First Deductions

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/1515164.

Rating: General Audiences
Archive Warning: No Archive Warnings Apply
Category: F/M, Gen, Multi, F/F, M/M
Fandom: Sherlock (TV), Pride and Prejudice - Jane Austen
Relationship: Sherlock Holmes/Molly Hooper, Mary Morstan/John Watson, Anderson/Sally Donovan, Molly Hooper/Jim Moriarty, Mycroft Holmes/Greg Lestrade
Character: Sherlock Holmes, John Watson, Molly Hooper, Molly Hooper's Father, Molly Hooper's Mother, Sally Donovan, Tom (Sherlock), Jim Moriarty, Kate (Sherlock), Janine (Sherlock), Mycroft Holmes, Sarah Sawyer, Philip Anderson, Harry Watson, Kitty Riley, Irene Adler
Additional Tags: Modern Retelling, Critique On Society, Very little romance, Female Protagonist, Female-Centric, Female Friendship, Light Angst, Little Sisters, very little angst, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Big Sisters, Completed
Series: Part 1 of The world of Molly Hooper

First Deductions

by sophie9709

Summary

Based on Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen and the ideas of fayemorgan.tumblr.com.

The cast of this very contrived and witty novel- by fayemorgan.tumblr.com.

Fitzwilliam Darcy: Sherlock Holmes
Elizabeth “Lizzy” Bennet: Molly Hooper
Jane Bennet: Mary Watson neé Morstan
Charles Bingley: John Watson
William Collins: Phillip Anderson
Charlotte Lucas: DI Sally Donovan
Catherine “Kitty” Bennet: Kitty Riley
Mary Bennet: Sarah Avvocato
Lydia Bennet: Kate
George Wickham: Jim Moriarty
Mr Hurst: Tom (now Mrs Hurst)
Caroline Bingley: Irene Adler (changed to Irene Watson)
Anne De Bough: Janine
Colonel Fitzwilliam: Mycroft Holmes
Lady de Bourgh: Lady Smallwood
Map of the novel: https://mapsengine.google.com/map/edit?
mid=zK4yR3lyjGzY.ka3AQsEPww6U

It is the novel as you know it, except it isn't.

Notes

Sherlock Holmes and the John Watson live in 221B Baker Street, London
Lady Catherine De Bourgh's residence is at Frant Place in Frant, Kent
The Hooper household is based in 10 Vine Street, Sevenoaks, but Molly and Mary have
apartments in 17 Garrett St, London. This is a difference from the novels because Meryton is
a made up place and there has to be a sense that the Hooper household, although rich, are not
really part of the gentry. Sevenoaks is an affluent area near London but it is still considered
suburban.
Holmes Manor is based on Lyme Park, which was also the set location for Pemberley the
1995 BBC adaption of Pride and Prejudice
It is a common misconception that nobody is whole if they are not married. And yet that lie has been so permeated throughout society that it was no surprise mothers often reserve—at least in their minds—dreams of their children being married to so-and-so.

This is especially true with mothers for their daughters.

So it came to no surprise to a particular Mister Robert Hooper when he found his wife bouncing into the living room waving her phone in her hand with a recent Facebook postings of an especially nosy friend (Mrs. Long). She kept on chattering excitedly and couldn’t shut up. Robert persevered on reading, but to no avail. To hopefully rid himself of the din, Mr Hooper asked his wife to slow down. She did, but only by the tiniest fraction. She wasn't called Ginger for no reason, he mused. From what he could distinguish a certain young, eligible man has moved into 221B Baker Street, a flat in London city that for the last few weeks had been empty because the last occupant got married into aristocracy.

"Dr John H. Watson is his name! And he is handsome, and nice, and a doctor, to boot! What is more…Robert, are you actually listening?"

"Barely."

"Oh come on, Robert! We have a new bachelor near us and you are not even listening? He will make a great match for one of our daughters! You know they will need to get married soon, because, you know!"

Robert sighed. "Ginger, in our day and age it is perfectly alright for women to not get married and start a family if they don't want to. Besides, just because Mary is nearing her thirties doesn't mean she is over the hill.

"My dear Robert, you just don't understand." Ginger looked wistfully out the window. It was almost midnight, and the party scene was still in full swing. They could barely hear the pulsating music from the next to them in their fancy house in Sevenoaks. "My daughter's lives are not complete if they don't love and marry a man. Mine certainly wouldn't."

"What, you are jealous of Mrs Cottingwood and her three grandchildren? You do realise that her daughters don't have university degrees?"

"Nonsense! But it will still be nice if you visited the bachelor."

"Why don't you visit with our daughters? He might take a fancy to you, you are the prettiest."

"Oh come on," Ginger giggled. "After one has five daughters, one must concentrate on the daughters' beauty, not oneself's! Please, my dear Robert, just for once, think of your daughters."

"I cannot do such a thing!"

"Robert, we have competition. Already Sir and Lady Donovan have paid a visit, and now Sally has more of a fighting chance than anybody!"

"Then go visit them! I will also give you a note stating my welcome, and also recommend Molly in the postscript."
"You and Molly, always closer than two conspiring peas. She is the worse out of our daughters. Her humour is not as hearty as Mary, nor is she beautiful like Kate. What do you see in her?"

"I see in her a decent sized brain and a screwed on head. As for the rest of you, a pea-sized brain and a decapitated head."

"Robert, how can you bully your daughters in such a way? I see you are pleased in snipping my nerves."

"My dear Ginger, you and your nerves have been my constant companions for the last thirty years. You know I have the deepest reverence for them."

"Robert, you are making me depressed."

"Then I hope you get over it and see many young, eligible bachelors moving near us."

"But what is the use if you don't visit them?"

"You can then bet that I will visit them all."

The personality of Mrs Hooper is of course, easy to understand. She is easily wound up, a little silly, and her only goal in life is to see all five of her daughters well-married. Mr Hooper, on the other hand, has such an unpredictable and unique personality of sarcasm and wit that even after their years of marriage she still couldn't understand him.
Onwards to the ball

As observed earlier, Mr Hooper is of a caprice personality and therefore very changeable. He also loved playing jokes on people, and making them look very silly indeed. One way he did it was through saying he will do one thing, and then doing the opposite.

He did exactly that after the quick fire conversation with his wife. The very next day, on the pretence that he was out for a stroll, he called upon 221B Baker Street, and found Dr John Watson to be very respectable indeed. His wife had no idea, nor did his five daughters.

That evening, his wife did find her to her immense happiness. This is what had happened:

It was evening, and the family was gathered around the living room fire as they did when the five daughters visited. The two youngest, Kate and Kitty, hadn't quite left home yet because they were on their second to last and last year of school respectively. Molly was internet shopping for hats on her smartphone with Mary sitting beside her. They both oohed and sighed appreciatively at a purple silk hat with giant boa feathers on it. Mr Hooper looked on, and muttered, "I hope Dr Watson will like your taste for hats."

"Well, how are we suppose to know if you don't meet him?" grumbled Mrs Hooper.

"But Mum," interjected Molly, "we are going to the Charity Ball in Albert Hall and he will be there, remember? Mrs Cottingwood will introduce up to him."

"Heh, I don't think so," Mrs Hooper sniffed. "She is a spoiled sod, and thinks of nothing but herself and daughters."

"Well, that is nice to know you don't rely on anybody," Mr Hooper added.

Mrs Hooper was very much offend at that remark, but couldn't reply without making herself look sillier. So she took it on her daughters.

"Kitty, please stop coughing. You are making me nervous."

"I do not cough for fun, Mum."

"You do cough at inappropriate times," agreed Mr Hooper.

Mary could sense the anger built up in the people in the room, and quickly changed the subject: "Hey Molly, when is the ball again?"

"15 days away."

"Of course," cried the mother, "and you know what this means?" Since Mrs Cottingwood wouldn't be back from her skiing holiday in Switzerland till the day before the ball, she cannot introduce us to Dr Watson, can she?"

"Well, my dear Ginger," mused Mr Hooper, "maybe you can use that to your advantage. Why don't you be the one who introduces Dr Watson to her?"

'Impossible, Robert, have you forgotten your manners already? You know we won't know Dr Watson enough after two weeks to introduce him to anybody."

"Well, if we don't do something someone else will. If you decide to not do anything I shall do it
There was a hush of surprise in the room, and six pairs of eyes stared at Mr Hooper. Mrs Hooper broke the silence by muttering, "Nonsense, nonsense!"

"What do you mean by such statements?" cried he. "Do you count that form of introduction as nonsense? Sarah? You are the philosopher and the bookworm of the family. Do you have anything to say?"

Sarah only looked wide eyed as she tried to think of something sensible to say but couldn't.

"Before we return to Sarah," continued Mr Hooper, "let us continue with Dr Watson."

"I am sick of Dr Watson," cried Mrs Hooper.

"Really?" said, Mr Hooper, amused. "Sorry to hear that. I'm afraid that you said that a bit late now, since I have already introduced myself to him."

The surprise from his wives and daughters were what he wanted and expected, though Mrs Hooper probably surpassed the rest. She was in full rapture over the news but soon said that she had expected him to do so all along. "There, you see, my daughters. Your father does love you all after all."

"Kitty, you can cough now," Mr Hooper muttered as he rose to go to bed, exhausted by his wife's excitement.

"My girls, here, you see a good example of a parent. Let me tell you, making new acquaintances everyday is hard, but I'll do anything for you all. Kate, my dear, although you are the youngest, I think Dr Watson will dance with you first."

"Oh, of course," said Kate strongly. "I am the tallest, after all."

The ladies spent the rest of the evening making plans to invite Dr Watson for dinner.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It was natural of course for the Hooper ladies of the household to get curious about their new acquaintance and suitor-to-be. So they did what came naturally to them- asking questions to hopefully sate their curiosity. The only problem was they were wildly unsuccessful.

Several tried and true methods were used, from hypothesising to cajoling and even the odd straight question. But Mr Hooper hadn’t been living in a household with six women without learning something and he had managed to elude them all. Exasperated, Mrs Hooper was forced to accept the opinion of the Donovans. They were very highly favourable. Although this particular Dr John H Watson was shorter than average, and was prone to a grumpy disposition, he was very kind nonetheless and sociable. He was relatively young, handsome, loved balls, and as the icing on the cake, he has plans to bring several of his friends to the ball. Mrs Hooper had very high hopes for one of her daughters’ marriage to this man.

“If one of my daughters becomes the mistress of 221B, then I shall have done everything I need to accomplish in life,” admitted Mrs Hooper.

A few days later Dr Watson returned the visit and sat for ten minutes in the Hooper living room. He was kind of hoping that he could see the ladies, but he only saw Mr Hooper. The girls were luckier. They saw that Dr Watson was fond of cardigans and drove a black Bentley.

Mrs Hooper immediately gave Dr Watson an invitation to dinner and prepared courses that would do her praise to her housekeeping, only to be disappointed. As it turned out Dr Watson had business in Birmingham for the next few days. Mrs Hooper got worried, and wondered if he will turn out to be another wanderer with no roots and no plans to settle down like he should. But as it turned out he was going there also to gather some of his friends and family members so that they can come to the ball. The initial number was twelve ladies and seven gentlemen. This, not surprisingly, saddened the Hooper sisters. However the number was rectified to six ladies- his two sisters, two cousins, and a married couple from when he known them in university- and the same number of gentlemen. In the end he bought only four of the group: his sister Louise and her husband Tom, Irene, and a mysterious dark man by the name of Holmes.

Dr Watson was pleasing and every bit the gentleman; he was a pleasant conversationist, and easy manners. The sisters however had an snobbish air, and Tom was part of the nouveau riche.

Sherlock Holmes, however, was the centre of the attention as soon as he stepped into the room. His iridescent blue eyes, sharp, high cheekbones, thick, curly, black hair, and expensive bespoke suit...
that fitted his stately form perfectly made everybody turn towards him. Rumours swiftly flew across the room that he was of old money, and he was easily earning £650,000 a year. The Hooper ladies couldn’t believe their ears.

However, his good reputation was soon blown out of the water when he was found to be extremely haughty, proud, and snobbish. He wouldn’t dance with any ladies apart from those within his acquaintance and couldn’t be pleased. No amount of estates or money could recover his reputation.

Dr Watson was very soon acquainted with everybody in the room, and danced every dance. He made himself very agreeable, and loved every minute of it. He was irked when the ball ended and he declared he will hold his own ball once he gets his own manor. Mr Holmes on the other hand only danced two dances, mainly mooched around, and only talked to his own party while refusing to be introduced to anyone else. His reputation was set. In one night he had become the most disagreeable, disgusting, rude man in the world.

For Molly Hooper, she had more experience in his ill-temper than most. This is what had happened:

Miss Molly was forced to sit down for two dances that evening due to the shortage of men. At the same time Dr Watson and Mr Holmes were in a corner having a discrete conversation, but it was loud enough for Miss Molly to hear.

“Come, Sherlock, don’t be such an ass. Come dance with us.”

“John, you do know that I will not dance with anybody that is not in my acquaintanceship. I refuse to be introduced to another ‘charming lady,’ as you had described all of them.”

“But surely you admit most of the ladies here are quite nice.”

“What do you mean? You are dancing with the only nice one on the room!” He then eyed Mary Hooper.

“Well, what about the one sitting near us?”

Sherlock Holmes then glanced at Molly Hooper. She felt his probing gaze, but managed to keep her composure by watching Lydia dancing with Tom Hurst.

“Pathetic pathologist. She is the second eldest, and yet the plainest. She is nice-looking, but much too mousy for me. I believe, John, you are much better off dancing with your dear partner and give up trying to irk out some benediction to meet another lady from me.” Dr Watson shrugged his shoulders and walked off to find Mary.

Molly, not surprisingly, had nothing good to say about Mr Holmes afterwards. But she would always
repeat that anecdote with great glee and laughter to many of her friends, for she had a lively disposition, and a witty sense of humour. She, with her father, made great sport at satirising anything ridiculous.

The night as a whole passed pleasantly for all of the Hooper ladies. Mary Hooper was admired and liked by the Baker Street group, as she was thought of to be the most pleasant Hooper sister by the Watson sisters. She managed to dance with Dr Watson twice in the ball, a fact that was noticed by the beaming Mrs Hooper. Sarah was noticed to be the most accomplished in the room, and Kate and Kitty always had partners (which, for the moment, was all they cared for.) They returned to their house in 10 Vine Avenue, Sevenoaks, all in happy spirits. In the library they found Mr Hooper, once again, to be curled up in a book. Mr Hooper, like all bookworms, often lost his sense of time with his mind in a book and completely forgot about his family. He hoped that his wife had bad news about Dr Watson when he greeted them at the front door, but he was to be disappointed.

“Oh, my dear Robert, you must hear me out,” she said as she waltzed into the living room where Mr Hooper was forced to once again sit and listen, "I had the most wonderful evening. Mary was once again admired by all, and she even danced with Dr Watson twice! Just imagine, my dear, twice! He chose the disgusting vixen Sally Donovan first, by mistake; but he didn’t admire her, oh no he didn’t. I could see it in his eyes. He then danced with Mary for the first time, and I could tell that he was absolutely smitten. Then he danced with Miss King, then with Molly, and then with…”

“Oh for god’s sakes!,” shouted the exasperated Mr Hooper. “Please, spare me from the pain! Please tell me that Dr Watson then sprained his wrist, or he had a dodgy leg, just anything that makes him stop dancing!”

Mrs Hooper was clueless on why her husband was annoyed with her description of the ball, so she tried a different tact. “Have you seen Mrs Hurst’s gown! Let me tell you, the lilic damask is something to be seen!”

Here she was stopped, rather rudely she thought. She then tried another angle of the ball, and talked about the immense rudeness of Sherlock Holmes.

“I tell you, my dear Robert, she has nothing to loose and everything to gain by displeasing him. He is the most haughtily, proud, and vile creature I have ever meet! He strutted from one side of the room to another, with a nose so high the ceiling almost needed a new extension! Molly, too mousy for him! I wished you were there to give you one of your famous insults. I almost wanted to snap his neck.”

Chapter End Notes
As my mid-term exams are coming up, there will probably be no updates for the next few weeks. Enjoy this one though, it is gigantic!
Molly and Mary return to London, and the first goings on in 221B Baker Street

Molly and Mary returned to their flats in Garrett Street, London, the next day. Both sisters worked in London city and preferred to keep a flat there than to endure an hour-long commute everyday for each direction just so they live with their parents permanently. Although the Hooper household was by no means poor, their flat was still extremely expensive to buy so they preferred to share it to save money. It was fine for the two sisters, as they were used to sharing a bedroom and therefore was very close. An apartment just meant both have a bit more space and independence than living with their parents.

It was a custom for them to have a cup of hot chocolate just before they go to bed and discuss the events that had happened. That evening the discussing naturally turned to what happened at the ball. Mary, who had been formally wary of praising Mr Bingley, was just then confessing to her sister how much she admired him.

“He is everything I look for in a man! He is charming, very sweet, with perfect manners, and witty! I have never seen such a perfect person!”

“He is also good-looking as well, which every bachelor should strive to be. His character, is therefore, complete.”

“You know, I was very much flattered when he asked me to dance for the second time. That surprised me immensely.”

“Did it? You know, all praises directed to you always surprise you. I certainly wasn’t surprised: you were easily the prettiest woman in the room. Of course he would ask you twice to dance with him. But he is good-humoured- I will give you that. After all, you have liked more ill-humoured people.”

“Oh, come on, Molly!”

“Dearest Mary! Your greatest talent is to see more good in a person than there really is. Everybody is nice in your eyes, and you haven’t spoken a bad word against anybody. Ever.”

“But I always speak what I think!”

“That, Mary, is your greatest fault. I always have known you to be sensible, and yet, you are foolish enough to turn an eye of all the faults of people! To be honest is a common trait; however, sister, you are the only person I know that makes a person’s good character even better by ignoring the bad. So you do like the Watson sisters, do you? You know perfectly well they are not as mannered as the good Doctor.”

“But only at first. They can be very well mannered if you get to know them. Irene Bingley will live with her brother in the downstairs flat in 221C.”

Molly was still unconvinced, but rather thought their manners were too false, too perfect, and was only designed to please. She was always the more observant of the two and she could always see the situation more objectively than her sister, especially since she was usually on the outside. To be sure, they were still very classy ladies, and can have a very good temper when pleased, but nevertheless haughty. They were educated in one of the oldest boarding establishments in England, rather handsome, and each had a fortune of one million pounds and respectable jobs, but they were in a habit of spending more than they should. Furthermore, their connections were
both wealth and powerful, so they were in a good position to think highly of themselves and not of others. They were also in the habit of thinking their family was respected and ancient, never mind most of their fortune came from recent merchant banking.

Doctor John Hamish Watson (“John will do”) inherited a fortune worth nearly six million pounds from his wildly successful banking father, who had intend to use the money to buy an estate but had an aneurism before he could do so. Dr Watson had the same intentions, but because he had been settled and happy with the rented flat in the middle of London, it was unclear whether he would get round to it or be a tenant for the rest of his life and leave the flat for another worthy bachelor. His sisters, of course, was anxious to get an actual estate but Miss Watson was by no means complaining to be the head of the household. Mrs Harriet Hurst was also grateful to just have a house. Her wife Mrs Thomasina “Tom” Hurst was more a woman of fashion than fortune, and they have a difficult time keeping the facade up. Dr Watson was recommended the flat by his fellow medical graduate Mike Stamford. He had a look around for about half an hour, considered it pleasing, liked the landowner Mrs Martha Hudson, and signed the tenancy papers the same day.

Between him and Sherlock Holmes they shared a deep friendship despite (or due to their) opposing characteristics. Holmes liked Watson for his frankness, kindness, and easy personality, while Watson relied on Holmes for his judgement. Although Watson is a reasonably judge of character, Holmes was easily the cleverer of the two. This, combined with his proud, above-all attitude to other people, and cold manners, made him very unpleasant. In social contexts, this meant that Watson has the better advantage, while Holmes was always considered offensive.

The way they talked about the ball was sufficient to indicate their personality. Watson thought that it was the best ball he has ever been to, full of charming people and pretty ladies. Everybody had been polite and friendly to him; he soon knew all the people in the room, and as for Miss Mary Hooper, she was the most beautiful goddess that he has ever met. Holmes by contrast thought the whole business was tedious, and all he deduced was that everybody had secrets to hide from anybody, and nobody was at the least big different or interesting. He did admit he found Mary Hooper pretty, but she smiled too much.

Mrs Hurst and her sister gave Sherlock that, but still proclaimed that she was a sweet girl. It was therefore recommend that whenever John talks about her, he would comment so.
It was also the custom for Mary and Molly to go back to Sevenoaks in the weekends to visit their family and to relax. That is, if it was possible to relax under the intense eye of an overbearing mother. Both have to admit though there is something relieving having a sleep-in and not doing any chores at all because your smothering mother also happens to be a talented housekeeper. They were also grateful for Macy, an outside help who comes in every day to help cook and clean the house.

Another good prospect of such visits was meeting up with the Donovan family. Sir William Donovan had earned his knighthood during his time as the mayor of London for developing it into the most intense and sought-after business hub once more (the Hooper family constantly joke he was the reason why Molly and Mary couldn’t get separate flats). At the time he was living in the middle of London, but he felt his newly acquired title meant his family deserved to live in something bigger, fancier, and healthier. So he decided to move them to 31, Vine Court Avenue, Sevenoaks, just a ten minute walk from the Hooper residence.

Lady Carolyn Donovan was a very good friend of Ginger Hooper, by nature gossipy, and wanting to always share the latest news with a pair of equally curious ears. She had two daughters and a son herself. The eldest daughter, Miss Sally Donovan, was a distinguished Sergeant in Scotland Yard, was also Molly’s best friend. They met at their local school Walthamstow, and have been friends ever since.

It was customary that every weekend both distinguished families meet together, with alternate weekends at one of their homes. This weekend it was the Donovans’ turn to host. Conversation naturally turned to the ball that had happened last weekend.

“You had a fine start, Sally,” Mrs Hooper said with forces civility. She was one to keep silly grudges where there is none to be kept and haven’t quite forgiven Sally Donovan for being the first choice of John Watson. “To catch the eye of Dr Watson, my, that is something.”

“You really think so? I believe he preferred my sequel more.”

“Do you mean Mary? I did believe I heard something about him being attracted to her the most—something about Mrs Robinson, I believe.”
“Oh, I believe I know. Mrs Robinson asked him who he liked to dance with the best, and he said, ‘Naturally, the eldest Hooper sister.’”

(For those wondering, this particular Mrs Robinson was a sister-in-law to a married woman who infamously seduced a graduated college student and tired unsuccessfully to prevent said student eloping with her daughter. She has since then inspired a famous Simon and Garfunkel song. Luckily for our Mrs Robinson, never meeting her namesake for the last 20 years or so allowed her to keep her reputation intact)

“Oh, that is wonderful to hear. But you know, this might never come to nothing.”

“My eavesdropping has been more of a use to you Molly, I believe,” continued Sally. "To be called ‘mousy’! If only I had had the chance to slap him.”

“Sally, stop talking right at this instant,” shooed Mrs Hooper. “I would rather you didn’t put such vexing thoughts in Molly’s head. Indeed, it would be a curse to be even tolerated by such a haughty man. Mrs Cottingwood told me that when she was sitting next to him he was silent for more than half an hour.”

“Are you sure?” questioned Mary. “I am pretty sure I did see the two conversing.”

“Only when Mrs Cottingwood asked him if he liked London, but he only shrugs. He looked annoyed being disturbed.

“Miss Watson did tell me that he can be remarkably conversive and agreeable among his acquaintances,” continued Mary.

“I will never believe them,” replied Mrs Hooper. “If he could be agreeable, he would have talked to Mrs Cottingwood. He only ever associates with the rich, and he prides himself for it. He must have seen Mrs Cottingwood come in a taxi.”

“Never mind the fact that he didn’t talk to Mrs Cottingwood,” signed Sally. “I would rather he danced with Molly. He does have a right to be proud though. Who wouldn’t if they had a six-figure income and a large estate to go home to?
Sarah, who prided herself in her so-called deep reflections from all her book reading, added, “Pride and vanity are two entirely different things. Both are part of human nature, and both are often mistaken for being one and the same. However, pride is about how one thinks of oneself, and vanity, how one thinks other people think of oneself.”

Just then, the Donovan’s son came inside for their afternoon tea. He overheard the conversation, and added, “Well, if I was as rich as Mr Holmes, I wouldn’t care what other people thought of me. I will live in Monte Carlo, and I will drink a bottle of the best whisky everyday!”

“In which case I shall take you to a rehabilitation centre,” scolded Lady Donovan,

“Shall not!”

“I shall.”

The argument only ended when the Hooper household took their leave for dinner.

Chapter End Notes

The link of the map for the story is now in the summary so you can get a sense of distance and environment of the story. Here is also the URL:
The next week the ladies of Baker Street visited the Hooper household and the visit was returned again the next week. Mary’s manners made the Watson sisters very fond of her, and, although they found the mother to be insufferable and the three younger sisters to be too much to bear, they were very much keen to be acquainted with the two eldest. Mary had borne this with the greatest pleasure, but Molly could still see the superficialness in their relationships, even with their conversations with Mary. She suspected they developed a preference for her due to the admiration of Dr Watson to Mary. After all, it was getting more obvious by the day that he did prefer her company above all others and Mary had been yielding to that preference from the very start. Her easy manners and composed feelings however always put her above suspicion of indecency, a point that she made to her good friend Sally Donovan.

“There are advantages,” she admitted, “to be able to keep your emotions hidden and to keep a mask in public. However, I believe that it would be better if the lady showed more affection to the man than she actually had. After all, how else is she going to bag him? Both parties will be left clueless, and soon there will be a parting of ways. Of course, a slight crush is normal at first, but I believe in nine situations out of ten, it would be better if the woman showed more emotion than she really had.”

“But if she does make it clear to him, as much as her personality would allow her to. Only a vegetable wouldn’t notice.”

“Molls, hush. Remember he does not know Mary as well as you do.”

“Oh come on, Sally. If two people who are in love with each other and don’t attempt to hide it from each other, surely they will both find out?”

“Only if they are ever alone together though. Jane never sees Dr Watson unless they are at a family gathering and therefore impossible for them to ever get some alone time together. What she should do then is at every chance she has she should talk to him. When they are official, she then has as much time to actually fall in love as she wishes.”

“That is the plan of action I shall take if I ever set my eyes on a rich husband,” replied Molly, “but we are talking about Mary here. I’m not even too sure if she knows what her feelings are. She has only known him for almost two weeks and in that time we only had one ball and two dinners.”

“Ah, but you forget the hours spent together after the dinners. Had she merely had dinners with him, she would know his favourite foods and the size of his stomach. But she has also been playing cards with him.”

“Yes, in those two evenings they have agreed they enjoy playing whist better than bridge, but not much else.”

“Anyway, I wish Mary well. If she married tomorrow, she is going to be more likely happy than not that if she had been dating for years. After all, happiness in long-term marriage is only a matter of chance, and relationships can cool very quickly.”

“Sally,” Molly laughed, “where on Earth do you get your antiquated ideas from. You know you are a hypocrite.”

Molly had been so occupied in observing Dr Watson in his admirations for her sister that she didn’t realise that she herself was being admired. Sherlock Holmes however had it a long time coming. At the ball, he only ignored her; the next week, he only commented harshly on her defects. When he
had finished making himself perfectly clear he found her face ugly, he did admit she looked intelligent with her dark, shapely eyes. He did feel repugnance towards her lack of symmetry on her body, but he still found the overall form pleasing, and although her manners were unrefined and clumsy, he still loved her sense of humour. To Molly, however, Holmes was still the proud, haughty man that humiliated everybody.

He was curious of Molly, and wanted to know more about her. When the Donovan Christmas party came about, he started eavesdropping on Molly to glean any information. That was when Molly started to notice his change in behaviour.

“Sherlock Holmes is acting slightly creepy recently, Sally. Why do you think he is always following me around in the room?”
“Molls, only the man himself could answer that question.”
“Well, if he continues doing so, I must be straight with him. He has such a critical eye, I fear I shall be made into a satire.”

Both soon approached him, and Sally broke social conventions to speak first, forcing Molly on the subject.

“Well, Mr Holmes, did I do well when I was telling Colonel Froster about the highlights of the ball?”
“Of course, but ladies always communicate well on that subject”
“Oh, come on, you are being unreasonably harsh.”
“Don’t worry, Mr Holmes, I shall do the teasing from now on. Molly, the piano is unoccupied, and you know what that means.”
“Seriously, Sally?”

Sally kept on pushing Molly to play on the piano. A few minutes later Molly relented. “All right then Sally.” She then turned coolly at Mr Holmes. “My favourite proverb is this: 'keep your breath to cool your porridge.' I shall do the same to sing my songs.”

Her aria was very sweet, but Molly was by no means a virtuoso. Before she could be enticed to sing again, her sister Sarah offered to entertain everyone. She was the only plain one in a family of pretty sisters, and was therefore impatient to show off her ‘talents’. She was always ‘improving’ herself by practising the piano and reading, and made a point of studying two phDs at the same time. As a result she is always eager to show off.

Sarah was by no means talented (in fact her piano playing has more method than passion) but Molly sat throughout the performance. Her delusion of her abilities had caused her to disregard the increasingly uneasy guests of the party until after two pieces, Mary requested that she played the piano for some dancing.

Sherlock Holmes sat at a dark corner of a room, too engrossed in his thoughts to converse anybody. He didn’t even notice Sir William Donovan sitting next to him until Donovan spoke.

“It is an awfully nice recreation, to dance. I believe it is one of the finer points of a polished society.”
“Yes, and it is also a custom for lower ones as well. It was the peasants that invented the jig.”
Sir William could only chuckle, and pointed to Dr Watson. “I believe your friend over there is doing very well. Do you dance well, Mr Holmes?”
“You have seen me at the Charity Ball. Make up your mind.”
“I have loved seeing you dance. Say, do you regularly go dancing?”
“No I don’t.”
“A considerable waste of your talents. Say, do you have a house in the country?”
Holmes only nodded.
Donovan continued, “I was thinking about getting a modest country seat, until my wife protested. She does love the trappings the city has to offer.”

He then paused hoping for a reply, but then he saw Molly walking towards them without a partner. He then suddenly had a very gallant idea.

“Say, Molly, why are you not dancing? Don’t you have a partner? Indeed, I believe this particular Mr Holmes might want one.”
“Thank you for your introduction, William, but I didn't wander into your direction looking for a partner.”
Holmes then, with a grave air, held out his hand to Molly and offered to dance with her. She declined with a look of hatred.
“Come, Ms Hooper, you excel so much for dancing. Please, just for a song.”
Molly only walked away to the bookshelf on the opposite corner of the room.

Holmes only thought of her with a sense of loss, when Irene Watson then slid up next to him.
“I wonder what you are thinking about.”
Holmes then looked up to her, startled. He then regained his composure, and replied, “No, you cannot.”
“It is so sad to see you sitting like this, all alone, when there is good company to be had. Certainly not in this room though, you are right about this. All the people I have met in here are insipid, idiotic, and generally uninteresting! Tell me, what do you think of them? Thought up of any satires yet?”
“No, I was musing about how much beauty eyes can have.”
Irene then looked at Holmes straight in the eye, and coolly asked which set of eyes would give him such inspirations.
“Miss Molly Hooper’s.”
“Miss Molly Hooper’s! When did she go into your favour’s? Do you have a rose on your pocket- no, you don’t. You have an engagement ring.”
“My dear Irene, you have no idea how predictable you are. A woman’s mind always jump from attraction, to love, then to matrimony, in matter of seconds.”
“The way I see it, everything is planned. Just imagine! You will have such a charming mother-in-law to dote over you.”
Only by this time Holmes wasn’t even listening to her, but went back to his reverie. Irene didn’t notice this, however, and she continued to subtly critique the Hooper family in all the ways she could.
Chapter Notes

Sorry it has been so long but the chapter was remarkably large and I was very busy with school.

Mr Hooper had an income of £120,000 a year, but unfortunately for his daughters, they will never benefit from it when he dies. The house they live in is owned by an estate that stipulates when Mr Hooper dies it must be passed onto a male heir. This was thanks to Mr Hooper’s misogynist father*. Mrs Hooper came from a respectable family with her father as a barrister, and she inherited a sizeable sum of £240,000. This was however not enough to supplement her daughter’s lack of fortune. Many times they wished they had created a separate family estate for the benefit of their daughters but they always thought they would have a son. They were however glad their daughters could make a decent living for themselves, and already their two eldest were fully independent.

*(It can also be noted that Mr Hooper Senior was only married for a year, and the marriage ended when he was found slumped over his half-eaten dinner one night by his wife. His death certificate stated he died of a heart attack, with no signs of foul play. Other widows of abusive husbands knew otherwise, of course.)

Mrs Hooper had a sister, who was married to a Mr Phillips, a junior partner under her father, and a brother, who settled down in London and has a respectable job of being a civil servant.

Sevenoak’s town centre was only four and a half kilometre’s away from the Hooper residency, and so it was extremely convenant for the two youngest Hooper sisters to go down there at least three times a week. Their Aunt Phillips had a hairdressers down there, and as Kitty and Kate had more air in their head than their elder sisters, both of them liked to go pay a visit to their aunt after school to gossip and gather material for dinnertime conversations. No matter how quiet and slow days are, Aunt Phillip’s occupation allowed her to pass on new insinuations every time the two visited. Right now, over Christmas fruit tarts and cake, they discovered with happiness that a boy band by the name of Wrong Directions were to move to Sevenoaks as their headquarters.

As it was the winter holidays, the two girls were able to go to their aunt everyday for several hours. As Carolyn Phillips was a friend to the manager of the band, she was able to tell Kitty and Kate everything about them. Everyday added new information about all of them and on New Years Eve they managed to meet all the band members apart from their mysterious lead singer Jim Moriarty.
They could talk about nothing except for the band members. Dr Watson, with all his wealth and respectability, and once the jewel of Mrs Hooper’s eye, was now nothing more than glass compared to the drummer.

After being forced to listen to yet again how dramatic the green of the bassist’s eyes were, Mr Hooper then dryly observed, “Ah, how silly are my daughters that I have sired. I thought you were only mildly dim, but am now convinced you two are the most stupid people in the world.”

Kitty then stood in stunned silence, but Kate continued prating on about how she was looking forward to meeting one of the band members again before he goes back to visit his family in London.

“I would never get why you put down your brood, dear Robert. Other children, I do understand, but your own?”

“If my children are stupid, then at least allow me to know that.”

“It would be an entirely different matter if they are, but you do realise all out daughters are above average?”

“That fact is the only thing I am proud to disagree with you. You do realise your two youngest are especially air headed?”

“Robert, since when did you expect teenagers to be grounded? Why, when I was younger, I was chasing the Beatles! If one of those dapper rock musicians asked for my permission to marry my daughters, then of course I would agree.”

“Mum, have you heard?” interjected Sarah. “Auntie Phillips claims that the band managers Mr Froster and Carter no longer visits the Bennets’ house anymore, but are more likely to be found at the Sawyer’s.”

Mrs Hooper was about to reply if it wasn’t for Macy disturbing them with a cordless phone in hand asking for Mary. Mary came into the living room and talked to Miss Watson. Mrs Hooper eavesdropped with anticipation.

“Well, what is it, Mary?”

“The Watson sisters are inviting me to dinner over in London tonight. They said that they have been on their nerves for the whole day and they needed somebody with a compassionate air. She also mentioned that they invited the managers of Wrong Directions.”

“Oh really,” chimed in Sarah, “Auntie never told us that.”

“Dinning out,” mused Mrs Hooper. “That might not be the best idea tonight.”

“Should I take the car?”
“No, don’t—remember, Molly still has to use it. Go in a taxi. Since there will be blizzards tonight, they will be forced to host you overnight.”

When Mary had left in the taxi, Mrs Hooper had happily forecasted the blizzard was imminent, and that Mary wouldn’t come home anytime soon. Molly was still very much worried for her sister, and her fears were soon founded. The next morning, Mary called Molly with worrying news. The blizzard had been particularly bad and now Mary was struck down with a bad case of pneumonia. Dr Watson believed she shouldn’t be moved, especially since he could take better care of her than any public or private hospital.

“Well, my dear Ginger,” critiqued Mr Hooper, “when Mary dies, you will have the satisfaction of knowing she died under your orders.”

“Don’t be silly, Robert. Nobody dies of pneumonia these days, especially the young and healthy. She will be well. If her case turns particularly bad, then I go and see her.”

By then the blizzard had died down, but there was still a risk of black ice on the roads. Molly was anxious to see her sister, and announced she will take her car.

“Are you mad?” cried Mrs Hooper. “There is a lot of black ice on the roads, and it is too dangerous! No, you must not go. Besides, you will look terrible. Haven’t you brushed your hair?”

“Mary has seen me in worse conditions, and that is the only person I want to see.”

“Sister, slow down,” chided Sarah. “Use your mind. Are you going too far just so you can see Mary?”

“Nothing has much effort when one has a goal in mind. I shall be back before dinner.”

“Well, since you are using the car, do you mind dropping me and Kitty off in High Street before you go?” asked Kate. Molly agreed, and the three of them went inside the car, one with dread and the other two fizzing with excitement. “If we are fast enough,” whispered Kate to Kitty, “we might be able to see Charles Carter.”

Once Molly dropped her two youngest sisters at Aunt Phillip’s hairdressing shop, she then immediately headed for Baker Street. The ice was as bad as she had expected, but it still took over two hours for her to even get inside the vicinity of London. When she arrived at 221 Baker Street, she was shown inside by Mrs Hudson, and lead to 221C where everybody apart from Mary had been breakfasting. There was a shock of surprise from all as they had not expected anybody to be out on the roads in such dangerous conditions, especially from Miss Watson and Miss Hurst. Nevertheless she was welcomed with politeness and offered breakfast, and by Dr Watson even better: he offered her his kindness. The two other men didn’t say anything. Sherlock Holmes was thinking how complementary messy mousy hair looked with dark eyes, while Tom Hurst was only thinking of breakfast.
Molly discovered with sadness that her sister was in bad condition. Although Dr Watson’s prescription of antibiotics has finally taken hold, she was still constantly short of breath, and couldn’t even speak properly. Molly was adamant to see her sister, but Dr Watson held her back because the excitement might be too much for Mary. Mary begged for Molly to see her though and Watson relented. Molly, although overjoyed to see her sister, couldn’t properly have a conversation with her so she just sat there and nursed Mary. The rest of the household just stayed at home all day because they were still recovering from the Christmas festivities and the men had nothing to do.

At three in the afternoon Molly unwilling said she had to go home. Mary however asked Molly to stay with her and then Irene Watson offered Molly Mrs Hudson to send for her clothes. Molly accepted gratefully and Mrs Hudson was soon driving towards Vine Avenue.
On the stroke of five Molly went into her guest room in 221A and got ready for dinner. At six thirty Mrs Hudson summoned her for dinner. When she arrived at the dinner table at 221C she was inundated with forced questions on the conditions of her sister. Molly only replied sadly that there was no good news to be had. The two Watson sisters only repeated themselves a few times on how much they hated getting sick, and thought no more of the matter. This only made Molly pleased that her judgement of the sisters were indeed correct.

Dr Watson was indeed still the perfect, attentive gentleman. He had paid every attention to Molly and made her feel less of an outcast than the other people at the dinning table had felt towards her. Miss Watson hogged Holmes, so was her sister, and Tom Hurst only concentrated on her dinner. She was epicurean to the extreme- she only ever cared for wine, food, and cards. When she found out Molly preferred chicken to venison, he was offended, and didn’t talk to her for the rest of the night.

When Molly had finished dinner, she excused herself to look after Mary. As soon as she left the room Miss Watson began her barrage of insults against her apparent rival. She criticised Molly’s manners for being unrefined and very aloof and she could not carry a conversation. Her hair was terrible, and her fashion sense atrocious. Mrs Hurst agreed, and added:

“There is nothing I can praise on her, except, probably, she can handle a car well.”

“I agree, dear sister, and I could hardly keep in my laughter. Why does she have to drive for an hour without making herself presentable just so she could visit her sister? And her hair: do you think she keeps pet birds in them?”

“Oh, and don’t forget her cardigan. That hideous colour clashed with her dark cheeks. Also, have you noticed they were hand-me-downs?”

“Your impressions are very accurate,” mused Dr Watson, “but what you have said was all lost to me. I did not notice the low quality clothes at all.”

“You must have noticed, Sherlock,” Miss Watson said, “and you will be ashamed if you saw your sister in such a state.”

“I will surely not.”
“To drive one, two, three, or whatever hours in a car with high winds and black ice without a chauffeur. What does it mean? It means that she is ignorant of the genteel way of life, and she is not a proper lady.”

“But the amount of effort she used to see her sister is very gratifying,” mused Dr Watson.

“Did the driving,” Miss Watson whispered loudly to Mr Holmes, “changed her fine eyes at all?”

“No, it didn’t. In fact, the cold has made it brighter.”

A short pause followed. Mrs Hurst then started again. “I think that Mary Hooper is a lovely girl, and wish to see her well-married, but I don’t believe her chances are very good. Her family is very lowly, and her parents are terrible!

“I have heard that her uncle is a civil servant in London.”

“Yes, and another in Liverpool!”

They both giggled.

“But connections doesn’t determine the personality!” interrupted Dr Watson. “If she had family to fill the whole of Liverpool, she is still as nice as ever!” argued Dr Watson.

“However it will decrease her chance exponentially in finding a good spouse.”

Dr Watson immediately went quiet while his sisters and in-law chortled against their fondest friend’s unfortunate family.

They returned their composure immediately afterwards, and all proceeded to Mary’s room to see how she was doing. Her breath was still rasping, but she could breathe a little more easily. They left when they were called for coffee. Molly daren’t leave her sister’s side until she finally was assured that Mary was asleep and only then she went to the living room join the company. When she arrived she saw the company were playing whist, but declined to join them, as she didn’t enjoy the game much, and cited her sister as an excuse. She decided to pick a Jane Austen novel from the bookshelf and then started reading in one of the armchairs. Tom Hurst could only look at her in astonishment.

“Do you not enjoy watching or playing cards? What a boring existence you must lead.”

“Miss Molly Hooper,” chided Miss Watson, “only takes pleasure in reading. If that is her main amusement then so be it.”

“It is not my only pleasure,” admitted Hooper. “I do take enjoyment from many things.”

“Well, I hope nursing your sister is one of them,” replied Miss Watson, “and that seeing her well is another.”

Molly Hooper thanked her for her compliments. Dr Watson immediately offered her his whole book collection even though it was still in boxes, and said he will get them personally himself from the attic.
“Though, it is a bit small, and I wish I had a bigger one for your benefit, but I had been extremely busy, and reading is not my strong suit.

Molly assured the good doctor that the book collection on the shelves were more than adequate.

“What always puzzles me,” Miss Watson stated, “that our father has left us with such a meagre collection of books. It is so unlike the vast library of Pemberly!”

“I should think so,” said Mr Holmes. “It has been, after all, a collective effort over hundreds of years.”

“You are certainly keeping up the effort. Why, I always see a large package of books being delivered to the back door.”

“In ignorant times as these, I believe neglecting the family library is the worst crime that can be committed.”

“Neglecting will be the last adjective I will ever use on you. You put so much care and pride over everything in the estate. John, when you do get around building your own manor, make sure it is as beautiful as Pemberly, or else!”

“Well, then I would rather prefer to buy it than to build it.”

“I am only talking of possibilities, John.”

“For God’s sakes Irene you know such a place can only be bought nowadays.”

Molly was so focused on the conversation that by the time they finished it she has already returned the book to the self and bought a seat up between Dr Watson and his sister Hurst to watch the game.

“How is Gina, anyway, Sherlock? Will she be as tall as me this coming spring?,” asked Irene.

“I believe she will. She is currently tall as Miss Hooper here.”

“Oh, I long to see her again! Your dear sister, the most talented girl in this country! And her manners, exceptional and mature for someone her age. I have heard that she won a recent competition on the piano.”

“You know, what I have never quite got is how you ladies could have enough time and patients to be as brilliant as you all are.”

“Are you trying to say that all ladies are accomplished?!,” gasped Miss Watson.

“Well, all the women within my acquaintance knows how to sketch, to paint in watercolours, calligraphy, and fine embroidery.”

“You point has some merit in it,” interrupted Holmes, “however, you do cast a net too wide. For me, I cannot say that I know more than half a dozen ladies whom I can truly call accomplished.”

“Your standards of accomplishment must be very high,” noticed Molly.

“Why else won’t it be!” interjected his constant companion. “Why, a truly accomplished lady must have extensive knowledge of music, dancing, languages, and must also know how to carry a conversation and herself. Then, the world is her’s to conquer.”

“And,” Holmes added, “she must also have expanded her mind with extensive reading.”
“I am no longer surprised you only know six accomplished women,” replied Molly. “I would have personally thought that it was impossible to know any at all.”

“Molly Hooper, are you really that critiquing of your own kind?”

“Well, I have never met somebody that fits your description.”

The two sisters then interjected with protests of knowing at least a few ladies who does only to be stopped by Tom Hurst with protestations that the sisters doth fight too much. A heavy silence then followed, only to be broken with the scraping of a chair and Molly excusing herself to check on her sister.

“Molly Hooper,” complained Miss Watson, “is a mean person who undervalues the people around her to make herself look more valuable. It is a mean trick, often successfully used by base ladies, but it is a tactic underneath me.”

“It can also be said that every trick a lady uses to gain affection, no matter how small and innocent, is despicable, as with anything with at least a streak of cunning,” replied Holmes.

Miss Watson did not catch on the subtle insult, and continued with the subject.

Later on that night, Molly Hooper ran into the living room to say to Dr Watson her sister’s coughs were getting worse and she could not breathe. Watson immediately left the room to tend to Mary. Holmes then retired for the night, and then the Hursts, and Irene Watson was left in the room wondering what would happen if she could not find a spouse of any kind that would both appreciate and equal her intelligence.
Molly ended up sleeping in a cot next to Mary to keep an eye on her that evening. The next day she could finally say that her sister was doing well when she was enquired, firstly by Dr Watson when she went to the dining room for breakfast, and then later on the two sisters. Despite this she called her mother begging for Mrs Hooper to at least see how her eldest daughter was doing. Mrs Hooper immediately set out after breakfast in a taxi with her two youngest daughters.

If Mary was actually dying Mrs Hooper would be depressed but upon seeing that she was not in immediate danger she advised that Mary doesn’t recover quickly as that will merit her departure from Baker Street. Dr Watson also agreed that Mary shouldn’t probably be moved, despite Mary begging that she returns home. After a little while with Mary, Mrs Hooper and her two youngest were invited to the living room by Miss Watson. Dr Watson joined them and asked if Mrs Hooper was glad of her daughter’s imminent recovery.

“Oh, yes, of course I am glad. But I feel guilty for allowing my daughter to stay as an almost permanent guest. Should I take her home?”

“Take her home!,” gasped Dr Watson. “That is the silliest thing I have heard in a while. No, Mary must stay, she is too sick to even be moved.”

“She will be treated with the utmost kindness,” said Miss Watson with an icy voice.

Mrs Bennet could only reply with a stream of apologies and gratitude.

“You know, Mary puts up with the worst things with the sweetest temper, and without friends like you I don’t know what to do. I often tell my other girls they must behave more like her. You know, this house is in a lovely part of London, with beautiful rooms and very convenient. I hope you can stay here for a while.”

“Well, I always do things in a hurry. When I feel like moving house I can do so in a minute, but right now I feel rather settled here.”

“That, I have already noticed,” replied Molly.

“Oh, have you,” said Dr Watson. “I suppose I should feel flattered, but having somebody know me so well does unsettle me. Are you a studier of character?”

“I suppose I am. But fear not: a character like yours just as preferable as a deep one.”

“Molly, do remember where you are. You are no longer at home,” scolded Mrs Hooper.

“Have I got the right to assume that it is an interesting study?” asked Dr Watson.

“The more intricate the character, the more interesting it is.”

“In the suburb,” said Mr Holmes, “generally there is less people to study, as you are confined to a limited group of people.”

“Yes, but remember: people change all the time,” reminded Molly.

“I can vouch for that,” exclaimed Mrs Hooper.

Everybody looked surprised at Mrs Hooper’s outburst. Holmes then turned red and looked away. Mrs Hooper thought that she had won victory over the vile Mr Holmes and continued.

“The city does have its advantages of more people and shops, but that is all. I believe that suburban life is much better than city life, isn’t it, Dr Watson?”

“For me, when I’m in the city, I’m happy. When I’m out in the suburbs, I’m also happy. Each of them are merely different, and I can be just as content in either.”

“Aye, but that is because you have an easy countenance. This gentleman on the other hand,” pointed Mrs Hooper to Holmes,’’thinks that suburban life is nothing.”

“Mum, I believe Mr Holmes is talking about how there is less different people to be meet in the suburbs than in the city, which you must acknowledge to be true.”
“I agree with that, my dear, but it is also true we meet a lot of people. I believe we are acquainted with at least twenty families.”

Dr Watson could barely keep a straight face but did so for the benefit of Molly. His sister, on the other hand, was not as sensitive, and smiled at Holmes. Mary, desperate to change the subject, asked about Sally Donovan.

“Yes, she visited us yesterday with her father, such the gentleman! He is so kind, so genteel! He is the epitome of good breeding in my taste. People who are above all, and never socialise, might believe they might be classy, but they are very much in the wrong.”

“Did Sally stay to have dinner?”

“No, she had to go home to do something about mince pies. In my family, the daughters are bought up differently, you see. I have Macy to help us, you see, so that my daughters don’t need to do anything if they come down here. But each to their own, and the Donovan children are very well mannered. It is such a pity that Sally is so plain! Not that I ever think so, after all, she is our most dear friend.”

“She does sound like a nice lady.”

“Oh, of course! It is just such a pity she is so plain-looking. Even Lady Donovan envies me for Jane’s beauty. You know, when Jane was sixteen, many boys had crushes on her. Some even wrote couplets for her.”

“Which was why Jane never had a proper boyfriend. She was driven away from all those badly written verses. I wonder who first discovered poems being an anaphrodisiac?,” mused Molly.

“Oh, really? I have always thought that poetry was the food of love,” wondered Holmes.

“Of well established one, maybe, but when you are talking about something as insignificant as a crush, then it tends to stave it away.”

Darcy only smiled, and the pause in speaking made Molly uneasy. She wished to speak something to prevent her mother from embarrassing them all again, but found nothing to say. After a few seconds Mrs Hooper then repeated her gratitudes to Dr Watson. He then returned the civilities and forced his sister to do so, which she could if the situation called for it, but she did it unwillingly. Mrs Hooper then called for a taxi. Upon that signal the two youngest Hooper sister put themselves in front of the Watsons and introduced herself. The two had been whispering during the whole trip and it was finally agreed that it should be Kate that asked Dr Watson about the upcoming ball.

Lydia was a tall, plump girl of sixteen, with a colourful complexion and a friendly face. She was her mother’s favourite as out of all her sisters Lydia was most like her mother. She had high energetic spirits and easy manners which made her a favourite among the band members. She therefore felt equal to the task of pestering Dr Watson about the ball. His answer was music to Mrs Hooper’s ears.

“Of course I shall be delighted to host a ball. I will however only announce the date when your sister has recovered. You don’t want her dancing while she is sick, surely!”

Lydia then declared herself happy. “Oh yes, it would suit all of us very well. By then the manager Carter will also be back as well. And when you have given your ball, then I want Wrong Direction to throw a party for all of us as well.”

Mrs Hooper and her two youngest then departed for home. Molly then returned to her sister, which then left the Watson sisters to critique the Hooper ladies to Holmes. Despite how witty their statements were about a particular set of fine eyes, however, they could not get Holmes to agree to censure against them.
The day then passed as it has always done. The Watson sisters went to see the patient who was thankfully getting better. Later in the evening Molly went to the living room to join the party. The cards did not come out though, as Mr Holmes was busy writing a letter to his sister Georgina, Miss Watson distracting him with requests for messages to ‘Gina’ while watching him write, while Mr Watson was playing draughts which the Hursts.

Molly then got her knitting needles and was entertained by the conversation between Holmes and Miss Watson. Her constant praise, whether it was for the clarity of the handwriting, or for the evenness of the joins, only for all of them to be ignored, made for a very unique one-sided conversation.

“Gina will be so excited when she receives this letter.”
Holmes kept his lips shut.
“You write uncommonly fast.”
“You must be joking. I write very slowly.”
“Just imagine how many letters you have to write each year! Invitations, replies to business proposals, conversations with your sister…”
“Then you must be glad to know that most of my correspondence consists mostly of Skype and emails. The only reason why I am writing a letter is because Georgina prefers it that way.”
“Do tell your sister that I look forward to seeing her.”
“I did that a minute ago, at your request.”
“You must borrow my fountain pen. I bet they will write better than yours.”
“It writes very well, thank you very much.”
“Also please tell her to continue improving her pianoforte skills, and I love her designs for her embroidery, which is better than Miss Shawshanks.”
“Can you please delay your praises until my next letter? I have written plenty as it is.”
“Oh, don’t worry, I shall see her in the New Year. Just tell her to get well soon, and we missed her at the Christmas Party. My goodness, that is a long and charming letter! Do you always write like that to her?”
“They are usually pretty long, but whether they are charming is up to the reader.”
“Well, I have often observed that people who can write long passages cannot write badly.”
“I beg to differ,” laughed the good doctor. “Sherlock muses too much over the meanings of four letter words to even write fluently in the first place.”
“Everybody has their writing style, John.”
“In which case, John’s writing style involves skipping half the words, and scribbling the other,” teased Miss Watson. “You cannot mistake that he is not a doctor.”
“I think so quickly that my hands cannot keep up. What eventually happens is that I never quite convey the information to the recipient.”
“Your modesty does neutralise criticism,” added Molly.
“The appearance of modesty is extremely misleading,” announced Holmes. “It is only a careless slip-up of opinion, or, God forbid, an indirect boast.”
“Then what would you say about my recent statement of modesty?”
“An indirect boast, I’m afraid,” said Holmes. “You think that your mistakes in handwriting as pleasing, as you believe that they are an indication of quickness of thought, which you perceive as advantages, or at least rather interesting. The ability to do anything quickly is always prized by its processor and they often ignore the mistakes created from such. When you told Mrs Hooper that you can leave this place in five minutes, you mean it as a compliment to yourself. After all, what are the advantages of doing things sloppily, and leaving everything undone?”
“Oh for god’s sakes! Do I have to remember everything I said just so I can judge my own character! My words I believe are true. I did not say those words to deliberately mislead the ladies.”
“I know you believe it, but I would not bet on such swiftness. If you were mounted on your horse and a friend told you to stay a week, then you would stay a month.”
“Ah, but Mr Holmes, you are going too far,” interrupted Molly Hooper. “You need proof that he will commit to such an act. Are you sure he is as good as you say?”
Dr Watson laughed. “I am very happy that you had mistaken his words for praise. But he meant the opposite: he would rather that I had given a sharp refusal and ridden off to the sunset.”
Molly then raised an eyebrow. “Does Mr Holmes think that you will atone your rashness by adhering to it?”
“Hmmm… I think this is something that Sherlock can say for himself.”
“So you expect me to account for an opinion I have never said. Allow me to clarify. I am talking about when a friend just asks him to stay, without argument or facts.”
“To agree without discussion is a disservice to either party.”
“Mr Holmes, you have forgotten that affection between friends can often dissolve the need for persuasion into a decision. It is not just for situations like you described. Let us wait for a situation between Dr Watson and you before we discuss it further, but for general everyday situations, where the consequences are inconsequential, do you need to have an argument when making a decision every time?”
“Then let us hear all the factors that determine in an argument,” Dr Watson scoffed. “You do realise that you have more power in this argument than you realise, Miss Hooper. I am a very short man and therefore forced to give Sherlock at least double the respect than he actually deserves. There is none worse man to be with on a Sunday evening with nothing to do! Do you know he shoots walls when he is bored!”

Holmes only smirked and Molly Hooper felt like laughing but decided against it because she felt that Dr Watson was rather offended. Miss Watson could only look away in embarrassment at the nonsense her brother said.

“I see where you are going,” said Holmes. “You do not like arguments, and wish we would stop.”
“I agree with you. Now, if you would excuse me, I have to go to the post office, and you can say whatever you like about me.”
“Not that it actually matters. Mr Holmes still have to finish off his letter,” mused Molly Hooper. Sherlock Holmes took on Hooper’s cue and did finish off the letter to his sister.

When he finished the letter, he then requested that the two ladies played some music, which Miss Watson did with enthusiasm. She was the first to reach the pianoforte, only to remember her manners and asked Molly Hooper if she would rather play it instead. Molly declined.

The two Watson sisters entertained Holmes and Hooper with Mrs Hurst singing and Miss Watson playing. But when Molly was reading some music that was near the pianoforte, she noticed the intense gaze of Holmes settling in on her. In normal circumstances, she would find it unnerving as anyone would if they found themselves to be of admiration of another person. But in this case it left Molly bewildered. She thought that Holmes hated her for her ‘mousy’ looks. In the end, she decided he was looking at her because she was doing something more objectionable than the other people at present. Not that it mattered to her. She hated him enough to think that his discontent is her pleasure.

She then heard her phone ringing so she excused herself and took the call in the bathroom. A body had arrived at the morgue from a car crash. It looks cut and dried at the start, except Scotland Yard has their suspicions. The call operator then continued by saying that if Molly could come as soon as possible it would be wonderful.
When she came out the Watson sisters changed to some Scottish folk songs to add some variety. Holmes then glided next to her.

“Do you feel like some dancing? Probably an energetic Scottish reel?” Molly did not answer, only smiled. Holmes then repeated his question. “Oh, I have heard you the first time, but I know what you are thinking. If I said yes, this will give you provocation to insult my tastes. I am a great expert at destroying plans such as these, and I shall thwart your’s by saying no. Despise me if you dare.” “I do not.” “Good, because I have some work to do at the morgue.”

Molly Hooper then left with a huff. Inside, she was surprised at his sudden politeness, but there was a mixture of sweetness and sass in her manner that made it hard to approach anybody. Holmes already knew he was fascinated by Hooper; he felt that if it wasn’t for her lowly status he could be easily in love with her.

Irene Adler had already deduced what was happening and got very jealous. In fact, the only reason why she wanted her dear friend Mary’s recovery so that Molly could be whisked away from the house. She then exploited the fact that Molly Hooper was away to talk about the consequences of such a marriage when they were going for a walk through Regent’s Park.

“Shall I advise you to talk to your future mother-in-law the benefits of keeping quiet? Also, it will be a good idea to warn against the younger sisters against chasing boy bands. And, do keep your future wife’s sass in check, it will ruin your reputation.” “Anything else?” “Oh yes, do put the picture of your aunt and uncle Phillips right next your great uncle the judge. They are along the same line of professions, only at different stages. As for Elizabeth’s portrait, who will be great enough to capture the expression of her eyes?” “The shape and physical features can be replicated easily enough, but the actual expression will be harder to do.”

By that time Molly Hooper had finished her work and was walking towards them in the opposite direction with Mrs Hurst. “Oh my goodness, I didn’t know you were going for a walk!” cried Miss Watson. “You were rather rude by not telling us where you were,” scoffed her sister. She then took the other arm of Holmes, leaving Miss Hooper behind. Holmes could sense some rudeness and requested that they walk where the footpaths allowed for all of them to walk abreast.

But Molly, who didn’t want to remain with them, laughed, “No, stay as you are. You look like a charming party of a high standing, and would be ruined if I joined you. So long.”

Molly then ran around the park in elation of the prospect of going home. Already Mary has recovered enough to spend a few hours after dinner with some company.
The first departure

After Molly and Mary had discussed it for a little while the next day, it was agreed that they both went home as soon as possible and called their mother to tell them to expect them soon. However their mother wanted them to spend New Year's at the Watsons’ until the 3rd so that Mary could have stayed there a week and could not receive them before. It was not an auspicious answer for Mary, who was both willing and able to go home. Molly still had the car at least parked outside Baker Street so she decided to ignore her mother’s words and packed her and Mary’s bags.

The news made the occupants voice their concern and offer for both of them to say a bit longer, at least till the next morning. Miss Watson felt a bit regretful in making that suggestion, however, as her jealousy for one sister outweighed the affection for the other. Dr Watson on the other hand repeatedly told Mary that she should stay longer as her condition wasn’t completely stabilised yet. Mary reassured him she was okay and that he shouldn’t worry.

Holmes breathed a sign of relief at the news; Molly Hooper has been in his vicinity for long enough. She was more of a distraction than he would rather like, and Miss Watson has been more of an annoyance lately with her teasing. He then resolved wisely to be cold than usual, speaking no more than ten words to Molly and ignoring her for the rest of the day while concentrating solely on his books. It also helped by the fact that there is a new case to solve, one of which was about a suspicious car crash.

That afternoon, the departure, welcomed by most parties, happened. Miss Watson was more civil to Molly and affectionate to Mary, even shaking hands with the former and embracing the latter. Molly left with the happiest of moods.

They were not welcomed very warmly by their mother, who wondered why they would make such a fuss about coming home, and claimed Mary coughed too much. Their father, although did not explicitly show them, was relieved to have them back. The dinner table conversations without them was borderline brainless.

They found Mary in the process of her study of the human nature, and she had many obvious and clichéd things to say. From Kitty and Kate they had different news. Ever since their departure on Friday most of their band members had dined with their uncle, one had been jailed briefly for driving under influence, and the manager Forster is getting married.
The entail, and what it has to do with Anderson

Chapter Notes

I was thinking about who would be a perfect substitute for Lady Catherine de Bourgh, until I remembered Lady Elizabeth Smallwood. Sorry peeps, another name change!

“Ginger, I hope you can accommodate one more person for dinner tonight,” said Mr Hooper to his wife over breakfast.

“Who is visiting? I hope it is Sally; her dinners at home are terrible.”

“The visitor this time is both a gentleman and a stranger.”

Mrs Hooper’s ears pricked up. “Goodness, I hope it is Dr Watson! In which case I will have to call the butchers to get some special joint for us. I don’t have anything special in the pantry right now.”

“It is not Dr Watson, my dear. It is somebody that I haven’t seen in my life before.”

Everybody was astonished. Mr Hooper was soon inundated with questions about the identity of the gentleman. Mr Hooper seemed to be pleased to be the centre of attention and amused himself with their curiosity, until he announced:

“Before Christmas last year I had received a letter from my cousin Phillip Anderson. I have since replied to it, because it is a matter of delicate and legal importance. He will be the heir to my estate once I’m dead.”

“Oh for Lord’s sakes, don’t even speak about the odious man,” cried Mrs Hooper. “Have you ever thought about the sexist clause that your father has imposed on us all? To divert away property from your children to a cousin one hasn’t even seen before, it is a tragedy.”

Mary and Molly had once again tried to explain that wills cannot be changed when the testator is long dead but their mother refused to back down. Many times she has tried to hire lawyers to change the clause, but to no avail. The estate will be passed on to their cousin.

“I will certainly agree that the whole affair is sexist, and nothing will clear Mr Anderson of the crime of inheriting this house, but if you read the letter that he sent me, then maybe you might be more open-minded about him.”

“Not very likely, my dear. He seems such a rude man to be writing to you; such a false friend. How come you two are not fighting, like his father before him?”

“He seems to have doubts over the morality of his father’s actions, as you will note in this letter:

'Mr Phillip Anderson, London, England

Dear Mr Hooper

I am well aware of the feud that erupted between you and my late father and that has always been a subject of discomfort. I have always wished to heal the wound between the two branches of the family tree; however, I was afraid of doing it before now as it would be disrespectful to my father (There, Ginger). However, upon becoming a detective at Scotland Yard, I have seen many cases where a feud has caused tragedies. Therefore, also upon my godmother’s insistence, the honourable Lady Elizabeth Smallwood, widow of Lord Percival Smallwood, I am offering to make peace with the two sides of the family. Lady Smallwood I will hope will also become a much
valued member of the family, as she has been a wonderful patron not only to me in my studies but other fortunate young men. I hope to not have offended your wife or daughters so far, but it would be delightful if they will host me on Thursday at five in the evening. I will stay in a nearby hotel as to not impose on your hospitality for the next few weeks.

Yours sincerely

Phillip Anderson"

“We can therefore expect this peacemaker of ours to arrive this afternoon,” continued Mr Hooper has he replaced the letter in its embossed envelop. “By the way he wrote this letter, I suppose we can make amends with this conscientious gentleman.”

“Well, I’m not stopping him if that is his true intentions,” Mrs Hooper added.

“Though it is difficult,” Mary observed with a slightly raspy voice, “to know how he would do it. But like any other gift, it is the thought that counts.”

“Well, I cannot make him out,” said Molly. “On one hand, he has a sort of odd defiance to Lady Smallwood, but on the other hand, he has a sort of patronising air. Can it be assumed he will not be a sensible man.”

“I’m afraid so, Molly, and I have always hoped for the opposite,” replied Mr Hooper. “But there is also a sense of kindness and confidence in it as well. I look forward to meeting him.”

“His extensive use of metaphor of the family tree is well executed, I believe,” mused Sarah. “But it is rather clichéd.”

Kate and Kitty didn’t even care what their cousin was like, as it was very unlikely he could play a rock instrument. In fact, they have not meet any other boys for the last few weeks. As for the mother, the letter had calmed her considerably, and she was going to see the guest with the most amount of composure her family has seen in years.

Mr Anderson did arrive punctually at his prescribed time. He was received with the most politeness of the family. He was a young man of twenty five, a formal air and stately manners. No sooner has he seated himself in the living room did he compliment the beauty of the daughters. He has been told of their beauty before, but they all fall short of the mark. The purple praise was not received well to all its listeners, but Mrs Hooper was not complaining.

“Thank you so much, I have always hoped you are going to be kind. Things are going to settle so badly.”

“Are you alluding to the terms of the will?”

“Oh, you didn’t know how much I suffered before I actually met you. I was so worried for my girls, because you don’t really know what will happen when the estate is entailed.”

“I know how you must feel and the agony you must feel as a mother. I have much to say about the subject. But you must not worry: I have come to admire my female cousins. Right now I shall stop talking, but maybe another day…”

He was interrupted with the call to dinner; the girls smiled at each other. They were not the only source of Mr Anderson’s admiration however. The dining room, the oak furniture, nothing was left unpraised. It would have touched Mrs Hooper’s heart if it wasn’t for the morbid fact that he will one day own it all. The situation came to an abrupt end when he admired the dinner and asked which of his fair cousins cooked it. He was then gently but firmly told by Mrs Hooper that they were wealthy enough to employ a maid and therefore they don’t need to be in the kitchen. Mr Anderson then apologised, Mrs Hooper sweetly replied she was not offended, but he repeatedly begged pardon for the next half hour.
Mr Hooper was mainly silent throughout the meal; but when the dinner was cleared away he thought it was a good opportunity to talk to his guest and started with a subject he knew Mr Anderson will do well on. He observed to Mr Anderson that Lady Smallwood seems very attentive to her needs of her clients and they were very lucky. Mr Anderson replied that Mr Hooper could not have spoken more accurately. He was eloquent in his praise and was more serious than the situation calls for, with the main point being he has never seen somebody with such high breeding and yet being so kind. Her scholarships were generous, and she has invited him to dine at least twice already. Last Saturday she even invited him to join her group in dancing so there will be enough couples. Lady Smallwood was considered proud by most people who had met her but he hadn’t seen any other behaviour other than friendliness from her. She had paid for his train tickets to see his family regularly and had even recommended some aspects of renovations for his London home.

“Interesting,” mused Mr Hooper. “She seems like a good woman, and I wish there are more ladies like her. So, do you live near her?”

“I live a few streets away from her. She mainly lives in Downing Street as she is a Member of the House of Lords, but she also has a vast estate in Kent called Rosings.”

“I believed you mentioned that she is a widow. Does she have any other family?”

“Yes, a daughter, the heiress to not only her title but Rosings as well.”

“Ohhh, so she is of higher standing than most ladies. And what type of girl is she? Is she beautiful?”

“She is the most wonderful person I have ever meet. As Lady Smallwood had often said, she is the most beautiful person in the world when it comes to true beauty, as she has a personality to distinguish against the prettiest of young women. Unfortunately she is constantly sick, so she cannot accomplish as much as she could have had if she was perfectly healthy, according to her governess. She does visit my place from time to time in her car.”

“You are a good judge of character,” further observed Mr Hooper, “and you do come up with the most wonderful and yet tact flattery. Do you make them up as you go, or is it from previous experiences?”

“Mainly made up on the fly, but sometimes I amuse myself by rearranging old compliments. However, I always give them an unstudied air as possible.”

Mr Hooper’s predictions were proven correct. His cousin was as silly as he thought and he got great
amusement from listening to him. He only took an occasional glance to Molly as he needed no companion in his enjoyment.

However, he had his fill when it was time to serve the deserts. When that was also cleared away he invited Anderson to read to the family. Anderson readily agreed but when a book was given to him he jumped back (for the book was *Northanger Abbey*) and apologised that he doesn’t read romantic novels. Kitty could only stare at him and Kate almost swore. Other books were procured from the library until Anderson choose *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Kate gasped as he opened the book and before he had even read three pages in a robotic monotone, interrupted him with:

“Mum, did you know that uncle Phillips told me he is thinking of turning down Richards? If that is so, since he has such a fine singing voice, manager Carter is thinking of hiring him as a backing singer! I will have to go to town tomorrow to get the latest detail though.”

Lydia was told to be quiet by her two eldest sisters but it was already too late; Mr Anderson was very much offended. He then closed his book, and glared at Lydia.

“I have often noted how silly young ladies are not interested in books of a serious make, even though it is written solely for their benefit. But I will no longer bore my cousin.”

He then turned to Mr Hooper and offered himself as an antagonist in a game of backgammon. Mr Hooper agreed as he has wisely decided to allow the ladies occupy themselves with their own trivial pursuits. Mrs Hooper and her daughters apologised to Mr Anderson and promised him there will be no more interruptions if he would continue. Mr Anderson only replied that he doesn’t want to make his cousin uncomfortable, and prepared himself for the game.
Mr Anderson’s intentions, and the introduction of Moriarty

As correctly deduced by Mr Hooper before, Mr Anderson was a silly man, and his deficiency of the mind is not helped at all by his lack of education. He was a member of one of the great universities, but he only kept a minimal effort to maintain the membership and didn’t form any useful connections from it. This was due to his ignorant and stingy father, whose tight control gave Mr Anderson a great deal of humility; however, this quality has since been obliterated by the pride from having a weak head, early retirement, and the benefits of unexpected prosperity. It was Fortune’s favour that he was recommended to Lady Smallwood. Having a patron of such high standing and power made him respect her and have excessive assurance of himself. He ended up being a mixture of pride and servileness, pompousness and modesty.

As he now had a good house and a decent income, he sought out a wife. He also wanted to make peace with the Hooper family, and this naturally made him decide to marry one of the daughters; that is, if they are as amiable and beautiful as reported. This was his way of atoning for being the unintentional heir of their father’s estate, and he thought it was a wise decision, full of generosity and impartial.

His plans were solidified upon seeing the daughters. Mary Hooper’s stunning face settled his decision and for the first evening she was his fiancé-to-be. The next morning however saw an alteration in the plans, after a small chat with Mrs Hooper. The subject began with his career as a police detective, then it lead to the entailment, and then he told her of his plan to find a mistress for the estate. Mrs Hooper only nodded and warned him that Mary could soon be engaged but she was sure that her younger daughters were completely unattached. Not that it actually mattered. All he had to do was change to the second eldest daughter. After all, Molly is only second to Mary in beauty.

Mrs Hooper loved those hints as she might have two daughters married. Once this man was the scrooge in her heart, but now he is soaring in her good graces.

Kate’s intention of going to town was honoured and all the sisters apart from Sarah agreed to go with her. Mr Anderson also wanted to go at the request of Mr Hooper; for Mr Hooper was anxious of getting rid of Mr Anderson from his library. He thought Mr Anderson was a bookish person and had actually allowed him in his sanctum after breakfast but turned out he was actually very talkative even with the complete works of Shakespeare resting unopened in his hands. His stream of chatter was only about his house in London. This agitated Mr Hooper immensely. He was often fond of telling Molly that he is prepared to tolerate follies in the other parts of the house but his library is the only place were he could be left in peace as he often tells Molly. It was therefore imperative that he whisks away Mr Anderson into the party and as Anderson was a better walker than reader, he readily agreed. The five of them all squished inside Molly’s car and went to High Street.
Their conversations on the way there was overbearing remarks on Anderson’s side with polite replies on the sisters’. This was until they entered High Street. There the two youngest immediately demanded to stop as they could see Mr Denny of Wrong Direction walking their way. They got out and met up with them while Molly parked the car with her two remaining passengers. A few minutes later the three of them joined up with the two giggling sisters and they all walked towards Aunt Phillips place.

Suddenly they saw a young, handsome man walking towards them. All the ladies turned their eyes on his dark features and serene smile as he waved towards them. This was the very person Lydia had come to ask about and all was starstruck by his charming manner. Mr Denny introduced everyone to Mr James Moriarty, with what was probably the richest and best singing voice in the country. Everything about him was perfect: for one thing, he had just signed a contract for Wrong Direction as a singer, he was handsome, with pleasing body proportions. He was also happy to have a conversation and the whole group was still having a nice conversation when suddenly they saw Dr Watson and Mr Holmes drive towards them. Moriarty waved to Holmes and Holmes returned it while trying not to catch eyes with Molly. Molly could see both of their faces and was astounded with their changes. Both changed colour, one white with fear and the other red with embarrassment. Why is Dr Watson, and for that matter, Mr Holmes here? How did Moriarty and Holmes know each other? Who wasn’t intrigued?

Denny and Moriarty then walked the sisters and Mr Anderson to the Phillips house and bid farewell there, even when Mrs Phillips invited both inside. Mrs Phillips was always glad to see her nieces, especially the two eldest as they were in London for a few days. The first subject of the day was of course her surprise that the visit was ended so abruptly and she only knew because Mrs Hooper rang her to complain what had happened. Her attention was then directed to Mr Anderson when Mary introduced him to her. She was awed by his extreme politeness but she was soon distracted by her other guests’ questions of Moriarty. She only knew what the others knew: that he has been signed onto Wrong Direction as a vocalist and was living with Denny. She had been watching him walk up and down the street; Kate and Kitty proceeded to do the same. They would have continued for hours if it wasn’t for the fact they saw nothing but fellow shoppers still slightly tipsy from the New Years celebrations. Mrs Phillips then invited the party to dinner the next night, saying that she has invited the band. The whole thing passed very agreeably and everybody agreed to come. When they left Mr Anderson picked up the need to apologise for intruding, something that was assured to him was perfectly unnecessary.

When they prepared for dinner back at Vine Avenue, Molly related to Mary the extraordinary event that happened between the two gentlemen earlier. Both couldn’t figure out what could have happened and even Jane couldn’t defend either, if they indeed did anything wrong.
Moriarty's story

The only objection that Anderson had for going to the dinner was that he had to leave the company of the parent Hoopers for an evening but that was steadily resisted against. So when he and his fair cousins had arrived at the Phillip’s house at the proscribed hour, they were pleasantly surprised to hear from Mr Phillips that Moriarty had also accepted an invitation to dinner and was in the house.

When this information was given the party then eagerly took their seats at the dining table, where Anderson could then observe the house with much greater leisure. He then said the room was magnificent, and reminded him of the breakfast room in Rosings. This was taken with much offence by Mrs Phillips until Anderson explained to her what it really was. She was amazed at some of the features of the manor, including a silverware set valued at seven thousand pounds (the market price will never be known, he also added, as the set was bespoke and will never be sold). From then on a comparison to one of her rooms to the scullery meant flattery.

When he was eloquently describing the grandeur of Rosings, and occasionally describing his own modest apartment back in London, and praising Lady Smallwood for giving him money for repairs and renovations, he found Mrs Phillips was a keen listener and found his situation interesting enough to tell her friends. His cousins however could not stand his purple prose and was tortured waiting for the men to come. It was soon over though. They all breathed in relief when the men came into the dining room. Molly only knew that her admiration of him was entirely justified when Moriarty walked in. After all, the other band members, although respectable and friendly, Moriarty was above them all in class and manner, especially against her boring Uncle Philips who already smells of port.

Moriarty was by all accounts a happy man as all female eyes gazed at him, and Molly a happy woman when he sat next to her. It was raining that night, but he gave the impression that he can talk about anything. Even the smallest, most boring subject can be made interesting.

Anderson does’t even exist in the land of handsome officers but he could still talk to Mrs Phillip’s attentive ear, and was soon heaped with cake and tea because of her observations. When she got the cards out, he returned her politeness by taking his turn in whist. “I know little of card games, but for me I shall be glad to learn, as…”

Mrs Phillips didn’t wait for his reason. She was just glad he was willing to play.

Moriarty to his delight found himself seated at a table with Molly and Kate, who preferred not to play card games. Kate was very talkative, and her chatter would have taken his attention entirely if it wasn’t for a game of bingo going on. Kate loved bingo, and soon all her attention was drawn to it leaving Moriarty and Molly entirely free to talk. She hoped to ask him about his history with Holmes, but knew that it was impolite to do so. Her curiosity was soon well rewarded though, as he soon asked her how long it takes to go to London from Sevenoaks, and reluctantly asked how long
Holmes had been staying in the city.

“About three weeks now, I believe.” She knew she had to keep the ball rolling. “I have heard that he has extensive property in Stockport.”

“No, his elder brother does. However under his parents’ will he is granted an income of £665,000 a year. Believe me, if you want to know anything about the Holmes family, ask me, for I have know them for my whole lifetime.”

Molly only stared at him.

“I can see why you are astonished, after our brief chilly greetings yesterday. Do you know Sherlock well?”

“As well as I ever want. I had once spent three days at Baker Street with him. Never again!”

“I can no longer say what I think of him, because I have known him too long to be an impartial judge. However, I do know that your opinion is rather uncommon and maybe you might tone it down a bit. After all, you are at home.”

“Well, in Sevenoaks the general consensus is that he is a pompous ass and nobody would speak any good of him.”

“I sometimes feel sorry for a person that is hated beyond the reasonable, but I don’t think that happens for him. He is so rich, so powerful, that nobody dares to see him apart from how he wants to be seen.”

“On my first meeting I thought he was a rather ill-mannered man.”

Moriarty only shook his head. A few moments of awkward silence later, he then continued. “I wonder why he was here?”

“I don’t know, Holmes never told me he will come here. Will that affect your plans to stay here?”

“No, no. A town is definitely not big enough to hold our contempt for each other, but he must be the one to go. He has after all been in the wrong. His father was my best friend in the world, and Sherlock always reminds me of his father’s many kinds acts for me. I would rather forgive Sherlock for his many atrocities rather than disrespect the memory of his father.”

Molly had been giving her full attention to the subject and wanted to continue it further, but doing so would be bordering on indelicacy.

Moriarty then continued on more general subjects, continuing on with what he thought of Sevenoaks and the people inhabiting it. He spoke with great respect about the people, and appeared to have
loved staying there.

“I went to London in search of employment because I cannot bear to live a dependent, lonely life. I would have become a lawyer, but circumstances prevailed that I must become a singer. Those circumstances were of course created by the gentleman we were speaking of just then.”

Molly gasped.

“The late Mr Holmes was going to arrange in the will a scholarship for me so I could study in University but he died before he could do so. He did give me the greatest gift of them all though. He was my godfather, and his very presence gave joy to me.”

“But surely the Holmes brothers would know of his wish, and given something to you?”

“No. Sherlock hates me too much, for no apparent reason, and has somehow slyly convinced his brother that I was undeserving. Maybe it is because we are two different types of people, and I was too upfront to him.”

“How come this disgrace hasn’t been well-told?”

“One day, it will be, but definitely not by me. As long as I remember Mr Holmes Senior, then I shall keep the Holmes name untarnished.”

“But why would they treat you so harshly?”

“Jealousy, I’m afraid. I was always the favourite child of their father’s. Had Mr Holmes liked me less, then maybe the brothers would treat me better, but they were unable to compete. Both are of terrible temper.

“I never knew the Holmes brothers could be like this. I always thought Holmes the Younger was a horrible person, but not like this…” She then reflected to her past experiences. “I do recall staying back at Baker Street that he once boasted of having an unforgiving temper.”

“I don’t have anything to say on the subject, as I can hardly be called a fair judge of him.”

“But to treat the dearest friend of his father in such a manner, it is an abomination!”

“We were born in the same town, and most of our childhoods were passed in company of each other. My father was a lawyer, like your uncle Phillips, but he gave up everything retired early to help Mr Holmes Senior in the care of the estate. Both were very firm friends, and I do recall Mr Holmes promising that he will care for me.”

“How odd! I wonder about Sherlock Holme’s pride now, because surely his pride will make him help you, if not for a better motive. He should be too proud to be dishonest, for the whole sordid business is dishonest.”

“His pride is a good thing, because it has made him much closer to virtues. However, his hatred for me is stronger than pride.”

“Has his terrible pride ever done any good?”
“It has made him generous to the poor around him, and protective of his younger sister. His has familial pride, the duty to not sordid the Holmes name, to retain its honour. He also has brotherly pride, which made him a kind and careful guardian to his younger sister, making him the best of brothers.”

“So what is the sister like?”

He only bowed his head. “I wish to call her a good girl, but she is not, and it pains me to say it so. She is like her two brothers: extremely proud. When she was younger she was kind to me as I was her constant playmate. She is now a beautiful young lady of sixteen and has been boarding at Wycombe Abbey School ever since her father died.

Both of them tried to talk about other subjects, but faltered, and eventually failed. They reverted back to the first.

“So, how did Dr Watson and Mr Holmes become best friends? Their tempers are so different! No, I correct myself- opposing. Do you know Dr Watson?”

“Dr who?”

“Dr Watson. He is probably the sweetest man you can probably meet, though can be a bit grumpy at times. The two cannot be any more different.”

“Mr Holmes however can be charming whenever he can be- he is certainly not completely antisocial. However, his pride overpowers almost everything, and is only friends of people of consequence. So long as you are wealthy enough he is sincere, just, and maybe even nice to you.”

The card table soon broke up. Mr Anderson and Mrs Phillips then sat at Molly’s table. The cliched questions about his success was passed around and answered, which was not particularly great. In fact, he has lost almost everything match. When Mrs Phillips expressed worry over his lost money, he replied she shouldn’t, and that it wasn’t very great.

“As in every activity, there are risks, and the risk of playing cards is to lose money. But don’t worry: my patroness Lady Smallwood makes sure I do not need worry over such trifle matters.”

Moriarty sat up at the mention of the name. He then asked Molly what she knew of Smallwood, to which she whispered back was not much. All she knew was that she was a patroness to a few university students, a Member of the House of Lords, and evidently very rich.

“Did you know that she is the sister of the late Lady Violet Holmes? She is the aunt to the Holmes brothers!”

“No, certainly not. I have only heard of her existence yesterday.”
“Well, she has a sickly daughter and she is the sole inheritor to the estate. She will be married to the younger Holmes brother to merge the two estates.”

“Why not the elder Holmes brother?”

“He has no intention of marrying. Smallwood had to settle for second best.”

Molly then grinned at the pathetic, now obviously wasted efforts that Miss Watson has displayed in trying to woo Mr Holmes.

“Mr Anderson would of course praise Lady Smallwood and her daughter, for they are his patronesses. However I already could see that Lady Smallwood is arrogant and proud.”

“I could agree to that, thought it has been many years since I had seen her last. She is however very professional at her job and does a good job running the country. Whether she got the reputation though her own actual efforts, or her nephew, I cannot determine.”

Molly then gave him her theory and they talked about other things, until the cards was stopped for desert. It was now time for the other ladies to gain Moriarty’s attention. Whatever he said was said well, and whatever he did was done superbly. Molly couldn’t think of anyone else but him for the rest of the evening. When it was time to go home Lydia and Anderson couldn’t stop talking. Lydia chattered about the card games she won and lost while Anderson mused about how lovely the house was and the hostess who owned it all.
Molly told Mary the conversations she had with Moriarty as both were packing up for their journey back to London. Mary couldn’t believe her ears half the time; for one thing, she wondered how Watson could accept so mean a friend. She was not one to question the accuracy of Moriarty’s stories but one to sympathise with all hurt people. She could only defend either party by saying there could have been a misunderstanding, and retain high opinions for all people involved.

“Oh, I do think you could be right, Mary, but there is definitely something fishy about this business. Somebody has done something wrong.”

“But that still does not explain how a man such as Dr Watson could be best friends with Holmes without knowing what had happened.”

“Well, I have an easier time believing that our good doctor was deceived. Moriarty doesn’t have a lying face on him.”

“But…but…what should I think?”

“Excuse me, dear sister, you do know what you should think.”

But Mary could only think of the terrible consequences on Dr Watson, if he was indeed lied to, if the scandal did break out.

They were soon called downstairs to meet the very person they were talking about: Dr Watson and his sisters came to personally give their invitation to their ball two weeks away. The two ladies doted on their dear friend, saying it was a long while since they had seen each other, and asked each other what they had done since their last visit. To Molly they only acknowledged, and the rest of the family completely ignored. Dr Watson wanted to stay a little while, and was a little surprised when the sisters immediately went to the car after giving the invitation, as if they wanted to avoid Mrs Hooper at all costs.

The Watsonian ball was an exciting prospect for all the female members of the Hooper households. Mrs Hooper considered it a compliment that Dr Watson personally gave the invitation rather than sending the card through the post; Mary was elated with the thought of seeing Dr Watson again and her two best friends; Molly wanted to see Moriarty again while confirming her suspicions with Holmes. For Kate and Kitty, their happiness has not depended on a single event, or indeed, a single person before. They, like Molly, are pining to dance with Moriarty for half the evening as no other person will surely satisfy them. And of course Sarah showed no reluctance for the event.

“I believe that it is possible to work to hard, and a little play can be beneficiary. Besides, one has to mingle with society now and then.”
Molly’s spirits were so high she thought she could speak to Mr Anderson about the ball, and asked if he will go as well. His response was surprising. He will go to ball, and no, he won’t get into trouble with Lady Smallwood by dancing.

“This type of social event, filled with respectable, well mannered people, will have no vices whatever. Actually, you have reminded me of something. I will be honoured if you accept my hand in dancing for the course of the evening.”

Molly was slightly crushed, however, this only meant that she cannot see Moriarty for a little while longer. Besides, it was a gallant proposal, and she accepted it with as much kindness as she could. As she walked away however she was suddenly struck with the reason why he asked her: he wanted her to be his wife, and to assistant Lady Smallwood in filling the card table when there are no other visitors available. It also explained why he tended to favour her above other people, and why her mother talked to her about marriage more often. She dismissed them beforehand, because the proposal didn’t come up, and it was useless to argue.

If it wasn’t for the ball, the days would be very dreary indeed. It constantly rained, and without suitable transport the two younger sisters were forced to stay at home all day. They had to get their dresses through internet shopping and they couldn’t go see their aunt or any of the band members. It also didn’t help they had to go back to school. Even Molly wanted to see Moriarty again, and it was only the ball that kept their spirits up.
Sorry it took so long! But this is only because this chapter is, quite frankly, bigger than usual. Enjoy! Bring on the angst!

Molly didn’t really imagine the possibilities of Moriarty not present at the ball until she was actually searching for him in the sea of silks and satin. She dressed up with a lot more care than usual, buying an expensive peach damask ball gown with small rose motifs and actually bothering to go to her aunt to dress up her hair. Her heart was also full of spirits and excitement of the night that was going ahead, something she only needed to grasp with her white silken glove. But after a few minutes she realised with horror that Moriarty might have been deliberately left out of the invited list to appease Holmes. Her suspicions were confirmed when Denny said to her and Kate that Moriarty had business elsewhere, something that might not have popped up if it wasn’t for the host’s best friend.

Kate did not catch onto the last statement, but Molly did. She blamed Holmes for Moriarty’s absence, and her hatred for Holmes was already augmented by her missing Moriarty. She was then determined to completely ignore Holmes. After all, even a slight bit of politeness were wounds to Moriarty. Molly was even rude to Dr Watson, whose ignorance she detested.

Thankfully, Molly’s personality does not allow her to remain sad for long; she cannot bare to wallow in her disappointments. After sharing her grievances with Sally Donovan, whom she hasn’t seen for a week now, she then rapidly proceeded to mock her cousin’s awkwardness, and pointed him out to her. The dances soon came up, and what torture they were! Anderson was born with his feet back to front, fumbling, distant, about as painful as a partner could be. Molly could barely control herself from crying out in pain, and being released from him was utter joy.

The next dance she had the band drummer and they talked about Moriarty, which she found to her liking. She found out that he was well regarded by all. She then rejoined Sally after the three dances for a bit of chatting, when she found Holmes looming over and actually addressing her. He asked her if she could be his partner for his next dance. Before she could stop herself, Molly had said yes. Holmes then walked away. Molly then started panicking over the decision she just made, and her own stupidity. Sally then tried to comfort her, saying that he is not that bad looking.

“And you don’t know, dear Molly, he might actually be a lovely person.”

“Lovely person! What are trying to get me to do? Make me love my worse enemy? Have mercy upon my soul!”
When the dancing suite came up and Holmes approached her, Sally whispered to her to exaggerate her attraction to Moriarty; if anything, it will repel Holmes away from her forever. Molly thought she wasn’t in full control of herself as she gracefully stood in position to her abhorrent partner. She could see over Holme’s shoulder that many people had their mouths agape. They began circling around the slippery dance floor but none of them spoke for a while. Molly was determined to keep the silence until she had the brilliant idea of forcing him to talk. She then made a trite remark about the size of the ballroom, and the number of people in the room, and waited for his reply.

“Well, Mr Holmes, I would think that it was polite society for you to say something now. Maybe you can start talking about the quality of the chamber orchestra.”

He then smiled, and replied that anything she wanted to be said will be done. A smile was of course a wonder to behold, especially since it started to melt Holme’s icy blue eyes, but Molly was determined not to notice.

“Well, that reply will do for now. Maybe I shall continue for a little while by saying that I prefer the private balls organised by an individual rather than the public ones organised by large companies. But we must now maintain silence.”

“Do you always talk during a dance?”

“Sometimes. It does look rather awkward to be together for half an hour and not have a conversation during that time. Although, for some people, conversation has to be arranged so they may have the privilege of speaking as little as possible.”

“Who is the benefactor? Are you doing this to satisfy me or you?”

“Both, actually, because we both have the same personalities. We are both unsocial, taciturn, and would rather not speak unless the sentence we say is so dazzling that it leaves the whole room speechless, and the sentence itself handed down over the generations as a proverb.”

“I do not see you being such a person. As for us having the same personality, well, I believe that you are much better judge than me. I know that you think that we are exactly the same.”

“But I cannot judge myself impartially.”

They were quiet once more. None of them spoke again until the end of the second dance, when Holmes asked Molly if she and her sisters went down to Sevenoaks very often. Molly says that they go down there at least once a week, and couldn’t resist saying her next statement.

“You know, when we saw you, we were making a new friend.”

Holmes immediately put on his stony, aloof mask. Molly then felt guilty for making
Holmes uncomfortable but didn’t know what to say next. Eventually, it was Holmes who broke the silence.

“Moriarty has always been good at making friendships. *Keeping* them however, has continuously been another matter altogether.”

“He did have the unfortunate luck to loose your friendship, in a manner that will haunt him for life.”

Holmes kept his lips shut and stared at his feet. Just then Sir William Donovan was walking from one side of the ballroom to another, and spotted the couple. He then proceeded to bow to Holmes and to compliment the superior dancing he had with his partner.

“Well, I have never seen such exquisite dancing before, Mr Holmes. I couldn’t take my eyes off you two. You must have had some private dancing lessons from the best tutors, Mr Holmes, to dance so well. And your fair partner did not let you down. I hope to see a repeat performance when a certain happy event (by then he was eyeing at Mary and Dr Watson talking) takes place. But do continue what you were doing, sire. Those bright eyes are also criticising me.”

The last sentence was whispered, but the force of it still struck Holmes. He then glanced at Watson and Mary, who were then already dancing. Holmes then turned back to his partner. “Well, Sir Donovan’s interruption made me forget what I was suppose to talk about.”

“We weren’t talking about anything. Donovan could not have disturbed two people who have less to say. We have tried multiple subjects, but without success.”

“Books. What do you think of books?”

“Don’t bother talking about them. Not only will we have different tastes, we won’t have the same opinions of the books we do read.”

“Sorry to hear that, but at least we can compare the books we had just read.”

“I’m afraid I cannot talk about books right now. I can never talk about intellectual subjects during balls: the surroundings distract me too much.”

“You are always distracted by such scenes.”

“I suppose I am.” But Molly didn’t know what she had just said. Her mind had alway wandered, then snapped back to attention. “I recall you saying that you hold your grudges. Is it hard for them to form in the first place?”

“Of course.”

“And you always judge partially?”

“What is it with all your questions?”

“I am trying to figure you out. Unfortunately I seem to be getting a lot of conflicting reports.”
“I am not surprised,” he then said in a serious tone, “that people have such varying opinions of me. It is therefore wise, Miss Hooper, to stop studying me at the present moment. It will not do any good for either of us.”

“But what other time can I ever study you than the present moment? I hardly ever see you.”

Holmes’s reply was chilling. “I do no, and will ever, stop you from enjoying your little hobbies.”

They soon separated in anger and a slight bit of longing, but in different intensities. For Holmes, there was a feeling of tenderness, a powerful emotion that soon forgave her but redirected his anger to other people.

For Molly however, the anger lasted for much longer. Especially since Miss Irene Watson came her way a little while after.

“Molly! I have heard that you have become a little infatuated with James Moriarty. I have been talking to Mary and she has asked me a thousand questions about him and found out he forgot to tell you that he is the son of George Moriarty, the Holmes family lawyer! Well, let me give you some advice- don’t trust him. The rumour that Holmes brothers have treated him ill is completely false, well, it may as well be the other way round. I cannot give you the details out of confidence but I can certainly tell you the rift between Holmes and Moriarty is caused by the latter. I’m sorry to tell you this Molly, but it is in everybody’s best interest, especially you now, to know the truth.”

“But you have accused Moriarty of being nothing more than lowly born, a fact which he has told me already!”

“Just be careful around that man. He hides a lot of secrets.”

“What a bully,” thought Molly, “if she thinks that she can put me off anything by spreading a few malicious rumours!” She then went to seek solace in her sister, who has been in the company of Watson the whole time. Molly, when she saw the smile on Mary’s face, gave up her resentment of Moriarty’s enemies with the hope of joy for Mary.

“Did you find anything else about Moriarty? If you were too pleasantly engaged with the doctor to think of anyone else, you have my full pardon.”

“Don’t worry,” replied Mary, “I haven’t forgotten about either of you. John can stand behind his best friend’s conduct. He does not know the whole story about what had happened, but he definitely knows that Moriarty has done something unforgivable. In fact, he believes that Moriarty should have been more severely punished for his crimes. Whatever has happened, dear sister, it is definite that Moriarty is not what he claims to be.”

“Has he ever met Moriarty before?”

“NopE.”
“What does he say of the will?”

“The will stipulates that Moriarty’s share was conditional only.”

“So Watson does not know the full story?”

“No.”

“That does explain why he is so staunch in the support of his best friend. I do have to say that Watson’s defence of his friend is very convincing. However, as he does not the full facts, I shall have to retain my opinion of the two men as I have done before.”

She then changed the subject to something both could agree about. Mary had high hopes of courting Dr Watson successfully and Molly thought her changes were high. Before Dr Watson could see them she then went to see how Miss Donovan is feeling. Donovan could scarcely reply when Mr Anderson went up to them to announce the ”most important discovery.”

“Well, wouldn’t you have it! I have found out by the most singular accident that this ball has a near relation to my patroness! This particular gentleman has the same name of my patroness’s sister. I am so glad that I have found out now, because there is still time to make my introduction to him.”

Both ladies were speechless for a moment. Molly then spoke up: “You mean…you are going to introduce yourself to Mr Darcy?! Surely not!”

“Of course! In fact, it was incredibly rude for me to have not done it earlier! He is Lady Smallwood’s nephew, right? I must have his pardon, and tell him his auntie is well.”

Molly tried to persuade him from doing so, citing the social norm of having the person of a higher social class introduce first. But Mr Anderson was adamant.

“Dear Molly, I trust you in the guidance of social mores, but you must understand my position as a client. I am of the same social status of his auntie because she is my patroness, and therefore more than equal to introduce myself. On other subjects, you may have more knowledge than me; but on this case I have the better understanding, especially for a woman of your standing and age.” He then attacked the problem of making himself known to Holmes. Molly could only stand and watch. Anderson started with a bow. Although Molly couldn’t hear the conversation above all the other ones she could make out from the lip movements the words ‘apology,’ ‘Kent,’ and ‘Lady Smallwood.’ Holmes could only see him with surprise as Anderson continued speaking. After he has allowed Holmes to speak for himself, Anderson started his second speech, this time met with vexed contempt. Holmes, couldn’t take it anymore, only made a slight bow and walked away. Mr Anderson glided back to Molly.

“I am so glad,” he babbled on, “to have meet Sherlock Holmes, at last! I have to say, he is the most polite and kind person. He took to me well, and complimented me by saying that Lady Smallwood only chooses the best of the best. I already like this Holmes fellow.”
Since Molly had nothing else to do, she started to daydream about the future of Mary and Watson together. She imagined them with a nice mansion out in the country, with a couple of children and everything which could bring them happiness. She even imagined that she could like her prospective sisters in laws after a while. Molly could also see her mother daydreaming the very same things, and resolved to stay far away from her lest she hears too much. It was the worst luck for her when she was placed next to her mother for the supper, and her mother Lady Donovan. She had to listen for the whole meal how her mother hopes that Mary will soon be married to Dr Watson. It was a subject that will never tire out the Mrs Hooper. She began how nice and lovely her son in law will be, how rich he is, how he only lives an hour’s drive from their place, and how his connections will ensure that her other daughters will marry well. She then ended with wishing Lady Donovan the same chances that she had, but in her heart she knew it wouldn’t be so.

Throughout the whole performance Molly in vain tried to change her mother’s subject, or at least get her to pipe down. She could already see that Holmes was getting annoyed. Her mother dismissed her with each attempt.

“Molly, do I look as if I care about the opinions of that annoying man? In fact, I will be glad to vex him.”

“But Mum, do you really think you will doing any favours when Mr Holmes tells what you have just said to his friend?”

But it was all in vain. Nothing Molly said checked her mother’s own foolish words. Molly’s face was getting warmer and warmer and she glanced back at Holmes to see his reaction to her mother’s words. Her deepest fears were realised. Holmes was not focused on her mother, but on her. She could see his face change from annoyance to an icy gravity.

It was a long while later when Mrs Hooper has nothing more to say. Lady Anderson had already began yawning over listening to the blessings the Hooper family would soon receive and she no change of getting, and comforted herself over glazed ham. Molly soon started to recover her dignity. But more horrors were to follow. Somebody has recommend that some people should sing and to Molly’s chagrins Sarah accepted the request with very little forethought. Molly tried to discourage her with hand signals and staring, but to no avail. Sarah didn’t understand what Molly was trying to tell her and was always impatient to display herself. Molly could only sit there in utter humiliation. Sarah had neither a tuneful nor powerful voice, and her English folk songs were not very well received. Molly then glanced back to see how Mary was faring; Mary was talking with Watson. She then looked at her two youngest sisters, who were mocking Sarah, and then Holmes, who continued with his cold stare. Her last, desperate act was to signal to her father to stop Sarah from singing anymore, lest she continues until Christmas. He understood. When Sarah finished her second song, he said to Sarah, “You have done well, daughter, but I think it is high time some other lady to show off her talents.”
Sarah didn’t want to hear that. She went back to her seat with her head bowed and lips all curled down. Molly felt sorry for Sarah, sorry for her father forced to make that call. Soon, others offered too.

“If I did indeed have a fine singing voice, then I would love to entertain the company with some singing,” said Anderson. “Music is a respectable and sophisticated subject, and a good pastime for a man of the law. That is not to say that one should devote all their time to music though, because there are always other things to attend to. A detective has so much to do to catch those criminals, and one sometimes has to devote the rest of his life to catch that one elusive serial killer. The duties also include connecting with the community, especially with members of high influence.” He then turned to Holmes, and nodded at him. Anderson’s little monologue was loud enough to be heard clearly by at least half the people in the room, and many heads were seen nodding. Some smiled, but none was more amused than Mr Hooper. His wife on the other hand commented to Lady Donovan what a kind, sensible man he was.

If the Hooper family has suddenly decided to turn themselves into a family pantomime show, their act could not have turned out with more success. Molly was thankful that Mary and Watson seemed to be too distracted by each other to notice what was going on, but she could see Holmes and the Watson sisters weren’t. She couldn’t decide what was worse- the stern gaze of Holmes, or the insolent smiles of the sisters.

The rest of the night was rendered dull with Anderson continuously tailing Molly. Many times she tried to introduce him to other ladies to dance, but he refused to leave her side. After all, how else was he supposed to woo her? She did at least prevented another dance with him, but she couldn’t not dance with anyone else. Her friend Sally Donovan helped her situation a bit by talking to him.

Another unexpected blessing from this otherwise clingy curse was that she was no longer subjected to Holme’s unsettling gaze. As she is constantly engaged, he could not approach her to speak. Molly thought this was due to her allusions to Moriarty, and congratulated herself for it.

The Hooper household was the last to leave the ball. Mrs Hooper made sure of that by having their hired limousine come at least fifteen minutes after the ball was supposed to have ended. This gave her a good chance to see how welcome the family was to the Watsons. The sisters didn’t speak, apart from complaining that they would rather go home and how tired they were. They also repulsed any of Mrs Hooper’s efforts to speak to them. An aura of languidness washed over the party, not helped by Mr Anderson’s soliloquies to the Watsons on how wonderful they were hosts, and how nice the whole event turned out. Holmes stayed in silence, and so did Mr Hooper, enjoying the scenery. Mary and Watson were sitting together, in one corner in the room, talking. Molly was too tired to speak, and even Kate, the most talkative of the lot, could only mutter how tired she was from time to time.

Mrs Hooper was delighted with what she saw, and began to plan for the wedding she was sure
would happen within the next year or so. She began to plan the dress, the wedding entourage, the fleet of cars, and everything else her daughter would need to settle into Baker Street. She was perfectly happy, as she was also sure that another of her daughters will marry soon. Molly was her least favourite of her daughters, and thought that Anderson was good enough for her. After all, the two together would be worth less than the wealth of Watson and Baker street.
The first proposal

The day after the ball was another remarkable day in itself. Mr Anderson has decided to declare a formal relationship. With consent from Mrs Hooper, and since he had to return to his work the next day, he then set to work almost immediately. His chance came after breakfast as everybody was sitting down at the same table. When the plates were cleared away and only Molly, Mrs Hooper and Kitty were keeping him company, he then turned to the mother.

“Do you mind if I have a private moment with Molly?”

Before Molly could even react her mother answered for her. “Oh yes, please do. Kitty, I need you upstairs to help me with a spot of sewing.”

“But Mum,” objected Molly, “please stay. I am sure that whatever Mr Anderson has to say to me could be said to you either.”

“No no, Molly, do hear Anderson out. In fact, I insist you do so.”

Molly couldn’t disobey her mother’s command without embarrassing the rest of the family, so she braced herself with whatever trivialities Anderson had to say. He began as soon as they left the room.

“Miss Hooper, please do not be troubled by your own modesty; in fact, they add to the list of your qualities that make you so perfect. Your little performance there has only increased my admiration for you. But don’t worry, I do have your mother’s permission to discuss what we are going to discuss. I do know you have guessed what I am about to say, but your natural shyness prevented you from believing it. When I first laid eyes on you I knew you were my soulmate, and that we are fated to spend our lives together. But before I let my feelings run away from itself, I would like you to know that I want our relationship to be more serious, and I will be delighted to be your partner.”

Molly was almost externally laughing at the idea of Anderson, so stony and composed, having feelings at all, let alone ones that ran away from itself. She tried to stop Anderson from making more of a fool of himself, but he continued too rapidly.

“I need to have a relationship, you see, because it is now proper for me to. I have a stable career, a house in the city, and an empty space in my bed. I have also been advised by my patroness over this matter. Lady Smallwood has already told me directly (without asking too!) that I should marry soon. Last Christmas she told me this: ‘Mr Anderson, it is high time you settled down. Chose a partner in life carefully; she must be highborn for both mine and your’s sake, but not so high that she cannot be frugal. She must also be active and skilled in all the ways to keep a home. If you can bring her to the city, of course I will be able to visit her.’ You will find that getting the attention of Lady Smallwood is the least of my abilities. She is a most proper and wonderful lady, with impeccable manners and a
sharp mind. Your wit, if tempered with respect for her title, will go down well with her.

"As it is such a good time for me to find a partner in life, I thought about choosing someone from the city. However, once I realised that I will inherit the Hooper estate with nothing for the daughters, I changed tact and considered it my duty that I choose one of the daughters, so at least they can get something. This is why I chose you, dear cousin, and hope that I have done well to earn your esteem. Do pardon my explicit wording of my affections. I do realise that you will be poor, as you will only receive part of your mother’s estate. But don’t worry: once we are married, I shall be as generous to you.”

Molly couldn’t bear it anymore.

“Before you continue, Anderson, please reconsider our positions. We are not even on first name basis yet, let alone ready to even consider a relationship. I am grateful that you consider me worthy, but we cannot be together. I cannot do anything else but to decline your offer.”

“Don’t worry, Miss Hooper, I have learnt that girls tend to be finicky like that. I have learnt from my extensive research that girls often turn away their suitor the first time, then the second, and sometimes even the third. I shall give you a diamond ring before long.”

(What a sexist bastard, thought Molly. He is the personification of Blurred Lines. I cannot believe he has graduated from university if he doesn’t know what ‘no’ means.) “Anderson, I am being serious here. I am not one of those finicky girls as you have described. I know for sure that I cannot make you truly happy, and vice versa. As for Lady Smallwood, well, that would make the situation worst.”

“But dearest, I have chosen you for exactly the last point. You are a person that cannot offend Lady Smallwood. And when I have the honour of seeing her next week, I shall tell her about your economy, diligence, and wit.”

“Praise for me will be unnecessary. I wish you well, that you will be fortunate and rich with a partner that makes you happy. Please believe that when I refuse your offer, that I am ensuring a chance of happiness for both of us. I know that you mean well by doing so, and that my family won’t have any bitterness if the estate now falls to you. There, the matter has been settled.”

She then got up to leave, if it wasn’t for him piping up again.

“I hope the next time we meet that you will present me with a more favourable answer. However, I
can hardly call it inhumanity for the moment, because I know that it is the nature of your gender that you reject the first offers of a suitor. In fact, it is a mark of a desirable lady."

“Really, Anderson?,” asked Molly with a little amusement, “then how can I phrase my statement to tell you my refusal is serious?”

“But you must not be so modest, dear thing. Remember, I am probably the most eligible bachelor you have ever met. I have connections to the House of Lords, I have a stable and considerable income, and I will inherit and sizeable estate. You are not exactly the most desirable maid out there anymore. I therefore conclude that you cannot be serious. Besides, I will soon have the express permission from both…”

“GO TO HELL YOU PRETENTIOUS DOUCHEBAG!” Molly then stormed out with fury in her head and tears in her eyes. She cannot believe such a silly, sexist man would want her. She wanted to escape, and her longing was overwhelming. Her bags were already packed for London and Mary was already loading them into the car. She threw the last of the bags in, and slammed the boot, almost trapping Mary’s fingers.
An unexpected outcome

If Molly was her ancestral counterpart living in the early years of the nineteenth century she would have been able to escape her problems for a few hours or so by racing to a neighbouring village. However, in this immaculately connected world, there are very few precious spots where you cannot be contacted. Modern day London is not one of them.

She wasn’t surprised as her phone buzzed in her hip pocket several times during the next hour. In fact, Molly could not be bothered to solve her dilemma until she got back to her flat in Garrett Street.

10 missed calls.

Oh God.

She called back though the landline. Against all expectations, her father answered.

“Molly, dear, don’t worry, your mother has told me everything.”

“Don’t worry, Mr Anderson, Molly will be called to reason.” Her mother’s loud voice travelled through to the receiver to the other side. I shall tell her that it is imprudent for her to decline. She can be slightly immature sometimes.”

“But if she is immature,” came Anderson’s equally loud reply, “then it is probably not a good idea for me to marry her in a few years time.”

“Oh, don’t worry, Mr Anderson, she is a little silly in situations such as these. Bob, is that Molly? I need to talk to that indolent daughters of ours.”

“Yes, the matter has been settled,” said Mr Hooper.

“Hello? Your mother here, talking on another phone in the house. Molly, you must become Anderson’s girlfriend. Do you realise what will happen if you refuse every relationship with men? You will die an old maid! Or worse…”

“Ginger, are you going to put Molly’s happiness on the line just because of her eventual suitor’s gender? Anyway, I have a solution to this situation. So, you have rejected Anderson. Is that right Molly?”

“Yes, Dad.”

“Very well then. Molly, I have a hard decision for you. Either you don’t accept Anderson’s
advances, and never see your mother again, or accept them, and never see me again.”

“Robert! You promised to help me!”

“Ginger, I have two favours to ask of you. One: please trust my judgement for this present situation. Two: please leave me alone for a little while. I do not like to be disturbed, especially if I am in my study. Besides, I think it is best for me if I organised an outing with Anderson to break the news. I think a spot of shooting will help irk out any anger.”

For a little while the household was in confusion. Everyday Mrs Hooper called Molly to reconsider her situation and even sometimes asked Mary to intervene, which Mary declined to do repeatedly. Kitty and Kate didn’t know what was happening, especially since two days after the ‘incident’ Anderson was in hospital with a minor bullet wound to his upper thigh*.

(*The cause was apparently accidental misfiring on a shooting range. Luckily for Anderson, the bullet narrowly missed his essential organs, including his bladder.)

It was the next Saturday before anything could be straightened out. Molly and Mary were back with their family while Anderson was once again visiting, fresh out of hospital. He was nursing his not-quite healed wound and meditating on the reasons why his cousin would refuse him. It was unfortunate that he thought too highly of himself to come to the real conclusion. He wasn’t too bothered about it though because his affection for her was superficial, easily dissipated, and he was satisfied Mrs Hooper would dole out suitable punishment for her daughter.

That day Charlotte had also decided to visit Molly, and was invited inside by Kate.

“Oh Sally, thank goodness you came! Everything is so much fun! Have you heard the news? Molly refused to be in a relationship with Mr Anderson!”

“Hey Sally!,” greeted Kitty enthusiastically, about to tell the same news. Sally was then joined by Mrs Hooper in the parlour, begging her to get Molly to accept the family’s wishes. “You have no idea how stressful it is right now, Nobody is on my side! I live a depressing, support less life.” Molly then entered the room. “Ah, here she is!” cried Mrs Hooper, “the anarchist, the rebel, the defier of respect. Now you are going to die an old maid. I don’t really know what to do with you sometimes. Who is going to look after you once your father dies? Never mind, I shall honour the decision made in the phone conversion. I shall never speak to you again. Not that anyone would like to talk to me in the first place! Do you know that complainers are always ridiculed?”

Her daughters knew their mother enough to not silence her, lest her vitriol ended up on them. She ranted on until the clack of Anderson’s walking staff came into the room, his head was higher than usual. Mrs Hooper, upon noticing him, shooed her girls away. “Now, my dears, you must allow me and Mr Anderson a private moment. I need to talk to him.”
Molly was the first to past the doorway, then Mary and Kitty, but Kate stood her ground, keen to hear as much as she could of the subject. Sally on the other hand was arrested on the spot by Anderson’s civilities, and he was soon updated of the minutes of her family as well as the town. She ended up camouflaged sitting on the bay window pretending not to listen. In a depressed tone Mrs Hooper then started her planned and forced conversation. “Mr Anderson!”

“Esteemed madam, may we let go on this matter,” replied Anderson as he gratefully sat down on the comfortable armchair. “I do not resent your daughter. Far from it actually. It might even be more accurate to say I have forgiven her.” He then massaged his unholy hole in his leg and mentally reminded himself to not accidentally offend any more suitors, lest the next bullet went through an less opportune area. “A man in the law soon learns that you have to sometimes tolerate people for their sins. Please don’t believe that just because I am withdrawing my suit that I think your family is any less than one of the best of the area. I came here to find a soulmate. If your family by any chance find my manner rude, then I shall now leave.”
The Departure of the Watsons

Molly found the whole experience less excruciating than she thought. All she had to do was sit through the conversation and then afterwards some angry mentions from her mother. As for Mr Anderson, he never spoke to her again throughout the day out of angry pride, but instead directed his attentions to Sally Anderson, who received it submissively. It was a relief for all, especially for Molly.

The next day bought no relief to Mrs Hooper. She continuously complained about her nerves, and how her headaches was getting to her. Anderson’s pride was no better. He decided to stay the weekend, and till the end of the weekend he is staying.

After breakfast the daughters, apart from Sarah, all drove to their aunt’s hairdressing shop to ask after Moriarty. He was already in the shop, apparently expecting them, to greet them. To Molly he confirmed his absence from the recent ball was self-imposed.

“I knew closer to the time that me and Holmes cannot be in the same room, lest some unpleasant events occur, so I decided to stay respectfully far away.”

She then praised his self-discipline, and they then talked about it for a few minutes with him returning the compliments. As they walked around the town he was beside her all the time, a particular compliment to Molly. It also served another purpose- she was able to introduce him to her parents when they also came to town to buy groceries.

Moriarty was then invited home for lunch and Mary found a letter addressed to her in the letterbox. It was unusual for two reasons- for one, it was a Sunday. Another was the sheer old-fashionsness of it. The cream, embossed paper was filled with an elegant, familiar, flowing hand of Miss Watson. Molly watched her sister change her body language reading the letter, from hope, to seriousness, and finally despair. Jane then folded the letter and placed it back inside the lilac envelope. She then joined the conversation between the sisters with her usual cheeriness, but it was still obvious she was trying to hide something. Molly couldn’t concentrate on Moriarty properly but constantly darted her attention to Mary’s slightly stooped posture.

It was only when they were in the privacy of their own rooms did Mary explain the contents of the letter. “Irene wrote to me saying that by the time we get this, the whole of the Watson household would be in Edinburgh, with no intention of returning to London. Maybe I should read the letter to you.

‘Dear Mary
I am very regretful to tell you this, for you are my best friend, and I hate to lose such a relationship such as ours. However, my brother has resolved to go back to Edinburgh, the place of our birth and where our parents once lived. Although my accent and lifestyle might tell you otherwise, I am still very Scottish at heart and therefore not that sorry to leave London, save that I can no longer see your face very often now. However, with the hope of modern technology just because we cannot see each other in person every week doesn’t mean we cannot keep in touch. In fact, I expect to at least write to me every week, though I am partial to phone calls (“Did she actually give you a phone number to call?” asked Molly. “No, surprisingly,” replied Mary). I also expect you to accept my invitations to any birthday/Christmas/special functions I give to you, because when else can we see each other?’ ”

“It is unlucky,” interrupted Molly, “that you cannot see your friends before they galloped off. But surely Miss Watson is looking forward to more intimate conversations when you become sisters?”

“No chance, I’m afraid. I’ll read you the rest of the letter.

‘My silly brother thought that his business in regards to his father’s estate would sort itself out within a week or so, but as it turns out there are some legal deputies that might last until next summer. In the meantime, as his dependent I have to follow him wherever his whims fancy and he has decided to live in his father’s manor for the meantime (which should have been sold by now, may I add!). We have moved there with our processions sent beforehand so by the looks of things we are not going back to London anytime soon. I hope this year is prosperous to you, and that you have so many wealthy and kind suitors that you don’t miss the company of three buxom friends.’ I guess that letter says it all, Molly. Dr Watson is not coming back anytime soon. Maybe not ever.”

“But it does not mean that Miss Watson thinks he shouldn’t,” replied Molly.

“Ah, Molls, it is not so! As my closest confident, you must know of all my pain. Dr Watson is his own man, the paterfamilias of his household. It is he that has done this. I shall read you the relevant passage.

‘Holmes wants to visit his sister and to tell you the truth we can hardly wait ourselves. She boards at Wycombe Abbey School and hardly every sees her beloved brother. It is her short leave this weekend and we will pick her up to take her to Pemberly. Let me tell you, she is the most beautiful, elegant, and clever person you could ever meet! But before we could even do that Johnny made us promise that we would stay at Wycombe for a little while. He does not tell us, but I can tell he has a thing for the new headmistress of the school. Be rest assured- she is worthy of him. In fact, I am a little worried that he won’t be worthy of her. However he has never failed in a conquest before and he has had several girlfriends. It is just a matter for him to keep them.’
“Well, Molly what do you think of that damning little passage? It looks as if Irene wants to abandon hopes of marrying her brother. She doesn’t want to be my sister! And she is convince me of her brother’s indifference to me! What else can be said of this subject?”

“Many things, Mary, and you shall get it as concise as possible. For one thing, you got the intentions wrong. She could see that Dr Watson is in love with you, and doesn’t want him to stay this way. She wants her brother to break the attachment, hence the reason why she is trying to keep him in another country and for writing this letter.”

Mary only shook her head.

“Mary, please don’t dismiss my opinions- you know they are right. Miss Watson is not a blind person, but even if she was she would know. If she felt that Holmes had at half the love for her as you do for the good doctor, then she would have hired a wedding planner. But here is the crux of her plan: once she can get her brother married, it might put more pressure on Holmes to marry as well, so she will have a better chance of getting him. We are definitely not part of the plan simply because we are not hightborn nor rich enough to be good connections, let alone relatives. I will say that Miss Watson is a shrewd planner, and her plan is going to succeed, if she can somehow remove Miss Smallwood out of the picture. But don’t worry Mary: I am pretty sure she is exaggerating his regard to the headmistress.”

“Alas, if I only had the same opinions as you! Then I can take solace in your viewpoint. However, I know personally that Irene is incapable of deceiving people. She must be deceived herself”

“As you cannot accept my opinion, by all means make your own. You have now done your part- now don’t stress about it anymore.”

“But Molls, do you think I will ever be happy if I accept the hand of a man whose sisters wish him to marry someone else?”

“It is for you to decide, dear sister. If you think that happiness of marriage to one man is outweighed by the misery you get from his sisters, then by all means ignore him.”

“My dear sister, how can you be so pessimistic! Of course I will choose him!”

“Of course your will, Mary. Then I cannot comprehend your situation with much compassion.”
“But if he is not coming back until the summer, then I may as well not have any input at all. Anything can happen within six months!”

Molly was slightly angry at the idea that Dr Watson would not return for another half year. She was convinced that it was the nefarious plan of Miss Watson, and her determination to get what she wanted. Molly was a little dubious of Miss Watson’s influence on her brother, especially one as independent as he was.

Both sisters agreed that they should break the news gently to their mother, and that they only told her the bare minimum facts without any detail of Watson’s alarming behaviour. Even then their mother got a bit flustered to lose such good friends just when they were getting intimate. Still, she hoped that one day Dr Watson would come back and dine with them, and was already starting to plan that eventual meal.
Surprising news from unexpected places

Chapter Notes

Well, would you believe it? We are past the third way mark! Maybe when we pass the halfway mark I will post a ficlet of something within this Sherlock universe. If there is something you want me to write on in about ten week’s time tell me in the comments and I shall see what is the most popular.

That evening the Hooper family was invited by the Donovans to a masquerade dinner party. Molly and Mary was up in the attic searching for costumes in a large ornate oak dresser when the lightbulb blew. Molly, being the braver of the two, crept cautiously along the splinted floor and down the ladder. She ran into Macy and asked where the nearest torch is. Macy whipped a small one out of her trousers pocket.

“I was taught in the Boy’s Scouts to always carry a torch in your pocket, lest you are left in the dark.”

“Do you still remember how to light a fire? I believe the Donovans are trying to do an open spit roast tonight. You will be handy if they can’t get it going.”

“Oh of course! Those skills are for life.”

They both laughed. Then Molly sobered up with the thought that she can never, ever tell her mother the conversation they just had.

Later on that evening the Donovans and the Hoopers with Mr Anderson were gathering around a crackling bonfire with several roasting carcasses slowly turning on the spit. Everybody was dressed in medieval clothing and had elaborate feathered masks on. The bonfire was big enough to melt a ring around the snow but the whole show was ruined with several outdoor heaters strategically placed around the backyard.

Molly was glad that Sally took most of Anderson’s attention away from her by listening and conversing with him. Unbeknownst to her, Sally was doing much of a bigger favour than what Molly could have ever imagined. They were all going back to the various London places later that evening or the next day, but there was always time for everything. The full extent of the sacrifice was shown the next morning.

“Morning Molly! I have urgent news to tell you!”
Molly was surprised to hear from her best friend so early in the morning. In fact, she had just gotten up and was about to take a shower back at the London flat.

“I hear you Sally. Fire away.”

“Anderson is now by boyfriend.”

Molly’s smartphone hit the tiles of the bathroom and bounced against the cabinet.

That day Molly received a barrage of phone calls of her haggard mother telling her about the news of the relationship. The theme was the same: Molly shouldn’t have declined the proposal, now her less eligible friend is getting a man, she is bringing shame to her family, she will bring shame to her family and how smug the Donovans are.

The Donovan family did have the right to be rather proud with what they accomplished. Sally never really had a relationship before, just a string of one night stands with various people of different ages and genders. The closest thing she had to a romantic relationship was with a rather sweet but absent minded young professor of archaeology at Oxford university. The relationship lasted for almost a year, until the said professor died in a landslide caused by the digging. Since then Sally would rather not get into a serious relationship out of grief, and focused more on her work as a detective at Scotland Yard instead. She has always been plain looking, and her dark skin caused her slight disadvantage in a subtly racist dating society. So for her to be finally in a relationship on her twenty-eight year was a complete miracle.

All of this was already known by Molly but what was new to her was that Sally already knew Anderson from work.

§

“I met him three years ago, actually, when I started working at the Yard. He was working in a different division than me at first, then transferred to mine. I quite like working with him, and yes he can be a bit stupid sometimes. He is however hard working and has a tenacity of a bulldog.”

Sally and Molly was sitting at a cafe after work to discuss the events that morning, and the implications that will have on their lives. Molly was still reeling from the shock of her friend’s announcement. She ended up having a cup of herbal tea lest coffee accented her shaking.

“Molly, I can see that you are still shocked that I would consider a relationship with Phil. But you
must understand. I know I am no longer an eligible maid and I must take what I can get. All I want is a comfortable home with someone I can spend the rest of my life with. I don’t want to be lonely and maybe I want children in the future. I don’t know. But I have definitely decided that I have focused on my career too much. Remember, Molly, you can demand more because you deserve more. You are much more smarter and more beautiful than me. You have your full independence and you are still quite young. You can choose. But me? I cannot.”

“I don’t know Sally. I have always thought that you are more beautiful than you think and you are just as smart, or at least smarter than me. And you are only a year older than me. You can choose, Sally. You don’t have to settle for second best.”

“You are so sweet Molly! But this is not the reality!”

But Molly could not shake off the thought of a broken, unhappy relationship between the two.
Molly only got back to Sevenoaks that Friday when Sir Donovan came waltzing inside the house to announce his daughter’s new relationship rather proudly. He was filled with happiness and self-praising with arranging the matter so that the two families would be connected soon by marriage. Mrs Hooper listened to him retelling what had happened with more annoyance than civility, and told him she refused to believe him. Kate, the most unguarded and uncouth of the sisters, blurted out, “After all, wasn’t it only last week that Mr Anderson offered himself to Molly?”

Molly then turned into a pale shade of pink, and forced herself to verify the statement to save everybody from further embarrassment. However Sir Donovan carried it all with grace, something he learnt when he received his knighthood. She and Jane then distracted everybody from that event by continuously congratulating Donovan on the match, stating that London is very close to Sevenoaks should Sally needs to visit.

The mother was dumbstruck and couldn’t talk for a few hours. When she did, she rapidly fired off her anger in a series of accusations. She mainly focused on two points: firstly, Molly was the cause of this whole debacle, and secondly, she was well abused. She simply refused to forgive and forget. She couldn’t see Molly without scolding until the next week, a month until she could be civil to the Donovans, and only a year later could she actually bear to see Sally.

Mr Hooper on the other hand took it rather well. In fact it pleased him to have finally found another person just as foolish as his wife.

Mary was a little surprised at first, but then focused more on promoting their future happiness. Even Molly couldn’t dissuade her. As for the two youngest it was only small talk for them, another news to spread, just another man taken. Besides, he couldn’t even sing.

Lady Donovan came around the house more often than she ought with pride of the news, though avoided Mrs Hooper’s curdling glare.

Silently Molly and Sally decided not to talk about the relationship any further. But on Molly’s side she was disappointed in her friend’s foolishness, but that was soon replaced by worry for her sister’s relationships. It has been a week since they last heard from the Watsons and still they haven’t heard anything.

Mary immediately sent Miss Watson an email to ask how they were and she was still holding hope for the eventual reply. There was nothing, apart from a letter from Mr Anderson expressing thanks for the month long hospitality of the Hoopers. He also told them that Sally was doing well, and that
Lady Smallwood highly approved of the union. She continuously asked Sally when the marriage would be, which showed her high regard.

Mrs Hooper grew sick and tired of the subject, and then proceeded to brood over the absence of the Watsons. Even Molly was slightly worried over the matter, and wondered if Miss Watson was actually successful in keeping her brother away. Although the idea was uncomfortable and Molly tried to convince herself that that preposterous idea was not even remotely true, the nagging thought continuously surfaced though out the days. She feared the worse: that his two selfish sisters had kept him distracted, his attachment to the headmistress was strong, too strong to allow the attachment of Mary as well.

For Mary though her pain was more intense, as to be expected, however she kept a steady lid on it. She was more unfortunate with her mother however. Not one hour in her waking state did she not inquire about Watson. It took all of Mary’s patients to bear it all with a carefree veneer.

Mr Anderson had returned as well, this time to the Donovan residence to do some intense flirting. Luckily this allowed him to avoid the Hooper family easily and he didn’t bear the consequences of Mrs Hooper’s anger. Mrs Hooper on the other hand became insanely jealous of Sally, the eventual mistress of the place. Mr Hooper found her after dinner staring out the window at the living room with the glummest look on her face.

“Ginger, everything alright?”

“It’s just this entail…Grrrr, why does everything have to be so? Why is it that out of all people, Mr Anderson gets to be the sole heir to this estate? If it wasn’t for this, I shall care for nothing at all.”

“Care for what?”

“Nothing!”

“Well, lets us be thankful that you are at least spared of boredom.”

“Boredom! Well, that would be a blessing compared to this! Say, why on Earth do entails exist in the first place? Especially one that makes children poor.”

“I will let you decide that for yourself.”
Opinions of love

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Miss Watson’s letter finally arrived the next day, and answered all questions in the worst possible way. The first paragraph was exclusively confirmation of the plans for them to stay in Edinburgh for the rest of winter, at least, and maybe a bit of spring.

There was nothing in the letter that didn’t make Mary’s feelings worse than she already was, apart from a few cursory lines about how the sisters were missing her, and how apologetic they were that their brother didn’t even bother saying goodbye to them. In fact, more of the letter was dedicated to the deepening of the relationship between Dr Watson and the headmistress, and how she was already starting to ship them. She then also described the joys of visiting Pemberly, especially with the purchase of the new damask curtains to admire.

Molly listened to Mary’s summary of the letter with well-hidden contempt against the very people who would hurt her dearest sister and best friend. She refused to believe from Miss Watson that her brother really was getting closer to another person. Instead, she felt a hint of annoyance for Dr Watson for being so weak-willed, for changing his mind just for the happiness of his friends. Of course if it was only his happiness on the line he can go his own merry way, but that was her sister they were talking about. He should have been a bit more sensible. It can be noted that her opinions would be influenced on whether she knew Dr Watson’s feelings for her sister were completely done away with, or merely suppressed by his friends, and whether he actually knew about Mary’s attraction in the first place. Whatever happens right now Mary was hurt, and equally so in all four possible situations.

It took a few hours before Mary could talk to Molly about the letter. Their mother had just completed another lecture about Dr Watson and Baker Street, before leaving them alone.

“Oh, if only our mother would have a little more self control!,” lamented Mary, and justifiably. It was the thirtieth time she had to hear about the same subject that week. “But we must go on. He will be forgotten, just like any other young man that passes through London.”

Molly only stared at her in befuddlement.

“Oh dear sister, you know me too well!” Mary then blushed and continued. “Indeed, I will remember him for a long time, in my heart, but there is nothing to expect of him now. No hope, no fear, no bitterness. Thank goodness I have been spared of that pain! No, there is nothing to worry about. I will get better soon.” She then rose and strengthened her cracking voice. “I for one, is at least comforted by the fact that I have done nothing wrong. I have not hurt anybody but myself, and I must be grateful for that.”

“My dear, sweet, angelic sister! Why must you always see the best of everybody, even when it is not there? I will never be able to live up to your kindness, nor your love.”

“Except you do, Molly, you do. You are the best sister I could ever imagine to have. In fact, I’m not too sure how I am deserving of you!”

“Then this situation is definitely not fair. You think the world as wonderful and respectable when it is
most definitely not. Whenever I speak critically of people, you seem hurt by it. But please be not, dear sister. You are the only perfect person left in this world and the person I hold in the highest regard. There are not many people I love, and even fewer I respect. Everyday I get more and more disillusioned of the world, and find it more terrible. Two events recently have made me this more than usual: one is the event which must not be mentioned, and the other is Sally’s relationship.”

“But Molly, you must let yourself go from these feelings more. They are impairing your chance of happiness. Consider for example Sally. She might already feel the pressure of being a ‘Christmas Cake’ (Mary bunny eared that term) and was desperate to be in a relationship. Besides, who knows what her true feelings are? Maybe she was already in love with him.”

“For you, I would almost believe anything. However, this is a step too far. Anderson is a silly, over-confident, vain, sexist pig and a woman who decides to be in a relationship with him cannot be saved. I know it is Sally, but you cannot defend her. Not from this atrocious act.”

“Oh dear Molls, there you go again. Why must your language always be so strong? I hope you see them happy together, and that you are convinced of their prudence. But enough of that subject. Molly, you have alluded to a second subject. As for that, I have nothing to say. Please don’t hurt me with mentions of that person. We women tend to amplify any affections we get, and we often see more to it than there actually is.”

“Then men should always keep that in mind.”

“If it was intentional. However, I cannot imagine people doing such dastardly deeds.”

“Of course there is a big chance that Dr Watson did not do it deliberately. However, you must admit there is a carelessness to it, and thoughtlessness can do the trick.”

“And you think it can be either situations?”

“Of course. Mary, you look hurt. Stop me if you want.”

“So your current theory is that he is influenced by his sisters?”

“Yes, and in addition to his best friend.”

“But why would they do that? If they are only concerned about his happiness, surely they know that he is fond of me.”

“But what if they have other ulterior motives? What if they are more worried about his social position? What if they want him to marry a woman of more consequence, one whose parent carries a title, one with access to tremendous wealth, one with connections?”

“Oh, of course they want him with the headmistress, but maybe it was for good reason. After all, they know him longer, and better than me, and I find in unimaginable that they would go against their brother’s wishes otherwise. If they believed the attraction between me and him, then surely they would allow it. However what you are saying is that they want to make me unhappy. Please, dear sister, believe in the best! I don’t want to think that I am wrong.”

Molly upheld that promise the best way she could- she never spoke of Dr Watson to Mary for a long time.
Mrs Hooper still continued to wonder and brood over the fact that Dr Watson might not be returning for a good few months and hardly a day went by in which she did not mention it. Molly had to keep on explaining to her mother what had happened but it never worked. Her best comfort laid with the fact that the Watson might return later on that year.

Mr Hooper took a more pragmatic view to the whole situation. He then invited her to his study for a little chat. “So, Mary is in love. That is good. The second best thing that could happen to a young girl like you is to be in love from time to time, after marriage. It can give her something to muse over, and to give herself a distinction among her peers. Now, Molly, you will never admit it, but you have always been slightly competitive with all your siblings. Why don’t you look towards one of the band members? Moriarty seems nice enough, and you seem to have a liking for him. Let yourself fall for him.”

“Thanks Dad, but that might be too far of a stretch. Mary was lucky in that regard, but we cannot afford to hope to get what she got.”

Moriarty’s company and society did eventually help Molly in the next few months after that to help dispel the loneliness within the Hooper family. Because of that Moriarty’s pitiful story spread throughout the town and everybody was glad that they hated Mr Holmes before the whole matter came to light.

Only Mary pleaded that Mr Holmes should be spared of such rancour. She then said that they should be room for error, and that nobody knows the whole story. She was ignored however, a peaceful island in a sea of hate.

Chapter End Notes

Any ideas for ficlets you want me to do for the halfway mark celebration? Post in the comments!
The wisdom of the Gardiners

It was almost a week since their announcement but already Sally Donovan and Phillip Anderson were planning their future lives together. As on recommendation from Lady Smallwood, they were to move to Frant, where Smallwood had a sprawling estate, so that she could better support them as well as providing company for her daughter. The happy couple had to quit their jobs, of course, and instead become the local police constables. He had to leave that weekend, however, as he had more business to attend to, but the pain of leaving was remedied with the business of finding a new house.

The next weekend the Hooper family had the pleasure of receiving the Gardiners, Mrs Hooper’s brother and his wife. Mr Edward Gardiner was well regarded by his family because although he was a mere civil servant by trade, he had the manners and temperament rivalling the Lords he worked for. The Watson sisters would have been surprised at the ‘juxtaposition’ that created as no commoner should be so well-bred. Mrs Beatrice Gardiner, an intelligent, warm, and kind woman, was several years younger than Mrs Hooper. She was much liked by her Hooper nieces and by the two eldest she shared a special bond.

The first order of business was to apologise for not coming to the Christmas party that year and to give out the presents that should have been given out. Last Christmas all the civil servants were especially busy as there was a major emergency within Parliament. Apparently a very important person was killed and that caused a kerfuffle that took more than a month to fix. “All I can tell you,” Mr Gardiner whispered cheekily to Molly, “is that the person killed was very evil, and he was intimately know by Lady Smallwood.”

As soon as the Gardiners had told the Hoopers what has happened since their last meeting, it was the Hoopers’ turn. Mrs Hooper then spilled to her sister in law all her complaints she had been bottling up. After all, as a woman aspiring for every single one of her children to be at least in a relationship, she was disappointed that two promising prospects has come to naught.

“Mary of course is innocent in that regard, for it was all Dr Watson’s fault that he decided to move away. But Molly on the other hand, that devious minx! Indeed, she could have been in a very committed relationship by now, if she had accepted the very proposal devised by Mr Anderson. But she has chosen to reject everything, and now I have a selfish neighbour whose daughter will soon be moving away permanently, before mine, and the estate is entailed away as ever. To be used in such dastardly ways by your own children and friends, oh, my dear sister, it makes me so ill! You have come the right time, to help me in such matters.”

Mrs Gardiner, who had already received most of the information through regular correspondence with her nieces and then sympathised quickly with the situation and immediately changed the topic.

It was only when she was alone with Molly did she speak more on the subject. “He seemed a decent man enough, a good pair with Mary.” she began. “However, Mary’s story is all too common, of men who are fixed on a woman for a little while, until circumstances change, an accident occurs and they are separated. The man then forgets about the existence of the woman, let alone he had ever loved her.”

“What you have said would usually console, however, it will not do now. We do not suffer accidents: the universe is rarely so lazy. In fact, I find it hard to believe that a man, so deeply in love with a woman, would forget about her in a few days of separation.”
“‘Deeply in love’ is an overused cliché these days and tells me nothing. It can mean anything from a slight crush to a full blown infatuation. Can you please tell me how deep that love was?”

“I never saw more than an obvious attachment, for he was getting more and more markedly unconscious of his surroundings when she is around. In fact, during the ball last month, I saw him ignoring two rather enticing young ladies in favour of talking with Mary and when I tried to talk to him he didn’t notice me. That has to be pretty deep love, right?”

“Just as I thought. But oh dear, poor Mary! I sometimes wish it has happened to you instead, because you would have laughed out of quicker than she did. But I think I can be of service. What do you say to a little holiday away from this hustle and bustle? Would you like to stay with us for a little while?”

“Of course there is little chance of us and the Watsons ever meeting each other, with them being safely tucked away in Edinburgh. Besides, we hardly ever go out, and we have such different connections. Unless Dr Watson actually personally comes to find Mary, we might never actually see him.”

“The possibility is impossible, actually. Dr Watson is imprisoned by his friend, and I doubt he has even heard about it before, let alone knowing its existence. Besides, the doctor will never go outside if it wasn’t for his friend.”

“Perfect. Now there is the problem of his sisters. Do Mary still communicate to them regularly?”

“Not that I know of. She has written an email back last month but still no reply. It can therefore be assumed that they no longer remain in contact.”

Despite her sureness of her facts in regards to the previous point, there is still one about Dr Watson and Mary. She still harboured hopes for their reunion and relationship. After all, the natural triumphs the artificial eventually, and by that logic Dr Watson will eventually overcome his friends’ influence and come back to Mary again.

Mary accepted the invitation with pleasure and hoped she could see Miss Watson again without her brother. In her last letter Irene Watson mentioned she would be going down to London again to continue with her university studies. Mary hoped she could at least spend an afternoon with her without seeing Dr Watson.

Later on that night it was the Hooper’s term to host the Donovans, but not without some reservation from Mrs Hooper’s part. To help ease the pain she also invited Wrong Direction and their band managers. Of course Mr Moriarty had to be invited for the support he offered to the family throughout the time. Mrs Gardiner watched Molly interact with Moriarty after dinner and narrowed her eyes. Although they weren’t quite in love yet, it was quite obvious they preferred each other over different company, enough to make Mrs Gardiner slightly uncomfortable. She made a mental note to herself to speak to Molly.

Moriarty did have an unexpected pleasure to give to Mrs Gardiner, however, and it was for once uncontrolled by his charisma. He had lived in Poynton, near Pemberly, where Mrs Gardiner had lived before her marriage. They had many connections in common and Moriarty was able to update her on news of the people she had not seen for ten, even fifteen years. Moriarty had not been near Poynton for the last five years but that was still short enough to give Mrs Gardiner meaningful intelligence.
They also talked about Pemberly, about the Holmes family that still owns it. Mr Holmes Senior was still alive, but a lot more sedentary these days, and preferred to keep the maintenance of the estate to his two sons. They talked at length about Pemberly, about its appearance and its old wooded forests, giving each other joy over old memories. Mrs Gardiner also tried to remember the old reputation of Mr Sherlock Holmes, and recalled that he was a proud, ill-tempered boy.
Mrs Gardiner spoke to Molly as soon as she could alone. After telling her what she thought, Mrs Gardiner then continued:

“Molly, I have every trust in your sensibility that you will not fall in love just because someone warned you against it. So I have no fear in telling you this. I would like to be more guarded in showing your affections. It is best for you to sway away from a relationship that will be in want of money. I personally have nothing against Moriarty, and if he had a stable income he would be one of the most eligible bachelors England ever had. He is very interesting, that is for sure, but please don’t get your imagination too far. You are the most sensible young lady I know, and your father depends on you to do him proud.”

“Aunty, this is quite a stern warning you are giving me.”

“Yes, and I expect you to be the same.”

“Then not to worry. I am not in love with Jim and I shall prevent him from loving me.”

“Do be serious now Molly.”

“I am serious. Right now I am not in love with Jim, and yes, I do see the consequences of falling in love with him. And of course I would hate to loose my father’s esteem. However my father actually likes Jim a lot. In summary, dear aunty, I will be very sorry in making you unhappy, but as we are seeing each other quite often now and there is quite a bit of affection, what is there to stop him? We are young and not in poverty. He might also not have the wisdom required to avoid this union? I will from now be less eager to see him and when I do I be a bit colder. So, I will try my best.”

“Then it would probably be a good idea if you would discourage him from coming around so often. At least stop reminding your mother to invite him to dinner.”

“Yes, I remember doing that yesterday. But don’t worry, he does not come as often as you think, or as my mother proclaims him to be. She can be a bit of a exaggerator.

Mr Anderson returned to Sevenoaks the next day but instead of staying with the Hoopers, this time he stayed with the Donovans. Sally had to leave that Wednesday to Frant so Molly stayed that
weekend to say goodbye to her. Mary was already at the Gardiner’s place by Sunday, while Molly ended up declining to go to give Mary some space. Molly didn’t have much hope for the happiness of Sally and her new boyfriend, but she still had to keep up appearance. She even said that she “wished that they will be happy” in an almost mocking tone. When Molly was about to leave the Donovan residence and say goodbye to her best friend for a long time, Sally said to her:

“Do write to me often, or at least email me.”

“Of course! I endeavour to keep the relationship as it is.”

“I do have one more thing to ask of you. Will you come visit often?”

“Hopefully, when you come around.”

“I’m afraid I might not come back for a long time. Do you mind visiting me? My parents and Maria will go to Frant next month and it will be an honour if you can join them.”

Molly didn’t look forward to the visit, but she found it impolite to refuse.

Molly went back to her flat in London later that day. It was Sally that contacted her first, with a text that she has arrived safely in Frant. From then on the correspondence was as frequent as it always had been, though not as intimate. Molly never broke correspondence but it was more for what it had been rather than what it really was. She looked forward to the first emails, to see how Sally thought of her new home. Reading them however Molly was disappointed. Sally wrote predictable things on how she felt her new home. She loved her new home as it had all the comforts she wanted, Lady Smallwood was kind and civil to her, and praised everything she could. The local schools were top-notch, the roads well paved, and the supplied furniture stylish and comfortable. In fact, Anderson may as well have written the letter if Molly replaced some of the words with superlatives.

Jane of course called her sister everyday while they were separated. The first one was to tell her that she had arrived safely and settled in comfortably. Everyday she seemed more and more dejected as her efforts to see Miss Watson got continuously turned down.

“Aunty Beatrice will go down to the LSE to inquire about Irene. Maybe I will see her soon.”

Three days later, there was slightly better news. “Irene managed to pop by today at Aunt’s place and
paid me a visit. She seemed happy enough, but by no means elated. I was right about one thing—she never received the email. She told me everyone was well, including John. However, there is almost no chance that I can see him because he is so busy with the legal proceedings. I so wish I can see him again.”

Molly only shook her head over the matter.

During the month Mary was in London she never saw Dr Watson once. She could accept that, and forgive him, but Miss Watson’s disregard for her could not be tolerated any longer. She called at the university everyday after work but didn’t even see her face for two weeks due to some excuse for something rather. Besides, such a shortness of stay when she did finally meet her and the change of attention meant that Mary could not be deceived any longer.

That night, Mary decided to write an email to Molly.

“Molly, as usual you have been right about things again. I am afraid that Irene has been deceiving me a bit when it came to her affections. I cannot entirely grasp why she would act this way to me, just as my confidence in people has been matched by your suspicion. Even though I have learnt from this lesson, I am pretty sure I will make the same mistakes in the future. I did not see Irene until today and when she did, she only make a trifle of an apology. Beforehand, nothing. Sans notes, sans, word, sans attention. She then proceeded to treat me in an entirely different way, so much so I have now resolved to break off this friendship. She was wrong to make me her friend in the first place for she was always the one advancing our relationship. However, I cannot help but pity her. She must feel guilty for her actions these past few weeks and her brother is causing her a lot of stress.

“This anxiety is obvious, and it would explain her behaviour to me. She must have as much affection for him as he does for her, so anything he does will affect her in some way. Nevertheless, there is a sense of duality there, and if I may be so harsh, a bit of deceiving. If John had ever cared for me, then it must have been a long time ago. He knows I am here, and yet he has not even contacted me. Irene has neither confirmed nor denied that they will go back to London.

"Never mind. I must think of things that make me happy—your affection, family, friends. I must not think such nasty thoughts. Tell me more about Sally—how she is. I love to think that she is very comfortable where she is. Do contact soon.”

Although Molly usually loved being proved right, this time it caused her heartache. She was consoled by the fact her sister is not longer naive to the matter and she will no longer be duped by the sister nor expect anything from the brother. His reputation had been shot down beyond all repair, and in fact she hoped he will marry the headmistress. Hopefully he will be unhappy and have a downer marriage.
Mrs Gardiner around the time had also sent Molly a letter concerning a certain gentleman and this time Molly was able to give a satisfactory answer. He had given up on her, and was now seeking the attention of a certain Ms Prince. Molly of course had been observant enough to see the attention transit, and yet was not hurt by it. She was vain enough to know that, had the situation been different, she would have been his only choice. Besides, she did have quite an impact on him. He was now a big fan of Glee after she forced him to watch it and he was now considering getting a cat. Indeed, she was so detached from this affair that in the end she sincerely wished him happiness.

Mrs Gardiner read the passage with satisfaction, which then went on, “I now know that I was never really in love in the first place. It might have just been a bit of a puppy crush, but nothing more. If it really was more, I should have Prince’s blood on my hands. But I’m still on good friends with him and have neutral feelings about Prince. She, on observation, is actually a good sort of woman and not worthy of my hate. Of course I was more popular with a ‘boyfriend’, and more talked about, but I find being in the backwaters better suited for me. Fame has a price that is sometimes too high to pay. This is a lesson sadly not yet learnt on the two youngest. They have also not yet learnt the horrific lesson that sometimes the handsomest men are also the hardest to keep.”
Slight disappointments

There was no events to note during the wait for the journey to Kent, apart from the fact that soon after, Ms Connie Prince became a reality television superstar. It never occurred to Molly to link Moriarty’s new relationship to Prince’s success in the meantime. She had other things to think about—the pleasure of seeing Sally again, change in scenery. Everyday, absence has made her desire of seeing Sally grow stronger, and subsequently her disgust for Anderson weaker. There was also something novel in that scheme, travelling with her best friend’s family away from her tedious family. Also, she gets to visit Mary for a night before the journey officially commences. So much the better. The plans were in place and Molly would have felt down if anything were to happen to it.

It only came down to saying goodbye to her father, who she is guaranteed to miss. She promised to call everyday; he almost promised to answer them.

As for Moriarty, there was very friction between them. He bid his adieus with as much friendliness as possible, even more so than Molly. Even in his current pursuit he did not forget Molly was the first: the first to catch his attention, the first to keep him, the first to admire. He then told her what to expect of Lady Smallwood, and hoped that his opinions—everybody’s opinions—of her would match up to Molly’s. Molly left thinking that whatever state of life he is he would always be the model of a perfect gentleman.

Her fellow travelling companions particularly accented that. Sir William Donovan and his daughter Maria (Lady Lucas had stay back to look after Sally’s little brother when he had a particularly case of the flu) were as empty headed as each other. They could talk about nothing but trivial gossip (especially about Connie Prince. Molly had nothing against her, but to be able to talk about somebody for hours on end definitely put her on nerves. It didn’t help that there was a huge lorry-and-car crash that grounded traffic to snail’s pace on the A4. By the time they arrived in London Molly was shattered, and wondered again for the fifth time why she was going to London when Kent was in the opposite direction. Normally, Molly loved absurdities, but she knew the Donovans for too long now, and she was too annoyed for anything else. At the least the car was nice. Sir Donovan changed his car again and this time he chose a rather expensive silver Jaguar. It looked better than it handled though and Molly had to swallow bile down more times she would rather liked.

It was a completely miracle that they managed to reach Gracechurch Street by lunchtime. Mary was waiting by the living room window so she could rush out as soon as the car pulled up. Molly was pleased to see her sister was as healthy and happy as ever when they hugged each other. When they went inside they were greeted by a young boy and a girl, curious to see their cousins again but too shy to actually come up to them. They spent the rest of the day shopping and then went to a theatre after dinner.

Molly then sat alone with her aunt to catch up on any news. The first subject of the matter was of course Mary’s mood. Molly was dejected to find that, although Mary tries her best to keep her sprits up, there were noticeable periods of depression. They expected for it not to last too long. Mrs Gardiner then told Molly a detailed report of Miss Watson’s visit with Mary. She then told Molly of the various conversations she had with Mary later on. Mary has given up on Miss Watson one and for all.

They then turned their attention to Moriarty. Mrs Gardiner praised Molly for taking up the breakup so well. “But dear, can you please tell me more about Miss Prince? I shall hate to think of our dear friend as a mercenary.”
“My goodness, Aunt, you are contradicting yourself here! It was only a month ago when you told me to stay away from him. How can a man choose a rich partner, and not be accused of being a gold digger? Besides, she only came to this money rather recently. Her daytime television show has only began taking off.”

“If I knew more about Miss Prince, then maybe I can make my mind about it better.”

“Well, she does seem a tad bit old for him, that’s for sure. But otherwise she is a kind one. I have nothing against her. In fact, she helped me a bit to choose some new clothes that suited me very well.”

“But he never noticed her until she signed the big contract with ITV.”

“But then, why should he? If he wasn’t allowed to woo a lady as poor as me, then of course he would pass a woman who was as poor as me.”

“But think of the age difference, Molly!”

“Some people cannot afford to be polite. If she loves him, then who are we to say?”

“Just because she accepts his advances does not mean we should tolerate it as well. No motive justifies murder. If she accepts, well, that means she is deficient in either sense or manner.”

“Well, that ends it then, just the way you want it. She shall be an idiot, and he is a gold digger.”

“No, Molly, this is not the way I want it. I do not want to think ill of a young man that I knew so long ago in Poynton.”

“Oh, lets see. I should give the finger to the boys of Poynton, and my good friends of Edinburgh are not much better. Good thing I shall be seeing an idiot tomorrow, because they are the only people worth knowing!”

“Do take care Molly- you know how rash your anger can be.”

But before she left the next morning, Molly was surprised on with an exciting proposal from her aunt and uncle. As a reward for their hard work over the last winter, they were offered an all expense paid trip around England during the summer.

“Oh goodness where we will go. We might pop over to the Lakes and do a few other things, but we will mainly take things at a leisurely stride. Mister Mycroft Holmes offered to pay for anything we might fancy doing for two months, between August and September. Will you be free then?”

“Holmes?! Is he in any way related to the rude ass?”

“Elder brother, I’m afraid.”

“As to your previous question, I shall be delighted to go. I just need to make sure I will be free. I have been doing an awful lot of overtimes these last few years so maybe I can get compensation.”

To Molly, there could be no better news. She adored her aunt and her uncle for having a sound mind parallel to her father and Mary. During the long road trips she and the Gardiners would discuss
politics as well as philosophy. They were also detailed recorders, which meant details such as which places they went to were clearly recalled. Those two traits Molly appreciated in travellers- nothing annoyed her than tourists talking in clichés over the supposed beauty of a lake, and then afterwards squabbling over where they actually went to.

If the trip had no relation to Holmes at all, she would have considered it perfect.
Molly left the Gardiner’s in a better state of mind than when she had arrived in it. She now knew Mary was in a good state of health apart from her slight depression, and the prospect of her summer holiday quickened her senses.

When they made the turn off from public to private road into Frant Place, each person was expecting to see a small cottage to signal their arrival. They did eventually get there, and Sally was already at the small picket fence waiting for them. Molly noticed with slight amusement that they were firmly in Lady Smallwood’s land. It was quite obvious with her sprawling mansion taking up half their views from across a lake.

There was a lot of greetings as each person hugged Sally. Sally was equally enthusiastic to see them all. “Say, Molly, I am so glad that you are actually allowed to come down. All those overtimes must have paid off!” Anderson meanwhile waited for his girlfriend to finish her greetings before beginning his. He was as formal and flowery as ever.

Sally and Anderson then gave a small tour of the place. It was pleasing as well as charming, with the other side of the view dominated with a fertile garden full of vegetables as well as two greenhouses. Anderson was proud of his gardening skills, it was evident, as he gushed about the vegetables he was growing in there. Of course, Lady Smallwood’s contributions of advice as well as the space cannot be forgotten. The front space was neat, as it was pointed out, before everybody was formally ostentatiously, for the second time, to Frant Place. Anderson then repeated the offer of refreshment.

This was Anderson’s environment, and Molly always wanted to see him in it. He was now a proud house owner, almost like a collector of the fine arts, as he gushed over how fine a quality his furniture was. Most of his statements were indirectly addressed to Molly, as if he wanted her to regret over throwing away a pearl richer than anything. It had the opposite effect. Molly then wondered more intently than the last thousand times how Sally was supposed to find happiness in such an abode. Whenever Anderson said anything embarrassing, which was too often, Molly would cast an eye on Sally’s reactions. Once or twice she blushed and pretended to look out a window, but most of the time she just pretend not to listen.

After admiring every article of furniture in the living room, from the wireless router (best in the market- the only one that can provide decent coverage to every part of the cottage) to the fender (installed 200 years ago and yet still looks as if it was made today). Only then could they sit down in the plush settees to recount their journey and news. Anderson then invited them to have a tour of the greenhouse. He was still limping a bit from his last accident, but he was relieved that he no longer needed a walking stick. He lead them around the garden and the greenhouses, showing off his prized tropical flowers as well as fruits so quickly that his visitors could barely utter the praises he expected. Afterwards, he allowed them to gaze into the view. He could number the fields as well as count the trees. But according to him, even the best views in England pales at the presents of Frant Place, a beautiful mansion with nine bedrooms on top of rising ground.

From there onwards Anderson wanted to show off Lady Smallwood’s tennis court and lake but the ladies wanted to go inside lest they caught the chill. Sir Donovan accompanied him while Sally used this chance of an absent boyfriend to give a proper tour of the house to her friend and sister. It was obviously not as big as the main house next door, but it was neat and had a genuine air of homelessness to it, all of which Molly credited to Sally. If Mr Anderson could be forgotten, and by
the sounds of things he often is, Sally could actually enjoy living here.

That evening it was revealed that Lady Smallwood and her daughter had come back to the country to visit Anderson. He himself saw it as a great chance of introducing his visitors to them.

Molly was curious of Lady Smallwood. Apart from the aforementioned fact that she had a daughter, a member of the House of Lords, her relation to the Holmes, and was Anderson’s patron, she knew nothing of her. She began to inquire to Anderson about her.

“She is indeed an aunt of the Holmes bothers, but not first aunt. She is actually second cousins with Mrs Holmes, so that makes her relation to the Holmes brothers- I believe- second cousin once removed. Otherwise the match with Sherlock Holmes and her daughter Ann will be downright incestuous. She is such a fantastic person to met. She is part of the upper crust, with all the behaviour that comes with it. She is generous and can be slightly condescending, but that is to be expected of all titled people. When I was in London she regularly invites me to dinner at her house at Downing Street. You know, whenever I get down there she never allows me to walk home? She orders her car- sorry, one of her cars- to take me! Sally has never been to one of her dinner parties, but that is set to change.”

“Indeed,” Sally agreed. “She is a lady whom it is impossible to give too much respect.”

It was only then was Molly informed that they were all invited to dinner at the main house the next evening.

The rest of the evening was repeating all the news of Sevenoaks, of what was already written in the emails and letters. When she retired that night, Molly reflected upon the happiness of Sally, and how the rest of the trip will pan out. She silently congratulated over Sally’s handling of Anderson, hard as he was to live with. Everything else in her curiosity, from the supposed interruptions by Anderson to the joyous activities at Frant Place, all sated by her bright imagination.

After lunch the next day, as Molly got herself ready for a walk, there was a huge commotion underneath her room. Quick footsteps launched themselves up the stairs and soon Molly had to open the door to the puffing Maria. “You have to come down Molly! Now! You won’t believe it otherwise!”

“What has…” Maria pulled Molly’s sleeve and forced Molly to run after her. They ran down the stairs out through the hallway and straight to the front entrance. Outside were two woman, one old, and the other, frail, in a small phaeton.

“Why, Maria, with all the hullaballoo I was expecting a triple rainbow or something like that, but all I see is Lady Smallwood and her hapless daughter.”

“Not Lady Smallwood! Get some sense in your head. This is Mrs Turner, who looks after Miss Ann Smallwood. La, what a marvel! She is so tiny and fragile, like a hummingbird.”

“Why is she keeping Sally outside in this chilly wind? She is incredibly rude to do so.”

“She hardly ever comes in. In fact, according to Sally, it is the greatest honour when she does.”

But Molly’s head has already wandered elsewhere. I quite like her appearance, she thought to herself. She will make a perfect wife for that other person.
Anderson was in deep conversation with the three ladies. To Molly's annoyance Sir William just stood behind her, almost hitting her head whenever he bows as Miss Smallwood looked his way.

It took a little while, but eventually there was nothing left to be said. Anderson left with his head high, shaking everybody’s hands, and Sally had to explain that they were all invited to dinner by Lady Smallwood the next evening.
Meeting the Lady

Anderson had everything he wished for- an event to fulfil all his goals. He now has an opportunity to showcase his patron to his curious cousin/in-laws and allowing them to observe her generosity to everyone. The fact that it was Lady Smallwood that offered the chance only made him gush more intensely.

“I have to say I did not expect this,” he continued. “Of course there was the chance that her ladyship would invite us for afternoon tea on a Sunday but a full dinner party? So soon? And for you all? I’m in heaven!”

“Well, I have to say that I was not all that surprised,” interjected Sir Donovan. “Ever since I got my knighthood, I have been in contact with many respectable peers. Such behaviours are not uncommon among the most elegant.”

They could talk of nothing but the dinner the rest of the day or the next morning. Anderson did most of it though, instructing each of them on behaviour and what grandeur to expect lest everyone else falls into shock otherwise.

Finally, it was time to get ready. Anderson still found the opportunity to deliver one last lecture.

“Sweet cousin, do be relaxed in terms of costume. Although this is a formal dinner, Lady Smallwood does understand if you didn’t have the foresight to bring something suitable. Just wear the best clothes you have. In fact, Lady Smallwood will prefer that. She likes having class distinctions to keep people in place.”

Throughout the afternoon he would pop into each bedroom to hurry everybody up in their preparations, for her Ladyship values promptness. All this haranguing left Maria rather timid, augmenting her already obvious shyness. She was nervous to meet Lady Smallwood as her father was when meeting the Queen.

The late afternoon was clear, so the company had the pleasure of walking to the main house while admiring the lake. It was very pretty, though not as beautiful as Anderson had made it out to be. She was also rather put off by his ratting on how much money Lord Smallwood had to spend to refurbish Frant Place to its original splendour.

Maria was almost fainting as they climbed the main stairs. Her father was not much better. Molly ended up the calmest of the lot. After all, she did in fact remember to bring along a fine dress, and she has heard nothing against the behaviour of Lady Smallwood. Only her title and wealth could intimidate people, and Molly cared not for such things.

Mr Anderson was quick to point out that the hall was filled with splendour, and it had pleasing proportions. There were no oils of note, and the statues were cliched, but they were done well. Guild covered a lot of ground and most of the walls, with dark wood accents. Anderson had to march his party up and down the corridor before a maid could even stop him to show them to Lady Smallwood in the drawing room. From there on it was agreed upon that Sally should do the introductions, and with a quarter of the apologies and gratitudes that Anderson though necessary.

Sir Donovan has been to many grand residents before such as Buckingham Palace, but he was still shell-shocked at the richness that surrounds him. His daughter was no better as her eyes flitted
around all over the room. Only Molly was composed, back straight, as she looked at Lady Smallwood straight in the eye.

Lady Smallwood, although almost old enough to be Molly’s grandmother, still retained her light blond hair. She had brown, determined eyes, and pursued lips. These formidable features had never lost its intensity and maybe at one time considered handsome. She had an overbearing air that quashed everyone down lower than her rank. This was augmented by her speaking; it had a tone so authoritative, so definitive, that she became the final word on everything.

It was exactly what Mr Moriarty had said about her.

There was of course similar characteristics on the face to Mr Holmes. After inspecting the mother, Molly turned to her daughter, and was taken aback. Maria was right in saying how fragile Ann was. She just occupied a small corner of the room, near the doll collection, almost out of the circular seating arrangement. Her voice by contrast was quiet, if she spoke at all. Her brown hair was thin and resembled down that barely reached her shoulders. Her skin was porcelain sallow and she had to be constantly supported by Mrs Turner. She was the antithesis of her mother. It took a long stretch of the mind to link mother and daughter together. Besides her on top of the fireplace were two war medals, quite recently made. Molly deduced they were for Afghanistan, considering the newness of the silver metal bearing the Queen’s face.

After the introductory conversation everybody was ushered to look out one of the grand bay windows. Anderson was of course more than happy to point out all the various points of interest, but Lady Smallwood modestly admitted the view was better during summer.

The dinner was as expected- rich, opulent, expensive. Everything Mr Anderson predicted to be there was there, and as he foresighted, he sat at the bottom of the table at his lady’s wish. Surprisingly Lady Smallwood kept servants and they were all there, although as invisible as they can, placing each course on the huge mahogany table and refilling the wine glasses. Anderson served and praised each course as they came so that each dish was praised twice (by then Sir Donovan had recovered enough to echo his prospective son in law). Lady Smallwood just smiled and gave a commentary on any dishes unfamiliar to the gentlemen. Molly had wished to start a conversation but was seated between Charlotte and Miss Smallwood. The former was constantly engaged by Lady Smallwood while the latter kept quite. The only noises coming from her mouth was confirmation to her caregiver that indeed she had eaten enough when Mrs Turner tried to tempt her with a forkful of food next to Miss Smallwood’s mouth. Maria was still too shocked to speak. The gentlemen spoke of nothing but the food in front of them.

The ladies then retired back to the living room to allow the men to smoke and drink. This archaic custom was a little surprising for Molly for she swore the last time someone did this was fifty years ago. All she could do was sit and listen to Lady Smallwood talk, and only Lady Smallwood. Her daughter podded up to her bedroom straight after dinner but Molly didn’t notice until she saw a hole in the doll collection. Lady Smallwood talked in a decisive manner and it was immediately obvious she does not like being contradicted. She inquired to Sally all the aspects relating to domestic life. No detail was left out. She had an encyclopaedic knowledge on everything, from chickens to stain removal, and could lecture at ease. Inbetween her discourse with Sally Donovan she dressed questions to Maria and Molly, mainly Molly because she was the one that Lady Smallwood could get some decent answers out of. She liked Molly, for she had good manners and was quite good looking, as she had commented to Sally. There was a volley of questions, from number of siblings, to their ages, and then their relationship statuses. Where did they go for their education? What was their mother’s maiden name? Molly thought the questions were rather a little too private, but answered directly all the same.
“I have heard that your father’s estate will be entailed towards Anderson,” continued Lady Smallwood. “For your sake, Sally, I am glad, but for you, Miss Hooper, I express my pity. There has never been a need for the Smallwoods to divert assets away from a heiress for a want of a different chromosome. Do you play an instrument, or sing?”

“A bit.”

“We shall be looking forward to hear your talents. The main pianoforte is an exquisite one, a Steinway. You should try it someday. How about your other sisters?”

“One of them does. Constantly.”

“What a pity! You should all have learnt. The Miss Stanfords all play and they have a smaller income. How about painting? Do any of you paint?”

“No.”

“Surely not!”

“No one, I’m afraid.”

“Odd, odd. But then again you never really had the chance. You should have stayed in London during the spring to be taught by the great Masters.”

“I know my mother would have relished the opportunity, but my father hates London.”

“And your governess? Retired?”

“We never had one.”

“Impossible! Five daughters, and no governess? Your mother must have exhausted parenting you all.”

“Fortunately, no.”

“Then how was your childhood? With so many siblings, and no outside help, one would be depraved of a proper childhood.”

“Compared to similar families, we might have been, but my father made sure we all went to a good private school. Also, if we wished to learn other things, we were certainly not stopped.”

“If only I knew your mother early enough! There are plenty of governesses I could recommend. After all, the best education one could have is a constant one at the ease of one’s home. It is quite satisfying to see all the families who benefited from my recommendations. I have provided suitable young women to all of the Jenkinson nieces. In fact, the other day I invited over Lady Metcalf over in London. She complimented me in my choice of recommendations, and absolutely adores Miss Whitney. ‘You have found me a treasure,’” she told me. Tell me then, Molly, what is your age.”

“I have three grown younger sisters. You can surely deduce what it is.”
Lady Smallwood leaned back and folded her arms. It was evident to Molly that Smallwood always expected straight answers. For someone to question her authority in such a manner, well, she was the first.

“Well, you can hardly be one and thirty, so there was no need to be ashamed.”

“Correct, my lady.”

The gentlemen soon joined them and it was soon another round of archaic rituals. Lady Smallwood had her maids set up two card tables (Molly had counted four maids so far with a butler and a valet). She played bridge with the gentlemen and Sally, while her daughter decided on quadrille with the rest of the ladies and Mrs Turner. Molly didn’t like it one bit. Nothing was said during the game’s conversation not pertaining the game, apart from the fretting of Mrs Turner worrying over whether Miss Ann was too hot or too cold. On the other table Lady Smallwood dominated the conversation with hints for the game and stating mistakes of her opponents. Afterwards she would tell boring, senseless anecdotes of the various escapades of her noble friends. Mr Anderson also told stories of his crime escapades, crediting to his patroness for his successes and apologising for his failures. Sir Donovan was too busy noting down all the noble names.

But the time for departure came soon enough. Lady Smallwood ran out of stories eventually, and asked Anderson if he would like to have a car, even for the small distance back. Anderson gleefully accepted and Smallwood sent for her chauffeur (that bought up the number of servants up to seven) to get the car ready. While that was happening Lady Smallwood had all of them debating on the weather forecast.

Before they left Mr Anderson praised and thank Smallwood for such a fine dinner and evening while Sir Donovan bowed many times and kissed Smallwood’s hand. Meanwhile, Sally asked Molly what she thought of the evening. Molly took pains to at least praise some aspects of Lady Smallwood, for the sake of Sally. But of course it was not enough for Mr Anderson, which was why he took the praising into his own hands.
Chapter Notes

It was a rather short chapter, so I decided to publish it early. The halfway ficlet and chapter will be posted soon. In the meantime, enjoy this bite sized chunk.

Sir Donovan could only stay three days in Kent but already he could see that his daughter was settled in well with good neighbours and a house. The next day, before he left, Mr Anderson was kind enough to drive him around Frant to show him the local highlights, which was not many. In fact, Sir Donovan could say he stayed at the biggest one for the longest. After he and Maria left Mr Anderson mainly kept Sally and Molly to themselves as he busied with other businesses. Molly was glad she often did not see him from dawn till dusk; he spent the daylight hours either gardening, reading, calling on Roslings, or actually going to work. Sally on the other hand stayed home if she wasn’t working. She had made a room dedicated to her handicrafts, which was getting better everyday.

It was soon learnt that Lady Smallwood not only managed to find time to run her bit of government, but also the land around her. She was the go-to person for any kerfuffles within Frant. Whenever someone has an argument she would walk inbetween them and with stern, harsh words she would restore peace and plenty to the land. She was an able administrator, Molly would give her that.

It was also Lady Smallwood’s birthday and as expected, she invited a lot of family members to stay at her house. This included the two Holmes brothers and their parents. Greg Lestrade, Sally Donovan’s former boss, was also rumoured to be there as Mycroft’s newly wed husband. But Molly was looking more forward to seeing Mr Sherlock Holmes again, to see how he holds against Lady Smallwood’s plan to marry him off with her daughter.

They arrived without ceremony on Tuesday, just an hour after Sir Donovan’s and Maria's leaving. But Mr Anderson knew soon enough, and soon the news spread throughout the town. It was soon heralded with the installation of wet floor signs and boxes of smelling salts in key places. With him was his portly brother and-the rumours were indeed true- his handsome, if somewhat older, groom. Mr Mycroft Holmes was said to be of great importance to the British Government though the nature of his office was rather hazy. Mr Sherlock Holmes had, to spite him, often joked that his responsibility was the size of his body.

Sally of course was excited to hear the news and got Molly to help her clean up the cottage to a more exacting standard. She then thanked Molly for a wondrous occasion. “For what?,” questioned Molly. “Don’t you know,” returned Sally. “Because of you, I have the honour of hosting the Mycroft and my former boss for a little while. Not too sure about the Freak though."
Molly chuckled at Sally’s enduring nickname for Sherlock Holmes. But then she had to stand to attention when the doorbell rang. Sally opened the door and in filed the three men, with the elder Holmes brother, followed by Lestrade, and finally Holmes the Younger. Sherlock Holmes has not changed his appearance since Molly last saw him. He still had the same curly black mop, the same sharp zygomatic sticking out of his pale cheeks, the same, technicolour blue eyes.

His elder brother started the conversation as all well-bred gentlemen do. There was a sense of aloofness within him, not quite as marked as his brother. He was pleasant enough, and Lestrade even more so. They soon went onto anecdotes on how Sherlock Holmes managed to solve his latest cases for Scotland Yard with the most surprising of solutions, especially the one about the Engineer’s Thumb.

“And who would have thought in this day and age there were still charlatans brave enough to turn to counterfeiting? Do they not know about the complexities of the securities of an actual penny?”

They all laughed, and fell silent. Only then Sherlock was comfortable enough to be polite. He then asked Molly how her family was. Molly gave the usual answer, and then said, “You sound as if you have been to London quite a lot recently. So has my sister; in fact, she has been staying at my uncle’s place during February. Have you by any chance seen her?”

Of course he hadn’t. But Molly wanted to know whether he had anything to do with Mary and Dr Watson. He looked a tad bit confused when he said he had not the pleasure of seeing her, and the matter rested at that.
For the halfway gift I did a short on the history of the Hooper women: http://archiveofourown.org/works/2729630. Enjoy!

Every year, on the 19th of March, Lady Smallwood would feel generous enough to invite quite a lot of her family members to Frant Place for her annual birthday ball. Most of them would leave straight afterwards, but the selected few, including the Holmes Brothers and their parents, were allowed to stay in the sprawling mansion that unfortunately only had nine bedrooms in the main house. This only allowed six bedrooms for the chosen guests, and it was considered a great honour, according to Mr Anderson anyway, to be allocated a room. The servants, well, Frant Village was only a few minutes drive away.

Molly’s arrival to Frant was a little unexpected, a spot in the perfections of Lady Smallwood’s plans. Nevertheless she was only one person, a small, mousy one as that, and her name could be easily shuffled into the footnotes of the invitation list. A hastily made invitation was soon given to her yesterday. It was still elegant in thick cream paper, gold lining, and handwritten details, but the lines were uneven and the M on her first name was a little too small.

Of course Molly had nothing suitable to wear—or she thought she didn’t. Just as she was about to go to Frant’s shops in a search of an emergency dress, a puzzled deliveryman arrived to the door with a huge white silk box. “Apparently for Molly Hooper. What on earth is this?”

Turned out it was a strapless silver evening gown with small sapphires running around sweetheart neckline and an outermost crimped layer of silk in a curved line sweeping down to the hemline of the full skirt. The skirt itself was not too outrageously billowy, just enough to allow Molly make a statement. It was made of light satin silk that shone brighter than a mirror. Near the bust there was a note.

“Just in case you got invited-SH.”

“Goodness knows how much this gown costs,” muttered Sally in wonder. “So much fine silk, with actual sapphires. And tailored for you to, I expect. Pity it came from the Freak. What to do?”

Molly knew the full implications of wearing this dress. If she wore it to the ball, it signalled she was defeated against his powers. She would then have no anger against him, for what he said against her,
for his possible involvement in tearing Dr Watson and her sister apart. There could be other ulterior motives as well. Maybe he wanted to take advantage of her, and this dress was one bait to lure her in.

Or maybe this was his way of saying sorry.

“You can try on my other dresses,” offered Sally. “You do realise that you don’t have to wear that gown?”

“Maybe I’ll do that, thanks.”

As it was a formal ball it was only proper that the guests came in suitable vehicles. Lady Smallwood therefore sent one of her finest Rolls Royces to pick up Molly, Sally, and Anderson even for the absurdly short distance. Molly ended up wearing one of Sally’s dresses, a plain cream imitation silk gown that didn’t accent her body very well. Nevertheless, it was an effective protest— an obvious signal to the turd that it would take more than gifts to change her mind.

When she was shown, again, to the drawing room, nobody paid much attention to her. The ones who did semi-leered at her. But Molly ignored them with the blinkered anger of sexist injustice. The only person that didn’t seem to mind was Lestrade. He was easily the most familiar person in the room after Sally, for the detective used the pathologist’s good work many times over the years. They talked of many things, from crime to the state of London and somehow strayed on the topic of music. This was soon caught by Lady Smallwood.

“What is it that you talk about Gregory,” demanded Lady Smallwood. “What are you telling to Miss Molly over there? Pray do tell me”

There was a few second of awkward silence, when finally Mycroft had to nudge Lestrade. “Music, madame.”

“Music! Then do speak out loud. There is no subject I revel in more. I know there are only a few people in this fair land that enjoy music as much as me. If you talk of music then I must partake in it. If I had ever learnt, I know I could have been a prodigy, and Ann as well, if she had the health. I have the greatest confidence in her. How is Georgiana going on with her lessons?”

“She is progressing well.”
“I am glad to hear that,” continued Lady Smallwood, “and do tell her from me that in order to excel, she must practise constantly."

“There is no need for that, thankfully. Georgina I assure you practises for at least a hour ever single day.”

“So much the better, though such sentiments cannot be repeated enough. In my next letter I shall remind her to do so. I have told many young ladies by now that talent in music cannot be acquired without practise- in fact I have told Miss Hooper that many times now. I do realise that Miss Donovan’s Cottage has no space for a piano, but I have offered the use of the attic piano. She will not be in anyone’s way over there.”

Lestrade only shifted in his seat, while the Holmes brothers looked out the reflecting window.

After an hour of dancing and sitting with various rich and some titled gentry at the emptied conservatory as well as the courtyard outside, Molly left the party to go back to the empty drawing room. It was dark and Molly couldn’t find the light switch. There, occupying half the grand room was an even grander black piano. Lady Smallwood’s words rattled in her mind.

When was the last time she actually practised on the piano? It was last week, back at Sevenoaks. A bit of a jaunt for a few minutes. Before that, she couldn’t remember. There was hardly any place at her London flat for even a small upright piano and she was never a musical person in the first place. Neither was Sarah, but that never stopped her. Poor Sarah, the plain sister in a family of beauties. She had to make it up for her various so-called ‘accomplishments’ she supposed to have achieved, but they came off as tacky. She was constantly bullied at school so she became a loner, filling her empty hours with study and melancholic piano music. Sometimes the songs did come out hauntingly beautiful, forcing everybody in the house to stop even for a few seconds just to enjoy it. If there was a musical prodigy in the family, Sarah was the one.

She turned on a floor lamp and rifled through the sheet music to find the easiest thing she could play. She was surprised. Lady Smallwood might have admitted she was not a prodigy, but her skill, if she did indeed could play those sheets, far outweighed hers. Finally, she spotted a copy of Für Elise. It was common, but familiar. A good warmup. Molly flexed her fingers and started to play.

Who was this Elise person anyway? Some say that she was Therese Malfatti, student of Beethoven’s. Apparently he proposed to her, but there was no evidence today of that. Lost in the time stream, Molly though.

She then noticed a reflection of Mr Sherlock Holmes on the window in front of her. She stopped
playing out of shock. “No, keep going,” he then said, and she did.

When she finished, she turned to him. “You mean to scare me.”

“Scare you? No, do not be silly.”

“You do realise I cannot be frightened?”

“I do realise your courage. In fact, I have known you long enough that you have strong, sometimes unconventional opinions that you are not afraid to voice.”

“Right.”

“And why are you not wearing the evening gown I sent you? You look like a fool amongst kings.”

“You know I cannot be bought.”

“For what?”

“For forgiveness for your petty and unforgivable behaviour amongst strangers.”

“Is that right,” laughed Mycroft Holmes as he slightly staggered down the hallway. He then leaned on the doorway next to his younger brother, but even the, his towering height and imposing girth made Sherlock seem very small. “Do tell me, Miss Molly, what my unfortunate Shirley had done this time in public.”

“Mike, do shut up.”

“It is Mycroft. Do endeavour to say my name in full.”

Molly smiled, and thus began, “Let’s just say he was never really that popular from the start. The first
time I had met him, it was at a ball. Do you remember, Mr Holmes? Guess what he did? He only danced four dances, even though there was a great need for gentlemen, so much so that ladies had to sit down for most of the evening. You cannot deny that Mr Holmes."

“I cannot say that I had the privilege of knowing any women outside my party.”

“True, and such social gatherings are hardly the time to introduce people. But surely a man like you are more than capable of introducing oneself to strangers? Let us ask your brother- why would someone not introduce themselves to other people?”

“There is no need, for I already know his answer. He would say that the person would rather not. After all, this person has a hard time talking to strangers, and unfortunately is not socially capable.”

“Mr Holmes, let me tell you that my piano playing is of inferior quality to most women I know. It is less familiar with the keys, and sometimes I play the wrong note. It is completely my fault, I guess, since I do not endeavour to practise everyday. I do however know that I can become an accomplished player, if I took the time.”

“Yet you instead used your time for other more suitable activities. I congratulate you. You are right though, but neither of us are able to perform in front of strangers.”

Lady Smallwood must have heard them talking, because before they all knew it she turned on the main light switch in the room, surprising everybody. She then demanded again to know the topic of their conversation. Molly soon turned around and began playing again. Smallwood then listened for a few minutes before beginning her commentary.

“Miss Molly here has good accuracy when it comes to notes, and her expressions are average. If she was taught by one of the great London masters and practised everyday, she could achieve mastery. Ann could have done the same, if her health was up to it.”

She then continued with her commentary on the playing, by giving instruction on expression here and there and recommendations for future pieces. Molly stayed silent throughout the whole with ever decreasing patients. Finally, Lady Smallwood ran out of things to say and she went outside to dance again. Mycroft also eventually left to inspect the wine room. It the only left Molly playing various pieces and Sherlock sitting down on one of the couches listening to her for the rest of the night.
Molly was by herself the next morning as Sally had gone to work. She was therefore more than surprised when there was a sharp ring on the bell. After all, she knew it was not Lady Smallwood, for she was in Anderson’s study writing an email to Mary and she heard no carriage. She then closed the lid of her laptop and went down with some apprehension to see who was at the front door. To her utter horror, it was Mr Sherlock Holmes who waltzed into the hallway.

He was slightly shocked to hear that she was alone, and then smiled the broad smile that he shouldn’t have. But he did, even if it was only for a second. He expected that Miss Donovan was on holiday, as it was the week of Lady Smallwood’s birthday after all.

They then sat down in the living room and, as soon as they both made their customary enquiries about their living conditions, was about to be enveloped in awkward silence. Molly then quickly remembered that Dr Watson had quit Baker Street in an unfashionably abrupt way and was curious to know why.

“How is Dr Watson, by the way? He must have been slightly surprised but pleased that you would follow him to Edinburgh since you have so much business in London. And how are his sisters?”

“All three are well.”

Molly suddenly realised that there was probably no polite way of getting the answers she wanted; but then again, politeness around Mr Holmes was a joke.

“From what I have been told, Dr Watson has very little intention of returning to London.”

“I cannot say, but there is a high probability that you are right. Dr Watson, after all, at his age has rapidly increasing commitments as well as a circle of acquaintances. He cannot afford to stay at one spot for most of the year.”

“Then in which case it might be a much more sensible act to leave Baker Street completely and just stay at hotels when he does come around, as it will be better if a more permanent family moved in for the community. But then again, he did chose the place more of his own sake than other’s, so we can expect him to make choices on that basis.”
“Then I shall expect your advice will be adhered to when a suitable successor calls.”

Another pregnant silence. Molly wished that they changed their subjects, because she didn’t really want to talk about Dr Watson anymore. Mr Holmes took a little while to take the hint.

“I must admit this is a very comfortable abode. Lady Smallwood renovated it quite extensively for Mr Anderson.”

“She could not have given her generosity to a more grateful creature.”

“Mr Anderson has made a very good choice for his wife.”

“Of course. Very few sane woman who would accept him, let alone made him happy. Sally is a wise one, though I would not at first thought of this decision as the wisest action she could have done. The more I think about it though the more I see why she did.”

“And of course she lives so conveniently close to her family and friends.”

“Close? It is a journey of 25 kilometres either way.”

“And the roads are sealed and the technology advanced. It is only a journey of half an hour each way. Yes, I shall call that very convenient.”

“Well, I thought the distance was never one of the advantages of the partnership. But to think that she was near her family- that is quite a stretch.”

“You have not travelled far in this life, Molly. You consider London far away enough from Sevenoaks to escape your family.”

“Well, I used to think that. Now I am a bit more pragmatic and believe it is more relative to the amount of money you have. My income, although modest, is quite grand to support one person only, so the distance between London and Sevenoaks is not that far. This is further aggravated with my shared income with Mary. Sally and Anderson, on the other hand, their combine income is around two-thirds of mine. Sure, they are often supported by their patroness, and they live quite
comfortably, but they have hardly enough to even consider regularly taking half-day trips to visit Sevenoaks. In fact, she would not even consider herself near her family until she is at least half the distance away as she is now."

“I am surprised you have formed such a fondness for your birthplace,” said Mr Holmes as he leaned closer to her. “After all, you spend more of your life in London now.”

Molly drew back in a mixture of surprise and offence; the gentleman changed as well. He then leaned back, and asked in his usual manner, coldly, if Molly found Kent to her liking. They then proceeded to talk about the countryside in general, in a cold, indifferent way, until a few minutes later Sally walked in on them. Mr Holmes seemed a little perturbed, apologised for coming into the cottage, and immediately left.

“What had just happened?,” Sally asked, and had a look around the living room. She then smiled. “Molly, dear, do you realise that he would never call in such a familiar way if he wasn’t in love with you?”

“What! No, that is not very likely. He stayed mainly silent and only answered my questions. Goodness, if he was he would be a little more talkative.”

“True, but why else would he be here.”

“I don’t know.”

“I think I do now. It is the time of the year where there is actually nothing to do. March is too early for tennis, and too late for football or rugby. There is nothing to shoot, because open season ended at the start of this month, and right now it is far too wet for golf. It has been intermittently showering today so walking is a bit risky and who wants to be around Lady Smallwood for long periods of time? So a bit of social calling to nearby houses seems to be the best solution for boredom today.”

Molly laughed and completely agreed with Sally. She then imagined, as she always did in her quieter moments, what it would like to be married. She quite liked Lestrade already in his easy manner and humility. But then, he is already taken, she chided herself. There was also an email to finish, and Molly does not like keeping Mary waiting.
A conversation with Mycroft Holmes

Chapter Notes

As I will be on holiday with relatively little to no internet, this chapter will have to be published early. Normal publishing schedules will return back to normal next week. In the meantime have a happy holiday, may it snow if you are in the northern hemisphere, and the sun shine if you are in the southern, and may all your feuds and fights be resolved in time for the festive season.

That evening, while out for her usual daily walk, Molly decided to deviate a bit from her usual path around the estate but rather around the gardens that Mr Anderson tended. There, she accidentally bumped into Mycroft Holmes. The shocked Molly, to hide her embarrassment, had to force a smile.

“What a surprise to see you here, Mr Holmes!”

“I generally make an annual tour of the park around this time, and always do a circular path. Are you by any chance heading to the main house?”

“I am heading this way back to the cottage. Shall we walk together?”

And so they did.

“So I heard that you and your brother are leaving this Saturday.”

“I will be, and so will Gregory. We both have important business to attend to, unlike Sherlock, who has the independence of a large allowance and a flexible occupation.”

“I have not known a person with such freedom before. He can pretty much live as he wishes.”

“He is a bit of a stubborn one,” chuckled Holmes, “but then again, who wishes not for a life of their choosing? I am the elder one, and for that reason my wings are clipped. My life is full of sacrifices. I must look after our parents as well as Pemberly. There is also my demanding occupation. I sometimes wonder if I made the right decision, becoming a governmental minister, actually. But then again, I have Gregory, and I suspect I am reasonably happy.”
"But surely your position in life has never given you any hardship? Surely the heir apparent of a vast estate will never know what it actually is to sacrifice fully? You will always have the resources to have what you want."

"True, and your views are entirely valid."

This rendered the conversation awkward, and once again Molly fell silent. But by then she was used to it, and came to expect it from the Holmes brothers.

"How is Georgiana, by the way? Younger sisters can be hard to manage and please. I know that much from experience. For your parents, I imagined it will be harder, for I believe she will be a true Holmes, and wish to have her own way in life."

"And why will you assume that?"

"I was not entirely serious. She does seem to be well liked amongst her peers, especially by Mrs Hurst and Miss Watson. In fact, I could almost say she is obedient."

"I have meet them once. Are they the sisters of Dr Watson? I dare say he and Sherlock have the closest thing to friendship Sherlock is ever capable of."

"Yes," deadpanned Molly, "your brother does take good care of the doctor. A very good care."

"Very good care! Yes, of course! In fact, dear Sherlock here takes care of the most minutest details for Dr Watson. In fact, on the journey here, he was recounting a tale of how he saved, once again, Dr Watson’s skin. I dare say that Dr Watson is indebted to him. But what am I saying? All of this is merely conjecture."

Molly’s ears perked up. “What do you mean?"

"My brother wishes not that this affair is publicly revealed, for he fears that it will bring great shame to the woman’s family."
“For secrets, I am an impenetrable vault. You can depend on me not telling anyone else.”

“I do not know the particulars, and there is not a lot of direct evidence for me to suppose it is Dr Watson. All of this is circumstantial. My details are scarce, but in summary this is what my brother told me. He is praising himself for saving his friend from a very imprudent marriage. I can only guess it is Dr Watson because of two things: he has quite an international reputation with the ladies, apparently having experience with ladies from three separate continents. Also, out of all the people my brother had spent last Christmas, he spent it most with Watson.”

“And what reasons for this separation?”

“From what I can gather, he had strong objections against her family.”

“And what methods did he employ in separating them?”

“He did not mention any methods, only telling me what I am telling you now.”

Molly then went silent and walked on with a bit more force than strictly necessary. Mycroft had to walk a lot faster than he was inclined to and he often found himself falling behind. But from a more distant perspective Mycroft was able to observe her a bit more easily, until his tired lungs called for her to slow down. “Goodness, what has gone into you?”

“I was just musing over what you had told me about your brother’s behaviour,” replied Molly. “I find it rather pretentious. What is he suddenly, a love doctor?”

“You believe his inference was uncalled for?”

“Well, it does seem rather pretentious of him to interfere with other people’s business, especially something as personal as relationships. For him to think that his judgement is better than everyone else’s, well, that is rather pompous, don’t you think? But then again, we don’t know the particulars, so there is nothing I can really judge.”

“What you have said is accurate, but that does tarnish my brother’s honour quite a bit.”
Of course Mycroft Holmes had said it in a joking tone, but it seemed too accurate a surmise for Molly to reply. She then decided to talk of other things. When she arrived back at the cottage she shut herself into her room for some deep reflection.

Molly knew that there was only two people in the world who Mr Holmes could have such a huge influence over: the lovesick Miss Watson, and his romancing friend the Doctor. Dr Watson was of course the closest one to hearing wedding bells so of course it was him that was influenced. This was a revelation to Molly; she always thought that it was Miss Watson’s meddling that separated her brother from Mary. To finally know that it was the bastard that caused Mary’s unhappiness! It made Molly sorely livid. He had ruined the life of the most generous, kind, and caring person in the world made him a very evil man indeed.

She then thought back on Holmes the Elder’s exact words. “He had strong objections against her family.” Of course the strong objections could be that she had one uncle who was a lowly lawyer, and another a mere government employee.

There was nothing he could say against Mary. She had the purist soul, the sweetest manners, and had a sharp mind. Their father, though slightly eccentric, commanded respect in the community. When she thought of her mother she balked and realised Mr Holmes the Younger’s decision was not without reason, but that was only a small point. No, Mr S. Holmes’s reasons are more selfish. He wanted only friends with strong and wealthy connections; it was his pride that ruined everything. The worse, most base pride that ruined families and left many friendless.

She was suppose to go to dinner that evening at the main house, but the anger against Mr Holmes was so much it bought tears to her eyes. She soon felt nauseous and gone rather pale. Sally saw that happening to Molly so she talked Anderson out of dragging her to the engagement but rather put her to bed.
Another botched date

Chapter Notes

Have you had a happy holiday? I hope you had. Anyway, aptly for this time of the year, finally something that resembles a bit of angst! Only on Sherlock's side though. Molly still rightfully thinks that he is an arrogant (insert expletive of choice).

After Anderson and Sally left for dinner, Molly got out her laptop to see all her emails sent by Mary to her in the last month. She wanted to know whether her thoughts against Mr Holmes was valid, and through her bias, this seemed very likely. Molly saw with news eyes tell-tale signs of unhappiness she never detected on first reading. Mary was too sweet to say directly if she had any complaint or heartbreak. However in every line her characteristic cheeriness, which she used with everybody, was gone. Molly couldn’t remember the last time that happened, so rare that Mary ever felt down. There was even a sense of tension in her emails, which Molly had never seen before. This was evidence of the hurt that Mr Holmes was so proud to inflict.

Molly could only gain comfort from the fact that she will see her sister again on Saturday, and that she would never need to see Mr Holmes for a long time. When she was settling on that fact, there was a sharp ring on the doorbell. Thinking that it might be either Lestrade or his husband, she got up and opened the door cheerily. Her mood plummeted into darkness when she saw it was Holmes the Younger that walked into the room and sat quietly in one of the plush armchairs in the living room. He then asked how her health was, and hoped that she was better. Molly answered sharply that she was indeed better, and what the dickens was he doing here? He then got up and paced the room muttering, which didn’t surprise Molly the least. She then went inside the small kitchen to make some tea. When she came out again with two mugs and a filled teapot, he came onto her and spoke.

“It cannot be done. However I do it, I cannot repress it anymore. I must now come to you to say how much I love you.”

Molly was astonished, so much so she sat down on the nearest chair and set the tea set onto he ground. She then blushed and kept silent. This was encouragement enough for Mr Holmes.

He spoke eloquently, with the occasional stutter, about everything he felt about her. For him though, the matter was just as much about love as it is about pride. Of course there was some scruples against her, mainly because she was of lower status than him. Of course, if there was anything between them, people will talk and it will give his family a slight scandal. Inside his family, members might not approve of her.
At first, Molly was resembling her name, until the second part came along. Instead, anger came from insults and she sat brooding thinking of clever things to tell Sherlock Holmes to cut him down. To think that she was not good enough for him, what nonsense! It was the other way round! To think that the prick believed he could easily win her hand after what he did…

“And in conclusion, I have found myself deeply in love with you. It is more than a supposed ‘crush’. I know that because I had a few. No. this is full blown, real, deep, affection.”

He then paused for a slight dramatic effect. “Miss Molly Hooper, c-c-can you do me the honour of um, going to dinner with me?”

Mr Holmes of course expected a favourable outcome, due to his past successes. But Molly was not a normal woman. She had her answer ready.

“No”

“But…”

“No.”

“Why not”

“Because,” Molly coldly replied as she stood up and started circling slowly around Holmes, “you are a pompous, deceitful, lying, arse. You have insulted me by implying I am not equal to you, but instead insinuated I have a lower social standing. Your love must not be that strong, for it does not transcend the small social barrier of class without some scruples. No, I must correct myself. There is no barrier in the first place. Your family has no title, just as my family does not. In fact, let’s just say we both have jobs.”

With every world, Sherlock Holmes turned paler than his already shallow complexion.

“And I have not finished yet. Why else would you go around and hurt my dear, sweetest, and lovely sister, the best person I have ever met in the world? Why else would you deprive your supposed best friend of love, breaking two hearts in the process?”
She stopped to catch her breath. To her horror Holmes’s colour returned. He even started to smile.

“Have you done such a thing?”

“I cannot deny I have not done it, nor can I say that I feel remorse for doing so. However, I am strong in my belief that I have done greater good to my friend than to myself.”

“But I have not finished. The matter runs deeper than that, back before even this matter first started. In fact, I had already decided on your character upon meeting you. In fact, meeting and talking with Mr Moriarty had only confirmed my suspicions. What do you have to say about yourself now? What fake acts of kindness have you done to defend yourself?”

“You have taken quite a deep interest in other people’s concerns.”

Molly could see she was winning again- Holmes was blushing. “Goodness knows what his misfortunes are,” retorted Molly, “but one cannot help but take an interest in them.”

“His misfortunes! Of course his misfortunes were big.” Mr Holmes’ tone was sing-songy and laced with sarcasm. This only enraged Molly further.

“And of his misfortunes, all of them were inflicted by you! You have deprived him of his rightful inheritance and made him a pauper. You have forced him to take a life on the road, without a home nor family. You have taken the best years of his life and made it all sour. And yet, you jest him.”

“So is this what you think of me! This is what you believe is what I am made of. Thank you for telling me everything. Indeed, my faults are weightily. But maybe, just maybe…you might have accepted my offer, if your pride had not been hurt so much. I should have hid my pain a bit more in regards to the inferiority of your family. Do you know what ridicule I will suffer if it was found that I wanted to court you? They will laugh at my connections, at your hilariously vulgar family.”

“In which case you are wrong again. There is no way in the world can you repeat your offer in a way that I would accept it.”

Again, Holmes was too astonished to speak, and very, very vulnerable. Molly knew this was her chance, and thus continued, “Even when I first laid my eyes on you, you have proven yourself to be the most selfish, arrogant man I had ever seen in my life. Your actions and the events afterwards only
solidified my dislike. In fact, only a few weeks after I had met you I had decided that there was no circumstances in which I would ever be romantically involved with you. Even if you were the last man, and I the last woman."

“If that is so, I must take my leave. I am sorry to have made such a bad impression on you. Please do not take it badly that I wish you a long and prosperous life."

And so with these last statements he walked out the house.

As for Molly, the confusion in her mind was crazy. She did not quite know how to think, apart from the fact that she had just got a marriage proposal from the most hated man in the world. For him to be in love with her all that time! And yet not showing any inclination. So apparently he was so in love with her that he apparently had to come over his pride to ask her on a date. Apparently. Yet, he insulted her family and there was the Moriaty injustice, not to mention what he did against her sister.

“C’est la vie, and all the things in it. But what now to do?”

She then sat agitated in the living room for a few hours, until she heard the sound of a purring car pulling up. She then got up and put herself to bed; she cannot stand to be near anyone, much less be fussed over.
The Letter

The next morning Molly’s thoughts were more in order but they were still exactly the same as before. Although calmer, she still had difficulty recovering from the surprise the onslaught of last night had bought. And so she resolved to go for a walk after breakfast to resettle her mind and to make sense of what had happened. Mr Anderson had promised that Lady Smallwood’s cherry trees were the best in the land and they would be in full bloom by now. Of course Mr Anderson’s claims were absurd (the best trees were still in Japan) but that still didn’t make it a bad destination to see.

When she arrived everywhere was covered in pink silky petals, from the chalk path to the whitewashed gate. She then saw Holmes sitting behind a tree on a bench, looking at the house in the other direction. Hoping he didn’t notice her Molly then tried to quietly walk away. It was however too late and Holmes then called out her name. Molly, out of politeness, finally gave up, and walked towards him.

“I was hoping you might come along,” he said with a slight smile. “Anderson bought you here, did he not? Anyway, I have waited here long enough. Can you do me the honour of reading this letter?”

He handed it out to her, and she took it instinctively. He then walked out of the grove towards the house, and she began reading the letter.

◊§◊

Friday 14 March 2014, 8am
Frant Place

To the esteemed Miss Molly Elizabeth Hooper

Please do not be surprised when you receive this letter; it does not contain anything about the ‘offers’ last night that so clearly pained and disgusted you. I wish not to make myself appear any better or worse in your eyes, but rather explain my actions in these past few months.

Last night, you have accused me of two very odious crimes of personality. Although distinct, I acknowledge they are as offensive as the other. The first one was of separating your sister from my friend John Watson. The second was, against all humanity and charity, I had destroyed all chances and livelihood of Mr James Moriarty. Of course to consciously deprave and destroy a reputation of a childhood friend, who was bought up side by side for many years, could be considered a more wanton act than to separate two lovers who had only known each other for a few weeks. But as you
were so strong in your criticism last night over the two matters, I am forced to explain myself in this letter but please keep in mind what I did was out of necessity. To expect further apologies from me will be absurd.

It was during the charity ball last year that I had observed that John had a bit of an attachment, if not, a ‘crush’ with your sister above all the other young ladies of the world. As we had travelled a lot and he had a long list of exes from three different continents, it was no surprise to me. However, my instincts changed when I saw him interact with your sister during his ball. Your friend Sir William Donovan was kind enough to furnish me with information and local gossip, one of which is that the relationship between John and Mary Hooper was expected to become something more. There was even some talks of marriage. He was convinced himself that it would happen. From then on I had watched my friend and your elder sister carefully. I had also extended my eye to your other sisters and family members. She seemed as open, joyous, and unattached as ever. However, you have a much more deeper experience with your sister and you know her better than I do. Thus the chance that I might be wrong, and you were right. If that is so I sincerely apologise for any pain caused, but please understand it was for the best. But please understand that I never wished to see your sister in this manner, but only relied on what I saw. Talk to anybody of my acquaintance, and they can tell you my sight has more clarity than most other people. And there was the matter of your own family. Trust me- I am not as prejudiced as you think. I have enough good connections to not worry about making a few bad ones. No- it is more a matter of your immediate family. Your mother lacks discretion and politeness. This trait seemed to have been inherited by your three younger sisters and sometimes, unfortunately, displayed by your dear father. Pardon me if I had offered you once again. But you will be pleased to know that you and now your elder sister are exempt from such criticisms, and are easily the most sensible members of your family. These observations were only sealed by studying you all at John’s ball. From then on I resolved to separate him from your sister to prevent him from unhappiness.

The reason has thus been explained, and now for my methods. I have strove to make sure that John stayed in Edinburgh, and only came down to the Surrey area to meet up with more experienced lawyers on the subject of his family estate. However, I knew this prevention was not enough to prevent the marriage unless I told him of your sister’s indifference with him. You must have deduced by now that John here is not a particularly decisive person. In many ways he has low self esteem and often relied on my opinion of something before he made any decision. Convincing him to abandon his ‘beau’ was frightfully easy as you may imagine. Now that you have told me what is really going on I sincerely regret doing so, especially since your sister made efforts to try and contact him whilst in London. The act is beneath me but again, no apologies offered because everything was for the best.

As for the other, more serious confrontation, I can only defend myself by explaining to you the history he has with my family. I have no idea what his actual accusations are, but I shall explain to you what had really happened between us.

James Joyce Moriarty was the son of the late respectable James Brian Moriarty, family lawyer and property manager. He had served the family well for the many years he was alive and he and my father were close friends. So much so that my father was the godfather to Mr Moriarty the
Younger and he was the only child to come within Pemberly often. My father, a generous man, treated his godson like a real son. The generous soul even paid for Moriarty’s university fees as well as living costs. We all hoped he would enter a respectable occupation such as accounting or medicine. Such was the joy when he decided to follow his father’s footsteps and got accepted into Cambridge's Faulty of Law. However, it was a thin veneer of what was really going on. As he lived far away from us we lost contact with each other. Soon, our relationship disintegrated from being brothers, to merely friends, and then acquaintances, and finally, strangers again. This was mainly because in a tempting environment such as universities, if one is not careful one can fall into the wrong crowd. Then in April 2007 Mr Moriarty was caught smuggling drugs into campus. He was expelled immediately. From then on I refused to be near him in public, nor acknowledge I had known him in a past life. I had no interest in him and never even known where he lived until he rudely barraged into my life last winter.

But what really sets my teeth against him is of a circumstance I would rather forget, much less divulge to another person. But I trust you know, and I have been told many times that telling another person can be cathartic, and hopefully help me be a peace with this. You are also the most secretive and trustworthy person I have ever known.

My sister, as you might have guessed, is many years younger than me. My parents set exorbitantly long gaps between children. Mycroft is seven years my senior and Georgiana 10 years my junior. Because of this the elder one often looks out for the younger one in an almost parental way. My parents are still alive, though they are often busy so we looked after ourselves. When my sister was thirteen it was resolved that she would be sent to a boarding school. She detested it so much after a half year we then sent her to live with an eminent private tutor Madame Celine Moran so that she can get a more personal education in a homely setting. Little did we know it was the start of our horrors. Madame Moran had a son Sebastion Moran, sharpshooter and confidant to Jim Moriarty. By then Moriarty had built a secret criminal empire that had not quite gone worldwide but covered every nook and cranny of Britan. He had ambitions to rule the world but never quite had the capital to do so. So he came upon a plan to seduce and elope with my sister, who was already by then rich enough with all the assets she owned, worth around £2.7 million, and then kill her. This plan also came with the added pleasure of revenge against my family, who he blames for his downfalls.

To be fair, my sister was an innocent girl of sixteen back then and had no experience of the evils of the world. She also had a fond affection for Moriarty as well, leftover from the times he would play with her as children. He managed to convince her the feeling was love and got her to agree to elope with him. Of course you might be thinking how they would get parental permission but remember, the king of the underworld has many resources, forgers included. Luckily Madame Moran had caught wind of the scheme and immediately called me. I then came unexpectedly in the pretence of a surprise visit, which unnerved Moriarty enough to abandon his plans. My dear Georgiana, after carrying such a heavy secret from me for many weeks, confessed all. As for the killing, I found out soon enough during my subsequent investigations into Moriarty and eventually his criminal empire.

Miss Hooper, this I swear is a true account of the events between me and Moriarty. Please believe me that this is accurate, and if you already do, forgive me for my hate against my arch-enemy. I know hate is a strong word but you have younger sisters to, and I believe you will do exactly what I
did if you found yourself in the same situation. Of course Moriarty is an expert liar as well as a storyteller so whatever tales he told you please forget. But I cannot blame you for not knowing who he truly is. Without the knowledge I know now, it is impossible to see him otherwise he wants to be seen.

Moriarty is a dangerous man, and this is the reason why I wrote down all of this instead of telling you last night. There is not knowing if he has his henchmen anywhere. For you, I do not think you are in so much danger that you need to burn this letter immediately, like in some illogical Bond film John absolutely oddly loves, but please do not speak of this again to anyone, unless you have to to save a life or required to by law, and keep this letter locked up at all times at the bottom of your luggage.

Godspeed

William Sherlock Scott Holmes

P.S Yes that is my full name but I prefer Sherlock. Never in any circumstances are you allowed to call me ‘Sherly.’ Mycroft is allowed to do that but only in special occasions.

P.P.S Here is a little secret puzzler for you: why would Moriarty finally use his real name after many years relying on pseudonyms? Is he trying to taunt me?
Revelations of past events

Molly of course did not expect a renewal of offers, for she was sure she had humiliated him once and for all. That still made her engaged immensely with the letter as she read from one section to the next. It caused a cascade of contrasting feelings, from surprise that Holmes was actually capable of apologising, to anger for offending her family once again.

This was no different when she got to the second part about Moriarty. At first, Molly was in disbelief, and read the letter over and over again. “This cannot be,” she muttered, “no, he must be lying to me. How else could I have it so wrong?” She then stowed it away in her dress pocket and resolved never to read it again. While walking back her mind could think of nothing else but the letter, so she once again read it to see if anything changed. Both Moriarty’s and Sherlock’s stories collaborated, including Mr Holmes Senior’s kindness, until they got to the university years. What happened there was of conjecture, whether Moriarty was denied a chance or was kicked out.

Molly recalled the conversation clearly she had with Moriarty, and knew one of them was lying. She smiled at the hope it was Holmes until she read the letter again. Then she thought about what Moriarty had actually accused Mr Holmes of. She was a little surprised to realise that even though the act was extremely rude, it was not in the least bit infamous until Moriarty came into Sevenoaks. Why not before then?

And there was also the claims of the drug smuggling. Little is known of Moriarty’s past life other than what he had told everyone. For his real character, nobody had ever felt the need to question what they saw. After all, his warm manner supposedly gave him all the virtues a young man should have. She then tried to remember if Moriarty did anything good or nice to save him from Holmes’s accusations, but she found none. This goodwill never extended beyond politeness in society and he never went out of his way to improve it. And there was the matter of Georgiana Holmes. Did Miss Watson refer to that when she warned her against Moriarty?

This lead her onto her first meeting with Moriarty. Most of his statements were still fresh in her mind. Those words, once pleasing and sweet, was now sour in her mind. How come he was so familiar to a stranger he had never met before? For a stranger to put forward so much information about someone else was just as rude as not talking at all. It was indelicate, unscrupulous, and just downright ill-breeding. And there was the contradictions he told her. He claimed he wished not to soil Sherlock Holmes’s name in honour of Holmes Senior, and yet puts him down whenever he can. He wanted the story to spread no further and yet it was repeated word for word throughout the community by his own doing. Lastly, he boasted he had no fear of Holmes, and yet he avoid Dr Watson’s ball.

She then tried to remember something good that Moriarty did but her sureness grew weaker and weaker. And now his behaviour towards her made her disgusted. He must have been misinformed about her supposed fortune for him to make a move like that. Or maybe he was practising so that he
Another thought struck her. No matter who talked about Holmes, nobody had ever said he was a bad person. He didn’t have any socially objectionable habits, apart from his lack of talking. Even Moriarty praised him for talking good care of his little sister so this meant he did have a heart, alas a very small one and hard to get to.

She felt guilty, ashamed, and knew she had been blind.

“Oh, I’m such a terrible person! Me! The one who prided oneself on open-mindness, the one whose judgement is supposed to be the best trait! Oh, how I have sinned. I, the vainest of them all! I have sacrificed my sister’s true judgement for the sake of my pride and chose the road of distrust. At least I was not in love, otherwise I would have been wretchedly blind! I have always preferred one over the other with the first impressions, and because of this I had driven all reason and wisdom away!"

This lead her to the first part of the letter. She wanted to know if a second reading with the enlightenment changes anything, and it does. When she read that Holmes thought her sister was never attached to Dr Watson, she remembered Sally’s statements about taking love out in the open. Jane on the other hand, though privately enamoured, publicly controlled it very well so that only the minimal indications could be seen.

And there were the accusations against her family. It was harsh, but fair. Molly remembered that night with coloured cheeks of embarrassment as she remembered her family put on quite a show. She could not deny it, but agree with the evidence provided.

She smiled at the compliment. It was a balm for the accusations but it was not enough. For Mary to be let down by her family! This is an unjust world, she though. If only her parents and other siblings were better behaved.

Molly walked on for at least two hours. When she got back she was surprised that she got a missed call from the Hospital. She then checked her voicemail.

“Molly, you might want to come back to London tomorrow as soon as you can. We have an urgent job for you- you need to dissect the body of Connie Prince.”
The Leaving

Technically Molly was supposed to stay a bit longer but this was rather urgent, to say the least. Mycroft Holmes and had already left to tend to his governmental business the day before while his younger brother and husband was also supposed to stay behind for an additional day to keep their aunt company. However, news of Ms Prince’s death shook everybody’s plans. After all, it was in Lestrade’s division.

“Can you not stay any longer, Molly? At least until the end of Sunday, which will make it a week.”

“No, my Lady, but I certainly would have loved to.”

“You and your sordid businesses. I never really thought that women should be allowed to dissect cadavers.” Lady Smallwood then had a small shudder over her roasted veal during dinner. "Never mind, I shall have to miss you all anyway. Sally here certainly will. However, she is making quite a lot of new acquaintances around here, so I am not too sure how much. But my family! Are they wonderful? Such cleverness has never been conglomerated in a family."

“I suppose not.”

“You must come back soon.”

“I endeavour to.”

“At least next year, when I am another year older. Oh, what a thought. Sooner or later I will be nothing more than a dotty babushka. But I intend to fight that cliché.”

“Good idea, my lady. Good idea.”

“And how are you travelling?”

Molly then gave her a detailed travel itinerary, with the occasional interruptions on Lady Smallwood’s part on improvements. Finally, there was the situation of companions.

“Women cannot afford to travel alone. Goodness what sort of situations she becomes vulnerable in.”

“Considering I will only be travelling for only an hour, such measures will be unnecessary.”

“I still insist that you travel with Sherlock.”

In the end they came to an agreement. Lestrade would travel with Molly in her car while Sherlock drove by himself.

Lady Smallwood’s pedantic mind still had their benefits. It helped Molly keep her mind off the
events of that day and Lady Smallwood did mention things that Molly forgot in the rush.

By then, she had studied her letter just as much as an English professor would have done with Shakespeare. She could quote whole passages by heart and knew the nuances of every word. She could tell you what every sentence made her feel. For example, she was angry at his over formal style of address, as he was showing off to her. However, she knew her feelings changed the more she read. By the end, she felt as if she could respect Holmes, but there was still no way she would ever come to actually like him. To herself, there was still feelings of guilt over how she treated and thought of him. Her family, well, there was nothing that could be done. Her father was emotionally absent to his three younger daughters, and treated the two youngest like jesters, subjects to be laughed at. There was no chance that he wished to change their insipid behaviour. Their mother was clueless. She was just as silly as them and indulged in their every act, mainly because they acted like her so much. Molly and Mary were constant and vigilant in trying to change their sister’s behaviours but it was too late. It was especially bad for the two youngest because Kate was bash, strong-headed and vain. Kitty was weak-willed and was often influenced by Kate. They often truanted school and flirted at any boy they can. So long as there was a village centre, they will be there for life.

And this came back to Mary’s hopelessness. Mr Holme’s explanation did well to recover Dr Watson’s reputation, by showing that he was never really in the wrong. He really did love Mary, and he was influenced away from her by his best friend, and only because of the friend’s genuine worry for him. Sad irony, for Mary’s happiness to be destroyed by her family!

All of this, plus learning who Moriarty really was, made it hard for Molly to hide her sadness.

The next morning was a rush. Lady Smallwood had personally came down to the cottage to oversee the packing. About half an hour was lost when she saw Molly pack her shirts the ‘wrong’ way and ordered her to pack it her way. The only breakfast Molly had was a small cup of tea plus a digestive. Finally, it was time to leave and with the car loaded up, Molly had to say the last goodbyes. She had to shake the hand of every person left, from the maids to her best friend. Even Miss Smallwood managed a small curtsy. And so Molly left for London, for a world that seemed unchanged, but was evolving restlessly.
A valuable body

There it laid before her- a pallid, deathy rendition of what was once a energetic woman, full of vigour and enthusiasm that made her show so popular. Connie Prince was by far the most popular daytime host in her era, surpassing even the breakfast show that came before her. Molly looked at the bleached sheet of paper again with language as cold and dry as the air itself in the morgue.

Name: Constance Clarity Prince

Date of Birth: 20 August 1958 (54 years old at time of death)

Date of Death: 21 March 2014

Occupation: Entertainer (Host of Connie’s Clothing Transformations)

She read on more about Prince’s medical records. Connie was never really a health nut. When she died her body weighed 120 kilograms and she was on the verge of getting type two diabetes. She was also lying to everybody, including herself, on how young she really was.

The common tabloids recorded her age to be 48. She looked the part, with blond dyed hair and constant botox injections.

Molly shuddered at that thought. The injections left many potted scars around her forehead which had to be covered up with concealer. There was also a slight irony to this- the use of the most poisonous substance in the world to maintain's one’s youth. And there was a fear of ageing as well within her industry- so much so that it is better to die young than live with winkles.

Her right hand had a deep cut in it inbetween her forefinger and her thumb. She must have been a pedantic woman, Molly though, for the cut to be so clean. You would expect a lot of blood in there…

The doors opened with Sherlock Holmes and his retinue. John Watson was trailing behind and then Lestrade further still. “So, Lestrade, what do you think killed her?,’’ asked Holmes.

“According to the report…”

“No Lestrade, listen. What do you think killed Ms Prince here?”

“Considering I wrote the report, I would rather like to agree with it.”

“And it is?”
“Tetanus poisoning from the deep cut on her right hand.”

“And what do you think here John?”

“Possible. Tetanus is everywhere, especially in the soil. She could have easily got it tending the roses.”

“Well, I shall investigate the body and see if you are right.”

Molly cleared her throat, which made a nice effect of having everybody spin towards her. “Excuse me gentlemen,” Molly said in what she thought was a gentle but firm tone, “I believe I have sole rights to this body? I am after all, the official pathologist to this case.”

“Oh, is that right?,” mock-mused Sherlock with a roll of his eyes. “Fancy seeing you here.”

“Mr Holmes, as a consultant of this case, I expect you to know full well who is involved, including me. Unless, of course, Greg here has not done his job of informing you properly?”

“Greg? Is that your name, Lestrade?”

“Yes, Sherlock, I have been telling you that for the last five years! What did you think my first name was?”

“Inspector.”

“Good one, Sherlock, I hope that was a joke.”

“Anyway, Greg, what business do you have in bringing Miss Hooper here?”

“She has been my preferred pathologist for the last year or so.”

“I shall be seeing more of you then, Miss Hooper. Anyway, shall I begin?”

It was clear that Holmes loved to be dramatic. With this quick, precise movement much akin to a prima ballerina, Holmes treated the room like a stage, and he was the only player. He danced around the audience expecting them to be wowed by his theatrics of quick deduction and thinking. By the end, he made them gather round to make his big announcement.

“It was not tetanus after all. It was botulinum.”

“What do you mean, Sherlock.”

“It was easy, my dear Graham. Miss Hooper, did you notice anything wrong with her right hand.”

“There was something not quite right with the cut. It was clean. Now that you say it, it was too clean.”

“Exactly, Miss Hooper. A deep cut like that, you would expect a bit of blood here and there or at least a large scab. Now, John, how long does it take for the tetanus to incubate?”

“Eight to ten days.”
"Which is definitely not enough time for the cut to heal to something clean like that. I had also examined other parts of the body. No bruises, so no trauma. The breath smells alright, and the body is a normal colour, if a little pale. So this also rules out a lot of poisons. However, the pock marks up there intrigued me. Those marks could only be obtained through repeated use of a needle and what type of treatment would use needles up there? For an entertainer, this was obvious. As you know, botulinum toxin is the most dangerous poison known to man. It is so deadly that it will only need two kilograms of this substance to kill everybody on Earth. It does this through destroying nerve endings, effectively paralysing the organs of the body including the diaphragm and heart if enough is used. This makes everybody who uses Botox, including Ms Prince here, at the mercy of beauticians every time they need another procedure. Therefore, I believe this time, though accident or intention, somebody had overdosed and made her body free of wrinkles forever. Miss Hooper, do me the favour of running some tests and validating my theory."

"Why should I?"

"You are the official pathologist of this case, of course."

"Oh, now you remember that. It must be because you want something from me."

"I apologise."

"Better. Expect results in a few hours. And whatever you do, never, ever upstage me ever again. I am qualified enough to do what I need to do."

"I apologise for that as well. Now, John, go to the Prince’s residence. I need to see what her home life is like."

It was indeed botulinum. Molly was slightly amazed that Holmes managed to work it out so quickly and without testing. Not that she would admit the last bit though. That man’s ego was inflated enough as it was.

"Mr Holmes, who do you think did this?"

"Her housekeeper Raoul. As it turns out Ms Prince used to have her beauty procedures done at home and Raoul would be the one to inject her with her ‘Botox’. However, as I said people who do those procedures are at the mercy of their beauticians. As it turned out Raoul was disgruntled with his employer’s treatment of him but he was getting handsomely paid. He wanted to leave but would miss the money so he murdered her. That way, there was also a high chance he would still be employed by the Princes, just this time by her less obnoxious brother. He almost got away with it."

"I bet. Do you think Moriarty had a hand in this?"

"Why would you ask that?"

"I don’t know. It is just that after the letter you gave me I tend to think that all the evils in the world are somehow connect to him, especially a clever piece of murder like that."

"I have no idea. The only link he has I can find so far is that in Ms Prince’s will, she bequeathed £102,000 to him."

"How did you find that out? I thought wills are rather private."
“My brother…well, let us just say he is more powerful than he lets on.”

“Goodness. Mind you, I would think by now £100,000 would be small change to an emperor of evil. It is hardly a motive for murder for him.”

“True. But then again one does not become who is now without a touch of psychopathy,”

“Good luck with this case. I have to go home now.”

“Take care, Miss Hooper.”
Homecoming

Nothing much of note had happened between then until the second week of May. There was the usual work for Molly dissecting cadavers of no importance and with no abnormalities. Evil as the criminals of London may be, they tend to be dim compared to the great works of Moriarty as Molly came to appreciate. When I mean appreciate, I mean as in Molly likes the fact they break the monotony of strangulations and gunshot wounds, not as in Molly likes Moriarty’s work. In fact, Molly would rather dissect a thousand bodies that died of the same gunshot wound than to have one more body that bore the hallmarks of an unusual death.

What was of note was the event that marked the arrival of Molly and Mary back at Sevenoaks. Kate and Kitty had been eagerly waiting for their sisters’ arrival by watching from the dining room window, reading the Daily Mail and setting the table in opposite turns.

Once the business of actually welcoming their guests had been done, they immediately got them to go to the dining table. There, they showed off the table of a cold luncheon just as a butcher would show off the best ham on the window.

“Do you like it? Surely this is a lovely surprise party for you all?”

“And of course there was more we could have done,” added Kate, “but our finances are rather in dire straits right now. I had spent all my pocket money recently on a skirt.” She wrinkled her nose in disgust. “I have to admit it is not the prettiest thing out there and it might not even suit my figure. Oh well, I guess I could always tailor it myself.”

“Kate, you have got to be kidding me. This is no longer ‘not quite the prettiest thing in the shop’. It has gone way past that into the realm of ugliness!,” cried Kitty.

“Oh, but I don’t really worry about it too much. I have found two or three uglier skirts right next to it.” Kate then sighed. “You know what, Molly, I don’t think my appearance will matter as much in two weeks time. Wrong Direction, well, they are all leaving. Do you know what this means? I might never see them again?”

“‘Might’? What do you mean ‘might’?,” asked Molly.

“Oh you know I have heard that they are doing a gig in London this summer and I tried to convince Dad to allow me to go. I could stay with some friends I know from school which will make the whole scheme very cheap and very safe for me. The way I planned it, even Mum wants to come along!”

“So finally you have found something that overshadows your pleasurable shopping trips around here?”

“Yes! And I actually have even better news, something that will bring benefits to us all. Have you heard about Ms Prince? I know it is kind of morbid, but now that she is dead, Molly, you are perfectly welcome to pursue James Moriarty again! Isn’t that nice?”
It was a wonderful lunch, courtesy of Macy and a little efforts from Kate and Kitty. Kate was telling her two elder sisters what had happened since they were away while Kitty helped with verifying or reminding Kate of little details.

“And now Mary, it is your turn. Have you found any nice men to marry yet?” giggled Kate. “Goodness, I hope you find someone soon. You are twenty-seven now. Getting a bit too close to the expiry date, right? I have read in several magazines that there are hardly any men who would date, let alone marry, a woman over the age of twenty-eight. You better get a move on! Goodness, I would be embarrassed if I was not married by the age of twenty-five myself. Aunt Phillips is all worried about you and she is promising that she will find all of us suitable husbands. What joy! You know, Molly, you should have taken up Mr Anderson’s deal. Well, Aunt Phillips certainly though so, she told me. To be fair, he is such a boring fellow, isn’t he? Anyway, what do you think might happen if I got married first out of all of you? I know right now it cannot happen but at the rate you are going it is looking very likely! And you know, I went over to Darcy’s place the other day, you do know Darcy right, the drummer for Wrong Direction, and he had just recently married. Mrs Eva Darcy, well, what fun she was! We are rapidly becoming fast friends. Anyway I went to one of her parties the other evening and she invited our neighbours Berksides. Well, unfortunately Chrissy was unable to come due to her flu so Peter had to come by himself. We eventually came up with a prank onto the rest of the guests by dressing Peter up as a woman. Only I, Kitty here, and Eva knew and you should have seen the reactions of the guests when he finally arrived! Many men had flirted with him, many women became jealous, until the big reveal that sent all of us reeling with laughter! I personally thought I had died from a heart attack. Even Moriarty had a go at him and he turned into the brightest shade of red afterwards.”

Molly can usually zone out of such talks of parties and debauchery, but there was no escaping the frequent mentions of Moriarty’s name.

That evening Mrs Hooper planned a special dinner to celebrate the return of her daughers. She was relieved to find Mary’s beauty undiminished while her husband was slightly openly relieved that his favourite daughter came back to raise the average IQ of the household.

The dinner itself was splendid. It was filled with more visitors than Molly would have liked but they were people she knew well. This included the Donovans, who were eager to know more details about their daughter’s situation. Because the children sat on one side and the adults on the other, it was a noisy and torrid affair passing information onto the relevant people. Mrs Hooper talked the most as she had to keep two conversations going- passing information onto the younger Donovan children about their sister and spreading the latest word of fashion from Mary to the others. Her favourite child was in comparison the loudest, whose voice travelled across the whole room about her life for everyone to hear.

“Sarah! Have I told about the last party I went to? Goodness, you should consider going out more. We had such fun playing party games and pranks on the other guests and of course there was a lot of
flirting with the band members. We all laughed a lot, almost to the point of dying, and then we ate wonderful food. I believe the police had to almost come and stop the party but it wasn’t because of the music. It was because we were laughing so hard!.

Sarah continued to pick at her food. “Quite the opposite, Kate. Of course to most other young girls like you such parties would be the pinnacle of your life, but I am different. I would rather read a book or practise on my piano.”

Kate was not offended, mainly because she never listens to what boring Sarah has to say.

After dinner Kate pressed for a small group including her sisters to visit aunt Phillips because she was too busy to come, so they might as well bring the party to her. Molly tried to talk her out of it for two reasons: it was ridiculous that less than half a day after their arrival, they want to go flirting with the band members again, and she wanted to avoid Moriarty. For her, it was a relief that Wrong Direction was going soon. Only a fortnight left, and he would never need to interfere with her life again.

It was also that evening that Molly learnt more about the London plan for Kate. Of course Kate talked a bit about it but she only spoke of a few patchy details so it was not until she bought it up with her father in front of everybody did Molly learn the whole plan. Mr Hooper was in no intention of accepting nor declining. Her mother was getting sick of the subject but she never gave up hope of it going her way.
Discussions of what to do

The two elder sisters were hardly ever apart so for them not to see each other for a week was extremely rare for them. Even more rare was for that said week to have such a big impact on Molly’s opinions and mindset. It was because of those two reasons that Molly found it necessary for her to talk with Mary as soon as they had some time alone. And so before they went to bed, Molly related Holme’s scene and letter to her sister that no email nor video calling could ever achieve.

Of course Mary was surprised at the revelations but she never really tends to dwell on these things. Rather, she moves onto feelings she would rather have—sisterly love, and all that came with it. She pitied Mr Holmes for being so socially awkward that he cannot even ask Molly out for a date properly and sympathised with his pain of rejection.

“He must have been so sure of his success! To be rejected is one thing, but to fall from grace from so high up…it would not only bruise his pride but actually break it!”

“Now you put it this way, I do feel sorry for him. However, he is not a man of one mind and soon one of his other ones would make the lovelorn one forget me. But do you think I am in the wrong for rejecting him?”

“No way.”

“Could I be more shocked? To think that it was Moriarty to be the villain of this story. And Mr Holmes, the victim of this absurd plan. The pain of his failure and having to relate to you what happened to his sister! And now knowing what you really thought of him! Is he alright? How are you feeling?”

“Better actually, seeing you grieve and sympathise for me. In fact, the more I see you do this, the better I feel. Thank you for repenting for us both. Soon, my conscience will be limpid as distilled water.”

“Dear me! Moriarty has such a pleasing manner and such a wonderful way of conversation. What happened?”

“Something serious did go wrong for the both of them in their childhood. One of them ended up with a good heart, and the other had the appearance of it.”

“But I never really believed that Holmes would end up so socially incepted without some sort of evil within him.”

“And yet I only spite him because it made me feel so clever. After all, one will eventually stumble on something witty to say when one is making fun of somebody.”

“How was the first reading, Molly. It must have been painful for you.”

“Oh, Mary, you must know my pain. I was in a wirlwind of confusion, with one part of my mind saying that surely I was not wrong, and yet another saying that I was. I was deeply unhappy and longed for you. If you were only there!”
“If only you never used such strong words in describing Moriarty and Holmes.”

“But then again, the pain now I receive is the natural consequence of speaking ill of the worthy. Now, I desperately need your advice. Should I denounce Moriarty publicly? The whole world should know of his deeds and yet something tells me this will be a dangerous thing to do. Goodness knows how many people Moriarty had killed.”

“Do you think he has the resources to wipe out Sevenoaks?”

“Yes, and London at the same time, to boot.”

“Oh dear. What do you think?”

“Maybe not. After all, I have been sworn to secrecy about the letter, especially the bit about his sister. You will not talk about this right (at this moment, Mary shook her head)? Thanks. Besides, people will start thinking that I’m mad as his reputation is so ruined around here and I had hated him quite vehemently. Off to Bedlam I go. And Moriarty will be gone here soon so what is the point? One day we will all find out and we will blush and laugh at ourselves for not knowing before.”

Talking to Mary had made Molly feel more at peace than she ever had in the last week. Already two secrets had been taken off her shoulder but prudence made her retain the last one. She could never tell Mary about how much she was actually loved by Dr Watson because that would only hurt Mary more. Besides, she thought, if there was ever a slim chance that they would reconcile, I’m sure that Dr Watson would make a better deliverer of the news himself.

Not that she would ever admit it herself but Mary was actually still quite in love with Dr Watson. She tried to hide it and any regrets that came from it but they were still noticeable to almost everybody. So much so that her mother actually asked Molly of her opinion of the matter which Mrs Hooper usually avoids doing.

“Of course I would rather not speak of this horrid business ever again and believe me I have told my sister Phillips about this. But the fact that Mary could not meet him in London kept on disturbing my mind. Well, I think he is a prick and there is no chance that Mary would get him now. I have also contacted with many people and they all said that he is not coming back to London.”

“I don’t think so as well.”

“Then let it be. I also hope that Mary dies of a broken heart so that he would feel guilty for what he did. But for now I must settle for the fact that he is currently another unpopular man in this town. Nobody wants to marry him to their daughters now ever since they heard what he did to poor Mary. Nothing much can be done about it. Oh well. How is Sally by the way? Is she living well? I can only hope that her arrangement will last. And what sort of food do they eat? Lady Donovan teaches her children well and if Sally took on half of her skills then I dare say they are saving enough. They don’t waste a lot of money, right?”

“Not at all.”

“A good deal of management. Yes, I know them. They will never run over their income. They will never need to borrow. Well, good for them. And I bet they talk about having this house once your
father is dead. They talk of it as if it is their own."

“If they did, they did not do it in front of me.”

“It would have been impolite if they did. Let us hope they do not overuse something that is not theirs.”
Kate's leaving

Chapter Notes

Goodness, are we two-thirds of the way through now? Time is going rather quickly.

Important announcement here: For the sake of moving the plot along, I, your long suffering narrator, will have to skip a few pages along till the second week of May. For those who are willing to pay a little extra to read what happened to our heroine during her absence, I suggest you don’t and save your money for more worthy things such as a new film poster. After all, who wants to read about a pathologist who dissects bodies all day and watches television with her cat all night? This is a romantic fan fiction, and we all know it. Get on with the love-making already! Where is our pale elfin brainy curly-fu we swoon over?

By now the boy-band sensation Wrong Direction had left the little town of Sevenoaks for around six weeks now. Since then, the town had never been so universally depressed. Any girl between the ages of 13 to 21, and some older than that, went about their daily lives with heads down and morning clothes. Grades had dropped so low in the area the teachers were forced to drop the standards just so grades became achievable while the school councillors had their days booked for another two weeks yet. On the plus side average grocery bills dropped for parents whose little girls refused to eat out of dejection. This however was not compensation enough for all the moans of such a loss to the community, and how harsh the world was for ignoring them, especially if their daughters were named Kate and Kitty Hooper.

“We have become pallid ghosts of ourselves, and yet Molly keeps on smirking. How can you be so cruel?,” cried Kate from a salty soaked tissue.

Only their mother sympathised with them. “I remember the time when Dexy’s Midnight Runners came into my town. When they left I cried in my pillow for a whole week.”

“God, Mum, that was weak! I cried every night for three weeks straight.”

“If only you could go to London.”

“Yes! If only! But Dad is being an arse and not agreeing.”

“Oh, the shopping to be done! It would be wonderful.”

“And Aunt Phillips just knows I need the holiday,” chirped in Kitty.

The conversation repeated itself everyday, sometimes multiple times a day. If that happened a year before, Molly would have made monkeys out of them but now she knew the true implications of
Kate going, and that filled her with dread. To Molly's horror Kate did receive an invitation, just for her only, to go to London with Mrs Eva Darcy. She had been recently married to the drummer of the band and while Kate had known her for six months, they had been calling each other best friends for four.

This made Kate’s best moment of her life. She flew around the house in ecstasy without any regards to Kitty’s feelings. She announced her news to everyone, begging them for congratulations and making promises of gifts. The unfavored Kitty, on the other hand, sulked around seeing her sister being so happy while she was denied.

“Oh, why was the invitation not extended to me! I am older than Kate by about a year, and she is no particular friend of Eva’s! I have the same rights to go with her!”

Molly and Mary on the other hand considered the invitation as a death warrant and tried to get Kitty to see it in the same way, or at least less jealous about it. Molly knew that it was the graveyard of Kate’s common sense. She tried to tell her father her opinion of the matter and used all her powers of persuasion to get her father to reject the invitation. She listed all of Kate’s transgression in the last year and noted down the impropriety of Mrs Darcy and how terrible a friend she will be. There was also of course the temptation to seriously transgression in London, whose seduction is vastly greater than the sheltered world of Sevenoaks.

“Katrina loves the limelight, even and especially if it is at the expense of our family reputation. If she can do so without destroying the latter, so much the better.”

“Dad, you must realise the dangers of an unbridled Kate. She will, no, I must correct myself, has embarrassed the family with her imprudent behaviour and speaking.”

“She already has? Goodness me, I pity you. How many prospective lovers have been scared off by Katrina’s imprudence? Give me a list, and you will be sure I will speak to them, but then again somebody who cannot stand a little folly are not worth fighting over.”

“Dad, no. I am personally not hurt by what Kate had done, but I fear for all of us for what she will do. We will all be bought down by her lack of sense and she will ruin us all. I mean no disrespect, Dad, but if you don’t teach Kate to control herself and that she cannot have everything in life, she will be forever spoilt. She will be seventeen in June and this is basically our last chance to reform her. She will become the worst kind of woman: a shallow one, who only follows her shallow heart, and will only have short affairs. The only attractions for her will be her youth. Kitty, poor Kitty, she will become the same as she follows her sister so dearly. Please Dad, can you see the dangers of giving Kate this sweet poison?”

Even the mocking Mr Hooper cannot bear to see his favourite daughter in such distress so he caressed her hand and seriously but lovingly replied, “Don’t be so unhappy, dear. Remember, whatever happens you and Mary will be so accomplished and successful that everyone will overlook that you have two, no, three silly sisters. Think of it this way, Molly. What will happen if I disagree?
Kate will never allow us to have any peace ever again. Besides, I have meet Mr Darcy. He seems like a good enough man, and he will keep her out of any trouble. Also, London has a vast population of airhead pretty girls like her so her importance amongst the officers shall be greatly reduced and that will be a much better lesson on her insignificance to this universe. Anyhow, if she does turn for the worse, we will have to lock her up in Bedlam."

Molly was forced to make peace with this arrangement. However, she did not feel guilty because she did her duty, and she believed that her father was wiser than her. He was sure to know the full effects of the trip on Kate. She then thought of better things, as it was in her nature not to dwell on the depressing things that was out of her control.

Not counted among her lucky stars was the fact that Kate or her mother overheard Molly talking to her father. If either one of them did, Molly would be harangued for the rest of her life. Kate had fantasises about London, and her mother encouraged her. She dreamt of London being the best paradise out there for her. London was the ultimate place for shopping, where every designer brand was out there just waiting to be owned. She imagined herself shopping and going to cafés with three handsome male pop musicians in tow, its fabulous five-star hotels with silken bedsheets, and the young partying till dusk to dawn, and the occasional indiscreet activity, away from the preying eyes of the adults.

This celebration of mother and favourite daughter continued until the day of Kate’s leaving, when Mr and Mrs Darcy arrived at the door with Moriarty behind them. Moriarty was a bit of a surprise, but he cited that since his best friend and band member was going down to Sevenoaks anyway, he may as pay a visit to see how his friends are doing. As the Darcys help Kate with her bags Moriarty talked with Molly after it had been for a very long time. Yet his manner was easy and calm, as if they had never really separated. Molly, who had once took this as a sign of gentlemanly behaviour, was now suspicious of his intentions. Not that he would know, for Molly had cultivated a mask of easy friendship to protect herself. Their conversation turned from what Moriarty had been doing, to what Molly had been doing.

“And you saw him in Frant Place?”

“Almost everyday for about a week.”

“I dare say his behaviour is different from his brother’s.”

“I agree. But I find that, just like cheese, Sherlock Holmes’s behaviour gets better with time.”

“Really?!” Moriarty, just for a split second, looked a little worried. He then settled back into his humourous face, and then joked, “And how does he improve? Does he change your address, or is he less inclined to speak ill? Surely, he has not changed his spots completely.”

“Oh no, he is the same person as he ever was.”

Molly relished the look of confusion on Moriarty’s face, on whether he should rejoice or be scared of
what Molly had just said.

“Actually, mind if I clarify? When I mean he improves with time, it is just that, the more you know about him, the more understandable his behaviour becomes.”

The look on Moriarty’s face was priceless as he scrambled for things to say. Molly smiled a bit but knew she cannot go any further, lest it gave something away. She changed the conversation to be more in his favour. “Doesn’t excuse his actions though. He is still an arse, no matter how tragic his background story.”

Just then Kate called out for everybody for final goodbyes. Moriarty looked relieved as he scrambled gracefully out of the living room and the house. It was a teary affair, mainly on Kitty’s side, as she was still grieving over the fact that she cannot go. Mary tried consoling her, telling her of wonderful opportunities to meet other boys during the summer holiday. Mrs Hooper was piling on advice for good places to visit and telling her child to communicate often so they may keep up with the news. Not that Kate needed the advice as her raucous goodbyes drowned out everything else people said.
Hey guys! This is a friendly announcement in that since my school is starting again tomorrow, the twice weekly chapter publication will be reduced back to the normal once-a-week schedule. You have all been wonderful and I wish you all well for your studies in whatever you do.

It was rather fortunate that Molly had more than one examples of family life for her family was not the paragon for it. Her father made the common mistake for marrying too quickly. He only courted Ginger Gardiner, back then the most beautiful woman south of London, for three months before proposing. Only then did he realise that in exchange for beauty he married a complete nitwit, foolish and intolerant to the point of unbeareableness. He considered divorce five years later but the birth of Molly gave him the misdirected determination to stay. Instead, he learnt the art of satire and made fun of his wife in his mind, which gave him great amusement. If he got sick of his wife and finally his thee younger daughters, who unfortunately took after their mother in terms of brainpower, there was always his study/library, a ground so sacred that even Molly had to ask for permission before she could enter.

Molly was always pained by the way that her father treated her mother and her younger sisters. But she respected him enough to forgive him for that. Instead, she strove to forget the actions that she cannot forgive, especially the ones that made her mother publicly look like a fool without Mrs Hooper knowing. But it was only until now that she fully realised what happens when a father is in such a tattered marriage will do to his children. With his abilities, he should have been able to protect his daughter’s virtues, if he could not make his wife smarter.

The loss of the boy bands in Sevenoaks were not of any importance to Molly. After all, she was in London during the weekdays and she could have seen them if they wanted to. Surprisingly during that time she never caught sight of Kate but then again London was a vast place. Kate could easily evade Molly’s eyes, and she wanted to. For Mrs Hooper and Kitty, the truth cannot be more different. They missed the boy bands and their associates, as they provided some different company than what they are used to. Molly was glad that Kitty stayed behind because without the overwhelming influence of Kate, there was still a chance that her mind would improve and she would end up a better woman than before.

And Molly had something to look forward to. There was the tours in August that will take her around the whole of England with two of her most favourite people in the world. If only she could take Mary, she thought. Ah well, that made the trip better because at least that will maker her expectations of the trip lower than reality, so that she will remember the trip more fondly.
Kate did not keep her promises that well, but then again she never really did. The promise of communicating often did not really occur to her apart from quick Skype calls that left more questions than answers and constant stream of texts for Kitty, all private of course. All she ever talked about was her latest shopping trips and what she bought with her remarkable generous allowance by her mother such as a new shirt or a new cocktail dress that she only quickly shown her mother and Kitty before apologising she had to go again as she had some dinner arrangement or something rather with members of record companies. The theme of the correspondence between Kate and Kitty was never known.

But time heals everything and eventually life came back to Sevenoaks. The loom band craze was taking off again and soon masses of girls were abandoning their life and wellbeing again just to perfect the art of making rubber band jewellery. For Molly, relief also came in the from of the expected trip. However, news came along that quashed part of the plan. Another scandal had arisen from the depths of the governmental agency and this time it had to do with the Bruce-Partington plans. Somehow, mysteriously, a spy was found dead near a train station with his belongings intact apart from an USB. As it turned out, the USB contained the aforementioned plans and now her aunt and uncle must delay travel plans to help find the USB quickly enough to prevent the press from ever finding out. “I am sorry, my dear, but please remember that this can turn out to be a huge scandal if handled improperly,” said Mrs Gardiner to the slightly disappointed Molly. “I think that we might be delayed by two weeks, which basically cuts the holiday in half. I think we have to miss the Lakes altogether and just go straight to the Midlands. I have to show you Poynton. It is not much so we might stay in Manchester yet.”

“Thank goodness you told me! I can still change my leave application.”

“I won’t worry too much about that. Something tells me a word to the boss and he can do anything.”

“Is this Mycroft Holmes, brother to Sherlock?”

“The very one.”

“Are we still going to Pemberly?”

“Before now, I was not too sure. Now that Mr Sherlock Holmes has a case he will not bother us.”

“Even after solving this case?”

“Believe me dear, this case is so intense he will need a holiday afterwards.”

They both laughed and got on with their day.

But the day did come, and during the middle of August the Gardiners came to pick Molly up. They left their children to the care of Mary, a general favourite for the son and daughter, six and eight, for her gentle patience and sweet disposition. Mary only worked part time as a nurse which gave her plenty of time to look after the wee ones in London.

Again, I am forced to move the story along, for who would want a long convoluted paragraph of
what they saw when our deuteragonist was nowhere to be seen? So we shall skip to the night before the party went to Pemberly. After almost two weeks of good company Molly felt rested and was able to take on the world’s cares again. However she was apprehensive of going for a tour around Pemberly. She was afraid that she would meet the master and after so many grand house tours, she was getting sick at the lack of imagination and the obvious competition in gaudiness. Mrs Gardiner thought otherwise.

“Dear, I thought you would like to go there, for is this not the place where Moriarty grew up?” asked Mrs Gardiner. Molly had only just stopped blushing at Moriarty’s name. “Besides, Molly, I have been to Pemberly before and this one is markedly different. I am a little surprised to learn that you don’t know the famous Pemberly wood.”

“The famous Pemberly what?”

“The Pemberly wood. Probably the oldest forest in England and the finest as well. My dear, this estate is not just another grand mansion with only silk curtains and giant paintings, otherwise I would never bother to go.”

Molly was still not convinced. There was still the chance of meeting Sherlock Holmes and she was apprehensive of that. His parents, not so much. She did not really think of them as she had met them once at Lady Smallwood’s birthday ball to what it now seemed half a lifetime ago. To her, they seemed rather…ordinary. So ordinary that they were just another rich, landed gentry couple with nothing much to do but manage their estate and visiting others. For them to have raised two extraordinary children, well…

Molly shook her head. The puzzle of how they managed to cope kept her up half the night as she laughed at the many scenarios that happened with two such bright children.
An unexpected visit

Her aunty was right about the woods, thought Molly as they drove towards Pemberly. Unlike the other estates who treated the outlying gardens like some ornamental nonsense that must have impossibly clean lines everywhere, Pemberly kept its original woods and kept it well. It looked natural enough and yet the trees were well maintained. A little babbling brook was seen running through the woods. In normal circumstances Molly would have looked at everything with hungry eyes but she was distracted by the yawning pit in her stomach.

They were slowly rising and by the time they got out of the forest they were on the apex of a very high hill. Pemberly stood on top, its glorious yet not gaudy stone facade shining in the sunlight. Beside it was a lake, which was the source of the brook. The lake itself was left alone so that only its unspoilt beauty was shown. Molly was astounded. She had never seen a place before where the artificial sat right beside the natural so perfectly. The lake’s bank was covered only with old willows whose weeping branches only skipped along the azure surface. A few stone benches can be seen here and there, but they were partly obscured. She stood there gawking at the lake until her uncle tapped her shoulder and lead her to the front door.

It was opened by a butler. Inside the atrium of marble polished marble flooring and oak stairs was the great Mistress, Viola Georgiana Capterson Holmes. She was a fine lady with silvery white hair in a high bun and silk blue flowing dress. Her bearing and steely eye gave Molly a sense of inadequacy in her jeans and shirt. However, there was a kind tone within Mrs Holmes as she walked up to them and introduced herself.

“Mr and Mrs Gardiner, I presume?. I am Mrs Violet Holmes, mistress of this estate and now your tour guide. Miss Hooper, good to see you again. I have been expecting you. This way, please, to the drawing room.”

And on they went, from the drawing room, to the music room, then the dining room, one of the guest bedrooms, and finally one of the porches. Mrs Holmes then invited them to sit down on one of the outdoor dining chairs and she asked a maid to send refreshments.

“Aunty,” asked Molly quizzically, “I have to admit, this whole arrangement is very unusual. Why are we given a tour by the owner and not by a servant or a dedicated tour guide?”

“Goodness knows. Maybe Mr Mycroft had told her we were coming so she wanted to see us for herself. She does seem to study you very intently.”

“Oh, not again! Is that where Sherlock gets his studious eye from? I cannot bear to be studied again.”

“Ha! Dear, just remember that you often study and satirise other people yourself.”
Over iced teas in the terrace, Molly felt a little longing to be more intimately connected to the Holmes, so she could come more often. Not that her aunt and uncle would be able to do the same, she remembered, and saved her from something akin to regret.

Molly was also curious to find out when Mr Sherlock Holmes was coming back to the estate, if he came back at all. However, Molly was too shy to ask such a probing question so she kept silent. Mr Gardiner however read her mind, and asked the hostess himself when they were walking towards the gallery.

“I will be expecting both my sons and quite a few of their friends tomorrow.”

Thank goodness there was never any major delays in Molly's travels.

Another surprise was waiting for them on the way to the gallery. Mr Archibald Henry Holmes was on the way to the dressing room wearing the most terrible green tartan golf jumper she had ever seen. On his head was a canary yellow cap, which matched his canary yellow Argyles. He walked in a slightly clumsy manner and looked more like a grandfather than a king. To think of him as the husband of the most elegant and queenly woman Molly in England, well, it was something to be believed. Even more unbelievable was that they were perfectly ordinary at the birthday ball. Mind, she thought, they are in different situations. For Mr Holmes, it was just another ordinary day for golf, while Mrs Holmes had to act convincingly the mistress of a grand palace in front of the public eye.

“Going into the gallery now, love?”

“Yes dear.”

“Good. Has to be my most favourite part of the house for its sheer magnificence.”

The gallery was magnificent. To call it a gallery is a bit of a misnomer, for it was not just one room but a series of rooms joined together. Some walls just had one giant floor-to-ceiling painting of a version of the Holmes family at one time or another, others contained multiple oil portraits. As they got deeper photos also start cropping up, from black-and-white, to faded Polaroids, and finally vibrant and detailed modern prints sitting right next to a recent oil portrait. Everyone was there, from Sherlock and Mycroft standing side by side, one haven’t quite lost his baby fat and the other confidence in his age. Then there was the three siblings together, the elder brother looking towards them, the middle straight at the camera, and the little sister up at them.

Then there was a blond girl inserted in some pictures. As the photos grew newer the girl grew older when suddenly the girl was no longer a girl. She became a man.
“That, Miss Molly, was Bernard Lestrade,” informed Mrs Holmes. “He was the childhood friend and beau of Dr Watson. I think the word for him was ‘transgender?’ Anyway, you know Dr Watson and Gregory Lestrade, right?”

“Yes.”

“Poor John was heartbroken when Bernard died in a car crash while Gregory lost his only family member left, his younger brother. Do you know how much hurt a death can cause? It can break families but fortunately for all it brought us closer together.”

Molly nodded and proceeded into the next room. She spotted Moriarty littered here and there in the photos. Behind one of those was a dark circular shape where a miniature used to hang. It must have been his oil portrait, she thought. Shamed by the family, they would rather not see him in such openness again. But they cannot afford to take down all his likenesses, for there were hundreds and he was so much a part of their life.

A maid was at the end of the rooms polishing the frame of a recent portrait of Mr Holmes. It was a detailed masterpiece which has somehow captured his intimidating gaze without being too intense so that one might be able to catch the essence of Holmes.

“Ah, here is his portrait. You know, dear,” continued Mrs Gardiner, “that I had never actually met Mr Sherlock Holmes. Is that portrait a good likeness?”

Molly coloured a little. “Yes, I suppose so.”

“You know Mister Holmes, dearie?,,” asked the maid after she finished polishing.

“A little.”

“Do you think he is very handsome?”

“Yes, I do.”

“I think there is a much better picture of him in the main hall. It is much bigger and painted by a much more experienced painter.”

She then pointed to another miniature, this time depicting Georgiana Holmes. It was a watercolour done when she was only a cute child of six. “What do you think of Georgiana? Is she as beautiful as her brother is handsome?,,” asked Mrs Gardiner to the maid.

“Oh goodness, she is the most lovely thing to see! And she is so talented too! She is the master of the piano and a few other instruments. In fact, the other day we bought in a new piano as her birthday gift. Don’t tell anyone, it is a surprise. She will see it tomorrow.”
Mr Gardiner had an easy way of questioning and soon got the ball rolling— it was evident the maid was eager, out of pride and attachment, to continue talking about the various children of her master.

“Does the Holmes siblings come down here often?”

“Not as much as they ought to. Mycroft is too busy with his work and Georgiana is at school. If Sherlock got married though…”

“What do you mean?”

“Sherlock is basically the heir of this place as Mycroft would rather not have any children. So there is a lot of pressure for him to stay here more often, especially now my master and mistress are getting elderly. But then again, I don’t think anyone is good enough for Sherlock.”

“I am sure that it is mainly due to him,” Molly snarked.

Mrs Gardiner stared at Molly out of fear. The maid did not seem to detect it though. “Yes, you are right. You know, he is the loveliest man I had ever met, and I have been the housekeeper for over thirty years? Yet I have never heard him say a bad word.”

“Mr Sherlock seems to be a good man,” continued Mr Gardiner.

“Oh, but of course! He is generous, supports the poor, and is a really good brother. I have heard people call him proud but I cannot see why. He is much better than some of the other young ‘uns who abandon their families and spend their time in sin.”

Molly could not believe they were talking about the same person. Yet, the housekeeper had known him longer, so she had the better say. Molly grew quite warm as she listened to her wax lyrically about how wonderful he was. She grew warmer as she met eye to eye with Sherlock’s miniature right beside his brother’s.

They must have spent over an hour pouring over the hundreds of paintings and photos made over the centuries. But once they had studied the last photograph, a crisp black and white of a recent ball with the Holmes all noble and proud at the centre, Molly and the Gardiners were ready to leave for a late lunch. There, on the driveway was a sleek black sedan. Molly first dismissed them as more visitors until the doors opened.

It was Mr Sherlock Holmes.

Mrs Holmes was just as surprised as Molly.

“Mummy, how nice to see you? Is Papa doing well?”

“Your father is doing well, thank you very much. Now, young man, can you please explain why you
are here one day early?"

“Mummy, dearest, we thought we might surprise you! Do you want me to go into Manchester and come back tomorrow?"

“No, no, don’t be silly, stay! You have travelled all this way only to leave now? Preposterous! We need you down here more often and you know it."

“Oh, Molly, surprised to see you here.” He then gave a smirk that said otherwise. “Mummy, is she a houseguest, or another one of those peasants jealous of our house?”

“No wonder why you are not married. What do you think?"

“If she was a houseguest, she better get changed. Mind, I like her. Can she stay?"

“Thought you might say that. Miss Molly? Mr and Mrs Gardiner? Would you like to stay here tonight?"

This was one of the rare moments where Molly was so shocked she had difficulty taking in her surroundings. It was only after she packed up her hotel room and returned to Pemberly was she able to see properly.

“Care to join me for a walk, Miss Molly?,” asked Sherlock Holmes when he saw Molly in a much more presentable dress and broad brim hat.

“Yeah, sure."

Mr Sherlock Holmes was mainly silent throughout the walk the the Pemberly woods. All he ever talked about was some important landmarks dotted around the place and talked a bit of history about the estate. To be fair, Molly had a shut-lipped syndrome as well, only making sounds affirming Mr Holmes as he talked about some tree or bridge. The woods were lovely with mottled sunlight here and there. The ground was dry and yet springy to walk on. The air was cool and refreshing compared to the stifle outside.

They soon reached the side of the lake opposite the mansion. There was a stone bench under the willows, which Mr Holmes invited Molly to sit down on. Mr Holmes remained standing up.

“So, who are those...people you are travelling with?"

“My uncle and aunt Gardiners, maternal side."

“Oh, really? I quite like them. Does he like fishing?"

“Yes...I suppose."

“I must invite him one day. Some of these rivers contain satisfactory brown trout."

“I would never have guessed.”
“So many secrets around here, all delightful. Tell me, how is your family? Especially Mary, tell me she is well.”

“She is better, I think. I still think it will be a little while left before she makes full recovery.”

“Ah. Sorry.”

“No need. By the way, your mother mentioned that you were supposed to come tomorrow with your little group of friends. When will they come?”

“Tomorrow, actually. Irene is coming, so is Harriet, and Thomasina…”

“Thomasina?”

“You might know her as Tom Hurst. She is rather embarrassed by her name.”

“I’m not surprised.”

“What you should be surprised about is how long the marriage managed to last. You see, Harriet was married before to a person called Clara-forgotten her last name- but divorced on account of Harriet’s alcoholism. Harriet is over it now but Tom met her while Harriet was recovering. Tom soon got married to Harriet, a year after meeting her, and immediately relapsed. How they managed to pull through with Harriet making full recovery again is nothing short of a miracle. I still cannot get why.”

“Because of love, I suppose. You love somebody when you accept their flaws and help them get over it.”

“True, true.”

They then sat in silence for a little while, unsure what to say. Holmes then perked up his eyes when he suddenly remembered what to say.

“Goodness, I almost forgot. There is somebody coming tomorrow that would rather like to be introduced to you. Would you like the honour of meeting my sister tomorrow?”

“Oh, but of course.”

That question gave Molly more relief than she would rather say. It proved that, since Georgiana was the most precious person in the world for Sherlock, at least he didn’t hate Molly. Quite the opposite. It showed that Sherlock held Molly in high esteem, and was one of the highest compliments he could muster.

They walked back in slightly less awkward silence than before. When they reached the house again, he asked Molly if she would rather go back in. Molly said she rather preferred the sunshine, so they stayed outside, not too sure what else to say. It was only then did Molly remember she had travelled around England, and she gave a full recollection what happened, with Sherlock interjecting with his opinions about the places they visited.
They talked for a little while until the Gardiners unexpectedly popped out the door looking for Molly. Both Molly and Sherlock was forced to go back in on account of dinner being served. There, she was able to ascertain who the Holmes really were. Violet Holmes was a very intelligent lady of formidable disposition, but she was still sweet and dotted on her husband and children. Archibald was more down to earth and Molly found it easier talking to him. She found out many things about Violet this way, how she became the top mathematician in Oxford and could have become a physicist. “She gave it up all for children. Not too sure if I should regret that for her, though she seems alright about it. But before she did, at least she wrote a book on the dynamics of combustion.”

“Did she?”

“Marvellously complicated stuff, let me tell you. I never bother to keep up. Unfortunately, as it was the only book she wrote, it became a magnum opus, but as far as great works go, it was a little explosive package.”

Before she went to bed that night, after she sent an email to Mary what she did that day, she and the Gardiners talked about what they thought of Sherlock Holmes. They thought he was a much better person than what the rumours depicted of him.

“He is definitely of old stock. You can tell by his politeness and stately air,” started her uncle.

“True, but he is not unbecoming. He is definitely not proud,” continued her aunt.

“His behaviour is the most surprising. He was not only civil to us, but actually attentive. There was actually no need for that- we are complete strangers, and Molly had only known him on and off for a few months.”

“I agree with you, Molly, in that he is less pleasant than Moriarty, but why did you paint Sherlock Holmes in such a terrible light?”

Molly blushed and then explained that he was uncommonly good that day; beforehand he acted in such a despicable way against her.

Mr Gardiner smiled at that reason. “Maybe you are right, Molly. After all, such great men are often capricious in their manner. I would expect him to warn me off the grounds with a shotgun tomorrow.”

“Surely not!” laughed his wife.

Molly laughed as well, but deep down inside, she knew that it would never happen, and only she would know why.
The visitors arrived just as Sherlock predicted. Molly had just finished her late and leisurely breakfast when she saw another sleek black sedan being driven up from the parking lot. It bore the coat of arms of the Holmes on the front door as well as the bonnet. Another more ordinary silver car was following behind it. Molly knew what it implied and told her relations about the honour she was about to receive. Her aunt and uncle then smiled at Molly’s embarrassment at the situation for they were the only ones who really understood the situation completely. After all, one does not introduce relations personally without some partiality. Molly on the other hand was too nervous to catch on what was really happening.

Molly was lead to the drawing room, where she paced to calm herself down and to straighten herself over and over again in the various mirrors. She watched herself, surprised at her nervousness, and then her aunt and uncle, annoyed by their amusement. The Holmes parents were there as well, intently watching the window for signs of their beloved children.

But it was already too late. Sherlock Holmes arrived with his younger sister and the formidable introduction began. There a correction was made- Miss Holmes was not proud, but only extremely shy. She refused to meet her eyes with any strangers and could only speak in monosyllables. She was taller than Molly and although she was barely seventeen she already had a full figure. Her face was not as beautiful as expected but she still had good humour and kindness in her face. She was more embarrassed than Molly, which gave Molly slight confidence in shared pain. But the Holmes parents broke the ice by standing up, hugging her, and left explaining jokingly that they expected the young ones to prattle on about their recent lives, and that they would only get in the way.

A few moments after the meeting footsteps were heard in the hall. It was Mycroft Holmes and Gregory Lestrade entering the room and then promptly sitting down in one of the easy chairs in the corner with a cursory greeting. The Watsons then popped in the room, firstly the good doctor and then his sisters and in-law. If Molly had not forgiven him then, which, rest assured, she already had, she would have forgiven him anyway as soon as he opened his mouth. He greeted everybody genially and then enquired about their health and wellbeing. To Molly he asked about her family in general, and never changed his easy, friendly manner that characterised him.

For the Gardiners this was a very interesting place for observation. They were interested in their niece and young host. On the lady's side they were satisfied with the indications of attraction. They arrived at that conclusion with heavily veiled questioning as well as some clandestine watching. It was now the gentleman’s turn. He fulfilled all their hopes and expectations by inadvertently displaying his affections for Molly.

Molly, in the middle of it all, was too busy to notice. She wanted to do some observation of her own but above all to please everybody around her. She was frightened that she would fail in what turned out the most easiest job of them all. Watson was easy, Georgiana was determined, and Sherlock
Holmes was already enchanted. Mycroft on the other hand decided to watch them all with a smirk on his face and his husband made polite conversation with the unattended women.

Molly was surprised to find that Dr Watson did not bring along the headmistress, if they were indeed close at all. What was even more surprising was that he ended up talking more about Mary than anyone else, especially since he had not seen her for a long time. He often asked Molly about her, from her health to how her career was going. Eventually, he signed and said to Molly:

“You know, I miss her constantly. I had not had the pleasure to see her since the 19th January, at my ball. Goodness, it is the 2nd of September now. How long has that been? Seven and a half months?”

“I don’t know, actually. I will need to consult my diary.”

“And Molly, are all your sisters still at home?” There was a air of nervousness around him, and the fact that he had to screen his questions so selectively.

“The youngest is on holiday in London, but otherwise we are still there.”

Molly tried to have a good look at Sherlock Holmes. She often didn’t succeed, but when she did, she saw a look of gentle sweetness and was friendly to all his guests. It was a look so far different from the one he gave her all those months ago at the first meeting Molly could safely conclude that his temporary improvement had at least stuck around for more than a day. Never has she seen him so civil. Not only did he extend his politeness to Molly but to her relatives as well. He was talking to, and actually seeking, the good opinions of new acquaintances that just a few months ago he found repulsive. Such the difference was his behaviour between her first meeting with him and now Molly could barely conceal her surprise.

Dr Watson rose to depart back to Edinburgh in the late afternoon but before he could do so Sherlock Holmes recommended that, although Molly and her aunt was now a most welcome guest in the house, would she like to invite them over for afternoon tea tomorrow? “After all, Georgie, it would not do for the guests to feel embarrassed to be left out of a party right in front of them.” Georgina was acquiescent though how she managed to do it with nothing but three and four letter words is still a marvel today. As for Molly, she could only look away and say a tentative yes.

Dr Watson then took leave by saying that he was looking forward to see Molly again as well as her dear family- by which he meant Mary- and then said that this day gave him the most enjoyment he had for the last year or so. When he was safely out the front door, Molly, fearful of interrogation from her aunt and uncle, made a quick excuse and ran to her bedroom while being trailed by Mycroft’s deep, echoing chortle. Not that she needed to do so. The Gardiners found it interesting Molly downplayed her familiarity with Sherlock Holmes (and the fact that he was seriously in love with her) but did not find anything to talk about.

For Mr Holmes, it was now his job to cultivate a new, better reputation. This was easier than
he actually knew because his new acquaintances couldn’t find any fault in him. Indeed such change was his manner that the Gardiner’s thought what was said of him in Sevenoaks was an entirely different person. Backing this up was the housekeeper. As she had known him since he was a newborn, there was much interest in her opinions. Even the people around Poynton could not find any fault in him, apart from his pride. But pride can go both ways. As a result of his familial pride Mr Holmes was unusually attentive to the people around his estate and was a generous patron.

-§-

Molly could not sleep that night. Due to her running thoughts of that one man in the mansion it took her two hours to sleep on the second night. Her mind was only clear on one thing- no, she no longer hated him. She kind of regretted even disliking him for a little while but the dislike came from a more ignorant time. No, she no longer hated him because she came to know him better, especially his more admirable qualities. But there was something else that made her feel so confused. Yes, she figured it out. It was gratitude. Gratitude that he had the grace to still love her after her unjust treatment against him. Gratitude that he was brave enough to show her his deepest fears even after she thrashed broken his pride. He was the first to forgive, the first to change for the better so that he would know her relatives and she know his. He actually changed for her benefit. Such a quick improvement inspires not only gratitude and admiration but maybe, just maybe, love.

Molly sat up at that thought. But she was supposed to hate him! But no, circumstances change, and people do to. It would have made her an ungrateful creature if she did not do some improvements herself. She was now interested in his welfare, just as he was now. She respected him, even went so far as esteem him, just as he was now. And now she realised just how much of an impact she could have on his happiness, just as he could impact her’s.

She wondered what happened to the dress he sent her, and whether that was a suitable dress for a first date.

The next morning was unusually quiet. The guests and the Holmes had a late breakfast before the men went out to do a spot of fishing. Mrs Holmes smiled as she kissed her husband and her sons and asked for plentiful catches. Molly then noticed out of the corner of her eye a maid delivering a small package upstairs. She wondered who it was for.
An embarrassing tea

Molly knew as much that much of Irene Watson’s dislike of her came from jealousy, so she wondered what her presence must have felt like to the downed suitor. This presented another question- how civil can Irene afford to be to her?

This was an important question of utmost urgency as Molly opened up the package on her bed. It was another beautiful gift from Sherlock, or, to be more specific, a set of gifts. It contained a wide while floppy hat with white roses on top, a white silk sundress that reached her knees with two wide straps on top, and copious amount of lace, and white leather sandals. When she tried it on, it fitted perfectly. A note at the bottom of it all- “You should go to the tailors more often. SH"

She met the ladies at the outside veranda at the east side of the house. There was Miss Holmes, with her regalia befitting her status, the Hursts in drab, and Miss Watson in an eye-catching red wraparound. A fourth strange woman, in deep blue, was also seated. Mrs Gardiner ran in soon after, apologising for her lateness. Miss Holmes smiled and began the tea ceremony.

It was an awkward affair, mainly because of Miss Holmes's shyness and fear of offending anybody. It was polite and rather civilised, but the way she conducted the whole matter did made her look a little haughty in the wrong setting. Mrs Gardiner and Molly rightly pitied her.

The strange woman turned out to be Miss Mortimer, too polite to declare she was also in fact a psychiatrist. She proved to be the most genteel of them all by being the first to try introduce conversation. It was stilted as nobody knew what to say but somehow it kept on going with the aid of Molly and Mrs Gardiner. Miss Holmes did talk a little bit, but nothing more than one word sentences and in places where she would be less likely heard.

Even more distressed than Miss Holmes herself is Molly, who was constantly watched by Miss Watson. This was especially done when Molly spoke to Georgiana. However, this would not have prevented Molly from converting to Miss Holmes if they were actually sitting in a comfortable distance away. Not that Molly minded as her mind was preoccupying her anyway. She consistently feared that Mr Sherlock Holmes would suddenly appear out of nowhere, and yet she wanted it to happen. She could not determine which wish she wanted more. Her eyes were distant. When Miss Watson suddenly asked her how Molly’s family was, Molly didn’t even register that it was Miss Watson that said it.

She stayed like this for the better part of the half hour. Her mind was bought back to the present by Miss Holmes announcing that the servants were bringing in the food. The procession was nothing but magnificent. Crystal bowls heaped high with the freshest seasonal fruit was brought to the table, all of which was grown in the nearby orchard. Then came the cakes, all little and dainty, in bone porcelain and silver cupcake towers.
This gave her time to think. While munching on the sweet peaches she wondered whether she wanted to see Sherlock Holmes or not more. Fate, being like a genie granting the oddest whims, made the decision for her. Sherlock Holmes, in the full glory of a tight purple shirt and even tighter black pants, came waltzing in trailed by Dr Watson. Only then Molly wished she never wanted that in the first place.

He was a magnet in the room. All eyes were turned to him but some more than others. Miss Watson still had a hold of power and exceeded it as much as she could. Jealously had not made her desperate yet. Meanwhile Miss Holmes acted as if she had just remembered a promise, and was a little more talkative towards Molly. It was the last straw for Miss Watson.

“Miss Margaret, did Wrong Direction move out of Sevenoaks recently? It must have been a great shock to your family.”

It was rude otherwise to speak of Moriarty’s name in the great house of Holmes. But an insulation was enough and soon unpleasant memories bubbled up Molly’s mind. But Molly knew this might happen and had mentally prepared herself for it. This allowed he to reply in a sufficiently deadpan tone. While she did this she gave a quick scan to see how the others reacted to the question. Mr Holmes was blushing while his sister casted her eyes down. If Miss Watson knew what pain she caused her beloved friends for saying that, she might have refrained, but this personal attack was for Molly and for Molly only. This was also the reason why no syllable of Miss Holmes’s intended elopement was ever mentioned.

This was enough to kill off the meeting. Her sister Harry Hurst made a quick excuse that her party had to make their way back to Edinburgh even though they were supposed to stay for two days. While their bags were loaded up in their car Miss Watson could not resist but further vent her disapproval of Molly. Many times she tried to get Miss Holmes to join her but Miss Holmes quietly refused to. Sherlock Holmes liked Molly, and this was reason enough for her to like Molly too. After all, her brothers was never wrong.

“Goodness, look at the colour of her skin! She looks so pasty, as if she was on the verge of death. You would think that summer would give her more vitality but no. God seems to have abandoned her.”

“As she usually takes sensible precautions against the sun’s harsh rays, I am not surprised she does not look sunburnt.”

“Well, I do not see any beauty in her. Her face is too round, and she looks plain. Her nose is common and there is no definition. Her teeth are tolerable, but she needs to go to a dentist. As for her eyes, which you call pretty, well, I have to disagree. They look too sharp, much alike a snake’s and she is too proud.”
Miss Watson knew that her grip on Mr Holmes was finally lost but to degrade others is not the best way to bring oneself up. But it also be noted that angry people are not necessarily the wisest.

“I remember that day,” she continued, “when we first met her at Sevenoaks, we were all surprised at her reputations for her beauty. In fact, I recall that evening, you said ‘She is a beauty- I shall soon call her mother a wit.’ But she soon seems to have improved on you.”

“I suppose you are right. Her apparence improves on acquaintance and now I consider her the most beautiful woman of my acquaintance.”

Again, that evening the Gardiners discussed their day. Mr Gardiner was caught out a few times telling the fisherman’s lie while the ladies discussed their mainly pleasant afternoon tea with cakes and fruit while leaving out the part after Mr Sherlock Holmes came in. They talked about everything- the house, the estate, the temperate of the people, just anything but Mr Holmes. Molly would have rather known what her aunt thought of him, while Mrs Gardiner hoped that Molly would bring up the subject.
It was common for Molly and Mary to either call each other every day or at the very least email if they are separated from each other. Before the next series of events they regarded the habit as a harmless pastime. Now they saw it as vital actions that could save lives.

It all began on the third day of Molly’s stay at Pemberly. That morning, Molly called to find a worried, flustered Mary.

“Slow down, Mary. Count to ten. Now, tell me, what has happened?”

“Kate is MISSING.”

“WHAT?!”

“I think you heard me the first time. Kate has disappeared! Gone! Poof!”

“But how did you find out?”

“The Darcys just called in to say Kate did not return to the hotel yesterday. At first they thought she just went for a harmless jaunt, just as she usually does, but now they are dead worried.”

“Have you tried her mobile?”

“It just went straight to voicemail.”

“God, god, god, god, what do we do now?”

It is a common truth amongst siblings that no matter how annoying they tend to get, if you grew up with them you will lay down your life for them. Both sisters ended up pacing up and down their bedrooms trying to calm themselves down.

“Who was she last seen with?”

“The Darcys say Moriarty.”

“Are you serious.”

“I wish I wasn’t.”

“Could she be dead by now?”

“We both know the answer.”

“Oh, GOD!”
All the shouting prompted the Gardiners, who had their bedroom next door, to knock on Molly’s door. Molly had to hold Mary to explain the situation to her aunt and uncle. When she got back to the conversation Mary had even more startling news.

“Kitty had just received a call from Kate. Kate is going to… am I saying this right, Kitty, she is going to marry… dear me… Moriarty?! Kitty, do not jest with me. Are you serious? You are?!”

“Mary, Mary, is Kitty telling the truth?”

“As far as I can tell, yes.”

“But when?”

“I don’t know. Kitty just mentioned they were only engaged.”

“That is already enough of a death warrant. Aunt, Uncle! We need to leave immediately! There is no time to waste!”

This was also enough to prompt Mr Sherlock Holmes to run to Molly to see what had happened. He had a worried look on his face when he saw Molly in a flustered state sitting on her bed. He asked if everything was alright. Molly tried to put on a brave face but she bursted into tears.

Sherlock Holmes’s brow deepened. “Are you sure, Molly, there is nothing I can do for you?”

Molly looked up from her tear stained eyes. “No, no, nothing. It is just that… what you said about Moriarty… it is horribly, horribly correct.”

She continued crying as her aunt comforted her with a tight hug and soothing words. The men could only watch in compassionate silence. At length Molly hiccuped a bit, but she regained the power of speech. “Kate, oh dear, Kate, she is missing. Goodness what she is doing now but she is most likely to be with Moriarty. Or was, she is most likely dead now! Oh wretched sister, if only I had the courage to expose the truth of Moriarty before this summer! She had the most wild of spirits, of course she would do as Moriarty had told her. Marry? Please! How rebellious! Oh, what ill fate to have lead us to this!”

Molly then bursted into another series of tears. Mrs Gardiner again comforted her while hiding her confusion. Mr Gardiner did the job for her while staring at Sherlock Holmes. Holmes then shrugged and whispered he would explain later.

When that episode finished Holmes then asked what was to be done. Molly said she did not ask, and immediately dialled Mary. The phone was answered in one tone. Molly, with Mary’s permission, switched her mobile onto speakphone so all may converse.
“Miss Hooper, Sherlock Holmes here, anything done on this matter?”

“Mr Holmes, good morning. My father and I are planning to go to London to track their steps.”

“Are you sure that Kate is more than just ‘missing’, and that she is not playing a prank?”

“Positively sure. Kate would never lie to Kitty.”

“You also seem certain that Kate is dead.”

“After what Molly told me, what did you expect?”

“Very well. I am here to tell you that I do not believe that Kate is dead. On the contrary, I think she is well.”

“Why would you say that?”

“I know Moriarty. Something tells me that he can do more to shame your family than leave her in a ditch.”

“Such as?”

“Making her a single teenage mother.”

“Dear Lord!”

“There are much better revenges than leaving your victims dead, dear Miss Hooper. That is a fact of life.”

“But why would he do that?”

“Same reason why you would shoot partridges.”

“Sport.”

“Exactly.”

Sherlock Holmes then gave the phone back to Molly and the Gardiners to discuss what may have happened while he got the servants to pack and load up their bags. They then had to write flurried letters making false excuses on why they cannot keep their planned engagements. When it was time to leave Molly tried to say goodbye to Sherlock Holmes and thank him for his hospitality but found him pacing in his study with his head down and eyes shining. She thought he might be too deep in thought to notice her anyway so she left quietly home.

Gratitude and respect makes for good foundations of love. This of course made Molly’s change of heart more believable. But if her affections were based on two words, or even first deductions, then it was a little less worthy. Molly did experiment the latter method on Moriarty. Now with the bitter result in fruition there is very little hope of her trying that again. Kate on the other hand, well, was she taught to believe otherwise? All the teenage dramas she watched, and all the romance books she read, all were advocating love at first sight. She must have been so sure she had it. If only she knew
the trap she was willing walking into!

You might think of Kate otherwise, but she was very much the sheep in control of the wolf. She had an easy, superficial charm of beauty as well as a hopeless romantic mind. But why would Moriarty marry her? After all, it would have been enough to simply elope and then dump the pregnant, shamed, and ruined Kate at the door. But then again, to be related to such a horrid man, even if it was only through paper and not actually by parentage, well, that was enough to spoil her descendents. Besides Kate might have subtly nagged him to it.

The Gardiners and their niece left Pemberly at mid-morning. For Molly, she would never want to be any later. She knew she was needed at home, to help support her mother and her younger sisters. She did wonder for a little while on the way back why Mary ended up going to London with their father instead of staying at home. But her thoughts were directed more towards pitying her youngest sister, and how poor her life’s education had been. If only Molly did tell everyone of her horrid revelations! But that was in the past and now they must concentrate on the future. The main thing now is to get her sister safely back home. If they have a baby to deal with later, well, that was something to be dealt with later.
First efforts

“I have been thinking it for a little while now,” said Mr Gardiner after a quick lunch break from driving, “and upon second thoughts I thought upon the unlikeness of the situation. By eloping with Kate Mr Moriarty here is taking a very big risk. I would even venture to say that he is almost committing suicide. What is his prize, his motivation, for one thing? As far as I can gather from what Mr Holmes had told me Moriarty is doing it out of revenge against us, act unknown. If our family owned vast lands and had connections to several royal European houses, then I would understand. But we, respectable as we are, have no sphere of influence outside of Surrey. So this puzzles me- the absolute lack of motive plus the huge consequences when he gets caught. I say when, because your father and sister is trying their damn hardest to track him down, even if it means they have to dedicate the rest of their lives for it.”

“Thanks for the reassurance, my dear uncle, and I am sure that one day Mr Moriarty will be brought to justice. However I do think I have been withholding important information again. After what has happened I better make sure not to do that again. The day Kate left, when she was leaving with the Darcy’s, I believe I might have hinted to Moriarty to know who he truly was.”

“What-oh, I see. Scared him a little, didn’t you.”

“You think?”

“That makes more sense. He fears that you might dob him in, so he is providing you with a reason why not to.”

“So the Holmes family never bought him to justice because of…shame?”

“Shame for being his family, yes.”

“Okay. But don’t you think it is more urgent now to find Kate.”

“Right then. Where to start?”

“Ohh, umm…”

Commercial airlines are one of the most defining industries of the 20th and early 21st century as they are based on the miracle of being able to transport people over very large distances in a very small amount of time. This makes tracking them down much harder than before, especially if Moriarty had travelled under false identities. However, Molly there is this one place that Kate would go. It was the ultimate romantic’s paradise.

“Gretna Green.”

Ah yes, the infamous Gretna Green. Many English people have married there due to its more romantic connotations. It harked back to the days where England had more strict marriage laws than Scotland. Back then parents could veto a marriage if their children were under 21 so the star-crossed (with the stars sometimes made out of drink) lovers would travel to Scotland away from the
clutches of their parents as well as the law. There, so long as they are at least teenagers, they could marry without the fear of their parents’ retaliation. Even today one only needs to be 16 to marry without parental consent.

That last fact worried Molly.

“But would she actually marry him? I find that hard to believe,” said Mrs Gardiner.

“Except she would,” replied Molly. “She has always been a spoilt one, you see. Mum has been indulging her ever since she was born. And in the last year or so, her behaviour has gone worse. She has done nothing but think of boys and she has not been encouraged to think otherwise. When she isn’t thinking about boys she is thinking of herself and her vanity. She is starting to fail at school because instead of homework she instead goes out with boys. Really, she is starting to become a failure! And of course now that Moriarty comes along, she now thinks she is Juliet of a fairytale. If only she knew the true tragedy of her ending!”

“And of course I suppose Kate does not know of Moriarty’s true nature?”

“This is the saddest fact of it all, and the most tragic. Until I went to Kent and found out the truth, I was just as ignorant as her. And when I told Mary the truth we both agreed that it was best to keep it secret. Even when Kate went with Mrs Darcy to London I thought Kate needed not know, for I thought surely she was not stupid enough to fall into his trap. Except she was. Oh, wretched me!”

“When they left Sevenoaks, you did not suspect any affection between the two.”

“Not even the slightest. Sure, Kate had a crush on him, but then again every girl and a few boys within the town were falling head over heels upon seeing him. He never paid any particular attention to her and before she left she got bored of him. Before she left she was fancying the bass player.”

They arrived at London before the clock reached three, where they met up with Mary and Mr Hooper. They had arranged the Gardiner’s place to be the battle HQ, to the amusement of the Gardiner children as they watched their parents and cousins discuss some “very important matter, and no dear, you must not listen in.” When Mary got out of the car Mary ran down the steps so they may give each other a hug. Copious tears were cried by both parties. Both tried to comfort each other while trying to make sense of what had just happened.

“And how is everyone else? Mum? Kitty? Sarah?”

“They are well as they can be, thank goodness. Sarah apparently is relishing being the oldest girl in the house and apparently the most well-behaved.”

“Oh goodness, what is she doing now?”

“Saying her silly sayings and parading around like proud peacock. Emphasis on the last syllable.”
They went into the dining room to find a huge map of Britain. In red circles was where Kate frequented in London, while green ones where she could be now. Yellow yarn, held by gold pins, indicated route taken to the green places. In a corner was a video link with the Darcys helping out Mr Hooper was still labelling important places Kate might still be.

Mr Hooper turned around to see his favourite daughter. He then walked to her to give a bear hug. “Don’t worry, Molly, Kate is not out of the country.”

“Dad, that is great news! But how can you be so sure?”

“Your uncle here has the most prestigious connections to the police in this country, as it turned out. He got them to check airport security to make sure nobody that looked like her left the country. There is always a slim chance she used a good enough disguise to evade them but that is not very likely. Also, her passport has not been used.”

“Oh, thank goodness!”

“Now, my dear ones, please help me with this map.”

While they tried to make deductions on where Lydia could be, based on little leads they could barely follow, they constantly talked to the Darcys to try and gauge the possibility of Kate marrying. But they were only amateurs and soon all their leads turned out to be false. It was a dark atmosphere that followed them into dinner that evening, for they did not know what to do next.

“So what do you think Moriarty will do now?,“ asked Molly over the plain dinner of fish.

“Kate would of course want to get married and of course Moriarty will have to give in. I think she would have the decency at least to want to get married before loosing her virginity. Then goodness what else he would have do next. He might become a leech, or maybe he will fake his death as well as destroy any evidence they were ever married. But the most important thing is that he will impregnate her.”

“But surely there is only a small chance that she would get pregnant?”

“15% chance for every try, more or less.”

“Wait a minute. What we are all doing here is assuming that Kate wants to get married in the first place. What if she doesn’t?”

“But of course she does!” interjected Mary. “She has been talking about marriage since she was twelve. No, what we should ask is whether Moriarty wants marriage or not. Maybe his charms can persuade her otherwise.”

“How else can you be so sure of her intentions?”

“Well, she did write a note before she left…”

“Show us!” cried Molly and her father at the same time.
Mary then meekly took out a roughly folded note from her pocket. The note read: “My dear Evie. I am off today for the most wonderful adventure, for I am to marry. Only an imbecile won’t know who! Yes, he is the most wonderful man in the world and I can no longer live without him by my side. And no, there is no cause to tell my folks what I will be doing, for won’t it be the most wonderful surprise for them to see my wedding Snapchats? And don’t worry about my clothes. I will send for them soon. P.S I have finally found the father to my wonderful children. I shall have many, and I shall love them all.”

“It is then signed Katty,” sighed Mary.

“A tragedy in the making,” mused Molly. “Where we can see King Lear, she could only see a blank page. Now what?”

“A child masquerading as an adult. People have a hard time seeing through disguises, especially when the mask mirrors the face. I’m going out tonight.”

“But Mary, where?”

“I need to make a few private calls.”
The wedding plans

It was a Saturday after all. Molly thought she should be back at Sevenoaks to support her family. Yet here she was still in London waiting for her sister to come back after her abrupt leaving. She did have a rough night sleep worrying about her sister, as attested by her lack of glow in her eyes. Yet when she was eating her breakfast she noticed her sister walking up the road. Her initial joy was cut when she saw a young woman of similar appearance…

It was Kate. Molly couldn’t believe her eyes. She immediately roused her father and the Gardiners to check if her eyesight was true. But there was no need, for as soon as they all came downstairs Mary had opened the door and let her youngest sister in.

Mr Hooper ran up to his daughter to hug Kate after Molly did. He than gave a quick laughter then settled his eyes very seriously. “Now that I see you are well, I want to kill you.”

“Oh, please Dad, please don’t! Believe me, Dad, out of all the men I could have married, Moriarty isn’t such a bad lot. Besides, don’t you want me married? So I won’t be so much of a burden when you die?”

“I never told you that.”

“But Mum did. She told me that young women like me may as well get married as soon as possible lest we become burdens. I know about the entailment.”

“Right, the knife shall point southwards.”

“Oh, Bob, you know that uxoricide will never do!,” laughed Mr and Mrs Gardiner as they both swept up Kate from her feet. “How are you feeling, dear?”

“Right as rain! I was treated rather well by my fiancée and trust me, he is not like the other men, you know, the one that abuses and kills their wives and girlfriends? I know the ones! I will never be that stupid!”

Molly and Mary could only stare at each other as Kate prattled on about how lovely a husband Moriarty will become.

“Listen, Kate, do you realise what day it is?”

“Saturday 5th.”

“And when does school start?”

“Uh, soon?”

“SOON? Katrina, it had started two days ago! Everybody is worried sick! You just expect that you can get married this weekend and then go back to school?”

“Uh, yep.”

“No, Katrina, you cannot do this!”
“Yes, Katrina, you must do this.”

Everybody either turned around or looked up to face the portly but well dressed gentleman with an umbrella on his hand.

“G-g-g-god, M-m-m-ist-t-t-er Holmes, fancy seeing you here!,” stuttered Molly.

“Call me Mycroft.” He then smiled at Molly and then faced the others sternly. “For those under my employ, a respectable 'Mr Holmes' is still expected.”

Mary only nodded solemnly. Molly’s face was full of questions.

“Mary, were you under the employ of Mycroft the whole time?!”

“Yes, Molly, I am his most respected spy.”

“But…but.”

“I was surprised that you never noticed it before, actually. After all, you have always commented how lucky we are to get such a bargain for our flat in London.”

“So your efforts in house hunting just amounted to…basically been given a flat by a mysterious government agency?”

“Not quite. It is owned by the government and we still have to pay rent for it. Just…reduced rates, that’s all.”

“I need to lie down.”

Half an hour later Molly went back into the dining room where everyone else was sitting around the table. Molly sat down the listened to the rambles of the plans they had to capture Moriarty. Mycroft raised his eyebrow.

“Now, my dear Molly, do you have any questions?"

“Yes. Must Kate marry Moriarty?"

“Only if she wants to, though she will be encouraged to do so. But the crux of the matter is to get Moriarty back at Sevenoaks so we may arrest him.”

“But why have you not done it before?”

“Mister Moriarty here is an expert criminal mastermind who had technically done nothing wrong since his university days. This is the whole genius of his enterprise. Are you familiar with the idea of a consulting detective?”
Molly only nodded as her mind flooded with Sherlock’s constant explanations of what he does.

“Well, then there is no need to explain what a consulting criminal is. This is what Moriarty does. He advises other people to do jobs, sometimes convincing people to do the dirty work for him, and then watch from the sidelines.”

“So you cannot arrest him until…”

“…we had caught him out on a crime. This time, it is the kidnapping of your younger sister.”

“I wasn't kidnapped!,” cried out Kate.

“Shut up you insolent child,” replied Mycroft.

“Mycroft, are you saying that we must hold a wedding?,” asked Molly with a raised eyebrow. The rest of her paternal family, apart from Kate, of course, mirrored her facial expression.

“Yes. But I will only trouble you with the time. All else, expenses, fake relatives, and guests, will be provided by us?”

“Us? Meaning…”

“The Government, yes.”

“Well, Mr Holmes, I thank you for the offer, but…”

“You must hold the wedding, Mr Hooper. To do otherwise will amount to treachery."

Mr Hooper then leaned back in his chair. “What are you, Mr Holmes, to justify this behaviour?”

“Mr Hooper, you are not in the liberty to know.”

Mr Hooper took the hint.

-§-

“So, Mycroft, when you mean you have ‘all else’, does it mean the actual planning in itself?”

“Yes.”

“So, when will the wedding be?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Where?”

“Your garden”

“Ummm…”

“Yes, Molly, I know the state of your garden. I know that it was once the pride of your indolent
mother but ever since her ongoing depression she has let it outrun. I know your father had tried to get a gardener to help maintain it but no sane person would ever within the measly pay your father could afford to give. I know about the knee-high grass and the mint that is threatening to reach the back porch. But I also know that several highly competent gardeners who are more than willing to prove themselves for a job at the Palace."

“Oh, thank you. So how are we going to explain that to my mother?”

“Why, a birthday present from your father.”

“BIRTHDAY?!”

“Yes, your mother’s birthday…”

“Is tomorrow! I know! But what to do?”

“I should not worry myself. Finding your sister is present enough for her, and the wedding will just be the icing on a magnificent birthday cake.”

“And when did you get experience in planning other people’s weddings?”

“I do have experience?”

“Did they turn out well?”

“Lestrade seemed to have liked it.”

“Alright then. But what if Moriarty knows about what is happening and he doesn’t come?”

“He will come.”

“But…”

“He will come. I have made sure of this by including in the wedding something he cannot afford to miss.”

“What is that?”

“I cannot tell you.”

“Classic ‘if I tell you I must kill you?’”

“If you must put it that way, yes.”

“But wedding clothes for my family?”

“All will be accounted for. In fact, I expect a shipment of clothes for the whole family arriving at your Sevenoaks residence right now.”

“Will they all fit?”

“Perfectly. Also, consider it as a wedding gift from my family.”

“Ah…thanks.”

“You are welcome. Now, my dear Molly, please tell your family to pack. You must leave in an hour for Sevenoaks. I will be placing you under the care of your elder sister, who I can assure you to
be very competent and knowledgeable of what to do."

“Great. Thanks.”

The whole Hooper family as well as the Gardiners arrived at Sevenoaks in time for lunch. Macy came out to greet them and help with their bags. She was clearly flustered, but it was more than justifiable by the fact that tens of strangers, each with their own little expertise, was running about.

“It all started when five gardeners at seven o’clock this morning started banging on the front door asking for Mrs Hooper. Mrs Hooper was of course a little surprised and very angry. She immediately demanded who they were and what type of business they had and they said that they were a birthday gift from Mr Hooper! Is that true? How thoughtful! Anyway, it got worse when seven, I think, yeah, seven, painters popped out of nowhere and then they also used the same excuse. Mrs Hooper, thank god, didn’t start a row otherwise goodness knows what might have happened, three women against 12 men, bad odds, don’t you think? Then Mrs Hooper got all worried about how she was going to cater for all those people when suddenly three chefs as well as six workmen showed up to set up an outdoor’s kitchen at one of the cleared corners of the garden. Now Mrs Hooper suspects she has been tricked into a house siege and is currently in a hysteria.”

“Don’t worry, Macy. Dad will calm her down. And you are right in saying that the whole thing is a birthday gift. My Dad is hosting Kate’s wedding tomorrow and you know how my mother wants all of us married.”

“Kate is getting married tomorrow? But what wonderful news! Isn’t she a bit young though?”

“I know. Long story with details I will never know.”

“I always thought Kate was a bit cuckoo and that basically does it for me. But this? This is even worse!”

“Macy, there is no way we will have enough room for them to stay overnight, right?”

“Right. Most of the workmen claim they will be gone by nightfall but there is the chefs say they are catering tomorrow and some of the workmen will stay to help with the cleanup. But we don’t have any guest rooms! But they seemed to shrug at that and say they have reserved rooms already at the local inn-they refused to diverge which one- and then left it at that.”

When Molly and Mary were alone in their room again, Molly was still as confused as ever. She was also a little angry at Mary, though what can you do when you cannot tell your nearest and dearest who you really were? It was hardly Mary’s fault, but Molly had a hard time keeping that in mind.

The package on her bed was only a plain white cardboard box with ‘Margaret E. Hooper’ printed on top. Molly opened it up to find a silver dress with a silver blazer. The sleeveless cocktail dress was less shiny than Sherlock’s first gift, but it still had all his fingerprints all over it. There was a subtle sapphire borderlines at the collar and hemline. It was a similar story with the blazer, but with added sapphire buttons. There was also a broad silver sunhat with white roses on top as well as silver ballet shoes.
Molly tried everything on. Everything fitted perfectly, but what else is to be expected by now? She then turned to her sister, who was wearing something similar except in red and emeralds.

onyx.

“I supposed, Mary, that what we are wearing is bulletproof?”

“But of course, Molly. I cannot afford to lose two sisters.”

“A battledress, worthy of war.”

“A war that has been continuously fought since the start of time.”

“Right verses wrong.”

“Good verses evil.”

They then looked at each other straight in the eye. “To battle,” they said.
Mary's story

Chapter Notes

Dedicated to Julius Caesar. Lacerations can be rather annoying.

But before I can personally take you to the wedding, there is still one more thing that needs to be said- how on Earth did Mary find Molly? And if you think that this chapter is rather irrelevant, you have another thought coming.

One of the first rules in finding something is to go back to the last known location. Usually reliable for inanimate objects, which cannot move from the spot, but what about the organisms with flesh and blood, who can move on their own volition? Simple: they always leave a trail.

Mary knew that. Whatever being they are, whether it is a literal trail to imaginary ones made of bits and bytes, there was always an indicator of where they have gone. Even criminal masterminds leave a faint one, if one is willing to look properly.

And so she snooped around a small hotel room (police badges can sure come in handy) looking for something that might point her in the right direction. This was where a couple of Moriarty and Kate's description was last seen and the last point before the trail went cold. In the recycling bin was two hastily ripped out tickets for a train to Scotland and a receipt from the local greengrocers.

Milk: 1L 80p
Bread (one loaf, white): £1
Cheese (one block, 1kg): £7
Potatoes (2kg): £3

Unless they are planning to stay with friends, she thought, they will end up starving. This also limits their movements to major cities. Unless…

But surely not. Would Moriarty blow his cover to save himself? No, his plan would not work if he did so. Moriarty would never throw away his chance of revenge over petty things such as self-sufficiency. No, he must maintain his cover, if he ever wants to get close to Kate. But what is his facade this time?
Poor musical trying to make it on his own.

Soho.

How romantic.

The bright restaurant lights almost blinds Mary’s eyes. Once a notorious red light district, it has now been transformed (or ‘bourgeoified’), depending on your political leaning) into a busy and respectable food hub, with little of its origins remain. There is also the (in)famous music scene, which mainly revolved around Tin Pan Alley. She turned into Denmark Street. It was a small thoroughfare of only a few shops, a pub, and a restaurant. The colourful stereotype of music everywhere has muted into silence but there was definitely some good sining voices where the alcohol flowed freely. She pushed the door inside.

The bell tingled more loudly than Mary would have liked, mainly because it zeroed the attention on her. Twenty masculine eyes tracked her as Mary strolled to the bar. She then shot a sharp glance back before she called the bar manager.

“Wha’ can I do far yew, mam?”

“A small scotch on the rocks, if you may."

“Comin’ up."

Drink in hand and money paid, Mary felt she lubricated the manager enough to lightly interrogate him.

“Do you know anything about a person called Moriarty?"

“Nah."

“Anything similar? A thin, medium sized black-haired Irish of an exceptional singing voice, but plays no instruments?"

“Ohch, I knew. He pass’d hare yes’erd’ay an’ left. Say he off to some festival in Eye o’ Righ. Whadoyaask?"

“Oh, my dear younger sister had a crush on him and wanted me to track him down. for a
‘chance meeting’ or something like that."

“Tell har bad luck. He’s in arm of sum o’her gal.”

“Oh, is that so? Well, thanks anyway, I will tell her the bad news.”

“Good luck.”

“Thanks.”

The Isle of Wright, did he say? Mary did an internet search of the upcoming festivals over there. Indeed, there was one. The Bestival Festival, on the 10th, would provide an interesting diversion for the couple. She looked at the watch. If she went fast enough, she could catch the train the 8:20 Waterloo train to Isle of Wright.

-§-

Ten o’clock in the evening in a small town of 150,000 people usually means quiet but this was a Friday, and Mary was not likely to forget. Crowds gathered, milled, and filled the town’s pubs until there was only standing room left. Mary went to each pub to enquire after Moriarty after each time she bought a drink. Her money was flowing out faster than the drinks she poured down the drain. Sometimes the trail ran red hot while other times it bought her to a wall. Nearing midnight Mary felt exhausted when she went into the last bar.

“Evening, m’am.”

“Hi.”

“Are you alright?”

“Yea…nah. It is just that I have been spending the whole of today…no wait, it is already midnight…yesterday, trying to find this guy for my poor little sister.”

“That seems rather dedicated. What would you like?”

“A matinee please.”

“Shaken or stirred?”

“Whatever suits best.”

“Half-half then.”

With expert dexterity the barman whipped up a limpid concoction of searing acid. Mary gulped it down because to be quite frank, she did need a drink. The barman then eyed her.
“Usually I would say that women like you have no business out in the dark amongst the scum of society. However, something tells me you can take care of yourself and the person you seek is more important than your safety. Now, how can I help you? Who is it that you seek?”

“Fancy seeing you here, James.”

“And you too, Mary.”

“How is the post?”

“Not much I could say without breaking confidentiality.”

“Of course. Have you tracked down the movement of Raven?”

“Raven was seen in a nearby inn with Target in tow.”

“Thanks.”

“By the way, Mary, it is inadvisable to drink on duty.”

“James, it was only a drink.”

“A drink can lead to many, and then many other things.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

-§-

The motel was respectable as far as motels go, but it was not much else. It was in desperate need of a renovation but it wasn’t exactly run-down. Mary walked into the outdated reception and hit the little bell.

In walked an irritated portly middle-aged woman with a cigarette in her mouth and curlers in her hair.

“Whadayawant?” She said it in such an angry and sharp tone that Mary decided it was too dangerous to lie. Behind the layers of fat could be layers of muscle, more than enough for her to pick up Mary and throw her onto the road.

“Umm, hello there, my name is Mary…”

“Whadayawant?”

“…and I want to find my lost sister.”
The mistress took out her cigarette and rubbed it against an old chipped dish. “What made ya think she came here?”

“I don’t, ma’m, it is just that I have a hunch that she could be around this area.”

“How does she look?”

“Well…” Mary paused, before fishing out of her handbag a school portrait of Kate taken just the year before. She gave it to the…

“Sorry, ma’m, but it seems I do not know your name.”

“Betty Carlinus.”

“Mary Hooper, at your service.”

“Now Mary, I say thar be little hope for your sister because she looks very pretty. Gawd knows whose company she is with.”

“Actually, I know. A potentially abusive boyfriend.”

“Ah.” Ms Carlinus paused in thought as she mentally went through all the people she saw that day. Usually she does not bother because she thought every guest was bothersome, rude, and messy. But this one…

“Try room five.”

“Thanks. Oh, and do you mind if I stay here tonight? I am rather exhausted and will need to leave tomorrow morning.”

“Thar be twenty-five quid.”

Mary paid immediately and went straight to Room 5.

Ms Carlinus was quite right about the faces. When Mary knocked on the door she was greeted with the tired face of Moriarty. The shock soon wore it off though.

“Mary…what are you doing here?”

“I could say the thing to you. Do you mind if I come in?”

“No.”

“Moriarty, there are matters I need to discuss with you. Confidential matters.”

“Who is that, darling?” sang Kate in the shower.

“Nobody, dear,” shouted back Moriarty.

“Nobody but only your dear sister Mary,” Mary added.”
“Mary…” Kate’s voice trailed off.

Moriarty turned back to Mary.

“I have the Bruce-Partington plans, you know,” began Mary.

“As in, right here?”

Mary gave a deep chuckle. “Do you really think I am that stupid? No. I would want something back for that.”

“So, what do you want me to do? Give Kate back?”

“Yes, but only temporary. Just long enough for her to get married.”

“So your sodding father has finally come to his senses.”

“If you say so. But here is the deal- marry my sister, and you can have the plans.”

Moriarty raised an eyebrow. “I can see a lot of cravets in this.”

“For example?”

“Who is paying?”

“Just as it always has been- the father of the bride.”

“When?”

“This weekend. Everything has been planned.”

“No spies?”

“Nope.”

“Why did you steal those plans? This country is not exactly easy on traitors, you know,”

“What makes you think I will get caught?”

Moriarty thought about it a bit longer. “Fine,” he replied, “but don’t cross me. If you do, I will skin you and turn you into shoes.”

“Oh and one more thing.”

“What?”

“Do you mind if I sleep on the couch? Me and Kate have an early start tomorrow morning.”

“Fine, fine.” Then, under his breath, and probably into a small microphone Mary may or may have not seen, “code orange.”
Molly hoped for rain. She prayed to the weather gods, the great, sodden weather gods, to answer her prayers, and she asked, just for once, for rain. She wanted a great big downpour to flood the marquees and to ruin all the lovely work the gardeners had done the day before. Just anything to cleanse Moriarty’s work. But it was not to be. Somebody, either Moriarty or Kate or Both had placated the right gods. Instead, that morning, the sun stubbornly shone while the birds were desperate to sing their tunes. It was the worst morning in her life.

Kate was singing on the top of her voice when she wasn’t talking about her wonderfully regal wedding dress (“This is lovely, Dad! Just as I had dreamed it to be) or ordering around the workmen to make sure her day “was as perfect as possible”. Sarah was practising the wedding march, but she deliberately added flats to it to make it sound more ominous. Molly admitted this was one of the few times she agreed wholeheartedly with her. After all, did Kate not know what was about to happen. Molly remembered an extract of a long-forgotten poem she never knew she learnt.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismay’d?
Not tho’ the soldier knew
Someone had blunder’d:
Their not to make reply,
Their not to reason why,
Their but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death"

Mary seemed as chipper as she usually is and Molly hated her for it. But the show must go on. If only she knew how to get Kate out of this mess…

The guests started arriving for the wedding brunch at 10pm. The guest list was extensive, from distant cousins Molly never knew she had (not that she actually had them in the first place) to associates of Moriarty she hoped to never see again. There was also the Holmes, though it was a relief to see none of the Watsons there. Mary seemed a little disappointed though as she hoped to see the doctor amongst the stream of guests. Moriarty would be arriving later as it was unlucky for the bride and groom to see each other until the ceremony itself.

Half an hour before noon, everybody started to seat themselves for the ceremony itself, which must begin at noon, exactly. When the sun was beaming down directly at everyone’s hats, a limousine
pulled up. Out came Moriarty and his best man. Moriaty was dressed in his usual immaculate suit and white bowtie got himself out elegantly before he reached the back garden and walk down the isle. Sarah took this as a cue and began the march accordingly.

Firstly came Kate’s friends, the Darcys, her school friends, and then Aunt Phillips. Then there was her sisters, casting pink rose petals on the white carpet before sitting down. Then came the mother and the Gardiners. Finally, after all the fuss, came the glowing bride herself.

The ceremony proceeded as planned. Molly wanted to speak out but Mary forbade her with her hand on Molly’s knee. With the vows said, the couple kissed. It was a moment to remember, for sure, but it felt more like a mistake to learn from.

-§-

In the marquee there was a colourful bar set up full of happy people and perspective couples hooking up. Except for the grey hunched figure in the corner, everyone looked rather happy. Molly instead was downing one drink after another but she did not feel any better. With one last desperado she gulped down the tenth glass before Mary came down to sit in front of her.

“Hi Mary. So tell me- why am I not feeling numb yet?”

“That is because you have not been drinking any alcohol today.”

“What a lame party.”

“There is a reason for that you know. One of them is that agents are not supposed to drink on duty.”

“What is the ‘official’ reason?”

“Kate’s friends are rather young. Wouldn’t want to cause a fracas.”

“Oh look, Moriarty’s man is bringing in a keg of Guinness. I wonder how much for a drink over there?”

“Your pride. Look, Molly, I cannot have you drunk. For this plan to work, you must be sober. You cannot be drunk.”

“Well, what is stopping me?”

“Kate’s marriage.”

“Wait, what?”

“Well, if we can send Moriarty to prison, that would destroy the marriage rather quickly, I say.”

“What, disillusionment and all?”
“Yes. I don’t think Kate wants to be married to a man she could only see once a week.”

“Okay then. Oh, and Mary, why have you not arrested him yet?”

“Have you seen him? He has five of his best henchmen with him at all times. I need you to separate him out.”

“How do I do that?”

“Tell him that I have given you an USB drive that I wanted to give to him. Show him to the outside of our bedroom. We will handle it from there.”

“Sounds crazy. Will it work?”

“It might.”

“Mary, are you mad? You know that Moriarty no longer trusts me. Why don’t we get Mum to do it? She being the elated mother in law and all.”

“Good idea.”

---

Mr Hooper was also in another corner of the garden watching the celebrations. He wondered again, for the fifth time that day, how he managed to get into this situation. He should have been more attentive to his younger daughters, he thought, and regretted not controlling them more. Only now did he realise that he did not care what happened to Sarah, Catherine, or Katrina and he felt very guilty for it. But why did he feel this way? He then looked at Kitty talking to some of Moriarty’s men and having a merry time being the centre of attention, and then his wife hugging Moriarty before inviting him inside. His brilliant, beautiful wife. Or was, anyway. Depression left marks on his wife that would never be erased. He of course noticed it after Catherine was born. Mrs Hooper would stare out the window at inappropriate moment as if she was not of this world. She also slept more and talked less. But he thought it would be a temporary thing until a year later he found her collapsed on the bathroom floor with blood everywhere. Since then he has taken her to psychiatrist after psychiatrist but every single one of them failed. And so his wife elected to stay the way she is and to hope she could hide it. Hence her silly behaviour. Hence her embarrassing words. She is trying, and failing quite miserably, to act happy.

Does he love his wife still? But of course. He tries to support her but sometimes it can get so exasperating. Yet he must stay. Who else would look after her then?

And of his three youngest daughters? They are silly, but they are still his. In many ways, he has failed them.

He will never fail again. It was too late for Katrina, but the others…
There was a scuffle at the front door and the driveway. Somebody put a cloth over Moriarty’s face, which made Moriarty’s body limp. He was then gingerly carried to a black car before being driven away. Nobody else noticed.

He smiled. Maybe it was not too late for Katrina after all.
This day was getting better than expected. Sure, Kate was still married but only in name. Her dreadful husband was carried off to god knows where and it is only better for it. She was still grinning when Sherlock Holmes decided to sit next to her in one of the garden’s shiny new seats.

“You know, this whole business may as well be a sideshow,” he started to say. “We could all say that Kate was playing the most elaborate prank on her friends.”

“Yes, expect she did sign the marriage certificate, did she not?”

“She did, but a certificate is a certificate. Paper is too volatile for its own good sometimes.”

“Speak of the devil, what on earth are your brothers doing?”

In another corner of the garden, sheltered by the cherry tree and the rose bushes, where they cannot be seen expect by Molly and Sherlock, Greg Lestrade gave Mycroft Holmes a gold lighter. Mycroft was holding the certificate with his left hand and the lighter on his right. The paper made a satisfactory gold light before it crumbled into the ground. The elder Holmes and the good inspector grinned at each other before sliding out of sight into the thicker parts of the bushes. Molly only hoped they can account for their tattered appearance afterwards before looking respectfully away.

“That settles it then. Sherlock Holmes, how are you enjoying this party?”

“This gathering to my satisfaction. And Margaret Hooper, must we go by our full names? I do admit it sounds…cumbersome.”

“You may call me Molly so long as I can call you Sherlock- if that is your real name. How did your parents come up with them? Smash the keyboard with their fists?”

“I am named after my great grandfather. He was a great cricket player and once played against Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.”

“Really? And your brother?”

“A grand uncle. Though to be fair, Sherlock is not actually my ‘first’ name?”

“Then what is your real name?”

“William Sherlock Scott Holmes.”

“I have three to chose from now! Fun! I can call you Bill, Billy, Willy, Scotty…”

“Just as I may call you Lizzie, Betty, Betsey, Marge.”
They then both sat in silence comprehending those names. After a little while, they both agreed that none of the new nicknames suited and they decided to call each other by their preferred names.

“You know, Sherlock, thinking about it, there are gaps in my knowledge I would rather have filled. A lot of mysteries unexplained over the last few months and I’m hoping you can explain it.”

“Such as?”

“How did Moriarty trick Kate into his nefarious plan?”

“Nefarious! I adore that word. Yes, nefarious does suit the whole situation.” He then chuckled. “Do you remember Sebastian Moran?”

“Son of Madam Moran, your sister’s ex-governess?”

“You have an excellent memory, dear Molly. Yes, she is exactly how you describe her. Well, this time the poor clueless goose got caught up again in one of her son’s mechanisations. She is innocent, thank goodness.”

“But how could she trust her son again after what he did?”

“Love, dear Molly. Love is a dangerous disadvantage.”

“Is that right?”

“Most of the time. That is why you must be careful who you open your heart to. Even then though, it can be unpredictable and uncontrollable. Hence its dangerous properties.”

“Does your brother hold the same view?”

“He used to, until he discovered cake.”

They both laughed. By then a few people had already stared in surprise at them.

“Shall I continue with my explanation?”

“You shall, and you must.”

“Well, the dear Madame Moran bought a house in London near where Wrong Direction was staying at. Easily done now of course, because her dear son has just been made a Lord.”

“Lord Moran…of the House of Lords?”

“Do you ever wonder why Moriarty has so much power and evaded us so long? He has help from none other than a peerage of the Realm. Politics is a cesspit of lies and betrayal, which is why I never got into it.”

“Mmmhmm. Please continue.”

“Mister Moriarty here then asked his dear friend to put up with him for the next few days so he may have the time, place, and privacy to seduce your little sister properly. With that done he invites Katrina to his ‘house’ everyday for the next month or so. Katrina, dazzled by the elegance of a well-made home and seduced by Moriarty’s stories, is tricked into thinking she has fallen in love with him. They then plan an escape from your family, though, not too far, because remember Moriarty still had a business to run. She tries to marry him but he would rather not, because who would like to be burdened by an uxor like her?”
“Kate can be very annoying sometimes.”

“Very much so. But in order to lure Moriarty here we needed something immensely valuable, something he cannot get.”

“The contents of the USB drive?”

“The perceived contents of the USB drive. Because, my dear Molly, there was nothing inside it.”

“Wait, what? So nothing valuable inside? Not even a map to Atlantis?”

“Molly, Atlantis exists only in the greedy delusions of green-eyed men.”

“But of course. So, what did he think was in there?”

“Shall I tell you and then kill you?”

“Nah. How come everyone else tell me the same thing?”

“Perhaps it is because it is true?”

“Okay…how many people have you killed?”

“Directly or indirectly?”

“Either.”

“Directly, none yet. Indirectly, many.”

“Ooohhh, a dangerous one, right? Dark, tall, mysterious, no wonder why all women fell in love with you.”

“Then it is a wonder such a man fell in love with a small inconsequential pathologist.”

A silence. There was some rustling of leaves, and the laughter and music of the reception. “Not good?,” asked Holmes finally.

“Not the greatest. You were a bit fast there I had to admit.”

“Then I apologise.”

“Don’t. In fact, this is probably the best news I have heard in a little while. Keep coming, and one day I shall know the right way to respond. Oh, and thanks for saving my sister.”

“But Mary did most of the work, did she not?”

“Someone must have told her where to start.”

“Oh yes. But of course.” Sherlock then started getting pink in the face.

“Please come back soon, will you? I do love our little chats. And maybe, just maybe, I will fall in love with your soul.” She kissed him on the cheek before heading to the lights in the twilight. Sherlock then stood up, and then sat down, smiling.
Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the short chapter. School has been extremely busy with projects after projects going on. This is also the only chapter for the next three weeks as I will be overseas. Have a nice week!
Hi guys! I'm back from my holiday so publication will resume as normal

The Hooper household resumed their daily schedule as much as they could. Kate was beside herself- with no records of marriage, she could no longer boast to be the first amongst her friends to enter matrimony. She of course had her two rings- the gaudy two-carat diamond engagement ring and the plain wedding band. Too embarrassed to wear it now, she locked them in her jewellery box. She never saw them again.

Another major change within the household was the new restrictions on the younger daughters. Kitty and Kate were forbidden to go anywhere other than school or their house without a chaperone on weekdays. Weekend town trips was restricted to four hours. The complaining was insistent.

“Oh Dad, why are you being so mean to us?,” came their chorus. "It’s like we’re grounded for nothing!"
“You are grounded and it is for good reason! Your reasoning skills resemble those of mullets."
“Don’t be so mean, Dad!”
“You are right- your reasoning skills is more alike to rocks. You two will be grounded until you both improve your minds."
“How long is that?"
“With your current progress, I expect I can let you alone for a few hours in your mid-forties."
“How come Sarah doesn’t get treated like this?"
“If I really wanted to punish Sarah, I will force her to go to more parties."

The week continued thus, until it was time again for Mary and Molly to return to Sevenoaks. They expected to come home to a bleak house with two depressed ghosts, but the place seemed a little chirpier than usual. One thing that added to the atmosphere is the constantly singing and praising of their mother. She then looked at Mary, ran up to her, and embraced her.

“Oh my dear child, have you heard the good news? Dr Watson has finished with his estate wangling and will be coming back down to London very soon. He is taking up rooms again in Baker Street! Isn’t that just wonderful?"

She then continued to dance up and down the rooms. Molly looked at Mary, who, blushing, then shrugged her shoulders.

“Mum,” inquired Molly, “how did you know about this?"
“Oh, sorry, dears, I was so excited. Have I not told you? One of my university friends happens to be the lawyer for the Watson estate. I had called her up a few hours ago to see how she was and she told me about her work. Goodness! We must have talked for hours about you, darling Mary, and him."
“Umm, okay, thanks Mum, me and Mary are going to unpack our stuff now."
“Do be quick dear. I need you to help me with the dinner arrangements for goodness, when?"
“You mean the dinner party with the Donovans and Quineys?"
“Yes, and one more person as well. I am determined to have Dr Watson as one of the guests, otherwise it will be thirteen of us. Thirteen is such an awkward number, don’t you think?"
It was a repeat of the past. The only difference was that Kitty had graduated from secondary school and was about to start university. When Molly asked her father how Kitty was supposed to stay grounded so far from home, Mr Hooper only stated that he had his own methods. Soon afterwards, for the hundredth time that day, Mrs Hooper had bugged him about Dr Watson.

“No, Ginger, we need to try a different tact this year. I tried visiting him and you said that it will work. But no. I will not tolerate two hours of driving and several hours of mindless chatter for such a trifle. I cannot afford the time to chase returning suitors, you know.”

“Such rudeness! Well then I shall just have to call him up to give him the invite to dinner then.”

Dr Watson accepted, of course. Mary only looked a little worried when she heard that news. But she stayed silence for a few days right until it was once again time to leave her London residence. Only then, when they were safely in the car driving towards Sevenoaks did Mary talk about the dark matter eating her away.

“You know, Molly, I would rather that he had stayed away.”

“Why is that? Don’t you want to see Dr Watson again?”

“But of course! But, it’s just that, all the talk and the fuss our mother makes of him…it makes me, well, embarrassed. She does mean well, but she doesn’t know how much she is actually hurting me inside.”

“Mary, I wish I could comfort you, but I cannot. I wasn’t, isn’t, and never will be as good as you when it comes to soothing.”

“Thanks anyway. But at least it is only for one night, right?”

“Let us hope so.”

The next day, a deep purring of a very expensive black car was heard out in the front lawns. Outside there was the click of opening and closing of car doors. Kitty was the first to see it, and called to her mother.

“Hey Mum, I think John is here! And he seems to have bought a friend.”

“Somebody he knows, I suspect.”

“God! His face does look familiar. And very very hot. But wait, he also looks like the dark proud man. The detective- whatshisname again?”

“Any acquaintances of Dr Watson is welcomed here but I believe you are describing Mr Holmes here. I have half a mind to drive him out because I cannot stand the sight of him but I cannot offend Dr Watson now, can I?”

This conversation was easily overheard by Molly and Mary. Mary was allowed to blush, of course, but Molly had to control herself. After all, to all accounts and figures, he was just a recently redeemed acquaintance, not a suitor. She was too embarrassed to even hint at Mary of her changing affections. This was luckily easily done as she was more surprised than anything of Sherlock’s changing behaviour. The fact that he bothered to came down to see her, well, that was unimaginable a year ago.

What was not surprising was how the three of them interacted. Mrs Hooper welcomed in Johnny like a son returned from war, or maybe just a very long university semester. Mr Holmes, on the other hand, was acknowledged in the coldest civility possible. Sherlock returned the favour.

The charade continued for the rest of the gathering. Mrs Hooper, Dr Watson, and Mary talked for most of the time about what had happened to the Watsons. Their conversation became so intense Molly could hardly join in. Sherlock, by contrast, didn’t even bother. He only enquired about the Gardiners, and his lips were clamped for the rest of the time.

Molly could not believe what was happening. Only two weeks ago they were easily talking like best
friends, and now their relationship has backslided so quickly! Could it because he is not sitting next
to her? No, it cannot be, because back at Pemberley he sought out her attention. Could it be because
of her mother? Molly then shut her eyes. If it is so, that would be the most painful explanation. If
only her mother knew his effort in getting her favourite daughter back! But she has not, cannot, and
will never not. Sherlock knew that enough to disguise his affections for Molly. Molly was pained,
but then hit herself mentally for being so.

The talk of Watson’s family over, Mrs Hooper then slit straight into the subject she has been waiting
so long to air.

“And you have finally come home, John! What took you so long? I did hear rumours that you were
planning to permanently leave London, you know? A great mainly things has happened in this small
town, let me tell you. And would you believe this- my family has played the greatest prank on me
ever- and even on my birthday! Because you see they managed to organise a fake wedding for my
little Kate and they even went for the whole show- the thing must have costed a fortune! Good thing
my husband managed to organise the whole event and- oh, I have forgotten. You must have seen the
missing persons advertisement for Kate, right? She was kidnapped! Thank goodness she came home
on her own accord!”

Dr Watson made small noises at the right moments while trying not to listen as much as he could.
Sherlock only stared outside while Molly had her head down, to try and hide as much of her
embarrassment as she could. If only this would not go any longer. Mary was smiling still but by this
point Molly recognised it was nothing more than a mask.

“And my dear Robert has missed you so much! You must play golf again with him soon- he
considers you the best. Just talk to him again today, will you?”

Dr Watson just nodded his head and smiled, while he was wondering in his mind if he really didn’t
go golfing with Mr Hooper, or he was going mad. For Molly, this was the end of the straw. She
almost wished with all her heart that the earth would have an earthquake and make a giant hole for
her to dwell in. The only thing stopping her is the increasing affection that Dr Watson had for Molly.
Dr John Watson, internally, felt that Mary was just as beautiful as ever, just as kind, and just as
cheerful, though not quite as talkative. Not that Mary knew. She was so determined to act just as
naturally as before she ended up looking artificial.

Dr Watson then noticed it was getting late in the day and there were several other things he wanted
to do before leaving back for London, only to be interrupted by Mrs Hooper asking him if he wanted
to stay the night. Dr Watson then politely declined and was out the door, with Sherlock trailing after
him. Mary ran after him and lead him in a secluded place near the house so they may not be spied
upon by her nosey mother. Sherlock was left in the car.

“Doctor…ah…John! I’m so sorry about…ah, my mother, you see, she, she, she…”

She was only stopped by John Watson kissing her very chastely, very lovingly, on the cheek. “You
know,” he grumbled, “that I have been wanting to do that for a furiously long time.”
“No, John, you mean this.”

She kissed him straight on. At that moment, they felt the heat of a million fireworks shower on their
heads, and then the glow of an eternal sun flowering in their hearts. It was all ridiculously clichéd,
but then again both have probably read one too many romantic novels within the last month or so.

After what it had been for ten seconds, or for them, ten years*, both collapsed on the floor laughing.
“Oh, I guess that is us sorted out, I suppose,” giggled Mary. “But what about Sherlock and Molly?”
“That bastard will never know what is coming! We must get them together.”
“Yes, we must! But how?”
“His little twerp head is already enamoured with her and she with him.”
“Ah, thank goodness! That is the hard part sorted. Now, I know. We must keep them together. Make them sit next to each other, make them walk together, make them do everything together! Make them look like an old married couple! Sooner or later they would have to admit something.”
“Perfect! Oh, that reminds me, I believe I have left Sherlock in the car. See you next week then.”

*Einstein is said to have quipped: “Sit on a hot oven, a second can seem like an eternity. Sit next to a pretty girl, an eternity can seem like a second. That’s relativity.”
With the meeting over, only then was Molly allowed a measure of peace. She then decided to go to the back garden, to the very same seat that a week ago she and Sherlock had shared. It seemed fitting now, as her mind was abuzz with thoughts of him. It was not hard to get to. After the wedding her father made the point of hiring a gardener three times a week to help maintain the lawn and control the weeds. He then encouraged his wife to go outside more, and with slight success. It was too late to start growing anything but it was nice to see her mother actually taking an interest in the flowers again. She had talked to some of her gardening friends for tips on roses and was personally planning next year’s garden.

“Why oh why did he come,” fretted Molly, “just to behave like that? He was silent as a statue for the whole time, yet he can be sweet as anything. Why, he had acted so amiably to my aunt and uncle but for me, why not? Oh, if only I can banish the thought of him from myself, I would be a happier woman!”

The last wish was temporarily fulfilled when her sister approached her and sat next to her. She had a happy look on her face and a slight smirk that seemed to have come out of nowhere.

“Why are you smiling, sister? Something must have pleased you immensely.”
“Oh, my dear Molly, if only I can bestow the same happiness to you! I kissed-kissed- my darling today, and just then. My past worries have vanished! But please don’t tell Mum. Goodness knows how she will treat him next.”

“Mary, that is great news! So, when are you going to tell Dad?”

“Next week, probably. It will be funny though if he suddenly pulled an engagement ring out of nowhere though for me.”

“Mary, I congratulate you but you must slow down. How long have you known him for?”

“A year now?”

“Don’t forget the few months he did not see you.”

“Pah! Tis only but a trifle.”

“Oh Mary, I know you are such a romantic but are you absolutely sure he is the one for you?”

“Oh, of course! But to please you, my dear Molly, I shall drag out the engagement for as long as possible.”

“No need to be that dramatic, dear Mary, but please, tread carefully. John’s heart is made of chocolate and kittens and I know your one is made of sterner stuff. But still both are easily broken.”

“Molly, who is the one that had more boyfriends?”

“Surely the one who claims is still not over you doesn’t count!”

“Of course he does.”

“You then.”

“Exactly. Don’t worry, Molly, I know what I need to know about love.”

Nobody saw either gentlemen till the next week, the night of the grand dinner. The Donovans came sans Sally, then Mr and Mrs Cottingwood, with one of their nieces, and only then Dr Watson and his constant companion. Nevertheless all kept to their time and it was a good show of reliability for all. Mrs Hooper loved those dinners as it was the very few times in her life she could personally show off. John Watson went straight to his future wife to sit with her, much to the pleasure of Molly. Sherlock on the other hand had the unfortunate luck to sit next to Mrs Hooper and on the opposite side of the table to her. It did provide a good viewing angle at the grimaces and pain Sherlock had to endure listening to a bitter woman. If only she knew what he had done for them all! Molly wanted to excuse herself but could not. She had to watch a worthy man, a man she very probably loved, being verbally beaten down by her mother. If only!
But time passes and even the worse disasters come to an end. Everyone is then invited to the living room for after dinner drinks and mints. Molly was somewhat in a corner chair, far enough from the crowd to observe behaviours, yet not so far that she could accused of being a wallflower. Mary and John (Molly loved how their name just somehow, stuck together, like they were meant to be) were chatting away near the fireplace exchanging jokes and stories. Just when John would know about Mary’s exact occupation Molly would never know, but she would pay almost anything to witness the moment. Sherlock on the other hand…

Oh, the dreamy Sherlock. Only now did Molly realise just why so many girls and a few boys go after him. The Byronic silhouette, the deep, dark voice and even darker hair, well, won’t that make anyone swoon? Or maybe it was a glass too much of wine. Molly then chastened herself for not having better self control. But in many ways, she was embarrassed. Here was the man, whom half a year ago, she rejected his advances. It would be impolite, nay, improper, for her to start something again. She would have to wait for him…

Sherlock then sat in a neighbouring chair with a coffee in his hand. Separated by side table, Molly makes the leap…

“So, umm, how’s Georgiana?”

“Hmmm? Oh, she is good. Back to boarding school actually. Good coffee this, who brewed it?”

“Macy, our house helper.”

“She would be much better off as a barista.”

“Don’t say that too loud- she is too valuable to us.”

“I shall have to keep that in mind. Maybe she will be better than Mrs Hudson?”

“Hmm?”

“Dr Watson’s housekeeper.”

“I thought she was the landlady?”

“She does overextend herself these days.”

Their conversation was abruptly cut when the card tables were taken out. Molly tried her best to join in on a group with Sherlock but her mother intervened. Thus her hopes for the evening are dashed. Instead both had to be content at looking at each other in odd intervals with pain in their eyes as Sherlock, sitting next to Mrs Hooper, bore patiently the rude and inappropriate ‘musings’ which Mrs Hooper thought was respectable philosophy.

Mrs Hooper had tried to get the two gentlemen to stay for the night, but by some unfortunate chance their taxi had just arrived so they had to go. Mrs Hooper let the last of her guests go with a sigh on her happy face.

“What a successful night this has been! The leg of venison was roasted perfectly and the ducks even more so. The soup was at least fifty times better than what the Donovans could ever hope to achieve and even Mr Pompous praised the dinner he had. We are talking about a man with probably a few private chefs! And you know what? Mrs Cottingwood even said that she is sure you, my dear Mary, are sure to be married soon to Dr Watson. Her neice is so well behaved today. I have to admit I love the Cottingwoods, they are such good friends, are they not?”

“Yes, Mum,” replied the exhausted Mary.

“Oh, and where is Molly?”

Molly was in her room, banging her head on her desk wondering how many more days she could deal with her hurricane emotions. It is hard being a teenager, especially after being one for more than a decade.
The next day was a Sunday and the two lovebirds just could not wait to get it together. Molly was wondering if she should be surprised to find Dr Watson walking up the gravel path to the front door. She was also wondering if she should have predicted her mother in happy hysterics. The only unpredictable element in this was that it was 9am- most people would only be just getting up now. It was a good thing they had all just finished and cleaned up breakfast.

“Oh come on, my dears, do hurry, please! Molly, Kitty, please help Mary with her hair, goodness knows she needs the help today. Kate, what are you doing? Here, let me help you find your scarf.”

They were all soon down in good time, but not before Dr Watson had a meaningful chat with Mr Hooper. Mr Hooper then retired to his study, as it was his custom on a Sunday morning, and Sarah could only be heard playing the piano. Three more roadblocks to go, thought Mrs Hooper, as she rushed her four remaining daughters down the stairs.

They received Dr Watson in the living room. There was a lot of small talk as well as winks, mainly by Mrs Hooper to Molly, Kitty, and Kate. Molly ignored her mother while Kitty and Kate were confused. The yawning gap of confusion lasted for a great many minutes, until Kate had to blurt out, “Mum, what is up with your winking?”

It was the smartest thing she said in a week. Molly smiled- Kate is indeed, improving.

“Don’t worry, dearest. The winking is not for you. I think I have something in my eye. Excuse me.” Mrs Hooper then walked out of the room and closed the door. The loud silence filled in the absence until Molly decided to speak up about the weather and about how uncommonly nice it was.

But of course one cannot talk about the weather forever without a meteorological degree, or delve into the dangerously political topic of climate change, so it was just as well Mrs Hooper decided to call to her three younger daughters in the room for a nice little chat.

“I think they just need a moment together, dearest things. I will be in my garden tending…something rather. Kate, Kitty, there is a wonderful book I would like you to read together- Sense and Sensibility. Or would you rather prefer something more adventurous?”

“For example?,” mused the curious Kate.

“The Lost World by Doyle is fantastic. Julius Verne also never fails to please. Any book suggestions, Molly?”

“Les Miserables if you want a challenge.”

After some protestations from the two youngest about the immensity of the book and then happy laughter as they decided on something a lot more romantic, Mrs Hooper then ambled down the halls to her garden. This left Molly to herself wondering why she ever looked at her mother in such an oppressive light.

John Watson didn’t need to invite himself to lunch that day. Rather, he was forced food on him by his doting prospective mother in law. Cucumber sandwiches, cold meats, salad, all was piled high on his plate before he could protest. This caused a slight delay for there was a message he wanted to convey to all but he was too busy eating. So, after lunch with a filled belly and a slightly tipsy head, he then gathered everyone around the living room. Mary was standing beside him in front of the fireplace. Both were holding hands and acting very sweetly. Upon seeing them, Molly swore off cake for the rest of the week. She passed a box of tissues right next to her mother.
“So, er, we have an announcement to make,” stared Mary.
“And we have been planning this for a few days now,” continued John Watson.
“We all want to be part of this moment because we know it is important to all of you.”
“Ahh, yes.” John then was on one knee and out of his trousers he procured a small green velvet box.
“Mary Elizabeth Hooper, will you do the honour of marrying me?”
“Yes, of course!”

The white gold diamond on her finger, the rise of John, and then a big, stroppy kiss. This was the stuff of fairytales, and Mrs Hooper was brawling her eyes out. Molly wondered how long it would take John, if she could call him that now, to notice she and Mary shared the same middle name, though not necessarily named after the same person.

She congratulated the couple and shook hands with them. It was the best ending for them all, the most just, and definitely the most joyous. Kate was already starting to sketch out wedding dresses for the eventual day while Kitty was asking very, very, hard, for a few balls in whatever place they end up settling in. Sarah was also begging for the use of the music room as well as the library.

The last word, of course, came from Mr Hooper himself.

“If there was ever a definition of a ‘soulmate’, I believe it is what you two are right now. After all, both of you are almost exactly alike. You two are so romantic, you will drown in roses, adventurous, you will never settle down, and generous, you will go into bankruptcy next Christmas.”
“Don’t be silly dear,” muttered Mrs Hooper into his ear. “His income is in the excess of £300,000 a year and her’s will add to that. How do you propose they spend that much?” And then to Mary,
“Oh, congratulations, my dear, congratulations. You have done so so well to find Johnny here, you have have, you have. How am I suppose to sleep now? I shall stay up all day and all night until your wedding and probably a few years afterwards!”

They stayed for a few hours afterwards but by mid-afternoon it was time to leave for London. Mary, Molly, and John got into their respective cars with their respective luggage. Only when the two sisters were safely on the motorway did they speak up.

“You know, the other day he told me he didn’t know that I was trying to contact him earlier this year. He thought that I became indifferent to him, you know? All my emails, calls, all contact was diverted from his phone and computer. Goodness knows how they did it and all that time, he was still in love with me!”
“I suspected as much. Who would do this to you?”
“I think the sisters has something to do with it. They after all not too keen for me to be part of their family, which is not surprising, as there are probably better people for him to marry. But when they see how happy I can make him, maybe they will back off a little.”
“What about Sherlock?”
“Oh, him? What makes you think I will change anything?”
“Good to know you have everything sussed.”
“I’m so happy to be where I am, Molly. If only you could be to! If only there is also someone for you!”
“You have got to be joking, Mary. I could never be as happy as you even if I had hundreds of Johns. No, don’t aim so high. Let us just hope that I can meet another Anderson in time.”
“Let us then,” echoed Mary, with a smirk on her face.

Such an engagement could not be kept secret for long. Mrs Hooper first told Mrs Phillips, who then took the liberty to spread it throughout the town. By the time it appeared on the Times, everybody was in Sevenoaks was congratulating the family, which, just three weeks before, almost fell from the pedestal of respectability.
Lady Smallwood's visit

The golden leaves were becoming a hassle for Mrs Hooper, who took it up as a job to sweep it up to make the house presentable. Still, it was lucky she did so, for they would have been an eyesore for the mysterious lady whose black taxi was just coming into the driveway. It was the weekend again, and the pumpkins were just getting ripe. Still, why the lady would visit the Hooper household when the liquid sun was just peeping over the shivering tress was a mystery. Mary was out for a walk with John amongst the streets. It was just as well Molly opened the door, for it was Lady Smallwood.

The word ‘surprise’ would be a major understatement. Lady Smallwood went inside, had a glance at Mrs Hooper and her three other daughters, and proceed to ignore them. She then entered the living room without even a slight introduction, which Molly had to quickly give to Mrs Hooper after Lady Smallwood was seated. When Mrs Hooper found about the eminence of her surprise guest, she had to sit down as well.

“I presume the young women in the dining room are your sisters?,” started Lady Smallwood tartly.
“Yes they are, madam, bar one. Mary, my eldest, is currently walking with a man who we hope would be part of our family."
“I see you have a small garden here."
“Yes, madam, but not everyone is lucky enough to have a country estate these days."
“No, they are not."

Silence. Mrs Hooper broke it with the only question she could ask. “Pray, tell me how the Andersons are doing.”
“Ms Donovan is doing well, and so is Mr Anderson.”

Surely she has news from Sally, though Molly, but nothing came.

Mrs Hooper then begged for her ladyship to take any refreshments, but Lady Smallwood refused to eat or drink. She then got up, and pointed to a tree in the back garden. “I am very fond of nature, you know. Do allow me to explore your garden with your daughter Margaret.” Mrs Hooper then agreed, and lead her out the back door.

Molly knew there was something wrong when, instead of doing a circular route around the fountain and sculptures, Lady Smallwood went straight for the bench. She sat down, with the expectation Molly would come standing near her. Molly walked to the bench and sat down next to her. Lady Smallwood pulled away.

“Molly, I must come straight to the point. I took a taxi here today on account of my earliness, and I cannot afford to keep the taxi waiting. However, I already know you know why I am here. Surely your heart and conscience has done so?"
“No, madam, I don’t know why you have honoured us with your presence,” replied Molly with perfect surprise.
“Miss Hooper, I must therefore be frank,” Lady Smallwood sneered. “You have chosen to fight the wrong woman. My character has been celebrated all around for its directness and steel. I shall demonstrate it now. I have received the most alarming missive last night that not only your sister was advantageously matched with Doctor John Watson, you will soon, in all likelihood, be the same with my nephew Mister Sherlock Holmes. My nephew, keep in mind. I at first this was just common filthy gossip, but the risks from this match is so high I was compelled to come here to assess the situation and let my feelings be known.”
“If you thought it was nothing but lies, then why come here? What do you want out of this?”
“To have such a report immediately and strongly contradicted at once.”
“Yet you coming here, being driven for an hour from London, does it not confirm this hypothetical report?”
“Hypothetical?! Why, by the time I heard of it, it was third hand news! The whole of Kent and London was buzzing with it. Have you not seen the tabloids?”
“I do not read such things, Madam.”
“And can you, with equal strength, declare there was no foundation for the rumour?”
“I cannot say to be as direct or frank as you. You may ask me questions that I would not answer.”
“Do not dare to be so saucy. Has my nephew made an offer of marriage to you yet?”
“You have declared it to be gossip.”
“I should hope it is only so. But you are a woman—your charms may have made him lose his mind, and in one moment of carelessness, made him forget his duties. You would have reeled him in.”
“If I did, why would I confess to it?”
“Miss Hooper, you are rude to the utmost degree. Do you know who I am and what I can do to you? As a family member, I am entitled to know his cares and concerns.”
“But you have no entitlement to know mine. Your words are not helping you, you know.”
“You know why your match can never happen? He may as well already be engaged.”
“How so?”
“He will get married to my daughter.”
“Then why are you here? If he is to be married to someone else, surely my engagement was impossible?”
Lady Smallwood hesitated, thinking intently. “I should have realised you are middle-class. Let me explain it to you: for our noble families, it is traditional, no, custom, to marry people of the same class. We, as in me and my first cousin, Lady Holmes, have already decided on the matter. Ever since they were in their cradles, we have planned on their union. Can you imagine, the wish of two close cousins of the highest order being married by a commoner? Surely you have heard of the intended union?”
“I thought such rarified matters was beyond my peasant ears, so no, madam.”
“Tush!”
“And your presumption that you can just manipulate people like that, thinking that they are nothing more than marionettes, well, that is just disdainful! This is a free country here— if Mr Holmes wished to be romantically attached to me—then that is his business, not ours. If he wanted me, then why could I not accept?”
“Because of honour, heritage, custom, and respectability all depend on it. If you act against the interest of all, you will be ignored, abandoned, insulted, and even revenged. We will all act as if you never existed.”
“Yes, they are serious consequences. But surely there are such benefits to being called Mrs Holmes that she would never regret it.”
“You stubborn idiot! Is this how you treat me after the reception of last spring? Is this how I am treated? I came here for a reason, and I will not leave until I have fulfilled it. I am not used to dealing with people’s whims—my way is always the way.”
“Then learn to fall, for I have done it a long time ago.”
“I will not be interrupted. Be quiet. My daughter and nephew are destined for each other. Their matrilineal line are one and the same as royalty and the patrilineal line, although untitled, is still of noble, ancient, and honourable stock. Both are rich and in marriage, the vast estates will forever be joined. Everyone in our families have approved of the match and what is to stop them? A common waif, whose family estate is to be entailed to a person under my patronage. Can you imagine how embarrassing that is? Surely you will not be a fish out the water and quit your own kind.”
“By being the daughter of a highly respected gentleman, and Mr Holmes a gentleman himself, I could hardly call it jumping from my pond.”
“True. You are upper-middle class after all. But who are your connections? Where did your father come from? And your mother’s family—I am not ignorant of them.”
“Whoever my family are, if your nephew are tolerant of them, surely you should be as well.”
“Get back to the point. Are you in a romantic relationship with him, engaged or not?”
“No.”

Lady Smallwood smiled.
“And do you promise, for the rest of your life, that you would not?”
“I do not make promises of such kind.”
“How dare you. I have expected a more level-headed, reasonable girl. But I will not leave until I have the answer I seek.”
“Good luck eating Mum’s cooking for the rest of your short, miserable life, because I will never comply. Besides, what you are doing is futile. What if I decline his hand, but he still wants me? That would still derail your plan, for your nephew would never marry your daughter. Besides, Lady Smallwood, you are out of your time. Such classist attitudes doesn’t make you fit to govern this fair land, dare I say. I do not know how much you meddle with your nephew’s affairs, but you definitely don’t have the right to interfere with mine.” So, while we can still keep our punches and claws to ourselves, please leave. Now.”
“Is that how you truly are! No matter- your ambitions shall go unanswered. I will not send compliments to your mother- you deserve no such attention. It is just as well I left my car at the front.”

The taxi driver looked quizzically at Molly, and then Lady Smallwood. He opened the back door, lead Lady Smallwood in, closed it, went in the front, and left, presumably forever.

“What a proper lady she is!” cooed Mrs Hooper. “Such elegance and highbrow company are rare and far these days. So, what did you two talk about?”

Normally, Molly would never be inclined to lie, but in this case, all agreed it was probably for the best.
It was one of those rare talks that Lady Smallwood managed to do to Molly. Indeed, it was one of those rare days when Molly’s resilient spirit was beaten down for more than a few hours. She was distracted all day- Lady Smallwood echoed in her mind: the notions she was not good enough for Sherlock gnawed her down. She was also curious to know why Lady Smallwood would make such an effort to come to Sevenoaks, until she remembered her sister’s upcoming nuptials. Where John is, Sherlock cannot be far behind, so she and Sherlock…no, Mr Holmes, will be seeing each other more often. And of course, through the use of Chinese whispers with the Donovans and Sally, the report gained all sorts of rubbish on the way to Lady Smallwood’s ears.

There were other things to be worried about. If Lady Smallwood did such a petition against her, then what would she have done with Sherlock? What would be his reaction with the slurs against her? Better not to think about it, she thought. After all, he could be very close to his aunt, much better than Molly could ever manage, and actually listen to the unfounded lies. His pride would ruffle with the notion that he was ever in contact with her, and never see her again.

The rest of the family were of course dumbfounded with the presence of Lady Smallwood at so odd an occasion, but they were satisfied with the explanation Molly gave her mother, so nothing was spoken of till the next day.

It was fortunate that Lady Smallwood visited on a Saturday, for a very important letter came on the Sunday. Mr Hooper felt obliged to invite Molly into his study to pour over the contents.

“I have received a letter this morning from Kent today. Two, to be exact, both sent in the same envelope. The first one is a card saying that Sally here is expecting a baby now and is inviting you to the baby shower.” He handed the thick cream card bearing the Smallwood insignia in purple. “The second letter, though,” he continued, “is of greater interest, and it mainly concerns you.” Which is why I thought it would be a good idea if you knew of its contents. For example, I did now know that two of my daughters are romantically engaged. I congratulate you, by the way.”

The colour rushed to Molly’s cheeks. Many questions rushed around her head. First one: who was this so-called admirer?

“No, Dad, I don’t know who it is.”

“Let me read it aloud for you. ‘Sally is static to know of the upcoming nuptials but she also disclosed to me something even more awesome. She told me that through her family she has reason to believe that Margaret is now romantically linked to the most illustrious patron of the land.’ Now for the odd part. ‘It must be forewarned though my dear cousin must reject this match at all possible costs. I admit it is vastly tempting- the manor, the land, the vast estate and the fortune it entails- but my cousin must not be lead astray by vices. It will lead to her downfall if she accepts the proposal. After all, Lady Smallwood does not approve of the match.’ It is only then does this bullock-head reveal who he is- he is none other than Mr Sherlock Holmes. Can you believe how groundbreaking this
news is? Mr Holmes, the one who thinks that all women are not worth his time, and that 'love is a disadvantage?' His words, not mine, my dear. I have overheard him say that once, quite aloud, during Watson’s ball."

Molly tried to join in the reverie, but could only smile and shuffle her feet. Her father noticed. “Do you want me to read on?”

“Yes please Dad.”

“When I mentioned the likelihood of the match to Her Ladyship, she erupted into a righteous hysterical fit, lecturing me on all the problems and reasons why such a match would doom us all. I feel obliged to tell you this, as Molly’s dearest paternal presence, to prevent such an affiliation from ever happening.” Then there is five pages of absolute classist rubbish about the purity of blood and the importance of family ties. I will not read them to you because they are more akin to Imperialist propaganda than something that is actually funny. But you have to admit, the stuff I read was actually quite funny?”

“Yes, of course! So when will our dear Anderson stop using superlatives?”

“When Lady Smallwood finds out she is my grandmother’s slave. But do you not think the whole situation as odd?”

“Rather, too much! I’m almost in hysterics even thinking about it.”

“That is what makes the whole situation deliciously funny. Almost any other man would make a more suitable candidate considering his sharp words and your obvious dislike. Now, I will need to write a reply for this. As much as I find writing hateful, this is too much of a good opportunity to miss. Go along.”

Molly was relieved when she ran out of the room, locked herself in a bathroom, and broke down in tears. Her father meant no harm, of course, and half a year ago, nay, three months ago, she would continue chuckling alongside him. Something has changed and maybe for the worst. Her father’s words had put her on a tightrope and, instead of Sherlock-Mr Holmes goddamit(!) getting too close to her, she now worried she might liked him too much.
Molly had expected Lady Smallwood’s influence was great enough to prevent John bring his best friend back to Sevenoaks the next week but it was delightfully not to be so. Behind her back Mary had told her beloved fiancée what had happened between Molly and Lady Smallwood and both agreed that a spot of righteous sabotage was exactly what was needed. And so when they went out for their weekly walk on the delightful day of Halloween they cannot help but invite everyone along. Mr and Mrs Hooper complained it was too cold to leave the house while Sarah could not be spared from her university studies, so it was the six of them- the four remaining Hooper sisters, John, and Mr Holmes- that walked out into the orange overloaded street. A faint hint of pumpkin soup was in the air.

Thus, the plan was set in action. Earlier on that day Mary persuaded her two littlest sisters to call upon the Donovans- not that it took much effort- and then agreed that as soon as they were able, they would fall behind. Kate and Kitty only prattled to themselves the whole time until they reached the Donovan’s place, while Molly and Sherlock just awkwardly listened to them. It was about relationships again, and how delicious it would be to be in love. Molly had to roll her eyes discretely several times and each time Mr Holmes smiled at her.

Once Kate and Kitty deposited them upon the Donovan’s gate the two remaining stragglers had to continue by themselves. Molly knew it was now or never, because who knew when they would meet up again?

“Mr Holmes, I am so sorry, so sorry for being such a blind and perjured creature, for thinking you so wrong for so long. It is only know do I realise the damage I have done in doing so. And I thank you for being the first to find my sister, and being instrumental in saving her. If only my family was allowed to know what truly happened. Even my father only knows Mary’s part of the rescue. In fact, Mary is the only person I could fully talk about the event. Mary has conveyed her gratitude already, I know, but if only had more to give you!”

“I sympathise with your pain, and I also feel sorry that you have to feel it. If only the situation turned out better.”

“No, please don’t. Just remember there will always things out of our control. I thank you so much for helping us and, on behalf of my whole family, for bearing with compassion the various horrors that you have found alongside the way.”

“If you are going to thank me, than something only from you is enough. Of course your happiness was one of my motivations for doing so. In fact, as much as it benefited your wonderful family, I think I only thought of you.”

They walked on, too embarrassed to talk. Finally, he spoke up again.

“Please, do not lie to me, but I know you will not. If your feelings towards me are the same as they were in May, tell me so now. My feelings and intentions have not, but one word from you can silence me forever.”

Molly was forced to reply despite her current embarrassment, but she did, in a halting, stuttering way. She explained, in more words than strictly should, how her feelings had changed since the period of time he had alluded to, and said, for the first time, she did very probably, no, actually loved him.

If she could actually bear to look up at him, she would see the most wonderful effect returned love would have on a man. His features softened and lit up, and he had the most boyish grin he ever had since childhood. He continued talking on about how lovely her response was, and how dear she was to him. This continued for a little while until he started talking about Lady Smallwood. Her Ladyship
did talk to him after all, about Molly's intentions and wishes. It had quite an opposite effect.

“I have never hoped harder for the first time in my life. After all, what my aunty had said to me was I had a chance, because if I did not, you would have told her in the first place. I know you- you are too upfront.”
Molly laughed. “I guess you have some experience of that now. After heckling you so terribly, I guess I could not miss the chance to do it to your relations.”
“But what did you say I did not deserve? Sure, it was based on false pretences, but my behaviour back then was the most abominable. I cannot think back on myself without disgust.”
“The now I think back on that fateful evening, the more I’ve realised that we were both in the wrong. So don’t feel guilty Sherlock, I think we have both since improved then.”
“But I cannot. I cannot help but think back on that evening and pain myself. You did say, “if only you were more gentlemanlike” and those were your exact words. It took many months till they took their full and worthy effect.”
“Well, I never expected my words to have made such a big impact.”
“Considering you thought I was incapable of feeling I am not surprised. The way you also acted towards me, saying there is no way I can approach you that will not make you vomit, well, that was memorable.”
“Don’t tease me any further! Just like you, I’m ashamed of how I acted. Just…forget about it, please.”
“And my letter. Did it change your opinion of me?”
“It did, slowly.” Molly then further explained in detail the effect it had on her and how her former prejudices were slowly eroded away.

“I wrote to you in pain and not of a sound mind. I had to write it to vent my feelings. Now, upon retrospection, I should have waited a longer time. The beginning, for example, was patronising, and there was sentences that would have made you hate me. Now I think about it, the letter was designed to be destroyed. I thought I was being logical and calm, but I was emotional and raging.”
“The letter might have began with fire, but it ended with a cool spring breeze. But don’t beat yourself upon it. Trust me, it is no longer relevant. The person who wrote the letter isn't the person standing in front of me now. Maybe you should follow my philosophy: think not of the past unless it gives you pleasure.”
“It is not really a philosophy you are preaching here but something much better. Your happiness does not come from philosophy but rather of innocence. I cannot claim that, you know. I will still have painful and embarrassing memories that will get in the way. Because you see, I have been a selfish being for almost my whole life. My parents have an odd habit of spacing their children almost a decade apart. Mycroft is seven years elder than me and Georgiana eleven. As a child I was spoilt almost rotten. I may as well be an only child for several years because Mycroft was constantly at boarding school as long as I could remember. I was, of course, set good examples by my lovely parents but I was never corrected. As a result, from the day I was born till the day I met you, I was selfish and overbearing, and cared for no one outside my small social circle. I would have continued doing so, until I met you, my dear, lovely, humble Molly! It is only you that I have learnt my manner was improper to please women worthy of being pleased.”
“Do you actually think that?”
“Molly, you are the worthiest I have met.”
“Dear me! Yet, you must have hated me after that evening!”
“Not hate. Angry, maybe, but soon that anger took a proper turn.”
“And what was your reaction of me coming to Pemberly. Surely you hated me then.”
“No, my dear, I only felt surprise.”
“Surely your surprise is not bigger than mine. I have never expected such kindness from you.”
“My offer of kindness is to prove to you there is another side to me, a more worthier side. It is to show that I not only have not resent the past, but is more than able to repent for the present. Other
reasons for doing so came had actually came with me."

He then recounted how Georgiana had enjoyed making her acquaintance with Molly, and how disappointed she was in that it had ended so quickly. Then there was her reactions when she found out (in censored generalities, of course) of what had happened that made Molly go home so quickly.

They walked on for several minutes, not too sure what to say. Only then did they realise the passage of time, and checked their watches. It was time to go home.

“Where did Mary and John go?,” was their synchronised speech. This of course induced laughter and questions on their reactions to the news of their engagement. Sherlock was of course happy over the event: after all, his friend had decided to tell him as soon as possible in person.

“Were you surprised?”
“Why should I be? It was obvious.”
“Considering you had to give them permission, of course.”

Sherlock blinked at that harsh, but nevertheless accurate accusation. He then confessed, “I told John when you went back to Sevenoaks what I should have told him a long time ago. I laid bare all my manipulations and plans. He never had any suspicions. Pity that. I told him of my thoughts that your sister was indifferent to him, and how I was mistaken. He is still lovestruck. They will be very happy together.”

“And did you personally deduce that my sister was still in love with him, or did you just trust my word?”
“The former, with the few visits I had done here recently.”
“And I suppose it had assured John immensely.”

“Of course. The more you will know him, Molly, the more you realise how modest he is. He, in such a difficult case, would rather defer to my judgement rather than his, which made controlling him rather easy. I did confess one thing to him that made him truly angry thought. I should have told him that your sister was trying to find him last winter. But don’t worry- now he knows that Mary loves him, he has forgiven me now.”

The conversation about the couple continued, mainly by Sherlock, until they reached the Hooper residence again. They parted at the hall.
The triumph of the Watsons'

It was proper that the two gentlemen would stay for lunch. After all, physical excretion does bring up quite an appetite and one does not become a graceful host by ignoring a guest’s needs. It was sandwiches again, and this time made from the cold meats of the previous evening. Only in the dining room did Molly see Mary again, whose quizzical look gave Molly dread. But it was to be expected. “Where did you go, Molly?” Molly only avoided Mary’s eyes and shuffled into a seat.

What marked that day was not of any extraordinariness but of how the ordinariness maintained itself at all. The two paired lovebirds laughed and shared their food, while the unpaired turned their backs on each other. Sherlock had perfected the cold mask required to keep up the charade while Molly knew that she was, rather than felt, happy. However what was overwhelming it was the dread of the future that laid before her. Must she keep this affair secret? If she did not, how will his family react? How will her parents react? He was only barely tolerated by her parents and not even his circumstances could improve that.

She had to talk to someone, and the only person that knew the whole truth was Mary. So she laid her soul bare to her elder sister that evening. Mary usually had a sharp eye on human behaviour, but even she did not predict this.

“Uh, Mary, there’s something I have to tell you,” began the apprehensive Molly. “I want to know your opinion on this but, ha, Sherlock wants to take me to a concert.”

“Sherlock? You mean…you have got to be joking, right? Is it a date?”

“Yeah…if you want to call it that.”

“Sherlock? You? Date? I don’t believe you.”

“Oh Mary please do! You were my only hope that someone would believe me. I’m not lying. He is in love with me.”

“Molly, he hates you!”

“That is all to be forgotten, my dear sister. Of course I have never loved him as much as I do now. Such is the curse of a good memory!”

Mary still had her mouth open, then closed it, and then congratulated her sister. When hugging her Mary then did a little smirk, something small so Molly would not notice, of a job very, satisfactory, well done. “Molly,” Mary then continued, “are you sure you are going to be happy though?”

“You have got to be joking? Sherlock and I have agreed we will be the happiest in the world! And aren’t you excited as well, Mary? Won’t he make a fantastic brother-in-law?”

“Oh yes I am absolutely delighted. Wait until we get John’s reply on the matter, shall we? But whenever we have talked about it, we have dismissed it as impossible. Do you actually love him? Please, whatever you do, don’t jump into a loveless relationship!”

“Of course! I was afraid to tell you that though because you would ask me to calm my passions a bit?”

“Why’s that?”

“Because I would then confess that I love Sherlock more than John!”

“Oh, do be serious,” hooted Mary. “Now, tell me everything. When did you fall in love with Sherlock?”

“I don’t know actually, because it really did not have a beginning. Maybe when I first laid my eyes on Pemberly?”

“Now I’m extremely happy, because you are now as happy as myself. Sherlock, of course, I have always respected him as John’s friend and constant companion. Now that he is your partner in life as well as love, he is now my most beloved person, after you and John, of course.” She then punched Molly gently in the arm. “But you, my little sly one, you have been keeping a lot of juicy secrets
from me, have you? You must tell me everything that happened in Pemberly, or else!"

They laughed and Molly complied. It was almost midnight before Molly ran out of things to say and their parents stared to complain about the racket. Only then did they agree to end the conversation.

§-

“What now!,” complained Mrs Hooper when she saw Sherlock sauntering up behind John the gravel path the next morning. “Why are we hosting this idiot again? Surely he has better things to do- what is wrong with golfing? He will only disturb darling John today. Molly, go distract him or something. Do anything to get him out of our way.”

Molly would like to do nothing better. It was just a pity that her mother would continue to insult him in such a way.

John came up to her and smiled so warmly there could be no doubt of his good intentions. There was also a mischievous twinkle in his eye. “Ginger, are there any lanes near here for Molly to lose herself in again?”

“I did recommend to her to visit Knole House. I know that Mr Holmes here lives in a grand estate but surely looking at another won’t hurt. It is absolutely sprawling and the architecture is apparently quite nice.”

“And I suppose the walk will be too much for the younger ones, right?”

Mary was too busy studying, while Kate and Kitty protested they have some urgent shopping to do in town (with their mother, of course). Sherlock thought it was a capital idea, while Molly just nodded. Just as Molly went back to her room to get ready, her mother called after her. “I’m sorry, my dear,” began Mrs Hooper, “but you must understand it is for the common good. We hardly ever see John, you see, and whenever he does Mr Holmes just happens to be stuck on him like a limpet! Just imagine having to deal with such a mooch on your own! Thanks for taking such a momentous task, just saying. Just tell me as soon as you get sick of him. I think we call all bear the load.”

During their walk, Molly and Sherlock discussed their upcoming ‘date’ and how they would get to it. Molly joking told Sherlock that she did not need any more clothes, thank you very much. Sherlock laughed and said it was all on his mother’s insistence. Molly then stopped.

“That reminds me…Lady Smallwood claimed it was also your mother’s wish that you marry Smallwood’s daughter.”

“What, little Ann? No, no my little sweet, you have nothing to worry. That was what you might call a ‘family joke’.”

“Oh, good.”

“As you know by now, Aunty Beth is very overbearing. So much so that even my mother, her dear beloved first cousin, continuously said ‘yes’ to whatever absurd request Aunty thought of that day. Must have made Aunty delusional. But you have nothing to worry about. Mother absolutely adores you.”

“Now, about my mother. However will she take the news that we’re dating.”

As you may have deduced by now Mrs Ginger Hooper has a perchance of overreacting to events pertaining her daughters, specifically if it is about relationships, love, or both. Whether or not she is overcome by the Holmes fortunes and influence, there were two guaranteed reactions: one, she will set a vendetta against anyone called Holmes (including the hapless mailman who makes the regular rounds every weekday and Saturday mornings and closest link to Sherlock Holmes was that his brother was once punched by Mycroft in a drunken incidence that had something to do with the colours of bananas back at university), or two, she will hug everyone with the said last name (see example above). Sherlock agreed to avoid her for the next week or so, whatever happens. It was also
agreed that it was high time that Mr Hooper finally knew the full story of the Kate/Moriarty incidence, and Sherlock agreed to explain it to him.

When they got back Sherlock did as exactly as he promised, while Mary and Molly packed. Mary explained to Sherlock beforehand the things that are still actually classified from the incident, to the interest of Molly (Mary and Sherlock had to go to the attic, the only place where they can talk without eavesdroppers).

When Molly was almost finished Sherlock came out to get her. This triggered a cascade of butterflies in her stomach as she realised what she had actually done. Her father would never object- in fact, when was the last time he opposed her decisions? She was his favourite child, and she knew it. What she feared was saddening him. If only she was more reasonable in her attacks against Sherlock! But Sherlock’s small smiled relieved her a bit. He then went right up to her and helped her pack her shirts. “Your father wants to see you,” he whispered in her ear.

Her father paced up and down his study, with such a grave look on his face that Molly’s stomach took a tumble. He saw her, and placed one hand on her shoulder.

“Molly, my dear, are you out of your mind? What has changed for you? This is rather unusual, you know. You have always hated him. Or maybe you are now determined to have him. Yes, the fortunes are there, and I dear say you might never need to work another day in your life. The designer clothes, the house, and the sport cars are there, but will that make you happy?”

“Is there anything that is bothering you, apart from my apparent indifference to him?”

“None, actually. We all, of course know him as a proud and unpleasant man, but if you really like him I think we can all change our minds.”

Molly then started crying. “But Dad, I do like him. In fact, I can almost say that I love him now. He does have pride, but they are all in the right places. Please, just don’t talk about him in such abhorrent terms. You really don’t know him.”

“Molly, my dear,” said Mr Hooper as he hugged his daughter, “I have given him my blessing, which I know will not mean much in this day and age. He is the type of man which I dare not refuse anything he asks for. You will be happy, Molly? I know you. You will never be happy unless you respect your mate in life, and that you are equals in your relationship. You are intelligent, Molly, so much so it will become the crux of whether you will never be happy or not with the person you are with. I know now that Sherlock is a good man, but is he still the right choice?”

“Yes, Dad, YES!”

She then explained to her father the gradual change of her estimations of Sherlock and the events that altered her perspectives. Mr Hooper had to nod through it all because although he had heard most it before from Sherlock, there was no stopping a girl violently in love. It was the whole deal: from the meeting at the ball, to Lady Smallwood’s birthday, and then the visit to Pemberly, and finally the Kate incident.

“Well then, this is a wondrous day indeed!,” began Mr Hooper as he pretended to be surprised. "So I will not need to repay any favours about Kate-gate because when I ask Sherlock about it he will rant on about his love for you and that will be the end of it. You know, dear Molly, that you have saved me a world of trouble?"

There was also the sudden realisation of the contents of Anderson’s letter. Mr Hooper then teased Molly a bit about it, and then they both laughed it off. Just before letting Molly go, there was one more consideration.

“Molly, my dear, it is best to announce your new relationship at or after Christmas, after you and Sherlock had known each other a bit more properly. I know it has been over a year now but it has been a bit sporadic, do you not think? It will be so soul shattering if your status before the end of this
year is a heartbroken ex."

-§-

"Must I wear this horrid jumper?"
"Shirley, it is my family tradition that for Christmas parties we wear matching jumpers."
"But I do not like it. I just do not." Sherlock’s pout as he looked at himself in the fireplace mirror sealed the deal. Molly’s back was bent double with laughter that tinkled throughout the flat. Even Billy the Skull was grinning.

They were at 221B, which Molly hope to call her home soon. It would free up a lot of her income if she and Mary no longer needed the flat.
"I am not part of your family, and therefore I do not need to partake in this terrible tradition."
"My dear pumpkin, please realise that even your family can’t afford designer jumpers for everyone. Besides, you will be part of the family by dinnertime."
"Fine."
"Hey, at least it is made of merino, alright? Though I think the red and green stripes do clash with each other. And the reindeer is out of place. And I acknowledge that reindeer do not have red bioluminescent noses. Anything else?"
"Do not forget the tassels."
"Oh yes, the tassels are just too silly for our serious, stubborn Sherlock."

"Are you two sillies ready?" Out came Mary and John in matching jumpers. "We better get going now anyway, before we’re all late for the party,” muttered John.

But they did arrive in good time. It was early enough for Mrs Hooper to look up from her raw venison roast and mutter about something that the Proud Man was back, and wonder what havoc he would cause this time.

This all changed when Molly asked to talk to her mother in private, and preferably in Mrs Hooper’s bedroom, where they would not be overheard. When Molly had explained everything that had happened between her and Sherlock, a strange change came over Mrs Hooper. For one thing, she sat down and was silent for a very long, very uncomfortable time. Mrs Hooper then roused herself and stood up. She had to pace around the room with the good news.

"Goodness me! Molly, in a relationship! With Sherlock to boot! The man with more than half a million pound income! I’m so happy for you, my dear Molly, I’m truly am. So tall! So handsome! My dear, I’m jealous of you. You will have all the jewels, all the luxury cars, all the houses. You will never be in want. Please forgive me of all the heresies I said of him! Two daughters sorted for life in such a small time! Oh, what rapture!"

Molly had to go to her room to calm herself from what had happened, so it was quite a nasty shock that only three minutes later her mother knocked on the door. “My dear, you must tell me Sherlock’s favourite dish, so I can prepare it quickly. It is the soup, is it not?"

It was a sad foreshadowing for Molly of what her behaviour would be like with her new son-in-law, but her fears are likely unfounded. During the whole party Mrs Hooper only had awe for Sherlock. She only spoke to him when he spoke to her first, and all her opinions aligned with Sherlock’s. Later that evening Mr Hooper had a long conversation with Sherlock. Once finished he talked to Molly.

"With Sherlock, I think his esteem of me is rising every minute, which is comforting to know. Now, all I need to think about is which of my two future son-in-laws I will like the best."
Letters and family matters

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! I cannot believe we have come so far but basically, it has finished! This is the last chapter for this story's timeline, though I do realise that there are two chapters to go. They will form the two-parter epilogue, and they will tie up the story nicely once and for all. Thanks guys for your support.

The concert was perfect. Sherlock was a member of a very small and yet exquisite Hall nearby Baker Street, where they had dinner and was treated to a recital for the ages. After an intimate evening together for the first time, Molly felt bless. She cannot help but lean on Sherlock’s shoulder once they hit the chilly November air. They were walking back to the Watson’s residence. Molly felt the champagne bubbling up her stomach, buoying her spirits. “So when did you fall in love with me?, ” teased Molly. “I can definitely see a change in you when you did, but surely when did it happen?” “I cannot say. By the time I realised I was, it was already too late.”

“Not because of my beauty, because you called me ugly. Not because of my brains, because you had better. Definitely not because of my behaviour, because my actions were designed to hurt you. Or was it?”

“It was actually because of your wit.”

“You’ve called it rudeness once. But the fact is, by the time you’ve met me, you’re sick of civility. You hated the girls who only acted for your benefit. You hated their thin veneer of apparent politeness, and the lies that came with it. You were only interest in me because I was different. If I had acted more courteously to you, you would have ignored me. Yet, when you fell in love, you didn’t actually see any good in me, but love has always been blind. There you go- now you don’t need to say anything more.”

“Surely your care for your ill sister last year counts as a saintly deed.”

“Oh, Mary, how Mary! There is too much injustice in this world if anyone would ever do less for her. No, it was not a virtue, it was a natural reaction. But do blow up my ego and laud me more than I deserve. I will then in return ask you why you have to go about so long in your pompous ways and never get to the point? Why did you avoid me so much when you came here? Don’t tell it was shyness. The great Sherlock Holmes, scared of little mousy me?”

“Because you gave me no inkling, no chance to try.”

“But I was embarrassed.”

“Same.”

“Surely you could have talked more over dinner.”

“A man who had less to loose might.”

“So it is so that you have the reasonable answers, and me forced to accept them as such! I wonder now what would have happened if I had just left you to your own devices. How long would it have taken for you to get to me? My action in thanking you for what you have done for Kate was successful- too successful. What now? Our best comforts came from suffering! I should never have broached the subject.”

“Do not worry about the morality of our actions. Instead, it is Aunty Smallwood that might have to look over her actions. It is due to her that I realised I still had a chance, not due to your expressions in gratitude. I was too impatient to wait for you, and I had forced my aunty to reveal all she knew.”

“Dear Lady Smallwood! It would please her to know she had been extremely helpful recently. But if that is so, why come down at all?”
“To come and see you, darling Molly, and only you. I wanted to see if I still had a chance. I had to hide that, of course, with an excuse to watch you sister, and to see if she would admit to John what I had recently did.”

“And as now we have made the bed, we must lie in it. What to do about Smallwood?”

“I know what I want to write, but I was waiting for a much better time to write it. Come to think of it, better late than never, right?”

“Once we get back home, of course. Or maybe the next day when we are not so tipsy. We can then get some paper out, I plain, you parchment, and I can get my ballpoint as you refill your fountain pen, as we write to our respective aunts. It is high time I wrote to Aunt Bee now and announce my current situation, and admire your handwriting, just as another lady had done once upon a time.”

It was right that Molly did write to Mrs Gardiner, for she did inadvertently help them come together. Granted, Mrs Gardiner’s obvious matchmaking behaviour was a bit annoying at times, but it was all for the best. Molly did feel guilty for not writing earlier (why not email, you ask? You really think such an important event could only be justified by ones and zeros?) and therefore left her beloved aunt hanging longer than it was proper. The letter was written as followed:

“I really must thank you, my dear Aunt, by helping two clueless idiots find each other. I know your role was nothing more than specularly, but you really did do a wonderful job. I know I should have written before with all the details and speculation, but to be fair time does pass quickly for lovers. In the past, I was afraid you had fancied more than there really was, but now I’m certain it is the opposite. Let loose your imagination and gallop around in your head what might happen, because more likely than not it will happen. Please write again soon and praise dear Sherlock more than you did last. Why on earth did I want to go to the Lakes the first time round? Yes, I will get ponies for Pemberly as soon as I can. That is a wonderful idea but there are other people to ask beforehand, of course. I’m the happiest person alive right now. I know that many other people will try and claim that title but trust me, I have more justification than them. Even Mary: she only smiles, I laugh. Sherlock is inviting you to Pemberly during Easter and he sends all the love he can spare from me. I do to.”

Sherlock’s tone of letter was of course world’s apart from his dearly beloved. Different still was Mr Hooper’s note to Anderson. It was as follows:

“Anderson

I must burden you once more with congratulations. Sherlock Holmes and my daughter Molly Hooper are, for better or worse, official. Comfort your mistress the best you can, but do side with her nephew. It will be better in the long run.”

Miss Watson even wrote in, with a lot of affection and insincerity. She even called Mary, to tell her how delighted she was and her apparent desire to resume their friendship. Mary learnt too much to be deceived, yet treated Miss Watson more kindly than she probably deserved.

Miss Holmes wrote in with the sincerity of a steel blade. Four pages was not enough to contain her joy of finally having a sister to love and it even went to the point that some of her writing spilled into the envelope. Mycroft Holmes sent a more serious letter, a 100 word note that amounted to a simple message conveying his and his family’s congratulations. It was written in such formal language it took Mrs Hooper to decipher the meaning.

But before they could get any reply from anyone else, Sally Donovan and Anderson was seen aligning at the Donovan’s residence. The reason was obvious. Sally, who was another secret shipper between Sherlock and Molly, was delighted at the match but frightened at Lady Smallwood’s fury. So was Anderson, which really said something. It was then immediately decided that the two of them would stay at Sevenoaks, at the edges of the maelstrom until it blew over. Molly was over at London
at the time, dissecting the body of Helen Louise, when she heard the good news. She immediately offered shelter at Baker Street, until they remembered that it was precariously close to Downing Street. There was also the problem of what was preventing Lady Smallwood from visiting when she went from Rosings to Parliament, until they remembered she was fond of her helicopters. On the second weekend of January the Hooper and Donovans had another small party. Molly knew that Sherlock would hate it, on account of Anderson and Sir Donovan being there, but he bore it with perfect patience. Sir Donovan commended Sherlock for snatching away the brightest jewel in Sussex, and expressed hopes of meeting often. If Sherlock did roll his eyes, it was when no one was watching.

However, the greatest challenge was yet to come. Aunt Phillips, due to an enormously stroke of bad luck, was unable to attend the Christmas party. Sherlock was able to meet her soon afterwards. What surprised him the most was her rudeness. Being of Scottish blood, and upbringing, this Aunt could not speak without talking about the most inappropriate things. Luckily, she shared her sister’s awe at Sherlock, so she stayed a little quieter. Not that it helped matters much. Molly was exhausted in protected Sherlock from her family and vice versa, and longed for the days she could just sit in peace in Pemberly, with her own chosen family circle surrounding her.
The short term conclusion

Of course, in this alternative universe, there has been a of changes to characters and events just to make it stable and not collapse after the ninth second. One of them was when this universe's Elizabeth Bennet, a very distant relation of Molly here, decided to marry Darcy a year later than what we are familiar in the Austenverse. This set up a chain of events that lead to James Moriarty’s mother not quite having enough fish during her pregnancy with James, and thus he is not quite as clever as he is in the Moffatverse. It had something to do with Elizabeth’s bridal veil arriving later than usual from France, which then disturbed the fisheries in the Channel, and that, 200 years later, leading to the exorbitant rise in the price of fish. Don’t ask me further about it.

What can be properly ascertained however is that Sherlock was against the idea of a double marriage. No, not just against. He actually promised that he would run away from the isle if he saw Mary wearing a bridal dress on his wedding day and continued to rant on for the better half of the hour about how ridiculously cliched it was. By then Molly was quite apt at dealing with divas so she wrote up a mock agreement with so many holes in the terms and conditions it would stand up like a rotten cod in court. It did however explicitly stated that Molly would not share the isle with Mary, and that calmed Sherlock for a little while.

Wedding planning was of course, a pain. After the traditional year wait was over, Mary and Molly announced to their family that they wanted help to plan the wedding. They should never have.

Mrs Hooper was ecstatic. She had her own dreamy perfect wedding, of course, and wanted nothing less for her daughters. She insisted on planning everything until Mary and Molly decided she would only make everything to gaudy. Mrs Hooper had also bought into the idea of having a double wedding, which the two had to quietly persuade Mrs Hooper otherwise. Their mother would have been more than enough to handle, until Lady Smallwood decided to wade into the matter as well.

Everyone was puzzled when once again the same cream embossed envelope arrived bearing the same elegant handwriting arrived the post. Inside it detailed everything Molly (and by extension Mary) had to do to perform a wedding worthy enough for her to be connected to. This came as a surprise to Molly, for was she not against this wedding? And how did she know Molly wants to plan her wedding? Anderson assured her though it was perfectly normal. “You cannot comprehend the higher reasonings of our aristocrats,” he explained. Molly wanted to slap him.

So, how did the weddings differ to the ones you have seen already in the Moffatverse? Well, it can be as different as could be expected when two of the most formidable women with differing ideas decided to plan two weddings together at the same time. Lady Smallwood arrived at the Hooper residence mid-March to make sure everything went her way, though everyone could see she considerably mellowed out. Ann Smallwood’s condition was getting a major turn for the worse but there was always hope, right until the end, a long decade later, she would get better.

The two women squabbled, fought, but mainly effectively collaborated over a month with Skype calls when Lady Smallwood was in London. In that time Mary and Molly were pushed into one fitting over another, with dresses, shoes, hats, ballgowns, and even nightgowns. Lady Smallwood did not miss a single detail, though how she went about it left much to be desired for. And there was the matter of the bridesmaids. Mary introduced Janine out of nowhere (quite literally- nobody apart from Mycroft Holmes knew anything about her and for good reason) while Molly and the safe and predicable Sally. Mary chose lilic theme while Molly gold. Sherlock shuddered at Molly’s choice and constantly complained that silver and blue would suit her much better. They argued over the trifle until a deal was reached: gold overlay with silver inlay and sapphire jewels. Such a colour
combination turned out very satisfactorily; even Lady Smallwood gave her nod of approval.

The date was set for the wedding. Mary was pining for a early summer wedding so mid-May was perfect for her. Two months was not enough for Lady Smallwood’s taste and many details had to be rushed. Nevertheless the ceremony was very successful and filled with the sweet scent of summer flowers. Sherlock gave the best man speech that gave him the reputation of a raconteur and even a murder was prevented. You know the one.

A month later the wedding of the year was held. Banes were printed in all the major newspapers throughout the country and the press were invited too keep their respectable distance from the venue. Many prominent guests came; it was even rumoured the Queen was there. But no, it was only the Prince of Whales, his consort, and Prince Harry. The prime minister was also invited but had to decline due to pressing engagements.

“So, my wedding was only the opening act,” trashed Mary as she readjusted Molly’s veil. Molly blushed but she still smiled. It was her dream day- of sorts, but she didn't expect the man. Mrs Hooper was fussing over the silk train and was weaving pink silk rosettes into the hem. Molly asked quite nicely not for a puffy dress and she was glad she did so. The dress was easy to move in and it accentuated her quite lovely figure. It was an ivory colour and it had gold and silver accents. Molly wore sapphire drop earrings and marching necklace.

The isle was beautiful. It was several long Persian carpet with yellow daffodils and blue forget-me-nots weaved within itself and had a silver boarder. Mrs Hooper was quite proud in finding it, which send Lady Smallwood in a small huff. It was so lovely, Molly was quite afraid of crushing it. Yet, everyone was there. The whole Hooper clan, who Molly was familiar with, and the British nobility, who Molly was not. The music started in the cathedral; this was the cue for Molly to start walking.

“You look beautiful tonight!,” exclaimed Mr Gardiner as he twirled around Molly in a familiar fashion. It was the reception, and Molly was wearing the silver and sapphire ballgown Sherlock gave Molly all those months ago. It still fitted Molly perfectly. “We were right about you and Sherlock and by golly, aren’t we!” But the time was going so fast. Soon, it was time for Sherlock to claim her for the first dance, then there was the second one, then the third, a scrumptious dinner, more dances, and finally, as the moon was about to give way to the sun, they all went to bed.

“Whatever we are going to do about you,” smirked Sherlock as he carried his bride to their ensuite. “Oh, I don’t know, Shirley,” smiled Molly as she nuzzled on his neck. “But don’t fall asleep too soon, won’t you?”
“No, certainly not. I have plans for you.”

And so the birds began their dawn chorus.
I have not decided yet whether babies are more likely the result of marriage or the other way round. But whatever it is, it is quite natural for most young couples to have a baby within the first year of marriage.

It was almost a year to the day of their wedding, and Molly was sitting on the couch. Well, she was doing the best she could for a heavily pregnant woman, which meant spraying out with one leg on the seat and other leg on the floor. Mary and John struck a new deal with Mrs Hudson, and 221C was opened up for them. Irene Watson, faulty as she was, at least knew she was defeated and bowed out gracefully. It was hard not to feel pity for her though so through Molly’s various law-practising family members Irene met a particularly nice and honest lawyer by the name of Adler. They have been living together now for a month and Molly was happy for her. Besides, the new baby needs the space.

Molly was leafing through her honeymoon photos. They were all taken from their lodge up in the mountains of Queenstown. In one of the photos the Southern Alps rose majestically and the little bustling town glowed in the sunset. The balcony was wide and inviting, with settees and ottomans. Molly was smiling, sitting and resting one of her legs on an ottoman, a drink in her hand. Sherlock proclaimed there was gold in those mountains, and very probably a dragon too.

It was the weekend in London. The summer sun bought in the flowers, and everything was in bloom. Even Molly’s neglected window box showed some promise. Toby, their new pet cat, nuzzled against her bump and fell asleep. All was content.

Molly’s legs suddenly became wet. Very very wet. Then the contractions. The cramps were not what Molly had ever experienced before, even during the worse days of her period. But Molly knew what to do. She grabbed a sky-coloured terrycloth bag and raced down the stairs.

It was a pity that John and Sherlock were once again on a case, but this did not mean Mary was as well. Molly called to Mary that the baby was coming, which sent Mary out the door to grab the car and assist Molly down the outside stairs.

Don’t believe in the fictional media’s versions of hospital births. It is only rarely ever pain free and quick. For Molly, it was a nightmarish hell. The baby took five hours to be born and the epidurals only dulled the intensity of the pain. Molly had Sherlock’s hand to hold on the whole time though and it did help. (“One of the benefits of mobile phones,” huffed John.)

But finally, the pink, squirming little human came out into the big wide world, and the first thing it did was cry.

“He’s beautiful,” blurbed Molly while she proceeded to soak her baby’s wrapping. Sherlock was crying as well, though he made a valiant effort to suck them in as soon as they came out.

“Shut up. He’s not as beautiful as Roxanne,” cut in John.

“Darling, don’t spoil the moment,” whispered Mary into his ear. “And now for the name?” she said in a much louder voice.”

“Hamish,” said Sherlock.

“William,” said Molly. “Hey,” they then both said at the same time.

“Sherlock, you know I hate my middle name,” face palmed John.
“In the same token, I abhor my first name.”
“So what you are saying,” gasped Mary, “is that you haven’t decided a name yet?”
“We kinda did,” replied Molly, “but it is a shortlist of William or Hamish.”
Both men made a disgusted facial expression.
“Well, decide soon otherwise I shall have to name him,” declared Mary. “He shall henceforth be ‘Hamish William Holmes’”
The other three looked as if they were about to cry, all for different reasons.

-§-

“Fitzwilliam Leonard"
“Too fancy.”
“Vivian Henry.”
“Isn’t Vivian a girl’s name?”
“Not in our class.”

This was what happened three months before. For inspiration, Molly and Sherlock looked around them and unfortunately for the soon-to-be child, another Star Trek film had just come out, Sherlock was researching the Hooper family history, and they had just watched an episode of The Young Ones. Where Henry came from was a complete mystery though.

“Well, I think we’ll be better off looking though this book.” It was a compendium of baby names and all their meaning and connotations. A week later though still nothing much happened. They complained to the Watsons. John then accidentally recommended Hamish, only to try and take it back again. And that was how Sherlock found out John’s middle name. Why not before? I don’t know, but it became a major aspect of this alternative universe.

In the end, three months later, with all options exhausted and the men in tears, Mary registered the new babbling baby William Hamish Holmes. It was on Molly’s insistence, and besides, the nicknames were endless.

“Sherlock, we can call him Billy! He can be your replacement skull! Or Hamster…”
“Hamster!” cried John. “My god, what are you trying to do? Insult me?”

And so forth. Sherlock did eventually get over the incidence, and did use little Billy to replace the dead Billy to discuss the intricacies of Murder and Mayhem. It took longer for John, but on the boy’s first birthday, he could stand being photographed with the full name etched in icing on the cake in the foreground.

I could go on about their lives, about how little Billy managed to take his first steps, about how he and Roxanne became best friends, about his (mis)adventures at school, about how Lady Smallwood eventually became the Prime Minister of United Kingdom (and a decent one at that), and how one day a dark blue police box accidentally crashed into the living room incurring damage not only to 221B but the neighbours as well.

But that is for another book. Maybe one day I will write it.

Chapter End Notes

And here is the official ending! I cannot believe I have managed to do this, over more than a year! Thanks guys for supporting me for so long. May your ideas sprang forth
and create universes of their own, and may all your lives be bountiful. P.S Message me if you have any ideas you want me to do.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!