Partners in love and crime, James Moriarty and his husband Sebastian Moran have been through a lot together. When their wedding anniversary coincides with Jim’s heat cycle, the mastermind decides that now is the right time for them to have a child. They have no trouble conceiving and are thrilled about their expanding family.

All seems idyllic until a mysterious stalker begins a campaign of harassment against the couple. Who is this person and what do they want? Jim and Seb try to figure it out as the threats escalate. Meanwhile, they must also contend with the ups and downs of pregnancy.

Notes

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conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.
Prologue

Chapter Summary

While on vacation celebrating their third wedding anniversary, Jim has something important to tell his husband.

Chapter Notes

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“This week has been perfect,” Sebastian Moran said, his eyes gazing down to meet those of his lover’s. He held the other man close as they lay bare on a plush sheepskin rug, basking in the glow of a fire.

The past seven days were sublime— easily among the best in the sniper’s recent memory. From the outset, he and Jim had decided to commemorate their third wedding anniversary with a trip to the Cotswolds. It’d been far too long since they’d last stolen away together, just the two of them without interference from the rest of the world. Both agreed a vacation was in order.

Perhaps serendipitously, their excursion happened to coincide with the criminal mastermind’s heat cycle. Seb delighted at this, knowing how insatiable Jim would be during that time. His heats were the stuff of legend, full of passion, vigor, and primal need. The mere thought of it gave the blonde assassin a thrill.

Little did he know, his husband had even greater plans in store. Sebastian would forever remember the conversation they’d shared their first night at the cottage…

“Sebby,” Jim whispered as the larger man hovered above him in bed.

“Yes?” he replied, placing nibbling kisses along his dearest Magpie’s neck and shoulder.

“I want this week— this heat— to be about more than sex. I want…” he trailed off, sounding uncharacteristically bashful.

“What is it, love?” Sebastian was slightly worried now. Jim was anything but shy. What could possibly cause him to become suddenly apprehensive?

“I want to have your baby.”
Oh, wow. Of all the things his partner might say, the former colonel never expected to hear that particular statement. He’d always hoped for a family of his own, but didn’t think Jim would ever welcome such a thing. Now, though...

The expression on his beloved’s face grew anxious as Seb had yet to respond.

“If you don’t want—”

“I do,” he answered, hoping to assuage any inkling of doubt. “I adore you, Jimmy. Having a child with you would be a dream come true. An outright blessing.”

The madcap Irishman relaxed at his alpha’s words, a gentle smile replacing all previous tension. “So you understand, then, why this week is so important to me?”

Sebastian nodded. He understood…he understood completely.

The next several days weren’t simply going to be dedicated to celebrating their bizarrely blissful union. No, they were going to revolve around something more historic than that: It would mark the turning point when James Moriarty—the world’s most brilliant consulting criminal—surrendered the last lock on his black heart. He was giving his husband the gift of conception, and in doing so, risked becoming more vulnerable than ever before. This was not an act to be taken lightly and both of them damn well knew it.

“Oh, how I love you,” Seb declared, looking upon Jim almost reverently. What he felt for his mate surpassed the scope of an ordinary alpha/omega relationship. Their bond transcended biology, joining them on a higher level. If soulmates existed, then their spirits were most assuredly intertwined.

“Tiger?” Jim called. “Earth to Tiger?”

Sebastian snapped back to the present at Moriarty’s provocation. “Sorry, I just got lost thinking about how wonderful this vacation has been.”

The genius smiled happily, his dark eyes twinkling with genuine joy. “Mmm, yes. One for the books, I’d say.”

Seb let out a breathless moan as the man in his arms ground against him libidinously. The sniper’s arousal quickly sprang to life at the sudden friction.

“We still have one final night here until we go back to London,” Jim reminded him. “Might as well make the most of it.”

Sebastian needed no further encouragement. In an instant, his lips were pressed to those of his darling Magpie’s, bidding entry into the other man’s mouth. The Irishman eagerly complied and their tongues twined together in a ravishing kiss. So much passion filled their fiery embrace, neither wanted it to end. Fortunately, it didn’t have to, at least not until the amber strands of daybreak shone through.

Chapter End Notes
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It was just after 3 a.m. when Sebastian walked through the entrance of the luxury residence he and Jim shared. Kicking off his boots, he sighed with relief that he was finally home. He’d spent the better part of the past two weeks abroad, seeing to various projects and loose ends. He hated being away from his husband for so long, but it was Jim who’d sent him on assignment. Married or not, Seb was undeniably the best sniper in his employ.

“Jimmy?” he called out as he wandered toward the man’s office, knowing he often kept odd hours and would likely still be awake.

A light shined through the crack beneath the door, but no response was given.

Sebastian gently knocked. “Jim?” he beckoned once more, but again received nary a reply.

Deciding to step inside, the tall blonde was greeted to the sight of his spouse lying face down on his desk, snoozing away.

He chuckled softly. “Hey there, Sleeping Beauty. Your prince has arrived.”

The mastermind stirred at the sound of his beloved’s voice. “Sebby, you’re home.”

“Sure am, hon,” he answered, moving to smooth down the mussed locks of Jim’s hair.

The smaller man hummed contentedly and leaned into his alpha’s touch.

“I take it someone missed me while I was gone?”

“Mmm, you know it.”

Seb grinned. He loved catching Jim in an affectionate mood.

“So how was the trip back?” the Irishman asked, yawning and rubbing the sleep from his eyes.
“Long and uncomfortable.”

Jim frowned. “First class not up to par?”

The assassin shook his head. “Didn’t make it there. The flight was overbooked and I got bumped to coach,” he explained. “Ended up sandwiched between a portly old man and a teenage girl who wouldn’t shut up. No leg room to speak of, either…had one hell of a charley horse by the time we touched down in London.”

Anger bubbled into Jim’s eyes. “Those worthless bastards! I paid good money for you to fly first class, and this is the service I receive? Well, they can sod right off,” he fumed. “I’ll be sending them a message first thing in the morning. Heads will roll, Sebby, mark my words.”

“Relax, sweetie.” With James Moriarty, the threat of heads rolling could be literal. “Nobody needs to get hurt over this,” he spoke softly, trying to diffuse his husband’s rage. “An attendant at the airline assured me that the price would be refunded within the next few days. It’s taken care of—no need to get upset.”

Jim took a deep breath and stared at Sebastian. “It’s the principle of the thing. People cannot be allowed to disrespect us. I won’t abide it.”

“I know, Jimmy. But this was simply a case of an overbooked flight. It’s okay now. I promise you it is.”

As suddenly as it had ignited, the fire faded from the man’s expression. “Fine,” he huffed. “I’ll consider the matter resolved. But only because you insist, Seb. If it was anyone else…”

“I know and I appreciate it. Thank you, love”

The two remained silent for a moment, wordlessly enjoying each other’s company as the mad genius calmed.

Jim motioned to pick up a cup of tea that sat on his desk, his nose crinkling as soon as he took a sip. “Ugh. This stuff is terrible once it’s gone cold.”

“What is it?” he questioned, noting that the liquid gave off a rather pungent aroma.

“Herbal tea.”

Sebastian smiled at the notion of London’s most dangerous man drinking some sort of new age, hippie brew. “Personally, I’d just as soon stick with Earl Grey.”

“Yes, well, you’ve got a choice. I have other factors to consider,” Jim said. “Too much caffeine isn’t good for a tiger cub.”

The former colonel’s eyes widened at his husband’s declaration. “Jimmy, are you—”

“Pregnant? Don’t know,” he admitted. “But with the possibility there, I’d rather err on the side of caution.”

Seb leaned down and kissed the smaller man atop the head, inhaling as he did so. “I don’t know how I didn’t notice as soon as I came in,” he whispered.

“What?”

“Your smell is different. Not by much…it’s just slightly off.”
Moriarty shrugged. “I started using a new body wash earlier this week. It’s supposed to tighten the pores.”

“No, I think it’s more than that.” He paused, considering the prospect. “How’ve you been feeling lately?”

“Bloody exhausted, though I’m sure that much was obvious by the nap you walked in on.”

“Yes, and it’s not like you. Magpie’s always abuzz, right?”

Jim quieted for a moment, knowing in his heart that Sebastian spoke the truth. Oftentimes he was manic, straddling the edge between genius and insanity. He was a man who dared darkness to come, then laughed as evil itself ran from him. James Moriarty was brilliant and brazen; fierce to a fault.

James Moriarty was not, however, tired.


“I’ll send for my doctor in the morning,” he said.

“Sounds good to me.”

Sebastian moved to stand behind his mate, massaging the man’s shoulders. He smiled as he felt him relax under the gentle ministrations.


“Well, if I ever retire, maybe I can find a second career in kinesiology,” he teased.

“Don’t even think about it. I’m the only one you’re allowed to touch like this. Nobody else.”

In a flash, Jim spun around in his chair and grasped Seb’s hand. “This palm, these fingers…they’re mine to command.”

The mastermind pressed Sebastian’s index and middle fingers to his lips, kissing them lightly before taking them into the warmth of his mouth. He sucked suggestively on the digits, a lustful look washing over him.

The sniper swallowed. He _loved_ this about Jim. His spouse was no ordinary omega; no wilting flower beholden to the will of another. By all accounts, James Moriarty was more confident and in control than many alphas he knew.

“Oh, Jimmy,” the fair-haired man muttered with a groan. Two weeks he had missed this. Two long, sexless weeks.

Before another thought could cross his mind, Sebastian found himself acting on instinct, swiftly scooping Jim into his arms.

The smaller man rested his head against his husband’s chest. “Make love to me, Sebby.”

“With pleasure,” he declared, his voice thick with desire.

Seb whisked them away to the main bedroom. Neither would be getting much, if any, sleep tonight. Somehow, both parties were just fine with that.
Chapter End Notes

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It was 10 a.m. when Dr. Peter Ashton arrived at James Moriarty’s business headquarters. Under retainer, the physician always came to him, meeting on the mastermind’s premises rather than his own. Today was no exception.

Dr. Ashton was escorted to an empty office where Jim and Sebastian sat waiting. Though the pair were an intimidating sight, the man tried his best to be congenial, offering both a smile and a handshake before unpacking the contents of his medical bag. Once everything was properly assembled, he turned to face the men again.

“The procedure for this is fairly straightforward,” the doctor assured. “I extract a sample of Mr. Moriarty’s blood and have it sent to the lab. Your hormone levels,” he explained, eyes focused on Jim, “will determine whether the results are positive or negative. It should take about 48 hours to process.”

“Two days?” he grumbled. “I pay you a small fortune for your services and that’s the best you can do? I’d be better off using a home test.”

“You didn’t let me finish, sir,” Dr. Ashton countered. “The bloodwork requires two days to process, but if you’d like something more immediate, I also brought along the necessary tools to perform a urine test.”

Jim’s icy glare shifted into one of contemplation. “How much more immediate?”

“We could have those results within 10 minutes or so. It’s not as accurate, but it does provide a faster turnaround.”

“I want both tests done,” he asserted. “We’ll do the urine sample first.”

Dr. Ashton dared not keep him waiting. He quickly handed Moriarty a plastic cup and sent him in the direction of the nearest lavatory.
While Jim was out of the room, Sebastian stayed behind. An awkward silence settled over the room as neither he nor the physician spoke. The assassin couldn’t really blame the man for their lack of conversation. Ashton only knew him as Jim’s primary bodyguard. He had no idea they were actually married. It’d been a mutual decision not to make their union publically known. If the wrong people got wind of the information, they could very easily be targeted. They were, as Jim put it, each other’s “pressure points.”

It wasn’t long before the genius returned, sample in tow. The doctor got to work setting up a test strip, then prepared to take a vial of his patient’s blood. After that, all they could do was wait.

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10 minutes. Such a short amount of time, and yet it felt like an eternity as Jim and Sebastian sat there, eagerly anticipating the test results.

Seb played it cool, his face a steely façade of iron. His husband, though, was not as calm. The man nervously drummed his fingers against the arm of his chair and shot frequent glances at the clock on the wall. Jim was anxious as hell, a fact which seemed to unsettle the doctor.

Finally, the moment arrived.

Dr. Ashton carefully assessed the test strip, then returned to sit across from the formidable men. Jim peered at him expectantly. “Well? What’s the verdict?”

The middle-aged physician swallowed, terrified of delivering what might be considered “bad news.”

“Mr. Moriarty, the results are positive. You’re pregnant.”

Jim’s eyes widened at the confirmation, a response Dr. Ashton sorely misread.

“I can schedule an appointment for termination as soon as possible, sir. I wouldn’t be the one performing the procedure, but I assure you’d be in good hands.”

Jim’s expression turned downright deadly as he lunged at his doctor, grabbing the man by the throat. The sheer force knocked him from his chair onto the floor, where Moriarty continued choking him.

“You want to murder my child before he even draws breath?” Jim spat. The fury surging through him was palpable.

Sebastian swiftly moved into action, pulling him off the man whose eyes were now bulging.

“Jimmy, stop!” he shouted, trying his damnedest to subdue his mate. Jim struggled fitfully before stilling in his arms.

“He wants to murder our baby! I won’t allow it!”

The fair-haired alpha took a deep breath. He knew what this was. Jim had a natural instinct to protect his young.

“It’s okay, love. Nobody’s going to harm our little one,” he assured. “I think Dr. Ashton just misunderstood your wishes. He didn’t know you were trying to get pregnant.”

Hearing Seb’s statement, the physician blanched. Never in his wildest dreams did he imagine that
James Moriarty, criminal extraordinaire, would seek to carry a child. Speaking of which…

“Mr. Moran here is the father?” he asked, finally gathering his bearings enough to stand.

Jim internally cringed at his own slip of the tongue. “You tell no one,” he warned. “If I find out you’ve said even the slightest thing about this, I will skin you.”

“I took an oath to uphold doctor-patient confidentiality, sir. I would never betray that trust.”

“For your sake, you had better not,” the Irishman declared. “And yes, Sebastian is the father. It’s a fine match in the genetics department, if I do say so. My brains and his brawn combined.”

Seb couldn’t help but swell with pride at the thought of his and Jim’s child. This is really happening. We’ve created a whole new person who’s a part of us both. It was surreal and wondrous, and if he pondered it for too long, it just might blow his mind.

“Yes, a remarkable union if ever there was,” the physician nervously concurred.

Dr. Ashton was clearly shaken by what had transpired and wanted to conclude their meeting posthaste. There was still one last matter to discuss, though.

“In the best interests of you and your progeny, I’m going to refer you to a specialist. I know an excellent obstetrician who has experience with male omega pregnancies. She’s among the best in Europe.”

Jim paused, considering the idea. “Register the appointment under a pseudonym and text me the details,” he said coolly. “Now if it’s all the same to you, I think we’re quite done here.” Ashton did not disagree.

“Come, Sebby. A celebratory brunch is in order.”

Sebastian grinned and followed his mate out the door. In that moment, his heart was so alight with the notion of fatherhood, he thought it might burst. This was worthy of celebration and then some.

Chapter End Notes

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The Sonogram

Chapter Summary

Jim has his first sonogram.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Honey, I know you don’t feel well, but if we don’t leave soon we’re going to be late.”

As if on cue, Sebastian heard the whoosh of a toilet flush, followed by the sight of his husband finally exiting their bathroom. Jim looked decidedly worse for wear. No surprise, though, considering the man had been retching for the better part of a half hour.

“They can bloody well hold our spot,” he grumbled. “If they give it away to someone else, I’ll have you bring the doctor here at gunpoint.”

Seb smirked. Coming from Jim, even if something sounded like a joke, there was at least a 50% chance he was serious.

“So long as we get a move on, I don’t think it will come to that.”

“Yes, well, it if does——” the consulting criminal abruptly stopped in mid-sentence, making a mad dash back to the loo.

*My poor Magpie.* Morning sickness was a normal part of pregnancy, but it seemed to have hit Jim especially hard. Seb could all too vividly recall an incident from earlier in the week that had given him quite a scare. Unable to keep down even a small packet of saltines, his mate succumbed to the throes of unconsciousness right there on the bathroom floor. The strapping assassin discovered him face down, clammy and incoherent. Thankfully, he regained his senses soon after being moved to the couch, but still, it was an image forever burned into Moran’s brain.

A few minutes passed and Jim reemerged. The Irishman appeared far more ragged than usual, having traded in his customary Westwood attire for jeans and a t-shirt. He hadn’t even bothered to slick back his hair, instead leaving it naturally tousled, reminding Seb of the time he masqueraded as Richard Brook.

“Better?” the blonde asked, pulling Jim into a protective embrace. He held him close, rubbing
small circles against his back. Moriarty hummed appreciatively at the gesture.

“I am now, Tiger.”

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Though Jim and Sebastian were nearly 10 minutes late, premier obstetrician Dr. Julia Swenson upheld their slot. The pair quickly felt reassured upon meeting her—she really did have impressive credentials and a strong background in her field. Once Jim was confident in the woman’s abilities, he admitted his and Seb’s true identities to her, knowing she would be his primary physician for the next nine months.

After getting the basics out of the way, it was time to proceed with the ultrasound. The mastermind was particularly excited, beaming like a child on Christmas morning. Thinking about it, Sebastian realized he hadn’t seen his husband so genuinely happy since their wedding day.

Jim laid back on the examination table and pushed his clothing out of the way, exposing his abdomen. The once flat expanse of his stomach now had a slight curve to it, which was somewhat unusual considering he was only 8 weeks along. Still, the doctor said it was nothing to be alarmed by.

“Ahh,” the dark-eyed man hissed as cold conductive jelly made contact with his skin.

“Sorry, that’s the unpleasant part of this process,” Dr. Swenson acknowledged as she pulled out a transducer. Placing the device on the slickened area, an image came up on the attached monitor.

“Oh my,” she said, looking at the screen.

Jim furrowed a brow. “What is it? Is something wrong?” He nervously glanced from her to Seb, and then back to her again.

“There’s nothing wrong,” she assured. “But I can see why you’ve been experiencing such intense morning sickness and why you’ve already got a bit of a baby bump.”

Moriarty and Moran peered at each other, curious as to what Dr. Swenson was getting at.

She smiled at the men. “Look closely. There are two sacs.”

Jim’s eyes widened. “Are you saying—”

“That you’re having twins, yes.”

“Oh, Jimmy,” Sebastian exclaimed. He reached out to hold his husband’s hand, their fingers interlacing.

“Are you sure?” the Irishman asked, seeing the picture on the screen but not entirely believing it.

“Very. There are definitely two sacs here, which means we’re likely dealing with fraternal twins. Both fetuses look healthy,” she noted. “Do you want to hear their heartbeat?”

“Yes,” Jim and Seb said simultaneously. They laughed at their synchronized timing, grinning like joyful fools over the news of their offspring.

“Bear in mind that it’s still early, so the sound might be faint,” Dr. Swenson said as she turned up the volume on the medical equipment.
Suddenly, a gentle pulsing noise could be heard. It was just barely audible, but pumped steadily.

Jim’s breath hitched and he squeezed Sebastian’s hand. “Sebby…” he whispered, overwhelmed by emotion. It was a strange feeling for one who’d once derided sentiment as little more than inane fodder invented by the weak-willed. How far the world’s greatest consulting criminal had come since those days.

“In a few weeks it will be easier to detect. By then, you’ll be able to listen at home using a Doppler.”

“I’ll order one today,” Jim proclaimed. The sound of his babies’ beating hearts was the most brilliant thing he had ever heard. He’d listen to them every day if he could.

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The Magpie and his Tiger walked out of Dr. Swenson’s office arm-in-arm. They were all smiles, drunk on love for each other and for the new lives blossoming within Jim. It was a perfect portrait of bliss.

One man, however, did not appear pleased. Camouflaged in a dark hat, coat, and sunglasses, he surreptitiously peered at the pair while pretending to read something on his phone. He snorted after watching them exit, lips curling into a sneer.

“The time’s come, Moran.”

Chapter End Notes

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Two weeks had passed since Jim’s fateful appointment with the obstetrician. In that time, he’d struggled to split his interests between work and baby preparations. Even with Sebastian’s help, there just didn’t seem to be enough hours in the day to manage it all.

Ultimately, he decided to tell his staff that he had a “special project” to attend to— one which would keep him away from the office at odd intervals. Those on his payroll needed no further explanation. Anyone who dared press Moriarty for more details wouldn’t live long enough to make the mistake again.

“Seb, what do you think of these swatches?” the mastermind asked his spouse. An array of color samples lay on the kitchen table, spread out in no particular order.

“They all look fine to me.”

“Come on, I want you to be a part of this. It’s for the babies.”

“I trust your good taste.”

And he really did. It was Jim, after all, who’d wanted to start planning the nursery as soon as they learned they were having twins. Straightaway, he was on the phone making arrangements, and within days, a decorator from New York stood at their door. Sworn to secrecy about the assignment, the woman had been sending over sample upon sample for absolutely everything. Frankly, the sniper was out of his element with this stuff, but Jim reveled in it.

Jim’s stomach growled loudly, interrupting their conversation on interior design. Sebastian was grateful for the reprieve.

“Sebby…” the dark-eyed genius spoke, gazing longingly at the other man.

Seb knew what he wanted.

*Oatmeal.*
The former colonel got up and began to prepare a hot, wholesome bowl of oats for his husband. It didn’t take much time to cook, and before long he was dishing it out to place in front of the hungry Irishman.

“Thank you, Tiger.”

Sebastian leaned down to steal a kiss from him. It was little moments like these that he treasured.

Jim devoured his oatmeal like it was manna from the heavens. Seb smiled at the sight, pleased that after several weeks of brutal morning sickness, his partner had finally found a food he could keep down.

It’d been no easy feat. Everything seemed to make Moriarty nauseous, even certain smells. The constant illness left him drained and he was concerned for the wellbeing of their unborn children. His research on twin pregnancy recommended consuming an extra 600 calories a day, but he simply couldn’t eat anything without throwing it back up. It was very discouraging.

Then one auspicious day, it all changed. Sebastian had made himself a bowl of oatmeal with brown sugar while Jim rested on the couch. The scent wafted through the air, and for the first time in ages, the consulting criminal found a food smell downright enticing. This was a huge development.

Testing the waters, he took a taste. One spoonful turned into another and another, until eventually he consumed the entire bowl. Even better was when, an hour later, he still felt okay. No retching or heaving to be had. It was remarkable. Ever since that breakthrough, Jim ate oatmeal on a daily basis, sometimes indulging in seconds or thirds.

“That’s the last of it,” Sebastian said. “I’ll run out for more soon.”

Finishing the final bite, Jim leaned back in his chair and yawned. “I appreciate it, Seb. Think I might take a nap while you’re gone.”

The blonde man smiled. He loved this; loved taking care of Jim. Never in a million years did he believe he’d find domesticity so rewarding, but something about it just felt right. His Magpie was the light of his life, and now with the babies on the way, his once dark heart threatened to overflow with joy. True happiness had found Sebastian Moran at last.

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Seb had a plan. After some light grocery shopping, he would pick up a surprise gift for his husband. The sniper was never very good at selecting presents, but this time he knew he wanted it to be a high-end item. The illustrious James Moriarty deserved only the best.

He drove around London for a bit, trying to decide on a shop. Finally, he came upon Rolex Boutique. Something about the place called to him. It was perfect.

Stepping inside, he approached a large glass display case containing a selection of finely crafted timepieces. There were so many to choose from, Sebastian wasn’t sure where to begin. Thankfully, a clerk soon approached.

“Hello, sir. May I help you find anything?” the posh young assistant asked. His nametag read Tom.

“Yes, perhaps. I’m looking to surprise someone.”

“Very good. Our quality watches make for an excellent choice of gift. Is there a particular model you had in mind?”
“Not really, but…” he paused, considering it. If he could, he’d like to find something that included his impending children’s birthstone—amethyst.

“Do you have any products that feature gemstones?”

“Certainly, sir. We offer a number of timepieces accented with diamonds. We also carry items featuring ruby and emerald stones.”

“What about amethyst?”

Suddenly, an elderly man standing nearby began to chuckle. The eavesdropper was apparently getting a good laugh out of their conversation, much to Seb’s chagrin.

“Something funny?” the assassin demanded, turning his attention to the nosy old codger.

“Oh, yes,” he asserted. “Coming in here asking for an amethyst Rolex. That’s bloody hilarious.”

“And why is that?” Sebastian pressed. He was growing increasingly irritated.

“They don’t make amethyst Rolexes—never have,” the man said as if it was common knowledge. “You must be new money. Either that or someone’s well-kept rent boy.”

This was too much for Moran to take. With one swift step, he bridged the gap between himself and the mouthy old man.

“Listen here, I’m no one’s ‘rent boy.’ In fact, I’m very happily married,” he informed him. “My money’s just as good as yours, and I don’t appreciate the snide remarks. So what if I’ve never bought a Rolex before? It’s not your business.”

Sebastian struggled to be as polite as possible under the circumstance. The last thing he needed was to be thrown out of an upscale shop on Bond Street. If that happened, he’d never hear the end of it from Jim.

Tom, the clerk, stepped between the two men. “Please, gentlemen, let’s not make a scene.” Glaring, both backed away from each other.

“This is disgraceful. The quality of your clientele has gone alarmingly downhill,” the elder spat before storming out.

*Good riddance*, Seb thought.

“I’m so sorry, sir. I swear to you, our customers are usually far more courteous than that. Please don’t let him ruin your first experience with us.”

“I won’t,” he assured. “Not your fault some people make arses of themselves.”

“Indeed, sir.” Tom smiled in relief that he had not lost a sale over the conflict. “Now, where were we?” he queried, hoping to steer the conversation back on topic.

“I wanted to buy a watch that incorporated amethyst into the design. However, I’ve since been made aware that those don’t exist.”

“While it’s true we do not currently offer amethyst accented timepieces, we do have some models which feature a purple dial. It’s not a gemstone, but the color is comparable. Would you be interested in seeing those?”
Sebastian was pleasantly surprised. A purple dial wasn’t what he’d initially set out to buy, but he reckoned it was worth a look. Nodding to the affirmative, the clerk led him to another display.

“As you can see, we have an assortment to choose from. Please note that most of these are a part of our women’s collection. We do offer one unisex model, though.”

“Show me,” he commanded.

Tom walked behind the counter and unlocked the case, removing a specific watch. He cradled the item in his hands, presenting it to Sebastian.

“This is made from stainless steel and features a grape dial. It’s scratch resistant and waterproof. It’s a wonderful style that combines both elegance and practicality.”

Seb keenly examined the timepiece, imagining what it would look like on Jim. The man did strive to be fashionable.

“I’ll take it,” he decided. “I’d like it giftwrapped as well.”

“As you wish, sir. I’ll have it ready in a jiff.”

Sebastian smiled, feeling content. He couldn’t wait to see his Magpie’s reaction to the gift. *Jim is going to love it.*

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A slight breeze carried through the air as Seb walked to his car, package in hand. His cheerful mood was cut woefully short by the unsettling sight that greeted him: a knife stuck through one of the back tires, rendering it flat.

“What the hell?” he exclaimed, crouching down to inspect the damage. The weapon piercing through the rubber was fairly nondescript—it was a plain looking blade without any distinguishing details. It could’ve been bought and wielded by anyone.

For a moment, he wondered if the ornery old man from the shop might’ve done it, but he wouldn’t have known which vehicle was Sebastian’s. So what did it mean? Was it just a random act of vandalism?

Then the sniper noticed something. There was a note wadded up and stuck under his windshield wiper. He hadn’t seen it at first because his attention went straight to the speared tire.

Unfolding the note, a chill ran down Seb’s spine as he read what it said: *See you soon.*

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Keeping Safe

Chapter Summary

In response to a threat, Sebastian tries to protect Jim.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sebastian Moran was on edge. It’d been a week since his tire was slashed outside the jewelry store, and in that short amount of time, paranoia set in. He couldn’t shake the unnerving feeling of being watched. Home was still safe, thank god, but at work and on the streets…that was another story entirely.

Twice while on assignment, he sensed invisible eyes fixing upon him. The presence lingered like a predator shadowing its prey. He checked his surroundings for signs of a pursuer, but it was to no avail. If someone was actually there, they remained well hidden.

So far, Seb had managed to keep Jim shielded from what was going on. He’d passed the vandalism incident off as a standard flat tire mishap, neglecting to mention that it was quite obviously an act of malice. News of the ominous note, too, was omitted. He wondered how long he’d be able to keep these things from his husband. Moriarty was, by all accounts, perceptive to a fault.

“Sebbby,” a familiar sing-song voice called out from the kitchen. “Be a dear and fetch me the newspaper.”

“Sure, Jim.” The sniper headed for the door, knowing how much his mate enjoyed reading The Daily Telegraph while feasting on his morning oatmeal.

Bending down to pick up the periodical, Sebastian’s blood ran cold when he spied a folded up piece of paper tucked under the doormat.

No, no, no! Not another one. He took a deep breath and carefully opened the note.

‘People like you don’t deserve to have families.’

“Oh fuck,” he muttered too softly for Jim to hear.

This was worse than he thought. It meant that the stalker knew where he lived, and by association, where Jim and their unborn children resided as well.

For the first time in a very long while, the ordinarily unshakeable assassin was really and truly
“No, two extra guards aren’t enough!” Seb barked into his phone. “I want at least a dozen men added to Mr. Moriarty’s security detail. Some of them will be posted at his office, some at home, and a few will remain on reserve to accompany him during offsite excursions. Do I make myself clear? Good.”

Sebastian ended the call with a weary sigh. It was difficult getting Jim’s underlings to comprehend why their boss needed increased security right now. He couldn’t exactly tell them the truth of the matter. Additionally, some individuals were reluctant to greenlight any orders that didn’t come from the consulting criminal himself. Seb had to remind them that as second-in-command, they had damn well better respect his authority.

After doing what he could to beef up Jim’s protection, the sniper’s next move was to find out who, precisely, was behind the campaign of harassment. Both he and his better half had acquired a slew of enemies through the years. With that in mind, it left the list of suspects wide open.

Whoever was responsible knew that he and the mastermind were a family. This aspect forced Sebastian to consider the terrible possibility that the culprit might be someone who knew them outside of their on-the-job activities.

‘People like you,’ the note had said. Taken at face value, the statement could be referring to the fact that they were criminals. But what if…

Sebastian growled, growing angty at the thought that ran through his mind. What if the person is some bigot who heard that a gay couple was having children?

At this point, he couldn’t rule it out. Maybe the decorator Jim hired had let something slip that she shouldn’t have. Or perhaps someone at the obstetrics clinic had seen them and figured it out. They’d taken Seb’s car that day—maybe they were tracked. The unfortunate truth was that, as of right now, he just plain didn’t know what he was dealing with.

He hated the uncertainty. Hated that some son of a bitch dared to threaten them. But most of all, he hated not being sure of how to best protect Jim. Protect the madcap Irishman who was his husband, his friend, his boss, his precious omega who was carrying his children. James Moriarty was everything to him.

Whoever is behind this will pay dearly. That was a promise.

Seb had just gotten out of a meeting to coordinate an upcoming mission when his cell phone went off. Checking the device, he saw that it was a text from Jim.

JM

Sebby, darling? My office NOW.

He furrowed a brow. A message like that could mean one of two things: (1.) Jim was pissed, or (2.) Jim’s morning sickness had alleviated enough that he was finally feeling frisky again. Personally, Sebastian was hoping for the latter.
As directed, he entered Moriarty’s office, shutting the door behind him. He could already tell by
the icy look on Jim’s face that he hadn’t been summoned for a shag.

“Something the matter?” Seb asked, sporting a sweet sharky smile he knew Jim found endearing.

“Don’t think you can get out of this by flashing me a sexy grin,” the dark-eyed genius spoke,
almost as if he could read the other man’s mind. “Sit.”

Sebastian obeyed.

“Good boy,” he mockingly praised. “Now you’re going to tell me why, as of today, you gave the
order to triple my security detail.”

“Well, uh, you see…” the sniper trailed off, at a loss as to how to explain the situation. He’d
dreaded this moment since the whole mess began.

“Please, do go on. I’d love to know the reason why I can’t visit the loo without having someone
wait for me outside the restroom. Or better yet, why I can’t even stop by the café across the street
without being trailed by a guard.”

“Café?” the blonde asked in surprise. “I thought you quit drinking coffee. Too much caffeine,
remember?”

Jim rolled his eyes. “I ordered hot chocolate— the caffeine in it is negligible. Now don’t change
the subject.”

“Fine,” he conceded. “It’s for your own safety,”

Moriarty snorted incredulously. “My safety? I’m pregnant, Seb, not made of glass.”

“There’s more to it than that. Recent events have led me to believe someone may try to harm you.”
Just saying the words out loud made Sebastian’s heart ache.

“What recent events? You work for me,” Jim stressed. “Why have I not been made aware of these
developments?”

It was a fair question, and one that the former colonel had mulled over at length. He should’ve been
honest with his partner from the start. James Moriarty deserved better than the sin of omission.

And so Sebastian told him everything. He admitted the truth of how he really got the flat tire and
informed him of the notes that had been left. By the end of his rambling confession, the sniper was
showering his husband and boss with a flurry of apologies.

“I’m sorry, Jimmy. I wasn’t trying to deceive you for any malicious purpose. I swear on my life, I
wasn’t. I just…” Seb paused, his composure waning. “It’s like you always used to say about
‘pressure points.’ Everyone has someone they want to protect.” He cast his sight downward,
ashamed to look Jim in the eye.

The consulting criminal moved from behind his desk to meet Sebastian where he sat. He placed a
hand under the larger man’s chin, tilting his face up.

“Hey, look at me, Tiger.”

And Seb did. Their gazes locked intently.

“Make no mistake,” Jim declared, “I do not tolerate deception from anyone, even you. Try it again
“and there will be consequences.” He took a breath and his sharp expression softened. “In this case, however, I understand why you did it.”

Jim shifted his hand from Sebastian’s chin to his cheek, stroking the slightly stubbled expanse of skin. The assassin leaned into his lover’s touch.

“You don’t need to worry about this anymore. I’ll find out who’s behind the threats and then I’ll send you to kill them. Perhaps I’ll even accompany you for the proceedings,” he said, grinning wickedly.

Seb didn’t reply with words, instead choosing a more visceral means of communication. He wrapped his arms around the man he adored, resting his head against Jim’s waist. If he could, he would stay that way forever, bound in his Magpie’s embrace.

Chapter End Notes

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Love & Terror

Chapter Summary

Decorating, lovemaking, and terror abound.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Careful!” Jim shouted. “That cot costs more than you make in a day. I’d sooner have you replaced than it.”

The delivery man took Moriarty’s criticism in stride, knowing better than to argue with a customer, especially one who’d bought such expensive furnishings. Thankfully, this was the last piece he had to unload.

“Sorry, sir,” he politely replied, keeping his head down as he finished positioning the second canopy crib. “That’s the final item. Please enjoy your purchase.”

The man exited the room and headed for the front door. As soon as he was gone, Jim turned to Sebastian.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” he asked, positively radiating with delight.

Today marked a milestone in the decorating process. Jim and his interior designer decided on a pastel color palette for the nursery and many of the luxury furniture items they’d ordered had arrived. Everything was so opulent and elegant—even the matching white canopy cribs were accented with 24-carat gold.

“It’s a room fit for royalty,” Seb affirmed.

“Oh Sebby, that’s exactly what I was trying to achieve. I want nothing but the best for our little princes…or princesses,” he eagerly declared. “I just wish I knew their genders already. Then I could tailor the accessories better.”

“We’ll find out soon, kitten,” the sniper assured. At Jim’s last checkup, Dr. Swenson said it was still too early to know for sure. In two weeks’ time they’d be able to make a more accurate determination.

“You know how much I hate waiting for things,” the Irishman bemoaned. “But,” he paused, pressing himself suggestively against Sebastian’s firm, muscular frame, “I can think of a few ways
to occupy myself until then.”

Excitement rocketed through the blonde assassin as he felt his husband’s body molded to his own. Not since the earliest stages of Jim’s pregnancy had the man expressed any real signs of sexual interest. The nonstop morning sickness had put a kibosh on that aspect of their relationship. Did something change? Dare he dream?

“You sure you’re up to it?” Seb immediately lamented his choice of words as he quite literally felt just how up Jim was.

“I think you know the answer to that one, Tiger.” He grinned impishly, his sheathed arousal rubbing against the matching hardness that had sprung to life in Sebastian’s pants.

The former colonel growled lustfully, seizing Jim’s mouth in a passionate kiss.

“That’s more like it,” the smaller man proclaimed. “Right now I’m feeling better than I have in months and I intend to make the most of it.”

Seb didn’t need to be told twice. If Jim wanted sex, he would get it.

*********

Afternoon turned to evening as the two most dangerous men in London surrendered unto their desires. Jim was downright indefatigable, almost daring his mate to keep up. Sebastian hadn’t seen him this hot and bothered since the last time he was in heat. It was spectacular.

“God, I’ve missed this,” the mastermind cooed. He nestled beside Seb as closely as he could, savoring the man’s warm embrace.

“Me, too.” He hugged his Magpie tighter, not wanting to let go. If he could just keep him like this, safe in his arms, then maybe everything would be okay. Maybe the worry that gnawed at him day-in and day-out would subside.

Oh, how Sebastian worried. They never found out who was stalking them. All intel proved fruitless, leading to nothing but dead ends. Jim shrugged it off, not treating the matter very seriously. He even let go of the extra guards Seb hired, insisting they weren’t necessary.

Moriarty theorized that their harasser was simply some low-level thug hoping to rattle them in order to make a name for himself. The mysterious individual had not struck again since the note under the doormat, further convincing Jim that the culprit was an amateur who got cold feet and gave up. Seb, however, was not fully convinced.

The intrepid sniper had a bad feeling about the situation. His instincts as a hunter and as an alpha told him to beware; told him not to become complacent. This period of inactivity from the stalker might be a calculated maneuver. A trick intended to lull them into a false sense of security. It could mean—

“Tiger,” Jim spoke, derailing the fair-haired man’s train of thought. “Would you like to hear the babies?”

“Yeah, Jimmy. I’d love to.”

The Irishman sat up and retrieved a handheld Doppler from the nightstand, along with a tube of ultrasound gel. He applied the viscous substance to his abdomen and turned on the device.
Sebastian watched in awe. “You’re an old pro at this,” he teased. In a manner of speaking, it was actually true. Jim made a point of listening to the babies every night, no matter how busy he was with other things. It was his way of bonding with them.

“Some people don’t know how to use these devices properly. Ordinary people,” he remarked disdainfully as he slid the transducer across the gelled area. Right then, a fast-paced thumping sound broadcast through the speaker. “I am anything but ordinary,” Jim said with a smirk.

Seb chuckled. “That’s for damn sure.”

The couple listened in silence for a few seconds, enjoying the strong rhythm of their children’s hearts.

“Is it my imagination or do I hear an echo?” Sebastian asked.

“Of course there’s an echo—we’re having twins. Two heartbeats, Tiger.”

“Ah, yeah. That’s true.” The former colonel felt a bit stupid for having questioned something so obvious.

If Jim was at all fazed by his husband’s gaffe, he didn’t show it. Pure, undiluted happiness was the only thing that registered on his face.

“Sebby, I love these babies so much,” he confessed, his voice steeped with emotion. “There was a time when I thought children would be a burden…a liability unworthy of my effort. But you changed my mind. Made me want to have a tiger cub who’d embody the best of us both.” He clasped his mate’s hand, looking deep into his blue eyes. “Thank you, Sebastian.”

The consulting criminal’s mood must have been contagious, because Seb found himself struggling to hold back a tear. He’d never adored Jim more than at that moment. The feeling was entirely mutual.

***********

Morning came quicker than Moriarty and Moran would’ve liked. They decided to get an early jump on the day in preparation for an 8 a.m. meeting where both would be in attendance. After a hot shower to wake themselves up, they dressed and shared breakfast together.

Jim glanced at the wristwatch Seb had given him, checking the time. “We should get going soon,” he stated.

The taller man nodded, finishing his last bite of bacon before grabbing the car keys. “Your chariot awaits, my lord.”

Moriarty laughed, smiling brightly. That was something the mastermind did a lot lately, and Sebastian was glad for it. He wished he could bottle this version of Jim—make it so that his husband remained in high spirits forever.

***********

The consulting criminal and his sniper were the first to arrive at Jim’s headquarters. Even his longtime personal secretary, Suzy, had not yet come in. The duo didn’t mind being alone—in fact, they’d half-jokingly discussed the merits of having a quickie in Jim’s office during the car ride over.
“Let’s hold off until after the meeting, Tiger. I’ve got a few hours free this afternoon,” he said with a seductive lilt.

Seb grunted hoarsely. “You know that’s all I’m going to be thinking about now, right? While everyone’s talking business, I’ll be sitting there picturing you spread across your desk wearing nothing but a smile.”

“Ooh, honey, I love your imagination.”

Jim turned to unlock his office door and Sebastian followed. Flipping on the lights, both were utterly horrified by the sight that greeted them: a baby doll hanging from a noose off the ceiling fan. A sonogram photo was tacked to its body…Jim’s sonogram, from his last appointment with Dr. Swenson.

The dark-eyed genius began to hyperventilate, his vision growing blurry as he collapsed to the floor.

“Jim!” Sebastian exclaimed, rushing to his husband’s aid. He lifted him into his strong arms and laid him on a nearby couch.

“S-s-s-Sebby,” he panted, struggling to speak through the panic.

“I’m right here, Magpie.” The assassin held the Irishman’s hand as he tried to calm him down. “It’s going to be okay. You’re safe with me.”

“The…the…the picture.”

“I know, Jimmy, I know. But the sick fuck who staged this isn’t here right now. It’s just us.” Sebastian prayed that was true. The last thing he needed was an early morning melee, especially with Jim in such an upset state.

Moriarty took deep breaths, trying to regain some semblance of composure. Despite what was going on, he still had a meeting to host within an hour’s time. He couldn’t let anyone see him like this.

“Sebby, we’re going straight home after the conference. I need to know if the house has been breached. I need to check…”

He didn’t want to say it. Didn’t want to say that he needed to check the baby book he’d been keeping since his first ultrasound. He had to see if the last photo was stolen from it.

“Of course, Jimmy.” Seb knew what Jim was thinking. And if it was true—if there was proof someone had been in their home—then god have mercy on the perpetrator’s soul, because London’s most dangerous men would not.

Chapter End Notes

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Hidden Talents

Chapter Summary

Jim is stressed and Sebastian convinces him to take some time off. At home, the mastermind experiments with hidden talents.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

After finding the macabre hanging doll display in Jim’s office, he and Sebastian redoubled their efforts to track down the stalker. As feared, the sonogram photo that was used had indeed been stolen from Moriarty’s scrapbook. Once it was confirmed, the couple temporarily vacated their home and brought in a team to sweep the place for covert devices. A thorough search found no evidence of bugging, but the men were unnerved just the same. For added peace of mind, locks were changed, security cameras were installed at the front and rear of the house, and a rotation of guards were assigned to surveil their home from the street.

Meanwhile, Jim spearheaded an investigation into how someone was able to break into his business headquarters. According to timestamps on the security footage, power had been cut for approximately 20 minutes. No one could explain exactly what caused the outage. The only thing they knew for sure was that no other buildings were affected—this was specific to their location.

Jim was truly frazzled. Either someone he trusted was in on the plot, or someone outside of his staff had found a way to hack into their system. Both options were awful. It was a collective clusterfuck that led him no closer to learning the identity of the stalker than before.

BAM. BAM. BAM.

Sebastian hurried into Jim’s office, hearing a series of loud banging noises. What he discovered inside was his husband kicking the ever-loving shit out of a filing cabinet. The metal plating actually had dents in it.

“Whatever that cabinet did to piss you off, I think it’s learned its lesson,” the sniper joked, trying to ease Jim’s mood.

“Tiger.” The Irishman sighed heavily, a jumbled mess of nerves and frustration.

Seb approached his spouse, encircling his arms around him in a gentle hug. Jim responded keenly, gripping the former colonel as if he were a life preserver in the middle of a raucous sea.
“Why can’t I figure out who’s after us?” he asked, sounding equal parts exasperated and afraid. “You know who gets stalked? Ordinary people, Seb. Boring people, too stupid for the hunt. They become prey. Not me. I’m too clever for it… or at least I used to be.”

Sebastian held Moriarty close. It broke his heart to see him so distraught. Pregnancy hormones and situational stress were a vicious combination.

“Jim,” the blonde assassin spoke, “I want to take you away from here.”

“Well, I was planning to call it a day after lunch. We could grab a bite and then go home together if you’d like.”

“No, I mean I want to take you out of this city. Leave London and go someplace else. Get away from everyone until the babies are born.”

Jim backed away, glaring angrily. “You want me to give up! You want me to turn tail and run. Let this bastard win.”

“What I want is for you to be safe. You’re my priority.” He took a step towards Jim, laying an outstretched hand on the small swell of his stomach. “All I care about is you and our little ones… our tiger cubs.”

That did it. The consulting criminal could take no more. His breathing grew heavy as he threw himself back into Sebastian’s embrace. Resting his head against the taller man, he closed his eyes. It was all he could do not to cry. Tears weren’t something Moriarty permitted, even when it was just the two of them.

“My worst fears are coming true, Sebby. I used to think no one would ever get to me. Now it feels like everyone and everything is getting to me,” he confessed. “I can’t bear it.”

“Jimmy, why don’t you take some time off? You can oversee business operations from home while you decompress.”

“Me, decompress? I’m not sure I’d know how.”

“I’ve heard yoga’s good for relaxation,” Sebastian noted. “Meditation, as well.”

Jim laughed. “Can you picture me doing either of those things? I mean really, Seb.”

“You are rather flexible,” the assassin teased.

“Not so much these days. I’m a bit thicker around the middle than I used to be.”

Seb grinned. “I love the reason why.”

The madcap omega looked up at his gorgeous mate, a genuine smile dancing across his lips. “You know what? I do, too.”

*********

Jim decided to take Sebastian’s advice and work from home. It had only been a few days, but so far, so good. The business dealings were the easy part. What proved more difficult was finding an outlet for his stress.

Moriarty’s mind raced at a breakneck pace. Attempts at meditation were futile. He’d also explored other potentially relaxing activities such as painting, piano playing, and even knitting. None
provided the release he so desperately sought after, though he had managed to craft an adorable set of booties for the twins.

There was still one more endeavor he wanted to try. He’d gotten the idea for it while watching, of all things, a segment on morning television. If nothing else, it would be fun for a lark.

Jim smirked at the thought. He’d do it…and Seb would be his guinea pig.

**********

Sebastian Moran, sniper extraordinaire, walked through the front door of his home after a hard day on the job. Upon entry, he was immediately bombarded by a sweet and sumptuous smell. Curiosity compelled him to follow the scent trail. The aroma grew stronger and more pervasive, until finally, he reached the kitchen. What he saw was astonishing.

The countertops were covered by a veritable smorgasbord of baked goods. Cookies, cupcakes, tortes, and pies sat everywhere. It was a display worthy of any gourmet pastry shop.

“Surpriiiise!” Jim sang out, sneaking up from behind the fair-haired man.

“It sure is. You’ve been a busy boy.”

Moriarty shrugged. “You mean this?” he said nonchalantly, motioning to the assortment of confectioneries that surrounded them. “It’s just a little something to help work out my stress. No big deal.”

“No big deal? It looks like you’re ready to cater a gala event.”

“Hmm, well, maybe I did go a teensy bit overboard,” he cheekily admitted. “How would you like to take a taste?”

“But of course,” Seb said with a chuckle. His Magpie was a shameless flirt and he loved him for it.

“What would you like to sample first?”

“You’re the baker. What do you recommend?”

The genius thought about it for a moment, then turned to select a cookie from off a silver platter. “I had you in mind when I made this one.”

“Oh? In that case, I’m sure it will be the best of the bunch.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Just eat it.”

Sebastian did as told. A rich blend of flavors came together in his mouth, combining to form one of the most delectable treats he’d ever had the privilege of tasting.

“God, this is amazing. What is it?”

“Oatmeal-chocolate chip almond,” he replied. “After all the times you made me oatmeal these past few months, I figured I owed you a bit of the stuff.”
“Jimmy,” he whispered, “that’s an incredibly thoughtful gesture.” He reached out to stroke the Irishman’s cheek. “Thank you, love.”

Moriarty flushed a little. “It’s just a cookie, is all.” But they both knew that wasn’t true. The sentiment behind it spoke volumes.

“Ready to try something else?” Jim asked. He was quick to change the subject for fear of becoming too emotional.

“I’d love to.”

At that, the mastermind picked out an especially decadent chocolate cupcake. “I consider this among my finest baking achievements. It’s devil’s food with fudge frosting.”

Seb eagerly bit into the dessert, grunting in approval at first taste. “You’ve outdone yourself, Jim. This is fucking fantastic.”

“I’m a man of many talents,” he quipped.

“You can say that again. All these years together and I never knew you were a pastry chef in disguise.”

“You flatter me, Sebastian. Baking isn’t so difficult. It’s mostly just chemistry.”

“Well, whatever the secret is, you’ve mastered it.” He paused, mulling over an idea. “I’ve got a proposition for you, Jimmy.”

The smaller man was intrigued. “Do tell.”

“I want you to make my birthday cake. I know it’s not for another few months, but when the time comes, I want it to be one of your creations. A James Moriarty original.”

“Really? You wouldn’t rather have it made by a professional?”

“As far as I’m concerned, you’re more than qualified for the task.”

Jim gazed adoringly at Seb, his dark eyes sparkling with true contentment. “Okay,” he agreed. “Anything for you, Tiger.” He would make sure his beloved alpha received the best cake this world had ever seen.

Chapter End Notes

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Mixed News

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian learn the gender of their children. Later, Seb prepares a romantic dinner.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Today was the day Jim had waited so long for. Now 16 weeks into his pregnancy, he would finally learn the gender of the twins. He was beside himself with anticipation.

“Sebby, I’m so excited.”

Sebastian nodded in accord. He knew very well how thrilled his mate was. The man kept him up half the night chattering about it. He didn’t fault him, though. This was a new experience for them both, and he could scarcely imagine what it must’ve been like from Jim’s perspective. To actually have life growing inside oneself, knowing that it would ultimately emerge as a fully formed, albeit tiny, person…well, the notion was nothing short of mind-blowing.

Dr. Swenson entered the room and Jim laid back on the examination table with his shirt pulled up — he knew the drill by now.

She smiled at her patient’s exuberance. “Eager for the assessment, aye?”

“I was eager a month ago. Now I’m rabid.”

“Let’s get started then.” The physician proceeded as normal, applying the gel and transducer to Jim’s abdomen. A picture soon came onto the screen.

“You’re in luck, gentlemen. Both fetuses are in good position for determining their sex.”

The Magpie and his Tiger exchanged a hopeful glance as they waited with bated breath.

“Here’s Baby A,” she noted, indicating on the monitor which twin she meant. “Looks like you’ve got yourself some sugar, spice, and everything nice. It’s a girl.”

Jim beamed at the news. “Oh, that’s wonderful.” Visions of porcelain dolls and frilly dresses filled his head.

“Over here,” Dr. Swenson pointed out, “is Baby B. Judging by the extra appendage I see, it’s safe
to say it’s a boy.”

“One of each,” the mastermind marveled. His heart swelled with joy as he fell even further in love with his unborn children.

Sebastian shared in an equal state of bliss. As an alpha, he felt tremendous pride that it was his daughter and his son thriving inside Jim.

The couple clasped hands, knowing they would remember this moment for the rest of their days. It was perfection.

“Mr. Moriarty, now that we’ve completed the gender assessment, there’s another matter that needs to be discussed.”

Jim furrowed a brow, slightly annoyed that the woman dared interrupt his and Seb’s happy mood. “I’m listening.”

“Today your blood pressure reading was on the high side,” she explained. “It’s not bad enough to require drug treatment, but I’d classify it as ‘borderline.’”

The Irishman frowned. “That would explain the headaches I’ve been having.”

Headaches? Sebastian wondered. Since when did Jim get headaches?

“Jimmy, why didn’t you mention it?”

“I didn’t think it was worth complaining about.”

“During pregnancy, it’s especially important to pay attention to your body’s cues,” Dr. Swenson warned. “Minor symptoms can be indicative of larger problems.”

Suddenly, Jim felt a pang of guilt. He wanted to be a good father. Wanted to provide his babies with a healthy, nurturing environment in which they could grow. Ignoring his own wellbeing was counterintuitive to that goal.

“What do you suggest I do for it?” he asked in earnest.

“I recommend you switch to a low-sodium diet. No salty snacks or overly processed meats. Also, remember to stay hydrated. Water can help flush out the body.”

Jim sighed and Sebastian instantly knew why. No processed meats. Magpie loved his bacon. And sausage. And ham. Poor thing, having to give all that up.

In a flash, it occurred to the sniper what he needed to do. Tonight, he’d prepare a special dinner for his husband that was delicious without being salt-laden. Perhaps a bit of romance would be on the menu, too.

**********

Sebastian stood back, admiring the fruits of his culinary labor. Thanks to Jim keeping busy in his office all afternoon, he was able to concoct the feast undetected. It was an impressive spread consisting of roasted Cornish hens, wild rice stuffing, and green beans amandine. For dessert, he’d tried to make a chocolate soufflé, but it fell. Oh well. He never claimed to be a master chef.

The strapping blonde went out of his way to create a romantic atmosphere at the dinner table. Candles were lit and fine china was set down. A crystal vase of red roses served as the centerpiece.
For an added touch of ambience, he even stoked a crackling fire in the fireplace. Everything was perfect. All that was missing was the guest of honor.

SM

I’ve got a surprise for you. Come to the dining room and see.

Moriarty didn’t bother to text him back. Instead, he simply walked to the room Seb had directed. At first sight, his dark eyes widened and a gentle smile stretched across his face.

“Tiger, this is lovely.” He approached the table, leaning over to smell the flowers. “My favorite,” he whispered. “Why have you gone to so much trouble?”

“I don’t consider it trouble when it’s for the one I love,” Sebastian replied. “Now have a seat and we can dig in.” The former colonel pulled his husband’s chair out for him, signaling him to sit.

“And they say chivalry is dead,” Jim teased.

“They haven’t met me.”

“Of course not,” he retorted. “They never will. I’m keeping you all to myself.”

Seb grinned impishly. “Good. That’s the way I like it.”

Concluding their flirtatious exchange, the assassin brought out the food on a sleek silver tray, plating both of their meals before going back to retrieve a bottle of sparkling apple cider.

“I know this stuff isn’t as fancy as what you’re used to drinking, but for right now it’ll have to do,” he declared, pouring them each a glass of the non-alcoholic beverage.

“Sebby, you never cease to amaze me. How did I get so lucky to meet a man like you?”

Sebastian paused, considering the question. “Some might call it random chance that we met,” he said. “I, however, believe we would’ve always found a way to each other, no matter what.”

“Destiny,” the consulting criminal crooned. There was a time when he scoffed at such fanciful concepts; thought them wholly foolish. But then Sebastian Moran came into his life, and the rest was history.

The couple enjoyed their meal as much as they did each other’s company. Jim was even willing to try Seb’s woefully flattened soufflé. It tasted fine, but they both agreed it would’ve turned out better had Moriarty made it instead.

Conversation turned to talk of the twins, as it often did of late. They were proud papas, Jim especially so. The Irishman practically glowed as he described the newest baby items he’d ordered. Now that he knew they were having a boy and a girl, he was eager to start planning a playroom that would be inclusive to both.

“I think I might sack the decorator I’ve been using,” he quipped.

“Oh? You two seemed to be getting on so well.” They really had been— the woman was at their home practically every day, conferring with Jim about one thing or another.

“Yes, well, she hasn’t taken my calls all day,” he answered indignantly. “I spent a fortune flying her out here and putting her up at a hotel. The least she could do is phone me back.”
Ah, now it makes sense. One simply did not ignore James Moriarty. Many an unfortunate soul had died for committing that very sin.

“Maybe an emergency came up,” Seb suggested.

The genius scowled. “She should have no higher priority than me and this project. There’s no excuse, Sebastian.”

The sniper knew there was little sense in arguing the matter. He loved his Magpie dearly, but the man often had unreasonable expectations of people.

Right then, Jim let out a pained sigh and shifted in his chair. He grimaced, absently rubbing the small of his back.

“Jimmy, are you okay?” After learning earlier that the dark-eyed omega had been suffering in silence with headaches, he wasn’t about to let another health concern go unchecked.

“Just a bit of a sore back. I don’t think it’s anything serious.”

“Sounds like you could use a patented Moran massage.”

“Mmm,” he hummed. “That would be divine.”

“Shall we take this to the bedroom, then? You can lie down and I’ll work my magic.”

Jim didn’t need convincing. Before Seb had even finished clearing the table, his husband was primed and ready.

“Tiiiiiger!” he called out. “Come on! You know I hate waiting.”

Sebastian chuckled. “On my way, Magpie.”

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Breakfast & Unboxing

Chapter Summary

Domestic bliss with a disturbing twist.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Sebby, I’m hungry,” Jim announced, poking the snoozing body beside him. “Wake up! Make me food.”

The sleepy-eyed sniper groaned. “Can’t you get it yourself?” He instantly regretted his statement as he saw the murderous look on Moriarty’s face.

“I’m going to pretend you didn’t just say that, because I want our babies to remain having two parents. However, I would recommend you choose your next words wisely.”

Sebastian sat up, pulling on a pair of boxers as he stepped out of bed. “I’m at your disposal, sir. Anything you want, simply ask and ye shall receive.”

“Ooh, ‘sir.’ Haven’t called me that in a while. I like it.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere, sir,” Seb said with a wink.

“Been there, done that,” he coolly remarked. “Now what I’d really like is a pastrami and Swiss sandwich on rye, extra mustard.”

“Sorry, no can do, sir.”

“Excuse me? I thought you’d learned years ago never to say no to me,” he spat. “I may be pregnant, but I can still enforce a bit of discipline in case you need a reminder.”

“It’s just not possible for me to get you a pastrami sandwich. ‘No processed meats,’ remember?” It was all Seb could do to resist smirking as he threw the doctor’s words back at the ornery omega.

Jim let out a very annoyed sigh. He remembered, all right—but he was so ravenous, he wanted to forget.

“You would deny sustenance to the one bearing your children?” he asked with mock indignation.
“I would deny something your obstetrician specifically said was off limits,” the handsome, half-naked blonde replied. “Besides, it’s not even close to noon yet. Wouldn’t you rather have a nice, hearty breakfast?”

Moriarty rolled his eyes. “A breakfast without bacon or sausage? Yes, I’d love that. Maybe I could really live on the edge and spread a bit of marmite on my toast while I’m at it. Oh, wait, no I can’t. That would be too salty as well.”

Sebastian understood his spouse’s frustration. Dietary restrictions were never fun.

“I could make you an omelette,” Seb proposed. “Throw in spinach, mushrooms, and cheese. Serve it with scones and jam and brew up a pot of herbal tea.”

“We have scones?” Jim asked hopefully.

“No, but it won’t take long for me to pop out and get some.”

“Then what are you waiting for? Get dressed and go.”

Seb smiled. “As you wish, sir.”

*******

After a morning of breakfast and quality time with Seb, Jim was tuckered enough to take a nap. He emerged refreshed at about half past two in the afternoon. Such episodes of midday slumber had become a regular part of the consulting criminal’s daily routine, along with raiding the cupboards for sweets and rearranging pillows to satisfy a nesting instinct.

“Sebby, have you checked the mail? I’m expecting some packages to arrive today.”

“Not yet, but I can do it now if you’d like.” He set aside the magazine he was reading and walked to the front door. There were indeed four parcels of varying sizes stacked on the porch. Gathering them up in a lazy man’s load, he hauled them into the house.

“Isn’t one-day delivery awesome? I couldn’t live in a world without it. I just couldn’t,” he babbled excitedly. “Regular mail is sooo slow.”

Retrieving a box cutter, Jim tore into the first package. He waded through a sea of packing peanuts to reveal several individual planks of wood and bolts.

“It’s a seesaw,” the mastermind declared. “Or it will be, once it’s put together.”

“No wonder those boxes were so bloody heavy,” Seb commented. “I suppose I’ll be the one assembling the thing.”

“Oh, come on. It’ll be fun.” Jim was radiating with almost childlike enthusiasm as he spoke. “I always wanted a seesaw growing up. Now the babies will have one and they can use it together. They’ll never have to play alone. Don’t you love that?”

Seeing how happy the idea made Jim, the sniper did love it. He loved anything that brought such a genuine sparkle to his husband’s eyes.

“I think it’s fantastic,” Sebastian replied. “When the twins reach a certain age, perhaps we ought to spring for a full playground set.”

Jim’s jaw dropped at the suggestion. “Seb, it’s like you’re reading my mind!” he gleefully
exclaimed. “I had the same thought. I also want to get them a carousel. A proper one, like they have at Kensington Gardens.”

The taller man laughed. “Our children haven’t even been born yet and they’re being spoiled already. Keep this up and they’re going to develop poshness in utero.”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing.” Jim teased.

Seb shook his head and placed a hand over the Irishman’s stomach. “Never,” he said. “It could never be a bad thing. They deserve only the best.”

Moriarty cooed at his mate’s touch. Sometimes he couldn’t help but feel every bit what he was: a blissfully pregnant omega reveling in the love of his current and impending family.

“Show me what else you bought,” Sebastian urged.

Jim moved on to another box. Slicing it open, he abruptly dropped the cutting tool and recoiled. His expression was horrified.

“ Fucking hell!”

“What’s the matter?” the assassin asked.

He peeked inside the package and instantly saw what was wrong. The box contained a set of severed hands, chopped off cleanly and cauterized at the wrists. Judging by the length of finger nails and the colorful varnish that adorned them, they belonged to a woman.

Seb stared at the dismembered limbs for a moment, noticing a sheet of paper folded up beside them. His heart sunk as he knew this was surely the work of their stalker.

He read the note to himself and growled, crumpling it in his fist.

“What’s it say, Sebby?”

“You don’t want to know,” the sniper warned through gritted teeth.

“Yes, I do! I’m not some fragile flower,” he insisted. “I can take it.”

Jim wrenched the note from Seb’s grasp, reading it for himself.

Here lay the hands
that helped to plan
a room for
your little bastards.

The genius’s eyes widened at the ghastly poem. “Oh God, Lisa.” He looked inside the box again to confirm his suspicions. “It’s her. I recognize the manicure.”

It wasn’t until Jim’s prompt that Sebastian recalled the interior decorator’s name. A shame it was only committed to his memory posthumously.

“This has gone too far,” the former colonel decreed. If their harasser was willing to kill, then all bets were off.
Jim checked the exterior of the box for a label that might indicate its sender. Alas, the cardboard was blank.

“There’s no address on here. Ours or otherwise,” he observed. “That means this didn’t come through the mail. Someone had to have delivered it personally.”

“You’re right,” Seb agreed. “And if that’s the case—”

“Then the security camera would’ve recorded it.”

“We need to review that footage now.”

*********

Jim and Sebastian pored through hours of surveillance video in the hopes of catching their stalker in action. Sure enough, at 11:17 a.m., a masked man appeared on their property bearing an unmarked box.

“That’s him,” the blue-eyed alpha surmised. “Too bad he wore a fucking mask.”

“I’d like to know how he got past the guard.”

Moriarty brought up a good point. Since the hanging doll incident, they had employed a guard to sit outside their home at all times. The individual was to remain in a parked car on the street for the duration of their shift, watching for suspicious activity. With that in mind, why hadn’t he apprehended this trespasser?

Sebastian had a terrible thought. *What if the guard was in on it?*

He quickly realized what he needed to do. “I’m going out front to check on the guard. I’d love to know why he didn’t stop our uninvited guest.”

“Be careful,” Jim cautioned.

“Always am.” At that, Seb took the safety off his gun and headed outside, ready for anything.

*********

When Sebastian reached the security guard’s car, he immediately noticed that the man was slumped over the steering wheel. To an untrained eye, it would appear he was asleep or passed out. Something about the setup felt very off to the assassin, though.

The windows of the vehicle were wide open, allowing Seb to simply stick his hand in and lift the guard’s head from the wheel. That’s when he saw it. There was a bullet lodged in the man’s temple.

Already unsettled, Moran grew even more alarmed when he stopped to analyze the scene in front of him. By the looks of the wound, the gunshot couldn’t have been administered at close range. No, this was done from a distance. This was done by—

*Another sniper.*

“Oh fuck.”

Chapter End Notes
This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Sebastian Moran laid in the dark of the bedroom, staring up at the ceiling. Though exhausted, he simply could not sleep. The events of the day had done a number on him in more ways than one, and he idly questioned if he’d ever rest soundly again.

Morning started out okay. Jim had been a little grumpy, but that was nothing new. The unexpected part came later, when they received a set of severed hands in a box. Hands belonging to the woman who’d helped design their children’s nursery. That was a shock to them both.

Tensions escalated further after the guard outside their home was found dead. Sebastian disposed of the body as discreetly as possible. He drove to the countryside and constructed a rudimentary bonfire pit in which he burned the corpse. It wasn’t his finest work, but it got the job done.

He would’ve taken the hands with him, too, but Jim wanted to perform a test on them. The consulting criminal claimed he knew how to check for fingerprints unrelated to those of the deceased’s. Unfortunately, it proved to be a waste of effort. No other prints were detected, and the severed extremities were swiftly sent through a wood chipper in the shed.

None of those events were what truly bothered Seb, though. What disturbed him above all else—what kept him wide awake—was the realization that their stalker was likely another sniper. Sure, the person could’ve just hired a marksman to take out the guard, but something told him that wasn’t the case. This felt personal.

Moran looked over at the slumbering silhouette of his spouse. The Irishman had begun to stir in his sleep, movements growing more fitful by the minute. Seb wondered what he was dreaming about.
The sun beat down brightly as Jim and Sebastian walked hand-in-hand along the shore of a white, sandy beach. It was just the two of them, surrounded by clear skies and a calm ocean that stretched on forever. This was paradise.

They stopped beneath the shade of a palm tree, taking a moment to hold each other close. The mastermind could do this all day. He never felt safer and more at peace than he did in the arms of his beloved Tiger.

Suddenly, a shadowy figure appeared behind them, brandishing a knife. The phantom lunged forward, piercing its blade into Sebastian’s gut.

“No!” Jim shouted as the sniper collapsed to the ground. He scrambled to his husband’s side, desperate to help him. Seb had to live, he just had to.

The malevolent presence approached once more. Faceless and menacing, it pulled Moriarty away from his dying mate. He struggled fiercely, not wanting to leave Sebby for anything.

It was no use. The cruel specter overtook him, and in an instant, they were transported somewhere else entirely. No more sun, sand, and ocean. Instead, Jim found himself bound to a table in a dark room.

The figure closed in on him, wielding the same weapon that had been used to slay his dearest Sebastian. In fact, it still dripped with the man’s blood.

Try as he might, the restraints refused to give. True panic set in as the consulting criminal realized there was no getting out of this. He was about to be killed and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

The entity did something unexpected. Rather than simply stabbing Jim through, it lifted his shirt and placed a shadowy palm on the Irishman’s abdomen.

Moriarty shuddered. The air seemed to drain from the room as he struggled to breathe. All he could think of were his babies. They were innocent and good. They deserved to live even if he didn’t.

“Please don’t do this!” he pleaded. The blade was now pressed to the small swell of his stomach.

Jim was beset by overwhelming despair. This evil apparition had taken his husband from him and soon he would take his children, too.

White-hot pain shot through the omega as he was cut open. Tears of agony and heartbreak streamed down his face. He knew his precious babies would not survive. At 4 months along, they were far too premature to live outside his body.

Blood and amniotic fluid gushed from the incision. A shadowy hand reached in and pulled a tiny, underdeveloped fetus from Jim’s belly. It laid motionless, its umbilical cord still attached.

All he could do was scream at the horrific sight. His cries hit a fevered pitch when the phantom clenched its palm into a fist, crushing the immature life-form held inside. A faint popping sound could be heard as the baby’s semi-soft bones snapped like wet twigs.

*********

“Jim! Wake up!” Sebastian yelled, barely able to hear himself over the volume of his mate’s deafening wail. The man had started screaming and flailing in his sleep, obviously locked into a
dream which was causing great distress.

Seb turned on the nightstand lamp. Now able to get a good look at Jim, he was taken aback by the absolute anguish plastered across his face. He’d never seen him so stricken.

The sniper did the only thing he could think of to do—he fetched a cool washcloth to wipe the sweat from Jim’s brow. Though his touch was featherlight, the damp contact was enough to rouse the mastermind from his nightmare.

Moriarty’s eyes shot open. Breathing heavily, he threw the covers off and hugged himself around the middle.

“Babies,” he mumbled, still half dazed. “My sweet babies.” His voice broke into a sob and hot tears ran down his cheeks.

“What about the babies?” Seb asked, truly afraid. Jim never broke down like this. Ever. The idea of him openly weeping was so at odds with his personality that Moran could hardly believe what was happening. Something was very wrong here.

The genius continued to cry, gasping for air. “N-n-need p-paper b-bag,” he managed to wheeze out. Sebastian quickly procured the requested item and Jim began panting into it. After a few minutes, his breathing seemed to steady.

“Jimmy,” the blonde spoke softly, “what’s going on? The way you were screaming…are you in some kind of pain?”

The Irishman stared at him with red-rimmed eyes, trying hard to regain composure. Every time he attempted to speak, another sob rose to the surface. It was like a floodgate had opened and a tidal wave of emotions were spilling out. Through the haze of upset, he found solace in rubbing his tiny baby bump.

“Oh, my Magpie.” Seb embraced his husband, feeling fiercely protective of him. “What is it?” he whispered. “What did you dream about that was so bad?”

“Something…someone…killed you,” he shakily replied. “Then they took me and…” Jim struggled to say the next words, their very existence an obscenity to him. “They slashed me open and tore out our children. Crushed them right in front of me.”

Sebastian paled. “Jesus Christ. No wonder you were shouting.”

“It was the stalker who did it, Seb. I couldn’t see their face, but I know it was him.”

“It’s okay. You’re safe now, Jimmy.” The assassin shifted position so that instead of merely hugging his mate, he was now spooning him. It brought comfort to them both.

“He stole everything that mattered from me,” Moriarty confessed. “And what terrifies me is that it could come true. He really could murder you…murder our babies. All of it.”

“Never, my love. I won’t allow it.”

“I wish I could believe that,” he said, nuzzling even closer against Sebastian.

“I’ll find this son of a bitch. And when I do,” the sniper warned, “there won’t be enough pieces of him left to identify.”
Seb meant it. Their pursuer had pushed him to the breaking point. If he wanted a war, he would get one. Colonel Moran never lost a battle.

*********

The next morning, Sebastian sat at the kitchen table, buttering a piece of toast when Jim entered the room. There was nothing unusual about that— they regularly shared breakfast together. What was strange, however, was the business attire he wore. The Irishman hadn’t sported a Westwood suit since opting to work from home.

“So stylish today, Mr. Sex.” The sniper grinned as he moved to pour his husband a cup of herbal tea.

“I’ve got to look good if I’m going to work on site,” he stated, grabbing some yogurt from the refrigerator before sitting down with Seb.

“Making an appearance at the office, aye? Is this for a special assignment?”

“No,” Jim answered sharply. “I’ve just come to the realization that sitting on my arse all day taking conference calls isn’t the most effective way to run a criminal empire.”

“Careful you don’t rush into anything.”

The mastermind glared. “I’m perfectly capable of managing my own organization, thank you very much.”

“Never said you weren’t,” Sebastian replied. “I was thinking more along the lines of your physical wellbeing. Be careful not to work yourself ragged. A healthy daddy equals healthy babies.”

Moriarty sighed. His expression changed from annoyed to…nervous? Flustered? Perhaps a little bit scared?

Seb wasn’t sure how to read his Magpie’s shift in mood. After Jim’s freak-out the night before, he couldn’t be certain what was going on in the man’s mind, though he suspected it wasn’t good.

Having barely eaten a thing, nor even taken a sip of his tea, Jim stood up and made a beeline for the front door. “See you at headquarters,” he said as he walked out.

Just like that, Seb was alone again.

What’s going on, sweetheart?

Something was definitely bothering his mate. If he had to guess, he’d say it was probably residual stress from the hellacious nightmare he had. But there was only one way to know for sure. Though he dreaded it, he and Jim would need to have a talk.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Sebastian Moran felt like he was finally getting somewhere in his quest to identify the stalker. Realizing the culprit was likely another sniper, he decided to sit down and make a comprehensive list of all the other marksmen he knew. This included both past and present acquaintances, dating back to his time in the British Army. As one might imagine, it was proving to be a very long roster.

In an effort to pare down the suspects, he began checking to see who was alive and who was dead. Some he obviously knew the status of, but others…others he hadn’t seen in well over a decade. Their continued existence was indeterminate to him.

After spending a large portion of the morning refining his list, he thought it was time to go ahead and speak with Jim. He’d use his newfound cataloguing initiative as a conversation starter. From there, he would hopefully be able to segue into the real reason for their meeting— to discuss Moriarty’s emotional state and how Seb could help him through his fears.

This was virgin territory for the sniper. He hated talking about feelings. It was a trait he and Jim both shared. But after what he’d witnessed the night before…his Magpie had been so utterly distraught. He couldn’t let him suffer alone. He wanted to be a good husband.

*********

The entrance to Jim’s office was slightly ajar. Sebastian peered inside, the door creaking open about an inch. The mastermind looked up from the paperwork he’d been reviewing and hastily shoved it into a drawer when he saw that the assassin was there.

“Excuse you,” the Irishman growled. “No one is to enter this office without knocking! No one!” He stood to approach Seb, but didn’t get far. A dizzy spell overtook him and he gripped the edge of his desk for balance.

Moran rushed to his spouse’s side, helping to hold him up. “Let’s sit you back down, okay?” For the moment, Jim didn’t disagree.

“Thanks,” he begrudgingly acknowledged. The consulting criminal looked pale and sounded more
than a bit winded.

“Jimmy, are you all right?”

“I’m fine,” he replied. “I just got up too fast.”

The rugged blonde fetched a cup of water from the cooler in the corner and handed it to his ailing mate. Jim accepted it without argument.

“How about we go home and I make you a nice lunch?”

“Sebastian…”

“Or if you’d prefer, we could order takeout. I’ve got a few menus stashed away in the car. You could have your pick.”

“Sebby,” he said again. “I’m not leaving here. I told you I was coming back to work and I meant it.”

Work, the sniper lamented. It was the only aspect of life Moriarty had much control over these days. Little wonder, then, that he’d run to it when trying to avoid everything else.

“Hon, you’re clearly not well. Please allow me to take care of you.”

The smaller man snorted. “Are you really so old-fashioned, Seb? You want to keep your omega locked up at home, barefoot and pregnant?”

Sebastian took a deep breath as he pinched the bridge of his nose. He had to remind himself that his better half was in a state of hormonal flux right now. Jim’s decidedly peevish attitude was not entirely his fault.

“Fine, have it your way,” the former colonel offered in reply. He thought about the reason he’d come to Jim’s office in the first place and knew he needed to get the conversation back on track.

“I actually stopped by because I wanted to keep you abreast of my efforts to identify our stalker.”

That got the mastermind’s attention. “Oh? Go on.”

Seb explained his theory about the perpetrator being a trained marksman and outlined the methodology of his list. Moriarty seemed to approve of the endeavor, possibly because it was the most they had to go on so far.

A minute of silence passed between them until finally the genius spoke up. “Is that all? Because otherwise, I think we’re done here.”

Now was the time for Sebastian to address his true agenda. Amazing that he could hunt, maim, and kill without compunction, yet have anxiety over something as basic as interpersonal communication.

“There’s another thing I wanted to discuss,” he gingerly answered.

Seb desperately wished he could abandon his sad attempt at discourse and just get back to work. That would be a whole hell of a lot less nerve-racking. But he knew this needed to be done.

“Well, spit it out already.”
“It’s about last night,” he began. “I’ve never seen you so upset. I mean sure, you’ve been psychotic as fuck on occasion, but this…this was something different. You were inconsolable.”

That was the truth. Even while he held Jim, he could feel the man’s teardrops hitting his arm. When he finally stilled, Seb was positive he’d cried himself to sleep. The ensuing slumber was not especially restful, either. His Magpie had called out for him at several points, to which he reassured him each time.

“Don’t worry, Sebastian. You’ll never see me like that again. Never.” The consulting criminal’s voice took on a harsh tone, as if he were angry. But the question was, angry at whom?

“Jim, what are you so mad about?”

“Oh, I dunno,” he snarled. “Maybe I don’t enjoy it when people barge into my office and proceed to mock me. When they throw things in my face that I’m not particularly proud of, like it’s some kind of game.”

“Mock? No, Jimmy, you’ve got it wrong.” The sniper was bewildered by his mate’s statement. Was that really what he thought?

“Do I?” he spat accusingly. “Then why come in here and remind me of what a colossal arse I made of myself? Why bring up what a weak fucking tosser I was?”

“Jim, no. I swear I didn’t—”

“Is it fun for you?” he continued, ignoring Seb’s attempt to interject. “I bet it’s hilarious, pointing out what a pathetic twat your omega is! Laughing because he’s sooo scared of losing his family!”

Jim was on the verge of a meltdown and it pained Sebastian to know that he’d caused this. It wasn’t what he’d intended at all. If only the Irishman would hear him out.

“Magpie, please listen to me,” he implored. “I would never insult you like that. I love you too much to even consider it. All I wanted was to let you know that I’m here for you no matter what.” Moran reached out to grasp Jim’s hand. “If something is troubling you, I want you to tell me. Don’t bottle it up. Don’t let it fester until it’s so overwhelming, it splits you open.”

“Tiger, I…” he trailed off, averting Seb’s eyes.

“It’s okay, Jimmy. I’m here,” he reiterated, hoping to assuage his fears. “Talk to me. Let me in.”

The consulting criminal slowly looked up again, returning Sebastian’s gaze. “I’ve never felt this way before.” He shivered at the admission. “Until I met you, I didn’t think I could love anyone. The very concept was foreign to me.”

Seb nodded. He remembered full well how closed off the genius was when they first began their relationship. What started out as mere sexual attraction grew into a deep mutual devotion that neither had anticipated.

“Now something new has happened,” Moriarty confessed. “Our children are growing inside me,” he said, pressing Sebastian’s hand to his stomach, “and even though I haven’t met them yet, I’ve fallen so completely in love with them. I know it must sound foolish, but it’s true.”

The assassin smiled. “It doesn’t sound the least bit foolish, Jim. The bond between mother and child can be powerful.”
“Mother?” The smaller man balked at his mate’s choice of words, sounding vaguely hurt by the feminization. “I’m a father just like you.”

“That’s right,” Seb agreed. “I misspoke, I’m sorry.” But really, he hadn’t. Technically, the secondary sex characteristics that allowed Jim to bear children did in fact qualify him as the twins’ mother. There was no need to get pedantic about it, though. What was important was that he was finally opening up.

“It’s fine,” he said, accepting the apology. “What I’m trying to say is that I’ve never experienced this kind of blind, unconditional love before. When I listen to their hearts beat, it’s like echoes of my own.” He lifted Moran’s hand and kissed his knuckles. “You and our babies mean the world to me. I think of that terrible dream I had, and of what our stalker could do, and it haunts me, Sebastian. It’s my undoing. If I lost any of you now, it would burn the heart out of me.”

“Oh, my beautiful, brilliant Magpie.” Every day, the former colonel’s love for his husband seemed to increase. Just when he thought he couldn’t possibly adore him more, moments like this came along and reset the entire paradigm.

Seb swooped in for a kiss, his mouth claiming and dominating Jim’s own. The Irishman’s breathing hitched as he was taken off guard by the passionate gesture. He soon responded in kind, kissing back with equal enthusiasm.

“You sure you don’t want me to take you home after all?” the blonde asked as he broke away for air.

Jim grinned. “Actually, I think you may have changed my mind.”

“Imagine that,” he teased.

Imagine, indeed.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Working Late

Chapter Summary

Jim is late to come home, and it isn’t the first time. Sebastian grows suspicious.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

James Moriarty was definitely up to something. Or so his husband thought.

The mastermind had gone into work early and stayed late every day that week. When Sebastian would ask why, he always had a plausible excuse, but the sniper wasn’t buying it. He bloody well knew when his omega was keeping secrets.

It didn’t help that on a few occasions, he’d observed Jim hiding papers from him when he walked into the room. It hadn’t just happened at headquarters, either. The other day, Seb popped his head inside the Irishman’s home office and noticed him handwriting a document. He had no idea of its contents, but Jim quickly stowed it in a locked drawer.

It all seemed a bit dodgy. Disappointing, too, considering the breakthrough he and his mate had recently made. After finally getting him to open up emotionally, Seb believed there would be no deception between them. Now he wasn’t sure what to think, and frankly, it hurt.

The sniper waited up once more. It was past midnight and the consulting criminal still hadn’t come home. There were no text or voice messages to explain his whereabouts, nor was he replying to any of Sebastian’s correspondences. The silence was worrying.

At long last, the front door opened and in walked Jim.

“You,” Moran spoke forcefully, “didn’t answer my messages. Why not?”

“Because I was stuck in a meeting. Things got bogged down and I couldn’t break away. You know what that’s like.”

Yes, Seb did know. But he was also wary of whether or not he was being told the whole truth. Then it hit him: the scent. His keen alpha senses detected an aroma on Jim that was incredibly familiar, yet could not be placed. He was positive he’d smelled it before.

“Who did you meet with?” the brawny blonde inquired.

“An associate from Australia. He took a 22-hour flight to get here. I wasn’t going to blow him off
after he’d gone to so much trouble. I’m not a total wanker, Sebastian.”

Seb grumbled. He knew a handful of Australians, but none whose scent matched the one on Jim.

The smaller man removed his shoes and socks and reclined on the couch. “Tiger, be a dear and rub my feet.”

Moran arched a brow. Rub his feet? That’s new.

“Come on, Sebby. They hurt.”

And just like that, the former colonel was sitting at the end of the sofa with his spouse’s feet in his lap, massaging away the man’s aches. Even if he was somewhat suspicious of Moriarty, he could never allow him to suffer in pain.

“Tiger, you’re a miracle worker.”

Sebastian smirked. “My hands are but instruments of the Lord. I humbly do their bidding.”

Jim laughed, flashing a genuine smile that truly warmed Seb’s heart. This is what he’d been missing all week. The sniper savored gentle moments like these.

“Guess I’ll have to have a chat with the Man upstairs. I’ve already hired you to do my bidding, and I refuse to share your services with anyone.”

“Well, maybe you’re my Lord.”

Now it was Jim’s turn to raise an eyebrow. “How do you mean?”

Seb cocked his head and gazed intently at the consulting criminal. “I mean, maybe you’re the one I worship. You remember our vows. I swore to honor and obey. To cherish and protect. If that isn’t putting you on a pedestal alongside God, I don’t know what is.”

Moriarty looked absolutely love-struck. “My sweet Sebby,” he cooed. “You make me so happy.”

The assassin blushed. “You make me happy, too, kitten.”

“Good.” He arched his back slightly, reveling in the masterful foot rub. “I’m sorry I haven’t been around much lately. With any luck, that will eventually change.”

“Oh?” Dare Sebastian dream?

“Yes, I plan on starting paternity leave once I enter my third trimester,” Jim declared. “Just a few more months to go.”

“Magpie, that’s wonderful.” Seb could hardly contain his excitement at the news. When the time came, he would be able to care for his husband the way he wanted to.

“I knew you’d be pleased.”

A thought occurred to Sebastian. “Does this mean you’re telling people about the pregnancy?”

“Honey, I don’t have to say a word. Any alpha worth their salt could pick up on the scent. Not to mention my expanding waistline. Even a well-tailored suit won’t be able to hide the paunch for much longer.”
Moran nodded. What Jim said made sense. At this point, his condition was basically an open secret and would likely remain so.

“By the way, I’ve been meaning to ask how your list was coming along,” the mastermind remarked. “Making any headway?”

“In a manner,” he replied. “I’ve been vetting it to check who’s alive and who’s dead.”

“That must help narrow it down some.”

“It’s useful to an extent. The main problem I’ve run into is the number of individuals who are MIA.”

“Really?” Jim sounded rather surprised. “There are a lot of those?”

“At least a dozen unaccounted for, yes.”

The Irishman crinkled his nose as he considered the information. “I trust you’ve utilized the full breadth of my resources to find them?”

“Of course I have,” Seb answered. “But in an assassin’s line of work, if you don’t want to be found, you make yourself disappear right and proper. No loose ends.”

“Is that so? Wish someone had told me ages ago,” he teased. “Then I could’ve gone to you for advice after the messy business at St. Bart’s.”

Sebastian’s blood immediately ran cold and he stopped massaging his mate’s feet.

*St. Bart’s. St. fucking Bart’s.* If he never heard that damnable name again, it would be too soon.

“What’s the matter?” Jim asked, noticing the other man’s demeanor change.

“You’re a genius, figure it out.” *As if you don’t fucking know.*

The consulting criminal rolled his eyes. “Lighten up. It was just a joke.”

“Not a very funny one.”

“Seb, it happened years ago. How long are you going to make me pay for my mistake?”

“Mistake?” the sniper repeated incredulously. “No, a mistake is being served decaffeinated coffee when you ordered regular. What you did was a hell of a lot more than that.”

“I’ve apologized for it umpteen times. I can’t take back what’s already been done. I thought we were past this by now.”

“Jim, I believed you were dead for two whole years. It was the worst period of my life,” he stressed. “Scratch that— what I was doing wasn’t living. I merely existed, going through the motions while my reason for breathing was gone, never to return. So no, it’s not a subject I’ll ever be able to laugh about.”

Moriarty sighed sadly. “I truly am sorry, Tiger. At the time, I didn’t realize how much you loved me…or how much I loved you. My head was in such chaos back then.”

“Full of scorpions is my mind,” Sebastian quoted in lament. The Bard always had a way of phrasing things with expert eloquence.
“Not anymore, darling. I know exactly who and what I want now,” Jim proclaimed. “No more games of life and death. I’m over and done with those.”

“Magpie…”

“Yes?”

“Sometimes I worry…” the former colonel hesitated to finish his sentence, almost afraid that if he said the words, they’d come true.

“What do you worry about, my dear?” the Irishman asked. “A week ago, you said I could tell you anything. Well, that’s a two-way street. So please, go on.”

Seb took a deep breath. “I know how changeable you can be. Sometimes I fear you’ll grow bored of me…bored of this domesticity we share,” he confessed. “I’m terrified that some random morning you’ll decide you want your old, unattached life back. Or worse, that you’ll feel trapped by our ordinary existence and check yourself out of the world for real.”

“Oh, Sebby.” The mastermind sat up from his reclining position and scooted close to his spouse. “I couldn’t possibly change my mind about this. About us. And our existence is anything but ordinary. It’s a bloody phenomenon,” he declared.

The assassin’s cheeks flushed hot with embarrassment. He loathed blabbering on about his feelings as if he were a teenage girl. But truthfully, it did help to hear Jim’s pledge of assurance.

“Sebastian, I want you to know that I’m not going anywhere. You’re stuck with me for the long haul. It’s you, me, Estella, and Edward. You’ve got us forever.”

Estella and Edward? Who? The fair-haired man was puzzled at first, but one look at his mate’s warm smile explained it all.

“What are the names you want to give the babies?”

Moriarty nodded. “I fancy a bit of alliteration. Thought I might call them by their shortened forms, Essie and Eddie,” he said. “What do you think?”

“If you like them, then I do, too.”

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter Summary

Jim isn’t feeling well.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sebastian walked through the doors of James Moriarty’s headquarters with a spring in his step. He’d finished his most recent assignment earlier than expected and wanted to pop in and surprise his husband. Maybe they could have lunch together— dine at one of those posh bistros Jim loved so much.

“Hey, Suzy,” he said, approaching the mastermind’s longtime secretary. “Is Jim busy? I was hoping to catch him at a good time.”

She furrowed her brow. “I’m sorry, but Mr. Moriarty has left for the day.”

“Oh? Did he mention where he was going?”

“He said he was heading home, sir. He took ill.”

*Took ill?* Dread shot through Seb’s heart. “What do you mean, he ‘took ill?’ What was the matter?”

She shook her head. “I don’t know, he didn’t specify. I’m sorry I can’t offer more than that.”

“Yeah,” he huffed. “Thanks anyway.”

Sebastian exited the building as fast as he could. Once outside, he checked his phone to see if Jim had sent him any messages he may have missed.

No, he hadn’t.

Next, he tried calling the man.

No answer.

The sniper’s perfect composure was all but gone by the time he reached his car. Something was wrong with his mate. The instinct to protect Jim and their unborn children coursed through every inch of his body. It was an almost primal urge that took him by storm.
I’m coming, sweetheart. Please be okay.

*********

When Sebastian arrived home, he quickly determined that Jim wasn’t in any of the main areas of the house. Ruling those out, it meant the man was probably in bed.

The tall blonde hurried to his and Jim’s room. Sure enough, there he was, curled up in a ball under the covers.

Seeing Seb enter, the Irishman’s dark eyes went wide. “Tiger,” he whispered, his voice sounding strained and his breathing labored.

“Magpie.” In an instant, Sebastian was at his spouse’s side. “What’s the matter?” he asked as he tenderly ran his fingers through the man’s hair. “I stopped to visit you at work and they told me you went home sick.”

“I don’t feel good. Glad you’re here with me now.”

Seb peeled back the heavy duvet and crawled in beside Moriarty. He moved to hold him in a spooning position, an arm flung around the smaller man’s waist. From that angle, he was able to gently rub his beloved’s belly.

Jim hummed at the touch. “Sebby…my sweet Sebby.”

“Tell me what’s wrong, darling.”

“It’s…I…” he trailed off, struggling to form a proper explanation.

Moran was even more worried now. His Magpie was one of the most articulate people he knew. If he was having trouble communicating, it meant something was very wrong.

“My head,” he began again, “has been pounding like a bloody jackhammer all morning. I started seeing stars and passed out for a bit. Nobody saw because I was in my office, but I left after that.”

Seb held Jim tighter, as if trying to shield him from harm. It pained him to realize that this was something he couldn’t fix.

“Tiger, I can’t catch my breath and…and my stomach hurts.” The consulting criminal shuddered at the last part of his statement.

“Jimmy, I’m taking you to the hospital.”

Sebastian rose from the bed and gently maneuvered the other man into an upright position. Jim didn’t try to fight him or disagree, a fact which was somewhat alarming. His cooperation was a tacit admission that this was serious and he needed help.

“Sebby, maybe I should put on real clothes.” Indeed, the mastermind was wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt—certainly not his typical attire.

“No time for a wardrobe change, hon. We need to get you medical attention ASAP.”

Jim nodded in agreement as Seb carried him to the car.

*********
Not since that awful nightmare two weeks ago had Sebastian seen his husband cry. The unflappable James Moriarty wasn’t one to wear his heart on his sleeve. It greatly unnerved him, then, to witness the man break down into tears on the way to the hospital. He was afraid for their babies, desperate to know if they were okay.

Checking in under assumed names, the couple was fortunate enough to be seen relatively quickly. Jim remained in a haze while a nurse practitioner performed a battery of tests. Seb stayed by his side the entire time, offering silent strength and support.

Eventually, the on-call obstetrician came to their room. She was pleasant enough—a ginger-haired woman with a kind face and friendly smile.

“Hi, I’m Dr. Kelly. And you must be,” she paused, glancing at the patient chart in her hands, “Tim?”

Jim nodded. He would’ve been amused, too, at Sebastian’s lack of creativity when creating an alias for him at check-in, but his poor health overshadowed any shred of humor the situation held.

“I’m glad you came in when you did, Tim. Your blood pressure is very high and you have a dangerously elevated protein count in your urine. If you’d waited much longer, you’d have been at serious risk for stroke and kidney damage.”

Seb’s façade of composure began to crack as he heard the news. People could die from the conditions Dr. Kelly described. Jim could’ve died. And through all this, somehow he’d missed just how sick the man had become. What kind of alpha was he not to have noticed? Worse yet, what kind of husband did it make him? The guilt threatened to swallow Sebastian whole.

“He’s been following a low-sodium diet,” the sniper blurted out. “Our regular obstetrician said his blood pressure was on the high side, but that reducing his salt intake would help lower it naturally.”

“She gave you sound advice. Diet is often the first approach to lowering one’s blood pressure. Despite those efforts, though, sometimes it’s not enough.”

Dr. Kelly turned her attention back to Jim. “Based on your presentation, I’m making a diagnosis of preeclampsia. Usually this sort of complication doesn’t arise until the later stages of pregnancy, but it isn’t entirely unheard of to develop at 18 weeks, such as in your case. The earlier the onset, the harder it can be on the body. But the good news is that there are steps we can take to improve the situation.”

“What can we do?” Seb asked immediately. He ached to help Jim in whatever way he could.

“For starters, I’m going to insist that Tim stay here overnight. We’ll put him on an IV drip of Labetalol, a hypertensive drug. It should bring his blood pressure down to a manageable level. If he responds well, then I’ll prescribe the medication in an oral form, to be taken daily throughout the remainder of the pregnancy.”

“Sounds like a solid plan to me,” the assassin agreed.

“What about the babies?” Jim spoke, finally breaking the silence that had overtaken him since arriving at the hospital.

“Tim,” she began, “I’m going to be upfront with you and your partner. Preeclampsia can interfere with blood flow to the fetus, which can lead to a series of problems down the line. But that doesn’t always occur, especially not if we’re actively treating the issue.”
“Right,” he said. The timbre of his voice was weary and broken in a way that Sebastian had never heard before.

“I’ll have them make up a bed for you in the obstetrics ward. That way we can also perform periodic fetal heartrate checks throughout the night.”

“He’s staying with me,” the Irishman abruptly declared, grabbing Seb by the hand.

“Of course. Spouses are always welcome. I’ll make sure they include a fold out bed for your husband.” At that, Dr. Kelly exited the exam room, leaving the two men alone.

“Forget the folding bed,” Jim announced. “You’re sleeping beside me.”

“Wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Sebastian leaned down and hugged the smaller man. It was a gesture full of warmth and reassurance.

Jim responded keenly. “My Tiger,” he whispered, wrapping his arms around the former colonel. He held on tightly, as if remaining in his alpha’s embrace could protect him from the rest of the world.

Sebastian only wished it were true.

Chapter End Notes

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Adventures at the Hospital

Chapter Summary

Jim is hospitalized. He’s not an easy patient.

Chapter Notes

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“This is humiliating,” Jim said as he wandered back to bed from the bathroom. The consulting criminal held one hand behind him to keep his paper-thin hospital gown closed, while the other hand gripped the IV pole he was attached to.

“It’s just for tonight, love. It’ll be okay.” Sebastian helped ease his husband into a comfortable position and retrieved a freshly warmed blanket to cover him with.

Moriarty had only been checked into the medical facility for a few hours and he already hated it. The food was tasteless, the sheets were prickly, and there was absolutely nothing interesting on tv. The only saving grace was the abundance of toasty blankets.

“I’m so bored,” he complained.

“I’ll see about getting some magazines in the gift shop,” Seb replied. “In the meantime, why don’t you try eating a little more?” The sniper moved a tray of food off the nightstand and sat it on Jim’s lap.

“Ugh. It’s terrible, Tiger. No flavor at all.” The low-sodium meal consisted of a grilled chicken cutlet, steamed carrots, and a gluttonous white lump purported to be mashed potatoes.

“I know it isn’t great, but the nurse wants you to finish it. Besides, you’ve got to keep up your strength. Can’t do that on an empty stomach.”

Jim sighed and picked up the plastic utensils provided. He glanced at his mate, who nodded encouragingly. The support was nice, but unfortunately, it couldn’t make a bland dish come alive.

“For the babies,” he proclaimed, jabbing into an unseasoned, rubbery carrot.

Moran smiled softly, pleased that the mastermind was making an effort. “While you tackle dinner, I’ll try to scare up some reading material. Shouldn’t take long.”

“It better not. I refuse to suffer alone.” Jim sounded testy, but Seb understood the truth of the matter. He was anxious and afraid, and his true emotions were manifesting outwardly in the form
of crankiness.

The rugged blonde leaned down and kissed the smaller man on the head. He inhaled deeply, relishing the sweet scent of him. No cologne could compare to the natural fragrance of a pregnant omega. It was almost intoxicating.

“Eat as much as you can. There might even be a treat in it for you if you do,”

“Oh reeeeally?” Jim drew out, instantly intrigued.

“Maybe. You’ll just have to wait and see.”

“You’d best not be toying with me right now,” Moriarty warned. “It’s been a while since I’ve made someone into shoes, but it’s rather like riding a bike—you never forget how.”

Seb chuckled. “I wouldn’t dream of it, dear.”

**********

The hospital gift shop was fairly nondescript. Nothing special about it, but at least they offered a decent selection of newspapers and magazines. Sebastian purchased a hefty stack of periodicals and threw in a crossword puzzle book for good measure.

He couldn’t forget Jim’s treat, either. After perusing an assortment of confectionaries, the former colonel decided to buy the largest milk chocolate bar on display. Knowing his spouse’s sweet tooth, he’d surely appreciate it.

As Moran returned to the Irishman’s room, he could hear yelling coming from inside. Concerned, he picked up his pace and rushed to see what the commotion was about.

“Sod off, you bloody cow!” Jim venomously shouted at a nurse. Both parties looked upset, albeit for different reasons.

“What’s going on here?” the assassin demanded, eyeballing each of them.

“This slag is trying to steal property from right off of my body!” he fumed, shooting the middle-aged woman a chilling glare.

“That’s not what happened!” the medical assistant refuted. She turned to Seb to explain. “The hospital has a policy of removing all jewelry from its patients. This man’s watch should’ve been taken off when he got in here, but someone obviously forgot to enforce the rule. I was sent to check his vitals, and when I saw what he had on, I attempted to remove it. That’s when he flipped out.”

Sebastian sighed. Jim was overreacting and he would have to diffuse the situation. The things I do for you, my love.

“I don’t care what asinine policy this place has! I am not surrendering one of my most valued possessions to you or anyone else in this hell hole! I’d sooner check myself out than submit to it.”

“Sir, given your condition, I strongly advise you not to leave until you’ve been reevaluated by a physician tomorrow. Furthermore, getting yourself worked up like this is only going to aggravate your blood pressure.”

Moriarty was furious, his eyes blazing with anger. “I wouldn’t be worked up if you weren’t trying to take what’s mine!”
This wasn’t good. Seb needed to act now.

“Stop!” the sniper yelled loud enough to be heard over their bickering. “You,” he spoke, pointing directly at the nurse, “are going to tell me why the hospital has this policy. Be concise, but don’t leave out anything important.”

“Okay, fine,” she agreed. “Our policy is based on two aspects. First, the fact that jewelry, particularly that which is on or near the hands, is a harbinger for germs. Removing such articles is a necessary precaution. The second reason is because metal can interfere with readings on some of our medical equipment.”

Sebastian considered her explanation. It sounded reasonable. “If he were to take off the watch, could I hold on to it for safekeeping?”

“Certainly, sir. It was never my intention to confiscate the item. The two of you would be allowed to keep it once it was removed.”

Jim vigorously shook his head back and forth. “No! I’m not doing it, Seb! I refuse.”

Something about the Irishman’s demeanor troubled Moran. Why was wearing the watch so important to him? He’d referred to it as one of his “most valued possessions.” Was that really true? The more Sebastian thought about it, he realized he’d never actually seen Jim take it off. Hmm.

“Ma’am, could I have a moment alone with my partner to discuss this?”

“Absolutely, sir. I’ll be in the hall.”

The nurse left and Seb turned to his husband. “Jimmy, what’s the issue here? I’ll make sure your watch doesn’t get lost. Honest, I will.”

Moriarty’s posture slumped and he averted his gaze down to the now-empty tray on his lap.

The fair-haired assassin frowned. Though glad to see he’d finally finished his meal, he was concerned by the man’s sudden silence.

“Magpie lost his flutter?” Sebastian asked as he moved the tray out of the way and sat with Jim. “Look at me, sweetheart. Tell me what’s wrong.”

The consulting criminal lifted his head, focusing an intense stare on Seb. “We don’t wear our rings.”

“What?”

“Our wedding rings. We don’t wear them.”

“Because you didn’t want people to see them and know what we meant to each other. It would make it too easy for our enemies to hurt us that way.”

“I know, Sebby. I know. But…”

“But what, hon?”

“I can wear the watch you gave me without worry. The whole world could see it, and it would be fine because—”

“Nobody knows what it means except us,” Sebastian said, finishing his mate’s thought. Sometimes
they were so attuned to one another, it was uncanny.

Moriarty nodded. “It’s an entirely foolish and sentimental notion, but it plagues me just the same.”

“Plagues?” the sniper repeated for emphasis. “If it’s a plague, then consider me cursed, because I love the idea.”

“You would,” he remarked.

“How could I not?” Seb flashed a playful grin, guaranteed to ease Jim’s mood.

The genius smiled back and did something surprising: he voluntarily removed his amethyst dial Rolex and handed it to Moran. “I’m putting this back on the moment we set foot outside.”

“I’d expect nothing less,” he replied, tucking the timepiece into his pocket.

Jim peered at the taller man. “Now that we’ve got that sorted, I do believe you promised me a treat.”

“Sure did.” Sebastian fetched the gift shop goods, setting them down on the bed. An oversized chocolate bar lay atop the stack.

“Oh, Tiger. You know what I like.” He reached for the candy with record speed.

“Might want to wait until the nurse checks you out before digging in.”

“Bugger that,” he quipped, tearing open the wrapper and taking a bite. “I’m tired, pregnant, and have been forced to eat food that’s barely a notch above what one might find at a Gulag. I think I’m bloody well entitled to chocolate right here and now.”

Seb couldn’t dispute Jim’s reasoning. He had dealt with an awful lot today, none of it being particularly pleasant.

“Okay, Jimmy. I’m going to invite her back in and she can work around your snacking.”

By then, the mastermind didn’t seem to care. He was terribly bored and wanted nothing more than to devour his sweet treat and read a newspaper.

“That’s fine. Carry on.”

Moriarty sifted through the stack of reading materials, stopping when he discovered a crossword puzzle book mixed in. A look of delight came over his face and all thoughts of reading *The Daily Telegraph* went out the window. He had something more interesting to occupy himself with now.

Chapter End Notes

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Sebastian Moran’s arm was going numb. The cause of his ailment was a softly snoring Irishman who’d fallen unconscious on his limb. It wasn’t really Jim’s fault, though. A nurse had administered a diphenhydramine injection to help him sleep. The drug was effective, putting him out like a light while he rested in Seb’s embrace.

The sniper gently maneuvered his arm out from under the slumbering body. Once freed, he worked to restore its blood flow. After a few minutes of massage, sensation returned at last. Ironically, while his extremity was now awake, the rest of him grew very tired. Seb could barely keep his eyes open, and soon he succumbed to the Land of Nod alongside Jim.

*********

Sebastian entered his mate’s hospital room carrying a cup of hot cocoa. It was prepared the way Jim liked— with real whipped cream and chocolate shavings on top.

He frowned. The bed was empty. Moriarty’s things were missing, too. The man hadn’t brought many personal effects with him during the impromptu stay, but Seb remembered his shoes being sat near the door and his t-shirt and sweatpants folded on a chair. Now those items were gone.

Suddenly, an orderly walked in pushing a laundry cart. She began stripping the sheets off the bed, totally ignoring the blonde’s presence.

“Excuse me,” he spoke, trying to get the woman’s attention. “This room is supposed to be occupied.”

“Not anymore,” she flatly replied without even bothering to look up at him. She just kept her head down, working on the sheets.

“What do you mean by that? My husband is staying here.”

“The last person assigned to this room died. That’s why they sent me to strip the bed. Somebody else already cleared out his things.”
Sebastian turned ghostly pale and began to shake. The hot cocoa he carried fell to the floor, a mess of brown liquid pooling on the lily white tile.

“Hey!” the woman complained. “Watch what the hell you’re doing! Now I’m gonna have to clean that up.”

Her words barely registered with the former colonel. He was in a complete and utter daze.

“You’re telling me that the man who was staying in this room is now dead?” Seb shouted, his voice fraught with hysteria. “When did it happen? And how?”

“I don’t know. Not too long ago, obviously.” She paused. “I did overhear some nurses talking about a guy who had a stroke. Said it was a real shame he died alone.”

Sebastian’s heart shattered into pieces. ‘Died alone.’ No…no! Not his Magpie. Not his beautiful, brilliant, madcap Jimmy. The person he loved more than anything else in this world.

The assassin second-guessed himself. Why had he left Jim’s side for even an instant? Maybe if he’d been there, he could’ve done something to help. Could’ve gotten the doctors’ attention quicker. Or at the very least, he could’ve simply held his hand.

It made him sick to imagine Jim overcome by a stroke as he laid alone. Did he realize what was happening to him? Was he scared? Worse yet, in those final moments, did he wonder why his husband wasn’t there? Did he think, god forbid, that his Tiger had abandoned him?

And their babies. Little Essie and Eddie. The children he and Jim so deeply wanted and adored. They were gone, too. Their tiny heartbeats, silenced forever. Seb ached as he thought of how he’d never be able to hold them, hug them, or rock them to sleep. He would never get to be their Daddy.

Moran was suffocating under the weight of his despair. This was not mere sorrow. This was immolation of the soul. This was what it felt like to truly have the heart burned out of you.

**********

Sebastian jolted awake. It took him a minute to calm down and reorient himself.

Jim, was the only thought on his mind. He looked over at the still-sleeping man who meant everything to him.

“My Magpie,” he whispered. “I love you so.”

The sniper wanted to kiss and caress him. Wanted to hold him in his arms again, circulation be damned. But he knew Jim needed to rest. His health was first and foremost, coming ahead of all else.

Quiet as a mouse, Seb crept out of bed. According to his mobile, it was nearly 5 a.m.

Bloody hell. He’d slept longer than he realized.

The sun would be up soon, and hopefully, Jim would be given clearance to go home. Before that happened, though, he’d probably be made to endure another unappetizing meal courtesy of the medical facility. If last night’s sorry excuse for a dinner was any indication, breakfast would be equally off-putting.

My poor kitten. Sebastian wanted to do something nice for his spouse. An idea quickly came to
him. All he had to do was make the appropriate phone call, and it would come together thusly.

Sunlight cascaded through the blinds of Jim’s room, casting a warm glow throughout. But it wasn’t dawn that stirred him, no. It was the scent.

An aromatic bouquet billowed in the air, transforming the sterile area into a realm of botanical ecstasy. If the essence of Eden could be recreated, it would surely smell like this.

Moriarty opened his eyes and blinked, uncertain if what he was seeing was real. There were flowers everywhere, and of numerous variety.

“Sebby, what is this?” he asked, staring in awe at his surroundings. The once spartan space was now filled to the brim with flora, turning the place into a makeshift garden. It was breathtaking.

The assassin grinned cheekily. “It’s just a little something I hoped you might like.”

“Like it? I love it,” he enthused. “But how did you manage to pull this off?”

“I know all the right people.” In actuality, Moran only had to contact one florist in order to get the job done. Money could be a very compelling motivator, especially when you were able to offer it in abundance.

“I can’t believe I slept through the delivery. I guess I was dead to the world after that Benadryl shot.”

‘Dead to the world.’ Seb inwardly cringed at the phrase. It was an innocuous figure of speech, but he didn’t want to hear Jim use the word ‘dead’ in relation to himself ever again.

“You needed the rest,” he said. “How are you feeling?”

“Hungry. And better than yesterday. I think the drugs are working.”

“Thank god.” Sebastian was relieved at the news. “You gave me one hell of a scare.”

Jim cast his eyes downward, fidgeting anxiously. “About that…I’m sorry, Tiger. You shouldn’t have to deal with this.”

“Don’t apologize. If anything, I’m the one who ought to make amends. You’ve dealt with so much stress lately,” he lamented. “I swore to protect you, but look what good it’s done. I’d fire me if I were you.”

“Then it’s fortunate I’m my own man. I would never give you the pink slip. You’re the only person I trust.”

“Likewise.” The sniper moved to sit on the bed with his mate, tenderly taking his hand. “I love you, Jimmy. I already lost you once. I couldn’t bear to again.”

“Well, you’re in luck, because I don’t plan on going anywhere,” he assured. “Except home, that is. Can’t wait to get back there.”

Sebastian smiled. “I’d like that, too. Our bed is a whole lot more comfortable than this thing,” he noted, referring to the hospital furniture they were currently perched upon.

“Sebby, go find a doctor to reassess me. I want to get this over with ASAP.”
“I’ll see what I can do.”

The fair-haired former colonel made his way to the door, intent on finding someone with the authority to clear his spouse for discharge. Maybe, just maybe, they’d be able to head home sooner than later.

**********

The Magpie and his Tiger were home at last, though it had not occurred quickly enough for Jim. The on-call obstetrician was unavailable to meet with him until 10 a.m. That meant he was subjected to a second dubious dining experience at the medical facility. Rubbery eggs and dry toast did nothing for his disposition.

The evaluation yielded a more positive experience. Moriarty’s body had responded well to the intravenous Labetalol, bringing his blood pressure down to a manageable level. He was prescribed to take an oral form of the drug twice a day for the remainder of the pregnancy. His regular OB was to be appraised of the situation and they would discuss it at his next checkup.

Upon release from the hospital, Sebastian was tasked with packing up the array of flowers in Jim’s room. Fortunately, someone at the nurses’ station was kind enough to provide them with empty boxes from a supply closet. In all, there were five cases of plant life to transport.

“Set those over there, darling.” Jim pointed to a spot in the living room.

Sebastian did as he was told, placing the box full of flowers exactly where his husband wanted them.

“I should’ve had these delivered here as a surprise for when you came home. I wasn’t thinking very far ahead,” the sniper admitted.

“I know, Tiger. But it was an incredibly sweet gesture.” He leaned up and stole a kiss from the taller man. “These will look wonderful around the house. They’ll add a fine touch of flair.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right.”

“Of course I’m right,” he said with an impish grin. “Now you finish unloading the rest while I go take a shower. If you’re quick about it, maybe you can even join me.”

Seb grunted huskily at the proposition. Moriarty always knew how to push his buttons.

Returning to the car for another load, Moran’s phone buzzed, indicating he had a new text message. He pulled the mobile device from his pocket, hoping it was Jim telling him to forgo the flowers and just hop in the shower with him. His mate changed his mind often, so it was possible.

He damn near dropped the phone when he read what it said.

**Unknown Sender**

*Welcome home, Colonel. I trust all is well. It’d be a shame if something befell those whelps of yours.*

Chapter End Notes
This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian argue. Secrets come to light.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Two weeks had gone by since Sebastian received the anonymous text message mocking the welfare of his unborn children. He tried to trace the correspondence back to its sender, but found that it originated from a burner phone. It was yet another brick wall in the quest to track down his and Jim’s stalker. The countless dead ends were driving him to madness.

Jim. Moran felt intense guilt over what the stress was doing to his mate. Pregnancy should be a time of great joy for an omega, and indeed, the Irishman was happy. However, he was also contending with excess anxiety because of their harasser. Seb couldn’t help but think that Jim’s high blood pressure was at least partially due to all the threats they’d received.

Moriarty was again operating under a reduced workload. After learning of his preeclampsia diagnosis, his regular obstetrician advised him to take it easy. Though not placed on strict bedrest, it was recommended that he avoid overexerting himself. This meant he would only travel to headquarters one day a week. The remainder of the time he’d conduct business from home.

Sebastian was relieved to have his husband mostly consigned to their house because that made it easier to keep him safe. He’d rehired the extra security guards Jim previously dismissed, giving them specific instructions to report any and all activity taking place on their property. This included the comings and goings of delivery people, repairmen, and even the mastermind himself. Moriarty was seemingly unaware of the increased surveillance and Seb knew he’d be livid when he found out.

The sniper broke his word by having Jim watched. But he couldn’t just sit back and do nothing. His primary goal in life was to serve and protect the man. Right now, this was the best way he knew of to achieve that. He had the consulting criminal’s well-being at heart.

It disturbed Seb to hear from the security crew that his Magpie was venturing out on a near daily basis. Like a true bird in flight, he was said to be fluttering from the nest at odd intervals, with no discernible pattern to his excursions. When asked about what he did during the day, the genius would play dumb, pretending he’d been cooped up inside.

What was the reason for Moriarty’s deceit? Sebastian contemplated the question endlessly, never
reaching a suitable conclusion. He thought back to a month earlier when he suspected Jim of hiding documents and letters from him. He was unsettled by it then and even more so now.

When Moran allowed his mind to wander, his thoughts took a dark turn. The last time the mastermind was this secretive…

Seb shook his head, not wanting to remember. But he could never forget, no matter how badly he tried. All the liquor in the world wouldn’t erase that godforsaken experience. It was branded into his soul.

_The rooftop of St. Bart’s._ The last time Jim had been this secretive was when he was planning that final fucking game with Sherlock Holmes.

Sebastian growled, throwing a now-empty tumbler of scotch across the length of his office. It hit the wall with a satisfying smash, shards glistening along the thinly carpeted floor. What he really wanted was to pound his fist into the wall, but in his line of work, he couldn’t risk damage to his hands. Glassware would have to suffice.

Jim was up to something. Of that, the assassin had no doubt. Surely, whatever it was couldn’t be as extreme as St. Bart’s. It just couldn’t be, not now. Not when…

_When we’re a family._

In his heart, he knew that Jim would never risk their children’s lives. His own, perhaps, but not theirs. He loved the babies far too much for that.

So what, then, was the criminal extraordinaire hiding? Seb would head home to find out.

*********

It was mid-afternoon when the former colonel arrived at the residence he and Jim shared. Funny how his husband didn’t greet him when he walked through the front door, or when he marched down the hall, calling the man’s name. Or even when he checked the backyard, searching for him there, too, in the off chance that he might be relaxing on the lanai.

_Where are you, Jim?_

Seb had half a mind to ring him up, demanding to know his current location. But he needed to remain calm and keep his wits about him. Getting upset wouldn’t do any good.

So he returned to the living room and sat down. He would wait. Wait for his mate to buzz back to their nest. Then he would bloody well get some answers.

*********

The smell was the first thing Sebastian noticed when Jim traipsed in. It was _that_ scent again. The one from a month ago that was so terribly familiar, yet unplaceable. A growl instinctively tore from his lips, grabbing the smaller man’s attention.

“Fancy meeting you here, Tiger. Make that sound again and I’ll have to insist we play a round of ‘Pin the Magpie.’” He ogled the strapping assassin wantonly, and if Seb wasn’t so angry, he would’ve found the look irresistible.

“No games, Jimmy. I want the truth.”
“Truth? You’ll have to be more specific than that, dear. And while we’re at it, care to tell me what you’re doing home so early? I can’t be at headquarters myself, but I presumed you’d be there to oversee things.”

“No,” Moran protested. “You don’t get to ask the questions right now. That’s my job.”

Jim blanched at his husband’s sudden attitude. “Sebby, have you recently suffered a head injury? Because that’s the only explanation I can come up with for why you’re acting so daft.”

_**Daft? He comes home smelling like someone else and I’m the one who’s daft?**_

“Cut the bullshit,” he spat. “I know you’ve been going out every day, even though you allege not to have left the house. And you _reek_ of alpha. The same alpha you claimed was an associate from Australia a few weeks ago. I believed you then. I’m not so sure now.”

The sniper’s words hung thick in the air as a hurt expression washed over Moriarty’s face. Seb hadn’t been prepared for that. He expected the Irishman would be furious, but this…this was pure dejection.

“You’ve been spying on me.”

“I had to do something to keep you safe. I received a text message from the stalker the same day we got back from the hospital. He threatened the babies.”

Jim paled. “And you didn’t think to mention it? We’ve been through this before! Why would you not tell me? Why?”

“Because of _this_,” Sebastian said. “Because of your kneejerk reaction to things. With your condition, it could aggravate your blood pressure.”

“Surveilling me is your solution?” he asked incredulously. “I suppose I should’ve realized what you were up to. Should’ve picked up on the clues. But I didn’t. Like a fucking idiot, I didn’t see the treachery that was going on right in front of me.” He shook his head in sadness and frustration. “I was blind because I trusted you, Sebastian. Trusted you completely. Well, shame on me for making that mistake.”

“Jim, try to understand—”

“Stop it! Just stop! I can’t abide these lies. I told you there would be consequences if you deceived me again, but still you persist.”

“Pot, meet kettle,” the blonde hissed in reply. “You’ve not been truthful either. Where do you go during the day? And who’ve you been with? Why do you smell like another alpha?”

Moriarty glared. “What _exactly_ are you implying?”

A stifling silence came upon them until Moran finally opened his mouth to speak. “I…I don’t know,” he whispered with uncertainty.

The former colonel honestly didn’t know what to think. Others in his situation would likely assume their partner was cheating. But Seb knew better. Despite mounting evidence, he could not believe Jim would ever stray from their marital bed. They’d sworn solemn fidelity to each other long ago and meant it.

“I’ve heard enough,” the dark-eyed omega announced. He turned around, car keys in hand, and
headed for the door.

“Wait!” Sebastian intercepted his spouse before he could step outside. “Please don’t go. It’s pretty clear that I took the wrong approach here,” he admitted. “I just wanted answers. I’m sorry if it came off as an ambush.”

“An ambush? Don’t flatter yourself. This was little more than an exercise in petulant machismo. Also, a fine opportunity to learn what you really think of me.”

“Jimmy, no.”

“Sebby, yes,” he mocked. “You automatically assume the worst of me. Even now, while I’m carrying our children, you figure I must be up to no good. That’s some grade-A loyalty, my love. You’re a real fucking prince.”

Overwhelmed by guilt, the assassin moved aside, allowing the other man to exit. Jim had every right to be angry. He’d fucked up royally and wished he could take back the entire conversation. How could it have gone awry so fast?

The door slammed as Moriarty left in a huff.

Seb sunk down into the couch, forlorn. The reality of what had just transpired hit him hard. He’d allowed his pregnant omega to go gallivanting god knows where, with zero means of protection. This solidified his failure as a bodyguard, a husband, and an alpha.

Jim simply needed to blow off steam, right? He’d be back in no time. Of course he would.

*********

Sebastian awoke to darkness and a splitting headache. Initially dazed, memories of the past several hours soon came flooding back. After he and Jim argued, the sniper sought solace in a fifth of bourbon. From there, he’d made his way to the bedroom where he unceremoniously passed out on the floor.

“What time is it?” he mumbled, standing up and turning on a light. He almost didn’t believe it when he saw the clock. It was 9 p.m. 

His thoughts turned to Jim. 

Surely, he must be home by now. With that in mind, Seb rushed out to the living room, calling the man’s name.

But he wasn’t there. He didn’t appear to be in any room of the house, for that matter.

Moran was about to send his husband an apologetic text message when he noticed something that made his heart sink. Jim’s phone was sitting on the coffee table. He’d been in such a hurry to leave after their quarrel that he’d left the device behind. This meant he had no way to contact him and vice versa.

And no way to call for help if he was in trouble.

Suddenly, Sebastian was very worried.

Chapter End Notes
This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Jim Moriarty was bored, tired, and brokenhearted. He’d been driving aimlessly for close to six hours. Oh, he made pit stops here and there, but those only worsened his mood. It seemed like everywhere he went, a memory of Sebastian followed.

He visited a park and remembered the time he and Seb picnicked there, shagging in an out of the way spot and watching a brilliant sunset as they laid in each other’s arms. He went to an arcade and couldn’t help but recall when the two of them played skee-ball for hours just so the mastermind would have enough tickets to buy a stuffed panda. Seb joked that it was too bad they didn’t offer a tiger. Jim said it was fine because he already had all the tiger he needed.

Even passing by something as mundane as an alleyway triggered thoughts of his husband. Moriarty recognized certain dark corners of the city as places where he and Sebastian had run off to after kills, fucking like animals under the pale moonlight. It was in one of those alleys that he first confessed his love for the other man.

He wanted to go home. Wanted a hot meal, a comfortable bed, and a gorgeous alpha to snuggle. It was also time for his second dose of blood pressure meds. He’d been taking them on a set schedule and was advised not to break the routine.

Before any of that, though, he needed to find a restroom. Dr. Swenson had warned him that the babies would soon begin putting pressure on his bladder. Jim thought it was a bit too early for such a thing, but sure enough, she was right. Carrying twins was definitely harder on the body than a singleton.

The consulting criminal pulled into a convenience store parking lot. It didn’t appear to be busy. With any luck, he’d be in and out in less than 10 minutes.

*Then it’s home to my Tiger.*

**********

Sebastian sat in Jim’s office brandishing a picking tool, contemplating what he was about to do. He
was mere moments from breaching the lock on Moriarty’s desk drawer. The man would undoubtedly be angry when he found out, but this was for a worthy cause.

The sniper sought contact information. He thought that perhaps Jim was with whomever he’d been sneaking off to see during the day. If he could figure out who he was dealing with, he might be able to locate his mate.

Attempts to access the mastermind’s phone for data proved fruitless—the device was password protected. He already knew his computer was similarly guarded, so that would be a dead end, too. The only option left was to check the drawer.

Oh, that damned drawer. It was a place of mystery and suspicion, its contents as elusive as a cryptid sighting. Things were filed away, never to be seen again. Seb had always been curious to see what was inside, especially after he realized the genius was hiding documents from him in there. Now he could finally justify cracking open the compartment.

Well-versed in the art of breaking and entering, Moran popped the lock with relative ease. At first glance, he observed several folder files and an incredibly ornate wooden box. Naturally, his attention was drawn to the latter.

_Hmm. What do we have here?_

He picked up the rectangular container and examined its exterior. Intricate designs were carved into the façade, forming a beautiful pattern. It was really quite elegant.

Seb lifted a small latch on the box, releasing the lid. What he found inside truly surprised him. It seemed that James Moriarty, the most dangerous man in London, was secretly keeping a box full of…mementos.

Sifting through the items, Sebastian was taken on a stroll down memory lane. There were ticket stubs from movies and West End shows they’d gone to see. There was a paper umbrella from the drinks they were served at a luau while on assignment in Hawaii. There was even a silver ribbon Seb recognized as part of the wrapping from a Christmas gift he’d given Jim.

At the bottom of the box was a framed photo of the two of them, taken on their wedding day. The assassin smiled, fondly remembering the event. It was one of the rare occasions when he’d worn a tuxedo, complete with cufflinks and a cummerbund. He felt rather silly in the formalwear, but Jim couldn’t stop gushing over how handsome he looked. The man was all smiles that day, among the happiest Seb had ever seen him.

“So sentimental, my Magpie.” For as often as his spouse railed against schmaltz, he was, at his core, a sucker for it just the same.

He closed the box and put it back in its rightful place, a pang of nostalgia now coursing through him. It was easy to get lost in musings of the past. He and Jim had shared so much together, it was difficult to imagine a time when they weren’t in each other’s lives.

Moran moved on to the folder files. Rifling through the thick stack, the materials contained therein appeared fairly humdrum. They were mostly a series of financial statements, ostensibly for recordkeeping purposes. It was very dry stuff, and he wasn’t sure why the mastermind had gone to the trouble of locking them up.

Sebastian was ready to concede that there was nothing of use to him there and return the documents to the drawer, when he spied something strange. There was a folder near the top of the pile that
held an eclectic mix of receipts. Multiple purchases had recently been made all over the city. Sales included a Waterford crystal punch bowl, several sets of porcelain dishware, a large luxury yacht, and the acquired services of both a gourmet caterer and a DJ. If Seb didn’t know better, he’d think Jim was organizing a party.

*A party…no, it couldn’t be.*

Quickly, he double checked the slips. The receipt for the DJ stated that the amount was paid in advance for services to be rendered on a specific date—*his* birthdate.

The sniper was absolutely gobsmacked. *This* was what Moriarty was hiding from him. He was venturing out every day to formalize plans for his husband’s birthday party. In fact, it might even explain why he’d smelled so different. If he was working in close proximity with an alpha, the scent could’ve rubbed off.

At first, Sebastian was deeply touched by the realization. The idea of Jim doing something like that for him warmed his heart in the most wonderful way. But then…

A sick feeling washed over him as he recalled the fight they’d had hours earlier. The formidable blonde was so suspicious of the Irishman. So confrontational, without any real proof behind his assertions. It was unwarranted mistrust on Seb’s part, and Jim was right—the assassin *had* assumed the worst of him.

“Oh, my love. What have I done?”

*********

Jim felt great relief upon exiting the convenience store. With his most urgent physical need sated, the consulting criminal was ready to get back on the road and head home. He could picture it already. When he walked in, Sebastian would probably be passed out on the couch or cleaning his guns. Either way, he’d put the man to work cooking for him. A filet mignon and baked potato sounded divine right now.

As he neared his car, he was struck by an eerie sensation. Goosebumps formed on his skin and he stopped dead in his tracks, looking around. Though the darkened lot appeared empty, Moriarty got the distinct impression that someone was there in the shadows.

He took a deep breath and wished to god that Seb was with him. The mastermind was no stranger to handling situations himself, but his current condition left him more vulnerable than usual. He now had to consider his children’s well-being in addition to his own.

“If you’re cruising for someone to rob, I suggest you look elsewhere. I don’t carry cash, and I’d be sure to cancel my credit cards before you ever got a chance to use them,” he icily warned. Hopefully, his words would be a deterrent.

*Here goes nothing.* He swiftly resumed his trek to the car. He’d just reached the door when a gloved hand grabbed him from behind. Jim struggled fiercely, scrambling to break free of his attacker’s grip. It was a futile effort. The man outmatched Moriarty in height and weight, easily subduing him.

But Jim wasn’t one to give up without a fight. Thinking fast, he let his body drop to the ground, careful not to land on his stomach. The burly assailant was taken off guard by the abrupt move, falling to the asphalt with his prey.

The genius only had moments to act. He bit down harshly on the larger man’s arm, eliciting a yelp
of pain. In the confusion, he managed to scurry a few feet away, but his pursuer was relentless. The hulking figure lunged at Jim, pinning him down and producing a wetted handkerchief from his pocket.

The Irishman’s eyes went wide as he could already smell the chemicals wafting from the cloth. He knew what was going to happen next—he would be knocked out. There was a twisted irony to it. He’d done the same to people before, and now he was on the other side of the rag.

As Moriarty slowly succumbed to the fumes, his last thoughts were of Sebastian. He desperately wanted his mate. Wanted to tell him how much he loved him. Wanted to feel his safe, warm embrace. Just wanted him, period.

“Tiger,” he whispered, as his vision descended into darkness.

Chapter End Notes

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Lamentations

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian both have regrets. Plus, Seb does some investigation.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Shit!” Sebastian yelled as a searing heat singed his leg. He looked down and saw that the cigarette he’d been smoking was now in his lap, having burned a dime-sized hole through his pants. He swiftly stubbed out the offending stick of tobacco.

“Must’ve nodded off,” he muttered.

The sniper waited up all night for Jim to come home. Night turned to day and the man still wasn’t back. To say that Seb was worried would be an understatement. He was positively frantic.

Why did I let you leave? Moran asked himself that question over and over again, never finding a good enough answer. There were so many things he would’ve done differently if only he had the power to rewind the clock 24 hours.

Guilt consumed him. Why had he been so quick to jump to conclusions about Jim? Yes, his spouse was being secretive, but why did he immediately assume it meant something terrible? At one time, his reaction might’ve been justified. But that was in the past. Not now. Not after they’d reunited following Moriarty’s return from supposed death. Not after they finally realized the depths of their love for each other and decided to wed. And most certainly, not after Jim became pregnant with their children.

I fuck everything up. Sebastian reflected on how colossally poor his judgment had been. He was trying to alleviate stress from Jim’s life, but instead added to it wholesale. If he hadn’t confronted him so bluntly, then the man wouldn’t have felt compelled to leave in the first place. Seb was taught that an expectant omega should be cherished and cared for by their alpha, without exception. In running off his mate, he’d done the exact opposite. He’d failed in the worst possible way.

I’m sorry, Jimmy.

The assassin couldn’t take sitting around doing nothing. He was a man of action. So what was next?
Phone calls. He would touch base with those in the criminal web. Maybe someone had seen Jim around or heard something regarding his whereabouts. It was worth investigating.

**********

James Moriarty awoke haphazardly sprawled across a cement floor. He was feeling woozy, probably a result of the chemical used to render him unconscious. Slowly, he sat up and took a look at his surroundings.

He’d been brought to a barebones basement that consisted of four concrete walls and precious little else. There was a toilet and sink along one side, and what appeared to be a standalone shower unit in the corner. A lightbulb flickered overhead, seemingly the only means of illuminating the windowless room.

Once his dizziness subsided, Jim rose to stand. He was quickly made aware of a shackle around his ankle and its corresponding chain attached to a pipe. He tested the length of the tether and found that it gave him enough leeway to navigate the room.

*Thank god,* the mastermind thought. If he was going to be held captive, at least he’d have access to a bathroom. That was more than he could say for previous abductions he’d faced.

Moriarty was almost certain his stalker was behind the kidnapping. Months of harassment had led to this. He loathed that he’d fallen prey so easily.

*Why did I leave?* He and Sebastian had fought, yes. But that didn’t mean it was right to storm out the way he did. He could’ve simply locked himself in his office or taken a long soak in the tub. Could’ve done any number of safer, smarter things. Instead, he let his temper get the best of him and now he was trapped. Worse yet, his children were trapped, too. They were unwitting victims in this mess.

Jim felt incredibly guilty. He’d spent so much of his life making one rash decision after another, rarely considering how his choices might impact those around him. He was changeable, fluid, impulsive. And why not? Only *ordinary* people allowed themselves to become pigeonholed. Better to be dead than predictable.

Impending parenthood changed all that. The moment he learned he was pregnant, he felt a shift in his worldview. Suddenly, actions had consequences which carried genuine weight. The things he did directly affected the tiny lives growing inside him. Essie and Eddie required stability and commitment. They depended on him to make good choices.

*I failed them.*

The Irishman’s mind began to buzz. He thought of how he’d been forced to inhale chloroform fumes. What might that have done to his babies? He was well aware of the substance’s chemical composition and knew it held toxic properties. However, he was unsure what, if any, immediate danger it posed to a gestating fetus.

He placed a hand on his stomach, rubbing it gently. At 20 weeks along, he had still not felt the twins move. That was okay, though, because he could listen to their heartbeats every day. So long as they were pumping steadily, everything was fine.

But he couldn’t hear them on this day. He was denied the comfort of knowing whether his little ones were alive or…no. *Never.* He refused to even think it. Essie and Eddie were thriving. They had to be. He would accept nothing else.
Sebastian had a lead. Several hours’ worth of phone calls finally yielded a piece of information he could use. Word got out that Jim’s car was found abandoned in the parking lot of a convenience store located on the outskirts of London. The vehicle was towed, but Seb was able to get a gander at it when he stopped by the impound yard. On sight, he recognized it as definitely belonging to his husband.

After confirming ownership of the car, the sniper’s next move was to survey the parking lot where it had been deserted. Seb was on a hunt for clues. Keen observation and attention to detail were at the forefront.

About an hour into his search, he realized there wasn’t as much to go on as he’d hoped. Motorists came and went, likely disturbing whatever evidence may have originally been at the scene. Still, Moran persisted.

It’s often said that missing items tend to show up in the last place you look. In this case, the adage held true. The former colonel thought he’d checked every nook and cranny in that parking lot, but lo and behold, there was a bush on the far end of the property he nearly missed. It was an honest mistake— the shrubbery in question was identical to the other bushes he’d already rifled through.

Seb discovered something that set this particular foliage apart from the rest. It harbored a discarded handkerchief and what he knew to be Jim’s car keys.

*Must have been stashed here by the kidnapper.*

Yes, he was officially using the term “kidnapper,” because that’s what he was convinced this was. He’d had suspicions from the start, but the abandoned vehicle and hidden effects confirmed it.

“Chloroform,” he noted, eyeing up the wadded rag. Even dried on cloth, the chemical gave off a distinct odor. Nobody used a substance like that unless they were intending to knock someone out.

*Who did this to you, Jimmy?*

Sebastian Moran would do all he could to find out.

*********

The most dangerous man in London screamed until his throat went raw. He was driven by many things. There was rage that he’d been abducted and left to rot in a cellar. There was frustration that he could find nothing to pick the lock on his ankle with. There was hope, however small, that someone might hear him and investigate the noise. And last, but certainly not least, there was anxiety over being forcibly separated from his husband.

Jim missed Sebastian terribly. He needed his Tiger just as he needed oxygen or water to survive. The blonde assassin was an imperative. Funny how he hadn’t thought about that when he ran away from the man.

*I fuck everything up.*

He peered at his watch. The timepiece was a source of great comfort for Moriarty. Wearing it made him feel closer to Seb even though they were apart.

*We’ll be together again soon, my love.* He believed with all his heart that either Moran would find him, or he would formulate his own escape.
This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Say a Prayer for Lovers Parted

Chapter Summary

Jim suffers in captivity while Sebastian struggles to find him.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jim felt like hell. Appropriate, seeing as how he was now residing there as well.

Shackled and forgotten, time blurred into an interminable procession of hunger, pain, and misery. Just how long had he been down in that basement? Even using his watch as a guide, he’d lost track. If he had to guess, he’d estimate maybe four or five days.

He’d not eaten since before the abduction. He was able to drink water thanks to the sink provided, but the hunger…good god. It was unforgiving. The Irishman had gone longer durations without food, certainly. But not while pregnant. His current condition seemed to make it so much worse.

The lack of nutrition distressed him. If he was starving, did that mean his babies were, too? They needed nourishment to develop and grow. Would this stunt them somehow?

Moriarty held his head in his hands, trying to breathe through the agony. His whole body hurt. Carrying twins was hard enough under normal circumstances— doing it without furniture to rest on was downright excruciating. In particular, sleeping on concrete proved nigh impossible. The rare occasions when he did nod off were more due to sheer exhaustion than having found any actual comfort.

And the headaches. Dear lord, the headaches. Brutal and blinding, they were enough to knock the wind out of a person. The last time he’d experienced pain like this was when he was hospitalized. He knew he was getting sick again. Without his twice-a-day drug regimen, his blood pressure rapidly shot back up.

Jim remembered what the obstetrician at the ER had said: preeclampsia could interfere with blood flow to the fetus. Her statement led him to research the specifics of his ailment, and what he’d learned was chilling. Its effects could cause a baby to be undersized and premature. Worse yet, it could even result in stillbirth.

But he thought he would be okay. The medication they’d put him on was working. Everything should’ve been fine. Until this happened. Until he was kidnapped and deprived of the antihypertensive medicine he and his children so desperately needed.
Sebastian always took care of him when he wasn’t feeling well. The assassin would stay by his side reading favorite books to him, cooking meals for him, even taking baths with him. Jim’s favorite part was when he’d hold him tight, their bodies pressed so close together, it was difficult to tell where one of them ended and the other began. In those moments, all malaise would fade away, supplanted by love, safety, and warmth.

*Tiger. My sweet Tiger. I miss you.*

*********

“Tell me!” Sebastian roared at the man he’d bound to a chair. “Tell me, or I swear to god, I’ll gut you like a fucking fish!”

“I already told you! I don’t know where Moriarty is!”

“Wrong answer.” Balling a fist, he propelled his arm forward and punched the captive square in the nose. A sickly pop could be heard upon impact, followed by a torrent of gushing blood.

The injured man screamed with abandon and fiercely struggled against his restraints. The effort was of little use, though. Moran could tie a knot that even Houdini wouldn’t be able to escape.

“You want me to stop?”

His detainee nodded affirmatively.

“Then tell me where my hu—” Seb quickly stopped himself from revealing the truth of his and Jim’s relationship. “Tell me where my boss is. That’s all you’ve got to do.”

“I don’t know!” he repeated. “And beating me up sure as hell won’t magically insert the knowledge into my head!”

The sniper growled. He’d been interrogating this individual for over two hours and still hadn’t gotten any information out of him. Perhaps he really was telling the truth.

Scowling bitterly, Seb pulled a blade from his back pocket. The other man’s eyes widened at the sight, but relaxed once he realized his bindings were being sliced through. At last, he could move freely.

“Get out,” the assassin ordered through gritted teeth.

“You’ll excuse me if I don’t thank you for the reprieve.” The battered man exited Sebastian’s office, shutting the door with a slam.

Moran began tearing the room apart in frustration. Chairs, bookshelves, and glassware went flying as his emotions violently spewed forth.

*He hated* this. Jim had been missing for five days and he was still no closer to finding him. It was maddening, heartbreaking, and made him feel utterly useless.

Seb was trying his damnedest. Since the kidnapping, he’d systematically worked through his list of suspects, hunting them down and applying interrogation when necessary. To maximize efficiency, he enlisted the help of select members from his sniper team. They were tasked with tracking suspects who were based outside of Great Britain. Once located, the potential stalkers were briefly surveilled for signs of suspicious behavior. If they displayed even the vaguest hint of peculiarity, they were brought to him for one-on-one questioning.
So far, nothing panned out. He’d exhausted the roster of living individuals, leaving only those whose statuses were undetermined. Seb had hoped it wouldn’t come to that. Searching for MIA sharpshooters was akin to finding a needle in a haystack. Though not impossible, it would take far more time than he had to spare. If he didn’t rescue Jim soon…

*Oh, Magpie.* Sebastian wasn’t prone to tears, but when he thought about his mate and what he might be going through…well, it took tremendous fortitude not to break down right there on the spot.

Today was almost too much for him to bear. When he first got up and checked his phone, he received a calendar alert stating that Jim had a doctor’s appointment at 2 p.m. His heart sunk immediately. He recalled how much the Irishman looked forward to his prenatal visits, always eager to see the twins on screen and get new printouts for the baby book he was compiling. Their unborn children brought out a kind of pure, undiluted happiness in him that Seb had never seen before. It was beautiful. But now, knowing his beloved would miss today’s appointment, he was intensely saddened.

Things only got worse when he arrived at headquarters. People at the office were acting strangely. There were awkward glances and whispers that died down when he came into earshot. It was infuriating. He wanted to know what the hell was going on.

In an effort to gain insight, he requested an impromptu meeting with Suzy, Jim’s longtime secretary. If something was abuzz, she’d surely be aware of it. What the woman relayed to him was appalling. The consulting criminal’s pregnancy had become an open secret, and with his recent disappearance, gossip spread like wildfire. Apparently, the popular theory was that Moriarty had run off somewhere to have a late-term abortion.

Seb was mortified. Not only had his mate been taken against his will, but he now had to suffer the indignity of slander in absentia. This defamation felt especially cruel, considering how deeply Jim wanted their babies. To suggest otherwise was a slap in the face.

He yearned to set the record straight, but knew he didn’t dare. The truth would raise questions that he was unprepared to answer. So he stuffed his anger down, something he’d become quite adept at.

The sniper stood back and surveyed the shambles of his office. He hadn’t trashed a place so thoroughly in ages. It seemed oddly fitting that the room now mirrored how he felt inside—broken and chaotic, in dire need of repair.

The fact of the matter was that he had no solace without Jim. No reason to crack a smile or enjoy a sunset. No reason to gaze at the stars or even get out of bed. Life itself rang hollow in his absence. It was just like the fall at St. Bart’s all over again.

*But it’s not Jim’s fault this time, and you can still fix it.*

Sebastian refused to lose faith. He would find his husband if it was the last thing he ever did.

**********

Moriarty curled into a ball on the cold cement floor. He’d endured untold hours of tedium and pain, and expected that to be the extent of the night’s activities. He was mistaken.

The door at the top of the steps creaked open. Jim gasped, hoping against hope that it was his darling Tiger who’d come to liberate him. Any such ideas were dashed, however, the moment he got a good look at the man.
Tall and muscular, he shared a similar build as Sebastian, but that was where the likeness ended. This individual was nowhere near as handsome, sporting much gruffer, grizzlier features. He also bore a cold, dead-eyed stare. It was reminiscent of…

_The phantom from my nightmare._

In a flash, the mastermind’s heart began to pound. If his blood pressure was high already, it now rocketed off the charts. He couldn’t breathe, either. Tunnel vision set in, and all he could think of was how much the man descending the stairs reminded him of the murderous apparition he’d seen in his dream.

Jim’s nerves were absolutely shot. By the time the kidnapper reached him, his world went dark. Panic-stricken and ill, he slipped into unconsciousness. The last thing he heard before going under was the cruel laugh of his captor. It was a sound that would haunt him for the rest of his days.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Know Your Enemy

Chapter Summary

Jim has a face-to-face confrontation with his stalker.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“If I’d known you passed out so easily, I wouldn’t have bothered with the chloroform,” a brusque voice taunted.

The Irishman’s eyes fluttered open and his vision came into focus. He quickly realized he was staring at the face of his stalker-turned-kidnapper. It was no one he recognized. “Who are you?”

“Colin Taylor, former marksman and surveillance expert for the British Army.”

“You were in the military?” Jim asked. Now was the time to glean as much information as he could. If he kept him talking, then maybe he could find a way inside his head, and ultimately, devise a plan of escape.

“For a dozen years, I was. Nearly made a career out of it before changing paths.” He moved to sit on a folding chair across from his captive.

*There wasn’t any furniture here before,* Jim observed. *He must’ve brought it down with him just now.*

“Why the switch?”

Colin paused, ruminating over the question. “Because everything good in my life died,” he finally answered. “I probably should have too, but I didn’t. Not on the outside, at least. But that’s okay, because I found a new purpose for my continued existence.”

“Which was?”

“Retribution.”

“You mean terrorization.”

He shrugged. “Call it whatever you like. In the end, the result will be the same.”

“And what, pray tell, might that be?”
“Death.”

Dear god, my nightmare is coming true. The mastermind was petrified, but would not allow his fear to show.

“You’ll never get away with it,” Jim coolly stated.

“Won’t I? In case you haven’t noticed, we’re alone here. I’m getting away with it as we speak.”

The consulting criminal snorted. “Sebastian will come for me, and when he does, he’ll snuff you out. That, I guarantee.”

“I’d like to see him try. I’ve got quite a score to settle with your husband.”

“If this is between you and him, why involve me? Why involve our children, for that matter?” Jim had a pretty good idea as to his motivation, but he needed to keep the conversation flowing in order to figure out how to best manipulate him.

“I think we both know the answer to that one,” Colin said with a smirk. “I can hurt him through hurting you.”

“Targeting a pregnant person is fucking low. You’re a bloody sick bastard.”

“Glass houses, Moriarty. I hardly think you’ve room to judge. I know you’ve threatened children.”

Jim grew very flustered. Yes, the accusation was true. He’d learned long ago that children were excellent “pressure points.” Oftentimes, the easiest way to get someone to comply was by going after their progeny.

But he never really hurt a child. Threats were all it amounted to. Even when he had explosive vests strapped to youngsters backs and snipers aimed at infants, he wouldn’t have truly ordered their deaths. He controlled those situations, and the tactics used were merely meant as compelling incentives.

“I’ve never killed a child,” Jim angrily spat. “But you’re well on your way.”

Colin rolled his eyes. “Spare the dramatics, princess.”

“This isn’t drama, you fucking moron! This is reality!” the Irishman yelled. “I’m supposed to be on medication! The babies and I could die without it.”

“Cry me a river. I’m not a walking pharmacy.”

Jim glared at his abductor with burning rage. The initial fear he’d held for the man transformed into fury. He wanted to lunge at him as far as his shackle would allow. Wanted to choke him out and tear him to pieces. But he couldn’t. For the sake of Essie and Eddie, he had to exercise self-control.

The mastermind took a deep breath in an effort to calm himself. He mentally noted that it was becoming increasingly difficult to steady his breathing. For now, he had to ignore it and power through his ills.

“Soooo,” he drawled, “what’s your grievance with Seb?”

“The short version is, he ruined my life.”
“Sebastian’s ruined a lot of people’s lives, I’d wager. You’ll have to be more specific than that.”

“Fair enough,” the man agreed. “I’m sure he’s mentioned the name Marguerite de Graaf at some point? Or perhaps simply Margo?”

“No, he never has.”

“Think about it for a minute. Are you certain?”

“I’m positive. She’s clearly not important to him, whoever she is.”

Jim’s blunt response seemed to upset his kidnapper. Good, he thought. Now we’re getting somewhere. This was exactly the kind of emotional trigger he could use against him.

“She,” Colin stressed, “was a bloody amazing woman. Moran was lucky to have known her.”

Ooh, past tense? He could definitely work with this.

“Dead, is she? Too bad,” he flippantly remarked. “But that’s what people do. Having served in the military, I’d think you’d be used to it.”

“Shut your filthy mouth! What do you know about women or love? Nothing. You’re just a fucking poofter.”

“Excuse me?” Moriarty’s barely suppressed anger was rising dangerously close to the surface. His captor had said the absolute wrong thing to him. “Not that I have any reason to justify myself to you, but for the record, I’m very happily married. So actually, I know quite a lot about love.”

Colin laughed derisively. “Yeah, right. What the two of you have isn’t a real marriage. It’s a goddamn freak show.”

“How dare you,” Jim spoke, his voice low and ominous. “How DARE YOU!” he repeated, shouting loud enough to make the other man flinch. “You couldn’t even begin to fathom the depths of our relationship.”

“You’re setting yourself up for disappointment with Sebastian Moran.”

“Bollocks. My husband is the most loyal mate you’ll ever find.”

“Oh yeah? The cold corpse of my wife would disagree.”

He considered his stalker’s words. “What are you trying to say here? Stop being vague and spit it the fuck out.”

“I’m saying that our spouses were involved, and my wife is gone forever because of him.”

Jim wasn’t sure how much more bullshit he could take from this lunatic. But he wanted to make damn certain he understood the charges being leveled against Seb.

“Start from the beginning. When was this involvement meant to have taken place?”

“Fifteen years ago. Moran and I were in the same regiment together,” he explained. “We hit it off right away. He was cleverer than most and a hell of a shot. I admired him.”

“How adooorable,” Moriarty mocked. “Sounds like you had a bit of a crush.”
Colin sneered. “Hardly. I did think of him as a friend, though, which is why I introduced him to Margo. Worst mistake of my life.”

“No, dear. Your worst mistake was stalking and kidnapping me. But do go on.”

The former military man scowled at the interruption. “As I was saying, I introduced Sebastian to my sweet Marguerite, and that was the beginning of the end. They started meeting in secret… carrying on behind my back. I hadn’t a clue what was going on until it was too late,” he recalled. “By the time I knew, he’d been booted from the army and disappeared without a trace.”

Jim stared at him blankly. “So Sebby fucked your girlfriend ages ago and then skipped town. I fail to see how he had anything to do with her death.”

“Seb had everything to do with it. He seduced Margo— made her fall in love with him. But he was just stringing her along. She was little more than a notch on his bedpost,” Colin rued. “After he left, she wasn’t the same. And when she realized he wasn’t coming back…” he trailed off, stilled by the sadness that crept into his heart. “She tried to kill herself.”

The consulting criminal sighed. “Booooring. Tell me there’s more to this sob story or I’m going to be sorely disappointed at how you’ve wasted my time.”

“Actually,” he said sharply, “there is more. Margo recovered and I married her. Took care of her when no one else would. We were mostly happy, too. Except she never really got over Moran. It was like he’d stolen a piece of her and she wasn’t whole anymore. Fool that I am, I thought things might improve if we started a family. Figured it would give her something else to focus on.”

Colin and Jim locked eyes, and suddenly the mastermind was very curious as to where the tale was headed.

“Margo got pregnant,” he continued. “I was thrilled. I thought she was, too, but…”

“But what? Don’t keep me in suspense.”

“She killed herself proper that time. No coming back.” The words hung in the air, neither of them saying a thing under the weight of his confession.

Finally, Moriarty spoke. “Listen, I’m sorry that happened. Contrary to popular belief, I’m not a total bastard— I can appreciate your loss. But I don’t see what this has to do with my husband. Clearly, his and your wife’s affair was in the past. It sounds like they didn’t even have contact after he was discharged from the army. So what’s this vendetta of yours about?”

“Well, you see, there was a note left behind. In it, she made clear that the only man she ever truly wanted was Sebastian. She tried to pretend otherwise for my sake, but it ate at her until there was nothing left,” he sullenly recounted. “The final straw, by her own admission, was falling pregnant with a child that wasn’t his. She couldn’t abide it.”

Hearing the man’s sad saga, one aspect became apparent to Jim: Seb was not responsible for Colin Taylor’s troubles. He merely needed someone to blame.

“You’ve been dealt a lousy hand in life, that much is undeniable,” the genius began, “but what happened to your wife wasn’t Sebastian’s fault. Maybe he did shag your lady and leave town. But that’s all he did. Anything after that was her choice.”

The man rose to his feet and growled, angrily flipping his chair. “No! That son of a bitch ruined her! Ruined our future!”
“Obviously, Margo was unstable— a trait you seem to share.”

The two men stared daggers at each other. If looks could kill, they’d have both been rendered lifeless on the spot.

“We’re done for now,” Colin declared, turning toward the steps.

“Wait!” Jim called out.

“What?”

“I haven’t eaten anything since you took me,” he said. “I need food. My babies have nutrition requirements that aren’t being met.”

“Tough shite.”

“Come on!” the Irishman pled. “Hate Seb and I all you want, but don’t take it out on our children. They’re innocent. They don’t deserve this!”

“My child didn’t deserve to die either, but he did,” the stalker coldly replied. “Frankly, I couldn’t care less if those bastards in your belly wither into nothing.” At that, Colin stomped upstairs, not even bothering to give his captive a second glance.

Jim screamed in frustration before curling into himself. He needed to find a way out of there soon.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
A Letter to His Beloved

Chapter Summary

In Jim’s absence, Sebastian discovers a hidden letter his husband wrote.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sebastian sat on the living room floor, his back against the coffee table as he watched flames dance in the fireplace. There was a hypnotic quality to the flicker and flow, making it easy to lose oneself in the sight.

The assassin absently took a swig from a half-drained bottle of scotch. He’d started drinking when he first came home and never stopped. That was the regular routine of late. His days were consumed by the pursuit of Jim, while his nights devolved into a liquor-soaked blur.

Shakespeare was right, he thought. Sad hours did seem long. During those lonely stretches, all he could think about was his husband. Where was Jim? What was he doing? Moreover, what condition was he in?

Moran worried for his mate’s well-being. The mastermind had left his medication behind when he rushed out after their quarrel. That was a little over a week ago. How much had his blood pressure gone up since then? He remembered how sick Jim was at the hospital. Was he suffering like that again now? Left unchecked, had it gotten worse? Seb didn’t want to dwell on the implications, but he wondered if…

No! Jim had to be alive. They’d persevered through such hardship across the years and managed to come out stronger for it. This couldn’t be the final act of their story, especially not now that they were expanding their family. There was so much more living they had yet to do.

The house felt empty without his Magpie. Despite what some might assume, theirs was a surprisingly loving relationship, and with it, every room held precious memories. He recalled stolen kisses in the library after Jim had summoned him to retrieve a book from the top shelf. He remembered raucous laughter after they attempted a spaghetti squash recipe, only to have it explode inside the oven. Perhaps above all else, he reminisced over the small intimacies they shared— little things like touches, caresses, and tenderness that no one would’ve believed Moriarty capable of.

There was one area he dared not tread— the nursery. Jim and his late interior designer had done a fine job decorating the space, transforming an extra-large hobby room into lavish sleeping quarters
for the twins. It was exquisite. But…

_I can’t face it without you, Jimmy_. He took another drink and stood up, stumbling slightly. He faltered down the hall, gripping the wall for balance. Eventually, he reached his target destination: Jim’s office.

Stepping inside, he made a beeline for the desk. He knew what he wanted…what he _needed_. The picture. He had to see it again.

Seb pulled his spouse’s keepsake box from the drawer it resided in. To think he’d worried about how Jim would react upon seeing that he picked the lock. Now he’d give anything to have the Irishman walk through the door and yell at him for it.

He retrieved their framed wedding photo from the assortment of items, running his fingertips along its glass surface. Moran smiled faintly at the smudges left behind. That was another transgression he could imagine Jim chiding him for. Once again, it was the small things Sebastian missed most.

The sniper gazed longingly at the picture in his hands. “Until death do us part,” he whispered. They vowed to never give up on each other, no matter what. Seb was determined to honor that pledge.

*********

Sebastian was woken up by the sound of a loud crack. He lifted his head from the desk and blinked several times before regaining his senses. He realized he must’ve fallen asleep right there in the office. Then he looked down and was aghast.

Shattered glass littered the floor beneath him. Not only that, but the photograph lay there as well, covered in sparkling fragments. In his inebriated state, he’d nodded off while still clutching it. This was the end result.

“Oh no,” Seb muttered sadly. He moved to sit on the ground, cradling the picture. Sharp bits dug into his skin, and a part of him thought he deserved the pain.

It was then that he finally broke. Unable to suppress his anguish any longer, the assassin cried. Hot tears spilled over the loss of Jim, and by extension, their children. He blamed himself for everything. Instinct reinforced his guilt, telling him he was an abject failure. He’d had one job—to protect his pregnant omega—and he couldn’t even manage that. He was unworthy of calling himself an alpha.

Amid the flurry of emotions swirling in his head, he noticed something strange. It appeared that a letter had fallen out from the back of the picture frame. Curious, he picked it up.

‘To My Dearest Sebastian, on His 40th Birthday,’ the envelope read, penned in Moriarty’s unmistakable calligraphy-style script.

Now he was really intrigued. Should he open it? He almost felt obligated to, but…would Jim want him to see it so early? His birthday wasn’t for a few more weeks, and clearly the man had gone to great lengths to hide it.

Something dawned on the sniper. _Hide it_, he thought. _Hide it_. Could this have been the handwritten document he’d seen his Magpie stash away? He had to find out.

Liberating the letter, he began to read:

_My Darling Tiger,_
It occurs to me that I don’t tell you often enough how much you mean to me. Feelings aren’t something I’ve ever been accustomed to expressing, but on today of all days, I think I owe you the truth.

For most of my life, I was alone. I’d like to say it was by choice, but honestly, I just didn’t connect with anyone. How could I? Everyone seemed so ungodly dull. So ordinary, I’d sooner slit my wrists than remain in their acquaintance.

I took it in stride—decided I didn’t need other people. I rejected commonly accepted notions of love. Relationships were liabilities and romance was folly. I refused to fall prey to such utter nonsense. No one would ever get to me, I was sure of it.

And then I met you. Sebastian Augustus Moran, former colonel and expert marksman for the British Army. Thought I’d put you on my payroll and that would be the end of it. I should’ve known better. From the very first time I laid eyes on you, I was hooked. All it took was one glimpse at that tall, taut body, strawberry blonde hair, and sexy smile. I was a goner before you’d even opened your mouth to speak.

In the beginning, I tried to write off my feelings as mere lust. You were, and still are, an incredibly attractive man. It was only natural I’d want to shag you morning, noon, and night. I rationalized it as making perfect sense.

But it didn’t stop there. I started to wonder what you were doing when I wasn’t around. I wished I could see you during those times apart, and found myself wanting to spend many of my free moments with you. I often imagined us doing “normal,” non-work related activities together. Things like going to the cinema, attending art showings, and visiting my favorite planetarium. I never desired to share my private life with anyone like that before.

And you stuck by me. Proved yourself over and over again. I expect my bodyguards to put their lives on the line, but you went above and beyond to keep me safe. I noticed that. Noticed your unwavering loyalty, and was more touched by it than I ever let on. You were my trusted protector from those who sought to harm me, and in a sense, you became my alpha long before we ever made it official.

I’m so glad I decided to take a chance on us. Dating was new and exciting, and a tiny bit frightening. All worth it, though. Our love has served as a source of strength, sustaining me during dark times.

I know you hate it when I bring up our 2-year separation, but honestly, it was then that I realized just how deeply my affections ran. Everything seemed hollow without you by my side. Days drug on in endless grey and the nights were even worse. I tried to keep myself as busy as possible in order to avoid going to bed. What had once been a place of solace and sleep became a torture...a cold and empty hell from which there was no escape. It was unbearable, and I swore that when we reunited, I would never let you go.

Words cannot fully convey how happy you’ve made me during the course of our marriage. I’m not an easy man to deal with—far from it. Somehow, though, you always know the right things to say and do. You’re a charmer, my darling husband, through and through.

Lately, family has been at the forefront of my mind. At one time, I didn’t care that I had no living relatives. Since becoming pregnant, however, a part of me wishes I had more to offer our children in that regard. I’d like to present them with some kind of roots through which they might find a sense of comfort and belonging.
This is where my gift to you comes in, Tiger. All those years ago, when we first got together, I remember you telling me about your troubled home life. We were similar on that account. Me, with no family to speak of, and you, with only one blood relative—an estranged sibling whom you hadn’t seen since you were a teenager.

Well, I’ve done something wonderful, Sebby. I used my wealth of resources to find your brother, Severin. You won’t believe this, but he’s working as a pediatrician in Australia. More specifically, Dr. Moran is a neonatal specialist at The Royal Melbourne Hospital. He was surprised by my call, but quickly warmed to the idea of reconnecting with you. He’s got a wife and daughter of his own, meaning our babies have a cousin. Isn’t that exciting? I can’t wait to see how they interact together.

I was able to meet with Severin a handful of times this past month while he was attending conferences in London and Edinburgh. I intend to conduct further dealings with him soon, as he’s planning on staying a few extra weeks to tour the local med school circuit. I only wish he’d still be here for your birthday. Unfortunately, he’s committed to hosting a children’s charity benefit back in Australia at that time. But no worries, Tiger— we’ll find a way to join up eventually. I’ll make sure of it.

I think I’ve said everything I wanted to. Happy birthday, my love. Here’s to many more.

Forever Yours,

Jim

“Oh God,” Seb spoke, staring down at the letter in his hands. The sniper was overwhelmed by the sum of what he’d just learned. There was so much to absorb.

Suddenly, he was struck by a startling realization. The night Jim had come home smelling like another alpha, he’d said he met with an Australian. The scent on him was incredibly familiar, too. Now Sebastian knew why. It was Severin.

Moriarty also smelled of him right before they’d gotten into their fight. When I accused him of being untrustworthy, he sadly recalled.

In that moment, the guilt Moran felt was crushing. What have I done? Oh Jimmy, please forgive me.

He needed to make this right through any means necessary. Needed to fix this utterly fucked up situation once and for all. His next move would be critical in the plot to bring Jim home.

Seb pulled out his phone, preparing to make a call. For you, Magpie, he thought. This was his last resort.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
The basement door swung open. “I’ve got a surprise for you, princess!” a voice boomed from the top of the steps. It was Colin.

Jim glanced up, but did not move from his curled position on the floor. These days, he spent a majority of his time in that particular stance.

The kidnapper stomped downstairs, and it was then that Moriarty caught full view of him. What he saw was decidedly unnerving. Colin had a woman limply slung over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

“I brought someone to keep you company,” he said, flashing a sinister grin. He unceremoniously dumped the body onto the cold concrete. Jim instantly recognized who it was.

“Lisa,” he gasped. Lying before him was the corpse of his interior decorator. Ever since the incident with the box, he’d wondered what had become of her remains— now he knew. This sick fuck had held on to them.

“That’s right. The bint stored remarkably well in my freezer. Looks as good as the day I snapped her neck.”

“You’re a twisted son of a bitch!” Jim spat. “She didn’t do anything to you.”

“She associated with the likes of Moran. That’s reason enough to die.”

As Colin got closer, the consulting criminal could smell the strong stench of alcohol wafting off him. “You’re fucking drunk.”

The man laughed. “Yes, I suppose I am,” he admitted. “And you’re a sodding abomination, so I
guess we’re even.” He cackled again, apparently finding himself humorous.

“Piss off,” Jim hissed. He was in far too much pain to deal with the lunatic’s remarks.

“You know, Seb wasn’t queer when I knew him,” Colin slurred, ignoring his abductee’s dismissal. “I think you turned him into a fucking fairy.”

The mastermind glared harshly. “You’re a fool if you believe that. Sebastian’s always been bisexual, even back then.” It was true. Years ago, when they first started dating, he’d told him of his lifelong duel desires. Jim couldn’t exactly relate, having never been especially interested in women, but he didn’t begrudge Seb’s proclivities so long as the sniper was faithful to him while they were together.

“Bullshit,” the inebriated stalker replied. “You did it. You and your deviant ways.”

Moriarty rolled his eyes. “Whatever. Unless you intend to free me or feed me, this conversation is done.”

“No! I say when we’re through, not you,” he bleated. “You think you’re such hot shit, don’t you? You think you’re better than me.”

Jim smiled confidently. “Honey, I don’t just think it. I know it.”

Right then, the man reached down and grasped the genius by his throat, forcibly pulling him up into a standing position.

“I’ve fucked plenty of omegas. Dozens of them. Granted, they were all women, but still. You’re nothing special.” He released his grip and roughly shoved Jim back against the wall. Panting and dizzy, the prisoner slid down and sat on the floor once more.


“Going after a pregnant person is what’s truly pathetic,” Jim venomously declared. “You call me an abomination? You’re the real disgrace.”

The drunken abductor growled and motioned to kick his hostage, but Moriarty rolled out of the way. Colin’s foot connected with the cement wall, causing him to shout a stream of obscenities.

Jim laughed. “You fucking idiot. I can’t wait until Sebastian kills you.”

“It’s already been eight days,” the man remarked. “I’m beginning to think Moran may have lost interest.”

“Never,” the mastermind spoke. “He would never stop looking.” Sebastian’s love for him was unconditional. He’d go to the ends of the earth to get him back. And maybe, Jim slyly thought, I can get out of this on my own.

Moriarty had to be certain a pin was available before making any sudden moves. He’d need to get...
close enough to Lisa to check. But how would he manage it without his captor growing suspicious? Suddenly, he had a wonderful, wily idea.

Jim scooted over to the woman’s lifeless frame. Looking down at her, he took a breath, steeling himself for what was sure to be an award-worthy performance.

“Oh, Lisa,” he uttered in a forlorn tone. “It isn’t fair what’s happened to you.” He gently stroked her cheek as he willed tears to form in his eyes.

Colin snickered contemptuously. “ Seems the infamous James Moriarty’s gone soft. Must be all those hormones at work.”

Ignoring the snide comment, Jim gingerly slipped a hand under Lisa’s head, feeling around for the telltale bump of a bobby pin. From an onlooker’s perspective, it would appear that he was simply cradling her head in a tender gesture.

“You deserved better than this,” he said. “Your talents were a gift to the world.”

**Bingo.** Jim felt at least two pins embedded close to the dead designer’s scalp. Now he just had to find a way to remove one, straighten it, and pick his restraints while remaining undetected by Colin.

A thought occurred to him: he’d also have to contend with the basement door. The genius was fairly certain it was being kept bolted when his abductor wasn’t downstairs with him. This meant that he didn’t have the luxury of waiting until Colin was gone to make his escape. He had to act while the madman was present in order to assure that the door would be unlocked.

The consulting criminal knew what he must do—he only hoped he had the strength to pull it off. A week without food or medication left him in markedly poor health. What he was about to attempt next would require agility he wasn’t sure he still possessed. But he had to try for his children’s sake. Had to at least make the effort.

“Is this what Margo would’ve wanted?” Jim asked, knowing what a touchy subject the woman was for his stalker. He sought to get a rise out of him. Make the man angry enough to storm off. Then, once he turned his back to leave, he’d attack. The mastermind only had one shot at this, so he had to be precise.

“Margo would’ve wanted to live,” Colin gruffly replied.

Moriarty shook his head. “No, I don’t think so. She died by her own hand, did she not?” he pointedly observed. “Seems to me, she chose death over the unenviable task of bearing your seed.”

“Shut up!” he barked, his agitation rising.

“Why should I? You wish to silence me because I speak the truth?”

“Just shut your filthy gob! I won’t warn you again.” The man glowered furiously at his captive.

“Ooh, big man, threatening a pregnant omega you’ve chained up in your basement,” he taunted. “What do you do for an encore, kick the cane out from under an old woman crossing the street?”

Fuck you,” Colin answered. “Let’s see how mouthy you are after I keep you down here for another week. Enjoy the dead girl’s company,” he said, motioning to Lisa. It was then that the kidnapper finally did what Jim was waiting for—he turned his back to walk away.
Now it was time to act. Jim swiftly gathered up a length of his chain and swung it around Colin’s neck from behind. Using every ounce of strength he could muster, he pulled the metal tether tight. The man gurgled as the life was choked out of him.

Colin attempted to knock Moriarty down, but Jim stayed a step ahead. The consulting criminal latched onto the larger man’s back, gripping him around the waist with his legs while he continued garroting him with the chain. It was a potent combination, and soon the kidnapper lost balance and fell to his knees.

Jim shifted his weight, forcing Colin into a prone position. He sat on his back, relentlessly pulling the chain. The fierce omega refused to stop until the other man’s body stilled.

When he thought it was safe to get up, he returned to Lisa and plucked a bobby pin from her hair. Moriarty made short work of straightening the implement and proceeded with the lock. It’d been a while since he last employed his picking skills, but one never really forgot the mechanics of it.

“Yes!” he exclaimed as the shackle popped open.

This was the freest Jim had been in eight days, and he wasn’t about to dawdle. He ran up the steps, taking them two at a time, and barreled through the door. At last, he got a look at the upstairs.

Colin’s house was wholly unremarkable. But the Irishman wasn’t there to judge aesthetics. No, he was checking the place for a phone.

Nothing…not even a mobile device, he conceded, coming up fruitless in his effort to find some means of calling for help.

Thinking fast, he grabbed a large knife from the butcher’s block in the kitchen. He figured he’d need protection for the next phase of his escape plan: to venture into the unknown of whatever lay outside.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Strange Bedfellows

Chapter Summary

In his continued quest to find Jim, Sebastian turns to an unexpected source.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Open up!” Sebastian demanded, pounding on the door at 221B Baker Street. “I know you’re in there!”

The wooden entrance creaked open slightly. “Do you have any idea what time it is?” a tired and annoyed voice asked. It was John Watson.

“I don’t care how late it is. I need a meeting with Sherlock.”

“Bugger off,” the man said, motioning to close the door.

Sebastian quickly wedged his hand between the door and its frame, stopping it from shutting. “I need to see him now.”

“He’s not interested in dealing with James Moriarty’s cohorts.”

“Oh? Making decisions for him, are we?”

The former army doctor let out an aggravated sigh. “I won’t tell you again. Go, or I’ll call the police.”

“I was trying to be diplomatic,” Seb explained, “but if you want to do this the hard way…” He pulled a pistol from his jacket pocket and pushed inside the apartment.

John’s eyes widened. “Put that thing away! My daughter’s asleep in the next room. I won’t have you waving it around with her here.”

Strangely enough, the sniper could empathize with Watson’s request. Now that he was going to be a father soon, he understood the drive to protect one’s offspring. It was a powerful force.

Seb tucked his gun away. “I’m not looking to hurt anyone. I just want a meeting with Holmes. It’s for a case.”

“A case?” he asked incredulously.
“Yes. I attempted to contact both of you by phone, but it went to voicemail.”

“We were asleep. That’s something people tend to do at 3 o’clock in the morning. You should try it sometime.”

“Speak for yourself,” another voice chimed in. “You may have been asleep, but I was simply ignoring him.” Sherlock entered the room, eyeing up London’s second most dangerous man.

“We need to talk,” Sebastian stated.

“About an alleged case, yes. I heard what you said to John.”

“Right. Can we sit down for this? It warrants a proper consultation.”

“By all means,” the tall brunette agreed, adjourning to his customary spot. He invited Seb to take a seat opposite him.

John stared agape at his friend, gawking as if the man had just sprouted horns. “You’re not seriously considering helping this bastard?”

“It’s been a boring month,” Sherlock dryly noted. “I could use a bit of entertainment.”

Sebastian disregarded Holmes’s condescending remark and began to describe his and Jim’s situation in earnest. He informed him of their stalker’s continued harassment and of Moriarty’s subsequent kidnapping. He stressed the importance of finding Jim because he was supposed to be on medication, and missing it for over a week could be detrimental to the Irishman’s health.

“I don’t see how any of this is our concern,” John dismissed.

“I would’ve expected that you, as a healer, would take a vested interest in the welfare of another human being,” Seb spoke.

Sherlock scoffed. “Really, Moran? I’d say any obligation to the Hippocratic Oath is nullified after one attempts to murder a person on multiple occasions. Additionally, you’re operating under the false premise that James Moriarty is human. He is, in fact, more of a spider than a man.”

Sebastian badly wanted to punch the smug expression off Holmes’s face, but willed himself to refrain. “Even a spider can take a mate,” he said through gritted teeth.

Watson cocked his head, looking at the sniper in stunned surprise. “Wait, are you saying—”

“They’re a couple,” Sherlock blurted out, confirming his friend’s suspicion. “Isn’t that right, Moran?”

He nodded and pulled at the thin chain he wore around his neck, revealing a portion previously hidden beneath his shirt. Old army dog tags hung off it, as well as a ring. It was his wedding band.

“Jim and I have been married for three years,” he confessed. Ordinarily, Sebastian would be hesitant to divulge the truth of their relationship. However, in the interest of rescuing his husband, he was willing to offer Holmes and Watson full disclosure.

“I don’t buy it,” John declared. “Moriarty is a psychopath. He isn’t capable of love.”

The assassin glared. “Never doubt the depths of our affection. We may be a lot of things, but first and foremost, we’re dedicated to each other.”
“He’s telling the truth,” Sherlock affirmed. “Mr. Moran is an easy book to read.”

Seb snorted at the pat assessment. “Is that so?”

“Absolutely. Even if you hadn’t shared your story, I would’ve been able to glean most of it within a few minutes, tops.”

_Fucking arrogant twat. He’s got Jim’s confidence, but none of his charm._

“I still don’t see any reason why we should help you retrieve him,” Watson maintained.

“Me either,” the consulting detective agreed. “Career criminals beget enemies. It’s the nature of the beast. Your harassment and his kidnapping do not warrant our services.”

Sebastian stared daggers at the two of them, barely suppressing his rage at their refusal. He would _not_ be dismissed. He would gain their assistance one way or another.

“I think it’s time we bid you adieu,” the doctor spoke. “You know the way out.”

“Wait,” Seb beseeched. He had one last chance to convince them to help. If he admitted the final detail, they couldn’t possibly deny him…or so he hoped.

“Jim is with child,” the sniper said. “Or perhaps I should say ‘with children,’ since he’s carrying twins.”

At that news, both men’s faces were matching portraits of bewilderment. _Not such an easy book to read after all, aye Holmes?_

“If you’re going to lie,” Sherlock began, “at least make it convincing. Don’t claim to have twins. It’s never twins.”

“Oh, it’s true, I assure you. We’ve already named them. Estella Sebastienne and Edward James, respectively. Jim likes to call them ‘Essie’ and ‘Eddie.’”

John shook his head. “This is preposterous. You expect us to believe Moriarty would ever willingly bear children? The very notion is absurd.”

“Why is it so difficult to imagine that a happily married couple might want to start a family?” Moran posited. “Isn’t that what people have been doing since the dawn of time?”

“Yes, well, when one half of the couple is a coldhearted monster like Moriarty, the concept becomes less credible.”

Monster. It was a term many used to describe Sebastian’s husband, and he hated it. Certainly, his Magpie could be vicious; could be callous to the extreme. But he could be thoughtful, too. Tender, even, to those whom he felt deserved it.

“What about your late wife, John? Mary was a trained killer who undoubtedly committed a slew of heinous acts. Yet she bore Rosie.”

“Don’t you dare compare her to that parasite you’ve aligned yourself with! Mary made an effort to change. But Moriarty? He revels in being a hateful son of a bitch. It’s his pastime.”

“Not the point,” Seb stressed. “What I’m trying to say is that deeply flawed individuals can have babies like anyone else, and those children are innocent. Just as Rosie mustn’t be punished for Mary’s sins, it would be wrong to hold Essie and Eddie accountable for the things Jim and I have
done. Hate us all you want— we’ve earned it. But help them.”

The former colonel’s impassioned plea seemed to have an effect on the men sitting before him. Their looks of contemplation spoke volumes, and Seb was sure he detected a hint of guilt between them.

“How far along is he?” Sherlock inquired, displaying renewed interest in Moran’s case.

“20 weeks when he was taken.”

“So 21 now. That would equate to approximately five months,” the consulting detective calculated out loud. “Even bearing twins, he should still possess a fair amount of mobility. It isn’t until the third trimester that movement becomes an issue.”

“You stated he was meant to be on medication,” John piped up. “Do you remember the name of the drug?”

“Labetalol.”

“He’s hypertensive, then?”

Sebastian frowned. “Yes. He was hospitalized for preeclampsia two weeks prior to the abduction. The meds were working, but with him being taken off them abruptly…” The sniper hated to think about what havoc had been wrought on his mate’s health in the eight, almost nine, days since his capture.

John’s expression grew dour. “You’re right to be concerned. Those kinds of drugs shouldn’t be stopped cold turkey.”

“Here’s what we’re going to do,” Holmes decreed, usurping control of the conversation. “At 8 a.m. sharp, you’ll bring me everything you’ve got relating to the stalker. This includes the notes and security footage you mentioned. From there, we’ll assess who it is we may be dealing with.”

_He makes it sound so simple. But it’s not. If it were, I’d have my husband back by now._ The assassin’s mind was abuzz, but all he uttered in response was, “Okay.”

Sebastian showed himself out, preparing to return home. He wasn’t thrilled about having to wait another five hours before continuing the rescue mission, but it did provide an opportunity to rest and recharge. It was probably best that they approach the situation with a clear head.

A pang of sadness washed over the alpha as he drove up to his residence. He used to look forward to walking through the double-door entryway after a long day or night. Without Jim, though, it wasn’t the same. Living there in his Magpie’s absence felt strikingly similar to the aftermath of St. Bart’s. He learned then that a house alone did not make a home— it was the people inside who transformed it into something more.

All Seb had now were empty walls. Fitting, as he too felt like a hollowed out shell. His home and heart lay with Jim. Until he got him back safe and sound, nothing would be right in his world.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Hope amidst the Darkness

Chapter Summary

Jim journeys into the unknown.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes


That was what Jim faced upon his escape from Colin’s house. They were apparently situated in a rural area devoid of civilization. The moon and stars were his only guide as he navigated through the night.

He’d hoped to find a road, a shop, or even a lamppost. Any of those things would indicate that a town was nearby. So far, he’d discovered nothing but abandoned farmland and forest.

I wish Sebby was here. His intrepid mate knew his way around Mother Nature’s domain and could easily survive in the elements. Jim, however, had no such instincts.

The mastermind recalled when Seb convinced him to go camping. It took a bit of cajoling, but he finally agreed after being promised s’mores and fireside sex. Oh, what a mixed bag that turned out to have been. Mosquitoes ate him alive, poison oak found a way to his hindquarters, and as a final insult, they were rained out and he slipped in the mud. That part of the trip was abysmal.

But it wasn’t all bad. Jim did get his s’mores before the storm began. And as for the sex, the wet weather may have put out their campfire, but it couldn’t extinguish the heat that burned between them. They took turns riding each other for hours inside the shelter of their tent. When they emerged after the downpour had passed, a brilliant rainbow shimmered in the sky. It was beautiful.

Jim would give anything to have that rainbow now. To bathe in its comfort, security, and peace. To make a wish that instead of gold, he’d find his sweet Sebastian at the end.

***********

Jim had been wandering for about an hour and was beginning to wonder if he might be going in circles. It was possible. Ordinarily, when lost, he would make a point of following the North Star. He’d tried that approach again tonight, but…

I feel awful.
Adrenaline had allowed the Irishman to make his escape, but the burst of energy proved short-lived. His health issues were catching up to him in a major way. He was dizzy, disoriented, and in terrible pain. For the first time since the kidnapping ordeal began, a tiny part of him questioned whether or not he’d persevere.

No! he reprimanded himself. Don’t think like that. You’ll get out of this. You’ve got a wonderful husband and beautiful babies on the way. You will prevail.

Then he heard it. A howl and a rustle.

Jim stopped in his tracks, just listening.

There it was again.

Oh God. He gripped the knife he’d stolen from Colin’s kitchen, ready to use it if necessary.

The noise was growing nearer. What could it be? Wolves and coyotes were not prevalent in the UK, but there were other creatures that roamed free. Mountain lions were occasionally spotted in the Highlands, and who knew for certain what else might be lurking in the dark of the countryside?

Moriarty set out on a dead run, hoping to put as much distance between himself and the animal as possible. He blindly waved the blade in front of him, unable to see a thing in the pitch black wilderness.

He was running, running, running—

BAM.

In a flash, the consulting criminal tripped over what felt like rocks. The momentum launched him forward a few feet, and he slammed smack-dab into a rotted tree stump. He made contact at an awkward angle, banging both his belly and knee against the wood.

No! No, no, no! He was trying so hard to protect his children, and now he’d gone and fallen. It wasn’t fair.

“Oh, babies. I’m so sorry.” The omega gently rubbed his stomach in a soothing gesture. Please be okay. Please. “Daddy loves you.”

Jim let out an agonized gasp when he attempted to stand. His heart sunk as he realized he could put no weight on his leg—it was too badly injured in the fall.

He wanted to cry. Wanted to scream. Wanted to tear apart the bastard who’d put him in this situation. But for now, he needed to regroup.

The Irishman refused to be a sitting duck. It was too dangerous to stay out in the open in his condition. If he was going to survive, he’d have to hide. But where?

From the corner of his eye, he noticed the moonlight hit a patch of land just right. Though difficult to discern, it vaguely looked to be shrubbery.

Might do in a pinch. He could honker down among the thicket until sunrise. Then he’d continue to search for a road.

As Jim prepared to crawl into the bushes, he realized his knife was gone. Must’ve dropped it when I tripped. He felt around the ground but came up empty-handed.
No worry. I'll find it at dawn. The sun would be up soon. He just had to bide his time.

*********

CLOMP. CLOMP. CLOMP.

Moriarty blinked, his eyes fluttering open in confusion. \textit{What the}—

And then he remembered. \textit{Oh.} He’d been so exhausted, he nodded off while waiting for daybreak.

CLOMP. CLOMP. CLOMP.

A sound became apparent to him. It was the rise and fall of heavy footsteps. They were coming closer with each second.

\textit{Maybe someone’s here who can help,} he thought hopefully. \textit{I’ll get a ride into the nearest town and call Seb. Then I’ll find food and a doctor. Maybe even—}

His joyful fantasy was cut short when the person stomped into view.

\textit{Colin.}

Jim’s eyes widened and he drained white as a sheet. How was this possible? How was Colin still alive?

The genius suddenly became very angry at himself. In his frenzied rush to break free, he’d neglected to check the man’s body for a pulse. It was an amateur mistake— sloppy, incompetent, and wholly beneath him.

\textit{How could I be so bloody stupid?} he despaired, knowing he’d unwittingly jeopardized his children’s lives.

“Rise and shine, princess!” Colin mockingly greeted. “Sleep well out here?”

Jim glared murderously at his kidnapper. He wouldn’t grant him the satisfaction of a reply.

“Silent treatment, huh?” the man said with a shrug. “Whatever. I don’t give a shit if you talk to me or not. The only thing I’m interested in is hauling you back.”

Colin pulled a thick bungee cord from his jacket pocket. He and Jim locked eyes for a moment, and then he spoke again. “Surprised you didn’t try to run as soon as you saw me. Unless, of course, you can’t run.”

The man swiftly seized Moriarty by the arm, harshly yanking him up to stand. His suspicion was confirmed when the mastermind hissed in pain and immediately dropped to the ground.

The lunatic laughed, putting the bungee cord away. “Guess I won’t need to tie you up after all. Thanks for making this so easy.”

With one fluid movement, Colin snatched up his infirm abductee and slung him over his shoulder. He carried him in much the same manner he had Lisa, a parallel which sent a chill down Jim’s spine.

\textit{How long until I become a corpse, too?} The notion was enough to make him wince. Or perhaps his grimace was due to the full-body ache he was experiencing. Either way, the outlook wasn’t good.
**Maybe I deserve this,** Jim thought as he sat in the confines of his concrete prison. He never wanted to see that basement again, but there he was, a hostage once more. Colin didn’t bother shackling him this time— he knew his leg injury prohibited him from any further escape. **Is this what they call karma?**

He glanced over at the lifeless form of his interior designer. Remorse wasn’t something the consulting criminal was known for, but even he couldn’t help but feel a pang of guilt in regard to her fate. Lisa was among the best in her field and had worked day and night to satisfy his every decorating whim. All that effort, and this is how she was repaid. It didn’t seem right.

Moriarty shifted uncomfortably, trying to find a position which would elicit the least amount of pain. Everything hurt. At this point, he was fairly certain that the agony was the only thing keeping him conscious.

He absently placed a hand on his stomach, causing him to flinch. His abdomen was very sore to the touch.

**What the hell?** Jim pulled up his shirt to inspect the area. He gasped at what he saw. A large, angry bruise marred his belly. It was in the same spot that had banged into the tree stump.

Tears filled the Irishman’s eyes. He didn’t think the impact had been that hard, but the red and purple welt staring back at him disagreed. If it looked this bad on the outside, what damage might it have done internally?

“Essie…Eddie…it’s going to be okay,” he shakily reassured his unborn children.

But would it? Jim was scared. He’d been starved for well over a week, his preeclampsia symptoms had returned, and now he’d suffered a traumatic fall with tender bruising.

Moriarty wept as an onslaught of questions bombarded his mind. **Can Essie and Eddie feel pain? Are they hungry and hurting? Are they dying inside me?**

He would give anything to hear the twins’ heartbeats again. Not being able to listen to them was one of the worst parts of his captivity. After all that had transpired, he **needed** to hear the sound. Needed to know they were thriving.

“Oh, my little ones…I’m sorry for everything. You’re good babies,” he spoke, hoping they were listening and could understand him. “No, I take that back,” he corrected himself. “You’re not just good babies, you’re the **best** babies. Daddy loves you so much.” Jim sounded truly broken, succumbing to a sob.

At that moment, something unexpected happened. The mastermind may not have been able to hear his children, but for the very first time, he **felt** them.

His eyes widened in great surprise at the new sensation. It was like nothing he’d ever experienced before. He’d waited so long for the quickening to occur, and now here it was.

“My darlings, is it really you?” Jim wanted to be sure he hadn’t simply imagined the movement in a fit of hysteria. **Please let it be true.**

He felt it again. A tiny kick from within. This **was** the babies, he was positive of it.

Moriarty’s sadness turned to elation. His children were alive! If he was a religious man, he
might’ve praised God for the miraculous event. But he wasn’t religious, and so he simply celebrated the act for what it was—immutable proof of the bond between him and the twins. They were a trinity of sorts; a triumvirate sharing one body. In this knowledge, Jim found renewed strength.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
When Past Becomes Present

Chapter Summary

Sebastian gets closer to bringing Jim home and makes a surprising discovery.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sebastian sat in the kitchen at 221B Baker Street, nervously nursing a cup of tea. As instructed, he’d brought along everything he had in relation to his stalker. Now he eagerly awaited Sherlock’s assessment of the evidence.

It felt surreal to be sitting in Holmes’s apartment, casually sipping on Earl Grey as if they were old friends or cordial acquaintances. The reality couldn’t be further from the truth. He hated that brainy bastard with every fiber of his being. Hated all the Holmes’s, for that matter. As far as Seb was concerned, the lot of them were nothing but trouble. It was only out of sheer desperation that he sought Sherlock’s assistance.

The consulting detective hastily entered the room. “You might have mentioned that the notes were written on stationery,” he chided.

“Huh?” Moran wasn’t sure what that had to do with the matter at hand.

“The notes weren’t composed on standard paper,” he stressed, as if it signified something important.

“I didn’t think the aesthetics were relevant.” Indeed, the threats had been made on off-white colored paper featuring a stenciled border. It looked nice. Sebastian, however, was more concerned with the content of the notes rather than their overall appearance.

“They’re relevant when the stationery in question is only sold at one location in the whole of England.”

The former colonel eyed him incredulously. “Only one? How can you possibly know that?”

“I know because it came from an artisan shop that exclusively sells goods designed and produced by local craftspersons. It’s meant to honor creativity within the community, or some such nonsense.”

Seb peered at Sherlock, not fully believing him. “And how can you be sure this is one of their
wares?"

“I’ve been to the store it was sold at and I have a photographic memory,” he answered. “Trust me on this.”

“I need more to go on than that.”

“Very well.” Holmes approached a drawer, pulling out a small stack of papers. He dropped the bundle on the table in front of Moran. “Is this proof enough for you?”

The sniper stared at the pile for a moment, then looked back up at the tall brunette. “Where did you get these?” he asked, flabbergasted. It was the same stationery the stalker used.

“At Eventide’s in Ermington. John and I stopped off there while working on a case a few months ago. He picked up this and several other packages of stationery for Rosie to draw on. Personally, I thought giving them to a three-year-old was a bit of a waste, but he seems convinced she’s the next Georgia O’Keeffe.”

Seb was silent, processing the information. Ermington. The location sounded familiar, but why? Had he been there before? Passed through it, maybe?

“Where’s this place at?”

“It’s a village in the Devon region. The population is under 900.”

“That should make it a lot easier to track the kidnapper, then. Assuming he lives in or around the vicinity.”

“My thoughts exactly,” Sherlock agreed. “Now the ball is in your court as to how you choose to proceed.”

The assassin nodded. “You’re right. I think I can take it from here.” With such a specific lead to go on, he could handle the rest of the legwork. “Thank you for helping me. If I need anything else, I’ll call.”

“I’m not helping you,” the consulting detective quickly remarked. “I’m helping two children who, though unborn, are already suffering due to the misfortune of their parentage.”

Moran growled, struggling to keep his anger in check. He can’t even accept a fucking ‘thank you.’ Always has to run his mouth. Fucking wanker.

The fair-haired alpha got up to leave. Before he could open the door, John appeared, heading him off.

“Let us know how things turn out,” the doctor implored. “With the babies, I mean.”

“I will,” Sebastian affirmed. Though nowhere near being friends, the two men could relate on a father-to-father level.

Now it was time to part ways. Come hell or high water, he was determined to find Jim and their stalker by the end of the day.

**********

Since leaving Holmes’s place that morning, Seb had been a busy boy. He contacted a hacker on Jim’s payroll about infiltrating Eventide’s database and sales records. The tech expert was able to
gain access relatively quickly. He sent the intel to Moran, who promptly began scouring the logs for any names he might recognize.

So far, nothing. He was starting to grow frustrated. What if the stalker used a pseudonym? What if he paid in cash, or conversely, simply stole the stationery? There’d be no documentation of that. What if—

And then he saw it. For once, the universe had finally thrown the former colonel a bone. Colin Taylor. Or Captain Taylor, when Seb knew him.

Colin was one of the individuals on his suspect list whose whereabouts were unknown. He hadn’t had contact with the man in years. Over a decade, in fact.

Why would he take an interest in me after all this time? What grudge does he hold? The sniper was genuinely baffled as to why someone from his past would suddenly decide to lash out in such a way.

He thought back to his army days, when he and Taylor were acquainted. The two had become fast friends, working side-by-side as marksmen. They got along splendidly, until the Captain made the mistake of introducing him to his girlfriend, Margo. With sun-kissed hair, porcelain skin, and an outstanding hourglass figure, Marguerite de Graaf was a quintessential Danish beauty. He absolutely had to have her, camaraderie be damned.

In hindsight, Sebastian deeply regretted his actions. He was a shameless cad for most of his adult life, going from one carnal conquest to another. Sex without attachment was a mainstay until he met Jim. His Magpie stole his heart and he never wanted to be with anyone else again.

Colin wasn’t supposed to know. Seb had been sleeping with Margo around the same time he was kicked out of the military. When he skipped town, he still hadn’t confessed the truth to him.

Could Margo have admitted it? It was possible— she was prone to wildly unpredictable behavior. Soon after they began their affair, he realized just how emotionally unstable she was. The woman got attached to people easily and her mood often changed on a dime. He’d actually wanted to break things off with her at one point, but feared that she might harm herself in response.

So many years had passed since then, though. Even if Taylor had learned what they’d done, surely it would be water under the bridge. Why hold on to a grudge like that?

Seb would find out. He would get all the answers he sought, and rescue his husband at the same time. All he needed was an address.

**********

“Stay awake!” Jim demanded of himself. He was panting heavily as he held his head in his hands.

It’d been a bad day for the consulting criminal. Though his babies’ recent movement gave him newfound resolve, his health was in serious decline. He’d begun throwing up at regular intervals—not good, considering the only thing he consumed was water.

This development terrified him. When researching his condition after release from the hospital, he’d discovered that vomiting in association with preeclampsia was a very bad sign. If it got much worse, he risked entering into full-fledged eclampsia and could begin having seizures. At that stage, it would probably kill him.

It was difficult to stay conscious and coherent. He was actively fighting against his own body’s
Tiger, please find me. He desperately wanted to see his spouse again. Wanted to touch him, embrace him, and just be near him.

Moriarty felt a small kick. He smiled faintly, knowing it was Essie and Eddie’s doing. Somehow, they seemed able to sense his emotions. He found it strangely comforting.

“You miss Papa, too. I understand.” He placed his hand on a section of his belly that wasn’t bruised. “We’ll be together soon, I promise.”

He registered another gentle flutter from inside. “You like hearing that, huh? Well, then you’re going to love the next piece of news I’ve got,” he proclaimed, not feeling the least bit silly that he was effectively holding a conversation with his stomach.

“In a few weeks, once we’re long gone from this place, we’re going to throw a big party for your Papa. It’ll be on a boat, with lots of music and delicious food.” He paused for a moment, thinking about how wonderful it would be to have something to eat. “Daddy’s even going to bake a chocolate cake. Pastry chefs everywhere will be positively green with envy.”

Jim wanted to keep talking to his children, but he was too winded to continue. There was a certain irony to the fact that he, of all people, was now forced to limit his speech. Magpie’s not so chatty anymore, he somberly thought.

Despite the Irishman’s best efforts to remain cognizant, he grew clammy and his vision blurred. He’d been close to passing out for several hours and could stave it off no longer. Before yielding to unconsciousness, his mind offered a final plea. Come for us, Tiger. Come for your family.

Chapter End Notes

I know it seems like I moved away from Sherlock and John rather quickly here, but I promise they WILL return in the next chapter.
At last, Sebastian had it. He possessed his stalker’s home address and then some. The hacker he’d been working with forwarded him a file containing a good deal of information on the man. It was an eye-opening document, to say the least.

Apparently, a year after Seb was booted from the army, Captain Colin Taylor switched his specialty from marksmanship to surveillance technology. That would explain how he’d managed to spy on him and Jim with expert precision, and it accounted for how he’d been able to override the electrical system at Moriarty’s headquarters. Taylor had the training to pull it off.

There was more. The file also indicated that he’d married Margo. Tragically, she died a mere three years after their union. No cause of death was given, but if Seb had to guess, he’d bet it was suicide. The thought saddened him. He knew all too well how painful it was to lose a loved one that way.

Colin left the military not long after his wife’s demise. In fact, it seemed he’d decided to drop out of society altogether at that point. He was reported to have sold off most of his belongings and cut ties with everyone. He moved to a rural property just outside of Ermington, where he’d lived as a virtual hermit ever since. How he supported himself was a mystery, but for someone with his skillset, it wasn’t unheard of to accept under-the-table freelance assignments.

Now was not the time for speculation, though. Sebastian had a rescue mission to commence. He’d be getting his husband back tonight, that much was definite. The uncertainty laid in how he’d go about the operation.

Ordinarily, the intrepid assassin worked alone. Give him a gun and a location, and that’s all he’d need to get the job done. In this case, however, he couldn’t be sure what kind of situation he was walking into. It might be prudent to bring backup.

Who could he trust to accompany him? He first considered the members of his sniper team. They were an exceptional group of sharpshooters who would act on his command without question. 

But...
What if something went wrong? There was always the potential for a mission to go sideways when unknown variables were at play. Despite Jim’s stance that employees were replaceable, Seb would hate to lose any of his snipers if he could help it. It’d taken him years to assemble a lineup as proficient at the one he had now. He didn’t dare risk them getting killed.

Who did that leave? What other options did he have? There was no time to interview people— this rescue was being undertaken tonight.

An idea popped into Seb’s head. Perhaps he was mad for even entertaining it, but then again, he always had been a bit off kilter. Maybe, just maybe, this would work…

*********

For the second— technically third— time that day, Sebastian found himself knocking on the door at 221B Baker Street. As was true earlier, John was the one to greet him again now.

“Moran? What are you doing back so soon?”

“I could use a bit more help. Care to let me in?”

At that, Watson cautiously permitted him inside. Sherlock was waiting in the wings.

“I thought you were going to call if you needed anything else?” Holmes hastily spoke.

“Yes, well, I got the impression that you might hang up on me if I did.”

“You’re cleverer than I pegged you for,” the consulting detective quipped. Coming from him, that was something of a compliment.

“What is it you require?” John asked.

“You,” Seb said. “Both of you, actually.”

The two men eyed him quizzically, unclear as to what, exactly, Moran had in mind.

“Elaborate,” the tall brunette implored.

“I want you to come with me when I confront the bastard who’s got Jim.”

Sherlock snorted in derision. “You can’t possibly think we would agree to that?”

“Does the phrase ‘not a snowball’s chance in hell’ mean anything to you?” Watson chimed in.

Sebastian had expected this. Given the history between all parties involved, of course they’d be resistant. The sniper just needed to make a convincing appeal, much like he had the first time he stopped by.

“John,” Seb began, focusing his gaze intently on the man, “Jim’s going to require medical attention. He’s been off his medication for nine days, and god only knows what other injuries he may have. Not to mention the special care he might need on account of the babies.”

“Couldn’t you bring him to a clinic in the village?”

“Listen to yourself, John— ‘a clinic in the village.’ The medical help in a place as small as Ermington can’t compare to the care he’d receive in London. My objective is to have him treated on the scene so that he’ll be stable enough to bring back to the city, where I can get him checked
into a proper facility.”

“I don’t know…this sounds awfully sketchy.”

“Essie and Eddie deserve a fair shot at life. Don’t sell them short.”

“Wanting a doctor on site is one thing,” Holmes interjected. “But what do you need me for?”

“Glad you asked.” Now it was time to turn on that patented Moran charm. “You’re quick-witted and hold up well in tough situations. I could use someone with your talents.”

The duo was silent for a moment, each pondering Sebastian’s proposal.

“All right,” John stated. “In the interest of saving the lives of two children, I’ll come.”

Sherlock peered at his friend in disbelief. “You’re really agreeing to this? Who knows what sort of trap you might be entering into.”

“There’s no deception on my end,” Seb professed. “I’ve offered full transparency. As for what, if any, traps Colin may have devised…well, that I don’t know.”

“Obviously, then, I can’t allow John to go alone. I’ll have to come, too.”

Watson took exception to the consulting detective’s remark. “You ‘can’t allow’ me? Hate to break it to you, but I do have a will of my own.”

“Oh, you know what I mean. Stop squabbling.”

“Squabbling? Please. I’m just trying to establish the fact that I’m perfectly capable of making decisions with or without the Holmes seal of approval.”

Sebastian smirked. Listening to the two of them bicker was rather amusing. They reminded him of an old married couple. No wonder people still sometimes mistook them for life partners.

Eventually, their argument subsided and they began making arrangements. John would have Mrs. Hudson watch his daughter while he and Sherlock rode together. Moran would drive separately, and they’d meet up near Colin’s house, but not directly at his address. This was a rural area they were dealing with—if he saw cars parked outside, he’d know something was afoot. It was best to capitalize on the element of surprise.

**********

Ermington. Seb had thought the name sounded familiar, and as he traveled through the village, he realized why. In the days when he was carrying on an affair with Margo, she’d shown him photos of the place. Specifically, they were snapshots from a favorite family vacation during her childhood. She remembered Ermington very fondly, idealizing it to almost mythical proportions. To hear her describe it, the village was like something out of a storybook, full of rolling hills, songbirds, and sunshine.

She must’ve told Colin about it, too. Interesting that he chose to live on the outskirts of the area his late wife adored. Was settling in the heart of Ermington too painful? Is that why he opted to inhabit its fringes instead?

Sebastian glanced at the clock on the dashboard. It was nearly 8 p.m.—approximately 12 hours since he’d vowed to get his husband back within the day. He was about to make good on that
promise.

The sniper pulled over to the side of the road, waiting for Sherlock and John. He made the most of his time by double-checking the backpack he’d brought especially for this mission. Among its many contents were extra ammo, rope, mace, a first aid kit, and Jim’s medication. He wanted to be prepared for whatever was thrown at him.

Seb’s backup soon arrived, and the trio embarked on a 300-meter trek to Colin’s house. The night was temperate, but dark as sin. Thankfully, Holmes had come bearing a flashlight to illuminate the way.

The men walked in silence, trying to be as stealthy as possible. While they journeyed amid the countryside, Moran reflected upon how surreal it was to be working with the consulting detective and his close personal assistant. Never in a million years did he think such an alliance would occur.

_Anything for you, my love._ There was no limit to the lengths he’d go to for his Magpie. He’d make a deal with the devil himself if it ensured Jim’s safe return.

Finally, they reached their destination. Remaining hidden behind a thick patch of shrubbery, they surveyed the property in front of them. There really wasn’t much to it. This was no mighty fortress or compound. No, it was just a ramshackle cottage surrounded by forest and farmland. Somehow, Sebastian had been expecting something more grandiose.

_This is the home of the person who’s thwarted London’s most dangerous men at every turn?_ A part of him was ashamed, but then again…

_Evil comes in many forms._ He ought not be lulled into complacency by an innocuous exterior.

Moran stepped back and looked at his begrudging partners. “Gentlemen,” he said, “it’s time to assemble.”

_Chapter End Notes_

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
A Mission of Love

Chapter Summary

The rescue mission is underway.

Chapter Notes

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“Holmes, I’m going to break the door down while you cover me from behind. Stay alert and keep your gun poised at all times,” Sebastian instructed. “Watson, you wait out here. Don’t come in until we signal you.”

“Why am I being sidelined? I was in the army, too. I can handle myself.”

“It’s nothing personal,” the sniper explained. “You’re acting as our medic. We need you safe and sound so that you can perform to the best of your ability.”

“He’s got a point, John.”

Hell has officially frozen over, Moran mused. Sherlock Holmes actually agreed with him. If he didn’t know better, he’d swear it was a sign of the apocalypse.

“All right,” the doctor relented. “But if I hear gunfire, I’m going in, signal or not.”

Seb nodded and charged ahead. He kicked the front door open with ease, having executed the maneuver many times before. As luck would have it, he didn’t need to search for his target. Colin Taylor sat right there, paging through a photo album with one hand while brandishing a pistol in the other.

“How nice, I’ve got company,” he said, seemingly unfazed by their brazen entry. “I don’t have much in the way of refreshments, but if you’d like a whiskey, feel free.”

“Let me cut straight to the chase. I’m here for my husband. Where the fuck are you keeping him?”

“So abrasive, Colonel. Mind your manners when you’re in someone’s home.”

“Manners?” Sebastian fumed. “You orchestrated a campaign of harassment and you’ve got the nerve to challenge me on manners? Sod off.”

“It pleases me to know my methods were effective,” Colin smugly replied.
“Stop gloating and tell me where my mate is.”

“You really want to know?” The kidnapper stood and approached Seb and Sherlock. It was a standoff, all three of them pointing guns at each other. “He’s dead, Moran. I killed him.”

For a brief moment, Sebastian’s expression held absolute anguish at the thought of Jim’s demise. Quickly, he forced himself to resume a steely façade. “You’re lying.”

“Am I?” the madman countered. “Maybe I strangled him or snapped his neck. Maybe I slit his throat and listened to him choke on his own blood.”

“No, you didn’t,” Holmes asserted. “I can read people extraordinarily well, and everything I’m getting off you screams that that’s a lie. James Moriarty is alive and you’re wasting your breath pretending otherwise.”

He snorted. “I beg to differ. It was worth telling just to see the look on Moran’s face.”

Seb growled. “You’re a sadistic bastard.”

“No, I’m simply a proponent of retribution,” the man spat. “My pregnant wife died because of you. It’s only fitting that your spouse should suffer the same fate.”

“Margo was pregnant when she died?” the assassin asked, genuinely surprised. It felt more tragic knowing the loss of life was twofold. “I’m sorry to hear that, Colin.”

“Good. You should be sorry. She killed herself on your account.”

“Oh? How do you figure?” Sebastian was utterly flummoxed by the accusation. He hadn’t seen the woman in years, so how could he be responsible for her death? It didn’t make sense.

“You ruined her mind. Corrupted her.”

“You give me too much credit. Her mind was broken long before I came along.”

Colin glared at him with burning fury. “Don’t you dare disparage my Marguerite,” he warned. “We were happy until you entered the picture.”

“You know what? Carrying on an affair like we did was wrong,” Seb admitted. “But I left town and never talked to her again. So how the hell can he be responsible for her death? It didn’t make sense.

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“You know what? Carrying on an affair like we did was wrong,” Seb admitted. “But I left town and never talked to her again. So how the hell can you stand there and claim that I had a role in her passing?”

“It’s simple. She never got over you. She was obsessed, pining away for a man who didn’t give a damn. You were her undoing.”

So this is why he blames me. He’s missing the forest for the trees. The man was undeniably insane, but at least now Seb understood his motivation.

“Colin, I know you don’t want to believe it, but I do have an idea of how you feel.”

“You’re right, I don’t buy that for a minute. How could you possibly begin to imagine the loss I’ve suffered?”

“Because I’ve gone through it, too. Jim shot himself and let me think he was dead for two whole years,” the sniper recounted. “It was the worst period of my life, bar none. And even though I thought he’d died by his own hand, I still wanted the lay the blame on someone else.” Sebastian’s eyes shifted toward Sherlock for a split second, before returning to focus on the stalker. “When
you lose someone to suicide, there’s a lot of misplaced anger and guilt to go around.”

“In this case, it isn’t misplaced,” Colin hissed. “If she’d never met you—”

“Then she’d have become fixated on some other guy, and the results would’ve been the same.”

“No! That’s not true!”

“Yes, I’m afraid it is. Margo was a charming, vivacious woman. But she was also fragile and frenetic. Always teetering on the edge of a breakdown.” He paused for a beat, suddenly reminded of his relationship with Jim. “We want to see the best in those we love. It’s all too easy to ignore the flaws.”

At that moment, Moran and Holmes spied something that astonished them both. From seemingly out of nowhere, John appeared in the hallway behind Colin. The duo played it cool, pretending not to notice as he quietly crept up on the madman.

“I…I don’t want to hear this! It’s not the same! You got Moriarty back. My wife is still in a mausoleum.”

Before Seb could respond, John made his move. Using the butt of his gun as a blunt instrument, he bashed Colin in the back of the head. The kidnapper dropped to the floor like a ton of bricks. He was knocked out cold and would probably have a concussion when he awoke.

“John!” Sherlock exclaimed. “What are you doing in here?”

“I hated the idea of standing outside doing nothing, so I decided to inspect the perimeter. There was a window partially open at the rear of the house. I crawled through and took a cursory look around. There’s not much to the place, but I saw a door with a deadbolt on it. I suspect it leads to the basement.”

“That’s probably where Moriarty’s being kept,” the consulting detective noted.

Without hesitation, Seb dug into his backpack and produced a pair of bolt cutters. “Holmes, you take these and get started on the lock. I’ll join up in a minute, after I take care of Colin.”

Sherlock arched a brow. “Take care of him how?” The genius had already gathered Moran’s meaning, but he wanted to hear the sniper say the words out loud.

“You know what I have to do,” he answered sharply.

“I never agreed to help you kill someone. This was intended to be a rescue mission, not an execution.”

“I can’t just let him walk out of here scot-free!” Sebastian snarled. “For fuck’s sake, I thought you understood that much.”

“I’m not suggesting he go free. I propose we restrain him, get Moriarty out of here, and then call the police.”

“Sherlock, this man has tormented my family for months. Expressly threatened the lives of Jim and our children. He needs to die.”

“You think this is strictly about you and yours? Hardly. You told me he murdered one of your security guards as well as your interior decorator. Well, the former is inconsequential, seeing as
how you destroyed the body. But the latter, Lisa Abernathy, is a different story. I’ve researched the case. She’s considered a missing person. Her parents want to know what happened. If you shoot Colin Taylor now, then we can never point the authorities in his direction and her family will never see justice done.”

“This is justice,” Seb stressed.

“No, this is vigilantism.”

The two stared daggers at each other, neither wanting to back down.

Finally, John spoke. “Can we get on with it, please? Time is of the essence.”

Sebastian growled in frustration, knowing that Watson was right. Every instinct told him to kill Colin, but he didn’t have a moment to waste arguing with Holmes. Self-righteous son of a bitch.

The former colonel pulled a length of rope from his bag of tricks. If he couldn’t slay the monster in front of him, he would at least make damn sure that the beast was restrained in the most uncomfortable position imaginable.

*********

“Got it!” Seb announced. The bolt cutters had sliced through the basement lock. With the door now accessible, he rushed downstairs. Sherlock and John followed close behind.

Magpie. There he was, laying in a heap on the cement floor. Moran practically flew to his side, thrilled to see him for the first time since his abduction nine days earlier.

“Jimmy, it’s me! I came for you.”

Jim grunted, struggling to keep his eyes open. “Tiger?” he rasped. “Am I dreaming?”

“No, darling. I’m really here.” He leaned down to kiss him on the cheek, noting the considerable amount of stubble that had grown while he was gone. It was a rarity to see him with that much facial hair.

Seb lovingly placed a hand on Jim’s belly, eliciting an agonized cry from the Irishman. The response alarmed him and got John’s attention as well.

Watson crouched on the ground and lifted Jim’s shirt to get a look at his abdomen. This seemed to startle the omega.

“Noooo…what’s he doing here? I don’t want to see him,” Jim weakly protested.

“It’s okay. I brought him to act as a medic. He’s going to check you out so that you’re safe to travel to a real hospital.”

“Blimey.” John said, taken aback by the large red and purple welt on Jim’s stomach. “That’s one hell of a bruise.”

Horrified, Sebastian’s jaw dropped at the sight. “Did Colin do this to you?”

“I fell trying to get away. Hurt my leg, too. I…it’s…” Moriarty was fighting to remain conscious.

“Stay with me, Jimmy,” the assassin urged. “We’ve only just been reunited. I refuse to let you fall sleep on me already.”
“So tired, Tiger…”

“Do something, Watson!” Seb yelled at the doctor. “I won’t let him slip away!”

“I’m trying the best I can.”

John dug into Moran’s medical kit and pulled out a stethoscope. He listened to Jim’s labored breathing and then moved the device down to his abdomen to check on the twins.

“The fetal heartbeats sound good,” he stated. “Obviously, you’ll have a better idea of how the babies are doing when you can get an ultrasound, but for now, they’re steady.”

Seb was relieved at the news, but still worried about his mate. He’d be glad when he could take Jim out of there and get him proper medical attention.

While the former army men worked on Moriarty, Sherlock’s attention was diverted to the corpse laying several feet from where he stood. “Dear God,” he whispered. The consulting detective recognized who it was not only because of the research he’d done, but also because her hands had been severed. This was the body of Lisa Abernathy.

“Watson, Moran,” he called out, “we have proof of the decorator’s murder right here.”

John glanced over, now seeing the lifeless woman he’d been too distracted to notice when he first walked in. “My day just gets better and better.”

“This is the perfect opportunity,” Holmes asserted.

“How do you figure?” Watson asked as he strapped a blood pressure cuff on his patient’s arm.

“When we call the police, we can tell them we were investigating Lisa Abernathy’s missing persons’ case. We’ll say we received an anonymous tip indicating she might be here. When we arrived, the cellar was locked. Naturally, that seemed suspicious, and so we forced our way inside. It was then that we discovered her mutilated corpse.” Sherlock paused, pondering the potential cover story. “Yes, that will make for an ideal explanation. Moran and Moriarty needn’t be mentioned at all.”

“Fine,” John replied, sounding preoccupied. The look on his face showed marked concern.

“What is it?” Sebastian inquired. He tried to remain composed, but could not disguise the fear in his voice.

“James’s blood pressure is through the roof. If it isn’t lowered soon, he could die. And I don’t mean within a day or two— I’m talking tonight.”

The sniper felt his heart breaking at the prospect. It was as if his nightmare was becoming a horrifying reality. “I brought his medication. Can’t we give him that?”

“We could administer it, yes, but I honestly don’t think it would be enough. At this point, he should be on an intravenous drug. Additionally, he’s having difficulty staying conscious. Giving someone pills in that condition poses a major choking hazard.”

“So I’ve got to get him to a hospital ASAP.”

“Correct. There’s one more thing I want to check before releasing him, though. It’ll actually go quicker if you help.”
“Sure, anything.”

“Moriarty mentioned hurting his leg. I want to assess the damage,” John said. “I’ll roll up one pant leg while you do the other.”

Seb nodded and did as instructed. With his clothing out of the way, it was clear that Jim’s right leg was twice the size it should be. There was a lot of swelling going on.

“He’ll never be able to stand with that much inflammation. You’ll have to carry him.”

“Not a problem.” These days, he was used to transporting his husband in such a manner.

“Jimmy, I’m going to pick you up, okay? Then we’re leaving this hell hole for good.”

The mastermind grunted, which Seb took as a sign of approval.

With his backpack strapped firmly on, the fair-haired alpha lifted his mate into his strong arms and proceeded upstairs. When he reached the top of the steps, he turned for a moment to face his unlikely allies.

“Holmes, Watson, thank you for the help. I still disagree with keeping Colin alive, but you did get me this far.”

Moran left it at that. He had bigger things to attend to now. Jim was back, but required serious care. It was up to the intrepid assassin to get him the medical attention he so desperately needed.

Chapter End Notes

This is NOT the last we’ve seen of Colin. He will eventually be dealt with. But for now, I want to focus on the boys being reunited. Give them some much needed one-on-one time.
Recovery

Chapter Summary

Jim is hospitalized following his rescue. Sebastian must explain a few things.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

TICK. TICK. TICK.

Time is a funny thing. It can fly by in the blink of an eye when you’re not expecting it. Conversely, if you stare at a clock, the minutes seem to stretch on at an excruciating rate.

TICK. TICK. TICK.

Sebastian had languished in the hospital waiting room for over an hour. He wanted to be by his husband’s side, but the doctors and nurses insisted that all non-medical personnel leave the room while they worked on him. They claimed they’d keep him informed of Jim’s status, but so far he’d heard nothing.

You’ll get through this, Mapgie. I know you will.

Moriarty was in rough shape when the sniper brought him in. Seb raced to the hospital as fast as he could, and even then, it felt like it took too long. He briefly considered calling in a helicopter to have him medevacked over, but quickly nixed the idea once he realized how much undue attention it would create. It was important that Jim maintain a low profile, lest the authorities take an interest.

TICK. TICK. TICK.

‘Please be okay’ became a mantra in his head. If the Irishman didn’t survive, hell would hath no fury like Sebastian Moran. His grief would be epic. Cataclysmic. Transcendent. He’d burn the world down in James Moriarty’s name.

The former colonel was so caught up in thought, he almost didn’t see it when Dr. Sanders, the primary physician who’d been treating Jim, came out to meet him.

“Mr. Jones?” the medic spoke, commanding his attention.

“Yes?” he answered to the pseudonym he’d provided at check-in.
“I’m here to update you on your husband’s condition. We’ve managed to stabilize him, but he’s not in the clear just yet.”

Seb nodded. **At least he’s alive.** That alone was something to celebrate.

“As you’re probably aware, his blood pressure is dangerously high. We’re doing everything possible to bring it down,” the practitioner assured. “Given his previous responsiveness to labetalol, I’ve put him on an IV of the drug. I also administered magnesium sulfate to reduce the likelihood of seizure. Additionally, he’s been placed on a saline drip to combat dehydration and is receiving intravenous vitamins as well. His body is extremely depleted of nutrients. In fact, I don’t believe he’s eaten in at least a week.” The physician paused for a moment to let the information settle. “How long did you say he was lost in the woods? Seven days?”

“Nine,” Sebastian whispered, aghast at the revelation. **Colin starved him. Starved a sickly, pregnant omega. My omega.**

Oh, how he regretted leaving their stalker alive. Once again, Sherlock fucking Holmes had found a way to inflict more pain and misery into his life. If he could do it over, he’d have splattered Colin’s brains across the goddamn wall.

“I performed an ultrasound and the twins were fine,” Dr. Sanders continued. “In serious cases of preeclampsia, there’s always the concern of it affecting blood flow and fetal growth, but thankfully, your children are measuring at normal size,” he noted. “As for the fall your mate took, they were unharmed by it.”

“Thank god,” the assassin breathed in relief. “Were they at all impacted by the lack of nutrition?”

“No as much as you’d think. During pregnancy, the fetus will take whatever it needs from its host. So even though your husband wasn’t able to eat, the babies were leeching vitamins and minerals from his body in order to sustain themselves. That’s why his system is so depleted right now.”

**My poor Magpie. Giving everything he could to our little ones.**

“Finally, regarding your spouse’s leg injury, there don’t appear to be any breaks. We’re dealing with a sprain, which is fortunate, because it yields a quicker recovery period. He will, however, have to stay off his feet for a bit.”

More good news— better than Moran had imagined. At this point, he wanted to shout from a mountaintop that Jim and the babies were okay.

“If you’d like to see him now, you can. Be aware that he’s sleeping, though, and could certainly use the rest.”

“Of course,” Seb agreed. “I do have one last question.”

“Go on.”

“I was wondering if I could bring him some food? Would that be allowed?”

“I don’t see why not,” the physician replied, “so long as it adheres to a low-sodium diet.”

“Excellent.” The wheels in the sniper’s head were turning. He knew just what Jim would like.

**********
It was the middle of the night when Sebastian entered Moriarty’s private room. He came bearing a number of takeout containers and a folding table brought from home. As he prepared to dish out a feast for them both, he stopped to glimpse his mate. This was the first he’d seen him since being forced to leave his side shortly after check-in.

He looks so worn down. Jim was pale, thin, and hooked up to multiple IVs. It hurt Seb’s heart to witness him in such a state. His deepest instincts commanded him to nurse the Irishman back to health.

Moran began plating a gourmet meal of prime rib, baked potato, and roasted vegetables. Two delectable slices of German chocolate cake would be their dessert.

“IT’S time for dinner, kitten.” He gently caressed the slumbering man’s arm and leaned down to place a kiss on his stubbled cheek.

“Mmm,” Jim hummed, slowly stirring. “What…where…” he trailed off, trying to make sense of his surroundings. “This is a hospital.”

“That’s right. I got you out of Colin’s house and brought you here. You’re safe now.”

The expression on Moriarty’s face was a combination of joy and relief. Even in his infirm state, he immediately moved to hug the assassin.

“I missed you terribly,” the mastermind cooed, finally feeling secure after nine days of torment.

“I missed you, too. I’d have done anything to get you back.” And in a way, he had, aligning himself with Holmes and Watson for the sole purpose of undertaking a rescue mission.

“It’s good to be back. My body wanted to quit, but I refused to allow it. You and the babies kept me going.” He paused, breaking their embrace to look Seb in the eye. “How are they?”

“Essie and Eddie are doing well. Their size is on target and their heartbeats are steady.”

The consulting criminal took comfort in the news. “I was so scared for them. Petrified they wouldn’t make it,” he confessed, shuddering at the memory. “I…I’m sorry, Tiger.”

“Sorry for what, love?”

“For storming off the way I did. If I hadn’t reacted like that, I never would’ve been kidnapped.”

“And if I hadn’t acted like such an arsehole, you wouldn’t have gone. It’s my fault you left in the first place. I should’ve trusted you, Jimmy.”

The couple gazed at one another for a moment, each realizing that the other blamed himself. Their guilt was a shared burden; a deadlock of sorts. Perhaps, then, they could concede that while both had made mistakes, the true menace was Colin.

“Sebby? Our stalker…is he…did you…”

The fiercely protective alpha knew what his mate was asking, and he wasn’t sure how to break the truth to him. There really was no way to explain it without admitting everything.

“Magpie, I brought food for us from The Savoy. How about I tell you what happened while we eat? No need to let our meal get cold.”

Jim peered at the spread that was set out, having already caught the scent in the air. “Is that prime
“You know it.” Sebastian smiled and passed his spouse a knife and fork. “There’s no au jus on account of your special diet, but it should still be delicious.”

The genius wasted no time digging in. He audibly moaned upon tasting the first bite. “This meat it so tender, it practically melts in my mouth.”

“It’s damn good,” Moran agreed.

A few minutes went by as the pair enjoyed their indulgent repast. Finally, Jim broached the topic of his rescue again. “So tell me what happened, Tiger.”

This was it, the moment Seb had dreaded. “How much do you remember from when I came to get you?”

“Not a whole lot. I was pretty out of it.”

The former colonel nodded. “I guess it’s up to me to fill in the blanks.” He paused, trying to decide where to start. “I searched for you ever since the night you didn’t come home. I went out investigating. I made phone calls. I even tracked down all the living persons on my suspect list and performed interrogations. Unfortunately, none of it got me any closer to finding you.”

“Well, we’re together now,” Moriarty remarked. “Something must’ve pointed you in the right direction.”

“More like someone.”

Intrigued, the mastermind furrowed a brow. “Oh?”

It was now or never. Sebastian took a deep breath. “I sought assistance from Sherlock Holmes. Pounded on his door at an ungodly hour and refused to leave until he agreed to help.”

Jim damn near choked on his baked potato. “Did I hear that correctly? You coerced Sherlock into doing your bidding, which, in this case, entailed retrieving me?”

“Yep.”

The dark-eyed omega erupted into uproarious laughter. “Sebby, that’s hilaaaarious.”

“So…you’re not mad?” The sniper was pleasantly surprised by his mate’s reaction.

“Mad? Heavens no. The idea of you commandeering his services for my benefit is priceless.”

“He wasn’t the only one involved. I got Watson on board as well. Recruited the two of them to be my backup when I raided Colin’s place.”

Moriarty hushed at the mention of his kidnapper’s name. “Him, yes. I learned plenty about Colin during my captivity. He liked to get drunk and ramble on at length.”

“So you know of our history?” Sebastian was ashamed that his sins of the past had nearly gotten Jim and their children killed.

“I do,” the genius confirmed. “That man was an absolute fucking loon. And a bit of a bigot, too. I can’t believe you were ever friends.”
“Guess I know how to pick ‘em,” the blonde bleakly replied. “For what it’s worth, he didn’t seem insane back then.”

Jim put his fork down and reached across the table to take Seb’s hand. “Sometimes it’s impossible to see who, or what, someone really is until it’s too late. I don’t blame you for his twisted vendetta. Not at all.”

“Oh, Magpie.” He leaned down and reverently kissed his husband’s knuckles. “Thank you.”

There was a time when the mastermind wouldn’t have been so understanding. A time when both of them were more hotheaded and less than kind. But that was years ago, when they were younger men. Though still incredibly flawed individuals, the couple now had the benefit of maturity on their side. They’d seen and experienced a great deal together and come out stronger for it. Sebastian was keen to remind himself of that as he readied to tell Jim the next part of the story.

“There’s something else you should know,” he uttered anxiously. “Colin is alive.”

The Irishman’s expression dropped like a rock and his eyes widened. “What? Why? Did he get away?”

“I was going to shoot the bastard, but Sherlock refused to let me kill him because he wanted Colin to be held accountable for Lisa’s death. Holmes insisted we tie him up and call the police. I didn’t want to go along with it, but I couldn’t waste time arguing with him—I needed to get you out of there,” he explained. “Colin’s probably sitting in jail right now.”

Moriarty went quiet as he processed the information. Seb never knew what to expect when his mate grew so silent. The inner-workings of the man’s mind were strange and mysterious, indeed.

“Good,” Jim declared at last. “Shooting him would’ve been too quick. Too clean. He should die, but not like that. He doesn’t deserve the luxury.”

*Interesting*, Moran thought. He hadn’t considered it that way before. Maybe his Magpie was right. Their stalker’s punishment ought to fit the crime. In this case, it would mean a painful and protracted death, commensurate to the hell he’d put them through for months.

Jim suddenly gasped and pulled his hand back, startled.

“What’s wrong?” the assassin asked with alarm in his voice. “Are you in pain?”

“I was put through the wringer for nine days straight,” he quipped. “Of course I’m in pain, but that’s beside the point. I just felt the babies move again.”


“I felt the first movements a few hours before you rescued me,” he said. “It was incredible, Tiger. I was at such a low point, wondering if they were even still alive, and then it happened. They started kicking, as if to tell me they were okay. It sounds unbelievable, but it’s true.”

“I believe it, Jimmy. I do.”

The men beamed at each other, basking in the simple joy of being a family. Pure, unfiltered love filled the space between them.
Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
An Extended Stay

Chapter Summary

Jim must endure an extended stay at the hospital. Thankfully, his husband Sebastian is on hand to help him through the experience.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Scroll. Scroll. Scroll. CLICK.

Daytime television is bloody awful, Sebastian thought as he shut off the tv. There were fifty-two channels available on the hospital’s cable hookup and nothing good was playing on a single one.

Seb sat back in his chair while waiting for Jim to finish up in the bathroom. His mind wandered, recalling the events of the past four days. It had been a whirlwind since Moriarty’s rescue.

The doctors were adamant that the Irishman not make plans to leave anytime soon. They wanted him to remain in their care indefinitely, but he wouldn’t hear of it. He refused to be cooped up for too long. So a compromise was struck. Jim would agree to stay there for a minimum of ten days, after which point, he’d return home under the proviso that he adhere to modified bedrest.

Moran was at his most dutiful, doing whatever he could to help his mate endure the tedium of hospital living. One of his first tasks had been to assist Jim as he showered and shaved. Apparently, even though there was a shower stall in his basement prison, he was only able to get limited use out of it due to his shackle being in the way. The mastermind was thrilled to finally take a proper shower and shear off the heavy stubble that had grown during his captivity. He was less enthused, however, by the fact that he could put very little weight on his sprained leg, or even lift it high enough to wash. Fortunately, Seb was more than willing to pitch in, scrubbing him anywhere he couldn’t reach.

Other measures the sniper had taken included arranging for gourmet meals to be delivered so that Jim would have better quality food, replacing the scratchy sheets on his bed with a silken variety, and keeping a well-maintained cache of reading materials on hand for his leisure.

Speaking of reading materials, the couple’s interest was piqued when a recent edition of The Daily Telegraph carried an article about Colin Taylor’s arrest in connection with the disappearance and murder of Lisa Abernathy. The media once again praised Sherlock Holmes for “solving” what was rapidly becoming a high-profile case. Moriarty and Moran were eager to follow the impending trial, both having their own ideas as to what his punishment should be.
At long last, the consulting criminal reemerged from the lavatory, crutching his way back to bed. Sebastian was quick to ease him into a comfortable position and reattach his blood pressure monitor. He disliked being hooked up to the thing, but at least he wasn’t saddled with IVs anymore.

“Thank you, Tiger. You take excellent care of me,” he purred. “Let me show you how grateful I am.” Jim gently stroked the larger man’s firm bicep and gazed at him with a come-hither gleam.

_Not this again._ Ordinarily, Seb would jump at such an offer, but right now he didn’t believe his husband was in good enough health for sexual activity. Yesterday’s encounter had certainly proven that.

It was late last night when Jim first propositioned him. The assassin was wary, but his Magpie could be mighty persuasive. He ultimately agreed under the condition that they not go all the way — it would just be a bit of harmless, affectionate fun. He really ought to have known better. One thing led to another, and what started as a heated make out session progressed into him pleasuring the mastermind in an area decidedly south of the mouth.

Oh, what a mistake that’d been. Jim reached his peak, all right — and the monitor did, too. A nurse came rushing in after hearing the medical equipment sound off. They scarcely had time to hide what they were doing, and played dumb when asked if they had any idea what might’ve caused Moriarty’s blood pressure to spike. Though no accusations were made, she eyed them suspiciously, almost as if she somehow knew what they’d done. It was mortifying.

“Come on, Sebby. Let’s play ‘Pin the Magpie.’” He grasped Moran’s hand and suggestively licked at his lover’s fingers.

The gorgeous alpha grunted, trying his damnedest to resist temptation. Jim knew how to drive him wild. Knew how much that hot, wet tongue turned him on. _Ugh._

“We shouldn’t, kitten. You remember what happened last time.”

“It’s okay. I’ll just remove the monitor while we go at it.”

“Jimmy…” His mate’s solution wouldn’t fix the real problem. This kind of activity would cause his heart rate and blood pressure to increase. Simply taking off the device so that it couldn’t be recorded didn’t change the imminent health risk.

Sebastian pulled his hand away. “I’m sorry, but we really can’t do this.”

Jim peered at him sadly, hurt by the perceived rejection. “You don’t want me.”

The former colonel shook his head. “No, that isn’t true. I always want you,” he stressed. “But you’re not well enough for sex, sweetheart. It’s dangerous and I won’t chance it.”

Moriarty sighed. “I know you’re right, I just…I’m so frustrated.” Pregnancy hormones were beginning to get the best of him. He never knew how he’d feel from one moment to the next. For someone who strongly valued being in control, these emotional fluctuations were maddening.

“Look at me, Jimmy.” And he did, brown eyes locking with blue. “I swear that when you’re back to full health, I will ravish you spectacularly. We’ll go through every position in the _Kama Sutra_, and then some. Maybe even invent a few new ones.”

The statement elicited a playful smirk from the smaller man. “I’ll hold you to that promise.”
“You’d better,” Seb teased, grinning in return.

A moment passed before Jim spoke again. “Soooo,” he drawled, “if we’re not going to fool around, do you think you could take me for a different kind of ride?”

Moran tilted his head, intrigued. “What did you have in mind?”

“I’m going stir crazy. I want you to wheel me out of here,” he replied, referring to the restriction his doctors had put him on. He was only permitted to walk as far as the bathroom. Any further than that and he had to use a wheelchair.

“Sure. This is a state-of-the-art facility,” the blonde noted. “It’s high time we took a tour.”

“We’ll stop at the cafeteria, too. I need hot chocolate.”

“You got it, hon.” Food at the hospital was abysmal, but they had a surprisingly good coffee bar that just so happened to serve Jim’s beloved cocoa.

Sebastian delicately maneuvered his husband off the bed and into the chair, rolling the blood pressure monitor alongside him. As they ventured out the door, he couldn’t help but feel a swell of happiness deep inside. Here he was, an alpha taking care of his expectant omega. It felt so right… so satisfying. This is what he was meant to do.

*********

“Sebby, I want to see the babies.” Of course, the mastermind didn’t mean his own, but rather the newborns in the maternity ward. He’d spotted a sign indicating that the area was down the hall.

“I’d like that, too.” The sniper hadn’t been around many babies before. Perhaps this could serve as a preview of what was to come.

Following the directions on the wall, they soon reached the nursery. It was a sight to take in. Behind a large glass window were rows of clear plastic cribs, each one containing a tightly swaddled bundle.

“Tiger, they’re so tiny,” Jim said in awe.

He was right, and for a brief moment, Seb thought back to what he’d recently learned about his brother’s career. I can’t believe Severin is a neonatal specialist, working with patients this size every day. They looked so fragile—he’d be afraid to handle them for fear of breaking something.

Moriarty was positively beaming as he stood up from his wheelchair to get a better view, leaning against Seb for support. “Imagine, in a few months Essie and Eddie will be in there. We’ll finally get to meet them.” He took a sharp breath, inhaling quickly. “Ooh, they know I’m talking about them,” he joyfully declared, grabbing Moran’s hand and placing it on his stomach. “Feel them?”

The assassin smiled widely. He definitely registered movement. “Magpie, that’s amazing.”

“It really is,” he agreed.

There was another kick, stronger this time.

“I think you’ve got future footballers in there.”

“Or dancers,” Jim suggested. “Practicing pirouettes as we speak.”
Sebastian chuckled. “Always a possibility.”

The two men gazed at each other adoringly, and for an instant, it was as though the rest of the world had fallen away. Nothing and no one existed except for their cherished family unit and the love shared therein.

The Irishman glimpsed the nursery again as something caught his eye. “Tiger, do you see that?”

He did. One of the infants had turned its head and was staring straight at Jim. It was truly precious.

The genius made a silly face in response, and the baby smiled back. Its chubby cheeks were scrunched while its little lips upturned. They were making a connection.

“Who knew I was married to the finest ‘baby whisperer’ in London?” Seb teased.

A remark like that would generally warrant a smart comeback from the mastermind, but not now. He was too enamored by the newborn to care.

“Cute, aren’t they?” a female voice suddenly spoke. It was a nurse approaching behind them.

“I’ve never seen anything sweeter,” Moriarty confessed.

She turned her attention to the happy couple. “You must be pretty far along, huh?”

“Actually, I’m only 22 weeks. I look bigger because we’re having twins.”

The woman’s face lit up at the news. “Twins? How exciting! It’s been some time since we’ve had a multiple birth here.”

The consulting criminal grinned with delight. “Yes, it is quite thrilling. I can’t wait.”

“Is this your first pregnancy?”

His cheeks flushed slightly. “It’s that obvious?”

“Nah, I’m just an old pro when it comes to reading these things. First-time parents have a certain glow about them,” she noted. “By the fourth or fifth kid, most of the magic’s worn off.”

Jim laughed. “You’re cynical, but honest. I like that.”

“Thank you, sir. It’s nice to be appreciated.”

Proceeding with her work, the medical assistant walked over to the door of the nursery and stepped inside. To Moriarty’s surprise, she picked up the baby who’d been smiling at him and carried the tiny bundle out in her arms.

“Where are you taking that one?” he asked, curious.

“This darling girl is due for a feed. We try to stay on schedule with these things. Establishing a nursing regimen is important for mama and baby both.”

“Oh,” Jim said, his voice wavering. “Okay.” He paused just a little too long between words, and though the woman didn’t seem to notice, Sebastian did.

After she’d gone, the mastermind averted his eyes down to the floor, no longer looking at the newborns. “Take me back to my room, Seb.” His tone was sullen, having lost the exuberance it
held only moments before.

“What’s wrong, Jimmy?” The former colonel knew his husband could be moody, but this shift was abrupt even for him.

“Nothing. Just help me into my chair and take me back.”

For the moment, Moran did as told. The last thing he wanted was to press the issue and risk upsetting his mate. But he wasn’t going to let it go forever. He would find out what was bothering him before the day was out.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Chapter Summary

Jim is going through some very personal issues. Sebastian is his rock, lending support as best he can.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“No, thanks,” Jim said, declining a ramekin of chocolate mousse.

This is serious, Sebastian thought. Not only had his husband been depressed all day, but tonight he’d barely touched dinner and now flat-out refused one of his favorite desserts. Though the sniper despised emotional confrontations, he realized it was time to address the elephant in the room.

Seb took a seat on the edge of the bed beside his moody mate. “All right, enough is enough. Talk to me, Jimmy. Something’s been bothering you since this afternoon and I want to know what it is.”

The consulting criminal eyed him somberly. “Please, let’s not do this.”

Moran reached over and grasped the man’s hand. “What did I tell you weeks ago? I said I wanted you to be open with me. Fill me in when you’re upset, and I’ll do my best to help you through whatever it is.”

Jim sighed. “It’s something stupid and irrational that hardly merits a mention.”

“If it troubles you, then it’s worth discussing. Let me take some of the burden off your shoulders.”

“You’ll laugh,” he whispered while looking away.

“Never, sweetheart. I promise.” The assassin gently stroked the Irishman’s cheek, encouraging him to face him. And he did, their gazes meeting once more.

“It’s…I…” Moriarty stammered. Gone was his usual poise, replaced by nervous hesitation. He took a breath and started again. “When we visited the babies earlier today, it was wonderful. Seeing them made me so happy, Seb. It really did.”

The blonde smiled warmly. “I know, Jimmy. I loved the sparkle it put in your eyes.”

“Yes, well, I was a fool.”
Seb shook his head. “No, kitten. Not at all. Why would you think that?”

“Because for just a moment, I let myself forget what I am. I felt pure, undiluted bliss, and it was bloody extraordinary.” He paused, squeezing Sebastian’s hand. “But then the medical assistant announced she was taking that adorable little girl out for a feed, and it sent me crashing back to earth.” The timbre of his voice began to falter, growing more distressed as he went on. “I remembered how I can’t do that. I can’t nurse our children.”

“Darling, it’s okay.” He moved to embrace his mate in a hug, and the smaller man didn’t fight it—he simply allowed himself to melt into his spouse’s arms.

It broke Seb’s heart to see Jim so distraught. They didn’t talk about it much, but the truth was that life could be difficult for a male omega. Collectively, men comprised only 20-25% of the total omega population and were faced with some unique biological challenges. Among those issues was an inability to nurse offspring due to a lack of sufficiently developed mammary glands.

“It didn’t used to bother me, but since I’ve felt Essie and Eddie move, things have changed,” Moriarty admitted, still clinging to Seb. “I like being a man and I’m thrilled to be their daddy. But at the same time, they’re growing inside me and have become an extension of myself. I feel as though I’m something more than a father to them and I wish I could nurse.”

“You’re beginning to feel like their mother,” Sebastian surmised, finally uttering the words his Magpie couldn’t bear to speak.

Jim nodded, resting his head on the sniper’s shoulder. “My instincts tell me to nurture them but my body won’t allow it. I’m a failure.”

The alpha continued to hold his hormonally-charged mate, rubbing his back in a soothing manner as he felt the man’s teardrops soak through his shirt.

“Hush now. You’re nothing of the sort. Not being able to nurse doesn’t change what you are to our babies. Plenty of women can’t or won’t breastfeed. It doesn’t make them any less of a mother to their children. The same is true for you.”

“Oh, Tiger. I love you. I’m sorry I’m such a mess these days. Everything gets me so worked up.”

“It’s fine, Jimmy. You’ve had a lot on your plate recently.”

Plate. Moran’s turn of phrase resonated with his expectant spouse in a sudden and unforeseen way. “Yes…yes, I have.” He paused. “Sebby?”

“Yeah?”

“At the risk of sounding highly suggestible, I think my appetite’s starting to come back. I’m ready for that mousse.”

The assassin smiled, standing up from the bed to retrieve the ramekin. “Bon appétit, my fair Magpie.”

**********

The next few days flew by quickly for London’s second most dangerous man. After Jim confessed his personal struggles to him, the sniper felt compelled to lift his spirits. He decided that a grand gesture was in order and he knew exactly where to begin: the twins’ playroom.
Numerous secret phone calls and text messages took place, all with the goal of fulfilling his husband’s decorating dreams. He’d previously described how he wanted the area to look, and that was the blueprint Sebastian worked off of. Dozens of laborers were hired to focus day and night on the project. Time was of the essence, as it needed to be finished for Moriarty’s impending arrival.

So far, everything was shaping up nicely. A lavish mural of a branching oak tree was painted on the walls, ornately carved toy chests were installed, child-size velvet sofas and chaises were arranged, and an extra-large shelving unit intended for stuffed animals was erected. It was an impressive sight that served as a fitting companion to the already-completed nursery.

In addition, Seb had one more surprise up his sleeve. The playroom’s pièce de résistance was to be a functioning replica of the carousel at Kensington Gardens. It was rare, expensive, and thoroughly indulgent. Jim would love it.

Sebastian couldn’t wait to bring his Magpie home. He still felt terrible about the argument they’d had just prior to the Irishman’s abduction and wanted to show him how truly sorry he was. The only aspect he had trepidation over was how Moriarty would react to the news that he’d infiltrated his private office drawer. Under the circumstance, he hoped the genius would be lenient.

Two more days. If all went according to plan, he’d soon have his family back where they belonged. Hallelujah.

*********

Sebastian returned to the hospital late in the afternoon. Though he sometimes ran errands during the day, his nights were dedicated solely to Jim. Their increased quality time together was precious to them both.

The former colonel frowned upon finding his husband’s room empty. The man wasn’t in bed, nor was he in the attached bathroom. His wheelchair and shoes were missing, too.

Oh no. Seb grew panic-stricken, instantly flashing back to his nightmare from several weeks earlier. Had something happened while he was out? Surely he’d have been notified if it did? His heart raced as he imagined the worst.

Moran rushed to the nurse’s station, flagging down a lady behind the desk. “Excuse me, I’d like to know where the man in room 102 has gone?”

She glanced up from her computer screen. “I’m sorry, sir, but I’m not at liberty to disclose patient information.”

His eyes widened with fury. “You can bloody well disclose it to me! He’s my husband! My mate! My everything!” Seb was shouting now, rapidly approaching full-blown hysterics. “I need to know if he’s okay, or—”

“Still in the land of the living, Tiger,” a familiar voice spoke.

The sniper turned around and saw Jim wheeling down the hall. He immediately ran over to meet him, administering a hug so fierce, it nearly knocked the omega from his seat.

“Easy does it, love. I’m right here.”

“Thank god. When I couldn’t find you, I was so worried. Where were you?” he asked as he escorted him back to his room.
“They sent me to orthopedics to evaluate the progress of my leg injury.”

“And how did that go?

“It’s healing, but they don’t think I’ll be able to walk on it for another month,” the mastermind answered.

“That’s okay. There’s a wheelchair waiting for you at home. And thank goodness for the elevator we installed last year— you won’t have to struggle with using stairs.”

Moriarty peered at him. “You’ve already bought a chair?”

“Yes, I ordered it on account of your bedrest restrictions.”

“Ugh, don’t remind me. Not looking forward to those.”

Sebastian smiled, noticing the cute way Jim crinkled his nose. “It won’t be all bad,” he assured. “You’ll have me at your beck and call, catering to your every whim.”

“I’ve already got that,” he dryly remarked.

“I suppose you do, sir,” the assassin said with a wink. Sometimes the best way to counter Jim’s grumpiness was by being playful.

“Acting as the good little soldier, are we?”

“Maybe.”

“There’s no ‘maybe’ about it. You either are or you aren’t.”

“And if I was?”

Their eyes locked intensely as Jim’s smoldering stare threatened to set Seb ablaze. “If you were,” the Irishman intoned, “then I’d give you a few orders right here and now.”

“Such as?”

“I’d insist that you take off your clothes and let me lick every inch of your magnificent body.”

Moran growled with lust and frustration. Lots and lots of frustration. “Magpie…you know we can’t.”

“I ache for you, Sebastian. I doooo.”

They were at a stalemate. The heat between them was as fiery as ever, but the sniper would not relent. He didn’t fault his husband for making such bold advances— it was clear that hormonal fluctuations were fueling many of Moriarty’s actions these days. But even still, he could not give in. Above all else, Jim’s health came first.

“You’ve the fortitude of a saint, Tiger.”

“Thank god one of us does.”

Jim sighed. “Soooo…what do you want to do instead?”

Seb considered the question for a moment. Obviously, they both needed something to calm their
libidos down. “How about we stream a movie?”

“Fine by me. I get to pick the film.”

“Of course, darling. But please make sure it’s nothing too…stimulating.”

Just for that, Jim made him watch a five-hour PBS production of “War and Peace.”

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Home Again

Chapter Summary

Jim finally comes home and Sebastian has some surprises for him.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Today was the day. Jim’s requisite hospitalization had come to an end and Sebastian could finally bring him home. It was especially exciting for the consulting criminal, as he’d not been back there since his abduction. Nineteen days away was far too long.

Moran carried the man bridal-style up the walkway and through the double-doors of their sprawling mansion. Once inside, he carefully sat him in his brand new wheelchair.

“How do you like it?” the handsome blonde asked, taking a seat opposite his husband.

“Not bad. It’s better cushioned than the one at the hospital.”

“Good, that was the point of buying a luxury model. Maximum comfort for my Magpie.”

Jim nodded and began glancing around. “On the drive over, you mentioned there’d be a surprise for me,” he recalled. “Nothing looks different, though, and I don’t see any packages.”

*My sweet, impatient kitten.* “My gift to you is in another room. I think you’re really going to enjoy it.”

“Well, let’s not dawdle. Take me to it.”

*Always so eager.* “I appreciate your enthusiasm, Jimmy. But before I show you what it is, I’d like to get something off my chest.”

Moriarty grinned impishly. “I’d like to get something off your chest, too, but when last I checked, you’d sworn a vow of celibacy.”

Seb chuckled. “Very funny. I’m trying to be serious, though. There’s a matter I want to discuss so that I can get it out of the way and not have it looming overhead.”

The mastermind let out an exasperated sigh. “All right, fine. What is it you’re so keen to tell me?”

For weeks, Sebastian imagined how he’d explain his breach of privacy to Jim. Now that the
moment had arrived, he felt a flood of anxiety wash over him.

“Well?” the Irishman urged. “If you’ve got something to say, spit it out already.”

At that, he forged on. “While you were gone, I picked the locked drawer in your office.”

There, he’d said it. He’d confessed—

SLAP.

A loud smack reverberated through the air as Jim’s palm made direct contact with the sniper’s cheek.

“How DARE you!” he shouted furiously. “You had no right to go through my things! That drawer was locked for a reason!”

“It was wrong, I know. But please let me explain.”

“Explain? What reason could you have possibly had for committing such an egregious violation of privacy?!”

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

The wireless blood pressure monitor Jim agreed to wear upon release from the hospital began sounding off.

“Calm down, hon. For the babies’ sake, try to relax.”

“How do you expect me to be calm after what you’ve just told me? I’m supposed to accept this without issue? No, it doesn’t work that way! I trusted you, Seb.”

“It’s so important that you understand why I did it. Please hear me out.”

Moriarty glared at his mate. “Speak.”

“After you went missing, I thought maybe you were with someone you’d recently been in contact with. I tried to check your phone, but it was password protected. I knew your computer was, too. So that didn’t leave me with many options. I broke into your drawer as a last resort.” Sebastian paused, noticing that the monitor had stopped beeping and Jim’s expression had softened a bit. “I honestly believed it might contain information that would help me find you. I had your interests at heart. You know I’d do anything in service to your continued safety.”

“Sebby, I…” he looked downward, absently fidgeting with his watch.

“I wanted to tell you this so that there would be no secrets between us.”

“Right. So if you’ve been in the drawer, then you’ve seen everything. Seen what I was hiding.” He still averted his gaze, refusing to meet Seb in the eye.

“I saw some wonderful things,” the sniper replied. “Beautiful, heartfelt mementos that I never realized you’d kept.”

“Sentimental rubbish is all,” he dismissed.

“I thought it was fantastic, especially the wedding photo.” Seb hesitated for a beat, adding, “I accidentally dropped it and broke the frame.”
That got Moriarty to glance up, and when he did, Moran saw there were tears welling in his dark brown eyes. “You broke it?”

“It’s okay, Jimmy. I replaced the frame,” he assured. “But when it shattered—”

“You found the letter hidden inside.” The consulting criminal was nothing if not astute. He knew where this was headed.

“I did,” Sebastian acknowledged. “I read it, and it was breathtaking. Nobody’s ever written me something like that before. Your words were beautiful beyond measure.”

“I meant all of it.”

“I know, love. I know.”

“You’re also aware of what I’ve been planning…with your brother and the party.”

He nodded. “Yes, and I was gobsmacked by it. Threw me for a total loop.”

“I wanted to give you something special,” the mastermind declared. “After what you’ve given me,” he said, motioning to his belly, “it was the least I could do.”

Suddenly, Seb found himself incredibly affected by his omega’s admission. He leaned in and kissed him on the lips, a move which Jim was eager to accept. When he broke from their embrace, only one question remained. “Ready for your gift?”

“Completely and utterly.”

*********

Sebastian brought Moriarty to the playroom, insisting that the genius shut his eyes until being told to open them. Begrudgingly, he complied.

“You can look now, kitten.”

What Jim saw left him in awe. Everything was decorated just as he’d imagined when planning it out in his mind. From the muted color scheme to the placement of furniture, it was perfect.

“When did you have time to do this?” he marveled.

“I hired people to work on the room while you were in the hospital. It was a round-the-clock effort to get it done.”

“Thank you, Sebby, really. This is amazing.”

The consulting criminal wheeled his way toward a large structure concealed by a tarp. “What’ve you got here?”

Moran grinned widely. “Glad you asked.” Rather than simply tell Jim what it was, he opted to show him instead. With a swift tug, the covering was removed, revealing the carousel in all its glory.

Moriarty stared in stunned silence, his face a portrait of indescribable wonder. A million questions ran through his head, but the only one that came out was, “How?”

“I tracked down someone who owned a replica of the merry-go-round at Kensington Gardens.
Then I made them an offer they couldn’t refuse. It was a fairly straightforward transaction.”

The Irishman gazed at his lover with huge, glimmering eyes. “Can we ride it?” he asked in a hopeful, almost childlike manner.

“Certainly. That is the point, after all.”

Sebastian lifted Jim up and placed him on a carousel bench. “I know the horses are enticing, but I figured that for now, it’d be safer to stick with a bench seat.”

The smaller man nodded in agreement. “You’re right, Tiger. I don’t think it’s wise to try mounting one of those in my current condition.”

Once Moriarty was settled in, the sniper began tinkering with the ride’s control panel. A few buttons were pressed, and suddenly the machine came alive. Lights switched on and cheerful music played as the merry-go-round slowly started to turn.

Sebastian quickly hopped on while the ride’s pace was still building. He nestled beside Jim, putting an arm around him protectively. “This is set on a timer, so it will eventually stop by itself. No need to man it from the sidelines.”

The mastermind radiated with delight. “This is brilliant, Tiger,” he enthused. “I can’t thank you enough. You’ve made my day.”

Hearing that was the best reward Seb could’ve hoped for. He treasured moments like these, taking mental snapshots of them so he’d have something good to think about during dark times.

“I can’t wait until Essie and Eddie are big enough to ride with us,” the genius excitedly remarked. “I know they’ll adore it as much as I do.”

Jim’s statement got his husband thinking. “Magpie?”

“Yes, dear?”

“What is it you like about the Kensington Gardens carousel? There are a lot of merry-go-rounds out there. Why is this one special to you?”

“Well,” Moriarty said, snuggling as close to Sebastian as possible, “it’s my first memory.”

“No kidding?”

“Yeah. When I was a little boy, my mum travelled to London a lot. Sometimes she’d bring me along and we’d stop at Kensington Gardens. We’d ride the carousel together and then go for ice cream. It was nice.”

“Sounds like it, darling.” The former colonel was always interested to hear anecdotes from his mate’s childhood. Jim rarely discussed the early parts of his life, particularly in regard to his parents.

“Sebby, how about we do that after we’re done here?”

“Get ice cream?”

The Irishman nodded. “I would loooove a hot fudge sundae with all the trimmings.”

“Far be it from me to deny such a vital request.” He turned to kiss the top of Jim’s head and smiled,
savoring the bliss that had come back into his life. His home and heart were complete again.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
It’d been approximately two weeks since Jim’s return from the hospital and already he was faring better than expected. Seb wasn’t surprised because he knew how determined his mate could be when he set his mind to something, but the doctors certainly were impressed.

The consulting criminal hated being confined to a wheelchair, and so he practiced walking around a little bit more each day. He was beginning to split his time half-and-half between crutches and the chair, defying predictions that he wouldn’t regain mobility for at least a month. His goal was to move away from the wheelchair and eventually only use crutches, then downgrade to a cane, and after that, walk with no assistance at all. It was an ambitious recovery plan, but if anyone could do it, it was James Moriarty.

He’d improved in other ways as well. The Irishman had taken up learning breathing techniques to help reduce the incidence of sudden blood pressure spikes. Though meditation and relaxation didn’t come easily to him, he was making a concentrated effort to try his best. He had strong motivation for this—if he could maintain a steady rate, Sebastian would have sex with him again. It was a compelling impetus, to be sure.

Outside developments were happening, too. The couple regularly watched the news and had been following the case against Colin Taylor. Some startling information came to light in the wake of his arrest. It was reported that when the police ran his fingerprints through their system, matches popped up linking him to the scene of various unsolved crimes that’d taken place within the past decade. Court proceedings were temporarily stalled while the authorities worked to determine just how many charges they could level against him.

Jim and Seb sought to enact their own brand of justice. The duo discussed the possibility of going after him once the twins were born. If Colin was to be taken down, Moriarty would damn well be there for the proceedings. In his current state, however, it wasn’t safe to enter into such a
dangerous situation.

But never mind that— the details could be hammered out later. Right now, all the mastermind wanted was a long, luxurious soak in the hot tub with his gorgeous husband.

“Kitten,” the sniper’s voice called, “it’s ready.”

Jim eagerly entered the bathroom, delighted by what he saw. There was a steamy bubble bath drawn, softly dimmed lights, and Sebastian wearing only a towel. It was a true trifecta of wonders.

“You sure you’re allowed to wear the monitor in here?” he asked.

“It should be fine. It’s supposed to be waterproof like my watch.”

“Let’s hope so.” At that, Moran dropped the towel around his waist, leaving him completely bare. “Need me to help you in?”

The genius was immediately rendered speechless, unable to focus on anything besides the godlike nude body standing in front of him. Seb was absolutely stunning.

“Jim? You okay?”

“Uh…yeah. Yeah, I’m good,” he hurriedly muttered. “I can do it myself.”

“All right. I’ll get in first and then you ease onto my lap.”

Moriarty nodded as he started to remove his silken bathrobe. He shrugged the material off his shoulders and then stopped, suddenly overcome by a pang of self-consciousness.

Seb, now situated in the tub, noticed his spouse’s hesitation. “Something the matter?”

“Not really, I just…”

“What?”

Though the Irishman tried to suppress his embarrassment, his cheeks flushed tellingly. “You look amazing,” he coyly admitted. “And I don’t.”

Moran peered at him quizzically. “What are you talking about?”

“You know what I mean. Don’t patronize me, Sebastian.”

“I’m afraid you’ve flown right over my head. I honestly don’t have a clue what you’re trying to say.”

Jim sighed in frustration and flung his robe all the way off. “Now do you get it?” he demanded.

“No. The only thing I see is the love of my life standing on a cold marble floor when he ought to be in a hot bath with me. You’re missing out. Come on.”

“Sebby…you truly don’t see what’s wrong? You’re not disgusted by the weight I’ve put on since I got back?”

“Not in the slightest,” he assured his anxious mate. “You were starved during your ordeal and have finally been able to catch up to where you should be.”
“I know, but—”

“No ‘buts’ about it. You’re nearly six months pregnant. If you weren’t gaining, I’d be alarmed. Now get in here.”

“Okay.” The genius complied, positioning himself on Seb’s lap and laying back against the man’s chest. After a few moments, he calmed, his tension dissipating like fog on a mirror.

“God, you smell good,” Moran remarked, catching Jim’s scent as he lingered so tantalizingly close to him.

“Careful, Tiger. Keep it up and I might start to think you’re interested in me.”

“You know I am.”

“Not lately.”

The assassin frowned. “I just worry about your health. I don’t want to be the reason you suffer some horrible medical setback. Remember what happened at the hospital?” He still blamed himself for Jim’s blood pressure flare up. If he’d exercised a modicum of restraint and not gotten carried away when they were fooling around, the incident never would’ve occurred.

“Take it as a compliment, dear. You suck cock so well, it throws me into a fit. That’s a bloody accolade.”

Sebastian couldn’t help but laugh. His spouse had a unique way of looking at things sometimes. “Yes, perhaps from a certain perspective. But I care about you too much to risk doing harm.”

“My sweet Tiger…forever my protector,” Moriarty mused. “It’s funny to think that years ago, we used to fuck like blood-soaked rabbits—hard, fast, and with a fair bit of grime. Now look at us. We’re downright serene. What happened?”

“We started making love,” he said. “And it was better than anything else that came before.” He took Jim’s hand into his own, lacing their fingers together in a show of intimacy. “Fucking is easy—anyone can do it. But making love requires something more. It’s raw, and honest, and without shame. Definitely not for the faint of heart.”

“Sebby, darling? You never had shame to begin with.”

Moran grinned. “Maybe not, but you get my point.”

“I do,” he replied, lifting their interlocking hands to kiss Seb’s knuckles. “I miss it…miss being with you like that.”

“Me, too.” It wasn’t an exaggeration to say he wanted Jim all the time—he had a passion for him rivaled by no other.

“Tiger,” the consulting criminal whispered, “I’ve been practicing breathing techniques to help regulate my blood pressure. Perhaps we could test out how well they work.”

It was a very tempting offer. Also, a good way to assess Jim’s progress.

“We’ll stop if your monitor goes off,” Seb announced, making his ground rule loud and clear.

Moriarty smiled giddily. His partner was willing to entertain the physical side of their relationship again. This was wonderful.
But who would make the first move?

Sebastian quickly answered that question as he began showering the Irishman’s neck and shoulder with kisses. He ran his tongue along the smooth stretch of skin, suckling a spot just above the collarbone.

“Mmm.” Jim carefully guided Seb’s hand below the water’s sudsy surface and onto the hardness that pulsed between his legs. He let out a faint moan as his alpha’s fingers wrapped around him, thrusting upward in search of friction.

“I need more,” the omega hungrily proclaimed.

“So do I.”

The sniper changed position, shifting so that Jim was pinned beneath him. He swooped down and seized the smaller man’s mouth, their tongues meeting in a fevered rush.

Ever eager, Moriarty ran a hand across the broad expanse of his husband’s chest. He captured one of Seb’s nipples, rolling the sensitive bud between his forefinger and thumb. Sebastian grunted at the touch and bucked his hips, grinding their erections together as he devoured Jim’s mouth.

With a reluctant whimper, the mastermind broke their kiss so that he could steady his breathing. He inhaled and exhaled at controlled intervals, ensuring his blood pressure would not crest too high.

“What do you think, Tiger? No beeps.”

Moran eyed him rapturously, his formidable arousal straining against Jim. “We need to take this to the bedroom now.”

The blonde didn’t wait for a response—instead, he simply lifted Moriarty into his arms and stepped out of the tub. Dripping wet, he stole another heated kiss from his dearest Magpie before speaking again. “I have a promise to keep.”

“Damn right, you do. I’m owed a ravishing.”

Jim would soon collect on that vow. Collect all night long.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian spend the day together.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jim was nesting and Seb was slowly being driven mad. Whenever the mastermind wasn’t on a conference call for work, he was rearranging and reorganizing things around the house. Suddenly, items that had always been kept in a specific spot were nowhere to be found. The other day, Sebastian spent ten minutes searching for hand towels. When he finally located them, they were situated where the blankets used to be.

There was no consistency to the placement, either. Just when he thought he knew where something was, it would be moved around again later. He had to remind himself that Jim wasn’t trying to gaslight him— biological instinct was the driving force behind his actions. Even still, it was damn frustrating.

“Breakfast is ready,” Seb announced. The sniper had prepared blueberry pancakes and scrambled eggs.

Moriarty crutched his way out of the bedroom. He was ambling slowly, struggling with his movements. By the time he reached the table, he was noticeably winded.

Sebastian pulled out a chair and guided him into the seat. “Darling, I know you want to be mobile, but those crutches seem to be doing more harm than good. Maybe you ought to reconsider what Dr. Swenson suggested.”

At Jim’s most recent appointment with the obstetrician, she’d seen how much difficulty the crutches were giving him. The weight of his belly was throwing off his center of gravity, making movement more laborious. She recommended he switch to a walker instead, because it would provide greater stability.

“Seb, I refuse to shuffle around like someone’s grandad. I’m thirty-eight, not eighty-eight.”

“I know, kitten. I just hate seeing you struggle. A walker would make things easier.”

“No,” he sharply replied. “And that’s final.”
Moran sighed. “All right, fine.” The assassin had learned a long time ago that it was pointless to argue with Jim once he’d made up his mind. The man was a paradox in that sense— he could be wildly changeable in some regards, yet stubborn as a mule about other things.

The consulting criminal ogled the food on the table. “This looks delicious, Tiger. Any chance you might be able to slip me a bit of sausage on the side?” Moriarty didn’t realize how dirty his statement sounded until the words had already left his mouth.

Sebastian smirked. “If you’re a good boy, I’m sure something could be arranged.”

“I suppose I walked into that one,” Jim admitted with a laugh.

“Yep, you did,” the dashing blonde agreed as he dished out their morning meal. He loaded his Magpie’s plate with a generous portion of eggs, wanting to make sure the expectant omega got enough protein in his diet.

Midway through breakfast, Seb posited a question. “What are your plans for today?”

“I thought I might organize a few things around here,” he answered, causing the sniper to internally cringe.

“What if I made you a better offer?”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, it just so happens that I’ve blocked some time out for us to go shopping.”

“Oh reeeealllly?” His interest was piqued.

The former colonel smiled. “Yes, really. I know how you love to shop, but haven’t been able to do it in person lately. I think you deserve a hands-on spree.”

For a moment, the genius’s dark eyes sparkled with excitement. Quickly, though, the magic faded. “Sebby…I’d like to go, but I’d never be able to get around properly. Even if I used the wheelchair and had you assist me, it wouldn’t work because of the crowds. There wouldn’t be enough room to move freely.”

“Who said anything about crowds?”

Jim stared at him incredulously. “London has a huge population, dear. The shopping districts are always swarming with people. I shouldn’t have to explain that— you’ve lived here for ages.”

“The store I had in mind won’t be busy at all,” Moran assured.

“Wishful thinking. Every store in this city is perpetually swamped.”

“Not when you rent the shop out for private use.”

The Irishman raised an eyebrow in surprise. “Ooh, has Tiger been up to some tricks?”


“Tell me more,” he encouraged. Vigor had returned to his voice.

“Okay. After placing a few phone calls and paying a considerable fee, I was able to secure three hours of uninterrupted time at Mon Petit Amour. The manager will temporarily close the boutique
to the public so that we can navigate the premises without issue.”

Jim’s expression grew gleeful. “Mon Petit Amour? Really, Seb? You’re not putting me on? Because if this is a joke, I promise I’ll punch your lights out. Not even kidding. I’ll see to it that you’re well concussed.”

The sniper chuckled. He enjoyed making his husband happy, and right now, threats aside, the mastermind was definitely pleased. Moran knew he would be. Mon Petit Amour was one of the most exclusive baby-related shops in England. It sold designer clothing, toys, and accessories. To say the place was posh would be an understatement. Even members of the royal family had been spotted there.

“It’s no joke, I swear,” Seb affirmed.

“What time are we scheduled for?”

“Noon—3 p.m.”

“We’ve got some time to kill, then.”

“Yes, there’s no hurry.”

A devilish smile crept across Jim’s face. “Fancy a bath after breakfast? The new loofah I ordered came in yesterday.”

“Sounds wonderful, kitten.”

*********

Mon Petit Amour was a godsend according to James Moriarty. He wanted absolutely everything he saw. Each item seemed better, and more expensive, than the last. It was heaven.

“Seb, this place is awesome. Thank you again for bringing me here.”

“You’re welcome, Jimmy,” the alpha said while pushing his wheelchair-bound mate through the formalwear department.

Moriarty gasped. “Tiger, look!”

And Sebastian did, stopping to view the display that had so rapidly caught Jim’s attention. Immediately, he understood why. It was an assortment of miniature, infant-sized suits.

“Sebby, these are adoorable! Imagine how dapper Eddie would look in a suit. He’d be the handsomest baby in London.”

The assassin stifled a laugh. Their children weren’t even born yet, and Jim was already envisioning them as tiny fashion plates. He had to admit, though, it was a precious mental image.

“I want one of each,” the consulting criminal declared. “Add them to the list.”

“Yes, sir.” In addition to escorting his spouse throughout the store, Moran was tasked with keeping an inventory of everything Moriarty wished to purchase. Once they finished making the rounds, he’d present the list to the clerk who would have the items packaged up and delivered to their home.

“Let’s see what kind of accessories they’ve got,” the Irishman spoke. “Suspenders and woolen caps
would be so whimsical, don’t you think?”

“If it makes you happy, Magpie, then I think it’s great.”

“Happy? It positively *thrills* me,” he proclaimed. “Now come on. Get the lead out.”

“Aye aye, love.” Like a good soldier, Sebastian did as he was told.

*********

Three hours and several thousand dollars later, Jim and Seb decided to take a rest. The couple sat at the food court of a shopping plaza, relaxing as they shared an extra-large lemonade.

“I’m bloody exhausted,” the omega complained.

“Me, too. I could go for a long nap right about now.”

“I hate to admit it, but I think the doctors may have been right to put me on bedrest restriction. I’m too old and pregnant for these kinds of excursions.”

“Hey, I’m the one who’s turning forty soon,” the former colonel reminded. “If you’re old, what does that make me?”

Jim smiled cheekily. “Methuselah, my sweet. How does it feel to have actually been present during the writing of *The Bible*?”

“Ha-ha, very funny. I’m not ready for the retirement home just yet.”

“I should hope not,” the genius replied. “There’s plenty more I intend to do with you before you’re put out to pasture.” He paused for a moment, considering something. “Seb, while we’re on the subject, your birthday is coming up shortly. We should discuss the particulars.”

“Okay. If you’ve got any questions, ask away.”

“All right. How about music? The DJ will play whatever we tell him to.”

“That’s a no-brainer—70s and 80s rock. Preferably songs I can dance to.”

“Planning to cut a rug, are we?”

“Of course. It wouldn’t be a party without some patented Moran dance moves.”

The consulting criminal sighed wistfully. He knew those moves well. A shame he wouldn’t be able to participate. “Guess I’ll have to admire you from afar. My dancing days are on hiatus until further notice.”

*Jim can’t dance on account of his restrictions.* It should’ve been obvious from the outset, but somehow that salient point hadn’t occurred to Sebastian until now.

“Perhaps after the festivities, I could give you a private performance,” the blonde proposed.

“Mmm,” Moriarty hummed. “It’s been a while since you’ve put on a show.”

“Too long.” Seb eyed his husband enticingly. “I seem to recall literally charming the pants off you with a few of my moves.”
“What can I say, Tiger? I’m a sucker for a good striptease.”

“Oh, I’m well aware.”

Jim took a deep breath. “We’d best get this conversation back on topic or else we’ll never get the details sorted,” he said.

“Okay, what more is there?"

“The food. Appetizers will include crudité, bruschetta, and spinach-stuffed mushrooms. The main dishes will be Beef Wellington and broiled lobster, served with garlic roasted potatoes and braised carrots. As for dessert, I’m going to prepare a multi-tiered chocolate layer cake,” the Irishman stated. “Is there anything you’d like added to the menu?”

Seb pondered the possibilities. “Would you be terribly offended if I requested cocktail weenies? I know you’re not supposed to eat processed meats on your special diet.”

“Being a processed meat isn’t the problem. I’d be offended because cocktail weenies are among the most lowbrow edibles in existence,” he snidely remarked. “But if it’s what you want, so be it. Anything else?”

“I like macaroni salad,” he noted. “And pork rinds.”

“Sebastian, sweetie, I love you…but dear lord, do your tastes scream ‘poor white trash.’ I’d have thought that after all these years with me, my palate might’ve rubbed off on you, but I guess not.”

He shrugged. “A leopard can’t change its spots.”

“Or a tiger his stripes,” Jim said with a grin.

The sniper smiled back warmly. “That, too.”

Moriarty stopped to take a sip of lemonade before speaking again. “Hey, Sebby?”

“Yes?”

“All this talk of food has made the babies hungry.”

“Has it now?”

“Indeed. I think we ought to finish up this discussion over a late lunch/early dinner.”

“I’m game for that. What’d you have in mind?”

“Me? I have no opinion on it whatsoever, buuuut,” he drawled, “the babies would adore a slab of ribs.”

Seb chuckled. “And you say my tastes are unrefined? I doubt you’ll see ribs served at a high-society event anytime soon.”

“Tiger, darling? I’m tired, hungry, and hormonal. Kindly shut that luscious mouth of yours and take me to a barbecue restaurant.”

The blonde nodded, knowing it was best not to push his luck in a situation like this. “There’s a rib joint a few blocks from here that I’ve heard good things about.”
“Then let’s not dally. Essie and Eddie are getting impatient.”

*Essie and Eddie, yeah right.* Moran wanted to roll his eyes, but he dared not risk antagonizing his ornery omega.

“Understood, my love.” Oh, the things he put up with. Really, though, it was all worth it. Since Jim’s ordeal, he treasured every moment they spent together, as if each second was a rare and precious gift.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Strange Tidings

Chapter Summary

Sebastian receives a surprising request.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sebastian had been granted a reprieve. Instead of neurotically reorganizing household items, his nesting omega was now preoccupied by nonstop baking. In preparation for crafting the sniper’s birthday cake, Jim began experimenting with various recipes as a skill-building exercise. Though already a talented baker, he sought to achieve mastery of the art.

“Everyone at headquarters loved the key lime cupcakes, hon.”

“As well they should. It was an outstanding batch.”

DING-DONG. The doorbell chimed.

“I’ll get it,” Seb volunteered. He expected it to be the delivery of some new baby-related product Jim had ordered. To his surprise, a young man in a business suit stood before him.

“Excuse me, sir. I’m looking for Sebastian Moran.”

“That’s me,” he replied. “What’s this about?”

“Under the authority of the Crown Prosecution Service, I’ve been sent to present you with formal documentation regarding the case against Colin Taylor. You’ll need to sign for the letter.”

The assassin was dumbfounded. “What exactly does this documentation entail?”

“I really don’t know, sir. I’m interning with CPS. They don’t tell me the specifics.”

“Right,” Seb muttered as he signed for the mail.

“Good day, sir.”

Envelope in hand, Moran shut the door and sat down at the kitchen table where Jim was whisking meringue.

“I was just served an official letter pertaining to Colin’s legal proceedings.” The statement felt
strange as it left his mouth—he couldn’t understand why he was being contacted. The police were
unaware of Moriarty’s kidnapping. Why, then, would a judicial office be reaching out to him?

“Don’t just sit there,” the consulting criminal urged. “Open it.”

Sebastian did, and what he read shocked the hell out of him.

“According to this, Colin has been refusing to cooperate with authorities. He’s not spoken a word to
anyone, and was recently remanded to a psychiatric facility for evaluation.”

“They’ve certainly managed to keep that aspect hidden from the press,” Jim remarked. “But what’s
that got to do with you?”

“Well, apparently he broke his silence to request a private meeting with me. He claims he’ll
confess to his crimes if an unsupervised visit is arranged. Of course, they can’t force me to agree to
it, but they’re formally suggesting that I do.”

The mastermind contemplated this new information. “Interesting proposal. What do you want to
do?”

Seb shook his head. “Honestly, I don’t know. I didn’t think I’d see him again in person until we
went after him,” he admitted. “I can’t imagine why he’d wish to meet with me at this point.”

“Could be unfinished business,” Moriarty mused.

“Yeah.” Unfinished business. The notion struck a chord with the sniper. “There are a few things I’d
like to ask him myself, actually.”

“So do it. Go in there and call his bluff. Make him tell you everything you want to know.”

It was tempting. But a part of him was hesitant. He remembered all too well the last time one of
them had agreed to a meeting under dubious circumstances.

“Magpie, this situation…it vaguely reminds me of when you met with Eurus Holmes. Look what
happened with her. Mind games were all that bitch was good for.”

“That was a unique case,” the genius noted. “I didn’t know who or what I’d be dealing with on
arrival. You, however, have been fully apprised of what you’ll be walking into. You’ve dealt with
this man before and have the benefit of familiarity on your side.”

The former colonel paused as he considered his spouse’s advice. Perhaps Jim was correct and he
did have the upper hand. He could go in there with his head held high, confident that Colin had no
power over him. He’d not allow himself to be manipulated by the madman.

“Thank you, Jimmy.”

“For what?” he asked, hobbling towards the refrigerator to take out a chilled pie crust.

“For your good sense and wisdom. I appreciate it.”

“It’s no trouble, darling. Does this mean you’re going to pay Colin a visit soon?”

“Yes. If he’s seeking a meeting, he’ll get one,” Moran declared. “And he’ll damn well be held
accountable for what he’s done—be made to answer my questions.”

“I envy you, Tiger. I’d love to confront that bastard. Fillet him alive. Turn him into an exquisite
pair of shoes.” A devilish gleam flickered in Moriarty’s dark eyes. It was pure bloodlust.

Sebastian stood and approached his beguiling mate. “Did I ever tell you how incredibly sexy it is when you get that look?” His voice dropped a little, thickening with desire.

“Why yes, actually, you have. But I never get tired of hearing it.”

The assassin closed in on Jim, pinning him against the counter. “You’re irresistible, kitten.”

“Even with my body the way it is now?” he coyly inquired. Despite Moran’s constant reassurance, the mastermind was still self-conscious about his changing shape.

“Always.” Seb loomed over him, leaning down to nuzzle his neck. He breathed in the omega’s honeyed scent and came alive at the promise of its bounty.

Moriarty ghosted a hand down the larger man’s muscular frame, stopping when he reached the noticeable bulge in his jeans. “Oh my. Is that a British Army Browning L9A1 in your pocket, or are you just pleased to see me?”

The fair-haired alpha grunted at Jim’s suggestive remark. “You’re mine,” he huskily intoned. “Mine forever.”

“Yours, Tiger, yes. We belong to each other.”

Seb kissed him on the lips, moaning softly as he felt his Magpie’s tongue enter his mouth. It was warm, wet, and wholly electric. God, Jim was good at this.

Calloused hands grappled with clothing as the sniper tugged away his lover’s t-shirt and pants. He wanted to ravish him right there in the kitchen, but quickly realized the location might not be ideal for someone in Jim’s condition. Soft, cushioned surfaces would be kinder on his back.

He scooped the genius into his arms with the intention of heading to their bedroom.

“Wait,” Moriarty bleated. “My pie—”

“Leave it.”

And so the letter and the baking were temporarily forgotten as the couple’s passion ignited anew. As far as they were concerned, nothing else mattered in that moment except for the two of them. The rest of the world could wait.

***********

The next day, Sebastian got in touch with the Crown Prosecution Service. Officers at the department were glad he’d responded to their communiqué so quickly. It made them even happier to hear that he was willing to oblige Colin Taylor’s request.

At CPS headquarters, the sniper was first made to sign a confidentiality agreement assuring his silence. Following that, he was brought up to speed on the situation. It seemed the prosecution was in a quandary. The DNA samples linking Taylor to various cold cases was being called into question due to slipshod recordkeeping and evidence collection. They were concerned that when the case went to trial, the defense could easily have the samples— and their corresponding charges — dismissed. In short, they needed a confession in order to secure an indictment for anything beyond Lisa Abernathy’s murder.
Colin was stonewalling the authorities at every opportunity. He’d elected to go mute, offering absolutely nothing during interrogation. He had even gone so far as to reject making a written statement. Things took an unexpected turn, however, during his psychiatric assessment. The madman briefly spoke, proposing a deal in which he’d admit to his culpability in those other cases if he was granted a private meeting with Sebastian Moran. Ordinarily, CPS shied away from bargaining with criminals, but in this instance, they were desperate.

An arrangement was made, though it did not sit well with many. Concern arose from the fact that Colin would only consent to a confession after the meeting took place. This meant he could, theoretically, renege on the agreement. But those were his terms, and he would continue the pattern of self-imposed silence if they were not met. The authorities begrudgingly decided that it was worth the risk.

There were a handful of stipulations the stalker was willing to accept: (1.) he would be handcuffed for the duration of the meeting, (2.) a guard would be posted outside the room at all times, and (3.) their conversation was to exceed no longer than thirty minutes total.

The assassin wondered if he was crazy for going along with this plan. It was almost surreal to think that he, the second most dangerous man in London, was suddenly working with the legal system rather than against it. Life certainly could be surprising sometimes.

*********

When Sebastian returned home, he explained everything to Jim, non-disclosure agreement be damned. He swore he’d keep nothing from his spouse and he meant it. Furthermore, he was hoping Moriarty would offer up an opinion on the matter.

“So what do you think?”

“It’s a risky proposition, Tiger. But then again, when has that ever stopped either of us?” he lightly teased.

“I just worry that when I see Colin, I’ll want to beat the hell out of him,” Seb confided. “There’s a lot riding on this. I can’t afford to lose my cool.”

“I understand. Believe me, I do.” He paused, considering something. “Have you thought about writing down what you want to say? It might help you stay focused.”

“That’s a good idea. I should make notecards of the questions I intend to ask. If I feel like I’m faltering in any way, I can refer back to them.”

“I tell you what, hon. You put together the cards and I’ll review them with you, point-by-point. It never hurts to do a run-through.”

The former colonel nodded. “Thanks, Jimmy. Your support means a lot to me.”

“Well, I know I haven’t always been an ideal mate. But I’d like to change that…be there for you more,” he said. “I want our children to have what we didn’t—a stable homelife with parents who are attentive to one another.”

“I want that for them, too. They’ll be brought up in a house full of love.”

Jim smiled at the notion. “Safe and happy…all of us,” he fantasized aloud.

Moran truly hoped so, but in their line of work, was it possible? Only time would tell.
Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
The meetup between Colin Taylor and Sebastian Moran was about to commence. Experts for the prosecution brought the assassin to Bethlem Psychiatric Hospital, a facility colloquially known as “Bedlam.” The stories he’d heard about the place spooked him more than he cared to admit, and he would be glad to leave the premises as soon as possible.

Moran received a pat down from security before being ushered into a conference room where Colin sat cuffed to a chair. On sight, Seb immediately noticed that the man had been cleaned up since they last met. Back at the cottage, he was little more than a drunken, unkempt mess. Now he actually resembled an older version of the comrade Moran remembered.

When the guard shut the door, Sebastian took a seat opposite Taylor. Only a small table separated them.

“You wanted to see me,” the sniper said, staring straight at him.

“I did,” he acknowledged.

“Why?” That was the million dollar question.

“Because there are some things I think you ought to know.”

“Such as?”

The kidnapper tilted his head and smirked. “Ready for storytime?”

Seb nodded, wanting to get this over with.

“It’s a tale about a man and a woman. We’ll call them ‘George’ and ‘Betty.’ They were a married
couple, and George tried to give his wife the world. Somehow, though, it was never enough.”

The sniper slumped in his chair. He had a pretty good idea of where this was headed. It would not have a happy ending.

“Betty used to get depressed for days, sometimes weeks, at a time. It was like a fog would settle over her, suffocating and siphoning the joy from her life. George did his best to pull her out of those dark moods. He’d do anything to make her smile. So one afternoon, he decided to come home early and surprise his beautiful bride of three years. He stopped off to pick up a bouquet of lilacs, because those were her favorite. He also booked reservations at a restaurant she liked, thinking that a night on the town might cheer her up. Sadly, he was mistaken.”

“Colin, you don’t have to finish this story.”

“No, Moran, I do. You need to hear it.”

Seb sighed. Maybe this is cathartic for him. Or maybe it’s just another twisted game. Who could tell, and did it matter? He was going to keep narrating either way.

“As I was saying,” the stalker continued, “George was mistaken. When he set foot inside the house they shared together, he had no idea what was waiting for him. He should’ve realized something was wrong because it was too quiet. Betty used to leave the radio on all the time, but that day, it was shut off,” he explained. “I digress. His wife wasn’t there to greet him, and she didn’t respond when he called her name. He thought maybe she was taking a nap, so he checked their bedroom. Well, he was getting close, but still no cigar.”

“It was then that George noticed a light on in the master bathroom, and the door was cracked. He figured she must be in there, so naturally, he stepped inside.” Colin paused, taking a deep breath before proceeding. “The first thing that hit him was the blood. It was everywhere. Red staining the tiles and filling the air with an acrid copper stench. He wanted to vomit, but forced himself to forge ahead. He made his way to the tub, and that’s when he saw her. His sweet, wonderful Betty was lifeless— her wrists slit open and the bathwater tinted like a valentine.”

An uneasy silence settled upon Colin and Sebastian, neither uttering a word after the heaviness of Taylor’s story.

Finally, the sniper spoke. “Colin, I’m sorry for what happened to your wife. From the bottom of my heart, I am. No one should have to go through what you did.” He hesitated for a beat. “But that doesn’t make what you did to Jim and I okay. It doesn’t excuse the fact that you stalked us. Threatened us, and our children. Killed our guard and our decorator. Kidnapped Jim. He nearly died. None of that was justified.”

“The hell it wasn’t!” the criminal spat. “I didn’t go far enough. I should’ve made sure that ponce bastard of yours was dead.”

Sebastian let out a low growl. He was trying to remain calm, but had difficulty doing so when the topic turned to Jim. His alpha instincts were on high alert.

Questions. You have questions to ask this arsehole. Focus on that.

The former colonel pulled a set of notecards from his pocket. “There are a few things I’d like to know. Since I went to the trouble of agreeing to this meeting, the least you could do is answer them.”

Colin snorted. “This ought to be good for a laugh.”
Ignoring the remark, Seb began his informal interrogation. “Why did you wait so long to come after me? Why seek revenge now?”

“Because this is the year of your third anniversary,” he replied. “Margo died three years into our marriage. I thought it would be poetic justice.”

“That’s fucking vindictive.”

The lunatic shrugged. “You asked.”

_Touche._ If this Q&A session was going to work, he’d need to steel himself for whatever spiteful declarations Colin might make.

On to the next question. “The day you abducted Jim, how did you know where he’d be? Did you put a tracker on his car?”

“Actually,” he said with a smug grin, “that was a happy accident. I was at a shop across the street from the convenience store when I spotted his vehicle in the parking lot.”

“So it was just dumb luck, then.”

“I like to think of it as a reward from the universe. Divine guidance, if you will.”

“Yeah, right. There’s nothing divine about the shit you pulled.”

Colin eyed Seb disdainfully. “How’s the air up in that ivory tower you live in? Gets thin at such a high and mighty altitude, I bet.”

“Listen, you fucking twat— I’m looking for answers, not snide comments.”

The madman stuck his bottom lip out, mocking a pout. “Aww, poor little soldier’s feelings are hurt. You used to be so much better than that, Moran. Tougher,” he taunted. “I guess that’s what happens when you start fucking other guys. You turn into a gutless nancy.”

Sebastian snarled in anger. If he had to spend another minute in the same room as this insufferable son of a bitch, he would explode.

“Look, I had various things written down that I wanted to ask you. But frankly, I don’t believe this conversation is doing either of us any good. So,” he stressed, shoving the notecards back in his pocket, “I’m going to pose a final question. Fuck the rest—I just need you to answer this one.”

“I’m all ears, Colonel.”

“I want to know how you could bring yourself to treat Jim as badly as you did. You and I are alphas, for Christ’s sake. It’s hardwired into us to protect an expectant omega, even if they’re not our mate. But you…you kept him chained up in a cellar, starved and deprived of medication.” The assassin’s voice grew angrier with every word. Thinking about his husband’s ordeal filled him with unbridled rage. “How did you override biological instinct like that?”

“I didn’t override anything.”

“Of course you did. The hell you put him through—”

“Was only the tip of the iceberg,” he asserted. “I planned to do so much worse to him, but those fucking instincts wouldn’t quit.”
Suddenly, Sebastian was truly horrified. What else had Colin intended for Jim? He didn’t want to think about it, but his mind wouldn’t stop reeling.

The kidnapper flashed a sinister smile. “I bet you’re wondering what I was going to do to him.”

“Shut up,” Seb said through gritted teeth.

“Nah, don’t believe I will. I’m feeling rather chatty at the moment.”

“If you know what’s good for you, you’ll stop right there,” the sniper warned.

“You’re mad that I starved him,” Colin spoke, undeterred. “But you should be grateful. I was originally going to give him food laced with an abortifacient.”

Moran paled at the admission, fury coursing through him in a blinding rush. He planned to kill our children. Planned to put Jim through the agony of losing them. This was beyond unforgivable. It was straight-up fucking evil.

“Imagine it, Seb. Imagine him feeling the lives inside him slowly drain away. Knowing they were dying and being helpless to stop it. It’d be devastating.”

He could picture it…he could picture it all too well. And that’s when he snapped.

The assassin hastily stood up, overturning the table between them.

“Temper, temper,” Colin jeered. But he would not remain heckling for long.

The man’s taunts turned to screams as Sebastian’s fists made contact with his face. Punch after punch rained down and the blonde could not bid himself to stop. He heard the sounds of bones cracking and cartilage popping, but still refused to yield. It was as if he’d gone into autopilot, acting entirely on impulse.

Suddenly, the security guard posted outside the door barged in. “What the hell is going on?” he roared.

Seb was disoriented, adrenaline pumping at a furious rate. He glanced down and saw his hands covered in blood. Then he looked at Colin.

“Oh God.” The man was hideously mangled. Both eyes were swollen, his nose was crooked and bleeding, his lip was split wide open, and his jaw jutted out at an unnatural angle. It was a nightmarish Picasso abstraction in the flesh.

Overwhelmed by the reality of what he’d done, Moran tore from the room at a breakneck pace. He fled the hospital entirely, running several blocks before finally darting into an alley. Using his shirt as a rag, he wiped off his blood-soaked hands and then pulled out his phone.

SM

Did something bad, Jimmy. Don’t know if it’s safe to come home. They might look for me at the house.

JM

What’s happened? And where are you?

SM
Beat the shit out of Colin. Hiding in a backstreet between 5th and Chisolm.

JM

I’ll send a car to pick you up.

SM

Okay. Love you, Magpie.

JM

Love you, too.

Now all Sebastian could do was wait.

Chapter End Notes

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Change of Plans

Chapter Summary

Jim has information. Later, party plans change.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

For two days, Sebastian made himself scarce at a loft Jim owned on the far side of the city. After the beating he’d administered to Colin during their meeting, he wasn’t sure how the authorities would react. Now his Magpie had texted him saying it was safe to return home.

He must know something about what’s going on. It was possible— the man did have a contact on the police force.

Seb would find out soon.

When the sniper entered his residence, he was surprised by what he didn’t see. For the first time in quite a while, Jim wasn’t baking. In fact, he was nowhere near the vicinity of the kitchen. His voice, however, could be heard in hushed tones.

Seb followed the sound and it led him to the mastermind’s office. He gently rapped on the door and was waved inside. Moriarty finished up the phone call he was on just as the blonde took a seat.

“What’s the scoop?” Moran asked.

“You needn’t worry about police showing up anytime soon.”

“Thank god,” he breathed in relief. “Details, please.”

“An informant told me that the Metro PD is livid over the incident between you and Colin, but,” he stressed, “they’re not going to charge you with any wrongdoing because then they’d have to admit that they brought a known associate of yours truly— James Moriarty— in to assist on the case.”

Seb smirked. “I suppose that might make for bad PR.”

“Even worse, the authorities would also have to explain the circumstance under which they sought your help. In other words, they’d be forced to acknowledge the problems with their evidence backlog. That, of course, would open a whole other can of worms they’re not prepared to address.”
“Damned by their own deeds. Got to love the irony.”

“Oh, I do,” the Irishman agreed. “I’m afraid it’s not all good news, though.”

“What else has happened?”

“Colin called off the deal and has accepted the counsel of a defense attorney. It hasn’t been made public yet, but they’re planning to sue for police brutality.”

“Fuck.”

“Indeed. This case is turning into a fine mess before it’s even gone to trial.”

Sebastian suddenly felt a mountain of guilt closing in on him. His thoughts raced into overdrive. I caused this to snowball. Fucked up the chance to put Colin away forever He’ll use his injuries to gain the jury’s sympathy. Convince them he was framed, and they’ll fall for it hook, line, and sinker.

“Tiger, you stop that right now.”

“Huh?”

“I recognize the look on your face. You’re blaming yourself for what’s going on, and that’s completely unacceptable. Cut it the fuck out.”

“You know me well, love.”

“Yes, I do. And I’ll not permit you a moment of self-flagellation.”

The assassin sighed. “I just can’t believe how I flew off the handle. The things that came out of Colin’s mouth were so vile…so reprehensible. He pushed my buttons and I couldn’t pull myself back from the edge. I wanted to kill the son of a bitch.”

“I understand. I’d like to see him dead, too. Preferably with his body disassembled into several parts.”

“That could be arranged.”

“All in good time, darling. We’ve got to wait for our buns to finish baking first.”

“Buns?” It took the alpha a second to realize what his mate meant. “Oh…the babies. Duh.”

He grinned. “Silly Seb. Get over here.”

Moran slid his chair close to Moriarty. “Better?”

“Much.” He grasped Sebastian’s hand and placed it on his stomach. “Feel that? They’ve been kicking up a storm today.”

“Wow, you aren’t kidding.” There was definitely an increase of movement going on. “Does it hurt?”

“Not especially, but it can be uncomfortable when one of them hits my bladder.”

“I bet.” The sniper could hardly imagine what this pregnancy experience must be like for Jim. All he kept picturing were the creatures from “Alien” and how they would violently burst out of a
person’s body. He didn’t think his spouse would appreciate that particular comparison, though.

“They’re happy to have you home,” the genius declared. “Their activity level spiked when I told them you were coming back.”

Seb’s eyes glimmered joyfully at the notion. “Really? You’re not pulling my leg?”

“It’s true, Tiger, I swear. They love you as much as I do. It was sad for them not to hear your voice these past two days.”

“Is that a fact? Well, I guess I owe them an apology.” He leaned down so he could speak directly to Jim’s belly. “Essie, Eddie,” the fair-haired man began, “I’m very sorry I wasn’t able to be here. Rest assured, it won’t happen again. Your Papa isn’t going anywhere.” He concluded his promise by pressing two gentle kisses to his omega’s abdomen—one for each twin.

When Sebastian sat upright, he noticed Moriarty’s eyes were welling with moisture. “Are you okay, kitten?”

The mastermind wiped away a tear before it could fall. “Yes, I’m fine,” he answered, sounding slightly embarrassed. “Everything seems to tug at my heartstrings lately. At this rate, I’m liable to start blubbing the next time I pass the greeting card department at Harrods. It’s bloody pathetic.”

“Never,” Moran said. “Nothing about you could ever be classified as ‘pathetic.’ The most dangerous man in London is a force to be reckoned with. I know it, and so does all of Great Britain.”

Jim smiled. “You’re always so good to me, Seb. Even when I probably don’t deserve it.”

“I don’t know how to treat you any other way. You’re my family. My heart and soul.”

At that, the consulting criminal wrapped his arms around his husband in a fierce hug. His emotions were running so high these days, it was overwhelming. Thank god he had Sebastian as his rock; his guiding light through life’s storm. With him by his side, he could be invincible.

*********

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

“This is ridiculous! I won’t stand for it!”

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

Sebastian was unceremoniously awoken from a nap by the blare of his husband’s blood pressure monitor, followed by yelling. What the hell?

He rushed to Jim’s office, where he found the man barking into his phone.

“No, I will not calm down! So help me god, if I have to cancel my plans, I will skiiiiiiiin you! That’s not a threat—it’s a guarantee!” he snarled, hanging up on the call.

Uh-oh. This can’t be good.

The ornery omega noticed Seb standing outside the door. He hobbled over to him, his monitor still beeping. “Tiger, why does the world show me nothing but opposition?”

“I don’t know, kitten. How about we sit down while you focus on your breathing exercises?”
Moriarty nodded as the sniper led him down the hall and into the living room. “Inhale and exhale, sweetheart. You’re doing great.”

Finally, the alarm stopped.

_Whee_. “Care to tell me what’s got you so upset?”

The Irishman stared at him sadly. “It’s the party. I went to such trouble planning it, and now it’s all falling apart.”

“How so?”

“Well, the weather’s been cooler than I’d like recently— not conducive to an outdoor event on a yacht. So I thought I’d change the location to someplace warmer. Specifically, Saint-Tropez,” he explained. “It wouldn’t be too difficult to have the festivities transferred over. I’d just get a different boat and fly everyone out there— DJ and caterer included.”

_Wow_. The former colonel was amazed that his mate was willing to go to such lengths to make his birthday celebration possible.

“What’s the problem, then?”

“The problem,” he said, groaning in frustration, “is that my doctors are refusing to clear me for being fit to fly.”

“Really?” Moran was surprised by the news. He had no idea air travel could be prohibited by pregnancy.

“Yes, unfortunately. I’m not so far along that I would ordinarily be barred from flying, but due to my medical issues, they deem it ‘too risky.’”

“Magpie, I’m sorry.”

“They’re the ones who’ll be sorry, trust me. I require Dr. Swenson’s services because she’s an excellent obstetrician, but the others,” he declared, “are disposable. I’ll obtain their home addresses and have them killed.”

_Bloody hell_. Seb knew he needed to talk his husband down from this madness before it got out of hand.

“Jimmy, nobody has to die here. We can still make it to Saint-Tropez without boarding a plane. We’ll take the Eurostar to Calais and then rent a vehicle. I’ll drive us the rest of the way.”

The mastermind peered at him, considering the offer. “It’s a fifteen-hour trip by car. Are you sure you want to commit to that?”

“Absolutely. It’s been ages since we’ve gone on an adventure together. I think it might be fun.”

“Hmm. You’re right, it has been a while,” he mused. “And with the babies coming in a few months, who knows when we’ll be able to do something like this again.”

“Exactly.”

“Okay, it’s settled. We’re taking a road trip.” Jim sounded strangely excited at the prospect. “I’ll start making a list of what to pack.”
“That’s a great idea, hon.”

Sebastian was glad to have averted an unnecessary bloodbath, but a part of him wondered what he’d just wrangled himself into. This would be quite an escapade, indeed.

Chapter End Notes

Please allow me to explain the reason why I changed the location of Sebastian's party.

I wanted Jim and Seb's babies to be born in February, hence the amethyst birth stone. That being the case, if Jim is supposed to be six months along at this point, it would mean that in-story, it's sometime in November. But England would be way too cold in November to hold a party on a yacht, so I decided to move the location to Saint-Tropez, a city on the French Riviera. Admittedly, the temperature in the south of France would be a bit cooler during that time of year as well, but still warmer than England. I kindly ask that suspension of disbelief be employed here.

P.S. -- I'm temporarily moving away from the Colin storyline to focus on Sebastian's birthday proceedings. But rest assured, the Colin situation WILL be addressed; this is NOT the last you've seen of him.
**Road Trip**

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian drive cross-country from northern France to the Riviera. They butt heads along the way.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Be gentle with that bag,” Jim urged as his mate loaded luggage into the trunk of their rental Ferrari. “Our tuxes are in there. I will *not* permit them to be wrinkled.”

*Tuxes, ugh. Don’t remind me.*

Shortly before their road trip was set to commence, the mastermind decided that after the party in Saint-Tropez, they’d spend an additional few days in Monte Carlo. It made sense—the cities weren’t really that far from each other, and they might as well make the most of their mini-vacation. But it also meant they’d be expected to dress up, as was the norm in many Monaco establishments. This was no problem for Jim, who was a bastion of good taste and fashion sense. But for the sniper, formalwear was little more than a chore.

“Why the grumpy face, Tiger? You look sexy as hell in a designer suit.”

“Doesn’t mean I like to wear them.”

The consulting criminal flashed a devilish grin. “Don’t worry, darling, you won’t be keeping it on for long.”

Seb’s expression softened. “Oh really?”

“Reeeeeealllly.”

Moran smiled back and closed the boot of the car. “Ready to roll, kitten?”

“With you? Always.”

*******

“Sebbyyyyy, come on.”

“Jim, we just stopped an hour ago. And an hour before that. And yet another hour even prior to
that. You can’t possibly have to go again.” This was getting ridiculous— the Irishman had forced him to pull over three times in four hours to use rest stop bathrooms.

“But I doo. I can’t help it. The babies are putting pressure on my bladder.”

The assassin sighed. They were supposed to be on a schedule. With all these pit stops, they’d never be able to make the drive in one day as originally planned.

“Jimmy, we can’t keep having these impromptu breaks. You rented out that bakery kitchen to use tomorrow morning, which means we’ve got to be in Saint-Tropez by then. We have to power through the rest of the way.”

“I know I reserved that space— I’m the one baking the bloody cake. I don’t need a reminder,” he said, sounding annoyed.

“Then you ought to appreciate why we can’t lose any more time.”

“Well, what alternative do you propose? You can’t expect me to hold it.”

“I don’t know what to tell you, Jim. I’ve got to stay on target here.”

“And I’ve got to use the loo.”

They were at an impasse. Moriarty stared silently at Seb while the sniper focused on the road. It was then that a gas station appeared in the distance. The consulting criminal fully expected his mate to pull into its parking lot, but instead, he blew right past the place.

Jim’s eyed widened with shock and anger. “Sebastian!”

“Yes?”

“You were supposed to stop back there!”

“No, I’m supposed to get us clear across France within a day’s time.”

The genius glared at Moran, and then for a split second, he glanced at the electric cigarette lighter near the dashboard. A truly wicked idea came to mind, but he knew he mustn’t indulge it. Didn’t mean he couldn’t dangle the thought over Seb’s head, though.

“You know, the old ‘me’ would’ve jabbed you in the throat with a cigarette lighter for your disobedience,” he matter-of-factly declared. “But these days, I try to make wiser choices for Essie and Eddie’s sake. If I did what I wanted, we’d careen off the road and they might get hurt. I can’t allow that.”

Seb honestly had no clue how to respond to his spouse’s admission. He was already well aware of the man’s madness. And actually, it was somewhat comforting to realize that parenthood was having a positive effect on him. Jim was now thinking through the consequences of his actions and considering the welfare of others before his own. That was an incredible achievement. Their children were doing the impossible— shaping him into a better version of himself.

Maybe they could compromise. “Magpie, there’s a bottle of water in my backpack,” he said, motioning to the seat behind him. “Dump it out and use that.”

If the mastermind was angry before, he was absolutely furious now. “Excuse me? ‘Use that?’ Are you really suggesting I piss in a plastic beverage container?”
“It’s not so bad. I’ve done it.”

Moriarty snorted. “You once fucked a one-legged, toothless prostitute under a bridge in Prague. Just because you’ve done something hardly means it’s advisable.”

“Point taken. But to be fair, she had a great rack,” Seb joked, attempting to lighten the mood. Jim, however, was not amused.

“Sod off,” he spat. “If you’re going to act like a jackass, kindly refrain from speaking to me.” At that, the Irishman adjusted his seat, reclining all the way back. “I’m taking a nap. Don’t you dare fucking wake me.”

“Jimmy—”

“Not a word, Sebastian. Not. One. Word.” His tone was deadly sharp, and in an instant, the former colonel realized just how badly he’d fucked up.

_I’m a goddamn idiot._ This was going to be a long ride, indeed.

*********

Seb was at his wit’s end. Jim had refused to talk to him all day, and it was becoming worrisome. Sure, they were now making great time on their travel route, but at what cost?

As the hours of silence wore on, Moran kept thinking about how hard it must be on the body to carry twins. His husband couldn’t help some of the physical effects pregnancy was having on him, and it wasn’t fair to marginalize the very real issues he was facing.

And then the sniper thought of all the trouble his Magpie had gone to, coordinating this grand birthday celebration. Hell, it was the whole reason they were trekking across France in the first place. For _him_. Because tomorrow was _his_ birthday. Yet despite this, he’d acted like an ungrateful, officious prig. Well, no more. He was determined to right his wrong.

According to the clock on the dashboard, it was almost 5 p.m. They hadn’t really had lunch that afternoon, only snacking on a bit of trail mix and dried fruit during their commute. It was definitely time to break for dinner.

He glimpsed the softly snoring omega at his side. Jim had nodded off while reading a book, its pages spread open, creased against his belly. He looked so serene, which made Sebastian feel even guiltier.

_You deserve better than how I’ve treated you today, sweetheart._

After tooling around the city of Lyon for several miles, the assassin decided on a restaurant he thought would best suit their needs. Translation: he’d found an eatery that didn’t appear to have a formal dress code or require reservations. He watched people go inside wearing casual attire, and it wasn’t too crowded for immediate seating.

Moran gently nudged his partner, alerting him of their current location. “Jimmy, we’re going to get dinner now.”

The consulting criminal wiped the sleep from his eyes and yawned. “What…” And then he remembered, his face pursing angrily as the day’s events came flooding back. “Oh.”

“Jim, I’ve had plenty of time to think about it, and I want to say I’m sorry. I was a total wanker
earlier. An inconsiderate bastard, and you were right to be upset.”

Moriarty remained silent for a moment, contemplating his lover’s plea of contrition. “You certainly seem to apologize a lot lately.”

Sebastian frowned. It was an accurate observation. Each day brought a new fuckup. A new way for him to make an ass out of himself and disappoint the man he adored. Why did this keep happening?

“I’m a terrible alpha,” the blonde brokenly whispered. “All I do is make you miserable.”

“Seb…”

“You’ve gone through hell these past few months, and here I am, giving you more grief to deal with. I’m sorry, Jimmy. I really am.”

“Tiger,” the mastermind began, “you’re not a terrible alpha and you don’t make me miserable. Far from it.” He reached over and stroked his husband’s stubbled cheek. “You’re my light in the dark, darling. My beacon, shining true in a starless sky.”

“Oh, Magpie.” The sniper leaned into his touch, savoring the quiet intimacy between them.

“For the record, the reason I got so mad when you refused to make another stop wasn’t just because I’m a cantankerous old twat.”

Moran chuckled at his mate’s turn of phrase. Jim always did have a way with words.

“Yes, it sucks when you’ve got to take a leak but can’t stop anywhere. It’s uncomfortable, but I could manage if I had to,” he explained. “What angered me was the health risk it posed, and your lack of regard for that.”

The former colonel furrowed a brow, confused. “Health risk?” This was the first he was hearing of it.

“My doctor warned me that holding it for too long would be bad for my kidneys. I need to be careful because the preeclampsia is hard enough on them.”

“I…I didn’t know.”

Sebastian was ashamed, growing clammy and nauseous at the idea that he’d unintentionally jeopardized Jim and their children’s well-being. He should’ve known what the doctor said, but he didn’t, due to having recently missed two prenatal appointments in a row. He wanted to be there for his mate every step of the way, but he also had to contend with matters at work and fulfill job assignments. Even still, this was something he felt he should’ve known. Should’ve—

Suddenly, the alpha’s frantic train of thought was derailed by a kiss. Moriarty’s warm, supple lips melded against his own. They offered familiar comfort amid a sea of self-doubt.

The genius pulled back. “You looked like you needed that, dear. You were spiraling dreadfully off kilter and I had to do something.”

“It’s stress, I guess,” Seb conceded. “I want to do right by you…do right by our babies. But I’m not sure I know how.”

“All of this is new for me, too. We can learn together, Tiger.”
Together. Now there was a word that inspired strength within the sniper. Alone, he was fleeting—as impermanent as a wildflower that blooms and withers inside the span of a day. But alongside Jim, he could be so much more. They could be more. Together, forever and always.

“Let’s get a move on,” the consulting criminal said. “At the risk of sounding indelicate, I’m ravenous and need to piss like a race horse.”

“Okay, hon. I promise you, from here on out, we’ll make whatever stops you want.”

“Good. Glad we’ve come to an understanding on that.”

As far as Seb was concerned, they most certainly had.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Of Birthdays & Beaches

Chapter Summary

It’s Sebastian’s birthday. He and Jim spend the day together before the big party.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Rise and shine, birthday boy.”

Sebastian grunted, rolling over on the king-size bed of his hotel room. He glimpsed the nightstand clock and—

“Holy shit, it’s noon.”

“Yep, that is it,” Jim confirmed with a grin.

Where did the time go? As Seb came to his senses, he thought back.

After last night’s dinner in Lyon, they’d continued driving and finally reached Saint-Tropez at around 10 p.m. The couple was so tired, they went to bed as soon as they checked into their suite.

The assassin vaguely recalled his husband leaving early in the morning. He’d rented out the kitchen space of a local bakery so he’d have somewhere to prepare Moran’s cake. It was still dark out when he’d gone, and Seb quickly fell back to sleep.

“How’s my favorite pastry chef?” he teased, knowing how hard the Irishman must’ve worked.

“Long dead, I expect. Although come to think of it, I’m not certain if ‘Betty Crocker’ was a real person at all. Remind me to Google it later.”

“Ha-ha,” the blonde scoffed. “You know I meant you. How are things today?”

“Fabulous, dear. Two of the bakery’s regular staff came in to assist. I hadn’t even requested them, they just showed up. So we got the job done swifter than anticipated.”

“That’s wonderful. Do we have to bring the cake to the party ourselves or is someone else sending it over?”

“My event coordinators will be picking it up. They’ll make sure everything, and everyone, is in its proper place for tonight’s festivities.”
Moran smiled. “I can’t believe we’re really doing this. A party on a yacht with catered food, a DJ, and everyone from headquarters in attendance. And it’s happening in the south of France,” he marveled. “I can’t get over how posh it all seems. It’s surreal.”

“Only the best for you, Sebastian.” Jim sat at the end of the bed and rifled through a travel bag. “Now I want your opinion.”

“Okay,” he agreed, sitting upright to focus on the matter at hand.

“Tell me which swim trunks you prefer. This,” he announced, holding up a grey garment, “or this,” he asked, brandishing a navy blue pair.

“Hmm. Honestly, I’d go with the blue.”

Moriarty grinned like a Cheshire cat. “I was thinking the same thing. Sometimes, it’s as though we’re of one mind, darling.”

“Planning to go for a swim?” The hotel was situated on a beachfront property, so one might as well capitalize on the opportunity.

“I’m not sure if my restrictions would allow it. However, I do want to catch a few rays on the beach.”

Though he tried to suppress it, the sniper burst into laughter.

“What’s so funny?” Jim asked.

“You, one of the palest people I know, intending to sunbathe. Remember the awful burn you got in Rio? You’ll fry like an egg.”

“Not if I use sunscreen and don’t let myself fall asleep out there,” he replied. “Anyway, I’ve read that vitamin D produced from exposure to natural light can promote good fetal health.”

“Ahh,” now he understood. “I’ll come with you.” No way was he permitting his heavily pregnant, mobility-challenged omega to get so close to open water without him being present. His protective streak ran deep.

“That would be divine. The party doesn’t start until 5 p.m. We could spend the afternoon together.”

“Perfect timing, then.” Moran paused, an idea popping into his head. “Fancy a picnic?”

“Ooh, splendid suggestion. We can change into our swimwear and instruct room service to bring us a beachside lunch.”

A sweet, sharky smile settled upon Seb’s face as he looked for his trunks. He was really and truly happy in a way he hadn’t been for quite some time. It felt fantastic.

*********

The weather in Saint-Tropez was heavenly. The sun beamed brilliantly in a cloudless sky, while the water was crystal clear and the temperature mild. One couldn’t ask for better conditions.

“More duck, dear?” the consulting criminal asked his partner. They were sprawled across an oversized towel, feasting on roast duck, garden salad, and baguette.

“I’d better not. I’ve got to save room for tonight.”
“I wish I had your willpower,” Jim lamented. “I feel like I’m hungry all the bloody time. For as much as I’ve eaten now, I’ll be famished again in two hours. Mark my words.”

“You’re eating for three, Magpie. Little wonder your appetite’s increased.”

“I know. I’m just a bit self-conscious,” he admitted. “This is the heaviest I’ve ever been.”

“The babies would thank you for that if they could. You’re keeping them well-nourished,” the sniper assured. “And you’re still the handsomest man in all of Europe,” he added with a wink.

“Not merely Great Britain, but continental, you say? How flattering.”

“Well, of course. They don’t call you ‘Mr. Sex’ for nothing.”

Jim laughed heartily at the remark. “Honey, these days, the only one who refers to me by that name is you.”

“And I always will.” Seb tenderly took his mate by the hand, gazing intently into his dark brown eyes. “Even when we’re in our nineties, sitting in rocking chairs on a porch, you’ll still be ‘Mr. Sex’ to me.”

“Oh, Tiger.” The mastermind was absolutely love-struck. Hormone-fueled or otherwise, he adored Sebastian Moran. His husband. His family. His everything. This moment with him was perfect beyond his wildest dreams. It was—

THWACK.

“Ouch!”

From out of nowhere, a stick hurled through the air and hit Jim square in the shoulder. Before he could make sense of what was going on, a fluffy white dog came bounding towards him. Ostensibly there to retrieve its wooden toy, the pooch was quickly distracted by the smell of duck, nosing its way to the poultry. The cute creature began gobbling up the leftovers while Moriarty simply stared in stunned silence.

Seb, on the other hand, was anything but silent. He couldn’t stop laughing at the absurdity of the situation. It was priceless.

Soon, a little boy came running over.

“Pardon, messieurs. Parlez-vous anglais?”

“Yes, we speak English,” Jim answered. “Is this your dog?”

The child nodded. “It is, mister. Sadie and I were playing fetch. I didn’t mean to hit you. I’m sorry.” He appeared visibly nervous, worried he’d get in trouble for what had happened.

“Be more careful where you throw this,” the genius advised, handing the object back to him. “Sadie has excellent taste in food, by the way. My husband could learn a thing or two from her,” he teased.

The boy laughed. “You should see her at home, begging for table scraps. If we drop anything, she goes right for it.”

“A canine cleanup crew,” he mused. “You’re lucky to have her.”
“I am.” The child paused, rounding up his furry companion. “Thank you for giving me the stick back and not being mad.” At that, the youngster and his pup scampered off.

Moriarty watched from a distance as they continued their game of fetch. “She really is a beautiful dog,” he noted. “I always wanted one when I was that age, but they wouldn’t let us keep pets in the children’s home.”

“I’m sorry, love.” The assassin knew bits and pieces about his mate’s early life. From what he’d gleaned through the years, he understood that after Jim’s mother died, he was put into foster care. Though he never went into much detail, Seb got the distinct impression that it was a negative experience.

The Irishman shrugged. “No sense dwelling on it, I suppose. Can’t change the past.”

He was right— you couldn’t change the past. But…

“We can make our own future,” Moran stated. “Get a dog when the twins are old enough to play with one.”

Jim smiled softly. “I’d like that.”

The duo’s attention rapidly shifted as they saw the boy’s parents join him in romping with Sadie. Ordinarily, such a sight wouldn’t be worth a second glance. What caught their interest now, however, was the fact that both of them were men. Moreover, one of them sported a baby bump.

The Tiger and his Magpie were delighted. Seeing a gay couple in public was nothing new. But seeing a gay couple where one half of the pair was a male omega— that was rarer than finding a four-leaf clover.

“Look how happy they are, Seb.” Moriarty’s voice was steeped with emotion. He encountered so few of his kind, it was difficult not to be deeply affected during moments like these.

Sebastian was moved by it, too. He imagined having a family with Jim similar to the one frolicking on the beach. Perhaps it was a foolish notion for someone in his line of work, but he held out hope just the same.

“I want that to be us,” the genius proclaimed.

“Really, Jimmy? That kind of life wouldn’t be too ordinary for you?”

He shook his head. “Our love is far from ordinary. A life spent with you and our children would be immensely rewarding. I’m sure of it.”

They held hands once again, fingers intertwined. A sense of strength resonated between them as they basked in the bliss of what could be. London’s most dangerous men shared a dream, and in that vision, anything was possible.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Happy Birthday – Part 1

Chapter Summary

It’s party time. How will the festivities unfold?

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

So far, Sebastian’s 40th birthday bash was a rousing success. The caterer, DJ, and guests all arrived on schedule, and Jim’s specially crafted three-tier cake was delivered intact. Of the large group assembled, most appeared to be having a good time.

“Tiger, I have no idea who some of these people are.”

The sniper chuckled. “You don’t know them? You’re the one who sent out invitations.”

“I forwarded a mass email to headquarters. That hardly counts as a personalized invite.”

“Well, lucky for you, I’m familiar with everybody.”

Jim sighed. His mate made the issue sound like no big deal, but it was important to him. How could he act as a proper host if he didn’t recognize all the guests? Worse yet, he felt like he was out of the loop. Ever since his reduced workload went into effect, he’d left Seb in charge of procuring new hires. It initially seemed like a good idea, but now he was playing catch-up.

“Relax, Jimmy. It’s a party. Try to have fun.”

“That’s easier said than done when half the crowd is staring at you.” It was true, and neither could deny it. Plenty of eyes were on Moriarty tonight, as the open secret of his pregnancy was now confirmed. He didn’t exactly have a choice in the matter—his condition was obvious at a glance.

“Of course they’re staring,” Seb teased. “You’re ‘Mr. Sex.’ Who wouldn’t want to sneak a peek?”

Before the mastermind could respond, two women approached. Thankfully, he was already acquainted with the pair. Gemma and Marie worked as acquisition experts. If you needed an item, they would find a way to obtain it—legally or otherwise.

“Hello, ladies,” Moran greeted. “Enjoying the festivities?”

“Totally. The food is terrific,” Gemma enthused. “Love the cocktail weenies.”
Jim rolled his eyes while Seb grinned broadly, trying not to laugh out loud at the remark.

“We just wanted to pop over and congratulate Mr. Moriarty. Both of us have children of our own, so we know how exciting the experience can be.”

“Thank you,” the genius replied. “It’s simultaneously thrilling and nerve-wracking, but I wouldn’t trade it for the world.”

Gemma smiled warmly. “I understand completely.”

“You should talk to Annie,” Marie suggested, referring to another employee. “Her brother-in-law had a baby last year.”

“No kidding?” The consulting criminal was surprised to hear that, but then again, he made it a point not to involve himself in his staff’s personal lives. Well, all except for Sebastian— he was a special case.

Marie nodded. “Yeah, he had a little girl. I’ve seen the pictures. She’s cute as hell.”

“We were hanging out with Annie a few minutes ago at the hors d’oeuvre station,” Gemma noted. “Why don’t you come over and we can swap stories?”

“I don’t know…” It sounded like it might be fun, and that is what Seb said he should be having, right? But he didn’t want to abandon his husband at his own birthday party, either.

“Go on, I’ll be fine,” Moran assured. It was almost as though he’d read the Irishman’s mind.

“Well, okay.” Jim couldn’t disguise the delight in his voice. He hadn’t had the opportunity to exchange anecdotes and stories with other parents before. It was an intriguing prospect.

The assassin smiled as he watched his omega walk off with the women. Jim needed this— needed people he could discuss pregnancy and baby-related matters with, who actually had experience on the subject. It would be good for him.

*What should I do in the meantime? The night was fairly young and they hadn’t even cut the cake yet.*

And then it happened. Like a sailor beckoned by a siren’s call, Seb was drawn forth to the dancefloor. He’d forgotten how freeing the act could be. It was a surrender of sorts, to give oneself over to the music and beat. There was nothing else quite like it, and for the moment, he relished the simple joy that it brought.

*********

Time flew by quickly as Jim chatted up a storm with Gemma, Marie, Annie, and a group of other women. After about an hour’s worth of conversation, he decided he should to return to his mate. He needn’t look far to find him— the birthday boy was having a marvelous time grooving along to whatever song the DJ played.

Moriarty dragged a deck chair towards the dancefloor and positioned himself in an ideal viewing spot. He watched on, enrapt at how seamlessly the sniper kept in time to the music. His body moved with expert precision, as if the rhythm was a part of him, infused into his soul. The mastermind mused that perhaps in another life, his husband could’ve had an entirely different career commanding the stage like a modern-day Gene Kelly or Fred Astaire.
He’s more handsome than both of them combined, the Irishman thought. Flawless in every way.

Eventually, the song ended and Moran opted to take a break. He wasted no time in rushing to Jim’s side, cozying up so close to him, he was practically on his lap.

“Magpie, this night has been wonderful. The best birthday I’ve ever had.”

“Good. It’s supposed to be.” He paused, biting his lip as he gazed longingly at Sebastian. “God, you’re gorgeous. I wish I could kiss you.”

“Go ahead. I won’t resist.”

“Seb…you know we can’t do that around people from work.”

“Why not? It’s a daft rule that ought to be broken.”

“Because if any of them were to turn on us, they’d know our weakness for each other.”

Moran frowned at his partner’s choice of words. “My love for you isn’t a weakness,” he asserted. “It gives me strength and purpose. Makes me fight harder and smarter. So don’t ever call it a weakness, because it’s not. Our love is an attribute.”

The consulting criminal placed a hand to his stomach, feeling movement from within. It was as if the babies had taken their papa’s side, kicking in solidarity. And maybe, Jim thought, they were right to do so.

Suddenly, everything became clear to him. These were his employees and this was his husband’s birthday party. If ever there was a time to show affection without risk of reprisal, it was now. They were owed at least that much.

“Get your lips over here,” the genius demanded, grabbing Seb by the shirt collar and aggressively pressing their mouths together.

The alpha relinquished control, leaning into the kiss and allowing his mate to guide him. Sometimes he enjoyed letting Moriarty take the reins, succumbing to the will of his ardent omega.

Sebastian was left breathless, his heart aflutter and goosebumps raised on his skin. “You kiss by the book,” he declared.

Jim grinned wickedly. “Ooh, if I’m Romeo, does that make you Juliet?” he asked, recognizing the quote.

“It makes me the luckiest man on earth.”

“Good answer.” He hesitated for a moment as a question formed in his head. “How about we cut that cake, Tiger?”

“Only if you do the honors. Baker gets first slice.”

“Well, if you insist.”

“I do.”

The Irishman’s dark eyes twinkled with devilish delight. “Bring me a knife.”
The evening wore on in a whirlwind of revelry. Guests partook in their fair share of dancing, drinking, and dessert. No one had left yet, though things were winding down. Even the birthday boy was getting tired.

“Remember when we used to party all night, Jim?”

“Oh, yes. Up ‘til dawn in more ways than one,” he cheekily replied.

“How did we manage it?”

“Youth and cocaine.”

The sniper laughed. “Ah, yeah. I suppose that was it.”

“Don’t worry, dear. I won’t let you fall asleep. You still owe me a private performance.”

A smile stretched across his face. “You’d like that, aye?”

“Sebby, I’ve had to contend with watching you undulate for hours. I looked on as you shimmied and shook, and moved your body in ways that redefine the meaning of flexible. So yes, I would very much enjoy a private show.”

Moran tilted his head in mock confusion. “I’m sorry, darling, but you’re just being too subtle. Are you trying to say you like my dance moves?”

The mastermind scowled at his spouse. “Since this is your birthday, I’m going to refrain from calling you something unkind. But be mindful that once the clock strikes midnight, I’m no longer beholden to such constraints. At that point, I can and will tell you when you’re acting like a doofus. Are we clear?”

“As crystal,” he said with a wink. Jim could be so cute when he got indignant, though Seb would never acknowledge it aloud for fear of receiving a pummeling.

“Glad we’ve got that settled. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to the loo. Be a dear and fetch me another slice of cake for when I return.”

“Fetch you cake on my birthday?” the blonde asked. “Shouldn’t it be the other way around?”

“I’m carrying your children. I think that makes us even,” the Irishman glibly noted as he walked away.

Moriarty ventured below deck to get to the bathroom. Fortunately, he wouldn’t have to wait in a queue— no one appeared to be using the facilities.

He flipped on the light switch and was horrified by what he saw.

Graffiti. Cruel and offensive slurs were scrawled on the walls and mirror in black marker. Many of the vile sentiments were directed expressly at Jim, being not only homophobic in nature, but also anti-male omega.
The genius backed out of the room in a daze. He was completely blindsided by the hateful display. It was the absolute last thing he expected to find.

Who would do this? And why? It made him sick to think that an employee of his was responsible. Even worse, that they’d dare commit such a heinous act during Sebastian’s party. It was a terrible betrayal.

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

Moriarty’s portable blood pressure monitor blared as his heart began to race. He was dizzy and clammy and struggling to breathe. Was this just an anxiety attack or something more? He wasn’t sure, and it scared him.

“Seb!” the consulting criminal called out. “Sebby!” He hoped the man would hear him, but with the music playing on deck, he might not.

Jim’s legs turned to jelly and he sunk down on the floor. His whole body felt heavy. There was no way he’d be able to stand up again without assistance.

Thinking fast, he slipped a shaky hand into his pocket and pulled out his phone. It took a bit more effort than usual, but he eventually managed to send a text.

*JM*

*Help me, Tiger.*

TO BE CONTINUED…

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Chapter Summary

Drama unfolds at Sebastian’s birthday party.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains some pejorative/offensive language and sensitive themes. Reader discretion is advised.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

Sebastian was getting set to plate a slice of cake when his phone buzzed. Who would be contacting me now? Everyone I know is already here. Curious, he checked the device.

JM

Help me, Tiger.

Those three little words were all it took to make the sniper drop everything. The cake and party were forgotten as he made a mad dash for the deck below. He found Jim sitting on the floor outside the bathroom. His mate looked distressed and his blood pressure monitor was sounding off. He knew this couldn’t be good.


The mastermind grimaced, grateful to see Seb but having difficulty speaking due to shortness of breath. “I went in…I saw…” He pointed toward the bathroom.

Moran got the gist of what he was trying to communicate. With his gun poised, he entered the lavatory to investigate. Immediately, he knew why Moriarty was so upset.

Omega cocksucker. Abomination. Real men don’t get pregnant. Male omega spawn will burn in hell. The graffiti went on, but Seb didn’t need to see any more.

He growled loudly, blue eyes blazing with rage. “Who did this? Did you get a look at them?”

Jim shook his head. “No,” he panted. “Don’t know who.”
The former colonel needed to put his anger aside and tend to his husband. He tucked his gun away and knelt next to him.

“Remember your breathing exercises. Inhale and exhale at controlled intervals. You can do this.”

The Irishman was trying, he really was. Even still, his heart continued to race. He just couldn’t calm down.

“Tiger…I’m sorry,” he wheezed between laborious breaths.

“You don’t have anything to be sorry about, hon. Whoever is responsible for this…they’re the ones who’ll be sorry.”

Jim clasped Seb by the hand. His palms were sweaty and he was trembling. This was worrisome. The assassin had to find some way to relax him, and fast.

“Close your eyes.”

“Huh?”

“Close your eyes and think of the nursery we’ve got at home. You did a wonderful job picking out the furniture and color patterns. Picture it in your mind. Think of those beautiful canopy cradles.”

Moriarty complied while maintaining his breathing techniques.

“Imagine what it’ll be like when we bring Essie and Eddie in there for the first time. They’ll be swaddled tight in blankets from the hospital, probably cooing and smiling the way babies do.”

“Oh, Sebby. Keep talking.”

“We’ll lay them down in their gold-accented bassinets and they’ll look just like royalty. They’ll be the poshest babies in England.”

Jim smiled, still clutching his spouse’s hand. “They are royalty,” he stated. His voice was raspy, but his breathing seemed slightly improved. “Our little prince and princess.”

“You’re right, kitten. They definitely are.” Moran paused, brainstorming what else he could say to soothe his Magpie. “When they get a bit bigger, they can use the playroom, too. We’ll all ride the carousel together and have ice cream afterward, like you used to do with your mum. Hot fudge sundaes for everyone.”

“That’s lovely, Tiger. What about the seesaw?”

_Seesaw?_ Sebastian momentarily drew a blank, but then remembered the toy. Jim had bought it a while ago, and the only reason he hadn’t included it in the playroom décor was because he thought it would be better suited as part of an outdoor playground area.

“The seesaw will go in the backyard,” the sniper proclaimed. “We’ll have a jungle gym built with all the accoutrements. Slides, swings, monkey bars—the works. Their friends will want to come by every day to play.”

It was then that he noticed Jim’s monitor had ceased beeping. _His blood pressure must’ve stabilized. Thank god._ Seb also realized that his mate was no longer quivering.

“You can open your eyes now, sweetheart.”
He did, his gaze instantly locking with Sebastian’s. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me, thank our children. Thinking of them is what calmed you down.”

“Yes, it’s just…you always know the right things to say. When I start to lose it, you’re the only one who’s ever been able to talk me back from the edge. Nobody else has managed that.”

“I guess it’s a gift,” he said warmly.

“You’re a gift,” the genius quickly replied. “Sent in human form, and you’ve given me two more to share.”

Moran was suddenly very touched by his husband’s words. “I love you, Jimmy.”

“I love you, too.” Jim let go of the man’s hand so that he could hug him instead. “I think I’ll be okay. Help me up?”

“Of course.” The blonde arose first and then assisted his partner into a standing position.

Moriarty nodded appreciatively. For a brief moment, he turned to glance at the bathroom again. Sadness welled in his dark brown eyes as he took a second look at the vicious graffiti. He was no stranger to bigotry, having been openly gay since the age of seventeen. But this…this was an attack on more than his sexuality. It was a condemnation of his identity as a male omega and of his choice to bear children. It was an insult to his personhood. And perhaps most egregiously, it had been committed by an employee. There were no words for the level of violation he felt.

“We need to find out who did this and slit their fucking throat,” the consulting criminal declared. “It’s a shame there are no security cameras on board.”

“No one’s left yet. We can go up there and suss it out. Or at least, I can. If you’d rather take a rest, I’d understand.”

“I’m coming with you.” Newfound determination rang in his voice. He had to know who’d chosen to betray him in such an abhorrent way. This was a transgression which demanded accountability.

**********

Returning topside, Sebastian ordered the DJ to stop the music. That seemed to get the crowd’s attention, as many looked over to see what was going on.

Good, I’ve got a captive audience.

Using the DJ’s microphone, he began. “I want to thank everyone for attending my birthday party. For the most part, it’s been fun. However, I’m disheartened to announce that there’s been an act of vandalism in the on-board bathroom. Some incredibly derogatory things were written on the walls and mirror.” People were abuzz at the news, and Seb continued, “What Mr. Moriarty and I would like to know is simple. We want to uncover who was responsible for the heinous display. So please, for your sake and ours, do the right thing. Own up to what you’ve done.”

The crowd clamored amongst themselves, but no volunteers stepped forward. Noticing this, Jim moved to stand alongside his mate. “Not exactly a forthcoming bunch,” he whispered.

“No, they’re not,” the alpha said with a frustrated sigh.

Speaking into the mic again, he related another message. “This situation will go a lot easier if the
perpetrator just comes clean. Don’t make matters more difficult than they need to be.”

Still, no one offered a confession.

“Fuck this,” Jim hissed, grabbing the microphone away from Moran.

“Hiiiiii,” he greeted the attendees. “It’s your boss here, James Moriarty. I’d like to take a moment to stress the importance of what my charming associate has told you all.” The audience fell into a hush as the mastermind spoke. Not a soul dared interrupt. “If the vandal admits to what he or she has done right now, there will be consequences, yes. But if they don’t acknowledge their wrongdoing and we learn who it is later, the repercussions will be exponentially worse,” he informed the group. “Consider your silence carefully, because it may come back to haunt you.”

To Jim and Seb’s mutual disappointment, the Irishman’s straightforward appeal inspired precious little honesty among the partygoers. The duo looked at each other, realizing they would have to apply alternate measures to smoke out the culprit.

“Okay, since the person who defaced the bathroom is too cowardly to admit their guilt, we’re left with no choice but to do this the hard way,” the genius declared. “I’m going to insist that everyone line up in an orderly fashion. Sebastian and I will be checking any bags or purses you may be carrying, as well as administer a bodily pat down. Anyone who refuses to submit to inspection will be permanently dismissed from my employ.”

“What is it we’re looking for?” the sniper quietly asked.

“A black marker. The same kind that was used to write the graffiti.”

“Understood.”

With a heavy heart, Moran did as directed. This wasn’t at all how he’d hoped to cap off his birthday. *When I find the miserable son of a bitch responsible for this, they’ll be begging for death.*

*********

The Magpie and his Tiger were in dismay. Their efforts to uncover the vandal proved fruitless. Though the miscreant had to be a guest, none confessed to the act and no marker was found. Ultimately, they were forced to let everyone leave without having apprehended anyone.

When the couple returned to their hotel room, they practically collapsed into bed. Both were worn down by the exacting emotional toll the evening had taken. For a day that had begun so wonderfully, neither could’ve anticipated the dour note it would end on.

Sebastian laid stalk-straight while Moriarty curled into a ball, facing away from his husband. Tired as they were, sleep refused to come.

After several restless minutes, the former colonel heard a pitiful sound amid the darkness. It was a sniffle and a whimper— small, but weighty in the depths of its sorrow. It was Jim.

Moran flipped on the nightstand lamp and rolled over towards his mate. He moved to hold him in a spooning position, a gesture the smaller man readily accepted.

“Don’t cry, love. We’ll find the bastard yet.”

“I’m sorry it ruined your party. It was supposed to be perfect for you, Tiger. I *wanted* it to be perfect.” The consulting criminal let out a shuddering sob.
“Shh, it’s okay,” Seb consoled. “You organized an excellent event. The awful actions of a bigoted individual were out of your control. No one could’ve predicted what would happen.”

“I know, Tiger. Logically, I get that. But inside…in my head and my heart…” he trailed off, tears overtaking him once more. “It feels so wrong.”

The mastermind nestled as close to Sebastian as possible, his back pressed firmly against the larger man’s bare chest. Their bodies were molded together like pieces of a puzzle, but still it was not enough.

“Hold me tighter,” he said, and sniper obliged. Moran’s arm slung over him, his hand resting on the swell of Jim’s stomach. Seb absently massaged his abdomen, feeling gentle kicks arise to meet his touch.

“They were sleeping,” Moriarty remarked. “You’ve stirred them up.”

“Sorry.”

“It’s fine. I like it when they’re moving. It lets me know they’re alive and well.” He took a deep breath, shivering ever so slightly. “Sebby?”

“Yes?”

“About the graffiti tonight— I don’t care what people think of me. I stopped giving a toss ages ago,” the genius stated. “But the babies…what upset me was seeing what was written about them.”

Seb was silent for a moment, recalling the cruel sentiments on display. It had enraged him, too.

“I’ve been a rotten son of a bitch plenty of times,” Jim admitted, “but even I’ve never done that. Never wished an innocent baby to ‘burn in hell.’ How could anyone be so hateful?”

“I don’t know, Magpie. I can’t understand it either.”

“Sometimes I wonder what kind of world we’re bringing Essie and Eddie into.”

“One that will be filled with our love,” the alpha assured. “They’ll know nothing but affection.”

“From us, yes. But what of everyone else? We can’t keep them locked away in a tower. Eventually, they’ll go out. Meet other people. And then what?”

“Jimmy, I believe that as parents, we just have to do the best we can. It’s impossible to control what others may do, but we can be there for them when they need us, and trust that our examples will prepare them for the outside world.”

The consulting criminal laughed. “Our examples? Good grief, Tiger, are you sure that’s a good idea? I can picture it now—you taking the twins out to a shooting range or explaining to them the nuances of selecting a garrote.”

Sebastian grinned. “Hey, that’s actually a very important piece of information. You don’t want to choose a cord that’s too thick and unwieldy, but conversely, you don’t want it to be so thin it will snap. There’s a delicate balance that must be achieved.”

“Oh, Sebby. Are we crazy for this? For wanting to be parents?”

“No crazier than anyone who decides to have kids. It’s a commitment, but I know we can handle it.”
Jim sighed contentedly. “You’ll be a good daddy,” he declared, a soft yawn escaping his lips.

“So will you. We’ll cherish and protect our cubs together.”

The dark-eyed omega cooed. “I like it when you call them that. Makes me think of little tiger babies romping at the zoo.”

“Hmm, now there’s a thought. Perhaps I’ll start counting kittens instead of sheep to help me sleep,” Moran teased.

“Silly Seb,” he groggily spoke. “I love you.”

“I love you, too, Magpie. Always.”

It didn’t take long for Jim to drift off to dreamland, and his husband soon followed suit. They slumbered all night in each other’s arms, not even caring that the lights were left on.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Chapter Summary

You never know who or what you’ll come across in Monte Carlo…

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

The day after Sebastian’s birthday party, he and Jim set out for Monte Carlo. It was a relatively short drive, taking just over 2-hours total. Despite this, the ride felt at least twice as long, not because of traffic or road construction, but due to the impenetrable wall of silence that had settled between them. Seb tried to make conversation, but his mate retreated inward, barely uttering a handful of words. Body language and experience told him that the genius was not mad at him. Rather, he was simply in one of his morose moods.

When they arrived at their hotel, the sniper discovered that Jim pre-booked the largest suite available. It was an incredibly opulent room, one which the desk clerk assured them had been occupied by royalty on numerous occasions. Frankly, Moran didn’t much care, but it was the kind of pedigree that would’ve impressed his husband, had the man not been in a state of depression.

Seb was brainstorming a strategic plan to cheer the Irishman up. The tuxedo. Moriarty always loved seeing him in formal-wear, dressed to the nines like he’d just come from a red carpet event. So now, as Jim soaked in the tub, he would secretly slip into the Armani tux he’d brought along, accessories included.

He unzipped the bag his suit was in, checking to make sure there were no wrinkles. Smooth as ever, he noted. Nary even a crease. All he had to do was put it on.

Here goes nothing.

**********

Moriarty stepped out of the bathroom wearing a black silk robe. He was fresh and clean, feeling slightly more relaxed than he had prior to his soak. It’d been a rough morning for the consulting criminal. He’d awoken in a terribly dour disposition. His back ached, his feet were swollen, and he felt hideously fat. Not to mention, he was still reeling from yesterday’s graffiti incident. All of those things combined to create a flurry of woe.

The mastermind audibly gasped when he caught sight of Sebastian. His husband stood before him, clad in a tuxedo while posing with his gun. He was the epitome of elegance and sophistication,
oozing charm from every pore. Jim could ogle him for hours and never grow bored.

“See something you like?” the sly blonde asked with a smirk.

Oh, yes. Yes, he most certainly did. Seb was gorgeous on any given day, but dressed like that, he was spectacular.

“Tiger, you’re so…dashing.” Moriarty could not disguise the want in his voice. He was powerfully attracted to the man.

“Thanks, love. Can’t remember the last time I wore one of these things.”

“It was this past New Year’s Eve, at the black-tie gala in Munich,” he answered without missing a beat.

“Ah, that’s right.” Moran thought back, his memory jogged. “God, they served good spätzle.”

“It was passable catering,” Jim quipped. “Truth be told, I was more taken by you than the food.”

Sebastian saw this as his cue to make a move. He strode up to his spouse, closing in so that they were a hairsbreadth apart. The energy surrounding them was smoldering in its intensity, reaching near-combustible proportions.

“Christ,” the dark-eyed genius muttered. “It’s a good thing I learned those breathing exercises.”

“Am I really so appealing?”

“Must you ask?” He took a long, lingering look at the former colonel. “Bloody hell, Seb. In that outfit, you could be James Bond.”

“It’s funny you should say that. Bond was one of my first crushes.”

“Oh? Doooo tell.” Jim was listening with rapt anticipation. He enjoyed discovering new things about his magnificent mate. Even after several years together, they still managed to surprise each other every now and then.

“When I was ten, my brother Severin went through a phase where he was fixated on spy films. One day, I came in while he was watching “Goldfinger,” and, well, you could’ve knocked me over with a feather.”

The consulting criminal flashed a devilish grin. “You fell for Connery, aye? Good taste.”

“What’s more, I fell for Pussy Galore, too. I wanted to snog them both.”

“Oooh, how scandalous.”

“That’s me,” Seb teased. “Salacious as the day is long.” He gingerly reached out to stroke Jim’s arm through the fabric of his robe. Their eyes met in a penetrating gaze, and he continued, “Let me take you out, Magpie. Allow me the honor of escorting you through this fine city.”

“Hmm.” The mastermind badly wanted to say ‘yes,’ but he was still feeling self-conscious. “Sebby…are you certain you wish to be seen with me? I’m not exactly cutting the most striking figure of late.”

The assassin sighed, shaking his head. “How many times do we have to go through this, darling? You know where my heart lies.”
Anxiety crept across the Irishman’s face. His emotions were haywire, a mess of stress and hormones in collision.

Sebastian dropped down on one knee and grasped his partner’s hand. Moriarty looked at him, confused, but said nothing.

“Jimmy, I hereby swear that you shall forever be my greatest passion and my deepest love. I cherish you, and you alone. It thrills me that you’re carrying our children, and I would proudly go anywhere with you by my side. Permit me to do so. Grant me the gift of your glorious company.”

Jim’s breathing hitched and his eyes glistened with tears. “Tiger, that was beautiful.”

“It’s all true. I’m irrevocably yours.”

“Oh, my sweet, sweet Sebby.” He pulled the other man upwards so that he was standing again, and proceeded to wrap his arms around him. “Yes, I’ll go out with you. Just give me a moment to get dressed.”

“Take whatever time you need.”

The sniper would wait an eternity if that’s what it took.

*********

Afternoon stretched into evening as Jim and Sebastian painted the town red. They dined at a 5-star restaurant, attended a concert performed by the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra, and participated in a bit of high-stakes gambling. In all, it was a wonderful day.

Before returning to their suite for some much-desired alone time, the couple decided to stop at the hotel bar and get a nightcap. Seb was drinking scotch as usual, but Moriarty’s cocktail request sent the assassin into a barely stifled fit of laughter. In his most serious voice, Jim had asked the bartender for a Shirley Temple. Moran wished he’d captured the moment on film.

“How is it, dear?” the blonde inquired, flashing the faintest hint of a smirk.

Jim locked eyes with his alpha, wordlessly plucking the cherry garnish from his drink. He pressed the fruit to Seb’s lips, feeding it to him and leaving only the stem. Then, he popped the inedible stalk into his own mouth. Moran watched intently as he appeared to work it around his palate the way one might do when sucking on hard candy. After a few seconds, he stopped and pulled out the stem. It was now tied like a tiny pretzel.

“Wow,” the former colonel marveled. “I always knew you had a talented tongue, but I didn’t realize you could do that.”

The mastermind smiled wickedly. “Just a little something to tide you over until we get back to our room.” He rose from his barstool and assumed a standing position. “I’m heading to the loo. Don’t leave without me.”

While waiting at the bar, Seb ordered a second drink and checked some things on his phone. After the awkward way his party ended, he wasn’t sure what to expect in terms of fallout. So far, he’d received no angry messages, which was a relief. Still, the vandalism incident weighed heavily on him. When they returned to London, he would begin an investigation into the backgrounds of their most recent hires. He thought he’d done a good job of that during the interview process, but apparently not. The person responsible had to be a new employee, right? Neither he nor Jim wanted to believe that a seasoned associate would do such a thing.
Suddenly, a female voice caught the sniper’s attention.

“I’ll have a gin martini with a lemon twist,” the woman spoke.

He knew that voice. Knew it quite well, in fact, but he’d not heard it in years.

Turning his head toward the sound, he was gobsmacked.

_Irene Adler_.

Never in a million years did he think he’d see her again. And why would he? She was supposed to be dead.

*Has everyone I know faked their death at one point or another?* It was becoming a bizarre trend in his life.

As he spied Irene, she noticed him, too. Their eyes met for a split second before he quickly averted his gaze. But it was too late, and she was already making a beeline straight for him.

The beguiling dominatrix took a seat next to Seb—*Jim’s* seat.

“Fancy meeting you here, Moran. Long time, no see.”

“Indeed. You’ve held up remarkably well for a dead woman. Tell me, what’s your secret?”

“Sex, gin, and good genes. Not necessarily in that order.”

“Cheers,” he pithily replied, raising his glass in mock salute.

She smiled, raking her eyes over him. “I must say, you’re looking exceptionally suave. Are you here for business or pleasure?”

“What concern is it of yours?”

“Curiosity, is all. You needn’t be defensive.”

“Pardon the lack of manners, but you’re crashing my date.” He motioned to the half-empty cocktail sitting near the stool Irene had usurped.

She glanced at the drink. “A Shirley Temple? Really, Sebastian? Please tell me you’re not romancing a teetotaler. Or worse, an underage girl.”

“Hardly.” _Presumptuous bitch._

“I suppose it’s not my place to pass judgment. To each their own.” Adler paused, considering something. “Regrettably, I’m here on business. However, that doesn’t mean I’m averse to finding a bit of pleasure when and where I can.”

*Where is she headed with this?* Seb was almost afraid to find out.

“We used to have fun together,” Irene said, casually slipping a well-manicured hand onto his thigh. “I wouldn’t be opposed to a rendezvous for old times’ sake. Perhaps once you’re through with your date tonight. Or, if you’ve an open-minded partner, maybe a different sort of meetup could be arranged.”

Moran removed the woman’s hand from his body and stared at her, unwavering. “I don’t do that
anymore, Irene. I’m dedicated to the relationship I’m in.”

She let out a flustered laugh. “You, one the biggest philanderers I know, is in an exclusive relationship? Now I’ve heard everything. Next you’ll claim to be married with two kids and a dog.”

*Not far off.* “People change. They grow and evolve. I did, and I’m happier for it.”

Adler scowled at him. “People lie to themselves, you mean. We are who we are, Sebastian. Pretending otherwise is a nice fantasy, but sooner or later, reality will catch up.”

At that moment, Jim reemerged from the bathroom. He was none too thrilled when he spotted a woman in his seat, and became even more annoyed when he realized who she was. His hormones were flaring, and instinct alerted him that a potential competitor was horning in on his alpha. He could *not* permit this.

The consulting criminal sauntered over, making an effort to sit on his husband’s lap, but not quite being able to heft himself up properly. The assassin had to assist, actually lifting him with both arms in order to secure him in place.

“Not so dead after all, aye?” the genius spoke, addressing Irene.

“No. You either, huh?”

“Well, I’m sitting here, so obviously not. Duh.”

Irene focused her sights on Seb. “This is the recipient of your undying fidelity? I never would’ve guessed.”

“Don’t feel badly about it, dear,” the Irishman quipped. “You’re not the sharpest of the lot. I’m sure a great many things elude you.”

“Still as charming as ever, Moriarty.”

“I do try.”

“Jim and I were just grabbing a nightcap. We really should get to our room,” Seb stated. He wanted to vacate this situation, pronto.

“I suppose I understand the Shirley Temple now,” Adler commented, glancing at the drink and then back to the couple. “You look like you’re positively ready to pop. I guess that kind of weight gain really shows on a person your size. Not as many places to distribute the pounds.”

The mastermind was stricken by her stinging remark, but he had to put on a brave face. “Honey, don’t even attempt to be clever. It doesn’t suit you.”

Irene was about to respond when her phone went off. She checked the device and swiftly stood up. Clearly, she received whatever message she’d been waiting for.

“If you’ll excuse me, gentlemen, I have business to attend to. It’s been splendid chatting.” And just like that, she was gone. It was almost as if she existed in ephemeral form—a ghost, sent to rattle their bones and then vanish into the night.

“Thank God,” Seb said, breathing a sigh of relief. “I was beginning to think she’d never leave.”

“That fucking cunt should’ve stayed dead,” Jim spat. “Maybe we ought to remedy her
resurrection.”

“Magpie, we’re on holiday. Let’s not kill anyone for now, okay? I want to savor this time away with you.”

Moriarty took a deep, calming breath. “You’re right, love. Seeing her invade my territory set me on edge. And that awful remark…”

“She was just trying to push your buttons. Don’t let it get to you.” The sniper took advantage of his spouse’s placement on his lap, leaning in to nuzzle the man’s neck.

There is was again. That alluringly sweet scent. It seemed to be growing more pronounced by the day.

“Jimmy, you smell like heaven,” he declared, littering the exposed section of skin with hungry kisses.

“I think the scent gets stronger as pregnancy progresses, if I remember my high school biology text correctly,” the consulting criminal teased, enjoying the attention he was being given.

Sebastian grunted. “I never got to put on a show for you last night,” he whispered hotly into the omega’s ear. “I think it’s time to amend that.”

Jim’s eyes blazed with an all-consuming lust. He could feel his mate’s burgeoning arousal as it pressed against his backside, and he wanted more.

“Do your worst, darling.”

Moran required no further encouragement. In an instant, he was carrying his Magpie out of the bar and into an elevator headed upstairs. They mustn’t dally— this was to be a performance for the ages.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
The Road Home

Chapter Summary

It’s time for Jim and Sebastian to head home.

Note: This is meant to be a transitionary installment, rather low-key, but bridging the gap between them being on vacation for Seb's birthday and returning to London.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunlight shined through a gap in the curtains, signaling a new day had arisen for the Tiger and his Magpie. This was no ordinary morning. After four glorious days spent in Monte Carlo, it was time for the couple to bid France adieu.

Jim shifted in Sebastian’s arms, maneuvering so that he could kiss the sleepy sniper. Moran began to stir at the feel of his lover’s lips, humming softly as he awakened.

“Morning, my dear,” Moriarty whispered.

“Already? I don’t believe it.”

“I’m afraid so, Sebby.”

“Let’s pretend it isn’t.”

“Sorry, darling, but we’ve got a long day ahead of us. I say we get the ball rolling bright and early.”

The mastermind sat up and scooted to the edge of the bed, attempting to stand. He grumbled in frustration as his efforts failed.

“I need some help here, Tiger.” Jim looked towards his husband, affecting a coquettish stare. He was trying to appear as enticing as possible to get the man moving.

“Of course.” Moran rose from the mattress and approached Moriarty, carefully easing him into an upright position. “There you go. Better?”

“Much. Thanks, hon.”

“I aim to please,” he said with a wink. “How about we grab some breakfast and then I bring our
luggage to the car?”

“Excellent suggestion. I’m itching to get on the road.”

Seb nodded. As wonderful as their mini-vacation had been, he understood why the Irishman was so keen to return to London. It was because they had a bigoted son of a bitch in their midst. Ever since the vandalism incident at the party, both he and his partner wanted to determine who was responsible for the heinous display. The sooner they got home, the sooner they could probe the situation.

“By the way, you’ll be riding shotgun for the trip back.” Jim flashed a cheeky, devil-may-care grin at the assassin.

“Is that a fact?” He wasn’t sure how to take the news. On one hand, Moriarty was footing the bill for the Ferrari rental. So really, he had every right to drive it. But on the other hand, Seb was feeling fiercely protective. The idea of his mate behind the wheel of a sports car filled him with dread. There was so much potential danger involved.

“You bet your ass it’s a fact. I rented the bloody thing—I ought to have a crack at driving it. Can’t let you have all the fun.”

“Oh, I think you’ve had a great deal of fun these past few days,” Moran flirtatiously replied.

Ever since the duo’s run-in with Irene at the hotel bar, they’d decided to cut themselves off from the rest of the world. They powered down their phones and only left their room to occasionally dine at the downstairs restaurant. All other time was spent together, basking in a suite that’d become a veritable love nest. It was a place of absolute bliss.

Jim blushed slightly at his alpha’s insinuation. He had been insatiable, no doubt about it. The genius’s libido was skyrocketing off the charts. He figured it had to be hormonal, and made a mental note to mention it to Dr. Swenson at his next prenatal appointment.

“Fancy a shower before we go eat?” Seb asked.

“Sounds lovely, though I may require your assistance reaching a few spots.” Bending down was not something the consulting criminal could do easily anymore. Thank goodness he had such an attentive spouse.

“Whatsoever you need, I will humbly oblige,” the blonde assured. Sharing his life with Jim was a privilege and he took none of it for granted. Even performing small tasks for the man was a blessing.

*********

The trip home was considerably more pleasant than the ride out had been. For starters, they were actually talking this time around. Hours on the road flew by faster once conversation was introduced. It also helped that they no longer had an arrival deadline looming overhead. While the pair wished to travel with expediency, they could be a bit more flexible in terms of making pit stops along the way.

“If you get tired at any point, say the word and I’ll take the wheel,” Sebastian spoke.

“Tiger, I believe that’s the third time you’ve made such an offer. I appreciate the thought, but I’m a big boy. I can manage driving us back to the rental lot in one piece.”
“I know, I just worry. If I could, I’d probably cover you in bubble wrap for protection,” he teased.

Jim chuckled. “Bubble wrap, aye? Why stop there? A giant hamster ball would have so much more flair.”

“Not a bad idea. If you started to get on my nerves, I could roll you in the opposite direction. Problem solved.”

“It goes both ways, darling. If you pissed me off, I could roll right over you— splat, like a bug.”

“Well, then, remind me to stay on your good side.”

The two men smiled warmly at each other, feeling more carefree than they had in ages. Seb was delighted to see his mate in better spirits. He loved laughing and joking with Jim; loved the playful rapport between them. After all he’d been through this past year, his Magpie deserved happiness.

Moriarty hissed, inhaling sharply. “Aaah, that was a strong one.”

“One what? A kick?”

“Yeah. Forget dance and football— these babies are training to be martial artists. At this rate, they may soon qualify for black belts in utero.”

“They’re feisty, Jim, just like you.”

Moran didn’t think it possible, but his husband’s grin somehow grew even wider than it already was.

“Oh, Tiger, I do hope so. I want our children to exemplify the best of us both.”

“That’s a nice thought, Jimmy. I hope so, too.” Indeed, he did. Because if they inherited their less than admirable traits, heaven help anyone who got in Essie and Eddie’s way. The world may not be able to handle them.

There was a brief pause before the mastermind spoke again. “I’m considering joining a specialized pregnancy group when we get back to London.”

“Really?” This was the first Seb was hearing of it.

“Yes, it’s supposed to be for expectant male omegas. Meant to facilitate interaction with others who are going through the same thing.”

“Sounds like a fine idea.” Maybe Jim could find solidarity amongst them.

“I didn’t even realize such a group existed until Annie told me about it at the party. Her brother-in-law used to attend meetings before he had his daughter.”

“Hmm…would I be allowed to accompany you?” These days, he really didn’t like leaving Jim unattended for too long.

“I don’t think so. From what she said, partners aren’t generally included.”

The policy made sense. Male omegas faced unique challenges. By keeping the group private, it enabled them to create a safe space where they could find security and support without fear of outside judgment.
“Ah, I get it. Keep the spouses away so you can vent your frustrations about us,” Moran jested.

“An omega having frustrations with their alpha?” he asked in mock surprise. “You’ll turn society on its ear with that revelation.”

“I’m counting on it,” the former colonel deadpanned. “In other news, the sky is blue and grass is green. You’re married to an astonishingly perceptive man, kitten.”

For just a second, during a stop in traffic, Moriarty took his eyes off the road to shoot Seb a glance. Brief as it was, it told the assassin all he needed to know. Jim was happy. Despite the endless stresses of life, he was genuinely content.

“Tiger?”,

“Yes?”

“You can take the wheel. I think I’m ready for a nap,” he declared, his statement punctuated with a yawn.

“Okay.”

The genius soon pulled over to the shoulder of the road, where he and Seb swapped places. Settling into the passenger side, Jim reclined his seat while the assassin pulled something from his backpack. It was a fleece blanket.

“Here, let me tuck you in.” He covered up the smaller man and placed a kiss to his forehead.

“Sweet dreams, darling.”

“Love you, Sebby,” the consulting criminal cooed, snuggling against the soft material.

“Love you, too.”

Chapter End Notes

What do you think of the idea of Jim joining a pregnancy group? I thought it might be interesting, to see him interact with other expectant male omegas, and maybe even find a way to relate to otherwise "ordinary" people. I think there's potential in the situation.
At last, Jim and Sebastian were home. It felt good to be back in London. The only aspect they were less than thrilled about was the brisk English air and dreary skies that greeted them on arrival. Too bad the British Isles didn’t have the same temperate conditions as Saint-Tropez.

Once Seb brought their luggage inside, he got to work unloading the postbox. For having been gone a week, a shocking amount of items had amassed.

“God, look at it all,” Jim exclaimed as the sniper dropped the pile onto the coffee table.

“We wouldn’t have so much junk mail if you didn’t keep sending away for catalogues.”

“Hush. You know what a savvy shopper I am.”

Moriarty sifted through the stack, stopping when he came across an envelope addressed to his husband. Actually, it was listed as being both to and from Moran. He had to double check that he’d read it correctly, before quickly realizing what he was looking at.

“Tiger, your brother sent you something.”

“Hmm?” Seb took the envelope and saw for himself that the return address was indeed credited to an ‘S. Moran’ in Melbourne, Australia. He opened the mailing and discovered it was a birthday card.

Dear Sebastian,

Happy 40th. Sorry I can’t be there to celebrate with you. Hope the day treats you well.

Sincerely,

Severin
“Short and to the point. Sounds like Sev, all right.”

“Since I’ve known you, that’s the first card he’s sent,” Jim mused.

“Yeah, it is. Maybe he’s serious about wanting to reconnect.”

“Oh, I know he is. When I met with him, he was very sincere. He regrets letting so much time go by without speaking to you.”

The assassin shrugged. “Severin had his own life to lead. I understood that.”

“Perhaps, but he still feels badly about it.”

Moran sighed. “I’d offer to call him so we could catch up, but with the time zone difference, I don’t think it’s feasible.”

“Might I suggest you try texting or email? There are more methods of correspondence out there than just the telephone.”

“You’re right,” he admitted. “I guess a part of me is reluctant because I wouldn’t know where to start. ‘Hello, how’ve you been for the past 25-years?’ How do you even begin a conversation like that?”

“I don’t have all the answers, Tiger. But if there’s one thing I’ve come to realize these past few months, it’s that family is invaluable. I never had relatives growing up, so the concept didn’t faze me. But carrying our children has put things into perspective. They’re my flesh and blood, and I would do anything for them. The same goes for you, too,” Moriarty professed. “I— no, scratch that— we have a family now, and I cherish it. So I think you ought not worry about what you say to your brother. Just the fact that you’re reaching out to him is the important part. Content is secondary to the gesture in and of itself.”

Sebastian paused, contemplating his mate’s words. “When did you become so wise?”

“I’ve always been a visionary, my dear. Though I do tend to believe I’ve gained greater clarity of late.”

The blonde smiled warmly. Pregnancy really had brought out something wonderful in Jim. Hell, it was having a positive effect on them both. “Have I told you yet today how much I adore you?”

“You have, but it’s the sort of thing that bears repeating,” he answered with a sly expression on his face.

Seb gazed in awe at the other man, utterly spellbound. Sometimes he felt so much affection for Jim, it was overwhelming. His heart swelled at the mere sight and sound of him, cresting in ways he could not possibly convey through language alone.

The consulting criminal glanced at his watch. “I’ve got a fabulous idea. Let’s go to high tea. I’m sure they must offer an herbal blend at The Ritz or The Savoy.”

Ah, yes, high tea. Several upscale establishments held such proceedings on a daily basis. The events were always expensive, urbane, and featured a strict ‘jacket and tie, no jeans’ policy. Naturally, Moriarty loved to attend. Moran, not so much. But if it pleased Jim, he would oblige.
“Admit it, Magpie— this is just an excuse to get me into a suit.”

“Nooooo. It’s a way of getting you into a suit while also enjoying the finer delicacies of life. You see? There’s a subtle difference.”

*That cheeky git.* “Brilliant logic, darling. I don’t know how you manage it.”

“With smoke and mirrors,” he sassied back. “Now go on and get changed. I want you to wear the pinstripe Westwood I bought you last Christmas.”

The sniper quirked an eyebrow. Jim loved him in that suit. Well, more to the point, he loved taking him out of it.

“Planning some post-tea activities, are we?”

“Now that you mention it, I did want to pop in at headquarters. After what happened at the party, I think I should make my presence known. Show whoever committed the vandalism that I won’t be intimidated in any way.”

“Oh. Okay, sure. We can do that if you’d like.” The disappointment in Seb’s voice was palpable.

Now it was Jim’s turn to raise a brow. “Tiiiiiger,” he drawled, “what did youuuouuu have in mind, hmmm?”

“Nothing much. Just countless hours of unbridled passion, punctuated by screams of ecstasy echoing through the night.”

Moriarty gasped. “Oh my. Well, the day’s still young. I think we have plenty of time to tackle that endeavor, don’t you?”

Moran grunted hungrily at the prospect. He wanted to say, ‘to hell with tea and headquarters,’ and simply drag the Irishman off to the bedroom. But he had too much respect for Jim to do that. It would be wrong to place his desires above those of his mate’s. An expectant omega was to be revered.

“I’ll get dressed right now,” Seb said.

“Good. And hon? Do put on your burgundy tie. It really brings out your eyes.”

“Yes, sir.” Who was he to argue with fashion advice from Mr. Sex?

*********

High tea at *The Ritz* proved interesting, and not necessarily in a good way. Service was impeccable and the food and drink were excellent—they even had multiple varieties of herbal brew for Jim to sample. The patrons, however, were another story.

Jim and Seb recognized many of the guests that afternoon. A number of businessmen and women they’d had prior dealings with made an appearance. Most were not willing to acknowledge the duo, a fact which became increasingly difficult to deny.

While it’s true that some may not wish to openly fraternize with a man as infamous as James Moriarty, he would typically be afforded a polite greeting or nod. Today, though, it seemed people were actively avoiding eye contact with him and his sniper. Worse, the handful of times he did catch someone glancing their way, it was accompanied by hushed chatter.
“I know they’re gossiping, Seb. Running their fucking mouths as though they’ve got nothing better to do,” Jim spat. “What a disgraceful bunch of prigs.”

“I thought you didn’t care what others said about you?” Moran remarked, taking a sip of Earl Grey.

The consulting criminal glared at his mate. “I care when we’re being blatantly disrespected, and you should, too. This is appalling.”

“I’ll grant you it’s strange, but for the sake of your health, you can’t let it upset you.”

“How can I not? I demand to know why we’re suddenly being given the cold shoulder. There’s got to be a reason.”

Sebastian paused, considering the situation. “Maybe they’re just not used to seeing you pregnant,” he suggested. “It’s been a while since we’ve done much socializing around the city, and working from home, you take conference calls rather than hold meetings in person. It could be that some folks simply haven’t seen you like this before and it’s jarring to them.”

Moriarty’s look of frustration grew more intense. “Why would it jar them, Seb? And why would they be avoiding you as well?” The Irishman’s tone was razor sharp, his features becoming animated as he spoke.

“Magpie, you’re the most dangerous man in London. Like it or not, that kind of reputation carries expectations and ideals. ‘Tough guy’ stereotypes, really,” the assassin stated. “The notion of you bearing children is probably a surprise to a lot of people because they only view you as a criminal extraordinaire. They don’t get to witness the sides of you that I do. They don’t realize how multifaceted you are, and so it’s shocking to them,” Seb asserted. “As for them snubbing me… well, it could be because they suspect I’m the father. Logic dictates this wasn’t an immaculate conception, and we do spend a fair amount of time together.”

The genius sighed, reflecting on his husband’s hypothesis. He raised good points. Perhaps that’s all this was—a knee jerk reaction to an unanticipated occurrence, e.g., his pregnancy, and the speculation as to who’d put him in such a state. At that rate, was this truly worth getting worked up over?

Jim stared into the boundless depths of Seb’s blue eyes, admiring the strength and wisdom housed within. He loved that he and his Tiger could talk through things together. Though neither relished flowery, emotional discussions, impending parenthood had gone a long way towards helping them open up and be completely honest with one another. He dare say they’d reached a new level of intimacy in their relationship and had never been stronger as a couple. It was exhilarating.

“You’re probably right,” Moriarty finally said. “I don’t know why I insist upon overcomplicating matters.”

“It’s because you’re slightly neurotic,” the sniper teased. “But that’s fine by me—I find it rather endearing.”

He snorted. “Endearing? Please. I annoy myself sometimes. It’s these bloody hormones, I swear.”

Sebastian smiled at his mate. Jim could try pinning this on the babies all he liked, but it didn’t make it so. He’d always been high-strung, pregnant or not.

“Tiger?”

“Yes, dear?”
“Are you going to finish that?” the omega asked, eyeing up a half-eaten finger sandwich on Seb’s plate.

“I’ve had my fill,” he warmly replied.

Moriarty wasted no time polishing off the leftovers. He also made short work of his last few biscuits and tea. Before he knew it, all that remained was an empty platter.

“I think I’m done,” the Irishman spoke. “Let’s pay the bill and stop in at headquarters.”

“Sounds good. Then, after we’re through there, we’ll have time for other endeavors,” Moran reminded with a wink.

“You’re insatiable, darling.”

Seb flashed him a smoldering gleam. “And you love it.”

“I dooooo.”

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Revelations

Chapter Summary

Something strange is afoot. Jim and Sebastian demand to know what’s going on.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was late afternoon when Jim and Sebastian dropped by headquarters. As soon as they walked in, they got the sense that something wasn’t quite right. Everyone suddenly grew silent at their presence and no one wanted to make eye contact with them. It was reminiscent of what had occurred during high tea at The Ritz.

Moriarty pulled his mate aside to discuss the curious situation. “Okay, this is getting too strange. It can’t be a coincidence that we’ve received the same reception twice in one day. Something is going on.”

“It does seem odd,” the sniper admitted. He’d been quick to write off the reactions at the hotel, but this development called his original assumption into question. Maybe there really was more to it than he thought.

“We need to figure this out. I’ve got half a mind to address the room and ask them what their bloody problem is.”

“Wait,” Seb said, remembering how he’d dealt with a similar situation once before. “Let’s talk to your secretary. She knows the inner-workings of this office like the back of her hand.” When people started gossiping during Jim’s kidnapping ordeal, Suzy was the one he turned to for information. Why not approach her again now?

“Okay,” the mastermind agreed. “I’ll call her in for a meeting.”

Moran nodded, eager to get answers. There was definitely something afoot and they deserved to know the truth.

**********

KNOCK. KNOCK.

“Come in,” Jim commanded, and Suzy entered his office.

“You wanted to see me, Mr. Moriarty?”
“Yes. Please shut the door behind you and take a seat.”

The woman did as directed, sitting opposite him and Seb. “How may I help you, sir?”

“You can tell us what’s going on around here,” he sharply replied. “It’s obvious people were reacting in a peculiar manner when we arrived. What we don’t know is why. Care to shed some light on the subject?”

Her expression sank. “You’re…unaware of recent events?” The secretary’s voice was equal parts saddened and surprised.

Jim and Sebastian exchanged a worried glance. What exactly happened while they were away, and why were they only now finding out about it? This was terribly disconcerting.

“Apparently, we’ve missed a few things. Bring us up to speed.”

“I…well…I’m not sure how to say this,” she stammered, visibly nervous.

“We’re all adults here,” Sebastian interjected. “Whatever it is, surely we can handle it.”

Suzy stared at the formidable men, appearing very much on edge. Neither had seen her like this before. She generally conducted herself with poise and efficiency.

“Come on,” Jim hissed. “Just tell us, for Christ’s sake.” His tone was harsher than he’d intended it to be.

“I’m sorry, sir. This is difficult for me to explain.” She paused, collecting her thoughts. “Have you checked your email lately?”

Moriarty’s face scrunched up in confusion. “Email? What’s that got to do with it?”

“We’ve had our phones turned off since the first night in Monaco,” Moran stated. They’d been so wrapped up in each other, they hadn’t bothered powering them back on, nor had they logged onto a computer, either. The break from technology was refreshing.

“Oh, dear…” Suzy fretfully remarked.

“What? Why is that important?” Jim exclaimed, beginning to lose his composure.

The duo simultaneously whipped out their mobile devices, firing them up for the first time in days. If something significant had come through the mail, they were determined to see it for themselves. After about 60 seconds, their phones successfully booted and they were able to view new messages.

Jim saw what was circulating and instantly went into a fit. His blood pressure monitor began to blare and he shook so badly he dropped his phone. Sebastian was also taken off guard, growling loudly as the mobile screen cracked under the force of his grip.

This was worse than they ever could’ve dreamt. Some sick son of a bitch had violated their privacy in one of the vilest ways imaginable. They’d secretly recorded the couple in their Monte Carlo hotel room— specifically, the night when Seb had given his husband what he thought was a ‘private dance performance’ and then made love to him for hours.

To add insult to injury, the twisted voyeur did the unthinkable and forwarded the video across headquarters, cc’ing it to some outside business associates as well. The original sender’s identity
was encrypted, but a brief message was attached: *You don’t get to walk away.*

The sniper had no time to think about what the ominous comment might mean. Jim was fading fast and required his immediate attention.

“S-S-S,” Moriarty attempted to speak Seb’s name, but the words would not come out. He was deathly pale, beads of sweat running down ashen skin.

“Jimmy, please try to breathe. I know this is upsetting, but remember your techniques.”

It wasn’t working. This bout of anxiety had hit him more intensely than the last, and the genius was too far gone for simple remedies. Sebastian quickly realized the severity of the situation when the man clutched his chest and slumped over in his chair.

In a flash, Seb scooped up his ailing mate and laid him down on a nearby couch. Is this what a heart attack looked like, or a stroke? He was terrified of the possibilities.

“Call an ambulance NOW!” the former colonel roared at Suzy.

She did as she was told, rushing to get ahold of emergency services while Seb tried his damnedest to keep Jim conscious. It was a losing battle.

“Stay with me, Magpie, please!” he begged.

The consulting criminal was clammy and motioning to undo his tie. Moran took notice and helped him loosen the accessory, also unfastening the first few buttons of his shirt. He could feel how hard Jim’s heart was beating— it pounded wildly, as if trying to escape his chest.

Sebastian listened to his spouse whimper and pant, helpless as to what was going on. All he could do was hold him in his arms and whisper words of reassurance until the paramedics arrived. The wait was interminable, but he never left Moriarty’s side, riding along with him to the hospital.

As they rushed Jim into the facility, Moran was forced to let go of his hand and allow the doctors to do their work. The anguished sound the Irishman made in response was the saddest thing Seb had ever heard. After that, the tears he’d struggled not to shed flowed without end.

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The sniper was at a total loss. He’d gotten the hell out of the waiting room and went to the hospital’s gift shop instead. He just couldn’t bear sitting there, not knowing what condition his Magpie was in. When they wheeled him away, it was almost too much to take.

He looked around, staring vacantly at the items on display. They had trinkets for every occasion, from condolences to congratulations and all that lay in between.

*Too bad they don’t have a pack of Marlboro’s.*

Seb stopped smoking at Jim’s behest when they began trying to conceive. The anxious omega didn’t want to risk exposing their potential unborn child to toxic agents. It hadn’t been easy to quit, and there were many times since then that he’d considered starting back up. Somehow, though, he always remained steadfast, even while Moriarty was being held in captivity.

Tonight was different. Tonight, he’d seen and experienced things that made him yearn for his old, trusty combo of whiskey and cigarettes. It was the bitter, burning comfort he’d relied upon for so long.
But his thoughts inevitably returned to Jim. To his madcap kitten who loved him in spite of his innumerable flaws. It wouldn’t be right to light up again. Wouldn’t be what he wanted.

Moran snorted. It was hilarious to think that Jim was apparently the angel on his shoulder, discouraging him from certain vice. Who’d have figured?

And then the assassin saw them— bubblegum cigars sitting on the shelf. With a bleak laugh, he grabbed a box.

*Call it a compromise.*

Only moments later, he noticed something else on display. It was a white stuffed dog resembling the canine who’d crashed his and Jim’s picnic in Saint-Tropez. How could he resist buying that, too? The genius would surely get a kick out of it.

Seb made his purchases and exited the shop. He walked the halls, refusing to go back to that damnable waiting room. His mind wandered as well.

*We were spied on. Recorded. Intimately exposed.* The reality of it hit him like a ton of bricks.

He and Moriarty were the victims of an outrageous violation and there was no way to fix it. No way to undo the damage. People had seen that video. The whole fucking office was now privy to their most private activities. How could he look any of them in the eye again?

The sniper was startled by the sudden ring of his phone. Amazing it still worked after the crushing grasp he had on it earlier.

“Hello?”

“Is this Sebastian Moran?”

“It is. Why?”

“I’m an attendant nurse in the Urgent Care unit at St. Thomas’ Hospital, and we have a patient here who’s been asking for you. He wanted to contact you himself, but didn’t have his mobile on him. He gave me your number so that I could get ahold of you instead.”

“He’s up and alert?” Seb was pleased to hear of Jim’s cognizance, but also felt guilt over the fact that he hadn’t been there when his husband requested him. He should’ve kept his ass planted firmly in that waiting room, but no, he just *had* to get out of there. Had to behave like a selfish twat and turn tail at the sign of trouble. It was inexcusable.

“Yes, sir. The patient, James, is stable and would very much like to see you. The physician who treated him wishes to speak to you, too. There are some matters he wants to discuss.”

*Oh no.* The former colonel felt sick to his stomach. Doctors never wanted to have conversations about good things. They only sought out meetings when bad news was involved. At this point, he wasn’t sure he could withstand any more distress.

“Are you still there, sir?” The line had gone silent as Seb’s mind went into overdrive.

“I’m here. Sorry.”

“No apologies needed. Just come to room 106. Mr. Moriarty is waiting.”

“Understood.”
With a heavy heart, Moran ended the call and headed for the specified address. Whatever happened, he and Jim would face it together.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
I’ll Stand by You

Chapter Summary

Sebastian stays by Jim’s side during a bout of physical and emotional unrest. Serious matters are discussed.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

Sebastian entered Jim’s room and hurried to his bedside, hugging him tightly. A rush of emotion flooded their embrace, speaking volumes without the use of a single word. Neither wanted to let go, but after several seconds, the mastermind was the one to relent.

“Where were you?” he wearily inquired.

“I was at the gift shop,” Seb answered, presenting the bag he’d brought with him. “Take a look.”

The Irishman peeked inside, smiling faintly when he saw its contents. “Candy cigars and an adorable little dog, aye?”

“Not just any little dog,” the blonde was quick to point out. “It’s a miniature version of Sadie. You seemed quite taken with her.”

“I was. Thank you, Tiger.” He held the toy in his hands, staring at it contemplatively. “I think this should be Essie and Eddie’s first stuffed animal. We’ll buy a second one so they don’t have to fight over it.”

“That’s a wonderful idea. All babies need something to snuggle.”

Jim nodded and then grew silent, clutching the stuffed doll. His huge dark eyes were haunted, full of sadness and dread. He was overwhelmed, struggling to keep his feelings in check.

“It’ll be okay, love,” the sniper said. It pained him to see his omega in such distress. He was already making a mental checklist of people to maim and destroy. So far, it included Colin, the vandal, and the bastard who’d recorded them in their hotel room. The roster mounted by the day.

“Sebby, I’m sorry.” Moriarty sounded utterly broken, all bravado absent from his voice.

“You’ve got no reason to be. This wasn’t your fault.”

“Isn’t it? I flipped out and ended up in the bloody hospital again. If I wasn’t so fucking weak, we
“You reacted to a horrifying situation,” the former colonel stated. “We’ve been wronged and I can’t fault you for getting upset. It was a shock in every sense of the word.”

Jim paused, taking a deep breath. “I just can’t abide what’s happened. There was a time when I wouldn’t have given a toss about someone taping me like that. Hell, I’d have probably gotten a laugh out of it,” he confessed. “But nowadays, my mind is in a different place. What we do together is special to me and I don’t want to share the experience with anyone else. I’m sure that sounds incredibly lame, but it’s the truth.”

Sebastian smiled. “It’s not lame at all. I understand completely. It’s special to me, too.”

When the couple initially met, the assassin was a cad of the highest order. His conquests were fleeting sources of pleasure, meant as mindless ways to occupy his time. In that sense, they had something in common. Both men were restless beyond reason, seeking distractions wherever they could. Somehow they found solace in each other, and as their relationship bloomed, Seb felt less like he was having a fling and more like he was engaging in a true romance. Crazy as it was, he’d fallen in love. The intimacy they shared was precious to him and had remained so ever since.

At that moment, the on-call physician who’d treated Jim walked in. He was a stoic middle-aged fellow, carrying himself with utmost professionalism.

“Hello, gentlemen. I’m Dr. Callahan,” he introduced. “Glad to have the both of you present.” Handshakes were exchanged and he continued, “Mr. Moriarty, there are some things regarding your health that must be discussed.”

The Tiger and his Magpie clasped hands, readying themselves for whatever lay ahead. They took a vow assuring mutual devotion in sickness and in health, and they weren’t about to break the promise now.

“You reported to an attending nurse that you’ve been suffering anxiety attacks off and on throughout the duration of your pregnancy, correct?”

“That’s right,” he replied. “I’ve had them before, but never as intense as today.”

“Based on your EKG readings, I think I can explain what happened.”

“Go on,” the genius encouraged, squeezing Moran’s hand a little bit tighter.

“Well, taking into account your history of symptoms and your most recent results, I believe you have a slight arrhythmia that’s playing a role in these attacks.”

“What?” Jim asked in confusion. “That’s impossible. This is the third time I’ve been hospitalized within the past six months. If I had the condition you’re claiming I do, surely someone would’ve caught it by now.”

The doctor’s suggestion scared the hell out of Seb. He was no medical expert, but he recognized that an arrhythmia was related to the heart.

“It’s not the kind of thing that’s noticeable right away and it can be easy to miss when it’s a minor case,” the physician explained. “Basically, your heart is occasionally beating a little too fast. During your anxiety attacks, the adrenaline surge is compounding the matter, causing you to experience tachycardic episodes.”
Moriarty was visibly distraught by the news. “Can it be treated?”

“Honestly, there’s not a whole lot that can be done beyond keeping calm and avoiding stress in your life. In all likelihood, the arrhythmia was probably brought on by the pregnancy. Once you deliver, there’s a strong chance your heartbeat will return to normal.”

“Thank God,” Sebastian uttered aloud. It was a huge relief to know that this was only temporary.

“It’s possible that blood flow to the fetus may be compromised during these attacks,” the doctor warned. “This is something to be mindful of because your twins are still developing. Furthermore, we don’t want to risk the possibility of triggering premature labor.”

Jim was truly stricken. It took every ounce of fortitude within him not to cry. “What’s wrong with me?” he asked. “The high blood pressure, the stroke risk, the kidney damage risk, and now this. Why does my body hate my babies?” The anguish in his voice was harrowing.

“All pregnancies are different, and some can pose more challenges than others. Certainly, one could consider factors such as lifestyle and family history, but at the end of the day, sometimes things just happen without a definitive reason as to why.”

A sudden fury flashed in the mastermind’s eyes, his pain turning to anger. “I demand a second opinion.”

“Of course, you’re welcome to consult with whomever you like,” Dr. Callahan acknowledged. “I could refer you to cardiology where they’d be able to run additional tests.”

“Do that.”

“Very well. Rest up and I’ll start making the arrangements.”

“Good. Now get out.”

The physician exited in short order. As soon as he was gone, Sebastian piped up.

“Are you sure this is what you want?”

“Yes, Seb, it is. I refuse to believe that my body has betrayed me this badly. That it’s responsible for hurting our children over and over again.”

Moran was unsettled by his mate’s remark. Clearly, the man blamed himself for his own medical problems. This was not good.

“Jimmy, I don’t think your health issues are anyone’s fault. Who knows why the human body responds the way it does? Take me, for example. I’m allergic to avocados. Too much guacamole and I break into hives. It’s weird as fuck and no one’s ever been able to figure out why. It simply is, through no wrongdoing of mine.”

The consulting criminal shook his head. “That’s not the same thing. You’re talking about a bloody food allergy. I’m talking about a failure to safely sustain our children’s lives. There’s a big difference,” he insisted. “I’m having the additional tests done and that’s final.”

Seb sighed. It was no use arguing. Ultimately, he’d do whatever he pleased.

“All right, kitten. If you really want this, I’ll stand by you.” The sniper leaned in and kissed the top of Jim’s head, snuggling him close.
Dr. Callahan made good on his offer to have Moriarty evaluated by the cardiology department. A battery of tests were performed and now he had to wait for the results. Until those came in, he and Sebastian were left alone in the mastermind’s private room.

“Tell me something, Tiger. Do you think that the vandalism incident at your party and the hotel room recording could be related?”

*Oh boy.* The assassin had wondered about that, too.

“I don’t know, hon. Can’t rule it out at this point.”

“And what about Irene?”

Seb arched a brow. “What of her?”

“Do you suppose she might be involved? She was at the hotel the night we were spied on.”

“Truthfully, no, I don’t believe she is. Adler may use scandal to her advantage, but in the form of blackmail. Not like this.”

“Yeah, that’s not her style at all,” Jim agreed. “You know, before I dropped my phone, I saw the message attached to the video mailing. It reminded me of…”

“Colin,” Seb said, completing the thought. “It was similar to the kind of notes he would leave us.”

*You don’t get to walk away.* That sounded exactly like something he’d say. Vague threats and sinister statements were his calling card.

But how could it be possible? He was locked up. There’d been no reports of him escaping the authorities. And even if he had, how would he have known the location of the party and the hotel they were staying at? Unless he’d somehow gained the power of clairvoyance, it was improbable.

“Logically, I realize there’s no way it could be him,” the genius began, “but it just *feels* like it is.” Moriarty paused, turning an idea over in his mind. “Maybe…maybe he’s got an accomplice?”

Jim’s words hung in the air, the chilling suggestion filling both men with dread. If true, it meant that Colin was working with someone they knew. Someone they employed, for that matter. An individual who had access to their inner-circle and could strike at any time. It was a terrifying notion.

“That settles it, then. Tomorrow we delve deep into the backgrounds of our most recent hires. It’s got to be one of them,” Moran fumed. “I’m sorry I let this happen on my watch. You trusted me to vet our newest employees, and I allowed some traitorous cretin into the fold. I failed you, Magpie.”

“Never, darling. You did the best you could. Whoever this rogue operative is, they must’ve provided decent credentials for you to have given them a chance. You couldn’t have known their true alliance.”

“I just wish I’d protected you better. That’s all I ever want to do, Jimmy. Protect you and our cubs.”

KNOCK. KNOCK.
There was an abrupt rapping at the door, and seconds later, a nurse walked in.

“Good evening. My name is Jane and I assist the department head. I’ve been authorized to deliver Mr. Moriarty’s test results. If he has any questions regarding them, I can put him in touch with our lead cardiologist.”

“Oh, what’s the verdict?” Jim asked.

The woman paged through the paperwork in her hands. “According to this, the attending ER physician’s diagnosis was correct. You have a very minor arrhythmia that’s acting in conjunction with your panic attacks. It’s recommended you take things easy. Avoid potential stressors and cut caffeine from your diet.”

“He already avoids caffeine on account of his blood pressure,” Seb was quick to note.

“That’s great,” she cheerfully replied. “Keep doing what you’re doing, then.”

There was an awkward silence as Jane waited for acknowledgement from Jim himself. Usually the person receiving results would engage in some form of communication with her; exhibit a sign that they understood what she’d told them.

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

Jim’s monitor shrilly rang out as he shook with rage.

“LIAR!” the Irishman shouted. He attempted to leap off the bed and lunge at her, but did not have enough mobility to complete the task. Instead, he fell and landed belly-first onto the tile floor.

“Jimmy!” Moran exclaimed, horrified at what he’d witnessed. He knelt down by his spouse to assist.

The nurse, meanwhile, was aghast. “He’s insane! I should call security. Have him thrown out of here or sent to the psych unit for observation.”

“Please don’t do anything drastic,” the former colonel pled. “Help me get him back into bed and I promise he won’t hurt you. I’m his alpha—I’ll make sure of it.”

She seemed hesitant, but begrudgingly complied when she saw Jim make no further advances to harm her.

After situating him, the nurse locked eyes with Moriarty. They were wide and sorrowful, reminiscent of a frightened animal.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Jane reassured. “Take deep breaths, in and out. It should ease your anxiety a bit.”

“He practices exercises like that at home a lot,” Sebastian remarked.

The woman smiled warmly at her patient. “You’ve cut out caffeine and you’ve worked on breathing techniques? That’s wonderful. You’re ahead of the curve, sir.”

“I’m sorry,” Jim somberly spoke. A choked sob soon followed as he cupped the swell of his stomach. “I’m a fucking idiot for what I just did and I’m afraid I hurt the babies.”

“They’re probably fine,” she stated. “It wasn’t much of a fall.”

Her words were cold comfort to the frantic omega. “Check them!” he tearfully demanded. “Check
“Okay, calm down. If it makes you feel better, we can do a scan.” The nurse paused, an idea coming to mind. “How would you like a 3D ultrasound?”

“3D?” Moriarty and his mate looked at each other. This was something they’d discussed but never actually done. Perhaps they ought to seize the opportunity now.

“What do you think, Magpie?”

“Let’s do it.”

Jane smiled at the couple. “I’ll bring in the equipment. Hold on.”

A few minutes passed and the nurse returned with the ultrasound machine in tow. They proceeded as normal, applying gel to Jim’s abdomen and placing the transducer on the exposed area. The image that came on screen was very different from the usual, though.

“Oh, wow.” Sebastian was taken aback by the picture clarity. This wasn’t merely blurry shadows and murky outlines—you could discern actual features.

The consulting criminal gazed at the monitor the way one might when viewing a piece of art. He was really and truly seeing his children, finally able to make out the shapes of their tiny noses and mouths, their sweet little eyelids, and their stubby—but beautiful—fingers. One was even sucking its thumb.

“Tiger, this is incredible.” Jim reached out to grasp Seb’s hand, his smile bright enough to light up the room. “Look at them. They’re perfect,” he marveled.

Moran grinned, too. Not only because of the babies, but also because Moriarty’s blood pressure had relaxed. Somehow, Essie and Eddie always seemed to have a calming effect on him.

The nurse turned up the volume on the device so that the twins’ heartbeats could be better heard. They sounded good, pumping at a steady rate.

“I hope this allays your worry,” Jane spoke. “Your babies are doing fine.”

Indeed, the ultrasound did wonders for Jim’s peace of mind. For a brief moment, he could forget about all the awful, demoralizing events that had occurred of late. Everything bad faded away, supplanted by the unconditional love and absolute joy he felt for his children. It was sublime.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
A few days had passed since Jim and Sebastian went back to work. They doubled down on their efforts to discover the traitor amongst them, conducting strenuous independent research. So far, nothing really stuck out as a red flag. It was a bit disconcerting, because if the vandalism and spying couldn’t be traced to a recent hire, then it meant they’d have to consider the awful possibility that an established team member might be responsible for those acts.

The sniper desperately wanted to interrogate Colin. He was almost positive that the man had some connection to what happened, though he couldn’t be sure to what extent. A torture session or two might compel the bastard to talk, but Seb knew he’d never be allowed near him after the debacle of their last meeting. The police were furious about it, and even Jim’s contact on the force wouldn’t be enough to get him in for another go-around.

“Sebbbbby,” the mastermind sang out, pulling Moran from his thoughts. “Is breakfast ready?”

“It will be soon, love. Why don’t you sit down and read the paper while you wait? It’s on the table.”

Jim entered the kitchen at a gingerly pace. He wasn’t using mobility aids anymore, relying instead on his own coordination.

“That smells divine,” he said, taking a seat.

“Hopefully it will taste good, too.” This morning’s meal was a real treat: steak, eggs, and hash browns.

Seb was contentedly cooking when he heard a loud gasp from his mate. Turning around quickly, he asked, “What’s the matter?”
“Have you seen today’s headline?”

“No, I didn’t bother to check it when I brought the paper in,” he admitted.

“Take a look.” Jim held up The Daily Telegraph so that he could read the front page.

*Murder Trial for Slain American Decorator Delayed as Defense Argues to Dismiss All Charges.*

The assassin was stunned by the news, dropping his spatula with a clatter. He hastily retrieved the utensil and closed in on Jim, reading the article over his shoulder.

He could hardly believe what was being reported. Apparently, because Sherlock and John were credited as having discovered Lisa’s body before the police did, Colin’s lawyer was arguing that it was an unlawful search and suggested her remains may have been planted on the scene. The magistrate was said to be considering a dismissal of charges, pending further review of the evidence.

“This is outrageous!” Seb snarled. How could the authorities entertain letting him go? The notion was flabbergasting.

“Tiger, if he goes free, you know he’ll come after us.”

“No, Jim. Never. I won’t let him.”

“You said that before and he still kidnapped me.”

Sebastian blanched at Moriarty’s words. The truth hurt. “I’m sorry, kitten. I should’ve protected you better.” His head hung low as he spoke, ashamed to look Jim in the eye.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” the consulting criminal insisted. “I know you did everything you could. I’m just worried for our children. I can’t risk the lives of these babies. They mean the world to me.”

Suddenly, smoke began pluming from the stove.

“Shit!” the sniper exclaimed, rushing to pull a charred pan of potatoes off the burner and setting it in the sink.

“So much for Colonel Moran’s heavenly hash browns.”

“Sorry, darling. I can make more if you’d like.”

“It’s okay, I could stand to cut back on the carbs anyway.”

“Hush. You’re handsome as ever.”

Moran began plating the non-burnt food, making sure to serve his spouse first. By the time he sat down to join Jim, the smaller man had already dug in.

“I do apologize for my lack of manners. Essie and Eddie demanded I start in on the steak. If I don’t abide their wishes, they’ll be kicking me in the ribs all morning.”

Sebastian chuckled. “Is that so?”

“Oh, yes. It is,” he confirmed. “Yesterday, I got stuck on a conference call and had to take a late lunch. The babies proceeded to kickbox me from the inside out for a solid hour. They’re an
unforgiving pair.”

“Our little hellions,” Seb teased.

“I’d expect nothing less.”

The Tiger and his Magpie enjoyed the rest of their breakfast together. No more talk of Colin was had— both realized it was futile to stress over something that may not even happen. The authorities had yet to make a decision, and until then, they refused to live in fear of “what ifs.”

*********

Jim was bored. Totally, utterly, and unrelentingly bored.

It was a slow day without any meetings or calls on the schedule. He checked in with his husband, who told him things were fine at headquarters. The atmosphere was awkward due to the video that had circulated, but beyond that, it was uneventful. Nothing new there.

Moriarty needed something to do. An activity to focus on. Ordinarily, baking would fill that void. Now, however, being nearly 6½ months pregnant, he could no longer withstand a task which required him to be up and down at regular intervals. His back ached, his feet hurt, and he became winded quite easily. Clearly, he was better suited for more sedentary endeavors.

An idea had been rattling around the mastermind’s brain. Ages ago, he’d made a point of trying out different hobbies. One of those pastimes was knitting. He didn’t stick with it at the time, but lately the activity held increasing appeal. It was something he could do that necessitated little physical movement while also providing a creative outlet.

The holidays weren’t too far off. There were plenty of things he could craft for the occasion. He imagined knitting a Christmas sweater for Seb and blankets for the babies. All tiger-striped, of course.

And why stop there? The more Jim thought about it, the more items he wanted to make. Caps, scarves, cloaks— the sky was the limit. Perhaps he’d even attempt to knit dolls for the twins. Oh, what an exciting prospect!

But he would need yarn, and patterns, and probably a whole lot of other things he didn’t currently possess. That was easy enough to fix, though. A trip to the fabrics and crafts shop should suffice.

“What do you think, darlings?” the genius spoke, placing a hand to his stomach. He felt a tiny patter, which he chose to interpret as a sign of agreement.

“We’d best get a move on,” he advised his unborn children. “Daddy’s going to channel all his energy into walking around the store.”

Jim grabbed his wallet, phone, and keys and headed for the door. He was a man on a mission. ‘Operation Knitwear’ would soon commence.

*********

Crowds were surprisingly sparse at The Sewing Sophisticate. Moriarty was grateful for that much. He was able to pace himself as he wheeled a cart throughout the store, browsing goods to his heart’s content without hordes of people getting in the way.

He’d already picked up orange and black yarn for the tiger print and was trying to decide on other
colors as well. The display presented a rainbow of possibilities.

*Rainbow,* Jim thought with a smirk. *Yes, that’s it!* He would buy one of each shade to create a beautiful rainbow patterned design. Babies were supposed to like vibrant colors, right? He was positive he’d read that somewhere.

**BZZZ. BZZZ.**

The mastermind’s phone buzzed. Hoping it might be Sebastian, he broke from browsing to check his mobile device.

*Unknown Sender*

*I wanna ride you all night, you hot little whore.*

“What?!” Moriarty exclaimed upon reading the vulgar message. Before he had a chance to ask the obscene texter who he was, more correspondences started flooding in from other unidentified persons.

*How many cocks can you take at a time?*

*I’ll fuck you ‘til you cry.*

*Hottest video ever. Make more.*

*Wish I was the lucky bastard who knocked you up.*

Jim was absolutely horrified. What was going on here? One of the texts mentioned a ‘video.’ This had to be related to his and Seb’s wholly unauthorized sex tape. But mortifying as it was, that’d only circulated across the office and to select associates. So why was he suddenly receiving a barrage of lewd, anonymous messages about it?

He scrolled to find the comment that had expressly referenced a video, intent to reply.

**JM**

*What video? And how did you get this number?*

*Unknown Sender*

*Vid @ XXXomegasex. Number was posted on the page. Said to text for more action.*

“Oh God,” Moriarty whispered, realizing what this meant. Someone had taken the illicit footage of him and his husband and put it on the internet, along with personal information and an ‘invitation’ to contact him.
He could feel the palpitations coming on. He needed to get out of there, and fast, before his monitor went off.

The Irishman abandoned his cart and rushed outside. He got into his car, but was so worked up, he didn’t trust himself to drive. Instead, he simply pounded on the steering wheel as tears ran unbidden down his face. So many emotions swirled in a frenzy, threatening to overtake him.

Jim pulled his phone back out, trying hard to ignore the slew of filthy text messages that continued to pour in.


JM

Need you, Sebby. I’m parked in front of The Sewing Sophisticate. Please come.

Once his mate got there, they’d figure out their next move.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Love & Protection

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian have a serious talk. Later, Jim goes to his first pregnancy support meeting.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I’ll fucking kill them,” Sebastian growled. “All of them.”

The sniper had just finished scrolling through the deluge of obscene messages his husband received. It was sickening. Some of the things these anonymous texters said they wanted to do to him were downright depraved. He was legitimately worried for Jim’s safety.

“Have at it, honey. I won’t stop you,” the mastermind remarked. “But at the moment, I think it’s more important that we figure out who posted the video with my phone number attached.”

Seb understood the urgency. Only a select group of people were privy to Moriarty’s contact information. If the person who uploaded the video knew that kind of detail, it certainly narrowed the suspect list.

“How do you want to proceed?”

“For starters, I’m taking the site down. Not just our video, but the whole bloody thing. Those bastards will have to find another pregnant omega porn page to wank off to.”

“Fine by me,” Moran agreed. As far as he was concerned, no one should be looking at Jim like that. It enraged him to think of random strangers viewing his mate as a piece of meat.

“After that, I’m going to check my incoming call log. Print out the names of everyone who’s phoned me for the past year. Then we’ll concentrate on any newly hired employees who turn up there. Go through their computers and look for suspicious activity,” he declared. “I can’t imagine anyone would be so stupid as to upload the footage directly from headquarters, but it’s worth reviewing just in case.”

“Sounds like a plan. When shall we begin?”

“Immediately. I’ll go home and get to work hacking the website. Once I find a backdoor inside, I should be able to bring it down without too much trouble. If all goes smoothly, I’ll have it done in
time to make my meeting tonight.”

“Meeting? I thought your schedule was clear for the rest of the day?”

“Businesswise, yes. But this evening I’m going to attend that pregnancy group I told you about.”

Sebastian let out a low-pitched snarl. “No. You shouldn’t be going anywhere alone.”

“Darling, I know your education wasn’t quite on par with mine, but surely you understand the definition of the word ‘group.’ Generally speaking, it refers to a collective, not the singular.”

“I’m well aware of what a group is,” Seb snapped. “What I’m trying to say is that I don’t want you traipsing around the city without me. It isn’t safe.”

“While I appreciate the sentiment, dear, I think I can manage this on my own. I’ll be among other pregnant omegas. I doubt that in their condition, they’ll pose much of a threat.”

“Anything could happen, Jim. Especially with the sick shit people have been messaging you about.” He paused, terrible images racing through his head thanks to those obscene texts. “You’ve already been kidnapped once when I wasn’t there to protect you. I won’t allow it again, or worse…”

The consulting criminal stared at his distressed partner, reaching over to take his hand. “Sebby, I get why you’re worried. I really do. But I refuse to forgo my freedom on account of fear,” he asserted. “We’re better than that. London’s most dangerous men send people running—not the other way around. We don’t hide or compromise. We hold our heads high.”

Moran could see where Jim was coming from, but the situation still didn’t sit well with him. His alpha instincts were flying off the handle, and it was only through sheer force of will that he hadn’t done something crazy.

In the old days, it wasn’t unheard of for an alpha to lock his expectant omega away at home until it was time for delivery. The world had progressed significantly since then, but every once in a while, Seb wondered if that wouldn’t make things a whole lot easier. If Jim remained in their home, he’d certainly be able to protect him better.

“What about the babies, Magpie? You said you’d never risk harm coming to them. But if someone hurt you, it’d hurt them, too.”

The Irishman frowned, not wanting to imagine injury befalling Essie and Eddie. After gazing at their sweet, chubby faces during the 3D ultrasound, he felt even more connected to them than before, if that was possible.

“Tiger, I’d give my life for our little ones.”

“You shouldn’t have to, is what I’m saying. Let me keep you safe and there will be no worries. None.”

Moriarty sighed, squeezing the sniper’s hand. “Don’t tempt me.” As fiercely independent as he was, some small part of him would always want to succumb to his omega nature, particularly now, in his hormonally-driven state. It’d be so easy to melt into his alpha’s arms and permit himself to be whisked away.

“I love you, kitten.”
The look on Sebastian’s face was so tender and sincere, that Jim’s first reaction was to kiss him. Their mouths came together and their fingers interlaced, lips parting as tongues met in a gentle, but fervent, union.

Moran was breathless when they broke their embrace. “Your kisses are a revelation. I couldn’t bear to live without them.”

“You’re in luck,” the mastermind said. “I’ve saved up a lifetime’s worth just for you.”

“Oh, Jimmy,” he whispered while staring into the pools of Jim’s big brown eyes. “Please allow me to guard you in some way. Bid me permission to drive you to the meeting and I’ll wait in the car until it’s done. It won’t be so bad—I’ll bring a book to keep myself busy.”

“Seb…”

“I know I’m being possessive right now. I admit it. But I’ve got damn good reasons for wanting to protect you,” the blonde insisted. “You’re mine, and so are they,” he affirmed, resting his free hand on Jim’s stomach.

A thrill rushed through Moriarty at his husband’s declaration. Truthfully, sometimes it turned him on when Sebastian acted like this; when he tapped into the raw, unrestrained machismo that bubbled beneath the surface of every alpha. It was beguiling.

“If it means that much to you, okay. You can give me a lift to the meeting,” the genius consented. “It’s being held at the community center on Ives Street.”

“Thank you, sweetheart. You won’t regret this, I swear.”

“For your sake, I’d better not.”

Jim glanced at the dial of his watch, surprised by how much time had passed since he left the house. As much as he wanted to revel in Moran’s virility, he knew he needed to get moving on the website takedown.

“I’ll see you tonight, love. Thanks for making it out here so quickly.”

Seb shrugged. “You call, I come. I always will.”

The consulting criminal smiled softly. “My loyal soldier, dedicated from day one. There should be a special medal of honor awarded for that,” he teased.

“There is.” Sebastian tugged at the chain he wore around his neck, pulling out the portion that was hidden under his shirt. Dog tags and a wedding band hung from the tether. “This ring is my medal. I cherish it every day.”

Moriarty’s breathing hitched as he struggled to maintain control of his emotions. “Stop it, Tiger. You’re going to make me cry.”

“I can’t help it, hon, it’s true.”

“Be that as it may, I’ve got to stay composed. There’s work to be done.”

The fair-haired assassin nodded. “Catch you on the flip side, Magpie.”

As soon as Moran was gone, Jim went back inside The Sewing Sophisticate and retrieved his previously abandoned cart. Now more than ever, he required a means of relaxation and escape.
Hopefully, knitting would be just what the doctor ordered.

**********

Jim worked diligently through the afternoon, hacking into the website that hosted his and Seb’s illegally recorded sex tape. As anticipated, the page wasn’t too difficult to take down once he found a crack in its coding. With step one achieved, he’d continue on to the next phase tomorrow when he accessed his backlog of calls received. For tonight, though, he had other plans.

“I’m not certain how long the meeting will run,” the mastermind told his partner as they stood in front of the community center entrance.

“That’s fine,” Seb assured. “Whenever you’re ready to go, I’ll be here.”

At that, Jim gave his Tiger a peck on the cheek and ventured into the building. He’d never been there before, but had memorized a map of the place prior to arrival. He found the designated room with relative ease. Just in case there was any confusion, a sign posted on the door read: Male Omega Pregnancy Support (MOPS).

“Bloody hell,” he muttered to himself. ‘MOPS?’ Maybe this was a bad idea after all.

There was no time to opt out now. He was rapidly being approached by a somewhat older-looking fellow.

“Hello,” the man greeted. “You must be new?”

“I am. It’s my first time attending a meeting like this.”

“Glad you decided to come. My name’s Trevor and I’m the group coordinator.”

“Really? Do tell.”

“Well, I’m a family therapist and in my line of work, I noticed how few support systems there were for expectant male omegas. Being one myself, and having children of my own, I thought someone ought to help bring our kind together— facilitate a community so that none of us would feel alone.”

Jim scanned the room, seeing chairs set up in a circle and a table of refreshments located off to the side. For a brief moment, he flashed back to the time one of his foster mothers brought him along to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. He hoped this group would produce a better quality of attendees than that had.

“So how does this work?” the genius asked.

“Basically, we discuss whatever’s on our mind, good or bad— anything goes. You can say as much or as little as you want. There’s no pressure,” he noted. “We do encourage new members to introduce themselves, but you don’t have to go into too much detail if you aren’t comfortable with that. Sometimes it takes people a while to open up, and that’s okay. This is a safe space.”

“I’m willing to give it a try.”

Trevor smiled warmly. “Wonderful. Take a seat and we’ll get started soon. Feel free to sample the snacks and juice,” he invited. “Oh, we’ll also have a bathroom break about midway through, so no worries on that front.”

“Sounds good,” Moriarty spoke, and he meant it. Even though he’d be fraternizing with ostensibly
ordinary men, they would share a bond that ran beyond the surface. Maybe, just maybe, he could find kinship amid common ground.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Encounters of a Different Kind

Chapter Summary

Jim is at his first pregnancy support meeting while Sebastian waits in the car. Both have unique experiences.

Chapter Notes

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All eyes were on James Moriarty. As the newest member of London’s Male Omega Pregnancy Support group (MOPS), he was expected to introduce himself. It was an intimate gathering of about ten individuals, including the organizer he’d met upon arrival. Despite the small size, he was anxious.

What do I tell them? Should I give a fake name? Again, he thought back to his foster mother who’d dragged him along to an AA meeting once. He recalled that they didn’t use surnames there. If this group functioned the same way, he’d probably be fine to use his real first name— it was innocuous enough.

Oh, shit. People are staring, he realized. It’s because you’re just sitting there like a bloody idiot. Say something!

“Hiiiiii,” the consulting criminal finally spoke. “I’m Jim and this is my first pregnancy. I’m pleased to report that my husband and I are having twins.” He paused as the group clapped in response to the announcement. “Thank you. It’s going to be a girl and a boy. We plan to call them Estella and Edward— Essie and Eddie for short.”

What else should I mention?

“I work as a businessman and my alpha is one of my employees. I guess you could call it a good old-fashioned office romance,” he lightheartedly remarked. “We were together for quite a while before deciding to get married, and now, after three years of wedded bliss, we’re expanding our family.”

More clapping ensued and Jim had to willfully refrain from rolling his eyes. Talk about an easy crowd. Ordinary people are adorable.

“Is there anything else you’d like to add?” Trevor, the MOPS coordinator, asked.

“Actually, yes, there is,” Moriarty replied. “As may be obvious, I’m slightly older than many of
the faces I see here tonight. That’s probably because, for the longest time, I wanted nothing to do with children,” he confessed. “I couldn’t picture myself as someone’s parent, let alone going through the rigors of pregnancy. But then something came along and changed all that, or rather, someone. My husband, the most wonderful man in the world, entered into the equation.” Jim was afraid the audience might laugh when he said that, but they didn’t. In fact, he appeared to have their rapt attention.

“I got to thinking about what a fabulous father he’d make and how lucky a child would be to have him in their life. He possesses some of the finest qualities one could ever hope to find in a partner. He’s loyal, thoughtful, loving…the list goes on. I’d be here for days if I described all his attributes. Suffice to say, he’s the kind of person the world needs more of,” Jim proclaimed. “I knew that by combining his personality traits with my intellect, we’d be creating an incredible child.”

After he was done speaking, Trevor chimed in again. “Thank you for sharing, Jim. Having multiples can present a challenge, but it can also be extremely rewarding. My sister has a set of twin girls and there’s always been a strong bond between them. They even finish each other’s sentences.”

“Really? That’s fascinating.” The Irishman often wondered how his babies would interact once they were born. Would they instinctively recognize that they’d been womb mates? Would they feel a sense of familiarity in each other’s presence? He couldn’t wait to find out.

“Unless there are any questions or comments for Jim, I’m going to open the floor for general discussion,” the organizer declared. No one objected, and the group proceeded on.

So far, so good, the genius thought. His initial nervousness was dispelled by the warm welcome he’d received, and it felt nice just being in the same room as other omegas in his condition. With any luck, joining this consortium would help ease the anxiety that plagued him at every turn. Maybe this really can be a safe space. Dare he dream?

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ZZZ. ZZZ. ZZZ.

Sebastian Moran had a change of plans. He originally said he’d read a book while waiting in the car during Jim’s meeting. It seemed like a good idea at the time, and to his credit, he had brought reading materials with him. When the moment came, however, the prospect of taking a nap overruled all previous intentions. Now the sniper lay prone in the backseat of his midnight blue Mercedes, softly snoring as he slept.

BAM.

Seb stirred slightly at the sound of a loud bang.

BAM. BAM.

He grumbled, hearing the noise again.

BAM. BAM. BAM.

His eyes shot open. What the hell? Something was definitely pounding on the roof of the car.

Moran sat up and groggily peered out the window to see what was going on. This particular section of the street was rather poorly lit, making it difficult to discern much of anything.
BAM.

There was another bang, followed by a vibration that felt like something had bounced off the rear of the vehicle.

“Never a moment’s peace,” he muttered, knowing he would have to investigate the racket.

With one hand firmly gripped on the gun in his pocket, Sebastian stepped outside. He took a cursory glance at his surroundings but noted nothing unusual.

*Maybe there was an animal atop the car and it ran off?* He checked the exterior and found no obvious scratches or dents. *Hmm.*

As the assassin stood there, an eerie feeling came over him. It was the unnerving sense of being watched. He hadn’t felt that way since the early days of Colin’s stalking campaign. But now the psycho was locked up, so it couldn’t be him.

*Am I just paranoid?* It was possible. These days he was very much on edge, reeling from the shock of having been secretly recorded. His guard was on high alert and would likely remain so for some time.

He waited a moment before returning to his vehicle. Erring on the side of caution, Seb decided to stay awake in case any more oddities occurred.

“I guess a bit of reading is on the agenda after all,” he remarked, pulling a book from the glovebox.

Several minutes went by uninterrupted and the former colonel began to relax. He still wondered what had produced the banging on the roof, though. A large cat or a raccoon, perhaps? The lack of identifiable marks made it hard to tell.

POP.

There was an abrupt shattering sound as the area surrounding the car plunged into darkness.

Now Sebastian was officially spooked. He set his book aside and ventured out once more, intent on getting to the bottom of the situation.

He walked a few feet and discovered that the lone working streetlamp had been shot out. Shards of broken glass sparkled under the veil of moonlight, but a gunman was nowhere to be seen.

*Someone’s here. I know it.* This wasn’t mere paranoia. His instincts as a hunter were broadcasting clear as a bell.

The sniper attuned his senses to focus on the presence lurking amid the shadows. *Over there, in the alley.*

He turned, stealthily heading towards the source. A rustling could be heard as the mysterious individual made their escape. Seb trailed close behind, using sound as his guide.

They were running. Running, running, running through a series of darkened alleyways and side streets. Moran was a hairsbreadth from catching the elusive figure when suddenly a trashcan was knocked over, directly impeding his path. He stumbled, and in the brief time it took to right himself, the prowler was gone. Sebastian looked in every direction but saw no one.

“Fuck!” he shouted. *So close! So bloody close, it isn’t fair.* He was truly frustrated.
His thoughts immediately went to Jim. He needed to protect his omega. Get him the hell out of there. The consulting criminal hadn’t sent a message to indicate the meeting was done, but Seb refused to wait. This was a potentially dangerous situation and he would not permit his spouse to linger there a minute longer.

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James Moriarty was actually having a good time amongst the company of ordinary people. Who would’ve believed it possible? A year ago, he certainly wouldn’t have.

The genius steadily interacted with the group during open floor discussions, offering his own opinions and experiences as the conversation flowed from one topic to another. Now that the midway break had commenced, he was socializing further.

Jim sat at a table with two other men. Jack was a thirty-year-old paralegal who was six months pregnant with his second child, while Ian was a nineteen-year-old store clerk who was four months along with his first baby. Truthfully, Moriarty decided to sit with them in particular because he’d noticed that they both had Irish accents like he did. It was a bit of a novelty, meeting other male omegas from the Emerald Isle.

“This cobbler is terrific,” Jack proclaimed, digging into the dessert one of the members had brought.

“It’s not bad,” Jim stated, “but I could make better.”

“Fancy yourself a baker, huh?”

“Honestly, yeah, I do. And a damn good one, at that.”

“You should bring something in with you next meeting. Nobody here would complain about extra dessert being served,” he said with a wink.

“Maybe I will.”

“Wish I could try it,” Ian piped up, staring longingly at the luscious apple cobbler. “No sense attempting to, though—I can’t keep anything down.”

“Ugh, sorry to hear it,” the mastermind commiserated. “I know how that can be. I suffered hellish morning sickness for the first few months.”

“Morning sickness,” the young man groused. “Whoever came up with that name was a bloody liar. It should be called ‘24-hour-morning-noon-and-night sickness.’”

Jim chuckled. “Doesn’t quite roll off the tongue the same way, does it?”

“I suppose not,” he agreed.

“If they called it what it really was, no one would ever want to get pregnant,” Jack quipped between forkfuls of dessert.

Ian snorted. “Who’s to say all of us ‘wanted’ to become pregnant in the first place?”

Moriarty cocked his head, surprised by the younger man’s remark. “You didn’t want to have a baby?” The genius had assumed that everyone there was pregnant by choice.

“I’m nineteen, single, and work a shit job. What do you think?”
“Why are you keeping it, then?”

“I ask myself the same question every day,” he admitted. “I guess it’s because this kid’s all I have. I’ve got no family and no alpha, but at least with the baby I won’t go through life alone.”

Alone. Jim knew the feeling well. As an orphan, he didn’t have anyone either when he was Ian’s age. In that sense, he sympathized.

Before the consulting criminal could say anything else, an uninvited guest entered the room: Sebastian.

The sniper caught sight of his spouse and marched up to him. “Jimmy,” he began, “we’ve got to go.”

Moriarty gaped at Seb in bewilderment. “Excuse me? What are you doing here?”

“I had a strange encounter outside. I’ll tell you about it on the way home.”

“If you think I’m leaving right now, you’re sorely mistaken. We’re only halfway through the meeting.”

“I’m sorry, dear, but it’s too risky to stay. I insist that we get out of here.”

Jim turned to his tablemates. “Jack, Ian, I need to have a word with my husband. He seems to be in the throes of temporary insanity and I feel obligated to assess his mental duress. This shouldn’t take long.”

London’s most dangerous man stood up and walked just outside the doorway of the meeting room. Seb followed.

“I’m having a delightful time, Sebastian. I refuse to make an unceremonious exit at the snap of your fingers. I’m not a dog—I don’t step and fetch on command.”

“Hear me out, okay? Some weird shit went down tonight.”

“I’m listening.”

The former colonel relayed everything that had happened, from the banging on the car to the streetlamp being shot out, and finally the chase that led him down a series of darkened alleys. When he was finished with his tale, Jim stared at him blankly.

“Is that all?”

“Yes. I think it’s reason enough to get the hell out of here.”

“You expect me to leave simply because you had a run-in with a hoodlum?” he asked incredulously. “Before jumping to conclusions, I suggest you stop and consider the fact that we’re at a community center in a rather dodgy part of the city. And did you even get a good look at this person? It’s possible you were being menaced by some bored, disgruntled teenager.”

“I couldn’t see much in the dark, but I’m not taking any chances,” Seb declared. “We’re going home now.”

“If you want to go, fine. I won’t stand in your way. But I won’t be accompanying you.”

Moran growled. “Jim, it’s my duty to keep you safe.”
“Well then, as your boss, allow me to give you the night off.” He turned to head back inside the room, but was abruptly halted when the assassin grabbed him by the arm.

“Hey!” Jim yelled. “Bugger off!”

Some of the group members watched on in alarm. The MOPS coordinator was among them.

“Oh, great,” Moriarty muttered as Trevor approached.

“Jim, is this man bothering you?” he inquired with concern.

“This man?” the blonde huffed. “I’m his mate, thank you very much. And we’re having a private conversation here.”

“No,” the Irishman spat. “We’re done chatting. Now if you don’t mind, I have a meeting to return to.”

“James!” he exclaimed in frustration. “Be serious. This isn’t a game. I’m worried for your welfare and want to take you home.”

Trevor peered at Moran. “Maybe it isn’t my place to interject, but as a male omega advocate, I feel compelled to point out that this is a safe space. Barging in and demanding he leave is unacceptable behavior. It threatens the security of everyone here and undermines the purpose of the group. I’m going to firmly, but politely, request that you leave.” Next, he turned his attention to Moriarty. “Jim, you don’t have to go if you don’t want to. Never let anyone force you into doing something you don’t feel comfortable with.”

Sebastian sighed heavily. “For fuck’s sake, this is ridiculous. Trust me when I say that there’s no forcing him to do anything. He does what he pleases regardless of the effect it may have on others. Just look up ‘selfish git’ in the dictionary and his photo will be right there.”

Genuine hurt flashed in the mastermind’s eyes. “To think I told the group what a wonderful partner you are. Shame on me. I won’t make that mistake again.”

“Jimmy,” he spoke, his tone softening. “Come on. Don’t be like this. I love you and want to assure your well-being. Is that so bad?”

Jim was quiet for a moment, struggling to control his emotions. “You’re treating me as if I were a piece of property. Some fragile object to be locked away in a cupboard that only you have the key to,” he accused.

The sniper shook his head. “No, I’m not trying to lock you up. I just…I’m scared of what could happen to you and our cubs,” he confessed. “You’re my greatest joy. My angel and my devil rolled into one. I’d be nothing without you.”

“Tiger…” Moriarty’s eyes grew misty as he gazed at his alpha. He was truly conflicted, a jumble of hormones and mood swings battling for dominance.

Seb had an idea. “It’s obvious this group is important to you,” he acknowledged. “So how about you finish the rest of your meeting while I sit out in the foyer? If you won’t leave here, then at least I could remain inside the building in case something happens.”

“I’m amenable to those terms,” the consulting criminal agreed.

“Good,” he said, grateful to have reached some semblance of a resolution.
The fair-haired assassin wrapped his arms around his husband, holding him close. These days, Moran wished he could stay permanently affixed to the smaller man, acting as a human shield to guard against the ills of the world.

It seemed Jim felt the same—for all his complaints, he clung to Sebastian as if his life depended on it. “I love you, Sebby,” he whispered.

“I love you, too.”

The Tiger and his Magpie were jarred by the sound of sudden applause. Turning their heads, they realized that most of the MOPS group was looking on, clapping enthusiastically. It seemed they’d been watching and listening to the confrontation as it played out in the doorway.

Sebastian was beet red with embarrassment. “Oh, God.”

“That was beautiful,” one man decreed.

“So heartfelt,” raved another.

Other attendees buzzed about them as well, some even wiping tears from their eyes. Meanwhile, the sniper just stood there, utterly mortified.

“I’ll handle this,” Moriarty murmured in his spouse’s ear.

“Nothing to see here, fellas. He’s all mine,” the genius quipped to the crowd. Then he glanced at Seb. “Go on, darling,” he urged in a hushed tone. “Now’s your chance to make a break for it.”

Moran nodded. “Meet you in the foyer when you’re done.”

Sebastian made tracks so fast, you’d think he was the Road Runner in an old cartoon.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
An Afternoon at the Office

Chapter Summary

Developments arise at headquarters. Sebastian must take care of business.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Much was afoot at headquarters.

After a comparison of Jim’s incoming call log with the names of his most recently hired employees, a few people stood out. From there, those persons’ computer histories were accessed. Surprise, surprise, one of them was found to have visited the pornographic website that hosted Moriarty and Moran’s illegally recorded video. Even more damning was when this individual’s desk was searched and an entire box of black markers were discovered in a drawer— the same variety used to commit the vandalism at Seb’s party.

The evidence was all there, and at first glance it would appear to be an open and shut case. But that was the problem. It was too easy. Too neat and clean. The pieces had come together in an almost effortless fashion. Quite frankly, it seemed staged and neither Jim nor Seb was buying it.

“I really think Steve is the fall guy here,” Moran said, referring to the fellow who was assuredly set up. He worked in the office’s finance division.

“I agree. Something about this doesn’t ring true,” the mastermind observed. “I suspect the real culprit has framed him in the hopes of diverting our attention elsewhere. I also believe they have some connection to Colin, though I can’t prove it yet.”

Seb nodded. “What should our next move be?”

“We play along. Fire Steve for appearance’s sake, but continue to look for the actual traitor behind closed doors. If he or she thinks we’ve fallen for their scheme, they may let their guard down…get sloppy.”

“And then we’d be able to nail them,” the sniper remarked. “Swoop in for the kill.”

Jim smiled wickedly. “Yes, darling. That’s the general idea.”

“I love the way you think, kitten.”

“I’ve always considered my intellect to be among my greatest attributes.”
Sebastian scooted close to his mate, a stray hand snaking its way between the genius’s legs. “I can think of a few more qualities I enjoy just as much,” he huskily intoned.

The Irishman hummed at his lover’s touch, savoring the contrast of rough hands rubbing him through the soft fabric of his pants. “Oh, Tiger, why do you tease me so?’

“No tease, Magpie. I like to finish what I start.”

“But you can’t right now.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m counting on you to give Steve the pink slip and make sure he’s thrown out on his arse. You need seem irate. Really sell the performance so that our rogue employee believes it.”

The former colonel removed his hand from Jim’s nethers and shot the man a look of incredulity. “You want me to fire the guy?”

“I dooooo,” he affirmed. “And not just fire him— turn it into a big hubbub.”

“Jimmy, in all the time you’ve known me, have I ever been the type to instigate workplace ‘hubbubs?’ Why would I suddenly engage in one now?”

Moriarty paused, his face scrunching up as he considered the question. “Hmm. Maybe you’re right. If you behave too unusually, it might not come across as authentic,” he mused. “But let me ask you something, dear.”

“Okay, go ahead.”

“Hypothetically, if Steve truly was responsible for what happened, how would you react?”

“I’d fuck him up, no doubt about it.”

“Ah-ha!” the consulting criminal exclaimed. “So you would make a scene. See? Hubbub.”

“Actually, I’d probably wait until he left the building and then I’d strike,” Sebastian stated. “No witnesses that way.”

“Hrm. Well, whatever you do, be convincing.”

“Understood, though I’m still not clear as to why you want me to deliver the news. Office politics have never been my strong suit.”

“Tiger, trust me, I’d do it myself if I could. You know what an excellent actor I am.”

“Yes, I’m quite aware, Richard,” he said with a wink.

Jim rolled his eyes. “Ha-ha, very funny. As I was saying, I’d fire him myself, but I’m supposed to avoid stressful situations.”

“The one time you decide to take a doctor’s advice without complaint, and it’s so that you have a valid excuse to pass your dirty work on to me. Wonderful,” Seb lamented.

“My, oh, my— what an astute observation,” he derisively replied. “And people claim you aren’t clever. If only they could see you now.”
The assassin snorted. “Someone’s feeling sassy today.”

“Today? Honey, I’m sass personified 24/7.”

“I stand corrected.”

“Good. Now get a move on. I expect you to report every detail to me.”

“Aye, aye, sir.” Seb leaned over to give his omega a quick kiss on the cheek. “Take care, love,” were his last words before leaving.

Moriarty peeked out the window to make sure the other man was gone. “Finally,” he muttered, seeing that the coast was clear.

He hurried to the storage closet and pulled out the knitting he’d hidden in a box. Eyeballing his handiwork, Jim made a mental note of what more had to be done. He was halfway through with Seb’s sweater. Once it was finished, he could move on to crafting baby items and would no longer need to conceal what he was working on.

The genius grinned, imagining the look of surprise on his mate’s face when he opened his gift Christmas morning. It would be a sight to relish. He could hardly wait.

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It was done. Steve from finance had been fired. Seb did not, however, turn the event into a spectacle as Jim desired. Drumming up a commotion might suit the mastermind, but it wasn’t Moran’s style at all. Instead, he’d handled the situation with firmness and professionalism, simply informing the man that his services were being terminated and he was to vacate the premises immediately. Steve wasn’t thrilled about it, but he complied without issue.

Now Seb sat in his office, reviewing paperwork that’d been left on his desk. It was mostly final reports of how various assignments had gone and write-ups outlining potential future projects. He was in the midst of reading a memo when he heard a knock on the door.

“Come in,” the sniper invited.

Gemma, one of their resident acquisitions experts, entered the room.

“What can I do for you?” he asked. This was the first an employee had actively sought him out since the sex tape incident. Everyone seemed to make themselves scarce after that debacle.

“I was hoping I might be able to discuss something with you, Mr. Moran.”

“Certainly. Take a seat and we’ll talk.”

She obliged, sitting opposite him. “A few of us here at headquarters were thinking about throwing Mr. Moriarty a baby shower. What would you say to the idea?”

The former colonel fell silent, contemplating the prospect. A baby shower. He was vaguely familiar with the concept. It was an American tradition that’d picked up steam in Great Britain in recent years. From what he gathered, these types of festivities typically involved cake, presents, and games— almost like a kid’s party, except in this case, the child was unborn.

“Gemma, that’s a fine suggestion. I think Jim would enjoy it.”

She smiled. “I’m pleased you approve. I always wanted a baby shower, but the plans never came
together. I thought maybe I could get the itch out of my system by throwing one for someone else.”

“Splendid. You iron out the details and then run them past me.”

She nodded. “I will. Thank you, sir.” The woman paused for a moment. “How is Mr. Moriarty doing? Everybody saw the paramedics take him away earlier this week and we weren’t sure what happened.”

“He had a medical issue to contend with, but is doing fine now.”

“Whew, that’s a relief,” she said. “You know how gossip spreads like wildfire around here. People were saying all kinds of crazy things.”

Seb frowned. “Yes, folks in this office are a bit too chatty for my liking. I miss the good old days when people minded their own goddamn business.”

The woman laughed. “I’m going to take that as a hint to get back to work,” she quipped, standing up. “Again, thank you for your time, sir. I appreciate it.”

“No problem.”

At that, Gemma exited.

“A baby shower,” Seb repeated to himself. He opened up the browser on his computer and typed the term into a search engine. “Time to learn all there is on the subject.”

After an hour’s worth of Googling, Sebastian decided to venture home. He locked up his office and headed to the elevator. As he waited for the lift, a statuesque blonde approached.

“Mr. Moran, I’m happy to have caught you before you left.”

“Uh, hello,” the assassin awkwardly greeted. The woman looked familiar, but he could not remember her name.

“I know that expression. You don’t recall who I am, do you?”

“I’m sorry, but no, I don’t,” Seb admitted. “I’ve seen you around, though. Here at headquarters and at my birthday party.”

“Glad I wasn’t entirely forgettable,” she teased. “I’m Annie, an assistant secretary. I wanted to inquire about Mr. Moriarty.”

“He seems to be a hot topic today.”

“No surprise, considering the last time he was here, he left via an ambulance.”

“Fair point,” the sniper acknowledged. “He’s doing well, by the way. In case that’s what you were wondering.”

“Excellent,” she said, sounding relieved. “I was actually curious as to how he liked the pregnancy group.”
Seb peered quizzically at the woman, trying to figure out how she knew of the MOPS meeting Jim had attended. And then it occurred to him—

“You’re the one who told him about the group in the first place.”

“Guilty as charged,” Annie confirmed. “I thought he might find it useful.”

“I appreciate you mentioning it to him, thanks.”

“It’s the least I could do.” She briefly hesitated, formulating her thoughts. “Sir, some of us were toying with the idea of throwing Mr. Moriarty a baby shower. After what happened on your birthday, we feel like he ought to have a positive party experience.”

“Gemma already brought it up to me. I’m keen on the notion,” he stated.

“Fantastic. It’s going to be so much fun planning this out.”

“Better you than me.” The only kind of events he was good at organizing were assassinations. If he had to coordinate the shower, it would almost certainly end in disaster.

At long last, the elevator arrived. Moran stepped inside, eager to return to Jim.

“It was nice talking to you,” the woman spoke. “Please, give Mr. Moriarty my regards.”

“Will do,” he assured, just as the lift doors closed.

_That was relatively painless._ Nobody had acted too suspicious at Steve’s dismissal, and the only real interfacing he had to do was with two subordinates who were looking to plan a party. All things considered, it could’ve gone worse.

“Now,” he said to himself, “to get back home.” Maybe he’d stop off somewhere for takeout. Jim would probably be hungry—he often was these days. Just last night he’d mentioned having a craving for spaghetti bolognese with garlic bread.

_That settles it._ There was an Italian restaurant not far from where they lived. Seb would drop by soon to pick up a proper meal. _Including an order of chocolate cannoli_, he mused, because Jim absolutely loved dessert. Nothing made the fair-haired alpha more content than pleasing his Magpie.

_BZZZ. BZZZ._

Sebastian’s phone buzzed. Checking the device, he saw he had a new text message.

_JM_

_Are you done yet? What’s taking so long?_

_SM_

_Relax, kitten. Patience is a virtue._

_JM_
Fuck virtue. The babies are famished. You MUST bring them food. It’s imperative.

Moran laughed. He could have some fun with this.

SM

How does tofu burgers and kale salad sound?

JM

If you dare serve me tofu, I’ll burn the heart out of you.

SM

*You’re* my heart, darling. Burn me and you scorch yourself as well.

JM

Touché.

But seriously, Seb, BRING FOOD.

SM

Okay, okay. Was already planning to get takeout on my way home. I think you’ll like what I have in mind.

JM

Thank you, Tiger.

SM

My pleasure, love.

Sebastian stepped out of the elevator with a sense of purpose. He had a feast to order.
This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Memories Stir

Chapter Summary

Old wounds are stirred up for Jim.

Chapter Notes

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DING.

The timer on the oven chimed.

“Tiger, could you get that? I don’t want my brownies to burn.”

“Sure thing, hon.”

Sebastian tended to the chocolatey treats, sitting the square pan on the counter to cool. “These look amazing.”

“I was hoping they’d turn out well. I promised the group I’d bring something sinfully delicious tonight.” At this point, Jim wasn’t doing much baking anymore, but he did make the occasional exception.

“In that case, you needn’t bother with the brownies. Just showing up as yourself would qualify.”

Moriarty grinned impishly at the remark. “Keep talking like that and I’ll insist you come over here and kiss me.”

Not missing a beat, the sniper walked from the kitchen to the living room, joining his mate on the couch. He nestled close to him, seizing the mastermind’s lips in a sizzling display of affection.

Jim dropped the knitting he was working on and ran a free hand through Seb’s hair. He relished the softness of his husband’s strawberry blonde locks.

Moran grunted hoarsely as he deepened their kiss. He noted that his omega not only smelled sweet, but also tasted honeyed as well. It was an incredibly enticing combination.

“God, I love you, Jim.”

“Prove it.”
Seb tilted his head, unsure of what the other man meant. “Huh?”

“Prove that you love me,” he reiterated. “Rub my feet.” Moriarty eyed his Tiger temptingly, almost daring him to do it.

Never one to back down from a challenge, the assassin gently maneuvered Jim into position. He was laid across the couch lengthwise with his feet in Moran’s lap.

“No shoes or socks to take off,” he observed.

“That’s because I can’t fit into them.”

“Hmm.” Sebastian took a moment to examine the foot he was massaging and realized that it appeared swollen. Both did, actually.

“Kitten, is this normal?”

“I’ve no idea. They’ve been swelling off and on for a few weeks. Today’s the worst so far.”

“Maybe we should tell Dr. Swenson.”

“Ugh. Frankly, I’m sick of doctors right now. I’ve seen enough to last a lifetime,” he declared. “I just want to relax and enjoy the rest of this pregnancy. My paternity leave is coming up shortly and I intend to make the most of it.”

Paternity leave. Seb almost forgot. It seemed so long ago when Jim first mentioned it. Before his health issues kicked in and his kidnapping occurred; before the vandalism and spying. It felt like an eon had passed since then.

“When do you go on leave, darling?”

“Soon,” he said. “Just another two weeks or so.”

“Pardon me if I sound ill-informed, but how will your schedule be changing? You already conduct a fair bit of business from home.”

“Well, I’ll stop coming into headquarters entirely until the babies are born,” he noted, referencing the fact that he currently ventured into the office one day a week. “I’ll also limit my conference calls— cut down on them by about half. I trust you’ll pick up the slack for me, Seb. You are my second-in-command.”

He nodded, knowing he’d have a lot of work ahead of him. Between running the business in Jim’s absence and taking care of the man as well, he was going to be extremely busy. Somehow, though, he didn’t mind at all. It felt right to be aiding his expectant omega in such a way.

Moriarty shifted slightly, retrieving his dropped knitting. This latest creation featured a colorful rainbow design.

“What are you making, Magpie?” he asked, continuing to rub his mate’s tender tootsies.

“I’m working on a cap and mittens for the twins. There will be a set for each of them.”

“Oh, that’s adorable.” Moran smiled broadly at the mental image.

“I thought so.” He paused, adding, “I know we’ll be past the worst part of winter by the time they’re born, but February and March can be awfully chilly in England. I want to make sure they
Sebastian gazed at his spouse with all the love in the world reflected in his eyes. Witnessing Jim’s transformation over the last six months was nothing short of astonishing. No one would ever expect the most dangerous man in London to be nurturing and parental, but here they were. It was beautiful.

“Will you be waiting in the foyer tonight?” the genius inquired.

“I figured I would. I feel like I’m protecting you better when we’re in the same building.”

“Makes sense.” He was silent for a moment, contemplating something. “Seb?”

“Yeah?”

“It won’t be long until I enter my third trimester. Before you know it, our little ones will be here.”

“That’s right. Exciting, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I’m eager to meet them,” he agreed. “But…” the mastermind hesitated, a sudden nervousness coming over him.

“But what, dear?” He could tell his mate was tensing up.

“But what if they don’t love me?”

Jim’s statement made Sebastian’s heart ache. “Of course they’ll love you, kitten. You’ll be their whole world. No one will be more important to them than you.”

“Do you really think so?” Moriarty desperately wanted Seb’s words to be true, but some nagging remnant of self-doubt persisted.

“I know it for a fact. The instant those babies are put into your arms, they’re going to love you forever.”

The Irishman smiled softly. “And I’ll love them. Hell, I already do.”

Jim gasped, placing a hand to his stomach.

“Big kick,” he panted. “It’s safe to say they’re listening.”

Moran chuckled. “See? No worries, darling.”

For the moment, it appeared Moriarty had let go of his fear. Sebastian truly hoped his positivity would remain.

*********

Jim was a sight to be seen at the MOPS gathering. With his feet swollen, the only thing he could comfortably fit into was a pair of slippers. They were a very nice leather-bound variety, well-insulated and featuring cushioned arch support. But still, it was a bit of a blow to Moriarty’s pride, having to wear them outside the house.

He’d also arrived bearing brownies and a tote bag of knitting. The baked goods were supposed to be for the mid-meeting break, but several people sampled them early. In a room full of pregnant omegas, one couldn’t expect too much dietary restraint. As for the knitting, Jim was on a roll and
didn’t want to stop for anything. The other members seemed to understand, and some even complimented his handiwork.

“So what else is on your minds?” Trevor, the group coordinator, asked. It was final call before they took a recess.

“I’ve got something to discuss,” a ginger-haired man volunteered.

“Okay, Scott. Tell us about it.”

“Well,” he began, “it has to do with my family. A few years ago, my parents basically disowned me. It was hard at first, but I managed, and I’ve been doing fine ever since. Cut to today. My sister messages me out of the blue, saying that our parents have started making holiday plans and they want to invite me to the proceedings. I haven’t replied to her because I don’t know what to do.”

“Are they aware you’re pregnant?” another member, Jack, wondered aloud.

“Yep. Apparently, that was the catalyst,” Scott answered. “They heard through the grapevine that I was going to have a baby, and they want to reconnect so they can play a role in their grandson’s life. The problem is, I’m not sure I want my child to know them. Not after the way they treated me.”

That caught Jim’s attention. “What did they do to you?” he questioned while stitching tiny rainbow legwarmers.

“They disapproved when I dropped out of university to live with a bloke in Birmingham— cut me off financially and told me not to come back until I’d regained my sensibility.”

“That’s it?” the consulting criminal quipped. “Your parents didn’t beat you, or neglect you, or curse you out from here to kingdom come?” He shook his head disdainfully. “You got off easy.”

“Hey,” Scott objected, “just because I didn’t have some maudlin foster care upbringing doesn’t mean I didn’t go through rough times.”

**Maudlin foster care upbringing.** Oh, that was the wrong thing to say to Jim.

Moriarty tossed his knitting to the floor and stared daggers at the redhead. “You should thank your lucky stars you weren’t put into the foster system,” he angrily spat. “It’s vicious and cruel, and the people you meet will do nothing but hurt you for their own amusement. We should all be so fortunate as to have living parents who are willing to reach out to us.”

“Now wait a minute,” Trevor interrupted, “let’s not get hasty. The purpose of this group is to provide kindness and support. Everyone has a right to their own thoughts and feelings. We don’t diminish anyone’s problems here.”

“I think Jim’s right,” Ian, the youngest MOPS participant, said. “I was in foster care for most of my life and it was hell. In the beginning, I used to pray that my parents would come back for me. Later, after I found out they were dead, I prayed that someone— anyone— would love me. By the end, I stopped praying altogether because I realized there was no point in it. God didn’t fucking care,” he somberly asserted. “So yeah, I wish I had family to reconcile with.”

The mastermind was surprised someone had jumped to his defense so readily. He was further taken aback to learn that he and Ian shared a similar background.

“So you think I’m being unreasonable?” Scott asked.
“That depends,” Jack chimed in. “Would your folks have been as upset if you’d decided to shackle up with a woman rather than a man?”

“They likely would’ve been mad either way,” he admitted. “What bothered them most was that I’d received a full scholarship to the University of Cambridge, but quit school to pursue a relationship.”

“You threw away a free ride to Cambridge? Fuck, I’d have disowned you, too.”

“Guys, we shouldn’t rush to any snap judgments,” the organizer warned. “This falling out was significant to Scott and it’s not our place to criticize how it happened.”

“Thank you, Trevor,” the ginger gentleman spoke. “I’m just looking for a little clarity.”

“What do you have to lose by reconciling with them?” Jack posited. “There will be two more people in your son’s life who’ll love him. And personally speaking, some of my fondest childhood memories involved my grandparents. It’d be a shame to deny one’s baby the opportunity to forge lasting, positive experiences like that.”

Jim fell silent, ruminating on what Jack said. He never had grandparents, though as a boy, he often wished he did. Especially at holidays. He wished he had any relatives at all then.

The Irishman could still recall a particularly painful incident from his youth, when a supposedly ‘fun’ grade school assignment entailed writing a letter to Santa and sharing it with the class. In his correspondence with jolly old St. Nick, he’d asked for a family to adopt him. One student, Carl Powers, had reacted in an absolutely merciless fashion, making fun of him in front of everyone and laughing uproariously at his expense. Ultimately, Moriarty got revenge, but it couldn’t erase the awful memory.

*KICK*KICK*

The genius felt his children shift inside him, probably sensing his agitation. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, trying to focus on the group’s conversation. It was no use. His mind was spiraling, jumping from one misbegotten thought to another.

*Essie and Eddie won’t have grandparents, either,* an inner voice taunted.

*No, but they’ll have me and Seb, and their uncle and cousin.*

*Still no grandparents, though. Maybe that’s for the best— your mother would be ashamed of you.*

*Never! My mum loved me. She used to call me her ‘little prince.’*

*She might’ve loved the boy you were, but she’d hate the man you became.*

*Her love was unconditional. She would’ve adored me no matter what, and she would’ve adored my babies, too.*

*But she’ll never know them, will she? And they’ll never know her. Because she’s DEAD.*

*Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!*

Jim opened his eyes. He was sitting down, but felt dizzy from all the noise in his head.

Quickly glancing around, he realized the group had gone on break without him. When did that happen? He’d zoned out completely, becoming lost in his own mind.
The consulting criminal was shaken up and needed to regroup. Maybe even go home altogether. He was just so fucking frazzled.

*Must find Seb.*

Jim grabbed his bag of knitting and rushed out of the room.

*Seb. Seb. Seb.*

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Love, in Many Forms

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian must deal with the emotional fallout from Moriarty’s dredged up memories.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

Jim’s blood pressure monitor rang out as he raced down the hall in frenzied pursuit of his husband. Thanks to the alarm, Sebastian heard him before he came into view.

That sounds like—

“Jimmy!”

The sniper stood up, eyes widening at the sight of his omega making a mad dash towards him. What the hell?

Moriarty threw his arms around the larger man. “Sebby,” he panted heavily.

Moran returned the embrace, holding him close while stroking his back. “Easy does it, hon. It’s okay. Try to steady your breathing.”

A few minutes went by as Jim focused on calming down. It was hard, but the last thing he wanted was another trip to the hospital. Eventually, the beeping subsided.

“What’s got you upset, love?”

“The group…we were having a discussion and it riled me up,” he shakily confessed.

“How so?”

“It made me think of things. Childhood, family…mum.”

“It’s all right now. You’re safe with me.” My poor Magpie. No wonder the conversation set Jim off. Those were all topics he generally avoided, and Seb knew better than to bring them up.

“I wish she was alive, Tiger. Why did she have to leave me? Why couldn’t she stay?” The
mastermind was fighting back tears as he spoke.

“I don’t know, sweetheart. I’m sorry.” In truth, Sebastian had no clue how his mate’s mother died. The circumstances of her passing were a mystery to him and would likely remain so unless Jim decided to open up about it.

“I’ll never leave our babies. Never.”

“I won’t, either. Not if I can help it.”

The couple was pressed so snugly together, Seb could actually register movement against his skin as the twins kicked inside Jim. It was a strange sensation, to be sure.

“Hello?” a male voice suddenly called out. “Jim?”

Moriarty and Moran let go of each other, both turning to see who beckoned.

“Ian?” the consulting criminal said in surprise. It was the young man from his group.

“You left in a hurry. I wanted to see if you were okay.”

“I…I’m fine.” Jim quickly collected himself, putting on a brave face. “Just needed to check on my fella. Can’t be too careful with him. The handsome ones require extra supervision.”

Ian laughed lightly. “Yeah, I guess so. Wouldn’t really know.” He paused, feeling socially awkward. “So…are you coming back to the meeting? Break’s almost over.”

That was a good question. When Moriarty rushed from the room, it was with the intention of finding Seb and going home. But now he wondered if that was the right response. The most dangerous man in London didn’t run away. He might occasionally step out to clear his head, but he always returned, ready to take on whatever challenge awaited him next.

“I’ll be there soon. Go on and I’ll catch up.”

He nodded. “See you, then.” The young man began to walk away, but stopped to say, “By the way, everyone loves the brownies. I wouldn’t mind having the recipe if you’re willing to share it.”

“Sure, it’s fairly simple. I’ll give it to you tonight.”

“Cool, thanks.” At that, he ventured back to the MOPS gathering.

When the man could no longer be seen, Sebastian turned to his spouse and grinned. “I do believe Mr. Sex strikes again,” he teased, “and in record time. Only the second meeting and you’ve already got an admirer.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Please, it’s not like that. Ian’s a boy who’s had a shitty lot in life. Been through the foster care system and doesn’t have anybody to support him. I can relate— it was rough for me at his age, too.”

“Still seems a bit sweet on you, dear. Why else would he come to look for you?”

“Camaraderie, I imagine. When you’re completely alone— like he is and I was— you try to remedy the problem in whatever way you can.”

“If he’s as bad off as that, maybe you could mentor him.”
The genius contemplated his mate’s suggestion. It held potential.

“You know, that’s not a bad idea,” he mused. “Ian was complaining about his job as a store clerk recently. Perhaps I could find him something to do at headquarters.”

“Really? You trust him enough to hire him?” After the issues they’d dealt with regarding disloyal staff, Seb was surprised he’d be willing to employ someone willy-nilly.

“Actually, I do. Crazy as it sounds, I see a bit of myself in him,” Moriarty admitted. “Besides, he could certainly use the pay increase— babies aren’t cheap. And who knows, maybe he could act as our eyes and ears around the office. Someone to report back to us about suspicious goings-on.”

“Hmm.” It might be advantageous to have a mole amid headquarters. But… was it wise of Jim to reveal his true identity to someone from the MOPS group? To disclose that he was the James Moriarty, criminal extraordinaire? In the end, it was the mastermind’s decision to make.

“I’ll mention it to him. Gauge his interest and learn if he’s got any special skills we could hone.”

“I suppose,” Sebastian pensively replied.

“It’ll be good,” he assured. “I probably ought to head back now, though.”

The sniper leaned in and stole a kiss from his beloved Magpie. “Until later, my darling.”

“See you then.”

And so Moriarty returned to the meeting, while Moran, his ever-patient assassin, waited.

*********

“Sebby?”

“Yes?”

“How busy are you tomorrow?”

“There are a few things to be done at headquarters. Why?” The former colonel’s inquiry was followed by a snuggle as the two men laid together in the comfort of their luxurious four-poster bed.

“I have a special appointment with Dr. Swenson tomorrow afternoon and I was wondering if you’d be able to come along,” Jim explained. “I know I swore I’d seen enough doctors to last a lifetime, but this can’t be helped— it was scheduled ages ago.”

*Special appointment? This sounded serious.*

“What’s this in regards to, hon?”

“We’re going to discuss my birthing plan. I’d like you to be there so we’re all on the same page.”

“Of course, kitten. That’s important stuff to cover.”

The Irishman smiled. “It sure is. I’m nervous and excited at the same time.”

“Me, too,” Seb agreed, though he imagined the notion took on a whole different meaning for Jim. He was, after all, the one who’d be physically bringing new life into the world.
“Mmm…love you, Tiger,” the genius sleepily stated, spooning back against Moran. He felt so safe like this. So warm and protected. It was little wonder, then, that he drifted off to dreamland with ease.

*********

It was a gorgeous day amid a field of green. There were no clouds or rain in sight, and a gentle breeze billowed through the air, carrying the scent of lilies.

Jim instantly recognized the location. This was a patch of land in the countryside near Donnelly’s farm. His mum used to buy eggs there, fresh from the coop. While she was occupied with that, he often played in the meadow, flying kites, chasing after butterflies, and cartwheeling across the grass.

Today he’d decided to do something different. He went wandering further than usual and came upon a beautiful bushel of wildflowers. They were purple and pink, with dark speckling. As soon as he saw them, he knew he had to pick some for his mother.

Like magic, he suddenly held a bouquet in his hand. Even better, he spotted her driving up to where he stood. In a flash, she was in front of him, waiting with open arms. He bounded into her embrace, and she lifted him up, spinning the both of them in a circle as he giggled. When she placed him back on the ground, he proudly presented the flowers he’d gathered.

“Such a lovely gift from my sweet little prince. Thank you, honey.” She hugged him tightly and kissed the top of his head. “I’ve got a surprise for you, too.”

His eyes lit up at the news. What could it be? He was bursting with anticipation as she retrieved an item from the trunk of her car.

“Oh, you go, darling. I thought you might like this.” She handed him a blue kite with stars and crescent moons printed on the material.

He was ecstatic, his smile stretching from ear to ear. He wanted to try it out right then and there. And so he did. Or rather, *they* did. It was wonderful. He and his mum flew the kite for what must’ve been hours, but it felt like only seconds had gone by.

As the sun began to fade into dusk, a terrible feeling came over Jim. It was a sense of panic, dread, and déjà vu. Something awful was about to happen, the way it always did, and he could never change it, no matter how hard he tried.

“Let’s go home, sweetie,” the woman urged. “I’ll take some eggs from the cooler and make us a scramble. How’s that sound? Breakfast for dinner.”

“Can we have bacon, too?” he asked hopefully.

“It wouldn’t be a proper breakfast without bacon, now would it? Come on.”

The two settled into the car, and Moira Moriarty made sure her young son was strapped in securely.

Jim’s distress continued to rise. But why? It’d been a fabulous day. One of the best, in fact. He should be happy, but…there was a sick feeling deep inside. A sorrow. A—

BAM.
They’d barely ridden a half mile when their vehicle was blindsided by a pickup truck. The car was sent careening into an embankment and flipped twice. It was a hit and run— the other driver never bothered to stop. Moira was killed on impact while her small child wailed beside her mangled corpse.

*********

Jim awoke with a scream and his blood pressure monitor was beeping. It scared the hell out of Sebastian.

“What’s wrong?”

The Irishman was confused for a moment. Waking in such a tumultuous state was disorienting, to say the least.

“I…” he trailed off, letting out a sob as the dream flooded back to him.

“Was it a nightmare?”

Moriarty didn’t answer. Instead, he sat up and ripped the blaring monitor off his arm, hurling it across the room. The action did nothing to relieve his grief. He cried uncontrollably.

“Shh, it’s okay, kitten,” the sniper consoled, pulling him into his arms. “Whatever it is, I’ve got you.”

The mastermind wordlessly wept as Moran held him tight. Eventually, he found his voice. “It was real, Seb.”

“What was, hon?”

“My nightmare. It really happened.”

“If you need to talk about it, I’ll listen.” Sebastian figured his approach was a longshot, but what else could he do to help?

“I was a little boy in the dream,” Jim said. “It was that day…when she…” he struggled to finish the sentence. “It was when my mum died in front of me,” he finally spat. The consulting criminal was utterly distraught, his tears flowing freely.

“Oh, Jimmy.” The fair-haired alpha gently rocked his mate in an attempt to soothe him. No wonder he barely speaks of his mother, Seb lamented. He hadn’t seen the man this anguished in quite some time.

“We were so happy,” Moriarty choked out between sobs. “And then someone hit her car and it went off the road. They never stopped to see what they’d done. Never cared that they’d killed her.”

“God, I’m sorry, sweetheart. That’s horrific.” What must he have gone through in that moment? It was difficult for an adult to process tragedy like that, let alone a child.

“I loved her so much,” Jim confessed.

“I know you did, honey. I know.” Sebastian just kept rocking his husband as he held him close, praying he’d calm down.

Jim winced, clutching his stomach. “Oww. Tiger, feel this.”
The assassin placed a hand on Moriarty’s abdomen. The babies were kicking furiously.

“I’ve upset them,” he cried. “They were sleeping and I worked them up. I’m an awful omega.” The guilt in his voice was haunting.

“No. You’re the farthest thing from awful, and the babies will be fine. You said yourself that when they’re moving, it lets you know they’re alive,” Moran reminded. “Think of it that way. Essie and Eddie are trying to communicate that they’re here with you and they love you.”

The genius stared in awe at his sweet, devoted spouse. “Sebby, how do you always know the right thing to say?”

“It’s my gift, remember?” he stated with a smile. “I’m London’s preeminent Magpie whisperer.”

“Yes, you are. I’m damn lucky to have found you.”

“I like to think we found each other.”

“We sure did, darling.”

The couple soon resumed their previous spooning position. Though neither had much success getting back to sleep, they were able to take comfort in each other’s company. The simple act of being close together brought a sense of peace.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Looking to the Future while Thinking of the Past

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian attend a special meeting with the mastermind’s doctor. Later, Seb returns home and is upset when he cannot immediately find Jim.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jim and Sebastian were both groggy as they sat in the obstetrician’s private office. After Moriarty’s nightmare about his mother, they had a hell of a time getting back to sleep. Even now, the sniper could tell his mate was still upset. The Irishman hated showing vulnerability, and during last night’s incident, he’d been starkly exposed.

Moran wished he could take away his husband’s pain. Make it so that Jim had had a better life—an existence free of the tragedy that haunted him to his core. People were quick to dismiss the man as a monster, but they never stopped to consider the things that put the darkness inside him; never bothered to examine the hideous events which had led a brilliant little boy to become a beast.

Suddenly, the door opened and Dr. Swenson walked in.

“Good afternoon, gentlemen,” the woman greeted, taking a seat behind her desk. “We have some plans to discuss.” She pulled up Jim’s medical file on her computer and began to review it before turning back to the couple. “As I’m sure you’re aware, male omega births are more limited than most, on account of vaginal delivery not being an option. That said, I’ve performed Caesarean sections on several male patients and all instances were successful.”

Seb was reassured by her claim. He knew from the outset that Jim would need surgery in order to deliver their children. At least with Dr. Swenson at the helm, he’d be in good hands.

“You’ll be awake for the procedure and it really shouldn’t take long to perform. Barring complications, the whole thing will be completed in under an hour’s time.”

Moriarty nodded. “My research told me as much,” he acknowledged. “What I want to be absolutely certain of is that my partner will be allowed to stay with me throughout the process. He’s the father of these babies and I’d like him to be a part of this.”

The physician smiled. “That shouldn’t be a problem. In fact, we encourage alphas to be present at delivery whenever possible. It aids in an omega’s mental and emotional well-being, and also helps establish bonding between father and newborn.”
“Good,” Jim replied. “Now, I’ve read that people generally have to remain in the hospital for a few days following a C-section. Is there any way I’d be able to check out early?”

“Legally, we can’t stop you from doing so, but it’s not recommended. Staying 2-3 days ensures that any immediate post-op issues will be caught and treated accordingly,” she explained.

“Right.” The consulting criminal sounded displeased, but he understood the reasoning behind it. “What about food? Since I’ll be undergoing a surgical procedure, I assume a fast will be in order.”

“You’re correct. 8 hours is the length of time we ask patients to abstain from food and drink prior to surgery.”

“Bloody hell.”

“My apologies, Mr. Moriarty, but it’s standard policy,” she stated. “Are there any further questions?”

Jim and Seb exchanged a glance, neither appearing to have anything more to say.

“I think that’s it,” he said.

“Wonderful. If you come across any additional concerns, don’t hesitate to shoot me an email or call the office.”

At that, the consultation ended. It was brief but informative, giving the Tiger and his Magpie an idea of how events would unfold during the fateful day of their children’s arrival.

*********

Jim was depressed and Seb was worried.

After their meeting with the obstetrician, Moran suggested they go somewhere for a late lunch, but the genius refused. He claimed he just wanted to crawl into bed for a nap. Sebastian didn’t think much of it at first, returning to headquarters while Jim rested at home. But as the hours wore on, the sniper grew increasingly concerned. When he was away, his Magpie almost always texted him at least once about something or other. Today, though, there was nothing. Not a single message from the man.

Sebastian hoped that when he came home, he’d see Jim and his fears would be assuaged. Oh, what wishful thinking that was. As soon as he pulled up to their residence, he noticed the lights were off. It was a curious thing, indeed.

_Maybe he’s been sleeping all this time_, Seb thought as he entered the ominously dark house.

Moran made his presence known, clicking on lamps to make sure the place was well-illuminated. “Magpie,” he called out, “I’m back.”

He received no response and couldn’t find Jim in any of the main areas of the house.

_He’s got to be in bed. He went to take a nap and has been there ever since._

“Okay, sleeping beauty, it’s time to wake up,” Seb announced, stepping into their quarters and turning on the light.

This room was empty, too. The covers were askew, signifying Jim had been there, but the sheets were cool to the touch.
He must’ve gotten up a while ago. So where is he now? Seb briefly considered phoning him, but noticed that his mobile was left on the nightstand.

The former colonel checked every room in search of his husband. He was close to full-blown panic when he decided to investigate the back yard— the lone location he’d not yet explored.

Hallelujah. To his great relief, Sebastian spotted Jim sitting on a lawn chair, staring down at something in his hands. He became slightly disturbed as he approached the Irishman and saw his state of dishevelment. It was a frigid night, and there Moriarty sat, clad in only a thin t-shirt, pajama bottoms, and his watch. He didn’t have shoes or slippers on— his feet were totally bare.

Moran took off the leather jacket he wore and wrapped it around his mate. It was then that Jim looked up, recognizing Seb was there.

“Tiger,” he softly spoke. “Home already?”

“Already? Jim, it’s 10 o’clock at night. I was actually late getting back.”

The consulting criminal paused, looking at his surroundings. “I suppose you’re right. The sun’s gone down. When did that happen?”

Seb was trying to remain calm, but found it difficult to do under the circumstance. This was strange behavior, even for Jim.

The assassin took a seat next to his troubled omega. “Sunset was a few hours ago, love. Have you been out here all this time?”

“I guess so,” he blankly replied. The man looked and sounded truly haggard.

“What is it you’ve got in your hand?” Seb asked, referring to the small card he clutched.

“You mean this?” Moriarty showed his spouse what he was holding.

Sebastian was shocked. It wasn’t a card at all. It was a photograph.

“Jimmy, is this—”

“It’s me and my mum, yes.”

The picture showed a beautiful raven-haired woman holding up a small boy so that he could touch the star on top of a Christmas tree. The child appeared thoroughly joyful.

“You were cute, hon. A fan of the stars even back then.” The sniper recalled Jim’s fondness for astronomy. Seems his fascination with the cosmos started early on.

“I barely remember when it was taken,” he said. “I think I was about four or five at the time.”

“Didn’t know you kept childhood photos,” Moran gently remarked.

“I’ve got a few. Don’t pull them out often, though.”

“What made you decide to look at them today?”

Jim sighed wearily. “You really want to know?”

“Of course. If something is important to you, then it’s important to me. Please, go on.”
“Well, when I went to take a nap, I had another nightmare.”

“About her again? Your mum?”

He nodded. “Yeah.” The mastermind’s voice wavered as he fought to stay composed. “It’s always the same dream. We’re together, and then…”

…she gets killed, Seb thought, mentally finishing the other man’s sentence.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart.”

“Don’t be. It’s not your fault. You didn’t smash into her car and flee the scene. Didn’t leave an eight-year-old boy orphaned, screaming beside the broken body of his mother.” He took an exasperated breath and stared Sebastian straight in the eye. “We were in the countryside when it happened. Donnelly’s farm was the only establishment for miles, so I walked there looking for help. A pity nobody answered the door,” he recounted. “I wandered for hours in the dark, terrified, hoping to find someone— anyone— who might be able to assist. I walked nearly ten miles before a garda spotted me on the side of the road. Turned out he couldn’t help much, either,” Jim lamented. “She died on impact and I was too stupid to realize it. I’d gone off thinking she could actually be revived. Bloody foolish child, I was.”

“Oh, Magpie.” The sniper leaned over to hug his partner. “You weren’t foolish. You were a loving son.”

Moriarty reached his limit and could contain himself no longer. Hot tears ran down his face as he melted into Sebastian’s arms. He’d kept the memory of that terrible day locked away for so very long. It haunted him his entire life, existing as a frenzied darkness that ate at him, devouring from the inside out.

“It’s okay, Jimmy. I’ve got you,” Moran assured.

“I loved her,” he sputtered between sobs. “She was all I had…and then she was gone, and I was completely alone.”

“You’re not alone anymore, kitten. You have me and the babies now. We adore you.”

Seb’s words made Jim cry harder. “Our sweet babies,” he whispered. “Essie and Eddie will never know what an amazing woman their grandmother was.”

“You can tell them. Show them pictures and pass on stories. Keep her memory alive.”

The genius pulled out of his mate’s embrace to look him in the eye again. “Secondhand experiences just aren’t the same. I’ll never be able to relay the intangible qualities that make a person who they are. There were so many wonderful things about her, Tiger. The way she used to smell like lavender and grass from all the time spent working in her garden. The way her hair felt — it was even softer than yours, darling, because she liked to wash it in rainwater. She’d collect it in a bowl whenever there was a storm, and then bring it inside the house to use. Said it was purer than what came out of the pipes.”

Jim paused, his mind abuzz with visceral recollections of the woman. “Don’t even get me started on the sound of her voice,” he continued. “When I got upset— really and truly out of sorts— she would sing to me. So gently, so soothingly. It was often the only thing that settled me down.”

“She must’ve been incredible, Jimmy. Had to be, if she created you.”
The consulting criminal gazed at Moran, his expression overwrought with emotion. “My precious Sebby. I wish she could’ve met you.”

Sebastian smiled warmly. “Think she would’ve liked me?”

“She’d have been crazy about you, dear. Always was an excellent judge of character.”

The two men fell silent for a moment as they noticed that flurries had begun to billow from the sky. It was the first snow of the season.

“Magpie, I do believe we ought to head inside.”

Jim glanced down at his cold, bare feet and then looked back at Seb. “You may be right,” he admitted. “I don’t know what I was thinking when I came out here like this. I could go for a long, hot soak in the tub.” He hesitated, adding, “Might need some help scrubbing my back, Tiger.”

“Lucky for you, I’m exceptionally limber and can reach every part,” the blonde teased with a wink.

“Oh, I’m counting on your flexibility. Just wait and see.”

The duo returned to the warmth of their home, intent on taking a luxurious bath. Jim needed it, and really, Seb did, too. It was the ideal remedy to a demanding day.

Chapter End Notes

Interesting fact: A 'garda' is a police officer in Ireland. I didn't know that until researching the topic.
Chapter Summary

Jim’s potential employee is wary. Later, London’s most dangerous duo must deal with the unexpected.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“God, these are delicious,” Jack said as he plowed through his third lemon chiffon cupcake. “Are you sure you aren’t secretly a pastry chef in disguise?”

Jim laughed lightly. “No, baking is just a hobby.”

“Should be your career,” he enthused.

“I agree,” Scott interjected. “You’ve got a real knack for it.”

The consulting criminal couldn’t help but smile at the praise being heaped upon him. He took pride in his dessert endeavors and was pleased to receive recognition for the effort he put into them. Baking was becoming progressively harder to do, thanks to the perpetual backaches and swollen feet he was afflicted by these days. It pleased him to know that his suffering wasn’t in vain.

Out of the corner of his eye, Jim noticed Ian return from the bathroom. Now was the perfect time to ask him if he’d made a decision regarding his job offer. At their last MOPS meeting, he’d extended an invitation of employment to the young man, but did not reveal that he was the James Moriarty. He decided he would only disclose his true identity if Ian consented to work for him.

The genius got up, approaching his potential employee. “This seat taken?” he joked, seeing that Ian was sitting alone.

“Be my guest.”

Jim hunkered down, sporting a hopeful grin. “Soooo, have you given any thought to my proposal?”

“I have.”

“And? Don’t keep me in suspense.”

“I’m still not sure what I want to do,” he shyly confessed. “I mean, I hate my current job, but I feel
a certain obligation to it. The old lady who owns the shop has always treated me kindly, which is more than I can say for most people I’ve met in life. I’d hate to leave her in a lurch.”

Moriarty snorted. “Ian, you have a baby on the way. You need to start thinking with your head instead of your heart. Prioritize. An office worker’s salary could buy a whole lot more nappies and car seats than a store clerk’s could.”

The young man flushed with embarrassment. “Actually, I can’t afford a car. I use public transit.”

“See what I mean? You’re going to need a better mode of transportation when your child arrives. If you came to work for me, it wouldn’t be an issue. I pay my staff handsomely.”

“I…I just don’t know. Let me think about it a little longer, please.”

Oh, the folly of youth. Jim was growing frustrated with Ian’s wishy-washy attitude. He wanted a mole at headquarters and this unassuming chap would be perfect for the position. Besides, what was there to think about? The decision was a no-brainer. Work for a billionaire and prosper or work for some tired old crone and be paid peanuts? It wasn’t even a question as far as he was concerned.

“I’m sorry if I’ve disappointed you, Jim. It really is a fantastic opportunity.”

“So take it, then.”

“I can’t yet. Switching jobs is a big deal. I need more time to consider it.”

“I won’t claim to understand your apprehension, but fine. The offer stands, if and when you choose to come on board.”

“Thanks.” He fell silent for a moment, his social anxiety getting the best of him. “Those cupcakes look good,” he awkwardly remarked in an attempt to change the subject.

“They taste even better. You should try them before Jack inhales the whole batch.”

“Smashing idea. I think I will.” Ian rose from his chair in search of dessert.

“Bring me one, too. Might as well enjoy the fruits of my labor.”

“You got it.”

Jim sighed as he watched the younger man head towards the refreshment table. His wanting to hire the teen wasn’t simply because he desired an office mole. No, a part of him genuinely wished to help Ian improve his quality of life.

You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink, the mastermind lamented. Ultimately, the ball was in Ian’s court as to what happened next. He hoped he’d make the right choice.

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“How was the meeting?” Sebastian asked as he drove Jim home.

“Not bad. The group keeps raving about the treats I bring in, but I’m not sure how much longer I can continue baking. I just can’t stand or walk the way I used to,” he confessed. “When I made this last batch of cupcakes, I got so desperate, I actually considered using the wheelchair.”
Oh, wow. This was serious. His Magpie hated that thing. If he’d thought about using it again, he must’ve truly been in dire straits.

“Sweetheart, I think you ought to take it easy. Don’t push yourself too hard.”

“I try not to, but it’s ingrained into me. I give my all no matter what I’m doing.”

“I know, Jimmy. Perhaps next, you could ‘give your all’ to relaxation,” he teased.

“With paternity leave coming soon, that might be arranged.” He paused, contemplating something. “Tiger, I’ve been mulling over an idea for a little while.”

“What’s that?”

“I’d like to take an excursion to Ireland. To my hometown of Adare.”

“Is it wise to travel right now? You just said you’re having trouble standing up and walking around at home. Imagine what it would be like having to navigate streets.”

“Well, I thought you’d aid in my mobility, Seb. Was I mistaken in that assumption?” The consulting criminal’s voice grew sharp as he questioned his mate.

“No, of course not. I’ll help you with whatever’s necessary. I just get worried, is all. What’s put you in the mood to visit your old stomping grounds?”

“Honestly? It’s my mum. I can’t get her out of my head. I don’t know if that’s because I’m about to have children of my own soon, or if it’s because this year marks the 30th anniversary of her passing. Maybe it’s a combination of both,” he mused. “In any case, I feel like I have to go to her. I have to visit her grave.”

“Okay, kitten. If that’s what you really want to do, I’ll accompany you. We’re in this together.”

The Tiger and his Magpie exchanged a small smile. ‘Together’ was a word that held great meaning to them both. Knowing they could count on each other provided solace in times of turmoil and woe. It was devotion in its purest form.

When Jim and Seb neared their home, they saw a commotion in the distance. There were flashing lights and various authorities up ahead.

“Wonder what happened?” the sniper pondered aloud.

“I don’t know, but it looks like it’s awfully close to our neighborhood.” As they proceeded further, he changed his assessment. “Scratch that, it is our neighborhood.”

“Hmm.” Jim was correct. Something was transpiring right in their midst.

They drove closer, and closer, and closer—

“Fuck!” the sniper exclaimed. “That’s our house!”

Moriarty’s eyes widened and his mouth hung agape at the sight of emergency vehicles and police surrounding their residence. There were no flames to be seen, but the presence of a firetruck
suggested that something must’ve been extinguished.

Sebastian pulled over and rushed onto the scene, flagging down an officer.

“Constable, I live here. Can you please tell me what’s going on?” Though he tried to remain calm, a frantic urgency crept into his voice.

“A report came in about an hour ago saying that someone had shot out the lights in front of this house and then threw a Molotov cocktail through a first floor window.”

The assassin’s heart sunk. “Oh no.”

“Luckily, your security guard called it in quickly and the fire didn’t have long to burn. It singed your living room, but the rest of the property was unharmed.”

“Thank God.”

Jim made his way to Seb and the bobby. He was wheezing when he reached them.

“Honey, I’m sorry I didn’t help you out of the car. I had to find out what happened.”

“What’s *pant* the *pant* situation?” he breathed heavily between words.

“Someone busted the outside lights and hurled a makeshift explosive through the window.”

Moriarty’s expression grew panic-stricken. “The *pant* nursery, is it—”

“It’s intact,” Seb assured. “Apparently, only the front room was affected.”

“That’s correct,” the constable confirmed. “The guard you posted did the right thing and immediately phoned for assistance. Firefighters were able to neutralize the flames before they got out of hand.”

The look on Jim’s face communicated tremendous relief, and his breathing steadied as well.

“Bloody hell, that gave me a scare. Is it safe to go inside?”

“I believe the last of the crew are clearing out now, so it’s probably okay to go in.” The cop paused, saying, “Sirs, as the owners of this property, we’d like you to come down to the station and give an official statement as soon as possible.”

“Give a statement?” Moran questioned. “Why?”

“Because what occurred here was a crime.”

“Nobody got killed or was even wounded tonight, right?” Jim asked.

“No, but—”

“We don’t want to press charges,” the Irishman asserted. “Since there were no fatalities or injuries involved, you’re not beholden to pursue the case unless we request it.”

“I realize that, but—”

“No need to continue, constable. We won’t change our minds.”

The officer stood there, absolutely dumbfounded. “Are you quite certain? Whoever did this may
strike again.”

“And if they do, we’ll be sure to give you a holler. Until then, I bid you goodnight.”

At that, Moriarty sauntered toward the house.

Sebastian followed, bearing a smirk on his face and lust in his heart. He loved it when Jim got sassy and commanding.

The last of the firemen passed by Jim and Seb as the duo entered their home. The officer was right — damages appeared to be minimal. There was a broken window, a singed area of carpet, and some drapes that would need to be replaced. Altogether, nothing too severe.”

“We got damn lucky,” Moriarty declared. “Which guard was on duty tonight?”

“Rocco, I think.”

“He’ll be receiving a bonus this Christmas.”

Seb nodded, surveying the scene. “Hey, Jimmy?”

“Yes?”

“Here’s a thought,” he announced. “How about I call the contractors who worked on the playroom and have them cleanup and repair the damages, while we get out of here for a few days and go on that trip you suggested? Last time, I paid them to work round-the-clock and they were very efficient. I’m sure something similar could be arranged.”

The mastermind considered his mate’s proposition. “Actually, that’s not a terrible idea. I’m game if you are.”

“Wonderful. I’ll ring them now. Best to get things squared away without delay.”

And so the former colonel did as promised, securing the services of the same crew he’d employed before. Most of them were eager to take the job, grateful to make extra wages as the holiday season neared. With that aspect settled, all Seb had left to do was plan out their travel itinerary and reserve the necessary boarding passage— easy to accomplish, thanks to online booking. For a last-minute trip, it was coming together quite smoothly.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Ghosts of the Past (Live on in the Present)

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian travel to Ireland so that the consulting criminal can visit his mother’s grave.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Traveling. Fucking traveling. Sebastian was beginning to hate it.

As planned, the two most dangerous men in London arranged for contractors to come and repair the minor fire damage in their living room, while they themselves headed to Ireland. It seemed like a great idea, until the reality of time and distance came into play.

I should’ve learned from the trip to France. Should’ve thought harder about it before opening my big, fat mouth.

The pair set out at 8 a.m., taking a train from London to a port in Liverpool. After that, they hopped a ferry voyaging to Dublin. Finally, they rented a car in the Irish capital and took off for Jim’s birthplace, the village of Adare. The nonstop commuting was downright grueling.

There was a positive aspect to the situation, though. It afforded the sniper ample opportunity to spend time with his husband. They could have intimate conversation and discuss matters of importance without interruption.

“Jimmy, I think we should talk about what happened last night regarding the fire.”

Moriarty closed the book he was reading and turned his attention to Seb. “I suppose so. It was a disturbing sight to return to.”

“No kidding. I keep seeing it in my mind. Maybe I’m just paranoid, but I feel like whoever was responsible for the attack must’ve known we were out. They had to realize we’d go after them if we were home, so they deliberately struck while the house was empty.”

The consulting criminal contemplated Moran’s theory. It was a plausible deduction. It also held some troubling implications.

“If that’s the case, then we need to stop and think about who would be familiar with our schedule.”

“Someone close.” The sniper paused, mulling over potential suspects. “Security, maybe?”
Jim shook his head. “Couldn’t be. None of the regular security crew was there for the vandalism incident on your birthday, nor were they present when that bloke in finance was set up as a patsy. Assuming this is the work of the same individual, it couldn’t possibly be one of our guards. It’s got to be office personnel,” he declared.

“You’re right, love,” Sebastian said with a sigh. “My mind is so clouded lately. I’m beginning to jump at shadows.”

“I can’t say I blame you. This stalking bullshit has gone on too bloody long.”

“I agree.” Moran fell silent for a moment, before speaking again. “Jim, if we’re operating under the premise that all of these events—the vandalism, the spying, the set up, and now the fire—have been orchestrated by the same person, then I think we should also include the encounter I had outside the community center to the tally of offenses. The phantom I dealt with that night shot out a streetlamp. Seems awfully similar to the M.O. of yesterday’s firebug. They shot several of our outdoor lights.”

“Seb…I believe that’s a sound assessment. It may well be connected, and I’m sorry I doubted you when you first described your experience. For someone as clever as I am, I certainly can be thick at times.”

“I prefer to call it ‘bullheaded,’” but who’s counting?” the assassin teased.

“Hush. I’m trying to apologize.”

“I know, hon. Sometimes I just can’t resist.”

“Cheeky bugger,” Jim proclaimed.

Moran flashed a sharky grin. “You’ll get no denial from me.”

“At least I’m married to an honest man.” The genius was smiling now, too. His Tiger often had that effect on him.

Sebastian glanced at the dashboard GPS. “We’ve almost reached Adare. Any of these surroundings recognizable to you?”

“Bits and pieces, but it’s been 30 years since I was last here. Not since my mum died,” he admitted. “Sites are bound to be hazy.”

“Makes sense,” the former colonel remarked. “Hey, Jimmy? Could I ask you a weird question?”

“Weird? Ooh, now you’ve got me intrigued. Please, go on.”

“Well, I was wondering…if you were originally from Ireland, how did you end up in England after your mother passed?”

“Ugh, you got my hopes up. I was expecting something truly bizarre, but that question is booooring. However, I do find you incredibly sexy, so I’ll answer.”

“I appreciate your benevolence, dear. It’s an inspiration to the world.”

“I’ve always thought so,” he deadpanned. “But I digress. Adare is a very small place. Social services decided I’d have a better chance of finding an adoptive family if I was sent to an orphanage in a larger area, specifically, Dublin. As it turned out, my options were slightly broader
than that, because my mum had dual citizenship between Ireland and England. So I was given a choice: go to the capital of the country I was already in, or go to London. Well, I wanted to get as far away from where she died as possible, so I told them ‘England’ and didn’t look back.”

“You were bold, even back then. Venturing forth to conquer new lands at age eight.” In all the years he’d known Jim, Seb had never heard the backstory explaining that particular mystery. Now he understood.

“It was more like running from painful memories— nothing valiant about it. But I do prefer your interpretation of events.”

My dear, sweet Magpie. Just coming back here must be hard for him. The sniper wondered if this was a mistake. Maybe they shouldn’t have made the pilgrimage after all— not while Jim was in such a compromised physical and emotional state. But it was too late to turn around now.

They soon entered the village proper, stopping when they reached their point of destination: The Emerald Clover Inn. It was a quaint bed & breakfast located in the heart of Adare.

“Here’s the plan,” Moran announced. “We check in, and before settling into our room, I’ll sweep the place for bugging devices. Don’t enter until I give the all-clear.”

Jim smirked. “Roger that, colonel.”

Seb leaned over, stealing a kiss from his mate before stepping out of the car. “I love it when you talk military to me, kitten.”

“There’s more where that came from. Maybe later we can have a bit of fun,” the mastermind flirtatiously suggested.

“I’ll hold you to it, provided this location is free from surveillance.”

And so the couple headed inside the B&B, hoping for the best.

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“Ooh, Tiger, this comforter is so soft, I think I may cocoon in it and never reemerge.”

The handsome assassin laughed. “A tempting prospect.” He sat down beside Jim and paused, looking around. “This really is a lovely room. Very cozy.” And thankfully, 100% camera-free. No prying eyes.

“Reminds me of where we spent our honeymoon,” the Irishman said. “Do you remember it?”

“The Inverness Inn?” he asked. “How could I forget? Because of a last-minute business meeting, we had to cancel our reservations in Barbados and trek to the fucking Highlands instead.”

Moriarty affected a pout. “Aww, come on, Sebby. It wasn’t that bad. As I recall, you ended up having a pretty great time, all things considered.”

He hated to admit it, but Jim did speak the truth. Perhaps by some cosmic accident, the consulting criminal began going into heat a mere two days prior to their wedding. It’d taken incredible fortitude not to ravish him on the way down the aisle, but ultimately, Seb persevered. He couldn’t claim the same for the rest of the proceedings, though.

The duo consummated their matrimonial union immediately before, and during, the reception.
Then they partook in a repeat performance as they headed to the inn. Finally, upon arriving at the B&B, all bets were off. The Tiger and his Magpie went at it like animals, barely leaving their suite for the entirety of the trip. It was a celebration of glorious carnal bliss.

Jim placed a hand on Moran’s inner thigh. He rubbed the area oh-so-enticingly, the pads of his fingers nimbly massaging against a barrier of denim. “Remember the fun we had? Cuffs and cock rings and all the switching we did that week?” he reminisced. “An omega chaining down an alpha and fucking him senseless— what a scandalous pair we were. Of course, I know you’d rather think of it as ‘making love.’ My darling assassin, ever the romantic.”

Sebastian breathed heavily at the memory of their exploits. Jim always knew how to cut through his tough exterior and make him weak in the knees; make him quiver and quake as if he were possessed by some otherworldly lust that only Moriarty himself could sate.

“Such a naughty kitten, you are.”

“Oh, that I am,” the dark-eyed genius affirmed. He continued to tease his spouse, caressing so close to the bulge in his jeans, yet not actually laying a hand there. It was torturous.

A grunt tore from the sniper’s lips. “No props now, Magpie. Just the two of us, unrestrained.”

“Don’t need anything else, my sweet. You, me, and the Astroglide in my travel bag are all that’s required.”

“Are you telling me this just for kicks, or am I being propositioned?”

Jim gazed at him seductively. “Honey, if I was any more obvious, I’d be flashing a billboard.”

Moran got the gist after that. Without skipping a beat, he stood up and hung the ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign outside their door. They were going to be busy for quite some time.

*********

“Comfortable, darling? I could make adjustments if you’d like.”

“No, it’s fine. I’ll never get used to using this thing, though,” Jim said, referring to the wheelchair Sebastian had just helped him into.

The couple was at Adare’s lone cemetery. It was getting dark out, but Moriarty badly wanted to locate his mother’s grave. He wouldn’t take ‘no’ for an answer when Moran suggested they look for it the next day. When he got it in his head to do something, it usually had to be undertaken straightaway. Patience was not a virtue he held dear.

“Do you have the flowers, Seb?”

“Yep. Here they are,” he confirmed, passing the bouquet to his mate. The mastermind had insisted they stop at a shop to pick up lavender blossoms. Apparently, those were his mother’s favorite and she used to grow her own in a garden.

Sebastian began pushing his omega through the dusky graveyard. It felt a bit spooky to him, but he dared not admit it.

“Any idea which one is hers?”

“Unfortunately, no, I don’t. But considering how small this place is, it shouldn’t be too difficult to
find.” As they navigated the area, Seb’s thoughts wandered from one thing to another, seemingly at random. Eventually, a matter came to mind that he’d wanted to discuss with Jim.

“Magpie?”

“Yes?”

“I’ve noticed you stopped wearing your blood pressure monitor. Is there a reason why?”

“It’s broken.”

“Broken?”

“Yeah. When I threw it across the room, it must’ve short-circuited.”

“Hmm. I could take a look at it for you. I’m fairly handy with wiring.”

“Don’t bother. Truthfully, I’m glad to be rid of it. That beeping was obnoxious as hell.”

“It was just doing its job,” Moran noted. “Maybe we can get a new one from your doctor.”

“What part of ‘glad to be rid of it’ don’t you understand? Use your brain.”

“Jimmy, please reconsid—”

“There!” the consulting criminal abruptly shouted, cutting Seb off in mid-sentence. “There it is!” Indeed, the headstone he pointed at read ‘Moira Elizabeth Moriarty, Loving mother & friend.’ They wheeled closer so that Jim could lay the flowers on her grave.

“Honey, do you need some time alone for this? I could take a walk.”

“You’re not going anywhere,” Jim decreed. “I want you here. This is the closest either of you will get to meeting each other.”

“Okay, dear.” However his partner chose to handle this was fine by Sebastian. He was there to lend support.

A brief silence came over them as the genius pondered how to get started. He’d put plenty of people into graves, but never actually visited one before. Was there an established etiquette to adhere to? He suddenly wished he’d researched the subject prior to making the trip.

“So,” Jim finally began, “it’s me, mum. Your little prince, all grown up. I probably should’ve come to see you sooner, but it hurt too much,” he confessed. “I’ve been a busy boy through the years. Got myself a proper education and built up a web of clients and connections. Not to brag, but I’ve made a fortune. If you were still here, I’d have moved you into a posh château and got you the greenhouse you always wanted.” His voice faltered slightly as he attempted to stave off rising emotion.

“I’m married now, too. The man standing beside me is my husband, Sebastian. He’s a wonderful mate and I’m sure you’d have gotten along famously. He makes me happy, mum. I know that’s what you would’ve wanted for me—to find happiness in life.”

Seb placed a hand on Moriarty’s shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze to signify his encouragement.
"We’re going to be parents in a few months,” Jim continued. “It’s twins—a boy and a girl. Edward James and Estella Sebastienne are their names. We’ve prepared a beautiful nursery and playroom for them, and I’ve knitted a good deal of items meant to keep them warm,” he recounted. “I’m very excited for their arrival. Not so keen on the Caesarean birth I’ll have to undergo, but the end justifies the means. Whenever I get too anxious thinking about the surgery, I imagine what it’ll be like to hold them for the first time. That helps calm me down.” He grew quiet for a beat, wanting to say more, but struggling to find the right words.

Moran let go of Jim’s shoulder and grasped his hand instead. The Irishman welcomed the gesture, twining their fingers together. It was a simple act, but one that meant the world to Moriarty.

“I wish you were here, mum. Wish you could meet your grandbabies and sing to them the way you used to sing to me. Wish you could tuck them in and tell them bedtime stories. Whenever I got bored with my books, you’d make up your own stories to keep me entertained. I loved that. My favorite was the one about the prince who found a magical key that allowed him to unlock any door in the kingdom. Sometimes I think maybe it inspired me a bit.”

Jim shivered as a howling wind blew past. It was getting cold out.

“Tiger, I’ll need to go back to the car soon. I want to say one last thing, though.”

“Oh, hon.”

“Mum,” he addressed, resuming the ‘conversation’ with his mother, “I’m sorry I’ve never been able to catch your killer. Believe me, I’ve tried. Everything happened so fast that day, certain details are a blur. But I’ve always thought the vehicle that hit us was a dark blue pickup. I spent countless hours researching who, in this area, might’ve owned such a truck around the same time as the accident. Regrettably, my results were inconclusive and I came to realize that there was no foolproof way to know who the guilty party was. It enraged me,” he declared. “Still does, in fact. Knowing that some cowardly bastard got away with your murder… I think it’ll haunt me until the end of my days. I can’t abide it, and yet I must.” Jim somberly sighed, feeling very drained. “I love you, mum. Love you forever.”

Moriarty turned to look up at Sebastian. “We can go now.”

The sniper nodded. “Aye aye, kitten.”

When they returned to their car, the pair noticed a strange sight in the distance. There was an unmanned kite being propelled across the sky by a stiff breeze. Though difficult to make out from afar, there seemed to be a star pattern on the object.

Jim’s eyes widened as he was reminded of the kite he and his mother had flown during their last happy moment together. He wasn’t a superstitious man, but a part of him couldn’t help but feel like this was a sign of some kind. It was a fanciful notion, but who knew for sure?

A sense of peace flooded through him, filling his heart with unexpected joy. Maybe you heard me after all, mum.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
The Choices We Make

Chapter Summary

Jim’s potential employee has come to a decision.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I want holly wreaths hung up here and here,” Jim declared, pointing to two specific spots. “I’d also like garland strung across the entire framework of the archway and twinkle lights accenting every window. Not the tacky multi-colored kind, but the white ones. Those give off such a brilliant glow.”

“You’ve really put thought into this,” Sebastian said, and it was true. Ever since they’d returned from their excursion to Ireland, the consulting criminal had been bursting with energy and ideas. Visiting his mother’s grave proved cathartic, relieving him of the invisible burden he’d carried with him for so long. Now he felt freer…more serene. He wanted to celebrate his newfound disposition by focusing on something positive— specifically, the impending holidays.

“Of course I have. Decorating isn’t the sort of thing one does impulsively,” he stressed. “To do it well is an art form, and requires strategic planning and precision. You can’t approach it in a haphazard manner.”

“Well, I’m afraid there’s one decorative aspect you’ve overlooked, darling.”

Jim’s face scrunched up as he glanced around, contemplating what he might’ve missed. “Tiger, don’t be daft. I’ve forgotten nothing.”

“Uh-huh, you sure did.”

“Never.”

“Wanna bet?” He grinned broadly, his blue eyes shimmering with delight.

“Stop saying that!” the Irishman commanded. “And at least have the decency to tell me what it is.”

“Oh, love. You forgot the mistletoe.”

A look of sudden realization washed over Moriarty. He had neglected that particular Christmas accessory.
“Leave it to you to notice something like that,” Jim quipped.

“Just thought I should mention it, seeing as how you wanted to be thorough.”

“Yes, well, I’ll add it to my list of decorations. I intend to order a proverbial boatload of holiday adornments and then hire people to arrange them to my specifications,” he proclaimed. “Perhaps we could use the contractors who worked on the playroom and did such a fine job repairing the living room.”

“Hmm, that may be doable.”

The mastermind’s lips upturned in a wicked smile. “I like the way that word rolls off your tongue, Tiger. Doable. Doo00o-aaaa-ble.”

“You always did have a knack for stretching things out.”

“I know,” he whispered hotly into Sebastian’s ear. “Especially those things I can unfurl inch-by-inch.” Forgoing all subtlety, he punctuated his statement by cupping the bulge that lay between the sniper’s legs.

Moran captured his mate’s mouth, kissing him passionately. Jim tasted sweeter by the day and he could not get enough.

BZZ. BZZ.

The couple ignored the vibration emanating from the back pocket of Moriarty’s pants.

BZZ. BZZ.

The buzzing persisted, but again, they disregarded it in favor of continuing to make out with great verve.

BZZ. BZZ.

Whoever was texting the genius was incredibly determined. And also a total idiot to think they could get away with pestering him so incessantly.

“You’d better get that,” Seb said, breaking their heated exchange.

Jim grunted in frustration. “Yeah, guess so, or else my ass may never stop buzzing.”

The assassin chuckled. He often enjoyed the unique way his spouse phrased things.

“It’s Ian,” Moriarty exclaimed, reading the text messages he’d just been sent. “He’s ready to discuss the employment offer I made.”

“Oh? So we may be getting our office mole after all.”

“Fingers crossed, Sebby. With me going on paternity leave soon, the timing couldn’t be better.”

Moran nodded. “When will the two of you meet?”

“Today, if possible. I’ll take him to lunch and we can iron out the details,” he answered. “Where do you suppose we should dine? Someplace showy and sophisticated, I think, to really drive home the idea that working for me is a grand opportunity.”
“Careful he doesn’t mistake the gesture for more than what it is, Magpie.”

“Ugh, not this again. I told you already—I’m strictly trying to help the young man. There’s nothing more to it.”

“You’re charismatic, Jim. Even when you’re not attempting to flirt with someone, it comes off that way.”

He shrugged. “I have a naturally charming personality. So what?”

“So it can be easily misconstrued, especially when you’re dealing with a lonely, impressionable youth like Ian.”

The consulting criminal peered at his partner. “If I didn’t know better, I’d say you were a teensy bit jealous.”

“Jealous?” he repeated incredulously. “Hardly. Why would I be?”

“That’s what I’m trying to figure out, dear.”

Seb scoffed. “It’s a ridiculous notion. As if a 19-year-old pregnant omega would be any competition?”

“Methinks you doth protest too much.”

The sniper sighed in exasperation and fell silent for a moment. “I’ve always wondered something, though.”

Moriarty arched a brow. “What’s that?”

“Have you ever been with another omega?”

“Honey, I’ve gone through the gamut— alpha, beta, and omega,” he matter-of-factly stated. “But before you work yourself up into a tizzy, I should note that you’ve been the best of the lot. Nobody holds a candle to you, my magnificent Tiger.”

“Okay, now you’re just saying things to make me feel better.”

“Is it working?”

“Maybe,” he replied with a wink.

The genius laughed lightly. “Good. Now I’ve got to text Ian back and then make the necessary dining reservations.”

As Jim began typing on his phone, Moran spoke up once more. “Don’t take him anywhere too fancy.”

“Why not?”

“Because if he’s as down-and-out as you say, then odds are he probably doesn’t own a suit. All those posh places you love have dress codes.”

Jim paused, considering his husband’s advice. “Hmm. An astute observation.”

“I speak from experience. When we first met, I didn’t own a suit, remember?”
Thinking back, Moriarty did recall buying Sebastian an entire wardrobe of designer clothing shortly after they began dating. A man keeping his company needed to appear properly debonair.

“I do,” he admitted. “So where should we go, if not to one of my usual eateries?”

“A pub, perhaps. Generally, any kind of attire is allowed at those.”


“Ordinary is the point, my love. You want a place that’s no-frills.”

“I suppose.” The mastermind still wasn’t sold on the idea.

“How about you let Ian pick the restaurant? Problem solved.”

Jim smiled gleefully at the suggestion. “Darling, you’re brilliant. Not as clever as me, of course, but brilliant nonetheless, in your own wonderful way.”

“Thanks, sweetheart.”

The assassin checked his watch. He really ought to drop by headquarters to make sure all was running smoothly. He also needed to touch base with the ladies who were planning Jim’s baby shower.

“Hon, I’m going to pop in at the office.”

“That’s fine. See you later, Sebby.”

Both men went their separate ways, each setting out to accomplish very different things. They took comfort in the knowledge that, no matter what, they would ultimately return home to each other.

**********

“Here you go, gentlemen. Our famous 5-meat medley. Enjoy!” a perky waitress said as she served Jim and Ian their meal.

They hadn’t ended up at a pub like Jim thought they might. Instead, they’d gone to a quaint Italian place of the younger man’s choosing, Vittorio’s Pizzeria.

“Looks delicious,” Moriarty remarked, and he meant it. He’d not eaten processed meats since being put on a strict low-sodium diet that Seb was keen to enforce. But his militant mate wasn’t here right now, and Jim was going to take full advantage of that fact.

“Oh, it is,” Ian assured. “Reasonably priced, too.”

Jim grunted obscenely as he savored the first bite. “God, this is amaaaaazing.”

“Best pizza in London, hands down. I come here about once a month or so, when I can afford it.”

“Well, you’re in luck. By agreeing to work for me, you’ll soon be making more than enough money to dine here daily.”

“Wouldn’t be good for the baby to eat here too often, but I see your point.”

“Excellent, we’re on the same page,” he said between bites. “At least, I assume you’ve decided to take the employment offer I made. Correct?”
He nodded. “Yes. I’ve come to the conclusion that if I had higher wages, I could provide a better life for my child. Since I’ll be raising him or her alone, that’s an important factor to consider.”

“How very wise of you, Ian. I guarantee that coming on board with me is a step in the right direction.”

“I hope so.” There was still a hint of apprehension in his voice. “What would you have me do for you?”

“Splendid question,” the consulting criminal enthused. “When I asked if you had any special skills, I seem to recall you mentioning you were adept with digital arts and graphics.”

“Yeah. I was studying it in college before I got pregnant and had to drop out.”

“Would you be interested in maintaining the corporate website? The page hasn’t been revamped in ages. It could use an update.”

“Sure, that’d be easy. But it’s also the kind of thing one could do from home,” Ian pointed out. “I thought this would be an in-person assignment.”

“You didn’t let me finish,” Jim informed his new hire. “In addition to acting as webmaster, I’d also like you to do a bit of secretarial work. Answer phones, send out memos, and keep an eye on the staff.”

“Keep an eye on the staff?” he reiterated curiously. “How do you mean?”

“Well, it’s come to my attention that there’s a disloyal individual hiding amongst the ranks. It would be a huge help if you were to remain vigilant of any unusual behavior, and then report back to me about it.”

Ian was silent for a few seconds, contemplating what was being asked of him. “You want me to be a spy?”

“Oh, heavens no. ‘Spy’ is such a dramatic word. What I had in mind was more along the lines of staying attuned to the heart of the office. Being alert to your coworker’s habits and behaviors.”

“Still sounds like spying…like I’d be your mole.”

The boy was cleverer than Jim anticipated. That could work for him or against him, depending on how things proceeded next.

“You’re very perceptive. A fine quality to possess, particularly when aligning yourself with a man like me.”

Now was as good a time as any to reveal the truth of his identity. How would the young man take the news?

“Ian, since you’re such a smart bloke, I feel inclined to be upfront with you.”

“Okay.” The shy omega wasn’t sure where Jim was headed with this conversation.

“I’m going to whisper in your ear who I really am.” At that, he leaned across the table as best he could with his belly being in the way. “I’m James Moriarty, consulting criminal.”

There was an awkward pause as Ian clammed up.
“Well?” the genius urged, trying to elicit some form of response.

“I…already knew that.”

It took a lot to catch Jim off guard, but Ian had done it effortlessly and in one fell swoop.

“Excuse me, what?” He was reeling, wondering how it was possible. Sure, he went by the name ‘Jim’ at the MOPS group, and used the initials ‘JM’ for phone and texting purposes, but it seemed unlikely Ian would’ve figured it out from those clues alone.

“I’ve known you were James Moriarty since your first meeting. Most of us know.”

All color drained from the mastermind’s face. He was completely and utterly aghast.

“Did I say the wrong thing? I’m sorry,” the youth was quick to apologize.

“No need, I’m just…dumbfounded.” He was virtually speechless, struggling to articulate a cohesive reply. “Most of you know? Really?”

“Yeah. Not Jack, because he’s surprisingly scatterbrained for a paralegal, but the rest of us do. We’ve all seen your picture in newspapers and on television screens.”

“Right. Of course.”

It’d been years since his image was broadcast through the media. With short attention spans being the norm these days, he assumed people would forget; would move on to other things, thus allowing him to hide in plain sight. Apparently, he’d operated under a colossally flawed premise.

This revelation raised questions. If the group was able to identify him, who else had by now? All the medical professionals he’d dealt with these past few months— had they known, too, and simply played along in fear of reprisal?

Jim stood up from the table, pulling out his wallet and dropping a few bills in front of Ian. “Here. Lunch is on me.”

“Wait, you don’t have to go.”

“I beg to differ. I’ve got some serious things to consider,” he ominously remarked.

“Do I still have the job?” Ian sounded panicked, terrified that another opportunity was crashing and burning before his eyes.

“Yes, your employment stands.”

Moriarty hastily exited the pizzeria. His mind was abuzz, thoughts racing at a breakneck pace. It was overwhelming, and if he’d been wearing his blood pressure monitor, it surely would’ve blared. He needed to speak to Sebastian, and fast.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
A Serpent Lurking in the Grass

Chapter Summary

We finally learn what Colin has been up to. Also, plans for Jim’s surprise baby shower are discussed.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

Colin Taylor’s life was going pretty well these days. His lawyer was in the process of getting the murder charges against him dropped, and he no longer had to stay in the hellish prison unit he’d initially been confined to. Thanks to Sebastian Moran’s fists of iron, he and his attorney were able to convince the judge that his welfare was in jeopardy if he remained in police custody. The ghastly facial injuries incurred during Taylor and Moran’s meeting were very compelling, and he was permitted to stay at Bethlem Psychiatric Hospital until further notice.

Though the facility— commonly referred to as ‘Bedlam’— had a rather infamous reputation, Taylor didn’t find it too bad. He was left alone in a locked ‘bedroom’ for most of the day, which worked out fine because it gave him time to catch up on his reading. The institution had a surprisingly decent library that he could request books from daily. Right now, he was finishing up Moby Dick. He felt an affinity for Ahab. Both he and the character were captains (albeit of different kinds), and more importantly, both understood the ever-consuming need for revenge. He only hoped his tale would end more satisfactorily than that of the whaler’s.

Colin glanced at the clock on the wall. It was nearly time for lunch. But lunch didn’t just mean food. No, it also denoted he’d be receiving a visitor as well.

Katie.

During his residence at the hospital, he met a middle-aged nursing assistant by the name of Katherine Ramsey. She was a dowdy individual, beset by two failed marriages, an underactive thyroid, and a lazy eye. It hadn’t been too difficult to win her over. The woman was starved for male attention, and when he decided to break his self-imposed silence just to speak to her…well, it certainly made her feel special.

The two began to talk whenever she delivered his meals or brought him his latest library order. That he was recovering from Moran’s beating at the time was a boon to his cause— the injuries elicited sympathy from her, and soon he was able to convince the woman of his ‘innocence.’ He had her believing that the case against him was a terrible miscarriage of justice; a conspiracy to bring down a former soldier who’d turned his back on bloodshed in favor of leading a simpler life.
off the grid.

What, exactly, did Colin Taylor derive from his acquaintanceship with Ms. Ramsey? Besides entertainment value, the answer was access. More specifically, access to the iPhone she kept on her person. Along with dispensing lunch, she would also leave her mobile device behind so that he could correspond with his outside contact. She always retrieved her phone before leaving for the day, but during those precious hours between noon and 5 p.m., he had unlimited access.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

Bingo.

As expected, the matronly medical worker entered his room carrying a tray of food. She sat it on the nightstand and then moved to shut the door.

“Hi, Colin,” the woman cheerfully greeted. “How’s your day going?”

“Better, now that you’re here.” He faked a smile to appease her desire for affection. “What’s on the menu today?”

“Meatloaf with mashed potatoes and broccoli. Not the most appealing dish, but…” she reached into her pocket and pulled out a small package of cookies. “I got these from the vending machine. Thought you might like them.”

“Thanks, dear. You’re a peach.”

Katie blushed slightly. “It’s the least I could do, after the hell you’ve gone through.”

“Just the sight of your lovely face makes my world a bit more bearable,” he lied.

The woman beamed with contentment. It was so easy to manipulate her, Colin almost felt guilty. Almost.

She slipped her hand into another pocket, this time retrieving the item Taylor most coveted— her iPhone. Passing it to him, she spoke. “I have to cut out of here early today, so I’ll need this back by 3 o’clock. Hope that’s okay.”

Grr. There’d be no time to dally. No mucking about checking sports scores or reading the news. He’d have to get down to business straightaway.

“It’s fine, Katie. What’s going on this afternoon?”

“Just a dental appointment. One of my teeth has been bothering me. I think it’s a cavity.”

“Sorry to hear that, babe. Probably got it because you’re so damn sweet.” Colin cringed internally at how thick he was lying on the artificial charm. A smarter woman might’ve seen through his guise, but Katherine Ramsey was the type who’d relinquish all common sense in exchange for potential romance. It was a romance that would never happen, not in a million years, but she didn’t have to know that.

If the nursing assistant was happy before, she was absolutely delighted now. “Oh, Colin. You say such kind things. It’s inspiring how thoughtful and upbeat you are while being kept in captivity. Not a lot of people would be so resilient.”

He paused, taking a moment to ruminate on her remark. “It’s belief in karma that keeps my spirit
strong. I endure each day with the knowledge that my adversaries will eventually be made to answer for their transgressions.”

“Be sure your sin will find you out,” she quoted.

“Read the Bible often, do you?”

“My mum was a good, proper Christian,” Katie declared. “Used to make me study scripture with her every night.”

“That’s beautiful, dear.” Mum must’ve been a real nutter. No wonder she ended up working in an asylum. Probably reminded her of home.

The woman sighed wistfully. “Wish I could stick around here longer, but if I don’t return to my post, people may become curious.”

“I understand. See you later, Katie.”

“Au revoir,” she said with a smile, bidding him goodbye.

When the door closed behind her, he immediately reached for the phone. “Finally. Thought that slag would never leave.”

Colin dialed a number, praying his contact would pick up. Alas, it went to voicemail.

“Hey, we don’t have as much time to talk today. Call me back as soon as you can.”

All he could do now was wait.

*********

“So what do you think of our plans?” Gemma asked as she and her baby shower collaborator, Annie, sat in Moran’s office.

“Everything the two of you have laid out sounds good.” They’d decided on food, games, decorations, and more. The event itself would be held at his and Jim’s house. The mastermind took a lot of naps these days, so they’d stage the party while he was asleep, ensuring he’d wake up to a grand surprise.

“The only thing we’re having trouble with is the guest list,” Annie noted.

“Oh?”

“Yes. I don’t know how to say this without it coming out awkwardly, but…Mr. Moriarty doesn’t have many friends.”

“He’s got plenty of business associates,” Gemma was quick to add, “it’s just that these sorts of celebrations are usually an intimate gathering of friends and family. We didn’t realize how small his circle was until midway through our preparations.”

“I see.” Honestly, Seb could’ve told them that from the start. Of course London’s most dangerous man didn’t have a rolodex of friends on standby. You didn’t garner his reputation by playing nice.

“We were wondering if you knew of anyone he might want to invite?”

“Hmm. Actually, yeah. He’s recently become chummy with a bloke by the name of Ian
Fitzgerald.” You may be seeing a lot of him soon, if things go well at his and Jim’s lunch.

“Excellent, sir,” she said, committing the moniker to memory.

“Also,” Gemma spoke, “I was considering asking my cousin to tag along in order to beef up the numbers. She’s a sweet girl and we could use all the attendees we can get.”

“That should be fine,” Seb replied. “I trust your judge of character.” Gemma always seemed to have a good head on her shoulders. He had faith that she would not permit any riffraff onto the guest list.

BZZ. BZZ.

The sniper’s phone was buzzing.

“Sorry, ladies. Hold on a second.” He pulled out his device and saw he’d received a text from Jim.

JM

Was just delivered shocking news. Must speak to you.

Shocking news? His heart pounded with dread.

“I have to respond to the message I was sent,” he alerted Gemma and Annie. “It’s important.”

The women understood, graciously thanking him for his time and then exiting his office.

SB

What’s wrong? Is it the babies?

JM

No. The babies are okay. This is another matter entirely.

SB

Thank God. You gave me a fright.

JM

Sorry, Tiger. But we NEED to talk. I’ll swing by headquarters.
Sure thing. You know where to find me.

Seb sat back in his armchair, wondering what could possibly be going on now. Jim always did have a flair for dramatics, so perhaps this was one of his imagined crises.

But what if it really is something serious?

The truth would reveal itself soon.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Confessions of a Consulting Criminal

Chapter Summary

Jim confronts some hard truths.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I really don’t think this is worth getting riled up over. A few men in your pregnancy group recognized you—it’s not great news, but it isn’t the end of the world, either.”

Sebastian had just spent the past 20-minutes listening to Jim go on a tirade about how ‘everyone’ knew his identity, and it was, according to him, a ‘catastrophe.’ While the sniper agreed it was an unfortunate turn of events, he didn’t feel the issue was quite as dire as his omega made it out to be.

“Most, Seb. Not a few. Most,” he corrected. “You don’t seem to get it. If I’m still in people’s heads, then I could become a target. Or worse, our children could become targets.”

“None of you will be targets, that much I guarantee. I’ll protect you, and we’ll protect them. We’re a family unit. We look out for each other.”

The consulting criminal huffed, turning away from his husband. He was quiet for a moment, almost too quiet.

“Jimmy, it’ll be okay.” Seb reached out to put a hand on the smaller man’s shoulder, but he jerked out of his grasp.

“No! Nothing will be okay! How do you not comprehend that?” His voice was breaking as he spoke.

Something’s wrong here. Moriarty could be temperamental, especially now, with his hormones in a state of flux. But even so, he wouldn’t be this affected by the situation. There had to be more to it.

“Hon, what’s the real reason you’re upset? There’s something you’re not telling me,” he said. “And don’t claim it isn’t true. I’m an expert Magpie whisperer, remember? I can sense these things.”

“It’s…I…” Jim trailed off and his breathing grew audibly labored. Moreover, he appeared to be trembling.
Oh no. Not another attack. “Let me help you to the couch.”

Seb took the genius by the arm and didn’t allow him to pull away this time. When he got a good look at him, he understood why he’d turned his back: he was in tears.

The assassin ushered his distraught spouse to the leather sofa in his private office. Once seated, Jim hung his head low, not wanting to meet Sebastian in the eye. He also continued to shake uncontrollably.

Sitting close beside him, Moran began rubbing his back in a soothing manner. He could feel a great deal of tension built up in his muscles.

“Talk to me, love. Let your Tiger help.”

“You can’t help this. No one can. I’ve made my bed and now I have to lie in it.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Figure it out.”

“I’m not as smart as you, darling. I’m afraid I need further elaboration.”

“Smart as me?” he scoffed. “That’s a laugh riot. Turns out, I’m a fucking idiot.”

Seb frowned at the harsh remark. “Never, Jimmy. You’re the cleverest person I know.”

“If that’s true, then you really ought to broaden your horizons.”

“My horizons are just fine,” he replied. “As your husband, your alpha, and your friend, I insist that you tell me what’s going on.”

“I’ve already explained. Ian and some others realized who I was straightaway. They knew on sight.”

“For a time, you were all over the media. Even if it was years ago, it stands to reason that you’d be recognized sooner or later.”

“I know, Seb. I know. That’s the problem.”

“Hmm?” The sniper wished his partner would speak less cryptically.

Jim finally looked up, casting a sad gaze on Sebastian. “I was lying to myself,” he confessed.

The sniper stared back at him, perplexed. “Lying? How?”

“Even though my image was once plastered across the news, I was convinced no one would be able to identify me. I told myself over and over again that ordinary people had the mental capacity of goldfish. That they’d forget my face as soon as something else entered their myopic little minds. I was wrong.”

“That’s not a lie, hon.”

“Oh, yes, it is,” the Irishman declared. “Because while that’s what I believed in my head, in my heart, it was different. In my heart, I knew.” He paused, unsuccessfully attempting to catch his breath.
“Jim, maybe we should go outside for some fresh air.”

“No! Let me finish.”

“Okay. I’m just concerned for you, is all.”

“Don’t be,” he rasped. “I…I knew, deep down, that someone would recognize me eventually. But I shoved common sense aside because I wanted to believe the lie. Now, more than ever, I wanted to believe it, and I wish I still could.”

“Why, Jimmy?”

“Because look at me, Sebastian. Look at who I’ve become these past 6 ½, almost 7 months.”

“That’s how long you’ve been carrying the twins,” Moran plainly noted. *What’s he getting at?*

“Yes, exactly. I’ve become an expectant omega who knits, and bakes, and cries at the drop of a hat. *Me, Seb. The purported ‘most dangerous man in London.’”

“What are you saying? That you’re unhappy? That you regret doing this?”

“No,” he said, shaking his head emphatically. “That’s the thing. I could *never* regret our children. I love them, and I love knitting mittens and caps, and I love baking treats to bring to my group meetings. I love *all* of it,” he stressed. “But do you know who wouldn’t? You know who’d absolutely *despise* it? James Moriarty. Because he is untouchable. He’s cold, calculating, and cruel. He would never do any of the things I’ve done these past several months.”

Seb was at a loss for words. What Jim was saying wasn’t untrue. The mastermind had changed a great deal since becoming pregnant. He’d grown in so many ways—it was beautiful, like watching the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly.

“Jim, I don’t know what to tell you.”

“Well, imagine how I feel. I can’t reconcile who I was for most of my life with who I am right now. And that’s the crux of it. Some part of me wanted the world to forget James Moriarty, criminal extraordinaire, because if they could, then maybe I could, too. Maybe I could just be Jim.”

“Oh, Magpie. I love every version of you, both old and new. I always will,” the assassin proclaimed.

“And I love you, Tiger.” Jim leaned over, wrapping his arms around Moran as he laid his head on the alpha’s shoulder.

Sebastian hugged him back and noticed that his breathing had normalized and his trembling ceased.

“I don’t know if I’ll ever be the man I once was, Sebby. Sometimes…” he stopped, leaving the unfinished statement dangling between them.

“Sometimes what, sweetheart?”

The genius wearily sighed. “Sometimes, I think I might walk away from it all after the babies are born.”

*Bloody hell.* Up to this point, Seb never dreamed his spouse would consider such a thing. This was huge.
“Retire, darling? Really?”

“Yes, perhaps,” he confirmed. “The ‘me’ who’s sitting here, bearing his soul to you, wants a different kind of life. But the ‘me’ who painstakingly built a criminal empire from scratch…he wants to return to work as soon as possible. My mind is in conflict with itself, Sebastian. I’m so changeable, and it’s maddening.”

“Whatever you decide to do, I’ll support you,” the sniper assured. “If you say you want to go back to running this city with an iron fist, I’ll be there right beside you. And if you say you’d rather stay close to home and care for our children, I’d understand that, too. Either way, I’m in this with you for the long haul.”

“Thank you, love.”

“No thanks are necessary. You’re a gift, Jim, given to me by the universe. I won’t ever let you go.”

“You’d better not,” Moriarty playfully remarked.

The small smile Seb saw on his mate’s face was the ultimate reward.

**********

RING. RING.

Colin closed the book he was reading and answered the phone.

“I was beginning to think you’d never call back.”

“Quit complaining. I’m here now, aren’t I?” the voice on the line said. “Better late than never.”

“Just don’t make it a habit,” he warned. “Have you got any updates?”

“Nothing significant to report. The next phase is still a go. I’ll implement it soon.”

“Good. I’ve got a few new ideas, by the way. I’ll email you the specifics. I think you’re gonna get a kick out of them.”

“You’re a wicked man, Colin Taylor. I’m grateful we’re on the same side.”

He laughed. “I’m only a bad guy if you cross me.”

“I wouldn’t dare,” the voice spoke. “Any word on the charges being dismissed?”

“Eh, not yet. The legal system is slow. Too slow, frankly. But I can be patient.”

“I worry whether or not I’ll be able to pull everything off myself. If you don’t get out, we may have to consider an alternate endgame.”

“Hey, don’t talk that way. For now, we’re sticking to the plan as is. Understand?”

“Yeah. I’ll do my best to execute the orders.”

“Now that’s what I like to hear,” he asserted. “Chin up, and remain focused. I know you want to bring down Moran as much as I do. Don’t lose sight of the goal.”

“I won’t disappoint you, Colin.”
“I sincerely hope not.”

At that, they ended their conversation. Though Taylor was loath to admit it, he too wondered what would happen if the charges against him weren’t dropped. He’d be asking a lot of his cohort to carry on the mission without him. He needed to be free in order for their plans to reach full potential. Right now, he could bide his time. But eventually, there would be a reckoning.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Traditions, Old & New

Chapter Summary

Jim recruits an unexpected baking assistant. Also, holidays past are revisited during the mastermind's group meeting.

Chapter Notes

In-universe, it's meant to be late November/early December, which is why Christmas figures so heavily into this chapter.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’d been a hectic day at headquarters and Sebastian couldn’t wait to return home. As he pulled into the driveway, he was immediately taken aback by what he saw. There were twinkle lights, holly wreaths, and ribbons abound.

Looks like Jim made good on his promise to have the place decorated.

When Seb walked inside, he was greeted to even more festive surroundings. Everything was done up exactly as his mate had envisioned it, and then some. An enormous fir tree sat in the living room, adorned with white lights, red and gold baubles, and a star on top. Knitted stockings were hung over the fireplace, personalized with each of their ‘names’— Magpie, Tiger, Essie, and Eddie. Moran had never heard of unborn children getting their own stockings, but he supposed Jim didn’t want to leave them out of the revelry. And lastly, there was mistletoe. The familiar plant now dangled between every doorway.

Moriarty entered the room, grinning from ear to ear. “What do you think?”

“It’s wonderful, dear. You really outdid yourself. I can’t remember the house ever being this decorated before.”

“That’s because it hasn’t been,” the mastermind informed. “I wanted to do something special to celebrate our first Christmas with the babies.”

Sebastian raised an eyebrow. “Uh, kitten, since they’re not technically ‘here’ yet, I’m not sure if this counts.”

“Of course it counts,” Jim said, sounding shocked that his husband would dare question the matter.
“They are here. I feel them inside me every day. They’re cognizant and we communicate.”

The sniper quickly realized how badly he’d stuck his foot in his mouth. “You’re right. I’m sorry, hon.” He hoped a swift apology would curb any further ill-will. “I noticed you made some lovely stockings for us.”

“Yes, it wouldn’t be a proper yuletide without them,” the Irishman replied. His tone seemed to have mellowed.

“I also spied mistletoe,” Moran remarked, closing in on Jim. “A fine addition, I’d say.”

“After the other day, how could I forget it?”

Seb smiled devilishly. “You couldn’t. Now let’s uphold tradition.” Without another word, he scooped the genius into his arms and carried him to the nearest doorway. Beneath the hanging plant, he laid a dazzling kiss upon his lips. They lingered in their exchange, savoring the act for all it was worth before finally pulling apart.

“Bloody hell, Tiger. If I’d known you would respond like that, I’d have hung mistletoe ages ago.”

“Live and learn, my sweet.”

DING.

The former colonel peered curiously at Jim. “Was that the oven timer?”

“Yeah. I’m going to bake more treats for the meeting tonight.”

Sebastian carefully set his spouse back down. “I thought you were planning to cut back on the baking? Not wear yourself out with it.”

“It’s funny you should say that. As it turns out, I won’t have to overexert myself because I’ll have help in the kitchen.”

“Oh? Who’ve you brought on?”

“You, darling. Duh.”

“Me?” he asked, genuinely surprised.

“Yes, you. Who else would I recruit?”

“Hrm…I don’t know. Maybe someone with real pastry chef training?” The assassin could cook a few dishes quite well, but dessert was not his forte.

“Relaaaaaaax,” Moriarty cooed. “I’ll handle the baking part. The dough is already rolled and the oven’s done preheating. I just need you to assist me in cutting out and decorating the cookies.”

“I guess I could manage that without fouling it up too badly. What kind of cookies are they?”

“Gingerbread men,” he stated. “They’ll be whimsical and delicious.”

“Well, when you describe it like that, how can I refuse? Far be it from me to deny the power of whimsy.”

“Precisely. Now come along and we’ll get started.” Jim didn’t bother waiting for a reply, he
simply turned around and headed towards the kitchen. Naturally, his Tiger followed.

*********

To Sebastian’s amazement, he discovered that baking could actually be fun. He and Moriarty worked diligently together, preparing the sweet treats and then piping little faces onto them.

As they approached the end of the dough, Seb decided to do something cheeky. When his partner wasn’t looking, he added an extra appendage to a few of the cut-out figures and quickly stuck them in the oven.

Eventually, the timer rang and Jim stood up to retrieve the last batch. “You’ve really been a great help, Tiger.”

Moran shrugged, flashing a sly grin. “I aim to please.”

The dashing blonde began a countdown in his head, starting from the time Jim opened the oven door until he noticed what was staring at him on the baking sheet.

5, 4, 3, 2—

“Sebastian Augustus Moran!”

“Yes, dear?” He tried to keep a straight face, but it was damn near impossible.

“Why do these gingerbread men have three legs?!”

“Are you sure those are legs, sweetheart? Perhaps they’re just happy to see you.”

The mastermind looked at his mischievous mate, then to the anatomically correct cookies, and back again. Suddenly, he burst into laughter. It was wild and uproarious. The kind that gives you a cramp in your side and brings tears to your eyes.

By the time he made it back to the kitchen table, he was breathless. “Oh god, you need to warn me before pulling a stunt like that.”

“Ah, but then it loses the element of surprise.”

“True.” He inhaled and exhaled deeply, trying to resume a normal breathing pattern. “I think I’ll leave this last batch at home, though some of the blokes at the meeting would probably get a kick out of it.”

“I bet,” the assassin said with a wink. “I’m glad you’re still going to your group, by the way. After what you found out this week, I was afraid you might not return.”

“Well, I considered quitting MOPS. But then it occurred to me that the people I’ve met there have always treated me like I was just ‘Jim.’ Despite knowing my true identity, they welcomed me without question. I think that counts for something.”

“I think so, too.”

Maybe I should invite more of the group members to the baby shower besides just Ian. They seem supportive, Seb mused. On the other hand…a house full of pregnant omegas could present a challenge. All the amplified emotions, the appetites, and the need for frequent bathroom breaks. Hmm. He would have to give the idea further reflection.
“I’m going to take a little catnap before we have to go out. Care to join me?”

“I’d love to, hon.” Seb had gotten a second wind since coming home, but he knew that Jim tended to sleep better when he was there to hold him. So the blonde would oblige. Certainly, it was the least he could do for the bearer of his children.

*********

“Who wants to go first tonight?” Trevor the ‘Male Omega Pregnancy Support’ organizer asked.

Generally, it took a few minutes to get the conversation rolling, but tonight they had an immediate volunteer. Scott, a ginger-haired gentleman, spoke up. “I’d like to give an update on the situation with my family.”

“Okay, let’s hear it.”

“As you may recall, I recently talked about how my sister contacted me on behalf of our parents. They wanted to reconnect and have me over for the holidays,” he explained. “Well, I decided to take the advice I got from the group and make an effort to mend fences with them. I’ll be spending this Christmas with my parents, siblings and cousins.”

“That’s wonderful,” Trevor affirmed.

“It really is. I’m looking forward to all the traditions I’ve missed out on since the estrangement. Cooking goose and Yorkshire pudding, attending midnight mass, and going caroling. I’m excited just thinking about it.”

“Oh, I used to love caroling,” one MOPS member fondly recalled.

“Me, too,” another agreed. “Haven’t done it since I was a boy.”

“Goose,” someone else remarked, “was always my favorite part of Christmas dinner. Besides the egg nog, that is, but I’m laying off the stuff this year for obvious reasons.”

The group descended into a cacophony of chatter as the attendees began bringing up various holiday traditions they enjoyed. It became difficult to hear one voice over another, and soon the sound blurred into little more than an acute, discordant buzz.

Finally, the coordinator stepped in to regain control of the room. “Hey!” he shouted, “listen up,” and thankfully, people did. “It’s great that you’re so eager to dive into the conversation, but it’s important we conduct ourselves in an orderly manner.” He paused, adding, “Since it seems everyone is keen to discuss the impending holidays, I think we should make that the theme for the first half of this meeting. What Christmastime practices would you like to pass along to your children?”

Most were thrilled with Trevor’s suggestion and spoke openly on the topic. All except for Jim and Ian, that is. The two members who grew up primarily in foster care had few happy memories to share. It didn’t stop other MOPS participants from encouraging them, though.

“Come on guys,” Jack urged. “There’s got to be something about the holiday that you enjoy enough to want to share with your babies.”

Jim thought hard on it, recalling Christmases past. Nowadays, he spent them with Seb, but that was the only constant. There were no customs they upheld on a regular basis, and oftentimes, they weren’t even at home for the occasion. Last December 25th, they were vacationing in the Swiss
Alps, drinking hot chocolate with peppermint schnapps and skiing down slopes.


“There is one thing my mum did at Christmas that I might also be inclined to do with the twins.”


Jim rolled his eyes, ignoring the man’s smug response. “On Christmas Eve, she would tell me how everybody leaves cookies for Santa, but they forget about his reindeer. This was a terrible oversight, she explained, because without them, he’d never be able to fly all around the world. So, she’d have us set out a plate of carrots just for Rudolph and his friends. Then, on Christmas morning, we’d come downstairs and there’d be nibble marks in the carrots. Obviously, she must’ve done it herself to make it look like an animal had been there, but at the time, I thought it was very cool. I might try something similar with my children when they reach a certain age.”

“That’s delightful,” Jack replied.

“An incredibly sweet story,” another man declared.

“So Ian, it’s just you now. What have you got?”

The young omega shook his head. “I honestly don’t have any traditions to share. Not a single one. Sorry.”

Jack frowned. “Ah, well, that’s too bad. Maybe your baby’s father has some he can pass down.”

Ian’s demeanor instantly grew tense. “No. Never,” he stressed. “You know I’m single. Why would you suggest such a thing?”

“It was just a passing notion,” the man said. “Even if you and your partner aren’t together anymore, I assume he’d have some involvement in your child’s life.”

“You guessed wrong. Very wrong.”

*Clearly a pressure point,* Jim observed. He hadn’t seen Ian get this upset before. His baby’s father was a definite trigger. *But why?* The mastermind was curious.

“Guys,” Trevor interjected, “let’s not ruffle each other’s feathers. I think this is a good time to pause for our break. Once again, Jim has prepared some delectable treats for us. Help yourselves,” he directed, “and we’ll reconvene in about 15–20 minutes.”

The group scattered, some leaving to use the restroom while others stayed behind to sample refreshments. It was an ideal opportunity for Moriarty to make his move. He approached Ian, sitting beside him.

“Everything okay? You seemed a bit agitated a moment ago.”

The teenager sighed. “Yeah, I’ll be fine. It’s just that family is a rough subject for me, especially in regard to my baby’s father.”

“Well, whoever he is, I already know he’s a right arsehole for leaving you in a lurch like this,” Jim stated.

“You’re correct, he is an arsehole. And a whole lot worse than that, too. Which is why I haven’t
told him I’m pregnant, and I never will.”

“Really?” The consulting criminal hadn’t expected that piece of news. It must’ve been a particularly brutal breakup for him to take such a firm stance.

“Yes, really.”

Ian’s expression spoke volumes. It was obvious he wanted to say more, but was afraid of divulging too much.

Jim found himself feeling strangely parental, fighting the urge to give the boy a hug and reassure him that things would get better. It was such a foreign instinct, he wasn’t sure what to make of it.

“You know, I love MOPS, but some nights these discussions do nothing but stir up shit in my head,” the youth lamented.

“I hear that. I’ve had the same problem.”

“How do you get through it?”

“My husband helps me a lot,” he reflexively answered. As soon as the words left his mouth, he regretted them, not because they were untrue, but because it seemed wrong to mention Seb when this boy had no one.

If Ian was bothered by the honest response, he didn’t show it. “Your mate is a solid bloke. I’ve seen the two of you together here and there—you have a natural connection that comes through even when you don’t talk. It’s in your body language…the way you carry yourselves in each other’s presence. There’s a sense of trust.”

“You notice the little things…the details. That’s good.” He’d chosen his workplace mole well. “Picked up on any peculiarities at headquarters?”

“Not yet. So far, everyone’s been very gracious.”

“It’s only your first week. The traitor may not present themself right away, but you’ll be there when they do.”

“The moment I see something amiss, I’ll alert you ASAP. You can hold me to that.”

“Oh, believe me, I will.”

Moriarty was putting a lot of faith into this young man. He sincerely hoped it wasn’t misplaced.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
This was it—Jim’s last day of work before going on paternity leave. He planned to spend the afternoon at headquarters so that he could tie up any loose odds and ends. He wasn’t sure when, or if, he’d be back, so it seemed like the most appropriate course of action.

Sebastian greeted him on arrival in the lobby, escorting him to his private office. They passed several employees on the way, and many of them actually smiled and made eye contact. That was major progress. After the sex tape incident, everything had become so awkward between him and his personnel. It was a relief to see the dynamics return to normal.

As the couple stood in front of Jim’s office, Seb spoke up. “I’m going to ask that you close your eyes and let me get the door for you.”

“Why? I can do it just fine myself.”

“Trust me, darling.” The sniper flashed him a coy, yet irresistible look that he knew Moriarty couldn’t deny.

“This had better be good,” he said, shutting his lids tight.

Moran grasped him by the hand and led him inside. “You can take a peek now, love.”

Jim did, and what he saw was delightful. On his desk sat a large, multitier tower of golden boxes. He instantly recognized the packaging. It looked like—

“My favorite chocolates,” he blurted out, staring in awe at the gift.

Seb grinned. “That’s right. Imported directly from Belgium.”

He approached the tower of gourmet confectionery, examining the contents of each tier. They
contained all the best varieties, as if expertly chosen with his tastes in mind.

“This is wonderful, Tiger. Must’ve cost a fortune, too.”

“Yes, it did. But everyone at headquarters chipped in. This is a group gift from your staff, myself included.”

That wasn’t the end of it. Also sitting on his desk was a large envelope bearing his name. “And what’s this?”

“Open it and find out,” Sebastian urged with a wink.

He obliged, discovering that it was an oversized greeting card. A cute drawing of a stork carrying a baby bundle was depicted on the front. Inside were the signatures of all those who worked at the office.

“It’s lovely,” Jim stated, genuinely touched by the gesture.

“Glad it meets your approval. I wanted to make sure you got a proper sendoff.”

“I wasn’t expecting anything like this. Thank you.”

“It was the least I could do,” the thoughtful blonde replied. “After all, I’m the one who put you in this condition.”

“Yes, but not without my explicit encouragement and consent.”

Moran moved close to his mate, enjoying the sweet scent of him. “Now that you mention it, that was some pretty intense ‘encouragement.’ As I recall, you insisted we shag a minimum of three times a day to ensure conception. We may have been vacationing in the Cotswolds that week, but the only sights I took in were of you, from all angles.”

Jim affected a face of mock innocence, staring at the assassin with big, brown eyes. “I don’t remember you expressing any complaints. In fact, I think you liked it a lot,” he declared. “The idea of having me completely. Of claiming me in a way that no one else ever had or ever would. It was an alpha’s wet dream and you relished it.”

“So what if I did?” Seb countered, capturing his mate between the desk and himself.

The mastermind’s coquettish façade fell away, replaced by a wanton gleam. “Then you’d be the same as me, because I fucking loved it.”

Sebastian breathed heavily, his desire rising. He imagined ravishing Jim right then and there, atop every piece of furniture in the office.

“Getting a bit excited are we, solider?” the genius cheekily inquired. He could feel his husband’s arousal pressing against him.

“I’m always excited for you.”

Moriarty smiled devilishly. “Tonight, my gorgeous Tiger.”

“Tonight?”

“Oh, yes. I expect you to make my first official night of paternity leave a memorable one. Bear in mind, I’m not quite as limber as I used to be, but I’ve still got a few good moves up my sleeve.”
“Anything you want, I can deliver.” If Jim was seeking an evening of unbridled passion, he’d get it.

“I’m very pleased to hear that, dear,” he cooed, stroking Seb’s stubbled cheek. “Now if you’d be so kind as to run along, I’ve got work to do.”

Shit. Moran was really hoping the conversation would lead somewhere else entirely. It never ceased to amaze him how easily Jim could turn the charm and seduction on and off at will.

“You’re a cock tease, Jimmy, of the highest order.”

“I knooooow.”

As the sniper headed for the door, Moriarty spoke again. “By the way, Seb, I want you to pick up takeout for dinner. It has to be ready as soon as we get out of here.”

“Any special requests?” Really, that was a silly question. Jim always made special food requests, without exception.

“Yes, get me eggplant parmigiana and baked ziti— extra cheese on both. And then throw in whatever you might like for yourself.”

“You want two dinners?”

“Got a problem with that?”

“No, sir. Just checking to be sure I understood correctly.”

“Your orders have been made clear, colonel.”

“Aye, aye.”

Sebastian exited the Irishman’s office, eagerly awaiting the end of the day. Thankfully, he had a meeting to attend and an assignment to oversee. If he kept busy, time would fly by faster…or so he hoped.

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“Tiiiiiiiger,” Jim bellowed as the assassin returned to their car with bags of takeout in hand. “That took forever.”

“I’m sorry, sweetheart. It wasn’t my fault. They’re swamped in there.”

“Don’t apologize to me. Apologize to the babies. The three of us are desperately hungry,” he proclaimed. “When my stomach growled, I think it scared them.”

Moran did his best to suppress a laugh. Jim could be the ultimate drama queen sometimes.

“I’m sure they’re fine.”

“You didn’t feel it. I swear they jumped.”

The consulting criminal looked down at his belly, gently rubbing it. “No need to fret, my darlings. Daddy will have dinner soon.”

Seb smiled. It’s so sweet, the way he talks to them.
“I watched a video online about how babies can become frightened and cry in utero,” Jim remarked, turning his attention back to Sebastian.

“No kidding? I didn’t know that was possible.”

“Me either, until I saw it for myself. The footage was quite unsettling. It made me wonder how many times Essie and Eddie have endured such a terrible experience. I get anxious just thinking about it.”

“You’ve got nothing to worry about, hon. You speak to them so soothingly—I’m positive your voice makes them feel safe.”

“I do try my hardest in that regard,” the genius acknowledged. “You’re not always there to witness it, but we have splendid conversations throughout the day.”

“Oh? Explains why my ears have been burning lately,” he teased.

“Hush. On those rare occasions when you’ve come up during our chats, we’ve had only good things to say. However, that could easily be rectified, so I’d tread carefully if I were you.”

“Duly noted.” Still sassy, the sniper mused. Jim may have transformed in a variety of ways, but at his core, some aspects remained the same. Somehow, the notion warmed Seb’s heart.

As the couple neared their house, Moriarty took a moment to marvel at how magnificent the place looked. The Christmas lights were on a timer and had turned on prior to their arrival. Illuminated, the mansion really was a thing of beauty. Jim often wished for a home as festive and inviting as this when he was child. Every once in a while, perhaps dreams did come true.

When they reached the driveway, Moran carried their food to the front door, stopping to pull out his key and undo the lock. That was when he noticed a package.

“Did you order something, love?” Sebastian asked, stepping inside their residence. He sat the takeout on the kitchen counter and approached his partner, who stood at the entryway, eyeballing the parcel.

“No, I didn’t. And this doesn’t appear to have postage on it.”

A shared sense of dread came over both men. They remembered all too clearly the last unmarked package that graced their doorstep—it’d been their interior decorator’s severed hands in a box. Certainly, this couldn’t be as ghastly as that, though…right?

After exchanging a glance, they knew they had to see what was in there. Seb took the reins, bringing the mysterious item into the house and setting it on the coffee table. He pulled a switchblade from his back pocket, but paused before using it.

“Are you sure you want me to open this? We could get rid of it without checking what’s inside.”

Jim shook his head. It was a tempting offer, but he had to know the contents. “Just do it, Seb.”

And so the assassin did, slicing through the heavy duct tape that kept the box closed. Thank god they hadn’t eaten yet, or else the foul odor that wafted out may have caused upset.
“Fuck, what is that?” Moriarty exclaimed in disgust.

“It smells like death,” Seb said, and he wasn’t joking. It reeked of decay.

Now that the seal had been broken, it was time to lift the flaps and actually learn what was producing the stench. Neither was enthusiastic about that part, but it needed to be done.

Sebastian mentally prepared himself—3, 2, 1. Go!

The Tiger and his Magpie stared agape at the grisly sight that lay inside. It appeared to be…small body parts? But there was something odd about the way they looked. Something not quite human.

“This is a fetal pig,” Jim stated, “that someone decided to dismember and let decompose.”

“A fetal pig? How can you be sure?”

“We dissected one in a biology class I took. Though the specimens they gave us at school were a lot less putrefied than this.” He hesitated, ogling the contents keenly. “Sebby…I believe there’s something else in there as well.”

The blonde saw it, too. He was about to stick his hand in and grab it, when Jim stopped him, fetching rubber gloves from the kitchen.

“Use this. Lord only knows what kind of bacteria might be festering among the rot.”

“Smart thinking.” Now safeguarded, Moran reached inside the box and retrieved an envelope with the word ‘Daddy’ scribbled on it.

There was a silence as Jim’s expression grew panicked and his breathing sped up. “I…I’m probably meant to open that,” he stammered.

“You don’t have to. I will,” Seb asserted. The alpha was feeling very protective of his mate.

“I won’t have you coddling me. I’m a big boy, Sebastian. Give me those gloves and I’ll do it myself.”

He complied, knowing the mastermind would have it no other way.

Moriarty was trying very hard not to launch into a full-blown anxiety attack, but even as he held the envelope, he was shaking. His Tiger saw this, and rested a hand on his shoulder to help calm him.

It was now or never. The Irishman tore into the letter, unfolding the paper inside.

He promptly collapsed upon reading it.

“Jim!” Seb swooped in, carrying his spouse to the couch. Once he laid him out, he went back to pick up the note. As soon as he read it, he understood why the consulting criminal reacted the way he did.

*Enjoy your paternity leave. Consider this a sneak preview of what’s to come, though I think the babies may require a bigger box.*

To Be Continued…
Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Paternity Leave – Part 2

Chapter Summary

Jim is shaken up by the latest threat from his and Seb’s stalker(s).

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Get your ass in here NOW!” Sebastian barked into his phone. “If I don’t see you standing in front of me within the next two minutes, I’ll come out there and introduce you to my .44 Magnum.” At that, he ended the call.

“Wha…” Jim mumbled, his eyes fluttering open as he regained consciousness on the living room couch. “Tiger?”

The sniper rushed to his spouse’s side.

“Hey, sweetheart. How are you feeling?”

“Sore.”

“That’s probably because you hit the floor when you passed out. But don’t worry, you didn’t land on your stomach. I think your tailbone bore the brunt of it.”

The consulting criminal hissed as he attempted to sit up. “You’re right. The pain is radiating through my back.”

“I’m so sorry, Magpie.”

“It’s not your fault.”

Jim caught wind of the putrid smell that still lingered in the air. Suddenly, everything came flooding back to him. The unmarked package. The rotted swine parts. The note.

Dear god, the note. He was so horrified by it, his body entered into some kind of shock. His vision went bleary and his knees buckled beneath him. Before he had time to process what was happening, he was out cold.

DING. DONG.

The doorbell chimed and Seb moved to answer it. A uniformed security guard stood in front of
him. The assassin didn’t bother with a formal greeting. Instead, he growled and roughly yanked the man inside.

“What’s your name?” Moran demanded.

“Jeff,” he answered.

“And how long have you been here today, Jeff?”

“Since 9 a.m., sir. My shift is almost over.”

“So all day, then?”

“Yes, sir.”

As soon as Seb heard the confirmation, he reeled his arm back and swung. His closed fist made contact with the guard’s face, landing a blow that would surely produce a nasty black eye.

“Let me show you something,” he said with a snarl. The furious alpha grabbed Jeff by his arm and forced him to view the gruesome contents of the mystery box.

“Oh god,” the man uttered in revulsion. “What the fuck is that?”

“It’s a fetal pig whose parts— organs included— have been disassembled and left to decay,” Sebastian matter-of-factly replied. “There’s no postage on the package, which means it didn’t come through the mail. Someone had to have dropped this off personally. I’d like to know who the HELL it was and why you didn’t stop them dead in their tracks.”

The guard appeared very confused. “No…that’s not possible. I’ve been here for 8 hours and no one delivered anything.”

Moran slugged him again, this time in the gut. He doubled over, gasping for breath.

“Obviously, your statement is incorrect. Someone did deliver this today. So either you’re lying because you or someone you know is responsible, or you’re just flat-out fucking incompetent and missed the perpetrator completely. Which is it? Both are bad, but for different reasons.”

“I didn’t see anyone, I swear!” the man insisted.

“Going with option two, then? I suppose that’s the safer route, but don’t think you’re getting off scot-free.”

Seb kneed the guard in the groin, causing him to drop to the ground like a sack of bricks. “You’re fucking fired,” he declared. “Oh, and before I forget—” the sniper knelt down and confiscated the gun that was concealed inside Jeff’s jacket. “You won’t be needing this.”

The man began to slowly crawl away. He wasn’t moving fast enough for Sebastian.

“Let me help you with that,” Moran offered. But rather than lend a hand, he opened the front door and literally kicked Jeff out, slamming and locking the entrance behind him.

“Good riddance to bad rubbish,” the blonde muttered.

Meanwhile, Jim stared at his mate, transfixed. “Tiger, you were amaaaaazing.”

Seb shrugged. “I did what I had to do. Simple as that.”
“I know, but you were so forceful and commanding. Seeing you in action like that…I’d almost forgotten how much it turned me on.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah.” Moriarty’s libido was on high alert.

The former colonel smirked, taking a seat close to his husband on the couch. “You like it when I’m fierce, huh?”

“Always,” he lustfully proclaimed.

Their eyes locked as Seb ran a hand along the mastermind’s inner thigh. “It did feel satisfying, being able to channel my energy into something I’m so good at.” His fingers inched their way up to the bulge between Jim’s legs. He was hard.

“Oh, yes, honey. You’re verrrrrry good at it.”

Moran stroked the Irishman’s erection through the fabric of his pants. “I don’t think it was enough, though. I beat someone up a bit, sure. But you know how it is…once you take a taste, you want more,” he said seductively.

“I get it. I dooooooo.”

“I wish I had something—or maybe, someone—else to focus on. To really pound.”

Jim grunted, coming undone at his mate’s use of talk and touch. “Pound me,” he volunteered. “I can’t move much with this backache, but that’s okay. I don’t have to get up. We can do it right here.”

Sebastian unceremoniously removed his hand from Jim’s throbbing manhood and stood up. “Sorry, kitten, but I’ve got to go. There’s work to be done.”

The look on Moriarty’s face was priceless. “What?! No! I demand that you stay here and fuck me! That’s an order.”

“An order? You’re off duty. Paternity leave and all,” Seb reminded while flashing a huge, sharky grin.

“Bollocks that! You’ll damn well do what I tell you to,” the frustrated genius fumed.

“You’re not the only one who can be a cock tease, darling. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to review the security footage and see who delivered that revolting package.”

“Wait!” Jim called out before his alpha could leave. “At least bring me my dinner.”

The assassin was not unreasonable. He did as Moriarty requested, serving him the Italian takeout and helping him into an upright position.

Rather than thank his partner, the consulting criminal glared at the larger man. “Willfully giving a pregnant omega blue balls,” he spat. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

“Now you know how I felt earlier, when we were in your office.”

“That was different.”
“How so?”

“Because,” he began, quickly trailing off as he realized he didn’t have a good answer.

“Because what, dear? I’m waiting.” Sebastian knew he was pressing his luck, and he enjoyed every minute of it. He was the only person who could get away with talking to Jim so cheekily.

“Because I’m pregnant and you’re not!” the mastermind huffed. “In case you hadn’t noticed, I’m growing not one, but two human beings inside my own body.”

“And that makes it okay to rev me up and then send me out the door?”

“Yes! Maybe. No…I don’t know.” Jim was a confused mess of hormones and emotions, and this conversation was doing nothing to improve his disposition.

But Seb knew where to draw the line. He didn’t truly want to upset his husband, just engage in a bit of ribbing.

Leaning down, the sniper kissed the top of Moriarty’s head. He noted that his hair felt very soft and smelled lovely. “No hard feelings, Magpie. You know I love you.”

“Yeah, Seb. I do.” The Irishman paused for a moment. “I want to see the surveillance recording, too.”

“Are you sure? I thought it might be less stressful for you if I did it alone.”

“Sebastian, this son of a bitch is overtly threatening the lives of my—” he stopped, correcting himself, “of our children. So you’d best believe I want to see it for myself.”

“Okay. I’ll bring the recordings out here and we can watch them together.”

“I appreciate it, Tiger.”

The formidable blonde went to fetch the day’s surveillance logs. With any luck, it would provide some much sought-after clues.

*********

“This is insane.” Seb had reviewed a particular portion of the security footage over a dozen times, and he still couldn’t accept what he was looking at.

A drone. A goddamn drone had dropped the package on their doorstep.

Jim was beyond angry. “This isn’t how it was supposed to go!” he shouted. “There was meant to be a person caught on camera! Someone we could identify and destroy. NOT. A. FUCKING. ROBOT!”

Ordinarily, Moran would attempt to calm the genius down. Right now, though, he was just as irate as his mate. There was no way to sugarcoat or suppress the frustration that burned through them both.

“This explains why the guard didn’t see anyone,” Seb remarked. There really hadn’t been a deliveryman per se— the box arrived from above. “If we were to bake Jeff a basket of muffins, do you think he might agree to come back?” the assassin bitterly joked. Gallows humor was all he could muster.
But Moriarty could not bid himself to laugh. He rapidly turned his rage inward, retreating to a dark place deep inside. It was a void he’d existed in for years prior to being liberated from its grips by Sebastian, his love and his light.

Jim sat on the couch for a long while, utterly listless. Finally, he spoke. “Help me to the bedroom.”

“Sure, honey.”

Like any good alpha, Seb assisted his achy, expectant omega up the stairs. He aided him in changing out of a finely tailored suit and into something more comfortable. At first, he reached for a silken pair of black pajamas, but then decided on a different choice of loungewear for his mate.

Jim remained quiet as Moran rifled through a shopping bag hidden in the closet. When the sniper reemerged, he was holding a festive set of flannel nightclothes.

“I bought these as a Christmas present for you, but I think it’d be okay to try them out early.” He was determined to infuse some light into his husband’s starless sky.

The smaller man said nothing as he was eased into holiday-themed paternity jammies. They were very cute, featuring the ‘Peanuts’ character Snoopy printed on them.

“Sweetheart, you look adorable. I’m going to guide you over to the mirror so you can see for yourself, okay?”

Jim nodded, but was still awash in a haze of melancholy. He walked slowly and with a heavy step, as though his feet were weighed down by an invisible force. Eventually, they came to stand in front of a full-length mirror.

“See, kitten? It’s a wealth of whimsy.” The former colonel spoke in an upbeat tone, hoping it might rub off on Jim.

No response, he noted. His partner wouldn’t even acknowledge his own reflection, instead staring downward at the carpet.

“When I was a little boy, I used to think Snoopy was the absolute coolest. I had his doll, bedsheets, lunchbox…everything. And don’t tell anyone, but I also kept a Snoopy nightlight until the age of ten. Severin teased me mercilessly about it, but I didn’t care, because I loved that little dog. He made me happy and nothing else mattered.” Moran paused, eyeing his morose Magpie. “I thought maybe he’d have a similar effect on you. Guess it was a longshot.”

Sebastian began to turn away, when suddenly a hand reached out and grabbed his wrist.

“Tiger,” the mastermind whispered, “don’t go.” He slowly looked up, glimpsing his reflection at last. His dark eyes widened as he took in the sight of himself. “Bloody hell.”

The assassin chuckled softly. Now this was more in line with how he’d imagined Jim reacting. Embarrassed and appalled, perhaps, but none of that silent business.

“I suppose I don’t have to ask what you think of your new PJs.”

“Actually, they’re not half bad. There’s a kitschy sort of charm to them.” A small smile graced Moriarty’s face, which was better than Seb had anticipated.

“Really? You don’t want to set the outfit ablaze?”
“How could I, after you so fondly recounted how much the beagle means to you?” he replied with a wink.

“It’s a relief to hear you say that, because, well…there was a sale going on when I bought the pajamas. Buy an adult set and get a matching baby-size version at half price.” Moran retrieved the shopping bag from the closet and pulled another article of clothing out of it. In his hand, he held a tiny Christmas-themed Snoopy onesie.

Jim’s expression lit up like a sunrise and he let out a sound that was somewhere between a coo and a trill—a signal of intense omega joy. “Sebby, this is sooooo precious!”

“Yes, that’s why I had to have it. However, it occurred to me after the fact that by the time the twins are born, the holiday motif will be outdated.”

“You’re right,” he agreed. “But I don’t give a toss. I’ll dress them in it anyway. It’s too sweet to go to waste.”

“Too sweet to go to waste? Hmm. That description could also apply to a certain someone I know.” Seb pulled his mate close, resting a hand on the Irishman’s midsection. He could feel their children beating back at his touch. “The kiddos are feisty tonight.”

“They’re feisty every night, trust me on that.”

“Good. I want them to be full of sass and sophistication like their daddy.”

The consulting criminal breathed in sharply as a particularly strong kick came from within. “I believe they’re trying to tell you that you’ve got your wish.”

A broad grin spread across the sniper’s face. “Oh, Magpie, I love our family.” Despite outside attempts to dampen his spirit, he was happy. “I’ll protect you and our little ones, I promise.”

“I’ll protect them, too,” Moriarty vowed. “Our children will be guarded more heavily than Fort Knox. I’m even planning to have a Kevlar baby carriage built.”

“Kevlar, huh? I like the way you think.”

“Mmm…in that case, can you figure out what else is on my mind right now?” He punctuated his inquiry by slipping a stray hand onto Sebastian’s firm backside.

“I’ve got a pretty good idea,” he answered. The dashing blonde had previously sworn to give Jim a night of passion and he intended to keep his word.

“I can’t believe I’m about to say this, but be gentle, Tiger. I’ve got a lot of aches and pains, and I don’t want to put too much stress on my belly.”

“No whips, restraints, or weighted devices. Understood.”

“When you put it like that, it makes it sound so booooorrring.”

“Never, Jimmy,” he declared while carefully lowering his beloved onto the soft, cushioned surface of their bed. “We could never be boring, darling. Not in any way, shape, or form.”

Moriarty contemplated Seb’s statement. “You raise a compelling point. If we were boring, then by association, it would mean I was boring, too. Obviously, that’s an impossibility. So your premise must be correct. We can never be boring because I can never be boring.”
“Kitten? Quit blathering and kiss me already.”

Jim was more than eager to oblige.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
The Baby Shower – Part 1

Chapter Summary

It’s baby shower day, and the event is almost set to begin.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains some disturbing imagery. Reader discretion is advised.

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My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A few days had passed since Jim received his gruesome paternity gift, and he was not doing well. He put on a brave face, but Sebastian saw through the guise. His mate was tense and uneasy, and had twice awoken screaming in the night. Though he refused to discuss the content of his dreams, Seb swore he’d mumbled something about ‘the babies.’

Speaking of their children, some changes were made regarding the surprise baby shower. Moran lobbied to have the party date pushed up because he thought it might brighten Jim’s spirits. The request put additional stress on the ladies organizing the event, but ultimately, they rose to the occasion and managed to pull everything together on an abbreviated deadline.

Today was it. Gemma and Annie had just arrived to set up for the shindig, while Jim, as anticipated, remained blissfully unaware in bed. All seemed fine at first, but one member of the coordinating crew was absent.

“I haven’t been able to get ahold of Marie for a day and a half,” Gemma complained. “She was supposed to help us run the show, so to speak. It’s not like her to go MIA. I don’t know what happened.”

Seb frowned. He’d actually received a text from Marie two days ago, stating that she needed to talk to him. He replied back, but never got another message from the woman. He figured she was just busy planning the shower, but now he wondered if there was more to it than that. If she was still incommunicado tomorrow, he’d send someone to her house to check up on her.

“Mr. Moran, I hate to be a bother, but in light of our missing assistant, do you think you could aid us with a couple of things? The hors d’oeuvres and cake are in a cooler in my van,” Annie noted. “It would be a huge help if you’d bring those in while Gemma and I rig up the banners and balloons.”
“Yeah, I can do that. And if you need anything else, don’t hesitate to mention it.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Seb would do whatever was necessary to ensure that this party went off without a hitch.

*********

It was 1 o’clock in the afternoon when Ian showed up. At that point, half the guest list was already there—Gemma, Annie, and Sebastian, respectively.

“Hey,” the young man greeted. “Am I early?” he asked, noticing there was hardly anyone in attendance.

“No,” Seb answered, taking the gift box Ian walked in with and setting it aside for later. “We’re keeping this a small affair.”

“Ah, okay. I guess I should feel honored that, of all people, you decided to invite me.”

“Well, I considered including your whole MOPS group, but it seemed like it might be overkill. Of the bunch, I think you’re the only one he’d really want here.”

“That’s actually kind of sweet.” The teen took a cursory look around. “This is a beautiful home you’ve got. Where’s the man of the hour?”

“He’s still in bed. It’s been a rough week for him since going on paternity leave.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.” Ian paused as his stomach growled loudly. “Got anything to eat? I skipped breakfast today.”

Gemma overheard the remark. “We have a variety of finger foods in the kitchen,” she warmly informed. “Let me show you. We can take a look at the cake, too, if you’d like. No cutting it until we’re at least midway through the festivities, though.”

“Understood,” he said, following the woman as she led the way.

Moran turned to Annie. “I really hope this party perks Jim up.”

“I think it will. Who can resist a bit of revelry?”

“Not me, but my mate can be stubborn.” When dealing with office staff, Seb now openly acknowledged what he and Jim were to each other. After the sex tape circulated across headquarters, it seemed pointless to deny their relationship.

“If you don’t mind my asking, what’s got Mr. Moriarty so upset? Pregnancy is usually a very happy time for an omega.”

“He’s mostly happy, it’s just that he’s been under a lot of stress lately. It’s taken a toll.”

“Well then, let’s do our best to make sure he has fun today.”

“Believe me, I intend to.”

She nodded. “When should we get this party started?”

“Soon. I’m mainly waiting for Gemma’s cousin to arrive. Once everyone’s here, we can begin,”
the sniper stated. “Besides, Jim could use the rest. He hasn’t slept well these past few nights, so I
don’t want to wake him until it’s absolutely necessary.”

“You’re a thoughtful man, Mr. Moran. They don’t make alphas like you anymore.”

He smiled, slightly embarrassed to be receiving such praise. “You’re too kind, Annie.”

“Nah, I just call it as I see it,” she said with a wink.

Seb was silent for a moment, feeling a strange twinge of déjà vu. He couldn’t place why or how
the sense had come over him—it was simply there.

“Is something the matter, sir? You got awfully quiet.”

“I’m fine. It’s just that when you winked, it was…familiar.”

She furrowed a brow. “Hmm. Well, you’ve probably seen me do it at work.”

“Yeah, maybe.”

“I’m sure that’s it,” the woman insisted. “I’ve been told I can be quite animated at times.”

The sniper was about to reply when, out of the blue, screams erupted from the bedroom. Without
another word, Seb made a mad dash for his spouse.

*I’m coming, love.*

**********

White. Everything was bright, blinding white.

Jim blinked, taking in his utterly sterile surroundings. It appeared to be a hospital and he was lying
in a bed. When he attempted to get up, it became clear that he was strapped down and couldn’t
move.

A million things raced through his head—where is this place? Why am I here? Who restrained
me? One question in particular rose to the surface above the rest: Where is my husband?

His sweet Sebastian would never allow him to be locked up in a facility like this. He must’ve been
taken without the assassin’s knowledge.

Moriarty wasn’t given much time to contemplate the situation, as the door to the room swung
open. In walked a truly bizarre sight. A man dressed in black and wearing a ‘plague doctor’ mask
approached him. He carried a bag of surgical instruments that he sat on an end table near the bed.
When he pulled out a large cutting tool, Jim found his voice.

“What are you doing?” the genius demanded. “Who do you work for?”

The ominous figure did not respond, instead continuing to line up various scalpels and implements
in a row.

“How dare you ignore me! You’ll tell me who you are!”

But yelling didn’t help, and the shrouded physician remained mute.

Jim was horrified by the realization that he wore only a paper-thin hospital gown. It afforded no
protection when the masked man proceeded to uncover him.

His thoughts immediately went to his children. He was supposed to keep them safe. Shield them from danger. Yet it became obvious that this ‘doctor’ meant to do harm.

The mastermind screamed bloody murder as a sharp blade sliced into his abdomen. He quickly realized that a caesarean section was being performed without his consent.

“No!” he shouted in pained desperation.

The twins were viciously ripped from his body and handed to a faceless nurse who’d materialized out of nowhere. He wasn’t permitted to see them or hold them. All he could do was listen to their cries.

“Give them to me! Please! They need their mother,” he pled, abandoning the pretense of his own gender identity and admitting what he was to his children.

Covered in birthing fluids, the wailing newborns were placed on a cold metal table where Jim could now view them, but do nothing more.

“They need to be cleaned off and swaddled! You can’t just leave them like that!”

Oh, how he ached to comfort his babies. To wrap them in soft, warm blankets and rock them until they were settled and serene. To show them that they were loved completely and unconditionally.

Jim’s heart pounded wildly as he watched the plague doctor approach his littles ones with a large scalpel in hand.

“No! God, no! Please don’t hurt them!” the Irishman begged, tears streaming down his face. “Do whatever you want to me…I know I deserve it. But NOT them! They’re innocent!”

He struggled violently to break free from his bindings, but it was no use. The straps refused to break, and the masked madman sunk his blade into tender infant flesh. His children’s agonized cries would haunt him forever.

“Jim! Jimmy! It’s okay,” Sebastian assured, sitting beside his hysterical mate. The consulting criminal was slowly awakening.

“My babies,” he gasped.

“It was just a bad dream. The babies are safe and so are you.”

“Huh? Sebby?” His voice was sad and confused as he tried to regain his bearings.

“I’m here, hon. No worries.” The sniper soothingly ran his fingers through Jim’s sleep-tousled hair.

Moriarty sat up and hugged his stomach, making sure that Essie and Eddie were still housed inside him. A rush of emotions flooded through the mastermind when he felt them kick. He was relieved that the twins had not been harmed, but still felt terror over the images wreaking havoc in his head.

“Oh Tiger, this was the worst one yet.”
“I’m sorry you’re having such terrible nightmares,” Seb said, taking Jim into his strong, protective arms. “I know you haven’t wanted to discuss what happens in them, but sometimes talking about these things takes their power away. Do you understand what I mean, sweetheart?”

“I do,” he shakily replied. “It just…it hurts to even say the words.”

“Keeping it bottled up will only bring you more pain in the long run,” Moran noted. “I’ve told you before that you can share anything with me, and I stand by my vow. I’ll always listen. Always be there to help.”

The dark-eyed genius stared somberly at his spouse. He took a deep breath and began to recount the distressing dream as best he could. “In my nightmare, I was tied down to a hospital bed and a ‘surgeon,’ if you could call him that, came in dressed as a plague doctor. The bastard cut me open and took our children from me. Tore them right out. And then…” Jim stopped, overcome by the awful memory of what occurred next. “He tortured them, Seb. VIVISECTED newborn babies! It was horrific. I’ll never forget their screams.”

“Dear God, that’s ghastly.” The former colonel clasped Moriarty’s hand, lacing their fingers together. “Take comfort in the knowledge that it wasn’t real. Our little ones are healthy and thriving. We won’t let anyone harm them, not ever.”

Jim nodded, summoning whatever strength he could. “That’s right. Those who so much as look at them funny will be made into shoes.”

“Amen,” Sebastian agreed, giving the smaller man’s hand a squeeze for good measure.

“Darling?”

“Yes?”

“The yelling hurt my throat. Be a doll and make me some herbal tea.”

“Sure.” Moran was hoping for a way ‘out,’ and this would do fine. He needed to get back to the living room and see if the final party guest had arrived. “I’ll be back soon,” the assassin promised as he stood up and exited their sleeping quarters.

When he returned to the main area of the house, he saw that Annie was waiting with a concerned expression on her face.

“Is Mr. Moriarty okay?” she asked.

“He’s all right, just a bit shaken up from a dream. I’m going to brew him some tea.”

“Sounds sensible. Hot beverages have a way of calming one down. I could do with an Irish coffee myself,” she joked.

Seb smirked. “You and me both.”

A few minutes passed, and by that time Gemma and Ian had brought several hors d’oeuvre trays into the living room. Bottles of sparkling cider were also present, chilling on ice as if it was actual champagne. The refreshments display, combined with the decorative ‘Congratulations’ banner and balloons, made for an inviting atmosphere.

DING. DONG.
The doorbell chimed and the kettle whistled almost simultaneously. Moran went to the kitchen while Gemma answered the door.

As Seb tended to the tea, he could hear the meet-and-greet going on in the next room. Though he was unable to make out what was being said, there was a familiarity to the sound of the guest’s voice. Curious, he decided to pop in and introduce himself like a proper host before bringing the tea up to Jim.

“Good afternoon,” he gregariously spoke. “Thank you for com—”

The woman turned around, and Sebastian stopped dead in his tracks, nearly dropping the porcelain cup he carried. Now he knew why he recognized the voice.

It belonged to Molly Hooper.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
The Baby Shower – Part 2

Chapter Summary

Jim is caught off guard by some surprise guests.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sebastian was speechless, just staring at Molly. She appeared equally flabbergasted. Their reactions to each other did not go unnoticed by the rest of the guests.

“Is something wrong?” Gemma asked in confusion.

Neither uttered a word, they simply continued to stare.

Another woman came walking up behind Molly, carrying a gift bag. This time, when Seb saw who it was, he did drop Jim’s cup of tea.

Irene Adler stood in the doorway.

“Oh dear!” Annie exclaimed. “I’ll clean it.” She hastily headed to the kitchen for paper towels, returning with a brand new roll to sop up the mess.

Spilt tea was the least of Moran’s worries. Maybe Jim isn’t the only one having nightmares, he thought. Surely, this couldn’t really be happening. He would wake up any moment now. He’d wake up and—

“What the HELL are these bitches doing in my home?! Sebastian, you’ve got some serious explaining to do!”

Fuck. Moriarty was standing right behind him. Must’ve gotten impatient and decided to come down.

“Somebody had better start talking NOW.” He spoke in a sharp tone that often instilled fear into ordinary people’s hearts.

“Gemma,” Molly began, “you questioned if something was wrong. Allow me to state unequivocally that, yes, something is very wrong. The fact that James Moriarty lives is an affront to decency itself.”

“Oh, shut up you cow,” the genius spat. “This is my house and I demand to know what you and
Adler are doing here. If I don’t get an answer soon, bones will be broken, and no, that’s not an idle threat.”

“Jim, I’m as shocked as you are,” Seb asserted. “Honestly, I didn’t know Molly and Irene were coming. I never would’ve invited them.”

“And I never would’ve shown up if I’d known the party was for him!” a flummoxed Ms. Hooper insisted.

The consulting criminal glared ominously. “What’s this business about a party?” He looked around, observing the décor. “The banners and balloons. The hors d’oeuvres. Why?”

“It’s a baby shower…for you,” the sniper admitted. “Some of the ladies from work wanted to throw it and I agreed. It was meant to be a surprise.”

“Well, mission accomplished, soldier. Who else should I be expecting? Did the Holmes clan score an invite? Perhaps you’ve arranged for Eurus to get a day pass just for the occasion?”

“I told you, I didn’t invite them! You want the truth? Fine. I’ll give it to you,” Seb said, sounding exasperated. “You don’t have many close friends, so in order to increase the guest list, Gemma asked her cousin to come. I didn’t think it would be a big deal, so I okayed it. But I had no idea her relative was Molly Hooper.”

Jim was quiet for a moment, processing the new information. He turned, setting his sights on the party planner.

“Gemmammmma, please explain to me what the fuck you were thinking. And know that if you’re lying, I’ll skiiiiiiiiin you.”

“I didn’t realize there’d be a problem with it, sir. I was unaware you knew each other.”

Moriarty arched a brow. “We dated,” he declared. “She never mentioned it?”

“No, sir.”

The mastermind shot Molly a glance of stunned disbelief. “Seriously, Mol?”

“Why would I?” she retorted. “It wasn’t exactly a high point in my life, and besides, it was all a con anyway.”

“True, but I pulled off one hell of a performance. That should count for something.”

“Don’t flatter yourself.”

He snorted. “Honey, I’m just telling it like it is. Pretending to be interested in you was no small feat.”

“She’s moved on to better prospects,” Irene interjected.

Jim scowled at the dominatrix. “Still waiting to learn why you’re here, Adler.”

“I asked her to accompany me,” Molly answered. “When my cousin told me she was throwing a baby shower for a male omega with no friends, I felt sorry for the guy. I thought that if I brought my girlfriend along, it would add to the number of attendees, which in turn, might make him feel less alone. This was a kindness,” she stressed. “You, the once great ‘Napoleon of Crime,’ have become little more than a charity case.”
The room grew silent enough to hear a pin drop as the formerly mousy pathologist’s words hung in the air. Jim had not anticipated such harsh sentiments to spew forth from the likes of Molly Hooper. Evidently, she was no longer the meek woman he remembered.

“What, no clever comeback? You’re losing your touch.”

“That’s enough, Molly!” the assassin warned. “I’ll not have anyone disrespect my husband in our home.”

Suddenly, Jim felt very unnerved. Seb shouldn’t have to be defending him, especially not to Molly, of all people. What was he doing, allowing her to speak to him like that? James Moriarty didn’t permit such insolence. He’d smack her clear across the face. Wrap his fingers around that pretty little neck of hers until she had no breath left to backtalk him with. She’d dare not cross him again after he was done.

But now, things were different. He had to stop and consider the situations he put himself into. Think of the impact it might have on his unborn children. A physical altercation could yield consequences, however slight. He refused to endanger their lives.

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

Jim’s heartbeat pounded in his ears. It was rapid and erratic, and it became difficult to breathe. He needed to get out of there before things escalated further.

The mastermind bolted from the living room as fast as he could. He retreated to his office, locking the door behind him. At least in there, he’d be able to break down in private.

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“Jimmy, please. If you don’t want to come out, fine. But let me in. I’d prefer that we speak face-to-face rather than through a door.”

“I don’t know, Seb. You might try dragging me out.”

“I won’t drag you anywhere, I promise.”

The nervous omega took a deep breath, still trying to calm himself. With a jittery hand, he unlocked the door to allow his mate inside.

Moran entered as soon as he heard the latch click open. When he got a look at Jim, he saw that the Irishman was worse for wear. He was balled up on the floor, sporting mussed hair and red-rimmed eyes.

The sniper crouched down to sit beside him. “Hey, it’s okay, love.”

“No, Sebastian, it’s really not.”

“Are you upset because of what Molly said? Don’t listen to her. She’s a fool.”

“Yes, but even a stopped clock is right twice a day.”

Seb peered at him quizzically. “What do you mean by that?”

“I mean she may be a nitwit, but she wasn’t wrong about everything. I’ve got no friends. Burned too many bridges through the years, and now I’m reaping what I’ve sown. You could barely scrape together a half dozen guests. It’s pathetic,” he hissed.
“It’s not pathetic,” the blonde reassured. “You’re just very particular about who you allow into your inner circle. You won’t befriend every bloke you meet. A person has to be worthy of your companionship.”

“Most people I’ve met have been dreadfully disappointing,” he conceded. “So ordinary.”

“Exactly. Your standards are higher than most. You’re a connoisseur. Quality wins out over quantity every time.”

“Maybe.”

“No ‘maybes’ about it. It’s the truth.”

Jim sighed, growing silent for a moment. “Oh, Sebby. I’m sorry. You helped organize an event for me, and here I am, hiding away like a petulant child.”

“It’s fine, hon. Given the surprise guests we received, I don’t blame you for being upset.”

“I’m not sure I can go back out there.”

“If you truly don’t want to, I won’t force you,” the assassin spoke. “But bear in mind that Gemma, Annie, and Marie worked hard to put this party together under a rushed deadline. Not to mention there’s games, gifts, and cake awaiting.”

Moriarty’s expression piqued. “Can we skip the games and go straight to gifts? I don’t feel much like playing right now, but I could do with opening some prezzies.”

“We can do anything you desire, dear. This baby shower is in honor of you and the twins. Whatever you say goes.”

The consulting criminal smiled. “Let me freshen up a bit and I’ll meet you downstairs.”

“Sounds good to me.” Seb rose to his feet, helping Jim stand as well.

“Thanks, Tiger.” He hesitated for a beat, pondering something Moran had said. “Darling, you mentioned that Marie helped coordinate this party, correct?”

“Yeah, it was a team effort.”

“That’s nice, but where is she? I saw Gemma and Annie here, but not her.”

Sebastian frowned. “No one’s been able to get ahold of Marie. She seems to have recently gone MIA,” he informed. “I’m sending someone over to her house to check on her tomorrow.”

A shiver ran down Jim’s spine. He paled, flashing back to the fate of his missing interior decorator. “You don’t think something could’ve happened to her like with Lisa, do you?”

“I hope not. Two days ago, she texted me saying she wanted to tell me something. After that, I didn’t hear any more from her.”

“Perhaps someone decided to shut her up,” Jim suggested.

“Can’t rule it out, I suppose.”

The Irishman grumbled. “It’s all very curious. Do keep me posted on whatever’s found at her house.”
“Of course.” As Seb was about to exit the room, he turned back for an instant, planting a surprise kiss on Jim’s lips.

“Ooh, Tiger, that was lovely.”

“Wouldn’t want to forsake tradition,” he quipped, pointing up at the mistletoe that hung in the doorway. “There’s a potential kiss around every corner, kitten.”

“Mmm, yes. Quite literally.”

Moran smirked. “That, my sweet, was a small parting gift. I’ll see you when you return to the festivities.”

The mastermind wistfully watched his partner leave.

Now it was time to get ready. Jim would head to his walk-in closet and select the perfect outfit for the occasion. He wasn’t sure what that ensemble might be, but he’d know it when he saw it.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

I have ideas for Jim's baby shower outfit. It's going to be a hoot ;-)
The party continues and Jim is excited to open gifts.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

“Hiiiiiiii!” Jim announced as he sashayed his way into the living room, making a grand entrance.

All eyes were intently fixed on him, not because he was the guest of honor, but because of what he was wearing. The consulting criminal had decided to dress in a carnation pink velvet suit paired with a Victorian-style white ruffle shirt. The pants clearly didn’t fit—they were unzipped, fastened together at the buttonhole via an elastic hair tie—and the matching jacket wouldn’t close, either. To complete the outlandish look, he sported a bejeweled crown.

Oh dear god. Sebastian couldn’t believe his mate’s choice of wardrobe. He’d expected him to change out of his pajamas, certainly, but into this? Bloody hell.

While everyone else attempted to stifle their reactions, Irene did not hold back. The woman’s laughter was irrepressible.

Seb shot her a steely glare in an attempt to silence her. It didn’t work. In fact, her snickers proved infectious as Molly began giggling, too.

“Ladieeeees,” Jim sang out, addressing the duo, “it’s nice to see that even soulless shrews like you can crack a smile every now and then.”

“I can’t take all the credit,” Adler quipped, undaunted by his insult. “When one’s host is cosplaying as the lovechild of Liberace and an Easter egg, the amusement flows almost involuntarily.”

“Sweetheart, if Liberace were alive today, he’d wish he looked as good as me.”

“Sebastian,” she spoke, glancing at Moran, “perhaps you ought to give your omega a once-over. I suspect he’s suffering from some form of pregnancy-induced delirium.”

“Now, now, Irene, let’s not—”

Before Jim could finish his snarky remark, the sniper pulled him away from the woman and out of earshot of the other guests.
“Hey! What’s the big idea?” Moriarty groused.

“I’m checking to see if you’re in your right mind. What the hell are you wearing?”

“A snazzy ensemble I picked up during last year’s Fashion Week in Paris. You must remember this — I wore it on Valentine’s Day.”

“Actually, now that you mention it, yeah, I do. But why are you wearing it here and now? You’ve got plenty of finely tailored paternity clothes. Why choose something that blatantly doesn’t fit?”

“Because I like this suit,” he answered, sounding a tad bit annoyed by his husband’s questioning. “It’s got flair, and that’s what I’m trying to exemplify. Now, if you’re through interrogating me, I have a party to enjoy.”

Moriarty returned to the group, whistling to get their attention.

“Wellllllcome to my baby shower, one and all! We’re going to skip straight to the prezzies,” he declared. “If anybody’s got a problem with that, you know where the door is. Otherwise, I invite you to take a load off and gather ‘round.” He turned to Seb. “Darling, fetch my gifts. I want to open them in here on the recliner.”

“Sure thing, love.” Moran dutifully retrieved the boxes and bags that had amassed in the corner of the room.

It’s going to be a long day, he thought to himself. But if it made his Magpie happy, it would be worth it. Right?

*********

“Whose haven’t I opened yet?” Jim asked, trying to keep track of everything he’d been bestowed so far.

“Just mine and your husband’s,” Ian stated. “Truthfully, I’m rather nervous, having to follow after the wonderful stuff everyone else brought.”

Indeed, it was quite a haul. Annie had gifted him a set of designer cashmere onesies, Gemma gave him two luxury infant car seats that featured heated cushions, and Molly and Irene offered up a dual gift of a ‘Hello Kitty’ baby monitor and nightlight. Though he’d never admit it, Moriarty secretly thought the cartoon-themed items were adorable.

“What’s in this box, I already know it’s going to be awesome.” Grinning gleefully, the mastermind tore away the wrapping paper and sliced through the packaging tape. Inside was a supply of baby formula and an accompanying set of bottles.

“It isn’t anything fancy because I’m still getting my bearings financially. So I’m sorry it’s not a very posh gift, but at least it’s practical,” the young man explained.

“I appreciate it. It’s quite sensible. The babies will need to eat, after all.”

Eat. The word made Jim think about the cake he was promised. He wasn’t certain what kind it was, but that didn’t much matter. He enjoyed many varieties— all except for those disgusting candied fruit and nut concoctions that were inexplicably popular during the holiday season.

If it’s one of those, he thought, someone’s losing digits. And he didn’t mean he’d delete their number from his phone. No, if there was a fruitcake waiting for him in that refrigerator, those
responsible would be losing actual fingers and toes.

“Mine’s the final one,” Seb noted, handing him an elegant gift box.

“Saved the best for last,” Jim said, returning to his senses after having been temporarily sidetracked by daydreams of dessert.

“Best? I don’t know if I’d go that far, but I do hope you like it.”

The Irishman smiled softly. “So humble, my gallant soldier.” He made short work of opening the present, squealing with excitement when he saw what it was.

“A baby sling! Oh, Tiger, this is delightful!” He’d wanted one for ages, but hadn’t gotten around to making the purchase.

“It’s a special model designed to carry two babies at once. I thought maybe you could use it when taking the twins out to the park or the store, or anywhere, really.”

“I’m envisioning it already. Thank you, love.” Jim leaned over to kiss his mate.

“Well, now that we’ve finished with the gifts, who wants cake?” Gemma asked, eager to make up for her guest list blunder.

“Wild horses couldn’t stop me from taking a taste. Come on, darling. I’m going to cut the first piece,” Moriarty declared.

“As you wish, Your Majesty.”

“Ooh, ‘Your Majesty.’ I like that.”

“It’s fitting, seeing as how you’ve got the crown.”

“It is a spectacular accessory, I must admit. Really brings out my eyes, don’t you think?”

“Definitely,” Seb agreed. “Gives them an extra sparkle.”

“I know you’re just humoring me now, but I’m in such a good mood, I don’t care.”

The pair continued chattering back and forth as they proceeded to the kitchen. Gemma was already in there prepping the plates and silverware, and Annie excused herself outside for a smoke break. Molly, Irene, and Ian were the only partygoers left in the living room.

“Who was that lovesick fop and what has he done with James Moriarty?” Irene quipped. She’d observed him and Seb briefly during their encounter in Monte Carlo, but now, having spent more time in their company, she was astonished at how different he seemed. The man who’d once projected nothing but cruelty and malice now radiated with a warmth that could not be denied. Though still snarky and eccentric, he was also surprisingly upbeat, bordering on cheerful.

“I know,” Molly replied. “I’ve never seen him so genuinely happy before. It’s bizarre.”

“I think it’s because of the babies,” Ian commented.

Both women peered at him, neither clear as to who he was.

“Pardon me?” the pathologist inquired.
“The babies make Jim happy,” he reiterated. “I’ve only known him for a short while, but that much is obvious. He really loves them and his husband does, too. They’re excited about expanding their family.”

“Interesting,” Irene remarked. “Who might you be and how do you know Jim?”

“I’m Ian. I first met him through a pregnancy support group, and now I work at his office.”

“Moriarty attended a support group? I don’t believe it.”

“Not ‘attended’— he participates in the present tense. We’re a community and we help each other,” the omega informed. “Jim’s got an infamous reputation, but he’s been nothing but kind to me.”

“Hmm.” Molly bore a pensive expression as she contemplated Ian’s statement. “I just can’t picture him being a parent. The very notion is absurd. But,” she hesitated, “he did seem different. The way I spoke to him on arrival…there was a time when he would’ve had my head for that. Today, though, he simply removed himself from the situation rather than come at me.”

“Ma’am,” the teenager addressed, focusing directly on Molly, “it’s not my business, but I’m curious— earlier, Jim mentioned that you and he dated. What happened with that?”

“Ugh. It was an unfortunate period of my life. I was lonely and he pretended to be someone else. Had me going for a bit, but a friend helped me see the truth.”

“So there was no real relationship there?”

She snorted. “Hardly.”

“And now the two of you are together?” he asked, referring to the woman sitting beside her.

The ladies exchanged a playful glance, joining hands in a show of solidarity.

“Oh, yes,” Adler confirmed. “Very much so. We’ve recently begun sharing a penthouse.”

“A penthouse? Sounds quite posh.”

“It is,” Molly chimed in. “A far sight better than my previous flat, and with greatly improved company.”

Irene smiled devilishly at the declaration. “Thank you, dear. I’m pleased by our new accommodations as well.”

The trio suddenly heard the front door open. It was Annie, coming back from outside.

“Did I miss anything?” she queried, removing her coat and gloves.

“Not especially,” Ian answered. “Half the group is still lingering in the kitchen.”

“Hmm. Perhaps I ought to pop in, too, and put on a pot of tea,” she pondered aloud. “Yes, I think I will.” Without another word, Annie headed off again.
“It’s just so hard to believe,” Jim said as he cut and plated slices of chocolate cake for everyone. “The interminably dull Molly Hooper taking up with Irene Adler. How do you suppose they met?”

Sebastian shrugged. “I’d imagine through Sherlock, but who knows? What I’m more curious about is why she made a pass at me in Monaco if she was involved with someone. I wonder if Molly’s aware of her girlfriend’s wandering ways?”

The consulting criminal nearly dropped the knife he was holding, a combination of anger and hurt flashing in his dark eyes. “She made a pass at you? Why didn’t you tell me?” he demanded.

“Relax, love.” Seb moved behind Moriarty, wrapping his arms around the smaller man and nuzzling his neck. “We were having such a wonderful time that day in Monte Carlo, I didn’t want to ruin it by mentioning her deluded intentions. You’re the only one for me, Magpie.”

Jim hummed contentedly at the feel of his alpha’s warm, well-built frame pressed up against him. He knew he would always be safe in his embrace; always be shielded from harm. Best of all, his children would be protected, too. He’d selected an excellent mate.

Meanwhile, Gemma stood off to the far corner, slack-jawed and horrified at what she’d heard. “Mr. Moran…Mr. Moriarty,” she spoke, “did you forget I was here? You’re talking about my cousin right in front of me!”

“Shit,” Jim muttered under his breath. He’d been so focused on what he was doing, and she’d been so quiet, he actually did forget she was still there. Seb overlooked her continued presence as well. Now they needed to exercise damage control.

The mastermind turned to his employee. “Gemmumma, darling, be a sweetheart and wipe that revolting look of surprise off your face. It doesn’t suit you,” he coolly remarked. “Should you ever share the details of the conversation you’ve just witnessed, there will be consequences, the likes of which you shan’t survive. And even if you did, by some miracle, persevere, the condition you’d be left in would have you begging for a swift death. Is. That. Clear?”

“As crystal, sir.” Her tone was rightly fearful.

“Good girl.”

Soon, Annie entered the kitchen, breaking up the awkward tension that had enveloped the room.

“I’ve come to brew some tea,” the fair-haired woman announced. “What variety have you got?”

“Herbal and Earl Grey,” Moran informed. “I recommend preparing both.”

“That’s a sound idea, sir.”

She began setting out the necessary items— cups, saucers, spoons, and the like. Everything was fine until she abruptly let out a yelp.

“For helvede!” Annie exclaimed. She’d pinched her finger in the silverware drawer.

Seb rushed to her aid. “Let me see it,” he said, and she consented.

“I feel like an idiot for doing that.”

“Accidents happen,” the sniper reassured as he inspected her injured digit. “It doesn’t appear to be broken, though it may swell a bit.”
She breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank goodness. I’m such a klutz sometimes.”

“Happens to the best of us.” Sebastian paused, the wheels in his head turning at a breakneck pace. “Annie, why don’t you give your finger a rest and go sit with the guests for a bit? I’ll watch the tea.”

“Are you sure, Mr. Moran? I’d hate to impose.”

“It’s no bother. Go on,” he encouraged. “And Gemma, I insist you do the same. Jim and I will take care of things.”

“Thank you, that’s very considerate,” Annie graciously replied.

Gemma merely nodded, not wanting to incur wrath from either of the men.

Both ladies exited the kitchen, leaving Jim and Seb alone at last.

Moriarty peered at his partner. “Okay, start talking. You just got rid of those women and I want to know why.”

“I noticed something strange. I’m surprised you didn’t pick up on it, too.”

Now Jim was scowling. “Seb, please get to the point. If all you plan to do is stand there and ridicule my skills of perception—which are, and always have been, superb—then I’ll be the next person walking out the door.”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” the blonde quickly protested.

“Well, what did you mean, hmm? Cut to the chase.”

“Annie swore when she caught her finger in the drawer.”

“Yeah, what of it? I’d have done the same.”

“ Probably, but would you have shouted an expletive in Danish?”

The mastermind’s expression reflected great contemplation as he mulled over Seb’s statement. Did her use of another language bear significance? If so, what?

“It’s peculiar,” Jim granted, “but I’ve heard people curse in a dozen different languages. Why does this concern you?”

“Because her employee file lists her as being German, not Danish. It’s what she claimed when she was first hired, and was then corroborated by a background check.”

“So you think she’s lying about her origins? What reason would she have to do that?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” the assassin lamented. “But if she lied about one thing, who knows what else she may have fabricated. With there being a traitor amongst headquarters, we mustn’t dismiss an oddity like this.”

“You’re right. It’s wise to err on the side of caution. I’ll have Ian keep an eye on her.”

“That’s all we can do for now.”

The pair grew quiet, waiting for the tea kettle to heat. Finally, Jim had enough.
“Sebastian, this is bollocks. A watched pot never boils. We’re wasting precious time when I could be eating cake.”

“Want to start bringing the dessert out, then?”

“Yes, I do. And you’re going to help me.”

“Of course, Your Majesty,” Moran said with a wink. "I wouldn’t dream of making you carry them all by yourself.”

Jim smirked, a wicked idea coming to mind. “Perhaps after the festivities, you can show your king just how dedicated you are to the crown.”

Moriarty didn’t need to say anything more. Once the notion was put into Seb’s head, he was eager to ply the partygoers with cake and send them out the door. They were both eager, for that matter.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone is interested in a translation of what Annie said when she swore, see the following for reference: https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/for_helvede
Darkness on the Horizon

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian receive disturbing news. Later, the consulting criminal vents his frustrations.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was the day after the baby shower and Sebastian decided to go into headquarters a little later than usual so that he could assist Jim with some things around the house. He was in the middle of assembling a baby changing table when his phone rang.

“Hello?” he answered.

The sniper stayed on the line for a few minutes, listening, but not saying much. The color began to slowly drain from his face, and by the end of the call, he was alarmingly ashen.

“What’s wrong?” Jim asked. He was sitting in the nursery with Seb, overseeing his handiwork.

“It’s Marie…”

“You sent someone to check on her early this morning, right?”

Moran nodded. “Yeah, I did.”

“And?”

There was a pause that seemed to stretch on forever as Jim awaited a response.

“She’s dead,” Seb finally spoke. “Her throat was slashed. There was a lot of blood.”

Now Moriarty paled as well. “Christ.” Though he wasn’t especially close to the woman, he didn’t want harm to come to her, either.

“The man I sent over received no reply when he knocked on her door, but he was able to go inside because it was unlocked. He searched the place and eventually discovered her body in the bathroom.”

“God, that’s terrible.”
“It gets worse,” the former colonel warned. “As he was about to leave and ring the police, he heard a child start to cry somewhere in the house.”

“Oh, no.” Jim didn’t like where this was headed.

“Turns out Marie’s two-year-old son was hiding in a broom closet. Apparently, he’d been there for days. No one came to get him after his mother died.”

The Irishman was stricken by the news. It broke his heart to imagine a little boy abandoned under such heinous circumstances.

“Right now, the cops are investigating to determine if this was a murder or a suicide.”

“It had to be murder, Seb. I’m sure of it.”

“I think so, too. But they’ve only just begun examining the crime scene. It may take a while to reach a conclusion.”

“Fuck their examination,” Jim hastily spat. “I don’t require further analysis to know the truth. She was going to tell you something, and somebody got to her before she could.”

“You may be correct, Magpie. This all feels very strange.”

“To say the least. First Lisa, now Marie. Who’ll be next to go missing and turn up dead? This is outrageous and I won’t abide it.”

“I agree, Jimmy. As soon as we come across a solid lead, I’ll be there to sort them out. That much I guarantee.”

“We’ll sort them,” Moriarty stressed. “I want my pound of flesh from Colin and his lackey both.”

“I wouldn’t dare exclude you, love. When the time for retribution comes, we’re in it together.”

“It can’t arrive soon enough.”

Seb paused, a thought coming to mind. “Have you contacted Ian about keeping an eye on Annie?”

“No yet, and frankly, I’d rather have you do it.”

“Oh really?”

“Yes. I thought I’d pull him aside for a chat about it at tonight’s group meeting, but now I feel like it can’t wait. He needs to be briefed immediately,” the genius explained. “I want you to go to headquarters straightaway and speak to him.”

“Okay, I will. But what about the changing table? It isn’t going to assemble itself.”

“Save it for another day.”

“Fine.” If that’s what Jim truly desired, he would comply. “Guess I’ll see you later, then.”

“Yes. Update me after you talk to Ian. I want to know if he’s observed anything unusual about Annie up to this point.”

“Aye, aye.”
And just like that, at the figurative snap of Moriarty’s fingers, Sebastian was gone. He had a mission to fulfill.

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“Wow,” Ian uttered in astonishment. “That’s a lot to take in.”

It really was. Sebastian had finished telling the young man about his and Jim’s stalking ordeal, not leaving out any detail. He wanted to make clear what they were up against.

“I’m sorry you’ve been put through such hell. Jim mentioned having a traitor in the office, but I didn’t know the whole story until now. I’ll do what I can to help. If that means watching Annie like a hawk, so be it.”

“I appreciate your cooperation,” the sniper spoke. “Have you noticed any odd behavior from her?”

Ian stopped to consider the question. “Well, she checks her mobile phone pretty often, but the same could be said for most of the staff.” He wracked his brain for other possible peculiarities. “She takes long lunches sometimes, extending past the hour we’re allotted. I didn’t want to make a big deal out of it, but since you asked, it might be worth noting.”

“Hmm, I see.” Was she simply dallying at lunchtime or was something else afoot? “Do you know if she takes her lunches here in the building, or if she goes off-site for them?”

“I’m fairly certain she leaves,” the youth answered. “I’ve never seen her in the cafeteria, not even on ‘Chocolate Mousse Monday’— and you know how popular that is.”

“Perhaps it would be wise to monitor her whereabouts,” Moran mused. “Put a tracker on her vehicle and find out where she goes.”

“A tracker? Isn’t that illegal?”

Seb looked Ian in the eye, unwavering. “You work for James Moriarty now. There’s no longer a line between what is or isn’t legal. We do whatever’s necessary to get a job done. It’s best you remember that.”

He nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“Unless there’s anything further you’d care to add, I think this concludes our briefing.”

“Very well. Thank you for being honest and upfront with me. I prefer dealing with straightforward people.”

“As do I.”

Having been thoroughly informed, Ian exited the assassin’s private office.

Sebastian sat back in his chair, contemplating his next move. He had a myriad of things to do, but not much time to accomplish them in. Such was the life of London’s second most dangerous man. There was nary a moment of peace.

*********

The day flew by quickly for the Tiger and his Magpie. They each had their own activities to attend to, and before either knew it, it was time for Jim’s MOPS meeting. As usual, Seb chauffeured him there and waited patiently in the foyer while the group convened.
A headache had kept the genius from baking his customary treats, and he was not happy about it. He’d resorted to picking up store-bought pastry, an act that felt like sacrilege. He was sure people would notice the difference as soon as they took a taste. Thankfully, they hadn’t reached intermission yet.

“Jim, you’ve been awfully quiet this evening,” one of the members, Jack, remarked.

“I’ve had a lot on my mind today.”

“Care to share it with the rest of us?”

“I doubt it would do much good.”

“Nonsense,” the man replied. “We’re here to lend support. This is an ideal opportunity to vent your frustrations, whatever they may be.”

The consulting criminal sighed. “All right, fine. If you must know, this morning I learned that one of my employees was dead. They were slain quite brutally via a slit to the throat,” he announced, and the group’s collective eyes grew wide. “As if that wasn’t bad enough, this person’s small child was found wailing in a closet. He’d been alone in the house with his mother’s corpse for days.”

The atmosphere of the room grew thick with shock and sorrow. Nobody seemed to know what to say, until finally Trevor, the coordinator, spoke up.

“Jim, that’s horrific. It’s understandable you’d be upset after receiving that kind of news.”

Moriarty was silent for a moment, trying to process the macabre thoughts that ran through his head.

“I can’t stop imagining what it must’ve been like for that little boy,” he confessed. “It’s impossible to grasp the concept of death at two-years-old, and yet, he was made to face it up close and personal. How would a toddler process such a thing? And the violence of it…” he trailed off, recalling what Seb had said about there being ‘a lot of blood’ at the scene. “God only knows how much the boy saw. I really hope he didn’t witness the actual event.”

“It may be cold comfort to hear this, but memory can be sporadic during the early stages of childhood. At his age, there’s a chance he may not remember what happened, and even if he did, it would probably be in bits and pieces, akin to recollecting a dream,” Trevor stated.

“You mean a nightmare,” the Irishman scoffed.

“In this case, yes, I suppose so.”

Jim’s expression was grim. “This ‘incident,’ for lack of a better word, has also got me thinking of my own children. What if I died…what would become of them? I know my husband would see to the twins, but our line of work is fraught with danger— what if he was killed, too? What if something felled us both, and they were left all alone? They’ve got an uncle, but he’s in Australia. There’s no one close by to take care of them. They’d end up in the foster system. I can’t bear the idea of it,” he said, his voice taking on a frantic tone as his thoughts began to spiral. “I’ve always treated life so casually. Taken it entirely for granted. But now, every second seems precious and I don’t want to leave my babies.”

“Jim, however you treated life up to this point is irrelevant, because that was in the past and thus cannot be changed. You need to look ahead,” Trevor advised, putting his family counseling skills to use. “The present and future are malleable, and those are what you should focus on. Try to envision them as bricks of clay— they haven’t yet been formed and thrown in the kiln. You can
still shape them into whatever you want. With that in mind, reconsider your problem. If you feel your current job is too dangerous, you could take steps mold the situation into something more ideal.”

“You mean find less risky employment?”

“If necessary, yes.”

“I’ve already considered it,” the mastermind admitted. “Considered handing over the reins to my enterprise and letting someone else run the show. Then I could stay home and care for my children on a permanent basis. Maybe even embark on a new career path while I’m at it. People seem to love my baking—I’ve daydreamed about pursuing that on the side.”

“Really, Jim?” Ian chimed in to ask. He’d only just started working for the man, so hearing this was a bit disconcerting. If Moriarty resigned, what would that mean for his job security?

“Yeah, but another part of me can’t stand the thought of walking away from the business I worked so incredibly hard to build. It didn’t happen overnight. It took years upon years of effort,” he stressed.

“I sympathize with what you’re going through,” a MOPS newcomer named Simon spoke. “My brother was a field agent for MI5. After his daughter was born, he worried about his safety because he wanted to see her grow up.”

“How did he deal with it?” the genius inquired.

“He put in a formal request to be transferred to a desk position. Bureaucratic red tape being what it is, the paperwork went directly into a queue, and by the time someone got around to reviewing it, his fears had proved true. He was killed in the line of duty.”

“Simon, I’m sorry to hear that. It must’ve been an extremely painful experience,” Trevor acknowledged. “Thank you for sharing something so personal with us.”

Moriarty was not as enthusiastic. He stared daggers at his fellow group member.

“Don’t thank him for that awful story! Here I am, pouring my heart out to you people, and he sees fit to relay the fact that his relative had a high-risk job and got killed because of it. How is that meant to comfort me in any way? It was depressing as fuck,” the consulting criminal angrily declared. “Tell me, Simon, if I’d said I was upset over an ailing pet, would you have regaled me with the tale of ‘Old Yeller’?”

“I wasn’t trying to agitate you, Jim,” the man insisted.

“No? Could’ve fooled me.”

“Hey,” the coordinator interrupted, “there will be no infighting amongst us. This is a safe space and I intend to keep it that way.”

Jim snorted. “Fine. Do what you want. I don’t have to be here for it.” He stood up from his chair and proceeded towards the door.

“Don’t go!” Ian beseeched. “We’re not even halfway through the meeting.”

“I don’t care,” he icily replied.
Others called out, bidding him to stay, but it was futile. He stormed from the room feeling irritable, headachy, and exhausted. As far as Jim was concerned, if he never participated in MOPS again, it would be too soon.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Unwell

Chapter Summary

Jim doesn’t feel good.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been a full week since Jim stormed out of his MOPS meeting, intent never to return. He’d received calls from multiple group members urging him to come back, but he was stubborn and refused their persuasion.

Of course, acrimony wasn’t the only reason he hadn’t gone. The Irishman was feeling decidedly unwell. Pounding headaches, dizziness, and extreme fatigue plagued him on a near-constant basis, making him hesitant to venture anywhere. He hid it easily enough, not wanting to bother Sebastian with his health woes because there were important business transactions in the works. They were in the middle of conducting a major arms acquisition and it was vital that the sniper not be distracted by anything.

As of this morning, Sebastian was traveling to meet with their client in Moscow. He never would’ve agreed to go if he knew his mate was ailing, and then they’d risk the entire deal falling apart. Moriarty couldn’t allow that to happen.

Jim didn’t think he was acting irresponsibly because he already had an appointment with Dr. Swenson scheduled for that day. Surely, she’d see him through whatever was the matter and Seb needn’t be the wiser.

“Come on, darlings. We’d best get a move on,” he said, staring down at his belly.

He ambled slowly, grumbling when his coat wouldn’t close. It was the one article of clothing he hadn’t replaced with a paternity version, and he sorely regretted the oversight. He’d definitely be ordering a new parka when he returned home.

Much to Moriarty’s chagrin, that wasn’t the only thing that didn’t fit. Again, his feet were swollen to the point where only slippers would slide on without issue. Additionally, he faced a new predicament: his fingers were bloated and he couldn’t comfortably wear his gloves.

“This is bloody ridiculous.” He had half a mind to cancel his consultation, but he knew he needed to see a physician.
As he lumbered out the door looking rather a mess, he spoke to his stomach once more.

“This is all for you, I want you to know. I could be reclining in front of the fireplace, sipping a cuppa and reading a good book. But I’m not, because I’ve got to make sure I’m okay for your sake. Daddy wouldn’t do this for just anyone, so you ought to consider yourselves pretty special.”

He observed a slight shift inside as the twins responded to the sound of his voice. Moments like those always made him smile.

“Off we go,” were his last words before gingerly maneuvering into the car. Even small tasks such as that were becoming difficult to manage. For the millionth time, he found himself wishing his husband was there. Somehow everything seemed better with his Tiger by his side.

“Ugh. Stop being so weak and codependent!” he chastised.

His eyes grew wide as he felt a sharp kick from within. Jim quickly realized his mistake.

“I didn’t mean you, darlings. Daddy was talking about himself.” He placed a hand on his abdomen, rubbing it gently. “I’d never call you weak. You’re my little toughies. Been through a lot, but you keep hanging in there…just like your Papa. He’s tough, too.”

Moriarty couldn’t seem to get Seb off his mind. It was only through sheer force of will that he was able to resist pulling out his phone and texting Moran.

“No. He’s got business to attend to. I can handle this on my own.”

Taking a deep breath, Jim started his vehicle and drove off. He’d muster through this, come hell or high water. He had to. There was no other option.

**********

TAP. TAP. TAP.

The consulting criminal drummed his puffy fingers on the examination table as he awaited Dr. Swenson’s arrival.

He was nervous. After the check-in nurse recorded his symptoms and then took his weight and blood pressure stats, she exited the room in a bit of a hurry. Jim was no medical expert, but he recognized that probably wasn’t a good sign.

Finally, the obstetrician entered.

“Hello, Mr. Moriarty,” she greeted. “I understand you’ve been experiencing some troubling health issues recently. You reported severe headaches, vertigo, and lethargy, correct?”

He nodded. “That’s right. My hands and feet have also swelled. It’s quite annoying, to be honest. This time of year, I’d much rather fit into my Givenchy boots than a pair of slippers.”

The practitioner approached him, carefully inspecting his enlarged digits. “Have you been following the low-sodium diet I recommended?”

“Yes,” he answered. “Well, mostly. I cheated and ate a meat-laden slice of pizza about a month ago, but that was it. I’ve consumed nothing especially salty since then. Why do you ask?”

“Because your blood pressure has skyrocketed,” Dr. Swenson reported. “It’s likely the reason your extremities have ballooned up.”
Moriarty’s expression sank. “What? No…that can’t be true.” He took his antihypertensive medication as directed and it had worked fine until now.

“I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but it’s the truth,” she stressed. “When did you first notice these symptoms?”

The mastermind thought about it. “My feet have swollen off-and-on for a while, but I read that was a fairly common occurrence during pregnancy. They always returned to normal after a day or two, and my hands weren’t previously affected at all,” he explained. “This past week is when everything went to hell.”

“So it was a rapid onset?”

“Yes.”

She peered at him for a moment, considering his response. “Mr. Moriarty, I’d like to have my nurse take a blood sample from you so that we can run some tests. Our lab is able to process results within an hour, meaning it shouldn’t take up too much of your time.”

Jim blanched at the request. Time wasn’t an issue, but anxiety certainly was. “Blood testing? What for?”

“To check your protein and enzyme levels before proceeding further.”

“Okay, if you think it’s necessary.”

“I do.”

From there, Dr. Swenson went to fetch her nurse while Jim sat restlessly, steeling himself for what was to come. He was feeling less like the most dangerous man in London and more like a pregnant omega who was sick, scared, and alone.

Oh, Sebby. I’m sorry I let you leave.

*********

When Jim was ushered into his doctor’s private office, he could tell she was unhappy by the look on her face. It reminded him of the glower his primary school teachers used to give him when he acted up in class.

“Mr. Moriarty,” the woman began, “for future reference, if you decide to discontinue a medication I’ve prescribed, I ask that you please report it to me and my nurse. It’s important you share information of that nature so we know what we’re dealing with.”

Suddenly, the genius was incredibly confused. “Excuse me, what? I haven’t discontinued anything. I take the labetalol twice a day, every day.”

She frowned, not entirely trusting his claim. “Sir, as your physician, we have an established confidentiality between us. You can be honest with me.”

“I am being honest!” he insisted, growing frustrated that she didn’t seem to believe him. “I don’t have the bottle with me right now, but it’s sitting in my medicine cabinet at home. I took one pill this morning and I’ll be taking another later on tonight!”

There was a pause as both stared at each other. Finally, Dr. Swenson spoke. “Mr. Moriarty, the
blood test indicates that you have no antihypertensive medication in your system, which I’m positive is the cause of your current symptoms. Whatever you’re taking, it’s not the drug it’s supposed to be.”

Jim paled, absolutely shocked by the news. How was this possible?

“It’s my professional opinion that you ought to be checked into the hospital where they can administer an IV drip of the correct medication, and also monitor your vitals just to be on the safe side. Furthermore, I’d ask that you bring along the pill bottle you’ve been taking doses from and submit it to their lab for analysis. I’ll even post a referral for it to be rushed through, because I’m very curious as to what it actually is.”

“I’m curious, too,” he muttered, still processing what he’d learned.

A terrifying thought came to Jim’s mind. “Could these…incorrect drugs have been harmful to my babies?”

“I wish I could provide a definitive answer on that, but we won’t know for sure until the lab identifies what the substance is,” she said. “However, you can take some solace in the fact that you’ve consistently felt movement from them, and we did detect steady fetal heartbeats here today.”

All he could do was nod. Earlier, in his worried state, he’d cajoled the nurse into performing an ultrasound after she’d finished collecting his blood specimen. Essie and Eddie seemed okay then. He was grateful for that much.

Ultimately, Jim agreed to check himself into the hospital for treatment. He hated having to do so, but it was a necessary evil. The genius would withstand anything for the continued welfare of his little ones.

Before heading to the medical facility, Moriarty swung by his house to grab a few items. He packed a bag containing the usual overnight supplies, making sure to throw in the bogus bottle of pills as well— he was eager to get the results back on those damnable things.

The Irishman paused, knowing he’d need to bring his own loungewear, lest they attempt to put him in one of those ghastly gowns that never fully close in the back. He rifled through a chest of drawers, coming up with an elegant pair of grey silk nightclothes. It was then that he spotted something else. Beneath his chic apparel lay the Snoopy pajamas Seb had recently gifted him. He wanted to reach for them, but hesitated.

I can’t be seen wearing those in public.

Even so, he was inexplicably drawn to them. The fact that they came from Moran elevated them above being ordinary. They were rendered special by virtue of association.

I’ll pack both.

There was one final garment he wanted to bring.
Approaching Sebastian’s laundry pile, Jim rooted around until he found what he was looking for. He clutched an old, raggedy sweatshirt belonging to the sniper. The item had seen better days, but that didn’t matter. The scent was what appealed to Moriarty. It smelled like his alpha, and right now, he needed that kind of comfort. He could throw on the oversized covering, close his eyes, and pretend Sebby was there. Maybe he could even trick his black heart into believing it for a few seconds.

The consulting criminal made it almost to the front door when he abruptly stopped in his tracks. Should I contact him? If the situation was reversed, and it was Seb who had a health issue, he would want to know.

But…in this case, what would it accomplish? Tiger’s busy. If I worry him, he won’t keep a clear head.

Jim was torn. He sighed, lamenting his changeable nature.

I can decide later. Right now, he needed to concentrate on getting to the hospital before his condition worsened.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Devotion Personified

Chapter Summary

Sebastian comes to Jim's aid.

Chapter Notes

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“Thank god that’s over with,” Sebastian said upon returning to his hotel room. He’d just concluded a lengthy meeting with an oligarch to finalize the largest arms purchase Continental Europe had seen in years. This was a major coup for Moriarty’s criminal web, the kind one might be inclined to celebrate if they had someone with them to share in the good fortune. Sadly, Seb was alone.

Like a lizard shedding its skin, the sniper quickly peeled off his three-piece Armani suit, leaving it strewn across the floor.

Jim would have a fit if he saw this. The mastermind insisted that Seb wear ‘something professional’ during his trip to Moscow. He hated it, of course, but understood the necessity. Didn’t mean he had to keep it on a minute longer than required, though.

Speaking of Jim, he wondered what his husband was up to right now. It was 6 p.m. in Russia, so taking into account the three-hour time difference, it would be 3 o’clock in England.

He’s probably having tea and scones or knitting something for the twins. Possibly both— the man excels at multitasking. The thought of it put a gentle smile on Seb’s face.

Moran found it increasingly difficult to leave his Magpie’s side. Perhaps now more than ever, his alpha instincts were on high alert. He had an overwhelming urge to look after his omega, protecting him and their young. This past week, the desire was particularly strong.

The assassin sensed there was something amiss with Moriarty. First, his mood seemed out of sorts, but Sebastian attributed it to hormonal fluctuations and fallout from the spat he’d had at his group meeting. Then, other peculiarities emerged. The ordinarily insatiable Irishman lost all interest in sex, citing headache and fatigue whenever he tried to initiate intimate contact with him. He also observed that his mate had started using the elevator in their home rather than climb the stairs.

Prior to leaving for Moscow, Moran questioned the consulting criminal about his health. He denied there was a problem and jokingly referred to the former colonel as a ‘worrywart,’ assuring him all was well. Sebastian begrudgingly accepted the response, though a part of him remained wary.
The blonde sat on the bed and grabbed his phone from the nightstand. He was going to send a text.

SM

Meeting finished. Deal is a go. I’m at the hotel now.

As he leaned back against the pillows, a wicked idea came to mind. He had the perfect surprise for his spouse…

“Dammit!” Jim exclaimed. He’d dropped another stitch. “Why can’t I get this right?”

The genius was deeply frazzled and had hoped knitting might calm him down. No such luck. He was too jittery; too on edge. If anything, he was growing more frustrated, not less.

A million things ran through his head at once. It was overwhelming and all-consuming. Not even his breathing exercises helped. He was teetering precariously close to a meltdown.

*Maybe I should call someone.* He knew who he wanted to talk to— Seb was often the only person who could pull him back from the brink. But…

*No, I mustn’t distract him. What about Ian?* Truth be told, Moriarty missed interacting with the men from his support group. He didn’t realize what a positive influence MOPS was in his life until he’d stopped going for a week.

BZZ. BZZ.

Jim’s phone buzzed, fate having apparently decided who he would talk to.

He checked his mobile device and gasped. Sebastian had texted him to say that the assignment in Moscow was a success, and…he’d also sent a photo of himself laying on the bed wearing only a pair of form-fitting grey briefs. He looked spectacular.

JM

*Oh my.*

SM

*Like what you see? ;-)*

JM

*You know it.*

SM

*Here’s a better view—*
Seb forwarded another pic, this time a close-up of the generous bulge between his legs.

“Holy fuck.” It was a good thing the mastermind was hooked up to a stream of antihypertensive drugs, because otherwise, the sight might’ve thrown him into a tizzy.

SM
Still there?

JM
Yes, sorry. Had to collect myself after seeing that.

SM
Glad I haven’t lost my sex appeal. Was wondering lately.

Jim knew what his partner was hinting at. He’d refused the sniper’s advances this past week due to feeling like total shite. But he’d hoped Seb wouldn’t take it personally— he wanted to be with him, he was just too sick to participate.

The consulting criminal paused, a thought occurring to him. Perhaps this was the segue he needed to explain his current condition.

JM
Tiger, you’re as gorgeous as ever. I’ve simply not been well. I’m not well now, for that matter.

SM
What’s wrong, kitten?

JM
I…it’s…let me show you.

Moriarty quickly snapped a shot of himself in his hospital bed, clad in Seb’s sweatshirt and attached to three different machines— an IV, a blood pressure monitor, and a heart monitor. He nervously submitted the selfie.

There was a momentary lull in the conversation, and for an instant, Jim regretted sending the
candid photo. Finally, Moran replied.

SM

*Got my clothes back on. I’ll check out of here and try to get a flight home within the hour. Which hospital are you at?*

JM

*St. Thomas.*

SM

*Okay. With any luck, I’ll be there before the night’s out.*

*Love you, Jimmy.*

JM

*Love you, too.*

The Irishman sat his phone down, amazed by how his mate had responded. All it took was one glimpse of him in trouble and he was rushing to be at his side. Seb was devotion personified.

“Such a loyal Tiger. Forever my—” he stopped, looking down at his belly and placing a hand on it. “Forever *our* protector. Your Papa is the finest man in the world. There are some idiots out there who would disagree, but they don’t count— they’re *ordinary*. Small people who lead small lives. Not like us.”

Moriarty felt calmer knowing that his alpha was on the way. He picked his knitting back up and decided to try it again now that he had a cooler head. This time around, he was confident his stitching would be on point.

**********

Today was proving to be among the longest in Sebastian Moran’s recent memory. Perhaps that had to do with the fact that he’d been in two separate countries and gone through two different time zones all in the span of approximately 18 hours. It was fucking grueling and he did not wish to repeat such a journey anytime soon.

The whole trip back, he was berating himself for ever having left in the first place. He’d suspected there was something wrong with Jim, but foolishly ignored his gut instinct. He had failed his expectant omega and was filled with shame.

Though Seb believed nothing could truly make up for his transgression, he still wanted to present some token of amends. He accomplished this with a bouquet of a dozen long stem roses, thorns clipped off and tied together with a satiny bow. They were beautiful, and he figured it was the least
he could do.

“Here we are,” the fair-haired assassin noted. He was standing outside the room a nurse had directed him to.

Sebastian rapped on the door. When he received no reply, he quietly let himself in, observing that Jim was asleep.

“Oh, Magpie.” His mate looked peaceful as he slumbered, yet surprisingly vulnerable, too. He was drowning in Seb’s sweatshirt and hooked up to all sorts of medical equipment. It was one thing to have seen the picture Jim sent, but to witness him like this in person…it made his heart ache.

Moran laid the flowers on the nightstand and sat down on the bed, intent to gently wake his husband.

“Your champion has arrived, my sweet.” Seb stroked the Irishman’s arm as he whispered softly to him.

“Hmm?” Jim mumbled, stirring a bit.

“I’ve come back early just for you, kitten. Jet lagged as hell from switching time zones so rapidly, but I’ll survive.”

“Tiger,” the genius groggily spoke, “am I dreaming?”

“No, love, I’m really here.”

Moriarty sat up and pulled his partner into a tight embrace, his arms wrapping around the larger man in a vise-like grip. He held fast longer than he ordinarily would, not wanting to let Sebastian slip away from him.

“Easy does it, darling. Hug me any harder and I may crack a rib,” he teased.

Jim let up, slightly embarrassed. “Sorry, I don’t mean to be so fucking clingy. I can’t seem to stop myself lately. It’s pathetic.”

“No,” the sniper asserted, smoothing down a sleep-tousled lock of Jim’s hair. “It’s not pathetic. In fact, it’s actually quite normal. That’s how our biology works— at this stage of pregnancy, an omega becomes more dependent on their alpha, and being separated for too long a time can cause marked anxiety. Doubly so, if the omega is already in a state of illness or injury.”

“I’m well aware of the science behind it, Seb. But reading about it in a textbook and experiencing it firsthand are two entirely different things.”

“Fair point,” he acknowledged. “I shouldn’t have left you like I did. You needed me here.”

“I needed you on assignment,” the consulting criminal countered. “I don’t trust my other employees the way I trust you. No one else would’ve sufficed.”

“But still…I sensed something was amiss and I went to Russia anyway. A worthier alpha wouldn’t have done that.”

Jim blinked in surprise. “You sensed it? How? I was trying to hide how badly I felt.”

“Everything just began to add up. Little bits and pieces, here and there.”
“I see.” Clearly, the illness had thrown him off his game.

“So what’s the matter?”

That was the million dollar question. Now the mastermind would have to explain.

“Well, turns out the reason I’ve been feeling awful is because my blood pressure went up. Way up. My obstetrician recommended I check in for treatment, so that’s what I did.”

Seb nodded. “Glad you followed her advice. Do they know what triggered your blood pressure to rise? Maybe they ought to increase your meds.”

“The problem is related to my meds, all right, but not in the way you might think.”

“Oh?”

“Apparently, someone tampered with my drugs. For the past week, I’ve been taking what I believed was labetalol, but it really wasn’t that at all.”

Moran’s eyes widened in shock. “Good Lord!” he exclaimed. “What were you actually being dosed with, then?”

“The lab ran an analysis and determined it was a multivitamin. Thank god it wasn’t anything harmful to the babies.” Jim shuddered at the thought of how it could’ve been so much worse.

“That’s a relief,” Seb agreed. “How did the medication mix-up occur? You said there was tampering involved? How, and by whom?” He wanted to know exactly who it was he needed to hunt down and kill.

“I suspect tampering took place because it was only this week that I’ve experienced symptoms. I think I started out with the correct drugs, but someone swapped them within the last seven days or so.”

Though he tried to suppress it, the burly blonde alpha was fuming mad. Switching a person’s medication was fucking despicable. And to do it to a pregnant omega…he couldn’t begin to wrap his head around how wrong that was. Even to a career assassin, the act was unfathomable.

“Jimmy, who do you suppose would do such a thing?”

“I hate to suggest it, but logically speaking, it must’ve been a guest at the baby shower. The timing fits, and they were the only other people to have had access to our medicine cabinet.”

“Fuck.” Sebastian’s fingers balled into fists as a blazing fury coursed through him. He’d allowed visitors into his home— his sanctuary— and this is how he was repaid. Someone had violated his trust and hospitality by targeting Jim and their unborn children. It was thoroughly contemptible.

“As for which of our guests is the guilty party, well, that I don’t know. We’ve got to consider this carefully.”

“I’ll kill them. Whoever it is, they’ve signed their own death warrant.”

“Indeed,” the genius concurred. “I don’t think it was Ian. I’m fairly confident he can be ruled out right off the bat. Probably not Molly, either. This pill swap was obviously premeditated, yet she was stunned to see me. She’s not a good enough actress to have faked that reaction.”

“And what of her companion, Irene?”
“Adler seemed surprised as well, but she’s a much better liar than Miss Hooper. She was also at
the hotel the night we were spied on,” he recalled. “I’m still not convinced this is her M.O.,
though. And besides, she wasn’t there for the graffiti incident that occurred shortly before we went
to Monaco. Remember, I’m operating under the premise that the same person has been perpetrating
all of these acts.”

“Then it’s got to be Gemma or Annie,” Seb swiftly remarked. “They’ve been around for a lot of
things.”

“They certainly have,” the Irishman declared. “Gemma’s never given me a reason to doubt her,
aside from the baby shower invite snafu. Annie, however…” He thought back to the language slip-
up she’d made at his party. “Earlier this week, you mentioned putting a tracker on her vehicle. Has
anything come of it?”

“Unfortunately, no. She’s been venturing to cafes, bistros, and bars. Nothing outwardly
suspicious.”

Moriarty sighed. “We need more information on her, immediately.”

“I’m trying as best I can.”

“I know. I didn’t mean to imply that you weren’t. I’m just frustrated by the direction this is taking,”
Jim admitted. “I’ve always prided myself on being able to see through people. To look at someone
and instantly deduce everything about them. But with Annie…I didn’t get the impression that she
was lying. If she truly is responsible for terrorizing us, then it means I’m a complete and utter fool.
A fucking moron. Or worse yet…ordinary.”

“No, Jimmy. It simply means you’re human. I hate to break it to you, but no one is infallible, not
even the illustrious James Moriarty.”

“But I should be, Seb! Don’t you grasp that?” The mastermind was yelling, though his tone was
more saddened than angry.

Now it was Moran’s turn to do the hugging. “Come here,” he commanded, taking his mate into his
arms. Jim halfheartedly struggled for a moment, but soon melted into the larger man’s embrace.

“People don’t deceive me,” he insisted. “I deceive them. That’s how it’s supposed to work.”

“I know, honey, I know. It’ll be okay. We’ll get through this together. I promise we will.”

Seb rubbed his omega’s back in a soothing manner as he listened to the tiny sniffles coming from
him. Jim had been trying not to cry, but was now coming undone.

“Tiger…she told me about MOPS.”

“Huh?”

“At your birthday party. Annie was the one who said her brother-in-law had attended the support
group, and she recommended it to me. Why would she have told me about MOPS if she had a
vendetta?” the genius wondered aloud. “Does she even have a male omega relative? If it’s true,
then how could she have written those terrible slurs in the bathroom? And if it’s a lie, how was she
aware of the group in the first place? It doesn’t make sense.”

Sebastian had to agree—this was strange, and they definitely needed an accurate account of her
background. Surely, if they dug deep enough, something would surface.
“Hey, Sebby?”

“Yes?”

“Are those for me?” Jim asked hopefully, noticing the roses on the nightstand.

“Yeah, they are.” The sniper smiled warmly, pulling out of their hug so that he could hand his spouse the bouquet.

Moriarty leaned down to smell them. “These are lovely, Tiger. Thank you.”

“The pleasure is all mine.”

“Maybe you could go to the nurses’ station and see if they have a glass or a vase to put them in?”

“That’s a fine idea. I’ll get right on it.”

“I appreciate it, Seb.”

Jim hummed softly. He was still a jumble of hormones and emotions, but at least now he had his alpha by his side.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
The Things We Do for Those We Adore

Chapter Summary

Sebastian plots to cheer up Jim.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jim was feeling morose and Sebastian was determined to perk him up before it got any worse.

The mastermind’s poor mood was a direct result of the lecture he’d received that morning from not one, but two, doctors. He was reprimanded for not following the orders he’d been given when last discharged from the hospital. His attending physicians had instructed him to maintain modified bedrest, use a wheelchair at least half the time, and wear a portable blood pressure monitor 24/7. He’d kept up none of those things and they had a few choice words to say about it.

Seb was present for the confrontation, and he fully expected Jim to flip out in response. It came as a huge shock when, instead of anger, he reacted with profound sadness. He sat stone-faced until the doctors left the room, at which point he broke down into tears. The Irishman was utterly guilt-ridden, sobbing and apologizing to their unborn children for not taking better care of them.

Moran wanted to knock those fucking physicians’ teeth out. How dare they speak to his husband so rudely? He was the Napoleon of Crime, not some ordinary bloke off the street. He deserved respect. Furthermore, Seb was appalled by their lack of overall sensitivity. It was well-established within the medical community that pregnant omegas were often highly emotional and protective of their young. Most practitioners wouldn’t dream of addressing one so harshly. What, then, was this pair thinking?

Bloody bastards. Probably treated him differently because he’s male.

“Tiger?”

In a flash, the sniper was pulled from his thoughts.

“Yes, dear?”

“Fetch me something from the vending machine. Make sure it’s chocolate. But absolutely no raisins.”

“Your wish is my command.”
Seb made his way down the hall to the candy dispenser. There were many options to choose from. Which would his Magpie most enjoy?

“Hmm.”

RING. RING.

The former colonel’s confectionery selection was interrupted by the din of his phone.

“Hello?”

“Mr. Moran? It’s Ian.”

“What can I do for you?”

“I wanted to ask you a question. It’s not work-related. This is a personal matter.”

“Okay, go ahead.” Sebastian was officially intrigued.

“Well, as I’m sure you’re aware, Jim hasn’t attended a MOPS meeting in a week. I’ve tried convincing him to come back and so have others. We haven’t had much luck, though. Bearing that in mind, I was wondering if you might be able to talk him into returning? We’re meeting tonight and it would be great if he showed up. A lot of us have missed him.”

“Really? That’s interesting, because I’ve gotten the distinct impression he misses being with the group, too.”

“Then it shouldn’t be difficult for you to persuade him. Lay out the facts and maybe he’ll realize that coming back is the best option.”

Seb sighed. “If you’re convening tonight, there may be a slight problem.”

“How’s that?”

“Jim’s in the hospital and they want to keep him here for a few days.”


“I’d rather not discuss the specifics while I’m standing in a public place, but let’s just say he had a high blood pressure episode.”

“Understood,” the young man stated. “I’m sorry he’s having health issues. Will he be all right?”

“Yes, but he’ll need to follow some fairly stringent guidelines. I suspect the next two months will be colorful, to put it mildly.”

Ian chuckled. “Yeah, I get the sense that Jim’s probably not the most cooperative of patients, even on a good day.”

“Very perceptive,” Moran replied. He paused for a moment, an idea swirling around in his head. “Is there a number I could call to get in touch with the MOPS organizer?”

“I’ve got Trevor’s contact information. Why?”

“I’m hatching a plan.”
Jim stared, his expression steely and unflinching. It was a fierce battle of wills. Staring, staring, staring.

Unfortunately, his opponent, a tepid bowl of peas, won out.

“Here goes nothing,” he announced, shoving a heaping spoonful of the tiny green orbs into his mouth. He wanted to gag, but forced himself to swallow it down.

Seb looked on supportively. “You’re a trooper, honey.”

“I have to be. This pitiful excuse of a side dish is supposedly ‘nutritious.’ Nutrition is essential to the babies. Therefore, it’s in their best interest that I suffer the horror and indignity of peas.”

The assassin stifled a laugh. Somehow, Moriarty could transform the simple act of eating vegetables into a dramatic event. It took talent to achieve that.

“Hey, Jimmy?”

“Yes?”

“Want to take a break? We could leave this room…walk around for a bit.”

The consulting criminal considered the proposal. It did get awfully boring being cooped up in bed all day. And he really hated those peas—the mere sight of them turned his stomach.

“Let’s do that,” he agreed, detaching the medical equipment from his body. The only device he left on was a portable blood pressure monitor. “Bring that damn wheelchair over here so I can ease into it.”

Sebastian complied, moving it closer. Jim got in without any trouble, a fact which pleased his mate.

“Nice to see you’re adept with the chair,” he remarked.

“I’m not manning a rocket ship. The learning curve isn’t especially steep.”

“Still, it’s good you’re not struggling.”

The irritable omega snorted. “Yeah, it’s fine and dandy. Now London’s most dangerous man can be seen rolling his way through the mean streets of England like someone’s gran.”

“Hey, don’t be so hard on yourself. You won’t have to use this thing forever,” Moran spoke as he pushed Jim out the door and into the hall.

“Thank god.”

“Why do you hate it so much?” Seb inquired. “I know it’s not ideal transportation, but surely it can’t be that bad.”

“Try it sometime and see how you like it.”

“I have tried it. Broke my leg once when I was in the army. They made me use a wheelchair for a few weeks while the fracture healed. It wasn’t that big a deal.”

“Well, pardon me for not possessing the resilience of a combat-trained soldier. I’m 7 months
pregnant with twins and constantly uncomfortable, but I can see how you’d think our situations were comparable.”

*Oh hell.* Jim’s disposition was rapidly taking a nosedive. He needed to show him his surprise ASAP and pray it was enough to improve his mood.

“My apologies, kitten. I didn’t mean to suggest a similarity. I know you’ve had a particularly rough time these past several months.”

“Rough? That’s an understatement if ever I’ve heard one. I’ve been put through the bloody wringer.”

Seb frowned. “I’m sorry things have gone so wrong this year. I always thought that if we had a child, it would be a joyful experience for us both; a period of our lives we’d look back on fondly. Instead, it’s been fraught with terror and illness.”

“Tiger,” the genius began, his tone softening, “it has been joyful. Just because there’ve been low points doesn’t mean there haven’t been high points as well. And what’s this about you thinking of us having a child? You never mentioned it to me.”

The sniper flushed, slightly embarrassed by his admission. “Long before you expressed a desire to have my baby, I imagined what it would be like if we did. All bonded alphas fantasize about that kind of thing.”

“In your mind’s eye, how did you picture it?”

“ Mostly, I envisioned taking care of you. I saw myself as being there every step of the way, from the first checkup to the delivery. And then I’d contemplate what might come after — the milestones and moments we’d share as a family.”

Jim suddenly grew quiet, leaving Moran to wonder if he’d erred in his disclosure.

“You okay, sweetheart? I hope my confession didn’t upset you.”

“No, I just… I’m a bit overwhelmed. What you imagined was so beautiful, Seb. I don’t think I could love you more if I tried.”

“Likewise, Magpie.”

Contented, they continued their evening stroll. But the assassin had a trick up his sleeve. This was no ordinary jaunt around the building. No, it was a purposeful trip.

Sebastian stopped when they reached a door labeled ‘Conference Room.’

“Is there a reason you’re not pushing me anymore, dear?”

“Yes, I’ve got a surprise for you.”

Jim’s face crinkled with curiosity. “Oh? Do go on.”

“Let’s take a peek behind this door, shall we?”

The couple entered the room, and to Moriarty’s amazement, everyone from his Male Omega Pregnancy Support group was there.

He looked at them, then turned to Seb, and back again. “How did you manage this?”
“I called the coordinator and we hammered out a plan to bring the meeting to you.”

“Tiger, that’s so sweet. I don’t even have the words to properly thank you.”

“Well, do you have the words to say ‘hello?’” a familiar voice asked. It was Jack, injecting himself into the conversation.

“For a fellow group member? Of course.” Jim wheeled himself closer to where the attendees were sitting. “How’ve you all been?”

“Not bad,” Scott answered. “Though we were concerned when we heard you were in the hospital.”

“Yeah,” another man agreed. “Are your babies okay?”

“My babies are perrrrfect,” he proudly proclaimed. “But I’ve got to take it easy. They’re worried about the possibility of premature labor if I don’t abide doctor’s orders.”

“Sorry to hear that,” someone else spoke. “Try to be careful.”

“I will,” the mastermind assured. “Anything for my little angels.”

To Moriarty’s surprise, he was soon approached by Simon, the person he’d clashed with at his last meeting.

“Hey, Jim? You may not be keen on seeing me, but I want to apologize for us getting off on the wrong foot.”

“Well, I might’ve behaved a teensy bit rashly that night myself,” he admitted. “I think we’re even. But for future reference, never tell me a depressing story when I’m looking to be cheered up. I guarantee it won’t end well.”

“Duly noted.”

Now that the Irishman was back in his element, Seb wasn’t sure what to do next. Return to Jim’s room, maybe? Grab some coffee in the cafeteria? Sit in the lobby and play games on the phone? He didn’t know.

Out of the blue, Trevor, the MOPS organizer, began waving Moran over to where he and the participants sat. It was a trifle eerie, as if he’d read the sniper’s mind.

“Care to hang out with us, Sebastian? Usually, I maintain a ‘no partners’ rule for our meetings, but this is a rather unique assembly we’re holding tonight. I don’t believe anyone here would object.”

“Uh, sure. I guess I could stick around if nobody has a problem with it.”

At that, the members expressed their enthusiasm to let Seb stay. It seemed the dashing alpha had fans among the flock.

“You heard them,” Trevor noted. “It’s safe to say they want you here.”

Jim flashed a devilish grin. “Come sit by me, darling. This is going to be fun.”

Chapter End Notes
This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Holiday Happenings

Chapter Summary

Jim and Seb decide what to get each other for Christmas.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

KNOCK. KNOCK.
Sebastian rapped on the bedroom door while balancing a tray of food on one hand. He knew Jim was awake—he could hear the television blaring down the hall as he approached.

Suddenly, the tv was turned off and a sing-song voice called out.

“Come in, Sebbbbby.”

He did, marching up to the Irishman and presenting him with breakfast.

Jim grinned. “What’s on the menu, soldier?”

“Strawberry stuffed french toast, scrambled eggs, and a new herbal tea blend. Bon appétit, sir.” He leaned down, stealing a kiss from his mate. It was meant to be a quick peck, but Jim grabbed him by the shirt collar and seized his mouth with sizzling abandon.

“Blimey,” Seb exclaimed. “If this is your reaction to french toast, I’ll start making it every day.”

“It’s my reaction to you, darling. Though I wouldn’t mind you preparing breakfast on a daily basis.”

“I already do.”

“Only some of the time,” the genius quipped. “I’m not an idiot. I can tell when you’ve really cooked versus when you’ve just brought me takeout and pretended it was homemade.”

Damn he’s good. It was as if the man had an all-seeing eye.

“In any case, I hope you enjoy today’s selection. I got it from a recipe I found on the internet.”

“If it tastes half as good as it looks, I’m sure I’ll love it.”
Moriarty dug in, sampling everything on his plate. “This is superb, my dear. You’ve outdone yourself.”

“Thanks, kitten. I aim to please.”

For the next few minutes, Jim continued to eat while the sniper did a bit of light housekeeping around the room. He wasn’t an especially tidy individual, but he had to pick up the slack now that his partner was mandated to stay off his feet.

“They briefly mentioned Marie on the news this morning,” the hungry omega said between bites.

“Oh? What’s the scoop?”

“Her death has been ruled a murder. It was staged to appear like a suicide, but her body showed signs of struggle.”

“Just as we thought,” Seb noted with a sigh. “Do they have any leads?”

“No word on that,” he answered. “I think we’ve both got a suspect or two in mind, though.”

The couple was quiet for a moment, mutually contemplating the situation.

Finally, Moran broke the silence. “I’d best get to headquarters. A criminal empire can’t run itself.”

“Quite right,” Jim agreed. “I have plans for today as well.”

“Magpie, we’ve discussed this— you mustn’t overexert yourself.”

The smaller man laughed. “Exert? Please. The only energy I’ll be expending is the negligible amount it takes to open and close my laptop. I’m going to do some online shopping.”

“Ah, I see. Looking for anything in particular?”

“Actually, yes. Christmas presents for the babies. We’ve got to have something to stick in those stockings,” he declared. “Also, the shelving unit in the playroom is far too bare. I want it filled to the brim with stuffed animals. I’m just not sure if I should have them arranged by color, size, or species.”

Sebastian arched a brow. “Color and size, I understand. But species? These are dolls we’re talking about here. I don’t think they have a genus classification.”

“Of course not, darling. Don’t be daft. What I’m referring to is the type of animal they are. Bear, bunny, puppy…the odd llama or giraffe. That sort of thing.”

“Okay, gotcha.” Now it made more sense.

“Tell me, Tiger…have you done any shopping yet this holiday season?” The mastermind flashed his spouse an endearing, wide-eyed expression. He was attempting to gain gift information in a none-too-subtle manner.

“Don’t give me that look,” Moran spoke.

“I beg your pardon? I know of no ‘looks.’ I’m simply asking my ruggedly handsome husband a question. Surely, there’s no harm in that.”

“I wasn’t born yesterday, Jim. I know you’re trying to pump me for details.”
Moriarty gasped in mock indignation. “Why, I never!”

“You’ll not get a word out of me regarding Christmas presents. This year, I intend to truly surprise you.” In holidays past, the consulting criminal had a way of figuring out his gifts ahead of time, be it through logic and deduction or, on occasion, good old-fashioned snooping. Either way, Seb was determined not to let that happen again this Yuletide.

Jim rolled his eyes. “Whatever. I’ll work it out. I always do.”

“Not this time.”

“I’m a genius, Seb. There’s no point in trying to hide things from me, but it’s adoooorable that you think you can.”

“We’ll see.”

“Yes, we will.”

“On that note, I’m heading off. Have fun shopping, and remember not to do anything too strenuous. Use your wheelchair, use the elevator, and just to be on the safe side, keep an eye on your meds.”

“Christ, when you talk to me like that, I feel as though I’m 90.”

“Hey, it could be worse.”

“I fail to see how.”

“You could be forced to wear one of those ‘Life Alert’ bracelets like the grannies in adverts who’ve fallen and can’t get up.”

Jim laughed heartily at the remark. “Touché.”

Before Sebastian left, he took one last glimpse of his mate. He hated walking away from him when he was in such a compromised state.

*What kind of alpha leaves his pregnant, semi-disabled omega home alone?* Yes, there was a guard posted outside, but what about in the house? Anything could happen.

Seb was incredibly conflicted. He wanted to be there to take care of him. At the same time, he had a criminal empire to oversee. Balancing the dual responsibilities was proving more difficult than he’d anticipated.

For now, he’d try to focus on the task at hand— traveling to headquarters. He’d have time to think later.

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“I don’t know what to get Jim for Christmas,” Moran confessed. He’d called Ian into his private office so that they could brainstorm potential gifts.

“I really want to surprise him,” the sniper continued, “but I haven’t the faintest idea what to buy. There’s the obvious stuff— designer clothes, cologne, chocolates, and the like. But those are all so predictable. I need to come up with something he’d never expect. Any suggestions?”

The young man hesitated, pondering the matter carefully. “Well, Jim is a man who already has
‘everything,’ correct?”

“Yes.”

“Then maybe, as a change of pace, you ought to consider giving him a gift that places its value on the immaterial.”

“Immaterial? How do you mean?”

“I mean something that ties into an abstract concept, like love, family, and togetherness.”

_Huh…that’s actually a good idea._ These days, the mastermind was wrapped up in all things relating to the twins. _He’d probably go nuts for a Christmas present linking back to them._

“Ian, what sort of item might reflect the essence of family?”

“Something symbolic, perhaps? Families bud and bloom…branch out through generations,” he said. “To people like me and Jim, the notion takes on a special meaning because we didn’t have much in the way of stability or connectivity growing up.”

_Bud, bloom, branch…I’ve got it!_ The youth’s choice of words gave Seb a wonderful idea.

“A tree,” the assassin announced.

“Pardon me?”

“I’ll buy Jim a tree. Have it planted in the yard, and dedicated to our expanding family. It will grow up alongside us.”

“That’s lovely, Mr. Moran. I think he’ll be touched by it.”

“You helped me figure it out. I appreciate that.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Seb nodded. “I know I pulled you away from your work to hold this impromptu meeting. Now that we’ve settled the gift situation, you’re free to go back to what you were doing.”

“Very well. If you need anything else, give me a holler and I’ll be right in.”

“Sounds good.”

Ian exited Moran’s office, returning to his desk. He pulled up the file he’d been working on, prepared to resume coding a new splash screen for the business website. All seemed well, until he was interrupted again, this time by the vibration of his mobile phone. He initially wanted to let it go to voicemail, but changed his mind in case it was something important.

“Hello?”

“Hiiiii, it’s Jim.”

“Hey, how’s it going?”

“Splendidly. I just went on a bit of a shopping spree. Spent a small fortune on toys for Essie and Eddie.”
“Really?”

“Oh, yes. It was quite thrilling, if I do say so myself. Did you know that Louis Vuitton and Gucci make branded teddy bears?” he asked excitedly. “I had no idea until today!”

“Life’s full of surprises.”

“It certainly is,” the genius agreed. “Speaking of surprises, that’s what I’m calling you about.”

“Ah, okay.”

“I want to give Seb an awesome Christmas present. I’ve already knitted him a sweater, which I’m sure he’ll adore, but I don’t feel it’s enough. He’s gone above and beyond for me this year, and I want to repay him with a grand gesture. I’m talking knock-your-socks-off amaaaaazing.”

“What will it be?”

“Wellllll…that’s the problem. I’ve got no clue. I should know, because I’m brilliant, yet somehow I don’t. It’s frustrating,” he complained. “But I thought that if we put our heads together, we could come up with the perfect prezzie.”

Ian was taken aback, astonished that both Seb and Jim would consult him regarding their gift-giving endeavors.

“Anything readily spring to mind?” Moriarty prodded.

“Hmm…you mentioned he’s done a lot for you this year. Would that be in relation to your pregnancy, or is the timing coincidental?”

“Sebby’s always done whatever I demanded of him. But yes, he’s been particularly attentive throughout the pregnancy. We’re growing into a real family and I almost can’t believe it. I never saw myself as the domestic type. Now, though, I find it strangely gratifying.”

“Maybe that’s your answer.”

“Huh? Care to be a little less vague?”

“Family,” he spoke. “You could focus on a gift that celebrates the family you’re building and the love that encompasses it.”

Jim was silent for a few seconds, considering the suggestion.

“Ian, that’s fabulous! I adore the idea,” he enthused. “In fact, I know exaaaaaactly what to do.”

“Go on. I’d like to hear it.”

“I don’t want to say what it is just yet. First, I need to make sure my plan is feasible. I dare not speak too soon.”

“All right. I hope everything pans out. Keep me posted.”

“Oh, I will. This is going to be spectacular.”

The two concluded their conversation, each having work to do. Ian needed to finish coding that splash screen, while Jim had to start putting his plans into motion. It was shaping up to be a productive day all around.
Maybe, just maybe, this holiday season would turn out well for everyone.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
‘Tis the Season to be Scheming

Chapter Summary

Jim shares a plan with Sebastian. Later, the consulting criminal ponders the future.

Chapter Notes

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Jim was ecstatic. He’d placed calls to all the proper people and it appeared his gift to Sebastian was really going to happen. He was absolutely beaming at the prospect.

“Look at you, grinning like the cat that ate the canary,” Seb commented as he entered the living room after a hard day’s work.

“I’m happy, darling, and why shouldn’t I be? I live in an exquisite home with my gorgeous husband, I’ll soon have two beautiful babies to care for, and topping things off, it’s Christmastime.”

“Well, I’m just glad you’re focusing on the positives,” Seb said, sitting down beside the mastermind. “I’ve seen you get hung-up on the darker aspects of life all too often. It’s nice to witness you embracing the good as well.”

Jim paused, contemplating Moran’s statement. “It is strange, isn’t it?” he mused. “I’ve always had this ugly, empty thing inside me. A proverbial ‘hole’ in my black heart. But lately, it doesn’t feel so bad. It’s as if the void is being filled by something…by hope and excitement, maybe. And love. Love for our family.”

The sniper’s smile now matched his spouse’s. “That’s wonderful, honey.” He reached out to gently stroke the smaller man’s hand.

“You don’t think it’s a bit corny or clichéd?”

“Never.”

The couple gazed adoringly at each other, swept up in the depths of their mutual affection. It was quiet moments like these when they truly knew they were soulmates, bound together by more than a marriage license and shared assets. Theirs was a love that could not be quantified in ordinary terms, nor explained to those on the outside looking in. It simply existed, and always would, no matter the time or place.
“Sebby?”

“Yes, dear?”

“I want to do something special for the holiday.”

“Like what?”

“Throw a party.”

Seb’s jubilant expression dropped. “A party, huh?”

“Yes. You don’t seem too enthusiastic about it, though.”

“Consider our current track record. The last two parties we held were for my birthday and your baby shower, respectively. Neither went off without a hitch, and both led to some serious repercussions. You really want to chance a third?”

“Actually, there’s a method to my madness.”

“Then by all means, explain.”

“I’d like to hold an employee-only Christmas party here at the house as a way to smoke out Annie.”

“I’m afraid I don’t follow. How would hosting such an event expose her? She’d never admit to having an agenda.”

The consulting criminal flashed a devilish smirk. “Oh, she will if we dose her, darling.”

Seb arched a brow, intrigued. “With what?”

“Sodium pentothal, duh. Must I spell everything out for you?”

“Truth serum?”

“That’s the ‘Hollywood’ name for it, yes. I prefer the scientific term.”

“Interesting proposition, kitten. We haven’t gone down the pharmaceutical route in ages.”

“It would be fitting after the way she tampered with my medication. I’m almost certain it was her,” he asserted. “Let’s see how much she enjoys being administered a drug she didn’t consent to take.”

“Poetic justice,” the assassin remarked.

“Precisely.”

“If we were to do this, who’d be in charge of the interrogation?”

“You and me, of course. Who else would I entrust?”

“Right.” Seb wasn’t particularly keen on the idea of Jim participating.

“Why are you scowling? This will work. I’m just sorry I didn’t think of it sooner.”

“You shouldn’t be involved in the debriefing. It’s too dangerous.”
“Too dangerous?” the genius scoffed. “Hardly. She’s one woman, not a militia. I can handle her.”

“You could get hurt. Even with me there to guard you, she might try to lash out. We can’t risk the babies’ safety.”

When Moran put the situation into perspective, it was difficult for Jim to argue the point. But he wanted to be there for the proceedings, goddammit. This was unfair.

“I deserve to play a role in revealing the truth,” he declared. “She’s working for the man who kidnapped me, Sebastian. I was put through nine days of hell. Shackled, starved, and left to rot in a fucking basement. Not knowing if I’d ever see you again or if our children would survive the ordeal. I was terrified they’d die inside me, and then I’d die, too, from the heartbreak. So don’t you dare tell me I can’t be involved. I’m owed this.”

The sniper was silent for a moment, processing his husband’s plea. Clearly, this meant a lot to him.

“Okay, Jimmy. You’ve got a right to participate, and I won’t begrudge it. But please, let me protect you…all three of you,” he stressed, placing a hand on his mate’s belly. “If, god forbid, something goes wrong, I need you to promise that you’ll make yourself scarce and allow me to deal with it. You’ll do as I say if the situation demands it.”

Moriarty nodded. “Fine, I promise. I’m not unreasonable, Seb. All I want is to take Annie and Colin down.”

“As do I.”

“It’s settled, then. We’ll throw a party, lure the bitch away from the crowd, dose her, and interrogate. Not sure how long we should keep her alive beyond that point. I suppose it depends on how useful her information is. We may require supplemental details later on.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Once they’d reached an agreement, Jim moved to stand up. He immediately grimaced in pain.

Sebastian was quick to come to his aid, letting the Irishman lean against him for support. “What’s the matter, sweetheart?”

“My back is killing me and my body feels so heavy,” he complained. “I’m a whale, Tiger. An enormous, waddling whale who can barely lumber from one room to the next without gasping for breath.”

“Maybe we ought to talk to your doctor about putting you on oxygen,” the assassin suggested.

“God, no. I’m enough of an invalid as it is. I don’t need to be hooked up to any more tubes or devices, thank you very much.”

“It was a fleeting thought. Consider it forgotten.”

Moriarty didn’t reply. Instead, he maneuvered into his wheelchair and began rolling towards the bathroom.

“Can I help with anything?” Seb asked.

“Possibly. I could use a soak. Care to draw Shamu a bath? Fair warning— I’ve got one hell of a splash zone.”
“Magpie, don’t be cruel to yourself. You’re not fat, just pregnant.”

“Refer to it however you want. I still look like a blimp.”

“Would it shock you to hear that I find it kind of sexy? As an alpha, a part of me is pleased to see you bearing my cubs.”

“Honey, I stopped being surprised by your predilections a looooong time ago. You could tell me you’re turned on by one-legged albino midgets and I wouldn’t bat an eye.”

Moran chuckled. “I don’t believe my tastes go quite that far, but it’s good to know you keep an open mind.”

The former colonel and his partner entered the bathroom together. Seb was intent on drawing the best damn bubble bath Jim had ever dipped a toe in. And perhaps he would offer his patented back-scrubbing skills, too.

*********

A few days passed and things were running smoothly, both at headquarters and at home. The consulting criminal was focusing most of his energy on the Christmas party he’d decided to throw, forwarding invitations office-wide and making arrangements with a caterer. Festive decorations were already up, so he needn’t worry about the aesthetics. As for music, holiday tunes could easily be piped in through the home stereo system.

Satisfied he’d done enough planning for one day, Jim checked his watch. He was a bit disappointed to find that it would be another hour until Seb came home. He hated to seem clingy, but he really did miss his mate.

Stupid omega hormones. Turning me into a pitiful, codependent creature.

“Ooh!” he blurted out. “Big kick.” One of the babies had abruptly made their presence known.

The mastermind rubbed his stomach and smiled, feeling significant movement from within. “I’m sure it’s getting to be cramped quarters in there, my darlings. But rest assured— it won’t be much longer until you’re out here, in Daddy’s arms.”

Sometimes it was hard to believe that the twins were due in a mere two months. It seemed like just yesterday he was at Dr. Swenson’s office having his first sonogram done. Now they were almost ready to be born. The reality of it both thrilled and terrified him.

Jim couldn’t wait to meet his children. There were so many things he wanted to teach them. So many places he would take them and sights he would show them. They’d be the most doted upon babies in the world, forever loved and protected by London’s fiercest duo.

Despite this, an untold horror lay beneath the surface. Jim was utterly petrified of giving birth. It was a fear he’d kept well hidden, yet it burned with the fury of matches lit amid kerosene.

The Irishman was no fool. He knew the statistics were in his favor and Cesarean sections were routine. His apprehension was 100% irrational. Cognizance, though, did not make the anxiety cease. It lingered, casting dread on what should be a joyous event.

He wheeled himself into his office and opened the desk drawer that no longer locked thanks to Sebastian’s handiwork. After a short bit of sifting, Jim found the document he was looking for. It’d been some time since he’d gone over its contents and an update was in order.
Taking a deep breath, he stared at the ominously titled paperwork. It was the “Last Will & Testament of James Declan Moriarty.”

To Be Continued...

Chapter End Notes

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The front door creaked open as Sebastian entered the sprawling residence he and Jim shared. Looking around, he didn’t immediately see his spouse.

“Hello?” the sniper called out. “I’m home early, sweetheart. I thought maybe we could have a date night, if you’re feeling up to it.”

He received no response.

“Jimmy?”

Still nothing.

_Hmm._

Seb ventured down the hall, on a mission to locate the mastermind.

He checked Moriarty’s office, knowing that the man often spent a good deal of time there. Unfortunately, it was empty. He was about to leave the room when something caught his attention. On Jim’s desk laid a document labeled ‘Last Will & Testament.’

Curious, he reached for the paperwork and began paging through it. The title didn’t lie— this was definitely a written account of his mate’s final wishes.

Panic set in. _When did Jim have a will drawn up? Why is he going over it now? Is something wrong and he hasn’t told me? If so, what does that mean for the babies? He’d have disclosed if his health was in crisis, right?_

Moran’s worry was rapidly spiraling out of control. His breathing grew heavy as he imagined the worst possible scenario. Ordinarily, he prided himself on keeping a cool head, but this had taken him off guard.

“Tiger?” a voice uttered from behind. Jim was perched in the doorway. “I didn’t hear you come in.” He wheeled towards his desk, locking eyes with the frantic alpha.
“Why do you have a will?” Sebastian demanded. “And why is it sitting out in the open? Did you want me to find it?”

“No, I didn’t mean to leave it unattended. I was reviewing my will to see what needed to be updated in light of the twins’ impending birth. Funnily enough, they seemed to think that was their cue to punch me in the bladder. So I had to take a bathroom break.”

“Answer my original question. Why do you have a will in the first place?”

“Because I’ve got a huge amount of assets to manage,” he stated. “It’s smart to provide formal instructions on how I want them distributed and dealt with upon my demise.”

“Don’t use that word! I suffered through your passing once. I won’t do it again.”

“Tiger, hush. You’re acting like you didn’t know I had a will and testament. Surely you saw it when you broke into my drawer all those months ago?”

Seb was quiet for a moment. He had indeed breached Jim’s private drawer when the Irishman went missing. However, he didn’t recall uncovering this particular document.

“I didn’t see it, no. But I drank a lot while you were gone,” the assassin admitted. “It’s possible I may have overlooked it in an inebriated haze.” He paused, thinking about what his husband had said regarding an update to the will. “You mentioned you were planning to include the babies in your…wishes?”

Jim nodded. “Yes, Essie and Eddie are my heirs. Should anything happen to me, I want to ensure that you and our children will be well taken care of.”

“You think something’s going to ‘happen’ to you?” Moran shakily inquired.

“I certainly hope not, but with the myriad of medical issues I’ve experienced, one never knows.”

“Please don’t talk like that, Magpie. It’s important to stay positive. Whatever ensues, you’ll recover.”

“I’d like to believe that’s true, but frankly…” he trailed off, his anxiety rising.

“But what?”

“Nothing,” the genius replied. “Never mind.”

“No, tell me.”

“Leave it alone, Seb. I said it was nothing and I meant it.”

“I refuse to let you shut me out. Your concerns are my concerns. We’re in this together. So just spit it out, for fuck’s sake.”

The consulting criminal sneered. “Fine. You want me to finish that sentence? I will,” he spat. “I’d like to believe I’ll recover from any issue that comes my way, but I’m terrified I won’t make it through delivery. The closer I get to my due date, the more scared I become.” Even now, a chill ran down his spine as he thought of it. “Are you satisfied? Delighted to have gotten a confession out of your cowardly omega?”

“Jimmy, stop! Do not put words in my mouth. I wanted to learn what was troubling you so that I could help. I love you, dammit. And for the record, you couldn’t be cowardly if you tried. It’s an
impossibility.”

Moriarty fell silent, his anger and bravado fading in the shadow of his partner’s earnestness.

“There’s no shame in being afraid of a procedure you’ve never undergone before,” Seb continued. “Surgery can be scary. I get that. When I had my tonsils taken out, I cried like a baby.”

“How old were you then?”

“Seven.”

“See? You were a child, it’s natural you’d be afraid. But me…I’m a grown man. I’ve got no excuse.”

“Excuses aren’t necessary. You have a right to your feelings at any age, fear included.”

“No,” he objected. “The most dangerous man in London isn’t granted that luxury. I have to be impervious without exception. Doubly so, when the fear in question is wholly irrational.”

“So you understand, then, that C-sections are actually quite safe? And considering how experienced your doctor is, the risk of complications is low.”

“Of course I understand,” Jim bleated. “That’s what makes it irrational. I know the facts on an intellectual level, yet I’m still plagued by dread.”

The sniper contemplated his husband’s predicament. “Maybe if we discuss the problem, it will seem less scary,” he suggested. “What is it about the delivery process that frightens you most?”

“All of it. Being cut open. Losing too much blood. Struggling to maintain steady vitals. There are a million different things that could go wrong.”

“Fair point, but the same might be said of day-to-day living. You could step outside and be struck by lightning. It’s highly unlikely, but the slim possibility is there. The key is not to let such remote ‘what ifs’ control you.”

The consulting criminal sighed in frustration. “Struck by lightning? That’s a ridiculous example that only occurs in cartoons. But death during childbirth…it’s real, Seb. And not just in underdeveloped countries. I’m talking right here in Great Britain.”

Moran gazed at his mate, clues clicking together in his head. “Magpie, this is starting to sound personal. Forgive me if I’m off base, but did you know someone who died that way?”

Jim hesitated, the look on his face confirming Seb’s suspicion. “It’s…I…yes,” he stammered. “Who was it, honey?” the sniper asked softly. He sat down as well, so that the two of them were at eye level.

“Sarah Milford,” he whispered. “Or ‘Mrs. Milford,’ and later, ‘mum.’”

Sebastian furrowed a brow in confusion. “What?”

“You know how I grew up in foster care.”

“Yes, kitten, I do.”

“Well, I lived with the Milfords for almost a full year. It was the longest I ever stayed with a
family. I took a shine to them and they liked me, too. In fact, they wanted to adopt me,” Moriarty revealed. “I was so happy, Seb. Truly over the moon about it. And then, to everyone’s surprise, Mrs. Milford got pregnant. Nobody thought she could have kids because of endometriosis, so this was something of a miracle.”

Seb nodded, listening with rapt attention.

“At first, I was worried that if she had a new baby, she wouldn’t want me. But she swore it made no difference—she’d raise us both. I believed her, and I was thrilled to be getting an entire family at once. I’d have a mum and dad, grandparents, and a sibling. It was a dream come true.”

“That sounds lovely. What happened?”

“She…she went…” Jim struggled to keep composure, barely holding back the barrage of sadness that so desperately yearned for release. “She went into premature labor and began hemorrhaging,” he grimly informed. “They gave her a transfusion, but it wasn’t enough. In the end, she bled to death.”

At that, the Irishman could take no more. Tears flowed freely down his pale cheeks and his breathing hitched. “The baby died, too,” he said between sobs. “It turned out to be a girl. I would’ve had a sister.”

Sebastian leaned over, embracing his distraught omega in a hug. “I’m so sorry, Jimmy. That’s awful.”

“There’s more,” he warned. “Mr. Milford couldn’t handle what happened. He had a breakdown and…” Moriarty shuddered, long-buried memories flooding his mind at a brutal pace. “He said he couldn’t take care of me, and he brought me back to the orphanage. I lost everything all at once. No more family, no more dreams.”

“Jesus Christ,” the sniper muttered in disgust. How could someone do that to a child? Seb understood the potency of grief, but for a man to have made the promise of becoming one’s father, only to rescind the offer…that was beyond fucked up.

“I refused to let anyone see how upset I was, but whenever I was alone, the waterworks wouldn’t stop. I cried about it for months,” he confessed. “I never wanted to feel that way again. From that point on, I decided no one would ever get to me.”

“Oh, Magpie. I wish I had the power to undo everything you’ve been through. You deserve so much better than what life’s given you.”

“Thank you, Tiger.” He begrudgingly pulled himself from Seb’s arms so that he could look into the man’s eyes. “Now you know why I’m so worried about delivering the twins. I don’t want to leave them…or you, for that matter.”

“Believe me, I won’t let you leave us. I’m going to be right there by your side when our children are born. We’re doing this together,” the former colonel reassured. “If you get scared, you can just squeeze my hand.”

“That’s a fine idea in theory, but I’m afraid I’d wind up shattering some bones. Wouldn’t be wise to damage your assets.”

“You’ve got a decent grip, darling, but I doubt you’d break anything.”

“Hey,” the genius protested, “I’m plenty strong.”
“For an omega, maybe,” Sebastian teased.

Jim swatted his spouse on the shoulder. “Cheeky bastard.”

“Yes, I am,” he said with a grin. “But remember, I’m your cheeky bastard.”

“That’s right. Mine.”

“Always, kitten. Always yours.”

Moriarty’s gaze grew intense. Soon, his lips found their way to Moran’s own— they were warm, supple, and full of want. He needed this. Needed the passion and affirmation. Needed the confidence and love. With his alpha’s support, he could conquer anything.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Chapter Summary

Jim helps Ian through a difficult situation.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains references to domestic violence.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jim was worried. It was almost time for the midway break at his MOPS meeting and Ian still hadn’t shown up. It wasn’t like him to miss a session. If he didn’t arrive soon, the consulting criminal would send out a text message.

As if the universe had decided to answer Moriarty directly, Ian walked into the room. The young man appeared slightly disheveled and wore sunglasses— strange, considering it was after dark.

“Look who the cat dragged in,” Jack quipped. “Fashionably late this evening, aye?”

“I got busy,” he tersely replied. His voice sounded wearier than usual, and perhaps a bit on edge.

“Cool specs,” another attendee said. “But why are you wearing them indoors and at night?”

“I’ve got a migraine. The lights make it worse.”

“My mother used to get terrible migraines,” Scott noted, injecting himself into the conversation. “Sometimes they were so bad, she’d stay in bed all day, heaving into a bucket.”

“What a coincidence,” Jack spoke. “My mum spent most days the same way, only it wasn’t on account of a medical condition— she was just hungover.”

“You know, I can never tell when you’re kidding and when you’re being serious,” Simon, the newest group member, commented.

“That’s my life’s goal. Always keep people guessing.”

Finally, the MOPS coordinator addressed Ian. “It’s wonderful to see you here. I hope you feel better soon.”
“Thanks.”

“I think this is an ideal point to stop and hold our intermission,” he announced. “As a special treat, I’ve brought chocolate cheesecake for us to enjoy. And in case anyone is lactose intolerant, there’s also Dutch apple pie.”

The group began to disperse, with many heading straight for the dessert table. Jim, however, opted to wheel on over to his employee.

“Hellooooo,” he greeted.

“Hey.”

“You don’t seem too upbeat tonight.”

“I’ve got a lot on my mind.”

“I bet you do. Like trying to figure out how to best hide the truth from everyone.”

“Huh?”

“You’re good at reading body language,” Jim remarked, “but so am I. And noooobody beats me at my own game.”

“I’m not sure I understand what you mean.”

“Oh, I think you do. That little spiel about having a migraine was bollocks. You’re not wearing those shades because of a headache,” he asserted. “No, you’re hiding something.”

Ian was silent, unable to deny the accusation.

“What’s going on?” Moriarty pressed.

“I’m not at liberty to say.”

“Not at liberty to say?” he repeated mockingly. “Are you suddenly 007, dealing in classified information?”

“It’s complicated.”

“Actually, I’d wager it’s pretty simple.” He leaned over and pulled the sunglasses off the teen’s face. Just as Jim suspected, he’d been concealing a black eye.

“Give those back!” Ian demanded, wrenching them from his boss’ hand and putting them back on. “God, I hope no one saw that.”

“Don’t worry, they’re too distracted by cheesecake to be looking at us.” And really, the genius wasn’t being facetious— about a half dozen pregnant omegas were swarming to get a piece. “So,” he said, turning his attention back to the battered youth, “are you going to tell me who did that to you, or shall we continue to drag out the charade?”

“I can’t talk about it here. I won’t risk someone overhearing us.”

“Well, I’d suggest we take a walk and discuss it, but I’ve been strongly advised to stay off my feet.”
“Hmm,” the younger man paused, contemplating the situation. “How about I do the walking and push you along?”

“Works for me.”

The two exited the meeting room and began down the hall at a leisurely pace. Once they were far enough away from prying ears, Ian attempted to open a line of dialogue with the mastermind.

“So…I don’t know where to start.”

“From the beginning is generally a good place.”

“That would open up a massive can of worms. I think I’ll just stick with describing what happened tonight.”

“All right, let’s hear it.”

Ian took a deep breath, steeling himself for the inevitable. “There’s no nice way to put this, so I won’t bother sugarcoating it,” he stated. “My baby’s father showed up at my flat and we had a confrontation. It seems he heard from a mutual acquaintance that I was pregnant, and he wanted to see if the rumor was true.”

“Oh dear.”

“Yeah. I was completely unprepared to deal with him, but I had no choice. When I refused to allow him inside, he shoved his way in and clocked me clean across the face. I threatened to call the cops, and that finally got him to leave. But he warned me he’d be back.”


“I agree. I lied and told him it wasn’t his baby, but I don’t think he believed me. Now I’m worried about what will happen when he returns.”

“Obviously, it’s no longer safe for you and your unborn child to live in that apartment. You need to vacate the premises immediately.”

“I’d like to, but where would I go? I don’t have enough money saved up yet to rent a better space, and all my belongings are at the flat. Granted, I don’t own much of material value, but I’ve got some sentimental items I’d prefer not to lose.”

There was a brief silence as Jim pondered an idea. “I keep several properties throughout London. You can stay at one of them.”

“Jim…are you serious? That’s a hell of a gesture.”

He shrugged. “It’s nothing. Consider it an early Christmas present.”

“When could I start moving in?”

“Tomorrow, if you want. I’ll make the arrangements and have someone send for your things.”

“You’re willing to transport my stuff to the new place? Really?” Ian was astonished by the consulting criminal’s generosity.

“Yes, really,” he assured. “I suppose I can’t send you back to your current flat this evening, either.”
Not with the risk of your ex turning up to harass you. Why don’t you come home with me and Seb after the meeting? It’s been ages since we’ve had an overnight guest.”

The young man was truly flabbergasted. “This is the nicest thing anyone’s ever done for me. How can I repay you?”

“Live happily,” he replied. “Have a healthy baby. Raise him or her with the love we never got growing up in foster care.”

“I intend to.”

“Good. Now I need to run this past my husband as a formality, and we’ll be set.”

“Do you think he’d say no?”

Moriarty chuckled darkly at the notion. “Say no to me? Never. And even if he did, it wouldn’t make a difference. I do what I want, when I want, and he knows it.”

The teen smiled. “You’re quite sassy, Jim. I admire that. Not all omegas are so bold.”

“What can I say? They broke the mold when they made me.”

Eventually, the pair reached the foyer where Sebastian sat waiting for his mate. He shut the book he was reading as he saw them approach.

“Midway break?” the sniper asked.

“Yep. And just so you’re aware, Ian’s sleeping over tonight. Then tomorrow, I’m having him moved into one of my unused apartments.”

“Oh? What’s wrong with his current place?”

“He had a run-in with some… vermin. It’s not safe there.”

Seb nodded, catching Jim’s meaning. “Understood, darling.”

“Splendid. Glad we’re all on the same page.”

“Wait,” their young employee interjected. “I’ll require a toothbrush, deodorant, soap— those kinds of things.”

“I’ve got plenty of extra toiletries you can use.”

“Are you sure?”

“It’s true,” the assassin attested. “He keeps the guest rooms stocked like a bloody hotel. If we ever decide to switch careers, I think the hospitality industry would be a perfect fit. We could just rename the estate ‘Moriarty-Moran Manor’ and open it to the public as a bed and breakfast. We’ve already got the accoutrements for it.”

“Hush. It’s not that bad.”

“Honey, I’ve seen you put complimentary mints on the pillows. It is that bad,” he teased.

Ian laughed. “I like being around you guys. You’re very sweet to each other.”
“Thanks,” Seb spoke. People often assumed he and Jim were little more than debauched maniacs. Perhaps sometimes that was true, but they were also loving and affectionate; playful and endearing. There were many sides to their relationship, and it was nice to have someone recognize that.

The genius checked his watch. “We ought to head back. I want a piece of cheesecake before the rest of the group has devoured it.”

“Howe too,” Ian concurred. “I think I saw Jack sneaking off with two slices as we walked out the door.”

“Then we must make haste. Times like these, I wish I had a motorized chair.”

The omegas ventured back to their meeting room, leaving Sebastian behind.

Meanwhile, it took every ounce of fortitude the sniper had to suppress his laughter at the mental image of Jim riding a power chair. Maybe, just maybe, Santa would include one under the tree this Christmas.

To Be Continued...

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed – Part 2

Chapter Summary

Jim and Ian have a revealing conversation.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains references to domestic/sexual violence. Absolutely nothing graphic, but I thought I should note it anyway.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So000, what do you think of the place?” Jim eagerly awaited a response from Ian after having just given him a grand tour of his house. They concluded the showing in the guest bedroom where the young man would be staying.

“You have a truly beautiful home. At the baby shower, I only got to see downstairs. Now, looking at the rest, I’m in awe,” he declared. “The nursery was particularly stunning.”

The mastermind smiled. “Thank you. A lot of effort went into planning and decorating the twins’ quarters. I wanted it to be absolutely perfect.”

“You’ve more than succeeded. I hope I can give my little one a nursery that’s even half as nice.”

“Well good news— you can afford to, now that you’re working for me.”

“Yes, I suppose that’s true.” He paused, walking over to a series of framed pictures on the dresser. They were of Jim and Sebastian. “I noticed you guys keep photos of yourselves in every room.”

“I keep photos of us in every room,” the genius clarified. “Seb thinks it’s a bit much, but I like seeing us together no matter where I am in the house. These days, I find it increasingly comforting,” he admitted.

“I’m sure it is,” Ian said, a twinge of sadness creeping into his voice. “Comforting, I mean.”

“Yeah.”

Moriarty observed that the youth was depressed, and it didn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out why. During pregnancy, an omega had certain urges and instincts that could only be fulfilled by their alpha. Contrary to popular misconception, such needs were not of an expressly sexual nature.
Rather, they were based on an innate yearning for domesticity and protection.

In the old days, a mateless expectant omega was someone to be pitied—a cautionary figure accompanied by the unspoken caption, ‘Don’t let this happen to you.’ Things were different in modern times, but even so, it was rarely an ideal situation.

“You and your husband are lucky to have each other,” Ian stated. “It seems like he treats you well.”

“Sebby’s the best. I’ve often wondered how the universe saw fit to give me a man as amazing as him. He’s the light of my life, but don’t tell him I said that or I’ll never hear the end of it.”

“My lips are sealed.”

“Good.”

Jim was quiet for a few seconds, his face growing animated as a thought occurred to him. “I’ve got a fabulous idea. I’ll have Seb prepare us hot chocolate, and then we can chat in front of the fireplace. Oh, it will be delightfully cozy,” he enthused. “I’ll fill you in on what I’m getting that gorgeous beast for Christmas.”

Ian chuckled at the consulting criminal’s choice of words. “Sounds like a plan.”

Without further ado, Jim led the way to the elevator.

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“Two hot cocoas served just as you requested, darling.” Sebastian carried both mugs on a silver platter, setting the tray down in front of Moriarty and his guest.

“Wow, this looks decadent,” Ian marveled. The piping beverage featured whipped cream, chocolate shavings, and as an added treat, a peppermint candy cane.

“I know what my Magpie likes,” the sniper remarked.

“Ooh, honey, you sure do. Get those lips down here and kiss me.”

Moran did as commanded, bending to meet his partner’s mouth. He wanted to savor the act for all it was worth. Deepen it, prolong it, lose himself in the moment completely.

But…they had a visitor in their midst, one who also happened to be an employee. Grr.

Seb pulled away. “If either of you need anything, send me a text. I’ll be in the armory, cleaning my guns.”

The two watched on as the sexy assassin exited the room. His jeans clung to the curve of his buttocks in a spectacular fashion, leaving little to the imagination. It was enough to make any red-blooded omega swoon.

Ian sighed wistfully. “Damn.”

“My sentiments exactly.”

A brief silence fell over the pair as they sipped their hot cocoa and basked in the warm glow of the hearth. The younger man wanted to say something, but was beset by nervousness. Finally, he mustered the courage to speak.
“I’m surprised your mate didn’t ask about my black eye.” Ian had removed his sunglasses shortly after they arrived at the house. He assumed there would be questions once Seb saw the nasty bruise.

“I warned him of your injury while you were in the bathroom earlier. I didn’t want him to see it without a heads-up,” the mastermind explained. “He tends to get upset over violence against omegas, and rightly so. It makes me angry, too.”

Boy, was that an understatement. Jim fully intended to get the name of the man who’d accosted his protégé. He would enjoy ordering Seb to beat the hell out of him.

“I’m sorry,” the youth shyly muttered. “I didn’t mean to drag you into this mess. I’d hoped never to see Luke again.”

Luke. Now he had a first name. It was a start.

“You’ve got nothing to be sorry for,” Moriarty replied. “He had no right to do what he did. It’s inexcusable.”

“He’s had no right to do a lot of things, but that hasn’t stopped him so far.”

The genius frowned. “I gather this isn’t the first time he’s harmed you?”

Ian averted his gaze downward, reluctant to make eye contact. “You’re right…he’s hurt me before.”

“Fucking wanker.” Jim hated alphas who acted like it was still the dark ages, thinking they could get away with treating an omega however they pleased. This was an enlightened era, for fuck’s sake.

“He absolutely is. You’ll get no argument from me.”

“At least you had the sense to realize it was a bad situation. When I was in foster care, I saw a lot of people in terrible relationships who refused to admit the truth.”

“I did too,” the younger man lamented. “I’m not sure I can accept much credit in this case, though. What Luke and I had wasn’t exactly a relationship.”

“No?”

He shook his head. “I didn’t correct you when you referred to him as my ‘ex,’ but honestly, I would never call him my boyfriend.”

“Excuse me if I’m being intrusive, but what was he to you, then?” The consulting criminal was genuinely curious. Ian didn’t seem like the type to enter into a fuck buddy arrangement— he was far too timid for that.

“We went on a total of three dates. The first was a quick meetup for coffee, the second was a trip to the bowling alley, and the third…well, I’d really rather not discuss how that one went. Let’s just say I won’t make the mistake of inviting a man I barely know up to my apartment again.”

Jim’s expression darkened at the boy’s tacit admission. This was worse than he’d imagined. No wonder Ian reacted so negatively when someone in their MOPS group had inquired about his baby’s father.
“I apologize for burdening you with this. I don’t usually open up about these sorts of things. I guess I feel like I can trust you.”

In a flash, Jim was taken aback. How long had it been since someone spoke those words to him? He was James Moriarty, criminal extraordinaire. People didn’t trust him—not if they were smart. Yet somehow, hearing the statement come from Ian, he was surprisingly touched.

“Thank you, I’m glad to hear it.”

“I should be the one giving thanks. You’ve been nothing but kind to me from the get-go. I’m not used to that.”

“And I’m not used to being this nice to another person. Besides Seb, that is.”

“This is new territory for us both.”

“Indeed.”

He contemplated if he should press the teen for more information regarding Luke. He seriously wanted to go after the bastard. Maybe he could get away with posing one more question…

“Hey, Ian?”

“Yes?”

“Where did you and your baby’s father meet? Was it at work or school? Or someplace else altogether?”

“It was a pub near campus,” he answered. “Luke tends bar at The Golden Anchor.”

Bingo. The mastermind had a name and a location of employment. He could officially send Seb out to fuck him up.

“Jim, can we talk about something else?”

“Of course.”

“Tell me what you’re getting your husband for Christmas,” he insisted. “I’m all ears.”

Moriarty grinned. “Wellllll…earlier this year I managed to track down Sebastian’s estranged brother, Severin. This was a significant gesture because Sev was thought to be his only living relative. Turns out, his sibling has a wife and child, so there’s been a slight addition to the family.”

“That’s wonderful,” Ian excitedly remarked.

“Yes, it is. Unfortunately, they’re way down in Australia.”

“Ooh, Australia. I’ve always wanted to go there.”

“It’s a fun place, but the 22-hour flights back and forth are beyond booooor.”

“Wow, that’s long.”

“Excruciatingly so,” the Irishman quipped. “I digress. This Christmas, I’m flying the three of them to London and they’ll be staying with us for an entire week. Isn’t that fantastic? I can’t wait to see the look on Seb’s face when they arrive at our doorstep.”
“I love it, Jim. When I suggested you give him a gift that revolved around family, I didn’t expect this. It’s brilliant.”

“I know, and it’s been hell having to keep it a secret. Just telling you now is something of a relief.” He paused, his mind already abuzz with a new preoccupation. “What do you suppose he’s getting me?”

It was time for Ian to put on his best poker face. He dare not spoil Sebastian’s arboreal surprise.

“Hmm, that’s a tough one.”

“Has he dropped any hints? Maybe mentioned stopping at a particular store, or received branded packaging in the office mail?

“No that I can recall, sorry.”

The consulting criminal eyeballed his guest. “You wouldn’t be fibbing to me, would you?”

“Never,” he nervously avowed.

But Moriarty could see through the guise. Ordinarily, he despised being lied to. People had died for committing that very offense. This, however, was a special circumstance. It was possible Sebastian had sworn him to secrecy.

“Has my darling other half gotten to you, Ian? He can be incredibly persuasive. All those taut muscles and the deep blue eyes. That sexy grin and strawberry blonde hair. He could convince a person to do anything—including keep secrets.”

“I…well…what?”

Jim sported a wicked smirk. “I suspect Sebby’s conferred with you about my gift. You know what it is, but don’t want to give the truth away. Am I right?” he asked the anxious young omega.

Ian’s face showed deep confliction. Both Jim and Sebastian were his bosses. But the genius was his friend, too. He didn’t want to break either of their confidences. This was maddening. What should he do? What—

“Relaaaaaax,” Moriarty said. “I’m just teasing.”

“Oh, thank god.”

The mastermind chuckled. “Every year, I figure out what Seb’s getting me for Christmas. This season he’s brought a third party into the mix—you. It’s a means of upping the ante, perhaps,” Jim mused. “He probably thinks he’s being clever, but he forgot one salient point.”

“Which is?”

“That I relish a challenge. He wants to make it harder for me to guess what it is, but his efforts only add fuel my fire. This is a game of deduction and I play to win.”

“You approach things from an interesting perspective,” Ian noted. “It’s inspiring.”

“I do pride myself on thinking outside the box.”

At that, Jim stared down into his mug. “I could use more cocoa,” he declared. “How about you?”
“I wouldn’t say no to a refill.”

“It’s settled, then.”

The consulting criminal grabbed his phone and began composing a text.

**JM**

*Need more hot chocolate, ASAP.*

Jim paused, surreptitiously glancing at the nearby teen.

*P.S. – Also need to talk to you about Ian. Have details on his ‘vermin.’ Will be sending you out to deal with the problem soon.*

**SM**

*Okay.*

Seb slipped his mobile device back into his pocket as he prepared to fetch more warm refreshments for Jim. On his way to the kitchen, he couldn’t help but ponder the ominous postscript he’d received. Something was afoot and it didn’t sound good.

Chapter End Notes

Expect some fierce Seb action in the next chapter.
A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed – Part 3

Chapter Summary

Sebastian is sent on a challenging assignment.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains graphic violence, sexual content, and mention of rape. Reader discretion is advised.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a busy day for Sebastian. This morning he was tasked with overseeing the transport of Ian’s belongings from his old apartment to the new flat Jim had generously provided. It was decided that the young man would move into a property located near headquarters, to cut down on his commute. So far, the operation was going well.

“That’s the last box,” one of the laborers announced.

“Yeah,” another mover agreed. “The kid didn’t have much stuff. Made for an easy haul.”

Seb looked around, noting that the amount of items brought over were fairly sparse. Thankfully, Jim already had furniture in the apartment to help spruce things up and give it a homier atmosphere.

“You’ve done a fine job, gentlemen.” The sniper pulled out his wallet and handed them each a £100 note. “Merry Christmas, compliments of Mr. Moriarty.”

“Thank you, sir. This is more than we expected.”

“‘Tis the season, right?” Seb jauntily remarked. It made him feel good to play ‘big spender’ this time of year. A bit of charity during the holidays seemed like a noble expenditure.

When the laborers left, Moran took out his phone to send a text message.

SM

Mission complete. Everything has been transferred to the new place.
JM

Excellent.

You know what’s next on the agenda.

SM

I do. Are you sure about this?

JM

Yes.

SM

Killing the guy would be easier…for me.

JM

Stick to the plan, Tiger.

SM

Fine. I’ll text you when it’s done.

JM

Wait— Sebby?

SM

Yeah?

JM

I know I’m asking a lot here. It’ll be worth it, I promise.
They ended their conversation and Seb proceeded to check the time. It was a little past 11 a.m.

“Pub should be open now,” he muttered.

With a heavy sigh, he exited the flat and headed to his car. He had misgivings about this assignment. He was all for getting revenge against Luke, but what Jim wanted him to do…

The assassin swallowed down his apprehension, trying to focus on the positives. He would enjoy the primary part of the plan and the end result. It was merely the prelude that gave him pause. If he could just make it through the unsavory start, it’d be smooth sailing from there on out.

Never had so much hinged upon the weight of an ‘if.’

Sebastian entered The Golden Anchor, quickly scanning the room for any signs of his target. Thanks to the business’s Facebook page, they were able to find the father of Ian’s baby with relative ease. There was only one ‘Luke’ who worked at the establishment—34-year-old Lucas Darrow, originally from Birmingham, but currently located in London. His profile made him out to be an affable, decent-looking guy with a penchant for the Aston Villa football team.

Forgot to include ‘douchebag rapist’ in the info box. Gotta love social media.

The sniper really hoped that this was Luke’s shift and he wouldn’t have to linger there too long. He had plans to pick up Jim’s present later in the day. He’d found a botanical garden willing to sell him the exact type of sapling he wanted to give his mate. It was a long-lived variety guaranteed to grow for at least fifty years. The tree would likely outlive them both, but that was the point. It would blossom along with their family.

There he is.

Seb spotted the son of a bitch coming out of the kitchen carrying a supply of glassware. He was approximately 6’2”, dark-haired, and sported several days’ worth of stubble. Moran might’ve even considered him mildly attractive if not for the fact that he knew what he’d done to Ian.

Now came the hard part. The segment of Jim’s plan that made him want to disobey a direct order for the first time in years. He had to lure the man into a compromising situation. In other words, he’d need to pretend he wanted to fuck him in order to set the trap.

Here goes nothing.

The assassin saddled up to the bar. No one was sitting in that particular section—a handful of patrons were assembled elsewhere, at various tables and booths.

“Hey,” the pervert greeted with a smile, “what can I get you?”

“A fast car, a trip to Mykonos, and box seats at an Aston Villa game,” he replied with a wink. “But in lieu of those, I’ll take Guinness on tap.”

The bartender chuckled. “Good answer. You’re an Aston Villa fan, huh?” His interest was piqued.
"Never miss a game. Wish they were having a better season, but don’t we all?"

"Amen to that," he agreed.

As the man slid Sebastian his drink, the former colonel made sure to caress his hand ever so slightly and make eye contact. It was a move borrowed from Moran’s personal playbook, one he knew worked well on men and women alike.

Indeed, this had the desired effect. The look on the other man’s face denoted genuine intrigue.

“I’ve tended bar for a while, but I’ve never seen you here before. The name’s Luke, by the way.”


“Where from?”

“Lots of places. I do my fair share of traveling.’’

“Guess it’s lucky that of all the pubs in London, you chose to visit this one.”

Moran grinned broadly. Lucky, ha. If this goes according to plan, you’re really going to regret saying that. “I decided to take a chance,” the blonde stated. “I always enjoy good drinks, good food, and good company. So far, I’ve already found two out of the three right here.”

“You’re quite a flirt, aren’t you?”

“I prefer to think of myself as exceptionally friendly.”

“I’ll bet you make new buddies by the day. Or is it by the hour?”

“Suggesting I’m a rent boy? Ouch.” Fucking arsehole. If I were a whore, I’d have better taste than the likes of you.


“Maybe I’m just a man who wants to see the world and have as much fun as possible while doing so.”

The scumbag smirked. “Well, then, I think we might have something in common besides a favorite football team.”

Taking a deep breath, Sebastian summoned the most seductive gaze he could under the circumstance. “Wanna have fun together? Seeing as how we’re of the same mind.”

Luke leaned across the bar and whispered, “I can tell you’re an alpha, like me. I’m cool with that, but just so we’re clear, I do the fucking. Never the other way around. Is that going to be a problem?”

The sniper stared him straight in the eye, unflinching. “Not at all. I’m one hell of a switch-hitter.”

“That’s what I like to hear,” he lasciviously spoke. Luke paused, looking around. “We haven’t hit the lunch rush yet, so I could probably get someone from the kitchen to come out and cover my post.”

“ Wonderful. Where do you want to go?”
“I keep a flat above the pub,” he informed. “Give me a minute so I can find another person to man the bar.”

“Sure thing. I’ll be waiting.” For added appeal, Seb gently bit his lower lip while flashing a sultry half-smile.

Luke turned and walked into the kitchen, momentarily leaving Moran to his own devices.

*Jim’s going to owe me BIG for this,* he thought. *If I can get through the next part, then the worst will be over.*

He discreetly patted himself, checking to make certain his weapons were in order. He had a gun tucked into the waistband of his pants, a switchblade hidden in one back pocket, and a set of brass knuckles concealed in the other. Seb was well-prepared.

*********

“Easy does it, Tiger,” Luke said in reaction to the assassin shoving him against the wall and kissing him aggressively.

Sebastian’s blood ran cold. “What did you call me?”

“Huh?”

“What did you just call me?” he repeated, the familiar term of endearment catching him off guard.

“Tiger,” the man answered. “Why does it sound like that bothers you?”

“Because…because I had an ex-boyfriend who used to refer to me as that,” he lied. “It was a bad breakup.”

“Ah, duly noted.”

Thank god he bought it. Gotta keep a cool head.


Seb got back into ‘character,’ eyeing the man with a smoldering gleam. “Let’s fix that, shall we?” He peeled off his own shirt, not wanting Luke to touch him any more than necessary. He now stood bare-chested, having omitted the usual dog tags and wedding band he often wore on a chain beneath his clothes. This fucker didn’t need to see them.

“Nice guns.”

“Excuse me?” The blonde’s heart skipped a beat.

“Your biceps,” he continued, “they’re well-defined. I like that.”

“Right,” Moran responded, breathing a sigh of relief. *Just a bit of harmless slang.*

“You seem awfully nervous all of a sudden.”

_Bloody hell. Can’t let him see through the guise. Must relax._

“I’m fine, I swear. It’s just been a little while since I’ve seen this kind of action. I dare not disappoint.”
“Been a while? Really?” Luke inquired. He ran his hand across the firm expanse of Seb’s chest, teasing his nipples as he went along. “I can’t believe a sexy guy like you would ever have a dry spell.”

“I decided to try celibacy on for size. It didn’t agree with me.”


“Well, actually, I thought maybe I could take yours off first. Slide them down and… service you.” The blue-eyed assassin licked his lips and leaned in, whispering breathily. “Wait ‘til you feel what my hot, wet mouth can do.”

With a lecherous grunt, the man guided Sebastian to his bed. He undid the fly of his jeans and laid back on the mattress. “Have at it, handsome.”

*Almost time,* Moran reminded himself. Things were going to plan, and he had this douchebag exactly where he wanted him.

Descending onto the bed, he began peppering Luke’s neck with kisses. He snaked his way down the man’s sturdy frame, pausing when he reached the forbidden trail of hair leading from his navel to areas not yet exposed.

“Are you ready?” Seb asked.

“As I’ll ever be.”

“Perfect,” he said with a devilish smirk. “Close your eyes and clear your mind. I want you to really feel this.”

“Okay.” He did as instructed.

The former colonel made short work of pulling off his target’s pants, tossing the denim aside. Luke’s erection pressed against the fabric of his briefs, strained and leaking as it longed for release. Moran would set it free, all right.

Sebastian tugged down the man’s undergarments, revealing his thoroughly aroused length.

*Now.*

In a flash, the sniper gripped Luke’s cock with one hand, using it as leverage to keep him pinned down. With the other hand, he grabbed the switchblade from his pocket and plunged it into the man’s thigh, careful not to hit a major artery. The last thing he needed was for this son of a bitch to bleed out.

Luke screamed in agony as his flesh was pierced. He tried to throw Seb off him, but the tight grasp he had on his penis prevented that from happening.

“FUCK! Are you crazy?!”

Moran’s smirk transformed into a full-blown sharky smile. “Maybe,” he gleefully replied. “Wanna find out?”

The look on the man’s face conveyed pure terror.

“NO! Let me go!”
“I wonder, did Ian say that when you held him down and forcibly fucked him in his own apartment?”

“Ian? What’s he got to do with this?”

“Everything.”

“That prig was more trouble than he was worth. Tried to keep me from finding out he was having my baby.”

Seb twisted the blade in Luke’s thigh, eliciting another scream.

“Listen here, you rapist piece of shite— that baby is Ian’s, not yours. You’ve forfeited the right to any and all parental privilege. You’re to stay as far away from him as possible. If, by random chance, you so much as see him walking down the street, you cross the road and head in the opposite direction without uttering a word.”

“No!” he hissed. “Sod off, psycho!”

“Guess you want to do this the hard way. Fine by me.”

The assassin slipped on his brass knuckles with one hand while still gripping Luke’s now-flaccid cock.

Before the pinned pervert realized what was happening, Sebastian’s armored fist made direct contact with his balls. The force was so great, a testicle audibly ruptured on impact.

Luke’s body seized in indescribable agony. His mouth opened, but no sound came out, the pain transcending verbal communication.

Seb released the man’s penis, knowing that the physical trauma would act as its own temporary paralyzer. Just to be safe, however, he reached for the gun in his waistband, pointing it at him.

“Here’s how this is going to work,” Moran announced. “Not only will you stay far away from Ian and his baby at all costs, you’ll also send cash every month to a P.O. box where he can collect the money and put it towards raising the child. You’ll do this for the next eighteen years, without fail. Should you miss even one installment, I will personally hunt you down and give you the kind of experience that’ll leave you begging for the sweet release of death. And just in case you think I’m bluffing, know that I work for James Moriarty, a man whose reputation most certainly speaks for itself. IS. THAT. CLEAR?”

Luke nodded, struggling to find his voice after the intense shock his body was put through. “Y-yes.”

“Be grateful I don’t kill you now. The only reason I’m not painting the wall with your brains is because one day, who knows if Ian’s child will require a blood transfusion, bone marrow, or a kidney transplant? God forbid that happens, but it’s prudent to make provisions,” Seb explained. “You’re being kept alive strictly on the basis of your genetic material. That’s it.”

The former colonel rose from the bed and retrieved his shirt. He also took a moment to throw Luke’s discarded clothing back at him. “Here,” he spoke. “Get yourself to the hospital and maybe they can save your busted ball. Wait too long and it might need to be amputated.”

The man stared wide-eyed at Moran, absolutely horrified.
“Oh, before I forget,” Sebastian said, bending down to yank the switchblade from Luke’s thigh. “Would hate to leave this behind. It was a gift from my husband.”

As Seb made his way to the door, he abruptly stopped, deciding to offer one last parting message. “If you ever force yourself on an unwilling partner again, there will be no hiding it—I’ll find out,” he avowed. “And then I’ll take my brass knuckles to your cock. You’ll be mangled so badly, it’ll look like you fucked a meat grinder.”

He promptly exited Luke’s flat, and the building altogether, not wishing to stick around a second longer than necessary. At last, he could breathe easy, satisfied at a job well done.

Chapter End Notes

I'm aware that there's no such thing as a £100 note. Please suspend your disbelief.
Discussions & Discoveries

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian have a talk. Also, a revelation is made.

Chapter Notes

This is more of a "transitionary" chapter, so it might seem a little slow compared to others. Still, I think it's important to include these in-between bits.

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My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After a long day, Seb had finally returned home. Naturally, Jim couldn’t stop talking about the assignment he’d sent his mate on hours earlier.

“I almost wish I’d been there. You know how much I admire your handiwork,” he enthused, marveling at the fact that Moran managed to hit someone so hard, it actually ruptured the person’s testicles.

“I’ll admit, it was satisfying to hurt Luke. But I never want to ‘lure’ a target in like that again.”

“I’d rather you didn’t have to, either. This was a highly unorthodox situation. Not the kind of thing one encounters every day.”

“Thank god for that.”

“In any case, I appreciate what you did. Consider it a good deed for the holiday season.”

“Believe me, I do. “Sebastian stretched out across the couch, propping a pillow behind his head. “Does Ian know what we’ve done yet?”

“I haven’t spoken to him, no. I wasn’t sure which of us should do the honors.”

“You’re closer to him than I am,” the blonde remarked. “I reckon it ought to be you.”

“We’re holding a MOPS meeting tomorrow night. I could speak to him then.”

“Sounds good.”

There was a brief lull in the conversation as the wheels in Jim’s head started to turn. The look he
gave his spouse signified something was definitely on his mind.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Seb asked. “Or are you just going to keep staring at me for the rest of the evening?”

“I was thinking about when you got home. I peeked through the curtains and saw you leaving the shed before you came inside the house. What were you doing out there?”

*Oh, my nosy little Magpie.* Moran had picked up the consulting criminal’s gift—a potted sapling—and was storing it in their shed for safekeeping. He’d even gone to the trouble of bringing in a space heater so that the young tree wouldn’t freeze.

“I was taking stock of our tools,” he claimed.

“For what? Are you planning to build something?”

“Maybe. Who knows?”

Moriarty eyed him shrewdly. “I don’t believe you.”

“That’s your prerogative, hon,” Seb matter-of-factly replied. He refused to reveal any information about Jim’s gift or play his games.

“Tomorrow, I might wheel myself out there and see what’s going on in the shed.”

“That’s fine, kitten.” He wasn’t too concerned—he’d padlocked the storage unit as a precaution.

Jim grumbled in frustration, his patience rapidly wearing thin. Sebastian was supposed to tell him not to investigate the shed, thereby confirming that something was secretly being hidden away there. Something like his Christmas present. But if Seb didn’t care whether he checked it or not, then perhaps that meant there was *no* gift inside, in which case, he’d be back at square one without a single lead regarding his prezzie. It just wasn’t fair.

“You know, there aren’t very many days left until Christmas, darling. Another week and a half and the holiday will be here,” he gently reminded his mate.

“I’m well aware,” Moran stated. “Speaking of impending dates, how are the party plans coming along?”

“Splendidly. Everything is set, and this afternoon our secret ingredient arrived—sodium pentothal.” Jim paused, an idea surfacing from the depths of his devious brain. “Tiiiiiiiger?”

“Yes?”

“You love me, correct?”

“With all my heart. You know that.” **What a strange thing to ask,** the assassin mused.

“And you’d do anything for me?”

“Of course. Today’s literal ball-busting is proof enough of that.” **Where’s he going with this?**

“Well, then, I should think you wouldn’t mind assisting me in a small experiment.”

Sebastian furrowed a brow and moved to sit in an upright position. “An experiment, you say?”
“Indeed. I’d like to test my newly acquired serum out on you, sweetie. Surely, that isn’t a problem.”

The former colonel’s eyes widened in disbelief. “Excuse me, what? You seriously think I would agree to be your guinea pig?”

Moriarty sighed. “No, not really. I’m just too pregnant to be stealthy right now, so I can’t simply fill up a syringe and prick you with it— I’d need your cooperation.”

“Jimmy, why would you want to use drugs on me?” he inquired, appalled at his husband’s admission. “After everything I’ve done for you, especially today.”

“Because,” he muttered, looking away.

“Because what? Answer me.”

“Because I can’t figure out what you’re getting me as a gift, okay?” the Irishman gruffly spat.

“No, it’s absolutely not okay to dose someone because you want to learn what your Christmas present is. That I even have to explain this is astounding.”

Jim turned his head towards Moran again, shooting him a murderous glare. “This isn’t exactly a shining moment for me, Sebastian. I’m not proud of it.”

“Why is the issue such a big deal to you? Forgive me if I sound unkind, but you're blowing this way out of proportion.”

“Am I, Seb? Consider this— I’m supposed to be clever. Accordingly, I’ve cracked the mystery every year, without fail. Until now. There are only ten days left until Christmas, and I’ve yet to solve the puzzle,” he lamented, sounding noticeably frazzled. “Yesterday, I told Ian how good I am at figuring these things out. I think maybe I said it because it always used to be true, and because I wanted it to be true again.”

“Honey, stop right there. You’re the most brilliant man I’ve ever known, and I won’t have you disparaging yourself.”

“No!” Moriarty countered. “I’m frustrated and I can’t deduce things clearly anymore! You don’t know the hell of it. I can’t concentrate. I try, but all I’m able to think about is you.”

“Really, Jim?”

“Yes, it’s as if I’ve been possessed by a wave of rogue hormones,” he said in a huff. “I want you every hour of the day. It’s this instinct telling me that I should be with my alpha; that I need protection. The impulse is relentless, Seb, and I hate it. I’ve never felt so clingy in all my life.”

The sniper reached out and tenderly took his mate by the hand. “We’ve been over this before, dear. An increased desire for safety and security is normal during the latter stages of omega pregnancy,” he reminded. “If it’s any consolation, I’ve had you on my mind a lot lately, too.”

“Is that so?” Jim asked somewhat skeptically.

“It is. I want to be at your side day and night, watching you like a hawk. The urge is irrepressible.”

“We’re on two sides of the same coin, then.”

“Perhaps we shouldn’t try to fight it.”
“Don’t tempt me, Seb.”

“I mean it, hon. We’re both going to continue having these instincts, and they’ll only get stronger the closer you are to giving birth. The best recourse may be to accept the situation and make the best of it.”

The genius contemplated the notion. His partner presented a compelling argument. Denying their pregnancy-induced urges did seem like an exercise in futility at this point. But there was one major problem; the ‘elephant in the room,’ so to speak. What would become of Moriarty’s criminal web if neither of them were available to oversee day-to-day goings on?

“Tiger, I’d say ‘yes’ in a heartbeat, but we’ve got to take work into account. There needs to be some kind of supervision at headquarters, and the only person I trust with the job is you. It’s too important a role to pass along to just anyone.”

“I understand that, love. But maybe I could operate remotely. Hold video conferences and the like,” he suggested. “I wouldn’t stop going to headquarters altogether. I’d simply cut back on the hours. You wouldn’t have to be alone as often.”

“Oh, Sebby, that sounds wonderful.” It really, truly did. “I just don’t know if it’s in the best interests of my empire. Let me mull it over, okay?”

“Yes?” he agreed, lifting Jim’s hand to his lips and kissing it. “But don’t keep me in suspense forever. A man can only wait so long.”

“You’ll have your answer sooner than later, I promise.”

“Excellent,” Moran replied, flashing a sweet smile. “You know what I’d prefer, but even if you don’t choose that, I’ll respect your decision.”

“Thank you, Seb.”

The mastermind was in need of advice and he knew precisely who to turn to: the men in his MOPS group. They were the closest thing he had to friends. With their combined experience, perhaps they could offer him the clarity he required.

*********

Annie glanced at the time on her phone and grumbled. She had better things to do than sit in an automotive repair shop all night. She could be at home, relaxing in a hot bath while sipping chardonnay. But alas, on the way back from work, a tire blew out on her van. Now she was stuck having an emergency replacement put on.

Eventually, a mechanic appeared. “Ma’am?” the man called, obviously referring to her, as there were no other women in sight.

“Yes?” she answered, approaching him. “Have you finished?”

He nodded. “Yep. The new tire should hold up for a while. There’s something I thought you should see, though.”

“What might that be?”

The man pulled a small black device from his pocket. “This was attached to the undercarriage of your vehicle.”
Annie took the item from his hand, examining it. Her eyes widened as she realized what it was.

“I think it’s a tracker, ma’am,” the mechanic said.

“Yeah, you’re right, it is.”

“I’m not one to stick my nose in other people’s business, but you might want to be careful— maybe even consult the authorities. Somebody’s obviously been monitoring you with this thing.”

“I’ll handle the matter,” she assured.

Oh, yes. Annie would handle it, all right. She didn’t even need to think about who was responsible for this. It was Moran...had to be. Either the sneaky fucker did it himself, or he got his new office assistant to do it. Whichever the case, she was angry. How dare he? After the misery he’d brought into her life, this was one more slap in the face.

She’d originally planned to skip the Christmas party he and Jim were throwing at their house. Now, however, her interest was renewed. Annie had a damn good reason to attend— she would go in the name of pure, unadulterated spite.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
It was time for another Male Omega Pregnancy Support meeting and Jim was especially eager to get the ball rolling. He had a lot on his mind tonight, between the weirdly clingy way he was feeling and the offer his mate had made to be with him more often. Then there was also the matter of what he would say to Ian regarding the Luke situation. He thought he ought to address that particular subject during the midway break.

As the group waited for its participants to arrive, Jim was taken aback by one member’s entrance, and with good reason: Jack walked in carrying a small child.

“Hello, folks,” he greeted. “Sorry about the extra guest. I couldn’t find anyone to watch my son this evening. He shouldn’t be too much trouble— he’s in hibernation mode,” the man said with a wink. “His name’s Reginald, by the way.”

“Weggie,” a tiny voice sleepily mumbled.

Jack grinned, holding his little boy close. “Excuse me, it’s ‘Reggie,’ not Reginald. My mistake.”

“S’ok,” he cooed before nodding off again.

In an instant, everyone was ‘oohing’ and ‘aahing’ over Jack’s child— quietly, of course, so not to wake him. Reggie was cute as a button, wearing Iron Man footie pajamas and wrapped in a fleece blanket. The sight was precious beyond words.

“I almost forgot you already had a kid,” Simon remarked. “How old is he?”

“22 months.”

“That’s delightful. I’d love to have more than one.”

“Me too,” another person agreed.

“I got lucky with this lad,” Jack happily stated. “He’s always been a good boy.”
“Unlike his daddy,” someone cattily commented.

“If I may,” he informed, “and I ask that you all please refrain from saying anything overtly snarky in front of my son. I realize it may be difficult for a few of you, but at least try.”

“I completely understand where you’re coming from,” Trevor, the MOPS coordinator, spoke. “Let’s be on our best behavior tonight, gentlemen. And actually, as a support community, we should aspire to respect each other regardless of who’s present. It’s basic courtesy,” he noted. “That said, how about we get this meeting started? Anybody want to go first?”

Immediately, Moriarty raised his hand.

Trevor was pleasantly surprised. “Jim, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you volunteer so quickly.”

“Yes, well, I’m going through a rough time and could use a bit of advice.”

“Sorry to hear you’re having troubles,” he sympathized. “Know that we’ll do whatever we can to help.”

The consulting criminal nodded, unsure how to begin. Sharing his emotions was still a relatively new concept. Until recently, the mere idea of it was verboten.

“Rather than skirt the issue, I’m just going to come right out and say it,” he declared. “These days, I find myself disgusted by how needy I’ve become. My husband leaves for work in the morning, and I miss him so much, it’s like there’s a physical ache. Something inside me hurts when we’re apart. Worse yet, is the anxiety. I have this nagging sense that I’m not safe if he isn’t there.” Jim sighed wearily and continued, “I’m aware certain urges become stronger during the final months of pregnancy, and that this is likely a manifestation of that. But I despise feeling so vulnerable. It’s beneath me.”

“When you’re accustomed to being independent, a sudden change in that dynamic can be jarring,” Trevor acknowledged.

“I felt similarly when I was expecting this one,” Jack attested, referring to the sleeping toddler in his arms. “I used to do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted. Then my hormones kicked into overdrive, and I thought I was losing my mind. I couldn’t stand the idea of Gary— that’s my partner— leaving me for more than a few hours at a clip. He’s a barrister, so he generally has a heavy workload that keeps him away from home. The instinct to have him with me was powerful, though, and I did some things I’m not proud of to ensure he’d be at my side.”

“Oh really?” Jim was intrigued.

“Yeah. I’d hide his keys and bus pass to make it harder for him to leave. I’d ‘misplace’ documents so that he had to retype them, and thus stick around longer. And once, when I was truly desperate, I put thumbtacks in his tires,” Jack described. “I know it sounds awful, but I’d just get so anxious when he wasn’t there with me. It was this constant dread that something terrible would happen if my alpha was gone for too long.”

“Christ, that’s spot on. Exactly what I’m dealing with right now,” the genius said. “Only I haven’t done anything to keep him at home. I have, however, obsessed over other matters.”

“Do tell. I love comparing notes.”

“Well, I recently became fixated on what my husband was getting me for Christmas. I went a little
crazy and actually considered drugging him so that he’d tell me,” Moriarty confessed. “He was rightly appalled. It was an insane idea, even for me.” The Irishman paused, further reflecting on the incident. “When I say it out loud, it doesn’t make much sense. But at the time, in my mind, it seemed crystal clear,” he somberly stated. “It wasn’t about the item itself, not really. Rather, it had to do with the fact that I can barely focus on anything while these urges and worries flood my head. I wanted to regain a semblance of control in whatever way I could. Too bad all I did was fuck things up.”

“Jim,” the coordinator spoke, “you wouldn’t contemplate that again, would you?”

“Never. I’m ashamed to have entertained the thought in the first place.”

“Then I don’t believe you should beat yourself up over this. Yes, you acted in an irrational manner. But now you’re able to recognize how wrong it was, which is progress,” Trevor asserted. “Remember the analogy I made weeks ago, about the past, present, and future being like clay? That’s applicable to this situation.”

“How do you figure?”

“Because you made a mistake. It’s done— been sculpted and baked. But the good news is that going forward, you can learn from the error, so you won’t make it again. You’re free to mold something else entirely, un tarnished by past transgressions.”

Jim mulled over the man’s words. Trevor had a way of putting things into perspective, probably due to his training as a family therapist. He also had children of his own, meaning he’d likely gone through similar struggles in his personal life.

“I’ll certainly try to shape a better future,” the mastermind affirmed. “There’s also another issue I wanted to address. It’s related to this.”

“Okay, go on.”

“In response to how I’ve been feeling, my mate offered to cut back on his hours at the office so that he could be at home with me on a more frequent basis.”

“Sounds great,” Jack quipped. “What’s to discuss?”

“It’s complicated. He was meant to take over for me while I’m on paternity leave. If there are substantial periods where neither of us are at headquarters, I’m afraid my enterprise will suffer for it.”

“Pardon me,” a group member, Scott, interjected. “Is this the same business you told us you were thinking about retiring from a few weeks ago?”

“Yes, why?”

“Because if you’re seriously planning to retire, I don’t see why it matters if your enterprise suffers or not. You’ll be leaving regardless of its status.”

“I haven’t decided to retire just yet. It’s one possibility, not a guarantee.”

“In any case,” Jack proclaimed, “when an alpha makes an offer like that, you don’t say no.”

“I agree,” someone else chimed in. “It’s an expectant omega’s dream. You can’t just throw it away.”
“I think Jim should be allowed to make his own choices,” Simon countered. “There’s nothing wrong with wanting to maintain one’s business interests.”

“Maybe having his husband at home is worth the risk.”

“Could be, but it’s his decision, not ours.”

“Hey, he asked for advice, so we’re giving it.”

The chatter went back and forth, with people arguing amongst themselves. Jim hadn’t intended to set the room abuzz— he was merely seeking to vent his frustrations and glean some outside opinions.

The cacophony of voices was suddenly silenced by the cries of Jack’s son. All the noise had woken him up with a fright.

“It’s okay, honey,” he reassured the wailing tot, rocking him slightly. “Mummy’s group just got a little loud. Nothing to be scared of.”

Everyone’s faces hung heavy with shame. None of them wanted to upset the wee lad, but they’d allowed themselves to get out of hand and it happened anyway.

“Jack, I’m sorry for this,” Trevor apologized. “I should’ve quieted the group down as soon as they started talking over each other. I take full responsibility for not stepping in ASAP.”

“It’s fine,” he replied. “Reggie will be okay. He was simply a bit startled. Isn’t that right, love?”

There was a brief pause as the toddler settled down. He sniffled and stared wide-eyed at the small assembly of men.


Jim could swear his heart grew three sizes in that moment. And actually, the sentiment seemed universal. The whole room began to smile, collectively overtaken by baby-induced joy. Perhaps that was precisely what they needed.

*********

The mid-meeting break commenced and store-bought cookies were set out for all to enjoy. Again, the consulting criminal lamented not being able to bake homemade treats. He knew he could come up with something far tastier than any mass-produced product. Before the holiday season was through, maybe he would attempt one last baking effort to knock their socks off.

For now, Jim had more important things to do. Talking to Ian was at the top of the list.

Moriarty rolled himself towards the teen, who was standing near the refreshments table nibbling a tree-shaped sugar cookie.

“Hiiiiii. How are the treats tonight?” As if he had to ask. Sometimes, he just liked hearing people say that his baked goods were better.

“Not bad, but they don’t hold a candle to yours.”

“Unsurprising,” the genius remarked, before segueing into the real reason he’d approached his quasi-protégé. “Ian, I’d like to speak to you about a personal matter. We may want to take a stroll for this conversation.”
The young man nodded, finishing his cookie and then wheeling Jim out the door and down the hall. He sought to put distance between them and the rest of the group.

“What’s up?”

“I thought you might be relieved to know that Luke isn’t going to bother you anymore.”

“Really, Jim? That’s great,” he exclaimed. “But how can you be sure?”

“Let’s just say my second-in-command paid him a visit.”

“Wonderful.” He paused, turning Moriarty’s words over in his mind. “Jim?”

“Yeah?”

“I don’t know the etiquette for asking a question like this, so I’ll be blunt. Did you have Luke killed?”

“I wanted to at first, but then I got a better idea.”

“Oh?”

The older man flashed an impish grin. “I sent Seb to tease him a bit, and then give him a pummeling he wouldn’t soon forget. He managed rupture one of the bastard’s testicles,” Jim cheerfully reported.

“Wow, that’s impressive…and rather terrifying, too.”

“An excellent way to describe my Tiger.” Sebastian often did brilliant but brutal work. It was one of the things that made him fall in love with the sniper all those years ago.

“So long as it worked, I won’t complain.”

“Well, there’s moooore.” Moriarty dug into his pocket and pulled out a key, handing it to the boy.

“What’s this?”

“The key to a P.O. box where Luke will be forwarding you money every month for the next 18 years.”

Ian paled in astonishment. “Are you serious?”

“Very. Consider it a form of restitution.”

“This is incredible. I don’t know how to begin to thank you.”

“It’s quite simple. Thank me by using the funds wisely. Start a fund for your child’s education. Make sure he or she is well-provided for. Don’t forget to be good to yourself, as well.”

The teen nodded. “I will. You won’t be disappointed. That’s a promise.”

“I know, Ian. I trust you.” In his lifetime, the number of people Jim genuinely believed in could be counted on one hand. Somehow, this unfortunate youth had found a rare foothold within the recesses of his dark heart. It was almost enough to make one wonder if Christmas miracles really did occur.
In case anyone needs a "Baby Talk" translation for what Reggie said: "I'm okay. Not scared. Reggie's brave."
Chapter Summary

As Christmas nears, plotting and scheming abound.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

The irrepressible spirit of Christmas had taken hold throughout Moriarty’s headquarters, and it was funny how it came about. Recently, Sebastian snapped a photo of the newly installed flooring in the lobby and sent it to Jim. The mastermind replied back, incensed. He didn’t have a problem with the tile job, but rather with the office’s total lack of yuletide flair. He demanded that the place be given a “merry” makeover. This included erecting a fully decorated tree near the entrance of the building, stringing twinkle lights and garland along the walls and doorways, and piping holiday music through the loudspeakers. These measures actually seemed to have a positive effect— most employees did appear cheerier than usual.

It didn’t end there. Jim also insisted that all personnel be gifted with lavish fruit baskets. Naturally, the endeavor cost a pretty penny. He’d settle for nothing less than the finest produce available, even if it meant importing from international sources. Ultimately, the Irishman found what he was looking for, and now it was a matter of waiting for the shipment to arrive. Seb tasked Ian with keeping an eye on mail deliveries. When the packages came in, he was to notify Moran immediately.

The sniper stood up from his desk and walked to the door. It was open just a crack, so that he could peek out and glimpse the main floor staff. Ordinarily, he wouldn’t watch them in secret like this, but today he had his reasons. Annie was conspicuously missing. She’d not given prior notice of her absence, and perhaps more worryingly, Seb discovered that the tracker he’d planted on her van had been deactivated. Were these two developments related? At this point, it almost felt foolish to pretend otherwise.

_I know you’re up to something, Annie. The question is, what?_ It was the uncertainty that set him on edge. That, and the woman’s utterly ambiguous motivation. Why would she be in league with Colin? He understood the madman’s pursuit of revenge, but what stake did Annie have in this? Was she romantically involved with him and he convinced her to help? Was she a stranger, recruited at random? Or was the connection something else entirely? There were so many questions begging to be answered.

Seb supposed that tomorrow night would be quite a learning experience. He and Jim’s Christmas
party was scheduled to commence, and with it, the genius’s interrogation plot would be underway. He hoped they’d finally learn just what the hell was going on. No more vagary and conjecture—he wanted straight up truth. Was that too much to ask?

Moran sighed. He couldn’t wait to be done with all of this. Couldn’t wait for the stalking and conspiracy to end. For his family to be safe and sound, free from the threat of harm. Lifelong security was a crapshoot considering his line of work, but the former colonel dared to dream.

**********

BZZ.

The door buzzed, permitting Annie entry into Colin Taylor’s room at Bethlem Royal Hospital. Or rather, ‘Emily Grant’ was allowed in. The crafty blonde was passing herself off as an assistant to Taylor’s attorney. The ruse went over with surprising ease, perhaps a testament to how short-staffed the facility currently was. As the holidays approached, many had elected to use their vacation time, leaving the psychiatric unit with a barebones crew.

The door shut behind Annie, and Colin glanced up from the book he was reading. His eyes widened in shock at the sight of her.

“What are you doing here?”

“Visiting you.”

“Obviously. I mean how did you get clearance to be let in?”

She smiled wickedly. “Oh, that. It was simple. First, I phoned ahead to inform the receptionist that an ‘aide’ to your legal counsel would be dropping by. Then I dressed up in my most professional attire, drove here, sauntered up to the lady at the desk, told her I was ‘Emily Grant’— the person sent on your lawyer’s behalf— and voila! She buzzed me through.”

“That’s all it took?” he uttered in disbelief. “They didn’t insist you show them some form of ID or credentials?”

“Nope. There’s hardly anyone on duty out there. The few people they’ve got are too busy picking up slack to ask questions.”

Colin snorted derisively. “A superb system for maintaining patient care. I’m beginning to understand why they call it ‘Bedlam.’”

“Hey, be grateful they’re operating at a minimum right now. I probably wouldn’t have been able to pull this off otherwise.”

“True.” The wheels in the deranged man’s brain began to turn. He was formulating an idea.

“I know that look,” Annie remarked. “What are you plotting?”

“Well, you say security is lax at the moment. Maybe we should take full advantage.”

“You mean…” It quickly dawned on her what he was suggesting.

“I think the time is right to get me out of here.”

“But your trial—”
“Has been postponed pending review of the evidence, and it’s going at a snail’s pace,” he stated. “You’re the one who was pushing for me to get out. Claimed you couldn’t execute the endgame without me. Was that merely lip service, Annelise?”

“No, I meant it. This is just very sudden.”

“Best to strike while opportunity presents itself.”

Annie nodded. “How fast can you come up with a plan? I’m leaving the country in a few days to spend Jul with my parents.”

His expression lit up as soon as she told him that. “Perfect. Give me a day or two to work on Katie,” he said, referring to the nursing assistant he’d charmed early on in his stay. “I’m sure I can sweet talk her into helping me sneak out of this room. From there, I'll make my own way out of the building, and you'll be waiting nearby with your van,” Colin continued. “Then we’ll go to the airport, buy me an extra ticket so that I can fly with you, and I’ll regroup at your parents’ house. You know they’ll let me stay with them.”

“Yes…yes, they would,” she spoke slowly, processing everything. It was a lot to take in.

“Excellent. Now that that’s settled, what did you originally come here for?”

“I wanted to give you a gift before I left,” Annie replied, “and also keep you in the loop about what’s happening with Moran.”

“Gift first, news second,” he declared.

“Okay.” She opened the briefcase she’d brought along with her, taking out a wrapped box and setting it in front of him.

The man haphazardly tore through the paper and lifted the lid from the package. Inside was a snowglobe depicting an ornately decorated building and fountain. It only took a second for him to recognize the locale.

“The Nimb Hotel at Tivoli,” he said in a voice barely above a whisper.

“I had a feeling you’d remember the place.”

“How could I forget?”

A silence came over them as they both thought back to happier times.

Finally, Colin was the one to speak up. “You mentioned you had an update on Moran?”

“Yes. I recently discovered that a tracking device was planted on my vehicle. It’s since been destroyed, but I’m still angry about it. Though I can’t prove Sebastian put it there, I strongly suspect it was him.”

“Sounds like something he would do. Always thinking he’s so fucking clever.”

“There’s more,” Annie reported. “Jim and Sebastian are throwing a Christmas party at their house tomorrow night. I didn’t tell you about it during our last phone call because I hadn’t planned to attend. But now, after this tracker bullshit, I’m going. Wild horses couldn’t stop me.”

“An invitation like that offers a wealth of possibilities.”
She flashed a sly smile. “Oh, I know it does. With inside access, I could do a whole lot of damage.”

“You certainly could,” Colin agreed. “On the other hand…” He paused, suddenly second-guessing himself. “If Moran was responsible for the tracker, it means he’s on to you. He may not know the specifics of what you’re involved in, but he must believe something’s up.”

Annie peered at him contemplatively. “So you don’t think I should go?”

“I didn’t say that,” he quickly clarified. “What I’m suggesting is that you be prepared.”

“For what, exactly?”

“Anything.”

“Hmm.” It was good advice. She’d be a sitting duck without some form of protection. “I already carry pepper spray in my purse,” the woman noted. “I’ve got a Glock 43 in my nightstand that I could also bring. It’s small enough to conceal.”

“That’s more like it,” Colin approved. “But only use it if absolutely necessary. I don’t want either of them dead yet.”

She glared at him, somewhat offended. “You think I’d throw everything away just to shoot those bastards at a lousy Christmas party? Never.”

“I’m simply making sure we’re on the same page. It would be a shame to have our plans unravel now. This is the home stretch. Or it will be, soon.”

The blonde closed her eyes and took a deep breath, picturing the near future so clearly in her head.

“Do you see it, Annelise?”

“I do,” she affirmed, “and it’s magnificent.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations are as follows:
* Folie à Deux = Madness of Two (French origin)
* Jul = Christmas (Danish origin)
The Christmas Party – Part 1

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian’s Christmas party gets underway.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: There is brief mention of violence and bloodshed in this chapter.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“A little to the left, dear.”

“Here?” Sebastian asked as he hefted their couch in the specified direction.

“No,” Jim answered, sounding annoyed. “Not your left. My left.”

Seb gruntingly corrected his mistake. “How’s that?”

“Better, but it could stand to be over just a smidge more.”

Again, he obliged. “Now?”

Moriarty peered at the newly positioned sofa and grinned. “Perrrrfect.” He rose from his wheelchair and gingerly maneuvered towards his mate. “Thank you for moving the furniture, darling. It’s really opened up the floor space. This will be much more accommodating for our guests.”

The sniper absently nodded, distracted by the fact that Jim winced with every step. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, why?”

“Because you look like you’re in pain.”

“Pain? That’s nonsense.” His words were a denial, but the manner in which he held his back suggested otherwise.

“There’s no need to hide it, honey.”
“No need to burden you, either.”

“It’s not a burden. I’m your alpha. Let me take care of you.”

Moran reached out, embracing the smaller man in his arms.

Jim hummed softly, enjoying the feel of Seb’s warm body pressed close to his own. It was a comforting sensation, the kind he hated to pull away from. But…

“We shouldn’t be doing this, Tiger.”

“Why not?”

“Because I won’t want you to stop.”

The former colonel smiled. “How is that a bad thing? I’d hold you all day if you let me. Hell, on some occasions, I have.”

“I must remain in party mode. Tomorrow you can care for me, but tonight, I’m to act as host.”

Seb began to rub small, soothing circles against his husband’s aching back. “Perhaps we ought to call off the whole affair and spend a quiet evening together instead. We could soak in a bubble bath, eat catering for dinner, cozy up and watch movies…maybe even turn our bed into a makeshift nest, with lots of snug blankets and cushiony pillows. Doesn’t that sound divine?”

Moriarty let out an involuntary coo of contentment. His partner had played the ‘nesting’ card—a difficult proposition for any pregnant omega to resist.

“Oh Sebby, you’ve no idea how much I’d like to take you up on that offer.”

“So do it.”

“You know we can’t cancel this party. We have a plan to follow,” the Irishman insisted. “I thought you were on board for us gathering information. Why the change of heart?”

“I’m still game to get intel, I just…”

“What?”

“Nothing,” Moran muttered, forlornly releasing Jim from his embrace.

“No. Tell me, dammit.”

“You might laugh.”

“Try me and find out.”

The blonde sighed, realizing there was no use holding back his thoughts. When Moriarty wanted an answer, he’d be relentless until he got it.

“Fair enough. The reason I’m apprehensive is because this doesn’t feel right.”

Jim’s face scrunched up in confusion. “How do you mean?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know. I just have this sense that something bad is going to happen. Call it a gut instinct.”
The consulting criminal was silent, not wanting to reveal how anxious Seb’s statement made him. These days, he dealt with dread on a near-constant basis. It was only through his mate’s protection that he had peace of mind. Now, with the assassin expressing his own doubts, all bets were off.

“We’ll do what we must,” Jim finally spoke. “We’re the most dangerous men this city’s ever seen. We won’t fall prey to the folly of jitters.”

Sebastian held his head high and nodded. “You’re right. We’re better than that. I’m sorry for allowing such foolishness to cloud my judgment.”

“No worries, darling. Let’s just proceed as normal.”

“Yes, let’s.”

And so the couple continued on, setting up for that night’s festivities. Neither man felt particularly good about the impending soirée, but they could hardly justify cancelling the event on the grounds of ‘bad vibes.’ Those sorts of fears never amounted to anything, right?

*********

It was official: Jim and Sebastian’s qualms were laid to rest as their Christmas party proved a rousing success. Plenty of people showed up— many bearing gifts. That aspect surprised the duo. There was no requirement for it, yet several employees saw fit to bestow the genius with tokens of their appreciation. A decent sized pile of presents amassed, reminding Seb of the baby shower they’d held not too long ago. He was rather curious as to what the items might be, but he’d have to wait until the celebration was over to find out.

For as good as things were going, they did run into one snag. Annie was nowhere in sight. Granted, the night was still young, but both men would’ve preferred she turn up sooner than later. Moriarty was especially flustered by her absence. His whole plot hinged upon the woman’s attendance.

Speaking of Jim, the sniper had unwittingly lost him amid the crowd. You’d think it would be impossible to lose track of a person in a wheelchair, but with their house being so jam-packed, it happened.

Seb pulled out his phone, intent to send a text.

**SM**

*Where are you?*

**JM**

*In the kitchen with Gemma. She’s a blubbering mess. Help get me out of here ASAP.*

Moran immediately flew into action. Shoving past the sea of partygoers, he made his way to the designated room. Sure enough, there was Jim…and also Gemma, who appeared to be crying. She sat at the table, mascara streaming down her face and an empty wine glass clenched in her hand.

*What the fuck is going on?* Seb wondered.

“Gemma, what’s the matter?” he asked, almost afraid to know. Sometimes ignorance was bliss.
“I’m s-s-so s-sad,” she sputtered between sobs.

“Sorry to hear it,” the confused assassin said.

Seb quickly took his Magpie aside, speaking to him in a hushed tone. “What’s with her?”

“Two glasses of merlot, and suddenly she starts blathering on about Marie being dead. Apparently, they were best friends.”

“Ah, hell.” If they were close, then it was understandable why she’d be upset. Not only had Marie been murdered quite brutally, but the case had also gone cold. Everyone she was in contact with at the time of her death had an acceptable alibi, and the lone person at home when the crime occurred was her two-year-old son.

“Why would someone want to hurt her? Why?” Gemma stared at Sebastian as if she expected a response.

“I have no idea,” he lied. Both he and Jim were fairly certain that Marie was killed because she knew too much and was about to warn them of something.

“My cousin performed the autopsy,” she stated. “Molly’s not supposed to discuss her findings, but I made her tell me. I needed to know the details.” Gemma was slurring her words as she related the news. “Marie’s throat was cut so deep, she was nearly decapitated. Lost five pints of blood. Five pints!” the weeping woman repeated for emphasis.

Seb couldn’t help but notice Jim typing on his phone while Gemma was in the throes of her breakdown. Soon, Ian entered the kitchen and they exchanged a nod. It became clear that he’d summoned the young man to assist.

“Gemma, you’re just who I was looking for,” he announced.

“I am?”

“Yes,” Ian confirmed. “You were so good at throwing Jim’s baby shower— I’d love to get your advice on how to surprise someone else with one.”

“Well, it’s not an undertaking for amateurs,” she noted, wiping a bit of mascara from beneath her raccoon eyes.

“Walk with me and we can chat about it.” He extended his hand and smiled, waiting patiently for her to take the bait.

She did, standing up on wobbly legs.

“Easy does it,” the teen spoke, allowing her to grip him for support. Together, they exited the room.

As soon as the pair left, Seb sat down so that he was at eye level with Jim. He sighed and shook his head. “That was the result of two glasses of wine? Remind me never to invite her to a New Year’s party.”

Moriarty chuckled. “That’s for damn sure.”

“Smart move, by the way, calling Ian in. He deserves a bonus in his next paycheck.”

“Oh, he’ll be well compensated, believe me.”
A calm came over the men as they listened to the music pouring in from the living room. It was ‘2000 Miles’ by The Pretenders.

“There’s a blast from the past,” Moran remarked.

“Yeah,” Jim agreed, thinking back on it.

“Do you remember the first Christmas we spent together? We had such grand plans to tour New England, but ended up snowed in at the first hotel we stopped at. You were so pissed off.”

“Of course I remember. And I may have acted cranky at the time, but deep down, I didn’t much mind.”

“No? Could’ve fooled me. You ranted half the night.”

“Yes, my dear, but do you recall what we did the other half of the night, when I wasn’t complaining?”

Sebastian grinned broadly. “Some things, you don’t ever forget.”

“I should hope not,” the genius declared, reaching over to grasp his husband’s hand.

“Afterwards, we went down to the lobby and discovered that a slew of guests had decided to stage an impromptu party at the bar and grill.”

“A few drinks in, and this song came on,” Jim reminisced. “Then you asked me to dance.”

“And astonishingly enough, you agreed.”

“Glad I did,” the Irishman asserted. He lifted Seb’s hand to his lips, kissing the back of it. “I miss dancing with you, Tiger.”

The two stared lovingly at each other, as if in that moment, they were the only two people in the world.

BZZ.

BZZ.

BZZ.

Jim’s phone was buzzing, but he ignored it, paying no attention to anyone or anything besides his cherished mate.

Eventually, the sniper spoke up. “Honey, maybe you should answer that. It might be important.”

“Ah, right.” He hastily returned to his senses and checked the vibrating device. The look on his face confirmed that something was indeed afoot.

“What’s the scoop?”

“Annie’s here.”
To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
The Christmas Party – Part 2

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian escape the crowd at their Christmas party. Much is discussed.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Annie’s here?” Sebastian asked.

“Yes. That bitch has the nerve to announce her arrival via text message. Says she’s out by the fireplace.”

“What kind of game is she playing?” the sniper wondered aloud.

“A losing one,” Jim quipped. “Come on, let’s roll. And I mean that literally—I want you to navigate me through the crowd.”

“Aye aye, sir.”

The two ventured forth as men on a mission.

Traveling from the kitchen to the living room, Moriarty and Moran spotted their target sitting alongside Ian and Gemma at the hearth. She quickly noticed them as well, flashing a sacchariney smile and waving their way. The duo returned the gesture, moving in closer until they were near enough to talk.

“We were beginning to think you might not make it,” Jim remarked.

“Leave it to me to be fashionably late. I didn’t miss anything good, did I?”

“Nah, the fun’s just getting started.”

“Fantastic,” Annie cheerfully enthused. “Now if someone could show me to the egg nog and hors d’oeuvres, I’d be eternally grateful.”

I’ll take you there.” The woman, no longer weeping, stood up with some assistance from Ian.

“Perhaps I ought to accompany you, Gemma,” the teen suggested.

“Sure, why not? The more the merrier. Let’s go as a trio.”

“Fine by me,” Annie agreed. “Lead the way.”

Sebastian stifled a laugh as he watched the three of them walk off. “A liar, a lightweight drunk, and an office spy saunter up to the bar at a Christmas party—there’s gotta be a joke in there somewhere.”

Jim grumbled. “Less revelry, more action. We need to figure out how to get Annie alone.”

“Relax, we have plenty of time to lure her away. And hell, it’ll probably be easier to achieve once she’s had a few drinks under her belt.”

“Actually, I’d prefer to launch the interrogation sooner than later.”

Seb eyed the mastermind curiously. “Really, Jim? I thought we’d enjoy the festivities for a bit before executing your plan.”

“Where did you ever get that idea?” he questioned, sounding thoroughly annoyed. “I didn’t say a word about waiting.”

“I guess I naturally assumed—”

“There’s your mistake,” Jim spat, cutting his mate off in mid-sentence. “Never assume things, Sebastian. You don’t have the aptitude for it. I’m the brains, you’re the brawn. Get with the program.”

Moran blinked in surprise at what he was hearing. This was the crankiest he’d witnessed Jim in ages. Were hormones to blame or was it something else?

“Honey, are you feeling okay?”

The consulting criminal scowled intensely. “I’m dandy. Would be even better, though, if I could get my plan in motion instead of just twiddling my thumbs here.”

“Look, I’m trying to be patient with you, but I’m also wondering what switch flipped inside your head to make you suddenly start acting like a wanker. Five minutes ago, you were fine. Now your mood’s done a complete 180. What’s the matter?”

“I’m changeable,” he bitterly replied.

“Yes, but that’s not the issue at hand. There’s more to this.”

Jim sighed in an exaggerated manner. “It’s simple, Seb. I’m pissed because you’re refusing to help me.”

“Huh?” The sniper was genuinely baffled by the accusation. “I’m not refusing a bloody thing. All I said was that we shouldn’t rush into the plan. It’s always smarter to wait and lull one’s prey into a false sense of security before lowering the blow. As a hunter, I know that, and as a genius, you know it, too.”

Moriarty fell silent, unable to refute his alpha’s claim. What he said was true.
“Tell me what’s got you so wound up, love.”

“I won’t discuss it here,” Jim stated. “Let’s go somewhere less crowded.”

“Good idea.”

The couple sought refuge in the downstairs library. Certain sections of the house were partitioned off using baby gates to discourage guests from exploring beyond those points. The library was one such prohibited area.

Moran sat in an elegant leatherback armchair. He faced the mastermind, giving him his undivided attention. “Whenever you’re ready, I’m listening.”

For several moments, neither uttered a word. Music from the party filtered in, the happy holiday tunes playing in stark contrast to the heaviness that loomed between them.

“I hate Annie,” Jim said at last. “Honest-to-god hate, not hyperbole. Every fiber of my being despises that woman.”

“I feel the same. She’s done terrible things to us. Her and Colin both.”

“Yes, they have,” he acknowledged. “But I don’t think you could ever truly understand how deeply she’s hurt me. And I don’t mean that as a dig against you. I mean it as a statement of fact, because you’re not an omega.”

“Alpha, beta, omega— what difference does it make?” The assassin had no clue where his husband was going with this.

“Seb, the graffiti she wrote at your birthday party was very specific. I still think about it.”

The blonde frowned. He vividly recalled the heinous display, and Jim’s reaction to it. His Magpie had been in shambles. It broke his heart to learn that he continued to be haunted by the incident.

“I’m sorry, sweetie.”

“I know you are,” Moriarty sadly spoke. “Those slurs were vicious and cruel, and should never be directed towards any male omega. But even so, if they were only about me, I could’ve gotten over it,” he confided. “We both know they weren’t, though. That soulless viper included our babies in her sickening screed. She wished for Edward and Estella to ‘burn in hell.’ I can’t just let that go. The affront is too great.” He paused, his anger and upset feeling as fresh today as it did then. “Later, she was so brazen as to come into our home and steal my medication. Again, it wasn’t only me she put in danger— our children were at risk, too. I never told you this, Seb, because I didn’t want you to worry, but shortly after I checked into the hospital, a doctor informed me that if I’d gone another week without treatment, they might’ve needed to deliver the twins early. Do you know what that would’ve meant? They’d have been two months premature and probably ended up in the neonatal intensive care unit.”

Moran’s eyes widened at the news. “Oh no.”

“My sentiments exactly,” Jim said in a huff. “I hate Colin, I do. But he’s not here. Annie is, though, and she’s parading around scot-free. She’s in the same house as us and we have an opportunity to hurt her. After the things she’s done to our babies, I demand retribution. I’ve waited long enough.”

Sebastian was speechless, processing everything his mate had shared. It wasn’t always easy getting Jim to open up, but once the flood gates were lifted, watch out— there was no holding him back.
“Magpie,” the former colonel finally replied, “now I get why you want to go after her right away. It makes perfect sense,” he conceded. “But from a strategic standpoint, I honestly think it’s wiser to enact your plan later on tonight. Not only would it be more effective in terms of catching her off guard, but as the evening wears on, people will start to leave. That means fewer witnesses to ask questions about where she is.” He hesitated for a moment, adding, “We’re the most formidable men in London. When we do something, it’s to the best of our ability. This situation should follow suit.”

Moriarty didn’t immediately offer a verbal response. Instead, he stared despondently at his spouse, looking sad, tired, and frustrated.

“You’re right,” he admitted. “We should wait. I already knew as much, really. I just let these fucking emotions poison my mind.”

It pained Seb to see his omega in this state. He had to cheer him up. Had to make him smile. The alternative hurt too much.

Suddenly, an idea popped into Moran’s head, and it was brilliant—or at least he thought so.

“Jimmy?”

“Yeah?”

“Is the heated pool turned on?”

“It’s always on. Why are you asking me about this now?”

“Because there’s something I want to do.” The sniper stood up and walked behind Jim.

“What’s going on?” he inquired, sounding slightly nervous. His trepidation increased as Sebastian proceeded to wheel him out of the library and into the hall, continuing down the lengthy corridor until they reached a set of ornately carved double-doors.

“Allow me to get that,” the blonde announced, opening the wooden entrance so that his partner could push through. “Après vous.”

The genius warily obliged. “Why did you have us come here?”

“Because listen to that,” he instructed.

Moriarty did…and then promptly crinkled his nose in confusion. “What is it I’m supposed to be hearing?”

A wide grin flashed across Seb’s face. “The music, silly. The way our speaker system is set up, we can still hear it from the far wing of the house.”

Jim peered at his handsome husband, not quite knowing what to make of all this. “You brought me here so you could point out how impressive our stereo unit is?”

“No,” he answered, and abruptly began stripping off his clothing piece by piece.

The impromptu disrobing captured Jim’s attention, leaving him both shocked and enthralled. He watched as Sebastian removed every last stitch, eventually standing naked in front of him. It was a glorious sight.

“You want to skinny dip?” the consulting criminal asked, trying to puzzle out what was happening.
“Not quite.” He moved close to his mate and started tugging at the wheelchair-bound man’s clothes. “A little while ago, when we were in the kitchen, you said you missed dancing with me.”

“Riiiiight,” the mastermind drawled, allowing his gorgeous Tiger to peel the designer casualwear from his body.

“Well, I thought of a way that we could.”

Jim’s expression lit up excitedly as he realized what Moran meant. In water, he’d have greater buoyancy and mobility. He’d be able to move uninhibited, free from back pain, sore muscles, and a skewed center of gravity. The notion was ingenious.

Once the Irishman was laid bare, Seb scooped him into his arms and carried him to the pool.

“I could’ve done that myself, you know. I’m not actually paralyzed, just on prescription bedrest.”

“The less walking you have to do, the better. Now relax, and you might enjoy this.”

“I already do,” Moriarty declared. He took a moment to stretch, relishing how much lighter he felt while submerged in water. It was as though a literal weight had been lifted.

“Pleased by the change of venue?” Sebastian inquired. He couldn’t help but notice the gentle smile that graced the smaller man’s face.

“Mmm, yes. It’s wonderful.”

“I read that hydrotherapy is a good way to stay active during pregnancy without wearing oneself out.”

“Since when do you read medical literature?”

“Since my mate got pregnant.”

Jim balked at the choice of words. “‘Got pregnant?’ You make it sound like an independent effort on my part,” he quipped. “It takes two to tango, darling.”

“Indeed, it does,” Moran agreed. “Speaking of tangos…may I have this dance?” He extended his hand, bidding the genius’s permission to lead.

“I thought you’d never ask.”

Jim’s smile became an all-out grin as Seb pulled him close and spun them in a circle. They began to move in time to the music, their bodies exhibiting fluidity and poise. It wasn’t ‘dancing’ in the traditional sense, but it was enough of an approximation to keep the mastermind content.

“Sebby?” he whispered, resting his head on his spouse’s shoulder.

“Yes, dear?”

“Thank you for this. I know I’m not the easiest person to be married to, or hell, even be around sometimes. But you’ve stuck by me through everything, and you still manage to come up with sweet gestures like this. It’s probably more than I deserve,” he admitted. “I love you, Tiger.”

“I love you too, Jimmy. Never doubt your worth. I have it on good authority that you’re a god among men.”
Moriarty hummed, basking in the glow of pure omega bliss. He wanted the moment to go on forever—an endless loop featuring the two of them, pressed skin-to-skin as they moved together in their perfectly heated pool. If heaven existed, he imagined it would feel something like this.

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Jim and Sebastian ‘danced’ their way through several songs. The couple finally stopped when the Irishman had to take his nightly dose of antihypertensive medication. By that time, both men were pruney and waterlogged. Thankfully, they always made sure to store a supply of terrycloth towels near the poolside.

After drying off and dressing, the duo returned to the kitchen so that Jim could get something to swallow his pill with. Moran poured him a glass of apple juice, bending down to sneak a kiss as he handed over the drink.

“Darling?” Moriarty spoke. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but you smell like chlorine.”

The sniper smiled. “So do you, Magpie.”

Jim’s face scrunched up as he realized his husband was correct. “Ugh, I hate it.”

“It’s not so bad. There are far worse things one could smell of.”

“Now there’s some cold comfort,” he groused.

“Once everybody’s gone, how about we take a hot shower to rinse off the chlorine? You can lean on me for support if you need to.”

He considered the prospect, and it actually sounded pretty good. He could stand for short durations with a bit of assistance; certainly long enough for a rinse.

“Yes, I’d like that. Until then, I’m going to try covering the scent with cologne. Do you think my ‘Jardin d’Amalfi’ will adequately mask it?”

“For £500 a bottle, it had better.” Seb adored his mate more than anything else in the world, but was often astounded by the amount of money he was willing to spend on items that were essentially beauty products. Give the former colonel a bar of soap and a stick of deodorant, and he’d be good to go. Jim, on the other hand, required an extensive regimen of fragrances, moisturizers, cleansers, and the like. Frequently, walking into their master bathroom was akin to browsing the cosmetics department at Harrods.

“This shouldn’t take long. Go keep an eye on the crowd and I’ll meet you back at the fireplace.”

“Okay, see you soon.” Sebastian stole another quick kiss. “One for the road,” he teased before slipping out the door.

Meanwhile, Jim was determined to combat the scourge of chlorine. He took the elevator upstairs, wheeling towards his and Seb’s room. He’d almost made it there when something unexpected caught his attention: the lights were on in the nursery.

His heart instantly sank. No one was supposed to be on the upper floor of the house. The gates on the stairs were meant as a deterrent. Clearly, someone didn’t get the message.

Moriarty was mad. Nay, he was downright livid. Not only did he have an interloper in his midst, but the person had chosen to intrude upon his children’s private quarters. He felt very protective of
that space, even though it was not yet in use.

The mastermind rose from his wheelchair and crept over to the babies’ room. He gasped at the figure standing inside. It was Annie.

Searing, ineffable rage coursed through him. How dare she? The nursery was a sacred spot. For her to have set foot within its walls was an egregious violation.

Forget waiting to enact his plan. He would deal with her right fucking now.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Translation:
Après vous = "After you" (French origin)
The Christmas Party – Part 3

Chapter Summary

Jim confronts Annie. Seb must intervene as the situation spirals out of control.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jim stood there, fists clenched and shaking with fury as he spied Annie in his unborn children’s room.

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

“Fuck,” he muttered. His portable blood pressure monitor had gone off. He sorely regretting having strapped it back on after exiting the pool.

The noise caused Annie to turn around quickly, and she spotted Jim in the doorway.

“Are you okay?” she asked with mock concern.

He wanted to say ‘no.’ Wanted to tell her that he knew she was a lying piece of shite and he would enjoy giving her an agonizing, protracted death. But he couldn’t speak those things. Not yet.

“I’m fine,” he hissed through gritted teeth. “It just gave me a jolt to see someone in here.”

“Oh, right. Sorry. The bathroom downstairs was occupied, so I hoped to find another loo up here.”

“You entered Essie and Eddie’s room because you were looking for a toilet?” Her pathetic excuse made his blood boil even more. Did she honestly think he was that stupid?

“Yes,” she claimed. “Then, when I saw how beautiful the room was, I got distracted admiring everything.”

BEEP. BEEP. BE—

Jim ripped the medical device from his arm, fed up with listening to both it and the insufferable bitch standing in front of him.

“Is it advisable to take off your monitor?”

“I can do what I damn well please,” he sharply replied.
“All right.” Annie paused, uncertain of how to end the awkward exchange they were locked into. “My apologies for intruding. Maybe the bathroom downstairs is free now.”

An idea swiftly came to Moriarty’s mind. “Would you care to use my private bathroom?” he offered. “It’s attached to the master bedroom.”

“Uh…sure,” she hesitantly agreed. At this point, she couldn’t refuse him without appearing suspicious.

He grinned devilishly. “I’ll show you the way.”

There was a method to Jim’s madness. He kept the sodium pentothal in his nightstand. While Annie was otherwise engaged in the bathroom, he would prepare the syringe and be waiting to administer it the instant she stepped out. He had the scenario perfectly plotted in his head. This was going to work.

*********

“Soooo, what are you doing for Christmas?” the consulting criminal inquired. He sat on the edge of the bed, making small talk with Annie through the closed door while readying a dose of ‘truth serum.’

“Nothing too exciting,” she answered. “I’ll be spending the holiday with my family.”

“Is it a large group?”

“No, not really. I don’t have many relatives.”

“I know how that is,” he spoke, squirting the syringe to eliminate any potential air bubbles. “I had no family at all before Sebastian. Didn’t know what I was missing until he came along.”

“Aww, that’s sweet. I hear he was a real heartbreaker before deciding to settle down with you.”

“Who told you that?” Had Colin been filling her head with stories about Seb?

“No one in particular. It’s just watercooler gossip,” she said. “How’d you manage to tame a man like him?”

Jim snorted. “Honey, if you think he’s tame, you obviously don’t know him very well.”

“Oh? In my dealings with Mr. Moran, he seemed pretty subdued.”

“He’s matured through the years, yes. But he’s also a trained killer and can be incredibly fierce when necessary. It’s best you not forget that.”

The woman was silent for a moment, and Jim wondered if he’d perhaps scared her with his warning. In which case, good— she should be afraid.

WHOOSH.

The toilet flushed and Moriarty used the sound as a cue. He got up from the bed, intending to meet Annie when she opened the door.

Unfortunately, his timing was off.

In the Irishman’s mind, he’d envisioned the situation playing out with him as he used to be— a
master of agility and cunning. Lately, however, things were quite a bit different. Now at an advanced stage of pregnancy, he was slower and more easily winded. So instead of being right there, poised to stick Annie with the syringe, he was only partway to the door when she came out.

“What the hell is that?” she demanded, catching sight of the sharp device in Jim’s hand.

“Ugh. You weren’t supposed to see the needle,” he stated.

“Allow me to repeat the question. What in god’s name is that thing for?”

He cocked his head and smiled. “Consider it a gift from me to you, dear.”

The genius closed in on the woman. She dodged his attack, moving out of the way when he attempted to jab her. But Moriarty wasn’t the type to give up without a fight. When she ran to the opposite end of the room, he followed.

“You’re fucking crazy!” Annie spat.

“You don’t know the half of it,” he quipped. “You’re reeeeeeally going to regret having conspired against me.”

“What? I’ve done no such thing!”

“Oh, just stop lying already. Seb and I know you’re in league with Colin. There’s no point denying it.”

“Colin? Who’s that?”

He rolled his eyes. “You’re not fooling anyone. But don’t worry—I’ll get the truth out of you soon enough.”

Annie looked at him, then at the bedroom door, and back again. She was definitely contemplating making a break for it. Jim knew he needed to act fast or risk her getting away.

Fueled by a surge of adrenaline, he lunged at the woman, sending them crashing to the ground with a loud thud.

“Jesus Christ, you’re heavy!” she yelled as he landed on top of her.

“Shut up and hold still!” Annie was wriggling around so much, he couldn’t get at a decent angle to inject her.

She bit his shoulder hard, eliciting a scream from the mastermind.

Angry and in pain, he haphazardly thrust the syringe downward in the hopes of stabbing whatever part of her he could.

To Jim’s chagrin, she blocked the assault by using her purse as a shield. The blunt impact knocked the needle from his hand. He scrambled to reach for it, and in that fleeting moment of distraction, she rolled out from under him.

“No! We’re not finished here!” Moriarty shouted. He grabbed her by the foot and she kicked at him, the sole of her boot making contact with his face.

“You’re gonna pay for that, you sodding cow!”
Annie frantically rifled through her purse, producing a can of pepper spray. She pressed the button on the container and aimed in Jim’s direction. A misty flood of capsaicin was released, incapacitating him immediately.

The consulting criminal writhed on the floor, blinded and gasping for breath. As he lay in agony, he felt deep remorse for having gone against Sebastian’s wishes. He shouldn’t have undertaken this alone. It was rash and foolhardy, and it ruined everything.

*I’m sorry, Sebby.*

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The sniper was worried. He’d heard what sounded like a crash coming from upstairs. No one else seemed to notice, probably because the music mostly drowned it out, but Seb’s senses were acute.

Knowing that his mate was up there made him doubly concerned. What if he’d suffered an accident? What if he required assistance? Moran checked his phone to see if he’d been sent any distress messages. There were none.

Still, something didn’t feel right. It was the same uneasiness that plagued him before the party began. He needed to be sure Jim was okay.

Seb hurdled over the baby gate blocking the stairs, taking the steps two at a time. He could’ve used the elevator, but it was too slow for his liking. Sprinting would be faster.

Once he reached the upper level, he saw Jim’s wheelchair abandoned in the hall. A knot formed in the pit of his stomach. He didn’t want to jump to conclusions, but…

THUMP. BAM. HISSS.

The assassin heard noises emanating from close by. He followed the sounds, realizing they led to his and Jim’s bedroom.

Sebastian entered their sleeping quarters and was aghast at what he found. His husband lay on the floor, coughing and moaning as he rubbed his inflamed eyes. Their rogue employee, Annie, stood over him, clutching a canister of some kind.

“What the FUCK did you do?” Moran roared. He ripped the can from her grasp, reading the label and then promptly hurling it several feet away, enraged. “Pepper spray?! You used pepper spray on my pregnant omega?!” He looked like he wanted to destroy her.

“I…uh…” she clammed up, intimidated by the irate alpha.

Moriarty struggled to speak between coughs. “G-g-get herrrrrr,” he choked out.

That was all Seb needed to hear. In a flash, he grabbed Annie by the throat and pinned her against the wall. There were a million things racing through his head that he wanted to say, but once the raw fury took hold, words fell away and only action remained.

She gurgled and grew red in the face, her eyes teary and bloodshot. For a brief moment, the former colonel was taken aback by a chilling wave of déjà vu. There was something familiar about those eyes…a haunting quality. He saw it the day of the baby shower when she winked at him, and he saw it again now. What was the reason for this?

The woman suddenly went limp.
Fuck. They needed her alive if they hoped to get answers. He prayed she was merely passed out.

The instant Seb eased his grip, Annie straightened up and kneed him in the groin. He doubled over with a groan, furious he’d fallen for her trick.

But Moran had little time to lament. His target was on the move, brushing past him on her way out the door. He had to go after her in spite of the pain he was in.

Sebastian willed himself into an upright position and made good use of his long, muscular legs, catching up to Annie quickly. He reached out and grasped her lengthy blonde tresses. The assassin expected her to stop, but she just kept on going.

Annie screamed as a clump of hair was torn from her scalp. Seb glanced at the strands in his hand, noting a tinge of blood left behind. Even he was a bit surprised by the sight.

Panicked, the woman dug into her purse as she ran. Shaking like a leaf, she brandished a small gun and turned around.

BANG. BANG. BANG.

Moran dropped to the ground, rolling out of the way to avoid her line of fire. She shot a few more times and then fled downstairs. Seb followed in hot pursuit, pushing past guests at a breakneck pace. Eventually, though, he lost track of her amid the crowd. He looked in every direction, but she’d disappeared.

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Jim was absolutely terrified. After being pepper sprayed at close range, he was temporarily blinded, his eyes burning like hellfire. His lungs were affected too, making it difficult breathe. The pain was excruciating.

But that wasn’t the worst of it. What troubled him above all else was the fear for his family. Gunshots were discharged and he had no idea if his mate was okay. He hoped Seb snuffed out Annie, but what if it was the other way around? What if his Tiger was injured…or worse? What if he was gone forever? The thought of it overwhelmed him with sorrow.

And his babies. His precious little loves. When he jumped at Annie, they responded by kicking up a storm. Now they weren’t moving at all. Were they hurt? Could they have been poisoned by the spray? What if—

No. He dared not consider it. But he couldn’t shut off his brain. Couldn’t stop the barrage of horror that barreled through his mind like a runaway freight train.

What if Sebby and the babies are dead? My family, wiped out at once.

The prospect was too much to bear. Tears began to spill at an uncontrollable rate. They stung his already burning eyes, but at that point the physical pain no longer fazed him. He was in turmoil, sobbing while balled up on the floor.

So intense was Moriarty’s despair, he didn’t hear when his spouse returned to the room.

“Jimmy?” the sniper spoke, crouching down beside him. “Sweetheart, it’s me.”

“S-seb?”
“Yes, I’m right here.”

“You’re a-a-live,” he rasped. His speech was coming back slowly but surely.

“Of course I am. I’d never leave you, Magpie. Not willingly, at least.”

“I’m so glad. I heard shots fired and I didn’t know what was happening.”

“Annie had a small pistol concealed in her purse. Luckily, she’s got terrible aim,” Moran remarked. “I’m amazed Colin didn’t teach her how to properly operate a gun.”

“Be grateful for it. I am.”

“Aye,” Seb agreed. “We ought to focus on you right now, though. I know you were dosed with that damned capsaicin. It’s good you’re able to talk— some of the effects must be wearing off.”

“I still can’t see. And the babies… they were moving, and now they’re not.”

Sebastian took a deep breath, knowing he needed to remain cool and collected, even though inside, he was a wreck. He had to be strong for his partner’s sake.

“I’m taking you to get medical attention, Jim.” The assassin didn’t give his husband an option to refuse. He simply lifted him into his arms and carried him out the door.

“We’ll take the back exit. Should run into less people there.”

“What about the party?”

“Fuck the party. You’re more important.”

“Sebby, I’m sorry for all this.”

“It’s okay, hon. We can talk about it later. For now, you’d best conserve your strength.”

Moran was an alpha on a mission. The instinct to protect his family was almost primal. He would allow nothing and no one to get in his way.

Chapter End Notes

Just a heads up-- the next chapter will feature an update on how Jim’s doing, and then it will be a prelude to Christmas. I want there to be some sort of lead up before the big holiday reunion.
The Christmas Party – Part 3.5/A Prelude to Christmas

Chapter Summary

We see what happened to Jim and Sebastian following their abrupt exit from the party. Then, the couple prepares for Christmas.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Listen to that,” the on-call obstetrician said to Jim and Sebastian as he performed a fetal ultrasound. “Steady heartbeats.”

Both men breathed a sigh of relief, though the mastermind was still concerned with another matter.

“What about the lack of movement?” he asked. “I don’t feel them kicking and they aren’t moving on the monitor either.” Jim could view the screen now, his vision having returned since checking into the hospital.

“Let’s see if we can get them to respond to a bit of stimuli.” The physician pressed down on Moriarty’s abdomen in a few different spots, trying to encourage activity from the twins. Despite his efforts, nothing would cajole them.

The consulting criminal anxiously squeezed his mate’s hand. “Could the fall or the pepper spray have harmed them?” He was very worried.

“I don’t think so. It’s possible this may be a stress reaction, though,” the medical professional suggested. “When my wife was pregnant with our son, she was in a minor car accident. Afterward, the baby didn’t move for a few hours. He just sort of curled into himself, in a state of shock. It can happen— babies get scared sometimes following a traumatic event.”

Jim was devastated by the news. “I did this, then,” he whispered.

“You shouldn’t blame yourself. It isn’t your fault you got mugged.”

_Mugged, ha_, he bitterly mused. That was the cover story they gave upon arriving at the ER.

“Honey, no, don’t say that.” Seb leaned down, smoothing a stray lock of his spouse’s hair in a bid to calm him.

“Why not? It’s true.”
“Maybe I ought to leave the two of you alone,” the doctor spoke. “You’re free to go home whenever you’d like, but there’s no rush.”

His statement caught Jim by surprise. “I don’t have to stay overnight?” He almost didn’t believe it. Every other time he visited the hospital, they insisted he remain there.

“Not unless you want to. Your vitals show that you’re doing as well as could be expected for an omega with your medical history. Your blood pressure was elevated at check-in, but has since leveled out, and your vision and breathing have also normalized. I see no reason to keep you here any longer than necessary.”

“I wish you’d been on duty the other times I came in,” Moriarty remarked. “I was beginning to think I should have a room with my name on the door, considering how often I was made to stay.”

The kindly obstetrician smiled. “Well, something tells me that after the experience you had tonight, you’d be better served at home in a warm bed with your husband than in a clinical environment like this.”

He nodded appreciatively. “Thank you.” Before the man exited, Jim said one last thing to him. “Are you certain my children will be okay?”

“I’m 99% sure. If you’re really concerned about their lack of activity, there’s another trick I’ve seen work.”

“What’s that?”

“Drink a cold beverage. I’ve witnessed babies kick like junior footballers after their mums drank ice water.”

“I’ll try it,” the genius quickly announced.

“All right, I’ll have an orderly bring you some,” he promised.

At that, the doctor left the couple alone.

Sebastian immediately wrapped his arms around his Magpie, taking a moment to savor the closeness between them. It felt so good to hold him. The sentiment was mutual, as Jim relaxed in his embrace, letting out a peaceful coo.

“I love you, kitten.”

“I love you, too.” The mastermind scooted over so that his alpha could sit next to him on the bed and continue holding him. “I’m sorry I fucked things up.”

“What actually happened, darling?”

“When I went upstairs to put on my cologne, I found Annie in the nursery.”

“Bloody hell. What was she doing there?”

“She claimed to be searching for a bathroom, but I think it’s safe to assume she was snooping. Perhaps it would be prudent to sweep the room for surveillance devices once we get back.”

“Good idea,” Moran agreed. “What else occurred? It’s clear you had an altercation.”

“We did, yes.” Moriarty hesitated to describe the rest— he knew his decision to take on the woman
was reckless, and there was no way he’d come out of the story looking like ‘parent of the year.’ His actions endangered his children and there was no denying it.

“Are you okay? You got kind of quiet all of a sudden.”

“I’m just trying to figure out how to tell you what I did,” he answered. “This isn’t easy. I made some poor choices.”

“Jimmy, I’ve stuck by you through a lot of crazy shite. Nothing you say regarding this evening is going to scare me off. In fact, I’m sure it will barely scratch the surface.”

“I hope you mean that, Tiger.”

“Of course,” Seb reassured, hugging the Irishman a little bit tighter to drive home the point.

“You asked for it,” he warned. “When I saw Annie in the nursery, it was the final straw. I snapped and decided to enact my plan without delay. I lured her to our bedroom and I was ready to drug her. Had the syringe prepped and everything,” he admitted.

The assassin’s expression was sobering. “You went ahead and did it yourself, even after what we discussed?”

“Yeah, I did. I’m not proud of it, but that’s how the situation began. Shall I go on, or are you already so mad, you’ve heard enough?”

“Keep going.” Sebastian was upset by his mate’s disclosure, but shutting the conversation down now wouldn’t do either of them any good. He needed to know the whole story.

“Okay, fine. In a moment of spectacular failure, I was too slow to get the job done,” he grimly informed. “She saw the needle and attempted to flee. I was determined not to let her leave. I tackled her and we struggled. Eventually, the bitch managed to knock the syringe out of my hand and doused me with pepper spray. You were there for what came next.”

The former colonel wearily sighed. “Indeed, I was.”

Silence washed over the duo as Jim waited for Seb to say more, but the man did not speak.

“You have every right to be angry,” Moriarty acknowledged. “I didn’t think, I simply lashed out… the way I always do, I suppose.” He eyed his partner sadly. “If it’s any consolation, I hate myself right now. Throughout this pregnancy, I’ve tried to work on certain aspects of my personality. Tried to be less volatile and impulsive. Tried to consider the consequences of my actions. In some ways, I’ve made progress. But today I fucked up. The ‘old’ Jim took over, and he can be a grade-A arse. A selfish git who does what he wants, when he wants, repercussions be damned.”

“Believe me, I know,” Moran declared. He stared at the smaller man, noting the regret painted across his face. It was genuine.

“I’m sorry I went after Annie with zero backup. We should’ve done it together. I botched what would’ve been a fantastic opportunity to gain information. Worse, though, is how little regard I showed for our children’s welfare. The babies have come to mean everything to me, and yet I entered into a potentially deadly situation without heed. Knowing now that she had a gun…” he trailed off, his eyes growing teary. “It makes me sick, Seb.”

_Oh bollocks._ The sniper couldn’t stay mad at his mate, not when he was looking at him with those big, sad brown eyes and forlorn pout. Jim wasn’t putting on appearances here— this was sincere.
“We all make mistakes, Magpie. The key is to learn from them, and I’m fairly certain you have.”

Jim gazed at his spouse hopefully. “Sebby…my sweet, wonderful Sebby. Thank you.” He snuggled impossibly close to the handsome blonde.

Sebastian smiled. “Comfy?”

“Very mu— ooh!” he suddenly exclaimed in mid-sentence. “I don’t think I’ll be needing that ice water after all. Feel this,” the mastermind excitedly spoke, placing Moran’s hand on his stomach.

There it was. Their little ones were moving at last. The couple beamed at each other, now not only the most dangerous men in London, but also the happiest.

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In the days following the Christmas party, both Jim and Sebastian had their work cut out for them. Cleanup was the first hurdle. It seemed that after the gunshots rang out, revelers were quick to disperse. In their haste, they left a lot of half-eaten foodstuffs on plates and half-drunk cocktails in glasses. Seb didn’t want to tackle the intensive tidying effort by himself, and Jim couldn’t be asked to help in his condition, so a professional service was brought in to make their home habitable again. It was a wise move, as they did excellent work.

Next came Seb’s venture to retrieve the bullets expelled from Annie’s gun. She’d missed him completely, but managed to shoot up the wall in the upstairs hall pretty good. He was able to dig them out and patch the holes with drywall. It was a fairly simple fix, and honestly, he liked being handy around the house. Jim enjoyed it, too. Or at least he appreciated the sight of his strapping sniper in tight jeans and a tool belt.

The Christmas presents were another matter to be addressed. Moriarty was crafty as ever, sneaking a slew of boxes under the tree while Sebastian napped. He had no trouble moving them because they were all so lightweight. The elegantly wrapped parcels may have been low on heft, but they were rich with love and whimsy. Everything he’d secretly knitted for his mate throughout the past few months was packaged up, waiting to be opened by his smiling spouse.

Jim’s gifting endeavors didn’t end there, oh no. The knitting was merely a bonus to the main event he had organized. Using expert investigative skill and unlimited funds, he’d ensured that his Tiger would have the best damn prezzie in the whole world this holiday season: his family. He’d remained in contact with Dr. Severin Moran since their initial meeting many months ago, and now a proper reunion was to finally take place. The mastermind could hardly contain his glee.

Sev, along with his wife and child, were scheduled to touchdown at Heathrow on Christmas Eve. It was a 24-hour flight from Melbourne to London, with only one stop in between. From there, a driver would chauffeur them to the Moriarty-Moran residence. Once the requisite shock and awe was concluded, Jim planned for them to dine as a group at ‘Le Gavroche,’ one of the city’s most preeminent French restaurants. Reservations at the eatery had a three-month waiting list, so it was fortunate he’d begun making arrangements early.

The consulting criminal figured things would develop organically during the Moran clan’s stay. They’d exchange introductions, open gifts (because Jim had something for everyone), share a well-catered Christmas feast, and basically spend the week reconnecting. It was going to be marvelous. Moriarty grinned like a Cheshire cat just thinking about it.

As for what the gallant assassin was giving his Magpie this year, Jim still hadn’t a clue. Amazingly, he found himself feeling okay with that. It wasn’t too long ago when such a mystery
would've sent him skyrocketing to the brink of madness. Ever since venting his frustrations to his
MOPS group, though, much of his anxiety over it had alleviated. Now he was primarily concerned
with running a smooth ship this yuletide season. A joyful Christmas would be the greatest gift of
all.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Christmas Eve

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian spend time together on Christmas Eve. Later, guests arrive at their home.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains some explicit sexual content. Reader discretion is advised.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Darling, please try to relax. I know you hate it when a situation is outside of your control, but sometimes these things just happen,” Sebastian said to his anxiously pacing mate. “Come sit down and have breakfast with me. You shouldn’t be on your feet so much, and ‘Colonel Moran’s heavenly hash browns’ are not to be missed.”

“Sebby, how can I eat at a time like this?”

The sniper rolled his eyes. He loved Jim dearly, but the man was nothing if not a consummate drama queen. Today’s cause for alarm was brought on by a weather report calling for heavy snowfall to begin in the evening and continue through until the following night. Seb couldn’t understand why Moriarty was so on edge about it. Yes, it would throw a wrench into their dinner plans, but besides that, what was the big deal? If anything, he was the one who ought to be worried, not Jim. After all, if it stormed too badly, he wouldn’t be able to plant the tree he’d gotten the Irishman as a gift. Thank goodness he thought to purchase a second present in addition to the sapling.

“Why does it have to be now? A week goes by with picture perfect weather, and then suddenly, on Christmas Eve, it plummets straight to hell. Why?”

“Maybe Mother Nature has a twisted sense of humor.”

Jim glared at his partner. “In that case, the bitch isn’t very funny.”

“Kitten, come sit and we’ll talk.”

Moriarty begrudgingly complied, taking a seat across from the blonde. He promptly began
devouring the plate of eggs, hash browns, and fruit mélange Seb had set out.

“I thought you were too upset to eat?”

“I am, but the babies require sustenance.”

“Oh huh,” Moran replied, not sounding convinced.

“It’s true,” he insisted.

“I’m sure it is, dear.”

The mastermind grumbled, feeling patronized. “If you’re going to give me a hard time, I can finish my meal in the dining room.”

“Oh Magpie, calm down. I’m merely trying to lighten the mood. You seem awfully worked up about the weather and I can’t quite fathom why.”

Jim sighed in frustration. He couldn’t tell him he was worried that the snowstorm might interfere with Severin’s flight, thus throwing the whole reunion into question. He wished he could be honest, but it would ruin the surprise. Instead, he’d have to concoct a plausible excuse.

“Have I mentioned that ‘Le Gavroche’ has a three-month waitlist for reservations? Three months, Seb. If we miss this, we won’t have another opportunity to dine there until after the twins are born. And at that stage, would we still want to go? A five-star restaurant is no place to bring newborns, and I certainly won’t allow some stranger to watch our little ones just so that we can attend. They’d be far too young to send off to a babysitter. I’ve seen the news reports— I know what happens when you leave infants in other people’s care. They die, Seb. They’re neglected, shaken, slapped, drugged so that they’ll stay asleep and won’t cry. It’s terrible and I won’t permit anyone but us to watch Essie and Eddie for at least the first year of their lives. So if we don’t go tonight, then we don’t go, period. Do you get it now?”

Sebastian blinked, taken aback by his spouse’s rambling screed. He wasn’t sure what he expected Jim to say, but it wasn’t that.

“Sweetheart,” the assassin spoke, “if that’s what you’re concerned about, let me gently point out that you’re an expert hacker. If you really wanted to, you could infiltrate their database and assign yourself a reservation for whenever you’d like.”

Bollocks. Moriarty hadn’t counted on him offering such a pragmatic response. But then again, Seb always was smarter than your average gun-for-hire. It was one of the things that had made him fall in love with the man all those years ago.

Jim let out a nervous laugh. “Yes, I suppose you’re right. If a system has a backdoor, I can crack it. I guess sometimes I lose sight of the forest for the trees.”

Moran smiled warmly. “It’s fine, darling. The holidays can throw anyone off kilter. Now that a solution’s been brought to your attention, you can relax.”

“Relax. Yeah. That’s the ticket.”

Ugh. Jim knew this was going to be a long afternoon. He hoped he had the fortitude to withstand it.

**********
As early evening rolled around, Moriarty was on pins and needles. Snow had started falling and he had no idea if Severin’s flight arrived at Heathrow on time. The airline’s website noted that some bookings would be affected, but annoyingly, did not specify which ones those were. Texting the elder Moran sibling did no good— he’d apparently shut off his phone prior to boarding. Still, the mastermind sent a car to pick him up. He’d not heard back from the driver, so perhaps things remained on schedule. It was the uncertainty that made him want to scream.

“You’re carrying so much tension in your back, love. It’s no wonder you complain of it aching.” Sebastian and Jim rested atop a makeshift ‘nest’ of pillows and blankets in front of the fireplace. The sniper was in the midst of giving his mate a massage, working magic on the smaller man’s sore muscles.

“Ooh, Tiger, your fingers are a godsend.” He laid on his side while receiving the rubdown, so as not to put undue pressure on his abdomen.

“I’m not sure god has anything to do with them, but they have served me well on many occasions.”

“I bet.”

A sly expression settled across Seb’s face. He was feeling rather amorous and thought that maybe a bit of passion would help his husband unwind.

“Blimey, it’s getting toasty in here,” the blonde declared as he paused to remove his shirt. He didn’t miss the way Jim turned his head to admire the view. In fact, Moriarty was ogling him quite shamelessly.

“Like what you see, Magpie?” he asked, flashing a come-hither gleam.

“I dooooo.”

“Then you won’t mind if I ditch the rest.”

Before the genius could reply, Moran had undressed and was standing brazenly in the nude. Jim’s mouth formed into a grin as he was captivated by the sight of Seb’s gorgeous, well-toned physique. The firelight framed him in a gentle glow, giving his visage an almost ethereal quality. It was mesmerizing.

“Oh darling, you really are magnificent.”

“So are you, kitten.”

The former colonel knelt down beside his partner. Moriarty responded immediately, grasping the chain he wore his dog tags on and pulling him in for a kiss. It was a heated, hungry exchange that left them both in need of more.

Sebastian tugged at Jim’s sweater, yanking it off and mussing the Irishman’s hair in the process.

“Let me make you more comfortable, honey.” He gathered up some of the extra pillows surrounding them and placed the cushions beneath his omega. “How’s that?”

“Diviiiiine.”

“Good.”

Having received confirmation of Jim’s well-being, Seb resumed his lustful ministrations. He kissed
along the man’s collarbone and began sucking a spot on his neck.

The consulting criminal grunted, goosebumps rising on his skin as he grew increasingly aroused. He wanted this, he truly did. But…

*What if our guests arrive?* He didn’t know if they’d be on time or not. Should he put an end to his and Seb’s carnal activities just in case they showed up?

The trouble was, Moriarty didn’t *want* to stop. He relished the sensation of his husband’s bare body pressed against his own. Savored the touch, taste, and scent of him. That, in conjunction with the mastermind’s hormonally-driven urges, made for a dangerous combination.

Jim could feel the assassin’s hardened manhood through the barrier of his clothing. He wished that he, too, was unsheathed.

“Help me take off my pants,” he swiftly commanded.

“With pleasure.”

Moran undid his mate’s trousers and slid a hand inside. He stroked the dampening fabric of his underwear, eliciting a delicious moan from Moriarty.

“Are you enjoying this?” the sniper wantonly inquired, though he already knew the answer.

“God, yes,”

Sebastian seized the genius’s mouth while continuing to caress his leaking length. Their tongues met in fervent delight as Jim bucked upward, grinding into his alpha’s palm.

“I want to make love to you,” the blonde tenderly whispered between kisses.

“I do, too.”

Seb smiled seductively and slid Moriarty’s pants all the way off, stripping him of his briefs as well. For just a moment, he sat back on his knees and admired the Irishman. He looked so handsome, alit by the gentle flicker of the hearth. So sexy and serene.

“Magpie, I—”

DING. DONG.

Moran’s statement was cut short by the sudden chime of the doorbell.

“Who the fuck would be at our door during a snowstorm?” the assassin complained. “Carolers, maybe?”

Jim’s eyes widened as panic set in. *Oh no.* He knew who it was.

DING. DONG.

“I’m letting it go. They can move right along to the next house.”

“Wait. Maybe we should answer it.”

Sebastian shot his spouse a look of incredulity. “Are you kidding me?”
“It’s possible someone’s car broke down and they need help.”

“Since when do you care about random people’s problems?”

“Since I became a parent,” he sharply informed. “They might have small children who’ll freeze to death if they don’t get assistance.”

DING. DONG.

The bell chimed yet again, and the two men stared at each other long enough for Seb to realize that Jim wasn’t going to back down.

“Fine, I’ll see who’s there.” The blonde threw on his jeans, grumbling at the erection that strained inside his pants. “I can’t answer the door like this! They’ll think I’m some kind of pervert.”

“Wrap yourself in a blanket. We’ve got plenty,” the mastermind said, referring to the surplus that surrounded them after Seb had decided to build a fireside nest.

“Good idea.” He grabbed one off the floor and wore it like a cloak. As he turned around, he noticed Moriarty was also getting dressed. “What are you doing, hon? Once I deal with these folks, I’m coming back.”

“Yes, well, who knows how long it will take.”

The former colonel frowned. “I suppose that’s true.”

DING. DONG.

“They certainly are persistent.”

“Indeed. Help me stand up and then get moving.”

“Aye aye, sir.”

As Seb neared the door, Jim counted the seconds in his head. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1—Open.

And there they were.

Sebastian stood face-to-face with Severin for the first time in almost twenty-five years. Not only that, but he had a woman and child in tow.

“Merry Christmas!” the older Moran greeted.

The sniper remained motionless, utterly gobsmacked.

Moriarty soon approached. “Hello, everyone! So glad you could make it, especially with such unfortunate weather. Please, come in.” He was beaming as he ushered the trio inside the house.

Seb pulled his grinning mate aside, seeking an explanation, but was too shocked to properly articulate a question. “Jimmy, how…when…what is this?”

“It’s a family reunion, darling,” he matter-of-factly replied. “Just in time for the holidays. They’ll be here all week.”

“I…well…wow.”
This was going to be interesting.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will feature Christmas Eve dinner, and then Christmas Day festivities. My goal is to have it posted on December 24th or 25th.
Christmas Eve, Continued

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian host a Moran family reunion, just in time for the holidays.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was Christmas Eve and James Moriarty was acting as the consummate host. He graciously welcomed the Morans into his home, the trifecta consisting of Severin, his wife Paige, and their daughter Penelope. He made sure everyone’s luggage was brought safely inside, and then served his guests a piping pot of Earl Grey tea. Now they sat in the living room, sipping cuppas as Jim attempted to break the ice.

“I imagine it must’ve been a madhouse at the airport,” he said. “With the blizzard going on, I honestly didn’t know if your flight would come in on time.”

“It was a brutal commute,” Sev remarked. “We were playing it by ear as to whether or not we’d be grounded, but ultimately, we got lucky. Ours was one of the last flights to make it to Heathrow without an extensive delay.”

The consulting criminal smiled. “I think it’s a sign that this was meant to be. Come hell or high water, we’re supposed to spend the holiday together. Don’t you agree, Seb?” He turned to glance at his mute mate. The younger Moran sibling had barely spoken a word since his family arrived.

“Uh…yeah. Sure, hon.” He awkwardly clutched at the blanket wrapped around him, still processing the whirlwind reunion he’d been thrust into. What was the protocol for a situation like this? He wished he knew.

“I’m hungry,” Penelope declared. The auburn-haired preteen sat cross-legged on the couch, playing a game on her iPad.

“Well, good news— tonight we have reservations at an exclusive French restaurant,” Moriarty informed. “They make the best crème brûlée. You’ll love it.”

Severin arched a brow. “Sounds nice, but I’m not certain the place will be open this evening. On the drive over, it looked like a lot of businesses were closing early because of the storm.”

Jim scowled intensely, his perfect composure waning. Without missing a beat, he pulled out his phone and began dialing a number. He stood up from the group, walking just outside the room to
conduct the call.

“This is my first time in England,” Paige stated, trying to keep the conversation flowing.

“Oh? How do you like it?”

“As first impressions go, it’s definitely a change of pace. Our seasons are reversed,” she noted. “It’s sunny in Australia right now. I didn’t think I’d ever see a true ‘white Christmas,’ but here we are. Life’s surprising sometimes.”

“It sure is.”

Penelope looked up from her handheld device and stared at the sniper. “Why aren’t you wearing a shirt?” she abruptly asked.

“Penny!” her mum chided. “This is your uncle’s home and he didn’t know we were coming. He was probably relaxing and didn’t have a chance to put on a shirt before we got here.”

“He kept us waiting forever. There was plenty of time.”

Paige looked absolutely mortified by her daughter’s blunt commentary. She turned to Sebastian, apologetic. “Please, forgive Penny’s lack of tact. If it’s on her mind, it’s on her lips.”

Seb chuckled. “It’s quite all right. I have experience with that type.”

As if on cue, Jim could be heard raising his voice from the doorway.

“Unacceptable! How could you possibly expect that to be adequate compensation? A voucher for a free appetizer hardly makes up for shutting down on Christmas Eve!”

“This doesn’t bode well for our dinner plans, does it?” the woman whispered.

Moriarty returned to the living room, his glower an indication that all was not well. “I regret to announce that, due to inclement weather, our reservations at ‘Le Gavroche’ have been cancelled. Worse yet, numerous eateries throughout London are closing as we speak, so there’s really nowhere for us to go this evening. I’m sorry we’re getting off to such an abysmal start.”

“No reason to be upset, darling. Let’s whip up something ourselves,” Seb suggested.

“What a fabulous idea,” Paige enthused. “I love to cook. Do it all the time at home. Tell them, Sev.”

The older blonde nodded. “It’s true,” he confirmed. “She’s a bit of an amateur chef. Makes a chicken kiev that’s to die for.”

“Hmm.” The mastermind considered the prospect. They did need to eat; there was no getting around that fact. Under the circumstance, preparing their own meal seemed to be the only option. “Okay, we’ll cook. The fridge is fully stocked. Surely we can rustle up a palatable dish. My sole stipulation is that we work as a team. I’ll not have you doing it alone.”

“Of course,” Paige agreed. “This is your house— it makes sense you’d want to be involved in the process.”

“Glad we’ve got an understanding. Come, and I’ll show you to the kitchen.”

Jim began wheeling away when Penelope suddenly called out to him.
“Hey, can I use your pool?” the girl inquired. “I was told there’d be a heated pool here. I brought my own bathing suit and everything.”

“If it’s all right with your parents, it’s fine by me,” he answered, deferring to the couple for a decision.

“I don’t have a problem with it,” Paige acknowledged, “but wouldn’t you rather spend some quality time with your Uncle Seb?”

“We’ll be here all week. I can hang out with him later.”

The woman sighed. “Okay. I expect you back for dinner, though.”

“Got it.” Penny paused, realizing there was one pertinent question she’d failed to ask. “How do I get to the pool, anyway?”

“Down the far corridor to your left,” the genius explained. “It’s just beyond a set of carved double doors.”

“Cool, thanks.” She grabbed the bag containing her swimwear and headed off.

“Sebastian, I want to apologize in case my daughter has come across as slightly rude,” Paige spoke. “She’s twelve…you know how kids are at that age.”

“No worries,” the assassin assured. “It’s got to be difficult for her, traveling to another continent to meet people she never knew existed until recently.”

Severin shot his brother a wounded glare. “She’s always been aware of you, Seb. Why would I hide such a thing?”

The younger Moran was caught off guard by his sibling’s admission. “Because of our estrangement,” he said. “You didn’t want me in your life, so I naturally assumed you’d omit me from discussion.”

“That’s not true,” Sev countered. “I’ve often thought about you. Why would you think otherwise?”

“Oh, I dunno. Maybe it had to do with the fact that you didn’t try looking me up for over two decades. As it is, Jim’s the one who found you. If he hadn’t put in the effort, we wouldn’t be talking right now.”

“This argument goes both ways, Seb. You didn’t exactly hunt me down, either.”

A silence washed over the room and Moriarty grew nervous. This wasn’t how the reunion was supposed to go. It was meant to be magical and joyful. A celebration of familial glee.

It still could be, a tiny voice in his mind proclaimed. You brought them together physically, which was a good start. But now it’s time for the most important part—you’ve got to bring them together emotionally as well.

He knew what he needed to do.

“Tiger, I want you to show Severin around the house. No shortcuts—he gets the grand tour.”

“Seriously, Jim?”

“Very. The two of you will go exploring while Paige and I make dinner.”
“If you insist.” The blonde relented, tossing away his blanket covering and retrieving his discarded shirt. Once properly dressed, he tapped Sev on the shoulder, urging him to come along. “Up and at ‘em. We’ve got a lot of ground to cover.”

“After a 24-hour flight, it’ll be a relief to stretch my legs,” the older man remarked while walking adjacent to his brother.

Soon, the room was empty except for Jim and Paige. The woman eyed him slyly, a smile gracing her face.

“I see what you did there.”

“Me?”

“Yes you,” she repeated for emphasis. “You set our husbands up so that they’ll have to talk to each other, thus laying the groundwork for them to reconnect. It’s brilliant.”

The consulting criminal flashed a devilish grin. “I know.”

He’d planted the seeds, now it was up to the Moran brothers as to whether their relationship withered or bloomed.

**********

Sebastian followed his mate’s instructions, leading Severin on an expedition through the wilds of their residence. It took some time, but eventually they made it to the final stop; the place he’d deliberately saved for last: the games room. This was a recreational area containing a billiards table, dart board, pinball machine, and minibar. The sniper thought that maybe, just maybe, he and his brother could hang out and have a bit of fun the way they used to in their formative years.

“Impressive layout you’ve got here,” Sev complimented. “The whole house is exquisite, but this is a place you could really unwind in.”

“Believe me, I do.” Seb turned to the bar and poured himself a tumbler of whiskey. “Care for a drink?”

“Yes, that would be splendid.”

The assassin obliged, handing Severin a glass. “Cheers.”

Both men toasted, taking hearty sips of the amber liquid. It wasn’t long before they were in need of refills, the pair deciding to take the bottle with them and sit down on the couch.

“Glad to know you have superb taste in liquor, Sebby. This is a fine variety.”

The younger man almost did a spit take. “You haven’t called me that since we were kids.”

“I haven’t seen you since then, so yeah, that’s probably true.”

Another hush beset the siblings. It was as if they wanted to open up a dialogue, but couldn’t quite figure out how. After so many years of separation, was it possible to rebuild a bond? Was there anything to salvage?

Sebastian hoped so. Deep down, he’d missed his brother more intensely than he ever let on. After their parents passed away, Sev was his only relative. When he left as well, the sniper felt very much like an orphan. He was always able to relate to Jim’s plight in that sense— in his heart, he
was alone, too. But now…now he had an opportunity to change things. Reset the situation and get some of his family back. It would be foolish not to at least try to mend fences, even if it was simply for his children’s sake. Bearing that in mind, the former colonel chose to speak up.

“So you’re a doctor,” he began, “a neonatal specialist, I’ve been told. How’d that happen?”

“An outstanding question, my dear Seb.” He took another swig of whiskey and continued, “When I left home to backpack across Europe, I got more than I bargained for.”

“How do you mean?”

“I saw things that shook me up. Rattled me in a way I couldn’t forget.”

“Such as?”

“Women,” Sev somberly replied. “Women in Belarus and the Ukraine, who lived in villages that were little more than glorified toxic dumping grounds. Many of their babies were stillborn, and those that survived often had severe physiological problems. Defects you wouldn’t want to imagine. It was the stuff of nightmares.”

“Bloody hell.”

“Indeed. I couldn’t shake what I’d seen. The suffering of those children was too much. I had to do something,” he declared. “I decided to dedicate my life to helping medicine’s tiniest, most delicate patients— newborns. The infants I assist on a day-to-day basis may not be as bad off as those I encountered in Eastern Europe, but I still feel as though I’ve made great strides through what I’ve done. It’s fulfilling work, Seb.”

He nodded. “I’m proud of you, Severin.”

“Thanks. I’m sure it must seem hard to believe, considering what a layabout I used to be.”

“I’ll admit, it’s a surprise. But in a good way, you know? A beer-guzzling slacker grows up to become a champion who saves sickly newborns. It’s inspiring.”

“Champion? That’s a bit heavy-handed, but I’ll take it,” he quipped. “What about you? I’m not 100% clear on what it is you do.”

Sebastian took a deep breath. It would be difficult explaining the profession he was in. Best not to get overly specific.

“I used to work for the military and then I freelanced a bit. Now my employer is James Moriarty. Has been for several years, actually.”

“Yes, but what do your services entail?”

“You name it. Anything Jim wants, I deliver.”

Sev smirked. “So basically, he’s got you whipped in and out of the bedroom?”

“Blimey. Someone’s getting awfully cheeky. Perhaps you’ve had enough to drink.”

The elder Moran shrugged. “I’m not wrong, though, am I?”

“He has my heart,” the assassin said. “I worked for him…and then I loved him. Most amazing of all, he loved me back.” Seb paused, reflecting on his and Jim’s storied relationship. “Tell me, does
it bother you?”

“What? That you’re involved with a crime lord? Certainly, I’d prefer it if my little brother had selected a safer mate, but at the end of the day, the heart wants what the heart wants.”

“I mean, does it bother you that I’m married to a man? Are you surprised by it?”

Severin sighed, gazing softly at his sibling. “Honestly? No. We grew up together, Seb. You think I didn’t see the way you looked at other boys? It was the same way you looked at girls. I always figured you’d be just as likely to end up with a man as you would a woman.”

“I didn’t realize I was so obvious,” he replied, flushing with embarrassment.

“Relax— you weren’t. Being the oldest, I felt like it was my job to watch you closely. I noticed things no one else would.”

“Ah, a wise observer. Guess I didn’t give you enough credit.”

“It’s water under the bridge.” Sev tossed back another measure of whiskey and spoke, “For what it’s worth, I’m sorry I didn’t stay in touch. At first, it was impossible because I was traveling abroad without a permanent address. But later, when I put down roots and went to university, I should’ve tried to find you. There’s no good excuse for my neglect. Do you think you could forgive what a shitty brother I’ve been?”

“If you can forgive me for the same,” Sebastian stated. “As you pointed out earlier, the matter goes both ways.”

“Let’s agree to start over. Put the sins of the past behind us and proceed from here.”

“I’d like that.”

“Excellent. I propose we make a toast— to family.”

“To family,” the sniper repeated.

The Morans raised their glasses in salute, marking a promise they both sought to keep.

**********

“Ready for a taste?” Paige asked, offering a spoonful of freshly prepared pesto to Jim.

“Honey, you know it.” He eagerly sampled the sauce, his eyes growing wide the instant it hit his tongue. “This is amaaaazing.”

“Thank you. How are the noodles coming along?”

Jim pulled a strand of linguini from a bubbling pot, biting into it. “They’re not quite done, but will be shortly.”

“Wonderful. I dare say we make a fine culinary duo.”

“This has been fun,” he concurred. “Have you ever tried your hand at baking?”

“I’ve dabbled, but not attempted anything too challenging. Penny’s a budding baker, though.”

The consulting criminal cocked his head, intrigued. “Is she?”
“Oh yes. Swimming is her primary passion, but whipping up cookies and tortes is a close second. Before her grandmum passed away, they spent a lot of time baking together.”

An idea quickly came to Moriarty’s mind. “Perhaps that’s something we could do together as well,” he posited. “You, me, and Penelope will start a brand new tradition—Christmas baking with Uncle Jim.”

Paige smiled happily. “That’d be very nice. I think she’d enjoy that, and I would, too.”

“Then it’s settled. Tonight, we dine. Tomorrow, we bake.”

Soon, dinner was ready and all members of the Moran clan gathered to share in a delicious, albeit unconventional, holiday feast. Linguini with pesto and leftover chicken wasn’t what anyone had originally counted on, but as spur-of-the-moment meals go, it turned out pretty damn well.

After dinner, Paige and Penelope settled in, familiarizing themselves with the mansion while Severin and Seb played darts. As for Jim, he simply sat back and watched on in delight. His childhood dream of having a family had finally come true.

Chapter End Notes

Happy holidays, everyone! Hope you're all doing well.

It's difficult for me to say this, but I'm not going to have the "Christmas Day" chapter ready by December 25th. It will most likely be posted a day or two later. I feel terrible about this and offer my sincerest apologies. I hope I haven't disappointed anyone too badly. Again, I'm sorry.
Christmas Day

Chapter Summary

It’s Christmas Day in the Moriarty-Moran household. Fluff, angst, and whimsy abound.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At last, Christmas Day had arrived. Jim was the first to awaken, up bright and early before anyone else in the house. He seized the opportunity to sneak off and place some strategic phone calls, making arrangements for a holiday feast to be delivered despite the treacherous weather conditions. He’d learned long ago that if you threw enough money at a problem, you could often garner whatever result you wished. This case was no different. For an ample fee, he was able to secure the services of someone willing to brave the storm and bring them a fully catered meal. He delighted at the notion of surprising his guests in such a way. With all the snow, they’d never dream it possible.

After dinner was ensured, Moriarty settled in front of the fireplace and removed his babies’ stockings from the mantle. He planned to ‘show’ the twins what was inside, but didn’t want to do it in front of other people. This was a private matter and they simply wouldn’t understand— Seb included. His mate already thought it strange that he was buying presents for children who were not yet born. If he caught him conducting a gift unveiling ceremony with them, he might never hear the end of it.

“Which one should I dive into first?” he wondered aloud. Plagued by indecision, he resorted to a round of ‘Eeny, meeny, miny, moe.’ This led to the selection of Eddie’s stocking.

He grinned broadly. “Okay, my little prince. Are you ready to hear what Santa brought?”

Jim pulled an item from the festive, monogrammed sock. “Looks like you’ve got a lovely set of alphabet blocks. You’ll have loads of fun with these, sweetheart. Once you’re out of Daddy’s tummy, I’ll teach you how to spell your name. I’m sure you’ll be a quick study,” he said, resting a hand on his abdomen. There was a slight bit of movement, but nothing significant. “Not overly impressed, aye, son? Well, you are my child— it would probably take more than a few wooden blocks to wow me, too.”

His next gift was for Essie. It was a Rubik's Cube. “The lady at the shop thought I was crazaaazzy for buying a baby a puzzle like this, but she doesn’t know you the way I do, darling. If you take after me— and I’m sure you will— you’ll be solving greater complexities than this before you’re out of diapers.”
Suddenly, the mastermind felt a strong kick from within. He was absolutely beaming in response. “Enthusiastic about that one, huh? I suspected you would be,” he happily declared. “Back to you now, Edward. Let’s see what else Santa has in store for London’s finest little lad.”

Jim continued pulling out presents for the twins, describing them as he went along. What he seemingly didn’t realize was that his spouse was watching. The sniper hid outside the doorway, peeking in on one of the sweetest things he’d ever seen. When Jim produced a miniature G.I. Joe action figure and stated that the army man was ‘rugged and brave’ like their Papa, it damn near brought a tear to his eye.

Eventually, the consulting criminal exhausted the contents of the stockings, setting them aside and then turning his head towards the door.

“I’m done now, Tiger. You can stop gawking and come in.”

Seb entered the living room with a stunned look on his face. “You knew I was standing there? How?”

“You’re my alpha, dear. I’d recognize your scent anywhere.”

“Ah, foiled again by your keen senses,” he teased, approaching his mate. The blonde leaned down, gently kissing the top of Jim’s head and inhaling the sweetness of his hair. “Speaking of scents, you smell amazing. Like freshly baked cookies or cinnamon buns,” he stated. “I could devour you.”

“Ooh, promises, promises, my love. I’d hold you to that offer, but we do have guests.”

Moran grunted, forever enticed by the smaller man’s flirtatious ways.

“It’s actually kind of funny you bring up baked goods. I have plans to make cookies with Paige and Penelope later today.”

“Really? That’s wonderful, hon. I’m glad you’re getting on well with them.”

“We’ve only just met, so it remains to be seen how things will go in the long-term. Still, I do hope for the best.” He paused, reflecting on the situation. “You made strides with Severin last night.”

“Indeed, I did. He’s not the wanker I remember, Jim. He’s actually become a halfway decent bloke.”

The genius smiled. “It’s a Christmas miracle.”

“Yeah, I guess it kind of is.”

A peaceful calm washed over the couple as they enjoyed the simple pleasure of being in each other’s company. They treasured quiet moments like these.

“Magpie?”

“Yes?”

“I know you also bought the babies new stuffed animals for their playroom. Shall we go upstairs and you can tell them about those as well?”

“You’d want to be there while I do that?” he cautiously inquired.

“I would,” Seb confirmed, giving his husband’s shoulder a reassuring pat. “The things I heard you
say to our children were beautiful. I’d love to listen to more.”

Jim was taken aback by the assassin’s admission, but in the most wonderful, remarkable way. “Let’s go,” he announced, not wishing to dally.

Off they went, riding the elevator to the second floor in search of plush turtles and teddy bears. All the while, their hearts were bursting with affection for each other, for their little ones, and for the whole holiday season.

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The Morans slept long and hard. So long, in fact, that by the time they arose, it was mid-afternoon. Jim let them sleep because he knew all too well the hell of jetlag and time zone hopping. He’d done his fair share of traveling through the years and did not envy those who had to commute from England to Australia, and vice versa. Theirs was a grueling cross to bear.

His guests’ late wakeup proved surprisingly fortuitous. It allowed him and his mate to receive their catered meal and set everything up in the dining room while the group remained blissfully unaware. When they emerged from hibernation, they were treated to a repast of roast turkey, potatoes, glazed carrots, and cranberry sauce. It was an old-fashioned feast worthy of any proper English dinner table.

“Jim, this is spectacular. How did you manage it?” Paige asked, truly amazed by the spread.

He flashed a devilish smirk. “I have my ways.”

“It looks delicious,” Severin said. “Where should I sit?”

“Anywhere you’d like.” Moriarty hesitated for a beat, adding, “Tiger, take a seat so that Sev and I can assemble on either side of you.”

“Sure thing, hon.” The sniper did as requested, and soon the others followed suit, settling into their respective spots at the table.

“Ordinarily, I’d refuse to share my hubby with anyone, but you are family, so I’m making an exception.”

The elder Moran chuckled. “That’s very generous of you, Jim.”

“It reaaaaally is, yes.”

Several serving dishes were passed around, allowing each person to take as much as they wanted. Any inkling of doubt about the catering was laid to rest after the first few bites. The food was excellent and there was no denying it.

With that aspect out of the way, now came the hard part— initiating conversation.

“Soooo…how do you usually celebrate Christmas in Australia?” Jim inquired.

“We tend to keep the festivities small,” Sev informed. “Neither Paige nor myself have many relatives, so there’s never been a need for anything grandiose. I think the most extravagant we got was the year we prepared lobster thermidor. It was pricey, but worth every penny.”

“Ooh, I adore lobster. Haven’t had it in ages, though. I was warned to avoid shellfish during pregnancy due to the mercury content.”
“Yeah,” Severin spoke, “best to err on the side of caution.”

“How far along are you?” Paige prodded. “I saw the nursery last night and it was utterly enchanting. Such regal décor.”

“Thank you,” the Irishman replied. “I’m very pleased with how the room turned out. And for the record, I’m 7 months now.”

“They’ll be here before you know it.”

He nodded. “I can scarcely believe it. The time’s flown by so fast, it seems like just yesterday I was having my first sonogram.”

“Once they’re born, it only gets worse. Time, I mean. One minute you’ll be holding a tiny baby in your arms, staring into a beautiful set of brand new eyes, and then BAM. You’ll look again, and that sweet little baby will be almost halfway grown and hardly need you anymore.”

“Mum,” Penelope interrupted, “don’t be so melodramatic. It’s Christmas and you’re bumming people out.”

“Am I? If that’s true, I apologize. It wasn’t my intention. I’m merely trying to offer some advice from one mother to another,” she stated. “Cherish every second you have with your children, because it goes by in an instant.”

Paige’s words cut Jim to the core, hitting on an issue he’d struggled with for far too long. He was perpetually uncertain about whether or not he should walk away from his empire to raise his babies. He didn’t want to miss them growing up. Didn’t want their relationship to be akin to ships passing in the night, and one day find that they’d become fully formed adults he’d never bothered getting to know. The idea of it made him heartsick.

“Magpie, are you okay?” Sebastian’s voice was steeped with concern as he leaned over to wipe a tear from the consulting criminal’s eye.

“I…uh…” He didn’t realize he’d grown misty until that moment.

“See what you did, mum? You made Uncle Jim cry.”

“Oh, bloody hell,” he mumbled under his breath. This was not the impression he’d hoped to make on Seb’s family. Not by a longshot.

“Jim, I’m so sorry.”

“No, Paige, it isn’t your fault. My hormones are maddening. I get rattled by the smallest things lately.”

“I understand, but Penny’s right— I am a bit maudlin at times,” she acknowledged. “I like to joke that Severin loves me in spite of my personality, not because of it.”

“Sounds similar to me and Seb,” Moriarty remarked. “Guess we’ve got something in common.”

“The Moran boys sure know how to pick their mates,” she jested, trying to lighten the mood.

“I’d say we have impeccable taste,” Sebastian proclaimed, giving Jim’s hand a gentle squeeze.

“I couldn’t agree with you more,” said Sev. “We absolutely do.” He, too, grasped his spouse’s hand in a show of solidarity.
Penelope stared at the adults surrounding her and rolled her eyes. “Old people are so weird.”

The whole group got a good laugh out of the girl’s candid assessment. It was just what they needed to diffuse the tension in the room. From there on out, the conversation flowed effortlessly.

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 Shortly after finishing up dinner, everyone retired to the living room for a gift exchange. Actually, it wasn’t so much an exchange as it was Jim playing Santa to his guests. He gave each member of the family a box containing various knitted items he’d crafted throughout the past several months. Hats, gloves, socks, and scarves were included in the mix.

It was Sebastian, however, who received the most exciting package of all. When he opened his box, he was immediately bombarded by the color scheme.


And it was striped. Not just any stripes, either. These were—

“It’s a tiger print sweater,” the mastermind gleefully announced, “for my Tiger.”

“Aw, thank you, sweetie.” He gave his husband an appreciative peck on the cheek.

“I expect you to wear it at some point this week.”

“Duly noted.” It was gaudier than the former colonel’s usual wardrobe, but if it made Jim happy, he’d oblige. “Are you ready to see your presents now, too?”

“Bring them on.”

Seb left the room for a moment, returning with a pushcart that held a large wrapped box and a potted sapling with a red bow fastened around it.

Moriarty gazed at the gifts, slightly confused. “You got me…a tree?”

“Yes, and it hasn’t been easy hiding it from you. First, I had to stash it in the shed, and then, after you fell asleep last night, I snuck it inside the house. My idea is to plant it in the yard and we can watch it grow alongside our family.”

The Irishman’s expression softened as he was overtaken by emotion yet again. At this rate, his in-laws would never believe him to be the most dangerous man in London, but screw it. He was also a hormonally-charged omega at Christmastime. Allowances could be made.

“Sebby, that’s wonderful. We’ll have to find a way to keep it alive in here until the snow clears. Maybe put it in the solarium—it’d get plenty of light there.”

“Sounds like a plan.” He hugged Jim tenderly and whispered in his ear, “Go on and open the big box. It has an accessible side panel.”

“Okay.”

Moriarty proceeded to unlock the mystery of his second, and final, gift. The looks on his guests’ faces suggested that they were interested as well. After a fair amount of ripping, tearing, and slashing via a box cutter, he was finally able to liberate his prezzie. The cackle he let out on sight was priceless.
It was a motorized wheelchair—the kind elderly people rode around on in tv adverts.

“I know something like this may seem a bit off-the-wall, but practically speaking, it would afford you greater mobility. Plus, you wouldn’t have to work your arms as much.”

“I think it’d be fun,” Penelope interjected. “Imagine zipping through a shop in that thing.”

The mental image made Jim laugh harder. Even Severin and Paige appeared amused.

Seb was a tad flustered by their reactions. “If you want to return it, I’ve got the receipt.”

“Return it? Never. Hell, I intend to try it out today.” The genius turned to the ladies in his company. “Paige, Penelope,” he addressed, “the kitchen tile would be great for racing on. How about the three of us head in there so that I can test out the chair, and then we do a bit of baking while we’re at it? I’d love to see how fast it takes me to get from the counter to the oven.”

“Can I ride it, too?” the girl asked.

He grinned. “Impress me with your baking abilities and I might consider it.”

This got Penny excited. “Then it’s as good as guaranteed.”

Moriarty arched a brow. “Awfully confident, aye?”

“Just honest. My grandmum taught me all about baking when I was little, and she made pastries professionally. So you could say I’ve been expertly trained.”

“Splendid. I look forward to working with such a formidable authority on the subject.” Jim was getting a big kick out of his precocious niece. She was forthright in the most adorable way.

“Well,” Seb spoke, “if that’s the plan, we’d best get this chair out of the box and make sure it’s fully charged.”

“I leave that up to you, darling. I’m in no position to be performing strenuous tasks. I am, however, quite willing to supervise.” The consulting criminal celebrated any opportunity which required his gorgeous mate to crouch and bend while he simply sat back and watched.

“I’ll help,” the older Moran declared. “Two sets of muscle are better than one.”

Jim bit his lip, suppressing a cheeky remark. He was making a conscious effort to behave in front of Penny.

“Is there anything I can do to assist?” Paige asked. “I feel badly about not having brought presents for you and Seb.”

“Hush. Just you being here is enough of a gift,” the mastermind insisted.

“That’s right,” Sebastian agreed. “A commute like yours is no easy feat. You’ve traveled halfway across the world, and then been made to contend with hellish weather. I almost think I should be giving you something for your trouble.”

She smiled. “You already are. You’re giving hospitality.”

_Hospitality._ It was interesting food for thought. He and Jim so rarely opened their doors—or their hearts—to other people. They never really had a reason to, until recently. It felt good. Perhaps, he mused, this could be the start of a new chapter in all of their lives.
Chapter End Notes

I'd like to thank everyone for their patience, as it took me longer than expected to get this chapter out.
Citizens throughout London rejoiced as the snow had finally stopped falling. Streets were plowed and businesses reopened, allowing people to resume their day-to-day activities. Private property holders, however, were on their own when it came to dealing with the aftermath. If you wanted your residence cleared, you had to manage it yourself.

Jim offered to hire a professional to dig them out of the snow, but the Moran brothers insisted that they could handle it. So far, he was none too impressed. They’d been outside for close to an hour, yet had barely made a dent in the wintry deluge.

“Should’ve called a plow company,” the mastermind muttered in a hushed tone.

The only reason he’d agreed to their foolhardy endeavor was because he thought it might be good for them to work together. Sometimes bonds could be strengthened through shared experiences, and he hoped that perhaps this was one such case. Their lack of progress was making him rethink the matter, though.

“I’ve never seen so much snow,” a voice said from behind. It was Penelope.

“I imagine this is a rare treat for you, aye?”

“Yeah,” she replied, now looking out the window alongside Jim. “It’s never like this back home. There, it’s all palm trees, sunshine, and ice cream on the beach. That’s what I’m used to, but somehow, this seems more…” she paused, trying to think of the right word. “Classic, like how the holiday season is described in books. I reckon I’m seeing it as Charles Dickens did.”

“Read a lot of Dickens, have you?”

“Oh yes,” the girl answered enthusiastically. “I’m in an accelerated studies program that allows me to take English courses at the high school level. We spent the fall term examining the works of Charles Dickens. In spring, we’ll be tackling Shakespeare. I can’t wait.”
and then. You’re going to love it.”

“I’m sure I will.”

The two of them continued gazing out the window in silence for a few moments, and Jim couldn’t help but notice the wistful longing in Penelope’s eyes. It was as if something was calling to her from beyond the glass.

“Tell me, dear, have you ever romped in weather like this? Built snowmen or sledded? Done anything of the sort?”

She shook her head. “No.”

“I bet you’ve always wanted to. Dreamt of it since you were a little lass. Am I right?” Moriarty phrased the statement as a question, but he already knew his deduction was correct.

“I…I guess so,” she stammered, growing unexpectedly shy. “But it’s a silly notion.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because playing in the snow is for kids,” Penny declared. “I’m way too old. I’ll be a teenager in six months.”

It was all the Irishman could do to suppress a laugh. “Too old at age twelve? Darling, you don’t know the meaning of the word. Enjoy your childhood while you’ve got it,” he implored. “Or at least learn to capitalize on an opportunity when one presents itself.”

The girl’s face scrunched up in confusion. “How do you mean?”

“Well, who knows when you’ll next see snow again? It may not be for a very long time,” he pointed out. “A wise individual would seize the occasion.”

She considered his advice, turning it over in a mind that was at once both childlike and mature.

“I’ll let you in on a secret,” the genius spoke. “If it wasn’t such a health risk, I’d be out there right now, mercilessly pummeling your Uncle Seb with snowballs.”

Penelope grinned. “That does sound like fun. And a little bit mean, but mostly fun.”

“A girl after my own heart,” he remarked with a chuckle. “So why not do it? Go outside and raise some hell. Let me live vicariously through you for a few fleeting moments.”

“Mum did make me pack a bunch of cold weather clothes for the trip…”

“Perfect. You’ve already got what you need.”

“I do.” She took one last glimpse at the winter wonderland before returning her attention to Jim. “Okay, I will. I just need a minute to suit up.”

“Remember to wear a scarf!” he called out as she scampered off to her guest room.

Soon, Paige entered with a curious expression on her face. “Where was Penny going in such a hurry? She almost ran into me on the way upstairs.”

“She’s putting on her winter clothes so she can play outside.”
The woman smiled. “Really? That’s delightful. She’s never experienced snow before.” Paige paused, pondering the subject. “Come to think of it, neither have I.”

“You’ve never vacationed in a cooler climate?” Moriarty was rather surprised by her admission.

“Severin and I have always stuck to tropical destinations,” she informed. “I’ve often wanted to take an Alaskan cruise, though. Go whale-watching and see glaciers— the whole nine yards.”

“You should definitely check out Alaska if you can. The aurora borealis is breathtaking.”

“You’ve been? Now I’m jealous,” she teased.

“You’ll get there eventually. You seem like the determined type.”

Suddenly, Seb and Sev came into view from the window. They continued their diligent quest to clear the snow.

“Look at them out there,” Paige said. “They’re going to be at it all day at this rate.”

“I know. The minute they’re tired enough to come inside, I’m phoning a plow service. Bollocks this ‘we’ll do it ourselves’ nonsense. A professional is the only— oww!” he gasped, registering a sharp kick from within.

“Are you okay?” the woman asked.

“I’m fine. The babies have decided to practice their daily calisthenics routine. Put your hand on my belly and feel them.”

She did, grinning at the movement that beat back against her touch.

“You’ve got some feisty kiddos, Jim.”

“Oh, indeed. They’re going to be amaaaazing. Scratch that— they already are,” he asserted with pride. “I’m so eager to meet them, especially on a day like this.”

“What’s special about today?”

“It’s the aftermath of a blizzard,” he answered. “I look at the tundra that is our yard, and I imagine what it’ll be like to play with Essie and Eddie in the snow. First, I’ll make sure they’re completely bundled from head to toe— no frostbite for my angels. Then, I’ll take their tiny gloved hands into mine and lead them outside,” the mastermind lovingly described. “Their eyes will go wide and their mouths will upturn into smiles. They might even giggle and skip with glee,” he continued. “I’ll show them how to build a snowman. We’ll fashion it to look like Seb, and maybe, if there’s time, we’ll create representations for each of us— Daddy, Papa, and two little darlings, together as a family of snowpersons. Doesn’t that sound wonderful?”


“Yes?”

“Where’s Sebastian during all this?”

Moriarty smiled impishly. “He’ll be in the house, preparing hot chocolate and keeping the fireplace stoked.”

“How thoughtful,” she noted. “I hope it really happens that way.”
“Me too.”

Paige found herself wondering something else. “When you were a boy, did you have many wintertime adventures?”

He hesitated, his smile fading at the inquiry. “I did…and then I didn’t.”

“Hmm? I don’t follow.”

The consulting criminal sighed. How honest should he be? He’d only met the woman recently. Then again, she was Seb’s family, which in turn, made her his family as well. Even so, did he dare reveal certain truths?

“Jim?” she prodded, noticing the change in his mood.

“When I was very young, my mum and I used to play in the snow. After she passed, I stopped. It made me too sad,” he confessed. “It wasn’t until I met Sebastian that I was enticed to try it again.”

“He’s been good for you,” she surmised.

“More so than I ever thought possible.”

“I understand. Sev came into my life at a pretty dark time, too.”

“Did he?”

“Yeah. Guess the Morans have a knack for that.”

Jim and Paige’s conversation was unceremoniously interrupted by a 5 ft. tall, auburn-haired blur whizzing past them.

SLAM.

The front door shut with a racket as Penelope rushed out.

“So much for ‘hello’ and ‘goodbye.’ I swear she didn’t used to be this rude. I dread what her teenage years will bring.”

“I don’t think you need to worry,” the Irishman reassured. “She’s a clever one.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of. Those brains in the body of a reckless adolescent— it’s a terrifying combination.”

“Perhaps, but I’m sure you’ll provide her with proper guidance. That ought to count for something.”

“I appreciate the vote of confidence,” she said, offering a warm smile. “Being a parent isn’t easy. There’s a lot of learning as you go along.”

“I’ve heard that from a few of the men in my pregnancy support group. Sometimes it’s daunting—the uncertainty of it all. I’m simultaneously thrilled and petrified at the prospect.”

“I’d be concerned if you weren’t. It’s scary,” Paige stated, “but we do the best we can, and roll with life’s punches as they come our way.”

Life’s punches. He’d endured enough of those throughout the years. God willing, he would protect
his children from ever having to know the pain and suffering this world could wreak.

Speaking of punches, the two were swiftly distracted by what they spied out the window. Sebastian was in the midst of shoveling when he was abruptly walloped with a snowball from behind.

Mischief flickered in the depths of Jim’s dark eyes as he immediately knew that Penny had taken his advice to heart. It was just a bit of harmless fun, right?

_Fuck, this is taking forever. Why did I let Sev talk me into cleaning up after a blizzard? What the hell does he know about snow removal? He’s lived on a bloody beach for well over a decade._

_THWACK._

The sniper suddenly felt an ice cold sensation hit him squarely in the back. With narrowed eyes and flaring nostrils, he rapidly spun to face the source of the assault. His angry expression transformed into one of bewilderment as he saw that it was Penelope standing there.

“Penny? Did you just hurl a snowball at me?”

She nervously nodded, scared to death by the murderous glare he’d flashed upon first turning around. “Uncle Jim convinced me to come out and play.”

_Jim. Of course._ Naturally, the genius would instigate something like this. He knew full well that in his current condition, Seb wouldn’t dare seek revenge.

The younger Moran brother waved his niece nearer, an idea coming to mind. He might not be able to wage a snowball war with his mate, but he could at least give Penelope an education on the subject.

“Please don’t be mad at me,” she beseeched. “I was only goofing around.”

“Me, mad? Nah.”

“But your face…you looked like you wanted to kill someone.”

“Oh, that. You shouldn’t take it personally. It was instinct kicking in,” he explained. “It’s my duty to serve and protect Uncle Jim, especially now that he’s got my babies in his tummy.”

“Uncle Seb, you can just use the word ‘pregnant.’ I know how these things work. You don’t have to phrase it like you’re speaking to a kindergartner.”

“Sorry, I’m a bit rusty when it comes to talking to kids.” He quickly attempted to steer the conversation towards his initially conceived direction. “That was a decent hit you landed with the snowball. I can show you how to improve it, though.”

“Yeah?” She was intrigued.

The assassin grinned. “Yeah.”

“I’m listening.”
“Well, for starters, it’s important to pack a snowball as tight as possible. Leave it too loose, and it loses momentum during flight. It also yields a softer impact.”

Seb bent down, gathering snow into a ball for demonstration purposes. He left it loosely packed, and then handed it to her. “Hold on to that for now.”

“Okay.”

The blonde began forming a second snowball, this time making sure it was nice and firm. He surreptitiously glanced over at his brother. Severin was salting the area Seb had shoveled, his back turned, with earbuds plugged in as he listened to music.

“Dad’s not paying attention,” Penny remarked.

“All the better to surprise him.”

“Surprise him? How—” she stopped in mid-sentence, his meaning dawning on her. “Ohhh.”

Sebastian winked at the girl and proceeded to roll more snowballs. He finally ceased his efforts when he had an even dozen.

“After firmness, the second most essential factor is your throw. This aspect is easier to master if you’ve played sports. However, with practice, proficiency is achievable by non-athletes as well.”

“Sure, that makes sense.”

“You nailed a decent hit to my back,” he stated. “I’m going to guess you’ve probably participated in a fair amount of softball?”

“When I was little, yeah. I wasn’t very good at it,” she lamented. “But go on.”

“Once you have a well-packed ball, you’ll want to focus on your target— concentrate as if they’ve got an invisible bullseye painted on.”

She nodded affirmatively. “Right.”

The sniper set his sights on Sev, and Penny smirked. Her oblivious father was about to receive a throttling.

“Allow me to properly highlight the artistry involved in this. Pass me the loosely packed snowball.”

She did.

“Watch closely.”

Seb wound his arm back, chucking the chilly sphere straight at Severin. It flew through the air, breaking up slightly before making contact.

“Hey!” the elder Moran shouted, turning to see what was going on.

Penelope laughed while Sebastian sported a sharky grin across his face.

“Note how that particular snowball lost some of its cohesion on the way to its target. Now observe what happens when I launch the tightly-packed versions.”
“Seb? Penny? What are you doing?”

THWACK.

“What the—”

SPLAT.

“Excuse me—”

THWACK.

The barrage of snowballs just kept coming. Seb’s aim found Severin no matter what direction he maneuvered in. His expert precision was almost mesmerizing.

Severin dropped to the ground, crawling behind a tall snowbank for cover.

“Perhaps we’ve exhausted your father,” the former colonel suggested.

“Maybe,” she agreed. “How did you get so good at this?”

“Years of practice, my dear.”

A moment of silence passed, where all that could be heard was the wind. It was an eerie calm, the kind that makes the hairs stand up on the back of one’s neck.

“Uncle Seb, look out!” Penny suddenly yelled.

The older Moran sibling had popped up from his hiding spot and thrown a snowball the assassin’s way. He was able to dodge the initial attack, but soon the balls were coming faster than he could evade. To Severin’s credit, the ambush was centered exclusively on Sebastian— his daughter remained untouched.

Back and forth they went, pummeling each other from both sides. It was an all-out war and neither wanted to concede defeat.

“Getting tired yet, Sev?” the sniper asked.

“Never.”

“Nor I.”

But that was a lie. The men were breathless and freezing, their bodies sore from the nonstop stream of icy blows. Pure adrenaline fueled them now, along with a heaping dose of misplaced machismo.

Penelope wasn’t sure what to do. The situation was amusing, yes, but also decidedly strange. She’d never seen her father behave like this. He was the type who shied away from shenanigans and tomfoolery. Yet here he was, indulging in a thoroughly childish battle against his younger brother.

And then she heard a whistle. All of them did, for that matter. It was loud enough to halt the wrangling Morans.

“Yoooo-hoooo, boys.” Jim was standing on the porch, commanding their attention as only he could. “While I appreciate the entertainment you’ve provided, I believe it’s time to call it quits and come inside. Paige is brewing a pot of tea— if you hurry, you might be able to change out of those cold, snow-covered clothes before it’s finished steeping.”
Sebastian and Severin exchanged a regretful glance, embarrassed that they’d let themselves get so out of hand. They were grown men with families and careers—certainly above such juvenile antics.

They were headed up the front steps when Seb stopped. “Wait,” he said, turning to his sibling. “Sev… I’m sorry I got carried away.”

“Me too.”

“No hard feelings, then?”

“Not of the emotional variety, but physically, I may be a wee bit bruised.”

“Same here.”

The sniper leaned in and gave Severin a brief, but awkward, hug.

Moriarty watched on, rolling his eyes. “Less sentiment, more walking. It’s freezing out here and I’d like to go inside.”

At that, everyone returned to the house. There would be no more fighting that day, with snowballs or otherwise. Instead, there’d be toasty fireplaces and warm cuppas for all.

Chapter End Notes

Wishing everyone a happy New Year! I’d like to thank you all for your readership and patience. It is appreciated.
The Last Supper

Chapter Summary

As the family reunion comes to a close, new developments arise elsewhere.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A week had passed since Severin and company arrived in London to spend the holidays with Jim and Seb. Christmas was a delight, while New Year’s was among the mildest the men had experienced in ages. The consulting criminal was too pregnant to party, and ended up falling asleep on the couch shortly after the clock struck midnight. Even so, a good time was had.

Now it was their last day together. No one wanted to make it a sad affair, particularly Jim. Bearing that in mind, he brainstormed the perfect plan: he would finally take everyone out to dinner at ‘Le Gavroche.’ Moriarty merely needed to breech their online database to secure the necessary reservations, and voila, they’d be set.

CLICK.

He closed his laptop. It was done.

Sebastian entered the living room at just the right time.

“Tiiiiiiger,” Jim drawled, “guess what?” He gazed at his mate with big, beaming eyes.

“I’ve no idea, but whatever it is, you certainly seem pleased. Should I be afraid?”

“Oh, heavens no. This is something wonderful.”

“Then by all means, do tell.”

The genius grinned. “Wellllll…remember the restaurant I wanted to take us to, but the blizzard happened and we couldn’t go?”

“Some French place, yeah.”

“We’re finally going there tonight. It will be like a ‘last supper.’”

“Great. I’ll let the rest of the family know.”
Family. The word sent Jim’s heart aflutter. This week had granted him his childhood dream of being surrounded by loved ones. But his expression swiftly dropped as he thought about having to say goodbye.

Seb sat down next to the mastermind. “What’s wrong, honey?”

“You know,” he somberly whispered.

The sniper did know, all too well. It was obvious he was upset about their guests’ impending departure.

“After we’ve finished up at the airport tomorrow, why don’t we spend the day together?” Sebastian suggested. “We could have lunch, do a bit of shopping, and maybe take in a movie. When we get back home, I’ll even make hot chocolate and draw us a bubble bath. How’s that sound?”

“I have a meeting tomorrow night.”

“Meeting?” he asked in confusion. Jim’s not taking meetings these days, he’s on paternity leave.

“It’s my MOPS group. First session of the new year.”

“Ohhh, right. Duh. I’m such a dope sometimes.”

“Yes, but you’re my dope. Don’t ever forget it.” The Irishman snuggled as close to Moran as possible without actually sitting in his lap.

“I never could.” Seb placed a protective arm around Jim. It felt good to shield him; to be a living barrier guarding his omega from harm.

Moriarty yawned sleepily, his head resting against the blonde’s chest. “So safe with you, Sebby,” he murmured.

“Always, Magpie.”

The couple remained on the couch for a long while, enjoying the comfort of being together. There was something serene about those simple moments when they could bask in the love and warmth found within each other’s embrace.

As peaceful as it was inside Jim and Sebastian’s private bubble, developments were unfolding elsewhere. If they’d had their phones turned on, they would’ve seen that they were simultaneously texted by pathologist Molly Hooper regarding a sample they’d submitted to her.

In the aftermath of the duo’s Christmas party confrontation with Annie, they saved the hair Moran had ripped from the woman’s scalp, sending it to Ms. Hooper for professional analysis. She initially refused them, but was persuaded when told that it likely contained the DNA of the person who’d killed her cousin’s best friend. The results were now in, but Jim and Seb hadn’t a clue.

*********

Dinner was only an hour away and the mastermind still hadn’t settled on what to wear. He’d tried on three different outfits and hated them all. Sebastian exercised the patience of a saint, but found that it was getting harder to keep the other Morans happy while they waited.

“Come on, Uncle Jim,” Penelope urged from the opposite side of the closed bedroom door. “Put on
“I’m sure you look fine,” Paige chimed in, attempting to cajole him through positive means.

The sniper sighed. “I’m going in. Wish me luck.” Nods were exchanged among Seb and his family, and he stepped inside.

“Jimmy?” he beckoned, not seeing him at first. Then he ventured a bit further and discovered a decidedly sad sight. Moriarty was on the floor of his walk-in closet, half-dressed and teary-eyed, with clothes strewn around him.

Seb immediately rushed to his side, helping him stand. Their gazes locked, and Moran was stricken by how utterly defeated Jim appeared. He instinctively enveloped him in a hug.

“I’m hideous, Seb. An absolute fright.” The consulting criminal paused, backing up slightly so that he could admire his mate. “You’re as handsome as ever, though. So suave in a suit.”

“Thank you, hon. You look good, too. I’ll have none of this ‘hideous’ talk.”

“It’s the truth. My reflection is unforgiving.”

“Bollocks whatever you think you saw in the mirror. When I look at you, I see a dashing and debonair man who I’m privileged to say is my husband. Would you sooner believe me or a panel of glass?”

The genius was silent for a beat, thoroughly conflicted. “I…well…oh, Tiger. I don’t know what I’m doing. I think I’m losing my mind.”

Sebastian held his distraught omega once more, trying his best to calm him. “Hush now, sweetheart. You’re just extremely hormonal and stressed out. It’s nothing we can’t manage.” He rubbed the smaller man’s back soothingly as he spoke. “Let’s get you properly dressed, okay?”


And so the former colonel valiantly assisted Moriarty into a stylish ensemble that included a cozy cardigan sweater. The choice of wardrobe was no accident—he loved it when the Irishman wore sweaters.

“You really think I look all right in this?”

“No,” he answered. “I think you look sexy as hell in it.”

Jim smiled. Seb was like sunshine, always there to chase his dark clouds away.

Moran grasped him by the hand. “Come. Our dinner date awaits.”

Without another word, the two proceeded onward, poised for what was sure to be an auspicious evening. This wasn’t merely a meal they were attending. No, it was an event meant to bookend a reunion that all of them would look back upon fondly. In essence, it was history in the making.

‘Le Gavroche’ was certainly living up to the image Jim had painted for his guests. The illustrious eatery presented a chic and sophisticated atmosphere, along with excellent service and a varied menu that offered something for everyone.
“This has got to be the richest meal I’ve feasted on in years,” Severin remarked. “I can feel my cholesterol levels rising as we speak. Needless to say, I love it.”

“Yes, it’s impressive,” Paige agreed. “I may try to recreate a few of these dishes at home.”

“Do you and Uncle Seb eat here often?” Penelope wondered aloud between forkfuls of decadent cheese soufflé.

“No, dear. This isn’t exactly Seb’s kind of place. But I’ve conducted business meetings here on numerous occasions.”

“Cool,” the preteen replied. “The food’s way better than I expected.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it—all of you. I so hoped you would,” he said with a gentle smile.

“I think a lot of things have turned out better than expected this entire week,” Paige interjected, branching off from her daughter’s comment. “Please don’t take offense to this, but you’re nothing like what I assumed you’d be.”

“Oh? How’s that?”

“Well, you hear the name ‘James Moriarty,’ and you envision a diabolical mastermind. Someone who’s cold, calculating, and cruel,” she plainly stated. “That’s what I was expecting, but you’re none of those things. I’ve never been so mistaken about a person in my life.”

He stared at her for a few seconds, contemplating how to respond. “You weren’t wrong to believe that about me.”

She tilted her head, confused. “But—”

“No ‘buts.’ I’ve done terrible things. Hurt people in ways you couldn’t begin to imagine.”

“Jim—” the assassin interrupted.

“Let me finish, Sebastian. Perhaps I shouldn’t be saying this in front of Penny, but in the interest of transparency, I am.” He returned his attention to Paige. “I was vicious and manipulative, and deeply selfish. You didn’t meet that Jim, thank god.”

An uncomfortable silence fell over the table at Moriarty’s admission. For a fleeting moment, he wondered if he’d erred in his openness. Maybe some truths were not meant to be shared.

Of the group, Penelope was the one to finally speak. “That doesn’t sound like the man you are now, Uncle Jim.”

“Thank you, darling. I’ve made a conscious effort to work on myself these past several months. I attribute it in large part to my children.”

“Really? They’re not even born yet.”

“That’s the point, you see. I came to realize that life was no longer centered exclusively on me. They were more important. As such, I needed to rise to the occasion and become the kind of person who would be a good parent to them. I’ve been trying so hard to get it right before they arrive.” The genius paused, noticing that everyone at the table was focused on him. He smiled nervously, adding, “I don’t claim to be anywhere near ideal, but I’d like to think I’ve improved my behavior quite a lot.”
Seb reached over to squeeze his spouse’s hand. “You have, Jimmy. I’ve observed it every step of the way.”

“It’s a commendable gesture,” Severin asserted. “If more people attempted to better themselves for the sake of their children, the world might be a brighter place.”

Paige nodded in accord. “I’ve only known you for a week, but I can say with some confidence that this version of ‘Jim’ is going to make a wonderful mother.”

The consulting criminal flushed at the compliment. He was incredibly self-assured about some things, but still had worries regarding his prospects as a parent.

“Do you truly mean it?” he asked hopefully.

“I do.”

“Thank you.”

Soon, the group was visited by their maître d.’ Boxes were brought to package up leftovers and dessert was ordered all around. Closing out the proceedings with crème brûlée was a must.

Paige and Penelope excused themselves to the restroom while the men stayed behind, waiting for the final course to be served.

“Do you mind if I check my email?” Severin inquired. “I’m expecting a correspondence from a colleague, but didn’t want to seem rude by pulling out my phone during the meal. This feels like an acceptable intermission.”

“Go ahead,” Jim said. “We won’t be offended,”

“That reminds me,” the younger Moran brother noted, “I don’t think I’ve had my mobile turned on today.”

Moriarty smiled. “Me either. Everyone I wanted to talk to was already right in front of me.”

“I ought to take a quick peek in case there are any business matters that require tending to.”

“My sweet Sebby, dealing with work and taking care of me at the same time. I don’t know how you do it.” The Irishman gazed adoringly at his amazing mate. If Sev wasn’t present, he’d have started playing footsie with him then and there.

It only took a moment for Seb’s phone to boot up. When he went to review the day’s messages, his breathing hitched as he read a text from Molly Hooper.

MH

_Got the results back on the sample you provided. I’d prefer to discuss the findings in person. Let’s pick a place to meet._

This was huge. With the DNA analysis complete, they could finally learn who Annie really was, or at least glean enough to narrow it down.

He was about to reply, when something occurred to him that made his heart sink: the timestamp on the message indicated it was sent hours earlier. Seven hours ago, to be precise.
Seven bloody hours. So much time wasted. If they’d had their devices powered on, they would’ve seen the text and then arranged to meet with Molly that very afternoon. Now it was getting to be late in the evening, and if they were to leave for a rendezvous, it would almost certainly raise suspicion from their guests. They’d have to postpone any such assembly until the following day.

“Jim, take a look at this.” He slipped his phone to Moriarty, trying to appear cool and collected.

The mastermind indulged his partner’s request, and within seconds, his eyes widened like saucers.

Though the couple dared not speak a word, a whirlwind of thoughts raced through their heads. They’d assumed that tonight would be noteworthy— oh, how adorably naïve. This was child’s play compared to what tomorrow would bring.

Chapter End Notes

So I’ve been wondering if I should continue adding chapters to this story as a single work, or if I should consider breaking it up into a series of sections. I’d prefer to keep it as one work, but I’m concerned that the length of the story might discourage people from reading it.
It was the morning of the Moran family’s departure and emotions were running high amongst the group. At breakfast, Paige and Penelope teared up. Jim wanted to as well, but somehow managed to rein himself in before the waterworks could start. As for Sebastian and Severin, the brothers remained stoic in the face of separation.

It was decided that they’d travel to the airport in two cars— one for Sev and his brood, and another for London’s most dangerous men. This would give the couple time to discuss what their game plan was for the day. In light of Molly’s text, some scheduling changes needed to be made.

“I didn’t sleep last night, Tiger. Not a wink. Couldn’t stop thinking about everything. I’m sad, happy, scared, and excited all at once. It’s overwhelming.”

“I know, hon. It’s a lot to deal with, but we’ll handle it together. No worries.” It was important that Seb stress this point to his mate. At around 2 a.m., he’d rolled over to find an empty bed— not such an unusual occurrence these days, since Jim had been making more frequent trips to the bathroom at odd hours. But when he hadn’t returned nearly twenty minutes later, the blonde went searching for him. He eventually discovered Moriarty pacing the halls, anxious and achy. He quickly brought him back to their room, making him promise to stay put until sunrise. Jim obliged, but even so, Moran could tell that the man was still very much on edge.

“I’m never turning my phone off again,” the mastermind vowed. “No more missed messages. Not ever.” He paused, diverging into their itinerary. “Once we’ve finished at the airport, we’re heading straight to Starbucks.”

“I can’t believe that’s where Molly wants us to meet. Of all the places, it just seems so…”

“Plebeian?”
“I was thinking ‘impersonal,’ but yeah, that too.”

The pathologist was adamant they gather at a public spot. She didn’t trust the duo in the slightest, so it made sense. However, they could’ve easily come up with a better location than that.

“We’ll keep the proceedings brief. No dawdling.”

Seb nodded. He didn’t wish to spend a moment longer than necessary there.

“Afterward, we can enjoy some quality time. Then tonight, I have my MOPS meeting. I’m rather looking forward to those starting back up.”

Jim really had begun to think of his fellow group participants as friends, albeit to varying degrees. A year ago, it would’ve seemed unfathomable that he’d willingly associate with ordinary individuals, but the camaraderie he’d found among them was an unexpected breath of fresh air.

“I wonder how Ian’s doing?” the sniper questioned. He hadn’t spoken to the youngest MOPS member since the night of the Christmas party. “You think he’s happy with the apartment we moved him into?”

“I imagine so. What’s not to like? It’s got plenty of amenities and is situated in a posh part of the city.”

“You haven’t actually spoken to him, though?”

“No, the family reunion kept me fairly distracted. We just exchanged a few text messages and that was it.”

“Ah, okay. I hope he had a decent Christmas.”

“Me too.”

Both of them knew how bleak it could be to spend holidays alone— it’s what they’d often done before finding each other.

“Seb?”

“Yes?”

“Do you suppose we should’ve invited Ian over for Christmas?”

“It’s a nice idea, but he wouldn’t have been able to make it with the blizzard going on.”

“True,” Jim admitted. “Sometimes, though, it’s the mere invitation that counts. Knowing that another person cares enough to extend an offer. Being able to attend is secondary to the gesture in and of itself.”

“Hmm. I hadn’t thought of it like that.” Perhaps they’d erred in omitting the teen from their plans.

“I’ll see how he’s doing this evening.”

“Good idea.”

At that, the conversation died down as the duo drove the rest of the way in contented silence.
The airport was every bit as nightmarish as anticipated. People were jam-packed throughout the facility, and the lines to get past customs and security proved especially grueling.

All the walking around did Jim no favors. He’d opted not to bring either of his wheelchairs along for the trip, insisting they’d be difficult to navigate through a crowd. He changed his mind, however, early in the trek and attempted to get wheelchair assistance on site. To the consulting criminal’s extreme displeasure, they denied his request on the grounds of having a 48-hour notification policy. They would only issue mobility devices to those who made arrangements at least two days in advance.

Needless to say, the whole group was put off by the airport’s draconian rule. Severin tried to use his clout as a doctor to help Jim out, claiming he authorized the use of a chair, but the man in charge of disability services wouldn’t relent without proof that he was, in fact, Moriarty’s physician.

Now they were at an impasse, and no one was angrier than Seb.

“How fucking dare you treat him like this?” the assassin spat. “He has serious medical issues and you’re prepared to just sit back and let him suffer. It’s fucking disgraceful.”

“Sir, I don’t make the policies, I simply enforce them. Furthermore, I ask that you please refrain from using vulgar language or I’ll be compelled to call security.”

The man’s dismissive reply only added fuel to Sebastian’s fire. He flashed him a downright murderous glare before continuing on. “Go ahead and phone them. I’d love to have you and this whole establishment sued for discrimination.”

“Discrimination? What are you implying, sir?”

“Oh, don’t play dumb with me. I know how this goes. If my spouse were a woman, you’d have no problem bending the rules and rustling up a wheelchair. A pregnant lady is fine, but god forbid a male omega needs help.”

The administrator scowled. “If your partner is in such poor shape, perhaps you ought not to have brought him in the first place.”

“That’s your rebuttal?” Seb scoffed, noting that the officious bastard didn’t even try to deny the accusation of bigotry. “For your information, he’s here because we’re seeing off family. Maybe that doesn’t mean much to you, but anyone with a shred of decency should be able to comprehend it.”

“There’s nothing I can do. Next time, provide proper notice.”

“Listen, you judgmental son of a bitch—”

“Stop,” Jim said, interrupting his mate’s impending tirade. “This is taking too long, and I refuse to be the reason why our guests miss their flight. Let’s just go.”

“No. This isn’t right and you know it.”

Moriarty took a deep breath and then pulled the former colonel aside so that they were out of the administrator’s earshot.

“Seb, I’m furious about this. Believe me, I am. But I don’t have the luxury of allowing myself to get truly upset. If I do, my blood pressure will spike, and that’s a dangerous thing. It isn’t worth
risking our children’s lives on account of this arsehole,” he declared. “Rest assured, I memorized his name from the tag on his shirt. ‘Ferdinand’ is fairly unique, so I doubt there are too many others working here with that moniker. I intend to place a few calls and have him dealt with later. For now, though, it’s important your brother not miss his flight.”

The blonde sighed. “When did you become so practical and wise?”

“Around the same time my husband decided to chuck all that and operate on impulsive alpha instincts.”

“I won’t apologize for making you my top priority,” Seb stated, “but I’ll admit, responding with a kneejerk reaction probably won’t solve anything.”

“No, it will only get you thrown out of the airport, and we most certainly can’t have that. Today’s itinerary is too vital. So cool your jets and we’ll proceed on our way. Understand?”

“Aye,” he agreed. “One question, though.”

“What?”

“Instead of ‘placing a few calls’ to deal with that wanker over there, why not let me have a crack at him? It’s been ages since I’ve bagged a bigot.”

The mastermind grinned gleefully. “By all means, Tiger, go wild.”

Satisfied with the compromise, Sebastian signaled his family to continue their pilgrimage to the boarding gate. He would follow behind in order to aid Jim as best he could. If he needed to carry him the rest of the way, so be it. There was no limit to his devotion to the Irishman. He was his love, his light, his dark king for all time.

At last, the couple arrived at the gate. It’d taken them a little longer than their guests, but the salient point was that they made it there before takeoff and could still say goodbye.

Penelope approached the genius, giving him a great big hug. “Thank you for everything, Uncle Jim. This week went by way too fast.”

“It sure did, darling. Now you be good for your parents. Keep studying, keep baking, and when I see you again, expect that I’ll quiz you on your Shakespeare.”

She smiled. “We’ll see each other again?”

“Yes, of course we will. I have every intention to stay in touch.”

“Good, I’d like that.” The girl paused, setting her sights on Seb. “And thank you for the lesson on snowballs. Maybe we can make more someday?”

“You bet,” he warmly replied.

Next, Paige came up to the consulting criminal, also bestowing a hug. “It was a delight to meet you, Jim. You absolutely must send us pictures when the babies are born.”

“Will do. I plan to have Seb take scads of photos. Possibly even install a darkroom in our home,
just for that express purpose.”

The sniper arched a brow. “Oh really?” This was news to him.

“Yes, really.”

“Sebastian,” the woman spoke, “it was nice to meet you, too. I’d heard tales through the years from Sev— now I have a face to put to the name.”

“And what a handsome face it is,” Moriarty quipped.

The group’s final farewell was delivered by Severin. Unlike his wife and daughter, he approached Seb first, rather than Jim.

“It’s been wonderful catching up, brother. I wholeheartedly agree with Penny— this week went by too soon. It wasn’t nearly long enough to make up for the years we spent apart.”

“Perhaps not, but it’s a start.”

In an uncharacteristic display of affection, Severin gave his sibling a quick hug and a pat on the back. “Take care of yourself, and your mate. If you ever need any parenting advice, don’t hesitate to ask.”

“I’m sure I’ll be texting you often, then,” the sniper said with a wink.

Last call for boarding was announced and the Morans had to go. It was a bittersweet moment, leaving everyone a bit forlorn, but hopeful of the future. This would not be the end— far from it. Though separated by distance, there were more holidays, vacations, and visits on the horizon.

**********

The time had come for Jim and Sebastian to meet with Molly. It was all fine and good, except for the fact that Moriarty was in the midst of a mini-meltdown. He’d put on a brave face at the airport, but the instant Severin and company got on their plane, the tears simply wouldn’t stop.

“God, what’s wrong with me? Why can’t I pull it together? This is pathetic.”

“You’ve had an emotional morning. You’ll calm down eventually.”

“Eventually?!” he repeated with alarm. “I don’t have time for ‘eventually!’ We’re supposed to meet Molly right fucking now, and I’m a mess.” He glimpsed himself in the sun visor mirror and cringed. “Look how red my eyes are. She’ll know I was crying. I can’t let her see me like this.”

“Open the glovebox,” Seb instructed.

“Why?”

“Just do it. Trust me, you’ll be pleased.”

The mastermind begrudgingly complied. When the compartment popped open, he saw that there was a pair of sunglasses inside. Not just any sunglasses— these were Sebastian’s favorite aviator shades.

“Wear those, and she’ll never suspect a thing. You’ll also look quite cool.”

Jim put them on, his mouth upturning into a sly smile as he did so. “What do you think?”
“I think,” Moran began, pulling into the Starbucks parking lot and settling on a spot, “that I need to kiss you.” He powered off the engine and leaned over, seizing his passenger’s lips.

Moriarty responded enthusiastically, tugging the other man closer while deepening their kiss. Seb tasted like spearmint Altoids mixed with pure delight, and he wanted more.

Before the sniper knew it, he and his mate were making out rather passionately, right there in the front seat of the car. He understood Jim’s vigor— they hadn’t engaged in intimate relations the entire time his family stayed at the house. It was the longest they’d gone without making love since Moriarty had figured out how to keep his blood pressure steady during the act.

“Get a room!” someone catcalled as they walked by. It was enough to bring the men back to their senses.

“Well, that was…spirited,” the genius remarked.

“Indeed.”

“Shall we go in?”

“Yes, that’s a sound idea.”

Sebastian carefully assisted Jim out of the vehicle and escorted him inside the coffee shop. The place was moderately busy— not packed, but not at a lull, either.

“Oh,” Moriarty exclaimed, “they have hazelnut hot chocolate!” He viewed the dessert case and was positively gobsmacked. “Chocolate chip cheesecake muffins...even better.”

And then Seb looked away and saw her. Or rather, saw them.

He spied Molly at a table, all right. And she was sitting alongside Irene Adler.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Truths & Declarations

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian learn some surprising truths during a meeting with Molly.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Oh no,” Seb muttered under his breath.

“What?” Jim asked in confusion. “Since when don’t you like muffins?”

“It’s not the muffins. Look over there,” he urged, motioning towards the table where Molly and Irene sat.

All color drained from Moriarty’s face when he saw the couple. They were sipping cappuccinos while chatting and laughing, thick as thieves.

“What’s she doing here?” the mastermind hissed.

“Good question. Let’s find out.”

“Wait— I want hot chocolate and a muffin first.”

“I thought we were keeping this brief? ‘No dawdling,’ remember?”

“Yes, I remember. But if you expect me to deal with the both of them, then I demand compensation.”

The sniper rolled his eyes. “Fine.” Sometimes it was easier to placate him than to argue.

Fortunately, there wasn’t much of a line. Moriarty got his sweet treats quickly and they were able to proceed. The ladies took notice, holding their gaze as they approached.

“So glad you could join us,” Irene greeted. “Have a seat.”

The duo obliged, still dumbfounded by Adler’s presence.

“Jim,” she continued, “it’s nice to see you’ve upgraded to a wardrobe that fits. Also, I like the shades.”
“Thanks. You really ought to invest in a pair. They’d do wonders to hide those pesky crow’s feet.”

“Is that what yours are for, dear?”

Though obscured by the sunglasses he wore, Jim glared harshly at the dominatrix. He was growing sick of her already and they’d only just begun.

“Tell me, Irene, why exactly are you here? I was under the impression that this was to be a meeting with Molly, not her and anyone else who felt like tagging along.”

“Well, why is it you and Sebastian seem to go everywhere together, hmm?”

“He’s my second-in-command and bodyguard.”

“I operate in a similar capacity. Consider me her backup. I’m here to make damn sure nothing befalls this extraordinary woman.”

“Oh, that’s rich,” the consulting criminal said with a laugh. “Where was this swell of devotion when we met in Monte Carlo? You know, the night you propositioned my husband for sex.”

Sebastian flashed his mate a look of utter mortification. Why did Jim always seek to stir up trouble? Why did he thrive on drama?

To both men’s surprise, Molly didn’t bat an eye at the revelation.

“You think you can hurt me by disclosing the news that my partner was unfaithful,” the pathologist spoke, “but you’re mistaken. Irene and I had a row shortly before she left for Monaco. We were broken up for about a week, and when we reconciled, she told me what happened. There are no secrets between us.”

“Aww, isn’t that sweet?” Moriarty mocked.

“Jealous?” she challenged.

“Of the two of you? Hardly.”

“Methinks thou doth protest too much.”

“Molly, darling, I strongly recommend you shut your mouth. Right. Fucking. Now.”

“Or what?” Adler interjected. “She’s got information that’s of value to you. Harm her and you’ll never get what you want.”

The Irishman heaved a heavy sigh and started rapping his fingers anxiously atop the table. Moran recognized his partner’s idiosyncrasies as signs of mounting agitation. He knew he needed to intervene.

“Enough chit-chat,” Seb decreed. “Let’s get down to business, shall we?”

“Yes,” Molly agreed, “I’d prefer to get on with it, too.”

“My apologies, love,” the other woman spoke, delicately brushing her fingertips across her girlfriend’s hand. “Jim’s just so much fun to play with,” she cooed.

From beneath the table, Moriarty’s foot made contact with Irene’s shin, administering a swift kick.
“Oww!” she exclaimed. “You bloody loon!”

Sebastian was alarmed at the direction the meeting was taking. If ever there was a time to assert his authority, it was now.

“Hey!” he yelled, commanding their attention. “Cut this shite out, both of you. I’ll tolerate no more snarky remarks and no more physical attacks. We’re all going to sit here and behave like civilized persons. Everybody got that?”

“Yes, Tiger.” The genius abided Seb’s orders without complaint. It wasn’t often that Moran broke rank by tapping into his alpha dominance, but when he did, some instinctive force compelled Jim to obey.

For her part, Adler simply nodded.

“So,” the sniper began, “what did you learn from the DNA sample?”

“Well, there’s the basics. The specimen belongs to a female who’s approximately 25-30 years of age. Trace blood fragments at the hair follicle also show that the individual is AB positive and of Nordic descent.”

“We knew that much already,” Moriarty quipped. “Got any new information, or have you brought us here on a wild goose chase?”

“Permit me to finish and you’ll get your answer,” Molly sharply replied.

“Go on, then.”

“As I was trying to say, those were just the basics. When the DNA was run through various databases, it was found to contain several genetic markers closely associated with a Danish industrialist by the name of Lars de Graaf. Believe it or not, he was in the system because of a sample given to one of those ancestry search websites. But I digress. I’m almost positive that the person you’re looking for is a direct relative of his—in other words, she’s his child.”

Jim and Seb were rendered speechless at the pathologist’s pronouncement. They knew that surname. In Moran’s case, intimately so.

“There’s more,” Molly noted. “I took the liberty of checking into Lars’s genealogy records. Lo and behold, he has two daughters. Or rather, had. The elder of the pair died some years ago.”

The former colonel’s blood ran bone-chillingly cold. “Her name was Marguerite,” he said, barely above a whisper.

“That’s correct. You’re familiar with these people?”

He inhaled and exhaled deeply as he contemplated the terrible truth. “Yeah.”

“Process of elimination would suggest that the specimen came from his surviving daughter,” she stated.

Seb was shaking now, assailed by an intense wave of guilt and horror. The person helping Colin wasn’t some random stranger. No, it was Margo’s sister and this was pure retribution.

The mastermind observed his mate’s rapid decline and stepped in to ask questions on both of their behalf. “What’s this woman’s name?”
Jim thought about it for a second. *Annelise...Annie. Makes sense.* “Any details on her?”

“Just a handful of anecdotal facts. She graduated from the University of Copenhagen and then got involved with a small touring theater company. But that was a few years ago. Currently, she’s fallen off the radar and her whereabouts are unknown.”

The consulting criminal inwardly scoffed. *Unknown? Ha. She’s been right here in England, conspiring and playing a long con.*

“Thank you, Molly. I believe we’ve heard enough.”

“Wait,” she implored. The pathologist reached into the attaché case she carried with her, producing a folder file. “Take this. It’s a copy of my findings. I hope you can use it to bust the monster who killed my cousin’s friend. Gemma’s been a wreck since it happened.”

Jim accepted the document and stood up. He hadn’t even finished his muffin, but pastries be damned at a time like this. Knowledge is power, and with the new information, he and his husband could regain the upper hand.

At least, that’s how Moriarty saw it. Seb, though…well, he wasn’t certain what the assassin was seeing at the moment. The man had gone into a fog, jittering while staring off at nothing in particular. It was more than a little disconcerting.

“Sebastian,” Irene addressed, “you’ve gone incredibly peaked. Are you all right?”

He rose from his chair, standing adjacent to Jim. “No, I’m really not.” The blonde paused, looking around the room and feeling as if it were about to close in on him. “I have to get out of here.” With that said, he bolted for the door.

“Seb!” the Irishman shouted as he watched his Tiger leave in distress. He followed after him, struggling to keep up. When he got outside, he saw that Seb was kicking the ever-loving shit out of his car. It had a decent sized dent in the side where his steel-toed boot made impact.

“Once upon a time, I found myself in a situation similar to this,” Moriarty spoke, removing his sunglasses so he could look the sniper in the eye. “I was beating the hell out of a cabinet in my office, and then a wise and handsome man came in and told me that whatever the storage unit had done to piss me off, it’d learned its lesson. Well, now I get to return the favor.” He took Moran’s hand that was balled into a fist and unfurled it, pressing their palms together while their fingers entwined. “Whatever that Mercedes has done to you, darling, I think it’s been duly punished.”

Seb gazed straight at his mate, a shudder running through him as he was overwrought with emotion. “Oh, Jimmy. I’m so sorry.”

“For what, my dear?”

“For the mess that I’ve brought into your life. This whole debacle with Colin…the danger I’ve put you and our children in…I’m sorry for all of it.”

“That’s bollocks. You’re not responsible for what a madman has done. Quite the opposite—you’ve tried to protect us every step of the way.”

“But don’t you see? *I’m* the reason you’ve needed protecting. If it weren’t for me, Colin and Annie wouldn’t have targeted you…kidnapped you…none of it.” He hesitated, adding, “Sometimes I
almost think you’d be better off without me.”

“Never, Seb. Fucking never. If not for you, I wouldn’t have a life to protect. I’d be long dead by now.”

The assassin grimaced, the mere idea of Jim’s demise feeling like a knife through his heart. “Don’t say that, Magpie.”

“It’s true and we both know it.”

“No…”

“Yes. If you hadn’t been a part of my life, I would’ve killed myself years ago,” he declared. “What happened on the rooftop at St. Bart’s— that would’ve been real. I wouldn’t have faked it.”

Moran shook his head furiously, in denial of his spouse’s claim. “No, no, no.”

“You don’t want to hear it, but it’s the truth,” he insisted. “I never experienced honest-to-god romantic love until I met you. Lust, sure, but not love. People were always so boring and slow, and irritating. Not worth my time,” the genius recalled. “And then you changed all that, Sebastian. You swooped in, and we connected effortlessly. For the first time in my adult life, I was happy. I had a reason to keep going; to wake up every day and face the world anew. It was you.”

“Jimmy—”

“Hush, and let me finish telling you what I need to, okay?”

“Okay.” He nodded, squeezing his husband’s hand.

“As if that weren’t enough, this past year you’ve given me my greatest joy— our children. You claim your presence has put them in danger, but without you, they wouldn’t exist. So not only have you saved my life, you’ve ensured theirs as well,” Moriarty emphasized. “Don’t apologize for the trouble you think you’ve brought to my doorstep. The good things outweigh the bad tenfold.”

“Oh, honey. I love you.” Sebastian pulled the smaller man close, encircling him in a fierce hug.

“Easy does it, Tiger. I appreciate your enthusiasm, but be careful of the babies.”

“You’re right, I’ll try to be more mindful.” He slipped a hand down onto Jim’s stomach, hoping to communicate with his little ones. “It’s been a while since Papa’s said ‘hello.’ Do you suppose they remember the sound of my voice?”

“Of course. They’re always listening, even when you’re not speaking directly to them.”

At that moment, the twins shifted position. Their movements could be felt inside and out.

The consulting criminal smiled at his spouse, who sported a matching grin of his own. “See? They recognize you. They’re very clever.”

“Just like their Daddy.”

“Just like us both,” Jim corrected. “I didn’t marry a fool.”

The two men stared at each other for a beat, stressed, but confident that they could conquer any obstacle, so long as they faced it together.
“Wanna go home, Magpie? I’m sure there’s much to discuss, in light of what we’ve learned.”

“Yes, that’s a fine idea. I could also do with a soak in the tub. Naturally, I’d require your expert assistance.”

“Perhaps we ought to institute something new— bathtub talk time,” Seb suggested with a wink.

“Darling, I know you’re just teasing, but honestly, I’d be game for it if you were.”

“Oh really?”

“Reeeaaallllly,” the mastermind affirmed. “Some of my best thinking has been done while warm and wet.”

Moran chuckled. “I bet.”

“So let's roll. I’ve got a sore back and we’ve been standing out here for ages.”

Sebastian could not resist coming to his omega’s aid. He chivalrously helped him into the car, making sure his seat was warm and cozy before buckling him in.

“Thank you, love.”

“It’s my pleasure.”

The couple drove off, content to spend the rest of the day basking in togetherness and working out what they should do about Colin and Annie.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Catching Up

Chapter Summary

Jim attends his first pregnancy support group meeting of the new year.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Good evening, gentlemen. I’d like to take a moment to welcome you all back after our recent holiday hiatus. I hope the new year is treating everyone well.” Trevor, the family therapist and Male Omega Pregnancy Support group coordinator, smiled as he delivered his greeting. “I thought that might be a good topic to start off our discussion tonight— how did your Christmases turn out? For some of you, this was your first time celebrating the holidays while expecting. Did that change anything or did the dynamic remain the same?”

“The blizzard threw a wrench into my plans,” a man named Simon announced.

It seemed the tumultuous weather had impacted people’s festivities across the board, as a procession of others chimed in to agree.

“Midnight mass has long been a tradition in my household,” he continued, “but with the snowfall, services were cancelled and we were stuck at home.”

“I had something similar happen,” Jim said. “It wasn’t a mass, but rather dinner plans that ended up being sacked. Things worked out okay, though. My sister-in-law is a wonderful cook, and so we prepared a meal that was actually quite delicious.”

*Sister-in-law.* He smiled as the words left his mouth, never having used them in conjunction with himself before.

“That reminds me, how did the family reunion go?” Ian asked.

Another group member, Jack, raised an eyebrow. “What’s this about a reunion?”

“As a Christmas gift, I brought my husband’s estranged brother— along with his wife and child— all the way from Australia to England. It was the first they’d seen each other in almost 25 years.”

The whole room was impressed by Jim’s gesture, oohing and aahing at the news.

“That’s an awful long time to spend apart. How’d they get along?”
“Very well, I’m pleased to report. Obviously, their relationship isn’t anywhere near perfect, but they made good headway. I look forward to us getting together again in the future.”

“Reconciliation can be a complex process,” the coordinator spoke, “and families often mend fences at their own pace. It sounds like yours is off to a strong start.”

“I believe it’s a step in the right direction. My babies will have more people in their lives who love them.”

“You’ve got an excellent outlook on the situation, Jim. With positivity, anything is possible.”

“Yeah, right,” Scott, a ginger-haired attendee, commented. “You know where positivity gets you? Absolutely nowhere.”

“Yeesh. Who rained on your parade?” Jack quipped.

“Honestly? My bitch of a sister and her arsehole husband.”

Trevor turned his attention to the disgruntled young man. “Is there something you’d care to share, Scott?”

“I dunno…maybe.”

“We’re willing to listen.”

“It’s just some really personal stuff. I’m not sure I can talk about it in an open setting like this.”

“Oh, come on,” Jack urged. “You can trust us. This is a safe space.”

“Hmm…I guess so.” He took a breath, steeling himself for the discussion. “You may recall that I previously mentioned how my parents wanted to reconnect after they found out I was pregnant.” A few people nodded, and he mustered on. “Well, I went to their place for Christmas. My sister Amy, her spouse, and her 6-month-old daughter were there, too. Everything was going great—we were chatting, laughing, and drinking hot cider around the hearth. It felt like old times again. But…” he trailed off sadly.

“But what?” Jim inquired, curious as to where the story was headed.

“But then Amy decided to breastfeed her baby right in front of everyone, and when I got upset, she couldn’t understand why. It turned into an argument, and her hubby stepped in and made things even worse. I wanted to get the hell out of there, but the goddamn blizzard kept me trapped like a rat in a cage.”

Simon stared at him in confusion. “Pardon me, but I don’t think I understand why you were upset by it either. What was the problem?”

“Seriously? You have to ask?”

“It was because he knows he won’t be able to do the same with his child,” the consulting criminal stated. “I get it.”

“Thank you, Jim. I’m glad someone does.”

“It’s not a matter I ever gave much thought to,” Simon replied.

“Lucky you,” the redhead remarked. “I think about it constantly, especially as I get closer to my
due date. I’ve been reading books and watching videos to prepare for raising a newborn, and all the information stresses how much better it is to breastfeed than to bottle-feed. And here I am, trying to be a good mum, but I’m incapable of providing for my son on such a basic, fundamental level. I feel as though I’ve failed him already,” he confessed. “I see Amy nurse her little girl so easily, and it’s like she’s rubbing my nose in it.”

“I’m sure that wasn’t her intention,” Trevor asserted. “When babies are hungry, it’s a mother’s instinct to offer sustenance. She probably just wanted to get her daughter fed as swiftly as possible, and didn’t mean it as a slight against you.”

“Perhaps. All I know is that it hurts.”

“You’re not alone,” Moriarty declared. “I’m bothered by it, too. The first time the reality of it hit me was during a hospital stay. I went to visit the nursery, and when a medical assistant fetched one of the babies for a scheduled feed, it occurred to me that I would never be able to do that for my children. It made me so depressed, I didn’t speak the rest of the afternoon.”

“Male omegas have always faced specialized concerns,” the coordinator acknowledged. “In terms of our inability to nurse due to underdeveloped mammary glands, it’s important to view the issue for what it is—a legitimate medical condition which we have zero control over. There’s no shame in it,” Trevor emphasized. “It has no bearing on whether or not you’re a ‘good’ parent.”

“That’s what my mate said,” the genius recalled. “He told me that plenty of women don’t breastfeed, and it doesn’t make them any less of a mother to their babies. So why should it make a difference for us?”

“Your partner is a smart man, Jim.”

Moriarty smiled. “I tend to think so, though I may be a bit biased.”

“I wish I could find a bloke like him,” Scott lamented.

“Don’t we all?” someone else uttered.

“I agree,” another participant spoke. “He’s so supportive.”

“And handsome as hell, don’t forget that.”

“He waits in the lobby for Jim at every meeting. Isn’t that sweet?”

“He really is the perfect man.”

As his fellow group members sang the praises of Sebastian, the mastermind found it increasingly difficult to keep a straight face. Apparently, his spouse had a fan club— fucking hilarious. He would relish teasing him about it later.

The conversation canonizing Moran for sainthood eventually wound down, and the chatter moved on to other things. Jack talked about how thrilled his son Reggie was to meet Santa at Harrods. He even pulled out photos to show everyone, and a cuteness overload was experienced by all. Additional holiday tales were told as well, by various attendees. The only person who didn’t divulge any details was Ian. Jim wasn’t certain if that reflected his usual shyness or if it meant something more. He would soon find out.

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When they finally reached the mid-meeting break, Moriarty made it a point to approach Ian. They’d not engaged in a proper dialogue since the Christmas party. That night, the teen had hung around until after Jim and Seb returned from the hospital. He was apprised of what happened during the confrontation with Annie and given clearance to leave after seeing off the last few guests. Now a week and a half had passed, and there was a lot of catching up to do.

“So how’ve you been?”

“Good and bad, I suppose. Getting through life as best I can,” the youth answered while nibbling on a butterscotch cookie bar.

“When you say ‘bad,’ how terrible are we talking?”

“I’m not sure how one quantifies these things, but on a scale of 1-10, I’d estimate it to be a solid 7 or 8.”

The consulting criminal’s eyes widened with alarm. “Bloody hell. Fill me in.”

“Well, on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, I experienced some pretty severe abdominal cramps.”

“Oh no.” Jim’s heart sunk at the news.

“Yeah. It was scary,” he admitted. “I live alone, so there was nobody to turn to for help. I had to drag myself to the bus stop and get to the hospital from there.”

“Christ, that’s rough. I’m sorry to hear it.”

“I appreciate your concern,” the young man remarked. “They performed a scan and didn’t find anything wrong, thank god. My pain was attributed to muscles stretching to accommodate the baby. I was allowed to go home, but at that point the snow had started falling and everyone ended up stuck there through the next day.”

“How dreadful.”

“Indeed. It certainly wasn’t how I’d intended to spend Christmas. I don’t have family to celebrate with, but I’d arranged to volunteer at a soup kitchen. I felt rotten about not making it in.”

“Surely they understood, considering the circumstance.”

Ian nodded. “I spoke to the facility’s manager and he was very gracious. It seems the poor weather conditions prevented a lot of the staff from coming in.” He paused for a moment, a small smile slinking across his face. “Want me to let you in on a secret?”

The genius perked up. “Ooh, yes. Do tell.”

“One good thing did come out of my medical ordeal. When I had the ultrasound done, they informed me of my baby’s gender. It’s a girl.”

“Congratulations!” Jim enthused, his expression animated. “Why didn’t you announce it to the group?”

“I was a little too nervous,” he shyly explained. “Anyway, I’m thinking about calling her Matilda, after my late mother.”

“That’s lovely. A fine tribute if ever there was.” Moriarty stopped to ponder something. “We should have our children play together once they’re old enough. Can you imagine? It would be
adorable.” He could see the picture so clearly in his mind— Essie, Eddie, and Tilly, dressed in raincoats and galoshes, skipping joyfully through mud puddles and the wet grass. Maybe they’d even have a dog romping with them. The idea filled him with such excitement.

“Hey, Jim?”

“Yes?”

“There’s something I really ought to ask you. It’s about work.”

“Go ahead.”

“With Annie obviously being fired after what went down at the Christmas party, does that mean I’m out of a job, too? You hired me to keep an eye on her. If she’s gone, I assume you won’t need me anymore.”

“What? Never,” the consulting criminal insisted. “You’re still in charge of maintaining the business’s website design, plus you’ll be picking up some additional secretarial duties now that she’s been tossed out on her arse.”

“Oh,” he said, sounding pleasantly surprised. “Well, okay. I guess I can stop worrying, then.”

“Yes do. Too much stress isn’t good for you or Tilly.”

The teen laughed. “Tilly? You’ve given my daughter a nickname already?”

“Of course. It’s only natural, dear.”

“I haven’t had the occasion for nicknames, myself. When your moniker’s as short as mine, it’s hard to abbreviate it any further.

“Ah, I suppose. But there’s always your last name,” Jim noted. “‘Fitzgerald’ offers a wealth of possibilities. Perhaps I should start calling you ‘Fitzy.’”

Ian shot him a look of incredulity. “Don’t you dare. Unless, for some inexplicable reason, you’re trying to piss off your webmaster.”

“Splendid point. Wouldn’t want to end up with a page full of gifs, emojis, and Comic Sans.”

“Don’t forget clipart,” the young man teased.

“Right. So ‘Ian’ it is.”

The two both chuckled, enjoying a rare moment of levity.

Life is good, Moriarty mused. Despite all the strife he’d been made to endure, he really did feel optimistic for the future.

If only he knew that soon, the other shoe was about to drop.

Chapter End Notes
This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Don’t Shoot the Messenger

Chapter Summary

Sebastian must deliver upsetting news to Jim.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I think that’s everything. Sebastian looked down at the box of confiscated items, checking to be sure there wasn’t anything he’d missed. It contained Jim’s cell phone, their television remotes, their clock radio, and today’s edition of The Daily Telegraph.

What was the reason for Seb’s sudden hoarding? The answer was simple, but sombrous. He was trying to shield his beloved from truly awful news. It was a bombshell so upsetting, he feared it might send the Irishman into the throes of premature labor should he find out.

Colin Taylor had escaped the psychiatric facility he was being held at and was now on the loose. Worse yet, the breakout occurred two days before Christmas, but was deliberately kept from the press in order to avoid a scandal over the holiday season. Nothing can stay hidden forever, though, and eventually the authorities were forced to acknowledge the incident.

Moran was an erratic mess of emotions, his ordinarily cool demeanor replaced by a primal urge to destroy those who wished to do his omega harm. How else was he supposed to react when informed that the man who’d terrorized them was roaming free, and had apparently been at large for over a week? They were damn lucky the lunatic hadn’t tried anything during their family reunion. Just thinking about the unwitting risk inspired newfound fury within him.

“Sebbby!” a familiar voice rang out. Jim was beckoning him from their bedroom.

The sniper closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath. He was dreading this. He knew he wouldn’t be able to conceal the truth from his mate for long, but maybe he could delay it until he thought of a gentle way to break the news.

"Sebbby! Come here!"

He trudged upstairs, his trepidation mounting with every step. At last, he entered their sleeping quarters.

“Hello, kitten. You need something?” The blonde put on a brave face, smiling pleasantly as he spoke.
“Yes, have you seen my phone? I had it right next to me on the nightstand and now it’s gone.”

“Maybe you left it somewhere else by mistake? I wouldn’t worry—it’ll turn up sooner or later.”

Moriarty ogled him with suspicion. “Riiiight. I also noticed that the bedside clock is different, too. Any idea what happened there?”

“It wasn’t keeping the correct time. I think it must’ve shorted out, so I replaced it with another model.” One that doesn’t include a radio where news reports might be airing.

“Ah, I see.”

An uneasy tension wedged between them, but Seb was dead set on pretending nothing was wrong. “Shall I prepare us breakfast, darling?”

“I could eat, yeah.”

“For today, how about I make you anything you want? Bacon, sausage, ham steak—you name it.”

All the assassin sought was Jim’s continued happiness. He was fairly certain that once the genius learned of Colin’s escape, his joy would disappear like fog on a mirror. But for now, he could at least give him the small pleasure of a good meal before the bottom dropped out of his world.

The consulting criminal arched a brow at the offer. “That’s mighty generous of you. Why not cook up all three? We’ll have ourselves a meat extravaganza.”

“You got it.”

As he turned to leave, Jim called out again, stopping him in his tracks.

“One more thing. I’d appreciate it if you’d cut the bullshit and quit lying to me.”

Moran’s façade faded instantly, his untempered despair showing through.

“Look at me,” Moriarty commanded, and Sebastian did. It was then that he saw the turmoil painted upon his partner’s face. In a flash, the mastermind’s irritation at being deceived transformed into panic. What could’ve possibly caused Seb such anguish?

“Tiger, what’s the matter?” he prodded, his eyes widening with concern.

“Let’s have breakfast first. We can talk afterward.”

“No. Not later. Now.” The urgency in his tone was palpable.

“Don’t make me tell you yet,” the sniper beseeched. “Let me give you one last good morning. Please, Jimmy.”

“What do you mean ‘last?’” he frantically asked. “We have a lifetime of good mornings ahead of us.” Seb provided no response, which only worried him further. “Say something, dammit! You’re scaring me.”

BEEP. BEE—

The Irishman silenced his portable blood pressure monitor, ripping it off as soon as the alarm triggered.

“We should sit down,” Seb said.
“I don’t want to sit. I want to know what’s going on.”

“I’ll make you some herbal tea.”

When Moran motioned towards the door, Jim hastily grabbed him by the arm.

“No! Don’t walk away! We’re not done here. You’ll bloody well tell me what’s happened!”

This wasn’t at all how the former colonel hoped things would go. His Magpie wasn’t supposed to know something was wrong from the very start. But then again, James Moriarty was no ordinary bloke. He was a brilliant man, possessing supreme intellect and perception. Of course he’d immediately see past the subterfuge. It was foolish to imagine otherwise.

“Colin Taylor,” Sebastian finally answered.

The name sent a chill deep into Jim’s core. He paled, feeling as though the oxygen was rapidly being siphoned from the room. “What about him?”

“He escaped from the hospital. The police have no idea where he is.”

“Surely they can track him down. He’ll be apprehended by the end of the day.”

The blonde shook his head. “Honey, Colin broke out shortly before Christmas. They’ve been keeping it from the public all this time.”

An involuntary whimper tore from Jim’s lips. It was a sound no alpha ever wanted to hear, signaling intense omega distress.

Moriarty’s vision began to blur. He tried to practice his breathing exercises, but even those were failing him. Soon, his knees buckled and the world went dark.

“Jimmy!” Seb rushed to catch his collapsing spouse. He laid him on the bed, gently smoothing back a lock of mussed hair. “I was afraid you’d react like this.” Or worse.

The genius’s eyes fluttered open. Though slightly disoriented, he was comforted by the sight of his husband hovering at his side. He reached for the man’s hand, giving it a squeeze.

“Tell me everything. Spare no details.”

Moran stopped to collect himself, realizing there was no going back now. “Okay, love. I got up early this morning and the news about Colin was everywhere. The reports cite poor security and a staff shortage as the reason he was able to escape. The police checked his home in Ermington, but there was no evidence that anyone had set foot in the house since his arrest. It’s theorized he may be hiding out with a co-conspirator.”

“Annie,” he spat, uttering the woman’s name as if it were an expletive.

“My thought exactly. She deceived us all, hon. She’s a trained actor— putting on appearances is what performers do.”

“I could kick myself for ever hiring that bitch. I should’ve seen through her guise. But no, like a fucking idiot, I allowed her into the fold.”

“She deceived us all, hon. She’s a trained actor— putting on appearances is what performers do.”

“I know!” Jim snapped. “I’ve done my fair share of acting, too. I ought to have recognized what she was straightaway.”
“How do you think I feel? I was involved with her sister and I had no idea of her true identity.”

“Yes, but that wasn’t your fault. You never met Margo’s family.”

“Still, I should’ve noticed their resemblance. Sometimes Annie would look at me, and I’d get this eerie sense of familiarity. If only I’d been smart enough to connect the dots.”

Moriarty heaved a sigh. “We’re wasting our energy playing the blame game. What we need to do is brainstorm a strategy. Construct a plan to stay safe in light of Colin’s escape.”

The assassin nodded. “I’ve already had a few hours to mull it over.”

“And what’ve you come up with?”

“I’m moving you out of London, ASAP. We’ll go to Southern England and remain there until the twins are born.”

Jim stared at his spouse, incensed. “Like hell we will. We discussed this ages ago. I refused to leave then, and I refuse to leave now. This is my city. I won’t turn tail and run.” He paused, adding, “You’re an alpha. How is it that running away seems to be your first instinct?”

Sebastian glared hotly at the smaller man. They were both under a great deal of stress and he didn’t want to respond with anger. Jim made it damn hard not to, though.

“My first instinct is—and always has been—to protect you. When I suggest temporarily relocating, it’s not out of cowardice. It’s because I’m trying to ensure your welfare. We stay here and we’re sitting ducks,” he declared. “Have you suddenly developed amnesia and forgotten the numerous threats Colin and Annie have leveled against us? For fuck’s sake, they’ve sent us body parts in boxes and left notes about dismembering our children. Does that mean nothing to you?”

Hurt flashed in the mastermind’s dark eyes, and Seb instantly regretted what he’d said. But the words were out and the damage was done.

“You…you think I don’t care about our babies?” He sounded truly wounded, his voice wavering as if trying to hold back tears.

“I didn’t say that.”

“Yes, you did! For your information, I would give up my life for our little ones. I love them with all my heart,” the overwrought omega proclaimed. “But maybe you don’t believe me, because I’m James Moriarty, criminal extraordinaire. I’m not supposed to be capable of such sentimental notions, right? God forbid I have thoughts, and feelings, and dreams.”

“Oh, Magpie. I’m sorry,” the sniper apologized, genuinely remorseful for his cruel comment. “I know you adore them. They’ll be the most cherished babies on earth, thanks to you.”

“They certainly will,” he agreed. “I understand you’re on edge—I am, too. But never doubt my devotion to our children. It’s immutable, Seb. I’ll love them forever.”

“We both will.” Moran lifted Jim’s hand to his lips, tenderly pressing a kiss to his fingertips. “I just want to guard my family from danger.”

“I know, Tiger. You’re a loyal soldier and I appreciate what you do.”

“Can I ask you something, then?”
“Go ahead. I’m listening.”

“Why won’t you permit me to take you away from here? What would be so bad about the two of us journeying to a quaint town near the shore? We could rent a cottage and cook our own meals. I’ve got a stew recipe that’d be ideal to make this time of year,” he noted. “And the hearth—we could cozy up in front of it every night. Remember when we went to the Cotswolds for our anniversary…all the time we spent making love by the fireside? This would be a wonderful way to pay tribute.”

The Irishman gazed at his husband with a serene gleam, momentarily lost in the memory Seb had stirred up. They’d conceived the twins during that trip, and it was an experience he’d not soon forget. The idea that they were creating a brand new life, formed from the both of them, made the act of their coupling feel more meaningful. Gone was the coarseness and aggression that often characterized their sexual encounters, replaced instead by tenderness, passion, and purpose. It was beautiful.

“You tempt me, Sebby.”

“Good. Let’s pack our bags and hit the road.”

“It’s not that simple, my sweet. There are factors to consider.”

“Such as? And don’t say ‘work.’ We can manage the business remotely, and you know it.”

“Well, there’s my medical care, for starters. This is a high risk pregnancy. The obstetrician has me coming in once a week for checkups. I doubt I could get that kind of specialized attention elsewhere,” he stated. “Furthermore, Dr. Swenson is scheduled to deliver the babies in February—a mere month away. She’s one of the best in her field, and I won’t trade in her expertise for some small town physician who’s never treated a male omega before. I’m nervous enough about having surgery; I don’t require any additional stressors mixed in.”

The assassin couldn’t argue with his mate’s reasoning. His health concerns would probably be better served in London.

“That’s not all,” Moriarty continued. “As difficult as it may be to imagine, I do try to live my life by certain principles. Foremost among them is to never surrender to a threat. It isn’t a matter of pride—it’s a stand against fear. Can you understand that?”

Yes, Sebastian could. He respected it, even. But where did it leave them in terms of safety and security?

“Supposing we stay here, you must allow me to pursue some means of protecting you. I need to make an effort.”

Jim smiled softly at his anxious partner. “Of course you’ll find ways to protect me. We’ll come up with the provisions together.”

“I’m holding you to that promise.” Seb was still a bit uneasy, but discussing the situation had helped assuage some worries.

“Sofoo,” the consulting criminal began, “how about our breakfast? I’m ready for a meat medley.”

“Are you positive you wouldn’t rather have something healthier?”

“Nope. You’re not wriggling out of this one. You made the offer, now it’s time to ante up.”
“A deal’s a deal,” Moran conceded. “But you’re sticking to your diet for the rest of the day. This is just a one-off.”

“Yes, sir, Colonel,” he cheekily replied.

The blonde winked back at his devilish, yet adorable, mate. Perhaps I’ll sneak some fresh fruit onto his plate, he mused, heading for the door.

“By the way, Tiger? I expect you to return my phone, clock radio, tv remote, and anything else you might’ve absconded with in your vain attempt to keep today’s news from me. Is that clear?”

“As crystal.” Seb vowed, right then and there, to never conceal the truth from his beloved Magpie again.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Checkups & Provisions

Chapter Summary

Jim has a checkup. Afterward, he and Sebastian make plans.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

THUMP. THUMP.

THUMP. THUMP.

Jim was beaming with delight as he listened to the strong heartbeats of his children. It was a sound he’d heard many times before, but would never grow tired of.

“Your babies are very healthy,” Dr. Swenson said, reassuring the two men who currently occupied her exam room.

The consulting criminal and his spouse exchanged a warm glance as they joined hands at the good news. Jim had been on edge for the past few days, worried out of his mind over what he perceived as reduced fetal movement.

“At this point,” the obstetrician explained, “there’s not much space for them to move around. It’s perfectly normal.”

“See, hon? I told you it would be okay.” Seb was supportive as ever, doing what he could to help his omega through the latter stages of pregnancy.

Jim nodded. “I hate to seem like one of those people who frets about every little thing.”

“It’s smart to take notice of such changes. I wish all my patients were so attentive.”

“You won’t find a man more observant than him,” Sebastian remarked. “If one of the twins so much as yawns, he claims he can sense it.”


“Oh no? Last week you swore they were yawning. Although it turned out you just had heartburn, so maybe that doesn’t count.”

“Hiccupping,” he quickly corrected. “I thought they were hiccupping. It was an honest mistake.”
The physician grinned at the duo. She saw a lot of couples come and go through the doors of her practice, and this pair was among the most endearing she’d encountered in quite a while.

“It won’t be long until delivery. Have you got everything ready for when the babies arrive?”

“Oh yes,” the genius proudly announced. “The nursery and playroom are all set up. We’ve also bought plenty of clothing and supplies.”

“That’s right. Our cubs will want for nothing.”

“Excellent. I always encourage new parents to make a checklist of baby-related items they think they might need. It sounds like you’ve already got it covered.”

The sniper gazed at his mate, grateful he remained in good spirits. Seb had worried that Colin Taylor’s escape from the hospital would send Jim spiraling into a state of anxiety and depression. Thank god that hadn’t happened. He refused to let the bastard ruin one of the happiest periods of his life.

“Dr. Swenson?”

“Yes, Mr. Moriarty?”

“This might sound a bit silly, but I recently read an article that mentioned how, during the third trimester, babies in the womb can enter REM sleep and have dreams. It made me wonder what could possibly be going on in their heads. Not having had any exposure to the outside world, what do you think comprises their dreams?”

“That’s a fine question, and one we may never conclusively know the answer to. My own speculation is that fetal dreams revolve around sensory experiences. A baby might remember certain feelings or sounds, and be reliving them while in a dream state.”

“Interesting hypothesis. When you say ‘feelings,’ what would that equate to in an unborn child?”

“I imagine it’s a general sense of security, perhaps incorporating voices that bring comfort.”

“I talk to my little ones a lot,” the Irishman noted. “Do you suppose they could be recalling our conversations fondly?”

“In my opinion, yes. But do keep in mind that this is only conjecture.”

“Right.” Though not verifiable, he was keen on the idea. He liked to think of his babies slumbering inside him, dreaming about their ‘chats’ and how safe his voice made them feel. “Maybe I’ll start singing to them as well. Would they enjoy that?”

“I believe so,” the doctor kindly replied.

Jim looked at his partner. “Seb, we’re going to sing to them together.”

The sniper blinked in surprise. “Come again?”

“You heard me. We’ll perform lullabies and a few ‘Top 40’ classics.”

Sebastian wanted to laugh, but this was one of those occasions where there was at least a 50% chance the man was being serious. Times like these, it was best to simply smile and nod.

“Sure thing, kitten. You know I can’t carry a tune, though. Think back to the karaoke bar in
Osaka.”

Moriarty paused, contemplating it. “You’re right. Forget what I said. I’ll do enough singing for the both of us.”

“Splendid. I’m glad we got that settled.”

As the checkup came to a close, Jim wiped the conductive gel from his stomach and sat up. “I want a copy of the images from this week’s ultrasound,” he declared.

“Okay, I’ll print them out now,” the obstetrician spoke. “Still compiling pictures for your baby book?”

“Yeah. Once the twins are born, I’ll begin a whole new album for them. I’m actually considering breaking it down into three separate scrapbooks: one for Essie, one for Eddie, and one dedicated to them as a duo.”

“That’s a lovely idea,” she commented while selecting the monitor’s ‘print screen’ option. “Who can resist baby photos?”

“Not me. Lately, I find myself going through the birth announcements in the newspaper, just in case they’ve included pictures. I wish they all did,” he lamented. “Seb is going to be my photography guy, isn’t that right?”

Jim’s face was lit up with such exuberance, Moran didn’t have the heart to tell him how little experience he had on the subject. He could operate a standard digital camera, but what his husband sought was something more advanced. Honestly, he wasn’t certain why the mastermind would elect to use him for the job rather than hire a professional photographer. Perhaps it was another side effect of the errant hormones coursing through his system—some primal directive that told him his strong, virile alpha could do anything.

“Tiger?” the Irishman addressed, still waiting for a response.

“Whatever you’d like, I’ll try my best, dear.”

Dr. Swenson swooped in, handing the sonogram copies to Jim. “Good luck with the scrapbooking. I’m sure it’ll be great fun to look back on years from now.”

“That’s the main idea. Posterity at its finest.”

Sebastian glanced the time on his phone. He and Moriarty had a meeting to attend and needed to get going soon.

“Hey, sweetheart? I don’t mean to rush you, but we really should head out to that lunch date I arranged.”

“Ah, yes.” He stood up from the exam table, carefully clutching his printouts. “See you next week.”

“Have a wonderful afternoon, gentlemen.”

The couple bid the physician adieu and went on their way. An important engagement lay in the men’s near future.

**********
“So you truly believe this bloke will be able to help us?”

“I do,” Moran answered.

In an effort to improve upon his spouse’s safety, the former colonel had placed a call to an army buddy who might have some useful connections. Brigadier Roger Flynn was an expert marksman whose military career was prematurely ended by a knee injury. After receiving his discharge, he worked to regain mobility and then put his skillset to use as a freelancer, undertaking any assignment so long as the price was right. Though he wasn’t an especially ethical individual, he was damn good at getting things done and organizing a team.

At last, Seb spied the man from across the restaurant they’d decided to meet at. He waved him over to the VIP section where they sat. For privacy purposes, it made the most sense to reserve a table in that area of the eatery.

“Sebastian Moran,” the gun-for-hire greeted as they shook hands. “It’s been too long. How are you?”

“Pretty good overall, but I wouldn’t have contacted you if life was entirely perfect.”

“Indeed not,” he agreed. “What sort of trouble are you up against these days?”

The blonde presented a folder file to his old comrade. Information regarding Colin Taylor and Annelise de Graaf was outlined therein.

“I’m going to give you the abbreviated version of this story,” Seb began. “The two people described in the document you’re holding have terrorized Jim and I for months. They’re guilty of stalking, kidnapping, murder, harassment, and more— their transgressions run the gamut. We have plans to deal with them in our own way, but as you can plainly see, we’re also in the midst of expanding our family.”

Roger nodded. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you,” he acknowledged. “As I was saying, we’ve chosen to wait until after the babies are born to extract our pound of flesh. Now here’s where you come in: we need to beef up security to ensure that these lunatics don’t harm Jim through the remainder of the pregnancy. We’ve tried increasing security before, but it wasn’t enough. This time, I want there to be absolutely no margin of error.”

“So you require bodyguards?”

“Not quite— it’s more than that. I require a well-trained group of people who will remain vigilant at all hours and be prepared to defend my mate and our home through whatever means necessary. In other words, I’m looking to dismiss the current security staff and employ a band of mercs in their stead. I’d like you to assemble the best you’ve got and head up the team.”

The man paused, mulling it over. “You may be a friend, Moran, but this is going to be a costly endeavor. Good help doesn’t come cheap.”

“We’re well aware of that,” Jim interjected. “Money is no object and we’re willing to provide weaponry and ammunitions.”

“I suppose I’d be a fool to turn down a gig like this,” he admitted. “It’ll take a few days to gather everyone, of course. I’ll also need a stipend up front.”
“You got it. Seb, grab my checkbook.”

The sniper obliged, pulling the item from Moriarty’s coat pocket and handing it to him.

“How’s £25,000 to start?”

“Sounds great,” the sharpshooter enthused.

Jim wrote out the check and slid it across the table. “There you go. More will be forthcoming once you’ve brought me the group. And do know that I reserve the right to reject your selections and request alternate team members upon review. Understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Fabulous. I look forward to doing business with you, Brigadier.”

“Likewise.”

With that matter settled, the consulting criminal skimmed the menu in front of him. “God, I’m hungry. Think I might order a nice Porterhouse steak.”

“This is a real luncheon?” Roger asked in surprise. “Here I assumed it was just a pretense to conduct our meeting under.”

Moriarty smirked. “You’re working for me now, dear. Expect the unexpected.”

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
The Highs and Lows of Life

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian engage in a bit of pillow talk. Later, Jim has a group meeting where the topic turns dour.

Chapter Notes

Warning: The second half of the chapter discusses pregnancy loss. Don't worry-- Jim's babies are okay. I just mention this because I realize it's a sensitive topic.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the days following Jim and Seb's meeting with brigadier turned freelance assassin Roger Flynn, their residence had transformed into something of a fortress. Once the mastermind gave his approval of Flynn's mercenary team, intensive security measures were implemented. Armed guards surrounded the estate and could communicate via Bluetooth technology. Most were positioned on the ground, with a few posted in the trees as well. It was a round-the-clock effort, utilizing infrared sensors in addition to manpower. Nothing could get within 10 feet of the house without someone knowing about it.

Those who stopped by were required to present ID verification, or else be turned away on sight. This worked out fine a majority of the time. However, a recent incident had sent Jim reeling. He'd ordered takeout, and when the deliveryman declined to show identification because his hands were full, someone on duty seized the food packages and shot several rounds into them as a precaution. Needless to say, the consulting criminal was not pleased about having his dinner blown to smithereens. Seb had to physically restrain him after he used his motorized wheelchair to careen into the person responsible. From that point on, nobody made the mistake of coming between Moriarty and his meals.

Speaking of meals, the couple was now in the midst of afternoon tea. Jim had plowed through a pile of cucumber sandwiches and showed no signs of slowing down. He was positively voracious...in more ways than one.

“Tiiiiiger?”

“Yes, love?”

“It was a brilliant idea, using honey to sweeten your Earl Grey instead of plain old sugar cubes.
Sugar’s sooo ordinary.”

The sniper smiled. “Glad you approve.”

Moriarty gazed at his mate with a wanton gleam. “I certainly dooooo. I can think of a few more applications for it, too.”

“Oh?” Sebastian had a pretty good idea where this was headed, but sometimes it was fun to play dumb.

“Mnhmm.” He picked up the bear-shaped honey dispenser, giving it a small jiggle. “I think it’d be yummy to lick this off your body.”

Moran gasped in mock surprise. “Are you propositioning me, sir? What kind of man do you take me for?” he deadpanned.

“A sexy one.”

The blonde chuckled. “You’re quite cheeky today.”

“How about we be cheeky together?” His dark eyes twinkled devilishly as he spoke.

“No beating around the bush, aye?”

“Sometimes it’s best to cut straight to the chase.”

“Can’t argue there.” He took one last sip of tea before standing up from the table. “Let’s go.”

Jim was delighted that his partner required no convincing. “So eager, my sweet.”

“For you? Always.”

The Irishman hummed happily and began wheeling towards the direction of the elevator.

“Magpie?”

“Yeah?”

“Don’t forget the honey.”

A lopsided grin graced Moriarty’s face. This was going to be a fantastic afternoon.

*********

“I’m thirsty,” Jim remarked.

“Gee, I wonder why?” the sniper teased. “Maybe it has something to do with the sweat you worked up.”

They’d been going at it for nearly three hours— not a record by any means, but it was an impressive feat considering one of them was at an advanced stage of pregnancy. Even Seb marveled at his mate’s stamina. Twice, he’d asked him if he wanted to stop, and twice he was told ‘no’ by the seemingly indefatigable Irishman.

“Here,” Moran said, offering up the water bottle he kept by the bed.

Jim swiftly accepted it, guzzling with gusto. Soon, its contents were drained.
“I so needed that.” He snuggled close to Seb, resting his head against the man’s chest.

“Finally tuckered out?”

“Nah, I’m just relaxing a little until I have to get ready for my MOPS meeting.”

“Another one? I almost forgot. Too much sex scrambling the brain.”

Moriarty laughed. “A perfectly valid medical condition.”

“Yes, I’m debating the merits of applying for workers’ compensation, seeing as how the malady was induced by my employer.”

“Ha-ha. Very funny,” he sarcastically intoned. “And you have the nerve to call me ‘cheeky?’”

“You know I’m only kidding. I love you, kitten.”

The mastermind shifted so that he could stare into the pools of his partner’s deep blue eyes. “I love you, too.” He paused, caught up in thought. “Sebby? I’d also like to thank you.”

“For what, dear?”

“Everything, really— for staying in the city with me despite how dangerous it may be. For bringing people here who could help us. For protecting me and the babies. Thank you for all of it.”

“You’re my husband, Jim. Of course I’m going to do whatever’s necessary to ensure your safety. That’s not something you have to thank me for, though I do appreciate the gesture.”

“My whole life, hardly anyone cared what happened to me. Not until you came along. I think that’s worth acknowledging.”

“Oh, sweetheart. I wish things could’ve been better for you.”

It always saddened the assassin to think about how cruel the world was to his Magpie growing up. He remembered the childhood photo Jim had shown him months ago, depicting his mother holding him up so that he could touch the star on top of a Christmas tree. The sweet little boy in that image deserved so much more than the hell he was given.

“Nothing to be done about it now. But I do take solace in the fact that our darlings will never know that kind of pain. They’ll be thoroughly adored. Anyone who treats them otherwise will be made into shoes.”

“Agreed.”

The couple remained in bed for some time, nestled together, quietly enjoying each other’s company and warmth. Eventually, Moriarty broke their contented silence.

“Seb? I’ve got an idea regarding our current situation.”

“Oh? Do tell.”

“I think we should investigate Annie’s whereabouts. She’s been MIA since the night of the party,” he noted. “If we can track her down, chances are good we’ll find Colin as well.”

“Honey, ordinarily I’d be game for a hunt, but now? We’ve gone over this— it’s far too risky to seek those bastards out while you’re in a compromised state. What’s most important at the moment
“I understand that. I just feel I should be doing something proactive.”

“You are, Jimmy. You’re putting our children first by keeping out of harm’s way. That’s a huge contribution.”

“Is it? Because often, it feels suspiciously like I’m sitting on my arse, streaming movies and gobbling chocolates while those fucking psychopaths roam free.”

“They’ll get what’s coming to them in due time. And who knows— maybe they’ll visit us, and Flynn’s team can shoot the shite out of them.”

“Is it bad that a part of me hopes they don’t get to them before we do? I’m rather looking forward to exacting my revenge after the twins are born,” Moriarty confessed.

“Honestly? Me too.”

“I suppose it would be a change of pace, though, to see their bullets used against something besides an innocent platter of manicotti and garlic bread.”

“You’re not going to let that one go, are you?”

“Never. It’s a sin to waste good Italian food.” He sighed. “I shouldn’t talk about this, it’s making me hungry.”

“We’ve got time before you have to go out. Why don’t I whip us up some dinner?”

The genius flashed his mate a hopeful look. “Oh, that would be divine.”

“Then your wish is my command.” He leaned over to steal a quick kiss from Jim, then stood up and slipped on a pair of sweatpants.

Moriarty ogled Sebastian shamelessly. “I propose we institute a ‘no clothes’ policy around here.”

“Do you, now? Might get a tad chilly this time of year. Perhaps the summer months would be more conducive to such an ordinance.”

“Yes, perhaps so.” The Irishman made a mental note that Moran hadn’t dismissed the notion outright. The possibility was there.

“How’s pasta primavera sound?” Seb asked. “We’ve got leftover veggies in the fridge I could throw in.”

“I want it already. Get moving, chef.”

“Chef? Ooh, that’s new.”

“Would you prefer I call you ‘servant boy?’”

“Well, if I have a choice in the matter, then I think I’d like to be known as ‘King Moran, master of magpie taming and long-range weaponry.’”

Jim arched a brow. “Taming? Ha. You’re lucky you’re handsome, or there’d be hell to pay for that bit.” One look at Seb’s sexy, sharky grin, and the consulting criminal melted like butter.
Sebastian chuckled, proceeding towards the door. “I ought to get cooking. Meet me downstairs?”

“Yeah.” He paused, thinking it over. “I’d like to dine in front of the fireplace tonight.”

“Sure thing, hon. I’ll arrange the place settings.”

As his spouse left the room, a gentle smile emerged on Jim’s face. He was really and truly happy.

*********

The latest Male Omega Pregnancy Support meeting was already in session when one of its members arrived nearly 20 minutes late. Looking rather haggard, Simon’s sudden appearance turned a few heads.

“We were about to send out a search party,” Jack remarked.

“Aye,” said another. “Did you take a nap and oversleep?”

“Maybe he was having a romantic evening and lost track of the time,” someone else suggested.

“Is everything about romance with you? Sheesh.”

“Hey, I’m lonely and pregnant— allow me to dream.”

Conversation amongst the group went back and forth, until finally, Simon removed his jacket and the question was answered. He wore a hospital band around his wrist, clearly indicating where he’d been.

The chatter instantly went silent. All those gossipy voices, hushed in one fell swoop.

“Glad you were able to make it,” Trevor, the coordinator, spoke. “Is everything okay?”

He hesitated, realizing he had the full attention of the room. “I…uh…yes and no. I was at the hospital earlier tonight because I thought I was going into labor.”

The answer generated a buzz, as everyone knew he wasn’t far enough along to safely give birth.

“You’re here now,” Scott pointed out. “So it must’ve been a false alarm?”

Simon nodded. “Thankfully, yes. They said it was Braxton Hicks contractions, which are fairly common.”

“No real harm, then— you’ll be fine.”

“Fine…sure. Right as rain.” Despite the positive news, he was visibly upset, tears filling his eyes and streaming down his cheeks.

An awkward tension eclipsed the room. Nobody had a clue what to say.

Trevor passed the distraught omega a box of Kleenex. “A medical scare like that can be nerve-wracking, but the worst is over and you can relax.”

“No,” he uttered between sobs. “You don’t get it. I can’t relax. Not ever.”

Moriarty sat there, watching as the melodrama played out. He and Simon weren’t exactly close, and had in fact butted heads upon first meeting. Even so, he couldn’t help but feel sympathetic to
“Simon?” the mastermind addressed. “If it’s any consolation, I’ve spent a fair amount of time in and out of the hospital myself during the past several months, so I know where you’re coming from. It’s terrifying, especially when it isn’t only your life that’s at risk, but your child’s as well. The doctors let you leave, though, which is a good sign,” he emphasized.

“Yeah,” Ian chimed in. “I had a bit of a fright recently, too, but it turned out okay in the end. I think most of us can relate to how traumatic the experience is. What’s important to remember is that your baby’s safe. He’s still inside you, growing and thriving, and it’s better for him if you try to calm down.”

Simon wiped his eyes and took a deep breath. “You’re right. I’m sorry to be acting like this in front of you all. It’s just got me so shaken up. I can’t lose another baby. It would destroy me.”

The mood in the room grew sullen at his admission. There was nothing a pregnant omega—be they male or female—feared more than the prospect of harm coming to their unborn child. Many group members unconsciously placed a hand on their midsections, protective of the lives housed within.

“If you don’t mind me asking, what happened before? With your last pregnancy, I mean.” Jim posed the question everyone was thinking, but dared not speak.

“I had a stillborn son,” he replied. “His name was Alfie, and the situation was particularly distressing because he seemed fine, until suddenly he wasn’t. He was growing and moving...we had plenty of sonograms done. Everything was picture perfect. And then, with only two weeks left until his due date, they couldn’t find a heartbeat.” Simon paused, getting choked up at the memory of it. “There was a cord accident. Without warning or reason, it wrapped around his neck and killed him.”

The story was too upsetting for some. A few MOPS participants were in tears, the harrowing tale making them scared for their own babies. No one, however, was more disturbed by it than Jim. He refused to let the group see him cry, instead aching on the inside while he put up a steely façade.

People were talking and the coordinator offered comforting words, but Moriarty didn’t hear a single thing that was said. The myriad of voices distorted into a buzz in his head. The only clear messages he was receiving were thoughts of abject dread.

*What if your babies don’t survive? What if it’s all been for nothing? The effort and the love; the hopes and dreams you so naively allowed yourself to have—what if none of it matters?*

*It’d be fitting, wouldn’t it? For the universe to finally seek retribution against the evil you’ve done, by taking away the only good and pure thing to ever come from you?*

*You’d be a terrible parent anyway. Monsters can’t be mums. You don’t deserve Essie and Eddie.*

*No! No, no, no!*

He wanted to shut off his brain. Silence the demons that waged war in his psyche. Once the Pandora’s Box of doubt and self-loathing was opened, it was difficult to close.

But not impossible.

There was one person in this world who could always help him weather through the worst. Could always shine a light to lead him back from the abyss.
Sebastian. His love, his mate. His solider and source of unyielding devotion. He needed to see him now.

And so he would. Jim excused himself from the room, claiming he had to use the lavatory. Really, though, he wheeled himself down the hall in search of his husband.


At last, he reached the building’s foyer where the sniper typically waited. He quickly ascertained that something was different this time. Different, and worrying.

Seb was nowhere in sight.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
The Highs and Lows of Life, Continued

Chapter Summary

Surprises abound as Jim learns where Seb has been, and later, he receives news from his protégé, Ian.

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter contains descriptions of violence and bloodshed (nothing too graphic). Reader discretion is advised.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

Jim’s portable blood pressure monitor sounded off as he panicked at not being able to find his husband in the community center foyer. Seb always waited for him there without fail. So where was he now?

He wouldn’t just leave for no reason. Something must’ve happened. But what? Oh god, did someone abduct him?

A million awful explanations ran through his head, each possibility worse than the last.

BEEP. BEE—

Moriarty removed the monitor cuff from around his arm, not wanting to hear the shrill alarm any longer. He was grateful the damn thing hadn’t triggered while in the meeting room.

Suddenly, an idea came to mind. He’d send his missing mate a text message.

JM

Where are you?

A minute passed with no response.
Answer me, Seb. Where are you?

Still nothing.

Seb! I demand to know your location. That’s an order.

You’re going to be in BIG trouble if you don’t reply soon.

Sebby? Come on.

This isn’t funny. Tell me where you are.

Tiger? Answer me.

Please.

Tears welled in Jim’s eyes as he was now officially frantic. His phone shook in his hand and he struggled to breathe. If not for the fact that he was already sitting down, he likely would’ve fainted. Even the twins seemed to sense his unrest, kicking with an urgency he hadn’t felt in some time.

He knew he should return to the group, lest people start to worry. How could he, though, when his husband was unaccounted for? He’d never be able to concentrate on the discussion until he was assured of Seb’s safety.

In a last ditch effort, the consulting criminal decided to actually call Moran. Unfortunately, it went to voicemail.

“Fuck,” he muttered in frustration.

Maybe I’m overreacting. Maybe Seb simply popped out for a bit. But...why isn’t he responding to my communications? If he was okay, he’d at least text me back. Moriarty was torn, not sure what to think.

Before he could deliberate on the issue further, a wondrous sight appeared. It was Sebastian walking through the front door of the building.

The genius got up from his wheelchair and rushed to greet Moran with a fierce hug. He then followed up the gesture with a slap to the face.

“Oww! What kind of mixed message is that?” the sniper asked, rubbing his sore cheek.

“It’s for worrying me sick. Where were you?”

“Taking care of unfinished business.”

“Oh?” The statement piqued Jim’s interest. He looked his partner up and down, trying to deduce
whatever clues he could. *His shoes.* There was a tiny crimson droplet drying on the exterior of his boot, and he was fairly certain the substance wasn’t paint.

“Judging by the blood on your footwear, I say you *have* been busy.”

Moran glanced down, seeing the offending stain for himself. “Dammit, I thought I’d avoided getting anything on me.”

“So,” the mastermind began, “who was on the receiving end of this ‘unfinished business?’”

“Our favorite Heathrow employee, Ferdinand.”

Jim’s solemn expression lit up at the news. *Ferdinand.* It was the son of a bitch who’d refused him wheelchair service at the airport. "Do tell."

“After you agreed to let me have a crack at him, I observed the bastard in secret for a few days. Saw him give other male omegas a hard time, like he did to you. But between home life and work, I haven’t had the opportunity to make my move,” he explained. “I decided to finally pay him a proper visit tonight while you were occupied with your meeting.”

“You should’ve told me what you were planning.”

“If I did, you’d have wanted to come with me.” It was the truth. Moriarty loved to watch his hubby in action.

“Since when is that a bad thing? We’ve had some magnificent evenings together when I’ve accompanied you in the past.”

“Yes, we certainly have. But in your current condition, it wouldn’t be safe. I’m no expert, but I do believe pregnant people are generally discouraged from lingering at crime scenes.”

The Irishman sighed. “Can you at least tell me how you did it? So I can visualize it in my mind.”

“No harm in that, I suppose. I snuck up on him from behind and slit his throat with the knife you bought me. Then I disposed of his body in a dumpster. It was over relatively quickly. I made a conscious effort not to dally. I wanted to get back here to you.”

Jim closed his eyes for a moment, picturing the events in his head. He envisioned the glimmer of the blade and the smooth motion as it sliced through unsuspecting flesh. He imagined the spray of blood his mate was careful to miss, except for a single drop. He could almost hear the gurgling sounds the man surely made during his final death throes. Moriarty *so* wished he’d been there to witness it all.

“Thank you, Tiger. I needed something to help me refocus. I think your story did the trick.”

“Anytime, hon.” Amazing that a tale of murder could somehow center his partner the same way yoga or meditation might pacify an ordinary person. Jim was nothing if not unconventional.

The consulting criminal threw his arms around the blonde once more, clinging to him in earnest. *My Sebby.*

“What are you doing out here, dear? You should be at your meeting.”

“Someone shared a personal experience with the group and it upset me.”

Moran frowned. “What could’ve been so bad?”
“Simon had a stillborn baby when he was nearly full-term.”

“Bloody hell, that’s awful.”

“Yes, it is. After he described what happened, I couldn’t even pay attention to the conversation. All that went through my mind was overwhelming dread. I was so out of sorts, I had to leave the room.”

“Sweetheart, I’m sorry. I know how tense you get regarding the twins. Shame on Simon for putting those terrible ideas in your head.”

“It’s not his fault, Seb, not really. I asked him about it, so if anything, it’ll teach me to be less nosy.” Jim was silent for a second, lost in contemplation. “It’s the scariest prospect in the world—coming this far, only to lose a child regardless of the effort and love put in. To realize that it could be snatched away so easily. It’s chilling.”

Sebastian held his spouse close. “I know, Magpie. But I won’t let anything happen to you or them.”

“I’m afraid some things are impossible to guard against, no matter how much one tries. Simon had lots of ultrasounds done and his baby still died.”

“Hush. I’ll hear no more talk of tragedy from you. If you’re truly this concerned, we’ll take a ‘one day at a time’ approach. Today our children are healthy. We heard them loud and clear at the doctor’s office. As for tomorrow, we’ll deal with that when it comes. Okay?”

The Irishman looked up into his Tiger’s eyes and smiled warmly. “Okay.”

“Good. Now let’s get you back to your meeting.”

“I left under the guise of using the loo,” he admitted. “It may seem suspicious that I’ve been gone so long.”

“I see. Well, we can tell them that you ran into me and we got sidetracked gabbing. I’ll escort you myself to make it seem believable.”

“Oh, some of the guys will love that,” Jim noted.

Moran chuckled. “They have excellent taste.”

“Much as I’d like to wipe the smug grin off your face, in this case, I can’t disagree.”

Without further ado, the couple journeyed down the hall to reconvene with Jim’s support group. As it turned out, they were just breaking for intermission. Even so, Seb’s presence garnered attention.

“Don’t mind me,” the former colonel declared. “We got caught up chatting and I figured I’d bring him back here.”

“You’re so thoughtful,” Scott wistfully remarked.

“I try.”

“Yes, we’re all appreciative of you, darling. Now if you don’t mind, I’d like to go sample that pie over there,” Moriarty said, referring to the French silk dessert Jack had brought in. He’d gotten it from an actual bakery, meaning it would be a step up from the generic store-bought treats served of late.
“Sure thing, love. Take care.” Seb bent down to give Jim a quick peck on the lips before exiting.

Many of the MOPS participants had watched the duo keenly, looking as if they were about to swoon at any moment. The mastermind secretly felt a swell of pride, pleased that despite everyone’s interest in Sebastian, only he could have him. It was fun to be the envy of the crowd.

Ian walked up alongside Moriarty at the refreshments table. “Hey, how’s it going?”

“All right. Probably better once I try this pie.” He’d just dished out a slice but had yet to taste it.

“I’m sure it’s delicious.” The young man stared at his friend and employer like he wanted to say something, but was a bit too socially awkward to get the words out.

“Okay, what is it you’ve got to tell me?” Jim inquired, reading Ian’s signals.

He blushed. “Am I really so obvious?”

“Yeah, but it’s endearing,” the genius replied. “Let’s settle somewhere and we can talk.”

Ian agreed, and the two of them sat at a table away from the rest of the group. Some of the guys could be gossipy, so it was prudent to stay out of their earshot.

“Lay it on me,” Jim implored.

“Well, I’m excited to announce that as of tomorrow, I’ll be purchasing my first ever vehicle. I look forward to no longer being beholden to the London transit system.”

“Ian, that’s wonderful. What kind is it?”

“A silver MINI Cooper Countryman,” he enthusiastically informed. “I know what you’re thinking — Minis are small. But not this one. It’s their largest model, a subcompact SUV. It should be plenty big enough for me and Matilda.”

“Sounds delightful. I still remember my first car. It was a rather dodgy Ford pickup I won in a card game when I was eighteen.”

“You owned a truck?” the teen asked, utterly shocked by the news.

“Don’t act so surprised. I can handle myself quite well behind the wheel of any automobile.”

“I didn’t mean to suggest that you couldn’t. I just figured your first car would’ve been a luxury model.”

“If only,” he lightheartedly mused. “The truck was a real junker. There always seemed to be something wrong with it. As soon as one problem was fixed, another would emerge to take its place. Fortunately, I was shagging a mechanic at the time, so the maintenance was cheap.”

Ian laughed. “How advantageous. Luckily, the car I’m getting is brand new. It should last a while.”

“With proper upkeep, I’m sure it will.”

“Right. I can’t wait to take it for a spin. I was wondering if you’d care to join me?”

The consulting criminal grinned devilishly. “Ooh, I do love a good joyride.”
“So is that a yes?”

“Hmm.” Truthfully, he was beginning to go a bit stir-crazy cooped up in the fortress of his house. A day out might be just what he needed. “I’ll come, yeah.”

“Smashing,” the youth exclaimed. “We’ll have loads of fun.”

“I think we will, too.” Moriarty meant it. Tomorrow they’d be two omegas on the open road—wild, whimsical, and free.

Chapter End Notes

Just a heads-up: it won't be too many more chapters until the babies are born! Probably a few more, but still soooon! I'm really looking forward to writing those parts.
On the Road

Chapter Summary

Jim and Ian have an unexpectedly serious discussion while joyriding.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a beautiful winter morning in London. The temperature was rising, the snow was melting, and even birds had begun to sing again. Most exciting of all, Jim was getting set for an adventure with his protégé, Ian. The young man had purchased his first car, and together, they’d be taking it for its inaugural spin.

“You look good,” Sebastian remarked, noting that the mastermind had changed out of his pajamas earlier than usual. He wore tailored trousers and a sweater—casual, but quite stylish. More than that, though, he appeared to be in an upbeat mood and it showed.

“Thank you, darling. I feel good, too.”

Moran came up from behind Jim, wrapping an arm around the smaller man and pressing a kiss to his neck. “Want me to make us some breakfast? I have a French vanilla pancake recipe I’m dying to try out.”

“That’s extremely tempting, my dear, but I was thinking Ian and I would grab something simple while we’re on the road. Probably an egg McMuffin or the like.”

The blonde pulled away, moving to face his mate. “On the road? Where are you going?”

“Nowhere, really—just a jaunt around the city. Ian got a new car and we’re breaking it in.” He paused, acutely aware of the glare Seb was shooting him. “Stop pouting, soldier. This is merely a bit of harmless fun, which I could certainly use after having my home transformed into a veritable prison.”

“You agreed to the increased security measures.”

“Indeed, I did. But the idea of what it means to be on lockdown versus the reality is rather sobering. I need a break from it.”

“I’m coming with you,” Sebastian declared.

“No,” he sharply replied, “you’re not. I’m a big boy. I can handle going out for a ride with a friend.
I’ll return in one piece.”

“It isn’t safe. Colin and Annie could—”

“How would Colin and Annie know a bloody thing about Ian’s new vehicle?” Jim demanded, cutting his spouse off in mid-sentence. “I only learned of it last night. They won’t be tracking it, I guarantee.”

“Fine,” the sniper conceded. “That may be true, but it doesn’t negate any and all danger from the situation. Two pregnant omegas shouldn’t be driving alone.”

At those words, a look of unbridled rage burned in Jim’s eyes. “How fucking DARE you! That’s sexist bullshit and you know it!”

Moriarty took a deep breath to calm himself, and then walked briskly towards the elevator. Seb followed.

“Magpie, please. Don’t rush off. I’m just worried you could get into an accident or some other kind of trouble. That’s all.”

“Oh? Then why did you expressly say ‘two pregnant omegas,’ huh? Anyone could get in an accident, but you were very specific as to who you meant.”

“It was a slip of the tongue.”

“Yeah, right. You already watch me like a hawk here at home. Now you want to keep tabs on where I go and who I see,” the Irishman spat. “Newsflash, Seb— it isn’t the dark ages anymore and expectant omegas are allowed to leave the house of their own volition. A shocking revelation for you, I’m sure.”

They rode the elevator downstairs in silence. Well, partial silence. Sebastian tried talking to his partner, but the genius wouldn’t reply.

“Silent treatment, aye? How incredibly mature. Keep this up and you’re bound to set a wonderful example for our children.”

This time, instead of anger, a deep hurt resonated on Jim’s face. His parental abilities were a source of insecurity, and a barb like that was more wounding than he’d ever admit.

To his credit, Moran immediately knew he’d fucked up. “Honey, I’m sorry. That was harsher than I intended.”

“Don’t apologize. You delivered it with expert cruelty. The old ‘me’ would’ve been proud.”

When the elevator opened, Moriarty stormed up to the front door and was confronted by a mercenary positioned on the porch. He was in no mood to deal with his warden, though, charging past without a second thought. Seb, who trailed behind him, told the guard it was okay to let him go.

Ian arrived right on schedule, poised behind the wheel of his spiffy new MINI Cooper. He was made to show ID and was quickly approved.

In the consulting criminal’s haste, he pushed his body harder than what was recommended. By the time he reached the car, he was panting heavily.
A second guard, the one tasked with asking for identification, attempted to stop him. Jim, too breathless to speak, resorted to using a universal gesture to get his point across—i.e., he flipped the man off while slipping inside the vehicle.

“Are you okay?” Ian inquired with concern.

“Just go,” he wheezed.

Before the young man could drive away, Seb had caught up and was tapping on the side window panel. Not knowing what the hell was happening, Ian rolled down the glass to hear Moran out.

“Jim, I’m truly sorry,” the sniper pled. “Don’t leave like this. Let me come with you, or at least permit me to send someone on the team to follow.”

“Piss off,” the genius snarled.

“Please, Magpie. You’re not even wearing your blood pressure monitor or a coat.”

“Gee, I wonder why? Maybe it’s because my alpha was being an arsehole and I wanted to get away from him as fast as possible.”

“Be reasonable, for fuck’s sake.”

“Reasonable?” he scoffed. “Oh, that’s rich.” The Irishman turned to his driver, directly addressing the youth. “No more lollygagging. Let’s roll.”

Sebastian made one final appeal. “Ian, look out for him!” he shouted as the vehicle took off down the street. He remained standing by the curb, watching the car disappear into the distance. Though he knew it was a longshot, a part of him somehow hoped that the two would change their minds and come back. No such luck.

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“Pardon my language,” Ian began, “but what the fuck is going on? Why are you so mad at your husband, and why was he freaking out about you leaving?” Until now, the young man had only ever seen the good side of the duo’s marriage, never privy to their fights.

“He claims he’s afraid something bad will happen to us if we go out by ourselves,” Moriarty explained. “He actually said, and I quote, ‘two pregnant omegas shouldn’t be driving alone.’ Can you believe it? The nerve of him.”

“Well, that’s an awfully blunt way to put it, but it’s possible the remark came from a place of genuine concern.”

“Are you kidding me? You’re supposed to be my friend, not a Sebastian Moran apologist.”

“I am your friend. I’m also a third party who can view things from a slightly different perspective. In this case, I think your mate loves you a lot and wants to keep his family safe. He phrased his statement poorly, but I’m sure the feelings behind it were sincere.”

The mastermind was quiet for a moment, ruminating over Ian’s words. They stirred up something inside him that he hated to admit.

“Penny for your thoughts,” the teen prodded, trying to get the older man to open up.

“You certain you want to hear? The things that go through my head aren’t for the faint of heart.”
“Go on. Pretend we’re at a meeting and you’re sharing with the group. I’ll attempt my best Trevor impersonation,” he added, referring to the MOPS coordinator.

“All right. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.” Where to begin? “I guess maybe my reaction to what Seb said was a bit extreme. I didn’t need to behave in such a kneejerk manner.”

“Okay,” Ian acknowledged, listening keenly while focusing his eyes on the road. “Why do you suppose you reacted so rashly?”

“It may have been because…” he trailed off, hesitant to reveal the true impetus for his ire.

“Because what, Jim?”

He paused, inhaling and exhaling deeply in an effort to relax. “Because for a split second, when he said that pregnant omegas shouldn’t drive alone, it made me doubt myself. I felt scared and vulnerable and out of sorts. It was only for a fraction of an instant, but that was long enough.”

“I see. Is it conceivable, then, that your reaction might’ve come from a desire to ‘give it back to him,’ so to speak? Make him feel the way you did?”

“No…maybe…I don’t know.” The genius was a confused mess of hormones, emotions, and instincts. He simultaneously yearned to lash out and retreat inward.

Shut up, shut up, shut up! Jim thought to himself. But it’s true. Seb probably felt all those things when I stormed off. Not knowing where I was going, and by extension, not knowing where the babies would be. Worried because I didn’t bother to wear a coat, even though it’s wintertime. Bloody hell, that was a reckless thing to do.

“Oh, Ian. I acted like an idiot. I’ve always had such a hair-trigger temper,” he confessed. “I’ve tried so hard to work on myself…to be a better man for my children’s sake. But I still fly off the handle at the drop of a hat. What’s wrong with me?”

“I can’t rightly answer that, Jim. I may do a decent Trevor impression, but unlike the real version, I don’t have any fancy psychology degrees. However, if you want my opinion as a friend, I believe you’re a spirited kind of guy. Feisty, impassioned, and the cleverest bloke I’ve ever met. You experience life on an intense level.”

“And that makes me crazy? Makes me some sort of savage who strikes against people without a second thought?”

“You’re fiery, is what I’m saying. Maybe that’s just who you are, and you need to find a way to channel that erratic energy into something constructive.”

The consulting criminal sighed. “I did for a while. Took up baking, and it was a godsend. I came to love creating new and tasty treats; surprising Seb and my employees with all types of desserts.”

The young man nodded while continuing to watch the road. “I remember you used to bake stuff for the group early on when you joined. Why’d you stop?”

“It got too hard to move around in the kitchen. I’m fine sitting or reclining, but walking back and forth from the counter, to the oven, to the table over and over again was rough.”

“But you have a wheelchair now. Two, if I remember correctly. You mentioned your mate got you a motorized model for Christmas. That must make it easier, aye?”
“Possibly,” he replied. “I baked cookies with Paige and Penny during the holiday, and played around a bit with the new chair then. It worked out okay, but I attributed that mainly to the fact that I had able-bodied assistants.”

“Consider trying it again and see if the power chair helps when no one else is there to pitch in.”

“I may well do that, Ian. I’d like to make at least one more homemade dessert for the group before the babies arrive and I’m no longer eligible to participate in MOPS.”

The teen was saddened by his mentor’s statement. It was accurate—the twins would be born soon, and he wouldn’t be a pregnant omega anymore. “Jim?” he spoke, looking to the dark-eyed Irishman while they were stopped at a red light. “I’m going to miss the hell out of you. When you’re gone from the meetings, it won’t be the same.”

Moriarty smiled warmly at the youth. “I understand. But you’ll still see me.”

“Eventually, I guess. I imagine your paternity leave will go on for a stretch.”

“I don’t just mean see me at work, dear. You’re a friend, and in case my baby shower turnout wasn’t a tipoff, I don’t exactly have a surplus of those. I fully intend to keep you around,” he assured. “And lest you forget, our children are going to be buddies. Can’t set up playdates if we don’t stay close ourselves.”

Ian’s expression was hopeful. “I’d quite like that. Tilly would enjoy it as well.”

“It’s settled, then. We dare not disappoint your little girl,” he declared with a wink.

BZZ. BZZ.

Jim’s phone began to buzz. He pulled out his mobile device and saw that he’d received a text message from Seb.

SM

I’m sorry for what I said, honey. I didn’t mean to disparage you. I just want to protect you.

JM

I know, Tiger. I’m sorry, too. I overreacted.

SM

So…are we good?

JM

We’re great.

Come outside and I’ll have Ian swing by the house to pick you up.
SM
Really?

JM
Yes. And bring my coat and gloves.

SM
Jimmy?

JM
Yeah?

SM
I love you.

JM
Love you more. Always and forever, my sweet soldier.

Forever, indeed.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Vultures Circling

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian’s stalkers have been up to no good.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was mid-morning when Seb arrived at headquarters. Though not on-site as often these days, he did make a point of coming in at least once a week. His office staff appeared pleased to see him, and the feeling was mutual.

One thing he hated about having a sporadic schedule was the amount of mail that piled up in his absence. Yes, there were people assigned to sort through HQ postal deliveries, but if the name of the recipient was ‘James Moriarty’ or ‘Sebastian Moran,’ no one dared open them. Instead, such items were collected by Suzy, Jim’s longtime secretary, and then given to Seb when he checked in.

Moran entered his office, shutting the door as he prepared to examine the latest bundle of mail.


So far, it was a fairly mundane assortment.

Credit card application.

Ha, the sniper thought. Jim already owned every credit card under the sun, most of them featuring the kind of spending limits only afforded to celebrities, royalty, and tycoons.

Travel brochure.

Interesting. It was an advertisement promoting various romantic getaways for a special Valentine’s Day discount rate.

Valentine’s Day. With everything going on of late, Seb had completely forgotten about the impending holiday. Even stranger was the fact that his Magpie hadn’t brought it up, either. Since marrying, Jim always made sure to celebrate the occasion— usually opting to take a luxurious trip. Last year, it was two decadent days in Aruba where they drank, dined, surfed, and fed each other juicy mangoes on the beach after making love under the veil of a starlit sky.

Now he can’t jet off to an exotic destination. Maybe that was why the mastermind hadn’t mentioned it— he knew he was barred from flying until the twins were born.
But still, that didn’t mean they couldn’t enjoy Valentine’s Day right there in London. There was plenty for them to do in the city. The more Seb thought about it, the more he wanted to arrange the perfect night out. They could have dinner someplace chic and then take in a show. Perhaps an orchestral concert or a production on the West End. If Jim felt up to it, they might even be able to go on a horse-drawn carriage ride through the park.

The blonde smiled, pleased at the idea of giving his husband an evening to remember. He’d start making calls today to set things in motion.

With that decided, he resumed sifting through the mail. It was a tedious process and he could imagine how much Moriarty would loathe the task. Luckily, Moran had a bit more patience than his other half.

“Hmm,” he muttered, finding an envelope that bore his name, but included no return address. Naturally, he was suspicious. Past experience told him that unmarked mailings of any kind were a bad thing. He was hesitant to open it, but if he didn’t, he’d never know what was inside.

Bracing for the worst, he tore into the envelope…and it was empty.

Well, almost empty. Its sole contents were a flash drive with a note attached. ‘Watch me,’ it read.

Seb got a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. Whatever was on that USB stick couldn’t be good. To watch or not to watch? It was a burdensome decision.

Ultimately, he knew what he had to do. Colonel Sebastian Moran would be intimidated by nothing.

The assassin inserted the small device into his computer and quickly discovered that it contained a series of untitled video files. He hovered his cursor over the first item, contemplating what he was about to do. Once he clicked ‘play,’ there’d be no going back. No unseeing the images his stalkers saw fit to taunt him with. Despite this, he soldiered on.

When the video began, Seb tried to understand what was on screen. It took a few seconds to decipher because the footage was shaky and low-grade—obviously shot using a cell phone camera. The motion eventually steadied and he recognized the location. It was the food court of an upscale shopping plaza Jim frequented. They’d gone there many times together, as recently as last week.

The picture zoomed in on one table in particular. To Sebastian’s horror, he was confronted by his own visage. More than that, his spouse was there, too. In a candid moment, the two were shown chatting and laughing while sharing a gooey cinnamon bun.

“Bloody hell.” The sniper clearly recalled that day. There was a sale going on at a baby goods store, and Jim wanted to buy their little ones snow boots. He had no intention of exposing them to inclement weather, but sought to ensure that their feet would stay warm throughout the remaining winter season.

Once the video was done, he moved on to the next. It was more low-resolution footage, this time depicting the couple as they entered Dr. Swenson’s office building. The camera continued to film them through a window pane while they sat in the waiting room.

Another video was just Seb at a supermarket, picking up miscellaneous odds and ends. That became a running theme—snippets of them doing random things without any real setup or context. And it wasn’t limited to London’s most dangerous men. No, the files also captured select
individuals who were associated with the pair. Highlights included Ian riding on his former bus route, Dr. Swenson exiting a car and going inside what was presumably her house, and perhaps most disturbing of all, MOPS group members as they milled around the community center halls during a mid-meeting intermission.

“Fuck.” Moran shuddered at the stark realization that he and many others were being watched, recently and with regularity. He could convert his private residence into a fortress, but in public, all bets were off. The helplessness he felt made him want to destroy something…or someone.

Colin and Annie. This had to be their handiwork. Sebastian was not prone to hurting women, but under the circumstance, an exception could be made. He yearned to gut them both.

The alpha growled and grabbed his jacket. He’d be returning home sooner than expected. Jim needed to see what was on the flash drive.

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“Is she gone?” a female voice asked. It was Annie, peaking around the doorway of the living room.

“Yeah,” Colin answered. “The takeout joint’s halfway across the city, and she’s planning to stop for gas, too. It should be a while until she gets back.”

“Thank god. That bitch is creepy as hell. Loonier than the patients she tends to.”

“You’ll get no argument from me,” he conceded. Colin realized early on that nursing assistant Katherine Ramsey wasn’t playing with a full deck, but it had worked to his advantage, making her easier to manipulate. She’d fallen hook, line, and sinker for his lies, helping him every step of the way. Now she was even allowing him and his sister-in-law to hide out at her bungalow.

“I wish we could’ve stayed longer at my parents’ house,” Annie lamented. “I’m sure they wouldn’t have minded.”

“No, but I would’ve.” He pulled a cigarette from his pocket, lighting it with the strike of a match. “We’ve got business to attend to here in London. It’s important that we don’t lose sight of the mission.”

The flaxen-haired woman snorted derisively. “You keep saying ‘we,’ as if we’re doing equal work. But really, I’m the one who has to go out every day in disguise, busting my arse trying to follow people without being noticed. It’s not as easy as you think.”

Colin glared at her sharply. “Funny, I thought you might enjoy having an opportunity to stretch your acting skills. If you don’t feel they’re up to par—”

“It’s not my acting that’s the problem,” she was quick to refute. “I’m finely trained and damn convincing. The problem is gallivanting all over the city, with the expectation of recording incognito. The logistics are ridiculous, if not impossible, to carry out on my own.”

“And what, exactly, do you propose I do about that, Annelise? I’m on the lam. I can’t serve as a spy—if the authorities find me, the whole jig will be up. I haven’t come this far just to throw everything away in the final round. I’m seeing it through to the end.”

She sighed. “I know. I’m frustrated, is all. Nothing’s panned out the way I hoped it would. Hell, I’m still raw about what happened at the Christmas party.”

“That was a month ago, Annie. Suck it up already.”
If looks could kill, Colin would’ve been a dead man. “Suck it up?” she protested, her tone volatile. “I was nearly stuck with a syringe and choked to death that night.”

“‘Nearly’ being the key word. You didn’t die. You were able to escape. It’s time to move along and focus on the bigger picture.”

“Believe me, I’m trying.”

Colin was silent for a moment. He flashed the woman a slightly unnerving smile and patted the seat next to him, encouraging her over. She obeyed.

“Have a smoke,” he said, offering a cigarette from his pack.

“Oh okay.” Annie accepted the item and used the burning tip of his stick to light her own. She inhaled deeply, savoring the mentholated flavor.

“I get that you’re restless,” he spoke. “But once Jim pops out those babies, we can initialize the endgame. Until then, we have fun.”

“They’ve got armed guards surrounding their house, Colin. At this rate, how much ‘fun’ can we realistically have?”

“Lots. We know their pressure points. With those in mind, there’s no limit to the hell we can put them through.”

“I guess so,” she tentatively agreed. “Wonder if they’ve seen the latest ‘gift’ we sent?”

“I’d love to be a fly on the wall for that screening.”

“Me too.”

The man took a long drag off his cigarette, flicking the ashes into an empty beer can. “I say we go after those close to them. Rattle them right and proper.”

“Yeah?”

“Oh yes. I’ve got ample ideas up my sleeve,” he declared. “If we’re lucky, maybe the stress will send Moriarty into early labor.”

She smirked. “That’d be a delightful bonus. Imagine how much it would upset Sebastian.”

“Precisely.”

Colin and Annie continued to talk, discussing their poisonous plans while they waited for Katherine to return home with dinner. The days to come would be interesting—they’d make damn sure of it.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Something Wicked This Way Comes – Part 1

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian fear for a friend.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sebastian was worried. It was nearly 2 p.m. and Jim still hadn’t gotten out of bed. The consulting criminal did tire more easily these days, but even so, he rarely slept past noon, let alone into the mid-afternoon.

*Maybe stress is to blame,* Moran mused. When he showed his husband the flash drive files their stalkers had sent, the omega went into panic mode. Eventually, he calmed down enough to call everyone featured in the videos, cautioning them to stay safe and remain alert. Unfortunately, he didn’t feel like his warning was taken seriously by some. Since then, he’d seemed very much on edge. Seb feared his mate might be falling into a depression.

The sniper decided to check on him. He entered their bedroom and smiled at the sight of Jim cozily wrapped up in the comforter. Sitting down beside him, Sebastian gently nudged his spouse.

“Magpie? It’s almost 2 o’clock.”

Moriarty grunted and rolled over, staring at the blonde with a pained look in his eyes. Suddenly, Seb had an overwhelming urge to hold him close and soothe away his troubles.

“I’m awake,” he said. “It hurts too much to get out of bed and I didn’t want to bother you.”

“Kitten, you’re never a bother. If something’s upsetting you, I’m always available to listen.” He reached out to stroke his beloved’s cheek, noting the slight amount of stubble that had grown. The assassin found it quite appealing.

“Darling, I think you’ve misunderstood.”

Seb cocked his head in confusion. “How so?”

“I am upset about a few things, yes. But when I say it hurts, I mean that in the literal sense. My body aches.”

“What can I do to help?” It saddened him to see his partner ailing in any way, shape, or form.
“Not much, really. The only surefire cure is to give birth. The same is true for my high blood pressure and arrhythmia. Once the twins are delivered, I should return to normal health.”

My poor Magpie. He put himself through hell for their children. Carrying them was an entirely selfless endeavor that Sebastian wasn’t certain he could handle if the situation were reversed.

“How about I bring you something to eat? Afterward, we can spend a bit of quality time together.”

“Sounds lovely,” the genius replied. “Be a dear and help me into my chair before you go. I need to stop by the bathroom.”

“Okay, although I could probably just sweep you off your feet and march you in there myself.”

“Sebby? While I appreciate your assistance, there are some things a person ought to do on their own if possible. Using the loo is one such activity.”

“Yeah, you’re right. That was a dumb suggestion.”

“I thought it was rather adooorable. You’re a dutiful caregiver, my sweet.”

“Thanks, hon. I try my best.”

Moran carefully maneuvered the Irishman into his wheelchair. He was a tad heavier than he used to be, but nothing Seb couldn’t manage.

“Set a place at the kitchen table,” the mastermind instructed. “I’ll dine downstairs.”

“Yes, sir.”

Jim gazed lovingly at his husband as the man exited the room. Even though they’d been together for years, he still marveled at Sebastian’s stalwart dedication. He was the one constant in his life, tried-and-true no matter what the situation. To have an alpha like him was a blessing he’d come to cherish each day.

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“Tiger, that was delicious. But if I eat any more, I may explode.”

The blonde grinned broadly, pleased by the resounding approval his beef stew had received. “Glad you enjoyed it. I got the recipe from Severin. It’s a dish Paige often makes.”

“Oh? How’s the family doing? I’m afraid I’ve been remiss in keeping up with my email correspondence.”

“They’re very well. They recently adopted a Pomeranian at Penelope’s behest. She named the pup Calpurnia— ‘Callie’ for short.”

“Calpurnia, aye? I’d have saved that moniker for a cat, but it’s cute, nonetheless. Have they sent any photos?”

“Actually, yes. Check your inbox,” he advised. “I’m positive your address was attached to the mailing.”

Jim decided to do just that. When he turned on his phone, he was greeted to something unexpected. Apparently, Ian had sent him several texts earlier in the day that he hadn’t been aware of until now. They were a series of short, choppy sentences directing him to get in touch.
“Something’s going on with Ian,” he spoke, apprising his mate of the missed messages. “I’ll call and find out what’s happening.”

The phone rang and rang, but no one picked up.

“He’s not answering.”

Seb abruptly turned white as a sheet, all color draining form his face.

“What is it, Tiger? Do you know something I don’t?” The consulting criminal was truly unnerved.

“No, it’s just…” he hesitated, his voice haunted in a way that made Moriarty’s blood run cold.

“It’s just what? Spit it out.”

“Before Marie was murdered, she sent me a text saying we needed to talk. But she never responded to my messages or calls after that. We both know why.”

Jim was panic-stricken. He preemptively tore off his blood pressure monitor and stood up from the table, shaking like a leaf.

“Honey—”

“We’ve got to get to his flat NOW.”

The former colonel nodded. “Okay. Let’s go.”

At that, the couple made haste. To expedite matters, Seb carried his spouse to the car, shoving past the hired guns who guarded their house. This was a mission of life or death, and he simply didn’t have time to stop and explain.

*********

When Jim and Sebastian arrived at Ian’s loft, they buzzed the doorbell repeatedly but got no response. Luckily, being the property owner, Moriarty had a key. They accessed the building and rode the lift up to his unit.

“Ian?” Jim called out, hoping against hope that his protégé would answer.

Moran moved quicker than his mate and was able to conduct a walkthrough with relative ease. He gingerly approached the mastermind to report his findings.

“He isn’t here.”

“Are you absolutely certain?”

“Yeah. There’s no trace of him.”

Moriarty was momentarily speechless. It was a huge relief to know that Ian hadn’t been butchered like Marie. His whereabouts remained unaccounted for, though. He could still be in peril.

“Do you want to stay here and wait for him to return?” the sniper asked.

“Yes,” he uttered without a second thought. “I do.”

And so they would.
An hour went by as Jim and Seb hung out in Ian’s empty apartment. The Irishman was on pins and needles, pacing the living room while holding his back in obvious pain. Moran wished his partner would sit down—it was terribly disconcerting to watch him wince with every step. He was a hairsbreadth away from pulling alpha rank and demanding that Jim get off his feet, when suddenly, the sound of a car door slamming caught both their attention.

The pair looked out the window, baffled by what they saw. A constable was escorting Ian from a police vehicle into the building.

“What the fuck?” Seb wondered aloud.

“You're guess is as good as mine.”

All they could do was wait for him to reach the flat and then proceed from there.

The lift opened up to his apartment, and in walked Ian and a Metro PD officer. Immediately, the cop cast the duo a stern expression.

“Excuse me, gentlemen, but what are you doing in this young man’s home?”

“They’re friends of mine,” the teen rushed to reply. The less interaction Jim and Seb had with the authorities, the better.

“Oh? You said no one would be here. It’s why you requested a formal escort to walk you inside.”

“I didn’t realize they were coming. I assure you, I’m safe with them.”

The middle-aged constable paused, sizing up London’s most dangerous men. “You look familiar,” he remarked, staring straight at Jim.

“I get that a lot,” Moriarty coolly declared. “People on the Tube are alwaaaays stopping me to say how much I resemble some bloke from Eastenders. I don’t watch daytime telly, but I reckon he must be a popular character.”

“Hmm, maybe.”

The consulting criminal sported a disarming smile. “There are worse folks out there to look like, I suppose. If I had my druthers, though, I’d prefer it be someone a wee bit more handsome.”

Ian let out a nervous laugh. “Don’t be so hard on yourself. You’re plenty handsome.”

“You’re too kind, dear.”

The officer soon decided he’d spent enough time there. “I’d best be going, Mr. Fitzgerald. We’ll keep you posted if any new information comes in.”

“Thank you, sir. I appreciate it.”

Once the man left, Jim promptly embraced his fellow omega. “God, I’ve been worried out of my mind. Why didn’t you answer your phone?”

“I had it turned off at the police station.”
“Which raises another question— what were you doing there?”

“It’s…I…” the youth struggled to get the words out. “Someone trashed my car.”

Moriarty was shocked, gasping at the news. This was Ian’s first ever vehicle, and Colin and Annie — because it had to be them— went ahead and fucking ruined it. They couldn’t even allow him to have one good thing. He seethed with outrage.

Sebastian growled, equally incensed. Ian was a sweet kid who’d been through enough hell in his short 19-years to last a lifetime. He didn’t deserve another kick in the teeth, but here it was.

“They didn’t just bust it up,” he continued. “They…”

“You can tell us, hon. It’s okay,” Jim encouraged.

Tears filled the teen’s eyes as he tried to find his voice. “There were horrible slurs written all over it. Really vicious, anti-male omega stuff.”

“Oh god.” The genius’s black heart shattered. He flashed back to the night of his husband’s party, when he discovered cruel graffiti scrawled across the bathroom. It was a demoralizing experience he’d never wish upon anyone, and now Ian was being made to suffer the same.

“I need to sit down,” the young man said with a sob.

“Good idea,” Seb agreed. It was an opportunity to finally get Jim off his feet.

The conversation resumed from the comfort of the couch.

“I know you’re upset, but could you please give us a rundown of how these events transpired today?”

Ian nodded at his friend and mentor. “I got up to go to headquarters, and when I went outside, my car was in shambles. The windows were broken, tires slashed, and awful things were scribbled everywhere.” He took a deep breath, attempting to steady himself. “I got so sad and scared when I saw it. At first, I was terrified that Luke had found my new address and he’d done it. Then I remembered it could’ve been the work of your stalkers. Either way, I freaked out and called the police.”

“What exactly did you tell them?” Jim wanted to assess if damage control would be necessary.

“The basics, mostly. It was pretty straightforward,” he stated. “They did ask if I knew anyone who might be capable of perpetrating the vandalism, but I said no.”

“Good boy. We don’t deal with authorities. We cut out the middleman and handle situations ourselves.”

“Jim’s right,” Sebastian weighed in. “You were smart not to give them too much info.”

The couple’s reassurance did little to appease Ian’s distraught mood. He cried openly, the floodgates showing no signs of stopping. “I don’t know what I’m going to do,” he bleated. “The car wasn’t just for me. It was for Matilda, too. I can’t keep using public transportation with a baby.”

Moriarty and Moran exchanged a somber glance. Hardened as they were, neither could deny the injustice of what had occurred. A part of them felt at least somewhat responsible for dragging the
boy into their ongoing personal drama.

“Tomorrow we’ll go to the dealership and I’ll buy you a replacement.”

Ian’s red-rimmed eyes widened in surprise. “I couldn’t ask you to do that.”

“You’re not asking,” Jim pointed out. “I’m doing it of my own accord. So call the dealership and tell them you’ll be returning with a friend to make a repeat purchase.”

Flabbergasted, the young man turned to Seb as if expecting him to lend advice.

“Don’t look at me,” the sniper remarked. “Once he’s got an idea in his head, there’s no use fighting it.”

“You’ve already given me so much. I feel a bit guilty about accepting yet another handout.”

“Hush. I’m a wealthy man. You needn’t feel guilty in the slightest.”

“Well…okay. I’ll make the arrangements,” he conceded. “Thank you again. One of these days, I promise I’ll find a way to repay you.”

“I require no recompense, dear.”

In the course of his adult life, Jim never desired to help anyone beyond Seb and himself. Somehow, though, he’d felt strangely protective of Ian from the outset. Their similar backgrounds had connected them in a way he’d not anticipated, and contributing to the teen’s betterment proved thoroughly rewarding.

“Jim? I’ve got a question.”

“What’s that?”

“When I get the replacement vehicle, how will we prevent it from being vandalized like the original was?”

“I’ll send a few guards to watch over the property. As the owner of the building, I can assign whatever security I so choose.”

“Sounds good. Living alone, it will be a relief to know someone’s there to defend me.”

True to his word, the mastermind really would delegate a handful of his home-based mercenaries to look out for Ian. And that night, the young man would sleep better than he had in ages.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Something Wicked This Way Comes – Part 2

Chapter Summary

Trouble befalls those around Jim and Seb.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a lazy day for Jim and Sebastian. There were no conference calls on the schedule, nor were there any major issues at headquarters. Things were so slow, in fact, that they spent a majority of the afternoon snuggling on the sofa, streaming movies.

The clock crept up on them, and by early evening, they had a bit more to do. Taking Ian’s advice, the consulting criminal decided to try baking alone while using his motorized chair. Moran offered to help, but Jim refused assistance. It was imperative that he work by himself so he could gauge the state of his abilities.

Meanwhile, Seb sat in the living room watching tv. To an unassuming individual, it may have appeared he was merely lounging around, but this was not true. He had a purpose. Moriarty appointed him as the official taste tester for his baking endeavors, and expressly instructed him to stay put so that he could easily be found when needed.

VRR. VRR. VRR.

The sniper bolted up from his reclining position when he heard the familiar sound of Jim’s power chair.

“Sebbby! Time to play guinea pig.” A devilish gleam danced in his eyes as he approached with two plates balanced on his lap.

“What’ve you got there?” Moran asked, eager to nosh on some sweets.

“Strawberry shortcake bars and chocolate chip mini muffins. Both are fairly simple recipes. I thought it best to pace myself.”

“Makes sense. How did it go?”

“Honestly? Better than expected. When I made cookies over the holiday, I thought it went okay because I had two other people pitching in. Turns out I can manage just fine on my own. Also, I’ve become more adept at using this chair since then,” he noted. “Now, less chatting and more eating.
If these batches are good, I’ll bring them to tonight’s meeting.”

“Yes, sir.” Without further ado, he sampled the treats. An exaggerated look of pleasure eclipsed his face as he made a show of savoring each bite.

“Tiger, darling? Don’t be a doofus. Just tell me what you think.”

“I’m trying to, kitten. These are what you might call ‘visual cues.’”

Moriarty arched a brow. “Oh reeeeeally? Here I assumed you were suffering an unfortunate bout of muscle spasms.”

“Nah, those only occur when I attempt to eat marmite.”

The comment elicited a small smile from Jim, and in an instant, Seb was taken aback by how lovely his husband looked. Happiness quite suited him.

“Why are you staring at me like that?” the mastermind inquired.

“Because you’re so handsome, I can’t take my eyes off you.”

“I…well…oh bollocks.”

It was rare to render James Moriarty tongue-tied. Harder still, to make him blush. Somehow, though, Sebastian could do both.

“Your shortcake bars and muffins are delectable, Magpie. The same goes for you, too.”

Their gazes locked and a contented coo escaped Jim’s lips. The assassin lived for those sweet, dulcet sounds of omega bliss.

“Sit with me, honey. I’m watching the news.”

He obliged, moving from his mobility chair to the seat cushion beside Seb. Similar to earlier in the day, he cozied up to his mate, resting his head on the larger man’s shoulder.

An advertisement came on tv, promoting a Valentine’s Day jewelry sale. It got Moran thinking about the plans he’d organized for the amorous occasion. Everything was set—the dinner reservations, theater tickets, and carriage ride. It would be a magical night.

“I wish the babies could be here for Valentine’s Day,” Jim said. “They’d be the best gift of all.”

Sebastian wrapped an arm around his spouse. “You won’t have to wait much longer, sweetheart. February 24th is nearly at hand.” He paused, a question coming to mind. “Have you got your hospital bag packed yet?”

“Of course I’ve got my bag ready,” he replied, slightly annoyed that Seb would doubt him. “I started putting it together months ago.”

The blonde grinned. “This is so exciting.”

“It really is,” Moriarty agreed, beaming as he spoke. “A bit scary, too, with the surgery and all. But I’m trying to focus on the positive—by the end of it, I’ll finally get to meet our children. Right now, there’s nothing I want more.”

“Me either.”
London’s most dangerous men were indisputably drunk on love. The two of them sat there, nestled close and bearing matching joyful expressions. They were so transfixed in the moment, they almost missed the breaking news story that was being reported in full-color on their widescreen tv.

This morning, emergency services were called to the scene of a house fire in the west end district. Authorities described the incident as an ‘inferno,’ noting that the residence was entirely engulfed in flames, resulting in significant property damage. Sources confirmed the homeowner as renowned obstetrics specialist Julia Swenson. She was able to escape the blaze with only minor injuries. The cause of the fire has not yet been released, but officials say an investigation is pending.

Jim and Seb were totally and utterly aghast. Was this a terrible accident or something far more sinister?

“Tiger, do you think…”

“Yes.”

Silence fell over the couple as they struggled to process the horrifying development. First Ian’s car was trashed, and now Dr. Swenson’s home was burned to the ground. Both people were featured on the stalker footage they’d recently been sent— it couldn’t be a coincidence.

The consulting criminal stood up in a daze, his mind buzzing with abandon. He was clammy and jittering, and it felt like the room was about to swallow him whole. When his blood pressure monitor inevitably triggered, he threw the device to the ground and stomped it repeatedly.

“Jim!” the sniper exclaimed, also rising from the couch. “I know this is a disturbing turn of events, but please try to remain calm. Getting so upset isn’t good for you or the babies.”

“Calm? CALM?” he shouted. “How the fuck do you expect me to be calm when Colin and Annie are systematically targeting our friends and acquaintances?! This is a bloody nightmare!”

“It’s a bad situation, for sure. But this is what they want. They’re trying to scare us,” Sebastian asserted. “We’ve done the same to others. It’s a textbook intimidation method.”

Moriarty’s anxiety refused to abate. Like a frightened animal, his eyes darted wildly in every direction.

He’s going to have a goddamn meltdown, Seb thought. I’ve got to do something.

“Take deep breaths, kitten. In and out, nice and steady,” the blonde advised. He motioned to grasp his partner’s hand, but was rebuffed when Jim abruptly backed away. “Honey, please. It’ll be okay.”

The genius shook his head furiously. “No, it won’t! You’re intelligent, Seb. Surely you see the pattern here. Those fucking psychopaths are attacking the people they filmed, and they’ve already checked Ian and Dr. Swenson off the list. Do you realize what that means? Supposing the trend continues, either you and me or my MOPS group will be next.”

Sebastian didn’t know what to say. He had indeed observed the pattern and was duly unnerved by it.

“I can’t abide them harming group members. They’re a fine bunch of blokes who are having babies and just want to connect with others going through the same thing,” Moriarty declared. “Life can be rough for male omegas, but the support community has made it feel less lonely. They
welcomed me even after recognizing who I was. Not everyone would do that,” he noted. “I won’t allow them to be hurt.”

“I understand, love. I just don’t know what else can be done to protect them. You already called members to warn them of the stalker footage, including the coordinator. They’ve been apprised of the potential risk.”

Jim’s face scrunched up in frustration and he sighed. “There’s got to be more we can do. I refuse to let them be sitting ducks for a pair of vengeful lunatics to pick off.”

“If it’s any consolation, remember that I’ll be in the lobby during your meeting tonight. Should Colin or Annie make a cameo appearance, they’ll have to get through me.”

“That does help,” he admitted.

Seb stepped closer to his mate, again reaching for the man’s hand. This time he didn’t pull away.

“I’ll watch for suspicious activity. If something seems strange, you’ll be the first to know.”

“Thank you, darling.”

The couple’s fingers entwined as Jim slowly returned to a clearer state of mind. Now, more than ever, he would need to keep his wits about him. The question was, could he manage it?

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“These strawberry shortcake bars are amazing,” Ian remarked.

“The muffins are tasty, too,” Simon added.

Moriarty smiled. “Glad you’re enjoying them, gentlemen.”

The MOPS group was in the midst of an intermission and everyone was thrilled that Jim had brought homemade treats again. The compliments from his fellow omegas were a nice ego boost, but he was especially touched by the praises of a non-member in their presence tonight: Jack’s son, Reginald. For a second time, he’d brought the nearly two-year-old boy along to the meeting because he couldn’t find a babysitter. Nobody was bothered by it, though—the precocious toddler was actually quite popular amongst the crowd.

When Jack decided to come over and sit with Jim and some of the others, Reggie barreled ahead of him, running straight into the mastermind’s knee. He wasn’t hurt, but he did sport a look of surprise.

“Sowwy, Jim,” a tiny voice squeaked.

“It’s all right, dear. Accidents happen,” he reassured. “I’m impressed that you remember my name.”

“He’s an extremely gifted child,” Jack bragged. “Takes after my husband. Gary was educated at Harvard and Oxford, respectively. Smart as a whip, he is.”

“Can hav mow cookies?” Reggie asked.

“I don’t see why not. You’ve been such a good boy tonight.”

“Fank yu, mumma! Wuv mumma!” The tot cheerfully scampered back to the refreshments table.
“Oh, he’s adoooorable,” Moriarty enthused. “Even cuter than the last time you brought him.”

The man smiled. “My little lad does seem to get more precious by the day, though I may be biased.”

“Hey, Jack?” Scott spoke, chiming in on the conversation. “Why do you have him call you ‘mum?’”

“Because I carried him for nine months. He’s my son and I’m his mother. It’s as simple as that.”

“I know, but doesn’t it feel weird to use such a feminine term?”

“No, it doesn’t feel ‘weird’ to me in the slightest.”

“I appreciate the straightforward approach you take to it,” Simon commented. “It’s refreshing.”

“Well, what about you, Jim?” Scott asked. “Your babies will be here soon. What do you plan to have them call you?”

All eyes were on the consulting criminal as his peers awaited an answer.

“I’ve always identified myself as ‘Daddy’ when talking to them,” he stated. “I didn’t give it a second thought until now. Is there something wrong with that?”

“Absolutely not. Ours is a unique experience,” Jack said, referring to their status as male omegas. “To be both a man and a mother is an uncommon combination. The language we choose to use is very personal. You’re well within your right to have your children call you ‘daddy,’ just as I’m justified in having mine say ‘mummy.’ One term isn’t necessarily better than the other.”

“Interesting food for thought,” Moriarty replied. There was a time not so long ago when he would’ve scoffed at the idea of gaining insight from ‘ordinary’ people, but since participating in MOPS, he was amazed at how wise they could be.

Reggie returned, skipping up to Jack with a strawberry shortcake bar in each hand. He gave one to his parent. “Fow yu, mumma.”

“Thank you, sweetie. You’re so thoughtful.”

Jim smiled at the heartwarming exchange. He hoped that he would have a relationship like that with his twins. These days, he liked to believe anything was possible.

*******

Sebastian sat in the lobby of the community center, paging through a magazine. He would’ve brought a book with him, but he didn’t want to become too engrossed in what he was reading—he needed to stay alert to his surroundings.

Things had seemed pretty normal up to that point, and he was about to write the night off as mercifully mundane. Was being the key word.

Moran suddenly heard the sound of tires screeching to a halt outside. He stood up and walked to the door to see what was going on.

The sniper’s eyes immediately went wide. There was an armored vehicle parked directly in front of the building, and a Specialist Firearms Command unit was rapidly filing out.
“Holy shit,” he muttered. They didn’t send the SCO19 out for nothing—it was basically the Metro PD’s equivalent of a SWAT team.

Before he knew what was happening, the men came charging into the community center dressed in full combat regalia. Seb was shoved aside amidst the mad stampede.

This wasn’t good. This wasn’t good at all. He needed to contact Jim ASAP.

Whipping out his phone, he rushed to send a text.

SM

Get out of the building NOW. No time to explain. Just GO.

Chapter End Notes

Baby Talk Translation, in case anyone wasn't sure what Reggie said:

"Sowwy, Jim" = Sorry, Jim

“Can hav mow cookies?” = Can I have more cookies?

“Fank yu, mumma! Wuv mumma!” = Thank you, mama! Love mama!

“Fow yu, mumma” = For you, mama
The MOPS meeting was still having its intermission when Jim felt his babies shift in a major way. This was notable because their movements had recently become more constricted due to lack of space. Right now, though, he could definitely feel them.

When he placed a hand on his stomach, he observed a slight bulge. Curious, he discretely lifted the midriff of his shirt to get a look at what was going on. The mastermind gasped as he saw a moving protrusion from beneath his skin. It was a bit like something out of the ‘Alien’ movies.

“Yu tummy movin!” Reggie exclaimed, catching sight of the event.

Once attention was drawn to him, many group members swarmed in for closer inspection.

Trevor, the coordinator, smiled. “Amazing, isn’t it?”

Jim stared at the man, his expression indescribable. “Is this normal?”

He chuckled. “Oh, yes, most assuredly. There’s no cause for alarm.”

“Are you certain? Because I’ve never been able to literally see them kick before.”

“You’ve never been this far along until now,” he pointed out. “You’re due at the end of the month, meaning those babies are nearly the size of actual newborns. When they move, you’ll know about it.”

“It’s true,” Jack confirmed. “Towards the end of my pregnancy with Reggie, I could sometimes make out the shape of his foot when he kicked. It was rather surreal.”

BZZ. BZZ.

Moriarty’s phone began to buzz, and instantly, his heart leapt into his throat. Seb had promised to contact him if something suspicious was afoot. Knowing that, he was almost afraid to read the message. Almost.
Get out of the building NOW. No time to explain. Just GO.

He paled at the warning. He could make a break for it, yes. But what about the others in the group — what would become of them? And what would happen to Jack’s little boy? Jim was experiencing an exceedingly rare attack of conscience.

Listen to your alpha, a voice inside him said. It was as if he had a sixth sense that something awful would occur if he didn’t heed his mate’s instruction.

“Pardon me, gentlemen, but I require a quick trip to the loo.” Using the bathroom break as a cover story, he was about to wheel away, when suddenly, all hell broke loose.

BAM.

The door to the meeting room was kicked open and the Specialist Firearms Command unit stormed in. Everyone was taken completely off guard as the nightmare began.

“GET ON THE GROUND!” an armed officer demanded. “On the ground NOW! Hands behind your heads!”

Those present struggled to comply. It wasn’t easy to get on one’s knees while in the throes of mid-late pregnancy, which several MOPS participants were.

“What’s this about?” Trevor asked, kneeling down as directed. “Whatever’s going on, we can talk it out.”

“Shut up!” was all he received in reply.

Another officer turned his attention to Jim. “Out of the chair and on the ground!” he barked.

“Give me a minute,” the genius spoke, trying to maneuver as safely as possible.

Apparently, Moriarty wasn’t moving fast enough for him. “Not in a minute! Now!” He seized the smaller man by the arm and forcibly pulled him from the wheelchair, throwing him to the tile floor.

Jim looked up at the brutish bastard, wide-eyed and irate. “You’re going to regret that.”

“Shut your mouth.”

Seething with contempt, he looked around the room and observed the pandemonium breaking loose. Amid the chaos, guns were drawn on many panic-stricken omegas. Meanwhile, other SCO19 enforcers ransacked the room as if searching for something. They tore apart bookcases, storage cabinets, and worst of all, people’s personal belongings.

Jack took exception when his diaper bag was emptied onto the ground. “Hey! The only thing you’ll find in there are nappies, Goldfish crackers, and a few of my son’s stuffed toys!”

Speaking of Reggie, the little boy was wailing in absolute terror. His cries reached a fever pitch when one of the officers snatched up a teddy bear from the bag’s spilled contents and proceeded to rip its head off, checking to see if anything was stashed inside the doll.

“Nuuuuuuu! Why huwt JoJo?! Wuv JoJo!”
That was the final straw.

Jack brazenly defied their orders by holding his child close and rocking him in his arms. “It’s okay, honey. Mummy’s here. When we go home, I’ll fix JoJo. He’ll be good as new.”

“Put the infant down and get back in position!”

“No! How dare you treat us like this,” he countered. “Do you know who my husband is? Sir Gary Norridge, a Queen’s Counsel barrister. I assure you he’ll be made aware of this incident and action will be swiftly taken against the Metropolitan Police Department.”

The omega’s audacious statement actually seemed to slow down a few of the officers. One of them approached, crouching to speak with him as he continued to comfort his distraught son.

“Excuse me, but did you say that your spouse is a QC?”

“Yes. Sir Gary Norridge. Look him up if you don’t believe me.”

“This can’t be right,” the cop said in a hushed tone, his demeanor markedly deflating.

At that moment, someone else appeared in the doorway. It was Sebastian.

“Jim!” The sniper rushed to Moriarty’s side. “I’d hoped you got out, but decided to follow behind the squadron just in case.” He stopped to take in the scene around him, quickly realizing how wrong the situation seemed. “What the hell is going on?”

“You,” an armed commander addressed, marching up to Moran. “Who gave you permission to enter this room? This is a suspected zone of terroristic activity. All non-law enforcement personnel are forbidden from admittance until we complete a sweep.”

“Terroristic activity?” the consulting criminal repeated incredulously. “This is a pregnancy support group, for Christ’s sake!”

“No talking,” he sharply reprimanded.

“Oh, sod off. This ‘raid’ you’re conducting is an embarrassment to the police force.”

The officer glared at him. “We’ll see about that.”

“Where did you get the idea that there was terrorism going on here?” Seb prodded. The notion was preposterous.

“Our sources are confidential.”

“They must be three sheets to the wind, and maybe you are, too, if you believe them.”

“Unless you want to be held as a person of interest, I suggest you quit running your mouth and let us do our job,” the man said with a huff.

“Don’t shoot the messenger,” Moran remarked. “You’ve clearly been sent on a wild-goose chase. I’m simply trying to spare you from appearing foolish.”

The enforcer was fed up listening to Seb. He walked away, choosing to end the conversation then and there.

“Are you okay?” the assassin whispered to his mate.
“I’m fine, no thanks to these power-hungry pricks,” Jim answered. “One of them threw me out of my chair and on to the floor.”

Sebastian growled. He had an intense desire to tear apart every SCO19 officer in the room.

“Easy, Tiger. We need to keep our voices low and figure out what’s going on.”

“Right.” He took a deep breath. Every instinct in his body was screaming to protect Jim.

“I wager Colin and Annie orchestrated this,” the Irishman declared. “Called in a false report to the authorities.”

“I’d put nothing past them,” Seb agreed.

As the fruitless raid continued, the confidence of the command unit seemed to gradually decline. They’d entered with such bravado, but uncovered no evidence to show for themselves. Eventually, the team conferred with one another and contacted their superiors.

After a fairly lengthy phone call, the man heading up the search elected to address the room. “It’s come to the Metro PD’s attention that the initial report we received was likely incorrect. We apologize for the inconvenience.”

“Inconvenience?” Moriarty spat. “You busted in here and terrorized a bunch of pregnant omegas and a sweet little boy. Your badges should be rescinded for a blunder like that.”

Many in the room supported Jim’s assessment, chiming in to express their solidarity.

Trevor stood up and approached the officer. “As the organizer of this group, I’d like to know what exactly you thought was going on here.”

“We were tipped off that MOPS was a front for a British nationalist faction, and that there might be explosive devices on site.”

“That’s outrageous,” the coordinator balked. “This could’ve been avoided if you’d just come to me to discuss the matter.”

“Again, we apologize for the disruption.”

Jack arose from the floor, still clutching his crying child in his arms. “You’ll be even sorrier tomorrow, when your department is slapped with a lawsuit and a formal inquiry is requested.”

“I don’t know what to tell you, sir. This was a regrettable misunderstanding.”

“You may not know what to say, but I do,” Jim interjected as Seb helped him to stand. “I think I speak for everyone when I insist that you get the hell out of here. You’ve done enough damage.”

“Very well. We should return to the station anyway, to meet with our director in person.” He looked to his unit and motioned for them to follow him out the door.

Once the men had finally gone, those in attendance could breathe a sigh of relief. Some remained badly rattled, though.

“God, that was horrible,” Ian said, wiping tears from his eyes. Several others did the same.

“Who would perpetrate a hoax against us?” Scott wondered aloud.
“Bigots, maybe?” Simon angrily speculated.

Jim and Seb exchanged a knowing look. Should they share their thoughts on the subject? Ultimately, the mastermind decided it was better to speak up than stay silent.

“Remember when I called all of you to explain that my husband and I have stalkers who secretly recorded footage here at the community center?” People nodded, and Moriarty continued on. “Well, within the past few days they’ve targeted individuals who showed up on the recordings. I’m almost certain they were responsible for this.”

The room was abuzz at the bombshell revelation. It seemed that tonight held a wealth of surprises.

“I’m incredibly sorry you’ve all been made to suffer because of me,” he stated, his voice breaking as he tried to hold himself together. “Nobody here deserves the wrath of those monsters.”

“It’s not your fault,” Ian stressed. “Colin and Annie are deranged. You have no control over what they do.”

Scott raised his hand. “Jim? I’ve got a question.”

“Yes?”

“These people who are stalking you— what do they want? Why are they going to this much trouble?”

Before the genius could answer, his partner offered a response of his own. “Revenge,” Seb spoke, “for something that happened a long time ago.”

“Must be one hell of a grudge,” Simon quipped.

“Yeah,” the blonde grimly confirmed, “it is.”

A hush fell over the room as London’s most dangerous duo felt a shared sense of guilt, despite Ian’s attempt to convince them otherwise.

An idea sprang to Jim’s mind. He couldn’t erase what had transpired this evening, but he could at least extend a gracious gesture now. “Do any of you have plans after the meeting?” Most said ‘no,’ and he smiled hopefully. “Good, because I’d like to take everyone out for a late dinner, my treat.”

“Where at?” Scott inquired.

“Wherever the group would prefer, though there is a new steakhouse nearby that I’ve been meaning to try.”

The MOPS members mulled it over, deliberating with one another for a consensus.

“Okay,” Simon affirmed, “we accept your offer and are amenable to the prospect of dining at a steakhouse.”

“Excellent. We can follow behind each other on the ride over.”

“Jim, would it be all right if I brought my son?” Jack asked, advancing on the consulting criminal so that he could whisper something to him. “Ordinarily, I’d put Reggie straight to bed, but after tonight’s madness, I doubt he’ll be too eager to sleep. That bear was his favorite stuffed dolly.”
“Of course he can come along. It’s terrible what those brutes did.”

“I fully intend to have charges brought against the department. We were all witnesses to what occurred here,” he noted. “We can corroborate as to how botched the operation was.”

“Indeed.” Moriarty would just as soon have the officers dealt with via alternative means, but this wasn’t strictly about him— others were involved, and it did seem like Jack had a leg up on the legal side of things, thanks to his spouse’s connections.

Trevor made an effort to regain control of the room. “I think we should take this opportunity to resume our meeting. Let’s not allow the evening’s upsetting events to interfere with our normal routine.”

Response from the group was largely positive. Many felt that carrying on after their ordeal was empowering, and they wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I want Seb to stay,” the Irishman announced, firmly gripping his alpha’s hand. He’d never admit it, but he was still quite shaken up by the raid.

“Under the circumstance, I think that’s a reasonable request,” Trevor acknowledged.

Moran was well liked among the MOPS participants, so no complaints were registered by them, either.

Everyone reassembled, setting their chairs in a circle. The room around them was trashed, but inside their formation, it was a safe and welcoming space.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it took me so long to get this posted. I’ve been dealing with insomnia, stress, and a recent snowstorm. Better late than never, right? ;-)

Also, baby talk translation in case Reggie's dialogue was unclear:

“Yu tummy movin!” = You're tummy's moving!

“Nuuuuuu! Why huwt JoJo?! Wuv JoJo!” = No! Why hurt JoJo?! I love Jojo!
In the days following the erroneous MOPS group raid, a few notable things had occurred. For starters, Jack made good on his vow to take legal action against the Metro PD. A suit was filed, alleging that the Specialist Firearms Command unit had acted without sufficient cause, and furthermore, applied excessive force and intimidation during the proceedings. Charges citing the infliction of duress were also included in the complaint.

Another item of importance was Jim’s inquest into how his obstetrician, Dr. Swenson, was faring after the sudden loss of her home. Physically, she was in good condition. Emotionally, however, it was a different story. The incident set her on edge, and she’d decided to take some time off while looking for a new place to live. Even so, the woman assured Moriarty she would honor their agreement to deliver his twins.

Last, but not least, Seb finally planted the sapling he’d gifted Jim for Christmas. They opted to put it in the front yard so that they’d see it whenever they pulled up to the house. The mastermind supervised his mate’s work from a distance, watching through a window as he daydreamed about the things they’d do with the tree once it grew. He envisioned carving their children’s names and heights into the trunk, hanging a tire from its branches to create a rustic swing, and perhaps building a playhouse atop its sturdy base. There were so many possibilities to explore.

In the present, it was Valentine’s Day morning. The genius had mixed feelings about the holiday this year. Ordinarily, he’d celebrate by whisking Sebastian away to an exotic locale where they could revel in the splendors of paradise. Now he was too pregnant to travel very far and worried that his Tiger would be disappointed because of it.

If only he knew what Seb was planning.

The strapping assassin got up early to prepare Jim a decadent breakfast in bed. When he entered their quarters, he was carrying a silver platter fit for a king.
“What’s all this?” the Irishman inquired, sitting up to greet Moran.

“A sumptuous feast, that’s what.” He placed the tray on his mate’s lap and revealed the contents of the meal. “It’s a Belgian waffle with strawberries and cream, scrambled eggs, and bacon. Also, freshly brewed herbal tea—a chamomile blend, to be precise.”

“This is wonderful, darling. Thank you.” Jim was especially surprised to find bacon on the menu, given what a stickler Seb could be regarding his dietary restrictions. He wasn’t about to look a gift horse in the mouth, though.

“It’s my pleasure. Happy Valentine’s Day,” the blonde announced, leaning over to bestow a quick kiss.

“And to you, dear.”

Jim promptly dug into his repast, savoring the bevy of flavors on display. Everything paired so well together, it was like tasting a bit of heaven in each bite.

“You haven’t wanted to discuss the holiday much, so I took the liberty of organizing a romantic evening for the two of us.”

“Oh reeeeeally?”

Moran smiled. “Yes, really. All the necessary reservations have been made. There’ll be dinner, a show, and a carriage ride.”

“Honey, that sounds divine.” He paused, reflecting on the situation. “I’m sorry I can’t take us somewhere nice this year. I know how much you enjoy our annual Valentine’s excursions.”

“I enjoy them because you’re there. It isn’t the location that pleases me, it’s the company I keep.”

Moriarty stared adoringly at his spouse. Every day, his heart swelled anew with love for the man. Sometimes, it was almost too intense to bear.

“Are you all right, Jimmy?” The consulting criminal’s eyes had begun to pool with moisture, causing him concern.

“I…I’m fine,” he answered. “It’s just…you say something like that while I’ve got all these rogue hormones rushing through me. The combination is potent.”

“So, happy tears?”

“Extremely happy,” the overwhelmed omega affirmed.

“Good. You make me feel the same.”

Despite outside attempts to thwart the couple, nothing could diminish the affection between them. If anything, the drama they’d faced in recent months only served to drive the duo closer together, strengthening their already indelible bond.

“Sebby?”

“Yes, kitten?”

“If our plans are for tonight, then what do you propose we do until then? We’ve got a whole lot of hours to kill.”
The sniper eyed his partner seductively. “Sky’s the limit, Magpie. I’m certain we can think of ways to occupy our time.” He reached for Jim’s free hand, pressing the Irishman’s fingertips to his lips. Their gazes locked as he applied gentle kisses to the delicate digits, and soon, they found a way into the warmth of his mouth.

Jim stopped eating to focus entirely on Sebastian. He was enthralled at the sight and sensation of his alpha sucking his fingers in such a suggestive manner.

“My, oh my,” the mastermind purred. “Tiger’s awfully bold today. It’d be a sin to waste all that pent-up energy.”

Moran reluctantly ceased his ministrations so that he could speak. “What if I said I wanted you to top? It’s been too long since I’ve felt you inside me.”

The consulting criminal’s cock instantly stood at attention. When was the last time they switched things up? Not since they’d stayed at The Emerald Clover Inn during their trip to Ireland. Clearly, this needed to be amended.

“Well, well, well,” Jim replied with a beguiling smirk. “How could I refuse, when you’ve asked ever so nicely?”

Seb’s expression now matched his mate’s. Wordlessly, he moved the tray of food off the bed and opened the nightstand drawer, retrieving a tube of Astroglide.

Moriarty watched intently as the gorgeous assassin stripped down in front of him, maintaining eye contact throughout. His Tiger truly was a thing of beauty, as awe-inspiring as a sunset or a rainbow after a storm.

When Moran returned to their bed, the genius seized him by the chain he wore around his neck and administered a fierce kiss. The heat between them was combustible, full of love, lust, and unfettered passion.

“Say it again,” Jim commanded.

“Huh?”

“Tell me what you want me to do to you. Be specific, soldier.”

“Yes, sir.” If Jim was seeking dirty talk, he’d get it. “I want you to press your body close to mine, skin-to-skin. I want your tongue in my mouth while I spread my legs and you touch me…open me up. And then…”

“And then what?” the amorous omega prodded. A blanket shielded his lap, but beneath the warm covering was an aching erection that grew stiffer by the second.

“Then I want your cock inside me. I want you to lay back while I take a ride. Pumping and rocking…pounding myself onto your leaking length. And I want us both to cum hard…cum until we’re quivering.” He noted how his husband had broken into a sweat at the mere description of what they were about to do. It was delicious.

“For god’s sake, let’s get to it. If this is just a tease—”

“It’s not.” Sebastian proved he meant business, crawling under the duvet alongside Moriarty and freeing the smaller man of his sleepwear.
“Oh, Tiger,” he ardently intoned. The rugged blonde was sucking a spot on his neck and it felt amazing.

This Valentine’s Day was turning out to be better than Jim ever could’ve imagined.

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After a full morning and afternoon of lovemaking, London’s most dangerous men had worked up ravenous appetites. It was a good thing, then, that they had reservations at Babbo’s, one of the city’s finest Italian eateries.

“We should dine here more often,” Jim remarked between bites of his eggplant parmigiana appetizer. “It has great atmosphere.”

“I agree, but I may be biased— this restaurant holds a special place in my heart.”

“Interesting. Why’s that?”

Moran looked at his spouse, slightly dejected. “You don’t remember why Babbo’s is special?”

“Not specifically, no.”

Seb frowned. “We had our first date here.”

“No, we didn’t.”

“Yes, we did.”

Moriarty furrowed a brow. “Tiger, I love you dearly, but I think perhaps you’ve sustained one too many concussions over the years. It’s affected your memory, darling.”

“My memory is just fine,” the former colonel insisted. “A few months after I started working for you, you asked me to spend the evening in your company. We went to a planetarium and saw an exhibit about the moons of Saturn. Then, you brought us here for dinner. We ate too much, drank three bottles of wine, and made out in the backseat of your limo. You threatened to shoot the driver when he switched the radio to a country music station,” Sebastian recounted. “This ringing any bells?”

Jim tilted his head and flashed a wide grin. “Of course I remember that night. Well, mostly— I did get a bit tipsy after all the cabernet. But I digress. That was our second date, not the first.”

The sniper eyed his mate quizzically. “Oh? This is news to me. What do you consider our first date?” He was genuinely curious.

“A week earlier, in Vienna, when we spent the night in my hotel room and then had breakfast together the next morning.”

Seb blinked in surprise. He recalled the occasion, but had never thought of it as a date. It was an assignment. “Jimmy, I was there in an official capacity. I’d been ordered to stay with you as your bodyguard.”

“And why do you suppose I handpicked you for that particular job, hmm? It was because I wanted us to have some one-on-one time.”

“But…you didn’t try anything with me. We just talked, watched tv, slept, and shared a meal.”
“I have to put the moves on you for it to be a date?”

“No, it’s just…” Moran didn’t know what to say. It was astonishing how two people could experience the same event, but interpret it in wildly different ways.

“Relaaaax, honey. Let’s not get caught up in the semantics. First date, second date— who’s counting? The important part is that we’re together now, and will remain as such forevermore.”

*Forevermore.* Seb liked the word. There was no one else he wanted to be with besides Jim, and the feeling was mutual. They belonged to each other, existing as two jagged halves that combined to form an unbreakable whole.

“I love you, Magpie.”

“I love you, too, Tiger.”

The duo couldn’t wait to find out what more the night had in store.

********

Following a delectable dinner, Jim and Sebastian proceeded on to the next leg of their Valentine’s Day extravaganza. The fair-haired assassin had secured them tickets to see a West End production of *The Phantom of the Opera.* Through the years, he’d come to discover that Moriarty was secretly an Andrew Lloyd Webber fan, and so he thought it would be the perfect show to attend.

If only he’d bothered to research the actual plot of *Phantom,* he’d have realized it was a tragedy. Maybe then he could’ve avoided his partner devolving into a sobbing mess by the end of the night.

“Kitten, I’m sorry. I honestly had no idea it would finish on such a sad note,” he pled. “I’m no theater connoisseur— I thought musicals generally had happy endings.”

The consulting criminal wiped the tears from his eyes and took a deep breath. “Did you really think that a tale about a deformed man who lives underground and stalks a young soprano would end well?”

“Fair point. Should we ever take in another show, I’ll be sure to thoroughly vet it beforehand.”

“Or you could run it past me, and I’ll tell you all you need to know.”

“True, but then I wouldn’t be able to surprise you.”

“I’d rather not have the kind of surprise that turns me into a blubbering idiot.”

Seb sighed. “Again, I’m sorry.”

Jim looked at his husband, seeing that he appeared contrite. “It’s okay. Truthfully, I adore *Phantom,* it just rips my heart out every time. You did good getting us tickets.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Moriarty confirmed, smiling softly.

The couple paused for a beat, glancing around the upper lobby of the theater. People were exiting the establishment in droves, and they probably should, too.

“Shall we depart?” Sebastian asked. “Our carriage ride awaits.” He’d arranged it so that all he had
to do was text the transport service, and a driver would come.

“Absolutely, my dear.”

The duo walked hand-in-hand. They were midway down the theater’s lengthy entrance staircase when Jim realized he was missing something.

“Sebby? I believe I left my scarf in the auditorium.”

“I’ll go back and get it, if you’d like.”

“Would you? I hate to impose, but it’s a cashmere Armani original.”

“Say no more, love. Wait here and I’ll return in a jiff.”

“Thank you.”

With Moran having gone to fetch the forgotten garment, Jim stopped to admire his surroundings. The building showcased some truly opulent architecture, reminiscent of the French Victorian era. He decided to capture a picture of it for posterity. The trouble was, people kept obstructing his view—not exactly a surprise, considering he was standing on the stairs that led into the main lobby, but it was annoying nonetheless.

Moriarty grunted in frustration. He could try to get the photo from down below, but it wouldn’t be at the same angle as what he wanted. Also, it was a long walk to the bottom and he wasn’t certain he could make the trip without Sebastian’s assistance. The sniper had been helping him get around all evening because he didn’t want to be confined to a wheelchair during their special Valentine’s date.

While he contemplated a solution to his quandary, a throng of theater patrons rushed past him. They weren’t exactly the most graceful bunch, bumping into him upon their exodus.

“Watch it!” he yelled, gripping the railing for support. Not one of them bothered to glimpse back. “Rude bastards,” the mastermind muttered. He had half a notion to go after them, but knew better than to risk it in his condition.

A second wave soon barreled through, this group even more inconsiderate than the last. They thought nothing of pushing him out of their way without so much as an ‘excuse me.’

Jim was getting really fed up. Were these arseholes blind to the fact that he was pregnant, or did they simply not care? He hated to assume the latter, but there were a lot of scumbags in this world.

His grousing was unexpectedly cut short when a gloved hand made contact from behind, roughly shoving him forward. Before he could process what was happening, he was in free-fall.

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

The genius tumbled down the staircase, hitting each step as he went. People cleared out of his direct path, but reformed to encircle him as he lay motionless on the floor.

Voices buzzed frenetically as the crowd argued over what to do. Some suggested helping him up, while others insisted he not be moved. Ultimately, the chatter came to a halt when an assertive figure forced its way through the swarm of onlookers. It was Sebastian.

“Jim!” Moran shouted in alarm. He crouched to assist his spouse, holding him so that he sat semi-
upright. “What happened?”

“I…I’m not sure.” The Irishman was in a bit of a daze. “I think someone pushed me down the stairs.”

Seb’s heart sank. Why would someone do such a thing? Why?

“Did you see who did it?”

“No.” He grimaced as a shooting pain pierced his abdomen. “I need to go to the hospital NOW,” he demanded.

“Okay.” The sniper was trying to be strong, but his hand shook while taking out his phone. He dialed emergency services as quickly as he could, stressing to the operator how important it was that they arrive posthaste.

Moriarty was assailed by another cramp. “It hurts.”

“It’ll be all right, honey,” Seb said, desperate to comfort his ailing Magpie. But would it really?

Moran remained at Jim’s side until the paramedics showed up, at which point he rode along with him in the ambulance.

One of the medical workers began palpating the mastermind’s belly, eliciting an agonized groan.

“Hey!” Sebastian snarled defensively. “What are you doing to him?”

“Checking something,” the young woman replied. She glanced at both men, and then quickly pulled the assassin aside to have a private word with him. “I don’t want to say this in front of your partner because he’s already upset enough, but he needs to have a fetal ultrasound performed immediately,” she stated in a hushed tone. “We don’t have the equipment for it here, but I recommend they do it ASAP once we reach the hospital.”

Seb paled, panic-stricken at the pronouncement. “Wha…what’s wrong?” he asked, struggling to speak properly. He feared he might hyperventilate at any moment.

“The kind of accident he sustained can be dangerous this late in pregnancy and the symptoms he’s exhibiting are a red flag.”

“A red flag for what?”

“Placental abruption.”

Though Moran didn’t know what the medical term meant, it struck fear into his heart. “Oh god. That doesn’t sound good.”

“It’s when the placenta separates from the uterine wall,” she explained. “If that’s happened, his baby will need to be delivered straightaway.”

In an instant, Seb felt as though the world had come crashing down like a ton of bricks. “Not baby — babies,” he whispered. “We’re having twins.”
“Well, I think there’s a good chance you’ll be seeing them tonight.”

“Tiger,” Jim called out. “Don’t leave me.” The timbre of his voice was fragile in a way that made Moran ache.

The former colonel returned to Moriarty’s side, holding his hand in reassurance. “I’m not going anywhere, kitten.”

“I’m so worried about our little loves,” he confessed, tearing up as he spoke. “What did the medic tell you? Why didn’t she want me to hear it?”

Sebastian took a few seconds to collect himself before mustering an answer. Dare he break the news to him? He didn’t wish to distress his omega any further, but surely he had a right to know what was going on. *Maybe he’ll react better if I’m the one who breaks it to him.*

“She said they’ll need to do a scan to see what your placenta looks like. Depending on how that goes, we may be putting the nursery to use a bit sooner than expected.”

Jim’s expression was a mixture of shock, fear, and amazement. “Truly, Seb? The babies might be coming now?”

He nodded. “That’s right.”

“Ahhh!” the consulting criminal cried, wracked by another shuddering abdominal pain. “We need to call Dr. Swenson,” he blurted out. “She’s supposed to deliver them.”

“I know, honey, but I don’t think there’s time. This is an emergency situation.”

“It has to be her! I can’t let a stranger do it.”

“Jimmy, sometimes these things are unavoidable.”

“No! I won’t allow it!”

The female paramedic approached her patient. “If it turns out you’ve got a placental abruption and you refuse to have a C-section done, your children could die. I apologize for being so blunt, but it’s imperative you understand the seriousness of this. Their lives are on the line.”

Her grave warning put things into perspective for Jim. He would have to swallow his misgivings and do whatever was best for Essie and Eddie.

“If it comes to that, and I’m required to undergo surgery, I want you to be with me, Seb. No wandering off, not even for a second.”

“Are you kidding? You couldn’t get rid of me if you tried.” He continued to hold his beloved’s hand, hoping it would provide some source of comfort.

At last, the ambulance stopped. The doors opened and the medics were set to wheel Moriarty into the ER. Everything was proceeding fine until Sebastian noticed something. The facility looked oddly familiar. In fact, he was positive he’d been there before.

And then he saw a sign posted, and was absolutely horrified.

*St. Bartholomew's Hospital.*

He was in hell, or at least a close approximation thereof. This was the place he’d visited so very
many times in his nightmares. The place that had once eviscerated his soul and rendered him an empty shell. It was, and always would be, the place that took away Jim.

“STOP!” the sniper shouted. “Why did you bring him here?! Why, of all hospitals, did you choose this one?”

“Because it was the closest to your location,” the medic replied.

“Find a different one!” he countered. The alpha had gone wild-eyed, appearing more than a little crazed.

“Sebastian!” Moriarty yelled out. “I know how much you hate St. Bart’s, but please, just let them do their job. Don’t fight it. We’re wasting precious time while our children may be in danger!”

Moran was breathing heavily, trying his hardest to calm down. ‘Hate’ wasn’t a strong enough word to describe how he felt about St. Bart’s. He wished that’s all it was. This cut deeper and burned blacker than mere hatred. It was an albatross from which there was no escape.

Jim was again beset by a terrible cramp, this one wracking him with a sob.

Suddenly, Seb felt incredibly guilty. He was letting his own personal hang-ups interfere with his family’s welfare. He needed to rein himself in.

“Go on. Help him. I’m sorry I got in the way.”

The medical workers nodded and the rush to treat Jim resumed. Sebastian kept up a steady pace, following along as his husband was taken to have his vitals checked and an ultrasound performed. The results confirmed what clinicians suspected: an abruption had occurred.

This was it. Tonight their twins would be born into the world, and simultaneously, a setting Seb associated with death would become a place of life.

Chapter End Notes

Hope everyone enjoys this! It's my longest installment so far.

Unfortunately, I won't be able to get the second half out in time for Valentine's Day proper. But even so, rest assured that the 100-chapter milestone will feature the babies' birth! :-).
Forever My Valentine – Part 2

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian become proud parents, albeit slightly ahead of schedule.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Possible fluff overdose :-)

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

Too fast, Sebastian thought. Everything was happening too damn fast.

20 minutes ago, he and Jim arrived at St. Bart’s hospital, where it was confirmed that the mastermind had suffered a placental abruption. 5 minutes later, his mate was administered a spinal block anesthetic. Now, they waited in a surgical suite where the emergency C-section would soon be performed.

“Tiger,” the genius spoke, giving Seb’s hand a gentle squeeze, “there are some items I need you to bring me once the procedure’s over.”

He nodded. “Anything, love. You name it.”

“I want the overnight bag I prepacked months ago. It’s a blue duffle under the bed.”

“Sure, I can get that.”

“There’s more,” Jim continued. “I also have a plastic crate in the linen closet. It contains things I knitted for the babies— booties, caps, mittens, and more. I want you to bring it here so we can dress them properly.”

“Certainly. I can’t wait to see your handiwork.” His spouse had shown him some of the garments, but not all. He looked forward to viewing the full collection.

“And one final thing… I want you to bring the little white dog plushie.”

Seb’s expression was noticeably confused. “Dog plushie?”

“Yes. Surely you remember Sadie, the dog we encountered on the beach in Monaco? When we got back to London, and I was hospitalized again, you found a stuffed animal in the gift shop that was
identical to her. We decided it would be the twins’ first plush toy.”

The sniper racked his brain, trying to summon the information. They’d gone through so much during the past several months, a lot of things blurred together. Still, he did recall their picnic on the beach, and the more he thought about it, he also had some recollection of buying Jim a doll to cheer him up.

“It’s on a shelf in the playroom,” Moriarty further explained. “I wanted us to get a second plushie so that our darlings wouldn’t have to fight over it. I don’t think we ever got around to buying another one, though,” he lamented. “See if they sell anything similar at the gift shop here.”

“Will do.”

Their conversation abruptly stopped when the attending obstetrician and nurses entered the room. Jim’s heart rate and blood pressure were reassessed, and he was cleared for the operation to begin.

“I can’t believe this is really happening,” he marveled. He’d envisioned the birth of their children so many times, and now the moment was here.

“I know, hon. It’s amazing.”

Moran watched as antiseptic was applied to Moriarty’s abdomen and an incision was made. It was surreal to see him cut open like that, particularly while he remained wide awake for the event. Next, his uterus was slit and the doctor’s hand disappeared inside the muscle cavity. When her appendage reemerged, she was grasping a crying, fluid-covered baby.

“This one’s a boy,” the physician announced. She cut the umbilical cord and swiftly passed the newborn to a nurse.

“No! Don’t take him away!” Jim bleated in alarm. This was just like the horrifying nightmare he’d had months ago, where his children were ripped from his body and tortured. The dream had shaken him to the core.

“Sweetheart, it’s okay. They need to wipe him off and check his vitals.”

Seb was correct. Almost as soon as he said that, one of the medical assistants returned with the baby, now cleaned and wrapped in a blanket. Both men radiated with delight as the infant was placed into Jim’s arms.

There were so many things the consulting criminal imagined saying to his little ones when they met. Now that the time had finally come, he found himself speechless, overtaken by an intense wave of emotion. He was in absolute awe of the tiny bundle staring up at him, and didn’t even try to conceal the tears that had begun to flow.

Before long, the remaining twin was delivered and presented to them. Jim carefully handed his son over to Sebastian, and accepted Estella into his embrace. The couple admired their children as the doctor worked to stitch Moriarty up.

“They’re so small,” the sniper remarked, “like porcelain dolls. I’m afraid of breaking them.”

Jim smiled. “They may be petite, but they come from a hardy stock.” He took a second to study both newborns. “Eddie looks just like you.”

It was true. With bright blue eyes and a head full of blonde hair, there was no mistaking his parentage.
“Essie’s got your dark locks,” Seb pointed out. “Gorgeous green eyes, too. I’m not sure which side of the family those come from.”

The genius stared deep into his daughter’s gaze, beaming as he recognized something familiar therein. “My mum had emerald eyes.” He’d wished his mother could be with him many times throughout the past nine months. Seeing an aspect of her reflected in one of his children gave him a sense of peace.

He turned to Moran. “Tiger? I want to hold them both.”

“Of course.” Seb passed the boy back to Jim, so that the Irishman was cradling an infant in each arm.

Moriarty looked at his babies, still emotionally charged, but ready to speak.

“Helloooo, my darlings. It’s Daddy. I’ve waited ages to meet the two of you, though in some ways, I feel as if I know you already. We’ve been through a lot together, haven’t we?” He paused, noting that he had their rapt attention. Were newborns always this transfixed, or were they listening so keenly because they remembered the sound of his voice? “You kept me going during the darkest of moments,” Jim continued. "I never gave up on you, and more importantly, you never gave up on me, either. You fought to stay alive despite less than ideal conditions, and I’m very grateful for that.” He was rapidly becoming overwhelmed again. The affection flowing through him was immense. “You’ve made Daddy so happy.”

“You’ve made your Papa happy, too,” the sniper interjected. Tough as Sebastian usually was, even he wiped away a few stray tears.

Jim smiled at his spouse. It warmed his heart to know that these babies were a part of them both, and they’d be raising them together. He truly had a family to call his own.

“We’re going to take such good care of you,” the mastermind vowed. “We’ll love and protect you forever.” He leaned down, nestling the twins close as he kissed each of them on the forehead.

The physician finished stitching Moriarty’s incisions and he was moved into the recovery unit. The omega was utterly exhausted. Though he tried to fight it, he eventually succumbed to the siren song of sleep. At that point, Essie and Eddie were taken to the nursery while Moran was able to sneak off and gather the items his Magpie had requested.

On his way out of the hospital, he took a long look at the place. He still didn’t like the facility, not by any stretch. Somehow, though, it didn’t seem quite as abominable as before. He would always resent St. Bart’s for the horrific memories it held regarding Jim’s ‘demise,’ but now the despair was tempered by a new connotation— it was the site of his children’s birth. The good didn’t negate the bad, but it counted for something. Perhaps, he thought, it was finally time to put away the sins of the past and focus on the present.

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Upon returning to the house, Sebastian realized he ought to explain what was going on to his current security staff. They needed to know why Jim would be absent for the next few days, and be informed that two more people would reside at the estate once the twins were brought home.

After phoning team leader Roger Flynn, Seb was able to round everyone up via an impromptu conference call and deliver the news in a straightforward manner. It was decided that they’d add a few extra armed guards to each shift as a precautionary measure. Moran wanted to make certain his
cubs would be safe.

Once that was squared away, the assassin quickly assembled the things his mate had asked for. He hightailed it back to the hospital, thinking he’d already spent too much time dealing with security matters. Lo and behold, Jim was still asleep. The consulting criminal had his own room now, so Seb dropped off the items and set out for a walk around the building.

His first stop was the nursery, to check on their progeny. He immediately knew which ones were his. Most of the babies were in single-size bassinets, but they’d put Edward and Estella together in a double-wide model. The two laid side-by-side, and Sebastian thought his heart might burst when he noticed that they were holding hands as they napped. It was the sweetest thing he’d ever witnessed, and he wished Jim was there to see it.

Magpie wants me to be the twins’ official photographer. Why not get a jump on the job? He took out his phone and used the camera feature to snap a shot of their slumbering angels. He’s going to melt when I show this to him.

A part of Seb yearned to hold his children again, but he didn’t feel right about doing it without Jim present to share in the bliss. Additionally, Essie and Eddie looked so serene. They needed their rest and he didn’t want to interrupt that. Like a good Papa, he would do what was best and allow them to sleep.

Moran soon sought out the gift shop. An eye-catching Valentine’s Day display stood front and center, featuring a variety of festive items. He decided to pick up flowers and a box of chocolates for his husband. If anyone deserved a treat tonight, it was Jim. Birthing two kids after falling down a flight of stairs had to be grueling.

Speaking of births, there was a special section of the shop dedicated to just that. Sebastian selected a Mylar balloon that read ‘Congratulations’ and played jaunty music when you pressed a certain spot on it. It was a bit cheesy, but he thought they could do with a touch of whimsy.

Unfortunately, the one thing Seb couldn’t find was a stuffed animal comparable to the white dog Moriarty so adored. They offered plenty of other plushies, but none matching that particular form. He was close to conceding defeat when he glimpsed a doll he knew Jim would appreciate: a little stuffed tiger.

He paid for everything and headed back to the genius’s room, where his mate was slowly awakening.

Jim blinked sleepily, taking in his surroundings. “Wha...what happened to the babies?” he asked, not seeing them anywhere. “Are they okay? Is something wrong?” His tone conveyed great concern.

“Relax,” Sebastian advised. “Our darlings are doing fine. They were brought to the nursery when you nodded off.” He sat at the Irishman’s bedside and pulled up the picture he’d taken as proof of their well-being.

A joyful coo escaped Moriarty’s lips at the sight his children clasping hands. “Oh Sebby, they’re so precious. Do you suppose they might recognize each other from all those months in the womb? I know they were in separate sacs, but still...”

“Anything’s possible.”

Jim hesitated a moment, observing the assortment of items in his room. “I see you fetched my
belongings and then some.”

The sniper flashed a sweet, sharky grin. “When I got to the gift shop, I just couldn’t resist.”

“Thank you, dear. The chocolate will come in handy when I’m allowed to eat again.”

Seb frowned. “You can’t eat?”

“Not for about a day or so. They recommend adhering to a liquid diet for the first 24-hours following a surgery of this nature. I studied up on the subject.”

“That kind of sucks, aye?”

“More than you could imagine,” he groused.

“Well, I’ve got something I bet will perk you right up.”

The mastermind eyed his spouse intently. “Oh? Go on.”

“This is more of a ‘show, don’t tell’ type of thing.”

Moran presented Jim with the bag his stuffed toy was in.

Peeking at its contents, he gasped in surprise. “A tiger, from *my* Tiger!”

“I couldn’t find the one you wanted. I hope this will suffice.”

“It’s even better than the dog. I love it and I’m sure our angels will, too.”

KNOCK. KNOCK.

There was a sudden rap on the door, commanding the couple’s attention. A nurse entered the room, and she wasn’t alone— the woman came bearing Essie and Eddie in their twin bassinet.

Moriarty’s face instantly lit up. “Ooh, this is a welcome visit. Thank you for bringing them here.”

“I thought you might be interested in feeding them,” she said with a smile. The medical assistant rolled the portable baby bed over to Jim and Seb, pulling two pre-prepared bottles from her pouch pocket.

“I’d love to,” the genius enthused.

“How about you?” she asked, looking at Moran.

“Yes, definitely.”

“Good. It’s best when both parents participate. Now, who wants which baby?”

The duo exchanged a glance.

“You didn’t really get to hold Essie earlier,” Jim pointed out. “Would you like to take her now?”

“Sure.”

With the decision made, the woman eased each child into their parents’ respective arms. She then gave them a quick primer on the basics of bottle-feeding, explaining how to test the temperature of the formula, what angle to position the babies in, and when to burp them. Once those topics were
covered, they were allowed to get started.

“Eddie’s taking to it like a pro,” Moriarty remarked. Happiness was radiating off him in waves as he fed his son.

Meanwhile, Sebastian was having his own bonding experience. “This little lady has a pretty healthy appetite, too.” Those striking green eyes of hers were swiftly carving out a special place in his heart.

“How often should we do this?” the consulting criminal inquired.

“An excellent question. For maximum nutritional benefit, a newborn should receive a bottle every 2-3 hours.”

Jim nodded. “That’s about what I figured.”

A few minutes passed without issue, and the nurse spoke again. “Your babies are doing wonderfully so far,” she complimented. “If you’d like, tomorrow someone could come by and show you how to give them a bath.”

“I would absolutely adooore that,” the Irishman replied.

Seb looked to his mate and grinned. He hadn’t seen him this excited in ages.

As the feeding went on, Jim began to hum— an act which Eddie was particularly responsive to. The infant appeared completely relaxed in his Daddy’s embrace.

After the twins had their fill, they remained with their parents for some time. Moriarty seized the opportunity to dress them in his homemade knitted caps and booties, and wrapped them in monogrammed blankets. They barely fussed at all, behaving quite well for having only been born into the world a few hours earlier. Edward and Estella truly were their little angels, content to be doted upon by London’s most dangerous men. Lucky for them, this was just the beginning. A lifetime of love and luxury awaited.

Chapter End Notes

Here it is, the 100-chapter milestone! This took a little while to finish because I wanted to get it perfect.

P.S. -- In case anyone is wondering how Seb was able to go back home when he and Jim rode an ambulance to the hospital, I like to imagine he called a driver to pick him up, and once he was at the house, took one of his and Jim’s cars to make the return trip.
A Friendly Visit

Chapter Summary

Following the birth of the twins, friends stop by to visit Jim at the hospital.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Bloody hell!” Jim shouted as he awkwardly limped from the bathroom back to his bed.

“I wish you’d let me help you,” Sebastian said.

“I’m not an invalid.”

“No, but you’ve recently fallen down a flight of stairs and undergone major surgery. You ought to take it easy while your body heals.”

The sniper worried that his mate was pushing himself too hard. It was the second day of Jim’s hospitalization following the emergency birth of their children, and he was in a lot of pain. After the initial anesthesia had worn off, he could feel the bruising and sprained ankle he’d sustained in the fall. To add insult to injury, his incision site was tender.

“I’ve taken it easy for months,” the consulting criminal complained. “I want to be mobile again.”

“It will happen,” Seb assured. “These things take time.”

“Bollocks that. I can’t wait forever. When we bring the babies home, I have to be ready to care for them. No sitting on my arse— they need me.”

“Honey, I think you’ll be more useful to them if you conserve your energy. Besides, it’s not like you’re doing it alone. I’ll be there to assist.”

“I know, and I appreciate the effort you’re willing to put in. I’m just so fucking frustrated. I should be better than this. Tougher.”

“You’re plenty tough,” the blonde replied. “One of the strongest people I’ve ever met, and that’s saying something.”

“Yeah, it says you’ve got a surprisingly small social circle.”
“No,” Sebastian emphasized, “it means you’re a hell of a man, despite your tendency to deflect feelings with snark and sarcasm.”

Jim shot his partner a glare, but the persistent assassin shut it down fast. “Don’t give me that look. We both know it’s true.”

Moriarty sighed. “What do you expect, Seb? Of course I feel badly about this. I was taken out so easily. One push, and BAM—I’m banged up and sent into early delivery. It’s pathetic.”

“Whoever decided to hurt you is pathetic, not the other way around. They were cowardly to attack a pregnant omega, especially from behind.”

“I should’ve been paying more attention…kept my guard up.”

“We were on a date at the theater. You had no reason to believe any amount of ‘guarding’ was necessary then and there.” He paused, reflecting on his own regrets. “It wasn’t exactly my shining moment, either. When I saw you lying at the bottom of those steps, I felt like a complete and utter failure as a husband, an alpha, and a bodyguard.”

“Tiger, that’s nonsense.”

“Precisely my point. We mustn’t blame ourselves for what happened. Someone else was responsible and it would behoove us to go after them instead.”

The mastermind contemplated his spouse’s words. He knew there was merit to the statement. Acknowledging it, though, opened up a whole other can of worms.

“The person who shoved me…you think it was one of our stalkers?”

“Don’t you?”

“I honestly can’t be sure. There were scads of people coming down the stairs. I was jostled by several of them prior to the fall. But…”

“But what?”

“But the push that sent me tumbling did seem more forceful than those preceding it,” he admitted. “Colin and Annie could’ve been involved. I’m not certain either way.”

An idea popped into Moran’s head. “Perhaps the theater has surveillance footage we could review.”

Moriarty was intrigued by the notion. “Interesting. How do you propose we go about acquiring the recordings, should they exist?”

“We start out with a straightforward approach. Contact the manager of the establishment and explain our situation.”

“And if they won’t cooperate?”

“Then we move on to ‘Plan B.’”

“Which is?”

“Hack into their system and retrieve what we need. Come hell or high water, if footage of the incident is available, we’ll get a hold of it.”
Jim smiled impishly. “Darling, sometimes I love the way you think.”

“Only sometimes?” Seb teased.

“Don’t press your luck, soldier.”

“Am I allowed to press other things, sir?”

“Hmm. Depends on your definition of ‘other.’”

The former colonel leaned across his mate’s bedside, swooping in for a kiss. It was slow and sensual, almost languid in its pace, as Seb savored the act for all he could. When their mouths finally parted, Jim let out a tiny whimper of disappointment that it was over.

“I hereby decree that lips may be pressed any time, soldier.”

“Aye aye, sir,” he said with a wink.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

The men looked at each other, slightly confused. Was it time to feed the babies again already? Maybe they required a nappy change— earlier in the day, a nurse had taught them the ins and outs of diapering.

It turned out to be neither of those things. When the door opened, a trio of familiar faces walked through. Ian, Jack, and Scott had dropped by for a visit.

“This is a surprise,” Jim remarked. He’d texted Ian about what was going on and gave him permission to share the news with their MOPS group, but he didn’t expect any of them to actually show up at the hospital.

“It’s a surprise for us, too,” Jack noted. “When we heard what happened, we were gobsmacked.”

“Yeah,” Scott agreed, “that must’ve been a scary experience.”

“It was awful, but I survived. A bit sore, though.”

The omegas sat down on the bed with Moriarty, unable to stand for very long in their respective conditions. Ian handed the mastermind a small gift bag he’d brought along.

“This is from the three of us,” the young man spoke. “It’s for the twins. We hope you like it.”

Jim eagerly opened the package, gasping with delight. Inside were two designer, gold-plated pacifiers. “I love them,” he immediately replied. A thought occurred to him, though, and his expression quickly dropped. “These had to have cost a fortune. I wouldn’t feel right about accepting them. Surely your money could be better spent on your babies.”

Jack chuckled. “At the risk of sounding like a pompous twat, I paid the bulk of the cost. So you needn’t worry— Gary and I can afford it.”

“Oh really? I suppose that does change matters a bit. Thank you for the prezzie.” Inwardly, Jim lamented the fact that Seb hadn’t invited Jack to his baby shower. Talk about a missed opportunity. Who knows what he’d have given him at an event like that?

“The pleasure was ours. Scott and Ian did help pick it out.”
“I appreciate the gesture, gentlemen.” Moriarty paused. “Hey, Jack? Since you mentioned your husband, I was wondering something— what’s the status of the lawsuit he filed against the police department? Made any headway with it?”

“Actually, yes. The Specialist Firearms Command unit officers who participated in the bogus raid have been suspended while Internal Affairs investigates the allegations of misconduct.”

“Good,” the genius declared. “They should be held accountable for their actions. It was bloody disgraceful.”

“To say the least. My son was inconsolable after what happened. That stuffed bear they decapitated in front of him? He’d had it since birth,” Jack informed. “I was able to sew JoJo back together, but still, it was a traumatic experience.”

Jim frowned, recalling how hard the boy had cried during the commotion. “That poor little guy. How’s he doing now?”

“Reginald’s quite well, thanks for asking. His birthday’s coming up soon and he’s very excited about it.”

“Oh? Splendid. Give me your address and I’ll send over a gift.”

“I can do better than that,” the man said with a grin. “We’re throwing him a party at our home. You’re welcome to come if you’d like. It’ll be mostly family, friends, and a few toddlers from Reggie’s playgroup.”

_Hmm._ It was an interesting proposition. The consulting criminal hadn’t attended a social gathering outside of his MOPS meetings in some time. This might be his chance to jump back into the swing of things.

“I’ll consider it,” Jim stated. “Are the two of you going?” he inquired, looking at the other visitors in his company.

Scott shook his head indicating a negative. “It’s a bit too posh for me, I’m afraid.”

“Yeah,” Ian chimed in. “I’m awkward enough at parties with regular people. I couldn’t imagine having to interact with the kind of friends Sir Norridge keeps.”

“Hush, the both of you. Our acquaintances may be powerful people, but that doesn’t mean they’re unkind. If you gave them a chance, I think you’d be pleasantly surprised.”

“Powerful people, huh?” Now Moriarty was intrigued. Perhaps a private soiree of this nature would provide an opportunity to make useful connections.

“Yes, but they aren’t snobby in the slightest.”

“Would I be able to bring my partner?”

“Certainly. The more the merrier. You could even bring the babies if you’d like,” Jack implored. “When I mentioned to Reggie that I was coming to see you because you’d had the twins, he begged to come along. He’d love to meet them.”

“Aww, that’s very sweet.”

KNOCK. KNOCK.
All eyes shifted to the door, and soon the group was smiling ear-to-ear as a nurse wheeled Essie and Eddie into the room.

“Perfect timing,” Jim enthused. “Now I can introduce everyone.”

“Thank your spouse for this,” the medical assistant remarked. “He just texted the Nurses’ Station to request your children be brought over.”

Moriarty gazed happily at his better half. Sebastian was always so thoughtful. He must’ve sent the message while I was caught up in conversation, the Irishman mused.

“This is wonderful, Tiger. Thanks.”

“No problem. I figured you’d want to show off our kiddos.”

“You know me well.” He turned his attention to the nurse. “Leave them here until further notice.”

“Okay. If you need anything, don’t hesitate to buzz us out front.” At that, the woman left.

Jim began doting upon his darlings, straightening their knit caps and wiping a bit of drool from their adorable faces.

“Dear lord, they’re cute,” Scott marveled.

“I agree,” said Ian. “They should be in commercials.”

The mastermind laughed. “I doubt I’ll be putting them in any adverts, but yes, my little loves are gorgeous. Seb’s going to take heaps of pictures of them when we get home. He’s even shot a few already. They’re extreeemely photogenic.” Jim couldn’t resist boasting about his babies. They were an endless source of pride and joy.

As if on cue, Essie and Eddie smiled up at their Daddy. It was remarkable how they appeared to understand what he was saying. Logically, Moriarty knew such a feat was impossible. Newborns didn’t have the mental capacity to comprehend an exchange of dialogue. Despite that, a part of him wanted to believe his progeny were brilliant enough to grasp things ordinary babies couldn’t.

“Soooo, who’d like to hold them?” he asked his guests.

“I’ll let these blokes go first,” Jack announced. “They’ve never had kids before. This will be good practice.”

“Fair point. Scott, Ian— are you ready?”

They nodded, and Jim proceeded to instruct them on how to properly lift and cradle an infant. He was a tad worried the twins might react badly to being handled by strangers, but their congenial demeanors shined through once more.

“Hello, little lass,” Scott greeted.

The genius scowled. “That’s Eddie you’ve got there.”

“Sorry,” he muttered. “Guess I’m not too good at telling them apart yet.”

“I’d have thought the blue cap and booties would be a giveaway.”

“Right...I’m a bit daft sometimes.”
Jim sighed. “Whatever. Keep talking to him— he’s a polite boy, he’ll excuse the faux pas.”

“Hey laddie,” the young ginger spoke again. “My apologies for the mix-up. You’re a very handsome fella.”

Eddie cooed endearingly in reply as London’s most dangerous men watched on. Seb hadn’t said much since the omegas arrived because they were more Moriarty’s friends than his, but he enjoyed observing their children’s response to others. Thus far, they were the most contented babies he’d ever seen.

“Both of them have beautiful eyes,” Ian complimented.

The consulting criminal beamed with satisfaction. “Yes, indeed they do.”

Suddenly, Essie wriggled a tiny arm free from the blanket she was wrapped in, outstretching it up towards the teen.

“Well, aren’t you just the absolute sweetest?” He tilted his head down so that she could touch his face. The child’s fingertips grazed the youth’s cheek, and she giggled.

“Estella likes your stubble,” Seb commented.

“You?”

“You’ve got a slight bit of stubble,” he noted. “For some reason, she seems to delight in the tactile sensation of it. She reacted the same way to me earlier.”

“Oh. That’s rather adorable.”

“I thought so.”

Ian rocked her gently and she continued to grin. “Pretty soon I’m going to have my own little girl, and the two of you will become best friends. You’ll be older than her by a few months, so I’m counting on you to be the wise one, there to steer her away from trouble should the situation arise.”

“All our babies ought to play together,” Scott interjected. “We already know and trust each other, and our kids would be around the same age.”

“Not a bad idea.” Moriarty was open to finding more playmates for the twins.

“I like it, too,” added Jack. “We could start an offshoot from MOPS. Instead of assembling as pregnant male omegas, we’d organize ourselves as a community of male omegas raising children.”

“Trevor has a family of his own,” Ian pointed out, referring to the coordinator of their support group. “I wonder if he might be willing to entertain the notion?”

“We can make an inquiry,” the mastermind suggested. “If he goes for it, great. If not, we’ll still put something together. It works either way.”

Everyone seemed to agree that this was a concept worth pursuing. It ensured that they’d remain in touch after giving birth, and it guaranteed their babies would have consistent peer interaction. It was a win-win scenario.

The room’s attention was swiftly drawn back to the twins when Eddie began to fuss. Perhaps intrinsically linked, Essie soon followed her brother’s lead, scrunching up her chubby cheeks and
letting out a cry. Jim and Seb took their darlings from the young men, attempting to soothe them as best they could.

“They’re cute even when they’re cranky,” Jack noted. “Reminds me of Reggie.”

“Reminds me of someone I know, too,” the sniper teased.

Moriarty shot his mate a glare, not missing the meaning of his quip. “I think our children may need a feed and a nap,” he tersely declared.

Sebastian grinned. “What a coincidence, me too.”

Try as he might, Jim couldn’t stay mad at his spouse—not when he looked at him with that sweet, sharky smile.

“Just send them a message at the Nurses’ Station saying we require formula.”

“I would, but as you can see, my hands are full.” Moran cradled a fidgeting Eddie in his arms.

“Why don’t I go out to the desk and inquire about getting some bottles made up for them?” Ian proposed. “I’d like to watch the feeding process.”

The Irishman paused, considering his protégé’s offer. “Okay, but once they’re sated, I’m going to insist that everyone leave. I appreciate you all coming to visit, but my poppets need their rest.”

“Understood.”

Ian ventured out in search of formula. A nurse was kind enough to oblige his request, and when he came back, the group keenly observed the couple as they tended to the twins’ dietary demands. Afterward, Seb saw the omegas off, walking them to their cars to make certain they got home safely.

Moran was not prepared for the sight he returned to. Upon entering the room, he saw that Jim had dozed off with the babies snoozing on top of him. It was so precious, he dared not disturb them. But it didn’t mean he couldn’t snap a picture.

This one’s going to be the new lock screen on my phone.

Chapter End Notes

I want to apologize for not updating sooner. This has been a stressful week and I got a bit bogged down. Thank you for your patience.
New Additions

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian bring their children home for the first time.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Moriarty-Moran clan had officially checked out of the hospital after a near week-long stay at St. Bart’s. When they arrived back at their palatial residence, Jim was practically bursting at the seams with excitement. The mastermind was determined to give his little ones a grand tour of the house, sprained ankle be damned.

Hobbling to his wheelchair, he hunkered down and called out to the sniper. “Tiiiiiger, bring me the babies!”

Sebastian complied, carrying their children in a double-slung papoose. “They’re right here, honey. Safe and sound.”

He beamed at the sight of Seb wearing Essie and Eddie on his body. “Oh my god, that’s adooooorable.” Even sweeter was how totally subdued they seemed. The twins lulled in and out of sleep, nestled securely against their Papa’s chest.

“I think they’re fairly relaxed.”

“Excellent.” The consulting criminal had been concerned about how the babies would react to a change of environment. It was a relief to see them unfazed. “I need you to hand me our darlings and then wheel us around the house. I must show them everything.”

“If that’s what you’d like, sure.” Moran thought it was a bit silly—newborns wouldn’t be able to remember the layout. But if it made Jim happy, he’d oblige.

The groggy infants were placed in Moriarty’s arms, still not fully lucid. They looked particularly cute, blinking and gurgling as they gradually became cognizant.

“Helloooo, sweethearts. You’re finally home,” he informed. “Get set, because Daddy’s going to take you on an adventure. I guarantee you’ll see some amaaaaazing things along the way.”

Seb smiled, delighted by his family. This was what he’d wanted for so long; what he’d dreamed of, but once thought impossible. Now it was real and he treasured every glorious moment of domestic
bliss.

“Where shall we commence the tour, my dear?”

“Hmm.” Jim paused, contemplating the question. “Surprise me.”

“Yes, sir.”

There was a lot of ground to cover and the assassin had just been given carte blanche to begin anywhere he pleased. What wealth of wonders awaited them? In their household, the sky was the limit.


Moran knew the mansion he and Jim lived in was large, but it never occurred to him how lengthy the hallways were until today. At certain points, it felt like he was pushing his mate down an infinite corridor existing outside the bounds of time and space. Despite the monotony, Moriarty remained enthused. Nothing could shake his ebullient mood.

As the couple closed in on the nursery, Jim’s joy became irrepressible. He let out a dulcet trill of delight, reawakening the twins, who’d nodded off somewhere between the billiard room and the solarium. What happened next was fascinating. Rather than be startled by the sound, Essie and Eddie responded positively to it, cooing and wiggling in a rudimentary attempt to cuddle the Irishman. Sebastian had read about omegas and their offspring communicating in such an instinctive fashion, but this was the first he’d seen it in practice.

“They really love you, Magpie.”

“And I love them,” he dreamily declared.

“Me too.”

They stopped at the door of the nursery, preparing themselves for what was to come. This was a big moment for all involved.

“Are you ready, Jim?”

He nodded. “Oh yes.”

“Then let’s go.”

The former colonel escorted his family inside. Everything was as magnificent as he remembered, perhaps even more so now that the twins were there with them.

“What do you think, my doves? Is the place to your liking?” Moriarty turned to his partner. “Sebby, take one of the babies so I can stand. We’ll show both of them around, up close and personal.”

“Are you sure that’s wise with your ankle injury?”

“It’s not that bad anymore. A dull ache is all. I won’t drop our children, if that’s what you’re worried about.”
“I know you wouldn’t. I just worry you'll wear yourself out.”

“I’ll be fine,” the genius assured.

The pair proceeded on, Seb taking hold of his lookalike son while Jim cradled their daughter. Eddie squealed happily on contact with Moran.

“Hey there, little guy. Do you know where we are? This is you and your sister’s room.”

Edward simply stared at the sniper with a big grin on his face.

“See that, Tiger? He even has your smile. Or he will, once his teeth come in.”

Sebastian chuckled heartily at the comment. “Poor kid.”

“Hush. You have a wonderful smile.”

“If I were a shark, maybe.”

Moriarty rolled his eyes. “Let’s just get our darlings acquainted with the nursery, okay?”

“Aye, sir.”

The consulting criminal brought Essie over to one of the white canopy cribs. “Isn’t it elegant? I had it picked out before I knew if you and your brother would be girls or boys. Some designs are classic regardless of gender.”

The adorable infant looked at the bed and yawned.

“Are you tired, love? Would you care to lie down?”

She answered with another tiny yawn.

“Seb, I believe Estella needs a nap. This may be a fine opportunity to get her used to sleeping in here.”

“Good idea, but what about Eddie? He’s still alert.”

“Continue showing him around. In a few minutes, he’ll probably tucker out. That’s the beauty of keeping them on the same schedule— eventually, they’ll synchronize.”

“Yeah, makes sense.”

Jim gently rested his baby girl in her crib, making sure she was positioned on her back. To his chagrin, she began fussing almost immediately.

“Maybe you should give her a blanket?” Seb suggested. “She might find comfort in something warm and soft.”

“I’d love to, but the nurses at the hospital warned me not to let them sleep with a blanket until they’re a year old.”

Moran arched a brow. “Why not?”

“Apparently, it increases the risk of suffocation,” he explained. “I felt like a right idiot. I’d knitted all those blankets, only to learn I couldn’t use them.”
“Perhaps you still can, in a manner.”

“How’s that?”

“Swaddle her with one of them. I’m certain that much is allowed— I was present when they gave us a demonstration.”

He considered the prospect. “That might work.”

The mastermind retrieved a pale pink blanket from the armoire and laid it on the changing table. “We’re going to try something different, sweetie,” he said to his daughter, scooping her up so he could administer the swaddling.

While Jim tackled that matter, Sebastian was occupied by Eddie. The boy was in awe of his surroundings, gazing at a brand new world. Everything enthralled the child, from the ornately carved furniture to the floral decals adorning the walls.

“Our Daddy put a lot of effort into decorating this place,” Moran noted. “I was impressed the first time I saw it, too. I’d show you the playroom as well, but I’m afraid it would overstimulate you right now.”

Eddie grunted, as if voicing his opinion.

“I can’t tell if you’re disagreeing with me or not. Either way, it’s incredibly cute.”

The baby grumbled again, this time looking his Papa in the eye.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d swear you were communicating with me.”

Jim glanced over at his husband and son. “He is, Tiger.”

“I don’t think that’s possible. He’s too young to comprehend what we’re saying.”

“And yet somehow he quite clearly responds to us during conversations. I didn’t believe it right away, either, but it seems like more than coincidence.”

Seb was dumbstruck. Could it be true? The claim was too far-fetched to entertain. However…

“Magpie? Permit me to make a hypothesis.”

Moriarty cocked his head curiously. “A hypothesis? Please, do tell.”

“Supposing Eddie was exceptionally gifted, he might recognize the nuances of speech pattern and react accordingly based on observational cues. So perhaps that’s what’s going on— it’s not that he truly grasps the content of our language, but rather the way in which we say things.”

The Irishman wasn’t convinced. “There may be some merit to your theory, but it doesn’t fully explain the experiences I’ve had with our children. I talked to them before they were born. I’d speak and they would respond. I’m not sure one can ‘observe cues’ in utero.”

“They might, if they were geniuses listening to your intonations and inflections even then. But I digress. It’s merely an idea. At the end of the day, who really knows?”

“I do, Sebastian. Trust me on this. The twins absolutely are budding savants,” he stressed. “But I also share a deep connection with them, and can state without a shadow of a doubt that they understand me perfectly. It’s innate.”
Seb was silent for a moment, processing his mate’s candid admission. He never thought a man as pragmatic as James Moriarty would think with his heart instead of his head, but here they were. Strangely enough, he found it endearing.

The quiet that came over the room alerted the couple to their children’s calm. It appeared both babies had drifted to dreamland while Jim and Seb were engaged in debate. Essie snoozed on the changing table and Eddie was conked out right there in the assassin’s arms.

“Look at them, Tiger. They’re spectacular.”

“They sure are.”

Moran carefully placed young Edward into his crib and Moriarty did the same with Estella. For a few minutes, they stood watch over their cubs, feeling intensely protective of them.

“Sebby?”

“Yes?”

“When they wake, let’s bring them to the playroom. I’m eager to fire up the carousel.”

“Sounds like fun,” the blonde remarked. He reached to clasp his omega’s hand, giving him a supportive squeeze.

London’s most dangerous men grinned in tandem, happier than they’d been in a very long time. It was joy well-earned.

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to indulge in a bit more fluff before resuming with the drama. Bringing the babies home seemed like a perfect opportunity for that.

P.S. -- I wish I was a better artist so that I could illustrate a picture of the twins. I envision them as being ridiculously cute ;-)
A Family Affair

Chapter Summary

Domestic duties and investigation abound.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hello?” Sebastian called out upon entering his home. He’d just returned from headquarters and had a surprise for Jim. Thanks to the handiwork of a hacker in their employ, he was able to acquire the security camera recording from the night of Moriarty’s ‘accident.’ He figured they could review the footage together and see what, if any, information there was to glean.

The sniper received no reply. He did, however, observe sounds emanating from another room. Deciding to follow the noise, he quickly realized that what he heard was laughter in the kitchen.

Moran peeked through the doorway, and what he saw was truly inexplicable. The twins were sat in their highchairs while Jim crouched below the table with a googly-eyed, black and white spotted sockpuppet on his hand.

“Bonjour, mes chéres!” the puppet ‘spoke’ in an affected French accent. “It is I, Monsieur Moo, bovine extraordinaire! It’s come to my attention that the two of you are the most adoooorable bébés in all of Europe. No, no…the most adorable in the whole wiiiiide world!”

Essie and Eddie giggled uproariously at their Daddy ‘talking’ through his hand and using a silly voice. At their age, it didn’t take much to induce amusement.

“Bonjour to you, too,” Seb said, making his presence known.

The consulting criminal swiftly stood up, trying to play it cool, but blushing slightly. “Welcome back, dear. I didn’t hear you come in.”

He grinned. “Obviously.”

“I was just indulging the babies a bit. The interactivity is good for them.”

“I’m sure it is, Monsieur Moo.”

Moriarty’s slight blush turned to a deep crimson at his mate’s remark. “Alliteration is easier for a child to remember.”
“I bet.”

For all his teasing, Sebastian was actually delighted to see Jim and their cubs having a fun time. Plus, it seemed educational as well—they were being exposed to a smattering of foreign language words.

“Would you care to join us for a rousing installment of ‘Barnyard Theater?’”

The assassin chuckled. “Is that what you’re calling it?”

“Indeed. Now let me think for a second. You could be…Colonel Clucker, expert avian authority.”

Seb stared at his mate in disbelief. “Colonel Clucker? Are you kidding me?”

“What’s the problem? It fits the farm animal theme and rolls off the tongue quite nicely.”

“Clucker implies ‘hen.’ A hen is a female, Jim. I’d be a rooster.”

“Well, duh. I’m aware of the difference,” he scoffed. “But it doesn’t hold the same alliterative appeal.”

Moran rolled his eyes. “You and your damned alliteration.”

“Hey,” the genius objected, “you had no issue with it when I wanted to give the babies names that started with the same letter.”

“Because the names you came up with for them were a far sight better than ‘Colonel Clucker.’”

“Of course they were. I had a lifetime to think of what I’d call my children, and only ten seconds to brainstorm your barnyard character.”

There was a silence following Moriarty’s statement. He averted his gaze downward, almost as if embarrassed by what he’d admitted.

Seb closed in on him, and to Jim’s credit, he didn’t back away. But he wouldn’t meet his husband in the eye, either.

“Kitten…”

“Don’t.”

“Honey, please.” Moran placed a hand on the smaller man’s shoulder. “This is a silly thing to argue about. I’m sorry I complained. ‘Colonel Clucker’ is actually rather cute.”

“It’s daft.”

“No, the more I say it, the more it grows on me.” He paused, pondering the curious part of Jim’s declaration. “So you had the twins’ names picked out for a pretty long time, huh?”

The Irishman finally looked up again. “Is that such a surprise?”

“Honestly? Yeah, it is. I was under the impression you never wanted children until recently.”

“I…it’s…” he trailed off wistfully. “You’re not wrong. For most of my adult life, kids weren’t even a blip on my radar. But…”
“But what?”

“When I was little, I used to imagine it. I had a stuffed dolly I would pretend was my ‘baby.’ I’d dress her up and carry her around everywhere I went.”

Sebastian smiled at the mental image. “Oh, Magpie, that’s very sweet.”

“Yes, well, what happened to her wasn’t especially sweet,” he lamented. “My first week at the orphanage, one of the older boys stole her from me the night I was assigned to do chores. He stomped her, gutted her, and left the remains on my bed.”

“Jesus Christ,” Moran gasped. It never failed to amaze him how Jim’s stories could go from heartwarming to horrifying in zero seconds flat. No wonder the man was so messed up.

“Funny, that’s what he said when I stabbed him in the eye socket. Though to be accurate, he uttered it immediately prior to the gouging. Afterward, it was really just a jumble of incoherent screams.”

“Wow. I’m sorry, love.”

“That makes two of us.”

The duo’s attention was soon usurped by the unmistakable sound of retching. They turned and saw that Eddie had spit up all over himself.

“Oh no, my poor darling.” Jim rushed to his son’s aid, wiping his mouth clean with a warm washcloth. Fortunately, the child wore a bib which had shielded his clothing from the mess. Moriarty removed the covering and scooped the infant into his arms, rocking him gently.

“Is he okay?”

“I should think so. I fed them about a half hour ago, hence the bibs. I burped them as usual, but I believe Eddie may have eaten a bit too much,” the consulting criminal explained. “This is my fault. He looked so satisfied while he was suckling, I didn’t have the heart to take the bottle away from him.”

“Don’t blame yourself, dear. These things happen,” Seb reassured.

“Perhaps, but they ought not.” He leaned down and kissed Eddie atop the mop of his blonde hair. “I’m sorry, sweetie. I won’t let it happen again.”

The tiny tot gurgled, his expression weary. Throwing up had sapped a lot of energy from him.

“It’ll be all right, I promise,” Jim said apologetically. “Tonight, after bath time, Daddy will dress you in your favorite jammies and sing you a song.”

“Maybe we could do it together,” Moran suggested.

“I’d like that.”

Essie began to grouse, and it became clear both babies were in need of a diaper change and a nap.

“Tiger? If you’d care to pitch in right now, I wouldn’t refuse the help.”

“Certainly, I’ll assist.” These were his children, too. It was only fair he lend a hand. “And Jimmy? I’ve got a surprise for you once we’re done.”
“Ooh, a surprise? How intriguing.”

“I think you’ll appreciate it.”

“Then let’s not dally. Come,” he commanded, heading for the door. “Grab Essie, and it’s off to the nursery. We have poppets to pamper.”

The sniper made a conscious effort not to roll his eyes. Moriarty was again going a tad overboard with the alliteration, but now was not the time to harp on it. Instead, he simply nodded and followed Jim’s lead.

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It took longer than expected to settle Edward and Estella down. The former was still somewhat rattled by an upset tummy, while the latter was showing signs of mild nappy rash. Moriarty initially went into panic mode, but remembered that he had the twins’ pediatrician on speed dial. The doctor was, thankfully, able to talk him through the situation.

“Try to relax, kitten. Our little ones are fine. They have normal baby issues. It’s nothing to be alarmed by.”

“Relaxation is easier said than done.” He paused for a beat. “Seb? Where’s the surprise you mentioned?”

“Glad you asked.” Moran pulled a USB stick from his pocket. “Fancy a guess as to what’s on this flash drive?”

“I’m not in the mood for games. Just tell me.”

“If you insist. What I’ve got here is security footage from the evening of your ‘accident’ at the theater. I haven’t watched it yet myself. I thought you might want to be present for the viewing.”

“You’re correct, I dooo.” Jim had intended to get a hold of the surveillance recordings himself, but he’d been too busy taking care of their children to tackle it.

“I’ll fetch your laptop.”

Seb retrieved the item from his mate’s office, bringing it to where they now sat in the living room. The stick was inserted into the computer port and a downloaded file appeared on screen. Without delay, they clicked to play the footage.

Eight hours. There were eight continuous hours of video to sift through. Mercifully, there was also a fast-forward option. They skipped ahead until reaching the timestamp of the incident, pausing to confirm that they were at the correct point.

“There we are, exiting the auditorium to go downstairs,” Moriarty noted. The quality of the recording wasn’t great, but he could at least identify him and his partner amid the crowd.

“Yes, this is it.”

The men were on the edge of their seats, anxious to resume playback.

So far, everything lined up with how Jim remembered it. He’d gotten Sebastian to go find his forgotten scarf while he waited on the stairs. Then he saw himself attempting to take a photo of the building’s architecture, only to be thwarted by a horde of patrons blocking his path. And finally, all
of it led up to that one fateful moment. In a matter of seconds, he went from standing off to the side and minding his own business, to somersaulting down a significant stretch of steps. It looked as painful as it felt.

They rewound the footage several times to study exactly what had happened. Surveillance showed another group of people brushing past Jim, and from that bunch, one individual trailed behind. It was this person who surreptitiously extended a gloved hand and administered the shove that sent him tumbling.

Due to the lackluster camera resolution, it was difficult to conclusively ID the perpetrator, but they did seem to be female. They sported dark glasses and a pullover hat, likely meant to obscure their appearance. Once the deed was done, the woman escaped by blending in with the crowd.

London’s most dangerous duo exchanged a sobering glance. A singular thought was going through both their minds, though neither wanted to say it.

At last, the Irishman found his voice. “You think that was Annie, don’t you?”

“I doubt it would be anyone else.”

“How do you suppose she knew we’d be at the theater?”

“Good question. My best guess is that she and Colin must’ve found a way to keep tabs on us without actually accessing our property. Perhaps they’ve set up a stakeout somewhere nearby.”

Jim sighed heavily. “So now what?”

“We remain vigilant.”

“Vigilance didn’t prevent this. We need to do better.”

“Okay, fair enough. What do you propose?”

“I…I don’t know.” What more was there? Their home was already guarded tighter than Fort Knox. Hell, they had actual mercenaries surrounding the estate, ready to dispatch intruders on sight. It didn’t get much secure than that.

“I have an idea, but I suspect you’ll hate it.”

“Go on.” Moriarty was open to anything at this point.

“Clearly, our welfare is at risk in public places. I suggest we hire a security detail to follow us whenever we venture off our own property.”

“Constant bodyguards, then?”

“Yes, basically.”

The omega was at a loss for words. His spouse was right—he did hate the idea.

“It’s a shitty solution,” Seb acknowledged, “but can you recommend an alternative course of action?”

No, Jim couldn’t, and the reality of that was frustrating as fuck. He relished his freedom and autonomy; his ability to go where he wanted, when he wanted. If he agreed to be tracked at all times, he would essentially be giving that up—surrendering, in a sense.
The more he thought about it, the more absurd it seemed. What if he felt like running out in the middle of the night for a pint of ice cream or a bag of crisps? Was it justified to assign bodyguards during such trivial errands? And even if security stayed out of view, he’d know they were there; know that he was being spied upon virtually every moment of the day.

“Say something, Magpie.” Seb didn’t like it when Jim was this quiet. It rarely signaled anything good.

“I say ‘no.’”

“Jimmy, please. Take a minute to really consider this.”

“I have.”

“Then you realize that whenever we leave this house, our safety is compromised? By default, that includes our children’s safety as well. Can you go on, knowing they’re in potential danger? Because I can’t do it, Jim. The very notion sends me reeling.”

Hurt flashed within the depths of Moriarty’s dark eyes. “How could you ask me that? Of course I want them to be safe.”

“Then we must undertake certain precautions,” the assassin stressed. “Yes, being chaperoned sucks. But if it helps protect Essie and Eddie, it’s a worthy sacrifice.”

Sebastian made a compelling argument, one that the mastermind couldn’t deny. Life no longer revolved solely around himself. The babies were more important.

“You’re right,” he conceded. “This is bigger than the both of us.”

“So you’ll consent to additional security detail?”

“Yeah.” He hesitated, wanting to further clarify his stance. “Be aware that I still intend to seek retribution against our stalkers. I swore I’d go after them once the twins were born and I meant it. But our darlings are only two weeks old and require constant care. Until I feel that the time is right to strike, bodyguards will be our recourse.”

“I think that’s a wise decision, my love.” Jim wasn’t haphazardly rushing into a perilous situation — this was progress, for sure.

WAAAH. WAAAAAH.

The baby monitor blared, giving Moran and Moriarty a sudden jolt.

“Oh dear, we’d best check on them,” the consulting criminal declared as he rose to his feet. “Be prepared— they may require swaddling and songs.”

“Understood.”

Though Seb was no stranger to caring for his children, he had to admit that Jim tended to them on a steadier basis. If anyone knew how to soothe them, it was him. Perhaps, the sniper thought, I can watch and learn.
This chapter started out one way and metamorphosed into something else as I was writing it.

Approximate translation of what Jim says to the babies in French:

“Bonjour, mes chéres!” = "Hello, my dears!"
Chapter Summary

Jim, Sebastian, and the twins attend their first social function as a family.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Sebbby!” Jim beckoned from the nursery. “Hurry up! I don’t know how much longer they’ll keep smiling!”

The sniper entered the room bearing a professional-grade camera. He was wearing semi-formal attire in accordance with the party he and Moriarty were scheduled to attend. “Relax, honey. I’m here.”

“And not a moment too soon. Snap a photo— this is going in the twins’ album.”

As Sebastian prepared to take the picture, he was struck by how lovely his children looked. Eddie wore a stylish grey suit, complete with a miniature clip-on necktie and loafers. Not to be outdone, Essie was decked out in a frilly lavender dress with an adorable floral headband and Mary Jane shoes. The twosome was perfect, resembling porcelain dolls brought to life.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

Moran made sure to get multiple shots so they could choose the best of the bunch.

“Thank you, darling. I can’t wait to see how the photographs turn out when the film is developed.”

“It’s my pleasure. You’ve selected excellent ensembles for our little ones.”

The consulting criminal smiled. “Do you really think so? This will be their first social engagement and I hope to make a good impression.”

“I’m certain they’ll ‘wow’ the crowd,” Seb affirmed. “Never have infants been so chic as ours.” At that, he pulled his partner close and delivered an unexpected kiss on the lips. “I’ve got beautiful babies and a ravishingly handsome husband. Someone pinch me, because I must be dreaming.”

“You’re a sentimental fool, my dear.”

“And you love it.”
“I doooooo.”

Sebastian flashed a sharky grin. “Let’s take a group shot. All of us, as a family.”

Now Jim’s expression rivaled his mate’s. *Family.* It was funny how a concept once so foreign to him had come to mean everything. He was living proof that impossible dreams could be made real when one needed them most.

The couple assembled with their children, and thanks to Seb’s long limbs, they were able to snap a fine selfie.

“That was wonderful. I know I’ll be framing it,” Moriarty declared. He paused, quickly glimpsing the time on his watch. “I hate to end this moment, but we should start loading the car. I promised Jack I’d arrive early to help him set up for the party. Plus, Reggie wants to meet the babies.”

The former colonel looked intently at his cubs. “You hear that, kiddos? You’re famous.”

“Of course they are. Any child of ours ought to be.” Humble, the mastermind was not.

“Naturally,” Seb said with a wink. “Anyway, sure, I’ll carry whatever you’d like to the car.”

“It’s kind of a lot,” he warned. “We’ll probably need to make several trips back and forth.”

“I am your indomitable pack mule. Weigh me down as you wish.”

Moran’s offer was soon put to the test. Jim had him haul two fully stocked diaper bags, a double stroller, swaddling blankets, bottles and formula, pacifiers, plush toys, a first aid kit, and last but not least, Reggie’s birthday present.

After all the items were moved, the next matter of business was safely transporting the twins. They were secured in their car seats, but Moriarty could not abide the idea of them being alone in the back while he was up front with Seb. His solution was to change position so that he sat between his angels in the rear of the vehicle.

Now the only thing left to do was locate Jack’s house. Thank god for GPS.

When the couple pulled up to the Norridge residence, they were immediately captivated by the vastness of the property. The home itself was massive and appeared to be very old— probably passed down through generations, Jim supposed. The surrounding acreage contained playing courts for tennis, croquet, and golf. There was also a hedge maze and greenhouse on site.

Sebastian stepped out of his Mercedes and whistled. “Damn, kitten, you’ve got some fancy friends.”

“Apparently.” No wonder Ian and Scott had felt too out of place to come. This was an estate fit for royalty.

“How is it that Jack needs you to help him set things up? From the looks of it, he could afford to hire a whole fleet of assistants.”

“Honestly, I think it’s because he wants someone around to talk to. He feels comfortable with me due to our dealings in the MOPS group.”
“Fair enough,” the assassin shrugged. “Shall we unload the car ourselves or see if they’ve got staff assigned to such menial tasks?” He was joking, but within seconds, uniformed servants were sent out to greet them and usher their belongings inside. Neither man complained, as it allowed them to focus on tending to the babies.

They entered the opulent home and were treated to the sight of celebratory decorations hanging wall-to-wall in the living room. Banners, streamers, and balloons filled the space, along with several large folding tables surely meant to hold a myriad of food and drink.

“Hello!” a voice called out. It was Jack. “Glad the two of you could make it!” he welcomed. “Please, let me take your coats.”

Jim and Seb shed their winter wear, removing the twins’ tiny Burberry jackets as well. They handed them over and watched their host summon a butler to hang the items in the cloakroom.

“Wow,” he remarked, seeing the duo dressed up, “the two of you are dashing as the day is long. I’m not used to this.”

Moriarty laughed. “It’s funny you should say that, because once upon a time, practically all I wore were suits.”

“Sounds like my husband. I swear Gary’s singlehandedly responsible for keeping Armani in business.” The man paused, a grin eclipsing his face as he noticed Essie and Eddie’s outfits. “Oh, I do believe we’ve discovered the absolute loveliest newborns in London. I haven’t seen babies this sophisticated since Reginald.”

“Thank you. How is the birthday boy?” Jim inquired.

“He’s been quite…exuberant. Woke me up at dawn, thrilled to death about his party. Then he was running all over the damn place this morning. Finally tuckered himself out an hour ago, and I was able to put him down for a nap. It’ll be good for him to get some rest before the festivities begin.”

“Right. So what’s the plan for today? Truth be told, I’ve never been to a children’s soiree.”

“For starters, I wouldn’t advise that you form your opinion of them based on what you see here,” he cautioned. “This is going to be more of an ‘all ages’ affair than something strictly geared towards children. However,” he noted, “that’s not to say there won’t be whimsical elements infused into the proceedings. Cake and ice cream will be served, along with a few other foods kids love. Then, of course, presents will be opened. I also wanted to include classic games like ‘Pin the Tail on the Donkey’ and ‘Musical Chairs,’ but Gary pointed out that Reg and his playmates are still too young for such activities. My little man is so mature for his age, I sometimes forget he’s only turning two.”

“Hey,” Sebastian interjected. “I don’t mean to butt in, but Essie’s getting restless here in my arms. I think she’d prefer to be sat down. Perhaps we should transfer the twins to the stroller?”

“Good idea,” Jim agreed.

“If you’d like, I could handle them while you and Jack catch up.”

“Certainly, if you’re confident you can manage on your own.”

“We’ll be fine, won’t we, Essie?”

The infant squirmed slightly, her huge emerald eyes fixed on the sniper’s face.
“Okay,” Moriarty spoke, carefully passing Eddie over to Seb. Before his spouse could situate the babies in their side-by-side carriage, he made sure to have a word with his darlings. “I expect both of you to be good for your Papa. If you need anything, we’re here. And know that later on, you’ll meet lots of new people. You ought not be shy or afraid,” he assured. “We wouldn’t introduce you to just anyone. You’ll be safe.” The genius then leaned in, kissing each of their chubby cheeks as they cooed contentedly. “Daddy loves you.”

Moran smiled warmly at the show of affection. Jim was so gentle with their children, it was difficult to believe that this was the same man who led one of the most powerful criminal empires in Europe—maybe even the world. They brought out something beautiful in him that few would ever be privy to.

“Come on,” Jack implored. “Follow me to the kitchen and I’ll give you a preview of what’s on the menu.”

The mastermind took one last look at his family before turning to walk away. He was anxious about leaving the babies behind, though he tried to play it cool. Intellectually, he knew they were in good hands with their father. Emotionally, it was a different story. He’d only ever left their side while in the hospital, and later, in the haven of their heavily-guarded home. Now they were on someone else’s turf and all bets were off.

Don’t be an idiot, he chastised himself. You’re better than this. Smarter. Tougher. Nothing gets to you. It was a mantra he repeated, but in his heart, he knew it wasn’t true. Not anymore.

“Tah dah!” Jack jauntily announced. “Doesn’t it look delicious?” he asked, referring to the numerous food trays lining the countertops.

Moriarty offered no reply, lost in a fog of nervous thought.

“Hello? Earth to Jim?”

“Huh?” he absently muttered.

“I was wondering what you thought of the food waiting to be served. However, now I’m more concerned as to your presence of mind. Where did you go for a minute there?”

“I, uh…sorry. I’m just worried about my children. I get worked up when they’re not in my sight and there’s no baby monitor to hear them. It’s silly, really.”

“Nah, not silly at all. I get it.”

“You do?”

“Totally. We have an instinct to protect our young. Sometimes it can be overwhelming. Hell, that’s the main reason why I have such a hard time finding babysitters for Reggie. I have difficulty entrusting him with anyone other than myself.”

“I hate this feeling. When does it stop?”

“I don’t know. Hasn’t so far for me,” he lamented. “If it’s any conciliation, I think we’ve hit upon another compelling reason to launch a male omega parenting group. It would give us a sounding
“Yeah,” Jim solemnly spoke. “In the meantime, it does nothing to help me right now.”

Jack sighed. “Hey, this is a party. Or it will be, in about an hour. I refuse to let any guest of mine sulk at a Norridge event. So buck up and look on the bright side—you’ll soon be socializing with some very exciting individuals, while also having your little ones nearby. It’s a win-win situation.”

“I guess so,” he said. The Irishman wanted to focus on the positive, but was galled by emotions he couldn’t seem to control.

“I know so. How about we do something to get the ball rolling?”

“Like what?”

“Look around. We’ve got a veritable smorgasbord in front of us. I say we oversee it as it’s put on proper display.”

“Oversee? We’re not actually setting it out ourselves, then?”

“Oh, heavens no,” Jack answered with a chuckle. “We simply instruct the staff where we want items to be placed.”

Moriarty paused, a sly smile creeping across his face. *This could be fun.*

“By the way, there will also be an ‘Adults Only’ wine bar on the buffet. The contents come courtesy of my own private cellar. I can’t drink at the moment, but I can live vicariously through those who do.”

“I used to love wine,” the genius reminisced. “I was never one to say no to a good cabernet. Not until recently, that is.”

Jack grinned. “Well, you aren’t pregnant anymore. Might as well live a little.”

*Hmm. Maybe this is just what I need to take the edge off my nerves.*

“Show me your best vintage.”

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Stay tuned for Part 2, which will feature a tipsy Jim, a meeting between Reggie and the babies, and perhaps even a surprise guest! :-(
Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian engage in pre-party activities, most notably, showing off the babies.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Ooh, this is delicious!” Jim exclaimed. The buffet was officially set out and a tipsy Moriarty had taken it upon himself to sample a bit of everything before the guests arrived. “What do you call it again?”

“Raspberry-brie tarts,” Jack replied. “I detest the combination, but Gary likes it, so I added them to the menu.”

“Your husband has excellent taste.” Speaking of spouses, he turned to Sebastian, who sat beside him in the spacious living room where the party was assembled. “Darling, try this. You’ll loooove it.”

“I’ll not be putting that in my mouth, thank you very much.”

“Aww, honey, come on. Just a teeeensy bite.” The mastermind affected a pout, hoping it might hold some sway over his mate. No such luck.

“Not even if you paid me, dear. You know how much I hate soft cheese.”

“Spoilsport,” he quipped, taking another generous sip of cabernet. Other, more explicit methods of persuasion soon raced through his head, but this was neither the time nor place to explore them.

“Tell me,” Moran began, addressing their host, “will there be music at this gathering?”

“Yeah, I’ve put together a playlist for the occasion. It’s a mix of songs Gary and I enjoy.”

“Splendid,” Jim enthused. “Perhaps there’ll be something we can dance to. You should see Seb cut a rug. He’s got all the moves.”

“Is that so?”

“Oh, yes. My fella’s a regular Fred Astaire.”

The sniper flushed at his partner’s praise. “I wouldn’t go that far.”
“I would. Don’t sell yourself short.”

“Thank you, love. I appreciate the kind words.”

“I mean it, Tiger. You’re an amazing man. Maybe I don’t say that often enough, but it’s true.”

“Must be the wine talking now,” he teased.

Moriarty grinned. “Approximately 25% wine, 75% heart, give or take a few decimals.”

“Only you could distill sentiment into a calculable quantity.”

“I can’t help it. I’ve the mind of a mathematician.”

“And a madman, but who’s counting?”

“Aren’t they basically the same thing?” Jim said with a wink.

“My goodness,” Jack interjected. “Has anyone ever told the two of you that you’re disgustingly sweet? Just listening to your banter is giving me a toothache.”

“I’m sure I’ve disgusted many people through the years,” Seb glibly intoned. “Sweet is a new one, though.”

“I’m not sweet either,” Jim insisted.

“Actually, kitten, sometimes you are.”

The genius peered at his mate in annoyance. “Excuse me?”

“What you’re doing right now is a great example. When you’re irritated, your nose crinkles up in the loveliest way. It’s adorable. I’ve seen Essie do it, too. She gets it from you.”

Jim’s agitation faded at the mention of his daughter. “She does do that, doesn’t she?” he fondly mused. “Perhaps she has inherited a thing or two.” He glimpsed the twins, who were slumbering in their side-by-side stroller. The mere sight of them made him smile.

“MUMMA! MUMMA!” a tiny, but loud, voice suddenly shouted from the distance.

It was Reggie. Clad in Spiderman footie pajamas, the birthday boy barreled towards them at a breakneck speed.

“Mumma! Am here!” He eagerly hugged Jack’s leg and giggled.

“You certainly are, sweetheart. How was your nap?”

“Boooorwing. Nu wanna sweep! Wanna parwty!” At that, the precocious toddler did an impromptu dance consisting of a spin and a shuffle. All three men laughed heartily at the performance.

“Those are some fine moves you’ve got,” the sniper remarked.

“Fank you, mista. Nu wemember you name.”

“It’s Seb,” he said, sporting his trademark toothy grin.

“Fanks, Seb.”
Moran marveled at how well-spoken the child was. Would his and Jim’s kids be as articulate, he wondered? It was possible, considering the consulting criminal’s intellect.

Reggie’s expression lit up when he noticed the babies, who remained stone-cold asleep. Their ability to snooze through almost anything definitely came from their Papa’s side of the gene pool.

“Baybuhs!”

Jack placed a hand on his son’s shoulder, stopping him from charging up to the infants. “Hold on, honey. They need their rest.”

“Nuuuuu. Wake baybuhs, pwease?” He gazed at the trio with wide, hopeful eyes.

“Actually,” Moriarty spoke, “it’s been a few hours since their last nappy change. It would probably be okay to gently wake them, since they’re due for a diapering.”

“Are you sure, Jim? My little lad can be a bit pushy at times. It’s difficult to say ‘no’ to a face as cute as his.”

The mastermind chuckled. “It’s truly all right.” He paused, looking to his spouse. “You ready, Tiger?”

“Yeah, just tell me what you need me to do.”

“I’ve found that the most effective way to rouse our darlings is by picking them up and holding them in my arms.”

He nodded. “So you’d like me to hand them to you, then?”

“No. I want you to hold one while I hold the other. We’re doing this together, soldier.”

“Aye, sir,” Seb replied. He was about to ask which child he should take, when Jim answered the question by scooping up their daughter and leaving Eddie for him to bear.

“Hiieee,” the Irishman greeted. “How’s my princess?”

Essie gurgled softly, her delicate eyelids fluttering open. She squinted, adjusting to the light of the room before focusing on her Daddy’s face. Recognizing his features, scent, and voice, she cooed.

Now it was Moran’s turn. Lifting Edward into his embrace, the boy yawned groggily and let out a tiny grunt.

“Hello, dearest. I do hope you had a satisfying sleep.”

The assassin moved to wipe a small dab of drool from the corner of his son’s mouth. When he did, the infant latched onto his thumb, sucking intently.

“Wow, this is new.”

“It’s reflexive,” Jim stated. “He has an instinct to suckle.”

“Oh. That’s actually pretty cute.”

Eventually, Seb pulled his finger away and Eddie groused.

“Honey, I’m sorry, but I need my thumb back.”
Still, the baby was cross, flashing him a grumpy glare.

“Hey Magpie, he may have my smile, but he’s got your scowl down pat.”

Moriarty rolled his eyes. “Ha-ha, very funny. Instead of making wisecracks, why don’t you try rocking him?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I think it’s wonderful that you two take such a hands-on approach with your children,” Jack remarked. “My husband works long hours and isn’t home often enough to really pitch in.”

“Will he be present today?” Jim inquired. “I’m interested to finally meet him.”

“Gary’s finishing up a few odds and ends at the office. No worries, though, he’ll be here. He wouldn’t miss his son’s party.”

“Can pway wit’ baybhuh now?”

“Soon, sweetie. And you’ll have to be careful, because they’re too young for any roughhousing,” Jack explained.

“Otyay, mumma. Nu wanna huwt dem.”

After a few minutes of rocking and gentle interaction, the twins were both cognizant and calm. Jim and Sebastian returned to a sitting position with the babies in their laps.

“Come say hello,” the genius encouraged, smiling warmly at Reginald.

The toddler approached, his gaze darting back and forth between the newborns. “Which baybuh which?”

“This is Essie I’ve got here,” Jim clarified, “and that’s Eddie,” he indicated by nodding in Seb’s direction.

“Fanks.” He reached out and started petting Estella’s dark hair, mindful not to disturb her headband.

Moriarty was surprised at the child’s method of affection. It was reminiscent of the way one might stroke a—

“Dis how I pwayed wit’ Coco’s puppies,” he proudly announced.

Jack laughed. “Coco’s my sister-in-law’s dog,” the host informed his guests. “She had pups earlier this year and Reggie got to visit them before they were adopted out.”

“Oh, I see.” Jim turned his attention to the birthday boy once more. “Well, these little darlings are not the same as a dog. You can hold their hands or play peekaboo. They like having their feet peddled, too.”

“How ‘bout hugs?”

“Oh, yes. They adooooore hugs and snuggles. You’re welcome to give them some, so long as you don’t squeeze too tight.”

Reggie didn’t need to be told twice. He stood on his tiptoes to reach the consulting criminal’s lap.
His small arms wrapped around Estella while Jim made sure to support her head and neck.

“Baybuh smells good. Wike powda and…” he stopped, stuck on how to finish the sentence.

“Like powder and roses,” Moriarty said, completing the boy’s thought. “I’ve been using an all-natural botanical shampoo on both of them. It’s impressive that you could discern two separate scents.”

“Weggie smawt. Mumma says genius.”

“I think your mum is correct.” He glanced at Jack, and the two exchanged a knowing look. Jim knew full well the pitfalls of being young and brilliant, but perhaps with the guidance of his family, Reginald would fare better than he had.

Essie began kicking her legs playfully and locked eyes with the little boy.

“Wish you could tawk,” he lamented.

“She’ll learn to speak soon enough.” Moriarty was excited about the many milestones his children were due to achieve in the coming months, speech being among them.

“Essie nice,” the tot decreed.

“Yes, she is. You’ll get no argument from me.”

“Care to hug Eddie, too?” Sebastian asked. He didn’t want his son left out.

“Wuv to!”

Reggie moved on to the other twin, embracing Edward this time. The infant squealed happily in response.

“You wike dat? Yay!”

When he pulled away, Eddie outstretched an arm, as if trying to beckon him back. Reg reached for the newborn’s hand and gasped on contact.

“Baybuh skin sooo soft!”

The couple chuckled at the boy’s priceless reaction.

“Just think,” Jack began, “it won’t be long until we have a baby here at home that you can see all the time.”

“Can’t wait to pway wi—” He abruptly stopped in mid-sentence, spotting something from across the room. Or rather, someone. “DADDA!”

Reginald went running towards the finely dressed man who’d just walked through the front door. He giggled with delight as his father lifted him into his arms and kissed him on the forehead.

“Happy birthday, my dear.”

“Fank you, Dadda! Dis parwty fo’ me!” he exclaimed, beaming joyfully.

“That’s right, love. We’re celebrating you.”
Gary trekked over to the trio of men sitting in his living room, carrying Reggie along with him. When he met up with Jack, he gave him a peck on the cheek.

“You’ve done a magnificent job decorating the place, hon.”

“It was the least I could do. Our son deserves only the best.”

“Agreed.”

“Now that you’re here, I’d like to introduce you to some friends.”

“Splendid,” he replied. “Any friend of yours is a friend of mi—” The barrister’s expression dropped when he turned and got a good look at the duo. He hadn’t really paid attention to their faces until that moment.

An awkward silence settled upon them, and it was clear that Gary disapproved of Jack’s guests. Moriarty rose to his feet, undeterred. “It’s a pleasure to meet you. Your husband’s spoken very highly of you.”

“You’re the Jim from his MOPS group?” he asked incredulously.

“I am, yes.”

Gary’s eyes darted to Sebastian. “And you’re his partner?”

“Yes.”

The man was silent for a few seconds, processing the revelation. Never in a million years did he imagine that his omega would befriend the likes of James Moriarty and company.

“Is there a problem?” Jack prodded.

“To put it mildly.” There most certainly was a problem—a big one at that. As a Queen’s Counsel barrister, these men were diametrically opposite him on life’s spectrum. He was galled by their presence in his home and could not believe his spouse would fraternize with known criminals.

“If our being here bothers you that much, we can go,” the mastermind declared. “Ordinarily, I wouldn’t kowtow to anyone, but this is Reggie’s big day and I don’t want to ruin it for him by causing a row.”

“Yes, do that. Leave before the other partygoers arrive. You don’t have long—I saw a few cars pulling up to the driveway when I walked in.”

“Gary!” Jack objected. “I invited them. How dare you send them away!”

“Nu wan dem to go!” his toddler bleated, squirming to be put back down on the floor.

The man sighed heavily. He didn’t wish to engage in an argument at his son’s soiree either. “Fine. You can stay. But we’re having a conversation about this later, Jack.”

“Must we? I don’t think there’s a whole lot to say.”

“Oh, trust me, there’s plenty to discuss.”

Jack scowled bitterly. There’d be a squabble later, but for now, both of them would set their
feelings aside for Reginald’s sake.

With tensions running high, Jim said nothing more to Gary, instead addressing Seb. “Give me Eddie. I’ll take the babies for their nappy change.”

“The nursery’s down the hall and to the left,” Jack was quick to inform. “You can use the changing table in there.”

“Thanks.” At that, he ventured off with his darlings.

Once Moriarty was gone, Sebastian stared daggers at his host’s husband. He wanted to eviscerate the son of a bitch for treating them so rudely, but he refused to stir up drama at what was intended to be a happy event. Didn’t mean he couldn’t envision beating the shite out of him, though.

DING-DONG.

The doorbell chimed and Jack went to greet the first wave of guests. While he dealt with the sudden influx of attendees, Gary took their pajama-clad son to get properly dressed. Reggie appeared unfazed by the newfound friction surrounding him, skipping merrily alongside his father.

Seb decided to make himself useful and assist Jim with the twins. He got about halfway down the hall when he realized that he hadn’t seen the Irishman bring either of the diaper bags with him. He’d left in a huff, simply storming from the room without much forethought.

*I’d better go back for them.*

As he neared the area where the party was being held, he froze at the sound of a familiar voice. It belonged to someone he hadn’t encountered in years and had hoped never to see again.

*It can’t be. Lots of people have similar voices, right? Right.*

Hedging his bets, the sniper surreptitiously peered into the living room from the doorway. To his dismay, he saw that his first assumption was correct— this was indeed the man he’d prayed it not be. A rush of emotions coursed through him, threatening calamity.

*How the hell am I going to tell Jim that Mycroft Holmes is a guest at this party?*

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Reggie had too many lines for me to provide a "baby talk" translation this time. If anyone is confused by a specific piece of dialogue, just let me know and I'll clarify it.

Also, I may have gone a little overboard with the toddler speech. I apologize if it's annoying to anyone. I'll try to cut back on it in the future.
Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian encounter a mixed bag of events at the party.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sebastian’s day was in rapid decline. First, he and Jim were in attendance at a party where their host’s husband had expressed outright disdain towards them. Next, the sniper discovered that an old adversary, Mycroft Holmes, was present at the very same soiree. And now, he faced the unenviable task of breaking the news to Moriarty.

On top of all that, he still had to retrieve the twins’ diaper bags from the living room without being seen by his enemy. Thankfully, Seb possessed expert stealth and could pull it off if he kept his wits about him.

The former colonel continued to peek out from the doorway, readying to make a move. When he saw the eldest Holmes sibling turn his back to chat with someone, he sprang into action. Rarely had Moran maneuvered as fast as he did in that moment. Inside the span of a few seconds, he was able to dart out, grab the necessary items, and return to the seclusion of the hall.

On his trek to the nursery, he thought about how he’d tell Jim that Mycroft was at hand. There was no way to put a positive spin on the situation. Given this new information, it was possible the mastermind might want to leave. If so, that was fine by Seb— he’d support whatever decision his mate made.

Finally, Moran reached his target destination. He entered the room and was startled at what he found. It wasn’t too unusual to see Jim in a rocking chair, cradling both babies. The worrying part was that this time, he had tears in his eyes while doing so.

“Kitten? Are you okay?”

“Bloody hell,” he muttered, averting Seb’s gaze. “You weren’t supposed to see me like this.”

The blonde approached his sullen spouse, setting the diaper bags in front of him and placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. “You left these behind. I thought I’d bring them over.”

“Thank you.”
My poor Magpie. He feels bad enough already. How can I deliver news that will only make things worse?

“Shall I help you with our little ones?” Seb gently inquired.

“Sure.”

Moriarty stood up and laid the twins on the changing table. He then dug into the bags and took out the needed supplies. Together, they tended to their children in silence.

The quiet surrounding them was broken when music from the party began to play. It was a pop tune from the ‘80s that Seb was certain Jim loved. Even so, it garnered no response from him now.

“Honey, I’m sorry Jack’s husband was such a twat. Just say the word and I’ll knock his teeth out. He’ll be taking meals through a straw when I’m done with him.”

“Tempting,” the genius remarked, “but I can’t do that to Reggie. You saw how much he adores his father. If we hurt Gary, we hurt him too.”

Sebastian sighed, knowing Jim was right. It wouldn’t be fair to the boy, especially on his birthday. Still, he despised feeling so completely ineffectual. When someone aggrieved his omega, he wanted to strike back. Nay, he wanted to destroy.

“I don’t know why this is bothering me,” Moriarty admitted. “Maybe it’s postpartum hormones at work.”

“Could be,” Moran mused. “Or perhaps it’s because you actually consider Jack a friend and hoped you’d get along with his partner.”

“Either way, I shouldn’t have expected anything. Ordinary people are always a disappointment.”

He hesitated, staring down at his precious progeny. Essie and Eddie were freshened up and ready to mingle. “We’d best head back so the babies can make their debut.”

Shite. Seb had to say something now. No way could he allow Jim to walk into that party unawares.

“Magpie, wait. Are you sure this is a good idea?”

“Well, I don’t much care to see Gary, but there are other guests worth sticking around for.”

“Oh?”

“Yes. Jack informed me that the headmaster of a very prestigious private school would be attending today’s gathering. I thought I might lay the foundation for our darlings to gain favor with him.”

“Ah, interesting.” Too bad Jack didn’t provide a full list of invitees.

“I’ll take Edward, you take Estella,” he instructed. “I do wish I’d brought the sling carrier,” he lamented aloud. “No matter, we can simply wheel them around in the stroller. It will be divine. Who could resist smiles like theirs?” Indeed, the babies were beaming at him as he spoke.

“They’re so happy, Seb.” Moriarty paused as a new resolve washed over him. “Screw Gary and his self-righteous attitude. We’ll show off our sweethearts with impunity. Rub his nose in it. Come on.”
“Jimmy, let’s not rush.”

“The party’s started. I see no reason to dawdle.”

You would if you knew who was out there. “Hon, please wait a second.”

“Why?” The consulting criminal was getting impatient. “Our children are good to go and so am I.”

“I need to talk to you first.”

He arched a brow. “About what?”

Sebastian inhaled sharply, steeling himself for the hell that was sure to follow. “About the party. More specifically, one of the guests.”

“Go on, I’m listening.”

“After you left, people began to arrive. I was headed to assist you when I recognized a voice coming from the living room.”

Jim’s face crinkled in confusion. “Whose voice? Where are you going with this?”

It was now or never. Time to speak the truth and let the chips fall where they may.

“I peered out from the doorway and saw that it was Mycroft,” he blurted out. “Mycroft Holmes is here.”

The room went dead silent at Seb’s declaration, while music from the festivities could still be heard in the background. Moriarty was rendered utterly speechless.

“I’m as surprised as you are,” the sniper noted.

A million things raced through Jim’s mind. He wanted to lash out. Wanted to accuse his mate of lying to him. Wanted to do a great many things that would not actually help the situation, and were in fact manifestations of old, toxic habits he’d worked so hard to overcome. Instead, the Irishman hastily looked away, focusing on those beautiful babies who continued to gaze up at him from the changing table. His eyes connected with theirs, and in a flash, he felt a sense of calm.

“Let’s not waste another minute,” Jim said. He turned to face his better half once again. “We’ve schmoozing to do and impressions to make.”

Of all the reactions Moran might’ve expected, this was the absolute last. “Magpie, are you certain? We don’t have to go back out there. We could leave right now and it would be completely understandable.”

“Why should we deny our children their first real social engagement on account of a pompous arse like Mycroft?”

“Jimmy…he had you kidnapped and tortured.”

“Yes, I recall the incident quite vividly. What’s your point?”

“Aren’t you afraid that if he learns about the babies, he’ll do the same to them?”

Moriarty chuckled darkly. “Oh, my dearest Sebastian. Assuming everyone is as wicked as we are. It’s adooorable.” The madcap omega moved to stroke his partner’s cheek. “Mycroft is a bastard of
the highest order, but at the end of the day, he’s on the side of the angels.”

“Forgive me if I’m unconvinced. I put nothing past any member of the Holmes clan. The whole lot of them are trouble, and not the fun kind.”

“Tiger, he couldn’t touch our little ones even if he wanted to. Have you somehow forgotten the extensive security operation currently underway at our home? Or the bodyguards who trailed us here and are parked a mere block away, ready to intervene at the drop of a text?”

“Of course I haven’t forgotten,” the assassin was quick to retort. “I’m the one who brought in specialized help, after all. But even so—”

“No ‘buts,’ Sebby. There isn’t a person on this earth who’ll get to Essie and Eddie without our consent, Mycroft or otherwise. We won’t let them.”

Jim’s confidence proved inspiring. Seb found himself persuaded by his husband’s sentiments, taking to heart the notion that they wielded total protection of their children. As an alpha, all he ever wanted was the enduring safety of his omega and their kin.

“Oh,” Moran answered. “We’re in this together, as a family.”

“Always, my sweet.”

At that, the duo cradled their cubs close and exited the nursery. They strode through the hall, side-by-side, prepared to join the party with their heads held high.

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London’s most formidable men made a splash at young Reginald Norridge’s birthday bash. As the consulting criminal predicted, guests went gaga for the twins. Never had so many ‘awws’ been registered in the span of a single afternoon.

Among the highlights were Reggie’s playgroup, who fawned over the ‘baybuhs’ rather cutely; Marcus Chambers, headmaster of Pembridge Academy, who was impressed by the newborns’ responsiveness to direct speech and communication; and Lucinda North, a retired advertising mogul who tried to coax the couple into submitting Edward and Estella for modeling work. Naturally, they declined the suggestion, but it was flattering that an industry professional saw such potential in their progeny.

Meanwhile, Jim and Seb had no verbal contact with Mycroft so far. They definitely saw each other, though.

“I don’t like the way he looked at you,” Moran grumbled.

“You don’t like the way anyone looks at me.”

“Because you’re for my eyes only.”


“I’d rather it was whiskey.”

“Beggars can’t be choosers. Now drink up.”
The sniper did as directed, swallowing down the wine faster than he probably should’ve. “Now what?”

“Now, my love, we dance.”

Sebastian barely had a moment to process what was going on as Jim grasped him by the hand and dragged him out to the area of the room designated for dancing. He pulled the stroller along as well, parking it on the sidelines so he could keep an eye on their children.

The opening strands of ‘The Pina Colada Song’ began to play and Seb immediately balked. “Oh, hell no. I’m not dancing to this.”

“But you are, Sebby. You arrrrrrre.”

Moran struggled to suppress a laugh at the smaller man’s drawl. “Kitten, you sound like a bloody pirate.”

“Maybe I am, matey,” Moriarty teased. He nestled against the dashing blonde, and soon the pair was swaying in time to the music.

“I’d believe it. Pirates are well-known for pillaging and plundering. You fit the description nicely, seeing as how you stole my heart.”

The genius grew coy at his husband’s honeyed words. In his whole life, no one ever got to him the way Seb did. It was as if the assassin was part man and part creature of myth, able to accomplish the impossible.

“We should do this more often,” Moran remarked. “It feels good to hold you…have you melt in my arms.”

“Yes, it does.” His alpha’s embrace was a place of serenity and bliss; a paradise in which he could seek refuge from the ills of the world.

The duo remained on the dance floor for quite a while, savoring the simple joy of each other. Time almost seemed to stop as their bodies moved from melody to melody in a seamless fashion. It became more than just dancing— it was a celebration of love, life, and the ineffable bond between two broken souls who forged something beautiful when brought together.

Eventually, it was announced that after a short intermission, the cake would be cut and the presents opened. Jim and Seb seized the opportunity to break away from the crowd and tend to their personal needs— a trip to the loo and a step outside for some fresh air, respectively.

The temperature was crisp, but not overly cold when Moran ventured out. He took a deep breath, relieved to put distance between himself and the highfalutin partygoers inside. Though this may have been Jim’s kind of soiree, it certainly wasn’t Sebastian’s. Forget caviar and cabernet. What the former colonel preferred were bacon cheeseburgers and frothy beer. Still, if it made his spouse happy, he would oblige.

As he casually wandered the perimeter of the mansion, a familiar scent billowed through the breeze. Marlboro’s. Before Moriarty insisted he quit smoking, they were his brand of choice. It surprised him to think that any of today’s guests would indulge in such a frowned upon habit. Curious, he followed the smell.

He was getting closer. Closer. Closer.
No. This couldn’t be. And yet it was.

Mycroft Holmes was standing at the back of the house, taking a long, slow drag off a cigarette.

The man turned and looked right at him, his expression unreadable. “I’d offer you a smoke, but this is my last one.”

Sebastian stood in stunned silence.

“Not much of a conversationalist, aye? I suppose Moriarty keeps you around for less cerebral purposes.”

“Hey!” he objected. “Shut your mouth. You don’t know the first thing about us.”

“I’m aware of more than you’d ever dare dream.”

Moran clenched his fists as he tried not to fly into a rage. There was something about the Holmes siblings that was just so damned punchable.

“I admit, it’s a surprise to see the two of you at an event like this. Gary doesn’t typically abide the criminal element.”

“We’re guests of Jack’s,” Sebastian muttered through gritted teeth.

“Ah,” he said, exhaling a plume of smoke, “I might’ve guessed that much based on his current state of pregnancy and your new additions. He and Jim probably met at some function for expectant omegas, am I right?”

The sniper was unnerved by Mycroft’s accuracy, but refused to show any signs of intimidation. “That’s correct. Are you so desperate as to keep tabs on him these days?”

“Hardly. It was a deduction of logic and inference,” the eldest Holmes declared. “I’ve no need to track Moriarty. Rumors of his ‘condition’ were widely speculated for months, and I received confirmation that it was true ages ago.”

Received confirmation? How? From whom? Seb paused, a thought dawning on him. Sherlock. Fucking Sherlock must’ve ratted them out.

“By the way, those whelps of yours are fairly adorable. A quick word of advice, though—I wouldn’t attempt to deny their parentage. One look at the boy and it’s obvious who his father is.”

“I’d never deny my children,” Moran protested indignantly. “What kind of alpha do you take me for?”

“I mean no insult. Simply put, in your line of work, people often claim to be unattached. Personal relations are a liability one can’t afford.”

“‘My family isn’t a ‘liability,’ you prig.”

“Aren’t they? I think we both know the exacting toll of pressure points.”

“Fuck you.”

“Discourse clearly isn’t your strong suit,” he scoffed. “Perhaps it’s best you not even try.”
That did it. Mycroft’s condescending attitude was the last straw. The final piece necessary to unleash Sebastian’s unbridled hatred of all things Holmes. His fist swung fiercely, making contact with the man’s jaw. He landed a blow so potent, it knocked the cigarette from his mouth.

For a fleeting moment, the former colonel was invigorated. Soon, though, reality set in. Oh no. What have I done? Jim’s going to be mad as hell.

Panicked, Seb ran to his car. There was no way he could enter that house again, not after assaulting one of the Norridge’s guests. No matter how much of a grudge he had against Holmes, it didn’t excuse his behavior.

*I always find a way to fuck things up.*

***********

Following Moran’s violent indiscretion, he phoned Moriarty to explain what occurred. The Irishman was livid, but maintained an appearance of civility as he excused himself from the party, citing a private emergency, and conscripted Jack’s staff to haul their belongings to the Mercedes so they could depart early.

They began to drive home in awkward silence, with Jim sitting in the backseat with the twins. Though the genius said nothing, he was projecting anger in waves. Seb knew he needed to fix the situation somehow.

The assassin pulled over to the side of the road and shut off the engine. He and his mate were going to talk this out here and now.

“What are you doing?” Jim demanded.

“Parking, so that we can discuss what went down a little while ago.”

“Sebastian,” he sharply addressed, “the things I’d like to say to you should not be spoken in front of our children.”

“Please, hear me out.”

“Why should I, huh? You had one job today. One. Accompany me and the babies to a social event. I didn’t think that was such a tall order. Apparently, I gave you too much credit.”

The blonde sighed in frustration. “Yes, I screwed up. Mycroft pushed my buttons and I reacted badly. I admit it and I’m sorry.”

“Good, you ought to be. That man is an unbearable twat, but this was a child’s birthday party, for Christ’s sake. You didn’t see the heartbreak on Reggie’s face when he saw that I was leaving right as they were about to cut the cake. He actually cried, Seb. It was awful.”

Moran frowned. “I’d take it back if I could.” Guilt weighed heavily on him. Reggie was a very sweet boy and did not deserve to suffer because of his mistake.

“Me too, but unless you’ve somehow gained access to a time machine, it’s rather impossible.”

Seb contemplated the mess he’d made, wracking his brain to come up with a way to make amends. “Magpie, I’m willing to do whatever it takes to show you how regretful I am. I’ll do anything you want, without complaint.”
The consulting criminal peered intently at his partner. “Anything?”

“You name it.”

“ESPA Life.”

“Hmm?” He was confused as to what Jim meant.

“ESPA Life,” Moriarty repeated, sounding annoyed that Sebastian didn’t immediately understand him. “It’s a spa at the Corinthia hotel, among the best in London.”

“Okay. What about it?”

“I want to go there for an all-day treatment package. Sauna, massage, mud wrap— the works. You’ll watch the babies while I’m gone.”

“Sure, I’d be glad to. It’ll be nice to have some one-on-one time with our darlings.”

“There’s more.”

“Go on.”

“I also insist that you apologize to Jack and Reggie. Formally, not just via text message.”

He nodded. “I agree wholeheartedly. An apology is in order.”

“You’ll bring them a peace offering as well. Specifically, a box of confectioneries from Artisan du Chocolat.”

“I can do that, absolutely.”

Jim’s mouth upturned into a lopsided smirk. He had his husband wrapped around his finger and it was delicious. “Excellent. I’ll make the necessary arrangements when we get home.”

The couple resumed their commute, both feeling less burdened than before. Moriarty had been precise in his instructions and Seb would comply as best he could.

Chapter End Notes

I'm really sorry it took so long for me to get this installment done. I had a personal situation during the week that threw me off. I hope to return to a more normal schedule soon.

Also, I'd like to give a special shout-out to Tinemo, as the last part of the chapter was a direct result of a suggestion she made.
R, R, & R – Part 1: Rest, Relaxation, and Revenge

Chapter Summary

Jim goes to a spa while Sebastian prepares to watch the twins. Later, sinister alliances are made between mutually monstrous individuals.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Maybe this was a bad idea,” Jim said. He was in the nursery, staring at his beautiful babies while they napped.

“Nonsense, honey. You’ve been looking forward to your appointment all week. It’ll be great.”

The consulting criminal had booked a private suite at London’s premier ESPA Life spa, and convinced his protégé, Ian, to accompany him. It was intended to be something of an “Omega Relaxation Day.” The trouble was, it also meant leaving his children behind. Since their birth, he’d remained in fairly close proximity to them at all times. Today, though, they would be separated by a significant distance.

“It’s just…” he paused, watching as Essie smiled in her sleep. She was swaddled snugly in one of the blankets he’d knitted. “I haven’t even left and I miss them already. God, that sounds stupid when I say it out loud. I’m the one who wanted to go, and yet here I am, dragging my heels.”

Sebastian wrapped an arm around his anxious partner’s shoulders. “It’s not stupid in the least. You’re very devoted to them. But, my dear, it’s also important that you focus on yourself now and then.”

He let out a halfhearted chuckle. “Funny, the only one I used to focus on was myself. Now I’ve gotten flipped around and all I can think about are these two slumbering bundles of ours. I wake up, and my first thoughts are of them. I’m so excited to see their sweet, cheerful faces every morning,” he confessed. “We have a routine, the babies and me. I change them, feed them, and then we play— usually peekaboo or sock puppets. They giggle up a storm, and once they’ve tuckered out, they go down for a nap. After that, I wait.”

“Wait for what, kitten?”

“For whatever they need. If either one makes a peep, I’m at their side, ready to assist. Daddy’s always there.”
“I can do that, too. You don’t have to worry.”

“I know you can, and it’s good for the three of you to spend quality time together. Still, I find it difficult to walk away.”

“That’s understandable.” Omegas often formed deep attachments to their young. In this case, Jim was no different.

“I insist you keep me posted every hour, on the hour.”

“If that will ease your mind, okay. I’ll give you full reports throughout the day.”

“Photos as well.”

“Huh?”

“I want you to take their pictures along with the hourly updates. Make sure the flash is off— we mustn’t risk damaging their eyes.”

“You got it, hon.” Seb thought the genius was going a tad overboard, but again, if that’s what it took to placate him, so be it.

Moriarty glanced at his watch. He still wore the amethyst dial Rolex his mate had gifted him all those months ago. “Ian should be arriving soon. I already informed security that he was coming to give me a lift.”

“I’m sure you’ll have a splendid time.”

“Hope so.” He hesitated for a moment. “I want to say goodbye to our sugar plums. They might get scared when they wake up and I’m not here. I need to assure them I’ll return.”

Sebastian stifled a laugh. “Sugar plums? Really?”

“Yes. Now help me situate them. I want to hold both at once.”

The sniper complied, aiding in the twins’ safe transfer from their cribs to Jim’s arms. The switchover went surprisingly well, as little Edward and Estella reacted with minimal complaint. They grumbled slightly at first, but calmed when they recognized the Irishman.

“Hello, darlings. Sorry to disturb you, but I thought we should have a small chat.” The infants gazed up at him, their expressions groggy and serene. “My goodness, the two of you are looking cute. That’s going to make this even harder.” He took a breath, soldiering on. “Daddy’s going out with a friend and won’t be around much today. I promise I’ll be back by this evening. There’s no way I’d miss your bath and bedtime.”

“You’ll get to spend the day with me,” Seb chimed in.

“That’s right,” the mastermind affirmed. “You’re very lucky— your Papa is one of the coolest blokes in the world and you have the privilege of hanging out with him.”

Eddie snorted while Essie yawned. As responses go, they seemed rather unfazed.

“I do believe they’d prefer to be snoozing,” Moran observed.

“Perhaps. Growing babies need their rest.” Jim leaned down to give each of them a kiss. They were more receptive to this gesture than they were the conversation, cooing happily in reply. “You like
that, aye? My little cuddlebugs.” Encouraged, he pressed his forehead to theirs, rubbing noses affectionately.

Seb grinned with delight at the sweet sight of his family. The love shared between them was immensely rewarding.

BZZ. BZZ.

Moriarty’s phone buzzed.

“Tiger, I’m guessing that’s probably Ian. Reach your hand into my pocket and check.”

The assassin did as directed, and sure enough, it was the teen texting to say he was parked in front of the house.

“I’m afraid I must depart now, dearies. Behave for your Papa and try not to get too upset if he doesn’t do something quite the way I would. He means well.”

“Hey, give me some credit. I’m certain I’ll do as good a job as you.”

“Riiiiight.”

“It’s true.” He hadn’t initially viewed this as a competition, but his spouse’s words compelled him to prove himself.

“Let’s not quibble. My ride is waiting.”

The duo returned the twins to their cribs and Moriarty prepared to leave. Before he walked out the door, Sebastian stopped him.

“Magpie?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you for providing me an opportunity to bond with our children. You needn’t have any doubts— I intend to do my absolute best.”

“I’m sure you will. Just don’t forget those hourly updates.”

“Of course.” Without warning, he pressed his lips to Jim’s, snogging him soundly. “One for the road.”

The genius smiled. “We’re picking back up on that when I get home.”

“It’d be my pleasure.”

“Oh, it’ll be both our pleasures, trust me.” On that wanton note, he exited.

Moran grunted huskily. *Kitten loves to play.* His husband was such a tease sometimes, but he’d be lying if he said he didn’t relish every minute of it.

**********

“You actually got him to go back there the next day and apologize?” Ian asked, marveling at the story Jim told about Reggie’s birthday party and Seb’s all too eager fists.
“Yep. Complete with a box of gourmet chocolates as recompense.”

“That’s priceless.”

“Indeed, it was.”

The consulting criminal and his young friend were chatting it up after having received facials. They reclined alongside each other, lounging in robes while sporting mud masks on their skin and cucumber slices over their eyes.

“So how are you doing personally?” Moriarty prodded. “I feel like I’ve been so busy with the babies, I haven’t had time to properly talk to anyone.”

“I’m mostly okay. Been assembling a nursery at the loft.”

“Ooh, tell me more.”

“There’s not a whole lot to say. I’ve got the basics in place—a bassinet, changing table, and rocking chair. Nothing fancy, but I think the room’s coming together fine.”

“If you require decorating assistance, I’d be happy to help,” the Irishman stated. He always had an eye for interior design.

“Thanks. That’s a generous offer.”

There was a brief pause as Jim contemplated something. “Hey, Ian? You said you were ‘mostly’ happy.”

“Yeah.”

“It’s got me wondering, why aren’t you totally happy? What’s holding you back?”

The teen inhaled a sharp breath, tensing at the question. “It’s complicated.”

“Let me hear the problem and perhaps I can simplify it for you.”

“I’m not sure about that,” he timidly spoke.

“Try me and we’ll see.”

“Well…I…uh…it’s…”

“Ian, I’m making an honest attempt to be supportive here, but if you don’t spit out a real sentence soon, I may have to administer a swift kick to your shin.”

He sighed heavily. “I think I’m being watched.”

Moriarty was momentarily speechless, taken aback by the declaration. Yes, the youth had been among Colin and Annie’s targets, but now there were guards assigned to monitor the building he lived in. If someone was surveilling him, surely they would’ve been caught.

“Elaborate, please.”

“For starters, I should note that nobody’s actually approached me or left any overt evidence. I just have this eerie sense that someone’s there, lurking and looking. I tried to shake it off at first, but it won’t let up.”
“Where’s this happening at?”

“All over,” he answered in exasperation. “Outside headquarters, at the grocery store, at the park—pretty much everywhere.”

“Hmm.” Could his and Seb’s stalkers be pursuing Ian? Anything was possible. “When did this begin?”

“About two weeks ago. A part of me thinks I’m being paranoid, but after the incident with my car, I can’t be too careful.”

The mastermind nodded. “Better safe than sorry,” he agreed. “Would you like me to provide you with a security detail for when you’re out in public?”

“I don’t know if I want to go that far. As I said, there’s no concrete evidence. I’m just spooked.”

“Right. It’s your call. I’m here, though, should you need anything.”

“I appreciate it, Jim. You’ve done more for me in the short time we’ve been acquainted than anyone else in my life ever has.”

“Yes, well, helping others is a relatively new endeavor of mine. It’s not something I practiced until recently.”

“Whatever the circumstance, I’m grateful to be on the receiving end.”

KNOCK. KNOCK.

A spa attendant peeked into Moriarty’s luxury suite. “Hello, gentlemen. Maybe I come in?”

“Certainly,” he replied, unable to meet the woman in the eye due to the cucumber covering his lids.

“I thought I’d pop in and give you a quick rundown of the next few treatments. Up ahead you’ve got a massage, seaweed wrap, sauna, aromatherapy, and salt scrub.”

“Oh,” Ian commented, “I can’t do some of those. Saunas and wraps aren’t recommended during pregnancy.”

“That’s fine. You’re under no obligation to participate in every activity. All treatments are optional.”

“I won’t be partaking in some of those either,” Jim announced.

“Why not?” the young man inquired. “You’ve already pre-paid. Might as well get your money’s worth.”

“I insisted you come along. It’s only fair that I show some solidarity.”

“I guess…I just don’t want you to have a shitty time because of me.”

“I’m having a faaaaaabulous time, dear. If I wasn’t, you’d know.”

“So which treatments are you two abstaining from?” the employee asked, seeking clarification.

Moriarty deferred to his friend. “You tell her, Ian. I’d rather not risk leaving something important out.”
“Uh…okay.” The shy omega nervously assumed command of the conversation. “Could…could I hear that list again?”

*********

Not far from the ESPA Life spa, Annie sat in a vehicle on stakeout. Such activities were nothing new— she'd tracked people many times before. Today, though, the assignment was a bit different. As absurd as it sounded, she was now stalking a stalker.

While keeping tabs on Ian, she’d noticed a man who was consistently present. No matter where she followed the teen, this person appeared too, shadowing from the sidelines.

It made Annie curious. She genuinely wanted to know what was going on. Colin discouraged her from contacting the individual, claiming that the less people they interacted with, the better. His warning went unheeded.

Using binoculars, she peered at him from across the street. The guy looked to be in his early to mid-30s. He was tall, brooding, and wore sunglasses and an Aston Villa football cap— not altogether unattractive, if she was being honest.

“Who are you?” she muttered to herself. It was time to find out.

Annie emerged from her car and began a trek towards the mystery man. When she reached him, he was casually leaning against a lamppost, staring at the hotel that housed the spa.

How would she break the ice? It was an odd situation, to be sure. No etiquette book in the world featured a chapter on making introductions of this nature.

“Hey, mister?” Annie finally addressed. “You got a minute?”

He turned to the woman. “Not really. I’m busy.”

“Yeah, you look like you’re doing a whole lot standing over here,” she sarcastically remarked.

“Sod off. Whatever you’ve come to bother me about, I’m not interested.”

“Oh, I beg to disagree. I think you’d be positively fascinated by what I have to say.”

“Bloody unlikely,” he spat. “In my experience, the only people who approach someone point-blank with that kind of pitch are bible thumpers and prostitutes.”

“I’m neither of those.”

“Then what’s your game? Explain fast, because I’m only going to ask you once.”

Sensing his agitation, she blurted out a name. “Ian Fitzgerald.”

That did the trick. Perhaps a little too well, as he gripped her arm harshly and pulled her aside.

“How do you know Ian?” he demanded.

“He’s a former co-worker of mine.”

“Co-worker? Where at?” There was an unnerving intensity to his tone.

“James Moriarty’s headquarters.” Annie answered truthfully, wanting to gauge his response before
The man’s grasp tightened even more at the mention of Jim. “Did he send you? Or was it his bastard of a mate?”

_Bingo._ It sounded like he had a definite grudge against the couple.

“Let’s go somewhere to discuss this. I’ll tell you my story and you can tell me yours.” She was taking a gamble by inviting a third party into the fold, but thought it was worth the risk. As her and Colin’s endgame grew closer, they could use all the help they could get.

He considered her proposal. “Okay. I work at _The Golden Anchor._ Swing by and we’ll have a chat.”

“You got it.” She paused, realizing she hadn’t given him her name. “I’m Annie, by the way.”

“Good to know. I’m Luke.”

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Stay tuned for what twists and turns unfold as Seb cares for the twins in Jim's absence.
Chapter Summary

Jim has a minor freak-out at the spa. Later, Sebastian is thrown for a loop while caring for the babies.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

“I never knew my muscles could feel like this,” Ian proclaimed.

“Like what?” asked Jim.

“Tension-free.”

The duo was engaging in a bit of downtime time after having undergone a Swedish massage as part of their spa treatment.

“Really worked out the knots, aye?”

“And then some.”

“A good massage is something to be savored. I still remember my first professional one. Well actually, semi-professional,” Moriarty clarified. “I knew a bloke in college who was training to get a kinesiology degree. He used to practice various techniques on me. God, that man was amaaaazing with his hands.”

Ian chuckled. “You’ve got a story for everything.”

“Live long enough and so will you.” He paused a moment, pulling out his phone. “Shite,” he exclaimed, his expression dropping.

“What’s the matter?”

“My mobile is dead.”

“I hate it when that happens.”

“You don’t understand. Seb’s supposed to send me updates about the babies while I’m gone.”

“Oh. Sorry, I didn’t know.”
“Yeah.” Jim stopped and considered something. “Let me use your phone. I’ll call him and explain the situation. He can forward the updates to your number instead.”

“Not a bad idea, but I didn’t bring my mobile in here with me. It’s locked in the glovebox of my car, wherever the valet chose to park it.”

“Why would you leave it behind?”

“Because when you said we were going to a spa, I wanted it to be an immersive experience. No outside distractions.”

“Fuck. This is a bloody disaster.”

“Wait a minute,” the young man spoke. “Try to calm down. Maybe this doesn’t have to be the end of the world.”

“You’re right. There might be a phone at the check-in desk I can use.”

“That’s not what I meant. I’m saying maybe it’s okay if you guys can’t get in touch, because things will probably be fine. Your husband seems pretty great to me. I’m sure he’ll take excellent care of your children.”

Moriarty sighed. The teen wasn’t wrong. Sebastian was a standup mate in every way. There was no reason to think he wouldn’t be able to handle their little ones for a day. Still, he felt uneasy. But why?

“You’re absolutely correct. I couldn’t ask for a more wonderful alpha. However, that alone doesn’t remedy my worry. When you have Matilda, you’ll see.”

“Fair enough. Is that what you’d like to do, then? Request access to the front desk phone?”

The consulting criminal hesitated. Yes, he’d suggested the idea, but was that going overboard? He knew he could get carried away sometimes— was this one of those occasions?

“I don’t know.”

Was his dread a reliable instinct or merely an irrational fear? How did one decipher the difference? He suddenly found himself wishing that the male omega parenting group he and Jack had discussed actually existed. This was the kind of issue he’d do well to share with a sounding board of experienced persons.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

An attendant popped in again, the same woman from earlier. “Hope I’m not interrupting, gentlemen. I just wanted to make sure the two of you were comfortable. Here at ESPA Life, customer satisfaction is our top priority.”

“I’m good,” said Ian. “How about you, Jim?” He was giving his friend an easy opportunity to bring up the phone concerns.

“I… I’m okay,” he declared, deciding to set his apprehension aside and trust that the babies were safe under Seb’s watchful eye. “A bit parched, though. Could I get some water?”

The employee smiled brightly. “You most certainly can. We offer an assortment of waters including artisanal, sparkling, mineral, and several vitamin-enriched varieties.”
“How about a bottle of Evian?”

“We’ve got that, too,” she confirmed. “Would you prefer regular or fruit flavored?”

“Regular is fine.”

“Very well, sir. I’ll fetch it for you right away.” At that, the woman exited Jim’s private suite.

Ian turned to the mastermind. “So you’re not going to fret anymore?”

“Oh, I’ll fret plenty. But I’ll also attempt to be less high strung about the matter. How much trouble could possibly arise during the span of a single day?”

Moriarty really should’ve known better than to pose a question like that. Some things were best left unchallenged.

*********

Sebastian stared at his cell phone and frowned. Jim hadn’t responded to any of his messages—odd, considering how adamant he’d been in demanding hourly updates. A part of him wanted to call the spa and check up on him, but he hesitated to go that far. Perhaps his omega had simply lost track of time or changed his mind about wanting detailed reportage.

Moving on to other concerns, he noted that approximately three hours had passed with nary a peep from the twins. Based on what his spouse told him in preparation for today’s babysitting assignment, Essie and Eddie were due for a scheduled feeding and should’ve begun to stir already.

*Maybe they’re extra tired.* Jim woke them earlier to have a chat before leaving—it might’ve thrown them off.

After giving it some thought, Moran decided to proceed as normal. He’d prep the bottles and bibs, and then go to the nursery to administer his children their lunch. Surely they’d be roused by that point.

His assumption proved false.

When he entered the babies’ room, both infants remained asleep and were unusually difficult to wake. Granted, he’d previously observed their ability to snooze through just about anything, but this was different. It was almost as though they were stuck in a fog, their eyes glazed and demeanors subdued. He’d never seen them in such a state.

The sniper cradled his son first, pressing the warm bottle of formula to Eddie’s lips. What happened next was very disconcerting. The tiny tot weakly suckled for a few seconds and then gave up, pulling away from the rubber nipple with a whimper.

“What’s wrong, honey? Aren’t you hungry?” The boy typically had a hearty appetite, sometimes even draining the contents of a bottle. That he wouldn’t eat now was troubling.

*Perhaps he’s sad about Jim being gone.* “Do you miss Daddy? I know it must seem strange, not having him around. But I’m here and I love you, too.”

Eddie started dozing off in his Papa’s strong arms. Seb kissed the child’s chubby little cheek and returned him to his crib.

He would try again with Essie instead. His daughter’s response wasn’t any better. Like her brother,
she barely ate, and more worryingly, presented an intermittent cough.

A harrowing thought went through Moran’s head. Are the babies sick? What should I do?

He was rapidly spinning into panic mode when an idea hit him. After making sure the twins were settled, he pulled out his phone and dialed a number.

It was ringing. And ringing. And ringing.

_Come on. Pick up._

“Hello?” a groggy voice spoke. It was Severin.

“Thank god you answered. I need some advice.” Being a neonatologist, he figured his sibling could help.

“Bloody hell, Seb. Do you know how late it is where I’m at? It’s the middle of the night.”

“Yes, and I apologize. I wouldn’t do this if it wasn’t important.”

The elder Moran sighed. “Well, go on. Tell me what’s so vital.”

“I’m taking care of the babies by myself for the first time, and I think they might be ill. They’re sluggish and refusing to nurse. Also, Estella appears to have a slight cough.”

“How old are they again? 1 month?”

“Yeah.”

“Hmm. Sickness in infants that young can be precarious. Have they recently had contact with anyone known to be ill?”

“I honestly don’t know. We brought them to a party several days ago. No one there seemed visibly unwell, but I guess it’s possible somebody could’ve been sick and not shown symptoms.”

Severin groaned. “Sebastian, how could you do such a thing? Either of you?” the man admonished.

“Do what?” he asked in confusion.

“Take newborn babies to a social gathering. You should never, ever place neonates in a situation of that nature. Their immune systems haven’t fully formed yet, meaning they’re exceptionally vulnerable to communicative disease.”

The assassin’s heart sunk at the news. “Oh god. We had no idea, I swear.”

“Regardless of your ignorance, it sounds like you may now be dealing with the consequence.” Sev paused, quickly realizing that his tone was unnecessarily harsh. Due to his line of work, he tended to have a kneejerk reaction when it came to an infant’s welfare being put at risk. “Are they feverish?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Good, then it may just be a simple cold. That’s the best case scenario. You’ll have to remain vigilant and monitor them closely. If their temperature rises above 100 degrees F, I advise you seek medical attention.”
“What do I do in the meantime?” Seb wanted to help his cubs however he could.

“Make sure they stay hydrated. I know you said they were refusing to eat, but I suggest trying to bottle-feed them periodically throughout the day. Even if they only ingest a small amount at a time, it’s better than nothing. Furthermore, you could also give them a few ounces of Pedialyte.”

“Pedialyte? What’s that?”

“It’s like baby Gatorade. It contains electrolytes to replenish their system.”

“Okay. Anything else?”

“Yes. Do you have a humidifier?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“Get one and run it in the nursery. It’ll improve the air quality, which will be better for their breathing.”

“Right. Makes sense.”

There was a brief pause as the sniper processed all the new information. His day had abruptly gone from 0 to 60 and showed no signs of slowing down.

“Seb? You can handle this. I have confidence in you.”

“Thanks. I appreciate the kind words. You’re a good man, Severin.”

“You too. Keep me posted on how it goes, huh?”

“Sure.”

The brothers ended their conversation and Sebastian set out to acquire the items Sev recommended. He tasked a member of the security team with retrieving the Pedialyte and humidifier. When he finally had the goods in his possession, he felt a bit less ineffectual, but still guilty as hell. He was supposed to protect his little ones, and yet he’d unwittingly jeopardized their health.

Jim’s going to feel awful about this, too.

Moran checked his phone again, just to see if his husband had replied. Alas, there were no missed calls or texts.

He picked a fine time to go incommunicado.

Maybe, though, it was for the best. Moriarty would almost certainly be beside himself with worry once he learned what was going on. Perhaps it was good that he’d have a day of relaxation under his belt to soften the blow.

In any event, the former colonel knew what he must do. Plugging the humidifier in and setting the Pedialyte on a nearby table, he gave each baby a gentle kiss as they slept. He then pulled a chair over to where the cribs were located and prepared to hunker down for the long haul.

“Papa’s here,” Seb whispered, “and he’ll never leave you.”
To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

What will happen as Sebastian cares for his ailing children? When/how will Jim learn what’s going on? And elsewhere, what were the results of Annie and Luke’s meeting (as referenced at the end of the previous chapter)? Stay tuned for more.
Chapter Summary

Sebastian is faced with a serious situation while tending to his ailing children. Elsewhere, we learn what Colin and Annie are up to. Then later, Jim returns home after having been away all day.

Chapter Notes

In the interest of transparency, I thought I should disclose that I've made a small edit to the previous chapter.

Upon review, I realized there was a plot hole regarding the fact that Ian had texted Jim in chapter 107, yet in 108, I wrote that he hadn't brought his phone with him at all. When I saw my error, I went back and amended the details to say that Ian had brought his phone, but locked it in the glovebox of his car, and therefore didn't have it readily available to give to Jim while they were at the spa. I'm hoping that this small change has improved the consistency of the story and I apologize for the mistake.

*********************

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sebastian Moran had been many things in his life, but today’s impromptu foray into pediatric nursing was a wholly new experience. He’d spent the past few hours keeping vigil at Essie and Eddie’s bedside, watching over the ailing infants as they slept. He attempted to bottle-feed them at various intervals, offering both formula and Pedialyte. Unfortunately, neither child would drink.

The situation was starting to grow dire. Seb barely needed to change their diapers all afternoon—a clear sign of dehydration. If things didn’t improve soon, he might have to take them to the hospital.

Estella mewed plaintively, twitching in a fitful sleep. The sniper reached down and smoothed back a lock of her dark hair. She leaned against his fingertips, finding solace in his touch.

“You’re a good girl,” he spoke. “Papa’s sorry he let you get sick.” There was a sadness to the man’s tone that couldn’t be denied.

Once his daughter settled, he returned to the chair stationed near the twins’ cribs. As they continued to snooze, he found himself tiring as well.

_Maybe I’ll shut my eyes for a minute_, he thought with a yawn. _No harm in that._
“Soooo,” Jim drawled, “do you feel any different after your spa experience?” He and Ian had finished up their final treatment and gotten redressed.

“Actually, yes, I think so. My back is less achy and I believe that botanical scrub did wonders for my pores. I’m still a bit tingly.”

“Oh, I knooooow. I haven’t been exfoliated so thoroughly since the time Seb surprised me with a new loofah.” He grinned, dreamily recalling the occasion.

“I’ve not forgotten,” the youth answered. “But that money’s earmarked for her college fund. I don’t want to dip into it unless absolutely necessary.”

Jim shrugged. “A fair decision, I suppose.”

Ian’s empty stomach rumbled again.

“Come on,” the mastermind persisted. “Your baby requires sustenance and so do I. If we grab dinner now, I can bring something back for Seb to nosh on. What do you say?”

“Well, when you put it like that, it’s awfully hard to refuse.”

The impish smile on Moriarty’s face stretched even wider. “Splendid. We’d be wise to make haste — the early evening rush will soon commence.”

At that, the duo set out on a mission to satiate their increasingly ravenous appetites. If only Jim had known what was happening at home, he’d have skipped the proceedings and headed straight back to his family.
The front door to nursing assistant Katherine Ramsey’s house crept open as a female figure slipped inside. It was Annie.

“Hello?” she called out, removing her disguise of a hat and sunglasses. “Anybody home?”

Footsteps could be heard from above. The sound grew louder and louder until Colin finally came into view. He stood at the top of the steps wearing a floral terry cloth robe while clutching a copy of ‘Wuthering Heights.’

Annie immediately burst into laughter. “Smashing outfit you’ve got on. That shade of mauve is very flattering.”

He glared, stomping downstairs to confront her directly. “Shut your gob. It belongs to Katie.”

“Duh, of course it does. The question is, why do you have it on?”

“It was either this or a towel, and frankly, the robe seemed like a warmer option.”

“Uh-huh. And the book?” she prodded. “You hate the Brontë sisters.”

“It’s also Katie’s. She picked it out for me to read to her in the bath.”

A look of abject horror washed over Annie. “Dear god, is this how you occupy your time when I’m not around?”

“Occasionally,” he said. “It’s not what you think. She’s the one bathing. I just keep her company and read aloud. It’s harmless.”

“Better you than me.” The thought of seeing that lazy-eyed crackpot in the nude sent a shiver down Annie’s spine.

“There’s a method to the madness. I make her happy, and she continues to let us stay. We’ve got a good thing going here and I don’t intend to fuck it up.” He paused, shooting his cohort a steely gaze. “You’d do well to remember that, too. No fucking things up.”

She rolled her eyes. The gesture did not amuse Colin.

“You will take my words to heart, Annelise. We haven’t come this far only to fail now because of your incompetence.”

“Hey!” she objected. “How dare you call me incompetent? I’ve helped you day-in and day-out for months. Done your dirty work a million times over. Hell, today I even secured us extra assistance. So a little gratitude would be nice.”

“Excuse me, what was that about ‘extra assistance?’” His voice took on an icy quality that was downright unnerving.

“I met someone potentially useful.”

“Who?” Colin stepped closer to Annie and she promptly backed up.

“A guy…I mentioned him before. He’s the one I saw following Moriarty’s protégé.”

“Ah, yes. You did speak of him. But I distinctly recall warning you not to get involved. So it
appears you’ve disregarded my wishes.”

“It was for our own good,” she insisted. “I had a feeling about this person. He seemed dedicated to what he was doing. Focused and unyielding. I figured there must be a reason for his behavior. Turns out, I was right.”

Colin considered her statement carefully. He was intrigued. “Tell me more.”

“Okay. For starters, the man’s name is Luke. He’s a bartender at a pub near the university. Apparently, that’s how he met Ian. The two of them briefly dated, and after they split up, he found out Ian was hiding his pregnancy from him. He wasn’t going to tell the guy he was having his kid—can you believe it?”

“Annelise, this story had better be going somewhere.”

“It is,” she stressed. “Once he learned of his ex’s condition, he initiated contact again. By then, Ian had already met Jim in that MOPS group and told him some tale about being an abused omega. For reasons I can’t begin to fathom, Moriarty bought the spiel hook, line, and sinker. He not only moved the teen into a cushy new apartment where he hoped Luke wouldn’t be able to find him, but he also sent Sebastian after him.”

“Oh yeah?” Colin’s attention was suddenly renewed at the mention of the sniper.

She nodded. “Yeah. He wouldn’t give me the details of their encounter, except to say that Moran had hurt him pretty bad.”

“Sounds like Seb. All he’s ever been good at is destruction.”

“Lucky for us, Luke’s seeking revenge against the happy couple and access to his unborn child,” Annie explained. “I told him we had similar interests regarding the matter of retribution. Suggested that maybe we could help each other. He seemed receptive to the idea.”

A moment of silence passed as Colin gave serious thought to the new information. Bringing someone else into the mix was a prospect not to be taken lightly.

“Well? What do you think?”

“It has possibilities,” the man answered. “To work with me, one must be willing to set aside certain moral compunctions. Would he dare go to such lengths?”

“He said he’d do anything to get what he wants. The look in his eyes was…compelling.”

“Hmm.” Could he put faith in a stranger’s claim? No. He needed to meet him firsthand to know for sure. Being a fugitive, however, made the situation rather tricky. “I’ll agree to nothing until I’ve spoken with him one-on-one.”

“Of course. He gave me his number. I’ll get right on it.”

“For your sake, Annelise, I hope this pans out. If we can’t trust him as assuredly as you think we can, then you know what must be done.”

The woman sighed. “Yeah. It’ll be more dirty deeds for me.”

“Hey,” he remarked, taking offense to her tone, “you knew the risks and consequences when you agreed to help with my plan.”
“I suppose I did,” she somberly conceded. “I just never imagined being made to spew so much hate and incurring an actual body count. Once the blinders are off, there’s no going back.”

Colin and Annie locked eyes, his gaze intense. “That’s exactly what needs to be impressed upon Luke.”

“Got it.” For a split second, she felt something she hadn’t in a very long time— guilt. Aligning oneself with Colin Taylor was akin to making a deal with the devil. In that sense, perhaps it was wrong to bring another person into the equation. Too late for misgivings now, though.

“I’m waiiiitiiing!” a woman’s voice bellowed from above. It was Katherine, calling out for Colin.

“I’ve got to go,” he hastily muttered. “Make the necessary arrangements.” On that note, he retreated upstairs to placate his quasi-companion.

Once her brother-in-law was gone, Annie pulled out her phone. She began dialing Luke’s number, but stopped midway through. Instead, she opened a folder file and accessed one item in particular—a photo featuring a younger version of herself alongside a beautiful blonde woman.

“Miss you, Margo,” she whispered. “This is all for you.”

*********

WAAAAH. WAAAAAH. WAAAAAAAH.

Sebastian awoke to the sound of uncontrollable wailing. He blinked rapidly and wiped the sleep from his eyes. *Must’ve nodded off.*

WAAAAAAAHAH.

The assassin stood at alert. His children needed him.

“Papa’s here,” he assured them.

It appeared Eddie was doing most of the crying. Seb bent down to pick him up and was instantly taken aback by how warm the boy felt. Not missing a beat, he retrieved the ear thermometer Jim had insisted they buy. Within seconds, the device showed a reading of 102°F.

“Oh no.”

He cradled his son in an effort to console him. The infant trembled, his tiny body overcome with chills. It broke Moran’s heart.

“Everything will be okay, honey. Papa’s going to get you help. We’ll take a ride to the hosp—”

Sebastian abruptly fell silent, his words withering on the vine when he saw the state of his daughter. Estella lay in her crib, panting and wheezing, her sweet face contorted into a grimace as she struggled to breathe. He was almost afraid to take her temperature. As expected, it was just as high as her brother’s.

“My poor babies.” The distraught alpha held his darlings close, desperately longing to soothe them somehow. They didn’t deserve this—not in any way, shape, or form.

Seb knew he couldn’t afford to waste time. His children were very sick and required immediate medical attention. He grabbed the keys to his Mercedes and threw on a double-sling, wearable baby carrier so that he could transport them at once. The security team cleared out of his way as he
charged a path to the car.

“You’re so brave,” he said, strapping the twins into their safety seats. “Papa’s fierce little soldiers.”

After checking to make sure they were properly secured, Moran noticed something balled up on the floor. It was a hoodie sweatshirt Jim had worn the day before, but discarded when he got too hot. It still smelled of his cologne.

The former colonel had an idea. He draped the garment over his babies’ laps like a blanket, knowing they would derive a sense of comfort from their Daddy’s scent.

Speaking of Moriarty, Seb glimpsed his phone one last time to see if he’d gotten any response. Alas, there was nothing.

*Why won’t you answer me, Magpie?* A part of him feared the worst, but he couldn’t dwell on the matter right now. He had to concentrate on his cubs.

*I’ll call the spa when I get to the hospital.*

Until then, he’d simply drive.

***********

It was around 6 p.m. when Jim arrived at home. He walked through the front door with a spring in his step and a bag of takeout in hand.

“Sebbbbby! I’m back.”

He was greeted to silence.

“Seb? Where are you?” The consulting criminal set the food container down and went in search of his husband. Specifically, he headed to the nursery, figuring the man was probably there with their children.

“Darrrirling!” he yelled through the hall, “I brought you dinner. I think you’re going to enjo—”

Moriarty was rendered speechless at the sight of an empty room. His heart sank. Where were Essie and Eddie? Where was Sebastian?

*Don’t panic. This is a big house. There are other places they might be.*

And so he looked far and wide, scouring every inch of the mansion for his missing family. Eventually, he had to acknowledge the truth that they were gone.

*No babies. No Tiger. Just...nobody.*

What happened? He decided to quiz the guard posted at the entrance of their home. Surely, someone paid to keep watch would have the answers he needed.

No such luck. A sizeable bloke named Dominic described the manner in which Seb had fled with the twins, but regrettably, had no clue where Moran was taking them. Neither did anyone else on duty.

Jim was a hairsbreadth away from having a meltdown. They say you shouldn’t shoot the messenger, but he badly wanted to snuff out the entire group of mercenaries in his employ. He was paying an exorbitant fee for their services, and yet they couldn’t even be bothered to ascertain his
He inhaled and exhaled deeply in an attempt to calm himself. It didn’t work. The mastermind told off the guard using some very expressive language and then stormed back inside.

There was only one thing left to do: use the landline phone they maintained for emergency purposes. If ever a situation qualified, this was it.

Moriarty dialed Seb’s mobile and waited. And waited. And waited.

“Hello?”

“Oh thank god,” he uttered in relief, grateful to hear his mate’s voice. “Sebby, where are you? I got home and the house was deserted.”

“I’m at St. Thomas’ Hospital. I’ve been trying to get in touch with you for hours, Jim. I even called the spa, but they said that you’d left.”

“My phone died,” the Irishman explained. “Why are you at the hospital? What the hell is going on?”

“The babies are sick.”

In a flash, Jim felt as though the ground had dropped out from under him. He was dizzy and his heart began to race. “Sick? How so?”

“The doctors say it’s influenza. It’s really hit them hard, Magpie.”

“No…no, that’s not possible.” His precious little loves couldn’t be ill— they just couldn’t.

“I wish it wasn’t true, but it is. You’ve got to come here. They need both their parents.”

“Absolutely. I’d have been there already if I’d known.”

“All right. I’ll meet you in the lobby and bring you up to speed on everything.”

“See you soon, Tiger.”

“Aye.”

Though still in a daze, Jim summoned the strength to carry on. He was fueled by a singular, all-powerful instinct to protect his children. Nothing would stop him now.

Chapter End Notes

In case anyone was wondering, the security detail didn't follow Seb to the hospital because he left in such a hurry, giving them no prior notice. At the end of the chapter, they don't track Jim either for similar reasons.
Recovery & Recrimination

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian are on edge as their children face a serious health crisis. They must rise to the occasion and be there for their precious little ones.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Where are they, Seb? I must see them.” Jim had just arrived at St. Thomas’ hospital and was in a frantic rush to get to his ailing angels.

“Follow me.”

The sniper took his mate by the hand, leading him to the Urgent Care unit where Essie and Eddie convalesced. At the same time, he relayed the events that had transpired throughout the day. Disclosing some of the details proved emotionally draining.

“Jimmy, it’s important you understand what we’re dealing with. Estella’s a bit worse off than her brother. In addition to the flu, she’s also suffering from the early stages of pneumonia. It’s going to be okay, though. They’ve administered antibiotics and are optimistic the treatment will work.”

Moriarty was absolutely gutted by the reality of his children’s affliction. It seemed that the universe had accomplished what no person ever could—discovered a way to burn the heart out of him.

When they entered the twins’ room, the mastermind audibly gasped as he saw his poppets hooked up to IVs. They looked so small and fragile; so in need of protection. His parental instincts immediately kicked into high gear.

“Never fear, my lovelies. Daddy’s here.” He reached down, scooping both babies into his arms. They were clammy and hot to the touch. “Tiger, they’re blazing!” he announced with alarm. “Why hasn’t something been done about their fevers?”

“They’ve already received cool sponge baths and Tylenol. Medically speaking, there’s not much more one can do. We have to let this aspect of the illness run its course. Eventually, their fevers will break.”

“That’s completely unacceptable! I demand to consult the attending physician.”
“Kitten, please calm—”

“Bring me their doctor NOW!”

The babies began to squirm, agitated by the Irishman’s yelling.

“Okay, fine. But at least put our little ones back down. They need to rest.”

“No! I’m gone for a single day and this is what happens!” he fumed. “I’ll never leave them again.”

“Jim, you can’t be attached to the twins 24/7. It’s just not feasible.”

“I can try!” The look in Moriarty’s eyes was truly harrowing, equal parts sad, mad, and afraid.

Seb recognized his partner’s expression all too well. If he didn’t subdue him soon, a meltdown was imminent.

“Magpie,” he began, gently placing a hand on his husband’s shoulder, “stop for a minute and take a deep breath. Regroup.”

“Regroup?” the genius repeated incredulously. “Bollocks that! I’ve got to ensure our children’s welfare.”

“Then you may want to start by setting them down, because your shouting is scaring the hell out of them.”

“What? I’d never…” he hesitated, gazing at the infants in his embrace. They were anxiously curling into themselves and appeared to be on the verge of crying. Their IV tubes were pulled taut as well, no doubt adding to their distress. “Oh god. You’re right.” His voice faltered at the realization. “Forgive me, darlings. Daddy isn’t angry with you.”

“Let’s put the kiddos back to bed, huh?”

Jim nodded brokenly, allowing his spouse to take one of the babies while he handled the other. “I…I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to frighten them.”

“I know, love.”

At that moment, a nurse strolled into the room without bothering to knock. She came bearing a portable oxygen tank.

“What’s that for?” the consulting criminal inquired. He recognized the equipment, but wanted to know why it was being brought in now.

“I’m not at liberty to discuss patient information with those outside of the immediate family, sir.”

“He is family,” Sebastian swiftly declared.

“Oh?” The woman arched a brow and began prepping some kind of tube.

“Yes,” Moriarty affirmed, speaking for himself. “I’m the twins’ mother.”

She ogled him disdainfully. “Yeah, right. You don’t exactly look the part.”

Both men were incensed at her remark, Jim especially so.
“Listen up, you bloody cow. I’m a male omega and these are my children. You’ll damn well tell me what it is you’re doing to them.”

The medical worker scowled. “I’ve been instructed to place the girl on oxygen. It’s a temporary measure to help her breathe until her lungs are at full strength.”

“See? Wasn’t it easier to just tell me the truth rather than cop an attitude?”

“I have to follow procedure.”

“Does ‘procedure’ entail acting like a bitch?”

She balked at the blunt assessment. “With all due respect, sir, it would suit you to behave in a less confrontational manner.”

Jim chuckled darkly. “Honey, it’s adorable that you think this is me being confrontational. You don’t know the meaning of the word.”

The nurse said nothing, but flashed an icy glare. She then proceeded to shove a length of plastic tubing up Essie’s nose. The tiny tot wailed and the woman exited in a huff.

“How dare you?! Say goodbye to your job,” the genius screamed, utterly irate. He stuck his head out the door as she continued to walk away. “I’ll have you fired!”

Meanwhile, Seb adjusted the tube that would provide his daughter with extra oxygen. He whispered soothing reassurances and stared deep into the pools of her brilliant green eyes.

Still shrieking down the hall, Moriarty attracted the attention of the on-call physician.

“Excuse me, sir, is there a problem?”

“Yes, quite a big one, in fact. The ornery bitch who just left here ought to be sacked. She insulted me and mishandled my child.”

“I’m very sorry to hear that. As the attending doctor, I’ll look into the matter and assign you a different nurse.”

“You’re the one who’s treating Essie and Eddie?”

“I am.”

“Come.” He grasped the man by the arm, tugging him inside the room.

Seb turned to greet the practitioner. “Hello again, Dr. Adams. This is my mate, Jim.”

“It’s good that the two of you are here. I’ve often found it beneficial to have both parents present.”

“Well, I’ve got some questions for you, doc.” The mastermind wasn’t beating around the bush—he wanted answers.

“Go ahead.”

“To start, they’re burning up. Why aren’t you doing more to lower their temperatures?”

“Kitten, I already told you they’ve done what they can,” Moran reminded.
“Surely they’ve not exhausted all options.”

“Your partner is correct,” the physician spoke. “He was here when we administered the infants a fever reducing medication, and even assisted in giving them a cooling sponge bath. Those are the primary methods of bringing down a high temperature in babies so young.”

Jim tilted his head, peering curiously at the sniper. “You helped with their bath?”

“Yeah, I did.”

“Hmm.” Somehow, he felt a bit sad that Seb had gotten to help instead of him. He was their mother, after all— he should’ve been there to do it.

“Their fevers have dropped almost a full degree since they were admitted. The treatment is working slowly but steadily.”

“Good. I’m glad to hear it. Have you given them anything to cut down on the duration of their illness?”

“Yes, they were dispensed a low-dose antiviral drug shortly after diagnosis. Your husband consented to it.” The practitioner paused, a thought occurring to him. “Gentlemen, it may be prudent for you to take the medication as well.”

“Why?” Moriarty asked. “We’re not sick.”

“Sebastian explained to me how you attended a party as a family. That’s likely where your children were exposed to the virus, and thus, you probably came in contact with it too. It’s possible you’re infected and just not showing symptoms yet.”

Dr. Adams’s assertion weighed heavily on Jim. “They’re ill because I brought them to a party?”

“I can’t confirm it with absolute certainty, but social gatherings are often a hub for germ circulation.”

The Irishman went dead silent. He was reeling on the inside, his mind awash in a sea of self-recrimination. How could I be so fucking stupid? Why didn’t I stop to consider the potential danger? What kind of parent would be so negligent?

“I got a flu shot earlier this year,” Seb noted, “so I doubt I’m at risk. I’m sure Jim must’ve done the same.”

Moriarty let out a weary sigh. “Actually, no, I didn’t.”

The doctor was unsurprised. “I gathered that from your children’s condition. If you’d received a vaccination during pregnancy, your children would’ve had an immunity.”

Jim’s guilt officially reached a new crescendo. Why didn’t I get the bloody shot? WHY? His obstetrician had suggested it at one of his regular checkups. But that day, he was tired and cranky and just wanted to go home. Wanted to kick off his shoes, sprawl out on the couch, and eat double fudge ice cream straight from the container. As always, he’d thought only of himself.

Seb and Dr. Adams continued to talk, but the genius didn’t hear a blessed thing. Their voices blurred, becoming background noise while his tortured musings took the forefront. He could swear that the walls were beginning to close in and the lights were growing dimmer and dimmer by the second.
“Are you okay, sir?”

“Jimmy?”

All eyes were suddenly on him. “Huh? I’m fine,” he lied.

“I realize this is a lot to process. I’ll leave you alone so you can decide what you want to do.” At that, the man walked out of the room.

“Tiger, what was he going on about? I lost focus midway through.”

“He wants to know if you’d like to take a dose of antiviral medication to ward off potential infection.”

“I caught that part. Was there anything else?”

“He also asked if we want to camp out here overnight while they monitor the babies.”

“That’s a no-brainer. I go where they go. We’re a package deal.”

Sebastian clasped his mate’s hand, entwining their fingers. “Likewise, my dear.”

The couple exchanged a knowing look. They were a family, bound together forevermore.

*********

Spending the night at their children’s sickbed proved to be among the hardest things Jim and Seb ever had to do. Forget stakeouts that left them holed up in darkness for days, or assignments that ended in a hail of gunfire— somehow this felt worse. Seeing Essie and Eddie writhe through chills and body aches was heartbreaking to endure.

The duo found ways to pass the long, sad hours. Jim made phone calls warning Jack and Ian of the possible influenza exposure. The latter had thankfully gotten a flu vaccine, but the situation with Jack was more troubling. It seemed that his son Reggie was exhibiting signs of illness. The mastermind made him promise to take the boy to a pediatrician, lest the ailment progress.

Meanwhile, Seb ventured to a familiar locale— the hospital gift shop. He’d visited the place so many times this past year, he knew the layout by heart. There was, however, a new display arranged for the Easter season. It was a bit cutesy and cloying, yet also strangely endearing.

He made a point of buying presents for everyone. Moriarty got a festive basket filled to the brim with candy, the babies received miniature bunny rabbit plushies, and as for himself, he decided to try something different in the form of a sketchpad and pencils. He hadn’t drawn in years, but thought it would be a good way to pass the time.

“Jelly bean?” Jim offered. He sat in a chair next to Moran, noshing on the colorful, sugary confections.

“No thanks, hon. If I stop for even a minute, our little ones might change position and it will throw off my work.”

“Ah, sure. I understand.” He stared at the twins and smiled softly. This was the soundest they’d slept all night. Despite being hooked up to IVs and tubing, they looked very sweet snuggling the stuffed bunnies their Papa had brought them.

The assassin couldn’t help but notice when his husband yawned tiredly. “You should try to get
some rest, kitten. They did provide us with a foldout bed.”

“I want to keep an eye on our doves.”

“I know. But you aren’t doing this alone. I’m here, so you can take a break without having to worry.”

He paused, considering the idea. It certainly was enticing. “Maybe just a teeeensy nap. An hour at most. No, make that two.”

“No. I won’t abandon my post.” Seb’s protective alpha instincts came in handy during times like these.

Jim gave him a peck on the cheek before moving to the bed. It wasn’t especially comfortable, but would do in a pinch. Exhausted, he fell asleep almost as soon as his head hit the pillow…

It was a beautiful spring day at the park and the Moriarty-Moran clan was indulging in a lovely picnic beneath the shade of an oak tree. A delectable array of gourmet goods were on the menu, comprising a four-course meal. Even the babies—who did not yet eat solid food—were treated to a sampling of organic, strawberry-flavored formula.

He turned to observe his family in action. Essie and Eddie were giggling up a storm as Seb played peekaboo with them. They were so happy and healthy; so vivacious in their approach to life. It was inspiring.

Out of the blue, a vibrant butterfly flew past, captivating the twins’ attention. They followed the creature’s movements with their eyes and beamed delightedly when it came to perch upon young Edward’s arm.

Jim knew he needed to get a picture of this moment. He rooted through a travel bag, searching for his camera.

Searching, searching, searching.

Ah-ha! Finally, he found it. Now he just had to make sure everything was still in place to snap the perfect shot. He looked up and—

Nothing.

Suddenly, nothing was there. No park, no picnic, no butterfly, babies, or Seb. Only a black void surrounded him.

“What’s going on?” he muttered frantically. “Where’s my family?” The consulting criminal wandered in a panic, finding darkness at every turn. “Sebby!” he called out. “Where are you?”

From the shadows, a disembodied voice spoke. “Why should you care?”

Moriarty whipped his head around in pursuit of whoever was talking to him. Again, he was met with a desolate abyss.

“Who’s speaking to me?” he demanded. “Where’s my husband? Where are our children?”
“Stop pretending you give a damn,” the voice sharply spat.

“I’m not pretending! I love them.”

“No, you don’t. You’re incapable of the emotion. No one ever gets to you, remember?”

Jim was really fed up now. “Sod off! How dare you question what I feel for my family? I don’t have to justify myself to an invisible man.”

Another voice chimed in. It, too, was independent of a physical form. “If you truly loved them, you wouldn’t have done the things you did.”

“You let Sebastian think you were dead for two years,” a third unseen person pointed out. “Doesn’t sound very loving to me.”

“And you put your babies in harm’s way over and over again,” a fourth faceless entity accused. “Even before they were born, your body was trying to hurt them.”

Soon more voices joined the chorus. A litany of transgressions were hurled at the mastermind with no time in between to refute them.

“Think of all the lives you’ve ruined. The death and destruction you so relished.”

“You’re a monster. Monsters aren’t fit to have families.”

“Your children will learn who you really are, and they won’t love you anymore.”

“A bastard like you doesn’t deserve them in the first place. They’re good and pure, and you’re human garbage. Something vile to scrape off the bottom of one’s shoe.”

Jim could take no more. The barrage of attacks were too much. “SHUT UP!” he screamed. “You’re a bunch of bloody cowards! At least have the decency to show yourselves to me!”

And so they did. A procession of familiar faces stepped out from the shadows. All the Holmes siblings were there—Sherlock, Mycroft, and Eurus, respectively. John, Irene, and Molly were present too.

Moriarty was flabbergasted at the reveal, but put on a brave exterior. He wouldn’t let them see him crack.

“WHERE. IS. MY. FAMILY?”

“Why don’t you turn around and see?” Sherlock suggested.

“Because there’s nothing behind me, you doofus!”

“I disagree.”

He scowled intensely and spun around to prove that there was only darkness. Except when he turned, the location had changed. There *was* something surrounding him now—a graveyard.

The Irishman didn’t want to read the names on the tombstones, but they were right in front of him, plain as day.

‘Sebastian Augustus Moran-Moriarty’
‘Edward James Moriarty’

‘Estella Sebastienne Moriarty’

This was a family plot and all of them were dead.

Horrified, he let out a bloodcurdling shriek.

Witnessing his spouse in distress, Sebastian threw down the pad and pencil in his hands and flew to Jim’s side.

“I’m here, Magpie. Whatever’s the matter, you’re safe with me.”

His eyes fluttered open, focusing on Seb. He clutched the sniper tight, as if his life depended on it.

Moran hugged him back just as fiercely. “It’s okay, darling. I’ve got you.”

The genius paused, trying to hold back tears. “Oh, Sebby. I had such an awful dream. Everyone was saying terrible things, and then…”

“Then what, sweetheart?”

“They showed me your graves— yours and the babies.’ You were gone forever.” His voice wavered as he said the words aloud. The mere thought of it made him shudder.

“Hush now. We’re very much alive and not going anywhere.”

WAAAAAH. WAAAAAAAH.

“Listen to that, Jimmy. Our cubs are calling.”

For a few seconds, Moriarty was relieved. Quickly, though, his expression dropped like a rock. “I woke them up. They were sleeping and I spoilt it.”

“No, don’t blame yourself. They probably would’ve stirred soon anyway,” Seb reassured. “Let’s comfort them together, okay?”

“That’s a good idea. Our little ones need us.”

They did, indeed. And London’s most dangerous men needed them as well.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
The Alpha Artiste

Chapter Summary

Sebastian flexes his artistic talents when Jim poses for a portrait.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“There you go, sweetie. Now you’re snug as a bug in a rug.” Jim had finished swaddling his son and was putting him down for a nap. He looked over to the other crib where Estella lay, and saw that she’d already dozed off. “My goodness, such sleepy babies.”

“They’ve been through a lot lately,” Sebastian remarked. “It’s got to be exhausting.”

“Oh, I know. I’m so glad to have them home.” After a week-long stay at St. Thomas’s, the infants were finally deemed well enough to leave the hospital.

“Me too.”

Moriarty proceeded to dim the lights in the nursery and put on a recording of soothing ocean sounds.

“Mood lighting and crashing waves, aye?”

“Yes, it’s meant to make the naptime experience more enjoyable.”

Seb wanted to roll his eyes, but didn’t dare. Ever since the twins’ illness, Jim had taken doting to a new level. He was very serious about pampering their darlings and would not abide jokes on the matter.

“They seem settled, kitten. Perhaps it’s time we go?” The duo had a ‘date’ to attend to, involving a sketchpad, pencil, and king-size bed.

“I guess so,” he answered, not quite meeting Moran’s gaze. His demeanor was noticeably less confident than usual.

“Something troubling you?”

“Not reeeally, it’s just…”

“Just what, my dear?” Sebastian smiled and stroked the smaller man’s hand in an attempt to ease
his tension.

“Are you positive you want me to pose au naturel?”

“I do,” he affirmed. “Having second thoughts?”

“No…maybe…sort of.”

“If you’re not comfortable, we don’t have to go through with it. This is your call, love.”

The genius paused and glanced up. “Let’s do it. Give me a moment to slip into something more comfortable and I’ll meet you in our room.”

“I’ll be waiting.” In all their years together, he’d never drawn Jim in the nude. There was a first time for everything.

Sebastian was ready. He reclined in a cushiony chair with his art supplies nearby. The only thing missing was his model.

It hadn’t taken too much effort to convince Moriarty to pose for him. After seeing the sketches he’d done of the babies, the mastermind permitted him to draw his likeness, too. One thing led to another, and by the end of their session, Seb cheekily suggested that next time he ought to lose the clothes. Jim agreed.

At last, the door creaked open. London’s most dashing criminal extraordinaire walked in, sporting a black silk robe and nothing else.

Moran couldn’t disguise his enthusiasm. He followed his mate’s movements with rapt anticipation. This was something to be savored.

Jim took a seat at the end of the bed, positioned parallel to Seb. He crossed his legs in an almost shielding manner and clutched the opening of his robe, making sure it was shut tight.

Hrm. This was not what the sniper was expecting.

“Honey? Forgive me for repeating myself, but I’ve got to ask again—are you certain you want to do this? Because I’m getting the distinct impression you’d rather not.”

“I’d like to, honestly,” he said. There was a hint of nervousness in his tone that signified something was weighing on him.

“So what’s the problem? I’ve seen you naked a million times. Hell, we once did a stakeout at a nude resort. You played volleyball in the buff.”

“What’s your point?”

“Well, I wonder what’s changed between then and now. Why the sudden surge of modesty?”

“In those days, I hadn’t recently given birth.”

The blonde furrowed a brow, confused. “What’s that got to do with anything?”
“You truly haven’t figured it out?”

“Nope. Toss me a few more clues and maybe I’ll be able to piece it together.”

Jim glared. “Stop playing dumb. I’m in no mood to be patronized.”

“I’m not playing, I swear. I just want to understand what’s got my omega in a tizzy.”

“For fuck’s sake, Seb. Are you really this daft?”

“Apparently.” Times like these, he wished his mate would simply say what was on his mind rather than dance around the subject.

“Fine, I’ll be blunt.”

“Please do.”

“You haven’t seen my body since I had the twins.”

He tilted his head, peering curiously at Moriarty. “Of course I have.”

“Not properly. Just half-clothed glimpses in the dark. Think about it.”

Moran did as instructed, recalling the physical side of his and Jim’s relationship since their children were born. The mastermind was advised to avoid sex for six weeks following the emergency C-section he’d undergone. But even so, they’d fooled around plenty of times after putting Essie and Eddie to bed for the night.

Night. Yes, their intimate activities had taken place during evening hours. Jim often slept when the babies did, and Seb joined him on several occasions. It was then that they’d—

He’s right. The assassin was astonished at the realization. He had not, in fact, viewed his husband fully naked since the whirlwind that was Valentine’s Day.

“You remember now, don’t you? I can see it in your eyes.”

“Yes, darling, I do. However, I’m still unclear as to why you’re upset. You’ve experienced the miracle of life— why is that a bad thing?”

“Because I don’t look the same!” he spat in frustration. “You act like this is no big deal, but it is to me. I’ve got a scar from the incision and my stomach’s not flat anymore. I thought that by agreeing to model for you, I’d get over my hang up, but it hasn’t worked. If anything, I feel worse. Sitting here, having to explain all this…it’s humiliating.”

Sebastian frowned. “Magpie, no. Don’t put yourself down. You are, and always will be, an amazing man. So what if you have a scar? I’ve got my fair share, too. And besides, consider how you acquired it— that mark is a testament to our children. If you didn’t have it, they wouldn’t be here.”

Jim was silent for a moment, contemplating his partner’s words. It was a perspective he hadn’t taken into account. “That’s an interesting way to look at it,” he admitted. “I suppose it’s true, in a manner of speaking.”

“Absolutely,” the former colonel affirmed. “Scars can be badges of honor. Yours most certainly qualifies.”
“Perhaps, but what about my ‘pooch?’ I hate it. Maybe I should get a tummy tuck.”

“Kitten, you needn’t resort to such drastic measures. I’d love your body at any size or shape. And you know why? Because it’s you. No matter what the window dressing looks like, inside you’d be the same.”

The Irishman gazed hopefully at him. “Oh Sebby, do you mean it? If you’re merely trying to placate me—”

“I promise I’m not. I’m with you for the long haul— together forever, ‘til death do us part. Nothing could deter me.”

“Don’t say ‘death,’ Tiger. Just don’t.” He was still raw from the terrible nightmare he’d suffered a week earlier. The sight of his family’s graves remained fresh in his mind, terrorizing him in a private kind of hell.

“I’m not too keen on the term either. Perhaps we ought to institute a moratorium on it. We won’t speak of demise in regards to each other ever again.”

“Sounds good to me.”

The couple exchanged a smile, both men feeling a bit more relaxed than when they began.

Jim stood up and shot his handsome hubby a come-hither gleam. “Got your pencil ready?”

Without delay, Sebastian grabbed his art supplies. Their session was about to commence and he couldn’t wait.

Moriarty took a pensive approach to disrobing, sliding off his silken covering the way a snake might slither from its skin. But no creature could look as good as he did in that moment.

“How do you want me?”

Seb swallowed. How didn’t he want him was a more apt question.

“Well? I’m patiently awaiting your expert instruction.”

*Expert instruction?* So that was how his Magpie wanted to play it. *Okay.* He could be an alpha artiste if Jim so desired.

“Get back on the bed,” he commanded, and Moriarty did. “Stretch out, facing me. Prop your head up with a pillow.”

“Like this?” the genius asked, positioning himself as directed.

“Yeah. Now move your arm over a little, and bend your leg slightly.” Seb would make damn sure that this portrait was both tasteful and erotic, revealing a fair amount without showing too much. “Perfect.”

The sniper paused to admire the sight of his gorgeous omega, sprawled out just for him. He couldn’t believe Jim was worried about the condition of his post-birth body— the changes to his physique were minimal at most. Yes, there was a scar on his abdomen, but it was relatively minor and would fade over time. As for the ‘pooch’ he complained of, well, he hadn’t exactly had rock-hard abs to start with. The way his stomach looked now wasn’t radically different from how it appeared before. In short, the man was seeing flaws where there were none.
Moran soon got to work sketching the likeness of his magnificent mate. He studied him intently, capturing every crease and contour; every freckle that littered the porcelain palette of his skin. It was an honor to pay tribute to the glory known as Jim.

“You’re beautiful, sweetheart.”

“Thank you.”

Though Moriarty kept a cool exterior, Seb didn’t miss the way he’d batted his eyes at the compliment.

“You make an excellent model.”

“Riiiiight, because it’s so difficult to lay in place on a comfortable bed.”

“There’s more to it than that. Posing requires confidence and grace—a certain je ne sais quoi.”

“Tiger? I love you dearly, but I’m smart enough to know a line when I hear one.”

“Me, feed you a line?” he replied in mock indignation. “Why, I never!” Seb flashed his irrepressible sharky grin and Jim smiled back.

“You’re a cheeky bugger today.”

“What can I say? Drawing you nude does wonders for my disposition.”

“Soooo, then…I take it everything is up to par, in your opinion?” His tone was playful yet nervous as he attempted to gage Moran’s reaction to his physical form.

“I said you were beautiful and I meant it. You’re a god among men, Magpie. My dashing dark king.”

“Does that make you my queen?”

Sebastian chuckled. “I prefer to think of myself as your knight in shining armor.”

“Ooh, yes. I do like the sound of that,” the mastermind dreamily declared. “It’s a rather fitting title. We’ve had our share of adventures. Conquered lands and slayed some proverbial dragons. Made off with untold riches along the way.”

“Not to mention the numerous times I’ve saved your arse.”

“Sebby, darling? One of your primary duties has always been to act as my bodyguard. If you hadn’t served me well in that capacity, I’d have sacked you early on.”

“Sack a handsome bloke like me? Never.”

“Cocky Tiger,” he tutted. “But perhaps you’re right. I’d have probably just kept you chained to my bed.”

The assassin smirked. “I think you did that a few times regardless.”

“Honey, you know it.”

“I sure do.”
The couple’s banter wound down as Sebastian focused on his drawing. It was a black and white sketch, but he wondered if next time he should try using color. He might even branch out and employ pastels instead of regular pencils. The possibilities were endless.

Eventually, it was done. Butterflies fluttered in Jim’s stomach as he awaited the finished product. He hoped the portrait would be flattering.

“Care to take a peek, kitten?”

“I doooo.” Rising from the bed, Moriarty approached the larger man, who had his sketchpad open. He was gobsmacked when he saw the piece.

“What do you think? Is it any good?”

“Good? Darling, this is stunning. It’s remarkable you’re able to produce such high caliber work after so many years on hiatus.”

Seb shrugged. “Once you get going, it doesn’t take long for the technique to come back.”

“Still, it’s impressive. I may insist we do this again.”

“Oh, we will,” he asserted. “You can count on that.”

The consulting criminal’s face alit with devilish delight. “So confident, my sweet. I like it.”

Moran grunted huskily at his husband’s comment and set the drawing aside. It had taken great restraint to remain professional while Jim laid naked before him. Now that they’d concluded their session, he could allow his baser urges to run free.

“I want you closer,” Seb proclaimed, gripping the genius by the arm and pulling him firmly against his chest. There was no space between them; no bridge left to cross. The duo’s warm bodies pressed together as if fusing into one.

Moriarty’s breathing hitched and goosebumps rose on his skin. He was putty in the sniper-turned-artist’s hands, electrified by his alpha’s touch. No other person on this earth held such sway over him. No one else ever could.

Their mouths soon met in a fevered display of love, lust, and unbridled need. Jim ran his fingers through Sebastian’s strawberry blonde hair, relishing how wonderful he felt in the man’s passionate embrace. It was heaven, or something close to it.

“Why are you still wearing clothes?” he panted, briefly breaking their kiss.

The strapping assassin tugged off his t-shirt and jeans, leaving him in only a pair of grey boxer briefs. “Better?”

Jim eyed him hungrily. “Almost.” Without warning, he tore the undergarments from Seb’s awesome, godlike body.

“Fuck.”

“My sentiments exactly.”

London’s most dangerous—and amorous—men stumbled to the bed amid a haze of wandering hands, lips, and heated declarations of love. Who knew that art could be such a potent aphrodisiac?
This chapter was originally going to include Colin and Luke's first meeting. However, I got on a roll writing about Jim and Seb's art session and decided to dedicate the chapter entirely to that.

Rest assured, the next installment will feature the antagonists meet-up. Also, Jim will receive some unexpected, but happy, news. Stay tuned.
Chapter Summary

Jim receives a surprising phone call. Meanwhile, Colin is up to no good.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Sebby!” Jim called out excitedly. “Sebbby, come quick!”

The consulting criminal was in the babies’ playroom, sitting on the floor with them while they were secured in infant support seats.

Sebastian rushed in, fearing the worst. “What’s the matter?” He looked his family over and saw that everyone appeared to be intact. It was a relief, but now he doubly wondered why Jim had summoned him with such urgency.

“Eddie just spoke!” The Irishman’s expression was incredibly animated as he relayed the news.

“Really?” Moran was delighted at first, but then stopped to consider the probability of his partner’s claim. “Wait, kitten…they’re not even two months old. There’s no way they could be talking yet.”

“I’m telling you, I heard it for myself a moment ago. I was pulling out the cow puppet, and when he saw it, he said ‘moo!’

“Hmm.” Seb wasn’t convinced.

“It happened, truly it did!” he insisted. “Our son recognized ‘Monsieur Moo.’”

“See if you can get him to do it again.”

“Fine, and when he does, I expect a formal apology for having doubted me.”

Jim brought the black and white spotted sockpuppet back out, placing it on his hand and waving it in front of the child.

Eddie’s face instantly lit up at the sight of the toy, his brilliant blue eyes widening and his tiny mouth stretching to form a toothless grin.

“He’s so happy,” Seb marveled. The little boy’s joy was utterly heartwarming.
“Of course he is,” Moriarty replied, now speaking in an affected French accent as he assumed the ‘Monsieur Moo’ persona. “Our chéries are like sunshine— always cheerful and bright.” He leaned in close to the twins, making the puppet ‘kiss’ their cheeks and tickle their tummies.

Both babies giggled wildly and began babbling a series of cute, contented sounds.

“Do you hear it?” the mastermind quizzed Moran.

Seb cocked his head, continuing to listen carefully. “Honey, I don’t think they’re actually talking. They’re just producing normal cooing noises that occasionally share tonal qualities with real words.”

“Are you kidding me? I’m offering proof of our children’s superior intellect, and you dare suggest it’s ordinary cooing?”

“Jimmy, I’m sure our darlings are clever beyond measure. With your genes in the mix, how could they not be?” he acknowledged. “But try to be reasonable. Isn’t it more likely that they’re making sweet, blissful baby sounds rather than attempting language at 7 weeks?”

The genius contemplated his mate’s pragmatic perspective. Seb had a point, though he was loath to admit it. Instead, he simply glared at him.

RING. RING. RING.

Moriarty’s phone rang. He removed the sockpuppet from his hand and out his mobile device.

“Hello?” *pause* “Oh, wow.” *pause* “Certainly, I’d be glad to swing by.” *pause* “See you soon.” At that, he ended the call.

“Who was that?” Sebastian asked.

“Jack. He had his baby and wants me to come visit him at the hospital. I’ll need you to watch Essie and Eddie while I’m gone.”

“Sure, that’s no problem. Which hospital will you be at?”

Jim hesitated to divulge the information, realizing it might ruffle some feathers. But as his spouse awaited a response, he knew he had to come clean. “St. Bart’s.”

Now it was Seb’s turn to glare. He abso-fucking-lutely despised the place. That his children had been born there only slightly lessened his hatred.

“It’s a good hospital. Despite your feelings toward it, they have an excellent medical staff. That’s probably why Jack went there.”

“I know their reputation. Doesn’t mean I have to like it any better.”

Moriarty stood up, in no mood to argue. “Let’s get the babies back to the nursery before I go.”

“Okay.” The sniper stopped for a second, wanting to make sure of something. “Magpie?”

“Yeah?”

“Allow our security detail to follow you there, all right? You’ll be heading out alone and I worry about you.”
“Seb…”

“Please.”

Jim sighed. He was resistant to the idea, but aware of how much it meant to his partner. “Fine. I’ll agree to be trailed, provided they stay a tolerable distance away. I won’t have bodyguards breathing down my neck at every turn.”

Moran nodded. “That’s fair. Thank you, love.”

“Well, let’s just get going before I change my mind,” he quipped. “I’ll take Essie and you can grab Eddie. I enjoy seeing my favorite boys together.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, there’s a certain novelty to it. It’s like viewing a side-by-side comparison of ‘Seb classic’ versus a new, reformulated version.”

The blonde chuckled. “Glad you didn’t say ‘new and improved.’”

“Honey, there’s no way to improve upon the original. He’s perfect as is.”

“You flatter me.”

“I merely state an indisputable fact.”

Time being of the essence, the duo cut short their banter and brought the twins to the nursery. They were a tad fussy at first, but calmed once Jim put on the ‘ocean sounds’ album they so adored.

“I’m amazed that actually works,” remarked Moran.

“The waves mimic what they would’ve heard in utero. That’s why it has such a soothing effect.”

“Ah, makes sense.”

As he readied to leave, Moriarty took a final glimpse at his family. They really were a dream come true. Never in a million years did he think life would lead him down a path of domesticity, but here he was, tucking in babies and making a mental checklist of grocery items to pick up so Seb could cook dinner. Weirdly enough, it felt good. He wished it could stay that way forever.

*********

Luke Darrow stared at the establishment in front of him, deciding whether or not to venture inside. From the looks of the place, you’d never suspect there was a bar operating within its walls. It had a derelict appearance, including boarded up windows, graffiti on the exterior, and a back entrance only. Not to mention that it also happened to be located amid one of London’s dodgiest boroughs.

Still, this was the address Annie had given him. It’d taken over a week for them to coordinate their schedules so he could meet with the man she’d told him about. Even then, she kept the details of their association vague, simply saying they were collaborating to take down Sebastian Moran. Other than that, he knew nothing of the bloke besides his first name.

Steeling himself for whatever lay ahead, he pushed through the alleyway door. Immediately, he was overwhelmed by a thick haze of smoke permeating the air. It was a mixture of tobacco, cannabis, and some third indeterminable substance. Opium, perhaps? He couldn’t be sure.
Luke scanned the room, taking in the sights and sounds of his surroundings. There were a handful of people present, most seeming fairly listless and doped out of their minds. There was music playing, though not in the bar itself— it was coming from upstairs.

He watched on as a buxom, but clearly drug-addled woman guided an equally inebriated man out of his chair and up a set of steps. The pair disappeared to a higher floor of the building, for the purposes of doing god knows what.

Suddenly, a male sitting in the far corner booth waved him over. Was this the guy he was supposed to meet? Taking a chance, he approached.

“Hello?” he warily began. “Are you Colin?”

The man flashed a lopsided grin. “I am. You must be Luke. Please, have a seat.”

He obliged, noticing that Colin had a bottle of whiskey with two glasses set out.

Not missing a beat, the former military captain poured his new acquaintance a tumbler full of the potent amber liquid.

“Thanks,” he said, taking a sip. “You picked a good blend.”

“Life’s too short to waste time drinking shite liquor.”

“Amen to that.”

The two silently eyed each other for a moment. Luke couldn’t shake the sense that he’d seen Colin before. Maybe he’d visited The Golden Anchor where he worked? It was possible; the pub was a popular hangout spot. He couldn’t confirm it with any certainty, though, and it bugged the hell out of him.

“Interesting venue to arrange a meeting at,” the slightly younger man remarked. “Probably wouldn’t have been my first choice, but I’m sure you had your reasons.”

“Yes, I did. This place is ideal for keeping things on the down-low. What happens here stays here.”

“Always a fine policy.”

Once more, Colin stared icily at the fellow across from him. Could he be trusted? He’d soon find out based on how the rest of the conversation went.

“Annie tells me she noticed you tracking an employee of James Moriarty and Sebastian Moran’s. She explained the relationship you have to this protégé of theirs.”

“Ian.” His tone grew dark as he spoke the teen’s name. “He’s having my baby and those tossers are doing everything they can to keep him away from me. They ought to mind their own goddamn business.”

“I’m not surprised to hear they’re nosing around where they don’t belong. Both are arrogant twats, and Seb…he’s got a long history of insinuating himself in other people’s lives. The man’s a fucking disease, contaminating everyone he comes in contact with.”

“Sebastian,” Luke angrily spat, as if uttering an expletive. “Of the two, I hate him most. He pulled some unforgivable shite with me a few months ago.”

“Annie mentioned he’d injured you in some manner, but didn’t go into specifics.”
“I don’t like to discuss the encounter we shared, except to say that if we ever meet again, I’m returning the favor tenfold.”

“An eye for an eye. I respect that.”

“The part I’d aim for is a bit lower than his eye, but yeah. Sometimes old school retribution is the way to go.”

*Lower than his eye?* Colin mused. *He must mean…ouch.*

“So what’s your beef with Moran?”

“He’s responsible for the death of my wife and unborn child.”

“Fuck. That’s terrible.”

“It absolutely is. Margo was a wonderful woman and we were going to be a family, right and proper. He ruined all that,” the man lamented. “There’s a special place in hell reserved for monsters like him.”

“Aye.”

Colin took a generous swig of whiskey, emptying his glass. “Let me cut to the chase,” he hoarsely declared. “I hate Moran and so do you. We both want him to burn. I suggest we work together to achieve that goal.”

Luke considered the proposition, intrigued. “What did you have in mind?”

“My objective is to make him suffer as much as I have. That would involve taking away everything he loves—his husband and his children,” the vengeful fugitive explained. “Several months ago, I almost pulled it off. I locked up his mate while he was carrying their whelps. Unfortunately, Seb enlisted in outside assistance and managed to rescue him.”

“That’s a damn shame.”

“No kidding. Not a day goes by that I don’t kick myself for it,” Colin confessed. “I now believe my mistake was going into the situation without enough backup. I need more manpower to ensure my plan’s success, but for the longest time, I refused to admit it. Annie recognized the issue, though, which is why she jumped at the chance to recruit you. She thought you might be receptive to our goal.”

“I like the idea, but…”

“But what?” Colin peered at him intently, on the edge of his seat waiting for Luke to complete the sentence.

“But where does Ian fit into this scenario? I want him and our kid. How would aiding you bring me closer to that?”

“Think about it, Luke. Once Jim and Seb are out of the picture, you shouldn’t have any trouble getting to Ian.” He paused, contemplating a way to sweeten the deal. “If you agree to help me with this, I’ll do the same.”

“Oh? How so?”

“We take out Jim and his brats successfully, and I’ll make sure you get Ian and his baby.”

Colin was momentarily taken aback by the other man’s outburst, but quickly realized it was a good sign. That kind of raw fury was what he needed in a cohort. Emotion could be a powerful tool if wielded correctly, and this individual clearly had a surplus of rage simmering just beneath the surface.

“Yes, of course. It’s a sin that you’re being forcibly separated from your kin.” He hesitated for a beat, a sly look coming over his face. “Imagine it— you could help destroy the family of the bastard who’s kept you from your own flesh and blood. There’s something poetic about that, don’t you think?”

“I do,” he answered sharply. “How shall we get started?”

Gripping the whiskey bottle, Colin poured himself a refill and topped off his tablemate’s tumbler. “I’ve got a few ideas,” he said.

Indeed, there was much to discuss.

Chapter End Notes

Just a heads-up: It will probably take me a bit longer than usual to get the next chapter written, edited, and posted because my birthday is this Friday (the 12th). I’m going to be busy finalizing party plans and indulging in some revelry. Hope everyone understands.
A Gathering of Friends

Chapter Summary

Jim visits a friend in the hospital and much discussion ensues.

Chapter Notes

Finally back after my week-long hiatus! Thanks for bearing with me. There are a couple things I want to quickly mention:

1. When I first wrote this chapter, I absolutely hated the end result. I decided to scrap the entire second half and change the direction it was going in. That's why it took so long to get this up, but I’m *much* happier now with the current, revised version.

2. Time-wise, the events in this installment are meant to take place immediately after those of the previous chapter. I thought that might already be clear, but since I haven’t posted in a while, I wanted to note it.

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My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Room 216, Jim reminded himself as he walked down the hospital corridor carrying a fruit basket. That was the number they’d given him at the reception desk when he asked for Jack Norridge. The consulting criminal grew closer and closer with each step, until finally, he reached his target destination.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

“Come in,” his friend beckoned.

Moriarty entered at once. “Hiiiiii. Congratulations! I brought you a little something.”

“Hallelujah, it’s a gift I can eat. After the slop they tried to pass off as ‘lunch,’ this is a welcomed treat. Get me an apple, would you?”

“Sure.” He handed him a deliciously ripe piece of produce and then set the basket aside. “Hospital food is the worst,” he commiserated. “I remember it all too well. Nothing but mushy vegetables, mystery meat, and green jello.”

“Ugh. Tell me about it. At this rate, I may have Gary start bringing in meals from an outside source.”
“That’s what I ended up—”

“JIM!” a tiny, yet booming, voice shouted.

He turned and saw that it was Jack’s toddler son peeking out from under a blanket in the corner of the room.

“Hello, honey. You’re so covered up, I almost didn’t see you there.”

“Reginald was taking a short nap. It’s been an exciting day for him.”

The child hopped to his feet, grinning gleefully. “Am big bwudda now!”

“That must be very thrilling.” He glanced back at Jack. “What did you have, anyway?”

“A beautiful 7lbs. 4oz. boy.”

“Splendid. What’s his name?”

“Longinus DuBois.”

Jim’s eyes widened. “Wow. That’s…uh, a bold choice.”

The man burst out laughing. “I’m just joking. That would be utterly daft.”

“Thank god,” he breathed in relief. “What’s the real name?”

“An excellent question. Unfortunately, it’s also one which currently has no answer. Gary and I can’t seem to agree on the matter. You’ve got kids—you know how it is.”

“Actually, naming the twins was quite simple. I told Seb what I wanted to call them and that was it.”

“Seriously? He put up no resistance?”

“My Tiger knows better than that.”

Jack chuckled. “It’s nice to see an omega who wears the pants in the family, so to speak. Ordinarily, Gary and I function as equals. This time around, though, we’ve come to an impasse. He’d like to name our newborn ‘Archibald,’ while I’m lobbying for ‘Bertram.’”

“Wanna cawl baybuh ‘Tony!’” Reggie proudly announced.

“I know you do, sweetheart.” He looked to Moriarty and whispered, “He’s crazy about ‘Iron Man.’ The other day, he wanted to rename the cat ‘Tony,’ too.”

The mastermind couldn’t help but smile at the notion—it was just so damn adorable.

“Penny for your thoughts, Jim. Which name do you prefer?”

“Neither are reeeeeally my style, but to each their own. If you’re at a stalemate, perhaps you should consider combining them.”

“Hmm. An interesting prospect.” The man paused, imagining a reworked moniker. “Bertram Archibald Norridge,” he said, speaking the name aloud to test how well it rolled off his tongue. “That’s not half bad. There’s a certain distinction to it. Thank you for the suggestion.”
“No problem. I’m glad to help.”

It was then that Reggie decided to scale the bed, crawling over to Jack and snuggling close beside him.

“Mumma, where Jim’s baybuhs?”

“They’re probably nestled in their cribs, slumbering soundly. How about it?” he inquired, addressing the man himself. “Are they doing better now?”

“Thankfully, they’re much improved. It was scary for a while, though, and I’m not one to be shaken easily.”

“I understand. As a parent, there’s nothing worse than seeing your child suffer and being helpless to stop it. You may recall Reggie came down with a mild version of the flu around the same time your little ones did. I’m grateful we caught it early enough that they could give him meds to knock it out quickly.”

“I nu sick, but gotta wear mask around bwudda.”

“Why’s that?”

“It’s a surgical mask,” Jack explained. “The doctor wants him to wear it because he was recently ill. The virus is likely gone, but it was recommended we err on the side of caution.”

“Do you suppose I should wear one, too? I never really got sick when my darlings did, but they gave me an antiviral drug just in case.”

“I imagine it’s fine. Though to be safe, perhaps you ought not hold the baby if they bring him by.”

“Good idea.”

“Mumma, pwease give mask. Wanna show Jim.”

“All right, love.” He grabbed the item from the nightstand and passed it to his son.

“Fanks!” The tot proceeded to put on the protective barrier with some assistance from Jack. “Wook,” he said to Moriarty, “am Docta Weggie, M.D.!”

The genius chuckled. “What’s your specialty?”

“Nu know what spesh-ul-tee is,” Reginald replied, sounding out the word.

“It’s an area of expertise. Like right now, we’re in the obstetrics ward. The physicians assigned to this department specialize in pregnancy and childbirth. But if you went to the cardiology unit, for example, those doctors would be focused on a whole different aspect of medicine— the heart. Do you follow what I’m saying?”


“All of them, aye? How ambitious.”

“Yes,” Jack interjected, “let’s see if he still feels the same after assisting me with our new addition. The diaper changes and 3 a.m. feedings might convince him otherwise.”
“It’s grueling work, for sure. But totally worth it.” Moriarty truly meant that. Caring for his cubs had proven to be among the most rewarding experiences of his life. He wouldn’t trade it for the world.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

“Come,” Jack commanded.

Jim was pleasantly surprised when he saw Ian walk into the room. He, too, was bearing a gift— his being a box of chocolates with a decorative bow on top.

“More edibles,” the patient exclaimed. “Gary doesn’t know what he’s missing.”

“Where is he, by the way?” Jim asked. “Tell me he hasn’t ducked out to the office already?”

“You want the truth?”

“Truth?” he repeated curiously. “Of course.”

“Gary still can’t believe that we’re friends and didn’t wish to be here when you visited.”

The consulting criminal was taken aback by the admission. He prided himself on not giving a damn what ordinary people thought of him, yet somehow this hurt more than it should. “Oh…I see.”

“For what it’s worth, I promptly told him off before he left.”

“Mumma cawled him a bad word,” Reggie stated in a hushed tone.

“You heard that, hon? I’m sorry, I thought you were asleep.”

“Nu, was awake.”

“Jack, I apologize if our relationship is causing a rift between you and your husband. It wasn’t my intention to create discord in your marriage.”

“This isn’t your fault. Gary’s acting like a bloody idiot, and that’s putting it politely because my son is present.”

“Even so—”

“Even nothing. You’re my friend and he simply needs to accept it. End of story,” the man declared. “I’m done discussing this. Let’s move on to other things.” He turned to Ian. “Thanks for coming. How are you?”

“I’m okay. I feel like I should be the one asking you that, though. You just gave birth, after all.”

He shrugged. “Once you’ve been through it before, the process becomes a bit less magical and mysterious. Still, I’m delighted to welcome Bertram into the world.”

“So it was a boy? Congrats. Now my baby will have another playmate.”

Envisioning their children romping together cheered Moriarty up a little. “I can’t wait until our darlings really do start hanging out. It will be wonderful.”

“Hey, that reminds me,” Jack spoke, “I’ve got news about the parenting group we wanted to form.
It’s fortuitous both of you are around to hear this.”

“Go on,” encouraged Jim. “What’s the status?”

“Trevor is willing to coordinate an official weekly meetup for those who are interested. It will begin in either the summer or fall, depending on his scheduling constraints.”

“Excellent. I’m sure we could assemble a decent number of participants.”

“Yeah, I bet lots of blokes who attend MOPS would be willing to give it a try.”

While the trio chatted and made plans, Reggie grew restless. “Mumma?” he prodded, tugging at Jack’s arm.

“Yes, sweetie?”

“Can bwing back bwudda? Pwease?” The toddler stared at him with wide, earnest eyes.

“You miss him, huh?”

He nodded.

“Well, I think that’s a fine idea. Then I could introduce him to my guests.”

“I’d love to see him,” Jim enthused.

“Yes,” agreed Ian, “that would be terrific.”

“I guess it’s unanimous.”

The group halted their conversation so that Jack could request the baby be brought to his room. A nurse soon arrived carrying the swaddled newborn in her arms.

“Here we are,” the medical worker announced as she gently transferred the child over to his mother. “If you need anything else, feel free to phone the desk out front.”

“Will do, thanks.” He paused, waiting until the woman was gone before commencing introductions. “Everyone, I’m proud to present Bertram Archibald Norridge, aka, Bertie.”

The omegas were all smiles, beaming delightedly at the infant. He returned their gazes, transfixed. The world was exciting and new, and the faces greeting him today were among the first he’d ever seen.

“Burdee bawld wike gwampa.”

Jack laughed. “I suppose so. Don’t worry, though— his hair will grow in eventually.”

“It’s hard to believe we start out so small,” Ian marveled.

“Oh, I know. Sometimes I look at Eddie and can barely fathom the idea that one day he’ll probably be as big as Seb. It’s surreal.”

“They grow up too fast,” Jack remarked. “Seems like just yesterday Reggie was that size.”

“Am big boy now,” the tot proclaimed. “Gotta pwotect bwudda as bes’ I can. Dadda say so.”

Moriarty smiled. “I’m sure you’ll do a fine job.” He hesitated for a second, considering something.
“Jack? Once you’re out of the hospital, let’s plan a playdate. I want to see how our children interact.”

“Okay, but I wouldn’t expect much. At their respective ages, social responses are rather limited.”

“Fair point, but it’s never too early to familiarize them with one another.”

“Hey,” Ian spoke up, “could I hold the baby?”

“Certainly.” The man eased his son into his friend’s welcoming arms. “Be careful to support his head and neck.”

“Right.” He cradled the tiny bundle, in awe. “Hi, honey. It’s a pleasure to meet you. I hope my little girl is as cute as you are.”

“I think she will be,” said Jack. “It won’t be long until you get to do this with her, for that matter.”

“Yes, and I’m utterly petrified.”

“Really? You seem like a natural. Just look at how relaxed Bertie is.” Indeed, the baby appeared quite calm, not at all anxious about being in a stranger’s embrace.

“He’s precious, there’s no denying it. But I worry I won’t be a good enough parent. You two have your husbands to help,” he noted. “Me… I’ve got nobody.”

The older men exchanged a concerned glance. They hated to see Ian doubt himself.

“If you need extra assistance, you can always come to us,” Jim assured.

“It’s kind of you to say that, but you’ve got your own families to contend with. I’d feel terribly guilty distracting either of you from what should be your top priority,” he stated. “I’ll muddle through— it’s what I’ve done forever.” The teen sounded so somber and resigned to his fate, it was troubling.

“Perhaps it’s not my place to ask, but what happened to your baby’s father?” queried Jack. “I understand your relationship must’ve ended badly since you’ve refused to discuss him at our MOPS meetings, but maybe once your daughter’s born, you could find a way to work something out. Make it so that she’s got two parents and you won’t have to pull double duty.”

Moriarty’s breathing hitched as he witnessed his friend’s unwitting faux pas. Bringing up Luke would only serve to open a gigantic can of worms. It wasn’t even Jack’s fault, not really— he had no idea who’d sired Ian’s child and what the circumstances were. This was an ignorance-induced err of the highest order.

As predicted, the youth’s expression sank. “‘Ended badly’ doesn’t begin to cover it. I don’t want him anywhere near Matilda. That bastard should be in prison, or better yet, in the ground.”

Reggie gasped. “Bad word!”

“My apologies, but he’s a rotten guy and I believe monsters deserve to be called what they are.”

The boy paused, thinking about it. “I agwee. Docta Weggie wan’ pwotect baybuhs from him.”

“That’s incredibly sweet of you, dear. This world could use more upstanding, respectful lads.”

“I do my best to raise Reginald as the perfect gentleman,” Jack affirmed. “And for the record, I
didn’t mean to upset you. I wonder, though—if this bloke’s as horrible as you claim, and has committed jailable offenses, why is he still walking the streets?"

Ian hung his head low, passing the baby back to its mother. An awkward silence stifled the room while he tried, and failed, to articulate a response.

Jim reached over and placed a hand on his protégé’s shoulder. “Hey, it’s okay.”

“No, it isn’t!” he snapped, swiftly looking up again. “The reason he hasn’t been locked away is because I’m too chicken to tell the police what he’s done. He scares the hell out of me.”

“Nu be scawwed,” Reggie soothed. “Dat what munstas wan’.”

All three men stared at the precocious toddler, amazed that such an astute observation could come from one so young.

“You’re awfully wise,” Ian remarked.

“I wearn from ‘Iron Man.’” His voice, though babyish, rang with confidence and conviction.

The trio’s hearts were truly warmed. Amid the cynicism that permeated their lives, Jack’s firstborn was a source of pure, undiluted bliss. He could make them smile even during the darkest moments.

Jack shifted, holding Bertie with one arm while wrapping the other around his eldest son. “Darling, if I told you I loved you every hour of the day, it wouldn’t be enough.”

“Wuv you too, Mumma.”

The sudden atmosphere of affection had Jim aching for his angels. He made a promise to himself right then and there that when he got home, he’d insist upon staging a ‘family night.’ He, Seb, and the twins would spend the entire evening together, enjoying the simple pleasure of each other’s company.

Moriarty glanced at Ian and an idea quickly sprung to mind. He nudged the teen, commanding his attention. “Are you doing anything later?”

“No, why?”

“Because I’d like to invite you to dinner at my house tonight. Seb’s cooking chicken parmigiana, and trust me when I say it’s amaaaazing.”

“Oh, that does sound good. I haven’t had a homemade meal in ages.”

“Then drop by and prepare to be wowed.”

“You’re certain I wouldn’t be imposing?”

“Never,” the genius assured. “Let’s plan on eating at around 7 o’clock. Come a little early and maybe we can fit in a game of chess beforehand.”

“I…uh…this is embarrassing to admit, but I don’t know how to play chess.”

“No worries. I’ll teach you.”

“Well, okay. 7 it is.”
“Wish I could get in on the action,” Jack quipped. “If lunch is anything to go by, I shudder to think what horrors await on St. Bart’s dinner menu.”

Jim laughed lightly. “Once you’re released, I might be persuaded to break bread with you too.”

“Careful,” he teased, “make me an offer like that and I will hold you to it.”

“Please do. Who knows, perhaps I’ll even bake something for the occasion.”

“That settles it— when I get out of here, your place is my first stop.”

“I look forward to it.”

After a bit more chatting, the visit finally wound down. Jack was tired and in need of rest, while Jim had grocery items to acquire. As for Ian, he just wanted to go home and relax until it was time to dine at Moriarty’s magnificent manor. They parted ways not with sorrow, but with purpose, knowing they would see each other again.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone is confused by Reggie’s baby talk dialogue, I'm willing to translate it for clarification.

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Sneak Preview: In the next chapter, Jim and Seb’s stalkers will renew their efforts against the couple. Stay tuned as the situation unfolds.
Chapter Summary

A simple trip out yields more than Jim bargained for.

Chapter Notes

I originally started writing this chapter just before Easter, which is why the holiday is mentioned therein. It took me a little longer than expected to finish, but it's also a bit lengthier than usual, too. Hopefully that helps make up for the delay.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jim was grinning from ear to ear. He’d just finished dressing the twins in stylish springtime outfits and they looked even cuter than he imagined they would. Eddie wore a polo shirt with corduroy pants and suspenders, while Essie was clad in an adorable daisy-print frock and matching bonnet. They were picture-perfect for what he had planned.

“Let’s go, darlings. We don’t want to be late.”

He placed them in their side-by-side double stroller and rode the elevator downstairs. When he reached the lower level, he was greeted to a shirtless Sebastian in the kitchen.

“Oh, now there’s a sight I could get used to.”

The sniper turned around. “Hello, love. I was about to brew a spot of tea.” He paused, taking in the full view of his family. “You headed somewhere?”

“Yes, I’m bringing our little ones to the mall to have their photo taken with the Easter Bunny.”

“Oh.” Seb sounded rather surprised. “Are you sure it’s safe? After how sick they got following their last social event, I’ve been nervous to allow them anywhere near a crowd.”

“Me too, which is why I’ve arranged a private meetup. There won’t be any long, germ-filled lines to wade through. We’ll simply check in at the Customer Service desk and be escorted to a restricted-access room.”

“How’d you manage that?”

“Honey, by now, must you even ask?”
He thought about it for a second. “You wrote them a big, fat check.”

“I prefer to think of it as a charitable contribution,” Jim said with a smirk. “It’s going towards the construction of a new indoor fountain.”

“Right. Just be careful. You never know what could happen while certain people are on the loose.”

“I’ve got that part covered as well. One of our bodyguards, Rocco, will trail me and hang back at a distance. If trouble arises, all I have to do is press a button on my speed dial and he’ll be there to handle the situation.”

“No kidding? That’s good to hear.” Usually it was a struggle getting Jim to use their security detail. Today’s cooperation was a refreshing change of pace.

“My goal is to ensure that everything runs smoothly. This will be Essie and Eddie’s first holiday photo. I want to leave no room for error.”

“Sensible reasoning, dear.”

“Indeed. Would you care to join us?”

“I’d love to, but I’m scheduled to attend a meeting at headquarters in an hour. I’m only bumming around here until it’s time to go.”

“Ah, come on. Play hooky and we’ll go to the mall together. It’ll be fun.”

“I’m sorry, Magpie. I’ve got to work.”

He peered at his partner. “Do you reeeeeeally? I’m your boss. I guarantee you won’t get in trouble for missing the meeting.”

“Jimmy, that’s not the point.”

“Then what, may I ask, is?”

“My point is that someone has to run your empire because you aren’t doing it anymore. As second-in-command, the task falls to me. I don’t have the luxury of skipping out on meetings. I’ve got to keep business afloat.”

The genius stood in stunned silence. He hadn’t expected Seb to speak so bluntly. In fact, it actually kind of stung.

“Wait, that didn’t come out right.” Moran rushed to amend his hasty remarks, but the hurt that flashed across Jim’s face told him the damage was already done.

“I think it came out exactly the way you intended it to.”

“No, I didn’t mean to be harsh. I just wanted to explain why I can’t beg off work whenever I please.”

“Yeah, right. You think I don’t give a toss about the criminal web I dedicated most of my adult life to building.”

“I didn’t say that. You’re twisting my words.”

“How else am I supposed to take it when you suggest I’m negligent towards my own enterprise?”
Sebastian sighed. “Can we not do this, please? I don’t want to argue.”

“Neither do I, but you’re the one who opened this Pandora’s box.”

“You’re reading way too much into what I said.”

“Am I? You make it sound like you have to run the business all by yourself, but that’s patently untrue. I’m here. You could consult with me.”

“When, Jimmy?”

He furrowed a brow. “When what?”

“When could I consult you? You tend to the babies morning, noon, and night,” Moran stated. “I don’t begrudge that in the slightest. In fact, I think it’s wonderful how bonded the three of you are. But consequently, it leaves very little time to deal with work-related matters. When did you last hold a conference call or send out an official correspondence? It’s been ages, kitten.”

Moriarty wanted to disagree. Wanted to refute his spouse’s claims and demand an apology. He couldn’t, though, because Seb was correct. He’d sworn to stay abreast of what happened at headquarters, but work had fallen to the wayside these past few months in favor of—

Oh my. The Irishman’s breathing suddenly hitched as an epiphany washed over him. “Tiger… you’re not wrong. Our children are the most important thing in the world to me. Them and you. Everything else comes second.”

HISSS. HISSS.

The tea kettle whistled shrilly, pulling the couple from their respective thoughts.

“I’d better get that,” the assassin spoke. He scrambled to the stove, removing the pot from the burner.

“I should be on my way as well.”

Seb nodded. “See you later, hon. Maybe we can talk more then?”

“Maybe.”

Even as Jim departed, tension remained. Both knew what was coming—the inevitable discussion addressing whether or not Moriarty would continue with his criminal empire, or if he would retire to focus on family life. They’d touched upon the issue months ago, but had come to no definite conclusion. Now it sounded like he was leaning towards the latter, and if so, that was fine by Sebastian—he would support his Magpie no matter what.

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Jim’s thoughts raced in a frenzy. The whole ride over, he replayed the exchange he and Moran had shared. He’d not anticipated the confrontational nature of their chat, nor the realization that sprung from it.

My empire no longer comes first.

It was a bombshell to bear. After so many years of being driven by power and ambition, his
priorities were irreparably changed. When he looked at those darling babes secured in the backseat, he was filled with a swell of joy unlike anything he'd previously known. It was different from the love he felt for Seb. This was nurturing and protective; parental at its core.

He never wanted to leave his children. Never wanted them to grow up as he had— orphaned and alone. That’s what they’d be if something happened to him and Sebastian. In their line of work, death was an all too real possibility. He used to relish that aspect; revel in the danger they faced on a regular basis. Now, with Essie and Eddie in his life, such recklessness seemed unconscionable.

Moriarty was finally able to put his mind on other matters when they arrived at the shopping center. The check-in process was blessedly hassle-free, and thanks to the generous donation he’d made, everyone on staff treated him like royalty. They’d even gone so far as to bestow a complimentary gift basket featuring baby-related products and discount vouchers for some of the stores.

The genius watched on as his sweethearts had their pictures taken. He wasn’t sure what to expect at first, having heard stories about kids who were terrified by shopping mall Easter Bunnies and Santa Clauses. For better or worse, Edward and Estella had no problem fraternizing with a 6-foot-tall rabbit. Individual photos were snapped, as well as one that included them both. The images would certainly be framed once they got home.

“Your Papa’s going to be over the moon when he sees these,” Jim announced to his precious progeny. He wheeled them into the lobby and looked around for Rocco, the bodyguard who was meant to be waiting for him. Curiously, he didn’t see the man anywhere.

Hmm. Maybe he was in the bathroom, or out taking a smoke break. Either way, Jim was annoyed.

He sat down on a bench and pulled out his phone, deciding to text the AWOL guard.

**JM**

*Where are you? I’m at the agreed upon spot.*

No reply.

**JM**

*Hello? Are you in the building?*

Still nothing.

**JM**

*My patience is wearing thin. If I don’t see you here soon, consider yourself sacked.*

A few more minutes passed and Jim tucked his mobile device away. He glimpsed the babies, smiling softly when he saw that they’d drifted to sleep. They always looked so serene while at rest.

In light of his security going MIA, the mastermind contemplated what to do next. Given his current location, the answer seemed obvious: he was going to shop with a vengeance. If the guard
eventually turned up, great. If not…well, at least he’d have some lovely new purchases to show for his trouble.

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Almost two hours had gone by since Moriarty opted to indulge in a bit of retail therapy. He was feeling particularly munificent, the presence of his children no doubt having a direct influence on his mood. As such, everything he bought was intended for other people. Gifts of clothing, electronics, and jewelry were acquired from a variety of stores throughout the mall.

Amazingly, during all that time, Essie and Eddie remained remarkably well-behaved. He’d witnessed plenty of infants screaming bloody murder while their parents attempted to shop. Not his angels, though. They really were the best babies in the world, he was sure of it.

Jim glanced at his amethyst-dial Rolex. The twins’ scheduled feeding was coming up soon. Some mothers fed their little ones in public, but he preferred to do it at home, where it was easier to handle two babies at once and prevent the formula in their bottles from getting cold.

“We’ll just visit one more store, darlings. Then it’s back to the house. Daddy will give you a special treat for being so good today— organic strawberry-flavored formula. How does that sound?”

His children stared up at him with their big, beautiful eyes. Though too young to provide a proper verbal response, they could communicate a great deal using only facial expressions. At the moment, it seemed they were very much content.

The consulting criminal decided that Harvey Nichols would be their final stop. Upon entering the shop, he immediately noticed it was packed. Apparently, a major sale in the ‘Body & Bath’ department had drawn a sizeable crowd.

How advantageous, he mused. Moriarty was always in the market for beauty products. Seb sometimes teased him that their master bathroom contained enough lotions, moisturizers, and cleansers to be mistaken for a cosmetics counter. He wasn’t far off in his assessment.

A rush of excitement coursed through the luxury-loving omega as he reached that specific section of the store. Items were marked down 15, 20, and even 25% off the normal retail price. It was like Christmas come early.

He was about to charge through a swarm of shoppers when a thought occurred to him. Is it safe for my sugarplums to be around all these people? He’d originally gone out of his way to avoid the germ-filled masses, but now here he was, standing in the midst of an undeniably congested environment.

We won’t stay long. I’ll grab a few things and be in and out, he told himself. Once I flash my black card, they’ll move me to the front of the line. He didn’t make a habit of flaunting his unlimited credit line, but on those rare occasions when he did, it got retailers’ attention.

Jim took a deep breath and forged ahead. He was ready.

Twenty minutes later, the Irishman had a basket full of high-end goods. It was getting unwieldy to carry his haul of beauty products and push the babies’ stroller at the same time, though. Not to
mention the navigation issues he faced with so many people crammed into the aisles. The conditions reminded him of footage he’d seen on the news depicting crazed Black Friday shoppers in the U.S.

Moriarty tallied up the items he’d gathered. There wasn’t much more he was interested in. He’d simply bring his order to the checkout counter and—

The genius gasped, stopping dead in his tracks. Just when he thought he was done, he spotted the holy grail of skincare products: *La Prairie Skin Caviar Luxe Soufflé Body Cream*. He’d heard wonderful things about the Swiss-imported anti-aging lotion, but had yet to try it himself. Seeing it on display at a 20% discount was too tempting to resist.

There weren’t many jars left. If he was going to buy one, he’d have to act fast. With fierce determination, Jim neared the sales rack. Patrons bobbed and weaved past him, blocking his path. He inwardly fumed, recalling how much he despised crowds.

Moriarty persevered nonetheless. He was almost close enough to reach the item on the shelf. Almost…almost…

**BAM.**

From out of nowhere, a large man forcefully barreled into him. He was knocked to the floor, his basket scattering. When he attempted to stand up, he was thwarted by the heavy traffic around him. People were swarming at every turn, some even grumbling that he was in their way.

Jim was absolutely livid. How dare this bunch of arseholes treat him so appallingly? He had half a mind to rescind the donation he’d made to the mall. They could bankroll their own damn fountain if this was how they permitted VIP customers to be handled.

When he finally got back on his feet, he was prepared to walk out without buying a single thing. As far as he was concerned, the establishment didn’t deserve his money and had lost a customer for life. In fact, he would register an official compla—

**Oh god.** Time itself seemed to freeze as Moriarty saw that the stroller was gone, and with it, his children too.

He looked in all directions. The crowd made it difficult to see much, but he could hear just fine. The sounds of his babies crying were unmistakable. He followed the noise, pushing through hordes of shoppers in the process.

Once he reached a section of the store that was less busy, he spotted the figure wheeling his angels away and redoubled his efforts to catch up to them.

“STOP!” he shouted, frantically racing after the kidnapper. The person in question was dressed to conceal their identity, though it was no mystery to Jim. He knew it had to be his and Seb’s stalkers at work.

Eventually, they came to the *Harvey Nichols* entrance. Moriarty was hell-bent on not allowing the abductor to leave. He was making real headway towards his goal, when suddenly, a set of hands yanked him back.

“Let go!” he yelled. The Irishman struggled furiously, an involuntary whimper escaping his lips as he watched the figure exit the shop and head into the walkway area of the mall.

“Why are you chasing that woman?” a male voice demanded. It was a uniformed security guard.
“Woman? Are you positive?” Jim hadn’t seen the individual’s face, but if this bloke did, it was all he needed to confirm that the abductor was Annie.

“Yes. Now answer me. Why were you pursuing her?”

“Because she stole my children! You’re abetting a kidnapper by letting her get away!”

The mall employee paled. “What?”

“That bitch took off with my babies! If you don’t believe they’re mine, ask the staff at Customer Services. They treated me better than anyone in this store has.”

“Sir, you’re making a serious charge. If this is a ploy of some kind, it’s best to admit it now. Otherwise, protocol dictates we have to put the building on lockdown to prevent the suspect from fleeing.”

“Yes,” he agreed without hesitation. “Do that. Lockdown the building.”

“As you wish, sir.”

The security guard called in the report. Exits to the mall were sealed off and the location was searched.

It didn’t take long to locate Edward and Estella. Their stroller was found abandoned in a nearby bathroom. The culprit, however, remained at large. It appeared that, having not gone far with the twins, Annie was able to hightail it out of the shopping center prior to the automatic locks kicking in.

At the moment, Jim didn’t care. Nothing mattered except for the fact that his darlings were unharmed and in his loving embrace once again.

“It’s okay, sweethearts. Daddy’s got you now,” he soothed. Both infants were wailing terribly when discovered by the security crew. He was doing whatever he could to calm them, though to be honest, he was very shaken up and could’ve used a bit of comfort himself.

The mastermind was soon approached by a police officer. Authorities were notified due to the nature of the incident, and unsurprisingly, they wished to speak with him.

“Sir, I understand you’re probably upset right now, but I’d like to ask you a few questions.” The cop was a young woman whose tone sounded genuinely sympathetic.

Jim really didn’t want to deal with police, but if it helped him get out of there quicker, he’d play along. “Sure, what do you need to know?”

“For starters, someone from mall security stated that the perpetrator was female. Did you recognize the suspect?”

“No,” he lied. “I’d never seen her before in my life.”

“Okay. Do you know of anyone who might be motivated to do something like this?”

“Motivated to steal my children? Not hardly.”

“You think this was a random event, then?”

“Yes. There are a lot of nutters in the world.” He bent down, kissing both babies on the forehead.
“I’m just glad she didn’t take them far.” That part was true—it made him sick to imagine what could’ve happened if she’d been allowed to leave the premises with them.

“As an officer of the law, it’s always a relief to see a swift reunion in situations such as these. We’ll be reviewing the surveillance footage to try to identify the abductor.”

He nodded. “I hope you catch her.”

“So do I, sir. Is there a phone number you can be reached at in case further questions arise?”

“Of course.” Jim proceeded to give her bogus digits, and flashed a fake ID when she asked for that, too. London’s most dangerous man never, ever worked with the authorities and he wasn’t about to begin now. He would handle matters in his own way, outside the bounds of the legal system.

“Thank you for your cooperation. Would you like a police escort back home?”

“I appreciate the offer, but no. I can drive myself.” Her inquiry did get him thinking—what became of the bodyguard who actually was intended to be his escort? After today’s ordeal, he couldn’t help but assume the worst.

Moriarty brought his cubs to the car. Though he’d managed to subdue them some, they still showed signs of agitation. When they got home, he would make sure to give them lots of extra cuddles.

“Daddy’s sorry you had to go through that,” he said as he secured the babies into their safety seats. “It must’ve been awfully scary. But don’t worry, my doves. Papa and I are going to have a serious talk about this. There’s much to discuss.”

Once Essie and Eddie were settled, Jim went to collapse the stroller so he could pack it in the trunk. It was then that he noticed something he’d initially missed—a folded up piece of paper was tucked beneath one of the twins’ blankets.

His blood ran cold. He knew damn well it hadn’t been there before the kidnapping attempt. Past experience suggested it was likely a message from his and Seb’s stalkers.

With jittering hands, he opened the note and read what was inside.

You probably think you were victorious today. You’re wrong. This was just a taste of what’s next. Know that I’m out there, watching and waiting. Ready to decimate your family the way Moran did mine. No matter how many guards you hire, it won’t make a difference in the end. I’ll always find you and your brats.

P.S. – I’ve left a special gift from me to you in the boot of your car. Enjoy.

Jim was utterly panic-stricken. His eyes widened while his breathing grew heavy. He shook like a leaf as he slowly crept up to the rear of the vehicle.

“Tiger, I wish you were here.” But Seb wasn’t, and so the thoroughly rattled omega would have to be strong for his children’s sake.

Summoning every ounce of courage he could, Moriarty popped open the trunk. He shuddered, his gut instinct proven true. There lay the lifeless body of Rocco, the man who was meant to provide him with security on today’s excursion.

“Oh fuck.”
Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Tangled Webs & Turning Points – Part 1

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian have a candid conversation about what their next move should be regarding their stalkers.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

Sebastian Moran walked through the front door of his house, sweat-soaked and with grit under his nails. He’d spent the better part of the day burying his and Jim’s bodyguard, Rocco. No easy feat in near 90°F temperatures.

If it was up to him, he’d have just burned the body, but Roger— his old army buddy and organizer of the current security team— wouldn’t allow it. He insisted that the man didn’t want to be cremated, and since Rocco had no family to honor him, he took it upon himself to respect his final wishes.

All things considered, the sniper was glad to be home. He peeled off his shirt and shoes and headed upstairs in search of a shower. As he strode through the hall, something caught his attention. There was a melodic sound coming from the nursery. Curious, he crept outside the door to listen.

A smile graced Seb’s face when he realized what he was hearing. Jim’s singing to the babies. It didn’t seem to be in English, though. Gaelic, maybe? Hmm.

He stepped into the room and his heart melted at what he saw. Moriarty was sitting on the rocking chair with an infant cradled in each arm, gently ushering them to dreamland.

The Irishman looked up, acknowledging Sebastian’s presence, but not stopping what he was doing. Once the song was over, he placed the twins in their cribs and bid them adieu. “Sleep well, my darlings. Daddy loves you.” He turned down the lights and approached his spouse. “Enjoy the show?”

“I did. That was beautiful, Magpie. I don’t think I’ve ever heard it before.”

“It’s a lullaby my mum used to sing,” he fondly recalled. “She had a fabulous voice. My rendition doesn’t do it justice.”

“It sounded great to me.”
“That’s sweet of you to say.” Jim paused, his thoughts wandering. “Let’s convene elsewhere so we can discuss matters.”

“Good idea.”

The couple ventured to their bedroom where Moran finished stripping down while Moriarty watched.

“Must you do that now?” the genius bemoaned. Seeing his magnificent mate in the buff was distracting as hell, especially when he was aiming to conduct a serious conversation.

“Yes, I must. Today, I’ve had to drive to the countryside, dig a sizeable hole in the woods, heft a 200-lbs. corpse from the car into that same hole, refill the area with dirt and leaves, and then drive back here—all during an unseasonable heatwave. Suffice to say, I’m in desperate need of a cool shower and an even colder beer,” he declared. “Besides, I don’t require clothing to talk.”

“You may not, but…”

“But what?”

“When I see you like this—nude and glistening—it’s difficult to concentrate on anything else.”

Seb flashed a sharky grin. “My goodness, you mean the mere sight of my nakedness has felled the impervious James Moriarty? How flattering.”

“Don’t mock me. You’re my alpha. You know the sway you have.”

“And vice versa, kitten.” He closed in on the smaller man, pressing his firm, virile body against him.

Jim inhaled sharply at the contact, his senses electrified. “God, you smell amaaaazing.”

Moran laughed. “Yeah, grave digging on a hot day does wonders for my fragrance.”

“No, really, dear. Your scent is a mix of sandalwood and cinnamon. It’s very…enticing.”

“Is that so?” he purred, his velvety voice oozing with charm.

“Oh, yessss.”

The duo locked eyes, blue and brown uniting in a smoldering gaze.

“Shower with me. We can talk afterward.” He continued to lean in, his calloused fingertips stroking the smooth flesh of Jim’s arm. “We’ll be refreshed…have clearer heads.”

Moriarty grunted softly. It was an appealing offer. He’d been badly shaken up by the events of the day and could certainly use the comfort he knew his partner would bring.

“Okay, hon.”

Following those magic words of permission, Seb sprang into action. He freed the mastermind of his clothes and carried him to the luxurious bathroom that adjoined their sleeping quarters. Though the intent was ostensibly to bathe, neither could resist the inexorable chemistry between them. Caresses led to kisses, which paved the way for more to come. Soon, they were enveloped in a haze of passion and want. It was exactly what Jim needed—to feast on the sweet succor only his beloved Tiger could provide.
When the twosome reemerged almost an hour later, both were wearing fluffy monogrammed robes and precious little else. Moran immediately assumed a reclining position on the bed, while his hubby went to check on their slumbering babes.

Upon Moriarty’s return, he took his rightful place alongside Seb, nestling close to him. “Our poppets are snoozing away. I’m grateful they’re able to rest after what happened today.”

“You’ve done an excellent job of making them feel safe again, Magpie.”

“I try,” he said. “You didn’t see them earlier— they were terrified and wailing when security found them. Not normal crying, but actual wailing. I’ve never heard a sadder sound in my life.”

“I’m sure it was awful. Take solace in the fact that they were discovered swiftly and unharmed.”

“Believe me, I do. Even so, it’s upsetting.”

“I should’ve accompanied you to the mall,” Sebastian lamented. “You asked me to, but I refused. I’m sorry.”

“You’ve got no reason to apologize. Business needed tending to and you did what was necessary.”

“Perhaps. I just can’t help but think that things might’ve been different if I were there. I could’ve protected you and the babies.”

“Don’t go down that path, darling. I’ve beaten myself up about the same thing. It’ll only drive you crazy.”

“It’s hard not to feel guilty. An alpha should take care of their kin, and yet within the past year, you’ve been kidnapped and now our children almost suffered the same fate. I’ve failed my family.”

“Hush. I won’t have you spouting nonsense like that.”

“It’s the truth, kitten.”

“No, it isn’t,” Jim declared. “You do so much. More than most men ever would. You’re a blessing to our family, not a failure.”

The sniper gave his husband’s hand a squeeze. “Thank you, love.” He fell silent for a moment, contemplating the day’s developments. There were important issues to discuss. “Regarding what went down at the mall, I believe it has the earmarks of a coordinated attack.”

“Well, obviously. I just don’t know how they managed to pull it off. I understand stashing a body in the trunk— locks can be picked. But the rest…” he stopped, shaking his head. “I can’t figure out how they knew precisely where I’d be, and when. Going to Harvey Nichols was a last minute decision. There’s no way anyone could’ve predicted I’d be there, yet somehow Annie was ready and waiting.”

“It’s highly disconcerting,” Seb agreed. “There’s another element that bothers me, too.”

“What’s that?”

“Annie was doing Colin’s bidding— no surprise there. But you also mentioned that a man knocked
you over before she absconded with the stroller.”

“Right. It couldn’t have been Colin himself because the build was larger, and regrettably, I didn’t get a look at the bastard’s face to ID him.”

“It makes me wonder if that part was random, or if it was a calculated maneuver.”

Moriarty pondered the thought, paling as he did. “Oh no…” Sebastian’s observation chilled him to the bone. “If it’s the latter, then that would suggest there’s someone else working with them. An individual we weren’t previously aware of.” It was a horrifying prospect. Having two stalkers was bad enough. Adding a third would be pure hell.

“Let’s not panic. Supposing there is another accomplice, there’s no saying it will change the dynamics all that much.”

“No?” the consulting criminal balked. “One needn’t be a mathematician to realize that 3:2 odds are unfavorable.”

“We’ve gone up against worse and come out fine.”

“Yes, but that was in the past. Here and now, more is at stake.”

Moran paused to reflect on his mate’s statement. “You mean—”

“The babies,” he spoke, completing Seb’s sentence. “It isn’t merely the two of us. We’ve got Essie and Eddie to consider. Their welfare is paramount. I’d sooner die than allow harm to come to them.”

“Don’t say that, Jimmy. We promised never to speak of death in context to each other again, remember?”

“I know, and I’m sorry. I just need you to grasp how important this is to me. I used to worry that my love for you made me vulnerable. And now, with those sweet, wonderful cubs of ours…’ he trailed off, struggling to keep his emotions in check. “It’s like they’re pieces of my heart existing outside my own body. If, god forbid, something was to befall them, I’d never recover. It would be the end of me,” he confessed. “So we can’t let that happen. We must protect them at all costs.”

Sebastian nodded reassuringly. “Of course we will. They’ll be the safest babies in Britain.”

“You bet your arse they will be. I’ll accept nothing less.”

“Shall I make arrangements to hire more security, then? I could give Roger a call and—”

“No more security guards,” the genius quickly protested. “Did you not read the note Colin wrote?”

“I did, yes. It was a lot of big talk meant to intimidate.”

“I don’t think that part was a boast, Seb. I wish it were, but let’s face facts— he trained as a sniper, just like you, and he’s spurred on by revenge, the most compelling motivator there is. Colin Taylor won’t stop until he’s gotten what he wants, security be damned.”

“Okay, what do you propose we do instead?” The former colonel wasn’t quite sure what his partner had in mind.

“I say we find out where Colin and Annie are hiding. Turn the tables and hunt them.”
“That’s…actually not a bad idea.”

“How do you sound so surprised?”

“Because sometimes I haven’t a clue what you’re going to come up with next,” he remarked. “This ‘hunting’ concept is intriguing, though.”

“It’s long overdue. We couldn’t take such action while I was pregnant, nor after I’d just given birth. But now our angels are almost 3-months-old and I’m feeling pretty spry. The time is right to strike.”

“I’m on board, kitten. You and me, putting paid to these lunatics once and for all.”

Moriarty smiled devilishly. “I can’t wait. My sole proviso is that we approach the situation carefully. No reckless, unplanned decisions. Everything has to be plotted out meticulously.”

Moran arched a brow. “Gotta admit, I never imagined you’d insist upon caution. You’ve always been an impulsive bloke.”

“I can’t permit that way of life anymore, not in respect to our personal safety,” he explained. “I don’t want Edward and Estella to be orphans. The very notion of leaving them alone in this world is harrowing. No, that isn’t a strong enough word. It’s downright soul-rending. We’ve got to ensure our survival.”

“I get it, love. I don’t want them to grow up without us either. There’s so much we have to teach them and show them. So many experiences we’ve yet to share as a family.”

“You think about that kind of stuff, Tiger?”

“I sure do. I picture what certain things will be like—holidays and vacations; special outings where we’re all together. I daydream often.”

“Me too.” He hesitated, a thought popping into his head. “Speaking of holidays, would you care to see the babies’ Easter photos?”

“Yes, that’d be splendid.”

Jim retrieved the images from an envelope on the dresser and sat back down beside Seb. “I’m going to frame these and hang them on the wall. I haven’t decided which room. Maybe the reception area, so people can see them when they first walk in.”

“That’s a nice idea,” the assassin commented as he reviewed the photographs. “Cameras are very kind to our darlings.”

“Oh, I agree. I’ve never seen them take a shot that wasn’t utterly adoorable. They really could be models. Just look at—”

BOOM.

The couple was suddenly jarred by a loud noise emanating from outside. Moments later, a blare of sirens followed.

“What the hell?” Moran wondered, confusion painted across his face.

BOOM.
Another explosion rang out, and it wouldn’t be the last. Nearly a half dozen were registered within the span of about 15 minutes.

Phones started buzzing. Jim and Seb received calls at almost the exact same time. The men exchanged a nervous glance as they answered their mobile devices.

“What? Are you serious?”

“How?”

“No…”

“Bollocks.”

Eventually, they both hung up and stared at each other, stunned by the news of what had transpired.

“Those noises,” Jim began, “they were…”

“Properties of yours.”

“Yeah.” The consulting criminal’s expression was ashen and in disbelief.

It seemed that a number of buildings owned by Moriarty had gone kaput, blown up only minutes apart.

WAAAAAAAH.

Cries blasted from the baby monitor on the nightstand. Though the twins were heavy sleepers, it appeared even they had their limit.

Jim instinctively stood up to go comfort Essie and Eddie, when a realization hit him. He froze, his dark eyes widening with panic.

“Seb, you were at headquarters today. Was Ian there?”

The blonde paused, trying to remember.

“Answer me, dammit!”

“I’m thinking,” he tersely replied. “No, I don’t believe he was. At least not that I saw.”

“Oh fuck. I own the building he lives in. For all I know, it could’ve been one of those that exploded!”

A sickened look washed over Moran. “I’ll tend to our little ones. You try to get a hold of Ian.”

“Okay.”

As Sebastian rushed from the room, Jim frantically dialed his protégé, praying the young man would pick up.

To Be Continued…
Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian must deal with the immediate aftermath of their stalkers’ latest attack.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Come on,” Moriarty muttered. “Pick up the bloody phone.”

It was ringing, and ringing, and ring—

“Hello?” Ian answered at last.

“Oh, thank god.”

“Jim? What’s the matter?”

“A series of properties I own around the city were…destroyed.” The word begrudgingly fell from his lips, sounding like an expletive of sorts. “I wanted to confirm your status, seeing as how you live in one of my buildings.”

“Jesus Christ, that’s what caused all the noise outside?” he asked in astonishment.

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“Everything’s intact over here. Should I evacuate just in case?”

“I don’t believe that’s necessary,” the consulting criminal replied. “I haven’t heard any more explosions within the past 10 minutes. I think they’re done.”

The young man breathed a sigh of relief. “I hope so. What exactly happened?”

“I don’t know yet, but if I had to guess, I’d wager Colin and Annie were involved. It’s been a banner day for them.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, I took my children to the mall earlier and they were nearly kidnapped by those maniacs. They also killed my bodyguard and stowed his corpse in the boot of my car. Got off scot-free on
Ian gasped. “Dear lord, that’s terrible. Are Essie and Eddie okay?”

“Yes, my darlings are fine. It was a traumatic experience, though.”

“I couldn’t even begin to imagine the horror. I’m so sorry, Jim.”

“Trust me, those tossers will be facing karmic retribution. What goes around comes around.”

“Good. They deserve to rot for the shite they’ve pulled.”

“Indeed. And it gets worse, because Seb and I suspect there may be a third person working with them.”

“You’re joking? Who on earth would be foolish enough to do that?”

“Someone with a death wish.”

“Clearly,” he agreed. “How are you holding up after everything that’s gone on?”

“Considering the day I’ve described, how do you think I’m doing?”

“You needn’t get snippy. I’m just concerned, is all.”

Moriarty sighed. “Pardon my poor attitude. I’m rather on edge at the moment.”

“I understand. I’ve been fairly anxious myself lately.”

“Oh? Why’s that?”

“Uh…no reason,” he shyly stammered.

“Ian, it’s no use lying to me. I can read you like a book, even over the phone.”

Their conversation came to an awkward halt as the teen clammed up. Jim sensed that whatever was troubling him must be serious.

“Out with it. Tell me what’s bothering you.”

“I…uh…you know…”

“No, I don’t. That’s why I’m insisting you elaborate.”

“Okay, fine.” He took a deep breath and collected his thoughts. “Remember when I said someone might be watching me?”

“Yeah. You hadn’t mentioned it in a while, so I assumed the activity stopped.”

“Not quite.”

The genius’s heart sank. “What’s the situation?”

“About a week ago, I started receiving strange letters in the mail. Some are cryptic, while others are more overtly threatening.”

“I don’t suppose there was a return address listed?”
“Nope.”

“Of course not.” Nothing was ever that simple.

“I hate to seem paranoid, but I really think Luke’s behind this.” The youth’s voice wavered as he spoke his tormentor’s name.

“Could also be Colin and Annie’s doing.”

“I guess it’s possible. I just have a gut instinct that it’s him.”

“He’d have to be pretty fucking daft to harass you after the impression Seb left on him.” Moriarty paused, a sly idea springing to mind. “Here’s a thought— why don’t I send Seb to Luke’s apartment so he can do a bit of investigating? We’ll see if there’s any evidence to confirm he’s been stalking you.”

“I’m cool with that. I’d like to know once and for all if my suspicions are correct.”

“Very well, then. I’ll apprise him of the matter shortly.”

“Thank you.” Ian was quiet for a beat, before speaking up again. “Hey, Jim?”

“Yes?”

“I know you’ve got a lot on your plate, so feel free to say ‘no,’ but I was wondering if I might be able to stop by your place tonight? I’m feeling kind of rattled and could use some company.”

“Sure, that’s no problem.” He checked his watch. It was late afternoon, approaching early evening. “We can order takeout for dinner and I’ll show you the twins’ Easter photos.”

“Sounds delightful. I’ll be there within the hour.”

“Splendid. See you soon.”

Once the call was concluded, Jim headed to the nursery. The babies had mostly calmed down after Sebastian laid them in rocking bassinets that featured colorful mobiles for them to focus on. Now the sniper stood tall, dutifully watching over their little ones.

Moriarty snuck up behind him, snaking his arms around the man’s solid, well-built frame. He smiled impishly as his Tiger hummed in response.

“Ian’s alive and dropping by for dinner.”

“The more the merrier.”

“Yes, I only wish the circumstance was less worrying. He’s dealing with his own stalker and doesn’t want to be alone.”

Seb frowned. “I’m sorry to hear that. Who do we have to kill to make things right?”

The Irishman laughed. “Funny you should say that. I have an assignment for you, related to the issue.”

Moran turned around to meet his husband in the eye. “An assignment? Please, go on.”

“Luke Darrow.”
Sebastian’s expression instantly darkened. He grabbed Jim by the wrist and tugged him into the hall. “What about that bastard?”

“Ian thinks he’s been following him and sending threats in the mail. So I’m instructing you to discreetly search Luke’s apartment for anything that might implicate him in the matter. Understood?”

He nodded. “Yes. I won’t be able to do it tonight, though. Once I see to it that you and Ian are settled in, I’m leaving to survey the damage done to your properties.”

“Oh.” Moriarty hadn’t expected him to have other plans, but in light of recent events, it made sense. “Smart thinking. We’ve got a few more hours of daylight left— best to take advantage.”

“My thoughts exactly. Call me impatient, but I’d rather not wait until tomorrow to find out what the hell happened. I want to see it for myself.”

“Right. I’m interested to know, too.”

The consulting criminal suddenly felt an eerie sensation wash over him. It was something akin to dread, but more ominous. Something…foreboding.

“Jimmy, maybe you should sit down. You’re looking awfully peaked.”

“Perhaps. The oddest feeling just hit me.”

Concerned, Seb put a hand to his mate’s head. “You don’t have a fever. When was the last time you ate?”

“A while ago. But don’t worry, I’ll be ordering takeout soon.”

“Where from?”

“Probably that Chinese place I like,” he absently replied. His heart wasn’t in the conversation anymore, not after the peculiar sense he’d experienced.

“Sounds good. It’s been ages since I’ve had egg foo young.”

“Yeah.” He hesitated, his mind abuzz. A part of him wanted to demand Seb stay home tonight, but he knew how irrational the notion was. Instead, he would swallow his misgivings and carry on as if nothing were wrong. That was for the best, right? Right, he told himself. It had to be.

*********

After dinner, Sebastian ventured out to check on the sites that had been targeted. Police tape cordoned off what was left of the individual buildings, but even from a distance, it was clear the properties were a loss. He was saddened by the extent of the damages— whole multi-level structures had been gutted, leaving only the occasional support beam standing.

The nature of the incident attracted a lot of attention. It wasn’t merely the authorities who’d taken an interest. News crews were present at many of the five locations, as well as numerous onlookers snapping pictures of the wreckage.

While going incognito amongst the crowds, Seb was able to glean information detailing the events. From what he was told, the explosions occurred shortly after a masked individual hurled something through a window at each location. People nearby reported hearing shattered glass, and then
seconds later, the properties abruptly detonated. It was shocking from a bystander’s perspective. None were killed in the blasts, though significant shrapnel and debris went flying.

There was no official word yet on what caused the buildings to blow up, but Moran had his suspicions. He was almost positive that grenades or Molotov cocktails were used in the proceedings. Colin and Annie once employed the latter to set fire to his and Moriarty’s front room, so it was possible.

Sebastian reviewed the photos he’d taken to document damages. *Jim’s going to be upset.* The structures sat vacant, but some were being used as extra storage space for items the genius had amassed over the years. Furniture, artwork, literary collections, and more were turned to cinder in their stalkers’ wake.

The sniper slammed the door of his Mercedes as he settled behind the wheel. He was angry— nay, *livid.* How fucking dare someone do this to his omega? Jim deserved respect.

*BZZ. BZZ.*

“Speak of the devil.” Moriarty was texting him.

*JM*

*Sebby? You coming home soon? It’s getting dark out.*

*SM*

*Yes, dear. I just finished up at the final site.*

*JM*

*Good. Make no pit stops. Come directly to the house.*

*SM*

*I will. Love you, Magpie.*

*JM*

*Love you, too.*

He tucked his phone away and started the car. Things seemed fine at first, but after driving a few blocks, he began to question whether or not another automobile was following him. It was hard to tell— they were making all the same turns as him, but it could’ve been coincidence.

When stopped at a red light, he tried to note as many details about the vehicle and its driver as possible. *Black Volkswagen Passat in decent condition. Driver’s wearing a dark hat and sunglasses*
There was only one way to truly test if he was being trailed. He’d veer off the main path and take a side road. Most commuters wouldn’t diverge like that; if the Volkswagen did, it would confirm what he was dealing with.

Moran turned…and so did the other car.

“Fuck,” he grumbled under his breath. This was precisely what he didn’t need right now.

He increased his speed and maneuvered down an alley. Let's see you follow me now.

The pursuant automobile picked up its pace, continuing to shadow him.

“Son of a bitch.”

Seb maintained his efforts to evade the Volkswagen, darting onto backstreets wherever he could. All the while, his stalker didn’t miss a beat. Their persistence would almost be impressive if it wasn’t so damned annoying.

He thought about switching to a busier roadway, but didn’t want to risk a collision. Having limited options, he decided to shift direction and head towards a wooded area he knew well. With any luck, he could bait the driver out there and then make sure they got lost amid the shrubbery and trees.

Moran eventually reached the stretch of forest, prepared to lead the Volkswagen on a disorientating ride. When he glanced at the rearview mirror, however, he saw nothing besides the dark of the night.

“What the hell?” The vehicle had definitely followed him there, so where was it now? Even the sounds around him fell unnervingly silent.

Close to a minute passed without any change. Sebastian remained in his Mercedes, trying to determine what became of his pursuer. They couldn’t have just disappeared—surely he or she was lurking somewhere.

For a brief moment, he considered getting out of the car and searching the vicinity on foot. He was packing a .44 Magnum and felt confident that he could dispatch of anyone who might be waiting to do him harm. But something stopped him, or rather, someone. What Jim had said about exercising caution flooded back to his mind. He needed to act responsibly and not rush into potential danger.

“I should just go home,” he said with a sigh.

The assassin turned his vehicle around, intent on rejoining the main road.

Tomorrow he would scour London’s automotive registry to find out who the black Volkswagen might belong to. He wished he’d gotten a better look at the license plate, but knowing the make and model was a start.

VRRROOOM.

In a flash, the rev of an engine roared. Seb had precious little time to process what was happening as the mystery car came charging up from behind. His Mercedes was hit, propelling it forward into a tree. The airbags deployed, but not before Seb banged his head on the dashboard, knocking him unconscious.
To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

What will happen to Seb? How will Jim react to the news of his accident? And how have Colin and Annie managed to pull all this off? Stay tuned for more.
Chapter Summary

Jim learns of Sebastian’s accident and makes a life-altering decision. Meanwhile, their stalkers assemble.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So when are you going on leave?” Jim asked his friend and employee, Ian. Ever since the young man arrived at his house, they’d taken the opportunity to catch up with one another. Many subjects were discussed, and now the topic had turned to Ian’s impending due date.

“Soon, I imagine. I’ve already cut back on my workload as per doctor’s orders,” he said. “It’s going to feel strange not coming in at all, though.”

“I understand completely. I got put on bedrest fairly early, and it was hell getting used to it. So booooring, I thought I’d go mad from the tedium.”

“How did you cope?” the teen prodded, looking to Moriarty for advice.

“An excellent question. I tried my hand at various hobbies, hoping to find an activity I enjoyed, or at the very least, didn’t outright despise.”

“Is that what led you to start baking?”

“Yes, it was. Knitting, too. I’d never done either of those before, but quickly discovered I had an aptitude for both.”

“Perhaps I’ll attempt something similar. I’ve always wanted to learn calligraphy.”

Jim smiled. “That’s a smashing idea. I have some specialty pens you could borrow.”

RING. RING.

The consulting criminal’s phone chimed. His breathing hitched when he saw that the call was coming from St. Thomas’s Urgent Care Unit. This couldn’t be good.

“Hello?”

“Sir, are you Jim Moran?”
“Actually, it’s—” he stopped, realizing now was not the time to quibble over a name. “Yeah, that’s me.”

“Sebastian Moran’s been in an accident and this was the emergency contact listed in his mobile device.”

Moriarty’s heart began to race. “Accident? What kind? Is he okay?”

“I don’t know the specifics, sir. I work at the front desk, so I’m not privy to his status. If you come to St. Thomas’s Hospital, I’m sure the doctors will be able to provide more information.”

“I’m on my way,” he affirmed, rushing to hang up and grab his car keys.

“What’s the matter?” Ian inquired with concern. “Who was in an accident?”

“Seb. I’ve got to see him. Watch the babies while I’m gone.”

“Of course. Let me know how he’s doing, huh?”

“I will.”

At that, the genius sprinted out the door. He was on a mission.

All the way over, Jim’s mind spiraled into chaos. Something had befallen his Tiger and he had no idea what condition the man was in. Was he conscious? Could he walk? Would he recover, or…

**No! Whatever it is, Sebby has to pull through. I won’t lose him. I refuse.**

His hands shook at the wheel as he blew past several red lights and ‘Stop’ signs. He was being reckless as hell, ignoring his own recent words of caution. In that moment, he could think of nothing but his beloved husband. When he found out who was responsible for putting him in the hospital, may god have mercy on their soul, because Moriarty would grant none.

**********

“I must insist that you please lay back down.” An exasperated nurse was trying to get Seb to stay in his bed. It was a losing battle.

“Ma’am, with all due respect, I don’t have time for this. I’ve got places to be and people who are expecting me.”

“That may be true, but you’ve also sustained a blow to the head. We need to monitor you for concussion.”

“Oh, come on. You think I haven’t been knocked out before? This is nothing. It’s a paper cut.”

“I suggest you take this more seriously, sir. Cranial injuries are no laughing matter.”

He sighed in frustration. “I get that, really, I do. But my partner is going to be worried sick if I don’t come home soon.”

“Too late,” a familiar voice spoke, “he already is.” Jim was standing in the doorway looking
unusually disheveled. He’d left home in a hurry, wearing sweatpants, a t-shirt, and tennis shoes—certainly not his standard attire.

The Irishman made a mad dash to his spouse’s side, hugging him tight.

“Easy does it, hon. I’m okay.”

“Right, sorry,” he sputtered, a bit embarrassed by his emotional reaction.

“Where are the babies?”

“At home with Ian.” He paused. “Let’s sit and you can tell me what happened.”

“Sure.”

“I’ll give you some privacy,” the medical worker said as she exited the room.

Immediately, Jim scooted as close to Seb as possible, savoring the sight, sound, and scent of him. “I’m so glad you’re ambulatory and alert.”

The sniper flashed a lopsided smile. “Of course I am, Magpie. It was only a minor accident. What did they tell you?” If someone had fed him false information, there’d be hell to pay.

“Nothing, that’s the problem. I received a call stating you were hospitalized, but they couldn’t tell me your condition. In the absence of facts, my mind went to a dark place,” he confessed.

Moran studied his mate’s face, noticing something odd. Jim’s eyes were distinctly red-rimmed. “Kitten, have you been crying?”

“What? No, don’t be daft.” His words were a denial, but his tone lacked conviction, revealing the truth he’d hoped to hide.

Seb clasped the smaller man’s hand, lacing their fingers together. “I didn’t mean to scare you, love.”

Moriarty stared at him, their gazes locking intensely. “What happened tonight? When I texted you, you swore you’d come straight home.”

“Yes, and then I was followed.”

“Followed? By whom?” As if he had to ask. These days, it was almost a foregone conclusion that their stalkers were lurking at every turn.

“A black Volkswagen Passat. Don’t know who the driver was, but they shadowed me for quite a while. I tried to lose them several times without success. We ended up in a wooded area where they charged me from behind and my Mercedes hit a tree. I got knocked out and woke up here,” he explained. “I don’t remember the ride over. I think the ‘OnStar’ service must’ve kicked in and notified medical assistance.”

“I knew there was a reason I agreed to subscribe.”

“It certainly proved useful, though I do wonder what became of my car.”

“I imagine they hauled it to the impound lot,” Jim remarked. “We can look into it tomorrow.”

“Yeah. I’d also like to find out who the Volkswagen is registered to. See if it brings us any closer
to tracking down Colin and Annie.”

He nodded, squeezing Moran’s hand. “I’ll help with the research. After everything that’s gone on, I’m ready to fucking annihilate those bastards.”

“You and me both. Sending them to hell will be a privilege.”

“Amen.”

Silence settled over the couple as Moriarty continued clinging to Seb. The trauma of the day weighed heavily on him, and he derived a sense of solace from his alpha.

“I shouldn’t have let you go out tonight,” he whispered. “I had a bad feeling about it, but I held my tongue. Dismissed it as folly, and now look what’s happened.”

“Stop right there. I’ll not allow you to blame yourself for other people’s sins.”

“I don’t blame myself, not really. I just…” the genius hesitated, trying his damnedest to remain outwardly collected, when inside, he was a hairsbreadth away from falling apart.

“It’s okay, Jimmy.”

“No, it isn’t. Within the past 24-hours, virtually everyone and everything I hold dear has been targeted—my children, my empire, you. No pressure point was left undisturbed,” he said in lament. “I hate it. Hate being made so vulnerable. It’s weak and pathetic and—”

“Human.”

“Is that what you call it? I’d say it’s something akin to torture.”

“Love certainly can be,” Sebastian asserted. “To open one’s heart completely is painful sometimes.”

“Then why do people do it?”

“You tell me, Magpie.”

For all his complaints, he knew the answer right away. “Because it’s beautiful, too.” His family brought him joy like nothing else.

Moran lifted the hand that was entwined with his own, pressing a kiss to Jim’s knuckles. “It sure is.”

“Oh Tiger,” he uttered softly. “I think this seals it.”

“Seals what, darling?”

“Our future…our fate. Today’s events have given me so much to think about. I can’t live the kind of life that would put you and the babies in constant danger. We’ve got to make a change.”

The gravity of his statement was not lost on Seb. “Are you saying—”

“After we’ve dealt with Colin and Annie, we’re retiring. No more worrying if we’ll make it through the day unharmed. No more assignments that separate us from each other, or goodbyes that could potentially be our last. We’re closing the book on that chapter and starting a new one.”
“If we do this, there’s no going back.”

“That’s what I’m counting on. A clean break.”

It sounded good, but was such a thing possible for men like them? Jim hoped so.

**********

POP.

The champagne bottle was uncorked and ready to be poured. Well, almost ready.

“Come on, Colin. After everything I’ve done today, I think I deserve a drink. Just fill my damn glass.” Annie was getting mightily impatient.

“I’m not doing it until Katie comes down.”

She rolled her eyes. “Yeah, whatever. I don’t see why we have to wait for her.”

“Because this is her house and she’s helped us out tremendously. I’d be a little more grateful if I were you.”

Annie scowled, staring daggers at her brother-in-law. She did that a lot lately.

“What are you so pissed about?” Luke commented. The three of them sat in Katherine Ramsey’s kitchen, preparing to celebrate a day of great success. “We knocked it out of the park today, yet for some reason, your gear seems to be stuck in ‘bitch mode.’ What’s your problem?”

“Nothing,” she spat.

“Actually, I’d like an answer to that, too,” Colin declared.

“I said ‘nothing.’ Leave it alone.”

“No. You’ll damn well tell me the truth, Annelise.”

She snorted. “You really wanna know?”

“Yes.”

“Fine. I’m ticked off about the games you’re continuing to play.”

“Excuse me?” Colin tersely countered.

“You finally managed to find a backdoor hack into Jim and Seb’s phones so that we can track them via GPS, and what do you have us do with this incredibly useful tool? Menace Moriarty at the mall and give Moran a fender bender. Oh, and in between, make us bust our arses wrecking a few buildings.”

The former army captain glared contemptuously at his cohort. “What, exactly, would you have done differently?”

“I’d have cut the bullshit and killed them. No more dragging it out. They’d be dead and we could move on.”

“Know this, Annelise: Moran must suffer. My work won’t be complete until he’s lost any and all
reason to live. Until he’s a hollowed out shell, going through the motions because everything he ever loved is gone. Only then will I allow him the release of death.”

She peered at the desperate madman, her expression different than it was mere moments before. It carried an air of…pity. “You want to turn him into you.”

Colin had no time to reply as Katherine entered the room, stopping their conversation cold. He put on a most charming smile and eyed the woman up and down. “Don’t you look lovely tonight. Is that a new dress?”

“This old thing?” she coyly spoke, doing a small spin to show off the outfit. “Nah, I’ve had it in my closet for ages. Been a while since I’ve worn it, though.”

“It’s utterly divine.” His words dripped with pseudo-praise that she devoured by the heapful.

“Thank you. I was hoping you’d like it.”

“I should be the one thanking you, my dear.” He turned to pour the perfectly chilled magnum of Moet, handing her a glass. “You were exceptional tonight.”

Katherine blushed. “I simply did as instructed. Followed that prat a few miles and rammed into him but good. It was fun.”

“I bet.” From what the tracker information revealed, her handiwork was enough to put Moran in the hospital. “Let’s make a toast.”

“What should we drink to?” Luke asked.

“To the decimation of our enemies,” he proclaimed, “and to all of us getting what we so richly deserve.”

Chapter End Notes

Sneak Preview: In the next chapter, Jim takes care of Seb after being told to monitor him for concussion.
A Magpie on Night Watch – Part 1

Chapter Summary

Jim monitors Sebastian at home after his accident. Also, they host an overnight guest.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

HISSS. HISSSS.

The kettle whistled as it came to a boil. Jim moved it off the burner and poured the piping hot water into a porcelain cup, steeping a bag of Earl Grey tea. After that, he sliced fresh lemon wedges and arranged them to spell out ‘I ♥ U.’ Last, but not least, he retrieved a container of honey packaged in the shape of a small bear. Once the items were assembled on a tray, he rode the elevator upstairs and made a beeline for his and Sebastian’s bedroom.

“Hiiiiii. How’s my favorite patient doing?”

“Favorite?” the sniper teased. “You mean you’ve got other half-naked men confined to their beds and I’m the best of the bunch?”

“Ha-ha,” he scoffed. “I see the blow to your head hasn’t affected your sass any.”

“Never, my sweet. And thank you for the tea. It’s perfect on a night like this.” It had started storming outside, rain beating against the windowpane while thunder rolled in the distance.

Jim set the tray on an end table near Seb and cozied up beside him. “I’ve always enjoyed a good cuppa during this kind of weather. I find it inexplicably soothing.”

“Me too.” He was about to grab a lemon wedge when he noticed the special ‘message’ his spouse had left for him. His grin became irrepressible. Eat your heart out, Holmes. The consulting detective may have gotten ‘I.O.U.s’ from Jim, but only Sebastian Moran was worthy to receive declarations of love.

“Soooo,” the Irishman began, “here’s the plan— I’ll keep it brief. To monitor for concussion, I have to periodically ask you basic knowledge questions and make sure you don’t sleep longer than 2-hours at a clip.”

“Oh, what a treat,” he sarcastically replied. “Although, I can think of a few ways to ensure I remain wide awake, if you catch my drift.” The look he shot Moriarty was both debaucherous and
disarming. He knew precisely how to push his omega’s buttons.

“Don’t tempt me.”

“Why not? There are more uses for that honey you just brought in than sweetening tea,” Seb suggestively asserted. “Sometimes it’s fun to get a little bit…sticky.”

The mastermind bit his lip, trying to stifle a lusty grunt. He could so clearly picture himself lapping the viscous syrup from Moran’s gorgeous, godlike body. Tasting every inch of him with the sweep of his warm tongue. The notion was exquisite. But…

“You’re not supposed to do anything strenuous for the next 24-hours. Sadly, that means no sex.”

Sebastian laughed lightly. “It’s rather funny having you decline my advances after all the times I did the same to you this past year. Quite a role reversal.”

“Yeah, and you’ve got it easy. In a day, you’ll be healthy enough to function again, whereas I had to wait until I could maintain my blood pressure during the act. You were a real stickler about that.”

“I hope you know I was just worried for your health.”

“I understood. Didn’t make it any less frustrating, though.”

“I’m sorry, hon. We had some pretty hot times after you learned those breathing exercises, though. I think that counts for something.”

“It does, Tiger. Believe me, it does.” Jim let out a wistful sigh as he checked his watch. “On that note, I’ve got to see to our darlings. They have a nightly routine and I’m already a few minutes off schedule.”

“Oh…I didn’t realize how late it was. Do you need any help?” Yes, he was meant to be on bedrest, but he hated the idea of sticking his partner with all the childcare duties. Tending to two infants by oneself was hard work.

“Actually, I’ve got it covered. Ian’s sleeping over and he’s agreed to assist me with the twins this evening.”

“That’s a lovely gesture. Should be good practice for when his baby arrives.”

“Indeed. He seemed excited at the prospect of gaining experience.”

“I’m sure you’ll teach him well.” Seb hesitated, an unfortunate thought returning to his mind. “Jimmy?”

“Yeah?”

“I’d like to talk to Ian about what’s going on with his stalker. I know it’s a sore subject, but if I’m breaking into Luke’s apartment to search for evidence, it would be wise to outline the particulars beforehand.”

“Right, I get that. I’ll try to find a way to bring it up without distressing him. May not be easy, though. He’s terrified of the guy.”

Moran’s expression hardened. He felt nothing but contempt towards men like Luke. Alphas were supposed to honor and respect omegas; protect them from harm as best they could. Breaking that
covenant was unforgivable.

“Are you okay, dear?” Moriarty asked, observing the stern look on his face.

“I was thinking about Luke. That bastard doesn’t deserve to draw breath.”

“You’ll get no argument from me. Sometimes I wonder if it was a mistake to keep him alive. I thought it would be better for Ian’s child, in case she ever required something vital from him, like blood or an organ. Now I’m not sure I made the right decision.”

“If you want him dead, just say the word,” Sebastian avowed. “You know I have zero tolerance for violence against omegas.”

The genius wrapped his arms around the larger man, administering a fierce hug. “I wish more blokes were like you.”

CRAAAACK.

A loud crash of thunder rang out, causing Jim to jump.

“Easy, kitten. No need to fret.”

“The noise startled me, is all.”

“I hope our cubs aren’t too frightened. I don’t believe they’ve been through a storm before.”

“You’re right, they haven’t. I really must check on them.” He leaned in, kissing his husband and then rising to his feet. “It might be a while until I come back. The babies are due for a feeding and bath.”

“Take as much time as you need. I’m not going anywhere.”

He smiled softly. “Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

As Jim exited the room, he was filled with a sense of purpose and dedication. Feelings that were once entirely foreign to him had become mainstays of his daily life, brightening the darkness that once consumed him. Maybe, he dared dream, it could remain that way forever.

*********

WAAAAAHH.

“Oh Eddie, I’m so sorry.” Ian frantically rushed to wipe a bit of soap from the tiny tot’s eyes. Unfortunately, once they were cleared, he continued to wail.

Moriarty saw the panic on his protégé’s face and leapt in to defuse the situation. “It’s okay, he just needs a minute to settle down. No harm done.”

“Are you certain?”

“Yes.” The mastermind paused. “Here,” he said, handing over a ‘Hello Kitty’ bath plushie. “Give this to him, it’s one of his favorites.”

“All right.”
The teen carefully placed the toy in Edward’s chubby little arms and waited to see what happened. Sure enough, the baby’s temperament seemed to rapidly shift. His cries turned to coos as he nuzzled the doll, suckling on one of Hello Kitty’s ears.

“Jim, this is the most adorable thing I’ve ever seen.”

“I knooooow,” he drawled with a grin. “Each day, I think my angels can’t possibly get cuter, and then they do something to top themselves.”

Not wanting to be ignored, Essie squealed boisterously, commanding her Daddy’s attention.

“No worries, poppet. You and your brother are a package deal. You’re both the sweetest babies on earth.”

She giggled and kicked up her feet in approval.

“It’s remarkable how communicative your children are,” Ian stated. “I’ve been reading some books on infant development, and yours are way ahead of the curve.”

“I expected as much,” he proudly declared. “They hail from a fine gene pool, and I don’t simply mean my own. Seb’s cleverer than people give him credit for.”

“I suppose he’d have to be. You wouldn’t marry just any guy. Something must’ve set him apart from the rest.”

“That’s very perceptive of you, and also quite accurate. I didn’t think I could love anyone until Sebastian came along.”

“I’ve never been in love,” the young man lamented.

“You’re only 19. Give it time.”

“I guess. It’s just…” Ian trailed off, his words withering before they could make their way out of his mouth.

“What?”

“I always figured that when I had a child, it would be with someone I loved. Not somebody who’d —” He stopped, taking a deep breath to calm his nerves. “Not Luke.”

“It’ll be okay,” Jim consoled. Inwardly, he wanted to rip the rogue alpha to pieces.

“I’ve tried to stay positive. Really, I have. But I can’t do it anymore. I don’t believe it will be okay,” he shakily confessed. “I think about the things Luke’s already done, and the things he could still do. It haunts me. I’m petrified he’ll take my Matilda.”

Moriarty peered at his friend, wanting to comfort him, but uncertain of how. Moments like these, he felt strangely paternal towards the youth.

CRAAAAACK.

A bolt of thunder suddenly shook the house and caused the lights to flicker.

The twins whimpered, agitated by the disturbance.

“We ought to drain their tubs and dry them off before the weather gets any worse,” Jim announced.
“Grab the towels, would you?”

“Sure.”

Ian did as instructed, and then continued to take direction when his mentor outlined the next series of steps. Once thoroughly dried, hypoallergenic lotion was applied to the infants’ skin. After that, they were freshly diapered and dressed in onesie pajamas, along with booties Jim had knitted himself. Finally, Essie and Eddie were placed back in their cribs.

“What do we do now?” the teen inquired.

“Funny you should ask. Generally, this would be the point when I’d pull out flashcards to review with the babies. I’m trying to teach them how to recognize and spell their names,” he explained. “Then we engage in cuddle time until they’re relaxed enough to fall asleep. The occasional musical interlude is incorporated when necessary.”

“Ah, cool. I’m learning a lot tonight.”

“Splendid. There has, however, been a slight change of plans this evening.”

“Oh?”

“Yes. Instead of the flashcard portion, we’re going to take a moment to visit Sebastian.”

“Okay. How’s he doing, anyway?”

“Quite well, I’m pleased to say. But he’s requested a meeting.”

“With us?” Ian uttered in confusion.

“With you. He has a few questions regarding the stalker issue you’re contending with.”

The young omega grew silent at the news. Sounds of pounding rain and rumbling thunder filled the room as Moriarty waited for his protégé to speak again.

“Do…do I have to?”

“I won’t force you, but I think you owe Seb that much. He’s handled Luke before and is prepared to search the bastard’s apartment for proof of his transgressions. It’s only fair you provide him with a bit of information.”

Ian let out a noise that was halfway between a sigh and a shiver. “You’re right. I know I should oblige. I’m just so fucking nervous.”

“Don’t be. I’ll accompany you. It won’t be as scary as you think.”

“I…well…you’ll truly sit with me while I talk to him?”

“Of course,” the genius assured. “I’m supposed to check in on him periodically as part of the concussion monitoring protocol. This’ll be like killing two birds with one stone.”

“Okay,” he reluctantly agreed. “I’ll tell your husband whatever he wants to know.”

“Thank you, dear. If it helps any, he’s just interested in the basics. He prefers to have as much intel as possible before entering a situation.”
“Makes sense.”

At that, Jim and his guest walked side-by-side down the hall, intent on commencing Ian’s meeting with Moran. When they reached the cracked bedroom door, the consulting criminal paused to knock.

“Sebby, he beckoned, “it’s time for that chat you asked me to arrange.”

No response.

“Seb, if you fell asleep, I can and will wake you up.”

Still nothing.

“Hmm.”

After one more ignored knock, Moriarty decided to charge inside. Ian followed. What they discovered was a surprise to them both: the room was empty.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Jim locates Sebastian. Then, the sniper and Ian have a chat.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jim and Ian were flummoxed by the sight of an empty bed. Sebastian should’ve been there, but he wasn’t.

“Where did he go?” the young man wondered aloud.

“I’ve no idea. Let’s find out.” Moriarty clutched his phone and proceeded to speed dial the sniper.

“Hello?”

“You’re in big trouble, colonel.”

“Huh?”

“Don’t play dumb with me. You know you aren’t supposed to be out of bed. Where did you wander off to?”

“The kitchen. I was—”

CLICK.

Jim unceremoniously hung up, refusing to hear Moran’s excuse. Right now, retrieval was his primary focus.

“Ian, you stay here. I’m going to bring Seb back.”

“Okay.” These days, the less walking he had to do, the better.

The consulting criminal strode through the hall and headed downstairs with great determination. It was time to bag a tiger.
As Moriarty approached the kitchen, he was hit by a delectable aroma. Following his nose, the scent grew stronger and stronger, until finally, he was standing just outside the doorway.

“Fancy meeting you here,” Sebastian quipped. He was at the counter, shirtless and pouring melted butter over a large bowl of freshly made popcorn.

It took tremendous willpower for Jim to resist the pull he felt towards his mate. Control yourself. Don’t give into base instincts. He disobeyed orders and must be duly reprimanded.

Even so, it was difficult to think clearly when Moran looked at him with those big blue eyes and that sexy come-hither smile. The Irishman could get lost gazing upon his face. And that body… dear lord. How was it possible for someone to be so unrelentingly gorgeous?

“Keep ogling me like that and I may have to bend you over the table,” Seb said with a wink.

Yes. Yes, do it! he silently beseeched.

Wait. No! Hold your ground.

“Stop trying to subdue me with your wiles. It won’t work.”

The beguiling assassin chuckled. “My wiles? Drat, you’re on to me. I’m secretly an incubus who practices the rare art of snack food seduction.”

Now Jim was really getting flustered. “Don’t mock me! This is serious!” he snapped. “You weren’t meant to get out of bed, and yet here you are. What happened to ‘I’m not going anywhere,’ huh?”

“I wanted something to nosh on and you were busy, so I got it myself. I honestly didn’t think it would be a big deal.”

“Of course it’s a big deal! You suffered a head injury and could be at risk for a medical emergency if you’re not careful. What if you’re more hurt than you realize? What if your brain is slowly bleeding and building up pressure?” he demanded, his voice taking on a frantic tone. “You need to stay where I can see you and monitor your condition.”

“I didn’t know you were so worried about this, Magpie. My apologies.”

“Yeah. I didn’t know either, until right now.”

Moran sauntered up to the frazzled omega, snaking an arm around his waist and pulling him close. “I’m here with you, love, and I’m fine. You couldn’t get rid of me if you tried.”

Their eyes locked intensely and the genius wanted to melt into his partner’s embrace. He had to be strong, though. Had to fulfill a duty.

“Come,” Moriarty commanded. “Ian’s waiting.”

“He’s agreed to talk?”

“Yes, I convinced him. But do go easy on the boy— he’s having a rough time of things.”

“Understood.” It never failed to amaze the former colonel how protective Jim was in regard to Ian. The way he’d befriended him was unexpected and surprisingly touching.

Sebastian relinquished his hold on the mastermind as they prepared to return to the bedroom.
“Tiger?”

“Yeah?”

“You’d better be willing to share that popcorn.”

“Naturally, dear. What’s mine is yours.” In oh-so-many ways.

Jim and Seb were back in their sleeping quarters, hunkered down on the bed while Ian rested in an overstuffed recliner chair.

“How are you?” the teen inquired, addressing Moran.

“Decent, considering the hellish day I’ve had.”

“The hellish day we’ve both had,” Moriarty corrected. “This has been among the worst in recent memory.”

“I wish I could do more to help you guys.”

“You’re doing plenty,” the genius declared. “Assisting with the twins is a huge favor, believe me.”

“I aim to please.” His faint smile faded as he continued, “So about this meeting…can we please get it over with? I’m on pins and needles here.”

“Certainly,” Sebastian granted. “In fact, let’s begin right now. First question— how long has the stalking gone on?”

“Approximately two months.”

“And what sort of activity tipped you off?”

“It was a feeling I got.”

“A feeling? Please elaborate.”

“I sensed I was being watched when I went out in public.”

“All the time or only some of the time?” Seb prodded.

“Some of the time, and at specific locations. Most notably, the grocery store and the park. Occasionally on the streets as well.”

“Did you ever catch a glimpse of Luke during those incidents? Maybe from the corner of your eye, or blending in with a crowd?”

“Unfortunately, no. If I’d actually seen him it would probably make this a lot simpler. But as it stands, I didn’t spot anyone. It was just this overwhelming feeling I had.”

“That isn’t much to go on,” the sniper commented. “However, there’s something to be said for gut instincts. I’ve relied on mine many times.” He stopped, remembering a detail his mate had disclosed. “I was told you’ve received some strange mailings. Is that correct?”
Ian nodded. “Yes, it is.”

“What’s the nature of these correspondences?”

“At first they were just creepy. They contained pictures of places I’d been to, which basically confirmed my suspicion that someone was there, observing me from the shadows. Then it got weirder.”

“How so?”

“Well, messages started to be included along with the images. Cryptic shite I couldn’t make heads or tails out of. But those were nothing compared to the threats I’ve gotten recently.”

“What kind of threats? Be as specific as possible.”

“The notes said things like, ‘Give up,’ ‘There’s no point in hiding,’ ‘I get what I want,’ and worse stuff that I’d rather not repeat. I can show you, though.”

“Show me?” Moran queried. “You brought them with you?”

“Not exactly.” He dug out his phone and accessed a file on the device. “When I initially received the threats, I took photos of them because I thought I might report it to the police.”

Jim and Seb exchanged a look of surprise at the teen’s admission.

“Did you go through with it?”

“No,” he sheepishly muttered. “I was afraid that if I went to them about this, I’d have to explain everything else, too.”

Sebastian hesitated, trying to choose his words carefully. “Ian, I can’t even begin to imagine how horrid this must be for you. To go through what you did, and then still be made to suffer now…it’s completely unacceptable. Know that Jim and I will do our very best to put an end to your stalker problem.”

“Thank you. I’m not used to having people stand up for me. It’s nice.” He passed his phone to Moran. “Here’s a sample of what I’m dealing with.”

Seb reviewed the materials and was quickly unnerved by their contents. Warnings of bodily harm were issued, some of which vowed a fatal outcome.

Moriarty also read through the items and was aghast at what he saw. Ian was a sweet kid and definitely didn’t deserve this level of harassment. If it turned out Luke was indeed behind the malicious campaign, he’d kill the bastard himself.

“It’s understandable you’d be upset,” the assassin acknowledged as he handed back the mobile device. “For right now, we could provide you with increased security if you’re interested.”

“At this point, I’m open to anything. I just want my daughter to remain safe. I can protect her while she’s inside me, but soon she’ll be born and then who knows what will happen?”


The statement caught Jim’s attention. “Like hell you will. The doctor said no strenuous activity for 24-hours.”
“I feel okay. I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

“No.” He cast his mate a steely glare to signify that he meant business. As far as he was concerned, this was non-negotiable.

“24-hours is an arbitrary length of time. It’s more a suggestion than an actual rule.”

“So help me god, I’ll tie you to the bed if necessary.”

“Promise?” Sebastian cheekily remarked.

“I’m serious. You were allowed to leave St. Thomas’s under the proviso that I monitor you at home. I intend to follow through on my end of the bargain.”

Moran stifled a sigh. Jim was going overboard, but it was only because he loved him so much. These ‘nursing’ duties clearly meant a lot to his Magpie.

“Fine. I won’t wait forever, though.”

“I never said you had to. I’m simply insisting you follow doctor’s orders.”

“There was a time when you wouldn’t have made such a big deal out of this. How often did I get shot, and you still sent me back out on assignment later the same day?”

“Yes, well, that was before parenthood became a fixture in our lives.”

“I get what you’re saying,” Ian interjected. “I feel like I’ve been more cautious since my baby entered the picture. Not that I was prone to reckless behavior, mind you. I just think I’ve tried to be ‘better’ all-around for her sake.”

“That makes two of us. I decided to focus on self-improvement after I heard the twins’ heartbeats for the first time.” It was a fateful moment that had irrevocably changed the course of his life. In an instant, he realized his children’s survival was dependent upon him and he needed to rise to the occasion.

“Sebby, darling?” Moriarty continued, “Why don’t I move Essie and Eddie in here for tonight? Then I won’t have to leave your side— I could watch over you and them simultaneously.”

“I’ve got no problem with it, but where do you propose they sleep? Their cribs are too heavy for one person to heft alone.”

“The bassinets are lighter weight. I can transport those.”

“Hmm. I guess that would work.”

“Good, we’re in agreement. I’ll get right on it.”

Ian peered at the couple, anxious to ask them something. “Hey, guys? Are we finished with the meeting?”

“I believe so,” answered Sebastian. “Thank you for your candor.”

“I try to be honest. Growing up, my integrity was all I had.”

At that, Jim ventured off to the nursery on a mission to gather his little ones. A sleepover full of cuddles and coos would soon commence.
Sneak Preview-- In the next chapter, Seb breaks into Luke's apartment.
Tiger Investigations – Part 1: See Seb Sleuth

Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

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Today was the day. Sebastian would finally search Luke’s apartment for proof that the rogue alpha was stalking Jim’s protégé, Ian. He’d hoped to tackle the job sooner, but Moriarty insisted—nay, demanded—that he wait until the concussion monitoring period was over. Initially annoyed by the delay, he came to realize its benefit. The extra time allowed him to better pin down his target’s schedule.

Gaining the necessary information proved surprisingly simple. All he had to do was call The Golden Anchor pub claiming to be an old friend of Luke’s who wanted to surprise him. The person he talked to bought the act, telling him what shift the wanker was assigned to work that week. Now he knew precisely when to strike.

But before Moran ventured out, he had to check on his husband.

Jimmy. The Irishman was not in an agreeable mood right now. He’d seen the photos of his ruined buildings and received official confirmation as to the extent of the damages. He didn’t give a damn about the properties themselves—what truly upset him was the destruction of the many priceless possessions stored inside. Structures could be rebuilt. One of a kind 18th century artworks, however, could not.

Seb proceeded to the kitchen where his partner was furiously attempting to bake out his frustrations. He’d entered the room four hours ago and remained there ever since.

“Hey, kitten. Looks like you’ve been busy.” Plates of cookies and muffins littered the countertops, and more sweet treats were currently in the oven.

“I’ve got to stay busy,” the frazzled, apron-clad omega said. “If I don’t focus on something else, all I’ll think about is what I’ve lost. Think of the irrereplaceable items that are gone forever because of Colin and Annie. Then, I’ll be struck by the overwhelming urge to stab them repeatedly. Gut the bastards for every fucking thing they’ve done to us.” He paused, a grim expression eclipsing his face. “Of course, I suppose we’d actually have to find them first in order for that to happen.”

“I’m trying my damnestest to locate them,” Seb replied. “It isn’t my fault we keep running into dead
ends.” The sniper was well aware of what his mate was hinting at. Yesterday they’d sought to uncover the owner of the black Volkswagen Passat that had tracked him and caused his accident. Unfortunately, the vehicle registry listings for that particular make and model was enormous. It was apparently a very popular car throughout the United Kingdom, London included. The amount of time it would take to vet each and every one was staggering—on par with finding a needle in a haystack. In short, the results disappointed them both.

Moriarty heaved a sigh. “I know you’re not to blame. I’m just so sick of this shite.” He stepped closer to Sebastian, resting his head against the larger man’s chest. “We hunt them, we kill them, and then we ride off into the proverbial sunset to raise our family. That’s what I want, but there’s no way it will come easy. Nothing ever does.”

DING.

The oven timer rang and Jim pulled away. “I’ve got to get that. I mustn’t let my tarts burn.” He promptly tended to the hot tray of pastry, setting it out to cool.

“Those look divine. What flavor are they?”

“Apple cinnamon.”

“Wonderful. I’ll try them when I get back.”

“Get back? Where are you going?”

“Take a wild guess.”

“I’d like to imagine you’re fetching me a sandwich and chips, but somehow I doubt it,” he quipped. “No, I wager what you’re reeeeeally embarking upon is a certain evidence retrieval mission we’ve already discussed at length.”

“Bingo, we have a winner.”

“Hurrah. If you discover anything even remotely suspicious, I expect to hear about it. No detail is too small.”

“Got it, boss.”

The genius smiled faintly. “You’ve not called me that in ages. I like it.”

“Maybe I’ll do it again later, under more intimate circumstances,” Seb suggested, his voice taking on a seductive tone.

“Don’t toy with me, Tiger. I’m in no mood for a cock tease.”

“Who’s teasing? It’s been a while since we’ve had a proper date night,” he noted. “This evening, I’ll cook you dinner and pour some wine. We can stream a movie or two. And then, if you’re up to it, you can show me who’s boss. I do enjoy a good demonstration.”

Jim eyed his mate wantonly, gripping him by the shirt and pulling him in for a kiss. It was hard, fast, and intense, giving Seb goosebumps.

“Consider that a sneak preview. Now get moving, soldier. You’ve got work to do.”

“Aye.”
Moran bid the mastermind adieu, secretly wishing he didn’t have to go. The thought of what awaited tonight would sustain him on his journey.

*********

Business at the pub was bustling, or so Sebastian assumed based on the number of cars in the parking lot. He was grateful for that. If he needed a crowd to blend into, one would be readily available.

With a gun concealed in his waistband and a knife tucked into his boot, he entered via the back of the building. The rear stairs led up to a series of apartments situated directly above The Golden Anchor. He headed straight for the one he remembered as being Luke’s.

An expert lock picker, Seb swiftly breached the door and stepped inside. At first glance, everything looked the same as it had the last time he was there. The layout was fairly basic, and he didn’t think it would take too long to comb the place.

*Where to start? Hmm.*

Moran opted to begin where he stood—in the living room. There wasn’t much to the area, and he was able to thoroughly search it within only a few minutes, uncovering nothing significant. His review of the kitchen proved similarly fruitless, although he did learn that Luke kept a rather impressive liquor selection on hand. *Probably swipes leftover stock from the bar.*

He moved on to the bedroom, a rush of memories flooding back to him in the process. It was difficult to forget an encounter like the one he and Luke had shared, though the assassin sorely wished he could. Pretending to be interested in such a reprehensible scumbag was among the most unpleasant experiences he’d ever endured while on assignment.

Seb sat down on the mattress and began inspecting the nightstand drawer. The usual was there—a pack of cigarettes, lube, a cock ring or two. He continued digging. Suddenly, he came across something a bit more curious. There was a sock shoved towards the back of the compartment and an item was stashed inside.

“What’s this?” He stuck his hand into the hosiery, grasping its contents. A sly smile spread across his face when he saw what it was. Luke had apparently been hiding a baggie of cocaine.

*Don’t mind if I do,* he thought as he pocketed the surprise score.

Next up was the closet. Once he navigated through a mountain of clothes, he was greeted to several storage bins. Moran popped the lid off the first plastic cube, and what it contained became immediately clear.

Porn. Lots and lots of porn, in both magazine and DVD form. He scoured the remaining bins and found more of the same. It was a comprehensive collection, to be sure.

The sniper sighed, growing slightly frustrated. He still hadn’t found anything to indicate that Luke was Ian’s stalker. Maybe the boy was mistaken, and Colin and Annie were actually behind it? The possibility was there. Even so, he refused to give up. There were more places to look.

“Let’s see what you’ve got in here,” he said, opening a set of dresser drawers. *Underwear, socks, t-shirts.* He made a mental tally as he appraised the wholly unremarkable assortment.

Finally, he checked the bottom drawer. Lo and behold, there laid a treasure trove. Sebastian was about to uncover more than he ever could’ve imagined.
Jim needed a break. He’d spent a majority of the day in a tizzy, spinning his wheels in the kitchen as he baked up a storm. Now it was time to find a different distraction. But what?

The consulting criminal whipped out his phone and scrolled through a list of contacts. He stopped when he reached a particular one, tapping to dial the number.

“Come on,” he muttered impatiently as he drummed his fingers against the table.

“Hello?” the voice on the other end answered. It was Jack. “This is lovely surprise. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Thought I’d catch up with a friend. How are you?”

“Quite well, thanks. Today’s been a bit of a whirlwind. We’re having a family portrait commissioned and had to remain in formal attire for most of the afternoon. Reginald absolutely hates wearing a suit and tie, though, so he was a tad cranky. He’d live in his PJs if he could.”

Jim chuckled softly. “I’ll have to have a chat with him. Emphasize the importance of dressing for success.”

“Oh, I’d love it if you did. He really looks up to you. I’m certain if you said a suit and tie were cool, he’d agree to wear them without complaint.”

Moriarty was silent for a moment, taken aback by Jack’s comment. “Reggie looks up to me?”

“Don’t sound so surprised. You’re an extremely charismatic man.”

“Well, duh. I know that. But to a toddler? I wasn’t aware my appeal extended to the preschool demographic.”

“Reg is very mature for his age. You can’t hold him to the same standards as an average child.”

“I suppose not.” The genius hesitated, his thoughts turning to the littlest members of the Norridge clan. “How’s he getting along with his baby brother?”

“Splendidly. You should see it,” Jack jauntily proclaimed. “Whenever Bertie cries, he’s right there alongside me to tend to him. He’s taken his ‘Dr. Reggie, M.D.’ shtick to a new level. It’s adorable.”

“Sounds like it.”

There was a brief pause before the other man spoke again. “Hey, Jim?” He stopped, his voice fraught with indecision. “Nah, never mind.”

“What?” Moriarty prodded.

“It’s nothing, really.”

“I’ll be the judge of that. Tell me what you were going to ask.”

“You truly want to know?”

“Yes, I do.”
“All right. I was going to inquire as to whether or not you’d be interested in attending a Father’s Day soiree I’m hosting at The Savoy.”

“Oh.” Jim wasn’t expecting to hear that.

“Yeah, it was foolish of me to mention it. You probably wouldn’t want to do something like that—not after what happened at Reginald’s party.”

“Who says I wouldn’t?” He hated it when people made assumptions about him, as if he, James Moriarty, could be pigeonholed. As if he was predictable. Obvious. Ordinary.

“My apologies,” Jack replied. “If you want to come, I’ve got no problem with it.”

“Before I agree, give me details on the event.”

“Okay, that’s fair. It’s a semi-formal brunch meant to honor some of the most outstanding fathers Gary and I know. A number of his colleagues will be there, as well as a few close family friends. Their spouses and children are also invited.”

“I see.”

The mastermind mulled it over carefully. He could think of no finer father than Sebastian. Perhaps this was something they ought to do together. After all, it was the first year his Tiger could be considered a papa. It seemed fitting that they should celebrate in a special way. Plus, some of the guests who’d be at this gathering were probably there for Reggie’s birthday bash. It’d be an excellent opportunity to set the record straight regarding his family. Conduct a ‘do over’ of sorts.

“So, are you coming?”

“There’s a strong likelihood, yes.”

“Wonderful, I’ll add you to the guest list.”

“Please do.” He was quiet for a beat. “I’d forgotten Father’s Day was almost here.”

“That’s understandable. It’s not a big deal until you have kids, and then every holiday becomes a spectacle,” he remarked with a laugh.

“Right.” But deep down, Moriarty suspected his disconnect with the occasion was more complicated than that. He could only recall celebrating the day once in his life—it was during the year he spent being fostered by the Milfords. Beyond that, he hadn’t grown up with any male figures who might approximate the role of a father. It never really bothered him until now.

“Well, I’ve told you how I’m doing,” Jack pointed out. “Allow me to do the same. What’s new with you, Jim?”

The Irishman was hoping his friend wouldn’t ask that question. So much terrible shite had transpired of late, he scarcely knew where to begin in explaining it all.

“How much time do you have? Because this will take a while.”

“At the moment, my schedule is fairly open. The children are napping and Gary’s at work.”

“Good. I recommend you get comfortable. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

**********
Sebastian sat on the floor of Luke’s bedroom, surrounded by the damning evidence he’d discovered hidden away in a dresser drawer. If ever there was any doubt regarding the man’s guilt, this put paid to it once and for all. The twisted bastard was keeping a dossier filled with photos of Ian. They were obviously taken unbeknownst to him, many shot from a distance and at odd angles. By Moran’s estimate, there were at least 100 pictures total, some appearing to be quite recent.

Other disturbing elements emerged. Luke maintained a list of locations the young man frequented — specific shops, restaurants, and even areas he favored at Hyde Park. As if that wasn’t bad enough, maps had been drawn up outlining the routes Ian travelled to get from his loft to those corresponding locales.

There was a datebook and calendar as well. Hours and minutes were included, denoting when the youth would be at certain places. Apparently, Ian was a creature of habit, often doing things around the same time each day. Luke caught on to this and used it to his advantage.

Amid the slew of documents, one aspect puzzled Seb. An entry on the calendar dating back to a few weeks ago was circled, featuring a time and address written down. What made this confusing was the fact that it didn’t tie into any of the previously established locations. Moreover, there was something strangely familiar about the street coordinates. He was almost positive he’d seen them before, but couldn’t recall how or why.

The sniper snapped a pic of the peculiar entry, figuring he would decipher its meaning later. After that, he put the items back and resumed a standing position.

He had one more area to examine— the bathroom. It was a barebones space with no frills in sight. The chance of uncovering anything useful was low, but he wanted to be thorough in his investigation.

Moran opened the medicine cabinet and was immediately drawn to the pill bottles on the shelves. He grabbed them, studying the labels intently. The names printed out showed that they definitely hadn’t been prescribed to Luke. Then he checked what the drugs themselves actually were. *Hydrocodone, Diazepam, Ketamine.*

“Hell of a supply.”

A terrible thought soon occurred to him. *Is he taking these recreationally, or is he using them on other people?* Knowing what a monster Luke was, Seb couldn’t dismiss the possibility.

**THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.**

The assassin froze as he heard the sound of someone stomping their way through the hall outside the apartment. It was growing louder with each footfall, until finally, it stopped. But now was not the time to breathe a sigh of relief— the next noise he observed was that of the front door opening.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes
This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Chapter Summary

Sebastian must get out of a difficult situation. Meanwhile, Jim spends time with the babies.

Chapter Notes

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Luke stomped into his apartment with a stain on his shirt and a grim expression set upon his face. “Thought I locked the door,” he muttered in confusion.


Meanwhile, Sebastian stood motionless in the bathroom, trying his damnedest to stay calm and collected. He still held the pill bottles from Luke’s medicine chest in his hands— one false move would send them rattling and reveal his presence for sure. It was times like these when his military training proved incredibly useful. He could remain steady as a rock even under duress.

More footsteps echoed within the flat, amplified by the hardwood flooring featured throughout. Seb badly wished he could see what was happening. In the absence of visual cues, he had to rely on sound alone.

Don’t come in here. The former colonel was armed and could certainly defend himself, but he hoped to avoid a skirmish if possible.

Luke entered the bedroom. It was located directly beside the loo.

Too bloody close. Though Seb could trick his body into a state of composure, his mind was harder to control. Every second that passed felt like perdition.

BAM. BAM.

Banging noises emanated from the next room. Moran recognized it as the sound of dresser drawers opening and closing.

When the man remerged, he was wearing a clean t-shirt. A mishap at the bar had led to his impromptu wardrobe change.

Much to Sebastian’s dismay, Luke did not leave right away. No, he lingered in an almost perverse
fashion, taking time to open mail, eat a bowl of cereal, and check the progress of a rugby game on TV.

Just fucking go already. His fingers were beginning to cramp from continuously clutching the pill bottles, and worse yet, a mosquito had flown in through an open window and was circling precariously close. He hated the little bloodsuckers.

RING. RING. RING.


The sudden, shrill tone startled Moran, very nearly causing him to lose focus. However, being a consummate professional, he was able to rapidly reel himself back in.


CLICK.

The call ended as abruptly as it began. “Nagging bitch,” he hissed, shoving his mobile device into his pocket.

Wonder what that was about? Seb rued not being able to hear the other side of the conversation.

But there was no time to dwell on the matter. He had bigger problems to contend with, namely the fact that Luke was again on the move, and from the sounds of it, heading straight towards him.

What to do? The apartment was small. A few more steps and the bastard would be right there. He needed to act fast.

BZZ.

The mosquito buzzed by Moran’s ear. In a flash, it gave him an idea. Maybe he could get out the same way that damned bug had gotten in.

There’s a fire escape. He’d seen it when he entered the rear of the building. This just might work.

Sebastian allowed the bottles to drop as he dove for the open window.

“Hey!” shouted Luke, charging in and briefly seeing the assassin’s feet as they dangled from the frame.

Moran maneuvered with great prowess, landing on the rickety metal grating and hurrying down a set of similarly shaky stairs. Once he hit the ground, he sprinted to his car at top speed.

Luke unleashed a tirade of obscenities from above, but it was unclear whether or not he’d actually caught a glimpse of Seb’s face.

Don’t look back. Drive. The formidable sniper stepped on the gas and raced from the scene. Things had definitely not gone as planned.

At least I’ve confirmed the identity of Ian’s stalker. He’d fulfilled his primary goal, and in that sense, the assignment was a success.
“Heeee-Heeee!” Essie and Eddie giggled loudly in unison.

“You like it, darlings? Daddy’s glad.” The mastermind had finished assembling a double baby swing and was trying it out on the twins. They seemed quite enthusiastic about the new item.

He stepped back, beaming as he admired his children. The pair positively radiated with glee. He’d never seen happier babies than them, and their delight was contagious.

“Oh, my lovelies, do you know what season is almost here? Summer. I can’t wait for you to experience it. Perhaps we should go on a holiday together? You, me, and Papa.”

The tiny tots stared at him while he spoke, their eyes wide and excited.

“I’ll take those adororable looks as a sign of interest,” he remarked. “Where do you think we ought to go, then? There are so many options. The world is a big place, poppets.” He paused, mulling over potential locales. “How about the Azores? They’re gorgeous this time of year. Or Ibiza—the ocean view from the island is spectacular. Your Papa and I went on our first real vacation together there.” Moriarty remembered it like it was yesterday. The couple had spent seven glorious days and nights basking in each other’s company amid the spoils of paradise. They surfed, sunbathed, and made love on white, sandy beaches. He hadn’t wanted it to end.

“Coo,” little Estella gurgled sweetly. Jim couldn’t be sure if it was in response to his talk of a trip, the new swing she sat in, or something else entirely. Whatever the case, she was content and that’s all that mattered.

BAM.

The front door slammed, audible even on the second floor.

Eddie tilted his head, trying to make sense of the noise. When he next heard the familiar sound of Seb’s boots clomping up the stairs, his whole face grew animated, blue eyes sparkling as his mouth formed a wide, toothless smile.

“Someone’s pleased to have Papa home,” the Irishman declared. He bent down and pressed a kiss to the boy’s forehead. “I’m glad, too.”

Sebastian stood in the doorway, gazing at his family. “Am I interrupting?”

Jim approached his mate, grinning from ear to ear. “Never, my dear.”

“Your mood’s certainly improved since I left.”

“Well, I’ve had time to regroup. I talked to Jack, which helped, and then I decided to put together the swings.”

“Our kiddos seem to be having fun with them,” Seb commented, taking notice of the babies’ blissful expressions.

“I know. It’s funny how their happiness becomes my happiness, like joy through osmosis.”

The sniper chuckled. “That’s an interesting way to think of it. Rather accurate, really.” Oftentimes, they had a similar effect on him.

“Indeed.” Moriarty hesitated for a beat, realizing he and his partner needed to broach a more serious subject. “Let’s step into the hall so we can discuss the assignment you’ve returned from.”
Seb nodded. “Okay.”

The duo walked just outside the playroom so they could chat and periodically peek in on their children.

“Now tell me, was there any pertinent information to be found at Luke’s?”

“Oh yeah, lots. That sick son of a bitch is keeping an extensive file on Ian. He’s got creeper photos, lists of places the boy goes, and even maps outlining his routes of travel. It’s fucked up.”

Jim’s demeanor darkened at the news. “Bloody hell. This is worse than I expected.”

“Honestly, I hadn’t anticipated the extent of Luke’s activity either. Seems like he’s gone off the deep end.”

“I wish he’d go off a literal deep end,” the consulting criminal spat. “Allowing him to live was a mistake. I won’t make it twice. He has to die.”

“Agreed.”

“Before we plot out the particulars, were there any other discoveries during the mission?”

“Actually, yes. There was a datebook and calendar among the documents. I wouldn’t have thought much of it, except I noticed something curious about one of the entries.”

Moriarty arched a brow. “Oh? What’s that?”

“There was a date marked on the calendar going back a few weeks ago, and it struck me as odd because the address written down didn’t appear to connect with Ian. Even stranger, I’m almost positive I’ve come across it in the past. I can’t remember the circumstance, though.”

“Can you recall the address offhand? If it’s familiar to you, I might recognize it as well.”

“I was afraid I’d forget, so I snapped a shot of the entry.” The quick-thinking assassin pulled out his phone and brought up the photo in question, showing it to his spouse. “Does this ring any bells?”

Jim stared at the picture contemplatively, wracking his brain for traces of information. Unfortunately, it was a bust. “Bollocks,” he grumbled. “I don’t know the address.”

“It was worth a try,” Moran lamented, tucking his device away again.

“We should ask Ian if it means anything to him.”

“Good idea. Want me to forward the image?”

“Let’s do better than that. For his own safety, he ought to be made aware of what you uncovered. We’ll summon the boy and apprise him in person. I’m sure he’ll require moral support after he hears what Luke’s been up to.”

“Yeah.” Sebastian paused, a slight frown emerging on his face. “Where does that leave us in terms of our date night? I was really looking forward to it.”

“We can keep our original plans. He won’t be here all evening.”

“I suppose.”
“Trust me, Tiiiiiiger,” Jim purred. “It’ll be fine.” He moved in on his husband until there was no space left between them. Their bodies meshed together as he ran a hand down Seb’s backside, cupping the man’s firm ass through a layer of denim jeans.

Moran grunted huskily. “You make a compelling argument.”

“Of course I dooooo. I’m ‘Mr. Sex,’” he teased.

“Damn right you are.”

“Ooh, what’s this?” the genius abruptly asked, feeling something in Sebastian’s pocket. Intrigued, he stuck his hand inside to grab the item. When he looked and saw that it was a baggie of cocaine, he immediately took a step backwards, his expression aghast.

“Is there a problem?” Moran was genuinely confused by the reaction.

“If this is what I think it is, then yes, we have a problem. A pretty fucking huge one, in fact. Where did you get this?”

“I stole it from Luke’s apartment. The arsehole has a surprising amount of drugs over there,” he noted. “I didn’t think you’d be upset— quite the opposite, actually.”

Moriarty’s eyes bulged with fury and disbelief. “Are you fucking joking? You assumed I’d be pleased that you brought narcotics into our home, when there are two infants present who require constant care and attention?”

Oh shite. It never occurred to Seb that his mate’s views on keeping drugs in the house might’ve changed since their children entered the picture.

“I’m sorry, kitten. I hadn’t factored our cubs into the equation. Guess I should’ve given it more thought.”

“To say the least. I can’t believe we even need to have this conversation,” Jim bitterly intoned. “So long as Essie and Eddie are dependent on us, there will be no getting high in this household. Do I make myself clear?”

“As crystal.”

“Good. That said, tuck it away someplace safe. We may find a use for it yet. Never know when you’ll need to plant drugs on an enemy.”

“Aye, sir.” Sebastian hung his head low with regret.

The Irishman eyeballed his partner and sighed. “I know you weren’t deliberately trying to piss me off,” he spoke, sounding a bit calmer than he had moments ago. “But we’re parents now. We have to put our babies first. Consider it— suppose we were to blow through that bag of coke like old times, and then, god forbid, something befell our doves. We wouldn’t be able to properly care for them in such a state.”

“I get it, Jimmy. You have their best interests at heart. You’re an excellent mother. Me, however… well, I’m not exactly vying for ‘Father of the Year.’”

“Don’t talk like that, Seb.”

“Why not? It’s true.”
“Bite your tongue. You weren’t thinking and you made a mistake. I’m not thrilled about it, but it doesn’t negate all the wonderful things you’ve done— and continue to do— for the twins.”

“Still, I should’ve known better. It won’t happen again, I assure you.”

“I’m well aware that it won’t,” Moriarty remarked, “because you learn from your transgressions. It’s one of the many qualities I love about you.”

Seb stared hopefully at the smaller man. “I love you, too.” He reached out, grasping him by the hand. “I can’t wait to start our date. I’ll whip us up an amazing dinner. Ian can eat with us if he’d like, but afterward, I want it to be just you and me.”

“Sounds divine.”

WAAAAAAH.

The couple’s conversation was cut short by the cries of their children. Both men returned to the playroom where Essie and Eddie were fussing.

“I think I know what’s wrong,” Jim announced. “It’s almost time for their feeding.”

“Makes sense. I’ve seen you behave similarly when in need of a meal.”

“Hangry runs in the family, dear. You’d best not forget it.”

“As if I could.”

And so the twosome tended to their little ones, making sure they were duly satiated before Sebastian went off to cook and Jim arranged to have Ian come over. With any luck, they’d be able to guide the teen through his tumultuous situation and still find time for each other.

Chapter End Notes

In the next installment, Seb pays a visit to the mystery address.
Journey of Remembrance – Part 1

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian both have plans for the day—meeting with a friend and conducting an investigation, respectively. In Seb’s case, the situation takes an unexpected turn.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains discussion of suicide.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Sebbbbby! Come here!” Jim shouted from the living room. He was standing up while the babies were nestled in their stroller.

“What is it, hon?” asked Sebastian. By now, he was used to being at his mate’s beck and call.

“I want you to double check the diaper bags. I’ve gone through them myself, but I feel like I’m forgetting something.”

“Will do.”

The sniper carefully reviewed the contents of each duffle, making sure all the necessities were there. In his opinion, they appeared thoroughly packed.

“Hold on, I remember!” Moriarty rushed off to retrieve the missing items. When he returned, he was carrying two colorful rattles. “It’s easy to overlook these. Our darlings just recently started playing with them.”

Jim proceeded to tuck the toys away and get moving. Jack had invited him over to assist in planning the Father’s Day soiree, and he wouldn’t miss it for the world. He never could resist an opportunity to organize a party, especially one posh enough to be held at The Savoy hotel.

The consulting criminal wasn’t the only one with plans. Today, Seb would embark on an adventure of his own. He intended to visit the mystery address that was written on Luke’s calendar. At this point, it was more out of personal interest than anything else. Ian hadn’t been able to identify it, and an internet search yielded negligible results. All he could find was an old public records notice indicating that the location was condemned. This furthered his intrigue, and he decided he’d see for himself what was really going on there.
Moran escorted his family to Jim’s car, helping him secure the twins into their safety seats. The adorable infants were cheerful as ever, babbling a series of grunts and noises. Listening to their sweet streams of gibberish warmed his heart.

“I hope you have a nice time, kitten.”

“I’m sure I will,” he said with a smirk. Sebastian had no idea what he and Jack were truly up to—the Father’s Day brunch was meant to be a surprise. “Call me after you scope out the address.”

“Oh, of course.” The devoted alpha leaned in, kissing his partner goodbye. “Talk to you later, love.”

He remained at the curbside, watching as Moriarty drove off into the distance. No matter how often they parted ways, he always felt a twinge of sadness at seeing him go.

I’d best get the lead out, too. Seb was ready for a bit of good old-fashioned exploring.

*********

“I’m glad you could make it,” Jack announced while pouring Jim a cup of tea. Acting as a proper host, he sought to create an atmosphere that was warm and hospitable.

“The pleasure is mine. When someone asks me to help put together such a fine event, I’m simply incapable of saying ‘no.’”

“Excellent. I can’t wait to discuss my ideas.”

“You can begin bouncing them off me now if you’d like,” the genius encouraged.

“Okay, great.” He paused, pondering which concept to broach first. “Let’s see… I may incorporate an interactive element into the celebration.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, I might request that guests bring in photos of the fathers they’re honoring. Then the images could be posted up on a wall like a collage.”

“Sounds fabulous. I’ve got plenty of pictures of Seb to choose from.”

Jack smiled. “Perhaps guests could also say a few words about the person in their photo. Or would that be too cloying?”

“Cloying? Never,” the mastermind answered. “Tell me, is there any way you might be able to gain access to a projector or video monitor?”

“Possibly, why?”

“Because if we can gather the pictures in advance, I could edit them together as a slideshow, to be played in addition to the collage.”

“Hmm.” The man took a sip of tea as he mulled over his friend’s suggestion. “I’ll see what’s available.”

“Splendid. We’re off to a promising start.”

Moriarty was already brainstorming what he’d say about his spouse. He could easily regale a crowd with the wonders of Sebastian Moran, though in this case, it’d probably be prudent to keep
things concise.

“There’s another idea I’m toying with, but I worry it may be deemed ‘too lowbrow’ for the attendees of this event.”

“I want to hear it. Don’t hold back.”

“All right. Suppose each partygoer was automatically entered into a prize drawing? I think it’d be fun, although I’m not certain how Gary’s colleagues would respond. Some of them are a bit snobbish at times.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “If those prigs can’t enjoy a dose of whimsy every now and then, that’s their problem. This is a family affair—if it should include lighthearted activities.”

“I agree completely,” said Jack, appearing quite pleased by the feedback. “On a different note, what do you propose we do in terms of decorations?”

A gleeful grin eclipsed Moriarty’s face. Decorating was definitely his forte. “Ooh, I’m delighted that you asked. I’ve got ooooodles of ideas.” And he would share every last one.

*********

604 South Street.

Sebastian stood in front of the ramshackle building, studying its exterior closely. Featuring boarded up windows and graffiti abound, it looked like any other derelict property in the city. Somehow, though, this place held an air of familiarity for the sniper that those similar structures did not. Unfortunately, he was still unable to determine why.

_I must’ve been here before._ He’d hoped that visiting the address would stir his memory. Instead, it merely induced a potent sense of déjà vu.

The next step was to investigate what lay inside. Seb quickly observed that the lone point of entry was via a back alley door.

_This seems sketchy as hell. There’s got to be an illegal operation going on._

Moran charged forward with purpose. Almost as soon as he did, he was overcome by a dizzying rush of emotion.

Everywhere he turned, something set him off—the heavy plumes of smoke that tinted the room a sickly greyish-blue. The scent of cheap liquor and dollar store cologne. The music that emanated from upstairs, just barely masking the unmistakable sounds of desperate, meaningless sex.

And then he remembered. Remembered how he knew this ghastly place. The images, fragmented as they were, flooded his head like a tide rolling in.

Sebastian couldn’t escape fast enough, bolting from the building at a breakneck speed. Fresh air hit him upon retreat, but even that couldn’t stop what was already set in motion. The assassin’s world spun and he dropped to his knees with a shudder. He was grateful for having skipped breakfast that morning, or else it would’ve been staring up at him as he dry heaved onto the pavement.

Why, of all locations, did the universe see fit to drag him back to this hellhole? Specifically, it was an unlicensed bar which catered to the seedier sides of life, functioning as a drug den and brothel. Seb only visited the site once, and it was among the darkest days he’d ever known.
Several Years Ago…

“Get the fuck out!” a large, irate barkeep hollered, tossing Sebastian to the curb.

“Piss off, you bloody wanker!” the inebriated alpha spat. He tried to pick himself up and get on his feet again, but faltered.

“If you’re still here in 20 minutes, I’m calling the police. Just go home.” At that, he shut the door, leaving Moran to drunkenly writhe on the sidewalk.

“Fucking piece of shite. See if I care that the bastard kicked me out. There’s better places to go than this dive.”

Indeed, there were other establishments one could drink at. Too bad, then, that this was the third place Seb had been forcibly removed from tonight. He was on a bender to end all benders—one last hurrah before bidding the mortal coil adieu.

The sniper finally managed to regain a standing position, gripping a nearby lamppost for balance. He paused to gather his bearings and glance around. Nothing appeared especially familiar.

“Where the fuck am I?” he muttered. Hours ago, he’d set out on foot, aimlessly wandering the streets of London. He hit up bars at random, with no real destination in mind. It was his way of saying goodbye to the city he’d lived in for so long.


“Why don’t you mind your own fucking—” he stopped after turning to get a good look at the woman. She was beautiful, or at least he thought so through the fuzzy filter of intoxication.

“You kiss your mother with that mouth?”

He snorted. “Guess again, bint. My mother’s been dead for years.”

“Mine too.”

“Yeah, well, that’s what people do.” Moran felt a pang deep inside as he quoted his departed lover’s words. They were more prophetic than he’d ever realized.

“You’re quite a cynical bloke, aye?”

“Just honest.”

“Good. Honesty’s a lost art. Nobody tells the truth anymore.”

“That’s for damn sure.” Not even those you trust the most.

“So who was she?”

Seb eyed the woman shiftily. “Excuse me?”

“Who was the bird that lied to you?”

“Really not your business.”
She shrugged. “Fair enough. I can show you my business, though, if you’d like.” Her tone and body language alluded to a decidedly lascivious implication.

The former colonel considered it. If tonight was his farewell party, then perhaps a sendoff shag was in order.

“All right. You got a name?”

“It’s whatever you want it to be.”

“I want what’s written on your birth certificate. I appreciate honesty, remember?”

There was a moment of hesitation, almost as if she wasn’t used to people requesting her given moniker. “Emily,” she answered at last. “And you?”

“Seb.”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance. Follow me and I’ll take you someplace where we can relax. How’s that sound?”

“Fantastic. Even better if you’ve got whiskey there.”

“Whiskey?” she scoffed. “We have a full bar.”

“Then by all means, lead the way.”

Perhaps his life would conclude on a high note, or at the very least, a pleasurable one.

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Sebastian was fully convinced that the universe hated him. Of the many roles he’d played throughout the years—son, brother, soldier, assassin, bodyguard, and boyfriend—he had never enacted the part of an impotent louse until now.

“We could always try again,” Emily gently suggested.

He took a heavy drag off his cigarette before answering, “No, thanks. Between this and being kicked out of three separate bars tonight, I think I’ve experienced as much embarrassment as I can handle.”

“Lots of guys have performance issues. I’m sure you’ll be right as rain in no time.”

Seb chuckled darkly. “‘No time,’” he repeated for emphasis. “Funny you should phrase it that way, seeing as how I won’t be around much longer.”

The sex worker stared at him in confusion. “What do you mean? Are you shipping out or something? I noticed the dog tags—must be in the military, huh?”

“I did serve in the army, but that was ages ago.”

“So where are you going, then?”

“That’s a fine question,” he acknowledged. “I’ve wondered it myself. As best I can figure, I’ll probably wind up in either a void of nothingness, or alternately, the bowels of hell. Not sure which is worse.”
Emily paled at the realization of what he was saying. “Are…are you joking? Because that’s not funny.”

“It’s no jest, I assure you. Tomorrow’s the day I sleep forever.” Sebastian spoke matter-of-factly, detached in a manner that was downright unnerving.

“But why?” she asked, sounding genuinely concerned. “You seem like a decent bloke. I’m sure you have plenty of reasons to live.”

“I’m already dead in all the ways that count. Have been for the past 324 days. Tomorrow I’m just making it official.” Moran reached for the open bottle of Wild Turkey on the nightstand, taking a generous swig. “Care for a taste?” he inquired.

“No!” The woman was aghast. “How can you speak so calmly about killing yourself? Treat it like it’s nothing?”

“Would you rather I devolve into a blubbering mess? Been there, done that. I cried for months and it didn’t change a goddamn thing. Certainly didn’t bring back my mate.”

A look of profound sadness washed over Emily’s face. She now understood the catalyst for Seb’s despair. “You lost your omega.”

“Yeah,” he confirmed, his voice barely above a whisper. “The love of my life. We were a bonded pair.”

“I’m so sorry.” She motioned to hug him, but he pulled away. “Hey, it’s okay. I’m not trying to come on to you. No bonded alpha should ever have to go through that kind of loss. It’s soul-rending.”

“You’re right, it is,” the grieving sniper admitted. Gone was the nonchalance he’d displayed only moments earlier. The more he thought about his brilliant, beautiful Magpie, the more heartbroken he became. Without Jim in this world, life ceased to have meaning. He ached for him every second of every day. The pain was unyielding and produced greater agony than any torture he’d previously known.

“If you don’t mind me asking, how did your mate pass?”

Sebastian inhaled sharply, struggling to maintain composure. “Suicide is what they claim, but in my view, he was driven to it. Pushed over the edge by those who sought to destroy him.”

At that point, Moran half expected Emily to question the disclosure that his partner was a man. She didn’t, though, choosing instead to simply hold his hand. It was the kindest gesture he’d received in a very long time.

“For what it’s worth, I don’t think you should give up. In my line of work, I see a lot of guys, and you’re one of the nicer blokes I’ve met. I wish there were more like you.”

“No need to flatter me,” he brokenly replied.

“I’m just telling the truth. I’ve only known you for an hour, and already my instincts are screaming that you have a sensitive heart.”

“There are plenty of folks who’d disagree.”

“Fuck them,” she brazenly declared. “Do you have any idea how many people hate me because of
my profession? Most of them are a bunch of hypocrites, rotting from the inside out.”

Her comment elicited a small smirk. “Sounds a bit like something my mate would’ve said. He had a low opinion of those he deemed ‘ordinary.’”

Emily locked eyes with him, observing the twinkle that lay buried beneath a mountain of sorrow. “Consider the prospect of living for him. Living to honor his memory.”

“I want to, I do. It just hurts so fucking much. Ever since Jim’s been gone, I feel like I’m only half a person,” he confessed. “The best parts of me died with him.”

She shook her head. “I don’t believe that, not for an instant. I’m seeing good parts right now, and I don’t mean what’s hidden under the sheet you’ve got on— though admittedly, that’s pretty impressive, too.”

Moran laughed lightly. “Thanks, I think.”

“Oh, it’s a compliment,” the woman affirmed. “And I’m serious about carrying on in tribute to your omega. If the two of you were a bonded pair, then he must’ve loved you dearly. As such, it’s safe to assume he’d also want you to be happy and thriving. That might seem impossible in his absence, but it’s worth it to at least try. You may be surprised by the results.”

“Who did you lose?” he prodded, recognizing that she spoke from a place of sincerity.

“My mum and my boyfriend, both within the same year.”

“Jesus, that’s terrible.”

“Aye, it was. For a while, I couldn’t picture being okay again. Yet somehow, I kept going, and I’m glad that I did.” Emily hesitated, her expression pensive. “All this probably doesn’t sound too convincing coming from a prostitute. Even so, I stand by my words.”

“As far as I’m concerned, your career path has nothing to do with your ability to give advice. Wisdom is wisdom, no matter the source.”

“That’s one of the nicest things anyone’s ever said to me. Thank you.”

Seb smiled softly. “I’m just telling the truth,” he remarked, quoting her earlier sentiments. He then paused to finish his cigarette, stubbing it in an ashtray on the nightstand. “So, feel like getting something to eat?”

“Maybe. This wouldn’t happen to be a ‘last supper,’ would it?” She watched him intensely while awaiting a response.

“I…I don’t know,” he conceded. “An hour ago, I figured tonight would be my last everything. Now…I’m not sure.”

“Well, that’s a start.”

It really was. Though his mind hadn’t totally changed, it was no longer set in stone, either. Having someone to talk to, even if briefly, proved more helpful than expected. Maybe he’d attempt to take life one day at a time.

BZZ. BZZ.
Sebastian’s phone vibrated in his pocket. He blinked, slowly regaining cognizance of the world around him.

BZZ. BZZ.

His mobile continued to buzz as he stood up from the ground, still in the alley behind the illegally operated ‘bar.’

BZZ. BZZ.

The call went to voicemail. When he checked it, he learned that it was regarding a minor work-related matter. Nothing especially important. Nothing about Jim.

Jim.

His spouse had wanted to know of his findings. Wanted the scoop on what the mystery address led to. How would he explain it to him?

Those years when Moriarty was gone were the worst of Seb’s life. He hated to discuss what he did during that time, and seeing how upset it made him, the consulting criminal never pushed for answers. It was a subject they’d agreed not to stir. Now it seemed the proverbial pot was boiling over, and in addition to stirring, it also demanded to be dished out and served.

How on earth would Moran cope?

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

In case it's unclear, the place Seb investigates is the same location where Colin and Luke had their initial meeting. I'm not sure how well that comes across, so I'm noting it for clarification.
Jim Moriarty was having a good day. After being invited to his friend Jack’s house to assist in organizing a Father’s Day brunch, the two were able to hammer out a detailed plan for the event. With that taken care of, they now sat in the living room catching up on each other’s lives.

“Did I tell you that Gary’s case against the Metro PD has come to a resolution?”

“No. What happened?”

“Rather than endure the scandal of a protracted lawsuit, the head of the Specialist Firearms Command unit resigned from his post and accepted a lesser position. Several officers involved in the community center raid were demoted as well.”

“Hallelujah. They deserve it for how they treated us.”

“I agree, although a part of me wishes they’d have been sacked outright instead of merely kicked down to desk jobs.”

“I could deal with them if you’d like,” the consulting criminal declared. “A single phone call is all it would take.”

“While I appreciate the offer, I don’t think that’s necessary.”

“If you change your mind, just say the word.”

“I’ll keep it under advisement.”

Soon, the pitter-patter of little feet could be heard nearing. The men looked and saw that it was
Jack’s son, Reginald.

“Jim! Baybuhs!” he exclaimed, racing over to greet them.

“Hello, sweetheart. How are you?”

“Doin’ good! Got new shoes!” The toddler danced in a small circle, the soles of his sneakers lighting up as he moved.

“Oh my, that’s some very exciting footwear.”

“Mumma says I wook gwoovy.”

Moriarty chuckled. “Yes, you certainly do.”

“Aren’t they cute?” asked the doting omega. “I spotted them on a shelf at Harrods and simply had to buy them.”

“I know how that is. Some items are impossible to resist.”

“For sure. I went on a bit of a spree— got a stylish summer wardrobe out of it.”

“One can never have too many ensembles to choose from,” Jim opined. “We ought to go shopping together sometime. Perhaps a trip to acquire Father’s Day gifts is in order?”

Reggie instantly perked up at the mention of the holiday. “So happy fo’ Dadda Day!” he announced. “Wuv parwties.”

“As do I, which is why I’m helping your mum plan it out.”

The boy gasped, his eyes wide with enthusiasm. “Wanna help, too!”

“You do, honey?” Jack questioned his child as he scooped him onto his lap.

“Yes, I’ll do anyfing.”

“Hmm. What do you think, Jim? Should we assign him a task?”

Reginald gazed hopefully at the mastermind, waiting with bated breath for a response.

“How could I say ‘no’ to a face like that? Of course we can come up with something for him to do. It’s just a matter of deciding what that duty will be.”

“Right. I’ve got an idea.” Looking at Reg, he continued, “how would you feel about handing out flowers to the guests?”

“Wuv to!”

“Then that’s what you’ll be in charge of. It’s a very important job, but I believe you can handle it.”

“I’ll twy my bes,’ mumma.”

“What’s this about flowers?” Moriarty queried. “You didn’t include it in our planning discussion.”

“It’s meant as a welcoming gesture. When fathers walk through the door, they’ll each receive a white carnation.”
“Oh, that’s lovely. I’m sure people will enjoy it.”

“I hope so.”

“I’m makin’ dadda a carwd,” Reggie chimed in. “He wikes carwds.”

“That’s because he gets most of them from you.” Jack leaned down to kiss his son atop the head, and then turned his attention back to Jim. “Gary isn’t especially sentimental, but he’s always been consistent about keeping whatever Reginald gives him.”

The consulting criminal smiled warmly. Though he wasn’t a fan of his friend’s husband, it was nice to know that the man seemed to be a decent parent.

“Gwampa gonna be at parwty.”

“Really? Which side of the family is he on?”

“Mine,” Jack clarified. “He’s traveling from Cork to be here and will stay with us through the following week. He’s quite eager to meet Bertie for the first time.”

“Sounds wonderful.” Moriarty glanced at his own babies, who were snoozing in their stroller. He was happy for the Norridge’s mini-reunion, but also felt a sudden sadness at the thought that Essie and Eddie would never know their grandparents.

“Bwing your dadda,” the toddler suggested, his adorable doe-eyes focused on Jim. “I’ll giv’ him flowa, too.”

“That’s incredibly sweet of you. Unfortunately, I don’t have a father to invite.”

“Oh.” His expression dropped a bit. “Where he go?”

“That’s an awfully personal thing to ask,” chided Jack. “You don’t have to answer the question, Jim. My apologies for his impertinence.”

“No, it’s fine. He’s curious— I can appreciate that.” The genius paused, considering how to explain the truth. “I didn’t grow up with a father, and when I tried to find him as an adult, I learned he’d already passed away.”

“What ‘pass away’ mean?”

Moriarty and his friend exchanged a knowing look. It was the latter’s place to tackle this subject.

“Remember what happened to your hamster, sweetie?”

The tot let out a tiny whimper. “Miss Pammy,” he uttered forlornly, moisture forming in his eyes. Soon tears flowed at a steady rate as the boy trembled.

“Oh, I’m sorry, darling. I didn’t mean to upset you.” The guilt-stricken omega rocked his child in an effort to calm him. “I just wanted to help you understand.”

Reggie sniffled and stared up at Jack. “Nu, mumma. I sowwy. Nu mean to act wike baybuh.”

“Never. You’re the bravest lad I know.”

“Your mum’s right,” affirmed Jim. “If my mate were here, he’d be impressed, too. Seb’s the toughest bloke around, so that’s saying something.”
“Weally?”

“Really.”

Jack proceeded to dry his son’s eyes and smooth back a stray lock of his hair. It seemed to have a comforting effect.

“Jim?” the youngster spoke.

“Yes?”

“Dat’s sad about your dadda. I’ll giv’ you flowa fo’ him at parwty anyway.”

“Thank you, dear,” he replied, truly touched by the little boy’s kindness. Most adults he knew weren’t as considerate as him.

WAAAAAAAH.

The portable baby monitor blared, broadcasting the cries of Norridge’s newborn.

“Burdee awake!”

“Indeed, he is,” Jack hesitated for a moment, an idea forming in his head. “After I tend to Bertram, how about we all grab lunch? I can have the cook whip us up something, or order delivery if you’d prefer.”

“I could eat, sure. Do you need any help with the baby?”

“Nu,” Reginald interjected. “Mumma has me. I’m baybuh helpa.” At that, he hopped off his mother’s lap and scurried towards the nursery, the lights on his sneakers flashing with each step.

Once the toddler was out of sight, Jack turned to address Moriarty. “Again, please excuse my angel’s occasional impoliteness. In this case, he’s very serious when it comes to caring for his brother.”

“Don’t worry, I’m not offended. I actually think it’s rather cute. And besides, this frees me up to give Seb a call. He’s on a site scouting mission today. I’m curious to know how it’s gone.”

“Well, I’ll leave you to that. It shouldn’t take long to settle Bertie down. I’ll be back in a jiffy.”

When he was finally alone, Jim pulled out his phone and dialed Sebastian’s number. It rang a few times before he got an answer.

“Hey, kitten. What’s up?”

“Thought I’d take a minute to chat with my favorite employee,” he teased. “I trust you’ve vetted the mystery locale by now?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Annnnnnd? Don’t keep me in suspense.”

There was a long pause as the Irishman waited for his spouse to reply.

“Seb? You still on the line?”
“I’m here.”

“Then I kindly suggest that you speak. It’s hard to conduct a conversation when one of the participants is nonverbal.”

“Sorry, hon. I’m trying to regroup.”

“Regroup?”

“Collect myself…gather my bearings…however you want to phrase it.”

“I know the definition of the word,” Jim remarked. “Did something happen? Was there a confrontation?”

“Not quite.”

“What’s that supposed to mean? And why are you being so vague?”

Sebastian took a deep breath. “I remembered why the address seemed so familiar. I was right about having been there before. When I entered the building, it came back to me like a flood.”

“Okay, well, what were you able to recall?”

“I’d rather not go into it over the phone.”

“Why not?” he demanded, his tone growing increasingly frustrated.

“Because you deserve better than that. This is a matter best discussed face-to-face.”

Moriarty’s mind raced as he began to imagine what could possibly be so bad that Seb would only broach it in-person. The horrors running through his head were enough to provide nightmare fuel for weeks.

“Jimmy?”

“Yeah?”

“I truly am sorry to spring this on you so abruptly. I didn’t expect to find what I did.”

“Just shut your mouth and listen carefully,” the genius hissed. “Jack and I are going to have lunch soon. You,” he emphasized, “will hightail it over here and dine with us. Afterward, we’ll excuse ourselves someplace private, and then you can regale me with this tale of yours that dare not be relayed through telecom channels. If you fail to arrive within the next half hour, there will be consequences. Understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Splendid. The clock starts now.” He promptly hung up, tucking his mobile device away.

Jim looked at his children, who were beginning to stir, and sighed. “Why must your Papa be so difficult sometimes? He can’t simply tell me what’s wrong— no, that would be too easy. Instead, he’s got to draw it out and drive me crazy.”

Eddie yawned sleepily and blinked, his vision coming to rest on the consulting criminal. Essie did the same, except she concluded with a tiny grunt.
“You’ll be seeing Papa shortly, my doves. We all will.” And hopefully, he thought, *he'll have a damn good explanation for his cryptic behavior.*

Chapter End Notes

I originally meant for this chapter to contain Jim and Sebastian's one-on-one conversation, but as Jim and Jack's scene unfolded, I felt like it had a natural flow that I didn't want to interrupt. So the next installment will feature their discussion-- and also highlight what Colin, Annie, and Luke are up to.

P.S. -- As always, if anyone needs a translation for Reggie's baby talk dialogue, I'm willing to provide it.
Journey of Remembrance – Part 3

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian have a serious talk. Meanwhile, Annie is up to something nefarious.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Not a fan of quiche, I gather?” queried Jack, noticing that Sebastian had barely touched the baked egg dish plated in front of him.

“No, it’s fine. It has, uh, an interesting flavor.”

Jim snorted. “Forgive my husband. He’s not exactly a quiche kind of guy. Perhaps you should’ve served him Reginald’s lunch— I’m sure a peanut butter and jelly sandwich with the crusts cut off would better suit his tastes. Isn’t that right, darling?”

Seb took a deep breath, refusing to be goaded. Ever since he’d arrived, his spouse had done nothing but snark at him. He’d learned long ago that in situations like these, it was best not to engage.

“Hee-heee! Heeheehee!”

Hearing the gentle laughter of his children, Moran glanced over to where Reggie and the twins were playing peekaboo on the floor. For just a second, he caught Jim looking too.

“I must say, you’ve got some of the jolliest babies I’ve ever seen,” Jack commented.

The consulting criminal beamed with pride at the observation. “They want for nothing,” he declared, and it was true. Rarely had infants been pampered as thoroughly as them.

“My Magpie is a wonderful mother.” Sebastian reached across the dining room table and grasped him by the hand.

Despite Moriarty’s previously poor attitude, he didn’t attempt to pull away. “You really think so?”

“I do, kitten.”

“Thank you.”

Maybe I’ve been too hard on him, the mastermind inwardly lamented. What had Seb done to warrant his ridicule? He’d acted cryptically, insisting they discuss the mystery address in person.
Beyond that minor annoyance, there wasn’t much else to be angry about. Perhaps he’d blown the matter out of proportion.

“Tiger?”

“Yes?”

“Shall we take a walk now?”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Excellent.” He turned to his host and spoke again. “Jack, if you’ll excuse us, my fella and I need to have a chat. Keep an eye on our cubs, would you?”

“Certainly. Whatever the issue is, I hope you’re able to work it out.”

“That makes two of us.”

Without further ado, the couple rose from the table and exited together.

It was a temperate afternoon, ideal for Jim and Sebastian’s stroll alongside the Norridge manor. They were greeted to clear skies and a gentle breeze, the sweet scent of cherry blossoms carrying through the air. One couldn’t have asked for lovelier conditions.

“Soooooo,” Jim drawled, “it’s time to tell the truth. And know that if you lie to me, there will be swift repercussions.”

“Actually, that’s part of why I’m doing this,” the sniper remarked.

“Oh? How do you mean?”

“It’d be easy to fabricate a story. I could say there was nothing notable at 604 South Street—pretend my familiarity was misplaced. Or, I could claim I’d carried out a hit there once, and leave it at that. Either way, you’d see through the ruse,” he stated. “But paramount to that is the fact that I simply don’t want to deceive you. After the hell we’ve endured this past year, I strive for utmost honesty between us.”

“While I appreciate the sentiment, I kindly ask that you quit stalling and get on with it already.” Patience was clearly not Moriarty’s strong suit.

Sebastian had practiced his explanation to Jim the whole drive over. He’d envisioned every detail beat-for-beat. Yet now that the moment was here, his words ran dry.

“If you don’t answer me soon, I’m going to scream. I mean it, Seb. The things running through my head are awful.”

“I’m sorry. This is difficult for me to articulate.”

“Well, imagine how I feel. I can picture a million different scenarios, each worse than the last.” Moran inhaled and exhaled sharply. “Turn around.”
“Huh?”

“I don’t think I could bear to see the look on your face when you hear what I’m about to say.”

“Okay.” The Irishman obliged his mate’s request, but was now on the verge of full-blown panic. How bad could this be?

“All right. As it turns out, 604 South Street is the location of an illegally operated drug den and brothel. It was familiar to me because I’d been there years ago. Not on assignment, though. This was a personal visit that took place while we were separated.”

“How personal?” he prodded, uncertain where Seb was going with this.

“Very. I went there the night before…”

“Before what?”

“Before I’d planned to kill myself.”

Moriarty was absolutely horrified. “You were …”

“Yes.”

Jim whipped back around, gripping the larger man by the wrist and forcing him to meet his gaze. “Why?!” he demanded, hands trembling as he spoke.

“You know.”

He did, and it was devastating. “Because I made everyone think I was dead. You were going to kill yourself because you believed I was truly gone.”

“Yeah, Jimmy. That’s right.”

The consulting criminal’s expression conveyed a mix of shock and sorrow. Sebastian never wanted to discuss the dark, two-year period during which they were separated, and he’d not pressed him on the matter. It was harrowing to learn the depths of his partner’s despair.

“Tiger, I…” he hesitated, recognizing that no apology in the world would be enough to undo the hurt he’d caused. “My actions were indefensible. Not cluing you in on the plan is one of my deepest regrets, and I’ll carry the shame of it always.”

“For what it’s worth, I’ve long since forgiven you. Who you were then isn’t who you are now. I went through anguish at the time, but I know you’d go back and do things differently if you could.”

Moriarty nodded emphatically. “God, yes. Without a doubt. It makes me sick to think that I risked losing you forever on account of the stupid fucking game I played with Holmes. I jeopardized everything— our entire future, and hell, our children’s very existence.” He unclenched his grip on the assassin’s wrist, his body going slack as he was bombarded by a wave of self-disgust. “I’m a monster, Seb. I knew I was to other people, but not to you.” His voice wavered and he blinked back tears at the realization.

Moran reached out, tenderly stroking his husband’s cheek. “You put me through the wringer, kitten, I won’t deny it. But we’ve come so far since then. Don’t beat yourself up over sins of the past.” To show he meant business, Moran pulled the smaller man close, encircling him in a warm embrace.
Jim’s head rested against Sebastian’s chest. After a few blissful moments, he looked up, staring into his beloved’s gorgeous blue eyes. “Sebby?”

“Yes, dear?”

“If you were at this bordello the night before you intended to…end it all, then what happened the next day?”

“What happened was that I didn’t go through with it. Someone convinced me of a better option than death. She listened without judgment and suggested that I could honor you by choosing to live.”

The genius immediately noted Seb’s use of the pronoun ‘she.’ “This person was a prostitute at the establishment, I surmise?”

“Yeah,” he confirmed. “She’d lost people…knew what it was like to experience that kind of grief.”

“Right.” Jim had one more inquiry in mind. He wasn’t sure he could withstand the answer, though. “Tiger, did you…”

“Did I what, hon?”

“Did you fuck her? It’s probably pointless of me to ask. Of course you must’ve— it was a whorehouse, for Christ’s sake. What else do people do in—”

“No.”

“Pardon?” The response came so quickly, and was spoken with such authority, it threw him for a loop.

“No, I didn’t have sex with the woman I met that night. I tried halfheartedly, but couldn’t perform.”

Now the Irishman was truly stunned. Seb never had any trouble in the bedroom. Quite the opposite, actually— his virility was often a source of admiration.

“You really expect me to believe you couldn’t get it up? I’m not naïve, darling. I know you’re attracted to women, too.”

“Attraction has nothing to do with it. I couldn’t fuck her because she wasn’t you. Male or female, you were the only one I wanted. Still are, in fact.”

Moriarty was at a loss for words. Had Sebastian honestly remained celibate the entire time they were apart? He liked to idealize it that way in his head, but deep down he assumed an alpha so handsome and commanding as him had probably gotten laid at least a few times during his absence. It wasn’t a subject he’d ever wished to dwell on, lest the scourge of jealousy set in.

“Do you mean it, Tiger?” he asked with slight trepidation.

“Completely. My life can be divided into two categories: ‘before you’ and ‘after you.’ We got together, and that was it for me. I knew I would be bound to you until my last breath.”

In a flash, Jim swore his heart skipped a beat. He was so overcome by the love he felt for Seb, it was dizzying. A trill of pure omega joy escaped him, and he blushed at the involuntary reaction. “Bloody hell, I hate my biology sometimes.”

“I adore it. The sounds you make are wonderful.”
“You’re just saying that.”

“Never. How could I dislike a signal of your happiness? It would be akin to hating the song of a bird or the purr of a cat. It’s natural and beautiful and I’ve loved it since the first time I heard it.”

“Oh, Sebby.” The mastermind gazed at his mate with wonder. “You’re incredible.”

A sharky grin spread across Moran’s face. “I could say the same about you.”

“Don’t tell me. Show me.”

Not one to refuse a challenge, he did exactly that, kissing Jim heatedly on the lips. His hands charted a path down the other man’s frame, snaking their way from his waist to his hips, and then finally coming to rest upon the curve of his buttocks.

“Mmm,” Moriarty hummed breathlessly. “That’s more like it.” He leaned in and returned the kiss with equal enthusiasm.

Their bodies pressed together, and soon Seb’s sheathed arousal strained against his spouse.

“Ooooh, so excited, my Tiger.”

“Hell yes,” he huskily intoned. “I’d take you right here on the lawn, but I know this is your friend’s house and it’d be easy to get caught. Also, I’m fairly certain your security detail is watching us from across the street.”

“So let’s grab the babies and go home. We can shag with impunity there.”

“That’s a fine plan.” Sebastian glanced down for a moment, observing the sizeable bulge in his pants. “I think I should wait in the car while you fetch our cubs.”

Jim chuckled. “A sensible suggestion, dear. I quite agree.”

The duo exchanged one last smoldering liplock before parting ways. Neither wished to dally. What lay at home was far too enticing to defer.

*********

“I’m just so fucking mad,” Luke hissed. He sat on the couch at Katherine Ramsey’s house, aka, Colin and Annie’s hideout spot.

Speaking of Annie, the young woman was positioned in front of a laptop computer while wearing headphones. She appeared to be concentrating diligently on something.

“Some wanker breaks into my flat and steals my stash. God only knows how long the bastard was lurking about,” he bemoaned. “I contend it was Moran. I may not have gotten a good look at his face, but I saw his boots when he dove out the window. Those were the same color and style as the ones he wore when we met. Had the same scuff mark on the buckle, too. That can’t be a coincidence. It must’ve been him.”

Luke waited for an acknowledgment that his cohort was actually listening. Such recognition never came.

“Hello? I’m talking to you.”

“I hear you,” she plainly replied, not taking her eyes off the computer screen.
“And? What do you think?”

“I think I’m busy with my own project right now.”

The man scowled intensely. “Well, sorry to fucking bother you. I assumed you’d be interested to learn that our target likely broke into my apartment. Guess the news isn’t as exciting as whatever the hell you’re up to.”

Annie moved to face him. “If you’re so worried about this, check the GPS logs,” she said, referring to the tracking information they were able to gain after Colin found a backdoor hack into Jim and Seb’s phones. “Compare the time and date of the break-in alongside their location data. Then you’ll have your answer.”

“I already did that. Apparently, the tracking feature only works when their mobiles are turned on. In this case, Moran’s was shut off for several hours that night. I can’t be sure where he was or what he was doing.”

“Hmm.”

“You see my problem now? I swear that arsehole was behind what happened, but I can’t prove it, not conclusively. It’s frustrating as fuck,” he growled. “I want to beat the shite out of him. Demolish the son of a bitch.”

“Get in line,” Annie quipped. She paused for a beat, an idea suddenly coming to mind. “Care to know what I’ve been working on? I think you’ll appreciate it.”

“Does it involve hurting Seb?”

“It involves hurting him and his partner both. Scoot next to me and listen to this,” she instructed, removing her headphones and handing them over. “Put these on and I’ll play you something.”

“All right.”

An audio file was resumed and voices could be heard.

“I insist we add kiwi to the fruit mélange.”

“Kiwi? I don’t know… guests might complain.”

“Complain about what? Kiwi is delicious.”

“Yes, I agree, but it also has a lot of seeds.”

“So?”

“So some of the more high-maintenance attendees might shy away from eating a dish that could get stuck in their teeth.”

“Good grief, are you kidding me?”

“I wish. There’s no end to some people’s vanity.”
Annie paused the recording. “Well?”

“What the hell was that?” Luke asked, genuinely stymied by the conversation sample.

“It’s Moran’s husband, Jim, planning a party with his friend, Jack Norridge.”

“And how were you made privy to this exchange?”

The woman flashed an eerie, borderline unsettling, smile. “I recently paid a visit to Norridge’s residence. I pretended to be an official city employee, sent to check on houses throughout the block after a suspected radon leak in the neighborhood.”

“Seriously? He bought a spiel like that?”

“Hook, line, and sinker. He allowed me inside, and while I was there, I hid a listening device in the living room.”

“Clever, but why did you single out this particular bloke? What makes him so special?”

“He’s one of Moriarty’s closest allies,” she declared. “From what I’ve observed, they visit each other at least once a week.”

“That’s all fine and good, but you still haven’t explained how eavesdropping on them will in any way hurt Jim or Seb. From the snippet you shared, the only thing taking place was a discussion about a fucking fruit cup. Not exactly useful material.”

“You didn’t hear the whole chat. I did, and a few of the details caught my attention.”


“Well, it seems the gala they’re organizing is a Father’s Day brunch at The Savoy hotel.”

“Interesting,” he mused. “So we’ve got a date, approximate time of day, and a location. Sounds like a gift-wrapped opportunity to fuck with them.”

“Indeed, it is. And I know precisely how to strike hard and fast.”

“You’ve got a specific plan in mind, then?”

She nodded, her eyes glimmering with a touch of madness. “You bet I do.”

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Some readers may recall that when we last saw Annie, she was frustrated by Colin’s insistence that they drag out Sebastian’s misery—she wanted to be done with it all. That said, I like to imagine her current change in attitude is a reflection of Colin’s toxic influence over her. Though she has occasional doubts about what they’re doing, at the
end of the day, she feels a certain duty to him and his/their cause.
Chapter Summary

Sebastian is in a bad mood and Jim must find out why.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains explicit m/m slash. I'm actually a bit nervous about posting it, as previous chapters have not been as graphic. That said, reader discretion is advised.

*************************

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes


He hung up, his expression grim. “Stupid fucking git.”

Unbeknownst to him, Jim was listening from the doorway of the nursery. He’d just finished putting the twins down for a nap when he heard his mate engaging in what sounded like a particularly heated argument.

Wonder what that was about? Curious, he stepped into the hall to find out.

“Everything okay, dear?”

“Peachy fucking keen,” the sniper tersely replied.

Moriarty raised an eyebrow. “Is there a problem with someone at headquarters?”

“No, that call had nothing to do with work.”

“Riiiiight.” He peered closely at his partner, trying to get a read on him. All signs indicated he was telling the truth.

“I’m heading to the shooting range,” Seb announced, quickly turning to walk away.

“Hey, hold on.”
The agitated alpha stopped in his tracks. “What?”

“Care to explain who you were yelling at?”

“Jimmy, I…” he trailed off with a sigh. “I’d rather not get into it.”

“You can talk to me about anything, darling. Your concerns are my concerns.”

“I appreciate the gesture, but discussing this won’t help.”

“Try it and we’ll see.”

He wearily shook his head. “Just leave it alone.”

Silence fell between them as Moriarty permitted him to go. The matter was far from over, though. Before the day was out, he’d learn what was bothering his beloved.

*********

Three bloody hours, Jim lamented. Sebastian had spent three hours holed up in their basement shooting range. He’d not anticipated the man would remain sequestered for so long. In the end, it was only the promise of a barbecue dinner that baited him back upstairs.

Unfortunately, the marathon target practice had done little to improve his mood. At mealtime, it became clear that Moran’s mind was elsewhere.

“How do you like the ribs? I decided to use a new kind of sauce on them. Paige sent me the recipe,” Jim said, referring to his sister-in-law. “The cornbread muffins were my own creation.”

No response.

“Sebby?”

Still no answer.

“Seb!”

That got his attention. The distracted blonde glanced up from his plate apologetically. “Hmm?”

“You’re sitting in front of me, yet it feels like you couldn’t be further away.”

“Sorry, I’m a bit out of sorts today.”

“Too say the fucking least. You haven’t been yourself since that phone call earlier.”

Sebastian was quiet for a moment, unable to refute the claim. “You’re right,” he admitted. “That conversation did a number on me. I figured I’d be less upset by now, but I guess I was wrong.”

“Let me help you through whatever the trouble is. You’ve listened to me yammer on about everything under the sun. I’d like to return the favor.”

“Kitten, it’s different when the situation is reversed.”

“Oh? How so?”

“Because I’m an alpha.”
Moriarty scoffed. “Spare me the macho posturing. I don’t buy into that shite and neither should you.”

“I know it must seem stupid. I’ve just always prided myself on being tough enough to shake things off without a second thought. Not this time, though.”

The Irishman set down his fork and stared into his husband’s eyes. “I demand that you tell me who aggrieved you.”

“Jimmy, please drop it.”

“No,” he sharply countered. “I won’t stop until I know who’s responsible. Don’t try stonewalling the issue—I’m persistent.”

Seb heaved a sigh. “Yeah, to a fault.”

“Hush. It’s an attribute, dear.”

“If you say so.” He paused, realizing a discussion was inevitable. “To answer your question, the person I argued with was Severin.”

Jim’s face displayed noticeable surprise, and he wondered if he’d heard correctly. “Severin? As in your brother?”

“Yep, the one and only. Amazing how he can live half a world away and still find ways to screw with me. It’s quite a talent,” Moran bitterly remarked.

“What did he do?”

“Stirred up a lot of old shite and heaped on a fresh pile of guilt for good measure.”

The consulting criminal was slightly confused. “I thought the two of you were getting along?” Ever since their Christmas reunion, the siblings had kept in touch via email and sporadic video chats. Seb never mentioned there being any rift between them until now.

“Things change.”

“Clearly, but could you be a tad more specific? I’m trying to make sense of the situation.”

After a brief pause, the sniper took a deep breath and spoke again. “He called to talk about Father’s Day.”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah. He’s planning to have a commemorative wreath placed on dear old dad’s grave for the occasion.”

“Okay…and how did that start a fight?”

“He wanted me to chip in and include my name on the arrangement. Asked me to take pictures of it, too, since he can’t be here to see it himself.”

“I still don’t understand the problem, love.”

“That’s because you don’t know what happened between me and my dad.”
It was true. When Jim and Seb first got together, one of the things they connected over was their mutual lack of family. Neither man had living parents, and while Moran told his partner how they died—an aneurysm and hepatitis, respectively—he never gave any indication as to what their relationship was like before that point.

“It’s true. When Jim and Seb first got together, one of the things they connected over was their mutual lack of family. Neither man had living parents, and while Moran told his partner how they died—an aneurysm and hepatitis, respectively—he never gave any indication as to what their relationship was like before that point.

“I’m listening, Tiger. Don’t hold back.”

“My father...he...he basically disowned me.”

The mastermind frowned at the news. “That’s terrible, darling. What was the circumstance?”

“You sure you want to know?”

“Of course.”

“All right. It occurred the summer after I turned 18. I was living at home, biding my time until I had to ship out for basic training. Anyway, in those days I used to go pub crawling a lot, and one night I met a gorgeous med school attendee. His name was Tom and he was a few years older than me.”

“Ooh, sounds like a proper catch,” Jim teased. “Can’t wait to hear how he figures into this.”

“Be forewarned, it doesn’t have a happy ending.”

A Little Over Two Decades Ago...

Sebastian stumbled into bed, and he was not alone. Entwined with him was Tom Hastings, a dashing medical student he’d come to know quite intimately. This was a fling—no doubt about it. Even so, it inspired great excitement in Moran. He’d shagged numerous women, but never another man. That would change very soon.

The two went at each other as if possessed by some primal force. Clothes were strewn aside amid a frenzy of roaming hands, warm tongues, and untempered want. There were no barriers. No constraints. Just the blissful feel of skin-to-skin contact.

Seb was awash with desire, electrified by his lover’s ministrations. This was what he’d craved for so long; what he’d fantasized about.

“Spread your legs,” Tom whispered, and he did.

Their eyes locked as he watched him pull out the Astroglide bought expressly for this purpose. His breathing hitched in anticipation of what would come next.

“Are you ready?”

“Hell yeah.”

A smoldering look was exchanged, and then Sebastian felt it. Felt his partner’s finger slide inside him. It was a new sensation, unlike any he’d experienced before. The moment was heightened when Tom ran his tongue along the peaks of his nipples, teasing and sucking on the hardened buds.

Moran grunted with pleasure as a second finger was added, the slickened digits pumping in and out of him at a steady pace. He desperately wanted to stroke his aching erection, but feared things would be over too soon if he did. This needed to be savored.
“Do you like what I’m doing?”

“God, yes. Keep going.”

He obliged, inserting a third finger into the younger man’s tight entrance.

Seb began bucking his hips in time with his lover’s thrusts. It was the closest he’d come to ecstasy in ages.

“Can I kiss you?” Tom hungrily inquired.

“Go ahead.”

Now granted permission, he devoured the blonde’s mouth, passionately probing its depths.

A muted moan overtook Moran as he allowed his body to be explored. He ground his leaking length against the other man, aroused beyond belief.

“I want to ride your cock,” he panted, breaking their kiss so he could speak.

“Okay.”

The med student extricated himself from his partner and grabbed a condom off the nightstand.

“Need any help?” Sebastian asked, flashing a debaucherous grin.

“Sure.”

He retrieved the prophylactic from his hand, carefully unrolling it over the man’s sizeable member. It gave him goosebumps to think that it would soon be inside him.

Seb assumed a straddling position atop his paramour. Unbridled lust coursed through him as he felt the tip of Tom’s penis press against his opening. He sunk onto it slowly so his body could acclimate, accepting inch after inch, until finally reaching the hilt.

“Bloody hell,” his lover gasped. “You feel amazing.”

“And you feel enormous.”

Moran began to rise up and down on the man’s rock hard shaft, his speed gradually increasing as he went along. After a few minutes, he found just the right angle to hit that sweet spot deep inside. There were no words to convey the extent of his pleasure, only raucous, wanton moans.

The world around Seb faded into a blur as he continued to pound himself on his partner’s cock. He’d imagined what it would be like to have sex with a man so many times, and the reality was proving magnificent. He could do this every day. Maybe even—

CRAAAAAACK.

Sebastian was ripped from his thoughts by the abrupt sound of shattering glass. He tensed, turning towards the direction of the noise.

All color drained from his face when he saw his father standing in the doorway.

Immediately, Seb pulled off of Tom and covered up with a nearby towel. Following suit, the med student quickly grabbed his clothes and made a mad dash out of the room.
Now alone, father and son simply stared at each other. The tension between them was stifling. Not knowing what to do, Sebastian knelt down to clear the glass from the floor.

“No,” the elder Moran said. “I’ll do it myself.”

That was the last time he’d ever speak to Seb.

“Holy shite,” Jim exclaimed, aghast at his mate’s tale.

“Yeah. I stayed at my parents’ house the rest of the summer because I had nowhere to go, and he wouldn’t talk to me or even acknowledge I was there.”

“That’s bloody awful.”

“It really was,” the sniper somberly agreed. “If he’d yelled and screamed, at least I could’ve reacted back. But this was much worse. He pretended like I was fucking dead.” Seb paused, trying his damnedest to maintain composure. “Can I confess something else?”

“Certainly, dear.”

“I’ve always wondered if things would’ve been different if I was the one who’d topped.”

Moriarty furrowed a brow. “What do you mean?”

“I wonder if my dad would’ve handled the incident better if I was fucking Tom and not the other way around. Like maybe he couldn’t accept one of his alpha sons taking it up the arse.”

The sadness painted on Seb’s face broke Jim’s black heart. If the Moran family patriarch wasn’t already dead, he’d want to kill him himself.

“Tiger, your father was a monster for how he treated you. Yes, it was a shocking moment to walk in on, but that’s no excuse for his actions. You were better off without that toxic bastard in your life.”

“Thanks for saying that, hon. This shite with Severin has reopened old wounds. He left home before the falling out occurred and doesn’t understand how much it hurt me.”

“Your brother may not get it, but I do.” The consulting criminal extended his arm across the table, grasping Sebastian’s hand in a show of support.

Moran’s sorrowful eyes grew a little bit brighter. “I love you, Jimmy.”

“Right back at you, darling.”

Chapter End Notes
There’s a few things I want to mention:

• I’d like to give a shout-out to my longtime reader, Tinemo. I was inspired to write this chapter after she suggested I explore more of Seb’s past.

• In the context of Jim and Seb’s conversation, Sebastian is *not* telling him every detail of his sexual encounter with Tom. He’s recounting portions of it, but the more explicit aspects are just playing out in his memory for the reader to enjoy.

• I hope people are okay with me giving Seb a sex scene that didn’t involve Jim. I was going for something a bit different here, framing it as a flashback and all.
Of Families & Foes – Part 1

Chapter Summary

Father’s Day has finally arrived and Jim has some surprises for Seb.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Father’s Day had finally arrived and Jim was excited. He hopped out of bed with a spring in his step, eager to get the holiday underway. His first stop was the nursery to check on the twins.

“Good morning, my lovelies. It’s time to rise and shine.” He walked over to the window, cracking the blinds so that a ray of sunlight peeked through.

The babies yawned and stretched, familiar with their daily routine. Little did they know, today would be a break from the norm.

“We’ve much ahead of us,” Moriarty announced. “In just a few short hours, we’ll attend a marvelous social event Daddy helped plan. But before that happens, we’re going to give your Papa a wake-up surprise.”

He’d plotted the perfect way to greet his husband— something Seb was sure to adore. He needed Essie and Eddie’s full cooperation, though.

“You remember what we practiced,” he said, peering down into their matching canopy cribs.

They met his gaze with sleepy eyes, still not quite alert.

Jim wasn’t worried. After a nappy change and feeding, they’d be ready for anything.

“Let’s get started, darlings. We haven’t a moment to waste.”

Sebastian rolled over in bed, frowning when he saw the empty spot where his Magpie should be.

Jim must’ve gotten an early jump on things. And then he remembered— it’s Father’s Day.

A part of him wanted to call Severin and wish him well, but after how they’d ended their last
conversation, the gesture seemed unwise.

It saddened Seb to think about their argument. Since reuniting at Christmas, it’d felt good to have a brother again. Now he wasn’t sure where they stood. Was this a normal familial spat, or would it be another 20 years until they spoke? He wished he knew.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

The sniper sat up, glancing curiously at the door. “Hello?”

Moriarty entered the room carrying a baby in each arm. “Hiieee. Our poppets are here to pay you a visit.”

He chuckled when he caught sight of his children. Jim had dressed them in tiger-striped pajamas featuring cat ear hoods. They looked utterly adorable.

“Oh my, this is a rare treat.”

“It gets even better,” the consulting criminal proclaimed. “Watch this.” He was grinning broadly as he set the twins on the floor, positioning them on their tummies.

“What are you doing?”

“You’ll see.” He pulled a rattle out of his pocket and placed it a few inches away from Edward and Estella.

Seb’s confusion was cleared up when he observed what happened next. The babies began wriggling in a rudimentary fashion, trying to get to the toy. They weren’t properly crawling, but they managed to scoot using their arms.

“Jimmy, this is great. How long have they been able to do that?”

“Only just recently. Earlier in the week, I noticed Eddie creeping across the playpen to reach a doll. You should’ve seen it— he was squirming like a little caterpillar,” Moriarty jauntily described. “Once I discovered Essie could do the same, I decided to work with them. I encouraged their movement.”

“That’s wonderful. And the outfits you’ve put them in— wow.”

“I thought you’d appreciate those.”

“You know me well, kitten. Now get over here.” Seb patted the empty space beside him. As soon as Jim sat down, he pulled him into his arms.

“Easy does it, darling. Hold on too tight, and I may not be able to get back up.”

“That’s the idea,” Moran devilishly teased. “I’ll keep you in my clutches forever.”

“Mmm, I like that word,” he purred, reveling in his alpha’s safe embrace.

“What, ‘clutches?’”

“No, silly. ‘Forever.’”

“Oh. Me too.”
The couple nestled close together, enjoying each other’s company and watching their progeny wriggle cutely on the floor. It appeared that the twins were attempting to race one another, both vying to reach the rattle first, albeit at a snail’s pace.

“Is it normal for them to be competitive at such an early age?” Sebastian wondered aloud.

“Honey, consider who their genetics come from. Our cubs can’t be held to the same standards as ordinary babies.”

“Fair point.” He paused, contemplating the day’s agenda, or rather the lack thereof. “So what are we doing today, Jimmy?”

The genius smiled. This was an ideal opportunity to convince him to go to The Savoy, where he’d be met with the surprise brunch.

“Wellllll, I’m glad you asked.”

*********

“Blimey, it’s packed.” Seb was doing his best to navigate himself and his stroller-bound children through a sea of people crowding the hotel lobby.

Moriarty grasped the larger man’s hand. “Come, darling. I know a shortcut.” In truth, he was actually leading him to the banquet hall where the holiday soiree was taking place.

Following a short path of hallways, they stopped at a set of festively decorated double-doors. “Surpriiiiiiiise!” Jim exclaimed.

“Huh? What is this?”

“Take a look inside.”

“Okay.” Seb did, and he immediately realized a party was afoot. A fairly posh one, at that.

“Happy Father’s Day, Tiger.”

Moran was absolutely gobsmacked. “You organized this?”

Before he could answer, another voice cut in. It was Jack Norridge. “We organized this event. I brainstormed the initial concept, and later, asked Jim to help. Though to give credit where it’s due, he thought up a slew of excellent ideas,” the man informed. “Glad you could make it, by the way.”

“Thanks for having me. I promise there will be no fisticuffs this time around,” Sebastian joked.

“Ah, what a shame. I was counting on that for the floorshow,” he said with a wink. “At least we’ve still got Jim’s video.”

“Video?” the blonde inquired.

“Yes,” Moriarty asserted, “it’s something I put together as a tribute to the fathers we’re celebrating today—a companion piece to the wall of photos over there.” He motioned towards a collage on the opposite side of the room.

“Is my picture included in the mix?”

“Of course it is, love. I’d never omit you.”
At that moment, Jack’s son Reginald came skipping into view, clutching a basket of white carnations.

“Happy Dadda Day!” the toddler cheerfully greeted. He gazed up at Seb’s towering frame and held out a flower. “Dis fo’ you.”

Moran bent down to accept the blossom. “Thanks, kiddo. That’s very thoughtful.”

“Jim gets flowa, too. Is fo’ his dadda,” he continued, presenting a second carnation. “Wan’ one fo’ yours?”

“No, sweetheart, I don’t think so.”

“I’ll take mine,” Moriarty interjected, wanting to direct the focus off of his mate. The less Sebastian had to think about his father, the better.

Meanwhile, little Estella was restless. As those around her chatted, she took an interest in Reggie’s basket. She stared at the object with great concentration, her brilliant green eyes transfixed. She simply had to get closer to it. Mustering as much force as she could, Essie hoisted herself forward, a loud grunt escaping her lips.

Reginald turned and gasped. The girl’s tiny hand was outstretched in his direction. “What baybuh doin’?”

All three men glanced down, catching her in the act.

“It appears your daughter is developing a sense of adventure,” Jack quipped.

Jim laughed heartily at the observation. “Indeed, it does.” The twins had tasted mobility and they wanted more—or at least Estella did.

“Baybuh wan’ pway?”

The infant’s face became animated and she squealed, delighted to have someone paying attention to her.

“Mumma, can pway wit’ Essie?”

“It’s fine by me, but you’ll need permission from her parents, too.”

Reggie gave the couple a pleading expression. “Pwease?”

“All right,” the mastermind allowed. “But absolutely no roughhousing. I packed some stuffed animals in the diaper bags. Those should suffice.”

The tot tilted his head, confused. “What suh-fice?” he asked, perplexed by the word.

“It means I brought dolls you can use. Just let me dig them out.”

“Otay.”

Jim began sifting through the contents of the bags, growing frustrated when he couldn’t immediately locate what he was looking for.

“Need some help?” Seb offered.
“No…maybe…I don’t know.” He sighed in annoyance. “Somehow I can never find anything in these bloody duffels.”

“That’s because you overpack them, love.”

“Bite your tongue,” he replied with a huff. “I do not overpack. I simply try to be prepared for all situations.”

“Call it whatever you like. Do you want my help or not?”

“Yeah, sure,” the genius begrudgingly agreed. “Hey, Jack?”

“Yes?”

“Is there somewhere I could dump these bags out, to sort through them? I’d do it on one of the dining tables, but the place settings and centerpieces are too lovely to disturb.”

“Hmm. Well, not all of the food has been put out yet,” Jack noted. “You could spread your things on an empty buffet table.”

“Eh, it’s better than nothing, I suppose.” He grabbed the duffels and nudged Sebastian. “Come on.”

“Wait, you seriously want us to upend them? It’ll be a mess.”

“Since when do you care about messes?”

“I care when there’s a good chance I’ll be stuck cleaning it up.”

“Oh, hush. You really think I’d make you do that on Father’s Day?”

“Maybe. You’re a very changeable bloke. I never know what to expect.”

Moriarty rolled his eyes. “Darling, if you’re going to act like a doofus, kindly do so on your own time and don’t waste mine. Now be a dear and assist me in emptying these bags.”

Stalwart as always, Sebastian complied, following Jim to a large, bare buffet table. He brought the babies along with him, still manning the stroller.

WAAAAAAH.

Estella objected to being moved, shrieking in protest.

“Nu cwy,” Reggie spoke, rushing over to comfort the girl. “We pway soon, I pwomise.”

Despite his affirmation, she kept on crying, and worse yet, woke Eddie in the process. Before long, both of them were caterwauling.

“Bollocks,” the consulting criminal muttered. “Seb, you find those plushies. I have to soothe our sugarplums.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Wan’ help? Am good wit’ baybuhs,” young Reginald declared.

“I’m sure you are, sweetie, but they’re my responsibility.” Jim paused, noticing that more guests were beginning to filter in. “Look how many people just arrived. You should be handing them
flowers, remember?"

The little lad’s eyes went wide when he realized the number of attendees had multiplied within only a few minutes. “Oh nu! Am bad parwty helpa.” He seemed genuinely distraught.

“No, honey, you’re not bad,” Moriarty assured. “Got a little distracted, is all. You’ll be fine.”

He nodded. “Hope so. Jus’ wanna make mumma pwoud.”

“You already do, trust me.”

WAAAAAH. WAAAAAH.

“I’ve really got to go, Reg. See you again in a bit.”

Jim proceeded to take the babies outside, where they could get some fresh air and settle down. While he was busy with that, Sebastian did as instructed, spreading the contents of the bags across an unoccupied tabletop.

The sniper shook his head, amazed at how many items his mate had managed to cram into both totes. Unbeknownst to him, someone else was watching and marveling, too.

Luke Darrow peered around the corner, waiting to make a move. He’d disguised himself as a member of the hotel staff and been biding time until the right moment came along. It seemed the perfect opening was almost upon him.

He whipped out his phone to send Annie a text message.

LD

You won’t believe our luck. Moran’s unloading a bunch of stuff from a duffel bag, and he just took out a blank CD case. That’s got to be the video Moriarty made for the party.

AdG

Sounds like it. We can’t squander this opportunity. Do you have the disc I gave you?

LD

Yeah, but I think I’ll need to create a diversion before I can do anything with it. I can’t simply make the switch while his back is turned. He’ll sense someone’s there. He’s gotta be a safe distance away for this to work.

AdG

I agree, he’s smarter than he looks.

Are there any fire alarms nearby?
LD

Yep, just passed one.

AdG

Pull it. That should clear the room fast. Then you can swap the discs and get the hell out of there.

LD

You’re a genius.

AdG

I know.

Text me back once it’s done.

LD

Okay.

Without further ado, Luke sprang into action. The alarm was pulled and a shrill siren blared throughout the building. People were in a panic to evacuate.

When he saw that Moran had left, he hurriedly removed the disc from Jim and Seb’s unmarked CD case and replaced it with the ‘special’ recording Annie had given him. He grinned like a Cheshire cat, imagining the fallout. This was going to be fun.

Chapter End Notes

In case the texting initials confused anyone, AdG=Annelise de Graff. I thought I should clarify that, because I rarely use her surname, so I’d understand if people forgot it.

Also, I hope no one is too put off by the weird holiday timing. I know it isn't Father's Day anymore, but I'm taking some artistic license with the date.

P.S. -- I'd like to wish a happy 4th of July to those who are celebrating it today. Have
fun and stay safe! :-)
Of Families & Foes – Part 2

Chapter Summary

Father’s Day brunch is off to a rocky start. Can the event be salvaged?

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter contains a fair amount of fluff/romantic banter. I apologize for nothing ;-)  

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“This is total and utter bullshite!” Jim yelled into his phone. “Completely unacceptable!”

It’d been nearly an hour since The Savoy was evacuated due to a fire alarm being set off, and no one would explain what was going on. Hundreds of displaced guests swarmed the perimeter as it steadily became a madhouse among the crowd.

Fed up, Moriarty had decided to call the manager. Their conversation wasn’t proving especially helpful.

“I expect better service from a venue of this caliber,” he chided. “I demand to know what the hell is happening.”

Suddenly, his eyes went wide with fury.

“He hung up on me!” The Irishman exclaimed. “Can you believe it? He actually hung up on me!”

“Maybe you were accidentally disconnected. He’s probably fielding a lot of calls right now,” Sebastian noted.

Jim scowled. “I want him dead.”

The sniper balked at the statement, pulling his mate aside. “Excuse me, what?”

“That bastard was vague, dismissive, and all around rude. I want you to dust him.”

Sebastian didn’t know what to say. The situation at the hotel was clearly stressing Jim out and he was looking for someone to blame.
“Honey, try to calm yourself. I’m sure we’ll find out more soon.”

“You said that a half hour ago,” he countered. “My patience is wearing thin.” The genius glanced down at his children, who were tucked into their stroller. “I’m not just complaining for my own sake. Look at our cubs. I think the heat is getting to them.”

Moran had to admit, they did appear more sluggish than usual, especially compared to earlier. “Perhaps we should bring them to the car for a while,” he suggested. “The Mercedes is well air-conditioned.”

As it turned out, Seb wouldn’t have to resort to such measures. A hotel representative finally arrived to address the crowd and permit guests back inside. What they learned was rather curious. Apparently, the fire alarm was falsely activated by an unknown individual. A sweep of the building showed that nothing else had been disturbed, so robbery was ruled out as a motive. It was possible someone may have perpetrated the deed as a prank, but they couldn’t confirm it with certainty. An investigation would be launched into the matter.

After the briefing, people rushed to reenter the establishment. Jim and Sebastian hung back, not wishing to be caught up in the frenzy. While they waited for the brunt of people to pass, Jack approached them—and he had his sons in toe.

“This isn’t quite how I’d hoped to kick things off,” the man lamented to Moriarty.

“Don’t get me started. They ought to give us at least a partial refund to compensate for our pain and suffering.”

The former colonel rolled his eyes. “Pain and suffering, dear? Really?”

“Yes,” Jim answered sharply. “This was an inconvenience of the highest order.”

“At the risk of sounding a tad dramatic, I’m inclined to agree. My poor darlings were terrified when the sirens began to blare. Reginald cried for 15 minutes straight. If that doesn’t constitute suffering, I don’t know what would.”

“Mumma! Nu tell!” The toddler’s cheeks blushed in embarrassment.

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of, sweetheart. The sounds were loud and scary, and someone almost tripped over you on the way out.”

“Nu wan’ people to fink I’m big baybuh.”

“I’d never think that,” Jim asserted.

“Me either,” Seb chimed in. “It’s perfectly natural to be frightened sometimes. Even I get afraid every now and then.”

The little boy stared up at him, his expression astonished. “You do?”

“Yeah, I do. The key is not to let fear control you. Accept it for what it is, but don’t give it all the power. Does that make sense?”

He nodded. “I unnastand. Wike wit’ munstas— they wan’ powa, too. But nu can giv’ in.”

Moran smiled reassuringly. For a child his age, Reggie really did possess maturity beyond the norm. It made him wonder what kind of personalities the twins would have. So far, they were very
good-natured. Eddie was a carefree lad who could frequently be found giggling at his daddy’s puppet shows and cuddling plush dolls. Essie was equally affable, but also had a streak of daring within her. Both promised to be a handful once full mobility set in.

Meanwhile, the youngster’s words triggered a whole different line of thought in Jim’s head. *Munstas...monsters.* Maybe Reg was inadvertently on to something. Could this ‘prank’ have been the work of his and Seb’s stalkers? Causing chaos and disruption was what those maniacs lived for.

When the initial rush of guests thinned out, they proceeded back inside. Jim eyed his husband, intent to flag him down for an impromptu meeting.

“Tiger, we need to talk,” he stated in a hushed tone. “But do keep moving, because I don’t want to draw attention.”

“Okay.” Though slightly unnerved, the sniper continued along as directed. “What’s up?”

“Do you suppose Colin and company may have been behind this fire alarm stunt?”

Sebastian paused, considering it. “I wouldn’t put it past them, but how would they know we were here?”

“I’ve no idea,” he replied with a frown. “Hell, I still don’t know how they knew I’d be at the mall that day around Easter.”

Moriarty remained greatly disconcerted by his enemies’ ability to track them. At first, he’d wondered if someone on their security staff was secretly a mole, but then he realized that even his employees didn’t have access to some of the intel Colin and Annie apparently did. So who, or what, was their source? It was confounding.

“Good point,” Seb conceded. “What action do you want me to take?”

“Stay vigilant. Keep your eyes and ears open at all times. If anything strikes you as suspicious, report it immediately.”

“Yes, sir.” There was nothing Moran wouldn’t do to protect his family. “I love you,” he whispered, slipping his hand into Jim’s. “On a day like this, I should say what’s in my heart. Thank you for making me a father.”

The Irishman gazed adoringly at him. “There’s no one else I’d ever choose. I’d have no one’s whelps but yours.”

A deep sense of pride filled Sebastian. As an alpha, his spouse’s declaration meant more to him than he could articulate.

The couple stopped walking, having reached the banquet hall.

“We’re here, Tiger.”

“So I see.”

“Come on, then. We’ve already lost an hour.”

“Aye.”

Seb was about to charge through the set of double doors leading into the room, when Jim abruptly tugged him back.
“What is it?”

“I want you to escort me properly, soldier.”

The blonde flashed a cheeky grin and linked limbs with Moriarty. Now they could enter arm-in- arm, while one of them made sure to push the stroller.

“Better?”

“Much.”

**********

The Father’s Day brunch may have gotten off to a late start, but once the ball was rolling, all elements came together splendidly. Guests raved over the catering, decorations, and ambience on display. People were also delighted by Reggie’s role as flower distributor and Jim’s wall-mounted photo collage tribute. The event was officially a smash success.

No one was more thrilled than the consulting criminal himself. He sat back, sipping a mimosa while watching the crowd. Everyone was eating, drinking, and merrily mingling. It felt so right.

“Look at you, with the thousand-watt smile,” Seb remarked. The dashing, Armani-suited assassin took a seat beside his mate. “Whatever you’re drinking, remind me to mix you a gallon of it at home, if it makes you this happy,” he teased.

Jim nudged him playfully. “Hush. It’s not the cocktail I’m pleased about. It’s—” he hesitated, an epiphany hitting him mid-sentence. “Actually, I am pleased about how good my drink is. And how good the food is, and the music, and the mood of the room. I love everything,” he extolled. “This is what I’ve always wanted— to throw a perfect party.”

“Really? Here I thought you always wanted the tour bus of a male strip revue to break down in front of our house during a snowstorm, and thus be forced to stay over for a long weekend.”

The genius cackled madly at his partner’s commentary. “Now that you mention it, the scenario does hold a certain appeal.”

“Indeed,” said Moran. “All kidding aside, I get what you mean. Our track record hasn’t exactly been stellar when it comes to social gatherings.”

“To put it mildly,” he agreed. “Granted, today’s affair was originally Jack’s idea, but I contributed a lot to the final product. I’m proud of how it’s turned out.”

“Congratulations, hon.” Seb leaned in, capturing Jim’s lips with his own. What was intended to be a quick kiss soon developed into something more as the Irishman deepened their exchange.

“You taste heavenly,” Moriarty purred.

“Is that so?”

“Yesssss. Sweet, like cantaloupe.”

“Must be from the fruit mélange. A very tasty dish, I might add.”

“As are you.”

The duo shared a fiery gaze, their conversation rapidly evolving into a form of verbal foreplay.
“Careful, darling. Keep at it, and I may have to sweep you away for a ravishing.”


“I’m not sure if I should. I’d hate to wind you up when there’s nothing we could possibly do about it at the moment.”

Jim slid a hand onto his husband’s thigh—discretely, so not to be noticed by the gaggle of guests. “I can think of things we could do. A great many, in fact.”

“I’m afraid there’s no time, my love. Once I’ve got you alone, I’ll want to savor every second. Proceed passionately…rapturously…and without interruption.”

The mastermind grunted. Seb was able to push his buttons like nobody else, a truth which both infuriated and electrified him.

Right then, a voice called out. “Jim?” the person beckoned by name. It was Jack.

The pair sat up straight in their chairs, trying to act casual.

“What?” Moriarty curtly demanded.

“I don’t mean to pester you, but I thought now might be a good opportunity to introduce the last segment of the event.”

“Oh, yeah. That’s a fine idea.”

Moran looked at the men quizzically. “Last segment? Does this have to do with the video you mentioned earlier?”

“Partly,” Jim answered. “There’s going to be an open mic for anyone who wants to say a few words about the fathers being honored today. Afterward, we’ll screen the video on a projector.”

“That’s a wonderful gesture.” Seb paused, a worrisome prospect suddenly coming to mind. “Tell me you aren’t planning to wax on about me?”

“Well…”

He sighed. “Guess I’d better brace myself.”

Sensing a bit of awkward tension, Jack was quick to make an exit. “I’ll get everything set up,” he announced. “It won’t take too long.”

Once his friend was gone, the consulting criminal addressed his spouse again. “I don’t know why you’re bothered by this. It isn’t a roast, dear, it’s a celebration.”

“Somehow, that’s even worse.”

“And people think I’m the crazy one? Ha.”

“Hear me out,” he beseeched. “Jokes, I can take. I’ve been through the army and was dealt my fair share of ribbing. You learn to laugh at yourself before others do first. But compliments…those are a whole different animal. They always feel strange.”

“Even from me?”
Moran was silent for a beat. This clearly meant a lot to Jim and he hated to knock the wind from his beloved’s sails.

“You know what, kitten? I look forward to whatever it is you have to say.”

“Really, or are you simply telling me what I want to hear? I’m not a child. You needn’t placate me.”

The former colonel reached for his partner’s hand, and thankfully, he didn’t object. “No, you’re not a child— far from it. You’re the most brilliant bloke I’ve ever had the good fortune to know. I value your opinion greatly and can’t wait to listen to your speech.”

“I wouldn’t necessarily call it a speech, per se. It’s more like a collection of thoughts I’ve deemed fit to share.”

“Not to split hairs, but if you’re recounting such things in a public forum, I believe that qualifies as a speech.”

Jim peered at him, annoyed. “Don’t get hung up on semantics. The point is, expressing my feelings has never come easily. There’s a learning curve to it that I’m still getting a handle on.” He paused, his demeanor softening. “This is special to me, and I want it to be special for you, too.”

A gentle smile spread across Seb’s face. “Oh Magpie, of course it is. All things are special when they relate back to you.”

Moran’s assurance wasn’t mere lip service. In many ways, Jim was the guardian of his heart, breathing love and life into the assassin’s once-weary existence. If speaking a few kindly words at a luncheon was what made him happy, then so be it.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Sneak Preview: In the next chapter, Jim will have some lovely things to say about his Tiger. But what will Luke and Annie's video swap mean for the couple? The fallout may yield unexpected results.
Chapter Summary

Brunch comes to a close, but not without a fair dose of drama.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

As the Father’s Day brunch wound down, several attendees spoke poignantly of those they were choosing to honor on the occasion. Guests’ tales ran the gamut from happy to heartbreaking, inspirational to comedic, and everything in between. The power of familial bonds held strong across the board.

Jim and Jack behaved as consummate hosts, waiting until partygoers had said their piece before taking the reins themselves. It turned out to be a wise decision, not only in the interest of courtesy, but also due to matters of length. Norridge’s tribute to his husband and father stretched on ad nauseam, teetering into filibuster territory.

Moriarty checked his watch. It was almost time for the babies’ afternoon feeding. He hadn’t anticipated a scheduling conflict because he’d assumed the event would be over by now. Oh, how he wished this was like a televised awards show where you could just play music to signal someone offstage.

WAAAAAAAAAH.

Jack’s youngest son, Bertram, let out a shrill cry, swiftly putting an end to his parent’s epic oration.


The consulting criminal stifled a laugh. “Not a moment too soon.”

Jim’s friend returned to his respective dining table to console little Bertie. Evidently, the infant was in need of a nappy change. When he excused himself to take care of it, Reggie tagged along, intent to uphold his role as “baybuh helpa.”

“Guess it’s your time to shine, kitten.”

“I suppose so.” A part of him wanted to wait for Jack to get back, but if he did, it would likely delay the twins’ nursing regimen. Hangry cubs were not to be trifled with.

Rising from his seat, Moriarty approached the microphone. A sea of faces stared at him.
expectantly. Many of those same individuals had been present at Reginald’s birthday bash. Thank god none were Holmeses.

“Hiiiiii,” he addressed the audience. “I’m sure everyone here is itching to get on with their day, so I’ll try to keep this brief.”

His preamble alone was enough to generate applause from a few people in the crowd. It seemed that they, too, had reached their limit during Jack’s speech.

“Today is something new for me. It’s the first I’ve celebrated Father’s Day in nearly 30 years. Growing up, I never really had a reason to, and frankly, I thought the whole concept was rather daft. I dismissed it as just another rubbish holiday popularized by sentimental fools. But this past year, my outlook changed considerably. I attribute that, in no small part, to my extraordinary mate.”

Jim paused, making eye contact with his spouse before continuing on. “Sebastian and I decided to expand our family, and he was supportive every step of the way. In the beginning, when I had terrible morning sickness, he did whatever he could to ease my discomfort. Whether it was helping to wipe the sweat from my brow, carrying me to bed after I’d collapsed in exhaustion, or preparing copious bowls of oatmeal because it was the only food I could tolerate, Seb remained steadfast throughout. Later, when I became seriously ill, he made sure I followed doctors’ orders, despite my efforts to rebel. I was an awful patient, yet he refused to give up.”

The Irishman took a deep breath. Speaking so candidly was more nerve-wracking than he cared to admit. Still, he persisted.

“Since our doves were born, I’ve done a great deal of doting on them. But Sebastian’s contributed his fair share as well, and oh, how they adore him. You should see the way their faces light up when he comes home. The instant they hear him clomping around in his boots, they smile so bright, it’s like concentrated sunshine.”

Jim didn’t miss the tiny squeal that came from the audience— one of the babies had chosen to voice their opinion. The timing was cute, though he realized they were probably stirring out of hunger.

“On that note, I ought to wrap this up sooner than later,” he commented with a gentle laugh. Granted, he’d not gotten to discuss a whole lot, but if his sugarplums required sustenance, he would never deny them.

What else did Moriarty want to say? Plenty. He could talk about how his husband had surprised him by finishing the twins’ playroom while he was stuck in the hospital; explain to them how he’d organized a private shopping trip to an exclusive baby boutique; regale them with the measures he’d taken to ensure their family’s safety. The list of good deeds Seb performed for him was endless.

But…if he communicated all that, he’d be babbling longer than Jack. So instead, the genius would impart one final message.

“In short, my spouse has shown me that some fathers truly are praiseworthy, and he’s chief among them. Thank you, love. I look forward to a lifetime of us raising our darlings together.”

Guests clapped following the conclusion of Jim’s speech. Little did they know, the proceedings weren’t over yet. No, the video was still to come.
“Before anyone leaves, I’ve got a quick announcement to make,” the mastermind informed. “I ask that you all stay seated a few minutes more, because I’ve created a special presentation for today’s event. Give me a moment to cue up the equipment and then we’ll be set.”

The crowd buzzed, eagerly awaiting whatever their host had in store.

Moriarty went back to his table to retrieve the disc from a duffel bag. When he’d repacked his belongings after the fire alarm incident, he made sure to place the DVD case where he could easily find it.

“Those were some wonderful things you said about me,” Sebastian remarked.

“I meant every word.”

“I know you did, hon.” He paused, instinctively wanting to help. “Need any assistance?”

“Nah, I’ll be fine. Jack connected my laptop to the projector, so all I have to do is dim the lights and insert the disc.”

“Cool. Where’d he get the projector from? Even we don’t own one of those.”

“It’s on loan from his husband’s office.”

Seb grumbled at the mentioned of Gary Norridge. He’d done his best to avoid eye contact with the prig all through brunch.

“I heard that grunt and I understand it completely. But let’s save our complaints for later, shall we?”

“Yeah, you’re right. Why spoil a near perfect day?”

“Precisely.”

Clutching the DVD case, Moriarty was about to kill the lights and get his presentation underway, when he suddenly noticed the sweetest thing: Essie and Eddie were holding hands as they sat in their side-by-side stroller.

“I love it when they do that,” he said, utterly smitten. He crouched down to speak to them at their eye level. “The two of you have been marvelous today. If you’ll be patient just a little while longer, Daddy promises you’ll get a scrumptious lunch— strawberry puree.”

The babies stared at him intensely, almost as if trying to ‘read’ him. Finally, Estella made a small snorting sound and then seemed to relax. Edward followed suit.

“Look at that, Tiger. He’s copying his sister’s lead.”

“Eddie’s no fool. He wants to stay on her good side.”

“As well he should. Our princess is a powerhouse.” The consulting criminal stood up straight, prepared to dim the lights without further distraction. “I’d best not dally.”

A hush fell over the audience as the banquet hall plunged into darkness. It was only a matter of seconds until the feature began. If Jim had known what they were about to see, he’d have laid waste to the projector right then and there.

The instant Moriarty inserted the disc into his laptop, he realized something was amiss. A dialogue
box should’ve popped up, prompting him to select a file to run. That didn’t happen, though. Instead, an item automatically downloaded, devoid of any input from him. It was strange behavior, more indicative of a virus than the executable video file he’d created.

And then the situation grew worse.

After downloading, the rogue file launched itself. What played on screen left Jim and the slew of partygoers aghast.

Broadcasting larger than life was the intimate footage recorded in Jim and Seb’s Monte Carlo hotel room all those months ago. The very same video Colin and Annie had posted to a pornographic website and mass emailed to employees at headquarters. Both men thought they’d put that awful debacle behind them. They were wrong.

Initially reacting with stunned silence, the attendees soon began ranting and raving, incensed that hardcore content was airing in front of their families. People shouted for it to be turned off and parents covered their children’s eyes.

Moriarty froze, paralyzed by shock, horror, and mortification. In that moment, he was absolutely gutted.

“Bloody hell,” exclaimed Sebastian. The sniper rushed to shut down the video, but found that the window refused to close. Not knowing what to do, he forcefully yanked out the cord connecting the computer to the projector. Though blunt, his action did the trick, effectively severing the feed.

The lights came back on. Moran glanced over and saw that it was Jack who’d flipped the switch. Like everyone else, he was flabbergasted.

An onslaught of comments were hurled at Jim, one after another, overwhelming the already distressed omega.

“What the hell was that?”

“Is this your idea of a joke?”

“How dare you show such filth in public!”

“Pervert!”

The crowd was unforgiving. All the while, Moriarty stood there, glassy-eyed and motionless.

“Shut up!” Seb yelled at the outraged assembly. He approached his mate, attempting to communicate with him. “Jimmy? It’s going to be okay.”

The Irishman said nothing, but when Moran reached out to touch him, he began to shake. Surely, this wasn’t a good sign.

Angry voices continued to swirl among the room, amplifying and combining to form an oppressive force.

“Magpie? Come on, say something.” The genius was retreating to a place in his own mind. He’d seen Jim do this before, but not in a very, very long time. If he could just get a response from—

And then it happened. Moriarty let out a deafening scream. By the end, his throat was raw, his complexion flushed, and the venomous mouths around him were made silent.
For a brief flash, he stared at the group, bewildered. He looked as though he wanted to speak, but the words would not come. In a panic, he ran, bolting from the banquet hall at a breakneck pace.

Sebastian’s first instinct was to go after him. Then he heard the gut-wrenching cries of his children, and stopped. The pandemonium had given them a terrible fright. He couldn’t abandon his cubs when they so clearly required comforting. In his heart, he knew Jim wouldn’t want him to, either.

While Moran tended to the twins, Jack made an effort to reclaim control over his party.

“Listen, everyone— I don’t know what exactly is going on here, but I can attest without a shadow of a doubt that what you just witnessed was a mistake. It’s not what was intended to be shown. I previewed the original video and it was a lovely tribute featuring the photographs many of you were kind enough to submit for the Father’s Day collage.”

“I don’t see how someone could mix up videos that badly,” a woman remarked.

“Yeah,” another person agreed. “You expect us to believe what happened was an accident? Not bloody likely.”

Seb was furious. Cradling a baby in each arm, he confronted the naysayers. “You want the truth? Fine, I’ll explain. My partner and I have been the target of a vicious stalking campaign for months. Closing in on nearly a year, actually. Our stalkers perpetrated this. The video you saw was recorded illegally, and they must’ve found a way to switch the discs.”

An awkward silence swept the crowd as none knew how to reply.

Jack shook his head wearily. “I think this soiree is done. Thank you, everyone, for your participation. I wish the proceedings could’ve ended on a higher note.”

Attendees sheepishly shuffled out of the room, eventually leaving only Sebastian and the extended Norridge family behind.

“Dad, why don’t you take the kids for a little walk while I have a word with my friend?”

“Sure thing, Jackie. I saw a gazebo outside— maybe we’ll sit out there and soak up a bit of sun. My doctor tells me I could use more vitamin D.”


“Stalkers are individuals who invade other people’s privacy,” Gary answered. “Jim was upset because of the bad things they did to him and his husband.”

“Oh.” The tyke gazed at Moran with sympathy. “Sowwy you got stawkas.”

“Thank you, dear. Now be a good boy and do as your mum says.”

“Otay.” He obediently complied, exiting alongside his grandfather and infant brother.

“Sebastian,” Jack spoke, “I feel sick about this. Jim put so much effort into helping plan the event…I can’t even imagine what a nightmare this must be for him. Please accept my sincerest apologies.”

“It’s not your fault. I just wish I knew how those bastards worked out that we’d be here. Jim suspected the fire alarm scare might’ve been their doing, but I wasn’t certain until now.”
“You think there’s a definite connection?”

He nodded. “I do. It’s too much of a coincidence not to be related.”

Gary peered at the former colonel contemplatively. “Have you and your spouse filed any formal charges against these stalkers?”

“No. We try to handle problems privately whenever possible.”

“If the harassment’s continued for as long as you claim—nearly a year—then obviously, your method isn’t working.”

“Gary! Shush. It isn’t our place to judge how they govern their lives.”

“I’m merely suggesting that they may want to consider a different approach.” He turned to address Moran directly. “Believe it or not, sometimes the legal system is quite beneficial. If the two of you were to seek assistance from the authorities, and there was sufficient evidence to make a case, I could utilize my resources to ensure a swift hearing.”

Seb arched a brow, not entirely trusting the man’s spiel. “Why would you help us? You hate us.”

“Because I’ve practiced law for almost 30 years and there’s nothing that angers me more than seeing crime go unpunished. No one should have to put up with being stalked, particularly at the level you’ve described. Illicitly recording a person’s bedroom activities is an egregious violation,” he stated. “If you ever decide to pursue the matter through legal means, call me. My door is always open when it comes to dealing justice.”

“Thanks, I’ll keep that in mind.” No way would the Moriarty-Morans ever rely on police, but as gestures go, perhaps Gary wasn’t a total wanker after all.

Seb rested the babies back in their stroller. They’d calmed down and he was grateful for it.

“If you’ll excuse me, I’ve got to locate my better half. Hopefully he didn’t get too far.”

Please be close by. Please be okay. Please don’t do anything crazy. The words became a mantra in his head, recited as a prayer of sorts, to offset the worry that steadily rose inside him. He needed to find Jim, and fast.

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James Moriarty sat slumped on the floor of the hotel lavatory. One hand held a phone to his ear, while the other was wrapped in blood-soaked toweling. A shattered mirror above the sink revealed he’d fought a battle against the glass and lost.

“That’s not good enough!” he shouted. “48 hours is too long to wait. I must have the passports within a day!” Pause. “If I don’t receive them by tomorrow evening, at the latest, you will be skiiiiiiined alive and dismembered. The authorities will have to use a DNA sample to identify what’s left of your remains. Do I make myself clear?” Pause. “Faaaaabulous. Contact me when you’ve got the finished product.”

CLICK.

Moriarty ended the conversation, abruptly hanging up. He wasn’t done yet, though. Not by a longshot.
The genius began typing out a text message as best he could with only one hand.

*JM*

*Tiger, come to the first floor loo. We have much to discuss.*

Indeed, they did. Jim had a plan, one which necessitated the skills of his finest employee— and husband— Sebastian Moran.

Chapter End Notes

What scheme is Jim hatching? And will Seb support it? Stay tuned.
Take the Bull by the Horns

Chapter Summary

In the aftermath of the brunch incident, Jim and Sebastian strategize. The duo must also deal with domestic matters.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Hold still,” Sebastian instructed.

“I am.”

“No, you’re jittering.” He was attempting to bandage Jim’s injured hand, but the man refused to settle down.

Moriarty glared at him. “It stings, okay?”

“I imagine it would, seeing as how I had to pick out glass shards and apply an antiseptic. You’ll probably continue to experience minor irritation as the skin heals.”

“Lucky me,” he sarcastically intoned.

“Hey, you didn’t have to punch a bathroom mirror, but what’s done is done. Actions carry consequences, my dear.”

The consulting criminal’s glare turned into an outright scowl. “Yes, of course they do. I know I fucked up— a reminder isn’t necessary.”

Seb sighed. It was hard to believe that only an hour ago, Jim was in high spirits, laughing, smiling, and seeming genuinely carefree. But as always, Colin and Annie had to ruin it. Had to taint an otherwise wonderful occasion.

“Kitten, I’m sorry for what happened today.”

“Don’t be. A sorry sniper won’t serve me as well as an angry one, and I need you in top form.”

“Right. Now that we’re back home, maybe you can elaborate on the plan you’re hatching?”

When Moran collected his husband from the hotel bathroom, he’d mentioned something about them undertaking ‘a new stratagem.’ The blood loss from his injury made him woozy, though,
rendering it difficult—if not impossible—to conduct a serious conversation.

“Glad you asked. My plan is simple, really. We’re going to take down our stalkers by capitalizing on the power of pressure points.”

“Oh?” Sebastian was intrigued. “How so?”

“Months ago, Molly gave us a file full of information on Annie.”

He nodded. “I remember.” Discovering she was Colin’s sister-in-law was a moment he’d not soon forget.

“We’re going to target her parents. Compel them to tell us where she’s hiding.”

“That’s assuming they’re privy to her whereabouts. Suppose they don’t keep in touch? What then?”

“They keep in touch—I’d bet money on it.”

“How can you be sure?” Seb skeptically inquired.

“Consider the lengths she’s gone to in the name of ‘avenging’ her sister. Family is very important to her, or she wouldn’t be doing all this.”

“Hmm. Good point,” he agreed. “What’s our next move?”

“We pay a visit to the charming city of Copenhagen. It’s quite lovely this time of year, if I recall correctly.”

“I’ll have to let people at headquarters know I’m going out-of-town. Might have to reschedule some things.”

“That’s fine. We leave the day after tomorrow, so you’ve got at least 24 hours to make any necessary provisions.”

Seb stared at Jim in shock. “The day after tomorrow?” he repeated incredulously.

“Yeah. As it stands, the main reason I’m waiting that long is because of the delay in getting passports made up.”

“Passports? Mine’s still valid. I’m fairly certain yours is, too.”

“It is, yes. I’m talking about passports for the babies. Ordinarily, it would take weeks for the request to be processed and approved, but I’ve got a guy who manufactures excellent fakes and can provide them within a day’s time.”

“Hold on,” the assassin objected, floored by what he was hearing. “You intend to bring our children along on a mission?”

“It’s not an ideal scenario, but I don’t see an alternative. If both of us are going, we can’t leave them behind.”

“You’re right, we can’t. However, I’d like to gently remind you that there’s such a thing as a ‘babysitter.’ Perhaps it would behoove us to investigate that avenue before making any rash travel decisions.”
“Seriously, Seb? You’d allow our poppets to be handled by some common nanny?”

“We’d screen them beforehand. Make sure they were reputable.”

Moriarty shook his head. “No…just no.”

“Why not?”

“Must I dignify that question with a response?”

“Please do.” He truly didn’t understand what the problem was. Plenty of kids had sitters, especially those raised in affluent households like theirs.

“I don’t trust our cubs with anyone besides us. The odds of something going wrong are too great.”

“I appreciate wanting to ensure their safety, but isn’t whisking them away on a mission equally dangerous?” he posited. “Maybe Jack would be willing to watch them for a few days?”

“Jack’s busy enough caring for a toddler and newborn. I’d rather not add on to his load.”

“Okay…well, what about Ian? Tending to the twins might be good practice for him.”

“Tiger, he’s nearly full-term and is due to give birth in a mere two weeks. He’s in no condition to play the role of ‘au pair’ right now. You should know that. Haven’t you wondered why he wasn’t coming in to work?”

The former colonel was silent for a second, embarrassed by his own oversight. Jim was correct, he should’ve known. There was no excuse for being so woefully oblivious.

“Paternity leave…makes sense.”

“Yes. So surely you grasp how our options are limited. I wish there was an able-bodied individual we could count on to mind the children, but there’s not.”

Sebastian frowned, realizing his spouse spoke the truth. “God, that’s sad. What does it say about us, that we have almost no trustworthy acquaintances?”

“Probably nothing good,” the genius lamented. He’d been trying his damnedest to make better life choices for Essie and Eddie’s sake, yet somehow the quality of his social circle remained lacking.

WAAAAAAAH.

As if on cue, a plaintive cry rang out. First it was from one baby, and then the other joined in. They were definitely seeking to communicate something.

Moriarty immediately stood up, noting the urgency in their voices. “Our darlings sound upset. What could be the matter?”

“I think I know. I need to feed them.”

“They still haven’t eaten?” he asked in alarm. “I thought that’s what you were doing when we got back and you told me to wait here in the bedroom. If you weren’t feeding them, then what the hell were you actually doing?”

“I was gathering medical supplies to treat your wounds. I figured I’d deal with the kiddos afterward.”
Jim’s expression conveyed deep dismay. “The twins’ welfare takes precedence over all else,” he declared. “Now come on. We’ll serve them lunch together.”

“Okay.” Moran rose to accompany his mate, content to spend the rest of Father’s Day at home with those he loved most.

*********

Feeding time was not going as Moriarty had hoped. Caring for infants with the use of only one hand proved problematic. He tried to make the best of it, but quickly became frustrated.

“This is bollocks,” the Irishman huffed. “I can’t do a bloody thing while bandaged up.”

“I’m sure it will get easier as you go along.”

“Somehow I doubt it.” He paused, his tortured mind working overtime. All he could think about were the numerous activities he’d struggle with now that he was at a physical disadvantage. Chiefly, he worried how it would impact upon his ability to take care of the babies.

Seb spooned out some strawberry puree, guiding it to his son’s mouth. Eddie hummed in approval.

“See how much he likes it, kitten?”

Indeed, the tiny tot was smacking his lips and smiling happily.

Essie saw her brother’s reaction and expressed interest, too. She wriggled impatiently in the seat of her highchair, eager to sample the new foodstuff.

“Jimmy, why don’t you feed our princess while I handle Edward? You did say we were doing this together.”

“All right.” Wielding a spoon was something he could still manage.

His partner passed him a utensil. “Here you go.”

He accepted the item and paused, gazing at little Estella. Those brilliant green eyes of hers reminded him so much of his late mother’s. Sometimes when he looked at her, it felt as though she were alive again, carrying on in spirit through his beautiful baby girl.

“Oh, sweetheart,” he muttered, suddenly swept by an unexpected rush of emotion. “I’ve really screwed up this time, haven’t I? I’m so sorry, poppet.”

Moran turned to his spouse in concern. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s…” he began, but trailed off sadly. “I’m a fucking idiot. I lost control and punched a mirror, and now I won’t be able to properly care for our cubs. Dressing them, bathing them, changing their nappies…I need both hands to do all that. And let’s not forget how often I have to move them around during the day. From their cribs to the stroller, playpen, swings, car seats, and more.”

He hesitated, a slew of other implications dawning on him. “Car seats…ha. Guess I shouldn’t dwell on that aspect— it’s not like I’ll be in any condition to drive a vehicle, either. So shopping trips are out. Visits to the park are verboten, too.” Panic flashed across his face at the next thought. “God, what if they get sick or hurt? Their pediatrician is on speed dial, but what if that isn’t enough? I won’t be able to drive them to the hospital.” He paled, his pulse quickening as his anxiety skyrocketed. “Sebby, I’m the worst parent in the whole bloody world.”
“Never. You’re attentive to the twins 24/7, dedicated like no other. It’s inspiring.”

“Fat lot of good I’ll do them now. I’m useless.”

“Hush,” said Sebastian. “Your hand won’t be injured forever. You’ve sustained superficial wounds — they’ll probably heal within a week.”

“Even so, that’s a week I’ll have failed our children.”

“No, you won’t fail anything because I’ll be there to pick up the slack. I can help with those tasks you’ve described.”

The consulting criminal stared hopefully at his husband. “Really?”

“Really,” he affirmed. “And I know a way you can carry the babies without requiring two hands. Use the wearable double-sling.”

“I suppose I could try it.”

“I have, and it worked very well.”

Moriarty was quiet for a moment, watching Essie and Eddie contemplatively. Perhaps all was not lost if he had Seb at his side.

“Thank you, Tiger.”

“It’s nothing. Just what any decent alpha would do.”

“So humble, my darling. You surpassed ‘decent’ ages ago.”

The sniper smiled shyly, his cheeks blushing to match the color of his strawberry blonde hair.

“Such flattery.”

“Not flattery— honesty.”

WAAAAAAAAAAAAAH.

The duo’s conversation was abruptly halted by a long, loud cry from Estella. Tears streamed down her face as her stomach growled with hunger.

“Oh no,” Jim exclaimed. “I’m sorry, honey. Daddy didn’t forget you.” He hastily spooned out the fruit puree, presenting it to his precious angel.

She gave the substance a sniff. Passing the smell test, she allowed it into her mouth. A coo of delight soon followed.

The couple continued feeding their little ones until both babies were sated. Afterward, they tucked them in for a nap.

Moriarty and Moran stood in the doorway of the nursery, watching on.

“Thank god they won’t remember what happened today,” the genius remarked. “I wish I didn’t have to, either.”

“It’ll be okay,” Sebastian assured. He placed a strong, comforting arm around his mate. The gesture was quite welcomed.
“I can’t wait until this is over and done.”

“Me too. I’m ready to wash my hands of Colin and Annie for good.”

“I mean more than that…the bigger picture. I want to be done with threats and enemies. Done with never-ending danger.”

“Ah, you’re talking about—”

“Retirement,” he stated, finishing the other man’s sentence. “Still on board for it, soldier?”

“Of course I am. I’d do anything for our family.”

Jim sighed softly as he rested his head against Seb’s chest. A part of him wondered if it was foolish to believe that people like them could lead ‘normal’ lives, divorced from the darkness they’d embraced for so long. There was a time when he’d have deemed it impossible. Absurd, even. Now, though, gazing at the slumbering bundles nested in those cribs, there was nothing he desired more.

Could his dream truly become reality?

Chapter End Notes

Next up, Jim and Seb head to Denmark.
Away We Go

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian get things in order before leaving for their trip to Denmark.

Chapter Notes

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“Estrella?!” shouted a very angry consulting criminal. “There’s no ‘R’ in my daughter’s first name, you idiot!”

The man Jim hired to manufacture passports for his children had brought him the finished product. Unfortunately, it was not without error.

“I’m sorry, sir. I didn’t realize the mistake. Your son’s document was typed perfectly.”

“Yes, I suppose it’s a miracle you didn’t fuck his up, too. So what are we going to do about this?”

“I could fix the typo,” he nervously offered.

“And how long would that take?”

“Another day, sir.”

Moriarty’s eyes flashed with rage. “I don’t have a day to waste!”

Silence stifled the room as the two were at an impasse.

Finally, Jim pulled out his phone and sent a text message. A few seconds later, Sebastian arrived.

“You requested me?”

“Yes, darling. I want you to punch the bloke sitting opposite my desk.”

“Sure thing.”

“Hey, wait!” pled the hapless employee. But it was already too late.

Moran clenched the man’s shoulder in a vise-like grip, wrenching him up and out of his seat. He balled his free hand into a fist and swung forward, delivering a direct blow to the face.

The incompetent forger screamed, his lip splitting open on impact.
“Need anything else, hon?”

“Not at the moment, but do stay.”

“Aye.”

Moriarty turned his attention back to the ‘guest’ in his home office. “The passports you’ve provided are adequate, aside from your blunder. As such, you won’t be skinned this time, though I strongly recommend you proofread all future documents if you wish to remain intact.”

“Understood.”

“Good. Consider yourself dismissed.”

He nodded and left, eager to get the hell out of there.

Once the couple was alone, Seb spoke again. “What was that about?”

“Take a look at what he submitted and then you tell me.”

The sniper obliged, reviewing the permits. He spotted the problem right away.

“A typo, I see. Is this going to affect our trip?”

“I hope not. I’ll bring their birth certificates along in case there’s an issue.”

“Smart thinking,” he replied. “Speaking of things to bring, have you finished packing yet?”

“Almost. Deciding what to include in the babies’ luggage is a bit of a challenge.”

“Really? I figured they’d be easy to pack for.”

“If only,” Jim lamented. “In addition to the items I’d normally carry in their diaper bags, I also have to plan out other aspects, like wardrobe, entertainment, and education.”

Moran eyed his partner curiously. “They’re infants. Are those categories necessary?”

“Absolutely. How many times must I explain that our little ones are anything but ordinary? Their needs exceed the norm.”

“Fair enough,” said Seb. “Honestly, I’m more concerned with keeping them safe than I am with the contents of their wardrobe.”

“On that front, you may be interested to know I’ve been looking into some security measures.”

“Oh? Do tell.”

“I asked around to find out if any of our current guard staff had experience with children.”

“And?”

“At least two individuals have raised kids of their own,” he reported. “I’ve insisted they come along. They’ll be posted inside our hotel suite to watch the twins while we’re on assignment. As it stands, I don’t anticipate the job taking too long. I estimate we’ll be gone for approximately an hour or so. After we’ve acquired the desired information, we can treat the remainder of our stay as a bit of a vacation.”
“That’s optimistic.”

“I’m confident in our abilities. We’re both superb at what we do. Together, there’s no stopping us.”

A gentle smile graced the former colonel’s face. “We make quite a formidable team,” he admitted.

“Agreed.” Moriarty rose from his leather-bound chair, approaching Sebastian. “I’ve missed working with you, my dear.” He hooked an arm around the larger man’s waist, drawing him ever nearer. “I think this might be fun. A bit like old times, perhaps.”

Moran’s breathing grew heavy as the beguiling omega made sure their bodies were pressed impossibly close. Old times. That was a loaded statement, indeed.

“Careful, Magpie. Once you take a taste, you may not wish to retire after all.”

Jim gazed into the depths of his husband’s vibrant blue eyes. “I can be changeable to a fault, it’s true. But not about this. Our family is too precious to risk.”

Seb stared back at him, noting the earnestness in his voice. This was no flight of fancy or fickle endeavor. He genuinely meant what he was saying.

“I love you, kitten. Love us.” The assassin paused for a second, a thought occurring to him. “Have you had lunch yet?”

“Lunch? I didn’t even eat breakfast.”

“Why not?”

“Simply put, there was no time for it.” He held up his bandaged hand, waving it in the air. “This injury has significantly slowed my ability to pack bags, so I’ve got to cut corners wherever I can.”

Suddenly, Sebastian felt incredibly guilty. “I’m sorry, honey. I should’ve been home to assist you sooner.”

“It’s not a big deal. You needed to reschedule things at headquarters. I get that.”

“Yes, but still, I promised to help you with tasks.”

“And you have,” the Irishman asserted. “We fed, changed, and dressed the babies before you left. That was a huge service, believe me.”

“Not enough, though.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll more than make up for it in Copenhagen.”

He arched a brow. “I will, huh?”

“Of course. You’re my number one sniper. I expect you’ll rise to the occasion once we’ve determined the coordinates of Annie’s parents.”

“Oh.” Seb sounded noticeably disheartened.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, it’s just…I was rather hoping you meant for me to ‘rise’ to a whole other kind of occasion, if you catch my drift.”
A devilish grin spread across Moriarty’s face. “Naughty Tiger,” he teased. “Your mind doesn’t merely live in the gutter, it *is* the gutter.”

“Can you blame me?” he asked, his tone taking on a husky quality. “I’m married to ‘Mr. Sex.’ That’s bound to have repercussions.”

“Yes, I suppose it would. Touché.”

Sebastian shifted position, his sturdy frame covering Jim like a human shield. “Remember our last visit to Denmark?” he spoke, breathing hotly into the man’s ear.

“I dunnoooo. Remind me.”

Moran knew his partner was playing dumb, and that was fine by him. He required no further encouragement, content to chart a path of nibbling kisses along Moriarty’s neck. When he reached his shirt collar, he growled at the accursed barrier.

The duo locked eyes, and it almost seemed as though Jim was daring him to go on; to make the next move.

As always, Seb didn’t disappoint. In one fluid motion, he tore open the genius’s top, buttons flying everywhere.

“You do understand that this is a £400 Gucci shirt you’ve destroyed, right? I’ve had people killed for lesser offenses.”

“I’m not just anyone and you damn well know it.” His voice exuded classic alpha authority, a mixture of equal parts confidence, poise, and machismo.

It drove Jim fucking wild.

Before the assassin could utter another word, he found his mouth otherwise engaged by the supple lips of his Magpie. Their kiss was raw and unrestrained, feverish in its intensity.

Moriarty reached for Sebastian’s belt. And then he abruptly stopped, realizing all over again that he only had full use of one hand.

“This blasted bandage does nothing but get in the way!”

“No worries. I can unbuckle it,” said Moran.

“That’s not the point!”

The Irishman’s expression rapidly switched from anger to distress, a fact which greatly concerned his spouse.

“Kitten—”

“Don’t ‘kitten’ me! I’m not some wilting flower to be coddled.”

“Coddled? Never. I just want to make sure you’re okay.”

“Oh, I’m hunky-dory. Can’t even undo my husband’s belt, but hey, who’s counting?” He hesitated, looking forlornly at Seb. “It took 3 minutes to fasten my own this morning— 3 bloody minutes to do something that should’ve only taken 30 seconds. Pathetic, isn’t it?”
“You don’t have a pathetic bone in your body, dear. And I would’ve helped if I’d known you were struggling. Why didn’t you mention it?”

“Because it’s humiliating. I’m a grown man, for fuck’s sake. I ought to be able to get dressed without aid.”

“Jimmy, you sustained an injury. There’s no shame in asking for help.” The sniper paused, trying to think of a way to drive the message home. He lifted his shirt, revealing a scar on his torso. “You recall when I got this?”

“Recall it? As if I could forget.”

Four years ago, Moriarty sent Sebastian on an assignment in Milan. The job went awry and he got shot amid the crossfire. It was a very serious wound, one which saw him hospitalized for nearly a month. In the beginning, doctors weren’t certain he’d survive. The prospect of losing his loyal, loving Tiger had been unbearable.

“Then you must also remember how much assistance I needed during my recovery. Do you believe it was wrong of me to accept your support while I was healing?”

“Seb, don’t compare our situations. What happened to you was different.”

“How so?”

“You were hurt through no fault of your own. Me, though…I did this to myself. I was rash and erratic. Acted like a massive git, not considering the implications of what I’d done until it was too late. So you see the difference? You deserved help, whereas I…” he trailed off, his face fraught with sadness. “I made my bed and now I’ve got to lie in it.”

“No. Bollocks that,” declared Moran. “I may have given you a hard time about what you did at first, but it wasn’t out of anger. I was worried, is all.” He grasped the mastermind’s good hand, twining their fingers together. “As long as I’m around, I won’t allow you to sit back and suffer. I swore vows to you— ‘for better or worse.’ I don’t take pledges like that lightly. You’ll always have my undying support.”

Jim gazed at his other half, briefly rendered speechless by the man’s affirmation. “You say such beautiful things.”


The consulting criminal smiled faintly in response. Seb was his own personal sunbeam, continually finding ways to part the darkness that often eclipsed him from within.

“Oh, darling…I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“You have to ask? I’ve been worked up over everything today.”

“It’s understandable. You’ve had to deal with a lot lately. Hell, that goes for both of us.”

Moriarty squeezed the former colonel’s hand and then moved in for a hug. “So patient, my sweet.”

“That’s me, enduring as the day is long,” he jokingly remarked. “At this rate, I’ll be canonized for
sainthood by the end of the year.”

“Hush. You know what I mean.”

“I do.”

The couple remained in an embrace for a few moments more. They finally separated when Jim pulled back, again focusing on his dashing mate. “Tiger?”

“Yes?”

“I think grabbing lunch is a fine idea. And we should definitely finish what we started here as well,” he stated, motioning to his open shirt.

“It would be my pleasure, hon. I’ll also help you pack.”

“Yeah? I’d like that.”

“Excellent. Let’s go.”

London’s most dangerous men had a busy afternoon and evening ahead of them. Tomorrow’s trip was sure to bring added excitement into their lives, but would it be for good or ill? In less than 24 hours, they’d find out.

Chapter End Notes

Originally, I intended for this chapter to end with a scene of them boarding the plane the next day. Reading it back, however, I felt like it would be better suited as an opener for the next part, introducing their travel. I hope everyone understands my reasoning and isn’t too upset about it.

Thanks for reading.
“Okaaaay, we’re ready for our close-up.” Jim posed in front of his private jet while toting Essie and Eddie in a double-sling baby carrier.

CLICK.

Sebastian snapped the shot, confident it would come out well when he developed it later.

“Thank you, darling. That’s definitely going in the scrapbook.”

“Should be a good one,” he agreed.

“Now let’s get a move on.”

“Aye aye.”

Moran followed behind the consulting criminal as they boarded. Other passengers included four bodyguards, two flight attendants, and the pilot and co-pilot, respectively.

The couple soon settled into a VIP section of the plane, located far enough from their entourage that they could talk freely without being overheard.

“Isn’t this exciting?” Jim spoke, a genuine sense of joy present in his voice.

“Travelling with you is always an adventure.”

“Especially today. Our first trip as a family,” he enthused. “I’ve imagined us stealing away somewhere for ages.”

Seb couldn’t help but smile at the Irishman’s exuberance. After the recent onslaught of drama they’d faced, it was nice to see the sparkle return to his eyes.

“We’ve got to situate our cubs,” Moriarty announced. “I think it would be delightful if we sat them in our laps for the duration of the flight, don’t you? It’s only two hours from here to
Copenhagen.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

The sniper carefully lifted Essie out of the sling, taking her into his strong arms. She gazed up at him and cooed.

“Princess loves her Papa,” Jim observed.

“And Papa loves her, too.” He leaned down to kiss the tiny tot’s forehead. “My sweet girl.”

“She’s an absolute treasure.”

Soon, Eddie began to grouse. He was still in the carrier because Moriarty dared not risk picking him up with a bandaged hand.

“I’m sorry, honey. You’re every bit as wonderful as your sister. Forgive me if I didn’t make that clear.” Jim smoothed back a lock of the boy’s ample blonde hair in an attempt to calm him.

“Sibling rivalry already,” Seb teased.

“You jest, but I want them to know they’re equally adored. What if they get the wrong idea and each believes we favor the other?”

“Then we set them straight. Quash the misconception before it has an opportunity to grow.”

“Is it really so simple, though? What if—”

Suddenly, both men were silenced by the sight that played out in front of them. Edward decided to shift as best he could in Estella’s direction. She responded likewise, wriggling towards her brother.

“Easy does it, little lady,” Sebastian said to his squirming angel.

But neither baby would relent. Essie persisted in her movements and Eddie extended his arms, as if trying to make contact.

“I think we got it wrong,” the mastermind announced. “Our son wasn’t complaining because he wanted attention. He was upset because we separated them.”

Moran looked at the twins and quickly realized his partner was correct. “Wow. How about that?” he marveled.

Jim was similarly in awe, a swell of bliss rising deep inside. “Oh, Tiger…sometimes it’s impossible to convey how much I love our darlings. No words could suffice.”

“Perhaps we ought to invent new ones. I hear Shakespeare was keen on that.”

The genius chuckled. “Ah, yes. A cracking idea if ever there was.”

WAAH.

Eddie let out a tentative cry, brief but effective in getting his point across.

“It’s okay, sweetheart. Your sister isn’t far,” Moriarty reassured. “This way you’ll get to be near her and have the ability to stretch out. It’s the best of both worlds, I promise.”
Meanwhile, Estella continued to fidget, concerned for her sibling.

“Kitten, you may have to keep the two of them in that carrier.”

“I know. I blame this on the time of day. They have a schedule they’re used to, and if we were at home right now, they’d be in their playpen together.”

“It’s actually rather cute, how loyal they are to one another.”

“Yes, it is,” he conceded. “Help me set Essie back in the sling.”

Sebastian dutifully obeyed.

Once ‘reunited,’ the babies relaxed almost immediately. For good measure, Jim gave them each a small stuffed animal to snuggle on their journey.

A few minutes later, after takeoff, Moran turned to his mate. “You know, it’s kind of a shame that this is our cubs’ first time on a plane, yet they won’t remember it at all.”

“We’ll make sure they’ve got plenty of other memories. This won’t be their last trip, not by a longshot.”

“Agreed.” He paused for a second, ruminating on the topic. “Magpie?”

“Yes?”

“I’m curious— what was your first flight?”

Jim closed the magazine he was paging through and addressed his spouse. “Interesting question. It’s been ages since then,” he noted. “Fortunately, I have excellent recollection. My first time was a holiday to Greece when I was 19.”

“What brought you there?”

“The hopes of shagging as many tall, dark, and handsome men as possible.”

Seb laughed heartily at the candid response. “How did that work out?”

“Fabulously,” he declared, flashing a cheeky grin.

“Good thing I’m not the jealous type.”

“Aren’t you? I seem to recall an occasion not so long ago when you were awfully cross about me coming home smelling like another alpha. An alpha who turned out to be your brother, I might add.”

The former colonel cast his sight downward, embarrassed by the aforementioned incident. “That wasn’t a shining moment,” he admitted. “A bout of temporary insanity, perhaps. I’m sorry for it.”

“Don’t worry, love. It’s water under the bridge.”

“When did you become so forgiving?”

“Me, forgiving? Ha. You’re a special case, my dear. I couldn’t stay mad at you even if I wanted to.”
“Thanks, I think. I choose to take that as a compliment.”

“I suppose it is, in a way.” Jim hesitated, finding Seb’s curiosity catching. “Tiger?”

“Yeah?”

“What was your first time on a plane? I told you mine—it’s only fair you do the same.”

“Tit-for-tat, huh?” he quipped. “Okay. I had a particularly exciting experience. When I was 10, my parents organized a family vacation to Disneyworld.”

“Disney, reeeeal? Tell me, did you meet the Mouse?”

“Of course. It’s mandatory.”

“Oh?”

“Yes, all visitors must engage in a photo op with Mickey before gaining access to the park proper. They don’t advertise that aspect, but it’s written in the fine print when you purchase tickets.”

Moriarty peered skeptically at his husband, not believing the claim. “Hmm. I suspect you’re pulling my leg.”

“You think I’d make up a tale like that? Why I never,” he replied in mock indignation.

The consulting criminal rolled his eyes. “Hilarious. Suddenly, I feel as though I’m travelling with three children. But it does give me an idea. Taking the twins to an amusement park might be fun. When we get to Copenhagen, let’s check out Tivoli. They’ve got some splendid attractions there.”

“I do fancy a good selection of carnival games.”

“Then it’s settled. Once we’ve acquired the information we came for, we’ll stop by and make a night of it. Those kinds of places are always more thrilling after dark.”

“You’ll get no argument from me,” said Sebastian as he shot his spouse a knowing look. One of their first dates had been to an amusement park at sundown. The rides and booths were lit up in a spectacular fashion, creating an atmosphere that was both festive and romantic. He’d never forget it as long as he lived.

The couple reclined in their seats, eagerly anticipating what the next several hours would bring. Assuming all went according to plan, it promised to be a busy day, indeed.

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Annelise de Graaf stared at the back alley barroom door, wishing like hell she didn’t have to go inside. Her options were far and few between, though. She desperately needed to speak to Colin, and this dive was where he’d been spending an increasing amount of time.

Entering the establishment, Annie tried not to gag amid the acrid haze of smoke that filled the air. She was rather surprised to see a fair amount of patrons present at mid-morning. It was a sad group, to be sure.

The woman spotted her cohort quickly. Colin resided in a corner booth, drinking bourbon and reading a book.

“We need to talk,” Annie stated as she slid onto the bench opposite him.
He glimpsed her briefly and then returned to the pages of his manuscript without uttering a word. Naturally, she was annoyed by the snub. “Aren’t you even going to ask me what’s going on?”

“I don’t have to,” he remarked, still not meeting her in the eye. “You’ll run your mouth whether I actively engage in the conversation or not.”

Annie glared, unamused by his dismissive reply. “Fine. So I guess I won’t tell you how Sebastian and Jim are on their way to Denmark right now.”

The woman moved to stand up, but was stopped when Colin reached out and grabbed her wrist.

“What did you just say?”

“Glad to see something finally got your attention.”

“Answer my question,” he demanded.

“Let go and I will.”

He released his grip and Annie sat back down.

“Thank you. As I came here to explain, our targets appear to be headed to Denmark. The GPS tracking on their phones indicates they’ve been in-flight for almost 45 minutes, meaning they haven’t yet arrived, but are due to land within the next hour or so.”

“How do you know that’s their intended destination? There are lots of other countries in Europe they might be visiting.”

“I know because they’re taking a very specific air route that goes directly from London to Copenhagen. I’ve travelled the same course often enough to recognize the coordinates.”

Colin fell silent for a second, processing the new information. “Could be business related,” he suggested.

“Yeah, or it could be they’ve discovered where I’m from…who I am.”

“And how would they have learned that, huh? You supplied false identity records.”

The woman shrugged. “Perhaps they hired a private investigator. Or maybe Moran had a lucid moment and realized my resemblance to Margo is more than a coincidence.” She sighed heavily. “The only thing I’m certain of is that those two coming to Denmark can’t be good for us.”

Colin poured a generous portion of bourbon as he ruminated on the situation.

Annie eyed him disdainfully. “Jesus, it’s not even noon. Keep that up and you’ll be passed out by lunchtime.”

“Shut your gob and let me think.”

“Think?” she repeated. “Too much of that stuff and you won’t be able to string together a sentence, let alone a coherent thought.”

Furious, the man reached across the table, grasping her again. “Listen well,” he cautioned through gritted teeth, “if I want your opinion, I’ll ask for it. Otherwise, I recommend you zip your lips and do as I say.”
“My parents are in Copenhagen,” she hissed. “I won’t allow them to be sitting ducks for whatever those bastards have planned.”

A hush came over the twosome and Colin loosened his hold. “Lars and Sophia are decent people,” he declared, referring to his in-laws. “They deserve better, it’s true.”

“Yes, absolutely. So what should we do?”

That was the million-dollar question.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Something’s Rotten in Denmark – Part 2

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian arrive in Copenhagen and get to work. What will the results be?

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Dah-Dee,” Jim sounded out phonetically as he held up a flashcard in front of his children. “It’s not so difficult to say. Why don’t you give it a try?”

The stroller-bound babies simply stared at him, offering no response beyond their sweet, toothless smiles.

“All right, maybe this will be easier for you to grasp if I use it in a sentence. ‘Daddy is waiting in the hall whilst Papa checks their hotel room for bugs.’” He paused, deciding his statement needed clarification. “By ‘bugs,’ I don’t mean those awful creepy, crawly things. These are the surveillance kind.” Moriarty stopped again, this time realizing his explanation required an explanation. “Surveillance devices are used to secretly monitor people and places. They can be utilized for legitimate purposes, but more often than not, they’re abused by those with nefarious agendas.”

Eddie tilted his head, blissfully bewildered. Essie appeared similarly confused, though she did supply a jaunty giggle, delighted to receive attention.

“I suppose the two of you don’t understand a single thing I’ve just said. It’s my fault, really, for using such lofty language,” he admitted. “You haven’t even spoken small words yet, and here I am throwing around vocabulary you couldn’t possibly have any frame of reference for. I’m sorry, darlings. Sometimes Daddy’s brain races at a breakneck pace and he expects everyone else to keep up.”

“Daaaaaaa,” drawled Estella.

Jim’s eyes widened in surprise. “Yes, that’s it, love. ‘Dah-Dee.’ I’m certain you can say the rest if you concentrate.”

“Daaaaaaa,” uttered Edward, mirroring his sister’s example.

The consulting criminal was beside himself with excitement. “You’re halfway there. Go on.”
“Daaaaaaa.”

“Daaaaaaa.”

After a solid minute of repetition, it became clear that the twins had reached their limit. Strangely, Moriarty didn’t mind. He was not a patient man, but when it came to his kids, he possessed a level of stoicism previously unknown to him.

“You’ll start talking soon enough,” he asserted, “and then I’ll be able to teach you all sorts of things. I’m positive you’ll blossom under my tutelage.”

At that moment, Seb reemerged from the suite. “I’m pleased to report that our room is bug-free.”

“Thank god. I’d hate having to find new lodging at this stage, when the luggage has already been brought up.”

“Yes, that would be inconvenient,” the sniper agreed. He swiftly scanned the hall for signs of their entourage, but saw no one. “What happened to our guards?”

“They’re settling into their own quarters. I told them it was okay since we wouldn’t be leaving for a little while.”

“I guess that’s fair. We’d best do the same.”

The couple entered their sprawling penthouse suite, and it was truly a sight to behold. Amenities included chandelier lighting, a king-size canopy bed, a Jacuzzi bath, and a state of the art dining/kitchenette area. They’d even made sure to provide specialty furniture for the babies.

“I must say, this is all quite posh,” Sebastian remarked. “When I first walked in, I felt like I ought to be wearing a suit and tie.”

“I only book the finest accommodations. You should know that by now.”

“Oh, I do. It’s just one of those things I’ll never completely get used to.”

Jim grinned broadly. “Think of it— our cubs will be raised in the lap of luxury, with this as their norm.”

“In other words, they’ll be spoiled rotten.”

“I prefer to define it as them being given the opportunities I was denied…but yes.”

Moran chuckled, pulling his mate close. “My amazing Magpie,” he said as he enveloped the smaller man in a full-body hug. A part of him didn’t ever want to let go.

“Sebbbbby,” the mastermind hummed. “I could stay this way forever.” There was something so comforting about his alpha’s embrace.

“Me too.”

“Mmm, good. I can’t wait until the day when we can do this endlessly. No more worries or interruptions.”

“It won’t be much longer.”

“Hallelujah.”
“On that note, why don’t we hunker down and prepare for our mission? Once it’s through, we can relax.”

“An excellent suggestion,” Jim declared, disentangling himself from the assassin’s arms. “There’s work to be done.”

The duo diligently set their assignment into motion. Moriarty compiled extensive information on Annie’s father, Lars de Graaf. The man was a wealthy industrialist whose company manufactured a majority of Copenhagen’s railways. Based on what he’d learned about the transport mogul’s workaholic tendencies, he knew there was a strong chance he’d be at his business headquarters today.

Pinpointing the whereabouts of Annie’s mum proved more difficult. Apparently, Sophia Nielsen-de Graaf had been a fairly popular print model in Scandinavia, but dropped out of sight after retiring to get married. That was 35 years ago. There was no indication as to what, if any, job she’d held in the three decades since.

The final element Jim uncovered was the de Graafs’ home address and phone number. It only required a simple Google search to suss those details out. He decided to take a gamble and operate under the premise that Sophia would likely be at hers and Lars’ residence. He preferred to have more exact knowledge before entering into a situation, but at this juncture, it just wasn’t possible.

“Tell me again what you want me to do,” Sebastian spoke. “I’d like to ensure there’s no room for error.”

“Okay, I’ll give you a quick refresher,” the genius replied. “You’ll begin by walking to the park located a block from here. When you arrive, you’re to wait for a bloke in a black Mercedes. He’ll hand off his keys and you’ll use that vehicle throughout the rest of our trip. There will be equipment packed in the boot of the car— specifically, a rifle and long-range scope. Next, you’ll drive to an abandoned high rise on Laksegade Street. Position yourself on the left-hand side of the building. From there, you should have an optimum view of the de Graafs’ house. When you’ve got everything ready to go, you’ll alert me via Bluetooth. That will be my cue to call their residential phone number and ask for Sophia. Once I’ve got her on the line, I’ll pretend to be a postal carrier with a delivery she needs to come outside and sign for. The instant you see her, focus your target on the woman. If she has any brains at all, she’ll realize there’s a crosshair pointed at her and make no sudden moves.”

“That’s when you’ll go after Lars, right?”

“Correct. I’ll venture to his company’s main office and get him alone,” Moriarty affirmed. “Then he and I will have a chat. I’ll make it abundantly clear that if he doesn’t divulge Annie’s hideout spot, his wife dies.”

“What if he wants proof she’s in danger? He might think you’re bluffing.”

“Should Lars question the validity of my claim, I’ll invite him to ring her mobile. Either she’ll answer and confirm the threat is real, or she’ll be too afraid to pick up and I can use her non-response as a means of putting apprehension into his head. Fear based on uncertainty is a powerful force.”
Moran nodded. “Indeed.”

“Before we bring in the guards and get this mission underway, is there anything else you need clarified?”

“No, sir. You’ve been very thorough.”

“Splendid. Then without further ado, let’s get to it.”

Jim and Seb soon stationed two large, muscular men to stand watch outside their door, and ushered two more inside to monitor the babies. With any luck, they would be back before their little ones awoke. That was the goal, at least—to complete the assignment as swiftly and efficiently as possible.

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“42 seconds,” Sebastian said to himself, sounding quite pleased. He’d managed to assemble his rifle and scope in that small amount of time, achieving a new personal best.

Following his accomplishment, he switched on the ear piece communicator Jim had given him, intent to make contact.

“All systems go. Do you copy?”

“Yes. I’ll make the call. Keep your eyes peeled.”

“Aye.”

And so the sniper waited for Sophia to exit the house.

And waited. And waited. And waited some more.

_This is taking longer than it should_, he thought. Almost 5 minutes had gone by, yet nobody had emerged from the de Graaf residence. What could be the holdup? He decided to use his Bluetooth device to touch base with Moriarty again.

“Jim, are you there? I haven’t registered any activity at our target site.”

“I’m here,” the consulting criminal answered, an undercurrent of irritation in his voice.

“What’s the status on your end?”

“No one’s picked up the damn phone.”

“Shite,” he muttered. “So now what?”

“I’m considering going after Lars as planned, but that’s an iffy prospect due to our lack of leverage. Sophia was meant to be the linchpin.” He paused, taking a moment to deliberate on the matter. “Fuck it, we’ve come this far—I may as well go in.”

“Jimmy, are you sure?”

“I am. Remain at your post until I direct otherwise.”

There was silence on the line as Moran felt uneasy about his husband’s choice. Was this truly a good idea? With such an important part of the plan askew, what might the ripple effects be?
“Seb? Did you hear me?”

“Yeah, loud and clear.”

“Is there a problem?”

“Well, it’s just…I’m concerned for your safety. One aspect of our assignment has already gone sideways. Who knows what’s next?”

“Sit tight and let me worry about that.”

“Don’t worry? How could I not?”

Moriarty sighed sharply. “Stop it. This is a job we’re on. If you can’t get your emotions in check, I’ll pull you off the assignment.”

The former colonel paled. “You don’t mean that.”

“I do. When we’re working, it’s imperative you never forget the chain of command. What I say goes, whether you like it or not.”

Sebastian wanted to growl. Wanted to scream, swear, and punch something. But he didn’t, because he knew his partner was right. In the hierarchy of Jim’s empire, he ranked second after the mastermind himself. For better or worse, that’s how it had always functioned.

“I value your input greatly,” Moriarty continued, “but ultimately, my orders are final. If I give you instructions, you’re to follow them without issue.”

“Yes, sir.” A consummate professional, Seb would abide by his mate’s wishes. He took heart in the fact that this situation was fleeting. Once they completed the mission, he’d resume his rightful place as the alpha to Jim’s omega.

“I’ll keep you apprised of what happens with Lars. If I require backup, you’ll be my first contact.”

“Thank you. I’m honored.” He hoped, however, that the Irishman wouldn’t need to make such a call. Something about all this felt strange to him, though he couldn’t identify an exact reason why. Was he merely being paranoid, or was there more to the proceedings than met the eye?

*********

*Gezelligheid.* Moriarty read the sign on the building and looked up, admiring the towering structure that seemed to stretch on into the heavens. It was an impressive visual, made even more so by the knowledge that Lars de Graaf was a true man of enterprise. The research he’d done on the business magnate painted a picture of an exceptionally hardworking fellow who’d built everything he had from scratch. To that end, Jim could respect his endeavors while still ruing the existence of his progeny.

The consulting criminal strode inside and was immediately struck by the sleek, modern design on display. As lobbies go, this was among the nicest he’d seen in quite some time. He didn’t dwell on the notion for too long, though—there were far more pressing things to attend to.

“Hiiiii,” he affably greeted the lady at the reception desk. “I’m here for an afternoon meeting with Lars de Graaf.” His voice and demeanor were dripping with poise as he relished the opportunity to show off his acting chops.
The woman— whose nametag read ‘Janine’— frowned. “I’m sorry, sir. Mr. de Graaf is unavailable.”

Not one to take ‘no’ for an answer, Moriarty flashed a thoroughly charming smile and soldiered on. “I realize he has a hectic schedule, but believe me when I say that the two of us have much to discuss.”

“I’m afraid meeting with him today isn’t possible. If you provide your contact information, I’ll forward it to his secretary and she can see about penciling you in at a later date.”

“I’ve come all the way from London. Surely he can spare a few minutes.”

She shook her head. “Time isn’t the problem. He was unexpectedly called away on an urgent family emergency.”

Jim was dumbfounded. “A family emergency?” he slowly repeated, trying his hardest not to fly into a rage and grip the woman by her throat.

“Yes, that’s correct. It’s too bad you didn’t get here a little sooner,” she remarked. “You only missed him by about an hour.”

An hour. One bloody hour. The genius’s heart rate increased as anger coursed through him like a tide.

“Sir, are you all right? You look a bit flushed.”

He took a deep breath, attempting to summon every ounce of fortitude he could. His eye involuntarily twitched and his pulse sped. At this rate, he was but a hairsbreadth away from having a meltdown.

“Sir?” the receptionist said again, her tone concerned. “Perhaps you ought to sit down for a minute or step out and get some fresh air.”

“Air,” he mumbled, “yeah…there’s an idea.”

Moriarty exited the building in a fit of fury. His hands shook as he pulled out his phone to send a text message.

JM

Mission suspended. Must regroup.

Come pick me up NOW.

Seb couldn’t arrive fast enough.

**********

“Get off me!”

“Not until you promise you won’t destroy anything else, including yourself.”

The sniper and his mate had reached a unique impasse. Jim was enraged over having been ‘thwarted’ again, and when they returned to the hotel, he tried to trash their room using his one
good hand. Moran didn’t allow it to go on for long. After a few shattered vases, he tackled the smaller man to the bed, refusing to release him until he calmed down.

“If you don’t let me up, I’ll fucking flay you!”

“No,” he firmly replied. They weren’t on the job right now—this was a domestic situation and he didn’t hesitate to invoke his alpha authority. “What happened sucks, but that’s no reason to demolish our suite and risk further damaging your hand.”

“Sod off!” The mastermind struggled fitfully beneath the weight of his spouse’s iron grip.

“Jimmy, stop. It’s a wonder you haven’t woken the babies,” he spat. “Is this the kind of example you want to set for them?”

Moriarty abruptly stilled, Seb’s words striking a chord with him. He let out a keening noise that sounded more like the cry of a wounded animal than that of a man.

“I won’t keep you pinned if you swear you’ll relax.”

The assassin received no response.

“Promise me, dammit! I don’t enjoy this. I’m supposed to be a Magpie whisperer, not wrangler.”

“I…I won’t do anything rash.”

“Do you mean it?” Moran cautiously inquired. “If this is a trick—”

“No tricks,” he interjected. “I’m sorry.”

Sebastian wanted to loosen his hold but remained wary all the same. Ultimately, he took a risk and let go.

“Thank you,” Jim spoke. Now freed, he sat upright on the bed.

A hush engulfed the room as neither knew what to say. It was Seb who finally broke the silence.

“I’ll prepare us a spot of tea.” He walked a few feet to the kitchenette area and put a kettle on. “It’s nice having a setup like this right in our quarters. Perhaps I’ll gather supplies to make breakfast tomorrow morning. Nothing else quite compares to ‘Colonel Moran’s Heavenly Hashbrowns,’” he declared with a wink.

The tiniest of smiles registered on Moriarty’s face. “Your recipe’s in a class of its own.”

“Oh, for sure. I’ll be over the moon when our cubs are able to eat solid food, and then they too can experience the majesty.”

“You may get your wish. I’m considering introducing a wider range of edibles into their diet.”

“Excellent.”

Seb assembled a small tray carrying teacups, sugar packets, and spoons while he waited for the water to boil. The items were provided complimentary to those staying in the penthouse suites.

Minutes passed, and it was eventually time to pour the piping kettle. Moran did the honors, serving his spouse the way he would when they were at home.
“Thanks, darling. You always did brew a marvelous cuppa.”

“I aim to please.”

Another lull fell between the couple as they sipped their Earl Grey. Both men realized they needed to discuss the afternoon’s events, but broaching the subject was easier said than done.

At last, Jim begrudgingly spoke up. “I guess we ought to address the status of our assignment. It isn’t often I suspend a mission.” He paused, thinking about it for a beat. “Not since Zanzibar.”

Seb shuddered at the memory. That was when he’d caught malaria midway through a job and become so violently ill, Moriarty actually flew in to keep vigil at his bedside. It was a harrowing ordeal all around.

“In this case,” he continued, “we traveled here for an express purpose, and it seems interference has been wrought. As far as I’m concerned, there’s no way Lars and Sophia leaving town was a coincidence, especially under the pretense of a ‘family emergency.’ This was calculated, I’ve no doubt.”

“I agree, it’s too on the nose.”

“Indeed. What upsets me most is that I don’t know how Colin and Annie always seem to know where we are. How were they aware of our trip to Copenhagen? And going back further, how did they know about the Father’s Day brunch? Or what shop I’d be in that day at the mall? Or where you were the night a car tracked you into the woods? It’s like they’re fucking omniscient.”

“I ask myself those same questions on a daily basis,” admitted Moran. “I’m supposed to be your protector, yet those bastards are perpetually one step ahead of us.” He gazed down into the darkened pool of his teacup, suddenly wishing he was drinking something a whole lot stronger.

“It’s not your fault, Tiger. I should be able to figure out their source. I’m a bloody genius. Brilliant beyond measure. So why can’t I deduce this? What am I missing?”

Jim’s frustration burned anew as he thought about it. His mind sped at a frenzied pace, jumping from one notion to another. It was frantic; chaotic; an exercise in madness, perhaps. Soon, he was shaking.

Sebastian took the cup from his trembling hand and set it aside. “Kitten, you’ve got to stop winding yourself up like this. It’s not good for you.”

“Good?” he scoffed. “I’ll tell you what isn’t ‘good’ for me— having those maniacs on the loose, never being quite sure what hell they’ll drag us through next. For fuck’s sake, we have children they’ve overtly threatened. I look at our sweet, wonderful doves, and then I remember the packages and notes stating how they’d be brutally dismembered. It’s sickening…infuriating…rending.” His voice wavered, raw and despondent. “I can’t bear it any longer. Can’t bear any of this.”

Overcome by a surge of intense emotion, the consulting criminal grabbed his phone from the nightstand and hurled it against the wall. It was no vase, but it would do.

“Jim!” the sniper exclaimed. He stood up, rushing to investigate the device’s condition. The results weren’t encouraging. “Looks like we’ll have to buy you a new mobile, because there’s no salvaging this one,” he announced. “Honestly, I get that you’re upset, but I wish you’d think things through before chucking expensive electronics across the room.”

Moriarty wasn’t listening, not really. Instead, his attention focused on the sight of his broken
phone. Something about the image transfixed him; called to him as if trying to spark a connection in his mind.

“Hello, Earth to Jim? Do you hear me?”

The Irishman just kept staring at his mangled mobile device in a trancelike manner.

“Jimmy?”

No response.

“Honey, are you okay?”

Still nothing.

“You’re making me nervous now, Magpie. Come on.”

And then it happened. The pieces clicked together in Jim’s head.

“Our phones,” he blurted out.

“Huh?” Seb was confused.

“What do we almost always carry with us? Our mobiles. And what do those sorts of devices feature? Geographic information.”

“Wait, are you suggesting—”

“That Colin and Annie may well be tracking us via the built-in GPS on our phones.” Moriarty’s expression grew animated as he felt confident in his deduction. “Think about it, dear. It’s the only common denominator present among each incident.”

“But how would they have gained such access?”

“Could’ve used a backdoor security hack. Certain programs are virtually undetectable unless you’re looking for them.” He stopped, an idea dawning on him. “Tiger, fetch me your phone.”

Sebastian obliged, though he did have some reservations. “What are you planning to do with it?”

“I’m going to run a few tests. Check the diagnostics and see if anything strange turns up.”

The mastermind eagerly got to work. Soon, he’d know for sure if his theory was correct.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Hey, everyone. I don’t normally speak personally in the “Notes” section, but in the interest of transparency, I thought I should say something this time around.
I’ve recently had a bombshell dropped on me which may cause upheaval in my life. I’m addressing this here because I don’t know what, if any, impact it will have on my writing. I post a new chapter once a week and don’t plan to change that. However, in the off chance that I’m ever a little slow with a “deadline,” I hope people will understand. Thank you.
It was late afternoon in Copenhagen and Jim Moriarty’s mood had vastly improved. At last he’d discovered how his stalkers were constantly able to locate Seb and himself. After examining his partner’s phone, he found that it was just as he suspected— a flaw in the device’s firewall allowed for its GPS feature to be illicitly accessed. Both of their mobiles were likely affected, though he couldn’t test his own due to its state of disrepair. Regardless, now that the source was revealed, they could put an end to it then and there. Jim may not have gotten what he originally came to Denmark for, but decommissioning that tracker was a pretty good consolation.

“It’s time to celebrate, poppets. Are you ready?”

His children stared at him from the comfort of their cushiony rental swings. They bore cheerful expressions, their eyes twinkling with excitement.

He grinned. “Let’s get you two dolled up, shall we? Daddy only has one fully-functional hand right now, but I promise I’ll do the very best I can.”

The consulting criminal sifted through Essie and Eddie’s luggage. This was their first trip abroad, and so he dared not dress them in any old thing. Whatever they wore tonight needed to be special. Needed to have a certain joie de vivre. He was determined to find the perfect ensembles for his doves.

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“Jim, you wanna pick up the pace a bit? I’m hungry and the restaurant will be packed if we don’t get a move on.” Seb stood outside the closed door of the makeshift nursery in their penthouse suite. “If you require assistance, I’ll gladly pitch in.”

**********
“One more minute, darling.”

The sniper sighed. Jim had been saying ‘one more minute’ for the past half hour.

This time, however, it seemed he meant it. Much to Moran’s surprise, the entrance slowly crept open.

“Tah-dah!” Moriarty exclaimed, presenting the twins as they sat in their side-by-side stroller. “I believe our sugarplums are duly prepared for a night on the town. What do you think?”

What did Seb think? That his heart might burst from the sheer amount of cuteness on display. Estella was clad in a frilly rainbow-print frock and red patent leather shoes. The pièce de résistance was her hair— Jim had given the girl tiny pigtails tied with gold ribbons. Edward looked equally splendid, wearing corduroy trousers paired with suspenders and a polo shirt. His accessories consisted of miniature loafers and a classic woolen flat cap.

“Wow, you really have transformed them into little fashion plates.”

“I feel it’s important they learn the intricacies of style early on. Which reminds me…” he pulled out an adult-size cap from behind his back and passed it to Sebastian. “Here. It’s crucial we lead by example.”

“You want me to put this on, I presume?”

“No, you’re meant to play Frisbee with it,” the Irishman sarcastically remarked. “Of course I want you to put it on. Duh.”

Moran did as instructed, hoping he didn’t appear too silly. “How’s that?”

“Marrrrrvelous, my dear. Now you and Eddie match. It will be an honor to accompany such dapper gentlemen this evening.”

“The pleasure is all mine. And on that note, I’m going to insist we head out.”

“Ooh, so commanding.”

“I’ve got to make up for earlier today somehow, don’t I?” Seb quipped, referring to the moment when Moriarty put him in his place regarding their ‘ranks.’

“Funny, I thought you already did when you had me pinned to the bed a few hours ago. That wasn’t exactly…*subordinate* behavior.” He eyed Moran seductively, unable to resist pushing his alpha’s buttons.

“Is this the right time, kitten?” His gaze turned towards their children. Surely, Jim would catch his meaning.

He did, though not without expressing frustration. “*Fine,*” the mastermind huffed. “Let’s go.”

As the couple exited their room, Seb strode alongside his mate, slipping an arm around the man’s waist. “Later tonight,” he whispered huskily, “I’ll show you how commanding I can truly be.”

For just a second, the assassin swore he heard Jim’s breathing hitch. A grin eclipsed his face, delighted by the effect he had on him. Nobody could elicit a response like that from the unflappable James Moriarty. Nobody, except for Sebastian.

**********
Dinner was divine. The restaurant they’d chosen was quite busy, but the instant Jim flashed his black card, a table ‘suddenly’ became available. Likewise, a sommelier appeared, offering them samples of their finest Bordeaux. Attendants were also bending over backwards to accommodate the twins, supplying booster seats and bibs. Their waiter didn’t bat an eyelash when the consulting criminal requested mashed fruits and vegetables be served to the babies. All members of the family were catered to as if royalty.

“Honey, your food’s going to get cold if you don’t stop feeding our cubs and concentrate on your own meal.”

“They need to eat, Seb. What kind of parent would I be to deny them sustenance?”

“You’re denying them nothing. They already had whipped carrots during the appetizer course. Giving them pureed plums right now is the equivalent of dessert.”

“Hush. I’ll have you know that this is an excellent source of vitamins, and I want them to grow big and strong.”

He beamed as his progeny devoured the sweet mash. Both infants were thoroughly pleased, murmuring happily while the purple substance coated the corners of their mouths. Jim generally abhorred messy eaters, but when it came to Essie and Eddie, he couldn’t help but be enchanted by their every move.

Even Moran had to admit how utterly adorable they were. In fact, as he sat there watching on, the wheels in his head began to turn…

Jim’s birthday is coming soon. Just a few more weeks and it’ll be here. I should throw him a party and get the babies all dressed up for it. He’d love that. And then another idea sprang to mind, this one better than the last. Perhaps I ought to make it a costumed event. He’d go nuts seeing them in theme outfits. Hmm. Yes, that’s what I’ll do.

“Something’s got you awfully chipper,” Moriarty observed, noticing the newfound smile stretched across his partner’s face.

“I guess I’m smitten by the sight of my family.” It wasn’t technically a lie—he honestly did relish moments like these.

The genius found himself surprisingly affected by Seb’s words. A sense of warmth enveloped him as his heart filled to the brim with bliss. Before he could stifle it, a trill of omega joy tore from his lips. Such biological responses often embarrassed him. Not this time, though. Any trace of self-consciousness dissipated when the babies ‘answered’ back, squirming in their seats and squealing merrily.

Sebastian marveled at what he was being made privy to. Omegas and their young tended to form intrinsic bonds which enabled them to communicate independent of traditional language or speech. He’d seen it firsthand the day they brought the twins home from the hospital and he was witnessing it again now.

He pulled out his phone, intent upon snapping an impromptu shot of the trio.

CLICK.

Perfect. Candid photos were his favorite to capture.

“You’ll forward me that picture ASAP,” Jim instructed, and Seb did.
“It’s a good one.”

“They always are, when you’re the one taking them.”

Finally, the Irishman wiped his children’s mouths clean and returned to his own meal. The lamb chop in front of him may have been slightly tepid, but it was a worthy tradeoff as far as he was concerned. They were together, the way a family should be. The way he’d imagined it from the start, when he had his first sonogram done.

Without even realizing it, Moriarty became misty-eyed.

“You okay, hon?” Sebastian asked, swiftly slipping into alpha protector mode. If something or someone was unwittingly offending his mate, he’d make short work of rectifying the situation.

“I’m all right, it’s just…”

Moran put his fork down and reached over to grasp Jim’s uninjured hand. “Just what, my darling? You can tell me anything.”

“Yes, I really can.” He gazed reverently at his husband, moving to kiss the man’s calloused fingertips. The contact was featherlight, yet breathtaking.

“Magpie…”

“I love you. Love us. We’re amazing.”

“We are,” Seb agreed, though he was a bit thrown by the sudden declaration. Where was Jim going with this? It wasn’t like him to wear his heart on his sleeve.

“I never thought this kind of life was possible for me,” the mastermind continued. “I convinced myself that having a family was a childhood dream…the folly of a naïve little boy. As the years wore on I became smarter, savvier, and a whole lot more cynical,” he confessed. “But somewhere deep inside, a tiny part of me still remembered that wish…remembered being a wee lad who carried around a dolly, pretending it was his baby and making up stories to explain where the ‘Papa’ was.” Jim paused, memories flooding back to him in a rush. “I used to imagine my baby’s father was a handsome runway model by day and a daring secret agent by night.”

The sniper chuckled heartily at Moriarty’s admission. “Clearly, you were quite the storyteller even then.”

“I suppose it does sound rather absurd in hindsight.”

“It’s sweet,” Sebastian reassured while gently squeezing the genius’s hand. “How do I stack up against your dream man?” he jokingly inquired.

“You’re basically him.”

“Is that so? Last I checked, I wasn’t on the shortlist for Versace’s fashion week presentation, nor am I employed by MI5.”

“Perhaps not, but you look spectacular in a three-piece suit and have successfully pulled off numerous covert assignments. That’s close enough in my book.”

“Touché.”

The duo went on to enjoy the rest of their dinner, finishing the main course and indulging in
scrumptious Danish desserts. Essie and Eddie were extremely well-behaved throughout the proceedings, only fussing when one of them was in need of a nappy change. Altogether, it proved to be a splendid outing for the Moriarty-Moran clan. Soon it would get even better.

*********

“This place is beautiful,” said Seb. He was agog at the splendor of Tivoli Gardens. Everything was lit up in a brilliant manner, a dazzling display set against the backdrop of inky night.

The twins were similarly impressed, their heads turning to and fro, fascinated by their surroundings. There was so much newness to absorb.

“It’s as lovely as I recalled,” Jim spoke. “Lovelier, actually, since I’ve got such superb company with me this time around.”

Moran smiled. “Reminds me of one of our first dates…when we went to that carnival in London. You know the one.”

“Ooh, yes, I certainly dooooo. Prizes of all kinds were had that night,” he quipped, flashing an impish grin that mirrored his mate’s.

“I’d be honored to win you something this evening.”

“Indeed you will, because I demand it.”

“Demand it? Sounds like an order, sir,” the former colonel cheekily replied.

“You’re damn right it is. The babies and I refuse to leave here empty-handed. You’d best get cracking at that skee-ball machine, soldier.”

“Aye aye.”

Sebastian approached the gaming area with a sense of purpose. He was now duty-bound to play his absolute best.

After approximately an hour’s worth of skee-ball, darts, and whack-a-mole, Moran had amassed a glut of tickets. Tivoli guests were permitted to combine their winnings from various games, and he was determined to take full advantage of the opportunity. At last, he could purchase an item Jim specifically had his eye on—a giant pink Care Bear with a rainbow embroidered on its belly.

Once he’d acquired the stuffed animal, he scanned the crowd but did not immediately see his spouse.

*Hmm. Magpie’s fluttered off.* The question was, where to?

Seb set out to find him. During his trek, he noted a number of attractions. There was a rollercoaster, ferris wheel, bumper cars, and more. He quickly decided he’d love to try the rides when Essie and Eddie got a bit older. Maybe they could make visiting this place an annual event.

The assassin stopped, still unable to locate his family. It was becoming worrisome. He wanted to text Jim, but didn’t have a free hand due to the oversized bear he was stuck toting.
Regret pierced his heart as he lamented leaving their security guards behind at the hotel. He knew Moriarty despised being followed on dates, and so he thought that just for tonight, they could omit their entourage. Now Seb was kicking himself over it.

*How could I be so stupid? I’m a fucking idiot. I should’ve known better. Should’ve never—*

“Where the bloody hell have you been?” a familiar voice called out. It was Jim.

Moran turned and saw his husband and cubs. He sighed in tremendous relief.

“Thank god. I finally collected enough tickets to buy this thing, but then you disappeared.”

“Disappeared?” the consulting criminal scoffed. “Hardly. The babies and I took a simple trip to the loo. We didn’t vanish into the ether.” He hesitated, observing the prize in Seb’s arms. “How did you know that was the one I wanted?”

“Your eyes.”

Moriarty peered at his partner curiously. “What about them?”

“There’s a twinkle you get when something tickles your fancy. A look.”

“No, there isn’t. Don’t be daft.”

“I’m afraid it’s true, kitten.”

His face crinkled in protest. “Really?”

“Yes. As a matter of fact, you’re giving it to me right now.”

“Am I?” he asked, his tone intrigued.

Sebastian nodded. “Yeah, big time.”

“And in your expert alpha opinion,” he began, reaching out to stroke the sniper’s stubbled cheek, “what do you recommend we do about that?”

*Expert alpha opinion?* Jim was laying it on thick as molasses. Fortunately, two could play at this game.

“The most sensible recourse is a good old-fashioned ravishing. I believe it would do wonders for your disposition.”

“Wonders, you say? I bet you use that line on all the omegas,” he flirtatiously remarked.

Seb leaned over and whispered into the Irishman’s ear. “Only the handsomest of the bunch.”

“You’re quite a smooth-talker, aren’t you? Must’ve had loooooads of practice.”

“I did, once upon a time. Now I’m a one-bloke kind of guy.”

“Oh? Been tamed, huh?”

The rugged blonde gazed at his Magpie with scorching intensity. “No. Been loved. Nobody else could hold a candle to him.”

“Sounds like a lucky fella.”
“I consider myself the lucky one. He’s a god among men.”

And that did it. That sent Jim to the brink. After bantering back and forth with Sebastian, the time for chatter was done, replaced by a need for glorious, unbridled action.

Moriarty grabbed his mate by the shirt, pulling him in for a kiss. Their mouths met, hungry and wanting.

Seb returned the exchange with equal vigor, his warm tongue slipping past Jim’s lips. It was passionate…electric…rapturous.

And then the damn Care Bear got in the way. Its plush, pink form wedged between the men, acting as a barrier.

“Grrr.” An audible growl erupted from Moran.

Essie and Eddie squeaked and gasped, never having heard their father make such an angry noise before.

He was horrified when he realized what he’d done. Passing the bear to his husband, he crouched down to address the babies at their level.

“Papa didn’t mean to scare you, darlings. I’m sorry if I did.”

The twins stared at him with great concentration. Time seemed to stand still as Sebastian waited for some sign that they were okay and not frightened.

Estella delivered on his wish. The little girl reached out, grabbing his finger and smiling.

“Paaaa…paaaa,” she drawled.

Seb gaped in amazement. Was this really happening? Was his daughter enunciating her first word and directing it towards him? He almost couldn’t believe it.

“Paaaa-paaaa,” the pigtailed tot said again. There was no mistaking it— she was definitely speaking to him.

“Jimmy, are you hearing this?”

“I am,” he excitedly confirmed. “I tried to get them to say ‘Dada’ earlier, but they couldn’t get the whole thing out at once.”

“Paaaa,” Edward interjected, attempting to say it too. “Paaaa-paaaa.”

“This is incredible!” The sniper’s sharky grin was on full display as he reveled in his children’s milestone.

Moriarty was beaming as well. There was a time when he would’ve been disgustingly jealous of Seb over something like this. Not anymore, though. Now he was just thrilled that his poppets were progressing at a swift rate, regardless of the catalyst.

“I think this is worth celebrating,” the mastermind announced. “Let’s order champagne when we get back to the hotel.”

“A fine suggestion.” He resumed a standing position and leaned in close to his captivating spouse. “Then we can put the babies to bed and rejoice with a private party all our own.”
Jim liked the idea. Liked it a lot. “Come on, Tiger. Last one to the car is a sissy.”

Moran laughed softly. His partner had a flair that was impossible to resist. Not that he’d ever want to resist, of course. No, he sought to enjoy each and every moment with him for as long as time would allow. They were a family, connected always by the strings of life and love.

Chapter End Notes

Sneak Preview: What will be the fallout from Jim and Sebastian's trip to Denmark? The situation grows increasingly difficult for their stalkers. Also, the time has come for Ian's baby to arrive. It should be an exciting event for all! :-}
Be Sure Your Sin Will Find You Out – Part 1

Chapter Summary

The truth catches up with one of Jim and Sebastian’s stalkers. Meanwhile, the couple attends to Ian during a time of need.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Annelise de Graaf was a woman on the edge.

Days had passed since Jim and Sebastian discovered the backdoor GPS hack on their phones and promptly deactivated the rogue exploit. Worse yet, the couple had also traveled to Copenhagen in search of her parents. It’d been a race against the clock to get Lars and Sophia out of the city before the duo’s private plane touched down. She managed to pull it off, but was then subject to a slew of questions.

Her parents rightly demanded to know what was going on. In a panic, Annie supplied a series of half-truths that did little to appease them. She admitted to being fired from Moriarty’s office under poor terms, but would not divulge the specifics. She further stated that she was in hiding from him and his unnamed partner. When pressed for details, the woman clammed up and became dead silent.

Lars and Sophia agreed to temporarily stay at a vacation home located along the Norwegian coast. It was one of several properties they owned throughout Europe. Annie opted to reside with them for the time being, while Colin kept a low profile in London at nursing assistant Katherine Ramsey’s house.

Tensions ran high as the de Graaf family patriarch refused to back down in the face of his daughter’s evasiveness. Starting right now, he was determined to get answers.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

Annie froze at the sound of someone rapping on her bedroom door.

“Hello?”

The entrance creaked open and Lars peered in. “I need to have a chat with you, Annelise.”

She said nothing as he stepped inside, not even raising her head to meet his eye.
“We’ve avoided talking about this situation for too long. I won’t let the deception continue.”

Again, the young woman remained mute. She dreaded having to confess the terrible things she and her brother-in-law had done.

Lars took a seat next to her on the bed. “Look at me, dear. Don’t be afraid.”

She hesitated, but eventually obeyed his command.

“That’s better,” he declared. “You’re going to tell me some things. Is that clear?”

“Yes, daddy.”

“Good. To begin, why on earth did you take a job working for James Moriarty?”

“No reason,” she lied. “Seemed like a fine opportunity.”

“That makes no sense. You’re a trained theatre actress. You were part of a touring company. How would entering into his employ be an opportunity for you?”

“I…I don’t know. It just would.”

He shook his head. “Stop lying. I’m not a fool. I deserve the truth.”

An eerie quiet settled over them as they simply stared at each other.

“All right, if that question is too difficult, maybe you can try answering a different one. Why is Moriarty after you, to the point where you’ve gone into hiding?”

“I have no idea. He’s a spiteful and vindictive bastard.”

“Yes, I’m sure that’s true. But in this case, it sounds like a vendetta,” Lars asserted. “A person doesn’t go to such lengths without cause. What did you do to aggrieve him?”


“So you’re saying you know too much?”

“That’s exactly it,” Annie proclaimed, latching onto the excuse. She hoped her acting talents would help carry her through yet another falsehood.

The man’s expression softened a bit and it appeared he genuinely wanted to believe his child. Still, a measure of doubt weighed upon him.

“Sweetheart, I’m going to ask you a very specific question, and if you love our family at all, you’ll respond honestly.”

“Okay. Go ahead.”

He inhaled a sharp breath, attempting to steel himself for the topic he was about to broach.

“Whatever it is you’re mixed up in, does it involve Colin in any way?”

The color drained from Annie’s face, her complexion turning a sickly ashen hue. “W-why would you suggest that?” she stammered, caught off guard by the blunt inquiry.
“I know he’s a fugitive, honey. Your mother and I were unaware of it when you brought him home at Christmas, but later, we saw the news reports.”

“Oh god. So then you know…”

“We know he killed someone. An American decorator who was in the UK conducting business with Moriarty.”

Lars’s words hung in the air, stifling and irrefutable.

“It’s hard to imagine there isn’t a connection between it all,” the man continued.

Annelise paused, suddenly feeling exceptionally defeated. She sensed where the conversation was heading and struggled to maintain her resolve. “What are you asking me, daddy? Just spit it out.”

“I want to know if Colin’s dragged you into his mess. If he’s put you up to something you can’t get out of.”

“I…he…” her voice trailed off somberly.

“You can tell me the truth. I understand how manipulative he can be. I saw what he did to Marguerite.”

The young woman’s expression quickly shifted from sorrow to rage at the mention of her late sibling. “He loved Margo!”

“In his own way, certainly. But she needed help that he refused to give.”

“That’s not true!”

“Yes, it is. Colin convinced her to check out of the hospital, insisting he could take care of her himself, and he pressured her to start a family. Six months later, she was dead.”

“What happened wasn’t his fault.”

“He may not have physically placed the razor in her hand, but he did nothing to make the situation better, either.”

Annie looked at her father in shock. “How dare you put this on him! Sebastian Moran is the one to blame. That rotten son of a bitch ruined their lives.”

The de Graaf patriarch was taken aback by his daughter’s irrational argument. “Surely, you don’t believe that? Your sister was obsessed with the man. He can’t be held accountable for her delusions.”

“He made her fall in love with him. It was his doing.”

“Margo had manic-depression and Borderline Personality Disorder. Her fixation on Moran was tied into her illness. Which, I might add, your mother and I were getting her help for until Colin swooped in and persuaded her to cease treatment.” There was a distinct sharpness to Lars’s tone as he spoke about the matter.

“I…I don’t know what to say.” Annie was overwrought with conflict. She’d long held faith in her sister’s husband, even if he did seem a bit crazed. But her father painted a different, equally compelling portrait of events. “If you have such disdain for him, why didn’t you object when I brought him home at Christmas?” she prodded.
“Because it was a holiday, honey. Mum and I would never turn away family during a time like that.”

Annelise stood up from the bed, reeling at the revelation of her parents’ true opinions. The circumstances surrounding Margo’s death were rarely discussed, existing as a verboten subject in the de Graaf household. Perhaps if they’d actually talked about it at some point, things would’ve been better for everyone.

“You’re trembling,” Lars observed. “Sit down and I’ll prepare us some tea.”

“No.” The woman’s eyes were wide and frantic. There was much to consider, though she was at a loss regarding where to start.

BZZ. BZZ.

Her phone vibrated on the nightstand.

As Annie checked the device, an old adage sprang to mind: ‘Speak of the devil and he shall appear.’

Naturally, Colin was calling. Of course he was.

*********

Jim and Sebastian were on a unique mission. One that led them through the winding corridors of St. Bart’s obstetrics ward while carrying the biggest gift basket they could find given only an hour’s notice. Indeed, this was not how they’d planned to spend their afternoon.

The couple had been at home enjoying some quality time together when Moriarty received a call from his employee and protégé, Ian. He contacted him to share the news that he was heading to the hospital to have his baby. The announcement came as quite a surprise. Matilda wasn’t scheduled to be born for another week, and so the duo wondered if everything was okay. They hurried to get there as fast as they could, knowing that the teen had no family or support system to speak of.

“How do I keep ending up in this godforsaken place?” grumbled Moran.

“Hush,” said Jim. “Now’s not the time to complain. We don’t know what’s going on with Ian’s baby. He may require our stalwart assistance to guide him through a rough situation.”

“Aye.” The sniper couldn’t disagree.

They soon located the room number they were given at the front desk. Moriarty knocked before bidding entry inside.

“Come in,” Ian greeted. He sounded upbeat, which was a positive sign.

The men charged ahead, closing the door behind them for privacy.

“Wow, is that for me?” he inquired upon seeing the gift basket. It included a teddy bear, balloon, hypoallergenic lotion and body wash, a matching knit cap and booties, and a terrycloth bath wrap.

“It sure is,” the consulting criminal affirmed. “For you and Tilly, both.” He set the festive assortment of goods on a side table and approached his young friend. “How are the two of you? Her arrival’s a bit earlier than anticipated, is it not?”

“We’re doing fine. And yeah, I wasn’t originally scheduled to give birth until next week.”
“If she’s okay, then why push up the date?”

“Well, it’s like this,” he began, “I’ve been feeling unusually short of breath, and during today’s ultrasound I found out why. Apparently, the baby’s pressed awkwardly against my ribcage, putting stress on my lungs. It isn’t harming her right now, but there’s a small chance it could lead to a reduction of oxygen in the bloodstream if she doesn’t change position. To be on the safe side, it was recommended I undergo a C-section sooner than later.”

The relief on Jim’s face was palpable. “Oh, thank god. I was imagining the absolute worst.”

“It’s true,” Seb chimed in. “You should’ve seen him on the drive over. I haven’t witnessed him so fretful since Eddie had colic.”

Moriarty stared daggers at his mate, angry and embarrassed at the disclosure. His ire swiftly settled, however, as Ian spoke again.

“Where are the twins, anyway? I don’t see them with you.”

“Jack’s watching them,” the genius informed. “Not knowing how long we’d be gone, it seemed prudent to make provisions.”

The teen frowned. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset your routine. I should’ve explained myself better when I called.”

“It’s no matter now. Besides, Reggie was thrilled at the prospect of spending time with our darlings, especially after hearing that they just started to talk.”

Ian’s eyes widened at the news. “They’re talking? Really?”

“Yes,” Jim confirmed, an undeniable note of pride present in his voice. “They’ve only said ‘Papa’ so far, but you never know what will be next. Sky’s the limit.”

“You’re quite right. I find myself thinking along the same lines lately. A new baby opens up a whole world of possibilities.” The youth stopped to contemplate the splendor of it all. “Sky’s the limit, indeed.”

“So when are you going under the knife?” Sebastian asked, trying to gauge a timetable for the proceedings.

“There’s a two-hour window within which they can fit me in. Seems the obstetrics unit is bogged down today.”

“No problem,” replied the mastermind. “We’ll keep you company until then if you’d like.”

“Truly?” He gazed at his mentor in awe, stunned by the offer.

“Of course. No one should have to go through this experience alone.”

“Thank you. It means a great deal to me.” He paused for a second, fidgeting nervously. “Hey, Jim?”

“Yes?”

“Would you…would you be willing to stay with me while the surgery’s being performed? I know that’s asking a lot, and I’d understand if—”
“I’ll do it, yeah.”

A look of delight washed over the young man’s face. “You will? No fooling?”

Moriarty smiled reassuringly. “No fooling. I’ve been where you are. I get how scary it is.” He reached to grasp Ian’s hand, inwardly pleased that he didn’t need to wear a bandage anymore. “We’ll see you through this, and when all is said and done, you’ll have a beautiful baby girl to show for it. Sound good?”

“Sounds amazing, actually.”

Seb watched on, astounded at how much his spouse had grown as a person this past year. Once upon a time, he’d have laughed someone out of the room for suggesting that Jim would be anybody’s mentor or emotional rock. The notion was patently absurd.

But things were different now. Pregnancy and parenthood had affected the Irishman in ways Moran never could’ve dreamed. Like a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis, he was transformed; shaped into a better version of himself. It was remarkable to behold.

“Tiger?”

“Yes, hon?”

“Be a dear and fetch me some coffee. I saw a hot beverage machine in the lobby.”

“Your wish is my command. Ian, do you want anything? Or are you not allowed because of the surgery?”

“Not allowed, unfortunately. If I’d known what was going to happen today, I’d have eaten a bigger breakfast.”

“When you’re ready to have that first post-birth meal, let me know,” the consulting criminal commented. “Hospital food is abysmal. I’ll make sure you get a finely catered feast.”

“Oh, I hate to impose.”

“Impose? Nonsense. We’ll break bread together, the three of us. Sebby loves a good prime rib and baked potato, isn’t that right?”

“You know me well, kitten.”

“I dooooo,” he playfully intoned. “Now get a move on.”

“Aye, sir.”

The dutiful alpha strode down the hall, locating the drink dispenser with relative ease. He began to read through the various flavor options available.

Regular, Decaf, French Vanilla, Hazelnut—

“I’m here to see Ian Fitzgerald,” a nearby voice gruffly declared.

Sebastian’s attention was immediately grabbed. He paused, listening intently.

“It’s important I meet with him. He’s checked in to give birth and I’m the baby’s father.”

Moran suppressed a growl. How dare that heinous bastard show up like this? Just waltz in, as if he had any actual claim to Ian’s child. As if he wasn’t a raping, stalking, omega-abusing scumbag who’d forfeited his parental rights from outset.

The sniper wouldn’t permit it. He knew what he needed to do. He’d cut the arsehole off at the pass, before he ever had a chance to make it to the young man’s room.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

I just want to take a moment to express my gratitude for everyone who’s continued reading this story through all its ups and downs. I truly do value your patience and support. Thank you.
Be Sure Your Sin Will Find You Out – Part 2

Chapter Summary

Things get complicated for Jim, Seb, and Ian when an unwelcome guest drops by at the hospital.

Chapter Notes

It's taken me a bit longer than usual to get this chapter done, so I thank you for your patience. If it's any consolation, this installment is extra lengthy! I hope that helps make up for the wait.

Warning: There's a bit of creepy/skeevy dialogue from Luke in one section of this chapter. It's nothing gratuitous, but I thought I should post a warning just in case anyone is especially sensitive to such things.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sebastian hid around the corner of one of the hospital’s labyrinthine hallways. He was biding his time, just waiting for Luke to walk past. Fortunately, his target didn’t dawdle.

BAM.

He lunged with expert precision. Before the bastard knew what hit him, Seb had one arm wrapped around his waist and the other around his neck, effectively choking out any potential cries for help. He hauled him off to a nearby janitor’s closet, dropping him on the hard tile floor.

“Listen carefully, you worthless piece of shite. I have no idea what made you think you could get away with showing up here, but I can tell you what’s going to happen next. You’re going to pull yourself together, leave this hospital, and head back to whatever cesspool you crawled out from.” Moran circled him as he spoke, much like a cat descending on vermin. “Should you fail to follow these instructions, you’ll discover how deeply I relish in making the lives of my enemies a living hell. Particularly those who’ve committed the atrocities you have.”

Luke glared up at him, coughing and wheezing. It was obvious by the look on his face that he felt intense contempt for the sniper.

“You’re one to talk,” he panted. “Your sins outweigh mine tenfold.”
THWACK.

Seb administered a swift kick to his target’s ribs.

“I’ve done awful things, it’s true. But don’t assume that the sum of my transgressions somehow rivals your own. The evil you’ve wrought is in a whole other category.”

“Sod off.”

“You’re in no position to be sass ing me. If anything, you should be grateful I don’t kill you on principle. I’ve little tolerance for rogue alphas.”

“And I’ve little tolerance for insufferable prigs,” the man huffed, his bearings slowly returning. “God, you’re pathetic.”

“Speak for yourself, arsehole.”

The pair locked eyes as Luke gingerly rose to his feet. He ambled towards Moran, coming to stand only inches from him.

“Why would I ever take orders from you, huh? You tricked me, caused me grievous injury, broke into my flat, and stole my personal property. After all that, I’ll be damned if I let you keep me from my child, too.”

“She’s NOT yours. Get it through your thick fucking skull— the baby is Ian’s, and Ian’s alone.”

“In that case, you’d best phone the Vatican. Immaculate conceptions don’t occur every day.”

A low-pitched growl escaped Seb’s lips. “Get the fuck out of here before I do something I regret.”

Their gazes affixed once more, and then— to Moran’s great surprise— the man seemingly decided to comply.

With his hand on the doorknob, Luke glanced at the formidable blonde. His expression was changed…eerily so.

“Catch you later, Tiger.” At that, he exited.

The sniper balked at the man’s parting words. How did he know Jim’s nickname for him?

_Maybe he meant it as a general term._

Seb thought back and remembered that during their initial encounter, Luke had slangily referred to him as ‘tiger.’ Perhaps that’s what was going on now.

But…there was something disconcerting about his sudden shift in demeanor.

_He gave up way too easily. Could a scheme be afoot?_

_He might simply be trying to psych me out._ Mind games weren’t outside the realm of possibility.

_What if it’s more than that, though?_

Sebastian couldn’t let this slide. A consummate protector, he felt compelled to report the incident to Jim and handle matters from there.
“Bollocks,” said Moriarty. “I’d hoped Luke would be smart enough to keep his distance after all that’s gone on. Clearly, I gave him too much credit.”

“I suspect he’s never been one to make wise choices.”

The couple conducted their conversation in the hall outside Ian’s room, not wanting to upset the young omega. The last thing he needed was additional stress on a day like today.

“They’ll be prepping Ian for surgery soon. Once he’s wheeled out, I’m accompanying him. Whilst I’m busy with that, you’ll stay here and act as watchman. Don’t permit anyone inside except for authorized medical personnel. Got it?”

He nodded. “Got it.”

“Good. Now let’s return to the room before our absence raises a red flag.”

Jim and Seb put on a cheery façade, smiling as if nothing were wrong. Ironically, it was their upbeat behavior that made the teen suspicious.

“You guys look awfully chipper. What’s going on?”

“Not a blessed thing,” the consulting criminal answered. “We’re just bursting with excitement at the prospect of meeting Matilda.”

“Oh. So am I.” He hesitated for a moment, eyeing the duo curiously. “Where’s your coffee?”

“The machine was broken. It’s no bother. If I reeeeeeally start to crave a cuppa, there’s a Starbucks down the street.”

“Hmm, I see.” Ian remained wary. “Why were you talking about it in the hall? There’s no reason to keep that a secret.”

“We didn’t wish to disturb you with our idle chatter,” explained Moran, swooping in to corroborate his spouse’s story.

“Indeed. You’ve far more important things to concern yourself with right now.” Jim reclaimed a seat at Ian’s bedside, doing his best to convince the youth that all was well.

“Don’t remind me,” he lamented. “There are a million worries racing through my head. If I dwell on them for too long, I panic.”

“That’s perfectly natural,” Moriarty assured. “Having a child is equal parts thrilling and terrifying.”

“It certainly is. I’ve read a slew of parenting books these past few months, trying to learn as much as I can. Even so, I don’t feel fully prepared.”

“I understand completely. In my experience, it was like flying blind at first. But eventually, you find your footing and the pieces fall into place.”

“I want to believe that,” the young man professed. “I’m just scared to death by the notion of doing this on my own. You’ve got Seb to help out. Me, though…I’ll be raising Tilly alone.”
“You don’t have to,” a booming voice declared from the doorway. “We can share in the duty. Care for our daughter together.”

All three men looked over and saw Luke standing there, a bouquet of flowers in hand.

“You’ve gotta be fucking kidding me,” exclaimed Moran. What sort of bizarre gambit was this?

Jim’s eyes narrowed on the unwelcome visitor. “Get. Out. NOW.”

“That’s not for you to decide. It’s up to Ian.”

“You’re the absolute last person he’d ever want to see, I guarantee it.”

“Let him speak for himself, why don’t you?”

Luke took a step towards the teen but didn’t get far. Sebastian leapt into action, promptly tackling him to the ground. The floral bouquet the man carried was squashed in the skirmish, stems crushed and petals torn.

“Get off me!”

“Shut up,” Seb angrily demanded. “Shut your fucking mouth or I swear to Christ, I’ll gut you like a goddamn fish.”

Luke chuckled darkly. “You’re keeping some fine company these days, Ian. Real salt of the earth.”

“I already busted one of your balls,” Moran taunted. “Shall I even up the pair?”

It was then that a nurse entered the room. She was flummoxed by the scene she’d walked in on.

“What in god’s name is going on here?”

“This bloke is crazy,” replied Luke. “I came to show support for the mother of my child, and he attacked me for no bloody reason.”

“No reason?!” Jim shouted, enraged at the accusation against his mate. “My husband is doing this facility a service. Surely, St. Bart’s frowns on subhuman scum wandering the building.”

“How dare you disparage me? You’ve no right to judge anyone!”

“Tread lightly,” the mastermind warned. “One more word…”

“Stop talking, all of you!” The nurse was in no mood for tomfoolery. “Break it up or I’ll call security! This is a hospital, not your own personal boxing ring.”

Sebastian begrudgingly unpinned Luke. His scowl, however, remained.

“That’s better. Now if you’ll let me do my job, I was sent to bring Mr. Fitzgerald to the surgical suite.”

“I’ll be joining him,” Moriarty swiftly informed. He half expected Luke to object, but the man stayed surprisingly silent.

Through the hullaballoo surrounding him, Ian had yet to say a thing. The instant his baby’s father appeared, he was rendered wide-eyed and mute. He knew, though, that he needed to offer a response before they wheeled him out. Needed to express himself in some meaningful way, no
matter how small.


Jim nodded appreciatively. “We won’t, dear. I promise.” He glanced at the medical worker present, addressing her thusly. “You heard that. You’re a witness to this patient’s wishes and are thereby sworn to abide his request.”

“Yes, sir. That’s correct.”

Luke growled, fury flashing across his face.

Seb reacted in kind, and the two stared at each other in a heated deadlock.

“Enough macho posturing,” said the nurse. “I want both of you out of this room until further notice.” Having issued her decree, she proceeded to ready Ian for transport, making sure his vitals were steady before moving him.

The consulting criminal soon exited alongside his protégé, while Luke and Moran went their separate ways as well. Things weren’t over between the opposing alphas, though, not by a longshot.

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Sebastian checked the time on his phone and frowned. He figured Ian would be out of surgery by now. When Jim had a C-section, it was performed very expeditiously.

*Maybe his was rushed because of the emergency circumstance? Hmm. Probably.*

Bored with pacing the halls, he opted to stop by the gift shop and browse for cards. Moriarty had already insisted they give Ian a lovely basket of assorted goods, so he didn’t feel obligated to buy anything extravagant. Still, a congratulatory card would be a nice gesture.

After selecting one for the young man, his mind began to wander. There were birthday greetings on display that made him think about his partner’s impending celebration. The genius’s 39th was just around the corner and Seb intended to make it memorable.

He was committed to the idea of staging a costume party, even brainstorming outfits for the babies. A surge of inspiration hit him earlier in the week as he was flipping through channels on tv and caught an episode of *The Flintstones.* It occurred to him that his cubs would look adorable dressed as Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm. The mental image alone made him smile.

I should coordinate with Jack. He knows how to throw a top notch event. It might actually be fun.

“Fancy meeting you here,” an all too familiar voice announced, interrupting his thoughts.

The sniper turned and his suspicion was confirmed. It was Luke, yet again.

“Jesus Christ, I can’t seem to get rid of you. You’re like a nasty case of herpes that keeps flaring back up.”

“I could say the same about you. Everywhere I go in this hospital, there you are.”

“Perhaps it’s fate’s way of telling me I’m meant to kick your miserable arse.”
“Ha,” he scoffed. “You really think you could?”

“Think it? I know it,” asserted Seb. “Hell, I already have. Those drugs I found in your medicine cabinet must be affecting your memory.”

“Oh, I remember perfectly. However, I don’t consider our encounter to have been a fair fight. You used trickery to get me into an unguarded state, and also incorporated the use of a knife. If it was simply the two of us, one-on-one without pretense or weapons, I’m positive I could best you.”

Moran laughed uproariously at the boast. It was the funniest thing he’d heard all day.

But the other man was not amused by Seb’s dismissive response, his anger rising to the surface in a sudden rush.

“You think you’re so fucking cool, don’t you? Parading around like the toughest bloke in London, driving your fancy cars and living in the lap of luxury,” he snidely accused. “Well, I’ve got news for you—you’re nothing special. Just a glorified rent boy with a nice arse and a handsome face who was lucky enough to score an omega meal ticket.”

If looks could kill, Luke would’ve been reduced to a grease spot where he stood.

“I’m no one’s ‘rent boy,’ you ignorant son of a bitch. You haven’t a fucking clue about my relationship with Jim.”

“Not specifically, no, but I’ve seen similar situations before. And by the way, I think it was smart of you to knock him up—now you’ll be able to ride that gravy train forever.”

Sebastian struggled to maintain composure. Unfortunately, a clenched and shaking fist betrayed his inner rage.

“Did I hit a nerve, Tiger?”

There it was again. Luke spoke the name in a tone that made it sound like he knew its connotation. But how could he? Nobody referred to him by that moniker except for Jim. This was deeply disconcerting.

“Get out of my goddamn way,” the blonde commanded through gritted teeth.

“Why, can’t handle an honest conversation?”

“I refuse to be goaded.” He attempted to walk away, but was halted when the man gripped him by the arm. “Take your filthy mitts off me!”

“Maybe I don’t want to,” Luke lecherously whispered. “We’ve got unfinished business, after all. I never did get to have you that day we first met.”

Moran was horrified by his enemy’s debauched comment. “You make my skin crawl.”

“Excuse me, I didn’t realize you possessed such delicate sensibilities,” he sarcastically remarked.

BZZ. BZZ.

The two were interrupted by the vibration of Seb’s phone. Both paused, hoping it was news about the baby.
Surgery has been completed. They’re stitching Ian up now.

Here’s the first photo of Matilda Mae Fitzgerald, 3.7kg and 51.3cm.

The sniper smiled softly when he saw the picture. Tilly was a sweet little lass, complete with rosy cheeks, a cute button nose, and wispy auburn hair.

“Is that info on my daughter?” Luke asked.

Sebastian ignored him, choosing instead to text Jim back.

She’s beautiful. Can’t wait to introduce her to our darlings.

“Answer me, dammit! I have a right to know what’s going on with my child.”

Moran glanced up from his mobile screen and sneered. “We’ve been over this already. What part of ‘she’s not yours’ don’t you understand? Matilda has one parent and that’s Ian.”

“No! I’m her father,” he fumed. “I won’t allow her to be raised solely by some weak fucking omega!”

“Ian is anything but weak. In fact, I’d say you’re the feeble one in this equation.”

A snarl escaped Luke’s lips as he made a play to snatch the phone from Seb’s hand. Luckily, the former colonel had excellent reflexes and was able to maneuver away in time.

The man’s failed effort only served to make him angrier. He was volatile in a manner that disturbed Moran, his eyes wild like some feral beast.

Sebastian backed up cautiously, seeking to avoid any further conflict.

It appeared that Luke had other ideas. He stepped forward to close the distance between them.

“You want to keep me from what’s mine. Well, maybe I should take what’s yours. Tit-for-tat.”

The sniper blinked. His enemy was clearly going off the rails. At this point, was it even possible to avert a fray?

“Imagine it,” he continued, “claiming your brats and your mate for my own. Making it so that you’re left with nothing. It’d be an experience to savor.”

“Never gonna happen. Jim wouldn’t want you in a million years.”

“Not a problem. Omegas don’t always know what’s good for them. They need to be…compelled.”

In a flash, Moran was set on edge. Few things infuriated him more than violence against omegas—doubly so, when it was his omega being threatened.
“Remember the instructions I gave you earlier? They still stand,” Seb declared with a growl. “Get the hell out of here and crawl back to the gutter you came from.”


That was the last straw. Rage, searing and blinding, coursed through Sebastian in a fevered blitz. His fist flew at Luke’s face once…twice…three times, before he regained control of himself.

By then it was too late.

The gift shop’s inattentive cashier finally put down her mobile device and pulled out her earbuds just in time to hear the rogue alpha’s screams. She called hospital security and they arrived posthaste. Both men were questioned as guards worked to sort out the situation.


A staff member turned to Moran. “Is that true, sir? Did you physically accost this man?”

“Yes, but he was threatening my husband.”

“So you admit you laid hands on him?”

“I was provoked,” the assassin insisted. “I had reason to believe he might harm my partner.”

Luke was eager to speak again. “That’s a lie! And what’s more, he not only attacked me here, but earlier this afternoon he choked me, dragged me to a janitor’s closet, and then tackled me in a patient’s room. You can verify the latter incident if you’d like—an obstetrics ward nurse walked in and witnessed it.”

All eyes were on Seb as the case against him mounted. Luke played the role of ‘victim’ to perfection, eliciting sympathy from the security crew.

“You don’t know the terrible things this bastard has done! He’s a rapist, an abuser, a stalker…who the fuck knows what else.”

“I’ve never been charged with so much as a parking ticket,” the opposing alpha stated.

Sebastian glared intensely. “That’s because the people you’ve hurt are too afraid to report your offenses.”

The interviewing guard let out a weary sigh. “It’s clear that each of you has strong feelings regarding what happened. You,” he began, looking to Moran, “say you were goaded, and that the person you assailed has a history of violence. And you,” he continued, glancing at Luke, “claim to have been targeted repeatedly today by this man. My job is difficult because I can only take into account what’s occurred on hospital premises. The basic facts are that one of you was beaten and the other admits to having done it. So with both a crime and a confession, we’re authorized to contact in the police should the injured party wish.”


“You’re making a huge mistake,” Seb avowed. “You think I’m the one at fault? Go on and talk to that obstetrics nurse he mentioned. Yes, she saw me tackle him, but she also watched as Ian—the patient—froze in fear and then requested that this bloke not be allowed near his baby. If he was such a standup guy, why would he have garnered that reaction, huh? Don’t be daft—really think
about it. He’s snowing you right now.”

“Sir, it’s not for me to judge what either of you may or may not have done outside of this altercation. I’m not a constable, I’m a security guard.”

“Yeah, and a fairly shite one at that.” The instant those words sprang from his mouth, he regretted them. This was a frustrating situation, but taking it out on the attending personnel would do nothing to make it better.

“I’m calling this in,” the man sharply announced, his haste no doubt influenced by Seb’s remark.

Though Moran was loath to show cracks in his steely façade, he was inwardly shaken by how fast everything was happening. All he’d wanted to do was buy a simple greeting card. How did circumstances escalate so quickly?

“Can I at least phone someone? My husband is in the building and I’d like to apprise him of what’s going on.”

“No calls until the police give you clearance. Maybe they’ll let you contact your spouse when you get to the station.”

“Bloody hell. This is ridiculous.”


“Actually,” the guard interjected, “you’ll be required to appear at the station as well. In order to bring charges, they’ll need an official statement from you.”

“Oh…I didn’t realize.” The information seemed to knock the wind from his sails.

Conversely, Sebastian was rather pleased. “Looks like your plan failed.”

“What plan?” he asked, feigning ignorance.

“To have me hauled off so I couldn’t interfere with your attempt to get to Ian’s baby. That is why you went out of your way to provoke me, isn’t it? But now you’ve got to waste time at the PD, too. As schemes go, it’s hilarious how spectacularly yours has backfired.”

His enemy scowled, clearly upset. “Shut up,” he grumbled. “I’m tired of talking to you.”

“That’s the best you’ve got? No clever comeback?”

“Hey,” the security guard chimed in again, “I’ve heard enough from both of you. Not another word until the police get here.”

Left alone with his thoughts, Moran’s biggest concern was how Jim would handle the news of his arrest. Posting bail wouldn’t be an issue, but Moriarty’s penchant for revenge might be.

To Be Continued…
This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Be Sure Your Sin Will Find You Out – Part 3

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian’s enemies regroup. Meanwhile, the couple must deal with fallout from Seb’s arrest.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains some pejorative/offensive language. Reader discretion is advised.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“They cuffed him, snapped a mugshot, took fingerprints— the whole nine yards. You should’ve seen it.” Luke sat in the kitchen of his cohorts’ hideout spot, regaling them with the details of Seb’s arrest.

“Enjoyable as that may be, I doubt he’ll remain in police custody for long,” remarked Colin. “That poofter omega of his is probably bailing him out as we speak.”

“Hey,” Luke gruffly objected, “watch your mouth. I don’t let people get away with using that term at the pub and I won’t abide it elsewhere either.”

“You’ve got no problem involving yourself in criminal activities, yet derogatory language offends you?” he scoffed. “Boy, is that rich.”

“Not all language. Just some.”

“It’s still fucking funny.”

A grim expression settled on the man’s face. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Thank god for that. I’d sooner be dead than a poof.”

“Colin!” exclaimed Annie. “Cool it.”

“Why? I’m being honest.”

“You’re being a bigot.”
He snorted derisively. “You’ve no room to throw stones. You’re the one who vandalized our targets’ property with a series of slurs.”

Luke eyed both of them shiftyly. “Excuse me, what?”

“Nothing,” the woman replied. “It happened a while ago. Don’t worry about it.”

“No, do go on. I’m curious.”

Seeing his sister-in-law’s hesitation, Colin elected to take the reins and explain. “Last year, at Moran’s birthday bash, I instructed Annelise to write unflattering graffiti in the bathroom of their party boat. She had no trouble carrying out orders.”

“Is that a fact?” Apparently, there was a great deal he didn’t know about his associates.

Annie nervously tried to avoid Luke’s gaze. “I…uh…yeah. I wrote some pretty awful stuff,” she admitted. “I didn’t mean it, though. I considered it akin to playing a part. I didn’t believe what I was scribbling— my ‘character’ did.”

“Wow, that’s fucked up logic.”

Colin chuckled, amused by his lackeys. “You two are hilarious.”

“Hardy-har-har,” Luke bitterly intoned. “Remind me again why I’m helping either of you?”

“Because it’s a mutually beneficial arrangement. You aid us with our endeavor, and in return, we assist you with yours.”

“Interesting how I’m no closer to my goal right now than I was the day we met.”

“Don’t blame us for your plans going bust today,” Colin retorted. “I could’ve told you that making a scene at the hospital wouldn’t end well. How you ever expected to be allowed access to Ian’s baby after the shite you stirred is beyond me.”

“My baby! Not his. Mine.”

“I stand by my statement. You fucked up and it isn’t our fault.”

He glared sharply. “Maybe if you’d actually honor your portion of the agreement, I wouldn’t need to resort to such drastic measures.”

“Your daughter was born approximately 3 hours ago. What could we have possibly done to help prior to her birth? Did you want us to rip the whelp from Ian’s body?”

“Don’t be absurd. I mean you could’ve assisted me in getting to him before Matilda arrived. Thanks to the security team Jim and Seb assigned, I’ve not been able to get properly near him for ages— until today, that is. But if you’d found a way to facilitate our meeting sooner, I’m confident I could’ve convinced him to raise the child with me.”

“You really think he’d be so easy to persuade?”

“Of course he’d be easy— he’s a male omega, for fuck’s sake. Weak. Naïve. Suggestible.”

“And you don’t suppose your previous actions against him would affect his opinion in the slightest?”
“It might color things a tad, sure. But at the end of the day, his feeble nature would prevail and he’d defer to my superior alpha will.”

“Christ, I thought I had a big ego,” Colin quipped, marveling at his cohort’s arrogant spiel. “Turns out I’m humble compared to you.”

Annie laughed, a response Luke didn’t take very kindly to.

“Piss off. I don’t have to stick around here and be mocked.” He hastily stood up from the table. “My shift starts in a half hour. Don’t contact me unless it’s an emergency.”

Leaving the conversation at that, he slipped out the backdoor.

Now alone, Colin and Annie stared at each other, an uncomfortable tension hanging thick in the air.

“You didn’t need to bring up the graffiti incident,” she said. “It wasn’t exactly my finest moment.”

“On the contrary, dear, I think you excelled at that assignment. Incorporating not only what I told you to write, but also brainstorming your own colorful insults— it was a stroke of brilliance.”

Her expression darkened at the quasi-compliment. “It was brilliant, all right. Brilliantly hateful.”

“Moran deserves our hatred, as does anyone connected to him. Never forget that.”

“Yeah, sure.”

The man arched a brow, noting her lack of enthusiasm. “Is something the matter? You’ve been acting a bit strange since you returned from visiting your parents.”

“I guess I have a lot on my mind.”

“Anything in particular?”

“Not really, it’s just…”

“Just what?”

She heaved an anxious sigh. “I had a talk with my dad while I was away. He made some interesting claims.”

“Oh? What about?”

“It was in regards to you and Marguerite.”

Colin fell silent for a second, taken off guard by the news. After her passing, the de Graafs never wanted to discuss their late daughter. This was a rare occurrence, indeed.

“What did Lars have to say?”

Annie wrung her hands, jittery as hell. “Well, he doesn’t blame Sebastian for what happened to Margo.”

“You must be joking?” Colin uttered in stunned disbelief.

She shook her head. “I was as surprised as you are.”
“Dare I ask what, then, he attributes her death to?”

“Daddy made an assertion. It was patently ridiculous.”

“I’ll be the judge of that. Tell me.”

“He said…he said you…”

“Spit it out, Annelise. I’m in no mood to play games.”

“Sorry, this isn’t easy to say.”

Colin reached out and grabbed her by the strands of her long blonde hair. “Fucking tell me already.”

“Daddy thinks it was you!” she hissed, wincing in pain. “He said you convinced her to stop treatment at the facility. But that couldn’t be true, could it? You wouldn’t do such a thing.”

The man abruptly let go of Annie’s tresses and slumped back in his chair.

“My father was wrong, wasn’t he?” Her voice wavered, fraught with uncertainty.

“Your sister hated that goddamn hospital. Every time I visited her, there was some new complaint about the place. She had grievances toward the doctors, nurses, orderlies, and even other patients. She’d often fly into hysterics over it,” he recalled. “Margo was desperate to get out of there, and only stayed as long as she did because your parents insisted on it. I hated seeing her so upset, and eventually I told her that if she wanted to come home, I’d support her decision. I guess Lars didn’t like that.”

Annie considered the new information. “What about outpatient therapy? Just because she left the hospital doesn’t mean you couldn’t have gotten her some kind of help.”

“By that point, she was ready to wash her hands of the entire psychiatric community, and who was I to dictate her medical care? Marguerite was a grown woman— I thought she ought to be given at least that much control over her own life.”

“Who were you? Her husband, that’s who! Someone who was supposed to look out for her. You gave her control and look what she did!”

“No,” he sternly replied. “You’ve got this all wrong. Margo would’ve been fine living with me. The problem was her never-ending obsession with Moran. She had her share of issues, I won’t deny it. But the way he infected her mind— that’s what ultimately sent her over the edge. Sent her into a dark, irretrievable place. If not for him, I’m positive she’d be alive today.”

“Colin, I…” Annie was at a loss, conflicted to the core. “I don’t know what to think anymore. You tell me one thing, my father tells me another…it goes round and round in a vicious circle.”

“I’m sure Lars means well, but he wasn’t privy to all that went on. And frankly, neither were you. So before going off half-cocked, you’d best remember that I was there for my wife when no one else was. I remained at Marguerite’s side and witnessed the damage Moran had done firsthand. Leaving the hospital didn’t kill her— that bastard’s cruel and casual treatment of her heart did.”

An intense wave of guilt threatened to swallow Annie whole. “I’m sorry. I wish I’d been there for Margo, too.”
“She would’ve liked that,” he affirmed. “But you’re making up for it now. Don’t let anybody dissuade you from our goal. It’s a worthy effort. We can honor her through retribution.”

Annie nodded. “And we’ll do whatever’s necessary to achieve results.”

“Amen.”

Colin leaned across the table, stretching to reach the woman’s hair again. This time, instead of wrenching it harshly, he smoothed down her locks, caressing the golden strands in an almost loving fashion.

“Forgive my lapse in judgment.”

“I already have, dear. We’re all entitled to a mistake every now and then.” He ceased stroking Annelise’s hair and swiftly moved to grasp her chin, forcing her to look him straight in the eye. “But don’t make it a habit,” he warned. “Is that clear?”

“As a bell.”

“Wonderful,” he declared, releasing her once more. “Now that we’re back on track, there are some important matters to discuss. I want to strategize our next course of action.”

“Shouldn’t Luke be included in a conversation like this?”

“That twat? Just summarize the details for him later.”

“Okay,” she acceded. “So what have you got in mind?”

A devilish smirk formed on Colin’s face. “Glad you asked.”

*********

“Mr. Moran,” an officer spoke, “the Magistrate will see you now.”

“It’s about bloody time,” Jim spat, walking alongside his mate as they were ushered into another room.

Moriarty’s words were not unwarranted. It was swamped at the police station, and after Seb’s initial booking, he’d been made to wait for hours. The consulting criminal shared in the tedium, having rushed over as soon as he learned of his husband’s arrest. Finally, though, it seemed there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

Once they were formally assembled in a small court, the proceedings got underway.

“The following bail hearing will be presided over by the Honorable Sir William Harker,” a bailiff announced. “Please rise.”

Everyone did as directed, and then sat again when Harker permitted the audience to be seated—all except Seb, that is. It was procedure for the defendant to remain standing.

“Sebastian Augustus Moran, you’ve been charged with simple assault in a public setting. How do you plead?”

“Not guilty, on the grounds of willful provocation. I contend that the man I hit deliberately goaded me into an altercation. Furthermore, I was acting in defense of my omega, whom he’d expressly threatened.”
The sniper suddenly felt his spouse’s warm hand slip into his own. He glanced down at the mastermind and they exchanged a thoughtful look.

“Your response is duly recognized.” The official took a moment to page through a document in front of him. “You’ve quite an extensive criminal record, Mr. Moran. Arrested nearly a dozen times in the UK and abroad. Been brought in for questioning on multiple occasions as well.” He paused, stopping to read a particularly curious entry. “Seems you’ve even attracted the attention of Interpol— their agents detained you twice, once in London and again in Antwerp. Do you have anything to say regarding your rather ignoble history?”

“Yes, sir. I was never found guilty in any of those cases. In fact, a few of the charges were dismissed outright due to insufficient evidence.”

“Funny you should mention that,” remarked Harker. “According to some reports, key pieces of evidence against you went missing during several investigations. Have you got an explanation for this recurring phenomenon?”

“No, I don’t.” Seb kept his reply brief, not wanting to disclose the truth. He knew full well that Jim was responsible for the rash of disappearing evidence. There was nothing Moriarty wouldn’t do to help him.

The Magistrate stared stoically at Sebastian. “How mysterious, indeed.”

“Your Honor, with all due respect, I don’t see what any of that has to do with the current situation.”

“This is a bail hearing, Mr. Moran. Your previous transgressions factor into the decision-making process.”

“Understood. My apologies, sir.”

Harker nodded and examined the file once more. He carefully reviewed Luke’s official statement and studied photographs displaying the plaintiff’s bruises.

“Based on everything I’ve seen and heard, I’m ready to make an assessment,” the man declared.

Jim’s grip tightened around the dashing assassin’s hand. He anxiously awaited news of how much he’d have to pay to bring his husband home. The dollar amount didn’t faze him— he just wanted to get it over with. The sooner they were able to leave, the sooner they could go pick up their cubs and settle in for the night as a family.

“Mr. Moran, given your track record— which includes numerous international connections— I have reason to believe you’d be a flight risk. Therefore, I’m denying bail. You shall be remanded into police custody pending trial for the assault of Lucas Darrow.”

Moriarty immediately leapt to his feet, outraged at the decision. “This is preposterous! How dare you keep him locked up?!?”

“Sir, I advise you to control yourself or you’ll be held in contempt of court.”

He flashed Harker a murderous glare. “The only thing contemptible in here is you. This is a miscarriage of justice and you damn well know it.”

“Don’t push your luck,” the man warned. “Another comment and I’ll have you placed in custody as well.”
Sebastian turned to his mate, a mixture of shock and sadness in his eyes. “Magpie,” he whispered, “I know the ruling is complete bollocks, but please don’t say anything to make it worse. If you get thrown in jail too, there will be no one to care for the babies. We can’t let that happen. We must think of them.”

And think of them, Jim did.

*Our babies. Our precious little loves, with their sweet smiles and joyful coos.*

He recalled an event from earlier in the day, before everything went to hell. That morning, he’d turned on the radio so he could listen to some classic rock while preparing breakfast for the twins. After pureeing a blend of peaches and plums, he readied to feed them. It was then that Moriarty witnessed one of the most adorable sights in the whole, wide world: Essie and Eddie were ‘dancing’ in their highchairs to the musical stylings of Queen. They looked utterly delighted, shimmying and swaying to the beat. It was so enchanting, he even made Seb come in and watch.

*We can’t allow them to be alone. Never.*

“Oh, Tiger. You’re right.” For their sake, he would exercise restraint.

A constable approached to act as Moran’s escort. The sniper agreed to cooperate without issue. He did, however, bid a lone request.

“May I say goodbye to my partner? I’ll make it quick.”

The uniformed officer glimpsed his watch. “You’ve got a minute. I’ll be counting.” At that, he walked a few feet away to grant the couple a modicum of privacy.

Jim promptly threw his arms around Sebastian, pressing their bodies so close together, it was as though they were molded into one.

“This isn’t over,” vowed the genius. “When I go to Jack’s house to pick up the twins, I’ll see if he can get his husband to pull some strings. Surely, a member of the Queen’s Counsel has sufficient authority to call in a favor or two.”

“Let’s hope so.” Moran absolutely *hated* being caged. He couldn’t do what was necessary from a jail cell. Couldn’t fulfill his sworn alpha duty to protect Moriarty and their young. Yes, they had security staff, but it just wasn’t the same. He considered himself his family’s primary watchman, with the hired guns serving as backup. How would they manage in his absence?

“I should contact Ian, too. I don’t want to upset the boy with news like this, but he knows something’s going on. He was in the room when I received the call about your arrest.”

_Ian._ The name got Seb thinking. Jim’s protégé might be the solution to remedying this madness.

“Kitten, you need to get him to talk.”

“Who, Ian?”

“Yes. If he tells the police about Luke, then perhaps they’ll understand that what I did was justified. It would establish him as having a history of harming omegas and give credence to my version of events.”

Moriarty had no time to respond. His and Seb’s minute was up and the attending officer stood poised to haul him off. The duo stole a quick kiss before parting, and that was it.
Though generally resilient, Jim felt his heart breaking as Sebastian got further and further away, until finally, he couldn’t see him anymore. They’d been separated on many occasions, but somehow this instance really hurt. Maybe because it happened so unexpectedly, or because for once, they’d done nothing to deserve it. Maybe he just couldn’t bear the thought of going home to a house with no Tiger. Their family meant everything to him, providing stability and serenity in his life. Now suddenly, all was askew.

The Irishman’s mind began to race. This is Luke’s fault. That son of a bitch has flown under the radar for far too long. Well, not anymore.

One way or another, Luke’s reign of terror would come to an end.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

My understanding of the UK legal system is somewhat limited, even after having done a bit of research. Court proceedings may not function the way I’ve described in this chapter, and so I ask that readers please suspend their disbelief. Thank you.
Be Sure Your Sin Will Find You Out – Part 4

Chapter Summary

Jim meets with friends in the wake of Sebastian’s incarceration.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CRAAAACK.

A loud crash of thunder rang out, striking close to Jim’s house and rattling the foundation.

He peered through a window in the nursery to observe the morning’s treacherous conditions. A sigh escaped his lips as today’s weather accurately approximated how he felt inside. Dark. Dour. Intense.

The past several hours had not been easy on Moriarty. His mind was abuzz with thoughts of Sebastian. The sniper’s incarceration hit him harder than expected, to the point where he couldn’t bring himself to sleep alone in their bed. How could he justify the luxury of it when he knew that his mate was probably reduced to using a flimsy, filth-stained mattress and thin, moth-bitten sheets? It didn’t seem right.

Jim opted to slumber with the babies instead. He brought pillows and blankets to his children’s room and camped out on the floor. Precious little rest was had, but he derived solace from being near them.

CRAAAACK.

Another thunderbolt touched down, this time causing the twins to stir. Eddie, in particular, had awoken with a start.

“It’s okay, love,” the genius reassured his son. “We’re having a storm, is all. No reason to fret.” He gently lifted the lad from his crib and cradled him in his arms.

Edward hummed, snuggling sweetly against the warmth of Jim’s nightshirt.

“That’s right, darling. Nothing to worry about.” He rocked him soothingly, staring into the infant’s soulful blue eyes. Eyes that reminded him so much of Seb’s.

“Oh, honey, you do look just like your Papa, don’t you? I wish he was here with us now, but awful people are keeping him away.”
Eddie’s face scrunched up and he blew raspberries in response.

The consulting criminal chuckled as he wiped a bit of spittle from the tot’s mouth. “My sentiments exactly. But never fear— Daddy’s going to get him back. Perhaps within the day.”

Indeed, Moriarty had plans. When he picked up his poppets the night before, he told Jack of Sebastian’s detainment. The man was sympathetic and swore he’d get his husband to appeal the Magistrate’s decision. If things went well, bail would be instated and Seb could come home.

Jim’s other goal was more daunting. He intended to initiate a conversation with Ian regarding the subject of Luke. Specifically, he’d try to convince the teen to file an official police report about his tormentor. It might be a hard sell, but if it could help Sebastian’s case, he had to make an effort.

“Fingers crossed, my dear.” He leaned down and kissed Edward atop the head. “Shall we get you and your sister ready for the day? Papa may be absent, but that doesn’t mean we can’t maintain our normal routine.” The mastermind knew it was important for babies to stay on a schedule, and besides that, he enjoyed the time spent with his doves during their morning rituals.

As if on cue, Essie squealed from the comfort of her canopy crib.

“Sounds like soooomebody agrees,” Jim jauntily drawled. He walked over and gazed at his princess. She was absolutely beaming, unbothered by the deluge outside.

Against all odds, Moriarty found himself smiling, too. The twins’ cheerful dispositions often had a way of rubbing off on him. Just when it seemed he was close to burnout, there they were, poised to reignite his fading flame with their own.

“Adventures await you today, darlings. You’ll get to meet other babies, whom I’m certain you’ll come to know quite well once a proper playgroup is established.” In addition to Tilly, Jack’s brood would also be present.

His sugarplums stared at him with glee, eager to get the ball rolling. They were budding social butterflies, taking after their Daddy in that respect.

Jim couldn’t have been prouder.

*********

The Irishman and his stroller-bound children navigated the halls of St. Bart’s hospital, determined to make their way to Ian’s room. For once he didn’t mind the maze of corridors, as it was a welcome alternative to being outside. The waterlogged weather continued to rage at a furious rate. Simply maneuvering from the car to the building was a slog in conditions like these.

Finally, he reached his destination. Sopping wet, he knocked on the door.

“Come in,” Ian beckoned.

The moment Moriarty entered, he was greeted by the surprised gasp of Reginald Norridge.

“Jim! Baybuhs!” the toddler called out. He ran up to them, wide-eyed and excited. “Baybuhs otay? Nu huwt in storwm?”

“They’re perfectly fine. It may be rough out there, but I’ve prepared them for the elements.”

Prior to leaving home, he’d dressed his doves in miniature yellow rain ponchos with matching
plastic bonnets and galoshes. They were as stylish as they were protected.

“Let me help you get their gear off,” Jack spoke. “I know it can be a challenge transporting little ones through a storm. And if you think this is bad, just wait ‘til it snows.”

“Ugh. I don’t want to deal with winter yet.”

“Me either.”

The twins were swiftly tended to, their outerwear cast aside. Reggie also pitched in, lining up Essie and Eddie’s boots next to his own. Before long, everyone was settled, seated, and ready to engage in some friendly rapport.

“Thanks for being here,” Ian began. “I appreciate the support. And Jim,” he said, addressing the genius individually, “I feel terrible about what happened with Seb. I wasn’t sure you’d want to come back after that.”

“While I’m not pleased by yesterday’s turn of events, I realize they occurred through no fault of yours. Besides, how could I pass up an opportunity to see Matilda again?”

The young man smiled softly. “She is lovely. A nurse should be bringing her around anytime now. They took her for a nappy change a few minutes before you got here.”

“Tilly cutah than Burdee,” Reginald announced, glancing at his infant brother who was asleep in a portable car seat. “Wuv Burdee, but he wook wike Gwampa, and Gwampa nu pwetty.”

The trio laughed at the lad’s forthright remark. Even Jack couldn’t help but be amused.

“That’s not a very nice thing to say, hon. Though it is somewhat accurate.”

“Weggie nu lie,” he matter-of-factly stated. “Dadda says good boys tell twoof.”

Jack’s expression grew decidedly grim at the mention of his husband. Ian didn’t seem to notice, but Jim did.

“How is Gary?” the mastermind asked, referring to his friend’s spouse.

“Fashionable as ever and probably taking tea with half of Parliament later.”

The man’s glib reply only further piqued Jim’s interest. He was clearly dodging a true answer.

“How about between the two of you?”

“We’re hunky-dory.”

“Tell twoof, Mumma,” Reggie urged.

Moriarty glanced at the tyke, his suspicion all but confirmed that there was something going on.

“Yes, Jack. Listen to your son.”

“Yeah,” Ian chimed in. “Tell us what’s the matter.”

“So now you’re tag-teaming me? Bloody hell.”

Before either of Norridge’s friends could reply, his eldest child made a startling declaration:
“Mumma nu tawkin’ to Dadda.”

Jack flashed Reginald a look of frustration. “Sweetheart, that really wasn’t your business to share.”

The toddler hung his head low. “Sowwy. Jus’ wanna help.”

He sighed, unable to stay mad at him. “It’s okay, dear. I know you meant well.”

Now that the cat was out of the bag, both omegas were disheartened.

“When I saw you last night, everything seemed fine,” noted Moriarty. “What changed?”

There was a moment of silence as Jack contemplated how to tactfully explain the situation. “Jim, I didn’t want to drop this on you right away and risk spoiling the morning, but I’m afraid I have bad news.”

The consulting criminal’s heart sunk. Immediately, he realized it must be about the promise his friend had made to have Sebastian’s bail instated.

“Gary couldn’t call in a favor to help Seb? That’s it, isn’t it?”

“More like ‘wouldn’t’ than ‘couldn’t.’ At my insistence, he accessed an electronic version of your mate’s case file shortly after you left our house. In his infinite wisdom, he agreed with the Magistrate. He thinks Seb is indeed a ‘flight risk’ and won’t contest the ruling.”

For a second, it felt as though all the oxygen had been siphoned from the room. Jim was well aware that Sir Gary Norridge wasn’t a fan of his, but he’d hoped against hope that the distinguished barrister would use his connections for a good cause. Evidently, such optimism was misplaced.

“There you have it,” continued Jack. “Now you know why I’m not talking to my partner. He’s being completely wrongheaded about this and I won’t stand for it.”

“At least you tried. Thanks for that much.” Though he attempted to mask it, disappointment rang in Moriarty’s voice.

“I…I’m sorry,” Ian sheepishly spoke. Tension rolled off him in waves as he fidgeted with his blanket. “I did this…brought Luke into your lives. If it weren’t for me, neither of you would know that monster. He wouldn’t be interfering with your marriages and families.” The teen paused, guilt weighing heavily on him. “I’m so sorry. Please forgive me.”

“Hey, stop this nonsense,” demanded Jim. “I already told you that what happened yesterday wasn’t your fault. I didn’t say it to placate you— it’s the truth,” he stressed. “You’re not to blame for anything Luke does. That cretin has a mind of his own and does what he wants, when he wants. You’ve no culpability in his crimes.”

“Yes, but—”

“But nothing,” Jack interjected. “He didn’t need to show up here and pick a fight with Sebastian—he chose to. That’s on him.”

KNOCK. KNOCK.

The men’s conversation was halted by a knock on the door. It was a nurse bearing precious cargo: little Matilda Mae, freshly diapered and swaddled.

All eyes were on the newborn as she was placed into Ian’s welcoming arms.
"Thank you," he uttered, glad to have his daughter back where she belonged. After everything that had transpired with Luke, he didn’t want her out of his sight for too long.

“If you require assistance, press the ‘Call’ button and someone will be in to check on you.” At that, the medical attendant left the room.

“Wan’ see baybuh again!” Reggie proclaimed as he began scaling the bed.

“Whoa. Hold on a minute, honey.” Jack lifted the rambunctious boy and sat him on the mattress next to Ian. “Don’t try climbing up by yourself. You could fall and get hurt.”

“Weggie nevva get huwt, Mumma. Nu worry.”

“If only,” the man wistfully remarked.

Soon, everyone was huddled close to snap pictures of Tilly. To her credit, she didn’t make a fuss, blinking cutely while the omegas got their photo ops in.

“She’s splendid,” Jack stated with a smile. “One day, I’d love to have a girl.”

“Raising her is going to be a bit of a learning curve, I imagine. But exciting as well.” Ian hesitated for a moment, an idea forming in his head. “Guys, how about you hold your babies so they can meet Matilda? I know I’ve got to remain vigilant of her germ exposure, but they don’t actually have to touch.”

Moriarty grinned. “Sounds good to me.”

“Me too.”

And so the men assembled their children thusly.

“Hello, Tilly,” Jack greeted. “You’ve already met my firstborn, Reginald. This is my other pride and joy, Bertram.” He tried to get the infant to look in her direction, but it was a lost cause—Bertie only wanted to sleep. “Seems he’s a bit tired right now. I’m sure you’ll have plenty of opportunity to get to know him later, when he’s more alert.”

“Oh yes,” Ian enthused. “I look forward to our angels having many playdates together. That would be marvelous.”

“Wan’ pway wit’ baybuhs too,” Reggie firmly asserted.

“You could join the playgroup, sure. As the oldest, you’d have to look out for the others. Do you think you’d be up to the task?”

The youngster nodded emphatically. “Yes! Am bes’ baybuh helpa evva. Pwotect bwudda day an’ night. Ask Mumma.”

“I’ll take your word for it, hon.” He then looked at Jim, who had Essie and Eddie situated in his lap. “Maybe we can introduce the twins next?”

“Of course.” Moriarty made eye contact with the wee lass and proceeded on. “Hiiiii, Tilly. Remember me? I was one of the first people to make your acquaintance yesterday.”

The tiny girl stared back at him, her expression relaxed.

“Well, I’ve returned and I brought a surprise. Two surprises, actually. I’m proud to present my
poppets, Edward and Estella. I’m positive you’ll become best friends in no time.”

Essie cooed, glimpsing the faces of those around her. She was a sucker for attention and seemed to think everyone was there to see her.

“I hope my daughter will be as happy as yours, Jim. What’s the secret to keeping such contented babies?”

“I spoil them rotten.”

The group chuckled heartily at his answer, but really, he was only half kidding. His children were among the most pampered in England, their every need catered to. He’d grown up with nothing, and so he wanted to give them all the things he never had. It was a conscious decision, one he wouldn’t deny.

“Baaaaaaa,” babbled Eddie.

Reginald giggled at the boy’s utterance. “Baybuh sound wike sheep.”


“Silly baybuh.”

But Moriarty was not so quick to dismiss his son’s communication. “I think he’s trying to say ‘baby.’ He’s heard us use the word multiple times and is attempting to mimic our speech.”

“Clever kiddo you’ve got there,” said Jack.

“I knoooow. Both of them are exceptionally gifted.”

Ian looked at his fellow omegas and then back at Tilly again. “You blokes have such brilliant children. I wonder how smart this little lady will be?”

“Very, if she takes after her mum,” Norridge replied.

The teen appeared pleased at first, but his smile quickly faded as a thought popped into his head. “What if she takes after Luke?”

“She’ll be fine,” assured Jim, “because half of her was created from you. She’s an improvement over him on that basis alone.”

“You flatter me.”

“I simply call it like I see it.”

RING. RING.

Speaking of ‘calls,’ Jack’s phone chimed. He checked his device and scoffed.

“It’s Gary. He’s got a lot of nerve, thinking he can chat me up after the shite he pulled.”

“Answer it,” Moriarty commanded.

“Why?”

“He might’ve changed his mind about Sebastian’s bail.”
“Not bloody likely.”

“Humor me and answer the damn thing.”

RING. RING.

Jim was getting agitated. “If you don’t answer it, I will.”

“Fine, if it means that much to you.”

Jack begrudgingly accepted the call.


CLICK.

The couple ended their conversation.

“What’s the scoop?” prodded Moriarty, anxious to hear details.

“Gary realizes he upset me a great deal and wants to make up for it by spending the rest of the day together as a family. He’s leaving work soon and we’re going to reconvene at home before heading back out. He suggested we stop at The Connaught for an early lunch and then visit a nearby indoor aquarium.”

“Uh-quar-ee-um?!” Reggie exclaimed, his face growing animated. “Wuv uh-quar-ee-um!”

“I know, sweetie. That’s why I agreed to go.”

“Wanna wide shark!”

“They don’t let people ride the sharks, dear. However, they might sell shark plushies in the gift shop.”

“Yay! Wuv pwushees, too!”

Though Reginald was bursting with enthusiasm, Jim found it difficult to muster any sort of vigor. Jack observed his melancholy and reached out to him.

“I’m sorry I don’t have better news about your husband. I’m still mad at Gary over this and am only obliging him because Reg doesn’t get to spend enough time with his father.”

“I understand. I hope he has fun.”

“Thank you, I’m sure he will. And on that note, we ought to head off. If I’m going to be at the aquarium for a significant portion of the day with a toddler and an infant, I’ll need to pack accordingly.”

The genius nodded. “Right.”

Norridge gathered his sons, making sure they were properly suited up for the storm outside. Reggie looked especially adorable in his raincoat and boots.
“I’m grateful you came to see Matilda and me,” said Ian. “We’ll coordinate that playgroup soon.”

“Absolutely. I’ll keep in touch and we can hammer out the specifics.”

“Fanks fo’ evvy-ting,” Reginald politely spoke. “Awwl baybuhs was good.” He bent down to take a bow. “I bid you uh-doo.”

“Oh my,” the young man remarked. “What a formal gesture.”

“Dat how gentlemen say ‘goodbye’ in movies.”

“Well, I appreciate the effort. The world is sorely lacking gentlemen these days.”

“Tell me about it,” Jack lamented with a sigh. “I’ll catch you later, fellas.”

Jim and Ian both wished their friend a fond farewell. He and his children exited, leaving the pair—and their respective babies—behind.

Moriarty saw this as the perfect opportunity to initiate a private chat with his protégé. It would be easier to broach the subject of Luke now that they were alone.

_Easier, ha._ This wasn’t a discussion he’d ever wanted to have, but some things were necessary evils. He had one shot to convince the teen to file a police report against Luke, and thereby help Sebastian’s case. He couldn’t screw this up.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Will Jim be able to convince Ian to speak to the police? And if so, what will it mean for everyone involved?
Be Sure Your Sin Will Find You Out – Part 5

Chapter Summary

Jim must cajole help from a friend.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Looks like my darlings are a tad drowsy,” Jim commented, observing how the twins’ eyelids were beginning to droop.

He set his children back in their double-stroller, tucking them in with monogram blankets and individual, miniature tiger plushies.

“Those blankets are lovely,” said Ian. “Where did you find them?”

“I made them myself, actually.”

“No kidding? I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised— I seem to recall you knitting during some of our MOPS meetings.”

The consulting criminal smiled at the mention of his former pregnancy group. “Ah, yes. That was a fine assembly we had there. To tell you the truth, I’ve missed it more than I thought I would.”

“I’m sure I’ll miss it too, now that I won’t be attending meetings any longer.”

“Trevor’s male omega parenting group is due to start soon,” he noted, referring to the man who’d coordinated MOPS. “We ought to give it a whirl.”

“I’d like that. I could use a sounding board for advice.”

“I just want a place to brag about my lovelies.” Moriarty punctuated his statement with a wink, indulging in whatever lightheartedness he could before the conversation inevitably took a heavier turn. Segueing into the topic of Luke would not be pleasant.

Ian gazed down at the babe in his arms, a sense of wonder coming over him. “I’ve never been one to brag, mostly because there wasn’t anything in my life worth boasting about. But I guess I’ve finally got something to be proud of— this little lady.”

“She’s a treasure,” Jim agreed. “Though I think you’ve sold yourself short. You have plenty of accomplishments to take pride in.”
“Oh? That’s news to me.”

“It’s true. Despite growing up amid the hellish confines of the foster care system, you managed to eke out your own path in life. You went to college for a while, worked a full-time job, and kept a flat without anyone’s assistance.”

“You consider those achievements? Really?”

“Of course.”

The young man sighed and shook his head. “No. I dropped out of school, was employed at a middling pound shop, and rented an apartment the size of a thimble. Not exactly markers of success.”

“You were thriving against the odds. That counts for something.”

“I was miserable,” he confessed. “Before you took me under your wing, I was barely scraping by and didn’t know how I’d provide for my child. You changed that. I owe you the world…and so does she.” He peered at his daughter, whose hazel eyes had turned to slits as she lulled in and out of sleep. “I’ll never be able to repay your generosity.”

“Nobody’s asking you to, dear. Seeing the two of you lead happy lives is all the compensation I require.”

A momentary silence fell over them as Ian became lost in thought. Abruptly, he reached out and grabbed Moriarty by the wrist. He stared at him intently, his expression haunting.

“I’m sorry, Jim. You’ve got to believe me. I swear I am.”

“There’s no need for apologies, though I must insist you loosen your grip.”

The teen immediately let go, mortified by his outburst. “Bollocks. I can’t stop screwing up.”

“Hush. You’re just flustered right now.”

“Perhaps, but it doesn’t excuse the innumerable mistakes I’ve made or the trouble I’ve caused. You say I shouldn’t apologize, but how can I not?”

“We’ve been through this, hon. I don’t blame you for a blessed thing. End of story.”

“The problem is, I blame me, at least partly. And especially in regards to what’s happened to your husband.” His voice quivered as he spoke, hands trembling slightly.

The genius noticed his friend’s shakiness and sprang into action. “Why don’t I put Matilda in her bassinet? She’s awfully tired.” A portable plastic unit, like those used in the hospital nursery, had been requested shortly after her birth so that she could stay in the same room with Ian for longer periods.

“I…well…fine, yeah.” He willingly allowed Jim to take the baby from him, pressing a kiss to her rosy cheeks before transfer.

“That’s a good girl,” Moriarty said as he laid Tilly down. She cooperated with minimal fuss. “We’re lucky to have such sweet poppets. Our playgroup will be delightful.”

“It will, yes.” He paused, his emotions abuzz. “Please sit back down. There’s something we ought to discuss.”
“All right.” The mastermind obliged, and he was more than a little intrigued. Apparently, they both had matters to address.

“I feel terrible about Seb’s arrest. It’s completely and utterly unfair.”

“You won’t hear an argument from me on that.”

“I can’t bear to idly stand by while your family is put through the wringer. I’ve got to help somehow.”

“Okaaaaaay…” Where’s he going with this?

“I volunteer to assist in whatever you need— babysitting, running errands, cooking, cleaning, etc. You recently mentioned you’ve been feeding the twins freshly pureed foods. Let me whip up their meals and save you the trouble. Anything to make your life easier.”

Jim stared at him in bewilderment. The proposal was almost comically absurd. “You’re offering to do…chores?”

“I know it’s hardly consolation for what’s gone on, but I simply must do something.”

“Ian, you delivered a child not even 24-hours ago. You’re in no condition to act as my manservant.”

The youth’s disposition sunk ever lower. “I…I know…I just thought…”

“You want to improve the situation. I get that. But you’re going about it the wrong way.”

“How do you mean?”

How, indeed. This was it— the segue Jim was searching for.

“Right now, Sebastian’s legal woes are a top priority. If you were to aid us in that capacity, it would be the greatest gesture of all.”

Ian was silent for a second, processing what was being asked of him. “You’d like me to help with Seb’s case? I’m afraid I don’t have much experience when it comes to the judicial system.”

“No experience is necessary,” Moriarty assured. “The only requirement is a willingness to tell the truth.”

“I’m not sure I fully understand.”

“Then allow me to explain. Sebastian hit Luke because he threatened my welfare. If we could establish that the bastard has a history of harming omegas, it would lend credibility to my husband’s defense.”

A look of startled realization washed over Ian’s face. “A history…you mean me?”

“Yes.”

The teen was rendered speechless, reeling from the gravity of his mentor’s request. In order to comply, he’d have to deal with police. Have to tell them the terrible things Luke had done. Provide dates, locations, details. So many fucking details, sordid as they were. The mere idea of it sent him into a panic. Soon, his breathing grew heavy and he began to perspire.
“Oh, god. I’m having a heart attack.”

“It’s not a heart attack,” Jim informed. “It’s anxiety. Trust me on this—I’ve suffered bouts myself.”

“Wha-what do I do?”

“Try to steady your breathing. Inhale and exhale sloooowly…methodically.”

Ian did as instructed, but it wasn’t enough. The consulting criminal would have to introduce another technique.

“Close your eyes and envision a person or place that brings you peace.”

“O-okay. And then what?”

“Keep taking nice, easy breaths while you focus on the image in your mind. Let everything else drift away.”

A few moments passed, and this time Moriarty’s advice seemed to have an effect. The young man’s pulse gradually normalized, his symptoms subsiding.

“Can I open my eyes again? I think the worst is over.”

“Certainly. I’m glad you’re feeling better. Anxiety fucking sucks.”

“Aye, it does. Thanks for talking me through that.” He stopped, an epiphany dawning on him. “You’re always helping me, and yet in your hour of need, I fly into a tizzy. It isn’t right.”

For once, the genius didn’t know what to say. He sought Ian’s testimony, but didn’t wish to guilt trip him into giving it. This boy had endured more adversity in his short 19-years than most would encounter in a lifetime. He’d hate to add on to his strife.

“I want to help, Jim. I’m just so scared. The notion of telling people about Luke…it’s terrifying. I barely admitted his crimes to you, and even then, it was never in detail. But the authorities…they’ll insist I leave nothing out.” He paused to take a deep, steadying breath. “This is too much.”

Moriarty grasped his protégé’s hand in a show of support. “I don’t claim to know what you’re going through—the trauma must be unimaginable. What I can assure you, though, is that you wouldn’t have to face anything alone. I’d be with you every step of the way.”

“Yeah?” he asked, his tone apprehensive.

“Yeah. I’d only leave if you told me to.”

Ian looked at him with sad, conflicted eyes. “I’m still not sure I have enough courage. Luke chills me to the bone. If I lodge a complaint against him, I fear he’ll retaliate.” He glanced over at his slumbering newborn. “Tilly’s safety is paramount and I’m worried he’ll come after us.”

“I understand your concern. But she’s another reason why you should speak out. That monster has no business insinuating himself in her life. By reporting Luke to the authorities, you’d be protecting your daughter. The police would make note of him and respond accordingly. Maybe they could issue a restraining order to keep him at bay.”

“A restraining order? I hadn’t considered that.”
The mastermind nodded. “Yes, and if one breaks the stipulations of those, they won’t hesitate to haul in the offender. Protection orders aren’t doled out lightly, though. You need to prove someone is an imminent threat to your well-being. In other words—”

“I’d have to recount our ugly history.”

“Unfortunately, yeah. But remember, I’ll be at your side.”

There was a hush between the omegas as Ian pondered the possibilities. He was frightened of his tormentor. At the same time, he felt compelled to do right by Jim, Seb, and Matilda. So much hinged upon his decision; so many lives could potentially be affected.

Meanwhile, Moriarty was beginning to wonder if he’d pushed the teen too hard. Ian had, after all, just given birth and was therefore subject to a slew of swirling hormones and emotions. Under the circumstance, was it fair to pressure him?

*What choice do I have? Sebastian is locked up right bloody now.* Time was of the essence and his options were limited.

“Jim?” the youth finally spoke.

“Yes?”

“I’ve got an idea.”

“Oh?” he inquired, surprised at the declaration.

“Yeah. I think I might know a way to get that restraining order issued *and* make sure your husband’s charges are dropped. It’s a bit devious, however. Not the sort of approach I’d usually take, but this is a special situation.”

A sly smile emerged on Moriarty’s face. “Tell me moooree.”

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

What sort of plan does Ian have up his sleeve? And will it pay off? Stay tuned.

P.S. -- This is probably the shortest chapter I've posted in a while. I hope no one is too disappointed by that. I don't set out to meet any specified length—i.e., chapters are as long or short as they need to be. In this case, I felt like I left off at the right point.
Chapter Summary

Jim and Ian set a plan in motion that will benefit them both.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains verbal abuse and reference to trauma. Nothing graphic or gratuitous, but I thought I should mention it in case anyone is especially sensitive to such things.

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“Are you positive you want to do this?” asked Jim.

“No, but it’s what will accomplish our goals the quickest,” Ian answered. “I’ve got to suck it up and be brave for my daughter’s sake.”

The two sat in the younger man’s hospital room, readying to enact a newly formed plan. It was a risky endeavor, but if successful, would benefit them both.

“Should you start to lose your nerve, remember that I’m here and I support you.”

“Thanks. You’re a true friend.” With a shaky hand, he reached for his phone. “Wish me luck.”

“Good luck, though I don’t think you’ll need it. You’re more capable than you realize.”

“I hope so.”

The teen dialed a number on his mobile device. It rang, and rang, and rang again. Finally, someone picked up.

“Ian?” a voice uttered in stunned disbelief. It was Luke.

“Yeah, it’s me.” He set the call on speaker phone so Jim could listen.

“You’re the last person I expected to hear from.”

“Well, life’s full of surprises.”
“It certainly is. I’m glad you decided to contact me.”

“Seemed like the right thing to do.”

“For sure. Omegas often get foolish ideas in their heads, but I knew it was only a matter of time until you came to your senses.”

Ian and Jim exchanged a grim look in response to the inflammatory comment. It took great fortitude to refrain from objection.

“Are you still at St. Bart’s or did you check out?”

“I haven’t left the hospital, why?”

“Because if I’m going to pay you a visit, it helps to know where you’re at.”

The youth’s eyes widened in panic. “Visit? Hold on— I didn’t invite you over.”

“It was implied. Why else would you phone me out of the blue? Obviously, you want to reconcile.”

Moriarty glared. The conversation had barely gotten started, and already he was galled by Luke’s blanket assumptions. Fucking twat.

“A reconciliation would suggest we were ever together in the first place. Three dates hardly constitutes a relationship.” Ian’s tone bore a noticeable edge. It was clear that this point of discussion hit a nerve.

“I consider quality over quantity. Those dates actually meant something to me.”

Outrage coursed through the young man in a fevered rush. He wanted to hurl his mobile across the room, but Jim intervened, reaching to stop him before he could grab the device.

“You still there? You’re awfully quiet.”

“I’m here. Just watching Matilda.”

“Ah, of course. How is she?”

“Picture perfect,” Ian tersely replied. If he had his druthers, he’d have told Luke to mind his own damn business. For now, though, he needed to remain civil.

“Excellent. And you?”

“I’m fine.”

“Really? Because you sound a bit tense.”

“I’ve got a lot on my mind. It’s been a whirlwind 24-hours.”

“I bet.” The rogue alpha paused. “Let me know when you’re discharged from the hospital. I’ll give you a ride back to your loft.”

“That isn’t necessary.”

“Oh, come on. It’s no trouble. Besides, I’d love to see what the baby’s room looks like.”
Now Ian was truly getting nervous. He refused to allow Luke inside his and Tilly’s home.

“I’ve arranged for a friend to pick me up.”

“Who needs friends when you’ve got me?”

“I said no.”

“Yeah, but you don’t mean it.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Whatever,” he dismissed. “I’m used to omegas and their games. Eventually, you’ll be broken of that.”

“I think you’ve broken me enough,” the teen muttered under his breath.

“Huh? I didn’t quite hear you.”

“Nothing. Talking to myself, is all.”

“Talking to yourself? Be careful— we wouldn’t want a touch of madness to rub off on Matilda.”

“Condescension dripped from the man’s every word.

Moriarty couldn’t wait for Luke to finally get his comeuppance. It was time to set the wheels in motion and level the next phase of the plan. With a nod, he signaled his protégé to proceed.

“Let me cut to the chase,” announced Ian. “The reason I called is because I have a proposition for you.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. I thought we might be able to come to an agreement of sorts.”

“I’m listening.”

There was a brief silence as Ian mentally prepared to lower the boom.

“My friend’s husband is in jail because of you, and—”

“No, he’s in jail because he has some serious anger management issues.”

Jim growled at the claim. Anger management, my arse. He was goaded into hitting you.

“What was that?” asked Luke. “Did you just growl?”

“Uh…no. My throat’s a little scratchy,” he lied. “I’ll be fine. They gave me lozenges.”

“Ah, okay. Now, as you were saying?”

“Seb’s in jail.”

“Yeah, what of it?”

“I’d like you to drop the charges.”

“And I’d like to win the lotto and retire to St. Tropez. We rarely get what we want in life.”
“Hear me out. I’m willing to make a compromise.”

“Oh?” Luke sounded intrigued. “What’d you have in mind?”

“If you drop the charges against Sebastian, I’ll let you see Matilda.”

An obnoxious cackle broadcast through the speaker phone. “You’ll ‘let me?’ That’s fucking hilarious. As if you’ve got any say in what I do, particularly regarding my own flesh and blood.”

“I wouldn’t be so quick to snub the offer. Imagine how things will go if you have to challenge me for visitation rights. I’m not the lowly kid I used to be. I have resources and stability now. I can hire the best barristers in London, who’ll fight tooth and nail on my behalf. The case could be drawn out for years, during which time Tilly will grow up without you. And even if you were eventually granted access to her, my lawyers would make damn sure that provisions were in place to severely limit your contact,” he asserted. “Wouldn’t it be a whole lot simpler to accept the terms of the compromise rather than turn it down and face the alternative?”

Ian experienced a sudden swell of confidence. He’d never had the courage to stand up to Luke—or any alpha—before. It felt good.

His pride was soon tested, however, when the man spoke again.

“You think that having a cushy job and a few pounds in the bank changes anything? Ha.”

“It changes everything.”

“You wish,” he bitterly taunted. “You could hire the most prestigious legal team in the world and try to reinvent yourself as some posh professional type, but we both know it would just be pretend. Would be akin to the games children play when they dress up in their parents clothes. Inside, you’d remain the same—weak, pathetic, and thoroughly disappointing.”

“Th-that’s not true,” Ian stammered, his newfound poise crumbling by the second. “I’m a man of means. A success.”

“Never. You might be able to fool some people, but I see you for the miserable failure you are. Once a loser, always a loser.”

Jim couldn’t sit there and listen to Luke’s verbal abuse any longer. He grabbed the teen’s mobile, covering the speaker with his hand so that what he was about to say wouldn’t be heard.

“Ian, you mustn’t believe the terrible things this bastard is spewing. He wants you to feel worthless, because then he can control you. Your confidence is a threat to him. Don’t let his serpent tongue deceive you—you’re the one with the real power here.”

The nervous youth nodded appreciatively. “I can’t allow him to intimidate me. I’ve got to be strong. Not only for my sake, but Tilly’s as well.”

“That’s right. Don’t kowtow to the son of a bitch, no matter what he tells you.”

“I won’t.” Ian took a deep breath to collect himself. “I can handle this.”

Moriarty had faith in his friend and gave him back the phone.

“Hello?” Luke bellowed. “Are you there or have I frightened you off?”

“You’ll find I don’t scare so easily anymore.”
“Yeah, sure,” he laughingly replied. “You’re a real tough bloke.”

Ian gritted his teeth, angered by the flippant remark. “Stop mocking me and listen up. You’ve got one chance to gain access to your daughter without the rigmarole of a lengthy court battle. All you have to do is drop the charges against Seb. It’s as simple as that. This kind of opportunity won’t come ‘round again.”

The alpha was silent for a moment. When he next spoke, his tone was far less acerbic. “How do I know you’ll honor your end of the bargain? Am I supposed to blindly trust that you won’t renge on your word? I’m not that naïve.”

“You want proof? Okay. If you agree to my proposal, I’ll meet you at the police station and bring Matilda along. Consider it the first visitation.”

“But you said you hadn’t checked out of St. Bart’s yet?”

“This isn’t a prison. I can leave for a few hours and come back. So what’ll it be?”

Another hush fell on the conversation as Luke struggled to reach a decision.

“Tick-tock,” quipped the teen. “My offer won’t last forever.” Inwardly, he delighted at making his tormentor squirm.

“This isn’t a matter to be treated lightly. I fucking hate Sebastian Moran.”

“If you’d prefer to leave him rot, then I think we’re done here. I’ll secure legal representation and you can get in touch with them regarding any and all child custody concerns.”

“Wait,” he hastily bade. “I’ll do it. I’ll agree to your terms.”

Ian and Jim sported matching grins in reaction to the news. They’d baited the scumbag, now they just had to finish reeling him in.

“A wise choice. When shall we convene?”

“Give me about an hour. I need to find somebody to cover my shift at the pub.”

“Fair enough. I’ll see you soon.”

“Until then.”

CLICK.

Finally, the call was through and Ian could breathe a sigh of relief.

“How’d I do?” he asked, gazing hopefully at his mentor.

“You were spectacular. We’ve got that tosser exactly where we want him.”

“I couldn’t have done it without you. The pep talk helped a lot.”

Moriarty shrugged. “I did what was necessary. He had no right to bully you.”

“I’ve been told off worse, on many occasions,” the boy sadly confessed.

“That doesn’t make it okay.”
The hospital room grew eerily silent as both omegas lingered over their thoughts.

After a minute or so, Jim stood up. “We’d better get you dressed and out the door.”

“Good idea.” The young man hesitated for a beat. “You’re coming with me, yeah?”

“Of course I am, dear. My Tiger’s due to be unleashed—where else would I be?” he jauntily stated. “Besides, I can’t wait to see Luke’s face when we turn the tables on him. It will be superrrrrb.”

“About that last part…”

The consulting criminal looked at Ian with concern. “What’s wrong?”

“Well, I know this was my idea and all, but to be honest, I’m terribly anxious. We get Luke to drop the charges, and then I spill my guts to the police and they book him for a whole slew of crimes. It’ll be entertaining as hell and richly deserved,” he acknowledged. “But the final bit, where I have to actually tell them what that monster’s done…it’s nerve-wracking. How do I even begin to describe the violations I’ve endured?”

Jim reached out, placing a gentle hand on his protégé’s shoulder. “Brilliant as I am, I don’t have the answers to all of life’s difficult questions. What I can suggest, though, is that you hold your head high and speak the truth. Remember, I’ll be right there with you.”

He nodded. “I know, and I’m grateful for it.”

Moriarty yearned to do something more for the long-suffering teen. Something to lift his spirits amid the heavy burden he’d been saddled with. But what might that gesture be?

“Hey, Ian?”

“Yes?”

“Have you partaken in your first post-op meal?”

“No. The 24-hour ban on solid food remains in effect for another half hour. Why?”

“I was thinking that after the hullabaloo at the PD is sorted, we could stop for takeout and bring it back here to dine on. I did promise you a well-catered feast once you were allowed to eat again.”

The younger man smiled. “It’d be nice. You needn’t go to too much trouble on my account, though.”

“It’s no trouble, I assure you. I’ll make a few calls and secure a chef on standby who’ll whip us up whatever we want. I’m sure Seb will be ravenous, too, upon his release,” Jim noted. “The only thing worse than hospital food is prison food.”

“I wouldn’t know,” said Ian. “But I’m glad Luke’s about to find out.”

That made two of them.
To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Will Jim and Ian’s plan conclude as they hope? Assuming all goes as planned, what will Luke’s legal trouble mean for his partnership with Colin and Annie? Stay tuned for more.
Jim and Ian meet with Luke at the police station. It’s a fateful encounter for all.

WARNING: This chapter contains reference to trauma. Nothing graphic or gratuitous, but I thought I should mention it in case anyone is especially sensitive to such things.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

“God, I’m such a fool.” Ian sat in the lobby of the police station, frantically checking the time on his phone. “Luke isn’t coming. He’s changed his mind, or worse, never intended to show up at all. Perhaps this was another way for him to have a laugh at my expense.”

“Calm down,” commanded Jim. “There’s no need to panic. He isn’t that late. Any number of things may have delayed him.”

The consulting criminal couldn’t help but note the irony of the situation. Usually he was the one to fret impatiently while Sebastian soothed his anxiety. Now he had to assume the stoic role and do the same for Ian. It was an unexpected shift in dynamics.

“You’re probably right,” the teen admitted. “I’m so antsy. I want to get this over with before I lose my nerve.”

“It’ll be okay. You’ve got people in your corner. A support system. If you lose your nerve, we’ll make sure you find it again.”

“Thanks, Jim. I—” he stopped in mid-sentence, seeing Luke walk through the entryway. His whole body tensed as the man made an immediate beeline towards him.

“Sorry I’m late. The pub is short-staffed these days, so it was a bitch getting someone to cover my shift.” He glanced at Moriarty. “What are you doing here?”

“Ian’s my friend and Sebastian’s my spouse. Hence, I have a vested interest in the proceedings. You might’ve intuited that bit of cause-and-effect if you had two brain cells to rub together.”

“You’re pretty brassy for an omega, aren’t you?”
“Honey, you have noooo idea.”

“I wonder how bold you’d be if you didn’t have security trailing you at all times? I bet that the moment you were alone, somebody would snatch you up with barely a struggle. Picture it,” he implored, “you, standing in the dark of a parking lot, minding your own business, when BAM— an attacker approaches from behind. Really catches you off guard. Then you’d be just as vulnerable as any other omega.”

The genius was deeply disconcerted by Luke’s statement. In addition to being incredibly creepy, it almost seemed like he was mocking his kidnapping ordeal. But how could that be? There was no way for him to know about it. Only a handful of individuals were privy to the incident.

Though rattled, Jim forced himself to play it cool. “I recommend you cease the macho posturing. I don’t intimidate easily, and your current attempt is rather embarrassing.”

At that, the man grew visibly agitated, his eye twitching and jaw clenched. He stared daggers at Moriarty— who, for his part, succeeded in appearing completely unfazed, smirking back at him.

“Let’s get on with this, shall we?” urged Ian. “We mustn’t lose sight of why we’re here.”

“No. Not yet. I want to see my child first.”

My child. The words made Jim’s blood boil. How fucking dare he lay claim to Ian’s sweet little girl? His self-entitlement was staggering.

“O-okay,” the youth nervously replied. “She’s sleeping, so please be careful not to wake her.” He reached for the portable car seat he’d borrowed from his mentor. There was a blanket draped over the top of it, canopy style. Peeling back the covering, a tiny, swaddled infant was revealed inside.

Luke smiled upon viewing the wee lass. “Oh, she’s adorable. A little on the small side, though. It’s too bad you can’t properly nurse our daughter to help put some meat on her bones.”

Both men were stricken by the callous comment, albeit in different ways. Ian was shamed, averting his gaze downward, while Jim responded with ire. A male omega’s inability to nurse their offspring was a sensitive subject. Definitely not the kind of thing to be treated lightly by one who’d never understand the hell of it.

“I know what you’re doing and it isn’t going to work,” asserted Moriarty. “You’re trying to rile us up for your own twisted amusement. Well, I won’t take the bait.”

“I’ve no idea what you mean.”

The Irishman peered at him closely. “You can feign ignorance all you want. It won’t change the fact that I’m on to you.”

“Sod off already.”

“What’s the matter? Can’t handle a clever, confident omega? It must drive you batty to think that your intimidation techniques are utterly ineffective on me.”

He glared intensely. “If we weren’t at a police station right now…”

“You’d what?”

“Never mind,” the alpha answered through gritted teeth.
“No, spit it out. Say what you’d reeeeeeally like to do to me.”

“Let’s not argue,” Ian interjected. “We should go to the reception desk and ask to speak with someone regarding Seb’s case. The sooner we get this done, the better.”

“Fine,” Luke spat. “But after we’re through here, you and I are gonna have a chat about the company you’ve chosen to keep. Some changes are in order.”

“I like my friends,” the youth declared. He was a tad shaky, but determined to hold his ground. “I see no reason to change them.”

“Of course you don’t. It’s in your nature to be foolhardy. Fortunately, you’ve got me to steer you in the right direction.”

Jim laughed at the risibly arrogant remark, earning another scowl from the rogue alpha. At this point, he didn’t care— retribution was nigh.

Without further ado, the trio and their respective children ventured to the front desk. Things were about to get interesting.

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“By signing this form, you, Mr. Lucas Darrow, hereby consent to the withdrawal of any and all charges against Mr. Sebastian Moran. In your own words, you describe the incident as a ‘grievous misunderstanding’ which you’ve gained perspective on in the 24+ hours since it occurred.” A female constable in the Commissioner’s office read aloud from a sheet, sliding it in front of Luke. “The Metropolitan Police Department requires your signature at the bottom.”

He nodded and made short work of autographing the document.

“Excellent,” she said. The woman then pulled out an officially designated stamp, adding the final seal of approval. “There we are. Now everything’s formally authorized. A copy of this will be scanned into our database for recordkeeping purposes.”

“When can I bring my husband home?” Moriarty inquired, eager to be reunited with his mate.

“Very soon. Officers in the detention center have been notified of what’s happened and should be processing him for release as we speak.”

“Thank god.” He turned to the twins, who were in their stroller. “You hear that, darlings? Papa will be back where he belongs in no time.”

Luke snorted derisively as he watched on. “They’re babies— do you honestly think they understand a word you say? You’d have better luck talking to a cocker spaniel.”

The consulting criminal’s eyes narrowed piercingly on the man. Oh, how he yearned to wipe the smug expression off that bastard’s face. But at the moment, he couldn’t jeopardize the plan. If he just maintained composure for a little while longer, they’d be in the clear. Still, he refused to let anyone disparage his doves.

“Perhaps your intellect is comparable to a canine’s, but I assure you, Edward and Estella’s prowess far surpasses the norm. I’m quite certain that by the time they hit preschool, they’ll be besting the likes of you.”

“Well la-dee-da. It’s amazing we’re all able to fit inside this room, what with the massive amount
of space your ego takes up.”

“I’ve got a massive ego? Ha. Pot, meet kettle.”

“Gentlemen, please control yourselves. Having dropped the charges, I’d expect the two of you to get along better than this.”

“Yeah, you’d think, but no,” Luke glibly retorted. “Now that the matter is settled, may I leave?”

“You’re free to go, yes. Unless, of course, you wish to stick around for Mr. Moran’s release.”

“I’ll pass on that, thanks.” He stood up, pausing to address Ian. “Come on, let’s roll.”

“No,” the teen firmly stated.

“Excuse me?”

“I’m not going anywhere with you.”

“The hell you aren’t. Grab Matilda and get moving.”

Ian didn’t bother to respond, instead looking to the officer who was presently assisting them. “Constable, I’d like to report this man, Lucas Darrow, for a series of crimes which I’d prefer not to disclose while children are present, even if their permanent memories haven’t set in yet.”

All color drained from Luke’s face. Flabbergasted, he stared speechlessly at his accuser.

The policewoman was taken by surprise as well. “This is an unusual turn of events. However, the MPD is always open to new information. The safety of citizens is our top priority.”

“Right. I don’t know how to go about this,” Ian admitted. “Do we talk in another room or what?” He fidgeted with his keychain, his anxiety level rising.

“Actually, I wouldn’t be involved in the case. If you’ve got something to report, we’d send you to one of the detectives.”

“But you seem nice,” he replied. “Seem like someone I could open up to. Why can’t I give you my statement?”

“First off, thank you, sir. I pride myself on being able to communicate with anyone. Unfortunately, I’m on desk duty. I don’t arrest the bad guys, I just sort the paperwork.”

“Oh. Sorry.” He kept his head down, not wanting to meet the woman’s gaze.

Jim reached over and grasped his hand. “Hey, it’s okay. I promised I’d stay by your side when you talked to the coppers, and I meant it. You won’t be alone.”

The constable looked at Ian, observing his obvious distress, then eyed Luke, and back again. “What sort of offenses are we dealing with?” she asked, getting a sinking feeling about the situation.

Before another word could be uttered, Luke unceremoniously fled from the office.

“Stop him!” demanded Moriarty. “When you hear the things he’s done, you’ll want him locked up straightaway.”
She directed her attention towards the young man. “Is that true? Did the bloke who rushed out of here hurt you? You needn’t go into specifics, but I require a reason to call in his detainment.”

“Yes, he’s hurt me,” Ian confirmed. “Please don’t let him escape. He might skip town, knowing what I’m going to say.”

“Duly noted.”

The officer quickly got on the phone, issuing an order to bar Luke from leaving the building. About a minute later, she was informed that he’d been halted.

“They got him,” she announced. “He’s being placed in a holding cell while we establish the particulars of the case.”

“Good,” declared Jim. “That beast belongs in a cage. What’s the next step?”

“Next, Ian meets with a detective to give a formal statement. They’ll take charge of the investigation from there.” She paused, considering something. “Sir, would you feel more comfortable speaking to a male omega?”

“Is that possible?”

“Yes, we do have one on staff. DI Wallace isn’t currently on duty, but we could request he come in.”

The youth was uncertain, seeking counsel from his mentor. “What do you think, Jim?”

“It’s entirely up to you, dear. If you believe it would make the process less traumatic, then by all means, request him. This is about what you want.”

He took a deep breath, contemplating the decision. “I…I guess so. Yes, I’d prefer to talk to him.”

“Okay,” the constable said. “I’ll make the arrangements ASAP. In the meantime, you’re welcome to remain here or take a little walk…stretch your legs a bit until the detective arrives.”

“Could I go with my friend while he reunites with his husband?”

“I don’t see why not. Just give me a phone number where you can be reached.”

Ian obliged, and soon thereafter he and his daughter headed out alongside Moriarty and the twins. Despite the madness of the day, he took solace in the fact that he’d helped to right an egregious wrong. Sebastian would be free, separated from his family no longer.

*********

“One black leather wallet. One iPhone. One silver chain with attached military tags and a gold band ring.” The man at the processing desk named off Moran’s personal effects, which had been confiscated upon lockup but were now being returned to him.

“Looks like that’s it.”

“Yep.” He was glad to get his possessions back. Hopefully, the cash in his money clip would all still be there.

“You’re lucky you got sprung so quick,” the officer said.
“Aye, I am.”

Seb had no clue what spurred on his sudden good fortune. He was taking a nap when, out of the blue, a guard woke him saying that his charges were dropped and he was scheduled for release. The sniper was grateful, but confused.

As he stood there, readying to leave, the door to the detainment center opened. His bewilderment reached new heights when he caught sight of Luke, who was handcuffed and ushered inside.

*What the fuck happened?* Clearly, he’d missed something big.

The alphas made direct eye contact, Luke’s gaze downright murderous. Moran considered asking him why he was there, but ultimately opted not to stir up trouble. Jim was surely waiting in the next room, and he’d rather get the scoop from his spouse.

“Let’s go,” the constable commanded. “Policy dictates I escort you out.”

“I know how it works.” This wasn’t Seb’s first time being incarcerated, though it was landmark in the sense that for once, he hadn’t really done anything wrong. Punching Luke was, in his opinion, a wholly justified act.

The instant Moran entered the holding area lobby, he was greeted by his beloved Magpie. The smaller man’s arms wrapped tightly around him, clinging fast like a Jim-sized bandage.

“Someone missed me,” he teased.

“More than I’m proud to admit.”

It used to be that the Irishman could withstand significant periods apart from his mate. Business often separated the two for extended lengths of time, and he managed just fine. Oh, how things had changed. Ever since expanding their family, Moriarty found that he had no tolerance for distance between them. He’d initially chalked it up to pregnancy hormones. Now, however, it was a bit more inexplicable—not to mention frustrating.

“You brought Ian along.” Seb then noticed the portable car seat he toted. “And Tilly’s here as well. What a sweet surprise.”

“She’s sweet, indeed,” agreed the teen. “I bet seeing Luke hauled in a minute ago was pretty surprising, too.”

“No kidding. What the hell happened?” He hesitated for a beat, his mind abuzz with terrible possibilities. “That scumbag didn’t come after either of you, did he?” The sniper flashed an intense scowl, feeling fiercely protective.

“Nooooo, darling,” Jim reassured. “It’s nothing like that. We enacted a plan to get you out of here, and as you may have gathered, it worked.”

“A plan? Do tell?”

“Since it was Ian’s idea, I think he ought to be the one to explain.”

“All right.” Seb shifted his focus to the younger man. “Fill me in.”

“It wasn’t any great scheme for the ages. I simply made a deal with Luke, stating that if he dropped the charges against you, I’d let him see Matilda.”
Moran’s expression sunk. “Oh no. Ian, you didn’t? Being in jail sucks, but my freedom shouldn’t come at your child’s expense.”

“Let him finish,” chided the genius. “Please, continue.”

“As I was saying, I made an offer and he accepted. There was, however, another aspect to the scenario which I omitted from him.”

Sebastian arched a brow, intrigued. “And what might that be?”

“That after your charges were cleared, I’d tell the police everything about him. Turn the tables and give them a real earful.”

“Holy shite,” the assassin exhaled. “You reported him? Well done. I’m sure it took a lot of courage.”

“Don’t congratulate me yet— I haven’t actually met with the detective. They had to call him in and will notify me when he arrives.”

“Even so, it’s commendable.”

“I suppose.” Ian’s tone was less than enthusiastic. “To be honest, I’m incredibly nervous. Jim’s going to sit with me while I issue my statement.”

Moran gave his husband’s hand a gentle squeeze. “That’s very kind of you, kitten.”

“It’s the least I can do. Nobody should have to go through this alone.”

“Certainly not.”

A brief silence settled over the trio as each of them ruminated on the events of the day. Change was on the horizon— they could feel it in their bones. But would it be for good or ill?

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Next up— Ian talks to the detective, Luke makes a phone call, and Sebastian busies himself with plans of his own.

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On a personal note, today my family and I suffered a tragic and unexpected loss. We’re all dealing with it as best we can, and writing is helping me muddle through. I’m glad I have an outlet like this to turn to.
To Tell the Truth

Chapter Summary

Ian tells all to a detective.

Chapter Notes

Sorry it took so long to finish this chapter. I've been really sick this week and it threw me for a loop. Still not quite over it, but doing better than before. Anyway, this is the lengthiest installment I've written in a while, so I hope that makes up for the delay.

WARNING: This chapter contains discussion/themes of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Reader discretion is advised.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“She truly is a treasure,” Sebastian declared as he held Ian’s newborn daughter, Matilda. The tiny bundle snoozed in his arms, her delicate auburn eyelashes fluttering while she lay immersed in a dream state.

Ian smiled warmly. “I’ve never loved anyone or anything as much as her,” he enthused. “She’s absolutely perfect.”

“I feel the same about my darlings,” commented Jim. “We’ve exceptional children all around.”

“We sure do.”

BZZ. BZZ.

The young man’s phone vibrated. He reached into his pocket and checked the device, his expression growing fretful.


CLICK.

“That was brief,” Moriarty observed. “The detective must be here?”

“Yeah. A constable will show us to his office.”
“Excellent. Tiger, you’ll watch the babies while we’re gone. I’m not certain how long this will take, but I’ve packed plenty of nappies in their tote bags. There’s also an assortment of plushies they can snuggle, and should you feel motivated to teach them something, I’ve included vocabulary flashcards as well.”

“At this rate, our cubs will have the entire Oxford dictionary in their heads by the time they reach nursery school.”

“You jest, but wouldn’t that be diviiiiine?” The genius reveled at the thought of raising junior savants. He could picture it so vividly—bonding with the twins through shared intellectual pursuit. Introducing them to maths, sciences, and language. Attending various museums and lectures together. Oh, the notion was marvelous.

Before Seb could reply, Jim and Ian’s escort had already arrived. Clearly, the authorities were treating the matter seriously, wanting to get a jump on the investigation. Moriarty considered that a good thing, however, his friend appeared anxious.

“You can do this,” the consulting criminal whispered.

“I hope so.”

“I know so.”

The teen nodded, bracing himself for what was to come. Though he feared it would likely be a hellish experience, at least he’d have ample moral support.

The trek to Detective Inspector Graham Wallace’s office was fairly short. Upon arrival, they were greeted in a pleasant manner, complete with handshakes and earnest introductions. This particular DI was a seasoned member of the police force who often handled violence against male omega cases, the cause being near and dear to his heart. Despite Ian’s initial apprehension, he was quickly put at ease by the man’s genuine desire to see justice done.

“How shall I begin?” asked the youth.

“Why don’t you tell me how you first met Luke? Explain the nature of your association.”

“Okay. I was going to university. I’d gotten a partial scholarship to study graphic design and it was an exciting period.”

“I bet. That’s a fine achievement.”

“Thank you. I took to the academic environment quite nicely. Got on well with my professors and classmates. It was great,” he recalled. “I worked full-time whilst going to school, so my day-to-day schedule was pretty booked up. Still, I wanted to have some fun like everyone else. Nothing too wild, just hang out with friends and blow off steam, you know?”

“Sure,” the detective said. “We all need to decompress every now and then.”

“Exactly. I’d heard about a pub near campus that a lot of students frequented—The Golden Anchor. Thought I might give it a try.” He hesitated for a moment, inwardly contemplating what a fateful decision it proved to be. “That’s where I met Luke. He was a bartender there…still is,
“I see.” Wallace jotted down the information as Ian went along. “What were your interactions like?”

“Honestly? It was flirtatious. He was handsome and older, and I couldn’t believe he’d taken an interest in me. I didn’t have much experience with men. I’d kissed a bloke once, but that was it. No boyfriends or anything.”

“So you were receptive to his attention?”

“Yes. I found it very flattering. When he asked me to go out with him, I jumped at the chance. We agreed to meet at a café.”

“This was a date, then?”

“Yeah…my first. I was nervous, but excited, too. I spent over an hour getting ready, trying to pick the perfect outfit. I even bought cologne to wear— another thing I hadn’t done before.”

“And how did your encounter go?”

“Wonderfully. Luke had me fooled into thinking he was a real gentleman. We talked a lot, and he acted like he was interested in more than just getting laid. I was hopeful things between us could develop further.” Ian paused, looking sheepishly at Wallace. “This probably sounds daft as hell, but I thought maybe he could be my partner.”

“That’s not daft at all,” the DI asserted. “First dates are often full of promise. There’s an element of newness and potential. A sense that anything’s possible.”

“You’re being kind,” he lamented. “I digress. I went out with him again a couple days later. He let me choose the location— a gesture which quite impressed me. I assumed I’d found an alpha who was progressive.” Ian quieted for a beat, embarrassed by his former naïveté. “Anyway, I suggested we visit a bowling alley close to where I lived. I didn’t own a car at the time, so I figured it would be easier to go someplace within walking distance.”

“On your second date, did his behavior towards you change?”

“No. Luke maintained the charade of being a decent guy. We bowled a few frames, grabbed dinner, and capped off the evening by making out behind my apartment building. Eventually, it got late and we said our goodbyes.”

The detective continued taking down notes. “When you were physically affectionate with him, did he pressure you or exhibit aggression?”

Ian shook his head. “No. Like I said, he kept a courteous guise. I had no idea what kind of monster I was dealing with.”

Jim silently stewed as he listened to his protégé’s account of events. He’d never pressed him for details on what happened with Luke. Hearing about it now made him hate the bastard even more. Ian had been clueless to his lecherous ways and believed that the scumbag was interested in a serious relationship. The level of manipulation and deceit on display was sickening.

“At what point did you begin to see cracks in his veneer?”

“Not long after that,” the young man somberly stated. “For our third— and final— date, I invited
him to my flat. Turned out to be the biggest mistake of my life.” He fell silent, glancing at Moriarty. The mastermind flashed him a reassuring look of support.

“Mr. Fitzgerald, I understand this is a difficult subject to broach, but for the purposes of the investigation, I need you to tell me what occurred when he came to your residence.”

“Right. I…well…I’m not sure where to start in describing the encounter.” For months, he’d sought to suppress the memory of his last date with Luke. Now he was being made to dredge up the ugly truth and it was harrowing as ever.

“Walk me through the events in the order they took place.”

“Okay.” He inhaled and exhaled deeply, collecting his thoughts. “I invited Luke to my flat with the idea of us spending a romantic evening together.”

“What do you mean by ‘romantic?’ Please, clarify your intent.”

“Intent?” Ian repeated, balking at the question. “You make it sound like I had some kind of hidden agenda. All I wanted was to hang out with a guy I cared about, even if it was foolhardy in hindsight.”

“I apologize if it seems I’m insinuating anything,” said Wallace. “I’m simply trying to establish the facts in a clear and concise manner.”

The teen heaved a wistful sigh. “Perhaps I’m being overly sensitive about this. I’ve never discussed the specifics at length.”

“You’re doing fine. If you need to take a break, we can.”

“No, I’d prefer to finish this in one go. Should we stop the interview, I fear I’d lose my nerve and not wish to continue.”

“Very well, we’ll push on.”

Ian nodded appreciatively. “As I was saying, I wanted to have an intimate night with Luke. I planned to cook us a special dinner, and then I figured we’d get cozy on the couch and stream movies.”

“How did it unfold once he arrived?”

“Initially, everything was great. The meal came out splendidly and I discovered that we had the same taste in films. As our date wore on, though, his actions took a turn I’d not anticipated.”

“How so?”

The young omega flushed. “There’s no delicate way to phrase this. He and I got rather hot and heavy. But at a certain point, I refused to go further. I wasn’t ready yet.”

“And he didn’t respect your decision?”

“Actually, he seemed all right at first. Then…” Ian trailed off, the memory flooding back to him in a terrible wave.

“Then what?”

“He asked if I wanted something to help me ‘loosen up’ and produced a small baggie from his
wallet containing pills. I demanded to know what they were. That’s when he informed me it was ketamine.”

*Ketamine.* Jim recalled Sebastian mentioning he’d found that particular drug—among others—while searching Luke’s apartment. *Must be the bastard’s modus operandi.*

The detective began scribbling in his notepad with more urgency than before. “How did you respond to the offer?” he prodded, his tone intense. This detail obviously held importance.

“I turned him down flat. I don’t use drugs and never have.”

“Did Luke accept your stance on the matter?”

“Yes, he said he occasionally liked to get high because it helped him relax, but if I wasn’t into it, that was okay. Like an idiot, I trusted his word.”

“He lied to you?”

“Oh yeah, big time,” Ian confirmed. “Shortly after our conversation, I excused myself to the loo. When I got back, I caught him dosing my drink.”

Moriarty snarled at the admission. “That worthless son of a bitch.” *I should’ve had Seb kill him. Would’ve solved so many problems.*

“Did you confront Luke about it?”

“I made an effort to, yes. The situation spiraled downhill quickly.”

An uneasy hush settled over the room as it was a foregone conclusion where the story was headed. Jim felt he’d heard enough, but stayed out of loyalty to his troubled friend. A promise was a promise, and he suspected Ian had endured too many broken ones during his lifetime already.

Both the constable and consulting criminal listened on as the youth continued to recount the events of that night…

“How could you?” shouted Ian, his expression despairing. *He was in tears, crying freely after Luke had stuck a metaphorical knife through his heart.*

“I don’t know why you’ve got your knickers in a twist. There’s no reason to make such a fuss.”

“No reason?!” he uttered incredulously. “I told you I didn’t want to take drugs, and yet here I find you spiking my drink!”

“Stop being so melodramatic. I was merely attempting to cure you of your ‘green eggs and ham’ complex.”

The teen tilted his head, bewildered. “My what?”

“Your fear of trying new things. You claim you’re not into getting high, but how do you know if you’ve never done it? Come down from your pedestal and give it a whirl. I think you’d be surprised.”

“That’s absolute bollocks! I needn’t be hit by a car or shoved off a cliff to know I wouldn’t like those things. An intelligent person doesn’t require firsthand experience to determine the obvious.”
Luke glared, his once-warm eyes now icy and steeped with contempt. “I’m unintelligent, huh?”

“I…I didn’t say that,” Ian nervously replied. “I just can’t believe you’d try to drug me.” His voice cracked, a wellspring of hurt and betrayal bubbling to the surface.


“Wait a minute, that’s not fair. I—”


Ian backed away, more distraught than ever. He’d gravely misjudged his suitor. The person standing in front of him may as well have been a stranger.

“Get out,” he spoke, barely above a whisper.

“Excuse me?”

“Leave my flat.”

Luke ignored the request and stepped forward, closing the distance between them.

“G-go,” the young man stammered, desperate to be elsewhere at that moment. “I can’t trust you. We’re done.” His words were drawn out slowly, as if they pained him somehow.

“I thought we had a decent thing going, but if that’s what you want, so be it.”

“It’s for the best.”

“Yeah.” The rogue alpha cast an eerie gaze Ian’s way. “I’m not going anywhere, though, until I get what I’m owed.”

“Owed? What are you talking about?”

“Oh, I think you know.”

“N-no. No, I don’t.” He wasn’t sure what the older man was getting at, but sensed it couldn’t be good. His suspicions were soon confirmed.

Luke pinned the trembling teen against the wall, kissing him roughly. “I’ve busted my arse treating you like a prince. Well, enough of that rubbish. If this is the last time we’re going to meet, I’ll make damn sure it counts for something.”

“Back off!” Ian squirmed, but could not shake his date’s iron grip.

“Do me a favor and shut your mouth. How am I supposed to enjoy myself while you’re whining?”

“Stop it! Let me go!” He was truly panicked now, struggling as the man trailed a hand down his body.

“For fuck’s sake, why bother to fight this? It’s happening— accept it.”
“No!”

“Yes.”

*From the corner of his eye, Ian saw that he’d left the window open. If he yelled loud enough, maybe a concerned neighbor or passerby would hear him and intervene.*

“Help! Someone, please help! I’m in apartment #2—”

*BAM.*

A clenched fist suddenly connected with his face and he was sent crashing to the hardwood floor. Disoriented, there was no time to get away. Before he could properly gather his bearings, Luke descended upon him.

“Afterward, he left without saying a word.”

“Bloody hell,” muttered Moriarty. The genius was chilled by his protégé’s tale.

“And you never reported it to the authorities?” inquired Detective Inspector Wallace.

“No, I was too scared. I’d hoped to put it all behind me and sever ties with Luke. But…then I learned I was pregnant, and some mutual acquaintances of ours saw me and told him about my condition.”

“With friends like that, who needs enemies?” Jim quipped. They’d certainly not done him any favors.

“Indeed,” agreed the DI. “What was his reaction to the news?”

“He came to my flat and forced his way inside. The bastard insisted he’d be a part of my baby’s life. Gave me a black eye in the process, and only left when I threatened to call the cops.”

“I stepped in to provide assistance at that point,” the mastermind noted. “Moved him to another location where I thought Luke wouldn’t find him.”

The young man nodded. “That’s right. Jim’s been a solid friend to me from the start.”

“It’s good you had someone to lean on during a tough time.” The officer paused and directed his attention to Moriarty. “You said you ‘thought’ Luke wouldn’t find Mr. Fitzgerald. Is that to say he eventually discovered his new residence?”

“Unfortunately, yes. That’s the problem with vermin—they always find a way to crawl back in.”

“Things escalated from there,” added Ian. “He started stalking me in public places and sending disturbing messages in the mail. I actually have pictures of the correspondences saved to my phone, if you’d care to see them.”

“I’d like to review whatever evidence you’ve got. Did you retain the original versions as well?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Excellent. I’ll want you to furnish those documents to the MPD as soon as possible. In the meantime, show me the photos.”
Ian accessed his mobile device and pulled up the pertinent files. “Here they are,” he declared, passing the phone over.

The detective studied the images carefully. “These do appear to share the same handwriting. I’ll order an analysis to confirm it once we receive the hardcopies.”

“Of course. I know you’ve got to be official and all, but I don’t need a special test to tell me they’re from him.”

“I’ll bet not. Has he made any more violent overtures towards you following the altercation at your previous home?”

“No, thank god. The stalking and threats have been unnerving in their own right, though. I’m grateful Jim supplied me with bodyguards. I live alone and the extra security is comforting.”

“Glad you’ve found a bit of respite, I just wish you’d contacted the PD sooner.”

“Better late than never.”

“Aye, that’s true. You’re very brave to come forward.”

“Thank you, sir.”

At that, DI Wallace turned to review an item on his desktop computer. “Mr. Fitzgerald, there’s another matter I’d like to ask you about.”

“Go ahead.” He and Moriarty exchanged a glance, both curious as to what was on the detective’s mind.

“When we ran your name through our database, it showed that you’d registered a vehicular vandalism complaint several months ago. The perpetrator was never apprehended, and the case remains open, classified as a hate crime due to the incendiary language used in the graffiti.”

“Yes, what of it?”

“Well, I’m wondering if the incident might be connected to your stalking situation.”

The young man furrowed a brow. “I…I don’t believe so.”

_Fuck_, thought Jim. Another set of foes were responsible for that endeavor: Colin and Annie. The last thing he needed was to have the Metro PD sniffing around his private affairs.

“Based on your description of Luke’s biased opinions against male omegas, I’m not sure we can rule it out,” stated the officer. “Additionally, our records also list you as being among the victims of a swatting hoax that took place at a local community center earlier this year. It was never determined who initiated the false report leading to the raid. Again, I must speculate as to whether or not your stalker had a hand in the events.”

_More mayhem caused by those maniacs._ This was getting precarious. If the police dug too deep while trying to link the crimes together, what might they inadvertently dredge up? Moriarty did _not_ want that Pandora’s box pried open.

“I really think it was coincidental,” claimed Ian. The youth knew who was truly behind those misdeeds and sought to avoid the cases overlapping. Today’s testimony was meant to focus solely on Luke.
“Perhaps. Still, we’d be wise to consider all possibilities.”

“Right.” He nodded politely, mindful not to arouse suspicion.

The questions began to wind down and it seemed the interview itself would soon conclude. Before the omegas parted ways, however, Jim had one final comment.

“Detective, may I offer a suggestion?”

“Most assuredly.”

“I recommend you get a warrant to search Luke’s flat. If he’s keen on dosing others, I wager he must keep a stash on hand.”

DI Wallace looked at the genius contemplatively. “I was thinking the same. I’m rather hung up on that detail, in fact. It could be relevant to a larger case.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah. For the past few years, I’ve observed an uptick in drug-related sexual assaults among the city’s male omega community. A number of those victims were administered ketamine, and I’ve often hypothesized it was the work of a lone individual.”

Moriarty and his friend appeared equally aghast.

“Are you saying Luke…” the teen stopped, too shocked by the revelation to finish his sentence.

“He may be a person of interest. Further investigation will show if there’s a credible link.”

The conversation temporarily ground to a halt as they processed the disturbing information. Ian, in particular, was reeling from the news. Could his child’s biological father be an even bigger monster than he realized? He’d not imagined it possible, but in light of this bombshell, who knew?

“I…I need to go,” the young man declared. “I’ve got to see Tilly. She’s barely a day old and shouldn’t be separated from me for too long.”

“I understand,” said the constable. “We’re basically done here, unless you have any questions you’d like me to answer.”

“No, sir. I’ve heard enough. This meeting has been quite illuminating.”

“Indeed. Thanks for coming and making an official statement. I promise I’ll do everything I can to nail this son of a bitch. I intend to file a motion for a search warrant before the day’s out.”

“Good. He deserves to fucking rot.”

“And then some,” muttered the mastermind.

Jim and Ian exited the Detective Inspector’s office, both of them emotionally drained by the proceedings. The worst seemed to be over for now and they could attempt to enjoy the remaining afternoon. A warm meal and quality time spent with their respective loved ones was on the horizon, and not a moment too soon.
I originally intended for this chapter to have scenes showing what Sebastian and Luke were doing, respectively, while the interview took place. However, as the writing progressed, it didn't feel right to split up the narrative focus. So next chapter, I'll rewind a little bit and present what was happening concurrently.
To Tell the Truth – Part 1.5: Dueling Communiqué

Chapter Summary

We see what Sebastian and Luke were up to while Jim and Ian met with the detective.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Lav-in-dur,” Sebastian spoke, sounding out the word phonetically as he read off a flashcard. He flipped it over to reveal a color swatch representing the shade. “Here’s what it looks like, kiddos.”

The twins stared serenely at their Papa, adorable but clueless as to what was actually being taught.

“Yeah, I wouldn’t get too excited about that one either,” he remarked. “Let’s see what else Daddy included.”

Seb reviewed the remaining selection. It didn’t take long to identify a distinct theme.


“Bloody hell, these are all colors…and not even the normal variety.” Truthfully, he wasn’t entirely sure what some of them were without checking the swatches.

*Why would Jim want to teach them these?* Was a traditional color palette too ordinary for his taste? Knowing the Irishman’s eccentricity, it was possible.

“I think we’re done with today’s vocabulary lesson,” he declared. “Between you and me, darlings, your Daddy’s been making inexplicable decisions for years. We’ll just add this on to the pile.”

Essie babbled in reply…or at least she started to. Midway through, it turned into a yawn.

The sniper smiled warmly at his little girl. “Tuckered out, are we? I guess it’s exhausting to be so cute.” He then noticed Eddie blinking sleepily as well. It seemed they were both in need of a nap.

“Hmm.” Sebastian began searching the babies’ tote bags, only stopping after he’d pulled out their favorite plushies—a llama and ‘Hello Kitty,’ respectively. “Here you go, my dears. Something to snuggle whilst you snooze.” He placed the stuffed dolls in his children’s arms and gave each of them a peck on the cheek. For good measure, Moran checked on Tilly, too. She appeared to be doing fine.

With all three infants at rest, he could now devote himself to a new endeavor: organizing Jim’s
upcoming birthday celebration. Last year, the event went woefully unrecognized as he and his mate were busy contending with drama at every turn. He’d not allow the occasion to be neglected again.

And oh, did Seb have ideas. While in lockup overnight, the assassin had been desperate for a distraction. Anything to get his mind off the fact that he was separated from his family. Party planning proved excellent in that regard. The hours hastened when there was a goal to focus on, his time made more meaningful than if he’d simply sat around stewing.

“Let’s do this,” Moran whispered. He proceeded to whip out his phone and dial a number.

It was ringing, and ringing, and—

“How are you calling me? I heard you were detained in police custody.”

“I was. The charges have been dropped.”

“Really? That’s marvelous! Jim must be thrilled.”

“We’re all very thankful for it, yes.”

“I felt absolutely sick about what happened. I’m sorry my husband refused to help. I tried to convince him to pull certain strings, but he’s so damned obstinate sometimes.”

“I appreciate the thought. Right now, I’d like to discuss something with you, if you’ve got a moment to spare.”

“As luck would have it, I do,” the eager omega replied. “I’m at the aquarium with Gary and our boys, and he just took them to visit a sea lion exhibit whilst I popped off to the loo. They won’t expect me back for a few minutes.”

“Good. I can’t chat long either, but I wanted to touch base.”

“Well, go on. You’ve got me on the edge of my seat.”

“Here’s the situation,” he began, “Jim’s birthday is rapidly approaching and I intend to throw him a surprise party.”

“A party?” Jack exclaimed. “Count me in for sure.”

“Glad to hear your enthusiasm, because I’m seeking assistance in the planning department.”

“Say no more. Whatever you require, I can provide. Staging events is a passion of mine.”

“I know, that’s why you’re my first contact.”

“I am? Oh, how flattering.” He sounded genuinely moved by the admission. “But enough of my prattling. Please, give me a quick rundown of your ideas.”

“Okay. For starters, I envision it as a costumed affair. I think Jim would enjoy the whimsy.”
“No doubt about it,” Norridge affirmed. “Costumed festivities are great fun. I’ll never forget when Gary arranged for us to attend the Met Gala as part of our honeymoon extravaganza.”

“The Met Gala? Wow.”

“Wow, indeed. We flew out to New York and had stylists brought to our hotel suite. He and I made quite a striking pair, dressed to the nines in white-tie couture. It was among the most spectacular nights of my life.”

“To be honest, I wasn’t thinking of anything that fancy. I have a notion to dress the twins as ‘Pebbles’ and ‘Bamm-Bamm,’ if that gives you an indication of what I’m going for.”

Jack chuckled at the announcement. “I suppose you’d be ‘Fred,’ then? To complete the theme and all.”

“Actually, I figured ‘Barney’ would be a better fit since he’s blonde.”

Uproarious laughter erupted on the line, reaching a fevered pitch as Norridge grew short of breath.

“I didn’t realize my concept was so risible. Guess it’s back to the drawing board,” lamented Moran.

“Oh, no, Seb— please don’t take this the wrong way. I’m not laughing at you, I swear.”

“Sure sounds like you are.”

“It’s the whole ‘Flintstones’ motif I find humorous. I’m certain you’d look smashing in a fur frock, to say nothing of how sweet the babies would be in their outfits.”

“And the hair,” Sebastian asserted. “Imagine Essie with a ‘Pebbles’ ponytail. Jim would love seeing her like that.”

“Then you should definitely do it.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Now I just need to brainstorm what the boys and I will wear.”

“Right. Speaking of your kids, care to hear more of my ideas before your family starts wondering if you fell into the loo?”

“Hardy-har-har,” Jack sarcastically intoned. “Yes, of course. Dare I inquire as to the catering and location?”

“Both fine questions. In terms of dining, Jim does have distinguished tastes. However, I believe we’ll be able to strike a balance between gourmet and traditional cuisine. We can serve chi-chi hors d’oeuvres alongside more recognizable fare. Maybe jazz up classic dishes to give them an urbane sensibility. The most important part of the menu, though, is undoubtedly dessert. My husband ought to have a thoroughly delectable cake to mark the occasion.”

“The trouble will be finding a pastry chef who’s as good at baking as Jim himself.”

“I know. His standards are already impossibly high. I’ll have to do some research before making a selection.”

“Or you could let me handle the task. I am assisting you, after all.”
“You’d do that? Thanks, Jack.”

“Any time,” he kindly replied. “Now what’s your preferred venue for this soiree?”

“I’ve not yet decided. Leaning towards a private place. Public locales pose too great a security risk.”

“Fair point.” The man paused, a prospect dawning on him. “Why don’t we host it at my house? There’s more than enough space. Plus, if we threw the party there, decorations could be set up without raising suspicion.”

“True.” Jim was smart as a whip— he’d realize something was going on right away if the festivities were staged in their home. But then again, holding it at Norridge’s estate might open another can of worms altogether.

“Why does it sound like you’re hesitating? My house would be the perfect spot.”

“You know why. Don’t make me say it.”

An awkward silence fell over the men, neither wanting to address the elephant in the room. Finally, Jack spoke up.

“You’re worried about how Gary will react.”

“Yes, and frankly, I’m surprised it doesn’t concern you, too.”

“Why should it bother me, huh?” he asked, agitated. “Jim’s my friend. In case you weren’t aware, I’m allowed to have those. This isn’t the dark ages, where I’m expected to ‘behave’ like a good little omega and only spend time with those of whom my alpha approves. I’m fully capable of exerting my own agency.”

“Whoa, wait a second. I didn’t mean to suggest otherwise. Of course you’re entitled to the friends of your choosing. No one’s denying that. I just don’t want to cause further friction in your marriage.”

“If Gary has a problem with it, too bad. I’ve never let a bloke dictate my life and I’m not about to start now.”

“Duly noted.” Suddenly, Seb understood why his husband had hit it off so well with Jack. At their core, they both possessed fiery personalities and refused to be limited by anyone or anything. They were, in a sense, kindred spirits.

Norridge sighed. “Look, I’m sorry if I seem a bit edgy. This is a tough subject for me. I hate the way some people treat omegas…hate the arcane notions they try to impose on us. It isn’t right.”

“No, it’s not,” agreed Moran. “For the record, you’d be hard-pressed to find a guy more progressive than me.”

“I’m sure that’s true,” he said, his tone softening. “Jim’s always spoken very highly of you. Again, please accept my apologies.”

“There’s no need, but okay.”

“On that note, I should catch up with my brood. Let’s sit down and formally discuss the plans soon.”
“Sounds good. Shoot me a text when you’re available.”

“Sure thing. Take care.”

CLICK.

Seb checked the time on his mobile device before tucking it away.

_Wonder how the interview’s going?_ he thought, referring to Ian’s meeting with the detective. He hoped there was enough probable cause to keep Luke behind bars indefinitely. If not, well…there were other forms of justice he was willing to enforce. One way or another, retribution would be served.

*********

“Lucas Darrow? Come with me.”

A guard escorted him from his holding cell to a small, barebones office. The constable then quickly recited the ground rules.

“Here’s how this works. You’re permitted one phone call, which shall not exceed 5 minutes in length. Should you run over time, the communication will be automatically disconnected. Is that clear?”

“As crystal, thanks.”

“All right, I’ll leave you to it.”

The man left the room to give Luke a bit of privacy. He shut the door, but remained standing outside to maintain some amount of security.

Darrow placed his call and silently prayed that the recipient would pick up.

“Hello?”

“Thank god you answered,” he declared with relief. “Annie, it’s me. I could really use some help.”

“Luke? I almost let this call go to voicemail. I didn’t recognize the number.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not contacting you from my usual mobile. I’m in jail.”

“Bloody hell. What happened?”

“Ian decided to double-cross me and spill his guts to the police. He’s probably talking to a copper right now.”

“That can’t be good.”

“To say the fucking least. Which is why I need your help.” The line went quiet as he awaited a response. “Did you hear me? I’m not allotted much time to chat, so we’ve gotta hammer this out fast.”

“I heard you, I just don’t know what you expect me to do. The issues between you and Ian aren’t my business.”

“Business?” he seethed through gritted teeth. “It sure as shite is your fucking business!” He paused for a moment, lowering his voice to a whisper, lest the guard outside grow suspicious. “Listen, bitch. When you recruited me, it was under the proviso that we’d help each other. So far, I’ve done my fair share to aid you and have gotten bugger all in return. That ends now. You’re going to get me the fuck out of here.”

“How do you propose I pull off such a feat, huh?”

“I’ve no idea, but you’d better think of something. Colin told me you helped spring him from the nuthouse. If you could manage that, you can do the same for me.”

She snorted. “Seems he conveniently forgot to mention the fact that I didn’t orchestrate his escape. Yes, I drove the getaway car, but he plotted the rest out with that weirdo nursing assistant we live with.”

“Then they can devise a plan for me, too.”

“You say that like it’s so simple. Like I could compel Colin to do anything. Newsflash, you fool—he isn’t going to give a toss about your problems.”

“Oh no?”

“Certainly not. His top priority is himself.”

“In that case, he might comply quite readily to my request,” Luke asserted.

“How do you figure?”

“Well, it’s like this—if I have to stay locked up, Ian won’t be the only one with loose lips.”

“Excuse me?” Annie huffed, taken aback by the threat.

“I’ve got plenty I could say to the police. All sorts of juicy tidbits about the two of you.”

“You wouldn’t.”

“Wanna bet?”

“Think this through. You’ve been complicit to our actions for months. If we go down, so do you.”

He chuckled darkly. “I’m phoning from jail, remember? It’s already too late for me.”

“Luke, come on. This is insane. You’re acting like you’re going to be sent away forever. Isn’t that jumping the gun a bit? For all you know, the police might not even believe Ian’s claims. You could be working yourself up for nothing.”

“There’s more to it than you realize,” he ominously informed. “Once the authorities get me where they want me, it’s just a matter of time until the dominoes start to fall.”

“Dominoes? What are you talking about?” Annie’s inquiry was met with an eerie silence. “Luke, what’s going on?”

“Never mind.” His tone grew sharp, and he continued, “You tell Colin that if I don’t get out of here, the entire Metro PD will be beating down his door.”

“You’re serious,” she spoke, genuinely surprised he’d take such extreme measures.
“I am. This isn’t a bluff. Desperate men do desperate things, and right now I’m out of options.”

Annie sighed in exasperation. “Fine, I’ll discuss the situation with Colin. But he may not react the way you’re hoping for.”

“I’ll take my chances.”

“Good luck—you’ll need it.”

“We’ll see.” He paused, a grim look set upon his face. “I think we’re done. I’ve got nothing else to say.”

“Likewise.”

CLICK.

At that, their conversation came to an end. Now the ball was in Colin and Annie’s court. He knew he was taking a gamble, but what choice did he have? Luke refused to spend the rest of his days in prison, punished for committing offenses he didn’t consider to be crimes at all. In his warped and outdated worldview, he felt justified in doing whatever he wanted to an omega. Very few people held that belief nowadays, but a handful of rogue alphas kept the hideous notion alive.

CREEEEAK.

The office door abruptly swung open.

“Time’s up, Darrow.”

Luke made no protest as the guard led him back to his holding cell. For the moment, he’d play it cool and try not to draw attention to himself. Maintaining a low profile would, after all, be pivotal to staging an escape.

*********

Sebastian was sitting in the police station lobby, using his phone to search for costume rental shops, when Jim and Ian entered the room. He hastily shoved the device in his pocket, careful not to reveal what he was up to.

“How’d it go?” the sly assassin asked.

“It was…illuminating,” muttered Moriarty.

“Yeah,” the younger man agreed. “A real game changer, you might say.”

Moran frowned, noticing that both of them appeared visibly shaken. “What’s the matter? Didn’t the detective believe you?”

“Oh, he believed me, and with good reason. It looks like I may not be the first person Luke’s aggrieved, if you catch my drift.”

“Wait, you mean—”

“He’s an even bigger monster than I ever could’ve imagined. I sure know how to pick ‘em, aye?”

“Ian, don’t be so hard on yourself.”
“Why not? I was a bloody idiot for trusting that son of a bitch.”

“Hey,” Jim swiftly interjected, “stop right there. You’ve done absolutely nothing wrong. Luke is despicable, through and through. He targeted you with ill intentions. There’s no way you could’ve known his true agenda.”

The teen grew quiet, holding back tears. When he spoke again, his voice denoted much distress. “I should’ve been able to figure it out. Should’ve been smarter…savvier…less starry-eyed.” He took a deep, tremulous breath. “I need to focus on something else. Please, give me Matilda.”

Seb nodded. “Yes, of course.” The sniper handed over the newborn, who was still situated in a car seat carrier. “She’s behaved exceptionally well. No fuss from this little one.”

Ian mustered a tiny smile. “That’s my girl.” He gazed at the infant, and soon she began to stir. Swaddled snugly, she blinked several times and let out a gentle coo.

“Your daughter’s divine,” complimented Jim.

“Thank you. It’s amazing how the mere sight of her can improve my mood.”

“I understand completely.” The consulting criminal looked to the stroller where his own babes were resting. Essie and Eddie hugged stuffed dollies while they slept, grunting and babbling intermittently.

“We ought to get back to the hospital,” Ian remarked. “This business with the detective took longer than anticipated, and I don’t want to miss Tilly’s scheduled feeding.”

“Right. I think we could all use some sustenance.” He turned to Sebastian. “Sebby, I’ve got a chef on standby at an excellent restaurant not far from St. Bart’s. I’ll place a takeout order and have you bring it to Ian’s room.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Now let’s shake a leg. The rain has finally stopped and we’ve got the rest of the afternoon ahead of us.”

Without further ado, the group exited police headquarters. Today had been among the most grueling in recent memory, inspiring mixed emotions across the board. For the time being, they would try to accentuate the positive rather than dwell on the negative. Moran was free, Luke was locked up, and their respective children were happy and healthy— all things worth celebrating.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first serious attempt at fanfiction. Please keep an open mind and be kind.
Planning & Preoccupation

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian engage in some amorous activities and discuss the future. Meanwhile, Colin and Annie argue following the news of Luke’s ultimatum.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains explicit M/M slash. It also contains a scene of physical/domestic violence. Reader discretion is advised.

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My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Ahhhh.”

“Ooooh.”

“Yessss.”

A series of breathy moans escaped Jim and Sebastian’s lips as the nimble genius rode his spouse with remarkable vigor. They’d been going at it for the better part of an hour and were rapidly approaching their respective peaks.

“Magpie,” the virile assassin called out. He gripped his mate’s hips and thrusted upwards, finding his release deep inside him.

Soon, Jim too succumbed to the height of passion, spilling his seed on Seb’s chest. After taking a moment to wind down, he peeled off his partner and grabbed a soft towel from their bedside. He used it to gently wipe him clean before nestling close and stealing a quick kiss.

“That was diviiiiiiine.”

“You’re the shag of a lifetime, kitten.”

The Irishman flashed a cheeky grin. “I aim to please…or is it ‘to be pleased?’ Hmm. Either way, I do my best.”

“You’ll get no argument from me.”

“I should hope not.”
Moran wrapped an arm around Jim’s shoulder, thoroughly enjoying the feel of his beloved’s body snuggled against him. “It’s always fantastic with you.”

“I could say the same.” He relaxed in the sniper’s embrace, flushed and mussed, but beaming nonetheless.

“You have such a beautiful smile.”

“Thank you. Some ample inspiration helped bring it out.”

“Is that so?” Seb prodded with a roguish smirk.

“Honey, you know it.”

“I do.”

They kissed again, longer this time, and Jim hummed in contentment. “Love you, Tiger.”

“Love you, too.” The former colonel reached for his mate’s hand, twining their fingers together.

“I’m very glad to be home.”

“That makes two of us. I’m embarrassed to admit how much I missed you.”

“Don’t be. There’s no shame in it.”

“Maybe not for you,” he lamented. “I used to scoff at those who let their emotions run wild. Now look at me. I couldn’t even bear to sleep in our bed without you.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. I stayed in the nursery last night.”

“But there’s no mattress in there.”

“I’m well aware. I camped out on the floor.”

“The floor? Good heavens, this is serious,” Sebastian teased.

“Hush, it’s no joke. I kept thinking about you being confined to some dingy cage like an animal, whilst I sat at home in the lap of luxury. It was a troubling notion.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make light of your upset.”

“It’s all right. I wouldn’t exactly call it my finest moment,” he conceded. “Though it was nice being near the babies. They missed you terribly.”

“At their age, how can you tell?”

“Intuition, I suppose. A mother just knows these things.”

“Naturally.” He paused, realizing this was an ideal segue. “Hey, Jimmy?”

“Yeah?”

“Speaking of our cubs, there’s something I wanted to ask you about.”

“What’s that?”
“Whilst I was watching them today, I noticed the vocabulary cards you’d packed were a bit odd.”

Moriarty’s face crinkled in confusion. “Odd? How so?”

“They were nothing but colors—and an unusual variety, at that.”

“Noooo, the flashcards I composed were an assortment of simple, three-letter words.”

Now Seb was stymied. “I’m telling you the truth. I didn’t even recognize a few of the shades. I had to check the examples on the back.”

In an instant, Jim knew what was going on—and he promptly burst out laughing. “My sweet, silly Seb. Those weren’t vocab cards.”

He arched a brow. “No?”

“Nope. They’re color swatches I picked up from the hardware store the other day. I stuck them in a diaper bag for temporary safekeeping.”

“Oh.” Somehow the explanation made sense, yet raised more questions than it answered. “What do you need swatches for?”

“Well, I’m toying with the idea of building onto our home.”

“You are?” he asked, surprised by the revelation.

“Yes. Specifically, I’m thinking of adding an additional kitchen space.”

“Um, darling? We’ve already got a kitchen and it’s quite state-of-the-art.”

“Duh, of course we do. I helped decorate it.”

“Then may I inquire as to why you want a new one?”

“Certainly,” the Irishman obliged, eager to share his concept. “Our current facilities are acceptable for a private household, but I was envisioning something on a more professional scale.”

“Professional?”

“Yeah, like the setup an actual bakery would have.”

“Ah, I see. Shall I take this to mean that my services as a taste tester will be required?”

“Perhaps. Quality control is crucial to any food-based business.”

Professional. Actual bakery. Business. Seb considered his spouse’s choice of words.

“Kitten, what’ve you got up your sleeve?”

“Absolutely nothing,” he playfully replied. “As you can see, I possess no sleeves at all.”

The sniper chuckled. “Indeed not. But honestly, are you planning to embark on a new endeavor?”

“I might be. People seem to like eating my desserts as much as I enjoy creating them.”

“So you want to try baking as a career?”
“Once I’ve officially retired from crime, yes, I do. And it’s catering,” he corrected. “I’ve no intention of opening my own storefront. This would be a commercial-grade kitchen where I’d prepare pastries for groups.”

“Sounds like you’ve put a lot of thought into the matter.”

“I have. It’s also worth noting that by working from home, I could tend to our poppets whilst on the job. Their welfare is of utmost importance to me.”

“I know, hon. You’re a good mum.”

“Thanks. You’re a good Papa, too.”

Moran gave his partner’s hand a gentle squeeze. “We’re in this together, my dear.”

The mastermind let out a telltale trill of omega delight. “Sorry,” he said, coyly biting his bottom lip. Such sounds used to be an occasional occurrence, but now happened with increasing regularity.

Sebastian gazed at his mate, totally and utterly enamored. “I’ve told you before— never apologize for your happiness. Someday, I hope to hear those noises on a daily basis.”

“Tiger,” he balked, “don’t even kid about that sort of thing.”

“Who’s kidding? It would be a dream come true to give you a life filled with bliss.”

“Oh darling, you do. You and the babies bring me more joy than I ever thought possible. I know we’ve been through hell this year, but that doesn’t cancel out all the wonderful moments we’ve shared.”

A sexy, sharky smile eclipsed the assassin’s face, and Jim’s breathing hitched at the sight of it. He was the only one who could make him weak in the knees with a single look.

Seb’s mouth met Moriarty’s, claiming and intense. So forceful was the alpha, they inadvertently rolled over. He now hovered atop his husband, pinning him with every inch of his broad, sinewy body.

Jim quivered, quickly growing aroused. The evidence of his excitement could be felt pressing against Sebastian’s hip.

“Turned on again already, Magpie?”

“When you kiss me like that, you’re damn right I am.” He writhed in wanton display, eliciting a lusty growl from his beloved.

Moran’s sizeable length soon stirred anew. But how? Following climax, a 5-10 minute cooldown period was usually necessary to regain proper blood flow. The only time that differed was when—

“Ooh, I do believe you’ve caught up to speed,” purred the genius. “Let’s put it to good use.”

Any and all thoughts immediately left Seb’s head as his spouse bucked beneath him, their cocks grinding together with abandon. Jim was in rare form, his libidinous mood too potent to resist. At this rate, they’d surely be busy the whole night through. That was A-OK with Moran.

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KNOCK. KNOCK.
“Come in.”

Annie entered the bedroom Colin shared with nursing assistant Katherine Ramsey. Their ‘landlady’ was currently out running errands, providing a chance to speak to him alone.

“What brings you ‘round?” he asked. The man was relaxing in an armchair while drinking bourbon and reading a book.

“We need to chat, ASAP.”

Colin closed his manuscript and stared her in the eye. “What have you done, Annelise?”

“Nothing. Thanks for assuming the worst about me, though. I’m really feeling the love,” she quipped.

“Spare me your commentary and explain what’s going on.”

“Fine,” Annie huffed. “There’s no positive way to spin this, so I’ll be blunt. Luke was detained by the police on account of his crimes against Ian. I think there’s more to it than that, but he wouldn’t elaborate much. In any case, he’s convinced he’ll end up doing hard time.”

The man shrugged. “Tough luck.”

“Yeah, for him and us both. He made it clear, under no uncertain terms, that if we don’t spring him from jail, he’ll rat us out to the cops.”

An eerie silence fell over them and Colin’s expression grew dark as sin. When he rose to his feet, Annie instinctively stepped backwards. The gesture was futile. He closed in on her, the back of his hand connecting with her cheek.

SMACK.

The sound reverberated through the room and Annie was knocked down.

Clenching the reddened, stinging side of her face, she glared at him. “What the hell was that for?”

“You did this!” he roared, fury raging through him like a storm. “Went behind my back and invited some random twat to stick his nose where it didn’t belong! Now we’re screwed because of your mistake.”

Indignant, she stood up, wary of Colin’s temper but refusing to accept the blame. “I didn’t recruit just anyone. Luke hates Moran and so do we. Our goals were aligned. But more importantly, we needed the extra help.”

“Whose fault was that, aye? Perhaps if you’d been competent, we wouldn’t have required additional assistance.”

Annie shook with anger at the accusation. “I worked day-in and day-out to execute our plan. Pulled off a long con that was damn near award-worthy. And what did you do? Pissed it all away.”

The look Colin flashed in response was absolutely murderous. “Annelise, unless you’re actively seeking a broken jaw, I suggest you shut the fuck up.”

“No, you’ll bloody well listen to this. I’ve held my tongue for ages,” she announced, suddenly feeling emboldened, as if an emotional dam had burst. “Months ago, Seb’s omega was right there in your basement, sick and pregnant and ready to be utilized as a primary means of revenge. The
opportunity was practically gift-wrapped with a big, shiny bow on top. And yet, somehow you managed to drop the ball in such a colossal fashion, he got rescued while you were arrested. I had to salvage whatever I could so that our actions up to that point wouldn’t be considered a total loss.”

He gaped at her, incredulous. “Are you fucking kidding me? I made a few errors, no doubt. But in terms of ‘salvaging’ the situation, you hardly swooped in to save the day. As I recall, your blunders led to Moran discovering your true identity and our association.”

“Oh, sod off! At least I fucking tried. I’ve put everything into helping you— have placed our agenda above all else, even to my own detriment.” She paused, the fire inside her burning out as she spoke. “I’m tired, Colin. Tired and wrecked. I’ve done a lot of hideous shite, and frankly, I’m approaching my limit.”

The pair stared at each other, tensions between them strained. What could be said in the wake of Annie’s pronouncement? What did it mean for the future?

Their confrontation was cut short by the sound of Katherine returning home. The front door opened and closed with a thump, followed by footsteps coming up the stairs.

“This isn’t over,” Colin hastily warned. “You’re going to pull yourself together and we’ll regroup later. Understood?”

“Yeah.” Despite her weariness, Annie knew they’d have to devise some course of action regarding Luke.

It wasn’t long before the lazy-eyed medical worker strode in, smiling merrily and carrying a shopping bag. She gravitated towards Colin, ignoring his female cohort completely.

“Hey, Katie. You look like you’re in a good mood.” He attempted to be as charming as possible, mindful not to let on that there was any conflict afoot.

“I sure am,” she confirmed. “Check out what I got.” The woman retrieved a package from her bag. It was a 3,000 piece jigsaw puzzle depicting a panoramic view of the Grand Canyon.

“Wow. That’s…uh…big.”

“I thought we could assemble it together.”

“I’d love to,” he lied.

“Splendid. I’ll make us some popcorn and we can work on it in the kitchen— that’s the largest table in the house.”

“I can’t wait.”

“Me either. See you downstairs.” At that, she proceeded on her way.

Once Katherine was out of earshot, Annie couldn’t resist tossing a barb in Colin’s direction. “Guess you’re set to have a ripping good time tonight. Puzzles and popcorn— truly the earmarks of a hot date.”

He scowled. “Mind your own damn business.”

“Why so defensive? You don’t actually have feelings for that cow, do you?” she mockingly inquired.
“Hell no. But I’m grateful for her hospitality. If I continue to play nice, Katie will let us stay here indefinitely. You’d be wise to make an effort as well.”

“Think I’ll pass, thanks.”

The aroma of freshly popped kernels soon billowed through the house as their ‘hostess’ began preparing for the evening.

“I’ve got to go,” declared Colin. “Remember, we’re not finished talking things through. We’ll meet again and decide what to do about Luke.”

“I don’t see how that’s possible now. Obviously, you’ll be preoccupied for the next several hours.”

“At some point, I’ll send Katie on another errand.”

“Fair enough. Have fun, handsome.”

Annie’s sarcasm earned further scorn from her collaborator, but she didn’t much care. Caring required energy, a resource she was sorely lacking at the moment.

The young woman retreated to her room and did what she found herself doing often these days—viewing old family photos saved on her phone. Technology allowed Annie to glimpse upon a time when the de Graafs were hale, hearty, and whole. More to the point, they were happy…happy in a way she’d not appreciated until it was far too late.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, folks. Sorry it took so long to get this posted. Sometimes real-life stuff gets in the way of my ideal schedule. Hope you all understand.

Next chapter sneak peek: Sebastian and Jack will formalize plans for Jim's surprise costume birthday party. Meanwhile, Colin and Annie will plot out the Luke situation, and maybe a few other things as well. Stay tuned.

P.S. -- In case anyone is interested, I've been making MorMor graphics for my Tumblr page. If you're curious, here's the link: https://winter-steele.tumblr.com/
Top Secret – A Mission of Cakes & Costumes

Chapter Summary

Sebastian and Jack meet up to plan Jim’s surprise party. Will their collaboration be a success?

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Here you go,” announced Jack Norridge as he entered the living room carrying a frothy mug of ale. He passed it to Sebastian. “This was specially imported from an artisanal microbrewery in Frankfurt.”

The sniper took a sip of the amber liquid and appeared pleased. “It has excellent flavor. Some of the best I’ve tasted in a while.”

Jack smiled. “I’m glad you approve. I’ve never been much of a beer connoisseur, but Jim said you’ve got a fondness for the stuff.”

“Aye, it’s true. I’ve sampled my fair share throughout the years, both domestically and abroad.”

“I’d imagine so, with all the travelling I hear you’ve done.”

“Jim mentioned that too, huh?”

“Oh, yes. The way he tells it, you’re a real adventurer who’s explored numerous countries across nearly every continent.”

Seb flushed, simultaneously flattered and embarrassed that his spouse had talked him up to his friends.

“Dear me, your cheeks have turned the color of your hair. Are you feeling okay?”

“I’m fine. Just a bit hesitant to brag, is all.”

Norridge heaved a sigh of relief. “Thank god. For a moment, I worried there was something terribly wrong with the ale and you were experiencing a delayed reaction.” He paused, peering at his guest. “I’m sorry if I’ve made you uncomfortable, yammering on like this. We’ve never really hung out one-on-one, and I’m trying to break the ice. Trying too hard, I suppose.”

“No, you’re a wonderful host. I appreciate your willingness to have me over so that we can discuss
our plans.”

“The pleasure is mine. If I hadn’t become a paralegal, I think I would’ve pursued a career as an events organizer. Staging big, splashy social functions has always given me a thrill.”

“You’re a paralegal?” Sebastian asked in surprise. He’d assumed the man was a stay-at-home parent, his family being enough of a full-time job.

“I am. Or rather was, before Reginald came along. That’s how my husband and I met, actually.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes, indeed.” He beamed softly, remembering it so vividly in his mind. “Our courtship was quite exciting. You might call it a whirlwind office romance.”

“Interesting,” Moran mused. “Believe it or not, I can relate. When Jim and I first got together, I was his employee.”

“So you know what it’s like to be unforeseeably smitten with the boss?”

“I could write a book on the subject,” he teased.

“We ought to compare notes. Did your co-workers give you a hard time about it? Mine were awfully catty, gossiping and making remarks behind my back. A bunch of jealous harpies, they were.”

Sebastian considered the question. “There was a bloke, once, who spoke out of turn. I put a swift end to that shite.”

“I’ll bet it was satisfying. I always wanted to wipe the smug expressions off those busybodies’ faces.”

“It felt justly deserved. As an added bonus, no one else dared make the same mistake.”

“Good. Sometimes a person’s got to do whatever it takes to get results.”

“Amen.” Moran took a swig of his drink as he prepared to switch gears and broach the reason he was there. “Shall we begin going over the plans?”


“Let’s take it from the top and work our way down.”

“All right. First is cake and catering,” he declared. “On that front, I’ve already researched a few potential vendors.”

“What were your findings?”

“To be honest, I wasn’t overly impressed with any of them. It got me thinking about the last time I had truly delectable food at a party. Then I realized it was during Reg’s birthday bash. Everyone loved the buffet Gary and I served.”

Seb nodded in agreement. “So you recommend we use your caterer?”

“I do. Furthermore, I’m inclined to suggest they provide the cake as well. I know you left before
having a chance to taste it, but trust me on this. It received rave reviews.”

“I’m cool with the idea. Just remember, I want a mix of gourmet and blue collar cuisine. Something for everyone. Oh, and the cake should be chocolate— that’s Jim’s favorite.”

“Got it. I’ll set up the necessary arrangements.” He ticked off a box on his list and moved to the next item. “Now, for decorations, do you have a particular color scheme in mind?”

The former colonel stared at him blankly. “Um…no, not really. Is that an important element?”

“Most assuredly,” replied Norridge. “Aesthetics are key to establishing the mood of an event. Different motifs can produce vastly divergent atmospheres, and thus, it’s wise to have a clear creative vision when planning a party.” He paused for a second, casting a curious gaze upon Moran. “Jim told me you helped plot his baby shower. At that rate, surely you should be accustomed to this.”

The man’s comment elicited a chuckle from Sebastian. “Boy, he really has been describing me with rose tinted glasses.”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean I had precious little to do with organizing that affair. I bankrolled it, yes. But other people were tasked with the decision-making.”

“Ah, well, no matter. You’ll learn as we go.”

“I’ll try my best.”

THUD.

Hearing a sudden noise from above, the men exchanged a glance. It sounded like something had dropped.

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

Fast moving footsteps followed.

“Mummmma!” yelled young Reginald as he raced into the room. Teary eyed, he made a beeline straight towards Jack.

“What’s wrong, darling?”

“Was sweepin’ and fell outta bed,” the pajama-clad toddler whimpered.

“Oh honey, I’m sorry.” Norridge scooped up his son, sitting him on his lap. “Does anything hurt?”

“Nu, but was scawwy.”

“You’re safe now. No worries.” He held Reggie in a comforting manner and gently smoothed back his sleep-tousled hair. “Would you feel more secure using your crib? Daddy and I could move it into your room again.”

The tot gasped in horror at the idea. “Nuuuu! Cwibs fo’ baybuhs!”

“Calm down, sweetie. It was just a suggestion. Nobody’s going to force you.”
“Sowwy,” he shyly apologized. “Wan’ be big boy is awwl.”

“I know, and you are. You’re my perfect gentleman.”

“Weally?”

“Yes, really.

“Fanks, Mumma.” Reg hugged Jack tight, clinging to him as if he were made of Velcro.

Moran smiled, touched by the affectionate display. He couldn’t help but imagine what it would be like when his own children were that age. What sort of personalities would they have? What traits might they inherit from him and Jim? How communicative would they be? He was eager to find out.

“Hi, kiddo,” Sebastian soon greeted, realizing the boy had been too distracted to notice his presence.

Reggie turned to see who was addressing him. His face immediately lit up.

“Seb! Wha’ you doin’ here?”

“I’m on a top secret mission to plan a surprise party for Jim, so I mustn’t let others know where I am.”

“Supwise parwty? Wan’ go!”

“Well, then you’re in luck. Not only are you invited, but also, the festivities will take place in this very house.”

“Wight here?”

“Yep. And guests will dress in costumes.”

His eyes went wide and he began bouncing excitedly. “Wuv costumes! Wha’ mine be?”

“Anything you want, hon. I’m not assigning them— you get to choose.”

The boy squealed with delight. “Mumma, hear ‘dat? Can be anyying!”

“Yes, my dear, a world of possibilities awaits us.”

“Gotta fink.” Reginald’s expression was priceless as he wracked his brain for ideas.

“You don’t have to decide yet,” Norridge assured. “If we put our heads together, I’m sure we’ll come up with a splendid outfit. Perhaps we can even attempt a theme.”

“Wha’ dat? Nu unnastand.”

“I mean we could wear costumes that relate to each other. A doctor and nurse would be a theme. A barrister and paralegal is another example.”

“Wike you and Dadda.”

“Precisely. Now you’re getting it.”

“Weggie qwick study,” he proudly proclaimed. “Dat wha’ gwampa always say.”
“I wholeheartedly agree.”

Jack leaned down to kiss his son atop the head. The toddler cooed in contentment, and Moran was reminded of how Essie and Eddie often responded to Jim. It was fascinating to observe the bonds between omegas and their offspring.

“Mumma? Burdee come to parwty, too?”

“Of course he can, isn’t that right, Seb?”

“For sure,” the sniper confirmed. “This is an all-ages affair.”

“Yay! Gonna be fun.”

“I’m counting on it.”

“You know,” Norridge remarked, “we should probably discuss the specifics of the guest list. Who, exactly, do you intend to invite? And will they have their children in tow?”

“I thought it might be nice to get some of the guys from MOPS to attend. It’s been a while since he’s had contact with most of them.”

“Ooh, that’s a fabulous idea. Then he could finally talk to people about forming a male omega parenting group. A majority of the fellas we associated with have given birth by now, though, which means we’ll need to consider what to do regarding childcare.”

“Child care?” Seb questioned. “Can’t they tend to their own whelps?”

“In a perfect world, yes. But if there’s going to be multiple infants at an event, it’s wise to enlist in additional assistance.” He paused, pondering the situation further. “We’ll also need to take extra precaution against germs. After the flu outbreak following Reggie’s birthday bash, I swore I wouldn’t let such a thing happen again. There’ll be no more babies sickened under my watch.”

“Smart thinking. I’d hate to allow it either.”

Moran was still haunted by the twins’ harrowing ordeal. His and Jim’s little ones had spent a week in the hospital, hooked up to monitors and IVs, while all they could do was keep vigil at their side. In the end, Edward and Estella recovered, but it was an experience the couple would not soon forget.

“Who we could hire to help mind the poppets?” he wondered aloud. “I’m generally hesitant to use babysitters. I’ve got a bit of an overprotective streak, I suppose.”

“So does Jim. Although, I’d say there’s good reason for it in his case.”

“Yeah.” Norridge hesitated, an idea coming to him. “Maybe I’ll put feelers out for a nanny with experience in the medical field, to ensure they’re familiar with safety protocols.”

“Wha’ ‘bout me?” Reginald glanced back and forth between the men, sporting an especially sweet look on his face.

“What about you, honey?”

“Nu need nanny. Have bes’ baybuh helpa evva— me.”

Jack smiled at the precocious lad. “I certainly do have you, and you’re a great assistant when it
comes to helping with your brother. That said, several babies will likely be present, which is more than you could handle.”

“How you know? Weggie smawrt. Can do anyfing.”

“Your confidence is commendable, my love. But a job of this sort requires a grownup. And besides, you’ll be busy enjoying the party.”

“Your mum’s right,” Sebastian asserted. “I expect you front and center to help us celebrate.”

The youngster heaved a sigh. “Fine, if it mean ‘dat much.”

“It does. Thank you, Reg.”

“Nu pwoblem.” He scooted to the edge of Jack’s knee and hopped off, having decided he’d spent enough time chatting.

“Where are you going, sweetie?”

“Back to woom. Gotta fink ‘bout costume.”

“All right. I’m here if you need anything.”

“Otay, mumma. See you later. You too, Seb.”

“Take care, kiddo.”

At that, the tiny boy toddled upstairs, leaving the adults alone once more.

“Dear lord, he’s adorable.”

“Oh, I know.” Norridge beamed as he spoke. “And cleverer by the day. I’m so proud of him.”

“As well you should be.”

“Indeed.” He stopped for a beat to collect his thoughts. “Shall we resume our planning session?”

“You bet. What’s next on the list?”

Jack grinned broadly. “One of my favorite parts— the prezzies.”

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“One of my favorite parts— the prezzies.”

Annie took out her earbuds, a sly expression painted across her face. She had an idea.

The woman grabbed her phone and dialed a number. It rang a few times and then went to voicemail.

“Colin, it’s me. Do you remember the bug we planted a while ago at Norridge’s house? I was just listening in and learned some very useful information. I think I know a way to solve Colin’s problems and ours in one fell swoop. It’ll require all hands of deck, though, so we’ll definitely want to formalize the details in advance. Call me back as soon as you can.”

CLICK.
She set down her mobile device, prepared to wait. For the first time in ages, Annie felt like there was a light at the end of the tunnel. If she could get Colin and Katherine on board with her plan, she was sure retribution would be theirs at last.

Chapter End Notes

Soooo...this chapter was a little different than I’d originally conceived.

Once I started writing the scene between Sebastian and Jack, it wound up going on much longer than expected. However, I was ultimately pleased with the direction it took. I also decided to hint at Colin and Annie's machinations, rather than explicitly give the details away at the end. I hope no one is too disappointed by that. Rest assured, the next chapter will explore their scheme in greater depth, as well as feature some domestic dealings with Jim and the babies. Stay tuned.

P.S. - Thanksgiving is coming up this Thursday in the U.S., so I'd like to wish everyone a safe and happy holiday.
**Tales of the Domestic & the Demented**

Chapter Summary

Jim engages in domestic matters while his enemies plot out their endgame.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*DING.*

The oven timer chimed.

Jim set his piping bag aside and stood up from the kitchen table. He put on protective rubber mitts, wearing them while he removed a tray of gingerbread men. Once the sheet was carefully placed on the counter, he returned to his previous task of icing an earlier batch that’d already cooled.

These were no ordinary cookies. For added whimsy, Moriarty decided to decorate them to look like people he knew. Some made sense, such as Sebastian, the twins, and various friendly acquaintances. Other choices, however, were a bit more strange—specifically, the inclusion of Molly, Mycroft, Sherlock, and John. He was nearly done frosting a sugary explosive vest onto the latter when he felt something brush against his foot.

Bending down to investigate, the consulting criminal was stunned by what he found. There, crouched beneath the table, was baby Estella. She stared at him sweetly, her emerald eyes wide as saucers.

“How on earth did you get here, poppet?”

When Jim last left his children, they were both in the next room, situated inside their playpen. Essie’s change of location was baffling.

Immediately, Moriarty lifted the infant into his arms, cradling her close. “I think this is the farthest you’ve ever crawled, isn’t it? You must’ve reeeeeeally missed me.”


Jim’s expression grew animated at his daughter’s words. “Yes, love, that’s right. I’m Dada.”

“Dada!” she said again, louder this time. Her mouth upturned into a grin and she radiated with delight.
“Oh honey, I’ve waited ages for this. Thank you.” In that moment, it was a toss-up as to which of them appeared happier.

Though temporarily overcome, the Irishman soon regained a clear head. His thoughts shifted to the mystery of how Essie had been able to roam free. Neither baby could walk yet, making it impossible for her to have climbed out on her own.

“Let’s solve this puzzle together.”

The duo began their journey to the living room, where the playpen was currently staged. After a few steps, they were met by an unexpected straggler— Edward.

“You too?” Moriarty remarked in exasperation. Apparently, both his sugarplums had gotten loose.

He picked up the wandering lad, now carrying a babe in each arm. His pace hastened as he was determined to get to the bottom of this.

It didn’t take long to reach his target destination. A cursory review of the pen told him all he needed to know— a loose screw had caused one of the latches to give out, creating a gap in the enclosure.

“That’s how you orchestrated your great escape, huh? Pretty clever.” The mastermind stopped, considering something. “I’ll put Papa to work fixing it straightaway. In the meantime, would you care to see what I’ve been doing?”

Essie and Eddie gazed at him intently, their curiosity mutually piqued.

“Let’s go,” he declared. “I think you’ll enjoy this.”

“Heeeeeheheee!”

The twins’ collective laughter filled the kitchen as Moriarty presented a cavalcade of cookies via an impromptu one-man show.

Knowing how much his darlings loved puppets, he opted to use a similar approach here, only substituting baked goods for googly-eyed socks. So far, it was a winning decision. They eagerly embraced “The Gingerbread King” and the enthralling tale of how he’d defeated scores of lesser “gingerfolk” to reign supreme as their undisputed sovereign.

“After his last adversary was crumbled and made into pie crust, the King assumed his rightful place upon the throne. He was joined by the valiant Ginger Knight, and together they ruled as the fiercest pair in the land. Life was good…and about to get even better.” Jim paused for dramatic effect. “The couple welcomed two freshly baked gingerbabies into the royal fold: Princess Estella and Prince Edward.” He grabbed the cookies he’d decorated in his children’s image, making them ‘dance’ on the tabletop. “That’s when the King and his Knight came to discover a different kind of joy, like none they’d known before. Their regime was bolstered by the newly formed bonds. Strengthened in a magnificent, mind-blowing way.”

Eddie squealed excitedly and leapt forward in his highchair, reaching for one of the gingerbabies in Jim’s hand.
“Sorry, but I can’t let you have this. If you put it in your mouth, you might swallow it and choke.”

The tot’s bottom lip quivered as a slow, keening cry rang out. “Waaaaaaah.”

“Honey, don’t fret. It’s just a cookie.” He stroked his son’s chubby cheek in a comforting gesture. Edward’s brilliant blue eyes were now tinged with sadness. The sight was almost too upsetting for Moriarty to bear.

“Having trouble with our cubs?” a husky voice inquired from the doorway. It was Sebastian.

Jim turned around to face his mate. “Eddie wanted a gingerbread man but I wouldn’t give it to him because it’s a potential choking hazard.”

Moran moved to stand at his partner’s side. “It probably seemed enticing after he watched you ‘dance’ it across the table.”

“You saw that, huh?”

“Only the tail end. From what I could tell, our kiddos were loving it.”

“Think so?”

“Absolutely.” Sebastian paused, switching attention to his little boy, “As for you, young man, go easy on your Daddy. Yes, he worries about you a lot, but it’s because he wants to make sure you’re safe. If he says ‘no’ to something, then you ought to listen. He’s got your best interests at heart.”

Eddie hushed in the wake of his Papa’s admonishment, his demeanor settling.

“Thank you, Tiger.”

“You’re quite welcome.” He rested his hands on the Irishman’s shoulders and began to administer a gentle massage.

“Mmm,” Moriarty hummed, practically melting into Moran’s touch. “Feels diviiiiine.”

“Good.”

Both men were silent for a beat as they savored each other’s company. Finally, Jim decided to strike up a proper conversation.

“How were things at headquarters?”

“Running smoothly,” Seb reported. When he left home earlier, it was under the pretense of visiting the office. After secretly meeting with Jack, he actually followed through on his claim, briefly stopping by HQ. “Your secretary, Suzy, asked about you and the twins.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. I told her everyone was fine. She seemed pleased to hear it.”

“Ah, nice of her to take an interest. Perhaps she’ll receive a Christmas bonus this year.” Another thought popped into his head. “Have the decorations gone up yet?”

“A crew is supposed to arrive tomorrow to do just that.”

“Splendid. Once the place has been fully decked out, I’ll pay a visit,” he announced. “I might even
bring our doves along. They’d adore looking at the lights and holly. Come to think of it, we’d better get cracking with the décor around here, too. I’ll need to sift through storage and see what we’ve got. Make calls to acquire extra help hanging things. And of course, there’s the tree—"

“Shh,” soothed Sebastian, his nimble fingers working overtime. “Relax, kitten. Your muscles are so knotted from stress. Just breathe.”

“Breathe?” the high-strung omega scoffed. “I did enough breathing exercises whilst pregnant, thanks.”

“Okay, let’s try a different approach. Tell me about your afternoon.” Moran hoped this would encourage Jim to calm his mind and unwind.

“Most of it was fairly standard. I fed the babies, caught up on my email correspondences, did some baking…” He hesitated, a grin suddenly eclipsing his face. “And Essie called me ‘Dada.’”

“That’s wonderful.” The sniper knew how much his spouse had wanted their little ones to address him, especially after the sting of them having uttered ‘Papa’ first.

“Yes, it was a great thrill. If only our son would say it, too.”

“Give him time. They’ll both be gabbing like miniature magpies soon enough.”

“I dare to dream,” he wistfully remarked. “Eddie tried saying the word ‘baby’ recently. It didn’t come out right, but the intent was there.”

“See what I mean? Every day, they get closer to achieving real speech. They’re making major strides thanks to you.”

“You’re very kind, Tiger. Does it get tiring, laying on sooooo many compliments?”

“Nope,” he answered, flashing a sharky smile. “It’s not tiring at all, because what I say never ceases to be true.”

Jim laughed lightly. “Were you this much of a sweet talker when we met, or have you refined your skills through the years?”

“I doooo.” Moriarty turned, whispering with a smirk, “Keep it up and you might charm the literal pants off me.”

Seb grunted at the suggestive comment. “I’ve got a smashing idea. We’ll put our doves down for a nap and then I can demonstrate the full breadth of my massage technique.”

“Sounds heavenly,” the genius purred. He cast his partner a gleam guaranteed to beguile. “There’s one teensy favor I want you to do first, though.”

“What’s that?”

“Fix a loose screw in the babies’ playpen. I didn’t realize there was a problem with it until today, when our poppets broke free.”

A look of surprise registered on Moran’s face. “They got out?”

“Only for a moment. I corralled them swiftly.”
“Attentive as ever.”

“I’d have it no other way.” Indeed, Jim’s dedication to his children was nothing if not stalwart.

“On that note, we’d best shake a leg.”

“Ooh, somebody’s feeling impatient.”

“Who wouldn’t be, when they’ve got you to look forward to?”

“Excellllent answer.”

The consulting criminal pulled his husband in for a kiss. It was quick, yet combustible — the kind of exchange meant to rattle one’s bones and leave them yearning for more.

“Bloody hell,” Moran breathlessly declared. “We need to get our cubs tucked in now.”

At that, Jim complied. Few things revved him up so potently as a commanding Tiger, and he couldn’t wait to show the sexy assassin just how deep his passions ran.

*********

…BONG. BONG. BONG…

The grandfather clock in Katherine Ramsey’s dining room struck several times as she, Colin, and Annie gathered around the table. When the chimes subsided, the trio eyed each other anxiously.

“You gonna get the ball rolling or what?” Colin prodded, sharply addressing his sister-in-law.

She glared. “Yes, of course. I’m simply trying to decide how to start.”

“A preamble isn’t required. Just tell us, in no uncertain terms, what this grand idea of yours is.”

“If you’d prefer me to be blunt, fine. Our associate, Luke, was recently booked on a number of felony charges. It’s pretty ugly stuff, and ordinarily, I’d say ‘good riddance’ to someone who was locked up for the crimes he’s accused of committing. This situation, however, is a bit different because Luke’s demanded we aid him in escaping the law. Should we deny his request, he’s prepared to tell the authorities what we’ve done and disclose our whereabouts.”

“No shite. I’m well aware of what that pathetic poofter’s been up to. Katie knows, too—I told her.”

“Yeah,” the middle-aged medical assistant confirmed. “This is old hat. Spare us the rehash and cut to the chase.”

Colin turned to Katherine, resting his hand upon hers. They made eye contact and he smiled roguishly. “Well said, dear.”

Annie huffed in frustration. “If you’d shut your mouths for a minute, I might be able to explain my plan.”

“We’re listening,” the man flatly stated.

“Good. To begin, I ask that you consider what Luke currently wants: his freedom. Now recall what he wanted when we originally teamed-up: his child. I know a way to give him both of those things, thereby eliminating the need for him to bother us ever again. Moreover, my proposal would also
afford us the chance to exact true revenge against Moran.”

“These are big claims you’re making. Care to back them up with actual details?”

“Gladly. Seb’s husband, Jim, is friends with Jack Norridge, and thanks to a bug I planted in the latter’s living room, I was made privy to some interesting conversation. Seems there’s going to be a gathering at the Norridge household in Moriarty’s honor. It’s an all-ages affair where guests are expected to bring their little ones along.”

“Keep talking,” Colin encouraged, genuinely curious to learn more.

“Jack’s looking to acquire a nanny for the event. Not just any nanny, either. He wants them to have previous medical experience as an extra safety measure.”

The dots started to connect in Colin’s head, his expression denoting a sense of understanding. “I think I see where you’re going with this.”

“I don’t,” complained Katherine.

“Let me finish and maybe you’ll catch the drift. What I’m saying is that Norridge is hosting a party for Jim, and he intends to invite some of the guys from Moriarty’s former support group. Based on this knowledge, we can reasonably infer that Ian will be among the attendees.”

“So what?” the woman retorted, still missing the point.

“Put two and two together—Sebastian and Ian’s brats will be there, respectively. At the same time, Jack’s going to bring in a glorified babysitter with medical training. Bearing those facts in mind, our opportunity is crystal clear: all we have to do is finagle a way to get you hired, and boom, we’ve got access to pull off the ultimate dénouement.”

“Which is?”

“Abduct Sebastian’s children and nab Ian’s daughter while we’re at it. We’d be killing two birds with one stone.”

Katherine stared at her pensively. “I don’t know…it sounds awfully risky.”

“Yes, of course it is. But if we succeed, it will be our greatest achievement,” she asserted. “People never truly get over losing a child. I know, because I see the sadness in my parents’ eyes every time I look at them. It’s a trauma like no other. Moran deserves to suffer that fate for the rest of his days.”

An eerie quiet engulfed the trio as they ruminated on the prospect. Should they attempt a scheme of such magnitude, it would almost certainly be their pièce de résistance. But was it worth the danger and distress? Worth the horror that accompanied an act so vile as kidnapping innocent babies? This required further discussion.

“What will you do with them?” the nursing assistant inquired, her tone apprehensive. “You wouldn’t really hurt them, would you?”

Colin and Annie glanced at each other. For months, they’d gone back and forth debating that very question. The young woman had had enough trouble slaying her co-worker, Marie, all those months ago. She couldn’t imagine having to do the same to an infant. The notion was unfathomable. Her brother-in-law, though…his blinding hatred of Sebastian knew no bounds. He might honestly want the twins dead. If so…
Annie shook her head. “No, they’ll not be harmed on my watch.”

“What will become of them, then?”

There was a long pause as she tried— and failed— to articulate a reply.

“I’ve got a few ideas,” Colin gruffly spoke. “But we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.” He cast an intense gaze upon his cohort. “This is your most ambitious plan by far, Annelise. I’m impressed.”

“Well, it’s like my father always used to say, ‘Go big or go home.’”

“I’ve had my share of differences with the man, but in this case, I agree. One question remains, however.”

“What’s that?”

“Your plot operates on the assumption that Luke will be free to simply pop off with his baby. But as of right now, he’s incarcerated. How do you suggest we spring him from jail in the first place?”

“Funny you should ask.” The young woman pulled out her mobile phone and brought an article up on screen. “Take a peek,” she urged, sliding the device across the table.

Colin viewed the blurb presented to him. ‘Suspected Serial Rapist Due in Court for Bail Hearing.’

“Evidently, Luke is meeting with the Magistrate tomorrow morning. If he manages to get out on bail, half the work will be done for us.”

“This is compelling news, but you’re leaving a lot up to chance. Suppose he’s denied bail or can’t afford it. What then?”

“Then we go back to the drawing board,” Annie stated with a sigh. “I’m not an idiot— I know this is one hell of a gamble. But conversely, I also believe it’s our best shot at achieving meaningful retribution.”

The man hesitated as he mulled over the plan. “At this point, I’m willing to give it a try. Take heed, though— seeing as how this is your brainchild, if things go sideways, I’m holding you responsible. Are you prepared for that?”

“I’m a big girl, Colin. I’ve been responsible for myself more years than I can count. Just add this to the pile.”

He nodded. “Very well, then.”

A brief silence followed, and was broken by the interjection of their lazy-eyed collaborator and landlady, Katherine.

“I’d like to voice a concern.”

“Yes?”

“What makes you think anyone would hire me as a nanny? I have a background in medicine, yeah. But I’m not a licensed childcare professional. Surely, this Norridge chap will go through an agency where candidates are screened and meet certain criteria.”

Annie smirked deviously. “Colin was able to produce false documentation for me when I went to
work at Moriarty’s office. He can do the same for you.”

“That’s right,” he assured, swooping in to allay her doubt. “Give me a few days and you’ll be amazed at what I come up with.”

“Hmm. I guess.” The woman didn’t sound convinced.

“Would I lie to you, Katie?” He gave her hand a gentle squeeze and continued, “Between my savvy and your poise, how could Jack not buy into the ruse? We’re a remarkable pair.”

A glimmer of hope shined through in her expression. “I tend to think so. I wasn’t positive you felt the same.”

“Of course I do, darling. I realized straightaway, the first time I met you, how special you were.”

“Really?” she asked, blinking shyly.

“Yes, really.” Colin lifted Katherine’s fingertips to his lips, gliding them across the warm, slightly chapped expanse of skin. Her breathing hitched, and he knew he’d won her over hook, line, and sinker.


“Marvelous.”

Annie looked on, pleased that her concept had been accepted by them both. That feat alone, she thought, was marvelous, indeed.

Chapter End Notes

I consider this the official kickoff to the third act of the story. Rest assured, I don't intend to drag things out for too terribly long. There will be a mix of drama and fluff to come.

Sneak Preview: Next chapter, Jim and Seb have holidays and special occasions on their minds. Meanwhile, Jack will be interviewing nannies as a precursor to the party — specifically, you-know-who.

Stay tuned.
“Close your eyes, Seb. No peeking.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.”

Jim led his husband inside their home, guiding him by the hand as they strode through a set of double doors and proceeded just past the foyer. As soon as they reached the living room, he gave the go-ahead to look.

“You can open them now, love.”

Sebastian did, and his jaw nearly hit the floor. Christmastime had arrived in a major way at the Moriarty-Moran residence. From top to bottom, the sprawling space was awash with yuletide flair. Holly, ribbons, bows, and beads were strung up everywhere, not to mention the mistletoe tacked above the archways.

It didn’t end there. A glorious 8-ft. tall fir tree stood proudly on display, decorated to the hilt with silver and gold garland, baubles, and twinkle lights. Mounted at the top was a star that emanated a brilliant shimmering hue. Located not far off was the fireplace, where personalized stockings hung over a crackling hearth. Seb recognized them as the same ones Jim had knitted last year. Apparently, they were becoming a tradition.

“What do you think?” inquired the consulting criminal.

“It’s spectacular. How did you manage all this?”

“I called in some assistance. A team of 12, to be exact. They did the whole house, guest rooms included. Tomorrow, they’ll tackle the outdoor decorations.”

“It’s like you’ve got your very own stable of elves toiling away.”

Jim’s expression lit up at the comment. “Ooh, darling, you just uttered the magic word.”

“Huh?”
“ElllIlives,” he drawled, practically bouncing off the walls with glee.

The sniper arched a brow. “I can honestly say I have no idea where you’re going with this.”

“Wait a tick and you’ll see.”

Moriarty rushed from the room at top speed. When he returned, he was carrying Essie and Eddie in his arms. The twins weren’t dressed in their usual apparel. Instead, they were costumed to look like little elves, complete with tassel hats and booties. It was among the sweetest sights Seb ever witnessed.

“Oh Jimmy, they’re precious beyond measure.”

“I knoooow. I fashioned the outfits myself.”

“No kidding?”

“That’s right. I was at The Sewing Sophisticate to pick up some yarn when I spotted the most delightful holiday pattern book. The instant I saw the elf designs, I couldn’t resist.”

“You’ve done excellent work,” he commended, noting the detailed embroidery and professional-grade stitching. One would be forgiven for thinking the attire was store-bought.

“Thank you, Tiger. It turned out better than I’d hoped, and the babies seem to like it.”

“Of course they do, because it was handcrafted by you.” He took a step closer and gave both his children a peck on the cheek. “Our darlings appreciate your tireless effort.”

Edward and Estella hummed contentedly, as if expressing their agreement.

Jim appeared similarly pleased, perhaps even more so. “It’s exciting to have them here, in person, this Christmas. Outside my body, where I can hold them, and dress them up, and show them all sorts of wonders. Everything about the holiday is brand new in their eyes. I love that.”

“Me too, hon.” What Sebastian especially adored was how happy it made his mate.

The twins began to squirm, indicating they wanted to be set down.

“Seb, shut the baby gates.”

“Aye, sir.”

Once the barriers were secured, Moriarty carefully placed his progeny on the carpet floor. The tiny tots started crawling around the room almost immediately. They stayed alongside each other at first, and then branched off in different directions, canvassing the area independently.

“Look at them, Sebby. Our poppets are so eager to explore.”

He nodded. “They’re born adventurers.”

“Like their Papa,” Jim said, flashing a sly smile.

Something about the gleam in his eye pushed Moran’s buttons. Without warning, the virile assassin pulled his partner towards the nearest mistletoe and delivered a smoldering kiss. One simply wasn’t enough, paving the way for another, and another, and another still.
Finally, in need of a breather, the Irishman broke their heated exchange. “Whatever’s come over you, I love it,” he panted.


“It’s probably from the baking I’ve been doing. Aromas intermingle. Linger and adhere.”

“Maybe,” he whispered huskily. “All I know is that I want you.”

Just as Moran had taken in his omega’s essence, Moriarty did the same, enveloping himself in the mishmash that was Seb’s scent. The alpha gave off an air of sandalwood, petrichor, and raw sex. It was a potent combination. So potent, in fact, it elicited an involuntary murmur from the mastermind.

Sebastian knew that sound well. Any experienced alpha would recognize it. Usually, it meant—

His train of thought was temporarily derailed by the feel of Moriarty’s lips pressed against his own. It seemed the smaller man wished to continue their mistletoe make out session, further proven when Jim’s warm tongue bid entry into his mouth. Their kiss was deep and devouring, fueled by an unyielding desire.

Some part of Seb suspected what was truly afoot, and he knew he ought to speak up. It was just so fucking hard to tear himself away from his husband, even for a second. These were powerful urges he was dealing with, as intense as one could get.

“Jimmy,” he beseeched at last, “slow down.”

Moriarty sighed in annoyance. “Why?”

“Because…” he trailed off, uncertain how to broach his concern.

“Because what?” the genius prodded. “You’re the one who started kissing me.”

“Fair point. I know it must seem like I’m being a tease, but please listen. Something’s affecting me, and it’s affecting you, too.”

“Yeah, it’s called love.”

“There’s a lot of love between us, I agree. Oceans and mountains worth. But besides that, here and now, I believe an additional element is at play.”

“Don’t be absurd,” he spat, his irritation increasing.

“Consider the signs, hon. These past few days, we’ve been very…uh…active.”

“We’re always active.”

“Okay, let me clarify. I’m not referring to the sex itself, but rather the drive behind it.”

Jim rolled his eyes. “Stop analyzing this to death. That’s an order, soldier.”

“I’m serious. I’ve felt drawn to you in a visceral, downright primal, sense. And that isn’t even the half of it.” Seb stopped, glancing at the twins. He was hesitant to discuss certain subjects in front of them and decided to lower his voice. “Haven’t you noticed how little rest we’ve needed in between
our... activities? It should be longer, but it isn’t. And then there’s the scents we’re throwing off. These are clear cut indicators.”

“I...you...bloody hell.” Moriarty was dumbstruck, a revelatory look washing over his face. “You think I’m—”

“In heat.”

The words hung thick in the air, their weight inescapable.

Jim shook his head vehemently. “No, that can’t be. It’s impossible.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure!” he snapped. “Omegas don’t go into heat for a year after giving birth.”

“It’s been 10 months. That’s pretty close.”

“Oh, suddenly you’re an expert on this stuff?”

“I may not have a fancy degree, but I remember Sex Ed. class. They explained family planning to us alphas. Said that 10-15% of omegas go into heat before a full year’s up. So yes, it does happen.”

The consulting criminal had no clever comeback or rebuttal. Reality was staring straight at him and further denial seemed pointless.

“Talk to me, sweetheart.” Moran grasped his mate’s hand, lacing their fingers together. He hated it when Jim got quiet.

“What’s there to say? That you’re probably right and I’ve been oblivious to what my own body was telling me? Or perhaps I should expound upon the fact that I failed to make provisions for such an occasion? Of course, then I’d have to admit that the prospect of going into an early heat never even crossed my mind. Some genius I am, aye?”

“Magpie, no. Don’t beat yourself up about this. It ought to have occurred to me too, but it didn’t. We’ve had so much to contend with, it’s little wonder our attention was focused elsewhere.”

“I suppose. Doesn’t change the situation we’re left to face, though.”

“Yeah.”

The couple stood in silence for a moment, reflecting on the fallout from their oversight. They’d been shagging like rabbits for days and used no protection whatsoever. As a result, there was a real possibility that their family might be expanding sooner than anticipated.

“Jimmy, depending on how things shake out, what do you want to do?”

“Well, I—”

WAAAAAAAH.

Both men were quickly distracted by their child’s cry. They turned and saw a curious scene beneath the Christmas tree. It appeared that the babies had reconvened and Essie was now attempting to crawl atop her brother in order to reach a shiny, dangling ornament. Unsurprisingly, Eddie didn’t take well to being used as a human stepstool.
“Estella Sebastienne!” Moriarty exclaimed. “Edward is not furniture for you to climb!” He scooped up his daughter, looking her squarely in the eye. “I won’t permit such mischief, young lady. Though to give credit where it’s due, that was quite resourceful of you.”

“She reminds me of somebody else I know,” teased Moran as he bent down to cradle his son. The sniper rocked him gently while he spoke. “I’m sure you’ve done the same plenty of times—walked on others to get what you want.”

“Hardy-har-har,” Jim dryly replied. “You’re a laugh riot.”

Seb shot his spouse a cheeky grin. “I try my best, kitten.”

“Daaaaa-Daaaaa,” Essie cooed, adding her two cents to the conversation.

“Oh princess, I can’t stay cross with you.” One peep from the tiny girl and his black heart melted like butter. “I do, however, insist that you refrain from scaling Eddie. The two of you could get hurt, and then Daddy would be very sad.”

“We’ll have to put a barricade around the tree.”

“Good idea. I thought the ornaments were too high for them to reach, but where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

“Especially when dealing with cubs as clever as ours.”

“Indeed.”

Edward’s cries abated and the mastermind approached. He gazed adoringly at both infants, a swell of bliss rising inside him. They were his pride and joy, borne from the enduring bond he and Sebastian shared. Their presence in his life was a gift— one which he treasured each and every day.

“Tiger?”

“Yes, dear?”

“Should any additions come along, I’d welcome them gladly.”

Moran beamed at the news. “I would, too.”

No matter what lay in store, they’d embrace it with open arms.

Following a short pause, Jim decided to address the elephant in the room. “Soooo,” he began, “now that we’ve established my probable condition, how do you wish to proceed?”

The strapping blonde leaned close, whispering in his partner’s ear. “I want to keep on shagging you morning, noon, and night. Want to make you shiver and shake and call out my name until your throat’s gone raw and all you can do is whimper.”

Moriarty grunted hoarsely. “Ooh, darrirling. There are so many ways I’d like to respond to that statement, none of which would be remotely appropriate given our present company.”

“We’d better fix that.”

“What’s your solution?”
“We put our 'elves' to bed and then I determine if you’ve been naughty or nice this year.”

“A bit of a mix, I’d say. But I’ll let you be the judge, oh wise and wanton Santa Seb.”

“Santa Seb?” he uttered with a chuckle. “If I’m jolly old St. Nick, what does that make you?”

“The most fashionable bloke the North Pole’s ever seen.”

“Naturally. Now, without further ado, shall we go?”

“I’m already ahead of you, slowpoke.”

Sebastian smiled, watching on as his husband bounded up the stairs while holding their daughter securely. It was a pleasure to witness Jim in such an excellent mood, particularly after the realization they’d made only moments before. Sometimes, it seemed, Christmas miracles really did occur.

Chapter End Notes

Happy holidays, everyone!

This chapter was originally supposed to include a scene where Jack interviews Katherine about the nanny job, but the spirit of Christmas took hold, and I just reaaaaally wanted to write some fluff. So the next installment will feature the interview. Hope people are okay with that.
An Auspicious Interview

Chapter Summary

Jack is interviewing nannies to help out at Jim’s surprise party. A dishonest candidate lobbies for the job.

Chapter Notes

Please see the "Notes" section at the bottom for important information regarding this chapter and the next.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

DING-DONG.

Katherine Ramsey rang the bell at Jack’s house. The illustrious Norridge estate was an intimidating sight, but she maintained expert composure. The woman came well-prepared, armed with a false identity and corresponding credentials. She also dressed for the part, sporting a smart pantsuit, attaché case, and eyepatch— the latter accessory worn at Annie’s behest.

The door opened and Katherine met face-to-face with her target.

“Hello,” Jack jauntily greeted. “How may I help you?”

“Well, sir, I’m actually hoping for the opportunity to help you.”

“In what way?”

“You’re in need of a nanny with specific qualifications and I strongly believe I fit the bill.”

“I am seeking to fill a nanny position, yes. But the agency sent over their last recommended candidate an hour ago.”

“Oh dear,” she remarked. “There must’ve been some kind of miscommunication. I was a late addition to the list. They were supposed to shoot you an email featuring the revised lineup.”

“Hmm. I never received any such notification.”

“I apologize if my being here is an inconvenience. I can go if you’d like.”
“No, that won’t be necessary. It isn’t your fault someone at their office dropped the ball. Come in and we’ll have a chat.”

“I’d love to.”

The woman smiled pleasantly as she was led inside. Her first objective was to make sure their conversation took place near the living room coffee table. Annie explained to her that a listening device was stuck on its underside, and she and Colin wanted to hear everything.

“I’ve been interviewing people right here in the front room,” Jack stated. “If that’s too informal for you, we could use my husband’s office.”

“Here’s fine,” she quickly replied.

“Excellent.”

Norridge guided her towards a set of white wicker chairs. Katherine had other ideas, though, noticing a couch located beside the aforementioned coffee table.

“Would it be okay if we sat on the loveseat instead? It looks so comfortable, I just have to know what it feels like.”

“Certainly. Truth be told, that piece is a favorite of mine.”

“Oh? Do tell,” the woman encouraged, intent to keep her ‘mark’ engaged.

“I acquired it whilst antiquing in Vienna. The shopkeeper swore it was once owned by a descendant of the Archduke Ferdinand.”

“Impressive. I’m almost nervous to sit on it now. Wouldn’t want to depreciate an heirloom.”

Jack chuckled. “Don’t worry. I’m fairly sure the chap was exaggerating in the hopes of making a sale. Fortunately for him, I’d have bought it regardless. But I digress—please, take a seat.”

Katherine obliged and the two settled in, eager to get the interview underway.

“May I see your résumé?”

“Of course.” She handed over the paperwork Colin had procured for her. It entailed a comprehensive employment history dating back at least fifteen years.

A brief silence fell over them as Norridge skimmed through the documents. Eventually, he glanced up and spoke again.

“You’ve got quite an accomplished body of work, Ms. Rhodes.”

“Call me Evelyn,” she insisted, referring to the alias her cohort had manufactured. According to the files, ‘Evelyn Rhodes’ was a lifelong childcare professional who also happened to share Katherine’s real background in assistant nursing. Some of her assignments were even described as taking place in households where the children suffered from various medical conditions.

“Well, Evelyn, it appears you do possess the skills I’m looking for. That said, I’d like to ask a few questions.”

“Go ahead.”
“According to this, your last job was in the Netherlands.”

“Correct.”

“Holland’s lovely, I admit. However, the fact that you were working outside the country gives me slight pause. There are numerous communicable diseases one could contract whilst abroad. Have you received a thorough physical examination since returning to the UK?”

She nodded. “I have, sir. I’m pleased to report that my health is in tip-top shape. I can furnish you the records from my doctor’s office if needed.”

“I’d appreciate it, yes. For my own peace of mind.”

“Consider it done.” In truth, no such records existed, but she reasoned it would be easy enough to have Colin fabricate them.

“Wonderful. My next inquiry pertains to the volume of your typical workload. Are you capable of attending to multiple babies at a time?”

“Most assuredly. When I did my training, there were a dozen neonates in the ward who required regular care.”

“The experience you refer to was more than a decade ago,” he pointed out. “Since then, have you had the occasion to babysit that many infants in tandem?”

“I’ve not minded a full dozen, but some of the families I au paired for had several small children. One in particular featured six youngsters, all under the age of 8.”

“That must’ve been an absolute madhouse.”

“Oh yes, it did get a bit crazed some days. I relished every minute, though. Caring for poppets isn’t merely my career,” she claimed, “it’s a calling.”

Norridge contemplated the woman’s response. “You’re the first person I’ve interviewed who’s phrased it like that. It’s refreshing to meet someone who approaches child-rearing from such a philosophical perspective.”

She flashed a sacchariny sweet smile. “Thank you. This vocation has brought great joy and purpose into my life. I feel blessed.”

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

The echo of footsteps was suddenly heard.

“Is someone else here?” Katherine wondered aloud. Colin and Annie had told her that Jack’s husband would be out of the house.

“It’s my eldest son. He’s small, but prone to stomping. I’m trying to teach him to take more graceful steps.”

Soon, Reginald came charging into the room and made a mad dash for his parent.

“Mumma, wha’ you doin’?”

“I’m chatting with this lady,” he informed the toddler. “Bid her hello, darling. The name’s Evelyn Rhodes.”
“Hewwo, Evva-win Wodes. Am Weggie. Pweeze to meet you.”

Katherine laughed, genuinely, at the earnest greeting. “Hi, dear. Sounds like you’ve been practicing your introductions.”

“Yes. ‘Hewwos’ and ‘goo-byes’ are key. Dat wha’ Dadda say.”

“He’s given you wise advice.”

The lad voiced nothing more in reply. Instead, he simply stared at her, transfixed. Reggie then tugged at his mum’s sleeve, beseeching Jack to bend down. When he did, the boy whispered something into his ear.

Norridge’s expression grew flustered, clearly in reaction to whatever Reginald had said. “I will not ask her that. It’s impolite and absurd.”

“What’s the matter?” the woman prodded.

“It isn’t worth repeating.”

“No, really. I’m a big girl, I can take it.”

“Well…Reg wanted to know if you were a pirate.”

“Pirate?” she uttered in confusion. And then she remembered— that damned eyepatch. “Good heavens, it’s because of this thing I’m wearing.”

“Please, don’t be put off. You know how little ones are…they operate uncensored.”

“It’s okay. I don’t ordinarily cover myself up. I only did it today at an acquaintance’s suggestion.”

“You nu piwate?” the boy cautiously questioned.

“Nope. I’ve got amblyopia, more commonly referred to as a ‘lazy eye.’”

“Does it hurwt?”

“No, it’s just annoying, is all. I used to be self-conscious about it when I was younger, but eventually I stopped worrying what other people thought. If they have a problem with it, that’s on them.”

“You vewwy bwave.”

“Thank you, honey.”

Katherine found herself unexpectedly touched by the tot’s kindness. He was so gentle and sincere; so candid in his nature. Suddenly, it didn’t feel right to be deceiving him and his mum. Conflict stirred inside, undermining her steely resolve.

“You look a tad flushed,” noted Norridge. “Are you okay?”

“Yes,” she answered, hastily forcing a smile. “I’ve been busy today and haven’t eaten since breakfast. I believe it’s catching up to me.”

“In that case, let me get you something. I’ll have the cook prepare whatever you want.”
“I’d hate to impose.”

“It’s no trouble, really. I’ll even join you. I’ve been craving jalapeno poppers and a stiff martini.”

“Umm…all right, I guess.”

And just like that, Katherine was in a quandary. She was set to break bread with Jack, an act which would surely earn his endearment and provide the leg up she needed to secure her hiring. But…

A nagging sense of doubt had emerged. She’d do practically anything for Colin, a fact proven many times over throughout the course of their relationship. This, however, gave her pause. The Norridges were clearly not bad people. Far from it. They didn’t deserve the shitstorm that was headed their way.

*Mustn’t let Colin down. Mustn’t allow innocents to suffer, either.*

Her heart and mind were at odds. What, oh what, to do?

“Come wit’ me, ma’am.” Reginald extended his hand, inviting the woman to take hold. “I show you dinin’ woom.”

“A personal escort? Oh my.”

“Am best host,” he confidently declared.

Katherine beamed at the child. “I bet you are.”

She walked with him, her visage cheerful throughout. Inwardly, though, it was a different story. A knot formed in the pit of her stomach, twisting and turning every step of the way.

How could she permit this lovely, gracious family to throw a party, knowing what would happen during the event? Surely, they’d be traumatized by kidnappings occurring under their own roof.

For the first time, it seemed she might need to draw a line in the sand. The question was, how would Colin and Annie respond to her change of heart? She’d followed their instructions flawlessly until now. Would this be a deal breaker between them, and if so, what did that mean?

Chapter End Notes

Hey, everybody. Sorry it took me so long to get this up. The holidays were a busy time, and I've also been dealing with a dental infection. That said, I want to share some quick details about this installment.

Chapter 147 was originally twice as long because there was another scene after the interview involving Jim and Seb. When I read it back, however, I didn't think it flowed well with what came before it. As such, I've decided to split the scenes into two separate chapters. This one-- the interview-- is being posted now, while Chapter 148-- the Jim and Seb section-- will go up either tomorrow or the next day. The latter needs a little more editing, but I promise you won't have to wait long for it.

Thank you for your patience and readership. It is appreciated.
Love, Friendship, & Pancakes— Oh My!

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian spend time together while the consulting criminal is in heat. Meanwhile, Jim must also contend with troubling news from a friend.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Sebbby! You’re taking too bloody long!”

Jim sat at the kitchen table clad in a red silk robe and matching slippers while Seb cooked for him. The assassin-turned-chef wore even less, donning only an apron and a smile.

“I’m going as fast as I can. These pancakes mustn’t be rushed. They’re a special recipe and I want to get it right.”

“Tiger, pleeeeeease. I’m starving. You know what an appetite my heats work up.”

“Yes, kitten, I understand. It’ll just be a little bit longer. Hold tight.”

The consulting criminal affected a pout. “I might waste away. By the time you’re done, I’ll be nothing but skeletal remains propped in a chair.”

Moran rolled his eyes. “Always the consummate drama queen.”


“I’m sure you do. You’ve forgotten one salient point, though.”

“Have I?”

“Yes,” the blonde replied with a lopsided grin. “That it’s generally unwise to threaten the person who’s preparing your meal. Keep at it, and the next thing you’ll see is me chucking these pancakes into the bin.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“Care to find out?”
The Irishman glared. He and Seb held each other’s gazes firmly, and soon what began as a show of irritation transformed into something decidedly more...beguiling. There was a blaze that burned within them both. A fire feeding on the passion they shared.

**Wanting. Needing. Aching.**

Sebastian took a step towards his mate and Jim instinctively moved to stand up. The desire they felt was intense; the pull overwhelming.

**Touch. Taste. Devour.**

Their breathing hastened as their thoughts were mutually consumed by the most primal of urges. Moran yearned to be inside his beloved Magpie as much as Moriarty hungered to be filled by him.

Another step was taken. They were so close now, a mere foot apart.

A low-pitched, guttural grunt escaped the sniper’s lips. The sound was heaven to Jim’s ears, and he hummed, wholly electrified.

**Alpha.**

**Omega.**

Their scents were peaking, particularly the mastermind’s. A heady bouquet enveloped him, producing an aroma that was utterly irresistible. Think of the sweetest smelling flowers in the world combined with the freshest, most decadent baked goods imaginable, and it still wouldn’t do justice to his natural, heat-induced fragrance.

Seb wanted to say something, but words failed him. None could convey the longing in his heart or the throbbing in his loins. He shivered when he saw how aroused Jim was too, observing the visible bulge beneath his robe.

A third step was made, this time by Moriarty. Now they were nearly touching.

Both men trembled ever so slightly at the promise of what lay just a hairsbreadth away. Emotions swirled and swayed, their bodies celebrating in glorious rejoice.

Rejoice followed by…smoke.

**Smoke?**

A billowing, acrid plume drifted through the air, abruptly jettisoning Moran from his amorous fugue.

**BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.**

The smoke detector blared.

“Oh fuck,” Sebastian exclaimed. He rushed to the stove and discovered the sad state of his pancakes. They were burnt to a crisp.

Jim looked absolutely stricken. Not only was his carnal interlude cut short, but now his meal was charred beyond recognition. It just wasn’t fair.

“I’m sorry, hon. I can make more.”
“You’re damn right you will, because I’m fucking ravenous. But first, shut off that godforsaken alarm.”

“Yes, of course.”

WAAAAAAAH.

Chaos increased as cries erupted from the baby monitor. It seemed the twins were no fan of the shrill noise either.

“Wonderful,” spat Moriarty. “Do you have any idea how hard it was getting them to fall asleep? They’re teething— both of them. And as if that weren’t bad enough, Eddie’s developing an eczema patch. Of all the things to inherit from me, it had to be my propensity for dermatitis.”

Seb frowned, a wave of guilt hitting him. “I didn’t realize,” he admitted. An alpha should know when his cubs are troubled. How was he so oblivious?

Jim made a beeline for the stairs. “I’ll tend to them. You get this mess sorted.”

“Aye, sir.”

At that, the duo went their separate ways.

“Coooo,” Estella murmured softly. The wee lass gazed up at her Daddy from the comfort of his arms.

“That’s a good girl. No need to fuss.”

Moriarty sat in the nursery, holding his children as he soothed them. It’d taken about a half hour, but they’d finally stopped wailing.

“Nothing to be afraid of, darlings. You’re safe and sound. Now let’s put you back to bed, shall we?”

He walked over to their cribs and carefully laid them inside. They looked so serene, yawning and blinking while still trying to maintain eye contact with him. Eddie even reached out, his tiny hand waving in a beckoning gesture.

“I’m right here, sweetie. If you’re not ready for me to go, I’ll stay a bit longer.” He stroked the boy’s rosy cheek and smiled. Patience was never Jim’s strong suit, but for his doves, he had plenty of time.

“Daa-daa,” Edward groggily mumbled, pleased by the man’s continued presence.

“Yes, I’m Dada, and you’re my perfect little prince.” His heart soared whenever the babies addressed him directly. “You’re both perfect, for that matter,” he amended, not wanting Essie to be left out.

A few seconds passed as he stood there, admiring his progeny. Those two blissful bundles were an endless source of joy. And now, with his surprise heat underway, perhaps there’d be more on the
horizon. It was a startling prospect at first, but he’d warmed to the idea quickly. In fact, it actually rather excited him. The frustrating part was waiting to find out.

BZZ. BZZ.

Moriarty’s phone vibrated in the pocket of his robe.

He checked the device and saw that it was Ian.

“Hello?”

“Jim,” the young man frantically began, “Did you watch the news tonight?”

“No, I’ve been busy. Why?”

“They let him out! I can’t believe the magistrate would allow a monster like him back on the streets. This is terrible.”

The genius paled. There was only one person he could be talking about: Luke.

“You’re saying Luke was released from jail?”

“Yes!” Ian confirmed, his tone panicked. “Apparently, he made bail the other day, but it didn’t hit the press until now.”

“Bloody hell.”

“My sentiments exactly. To make matters worse, nobody from the police station bothered to notify me. I learned it from a random news report.”

“That’s the MPD, all right— incompetent at every turn.”

“I’m so worried. What if he comes after me? What if he tries to take Matilda? God, I hate this.”

“Ian, I know you’re upset by what’s happened. I am too. But for Tilly’s sake, you’ve got to calm down and regroup.”

“How am I supposed to calm down when the bloke who’s terrorized me is walking around a free man?”

“Surely, there must be conditions to his bail. If he breaks the terms, they’ll lock him up again.”

“Luke’s never been one to let anything stop him. I doubt bail stipulations will make a difference.”

“Even so, you and your daughter are well-guarded. I assigned some of my best security crew to monitor you.”

“Yes, and they’ve done a fine job. Doesn’t change the fact that I’m scared out of my wits, though. Please help us. I don’t know what to do.”

Jim paused and took a deep breath. The fear in his protégé’s voice was palpable. It angered him to think that the police department had put it there, by virtue of their reckless decision-making. How could a scumbag like Luke Darrow be granted bail when Sebastian was denied it during his last arrest? Miscarriages of justice were nothing new, but this felt especially egregious.

“I don’t want to be alone right now. Can I stay with you for a little while?” asked the distraught
youth. “Just until I figure out my next course of action.”

Ordinarily, Moriarty would’ve consented in a heartbeat. The status of his current condition, however, complicated matters.

“I’m not sure it’s advisable at the moment.”

“I can be quiet as a mouse,” he assured. “And Tilly’s an excellent baby— she hardly cries at all. We wouldn’t disturb you.”

“It isn’t the noise I’m concerned about. It’s…I…” Jim trailed off, struggling to find a way to explain the situation. This was awkward beyond belief.

“What’s the issue, then?”

“Ian…I’m in heat.”

A silence fell between them as the declaration sat there, invisible but loaded in its meaning.

Eventually, the younger omega spoke. “My apologies. I didn’t realize.”

“It came as a shock to me, too.”

“No kidding?”

“Yeah. I wasn’t expecting my cycle to kick in for a few more months. Regardless, it’s here and I’m dealing with it.”

“I see. Well, you’ve got Seb to ease you through. I imagine it’s nice having a partner during times like these.” Though polite, he was quite clearly disappointed. “Under the circumstance, I’d better not keep you chatting any longer. You’ll probably want to resume activity with him.”

“I do.” Still, Jim hesitated to hang up. The wheels in his head were turning. “Ian?”

“Yes?”

“My house is huge. A person could live in one section and never know what was going on at the opposite end. That said, I’d like you to pack a bag or two. I’ll send a car to pick you up. Once you’ve arrived, one of the guards will escort you to the east wing of the property. There are several guestrooms in that area which are equipped with bassinets and baby supplies. Make yourself at home. Sebby and I will probably remain out of sight for a bit, but we do take periodic breaks, so you’ll encounter us at some juncture.”

The line went quiet again while the teen processed what he’d been told. It was a lot to absorb. “Wow. That’s…wow.”

“You’re welcome to use any facilities you wish. The only location that’s strictly off limits is my office. And at the moment, the master bedroom as well.”

“Right, I understand.” He paused to gather his thoughts. “I don’t know how I can begin to thank you, Jim. You’re the best friend I’ve ever had.”

“I’m just aiding a fellow male omega and Emerald Islander. We’re a rare breed.”

“It’s more than that,” Ian asserted. “You surpass the efforts of most, and I truly appreciate it.”
Moriarty wasn’t sure what to say. Accepting gratitude from others always felt slightly strange. Perhaps someday he’d be used to it, but not yet.

TAP. TAP. TAP.

The consulting criminal turned around, hearing a faint rapping sound at the door. Sebastian stood in the entrance of the nursery. He was wearing sweatpants now, and carried what appeared to be a forkful of pancake.

“I’ve got to go. See you later.”

“Okay. Take care.”

CLICK.

Moran approached his mate, standing close beside him. “I was about to ask how our cubs were doing, but it looks like you’ve settled them down.”

“They simply required a dose of comfort.” Jim peered at the drowsy tots as they drifted to sleep. He then glanced up at his spouse. “Our sugarplums aren’t the only ones needing support. That was Ian on the phone. He’s having a tough time.”

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s Luke.”

The sniper growled at the mere mention of his name. “Let’s move this conversation to the hall,” he urged, not wanting to disturb the babies.

Seeing the fury in Seb’s eyes, Jim agreed.

“So what’s the son of a bitch done now?”

“Got out on bail.”

Sebastian’s hands balled into fists and he nearly bent the fork he was holding. “Are you fucking kidding? How in god’s name did that happen?”

“Ask the magistrate.”

“Forget ‘Q & A.’ I’ve got a bullet I’d like to introduce him to.”

Moriarty’s breathing hitched as he listened to his alpha rage on. A fierce Tiger always revved his engine— not that he needed help in that department right now.

“Seriously, who allows a cretin like Luke to roam free? That’s fucking bollocks. I won’t stand for it.”

“Ooh, Sebby. My gorgeous, gallant fella. I loooove it when you’re full of fire.”

The mastermind pressed himself against Moran’s virile frame. His head rested on the man’s chest and he let out a contented coo.

“Magpie,” Sebastian panted, goosebumps rising on his skin. He was rapidly getting that ineffable feeling again; that tunnel vision, where all he could focus on was Jim.
“I’ve gotta tell you something, before we get too hot and heavy.”

“What is it, handsome?” he purred, nuzzling and nipping at the Irishman’s neck.

“Ian’s dropping by.”

“Oh? When?”

“This evening.”

The former colonel halted his ministrations and took a step backwards. “Excuse me, what?”

“Ian’s panic-stricken because of the situation with Luke. He asked if he and Matilda could stay overnight. Possibly a few nights, actually.”

“And you said ‘yes?’ Kitten, I know he’s a friend, but the timing is terrible.”

“It is, I don’t deny it. You didn’t hear his voice, though. He’s genuinely scared to death. He’ll do anything to protect his daughter, and as a parent, I completely understand where he’s coming from.”

Seb sighed. He couldn’t argue with that. “You…make a really good point.” The instinct to shield one’s child from harm was powerful, indeed.

“Yes. And you needn’t worry how his visit will impact upon our…regimen. I’ve already told Ian about my condition and he’s agreed not to bother us while we’re indisposed.”

Moran smirked, amused by his husband’s phrasing. “Planning to be awfully busy, huh?”

“Honey, you have nooooo idea.”

“On the contrary, I think I do. We’ve spent so many of your heats together…I know how amorous you can get. How much you hunger.”

Jim grinned. Now he, too, was tickled by his partner’s choice of words. “Funny you should say that, because I’m bloody starving. I was promised pancakes and I saw you walking around with a forkful.”

“I almost forgot.” He held up his utensil-bearing hand. “I brought you a sample. Might be tepid by now. Sorry.”

The criminal extraordinaire didn’t care. He eagerly tasted what he was given, grunting with great approval.

“This is the best thing I’ve put in my mouth all day.”

“I’m not sure if I should take that as a compliment or a challenge.”

“How about both?”

Sebastian arched a brow. “Trying to entice me, Mr. Sex?”

Moriarty stared at his alpha, displaying the most coquettish expression he could muster. “Are you suggesting I have ulterior motives? Moi? Why I never—”

His sentence was cut off with a kiss. Warm and welcoming, their tongues twined in delight.
Kisses in the hall led to kisses in the stairwell as Seb scooped up his spouse, carrying him to the kitchen. When they reached their destination, he sat the genius back at the table, prepared to serve him the best damn pancakes in Britain.

The food was dished onto a plate, accompanied by fresh creamery butter and imported Vermont maple syrup. It looked divine, like something taken straight from the pages of a gourmet magazine.

“You’ve outdone yourself, darling.”

“Only the best for my man.”

Jim didn’t offer a verbal reply, but his face spoke volumes— he was positively beaming. That alone was reward enough for Moran.

Chapter End Notes

Posting this a little later than intended, but that's because I realized it needed a bit more work. Hope nobody is too upset about the delay.

On another note, I quite enjoyed writing this scene. I love domestic moments involving the Moriarty-Moran family.
Post-Holiday Happenings, aka, A Chat Between Friends

Chapter Summary

Jim has a heart-to-heart talk with Ian.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains reference to past trauma/sexual assault. Nothing graphic, but I thought I should preface it case anyone is especially sensitive to such matters.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

It had been a tumultuous few weeks for Moriarty and Moran. First, Jim went into an early heat, his condition only realized after he was already amid the throes of it. Then, they learned that Luke Darrow was inexplicably released on bail. The consulting criminal’s protégé, Ian, was so disturbed by the turn of events, he’d temporarily come to stay with them for added security.

The troubles didn’t end there. Next, personal tragedy beset another close friend: Jack Norridge. Mere days before Jim’s birthday party was to be held at his estate, the man’s father suffered a heart attack. He survived, but the soiree was postponed as Jack travelled to Ireland to keep vigil at his bedside. Sebastian couldn’t really fault him, though he wished the timing had been better. The celebration would now occur belatedly.

A bright spot to offset the drama was getting to spend Christmas and New Year’s with the twins. Moriarty spared no expense, making sure their doves were spoiled rotten by ‘Santa Claus.’ He spent thousands upon thousands of pounds on toys and clothes, much of it high-end, designer fare. To say he went overboard would be an understatement. If they had a dozen children, there’d still be a surplus of gifts to go around.

The duo’s presents to each other were equally notable. Jim gave his spouse a host of lavish offerings. Black leather Gucci apparel, a Rolls-Royce Phantom, and a state-of-the-art periscope rifle were just a sampling of the items Seb received.

For his part, Moran decided to think outside the box and surprise the mastermind with a truly heartfelt gift: a life-size drawing of Moriarty and the babies, based on a photograph he’d snapped the night they were born. It was among Jim’s favorite pictures, and sure enough, he adored Sebastian’s artistic rendering of the shot. The work was framed and hung up on a wall in the nursery.
Meanwhile, Ian and his daughter remained at the pair’s residence through the holiday season. Having no family besides Matilda, he relished the opportunity to celebrate with friends. Even better, it afforded their children a chance to interact.

Their little ones got along famously. In fact, the tiny trio was engaged in a wealth of revelry at that very moment. Spirited giggles hailed from the playpen, filling the surrounding area with a certain joie de vivre.

“Hehehehehehe!”

ARF.

“Hahahahahaha!”

ARF.

“Heeee-heee-heee!”

Jim entered the living room and sunk down on the couch next to Ian. He sported a silk robe and slightly bed-tousled hair.

“The poppets sound absolutely delighted.” He watched as Essie and Eddie nudged a puppy plushie back and forth to one another. When squeezed, the doll would bark. Tilly was too young to play, but she sat near them, laughing uproariously every time it made noise.

“Yes, they’ve taken quite a shine to ‘Sir Barkington.’ Where did you find him?”

“Hamleys. There was a big display in the center of the store. It featured an array of pet shop plushies.”

“How charming.”

“Yeah.” The genius continued to study his progeny, enrapt by what he was witnessing. “They’ve staged a baby version of Russian Roulette.”

“What?” Ian wasn’t sure he heard him correctly.

“Really pay attention to what my doves are doing. You’ll notice they’re taking turns hugging the toy. Sometimes they manage to squeeze it hard enough to activate the sound effect. Other times, they don’t. When it happens, *bam*— all hell breaks loose, albeit an adoooorable, non-lethal kind of hell.”

“Ah, I get it now.” Leave it to Jim to make a comparison like that.

“I’m glad they’re happy. Thank you for looking after them. You’ve been a great help.”

“It’s the least I can do,” he said, smiling warmly at his mentor. “Will you be sticking around or is this just a short break?”

“Actually, I think I’ll be here a while. Seb’s waiting to take a conference call, which gives me time to do other things.”

“Good. It’s nice seeing you resurface for more than a few minutes at a clip.”

“Well, in that case, you may be pleased to know the end is nigh.”
“Huh?”

“The end of my heat. I suspect today is it.”

“Oh, okay. Gotcha.”

The criminal extraordinaire stared at his friend, a sly grin painted upon his face.

“Jim, are you gonna share what’s got you in such a gleeful mood or do I have to guess?”

“I’m not sure if I should say. I don’t want to jinx anything.”

“Since when are you superstitious?”

“I’m not…usually. This is a special circumstance, as daft as that may sound. I hesitate to tempt fate.”

“Now you’ve got me curious.” Ian paused to consider the possibilities. “Whatever it is, it must be pretty awesome to make you smile so wide.”

“An astute observation.”

“So I’m correct?” he inquired, noting the small clue.

“Perhaps.”

“All right, then. Spill it.”

Jim eyed him innocently, playing coy. “I beg your pardon?”

“Cut the timid routine and tell me what’s up.”

“I don’t have the faintest idea what you mean.”

“Please. Your expression gave half the game away.”

“It did not,” he insisted, his tone indignant.

“Uh-huh, sure.”

“Hey,” the older omega protested, but quickly stopped before saying anything else. Ian had called his bluff. He most certainly did have a secret—one he badly wished to reveal. Dare he, though?

“Well?” the youth prodded.

“Nothing.”

Ian shrugged. “Fine, keep it to yourself.” He picked up the TV remote, clicking it on. “Let’s watch a bit of telly, aye?”

“I guess.”

SCROLL. SCROLL. SCROLL.

Program listings whizzed by in a blur as Moriarty struggled to concentrate on the words in front of him. He was practically bursting at the seams, his mind racing a million miles an hour.
The genius turned to his apprentice. How on Earth could he just sit there, casually flicking through the television guide at a time like this? Why wasn’t he pressing him for more information? Didn’t he realize this was his cue to quiz him about his big, secret news?

“Jim?”

“Yes?” he perked up hopefully.

“Pass me the Kleenex, would you?”

Moriarty roughly grabbed the tissue box and handed it over with a huff.

“Jesus, what’d that box ever do to you?”

The consulting criminal glared. “Oh, I dunnooo. Only brushed me off when I clearly wanted to tell it something.”

Ian arched a brow. “Maybe the Kleenex took your reluctance at face value and didn’t wish to pressure you unduly.”

There was a brief silence as they held each other’s gaze.

“Bollocks,” lamented Jim. “Why must you be so damned sensible?”

“Sensibility’s a bad thing?”

“No as a rule, no. But if you’re going to remain my friend for the long haul, you need to understand how this works. When I seem ‘reluctant,’ as you termed it, you’re supposed to coax the details out of me.”

“Okay. What’s the great mystery you’re sitting on?”

He sighed. “The moment’s ruined. I can’t divulge it after the whole song and dance we’ve just been through.”

“Jim,” the teen balked, shutting off the TV and setting the remote aside, “for Christ’s sake. It isn’t necessary to play games with me. If there’s something you want to get off your chest, I’ll gladly listen.”

Immediately, Moriarty knew his aggravation was misplaced. There was no reason for him to be acting so pissy towards his protégé.

“Thank you, Ian. I appreciate it.”

“No problem. Now don’t keep me in suspense. Let’s dish.”

“Welllllll…” he drawled, simultaneously nervous and excited, “my heat’s coming to an end, but it’s possible I’ve snagged a fabulous souvenir. The kind that takes nine months to arrive.”

In a flash, the young man’s eyes went wide. “You mean—”

“Another cub may be on the way.”

“Oh my god, wow.”
“Wow, indeed.” He was beaming at the admission, thrilled to finally tell someone.

“I had no idea you were trying for more.”

“I wasn’t, but Seb and I didn’t recognize my condition as early as we should have. By the time it became apparent, we’d already engaged in some vigorous activity, if you catch my drift.”

“I do,” Ian affirmed. “This is a happy accident, then? You aren’t upset?”

“The notion was jarring at first, I admit. When I thought about it, though, I realized how incredible it’s been to have Essie and Eddie in my world. Everything changed when they came along—life got bigger, and better, and so much more beautiful.” He paused, glancing at his darlings in the playpen. “They’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me. Them and Seb…my family.”

**My family.** Saying the words brought joy to the Irishman’s black heart. They’d awakened emotions in him that he once thought were impossible. Transformed his whole existence, really.

“I understand. I feel the same about Tilly.”

“I’m sure you do. She’s a treasure in her own right.” Over the holiday season, Jim had gotten a sampling of just how sweet the little ginger lass could be. Matilda never fussed without a good reason and she seemed considerate beyond the scope of an ordinary infant. Often, it was hard to believe that half of her genetics came from a bastard like Luke.

“I’ll not disagree, but I may be a teensy bit biased.”

“We’re allowed. These are our children, after all.” He looked upon the tiny trio again and let out a wistful sigh. “I don’t know for certain if I’m expecting. We’ll see how it goes when enough time’s passed to take a test.”

“What results are you hoping for? It sounds like you want it to be positive.”

“Honestly, I never imagined having another baby so soon, but now that the prospect is there, I don’t mind it. I’ll manage either way.”

“And Seb? What does he want?”

“Anything that makes me happy.”

Ian cracked a faint smile. “Naturally.”

“My Tiger is magnificent.”

“I envy the two of you. To share the bond you have…the devotion.” He inhaled and exhaled deeply, a hint of melancholy peeking through. “I doubt I’ll ever find love like that.”

“Of course you will.”

He shook his head. “I don’t believe so. Nobody wants a broken omega.”

“Hush. I won’t abide such talk. You aren’t broken.”

“You’re being kind. We both know the truth. After what Luke did…”

“Stop right there,” the mastermind objected. “His actions were reprehensible, yes. But they reflect on him— *not* you.”
“Don’t they? I feel as though I’ve been ruined by that son of a bitch.” He paused, sadness present in his eyes. “I love Matilda with all my heart, but the way she came to be…I don’t think I’ll ever get over it.”

Moriarty was uncharacteristically stricken by his friend’s sentiments. He wanted to alleviate the young man’s sorrow, but realized there was no quick fix to the situation.

“Ian, when I look at you, I don’t see someone who’s ruined. Quite the opposite, actually. You’re an exceptional bloke who possesses many outstanding qualities. You’re stronger and more resilient than you think.”

“Strong? Ha.”

“It’s no joke. You’ve managed to remain steadfast in the face of true horror, where lesser individuals would’ve crumbled. That counts for something.”

“Maybe,” the boy conceded, “but even so, how could I ever trust an alpha again? I used to fantasize about having a mate. That dream is nearly dead now.”

“Don’t throw in the towel on Luke’s account. Alphas like him give the whole group a bad name. I’m confident you’ll meet a good one who’ll show you the respect you deserve.”

“I’d love that,” he asserted, a chord of hope in his voice. Almost as quickly as it appeared, however, it faded out. “But supposing I did find a decent partner, it would never last.”

“Why not?”

“Because…”

“Because what?” the genius gently prodded. His concern grew when Ian didn’t readily respond, instead choosing to stare down at the floor. “Hey, you said you were willing to listen to me. Well, I’m open to do the same.”

“Thanks, Jim. I’m trying, it’s just difficult to articulate.”

“Take all the time you need.”

“I…uh…bloody hell.” He began to fidget anxiously. “H-how could I tell him?”

“Pardon me?”

Ian peered back up at Moriarty, his expression haunted. “If, by some miracle, I met an alpha even half as wonderful as yours, it wouldn’t last, because how could I tell him about Tilly’s father? Certainly, he’d have questions.”

“You’d speak candidly. You’ve done nothing wrong and any man worth dating would recognize that.”

“It might skewer the way he thinks of me.”

“If he loves you, it won’t change a thing.”

“I wish I shared your optimism.”

The consulting criminal reached out and grasped the young man’s hand in a gesture of support. “Honey, this isn’t optimism—it’s irrefutable fact. When you find the right mate, he won’t cast
judgment on you. Especially not over something that wasn’t your fault.”

“I want to believe it, I really do. The trouble is, I’ve lived with this darkness for so long, it’s hard to see much else.”

“I understand. Healing takes time, and you’re under no obligation to rush. I’d just hate for you to give up. You’ve got loads of potential and an amaaaaazing future ahead of you.”

“Your faith in me is inspiring. I’ve not received such encouragement since the likes of my late mum. I appreciate it more than I can say.”

Jim flushed slightly, taken off guard by the remark. Who’d have thought that he, the ‘Napoleon of Crime,’ would be a positive influence in someone’s life? It was a far cry from his days of mayhem.

“That’s what friends are for, aye?” he humbly replied.

“Yeah,” Ian agreed. “I think it is.”

A smile slowly crept across the older man’s face as it occurred to him how blessed he truly was. Friend, mentor, husband, parent— there were so many titles he could now lay claim to. It felt divine.

Following their discussion, the pair remained seated for a while, silently watching their children interact. Little else was spoken, but that was okay. Sometimes the quietest moments were also the most fulfilling.

Chapter End Notes

Hi, everyone. I want to address two important things. This may be lengthy, so please bear with me.

1. First, the reason I decided to condense the holiday stuff is because Christmas and New Years are over in real-life, and I like to have in-story dates match up with current dates. That said, I hope no one is too upset about my decision to time skip.

Rest assured, Jim will still get his party, albeit belatedly. I’m actually thinking it might work out better this way, because the twins’ birthday is supposed to be on Valentine’s Day, so maybe I can write them as having a grand celebration for all three. We’ll see how it goes.

2. Second, I want to apologize for how sporadic my updates have been lately and explain the situation at hand. My health has not been great due to on-going dental issues. I’ve got an infected tooth that keeps recurring, and I need to have oral surgery and a root canal done. Unfortunately, my consultations keep getting cancelled. The scheduling is a nightmare, and as of right now, it’s looking like my dental work will be spread out over the course of several months. In the meantime, I have to deal with a lot of flare ups and pain. It’s slowed down the pace of my writing and I’m sorry about that. I’m still deeply invested in this story and wish I felt good enough to work faster.

Maybe you didn’t need to know all that, but I try to be truthful with my audience.
Thank you for your patience and readership— it’s very much appreciated.
A Magpie’s Misgivings

Chapter Summary

Seb’s been acting sneakily and Jim is determined to find out why.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

James Moriarty sat at his kitchen table, anxiously nursing a cup of herbal tea. The twins were positioned next to him, secured in their highchairs and happily sucking on rice cakes. He wished he could be so carefree. Unfortunately, the seeds of suspicion had taken root in his head.

Sebastian was hiding something. Precisely what, he had no idea. But there was definitely deception afoot.

It started with a phone call. A few days ago, the sniper received a communication and left the room to answer it. This was strange behavior, as he never hesitated to talk to people in front of him before. Why the sudden change?

Shortly after that, a more concerning issue emerged. His husband began venturing out under the pretense of visiting headquarters, but when he spoke to the lead office secretary, she swore Seb hadn’t stopped by in over a week. Where, then, was he actually going? And why did he feel compelled to lie about it?

Moriarty didn’t immediately confront his mate, deciding instead to search for clues at home. Despite scouring their house from top to bottom, the consulting criminal came up empty-handed. A part of him was grateful not to have found any damning evidence. Conversely, he was frustrated to be no closer to the truth.

Now Jim stewed as he waited for Moran to join him at breakfast.

“Get that gorgeous arse of yours in here already,” he muttered under his breath. Short on patience, the Irishman drummed his fingers against the tabletop. If Seb didn’t appear soon, he’d seek him out personally.

Thank goodness it wouldn’t come to that. The strapping assassin finally strolled in, making a beeline towards his mate.

“Good morning, love,” Sebastian greeted. He leaned down and gave Jim a peck on the cheek before taking a seat. “I see you’re feeding our cubs solid food.”
“Yeah, what of it?” Moriarty sharply replied.

“It’s new, is all. I didn’t know you’d made changes to their diet.”

“The pediatrician said it was fine to introduce simple foods, like cereal and rice cakes. In fact, she mentioned that the latter may help ease teething discomfort.”

“Interesting. They certainly seem to be enjoying themselves.”

Indeed, the babies were delighted as they gummed and suckled the edible disks. A look of satisfaction registered on their faces whenever tiny bits broke off that were soft enough for them to swallow.

“Imagine when they’re able to eat more substantial meals,” Seb spoke. “I can prepare ‘Colonel Moran’s heavenly hashbrowns’ for the whole family.”

For a second, the dark-eyed omega desperately wanted to smile. He struggled to remind himself that now was not the time to be charmed. Seb was hiding something and he mustn’t lose sight of that.

“Let’s focus on the present. I wouldn’t say ‘no’ to you whipping up a batch for the two of us.”

“I’d do it in a heartbeat, kitten, but I have an early meeting with my sniper team.”

Jim arched a brow. “Oh? This is the first I’ve heard of it.”

“I got a text alerting me that one of my best men was seriously injured. He’ll need to take leave for a while, so I thought it wise to hold an impromptu meeting.”

“I see.” It sounded plausible. However, it could just as easily be another lie.

“I recognize that tone. You’re displeased.”

“Well, you’ve been ducking out on me a lot lately.”

“Only due to necessity. It’s not an action I relish.”

Moriarty stared daggers at him. “Don’t you?”

“Never.” Sebastian reached out to calm the drumming of Jim’s hand. “Where’s this agitation coming from?”

It took great fortitude to remain silent on the subject. “I’m not feeling very good today,” he quickly covered.

Seb placed a palm to his partner’s forehead. “No fever, thankfully. What symptoms are you experiencing?”

“Nothing specific. I think I’m merely a bit rundown.”

“Hmm. If it persists, promise me you’ll see a doctor?”

“Yes, of course.”

“I mean it, Magpie. No toughing things out on your own.”
The genius sighed in annoyance. “Nobody likes a nag, dear.”

“I just worry about you.”

“If you were really so worried, you wouldn’t be leaving this morning.” He pulled his hand away from Moran’s, casting another steely glare.

“Hey, that’s not fair.”

_Not fair?_ thought Moriarty. _I’ll tell you what’s ‘not fair.’ Being abandoned multiple times within a single week by my husband, who won’t even admit where he’s truly going or what he’s doing. All whilst I’m at home, maintaining our household and taking excellent care of our children._

BZZ. BZZ.

“Saved by the buzz,” Jim quipped.

He and Seb exchanged an intense look as the former colonel pulled out his phone and checked the device.

“I’ve got to go, but we’re not done discussing this.”

“I quite agree.”

At that, Sebastian said goodbye to the babies and exited in a huff.

The mastermind waited until he was sure his spouse was gone, and then stood up. He turned to his sugarplums, addressing them directly.

“Fancy a field trip, darlings?”

Essie and Eddie gazed at him, their expressions intrigued.

“I think it’s high time we drop by headquarters and take a gander at Papa’s office. Who knows what sort of secrets he’s got stashed away? And besides, Daddy’s been itching to show you off. Hardly anyone from work has made your acquaintance.”

Estella squealed jauntily, eager to spread her wings as a social butterfly. The outside world was an exciting place, rife with newness and adventure. She embraced every aspect of it.

“I knew you’d be keen on the idea, Princess. You take after me, wanting to see and do everything. Now, how about my little man?” He smoothed down a stray lock of his son’s soft blonde hair.

“Are you interested in visiting HQ?”

Edward was a tad indecisive. His big blue eyes shifted from Jim to Essie and back again, as if carefully contemplating his options.

“I’m positive everyone will adooooore you, especially once you’re dressed up in the dapper new duds Santa brought. People will be ‘oohing’ and ‘aahing’ non-stop.”

“Coooooo,” the lad answered with a protracted trill.

Hearing her brother’s call, Essie hummed in recognition. They communicated like this for a few seconds, using only sounds and tones.

Jim was utterly tickled by the display. “Oh, my doves, you delight me so.”
How was it possible that two tiny babes could inspire such immense joy within him? Their powers were nothing short of miraculous.

Soon, the twins finished eating and were escorted to the nursery for a wardrobe change. Moriarty reveled in styling them like his own personal fashion plates. He hoped that in the long run, his good taste would rub off.

“What shall we wear today?”

He studied the contents of his children’s walk-in closet. There were options galore. The question was where to start?

“This may take a while, poppets. We want to get your outfits just right.”

Essie and Eddie put up no resistance. They would withstand anything if it meant getting to spend time with Daddy.

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“Those are the cutest babies I’ve ever seen!”

“They’re so perfect, they could be porcelain dolls.”

“Or models in an advertisement.”

“You really do have the loveliest little ones. Meeting them is a treat.”

Jim was grinning from ear-to-ear. As predicted, people began fawning over Edward and Estella the moment they entered the building. A crowd quickly formed, regaling them with an endless supply of compliments.

“The pleasure is all miiiiine,” he enthused.

If ever praise was due, this cinched it. The consulting criminal had meticulously selected his progeny’s chic ensembles. Eddie was garbed in grey Armani trousers paired with a cream-colored shirt and black cardigan. Meanwhile, Essie wore a pink pastel Dolce and Gabbana dress featuring floral embroidery and an accented gold trim. Both infants sported sophisticated footwear as well, in the form of custom-made Gucci shoes.

“Mr. Moriarty,” a familiar voice spoke, “may I snap a picture of them?”

“Certainly, Gemmmma,” the genius drawled, recognizing her straightaway. She was among his most dedicated office staff, and had helped orchestrate his baby shower all those months ago. Incidentally, the woman also happened to be Molly Hooper’s cousin, but he wouldn’t hold that against her.

CLICK.

The twins blinked several times following the camera flash. To their credit, they didn’t cry.

“No more,” Jim decreed. “One is enough—we dare not risk harming their eyesight.”

“Right, of course.” She swiftly tucked the camera phone into her purse. “How are you, sir? This is the first I’ve seen you since you went on paternity leave last year.”

He paused for a second, taken aback. Had it truly been that long?
Yes, he realized. Yes, it has. Amazing.

“I’m quite well, thanks.”

“Good to hear. And Mr. Moran?”

“What about him?”

“I understand he works remotely more often than not these days, but he hasn’t popped in at all this week. Some of us wondered if he’d fallen ill. There’s a nasty flu going around, so you never know.”

Bingo. Now the mastermind had further confirmation of his spouse’s duplicity. There was no sniper team meeting. It was another lie.

And then something occurred that caught him by surprise. He felt a sudden ache deep inside. It may not have been physical, but it pained him as intensely as any wound ever could. It was the agony of heartbreak.

Get ahold of yourself. This is not the time or place for a meltdown.

Jim looked at his sweet cubs, deriving strength from their presence. They were such a centering force in his life. Such a continual—

Wait. What did Gemma just say about a ‘nasty flu?’ His thoughts moved so quickly, sometimes it took a moment for them to synchronize.

“Sebastian’s fine. Now apprise me of the influenza situation.”

“Numerous people have gotten sick during the past two weeks. I’ve made sure to take extra Vitamin C as a precaution.”

Bloody hell. No way could he allow his children to stay here much longer, not when disease was running rampant. He needed to get what he came to HQ for and haul ass out of there, ASAP.

“Smashing idea. On that note, I mustn’t linger. I’ve got to grab something from Seb’s office and be on my way.”

“Sure. It was nice seeing you and the babies. Please, do visit again.”

“Perhaps I will.”

At that, Moriarty turned his back on Gemma and the other employees who’d huddled near. He had more pressing matters to address.

“Grrr.” An audible growl escaped Jim’s lips as he sifted through Moran’s belongings but uncovered little of consequence. The most significant information he’d found was a calendar which denoted a party on its schedule, curiously coinciding with his birthday. He might’ve assumed that the sniper was planning a soiree for the occasion, however, the date had come and gone minus any such festivities.

Is Sebby attending events without me? Why wouldn’t he want me to accompany him? Has he
grown tired of us spending time together? The consulting criminal’s mind was reeling, each thought worse than the last.

“No,” he whispered. “It can’t be.” His husband was devotion personified, loyal beyond measure and bound to him always. Never in a million years would Sebastian tire of him. What, then, was going on?

Moriarty needn’t wait long to find out. The door abruptly swung open, revealing Moran on the opposite side.

“Tiger,” the Irishman exclaimed in surprise. “What are you doing here?”

“This is my office, Jim. Under the circumstance, I think I ought to be the one asking questions.”

“I…it’s…oh bollocks.” He stopped to collect himself. “Yes, this is your allotted workspace, but I own the whole damn building. Technically speaking, every room is mine.”

The assassin sighed. “Not the point I was trying to make and you know it.”

“Yeah, well, maybe I don’t give a toss. You’ve lied to me repeatedly these past few weeks. In order to get answers, I had to take matters into my own hands.”

“So that’s why you’re here? To snoop?”

The smaller man glared. “You call it ‘snooping.’ I prefer to think of it as a learning experience—a journey to discover why my beloved partner, whom I trust above all others, has suddenly decided to start sneaking around behind my back whilst making pathetic excuses in the process.” Hurt flashed in his eyes as he continued, “I’m not stupid, Seb. And despite what many may believe, I’m not entirely without a heart. When you do these things, it maims me. It twists, and rends, and pierces to the core.”

Moran’s demeanor softened. “Kitten, I’m sorry. I don’t know what to say.”

“How about you admit the truth? Because otherwise, I’m left to second guess everything. Left to wonder what I’ve done to warrant your deception.”

“Jimmy,” he gently spoke, reaching out to touch him. “It’s not what you think.”

“Then just tell me already. No more lies. I deserve better and so do our cubs.” Moriarty motioned to the twins, who were sitting in their stroller. “Tell us.”

“Okay.” Sebastian took a deep breath. He hated to ruin the surprise, but realized there was no alternative. His mate would almost certainly go off the rails if he didn’t explain the situation in full.

“We’re waiting.”

“It’s a party,” the blonde blurted out. “I’ve been planning your birthday party for some time.”

“My birthday was weeks ago and there was no party.”

“Yes, because it had to be postponed.”

Jim’s face was fraught with confusion. “Postponed? Why?”

“Jack was helping me coordinate the event. It was actually supposed to take place at his house, but his father experienced a medical emergency and he had to leave London on short notice.”
The genius paused as he considered the facts. Jack had indeed told him that his dad suffered a heart attack, and that he was travelling to Ireland to be at the man’s side. He also knew how much his friend enjoyed organizing festivities. Bearing those things in mind, Sebastian’s claim was plausible.

“Due to the late cancellation, we lost our caterer and pastry chef. In Jack’s absence, I’ve been tasked with finding suitable replacements. Unfortunately, after some extensive taste-testing, I still haven’t found anyone as good as the people we originally hired.”

“Interesting. Is there a deadline you’re beholden to?”

“Not yet. If we stick to the agreed upon venue, it’ll have to be whenever Jack gets back.”

“Hmm.” The wheels in Jim’s head were turning. “I’ve got a proposal for you.”

“Oh? Let’s hear it.”

“Essie and Eddie’s first birthday is coming up. Why don’t we make it so that the celebration is for them? It’s on Valentine’s Day— surely Jack will have returned by then.”

Moran pondered the suggestion, his mouth slowly forming a smile. “That’s a damn fine idea.”

“Even better, I’ll bake the cake. You’ll only need to focus on finding a caterer, cutting down on half the work. Sound good?”

“Sounds fantastic,” Seb affirmed, pulling Jim close. “Once again, your brilliance shines through.”

The consulting criminal was grinning now, too. Gone were the fears he’d walked in with, his strife supplanted by a sense of love and security. “We should never keep secrets from each other. Not ever.”

“I think you’re right, my dear. No matter how well-intentioned our reasons may be, it always seems to backfire.”

“That said, is there anything else I ought to know about the soiree?”

“Did I mention it’s a costumed affair?”

“No, you didn’t. But I adooooore costume parties. What are you planning to dress up as?”

“I have a theme picked out for me and the babies. Fair warning, though— you may want to sit down before I divulge the details. It’s quite whimsical…”

Chapter End Notes

Sooo…this was meant to be a bit of an homage to an earlier point in the story, way back when Jim was planning a party for Sebastian and the sniper grew suspicious. I thought it might be interesting to reverse the scenario, but not drag it out too long.

Anyway, how do you suppose Jim will take to the idea of a “Flintstones” theme (as was discussed in previous chapters)? I think he’ll go along with it for the sheer novelty of seeing Essie dressed up like Pebbles ;-)
Also, I originally intended to have a scene featuring Colin, Annie, and Katherine. Ultimately, I didn’t feel it would flow well with the Jim/Seb stuff, so I omitted it. I think I’ll write a short chapter addressing our antagonists prior to the actual party portion of the story. It will serve as a means to deliver some necessary plot-pertinent information.

Thanks for reading and stay tuned.
Machinations of a Madman

Chapter Summary

All is not what it seems as Colin and his abettor discuss plans for the future.

Chapter Notes

Quick note-- this chapter is a little bit shorter than my usual. That's mainly because it's meant to serve as an intermediary between the previous section and the next. Sometimes bridging gaps is a necessary evil.

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that’s best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes
Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.”

“That’s beautiful, Colin. You breathe such life into the text. It gives me goosebumps.”

“I have a fondness for the works of Lord Byron. I suppose my enthusiasm shows through.”

“It does.”

Katherine Ramsey was in the midst of a luxurious bath, soaking her work-weary body while Colin sat on the edge of the tub and read to her.

Tonight’s literary selection was chosen by the fugitive himself, and with good reason. He sought to butter her up as best he could in the hopes of rendering the woman more receptive to his bidding. A lot was riding on this, so he’d have to be especially convincing.

“Katie?”

“Yes, dear?”

“Can I confide in you?”

“Always. What’s the matter?”
“It’s about the plans we had regarding Moran’s party.”

The nursing assistant heaved a sigh. “I already told you I don’t want to go through with Annie’s scheme.”

“I understand where you’re coming from. Truly, I do. There’s more to the situation than I let on, though. Things you ought to know.”

“Oh?”

He nodded. “Yeah. I had an idea…a dream, really. I was going to tell you right away, but I lost my nerve. I’m afraid it’s been weighing on me and I can’t keep it bottled up for much longer.”

“Please, speak freely. You can be open with me about anything.”

“Thank you, love.” He’d baited her on the proverbial ‘hook.’ The next step was to reel her in. “Lately, I find myself looking towards the future.”

“You do?” the woman’s voice denoted pensive intrigue.

“Yes, I picture it in my head, laid out like a path on a map.”

“And where does this itinerary lead you?”

“A better question would be, ‘where does it lead us?’”

She blinked in surprise. “I’m a part of your future?”

“Of course. Are you okay with that?”

“Okay? I’m over the bloody moon.” Her excitement was short-lived, however, as a thought came to mind. “What’s this got to do with the abduction plot?”

“Well, you see…” Colin trailed off, averting his gaze. If all went according to plan, Katherine would be ensnared by the shy, sensitive façade he affected.

“Hey, talk to me.”

He felt the woman’s warm hand rest atop his own, and immediately he knew she was falling for the ploy. *This is almost too easy. Now for the cincher.*

Colin peered up at her and resumed eye contact. “I realized that the plan could provide an opportunity for more than mere revenge. It could also serve as a new beginning.”

“How so?” she asked, hanging on his every word.

“I imagined us taking the twins and skipping town. Going somewhere far away to raise them together.”

“Like a family?” She queried in stunned disbelief.

“That’s right. One of our very own.”

Colin was positive his approach would elicit a favorable response. Not long ago, during a previous bath-time talk, she’d confessed to him her desire to have a family. Unfortunately, after two divorces and various fertility issues, the prospect seemed remote. Now he was offering a means to
fulfill her innermost wish.

“I…I’m speechless.”

“Have I made things awkward? Oh, bollocks.”

“No, I’m glad you’re being honest.”

He shrugged. “It doesn’t matter much now. You’ve told me how you feel and I respect your decision.”

“Wait. Give me time to process the information.”

“Certainly. I apologize if this is overwhelming.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll manage.” She squeezed his hand in an affectionate gesture. “You present a tempting proposition.”

Good. They were in the home stretch. One more push and she’d surely be persuaded.

“You’d make an excellent parent,” he declared. “A sight better than Moran and Moriarty, that’s for damn sure. Those monsters aren’t fit to raise goldfish, let alone children.”

“They scarcely deserve them, I agree. But kidnapping seems a bit extreme. Especially whilst at the Norridges’ home.”

“Katie, I adore your thoughtful nature. In this case, however, you’re being too kind. The havoc those two have wrought is immeasurable. They could never be proper caregivers. We, on the other hand, would do a fine job.”

“You really think so?”

“I know so.”

Silence fell as the woman contemplated all she’d been told. Colin’s proposal was not to be taken lightly. If they followed through with it, there was no going back. Was it worth the risk?

“Hypothetically, let’s say we did enact Annie’s plan. Would Luke still play a role in the proceedings?”

“Yes, he would. I know you probably don’t like hearing that— neither do I. But the bastard has us by the coattails right now. We’ll all go down if he spills his guts to the police.”

“I figured as much. A tiny part of me was holding out hope, though.” She inhaled and exhaled deeply, conflict rising inside. “I don’t want anything to do with him. I’ve studied up on the terrible crimes he’s accused of. It makes me sick to think that I let him set foot in this house. Never again. I can’t fathom how he was even granted bail.”

“It’s simple. His mother used to shag a high-ranking magistrate. She called in a favor and her ex obliged.”

Katherine arched a brow. “You’ve got to be kidding me?”

“Nope, I’m not. She must’ve been one hell of a lay to have that kind of sway over the guy.”

“Good grief. Where did you get your info?”
“From Annie— she’s stayed in contact with Luke. Apparently, he didn’t even know about his mum’s affair with this chap, so while he’s grateful for her efforts, things have been rather strained between them.”

“I bet.”

“There’s another interesting bit,” Colin noted. “Seems the deal wasn’t entirely without strings. He was released under the condition that he lives with her whilst the investigation continues.”

“Hmm.” Uneasiness wafted off the nursing assistant in waves.

“Penny for your thoughts?”

“You may regret asking me that.”

“We’ll see. Go ahead.”

“Okay, if you insist. I’m thinking Luke should be kept as far from his child as possible. Claiming the twins for ourselves is one thing. Handing an innocent baby over to a serial rapist is another, and I won’t do it.”

“Katie, come on—”

“No. If he wants his daughter, he’ll have to manage it himself. And as for the blackmail angle, let him try. If we’re running away together, then what will it matter? The authorities can’t capture those they can’t find.”

Colin quieted, maintaining a cool visage while burning within. His emotions were riled in a manner he’d not anticipated. He arrogantly assumed that Katherine’s full cooperation was a given; that she could be manipulated into doing absolutely anything for him. Clearly, he’d misjudged her.

The woman raised a valid point regarding their ability to evade the police. Trouble was, he didn’t actually intend to disappear with her and raise Moran’s brats— that aspect was nothing but a ruse to facilitate the kidnapping. Once he had those loathsome whelps in his possession…well, all bets were off.

“So you won’t aid Luke, but you’re still game to help me?” he spoke at last.

“Yes, that’s right. I hope this doesn’t cause ill will in our relationship.”

‘Ill will?’ Ha. The term didn’t even begin to describe Colin’s ire. How dare some middle-aged, lazy-eyed cow defy him? It was a slap in the face, one which he yearned to return in a literal sense.

_Pull it together_, he commanded himself. Any small crack in his veneer could give way to a cascade, and that was unacceptable.

“I could never be angry with you,” he lied, a disingenuous smile plastered upon his face.

“Likewise. You’re a special bloke. I thank my lucky stars that the good Lord brought us together. If that isn’t proof of God’s guiding hand, I don’t know what is.”

_I wouldn’t be so quick to credit the Almighty_, Colin mused. _Let’s see how attentive he is when I’m choking the life out of you._ Indeed, Katherine was rapidly approaching the end of her usefulness.

“Our union is a miracle,” the man duplicitously stated.
She beamed happily at her companion’s pronouncement. “I quite agree. I’m glad you feel the same.”

“I sure do. Now how about you sit back and relax while I finish reciting Byron’s poem? I think you’ll enjoy the rest.”

“Sounds divine.”

With his suggestion approved, Colin picked up the book and began reading aloud from where he left off.

“One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face…”

Chapter End Notes

I was finally able to post this chapter-- whew! Thank you for your patience.

In other news, I've already started writing the next installment. Chapter 152 will feature the first part of the twins' birthday celebration.

Also, to give credit where it's due, the poem excerpted in this segment is "She Walks in Beauty" by Lord Byron.
Birthday Spectacular – Part 1

Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian prepare for the twins’ first birthday…and so do their stalkers.

Chapter Notes

Fluff and drama ahead, in that order.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Rise and shine, my darrrrlings,” Jim crooned as he entered the nursery. “This is to be a day like no other, jam-packed with heap loads of fun. And do you know why?” He hesitated, peering at the twins while they lay snug in their cribs. “Today marks the one-year anniversary of your birth.”

Both babies gazed up at him groggily, oblivious to the event, but delighted to see their Daddy.

“I can’t believe it’s been so long already. Seems like just yesterday I was holding you in my arms for the first time.” He remembered the moment vividly. After having gone through the trauma of being pushed down a lengthy staircase, he was rushed to the hospital suffering a placental abruption. An emergency C-section was performed, and before he knew it, there they were— tiny, wailing, and absolutely perfect.

TAP. TAP.

Jim turned at the sound of a gentle rapping on the door. It was Sebastian.

“Good morning, Tiger. What brings you here so early?” Usually, Moran didn’t assume baby-tending duties until later in the day.

“It’s our cubs’ birthday. There’s no place I’d rather be than at their side…and yours.” Following his declaration, the sniper approached.

Moriarty grinned with glee. “Isn’t it thrilling? I’m practically bouncing off the walls.”

“Magpie’s all aflutter,” he teased, pulling his mate close. “I adore seeing that sparkle in your eyes.”

The consulting criminal laid his head against the larger man’s chest and sighed contentedly. “My gorgeous, gallant Sebby. Thank you.”
“For what?”

“Everything.”

Moran chuckled. “That’s pretty broad. Can you narrow it down a tad?”

“You want specifics? Fine. Thank you for sticking with me through the good, the bad, and the insane. For protecting me more fiercely than anyone else ever could. For showing me that I was not only capable of love, but also deserving of it as well. And finally, thank you for giving me them,” he emphasized, motioning towards Essie and Eddie. “Our children are my greatest treasures. Without you, they wouldn’t exist.”

The ordinarily poised alpha was taken aback. “Wow, I don’t know what to say. You’ve made me happy, too, in ways I never dared imagine. I should be the one thanking you.”

“At that rate, I suppose we’re grateful for each other.”

A sly smile eclipsed Seb’s face. “Always, my sweet.”

For just a second, the mastermind closed his eyes and allowed himself to steal another moment of bliss amid his husband’s embrace. It was warm and welcoming and so very safe.

“Need any help with the kiddos?” asked Moran. “We’ve got a few hours to kill before the festivities begin.”

“If you’re offering your services, then by all means, lend a hand. Do be aware, though, that our poppets adhere to a set routine. Variations in their schedule may produce undesirable results.”

“You run a tight ship, kitten. Hard to believe someone as changeable as you would stress the importance of regimented living.”

“It’s a necessary evil. I don’t particularly enjoy such rigidity, but infants and toddlers require a certain amount of structure.”

“Makes sense,” he remarked. “Essie and Eddie are lucky to have the smartest, most dedicated mum in the world.”

Moriarty’s cheeks flushed slightly at the comment. “I believe you’ve elevated flattery into an art form.”

“I simply call it like I see it. You’re incredibly devoted to our little ones. Even before they were born, you went to great lengths to care for them.”

“Any child of ours deserves the best,” Jim stated. “Naturally, I rose to the occasion.”

“Yes, you did.” A swell of pride filled Sebastian, brought on by his omega’s exemplary parental skills. It was a sought-after trait in a mate, valued highly among alphas.

“So… ready to get cracking, soldier?”

“Aye, sir. Where shall we start?”

“First thing’s first, we put them in new nappies. Next is breakfast, followed by a spelling lesson and a bit of playtime. Then we’ll administer some mid-morning cuddles—”

“Cuddles?” the former colonel questioned incredulously.
“It’s to help our doves relax. Once they’re sufficiently soothed, they’ll go down for a short nap. When they wake, I’ll prep them for the party.”

“Sounds like a plan. I’m eager to see the twins in their costumes.”

“Me too. Photos will be snapped, that I guarantee.” He paused, an impish gleam coming over him. “And then we’ll don our outfits. Oh, what whimsy awaits.”

‘Whimsy’ was one word for it, all right. After Moran told Jim about the costume theme he had in mind, the Irishman responded with surprising enthusiasm. Little did Seb know, his spouse intended to put his own spin on the concept. It would be an unforgettable ensemble, indeed.

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“Heeheehee!” Estella giggled madly while Jim worked to style her hair. The boisterous tot seemed to think her Daddy was playing some kind of game with her.

“Sweetheart, you’ve got to hold still. How can I fasten this bone in place if you’re squirming up a storm? Let me finish.” The ‘bone’ was actually a 24-karat gold, diamond-encrusted accessory Moriarty had commissioned especially for his daughter.

“There,” he said, having pinned it at last. “Now you’ve got the perfect ‘Pebbles’ ponytail. Take a look.” He brought her to a mirror so she could admire herself. “See how pretty you are?”

Essie’s emerald eyes widened and she tilted her head with curiosity.

“That’s you, honey— the loveliest lass in London, or anywhere else.”

She cooed happily, fascinated by her own reflection. Jim appeared pleased as well.

“You remind me so much of your grandmother. She was a great beauty,” he recalled. “Maybe later I’ll show you some pictures.”

“Dada!” Eddie beckoned from nearby. “Dada! Dada!”

Immediately, the mastermind walked to the dressing table where he’d left his son. “I’m right here, dear. No worries.”

The boy reached out, wriggling his arms in an animated fashion.

“Would you like to get a glimpse of yourself, too? I bet you do.” He scooped him up and returned to the mirror, carrying both infants. “Who’s that handsome little man across from us? He’s wearing the most adoooorable animal-print frock and hat.” Jim paused for dramatic effect before continuing on. “Oh my goodness…it’s you!”

Edward squealed and flashed a wide, gummy grin.

Moriarty couldn’t help but laugh as he envisioned what the lad would look like once a full set of teeth grew in. Eventually, he’d have a proper sharky smile.

“The two of you are so spectacularly cute, I believe this calls for a photo session.” Jim sat his children back on the dressing table and grabbed his camera bag. Whatever shots he took would definitely be going into the twins’ baby books. Perhaps he’d even create a special section dedicated to documenting their birthday.

“Dada. Dada!”
“Dada!”

The tiny duo was tag teaming him, chanting in unison as if they hadn’t a second to spare.

“Not big on patience, aye? I suppose you inherited that from me.” He adjusted the lens while he spoke, focusing it on his sugarplums. “Prepare to strike a pose.”

Essie and Eddie didn’t need to be told— they were born models, possessing an inherent sense of poise and charisma.

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

“You’re doing splendidly, my darlings. Imagine when Papa sees you, and then later, all the party guests too. I’m positive you’ll ‘wow’ everyone.”

“Papa!” shouted Estella.

“Yes, princess. Papa will be delighted.”

CLICK. CLICK.

“Papa!” Edward exclaimed, and this time Jim noticed that the boy’s eyes seemed to shift, like he was looking at something beyond the camera.

Hmm. Moriarty turned around. Sure enough, there was Sebastian, observing from the doorway. Or rather, there was ‘Barney Rubble.’

The couple’s gazes locked and they approached each other, coming to meet in the middle of the room.

“What do you think of my outfit?” Moran asked with a smirk.

Jim promptly set down his Nikon device and pressed himself close to the quasi-caveman. “I think that if any cartoon character was even half as sexy as you, I’d have watched a lot more TV during my adolescence.”

Seb chuckled at the remark. “I was afraid I might look silly.”

“Oh, you do. But there’s no rule saying a person can’t be sexy and silly at the same time. They aren’t mutually exclusive.”

“Name one individual who’s both.”

A brief silence fell while the genius pondered a response.

“See? Nobody springs to mind because it’s impossible.”

“Hush. I’m giving this some thought.”

“If you have to think about it—”

“Jimmy Fallon.”

Had Moran been drinking, he would’ve done a spit take. “Bloody hell. You’ve gotta be kidding?”

“The bloke is a riot at karaoke and looks smashing in a suit.”
Sebastian shook his head. “I love you, kitten, but you’ve got strange tastes.”

“Papa!” one of the babies suddenly belted out again.

“There’s my cue.” Like the call of a siren song, Seb was loath to deny his children’s cries. He moved to stand at their side, gazing upon them in an almost reverent manner. “Happy birthday, kiddos. Your costumes are top notch. Daddy’s done a wonderful job getting you ready.”

“On that note, I ought to do the same. Watch Essie and Eddie whilst I dress and apply makeup.”

“Okay, hon. Take your time.”

It wasn’t until Jim had left the room that the second part of his statement resonated with Moran. Makeup? Were cosmetics really necessary when portraying Fred Flintstone? Magpie’s always been eccentric. Perhaps this was another instance of him going slightly overboard.

At any rate, Seb didn’t dwell on the matter. There were more important issues to address, namely keeping the twins entertained while they waited. He scoured his brain for ideas and soon came up with a solution.

“Papa’s going to tell you a story about the perilous adventures of two very special babies. They were siblings, just like you, and they wielded magical powers that allowed them to do all sorts of fantastic things. Sound interesting?”

The pair didn’t offer a verbal reply, but stared at him with rapt anticipation. He interpreted it as a good sign.

“You seem eager to hear more, so I’ll continue. These babies I mentioned were called ‘Tessie’ and ‘Teddie,’ and on their first birthday, they began to manifest a series of unique abilities…”

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SNIFF. SNIFF.

Wha…

SNIFF.

Annie awoke, her senses bombarded by the distinct smell of smoke. Though the lighting was dim, she saw a male figure puffing away on a cigarette at her bedside.

“Colin?” she queried, recognizing the scent. “What the hell are you doing?”

“I want to run through our plans so there’s no margin of error.”

“Jesus Christ, couldn’t you have waited until I got up on my own? Sitting here while I sleep is pretty fucking creepy.”

He shrugged and blew a smoke ring in the air. “It got your attention, didn’t it?”

“Any number of things could get my attention. Doesn’t mean you should try them.”

“This is the least of your worries. Today, we need to execute our plan with expert precision. Seamlessly, like a well-oiled machine.”

She took a deep breath and sat up. “Fine, we’ll go over it for the umpteenth time. I don’t see how
this morning’s rendition will differ from last night’s, but if it appeases your neuroses, then let’s proceed.”

Sssssss.

Colin abruptly stubbed his cigarette on the woman’s arm, her flesh sizzling with a sickly hiss.

“Aaaah! Fuck you!” she spat.

“Nah, think I’ll pass. But do listen carefully.” He wrenched Annie by the length of her hair, forcing her to look at him. “Today is going to be the most important moment of your whole bloody life. What happens during the next 24-hours will determine whether you live to a ripe old age or wind up a mere footnote in the weekend obits. That said, I strongly advise you treat our endeavor with the gravity it deserves.”

Annie shook, genuinely terrified of her brother-in-law. He’d been rough with her before, but she never truly believed he might kill her until now.

“P-please let go. I understand how serious this is. Everything we’ve done has been for Margo.”

Several uneasy seconds passed as the two glared at each other in a stalemate. Finally, he released his grip.

“I’ll be brief,” Colin coolly declared, acting like he hadn’t just experienced another precarious sanity slip. “Katie will arrive at the Norridge estate early this afternoon. She’ll play the role of ‘nurse-nanny’ to perfection, minding all the little ankle-biters at the party. And then, when an ideal opportunity arises, she’ll text us and we’ll swing into action.”


“Correct.”

“Only she doesn’t know he’ll be tagging along.”

“That’s right. Her feelings on the subject are inconsequential, because by that point, it will be too late to turn back.”

“Yeah.” Annie inwardly lamented the truth of his statement. More and more, she’d come to regret her complicity in their horrors. Unfortunately, they’d reached a nadir from which there was no escape.

“Our objective is to grab the twins while Luke nabs his daughter. From there, we’ll make a swift getaway. Katie and I will take off with Moran’s whelps, and you’ll receive recompense for the help you’ve provided. After that, I think it’s best we cease contact.”

“I agree.” When all this was over, she intended to make a fresh start abroad. If she never spoke to Colin again, it was okay by her.

“Glad we’re on the same page.” The man stood up, satisfied with the quick review. “I’ll meet you downstairs. Consider today’s breakfast a ‘Last Supper’ of sorts.”

He quietly slipped into the hall, a devious expression on his face. Colin’s true plans were far more sinister than he’d admitted to. In actuality, there would be no running away with Katherine and the babies. He’d snuff them out before they ever left London.
To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Things will be kicking up soon. Next chapter, the Moriarty-Moran family arrive at Jack’s house and the party will get underway.
Birthday Spectacular – Part 2

Chapter Summary

Jim and Jack have a chat before the twins’ party officially gets underway.

Chapter Notes

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DING-DONG.

The doorbell chimed at the Norridge residence.

“Coming!” shouted Jack as he made a mad dash to the entryway. When he opened the door, he was flabbergasted. There stood Jim, clad in a chic black wig and knee-length blue dress.

“Hiyyyy. Care to invite us inside, or are you just going to gawk all day?”

“My apologies. Please, make yourselves at home.”

The Moriarty-Moran family proceeded onward, and Jack got a good look at each of their costumes. He knew about the ‘Flintstones’ theme, but wasn’t aware Jim planned to emulate ‘Betty Rubble.’

“That’s quite a striking ensemble,” he said, still taking in the surreal visual. “I must admit, I assumed you’d be the ‘Fred’ to Seb’s ‘Barney.’”

“Yeah,” commented Moran. “So did I.”

“Orange with black spots simply doesn’t suit my complexion. Blue is much more flattering.”

The sniper rolled his eyes. “Darling, you get hung up on the littlest things.”

“Bite your tongue. Fashion is no small matter and I’ve got to set a good example for our doves. Speaking of which...” he paused, casting a warm gaze on his stroller-bound children, “aren’t they diviiiiine?”

“Most certainly,” Norridge agreed. “‘Pebbles’ and ‘Bamm-Bamm’ have never been cuter.”

Following that, tiny footfalls were heard pattering across the hardwood floor. It was Reggie, racing towards the group.

“Jim! Seb! Baybuhs!” he exclaimed. “Am weady to parwty!”
“Me too, sweetie,” replied the consulting criminal. “I think this will be great fun.”

“Nu can wait. Wuv’ you costume! So pwetty!”

“Thanks, hon. I’m rather partial to yours as well.” The toddler was dressed stylishly in what appeared to be a miniature Westwood suit.

“Guess who am?” Reginald urged, his excitement erupting like a geyser.

“Hmm. Your father, perhaps?” Moriarty was no fan of Sir Gary Norridge, but the man did have refined tastes.

“Nuuuuu. Not Dadda! Am you.”

The declaration took Jim wholly by surprise. “Me?” he asked, disbelief evident in his voice.

“Yes. Am James Mor-wee-ar-tee, Napo-wee-uhn of cwime.”

Sebastian snorted at the description. “Blimey, what have you been teaching him?”

“Nothing disparaging, I assure you. Reginald reads at an advanced level and often peruses his father’s newspaper collection. He must’ve gotten it from an old headline.”

“I’ll say it’s old. Nobody’s called me that in years.” A question soon sprang to mind. “How’s Gary feel about his son’s homage to yours truly?”

“Dadda nu know. He finks am Tony Starwk.”

“Oh reeeeally?”

Jack nodded, keen to answer for himself. “It’s not a big deal. Originally, Reg was set to go as ‘Iron Man.’ At the last second, he had a change of heart and decided to be you instead. So I purchased the proper apparel, and when his father saw the outfit, he assumed it was meant to represent a non-armored version of the character. I didn’t bother to correct him.”

“Ah. Well, in any case, I’m extremely flattered.” Jim shifted his attention to the wee lad. “You look very sharp. I’m glad you’ve reconsidered your stance on formalwear.” He remembered Jack once telling him that Reggie hated putting on a suit. Clearly, the youngster had come to his senses.

“Fanks! Am dwessed to impwess.”

“Indeed, you are.” Moriarty turned to his friend. “And where’s your costume, huh?”

“I’ve got it on right now. Don’t you recognize it?”

Jim peered at him closely in an effort to deduce the mystery ensemble. He took a mental tally of the key components: dark trousers, suspenders, bowtie, tweed jacket. It all seemed familiar, but he couldn’t place how or why.


“Someone give this man a prize, because he’s 100% correct.”

“Betta’ wuck nex’ time, Jim.”

“No consolation is necessary. Seb watches waaaaay more TV than I do, so it’s only natural he’d
think of it first. Frankly, I’ve got better things to do than preoccupy myself with telly.”

The sexy assassin smirked. “He hates being bested by me.”

“You say that as if it were a common occurrence. Mercury transits the sun more frequently.”

“Relax, hon. I’m just teasing.”

Moriarty grumbled, but knew his mate was right. He hadn’t meant any ill will by the remark, and besides, today was supposed to be a celebration—no bad moods allowed.

“Let’s move swiftly along. Jack, show me the catering and decorations. And I simply must see where the cake will be stationed.”

“Of course. We can review the full layout. Sebastian’s welcome to join us if he’d like.”

“Nu,” Reggie objected. “Wan’ be good host and give Seb and baybuhs gwand tour.”

“That’s sweet of you, dear, but he might prefer to stay close by Jim.”

“Actually,” the genius chimed in, “I don’t mind if he and I go our separate ways for a bit. I’ve barely had any time to talk to you since you got back from Ireland. I’d love to catch up.”

“Well, if it’s okay with him, then it’s okay with me.”

All eyes settled on Moran, awaiting a response. Fortunately, the alpha was no fool—he knew better than to disagree with his partner’s wishes. “Sure, I wouldn’t mind taking a tour of this place. It isn’t often I find myself in a home bigger than my own. Plus, it might be fun for the kiddos.”

“Excellent. The party doesn’t officially start for another hour, so we have some leeway. Let’s regroup in the foyer before time’s up.”

“Sounds good,” Seb asserted. “You ready, Reg?”

“Yes.” A consummate professional, he encouraged the tall blonde to take his hand. “Come wit’ me, sir. I be you’ guide.”

Sebastian chuckled, walking alongside the precocious tot while pushing Essie and Eddie’s carriage. “Lead the way, pal.”

Jim watched on in a blissful haze. There was something affecting about seeing his and Jack’s families interact. It felt satisfying and serene and just plain nice. Who would’ve dreamed that such simplicity could be so rewarding?

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“Last, but not least, is the gift table. Attendees will drop off their parcels here, and someone from my staff will arrange them alphabetically based on the giver’s surname.”

“You’ve certainly taken detail management to a new level,” Moriarty quipped.

“Hey, I’ll have you know that coordination is key to staging a successful event.”

“I’m aware, believe me.”

Jack had finally finished showing his fellow omega all the amenities today’s soiree had to offer. It
was an impressive undertaking, of which the consulting criminal thoroughly approved. In fact, he was quite pleased by the notion that his husband had helped organize the festivities. Truly, there was no end to Seb’s thoughtfulness.

“We were lucky to secure a caterer after cancelling with our original vendor. Sometimes people in the industry gossip and word can travel fast regarding difficult clientele.”

“I imagine so, but this was a unique situation. You suffered an unforeseen personal emergency. One could hardly find fault in that.”

“Really? Because I do. Breaking promises is a terrible transgression in my book, and postponing the party made me feel like I’d broken a vow.”

“Nonsense. You’ve done nothing wrong. It isn’t as though you ducked out for frivolous purposes—your father had a heart attack. That’s more than ample reason to delay the plans. Hell, some folks wouldn’t have bothered to reschedule, they’d simply call off the event altogether. It’s commendable you were willing to hold it at a later date.”

“There was no way I’d cancel completely. Too much time, effort, and money went into the affair. And besides that, I saw what it meant to Sebastian. He was eager to do something nice for you.” The man smiled faintly at the memory of his and Moran’s brainstorming sessions. “You’ve got a solid bloke there. Don’t ever let him go.”

“I’ve no intention to. I know what a rare breed my Tiger is.” Jim stopped, thinking further on the subject of their respective spouses. “How’s it going between you and Gary? Should I expect a cameo appearance from him today?”

“I doubt it. He took leave to accompany me to Cork, and now he has a backlog of work to get through. I told him I didn’t need a chaperone, but he insisted we go as a family, Reginald included.”

“There’s strength in numbers,” the genius stated. “I’m glad your mate was there to support you.”

“Yeah. I suppose I am, too.”

A hush fell over the duo and Norridge’s expression grew melancholy. Moriarty noticed straightaway.

“What’s wrong, Jack?”

“I’m thinking about my dad.”

“Oh. Right, of course. He’s doing better now, isn’t he?”

“Yes, he’s faring well and was discharged from the hospital. I’m grateful for that. It’s just…I can’t get the image out of my head…”

“What image?”

“Him, laying there in the Urgent Care unit, hooked up to a dozen machines and too dazed to speak. It was awful.”

Jim sighed somberly. He understood that kind of heartache on a deeply personal level. Twice, he’d witnessed Seb in physical peril—the first time after he’d been shot, and again, when he was stricken ill with malaria. Both instances occurred while the sniper was on assignment. Later, he
saw his children in a similarly grim condition after they’d contracted the flu. All three cases were utterly nerve-wracking.

“I’m sure your father appreciated you being there.”

“Aye, he did. He loved seeing Reggie, too. I only wish the visit was under less dire circumstances.”

“Try not to fret. You’ll have plenty of happy get-togethers in the future.”

“I know. Still, it troubles me.” Jack hesitated, his eyes shifting to an empty table that was set up for guests. “I could use a ‘taste-testing’ break. Sit and I’ll fetch us some refreshments.”

“All right,” Moriarty agreed.

Norridge quickly disappeared into the kitchen. When he returned, he was carrying a tray containing pastries, two crystal goblets, and a bottle of champagne.

“This is a sample of the boysenberry-apricot tartlets we’ll be serving today.” He placed a portion in front of Jim and nodded encouragingly. “Bon appétit.”

“Looks delicious.”

“Oh, it is. And furthermore, it pairs exceptionally well with a bit of Dom Pérignon.” Jack grasped the bottle, ready to uncork it.

“Wait,” Jim demurred. “No bubbly for me, thanks.”

“Why not? It’s a fine vintage, I assure you.”

“Quality isn’t the issue.”

“Then what’s the problem? I’ve never known you to refuse a drink.”

There it was— the million dollar question, whose answer he’d only revealed to one other person besides his husband. Dare he divulge it again now?

Yes. Yes, he would.

“Welllllll…at the moment, I’ve cut alcohol from my diet entirely.”

“That must suck. Why endure the torture?” Suddenly, a worrying thought popped into Jack’s head. “You aren’t taking antibiotics, are you? If you’ve got a communicable infection—”

“No, I don’t have an infection. And even if I did, do you really think I’d risk spreading disease en masse by attending a party? Bloody hell.”

The man immediately regretted his kneejerk reaction. “You’re right, that would never happen. I’m sorry for jumping to conclusions.”

“Consider yourself forgiven.” Jim had more important matters to address than his friend’s gaffe. “The reason I’m abstaining is because I might be pregnant.”

Norridge responded with stunned silence, his eyes widening and mouth hanging agape. It was a rare feat to render him speechless, but Moriarty had managed it.

“I’d hoped you’d be excited when I shared the news. Is the idea of me having another child so
“appalling?”

“No, it’s not appalling at all. I’m just surprised.”

“I was, too, initially. Now I’m pleased by the prospect.”

“When will you know for sure?”

“Once I’m officially tested. It can take weeks to build up hormone levels in the body, so I wanted to wait a little while before visiting my doctor.”

“Makes sense.” A look of curiosity soon registered on Jack’s face. “Hey, Jim?”

“Yes?”

“How’ve you been feeling?”

“Okay, I guess. Why?”

“Because when I was pregnant with my youngest son, I experienced symptoms prior to receiving a clinical diagnosis.”

“What kind of symptoms?”

“Increased appetite, fatigue, sensitivity to smells,” he listed off. “I remember having to leave the room when Gary ate certain foods. The scent of fried eggs, in particular, made me gag.”

Moriarty ruminated on whether or not he was similarly afflicted. Truth be told, he had found himself snacking more often lately, and he’d taken an afternoon nap every day that week. Smells hadn’t posed a problem thus far, but he hesitated to tempt fate.

“If you’ve noticed anything of the sort, they could be early indicators of your condition.”

“Perhaps a home test is in order,” the consulting criminal mused. He hadn’t originally thought it necessary, but Jack’s cautionary words gave him pause.

“You should do that. The two-minute gap between knowing and not knowing what’s in store is exhilarating.”

“Exhilarating? I’d call it petrifying.”

“Why? You said you were keen on the possibility of another baby.”

“I am. However…” Jim trailed off, fidgeting anxiously with the hem of his costume. “Never mind…it’s daft.”

“Hey, you can confide in me. Just like old times when we shared our troubles at MOPS meetings.”

The dark-eyed omega breathed deeply. “What if the results aren’t what I’m hoping for? The more I imagine adding on to my family, the surer I am that that’s what I want. Suppose it doesn’t pan out, though? What then?”

“Then you keep thriving,” declared Norridge. “You continue to live your life and cherish the loved ones you’ve already got. And take note that while neither of us are ’spring chickens,’ you’ve hardly reached the end of your heats. There’s still time for you to bear another child at some point. Don’t despair if the results aren’t ideal. Eventually, all will fall into place.”
The conversation quieted as Moriarty contemplated his friend’s advice. It was moments like these when he realized how much he missed having a sounding board; an outlet wherein he could voice his thoughts and concerns.

“Patience has never been a virtue of mine, a fact which you’ve probably gathered. On occasion, I need to be reminded it’s okay to slow down. That said, thank you for helping put things in perspective. You’re a true ally and a standup gent.”

He smiled softly. “Careful, too much praise will go straight to my head. Before you know it, I’ll be doling out schmaltzy pearls of wisdom like some low-rent ‘Dear Abby’ columnist.”

“‘Dear Jackie’ does have a ring to it,” Jim remarked with a wink.

“Ha-ha. Yeah, right.” The man reached for a tartlet, taking a bite. He promptly grunted in delight. “God, you’ve gotta try these.”

Moriarty obliged, and he soon understood what Norridge was raving about. The pastries were so delectable, they nearly rivaled his own.

“If the rest of today’s menu is as tasty as this, I doubt we’ll have any leftovers to pack up.”

“It’s topnotch all around. That, I guarantee.”

“Promises, promises,” the mastermind teased. “I’ll require further samples in order to make a definitive judgment.”

“Well then, I’d best procure more edibles. Would you prefer savory or sweet?”

“Bring me a bit of both.”

“An excellent decision. I’ll be back in a flash.”

Once he was alone, Jim took a second to appreciate his surroundings. Jack and Seb had done a spectacular job of selecting decorations for the party. There were streamers, twinkle lights, balloons, and a large, colorful banner that read ‘Happy Birthday Edward & Estella.’ It was everything he’d dreamed of when he envisioned what the celebration would look like.

“You did good, Tiger,” he whispered. “Hope you’re enjoying your grand tour.” The genius grinned as he recalled the way Reggie had led him off. Surely, a whimsical time was afoot. He couldn’t wait to hear all about it…


Moran nodded and pushed inside, wheeling his slumbering cubs along with him. A quick survey of the area told the sniper everything he needed to know.

Shelves full of stuffed animals. ‘Iron Man’ posters on the walls. Toys stacked in the corner. A racecar bed adorned with ‘Avengers’ themed sheets.
These were Reg’s sleeping quarters, he was positive of it.

“You’ve got a cool space here, little man.”

The tyke beamed merrily. “Fanks! Was borwing baybuh woom, but Mumma wee-dec-o-wate and now is fun, big boy woom.”

“I like it a lot.”

Reggie shuffled over to a wide bay window, his enthusiasm irrepressible. “Dis’ fave-wit spot. Wuv’ to pway when sun shine in.”

“I’ll bet it’s nice.” Seb walked a few paces to meet the boy, and in doing so, noticed what a fantastic view the location afforded. “Wow, you can see the whole front yard.” A hedge maze, tennis court, and elaborate marble fountain were visible from their vantage point. It was an impressive sight.

“Am too small to wook out window,” the lad lamented. “Sometimes Mumma pick me up so can watch birdies.”

“I could do that for you now if you’d like.”

“Weally?” he asked, hope brimming in his eyes.

“Yeah, let’s do it.”

“Otay!”

Sebastian lifted him with ease. “How’s that?”

“Gweat! You so tawll. Wish I was tawll.”

“I think you will be one day. Give it time.”

At that moment, something curious occurred. Moran observed a car pull up to the house—odd, considering guests weren’t scheduled to arrive for another 45-minutes. Even stranger, the vehicle also struck him as being inexplicably familiar. Where had he seen it before?

Volkswagen. Black. Slightly dented fender. Seb noted whatever identifying details he could.

A woman emerged from the automobile and Reginald’s face grew animated. “Nanny here!”

“That’s her, aye?” He knew Jack had hired extra childcare assistance for the party, but he’d not met the individual himself.

“Uh-huh. Is nanny-nurse Evva-win Wodes.”

“Evelyn Rhodes?”

“Dat’ what I say.”

“Hmm.” The name didn’t ring any bells. Still, he couldn’t shake a nagging sense of déjà vu when he stared at her car.

A black Volkswagen with a dent. There are probably loads of those in London. So why does this one, in particular, feel different?
Thinking. Thinking. Thinking. He wracked his brain trying to come up with an answer.

Seb honed in on the vehicle’s logo and suddenly came to a startling realization. This wasn’t just a black Volkswagen. No, it was also a Passat— the same make and model that had followed him one fateful night and caused him to run into a tree.

_Holy shite._ Could there be a connection? Perhaps the dented fender was a result of that very accident. He never did find out who’d gone after him. The driver appeared to be female, so he’d assumed it was Annie. His suspicion went unconfirmed, though. Might this ‘nanny’ figure into the situation somehow? Or was he merely being paranoid?

The intrepid assassin didn’t know what to believe. The only thing he was certain of was that he needed to talk to Jim, ASAP.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Hey, everyone. I want to apologize for taking so long to update. Life has been hectic lately and it threw me a bit off track. Please know that I would never abandon this story. Even if it takes me a while to post something new, I’d never stop without seeing it through to the end. Thank you for your continued readership and patience.
Chapter Summary

Sebastian relays some interesting news to Jim.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“So you’re going to retire from your business empire to embark on a whole new career path?” inquired Jack. “That’s very brave.”

Jim shrugged, casually sampling a gorgonzola-stuffed mushroom cap. “I’m doing what needs to be done. It’s as simple as that.”

“Yes, but still…talk about a game-changer. Aren’t you afraid you’ll miss it?”

“A part of me probably will. Regardless, I’ve got more important factors to consider. My family’s safety must come first.”

“I understand. Sometimes I wish I could seal Reginald and Bertram in bubble wrap to protect them from the world.”

“In this case, my line of work is riskier than most. If I don’t make a change, the consequences could be dire. I won’t gamble with their lives.”

“You’re a good mum, Jim.”

The consulting criminal felt his cheeks flush at the remark. Why did positive praise always seem to have such an odd effect on him?

“Thanks,” he muttered softly. “That’s a high compliment coming from you.”

BZZ. BZZ.

Moriarty’s phone vibrated, and the look on Norridge’s face was priceless.

“Okay, I can hear your mobile buzzing, but I can’t fathom where you’d have stashed it in that outfit.”

“I had a secret pocket sewn into my costume,” he stated with a sly grin.
“Clever.”

“I knooooow.”

Jim retrieved his phone, checking to see who was contacting him.

SM

There’s been an unsettling development. Need to talk in private. Don’t say anything to Jack yet.

The mastermind’s heart sunk. Today was supposed to be joyful, fun, and drama-free. Was that too much to ask? Certainly, he’d racked up a lifetime’s worth of bad karma, but Essie and Eddie were innocence incarnate. They deserved better.

JM

Let’s meet in the foyer. See you soon.

He tucked his device away and put on a valiant front. “If you’ll excuse me, there’s an issue at headquarters I’ve got to address.”

Norridge frowned. “You’re not leaving are you?”

“Oh, heavens no. But I do have to make a call. It should only take a few minutes.”

“All right. Hope you’re able to resolve the matter.”

“Me too.”

Moriarty swiftly exited the room. A pang of dread rushed through him, his walk to the foyer feeling like a march towards impending doom.

When Jim laid eyes on Sebastian, he immediately noticed the sniper’s grim expression. Gone was the relaxed body language and sharky smile he’d previously sported. Now he carried himself with bone-chilling intensity.

“What’s happened?” the Irishman demanded in a firm, yet hushed, tone.

“Remember the night I was followed and got into a car accident?”

“Yes, of course I remember. I looked after you on concussion watch. Why are you bringing this up now?”

“Because I just saw the black Volkswagen Passat that hit me.”

“I was in Reggie’s quarters, enjoying a splendid view of the yard, when suddenly I spied it pulling up to the house.”

“Are you absolutely sure it’s the same one?”

He nodded. “I am. There’s even a dent in the fender that I suspect was a result of the collision.”

Jim paused to contemplate the new information. Had the claim come from anyone else, he would’ve dismissed it as being wildly improbable. This was Sebastian he was dealing with, though — a man whose instincts he trusted as staunchly as his own. If Moran believed it was the same car, then it was the same car, period.

“So Colin and Annie are here?”

“No, that’s the strangest part. The person driving the vehicle wasn’t either of them. It was a woman who Reginald identified as the nanny Jack hired to help out today.”

“You’re kidding?”

“I wish I were,” he lamented. “I’ve no idea how these pieces fit together. None of it makes sense.”

Jim took a deep breath. This was a baffling situation, indeed. Fortunately, he prided himself on cracking conundrums. “Let’s stop for a minute and employ some critical thinking, aye?”

“Okay.”

“Just prior to your accident, a rash of arsons occurred, destroying several of my properties. At the time, we wondered if our stalkers might be working with a third individual. The possibility was there, but we had no way to confirm or deny it.”

Moran growled, anger surfacing at the memory. His Magpie lost a veritable treasure trove during that particular incident, whole collections of art and antiques burned to a cinder. It was a goddamn tragedy.

“What if we were right?” he continued. “Perhaps they really do have another accomplice and this ‘nanny’ is it.”

“That’s an interesting theory. However, it also raises a pretty terrible question. Supposing she’s in league with Colin and Annie, what does that say about Jack? He hired her to assist at the party. Should we take it to mean he’s in cahoots with them as well?”

An eerie silence swept over the couple, neither wanting to believe Norridge was knowingly involved.

“Waaaaah. Waaaaaaah!” From the confines of his stroller, baby Eddie’s cry pierced through the quiet surrounding him.

Moriarty sprang into action, crouching beside the twins’ carriage. After taking a moment to assess his son’s needs, he concluded that the child was merely surprised to have awoken in an unfamiliar location.

“You’re okay, sweetie. Daddy’s here and won’t be going anywhere for the rest of the day.” Turning to Seb, he spoke again. “Fetch me the ‘Hello Kitty’ doll from their diaper bag.”
“Yes, sir.” The sniper did as told, handing over the item.

Jim quickly resumed focus on his precious little lad. “Look who else has come to see you,” he announced. “I have it on good authority that this kitty knew it was your birthday.” He placed the stuffed toy in Edward’s grasp and watched as the boy hugged it tight.

“Cooooooo.”

Sebastian couldn’t help but marvel at how exceptionally attentive his Magpie was with their cubs. He seemed to possess a real aptitude for soothing whatever troubled them.

The mastermind stood up once more, beaming at the sight of Eddie cuddling his plushie. “That dolly always makes him so happy.”

“Judging by the smile on your face, I’d wager it makes you happy, too.”

“He’s what makes me happy. Him and her and you,” Jim declared, referring to all his present family.

“Right back at ya, hon.” Moran moved in close, slipping an arm around the Irishman’s waist.

For a few seconds, the duo gazed adoringly upon their progeny. Both wanted today’s celebration to go off without a hitch, but was that goal still attainable? They couldn’t be sure of who or what to trust.

“Sebby?”

“Yes?”

“While we’re here, we won’t leave the babies alone for even an instant. One of us will be near them at any given time. Do you understand?”

“I do.”

“Good. It’s not that I think Jack is complicit in some scheme. It’s just…until we get this situation figured out, it’s wise to err on the side of caution.”

“You don’t have to explain yourself to me. You’ve got my full support.”

“Thank you, darling.”

“Now what shall we do about this mysterious ‘nanny’? Ever since the night of the crash, I’ve been dying to have a chat with the person who hit me.”

“Chomping at the bit, aye? Well, maaaaaybe something could be arranged.”

“Such as?”

“An introduction, to start. We’ll approach her and exchange pleasantries. Glean as much as we can from the encounter.”

“That’s not quite what I had in mind,” Moran huffed.

“No? What, pray tell, were you hoping for?”

“Honestly? An interrogation.”
Moriarty’s expression lit up with devilish delight. “Ooh, Tiger’s feeling feisty.”

“Damn straight I am. If this bitch is working with our enemies, I want details. I want to find out where they’re hiding and what their next move will be.” His instincts were in high gear, every part of him hell-bent on protecting Jim and their young.

“God, I love it when you talk like that.” He pressed up against the sinewy assassin, their warm bodies meshing together. “It drives me wild when you’re forceful and direct and 100% alpha.”

“Kitten, we mustn’t…” Seb trailed off, catching Jim’s naturally sweet scent. It was almost too potent to resist.

“My strong, sexy Tiger. Loyal like no other. You’re mine. All miiiiine.” He stood on his tiptoes and began nuzzling his mate’s neck. Soon, the contact gave way to a series of nibbling kisses and honeyed words whispered hotly into Moran’s ear.

“Bloody hell. We’ve got to get a hold of ourselves.”

“Nooooo.”

“I’m afraid so, dear. This is neither the time nor place for us to succumb to our urges. We need to keep clear heads. Deep down, you know that.”

Moriarty hesitated for a beat, heaving a sigh as he backed away from Sebastian. A mix of frustration and embarrassment resonated on his face.

“I…I had a lapse in judgment. My hormones seem to be running roughshod of late.”

There was a hush between them, both realizing what that might mean. Omegas often experienced an increased libido during pregnancy, and Jim had been no different when he was carrying the twins. Could this recent upsurge be a signal of his possible condition or was it pure coincidence?

“It’s okay, Magpie.” The blonde clutched his husband’s hand in a show of reassurance. “Tonight, once we’ve gone home and put the kiddos to bed, I promise I’ll have you swinging from a chandelier.”

“Talk is cheap.”

“Which is why I’m a man of action. Anything you want, consider it done.”

“Aaaaanything?” he crooned. “Are you certain you wish to agree to that? I can get quite creative.”

“Darling, I’m counting on it.”

The couple eyed each other with sizzling intensity, their passion forever aflame.

“Very well, then, soldier.” Moriarty tugged Seb encouragingly. “Come on. If we’re going to suss out your hit-and-run driver, we’d best not dawdle.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.”

At that, they and their stroller-bound babes proceeded on a mission.
To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Stay tuned as events continue to unfold at the twins’ party.
Chapter Summary

Jim and Sebastian chat up an enemy.

Chapter Notes

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Jim and Sebastian journeyed through the halls of the illustrious Norridge manor, intent on tracking down the woman whom they believed was posing as a nanny while secretly working with their stalkers. This wasn’t meant to be a confrontation per se, but rather a preliminary fact-finding mission. The duo would chat her up for a bit and observe how she responded to some basic questions.

“Here we are,” announced Moriarty as he came to a halt in front of a closed door. “Jack said she’d be in the nursery preparing Bertram for the party.”

“Right.” Moran placed his hand on the knob, ready to charge in, when Jim suddenly stopped him.

“Hold your horses, soldier. No matter how angry you may be, it’s imperative to keep a cool head. If we burst in and display an aggressive attitude, she’ll know we’re on to her. The key is to remain calm. Let the bitch think we have no idea what she’s up to. A false sense of security begets complacency, which in turn leads to sloppy mistakes. It’ll be that much easier to catch her in a lie if her guard is down.”

The sniper took a moment to consider his partner’s advice. It was interesting food for thought.

“Okay, how shall we proceed?”

“Watch and you’ll see.”

KNOCK. KNOCK.

Jim gently rapped on the solid oak door. A few seconds passed before the entrance crept open.

Facing him was Katherine Ramsey, aka, ‘Evelyn Rhodes.’

“Hiiiiiii,” Moriarty enthusiastically greeted. “You must be Nurse Rhodes. Or should I call you ‘Nanny’?”

“Evelyn is fine,” she answered, eyeing the couple shiftily. “Mr. Norridge told you about me, I presume?”
“Yes, he said you were here to help mind the poppets during today’s gathering. Since the party is in honor of my children, I thought it prudent to meet you. I’m Jim and this is my better half, Sebastian.”

She nodded and shook both men’s hands. “Pleased to make your acquaintances.”

“Likewise. I’m not sure if you’re aware of it, but Seb co-organized this soiree.”

“Impressive, sir. It looks to be a splendid affair.”

The consulting criminal flashed a thoroughly disarming grin. “I couldn’t agree more. A prodigious occasion is upon us.”

“There’s no denying it. Now if you’ll pardon my brevity, I really ought to finish dressing Bertram.”

“Ooh, I’d loooove to sneak a peek at what Bertie’s wearing. You simply must show me his outfit.”

Katherine forced a smile, struggling to hide her annoyance. “Certainly.”

She led Moriarty and Moran to a table where the infant’s costume was laid out. Viewing its components, Jim had a pretty good idea of what—or rather, who—it was supposed to be.

“He’s baby Thor.” There was a miniature red cape, crochet ‘armor’ cap, and a rattle shaped like a tiny hammer.

“Indeed, you’re correct. Mr. Norridge’s sons were originally going to follow a ‘Marvel’ motif before his eldest, Reginald, decided to do something else at the last minute.”

“Nothing wrong with that. A boy’s allowed to be changeable every now and then.”

“Very true, sir.”

There was a brief pause as Katherine clearly hoped the men would vacate the room. To her chagrin, no such departure occurred. Quite the opposite, in fact.

“Evelyn,” the crafty omega began, “while I trust Jack’s judgment, I’d like to go ahead and ask you a few questions for my own peace of mind.”

“All right.”

“To start, approximately how many years of experience do you have?”

“Nearly fifteen,” she proclaimed. “I trained as a nursing assistant and then applied my knowledge to the field of childcare. My medical background has afforded me the opportunity to work in numerous households where the children had special needs.”

“Sounds like a demanding job. Has the stress ever gotten to you?”

“No, not to any great extent. I’ve found my vocation to be incredibly rewarding.”

“How wonderful.”

Jim studied the woman’s demeanor. She possessed poise and precision, but could she maintain the façade if pressed further? He was keen to find out.
“Tell me about your last assignment.”

“I’d love to,” Katherine replied, her saccharine veneer unremitting. “For three years, I served as an au pair for a family in the Netherlands. They were a delightful couple who had a son and daughter, both under the age of 10.”

Moriarty’s eyes lit up. “The Netherlands, reeeeeally? Oh, I adore Holland. It’s a fabulous country.”

“In welke stad woonde je?” Moran interjected, peering at the imposter expectantly.

A sudden look of befuddlement came over Katherine. She rushed to suppress her confusion, but it was too late. Jim and Seb had already seen the first vestiges of weakness.

“I’m sorry, sir. I don’t understand what you’re trying to say.”

Sebastian snorted. “You don’t, huh? That’s funny, because I just spoke to you in Dutch— the official language of the Netherlands.”

“I…uh…linguistics have never been my forte,” she stammered. “The family I resided with communicated in English.”

“Hmm, I see.”

The men exchanged a glance, neither believing a word of her dubious spiel.

“So…what city did you live in whilst working there?”

“Amsterdam,” she swiftly stated. “It was a beautiful place, full of blue skies and quaint canals. I consider myself fortunate to have had the experience.”

“You certainly were.” Moriarty’s thoughts spun in a whirlwind. This was precisely the kind of opening he could capitalize on. “One of my favorite things about Amsterdam is the art scene. I’ve been to all the major exhibits. How about you? Fancy a bit of art?”

“Oh, sure. Love it.”

“What was your favorite museum there?”

Nervous laughter escaped the woman’s lips. “I visited so many, it’s impossible to pick only one.”

“Okay then, let’s say ‘top 5.’”

“I’m afraid it’s still too difficult to narrow down.”

Katherine was avoiding giving an answer— of that, Jim was positive. Probably because she’s lying through her teeth and has never set foot in Amsterdam, let alone frequented its’ museums.

“My personal favorite is ‘The Mauritshuis.’ Their Gustav Janssen collection is truly spectacular.”

“I agree. It’s a smashing display.”

He arched a brow. “You’re familiar with his work?”

“Yes, of course.”

The woman’s false smile returned, as if she somehow believed that the consulting criminal could
be swayed by her blind support of his every word. Little did she know, he was making up information to test her veracity, or lack thereof.

“I can’t begin to tell you how refreshing it is to meet a fellow Janssen fan,” Jim commented, his contempt well-disguised.

“I’m full of surprises,” she said with a wink.

“I’ll bet you are.”

An uneasy hush fell over the room, and it seemed like the group was about to part ways, when suddenly the twins began to stir.

“Cooooooo.”

“Daaaaaaaaaa.”

Katherine’s focus immediately shifted to the tiny twosome. “It appears our guests of honor are waking up.” She knelt down to address them at their level. “Hello, cuties. It’s a joy to meet you.” The ‘nanny’ reached out and stroked Estella’s soft, porcelainesque cheek. “Such a pretty girl you are.”

Jim and Seb looked at each other again, neither of them pleased by the fraudster’s interest in their children.

“And you’re quite a fetching little lad,” she remarked, continuing her discourse with the babies. “I could stare at those beautiful blue eyes all day long.”

Edward’s face scrunched up, as if he wasn’t sure what to think of the woman.

“My goodness, you’re adorable. Ticklish, too, I imagine.” At that, she moved to jostle Eddie’s tummy. The tot giggled uproariously in response.

“Heeeheee! Heeeheeeheee!”

Demanding equal attention, Essie unleashed a fierce grunt. “UHHHHNG!”

“You want in on this, honeybun? Okay.”

Soon, Katherine was tickling both babies. Their laughter echoed from wall-to-wall while their arms and legs flailed in a lively fashion.

“Yes, my darlings. I’ll make you happier than you’ve ever dreamed.”

That was the last straw. London’s most dangerous duo had heard enough. Together, they pulled the twins’ carriage back, extracting their cubs from her grasp.

“Stop it,” Sebastian growled.

“They’re not ‘your’ darlings.” Jim glared like he was death itself, ready to do some serious reaping.

The woman sheepishly rose to her feet. She’d gone too far and damn well knew it.

“I…I’m sorry, sirs. I didn’t mean to overstep any boundaries. Your children are just so sweet—”
“Save it,” hissed Moriarty. “I don’t have time to waste on your pathetic excuses. But do be aware that although I played no role in your hiring, I could very easily arrange your firing.”

“Right. I’m sor—”

He placed a finger to her duplicitous lips. “Did I give you permission to speak yet? No. Shut your mouth and listen.”

She nodded in silence.

“That’s better. As I was saying, you’d best tread lightly or there will be grave consequences. You’re here simply to serve as a babysitter for a few hours. Beyond that function, you’ve got no authority over my doves. You’re not to handle them or communicate with them outside of performing basic duties such as diaper changes and cleaning up their spittle. Is that understood?”

Katherine shook her head affirmatively.

“Use your words now, dear. Do. You. Understand?” He enunciated the question sharply for emphasis.

“Yes, sir. It’s crystal clear.”

“Excellent. Then there shan’t be any further trouble.”

“WAAAAAAAH.”

As if on cue, Bertie cried out.

“I’ll leave you to finish dressing him,” the mastermind declared. “Come, Sebby. We haven’t much time until guests arrive.”

Moran stoically complied, turning the baby buggy around and heading towards the door. Jim followed suit.

Once they’d walked a decent distance down the hall, Moriarty decided it was safe to share some thoughts with his mate.

“Everything about that woman is a fabrication.”

“Yeah, it felt like she was shoveling a load of shite.”

“Oh, I guarantee it, and my conclusion is based on more than a feeling,” he asserted. “That museum I mentioned? It’s not in Amsterdam— it’s located in The Hague, a completely different city. And the artist I referenced, Gustav Janssen? He doesn’t exist. I made him up to see how far she’d run with her lies.”

“She raced a full-on decathlon. Probably snowed Jack to get today’s nanny assignment, too.”

“I’ve no doubt. Hell, there’s a strong possibility her name isn’t even ‘Evelyn Rhodes.’”

“Bloody bitch,” Sebastian snarled. “And the way she behaved with Essie and Eddie…”

“It was disturbing, to say the least.”

“Aye. What do you suppose her game is? First she hits me with her car, and now she’s assumed a false identity to attend this party. What’s the point of it all?”
“To get close to us, maybe,” Jim mused. “To act as an intermediary between us and our stalkers.”

“How would they have known about the event we’re throwing? This had to have involved some amount of calculation.”

The Irishman frowned. His spouse was right—Colin and Annie shouldn’t have been privy to the details of their babies’ birthday bash, but if they’d gone to the effort of sending out a lackey, something must’ve tipped them off.

“I don’t believe Jack was their source,” Moriarty stated, wanting to eliminate the most obvious suspect. “As you said, he was likely lied to just as we were.”

“Who does that leave in terms of a culprit?”

Jim paused, giving the question due consideration. After a moment, an idea occurred to him. “Perhaps it’s not a matter of ‘who,’ but rather, ‘what.’”

Moran cocked his head, slightly confused. “Huh?”

“Colin managed to track the two of us for a time by hacking into our phones. Suppose he’s done something similar to Jack? Found a way to surveil him and gain information?”

“Hmm. Interesting theory.” When it came to his former comrade-turned-enemy, nothing could be ruled out.

“We’ll have a chat with him before the guests arrive. Apprise him of the situation at hand.”

“That seems fair.”

“Indeed. And we’ll also make damn certain to keep an eye on this ‘Evelyn.’ I don’t trust her with anyone’s children, ours or otherwise.”

“Me either.”

The couple walked a while longer, eventually reaching the foyer they’d agreed to regroup at. Sure enough, Jack was already waiting for them, a gregarious smile stretched across his face.

“Welcome back, gentlemen. What’d you think of the nanny?”

Jim and Seb glimpsed each other pensively.

“Well,” replied Moriarty, “there are some things you ought to know about her…”

To Be Continued

Chapter End Notes

Hey, everybody.
It’s been a really rough couple of weeks. In addition to concerns over the virus pandemic, I’ve been beset by a series of personal problems which have caused significant stress/distress in my life. I honestly can’t think of a time when I’ve experienced this much drama in succession—just one thing after another.

The lone bright spot is that my birthday was yesterday. I couldn’t actually go anywhere due to the quarantine, but I tried to make the most of it.

Anyway, stay safe. Hope you all had a happy Easter.

++++++++++++++++

P.S. – Here’s an approximate translation of what Seb said to Katherine in Dutch: “In welke stad woonde je?” = “What city did you live in?”

P.P.S. – Next chapter, Jim will catch up with some old friends from his MOPS group. It will probably involve a fair amount of fluff, because I really need to write something fluffy right now.
Birthday Spectacular – Part 5

Chapter Summary

As the party gets started, Jim catches up with an old friend from MOPS.

Chapter Notes

WARNING: This chapter contains reference to sexual assault. It’s not graphic in the slightest, but I’m noting it in case anyone is especially sensitive to such subject matter.

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Edward and Estella’s birthday celebration was off to a smashing start. Guests had begun to pour in, most of them being employees from headquarters. As expected, they came bearing gifts, some presented in lavishly decorated boxes. Moriarty couldn’t wait to find out what treasures lay inside.

“Look, my darlings,” he urged the twins. “All those packages belong to you.” He used to dream about such sights when he was a little boy at the orphanage. It thrilled him to make the fantasy a reality for his children.

“Step aside, love,” a familiar voice commanded.

Jim turned and saw Seb…and he was carrying a giant lavender bunny rabbit.

“Bloody hell. That’s got to be at least—”

“6 ft. tall.” Moran finished his mate’s sentence as he hefted the massively oversized plushie onto the gift table. “One of your secretaries is responsible for this behemoth. It didn’t even fit in her car. The damn thing was strapped to the roof rack via bungee cords.”

“You’re kidding?”

“Trust me,” he insisted. “I had to do the unloading.”

“Bun!” Eddie suddenly exclaimed. “Bun-bun!”

The consulting criminal radiated with absolute delight. “Yes, sweetheart. It’s a bunny. Daddy’s so proud that you know that.” Clearly, the time spent reviewing vocabulary flashcards and playing ‘Barnyard Theater’ had paid off.
Sebastian was similarly pleased. “Wonder how many other animals he can identify?”

“Dozens, I wager. Our poppets possess brilliance far beyond the norm.”

“With your genes, I don’t doubt it.”

“Yours too,” Jim remarked, a gentle smile gracing his face.

Moran fell silent for a second, struck by the genius’s pure, ineffable joy. There was nothing else quite like a thoroughly contented Magpie.

“Come here,” he said, pulling the smaller man close. It felt good to hold him near; to savor the state of their togetherness, almost as if they shared a single form. One heart, one mind, bound in bliss.

“Oh, Sebby. There’s a million things I should be worried about, but right now all I can focus on is how happy I am. You, me, the babies, this party…it’s exactly what I wanted. I adore us and I adore our family.”

“Me too, kitten.”

Minutes later, when the couple finally disentangled from each other’s arms, it was because Moriarty had spotted a surprising occurrence across the room. There appeared to be a mini MOPS reunion taking place, specifically involving Ian and Scott.

“Tiger, look— Scott’s here. I haven’t seen him since he visited me at the hospital after the twins were born.” Jim recalled the red-headed young man fondly, their acquaintanceship harkening back to the days when they attended the same male omega pregnancy support group.

“Go say hello,” Seb encouraged. “I’ll watch our little ones whilst you mingle.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, hon. It’s fine.”

He hesitated for a beat before responding. “Okay.”

The mastermind eagerly approached his friends, surveying their respective costumes in the process. Ian was dressed as a cowboy, complete with a ten-gallon hat, fringe jacket, and spur boots. Meanwhile, Scott sported a chic tuxedo and slicked back hair. Both men were flanked by baby carriages.

“Hiiiiiii, dearies. Those are some utterly charming outfits you’ve got on.”

“Jim,” the ginger gent greeted, “it’s good to see you.”

“Likewise. Now let me guess— you’re supposed to be a suave secret agent?”

“007 himself,” he confirmed with a wink. “Your ensemble is rather whimsical, too. Blue suits you nicely.”

“I knoooow. Wait ‘til you see Seb and the twins. Our family has a ‘Flintstones’ theme going on.”

“Sounds adorable.”

“It certainly is.” Moriarty paused, shifting his attention to the tiny bundle snoozing in Scott’s
stroller. “Speaking of families, this must be your son.”

“That’s right. Allow me to introduce Daniel Joseph Darby. Pardon his lack of exuberance. He had a tough time sleeping last night and is making up for it now.”

Ian nodded. “I understand completely. Tilly was a bit restless as well. I’m not sure how much of the party she’ll actually stay awake for.”

“Asleep, awake... what does it matter?” Jim mused. “The important part is that you’re all here.”

“I wouldn’t dream of being anywhere else.”

“Me either,” asserted Scott. “I’ve wanted to reconnect with you for months, but life got busy.”

Moriarty peered at him warily. “Busy, huh? I’ll give you a pass on having had a baby—that’s hard work. But what else has kept you so occupied that you couldn’t be bothered to send a simple text message?”

“Well...” Scott removed his hand from his pocket, revealing a gold band on his finger. “I got married, for starters.”

Jim and Ian were duly astonished by the announcement.

“Holy cow,” marveled the younger omega. “When did this happen?”

“And to whom?” As far as Moriarty knew, Scott had been single the entire time they’d participated in MOPS.

“Shortly before Danny was born, Nick—my baby’s father—reached out to me. He said he wanted to play a role in our child’s life.”

“And that’s when you got back together?”

“No, that’s when I decided to test him, to see if he was serious. I told him there was zero chance I’d raise my baby where he lived, in Birmingham—it’s too far away and too dangerous. He’d have to come here if he wished to be with his son.”

“An ultimatum,” Jim observed.

“Yes, and I never expected him to agree to the terms. Imagine my surprise when he was actually willing to move to London for Daniel’s sake. You could’ve knocked me over with a feather.”

“That’s quite a gesture,” commented Ian. “How’d the transition go?”

“Smother than you’d think. Within a month, he relocated to a flat near my residence. He visited every day and provided whatever I asked for. Milkshakes, massages, shopping trips...you name it.”

“Must’ve been nice to have that kind of support.”

“It really was. Things got even better once Danny was born. Nick stayed over most nights to help take care of him. The more time we spent together, the more our old feelings began to reemerge. Eventually, we started dating again and moved into the same apartment. Our relationship continued on from there.”

“Weren’t you nervous about rushing things too quickly?” Ian inquired. “Some people wait ages
before tying the knot.”

“There was no reason to delay. We knew marriage was right for us.” He looked to the criminal extraordinaire in the hopes of eliciting solidarity. “Jim, you’re married. Surely you understand what I mean?”

“I do, yeah.” Although he and Seb were romantically linked for years, their actual engagement had been relatively brief. It occurred after his ‘resurrection,’ and by then, neither of them could fathom being apart ever again. Finally making their union official was something both men needed.

Ian’s expression grew noticeably crestfallen. “Forgive me for speaking out of turn. Perhaps it’s best I keep my mouth shut.”

“Hey, no apologies are necessary. Nick and I did act fast, I don’t deny it. But he’s a good guy and we make a very happy family. That’s what counts.”

“Yes, of course,” the youth sheepishly replied. “I have trouble trusting alphas…I guess it shows through more often than I’d like to admit.”

“It’s okay. I probably wouldn’t trust them either if I’d gone through what you did.”

“Excuse me?” he balked at the statement.

“Your ordeal with Lucas Darrow. That had to be awful.”

“How do you know what happened with him?” Ian questioned, panic rapidly setting in.

“I read it in the news. An article was recently published regarding the case against him.”

“And they used my name without consent?!?” Suddenly he felt like he’d been violated twice—first by Luke and now by the press. “I don’t believe this.”

“Who wrote the piece?” demanded Moriarty. “I’ll make damn sure they get sacked.”

“Jim, I don’t think what they did was a fireable offense. Police reports are a matter of public record.”

The genius scowled deeply. “Only a rank amateur would namecheck a victim. It’s disgraceful.”

“Ordinarily I’d agree. This wasn’t a bad article, though. The story simply cited Ian as having been Darrow’s first accuser. Since then, numerous others have come forward as well.”

That particular detail stunned the troubled omega. “Really?”

“Yes, nearly a dozen thus far. Your courage has inspired a lot of people.”

“I…I don’t know what to say.” The detective he originally met with had noted that Luke might be connected to more sexual assault cases, but he’d not anticipated it hitting double-digit territory.

“They’re going to nail him for the terrible things he’s done, and it’s thanks to you. Try to take heart in that.”

“I—”

“WAAAAAH. WAAAAAH.”
Almost as if sensing Ian’s unrest, Matilda began to fuss.

“No worries, princess. I’ve got you.” He pulled away the blanket covering his daughter and lifted her into his arms. At the same time, her costume was revealed. Tilly wore an adorable yellow frock featuring decorative lace ‘petals’ attached to the hem.

“Such a lovely outfit,” complimented Jim. “She’s cute as a button.”

“Thank you. I thought it fitting to dress her like a little sunflower, seeing as how she brightens my day on a regular basis.” He rocked his baby and carefully observed her. “I know the look on her face— it means someone needs a nappy change. If you’ll excuse me, fellas, parental duties call.”

Ian’s fellow omegas nodded as he ventured off to the nearest unoccupied lavatory.

“So,” Scott spoke, addressing the Irishman, “where’s our gracious host? I’d like to catch up with Jack if I can find him.”

Moriarty scanned the room for any signs of their mutual friend. Alas, he was conspicuously absent.

“I’m not sure where he’s gone. Skipping out on a party isn’t like him, especially when the event is taking place in his own home. I’ll send a text and see what’s up.”

*JM*

*Get your arse in here. You’re missing all the fun.*

No reply.

*JM*

*Jack?*

Still nothing.

*JM*

*Everything okay? Where are you?*

Jim was growing genuinely concerned.

*JM*

*Tell me what’s going on, or so help me god...*
JN

Come to the study. There’s something I must show you.

A chill ran down his spine as he read the message. This couldn’t possibly be good.

JM

All right. I’ll meet you soon.

He was about to tuck his mobile away when another correspondence came in.

JN

Bring Seb, too.

Moriarty inhaled sharply, struggling to maintain composure amid the curious request. He took it as confirmation that something grave was afoot— why else would Norridge ask to see them both? His mind reeled at the prospect of what horrors might lay ahead.


“He had a slight wardrobe malfunction. I’ve got to go help him with it, actually.”

“Oh. Hope it doesn’t keep him indisposed for long.”

“That makes two of us.”

Jim waded through the rapidly increasing crowd on a mission to locate his husband. Whatever happened next, they would confront it together.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

So this chapter ended up being a lot less fluffy than I originally thought it would be. Life has continued to stress me out, and I think it’s showing in my creative output. It’s like I want to write fluff, my mind isn’t complying.
Anyway, back to the story proper. What do you suppose is going on with Jack? Is the situation as bad as Jim imagines or is he jumping to conclusions? Stay tuned and find out.
Birthday Spectacular – Part 6

Chapter Summary

Jim and Seb learn some disturbing information from a friend. Later, excitement and changes abound.

Chapter Notes

My version of Omegaverse is very freeform. It doesn’t adhere to many of the standard conventions. In my AU, people aren’t driven to criminality on the basis of hormones/pheromones and omegas aren’t subjugated. There is equality and respect between alphas/betas/omegas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What do you suppose this is about?” Sebastian wondered aloud. He and Jim walked down a long, winding hall, their stroller-bound children in tow.

“I’ve no idea, but I think it’s best we brace ourselves for anything.”

“Aye.”

They came to a stop at the study door.

“Ready, Tiger?”

“As I’ll ever be.”

Without another word, they pushed inside the room.

Their host was situated in a leatherback armchair, a pensive expression on his face. “Welcome, gentlemen. Please, have a seat.”

“If it’s all the same, I’d rather stand,” said Seb.

“Fair enough. How about you, Jim?”

“Yeah, sure.” The consulting criminal obliged his friend, hunkering down directly across from him. “Let’s not beat around the bush. What is it you want to show us?”

Jack didn’t verbalize a response, instead choosing to simply fish something out of his pocket.

The couple watched intently as he produced a small object, circular in shape and no larger than a dime. Recognizing the item, they exchanged a nervous glance. Both knew all too well what it was, but who would break the news to Norridge?

As it turned out, neither would have to.
"You can stop with the secretive looks," Jack declared. "I’m aware that this is a listening device."

Moriarty and Moran breathed a sigh of relief. Soon, however, another question arose.

"Where did you find this?" asked the mastermind.

"Stuck to the underside of a coffee table," he answered. "After you warned me about the nanny and her connection to your stalkers, I did a cursory check for surveillance. I’m hoping this is the only bug, but I didn’t have time to search every room."

"Bloody hell," muttered Seb. "Maybe we should evacuate the house and perform a clean sweep."

Jim stared daggers at his spouse. "Bite your tongue."

"Kitten, consider—"

"No. This is Essie and Eddie’s first birthday. I won’t allow it to be ruined. Do you understand?"

The sniper heaved a frustrated sigh. "Yes, sir." It was pointless to argue with him when he got into a mood like this.

"How shall we proceed, then?" inquired Norridge.

"We play it cool. Don’t act as though there’s been a disturbance. Pretend nothing’s changed."

"All right. I’m a consummate host— I can rise to the occasion."

"Excellent. And when the party’s over, that’s when we’ll conduct a proper sweep. I’ll see to it myself."

Sebastian placed a hand on his husband’s shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze. "Not alone, love. I’ll help."

"Of course you will," he replied, his sharp tone softening. "We’re in this together."

"Always."

Jack eyed the duo solemnly. "If you need additional assistance, just say the word. Since I’m partially responsible for this situation, it’s the least I can do."

"Hush," commanded Moriarty. "Our enemies’ transgressions are their own."

"Yes, but it would appear that my foolishness has given them an advantage. Had I realized there was a bug planted in my living room, they might not have infiltrated today’s event. And who knows how long it’s been there? Weeks? Months?" He paused, a terrible thought occurring to him. "Dear god, do you suppose that’s how they learned about the Father’s Day brunch?"

Silence washed over the group as they contemplated the possibility. Though a grim prospect, it could not be dismissed.

"Bollocks," Norridge angrily spat. "I feel like a fucking idiot. I may as well have served them information on a silver platter."

"Stop blaming yourself. You didn’t intentionally betray us. Colin and his cohorts are notorious for their breaches of privacy. I’m just sorry you’ve been dragged into this mess."
“Hey, Jack?” queried Moran.

“Yes?”

“Do you use a security camera system? If so, we could review the footage for suspicious activity.”

The man frowned. “Unfortunately, no, we don’t have cameras here. Gary’s suggested it in the past, but I never deemed it necessary. Not until now, that is.”

“Installing some might not be a bad idea.”

“I’ll get on it straightaway.”

BZZ. BZZ.

Seb’s phone began to vibrate. He pulled out the device to check who was contacting him.

“Another guest requires help carrying their gift inside.”

“Oh, what fun,” Jim dryly remarked. “Guess this means you’re the officially designated party pack mule.”

“I’ve had worse jobs.”

“I know. I’m the one who assigned most of them.”

Moran smirked. “Indeed, you are. On that note, I’d best head off.” He leaned down and gave Moriarty a peck on the cheek. “See you soon.”

And so the sniper left, resigned to assist his attendees’ needs. Today’s festivities were as much for Jim as they were for the babies, and he would do whatever he could to keep things running smoothly.

*********

CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

Sebastian snapped photos of the consulting criminal while he stood beside a refreshments table.

“Why are you taking pictures of me? You should be getting shots of our cubs.”

“I will, in due time. Right now, you’re who I want to focus on.”

Moriarty gazed at him, dark eyes alight with a curious twinkle. “To what do I owe the pleasure of your exquisite attention?”

“It’s that smile…that spark. The look that you get when you’re truly happy.”

“Tiger,” he whispered, momentarily thrown by his partner’s candid words.

“Magpie.” Seb cozied up close, snaking an arm around the smaller man’s waist. “My beautiful, brilliant Magpie.”

Jim hummed contentedly. “You know how to charm me, darling.” He paused, a devilish grin registering on his face. “But…”

“But what?”
“Maybe you have some deep-seated desire for ‘Betty Rubble’ and my costume is bringing it out. Perhaps she’s who you reeeeeeally want.”

“I’ve no interest in fictional paramours,” the alpha huskily declared. “You’re the only one I desire.”

“Moi? Goodness, gracious, soldier. I—”

Before he could finish his sentence, Moran had claimed his lips. It was a brazen display, filled with love, lust, and unbearable longing. Even Moriarty himself was surprised by the intensity of the kiss. When their mouths finally parted, both were a bit lightheaded.

“Mmm,” Jim grunted, satisfied beyond compare.

“My sentiments exactly.” For the millionth time that day, Sebastian wished he could steal away with the Irishman for some quality affections. Alack and alas, this was Jack’s house and there were children to attend to.

Speaking of their little ones…

Seb turned to get a better view of the playpen the twins were in. Tilly, Bertie, and Danny had been placed there, too. It was Moriarty’s idea to put them all together and see how they got along. So far their activities mostly involved a lot of napping, crawling, and cooing, punctuated by the occasional stacking of soft blocks.

“Hey, Jimmy, look at that.” Suddenly, there was a new addition to the mix—Reginald Norridge had entered the pen.

“How delightful. He certainly is enamored with our poppets.”

“Yes, and they’re quite keen on him.”

The couple spent the next few minutes observing the youngsters. It became clear that Reggie was trying to teach the babies how to dance. His ‘moves’ consisted of a shuffle, a spin, and a twist.

“Seb, you’ve always been a pretty good dancer. Does that resemble any technique you’ve ever seen?”

Moran stifled a laugh. “Not specifically, but he shows great enthusiasm. Jack may want to consider getting him real lessons.”

“I’ll mention it.”

As they continued to watch, something unexpected happened. Frustrated that she couldn’t emulate Reginald’s moves while sitting on the floor, Estella attempted to stand. The bold birthday girl rose on wobbly legs, gripping the side of the pen for support.

Jim gasped. “Tiger, we’ve got to get to her before she falls.” He motioned ahead, but was pulled back by Sebastian.

“Wait. Let her do this.”

“Have you gone mad? We must intervene or she’ll be hurt!”

“Look again, hon. She’s fine. Better than fine, in fact.”

Moriarty returned his attention to the twins and was amazed by what he saw. Not only had Essie
managed to stand on her own two feet, she was also taking a tiny step forward.

“Oh my god,” he marveled. The movement was shaky and awkward, but it was a milestone nonetheless. “Our princess is walking.”

“Yeah, Jimmy, she is.”

The duo was absolutely beaming as they witnessed their daughter’s foray into upright mobility. One step led to another and another. Soon, she’d made it halfway across the playpen without assistance.

“Why are we just gawking like idiots? Seb, snap some bloody photos!”

“Yes, sir.”

The sniper swiftly complied, recognizing that this was a moment they’d want to cherish forever.

“Keep taking pictures,” Moriarty instructed. “I’m going to fetch Jack and Ian. They’ll be thrilled to see this.”

“Sure thing, love.”

At that, the genius disappeared into the crowd of partygoers, a wide grin present on his face.

As Jim and Seb were watching the babies, so was Katherine Ramsey.

She’d waited hours for an opportunity to be alone with Edward and Estella. So far, though, no such opening had arrived. Someone was always lingering near, thwarting her efforts. It was damn frustrating.

Colin will be upset, she thought. His entire plan hinged upon her ability to abduct the twins. What would happen if she couldn’t deliver on the task?

Maybe I can convince him that we don’t need them. When we skip town, it can just be the two of us. We’ll get a child some other way.

That’d work, right?

Right. She’d had doubts about the kidnapping from the start. Perhaps today’s lack of success was a sign that they ought to cut their losses and abort the mission.

The more Katherine considered it, the surer she became. After all, it would be difficult to maintain a low profile while on the run with two infants. And if a police report was filed…

We might as well have targets painted on our backs.

That settled it. They clearly hadn’t thought this through. If she explained her rationale to Colin, he’d understand, wouldn’t he?

Yes, of course. The man was no fool and he valued her opinion. Surely, she could make him see what was best for them.
Katherine took a deep breath, casting her eyes on a side door. Nobody would notice if she slipped out for a break…and a phone call.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

How do you suppose Colin will react to his associate’s change of heart? I don’t think it’s a spoiler to say “not very well.”

Stay tuned to see what repercussions follow when the shit hits the fan (so to speak). We’re in the third act of the story and things will be ramping up.

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