing as silver pools of mercury in the lunar light. “I would surmise that there’s a trumpet in the next room, correct?”

She crossed herself, “Yes, there is.”

“When was the last you played?”

She swallowed hard and traced her lower lip with her index finger, “Night before Scotland.”
The cold, pang of guilt crashed into him. “Go get it.”

“Are’nt you worried about the neighbors calling the police and finding you here?”

He frowned, “No, why, are you?”

“No.”

“Thought not; you have soundproofing in the walls. I noticed earlier,” he commented with a gleam in his eye.

“Mm-hmm,” she grumbled in jest.

“Go get it.”

She eyed him skeptically and walked to the next room to retrieve the brass instrument. He had begun playing softly when she returned with the trumpet, a mute stuffed into its bell. “I haven’t played in so long…”

“No excuses. Just play; luckily for you, it’s only me here to hear you.”

The cold nickel mouthpiece rested on her embouchure and found the cushioned, scarred, lip tissue to rest against. She blew warm air into the instrument and took a few notes to bring it in tune. Sherlock, still bare chested with the blanket wrapped around his waist, waited patiently for her to begin.

Her first notes were whispery, she repositioned the mouthpiece and began playing around in multiple keys before settling into e minor. Her melody followed simple chord changes at first before moving into borrowed chords and dabbling in expanded music theory. Sherlock quietly played an ostinato underneath her with complimentary double stops and soon, the pair were having a musical conversation back and forth. She leaned against the bed post, trumpet angled downward while Sherlock’s torso swayed gently against the music with each stroke of his bow.

They say music is a universal language, that it has the ability to communicate the unseen when words fail. It was something that Shannon had utilized in her life growing up; always using music as a medium to transfer her emotions to the world. It was refreshing to have someone else that needed music for the same reason to ‘talk’ to. Lines passed back and forth, intertwined, harmonized, and music resonated well within that room in the dark.

Once their improvisation had naturally drawn to it’s end, Sherlock quietly faded his playing away and listened to her cadencing, noting she moved from e minor to G major. *She’s finished on the relative major; interesting.*

He replaced the violin below the window and took the trumpet from her hands, placing it on the side table.

Her lips tingled, slightly swollen from playing and her hands felt complete. Having had that metal between her hands, it scaffolded across a chasm somewhere within her, connecting her soul and mind back to one another and playing allowed the scaffolding to be turned into a bridge.

Shannon opened her eyes and felt as if she were seeing color for the first time after living in a world of grey. Everything, no matter how droll, was magnificent. He stood before her and looked down at her face. “How, Sherlock? How did you…”

His voice rumbled low in his chest like a cello resonating in a hall. “I knew a teacher once. She believed music could heal wounds; that music could talk to the darkest reaches within a person.”
“Oh?” her head tilted to the side. “Sounds fanciful or pretty smart.”

He bit the corner of his mouth and made a small sound in his throat. “Damn smart. She is always concerned with protecting everyone around her that often times, they don’t realize that she needs protecting. She’s strong, but not as strong as she would like to believe.”

“And so it goes,” she nodded.

“It does. Her mind is vast, she has a temper, can throw a nasty left hook, and there are few people in the world I would choose to have with me should I go to battle. I trust that she would do everything to bring us home.” Her eyes fell to the floor. “Fractured; broken, it would not matter. She is one of the truest and best people that I know. I would think,” he stepped closer, “that the world could use more people who’s true nature was as transparent as hers: to defend, to help, and to protect.”

“My silence is my self-defense.”

He whispered into her hair, “People have their reasons. Your secrets are yours. You do not have to share them unless you choose to.”

“When you said that you weren’t okay; I didn’t need to press you because I knew what that meant and felt like. But…I wanted to be right. I wanted you to know I was right; and I’m sorry. I’m not okay, but it is what it is. Perhaps, one day, I’ll be able to not loathe myself for what I have done to those closest to me.”

“Sherlock,” her voice caught in her throat.

His thumb brushed over her lower lip, now a darkened tinge of red pulsating under the soft skin from the blood rushing there during her playing. “You said…downstairs…that my heart is what drives me. But doesn’t yours do the same?” Shannon leaned her head back to rest on the wood, peering upwards. “If you were meant to be both my mirror and my foil, would it not make sense that someone with similar demons and similar motivators be chosen for that fate?”

She nodded and began to hum a tune quietly to herself, reaching for his hand. She raised their hands slowly and placed the other at her waist. With a gentle nod, the pair began to dance in place, moonlight creating natural spotlight.

“So I will share this room with you,” she sung in a whisper against his shoulder while they moved before she returned to humming. When song and dancing finished, she looked up, “Why?”

He was taken aback. “Isn’t it obvious?” Her brow furrowed. The gravel in his voice reverberated in her chest. “I am callous and cold, and I hurt people with my actions and words. But, so do you. And its because of this, that I know you. I know what it…feels like…to need saving. I cock up everything when I allow emotion to interfere with my reason. That’s why I strive to disallow it from interfering with my life.”

“Is that so? So you stabbing the mail you can’t answer right away to the mantle is you not being emotional?”

“Yes…er…no… But…” he paused, taking her left hand into his and examining the cut in her finger from the E string. “I find that you have the inane ability to pull emotional responses from me despite my efforts to keep them at bay.”

She smirked. “You may just find, Sherlock Holmes, that you are human; just like the rest of us.” He opened his mouth to say something, but didn’t speak. “You said that you would try to heal me
if I’d allow you.” Shannon’s face softened, fingers wrapping around his. “So now, I have a question to ask you.”

His eyes did not waver from hers, “Yes?”

She threaded her fingers with his, gently pulling him closer to her, “If I could, would you let me help you? Would you let me try to heal you?”

He sighed, his breath rushing against her skin. “Shannon, you always help; you sacrifice everything to protect us. Look at your skin! It’s marred and some of them are because of me.”

“It’s okay,” she replied in earnest. “I, mean, it’s not; but, I would rather take the pain than see any of you have it.”

“Tonight isn’t about me.” He deflected, looking down at an inane spot.

“Isn’t it? I thought you liked Paganini.” Realization dawned in his eyes and a knowing grin pulled at the corner of his mouth. Her free hand moved to cup the side of his face. The first shades of stubble grazed against her skin. “Will you let me help you?”

“I do not believe that you will be able to cure me of my ailments,” he said gravely. “I doubt there is anything in the world to do so.”

She nodded knowingly. “Right. I wouldn’t know what that feels like. At all.” She stood up on her toes and rested her forehead against his, her lips barely touching his.

His other arm wound about her waist to extinguish the distance between them. He could faintly hear her heart beating, calm and resolute, through her chest. *Though, he thought, perhaps its my own blood pumping in my ears.* The underlying notes of her perfume and dry sweat still lingered on her skin and the warmth of her body was radiating through the sheet. “What,” he breathed, “Could you do? You can’t help me.”

She pressed a gentle kiss to his lips and closed her eyes. “For you,” her eyes opening, “I can try.”

“Why?”

She pulled him, guiding the pair of them around to the side of the bed. “I’m not the only one in pain.”

Dim, grey light filtered through the window; the sun would be up within the hour and he could sense it without opening his eyes. *If one considers the angle of the sun and how it enters the window and the amount of light, that I can easily deduce…with overcast…that it’s approximately…*

Her long arm hooked under his and around his shoulder. “Stop.”

“I said nothing.”

“Your mind was making enough noise. Go back to sleep.”

Sherlock’s limbs stretched out under the sheet before retracting back to their original resting place. “You’re awake early.”

“You were thrashing in your sleep.” He made a sound low in his throat in acknowledgment. “Do you remember any of it?”
“No.”

“Go back to sleep, there’s still time. You and I both don’t function well at this hour.”

A small snort huffed through his nose. “You don’t function. I am fully capable, should there be a case, to…” He felt her pull his back flush to her and his mind paused. Damned woman.

“It’s fine, Sherlock. I’ve got your back. Still yourself; go back to sleep,” her voice rough and sleep-laden against his shoulder. “I’ll get you back to Baker Street at a fairly respectable hour.”

“Hmpf.”

She smiled to herself. “That’s what I thought.”

What a spectacle this must be. The great detective, Sherlock Holmes, here with a woman at his back. And we all know how scarred my back is… Hmm. It makes sense now, I guess: Mycroft’s codename for me…The Shield. The first defense. Hmm. Maybe he does know; perhaps Mycroft’s not as cold as he says.

Like lead falling through water, Sherlock sank back into the embrace of sleep as if the exhaustion and gratification of a finished case had weighed on his bones. Before he had completely surrendered to sleep, he heard Shannon whisper something quietly in his ear.

“…have…break.”

The temptation and fulfillment of an encompassing sleep pulled Sherlock deeper to the unconscious realm until, finally, he succumbed to it.
Nothing Satisfies Me, But Your Soul

Two Nights Later

Shannon walked into the library and stalked the shelves of books, nabbing a few here and there. She would open them, skim their pages, and replace the tomes back on their shelves without taking them any farther.

At least, should anyone come snooping, I have an alibi.

Her phone buzzed intrusively in her front pocket, ignoring the intrusion. She thanked the librarian for his time and slipped into the busy streets of London at rush hour. Her phone rumbled against the hollow of her hip, but she pressed on toward Southbank. Near the Eye, she took a seat on a free bench with a view of the river and waited.

There was a rustle beside her, but her gaze remained unbroken on the river. “You’re late.”

“Apologies, Kivuli. I have de information dat you requested. She is in here, just like you t’ought.”

Shannon sighed, flexing her fingers before leaning her onto her knees. “How did she know to come here?”

“Dis is unclear. I do not know de answer for you.”

“Hmm,” she nodded. “I need specifics; Darweshi, do no put yourself in the crossfire. I want you to use discretion. Be invisible.”

“Of course. You do not need to worry, Kivuli. All will be well.”

“I hope so. Call me when you have particulars: room, board, habits; the works.” Another rustle of cloth let her know that Darweshi had left her sitting alone on the bench.

She fished her phone out of her pocket, seven missed calls and fifteen missed texts. Her thumb grazed the screen in displeasure. “Mycroft: delete, Mycroft: delete, John. Ooh, what’s John need? Babysit Rosie tomorrow when he’s at session…”

John Watson:

You got it. Text me times and I will be there.

“Mycroft, Mycroft, Mycroft…delete all. Molly. I’ll call her on my way home. Mycroft…Jesus. He doesn’t know how to take a hint,” she muttered to herself. Just as she cleared her inbox, her phone rang again, the ID flashed Blocked.

She yawned, cracked her jaw and neck to prepare for the phone call. “Yes, what can I do for you?”

“You could say that this was enough,” a nasally voice stung.

“Hello, Irina,” she steeled her voice. “I’ve been waiting for your call. The shadowboxes were a nice touch.”
“Ana, I hoped that they weren’t lost on you; you aren’t the most intelligent whore I’ve met.”

She frowned, stood, and began to walk the river as dusk settled over the city. “You saw what I wanted you to see. You don’t know me or what I’m capable of.”

There was a moment of silence and then a long drawn breath. “Perhaps. Perhaps I know you better than you think, Ana.”

“What do you want?”

“You claim to be so clever... Tell me what I want.”

“Death comes riding on a pale horse.”

“Very good. And the rest?”

Shannon’s pace quickened to the nearest intersection for a cab. “The noose is for me, isn’t it... for traitors, I do believe, as per your little hit squad, the Veles.”

“Well,” she chuckled, “You are clever.”

Shannon hailed a taxi, covered the mouthpiece on her phone and whispered, “Baker Street.” She gathered herself and uncovered the phone. “You have no idea.” Her jaw set forward, shoulders stiff; eyes cold. “The hair?”

“That’s another matter, you see. It’s a surprise.”

Shannon frowned, the nerve in her face twitched, contorting her face into a scowl. “I could send it for DNA analysis.”

“Tsk, tsk, tsk. You don’t have that kind of time. We’ll be seeing each other this week. If you don’t figure it out, do not worry. You will have another package tomorrow.”

“Irina. I don’t want to kill you, you could walk away and disappear.”

The Serbian laughed deeply, gasping for air. “Oh, you dumb bitch. You have no idea what I have in store for you.”

The line went dead, Shannon left with potential Irina scenarios filling her thoughts. So entrenched in her mind, she had no recollection of leaving the cab and walking into the flat. Mycroft was sitting at the bottom of the stair, umbrella between his hands.

“Well, I’m glad you finally decided to return to this dank domicile.” She pushed past him and walked up the stair without a word. Intrigued, he rose from his spot and followed her.

Her fingers dragged across the two boxes, both now on the coffee table. He’s been home since I left. He saw it.

“Mycroft Holmes,” she addressed frankly, still deep in her thoughts.

“She speaks.”

Her head turned, her brown eyes locking with his. “Before we address whatever it is that you need; you will stand there and listen to me.”

“I most certainly will not. I am not so easily swayed to obey your commands as my baby brother is.”
Shannon pointed to the shadowboxes, “Yesterday and today, these came here in the post. As you know, all of my mail now goes to a post box that I am sure your office moderates.”

He sighed and rolled his eyes. “Yes, we do watch your mail. What does that have to with anything?”

“Look,” she pointed. “Tell me what you see.”

“I did not come here for trivial games. You refused to answer your phone and I was reduced to coming here to speak with you.”

“Damn it, Mycroft, look!” she barked, a shaking finger extended toward the boxes. “Irina Yenko sent them. Here.”

His eyebrows lifted up, “Did she? I see.” His calculating eyes moved over the boxes. “It appears,” he cleared his voice, fingers drumming across the umbrella handle, “that Ms. Yenko foresees your death in the exceptionally near future. You managed to irritate the leader of the Veles while abroad?”

“She worked for Kasun, as I stated in my reports. I don’t know if she’s coming after me or someone else in this flat,” her voice cold, “but if you’ve ever valued the work I have done for you or if there is a shred of decency within you that knows how much I care for your brother’s wellbeing…”

Mycroft sat in the chair across from her, lips in a firm line. “I don’t make a habit of expressing such things.”

“Your actions say enough.”

“Seems that you can read me better than I anticipated,” his complexion focused, “Ms. Byrns, I am listening.”

“I’m going to need your help.”

He nodded. “I see. I can only imagine the kind of predicament that you believe you are about undertake to warrant your person asking for my help.”

“Quid pro quo.”

He leaned forward, a shadow of a smile on his face. “I’m listening. Intently. You have my undivided attention.

The last package arrived late in the morning. John was at home, Sherlock was out dealing with a case that she’d solved in half an hour, and she was readying to go babysit Rosie so that John could go see his therapist.

It was another shadowbox: the glass said ‘Break in Case of Emergency’ and there was a sealed envelope inside. Rather than break the glass, she opted to pry open the frame and fish the envelope out. It’s not weighted and it doesn’t feel as if there’s a powder in there…

She ripped the side and withdrew a paper. Scrawled in the same ink as the label was the following:
5 by 5 and 76
Oui ceded in the east.
*Insurrection for Robert Johnson*
tar and feather, in the least.

West he marched to collect
*His toy soldier drenched in rye:*
Born in lands originally of *the Nations Five*
the *Queen of the Great Meadows* in his eye.

*Muses in blue and white,*
*Gregorian in their plight;*
For the woman in love with *fight*
*To be one and die by night.*

What *porcupine* would you trade your life for?
*Not your pet dolphin,* nor the *eagle;*
not the *lynx,* or the *English beagle.*
*Not your frog* or your *dragon.*
What would you give to protect your *lion?*

*Come to the address tonight,* alone, or the *porcupine will never be a lion.*

She flipped the paper over and there was an address to somewhere near Dartford.
*What kind of fucking riddle is this? I don’t have time for this.*
She took photos of the letter with her phone and left the shadowbox and its contents on the coffee table with its siblings.

“Looks like I’m going to be busy tonight.”

“*Is he alright?”*

“*He will be fine. He’s suffered far worse when I’ve drugged him.*”
“I heard that.”

“Jesus. Do you need me?”

“*Based on the symptoms…”*

“Sherlock,” her interrupting voice was stern.

“*He’s fine. We’re fine. Though he does seem to believe that I have a sister that I don’t remember.*”

She sighed, “Hmm. We can talk about that later and not over the phone. What can I do to help?”

“You have Rosie, do you not?”

Shannon looked to the wide-eyed child on her hip, adjusting her for comfort. “Yes, I have her. She’s fine.”

“*Good. We will come to get you and then make our way to the flat. Are you alright?”*
“Of course I am. Why?”

He cleared his throat and did his best to soften the volume of his voice so as not to alarm John. “If this woman tranquilized John, is it not plausible to think that she could come after his daughter?”

Shannon thought for a moment, “I guess it would depend on what they discussed prior to being knocked out. At least, that’s how my mind would work.”

“Come on, John. You’ve suffered far worse from me,” he called, more than likely, over his shoulder. He sighed heavily, “I saw your new shadowbox.”

“I’m sure you did. And the riddle, too, I bet.”

“Yes. John’s just about come round fully; it’s wearing off. We will be there shortly.”

“Ask John if he wants me to call Molly or not and text me. I’m going to go about securing his home for him, just in case.”

“Good. And Shannon?”

“Yes?”

“Be careful.”

Shannon sat with Rosie in her arms on the couch, Sherlock and John sat in the respective chairs, and Mrs. Hudson was puttering in the kitchen making a pot of tea.

“And you’re certain,” the detective pressed, “that those were the exact words that she used?”

“Of course I’m bloody sure,” John huffed. “She bloody well shot me.”

“With a tranquilizer,” Sherlock added.

“Boys,” Shannon warned from the couch. “Play nicely.”

“I was shot!”

“With a tranquilizer.”

She rolled her eyes. “Oh my God, will you two stop? Jesus. We have a bit of a situation on our hands! Will you two stop acting like children?”

“Sorry, Nanny,” Sherlock quipped with a sarcastic tone. “Would you rather we go out to the garden and play?”

Her eyes bored back at him, “If you think that I won’t hand John his daughter to whoop your ass…”


“So, Sherlock, you don’t remember her at all?” she stood to begin pacing around the room in thought.

“Nope. Nothing.”
“You think…” John paused, pointing at his best friend, “That you could go in there and find her?”

She shrugged and handed John his sleeping child. “I’m sure if I did deep enough and she is telling the truth, I could find her; but if you don’t remember her,” she turned on her heel to face Sherlock, “then that’s a bag of worms that I don’t want to mess with. And I’m sure that you don’t either.”

“You expertise on this subject is noted,” Sherlock steepled his hands under his chin. “Now, how does one go about inquiring about a sibling that one doesn’t remember?”

“The obvious step would be to look up public records, but I wonder if she would have any,” she crossed her arms in front of her torso.

John’s eyes conveyed puzzlement, “What do you mean?” Sherlock tilted his head and eyes in her direction.

“Well, if we assume that Eurus’ statements to John are true…then being three separate people; and you each met two of those personalities and you didn’t notice the similarities…I’d assume that she’s fucking brilliant,” she stared out the window behind Sherlock. “She might even be better than me in that department.”

John nodded before kissing Rosie’s forehead. “Jesus. You’re right. There may not be records of her at all.”

“If she was the one deleting records,” Sherlock added.

Shannon’s head dropped with a heavy sigh. “You don’t know if he’s involved or not.”

“Wait,” John’s eyes widened, “You mean Mycroft? I mean, I told you about that one time where he said ‘The other one’.”

The detective leaned back in his chair, eyes focused. “It should be entertained as a possibility.”

“You and I both know that he’d lie to your face and you would never get any farther that where we are now,” she said over her shoulder. She turned and stood behind the detective’s left shoulder, hands now on her waist. “I would go tonight, but I’ve got a place to be, apparently.”

“Right, the letter,” John pondered. “Sherlock, does your brother get scared?”

“What?”

“Every person does,” she squinted. “Where are you going with this?”

John leaned forward, “What if we set him up?”

“I’m all for trapping my older brother in precarious situations, but why inquire about his fears?”

Realization fired across Shannon’s brain like a bolt of lightning, “Because it’s Mycroft…unless I strip it out of him which could take weeks…we wouldn’t know if he’s telling the truth. Fear is a potent motivator.”

“Oh!” Sherlock jumped up from his chair. “John, you are brilliant!”

“Yeah, you can remember that the next time I don’t follow one of your deductions,” he snorted.

“We should be able to get a plan together for tomorrow night. That leaves us tonight free to assist you.”
“No,” Shannon argued. “You read the letter, I have to go to the abandoned hotel alone.”

“Like hell you are!” John asserted, a sternness in his demeanor. “Too many times you’ve gone off, alone, and we’ve been left to pick up the pieces or patch you back together. We are far stronger together.”

“John, you don’t know what she’s capable of. She was Kasun’s left hand and leader of a merry band of specialized muscle. They were his Marines…first in and last out; and there weren’t survivors hardly ever.” Shannon straddled the desk chair and propped her elbows on the chairback. “I tried to get in her head dozens of times…I couldn’t get into her mind well enough or deep enough to take hold.”

“But the letter!” John began.

She frowned, “All you need to know is that the first two stanzas were meant to bring me to heel: she knows where I grew up. The third stanza is something that I’ll deal with later…but the last bit with the animals…”

Sherlock twitched his head in her direction, “That makes sense to you?”

“A little; I mean, I had to look some of it up to double check but…just like the moth has symbolism attached to it:”

“The pet dolphin and eagle are the pair of you.”

“What?”

“Yes, John, I am obviously the eagle in this situation because….”

“Stop. Just…stop. Let me explain and don’t interrupt. My offer to whoop your ass still stands,” she smirked.

John laughed quietly, “Oh, now this I missed.” Sherlock, put out, slumped into his chair and motioned for her to continue.

“Porcupines, in certain cultures, are innocent creatures; capable of protecting themselves to a degree. I haven’t quite figures that one out yet.”

“The dolphin is Sherlock: intelligent and helpful, the eagle represents bravery and strength…let’s be honest, John; how you have the strength to put up with both of us in the same room should warrant your canonization into sainthood.” John smirked.

“The lynx can represent secrecy, so that’s Mycroft…The English beagle is Lestrade, easily. Sometimes frogs are viewed for honesty or healing…so I’m going to guess that’s what Molly is to me…and the dragon is Mrs. Hudson: luck, knowledge, and illusion.”

Sherlock nodded, “And of the lion? The last line states that the porcupine won’t turn into a lion.”

“That’s the thing,” she threw her hands up, “Lions could mean any number of things…uh…pride or, cunning; and if it’s a cub it could be mercy…or it could represent a person’s tattoo…or…” Her mind, having run in thousands of directions, suddenly came to a halt as if she’s crashed into a wall. *Oh, Christ. No.*

“Actually, I will need your help; but you have to do as I ask.”


“Together,” she agreed. “John, I’ll need you here in the event the person I’m after flees, I have a feeling she’ll show up here and try to leave bugs on the premises. If that’s the case, knock her out
and tie her up; call me and I’ll come and deal with her.”

He eyed her skeptically, “That sounds like a diversion.”

“I swear it’s not. Sherlock, a little help?”

“You believe it’s Irina Yenko,” he added with a wave of his hand. “She went missing after Shannon returned from Serbia. It would make sense, if she knows that Shannon resides here, that she would try to learn all of her habits and the habits of those that frequent here. Invite her in and subdue her.”

“Hmm,” John frowned. “Alright. Just this once, I’ll stay at home base. Next time, I’m going with you.”

“Deal.”

“Sherlock, I’ll need you to have your ear to your underground. If they move before I get there, I need to know where they’re going and who they have.” The corners of the detective’s eyes flinched. “If, you hear nothing, then come to the address and be a shadow.”

“Mrs. Hudson?”

“Yes, dear,” she quipped holding a tray of mugs. “You’re not leaving are you? I just finished making tea for you all!”

“No, I’ll finish my tea first,” she smiled. “But, if it’s okay with John, would you watch Rosie tonight?”

“Yeah, s’alright with me. What do you say, Mrs. H? Would you be able to watch her?”

Mrs. Hudson nodded quickly, handing each one of them their mug. “I suppose; are you three fixing to go out tonight because of those things you got in the post?”

“Yes.”

“Do be careful. Oh, Shannon, I worry about you when you go out at night!” The land lady clasped her hands together.

“Don’t worry, Mrs. Hudson. I’ll be as careful as I always try to be.”

Sherlock snorted, “That’s not saying much.”

John grinned and bit his bottom lip to keep from laughing. “He’s got a point, you know.”

“Oh, did I tell you I got your mail today?” Mrs. Hudson tapped her own cheek. “I nearly forgot! How silly of me. Figured you were busy and I was nearby!”

“You’re a darling, thank you. Is it on my desk?”

“What…do – do you always get her mail?” John asked, perplexed.

“No, I’m not the housekeeper,” Mrs. Hudson asserted. “Shannon gave me a key for when she goes out of town so that people don’t come snooping around the flat.”

“Logically,” Sherlock began to fashion his scarf about his neck. “Though I do think that I…”

“No,” Shannon and John decried in unison.
The detective smirked. “Well, it appears that I am to be your eyes and ears in London,” he eyed Shannon skeptically.

She nodded. “I’ll see you out. I need to check my mail.” The pair made their way down the stairwell, leaving the Watsons and Mrs. Hudson upstairs.

“He seems cheery,” the elder woman observed. “Did you notice it?”

“Hmm?” John placed his daughter gently into her carrier. “Notice what?”

“He didn’t argue with her. Isn’t that odd? I mean, even when they are working together, he almost always finds a way to argue, doesn’t he?”

“Huh,” John thought aloud. “Guess they are growing up.”

“It’s a good thing, isn’t it? That she’s home?”

John nodded, “Oh, definitely. She’s…a part of this place, you know?”

Shannon offered Sherlock his coat from the peg. “I know what you’re doing.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less from you,” she countered. “Look, you and I both know that I can’t be in two places at once and neither can you. But we are able to be. Which of the two is the lesser of two evils?”

“That logic would infer that you prioritize cases based on a criteria that…”

“Sherlock. Stop it.”

He frowned, shoving his arms through the sleeves. “What would you rather me do? Do as told in full obedience or be myself?”

“Always yourself, Sherlock.”

“Then what is it you didn’t divulge upstairs?” She paused for a moment. “God, Shannon, I’m going to go and do as you’ve asked; but I would think that I have…”

She interrupted, “It’s about Irina.” His eyebrow arched upwards as he stuffed his hands into his gloves. “She called me…last night. She knows about Baker Street and she knows ways to make people feel pain. I pissed her off by getting close to Kasun and ultimately booking out of there as quick as I could.”

“She wants me dead. So, I sent Darweshi out to get me some particulars, and he messaged me a bunch of information today and you will find that I sent it to you three minutes ago.”

“I see.”

“I’m not going to lie, Sherlock. I’m worried. This whole ordeal…it’s meant to hurt. I am, regardless of how careful I am, will get hurt tonight. She hates me. I need you to understand that.”

“Shannon…”

“Say it. Say that you know that I’m going to get hurt.”

“You’re going to get hurt tonight.”
She sighed and leaned against the wall, hands on her waist. “Thank you. Since she called me, I went into overdrive trying to map out my next move. That’s why your brother was here last night when you got home: he’d been calling and I wasn’t answering…”

*Last Night*

“Do we have an agreement, Mycroft?”

“I believe that we do, Miss Byrns.”

Shannon pondered for a moment, recalling memories from Serbia. “They were yours, weren’t they? Mikhail and Gregory?”

“They are. How did you know?”

She frowned in thought, threading her fingers together. “I don’t know. For the most part, they looked out for me once I was in…but I just…had a feeling.”

“I am not one to choose feeling over logic, but I must say that whatever intuitions you have are fairly reliable. Regrettably, they weren’t aware of your involvement until after you were dispatched to return to Baker Street.”

“That makes sense.”

“In what capacity?”

“They had no reason to blow their cover when I was at the cabin; I was just some random person…had they known that I was working on your behalf, they could have blown their cover, Luka would not have survived, and I would have far more healing wounds at present,” she offered in justification.

Mycroft leaned backward into his chair and cleared his throat. “We’ve left them attached to her detail. I will endeavor to have contact made with either one of them regarding Ms. Yenko and her whereabouts in Britain. I would believe that some sort of information would come up soon. They would prove of value to you when the time comes to intervene against Ms. Yenko’s plans.”

He stood up to leave, but her voice halted him. “Why, after you disbanded freelancers in your charge, do you have me work for you?”

He turned and faced her, his eyebrow popped up and then returned to sit in the chair. “Because you are effective.”

“Bullshit,” she muttered without changing her expression. “You’re lying.”

“Yes,” he admitted, “Because I was endeavoring to congratulate you on the rigor in which you accomplish things.”

“You two lie very similarly,” she blinked with a smile. “Even if I hadn’t known before hand, I would have figured your relation out after talking to the pair of you for three minutes.”

“Three?”

“If I was having a slow day.”
“Hmm,” he grinned.

She leaned forward, “Now that we’ve established that I know when you’re lying; and that you hate legwork…why do you utilize me as a freelancer after all that you did to shut them down?”

His fingers drummed across the umbrella handle again. “I suppose that it’s because you have done a personal service to me by means of my brother. You didn’t originally take payment until the home office began sending you paychecks, you have done well in creating a sustainable income that doesn’t rely on governmental spending…”

“Mr. Holmes…remember that I know when you’re lying…and stretching around the truth,” her voice placating.

“Before I divulge that information, you should know that through interrogation and some sifting, we have found that your mother and brother created a list of music that could unlock certain…abilities…” Mycroft grimaced.

“Did they now? Can’t say that I didn’t see that coming…”

“From the initial reports,” he began, “It permits your brain to perform a chemical dump; releasing dangerous amounts of adrenaline, endorphins, dopamine, and serotonin while suppressing your norepinephrine and conscience.”

“It’s designed to make you happy to ignore your moral principles.”

“And it’s untested because I haven’t put it in my ears yet.”

“There’s also…regrettably…a failsafe that your family installed into it. From the research, should you listen to the playlist in its entirety, you would…”

His pause caused her to grow irritated. “Come now, Mycroft: you’re not one to mince words usually. It would what?”

“Correct any programming collars that you slipped. So, as you can deduce…It’s not necessarily something that you should ever have your hands on.”

“This could be an emergency, Mycroft.”

He sighed and frowned, eyes drilling into her. “You have become a reliable asset in the eyes of my brother. And in mine. Your loyalty to Sherlock seems to have no bounds and you have physically sacrificed more than I believe I would in order to preserve it. It is admirable.”

She nodded and leaned back onto the couch. “Wow. I’m going to log this on the calendar as a national holiday.”

“And why is that?”

“You paid me a compliment. A few, actually.”

He cleared his throat. “I am aware, through your reports, your file, and my brother coming to threaten me repeatedly in my office, that this last endeavor was…taxing…if being polite.”

“I know that, so…”

“I suppose, Miss Byrns, that I regret the harm that has come to you because of the services you perform, but I can think of no one more capable to execute those tasks so efficiently or effectively.”
He stood and moved to the doorway. “So, please believe me when I say that the next time I call on your talents, I do hope it will be the last time that I do so. If you’ll excuse me, Shannon.”

Shannon remained still on the couch soaking in what Mycroft had said when she heard muffled discussion at the bottom of the stair. Did he just use my first name? Oh. My. God.

She had been in her head for a time when she realized Sherlock had, at some point, come upstairs and was drinking a cup of tea sitting across from her.

“There you are.”

“Hmm? How long have you been sitting there?”

“Long enough. Do you make a habit of going into the recesses of your mind more now when you have to speak to Mycroft? I can’t say that I blame you; however, you sat there for quite a while without blinking.”

She rubbed her eyes vigorously and yawned. “Yes, I’m feeling it. God…my eyes.”

“Do I need to be concerned that Mycroft showed up here to speak with you?”

Shaking her head and stretching caused her back and shoulder to pop deliciously. “No. We had a face-to-face chat about Serbia. I think…Sherlock, I think he gave me a compliment.”

“Don’t be silly, Mycroft doesn’t do those things. Was he sick?”

“Don’t think so,” she pondered. “Gave me a couple compliments, actually. I think you threatening him repeatedly is finally starting to affect him some.”

He chuckled, “Finally. Now, I know that wasn’t the lot of it because he is my brother, and I’m aware as to when he is withholding some information.”

“This is true.”

“Which?”

“Both of your statements,” she stood with another yawn. “You know that wasn’t all of it and he is withholding information.”

Sherlock’s features stilled. “And?”

She slowly meandered downstairs, “I will tell you when it’s time. Until then, do not worry about it.”

Present – Baker Street

“So you see, I thought I had more time, Sherlock. It wasn’t that I was purposely keeping things tucked away because I like to brood and show off…it’s that…you know…I didn’t think that everything was going to happen so quickly,” she offered in reconciliation. “And now, potentially your sister, that you can’t remember, shot John to make a point to you.”

“Your point?”

“Priorities, Sherlock.” He bowed his head and moved toward the door, hand resting on the handle.
“This is a moment where your priorities are going to be tested. You and I cannot be in two places at once; but we can.”

“Irina Yenko, in my experience, is highly unpredictable and keen to violence. She will, if I don’t play by her rules, come after every single person that I surround myself with. Not just you and John… She would keep me locked up and take you all, one by one. To maim… to torture… and ultimately, to kill; just to see if I break before she killed me.”

The detective bit the bottom of his lip in thought and sighed. “It’s not something that I’m willing to chance. So. We do this, her way.”

Sherlock nodded solemnly. “Her way.”

“Thank you.” With another nod, this one more determined, Sherlock left Baker Street and set foot into the darkening streets to find the answers and information that Shannon required.

The American turned and walked down to her room in the basement and found the pile of mail Mrs. Hudson had collected for her. Most of it what came in the mail was garbage: magazines and ads meant to show some signs of normalcy should anyone go snooping. Gardening was most definitely not a passion of hers, however, two magazines always showed every month without fail.

She hadn’t really collected her mail in the past few weeks because she hadn’t been expecting anything; and, for the sake of hoping that Shannon would return, Mrs. Hudson collected her mail while she had been in Serbia.

Now, the daunting task of sifting through everything for the sake of keeping her mind calm before going to work tonight was set before her.

For twenty minutes or so, she sifted through mail: sorting magazines into one pile, mail to be opened in another, and rubbish in the last. Part way through the pile was a magazine that she didn’t recognize, nor did she remember subscribing to. She double checked that it was addressed correctly and began to analyze the cover. 2019? Now that’s interesting. Why would I be getting a magazine for a date that hasn’t occurred yet?

Thumbing through the pages, most of it was incoherent nonsense until Shannon came across an insert with a paper CD sleeve, complete with a CD. In neat print across the disc was written, Hello, Gorgeous.

Alarm flooded down her body and heightened her senses. She carefully slid the disc out of its sheath and examined it against the light of her room. Opting to not taking a chance of installing a virus on her laptop, Shannon grabbed a small burner laptop she had picked up during her travels and had previously removed the wireless card.

Let’s see you try to infect my computer now, ha!

The CD whirred in the drive and when the file directory window popped up, two mp4 files appeared: one named First and the other When You Need Me.

She pursed her lips and clicked on the first file. The media player popped up and before her was Mary.

“Hello, Gorgeous.”

Shannon’s fingers slammed into the keyboard to pause the video. She fell into her desk chair and gripped at her heart, sure that it was shattering into infinitesimal pieces. Tears quickly welled in her eyes while her mind raced to wonder if she should call for John.

Her chest heaved under her sweater from the surprise and after another moment to collect herself, she resumed playback.
“I hope that this finds you before you realize that…well, if you are getting this disc; it means that I…am gone. Dead, most likely. I hope that you find this first and hear it from me rather than any of the others because, I know that you will blame yourself for not being here.”

“I know that you’re clever. That you will have found this rubbish magazine and figured it out rather quickly because you are amazing. If I am gone, you know that the boys are going to need you.”

“Shannon, before you left, I didn’t get a chance to tell you a few things; and…I think that they are important that you know. Hmm. I didn’t make a script for yours…didn’t rehearse it; it’s a bit off the top of my head…”

“The first time that I met you, I knew that you had been into it. The job. I could almost smell it on you; and it wasn’t as if you were hiding it and I’m going to admit, I thought you were there to assassinate one of them and planned on taking you out the minute you slipped up.”

Shannon chuckled quietly to herself. “But then you started telling me your story and I realized that you were good. Not – not just at what you do; but you are good. A good friend, a good flat mate; a good human being. I think you forget that sometimes when everything’s gone to shit; don’t. Don’t forget that you are good. Don’t believe for one second that you aren’t good or good enough. You are. You, miss, are good enough.”

“The longer that I got to know you, the more I realized that you had adapted to this horseshit kind of life that we live better than I could have; and that more than likely has something to do with how you came into being who and what you are. I would sit in those cafes and coffee shops in awe of how you endeavored so – so – so religiously to bring normalcy to those around you and I wondered, would she do this for me, too?”

“And Shannon, you did. After everything was out and John knew about my past; you helped me to feel human and real. Your perception of me didn’t change; you offered to help with getting ready for the baby, you continued treating me as if nothing had changed even though I felt as if my world was falling apart because of John…” she looked off camera and a sad smile graced her lips.

“Just like you took care of me; to show me that it’s all okay… and – and I know it goes without saying…but…take care of him, please. He’s going to be mad; and there will be days that are hard for him. You’ve lived through that. You know. Be patient with him; we both know that John doesn’t accept help from anyone.”

Hot tears fell down Shannon’s face, her cheeks felt as if they were on fire, and a lump swelled in her throat. Oh, Mary.

“I’m sending Sherlock on a mission, of sorts; because I’m sure that John is going to be angry at him. Sherlock’s creative when motivated, and I’m sure you won’t really be happy with whatever rabbit hole he’s going to fall down into. But…please believe me; I thought about this for a while and I can think of no other way to ensure that those two still have each other’s relationship without Sherlock putting himself into harm’s way.”

“You do it all the time, for us, like – like our personal whipping boy. And, before you argue with me…I’ve watched you do this to Sherlock twice now,” she pointed to the camera and wagged a finger. “No judging from you.”

“Shannon, if I’m gone…you are the best defense that they have. I’ve been happy to share some of that weight with you so that you didn’t feel it crushing you as you did before Reichenbach… But, it’s up to you to do what you feel is best; and that just plain sucks. You’re not just the shadow in the dark that chases away the nightmares; but, you’re the one that is going to defend their emotions and their hearts. They are fragile. They are growing up from the surly men that they were individually into semi-functioning members of society,” Mary laughed at her joke. “I mean, as much as they are able…but I know, because I have watched you and know you, that you have helped both of them grow up into who they are now and I must thank you.”
“There’s one last, major thing I must ask of you. It’s not fair, I know…but…I know that you know that we didn’t make you Rosie’s godmother because it was a liability. And you know you are one of her godmothers in everything but official title.”

“I know you created a trust for her before you left…I’m sorry; I did some snooping. The money that’s in there for her is… Thank you.”

“Shannon, protect my daughter. Help her grow up. Let her know that she was my life and that I love her so – so very much. And tell them…tell her that I think she’s beautiful and perfect. And steer her away from our line of work. Give her a chance at as normal a life as she can have when having Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, and Shannon Byrns in her life.”

“Know that, now, in this moment, I love you. You are enough. And I believe that you are a good thing. I believe, with all my heart, in Shannon Byrns and who she will become.”

Shannon covered her mouth with her hand, tears flowing freely from the corners of her eyes. Oh God, I’m going to do it. Mary Watson, you made me ugly cry. She sat at her desk for the next half hour silently crying to herself wondering what she had ever done to deserve Mary Watson in her life.
For Sinners and Saints

Shannon entered the abandoned hotel lobby and made her way up the stairs toward the top floor as instructed. Splayed fingers pushed open the door to her destination where a handful of men, all armed, and Irina waited. There was a hooded figure tied to a chair in the middle of the suite.

“As requested, I am unarmed and alone,” her voice laden with caution.

Irina motioned for the man closest to her to check and he did so, patting Shannon down thoroughly. A quick nod informed his boss that Shannon was clean. Irina casually strode across the room and laid a punch to Shannon’s jaw.

Irina smiled, “Ana, if you fight back, you know who dies.”

Shannon regained her balance and stood up straight, “I know.” She spat the blood from her mouth and grimaced.

“Good.” Irina landed another punch to Shannon’s gut. Shannon collapsed, the wind having rushed from her lungs. “We have a present for you. It seems that you have friends everywhere in this God-forsaken country.”

Shannon watched as Irina pulled the pillowcase off the seated figure’s head. She sighed, defeated, and whispered, “Darweshi.”

His body was broken and he was missing an eye. His hands were smashed, nearly unrecognizable; and, his chest heaved slowly indicating that breathing was taxing. “Ki-vul-i,” he gurgled.

Anger welled in her belly and she punched the floor. “I am so – so sorry. I never meant for this to happen.”

He did his best to grin. “Dhis is of my doing. I killed dhere boss-man. I know,” he coughed, “what tings he did to you. I…did it. I killed dhere man.”

“No! Darweshi,” she cried, tears falling quickly. “You shouldn’t have done that.”

His breathing sounded wet and blood had begun to bubble in the corners of his mouth, “No one in dis…world…deserves to be free…more dan you…Kiv-uli…dat was how I co – could give dat…to…you.”

Her face twisted into an ugly grimace as Irina moved behind her friend, confidant, and ultimately, her savior. “Look at me, Darweshi. I’m right here. I am here with you.”

“Den dis chapter…as you say…is done. I will see dem again. I will…see…you…again…Kivuli. One day.”

Irina unsheathed a blade from her boot and placed it behind Darweshi’s neck, eyes boring into her sobbing opponent. “Darweshi. Look at me,” she cried between sobs.

“Dat day…is not…today…Kivuli…dey…need…you…remember dat.”

Irina’s blade pierced through the flesh of his neck and throat to have the tip appear on the other side. She elected to leave the blade in its resting place and wiped her hands off on one of her men’s sleeves.
A sickening series of gurgles and coughs lingered in the air. Darweshi wouldn’t take his eyes off of Shannon. She watched as his body fought to breathe while he drowned in his own blood; and, after what seemed like an eternity of convulsions and blood-splatter, his mangled body exhaled one last time as his light had been extinguished.

Byrns was fixed to her place on the floor and cried out like a wounded animal. Her anger focused her mind to think of memories from Serbia. She glared up at Irina and said, “Seven jade sparrows fly free.”

Irina laughed maliciously, “Yes. That. That little device you put in my head…I found someone that could make it go away. So whatever little traps you put up there all those months ago…they are sprung and gone.”

“No…it’s – it’s not … how?”

“They are much smarter than you. And they do not care who is causing chaos for the world.” She nodded and her henchmen picked Shannon up from the floor and forced her to her feet. “Now, be a good girl and wear this necklace for me.”

She offered Byrns the end of a noose that the American took in her shaky hands. “Now put it on and walk out onto this wonderful, little balcony,” she ushered Shannon forward. “I like this hotel. This little balcony overlooks the courtyard inside on the ground floor. Rather ingenious. You can fall to your death, and be indoors where you will rot for a time before anyone notices to enter this building.”

Shannon’s unsteady feet caused the balcony step she had been perched atop to wobble dangerously underfoot. The hemp around her neck dug into her already raw skin. In this moment where she should have felt terror and come to terms with her mortality, she felt tranquility.

Standing on precipice of the balcony, Shannon was able to see the person whose life she was trading hers for while they stood on the tiled lobby floor. My sweet, sweet boy. It’s okay. It’s okay.

Luka had hot tears flowing over reddened cheeks. He was screaming and fighting against his captors.

“Luka,” she called down, voice hoarse from the rope necklace around her throat. “Stop.”

He peered up at her, confused. “No! They’re going to kill you! They’re going to hang you!”

Shannon nodded solemnly and looked to her bound hands, “So be it. But I need you to live.”

A leering smile unfurled on Irina’s lips, “Keep him quiet or we will kill him next.” Irina moved into Shannon’s eyesight on the balcony and shouldered her as she passed.

“Luka,” Shannon called down to the ground, “There’s a room where the light can find you.”

Realization dawned in his eyes, “I know.”

“Good boy. Mikhail?”

“Yes?” he called from behind Luka on the ground.

“How is your brother?”

Mikhail wiped his face with a rough hand. “He lives.”
“Good,” she replied. “I’m glad. You know I did this to protect him…my son.”

“Yes.”

Irina rolled her eyes and used her pistol to hit Shannon across the face. “Enough with the chatter.”

“STOP!” Luka yelled. “I know something!”

Irina turned on her heel and leaned over the balcony. “Oh? Do you?” she boomed. “Tell me, gutter rat: What information could you possibly sell me that I don’t know?”

Luka shook off the man restraining him and stepped forward, “You need to let my mother go first.”

“Ha!” Irina guffawed. “She’s not your real mother, boy! She put those memories in your head. She’s no more your mother than I am!”

“I know,” Luka acknowledged. “But she’s been more to me in the past five months than anyone ever has been in my life. She fed me…gave me a home…she was going to send me to school…She made me belong!”

“Is this going somewhere?” she asked before landing a kick to Shannon’s side while the American attempted to stand back up. “I have a traitor’s death to get along with.”

“If there’s a traitor here, it’s you,” Luka spat. Mikhail took a step forward to grab Luka for his safety, but halted due to curiosity.

“Me? You so sure?”

“I was given up at a hospital when I was three weeks old,” his voice shaky and green eyes piercing their target. “I was in and out of orphanages, foster homes…all of it…and then I was abandoned when I was six. No one knew what to do with me. So I learned how to adapt on the street. And I watched. And I learned.”


“Wasn’t it Stefan Kasun’s rule that his people had to take care of their children?” he asked Mikhail.

Mikhail nodded solemnly, “It was.”

“Do you know who surrendered me to the hospital, telling them she was my mother?”

Irina sneered, “Enough of your conniving words…”

Luka pointed up to the balcony, “That woman…up there…is my mother…my biological mother…and she threw me away. She’s the traitor.”

Mikhail and the other men on the ground looked up to Irina with questioning eyes. “Is this true?”

She clicked her tongue loudly, “I knew the minute he showed up in town who he was. He looks just like his father.”

Shannon stared up in disbelief at her captor. “You knew? He was…your son?”

“Of course I did,” she scoffed. “Spitting image of his father, who was a bit of a womanizer. So Stefan had him killed. He was bad for business. What we had was fun. And, that’s why I had
trouble believing you: you can’t erase that memory from me.”

Mikhail growled, “Then you should be on a rope!”

Irina’s head bobbed thoughtfully while scratching her temple with the barrel of her gun. “You’re right, if I had a child. If he were…alive.”

It happened as if Shannon were trapped in slow motion and the rest of the world had hit fast-forward. She heard the click of the hammer and watched Irina’s arm come up and take sight of its intended target.

“LUKA!” she bellowed as her footing slipped out from under her.

A deafening bang echoed, but she couldn’t see over the balcony ledge as she scrambled to stand up. Shannon tugged on the rope lead and took some of its slack in her hands. Irina had begun to turn to face her with a smug grin. There was then a look of perplexity, astonishment, and then finally fear: Shannon had taken what slack the rope gave and looped it around Irina’s neck before tackling her over the ledge of the balcony, sending them both falling through the air.

Shannon heard the wind rushing past her ears and her heart thumping wildly in her chest. There might have been yelling, but she couldn’t hear it. She knew that she had a split second to get her fingers under the rope before it became taut and she clawed furiously to find that opening. There was a crack as she jolted to a stop and felt as if her head would explode, but she had managed to get her hands under the rope. Legs kicked and flailed trying to find something to hold on to; her vision was darkening and she could barely breathe.

Foolish she thought. You truly are an idiot. And now, life is over.

A sickening thud brought her back to reality and jolted her lungs into working. Her body involuntarily gulped for air while her hands instinctively loosed the noose from its resting place. She rolled over, sputtering and coughing and did her best to heave herself to her feet.

“…Lu-ka,” she wheezed.

Strong arms hoisted her upward and spun her to face their owner. Gregory was shouting at her, but she couldn’t hear it. Her ears were throbbing. She tried to focus on what he was saying but she just wanted to collapse.

“…get…coming…hurry…fight…”

Ah, yes. My consequence for bringing Irina off the balcony with me. Her men will come for me. Stefan’s men will fight with me. Get up. Breathe that air. Find Luka. Shit is that Gregory? I wonder…

She staggered over to the outer wall of the building and surveyed the damage around her: Mikhail was on the ground clutching his arm and firing rounds off into the building. Gregory was reloading his gun and handing off a spare to her, which she took and automatically checked to be sure it was loaded. Some of Stefan’s other men were dispersed behind debris and firing rounds off into the building.

The silence she had heard gave way to incessant ringing and she was able to discern some sounds.

She tapped Gregory hard on the shoulder and did her best to rasp, “Luka.”

“He ran,” Gregory replied, looking for a better cover in the old hotel. “Can you fight?”
She nodded weakly, motioning to his pocket. “…need…music…”

His hand dove into the jacket pocket and produced a small mp3 player with earbuds. “How…how did you…? Mr. Holmes said that you might need this…”

Shannon stretched out her open hand and waited for the device. “What…ever…happens…” she croaked, “Don’t…wait for…me.”

He placed the audio player in her palm and wrapped her fingers around it, bringing her hand to his mouth. He kissed the back of her hand and nodded, “For what it’s worth, I am glad to have you on our side. We both are.”

Gregory dove forward in an effort to drag Mikhail to cover as Shannon placed the earbuds to their intended place. The device powered on quickly and sound began to fill her ears and mind, blocking out everything else around her. These songs were specifically chosen and left on a playlist that opened a response in her subconscious. Her brother and mother had created a list of songs, when played in a specific order, that could turn her into a super soldier, of sorts. It would flooded her body with adrenaline, cause her to be hyper-focused, and remove fear and fatigue from her system.

She waited for the preparatory trigger words to aid her in finding the door within her subconscious. She closed her eyes and waited until, at long last, she heard her brother’s voice: “Nothing ever lasts forever. Everybody wants to rule the world.”

A low pitch reverberated through her consciousness. Oh…that’s an E…hmm…delicious… It’s…so…delicious. Her pain was dissolving, a pleasant numbness and calm washing over her. Adrenaline released at the sound of the next pitch and she felt that she could take on the entire planet and be invincible. This…this I like.

Shannon stood upright and brushed off the dust from her shoulders, sliding the pistol into the waistband at the small of her back. Her lungs expanded with her deep breath, bones and joints cracking as she walked across the courtyard where lackeys were firing on Mikhail and Gregory.

A stride became a trot, which turned into a run. She stepped onto the fountain and leapt over it like a falcon swooping down on its prey. She wrapped her leg around the neck of the closest goon to bring him to the ground with her. A well-executed barrel roll allowed her to slide beside another group of Veles and fight as if she were performing a ballet.

Everything moved slowly for her. He’s bowled over…roll across his back and kick counterpart unconscious. After roll, grab partially incapacitated man and land heel of left palm into temple. Thirty paces left, up the stairs two men in the south room…I understand. I know now. I am God.

Loud pounding boomed from downstairs. “I said I’m coming,” John hollered. “Damn impatient…”

He swung the door open and found a young boy on the step. “I need Sherlock Holmes!” he yelled, having shoved his way inside and up the stair. “I need Sherlock Holmes!”

“Yes, yes; alright. I understand that. But I need you to tell me why,” John endeavored to calm the child down.

“No, you don’t understand,” the boy whirled around in the sitting room. “It’s my friend! She’s going to kill her!”
“Easy, young man!” John was nearly shouting. “Start from the beginning. When did you last see her?”

“I need Sherlock Holmes!”

“Listen here, you! He’s not here and I’m all you’ve got. Now, if you want my help you are going to calm down so that we can have some sense in all this!”

A new perception swept across the boy’s eyes and he gasped in excitement, “You’re Doctor Watson!”

John nodded, “Yes, yes I am; have we met?”

The child panted, “My name is Luka.”

‘Green eyes with splatters of the ocean in them, hair like sun shining through dark amber, and a smile gentler than moonlight,’ she said. Oh…this boy. It is. It’s him! Shannon!

“Oh my God,” his voice quaked. “Shannon.”

“Can you drive faster?” Luka’s anxious voice asked the cabbie. “We’re trying to get to my friend!”

John, irate, put his mobile to his ear for the sixth time, “Sherlock…pick up the damn phone!”

_Sherlock:_

_Pick up the damn phone!
Shannon’s in trouble.
I have Luka.
She needs you._

The detective’s phone sounded an alert for an emergency text as he opened the cab’s door.

_Brother Mine:_

_If you want to help her
and have her survive,
do not let her finish the playlist._

_Blood:_

_What playlist? What did you give her?
Oh. You are cruel._

_Brother Mine:_

She made the decision.
Do what you can to save her. If she cannot be brought back, she will be eliminated.
You understand.

Blood:

Ensure that your sniper doesn’t have a loose trigger finger.

Sherlock ran into the lobby in time to witness a body being thrown out of a first floor balcony. A bloodied figure hopped down from the balcony’s ledge and walked over to the woman on the floor attempting to push themselves to their feet.
Shannon.

She landed an axe kick between the other woman’s shoulder blades rendering her unconscious. Shannon spun about and counted the bodies on the floor with a pointed finger. “Hmm,” she pondered. “There should be one more…”

Before he could fully register that there had been movement in his periphery, Shannon had thrown a shard of glass to her right, toppling her opponent to their knees. With purpose in her step, Shannon strode across the lobby and grabbed the man who was yowling in pain by the shoulder, dragging him behind her to the Veles strewn about on the floor.

“Please…no; stop!” he roared. “I had no idea!”

Shannon wrapped her hands around the glass shard and ripped it from its resting place. “Do you or do you not,” her voice cold, “have a brain?”

“I do! But…” he interrupted himself by bracing in a wince for the glass Shannon had put into motion, planting it into his thigh.

“There is only one thing you should know now,” she replied. “Pain.”

She withdrew the glass and lifted her arm back to strike again when Sherlock shouted, “That’s enough!”

Shannon paused, peered over her shoulder, and threw the glass from her hand. Blood ebbed from the gashes in her palms and open knuckles into dark, spackled pools on the floor.

“I understand now, Mr. Holmes,” she rasped, her voice still stressed from the rope.

He took slow and sure steps toward her with hands raised upward in a sign of goodwill. “What do you understand?”

“The pull…the intoxication…the seduction…of addiction,” she smiled. “This…I like this.”

Cautious eyes moved about the room as he took stock of the damage. “Are they dead?”
She shrugged and slugged the whimpering man on the floor, knocking him out. “Not yet.”

“Will you let me get closer to you,” he asked when he was about two meters away from her.

Shannon waved a finger at him and clicked her tongue, “Tsk, tsk; no. I don’t think I will. You need to stay right there, Mr. Holmes.”

“It’s Sherlock, Shannon. I am not, nor will I ever be, Mr. Holmes to you,” he countered from his spot on the floor.

Byrns finally turned to face him and looked down at herself. “Tell me, Mr. Holmes: What do you see?”

His eyes squinted in scrutiny, “Multiple lacerations, mild tremors in the extremities, extreme focal clarity, your pupils are incredibly dilated…”

“No, no, no, Mr. Holmes” she prodded sarcastically. “Do not tell me what you observe. Tell me what do you see?”

“Shannon, take out the earphones,” he commanded sternly. “If you listen to that entire track, the programming could take hold…”

Her eyes reflected a devious mirth behind them. “Don’t,” she paused after each word, “change the subject.”

“Tell me, Mr. Holmes, what do you see?”

Sherlock’s demeanor turned cold and analytical while he looked her over, “The shade hiding in the dark.”

“Oooh,” she hissed in delight, “I’d like that on my mantle. But no, I’m not the big nasty shadow in the world. Try again.”

“I see the demon that you’ve worked so hard to fight against,” he countered.

She heaved a languorous, deep breath and yawned. “Here I am.”

“Shannon, don’t,” he warned icily. “I have precautionary measures in place; do not test my resolve.”

She rolled her eyes and looked around the room with hands open, “Don’t you see the work I did? This was an hour…an hour! You think you can stop me? I feel nothing: no pain, no fear, no worry…I am more than a machine. I feel like a god. I am Geist.” She kicked a groaning Veles regaining consciousness in the head and returned back to her conversation as if nothing had happened.

Sherlock withdrew his pistol and pointed at her, a click back echoed from the hammer, “I do hope you realize how encompassing my resolve is.”

“Hmpf,” she chuffed. She slowly walked toward him with a devious smirk upon her face. “You wouldn’t.”

He released a shot to the left of her foot and repositioned the barrel in line with her torso, “I would.”

“Allow me,” she sneered unflinchingly. Her bloodied hand grabbed the pistol and pulled the pair
of them closer together. She seemingly enjoyed his surprise and moved the barrel to her forehead. “Let me make it easier for you.”

“Stop this madness,” he sniped. “You’re better than this.”

“Don’t give me that ‘I believe in Shannon Byrns’ bull shit, we’ve come so far to know that it’s a falsity. You have no idea what I am capable of.”

“I don’t? After all of this time, you think I have no idea what you can do?”

“Then tell me, what do you see? Let me hear it before you lodge that bullet in my skull,” she taunted.

His hair bounced back and forth while his head shook. “No; she’s still in there and I intend to get her back.”

“And what,” she whispered, “Pray tell, makes you think that I don’t like being this way?”

Sherlock’s breath hitched in his throat. Do you know? How do you know? It is probable that she enjoys being this way. “Because I can see that Shannon is still there in those eyes; you can’t fake that, protocols be damned. I have, in my arsenal, one last thing that can make her change her mind to buy me time.”

She scoffed, “Go ahead, pull the trigger.”

“I want you to know; I am not sorry for this.’

She raised her brows skeptically, “Oh, you will be.”

He inhaled sharply and replied, “I don’t doubt it; but it will be worth it.” He dropped his pistol and cradled the base of her skull to pull her closer to his mouth. His free hand pulled at the chord to find the mp3 player and free her ears from the music. Sherlock Holmes kissed her deeply and threw the audio device across the room, hoping beyond his understanding, that this would work and buy time.

Winded, Sherlock pulled away from her, his mind in a daze. She leaned into his torso, off balance, while her eyes rolled back into her skull. “Come on, Shannon…” he urged. When her legs began to give way from under her, he wrapped his arms about her shoulders. “No…no, no, nope…hang on. I’ve got you, Shannon. Come on. Wake up,” he smacked her cheek lightly as they both crumpled to the floor. “Come on, you need to wake up.”
The Demon in Me

She looked around in the dark and found a sliver of golden light emitting from underneath a door. Before she could think about opening the door, she had been moved to it.

“Ah, yes,” she whispered, “I’m in my mind. Makes sense.”

She opened the door quietly to reveal a cozy study with dark walnut walls, floor to ceiling shelves lined with books, records, and instruments; and, and a crackling fire nestled within a slate fireplace. There were great tapestries hanging on the wall opposite the fireplace that covered the door once she entered and she observed an oriental rug underfoot. It reminded her of another place and another time, long ago from a book she had read. As she peered around the room lit only by the fire, she noticed that there wasn’t a single window to be found.

Before the fire, there were two leather-backed chairs reminiscent of those one might find in a Victorian smoking parlor. Between them was a table with a chess game set up. Shannon walked over to the game and ran her fingertips over the pieces. One side was made of sparkling crystal that showed moving, torrential storms within each piece and the other set was made of a dark marble in which raging fires burned from within.

“Beautiful, are they not?” a familiar voice asked.

“Yes,” she replied without looking up from the mystical pieces, “They are.”

The other voice continued, “Both beautiful in their own right; but within each, a power that cannot be conquered.”

Shannon nodded and looked up at her twin. “I knew,” her voice calm, “That I’d find you here.”

Her copy smiled and motioned to the chairs. “Shall we sit?” she offered congenially.

Shannon scrutinized her mirror image and noted their differences: Her eyes were almost entirely black, her hair fell perfectly, and an almost ethereal quality radiated off of her.

She took a seat and rested her tired limbs on the cushioned arm rests, letting the fire warm her extremities. “What shall I call you here?”

The copy thought for a moment and grinned, “Raum.”

Shannon nodded with a sarcastic smile. “Appropriate.”

“A great earl of hell that has thirty legions of demons at his call; stealing treasures out of kings’ houses, razing cities to the ground, and ruining the dignities of men,” she recited. “We learned about it somewhere; hmm…ah yes,” she selected a book from the shelf to show off, “The Lesser Key of Solomon.”

Shannon nodded again as Raum placed the book back on the shelf. “Not that I don’t appreciate this chat, but why are we having it?”

“I thought it necessary that we have a little discussion,” Raum offered with a heavy plop into her chair. “And, I’m bored. We should play chess. I see you picked the crystal side. Rather telling.”

“Am I dying?”

“You’re not any fun, that’s what you are,” Raum chastised. “Do you think you’re dying?”
"I suppose not," Shannon replied as she moved a piece forward on the chessboard. "What kind of chat did you want to have?"

Raum took her turn and shrugged, "I think it’s time that you take a seat and let me run. I want out of my cage."

"And why is that? You think that you can be so much better than me?"

"Of course," she replied, scooping up Shannon’s captured pawn. "I am better than you. At everything."

She smirked, "Sounds familiar."

Raum glared up from her position on the chair, "That’s insulting. That sack of carbon is a hinderance and should be removed."

"Not so convenient for you," Shannon divulged, "I’ll not allow that. And I’ll take your knight, thank you."

Raum looked Shannon over and sighed. "Look, I am better. I am faster. I am everything that you aren’t. Everything you’re supposed to be."

"I know that," Shannon agreed.

"And you have to admit: I tasted like divinity."

Shannon thought back to the fighting and the Veles being thrown into the lobby. "Yes – yes, you did."

Raum took her rook and had set up her turn so as to take Shannon’s bishop the next turn. "Let me take control. You’re tired. You haven’t been taking care of yourself and we both know that I would be much more fun." Shannon looked over the gameboard and took note that Raum had more of her pieces in play than she did. "See? You’re losing."

"That doesn’t make sense."

"Which part?"

"You said, ‘Let me take control’. But it’s not you or me…and it?"

The black-eyed copy smiled and leaned on her elbows, "Is it not?"

"No." Shannon stood up and began to pace the room. "Everything that I am…everything that I will be…it’s been because of you! In spite of you. By no means do I take things easy; we both know the work and danger I put myself through." She paused over the table and moved her last bishop.

"You seem so sure of yourself."

"I have fought for so long to keep the demon within me at bay…but perhaps that was wrong," Shannon pondered. She heard a faint rumbling coming through the wall, but dismissed it. "Exactly."

"No," she countered, "Not like you are thinking. This isn’t one against the other…and this – this is ‘we’."
Raum captured Shannon’s last rook and grinned like the Cheshire Cat at the board. “I tell you what, if I win, I get to take over and you can take the backseat.”

Shannon glanced down, “And if I win?”

“Let’s be honest,” Raum shrugged, “Your being here for so long isn’t boding well for you. That idiot knows that you’re gone.”

“Sherlock…” she whispered, quickly standing up to peer about the room. “That idiot is waiting for me.”

“…Yeah, to die.”

She shook her head and put her ear to the wall, “No. He’s speaking to me. Can’t you hear it?”

Roam glanced over the chair back, “No, not really. And it’s not important.”

“I need to hear him,” she announced aloud. She looked at her empty hands, to the chess game, and back to her hands and found an axe between her palms. She swung the axe at the paneling and landed its blade with a loud THWACK.

“What are you doing?!” Raum bellowed. “I like this room!” Shannon continued to swing at the wooden wall. “You don’t even know what on the other side of that wall!” She continued to hack into the wood. “You will only let me out faster.”

Hesitation crept into her arms. “Isn’t that what you want? That’s what you’ve been goading me for?”

“Yes,” Raum offered, “But this way is idiotic and not all-encompassing.”

A piece of wood gave way and Shannon pulled at it allowing a stream of bright, pastel light to flood the floor.

“Wake up, you idiot. You ae needed,” Sherlock’s voice was low and cracking with apprehension.

Raum hissed in annoyance, “That man always has a knack of ruining perfect moments.”

Shannon closed her eyes and let his voice resonate through nearly every fiber of her mind. “No,” she sighed.

“No?”

“I was right, you see,” Shannon began. “It’s not you or me. We are the same creature: opposites sides to a coin and neither of us can exist fully without the other.” She opened her eyes and moved back to the game.

“Oh, really,” Raum interjected, exasperated. “Think you have this all figured out? You have been trying to do so for so many years now. What makes you think that in this moment that you’ve got the answers?”

Shannon moved her queen and waited for her opponent to make their move. “Because clarity is a wonderous thing.” Raum moved her queen to capture Shannon’s last bishop, but Shannon’s knight captured Raum’s queen.

Raum hissed again, “Damn it!”
“Worried?”

“No, I would have rather held onto my queen.”

Shannon eyed her twin with a critical gaze. Her voice, calm and clear, filled the room. “It’s we. You keep trying to change the subject.”

Raum shook her head and ran a hand through her hair. “How are you winning?”

Shannon cornered the marble king with her queen, knight, and rook. “You were doomed to lose this game from the start, I suppose.”

“How do you figure? Just because you picked the good guy, crystal pieces…”

“No,” Shannon corrected. “Even you must realize that the storm can kill the fire. I suppose, telling enough, I am the storm. I am everything that they fear and they can see it. And yet they still want to have me in their lives. I mean…” she twirled about before lowering herself back into the chair, “…I could hide here in the dark, but that fire would burn hotter and brighter until everything burned down.”

She sat and outstretched her hand toward Raum. “It’s time.”

“You will never be rid of me,” she sneered as she matched her hand up to Shannon’s; a mirror’s reflection.


In an instant, Raum was gone and Shannon felt as if she had ice pass through her body. She had felt her eyes change somehow, and she knew that she looked like Raum. She blinked furiously and rubbed her eyes to disperse the darkness until suddenly, the shade lifted itself and she could see again.

“I have work to do.”

“Are you with me, Shannon?”

“I’m here,” she sputtered into consciousness. “I…heard…you.”

His chin rested upon the crown of her head, “You need a hospital. You’ve sustained multiple injuries and your rate of blood loss has increased. Your face is starting to swell, your hands are a mess, and it looks like you have multiple lacerations to your torso. You’ve been bleeding through your shirt.”

“I’m having a problem focusing my eyes, too,” she stated. “Not that this helps the situation any; just thought you should know.”

“Can you stand?”

She shrugged, “I’ll need help, but we can try.”

The pair slowly heaved themselves upward, Sherlock using his person to brace her to stand. He wrapped one of her arms behind his neck and they began to walk toward the exit.
“Shannon!” a distant voice shouted.

They continued walking when she asked, “Is that John?”

“More than likely,” Sherlock replied. “He’s been texting and calling furiously over the past hour.”

She chuckled darkly, “He’s going to be mad that he’s late to the party again.”

“Shannon!” Luka ran straight for Shannon, grabbing her other arm and draping it across his shoulders to help her walk. “Shannon, you’re hurt.”

“Yep,” she stated, “I am.”

John ran to his friends and stopped them. “Nope, no; you need to wait. You can’t be moved like this.”

Shannon attempted to lift an eyebrow up in query, but found that her face was swelling and she wasn’t capable of emoting as well as she would have liked. “I promise that I feel better than I look,” she offered. “How bad can it be?”

“You can’t be serious,” John’s voice giving away his sense of perplexity. “Shannon…your – your injuries are…”

“She listened to the playlist,” Sherlock stated. “She may not feel anything.”

The doctor ran a hand down his face in an attempt to hide his disapproval. “If that’s the case, then you would have no idea if anything’s fractured or not. *And* I’m going to say that you look like shit.”

“You do,” Luka agreed.

Shannon peered down at him feigning betrayal, “Not you, too!” She pulled her arms down from her assistants necks and leaned against one of the columns.

“I called for an ambulance before I got here,” Sherlock informed with a quick glance to his watch. “They should be here in fifteen minutes.”

“Finally, a time where he uses common sense,” John teased.

“I use common sense routinely, John; you just don’t pay attention.”

Luka whispered, “Your descriptions of them are one hundred percent.”

“I know, right?” she grinned. “What about the voices?”

“Yeah,” his smile matched hers, “That’s good, too.”

“How are you feeling?” John’s voice betrayed the worry he was trying to hide from his face.

“I need a holiday.”

“You just had one. I hear Serbia’s nice this time of year,” John cracked darkly.

“Ooh,” she whistled, “Doctor John Watson’s got jokes. He’ll be here all week. I was thinking somewhere near the ocean would be nice. And I’d really like to turn in my retirement paperwork again.”
Shannon heard something faint behind her and cocked her head to listen. When she noted that Sherlock had done something similar, she did her best to spin around quickly and gazed upon a very battered Irina with a gun aimed at them. Instinctively, she ushered Luka behind her and shot out her left arm protectively in front of the detective. “John,” she hissed, “Grab Luka.”
“I wouldn’t,” Irina spat, her voice equally hoarse. “I could take them out with one bullet.”

Shannon racked her brain and remembered a gun flung close to Irina in the fight; but it should be missing quite a few bullets. “You can have me,” she offered, “Let them leave.”

“No,” Sherlock quipped. “You will need help.”

“What I need,” she rasped, “is someone to deal with her if I fail.” Shannon’s gaze had not wavered from Irina, but she could feel his eyes boring into her. “I need you to be here to do what needs doing.”

“No,” he repeated. “I told you: I would be there with you in the future.”

Her whispered words stung at him. “I need you to listen, Sherlock Holmes. She has, at most, three bullets in that gun. I need you to listen to what I’m saying: Let me go.”

“You have a gun at your back,” he indicated by pressing his hand against it so that she could feel it on her skin.

“Just…trust…me…and don’t interfere. She will hunt you all down until she dies if I don’t play by her rules. I already tried to kill her once today; she’s not going to be in a forgiving mood.”

“What are you two whispering about?” John asked harshly.

“Yes,” Irina chimed in, “You want to say it for the class?”

Shannon stood tall and put her hands up, “It’s just you and me, Irina. Let’s finish this…your way. Just let them live.”

If ever there was evil in a smile, John thought, this woman exemplified the description. “Luka, stay behind Shannon and back up, slowly, to my voice.”

“But…she…”

“Listen, you know that she trusts us, right? I need you to trust me right now,” John’s sense of duty was exposed by the timbre of his voice; and, both Sherlock and Shannon could hear it.

“Do it,” Shannon tone curt. “Back up, Luka, nice and slow.”

He did as he was told and dragged his toes backward in a graceless step, all as vigilantly as he could muster.

“My way? Fine. Tie them up,” Irina acquiesced. “There’s a bag over there with restraints. Bind them. Only you and me.” She emptied her gun and broke it down into pieces, throwing each one around the room.

Shannon reached behind her back and pulled the firearm out from its hiding place, taking it apart. “You can’t be serious,” the detective’s tone admonishing her actions.

“Very,” Shannon replied.

Sherlock leaned down to whisper in her ear, “You are going to give up your one chance for what
purpose? You’re an idiot.”

“Such things you say to me.” She looked over her shoulder to John and said, “If the worst is to happen, I trust you to take care of my son.”

John’s head barely moved, but he gave a nod nonetheless.

She walked over to Luka and bent down gracelessly, falling onto her knees. “I need you to make me a promise, Luka.”

John had his hands on the young boy’s shoulders and patted him gently. “I don’t…You can’t do this…it’s – its’ stupid!”

“I know,” she offered. “I wouldn’t be doing this if it wasn’t important. I’m not going to lie to you; we made that deal and promise a long time ago. But…I need you to promise me that while I’m gone, you will listen to Doctor Watson.”

“I promise,” Luka choked on the lump in his throat.

“That’s my boy.”

“She’s going to kill you…she’s not like you. She doesn’t care about anything…”

“She might…but I need you to be safe. I will try my hardest. It might be enough. It might not. But you promised me…you will listen.”

“Yes, I will.”

“Good, now, take those ropes and tie up John. It’s going to be okay. Off you go.”

Shannon struggled to stand, prompting Sherlock to bend down and help her back up. “If I survive this, we’re having a talk when we get home. If I don’t, know that I expect you to take care of them.”

His brows knit together to reveal the crease above his nose. “This is hardly the time to have one of your faux-jovial discussion; I’m sure whatever internal cocktail is swimming through your veins has made you somewhat delirious. You realize that playing by her rules will increase your chances of testing your mortality?”

“Eh,” she replied. “Nice try, though. But…I did hear you, just so you know. I heard what you said. I’ll do my best to make good on that.” His movements stilled when she placed her hand over his heart, tapping the place lightly. “Sherlock,” her voice caught in her throat. “I’m tired. Your brother’s right: my body is wearing out. I can’t keep doing this.”

“You don’t have to, not like this,” he glared at Irina. “Not anymore.”

“You offering me retirement?” she chuckled, wiping a stray tear from her cheek.

Concern flooded his body, “If you wanted to, yes. I could get Mycroft to…”

“Sherlock.”

“No. I refuse to allow you to do this. It’s absolutely imbecilic: if one considered the injuries you’ve already sustained, there’s no feasible way you can win this fight on her terms.”

“Since when have you allowed me to do anything? Honestly. I might win; I got the demon at bay,” she informed. Luka interrupted and brought over some zip-ties and cord. Shannon cast a wary eye
over the boy.
“Luka, you remember everything that I taught you?”

“Yes.”

She secured a zip-tie around his wrists and patted him on the head, “For what it’s worth, I’m glad that I got to be your mother for a time. Now. Go on. Next to John, please.” Luka left to do as told and sat next to the doctor.
“Now, your turn,” she held out an open palm to the detective. “Give me your hands.”

“If I refuse?”


His eyes cleared; and begrudged, did as instructed. Intent eyes monitored her work as she secured the detective’s hands. “Shannon, tell me the plan so I can assist.”

“No. You won’t like it.” She hesitated for a moment and said, “Sherlock, I have to say something.”

“No you don’t. I know.”

“I know that but…I – I need to.”

“Shannon…”

“Whatever this is,” she wrapped her hands around his, “Whatever anyone might call it; hell, whatever we might call it…I think…somewhere in what should be my heart…” Her eyes reddened as tears fell free from her eyes. “I think in my own and insane way, I love you. Somehow.”

His mind stalled. “W-w-why?”

“I don’t know. But I suppose…before I potentially die for sure this time; that you know. And it’s something that only you should know. John’s tending to Luka and can’t hear.” She sniffed quietly and cleared her throat.

“You hold me to such a high place and I don’t think I can ever achieve the greatness that you think I exemplify.”

“I can’t – I can’t keep flying into the candle on the library window. It’s singed my wings, they’ve been burned away and…I still managed to crawl back to it. And – and every time I get closer to it, I burn, risking death…because…for that moment, the light is the most beautiful and comforting thing in all of my life and it is forever unobtainable.”

“If this be my end, then, I think, one last burn should do it.”

His eyes traveled to John and back to her, “Shannon…I…”

“Stop,” she croaked. “If you say it…if…if you do that to me right now…I’ll fall apart. You can’t do this to me…”

His head bowed to her ear, “Then I must humbly demand something of you.” Her head moved up and down subtly. “I believe in Shannon Byrns. Don’t leave me.” He gently pressed his lips to her cheek and righted himself.

Sherlock walked away to sit with John and the boy while fighting the lump in his throat; the assassin stared at the floor wiping her face.

“What did you say to her?” John’s voice critical as he sat down. Luka looked up at the detective,
his eyes round and welling with tears.

Sherlock dropped his voice low, “I told her not to die.”

“You’re a real comfort, Sherlock,” John chided. “The state that she’s in and she’s going to fight again? And – and we’re just going to let her do this?”

“Have we ever,” he whispered, “been able to stop her from doing anything? In the entire span of time that we’ve known her?”

He frowned, “No.”

Luka interrupted, “…she’s going to be alright, Doctor Watson? She’s – she’s going to beat Irina, right?”

John stared at Sherlock, noting Shannon was ripping her plaid coverup into strips and wrapping her hands just as a boxer would do. He remained silent.

Luka turned toward the taller, more stoic man. “Mr. Holmes?”

Sherlock stared on at his American accomplice doing her best to wrap and cover any wounds she had sustained during her first round with the Veles. “If we act quickly, she may have a chance. When I give the signal, you’ll free Doctor Watson and I will run to help Shannon.”

Irina had shed her jacket and paced back and forth on the other side of the lobby. “Ana, your death will bring me great pleasure. And after I kill you, I will hunt each one of them down and kill them.”

Shannon snorted mid-walk to her opponent. “That’s ambitious. He couldn’t kill himself and stay dead,” she nodded her head in Sherlock’s direction. “And the other one is a soldier. You do the math.”

Irina jabbed at Shannon’s face, but her fists missed their target. Shannon did her best to use agility, but she knew her joints and muscles were protesting even though she couldn’t feel it.

“You just don’t stay down,” Irina seethed. “Had you just stayed on your back, been the whore that you are…we wouldn’t been in this predicament.”

“Not a whore,” Shannon revealed, “Believe it or not. Definitely good at what I do; can’t say the same for you.”

“Your man upstairs might disagree with you,” she chided.

Momentarily caught off guard, Shannon took a blow to her side that elicited a series of sputtering coughs and groans. “You will find,” she breathed, “I am less agreeable than he was.”

“He should have killed me when he had the chance,” she shrugged. Shannon took the opportunity to smash her foot into Irina’s nose and felt a satisfying crack through her shoe. “BITCH!” Irina snarled. “You’ve broken my nose!”

“My name,” she panted, “Is Shannon.” She stumbled backward and heaved a sigh. “And it’s an improvement. Now you’re just ugly.”

Irina reached behind her back and produced a metal rod. Shannon searched around and grabbed the closest weapon to her: a piece of pipe that one of the Veles used. When Irina depressed the switch
on the side of her weapon, a compartment opened and a coil of leather fell to the floor.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Shannon groaned as Irina motioned her arm to make the leather crack in the air. “That thing is a fucking whip? That’s just unnecessary.”

Irina pivoted about and unleashed the whip in Shannon’s direction. The knotted leather made contact with her shoulder and ripped open a wound that had just begun to clot. “I have plenty of surprises.”

“Mom!” Luka shouted.

“Shit,” she hissed, her hand reaching for her neck after the whip lashed at her skin. She peered down at her palm and saw the ruby evidence of Irina’s work on her skin. “I hate you.” Come on, Shannon. If you’re going to survive, tune them out.

“Good,” Irina grinned, teeth gleaming in the low light. Shannon rushed at Irina, throwing her pipe at her head to give her time to close the distance. Irina used the butt of her whip and cracked is against Shannon’s skull. “Just die.” Shannon fell to the ground with a thud.

“Come on,” she growled at herself, rolling over with a swing of her leg having missed her opportunity to trip the Serb. “Get up.” She attempted to push herself up, but Irina launched a kick to Shannon’s ribs.

“Your body will give out before your will,” Irina observed. “You look like dog shit.”

Pain began to push at the far reaches of her consciousness. Whatever adrenaline and endorphins she had in her bloodstream were beginning to wear off. She felt her mouth grow slick and the unpleasant taste of metal and salt washed over her tongue. “I’m sure. You aren’t anything to look at on a good day, though.”

Irina’s whip lashed out at Shannon’s arm and found her intended target, but Shannon wrapped the braided leather around her forearm and pulled Irina closer.

Irina reached toward her ankle and grabbed a piece of loose rebar. She slid across the floor and propelled her arm forward.

Sherlock watched the fight happen as if life were in slow motion. The pair of them sparred regularly, she even got them to fight illegally in an underground ring a few times. He could see every move she executed was calculated for the highest probability of inflicting damage. She wasn’t doing much for her defense. *She always fights with defense. It’s why she was so good at grappling: she made opponents do what she wants…this is sloppy. If I could just free my hands enough…but, she tied these knots. She knew that I would try to free myself. John! Ah yes, the good doctor is trying to fray the ropes on a piece of glass. That will take far too long. Oh no. She’s miscalculated. If I twist my hands counter to each other and apply pressure to this knot…*

Shannon bellowed like a beast: explosions of fire and electricity blasted off through her body. When her eyes drifted downward, she could see that the rebar had gone through her left quadricep and punctured through to the other side. Irina beamed at her handiwork. Now what, genius? *How are you going to get to her? Get to her...oh, yes...oh yes!*

Byrns pushed her injured leg downward to follow the angle of the rebar to Irina’s position on the floor. Her teeth clenched together, a guttural growl escaped her throat as rebar traveled through her leg; all the while she pushed through the pain. Irina’s eyes showed a measure of disbelief and amazement.

When her knee hit the floor, Shannon’s hand grabbed Irina’s throat and began to increase pressure

Another surge of strength flooded through the American’s body as she pulled the Serbian to the floor and pinned her by her throat. Sirens heralded medical’s arrival in the distance. Relief crashed into her mind, the never ending surf against the shoreline. “I do; but I have restraint. I am better. And I am not you.”

“Pity,” she smirked.

“No!” Luka yelled. He had seen the movement before Byrns had. There was a glimmer of light, the whisp of air moving to her side; finally a pressure under her ribs.
Her hand released its grip on Irina’s throat; her head bowed down. *Oh… I’ve been stabbed. What’s under the ribcage on the left? Think. Spleen, stomach, both large and small intestine, lungs…Christ…think. Does it hurt to breathe? I don’t know. Cough. Nope, no more blood than what I’d expect…she didn’t puncture my lung, did she? Why is it always my left side? Worst case scenario? Death. Best case? She miraculously missed everything and I have a nifty scar. Oh fuck, there’s the pain. All of it. Oh Christ. Wait…come on, self, make the pain go away…*

“Sherlock?” her voice, weak, was a whisper in the sizable lobby. She collapsed backward onto herself as her friend had sprinted across the floor, headbutting Irina as she struggled to stand. He moved to Shannon’s side as he had undone the final knot that bound his wrists.

Luka snapped his arms against his torso sharply forcing his restraints to break and got to work freeing John. “How did you…” amazement beaming from John’s voice.

“Shannon,” Luka huffed, unknotting John’s bonds feverishly. “It’s easy to break zip-ties. She taught me. Come on, she’s going to need our help!” The pair ran swiftly towards the fresh carnage on the floor.

*The floor’s cold. I’m cold. I think I’m cold. I’m exhausted.* Shannon’s battered and bloodied body lie against the floor, her leg protruding at an odd angle with rebar speared through. *It’s done. It’s okay. Just…relax…I’m – I’m so tired…*

John ensured that Irina was unconscious before focusing his attention on Rosie’s faux-godmother. He slid to a halt at her side and applied pressure to her abdominal wound. “Shannon, tell me what’s going on.”

“Pain,” she heaved through gritted teeth back to reality. “All of it. Shit.” Tears escaped the corners of her eyes to trickle down her temples, blood spurting from her mouth.

“Where? Tell me what hurts; I’m trying to prioritize your injuries.”

Luka knelt beside Shannon and grabbed her bloody, right hand and wrapped his fingers around hers. “Shannon?” his voice quaked and tears welled in his eyes.

“It’s…okay…Luka.”

“Sherlock, pressure around the knife. Come on, that woman’s not going anywhere,” John commanded. The detective did as instructed and placed his hands around the obstruction at her side. “Shannon, I need you to talk to me,” his voice furious while he meticulously checked every injury he could see.

“It’s getting cold. I’m tired.”

“The ambulance is late,” Sherlock informed John with worry in his eye.

John shed his jumper and covered Shannon’s torso. “Luka, I need you to go and guide the ambulance here. They may not know where to go. Run and be careful.”

“But…she needs me!”
“I know,” John’s eyes firm, “But when they get here, we are going to need to move her quickly. The faster they can do their job, the faster she can get help. Now, go.”

Luka looked down at Shannon, hesitant to leave her. She did her best to smile and nodded, “Go on... Be my hero.” Luka bobbed his head and without any more hesitation took off for the entrance.

“John…” her hoarse voice strained.

“Shut up,” he growled. “Just shut up.”

Sherlock took his cue and began probing for answers, “Does your abdomen hurt?”

“You’re kidding…right…” she panted. “Everything hurts. I feel as...if I was hit...by a bus.”

John snapped, “Well, considering the number of injuries you have, no wonder, you god damned lunatic!”

“You …going to…yell…me...when...I may...be dying?” she labored.

“Think,” Sherlock instructed as a diversion. “What pain do you have that’s not been caused by the injuries you sustained before I got here? You're beginning to show signs of shock.”

“And some help you are,” John shouted at the detective. “You’re emotionless, again! I was in charge of the kid! What were you doing? Spectating?”

“I assure you,” Sherlock corrected, “I was endeavoring to come up with a plan that would have ensured everyone’s safety; but, because she’s a prat, she tied the knots in a manner that made them nearly immoveable!”

“Stop,” she coughed. “Stop…both…of you.”

Sherlock’s eyes fell downward, sheepish, and focused on her knife wound while John began to palpate her abdomen. She lurched forward and gasped. “That’d be it then,” John whispered. “Shannon? Slow down your breathing.”

“Son of a bitch,” she cried. “Fucking Christ.”

“What do you think, Doctor Watson?”

“She may have perforated her intestine and collapsed a lung; we need to get her to a hospital, now.”

She reached to her side to place a hand on top of the detective’s, wrapping her fingers around his. “You’ll protect them.”

“I won’t need to; you will fight and pull through, as always.”

“Stop,” she stammered. “Say it.”

His eyes didn’t waver from hers as he leaned over her body. “Shannon, you need to continue fighting…”

“Say…it…” her voice cracking under strain.

His face was inches away from hers. “I’ll protect them.”
Now’s your chance, Shannon. Better make it count. Shannon mustered any strength she could and forced her body upward to find her intended target. Their lips met and she returned his previous kiss in kind. Her fingers threaded through his hair and his hand had moved to cradle her neck.

John’s eyes traveled back and forth between the spy and the detective, the corner of his mouth turning upward. “Ahem.”

“This way,” a boy’s voice directed in the distance. “Hurry, she’s hurt… bad!”

“Moment’s over,” she relaxed and let him guide her head back to the ground.

“Why?” he breathed.

“Because.”

“Shannon, you need to conserve energy,” John commanded. “Your breathing is getting shallower. How are you feeling?”

“Content.”

Anxious eyes looked her over, “I’m serious, Shannon.”

“The last burn from the candle,” she reminded the detective.

Sounds of long strides echoed in the lobby. An older lady from the ambulance crew looked about at the carnage, “Oh my God… are they dead?”

“This woman is priority one,” the doctor’s voice clear. “She needs fluids, her pulse is thready, body temperature is dropping; stab wound on her left side: potential gastrointestinal perforation and collapsed right lung, left leg has rebar through…”

“Shannon?” Luka’s voice a whimper.

John reached down and placed his hands around the boy’s shoulders, “Not now; stay with me.”

“But… no!”

“Shh. It’s okay,” he knelt down and wrapped Luka in a hug. “They’re going to take care of her.” There was a muffle of voices and Sherlock heard John chime in, “…yes, Doctor Riggs. I don’t care if he’s on the other side of town; you’ll get her to the hospital and get him there. He’s her surgeon” The detective fished his blood covered hand into his pocket producing his mobile and began to walk off with the device against his ear. Luka broke free of John and clasped his arms around Sherlock’s waist. Holmes peered down at the foreign contact, but focused on the dial tone, his free hand placed gingerly on Luka’s back.

“Yes?”

“The last of the Veles problem is lying unconscious at my location. Send your cleaning crew.”

“It is done?”

“It is.”

“And the cost?”
“Not a single Veles life.”

“Good. Then all is well.”

He clenched his teeth, “She’s dying.”

“…”

“Nothing? You have nothing to say?”

“If you are trying to throw blame, Sherlock, you may stop. She was aware of the dangers she was to face and what would happen if loose ends were allowed to continue to fray.”

He looked down at a reddened, tear-stained face that peered up at him, lost. “Go to John, now.” With a solemn nod, Luka did as instructed and walked beside John as Shannon was wheeled out of the lobby on a gurney.

“The boy gets citizenship.”

“Oh? I’m supposed to keep enabling the lot of you and just cave to this demand?”

He turned his back to the exiting crowd and growled, “Mycroft, I am not playing games!”

“I disagree. That’s all that you have ever done. You are a master manipulator and will do anything to get your way. This includes manipulating her feelings for you to your advantage.”

“Does it sound like I’m playing games right now?”

“Who am I to judge?”

“She…is…dying!” he threw his fist into the wall.

“How many times have you told me that she was on death’s door, hmm?”

Sherlock shook out the pain in his hand as he finally made his way to the exit. “Possible perforated intestine, rebar punctured through her left quadricep, potential collapsed lung, severe blood loss… and she listened to it.”

“…Well, that is an interesting development. Did she listen to it in its entirety?”

“Citizenship, Mycroft. And…no; I do not believe so.”

“You don’t believe so? Fine. Done. Anything else, or am I permitted to get back to my day?”

“You should hope that she survives.”

“I am curious, Sherlock: judging by the lack of noise around you I could surmise that you aren’t near her. For as much as you claim that you are partial to her, I would have expected you to be keeping more of a watchful eye over her. I did mention that she would need put down if she listened to the playlist in its entirety.”

His movement halted outside the abandoned building. “I stopped her. I am watching over her. Your point?”

“The emotional attachment that you both have for each other is preventing you from elevating yourselves, but I suppose that can no longer be helped.”
“Why you wouldn’t want to keep one of your strongest assets alive is unfathomable to me. I would think that you would want her to survive, given that she is able to keep me under control better than you have ever been able. If she dies, you will find me a less agreeable You should ensure that a team is waiting at the hospital.”

“Sherlock,” John called from the ambulance, “You need to go with her. Now. She’s crashing.”

Mycroft could hear the background and his voice broke, “I will dispatch her doctors and surgeons to be there on her arrival. And, Sherlock... give her my best, will you?”
Greg sat beside Shannon’s hospital bed with his head in his hands. *Too much. She’s here far too much. And now…look at her.*

Her eyes fluttered open and she peered around the room disoriented. She tried to pull at her respirator, but Lestrade rested his hands on top of hers. “Hush, hush, Shannon; it’s okay. You’re alright. You’ve got a breathing tube in. You need to calm down and try not to talk. It’s okay.”

She blinked and did her best to regulate her heart rate as he calmed her. “I’ll get a nurse to see if we can take out your tube, hold on. I’ll be back.” He patted her bed and went off.

The door opened and a shadowy figure slipped in. Her eyes tracked the movement across the room and she sighed as best she could in relief. *Sherlock.*

“I…,” he sat at her bedside, a lump in his throat. Her bandaged had reached out for him and he placed it between his palms. “Irina is in custody; as are her men. Home office has dispatched a team to Serbia.” She blinked in acknowledgement. “I saw to it that Darweshi will be buried at home; he will be flown back to Tanzania after the autopsy. I surmised, based on the way that you spoke of him, that this would be suitable.”

Her eyes closed for a moment, as if saying thank you, and tears welled ready to cascade down her face.

He cleared his throat and looked about before focusing on her again. “Are you in pain?”

She closed her eyes in a single blink.

“Do – do you want me to adjust your morphine?”

Two blinks.

“I don’t want you in pain,” he shook his head. “I’ve – I’ve never relished the idea of you in pain. All those times when I couldn’t be of help to you…” he paused, his voice becoming thinner, “If I have a heart, it was breaking then…and it’s breaking now. It’s nearly all I can bear.”

Hot tears streamed down her face. She was doing her best to regulate her body against the breathing tube.

He laughed reflexively, “I suppose this is the one time where you have to sit there and listen to me without my having to worry about you arguing with me.”

Single blink and a flex of her fingers around his thumb.

“I’m sorry that I cannot stay for too long…I’ve – I’ve told Lestrade to keep an eye on you.”

Two blinks and a motion to his watch.

“You’ve not been here long. Just over a day. Your – your lung re-collapsed. Doctor Riggs forbade us from being here…said that we were detrimental to your recovery.”

Two blinks.

“I was able to sneak Luka in a few hours ago. The child is fairly intelligent and equally tenacious.
He refused to eat unless he was able to see you. It is easy to tell that you’ve rubbed off on him.”

Another blink.

His face softened. “Because,” he paused. “It’s something that you need to know. Because it is **important** that you know.” He coughed to shake off his nerves. “I want you to know something.”

Blink. “What you said at the hotel…what I’m…failing in endeavoring to say…is that – that I know. What this is, what we are…it is…something I need. It’s helped to mold me into what I am…and I don’t know if I could cope with your loss.”

She sniffled loudly while hot tears continued to trickle down her face. “And while I may not know love in society’s sense of the word, I would think, Shannon Byrns, that what I feel for you is as close to love as I may be capable doing.”

Lestrade returned with a nurse in tow. “What in God’s name…”

Shannon, still holding on to the detective’s hand, made an effort to wipe her tears and pointed to her throat.

Sherlock peered over his shoulder for her cue, “She’s telling you she’s in pain and wants the tube out.”

The nurse checked her vitals and the time. “It’s about time for that to come out now that you’re awake. I’m afraid this is not going to be pleasant.”

Another nurse came in to assist, and they removed her breathing tube, eliciting a series of gags and ultimately coughing. Her bandaged hand gripped tightly around the detective’s until her gasps for air returned to a more steady breathing pattern. Nurses adjusted the pillow behind her head and upped the morphine.

“Greg” her voice rasped, “Can you get me some water and ice?”

“Yeah, alright. Sherlock…be easy on her, yeah?” he patted the detective’s shoulder and left the room with the nurses.

Once they were alone and the door had shut again, she asked, “Can you stay?”

“No. I have work: gaining information. But, should I finish quickly I would return after visiting hours if you would like.”

Her head bobbed gingerly, “I would.”

“The Inspector has agreed to have someone here round the clock in the event he is not here.”

He turned to leave and Shannon squeezed his hand. “Don’t kill her. And don’t kill him.”

His eyes narrowed, cold. “Death would be, by mercy, far too kind for her.”

“Now, rest. I’ll need you in peak form to assist on cases.” He leaned over the gurney and kissed her forehead. As quickly as he’d arrived the detective had left the hospital.

Mycroft and Sherlock stood silently behind the pane of glass of a two-way mirror. They watched as Irina was cuffed to a gurney and a medical team tended to her wounds.

Jeremiah sat patiently at her side in the metal chair while Irina was brought back to consciousness.
He withdrew his mobile phone from his breast pocket and read the text from his boss.

Mycroft Holmes:

You may begin.

“Miss Yenko, my name is Jeremiah Hubbs. I am your contact here while you are receiving care at this institution. I am aware that you are fluent in Serbian, and semi-fluent in Russian and English. For your convenience, I am fluent in all three languages and I am willing to speak in the language you are most comfortable.”

She squinted and looked around the brightly lit room. “Where am I?”

“You have been detained and put into a holding facility until terms can be met for your release.”

“My release?” she whispered in Serbian.

“Yes,” Jeremiah replied in her native tongue. “There is potential for you to be released to Serbian authorities rather than face charges here in Britain.”

She nodded, but her face still showed discomfort from the lights. “I must apologize,” he offered plainly. “The lights are rather bright here for the camera. It ensures that the particular footage from that camera isn’t tampered with. A live feed is sent to someone in your government so that they are aware of the treatment you receive here.”

“Why are you being kind to me? You have to know what I have done to one of your people.”

Jeremiah shrugged. “I am not privy to that information. All I know is that I am assigned to you to ensure that your stay is more comfortable and that you get the proper care. I know you are still adjusting, but is there anything that you need at this time?”

“For these restraints to disappear,” she hissed.

“I am afraid that I can’t do that, ma’am. It’s a matter of security. If that will be all, my relief will be in shortly.”

“Does he speak Serbian as well? English is such an ugly language.”

“Yes,” he pondered thoughtfully. “He does. Until tomorrow, Miss Yenko.”

Mycroft inhaled deeply through his nose, eyes intent on the restrained prisoner. “Little brother,” his voice calm. Sherlock turned his head in his sibling’s direction briefly before looking back at Yenko through the mirror.

“It’s your turn.”

The consulting detective’s brow popped up, skeptical of his brother’s motives. He did, however, not waste time making his way to the holding cell that Irina Yenko was held in.

A series of three soft knocks heralded Jeremiah’s relief. The door opened slowly to reveal a tall, slender man with waves of dark hair; piercing blue eyes in a tailored suit jacket.

“Thank you, Jeremiah; that will be all,” a baritone voice reverberated from behind the door.
“Sir,” Hubbs smirked out of Irina’s line of view and moved past the new interviewer.

Irina’s slanted eyes strained to identify the blurry figure, but her eyes watered and refused to focus. “My eyes,” she cursed.

“Yes,” the baritone voice boomed in the confined space. His Serbian was muddy and she couldn’t place where he was from. “There’s a little something in your drip, I would think. It would be in your best interest if you kept your eyes closed. There will be, how would you say...discomfort for some time.”

“Why?” she growled.

“An unfortunate side effect from the pain-management cocktail you have been given; including but not limited to some of the sodium thiopental. It’s also known as sodium pentothal. From your file, I know that you are aware of what that chemical concoction is.”

She frowned and nodded. “You do know that it’s results are not always accurate. I could just want to talk and talk…”

“I already know what I’m looking for,” he assured her, leaning back in his chair. “You see, if I adjust the tone of my voice while asking you my questions, you are more apt to tell me what I need to hear versus what you think I want to hear. Truth Serum suppresses the areas of your mind that questions what might be wrong with a question before answering it.”

“Tell me who sent you to London after Shannon Byrns.”

“Who? Oh, you mean Ana. No one sent me, but they did give me information on her whereabouts. It wasn’t hard to figure out; I mean, she wasn’t hiding herself very well and she’s all over that famous detective.”

“Oh, is she?”

The concoction was working some despite her best effort to restrain herself from blabbing. “Of course,” Irina scoffed. “Anyone that pays half attention would know that she wasn’t truly invested in Kasun; and after she tried to convince me that the boy was her child; well. He’s mine, you see. And he has got his intelligence from me…”

Sherlock sat stoically and guided her back to the topic at hand. “Now, the person that you had contact with regarding her whereabouts: how did that contact occur?”

“It was a message,” she pondered, “sent to one of our phones. The information sent as a precursor of good faith was sound. So we allowed another message to come through and it gave me information about Ana. It wasn’t much to go on; for living out in the open she is still fairly secretive. I sent two men ahead as scouts, you see; and they…”

“Yes, yes. I can surmise the rest. There was no physical interaction between you and the person or persons that sent you those messages?”

She pondered for a few moments before sighing. “No, none. I would like to meet her, though. She seems powerful and insane. Just like me. I wonder if she had a dog growing up like I did…”

“She? Why do you say that the writer is a she?”

“Because of the way she writes, and how she has indicated we could be together; it’s all in the messages and in her voice. So calm and comforting. Like a song. I like songs…”
Sherlock puzzled, “Oh, I see. You didn’t physically see her, but you had to have had that communication…that voice on the end of the line to know it was real…and it was a woman’s voice. What did she sound like?”

“Like you. I mean, how you speak…”

“In Serbian?”

Her grin malicious, “I know you are the detective that she protects. I can tell by your voice, you know. And your Serbian isn’t as clean as you may think. At least her dialect was a bit more believable.”

“Hm,” he chuckled low in his chest. “Then let’s drop the charade, shall we?”

“Yes, I suppose you should. Charades…delicate little things. This charade, though, has been my favorite. That voice…so wonderful.”

He squinted and attempted to reroute the conversation. “I will begin by saying that, regardless of my person being under Shannon’s protection, she is also under mine.”

“I bet she was under you,” Irina sneered.

“Pa – pardon?” he gave a quick, uncharacteristic stammer.

Irina leaned her head back into her pillow, content with his discomfort. “Don’t act so surprised, Mr. Detective: it’s obvious. The voice on the end of the line said that there was a high probability that she would have feelings for you. But, oh, watching the two of you for the past few days and then seeing the show at that hotel. Watching how she dances around trying to hide her feelings; and I mean her actual feelings… It’s enough to make anyone sick.”

Sherlock waved off her comment in nonchalance. “What motivates you to hate her so much?”

“She is a cockroach in the world of power: she constantly moves about in the shadows to usurp the control the rest of us have. For what? Because it makes her feel better? That…that there is some greater purpose? She is a pest that is upsetting the balance of how this world works. You of all people, Mr. Detective, should understand that there must always be balance.”

“Me of all people,” he scoffed.

“Yes!” she shot forward in bed to only come to a sudden halt from her restraints. “For every one of us that you put away, two more come forward. We must always remain or you would be out of a job and have died from an overdose by now. Oh yes, Mr. Holmes, I know about you. I know you have vices…strengths…weaknesses…like intelligence.”

“Are you babbling on to say my intelligence is my weakness? Truly, you have missed the mark.”

“No, no, no, Mr. Holmes: your weakness is surrounding yourself with other forms of intelligence. And then you become comfortable…and weak. They all make you weak.”

“They? You seem to believe that their feelings for me have compromised them in some way and you believe to that end that has ultimately been her downfall.”

“Of course,” a smile with a contented sigh escaped her lips. “She died, did she not? You wouldn’t be having a conversation with me if she had survived. She would not have let you. No one could have survived wounds such as that and been left alive for very long. And all that blood…She said
that Ana would bleed for you. Over and over again…always willing to bleed. Always ready to die. For you. And why is that? Little stories that voice whispered into my ear about you. Stories and stories, whispers and whispers; and always with payments of blood and bone.”

He stood up slowly as his eyes absorbed as much information from her as possible. Anemic, primarily a vegetarian diet, doesn’t like the sun, sullen; ah. There that particular malformation under her mandible….

“This chat was most informative, Irina. Also, good luck with the tumor; though judging by its size when compared to a photograph that was taken two weeks ago, I would have to conclude that you may not have very long. We’ll be in touch.”

“What?”

Sherlock left with roaring screeches echoing behind him, the now closed door reducing her cries to nothing more than a whisper.

Mycroft waited for him in the hallway. “A mysterious voice at the end of the line; rather cliché, don’t you think? Anyway, Sherlock, you do know that everything that she’s told you isn’t necessarily helpful. That’s the trouble with those concoctions…you tend to get an abundance of information rather than selective information.”

“I was able to get the information that I require. I have work to do; the voice on the other end of the phone will still be after Shannon should they find out that she’s alive.”

“You will be happy to know that the hospital called while you were talking to Yenko. She is already causing mayhem at the hospital and is trying to leave early.” Sherlock grinned as he slid his arms through the sleeves of his coat.

“They had to medicate her because she commented on the care that she received as sub-par. I advise that you have a discussion with her about staying in the hospital or she will be forcibly relocated due to safety precautions.”

“She’s not going to listen to me,” Sherlock chuffed. “She’s awake and doesn’t want to be in your hospital anymore. She is going to fight any person that stands in her way.”

“Sherlock, be logical about this,” the elder brother warned. “She is not in any condition to not have around-the-clock care. And as you stated: the voice will come after her should they realize that she lives.”

“Yes, I know. I’m planning on it.”

Mycroft’s eyes lifted in surprise. “You’re planning to use her as bait? Well, that certainly is a development.”

The detective’s eyes narrowed. “The specter in the dark needs to be brought to light. She deserves freedom.”

“I will say nothing more. You appear to have all the information that you require. You are free to leave.” His brother’s hand rested on the door handle. “Do take care in remembering that there are larger pieces in motion on this chessboard of mine. Make intelligent moves, not rash ones.”
“No, no, no; she said you were enrolling in school when I talked to her this morning and that’s what we are going to do.”

“But… I don’t want to go to school right now. She’s in hospital and I need to be there to help her!” Luka argued.

John crossed himself, “Look: your education is important to her. She wants you to excel in the world. You're obviously a very bright young man and you’ve taken to her quite quickly. Now, this will be a discussion that we have later once we’ve returned. You are to stay here; watch tele or something.”

“You are telling a joke, right? Shannon used to have me passing information, sneaking secret files, and stealing money; and you want me here watching the television?”

John stood, stupefied. “Your English is pretty good.”

“Yeah, well, between doing runs at the airport when I was younger and Shannon helping me with it; I think I manage fine.”

“Sherlock. Assistance? Now?”

The detective’s eyes skated over John and Luka, exasperation running rampant in the room. “Of course your education is a priority. But your skill set is equally important. She may have mentioned a few things…”

John’s mouth grew stern. “You’re not helping.”

“Of course I’m helping. You asked and now I’m helping.”

Luka laughed, “I can see why she likes you both.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” John retorted, hands on his waist.

Luka shrugged. “You make her happy. This,” he motioned between Sherlock and John. “I bet it makes her happy, even when she was sad. You can’t always tell when she is sad, though.”

John joked, “Us arguing? God, she is a sadist.”

“She would talk about you two a lot,” Luka divulged.

Sherlock’s eyebrows furrowed, “Oh? That doesn’t sound like her to be so careless with her words.”

Luka nodded. “It was in her sleep, mostly. She’d be dreaming of being here, I guess…and conversations you used to have.”

Sherlock and John eyed each other. “She’ll have to be told.”

“Agreed,” the detective stroked his chin. “If it were to ever compromise her, she’d never know. Her dreams have been… difficult.”

“That’s true,” John nodded. “God knows what it’s like to wake her up when she’s startled.”
Luka smirked and plopped himself onto the couch. “Yes, she pulled a knife on me once.. She felt very bad about it afterwards; I told her I’d had worse.” John’s eyes widened in horror. “What? She didn’t mean it. I scared her awake when I snuck in to bring her information about the club!”

“Now, back to the matter at hand. Shannon is holed up in a hospital until further notice and we should be leaving shortly to go visit my brother. If all goes according to plan, we shouldn’t have need to be at my brother’s home for very long, which would mean that you, child, should do as we say because Shannon told you so,” Sherlock’s smug grin displayed proudly.

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Luka challenged. “You’re asking me to listen to you so that I stay out of the way because you think that’s what you think she would want?” The boy crossed his arms and shot a challenging stare. “I’ll stay because she told me to listen, not because you think you know what she’d want me to do. You don’t know her at all if you think that she’d only want me to hide…you work when you’re not visible to your target.”

John bit his lip, sheepish. “Listen, Luka…we know that you miss her; we miss her, too…but you know that she needs rest…she needs to heal and she’s charged us with looking after you until she’s out of hospital.”

“She’s given us roles, you see, and we need to follow them the best we’re able. Our role,” he motioned back and forth between him and Sherlock, “is to ensure that you are safe. She has done so much to ensure our safety so – so many times that I’ve lost count. She loves you; even if she hasn’t said it or doesn’t know how to show you…I know in my heart that she does. So, if you’ll let us, I’d like to help her with this…with – with you. Please.”

Luka nodded, awestruck. He wiped a quick hand down his face to remove any evidence of tears that there might have been. “So…what do I call you?”

“You can call me John, if you want; I think Doctor Watson’s a bit too formal,” the doctor smiled, moving to stand near the couch.

“I’ve – I’ve never had…a…an uncle…” The corner of his mouth turned up into a small, gentle smile. “I can be that, too.”

Luka bolted upright and wrapped his arms around John, burying his face into his jumper. “She said she didn’t think you’d mind,” he mumbled into the fabric. “She said I’d belong.”

John peeled Luka back to look him over. “You will always belong. She’s family. And that means you are, too. So…there’s some food in the fridge. I’d stay out of the top two shelves; Sherlock has experiments in there. I need you to stay safe while we’re out tonight. We’ll be back. But tomorrow, we will sit down and talk about what are next steps are, alright? You are not being forgotten about.”

_There’s the reason Shannon’s charged John with taking care of him. He’ll catch him when he falls…stand him back up when he is injured and reassure him that all is well. John’s the father figure; which makes sense. What is my purpose? Am I only to be the defender of this boy similarly to the way Shannon has taken beatings for us? Am I to be his back, as it were?_

“Right, we are off. John?” Sherlock shrugged on his coat and offered John his with an outstretched arm. Luka’s eyes seemed critical of the detective. “You will find the apartment in the basement is Shannon’s room. I suspect that you will want to be there tonight.”

“Thank you,” he whispered.
Sherlock bobbed his head. “Mrs. Hudson will be awake for approximately another seventy-three minutes, should you need anything. After that, she will retire for the evening and be difficult to wake. Endeavor to get some rest.”

The detective and doctor made their way downstairs and headed to Mycroft’s home. Luka moseyed to the fridge, grabbed the takeaway John had ordered and made his way to Shannon’s apartment to find the door was locked.

He knocked on the door at the end of the hallway, which elicited an abrupt open to reveal Mrs. Hudson. “Oh, hello. How are you, young man? I know it’s all a whirlwind…”

“Can – can you let me into her room?”

She gasped, “Of course, dear. Let me grab my keys. You stay right there.” The landlady disappeared for a few moments before appearing with her keys. “Now, she’s got some things out and about; try not to mess with her paperwork.” The apartment door opened to reveal a near spotless room. “Oh! She straightened everything up, when did she have time to do that?”

Luka placed his meal on the desk and looked around with his hands in his pockets, “She had time.”

“I don’t see how! She was here and then she left to go and get you, I’d wager.”

“No,” Luka’s voice shallow. “She had time…she…she cleaned to make things easier.”

“Easier? What do you mean ‘easier’?”

Luka looked over his shoulder, green eyes glimmering in the lamp’s light. “She didn’t think she’d be coming back. She thought she was going to die.”

Mrs. Hudson’s hand reached for her collarbone, trembling lightly. “Die? Good gracious!”

“Something she taught me,” Luka reminisced. “It makes it easier on others if the room looks as if no one’s really lived in it…you know…when they pack it up.”

Her demeanor turned from aghast to stern. “You listen here, young man; Shannon is perhaps one of the most stubborn individuals I have ever met and I know that she will fight with every fiber of her being to be here. That’s just the way she is. How do you think those gentlemen upstairs have lasted so long? Hmm? You think that, by sheer luck, everything’s just always fallen into their laps?”

“No. Every single one of them has had hard times and struggle…maybe not like you…maybe worse than you… But Shannon loves us all just the same. And if you are here…then you better figure out a way to make her realize that her giving up her life so freely isn’t an option anymore.”

“So, you can sit in here and dwell on her thinking she was going to die tonight or you can do something with your time and learn something about her.”

“I don’t think I could learn enough about her,” Luka conceded. “She’s secretive.”

Mrs. Hudson smiled and held Luka’s face between her hands. “Everything you need to know about Shannon is at your disposal. You already met those two and now you’ve met me. You’re here in her room with the belongings that are important to her. You don’t need a lot more than that to figure out what makes her tick at her core. She’s much easier to understand if you think of it that way. Trust me.”

The elder woman patted Luka on the head and left. The young boy looked about the room, eyes absorbing everything that he could commit to memory, waiting for the proverbial shoe to drop.
This can’t be it? Just this? Just these people and this room? I miss her. This place smells like her. The other smells from Serbia didn’t work. But everything here…it’s her. It smells warm and – and I don’t want to leave. I miss her. I miss my mom.

“‘Someone’?” Mycroft licked his lip quickly.

“Probably me,” John’s face smug.

“So that’s it, is it? You’re just…going?”

An expression of innocence was plastered onto the doctor’s face. “Well, don’t worry. There’s a place for people like you…the desperate, the terrified, the ones with nowhere else to run.”

“What place?” Mycroft sniped.

“Two-two-one B Baker Street.” John turned and began walking towards the door. “See you in the morning. If there’s a queue, join it!”

Anger slipped it leash and Mycroft blasted, “For God’s sake! This is not one of your idiot cases!”

John turned and pointed to the open balcony door that Sherlock used to get in, “You might want to close that window. There is an east wind coming.”

John left the property quickly and once Mycroft realized he was alone, he fished for his mobile out of his pocket and dialed a memorized number. “Put me through to The Shield.”

“The only person that would call me this late tonight would have to be you,” a raspy voice strained through the ear piece. “I dealt with everything. No damage…well, outside of what’s landed me in the hospital. Again.”

“Quid pro quo, Shannon.”

“Already? That was quick. Wow. Well, if you’re still up this late, come stop by my office. I’ll tell the nurses to make some tea. Room one twenty-four. I’m sure that with what your brother presented tonight, there’s a reason you’ve called.”

“He told you, did he?”

“Not in its entirety. Besides, I’m sure this line isn’t secure. I’ll see you when you get here. Ta.”

“Thank you, Allison,” Shannon nodded at the nurse. “We are both very grateful for the tea.”

“Of course, anything else that I can get for you?”

“That’ll be all, thank you.”

Allison stepped out and went off to finish her rounds. Shannon gestured to the guest chair beside her bed for Mycroft. He hung his coat on a nearby hook and took his cup of tea from the tray before sitting. “Sherlock has come to the realization that he has a sister…inquiring about her after all this time is problematic. I want to know if you delved into his memories recently.”

“That’s a fair enough request,” Shannon rasped. “I have not.”
Mycroft’s blue eyes were piercing and cold. “I know that the two of you were together overnight recently at one of your properties. You will understand if I find your simplistic answer difficult to believe.”

“I understand completely. We talked and worked through some of our demons,” she offered before sipping her tea. “He aided me in working over Luka’s caseworker and the caseworker’s cousin. I offered to call a cab; but he elected to stay.”

“By worked, I would like to assume it was all platonic; though we both know better, don’t we?”

She ignored his comment, grumbling, “You might as well tell me what you’re going to pitch to Sherlock tomorrow and I can tell you if you are being an idiot or not.”

“That’s not how this works, Shannon.”

She smiled and placed her cup on the bedside table. “It is how tonight works. I had to work for my portion; you best believe you’re going to sweat some for yours.”

“So, start at the beginning.”

“We had a sister, she died in a fire.”

“You must do better than that. He’ll see through that just as quick as I did. Do. Not. Lie,” she punctuated her words. “We already established that I know when the both of you are lying. Again.”

“There were three of us.”

“No,” Shannon rolled her eyes. “Your sister is obviously still alive. Use the correct tense.”

Mycroft sighed and rubbed his knee with his free hand. “There are three of us. Me, Sherlock, and Eurus.”

“Is there a similar age gap between Sherlock and Eurus as there is between the brothers?”

“No,” his eyes becoming vacant. “Only a year.”

“Good. Continue.”

“If you think Sherlock is brilliant and you know that I’m more intelligent than he is; you should know that Eurus was better…exponentially. Her mind was…one of a kind. She was beyond Einstein and Newton. I could regale you with the horrors of childhood, but if you’ll permit me a courtesy, I will save those for when I have to speak with my brother.” Shannon nodded and motioned for him to continue. “I will tell you that her genius seemingly made her devoid of certain emotional responses and unresponsive to social cues.”

“There are instances where this has been documented in other individuals, yes.” Shannon folded her hands into her lap and watched as Mycroft’s near impenetrable barrier had begun to crumble. “Mycroft…” He focused back into reality and peered over at her as casually as he could. “She horrifies you. My God…what happened?”

“You have heard of Redbeard, I surmise. Eurus took him and put him somewhere; then sang a song stating that her song was the clue. It didn’t make any sense…her mind created a puzzle so intricate that I couldn’t decipher it at that age. Eventually, she started calling Redbeard ‘Drowned Redbeard’ in the song and we made our conclusions.”

“Sherlock changed after that; never spoke of Redbeard again. Eventually, he seemed to forget Eurus altogether, too.”
She squinted and rubbed her temple, “You don’t readily forget someone in your household… So… why – why was she removed?”

“She started a fire. At least, that is what my parents believe so as not to ask about a body. My Uncle Rudy found a place for her and she ultimately started another fire to watch people run in terror because she wanted to gauge emotional response to certain stimuli.”

“Eurus was then moved to Sherrinford.”

“Sherrinford? Are you fucking kidding me?”

Mycroft cocked his head to the side. “How do you know about Sherrinford?”

Her eyes danced back and forth across her vision, trying to recall the information quickly. “Something…Jim…said…long time ago…something about presents… There’s a shelf of information I haven’t gone through yet…but…I know. I know what it is. How could you lock her up there?”

“There was nowhere else that she could be placed that could hope to contain her. A secondary, secure facility was built to house her. And since childhood, my sister has not left that compound.”

“But…something’s amiss.”

“Oh? And what is that?”

“Sherlock’s able to recall information from all over the place; I don’t understand how he would have tucked her away so far and…” Oh. Oh! No.

“Memories can resurface. You know that better than anyone.”

Her eyes narrowed and she leaned forward despite the gouge in her side, “You bastard.”

“I knew, somewhere, buried deep in his subconscious were the memories of our sister and what had happened. I also knew from monitoring James Moriarty that he had spent a fortune on a project out in America involving creative memory suppression. I studied the project to become familiar with it and was able to use certain trigger words to give me a quick view of Sherlock’s condition.”

“You’re an animal,” she growled.

“It was the only way I could think of to protect him without the memories resurfacing.”

“So…so was I just a fucking failsafe to make sure he’d never remember? Huh? Is that why you fucking brought me here?”

Mycroft rubbed his temples and closed his eyes, exasperated. “No. It’s not. I hadn’t received all of the information pertinent to your case until after you were established at Baker Street. It was purely coincidental.”

“The universe is so rarely so lazy, Mycroft.”

“Yes; perhaps if one believes in fate, this would be an excellent example of it.”

Her voice was icy. “I can’t believe you… You had me go into his mind more than once and snoop about! Were you hoping that I’d find his suppressed memories and start rummaging about?”

“On the contrary,” Mycroft opened his eyes, weariness creeping into his features. “I rather hoped that you wouldn’t find them at all. I knew that if you came across those memories while enacting
any Geist protocols, you would have ceased them immediately and the pair of you would have gone off in search of the truth. I was terrified.”

“You must believe me, I never… I never intended for Sherlock to have these memories resurface. They are incredibly painful.”

“You don’t get to choose, Mycroft. He’s your brother!”

“And,” he grew firm, “at one point he was nearly your lover and still, you did the same!” Shannon inhaled sharply and bit her tongue.

“You and I both have done terrible deeds in order to protect my baby brother; we both can at least agree on that much.”

“What is it that you want, Mycroft? I’m in no state to do any legwork for you, as you can see. They did pull a two-foot piece or rebar out of my leg, if you’d like to see the damage that was done…” she seethed.

“I regret that you were injured tonight, Shannon. I do. But for this task, which will hopefully be my last assignment for you, you need to convince my brother to listen to me tomorrow.”

“You’re joking.”

“Afraid not. He is, as you know, going to be inquisitive but resentful. To lessen that unsavory experience, I am calling in my favor now. Talk to Sherlock. Convince him that he needs to listen and hear what I have to say.”

“You’re either a genius or incredibly moronic to ask me to do this.”

“Interesting how often genius appears in the absence of it. There is…more.”

“Of course there is,” she snapped. “What else could you possibly add to this steaming pile of shit?”

“You.”

“Me? What the hell are you talking about?”

“If, and I use that term very creatively and abstractly, my sister has managed to get out; how long before she knows about you?”

Shannon paused to reanalyze the situation. Her eyes snapped up to meet his. “Explain to me the Moriarty information in my head. Now. How did he know about Sherrinford?”

Begrudgingly, Mycroft divulged. “For her cooperation, she needed presents…treats, if you will. When I asked her what she wanted for Christmas some years back, she stated that she wanted to speak with James Moriarty.”

“Okay… I don’t understand…”

“Unsupervised.”

Shannon’s eyes rolled into the back of her head and her neck swayed. “You are a genuine moron, Mycroft. How could you be so stupid?”

“She’s my sister. After all of it, it’s how I tried to keep her happy in that place.”

Shannon sat up quickly and felt her suture pinch at her side, eliciting a wince and yelp. “So… what? You’re – you’re telling me… which sibling means more to you?”
“They are both my younger siblings; I will do what I must to protect them. Even if that means protecting them from themselves and each other.”

Shannon slammed her hand onto the bed, “And you may have very well chosen one over the other! How could you let Jim in there with her, Mycroft? Why? You knew…somewhere you had to know that your brother would more than likely become the topic of discussion. You knew he was already entranced with Sherlock…” her voice conveyed her desperation and fatigue.

Mycroft used his palm to smooth his hair back. “She helped to divert terrorist attacks… Shannon, please, understand…”

“Just…stop.”
“If Jim divulged information about me in front of your sister; and your sister is as bright as you say she is…then… I’m a liability.”

“Yes.”

She swallowed hard. “Have you come to ensure my death?”

“No, nothing that drastic…yet. You will need to be moved underground before I venture up to the facility to ensure her incarceration. You will not like it.”

“Precautionary measures…of course;” she frowned.

He leaned forward, “I told you that I didn’t want to have to call on you again; but, this is a crisis. Because you’ve been inside his head, I’ve told you things I’ve not uttered to anyone else in over twenty-five years… Should my sister get to you somehow, she could, theoretically, rewire your mind back to Moriarty’s primary functions.”

“I am far more comfortable in this room knowing that you are on our side rather than the other. I am sorry. But radio silent will have to be a way of living for a short time.”

Shannon closed her eyes, disgusted. “When?”

“I’ll give you until I leave for the facility. No doubt that my brother will go; as will Doctor Watson. You, regrettably, must stay here and hidden. She can’t have any contact with you.”

“Do you doubt that I wouldn’t be able to hold my own?”

“Not at all,” he stood, hands on his waist staring at the floor. “I fear that, should she threaten or do serious harm to Sherlock, you would kill her. I don’t know what that would do to him.”

She pondered a moment and extended her hand, “If you will pass me my phone.”

“How best do you think you will go about it?”

She pressed the phone to her ear and waited. One ring. Another.

“Are you alright?”

“I’m fine. How did it go tonight?”

“Splendid. I do have a sister. His reactions were sublime. I should have filmed the way he ran about the house. You would have enjoyed it.”

“Sherlock, listen to me…”
“Aren’t you supposed to **not** be on your phone in the hospital? John would be very upset with you.”

“Sherlock, I have a feeling.”

“…”

“I need you to hear me out. I was thinking and putting some things together…and if what you’re eluding to is true…then my gut is not in a good place right now.”

“Your gut isn’t in a good place, to be fair; you were stabbed yesterday. How many times have you been stabbed or ripped open now?”

“Stop trying to be funny. You know I hate hospitals.”

“Sorry.”

“I know you are. Just – just think. Use all of your senses to aid you. If your brother is afraid…your big brother is afraid…then I think you need to listen to what he has to say.”

“You must be joking. There is no memory of a sister anywhere in my mind palace. I’ve looked. The only logical explanation is that he’s been suppressing or deleting those memories so that I would not be able to recall them.”

“Breathe.”

“…” The detective took a moment of pause and walked about his bedroom.

“Yield and overcome.”

“…empty and be full. I hate when you use that.”

She chuckled, “It forces you to focus on what I’m saying. Sorry. Sherlock, look: I’m all for you tapping into emotion to help you with your cases. But, don’t let this get the better of you. Play the detective and I think that may help.”

“I know you may get angry with him. Just…be patient. ‘Yield and overcome’.”

“I’ll take that under advisement. Are you okay?”

A quick, small smile vanished from her face. “I’ll live. At least for a while longer.”

“Good. That’s…good.”

“Are you okay?”

“Of course. Luka is sleeping in your room. I presume Mrs. Hudson let him in, or he is very good at picking locks.”

“He is great at picking locks,” she reminisced. “He might even be better than you; but, I doubt he’d be so impolite as to break into my room.”

The detective laughed, “Oh, now that would be a sight to see.”

“Sherlock, I know you said that you’d come round after; but I’ve been dosed for the night and I’ll be asleep soon. Go to bed. I’ll see you tomorrow, alright?”
“I’m not going to sleep. You know that.”

“Well, rest. Meditate…or something. You’ll need to be on top form tomorrow. Goodnight.”

“If you, for any reason, feel unsafe in that hospital…you call immediately. I’ll answer and I will be there as quick as I can.”

“I know you would. Go to bed.”

“Goodnight, Shannon.”

Shannon tossed the device onto the side table and lazily drew her eyes to meet Mycroft’s. “There. Done. *Quid pro quo* settled.”

“Thank you,” he sighed, deflated. “You have my deepest gratitude.”

Mycroft stood and readied to leave. When he reached the door, Shannon’s hoarse voice cut through the silence, “Mycroft, don’t fuck it up.”
Someone to Save

Chapter Notes

I’m so sorry that I post to sporadically anymore. Real life keeps getting in the way, as many of you know.
But, if you’re with me, let’s take this to the end. To the end.
-A

“What’s it carrying?” John was already fairly certain what was atop the drone.

“It’s a DX 707,” Mycroft revealed as all three men watched it hover in the center of the room. “I’ve authorized the purchase of quite a few of these. Colloquially, it’s knowns as the ‘Patience Grenade’.”

“Patience?” After landing, the grenade hummed, the top opened, and a glaring red lights emanated from inside while it beeped.

Mycroft blinked. “The motion sensor has activated. If any of us move, the grenade will detonate.”

“How powerful?” Sherlock asked with as little motion as possible.

“It will certainly destroy this flat and kill anyone in it. Assuming walls of reasonable strength, your neighbours should be safe…but as it’s landed on the floor, I am moved to wonder if the café below is open.”

“It’s Sunday morning, so it’s closed,” Sherlock offered.

John’s eyes moved toward Sherlock. “What about Mrs. Hudson? Or Luka?” The men could faintly hear the sound of a vacuum moving about downstairs.

“Going by her usual routine, I estimate she has another two minutes left. I sent Luka to Molly’s for some tutoring.”

“She keeps the vacuum cleaner in the back of the flat,” John added.

Mycroft, puzzled quipped, “So?”

“So, safer there when she’s putting it away,” John analyzes. Mycroft barely moves his head and John feels his stomach plummet. “Look, we have to move eventually. We should do it when she’s safest.”

Mycroft’s eyes convey his understanding until they widened in alarm. “Shannon?”

Sherlock looked over to his brother immediately registering how he addressed her by her first name rather than as Ms. Byrns, but was inclined to ask later should they survive.

“She’s still at hospital; unless there’s another one of these in her room, she should be safe.”

“Hmm,” Mycroft pondered. “I would have half-expected her to leave the hospital of her own volition to return here. She dislikes hospitals.”
“How do you know that?” John sniped.

“She’s made it apparent more than once in conversation,” Mycroft admitted. “Considering her line of work and her tolerance to pain, it’s not surprising. So, that leaves us with a predicament at hand.”

“When the vacuum stops, we give her eight seconds to get to the back of the flat. She’s fast when she’s cleaning. Then we move.” The detective peered over at his brother. “What’s the trigger response time?”

Mycroft stared at him blankly. “Once we’re mobile, how long before detonation?”

“We have a maximum of three seconds to vacate the blast radius.”

John’s eyes closed and Sherlock could tell he was crestfallen. “John and I will take the windows. You take the stairs: help get Mrs. Hudson out, too.”

“Youre closer.”

“You’re faster,” Mycroft argued.

“Speed differential won’t be as critical as the distance.”

Mycroft’s mind processed the information and begrudgingly said, “Yes, agreed.”

John listened intently to the noise and movement downstairs. “She’s further away. She’s moving to the back.”

“I estimate we have a minute left. Is a phone call possible?” Sherlock asked.

“Phone call? You want to call Shannon and what, ask for advice? Say things unsaid?” Mycroft quipped briskly.

“John has a daughter,” his eyes moved toward his best friend. “He may wish to say goodbye.”

“And…to your point, she already knows how that conversation would go.”

“Oh?” Mycroft’s voice expressing his surprise. “And how could you know that?”

Sherlock’s face grew serious. “We both have nearly died and had to piece ourselves back together. That conversation has already been said.”

Mycroft looked over to John, “I’m sorry, Doctor Watson…any movement will set off the grenade.” John grimaces in agony. “I hope you understand.”

“Oscar Wilde.”

“What?”

“He said, ‘The truth is rarely pure, and never simple.’ It’s from The Importance of Being Earnest. We did it in school,” John divulged. Sherlock smirked.

“So did we, now I recall. I was Lady Bracknell.”

“Yeah,” Sherlock remembered. “You were great.”
“You really think so?”

“Yes, I really do.”

Mycroft’s eyes smiled. “Well, that’s good to know; I’ve always wondered.”

The vacuum cleaner could be heard turning off and Sherlock counted the seconds in his head; eyes looking to the other men in the room. “Good luck boys.”

“Three…two…one…GO!”

If I continue to sift through more of these memories, there’s a good chance that…ah. Yes. Here we are. A large selection of leather-bound tomes: all worn and falling apart. That’s rather fitting: it’s my childhood.

So, let’s see here…I’m looking for something when I was in late middle school; early high school. I remember someone…but…I can’t remember…when…I saw him…

“Ms. Byrns…”

Oh, what now? I’m busy! Wait…I know that voice. Oh, Christ…why is he here?

“Ms. Byrns; I’m sorry…I need you to wake up.”

Shannon shifted under her blankets, eyes fluttering open. The soft, grey light filtering through the window made her eyes hesitate to adjust for a moment. She squinted everything into focus and yawned. “Jeremiah? What…”

“There’s been an incident.”

Focus. Wake up. Pay attention. He’s here because of me.

The voice in her head belonged to Sherlock and she did her best to snap to attention. “Incident?”

“Shannon…there was an explosion at Baker Street.”

Ice shot down her spine successfully removing the last tenants of rest from her body. “Are they okay?”

“Mr. Holmes; both the elder and younger, Doctor Watson, the boy, and the landlady were on the premises.”

“Are they okay?” her voice more stern, pushing herself upright. Her stitches pinched at her side, her hand reached to relieve the pain in vain.

“The blast completely destroyed the common area and most of that level…”

Shannon reached with her free hand and grabbed Jeremiah by his tie and pulled him toward her. “I will not ask again, Jeremiah.”

Jeremiah dropped his eyes, doing nothing to pull away from her. “They are alive.”

Stale air rushed from her lungs and she leaned back into her bed, her hand releasing Jeremiah to stand freely. “Mr. Holmes had failsafe actions in place should something occur in regards to your safety. Those protocols are now active. I came here as quick as I could to let you know that Sir Edwin will be here within the hour to escort you to your new facility. Mr. Holmes ensured that
there would be medical care for you.”

Shannon closed her eyes, heaviness settling into her chest. Not again. “I understand.”

Jeremiah moved to the door. “I know how important they are to you. So; in an act of reconciliation for having to take you to that warehouse and leave you there…I did some…wrangling. I can’t give you long and will call when Sir Edwin arrives on your room phone. Be quick.”

He opened the door and stepped out allowing three cloaked figures to walk in. The first through the door removed their hood to reveal a slightly disheveled John Watson moving with quick strides across the room to her bedside. She did her best to swing her legs over the bedside and stand, wrapping her arms around his neck with hot tears streaming down her face.

“Oh my God,” she cried, burying her face into his shoulder. “I thought…that…”

The second figure pulled down the cloth about their head to reveal Sherlock’s stern expression and calculating eyes surveying the room. She reached and pulled him closer; wrapping her arms around both of their necks.

“Shannon,” John gently patted her back. “We’re fine. We’re right here.”

“Before – before Jeremiah said you were alive…I thought…for a minute…I had died, too,” she stammered.

“Yes, well, Jeremiah is a fan of the dramatic,” the third figure divulged. “I can’t imagine who tutored him in that.”

Shannon looked between the heads of her boys and smiled. “I’m glad you’re alive, Mycroft.”

He pulled the fabric away from his face. “Thank you. Though I do hope you realize the severity of the situation; and, we must put certain pieces in motion.”

“How long do we have?”

“About fifteen minutes, pending the traffic in London at present,” Sherlock pulled away and walked to peer out the window.

“Shannon,” John held her face in his hands, “Mycroft told us that you are going to be put into a safe house that has a medical facility…”

“About that…” she interjected. All three men turned their heads toward her. “Yes. I’m going to be moved to that facility…but I think we all can agree that I am eventually going to be intercepted on the return.”

“What? Why?”

“Yes.”

“Agreed.”

She leaned back onto the edge of the bed, her left leg aching from the breakthrough pain. “Irina received information from two parties; one of which I can only surmise was your sister. The other, I fear, is something from a long ways in my past that I had buried quite some time ago.”

“The last shadowbox had the letter in it. I told you that you didn’t need to worry about the top two stanzas; that they were meant for me. They are. It’s essentially a target painted on where I grew up. Someone knows. I have to then conclude that they either knew me when I was still in school or they have had access to my brother’s files.”
John bowed his head, hands on his waist; his face soured. “You can’t be serious.”

“All those years ago,” she smiled weakly. “We three set out to solve my case...to close it. Well, this may just be the last set of hurdles before the end.”

“You’re – you’re suggesting...”

Sherlock turned back to the window, “She’s suggesting that she allows them to take her, John. When it’s time.”

“Yes.”

Mycroft nodded. “It is something that had crossed her mind before. This is an event that was, in all likelihood, going to happen. The most logical of solutions, to be certain.”

“I wanted to tell you...but this didn’t become more than a thought until yesterday and I was going to tell you today once you came round to visit.”

John’s eyes moved upward into a glare. “And is that it?”

“Yes,” she blinked, hands clasped together in her front. “It was important to ensure that it worked. Your mind’s a bit more...you know... Bringing those memories back last time was more than a challenge.”

“So...so it’s - so it’s not a complete removal, yeah?” John ventured.

“No. Just a few conversations and things you know I’m capable of. I essentially will make me a fairly boring roommate. I have to hide most of the interesting stuff.”

“Of course,” he replied nonchalantly. “Though I am curious to know what has gone missing.”

Shannon nodded, “When I return.”

“I think that a wise decision,” Mycroft stepped forward. “Is it a communal key or do we each have our own?”

“John...tell me it’s okay,” she sighed. “I won’t do it if you do not want me to; but, just know that it not only protects you from harm...but it protects me, too.”

“But I’ll still remember you?”

“Yes,” she winced, clutching at her side. “Damn stitches. But yes...I didn’t mess with any of our fundamental relationship drives in any of you. I left those memories intact.”

She looked toward Sherlock. “I did this because...I knew where you were going.”

John shrugged. “Alright. Fine. Let’s get this over with so that we can finally get back to something
more regular in our lives.”

Mycroft ventured closer, “If you don’t mind, Shannon, I would like to go first so as to get back to
our new task at hand.”

“…Yet he saw her, like the sun, even without looking’,”

Mycroft flashed a brief, polite smile and moved toward the door. “How long before it takes
effect?”

“Ten minutes at most. You may have a headache.”

“Hmm. Better get a move on then. I will give you a moment alone, gentlemen. Be brief.”

John begrudgingly stood still. “Headache, eh?”

Shannon chuckled. “That was just for him. Yours won’t hurt, I promise.”

“You know, just when I was getting used to having all my thoughts again…”

“It’s like Sherlock said,” she explained. “You’ll have blank spots in your memories. You will
remember the before and the after; but the pertinent information that could be used against you
would be hidden. Once the threat has been dealt with…then I can lift the curtain and you would
have them all back.”

“Huh. Why the black out, though…couldn’t you just do what you did last time?”

Her mirth turned morose. “I don’t want to do that to you; and, should things go poorly, I would like
you to remember some part of me.”

“Guess there’s no talking you out of this,” he tried to cheer her up. “Alright, yes; come on. I can’t
let those two have all of the fun, now can I?”

“What matters is the part we choose to act on. That’s who we really are’. There. Done.”

“John, if you would give me a moment?” Sherlock spoke to his reflection in the glass.

Dr. Watson nodded, kissing Shannon on her cheek before issuing her a stern, “You be careful.”

Her monitors beeped and whirred autonomously in the background while neither one said
anything. Shannon took a few unsteady and pained steps in his direction, the lines to her monitors
pulling her limbs backward.

The detective’s torso turned so he could face her. “Stop. If you pull you lines out before they get
here, one could infer that you were agitated enough by an entity that had been in your room to
cause you to leap out of bed.”

“Now, for the sake of all of this to work, you must get back into bed.”

His eyes seemed weary; but, underneath the worry she saw an acuteness for the information to be
gathered for the case at hand. He was ravenous to have answers and to solve the puzzle presented
to him.

Appealing to his directions, Shannon gracelessly returned to her spot under the covers. Sherlock
walked across the room to ensure that her lines were set back as they had been.

“Sherlock,” she whispered. “There’s something you need to know.”
“Whatever it is; I know.”

“No you don’t.”

“Yes, I do,” he assured her with a faint smile. “After all, how many times have we nearly died?”

Shannon laughed heartily, head thrown back into the pillow. “Oh my God, Sherlock!”

“What?” his voice boomed in surprise.

“Not that, you idiot!” Her hand leapt back to her stitches while she gasped for air. “Oh, Jesus Christ. You can’t keep doing that to me when I’m on the mend. Okay. Christ…”

Taken aback and panting from her startling laughter, he pouted. “Wonderful. I have to worry about you insulting my emotional intellect now, as well?”

Shannon’s breathing was laborious. “No. God, no. Just…you and I were not on the same page. But…okay. I think I’m good.”

“I’ve left you information back at Baker Street…”

“Bit…smoldering…up there…” he interjected.

“…in my room, duh. There are two copies of my favorite book on the shelf. Open the one that is lighter. There’s a present in there for you. I need you to get into it; the sooner the better, alright?”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

He clasped his hands behind his back, face becoming stoic. “I am curious…you left me with the Paganini concert, the club and walking towards your flat; but it’s the damnedest thing…everything after that until the immigration office was blocked out.”

“You’re a creative individual, Sherlock Holmes. I’m sure that you can write a story or something in there until I get back.”

“Are you going to be alright with all of this?”

“Of course.”

“It will be painful.”

She nodded and closed her eyes in concentration. “Everything about this has been painful. I think I can deal with it a bit longer. Just…keep an eye on Luka, will you?”

“I may just use both eyes to keep watch.”

She sighed. “I’ve been over this in my head more times than I can count in the past fifty or so hours; there’s no other logical way where I could come home…not in a body bag.”

“Be careful,” she warned, her tone low. “There’s something amiss…I have a feeling.”

Sherlock leaned down and kissed the crown of her head, breathing in the scent of her. “If it’s the gut feeling of Shannon Byrns saying to be cautious, then I would follow that intuition anywhere when logic is absent.”

“I can’t promise that I will…but…know that I’ll fight to come home. No matter what happens.”
He reached for her hand and squeezed gently. “I know you will. Be safe: you keep accruing more of us strays at Baker Street that need Shannon Byrns in their lives.”

“There’s another mind and soul there that will need your gifts again. He’s a bright boy,” Sherlock paused to fight the tension in his throat. She leaned into the crook of his neck to hide her agony. “I can see why you became so protective of him.”

“Be patient with him,” she nodded against his skin. “He’s going to drive you insane…but he’s a good kid.”

Sherlock pressed something metallic into her hand. “For when you feel like giving up.”
She brought the item under the light and scrutinized it: it was a heavy locket. Inside it was a quote from *The Great Gatsby*: ‘So we beat on, boats against the current’.
“If you take the time to observe it, it will serve you well.”

Byrns nodded and looped the long chain over her head, the locket resting below her sternum.
“Thank you.”

“You are quite welcome.”

The pair sat in silence for a moment, but then there was a knock on the door and her room phone rang. *Please. I want more time.* Shannon kissed his cheek and shoved him toward the door. “Take care of them. Sherlock, don’t forget, even when it gets dark…you’re a good man.”

He backed away toward his exit and frowned. “Who would have thought…hmm?”
“Shannon Byrns and Sherlock Holmes: Dragon Slayers. You remember to come home to Baker Street. We will be waiting. All of us.”

In a flourish of fabric, he was gone out the door. Jeremiah entered the room and noted she was crying. “When he comes in, start sobbing…I just told you about the explosion, yeah?”

Numb, she nodded.

The door was pushed wide open and a flurry of men walked into her hospital room to hear her wail. “Are they alive? No…please…God, no!”

Sir Edwin stood quietly and waited for the sobs to subside. “Ms. Byrns, there are measures in place to garner your safety and the safety of the realm. With the attack on Baker Street, you need to be moved to a private location. I know that you are recovering from your most recent incident…but we have to move you.”


Jeremiah moved forward and aided her out of bed into the wheelchair. Sir Edwin continued, “Mycroft is in the hospital, the others are missing. We need to get going. Gentlemen?”

Jeremiah pushed the wheelchair forward, leaning down to whisper in her ear. “Are you ready?”

She nodded, wiping her face. Sir Edwin continued to speak as they made their way out of the facility. “You will be transported to an undisclosed location until all of this mess is dealt with. In the event that your services are recalled, you will be sent for to…calm the threat…or neutralize it.”

Shannon glanced up at him and scowled. “You would know that I don’t *neutralize* any of my targets. And if you have a particular person in mind…that has connections to Mycroft…you can best believe that this would be far more difficult than you imply.”
“All of this, as you can imagine, was of Mycroft’s design,” the cabinet member crossed himself watching her being put into a car.

Shannon smirked and whispered into Jeremiah’s ear, “No it wasn’t. It was mine.” She shut the door and watched a dumbfounded Jeremiah stand on the sidewalk begin to shrink from view.

There was a woman driving, a man in the passenger seat, and another woman on the bench seat opposite her in the town car.

“Ms. Byrns, my name is Sarah. I will be your handler while you are in our custody. Do you understand what that means?”

Her eyes skimmed over Sarah’s features and took in as much information as she was capable of processing. *Look at her; so young…at least in this game, she is. This is her first big break…and she got me, of all possible people. There’s no love of country for me. The greater good isn’t going to push me. Out of every other file they could have handed her, she was given mine. And she’s terrified. Look at her: she hasn’t swallowed since I set foot in the car, she is holding her breath; and that look in her eyes…And that accent, where’s she from…Norfolk?*

“Yes” she rasped. “I’m aware. Though, Sarah isn’t your real name; but, for your personal safety I agree your anonymity is important.”

Sarah paused a moment and thought to herself. “Good.”

She turned back into the car and looked at the two women sitting in the front. *Standard suits, nothing of high quality. That watch on the passenger, though…I know that watch. Marathon Pilot’s Navigator: Military specs, tritium gas tubes, fiberglass shell, water resistant up to two hundred feet.. Oh. You’re fancy. That’s a three hundred dollar watch. Somebody loves you. And look at how tentative you’re taking these lefts…oh. You’re American; I thought this might be it.*

“Any time you feel like taking me to the safe house, that’d be great,” Shannon’s voice was curt and dripping with venom. “The sooner we get this over with, the better. I don’t feel like stopping over at the U.S. Embassy quite yet.”

The women eyed each other cautiously and refused to say anything on the matter.

“Come now, don’t insult me. I am curious though,” she paused for a beat before lazily dragging her eyes up the rearview mirror, “Why a pair of Americans are driving this car and not the two that were originally assigned to the detail.”

Sarah whirled around quickly, alarm seeping out from nearly every pore.

*There was a time that I did that. I remember. Being afraid…trying to get a foothold in this life and being terrified. Poor girl. Maybe this will get her a career change.*

Sarah had been hurling numerous questions to the women in the front, but they remained silent. One of them deftly reached for the glovebox.

“I wouldn’t,” Shannon warned, her voice almost a low, raspy growl. “You know that I would have control of this car before you could turn around. Sit back in your seat.”

“Sarah, sit beside me. Now.”

Sarah had now moved to do as told quickly still in a state of bewilderment. “How could you have known…? I didn’t even catch it!”
“I’m more observant than you, dear,” Shannon offered with a reassuring pat on her leg. “That’s all.”

“Now, you two: We are going to the address that is in Sarah’s file or I will leave you on the bank of the Thames.”

Each woman glared up to the mirror. Let’s call the passenger Pilot for now. Pilot sneered and a blatantly Tennessean accent filled the car. “Well, aren’t you just the picture of smarts. You’ve been away from home for some time, Ms. Byrns. We’ve come to collect you home. You understand.”

Shannon nodded absentmindedly rubbing her wrist as she stretched her neck from side to side. She wasn’t in any sort of way to get into a fight, but there was an innocent life in the car. Sarah hadn’t done anything wrong to the best of her knowledge and deserved to go home to her four-month-old puppy. Beagle, I think.

“Yeah. I understand,” she rasped. Pilot again, attempted to reach into the glovebox. “I said don’t. Next time, I won’t be so polite.”

The driver spied a wary eye into the backseat. “Do you even comprehend the extent of your injuries? Hmm? You aren’t some superhero. You should still be hospitalized! Now use that intelligence that we all know you possess to think of that!”

Pilot nodded. “Besides, it would be a shame if something happened to you. Who would take care of that boy you have left alone with your former landlady? Especially since your boytoy is missing. More than likely dead.”


Shannon stilled and Sarah noticed. “Now wait just a minute,” Sarah chirped. “That boy is under the protection of the government of The United Kingdom! You have no jurisdiction to threaten or insinuate any harm on a subject…”

“I’m tired of this,” Pilot whispered to the driver. The driver nodded and focused on the road while her counterpart reached into the glovebox.

Sarah felt a strong arm bar across her collarbone and watched as Shannon slid down the bench seat to kick her wounded leg through the gap. Her kick jarred Pilot into the window with a sickening crack echoing from Pilot’s skull. Shannon growled out in pain and pushed herself forward, thrashing her right elbow into the driver’s neck. Pilot grabbed at Shannon’s shoulder before landing a well-placed uppercut into her healing stab wound.

With a hiss of pain, Shannon’s rage ignited and she clumsily pulled her body through to sit on the center console. Lacking grace, she wrapped her legs around Pilot’s neck utilizing her grappling skills while making her best effort to gain control of the car. “Sarah,” she hissed again. “If you want to live, help me!” It’s worth a shot.

Fear. That’s what it was. She knew it. Some people can be motivated to survive; others not so much. Sarah, at present, was frozen in fear.

Pilot was nearly unconscious, but still putting up a fight with repeated blows to her leg and biting Shannon’s inner thigh. The driver, at present, was trying to sucker punch Shannon in the face, but kindly left herself open to a punch to her throat. Shannon quickly opened the door and shoved the driver out and onto the road. Had reached unconsciousness, allowing the grappler time to
maneuver and try to bring the car to a stop. Shannon’s eyes had just cleared the dashboard to see that they were careening off the road and towards the Thames. Well, that’s not what I had in mind. Oh. Right. Well, shit.

“LOOK OUT!” Sarah screamed. Shannon did her best to try and brace, but she still felt herself lurch upward as the car became airborne and then the violent crash as the car hit the water. The windscreen shattered upon impact and Shannon endeavored to kick it out with what strength she had left.

For the first time in a while, Shannon felt so overwhelmed that she felt as if she was paralyzed. What do I do first? Oh my God. I need to…I must…I have to…


Numbness washed over her body, lightheaded.

And then, the dark.
“Why were you never afraid of me?” Mycroft asked Shannon while she looked over her shoulder back at him. “Most people quake with the knowledge that I hold quite some power…in numerous facets.”

Sherlock smirked, his voice low, “Shannon’s not most people, brother.” He collected Shannon’s jumper with his own and headed toward the door. “My having to remind you is a bit redundant. Old age is creeping up on you.”

Sherlock stepped across the threshold first and Shannon followed behind, her hand clasped on the knob to close it after she had passed through. She paused and turned toward the still figure sat behind the desk whose hands were folded neatly upon it. Sherlock, realizing that his partner wasn’t behind him, spun on his heel and observed a moment that exemplified Shannon’s candor.

“I do not fear you, Mycroft, for one simple reason,” she uttered, her words powerful and picked with care.

“And what’s that, hmm?” he scoffed.

“This thing…this demon in me,” she tapped her temple lightly, “that I have tried to keep at bay…its nightmarers and its terrors are more horrifying than anything you could put me through. What could you possibly do to me that my mind hasn’t already flayed from my mind?”

She cleared her throat and forced herself to continue. “You may have power, Mycroft. I’ll give you that. But we both know that I could, if provoked, take it away from you; so really, who is king here? It’s simple, really: I am my own walking nightmare. You pale in comparison. Excuse me,” she bowed her head and shut the door behind her.

Sherlock Holmes and Shannon Byrns walked in silence through the Diogenes Club and stepped into the cool air of London. Sherlock rubbed his hands together and blew his breath through his palms in response to the crisp, October air.

“Well, that was foolish,” he quipped sliding his gloves on.

Shannon shrugged, following suit, “Oh darn, my streak is broken. Whatever should I do?” Her hand raised to her forehead in feigned dramatics.

“Showoff.”

“You bet your ass. Now,” she paused for a beat as she adjusted her scarf around her neck, “Where to?”

He chuckled and the corners of his eyes creased. He bit his bottom lip in thought and looked up to the dark canopy above. “Care to take in the pulse of London?”

Shannon paused and looked around, stuffing her hands into her peacoat’s pockets. He mistook her pondering as hesitation and began to backpedal.

“Oh, if you would prefer, I can take you home before I go back out again tonight. There’s something that…”

“Alright, Sherlock. Let’s go.”

His speech halted for a moment as his mind stalled. What? Did…did she just agree?
“Sorry?”

She looked up to the sky, lamenting the fact she couldn’t see the stars behind the cloud. “Yeah. I think it’ll do us both some good. Let’s go. We’ve been going over everything so meticulously for The Jarl, I need a break from what’s going to happen in York. Yeah. Let’s go for a run.”

The corners of his mouth turned upward and his eyes turned mischievous. “Are you sure that you’re fit enough to go out? I didn’t think about that before I asked?”

“Liar,” she pointed at him with an accusatory finger. “Not only do I know that you thought about it, but I can still tell when you’re lying. And I’m fit enough to whoop your butt if I had to.”

His laugh settled nicely in his chest, his head turning over his shoulder to take a look at the Diogenes Club. He pressed his lips together in thought before moving his eyes back to her. “I’m sure of it. Shall we?” He offered his arm to her congenially.

“Yes, I think so.” Shannon rested her hand in the crook of his elbow as they began to move through the city.

The pair had been walking for some time, stopping periodically for him to get whispers from his eyes and ears on the streets. They weren’t far from home when Sherlock laughed quietly to himself.

“Probably for the best.”

She eyed him suspiciously. “Care to share?”

He stopped and turned slightly to face her. “You said ‘go for a run’. We didn’t actually run. Considering that you’re healing, it’s probably best. I just thought it amusing.”

“Oh huh,” she retorted flatly. “What, so you think I can’t run?”

He shrugged. “I suppose if you had the right incentive you could, but you probably shouldn’t given the extent of your injuries and where you are in recovery.”

“Right,” she nodded. Her lips flashed into a frown and she stared up at the sky for a moment. “I suppose I would need the right stimulus or incentive.”

“Exactly.”

Her pointer finger tapped her chin lightly. “Huh.” Shannon looked directly at Sherlock and shoved him as hard as she could before taking off in the opposite direction.

“What are you doing!?”

“Found my incentive. Race you home!” she shouted over her shoulder.

Sherlock gave a lopsided grin and bulleted forward, doing his best to catch up to her. Shannon tossed another glance back to see him closing the space between them.

**He’s gaining! Come on, let’s go. Run. Open it up, Shannon. Run!**

The swung her arms faster and commanded the fire in her lungs to become fuel for the final push. Cool air continued to whisk past her face, but she noted by the sound that Sherlock wasn’t gaining on her anymore.
When she reached to doorstep she braced her hands on either side of the door for a moment: eyes closed, a smug smile on her lips, Sherlock’s long strides coming to a halt; every effort now going to controlling her respirations.

“I win.”

Sherlock bowed over, regaining some sense of breath. “You shoved me!”

“I have a handicap,” she tapped her side lightly. “You know, healing ribs and all that. Figured it was fair.” Shannon stood up and paced around in a wide circle with her hands stretched atop her head.

Sherlock’s cheeks were flushed and a small sheen of sweat could be seen at his brow. “Well, you seem to be fine enough without the handicap.”

Her cheeks, she noted, were hot and equally flushed from the run and she wanted desperately to lose her coat and walk freely in the cooler air. She undid her scarf and flopped it over her shoulder. “Good. Don’t you forget it,” she huffed as a finger lightly jabbed him in the torso.

They stared at each other for a brief moment before laughing. “Alright. But no sparring for some time. I don’t think that you’re ready for that quite yet.”

“I’m not? Or you’re not? You think a few broken ribs can stop me?”

“Most assuredly not,” he sputtered between longer, deep breaths. “I just don’t want to know what the handicap is for that match.”

She laughed heartily for the first time in a while and he was happy at that. “Oh, you know. Nothing major. Tie your hand behind your back…or a blindfold! Oh! I know. Both.”

He shook his head as his laughter became more of a chuckle and he took note of the time. “If we’re to go over the new aspects of York at a respectable hour tomorrow, I would advise you get some rest.”

“Nah,” she waved him off. “I’m going to get something to eat because God knows that you didn’t do the shopping today.”

“I was busy,” he defended.

Her tone turned sarcastic, “Oh yeah, sure. You’re always busy when it’s your turn to do the shopping. Well, come on then.”

She had turned around to continue down Baker Street. “Where are you going?”

“We,” she stressed, “Are getting something to eat. You haven’t eaten more than a handful of biscuits in two days. Come on.”

“I’m not hungry. I’m working!”

She turned around, but kept walking backwards and stretched her arms out dramatically. “And? How is that different from normal? You know, you’re going to feel really guilty if I pass out on the pavement and get stabbed…or something, because you weren’t there to have my back after losing the race.”

He groaned, rolled his eyes, but followed her with a smirk splayed on his lips. “I think we both are
aware of how capable you are in handling yourself. The hypothetical person in question would end up in the hospital.”

“Well,” she huffed as he finally caught up with her, “Then it’s good to know that I’ll have such a credible witness to give a statement to the police.”

“Care to race?” he jabbed.

Shannon wrapped her hand back into the crook of his elbow. “God, no. That’s enough running for now. How about a leisurely stroll? Oh, Jesus, take the wheel. I smell pizza.”

“Is that what you’d like to eat?”

She nodded as they continued. “Only if you agree to have some, otherwise we’ll keep walking and trust me: my stubbornness is willing to hold out against you on this one. It could be DAYS until I eat again. Are you willing to risk such a thing?”

“No,” he replied. His breathing had returned back to normal. “As John says, you become ‘hangry’ when you don’t eat on a semi-reliable schedule. As a victim of said atrocities left in your wake, I refuse to voluntarily put myself through such a trying time again.”

“Wow,” she quipped in a drawn out fashion. “Tell me how you really feel. I didn’t realize it was such a traumatic experience for you.”

He shrugged again, “I learned, did I not? Besides, it provided valuable data about how certain factors of the emotional scale could be enticed by removing or adding stimuli.”

She stopped and pulled his elbow. “You made that up on the spot!”

“Maybe,” he grinned. “Come on. You said you wanted fed. Let’s go.”

“No, I said I wanted ‘us’ to be fed. There was a difference of pronouns in there. AND you’re buying since you lost the race.”

“Hmm, difficult that,” he gave her a side eyes as they continued down the walkway. “I seem to have left my card at the flat…”

“I bet you did. Alright then. Dinner. Rest. Then back at it tomorrow.”

He smiled and wondered how many times tonight that had happened. It was easier to do so when she was around in a way, because she could pick up on the nuances from him faking it. It was easier to drop some of the barriers and allow himself to come through rather than the implied Sherlock Holmes everyone assumed he was.

Shannon sniffed loudly and took a long draw of air before sighing. “Smell that?”

He put his nose to the air and sniffed it, not fully picking up on what she was honing in on. “What is it?”

She smiled and breathed in deeply again. “It’s almost Halloween.”

“Yes, that does usually happen in the calendar year as time passes.”

“It’s almost my birthday.”

“I know.”
“No, you didn’t.”

“I looked in your file.”

“It could be wrong, you know. Aliases and whatnot.”

He shook his head and continued forward. “It’s possible, though not entirely probable.”

“Alright, Sherlock, when’s my birthday then?”

He paused for a moment before answering. “November fifteenth.”

“Nope,” she popped the ‘p’ loudly.

“Well then, I suppose I will have to do some digging.”

She smirked, “Good luck. Come on. We’re here. You’re going to have to humor me and attempt to have some sort of appetite.”

“If you insist.”

“I do!” she chirped with enthusiasm. “Besides, it had been my plan all along.”

“What, to make me eat against my will?”

She frowned, “You make it sound like I’m forcing a tube to your stomach during a hunger strike. But, uh, no. That’s not was I was going for. Running you, after all.”

“Me? Why do I need to be run? You’re the one that’s healing,” he fired back flatly.

She went to the counter and ordered their meal and the pair sat at a booth in the back. Sherlock took the seat against the wall so that he could have a view of the entire restaurant. **Even if I’m humoring her, she can at least eat in peace and not worry about looking over her shoulder.**

“You’re getting old there, old man. Not as fast as you used to be. It’s okay though,” he scowled at her, “At your age, you’ll start only liking apple sauce or prune paste. It’s bound to happen.”

He folded his arms across his chest. “You seem to forget that you’re not incredibly far from me on the age line, child,” he teased.

“I think we’re further apart than you think. I’m thinking we’re at least eight years apart…or so, which means my intellect and charm are my saving grace because I think we both can agree that this carcass on my bones has seen some better days.” Sherlock’s eyes squinted minutely at that, and she thought perhaps it was a pang of guilt.

“Hey,” she offered consolingly, “You can’t be upset with yourself for my actions, alright? I choose to be an idiot.”

He hadn’t uncrossed his arms yet but his features had become cooler and more stoic. “Except for this last time.”

The pizza arrived to their table, but neither one grabbed a slice. She threaded her fingers together under her chin pondering a moment before saying, “I’m mad you didn’t check up on me, sure. And I probably will be for a while because I believed there was a mutual understanding on protecting each other…”

“…there is…” he interjected.
“…but, I’m the one that chose to lure him out of the dark and deal with it. I just wasn’t anticipating a stun gun.”
“So, you can sit there and stew in your self-loathing all that you want, or we can agree that there are going to be times where I get mad at you and you’ll need to understand that you’re not necessarily the only one that I’m angry with.”

He nodded slowly, eyes transfixed on his counterpart. She threw her hands apart in mild exasperation before continuing, “It was careless. I’m smarter than that and I, for what it’s worth, am sorry.”

“You have no reason to apologize to me, Shannon,” he replied candidly. “At all.”

She slid a piece of pizza onto a plate and passed it to him, “Not even for beating you at going for a run?”

“Careless error,” he waved off before picking up his slice. “Won’t happen again.”

“Sherlock Holmes made an error?” she scoffed with a grin. “Hold the phone. Someone call the Queen: we need to have a national holiday installed on the calendar.” She kicked him lightly under the table eliciting an eyeroll from the detective.

“And what ‘careless error’ did you make, hmm? Didn’t calculate the amount of air you’d need?”

He wiped his mouth politely before speaking. “No, not quite. You.”

“Me. I waz ze errah?” she asked behind a napkin hiding a mouthful of pizza.

He bit the corner of his bottom lip. “Yes. I underestimated you. I won’t be doing that again any time soon. Sorry about that.”

She nodded and did her best to flex the muscles in her arms, “Yeah, you did. Look at these? Eh... eh? I’m a machine. You are no match for my superior whatever it is that I have.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that,” he replied slyly. “That being said, we’re getting back on a mat tomorrow. I may finally have a chance to enjoy you repeatedly losing every round to me.” Her look of disbelief was enough to start a deep laugh within his chest.

She finished her bite of pizza and stared over at him. “Fine. But if you do any cheap shots, I’m telling John that you hurt me. On purpose.”

“That’s not entirely true if you were the one that agreed to grapple or spar in the first place.”

She gave a devilish smirk, “No. But he would come over and give you a verbal lashing, then tut around me like a mother hen, and then reprimand you for letting me do something so stupid or instigating me to get back on my feet so soon.” She bit into her pizza lazily and covered her mouth with her hand, “Not that I’ve given it any thought when John’s angry at you for doing something to me.”

“How hypothetically intuitive of you.”

She sat back to collect her thoughts while he took some time to eat. Getting back on a mat would be helpful. At least for the stretching part of it. And it’s not like the Syndicate is going to take it easy on me.

“I’m in. What time tomorrow?”

He looked up at her from under hooded eyes that made him look more devious than normal.
“You’re certain?”

Her head bobbed again in agreement. “Yes. It’s time. It’s going to hurt, but I don’t want you to take it easy on me. We both know that they won’t. I need to get back on the horse. I would like to, even though I know you wouldn’t…”

He paused, wiped his hands on his napkin, and tossed it on the table to give her his undivided attention. He knew where she was going with this statement. I can’t say that I blame her for putting this question to me, given that she knows that she needs to get back to work. She needs to stay sharp if she’s going to survive…and – and I would much rather that she did.

She cleared her throat and held eye contact, “Cheap shots are fine. Just don’t make my ribs any worse than they are…please?”

He gave a brief bob of his head in agreement before they spent the rest of the evening talking about his cases and the upcoming endeavor in York, feeling like two fairly normal people just out to dinner to talk.

“It’s time,” he finally broke the silence as they were walking back to the flat.

Her brow burrowed and she shook her head. “No…no that’s not what happened.”

“I know,” he nodded, stopping and turning to face her. “But it’s time. You said that you would fight to come home.”

She felt confused. No, we walked the whole way back in talking quietly about different techniques that Akido could be used for when presented with…

“I know we did,” he nodded. “But this isn’t the real me and you know that. I think, for some reason, this was committed to memory because of how vividly ‘normal’ it seemed to you. I know that there is a part of you that hopes for this type of normalcy again.”

Her eyes darted back and forth in thought. “The car…it crashed.”

“Yes,” he agreed. When she looked up at him, Luka and John were standing on either side of him. “So, Shannon Byrns, what are you going to do about it? How best are you going to make it home to us?”

Her eyes shot open quickly to see the grey, London sky overhead. She could hear that Sarah was putting Pilot into handcuffs while rolling her onto her side in an attempt to make her cough up river water. A throbbing in her side and leg brought her crashing back toward reality when she pressed her hand to her stomach and found blood on it.

Great. I pulled my stitches. Shit.

“Sarah,” she croaked before a coughing fit seized her chest. “Sarah, we need to go,” she wheezed. Sarah peered over at her with a brief nod and began to refocus her attention onto Pilot. “I should have spotted it. I should have caught it, I’m better than that.”

“Sarah,” she winced in her first effort to stand. The pain emanating from the left side of her body was excruciating. “I can’t walk on my own. I need you to help me. I’ve ripped my stitches. She’s breathing, but I might not be soon. I need you to get me to the safehouse.”

Come on, Sarah. I know you’re fighting the shock. Breathe with me. Come on.
“You’re right. To the safehouse, but I feel it’s compromised.”

Shannon nodded and let Sarah help her to her feet. “Right then, where to?”

Sarah racked her brain and thought about the file that was now sitting at the bottom of the river. “It’s going to require a phone call, but there’s another location.”

“Right. Okay, come on…we need to get out of here. We don’t want the authorities asking questions; as it stands, she’s going to be rather talkative to her bosses. There’s a place we can go for you to make that phone call, but we’re going to have to do this a little unconventionally.”

Shannon peered around and waited for an okay from her handler and the two women began walking to the underside of the bridge. When they were close enough, two homeless men were visible sitting next to each other, watching the boats float by.

“Just…just wait here a moment. They might not feel comfortable if you’re right next to me…”

Sarah’s brows knit together. “What are you talking about?”

“Look,” Shannon rasped, “I will get you home to your puppy and whatever else brings you peace in your life; but, I need you to let me do this my way…well, our way. Alright? You have my word that I’m not going to run off without you, especially in this state. Just stay here. Please.”

She turned and walked as casually as possible to the two men that had been eying the pair of them suspiciously.

Sarah watched as Shannon waved a quick hello and asked if she could come closer to talk to them. After a fairly brief exchange of dialogue, one of the men stood up and went into his small camp and produced some worn looking blankets and pair of dingy sweatpants. She bowed in thanks and made her way back to Sarah.

“What was that about?”

Shannon handed her one of the blankets before sliding on the sweatpants and tying them tightly to her waist. She wrapped the other blanket tightly around her body and motioned for them to keep moving. “Part of Sherlock’s Homeless Network. I asked them if they would get word to him about the attempted attack from a pair of ex-military Americans and that I’m on my way to one of my safehouses.”

“We knew I was going to get taken, but we had both assumed it was going to be more on the up-and-up and in a few months.”

“Shannon,” Sarah began, concerned, “You might have hit your head in the crash, but Sherlock’s missing. So is John Watson and Mycroft is being flown to a hospital.”

Shannon grinned, “Yeah. Of course they are.”

“That’s what the formal report says.”

Shannon pivoted around and stared at her blankly for a moment to gauge how serious Sarah was being about all of this. “Sarah, you’ve read my file, right?”

“Yes, extensively.”

She nodded. “And do you think that, even for one second, that if I knew he was missing with any shadow of doubt that I would have got into that car this afternoon? Hmm?”
Sarah’s silence prompted her to continue, “Look, you’re new to this and this is admittedly the first
time that the home office has assigned me a handler, more than likely because Mycroft was viewed
as such. Allow me to let you into some insight about the Holmes brothers: they are going to be late
to their own damn funerals. They came and saw me before you all came to collect me. They are
very much alive. We’re working. Well. Sort of. We’re on different paths at the moment, but still.”

She was astonished. “But, the report!”

Shannon shrugged and motioned that they keep moving. “And who wrote the report, hmm? Bet it
was Mycroft. Ahead of time. They’re both very intelligent, more so than any one of you give them
credit for. Come on, we’re going to need to catch a cab. You have cash on you?”

“Yes,” she pulled it out of her pocket. “I do.”

“Good. At least that can’t be traced.”

“What do you mean that she got attacked?” John fumed. The Homeless Network reliably told Bill
Wiggins the information that needed to be passed on to the men of Baker Street as they were sifting
to find the book Shannon had left for Sherlock in her room.
John ran a hand through his hair quickly. “Was this part of the plan?” he shouted at Sherlock.

“Of course not,” he replied calmly. Internally, however, he felt as if he was falling to pieces. “This
is far too expedited and it means that someone was waiting for her.”

Luka sat cross-legged on Shannon’s bed in a state of confusion and numbness, eyes staring wildly
out at nothing. Sherlock noted his emotional state and knelt down to be eye level with him. “She’s
alive, Luka. She’s alive and that’s what matters.”

“Mrs. Hudson!” She shuffled into Shannon’s room momentarily to find the men standing somberly
about. “We need to discuss some of Shannon’s affairs. Will you take Luka out of the room for a
moment, please? I believe he needs some tea.”

She nodded quickly and ushered the young boy off the bed and out to her kitchen. “There, there;
young man. She’s alive, you hear? She knows that she needs to come back to take care of you.
There’s no stopping her now. Let’s get some tea.”

“But…I need to…stay…” he whispered vacantly.

“But…I need to…stay…” he whispered vacantly.

“Come on now, Luka. She wouldn’t want you to hear what they’re discussing quite yet.”

“Go over the details as they were presented to you again, Wiggins, and be thorough: leave no detail
unsaid.”

John busied himself looking for Shannon’s books on the shelves so that he didn’t throw his fist into
the wall. Which is worse? Not remembering Shannon or not remembering how I’m supposed to
help her since she blocked things out? I’m not sure. God! Why can’t I remember what I’m looking
for? It’s a book of hers…but which one did she say?

“It’s like I said,” Bill recounted, “The message I got said, ‘I’m alive. U.S. ex-military tried to take
us. Moving to another safehouse. Injured, but will survive. Do not come looking for me. There’ll
be a green light across the bay’.” And that’s it. Exactly that, Shezza.”

Sherlock pondered a moment, frustrated, then sank into her desk chair staring at the grand
bookcase. The green light across the bay?
John however had had much better luck with the clue than Sherlock had. He immediately ran back to the right side of the case at withdrew two copies of *The Great Gatsby* from their places on the shelves.

“*Gatsby!*” John shouted. “Of course, how could I forget?”

Sherlock’s brow arched upward, “Because she’s designed it so for our protection.”

“Well, that doesn’t mean I will forget,” Watson frowned. “She couldn’t possibly have thought of everything?”

*But she just might have this time. I can’t recall nearly anything about her, except for her eye color, the way she laughs when she’s genuinely amused, her height…almost nothing of our conversations…she’s a ghost to me.*

John observed a weight move down his friend’s features and realized that he was at a loss.

“Don’t worry, Sherlock. She’ll come back, right?”

Wiggins looked down to Sherlock to answer, and was surprised to hear him whisper, “I can’t remember.”

Across town, Shannon and Sarah had made their way into one of Shannon’s safehouses and were taking stock of their injuries. Shannon tended to the minor laceration Sarah had above her temple and tossed her a box of bandages for the other cuts and scrapes she had incurred. The American went into the bathroom to take stock of how badly she had ripped herself open and was worried to find that her blanket and sweatpants were drenched in blood.

Her skin had gone clammy and pale, and for the first time in since the collision, she realized exactly how dizzy she had been. A shaky hand opened up the cabinet and fetched a suturing needle and medical silk. With a hiss, she peeled away her hospital gown from her skin and was able to see the extent of her injuries. Her stab wound had all but entirely opened up and her left leg need re-stitched at the exit wound.

*There’s no way that I can do this on my own. I need help. Christ, when did I get so careless? No…no, not now. I can’t…pass out…now…*

Her body collapsed onto the cold tile and for the third time today, she was dragged back down into dark oblivion.

The haze of sleep had lifted and Shannon found herself lying in bed, Sarah sitting beside her. She squinted to find that they were connected by some IV tubing and a bottle between them. Sarah turned the page in her book and flexed her hand.

“Thank you,” Shannon whispered. Her limbs and head felt like lead sinking into the comfort of her pillow and mattress.

“We both have O blood, so it shouldn’t cause a problem. Did you know that you were bleeding that badly? You truly are as reckless as your file implies. I had to give you twenty-nine stitches while you were passed out. Twenty-nine!”

She winced when adjusting herself on the bed and smirked in exhaustion. “Well, if you ask Sherlock, I have a flair for the dramatic injuries.”
“Your body is a walking book on the scars of combat. You need to take it easy.” Her handler carefully removed her IV lead and taped gauze to the crook of her elbow. “You can’t possibly think to hold out much longer at this rate.”

Shannon chuckled darkly. “I will keep pushing until I have nothing left to push with. I have things to fight for. Besides, who wanted to live a boring life anyway?”

Sarah placed the book on the bedside table. “I’m going to give you time to rest before I make my phone call, but I just feel that, as an outsider, I should tell you that you’re going to burn out. Just – just be careful.”

*Careful? Now where have I heard that before? Sweet Oblivion, take me away.*

John opened his eyes and lifted himself up from the bed. He noticed that Sherlock had been pacing about and turned to face him. “How are you?”

“Bit of a lump,” he grimaced as he took his hand away from the back of his skull.

“True that, but you have your uses,” the detective retorted.

John sat up carefully and watched as Sherlock resumed pacing in front of a glass window, a sobering realization that they were in an identical cell like Eurus’. Mycroft was off the side and the governor was sitting with his back against the wall.

“Did you see your sister?”

“No.”

John moved his hand behind his head again to gingerly feel the pulsating lump. “How was that?”

Sherlock breathed deeply and replied, “Family’s always difficult.”

“Is this an occasion for banter?” Mycroft interjected in annoyance.

Sherlock motioned to his elder sibling and hummed a syllable, “Hmm. Case and point.”

The unmistakable sound of a phone ringing resounded loudly through the cell. John looked about, “Are we phoning someone?”

“Apparently.”

“What’s he doing here?” he looked over accusatorily to the governor.

“As he’s told,” Sherlock stopped pacing. “Eurus is in control.”

A girl’s voice came through the speakers. She sounded terrified and as if she was crying. “Help me!”

Sarah dragged Shannon across the threshold of the sanctioned safehouse and ensured that she was able to have proper medical attention. When entering her clearances to maintain a paper trail on her file, Sarah stole a glance back at Shannon. While Shannon was getting fluids and evaluated, Sarah logged into her computer and found that Sir Edwin had left her a message to call him immediately.
“Miss Evans, it is urgent that I speak with your contact: Codenamed The Shield. Where are they?”

“Sir,” she began quietly, “There was an incident, as you are aware, and they suffered injuries. The Shield is currently undergoing treatment.”

“Wake her up if she’s asleep.”

“Sir…the extent of their injuries…”

Sir Edwin leaned forward toward his camera. “Now, Miss Evans.”

She grabbed the laptop and took it into the procedure room where Shannon was on a gurney being evaluated. Sarah handed the laptop to her and muttered a quick apology under her breath.

“Miss Byrns, are you quite decent?”

She rolled her eyes into consciousness, “Probably not, but if we put you on the tray, Sir Edwin, you shouldn’t be exposed to anything indecent. I am essentially on an operating table at present.”

“Now you listen to me, young lady. You are being re-tasked. There’s been an incident.”

“Of course there has been. There’s always an incident,” she grimaced as a pair of forceps retrieved glass from her stab wound. “I need time to recover. You even said so to Jeremiah when you thought I couldn’t hear. By the way…who do I need to thank for not going over my security and driver detail? Hmm? That’s you, right? Should I come see you, personally, once I’ve recovered?”

The elder statesman growled under his breath and snarled at the camera. “It was at Sherrinford.”

The American smacked the arm of her attending doctor and sat upright. Sarah eyed her suspiciously with alarm. “All of you: leave. Sarah, you’ll stay, if you please.”

When they turned toward each other, Shannon slammed her hand on the tray table, causing the tools and instruments to jump violently from rest. “Now!”

Edwin saw Sarah in the corner of his screen and pointed, “She’s not cleared for this. She will need to leave.”

“Sir Edwin, now’s not the time. You either tell me what’s going on, or my handler will be sent home and I will go in the wind,” her voice was low and threatening. “You should know by now that I’m not playing games.”

His features grew stern. “I suppose not.”

“I am aware of the who and what of Sherrinford. I need a timeline. Now.”


He sighed, disgruntled, “Miss Byrns will be more than happy to fill you in after this call. Now, to the task at hand.” He reached out of camera shot and brought a small stapled packet of papers into view and began reading from them.

“At some point this afternoon, the alarms at Sherrinford had been triggered from within the compound and we made every effort to regain contact with the facility. So far, we are unaware of any casualties that there may have been and/or how the subject in question may have found out about a certain person with whom you are acquaint.” He idly flipped the page. “The facility has been on lockdown now for about four hours.”
“Four hours?!” she snapped.

Edwin clasped his hands together and shot her a stern look. “You were compromised and not at an appropriate safehouse for the transmission of this message. Had you made an effort to get to this location sooner…”

*Click*

Sarah had powered off the laptop with a heavy sigh. “That’s enough of that, then.”

“Could be your job,” Shannon cautioned.

Sarah nodded. “Yeah, kind of hoping so. A desk doesn’t sound too bad, actually.”

Shannon took the new set of clothes from another side tray and began to get dressed. “Look, I understand if you don’t want to know or be involved in any of this, and my personal warning to you is to stay out of it. You are one hundred percent off the hook with me, Sarah. I just need you to do me a favor before you go.”

“Well, you did say that I was going to get home to my puppy tonight.”

Shannon smirked in an effort to fight back the dread that was pooling in her stomach. “I need you to call Mycroft Holmes’ office and get me in touch with Anthea. It’s a matter of life or death.”

Anthea was standing next to Shannon with a set of headphones in hand. “Are you sure about this?” she cautioned.

“No,” Shannon replied honestly. “I’m terrified, but if I’m going to stand a chance at what I might be seeing on the other end of that footage, then I need to remove apathy and empathy from my self for a while. I’m going to need to be like her, in a sense. It should make me a little sharper. And not what she’s expecting.”

She shook her head in resignation, “Yes, ma’am. But I will let you know, there are protocols in place if the worst should happen. Is there anything that you would like mandated in the event of your demise?”

“Hmm,” she huffed in a moment of sobriety. “See that Luka is taken care of first and foremost. The rest, I trust, you will delegate admirably. If they’re alive, they’ll already know. There’s a file on my laptop that will free them of Geist protocols sitting on the desktop. Have them listen to it.”

She fastened the noise-cancelling device atop her ears, closed her eyes, and was immersed in programming after Anthea had pressed play.

There was an odd alert that came from the console as Eurus was watching her brothers and John Watson sit among debris. She turned, noted the alert was an incoming call and shifted her persona to potentially match whomever might be on the other end. *Silly games for silly minds. How*
“Hello, Eurus,” a voice could be heard before the video feed caught up. “I would surmise that you have been expecting a call from me.”

A young woman came into focus and piqued her interest for study. She was injured, of course, but there was nothing in her demeanor or in her body language that could indicate as such, if it weren’t for the physical evidence that could be seen.

“Ah, yes. It was a probability that you would survive leaving the hospital; though, I would then have to believe that your handler was not replaced and only the front seat passengers were. That, or you managed to have sex with someone other than my brother that could warrant a complicated emotional response from him.”

Shannon didn’t blink or acknowledge the comment Eurus had tried to bait her with. Frankly, she felt incapable of having emotion due to a protocol that she and Anthea had enacted in an effort to collect as much data from Eurus as possible.

“Which brother are you implying that I would care so deeply for? Emotional responses are vital for gauging subject stability.”

The younger Holmes eyed Shannon scrupulously. “Jim was so eager to set you free on the world. I can see why had this been the version that was initially released. Capable of being meticulous, relentless, and causing mayhem simply because she can. You were such a treat for him. He talked about what you could become when he came to visit. Did you know?”

“Yes.” She replied flatly. “The knowledge of said interaction before, during, or prior to this dialogue proves to be inconsequential so long as the knowledge was obtained.”

“Oh, look at you trying to be clever. Would you like to see what’s happening in my rat cage? Take a look. I’ll even back up the track some for you; this should be rather telling if I’ve hit the mark on you or not. I told Sherlock it was emotional context.”

The feed cut to a steam of Sherlock staring at a screen on a phone and Molly puttering about in her kitchen.

“Molly, please,” Sherlock begged as his eyes kept glancing toward a countdown clock.

She whispered into the receiver of her mobile, “I love you.”

The countdown clock beeped as the time had stopped with all three men sighing in relief. Sherlock buried his head in his hands while lurching forward.

Mycroft spoke, “Sherlock, however hard that was…”


“Saved her,” she queried, “From what? Oh, do be sensible.” Her tone was chastising. “There were no explosives in her little house. Why would I be so clumsy. You didn’t win; you lost.” Her brother frowned. “Look what you did to her; look what you did to yourself.”

Sherlock turned away from the screen, his apparent anger boiling from his gut. “All those complicated little emotions…I lost count,” Eurus stated plainly. “Emotional context, Sherlock. It
destroys you every time. Now please, pull yourself together: I need you at peak efficiency. The next one isn’t going to be so easy.” A door slid open after Sherlock had begun to unbutton his jacket. “In your own time.”

Soon, Sherlock is smashing his arms and fists down onto the coffin in rage as he destroys the wooden prop in the room.

Eurus paused the feed and came back on screen. “Nothing? Not even a tick of emotional response from you? My older brother seems to believe that you are the sole reason for Sherlock’s unreliable emotional stability.

“Interesting,” Shannon observed rather robotically. “Sherlock Holmes is able to keenly exemplify rage when certain stimuli are pressed and pressure is applied. Fascinating and you chose Molly Hooper to do so.”

Eurus seemed agitated. “Sherlock stating that you are emotional is one thing altogether based on the footage you’ve just viewed; but Mycroft stating as such in your file is something different. What have you; oh. But of course. A little slip of programming to hide your emotions.”

“Not to hide them, no,” Shannon offered in honesty. “They’re gone for now. Empathy, sympathy, emotional ties to memory: gone. I am simply the core of the machine set to task.”

“Wonderful,” Eurus analyzed. “Then I will show you what is happening live, shall I?”

The feed clipped to the same room with all three men staring at her. “No,” John whispered.

“They’ve kindly been eavesdropping on our conversation and the small video you got to watch and now, as an extension of the experiment concerning emotional context, I would like to analyze their reactions to you,” Eurus offered plainly.

“You promised,” John shouted. “You said you were going to stay far away from her.”

She eyed him quizzically. “Do pieces not move on the chessboard? And after so much time, every move becomes predictable. That is what Eurus has endeavored to show me.”

“Good heavens,” Mycroft ran a hand through his hair. “You were one of the strongest assets we had and now you’ve gone and played right into where she wanted you!”

“Chess pieces, Mycroft. For every move there is a reaction until a victor stands alone.”

“Look at all of your faces,” Eurus showed them a view of themselves. “I am not sure whether I am observing betrayal, sadness, or anger; or the proportions of the three on each of you. Fascinating. Had I delved deeper into her file, I may have used her instead of Molly Hooper…only,” Eurus paused a beat, “she would have actually had explosives.”

Sherlock’s fists balled at his side. “Shannon,” he looked at the camera dead on. “Are you with me?”

Eurus watched intently as the American blinked lazily and sighed. “Of course I am. I will say though, turning off all those emotional responses to only turn them back in again is taxing. Jesus Christ.”

“What is this?” Eurus exclaimed, giddy. “Is this the version that you are so familiar with?”

“I’ll make this quick. Boys, I’m almost there. I’m coming for you. Eurus, I don’t make idle threats
as you are aware, especially when they concern your brother. They live. All of them. And so do you. If they die, I will ensure that every possible form of ‘life’ is given to you before you beg to be put back in this facility. I may be injured, but you truly have no idea what I am capable of.”
“I strongly suggest that you desist before I force you to. Remember, your brother is the one who keeps me in the light. But I am more than happy to wage war in the dark.” She snapped forward and cut the feed to her camera.

“It’s alright,” Eurus shrugged. “Adding her to the experiment would be interesting, but I’m bored now. Off you pop to the last room. Perhaps you can beat her to the finish line.”

Shannon turned off the tablet she had been using for the call to Sherrinford and placed a jammer into its mechanics. “There. That’ll do for now.”

Rodger, the attendant that had fetched her from Serbia, came and stopped at her seat. “We’ll be landing in less than ten minutes, Ma’am. You preparations have been made: there will be a helicopter on the tarmac waiting to take you to the island. From what I’ve gathered, it will take an additional fifteen to twenty minutes after the take off for you to get there.”

She smiled weakly and gave a nod. “Thank you. I’ll see if I can get you a raise on my return.”

“That being said, Miss Byrns, I should like to remind you how foolish this mission could be…”

“…I can’t leave them…” she interjected quickly.

“…but, a large part of me that’s not connected to my position here is glad that you won’t listen. I have some things here for you, ma’am. Mr. Holmes the elder left a series of music for you to listen to, stating that everything you would need is in this file for discerning choice.”

He handed her a small folder that had instructions about the files should would find at her disposal and when he believed that they could do.

“Mr. Holmes the younger,” he led with a twinkle in his eye, “left you a package that will be waiting for you on the helicopter. It’s been brought out of storage; I felt that it was an appropriate time to fetch it.”

A muscle in her jaw flared and her lips pressed firmly together. Her throat felt like it was closing off and tears were going to begin flowing freely at any time. “I don’t know what I would have done without you, Rodger. How can I say thank you enough or – or in the magnitude that I want to express it?”

He gingerly patted her shoulder and handed her a bag with medical supplies. “The best thanks that you could give me, ma’am, is you coming out of this endeavor alive so that I might have the opportunity to serve you again. Bring them home, but don’t forget to bring yourself home.”

Sherlock looked to his brother and hoarsely said with his teeth clenched, “Five minutes. It took her just five minutes to do all of this to us.” His gun was still pointing at his older brother as he frantically tried to command the emotions that were welling within him.

She’s coming. But she’s not going to get here in time and I can’t let Eurus win. Shannon needs more time…if there’s a chance that she’ll be able to save John or Mycroft, I need to find a way to buy her more time. How? Think, Sherlock. What would you do, Shannon?

He peered between his best friend and brother and realized what he was going to have to do.
Emotional context. Potential self-sacrifice. Oh, she’ll never forgive me for this. The detective lowered the gun from his brother. “Well, not on my watch.”

Mycroft and John convey their terror as Sherlock changed the rules of Eurus’ game. His sister frowned and asked, “What are you doing?”

“A moment ago, a brave man asked to be remembered.” Mycroft’s face fell in alarm. “I’m remembering the governor,” he affirmed as he pressed the barrel to the flesh of his chin. “Ten.”

“No, no, Sherlock,” she frowned.

“Nine…” The men he cared about most looked on in horror. “Eight…”

“You can’t!”

“Seven…”

She pressed forward, “You don’t know about Redbeard yet!”

“Six…”

“Sherlock!” an anxiousness was bleeding from her voice.

“Five…”

His sister was in a panic, “Sherlock! Stop that at once!”

He could hear a small projectile and felt a pressure somewhere on the back of his neck. He took his hand and reached around for it to remove it and retain lucidity. “Four…”

Another whirred sound and Sherlock could see that John was shot with a dart and he knew what he was looking for. He removed it from his skin and scrutinized the tip and shaft size, determining that there were only a handful of potential sedatives that she would use to have such an immediate effect.

“Three…,” his voice faltered before he said more weakly, “Two…”

He felt himself fall backward and was loosely aware that the pistol had fallen from his hand. The sedative pulled him heavily into the dark and for whatever reason, he surrendered to it willingly. I know the reason. But I had to change the rules…she needed…something…we needed something… oh, yes…time.

It was cold, their air was cutting through the open cabin door. Sherlock’s package to her was a sent of tactical clothing that had reinforced leather and steel plating sewn into it with a small selection of holsters for knives and gear. A note sat on the top of the clothing in his handwriting:

If convenient, use to ensure that you stay in one piece.
If inconvenient, use anyway.
I know you.
-S.H.

She huffed air through her nose in a snort and began to change in front of the military personnel. One of them looked at her skeptically and she shrugged, tugging the compression shirt down by the hem to cover her fresh bandages. “I don’t get military issued garb,” she retorted smugly.
“Though I do think mine looks far cooler than yours.”

“All due respect, Miss, but…” a captain began.

Shannon wagged a finger at him. “Then I wouldn’t finish that statement if I were you. I know you were all briefed about me before I set foot on this chopper. Hush.”

Once she finished changing, she leaned forward and began speaking to the group. “Just so we’re clear, lethal fire is a last resort.”

The commanding officer nodded but eyed her with suspicion. “This is a recovery operation. We are supposed to retrieve a prisoner and detain her at all costs while ensuring the safety of everyone else in that compound.”

“She’s not going to be in there,” Shannon offered before putting her headphones over her ears. “She knew I was coming and if Sherlock was able to do anything, she’ll have moved. We’re going in to ensure the safety of everyone. They are more than likely going to be disoriented and unaware of their actions, in a sense.”

Shannon carefully tiptoed around as her squad of military partners cleared rooms and began rounding up the people that were left. Captain O’Reilly had radioed in for new people to assist in running the prison and was told they had forty-five minutes until the new crew could be flown out.

The playlist she had listened to flooded her body with adrenaline and forced her body to release pain-inhibitors into her bloodstream. With the exception of an uncomfortable pressure from her new sutures, she didn’t feel much.

“Byrns,” O’Reilly called out. “We’ve found something over here. I’ll go with you to assist.”

Her heart was thudding wildly in her ears as they followed Eurus’ maze she had set up for the boys. She passed through the coffin room and took stock of the explosive damage Sherlock had left in the wake of his anger. Her stomach tightened in empathy. She’s seen him that angry, but most times he left and went to interrogate or fight with Mycroft.

She walked down a long corridor to find a door requiring a code. O’Reilly used his scanner and was able to crack the encryption after a few minutes. The door gave way for them to find Mycroft lying unconscious on the ground in a cell without any glass. “O’Reilly, the room!” she barked as she sprinted to his side. She pulled a pack of smelling salts out of her pocket and cracked it open under his nose, O’Reilly dutifully checking the room to ensure it was secure.

His eyes fluttered open and his eyes rolled around in his head. “Easy,” her voice rasped gently, her hand cradling his head as she tried to help him sit up. “You’re alright, Mycroft.”

“Why are you here?” he slurred, lurching forward. “Y – you can’t be near her…”

“Mycroft, listen to me: Where’s Sherlock?”

Holmes turned and looked to the spot he had seen his brother before everything went dark. “Darts came out of the wall…not this room…” he rubbed his neck and produced the small dark to her. Mycroft looked off to the side deep in thought and then aghast at Shannon. “How are you here? We left you in the hospital…”

“Rodger gave me your file,” she replied, her eyes taking stock of any clues or evidence left in the
“And I listened to a couple things.”

“Are you mad? That could have played right into her hand!” he slurred. The heel of his hand pressed into his temple. “She’s playing a dangerous game, Shannon, and now she’s taken Sherlock and Doctor Watson. You’ve let her have the upper hand in her game; how could you be so careless?”

“Her game? Hers?” she pulled her head back in astonishment and allowed the newly entered medic to come and take a look at Mycroft.

He hadn’t seen it coming. Sherlock trying to find some way to be prepared after the blindsiding revelation of a sister, but me? That was new and not what he had expected. I was meant to be dealing with my own problems…not theirs. This was supposed to be beyond me. Why would I concern myself about their family affairs?

“No. Mycroft. It’s our game. She’s playing our game and Sherlock knew he was going to have to play for keeps. We’d talked about it. Why do you think he remembers so little about our conversations, hmm? It’s by design; our design.”

At the Hospital: Sherlock & Luka

“She looks bad,” Luka coughed nervously, slow tentative steps taking him closer to Shannon’s bed. Sherlock read off of her chart to see the extent of her injuries and surgeries, taking a mental note of the medicinal cocktail that was being pumped into her bloodstream.

“She’ll pull through,” he asserted. “She always does.”

Luka stood uneasily at her bedside and gingerly grasped her hand between his palms. “One day she may not.”

The sobering reality of Shannon’s work and the toll it was taking from the mouth of this child hit the detective in hard. “Yes. That is possible.”

The boy screwed his face up to Sherlock’s stoic features, watching the detective take meticulous care in checking the machines that she was hooked up to. “How can you say those things,” Luka snapped with water welling in his eyes, “When she is always saying such good things about you!”

“You mistake being nice with being honest. It is possible that one day, she may not pull through and her body and mind will have met their match. Would you rather I lie to you and tell you that all is well and the form on that bed is some abstract thing for you to contemplate as a bad memory?”

His gut twisted at the sight of her in another hospital bed. “She knew going to get you that this could happen and had her affairs in place. That’s who she is.”

He knelt down to look at him in the eye. “Luka, she is a rare and magnificent specimen of a human being. Her emotions and connections to this world keep her far more grounded than I think I would be capable should I have had a similar story to her own.”

Luka wiped his eyes roughly on the back of his sleeve. “I have to settle with the evidence and history that the majority of those scars on her skin are connected to me in some fashion; and now, you will have scars on her body from her protecting you.”

“I don’t understand,” he cried.

Sherlock sighed and let his eyes linger on the forced rise and fall of her ribcage from the respiration machine. “In a way, Shannon doesn’t feel that she’s done enough unless she’s protecting the people she cares about by paying their dues or debts for them with herself. It’s a very
complex train of emotional thought and understanding, and one day you may understand. I offer to help you do that. But you must know or come to some realization now that her being in this bed, right now, is a consequence for her actions in her mind, because she did what she thought was necessary to protect you. And, she was more than willing to pay that price.”

John quietly pushed the door open, brighter light cascading across where Holmes and child stood. “Now, you promised on her life that you would eat once you got to see her. John will take you to get a meal into your system.”

Luka stood at the doorway, John’s reassuring hand on his shoulder and whispered to something to Shannon. The only part that Sherlock picked up before he had turned to leave was moja mama and it was then that he realized Luka had said a quick prayer to whomever he believed to be listening to protect “my mother”.

The door shut quietly behind them and Sherlock turned to Shannon and sat on the edge of the bed. “I’m trying to protect you. You make it infuriatingly difficult at times.”

At the Hospital: After Mycroft’s Visit

Something in her voice had captured his attention and he couldn’t quite place his finger on it. It unsettled him enough that he collected his coat, ensured that Mrs. Hudson would watch over Luka until he returned, and left for the hospital. He stewed in a tense silence in the back of his cab, pondering what would cause her to choose him not visiting when they both were aware that his doing so would put her into a sounder sleep than had she tried to do so on her own at present.

The expert precision Sherlock maneuvered around security and nurses, and made his way to be on the inside of her closed room door. If she had heard the door click open or shut, she hadn’t made any indication as her eyes stayed transfixed on the window and he quietly walked out from the shadows.

“Even being medicated, I’ve not known you to cancel on one of our chat sessions when you’ve been in the hospital,” his low voice interrupted the silence. He caught a whiff of something lingering in the air. Mycroft. “Ah, my brother was here.”

Her head lazily rolled over to face him and looked exhausted and tormented. “You may have cause to truly hate me this time,” she whispered.

Sherlock took the chair and moved it closer to her bedside, shed his coat, and sat expectantly for her to continue. “That would certainly be an endeavor.”

She swallowed hard and winced in pain. “I’m tired of his secrets.”

“Then tell me some,” his voice assuring, his fingertips lightly resting on her exposed knuckles. “And I’ll decide if I need to be angry or not.”

Shannon heaved a long, labored sigh and yawned with some difficulty. “You’ve been poking around about your sister and after what you did to him tonight, I believe he is genuinely terrified. He called me after you and John left, prompting a visit here not long after.”

Sherlock sat back in the chair, but left his hand where it had been, stretching his arm across a small void between them. “Alright. You may begin.”

“I suppose I got the quick version and yours tomorrow will be far more encompassing. He was uncomfortable sharing what was exchanged but…” her heavy lids lifted, her eyes meeting his,
“after asking me to call you, he enticed his argument by throwing me into the mix.”

“I have thought of that.”

“I know.”

“…but?”

“But,” she agreed, “how am I going to help you if he’s implying that I need to be benched?” He frowned in thought. “Sherlock, you should have seen his face. Genius and manipulator that he is, I’ve not seen terror like this from him before.”

“Yes, changing focus may aid us both and open our minds to newer paths that were previously closed off. Now. Do you know what you’re doing next?”

She scoffed, “Is that all I am to you?”

“Don’t be imbecilic,” he reprimanded. “If you are able to be involved in the intimate details of my problem, let me return the favor and help you with yours.”

“It was the poem in the last box from Irina,” she resigned herself. “The last stanza we needed to get Luka, but the other stuff… Th – that was specifically for me and there’s no feasible way she would have known some of those details without a link to someone from my past. Before you. And it means that I might have to fly back to where I grew up.”

Before you. As in…?

“If you don’t mind, doing it in stanzas…and then I’ll show you if you’ll hand me your phone.”
“‘5 by 5 and 76; Oui ceded in the east.; Insurrection got Robert Johnson; tar and feather in the least.’.”

“The five by five, outside of being a term for everything being square, I don’t understand. But seventy six is an important number that comes up later. Oui? It’s a play on words and is most assuredly a reference to the French.”

“And Robert Johnson?”

“He was a tax collector in the late 1700s that was tarred and feathered by a gang of men in the county that I grew up in. I remember learning about him when being taught about the Whiskey Rebellion…because my final report was on that subject matter.”

“Yes, I saw. I looked it up already because you grew rather cold to me figuring it out. But then, that means that you grew up in…”

“Pennsylvania,” she grinned. “Knew you’d get there eventually.”

“‘West he marched to collect; His toy soldier drenched in rye: Born in lands originally of the Nations Five; the Queen of the Great Meadows in his eye.’”

She cleared her throat. “I have a suspicion that his is meant to be taken two ways. Washington, now president, dispatched himself, regulars, and militia to southwestern Pennsylvania to bring the distillers and brewers to heel. What do know about the Rebellion?”

“A tax was levied against a domestic product in an effort to pay for the war and generate revenue for your fledgling government. That’s about it without me having to do additional research.”

“That’s the distilled version of it. Took a few years, distillers fled into the west and landed in Tennessee and Kentucky or his in the mountains.”

“Anyway, uh…Queen of the Great Meadows could be eluding to Queen Aliquippa of the Seneca. She was a strategic ally to the British during the French and Indian War, which makes sense for the ‘oui’ stated earlier. Some of the lands there were contested during the war until the French moved Canada and the Louisiana Territory.”

“Well, Ms. Byrns,” he smirked. “Who knew you were such a wealth of knowledge?”

She continued, “Nations Five refers to the Iroquois Confederacy since they used some of the Pittsburgh area as hunting land, and then…oh yes, rye. That was the whiskey of choice back in the day.”

“So, the writer is referring to Washington, me, or both of us.”

“Interesting,” he sat down and pressed his fingers together under his chin. “And the third verse?”

“‘Muses in blue and white; Gregorian in their plight; For the woman in love with fight; to be one and die by night.’”

“That’s the part that’s getting me. I remember a person from home, but nothing about them except that they were of Greek descent and I saw them when I was growing up.”

“I could use hypnosis on you and delve into some of your Geist protocols, see if there’s any data hiding in there.”

She squinted, “What did you say…”

“Hypnosis…to for you to pull off another book from the shelf.”
“No, Geist protocols. That’s it. That’s how we can wrangle your sister, but it’s going to involve you going to your brother’s office tonight and making it so that he can sign a protocols waiver.”

Present

“It’s not been our game for long, but we’re directing it all the same. More or less. Now I need you to tell me where she may have taken him. Focus. You only have one chance to be correct: so I strongly encourage you to be as accurate as possible.”

He thought a moment using his faculties to focus as acutely as possible. “Musgrave Hall.”

“O’Reilly, see that he’s taken to a safehouse that’s towards the bottom of the list.” Her voice, still raspy from the noose, was no less commanding and conveying of her intent. “I’ll let him know when it’s safe.”

“And what of Sir Edwin? Lady Smallwood?” He gazed on as Shannon followed the medics escorting the elder Holmes brother to the chopper.

“Make something up if you have to; I don’t care.”

“Greg, it’s Shannon.”

“Oh my God. Where the hell are you? You were supposed to be in protective custody and then you went up and vanished!”

“I know…I know and you can have a good yell at me later. But we have a problem. Sherlock needs help and I don’t know if I’m going to get there in time,” her voice strained over the engines.

Any anger that there may have in his voice immediately disappeared. “Where? Shannon, where do I need to go?”

“Musgrave Hall. It was in the Holmes Family for a while, so I would check their records. He and John are potentially in danger…and I’m thinking it’s leaning toward the mortal kind.”

“Right. Where are you?”

“In a chopper. I just left a facility where Eurus Holmes performed experiments on him, John, and Mycroft and now’s she’s taken them both there.”

“I’m sorry. Eurus Holmes? Wait…wait…hold on...”

“Greg, there’s no time. I’ll explain when you call me back after your orders are dispatched. Send everything.”
Shannon was sprinting as quickly as she could across the grounds and shouted into the house, “SHERLOCK HOLMES, YOU BLOODY ANSWER ME RIGHT NOW!”

“Up here,” he called and she took off up the stairs. She slid into the room, disheveled and out of breath, but relief flooded her. Thank God. He’s alive.

Sherlock held his sister’s face and gently said, “I will be back. Now we have to save John.” He stood, turned quickly and grabbed Shannon’s hand, dragging her through the house. “I know where he is and we don’t have long to get him. Run!”

Together, it felt as if the wind was carrying them through the house and across the grounds. Sherlock snagged a set of bolt cutters he had seen when he was looking for clues. Her auditory protocol was starting to wear off and pain was throbbing through her body.

“There!” he pointed after five minutes. “John!”

Shannon handed Sherlock her flashlight and tossed a rope from her backpack down to the doctor. “Grab the rope, John. Keep your head up and don’t stop pulling.”

She handed the rope to Sherlock and began shedding her backpack and tactical shirt. “What are you doing?” Sherlock’s eyes angry in disbelief.

“You have to stay up here,” she said, kicking her boots off carefully. “I can’t pull either of you up. I don’t have the strength and my boost is wearing off.” She snapped the cutters away from his feet. “You collapsed a lung this week! You can’t be serious!”

Water continued to fill the well relentlessly. “Then I suggest you both fish me out when he’s free. As soon as he’s free, you pull him up and out of the water.”

“You might kill yourself!” he argued while John pulled the rope taut from his end.

Their eyes locked and the semi-unspoken rule was made clear to him. Save John Watson to save Sherlock Holmes. I’m not part of that equation.

“John,” she hollered down, “Swim to the wall if you can.” She gave Sherlock a quick nod and plunged into the water. The shock knocked the wind out of her, but she cleared the surface and took as large a gulp of air as show could before diving down to work on John’s chains.

The cutter was old and physically taxing, but she kept pushing her arms together to try and free her friend. The muscles in her back and abdomen strained in exertion, her teeth set on edge as she visibly gnashed them together.

Her vision grew fuzzy, red spots dotting it; a warning that she was going to pass out soon. Come on. One last push. Save John Watson. You promised Rosie.

John flailed to stay above water and accidentally kicked Shannon’s injured side. Shockwaves of pain flashed through her nervous system but she was able to somehow cut through the steel and rocket him toward the surface.

She sputtered underwater, intaking the murky fluid into her healing lungs and panicked. Somehow she’d twisted herself around and couldn’t figure out which way was up allowing her to effectively slam her head into the stone wall.

Her torso bobbed for the surface, Doctor Watson grabbing her and pulling her close to him. “Sherlock!” he called up. “She’s hurt. She needs to go first. I’m free; I’m fine. I’ll tie her off and
Eurus was being led away from the house by a pair of officers. John and Sherlock looked on as she was being led away.

“I just spoke to your brother,” Lestrade offered in assurance.

The boys turned to him, John tightening his blanket around his shoulders. “How is he?”

“He’s a bit shaken up, that’s all. She didn’t hurt him, she just locked in in her old cell. Shannon got to him and got him put into a safehouse just in case before coming here.”

John quipped, “What goes around comes around.”

“Yeah, give me a moment, boys?” Lestrade asked politely.

“Oh, erm,” Sherlock began, forcing Lestrade to turn around. “Mycroft…make sure…he’s looked after. He’s not as strong as he thinks he is.”

“Yeah,” he nodded. “I’ll take care of it.”

“Thanks, Greg,” Sherlock’s voice low and kind in gratitude.

John turned back and watched a gurney approach to take a limp body to an ambulance cabin. “She’s going to be okay, Sherlock. Her vitals starting coming back up once you got her out of the water.”

“Hmm,” he hummed, disconcerted. “She can’t keep doing this. And she knows it.”

A limp hand motioned for a momentary stop beside the two idle men. John reached his left hand down and squeezed her hand. “Hey there, stranger. Welcome back.”

“Sorry about the CPR thing,” she whispered. “Didn’t mean to take in water.”

“It’s okay,” John feigned a smile. “No more of that, though. No more scares. Just get well. That’s an order, soldier.”

John turned and walked off ten or so feet to give his best friend some privacy. “They’re going to take you soon,” he warned. His palm pressed itself against the skin of her forearm and his fingers wrapped lightly around her freezing limb.

“I know. Can’t put up much of a fight now. Not like this.” Her hand, in kind, reached up through the cuff of his shirt and replicated his hold in kind.

Sherlock’s lips formed a thin line and a nerve near his eye twitched. “Probably for the best. For them, at least. You’re too much trouble if you have even an ounce of energy in you.”

“It’s okay,” she whispered, her eyes closing against the bright lights nearby. “It’s time. Let me go. I need to finish it.”

He leaned down and lightly pressed his forehead to hers. “I suppose it is. For what it’s worth,” he brought the back of her hand to his lips and pressed and kiss there, “I wouldn’t trade any of it for you.”
Shannon’s eyes remained closed, but she heaved a single chuckle. “You don’t remember most of it.”

“Well,” he smiled, standing up right and squeezed her hand. “I won’t trade anything for those memories either. If convenient, return to Baker Street.”

“If inconvenient,” she replied with a lopsided grin. “Come to home anyway.”

The gurney pushed forward and put her in the ambulance cabin, speeding off to take her from the scene.

John returned and quietly said to Sherlock, “You okay?”

“I said I’d bring her home. I can’t, can I?”

John’s gaze lingered between the fading ambulance lights and the helicopter Eurus was on. “Which one?”

“Both, I suppose. It’s out of my hands and abilities to do so.”

“Well, you gave her,” he motioned to Eurus, “What she was looking for. Context.”

Sherlock looked down to him. “Is that good?”

“It’s not good; it’s not bad. It’s…”

“It is what it is,” John finished.

“What about Shannon? What was I able to do for her?”

“Oh, that’s easy.” John patted Sherlock on the shoulder. “You gave her meaning.”

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