Sherlock discovers he is an omega under the worst circumstances possible. With Mycroft’s help he endeavours to hide his gender and live as a beta. But what will happen to his carefully maintained façade, and his relationship with his brother, when he moves in with an alpha army doctor?
In retrospect, the first sign that something was happening – something different and wrong – came during my commute to the University aboard the Metrolink Tram. The morning had started unremarkably: it was as grey and rainy as any other Wednesday morning in March in Manchester. I had woken up feeling fuzzy headed and irritable, but this too was nothing special, as the previous evening my flatmate Victor and I had shared a few pitchers of cheap beer at the pub beneath our grotty student digs on Edge Street.

The Tram was packed with chattering uni students and even a few omegas on their way to fashion design classes or music and dance lessons at the Omega Retreat on Parsonage. The smells of wet wool, old beery vomit, and too-sweet perfumes clogged my nostrils and made me feel headachy and nauseous. I wasn’t usually troubled by the madding crowds, but that day I found them simply unbearable. At the time I attributed my discomfort to the sound of two omegas flirting with a disinterested female alpha. Even over the cacophony of traffic and rain I could hear their high-pitched, childish giggles. Though they were both significantly shorter than the beta and alpha commuters, I could easily see their voluminous curly hair-dos as they told an inane story about a party, while the alpha in the distinguished grey pantsuit checked her phone and subtly rolled her eyes at the pair.

“Oh my god, that is so insane! You’re crazy! What are you even doing?” laughed the first omega from behind his hand. I noticed his nail polish matched the purple kitties on his hoodie. I scoffed when he tossed his long, blond hair over his shoulder, exposing the unmarked scent gland on his neck. How brazen – and frankly sad – that he would make such a forward, overt gesture to an alpha whom he wasn’t even acquainted with, and who was clearly uninterested in him.

The female omega piped up, “Kyle, you are such a stupid-head!” Ugh. While I didn't know any omegas personally at the time, I still found many of their stereotypical attributes objectionable. The thing I hated most about them was their affected infantile behaviour. How on earth could omegas expect to be taken seriously – let alone be granted the same political rights enjoyed by everyone else in Britain – if they acted like toddlers all the time?

The female omega had clearly noticed that her friend was putting the moves on the unattached alpha, and, not to be outdone, tossed her dark brown ringlets in the alpha’s direction, no doubt hoping to entice the woman with her omega scent. As a beta, I had never been able to detect either alpha or omega pheromones; however, even at a distance of at least five feet I was able to smell the sickly sweet, rotten cantaloupe odour of what I assumed was synthetic omega scent.

That odour was the last straw for my already overwhelmed senses. I decided to move away from the omegas’ sad attempts at attracting the interest of the polished, elegant alpha. Curiously, however, instead of stepping around the little group to stand nearer to the door of the Tram, I decided to brush right past the alpha. I’m not sure what I was trying to accomplish. Perhaps I simply wished to give her a break from the omegas’ juvenile attention seeking, perhaps I wished to show up the omegas – to demonstrate how one ought to flirt with a sophisticated alpha. The latter explanation was certainly uncharacteristic of me. Even for a beta I had little interest in or experience with sex; something that my alpha roommate Victor had been teasing me about the previous evening. Ah, I thought as I approached the alpha, that must be the explanation: I was simply trying to prove to myself and Vic that I was not so clueless about sex.

As an adolescent, my mother frequently told me that I have ‘bedroom eyes.’ She, and all of our relatives and neighbours, anticipated that, like my older brother Mycroft, I would present as an alpha.
This was something to be proud of indeed because it is quite rare that two beta parents could produce a single alpha offspring, let alone two. I was nearly as tall as Mycroft, they reasoned, and every bit as arrogant and imperious. She predicted that the neighbourhood omegas would be powerless to resist my ‘seafoam’ (her word, not mine) green eyes and seductively deep voice. I know that she was a bit let down when I didn’t present as an alpha in my early teen years, when secondary sex characteristics usually became apparent, but she covered up her disappointment by reasoning that having two competitive young alphas in the same house would have been volatile and disruptive. My bossy arrogance, which she and Daddy had mistaken for a sign of my latent alpha nature, must have been due to my subconscious imitation of my older brother. My mother’s hopeful predictions about what a ladykiller alpha I would turn out to be had long since dwindled to a halt by the time I left Gloucestershire to study Organic Chemistry in Manchester, but I knew that she was right that my unusual eyes were my best asset.

In my three and a half years at Man U, I had acquired a terrible habit of submitting assignments late. Yet I was never penalized, because I had long known how to bat my eyes and charm my instructors (alphas and betas both – there were no omegas, obviously) into letting things slide time after time. The previous evening Victor had said that I was wasting my talent for manipulation on University staff, and that if ever I applied it to luring other betas into bed I would be unstoppable.

Time to put Victor’s advice to use then. With my deep, rumbly voice – so different from the shrill giggles of the omegas – I mumbled, “Excuse me,” as I brushed in front of the alpha. Up close, she was beautiful: tall; straight, dark brown alpha hair pulled back in a bun; square, determined jaw. Her masculine perfume smelled like forests and wind-swept beaches. I breathed in deep, for I had never smelled any perfume like it before. She glanced up at me, and I used the brief moment of eye contact to bat my lashes at her, before turning to stalk elegantly towards the Tram door. I could feel her eyes on me as I waited for the Tram to pull up at St. Peter’s Square. As the doors slid open, I glanced back at her. She stared openly at me, and I gave her a small smile as I strode out the door. Through the windows of the departing Tram I noticed the two small omegas glaring daggers at me.

Inexplicably thrilled by my encounter I strode down Southmill Street and Jackson’s Row towards the Library. My head cleared as I turned onto Deansgate, and my thoughts turned to my final year thesis. I intended to spend the entire Wednesday in the basement stacks searching for books and photocopying back issue journal articles that I could use in the literature review. As I had planned it, my thesis would compare bee pheromones to alpha/omega pheromones in humans, and examine how each helped populations to coordinate their behaviour. I intended to argue that the bees’ system of communication through pheromones was far more useful than the human system, as fully eighty percent of the human population (these being the betas) was completely oblivious to the pheromones exchanged amongst the other twenty percent (comprised in equal parts of alphas and omegas). I chuckled at the thought of how my alpha professor would react to such an cheeky suggestion.

As I approached the door to the Library, I felt the vibration of the text alert on my mobile phone. I checked it as I crossed the threshold, to the dismay of the attending librarian who scolded, “No mobiles!”

It was from Victor (Well, of course it was, he was really my only friend). “Bill where r u? U hav omeg ovr last nite??” I paused. The librarian again hissed, “No mobiles!” I winked at her and turned towards the stairs as I sent a reply to Vic, “At Lib… wut u mean???” I had no idea what Victor was implying. If that was meant to be a joke – perhaps a reference to our conversation the previous evening – I didn’t get it. I waited for his reply. It came just as the librarian came out from behind her desk. “omeg STINK –“ was all I could read before she snatched the phone from me, hissing, “You can have it back when you leave!” I shrugged insouciantly and descended the stairs to the entomology section in the basement.
I briefly wondered what Victor’s cryptic message meant. Had an omega moved into our building? Was it in heat perhaps? That would certainly be worthy of note to an unattached alpha like Victor. However, the morning’s encounter notwithstanding, I rarely allowed myself to be distracted by the whole mating business, and my thoughts soon returned to the wonders of apiology.

As I began to amass a pile of books on a study carrel, I noted with some dismay that my headache and fuzzy-headedness had returned, and were now accompanied by a distinct clamminess around my nether regions. I wondered if this was more than a hangover – was I running a fever? My nausea had returned too. It seemed that the Library was full of overlapping, overwhelming smells, some awful, others quite enticing. Like trees and rain and spearmint. Like that alpha’s perfume. I shook my head to clear it, and decided to go home and read on the sofa for the rest of the day. I gathered my books together, but when I tried to lift the small pile, I found that I had very little strength in my arms. I tried again, and noticed an unfamiliar achiness in my damp groin. I dropped the books, and flinched at the loud thumps they made in the quiet library. I made sure no one was looking towards my carrel, and slipped my hand inside my jeans. I was shocked to discover warm slime coating the crotch of my briefs. I pulled out my hand to see that it was covered in clear fluid. However, it wasn’t until I detected the distinctive flowery sweet smell that I finally understood what was happening.

“No!” I whispered. In a panic I unzipped my jeans and slid my hand inside my pants. To my surprise, my prick was hard and hot, but my concern was more for what was happening in my perineum. Where once there had been skin and hair, there was now a breach. An open leaking hole that ached to be touched. This couldn’t be happening! I thought. I was twenty-one years old, at least seven years older than the age when omegas typically presented themselves. And I was tall! And bossy! This couldn’t be happening! I gathered up my books, irrationally still intending to check them out before rushing home.

As I turned a corner towards the stairs, someone stepped in front of me. A woman. In fact the alpha from the Tram. She smiled at me and said, “I was wondering whether I’d find you.” My heart filled with ice as I realized that this encounter was no coincidence.

“Those look heavy,” she smiled at the stack of apiology books in my arms. “Need some help?”

“No, I – I’m fine. Just going to sign these out in fact!” She ignored my protests and leaned in to take my books from me, sniffing deeply at my bare neck as she did so. I backed away from her, noting with dread that she was blocking my access to the stairs.

“Hey now, don’t be shy,” she grinned wolfishly. “You were practically gagging for it on the Tram…”

I gulped, “That – I – sorry about that. I didn’t realize –“

“…And what kind of omega goes out during its heat?” We both knew the answer to this question. To protect their own virtue, omegas were expected to either stay at home for the duration of their heats, or alternately, at the first indication that their heat was beginning, proceed immediately to an omega retreat for ‘servicing’ by a volunteer alpha. (Indeed this need for a monthly, week-long sequestering was frequently cited by conservative elements of the government as a prime reason that omegas could not expect to be granted the right to stand for public office, access to universities, or equal employment.) An omega that went out in public during its heat, unaccompanied by either a family alpha or its mate, was assumed to be a slag: a ready and willing target for any alpha that could track its scent.

“Look,” I said, shifting my books in my arms, “That was j-just a mistake. I didn’t realize that I was going into heat…. It’s my – It’s my first one. I didn’t know what to expect.” She tilted her head to the side at that, and gave me a tender but patronizing smile.
“Aww, your first heat? You’re quite the late bloomer. Well, if you stop putting up a fight, we won’t hurt you too much.”

“We?” I said. Her eyes flicked to my right, and I caught a swift movement from one of the aisles beside me. Before I could do anything more than turn my head, however, a heavy book swung by a powerful arm hit me in the face, and I dropped my books with a groan and a clatter. I slumped to my hands and knees, and whimpered, “Please, no! Don’t do this! I’ll go home!” The words came out wet and slurred, as blood poured from my nose and split lip.

The male alpha – evidently a hunting companion to the female—grabbed me by the collar and dragged me to the furthest, darkest corner of the library. I kicked at him, and scratched at his frighteningly strong hands. My actions were impeded, however, by that same curious weakness that had made my books seem so heavy – a weakness that I was now beginning to realize might be another heat symptom. He dropped me on the floor, and reached around my waist to unbuckle my belt. With that it became painfully clear what they were planning to do to me, I kicked back at him and shrieked in panic. I felt my foot connect with something solid – possibly his leg – and he released me. As I tried to scramble to my feet, the female alpha appeared in front of me. She grabbed my hair and twisted cruelly, whispering, “Now, now. That’s enough of that.” Then she slapped me hard, and the world went blurry around the edges.

I came back to my senses just a few seconds later. It had been long enough for them to secure my hands behind my back with my own belt and gag me with my own necktie. Though the pain in my face was overwhelming, my attention was drawn to the alphas’ hands, which were currently running over my torso and crotch. The male alpha pulled down my zipper and yanked my pants and jeans to my ankles. I wriggled and moaned in protest, but he took no notice as he ran a thick, calloused hand over my bafflingly hard prick and leaking cunt. “Yeah, he wants it bad, the little tease,” he smiled.


The woman stood over me as I cowered and whimpered on the floor. “Mmm, you are pretty, aren’t you? It’s such an honour to be your first alpha.” I shook my head, and tears began to trickle down my cheeks. The tie in my mouth was drenched with saliva and I gagged on it. “Shh, shh. You’ll like it.” She said as she stripped off her blazer and stepped out of her skirt.

I had grown up with an alpha brother, and had lived for three and a half years with another, so I was no stranger to alpha cocks. I knew that even in their flaccid state they were far bigger than a beta’s. But this was terrifying. The female alpha’s hard cock was glistening purple-red and poked out of her lacy black knickers. It was covered in blue veins and it pulsed and bobbed in a revolting manner. The worst thing about it, however, was the inflated balloonish knot at its base. I knew – from my Human Biology class and confirmed by Victor – that at the time of climax that the whole knot would fit into an omega’s vagina. But there was no way that that entire monstrous organ would fit into me. I began to keen in fear.

“Don’t worry, baby,” she crooned as she knelt down beside me, “You’re making plenty of lube. It’ll feel so good.” She ran her fingers down my sore face, and I couldn’t help turn my head away. Then she sniffed and licked my neck, spending extra time on the weeping scent gland that had suddenly appeared. She did not bite it to mark me as her mate, however. This made perfect sense: why would she take me on as a burdensome omega mate when she could just fuck me for free?

Suddenly she tore open my shirt and ran her tongue down my bare chest. I was alarmed to see how swollen and red my nipples looked. She lapped at one, then bit it hard enough to leave a purple mark. I yelped through the gag, surprised at how sensitive my nipples were, and horrified that there was a tiny part of my own biology that was actually enjoying the alpha’s actions. Don’t get me
wrong: both then and now I saw the alphas’ attack on me as a brutal, degrading, unforgivable assault. But there was also a tiny part of my newly revealed omega biology – which I would soon come to revile – that was inexplicably and humiliatingly turned on by the alpha’s gropping hands and stroking tongue. This subhuman, debased part of me compelled me to arch my back to offer my neck to the alpha above me, and grind my swollen nipples against her blouse.

“See? I told you you’d like this,” She grinned and raised up on her knees. For a brief foolish moment I thought that she wouldn’t proceed any further. But, no, she took my feet, and roughly tore off my trainers, jeans, and briefs. I used the opportunity to renew my kicking, but she easily dodged my knees, and grabbed my hard, sensitive cock in her powerful manicured hand. I stopped struggling and whimpered into the sopping wet gag as she sunk her long red nails into the turgid flesh. “Now that’s enough,” she purred as she positioned my thighs on either side of her waist. “I told you that it wouldn’t hurt as much if you didn’t struggle, and I meant it.” I shuddered as I felt the hot wet tip of her cock against the lips of my cunt. “You just lie back and think of England and I’ll be done in a minute.”

I don’t think she even took that long. There were a few fast, hard thrusts, then I felt a gush of warm fluid deep inside me. For my part, I kept my eyes squeezed shut and tried to remain as quiet as possible – though I couldn’t help the occasional pained squeak. In the end she didn’t knot me, and as soon as her prolonged orgasm was over she pulled out and stood up, searching for a tissue in her purse to clean the blood and semen off her deflating cock.

Then the male alpha stood over me, pulling down his track bottoms to reveal his erect cock. “Carol there might prefer you to lie quiet,” he smiled at me as he knelt between my still spread thighs. “But I don’t mind if you struggle, you little bitch,” he sunk his cock into my wide open vagina with a single fast thrust. “In fact I prefer it.”

The male alpha was brutal. He started by scratching long, jagged lines down my flanks with his dirty blunt fingernails. My ineffectual wriggling and stifled screams only served to inflame him further, and he moved on to slapping me so hard I saw stars.

I was just on the verge of passing out from pain and prolonged lack of oxygen when I heard a familiar voice. “Bill? You down here? I’ve been looking for you all over the Library….”

Victor! My roommate, lab partner, and sole uni friend! Victor was an alpha. He could defend me against these two lowlifes! I screamed as loud as I could through the tie. Victor appeared at the end of the aisle. “Bill, I’ve been following this scent and – what’s going on here?”

“Get lost, junior. We found it; it’s ours,” said the woman.

“F-f-fuck off!” grunted the male, who was still gamely chasing his orgasm. I screamed again and writhed on the floor.

“Jesus, Bill! Get off of him!” The woman – Carol – took a swing at Victor, who responded by walloping her with his heavy book bag. He pulled the male alpha off of me, and flung him into a bookcase. The man grunted painfully, and Victor shouted “Go!” at the pair of them. Carol held a hand under her bloody nose and muttered, “He wanted it. While else would he be out?” before turning and walking away. The man struggled to his feel, and shakily tucked his penis into his track bottoms before following her with as much dignity as he could muster.

When they had disappeared up the stairs, Victor let out a breath and turned to me, “Jesus, Bill, what the fuck is going on? You’re an omega? Since when?” He knelt next to me as I struggled to sit up. I was acutely conscious of both my nudity and the puddles of cum and lubricant on the floor beneath me.
I shook my head and Victor pulled the gag out, “Vic, why – why did you let them go? Why aren’t you calling the police?”

Victor looked at me sadly and said, “You know how hard it is to prove rape – especially on an unaccompanied omega in heat.”

“Vic, look at me! They assaulted me! Now untie my hands, find my trousers, and let’s go to the campus security office.”

Victor looked my body up and down, but instead of loosening the belt around my wrists, he ran a gentle finger up and down my arm. “Looks to me like you enjoyed it a bit…” He said, softly stroking my resolutely erect penis, “… And I’ll bet you’d enjoy some more.” He ran his tongue over my sore cheek, and shifted his weight over me, pressing me down into the floor once more.

“Vic, no!” I cried as I began to comprehend the enormity of this betrayal. “Shh. Just this,” He said as he undid the zip on his trousers and slipped his hard alpha cock out. I sobbed, but I didn’t struggle as he slowly, revoltingly slipped his penis into my new vagina and began to quietly rock in and out of me. Somehow this gentle, quiet assault was far worse than the previous two. Victor was noisy, constantly humming and moaning and saying, “You like that, don’t you?” I was silent expect for sniffles and quiet sobs. He came with a surprised gasp and I felt a burning, stretching pain in my battered cunt; Victor had knotted me.

The intimacy of being knotted was by far the worst experience of my life. I could feel my traitorous vagina pulse and milk wave after wave of semen from Victor’s cock. Victor lay his sweaty head on my bruised shoulder, seemingly oblivious to my pain and discomfort. “All this,” he whispered, running his hands over my shivering flanks “All this is mine. Forever.” The thought turned my stomach.

Just then a deep male voice called out from the direction of the stairs, “Hello? We’ve had a report of an assault on an omega. Is anyone there?”

“Yes! Help me!” I shrieked in a voice so high pitched and panicked I didn’t recognize it as my own. There was a sound of running feet, and Victor looked around him in fear – he was still knotted to me. As the footsteps approached, he gritted his teeth in determination and forced himself to his feet. The blinding pain as he tore his ballooned penis from my clenching vagina forced tears from my eyes. Victor gathered up his bag and disappeared around a corner just as a pair of campus security guards appeared at the end of the aisle.

“Jesus!” One of them – a beta judging by his lack of scent – whispered upon seeing me, nearly naked, covered in scratches, bruises and semen, and huddled on the cold floor. I felt dizzy with relief.

“Follow him,” I whispered, as the security guard loosened the belt binding my hands. The other guard gave chase, but it was clear he wasn’t sure what direction Victor had headed, and at any rate didn’t even know what he looked like.

The security guard that remained with me radioed for an ambulance, and I gratefully slumped against him. “Please,” I said. I don’t know what I was asking for.
I was awoken from a troubled sleep by that smell. The same odour of pine forests, mint, and fresh breezes that I had first noticed on the Tram, and even in my half-asleep state had begun to associate with alphas.

“No!” I squawked, thrashing my arms and legs until I was sitting upright. I looked around me at the sunny, unfamiliar room. It was clearly a hospital room of some type, though instead of the usual clinical grey or beige, the walls were papered with a gaudy floral print, and there was a watercolour picture of a nude, curly-haired woman, smiling benevolently and holding four tiny babies. I heard a snort next to the bed, and turned my head to see my brother awaken.

My relationship with Mycroft can best be described as complicated. As a small child I worshipped him, and sought to imitate everything he did. When I was seven he presented as an alpha, and our brotherly relationship forever changed as he tested the waters of his new status and role in our family. Except for Uncle Rudy, who had been an omega, our entire extended family was comprised of betas. Though he was still a child in many respects, Mycroft became our family alpha, our pack leader. In both tradition and law, Mycroft had the right to approve or forbid marriages of family members, to choose in whose houses younger family members would reside, to decide how assets would be distributed after the death of a relative, and even to choose which University his pack members would attend. Of greater significance to me given my change of circumstances, he was also responsible for any omegas in his pack, who, in the eyes of the law and most of the British public, were relegated to a permanent state of childlike dependence.

As a teenager Mycroft reveled in his new position, and took great delight in exercising all of the powers available to family alphas. Far from a hands-off leader, he gleefully micromanaged our family vacations, compelled me to study violin and judo (when I would rather just play pirate in the garden with the family dog), and decided that I would study sciences at Man U. As an adolescent, I found Mycroft’s newfound bossiness to be unbearable, and I rebelled against his decisions whenever I could. Looking back, I think that Mycroft was a bit hurt that I didn’t appreciate that his nagging and bullying were simply his expression of love and concern.

Like all alphas, Mycroft experimented with relationships with both betas and omegas, but, as he once confided to me after a drunken New Years Eve party, he found the former to be dull and uninteresting, and the latter to be stupid, insecure, irrationally jealous, prone to histrionics, and incapable of conducting a conversation on any topic other than hairstyles, clothes, and romantic movies. By the time he left for uni, Mycroft had more or less given up on the fairer sexes. Instead he focused his considerable brainpower and alpha drive on his studies and thereafter his work as a junior official in the British government. Despite having visited his office on a number of occasions, I’ve never been entirely sure what his job is, but I am certain that he is very, very good at it. Indeed, though I would never, ever admit this to him, I am jealous that I have never been able to get my life together the way Mycroft has.

Mycroft yawned and stretched his long, gangly arms (so similar to my own) above his head. “Good afternoon, Billy,” He sighed while running a hand through his already thinning ginger hair. “How are you feeling?”

Using the trick Mycroft himself had taught me I allowed my eyes to rove over his form, collecting tidbits of information from his appearance that together would allow me to make logical inferences.
about his activities and character. Head canted to the right – night spent sleeping in a chair. Skin pale under his freckles and bags under his eyes – not a good night’s sleep. Long nose twitching – clearly he smells something. But what? Nails bitten to the quick – thinking about something important. Making weighty decisions. No doubt a matter of some importance to the British government. Blue pinstripe suit has a dried coffee stain on the right side – spilled his beverage on himself, but did not bother to mop it up. Why not? It would be a shame to ruin such a nice suit. Scratch mark on his neck – what could that be from? Mycroft doesn’t own a cat. Grey eyes red-rimmed – allergies? Maybe he has gotten a cat? Or dry hospital air, perhaps? I noticed Mycroft’s gaze travelling over my own body; no doubt he was performing the same deductive exercise on me.

I shrugged, not because I didn’t know how I felt – in fact there were throbbing sore patches all over my body – but because my throat hurt and I didn’t wish to speak. Mycroft noticed this (of course he did) and poured me a plastic cup full of ice water from a pitcher on my bedside table. I drank it while he pressed the call button for the nurse.

“Do you know where you are?”

“Hospital,” I rasped.

“The omega annex at the Manchester Royal Infirmary, to be precise. Do you know why you are here?” He asked, his voice sounding tired and sad.

“Yes, I was attacked in the Library.”

He paused, then asked carefully, “Do you know why you were attacked?”

“Be-because I’m an omega,” I whispered, drawing my knees to my chest, and wrapping my arms around them. I noticed that the pale skin of my forearms was mottled with deep purple bruises, and there were red, raw ligature marks around my wrists.

Mycroft sighed. “I didn’t know!” my voice wobbled. “Honestly, My, I didn’t know what was happening! I just felt funny.” I felt tears in my eyes. “And when I did figure it out, I tried to get home, but then these alphas – ”

“I’m not angry with you, Billy.” Mycroft said, suddenly reaching over to stroke my back. I think we were both surprised at the gesture, but it felt good to be touched with kindness, and I felt myself leaning into his touch. We stayed like that for a few minutes before Mycroft sat back.

“Have the alphas been arrested?” I asked. Mycroft gave me a pained look before shaking his head slowly.

“As much as I hate to say it, no. There’s simply not enough evidence of sexual assault – “

“What?” I squawked. “My, look at me! Look at these bruises! And there must have been gallons of spunk on the floor of the Library! And I saw them, My! I could easily identify them in a police lineup. Now, get on the police to go find them!”

Mycroft shook his head again, “Yes, there is ample evidence of a… rough… sexual encounter, Billy. But no indisputable evidence that the encounter wasn’t consensual, seeing as it took place under conditions of an omega heat. Legally, neither alphas nor omegas are considered fully responsible for their actions when under the influence of overwhelming hormonal action.”

“No evidence? Mycroft, I will gladly stand up in court and tell a judge and jury that those three monsters attacked me!”
“Ah, there’s the rub, baby brother. Under British law the testimony of an omega – especially an omega in heat – isn’t considered admissible evidence.” That brought me up short.

“All the evidence we have of an attack is a mobile phone call made to campus security by a…” he checked a small notebook in his breast pocket, “…Carol Phillips, who indicated that a young alpha male with blond hair and a goatee had assaulted a dark-haired omega male in the entomology section of the Man U library.” I snorted at this irony. No doubt ‘Carol Phillips’ was my first attacker, and she had given Victor’s description to campus security in reprisal for interrupting the fun she and her still nameless companion had had with me.

“My, the blond haired alpha? That was Victor.” I said to my knees.

“Yes, I know,” Mycroft said coldly. “I figured it out this morning when I dropped by your flat to pack you an overnight bag…. I knew as soon as he opened the door.”

“Did you – did you tell the police it was him?”

“No.” He said in a flat, almost bored tone. “That won’t be necessary anymore.” I glanced up at him. He gazed coolly at the watercolour painting, but underneath his placid stare I saw traces of raw, animalistic fury. Despite the seriousness of what Mycroft was implying, I couldn’t help but smile a little at him. My big brother, my family alpha, my pack leader.

He returned his gaze to me. “You won’t be returning to Man U,” he declared.

“What? Why not?” I cried, though I knew the answer.

“Beyond the obvious issue of there being two rapists wandering around campus, there is already a rumour circulating that an omega was attacked in the Library. There were also several witnesses to your departure from campus in an ambulance. Sooner or later – much sooner if you returned to classes covered in bruises – even your cretinous classmates would reach the conclusion that you were the omega attacked.”

Oh. Of course. If I returned to class I would be publicly outed as an omega, and a defiled omega at that. I would be forever labelled as a stupid, wanton slag who had invited a trio of alphas to have their wicked way with me in the entomology section of the Library. Even worse was the likelihood that I wouldn’t be allowed to complete my degree, since Man U, like every other university in Britain, didn’t accept omega students. Considering I had completed all but half a semester of my schooling, it seemed terribly unfair that all of it could be taken away so quickly.

I said in a tiny, sad voice, “What’s to become of me, My?” I thought about the pair of omegas on the Tram, headed to music or dance classes at the Parsonage Omega Retreat. Would I have to go there too? And take jewelry design and tap-dancing lessons? Learn how to organize a dinner party for my wealthy husband? And how to make homemade organic babyfood? Style my hair in big, bouncy curls? Spend my days gossiping with my omega friends about an objectionable dress a ‘frenemy’ wore to a party? It all seemed so awful. I held my knees tighter, and felt tears dribble down my cheeks.

“I have a plan,” said Mycroft. “I suggest that you start again. You can stay with me in Pimlico, and complete your degree at Imperial.”

“But Imperial wouldn’t take an omega student any more than Manchester would – “

“That’s the best part of the plan: Imperial won’t accept Billy Holmes, the newly presented omega; But it will accept Sherlock Holmes, the beta organic chemistry student.”
I thought about this for a moment. Was it possible to simply assume a false beta identity? Well, if anyone could arrange for the records of my omega transformation to be altered, it was surely Mycroft.

“Sherlock?” I said, sticking my tongue out. “I hate that name! You know Mummy chose it because it was the name of her female midwife. Why can’t we go with Scott?... And why do I have to change my name anyway?”

“It’s another means to distance yourself from the omega attacked in the Library. Personally, I’ve always liked the name Sherlock. It’s far more distinguished than Billy or Scott. Almost as distinguished as Mycroft actually.” We both smiled at his arrogance.

“So I change my name. That’s not going to prevent them from figuring out I’m an omega. You know, when I turn into a mindless sex-fiend every month, or when my hair goes curly, or when my balls drop off?” I blanched at that last thought.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Sherlock,” Mycroft waved a hand dismissively at me, “That’s an old wives tale. They don’t drop off, they get reabsorbed. Don’t you know anything about your own gender?” I said nothing, but it was clear to us both that I knew very little.

“Tomorrow a… specialist… will drop by to, among other things, address the question of how we will disguise your omega nature from Imperial. Don’t worry about that.”

“What’ll we tell Mummy and Daddy?” I asked quietly. Given my fragile state, part of me wished that Mummy was here to hold me and fuss over me, but a larger part knew that Mummy would be disappointed to discover that I was an omega, and mortified to learn the circumstances under which my status had revealed itself.

“Nothing,” said Mycroft brusquely. “We will tell them that you’re transferring to Imperial for your final semester, and that you want to be called Sherlock from now on, but that’s all.” I nodded at the wisdom of that plan, though I was troubled that we were introducing a measure of deceit to our relationship with our parents.

Just then a nurse stepped in the room. “Oh good, you’re awake,” said the female omega sporting bouncy red curls and a pink nametag that read, “Hi, I’m Belinda! I hope you have super day at the MRI Omega Annex!” I had forgotten that nursing was one of only a few careers that were considered suitable for omegas, due to their assumed proclivity for caring and nurturing. Nursing had always seemed to me a hard job, requiring both physical and mental toughness; it struck me as odd that the weakest members of human society were considered the best suited for it.

“My brother would like some help to the lavatory, and then some dinner,” smiled Mycroft. Belinda returned his smile brightly. So, an unattached omega then, and not immune to Mycroft’s perfunctory alpha charms. She took my pulse, checked my eyes (one of which throbbed mightily) and fussed with the IV port taped to my hand. Evidently satisfied, Belinda took the IV stand from its place next to my bed, and gestured towards the door to the lav. “After you, sweetheart,” she said in a soft, pleasant voice.

I threw back the covers, and pushed myself to the edge of the bed. It was surprisingly difficult due to the multiple aches and pains that revealed themselves with every small motion. I stood up wobbily and shuffled barefoot into the cold lavatory. Nurse Belinda flicked on the overhead fluorescent light, and I happened to catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror over the sink. “Good lord.” I said. I was wearing a yellow knee-length hospital gown. Every part of my body that wasn’t concealed by the gown was covered in red and purple contusions or scratches. My face
looked worst of all: there was a knot on my forehead, the right side of my face was puffy and purple
and my eye (the one that had reacted badly to the examination) was blackened and nearly entirely
closed. I had a butterfly bandage over the bridge of my nose, and a deep cut sealed with two sutures
on my right lower lip. There were distinctive friction burns leading from the corners of my mouth,
across my cheeks, and around the back of my head.

“It’s not that bad,” said the nurse as she guided my IV stand towards the toilet, “The fluorescent light
makes the bruises look much worse.”

I lifted the hem of my gown and discovered that my penis was wrapped in thick, soft bandages. Oh,
right: the female alpha had gripped me rather tightly there. Belinda knelt in front of me and mumbled,
“Let me help you with that.” She unwrapped the bandages so that the head was exposed and I was
able to use the toilet. “You’ll want to be careful with those wounds. They’re deep and fingernails are
dirty, so they’re prone to infection.” I nodded. Despite what Belinda had said, the extent of my
injuries had disturbed me, and I was not inclined towards conversation.

“Now, do you think you could tolerate a sitz bath?

“A what?” I asked.

“A sitz bath,” she said pointing at a small, oddly angled tub in the corner of the lav. “We fill that with
warm water and medicinal herbs, and you sit in it. Lots of omegas find it soothing after giving birth
or even after a… a bad experience like yours.”

“Oh. Alright,” I mumbled weakly. I hadn’t given much thought to the condition of my newly formed
genitals, but I imagined that they must have looked even worse than the rest of me, since they had
borne the brunt of my assault.

I shifted from foot to foot on the cold floor while Belinda filled the tub with warm water, and added
sprigs of lavender and other dried herbs from a jar on next to the sink. “That’s real French lavender.
Nothing but the best for our omegas,” she smiled comfortingly.

When the tub was full, she gently loosened the ties on my gown and hung it on a hook on the door. I
looked at myself in the mirror again and immediately regretted it because my body looked even
worse than my face. There were purple fingerprints on my hips, long scratches down my sides, and
my nipples were entirely bandaged over. Belinda removed the remaining bandages from my willy,
and I was able to see the deep, dark red cuts from where the alpha had sunk her fingernails in. Three
of them were secured with ugly black sutures. Belinda led me to the bath, and slowly sat me down in
the warm water.

As my battered vulva hit the water I gasped and tried to stand, but she held my shoulders and
shushed me. “Please,” I whimpered, “I need something for the pain! Morphine! Paracetamol! Anything!”

Belinda gave me an pitying smile, and began to wipe my mangled genitals with a soft flannel. “Can I
give you some advice? One omega to another?” she said seriously.

“Yeah,” I flinched as she rubbed her flannel over an ugly bite mark on my inner thigh.

“This,” she said gesturing to my injuries, “Is no one’s fault but your own.”

I looked at her in shock, as she continued, “Now I know you said it was your first heat, and you
didn’t recognize the symptoms – we hear that a lot, in fact. Whether or not it’s always true is another
matter – but you’ve got to realize that the way you treated those alphas was entirely inappropriate.”
I simply couldn’t think of a thing to say in response, so Belinda continued, “During your heat, an alpha is no more in control of its body than you are. So there’s simply no point in telling it no, or trying to fight it off. All you’re doing is making it angry; you’re forcing it to hurt you.”

I could hardly believe what she was saying. “If you ever get caught outside during your heat again,” she continued, still in that gentle voice, “my advice is to just let it happen. Ask the alpha to wear a condom of course. Then just lie back and wait for it to finish. Believe me, it’ll be less painful and over quicker if you don’t make a fuss.

“And it doesn’t have to be so bad, you know. My sister met her mate when he followed her home after her heat started unexpectedly. Their first time was terrible, but now they have four pups! And at the very least it’s quite a compliment for an alpha to be interested in you so much that it would follow you like that!”

Belinda stood me up and drained the tub while I processed her advice. “One more thing,” her voice dropped to a whisper as she gently patted me dry. “Don’t ever get the police involved. Even if they’re never convicted, accusations of sexual assault can ruin an alpha’s reputation, even their career. And all you’ll end up doing is dragging your own name through the mud. And what kind of alpha would ever want to take a ruined omega slag as a mate, hmm?”

“Right,” I gulped. Nurse Belinda rewrapped my penis, then inserted my unresisting body into a fresh gown.

“Back to bed,” She smiled kindly, “You can have a shower tomorrow… And please remember what I told you.”

“I will,” I mumbled, suddenly desperate to be in Mycroft’s presence again. We shuffled back to the bed, and Belinda made me wait while she changed the bloody pad that lay on the sheets where I had been sitting. Mycroft lounged in his chair thumbing through a number of brightly coloured pamphlets.

“Bit of light reading on your new… condition,” he smiled sadly as he handed them to me after I clambered into the high bed. I noted the titles of each: What’s Happening to Me? A Fun Exploration of the Changes You’ll Experience as a New Omega!, The Miracle of Life: Surviving Omega Pregnancies, and Making the Most of Your Omega Life! The covers all featured smiling teenaged omegas laughing with each other as they strolled through fields of wildflowers, or, in the case of Making the Most of Your Omega Life, teenaged omegas laughing while cooking a healthy meal for a waiting alpha.

Belinda left the room while I glanced at the pamphlets. She returned a few minutes later with a tray laden with organic healthy foods. I wrinkled my nose at the proffered cup of greyish herbal tea.

“Any chance of a coffee?” I asked.

“Coffee??” Her evident outrage seemed disproportionate to my reasonable request. “Young man,” Belinda recited, “An omega’s body is the spring from which the life of a nation flows! It cannot be contaminated with caffeine! An omega must strive to maintain its body with only the healthiest, most nutritious foods and beverages. It’s all in the pamphlets, you foolish, foolish boy!” She stormed out of the room.

“It’s true,” said Mycroft, taking a pamphlet from me and flipping to the correct page. “No coffee, no tea except decaf, no soft drinks, no drugs, no alcohol.”

I snatched the pamphlet from him, and he rose from his chair. “Billy – sorry, Sherlock – I have arrangements to make for tomorrow. Why don’t you eat your lovely dinner, and read your lovely
pamphlets, and I’ll be back before lights out.”

I grunted as I hurriedly read through the booklets to see what other fun things I was now banned from doing.

As I mentioned earlier, even for a beta, I knew very little about omegas. I could recall a few fairy tales in which omegas played supporting roles, but they were hardly heroic or well-rounded characters. In many stories, a poor alpha knight, or pirate, or some sort of charming, devil-may-care bandit would have a chance encounter with a beautiful omega, and then would spend years amassing enough wealth (through means foul or fair) to purchase the omega’s hand in marriage from his or her father. There was never any indication of the omega’s opinion of this arrangement. Thereafter, the two would naturally live happily ever after, as evinced by the birth of at least thirty sons and thirty daughters to the couple. (As I reflected on that story that evening in the hospital, I rather hoped that last bit was an exaggeration.) In another tale an alpha knight left his omega fiancee at his castle while he went abroad on some crusade. In some versions of the story, the knight was killed on his travels, in others he was tricked into marrying the omega daughter of some Eastern potentate. In either version, the outcome for the omega fiancee was the same: years of pining and misery followed by sudden death when news of the alpha’s death or marriage finally reached home. Like I say, hardly compelling characters.

My only other encounter with omega lore had been in Fourth Form. It was at that age when some of my classmates presented as alphas or omegas. After enduring their first heat, the newly revealed omegas were pulled from their science and maths classes (deemed too difficult and requiring too much sustained study for omegas to handle) and put into OmegEd classes. Alpha and Beta students were never allowed into the OmegEd classroom, but we would frequently try to glimpse inside on our way back from the lav. I remember ducking my head in the door once after hearing an outburst of shrill, twittering giggles. The omegas in the classroom were all sitting cross-legged on the floor knitting. Who knows what they had all found so funny about knitting? The classroom’s walls were covered in colourful posters of curly-haired omegas contentedly performing tasks like gardening, picking flowers, and nursing babies. The posters featured vague, mysterious slogans like “Your body: the garden where your children grow”, “Be all that your alpha needs you to be”, and “You’re here for them. Always and Forever.” I didn’t understand what any of them were implying.

Once an alpha friend had stolen an OmegEd informational booklet (it had too many pictures and the writing was too big to be properly termed a textbook), and several of my friends and I spent a lunch hour scanning through it and scornfully making fun of the juvenile, anodyne manner in which it advised young omegas on how to live fulfilling and happy lives.

As I flipped through the pamphlets Mycroft had left me I noticed that one - Making the Most of Your Omega Life! – was actually an updated version of that very booklet. And when I say ‘updated,’ I mean that the pictures now featured omegas wearing late-1990s fashions instead of late-1980s fashions; none of the information had been updated at all. I snorted at the irony of being so dependent for information on the one booklet I had once casually dismissed.

Underneath the glossy pictures of omegas laughing while performing day-to-day tasks (Why were they always laughing? What could possibly be so funny about baking cupcakes? ) Making the Most of Your Omega Life! appeared to have the underlying purpose of reassuring newly presented omegas that their lives still had meaning. Yet the deeper message was anything but reassuring. It explained toteenaged omegas that despite the educational and career opportunities now denied to them, they could still find fulfillment in the life they built with the alpha who would inevitably take them in marriage, and, prior to that, in preparing for that life by learning to cook, keep a house, entertain, and, most importantly, care for the litters of pups they would bear. The booklet even made brief mention of the careers that omegas could undertake while waiting to catch the eye of a
marriageable alpha. These included nursing, fashion design, teaching small children, karaoke hostessing (I wasn’t sure what that was), and party planning – the pamphlet presented the latter two as especially desirable, as they offered ample opportunities to encounter wealthy single alphas. Due to the restrictions imposed on their lives by their heats, Making the Most cautioned omega readers against working any more than one or two days a week. Thus, the purpose of working wasn’t actually to make a living wage – it was assumed that the omegas would live with their parents or family alpha until their wedding day – but to find that all-important alpha mate.

Making the Most of Your Omega Life! also explained how omegas could handle their monthly heats in a “responsible, safe, and modest manner.” (Where was this booklet when I needed it yesterday, I thought.) Their options included locking themselves in a room at their family alpha’s house with a selection of toys – always making sure that the family alpha was around to protect them from the unwanted attention of other alphas – or to visit an omega retreat. Every city and town in Britain had a few omega retreats. During their off-heat cycles, omegas could visit a retreat to take classes in any of the omeg-ish arts, and during their heats they could drop in to be serviced by “friendly, handsome, single, and certified disease-free” volunteer alphas. The alphas would of course be required to wear a condom, and were discouraged from injuring their omega clients. Making the Most considered the omega retreat to be the preferable means of enduring one’s heat, as it allowed single omegas to make the acquaintance of available alphas – the absolute necessity of finding a mate seemed to be a recurring theme in all of the pamphlets, actually. Couched in vaguely threatening euphemisms was the stern message that omegas must not even consider chemical means of delaying or obstructing their heats, as these were both illegal in much of the developed world, and posed numerous threats to an omega’s delicate health.

I next turned my attention to What’s Happening to Me? A Fun Exploration of the Changes You’ll Experience as a New Omega! Given my experiences the day before, this pamphlet was now mostly a review for me, but it did offer some insight into changes I was yet to endure. Besides the monthly heats and sudden loss of legal personhood, I could now expect several gradual physiological changes, including a loss of body and facial hair, weight gain around my hips and buttocks, the softening of my facial features, and the altering of my hair’s texture from wavy to distinctively curly. Most disturbing to me would be the reabsorption (Mycroft was correct on this) of my testicles. The pamphlet explained that I might also experience several cognitive and emotional changes, making me less capable of forethought, more prone to hysterical emotional outbursts, and, in the absence of an alpha’s praise and reassurance, clingy and insecure. Marvelous, simply marvelous, I thought with dread. Thank God I had Mycroft to rely on, I thought for the first time ever.

As I had no intention whatsoever of ever becoming pregnant – understandable, I think, considering I had only discovered yesterday that I was capable of bearing children, and under the worst of circumstances – I did not read The Miracle of Life: Surviving Omega Pregnancies with as much attention to detail, except to note that due to the widespread but –as far as I could tell as an Organic Chemistry honours student – scientifically unproven belief that omegas would pass any chemicals they had ever ingested to their offspring, omegas were banned from consuming all manner of processed foods, alcohol, tobacco products, caffeinated beverages, and even drugs as common as paracetamol or Kwells. However, as omegas were not legally responsible for their actions, any fines to be paid or jail time to be served for the sale of these products to omegas would be the burden of their alpha and the seller equally. So there was at least one small advantage to being an omega.

I was smiling at this last bit of bleak humour when Mycroft returned. “You haven’t touched your lovely organic dinner, Billy – Sherlock – are those pamphlets really so engrossing?”

“Hardly,” I said. “But it’s not like I have any other source of information.”

“I’m sure the delightful Nurse Belinda would relish the opportunity to offer you more judgmental
“advice,” he smiled grimly, “Or I can try to answer any questions you might have. I’m not a stranger to the workings of the omega body or mind.” His tone suggested that he would have liked to have added ‘unfortunately.’

“Alright then,” I said, “I’m confused about something. How long have I been in hospital? How many days?”

Mycroft’s brow creased, but he said, “Days? You’ve just been here since yesterday. Your ambulance arrived at around eleven in the morning. It took them until about three to patch you up, and you slept – in this ward – until a quarter to two this afternoon. So just about twenty-seven hours in total.”

“So just one day? You’re sure I wasn’t in a coma for a couple of days?” I asked.

Mycroft looked decidedly wary. “Why do you ask?”

I flipped through The Miracle of Life, and showed him a particular page. “It says here that a heat lasts from five to seven days, but I’m not in heat anymore, I’m pretty sure. So why would my heat have stopped just a day after it started?”

“Oh, Billy love….” he said sadly, taking the pamphlet from me.

“What?” I said, my alarm rising.

“If you had read further you might have figured it out….”

“What? Mycroft, what is it? Tell me!”

“It says right here,” he said pointing at the page, “An omega’s heat typically lasts five to seven days, but it is brought to an immediate halt at the moment of conception.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all for your comments and kudos. As with all of the places mentioned in the story, the Manchester Royal Infirmary is a real hospital, but I don’t think it has an omega annex.
I didn’t sleep that night. How could I?

When I got over my initial shock and hysterical tears, I was angry with Mycroft. “How could you not tell me?” I shrieked. “And why didn’t the nurse tell me?”

“Billy, please. I couldn’t – I didn’t want to add to your emotional burden. I asked the hospital staff to allow me to break it to you…. And I had hoped to have it all taken care of by tomorrow. I had hoped you’d never have to know.”

“What? What do you mean ‘taken care of’?” I asked wiping my eyes.

Mycroft handed me his handkerchief. It smelled like alpha. “The arrangements I’ve made for tomorrow? I’ve contacted a specialist in omega health. He’s coming here tomorrow – in secret, you must understand – to help with my plan to allow you to live as a beta. And also to… terminate your pregnancy.” He whispered the last part.

I was silent. Even I knew that it was highly illegal to perform an abortion on an omega, due to their – our – assumed delicate constitutions. I wondered how Mycroft was able to find someone to perform such a procedure.

I put my hand on my concave belly, wondering how many fetuses were growing in there. One? Two? Ten? I looked up at the painting of the female omega smiling lovingly at her four offspring, and tried to picture myself doing the same thing. As I imagined myself holding my tiny pups, I found myself wondering what they would look like. The likelihood that each would each resemble its alpha parent filled me with nausea, as this would inevitably serve as a forceful daily reminder of the violent and terrifying conditions under which they had been conceived. How could I ever love someone whose presence in my life was forced upon me in such a brutal and unwilling fashion? And how could I raise a family that I couldn’t love? What kind of life would that be for my children – to be unloved by their only parent through no fault of their own? Mycroft was right: it was best to put an end to this… unfortunate development as soon as possible, to put yesterday’s events behind me and get on with my life.

I nodded my head in reluctant agreement, for even as I committed myself to that decision – rationally, there was no way I could raise a litter of unwanted pups – a part of me – maybe my new omega nature rearing its ugly sentimental head – screamed at me to love and protect the babies growing in my uterus with my life if necessary. I ruthlessly quashed this objection, and asked Mycroft, “Will it be safe?”

“Yes. I wouldn’t have arranged it if I had any doubts on that score. In some countries omega health specialists regularly perform abortions. I recruited such a specialist willing to make a short, clandestine visit to England. I’m picking him up from the airport at eleven-thirty. We’ll come by after breakfast.”
I nodded again, and Mycroft gathered his briefcase and umbrella, making ready to leave. He suddenly bent down to hug me around my hunched shoulders and whispered, “I promise you that I will make this better. This isn’t the end of the world, Billy.”

“Sherlock,” I reminded him. “It’s Sherlock now.” Mycroft took his leave and I stared at the painting of the mother omega for a long time. In the middle of the night I got up to use the loo again. I looked at myself in the mirror. I was nothing like her.

Mycroft returned at eight-thirty, just as I was finishing a small cup of disgusting natural yogourt. He was followed by a small, clean-shaven man with thick, curly grey hair. Mycroft locked the door behind him, and introduced the man as Professor Esteban Alvarez of the University of Havana Medical School. Professor Alvarez, he explained, was a world leader in the field of omega health and a prominent advocate of omega rights worldwide. I knew that much of the developed world had imposed strict sanctions on Cuba in retribution for its liberal treatment of omegas. Along with a few post-communist countries in Eastern Europe, Cuba was one of the only countries in the world where omegas could vote, own property, attend university, divorce, and work alongside alphas and betas. To the chagrin of the omega health specialists in the rest of the developed world, Cuban scientists regularly published studies that conclusively determined that an omega’s health would not be compromised by its consumption of caffeine, alcohol, or heat suppressant drugs, and that abortions performed by properly trained specialists in hospital settings were no more a threat to an omega’s health than a tonsillectomy. Further studies revealed that the offspring of omegas who had previously ingested these products suffered from no more health or developmental problems than a control population. Such studies were anathema to the British government, and the staunchly conservative British omega health community which guided its policies. In fact, given his reputation, I was surprised that Professor Alvarez could obtain an entry visa. Ah, of course, Mycroft again.

In a kind, good-humoured voice, Professor Alvarez told me that he would examine me, then we would discuss options for ongoing treatment and terminating the pregnancy. I assented to this, and lay back on the bed with my knees spread, as he requested. Mycroft placed a chair in front of the door, and moved to the side of my bed to hold my hand. As the professor bent over me, I caught a whiff of his sweet, floral scent.

“Are you – are you an omega?” I asked incredulously.

“Yes, of course,” he grinned at me.

“An omega doctor?” I marveled.

“Yes. In Cuba the medical field is open to omegas. As are all the professions,” Professor Alvarez smiled proudly.

I gawped at this revelation, while he positioned himself between my legs. His grin faded as he took note of the condition of my genitals. He cleared his throat, then began to speak his observations into a small digital recorder. “The patient is a newly presented omega. Secondary sex changes have not yet taken place. The genitals still have pubic hair of an amount that is normal for an adult beta male…. The testicles are still present. The labia minora have not yet fully developed.”

“Pobrecito,” he sighed sadly as he continued his exam, “There is… considerable bruising of the inner thighs, and tearing of the vaginal walls and labia. This has been sutured in places. The penis is bruised, and there are five deep lacerations, evidently caused by fingernails. Three of these have been
sutured.”

He sat back and said to me, “I think it is too early to see any changes to your cervix, but possibly a sonogram will work.”

“You can pick it up already?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said, “Omega pregnancies proceed quickly. You ought to know that.”

“I didn’t finish that pamphlet,” I said unhappily.

He took a laptop, and a small, wand-shaped probe from his medical bag. He turned them both on, and rolled a condom onto the wand. “This may hurt. I have to insert it into your vagina so that it rests on your cervix.”

I nodded and bit my lip, but I stilled cried out when the transducer brushed against the stitches in my vagina. “Pobrecito,” the professor sighed sadly again. I wondered what that word meant. Mycroft squeezed my hand tighter, and brushed his other hand through my hair. Professor Alvarez adjusted the probe one way and another, and finally announced, “Yes, I count… seven blastocysts. All healthy and viable.”

“Seven?” I gasped in disbelief. Just my luck that I would be uncommonly fertile!

“Is it still your wish that they be terminated?” He removed the probe and moved to the side so that he was looking me in the eye.

I brutally suppressed that tiny part of my psyche that was actually proud to be carrying a large litter of pups, and said, “Yes, absolutely.”

Professor Alvarez gestured at me to sit up, and set about cleaning and returning the transducer to his bag. He closed his laptop and said, “At this early stage I think the wisest course of action is a chemical one.” He took a foil packet of two pills from his medical bag. “In Cuba, this is called a morning-after pill. You take these pills, and in a few hours the pregnancy will end. I won’t lie: it will be painful. However, given your present circumstances, this option may be preferable because the termination will be virtually indistinguishable from a normal miscarriage.” I nodded grimly and took the pills from him.

“Now, he continued, assessing me sadly, “Your dear alpha brother tells me that you wish to live as a beta. Is this correct?”

“Yes,” I said, suddenly conscious that I might be insulting the kind doctor by rejecting his gender. “You see, I – I want to finish university and get a job. I don’t want to have babies or marry an alpha – ever! I just couldn’t. Not after – “

“You don’t have to explain your decision to me,” he cut me off. “Plenty of omegas in Cuba choose career over family. And it’s perfectly understandable given your experience.” He rummaged in his bag and brought out two bottles of pills. He handed the first to me.

“That is Omegarrest – a heat suppressant. It is an over-the-counter medication in Cuba, but highly illegal in virtually every other country in the world. In this country you will need to obtain it from a medical supply smuggling operation. I will give your handsome brother a list of firms that I have worked with in the past and trust. You take one pill per day for up to six months at a time, then take a break for seven days. During those seven days you will experience an intense heat, so you will need to make arrangements to be absent from school or work.”
“Does it work? Is it – is it safe?” I noticed for the first time that I seemed to be developing a stammer.

“Perfectly,” he smiled. “I developed it myself, and have been using it for the past six years. I have no complaints.” He handed the second bottle to me. “This is Pherostol.”

“Pherostol?” asked Mycroft, “That’s a simple alpha scent blocker. You can get that at any pharmacy in Britain.”

“I know,” said the doctor. “Omegas can take it too, you know. If you take a double dose it will eliminate the production of the omega pheromone entirely, and you will be able to pass as a beta.”

“What about the curly hair? And the loss of body hair… not to mention my balls?” I whispered the last part.

Professor Alvarez shrugged, “Plenty of betas have curly hair.” He checked his watch and began to pack up his things. “I’m sure you and your clever brother can come up with a plausible explanation for why you do not have body hair. Or maybe you can just avoid taking your clothes off in front of strangers, hmm? That would seem to be the solution to the problem of your missing testicles too, I would think.

“Now, Mister Holmes-the-Alpha,” he said turning to Mycroft, “I believe the doctors will be starting their rounds soon, in which case this is my cue to disappear. If you would be so kind as to return me to the airport, I would be forever grateful.”

He returned his attention to me and patted my arm. I noticed that people patted omegas instead of shaking their hands. “Mister Holmes-the-Omega, it was a great pleasure to have met you, though I wish it had been under more felicitous circumstances. Nevertheless, I sincerely hope that we meet again. Good luck with your… endeavour, and if you are ever in Havana, please drop by the University to see me.” With that Professor Alvarez turned and left, with Mycroft following close behind.

I hid the pills he had given me under the mattress. Nurse Belinda arrived a few minutes later, accompanied by my attending physician, a young alpha doctor named Charles Fortwright. He examined my wounds and the two of them discussed my case as if I wasn’t even there. Doctor Fortwright indicated I should be put on pregnancy vitamins at the earliest.

As soon as they left, I pulled out the packet of morning after pills. I considered waiting for Mycroft to return, but I hurriedly swallowed them anyway, just wishing to put this whole sorry episode behind me.

I felt fine for a few hours, but then I experienced such a tremendous cramping sensation that I actually feared for my life. I pressed the nurse call button, and tried to lever my way out of bed to get to the loo.

As I stood up I noticed a bright red streak on the sheets. I felt some warm droplets on my toes and looked down to see blood pattering onto my bare feet. Just then Belinda arrived. “Oh God,” she whispered before poking her head out the door and shouting, “Code Pink! I need a doctor!”

She returned to me and sat me on the edge of the bed. She hoisted up my knees to examine me, while I cried out in pain. “Shit,” she said. I was surprised to hear an omega swear. She grabbed a number of absorbent pads from my closet and stuffed them under my hips.

The doctor arrived. He slipped a bit in the small pool of blood I had left on the floor. As he peered into my vagina, my body gave an almighty convulsion that pulled sharply on the stitches in my
genitals, and I felt a gush of hot fluid run out of me and land on the floor with a sickening splash.

“Damn,” whispered the doctor after a moment. “Though I guess it can’t be helped. You know the omega body has ways of bringing unwanted pregnancies to a halt, and we just witnessed a clear example of that.” He walked towards the door, telling Belinda, “I’ll have the janitors come up here with a mop, and you can give the omega a shower when he can stand. I’ll give him a scan tomorrow to see if there’re any survivors.”

My eyes were closed, but I could feel Belinda fussing around with the sheets and bloody pads. She was wiping off my thighs with a flannel when the janitor arrived to mop up the bloody mess. Neither of them thought to preserve what remained of my modesty by covering me up. I supposed that omegas eventually got used to these little indignities.

When the janitor left, Belinda whispered to me, “You are a lucky, lucky omega, you know. You’ve really dodged a bullet.” I didn’t feel too lucky at that moment.

I was able to stand in less than a half hour. I insisted on showering by myself, in a desperate bid to prove to myself, if not Belinda, that I was still an autonomous being. The shower felt wonderful, though there was still a lot of blood seeping out from between my thighs. When that trickled to a halt, I dried off, put on a new hospital gown and returned to my bed. Belinda had changed my sheets, and for a panicked second I thought she might have discovered my stash of pills. A quick check revealed that she hadn’t, and I crawled tiredly into bed.

Mycroft returned just as they were serving me dinner. He took one look at my tired, drawn face and knew I had done the deed. Instead of scolding me for failing to wait for his return, however, he sat next to me in the hospital bed, and wrapped an arm around my shoulders.

“I know you’re feeling pretty… low right now, Billy. That’s only to be expected. But together we can get past this. I think that if we are smart – and we are! Me more than you, of course – and disciplined – again, me more than you,” I smiled at his lame teasing, “we can build a new life for you. After all, you already know how to live as a beta. If you can just keep doing that, and keep that beta life separate from your omega life, I think we can do it. I’m sure that it will be difficult, sometimes, but since when have we Holmes boys ever backed down from a challenge? Hmm?”

Since he seemed to expect a reply, I weakly answered, ‘Never, My. Like you say, it’s just a matter of keeping the two lives separate.”

“Right,” he said, releasing me so that he could pick up his briefcase. “To that end I picked up a few things on my way back from the airport.” He dropped a sheaf of printouts and a bag from a bookstore on my knees. I first opened the bag to discover a book titled Memory Palaces: Simonides’ Method of Loci. “I think that will help you to build and maintain the fictions surrounding your new identity,” Mycroft smiled. I scanned the back cover. To me it seemed implausible that such a simple method of memory enhancement might actually work, but I resolved to give it a whirl.

I then flipped through the sheaf of printouts. It was the course catalogue for the Faculty of Science at Imperial College London for the next academic year. The last few pages were registration forms, already filled out in the name of Sherlock Holmes.

“I think it’s time we started a new chapter, with a new hero,” Mycroft smiled bravely. My own smile was rather more forced.
Life at Blown Apart Mews

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I stayed another six days at the omega annex of the Manchester Royal Infirmary. To me, this seemed far too long, but the doctors and nurses thought it necessary due to the assumed delicacy of my omega body. A lot happened over those six days: my bruises faded from purple to brown, green, and finally sickly yellow. Mycroft completed the task of withdrawing me from Manchester University, and transferring my credits to Imperial. On the Saturday evening a male omega in the room next door to mine gave birth to four healthy pups over a period of little more than an hour. (When Belinda poked her head in my room to ask if I wanted to see them, I pretended to be asleep.) And on Monday morning they put an omega woman who had drunk bleach in the room across from mine. I heard the doctors make comments about her as they passed by my room: “Silly omega. Probably mistook it for milk.” “Why can’t omegas ever read the bloody label?” I rather suspected it wasn’t an accident. She was taken off life support on Tuesday afternoon.

On Wednesday morning, Doctor Fortwright was completing my pre-release examination and removing my stitches, while we waited for Mycroft to arrive to take custody of me. “It looks like there’s going to be some scarring on your labia and vaginal walls,” he said. “You might feel a painful twinge during sexual relations.”

“Oh,” I said. “Is – is there something I can do – something I should take to help with that?”

He shrugged as he tugged out the last suture and said, “Not really.” Of course not, I thought bitterly. Why would an omega want to have an enjoyable, pain free sex life? “Though you might want to avoid knotting for a while.”

I sighed in frustration. Well, it hardly mattered to me because I had no intention of ever having sex again. I was suddenly quite fed up with sitting in bed all day, and the snippy, unsympathetic, comments made by the nurses and doctors, and eating kale and beets and flax seeds, and especially having people peering at my junk.

Mycroft arrived just then – his timing has always been impeccable. “Come along, Billy, you’ve had enough laying about all day. It’s time to go.” I hurried to put on my clothes – it was the first time in a week I had been allowed to wear anything other than those embarrassing backless gowns. I noticed that my jeans fit somewhat differently, but of far more immediate concern to me was the pain I experienced lifting my arms to put my t-shirt on. I gasped loudly as the movement stretched the deep fingernail scratches on my sides. Tugging my socks on was similarly uncomfortable, but I was soon fully dressed and looking like my former self – except for the bruises, raw marks on my wrists, and black eye.

Mycroft drove us in his sensible grey Saab 900 to the Edge Street apartment I had shared with Victor until a week ago. As Mycroft pulled into a parking space I noticed Victor’s distinctive powder blue Reliant Robin parked in front of us. I asked Mycroft, “Are you sure that – that he won’t be here?”

Mycroft snorted, “Very sure.”

The apartment was just as messy and smelly as it was when I left it a week earlier. I marveled that the place could look exactly the same when my life had changed so much.

“I’ll get your computer; you pack anything else you want,” said Mycroft, taking some black bin
liners out of a kitchen drawer. I went to my room and took down my first dan judo diploma and music stand, and set these in the hallway. These were soon accompanied by my beloved violin and bow, and a binder full of sheet music. Mycroft swore as he crouched under my desk detaching cables from the components of my desktop computer. He emerged covered in dust (neither Victor nor I ever hoovered) and carried the CPU to the trunk of his car. I was emptying my drawers and wardrobe into the bin bags when he returned.

Mycroft wrinkled his long nose at some of my sartorial choices. He has never appreciated my sense of fashion. There was one wrinkled, peach-coloured blazer that he found particularly objectionable – which had been reason enough for me to wear it to every formal family occasion for years. I stuffed it in a bin bag (naturally, I never folded anything) along with the ill-fitting t-shirts he hated, several pairs of torn jeans, and a squashed Panama hat,

“I’ll get these,” Mycroft said as I tied off the bin bags, “you get your certificate and the violin.” There was no discussion of taking any furniture; it all belonged to Victor, and the lease was in his name. Nor did either of us raise the possibility of dropping by the Library to pick up my abandoned mobile.

As I led the way back to the car, Mycroft gave a grunt, and I turned around to see him swing the full bin bags into a building skip. They landed with a booming thud.

“Mycrof!” I shrieked in that unnaturally high-pitched voice – I would really have to get a handle on that if I was going to pass as a beta. “My clothes! Why would you do that?”

Mycroft grinned craftily as he unlocked the Saab’s driver’s side door and climbed in. “I thought that part of the new Sherlock Holmes persona could be that he actually dresses like a grown-up. Get in. When we get to London, I will take you to my tailor and we’ll have a few suits made up for you.”

“I don’t want to dress like you, Mycroft.” I grumped as I buckled up my seat belt. And I really didn’t. At twenty-eight, Mycroft dressed like a man twice his age. His wardrobe was all windowpane tweed, button-down Oxford shirts, and tattersall checked waistcoats to hide his tum.

Mycroft paused, then said quietly, “Think about it, Billy love. Very soon your body is going to go through some changes.” I thought about how my jeans had felt that morning. “A well-tailored wardrobe could help disguise that.”

“Oh,” was all I said. It was not the first time, and certainly not the last, that Mycroft made me feel stupid. We were silent for most of that morning’s drive to London, each lost in his own thoughts.

Mycroft’s “executive alpha” flat was in Buonaparte Mews in Pimlico, in my opinion the most boring neighbourhood in London. Having purchased the two-storey flat just the year before, Mycroft was inordinately proud of its central location, its matchy-matchy old lady furniture, and especially its pin-neat orderliness. Our Grandma Lynn had died three years previously, and it was apparent that Mycroft had kept all of her Hummel figurines and crocheted antimacassars for himself. He said that I could add a few personal touches of my own, but, from the way he realigned his knickknacks on a daily basis to ensure that they were all “just so,” I rather doubted his sincerity.

As a residence meant for professional alphas, Mycroft’s flat included an “omega suite” in the attic. Before I moved in, Mycroft used this space as a home gym, which essentially meant long-term storage for his rarely used treadmill. I was certain therefore that its repurposing as my bedroom was hardly an imposition. The suite featured large windows facing both east and west, a well-appointed bathroom, and a sturdy door with both a solid lock and a small hatch, which I guessed would be used to deliver meals during my future heats. All in all, I supposed, it would fine as far as prisons go. I
took perverse delight in using thumbtacks and staples to fasten posters and all manner of papers to the unblemished white walls.

“Dammit, Billy, you could have used blu-tack,” Mycroft grumbled as he glanced around my room after helping me to carry my new double bed up the stairs.

“You mean, ‘Dammit, Sherlock, you could have used blu-tack,’” I corrected him.

As Mycroft and the pamphlets had predicted, the omega hormones that were now flooding my veins soon began to manifest themselves in numerous physical changes. The first thing to go was my body hair. In fact, I first noticed it sloughing off in the shower in the hospital. By the second week of April, my body was as bald as one of those ugly cats. I retained a small amount of facial hair. Given a few weeks, I could probably grow a wispy moustache and soul patch. The hair on my head went from wavy brown to a riot of fluffy dark curls. The change was so dramatic, and in my mind such a clear indication of my new status, I decided that the best thing to do would be to get rid of the curls entirely. I used Mycroft’s electric razor to shave my head, leaving just a small amount of stubble. Mycroft said it made me look like a thug.

My face began to change as well. My chin became weaker, my cheeks rounder, and my lips plump and full. I found that the latter change gave me a slight lisp. I had previously noticed that some of the more effeminate omegas often spoke with a lisp, but I had assumed that such a speech impediment was an affectation that omegas used to infantilize themselves in order to attract alphas. Now I had to admit that there appeared to be a biological basis for it. I was careful to enunciate my sibilants correctly, but my lisp still appeared when I was tired or upset. When my adam’s apple began to shrink to nothingness, my voice became noticeably higher pitched. So I practiced speaking in a deep, authoritative voice, to not allow myself to stammer or lisp, and to avoid making that shrieking sound of which I was apparently now capable. To Mycroft’s intense annoyance, I also took up smoking, which, I repeatedly explained to him, would help to keep my voice low and gravelly.

To me, the change that most dramatically illustrated my change in gender was the disappearance of my testicles. Over a period of just a month they retracted and shrunk, until, by the end of May, there was nothing to indicate they had ever been there, save for a small patch of stretchy, wrinkled skin. I was thankful that my willy didn’t undergo a similar transformation; however, what with the slow-to-heal fingernail gouges marring its surface, it was hardly a thing of beauty.

Though my eating habits did not change, I noticed that my hips and thighs became softer, my bottom became bigger and more rounded, and I even grew a little pooch—though nowhere near as prominent as Mycroft’s. Good as his word, Mycroft took me to his tailor to have me fitted for some suits that could be used to disguise the changes to my figure. I kept my pants and a vest on the entire time the tailor took my measurements, but I still wondered whether an experienced clothier such as he could tell that I was an omega in disguise. Well, if he could, he was discrete enough not to mention it.

I flatly refused to follow in Mycroft’s style footsteps and instead ordered slim-fitting, distinctly modern suits in plain blue and black. I did however follow his advice in requesting that the suits be made with narrow waists and broad shoulders that would help to draw attention away from my new bubble butt. I refused to purchase any neckties; after what happened in the Library, I never wanted to wear another tie again.

Despite the effectiveness of these disguises, I felt that the best way to avoid that distinctive omega roundedness was to keep myself as lean as possible. When Mycroft wasn’t around, I would skip multiple meals, and if we did eat together, I would frequently excuse myself after the meal to lock myself in my bathroom and stick the handle of my toothbrush down my throat. These habits soon
returned my belly to its former flatness, and my full cheeks to their previous gauntness – though nothing I ever did seemed to reduce the size of my now generous booty.

The combined effect of the physical changes I had undergone during this period – and the abuses to which I subjected my body in order to counteract those very changes – was that I had become a strikingly pretty young man. I was tall and angular, and my seafoam eyes were as attractive as ever. Those features mingled with my new omega characteristics – particularly my full lips and smooth, pale skin – to lend me an air of unusual, even ethereal beauty. Of course I hated how I looked, and saw those very changes as further evidence of the terrible turn my life had taken, so I undermined my unique beauty with a permanent forbidding glare.

Looking back at that time from a distance of many years I can see that through my poor treatment of my own body, which I then rationalized in my own head as necessary to maintain my disguise as a beta, I was both punishing and rejecting my new omega body, and by extension identity. It was no accident that I picked up smoking at this time. Though I justified it as necessary to ensure that my voice remained suitably masculine, I was well aware that smoking was considered one of the worst things an omega could do to its body. (Consuming alcohol and taking drugs were perceived to be equally bad. Out of fear that booze could loosen my tongue and cause me to reveal my secret, I never took up heavy drinking. However, as we will later see, drugs soon became a large part of my life.) I look back with pity at my younger self: a young man on the precipice of a chasm who was just starting to realize that the new life he was embarking on would be full of deception, lost opportunities, loneliness, and despair.

Despite all of the bodily changes I endured, I experienced none of the personality changes predicted in the hospital pamphlets, I reckon because, as a late bloomer, my personality was well-established by the time of my change. Furthermore, besides my cleverness, the most deeply ingrained part of my personality was its stubbornness. And there was no way that my stubborn streak would permit my entire temperament to change just because some omega hormones would prefer it that way. My refusal to allow myself to become a needy, irresponsible, hysterical child – a choice, I reasoned, that other omegas could also make if they were similarly inclined – also corroborated my long held belief that omegas chose to behave in that stereotypical infantile fashion. That somewhere along the line – probably in their OmegEd classes – omegas learned that giggling and pouting and crying was the best and easiest way to get what they wanted. This revelation only served to reinforce my contempt for omegakind.

Except for one hellish week when Mycroft and I visited our parents in Staunton, (which they spent pointing out to me that the name I had chosen to go by was in fact a girl’s name, and I spent complaining about the ghastly lipstick red colour they had chosen to paint my childhood home) I spent the entire summer acquainting myself with my new body and the city it now occupied. As mentioned above, I found Pimlico to be frightfully dull. I began to refer to our street as “Blown Apart Mews,” not because I particularly hated it – it was perfectly comfortable, and I always felt welcome – but just to needle my houseproud brother.

On a Saturday morning in May, my explorations around London took me to a flea market in Notting Hill. There I found a battered old Le Corbusier grand confort arm chair. Though it must have been quite striking in its youth, it was now battered and saggy, its leather upholstery cracked and faded, and its steel frame scratched. Nevertheless, it was comfy, and its faded modernist charm won me over in an instant. I paid more than it was probably worth, and charmed the beta stall attendant to deliver it to Pimlico. The chair arrived one afternoon before Mycroft returned home from his office on Marsham Street. I set it up in the sitting room next to the window, and spent the remains of the day sitting this way and that in it, trying to find all the most comfortable positions.

Mycroft walked in the door at 5:43. I smiled at him, and he rolled his eyes tiredly, “Surely you can
“Surely you can recall that you said I could introduce some personal touches to the sitting room, Mycroft,” I countered.

“I meant something small, like a CD player or a new plate,” he said, gesturing to the wall behind me where he had lovingly arranged a display of commemorative plates. (Featured heavily was Princess Diana, the omega wife of the Prince of Wales, who had perished the previous summer in car wreck in Paris, and who had long been Mycroft’s secret crush.)

“Mycroft, you are the only human being I know under the age of eighty who collects souvenir plates,” I said with contempt.

Mycroft sighed. I had lived with him for scarcely two months and he was already fed up with my little digs about his bourgeois décor. “Where did you find that monstrosity?”

“Flea market,” I said, wriggling my bum to get more comfortable.

“A flea market, Billy?” Mycroft griped, “God only knows where it’s been. It could be full of bugs! Get it out of here!”

“It’s Sherlock, remember?” I said, gripping the arms tightly.

“I mean it. Get rid of it!” Mycroft was starting to raise his voice.

“Make me.”

“Get rid of it! Now! I mean it, Billy, if you’ve brought bed bugs into this flat – ” He shouted.

Then, to my horror and surprise, I felt tears prickle my eyes, and I found myself flinching in the face of Mycroft’s anger – though he was nowhere near as wrathful as I had rendered him on dozens of previous occasions. Mycroft was perplexed by my tearful cringing, and his gathering tirade stopped in its tracks. At the exact same moment we both recognized my cowering reaction for what it was: the instinctive response of a submissive omega to the displeasure of its alpha.

“Oh, Billy love –“ he murmured sadly as I jumped to my feet and stumbled up the stairs to my room. I ducked under the duvet and sobbed angrily into the mattress, hating my body and life more than ever.

A few minutes later, Mycroft knocked on my door jamb. I was grateful he didn’t just barge in, as would have been his right as my family alpha.

I sat up, wiping tears from my eyes with the back of my arm. “I’m th-thorry,” I lisped. “I jutht liked it. I – I can m-move it up here if you like –“

“Shut up, Billy,” Mycroft said in his gentlest voice as he sat on my bed next to me. “It can stay where it is. You have every right to include some of your own possessions in our shared living spaces.”

“But – But you h-hate it!” I squeaked miserably while he wrapped a long arm around my back. I was surprised and disgusted at my obliging meekness – that too must have been a product of my new omega biology.

“I suppose we can disguise it with a nice afghan or some throw pillows, hmm? Don’t you worry about it for a moment longer, alright?” Mycroft’s tone was so kind it verged on patronizing, but I
found it comforting.

“Al-al-alright,” I hiccuped. Mycroft stroked the stubbly hair on my scalp soothingly.

He made a sound that was a cross between a sigh and a growl, and whispered, “God, I hate your haircut.”

I smiled and gave a snorting laugh. The balance was restored to our relationship.

From then on, however, whenever we argued Mycroft made a point of speaking in calm, even tones to avoid provoking that same pathetic submissive reaction from me. I know that his intention was to allow me to retain some measure of dignity, but somehow I found his kid glove treatment just as humiliating.

* It was the end of August and my classes at Imperial were due to begin in three weeks. Because some of my credits didn’t transfer, I would be required to retake my entire final year, but I was not bothered by this because I rather enjoyed uni, and I was able to take a few ancillaries that weren’t available at Man U, including a course on forensic science – a topic that had always intrigued me. The only drawback was that I would also have to take a first year maths class – I had managed to weasel my way out of the equivalent at Manchester, but it was a hard requirement for graduation in the science faculty at Imperial.

I had spent a morning registering for courses at the Imperial College Union building. Having completed this task, I left by the exit on Prince Consort Road, and paused for a cigarette. I heard some high-pitched giggling, and looked up from the printout of my class schedule to see a small gathering of omegas on the steps of the building opposite. Oh, of course: the Royal London Omega Retreat. Still puffing away on my cigarette, I sidled a bit closer to see what they were laughing at. A few of them were dancing and clapping along to a pop song on a portable radio; others sat braiding each other’s hair, and still others were tying friendship bracelets to each other’s wrists. I was baffled that people who faced so many restrictions and were offered so few opportunities in their lives could appear so happy.

Suddenly it occurred to me that if I had presented just a few years earlier, this would be my life. Indeed, because it was probably the closest omega retreat to Mycroft’s flat, I would likely have frequented this very building. I tried to picture myself sitting on those steps styling a friend’s hair while gossiping about alphas, or singing along to the Spice Girls and Aqua. At age twenty-one, I might even be married.

Just then an omega pushing a three-seater pram waddled up the group, and was greeted with squeals and hugs. I heard her friends coo over the contents of the pram, and make envious jibes about the size of her breasts. A brand new mum then. She passed her three tiny new babies between her friends, and I found myself doing some mental calculations. Omega pregnancies typically took just four months. That would mean….

I felt a sudden raw pang in my chest, like a sour tone on a violin, and I brought that line of thought to an abrupt halt. Just then some of the omegas took notice of me staring at them from across the road. They scowled at me and led the new mother and her litter inside the front doors of the retreat.

Instead of catching the Tube at South Kensington, I decided to walk home. I stayed in my room for the rest of the day smoking cigarette after cigarette, to which Mycroft responded with repeated theatrical coughing.
The next morning over coffee (another two-fingered salute to my omega biology) Mycroft cleared his throat and said, “Billy, how long has it been since your heat?” He did not look up from his newspaper, and I could sense he was uncomfortable.

I did the math. “Five months and eleven days.”

Still not looking up, Mycroft said, “Perhaps it would be wise to… undergo the next one before classes start. Why start the semester with unexplained absences, hmm?”

Another example of Mycroft’s excellent forethought. “Okay. I guess I can do it next week. Will you – will you be here?” I asked uncertainly. As he was my brother and family alpha, I had no fear that Mycroft would be attracted to me during my heat; rather, I hoped he would be around because I was not entirely comfortable with the thought of going through… that alone.

“I can take a week off,” he said. “The Home Office is sympathetic to alphas with family responsibilities.”

We sipped our coffees in silence for a moment. Then Mycroft said, “Have you given any thought about what supplies you’ll need during your heat?” I glanced up at him and saw a slight blush crawl up his freckled neck. He continued to focus on his newspaper, though I don’t think he was actually reading it.

“Supplies?” I asked in confusion.

“Don’t be dense, Billy,” he sighed. “You know that omegas often require some sort of assistance to enjoy their heats. I’m asking you what you think you might like.”


Mycroft rolled his eyes and finally looked at me, “Because it would like awfully suspicious if you, a supposed beta, were to wander into a sex shop to stock up on omega dildos. So I’m trying to offer to do it for you. Forgive me for attempting to spare you the awkwardness of asking me to go sex toy shopping on your behalf, you stupid boy.” He said this all in an exaggeratedly calm voice, careful not to provoke a submissive reaction.

That afternoon I found a large plastic bag from a shop in Soho sitting by my bedroom door. It contained a wide variety of pornographic materials and sex toys. While I could recognize the alpha- and beta-sized dildos and vibrators, I was at a loss to understand what some of the other objects were, or even where there were supposed to fit in my body. Asking Mycroft what to do with them would have stretched even our close relationship to the breaking point, so I set them aside, reasoning that I would have plenty of time to figure them out during my week-long heat.

Six days later, I stopped taking my nightly doses of Omegarrest and Pherostol, stocked my bedroom with clean towels, sports drinks, and energy bars, locked the deadbolt, and went to sleep in my comfiest pajamas.

I awoke before dawn with my head swimming, and my skin cold and clammy. My own floral grapefruity smell flooded my nostrils, and I shuffled into the bathroom, tearing off my pajamas as I went. I stared at my reflection in the mirror for a long moment: my fine eyes were wild and panicked; my thin, bony chest heaved, and the scars from the long scratches on my flanks stood out against my pale, damp skin. My lips and nipples looked flushed and swollen – a gentle swipe across the latter with the palm of my hand revealed them to be tender and sore. My cock was hard and red, the deep
fingernail scars a dark purple. My penis and vagina were dribbling clear fluid onto my belly and
thighs respectively.

I crouched on the floor of the shower and turned on the tap, making the spray as cold as it could go. I
sat that way until I was shivering and blue, disheartened that the cold shower had not diminished my
heat symptoms. I crawled out, wrapped my body in a towel, and went to find the bag of toys.

The large alpha dildo was quite painful to use, but, given what Doctor Fortwright had told me at the
Infirmary in Manchester, that was only to be expected. The beta-sized vibrator was far more
comfortable, and it quickly became a favourite during that humiliating, awkward, and strangely
monotonous week. Mycroft left me small high-carb, high-protein meals, which I gobbled up in
between rounds of furious masturbation. I especially prized the fish and chips with vinegar.

After just a few days, I grew impatient with the whole repetitive, sweaty, sticky, animalistic process,
and I began to flip through the erotic reading material Mycroft had provided for me. As it was written
with an audience of ditzy omegas in mind, much of it was just mind-numbing, juvenile drivel. There
was one particularly dreadful series about an omega in a love triangle with an alpha vampire and an
alpha werewolf. I lost patience with the series when, in the second book, the vampire left the heroine
for no apparent reason, and she literally spent six months moping in an armchair.

There were plenty of pornographic magazines too. These offered an interesting window into the
fantasies other omegas apparently found appealing. There were posed scenes of alphas dressed as
devil-may-care pirates or knights, holding swooning, tight-bodiced omegas. There were rock star
alphas with their disgustingly purple cocks hanging out of black leather trousers, and even Tarzan
alphas: naked, hairy wildmen who kidnapped delicate young omegas in white lace gloves and
hoopskirts.

About the only magazines I found appealing were the ones with the alpha soldiers. There was
something profoundly different about them. The soldiers had a certain economy of movement and
gesture that contrasted mightily with the preposterous, melodramatic poses and facial expressions
employed by the models in the other magazines. Their bodies weren’t more chiseled, their uniforms
weren’t particularly revealing, and their faces were more rugged than handsome, but I found them
irresistible. It was something about their expressions, I think. Rather than being infused with lust or
passion or triumph, the soldiers seemed forthright, disciplined, and strong. Protective, above all.
There was one photograph of a battle-weary alpha gently holding a ravished omega. The look in his
honest, sensitive eyes said, “Don’t worry, little omega, I’m here for you. No one will ever hurt you
again.”

I really got off on that.

Chapter End Notes

Want to see Mycroft’s car? http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saab_900

Want to see Mycroft’s preferred knickknacks? http://www.ebay.com/gds/M-I-Hummel-
Figurines-An-Easy-To-Use-Collectors-Guide-/10000000000884514/g.html
Friends Lost...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Classes began just five days after the end of my heat. I was still feeling tender and delicate. I really couldn’t fathom how other omegas went through that ordeal every single month.

I had four classes that first semester at Imperial: three final year classes on Green Chemistry, Catalysts, and Organic Chemistry in Industry, and the dreaded first year Maths class. I was very fond of the first three classes. Though Mycroft has long maintained that I am too stupid and careless to survive without constant supervision, I enjoy the mental stimulation (and the rewards of good grades and praise from my professors) available at university. I found that the memory palace trick explained in the book about Simonides was extraordinarily useful in helping me to organize and retain the information I absorbed. In fact that technique gave me quite an edge over my classmates in quizzes and exams, transforming me from merely a very good student to a truly excellent one – though I admit that I was otherwise no more disciplined about turning in assignments on time than I had been at Man U. My cohort of final year students – all of whom knew each other quite well as they had studied together for the previous three years – were curious about the brilliant newcomer in their midst, and I was well aware that rumours swirled about who I was, and how I came to be in their presence. I was careful, therefore, to not let my new identity – that of Sherlock Holmes, beta and brilliant organic chemist – ever slip when I was in their presence. Another area where my mind palace, as I called it, came in handy.

The only thing that I didn’t like about my classes that semester was the first year Maths class. Excelling in Maths, I found, required a certain diligence which I just couldn’t muster when I wasn’t interested in the subject matter. In other words, I was easily smart enough to master the material; I just didn’t feel like applying myself. My time in that class was made even more painful by the crowd of students who sat near me in the lecture theatre. Their leader, a posh alpha named Sebastian Wilkes, was easily the most spoiled, arrogant, profoundly stupid prick I had ever met. Like me, Sebastian was a fourth year student. Unlike me, he was a student in the business school, and was taking first year Maths for the third time. He had withdrawn from it the first time he had taken it, and failed it outright the second. All lecture long, Sebastian would whisper to his mates, “What’s he on about? Does anyone know? Maybe I’d be doing better if the Maths lecturers could actually teach!” I wept for the future of Britain’s banking industry if this was the sort of moron who would one day be leading it. It wasn’t just that Sebastian himself did poorly through his lack of preparation and general inability to grasp abstract concepts on any but the shallowest of levels, it was that his constant comments distracted everyone around him, and brought our grades down too.

One day I had finally had enough. I turned to him and hissed, “We’re doing partial differential equations! They have multivariable functions. You’re thinking of Ordinary Differential Equations! Those are functions with just one independent variable! Pay attention!”

“Oh,” he said, suitably chastened, “Right. Thanks, mate.” I fumed for the rest of the lecture, but at least Sebastian remained silent.

As I stood up to leave at the end of the lecture, I found Sebastian waiting for me at the door to the lecture hall. Expecting trouble, I rolled my eyes and tried to walk around him, but he stepped in front of me and to my surprise gave a genuine smile.

“Sebastian Wilkes,” he said, sticking his hand out.
I shook it reluctantly, “Sherlock… Sherlock Holmes.”

“T’was a pleasure,” he said with a sheepish grin, “for pointing me in the right direction in class just now.”

“S’alright,” I murmured, making to leave.

“It was very helpful,” he said, walking beside me as I headed to my next lab session. “I haven’t got a head for numbers, me. Don’t see why they’re so important.” I closed my eyes and took a deep breath through my nose. The future of British banking right there!

“But you seem to get it,” he continued, oblivious to my irritation. “I was wondering, could you help me out? Just keep me on track a bit like you did today? And maybe some help studying around exams? I could make it worth your while….”

As I had no positive feelings whatsoever towards this lout – and because I still wasn’t comfortable around strange alphas – my initial reaction was to say no. But then I thought that it might be nice to have some pocket money that I didn’t have to ask Mycroft for. (He begrudged me every penny he thought might go to cigarettes.) I also reasoned that such tutoring sessions might help me to test out my new identity, because, regardless of how uneasy Billy Holmes the omega might feel about being alone with an alpha, Sherlock Holmes the beta would have no such qualms.

“I’ll do it,” I said. “But you have to do the readings before class. Half your problem is that you’re unprepared.”

And that’s how I became friends with Sebastian Wilkes. He wasn’t a wholly terrible person. Just entitled and very used to having other people solve his problems for him. Not terribly uncommon qualities among bankers, actually.

In gratitude for my aid, Sebastian practically forced me to join his large circle of friends, most of whom were also wealthy alpha business or corporate law students at Imperial or other universities in the London area. I managed to dazzle and amuse them with Mycroft’s deductive observation trick, and the remedial assistance I could offer them in their science and maths ancillaries meant that they often competed to monopolize my attention over lunchtime. For the first time in my life, I was one of the cool kids. Sort of.

Though I reveled in the novelty of my popularity, there were some things about Sebastian and his group of friends that I found troubling. Besides their penchant for drunk driving and the amount of money they could spend on a single sushi lunch, their treatment of omegas made me uncomfortable. As I mentioned earlier, the Royal London Omega Retreat was situated just across the road from Imperial. Sebastian and his alpha cronies would spend their breaks smoking and loitering near the rear entrance to the Union building, where they could leer at the omegas arriving at or departing from the Retreat. I frequently joined them.

I was shocked at the aggressiveness of their flirtation. They were not the slightest bit shy about whistling or catcalling at the attractive young omegas who would hurry past them, eyes downcast and cheeks blushing. Sometimes they would even follow the omegas who were unlucky enough to be walking alone, saying things like, “Hey, when’s your next heat? Let me know and I’ll be happy to service you,” or, “All I want to do is talk to you. Don’t walk away from me!” Some of the omegas would smile shyly before quickly ducking inside the Retreat; others would bravely but tearfully shout at Sebastian’s gang to leave them alone. For my part, I did not join in with my friends’ predatory flirtation – as a beta it would be unusual for me to be interested in omegas. But I also didn’t tell them they were being disrespectful and unchivalrous, or that their advances were clearly unappreciated. At
the time I figured that, as a beta, Sherlock Holmes would have no reason to be concerned for the feelings of the hapless omegas who were unlucky enough to pass by the rear entrance of Imperial College’s Union building. But the truth was that I simply lacked the courage to tell off my new friends. That didn’t mean that I approved of their actions. In fact, I secretly felt terrible that I failed to stick up for my fellow omegas, though the fact remains that I did nothing to stop it. I regret few things in my life more than that.

In retrospect, there was no way my friendship with Sebastian and his crew could last for long. We were just too different: they were all law students or business majors, while I studied sciences; they voted Tory, while I’m dyed-in-the-wool Labour; they spent their weekends partying or “volunteering” at omega retreats, while I was used to spending mine studying or playing Uno with Mycroft; they had no sense of how their behaviour made omegas feel, while I understood only too well.

The beginning of the end of my brief foray into popularity came during a late night exam study session in January. Sebastian and I had commandeered a small study room in the Sherfield building. I had been helping him with Fourier methods since dinnertime, and it was now approaching four in the morning. I noticed that he had grown distracted, and for the past few minutes he was weaving his head about, sniffing the air.

Suddenly, he thrust his head in my direction, and breathed in deeply. “Jesus, Sherlock,” he said, “you smell like omega.”

Oh god, oh god, oh god, oh god, I thought. I had forgotten to take my nightly doses of heat suppressant and scent blocker, and now I was going into heat. Indeed I too could detect the light odour of cherry blossoms and grapefruit that I had begun to recognize as my own unique omega smell. I knew I had some Pherostol in my bag, as it wasn’t a controlled substance, but my entire supply of Omegarrest was safe at home in my bathroom. Stamping down on my panic, I forced myself to casually lean back in my chair, and said, “And why do you think that is, Sebastian?” He shrugged, while I scrambled to come up with a lie that would be persuasive enough to get me out of here before my heat began in earnest.

Ah! Found one!

“Oh god, oh god, oh god, oh god, I thought. I had forgotten to take my nightly doses of heat suppressant and scent blocker, and now I was going into heat. Indeed I too could detect the light odour of cherry blossoms and grapefruit that I had begun to recognize as my own unique omega smell. I knew I had some Pherostol in my bag, as it wasn’t a controlled substance, but my entire supply of Omegarrest was safe at home in my bathroom. Stamping down on my panic, I forced myself to casually lean back in my chair, and said, “And why do you think that is, Sebastian?” He shrugged, while I scrambled to come up with a lie that would be persuasive enough to get me out of here before my heat began in earnest.

I watched him slowly, painfully put the pieces together. “You were with an omega? Why?”

I stretched contentedly and said, “Why does anyone spend time with omegas?”

Sebastian took in my relaxed posture and his eyes widened in amused shock. “But – But, aren’t you –? How come –? Christ, you’re an alpha? All this time I thought you were a beta, Sherlock! Fuck, sorry about that!”

I shrugged with a smile, and began to pack up my books, hoping to leave without generating further suspicion.

“You dog, are you saying that you spent the afternoon at the omega retreat, and left without taking a shower? Is that why you stink so much like omega? That’s nasty, mate!” Sebastian’s expression was equal parts disgust and admiration. I smirked, and gathered together my mechanical pencil and graphing calculator. I could see the gears still turning in Sebastian’s head, and I wanted to be out of there.
“But if you’re an alpha,” he said abruptly, “How come I’ve never been able to smell it on you?”

Shit! My mind raced to come up with an adequate explanation. Forcing myself to breathe normally, I rooted around in my book bag in what I hoped was a casual manner. Finally, I found what I was looking for.

“That’s how come,” I said, placing the perfectly legal bottle of Pherostol on the table between us.

He picked it up and asked, “Pheromone blocker? Why?”

I snatched it back from him, dropped it in my bag, and did up the zip. “For the same reason any alpha takes scent blockers: A lot of omegas, especially the younger ones,” here I wagged my eyebrows suggestively, “don’t like a strong alpha smell. Makes them uncomfortable, or whatever. Especially during their off-heat cycle. I find that if I take scent blockers they’re more at ease around me. So they let their guard down, and then bam!” I used my fist and bent arm to make the universally-known gesture of male virility.

“So, you take pheromone blockers all the time?” Sebastian was still struggling to follow my lie, “Just in case you meet an omega and you want to have it off with it?” My response was a cross between a shrug and a nod.

Sebastian frowned as he thought about this. Admittedly, it was farfetched that an alpha would seek to continuously disguise its status, but it was really the only explanation I could come up with on such short notice. I stood up, shrugged on my overcoat, and tied my scarf tightly around the scent gland on my neck. Finally, Sebastian shook his head and smiled, “Jesus, you’re a sly dog, Sherlock. It’s always the quiet ones, you know?”

I grinned in relief, “Goodnight, Sebastian. See you at the exam.” I turned and rushed out the door. I paused for a deep breath on the threshold, and then began to jog home through the snow. Thought it was very early in the morning, I kept a sharp out for anyone who might be following my scent.

Just a half hour later I stumbled in the front door of Mycroft’s flat, out of breath and stinking of cherry blossoms and grapefruit. I sprinted up the stairs to my bathroom to take a double dose of Omegarrest to, hopefully, stop my encroaching heat in its tracks.

“Sherlock?” Mycroft was getting better at remembering to call me by my new name, “Is that you? Where’ve you been?” I heard Mycroft fiddle with the deadbolt. He sounded sleepy and worried.

“Go back to bed, Mycroft,” I shouted as I filled a glass of water.

Mycroft called up the stairs, “Are you going into heat? Now? Don’t your exams start on Monday?”

I swallowed the pills, and marched to the head of the stairs to glare down at my brother.

The only time that Mycroft looks his age is when he is in his night clothes. That evening – well, early morning – he wore the new red tartan dressing gown he got for Christmas over rumpled cotton pajama bottoms and a shabby Hootie and the Blowfish t-shirt that he had purchased at a concert three years earlier. He thought the t-shirt made him look cool. It did not.

Mycroft rubbed his eyes drowsily. My brother is never at his best without a proper night’s rest. This was apparent from the way he watched me in confusion as I descended the stairs.

“Yes, exams start Monday. No, I’m not going to go into heat. I was just a tiny bit late in taking my pills. But you can stop your fussing because I just took a double dose, so I’ll be fine!” I barged past him to the kitchen where I filled the kettle. My aroused senses easily identified his unique alpha
smell: juniper and cucumbers. A very domestic odour for an alpha.

“Can you do that? Make up for a missed pill by taking a double dose?” Mycroft followed me, running a hand through his fine red hair, which stuck up in all directions.

I shrugged, “Stands to reason….” I turned on the kettle and found a pair of mugs.

“Honestly, Sherlock, you have to be more careful!” he said, sitting at the kitchen table. “If I can smell you that means other alphas probably could as well.”

He spotted the guilty look I gave him. “What? Did another alpha smell you? Were you followed?”

He ran to the front window and peered out through the venetian blinds into the night.

“No, no, nothing like that!” I snapped in annoyance. “It – it was a friend.”

He turned to me. “A friend? A friend noticed your smell?” Mycroft was silent for a second as he processed this. “You have an alpha friend who picked up your omega smell? Jesus, Sherlock, there goes your disguise! You cocked up the entire plan just like that!” He threw his hands in the air as he sat down at the table again.

“No, no, no,” I growled. “I made up a lie. I said I smelled like an omega because I had been with an omega. He bought it. It’s fine. Your precious plan is still intact!”

“Well thank god for small mercies,” Mycroft took the cup of tea I offered him. “But you really do have to be more careful with your pills.”

I nodded and fished the teabag out of my mug. “I know. I think I’ll sew an emergency packet into the lining of my book bag.”

“Good idea,” said Mycroft, adding milk and sugar to his own tea. He was silent for a minute then added in too casual a voice, “So. You have an alpha friend?”

“If I’m meant to be a beta, why shouldn’t I have alpha friends?” I snapped.

“So alpha friends in the plural, is it?” he said carefully.

“Yes, Mycroft, I have friends in the plural, and they happen to be alphas. Why is that a problem?” I was growing impatient with Mycroft’s nosiness. It didn’t help that my lingering heat symptoms were making me irritable.

Mycroft gave a long-suffering sigh and said, “I think that if one has a secret to keep – as you do, brother mine – one ought to be careful about whom one takes into one’s confidence. A friend – especially one equipped to reveal one’s secrets – can be source of vulnerability.”

I rolled my eyes at my brother. “Making friends is a perfectly normal human activity, Mycroft. Indeed, some people maintain that having good friends is necessary to lead a happy, well-rounded life.”

Mycroft scoffed at that and said, “Don’t be ridiculous, Sherlock! Look at me: I haven’t got any friends and I’m perfectly… content.” We both noticed that he said ‘content,’ and not ‘happy.’

I don’t what caused Mycroft to blurt out that revealing and somewhat pitiable statement. Perhaps lack of sleep – it was only now five in the morning. Whatever the reason, it was very true: I have never known Mycroft to have close friends – other than myself of course. When we were children Grandma Lynn would say that Mycroft’s intelligence meant that he existed on a higher plane than
other children. They didn’t understand him, and he quickly grew bored with them, or so she reckoned. But that wasn’t quite true. Rather, Mycroft’s difficulties in relating to his peers stem from his deep but unacknowledged fear of rejection. Hierarchical relations with his underlings and superiors at the Home Office, or with the betas in his family, or even with his troublesome little brother, those were predictable, controllable – those were fine. But interacting with equals who might not be impressed by his accomplishments, and were free to decide they didn’t like him, and didn’t want to be his friend – that possibility, that level of uncertainty was utterly unacceptable to Mister Mycroft Holmes.

Mycroft was very aware that by admitting he did not have friends he had presented me with a fine opportunity to ridicule him, and right in the middle of an argument too. I could see a blush begin to creep up his neck, and he glared angrily at me, daring me to comment.

Still stewing with heat hormones, I could hardly resist such an opportunity. “Oh, I get it. You’re just jealous!” It was a childish argument, but effective.

Mycroft gave a short laugh and an amused “What?” but he was blushing to the tips of his freckled ears.

“Jealous I have friends, and friends in the plural at that. While you spend your weekends watching Poirot and University Challenge. Alone.”

A hit. A very palpable hit. Mycroft’s grey eyes widened, then narrowed.

“Look, Sherlock,” he said in a low, cold voice, “In your situation, having friends, especially friends who are alphas, just seems a bit dangerous to me. Especially if you’re not going to be careful with your medication. After all,” Mycroft sipped his tea before delivering the coup de grace, “remember what happened with your last alpha friend.”

That was a low blow. Too angry, too hurt to formulate a response, I shoved my chair away from the table and walked quickly up the stairs to bed. My heat did not materialize, and when I woke up late that afternoon I lay curled up under my duvet for hours pondering Mycroft’s advice.

It was remarkably easy to divest myself of my circle of friends. In the end I simply used Mycroft’s deduction trick, but instead of drawing humorous conclusions from my observations, all I had to do was search for the aspects of my friends’ appearances that they were trying to hide, and draw unflattering conclusions from those. I started right after our Maths exam, when we had all gone out for a drink to celebrate. I loudly deduced that one of them had undiagnosed chlamydia, another had been diddled by a schoolteacher as a child, and two others were in love each other. By the end of the evening, they were only too happy to part company with me. Sebastian – who would probably be doing a urine test in the morning – even told me, “I never liked you, you little spod. I was going to ditch you after the exam anyway, now that I’m done with Maths for good.”

I was glad that my plan to rid myself of my associates had worked so well, but also sad that people I had once thought of as friends would be so quick to give up on me after just one evening of tactless remarks. I would have to remember that.

Chapter End Notes

One of two short chapters. Chapter 6 coming very soon.
Thanks to you all for your kudos and comments!
In the spring semester I took two more fourth year Organic Chemistry courses: these being Advanced Chemical Theory and the Human Genome. I also took the aforementioned optional course on Forensic Science, and registered to write an honours thesis, though I had not yet settled on a topic. Through close personal familiarity, alpha/omega pheromones had rather lost their appeal as an area of study.

My strategy to keep my classmates at arm’s length by making tactless, hurtful observations persisted for the duration of the semester. While in the first semester they had found me to be both brilliant and intriguing, in the second they saw me as obnoxious and disagreeable. It would have been perfect except that I couldn’t seem to keep a lab partner for more than a week.

The one exception to this rule was the partner assigned to me in my Forensic Science course, a young woman I had initially dismissed as a timid, sexless, beta pushover. Her name was Molly Hooper. During our first lab session she told me that she planned to become a forensic pathologist. I bluntly told her that I didn’t think she had the stomach for it, but I couldn’t have been more wrong, for Miss Hooper has time and again proven that she has more grit than any beta – no, more than any person – I’ve ever met.

My interactions with Molly began in the same manner as all of my classmates: I made a rude observation and sat back to wait for her to either start crying, or get angry and call me a bastard. She did neither, though I could easily detect the hurt in her eyes when I told her that her poodle jumper, which she thought made her look cute, actually prevented her professors from taking her seriously. Instead, she set her jaw and suggested that we focus on the assignment. I tried again, commenting that the rattiness of her hairstyle was a clear indication that she lived alone, since she obviously didn’t have anyone around to tell her when her hair looked bad from the back. This time I saw a sparkle of tears in her eyes, but she simply said, “That’s rude, Sherlock, and you know it. Now let’s finish the write-up.” At the end of the lab, I fully expected her to approach the professor to beg for a new lab partner, but she didn’t. I tried again with the rude comments the next week, but again she either ignored me, or quietly chastened me before refocusing our attention on our work. At first I thought that Molly was a doormat – that her self-esteem was so low that she felt she deserved my insults – but I soon learned that the opposite was true: her faith in herself and her own abilities was such that she simply did not take my comments to heart. I eventually abandoned my attempts to push her away. After all, patient, tolerant, intelligent, and hard-working friends are a rare enough commodity that they shouldn’t be rejected without good reason.

One morning over shared coffee and scones Molly told me, “You know, everyone talks about you.”

“Oh yes?” I said, secretly alarmed. “And what does everyone say?”

“Lots of things,” she said, watching me closely for my reaction. “Emily George says that you have autism and that’s why you’re so rude to people, even though you do well in class.”

I shrugged at that.

“Anne Deacon says that the reason you left your old school is because you’re a psychopath – no, she said sociopath – and you attacked a professor.”
I laughed at that one. Sociopath; I would have to remember that.

“Arthur Inglis says that Sebastian Wilkes told him that the reason that the business school students won’t give you the time of day anymore is because you wouldn’t stop harassing the omegas at the Royal London. He even hinted that you got one pregnant.”

I gaped at that. The nerve!

“James Wilcox says that his cousin told him that you used to go to Man U.” I froze when Molly said that. I’m sure she noticed, but she continued anyway. “He says that there was an omega attacked in the Library there last year, and you stopped attending class right afterwards.” My eyes frantically searched Molly’s face. Had I been found out so easily? “He says that you were kicked out of school for attacking the omega.”

I let out a breath I didn’t know I had been holding, and began to chuckle as I sipped my coffee.

“What is it?” asked Molly. “That’s not true, is it? Sherlock?”

“Look at me, Molly.” I said in my most sincere voice. Molly obediently looked deep into my wide, earnest eyes. “None of it, none of it at all is true.” Her trusting nature compelled her to see what she wanted to see.

“I know it’s not,” she smiled. “I just wanted to hear it from you.”

Of course I knew from the start that Molly had a crush on me. And who could blame her? To her I was the bad boy of Imperial’s science faculty, the handsome, mysterious young man in the tailored suits who just needed the love of a good woman to tame him. I was her Mr. Darcy, her Rochester. Of course a romantic relationship – to say nothing of a physical one – even with someone as gentle and kind as Molly, was utterly out of the question for me. Besides my persistent discomfort with any form of intimacy, if we entered into a relationship it would only be a matter of time before Molly discovered my secret. So whenever she tried to push our collegial friendship in the direction of romance, I would make a few pointedly rude observations to remind her that she would have to put up with my tactless remarks on a constant basis if she and I were in a relationship. I always felt bad for doing so – in fact Molly is the only person I feel bad about insulting – but, given the strength and tenacity of her ardour for me, it seems the only way to put her off.

The seriousness with which Molly approached her studies was a welcome counterpoint to my own occasional lack of discipline. When she asked me whether I wanted to work together on a joint study for our honours projects, I accepted with a rare true smile. It was a challenge to come up with a project that would be equally relevant to my degree in Organic Chemistry and her MBBS program. Because I vetoed any project related to alpha and omega biology, we eventually settled on attempting to determine which of the gases released by a decomposing corpse were most attractive to insects – a project that amply satisfied our shared passion for the macabre.

I discovered that one of Molly’s most delightful (and unexpected) qualities is her appreciation for mischief. Though on the surface she appears to be a goody-goody, I made her laugh several times with my humorous observations about the sex lives of our teaching assistants. When I played pranks on our classmates or professors I found that her attempts to stifle her laughter – combined with her whispered admonitions of “Sherlock! You’re terrible!” – only encouraged me to reach for ever greater heights of sophomoric humour. It was a welcome change from Mycroft, who finds my idea of comedy childish and unsophisticated.

One evening in March, Molly and I took the Tube (Piccadilly to Holborn, transfer to the Central) to Saint Bartholomew’s Hospital. Our thesis supervisor, Professor Hollingsworth, made an appointment
for us to meet with a friend and former student of his who was completing a clinical rotation in the pathology department. Said friend, one Michael Stamford, was supposed to assist us in obtaining samples of decomposing human flesh, which we could utilize in our research project.

When we arrived at the pathology lab we were greeted by the sight of several skeletons lying on trays on the work benches. A young doctor in a lab coat – an alpha, I could tell by his smell – was wrapping up individual bones in acid-free paper before gently placing them in large, clear plastic boxes. Molly and I were fascinated, and both longed to examine the skeletons ourselves.

“Hello,” said Molly. “Are you Mike?”

“No, I’m John,” said the young doctor. “Mike’ll be back in a moment.”

“What are you doing?” I asked, far more interested in the skeletons than the doctor.

“They’re switching some of the specimens around in the museum on the third floor. These ones are going back into storage. Mike asked me to help pack them up.”

“Fascinating,” I said, not in reply to the young doctor’s explanation, but rather in reference to a skull exhibiting clear signs of trepanning.

Just then a portly young beta came in carrying two paper cups of coffee. “Here you go, John. Oh, who’s this?” He gave Molly and me a broad smile.

“We’re Professor Hollingsworth’s Forensic Science students,” Molly returned his smile. “He said you’d help us get a hold of some tissue samples for our research project.”

“What sort of research project?” asked the other doctor – John.

I gave a put-upon sigh and explained, “We’re isolating the chemical compounds released by decomposing flesh, and determining which ones are most attractive to insects.”

John laughed and said, “Yuck!”

I frowned, but Molly and Mike laughed along.

Mike had us leave our coats and umbrellas in the lab, then led us down to the morgue. Though he seemed to be a kind and friendly fellow, out of habit I made several pointed observations that could easily have offended him.

“The wear pattern on your belt shows that since you bought it you have put on approximately twenty pounds,” I said. Molly sternly shook her head at me.

Mike, on the other hand, laughed and said, “Closer to twenty-five, mate. It’s the pastries at the café here. They’re phenomenal.” He patted my stomach. “Maybe you should try them.” Molly laughed out loud at that, while I pouted and pulled my suit jacket tighter around my abdomen. I don’t like to be touched by strangers.

I tried again, “The ketchup stains on your cheek suggest that you have poor hand-eye coordination. Is that why you’re doing a clinical rotation at the morgue instead of something more difficult like surgery?”

Molly hissed, “Sherlock!”

Mike turned to me. At first I thought that he would call me a name, and tell me to get out of his
morgue, but instead he roared with laughter and said, “Don’t tell anyone, but that’s it! That’s it exactly! I’m an absolute klutz and a shite surgeon! Oh, well spotted, mate, well spotted!” He continued laughing until tears were streaming down his face and he was quite out of breath.

I gave up. The man had shrugged off the rudest deductions I could offer with a smile and a laugh. So much for my plan to keep people at arms’ length! Thus, Mike Stamford also became my friend – and would remain my friend for years to come – because his warm and genuinely friendly nature made him immune to all of my preemptive attempts to push him away.

Mike packed the tissue samples into a small red cooler. Shaking our hands, he told us to drop by if we needed more, or simply needed advice from him. Molly and I left after promising that the three of us would go for coffee and discuss the results of the project at the end of the semester. We returned to the pathology lab to retrieve our coats, and saw that the young doctor – John – had left.

After shrugging on my coat, I gave Molly a mischievous wink, and approached a tray of bones.

“What are you doing?” she whispered, her expression a cross between delight and worry.

I put a finger to my lips, then slipped a skull, mandible and all, into my book bag.

Molly’s mouth opened in shock, and she looked around guiltily, but she didn’t tell me to put it back, and she followed me willingly enough when I left the lab.

When we stopped for coffee on Exhibition Road I took the skull out of my bag and placed it on the table as if it was another person joining us for a cuppa.

“Are you going to return it?” asked Molly.

“No,” I said. “They have hundreds of skulls. They really don’t need another of a… forty- to fifty-year old beta male who died of a…” I picked up the skull and turned it over in my hands. “…An abscessed wisdom tooth.”

I replaced the skull at its seat. “What do you think we should name it?” I asked.

Molly shrugged, “How about Skully? You know, like the X-Files?”

I shook my head at that, and said, “Billy, I think.”

“Why Billy?” asked Molly, sipping her brew.

I smiled and said, “It’s a good name for a dead man, I think.”

Molly returned my smile and said, “Billy it is.”

I never did return the skull.

Of course I had no way of knowing this at the time, but that evening the pathology department at Saint Bart’s was in an uproar over the theft of the skull. The young doctor who was helping his friend to rewrap the skeletons did not notice the theft of the skull upon his return from the lavatory. It was only when the pathology museum director stopped by the lab to check on their progress several hours later that the disappearance was discovered. Mike and his friend searched high and low throughout the hospital, but of course they couldn’t find it. The museum director and their clinical instructors reamed them out for failing to lock the lab when they left it – a careless mistake that must have allowed some random member of the public to sneak in and purloin the skull. Thankfully no one connected the theft to the two studious undergraduates from Imperial.
Like I say, at the time, I had no way of knowing all this was happening at Saint Bart’s that evening. The only reason I do know what happened is that John, my John, claims to have been that unfortunate young medical student. He says that Mike had persuaded him to use one of his rare days off from his clinical attachment in the A&E department to help him pack up some skeletons. His reward for this good deed was to be raked across the coals when some miscreant stole one of the bloody skulls.

He says that he remembers me: a thin, serious, and rude young man with a bad haircut. (It certainly sounds like me.) For the life of me, however, I don’t remember him at all. The only reason that I’ve reported that the young doctor’s name was John is because John is so insistent that it was in fact him.

I find it remarkable that upon our very first meeting John made no impression on me whatsoever, that he meant nothing to me, when one day he would come to mean everything to me. I now wonder what had changed – about him, about me – between this meeting and our next one years later that could explain why my reactions to making his acquaintance on those two occasions could be so different. As risibly sentimental as it sounds, I sometimes think that at that first meeting I should have had a premonition, some intimation of the role that this young doctor, whom I had so casually dismissed and instantly forgotten, would play in my life.

How could I not have felt some sort of gravitational pull towards the person who would one day be the centre of my universe?

Chapter End Notes

The second of two short chapters. The next will be quite long and very troubling.

Thanks to you all for your comments and kudos.
It was a joy to work with Molly on our joint research project, though the students sharing our lab space did not share our enthusiasm for it. It turns out that separating the putrescine from the cadaverine from the plain old methane is a smelly process. Once, after a minor but explosive lab accident, the smell from my clothes left Mycroft retching in the kitchen sink, his sensitive alpha olfactory system utterly overwhelmed by the lingering odour of decaying flesh.

We determined that different types of insects (for example, blowflies, flesh flies, house flies, cheese flies, coffin flies, hide beetles, ham beetles, and carcass beetles) were attracted to different chemical compounds, which themselves were released at the different stages of autolysis, putrefaction, black putrefaction, fermentation, and dry decay. Our findings pointed to the conclusion that the different chemical compounds released by a decaying corpse acted as a signal to different insect groups, letting them know when a dead body had reached an ideal stage for them to begin eating and colonizing it. Given the scale, originality, and usefulness of our project to forensic entomology, we of course received an ‘A,’ which we celebrated over coffee and pastries with Mike. (He was right; they were phenomenal.)

I graduated with first class honours, and Molly spent the summer preparing for the fifth year of her MBBS program, which, to her delight, would begin with a course on clinical pathology, followed by her first clinical assignments. I began searching for a job – something in pharmaceuticals ideally – but was hampered by many firms’ requirement for a thorough health check upon hiring.

Though this was never publicly acknowledged (for fear of embarrassing the prideful but touchy alpha community) at that time – the summer of 1999 – there was a growing epidemic of STIs among young alphas, which they transmitted at an alarming rate to their multiple beta and omega partners. Concerned about lost time, many employers, including the British government itself, introduced regulations requiring new employees to be checked for STIs. As a thorough examination of my genitals was out of the question for me, I was left with few options. As a last resort, I applied for entry into Imperial’s graduate program, and, due to my excellent grades and promising undergraduate research, was eagerly accepted. I knew, however, that graduate school could put off the challenges that I would face upon joining the work force for only so long, a problem for which I blamed Mycroft (however unfairly).

“When you came up with your plan for me to live as a beta, did you think of what would happen when the time came for me to get a job?” I asked him as soon as he stepped in the door one Tuesday evening in June.

“Hello to you too, Sherlock. Yes, my day was quite satisfactory. Thank you for asking,” Mycroft said, hanging up his coat and whangee-handled umbrella.

“I mean it, Mycroft,” I pouted, following him into the kitchen. “Why did you even bother arranging for me to finish uni if I couldn’t get a job afterwards.” Looking back, I can see how ungrateful that must have sounded.
“I remember a time when education was valued for its own sake,” Mycroft grumbled as he poured himself a glass of water. “If I was in error when I broke the law and put my career at risk to make it possible for you to continue living as a beta, I am truly sorry. Where’s the phone? I’ll call the nearest omega retreat right away. I’m sure they have classes in macramé and jazzercise that you will find much more rewarding than your current studies.”

I glowered at his sarcasm. “I’m being serious, Mycroft. What am I supposed to do with my life if every place I could work requires a health check?”

Mycroft sat down heavily at the kitchen table – he clearly didn’t want to have this conversation after a long day at work. “Besides graduate school? You could be self-employed… I don’t know as what though. Or you could work for me.”

“I don’t want to be a civil servant,” I said, leaning against the refrigerator.

“No, you couldn’t be. The Home Office requires a health check too nowadays,” Mycroft leaned his cheek on his hand and sipped his water “I meant you could come work for me personally. As a sort of… dogsbody or errand boy.”

I sneered at my brother, “Work for you as well as live with you? You’d love that, wouldn’t you?”

He frowned, “What do you mean?”

“I mean that you love to have me under your thumb. In fact I’ll bet that you were delighted when I presented as an omega because it meant that you’d get to lord it over me for the rest of my life.”

Mycroft looked towards the ceiling and sighed in exasperation. “Do you have any better career ideas?”

“Alvarez!” I had a sudden epiphany.

“The Cuban doctor? What about him?”

“He’s a professor at the University of Havana. I could go to medical school there, and I wouldn’t even have to hide the fact that I’m an omega. Or I could work in their pharmaceutical industry. With my grades I’d have no problem getting a job. I bet that all we’d have to do is write to Professor Alvarez, and explain my situation. I’m sure he’d help me. I’m positive!” My eyes shone with eagerness.

Mycroft frowned though, “Your solution is to move to Cuba? Do you have any idea what that would entail? Britain considers Cuba to be one of its greatest ideological enemies. You would have to defect. That means renouncing your citizenship, Sherlock!”

I hadn’t known that. I mumbled, “So?”

“So,” said Mycroft, growing more irritated, “So if you did that you’d probably never be allowed to return to Britain. And it would be virtually impossible for Mummy or Daddy or especially me to visit you. God, if the Home Office ever found out that my own baby brother defected to Cuba my career would be over!”

“Oh, I get it,” I nodded angrily, “this is all about your bloody career. You won’t let me lead the life that I want because all you care about is how my behaviour reflects on you, and how it affects your chances for promotion.”

Mycroft stood up so quickly his chair tipped over. He fixed me with a baleful glare, and growled,
“Sherlock, do you have any idea of the risks that I have taken for you?” He took a threatening step towards me, his anger overwhelming his tacit commitment to not provoke a submissive omega reaction. I fought my instinctive urge to bow my head, but I couldn’t stop myself from trembling.

“No,” I tried to keep my voice as steady as possible, though I could feel tears in my eyes.

Mycroft stopped right in front of me. Suddenly our one-inch height difference seemed so much more significant. Unbidden by me, my chin dipped to my chest.

“Well, let me tell you,” Mycroft’s voice shook with suppressed rage, “Besides buying you medication that is banned in this country – a crime that could land me in prison for plying an omega with illegal pharmaceuticals – and besides conspiring to disguise your gender – another indictable offense – and besides obtaining an entry visa for a foreign national of an enemy country under false pretenses, and besides arranging for an abortion to be performed on an omega, I misused my position at the Home Office to have your bloody rapist flatmate deported!”

I wiped my eyes with the back of my hand, “What? You did what to Victor? He’s a British citizen!” I actually hadn’t given much thought into what had happened to my erstwhile roommate. I knew Mycroft had done something to him in retribution for his attack on me, but I had never inquired into the specifics. (In fact, a small part of me thought that Mycroft might have murdered Victor. I should have known better of course: Mycroft has always been remarkably nonviolent for an alpha.)

Mycroft gave a grim smile, his pride in his clever plot to dispose of Victor dissipating his anger. “I informed MI6 that Victor was actually a terrorist who had entered Britain on false papers. They picked him up and, after some extended tough questioning, dropped him in some poverty-stricken tin-pot dictatorship, with a warning to never return to Britain.” I couldn’t help but return Mycroft’s crafty grin with a watery smile of my own.

Mycroft ran his fingers through his wispy red hair, and the remains of his anger drained out of him, “Sherlock, do you know what would happen to me if any of that came to light? Don’t you dare tell me that all I care about is my career, when over the past year I have risked everything I’ve ever worked for to make a comfortable life for you.”

“If my comfort is so important to you, then why can’t I go to Cuba?” I persisted, wiping my nose on my sleeve.

Mycroft righted his chair and sat down again. His pensive expression told me that he was having trouble formulating a response. Finally, he looked me in the eye and said simply, “Because I want you here. With me.”

Mycroft’s selfish, weak, utterly inadequate response infuriated me. I stormed out the kitchen and slammed the front door behind me as I left the flat. Bitter tears dribbled down my cheeks as I hurried past Bessborough Gardens and towards the Thames Path. I sat on a bench facing the ponderously flowing river, just fuming about how unfair my life was and how Mycroft seemed determined to keep it that way. When it was well past dark I turned my coat pocket inside out and picked at the loose stitches at the bottom, where I had hidden an emergency supply of Omegarrest and Pherostol pills. These I swallowed dry, then drew my legs up and lay down on the bench. Though I was well aware that sleeping rough could be dangerous – especially for a well-dressed and pretty young man like myself – my anger at my brother overrode my common sense.

When my watch said it was eight in the morning – well after the time when Mycroft usually left for work – I stood up, stretched my stiff neck and walked home. To my great irritation, Mycroft’s Saab was still parked out front of our flat. Wasn’t it Wednesday? What was he doing at home? I thought.
I opened the front door as quietly as possible, but as soon as I stepped inside I was greeted by a familiar sleepy snort. Mycroft was curled up in my chair under an afghan. “Sherlock! Where have you been?” he stood up, and I could see that he was still wearing yesterday’s trousers and shirt. Indeed, judging by the dried sweat stains at his armpits and the dust on his socks, he had been out walking last night.

I was in no mood to chat, so I merely rolled my eyes and stalked upstairs to take a shower.

“I’m – I’m sorry I disappointed you,” Mycroft called up the stairs after me.

I finished my shower, put on fresh clothes, and went down to the kitchen. Mycroft sat waiting for me at the kitchen table with a pot of hot coffee. “Please let me explain, Billy love,” he only called me by that old term of endearment when he felt sorry for me, or when I was extremely upset and needed comforting. I suppose both were true that day.

“Save it,” I said, putting my upturned palm in front of his face.

He looked at it in confusion and said, “What?”

I snapped my fingers and said, “Money. I’m going to pick up my medication today and I need cash.”

“I can do that after work,” Mycroft said, his eyes searching mine. He usually picked up my pills from a holistic chemist’s shop in Shoreditch that functioned as a front for a black-market pharmaceutical smuggling operation.

“I’m not a child. I can do it myself,” I growled. He reluctantly fished his wallet out of his back pocket and dropped four ten-pound notes in my hand.

“More,” I said.

“That’s enough for a month’s supply – “ Mycroft started.

“Thtop trying to control me!” I shrieked as I snatched Mycroft’s wallet out of his hand. I took a fifty pound note, and threw his wallet in his lap. Mycroft stared at me in shock.

“Sherlock – ” he began. I turned and left the kitchen, making for the front door.

“Sherlock, wait, please,” he said while I tied my shoes.

I straightened and said, “Well?” I was so angry with Mycroft I was shaking.

“Please…” he said, plainly bewildered by my rage, and at a complete loss as to how to fix things between us. “Please don’t… buy cigarettes with that.”

I could feel my lips start to wobble so I bit down hard on them. I had to get out of there.

The holistic pharmaceutical shop – OmeGaia’s Medicine Chest – was at the corner of Chance Street and Redchurch Street. Travelling by the Victoria line to Oxford Circus and then taking the Central Line to Liverpool Street, it took me about forty minutes to get to there. I was no longer on the verge of tears, but my anger still bubbled and burned just below the surface.

As I stalked up Norton Folgate I took a phony doctor’s prescription note from my wallet, and scrawled my usual request: 30 ct 10 mg OmA. I paused and thought about what to write next. Having virtually no personal experience with prescription painkillers, I chose a narcotic I had heard referenced on Silent Witness: 20 ct IR 15 mg Oxycodone, I wrote.
The shop assistant recognized me from the few times I had accompanied Mycroft to the shop. She took my forged note, and I saw her frown slightly when she noticed the request for Oxycodone. However, this being a no-questions-asked sort of establishment, she asked no questions, filled my prescription, and wished me “day resplendent with the bounty of Omega Earth.” I took the Tube back to Pimlico, and happily noted that Mycroft’s car had gone. I let myself in the door and walked up to my room. I noticed a post-it note on my door that read “Fish and chips for tea?” I scrunched it up and threw it on the floor, then filled a cup of water at the bathroom sink and downed two of the Oxycodone.

I don’t remember much of the rest of the day. It was a blissful blur. I had trouble focusing on any thoughts, which meant that I was able to ignore the feelings of betrayal and injustice that had been building in me over the last few weeks. When I felt the wonderfully drifty sensations fade, I took two more pills, and two more a few hours after that. Later that night, when I felt the clammy horniness that presaged the onset of my heat, I took a double dose of my heat suppressant and odour blockers.

I know Mycroft came home sometime because I remember him knocking at my door and calling my name, but I didn’t answer. Evidently assuming that I was having a long sulk, he stopped bothering me.

I emerged from my room when the packet of pills was empty – I’m not exactly sure how many days later. It was around noon. I felt itchy and out of sorts. Mycroft was out, thank god. I stole another hundred pounds from the little safe in his closet (Combination: 010661 – I’ll leave you to figure that out.) and took the Tube back to Shoreditch to buy another forty tablets of Oxy.

The shop assistant looked at me suspiciously when I handed her the prescription note, “You went through the last packet quickly. Everything all right?” she asked, not without kindness.

“I remember a time when ‘no questions asked’ meant something,” I said pointedly. She shrugged and gave me a small paper bag. I took it to the alley outside, tore open a foil packet and immediately chewed up three of the tablets. I stayed in the sunny alley, leaning against some smelly old bins and watching a pack of rats fight over rotten peaches for the rest of the afternoon. When the evening chill set in, I got up and began to stumble home.

Because I took many wrong turns (and because I stopped numerous times to take a break, to pee against a wall, or to chew another pill) I did not get back to Pimlico until morning. I had trouble getting my key to fit in the lock, but Mycroft was at hand to open the door for me.

“Sherlock. Jesus. Where have you been?” He peered closely at me, making his own deductions about my activities.

“Don’t worry. I haven’t been buying cigarettes,” I shoved past my brother and made for my room.

“Sherlock, please. You can’t do that to yourself.”

I turned around at the top of the stairs, “Why not, Mycroft? Because an omega’s body is the garden where its children grow? I’m never having children, so what does it matter what I do to my body?”

He opened his mouth to reply, but I had already entered my room and slammed the door behind me.

Once more I spent several days in my room, not eating, not bathing, certainly not changing my clothes. Just riding wave after wave of bliss and, most importantly, not thinking.

Not thinking about not being allowed to move to a place where I wouldn’t have to hide.

Not thinking about being useless.
Not thinking about how lonely and isolated I was.

Not thinking about how I wasn’t allowed to have friends.

Not thinking about how quickly Sebastian and his buddies turned on me.

Not thinking about how I had failed to protect my fellow omegas from being harassed, even though I knew firsthand what it felt like to be victimized by alphas.

Not thinking about how dependent I was on my brother.

Not thinking about how weak and vulnerable I was.

Not thinking about how judgmental and unkind the staff at the Manchester Royal Infirmary had been to me.

Not thinking about aborting seven healthy babies.

Not thinking about the many restrictions and prejudices that omegas dealt with on a daily basis.

Not thinking about Victor’s betrayal.

Not thinking about being raped in the basement of the Library.

For the first time in a long time, I felt free from all of that.

* *

When my forty pills were a distant memory I again emerged from my room.

Mycroft immediately pounced on me, “Thank god. I was about to kick the door down. Christ, you look terrible.”

“I’m going out,” I said shortly, taking a few wobbly steps towards the door.

“That’s not wise, Sherlock,” he said, trying to take me by the elbow.

I wrenched my arm out of his grasp and screamed at him, “You killed them!”

“What?” Mycroft was plainly shocked. I was too. Where did that come from?

“My babies!” I screeched. “You – You weren’t even going to tell me about them!”

“Sherlock…. Billy…. Love. Please…. Please understand. I was trying to save you the pain of knowing –“

“You arranged to get rid of them with – without even athking me!” Tears were streaming out of my eyes, but I pressed on.

“Billy, please calm down. You know there was no way you could have raised a litter. It would have ruined your life.” Mycroft placed his hands on my shoulders, but I shrugged them off.

“What life?” I sobbed miserably. “You mean this fucked up mess where I’m always hiding, and I can’t – can’t have friendth, and I’m alwayth alone, and I can’t g-get a job, and you w-won’t let me l-let me move to a country where – where I would be treated like a human being?”

“Yes, that life, Sherlock,” Mycroft said placatingly. “Do you honestly think you would be happier as
a ruined omega raising seven babies without a mate?”

“At least I’d have them to love me! What have I got now?” I shrieked at the top of my lungs.

I turned and fled Mycroft’s flat, noting in passing that it was early in the morning. I walked all the way to OmeGaia’s Medicine Chest, and slammed my scribbled fake prescription on the counter.

The young shopkeeper looked at me guiltily and said, “It’s Sherlock, isn’t it?” I glared at her, and she gave me a sad smile. “Your brother called. He’s really worried about you. He asked us not to give you any more narcotics.” With a fingertip she pushed the prescription note back to me.

“You won’t sell me painkillers? What the hell kind of drug racket is this?” I growled angrily.

The shopkeeper straightened her spine and set her jaw. “The kind that understands the importance of family. We’re all Omega Earth’s children, and we need to love and respect our family alphas when they have our best interests at heart,” she said haughtily.

I swore and stormed out, trying to remember the names of the other grey-market drug smuggling firms recommended by Professor Alvarez. Once again, however, Mycroft had anticipated my next move: every place I walked into refused to fill the phony prescription.

By evening I was ready to give up and return to Mycroft with my tail between my legs. I was staggering past Victoria station when I suddenly remembered one of Sebastian’s less salubrious alpha friends – Freddy? No, Frankie. Little Frankie Hudson – the one who was always promising to “hook us up” with whatever we wanted. I checked my phone to see if he was still in my contact list.

Success!

I sent him a test message: “Frankie, Victoria @ 8. Bring gear.” I hoped he’d understand what I wanted. I was, after all, quite new to the drug business.

Little Frankie replied, “K.” Well, that was easy. The first bit of good news all day, in fact. I bought a soft drink and waited on the concourse for Frankie. Within a half hour he sidled into the station, small dark eyes shifting back and forth as he considered the possibility that this was some sort of a set-up. After all, except to help him with his chemistry assignments (Honestly, you’d think a drug dealer would be better at that sort of thing. Am I right?) I had never had reason to interact with him, and certainly had never given any sign that I might be interested in buying drugs.

“Shezza. Whassup?” I feel I should remind you that this took place in 1999, and that advert was still very popular.

“Frankie,” I said as he sat down. His alpha smell had a weird chemical top-note to it. Like pine air freshener and rubber gloves.

“What do you need?”

Not knowing any of the street slang surrounding drug use, I said, “Oxycodone. Fifteen milligram pills, or more. Not the time release stuff.”

Frankie laughed. “Hillbilly heroin? Sorry, mate, I only deal with the hard stuff.” He stood up to leave.

“Wait, wait,” I said, grasping his sleeve. “What else have you got?”
After a brief period of experimentation, I determined that my personal preference for drugs was a combination of heroin and cocaine, injected intravenously. This produced a fast, but long-lasting happy and euphoric high that made my problems drift far, far away. For a time I paid for my new habit by continuing to steal from Mycroft, but he quickly got wise to that and stopped leaving cash in the flat. I responded by pawning some of his precious Hummels. We argued when he discovered this, and I left the flat on Buonaparte Mews.

Little Frankie recommended a flop house on Rossington Street in Stamford Hill. I stayed there, sleeping on a filthy foam camping mattress, continuing to shoot up, for a few weeks. Actually I’m not sure for how long. I didn’t like it: it was dirty, and I shared my living space with several alpha addicts who were always fighting with each other. All hours, fighting, fighting, fighting. It really killed my buzz. Not wishing to attract their attention – or the diseases they no doubt carried – I was assiduous about taking my heat suppressants and scent blockers on a regular basis. Sometimes, just for fun, I crushed up my pills and added them to the spoonsful of hard drugs that I cooked and injected.

When my heat suppressants and odour blockers ran out, however, I returned home to find something I could sell for more. I timed my arrival for two in the afternoon on a Monday, a time when I knew that Mycroft would have a weekly progress meeting. I half expected him to have changed his locks, but I was able to enter the flat without trouble. On the coffee table I found two large bottles of Omegarrest and Pherostol with a note propped against them. It read:

“Dear Billy, I am so sorry. Please come home to stay, and I promise that I will support you in anything you want to do. Love, Mycroft”

I sat in my chair and read the brief missive several times. A month earlier I would have gladly accepted that offer. My skin was starting to crawl, however, so I pocketed the bottles and returned to Rossington Street.

However irrational this must have been, I still planned to attend classes when they began in September. I showed up to the first few seminars – always late and smelling terrible. When a professor would comment on my tardiness or lack of focus, I would make a few belligerent and hurtful observations, and then showed myself to the door, intending to never return to that particular class.

Immediately after this happened in my fourth and final class of the semester, I happened to run into Molly on Queen’s Gate. Judging by her brand new labcoat, she was just leaving her pathology clinic. I was suddenly very jealous that Molly was doing exactly what she wanted to do with her life.

“Sherlock! How nice to run into you! I didn’t get to see you all summer,” she said smiling brightly at me.

“Ah, Molly,” I slurred. “On your way to see Professor Hollingsworth? You know he only has it off with other alphas, right?”

Molly’s smile faltered and she said, “What?”

“Didn’t you know? He’s as bent as a nine bob note. No chance of a love affair with Miss Molly.” I pushed my lower lip out in a mocking pout.

Molly blinked rapidly. “What is wrong with you? Why are you acting this way?” Her voice trembled with hurt.

“I always act this way,” I shrugged. “I have to, you know. Because apparently I’m not allowed to be
happy. Everyone else is, even you. But not Sherlock fucking Holmes.” I was growing increasingly 
agitated.

“Are you – are you h-high?” Molly asked, her eyes wide with surprise.

“Right now I’m coming down,” I said with as much dignity as I could. “If you’ll excuse me, I think I 
will go remedy that.” I turned to leave her.

“Does your brother know about this?” Molly followed me. She took out her flip phone. I suddenly 
recalled that we had once exchanged home phone numbers. “Hello, this is Molly Hooper calling for 
Mycroft Holmes –” she began to leave a message on our answering machine.

I snatched her mobile out her hand, snapped it in half, and threw it into the street. “I should have 
known you were working with him all along!” I snarled.

“Sherlock!” she watched me in shock and growing fear.

“Leave me alone, Molly!” I bellowed. “Just… everyone… leave me alone.” I was suddenly on the 
verge of tears again. Having nothing left to say to one of my only friends, I turned away and returned 
to Rossington Street, where I promptly forgot our encounter thanks to an extra large dose of heroin.

Like I say, I was not overly fond of the smelly filth or the overabundance of alphas at the Rossington 
Street flophouse, so in mid-October I began to search for a new place to kip. I eventually found a 
small, dry gap under the Vauxhall Bridge – actually just a few blocks from Buonaparte Mews. (Why 
I chose to stay so close to Mycroft’s flat remains a mystery to me.) This I lined with cardboard, bin 
liners, and a rotting old parka I found floating in the river one afternoon. As I completed the 
construction of my squalid little burrow, I found myself recalling that one of the pamphlets I had read 
while in hospital had said that interior design was an excellent career for an omega, as it took 
advantage of their natural nesting instincts. I found myself laughing at that. Case in point right here!

I was strangely happy in my little den. I was independent; I didn’t have to smell alphas all day, and I 
didn’t have to worry about how royally I had cocked up my own life. All I had to do was get high, 
meet Little Frankie for the occasional top-up of my supply of needles and drugs, once in a while 
scrounge for a bite to eat in the bins, and watch the river roll by. It was wonderfully liberating.

Of course my omega biology sabotaged all of that for me.

Having forgotten to undergo my usual scheduled heat at the end of August, I had been taking my 
pills continuously since February. By mid-November, my body had built up quite a tolerance for 
both the heat suppressants and the pheromone blockers. Though I took double doses of my rapidly 
declining stocks of pills, I started to notice my odour of grapefruit and cherry blossoms starting to 
overpower even the smell of body odour and the sweet vinegary reek of heroin that had accumulated 
on my clothes. I wrapped the old parka tightly around myself, and kept a sharp eye out for any 
alphas that might approach my lair.

Late one night I awoke to the discomfort of the onset of my heat, and I felt panic rise in my chest as I 
sought to bury myself under heaps of damp cardboard. I stayed hidden that way for a few hours, but 
eventually heard the scuffing sounds of footsteps as unknown persons searched under the bridge for me. Despite my arousal, I made myself stay as still as possible in my hideout. I heard them shout to 
each other, “Over here. It’s stronger over here.” Then another, deeper, more threatening voice snarl, 
“Stay away. It’s mine.” Angry words were exchanged, and I heard grunts and thuds as the searching 
alphas started fighting each other over me. Finally, I could suppress my panic no longer, and I burst
out of my hiding spot, ready to run for my life.

I had forgotten, however, that I had long ago removed the laces from my shoes for use as a makeshift tourniquet. Consequently, almost immediately after I left my den I tripped and collided with one of the alphas. I screeched and scratched at its face. It grabbed my wrists and I twisted frantically in its grasp, the smell of cucumbers and juniper flooding my nostrils.


“Looking for you, you stupid boy. I could smell you from the flat. Let’s get you home before the others regroup.”

Mycroft carried me home to Buonaparte Mews over his shoulder. Though this might seem an incredible feat, it should be recalled that our flat was just a few blocks away, and I was very thin, having eaten very little over the past five months.

Chapter End Notes

Phew! That was a difficult chapter to write.

This is definitely one of the lowest points in Sherlock’s life. Things will get better, I swear.

If you don’t remember the advertisement that Little Frank quotes, this is it: http://youtu.be/JJmqCKtJnxM

10 points to whoever can explain the combination to Mycroft’s safe

Lastly, thanks to everyone for your kind words and kudos.
I cannot recommend simultaneously undergoing both heat and withdrawal. It is a remarkably uncomfortable process. To any omega drug addicts reading this memoir, please try to space those events out. This is the voice of experience speaking.

Mycroft left me alone and locked in my room for the entire ten-day combined process, with the promise that we would visit a doctor when my heat was over. Between the diarrhea, the constant pleasureless masturbation (and associated chafing), the sweaty fevers, the cravings that left me picking at my skin and chewing on my fingers, the anxiety, and insomnia, I truly wished I was dead. The lowest point for me came at the dead of night, when I found myself on the floor of my once pristine bathroom, grinding my prick into the coarse bathmat, a vibrator jammed far into my cunt. At the moment of climax, I found myself overcome with nausea, and I vomited all over myself. Too exhausted to do anything about it, I rolled onto my side and fell asleep for several hours, the vibrator still pulsing away inside me.

The only relief for me came at breakfast, which always included a glass of sweet – but unnaturally green – cherry-flavoured juice that helped to take the edge of my otherwise overwhelming cravings. I would later learn that this was Methadone.

Though I frequently feared that my simultaneous heat and withdrawal would never end – or that I might actually die from all the combined forms of discomfort I was enduring – one morning I woke up feeling extremely delicate but otherwise at peace. I rose from the floor, gingerly stepped over the trays of spoiled food, the crusty dried puddles of bodily fluids, and took a shower. Then I dressed in fresh pajamas – noting in dismay that they were now far too big for me – and slowly made my way down the stairs. Out the front window I could see that it was snowing, and I was glad to be home in Buonaparte Mews.

Mycroft was once again asleep in my chair. I made us both a cup of tea and sat down in his old-fashioned club chair to quietly observe him while he slumbered on, snoring slightly. I had not laid eyes on my brother in close to six months. During that time he had aged considerably. His hair was even thinner on top, and there were lines around his eyes and mouth that had not been there before. The most noticeable change, however, was the amount of weight he had lost. Mycroft had been chubby – with a cute little pot belly and round, dimpled cheeks – since he was a young child. It was something he had been terribly sensitive about, so naturally I had teased him mercilessly about it. Now he was as thin as a rail, and his round face was nearly as gaunt as my own. I’m sure that he would have been delighted with the change if it had not occurred as a result of fretting over me. I resolved then and there to not be such a burden to my brother, who really had tried to do his best by me… even if it hadn’t worked out the way he wanted.

Mycroft’s pale eyelashes fluttered, and he slowly woke up. “You’re looking better,” he said. This was a lie. I had seen myself in the mirror that morning and I looked terrible. (God, when was the last time I liked what I saw in a mirror?) I was as thin as a greyhound, the bones in my shoulders, spine,
arms, and hips clearly visible even through my pyjamas. My eyes were sunken; my skin was yellowish; I had somehow lost two molars, and my lips were crusty with healing blisters. There were scabs on my face, elbows, and hands from where I had been scratching and picking at my skin. My hair had grown longer, but had also fallen out in patches, so my scalp now had an unhealthy piebald look to it. Most tellingly, there were half-healed bruises and lumps on my hands, legs, and inner arms from where I had been injecting drugs.

Mycroft and I shared our tea, both careful not to antagonize the other. After a light breakfast, which for me included another glass of that miraculous green drink, he took me to a free clinic. I gave them a fake name (Victor Trevor) and, only after the doctor assured me that she could not discuss my results with anyone without my permission, allowed her to do a blood test to check for blood-borne diseases and hepatitis. She gave me a jab for tetanus, and removed a broken needle from the skin of my forearm. A drug counsellor spoke to me about continuing treatment. Since rehab was out of the question – how could I speak to strangers about the reasons behind my addiction when those reasons had to remain secret? – we agreed that Methadone maintenance was the best route. Mycroft would be in charge of giving me just one glass per day, and locking up the rest of the supply so that I couldn’t steal it. For once, I was glad to put him in charge of my well-being.

My blood test results came back the next day, showing that I did indeed have hepatitis, but was otherwise free from disease. The doctor didn’t comment on whether the test had revealed that I was an omega. But I would like to think that if she had known, she would have certainly have brought it up, because – as I learned much later in life – prolonged Methadone maintenance has been linked with omega infertility. Surely a doctor would discourage a patient from utilizing a treatment that could render the patient sterile, right?

Together, Mycroft and I cleaned the toxic waste from my room, and calmly and rationally discussed my future. We agreed that I could contact Doctor Alvarez in a year’s time if I stayed off the drugs. I was terribly disappointed, but even I could see the reason in the plan, as the professor would undoubtedly be miffed at having a drug addict foisted into his care.

After sharing a few heartfelt words of love and devotion (which were so embarrassingly sincere and awkward that I refuse to relate them here, lest they ruin your image of me as a suave and erudite raconteur) my relationship with my brother seemed to have righted itself once again. Nevertheless, I was still plagued by feelings of guilt whenever I passed by the curio cabinet where he had once kept his Hummel collection, which I had pawned months earlier.

Several weeks after my return – in fact the morning after my birthday in January – I was considering how I might retrieve the surprisingly expensive knickknacks, when I received a text from Little Frankie Hudson, my one-time dealer.


I texted back, “Off the brown, Frank. Get stuffed. –SH”

“LOL! Good luck!.... BTW, U still owe me £2000.”

Two thousand pounds? How on earth could I have incurred such a debt? “Huh? Wut 4?” I texted.

“Hey, U R the 1 who insisted on the hi qual H & C…. When do I get my money? My uncle is expecting it….”

I sighed in frustration. I really wanted to put my time in the gutter behind me forever, but that didn’t seem possible until I cleared my debt. I knew that if I had asked Mycroft for the money, he would have given it to me without question. But he would also be disappointed in me, and he might worry
that I would use the money to buy more drugs. Since I was trying to rebuild my relationship with my brother, I didn’t relish either possibility.

As I thought about options, Frankie sent me another text, “U got a passport? Come by Rossington. Maybe theres a way 4 U 2 work off the debt.” I was curious. What sort of work would require a passport?

*I*

I met Little Frankie and his uncle, Big Frank, an intimidatingly massive alpha who smelled of potting soil and seaweed, outside the Rossington Street flophouse. I refused to go inside, so, despite the cold, we sat in cracked plastic patio chairs in the snow to discuss business. It turns out that Little Frankie’s uncle was a major player in London’s drug smuggling scene, importing and selling all manner of addictive and otherwise controlled substances. That January morning, Frankie Hudson the Younger and Frankie Hudson the Elder explained to me that they were in dire need of a mule to bring a shipment of drugs to London from Big Frank’s operation in Miami, Florida.

As Little Frankie eloquently explained it to me, “You’re a posh git, Shezza. They’ll never expect you to be a mule. Do this for us just twice and we’ll call off the debt.”

I thought about it for a few moments. On the one hand, I was disappointed that I would not be able to quit the world of illicit drugs so easily. On the other, I did want to clear that debt without having to appeal to Mycroft’s generosity again. I also found the idea of a little adventure in glamorous Miami appealing. Additionally, even though Mycroft and I had agreed to wait a year before contacting Professor Alvarez, the fact that Miami was so close to the promised land of Cuba was awfully tempting to me.

“Two trips, and then we’re clear,” I said.

*I*

I’m going to let you in on a little secret: Even though documentary television shows about the horrors of overseas prisons tend to emphasize the dangers of drug smuggling, it is actually remarkably easy. No, scratch that: it is remarkably easy if you are Sherlock Holmes.

You see, together my mind palace, my skills at manipulation and deduction, my upper-class mannerisms, my pretty features, and the ease with which I can present a false face to the world (a skill I had acquired over the preceding two years) all combined to make me an infallible smuggler. The trick is to make sure that one’s luggage and person is checked only by UKBA and airport security personnel who are distracted, prejudiced, and/or tired. This usually entailed choosing the security queue manned by the person whose drooping eyelids and mussed hair indicated that they had been on duty for several hours, charming the x-ray operator with a wink and a smile so that they don’t notice the large packets of pills and powdered drugs in my carry-on, and misdirecting the person in charge of the metal detector so that they don’t do the pat-down. Easy. And easier with every trip, for I did not stop importing drugs to London after those first two shipments. Rather, when I realized how simple the process was, I continued making trips for Big Frank, each time earning around a thousand pounds.

Of course I recognized the dangers of getting caught, but here I figured my omega status might actually help me for once. I knew that if security personnel in the United States or United Kingdom discovered that I was smuggling drugs I would be subjected to an immediate strip search, which would instantly reveal my omega status. If this ever happened, I planned to tell the police that I was just a poor misguided omega who had been seduced by Little Frank, and coerced into smuggling drugs for my controlling lover. No one would expect that a silly little omega could get involved in
organized crime of its own volition. And since omegas weren’t even considered legal adults, I doubted I would even serve time. Yep, being an omega was my secret ‘get out of jail free’ card.

Naturally, when I made my first run, Mycroft was furious that I had disappeared for four days with no explanation. He dragged me back to the free clinic for a drug test kicking and screaming. (Literally kicking and screaming; we got into an actual fist fight in the clinic parking lot.) He calmed down when the test revealed that I had no drugs in my system other than the prescribed Methadone, and grudgingly accepted my explanation that I had taken a part-time job as an international courier. As the weeks and months went by, and I consistently returned to his flat when I said I would, and I hadn’t relapsed, he grew to trust me more and more.

One morning in March, when I had been home for a few days, I was awoken by a soft knock at my bedroom door. It was Mycroft. Cradled in his hands was a porcelain figurine of a little boy in lederhosen looking at an orange rabbit. It was the first Hummel figurine I had stolen from him to pay for drugs, and the first one I bought back from the pawn shop to return to Mycroft’s curio cabinet the previous evening. Mycroft gave a wobbly, “Thank you,” and I smiled in reply. Over the next several months, I returned all of his tasteless knickknacks.

* 

How I loved Miami! It seemed so exotic to a middle class, bookish young man from Staunton like me. Rather than send me back to Britain as soon as I arrived, Big Frank always had me stay in Miami for a few days. This, he reasoned, would look far less suspicious to any UKBA agents checking my passport. He usually booked me into some run down but architecturally interesting art deco style hotel on Miami Beach. I would spend my free days in Miami walking along the beach or driving around in a rented convertible. I even bought a white Versace suit, which I wore with the sleeves rolled up and a pair of sockless deck shoes.

The best part of Miami, however, was Big Frank’s omega wife. I met her at Frank’s warehouse in Little Haiti, where I was doing a pick-up before returning to the airport. I was chatting with Big Frank about the day’s shipment – several kilos of amphetamine pills that were banned in the UK – when she came out of the office carrying a large ledger. She stopped short when she saw me, and we both looked the other up and down.

At about sixty years old, Mrs. Hudson was by far the oldest omega I had ever seen. (Omegas, you see, have a short life expectancy, as we are often denied access to life-saving drugs, and the process of carrying and delivering several large litters of babies takes a harsh toll on our health. Mrs. Hudson, however, had never had any children because, as she revealed to me late one evening a few months later, Frank was sterile.) She had the requisite head of curly hair, though hers had gone frizzy with age. Her skin was wrinkled, but still soft-looking, and her lips were as full as my own. Her omega smell was a cross between violets and lemons. Very clean and refreshing. From the old bruises on her wrists and neck, I could tell that her marriage was far from happy.

I don’t know what she saw as she took in my own appearance, but I noted when her disapproving gaze fell on the white scars of healed track marks on my inner elbows. It briefly annoyed me that she, the wife of a high-ranking cartel leader, would be so judgmental towards a reformed drug user. In response to her pointed look I pulled the sleeves of my suit jacket down to cover my arms. She looked me in the eye with something like pity.

“Frank,” she said seriously. “You haven’t given me any numbers for Justin’s sales.”

“That’s because Justin hasn’t been around,” Big Frank replied brusquely. “I don’t think we’ll be hearing from him again.”
Mrs. Hudson sighed and mumbled, “I’ll just cross that entry out then.”

I gave a short, surprised laugh and said, “You’re doing the books?”

Frank remembered his manners and put his arm possessively around his wife, “Yep. Shezza… Sherlock, meet my wife Martha. Best cartel bookkeeper in Florida.”

We exchanged how-d’you-dos, and I felt compelled to say, “But… you’re an omega. An omega doing the books.”

Mrs. Hudson frowned at the unintentional insult and moved half a step behind her husband. He patted her shoulder and grinned at me. “See, it’s perfect, mate. If the coppers ever pick me up, any statement she gives can’t be considered admissible evidence. God bless omega wives, I say. Best helpmates on the planet.” He gave her a proud kiss on the cheek.

I remained incredulous. “But it’s the books! That’s maths. Everyone knows omegas don’t do maths.”

At this point Mrs. Hudson took a courageous step towards me and in a shaky, outraged voice declared, “Young man, an omega can do anything a beta or an alpha can do, if they’re just given the opportunity!”

“I’m so sorry,” I said, suddenly aware of the offence I had given. “I – I just don’t know any omegas personally.” Other than myself, of course. But I am hardly a representative sample.

“Well,” she said, somewhat mollified. “I suppose that’s understandable. You know, I hardly ever get to speak to any English people since we’ve been over here. Well, other than Frank, of course. Maybe on your next trip you’d like to stop by our house for tea.”

I smiled, “I would like that very much.”

And that is how Mrs. Hudson became one of my dearest lifelong friends.

Mrs. Hudson was nothing like the omega stereotypes. Sure, she was kind and nurturing towards me, and she adored fussing over Frank, but she also had a wicked, ribald sense of humour that I found very appealing. She had a mind like a steel trap, never forgetting either the details of the shipments moved by Frank’s motley collection of smugglers, or meaningless personal minutiae like how I took my tea and what bikkies I liked best.

On my afternoon visits to the Hudsons’ large, one-storey house in Bal Harbour we talked about England, which she missed very much indeed. I told her about my past history with drugs and my troubled relationship with Mycroft (leaving out a few obvious details), and she told me that, “He sounds like an absolute wanker, but he clearly loves you.” I told her that she was right on both counts. In return, Mrs. Hudson told me something of her own frequently unhappy relationship with Big Frank. They fought over many issues: Mrs. Hudson missed her alpha sister in London dearly and longed to visit her, but Frank insisted that Mrs. Hudson was the only person he trusted to keep track of the imports and exports moving through Miami. Mrs. Hudson knew that Frank had murdered a few of his competitors and some of his own unreliable dealers (Such was the fate of the aforementioned Justin) and felt that he ought to be more careful in disposing of the corpses, as just leaving them in the Everglades for the gators to find didn’t seem like such a foolproof plan to her. Finally, the couple’s failure to have children was a source of constant sorrow and mutual resentment. With Mrs. Hudson being an omega, their fights typically ended with Frank shouting and her in submissive tears.

The more I got to know Mrs. Hudson, the more I came to realize that omega stereotypes were
overgeneralized and unfair. That there were intelligent, witty, useful omegas out there, even though they were difficult to get to know since they were kept away from public life. Although Mrs. Hudson’s existence was far from a bowl of cherries, the life she built in Miami gave me hope that my own life as an omega could be adventurous and intellectually challenging.

Mrs. Hudson was quite fond of me too, and very soon after I made her acquaintance, she insisted that I stay with her and Frank in Bal Harbour when I was in town, instead of at the hotels on the beach. As I was glad of her easy company, I was only too happy to accede to her request.

Late one evening while Frank was out of town – possibly in the swamp meting out some final punishment to an employee of a rival cartel – she and I sat drinking strawberry daiquiris on the lanai, watching pleasure boats scooting to and fro on Biscayne Bay. I had just arrived from dropping off a shipment at the warehouse, and I hadn’t even changed my clothes to something more suited to the warm, humid Florida weather. I had expressed surprise that Mrs. Hudson, an omega, would be drinking alcoholic beverages, but she just patted my arm and with a slight drunken slur said, “Oh, Sherlock. Nobody cares what an old omega like me does anymore.”

I sat up from my floral patterned lounge chair, and said, “I care, Mrs. Hudson. I care about you deeply.”

She giggled – a very omega sound – and said, “If you care about me, then let me enjoy my vices in peace. We omegas have to take our happiness where we can find it.”

I smiled and said, “Certainly.” Then I rose to my feet and kissed her on the cheek. I picked up my small carry-on to go to bed. As I did so, to my horror, a bottle of pills fell out of the unzipped side pocket. On impact with the tile floor, the unlabeled, black plastic container popped open and spilled my entire supply of Omegarrest all over the lanai. Now an ordinary person would never have recognized the purple tablets for what they were – a highly illegal drug that was only used by omegas to delay their heats – but this was Mrs. Hudson, a sharp-eyed drug cartel bookkeeper who was an omega herself. I slowly looked up from my spilled pills into her eyes and I could instantly tell.

She knew.

Chapter End Notes

As Mrs. Hudson watched me pick up my dropped pills, I stammered and babbled out a hasty explanation: “Oh… That – that – that…. How did that get in my bag?”

“Sherlock,” Mrs. Hudson said kindly.

“It… Someone must have snuck it in there at – at the warehouse – you know, as – as a joke….”

“Sherlock, stop,” she smiled. I stopped and watched her worriedly.

“Please,” I said. “Please don’t tell.”

“I haven’t told anyone before tonight, so why would I tell anyone now?”

That threw me for a loop. “You – you knew?”

“Of course I did!” She giggled her girlish omega laugh. “Look at you with your curly hair and your sweet little face. I knew from the first moment I met you.”

I looked at my reflection in the darkened patio door. Since giving up drugs eight months previously, my hair had grown back thick and full and curly. And a steady diet of airplane food and homemade biscuits had filled out my cheeks and added some soft curves to my body. To my consternation, I looked very much like an omega.

“Now sit back down and tell me,” she said patting the cushion of the lounge chair I had just vacated, “How did you end up as an omega in disguise?”

I told her everything: about the Library, Victor, Dr. Alvarez, the babies, living with Mycroft, my time at uni, everything. By the time I finished she and I were both in tears. “Oh, Sherlock,” she said, gesturing for me to come to her. I rose from my lounger and she clasped me to her breast in a tight hug. It felt wonderful.

Just then, Big Frank strolled out to the lanai, his legs covered in smelly mud. “What’s all this then?” he asked suspiciously.

“Sherlock is going to be moving in with us for a while,” Mrs. Hudson said gently.

“Fine. I’m having a bath,” Frank said before returning to the house and tracking mud down the hallway.

I lifted my head and smiled at Mrs. Hudson.

* 

I returned to London for two weeks in June to spend my heat at home and to collect some clothes for
my time in Miami. Mycroft asked me question after question about where I would be staying, with whom I would be staying, and what we would be doing while I was there. It felt like the first time I went to a sleepover party when I was six years old. He was alarmed to learn that Mrs. Hudson knew my secret, and it took some work on my part to reassure him that she could be trusted to never give it away.

He dropped me off at Heathrow with a firm hug and a request to “Try not to do anything stupid, Billy love.”

While I myself was supremely happy to stay with Mrs. Hudson, it soon became clear that her relationship with her husband was far more troubled than I had initially thought. From my bedroom I could hear them arguing over all manner of issues late into the night. Frank, I noticed, frequently used Mrs. Hudson’s relationship with her sister, one Edna Sissons of Walthamstow, as leverage: If Mrs. Hudson did something that pleased him – for example, cooking his favourite dinner of chicken korma – he would allow her to telephone her sister for a chat. But if Mrs. Hudson nagged Frank about his careless spending on high ticket items like fancy new trainers and gold pinkie rings (habits, she argued, that could easily attract the attention of the DEA) he would respond by threatening to cancel their trip to visit Edna over the holidays. To me it was sickening that someone’s mate could be so controlling and manipulative (and sometimes plain cruel) to their bonded life partner.

I knew he hit her. I never saw him do it, but I did hear it a few times. And I saw the bruises. At least the ones that Mrs. Hudson couldn’t cover up with clothing. One morning when she was cooking breakfast, I noticed that her cheek was puffy and purple, and she was significantly more agitated than usual.

I gently asked her, “Do you want to talk about it?” Knowing firsthand what a relief it could be to get something like that off one’s chest.

She gave an impatient sigh and said, “What’s to talk about? It is what it is.”

“He shouldn’t hit you, Mrs. Hudson. You don’t deserve it. Everything you do, you do to make him happy.”

Mrs. Hudson paused in stirring the pancake batter to look me in the eye. “Sherlock,” she said quietly, “You haven’t been an omega long enough to understand this yet, so let me explain it to you.”

She took my hands and we sat together at the breakfast bar. I waited patiently while she thought about what she wanted to say to me.

“Sherlock,” she began. “I have dismissed or forgotten virtually everything they taught me in my OmegEd classes when I was a girl. But there was one lesson that has stuck with me, because my life – and the lives of other omegas I have known – has again and again proven it to be correct.”

She shook her head sadly and ran her thumbs over the backs of my hands, “Life for an omega is always unfair. The whims of our alphas determine virtually every aspect of our existence, and they very rarely put our hopes and interests ahead of their own. And there’s no point in fighting that, because we can’t change it. All we can do is accept the disappointments that come our way without complaint, and take our happiness where we can find it. Do you understand?”

I did, but I didn’t want to believe it. I nodded sadly, looking down at the countertop, where her small, wrinkled hands rested on my own.

*
I ended up staying in Bal Harbour with the Hudsons until December, when I flew home to spend my heat and then Christmas at Mycroft’s flat.

“So tell me, will the only time I get to see you be when you need to spend a week jerking off in my attic, hmm?” He said as we hugged at the arrivals level at Heathrow.

“Mycroft!” I was thoroughly scandalized. He smiled his crafty grin.

“By the way,” he said as we headed to the car, each dragging a suitcase. “I’ve gotten a promotion, so it looks like I’m going to be moving house. There’s a place in Hampstead I’ve got my eye on. The commute will be longer, but I will have a driver, so it hardly matters.”

“A driver? Sounds like quite the promotion, My. Look what you can accomplish when you haven’t got your baby brother around to distract you.”

Mycroft looked at me across the hood of his ageing Saab, “The new place has a suite for you.”

“Thank you.” Even though my time there was chaotic and frequently unhappy, I was going to miss Blown Apart Mews.

When my heat was over I brought up the issue of contacting Professor Alvarez. As I had stayed clean for an entire year, and had even weaned myself off of Methadone, Mycroft agreed that I could get in touch. He gave me the professor’s personal e-mail address, and I sent the following painstakingly crafted message on the day before Christmas – after Mycroft had edited it to make sure I didn’t say anything too incriminating:

“Dear Professor Alvarez:

I hope this e-mail finds you well. We met in the spring of 1998 in Manchester, when you helped me with a medical issue I was facing. I would like to thank you for your assistance in that area, because it allowed me to complete my undergraduate degree in Organic Chemistry. Now I am considering what career path I ought to take, and I wonder if I could ask for your assistance again. I am searching for a career that would allow me to live an independent life, free from restrictions. This is only possible in a few places in the world. I’ve been thinking that if I were to either attend medical school in one of those places, or get a job in the pharmaceutical or medical research field, I would be well on my way to achieving my goals of autonomy and liberation. If you would like to meet, please note that I am frequently in Miami on business, and I anticipate that it would not be difficult to arrange a visit. Yours sincerely, WSSH”

“It’s not too vague?” I asked Mycroft apprehensively.

“No, he’ll get the message.”

*

I did not receive a reply from Professor Alvarez by New Years, so I agreed to move a few more shipments of drugs for Big Frank before returning to Bal Harbour in February to stay with Mrs. Hudson. Every day I nervously checked my e-mail, and every day I was disappointed.

On the first of March I finally received a reply. Professor Alvarez was nowhere near as careful about revealing secrets in e-mails as Mycroft and I had been:

“My dear Pobrecito (it read):

Please forgive the lateness of my reply; it has taken me a long time to compose a response that will
no doubt be received with disappointment. First of all, congratulations on the completion of your
degree. That is a major accomplishment for anyone, but especially someone who experienced a
major disruption to their life. You are a smart and sensitive young man, and with those qualities you
will go far. But not, I am sorry to say, as far as Cuba. I am sure that your handsome brother has
explained the legal difficulties involved in moving between our two countries. Even with my help, it
would be next to impossible for you to acquire an entry visa, let alone a work permit. Nevertheless, if
legal matters were the only issue to be considered, I would gladly lend you whatever assistance I
could.

My larger concern is for you, Pobrecito. Your brother contacted me a year and a half ago to ask if I
would help him to arrange for you to enter Cuba as a human rights refugee, due to the restrictions
and discrimination you would face in Britain as an omega, which were forcing you to conceal your
gender. He explained how unhappy you were with your life, and how you had begun to self-
medicate as a means to dull your anguish. I was so sorry to hear that because I would hate to think
that you would waste your enormous potential. I tell you now what I told him then: That you would
turn to drugs to help you through a difficult time is understandable, but it also gives me pause for
concern as to how you would deal with the hardships you would face in Cuba.

You see, even if omegas enjoy the same legal rights as alphas and betas in Cuba, it does not
necessarily mean that all of our omegas are happy. All people face hardships, and omegas in
particular deal with ingrained sexism, discrimination, denied opportunities, and cultural violence
wherever they live. In that way, Cuba may be advanced as far as omega rights are concerned, but it
is no paradise. I fear that if you came to Cuba you would be trading one set of problems for another,
but with one key difference: In Britain you have your friends and brother to help you through hard
times, while in Cuba you would have no one.

I am not telling you this because you are an omega, Pobrecito, but because you are a human being.
You must understand that we human beings – omegas, alphas, and betas alike – are all pack animals.
We are all dependent on each other, and that is in no way a bad thing. The only way we as a species
can accomplish great things, or simply overcome the darkness that is life, is if we can rely on each
other as a pack. Your expressed longing for independence and autonomy tells me that you do not yet
understand this. If you did I do not think you would be so quick to give up your life in Britain, or to
abandon your brother, who needs you as much as you need him.

I hope that you can understand this, my dear Pobrecito. Sincerely, Professor Esteban Alvarez,
University of Havana”

The last few lines of the e-mail were difficult to read through my tears. “What utter rot,” I said,
closing the web browser.

I was angry: angry at the Professor for his lack of sympathy, but also angry at Mycroft for letting it
slip that I had been using drugs. Most of all I was angry at myself for building up Cuba as some sort
of promised land and Professor Alvarez as a saviour who would rescue me from the misery of my
existence.

I marched out of the Hudsons’ spare bedroom. They were both at the warehouse in Little Haiti. (A
rival drug smuggling firm had been encroaching on Big Frank’s territory in Florida, so he often
stayed late at the office devising means to convince its leaders to set up shop in another locale.) I took
the biggest bottle of spirits I could find from their liquor cabinet (it was orange vodka, as I recall) and
stormed out to the beach behind the house. I stood on the shore in my bare feet taking swig after
swig of flavoured vodka while glaring angrily at the southern horizon, where, I imagined, I could just
make out Cuba.
I stayed that way until I saw a pair of cars park at the small public beach just to the south of the
Hudsons’ house, and their passengers – a large extended family composed of alphas, betas, children,
and omegas – begin to set up their blankets on the sand. It was with some wonder that I noted that
one of the beachgoers was an immensely pregnant omega male.

I approached the little family, noting that my gait was somewhat impaired by the alcohol. The
pregnant omega wore bikini bottoms and a rash guard shirt that did nothing to cover his enormous,
stretch-marked belly. I wondered how many babies were in there. He did not look comfortable. He
rubbed his back as he sat down awkwardly in a folding chair, while the rest of the family group ran
to play in the ocean.

“Can I help you?” A voice said beside me as I watched the omega try to spread suntan lotion over its
unwieldly belly.

I turned to see an alpha female carrying a cooler.

“Just looking at that omega. I’ve never seen one that was so heavily pregnant,” I explained. “It’s nice
to see that omegas have a bit more freedom here. In Britain our omegas are kept at home during the
last two months of their pregnancy.”

“Well, not in the States,” the alpha smiled. “The vitamin D an omega absorbs from the sun is good
for the development of the pups’ bones, so we try to get our omegas to spend as much time as
possible outdoors.”

“Hmm. That one doesn’t seem to be enjoying it,” I commented.

“My wife,” the alpha said pointedly, “knows that it’s best for our babies, so he’s prepared to make a
few sacrifices. Besides, the rest of the family was desperate to get out of the house today.” She left
my side and carried the cooler to the blanket where the pregnant omega sat fretfully wiping the sweat
from his neck and forehead. The omega noticed me watching him, and he scowled at me before
tugging the rash guard down over his belly and turning to face the ocean. The alpha placed a kiss on
his forehead, and laughed as he peevishly waved her away.

Always what’s best for the pack, never for themselves – ourselves – I thought as I took another swig
from the bottle of flavoured vodka and returned to the Hudsons’ bungalow. They still weren’t home,
so I sat by myself in the gathering darkness and finished the bottle. Then I staggered to the bathroom
next to Frank and Mrs. Hudson’s bedroom. There I found a bottle of sleeping pills, which I downed
with several glasses of water. I shuffled back outside and sat on top of a dune facing south to watch
the remains of the sunset.
I awoke to the feeling of vomiting cold water.

“Sherlock, Sherlock. Stay with us, dear,” a voice said. There was a plastic tube down my throat. It was making me gag and I tried to pull it out.

“Leave it in, Sherlock,” the same voice – Mrs. Hudson – said firmly. I felt the urge to vomit again, and I opened my eyes to see that I was propped up next to the bathtub in the Hudsons’ master bathroom. I gave a colossal heave and another stomachful of cold water splashed into the tub and landed in a puddle of bile and pills that smelled strongly of alcohol and oranges. (I’ve never been able to stomach the taste or smell of oranges since.)

“I think that’s the last of it,” Big Frank said. He released his powerful grip around my abdomen; I had not realized that he had been holding me up to the edge of the tub.

I sat down heavily on the tile floor. Mrs. Hudson gently pulled the plastic tube from my mouth, causing me to retch a few more times. I wiped a shaky hand across my sweaty brow and panted. I noted that my trousers were covered in sand and urine.

“Drink this,” Big Frank said, holding a glass of black liquid up to my lips.

I wrapped my trembling fingers around the glass and said, “What – what ith it?”

“Activated charcoal. It’s important that you drink it right away, Sherlock,” Mrs. Hudson said sadly. I looked her in the eye as I sipped the gritty, cement-tasting mixture. She looked so unhappy as she sat there on the toilet lid.

I finished the glass. “Wow, you two thertainly know what you’re doing,” I tried to joke.

This made Mrs. Hudson look even more miserable, but Big Frank said heartily, “S’alright, lad, s’not our first OD, and I don’t expect it’ll be our last.” He patted his wife’s shoulder and left us alone in the bathroom.

“Why, Sherlock? I thought things were going so well.” I could see tears forming in her eyes.

I looked down at my still shaking hands. “I – I got an e-mail from that doctor in Cuba today. I’ll let you read it if you want. He – he thaid that he wouldn’t help me to move to – to Cuba… Thaid I’d be better off in England with M-Mycroft.” I shook my head. “Can you believe it?”

Mrs. Hudson looked down at her lap but said nothing. I got the impression that she was not at all surprised.

“Come on,” she said stroking my shoulder, “Let’s get you cleaned up and put you to bed.”

“Mrs. – Mrs. Hudthon,” I whispered warily as she helped me to my feet. “Pleathe don’t tell Mycroft. He – he worrieth tho much already.”

* 

Big Frank offered to take me to a doctor – one he knew to be both discrete and experienced in
dealing with drug overdoses – but Mrs. Hudson said that it wouldn’t be necessary. Instead, I spent the better part of a week in my bed while she anxiously hovered over me.

I showed Mrs. Hudson Professor Alvarez’ e-mail. “See, Sherlock, this is exactly what I was trying to tell you. That an omega’s life is full of disappointment, but you can’t react to it the way you did. You just have to accept it and learn to live with it.”

I lay on my side facing the window, which itself looked over the beach where I had tried to kill myself. I mulled over Mrs. Hudson’s words and the Professor’s advice. Though almost every omega I had ever met would tell me otherwise, and virtually everything that had happened to me in the past three years would contradict this, I could not accept that as an omega, I was destined to be unhappy. That there was nothing I could do to change that fate. If omegas were unhappy, I reasoned to myself, maybe that’s because they and society in general accepted that it was an omega’s lot in life to be unhappy, and so they did nothing to fight it. So maybe people’s belief that an omega’s life would inevitably be one of misery and hardship was a self-fulfilling prophecy. I knew that omegas could overcome society’s expectations for them if given the chance – both my success at university and Mrs. Hudson’s expertise at managing the finances of a multinational drug cartel were proof of that. So maybe if omegas fought hard enough – maybe not by themselves, perhaps Professor Alvarez had a point there – they could overcome the sorry fate that societal expectations had assigned to them. Maybe they could change their stars and eke out a satisfactory living for themselves. Maybe omegas like Mrs. Hudson and myself could be happy. Maybe? I owed it to Mrs. Hudson – and myself – to at least try.

“You’re wrong, Mrs. Hudson,” I said softly. “You’re wrong, and I’ll prove it to you.”

* 

As I mentioned earlier, at about the same time that I OD’d on sleeping pills, another drug cartel was muscling in on Big Frank’s operations in Florida. He spent many a long day at his warehouse and many a long night in his den at the house in Bal Harbour directing his goons on how they ought to go about disrupting the rival gang’s activities. The other gang was clever and determined, however, and Big Frank grew increasingly frustrated with their lack of respect for his domain. Unfortunately, he tended to take out his frustration on poor Mrs. Hudson. Though she had long since resigned herself to his poor treatment, I found that I could not.

Late one night in May of 2001 I awoke to the sound of harsh alpha laughter coming from the front foyer. I rose from my bed, and tiptoed down the hallway to see what was going on. There I saw Big Frank and a few of his cronies, covered in mud and patting each other on the back. An unmistakable gesture for a job well done.

“Well that’s the last we’ll be hearing of Mr. Gibbs,” one of them said with a grin.

“Ecchhh. These shoes are ruined,” said Big Frank.

“Hey, what do you think you’re looking at?” the first alpha said, catching sight of me watching them from the darkened hallway.

“Oh, leave off. That’s just the wife’s latest stray. He’s only a harmless junkie,” said Big Frank. “I don’t want to track mud all over the carpet again so I’m throwing these shoes in the trash outside.”

That’s when I came up with my idea to help Mrs. Hudson change her fate.

Early in the morning, I took a plastic grocery bag with me out to the trash bins and fished out Big Frank’s muddy shoes. I tied off the bag and left it my closet. I also collected a few chunks of the
dried mud that had fallen from his tyre treads, and kept those in a baggie too. A few days later, I noticed him take some black plastic bin liners from his car boot, and dispose of them in the trash can. I retrieved those as well. When I noticed a reddish brown smudge on one, I stuffed them into another grocery bag, and left them in the closet next to the shoes.

Because the mud that was frequently stuck to the treads of his car tyres and the soles of his shoes was of a consistent texture, colour, and composition, I knew that Frank had a preferred spot in the swamp where he liked to dump his victims. But precisely where that was, and how I could get the police there, was another question entirely.

The answer presented itself in the form of petrol receipts and odometer readings. I often helped Mrs. Hudson with some of her simpler bookkeeping tasks. (When she found out that I had only earned a ‘B+’ in my first year maths course, she wouldn’t trust me with anything complicated.) One of these tasks was to sort through Big Frank’s business receipts. I noticed that there were a few from a petrol station in the middle of the Everglades on Route 41 west of Miami. That gave me a possible direction to his dumping ground, but how far away was it?

I took up the habit of checking the odometer on Big Frank’s Cadillac Eldorado whenever I stepped outside for a cigarette. On two occasions he left late at night and returned before dawn with muddy tyres and muddy footwear, both of which he hosed off after breakfast. A comparison of the odometer readings indicated that he had driven 102.6 miles on each of those late night treks to the swamp.

Though I had a bloodstained bin liner, Frank’s muddy shoes, and a pretty good idea about where he was leaving his murder victims, I felt that one more piece of incriminating evidence tying Frank to any bodies discovered in the swamp was necessary. The tyres on Big Frank’s Caddy were relatively new Goodyear radials. Nothing unique about them; nothing yet, anyway. Late one evening I took a sharp kitchen knife and hacked a series of distinctive marks into the treads. Now all I had to do was wait.

My opportunity came one evening in April. I stepped out for a cigarette just as Big Frank’s car was pulling into the driveway. He and his cronies laughed amongst themselves as they hosed off the car tyres and cleaned their shoes. As Big Frank strolled up the front walk, he said, “Alright, Shezza?”

“I’m going out for a pack of fags.”

I walked to the convenience store at the end of the road where I used the public phone to place a call to the police. I said that Frank Hudson of Bal Bay Drive had murdered someone and dumped the body 51.3 miles up Route 41, and that if the police searched his residence that very night, they would find ample evidence of the crime. I returned to the house and retrieved the plastic bags from my closet. I placed Frank’s filthy shoes in the front closet, sprinkled the dried chunks of mud on the driveway under his tyres, and returned the bloody bin bag to the boot of Frank’s car.

The police arrived just a few hours later with a search warrant. Mrs. Hudson and I waited on the lanai and drank tea, while they recovered all of the planted evidence. In response to the sheriff’s discovery of the muddy shoes, I heard Frank exclaim, “I have no idea how those got there!” – perhaps the only time in history when a criminal sincerely meant that.

The dumping ground was discovered in the morning. A plaster cast of tyre marks leading to the crime scene was a perfect match for the tyres on Frank’s Cadillac. Although the remains of several individuals were discovered, due to decomposition and the feeding habits of the local alligators only two could be positively identified. Big Frank was charged with two counts of first degree murder, crimes punishable by death in Florida. “Well, you did warn him about dumping the bodies in the swamp,” I said to Mrs. Hudson as Big Frank was deposited in the back seat of a police cruiser.
“That I did, Sherlock, several times.”

Just as Big Frank had anticipated, as an omega, Mrs. Hudson was never arrested. Indeed, she was never even questioned about Frank’s or her own activities on behalf of the cartel. I was subjected to a cursory questioning, but when it became clear that I had nothing to do with the gangland power struggle that had motivated Frank’s murder spree, they lost interest in me. I doubt Big Frank had any idea of the role I played in his downfall, and Mrs. Hudson certainly didn’t ask me about it either.

There was a minor legal question of who would take custody of Mrs. Hudson, as her closest alpha relatives, these being Big and Little Frank, were currently in police custody. The only solution, it seemed, was for her to return to England and the care of her sister Edna Sissons to await the outcome of the trial and – if the trial concluded in the manner everyone expected – ensuing probate process. I volunteered to escort her home to Walthamstow.

Mycroft picked us up at Heathrow in his fancy chauffeured Lexus. I noticed him and Mrs. Hudson eyeballing each other in a not altogether friendly fashion. It warmed my heart to see that my self-appointed caregivers were a little jealous of each other.

We drove Mrs. Hudson to her sister’s house at the corner of Merton Road and Grove Road. Though it was cold and rainy, I leaned on the car and smoked a cigarette while the two sisters greeted each other with unalloyed affection. Mycroft exited the car and rolled his eyes at their noisy expressions of love.

“Can I have a cigarette?” he asked.

“You don’t smoke,” I replied in surprise.

He shrugged, and I held out my packet of Marlboros to him. As he selected one, I noticed that Mycroft had dyed his hair. It was now a dark brown colour similar to my own. That he would choose to change his hair colour did not come as a surprise to me: once when he was eleven or twelve, Mycroft came home in tears because one of his classmates had told him that gingers have no souls. I distinctly remember fetching him a huge piece of leftover chocolate cake to cheer him up, and then dropping it on Mummy’s cream coloured sitting room rug.

He struggled to light the cigarette. “You have to draw on it,” I instructed him. “Inhale through the filter.”

“I can do it,” Mycroft growled. When he finally managed to light it, he leaned on the car next to me, and together we continued to watch the Sissons sisters’ prolonged reunion. Mycroft took a single puff on his cigarette, coughed discreetly and then held it awkwardly to his side.

Finally, Edna Sissons turned to enter her house, and Mrs. Hudson waved me over to her. I dragged her massive suitcase up the walk and left it inside the front door. Mrs. Hudson caught me in a tight hug and said, “Thank you, Sherlock.”

“It’s no trouble. It wasn’t that heavy,” I said. (In fact it was very heavy, especially for an omega.)

She clasped my face between her soft hands, “I mean thank you for what you what you did… in Florida.”

I smiled, “I told you that you were wrong.”

“So you did,” she kissed my forehead. “And now it’s your turn to change your fate.”

I grinned at that. We said our goodbyes, and I promised to drop by for Sunday roast.
I strolled back to the car with a spring in my step. “What are you smiling about?” asked Mycroft. I noticed that he had stubbed out his cigarette on the sidewalk, after smoking only a quarter of it.

“It’s time to put my life in order,” I said.

I saw a glimmer of pleased surprise cross Mycroft’s face. “Good,” he said.

“First thing’s first though: we need to go coat shopping. I’m fucking freezing.”

Chapter End Notes

See, I told you that things would get better for Sherlock!

Thanks again to all of you for your kind words and kudos.
Mycroft’s new house was a rambling, black and white half-timbered affair on Kidderpore Avenue in Hampstead. He had had its large dining room and lounge professionally decorated. They were both very stylish and modern, and yet sterile and impersonal. Consequently, he spent most of his time in his spacious but relatively disorganized office, where the unfashionable tchotchkes and staid furniture he had accumulated in the flat at Buonaparte Mews had been relegated. As my chair had found its way there too, I often found myself passing the time with him. My new bedroom was in its own little ground-floor wing, looking out over the shady back garden. Mycroft had not bothered to have my private domain decorated, so it quickly attained the same level of clutter as my old room in Pimlico.

May of 2001 was unusually cold and wet – even for London. Consequently on the day after my return I went shopping for a warm overcoat. I found exactly what I was looking for at the Belstaff outerwear shop on New Bond Street in Mayfair. The shop assistant gave me a twenty percent discount because it had a glaring manufacturing fault: one of the buttonholes had been mistakenly stitched with red thread instead of black.

I wore it a week later – after I had recovered from jet lag – to visit my professors at Imperial. I don’t like to apologize to people; admitting fault just doesn’t come naturally to me so I try to avoid doing it as much as humanly possible. Luckily I am very rarely in the wrong, so I don’t have to do it often. But if I wanted back into Imperial’s graduate program I knew I would have to swallow my pride and be prepared to eat some crow.

I met with each professor individually, and explained that in the summer of 1999 I had undergone a personal crisis, and that I had turned to drugs to help me through it. All of them expressed sympathy and understanding. (In fact, one said that it was remarkable that a sociopath like me could function as well as I did in society – so apparently that old rumour had stuck around.) To a man they agreed to support my return to their program as long as I could get the endorsement of my former supervisor, Professor Hollingsworth, who was currently conducting research with my old friend Mike in the pathology lab at Saint Bart’s.

Professor Hollingsworth was only too happy to forgive me and support my return to Imperial’s MSc program in the autumn semester. Mike, who was now a pathology clinical instructor, was also delighted to see me. He told me that Molly had completed her MBBS program and was now the trainee coroner in the morgue. I visited her with great trepidation, because I knew that I had hurt and frightened her badly during our last meeting. However, she too was eager to forgive me. “I knew that wasn’t the real you, Sherlock,” she explained to me. “I know the real Sherlock Holmes. The one deep down inside. And he would never purposely hurt his friends.” Ah, Molly.

After a year of excitement in Miami, it was difficult to return to classes, but my work soon returned to its previous standard of excellence. For my thesis, I decided to catalogue all of the different types of tobacco ash that were available to British smokers. As I explained in my thesis proposal, this project would allow investigators to determine what brand of cigarette or cigar had been smoked at a crime scene from the ashes alone – a piece of evidence that could help link suspects to the scene of the crime. My thesis project also permitted me to smoke almost two hundred and fifty types of tobacco products, and all in the name of science – an added benefit that I did not see fit to mention in the proposal.

Because the microscopes in Mike’s lab were far superior to those at Imperial, I conducted most of my
research at Saint Bart’s. This arrangement also allowed me to regularly meet with Mike and Molly for coffee. One afternoon in April of 2003, I descended the stairs to the morgue to fetch Molly for our usual coffee break, only to see a contingent of police officers standing with her around one of the stainless steel mortuary tables.

“Look, I don’t see how a seven-point-eight millimetre bullet could have failed to pass through the skull if it was fired at close range. It would have exited through the occipital-parietal area,” she was saying.

I approached the table and looked over Molly’s shoulder to see a deceased omega male with a large, messy gunshot wound to the right side of his face. I was quite taken aback. Though I had studied Forensic Science as an undergraduate, this was my first face-to-half-face encounter with someone who had died a violent death. It didn’t help that the victim was a young omega with dark curly hair.

“The rifle was in its hand,” one of the Scene of Crime Officers – a skinny, rat-faced beta – argued. “Its fingerprints were all over it.” He waved a clear plastic bag containing a large Winchester hunting rifle in Molly’s face.

“Then there would be powder burns on his face too!” Molly insisted. “It’s just not possible.”

The rat-faced SOCO persevered, “The lab says the bullet came from this rifle!”

“Alright, alright,” a plainclothes alpha police officer waved his hands placatingly at Molly and the SOCO. “Has anyone got any better ideas?” He swiped his hand through his short dark hair as he turned his gaze towards his team members.

I cleared my throat. “Molly’s right. It’s not suicide. That omega is nowhere near tall enough to use that hunting rifle to shoot himself.” The alpha police officer looked at me questioningly.

“Is that right?” He pointed at the SOCO holding the rifle and then the body. The SOCO obediently held the Winchester up to the omega’s side, and it was clear that his arm was far too short to reach the trigger while pointing the barrel at his own face.

“I told you so,” said Molly.

“Don’t know how we missed that,” the rat-faced SOCO mumbled.

“I’ll tell you how,” the alpha in charge put his hands on his hips. “It’s what I’ve been telling you. You lot don’t pay attention. You don’t think critically. You follow the correct police procedure and expect the answers to just drop in your lap. And when they don’t you stand around like a bunch of gormless omegas.” His team shuffled their feet and looked away ashamedly. “And then it takes some random med student to show you up.” Here he gestured at me.

“Oh, that’s not a med student,” Molly said. “That’s Sherlock. He’s a graduate student in Organic Chemistry.”

“Well what’s he doing in the morgue?”

“He’s a friend of mine,” Molly smiled proudly. “And sometimes he does research related to Forensic Science…. Sherlock’s very perceptive. He does this trick where he can read people after knowing them for just a few seconds. I’ve often thought he’d make a brilliant detective.”

“Oh yeah?” The alpha said. “Can you do this little trick on me?”

“Certainly,” I smiled, and then launched into my deduction: “Your overly ornate wedding ring tells
me that you’re married to a sentimental omega. Female undoubtedly. The style tells me that you were married between 1995 and 1997. The watch on your hand originally belonged to your father, who was a doctor. He gave it to you when you were promoted to inspector. From the scuffs on the insteps of your shoes I can tell that you have children – probably… three, with whom you play football as soon as you get home from work. You don’t even bother to change your footwear, which tells me that you love playing with them. But from your greying hair and the carelessness with which you shave it is evident that your home life isn’t happy. Possible mental illness in the family. I’d bet that your wife is chronically depressed.” I stopped there, aware that I might be giving offence.

However, “Amazing,” was all the alpha said. “Sherlock, was it? I’m Detective Sergeant Lestrade…. Is there anything else you can tell us about the murder victim?”

I stepped up to the mortuary table, and turned my deductive skills on the deceased omega. I hmm’ed and muttered to myself as I peered and prodded at the body, then triumphantly turned to Lestrade and said, “The nail polish on his thumbs is quite chipped, while it is in perfect condition on the rest of his nails. This suggests that he was worrying at it with his index and middle fingers. A nervous habit. Indicates a disquiet mind.Possibly problems in his relationship with an alpha. This conclusion is supported by the presence of a small, half-healed cut on this inside of his right cheek – undoubtedly caused by his own teeth. This indicates that he had been slapped hard by a tall, left-handed alpha approximately one week ago. Finally, there are tiny fragments of untempered coloured glass in the victim’s hair, and friction marks on his heels. That tells me that he was shot through a pre-industrial revolution stained-glass window, and his body was dragged across coarse indoor-outdoor carpeting. Like a doormat at a school or office. Then the rifle was placed in his hand to make it look like suicide. If you find that broken stained-glass window, Sergeant, you’ve found your murder scene. From there you’ll be able to figure out where the killer was standing. All signs point to a fight with an alpha, who murdered the omega in cold blood, then made it look like a suicide.”

“Incredible,” DS Lestrade murmured. I preened at that praise. Certainly it wasn’t too shabby for a first try. “Alright, you lot, go find that broken window! Start with the omega retreat in Croydon that the victim attended.”

Lestrade’s team dispersed. He thanked Molly for her hospitality, then turned to me and said, “I mean it. That really was incredible. You know, this undoubtedly goes against regulations, but sometimes we get stuck on weird cases like this one. And sometimes an outside perspective can really help us…. If that happens, can I give you a call, and maybe you can tell us what you think? Maybe?”

“It would be my pleasure,” I replied. I was thrilled at the opportunity being offered to me. To help with police investigations! Like a real detective! How could I turn it down?

At first Lestrade texted me maybe once a month, and was guarded about granting me access to any confidential materials or sensitive locations. But once I demonstrated how valuable my insight could be to his investigations, he came to rely on me more and more. It also helped that my unorthodox methods allowed him to solve major crimes in a fraction of the time that it took his SOCO team, thus granting him more free time at home with his pups.

This is not to say, however, that his entire team appreciated my efforts. Besides the thick-headed, rat-faced beta I met that afternoon at the morgue – whose name was Anderson, I learned – there was an alpha Detective Constable named Sally Donovan, who didn’t like that Lestrade was deviating from established police procedure by relying on me. She argued again and again that if my involvement came to light during a trial or audit the whole team might be out on their ears. Plus she didn’t like that I picked on her secret lover Anderson.

Although the Metropolitan Police didn’t pay me anything for my efforts, I found it immensely
satisfying to be able to assist with Lestrade’s investigations. Especially the cases involving omegas, who – it saddened me to see – made up a disproportionate percentage of London’s murder and suicide victims. I lost track of the number of times that I examined an omega who had been strangled or beaten to death by a jealous or scorned alpha. Or the number of omegas who had hanged themselves with the cord of their curling iron when they found themselves unbonded and pregnant. Or, most frustrating of all, the number who would walk into traffic in a fit of pique when their celebrity crush got married, or who would overdose on pills in order to punish an alpha who had rejected them. I mean, did they have no regard at all for their own lives? Though I endeavoured to disguise how deeply these tragedies affected me, I always left those crime scenes thinking “there but for the grace of God go I.” Indeed the few heroin relapses that I experienced in that period before I met John were always triggered by my investigations into brutal omega deaths.

And yet I gradually acquired a special enthusiasm for those particular crimes, and deep sympathy for their victims. I came to see omegas largely as innocents whose worst crimes were to trust unreliable alphas and to fall in love with the wrong person. Just as Mrs. Hudson had once explained to me, the unhappy circumstances of their lives and even their deaths were usually the result of decisions made by alphas who had little regard for their happiness or well-being. I felt that doing my utmost to bring their killers to justice gave omegas a dignity in death that they were so often denied in life. Of course I always hid my personal feelings on omega deaths beneath a façade of cold, tactless rationality – a disguise that was easy to maintain after Molly mentioned to Lestrade that, if rumours were to be believed, I was some sort of high-functioning sociopath.

Of course I knew that I tended to be reckless in my pursuit of lawbreakers. Many was the time that Lestrade bawled me out for single-handedly chasing down and apprehending armed and dangerous murderers, but I never listened – not even after a serial killer nearly took out my left eye with a flick knife. You see, by running down dangerous criminals on my own I was proving to myself that I was no longer that sniveling, cum-drenched, broken, debased little boy from the basement of the Man U Library. Even though I was an omega, I was a force to be reckoned with. A scourge of the villainous. And no alpha would ever make me feel like a victim again.

And thus it was through the Work (I always refer to it with a capital double-u in my head, because it is that important to me) that I managed to reconcile myself with my once hated status as an omega. The Work gave my life some much-needed purpose. Even though omegas faced hardship and injustice on a daily basis, I was doing my part to remedy that. I was making the world just a little bit better for my fellow omegas. How could I not be proud of that? When I think back to the time when my gender had first revealed itself, I remember how uniformly negative my views of omegakind had been. Back then I would have had no interest whatsoever in the tragedies omegas experienced all too regularly. I interpret my increased compassion for omegas as an indication of my growing maturity as an omega and human being more generally.

This did not mean, however, that I would have considered outing myself as an omega. At that point in my life, only Mycroft, Professor Alvarez (with whom I had completely lost touch), Mrs. Hudson, her sister Edna, and Victor (wherever he was) knew that Sherlock Holmes was an omega, and I intended to keep it that way. However, my determination to keep my gender a secret was no longer motivated by a hatred of omegas, but rather simple practicality: if my gender was revealed there was no way that Lestrade would allow me to continue helping with his investigations. Like all alphas, he would undoubtedly assume that I was too delicate for the rigours of police work. And if that happened how could I help my fellow omegas?

Knowing full well how important it was for me to have a purpose in life, Mycroft was quite supportive of my volunteer Work for the Metropolitan Police. He first learned of it during one of my earliest cases – just after I submitted my thesis, so probably July of 2003. Mycroft had texted me while I was questioning the omega roommate of a murdered beta. (Here was another way that the
British legal system discriminated against omegas: since their testimony wasn’t considered admissible evidence, the police rarely questioned them, even when they had personally witnessed a crime. However, since I was not bound by police standard operating procedures, I was free to question whomever I pleased, which frequently included omegas. As witnesses I found them to be both fearful and prone to bursting into tears at the slightest provocation, but they also had terrific eyes for detail, and thus could be incredibly useful… provided I could stop myself from making insensitive comments that invariably made them cry.

My reply to Mycroft’s text was a simple “Helping police w. investigation. Hopefully C U @ home l8r –SH.” Mycroft must have interpreted that message as implying that I was a suspect in some crime and was currently being questioned by the police. Scarcely a quarter of an hour after I sent the text, there was an urgent “You can’t go in there!” from the hallway outside Lestrade’s office, and then Mycroft opened the door looking as livid as I had ever seen him.

This is not to say that Mycroft looked ruffled or upset; in fact he was just as cool and collected as he always was. Rather, he seemed to vibrate with a cold fury that petrified everyone in Lestrade’s office – which, besides myself, included Lestrade, Sally, and the witness. He fixed each of them with an icy, dead-eyed stare that promised a terrible vengeance to anyone who dared threaten his baby brother. This was the first time I saw my brother in the same way that his terrified subordinates at the Home Office must have seen him: as an immensely powerful and dangerous alpha male whose displeasure was to be avoided at all costs. Sally and Lestrade – themselves alphas and police officers! – instinctively bowed their heads in the face of the higher ranking alpha’s wrath. The omega witness started crying.

“Sherlock, go wait in the car. It’s downstairs,” Mycroft growled in his calmest voice.

“Mycroft, it’s not what you think –“ I started.

“The car, Sherlock.”

“Mycroft, just listen!”

“I won’t say it again.”

I heaved a sigh, gave Lestrade an apologetic look, and left the office, making sure to close the door behind me. As I walked towards the elevators, I heard Lestrade’s voice raise defensively, though I didn’t hear a single sound from my brother.

I waited in the back seat of Mycroft’s chauffeured car. He emerged from the front doors of New Scotland Yard just a few minutes later, looking composed and even pleased.

“You didn’t have to embarrass me like that!” I huffed as he sat next to me. “If you had just let me explain – ”

Mycroft cut off my complaints, “That detective fellow is a fine chap, isn’t he?”


“He’s certainly impressed with you,” Mycroft continued.

“Yeah, I know. I really enjoy helping them out, My. It’s so satisfying being a detective. It’s exciting, and it really engages my mind. And I feel like I’m really making a difference.”

“I can appreciate that,” he smiled to himself.
Mycroft’s unexpected agreeableness was confusing me. I peered at him closely. “So, does that mean I can keep assisting the police with their investigations?”

“Hmm?... Yes. Yes, that would be fine. Just fine. Hmm, hmm.” Mycroft kept smiling and humming to himself all the way home to Hampstead.

*  

I continued living with Mycroft in his too-big house on Kidderpore Avenue until 2010. Though I wasn’t pleased with how long it took to get to New Scotland Yard (at least forty-five minutes on the Jubilee line!), and I found that Hampstead was even more boring than Pimlico, it wasn’t such a bad life. Mycroft worked longer and longer hours at the Home Office, so we were rarely in each other’s hair. He once admitted that he looked forward to my heats because it meant that he got to take a much-needed weeklong vacation, which he usually spent catching up on paperwork or reading Ian Rankin novels in his chair by the fireplace. On Friday evenings we would get takeaway fish and chips and play board games, and on Sundays we would go to Mrs. Hudson’s sister’s house for a roast.

I adored those visits, not just because of the time I got to spend with Mrs. Hudson, but also because of the way she treated Mycroft. Mrs. Hudson, you see, felt sorry for Mycroft because he had never bonded with an omega. She thought this was positively tragic for such a “handsome and virile alpha.” (I’m not kidding: she actually called my goony brother virile to his face over Sunday dinner! I laugh at that still.) Mrs. Hudson would spend our entire afternoon visits making suggestions for places Mycroft could go to meet nice omegas, and giving him well-meaning advice for how he could avoid scaring them off. (She maintained that a big part of his problem was that his smile was too menacing. There is probably some truth to that.) Mycroft responded to her nagging and fussing by squirming in abject (and, to me, hilarious) humiliation.

“Have you ever visited Madame Tussaud’s, Mycroft?” she would ask.

“No, I’ve never had reason to,” he would reply tiredly. Indeed the idea of Mycroft hitting on members of the opposite sexes in a busy, noisy, tacky tourist trap beggars the imagination.

“All of those celebrity wax figures to get your picture taken with? That’s exactly the sort of place that omegas would go to on the weekends. You go there next Saturday, and I’ll bet that you come away with all sorts of omega phone numbers. You can tell us all about it next Sunday…. And then Sherlock and I can plan your wedding.” Here she would suggestively nudge his shoulder with her elbow, and Mycroft would roll his eyes heavenwards, as if to ask what he had done to deserve such a cruel fate.

At one such dinner in the winter of 2008, we learned that Big Frank had been executed by lethal injection. I worried about Mrs. Hudson’s reaction to this news, but, as she explained to me over coffee later that evening, she had long ago reconciled herself to Frank’s likely fate. And she was so much happier living in England… though she was increasingly frustrated with the way her alpha sister treated her like a small child.

It took until the spring of 2010 for the will to be settled. Big Frank had left his estate to his next-alpha-of-kin, his nephew Little Frank. However, Little Frank was also set to be executed for his role in the murder of several members of the rival cartel. (I tell you, those Florida judges don’t mess around with their sentencing.) Thus the estate was to be left to his only other living kin, Mrs. Hudson. Unfortunately, as an omega, Mrs. Hudson could not take sole possession of Frank’s assets, so her sister Edna was to be the joint inheritor of the estate, which, minus some property confiscated by the state of Florida, consisted of the house in Bal Harbour, the flophouse on Rossington Street, and a row house on Baker Street in Westminster.
As she had no interest in returning to Florida or managing a flophouse, Mrs. Hudson made plans to sell the Bal Harbour and Rossington Street properties. However, Mrs. Hudson had grown a bit weary of living with her overbearing alpha sibling (how I could sympathize!), and she longed for a bit of independence. On a Wednesday evening in January just before my birthday she and I visited the house on Baker Street to assess its suitability as a residence. It had three rather run-down apartments that had previously been rented out to members of Frank’s cartel. In fact, judging by some of the leftover flasks and beakers, they had used the place to cook meth. The boiler didn’t work terribly well, there was mould everywhere in the basement flat, and the ghastly mismatched wallpaper was an affront to our omega sensibilities, but we both appreciated 221B Baker Street’s location in central London, and especially its cozy, if slightly shabby, charm. Mrs. Hudson decided that she would move in to the ground floor flat, and would seek renters for the first floor and basement flats, and maybe even the single room in the attic.

“Mrs. Hudson,” I said, in what I hoped wasn’t a wheedling tone of voice. “Do you think I might take one of the flats? I’m sure Mycroft could afford to pay my rent. And then I would be around in case you needed help.” Although I got on reasonably well with my brother, I was sorely tempted by the thought of having my own apartment in the heart of Westminster.

Mrs. Hudson thought about this for a long moment, then patted my cheek and said, “I’m not saying no, Sherlock, because I really would like it if you were around. But both you and I know what happens when you get to feeling isolated and alone. And we both know how much better you cope when you have someone around to talk to.”

“I have a skull –” I started.

“I’m serious, Sherlock,” Mrs. Hudson said firmly. “I don’t think it’s good for you to live alone. And that has nothing to do with your being an omega.”

I opened my mouth to argue, but she continued, “So if you want to take one of the flats, I’ll let you, but I think that you should find a friend to share it with. Someone you can talk to when I’m not around. Alright?”

“Alright,” I grumbled.

*  

You have no idea how difficult it is to find a flatmate when you are in your thirties! When I was nineteen, I found Victor’s photocopied request for a roommate on a pinboard at the Library at Man U at eleven in the morning on a Saturday. I called him that afternoon; we went for a pint that evening to discuss the terms of the lease, and I had moved in all of my stuff by tea time on Sunday. But by January of 2010 every friend I had was either married with children (Mike and Lestrade) or had already purchased their first flat (Molly). By the end of the month I was despairing of ever being able to move into Mrs. Hudson’s spare flat.

On the morning of the twenty-ninth I dropped by Mike’s lab at Saint Bart’s to use his microscopes to examine green paint chips from a ladder that I suspected had played an important role in a murder. I complained to him at some length about my difficulties in finding a flatmate, before he left for lunch and I went to visit Molly to see if she’d let me use one of her fresher corpses to test whether the bruises on the murder victim’s torso were made before or after his death. Having completed that task, I returned to Mike’s lab to conduct a few more tests on the mysterious green paint chips while awaiting Mike’s return.

Presently I heard two voices in the hallway outside the lab: Mike’s and an unfamiliar alpha male’s. The door opened and the two of them entered. Mike took his seat at his workbench, and I looked up
from my work at the newcomer, the man who would be the love of my life.

Chapter End Notes

And just like that everything changed.

Here is where Mrs. Hudson thinks Mycroft should go cruising for omegas:
http://www.madametussauds.com/london/

Thanks to you all for your kudos and comments. Gosh, those are nice to read!
Duke and Wabi-Sabi

Chapter Notes

A short chapter, but an important one. Please enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When we were children, Mycroft played with G.I. Joes. You remember them: the three-and-three-quarter-inch action figures that were forever fighting their nemesis COBRA? Mycroft had twenty-three, all lined up in perfect order on his bookshelf, just out of reach of my curious, grubby hands. Our parents decided that I was too young to have my own G.I. Joes – they feared that I would choke on the tiny plastic guns and grenades that came with every figurine. A legitimate fear, I concede – so I had to beg Mycroft to let me play with his. Although he would act like he was making a huge sacrifice by letting me join him, he always allowed me to play with him when he acted out little skirmishes on the sofa or in the overgrown rhubarb patch in our back garden, as long as I agreed to use the figurines he didn’t like – these included the Baroness, Gung Ho, Major Bludd, and Mutt – and as long as my side always lost.

One afternoon Mycroft’s favourite action figure, Duke – the G.I. Joes’ alpha field commander and Hawk’s second-in-command – was left outside in the rhubarb patch, where our Irish setter Redbeard found him and chewed him up. Mycroft blamed me for this tragedy, but this was unfair because I never, ever got to play with Duke, so it couldn’t possibly have been my fault that he was left in the garden for Redbeard to gnaw on. Redbeard’s powerful teeth left deep bite marks on the figurine’s face and yellow painted hair. Duke’s left arm was so badly mangled it could no longer bend properly, and his leg was partially pulled out of its socket, making it impossible for him to stand unassisted on Mycroft’s shelf. Mycroft was both heartbroken and furious at this catastrophe. He tearfully threw the broken figurine at me, screaming that I could keep him.

I was delighted to have Duke for my very own. To me, he was still the best G.I. Joe. In fact the gnaw marks on his face and limbs seemed like real battle scars, lending Duke an air of combat-hardened experience that set him apart from the pristine figures on Mycroft’s shelf. I may not have taken the best care of Duke: he was perpetually grimy and sticky, and he was usually to be found squashed under crumpled papers and uneaten sandwiches at the bottom of my book bag. But I loved him dearly, and brought him everywhere I went for years. Indeed long after Mycroft’s other G.I. Joes were sent to a charity shop, Duke sat on my bedside table between my alarm clock and lamp, watching over me while I slept. Even today he has pride of place on my fireplace mantel, between Billy the skull and a pile of mail affixed there with a Leatherman knife.

Mycroft thinks that it is nauseatingly sentimental that I should feel so attached to a broken toy, but I am not the only person in the world who appreciates the value of damaged goods. There is an idea in Japanese aesthetics – which I learned a little of when studying judo – that nicely encapsulates my feelings for Duke. This concept is wabi-sabi, which loosely translates as the sense of serene melancholy that one experiences when one comes to realize that “nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect.” It is an appreciation that an object’s flaws make it more beautiful. It is the understanding that a new, unblemished teapot may be lovely, but a teapot that is cracked and repaired by loving hands is infinitely more interesting and precious. Similarly, it is our comprehension that part of what makes cherry blossoms or autumn leaves so beautiful is our knowledge that they will soon fade and be no more. I have long appreciated the concept of wabi-
sabi. Indeed a major reason that I selected my beloved coat from among all the others at the Belstaff shop was the mistake in the colour of the thread at the button hole. In the eyes of the shopkeepers such an error reduced the value of the coat by twenty percent, but in my eyes it made the coat pricelessly unique.

I explain to you what Duke and wabi-sabi have meant to me so that you might understand a little of how I came to fall in love with John Watson so quickly and so thoroughly – a development that came as quite a surprise to me, given my previous history with alphas. I saw him standing at the end of the lab workbench (the same place we had first met a decade earlier) and from his tan, his tidy haircut, and his parade ground posture, I could instantly decipher the hardships he had endured on behalf of queen and country, the physically and psychologically crippling effects of the injuries he had received, the extreme disappointment and frustration he had felt at being invalided home, and the difficulties he was presently having adjusting to civilian life. The feeling I experienced when I laid eyes on John Watson was the same feeling of astonished gratitude, and possessive affection, and overwhelming joy that I first experienced when Mycroft angrily hurled Duke at my head. In half a second I figured out that Mike had brought the stoic but sad army doctor to the pathology lab in response to my complaints that I could not find a flatmate – an act of thoughtfulness for which I will be forever in his debt.

I instantly knew – as surely that I know that blowflies colonize a decomposing body before house flies – that the feeling I was experiencing was love. It hit me with the force of a large caliber hollow point round, and flooded my veins like a hit of the purest cocaine. And for once – probably for the first time ever – my reasoning brain and the ruthlessly suppressed and denied omega portion of my psyche that I only allowed to influence my behaviour during my heats were on the exact same page. I could feel my omega biology dancing a merry jig and exclaiming, “Finally! Finally!” as it gleefully anticipated all the ways it could care for the marvelous alpha in front of it. Ridiculous, sentimental little acts of devotion that I didn’t even know how to do, like bake John a pie. Or iron his shirts for him.

I decided then and there that I would pull out all the stops to impress Dr. Watson, in hopes that he would agree to be my roommate. I had no idea what would happen thereafter – I had no plans at all to seduce him. God, how would I even go about doing that? – but just having the former army doctor as a flatmate and maybe even a friend was too wondrous a possibility to resist.

“Afghanistan or Iraq?” I asked him.

Chapter End Notes

Who is Duke?
http://www.bigislandtoys.com/images5/39101.jpg

And what's wabi-sabi?

Again, thank you all for reading, and for your kudos and interesting comments.
I was very nearly floating as I left my encounter with John Watson at Saint Bart’s. I tried to tell myself that the giddy, surreal feeling making my heart pound and my skin tingle was just infatuation – possibly brought on by a rare imbalance of omega hormones triggered by my exposure to the army doctor’s strong alpha pheromones – but even then I knew it was much more. John and I had agreed to meet at Mrs. Hudson’s house on Baker Street the following evening at seven. Because I was certain I had thoroughly charmed and impressed him with my deductions, I was supremely confident that he would agree to be my roommate, and I needed to go home to Kidderpore Avenue to start packing my things.

As I entered the Farringdon Thameslink station I noticed a small group of omegas sitting on benches in the waiting area. They were singing along to a song playing on a portable radio. The song was very different to the usual upbeat pop drivel favoured by omegas; it was slow and sultry and I found myself listening to the lyrics. “At last,” it went, “My love has come along. My lonely days are over, and life is like a song.” To my astonishment, they seemed to echo the very feelings that had been fizzing through my veins since meeting John. How wondrous, I thought then, that the songwriter knew exactly what I was feeling! You see, at the time I had never heard the old saying that when you’re in love all those songs make sense. I boarded my train to West Hampstead humming the tune and committing the lyrics to a special new room in my Mind Palace.

When I got home, I pulled Mycroft’s dusty old Saab out of the garage and left it at the front door. I managed to wedge my armchair into the boot, using bungee cords to hold the boot lid down. As I was packing my possessions into cardboard boxes, I heard Mycroft arrive home.

“Hello? Sherlock? What’s going on? What are you doing with your chair?” he asked while knocking on the bedroom doorjamb.

“I’m taking it to Mrs. Hudson’s house on Baker Street. I’m moving in with her,” I explained while dumping a drawerful of socks and underpants into a box.

Mycroft tiredly removed his suit jacket and hung it on my doorknob. “This is the first I’m hearing of this. Tell me, when did you two geniuses cook this up this plan?”

I shrugged and stuffed Billy the skull in the box. “A few weeks ago.”

“And why are you so determined to leave?” Mycroft asked while rolling up his shirtsleeves. “Is living here really so disagreeable?” I could tell that I had put his nose out of joint. Mycroft had, after all, always been very accommodating towards me. Even though I could tell that he desperately wanted to reprimand me when I came and went at all hours, or when I left his tidy home in disarray, or when I conducted experiments that ended up setting fire to the kitchen, he always held his tongue in the face of my inconsiderate behaviour.

I paused to think. “No, not at all. It’s because I’m thirty-three years old and I still live with my big brother. I’m a grown-up and I would like my own flat. Besides, Hampstead is too far from Central London.” I taped up the box, and Mycroft sat on my bed.

“So you and Mrs. Hudson living together. Is that such a good idea? I mean, two omegas sharing a house. What if something goes wrong? Who will protect you?”
“Why Mrs. Hudson, of course!” I quipped. Even though he was still miffed, Mycroft couldn’t help but smile at that. “It won’t be just the two of us, My. I’ll have a flatmate.”

“A flatmate?” Mycroft crossed his arms over his chest. “Who?”

“His name is John Watson. He’s a doctor recently retired from the RAMC.” You’ll notice that I didn’t mention John’s rank to my brother. That’s because Mycroft knew as well as I did that the officer corps of the British military was traditionally dominated by alphas. If I told Mycroft that John was a captain, he would immediately guess that he was an alpha, and then very likely would put the kibosh on my plan to move out.

Mycroft narrowed his eyes suspiciously at me. “And have you told this John that you’re an omega?”

“No, of course not!” I paused in my packing to look at my brother incredulously.

“And what happens if he finds out?”

“He won’t! I’ll be careful,” I insisted.

“You say that, but you let Mrs. Hudson find out pretty easily, didn’t you?”

“Mycroft, that was… nine years ago. No one’s found out since. Believe me.” I ran a hand through my curls in frustration.

“And what will happen during your heats? Won’t he figure it out then?”

I hadn’t thought about how I would conceal my heats. In fact I had one coming up in a few weeks. “I…. Can I come back here? Just for my heats? It’d – it’d probably be safer…. And you’d still get to take time off of work.” The latter argument was likely quite persuasive: as hard-working as Mycroft could be, as he entered his forties he was growing increasingly indolent – at least at home. He liked nothing more than spending his time off sleeping in a chair or reading on the sofa. What crime is to me, naps are to my brother.

“Hmm. I suppose,” he conceded. “I’m looking forward to meeting this Doctor John Watson. I suppose he’ll be able to keep an eye on you when I can’t.” I knew that as soon as Mycroft returned to the office he’d run a thorough background check on John – a check that would no doubt reveal his alpha status. It was therefore necessary to gain my brother’s blessing to move out that very evening.

“So. I can go?” I asked hopefully.

“Yes, I suppose so,” Mycroft stood up to leave. Clearly he had no intention of helping with my packing.

“Sherlock, if it doesn’t work out with this John person, you know that you’ll always have a place here with me,” he said as he retrieved his jacket from my door knob.

“I know. Thank you, Mycroft.” I started dumping shirts and suits into another box. “Oh, by the way, I’ve left the information about the rent on your desk. Mrs. Hudson expects to be paid on the first of the month, so you’d better cut a cheque right away.”

*

I couldn’t help but look at John with a wide, goofy smile as I exited the taxi outside of Mrs. Hudson’s house the following evening. He was just so lovely and adorable, with his serious dark blue eyes and perpetually worried expression. Mrs. Hudson caught my buoyant expression as I
proudly introduced them, and I knew that she had immediately figured out that I had feelings of some sort for John.

I bounded up the stairs to the first floor flat and waited for John to hobble after me. I opened the front door, anxious to show off the flat to John.

As he looked around the sitting room, he said, “Well, this could be very nice. Very nice indeed.”

“Yes, I think so. My thoughts precisely,” I replied. “So I went straight ahead and moved in –“

At the same time that I spoke, John said, “Just as soon as we get all this rubbish cleaned out,” referring to the possessions I had moved into the flat the previous evening.

I was mortified. “Well obviously I can straighten things up a bit,” I said as I rushed about the room making a futile effort to put my papers and boxes in some kind of order. My omega side, was intensely ashamed that it had failed to make a satisfactory nest for its alpha. I was suddenly overwhelmed with a deep feeling of inadequacy. I had never taken a single OmegEd class and I had no inclination at all towards cooking or cleaning, so what did I know about making a comfortable home for an alpha? How was I supposed to take care of John? What did I even know about being a friend anymore?

However, that very evening – when Lestrade showed up to ask for my opinion on a series of apparent serial suicides, and I brought John along to be my assistant – I discovered that what I lacked in domesticity I more than made up for in adventure, which turned out to be exactly what the good doctor had been missing since leaving the Army. He didn’t need coddling or fussing at all – he had had enough of those since getting shot, and all it did was make him feel weak and useless. Rather, what he needed was the same sense of being needed in a dangerous, life-threatening situation that he had gotten in spades in field hospitals in Afghanistan. And through the Work, that was one thing I could certainly offer to him.

And at that first crime scene – where a dying beta in a pink mac had etched the word ‘Rache’ in the floor of a derelict house – I discovered that John fulfilled one of my deepest unmet needs too. I don’t know whether you’ve picked up on this yet, but my brother has never been terribly generous with the compliments. Since I was a small child Mycroft has habitually referred to me as a stupid little boy. And even when I do something smart – like when I finished my undergraduate degree with the highest honours, or when my Master’s thesis received a commendation – he still makes sure to remind me that he did even better at school. Though I would never admit this to him because I know that Mycroft loves me, the little put-downs do grind me down. And the snide comments made by Lestrade’s jealous SOCO team don’t feel particularly nice either, though I admit that I give as good as I get there.

But, John, oh, John: since that very first night John has showered me with praise. “That was amazing,” he said when I explained how I knew about his time in the military and his alcoholic sibling. “Extraordinary! Brilliant! Fantastic!” he exclaimed as I explained my deductions about the dead beta’s recent activities. Do you know how gratifying it is to be admired for the very qualities that that other people call freakish? I blossomed under John’s approval like a flower in sunshine.

My growing infatuation with the army doctor did not entirely distract me from the Work, however, and I soon abandoned John at the derelict house in Brixton to search for the dead woman’s suitcase. (John was in the Army, I thought. Surely he can figure out how to get back to Westminster on his own.) This may have been a costly error, because it gave Mycroft the opportunity to attempt to intimidate John. As I had predicted the previous evening, Mycroft’s background check on John had instantly revealed that he was an alpha, and he had been calling me all day to express his concerns. However, I had set my phone to vibrate, so he was forced to lodge his concerns with my voicemail.
“Sherlock, it’s me. Pick up,” the first message said. “You know he’s an alpha. A single alpha. Do I really need to explain how dangerous this is for you?”

The second message said, “Jesus, Sherlock. You barely know this alpha. How do you know you can trust him? I think that this is a terrible, terrible idea. Call me back as soon as you get this.”

The one after that said, “I’ve gone through his service record and his psychiatrist’s notes. Listen to this: He was once put on kitchen duty for insubordination. Turns out he punched a Major General. Broke his nose…. And he has PTSD. Difficulty adjusting to civilian life, his record says. Trust issues: What do you think what would happen to those if he finds out you’re an omega? Even suicidal tendencies. Christ, Sherlock, I wouldn’t feel safe living with this maniac, and I’m an alpha!”

The next one said, “I just can’t – I just can’t allow this. Sherlock, as your family alpha I am forbidding you – do you hear that, I am officially forbidding you! – from moving in with this alpha. I’m going to tell Mrs. Hudson that you need to move home tonight.”

The penultimate one said, “Well…. I suppose that Mrs. Hudson learned that sort of language from you…. You know what? Fine. I wash my hands of you. You want to live with a mentally ill alpha who’s been trained to kill people, you do it. Just don’t come crying to me when this doctor fellow figures out that you’re an omega…. Or when he kicks you out because he’s sick of your nonsense and you need a place to stay.”

And the last one said, “Sherlock, look, I’m – I’m sorry about that last message. That was… unkind. Of course you’re always welcome at my house. I just think that you need to th – “ At that point, the message cut off because my voicemail was completely full.

I listened to the messages upon my return to the Baker Street flat after finding the missing suitcase – pink, just like I said – and deleted them as soon as I heard them. I had no patience for Mycroft’s overprotectiveness!

A while later I sent John a text message requesting his further assistance with the case. I was lying on the sofa waiting for a reply, when I received a message from Mycroft: “I don’t know why people are so desperate to have you as a friend,” it read – whatever that meant. A few moments later John limped up the stairs looking quite agitated.

“What’s wrong?” My solicitous omega side wished to know.

John replied, “Just met a friend of yours.”

“A friend?”

“An enemy.” Well that could be anyone!

“Oh. Which one?

“Your arch-enemy, according to him.” Ah, Mycroft, of course. He had said he was looking forward to meeting John.

“Did he offer you money to spy on me?” I asked.

“Yes.” Typical Mycroft: The day before he had hinted he would use John to keep tabs on me!

“Did you take it?”

“No.” Well. That the penurious army doctor would turn down the opportunity to augment his coffer...
by keeping an eye on a man he had just met, and to whom he owed no allegiance whatsoever, was unexpected… and kind of nice.

“Pity. We could have split the fee. Think it through next time.” John smiled at that. It pleased me to no end that John seemed to appreciate my sense of humour.

Shortly thereafter we proceeded to a nearby Italian restaurant belonging to a man I had once saved from a murder rap, to wait for the serial killer to spring our trap. It was over dinner at Angelo’s (Though I ate nothing, every omega knows that it’s their duty to feed up their alpha.) that the next major development of the evening occurred.

We were watching the street when, apropos of nothing, John asked whether I had a girlfriend.

As I was concentrating on the passing traffic, I did not immediately consider the significance of this question. “Girlfriend? No, not really my area,” I replied. And it really wasn’t. The only intimate relationship I had had over the previous twelve years had been with my beta-sized vibrator during my twice-yearly heats.

John seemed to think on this for a second, then said, “Oh, right. Do you have a boyfriend?”

I turned my attention to John. What could he be getting at? I considered what assumptions John was likely to hold regarding my sex life. Thanks to the Pherostol he would not have been able to detect my scent, so he would undoubtedly assume that I was a beta. While alphas often pursue romantic and/or sexual relationships with both betas and omegas, the norm for betas worldwide is to pair up with other betas – either male or female. If a beta is very lucky it might attract an alpha. An alpha is considered quite the catch for a beta, but an alpha’s friends and family will always be a bit disappointed if it settles for a beta, because betas are typically far less fertile than omegas, as you already know. An alpha, most people would agree, deserves a spouse that can provide it with multiple offspring so that it can pass on its superior genes. It is rare, and considered quite queer (in every meaning of the word) for alphas to have sex with other alphas. (Most people would say that, given the tremendous size of alpha genitals and the resulting difficulties they must have engaging in sexual intercourse, alpha-alpha relationships are obviously unnatural and therefore wrong.) And of course omegas are conditioned to think that the only type of relationship they can have is with an alpha, which is seen as the only gender capable of managing and protecting the weakest sex.

So if John thought that I was a beta, his first assumption would be that I would be interested in other betas – men or women – but could he also be wondering whether I was interested in alphas? Had he already figured out that I had feelings for him? Or was he – was he hitting on me? Was John interested in betas then?

He noticed my scrutiny. “Which is fine, by the way,” he said.

“I know it’s fine,” I replied shortly. I wasn’t sure I was comfortable with where this conversation was going. Though I was increasingly besotted with John, at that point I found the idea of beginning a romantic, or worse sexual, relationship with him frankly terrifying.

“So you’ve got a boyfriend then?” he smiled. Oh yes, the smooth talking alpha was definitely putting the moves on me.

“No,” I admitted warily.

“Right. Okay. You’re unattached like me. Fine. Good.” He licked his lips, took a sensuous bite of his food, and grinned at me.
Oh god, I thought. Though I berated myself for my cowardice, I just wasn’t ready to start a relationship. I had to let him down gently. “John, ermm,” I started. “I think you should know that I consider myself married to my Work. And while I’m flattered by your interest, I’m really not looking for any –”

John interrupted me before I could proceed further, “No. No, I’m not asking. No, I’m just saying: it’s all fine.”

Though I responded with “Good. Thank you,” I have to admit that my omega side was terribly disappointed both in John’s ready acceptance of my rejection and in my own lack of courage. It scolded me for wasting a perfect opportunity to convey my interest to the alpha. I told it to shut up, and continued watching the traffic.

Despite my lingering disappointment with the outcome of that conversation, other events on that first evening with John were far more promising:

When we returned to Baker Street after running down a taxi, it was clear that John had forgotten his limp – thereby proving that it had indeed been psychosomatic, and that he craved more adventure in his life. Though I had many failings as an omega and a friend more generally, that was one thing I was confident I could provide for him – the one thing he really needed.

And then a few minutes later, while Lestrade was ransacking the flat, I let it slip that I had a history with drugs. John was clearly astonished by this revelation – I suppose that I don’t look or smell like a junkie anymore. For a moment I fully expected him to refuse to move in with a reformed drug addict. That he didn’t told me that John could be uncommonly forgiving of the parts of my history that I wasn’t proud of. And if he didn’t judge me harshly for my history with drugs, I thought, it raised the possibility that maybe one day I could trust him enough to tell him the truth about my gender.

But perhaps the most portentous moment in a night full portentous moments was when John actually shot and killed the serial killer we had been trying to find through two closed windows and over a distance of perhaps one hundred metres. Not only did this incident offer a clear demonstration of John’s considerable skills as a marksman – skills that would undoubtedly prove useful to anyone who wished to help me with the Work – it also demonstrated the lengths to which my new friend would go to protect me. And not only from the baddies that I often encountered in the course of my investigations, but also from my own foolish recklessness. Though I didn’t see John’s actions in these terms at the time, I can see now that his protectiveness in the face of my thoughtless disregard for my own safety was a very alpha response to a very omega failing.

I remember chatting with John as we left Roland-Kerr College, after Mycroft showed up to make sure I was alright (Honestly, could he go one day without acting like a Mother Hen?) and John finally figured out that he was my brother. We joked and giggled – behaviours that most people would see as totally inappropriate for the scene of a murder – and I began to think that this, whatever it was, might actually work. That the two of us gave each other exactly the things we so desperately needed: I gave John the adventure he longed for, and an opportunity for the alpha in him to protect someone; in turn he protected me, accepted my failings, and praised my higher qualities. To me this reciprocal meeting of each other’s needs seemed like a fine basis on which to establish a friendship at the very least. It was enough to be getting on with anyway. For at the time I had no rational expectations of anything beyond friendship with John. Though it was already becoming difficult to ignore my omega biology’s urging to make this wonderful brave alpha my mate, realistically I was clueless as to how to go about doing that, and consequently had no reasonable expectation that it would ever happen.

And yet, when we returned to Baker Street after our midnight snack of dim sum, and I was preparing
for bed after a warm shower, I was surprised to see that I had an erection. It wasn’t one of the pulsing, rock hard, insatiable erections that afflicted me during my heats, but it did offer clear evidence of my attraction to the alpha currently brushing his teeth on the other side of my bedroom wall. Believe it or not, since the incident in the Library, I had never masturbated unless I was in heat. I found the very thought of being in an intimate situation with another person simply repulsive – even twelve years after I had been attacked. Nevertheless, as I lay on my bed listening to John humming to himself in the shower, I found myself gently rubbing my scarred penis with one hand and slowly caressing my soft, hairless labia with the fingers of the other. I came with the tiniest of whimpers, while thinking of John’s scent – pine forests and gun metal, I’d never smelled anything so tantalizingly masculine. Thus it was on that very first night at Baker Street with John that I began to think that maybe, just maybe, it was possible for me to be a sexual being again.

Chapter End Notes

Dialogue courtesy of the transcripts at Ariane DeVere’s livejournal. Seriously, how much work must have gone into preparing those!

Thank you all for your kudos, comments, and continued support. I am so pleased that you enjoyed the last chapter so much.

Oh, in case you wanted to listen to the song Sherlock heard the omegas singing at Farringdon Station: http://youtu.be/S-cbO196RFM
In retrospect the years I had spent living with Mycroft did not prepare me well for living with John. Though I frequently felt that Mycroft had been bossy and controlling, judging by John’s reactions to many of my habits, my brother may have actually been quite indulgent of me. It annoyed John to no end that I was never the one to go to the shops to pick up milk, and that I never cleaned the flat. However, I knew perfectly well that if I left both tasks long enough, Mrs. Hudson would end up doing them for me. And she is much better at performing typical omega household duties than I am, so in the end isn’t it better to have her do it? At least that’s how I rationalized what is in fact simple laziness.

John was especially irritated by the case-related experiments I performed on our kitchen table (under less than sterile conditions, I admit, but it’s not like I was seeking to publish my results, so it hardly mattered). “Is this another tongue in the butter compartment?” He would snarl. “God I’m sick of your bloody experiments!” When he called them ‘bloody experiments,’ I was never sure whether he meant ‘bloody’ in the literal or figurative sense. Possibly he meant both.

Unfortunately for John, I happened to find his frustration quite endearing. (I remember a time soon after we first moved to Baker Street, when John returned from Tesco’s without any of the shopping. By his own account he had had trouble using the chip-and-PIN machine, and had ended up shouting at the cash register in front of a large crowd of shoppers. Rather than continue to embarrass himself, he simply left without any of the groceries. How cute is that?) This meant that his annoyance with me actually encouraged rather than deterred my continued inconsiderate behaviour. When John was irritated, his garden gnome, tip-turned nose would wrinkle, his serious, dark blue eyes would narrow, and his thin-lipped, expressive mouth would set in a firm, indomitable line. He looked like nothing more than an angry hedgehog. Though I suspected that John had a typical alpha’s temper, he never went beyond snarling at me to shouting – which was a good thing because I suspect that a submissive reaction to a display of his anger would no doubt reveal my omega status to him. And in fact, John was surprisingly quick to forgive my tactlessness and selfishness – a quality he had no doubt learned as the family alpha to an alcoholic sibling.

Besides being adorable in his frustration with day-to-day annoyances, I found that John possessed many more fine qualities. For one, he was braver than any alpha that I had ever encountered. Though he was significantly shorter than the average British alpha, this never stopped him from getting into a punch-up during a case. Once when we were at the Planetarium looking for a certain professor Cairns – whom we hoped would be able to shed light on the death of a security guard – a gigantic Croatian assassin nicknamed the Golem attacked me. John wrestled the much larger man off of me with no thought at all for his own safety.

John’s bravery extended even as far as Mycroft. In case you weren’t aware, amongst a given population of alphas, rankings inevitably manifest themselves. I’m not sure precisely how alphas determine their hierarchy – I think it has something to do with assertiveness, or physique, or number of omega partners, or, in rare cases, fighting – but, for some reason (obviously not related to physique, omega partners, or fighting) my brother has become a very high ranking alpha. You may recall that it is normal for alphas, betas, and omegas alike to cower in fear when Mycroft enters a room. (I maintain that if they knew him when he was a pudgy, spotty teenager wearing a Members Only jacket, with a picture of Princess Diana sellotaped to the inside cover of his Trapper Keeper, they would have no fear of him whatsoever.) However, Mycroft’s typical intimidation tactics simply
didn’t work on John. My John has no fear of angering Mycroft by pointing out the failings of the British government, or by making fun of our competitive, sometimes resentful relationship. I think that this frustrates Mycroft, because it means that he can’t simply force John to do his bidding the way he can with virtually every other person in Britain. But it also means that Mycroft respects John more than anyone else. Consequently, despite his initial misgivings, my brother was surprisingly accepting of my living with John. I’m not sure why John is immune to Mycroft’s bullying – it could be that his time in the military gave him ample experience in dealing with macho alpha posturing, or it might even mean that, for whatever reason an omega like me couldn’t possibly fathom, in alpha terms, John actually outranks Mycroft.

John also has a terrific sense of humour, which overlaps nicely with my own. That is to say that John is probably the only other person I have ever met who can find humour in the scene of a terrible murder. I suspect that John’s proclivity towards gallows humour is a coping mechanism acquired in wartime Afghanistan, much like how the doctors on M*A*S*H engaged in hijinks in order to distract themselves from the horrors of the Korean War. Whatever its source, I am grateful that John does have a sense of humour, because if he didn’t I am sure that he would have trouble forgiving some of things I have done to him.

From the start John consistently displayed an unexpected level of loyalty to me. (I say ‘unexpected’ because the betrayal and rejections that had characterized my previous relationships with alphas had caused me to be rather pessimistic about how this friendship might turn out.) No matter how much I unintentionally (or intentionally) annoyed him, when the chips were down I knew I could count on John to defend me, whether this meant rushing to my defence when I was being chased by a Chinese gangster in the National Antiquities Museum (Actually, this may have been a mistake on his part because he left a key witness unprotected in the basement of the Museum, giving the gangster the opportunity to find her and murder her. Nice going, Watson.) or whether this simply meant defending me from Sally Donovan’s sharp tongued criticism. When I first met John, I had actually worried that he would distract me from the Work; very soon, however, I learned that with John to rely on, the Work was so much better.

The final quality I learned to appreciate during those first few months living with John was his level of intelligence, which was high, but not too high. And what I mean by that is that John was certainly of above average intelligence. Once while searching through his computer I found John’s CV. Besides his success in KCL’s MBBS program, John received six A*s on his GCSEs, which anyone familiar with the British education system will tell you is quite impressive. (In fact, more impressive than my own GCSE scores – but for reasons related to discipline rather than intelligence, you must understand!)

John’s medical background and particularly his experience in trauma surgery has proven invaluable on case after case. Though I would never admit it to him, his expertise in examining the corpses of victims of violent deaths far surpasses my own. If he ever wants to give up dealing with the whinging and squirming of live patients, I am sure that Molly’s lab would hire him in a trice. He is also good at making sutures: a skill I make use of all too often, given my line of work, and the number of flick knives apparently in circulation among London’s criminal classes.

During cases, John also exhibited moments of practical, commonsense intelligence that would often surprise me. For example, once while the two of us were separately searching for samples of yellow graffiti written in Hangzhou, John happened to be the first to find a coded message written on a wall next to some railroad tracks. Rather than simply run off to find me and tell me about it, he made sure to take a picture of the wall first. This meant that even though the gangsters lurking nearby were able to paint over the coded message before I could see it, we still had an accurate record of it. See what I mean? Commonsense intelligence, which sometimes even I lack.
And it’s this practical, plodding, commonsense intelligence that makes John particularly good at board games. My time living with my competitive, board game-mad elder brother has given me considerable practice with all the classic games of skill and strategy. (There is no luck in board games. Anyone who tells you differently is a fool, and will one day lose all of their money to card sharps.) I used to pride myself on the cutthroat strategies I could bring to bear on such games as Risk, The Great Game of Britain, Monopoly, Cluedo, and Battleship. In contrast, all John had to do was read through the rules on the inside of the box lid just once, and start playing. There was nothing flashy or impressive about his gameplay. He was simply systematic; he was a stickler for the rules, and he never made a mistake. Also, he never allowed me to evoke the Holmes Family Rules, which Mycroft and I had developed over the years as a means to settle heated arguments over the interpretation of board game regulations. For John, if the rule wasn’t on the box lid, it didn’t count. Consequently, it shames me to admit, John frequently won at board games.

And sometimes John isn’t even aware of how intelligent he is. The low self-worth he acquired upon leaving the Army, combined with constant comparisons to my own lightning-quick cleverness may have caused John – and many of our friends and acquaintances, besides – to believe that he was not terribly smart. But sometimes he would make an offhand, unthinking remark – or even just a significant gesture – that, upon further reflection and dissection, actually included a piece of brilliant insight that turned out to be the key to unlocking a case. For example, when he suggested that the letters UMQRA could be an acronym, it got me to thinking that HOUND could also be an acronym. Or when his tapping fingers made me think of morse code. Recognizing his potential as a conductor of light, I soon found myself closely observing John whenever we were in each other’s company, just in case he would say or do something else that would inspire me. (Also because I just loved watching him. I admit that’s also a significant motivating factor.)

And yet for all of his brilliance, John could be a bit thick. One morning I gave him a dose of Omegarrest in his tea, just to see what would happen. He passed out on the sofa, and spent an entire Wednesday fast asleep. On Thursday morning he woke up and went to the GP’s office, where he was scolded for missing a day’s work. I don’t think he would ever have figured out what had happened to that lost day if I hadn’t told him during my wedding speech.

Likewise, if I hadn’t shown him, I don’t think that he would ever have realized that I was an omega. Though once, when we had first moved in together, I thought that he had figured it out. I was noodling around on my violin, trying to figure out how to play the song that I had heard the omegas singing in Farringdon station, when John commented, “You could almost pass for an omega.”

I stopped playing with a screech across the strings. “I’m – I’m sorry?” I stammered.

He looked up from his newspaper. “Don’t be offended; I meant it as a compliment. You play so well. With such joy and… passion. Almost like an omega. It’s beautiful to watch.” John cleared his throat and returned his gaze to the Guardian, clearly uncomfortable with offering such a rhapsodic, heartfelt compliment to his beta male roommate.

“Oh. Thank you,” I said, quietly relieved that he hadn’t actually guessed.

John started chuckling to himself.

“What?” I said.

“Just… just the idea of you as an omega. It’s – it’s quite funny actually. Sherlock Holmes: The World’s Only Omega Consulting Detective. Hee hee.” He shook his head in amusement, and turned the page of the newspaper.

I watched him for a few moments as he giggled to himself, then I started playing again.
The next example I will give of John’s cluelessness (There are many similar incidents; this is just the highlight reel) occurred the morning after we had moved in together. I was sitting in my chair, surreptitiously watching him and cataloguing his physical features (as they appeared in the morning sunlight while wearing a terry cloth bathrobe). John got up from his chair, coffee cup in hand, and approached the fireplace mantel. I stiffened when he picked up Duke, fully expecting him to laugh at my choice of fireplace decoration. But he merely straightened Duke’s legs a bit and leaned him on a box of matches, so that he was standing upright. Then he turned his attention to the skull, which he had first noticed the previous evening. He picked up Billy and poked at the lower jaw where the abscessed wisdom tooth had eaten away the bone.

“Where’d you get this?” he asked.

“Oh, who knows?” I said dismissively. I didn’t want to be distracted from my study of the colours of John’s hair by pointless chit-chat.

“It’s just that…. No, never mind,” he said, returning Billy to his spot on the mantelpiece. I think this little incident says a lot about John’s particular brand of obliviousness: that he is capable of perspicacity, of making mental connections, which is a hallmark of great intelligence. But there is something about him, perhaps doubt in his own abilities, perhaps fear of the things he could learn through those mental leaps that, in the end, prevents him from making those connections and instead settle for much simpler, safer conclusions. You could ask John what two plus two is, and he would say four. But if you asked him what happens when you add another two, he would say, “I dunno, mate. What do you think?” I saw it on that first morning, and I saw it again when I asked him to try applying my deductive method to a pair of trainers belonging to a long-dead victim of botulinum poisoning. His first deductions were solid, exhibiting passable observational skills and a good grasp of logic. But all too suddenly, he gave up on the exercise, and let me carry on with it. I remember watching him with some disappointment as I tried to figure out what was holding him back.

In general, however, I benefitted from John’s obliviousness. While we were living at Baker Street together, every six months I would leave for a week to spend my heat at Mycroft’s house. John accepted without question whatever half-baked, implausible excuse I gave him for my absence. When I took my leave of him the night before the first heat I experienced while we were roommates, our conversation went something like this:

“Goodbye, John. If Lestrade calls, tell him I’ll be back next Sunday.”

“Alright…. Wait. Where are you going for an entire week?”


“Minsk? Wow, what for?”

“A c-case?”

“A case in Minsk?”

Another long pause. “Y-Yes?”

“Okay. Have fun.”

He didn’t even notice that I didn’t take a suitcase.

I guess John’s ready acceptance of even my most nonsensical lies could be interpreted as another sign of his loyalty to me, but I often worry that the fact that he can never, ever tell when I or other people are fibbing means that he can sometimes be a poor judge of character. I digress, however; this
chapter is meant to enumerate John’s admirable qualities. A description of his less than laudable traits will come soon enough. And to me, John’s shortcomings are vastly outweighed by his positive qualities.

In general, the more I learned about John in those first few months at Baker Street, the more I admired him… and the more deeply I fell for him. It grew more and more difficult for me to convince myself that the feelings I had for him – which seemed to grow with every passing case – were nothing more than an adolescent crush or the product of raging omega hormones.

God, how I wanted him! The platoons of sweaty, shirtless Marines that had long featured in my heat fantasies were replaced with one short army doctor with burnished gold hair. And when the two of us would tumble into a cab after the successful conclusion of a case – when we were both out of breath and full of adrenaline, and John’s manly smell of gun metal and pine filled my nostrils – I could barely carry on a conversation I was so terribly aroused. On those evenings I was very glad that I wore a coat long enough to cover the front of my trousers. But I remained utterly, miserably out of my depth as to how to communicate my interest to John. Being with John sexually would necessitate telling him about my true gender, and, as much as I loved him, I just couldn’t predict how he would react to that. So on those evenings, when the cab dropped us off at Baker Street, I would bid John a hasty goodnight and retreat to the bathroom, where I would have a forlorn, hopeless wank in the shower.

I told myself that I could still show John how much I cared for him without giving hint of my foolish romantic hopes. And I really tried to do that. Besides giving him the adventure he craved, on cases I always made sure to occasionally pause so that John could eat (Again, a classic omega display of affection) even though these snack breaks invariably distracted us from the case, and took up precious time that we could have been using to track down murderers. I admit, however, that I could have been more consistent in ensuring that John was well-rested.

I would spend hours in my Mind Palace during our first months together, reverently setting my warmest memories of John’s bravery, loyalty, humour, forgiveness, intelligence, and all around adorableness on the shelves of my favourite room. Even today I sometimes take these memories down to savour and relive them. And some days, when I’m awfully low, when the world is cold, I still feel a glow just thinking of him.

(I admit that I borrowed that line from a disgustingly romantic omega song. God only knows why I bothered to commit that pap to my Mind Palace.)

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for reading. I hoard your kudos and comments like a dragon hoards treasure!
I preface this chapter with the confident assertion that John has never knowingly, intentionally hurt me. That anything he’s ever done to cause me pain was a product of misunderstanding and his ignorance as to my gender and/or my feelings about him. And since keeping him ignorant on those matters was a deliberate choice on my part, any hurt that John has ever caused me is in fact my fault. Not that that makes it hurt less… in fact, it kind of makes it hurt more because I know that I have no one to blame but myself.

Most commonly, the hurts I experienced during those first few months together arose from little thoughtless comments that John couldn’t possibly have known had stung me so badly, because he was unaware of the depth of my feelings for him. For example, when I introduced John to Sebastian Wilkes, I called him my friend, thus proving to Sebastian that I had come a long ways from the solitude of my uni days. But John – at the time totally ignorant of how lonely I had been at Imperial, and of how much our burgeoning friendship meant to me – corrected me and called himself my colleague. The most humiliating part of this incident was that the significance of this correction was not lost on Sebastian.

Nor was John free from the prejudices of the day. One morning over breakfast, John was reading a newspaper article about a recent omega rights demonstration. At the time – the spring of 2010 – the omega rights movement was growing increasingly vocal with its demands for civil rights for omegas, specifically for voting rights, increased educational and employment opportunities, greater omega access to prescription medications, and the right of omegas to consume alcohol. Curiously enough, it was the latter demand that had the most support outside the omega community, particularly among alphas. (I suspect that many alphas simply wanted to get omegas drunk so that they could have their wicked way with them.)

“Can you believe this?” John said in reference to the article.

“What?” I said watching him over the rim of my coffee cup.

“Omegas demanding their rights. It’s crazy. How is an omega supposed to finish university if it goes into heat every month, and it’s already got a litter of pups by the time it’s eighteen?”

“Well, that’s why they’re also demanding the right to use heat suppressants,” I commented in what I hoped was a casual manner.

“You know the only countries that give omegas the same rights as everyone else, and let them use suppressants are Serbia, Romania, the Ukraine, Belarus, and Cuba. What else do they have in common, besides being Britain’s greatest ideological enemies?” John asked, folding his arms across his chest.

I shrugged. I really don’t follow international politics.

“All of their economies are in the toilet,” John explained. “That’s not a coincidence. When businesses have omegas on the payroll, productivity necessarily goes down. Omegas just aren’t smart or strong enough for full time employment.” That was a popular argument among Britain’s conservative medical establishment, so it probably shouldn’t have surprised me so much to hear John repeat it.
“And how many omegas have you known, John, that you can make such a – a sweeping generalization?” My voice betrayed my feelings.

“Oh, I’ve known plenty in my time,” John said, leaning back in his chair in that smug, lascivious manner that is so common among alphas.

I stood up angrily, “And in your time with them, I’ll bet you sought their opinion on employment and educational rights, didn’t you?” I turned around to rinse out my mug so that he wouldn’t see how upset I was.

“Okay, no need to get huffy,” he looked at me curiously. “It’s odd that you know so much about this, when you know so little about politics otherwise.”

“Over half of the deaths we investigate are omegas, but omegas are only ten percent of the population. Call it professional curiosity as to why one part of the population is at an increased risk of violent death.” I snarled while placing my mug on the draining board.

“And you think that a lack of rights is the reason?”

I turned to face him, “Yes! A large part of it, yes!”

John was taken aback by the vehemence of my response. Rather than risk further upsetting myself by continuing the conversation, I stomped off to my room.

*

Far more hurtful to me than his occasional thoughtless comments, however, was his active love life. Before meeting John I was aware in the abstract sense that alphas get around. However, I myself had gotten used to being around alphas that defied that stereotype – these being my brother (obviously) and Lestrade (who was wholly committed to his unwell wife) – so when John started dating just a few weeks after we moved in together, it came as an unpleasant surprise to me. I had thought that I was doing very well meeting his needs for adventure and companionship, and then all of a sudden he came home from a job interview practically licking his lips in anticipation of having it off with his female beta boss. Captain Watson worked fast: just two days later he charmed her into agreeing to go on a date with him.

Perhaps it should not have come as a surprise to me that John was so popular with the ladies. After all, I had read plenty of his e-mails from his former army buddies who habitually referred to him as “Three Continents Watson.” At first I didn’t understand what “Three Continents” could possibly mean, but I soon figured out that it was a reference to his figuratively and geographically wide-ranging experience with beta and omega women.

Oh, the first one, whatever her name was…. Sandra? Sherry? Sandy? Let’s go with Sandy. Anyway, the first one – Sandy… no, that doesn’t sound quite right…. The first one, whatever her name was, was simply awful. Boring, bland, mealy-mouthed – in short all the worst qualities in a beta. I managed to invite myself along on her first date with John, I admit in order to sabotage any possibility of a relationship. At the Chinese circus we had chosen to attend (because I suspected it was connected to the Chinese gangsters I mentioned in the previous chapter) she put on such a show of feminine weakness I was very nearly sick to my stomach. She practically jumped out of her skin when the performers crashed their cymbals, and when the gangsters kidnapped her, tied her to a chair and pointed a gigantic crossbow at her head, she just sat there, apparently paralyzed with fear and waiting for John to rescue her! Honestly, all she would have had to do was fall to the side and tip over her chair! I had thought that her cowardice and uselessness under fire would be enough to convince John to dump her, but to my everlasting bewilderment, John asked her out again.
As John was getting ready for their second date, I sat in my chair in my dressing gown and pyjamas, pretending to update my website, though really I was secretly watching John fuss with his hair in the mirror above the mantel.

“Alright, don’t wait up for me,” he said, shrugging on his corduroy blazer.

“Expecting a late night?” I asked resentfully.

“Expecting not to come home at all tonight,” he winked, and trotted down the stairs and out the front door.

I stood up and with all my might threw my full tea mug at the brown and white papered wall. It smashed, leaving a large brown splash mark. The moment of satisfaction was short-lived, however, and I set about picking up the broken pieces of ceramic from the floor and back of the sofa.

“Coo-ee,” said a worried voice from the stairwell. “Is that you, Sherlock? I heard something break.”

“Yes, it’s me, Mrs. Hudson,” I called. “My mug broke. Have you got a dustpan?”

She poked her head in the sitting room door. “Oh, Sherlock, what’s the matter?”

“Nothing,” I said, brushing tears from my cheeks with the hand that wasn’t full of broken pottery shards.

Mrs. Hudson painfully lowered herself to her knees, and together we silently picked up pieces of broken mug.

Though she said nothing to pressure me to speak, finally I could resist no longer. “John – John is on a date,” I said with a sniffle. “I juht – I juht don’t understand why he liketh her. I’m loadth more interethting and fun. What hath she got that I haven’t?” I stood up and took my fistful of ceramic bits to the kitchen rubbish bin, then rinsed out a rag to clean off the wall. Mrs. Hudson dumped her pottery bits and joined me at the sink.

“I see,” she said sadly. “And does John know how you feel about him?”

“No,” I admitted in a tiny, sad voice. “Mrs. – Mrs. Hudson, what I am to do?” I leaned towards her so that she could hug me.

“I don’t know, lovey,” she whispered while patting my back. “But you can’t expect an alpha to turn down the offer of sex. Believe me, they’re just incapable of it!” I nodded sadly, and together we wiped off the tea-splattered wall.

Whatever her name was eventually dumped John. Said he was too unreliable, and that he always chose me over her. I admit that I had a hand in that: I made a point of texting John to ask for his help with cases either during his dates or, better yet, on the nights he stayed over at her house. The fact that he consistently chose chasing criminals with me over dinner and sex with her offered a painfully clear illustration of where she ranked in relation to me, and eventually she got tired of it.

But there were other women: A teacher, as I recall. A dog owner. Some woman whose only memorable characteristic was her enormous nose. All betas, and all painfully boring. The tactics I used to get rid of the first one worked just as well with the others, but nevertheless I lived in constant fear that one of the women John met would have more substance to her – maybe she would be less boring, or maybe she would even be able to provide him with as much adventure as I could – and then I wouldn’t be able to chase her off so easily.
The last way that John unintentionally hurt me during those first months together was through his blog. And I don’t mean that his writing was painful to read – though it really was. The man used more exclamation points than a teenaged omega internet troll writing about a beloved boy band. And he had a terrible habit of sensationalizing our cases. He could have used his blog as an opportunity to carefully lay out the scientific means by which I make my deductions, but instead he chose to present our cases like childish adventure novels. Like the Hardy Betas.

What I mean is the comments he made about me. Again, I realize that John had no way of knowing how much his opinion of me mattered to me back then, but that didn’t stop it from stinging.

I first came across his blog while he was on a date with what’s her name. (So already I was feeling a bit vulnerable that evening.) As I so often did when he was out, I was Googling “John H. Watson RAMC shirtless,” when I came across a blog unimaginatively titled “The blog of Dr. John H. Watson. On previous searches, his blog hadn’t appeared at all, but it had recently gained in popularity, especially among the officers of the Metropolitan Police Service. So on that particular evening, it was the first link suggested by Google. I clicked on it and scanned through John’s descriptions of our cases. At first I was quite flattered – after all, who doesn’t like to be compared to a bloodhound? – but then I read the following line: “What’s incredible… is how spectacularly ignorant he (referring to me) is about some things. This morning, for example, he asked me who the Prime Minister was. Last week he seemed to genuinely not know the Earth goes round the Sun. Seriously. He didn’t know…. I still can’t quite believe it. In so many ways, he's the cleverest person I've ever met but there are these blank spots that are almost terrifying.”

I was flabbergasted that John, my trusted flatmate (and secret object of my affection), would call me ignorant. Battling tears, I stomped up the stairs to his bedroom, intending to ransack it in a fit of pique. (Have I ever mentioned that omegas can sometimes be melodramatic? This might have been a rare example of my exhibiting that trait.) However, the first drawer I opened contained his British Army standard issue Sig Sauer L106A1 – loaded and ready to fire. I decided that the pistol was far better suited to expressing my anger, and I took it with me to the sitting room. Retrieving the can of yellow Michigan spray paint from under the kitchen sink – a souvenir that I had lifted from the police evidence room upon the conclusion of our previous case – I drew a haphazard smiley face on our sitting room wall, and proceeded to empty the clip.

John returned home a few minutes later, shouting, “What the hell are you doing?” Though I told him that I was bored, I think that it was clear that I was upset about something more than that. When he didn’t take the hint, I calmly explained to him how disappointed I was that he would choose to describe me as ignorant on his increasingly popular blog, when in reality I had chosen not to pay attention to such trivialities as the solar system or celebrity news, as these would only distract me from the Work.

Having laid out my perspective on the matter, I lay down on the sofa, fully expecting him to reassure me that I am far more interesting and important than any stupid stars, and to apologize for his ill-considered comments. But instead, to my astonishment, all he did was pick up his coat and walk out again.

That incident – both the hurtful comments on John’s blog and his unreasonable reaction to my very reasonable expression of hurt feelings – introduced a measure of distance to our relationship that lasted for several uncomfortable days. Inconveniently enough, that brief period of disharmony happened to correspond with a complicated case involving a bomber who turned out to have been involved in several cases of murder, as well as a faked death, and a forged Vermeer painting.
That case, along with my feelings of distrust, culminated in a late night incident at a closed swimming pool. John, who had left me earlier that evening to go on another damnable date, walked out of a changing room into the pool area wearing a thick green parka. When he said, “Evening. This is a turn-up, isn’t it, Sherlock? Bet you never saw this coming;” for a shocking moment I thought that John was actually the bomber. However, when he opened his coat to reveal that he was covered in Semtex, I saw he was being forced to repeat the bomber’s words to me, just like all of the other hostages the bomber had used to communicate with us. When the bomber revealed himself a few moments later, John threw his arms around him, threatening to blow the two of them up so that I could escape. The stand-off lasted until the bomber abruptly left after receiving a mysterious phone call.

Two significant developments occurred as a result of that case. First, it was a turning point for my relationship with John. The incident at the pool proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that I could trust John with my life, and that he would even sacrifice his own life for mine. As we cabbed it home to Baker Street that night, I decided that that level of bravery and loyalty vastly outweighed the pain caused his occasional thoughtless remarks or his active sex life. I reminded myself that John had no way of knowing that either would be so hurtful to me. Furthermore, I told myself, given my lasting discomfort with the whole idea of sex, there was no way that I would be able to satisfy his alpha libido, even if I wanted to reveal my gender to him – which I didn’t. Finally, I reminded myself that I had long ago promised myself that I would never again let an alpha hurt me. Therefore, when John did something thoughtless, I would just have to turn the other cheek and focus on the positive. That strategy governed my living and working relationship with John for the next year or so, and for the most part it worked a treat. We had a great time investigating murders and painting thefts and kidnappings together, and I looked the other way when he brought beta women home, and ignored it when he made those comments. And whenever I was feeling uncertain about our relationship, I would purposely put my life at risk so that John would save me, and I could be reassured as to how important I was to him. It was the happiest I had been in a long, long time.

The other significant development to occur as a result of that case was that it introduced me to the bomber, a disguised omega named Jim Moriarty. Moriarty was not only responsible for the bombings, the murders, the faked death, and phony painting, as the self-styled Consulting Criminal he had also played a coordinating role in the case with the Chinese smuggling ring, and the case with the serial killer taxi driver. At the swimming pool that night, Moriarty warned me to stay out of his business, or he would burn the heart out of me. A warning I would later wish I had heeded.

Chapter End Notes

So there is trouble in paradise....

The quote from John's blog is from John's actual pretend blog. You know what I mean. Dialogue from Ariane DeVere's transcripts again.

Thank you one and all for kudos, comments, and most of all for just reading. I'm pleasantly surprised at the positive reaction this story has gotten so far.
In the halcyon days that followed the incident at the swimming pool, I quite forgot about Moriarty’s warning, as John and I enjoyed success after success with our investigations. I was content with the equilibrium that my relationship with John had reached as well. John’s beta women might have had him for a few hours a week – or at most one or two overnight stays – but for the rest of the time he was all mine.

I maintained my habit of fondly observing John when he thought my attention was occupied elsewhere. Mostly I was collecting tiny details of his expression and deportment to store in my Mind Palace: his typical alpha bow-legged walk, for instance. His endearingly inefficient hunt-and-peck typing method. The way he sniffed using just one side of his tip-turned nose when he was angry. I kept as much information about John as I could, regardless of its usefulness to cases.

When we had been living together for nearly a year, I began to notice small changes in John’s behaviour. Small things that caught my attention because he tried so hard to hide them. Like a mournful look when I pretended to flirt with a witness. A lingering pat on my hip when he put me to bed after I had been jabbed with a sedative-filled needle. A pointed glance at my crotch when I showed up to Buckingham Palace dressed only in a sheet.

At that time we were investigating a case involving an alpha dominatrix who was blackmailing a member of the Royal Family – a silly omega duchess who was foolish enough to let the sophisticated, elegant alpha take pictures during her heat. It was painfully clear that the Woman, as she called herself, was attracted to me, as she tried every trick in her lengthy playbook to seduce me. Though she eventually realized that I was unmoved by her considerable charms, she never figured out the reason why. Not only was I still very uncomfortable around alphas whose sexual aggression verged on the predatory, my heart belonged solely to John.

She did figure out, however, that John and I were very close. And in fact it was a comment she made that clued me in to the possibility that John might reciprocate my feelings. On Christmas Eve 2010, the Woman had her phone delivered to me. Given the importance of the photographs stored on the phone to the Woman’s line of business and indeed her survival, such an act suggested to me that the Woman would soon be no more. Sure enough, later that night a bashed-up body resembling the Woman’s was delivered to Molly’s morgue. I admit that the violence of the attack left me shaken, and I was grateful that Mycroft abandoned his usual Christmas plans of snoozing in front of the fire to meet me at the hospital.

He even joined me in a cigarette. Though I could tell that he really didn’t enjoy it.

A few days later, the Woman had John picked up and taken to the abandoned Battersea Power Station. I followed, of course. At the Power Station she revealed to John that she had not been murdered. When she suggested that John might be jealous over the possibility that my failure to respond to her text messages implied that she was somehow special to me, John told her, “We’re not a couple.”

Her immediate response was, “Yes, you are.”

John’s response was typical for him: “Who the hell knows about Sherlock Holmes, but for the record, if anyone out there still cares, I’m not actually into beta men.”
The Woman responded, “Neither am I, but look at us both.”

I overheard all of this. As I wandered home afterwards, I considered the significance of the Woman’s remarks and my own previous observations of the subtle shifts in John’s behaviour. My thoughts were interrupted, however, by the rather more pressing need to rescue poor Mrs. Hudson from the clutches of the unnecessarily violent American intelligence agents who had broken into the flat in search of the Woman’s mobile phone.

The remainder of that case distracted me from further consideration of the possibility that John might also be attracted to me, but the issue arose again during a case that took us to Dartmoor, where we were to investigate the twenty-year-old disappearance of our client’s father, as well as recent sightings of a gigantic, supernatural hound.

I was quite excited for our trip to Dartmoor. It was almost like my first vacation with John. Though we already spent virtually all of our time together, I looked forward to seeing John in a different setting. Though our client, one Henry Knight, was quite wealthy, he elected not to put us up in his spacious family home. Rather, John and I got a room with two single beds at a local inn called the Cross Keys.

I noticed that the proprietors of the Cross Keys were a mated couple: The owner and manager was a stout, hairy alpha who reminded me of Big Frank, while the chef was his bonded omega mate. The two presented such an image of bonded happiness and fulfillment that I couldn’t help but feel a bit jealous.

My feelings had to be set aside, however, for the duration of the case. After two trips to the nearby chemical and biological weapons research facility at Baskerville, I finally figured out that Henry’s (and my own) visions of the demon hound were caused by our exposure to mind-altering chemical agents, released into the atmosphere by pressure triggers hidden all around Dewer’s Hollow. We discovered that the person responsible for concealing those devices in the Hollow (and the death of Henry’s father twenty years previously) was Dr. Frankland, a virologist at Baskerville, and also a fan of John’s blog. Dr. Frankland managed to give us the slip, but ended up blowing himself up as he tried to cross the poorly marked minefield at the edge of the Baskerville facility. (It should be noted that the existence of the so-called Great Grimpen Minefield is in fact a flagrant violation of international law, as the United Kingdom is a state party to the Ottawa Landmines Convention. I fully intended to tell Mycroft about this when we returned home to London, but, as you will soon understand, later events distracted me.)

The Military Police noticed the explosion, and they soon picked us up and escorted us back to the base, while a few of their unfortunate comrades were left to pick up Dr. Frankland with a shovel and bucket. Baskerville’s commanding officer, Major Barrymore, was horrified to learn that one of his scientists was carrying out secret chemical weapons experiments behind his back. (Yet another violation of international law. Sigh.) He sent all of us – John, Lestrade, Henry and myself – to Baskerville’s health centre for a thorough check up, while he called up colleagues at Porton Down to ask about health risks associated with exposure to the HOUND agent.

The doctors determined that John and Lestrade were largely unaffected by the agent, no doubt because they had received the least exposure to the chemical. They predicted that I might be jittery and paranoid for a few days, but they were confident that there would be no long term damage. Henry, on the other hand, had had repeated exposures to the chemical. He responded to their tests of his reflexes, motor control, and memory quite poorly. The doctors were discussing which area hospital they ought to send him to, when Major Barrymore burst through the doors of the clinic wearing a triumphant grin and brandishing a large pill bottle.
“Ha! I knew our boys would figure it out!” he crowed, as he gave each of us two of the large pink pills. “You remember this new drug we’ll be testing on the rhesus monkeys next month? Turns out that it’s a new miracle antidote that the lads at Porton Down have developed for cases of mild to moderate exposure to incapacitating nerve agents. Just two pills, and you’ll be fine in under half an hour. Brilliant, simple brilliant.”

He handed each of us a small paper cup of water to wash them down. “Is anyone here on diabetes or thyroid medication?” he asked.

We all shook our heads, and swallowed our pills. “Why do you ask?” asked John.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” said the major. “Well, actually, the boys at Porton Down said that it’s such a powerful antidote it can render all sorts of medications ineffective. Especially those involved in hormone regulation, they said. Its effects shouldn’t last for more than a few days though, so I wouldn’t worry about it.”

I choked on my water.

*  

John drove Lestrade and I back to the Cross Keys in our rented Landrover. The two of them gleefully recounted their favourite parts of the case. They both noticed that I didn’t join them.

“You alright, mate?” John asked.


“A good meal will set you right. I think they had gnocchi on the menu.” Lestrade patted my shoulder from the back seat.

“I’ll just go to bed,” I said, winding my scarf even more tightly around my neck.

When we got back to the inn, I scrambled out of my seat and bounded up the steps to our room. I locked myself in the bathroom, and took a triple dose of my Omegarrest and Pherostol. Then I leaned against the door, panting and watching myself in the mirror.

A few minutes later, I hear a light tap at the door. “Sherlock? Everything okay in there?”

“Fine!” I snarled.

“Okay. Any chance I could use the loo?” John asked carefully.

“For god’s sake, use Lestrade’s!” I shouted. I heard the room door squeak open and close, and I let myself out of the bathroom. I left on my scarf, but I hung up my coat, and took my pyjamas from my overnight bag. I stripped off my suit and shirt, folded them and took a deep sniff of the collar areas to see if I could detect any traces of grapefruit or cherry blossoms. I was relieved that there was no omega smell whatsoever. Maybe the antidote wouldn’t counteract the effects of my heat suppressants and odour blockers after all. Maybe, like the doctors had predicted, I was just being jittery and paranoid.

I had a long, cold shower. When I let myself out of the bathroom, John was already in his single bed, fast asleep. I hung up my dressing gown next to my coat, but, just in case, I decided to leave my scarf on while I slept. If John asked the next morning, I would just tell him that I was cold.

I clambered into bed as quietly as I could. I didn’t want to wake John because I didn’t want to have
to explain my unusual behaviour that evening.

I slept for a few hours, but I was awoken before dawn by an all-too familiar feeling of fuzzy-headedness and clammy discomfort. For a panicked moment, I considered making a run for it and spending my heat alone on the moor. But there were far too many hikers and monster hunters around, and I knew that I would inevitably fall prey to some lucky alpha.

Could I call Mycroft, I wondered? But what could he do besides send in Lestrade? And if that happened, Lestrade would learn that I was an omega, and then he probably wouldn’t let me help on cases. Plus Lestrade was an alpha, and as I well knew, alphas can’t be trusted around omegas during their heats.

I slid down the door until I was sitting with my back against it, my knees drawn to my chest. I slid a hand down the front of my pants, and discovered that I was already beginning to self-lubricate. “Please no, please no, please no,” I whispered, running my other hand through my hair.

After a few minutes of hyperventilating, I stood up and unwound the scarf from my neck. The air of the bathroom was immediately flooded with my distinctive omega odour. “Pleathe no, pleathe no, pleathe no,” I begged. I stripped off my pyjama top and saw in the mirror that the scent gland on my neck was oozing fluid and my nipples were swollen and tender.

I stepped out of my pyjama bottoms and saw that my prick was standing to attention.

Feeling tears coming to my eyes, I leaned my head against the tiled wall, and gave it a solid punch with the side of my fist. While the rational part of my brain was horrified that there seemed to be no way for me to avoid giving away the secret of my gender, my omega biology demanded that I present myself to the strong, virile alpha sleeping on the other side of the door, and beg him to service me.

My punch to the wall must have echoed more loudly than I had expected, however, and a few seconds later I heard John knock softly on the door.

“Sherlock? Everything all right in there?” he mumbled sleepily.

“Yes! I just ate something that didn’t agree with me yesterday. Go back to bed,” my voice sounded almost hysterically cheerful.

“Phew! I know you can’t smell it, but there must be an omega going into heat somewhere in the inn,” John called through the door. “It’s really strong. Must be the chef.”

I sighed in resignation. “It’s not the chef, John,” I said miserably.

“No? Is there another omega staying here then? I didn’t notice any, but I suppose I’m not the world’s only consulting detective.” I heard him move away from the door. “Look, that smell is going to drive me nuts, so I’m going out for a walk. I’ll meet you at the picnic tables for breakfast, alright?”

“Wait, wait, John!” I said, slowly turning the lock. No turning back now. “D-don’t go.”

Chapter End Notes

Dialogue borrowed from the transcripts at Ariane DeVere’s Livejournal, as per usual.
Thank you all for your insightful comments, your appreciative kudos, and above all just for reading. I sincerely hope that you're enjoying where this story is going. I'll be making a few short-ish updates over the next few days.
I pushed the bathroom door open, and stepped onto the carpeted floor of the hotel room. I found that I just couldn’t look at John in the eye, so I stood there naked, my arms crossed around my boney chest, and my hard, leaking prick pointing straight at John. I heard him gasp.

“Jesus, Sherlock, you’re an – “

“An omega, yes,” I said, anticipating his question.

“H-how – “

“I take daily doses of highly illegal heat suppressants and over-the-counter alpha scent blockers. I’ve been doing it for well over a decade now.”

“Whe –“

“Mycroft gets them for me from a holistic chemist’s shop in Shoreditch.”

“Wh –“

“I just don’t want to live as an omega. My first –“ I paused. I was suddenly reluctant to tell John about the horrors of my first time. Not only did I have no desire to relive those terrible memories at that moment, I wasn’t sure how John would react to the news that I had been stupid enough to be caught outside during my heat, and that I was therefore a ruined omega. Poor John had to process enough shocking news that morning; the story of my past could wait. “I just don’t want to be an omega,” I whispered.

John was silent for a moment before clearing his throat. I was finding his smell quite distracting; I wondered if he was having the same problem. “So it was the antidote last night? It made your heat suppressant stop working?”

“Yep,” I said. I really didn’t know how to ask him for what I wanted – what I needed so desperately. We both stood there awkwardly, me staring awkwardly at my bare feet, him shuffling from side to side.

“So… so, you lied to me….“ John said quietly. I remembered what Mycroft had said about John’s psychiatric records. Without raising my head, I looked up at his face. His mouth was set in a thin, angry line; he was rubbing the back of his head with one hand, but his eyes were fixed straight at my cock.

“I’m sorry, John,” I whispered. There was another awkward silence.

“Listen, I can’t be here with all these pheromones – “ John started.

“John, wait. Please,” I started. Here goes nothing, I thought. “I’m in heat, and I’m two hundred miles from the box of sex toys I keep at my brother’s house. Could you – could you please – h-help me out?”

“You mean –“ John said roughly.
I nodded. John’s eyes darkened with lust.

“Oh, god, yes,” he growled.

* 

John stripped off his coat and jumper. “On the bed,” he commanded. I nervously clambered onto my own single bed. Sitting up against the headboard, I drew the duvet up to my chin in an unequivocal gesture of shyness. John kicked off his shoes, and tore off his shirt and jeans.

Though I was so tense I was shaking, a part of me was delighted that I finally got to see John’s body. He was lovely. Trim and neat. Not showy – no bulging muscles – but with a definite air of capability and confidence. There was a starburst shaped scar on his left shoulder; in places the skin was purple and stretched taut, in others it was lumpy and white. How I wished to run my fingers and tongue over it. To my surprise, on his upper right arm there was a faded tattoo of the RAMC caduceus. The banner below it read, “In Arduis Fidelis.” I decided that I liked it, though I understood why he now kept it hidden. Like all alphas he had a thick pelt of soft, almost fluffy hair on his chest – in his case a bright blonde colour that shone a brilliant gold in the early morning sunlight. It trailed in a crooked line down his tum and thickened again as it reached the elastic of his red briefs.

John pulled off his socks, but left his tight red pants on. They did little to disguise their contents. I tried to suppress my panic as I thought that… that would soon be inside me. John took the duvet from my hands and flung it to the side, exposing my naked body to him. I watched his face intently, trying to gauge his thoughts.

“God, you’re beautiful.” His voice was a deep, masculine rumble. He put one knee between my thighs and lay on top of me. Again a shiver of unease ran through my body, and again I forcibly shoved it aside. John kissed me then, mashing his lips against my tightly closed mouth. When he started running the tip of his tongue across the seam of my lips, I ducked my head away and to the side, feeling queasy and overwhelmed.

John noticed my uncomfortable reaction. “Sherlock,” he crooned, stroking the side of my face. “You’ve done this before, haven’t you?”

I paused, thinking about how much John needed to know at that moment. However, “Yes,” was all that I whispered.

“Good,” he grinned, turning my head towards him again. He tried peppering my lips with a series of gentle, tickly kisses, which I found far less intimidating. I soon parted my lips a tiny bit, and John responded by dipping his tongue into my mouth. At first I found it almost unbearably disgusting – it was so slimy and rough – and I almost gagged on it. However, I was determined to keep a tight control of my reactions, and in just a few minutes it began to feel much, much nicer. So nice that I began to mimic the stroking, dipping motion of John’s tongue with my own.

All too soon, John broke the kiss and turned his attention to the soft skin under my earlobe. I moaned and clutched at his shoulders as he nibbled and sucked there. John chuckled at my appreciative reaction, and then swiped his tongue down my neck towards my scent gland. I gasped as he ran the smooth underside of his tongue over the oozing, inflamed organ. “God, you smell delicious,” he growled between licks. I found myself arching my neck towards his mouth, my omega biology compelling me to offer myself as a mate to the magnificent alpha on top of me. John, however, kept his clever lips and tongue moving. I cried out and clutched at his hair when he suckled on my hard, tender nipples. I found myself grinding my entire body against John’s, reveling in the unfamiliar tickly-rough sensation of his body hair rubbing against my smooth, sensitive skin. I wrapped my ankles around his legs, and angled my hips so that the hard bulge in his pants was rubbing against
Suddenly, he sat back and said, “What’s this?” I opened my eyes, and saw that he was rubbing the skin around my left nipple. The scar left there so many years ago by the female alpha in the Library had long since faded to white, but John’s kisses and caresses had caused it to turn an ugly purple. To my dismay, the distinctive pattern of alpha teeth marks was clearly visible.

John sat up further and lowered his gaze to my flanks, where the old fingernail scars were once again visible. “And this?” He looked at me in the eye, “Christ, Sherlock, what sort of kinky shit do you get up to when I’m not around?”

“No, it’th not… it’th not like that,” I shook my head. God, I did not want to talk or even think about the Library when I was just starting to enjoy myself with John. “Pleathe. Just leave it,” I panted, and tried to pull a corner of the duvet over my torso to hide the scars from John’s sight.

“It’s alright. Don’t cover yourself up. I don’t mind them. I have scars too,” John smiled at me and flipped the duvet to the side again. I smiled back, but inside I began to dread what John might make of the scars on my genitals.

However, my thoughts were interrupted by John dipping his tongue into my navel. I let out a surprised squeak. He chuckled and dragged his tongue in a leisurely fashion down to the base of my penis, which was now as achingly hard as it had ever been. He nipped and kissed my hyphens for a few seconds, and then, with no warning whatsoever, took the entire length of my cock into his mouth and sucked hard. I made an unintelligible sound and grabbed his short trimmed hair in my fist. He chuckled, and began to bob his head up and down at a rapid pace, his tongue flicking over the frenulum with every pass. Then he dipped the fingers of his left hand into my dripping, gaping cunt, and began to slowly stroke its walls.

Since the onset of my heats over a decade earlier, I had gained extensive experience in pleasuring myself using whatever aids I have had available to me. But nothing I had ever done to myself could compare to what John did to me then. I felt my eyes roll back, and my knees curl up to hold John’s head in place. He laughed again, and that tiny vibration made me let out a low, choking moan. My hips squirmed and bucked as I desperately sought more friction, more stroking, more sucking.

Then suddenly he stopped and stood up. “A condom. Shit, I need a condom.” John frantically rifled through his overnight bag. I couldn’t help but stroke my penis and vulva as I waited for him to return. “Don’t you dare finish without me,” he ordered. I let out a pained whine in response.

“Got one,” he said, tearing into a foil package. Then John dropped his red briefs, and I finally got a look at his penis.

I’ve mentioned before that since that day in the Library I have found alpha penises to be absolutely repugnant and even somewhat frightening. They’re just so – so big! And when they’re hard, they’re covered in twisting, dark blue veins. And the knot at the base can only be described as grotesque and alien-looking. And they bob up and down with the alpha’s pulse, almost like they have a mind of their own. And they cause so much pain.

If I’m being honest, as much as I love John, that was precisely what I felt when I laid eyes upon his penis as he rolled the oversized alpha condom over its head and down its shaft. However, he didn’t seem to notice as he climbed back onto the bed, and slapped my hip.

“Over,” he ordered.

Oh. John wanted me on my hands and knees, in the traditional omega presentation posture. Captain
Watson really did like to be in charge then. Though I obeyed, my uneasiness returned in full force. I twisted my neck to the side so that I could keep an eye on John… and his massive, throbbing cock.

John knelt between my spread knees, stroking my buttocks and thighs. He paused at a particular spot on my inner thigh. I knew what he was looking at. “Here too, Sherlock?” He had found the ugly bite mark left there by the alphas in the Library.

Suddenly it was all too much for me, and I felt tears sting my eyes. John, however, did not see, as he was busy stroking my prick, while rubbing the head of his penis against the lips of my vagina. “Pleathe,” I sniffled. “Pleathe, John.” I felt myself pulling away from his touch.

“What – Sherlock, what is it?” he panted.

I looked over my shoulder at him. His eyes were glazed with passion. “Pleathe, John,” I couldn’t stop my voice from wobbling. “Pleathe don’t hurt me.”

John looked me in the face then, as I peered back at him with my eyes full of tears. He glanced down to my scarred genitals and then back up at me. His expression was a mixture of hurt and confusion. I longed to explain, but my thoughts were muddled by a mixture of fear and shame and heat-enhanced lust. So instead, I buried my face in the pillow beneath me and let out a pathetic, shuddering sob – though my bottom remained pointed in the air, my vagina still ready and eagerly waiting for John to fuck me.

I cried and cried – ugly, wet sobs – waiting for John to take me. But he didn’t. Instead, after a few seconds, I heard him mutter a curse and then the bed jerked as he got to his feet. I fell to my side and watched in openmouthed shock as he hurriedly pulled on his pants over his still distended cock, and finished dressing. He threw his pyjamas and shaving kit into his overnight bag, and finally turned to me, his expression tightly controlled, his left fist opening and closing. “John?” I whimpered.

“Right,” he said. “I’m going…. I’ll- I’ll see you in London. Be sure to lock the door.” And with that he left me.

*

That afternoon, my tearful masturbation and self-recrimination were interrupted by a soft knock at the door. “Hello in there? It’s me: Billy!”

“Billy the skull?” I asked – it had been such a crazy day already, surely anything was possible.

“Erm, no. Billy the chef. From downstairs?” Why is everyone named Billy, I thought, as I wrapped a towel tightly around my hips and unlatched the door. I opened the door a tiny crack and peered out. “Hi, it’s just me out here. Can I come in?” He smiled sadly at me, and I could see that he had a plate of sandwiches in one hand, and a plastic carrier bag in the other.

I was starving hungry, so I sniffled, “Alright,” and allowed him to enter. He set the plate on the side table, while I sat on the bed and wrapped the duvet around my waist to hide my erection. I noticed that his apple-y omega scent had a foul, rotten tang to it – a typical omega reaction to another fertile omega’s pheromones during heat.

“This is for you,” Billy said, holding the bag in front of me. I took it and saw that it contained a huge alpha dildo. “Your alpha asked me to pick up something for you. Told us that you’ll be indisposed for the week. That’s fine. Sometimes our heats just sneak up on us, right?” He gave me a sympathetic smile, which I tried to return.

“You can stay in here ‘til you’re done. Regular rate. Don’t worry; it’s the low season still. Just give
us a call in the bar if you’re hungry and I’ll put something together. And don’t you worry about alphas neither. After your alpha and the grey haired one left, there’ve been no more who’ve checked in. Gary promised that he wouldn’t let any other unbonded alphas stay as long as you’re here. And that’s a sturdy oak door besides.

“Thank you,” I murmured. “That’s very kind of you.” To my shame, I felt tears well up in my eyes at the thought of the innkeepers’ generosity. Damn omega hormones!

“Hey, hey now,” Billy whispered as he took a seat next to me on the bed, and curled a companionable arm around my back. I rested my own head on his shoulder, and allowed myself to take some comfort in this near-stranger’s kindness.

“If you don’t mind me asking,” he began. “Is everything alright between you and your alpha? Gary and I were talking about you. At first neither of us could detect which of you was the omega – couldn’t pick up the scent – and with you being in charge, we figured it was the little fellow. But we got that wrong. And now your alpha’s gone and left….” He trailed off.

“It’th – It’th complicated,” I sighed, swiping the tears away from my eyes.

“An omega’s life always is, eh?” Billy rubbed my shoulder soothingly.

I huffed a grim laugh and sniffled, “Yeah.”

Chapter End Notes

Seriously, how many characters on this show are named Billy? There’s Billy Wiggins, the chef at the Cross Keys is a Billy, the skull is apparently named Billy, and Sherlock himself is a William.
As I mentioned earlier, John and I first met Jim Moriarty during the case with the bombs and the pool, though he had been involved in some of the very first cases we had solved together as well. The first time we laid eyes on him was in Mike’s pathology lab at Saint Bart’s. In fact Molly introduced us.

I was using one of Mike’s fancy microscopes to analyze some shoelaces when Jim popped his head in the door. “Oh, sorry. I didn’t – “ he began.

“Jim! Hi!” Molly replied brightly. He looked wary, but Molly said, “Come in! Come in! Jim, this is Sherlock Holmes!” I glanced at him, preparing to dismiss him outright as I would virtually every other member of society. But then I noticed that there was something… off about him. As Molly introduced him to John, I found myself closely observing this Jim person, trying to deduce what was so unusual about him.

He was fine-boned and short; just a tiny bit taller than my John. His dark hair was cut short and gelled to within an inch of its life. He had long eyelashes and full lips. His deep vee t-shirt showed a large expanse of pale hairless chest, and his hips had an unusual shape to them, giving his stride a side to side sway that he tried to disguise by walking with his hands in his pockets. Finally his voice was soft and high-pitched, with a distinctive sing-song lilt to it. Though all the clues were there, I found myself refusing to believe what they were implying. It was only when I looked deep into his eyes that I knew I was right. For in his gaze I saw the same look of wary anger and defiant despair with which I too had regarded the world when I had first begun to disguise my gender.


“Sorry? What?” asked Molly.

“Erm, nothing,” I said, aware that I might have just given away a secret as big as my own. “Uh, that’s a mega… shirt…. By which I mean it’s good.”

“Thanks,” Jim said, eyeing me distrustfully. “Umm. Well, I’d better be off. I’ll see you at the Fox, ’bout sixish?” he said to Molly.

“Yeah,” she said, reluctant to have him leave. They said their goodbyes, then Molly rounded on me angrily, “What did you mean when you called him an omega?”

“Nothing,” I said. “I was just thinking out loud. About a case.” Molly accepted that, and returned to her morgue.

As soon as the door closed behind her, John chuckled, “Really? Do you seriously think that that guy is an omega? That Molly is dating an omega without knowing it? God, how would that even work?”

I shrugged, though I was absolutely sure that I was right.

* 

As I so often am, I was correct in my deductions.
Though the warning Moriarty gave me that night at the pool was vague – or at least too vague for John to pick up on – I left our encounter with the certain knowledge that the Consulting Criminal was warning me to both stop interfering with his criminal activities, and to not reveal his secret. “Do you know what happens if you don’t stay out of my business, Sherlock? If you don’t keep shutum with your clever deductions?”

“Oh, let me guess,” I replied. “I get killed.”

“Kill you?” Jim shook his head. “No. Don’t be obvious. I mean, I’m gonna kill you anyway some day. I don’t want to rush it though. I’m saving it up for something special. No, if you don’t stop prying into my life, I’ll burn you. I’ll burn the heart out of you.” I was taken aback by the bitter fury with which he said the latter. Here, I thought, was an omega who was as angry at his gender as I myself had once been. Though he was threatening to kill me, I couldn’t help but feel a bit sympathetic. As John and I left the pool that night, I found myself wondering how an omega could become the head of a criminal network. Surely his tale must have been as convoluted and interesting as my own. Though our meeting had been a troubling one, I was reassured by the fact that Moriarty had given no indication that he had figured out my own gender.

* 

However, as I mentioned earlier, I didn’t dwell on Moriarty’s warning for long. In fact the next time I gave him serious thought was shortly after I returned to London from Dartmoor.

I winced as I stepped out of the cab; a week using an over-large alpha dildo had left my genitals feeling delicate and raw. I quietly let myself in the front door, and saw Mrs. Hudson hoovering the hallway rug. I tapped on her shoulder, and she gave a start, then turned off the hoover so that we could talk.

“Is he upstairs?” I asked.

“Sherlock,” she said. “What happened? Where have you been? Why did John come home without you?”

I sighed, “He knows, Mrs. Hudson.”

“Knows what? Your secret?”

“Well… part of it. The important part. Is he home?”

“I think so. Oh, Sherlock, why did you decide to tell him?”

“I didn’t have a choice,” I shook my head sadly.

“Well, what’s done is done,” she tried to smile at me. “Look on the bright side: at least you don’t have to lie to him anymore.”

I grunted, well aware that I was still withholding important truths from John. “Depending on how things go, Mrs. H, I might drop by for tea later.”

“Anytime, poppet,” she kissed me on the cheek and resumed her hoovering.

I headed up to our flat, the sound of my ascent hidden by the hoover. I opened the sitting room door and paused when I saw John reading his paper with his back to me.

My poor, wasted heart twisted as I watched John sitting there, with his perfect military posture, his
compassionate eyes, and his cozy, cuddly jumper. During my week alone in the Cross Keys, I had had ample time to reflect on John’s and my… encounter. I was well aware that his refusal to have sex with me was uncharacteristic of an alpha – the vast majority of whom would have ravished a heat-addled omega regardless of the omega’s thoughts on the matter. That John didn’t either spoke of his unwillingness to take advantage of a vulnerable omega, or, rather worse, his total lack of attraction to me. I wished for the former to be true, but, in light of John’s low opinion of omegas, I rather suspected the latter to be more likely.

How I longed for John to look at me with kindness and forgiveness. To tell me that my being an omega wouldn’t change our relationship. To reassure me that that fact that I had been lying to him since the day we met wouldn’t make him trust me any less. Instead, when he noticed me watching him, his expression became guarded, and he returned his gaze to the newspaper. “Everything alright then?” he asked, his tone too bright and polite.

“Yes, thank you for telling the owners of the inn about my situation. They took good care of me.”

“Great. That’s just… great,” John’s eyes remained focused on his paper. I remained standing in front of him, watching him intently, trying to deduce his thoughts from his tense posture.

He managed to ignore me for a full thirty seconds, before he lowered the paper and growled, “I – You – Why did you lie to me for so long, Sherlock?”

“I’ve been lying to everyone, John. Well, almost everyone. I have to if I’m supposed to live as a beta.”

“But me too? I thought we were supposed to be… friends.”

“We were. I mean, we are!” I said. “John, please believe me: I am so sorry I didn’t tell you earlier. I just didn’t know how you’d react. Actually, judging by the way you did react – not to mention how you talk about omegas – that seems to have been a pretty valid concern.”

John hmphed at that. “But why, Sherlock? Why are you living as a beta? And why do you have all those scars? What sort of things do you get up to with other alphas? And if you’re into pain and bondage and all that, what was with your reaction to me? I was being pretty damn gentle with you when you freaked out.”

I sat down in my chair as I pondered my answer. “I presented late. Just when I was finishing my degree. I really wanted to complete it, so Mycroft came up with the plan to use heat suppressants and odour blockers to let me do just that.” That seemed to be enough information for now, I thought. I refused to answer John’s later questions. That could all wait for when our relationship was on an even keel again.

“So you assumed a false gender identity just to finish uni?”

“And so that I wouldn’t have to live as an omega. In case you haven’t noticed, John, an omega’s life isn’t all sunshine and rainbows.”

“It’s not so bad –“ John began.

I interrupted him, “It is, John. It really is.”

“Alright, so you hate omegakind – “

“I don’t hate omegas, John. Far from it.” I was starting to raise my voice. “I hate how omegas are treated. That’s why I take on the omega cases.”
John sighed and rubbed his hand over his face. “So all this time it’s been an omega haring about, chasing criminals all over London.”

“Yes. What of it?”

“It’s just… Is that safe?”

“It’s no less safe than when you thought I was a beta!” I snarled, annoyed that John would fall back on stereotypical gender roles after all we had accomplished together. “Omega or not, I still caught all those criminals.”

“Yeah, but omegas are… precious. Look, don’t get angry; it’s a compliment. But you shouldn’t be putting your life at risk like this.”

I was suddenly overcome with blind fury. “Don’t you – don’t you fucking dare,” I hissed through gritted teeth, “tell me what I should or shouldn’t do with my life! I do not need another bloody fucking alpha ordering me around! Alphas always think they know what’s best for omegas, but let me tell you that you know nothing – nothing! – about what omegas go through every day! About what I’ve gone through! The absolute hell that alphas like you have put me through. So don’t you fucking dare!” John blinked in surprise at my reaction.

Just then my phone rang. I took several calming breaths before answering it. It was the Daily Mail, calling to ask whether I wished to comment on a piece they had written about me, which was set to run in tomorrow’s edition. I hung up without answering. Which was my big mistake.

Chapter End Notes

Dialogue once again taken from the transcripts at Ariane DeVere's Livejournal.

I have two more chapters to give you today and tomorrow, and then I have to take a short break....
Omega? Oh my!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Daily Mail Online Edition

16 June 2011 - LONDON

Omega? Oh my! Hat Detective Hides Gender to Catch Crooks

By Kitty Riley

Have you ever wondered what famous London detective Sherlock Holmes hides under his deer-stalker hat? Turns out it’s omega curls! That’s right; the Daily Mail has learned that Sherlock Holmes is an omega. In a Daily Mail exclusive sources close to the detective explain that he has been concealing his gender since his uni days at Manchester University, where he went by Billy Holmes.

“That’s right,” a close friend says. “Billy and I were roommates in university. I was shocked to discover that he was an omega living as a beta. As soon as I found out, I told him that he had to come clean. That it wasn’t right, or legal, for an omega not to register itself with the Ministry of Health. But he wouldn’t listen.”

Compare this photo of the detective taken in 2010, with this photo of Billy Holmes from a fundraiser for the Man U Organic Chemistry Honours Society taken in 1998. Both photos clearly show the same individual.

When asked why Billy “Sherlock” Holmes insisted on concealing his gender even when his friends advised him against it, the anonymous source had this to say, “I don’t know for sure. He said he wanted to finish his degree, but he always had a lot of trouble finishing his schoolwork. He was an omega, you know; he just wasn’t that bright. I helped him a lot. As an alpha I saw it as my duty to take care of him.

“I actually think he liked to live on the edge. Maybe he liked a little danger. Omegas can be irresponsible, thoughtless in that way. Once he even went out during his heat. I warned him not to, but he didn’t listen. Got into a little trouble, but I think he liked it. Some omegas are like that. They like to put themselves in danger to tease poor unsuspecting alphas, and when it goes too far, they cry rape. I didn’t like that about him. That’s why we lost touch.”

The hat detective certainly seems to have retained his love of danger. Last year he rose to national prominence when he and partner, alpha Dr. John Watson, brought to an end a series of terrorist attacks in central London.

Though the anonymous source has lost touch with Billy Holmes, he had this to say about the detective’s relationship with the General Practitioner and former RAMC surgeon. “I’ll bet the two of them are way more than just partners. Watson’s an alpha, right? They must be bonded mates. That’s got to be why Billy wears that scarf all the time. To hide his bond mark. And I’ll bet it’s Watson who’s the brains behind the outfit. Like I said, Billy was never too bright. I reckon Watson solves the crimes, and lets his pretty, photogenic little omega take the credit. More chance they’d get their pictures in the paper then, right?”

These revelations do not come as a surprise to the men and women of London’s Metropolitan Police Service. Detective Sergeant Sally Donovan had this to say about the omega detective: “He’s always
been a weirdo. We thought it was because he was a sociopath, but now we know the truth. He pretends to use scientific means to solve cases, but it’s so obvious it’s just an act, and Watson has been telling him what to say.”

Scene of Crime Officer Philip Anderson agrees with DS Donovan: “This explains so much. Holmes is always overeager to work the omega cases, but he can’t remain objective. Tries to make us think that a straightforward omega suicide is actually a murder. I’m glad the truth has been revealed so that we can get back to solving crimes without being distracted by omega dramatics.”

This shocking news compels us to consider several important questions: First, how has Holmes been able to conceal his gender for so long? And was he using legal means to do so? Second, what does this imply for the investigations that were solved with the assistance of the omega detective? Will his previous expert court testimony be rendered inadmissible, thereby requiring dozens of criminals to be tried again? And, finally, will he be prosecuted for concealing his gender?

Prominent omega rights activist Lady Elizabeth Smallwood had this to say about Mr. Holmes: “Billy ‘Sherlock’ Holmes is a testament to what omegas can achieve given equal opportunities to pursue higher education. Not only did he complete a graduate degree in the hard sciences, he has made an important contribution to society. If the Omega Rights Now! Bill passes during the next session of Parliament, starting next year other young omegas will also enjoy the opportunity to attend select universities and pursue a wider range of career opportunities, just like Billy Holmes. I wish him and his mate Dr. Watson all the best. I am glad that young omegas everywhere have someone like Billy Holmes to look up to.”

Mr. Billy “Sherlock” Holmes could not be reached for comment.

Chapter End Notes

Just a quick chapter. I'll post two more tomorrow.

Thank you all for reading!
A phone call woke me early on the morning after my fight with John. My mobile played the Imperial March from Star Wars – my ringtone for my brother.

“What?” I croaked into the mobile.

“Sherlock, have you read the papers?” Mycroft sounded unusually panicked.

“I haven’t even gotten out of bed yet, Mycroft.”

“Well, there’s a piece about you in the Daily Mail, and they know you’re an omega.”

The phone fell on the floor with a clatter.

John watched me in silence from the kitchen table as I read and re-read both the online and print versions of the story. I ran my hands through my curls, and couldn’t help but groan anxiously.

“Can I help?” he said.

“I don’t – I don’t – I don’t know. We’ll see what Mycroft says. He’s better at planning than me.” My voice shook.

“Okay, but I want to help. I insist.”

“Why?” I asked in honest confusion. “Just yesterday you were angry that I had been disguising my gender.”

John cleared his throat. He hates talking about feelings more than I do. “Technically I was angry that you had lied to me,” his nose gave a one-sided twitch. “Still am angry about that, in fact. But…” he sighed, “That doesn’t change the fact that you’re my friend.”

I had never appreciated any gesture more than those few words of loyalty. Tears welled up in my eyes. “Thank you, John.”

Just then, Mycroft arrived. His eyes narrowed as he took in the tableau in front of him: Me crying, John patting my arm.

“Good morning, Sherlock, Doctor Watson. John, if you would be so kind as to let me speak to my brother in private, I would greatly appreciate it.”

“John knows,” I said.

“What does John know?” Mycroft asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Everything,” John said with a level gaze at Mycroft.

“Almost everything,” I corrected him.
John looked momentarily confused, but before he could ask what he didn’t yet know, Mycroft hoisted me out of my chair by my upper arm. I struggled, but there was no way that an omega like me could overpower a full-grown alpha. “Then I really do have to speak to my brother in private. Excuse us, John. We won’t be a moment.” Mycroft shoved me down the hallway to my bedroom, and closed the door behind us.

“I’m going to assume that John didn’t figure out on his own that you’re an omega. So explain to me why you told him”

“I didn’t,” I replied, sitting down on my as-yet unmade bed. “We went to Dartmoor for a case last week. Got exposed to some nasty incapacitating chemical agents at the Baskerville facility there. They gave us an antidote that stopped my pills from working.”

“So you went into heat?”

“Right there in the B&B, yes.”

“And John found out?”

“He’s an alpha, so, yes, my odour tipped him off… He – he knows I’m an omega, and he knows about how I disguise myself, and he knows that you help, but that’s all. I swear.”

Mycroft peered at me. He’s always been better at deductions than me, and he can tell when I’m fibbing, or even just withholding information, with no difficulty whatsoever.

“There’s more to it though, isn’t there?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” I said, looking down at my hands as they clutched nervously at my bedspread.

“What did John do when he found out? What was his reaction?”

“He was surprised, and was – is – annoyed that I lied to him. But we’re still friends,” I replied, determinedly looking Mycroft in the eye.

“I mean immediately after you told him, Sherlock. You were going into heat and John’s an alpha. What happened?”

“I… I don’t know what you mean….” I said lamely, looking down at my lap.

“Oh god, did you have sex with him?”

“No, not quite….” I said in a small voice.

“But you asked him to? Jesus, Sherlock I thought you said that you would never have sex again after what happened the first time? What changed?”

I couldn’t think of a reply, so I continued looking down at my lap. I felt tears beginning to well up in my eyes yet again. That week I cried more than I had in years.

Mycroft noticed this (of course he did) and out of the corner of my downcast eye I saw him glance back and forth between me and the closed door to the hallway, beyond which John sat waiting for us to finish our discussion.

Mycroft let out a groaning sigh, and sat down next to me.
“So you’re in love with him,” it was in no way a question.

“Uh huh,” my voice sounded watery.

“I should have known this would happen,” Mycroft grumbled. “Constant exposure to his alpha hormones has probably played havoc with your biology.”

“It’s not just omega biology, My,” I blurted out.

“How would you know?” Mycroft said. That little remark stung like a slap to the face, because it was true: at the time I had known nothing of love and very little of omega lust, so I had virtually no basis on which to compare my feelings towards John. “And does John feel the same way about you?” Mycroft asked.

“No,” I sniffled. “I thought he might. But then in Dartmoor I – I asked him to… you know. And he wouldn’t. If he was the slightest bit interested, he would have done it. So, no, he doesn’t feel anything for me but friendship. But that’s… fine. It’s all I wanted. Realistically, all I can handle.”

“He doesn’t deserve you,” Mycroft whispered, wrapping an arm around my shoulders. “Not one hair on your head.”

Suddenly desperate for physical affection, I leaned into my brother and tucked my head under his chin. He hugged me tightly while I cried unreservedly into his shirtfront. We stayed that way for a few minutes, until my sobs quieted into hiccups.

“As much as this thing with John hurts, Sherlock, it might make my plan easier to implement.” Mycroft said.

“You have a plan already?” I asked.

He did. Mycroft and I both agreed that the anonymous source could only be Victor Trevor, my ex-roommate. However, Mycroft did not believe that Victor would have shared his story with the Daily Mail, because he himself had given Victor a clear, stern warning to never again interfere with my life. Mycroft was confident that Victor understood the seriousness of the threat, so he must have shared his story with someone else, who had then sold it to the newspaper.

Home Office and MI6 records indicated that two months earlier Victor had visited Belgrade in Serbia, but since that time both agencies had lost contact with him. That was an interesting clue, for Mycroft knew of a single criminal network with extensive operations in all of the Eastern European countries where omegas enjoyed equal rights – the one run by the Consulting Criminal himself, Jim Moriarty.

I had previously told Mycroft all about my encounter at the pool with Jim, and my suspicions that he was a disguised omega. Mycroft had done some research, and found that an omega named James Moriarty had married Miki Bohaty-Potok, a Czech alpha and heir to a small crime syndicate specializing in human trafficking, in Belfast in 1996, and that the couple had relocated to Prague shortly thereafter. Miki had disappeared in 2005, and his widowed omega had taken control of the syndicate. In public Jim no longer dressed in feminine omega-style clothes, nor did he behave in a typical juvenile omega manner. It was perfectly understandable that a crime boss on the make would choose to present himself as a beta, as it would be difficult to gain the respect of underlings and competitors alike as an omega.

The omega crime boss quickly enlarged his small empire by diversifying its operations and intimidating its rivals (and various police services) in major cities across Eastern Europe. In 2010,
Moriarty returned to the United Kingdom in order to oversee the expansion of his empire’s operations in London, Manchester, Glasgow, and his hometown, Belfast.

Mycroft and I agreed that Jim must have given the story to the Daily Mail in order to discredit me so that I would be unable to continue disrupting his criminal activities – though how he got the story from Victor was anybody’s guess. We both suspected that Moriarty wouldn’t stop with just the newspaper article, however. Given his warning to me at the pool, we reckoned that Moriarty intended to have me killed to put an end to any lingering threat I might have posed to his growing empire. We anticipated that he might even arrange to make it look like I had killed myself, as my suicide in response to the outing of my gender would surely discredit anything I might have revealed to the police about Moriarty’s own gender.

We did not quite understand why Moriarty hated me so intensely; after all, there were dozens of police chiefs, Interpol agents, and shadowy bureaucrats (like Mycroft himself) who posed just as much a threat to Jim’s activities as I did. So why was I the focus of his hatred?

Mycroft and I plotted and planned for hours that day, devising responses to every move that Jim might make. We agreed that if he wanted me to die, that we would go along with that and fake my death. And then, while he was still in Britain reveling in his victory over me, I would travel in secret to Prague, where I would begin the long process of dismantling Moriarty’s empire. I would return to London only when his network had been utterly destroyed.

I didn’t like that part of the plan, but Mycroft didn’t seem to understand why I was reluctant to leave Mrs. Hudson, Mike, Molly, Lestrade, or especially John for an extended period of time. Nor was he particularly troubled by the emotional toll that my death – my suicide! – would have on my friends. “It will be fine. They’ll understand. If they love you, they’ll forgive you when you come home. You’ll see,” he said. But Mycroft has never had friends, so he doesn’t know what it means to truly miss someone or to hurt them so badly you fear they might never forgive you.

“But what about John?” I asked. “I don’t want to leave when things between us are still… up in the air.”

“What about John? Sherlock, you yourself said that he had made it perfectly clear that he wasn’t interested in you. At all. I know that sounds harsh – no, don’t look away – but maybe some time apart is what you need. So you can see your relationship with John a bit more objectively. Distance lends perspective, after all. And maybe you’ll see how foolish you’ve been to fall for an alpha who’s clearly only interested in beta women. And then when you get home you can move on with your life. Hmm?”

I said nothing in response. Though I knew that John didn’t feel about me the same way I felt about him, I knew I would still miss him. Badly.

We reluctantly agreed that there wasn’t much point in refuting the article’s claims that I was an omega or that I had once gone by Billy Holmes. After all my features hadn’t changed so much during my omega transformation that my former classmates at Man U wouldn’t recognize me. And there were a few individuals around the country who had certain knowledge that I was indeed an omega: Nurse Belinda and Doctor Fortwright at the Manchester Royal Infirmary, and, more recently, Gary and Billy in Dartmoor. “Well, never mind about that,” Mycroft shrugged. “It was a good plan while it lasted. I just couldn’t have anticipated that you would become so famous. Who would have thought that your little detective business would turn out to be a success?”

“But what’ll happen to me now that everyone knows that I’m an omega, Mycroft?” I asked worriedly.
Mycroft sighed and said, “Over the past dozen or so years, I’ve risen to a place of some importance in our government, Sherlock. Such that I am now capable of influencing legislation to an extent that I couldn’t have dreamed of when your gender first presented itself. So don’t you fret. While you’re gone I’ll see to it that the life you come back to is… reasonably rewarding. Maybe I’ll enlist the help of this Lady Smallwood quoted in the Daily Mail article. I think that she and I could be useful to each other.”

*

We exited my bedroom late in the afternoon. John had fallen asleep in his chair, but woke when he heard us enter the kitchen.

“So what’s the plan?” John asked.

“Not sure yet,” I lied. “We have to wait until Moriarty reveals himself. In the meantime I have to do some research at Saint Bart’s. And Mycroft has to go to the office.”

“It’s Moriarty?” John asked.

“Of course it’s Moriarty,” Mycroft replied, shrugging on his blue overcoat.

“Well, what about me? What am I going to do?” said John.

“John, you have the most important job of all. You’re staying here to look after Mrs. Hudson,” I said while slapping John’s shoulder.

“I am not!” John retorted. “If Moriarty is out there plotting revenge on you, I need to be there to take care of you.”

“I have taken care of myself for years, John,” was my withering reply. “Just because you finally found out that I’m an omega, doesn’t make me any less capable of doing so.”

“I know. Sherlock, I do understand that. I – I just want to help. Not because you’re an omega, but because you’re my friend.”

John’s heartfelt response crumbled my resolve. I was just half a second away from telling my brother that I just couldn’t go through with the plan, that I couldn’t inflict that kind of pain on John, when Mycroft nudged me with his umbrella. “Come on,” he said. “Time to go. This really is for the best.”

I nodded, and then gripped John in a tight hug. I committed the feel of his small, sturdy body locked in my embrace to the highest, most secure shelf in the John Gallery of my Mind Palace.

“What – what’s this for?” John gave a small laugh, before returning the hug. I would have loved to stay wrapped in his strong arms forever, but Mycroft cleared his throat, indicating it was time to leave.

“John, there’s something I need to tell you,” I started.

Mycroft shook his head and said, “Why, Sherlock? What difference can it make at this point? Come on, we’ve got to hurry.”

“But –“ I started.

“If you’re in a hurry, whatever it is you want to say will keep until you get home, right?” John smiled at me with his old gentle, trusting smile. I decided that I would much rather remember that smile than
the look of shock and disgust that would inevitably come from my telling him about how I was
ruined in the Man U Library.

“Right,” I smiled tightly at him.

In the back seat of Mycroft’s new Jaguar, I texted Moriarty using a phone number I had taken from
the contacts list on Molly’s mobile: “Come and play. Bart’s Hospital rooftop. -SH”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for comments, kudos, and reading! There is one more chapter to post
today, and then I need to take a break for a couple of days.
’Hat Detective Commits Suicide After Omega Status Revealed.’ I read it in the paper, so it must be true.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning for character death.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I received two texts from John while en route to Saint Bart’s. The first read: “Mrs. Hudson is fine. Can’t understand why you think she’s under threat. Sure you don’t need my help?” The second read: “Dammit Sherlock. I want to help. Let me help!” So far, that part of the plan was working perfectly.

I opened the heavy fire door and stepped out onto the hospital roof. Mycroft and I had chosen this location for my confrontation with Moriarty both because I was familiar with the layout of the hospital – which would help in the event that I needed to make an escape – and because its height suited our plan to fake my death.

Moriarty sat on the ramparts waiting for me. He was dressed in a Westwood suit and Kooples overcoat.

“How anyone could mistake such an impeccably turned out man for anything but an omega is beyond me.” I remarked.

“I could say the same thing about you,” he replied with a sharkish grin.

“How did you find out about my secret?” I asked. “I assume you found Victor in Serbia.”

“He found me, actually. I put out a call for information on Sherlock Holmes amongst the criminal classes of Europe, and he was only too eager to tell me his story. Your story.”

“Is Victor one of your minions then? I’ve wondered what happened to him.”

“That alpha low-life? The coward who was so scared of your big brother he wouldn’t set foot in Britain? No, no, no, no, nooo. As soon as he told me your sordid tale I killed him. Believe me, the world is better off with one less alpha like him.”

“Oh,” I said, feeling both grateful and strangely disappointed that that was all the justice Victor would ever receive. I felt the vibration of a text alert in my pocket. I had no doubt it was John, but I dared not answer it.

“You’re welcome,” Jim shrugged. “Now, shall we finish the game? One final act. Glad you chose a tall building. Nice way to do it.”

“Do it? Do – do what?” I was still thinking about Victor. “Yes, of course. My suicide.”

“’Hat Detective Commits Suicide After Omega Status Revealed.’ I read it in the paper, so it must be true. I love newspapers.”

“Why would you do this to me?” I asked. “Can’t you see how much you and I have in common? How little either of us stand to gain from having our genders revealed?”
“We have nothing in common, Sherlock. I mean, Billy.”

“We’re both –“ I started.

“Nothing in common that we have any choice over. You’re on the side of the alphas, you see?”

“I’m what?” I was taken aback by that statement. It was patently ridiculous: I was more aware than anyone of the harm that alphas could inflict on omegas, either on purpose or simply by disregarding their welfare. And with three exceptions – these being Lestrade, my horrid brother, and John, who was once again texting me – I had no love for alphas whatsoever.

“Think about it, doofus! All the laws that you try to uphold? Those were all made by alphas to protect their own interests. Not yours, not mine, not any omega’s. The British legal system doesn’t even recognize us omegas as persons, and yet you risk your life in its defence.”

That argument caught me wrongfooted. “I- I don’t catch criminals to protect the legal system. I do it to give omegas justice. Without me, so many crimes against omegas would go uninvestigated and unpunished. And – and what’s so noble about what you do? How does a criminal network benefit omegas?”

“It benefits at least one omega: me. And plenty more besides. You see, Sherlock, there are a lot of smart but underappreciated omegas in the world. What they can’t achieve in the law-abiding world, I give them a chance to attain working for me. I’m probably one of the only equal-opportunity multinational firms in Europe.”

“A criminal empire run by omegas –” I began.

“- For omegas.” Jim finished. “So, you see, Sherlock. That’s why you have to die. You’re a traitor to your gender. You use your cleverness to defend a system that oppresses your fellow omegas. It’s unconscionable. So come on then. Off you pop.” He gestured at the ramparts beside us.

“And if I refuse? Refuse to disgrace and discredit myself like that? What will you do then? Shoot me?”

“No, no, no. Let me give you a little extra incentive. Your friends will die if you don’t.

“John.” I gasped.

“Not just John,” Moriarty’s voice became a sinister whisper. “Everyone.”

“Mrs. Hudson?”

“Everyone.” He grinned madly.

“Lestrade?”

“Three bullets, three gunmen, three victims. There’s no stopping them now, unless my people see you jump.” I was surprised that Jim didn’t count my brother among the people who would be murdered. Perhaps he underestimated the depth of our brotherly feelings towards each other. Or perhaps murdering a senior bureaucrat who was constantly surrounded by bulletproof glass and armed bodyguard was simply infeasible.

“You can have me arrested,” Moriarty leered. “You can torture me. You can do anything you like with me, but nothing’s going to prevent them from pulling the trigger. Your only three friends in the world will die unless – “
“— Unless I kill myself,” I gulped.

“Before you do though,” Moriarty said thoughtfully. “There’s something I’d like to know…” I looked at him quizzically.

“What did you do to the babies?” My stomach did an uncomfortable flip. Despite all of our calculations, Mycroft and I had never anticipated that Moriarty would ask that.

“Babies?” I repeated in a choked voice. I felt another text alert.

“Yeah, babies. Don’t pretend you don’t know what I mean. Your pal Victor told me that the morning after he and those other alphas had it off with you, your own brother let it slip that your heat had stopped. We’re all grown omegas here; we all know what it means when a heat stops early.”

I was confused about the direction our conversation was going. Of all the things Moriarty could ask me, why would he care about my lost babies? “I- I took morning-after pills. They… brought it off.”

“Naughty, naughty, Sherlock. So few ruined omegas get the chance to end their pregnancies and hide their shame. How many were there?”


“How many did you have?” I asked casually.

He glared at me in sudden rage. “How did you - ?” I shrugged. Moriarty took a deep breath and very quickly recited, “Over the years: twenty-three. Four in the first litter, named Cecilia, Arthur, Julia, and Peter. Five in the next: Aiden, Lewis, Eileen, Angus, and Gwen. Five again in the third: Paulette, Francesca, Enda, Bree, and little Karen. Six in the fourth litter: George, Mark, Janice, Ian, James, and Leigh. Three in the last litter. But I didn’t get to name them before they were… taken.” He whispered the last word.

“Where were they taken?” Though this man was a dangerous lunatic bent on killing me, my heart throbbed in sympathy for him.

He shrugged, “I don’t know,” he whispered. “Miki – my husband – sold them. Sold them all before they were even a month old. I got pregnant after he caught me outside during my heat, and my family alpha forced him to marry me at gunpoint. But he never cared for me; in fact he hated me because he thought I had trapped him deliberately. His – his dad ran a human trafficking ring. Sold omegas and children like they were farm animals. People pay top dollar for pups from an alpha-omega pairing, you know. They made a lot of money off of me. And there was nothing I could do about it. No police station in County Antrim or all of the Czech Republic would take my statement without my husband present…. So after the last time – when they wouldn’t even let me hold them, not even once just to look at them and smell them – I killed him. Bleach in his morning smoothie – fitting for an omega, don’t you think?”

I nodded, well aware that that was a common way for omegas to commit suicide.

“I took over the family business. Brought an end to the human trafficking, and moved into other fields…. Tried to find my babies, but none of the buyers ever used their real names. So…” He trailed off and looked out over the rooftops of London.

Jim cleared his throat and looked me in the eye again, “Bless you, Sherlock.” He held out his hand for me to shake. “I should have known that you’d understand. I’m glad I was able to tell someone that before –“ he trailed off.
“Before what?” I asked quietly, shaking his hand.

“Before I do what I should have done when I found out I was pregnant the first time.” I tilted my head in confusion. Moriarty removed a handgun from his pocket, stuck it in his mouth and pulled the trigger. The blast took the back of his skull off, and the little omega collapsed, an odd, relieved smile on his face.

I dropped his limp hand, suddenly acutely aware that even with Moriarty out of the picture, there were still three gunmen out there waiting for me to jump. I texted Mycroft the code word “LAZARUS.” Time to put our plan into motion.

I stepped to the edge of the hospital roof, just as a taxi pulled up on the other side of the ambulance garage below me. John got out and began running around the building. I smiled to myself. I knew my John wouldn’t sit idly by while I was in danger. Though Mycroft didn’t believe that I could count on him to behave so predictably, I was confident that as soon as he had Mrs. Hudson safely in the care of the Metropolitan Police, he would come to the hospital to help me. And here he was.

I called his mobile number, and watched as he paused to answer the call. Beneath me, I saw a small group of people heave a large blue fire rescue airbag into position on the pavement behind the ambulance stand.

“Hello?” John answered his phone.

“John,” I said, well aware that this was likely to be our last conversation for a long time.

“Hey, Sherlock, you okay? I left Mrs. Hudson with Sergeant Dimmock—” John was getting too close to the corner of the ambulance stand.

“John, turn around and walk back the way you came just now!” I said urgently.

“No, I’m coming in,” he said in confusion.

“Just do as I ask. Please!”

John picked up on the pain and urgency in my voice and obediently stopped, “Where?” he asked.

“Stop there. Okay, look up. I’m on the rooftop,” my voice quavered as I began to comprehend the pain I was about to inflict on John. Though I understood that he would never love me the way I loved him, we were still great friends. And even though I had lied and lied to him, that hadn’t stopped him from rushing to Saint Bart’s to protect me. Such was the depth of his loyalty. And how was I about to repay that loyalty?

John looked up to the hospital roof, “Oh God.”

“I – I – I can’t come down,” I stammered. “So we’ll just have to do it like this.”

“What’s going on?” John asked. I could tell from the way he shifted restlessly from foot to foot that he wanted nothing more than to run up the four flights of stairs between us and pull me off the ledge.

“An apology,” I said tearfully.

“What? What for?” he asked.

“For lying to you. For lying to everyone… about being an omega.”

“I know you’re sorry. You told me yesterday. It’s fine. It’s absolutely fine. Now just get off that roof,
Sherlock!” He shouted it in a loud, authoritative alpha voice. I felt my chin dip and my eyes fill with submissive tears.

“I can’t… I can’t live as an omega, John.”

“I know. Just come down and we’ll figure something out. You and me and Mycroft. Alright?”

“And – and I’m sorry everyone thinks you’re my mate, John. I know you don’t want that.”

“Shut up, Sherlock. Shut up. Look, I’m coming in now.”

“No, stay exactly where you are. Don’t move!” My voice sounded frantic.

“Alright,” said John placatingly. “I’m not moving.”

“Keep your eyes fixated on me. Please. Will you do this for me?”

“Do what?” From the rooftop I could see how badly John wanted to rush inside the building to save me from my own omega recklessness.

“That phone call. It’s – It’s my note. It’s what omegas do, don’t they? Leave a note?”

“Leave a note when?” I could hear John’s voice fill with dread.

“Goodbye, John.” I whispered, taking the phone away from my ear. I prayed to any power that might be listening that that wouldn’t be the last thing I ever said to John, the man I had come to think of as the love of my life, regardless of how little he thought of me in return.

“No! Don’t!” I heard John’s voice coming from both the phone and the alleyway below. I dropped my mobile next to Moriarty’s corpse. “No! Sherlock!” John’s shout echoed up to me.

Centering myself above the blue airbag, I spread my arms in the manner Mycroft had explained would best slow my descent, and jumped. Four storeys is a lot higher than it looks, but I landed safely and stumbled off the airbag, where one of Mycroft’s legions of assistants was waiting to daub my head with fake blood. I pushed a squash ball under my armpit and settled myself on the pavement just as John struggled around the corner of the ambulance stand. He rushed to my side, shoving aside passersby.

“I’m a doctor, let me come through. Let me come through, please.” His voice sounded thick and choked. “He’s my friend. He’s my friend. Please.”

John grabbed my wrist, searching for a pulse that would not appear thanks to the squash ball cutting off my circulation. It occurred to me then and there that, despite everything that he and I had been through together, this was the first time John had held my hand. The first time anyone I loved had held my hand in fact. It was so typical, so fitting for my miserable, unlucky life that I would pass such an important milestone in such a horrible manner.

“Jesus, no. God, no.” Someone flipped me over and I was able to see the look of shock and disbelief on John’s face. A look that Mycroft and I had purposely put there. Why, why would I listen to my socially inept brother’s opinions on personal relationships? Talk about the blind leading the blind!

Then someone picked me up under the shoulders, deposited me on a stretcher, and that was the last time I saw John for two years.
Dialogue taken from the transcripts at Ariane DeVere's Livejournal.

There! It's been a marathon writing session over the past couple of days. Now I need to take a break and finish some things in real life (If such a thing exists anymore). Thanks for reading! -- your friendly neighbourhood Cuddlefish
He’s got on with his life, even if you haven’t

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I spent one year, eleven months, nineteen days, twenty one hours, and twelve minutes working to bring down Moriarty’s criminal network. I started in Minsk (the first time I had been there for real), then moved on to Kiev, Odessa, Chisinau, Bucharest, Varna, Budapest, Warsaw, Munich, Salzburg, Prague, Zagreb, Sarajevo, and finally Belgrade. It wasn’t that difficult to bring down his empire. Scratch that: it wasn’t that difficult for Sherlock Holmes. Also because, without Moriarty’s terrifying presence, the network had lost some of its ability to use coercion to coordinate the actions of its members, and it had a much more difficult time fending off rival gangs through intimidation.

Perhaps ironically, I found that the easiest part of the whole mission was operating in countries where omegas like me did not have equal rights. I could go to a party, pour poison in a local blackmailer’s wine, and, after she died, leave without ever being questioned by the police. All I would have to do was start crying and join the crowd of hysterical omega partygoers who were given shock blankets and cups of tea before being shepherded to waiting taxis. Simple!

For the most part the omegas who had taken over Moriarty’s syndicate were indeed formidable opponents. Moriarty had chosen his lieutenants well; the ones I dealt with had spent their lives being oppressed and mistreated. Consequently, they were embittered and had a real taste for cruelty and revenge.

I underestimated their physical prowess, I admit. I had assumed that with my advantage in height and the experience I had gained fighting London’s criminals, defeating omegas in hand-to-hand combat would pose no challenge to me whatsoever. I couldn’t have been more wrong. For what they lacked in size and strength, they more than made up for in discipline and skills in a martial art called Smert Udar Dlya Malenky Omegi, which had been developed during the Cold War especially for omega assassins. I was lucky to escape with my life from no fewer than four omega brawls. I would love to recount those stories in much greater detail, because they were quite exciting, but I know that you would prefer to hear about how I eventually returned to John. (It’s all John, John, John, with you people, isn’t it? I don’t see why. I am loads more interesting.)

I missed John most desperately. I spent many a long night going through my memories of him again and again and again. And wondering what he was doing at that very moment. Was he still living at Baker Street with Mrs. Hudson? Was he still working at the same dodgy clinic? The only one that didn’t seem to care when he showed up to work two hours late with a black eye and broken knuckles from beating up a crook who had taken a swing at me? Did he have another horrible beta girlfriend, or, worse, a new best friend? Had he forgiven me for lying to him? Did he miss me at all?

Anyway, my journey back to London (and John) started in Belgrade. I had finished my final task of framing a small gang of drug dealers loosely affiliated with Moriarty’s network for murder – actually in much the same manner as I had with Big Frank, all those years ago – and I had decided to visit an omega doctor whose office was located on Vojvode Stepe. It was the first time I had visited a clinic since I gave up drugs, and the first time that I had had a doctor check my omega parts since my week in the Manchester Royal Infirmary. I wasn’t worried about anything in particular: my heats generally work like clockwork, and I was feeling fine, but I figured that I might as well take advantage of being in a country where omega health care isn’t held back by a narrow-minded, backwards medical establishment.

The clinic doctor – herself an omega, I was glad to see – did a thorough physical examination,
including an internal exam. I waited while my tests were processed, and then she called me into her office to discuss my results. She made note of several medical issues: I was underweight, for one. Well, that was to be expected. Without John or Mycroft making sure I was eating, I sometimes went days without food. I promised that I would eat more healthily – and I fully intended to once I got back to England. She was also concerned about the scars – some old and some very new, some made by knives, others clearly by teeth and nails – all over my body.

She said, “You should avoid the company of alphas that do not treat you well. You know that you are under no obligation to spend your heats with alphas that do not treat you with respect.”

I was momentarily surprised that she said that: a British doctor would never have advised an omega to avoid the company of unkind alphas. In England, alpha violence was seen as unavoidable for omegas.

Then she said, “You have scars on your omega parts.”

“Yes,” I said. “I was attacked when I was younger.” I was not reluctant to confide in this open-minded doctor.

“No, I mean inside. In the uterus.”

“What?” I said. “H-how?”

“It is a common side-effect of synthetic narcotic use. Did you ever use methadone?”

“Y-yes, I did. For several months. But a long time ago.” I couldn’t stop my voice from shaking.

“Methadone is a very harsh drug. Omegas are strong, but their omega parts are delicate.”

“Oh, I thought that omega weakness was all a myth –“

“Not entirely,” the doctor said sadly. “I am afraid, sir, that the scar tissue is extensive enough that it is unlikely that you would be able to carry a litter to term…. I’m very sorry.”

“No, no, that’s fine. I – I never wanted pups anyway,” I said, giving her a brave smile. “Are y-you sure? I mean my heath h-haven’t changed at all….” I had no idea why I was stammering and lisping; this was no reason to be upset. Really, it changed nothing.

“Heat hormones have very little to do with the health of the uterus…. If you and your partner were hoping for children, there are many other ways to go about doing it. Adoption, for one. Or a surrogate. Your ovaries are fine, you know. Though you are in your late thirties now. If you are thinking of having children, you should start working towards that very soon.”

“No, I – I don’t want k-kidth. I never did. Thith – thith ith g-good nwuth.” I said, standing up.

“I’m sorry,” she concluded, giving me a sad smile.

I left the clinic deep in thought. I couldn’t figure out why I was so… upset: why my throat was tight, why my eyes felt hot, why my lips wouldn’t stop trembling. I never wanted children! Ever! I had aborted seven perfectly healthy fetuses! Surely I would never have done that if I had ever, ever wanted babies.

And yet I couldn’t deny it: my omega biology was screaming in anguish that it would never, ever get the chance to fulfill its purpose. That was to be expected. But there was a tiny part of my rational mind that was also… disappointed.
However, my reflections were interrupted by someone pulling a burlap sack over my head, and shoving me into a white van.

*

I’m not entirely sure where they took me, or how long I was there. I knew that the people standing guard over me were Serbian military police – betas mostly – but my torturers were omegas. (Of course they were; there are no crueler, more vengeful people on earth than omegas, I had learned.) I think that the small-time drug dealers I had framed for murder must have had some important friends in the Serbian army, and that those army commanders had had me picked up in retribution for the harm done to their friends. It was clear that all they were after was revenge; they didn’t ask me any questions about my activities or my connections to the British government. All they wanted was to hurt me.

I endured at least several days of their hospitality, when I overheard two of my torturers talking excitedly about a handsome new alpha colonel who had been posted to their facility. To their delight, he had freckles and bright red hair, which they apparently found both exotic and cute. And one of their colleagues had noticed that he was unbonded and unmarried. Though I had largely remained silent throughout various rounds of torture, I couldn’t help but let out a groan at that. It couldn’t be! It just couldn’t…. Could it?

That evening, the new, red-haired colonel demanded to speak to the English prisoner alone. My omega torturers were only too glad to acquiesce to his request, even if it flew in the face of their own security regulations. He closed the door of my cell behind him and greeted me in flawless Serbian. As soon as I heard his deep but soft voice, I knew it was him. “Hello, Mycroft,” I smiled.

*

We escaped Serbia in an SAS Eurocopter Dauphin, and caught a VC10 from RAF Nordhorn to RAF Northolt, just west of London. Mycroft was eager to show off all the legislative changes he had helped push through since I had been gone. He nattered on and on throughout the helicopter ride, while we were waiting to board the transport plane, through the whole flight to England, and the whole way to his Marsham Street office. He had to pause while I was taking a shower, but he started right back up again when his barber started hacking away at my overgrown omega curls.

He had indeed been a busy bee. Lady Elizabeth Smallwood acted as the public face of his campaign to improve the lives of omegas, but everyone in the British government knew who had been calling the shots. Not only did omegas now enjoy the right to take math and science classes in British secondary schools, they could attend certain universities as well – though in many cases, their classes would be segregated from alphas. (This seemed to be a necessary compromise to protect omegas from the unwanted attention of their classmates.) Just as significantly, the NIH was now barred from discriminating against omegas, and if British doctors wanted to refuse to prescribe medications to omegas, they had to demonstrate that studies had proven that those medications were more harmful to omegas than they were to betas and alphas; this assumption could no longer be taken on faith. Since studies of this sort were few and far between (though there was one showing clearly that Methadone use led to internal scar tissue formation, I later learned) this meant that omegas now had access to all sorts of prescription medications, including hormone blockers like Omegarrest.

“And now that Omegarrest is available, it’s only a matter of time before we’ll make it illegal to discriminate against omegas in the workplace. So by next year, or the one after at the latest, we’ll be able to introduce an amendment to existing human rights legislation saying that omegas are legal persons, with all that that entails.” Mycroft grinned from behind his desk. “Oh, and that ridiculous, alpha-sponsored Access to Alcohol Bill will pass in the Spring Session too, I should think.”
It was clear that Mycroft wanted me to thank him for all the effort he had gone to on my behalf, but I was tired (his constant chattering had prevented me from napping on the plane or in the car) and all I really wanted to hear about was John. So all I did was grunt in acknowledgement.

‘A small 'thank you’ wouldn’t go amiss,” Mycroft frowned.

“What for?” I rolled my eyes tiredly.

“What for? For wading in and rescuing you just now, you stupid boy. And more importantly for changing British laws so that you won’t have to disguise your gender anymore.”

I shrugged and said, “And what about John Watson?”

“John?” Mycroft looked at me incredulously. “Seriously? Two years away and all you want to hear about is the alpha who rejected you? Honestly, Sherlock, I don’t know what you see in him.”

Mycroft never would understand the depth of my feelings towards John – indeed I myself had trouble understanding them sometimes – but the fact remained that two years away from John had done nothing to dampen my affection. I loved John. With my whole heart. It was really that simple.

“Mmmm. Have you seen him?” I asked as I dressed myself, careful not to stretch the scabbed over wounds on my back.

“Oh yes, we meet up every Friday for fish and chips.” Mycroft growled sarcastically. His nose really was out of joint that I was unimpressed with the policy changes he had implemented. His assistant handed me a folder. I opened it to discover several surveillance photos of John, one of which featured a very unfortunate mustache. “I’ve kept a weather eye on him, of course,” said Mycroft. “You haven’t been in touch at all to prepare him?”

“No,” I said. “I think I’ll surprise him. He’ll be delighted!”

“You think so?” Mycroft asked skeptically.

“I’ll pop into Baker Street. Who knows? Jump out of a cake.” I straightened the suit jacket Mycroft had purchased for me. It fit rather loosely. I had indeed lost a lot of weight.

“Baker Street? He isn’t there anymore.” Mycroft scoffed. “Why would he be? It’s been two years. He’s got on with his life, even if you haven’t.”

“What life? I’ve been away.” I asked, fixing my collar. It too fit loosely. “Where’s he going to be tonight?”

“How would I know?” Mycroft rolled his eyes.

“You always know.” I said, giving my newly trimmed curls a good fluffing.

Mycroft sighed, “He has a dinner reservation in the Marylebone Road. Nice little spot.”

“I think maybe I’ll just drop by.”

“You know, Sherlock, it is just possible that you won’t be welcome.” Mycroft said seriously. “John… might have other plans for the evening.”

I rolled my eyes, took my beloved coat, and left my brother’s office. He knew nothing of friendship. Or love – indeed, thanks to his rotten advice, I had spent the last two years away from John – so he had no business advising me on either.
I strolled in the front door of the Landmark Hotel’s restaurant at eight-fifteen, and scanned the tables searching for John. I saw him at a corner table in a dark suit and tie. He had a few more wrinkles, and his mustache looked frankly ridiculous, but other than that he was unchanged from the last time I had seen him outside of Saint Barts. I felt my heart throb at the sight of him. Any fears that I might have had that two years apart would have cooled my ardour for him were demonstrably, obviously unfounded. I took a deep, steadying breath. Though my first inclination – and the one preferred by my omega biology – was to run up to John, climb in his lap, and beg him to mark me, I decided that a more clever re-introduction was called for.

Taking in the tuxedoed waiters, a man in a bow tie, a pair of spectacles resting on a menu, and an eyeliner pencil in an open purse, I devised a plan in an instant. I quickly gathered the elements of my disguise, fit the bow tie around my collar, placed the specs on my nose, and used the eyeliner to draw a skinny mustache on my upper lip. While I was occupied with that, I failed to notice a beta woman sit down in the chair across from John. Consequently, when I walked up behind John and asked him, “Can I help you, sir?” I was taken by surprise when she responded, “Yes, we’d like a bottle of champagne. We’re celebrating and we’d like something special. What do you recommend?”

I looked up at the woman. She was clearly dressed for a special occasion… and, come to think of it, so was John. Then I saw the red velvet box on the table between them. The empty red velvet box.

“Who – who are you?” I asked her. My voice came out choked and whispery.

“I’m Mary,” she replied with a confused smile. “Who are you?”

Chapter End Notes

Alright, this time I mean it. In 17 minutes I am leaving for the airport, so it will be a few days at least before you get the next chapter.

As always, dialogue taken from Ariane DeVere's Livejournal.

Thank you all for reading!
“Th-herlock,” I replied in a shaky voice. “I’m Therlock.” I stared at the woman – Mary, I think she said – momentarily forgetting John. She was about forty years old, with pale blonde hair, and mischievous green eyes. At a glance I could tell that she was a cat person, that she baked her own bread, that she was a disillusioned Lib-Dem, and that she was short-sighted, though she refused to wear glasses. But mostly my attention was focused on the recently cleaned diamond ring on her finger. From the 1940s style, I could tell it was probably a Watson family heirloom – most likely John’s grandmother’s. Undoubtedly it was an engagement ring. I felt dizzy and sick.


I continued staring at her, my mouth hanging open, a wine list crushed between my fingers. My clever plan to surprise John was totally forgotten.

“Oh my god, oh my god. Do you have any idea what you’ve done to him?” she nodded at John, who was struggling to his feet, his eyes wide with disbelief. John and I stared at each other, both of our mouths hanging open. My mind was totally blank. Then John’s expression changed from shock to anger, and he banged the table with his fist. I jumped; the flatware jangled loudly, and conversations around us came to a halt.

“Two years….” John growled. I felt tears prickle my eyes, and I began to shake submissively.

“John, I –“ I started, my voice a wobbly peep.

“Two years!” John’s voice became a furious alpha snarl. “I thought you were dead.” He stepped towards me, his hands clenched into fists.

I stepped backwards, and my chin ducked to my chest. I took off the borrowed spectacles so that I could wipe away the tears. “John, plea the litchen,” my voice squeaked childishly. “I – I had to m-make you think I wath dead. Otherwithe Moriarty’th people would kill you. I didn’t want to – “

John took another step towards me. Mary must have noticed John’s alpha temper peaking, because she stood up and rested a hand on his arm, saying, “It’s alright, John. John? Just keep cool….”

John ignored her. I backed away from him another few steps. I was too frightened to look John in the eye, so I kept my gaze fixed on the crumpled wine list in my hands, saying, “It’s alright, John. John? Just keep cool….”

John ignored her. I backed away from him another few steps. I was too frightened to look John in the eye, so I kept my gaze fixed on the crumpled wine list in my hands. The restaurant staff and patrons were all watching us. “You made me think that you had killed yourself.” His voice was raising in volume. “You even told me it was because I was angry at you. Do you have any idea how guilty I felt? Do you know how many times I went to your bloody grave to beg – beg! – for your forgiveness? What do you have to say for yourself?”

I had backed into a pillar. There was nowhere to go. I chanced a look at John’s face. Through my tears I could see nothing but black, bitter fury on his normally kind and good-humoured features. “I’m –I’m thorry, John!” I squeaked. “I’m thorry!”

“You’re sorry? That’s it?” John was shouting now. I sobbed and rubbed my face with the back of my hand.
“Pl-pleathe underthtand I n-never wanted to hurt you. My-Mycroft thaid that – “

“Mycroft? So you let your bloody awful brother in on your plan, and not me?” John’s voice was so loud it was rattling the crockery on the nearby tables.

“I’m thorry!” I squawked pathetically.

Just then a maître d’ – an alpha – strode up to John and laid an imperious hand on his shoulder. John turned his furious gaze on the man, and the maître d’ loudly proclaimed, “Sir, you are making a scene. Calm yourself this instant. It is entirely inappropriate to shout at your omega in polite company like this. If he needs disciplining, that is something you should take care of in private. Now I must ask your party to leave this establishment immediately! Please take your omega and go.” This announcement was met by a smattering of applause from the other diners.

John straightened his spine, twitched his mustache and said loud enough for all to hear, “He’s not my omega. Come on, Mary, we’re going.” He crooked his elbow; Mary took his arm and the two of them strode out the front door.


After following them for a block, Mary stopped and withdrew her arm from John’s elbow. “This is ridiculous! John, wait! Can’t you see how upset he is?” She took a tissue from her bra and began mopping at my cheeks. John gave her an incredulous look. “You can’t treat an omega like that,” she wiped my nose while I let forth another wet, miserable sob. “They’re sensitive things!”

“Him? Sensitive?” John snarled derisively. “If he was so sensitive, why would he break my heart like that? Hmm? I’ve had enough of this, I’m getting a taxi.”

John stalked to the corner of Marylebone Road and Upper Montagu Street, looking left and right for a taxi. Mary returned to comforting me. “I don’t understand,” I said as she wiped my nose. “I said I was sorry. Isn’t that what you’re supposed to do?” I noticed Mary’s perfume smelled like oranges.

“Well, John has an alpha’s temper. You must know that. But don’t you worry: I’ll talk him round.”

“You will?” I asked in confusion. Why would this woman be so nice to me? I couldn’t make sense of it.

“Yeah. It’ll take some time, but he’ll see reason…. He really loved you, you know.”

“I didn’t know that,” I replied. It concerned me that she used the past tense.

Just then a cab pulled up to the kerb. I followed Mary to where John stood waiting for us. I tried to make eye contact with him, but he wouldn’t look at me. “Get in,” he growled.

I scrambled into the waiting taxi, expecting John and Mary to follow me. Instead John told the driver, “Take him to Baker Street,” and slammed the door in my face.

“John, wait! Pl-Pleathe!” I whimpered. I watched him and Mary as the cab pulled away. She patted his arm placatingly, while he shook his head angrily.

“Wait,” I said to the driver. “Take me to Hampstead instead. Corner of Kidderpore Avenue and Kidderpore Gardens.”
“You knew!” I shrieked at Mycroft. “You knew and you didn’t tell me!”

I had let myself into my brother’s house using the key he kept under the sleeping garden gnome next to the kitchen door. I found him asleep in his old armchair in front of the office fireplace.

He woke with a jerk at my furious accusation. “Sherlock? Wha-?”

“Don’t play stupid, brother mine,” I hissed. “You kept surveillance on John, so you must have known he was seeing someone. You probably knew that he had had his grandmother’s ring cleaned. But you didn’t give me a word of warning! You bastard, you know how I feel about John!”

“Didn’t give you warning?” Mycroft sleepily rubbed his eyes. “This very afternoon I told you that he had got on with his life. What do you think I was implying?”

I scoffed, “That could have meant anything. Don’t you think that it would have been kind to warn me that the love of my life was getting engaged to a beta woman tonight?”

“Love of your life?” Mycroft asked scornfully. “Sherlock, it couldn’t possibly be clearer that John does not feel that way about you, and he never will. In a way it’s good that he’s engaged, because now you can stop pining after him and move on once and for all!”

Those words hurt. A lot. Tears filled my eyes again. “You don’t understand,” I screamed in anguish. “You don’t understand because you’ve never been in love! I can’t – I can’t just stop being in love with him! It doesn’t work like that. I was away for two years, and nothing – absolutely nothing – has changed. I wanted to get over him. I really, really did, My. I know he’s not in love with me. I know that my life would be easier if I didn’t feel this way. But I just can’t turn it off like that. I just can’t, My, I just can’t!” My tirade ended in a shuddering sob.

I flinched as I felt my brother’s tweed-clad arms wrap around me. He rubbed my back gently, and I rested my head on his shoulder, breathing in his familiar, soothing smell of cucumbers and juniper.

“I understand, Sherlock. Believe you me, I understand completely. Being in love is horribly, horribly inconvenient.” Mycroft murmured quietly between my noisy sobs.

“Uh huh,” I gulped. “My?” I asked. “Can – can I sleep in your bed tonight? I don’t – I don’t want to be alone anymore.” I hadn’t asked to sleep in my big brother’s bed since the time we had gone to see the Dark Crystal in Gloucester when I was six, and I had been thoroughly terrified of the Skeksis Chamberlain.

“Of course,” sighed Mycroft, guiding me towards his bedroom. “And Sherlock? I am sorry about John.”

I changed into some old pyjamas Mycroft retrieved from my room, and crawled under his duvet. I decided that I would spend the next day getting in touch with old friends and apologizing for my extended absence. Hopefully those encounters would go better than my reunion with John. I tiredly noticed that there was another smell besides Mycroft’s suffusing his sheets. Something like cedar and ocean breezes. Faint but familiar. I tried to place it as I drifted off to sleep, but by the time I woke up the next morning I had forgotten all about it.
Thank you all for reading... and for your patience during my travels.

Wondering what the Skeksis Chamberlain is? http://www.darkcrystal.com/encyclopedia_skeksil.php This thing scared the crap out of me when I was a little kid.

As always, dialogue taken from the transcripts on Ariane DeVere's livejournal.
Setting things right

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next morning I chose to drop by Mrs. Hudson’s first because I anticipated that she would be the easiest to convince to forgive me, as she had known that I was an omega before Moriarty’s Daily Mail story had revealed that to the world, and therefore the lies I had told her were nowhere near as extensive as those I had told to my other friends and colleagues – though I admit that letting her think that I had killed myself was still pretty bad. As always, however, Mrs. Hudson was quick to forgive me. I told her all about my adventures in Eastern Europe. She was particularly interested in the omega assassins, and insisted that if she had lived in Eastern Europe fifty years ago she could have been an expert in Smert Udar Dlya Malenky Omegi, and would have ruthlessly assassinated all manner of corrupt and unfriendly political figures. When she started miming karate chops and roundhouse kicks, and shouting, “Take that, Ceaucescu! You too, Leonid Brezhnev!” I snorted tea out my nose, and we both laughed uncontrollably for several minutes.

Then she told me about John’s last days at Baker Street. He was virtually catatonic with grief and guilt. She tried to get him to talk about it, but he absolutely refused to work through his emotions. Barely three months after my suicide, he announced to her that he had purchased a terraced Victorian house in South Croydon, and would be moving out. After a final shared trip to my grave in the Holmes family plot in Newport, she had lost contact with John – except for two Christmas cards sent from his new address on Glossop Road. It was clear, she said, that John was trying to put his life with me behind him completely.

I told her about our disastrous meeting at the Landmark Hotel the previous evening. “Oh, Sherlock,” she said while patting my hand. “I hope you haven’t lost your chance with him.”

“If I ever had a chance,” I sighed.

“Don’t say that,” Mrs. Hudson replied. “I saw the way he looked at you. The way you looked at each other. You were the centre of his world.”

“And then I lied to him about fundamental aspects of my identity. And I let him think that I had killed myself over him. And now he won’t even look at me.” I took a gulp of tea. “God, I’ve mucked things up!”

“Yes, you have,” Mrs. Hudson said as she kissed my forehead. “But I’m confident you’ll be able to set things right. Don’t give up!”

We hugged and I set off for Saint Bart’s to see Mike and Molly. To my astonishment, neither of them had been particularly surprised to learn that I was a disguised omega.

“Oh loads of people ‘round the hospital have suspected you were an omega, Sherlock,” Mike grinned. “It’s the curly hair, see? And the way you’d fall all over yourself if an alpha in uniform dropped by. And after John came into the picture we knew for sure.” Evidently my acting skills weren’t nearly as infallible as I had hoped.

“I had my suspicions in uni,” Molly added. “It was the way you’d frown whenever we saw an alpha hassling an omega on the tube. Plus I could never figure out why you were never interested in me, you know, romantically. But when I finally guessed that you were an omega, and that therefore you’d have no interest in a beta, it all made sense.”
“Yes,” I confirmed earnestly. “That’s exactly right, Molly.”

The pair of them had been deeply saddened by my apparent suicide, but, it would seem, neither was entirely surprised. “When we first met, Sherlock,” Mike explained sadly. “It was clear that something wasn’t right. You were angry and scared all the time. I remember telling the wife that I feared that you’d do something awful some day – to yourself, mind, not to another person. Something even worse than the drugs.” Molly nodded in agreement. “But then for a couple of years you seemed better. Happier, more purposeful. Especially after John came into the picture. Have you been in touch with him yet?”

“Of course I have!” I snapped. As if he wouldn’t have been my first stop! “But, he – we – It’s complicated right now.”

“I imagine it is,” said Mike pointedly. “He and I went for a couple of drinks after you… died. He was an absolute wreck.”

“So I’ve heard,” I said. “But he seems to have gotten over it. He’s getting married. To a beta woman named Mary.”

Mike and Molly exchanged a surprised look. “A beta?” asked Mike.

“A woman?” asked Molly.

I shrugged and gave them my deepest apologies for deceiving and hurting them. “I’m just so glad you’re back, Sherlock,” Molly hugged me tightly. “You’ve left a big hole in many people’s lives that’s been impossible to fill.”

My next stop was Lestrade’s office. I picked his lock and sat down at his messy desk. His squeaky office chair smelled like cedar and sea breezes. That seemed significant, but I couldn’t for the life of me remember why. Presently he opened his office door and saw me at his desk. To my puzzlement, his face betrayed no hint of surprise whatsoever. “I was wondering when you’d turn up,” he said casually.

“I’m back from the dead, Gabe,” I said. “This revelation should come as a shock to you. Or at least be somewhat unexpected.”

“Naaw,” he shrugged, setting his paper beaker of tea on his desk. “I figured it out ages ago.”

“You did?” I asked in honest disbelief. “How?”

“I’m a copper, aren’t I? And a good one too.”

“If you say so. But really, how did you know?”

“I’m telling you, I just put two and two together,” he smiled smugly. “Moriarty had a plan to kill me, and Mrs. Hudson, and your John if you didn’t kill yourself, right? Then you spent the last two years in Eastern Europe taking apart the remains of his empire. Pretty straightforward, I would think.”

I was perplexed. For years I had laboured under the belief that Lestrade was, well, a bit thick. But apparently he had unraveled Moriarty’s complex moves and my countermoves with no difficulty whatsoever. I looked at the detective with new respect.

“I’m sorry about your wife,” I said, looking at his hand. “What happened?”

He sighed. “She killed herself. Walked in front of a train at Penge West. About a year and a half ago.
It – it wasn’t a surprise. Ever since the pups left for uni, she didn’t have much to live for.” It was a common enough story for a middle-aged omega.

“Sherlock,” he began, clearly changing the subject. “How will this change our working relationship?”

“What do you mean?” I frowned.

“I mean your being an omega….” He rubbed the back of his head in an embarrassed gesture.

“What about my being an omega? I might not be on odour blockers anymore, but I’m still taking heat suppressants, so you needn’t worry that I’ll be going into heat at a crime scene!” This was exactly the sort of prejudice that I had been dreading.

“No, no, no. Nothing like that. It’s just that after your suicide, there was a lot of flack about an omega being allowed into crime scenes. Not to mention questioning witnesses and testifying before the courts. I’m not sure whether the brass’ll let you help out in the future.”

“Well you can tell the brass that, omega or not, I solved all those crimes for them.” I said tartly. “My record stands for itself. If the Metropolitan Police thinks it can solve London’s crimes without my help – and your frankly appalling rate of arrest and conviction over the past two years strongly suggests otherwise – they’re welcome to try!”

“Alright, alright,” he raised his hands in a mollifying gesture. “I’ll – I’ll square it with them. At least I’ll try. But you’re bound to get some hassle from Donovan and the other officers you’ve made look foolish over the years. Not Anderson though; when he got fired he had a change of heart about you. But anyway, they’re bound to give you a hard time about being an omega.”

I snorted, “I don’t care what they think or say –“

“It would help if you brought a little help. A beta or an alpha. They’d be less likely to pick on you if you had some backup.”

“I worked for you for years without ‘backup.’ I hardly see why it’s necessary now.”

“What about John? Can he join you now that he’s engaged?”

I looked at Lestrade in astonishment. “How do you know that John’s gotten engaged? It only happened last night!”

“I told you, I’m a good copper,” he grinned craftily.

“Hmm. Well. Maybe you are. But about John, no, I don’t think he’ll be helping for the foreseeable future.”

“He’s angry that you faked your death? You two had a fight, and now he won’t talk to you?”

“I won’t bother asking how you knew that,” Lestrade’s newly developed deductive skills were flustering me.

“I’m a good copper,” he smiled again. “Look,” Lestrade’s expression became serious again. “Give me a few weeks to gain permission from the top for you to work cases again. Until then, I’ve got a few boxes of cold case files you can look through. That’s the best I can do for now. And it really would help if you got an alpha or beta partner.”
We shook hands, and I left Lestrade’s office wondering how he had become so perceptive over the last two years.

*

Despite Mycroft’s protests I moved back into the Baker Street flat right away. I was still rather miffed at him for failing to warn me about John’s engagement, and Mrs. Hudson was only too glad to have me back to fuss over me and bake me scones. For several weeks in the autumn of 2013 I occupied myself by reading through Lestrade’s box of cold case files. On a good morning, I could solve five or six even before changing out of my pyjamas.

I met regularly with Mike, Molly, and Lestrade, and I could feel my life slowly return to normality – well, as normal as it had ever been – with one obvious exception: John’s continued absence. I missed him greatly, but I didn’t dare try to get in touch with him, as I was quite unsure as to how that would be received.

Then, out of nowhere, at the beginning of December, I received the following e-mail from Mary:

Message Sent: Friday 6 December 2014 08:14:36 GMT
Subject: Dinner next Sat?

Hi Sherlock!

I hope you’re doing well. Settling in alright? I’ve been talking to John. You know, explaining that you didn’t mean to hurt him and that you want to be friends again. And I think I’ve convinced him to give you another chance. Don’t get me wrong; he’s still pretty angry, but he really missed you and I think he’s open to the idea of forgiving you.

So we’d like to have you for dinner at our place in South Croydon on Saturday the 14th. I hope you’re free. I’m making John’s favourite – roast lamb – so he should be in a good mood. I’ll have wine, and you should feel free to try it, but if you don’t like it I’ll also have juice or milk on hand. Why don’t you bring something for dessert? Maybe Martha can help you make something?

To get here, you should take the Number 82 bus from Baker Street to Victoria, then catch the 6:09 East Grinstead train, and get off at Sanderstead. I’ll send John to fetch you from the station. Here’s my phone number in case you get lost: 020-7199-7035.

Looking forward to seeing you! Please RSVP! Mary

*

I was astonished. I knew very well how stubborn John could be about forgiving people – as far as I knew he was still angry at his sister for making a drunken spectacle of herself at their father’s funeral ten years ago – and yet Mary had somehow persuaded him to allow me back into his life. I couldn’t figure how she had done it, nor, more importantly, why. Here I was, a possible rival for John’s attention and affection (one she had acknowledged John had once loved), and yet she was encouraging him to renew our friendship. It made no sense at all.

And yet, despite my immense gratitude to Mary, I couldn’t help but feel a bit annoyed at the patronizing tone of her e-mail. She knew that I used to run all over London chasing murderers, and yet she told me precisely which train to take to get to their place in South Croydon, and she was sending John to fetch me from the station! I’m telling you, go and look up Glossop Road in Croydon; I swear it is at most a two-minute walk from Sanderstead station. But she didn’t trust me to
find it by myself. And she even gave me her number in case I got lost! And she said there’d be juice in case I wasn’t fond of the wine!

It took me a minute to figure out why she was being so condescending towards me, but then I realized it was because I’m an omega. While Mike, and Molly, and Lestrade initially knew me as a beta and consequently judged me based on my abilities and achievements, Mary had only known me as John’s former omega roommate. And, because first impressions do count for a lot, our brief meeting at the Landmark probably made her think that I was as emotional and fragile as any other omega. Therefore it only made sense that she would treat me like a small, delicate child. I groaned in frustration at this realization.

Nevertheless, there was no way I would turn down an opportunity to set things right with John, so I obediently RSVP’ed, and went to find Mrs. Hudson to ask if she could help bake me a pie next week, ideally strawberry, because that was John’s favourite. Maybe. Actually, I never asked. But somebody I know likes strawberry pie.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all of you once again for reading, leaving kudos, and making comments. I do enjoy reading your insightful responses.
Dinner with wine and sitting

The following Saturday saw me standing in the aisle of the 6:09 East Grinstead train while clutching a strawberry pie lovingly prepared by myself and Mrs. Hudson. (She made the crust and filling; I arranged the strawberry slices in an intricate fractal pattern that I was sure John would appreciate.) Though it was the weekend, the train was packed, and I found myself hunched over my pie, making sure that none of the other passengers bumped into it and marred its lovely perfection. I was terribly nervous.

When I exited the train at Sanderstead, it was already fully dark. There was a cold drizzle falling in my hair making it extra curly. I twitched the plastic carrier bag covering my pie to make sure it was still receiving adequate protection from the rain. As I crossed the pedestrian footbridge I saw John waiting for me under the eaves of the station house. I paused as my heart stuttered longingly. He wore the same comfortable black Haversack coat that he used to wear when we worked cases together. Under his coat he wore a new shirt – one with an odd paisley pattern and a too-tight collar that I could tell was uncomfortable. There was no way he would have picked it out for himself, so Mary must have. I could see that his hair had been cut recently – possibly even that very day – in the short military style that I had always found so appealing. His left hand was twitching, and he licked his lips repeatedly – he was nervous too then. Though I wished I could have stayed on that footbridge watching John for hours, eventually I screwed my courage to the sticking place and continued walking towards him.

He heard my footsteps as I descended the footbridge staircase. After I tapped my Oyster card to the reader at the bottom of the bridge we exchanged hesitant smiles, and John said shakily, “Look I know you didn’t need me to fetch you from the station, but Mary insisted, and besides it – it gives me a chance to say something.”

“Alright,” I said quietly, hoping desperately that the something he wanted to say wasn’t simply ‘Sod off!’

John took a deep breath, looked at his feet, and rubbed the back of his head in a familiar anxious gesture. “Oh,” he said finally, pointing at the pie. “What have you got there?” John was absolute pants at heartfelt discussions, so it came as no surprise that he would hesitate and change the subject.

“Strawberry pie,” I smiled proudly. “Mrs. Hudson and I baked it. Well, me mostly. I let her help though.”

“Oh. I’m allergic to strawberries.” John looked me in the eye. “Forgot that, did you?”

My face fell. “I – I never knew that,” I admitted. It was an inauspicious start to the evening to be sure.

However, John chuckled. “Never mind,” he said. “We’ll get some ice cream from the corner shop.”

We walked slowly past a Triumph motorcycle dealership. I stayed silent, watching John as he searched for the words to express his thoughts. “Sherlock,” he finally said as we reached Sanderstead Road, “When you were dead, I went to your grave. I made a little speech. I actually spoke to you. I asked you for one more miracle. I asked you to stop being dead.” I stopped walking and watched John closely, wondering where he was going with this. “I said that I would put up with all your
selfishness, all your disgusting experiments, all of your drama if you would just please, please stop being dead.” There were tears sparkling in the corners of John’s eyes. I longed to hold him and beg and beg for his forgiveness, but he continued speaking: “So, it looks like my wish finally came true.” He gave me a sad, tender smile.

I blinked. Was John forgiving me? “Well, you know, John, they say you should be careful what you wish for,” was my blasé response.

John gave me an amused, incredulous look and started laughing. I joined him. I had never felt more relieved in my life.

As we picked out a Vienetta at the corner shop, he said, “But you should know, Sherlock, that this doesn’t mean that I’m not still mad at you. That was a shitty, shitty thing to do, and it really messed me up. For a long time…. But I do want to be friends again. Best friends.” Objectively, I suppose that John’s offer of friendship was more than I should have reasonably expected, but I admit that a small part of me was disappointed that he seemed intent on keeping our friendship platonic. “But you can’t fucking lie to me anymore, Sherlock. I mean it.”

“Of course, John. And I am very, very sorry,” we smiled at each other, paid for our dessert and continued walking to John and Mary’s pretty Victorian house around the corner on Glossop Road.

*  

As much as I wanted to, god help me, I couldn’t bring myself to hate Mary. Though I may have seen her as a rival for John’s affections, she was unfailingly kind to me that evening. When we walked in the door, John said, “You know you have Mary to thank for the invitation to dinner.”

“Oh?” I said, hanging up my Belstaff on their coat rack.

“Yes. She kept harping at me to give you a call. And she’s the one who reminded me about the wish I made at the cemetery,” John said as he hung up his scarf and strolled down the narrow hallway to the kitchen.

“How’d she know about that?” I inquired, following him.

“Oh, I was there when he said it,” Mary smiled as she pulled a pan of Yorkshire puddings from their old Aga oven. I was deeply perturbed that Mary had been witness to what I would consider a very private moment between John and my absent self. “Plus I reminded him that sometimes omegas do… thoughtless, silly things. But you can’t hold it against them.” She put down the pan of puddings, and gave me a kiss on the cheek. “Welcome to our home, Sherlock. I’m so glad you could join us.”

Dinner was a pleasant affair all around. The three of us joked that by letting me sample the wine, John and Mary could be arrested for corrupting an omega, even though the new Access to Alcohol Bill was set to pass in March. Mary turned out to be a fine cook and a lively raconteur. She regaled me with tales of the adventures she and John had had while making plans for their upcoming May wedding. For certain, the rush they got from chasing down caterers and negotiating deals on their wedding cake could hardly compare with the excitement John and I once got from catching criminals, but I could see that their contrived, minor escapades went a long way towards satisfying John’s needs as an adrenaline junkie. Thus, my worst fear had come true: John had finally found a compatible beta woman who could meet his need for danger and adventure. Mary would be a fine mate for John.

And this explained why Mary didn’t see me as a threat to her relationship with John: simply put, I was no threat to her at all. It was abundantly clear that I had nothing to offer John that she didn’t
already provide for him. The competition was over before it begun, and she had won hands down. Magnanimous in victory, she could afford to be generous in allowing John to spend time with his silly omega friend. In fact, she insisted that the two of us renew our friendship.

“All chance that you’d let John help out with your cases again, Sherlock?” she asked over pie and Vienetta.

I choked a bit on my pie crust, such was the level of my surprise. “Of – of course. I mean if – if he wants to. His medical expertise has proven invaluable on any number of occasions,” I stammered in eagerness.

“Oh, you don’t have to tell me,” she gave John a saucy, secret wink, and I realized with some revulsion that she was making a joke about sex. There was yet another area where I fell short: given my persistent discomfort with sex, there was no way I could satisfy John the way Mary evidently did. I cleared my throat uncomfortably, and I could see John blush, though he chuckled along with her.

“I’d be happy to help out again, mate,” John smiled at me again. “In between making wedding arrangements, of course,” he rolled his eyes.

“I say, Sherlock, would you like to help out with that?” Mary asked eagerly.

“With wedding arrangements? Why on earth would I want to do that,” I frowned at the very suggestion.

“’Cause you’re an omega!” Mary smiled while patting my knee. “Omegas are supposed to be great at party planning and such. I mean, obviously you’ve got a terrific sense of style. Way better than John’s anyway.” The two of us shared a smile at John’s expense. “Plus I thought it would be nice for you to be involved. You’re very important to John, you know, so you’re important to me too.”

“I’d be glad to,” I smiled bravely, though the thought of helping with John’s wedding to this woman hurt very badly indeed.

We said goodnight shortly thereafter – after all it wasn’t safe for omegas to be riding the trains too late at night – and John accompanied me back to Sanderstead station through the cold, steady rain. John was positively buoyant with the success of the evening; he had his happy life with his house, and job, and pretty, well-suited fiancée. And now he even had his best friend back from the dead. Life couldn’t get much better for John Watson. I, on the other hand, was despondent and on the verge of tears.

We waited together on the platform for my train back to Victoria. When the schedule indicated that my train was three minutes away, I cleared my throat and said, “John, you mentioned earlier that you didn’t want me to lie to you anymore.”

“Yes?” he stopped watching for the train, and looked at me searchingly. “Oh god, is there something else you haven’t told me? It couldn’t possibly be worse than faking your death or hiding your gender, could it?” He was trying for levity, but I could tell he was dreading what I was about to tell him.

“That depends on your perspective,” I said. “It’s to do with why I hid my gender for so long.” I drew a deep breath. Though it was very dark I could see that John was watching me intensely. “I think I’ve mentioned that I was a late bloomer. In fact my gender didn’t present itself until I was twenty-one. It – it happened in the basement of the Manchester University Library. I didn’t know what was happening. Two alphas picked up on my pheromones, and followed me there. They – they attacked
me. They, you know… raped… me. It w-wath pretty bad. Then my roommate Victor found me, but rather than rethcue me, he – he had hith way with me too. Tho I gueth that’th why I reacted the way I did when we were in Dartmoor.”

“Jesus, Sherlock,” John said.

“There’th actually more, John,” I continued. “They got me p-pregnant. Theven b-babieth. Mycroft arranged for them to be aborted… Tho, you thee John, that’th why I didn’t want to be an omega.”

“Sherlock, I – I had no idea.” John reached out to pat my arm awkwardly. “Jesus, how – why – who else knows about this?”

I took a steadying breath. “Mycroft and Mrs. Hudson.” It felt strangely liberating to have told John about my past, even though he now knew that I was nothing more than a ruined omega slag.

“Why are you telling me this?” he asked. “I mean I know I told you that I didn’t want you to lie to me anymore, but you’ve kept this a secret for years. So why tell me now?” The train was approaching.

“Because – because it doesn’t matter anymore,” I said sadly, pushing the button for the train door.

“It doesn’t matter? I don’t understand.” John frowned in confusion.

“I know, John,” I said as I stepped onto the train. The doors closed behind me, leaving John to watch as the train carried me back to London.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Sherlock! Let's hope he hasn't given up completely.

Thank you all for your support!

As always, dialogue borrowed from the transcripts at Ariane DeVere's livejournal.
In the spring of 2014 John and I worked several cases together, in between wedding-related chores. It was just like old times… except that John was now extremely protective of me. If an alpha criminal attempted to attack me, John would wade in and subdue them with far more force than was necessary. And if a witness was rude or aggressive towards me he would snap, “You watch your goddamn mouth when you speak to him, or you’ll have me to answer to!” Normally, this sort of mollycoddling would drive me crazy, but I was painfully aware that our relationship would change considerably once John got married, and I was desperate to spend as much time as possible with John before then, so I put up with his overprotectiveness. For his part, John did not comment on the thoughtless, selfish things I did that used to annoy him – for example, the urgent late night texts, or how I always left him to pay for the taxi – which makes me think that John was also conscious of the impending changes to our relationship, and was therefore equally eager to spend as much time as possible with me before the wedding.

I helped as much as I could with the wedding. Mary was right: her and John’s sense of style could not hold a candle to my own. I picked out lilac bridesmaid dresses that would complement Mary’s girlfriends’ varying skin tones, and would look good in photos. I found a sunny, pretty orangery on the grounds of the University of Bristol to serve as their reception venue, and I went wedding dress shopping with Mary on four separate occasions. These tasks always left me with mixed feelings: on the one hand I was only too glad to spend time with John and to help him in any way I could; on the other I couldn’t help but feel I was helping Mary to take him away from me for good. On the twenty-sixth of February, John dropped by Baker Street to ask me to be his best man. Though I agreed, it struck me that this was an unspeakably cruel request for him to make of me.

* 

In March we sent out invitations. As she sat in John’s old chair at Baker Street, Mary asked me, “Is there someone special you’d like to take as your plus-one, Sherlock?”

I looked up from the coffee table where I was inserting reply cards into envelopes, “I don’t know. Maybe Mycroft?”

John groaned. Since my return, his interactions with Mycroft had been far less cordial. John, I think, blamed Mycroft for coming up with the plan to fake my death, while Mycroft felt that John was totally unworthy of my affections.

“No, I mean a date,” smiled Mary. “Is there anyone special you’d like us to ask for you?”

I blushed and shook my head. Mary sat back in her chair and thoughtfully rubbed her chin. “Well, maybe I could introduce you to one of my friends. John, what about Janine? She’s an alpha. And single too.”

“Give it a rest, Mary,” John shook his head.

“She’s really funny. Smart too. I think she’d like you, Sherlock. She really goes for the pretty omega boys.” I didn’t respond, and instead returned my attention to the invitations.

In the end I did invite my brother, but he adamantly refused to attend. “Why in the world would I
want to attend John’s wedding, Sherlock? I hate dancing and mingling. You know that. Everyone knows that. And yet the whole world seems determined that I should attend John Watson’s wedding.” We were eating a breakfast of cereal and fruit in his kitchen in Hampstead. It was the morning after the last day of my heat, and I was feeling quite tender and delicate – both emotionally and physically.

“You’d be going to support me, Mycroft. I’ll be the best man.”

“Best man to an alpha you’re in love with, even though he’s marrying a beta woman. Pardon me if I don’t want to witness you making a fool of yourself up there!”

I said in a small voice, “He might not love me like I love him, but we’re still best friends, and I’ll always be there for him when he needs me.” That was what I had been telling myself since John had asked me to be his best man. When I said it out loud, it sounded pathetic.

“Right. And when has he been there when you needed him, Sherlock?” Mycroft asked icily. “Remember what happened in Dartmoor?”

Tears filled my eyes. “Fuck you, Mycroft!” I squawked, and stormed back to my room.

* 

In April John and I visited a formal wear shop in Hatton Garden to pick out the suits we would wear to the wedding.

“Good morning,” John said to the omega male shop attendant, “We’re looking for morning suits. And top hats. Something with a bit of gold that’ll look good with purple bridesmaid dresses.”

“Lilac bridesmaid dresses,” I corrected him.

The shop attendant glanced between us. “And you’re the groom?” he said to John. John nodded, and the shop attendant turned his attention to me, “And that makes you?”

“The best man,” I said.

The shop attendant chuckled, “No, seriously. Are you the bride?”

“No, I told you: I’m the best man.” I could feel my cheeks blushing hotly.

The shop attendant looked me up and down, and turned his attention back to John, “Sir, I’m sorry to intrude in your affairs, but are you sure it’s wise to have an omega best man? I mean that’s a position with an awful lot of responsibility… you know, with the speech, and planning the stag, and whatnot. Traditionally omegas are ring bearers or bridesmaids, not the best man!”

“He’s the best man,” John said firmly. “I am confident that he can fulfill all of his duties better than any other man I know, so in every way he’s the best man.”

“But I have some lovely little outfits for omega ring bearers….”

“He’s the best man,” John said in a tone that would brook no further argument.

We spent the rest of the morning picking out our suits, waistcoats, shirts, and hats. I was preoccupied with the unwelcome realization that I was apparently expected to plan a stag-do for John.

* 

As expected, the alpha-sponsored Access to Alcohol Bill had passed in March. This meant that I
could drink in public, and therefore John and I could have a traditional pub crawl for his stag. However, I chose not to invite any of his other friends, as I did not wish to be the only omega on an alpha-dominated pub crawl, and, I admit, I wanted to have John all to myself for the evening.

Molly helped me to organize a pub crawl route that would take John and me to every street in Central London where we had investigated a murder. We started in Wapping and moved westward over the course of the evening.

At first it was fun: I got to spend time with my favourite person, and, with a few drinks under his belt, John opened up a bit about how much he disliked wedding planning, and how unhappy some of his family members were that he had settled for a beta. Especially his sister Harry, who refused to attend the ceremony. But as the night went on, and the bar crowds got drunker, I found that I was attracting a lot of unwanted attention from alpha punters. Several offered to buy me drinks (which I was sure would be drugged); others invited me to join them at their booths, and a few pinched my bottom as I walked by their tables. John noticed how uncomfortable this was making me, so he suggested that we buy a bottle of his favourite whisky and head back to Baker Street for the remainder of the evening. I was only too glad to give up on my disastrous pub crawl plan.

When we returned to Baker Street, John washed out two small low-form beakers and poured us each a generous helping of whisky. I regarded my glass with some apprehension, as I had never been a heavy drinker, and I was already feeling the effects of the beer we had consumed during the pub crawl. We played twenty questions; John won because I was very drunk and because John usually wins games with me because he knows the rules.

As we sat chatting and laughing with each other in our old armchairs, I found myself feeling maudlin and sentimental. This, I thought, might be the very last time that John and I sat together in our cozy living room, smiling and joking with each other. I was suddenly overcome with a feeling of drunken recklessness. It was now or never, I decided.

“Wait – wait right there,” I said to John as I stumbled to my feet. I retrieved my iPhone from my coat pocket, and flipped through my music downloads, finally stopping at a song by Simply Red. I inserted my phone in my music player, and pressed repeat. Then I extended my hand to John.

“What’s this?” his grin was sloppy and affectionate.

“I-I’d forgotten. You need to learn how to dance. For – for your wedding. For the dancing.” As I spoke I could tell that I was more drunk than I had thought.

“And you’re going to teach me?” John set his drink on his side table.

“Oh-huh,” I said, doing a spontaneous twirl on the carpet. “I took ball – ballroom dancing lessons when I was a kid. Mycroft made me. Plus I’m an omega, and you know we’re all ell-ellexent d-dancers.”

“Alright then,” John eased himself unsteadily to his feet.

I took his hands, placed the right one around my back, and held the left one in my right hand. “Th-this is the Closed Position,” I said. “Now, now, the thing w-with the waltz is – is you have to listen to the beat. So listen.” We both listened to the lyrics of the song: If you don’t know me by now, you will never, never, never know me. “Okay, now, it’s in three-quarter time, so it goes one-two-three, one-two three. Do – do you hear it John?”

“Three what? Sherlock, I don’t know anything about music!”

“I guess,” John was also very drunk.

“Okay, so on the one beat, you put your left foot forward. Like this. And at the same time I put my right foot back. Then on the two beat, you move your right foot to the side, and I put my left foot to the side. No, don’t move your left foot just yet. Okay, on the three you close with your left foot, and I close with my right foot. Yes, just like that. Now on the four you move your right foot back. Back, John! On the five you move your left to the side, and finally on the six you close with your right foot. And now we’re back where we began. Got all that?”

“What? No. Not at all.”

“It’s okay, John. All it takes is practice. Let’s go through the steps again. While counting.” We stomped around the living room. John had no more natural grace than Frankenstein’s monster, but he was determined to master the steps. After a few minutes of trod-upon toes and loud counting of the beat, there was a knock at the door. It was Mrs. Hudson.

“Hudders!” I smiled broadly. John stepped away from me as if we had been caught doing something naughty.

“Hullo, boys,” she gave a mischievous grin. “I heard a noise. Thought you might be moving furniture.”

“No, I’m teaching John to dance for his we-wedding,” I continued smiling drunkenly.

“Well, I’ll leave you to it then. John, you’re free to spend the night if you want. Your old bed hasn’t got sheets, but you can sleep down here, I suppose.” She winked at him.

“Erm, thanks,” John replied, rubbing the back of his head.

We returned to dancing, the Simply Red song playing over and over again. Eventually John figured out the steps. “Okay, now you need to stop looking at your feet, and look at me instead,” I said.

“I don’t think I can,” he said, still focused on his own shoes. “I might step on you.”

“I trust you, John,” I whispered. He looked up at my eyes, and we danced through the song three times without breaking eye contact. I had never been more in love.

We swirled round and round the sitting room in ever larger circles. I began to feel dizzy and unstable. Then John bumped me into the corner of my desk and we tumbled into my armchair, John on top, myself beneath him. “Are you, are you alright?” he asked me, still very drunk.

“Never better,” I replied, closing my eyes and pressing my lips firmly to his. I tried to put all the love, all the devotion I felt for John into that kiss. To my everlasting wonderment, I felt John grasp my by the back of my head and return the kiss. We stayed that way – each moving his lips over the other’s in a gentle, even worshipful manner – for several seconds, before John finally pulled away.

“Sorry,” he said hoarsely, getting up from my chair.

“Wh-Why?” I said. My head was swimming with lust and alcohol.

“I – I know you don’t want that. I didn’t mean to take advantage.”

“You’re not, John, I want it. Really.” I stood up, rather unsteadily.
“No. I’m not the kind of alpha who – who’d take advantage of a drunk omega,” he slurred. “And I know how you feel about… in-intimate situations, Sh-Sherlock.”

“I – I’m not that dru-” my statement was cut off by an uncontrollable urge to vomit. I rushed to the kitchen and expelled the contents of my stomach all over the sink, which was then full of dirty beakers and Erlenmeyer flasks. (Mrs. Hudson would be furious when she laid eyes on the mess the next day.) “Maybe – maybe I am a little drunk,” I groaned after I had finished.

John chuckled, emptied my glass of whisky over the smelly mess, and filled it with water. “Come on, you old sot. Party’s over. Time for bed.” He picked me up around the waist and carried me to my bedroom with one arm. (Have I ever mentioned how very strong alphas are?) In the other hand he carried my glass of water.

John placed the glass of water on my bedside table, and dumped me unceremoniously on my bed. I groaned when my impact on the mattress made the room spin anew. John found a couple of paracetamol in the bathroom and set them on the table next to my water. “That’s for the morning. I think you’ll need it. Thanks for a fun night. I’m – I’m going home.”

“Wait – wait, John,” I said, struggling to sit up. “You don’t have to go. Mrs. Hudson said y-you could stay the night.”

John hesitated. “I don’t mean to impose…..”

“It’s n-no ipmo – inner – imposition at all. Besides, it’s late. You’ll never get a taxi.”

“I hate sleeping on that sofa.”

“Then sleep here,” I said, shuffling to the far side of the bed.

“Are you sure? Is this alright with you? Having me in your bed?”

“Absolutely,” I said snuggling down into my blankets.

“Okay then,” John stripped off his cardigan and socks, and climbed into the bed next to me. I turned off the light, and watched his silhouette as he lay in my bed.

When I was sure that John was asleep I whispered, “I love you, John.”

He mumbled, “Err, whazzit? Errlervertoo, Sherl.” Maybe – undoubtedly – it’s wishful thinking, but I like to think he said that he loved me too.

*

I woke early the next morning to the whooshing sound of someone’s breath. As I regained consciousness, I realized that my head was pillowed on someone’s chest. Someone who smelled of gun metal and pine. John. I noticed that the fingers of my left hand had wormed their way between the buttons of his plaid shirt and were rhythmically stroking the soft, gold hair of his chest. I could feel his left arm resting protectively on my upper arm. Not wishing to bring this rare moment of closeness to an end, I did not move, nor did I open my eyes. We stayed that way for several minutes before I noticed that the shallow, uneven pattern of John’s breathing indicated that he was awake as well. And yet neither of us sat up, or spoke, or moved at all.

Eventually I fell asleep again. And when I woke up after noon – to the sound of Mrs. Hudson screeching in the kitchen – John had left.
Here's a link to the song that John and Sherlock were waltzing to:
http://youtu.be/zTcu7MCtuTs

Thank you all for reading! Tomorrow I'm going out of town to visit family for a few days, so the next chapter probably won't be posted until the first week of August.
I took my Belstaff from the unmanned coat check and swung it over my shoulders as I exited the orangery. It was only eight-thirty, but I was absolutely exhausted. It had been such a long day. All I wanted to do was to crawl into my bed at the Berkeley Square Hotel, sleep until noon the next day, and catch an afternoon train back to London by myself.

My morose thoughts were interrupted by a quick beep on a car horn. I turned to see a grey BMW Five Series slowing down behind me. Stepping to the side of the road, I peered in the windscreen, and to my mild surprise saw Lestrade behind the wheel. He stopped his car beside me and asked, “Need a lift?”

“Thanks, Gill.” I said tiredly. “I’m staying at Berkeley Square. It’s just up Lower Clifton Hill, and then left on Berkeley Place.” I opened the passenger side door and sat down with none of my usual grace.

“No, I mean a lift back to London.”

“You’re going back to London tonight? That’s a two-hour drive.”

“Yeah, well, I have to talk to someone. Tonight if possible.”

“Well, okay,” I sighed and fastened my seatbelt. I really did prefer to sleep in my own bed.

“Tough night?” Lestrade asked.

“Yeah,” I chuckled grimly. We did not speak again until we reached Lisson Grove when Lestrade remarked on the construction. He seemed just as melancholy as me. As I was preoccupied with my own reflections, I did not enquire as to why.

I told myself that, if nothing else, I could be proud of the fact that I had done my very best for John that day. I had walked Mary down the aisle – as she is an orphan, she did not have a close family member to present her in marriage to John. I shepherded the bridal party around the church, photo locations, and reception venue. I smiled in photos – though I am sure that when they get their proofs Mary will remark that my grin appears forced and unnatural. I mingled, and gave a heartfelt speech on how much John’s friendship has meant to me. I played the waltz I composed especially for the happy couple, and watched as John twirled Mary around the dance floor in the way I taught him. So what if I bottled it when the Minister asked whether anyone present knew a reason why John and Mary could not marry? So what if I lost my courage and didn’t say, “Me! I have a reason! Because I love the groom, and if he marries her it will kill me!”

“Where’s your late night meeting?” I asked Lestrade when he pulled up outside the Baker Street flat.

“Hmm?” he said, still lost in his troubled thoughts. “Oh. Hampstead. Have a good night, Sherl. I’ll see if we’ve got some more cold cases for you to go through while John’s on his honeymoon.”

“Thanks,” I said, fishing my house keys out of the pocket of my morning suit. The house was dark. Mrs. Hudson was not due to return from Bristol until the following morning. Judging by the way she had been knocking back Cosmopolitans, I doubted she would make her 10am train. Just as I was unlocking the door I received a text message. It read, “Got your digits from Mary. It was so nice to
meet you today. Please give me a call when you’re ready to give up on him.” It was from Janine, Mary’s chief bridesmaid.

Janine’s job as a personal assistant to a media magnate prevented her from attending the rehearsal dinner the previous evening, so we only met during the ceremony. The first time we spoke was during the photo shoot at an old fountain on the campus of the University of Bristol.

“So you’re the famous Mr. Holmes. The Omega Detective!” She smiled cheekily at me. Janine had dark brown eyes, straight, dark hair that had been curled into loose waves for the wedding, and a Northern Irish accent that strangely enough reminded me of Moriarty. Maybe that’s why I found her both compelling and a bit frightening.

“Yes,” I said, watching her warily. Even after all these years, I’m still a bit frightened of alphas, especially when they look at me with undisguised interest like Janine did just then.

“I’m very pleased to meet you, but no sex, okay?” she winked naughtily.

“Sorry?” I said, and stepped back in alarm. I briefly looked around for assistance, but John was busy posing with Mary and the Minister, and Mycroft had not shown up to the ceremony, even though I had called him that morning asking him (begging him) to reconsider. I saw Lestrade looking glum at the edge of a group of giggling omega guests, and I resolved that if Janine said anything else to make me uncomfortable I would go stand with him.

However, Janine seemed to notice my uneasiness. “You don’t have to look so scared,” she said. “I’m only messing. Bridesmaid, best man. Alpha, omega. It’s a bit traditional.”

“Is it?” I felt myself blushing, and looked down at my feet.

“But not obligatory,” she tilted her head and looked at me thoughtfully. “Hmm. You are a pretty one, aren’t you? So tall for an omega. And what’s your smell? I can’t quite place it with all the betas wearing perfume here.”

“Grapefruit and cherry blossoms,” I whispered. “If you’ll excuse me, I think my friend the policeman wants to speak to me – “ I made to leave, but she put her hand gently on my shoulder.

“Hey, I’m sorry I was being so forward,” she smiled gently. “Mary said you might be a bit skittish. Don’t you worry though; I’m not that kind of alpha.”

“Oh,” I said. “Good.” I gave her a small smile of my own.

We spoke several more times that day. Though Janine made it clear that she was interested in me, she told me in no uncertain terms that she would respect my boundaries. As a result, I found myself relaxing in her company. Though most alphas wouldn’t bother attempting to engage an omega in any sort of meaningful conversation, she asked me about my educational background and my career as a detective. She seemed genuinely impressed with my accomplishments, and posed several thoughtful, interesting questions about my deductive methods. I found that I genuinely liked Janine. She certainly took my mind off my heartache, if only for a few hours. I had considered saying goodbye to her before I left, but I had worried that she might alert John and Mary to my departure. However, the text message she sent would seem to indicate that my early exit would not deter her pursuit of me. Nevertheless, as I was consumed with self-pity, a relationship with another alpha was the last thing on my mind.

I let myself in the sitting room door, and my eyes immediately fell on John’s chair. I sighed a shaky sigh and walked resignedly to my bedroom. I took off my morning suit, crumpled it up, and shoved it
into a bin liner, ready to drop off at the formal wear shop in the morning. I noticed that I had left my hat in Bristol.

I changed into my pyjamas and dressing gown. Just as I was leaving my bedroom, I paused, and turned to the shelf full of CDs on the far wall. I flipped through them until I found the souvenir that my parents had picked up for me when Mycroft took them to the theatre the previous winter. I unwrapped the plastic and deposited it in the overflowing kitchen bin. I opened the plastic case to find two CDs, and inserted the second one in the CD player on the sitting room desk. I turned up the volume, fast-forwarded to the fourth song, pressed repeat, and settled myself in John’s chair. My cheek and nose were pressed to the backrest, where I could still detect traces of his fading odour of gun metal and pine forests. By the time the song had played for the third time, I knew the lyrics well enough to sing along. My voice was wobbly, and it cracked on every high note, but I bellowed my way through the entire song at least four times. It occurred to me that just as much as sappy love songs suddenly make sense when one falls in love, sad songs suddenly make sense when one is brokenhearted.

I fell asleep thinking that Mary had beaten me to the one thing an omega like me could ever offer to an alpha like John: She was pregnant. My sensitive omega nose detected it as soon as she took my arm in the church that morning: a distinct odour of milk underlying her usual smell of orange perfume. Betas usually find it terribly difficult to conceive, but here Mary was: pregnant by accident, without even trying. And me? My uterus was so scarred by my months of Methadone use, I would never carry any alpha’s litter.

I felt useless and so utterly alone.

Chapter End Notes

If you weren't able to guess, here's the song Sherlock was singing along to:
http://youtu.be/_EOla4fbRFM

As usual, dialogue borrowed from Ariane DeVere's livejournal.

Thank you all for reading, leaving kudos, and making comments! I really do appreciate it!
Lovely, perfect Janine

Chapter Notes

First of all, sorry for the delay in updating. I've been visiting my grandmother, and I just didn't have time to write. Plus, she doesn't have wifi.

This is the point where the story will start to deviate significantly from season 3. There will be some unexpected twists, and other characters' stories to be told. I hope you like it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I spent most of the three weeks that John and Mary were on their honeymoon cuddled up on John’s chair under his old duvet. I spent my days sorting through the John room of my mind palace again and again. I had reviewed some of my most precious memories so many times they had grown soft and fuzzy around the edges. It was increasingly difficult to tell which were real and which were fantasies constructed by my broken heart. Had John ever kissed me? Had we ever almost had sex? Most importantly, had I ever been the best friend and roommate of the kindest, wisest man I had ever known? In a life full of heartache and disaster, had I ever been so lucky? And if I had, how did I let it all slip away?

After her return from Bristol Mrs. Hudson came by a few times a day with tea and biscuits, which I left untouched (except for her ginger-molasses cookies – I never could resist those). “Sherlock,” she said sadly. “You can’t stay in here pining. You’re killing yourself.”

“Who cares?” I grumbled.

“Lots of people. Including me,” she sighed.

Two days after the wedding, Lestrade dropped off a storage box full of thirty- year-old case files (apparently I had already solved all of the Metropolitan Police’s more recent cases). I couldn’t summon the energy or interest to open the box, and instead used it as a footstool and tea tray. Over the next few weeks Lestrade stopped by a few more times to inquire after my progress on his cold cases. When he saw that I hadn’t even glanced at them, he said to me, “Sherlock, what’s going on? You used to live for the Work.”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” I muttered, cuddling deeper into the duvet.

“Look, I know about you and John.”

“You do?” I looked at Lestrade incredulously. He really had become very perceptive indeed!

“Yeah. And I know you’re hurting. But you can’t just let this defeat you. It’s killing you.”

“Uh-huh. Mrs. Hudson already said –“

“I’m serious, Sherlock,” Lestrade interrupted me. “Listen to me: you are literally, literally killing yourself.” His voice was tense and worried.

I looked at Lestrade for a long moment before whispering, “Wh-what do you mean, Gary?”
“I mean you’re pining. Wasting away over lost love. That can literally kill an omega. Jesus, didn’t you learn anything in your OmegEd classes?”

“I – I never went to any,” I said, feeling apprehension rise in my throat. I stood up and looked at my reflection in the mirror above the fireplace. My eyes were sunken, and my lips were pale and chapped.

“Well, remember all those kiddie fairy tales? The ones where the omega drops dead when their alpha is killed or marries someone else?”

“I th-thought thothe were m-mythth!” I said, poking and pulling at my purplish eyelids.

“They’re based in reality,” Lestrade said anxiously. Suddenly overcome with panic, I turned and thundered down the stairs to Mrs. Hudson’s kitchen, where she stood rolling out pastry.

“Ith it true?” I squawked.

“Is what true?” she turned and saw the fear on my face.

“About – about omegath dying from lotht love?”

Mrs. Hudson nodded sadly, and sat at her tiny kitchen table. I joined her, and she took my cold hands in hers. “It is true, Sherlock. A pining omega can die in less than a month. I think that the scientific explanation is that they waste away from dehydration and malnourishment, but traditionally we’ve just said that they die from a broken heart.”

“Oh god, Mrs. Hudthon!” I gasped, feeling tears in my eyes. “I – I don’t want to die!”

“Good, that’s good!” she squeezed my hands tightly. “That’s the most important thing. Now what you have to do is make a real effort to get past this. Surround yourself with love and positivity.”

“Right,” Lestrade said from behind me. “Get out there and live your life. Visit your friends. Visit your mad brother; he worries about you, you know. Work on those cases. Become the strong, independent Sherlock we all know and love once more.”

“Right, right. Okay. That’s… okay,” I gulped, still in a state of panic. “I can do all that.”

“And above all, stop fixating on John. He’s Mary’s now. I know it hurts, but you have to accept that,” Lestrade patted my shoulders comfortably.

“Right,” I whispered.

That morning I ate a full English breakfast, carried John’s armchair and duvet up to the attic bedroom (with Lestrade’s help – after nearly three weeks with very little food, I had no upper body strength), and sent the following text message: “Janine, it’s Sherlock Holmes. Sorry it’s taken me so long to get in touch. Would you like to meet for coffee? – SH”

Less than a minute later, I received the following reply: “I’d love to, pretty baby. Criterion near Russell Square 2day at 2 ok?”

* 

Janine arrived at the busy coffee shop precisely on time, and looking absolutely perfect. It was a sunny June afternoon, and she wore a strapless floral sundress that showed off her toned shoulders. Her hair had again been styled in loose, wavy curls that caught the summer sun and glistened in
shades of burgundy and chestnut. Her confident alpha stride caught the attention of several of the coffee shop’s omega patrons, but she ignored them completely. When she leaned over my table to kiss my cheek, I caught their envious, hateful stares.

“Hello, beautiful,” she said breezily, depositing her Chanel purse on the floor beside her chair. “What can I get you?”

“A lemonade, I suppose,” I said. Despite major changes to the laws governing the types of beverages that restaurants could serve to omegas, there remained considerable social pressure against allowing omegas to consume caffeinated drinks.

Janine, however, waved her hand dismissively and said, “Nonsense. You invited me to share a coffee. This is a coffee shop. We’re having coffee. What kind do you want?”

“Black, two sugars,” I said. “Aren’t you concerned about what people will think?”

“Not in the slightest,” she grinned. “I couldn’t give a beta’s toss about what this bunch of old farts think about what omegas should be drinking. You’re an adult; you should drink whatever you want.” I decided that I rather liked Janine’s refreshing take on the social conventions surrounding omega life.

Though our coffee break was brief – Janine had to return to the office by three o’clock – it was very encouraging. Janine was a well-read and erudite companion. Her job kept her busy, but she took great care in her appearance. Her wardrobe was carefully chosen: both feminine and professional. Her high-heeled Jimmy Choo shoes added three inches to her height of five feet, ten inches. Consequently, when we both stood up, she was an inch taller than me. I could see that she had her straight, alpha hair styled frequently, and her large alpha hands manicured regularly.

She paid close attention to everything I said, and, unlike most alphas on a date, did not dismiss my opinions as the uninformed, hysterical ramblings of an uneducated and ignorant omega. She was fascinated with my work, and asked me all manner of questions about my cases. However, when I asked whether she’d be interested in accompanying me on a case, she dismissed that possibility out of hand, with a casual, “Oh, no. I get enough adventure making sure my boss gets to dinner on time. No crime solving for me, thanks…. That doesn’t mean I’m not interested in hearing about it though.” For a second that rather disappointed me, but as our meeting progressed I realized how much I enjoyed her open admiration of my cleverness and bravery. This may have led me to embellish some of my stories, but I just couldn’t resist Janine’s fascinated, appreciative reactions. “And then you figured out that her password was SHERLOCKED, just from her increased pulse?” she would gasp. “My, aren’t you a smarty-pants! Good god, I think I’m out with the smartest omega in the world!”

I decided that my best – my only – chance for happiness lay with this woman, so I asked her out on a proper date on the next Friday. She readily agreed. As we left the Criterion, I resolved that I would do everything in my power to not make the same mistakes I had with John.

“Janine,” I said. “Before we take things any further, there’s something you need to know about me.”

“Is it that you were in love with Mary’s husband?” she asked seriously. “I asked you to get in touch when you were over him. If you’re not, then maybe we should put off dating.”

“No. I mean, yes, I – I was in love with him, but that’s not what – Wait, how did you know?”

“I saw you at the wedding,” she patted my arm soothingly. “I’ve never seen anyone looking so miserable when he thought no one was looking.”

“There’s more? Should I be worried?” Janine gave an uneasy laugh.

I drew a deep breath, looked down at my shoes, and said, “Janine, I am a ruined omega slag and I cannot bear children. I think that as a potential… partner you have a right to know that from the very start. If either of those revelations are a problem for you, I would understand if you don’t wish to see me again. I mean, I’ll be disappointed, but I’ll understand.”

“A ruined – What do you mean, Sherlock?” She kept stroking my arm. I looked up to see concern on her face, but none of the scorn or disgust I had expected.

“When I was in university I – I was raped by three alphas in a library basement. It was my fault because I went out during my heat… but you have to understand that it was my first heat, so I didn’t know what was happening. And then a few years later I took Methadone to help with the withdrawal symptoms from my heroin and cocaine habit. It ended up… wrecking my uterus. So I can’t bring a litter to term.”

“Heroin and cocaine? Sherlock, I –” Janine should her head in disbelief. “You?”

“For a period in my twenties, I was a drug addict. I’ve been clean for years though, so don’t worry about that. It’s just – I was very unhappy at the time.”

“I see. This is a lot to process, you know.” I noticed that she didn’t stop her comforting stroking of my arm. It was a very protective, very alpha gesture. “Is this why you’re – you know – the way you are?”

“Partly. I also have a strange brother. Anyway, like I said, I’ll understand if you don’t want to go out on Friday after all.”

“No. What? No, I didn’t say that I wanted to break our plans. Is that what you thought? That I’d hear all that and then say, ‘Sorry, baby, not interested’?” she asked.

I shrugged and felt myself blush, because that’s exactly what I expected.

“No. Jesus, the fact that some alpha lowlifes took advantage of you when you were at your most vulnerable doesn’t make me think any less of you at all. Actually, the fact that you could move on from that and become an internationally renowned detective makes me respect you even more. And as for your uterus, well don’t tell my Mam, but I never wanted kids anyway!”

I laughed at that. Both because it was funny, and because I was greatly relieved. Janine’s reaction was better than I could possibly have hoped for. “So… we’re still on for Friday?”

“Of course,” she smiled and kissed me on the cheek. “Of course we are, you amazing creature, you! But Sherlock, you have to promise me two things….”

“What?” I asked warily.

“First, if we’re moving too fast, or doing something you’re not comfortable with, I want you to say something. It won’t hurt my feelings or make me angry. And I can stop anytime you need to. I want you to enjoy yourself, so you set the pace, alright?”

“Yes. Fine. And the second?”

“I want you to stop telling yourself that it’s your fault you got raped.” I opened my mouth to
disagree, but she continued, “Alphas have a lot more control than they like to admit. Even during omega heats. It’s their fault. No one else’s. On behalf of all alphas, I’m sorry your first time wasn’t… nicer.”

“Oh. Well. It’s alright,” I mumbled, deep in thought.

“It’s not, but I’d like to try to make it up to you,” she smiled at me, and I found myself smiling back, my head swirling and heart pounding. In an uncharacteristic fit of daring, I leaned forward and kissed Janine on the mouth. She gave a surprised laugh, then wrapped her arms around me and kissed me soundly back. As our mouths and tongues touched and danced I found myself trying to place her scent. As she pulled away, and began to wipe her lipstick off my face and neck with a tissue, I figured it out: peppermint and snow. Very refreshing for an alpha.

* 

Our first proper date was at the Savoy, where generations of alphas before us had sought to impress omegas on their first dates. Janine picked me up at Baker Street, and we took a taxi to the restaurant. Janine insisted on a quiet booth, suitable for intimate conversation.

The beta waiter arrived to take our order. In keeping with tradition, he directed all of his questions at Janine. After Janine had placed her order, the waiter asked her, “And what will the omega be having? We have some lovely salads for omegas who are watching their weight, you know.”

“The omega is a grown-up. He can both read and speak English, so maybe you should ask him what he’s having,” she said in a false, bright tone.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Ma’am!” The waiter was mortified.

“Don’t apologize to me,” she said in the same dangerously happy tone. “He’s the one you’ve offended.” She gestured at me.

I magnanimously accepted the waiter’s grudging apology (Neither alphas nor betas like to grovel before omegas) and ordered the sole and a glass of red wine.

“Janine,” I said after the waiter left us. “Why are you so good to me?”

“What?” she laughed. “Because you’re lovely, you silly thing. Couldn’t you deduce that?”

“No, I mean that most alphas wouldn’t think twice about a waiter asking them for their omega’s order. And you’ve been so accepting about my… you know, history. Why?”

“Ah. That. Well, I had two omega half-brothers growing up in Belfast. I guess it helped me understand things from their perspective.”

“What do you mean you ‘had’ two half-brothers?”

“Oh, well one died in childbirth a few years ago. I lost touch with the other one a long time ago. He – he was also raped by an alpha. Our dad, the family alpha, made him marry the pig, and the two of them moved to Eastern Europe. He went back to Belfast to visit a few times while I was away at school, but I haven’t heard from him since.”

“I see,” I said. This couldn’t possibly be a coincidence. I made a mental note to do some research on the matter.

The rest of our dinner was quite pleasant. When we had finished our dessert and coffee, Janine suggested that we take a walk beside the river. As we strolled hand-in-hand past the Victoria
Embankment Gardens, she said to me, “Sherlock, I’ve been thinking: Mary said that you were sometimes skittish around alphas, and that any talk about sex made you uncomfortable. But she didn’t know why. Is it because of what those three alphas did to you when you were younger?”

“Yes,” I admitted, grateful that John hadn’t told his wife my secret. “Sometimes alphas frighten me… Not you though!” I hastened to add.

“Good,” Janine laughed. “And what about sex? Does that frighten you too?”

“Yes,” I stopped to sit at a bench while I thought about how to phrase this. Janine sat beside me and watched me carefully. “It does. I mean, I find the idea of it… intriguing. And when I’m in heat, you know, diddle and wank just like every other omega. But the thought of being… intimate with an alpha just… it turns my stomach. I’m sorry. I know that’s not what you want to hear. But it’s the truth, and I’ve resolved to be more truthful when I’m with a –“

“Sherlock, stop,” Janine stroked my arm again. “I understand completely. I told you that you could set the pace, and I meant it. But what is it about sex that turns your stomach?”

I thought about this for a full minute before replying: “It’s the loss of control, I suppose. For both me and the alpha. When I’m in heat I – I can’t trust myself not to make poor choices. And I can’t trust an alpha not to hurt me. You see, the alphas in the Library hurt me very badly, and there’s a lot of scar tissue still. During my heats I can’t even use an alpha-shaped sex toy because the knot is too painful.”

“You poor thing,” Janine sighed as she took my hand. “But you know there’s a solution to all that, right?”

“To not have sex ever again? That option’s been working pretty well for me so far.” I said drolly.

“No,” she laughed and rubbed my hand with the back of her thumb. “To have sex outside of your heat.”

“What? Can – can we do that?” I said in astonishment. You see, to me sex had long been something that an omega was occasionally forced to endure thanks to overwhelming hormonal pressure; it had never occurred to me that an omega might choose – of its own volition – to have sex outside of its heat.

“Well, of course you can, you silly thing!” she laughed, but not unkindly. “Didn’t they teach you that in your OmegEd classes? Or at an omega retreat?”

“No. I mean, I never took OmegEd, and I’ve never been to an omega retreat either. But I’m starting to wish I had.”

“Never?” Janine gave me a searching look. “Oh, Sherlock, in so many ways you’re just like a new omega.”

“New omega? I’m thirty-eight years old!” I frowned.

“It doesn’t matter. You still have so much to learn about how amazing you and your body really are.”

I looked away, inexplicably on the verge of tears. Janine seemed to have noticed this, because she said very gently, “Yes, you can have sex whenever you want. If you have it during the off-heat part of your cycle, there’s less hormones at play, so both you and your alpha can stop before things go too far. And without an omega’s heat pheromones to trigger it, the alpha’s knot won’t appear. That’s
why there’s no knotting in alpha-beta sex, you know. Plus, you can’t get pregnant.”

“I didn’t know any of that,” I admitted.

“Sherlock, I know that I said that you could set the pace, but if you ever wanted to try to have sex again – maybe during your off-heat – I would love to be the alpha to teach you how wonderful it can be. I promise that we would only do what you wanted to do, and if you wanted to stop for any reason, I would respect that. All I want is for you to be happy. Would you think about that?”

“Yes,” I replied. “Yes, I will.” Indeed for the next few weeks, I thought of little else.

* 

One month to the day after Janine and I had started dating, I sent her the following text message:

“Are you free tonight? I want to cook you dinner. – SH”

She replied, “Yes. I’m done at seven. See you at Baker Street around half seven. I didn’t know you could cook! Aren’t you amazing?”

I responded, “Yes I am. ;-)…… I thought about what you offered on our first date. Could we try that tonight? - SH”

There was a pause before she replied, “Are you sure?”

“Yes,” I replied.

During our month together, Janine and I had gone on seventeen dates, which included four movies, two plays, one musical (I begged Janine to never tell Mycroft that I cried at Les Mis), two hiking trips, two trips to the seaside, one dinner with Mycroft (who got along quite well with Janine, I was relieved to see) and five nights kissing and cuddling on her sofa. I had never cooked for her, but I wanted that night to be special. So I went downstairs to ask Mrs. Hudson how to make a shepherd’s pie, which I knew was Janine’s favourite meal.

During that month together Janine had been very patient with me. She kept our snogging sessions leisurely and gentle, and she always asked first before trying something new like putting her hand inside my shirt or nipping my sensitive neck gland. Though she would surely deny it, I think that she and I were both growing frustrated with my habit of putting a halt to things just when the two of us were getting aroused. It was time, I decided with no pressure from her, to finally move things forward.

She arrived promptly at seven-thirty. While the pie was in the oven, we drank the bottle of wine she brought (the liquor merchant on Baker Street still refused to sell me alcohol if I wasn’t accompanied by an alpha!) and she told me about her day. Though I think her job sounds a bit boring, she finds arranging the schedule of a high-powered media magnate to be immensely satisfying.

I took the shepherd’s pie out of the oven at eight. The crust on the bottom was doughy and raw, and the filling was cold and undercooked in places, but Janine told me that she loved it anyway. When we finished, I retrieved some of my favourite board games from the shelf above the television.

“I don’t think there’s enough time for a full game of Risk or Monopoly, but how does Battleship suit you? Or there’s always Cluedo.” I noticed Janine watching me fondly. “What?” I said.

She shook her head. “It’s just, board games on a date. You’re very cute, you know.” I smiled at that. “Cluedo, I should think. Then you can show off your detective skills!”

“Sadly, my detective skills give me no advantage whatsoever in Cluedo. Risk and Battleship,
definitely. But, ironically enough, there’s very little role for deductions in Cluedo.”

Janine laughed at that. We played three games before I noticed that Janine kept guessing that the knife was the murder weapon, even after I repeatedly showed her that I had the knife card. I realized that she was letting me win. I speculated that she was growing impatient with my delaying tactics, and would rather move things to the bedroom. But first there was something I had to ask her.

“Janine, why do you like me?” I blurted out as I packed the cards and game pieces into the box.

“Because you’re lovely. I’ve told you that,” she sipped her wine. “Why do you like me?”

“Because you’re perfect in every way.” I said emphatically. “You’re so confident, so put-together. You always say exactly what I need to hear, and you never let me down. And you make me feel safe and good about myself… especially about being an omega. I’ve never known any alpha like you. In fact you’re so amazing I can’t help but wonder why you’d be interested in a messed up, inexperienced, ruined omega like me. You could have any omega on the planet; so why me? What can I possibly have to offer you?”

Janine sighed thoughtfully, slipped off her Louboutin heels, and tucked her feet underneath her bottom. “Maybe it’s because I see what a precious treasure you are beneath your problems. I know that you see yourself as messed up and naïve and ruined, but I see that you are also brilliant and funny and loving. Maybe I hope that if I help you see past your shortcomings you can be happy. And love yourself as much as I do.”

I paused and thought about that. “Take me to bed, Janine,” I whispered.

* *

We kissed frantically on the sofa for a few minutes, before I took Janine’s hand and led her to my bedroom. She unzipped the back of her dress and shimmed out of it, while I tore off my suit jacket and shoes, and tossed them in the corner. We clambered onto my bed and kissed again before continuing to remove each other’s clothes. I tugged her slip over her head, and she lay down so that I could peel her pantyhose down her legs. I paused as I saw the bulge of her penis growing in her white lace panties. My throat suddenly felt dry.

“Janine,” I croaked as she unfastened my trousers and slipped her hand down the front of my pants.

“Mmm? What?” she mumbled while sucking at my neck.

“Can – can I leave my shirt on?”

“What? Why?” She paused to look me in the eye. “Do you need to stop?”

“No! It’s because – because I have scars. From the… you know.” God, I did not want to think about that tonight! “I don’t want you to see them.”

“That’s fine. Just fine. We all have body parts we’re not fond of.”

“Even you? You’re perfect!” I said in surprise.

Janine laughed and kissed me soundly. “You go ahead and leave your shirt on, darling. We can even – “she leaned towards my bedside table and clicked off my lamp. “ – do this in the dark if it makes you more comfortable.”

“Thanks,” I smiled, then sat back so that she could pull off my trousers and socks. Janine left my
pants on, though they did little to disguise the fact that my own penis was poking upwards towards her. She palmed its hard length through my pants, and placed a kiss on its head. Then she sat up to unfasten her bra and wriggle out of her panties.

Janine tossed her beautiful hair while my eyes roved over her glorious body. Though the room was in shadow I could see that she had full breasts with small, brownish nipples. Her thighs and buttocks were well-muscled and powerful looking. Like many female alphas, she waxed her thick, dark pubic hair, but there was still a thin treasure trail of hair leading from her navel to the base of her enormous penis.

Even half-hard, Janine’s cock was purple and veiny. And yet, without the grotesque knot, I didn’t find it all that frightening – even when it bobbed up and down in pace with her quickening pulse.

“Can I touch it?” I whispered.

“Please do,” Janine smiled and lay back on the bed. I used my fingertips to lightly stroke her cock from the tip to the base. I was relieved to note that it felt like normal flesh – like my own penis – though somewhat warmer and twitchier. I ran my fingers over the hairy, wrinkled skin of her testicles, and rolled them around in my palm to get an idea of their weight. Satisfied that there was nothing monstrous or supernatural about Janine’s genitals, I lowered my head and gave the head of her penis a soft kiss. She gasped at that. Encouraged by her favourable reaction, I opened my mouth and took the whole glans inside my mouth. It tasted like ordinary human skin, though the hole at the tip was beginning to leak salty fluid. I flicked my tongue over the slit, and Janine groaned, “Oh, Sherlock, Sherlock, do you know how long I’ve wanted this to happen? Finally you’re putting those gorgeous omega lips to their best use.”

I released her cock from my mouth and asked, “What do you mean?”

“Those lips, Sherlock. Those dirty, cocksucking lips. I guarantee that the first thought every alpha’s ever had when they first laid eyes on you was to wonder what your lips would feel like on their dick.”

I found Janine’s dirty talk terribly arousing, so I returned to sucking her cock and stroking her balls with gusto. There was no way that I could fit her whole penis in my mouth – especially not when it had become fully erect – but I took as much as I could without gagging. I am certain that this was far from the best blowjob Janine had ever received, but what I lacked in experience, I tried to make up for with enthusiasm and effort.

All too soon, Janine began to mutter, “I’m so close. Darling, you - you need to stop.” She pushed at my head with the heel of her hand.

“Why?” I said, still running my tongue over her tightening scrotum.

“Because tonight’s about you, and I don’t want to finish before you,” Janine sat up and smiled at me with a glassy look in her eyes. “So lie down, and let me have a turn.”

I lay on my back and allowed Janine to peel off my briefs. Though it was as stiff and sensitive as it had ever been, my omega penis was dwarfed by Janine’s massive alpha cock. She took its entire length in one large hand, and began to stroke it vigorously. “Please,” I whispered. “Please be gentler.”

“Sorry,” Janine replied. She made her strokes slower and softer, and I laid my head back to enjoy the sensations. She used her other hand to caress my hairless inner thighs, and then to tickle the lips of my vulva. I gasped at that, and spread my legs a bit so that Janine could have easier access to my vulva. Without a pause in the strokes she was administering to my cock, Janine ran her tongue down
the length of my hairless labia, then dipped it deep inside my vagina. “Delicious,” she said. “Grapefruit and cherry blossoms. You are absolutely delicious.”

She continued stroking my cock and licking at my vulva. I was so overwhelmed with the twin sensations, all I could do was lie back and moan when she found a particularly tingly spot. As pleasurable as it was, however, the growing, unsatiated feeling of need I was experiencing was too much for me. “Enough, enough, Janine. You have to stop!” I gasped.

She obediently sat up, and panted, “Alright, alright. What’s the matter? Aren’t you – aren’t you enjoying yourself?”

“I am, but I want you. Inside me. Now!” I replied, bending my knees and spreading my legs as far as they could go.

Janine smiled at my wanton display. “Are you sure? It’s not too late to stop.”

“Yes, for god’s sake, just take me now!” I groaned.

“Well, who am I to argue?” Janine knelt between my legs, and guided her hard, heavy cock to the entrance of my vagina. I lay back and stared at the shadows on the ceiling as she slowly thrust it into my body. The feelings produced were an odd mixture of pleasure as Janine’s cock stroked over my sensitive nerve endings, burning pain as it brushed past old scar tissue, and most of all fear as I struggled to process the notion that an alpha had its cock inside of me and was pinning me to the bed with its body. When her penis was fully ensheathed in my body, Janine stroked my hair and asked, “What’s the matter, Sherlock? Is this alright? Please talk to me, darling!”

“It’s – I – No, it’s not.” I admitted. To my horror, I felt tears in my eyes. “I just – I don’t like to be squashed underneath like this.”

“Ah. I know just the fix for that.” With no further warning, Janine looped an arm behind my bottom and twisted to the side. I found myself seated on top of her, her hard cock still firmly ensconced in my vagina. “There. Now you’re in charge,” she said, fanning her long brown hair over the pillow.

“Wh-what do I do?” I asked. In all my heat fantasies I had never pictured myself on top during sex; I had always seen myself as a passive participant.

“Anything you want. Go fast; go slow. Whatever works for you.”

I closed my eyes tightly and began to squirm side to side, back and forth, trying to find the positions that caused Janine’s hard cock to stroke pleasurably against the walls of my vagina. After a few minutes of trying, I found a particularly sensitive portion of the forward wall. I bounced up and down on Janine’s lap, trying to get her cock to brush against it again and again.

“Am – am I doing it right?” I gasped as I bounced erratically.

“Sort of,” Janine purred in reply. “But try to do it smoothly. And you can open your eyes.”

I opened my eyes and looked at Janine. Her perfect hair was mussed, and her eyes were glazed with passion. She held my boney hips, helping to correct my movements so that I was gliding easily, instead of bobbing around awkwardly.

When I finally got the hang of it, she said, “This is another benefit of having the omega on top.” She took my hard little cock in her hand and began to fondle it. I could not handle both sensations at once. My rhythm faltered and I let out a deep groan. “If you – if you keep doing that, I’m gonna come.”
“Good,” Janine said as she increased the pace of her caresses. I tried to regain my pace, but soon my movements devolved into frantic, frenetic shudders and thrusts. I ran my hands under my shirt and over my hard, sensitive nipples. With no advance notice, my orgasm washed over me, and I momentarily lost control of my body. I felt my vagina flutter and pulse around Janine’s hard cock, and a hot jet of clear ejaculate spray over her hand and belly.

And then, through no conscious decision of my own, I found myself groaning, “J-J-Oooohnnn.”

Chapter End Notes

Omega male + alpha female = a weird collection of body parts.

Thank you all for reading!
“Janine! Janine, I’m so sorry!” I shouted at the closed door to my bathroom. I heard the shower start, so I went back to my bedroom to fetch a pair of underpants. I put them on and sat down in the hallway outside the bathroom door to wait for Janine to finish.

As I had been high on a post-orgasmic endorphin rush, it had taken me a few seconds to realize what I had said. When I finally did, I looked down to see Janine staring at me with astonished hurt in her eyes. She muttered, “Excuse me,” and rolled to the side, causing me to topple off her lap and onto the mattress. Janine searched on the floor for her bra and panties, then fled to the loo.

She appeared ten minutes later, freshly showered, but with a blotchy face and tears in her eyes. “I’m so sorry, Janine,” I said again. “Please talk to me.” Janine ignored me and returned to the bedroom, where she pulled on her slip and stepped into her rumpled summer dress.

“Let me help you with that,” I mumbled, moving forward to help her with the zip.

“Don’t touch me! Don’t you dare touch me!” she snarled. I stopped in my tracks, suddenly recalling how many of the murder cases I had investigated were the result of the humiliation of a prideful alpha.

“I am sorry,” I whispered.

Janine scoffed at that. “Not as sorry as I am, Sherlock. Not half as sorry!” She gathered up her discarded pantyhose and marched out to the living room. I followed her. “Where are my fucking shoes?” she hissed impatiently.

“Un-under the sofa,” I murmured, careful not to enrage her further.

She sat on the sofa to slip on her shoes. “When we first started dating, I asked you whether you were still in love with John,” she sniffled as she fastened the straps around her ankles. “And you said you weren’t.”

“I know,” I whispered.

“So was that a lie?” she looked up at me angrily.

“No! I – I didn’t think I… I don’t know, Janine. I’m so sorry.”

“So you keep saying,” she sighed as she stuffed her pantyhose into her handbag. “That was the one thing I asked of you, Sherlock. To not be in love with John when we started dating.”

“I know,” I whispered again.

“I’ve been so patient with you. The only thing – the one single thing! – I asked for in return was that you not be in love with John fucking Watson.”

“I know,” my voice wobbled.

“So are you?”
“Am I what?” I asked, swiping tears from my cheeks.

“In love with him?” Janine stood up to fetch her cardigan from the coat rack.

I shrugged. “I guess so. I’m sorry, I don’t want to be be-because it’s killing me, but I can’t help it.”

Janine shook her head as she slipped on her sweater. “Do you mind if I ask why? What’s he got that I haven’t? What’s he done for you that I haven’t?” Her voice broke. “I’ve done everything for you, Sherlock!”

“I know!” I said, stepping towards her. To my dismay, Janine stepped away from me and opened the door. It was at that moment that I realized that I couldn’t fix this; that it was over. “I don’t understand it myself! I really, really wish I wasn’t, because I know I can never have him. Objectively, I know you’ve been so good to me. Better than he’s ever been. B-but… I just can’t help how I feel about John,” I finished lamely.

Janine shook her head angrily and descended the first flight of stairs. She paused on the landing to hiss at me, “Then why did you ask me out, hmm? Why did you get my hopes up?”

“Be-because I’m dying, Janine. I needed to get over John, and you seemed like the best – the only – chance I had of doing tho.”

Janine’s eyes widened in surprise. “Are you pining, Sherlock?”

I nodded sadly. There was a long pause before Janine said, “I’m sorry. I – I wish you weren’t. But if you’re still in love with John, there’s not a lot I can do about it.”

“I know,” I squeaked.

“Goodbye, Sherlock,” she whispered and continued down the stairs.

“Janine, wait!” I sniffled and followed her. “I have to tell you something.”

Janine stopped at the bottom of the stairs, but did not turn to look up at me. “What?” she asked in a flat voice.

“It’s about your brother – your half brother, I mean – Jim. Jim Moriarty?” I said from a few steps above her.

Janine whirled around. “Jimmy? What about him?”

“He – he’s dead,” I said without embellishment.

Janine’s hands flew to her face. “Dead? Oh my god! How? It wasn’t that horrible Miki, was it?” she said between her fingers.

“No. No, actually he killed himself.” I decided there and then that there was nothing to be gained from tarnishing Janine’s memory of her brother, so I deliberately left out major details of Moriarty’s story.

“Oh my god!” she said tearfully. “I – I knew he was unhappy, but I didn’t know he was that unhappy. How do you know this?”

“We knew each other briefly. Towards the end,” I said succinctly. “I think we understood each other.”
“Oh. Right. I guess omegas do tend to get to know each other,” she said, wiping her eyes. “Thank you for telling me. My family will be… happy to have some closure.”

“No problem,” I said, attempting a smile (and failing miserably at it).

“I will miss you,” she leaned in to kiss my cheek.

“I’ll miss you too,” I whispered.

“Goodbye, Sherlock Holmes,” Janine opened the front door. “I hope that you can find peace.”

“Goodbye, Janine.” Janine exited the door, and I sat down heavily on the bottom step of the staircase. “Fuck,” I said, running my hands through my hair.

I climbed the stairs to the attic bedroom, and cuddled into John’s old chair. I tried not to think, because my thoughts kept turning to how I had ruined my one and only chance at being happy without John… and, because of that failure, my imminent death.

The next morning I dressed in a pair of comfortable track bottoms and an old blue raincoat, and headed to Stamford Hill. I was glad to see that even though it was no longer being run by Big Frank’s cartel, the Rossington Street flop house was still functioning. I bought some syringes and several heroic doses of heroin from the resident dealer, and made myself comfortable on one of the filthy mattresses on the third floor.

Though my thoughts were muddled at the time, I am pretty sure that I intended to kill myself. Why would I want to spend a month wasting away in misery, I reasoned, when I could spend my last few days on earth in a drug-induced euphoria?

My plan, however, did not come to fruition. Even through my heroin stupor, I began to notice a frisson of excitement running through the dealers and junkies one afternoon about a week later. “Wh-what’s going on?” I lisped at a woman curled up on a camping foamy next to me.

“What’s going on? The Bookkeeper’s coming! So look alive!” The way she said ‘Bookkeeper’ indicated to me that this was a person of some importance.

I sat up and noticed the young men whose job it was to maintain security in the flop house rushing about collecting rubbish off the floor and straightening the mattresses lining the walls.

A wretched young man poked his head in the door and hissed in terror, “She’s here! She’s here!”

Three people entered the room. The first I recognized as the mid-level cartel boss who worked out of a small, damp office on the ground floor. I blinked and rubbed my eyes when I recognized the second one. It looked just like Lestrade. The dealers and security boys ignored him completely. However, when the third individual entered the room I noticed that they all bowed their heads respectfully towards her.

“Mrs. Hudson?” I gasped, certain that my eyes were playing tricks on me.

“That’s him,” she said pointing at me. “Put him in the car, please.” This couldn’t possibly be real, I thought; surely this was a drug-induced hallucination.
“As you wish, Ma’am,” the cartel boss bowed his head again. He pointed at two of the security boys and they scrambled towards me. They each took an arm and hustled me out the door and into Lestrade’s waiting BMW. As we left the room, I saw the cartel boss bend to give Mrs. Hudson’s hand a kiss. “Thank you for gracing us with your presence, Ma’am. It’s been far too long.”

“Hmm,” she replied in a displeased voice. “I don’t want your men to sell that omega any more drugs.”

*  

I passed out in the back seat of Lestrade’s car. When I came to myself, I was laying down on the smelly leather sofa in his office. I was vaguely aware of people milling around me. Mrs. Hudson was there, as was Lestrade. He was holding someone tightly. Someone crying hysterically. Someone who smelled like juniper and cucumbers. That someone was sobbing, “Thank you, thank you, thank you,” over and over again. Lestrade replied tearfully, “Anything for you.” I fell asleep trying to remember whether I knew anyone who smelled of juniper and cucumbers.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for reading. I’ll be spending the next couple of days at the lake, so there will be some delay with the next chapter (which is very, very important).
When I woke up, I was still on the sofa in Lestrade’s office. I gave a start when I realized that someone was sitting on the nearby coffee table, watching me in silence. I calmed down when I realized that it was only my brother. He sat with his elbows resting on his knees and his hands folded below his chin as if in prayer. I noticed that he had not dyed his hair in quite some time; his natural ginger colour was showing through the brown.

He cleared his throat and said, “If someone had told me four years ago that you, of all people, would fall apart over something as petty and small as an issue of unrequited love, I would have laughed in their face.”

I sighed and rubbed a hand over my dirty, sweaty face. “Jesus. Give me a fucking break, Mycroft,” I said as I painfully rolled to a sitting position. “Need I remind you that I’m just an omega? An omega who’s going to pine to death in the next month in all likelihood?”

“Wrong,” Mycroft said sharply.

“What?” I looked at him intently. I could see that he needed a shave and his eyes were red-rimmed.

“You’re wrong. You’re not ‘just’ an omega. You are Sherlock Holmes,” he said slowly rising to his feet. “Now get your coat. We’re going home.”

* 

When we left New Scotland Yard, I assumed that we would be taking the A41 all the way to Hampstead. I was surprised when the car turned east at Crawford Street and stopped at Baker Street.

When the car stopped outside number 221, I was dismayed to see a police van parked outside, and several SOCOs wearing their standard-issue white suits milling about. “What fresh hell is this?” I snarled and opened the door of the Jaguar. As I stood up, I noticed how hot and fuzzy-headed I was feeling. Damned heroin!

The front door of number 221 opened, and four SOCOs exited the building carrying blue rubbish bin liners full of trash. They tossed their burdens into the back of the van, and their leader removed his face mask to speak to Mycroft, who was now standing beside me. “Just finishing up, sir. There’s some food waste in the kitchen as well. Do you want us to dispose of it?”

“Please do,” replied Mycroft. “Was there much contraband?”

The head SOCO shrugged and said, “We found some old drug paraphernalia in a box under the bed, and several packets of unidentified pills in the bathroom. In accordance with DI Lestrade’s instructions, we disposed of all of it.”

“Marvelous. Thank you. You and your men are free to leave.”

The SOCO whistled loudly, gave a ‘wrap it up’ gesture to his colleagues, and they climbed into the van, preparing to depart.

“Ah, you received my message. I’m so glad,” Mycroft said as the van pulled away. I turned to see that he was addressing a man waiting next to the front door. To my surprise, it was John.
I had not seen or heard from John since the night of his wedding almost two months earlier. Married life seemed to be agreeing with him: from his time in Majorca he was tanned a golden brown, and he had put on seven pounds.

“Yeah, I did. What’s going on Mycroft?” John turned to me then. “And what happened to you? You look terrible!”

My face fell at that last comment. Mycroft smiled his dangerous smile and gestured at the open door to 221 Baker Street. “Doctor Watson, if you’d be so kind, I’d like to have a brief word with you inside. Sherlock, come.”

We followed Mycroft indoors. He deposited his umbrella in the stand, and began to remove his suit jacket. “Sherlock,” he said casually (a little too casually). “In the car ride over, I couldn’t help but notice that you need to freshen up. Why don’t you go upstairs and have a bath while I have a brief word with Doctor Watson.” (Perhaps I should have noticed that Mycroft was calling John Doctor Watson; he only does that when he’s very angry.)

“A bath? Mycroft, I would rather –” I started to argue.

“Now, Sherlock,” he interrupted me. I noticed that he firmly pulled the front door closed, and checked the latch.

“Mycroft, no –” I tried again.

“I won’t ask again, brother mine,” Mycroft said as he rolled up the sleeves of his shirt.

I heaved an aggrieved sigh and stomped up the stairs to 221B. Actually, I thought, a bath sounded fantastic.

“What’s this all about, Mycroft?” John asked as I closed the door to the flat behind me.

I ran a hot bath and climbed in. I soaped myself all over, taking special care around the small red and purple bruises on my inner arms. As I blissfully scrubbed my hair, I thought I heard an angry, animalistic growling, not unlike the noise that a pair of tomcats might make as they prepared to do battle. However, as I was preoccupied with untangling the knots in my hair, I did not pause to contemplate the source of the sound. When I was thoroughly clean, I let the water out of the tub, noting with some disgust how dirty my bathwater was. As I brushed my teeth, I heard John and Mycroft’s voices in the kitchen, though I could not make out the words over the buzz of my electric toothbrush. As I was shaving the small patches of facial hair on my chin and upper lip, I noticed that the fuzzy, sweaty sensation I had felt upon exiting Mycroft’s car had returned in force.

“Oh god!” I groaned when the penny dropped. I tore open the medicine cabinet to look for my bottle of Omegarrest. I could not remember the last time I had taken my heat suppressants. Had I brought any with me to the Rossington Street flop house?

To my horror, the medicine cabinet was almost empty: its only contents were my deodorant and Janine’s toothbrush. “Shit,” I said as I realized that the SOCOs must have taken my unlabeled bottle of Omegarrest pills when they swept the flat for drugs. “Shit, shit, shit,” I said to myself. I would have to ask Mycroft to pick up some more Omegarrest right away, or I would go into heat that very evening.

I opened the door and opened my mouth to ask Mycroft to make an emergency trip to the chemist’s. However, the tableau that greeted me compelled me to pause at the door to the kitchen: John stood leaning on the sink, his head tilted backwards, and a blood-spattered tea towel held to his nose. I
could see jagged fingernail marks on his hands and face. Mycroft sat on the kitchen table wiping his hands with another bloody tea towel. His knuckles were bruised and broken.

“W-what’s going on here?” I asked, thoroughly nonplussed.

“Ah, Sherlock,” Mycroft turned to me, running a hand through his mussed reddish hair. “John and I were just having a bit of a… tete-a-tete. I’ll be leaving now, however.” He unrolled his sleeves and winced when the movement revived the pain in his injured knuckles. “I trust that the two of you have a lot to talk about,” Mycroft said as he opened the kitchen door and departed. John groaned at that.

“What’s going on, John?” I asked, sitting down at the kitchen table and picking up the damp tea towel my brother had been using to wipe his hands. There really was a lot of blood.

“What’s going on? Your bloody mad brother only just tuned me up!” John sniffed while dabbing at his nose a few final times. “He told me that I couldn’t leave until you and I settled things between us.” John threw his tea towel in the sink, and turned to look at me. “He – he also said that you’re in love with me, and that you’re dying because of it. Is that true, Sherlock?”


“But Mary told me that you were dating our chief bridesmaid. That it was getting serious.”

“I was. It… didn’t work out.”

“So you went back to drugs just like that? Jesus, Sherlock,” John shook his head and walked out to the sitting room. “Hey, where’s my chair?”

I followed him. “I got rid of it – ‘I started to lie, then stopped myself. I couldn’t squander this opportunity to have an honest conversation with John. “No, that’s not true. I missed you. So I put it upstairs. Lestrade helped.”

“Yes, he and your brother love to help, don’t they? I think they must spend their evenings together devising ways of meddling in our affairs.” John strolled over to the fireplace and began to fiddle with the curios resting on the mantelpiece. He took particular care in leaning Duke on a framed picture of Janine and myself.

“Their evenings together? What do you mean?”

John turned and gave me an incredulous smile. “You mean you don’t know? Your brother and Greg Lestrade are, well, a couple. They’ve been having it off since before you came back from Serbia.”

I was amazed. “But – but Mycroft hates people!” I squawked.

“Not all people, apparently,” John grinned.

“But they’re both alphas!” I continued. “How would that even work?”

John shrugged, “Who knows? But if they’ve found a way to make it work between them, who are we to judge?” It was by far the most open-minded thing about relationships that I had ever heard John say. I began to think that maybe I had misjudged how traditional his outlook on love really was. I sat down heavily in my chair. My thoughts were muddled and fuzzy; however, with these latest revelations, I had momentarily forgotten about my impending heat.

John continued to smile. “So does this mean that the great Sherlock Holmes couldn’t see that his own brother is in love?”
“I – I guess it does!” I reluctantly admitted while mentally reviewing several interactions I had had with both my brother and Lestrade since my return from Eastern Europe. Had I not been so engrossed with my own problems, I might have picked up any number of hints that both had unintentionally (or perhaps intentionally, in the case of Lestrade) dropped about their ongoing secret relationship.

“Sherlock,” John started, still arranging and rearranging the objects on the mantel. “When Mycroft said that you were in love with me, was he telling the truth?”

“Yes, he was,” I whispered.

“How long has this been going on? Since your return, or –?”

“Since forever, John,” I said earnestly.

“I’m serious, Sherlock,” he looked at me.

“So am I,” I whispered.

John sighed and picked up Billy the skull. He spent a few moments closely examining the eye sockets, and running his fingers over the coronal sutures and maxilla. I noticed him poke at the abscess in the mandible. Finally, he looked up at me and said, “You’ve never told me where you got this skull.”

I blinked at the abrupt non sequitur. “Actually, I – I stole it. When I was in uni. Molly was there.”

“From the Saint Bart’s Museum collection, right?” John smiled.


“I was the person you stole it from, you arse. I was helping Mike Stamford put some skeletons in storage, when someone made off with one of the skulls. In fact, I think I remember you and Molly stopping by that day. You were the real surly little dick who looked like he cut his own hair, right? You know, I got in trouble when the museum director found out about the theft, so ta for that, Sherlock.” John shook his head in exasperation and returned the skull to the mantel.

He observed the skull in thoughtful silence for a few moments before turning to me. “In fact that was the day I decided to join the Army. I was so sick of the politics at the hospital. At the time I thought that the problem was that there were too many small-minded betas…. Plus I wanted a bit of adventure. So I joined the RAMC as soon as I was done with my A&E clinical attachment.”

“Hmm. What a coincidence,” I murmured. I really wasn’t feeling well.

“Actually I don’t think it was a coincidence,” John stuck his hands in his pockets and rocked on his heels, deep in thought.

“What do you mean, John?” I asked.

“Well, maybe it’s crazy, but I think that this skull says a lot about our relationship.” I raised an eyebrow in curiosity and John continued. “I mean that you and I, we’ve had so many chances to come together. But we always screw it up somehow, and end up hurting each other. And then we lose those opportunities. Maybe forever now.” This seemed to be one of those rare occasions when John’s inborn but oft-repressed insightfulness revealed itself.

“I’m sorry, John,” I began, feeling tears in my eyes. “It’s all my fault. I didn’t know how to tell you
I’m an omega. Or that I was in love with you. I was just too scared of how you might react! And then Moriarty – “

“It’s my fault as well, Sherlock,” John said, rubbing the back of his head in an uncomfortable gesture. “I was scared to tell you the truth too. You – you know I’m just pants at talking about feelings, right?”

“Yeth…. John, what are you getting at?” Normally, I might have guessed where John was going with this, but my impending heat was clouding my thoughts.

“Well, it’s just… I don’t know quite how to say this. Because…. Look.” John took a deep breath, screwed up his courage, and looked me in the eye. “Because I’m in love with you too, Sherlock.”

I couldn’t breathe. “Since when?” I squeaked.

“Since forever,” John replied. He cleared his throat and continued, “Well, that’s not quite true. I don’t know exactly when I fell in love. But when that crazy dominatrix pointed it out to me, there was no point in arguing, because I knew it was true. It was plain as day, even to me, at that point…. Of course I still thought you were a beta at that point… and from the start you had made it clear you weren’t interested. But I still held out some kind of… hope… for us. No matter how hopeless it seemed.” John gave a shaky sigh and turned away from me.

For a few minutes, the only sounds were the ticking of the wall clock and my uneven breathing.

“Wh-what about when you found out I was an omega?” I squawked.

“Oh, I was pissed! Well, hurt, is more like it. Deeply hurt that you had been lying to me. But I still loved you.”

“And when I faked my death?”

“That almost killed me, but then too,” John shook his head sorrowfully.

“And when I came back?”

“I was angry, but then too, yeah,” John shrugged.

“Even though you were with Mary?” I asked pointedly.

“Yeah, even then,” John sighed sadly.

“And – and now?” I whispered, hardly daring to hope.

John turned to face me. “I’ll always love you, Sherlock Holmes. No matter what. I can’t help it. You’re – you’re in my bones. Like the abscess in that old skull of yours. When I die there’ll be traces of you etched on my very skeleton. And when future consulting detectives and their army doctors examine my sad remains a hundred years from now, even then they’ll be able to see what you mean to me.” It was an analogy and declaration of love that few people besides myself would appreciate, let alone find achingly beautiful.

Though I know that it’s medically impossible, at that moment I felt my heart lift and swell in my chest cavity. The cold despair that had weighed me down for so long instantly dissipated. “I’ll always love you too, John,” I smiled.

He smiled at that for a few moments before his face fell. “But you know this doesn’t really change
“What are you talking about? It changes everything, John!” I stood up and grabbed him by the shoulders. “It’s a new world, John!”

“No, no. It’s not.” John stepped out of my embrace. “You’re forgetting Mary. I’m married to her. And she’s pregnant, you know.”

“I did know that,” I murmured, wrapping my hands around my own arms in a gesture of self-protection. “Are you happy with her, John?”

“I’m content, but that’s not the issue. I can’t just up and leave her and the baby. My baby!” John flung his arms out to the sides. “None of this is her fault, you know. She didn’t do anything wrong. And I won’t let my baby be raised in a broken home.”

The cold despair settled around my heart again. Sometimes I hated how loyal John could be.

“So what does this mean for us, John?” I asked, though my throat was so tight I could barely speak. John paused for a moment before declaring, “We’re – we’re just going to have to be secretly in love with each other, and leave it at that, Sherlock.”

I frowned. “That’s a pretty shitty solution, John.” I sat down heavily in my chair. “Particularly for me.”

“Well, what do you want from me? I won’t leave my wife and kid. I can’t do that to them. And isn’t being secretly in love enough to stop your pining? I mean, in fairy tales secret love could sustain an omega for years, right?”

I huffed angrily at that. “So all you’re interested in is keeping me alive? Why bother if I’m doomed to spend my life alone?”

“Well, what do you want me to do, Sherlock? It’s a goddamned bitch of an unsatisfactory situation all around. I don’t see a way for all of us to get what we want and deserve.”

I sighed and leaned my head back so that it rested on my armchair’s backrest. John was right; there was no fair, no universally satisfactory solution. As I sat there thinking, I suddenly remembered that my heat would soon manifest itself, and that I had forgotten to ask Mycroft to get my pills. I gave an unhappy groan.

“What?” said John, still standing by the fireplace.

“My heat,” I said. “It’s starting. And I don’t have any heat suppressants.”

“Oh! Oh god,” John said in surprise. He sniffed a few times before saying, “Thanks to your goddamn brother, I can’t smell a thing right now. I – I guess I’ll go then. Do – you want me to call your brother? You know, get him to pick you up and take you to his house? Or do you want me to go pick up some heat suppressants for you at Boots?”

I thought for a moment before a solution – to both problems – came to me. “No,” I said. “I want you to stay.”


“I know, John. That’s exactly what I want. What I’m asking you for.”
John’s brow wrinkled in confusion, so I explained: “You asked me what I wanted from you. This is it: I want you to spend the night with me. That’s all. Then you can go back to your wife and baby. And I’ll go on with my life. And we’ll both be happy.”

“That’s it?” John said. “What’ll I tell Mary?”

“Make something up,” I shrugged.

“And that’ll make you happy?”

“It’ll make me happier than I am right now,” I sighed. “Because I’ll know that you loved me enough to not just say it – though, believe me, I know that was very difficult for you – but to show it unequivocally as well. And that will be enough to sustain me, I think….Come on, John. I’m an omega in need.”

“But – but we tried this before, and you freaked out,” John pointed out. “Won’t that happen again?”

“Maybe,” I conceded. “But since then I’ve acquired some more experience with… relationships.”

“What? With Janine?”

“Yep.”

“Oh. Well,” John searched for more logical reasons not to do what I requested. “I don’t have any condoms on me. Do you have any? I haven’t needed them in a while, so I just stopped carrying them – “

“That doesn’t matter, John.” I looked down at my feet.

“Yes, it does. If you’re in heat, you’ll get pregnant.”

“I’m sterile. From the Methadone.” I looked up at John.

“Oh. I’m so sorry, Sherlock,” he said sympathetically.

“It doesn’t matter,” I said, rising to my feet. “So I think you’ve exhausted all the possible reasons we shouldn’t do this. So now maybe we can focus on the reason why we should?” I extended my hand to John.

“Why’s that?” John asked.

I rolled my eyes. “Because we’re in love, John. What better reason could there possibly be?”

“Right. Right.” John took my hand, and led me to the bedroom.

Chapter End Notes

Three points to anyone who can guess the lines borrowed from the Royal Tenenbaums and Brokeback Mountain.

Thank you all for reading. You know, when I started this, I told myself that I would be satisfied if my little story got 500 hits. I see that it now has over 15,000. Holy crow!
John opened the door to my bedroom, and pulled me through it – kissing my lips all the while. I was relieved that the SOCO team had stripped the sheets from the bed, because I was certain that they would be stained with trace evidence of my last encounter with Janine. (Goodness, when did I become the sort of person who has to worry about hiding the proof of my active sex life from the eyes of multiple lovers?) There was no way that I would put those sheets back on the bed – who knows how John would react if he saw (or smelled) clear traces of another alpha in my bed? Plus, I wanted the bed John and I would use for our night together to be clean and comfortable for the both of us.

“Let – let me get some sheets from the wardrobe,” I said between kisses.

“Hurry,” John muttered, giving me one final solid kiss. I bent to retrieve a spare set of sheets – preferably, my favourite striped Egyptian cotton set – while John divested himself of his shirt, belt, and shoes. As it was high summer, for once he was not wearing a jumper.

“Help me out here,” I said as I tossed John the fitted sheet. Together we stretched it over the bed. As I tugged it into place over a corner, I noticed that my hands were trembling with nerves. In silence we draped the flat sheet over the bed and inserted the pillows into their cases. I fussed and fiddled with them until I felt they were in the perfect position at the head of the bed.

As I finished, I noticed that John was chuckling to himself. “What?” I asked.

“Nothing. It’s – it’s just I’ve never seen you nesting before. Must be the omega hormones running wild,” he giggled.

I closed my mouth in surprise. It concerned me that my actions – which had seemed logical and entirely rational to me – might be the product of my heat hormones. I began to wonder whether any other decisions I might make during my heat might be similarly influenced by my omega instincts.

My troubled thoughts were interrupted by the sound of John unzipping the fly on his jeans. He tossed them to the side and sat on the edge of the bed to remove his socks. Finally, he pulled off his white undershirt and threw it on the pile with the rest of his clothes. I remained standing next to the bed, watching him nervously. After my bath I had only put on a dressing gown. I clutched it tightly to myself and said, “John? Do – do you m-mind if I p-put on a shirt?”

John looked me up and down and asked, “Why?”

I shrugged and looked down at my feet. “It… well, be-because I don’t want you to thee m-my thcars.” My lisp betrayed my discomfort.

John said in a rough, soft voice, “I’ve seen your scars, Sherlock.”

I squirmed a bit, frustrated that John would begrudge me such a simple request. Janine would never have refused my right to modesty, I thought. “But, John,” I tried to explain. “They’re tho – tho… ugly! They’re a – a conthtant reminder that – that I’m… ruined.” I whispered the last bit.

John looked at me sadly, and removed my right hand from where it continued to clutch at the fabric of my dressing gown. He held it tightly between his strong, square palms and said to me, “Sherlock,
take off your robe and lie down.” His voice sounded like his nose was blocked – undoubtedly from the solid punch Mycroft had landed there.

“But, John…” I whined.

“Please, Sherlock, lie down,” he said firmly. As I entered my heat, I was in no position to defy an alpha’s direct order. So, though I felt terribly shy and ashamed of my scarred body, I let my dressing gown fall from my shoulders, and crawled onto the bed. I lay down on my back and wiped away the tears that were gathering in the corners of my eyes. Though I was terribly anxious, my prick stood up from my groin, stiff, red, and already glistening with lubricant. John knelt on the bed beside me. Though he still wore his underpants, I could see his half-hard cock pushing at the white cotton fabric.

John bent over me, but instead of licking my weeping scent gland or stroking my genitals, he surprised me by placing a gentle kiss on the bite mark scar on my left nipple. “W-what are you doing?” I asked.

“Your wounds. I’m kissing them better.” John moved from my nipple to the ugly fingernail marks on my flank. He peppered those with tiny, gentle kisses too.

“How preposterous! What utter rot!” I squawked in irritation, and tried to turn away.

John stopped my movement with a firm hand on my belly, and directed his attention to my shoulder, which was marred by a triangular purple scar – which, as I recall, had been left by a Hungarian omega assassin wielding a red-hot screwdriver.

I huffed in frustration. “Why are you doing this, John? Can’t we – can’t we just get on with… things?”

“No, we can’t. Not just yet.” John was now kissing the inside of my elbow, which was mottled both with old scars and new needlemarks. “I’m doing this because your scars are beautiful.”

“I scoffed in derision. “Beautiful?” I said incredulously. “They are anything but beautiful, John. Now stop this nonsense and let me up so that I can get a shirt!” I wiggled away from John.

Again, however, he stopped me with a hand on my tummy. “They are beautiful, Sherlock,” John said in a resolute voice, his deep blue eyes fixed upon me in a solemn stare. “They’re beautiful because they’re part of you. The events that left every one of these scars helped make you the brave, clever, loving, amazing person that you are. And that’s why I think they’re beautiful, and why I love them, and why I can’t let you hide them from me.”

I returned John’s stare for a few moments, before suddenly bursting into tears.

“Sherlock?” John murmured, stroking his strong hand down my belly. “Sherlock, is – is this alright? Can I keep doing this?”

“Uh-huh!” I sniffled, and wiped my eyes.

I lay back down on my bed, while John continued kissing every one of my scars. There were dozens: most from the sexual assault in the Library of course, several from when I was tortured in the Serbian prison, others from fights with London’s never-ending supply of criminals, and even a few from my rough-and-tumble childhood – for example, the scar on my forehead from where Mycroft had thrown Duke at me. John paid particular attention to the scars on my penis and labia. To me, his kisses there seemed extra gentle and solicitous. Except for sniffles and whimpers, I was silent through the whole process. I am certain that it couldn’t have been remotely erotic or romantic for
John – after all, what alpha would want to spend over an hour kissing a sobbing omega’s old wounds – but I found it very… healing, I suppose is the only word.

John finished by kissing the scar on my lower lip left by the alpha who had hit me in the face with a book in the Manchester University Library all those years ago. I could taste old blood – no doubt from the injury to John’s nose – but it didn’t bother me. “Are you ready for this?” he murmured softly.

“Ready for what?” I asked in confusion. John tugged gently at my slick penis, and I said, “Oh, right.”

John removed his pants and flung them in a corner. His enormous cock pointed up towards his belly. Even though he couldn’t detect my odour, evidently my heat pheromones had managed to trigger the growth of his alpha knot. Unexpectedly, I found that I wasn’t all that frightened of it: this was John, who loved me even though I was a ruined omega. Scratch that: as baffling as it might seem, John somehow loved me because I was a ruined omega.

“Alright?” he asked.

“Uh-huh,” I whispered. John positioned himself between my legs, and aligned his penis with the entrance to my vagina. After a final glance up at my face, he leaned forward and slowly thrust his penis into my eager cunt. It didn’t hurt nearly as much as I had expected. Whether that was due to the volume of lubricant that my genitals were producing, the stretching my vagina had received during my sole sexual encounter with Janine, or because John’s tender cherishing of my scars had somehow dismantled a mental block that had previously caused me to associate sex with pain, I do not know. Though I suspect it was the latter.

John kept his movements slow and gentle, always with an eye on my face, trying to judge my reactions. “Is this alright?” he would ask. “Can I go a bit faster?”

After a few minutes of replying, “Yes, that’s fine. Please do,” to his questions, I sighed in impatience and growled, “For god’s sake, just fuck me, John!”

John laughed at that and picked up the pace of his thrusts. I responded by curling my long, skinny legs around his back, encouraging him to penetrate me even further. After a few minutes, he reached between us and took my own stiff little prick in his hand, and began to wank it hard and fast. I could not handle the combined sensations, and I felt my head tip back. “J-jooolloooowwwwnnnn,” I growled (this time at an appropriate juncture). The tingling, pulsing sensation in my vagina intensified; I was on the verge of a powerful orgasm.

“Sherrrlll,” he responded. I twitched as I started to come.

“I’m gonna – I’m gonna –“ John shouted as his thrusts became irregular.

Suddenly, I felt a second of intense pain, accompanied by a distinct ‘Pop!’ We had knotted.

John groaned with his own release. Utterly spent, he rested his head on my shoulder. My vagina squeezed and milked his still-hard cock. In contrast with my first experience with knotting, I found the sensation to be entirely pleasurable – like a prolonged, mild orgasm.

Though we were still tightly knotted together, and my vagina had not stopped gripping and fluttering against John’s penis, after several minutes, John lifted his head and said, “Fuck, I haven’t knotted an omega in years. I’ve forgotten how brilliant it feels.”

I smiled at that, the omega in me inordinately gratified that I could please my alpha so thoroughly.
“So you enjoyed yourself, then?” I murmured sleepily.

“Mm-hmm,” John replied, taking my left leg, and stretching it above my head. “Watch out, I’m gonna turn us around.” Without removing his still swollen penis from my vagina, he swiveled me around so that we lay with my back to his front, our genitals still firmly knotted together. I marveled at my alpha’s ingenuity.

“More importantly,” he sighed, gently stroking my softened cock. “How was it for you? Did you enjoy it?”

I gave a languid stretch and murmured, “Immensely. I love you, John.”

“I love you too, Sherlock,” John whispered, kissing me on the shoulder. He pulled up the sheet and covered us both with it. “Let’s get some sleep, okay?”

* 

I woke early the next morning because my back was cold; evidently John was no longer cuddled behind me. I felt the bed shift, so I rolled over to see John pulling on his socks and shoes. It was apparent that he just gotten out of the shower because the summer sun shone on his still damp hair, causing it to shimmer and shine like threads of silver and gold.

I yawned lazily. Though I felt deliciously relaxed, I could also feel the uncomfortable, shaky itchiness that presaged heroin withdrawal beginning to make itself known. Though my drugs binge had only lasted about a week, I knew that I would have a miserable couple of days ahead of me.

John muttered to himself, “Now where the fuck is my belt?” I couldn’t help but chuckle at him. He turned to me with a fond smile. “Sorry, did I wake you?” he murmured quietly.

“Yes, but it’s alright,” I grinned sleepily and rolled over onto my stomach, so as to better observe John as he finished dressing.

John eventually found his belt behind the door. As he pulled it through his belt loops, I could see his satisfied smile begin to fade, to be replaced with a look of remorse.

He cleared his throat and said, “I’m glad you’re up, Sherlock, because we need to talk, okay?”

“Okay,” I said with increasing dread. I sat up on the far side of the bed and pulled the sheets around my waist protectively.

John sat on the bed facing away from me. “Please understand that I’m – I’m not saying that I… regret what happened last night. What we did… It was wonderful. It was something that I wanted to do for years, and in every way it outshone my expectations.”

“Mine too,” I said softly. I saw that John’s hands were fretfully kneading the sheets.

“Good. That’s good,” he continued. “Be-because it – it can’t happen again. Ever. I can’t do that to Mary. She’s my wife, and the mother of my child. She deserves to be treated better than that. So, no matter how much either of us might want it, we simply can’t let it happen again. Or – or put ourselves in a situation where it might happen again.”

I pulled the sheet up to my armpits. Logically, I should not have been so disappointed to hear John say that: I knew that John was an innately loyal person – indeed that’s one of the things I admired most about him – and I had known last night that he didn’t want to hurt Mary. But part of me had held out a remote and completely irrational hope that after one night of mutually fulfilling sex, he
might change his mind and decide that we ought to be together.

He turned around to look at me searchingly. “Do you understand, Sherlock?”

“Yes,” I said, with a small, fake smile. “Goodbye, John.”

“Yeah, goodbye,” he said with a small, fake smile of his own. He gave a grim chuckle. “Guess I’d better think of a plausible explanation for where I was last night. Mind if I say we were on a case?”

“Not at all,” I said, lying back on the pillows, and covering my eyes with my bent arm.

“Okay, get some sleep. I’ll see you around.”

I did not respond.

I listened as John limped out to the sitting room to fetch his haversack coat. When I heard the front door close behind him, I let out a breath I didn’t know I had been holding. I started to mentally compile a list of items that might help with my increasingly uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms. Iced lollies, definitely. And I’d see if Mycroft could pick up some more Methadone for me. Maybe it came in better flavours nowadays. And maybe I would download some episodes of Fawlty Towers to my iPad to distract myself when things got really bad.

As I was preoccupied with my list, it took me a while to notice that even though I was exhibiting the classic signs of heroin withdrawal – the nausea, the itchiness, the agitation, and now even the leg cramps – I was not feeling the least bit horny, and my penis and vagina were no longer leaking lubricant.

I sat up with a start when I finally realized what was happening.

My heat had stopped.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will be an interlude told from another character's point of view. Perhaps you can guess whose?

Thank you all for your kind words, kudos, and reading. I know I say that with every chapter, but means a lot to me, so I am perpetually grateful.
Interlude – the Ballad of Greg and Mycroft, Part One

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning for mention of a suicide.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I first met Mycroft Holmes on the afternoon of the fourteenth of July 2003. I was in my office at New Scotland Yard with Sally Donovan – who was a newly promoted Detective Constable at the time – and Mycroft’s younger brother Sherlock. The three of us were questioning an omega witness to a murder, but only Sherlock was making any headway. He has a knack for getting omegas to open up to him. This used to surprise me, because Sherlock is abrupt and tactless with almost everyone. But he’s always seemed to have a soft spot for omegas. Probably because he himself is an omega, as I would learn much later.

Anyway, there was a brief kerfuffle in the hall, and the door to my office flew open. Standing there was a skinny, freckled alpha in a three-piece suit, shaking with barely contained fury. Though there was nothing physically intimidating about this man – what with his manicured hands, thinning brown hair, and pocket watch – I am ashamed to admit that I cowered in the face of his impending wrath. Donovan did too. In fact, I noticed her move to stand behind me, such was her fear of this oddly authoritative man.

He told Sherlock to wait for him in the car. From that comment it was evident that he was some sort of relative, though he and Sherlock had few features in common, except for their height and long, skinny limbs. Sherlock huffed and slumped out of the room, and the man turned his full attention to me.

“Detective Sergeant,” he said in a voice that was unusually soft and breathy for an alpha. “Do you know who I am?”


The tall, skinny man seemed disappointed in my failure to recognize him. Nevertheless, he soon recovered. “I am someone with the capacity to make your future career very difficult indeed…. If I am not satisfied with the outcome of this discussion.”

“Oh, my career’ll be difficult no matter what you do,” I couldn’t help but grin. “But can I help you anyway?”

Again, he seemed bewildered by my response, but he persisted in trying to intimidate me. “My name is Mycroft Holmes, the family alpha to the man you were just questioning. Whatever you suspect my brother has done, I assure you that you are mistaken. If you persist in focusing your investigations on him, you will find your chances for promotion permanently stacked against you. Please accept my apologies for any trouble Sherlock may have caused, and I assure you that this will be the last you hear from him.” His voice remained quiet, but I could easily detect the steely determination underlying it. Evidently so could Donovan; from behind me I could hear her gulp.

“Questioning?” I raised an eyebrow. “Wha -? No…. No, no, no. We weren’t questioning Sherlock.
He was helping us. To question this witness.” Here I gestured at the omega, who was currently watching the man with the same look of frozen, naked terror a cornered mouse might give a cat.

Here it was the tall, skinny man’s – Mycroft Holmes’ – turn to be confused. “Helping you? Sherlock doesn’t help anyone. I am sorry if he was bothering you –“

“No, he really was helping us,” I smiled. “He helps out on a lot of our cases, in fact.”

“Oh dear,” Holmes shook his head regretfully. “I am very, very sorry, Detective Sergeant, if my brother has been making a nuisance of himself. He does that quite frequently, I’m afraid.” Out of the corner of my eye I could see Sally nod in agreement. “He can’t seem to help it.”

“No, he’s not a nuisance,” I insisted. “And you, stay out of this,” I said to Donovan. “You might hate to admit it, but we couldn’t have solved that case with the omega who got strangled with the curling iron cord without him. Or that one with the stained glass window.”

Sally rolled her eyes in response and grumbled, “He might have helped us, but he’s still disrespectful, and I’ll tell you right now that the forensics team hates him.”

Holmes narrowed his eyes at Donovan and remarked in too casual a voice, “Hmm. Being resented by lesser minds is often the price of genius. Tell me, Detective Sergeant,” his cool, grey eyes turned to me, “How precisely does Sherlock assist in your investigations.”

I scratched my prematurely greying hair while I thought about this. “Well, lots of ways, really. He does this thing where he looks at someone for just a second, and he can tell a lot about them from just that one look. I forget what he calls it….”

“Deductions, yes,” he gave a small grin.

“Yeah, I’ve never seen anything like it. I doubt anyone in the world could do it better.” Here Holmes gave a tiny ‘hmph,’ but I continued, “Umm. He’s really good at questioning witnesses. He can always tell how to approach them to get them to tell us what we need to know. Especially the omegas.”

“Stands to reason,” Holmes muttered.

“And sometimes, if there’s some crook who’s trying to get away on foot, he’ll be the one who’ll run him down and subdue him. Our guys would rather use a patrol car to apprehend a suspect, but not Sherlock; he likes to chase them himself, I think…. Plus he’s not afraid to get into a bit of a fight with suspects if they resist arrest. One time this last spring there was a murderer with a flick knife…. What?” I stopped recounting the tale of when a serial killer had almost popped out Sherlock’s left eye because Holmes’ expression had changed from polite interest to shock and horror.

“He – he chases down criminals? You let him chase down criminals? He’s an unarmed civilian!” he looked me up and down, and I got the feeling that I was falling short in his estimation.

“Exactly,” Sally smiled in agreement. “The freak shouldn’t be allowed to participate in our investigations at all. I’ve been saying this – “

“Shut up, Detective Constable,” Holmes interrupted her oft-repeated rant. “I’m not interested in the opinion of an alpha who’s cheating on her omega fiancé with a married beta colleague!”

Sally’s eyes widened in surprise. “Who – who told you that? Was it your brother? It’s not my fault. Jerry’s been really clingy since we set a date – “
“Pipe down, Donovan,” I said placatingly. “Mr. Holmes, look: time after time, I’ve tried to tell your brother that he can’t put himself in danger like that, but he won’t listen. He’s got this really insatiable thirst for justice, which means he’s hellbent on catching criminals. So he just won’t listen to me.”

Holmes looked me up and down again. “Hmm. Yes, Sherlock can be a bit stubborn,” he said thoughtfully.

“A bit,” I grinned, and Holmes smiled in return.

We stood smiling at each other for a long moment. He looked very little like Sherlock. While Sherlock’s face was long and thin with prominent cheekbones, his brother’s was round, with a long, crooked nose. The colour of Sherlock’s oddly slanted eyes seemed to vary between aqua, grey, and green, but his brother’s were a uniform, unremarkable grey. While Sherlock had voluminous, curly, dark hair – almost like an omega’s, I thought even then – his brother’s was thin and already receding, even though he was only in his early thirties, I would guess. And though the colour of his hair was similar to Sherlock’s, I could tell that he dyed it. Judging by his freckles and pale eyebrows, he was probably a ginger. Like my wife Marguerite. He smelled of juniper bushes and pickling cucumbers. It was an unusually homey, domestic smell for such a high-ranking alpha.

Finally, Holmes broke our moment of eye contact to fish around in his pocket for his wallet. He withdrew a cream-coloured business card. “Detective Sergeant, this is my personal phone number. Please don’t give it out.” I shrugged because at the time I didn’t know Holmes well enough to understand what a privilege it was to have personal access to him. He continued, “If Sherlock is ever in trouble, I would appreciate it if you would give me a call right away. Especially if he’s been taken to hospital. Because I would prefer that our… family physician attend to any injuries he might receive.”

“Alright,” I smiled as I inserted the card in one of the empty slots in my own well-worn wallet. “Will do. So does this mean that you’re okay with Sherlock helping us out from time to time?”

“Yes, I suppose so. After all,” he gave a long-suffering sigh. “You and I both know that it’s impossible to stop Sherlock from doing something he’s set his mind to, so we might as well learn to live with it.”

I laughed, and we shared another conspiratorial grin. “Thank you, Mister Holmes. I appreciate it. Your brother is… unique, but he’s damn smart, and he’s been such a help to the Met already. I’d hate to lose him.”

“Yes, he is unique,” Holmes smiled fondly. “And please, Detective Sergeant, call me Mycroft.” He extended his warm, smooth hand for me to shake.

“Only if you call me Greg.”

We shook hands for several seconds, before Sally broke the moment.

“You can both keeping calling me Detective Constable Donovan,” she announced with unpleasant haughtiness. I winced at her unpleasant manner. Mycroft rolled his eyes, and we shared another smile.

“Goodbye, Detective Sergeant, er, Greg. It was a pleasure to meet you.” He turned and opened my office door. However, instead of exiting, he hesitated for a moment. “Incidentally,” he said, “If you haven’t already, you’ll want to check the alibi of the omega’s alpha girlfriend. She murdered the beta, and that omega’s covering up for her. Ta ta!” With that, he gave a jaunty swing of his umbrella, and swanned out the door.
Even if I didn’t call Mycroft Holmes to let him know that Sherlock had been stabbed with a broken bottle or he had gone missing while tracking down some crook or another, he always seemed to know when his baby brother was in danger. Anytime the police radio announced that the suspect we were chasing was considered armed and dangerous, I could be sure that Mycroft would show up at the crime scene, where he would hover anxiously until he was satisfied that his little brother was safe and sound. Donovan and the SOCOs had a secret nickname for him: Mama Bear.

Unless he was busy dressing down Sherlock for his recklessness, he would always stroll over to where I was directing the investigation for a brief, friendly chat. I would expound on Sherlock’s bravery and cleverness; if Donovan dared to say something negative about Sherlock’s participation in our investigations, Mycroft would humiliate her with a well-observed and impeccably timed insult, and together we would share a laugh about Sherlock’s stubbornness and flair for the dramatic. It was a comfortable routine.

On the night that Sherlock was saved from poisoning himself by a well-timed bullet fired by an anonymous sharpshooter, Mycroft found me while I listening to the paramedics explain to me that marks on the body of the taxi driver indicated that someone had trod upon his injured shoulder before he died. I could see Mycroft waiting with poorly disguised impatience next to my car. As soon as the paramedics finished their report, I strolled over to see him. I could see that he was agitated.

“Greg, what do you know about Sherlock’s new roommate, John Watson?” he asked without preamble. He must have been worried; Mycroft always started our conversations with pleasantries about the weather and the health of my wife and pups.


Mycroft gave an unhappy sigh. “Sherlock only met him yesterday. I think it’s far too soon to move in with someone he barely knows. And an alpha at that!”

“Well, yeah, but Sherlock’s a grown beta, right? And I’ve seen him take on far more dangerous characters than that little fella, believe me!” I gave Mycroft’s shoulder a comradely slap. He staggered a bit from the impact, and looked at me as if surprised by the casual contact. “Maybe it’s time for the baby bird to leave the nest, eh, My?”

“Greg, I’m serious,” Mycroft said gravely. “You know that Sherlock doesn’t like to tell me when something goes awry, so I’m counting on you: if you ever have any concerns that that doctor is – is hurting Sherlock, or… is having a bad influence him, or is even just… unkind to him, I want you to tell me right away, alright? Can you do that for me?”

I looked at Mycroft for a few seconds before replying; his concern for his brother was at once both excessive and touching. “Sure, My, anything for Sherlock.”

After John started helping out with investigations, it seemed like Sherlock got into ten times as much trouble. Consequently, Mycroft was showing up to a new crime scene at least once a week. Each time he made a point of seeking me out for a brief chat – of course, only after bawling out his truculent and unapologetic little brother.

After the conclusion of a complicated case involving the detonation of multiple bombs around London, Mycroft approached me while I waited for the bomb disposal team to take care of a vest covered in Semtex. I had seen Mycroft speaking with Sherlock for a few moments – for once the two of them weren’t arguing.
“It looks like they’re going to be a while,” he sighed. “They seem to be having trouble maneuvering the robot around the pool.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “Jesus, I could go for a coffee. Care to join me?” I asked Mycroft.

He blinked with surprise. “M-me?” he stammered. “Now?”

“Yeah. As you said, it’ll be a while before they get rid of the bomb. And I’ll be at a loose end until then. Come on, I think there’s a Starbucks around the corner.”

I saw his Adam’s apple bob as he swallowed. For someone with such a commanding presence, Mycroft Holmes seemed unusually nervous. “Yes. That’s fine. Coffee.” He finally murmured.

As we drank our caramel macchiatos (for some reason it delighted me that the two of us had the same coffee preference) we traded funny stories about Sherlock. Mycroft had dozens to share: my favourites included one about a GI Joe, and another about Sherlock playing pirate with the family dog.

We remained at the Starbucks for over two hours, waiting for Donovan to send a text indicating that my team could start checking surveillance footage and sweeping the pool area for prints. Finally, we seemed to have exhausted Mycroft’s extensive supply of stories about Sherlock’s unnatural predilection for trouble.

“Yeah, you’re not fooling anyone, Mycroft Holmes. However much you call your brother useless and chaotic, I can tell you love him,” I said.

He shrugged in reply. “I have to love him, Greg; I’m his family alpha, and he’s my brother. Plus god knows no one else ever will,” he laughed.

I laughed in reply. Mycroft’s insults were a poor disguise for the deep affection he felt for his brother. “But enough about Sherlock. Tell me a bit about yourself, Mycroft. We’ve known each other for years, but I hardly know anything about you.”

That comment stopped Mycroft in his tracks. He searched for something substantive to tell me. “Oh, well. As you know, I work at the Home Office – I’m afraid I can’t be more specific than that about my job. Official Secrets Act, and all that. I went to school at Oxford, and I live on Kidderpore Avenue in Hampstead.”

“That’s it?” I scoffed.

“What?” Mycroft asked, looking flummoxed.

“Well, I could have found out everything you just told me just by running your plates. Tell me something personal. Something to help me get to know the real you.”

“Like what?” I noticed Mycroft start to blush beneath his freckles.

“Like – well, about your family life. Your hobbies and all that. For example, I have an omega wife named Marguerite, and three pups named Robert, Angeline, and Rory. Robert’s an alpha like me; Angeline’s a beta, and we don’t know about Rory yet. We live on Sydenham Avenue near Crystal Palace. The kids and I are mad for football. Everyone but Robert supports Crystal Palace, obviously. Robert likes West Ham, for some reason. But besides footy I like going to concerts – anything soul or jazz – cricket, and swimming. Though I’ll think twice before going back to that pool,” I laughed as I gestured at the crime scene.
Mycroft did not laugh at my little joke. Instead he looked out of sorts. “I – I don’t really have any hobbies, Greg. I put in long hours at the office, and then I go home and sleep. If I have a few days off, I spend them napping and maybe reading.”

Though it pains me now to admit it, I laughed at Mycroft’s confession. I swear that I thought he was joking. It just never occurred to me that such an erudite, sophisticated alpha would have such a tedious little home life. I stopped laughing when I noticed Mycroft’s face fall a bit.

“Oh, um, what about your family then?” I tried to recover.

Mycroft’s gaze was focused on his hands as he held his empty coffee mug. He shrugged, “I don’t have a mate or pups. It’s just me and Sherlock. And most of the time he doesn’t even like me,” he murmured. It was a sad revelation indeed.

I watched him in silence, deeply regretting pushing him to open up, and at a complete loss as to how to fix things between us. “Mycroft, My, look – “

“Well, this has been an… experience, Gregory,” Mycroft stood up suddenly and pulled on his coat. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to look up something for my brother.”

Mycroft hurried out of the Starbucks. We didn’t see each other again for over a year.

* 

Near midnight on the day that Sherlock had jumped off the roof of Saint Bart’s, I found myself approaching a large, half-timbered house on Kidderpore Avenue in Hampstead. I had dropped Sherlock off there a few times, so I was confident that this was Mycroft’s house. In my hand I carried a bottle of Strathisla, which I intended to share with Mycroft. Though he might pretend to be a cold fish, I knew that Mycroft was very fond of Sherlock, and I was certain that he would be broken-hearted. Though we hadn’t seen each other in a long time, I hoped that Mycroft would allow me to grieve with him.

It surprised me a bit to see that none of the house lights were on. Was Mycroft out? Perhaps still at the morgue? I rang the doorbell anyway.

A few seconds later, I heard the shuffling of slippers, and the porch light flicked on. Mycroft opened the door in his pyjamas and flannel dressing gown, looking for all the world like he had just awoken from a sound sleep.

“Greg? What are you doing here?” he mumbled, rubbing his eyes drowsily.

“What am I doing here? I should think that’s obvious,” I said in amazement. “I dropped by to see if you wanted to join me in a belt of whisky, but I can see you’re coping fine without me.” I couldn’t believe that Mycroft could fall sleep so easily on the night that his own brother had committed suicide.

“Coping?” he yawned. “Coping with what?”

I scoffed. “With – with Sherlock’s death, of course! And with his outing as an omega! What is wrong with you?” I peered closely at him. Even in the dim glow of the porch light, I could see that Mycroft’s eyes showed no trace of tears. “Mycroft, what’s going on?”

All of a sudden, Mycroft seemed to remember something important, and he sighed heavily. “Damn. I suppose you’d better come in, Greg. I hope you can keep a secret.”

While we sat drinking whisky in his warm, knick-knack filled office, Mycroft explained to me all
about Sherlock’s confrontation with the dangerous and destructive Jim Moriarty. Mycroft’s plan to fake Sherlock’s death so that he could take down the omega criminal mastermind’s vast empire in Eastern Europe seemed entirely too risky to me.

As I finished my glass of the Strathisla, I shook my head and said, “I can’t believe you’d send your baby brother to deal with an international criminal network all by himself, Mycroft. I mean, you panic when he gets into a bit of a fight with a suspect. Now you’re parachuting him into Minsk tonight? It doesn’t make sense!”

“Well, maybe there’s more to it,” Mycroft said thoughtfully as he finished his own glass. I could tell that he was a little bit drunk already.

“What do you mean, My?” I asked.

He sighed, and went to stand with his back to the fire.

“I thought it might be a good idea for Sherlock to leave for a bit. So that he could have a… fresh start when he came back,” Mycroft explained.

“What sort of fresh start?”

“It’s John Watson,” Mycroft rolled his eyes. “Sherlock fancies himself in love with him.”

“Oh!” I sat up in surprise. “But he…. Well, I guess if Sherlock’s an omega, it could work out, right? I mean, you know how well they get along, right? Wow, good for them.”

“No, not so good.” Mycroft turned so that he was looking at the fire.

“I thought you liked John….”

“I did. I mean, I respect him well enough. Though god knows he gets my brother in far too much trouble.” Mycroft looked at me over his shoulder. “The problem is that John doesn’t return Sherlock’s feelings.”

“Oh. Oh. Ouch!” I winced in sympathy with Sherlock. God knows I knew what that was like: over the past fifteen years, Marguerite had made it abundantly clear that she did not love me anymore.

“Ouch indeed. So you see why I thought it best for Sherlock to get away. Hopefully that distance will help him gain a little perspective on John Watson.”

“Okay, but why was it necessary for him to fake his death? Did you even consider the impact that might have on Sherlock’s friends?”

“Of course I did,” Mycroft sighed again. (I have to admit that his impatience with anyone who thinks slower than he does sometimes gets on my nerves.) “And John’s hurt and sense of betrayal would actually help me.”

“How so?” I frowned. “I mean, John is really, really broken up about Sherlock. They’ve doped him up on anti-anxiety meds, and his sister’s come down from Norfolk to watch over him for the next few weeks. How can that possibly help you?”

“Think about it: If – when! – Sherlock gets back from Eastern Europe, John will be so angry that Sherlock didn’t let him in on the secret that he faked his death, he’ll never forgive him. And then Sherlock can stop pining over a sad, little army doctor who’s been nothing but trouble for him from the very start.”
“I think that John is good for Sherlock,” I countered. “You should see them together. They really… complement each other. You know, make up for each other’s weaknesses. Together they’re an unstoppable team.”

“They were, yes,” Mycroft agreed. “But then Doctor Watson broke Sherlock’s heart.” Mycroft’s voice became a furious snarl, “And no one does that to my baby brother!”

I was surprised at the vehemence of Mycroft’s response; until that moment, I had only known him to be soft-spoken and gentle.

“But, My,” I tried to reason. “Are you sure that you aren’t meddling a little too much? I mean, omega or not, Sherlock is a grown man. Surely he can decide for himself who’s worthy of his love.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes in exasperation. “Gregory, listen to me: I have been Sherlock’s family alpha for twenty-eight years. And if there’s any lesson I’ve learned repeatedly in that time it’s that he really cannot be trusted to make decisions for himself. At least, not important decisions. Every choice he’s ever made on his own is invariably the most foolish, irresponsible, poorly thought through decision anyone could make. Believe me, if I hadn’t taken it on myself to guide him through life, he’d be dead in a ditch somewhere ten times over.”

“Doesn’t he resent that?”

“Of course he does! But it’s all for his own good. Everything – everything! – I do is for Sherlock’s own good, Greg!” I was surprised to hear Mycroft’s voice crack. He turned to face the fire to hide his embarrassment. “And don’t forget,” his voice sounded choked. “I’m – I’m losing him too! He’s my closest relative and friend, and I don’t get to see him or talk to him until he’s done. I mean, I’ll get monthly reports from MI6, but it’s – it’s not the same, Greg!” Mycroft sniffled.

“I know,” I said, patting his shoulder in what I hoped was a friendly (but not too friendly) gesture. “I’ll miss him too!”

Suddenly, Mycroft Holmes whirled around and caught me in a bear hug. I was greatly surprised, and I staggered back a step before returning the hug in force. I could hear Mycroft sniffle and feel him shudder as he cried into my best suit jacket.

We stayed that way – hugging tightly in front of the gently crackling fire – for several minutes before Mycroft pulled back and wiped his face with the sleeve of his robe. He cleared his throat and said, “Sorry about that. Emotions running high, and all that. Please do send me the dry cleaning bill for your jacket.” His voice was cold, and he was studiously avoiding eye contact. “It’s late, and I have a fake funeral to plan tomorrow. I’ll – I’ll show you out.”

Without another glance at me, Mycroft strode from his office to the front door. I followed him without a word. As I pulled on my coat, I managed to briefly look him in the eye before he turned to open the door. “Mycroft, it’s okay,” I said gently. “We’re friends. We can support each other like this. You don’t need to be alone while Sherlock is away.”

He looked down at his feet, and from the way his brow wrinkled, I thought he might start crying again. However, he managed to take a deep, if shaky breath, and said, “Alright. Thank you, Greg. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight. You’re a good brother, Mycroft.”

He gave a watery smile at that.

*
Over the next few months, Mycroft called a few times to invite me for coffee or dinner. Initially, those invitations surprised me, but I soon figured out that, besides Sherlock, I really was Mycroft’s only friend and confidante. Our meetings were always pleasant, mostly because I now knew not to tease Mycroft about his dull home life, but also because, as I discovered, the two of us shared a love of international cuisine. As Mycroft himself admitted, it was perhaps the only way he was inclined to be adventurous.

Then, about six months after Mycroft and I started meeting each other, Marguerite killed herself. It shouldn’t have come as a surprise; I knew she was unhappy. She had been for years, but she refused to speak to a psychiatrist, preferring instead to place all the blame for her misery solely on me. Luckily, Rob, Ange, and Rory understood their mother’s temperament, and they refused to play along with her never ending mind games and guilt trips.

For a few weeks before she stepped in front of the train at Penge West, she had been complaining to the pups that I had become emotionally distant, and that she suspected I was cheating on her. Though at the time I denied that I had been seeing anyone, looking back I can see how she might interpret the time I was spending with Mycroft as some sort of emotional infidelity.

Given her level of unhappiness, and her talent for making the rest of the family equally unhappy, I thought that I might be relieved when she died. But all I felt was sadness for the omega who was once so cheerful and vivacious, but found married life monotonous and unsatisfying, and me as a spouse inattentive and far too unambitious for her tastes.

Because she spent virtually all of her time in the flat, and refused to build herself a life outside of the home, Marguerite had few friends. Consequently, her funeral was sparsely attended. The pups and I stood next to the grave while the vicar made a brief, impersonal eulogy. Rob stood tall and straight next to me; every inch a proud, young alpha. Angeline held Rory, who was crying openly. I wondered whether he might turn out to be a late blooming omega like Sherlock. As I reflected on the matter, I realized that that wouldn’t bother me in the slightest.

As the tiny funeral ended, I turned towards the limousine to see a solitary figure standing under a black umbrella smoking a cigarette. It was Mycroft, and it didn’t look like he was particularly enjoying the cigarette.

“What are you doing here?” I asked as I approached.

“Attending my friend’s wife’s funeral, obviously,” he replied between drags on his cigarette. “I’m sorry for your loss, Greg.”

“Thanks. How did you know about the funeral?… Or about Marguerite’s death, for that matter? I haven’t told anyone but close family.”

“Oh, um, I have ways....” He said uncomfortably.

“Oh my god, have you put me under surveillance? Like your brother?”

Mycroft looked away and gave a tiny, guilty shrug.

Probably because it had been such an unhappy few days, that small gesture struck me as absolutely hilarious, and I started laughing.

“What?” Mycroft raised an eyebrow. “What’s so funny?”
“You,” I continued to laugh. “So does this mean that you think I’m worthy of the same level of protection as your precious brother now? Wow, what an honour!”

“Maybe it does, Greg,” he grinned in return. “Look I’d rather not attend the lunch, but if you’d like to come over for a drink tonight, that would be great.”

“I’d like that. Very much.” I gripped Mycroft in a strong bear hug. He grunted in surprise, but soon returned it. “Thanks for coming. You’re a true friend.”

* 

I was drunk and feeling maudlin when the taxi dropped me off at Kidderpore Avenue that night. I thumped on the door with the side of my fist. Mycroft answered it in his pyjamas and plaid dressing gown again.

“That’s it: I’m fucking done with omegas!” I slurred.

Mycroft’s nose wrinkled as he caught a whiff of my breath. “Have you been drinking? I certainly hope you didn’t drive!”

“Naw, Ange used my car to drive Rory back to Aberystwyth, so I took a taxi.” I could feel myself swaying on my feet.

“Hmm. Well, you’d better come in. I’ll get you some water.” Mycroft led me to his stylish, modern kitchen. I noticed that there were scorch marks on the ceiling and cupboard doors. He noticed me examining the burns. “Oh, those are from Sherlock’s silly experiments. I don’t know why he bothers. Nothing is conducted under laboratory conditions – he rarely sterilizes his equipment properly, and he doesn’t even have a fume hood – so it’s not like they’ll ever get published in a reputable journal.” He sighed and poured me a large glass of water.

“Have you heard from him lately?” I asked between gulps.

“Sherlock? No. I mean he hasn’t gotten in touch with me himself…. Though MI6 tells me that he got into a bit of a dust up with some omega assassins in Zagreb a few weeks ago. He’s fine though. God knows how he manages to get through life relatively unscathed. I guess it’s true that god watches out for fools and little children, eh?…. But enough about my dear brother. How are you, Gregory? How was the lunch?”

“Aawful. Marg’s family spent the whole time telling me what a disappointment I was as a son-in-law. They blame me, you know.”

“You a disappointment? That’s absurd!” Mycroft poured himself a glass of water and joined me at the breakfast bar.

“Yep. You see, as an alpha, it was apparently my job to move heaven and earth to make sure that my wife was sublimely happy every moment of her life. According to them, omegas have no responsibility whatsoever for making themselves happy. It’s total bullshit, and that’s why I don’t want anything to do with omegas anymore.”

“Well, don’t just give up, Gregory. They can’t all be so… dramatic.” Mycroft said, patting my shoulder.

“Really? Name one omega who isn’t. Your brother, perhaps?”

Mycroft laughed out loud at that. It was a sniffling, snorting little chuckle. I found that I was very fond of it, perhaps because I so rarely heard it.
“No, I admit that Sherlock is a bad example. In fact, no matter how much he thinks that he doesn’t act like a typical omega, Sherlock is probably the most melodramatic omega I’ve ever met.”

We both laughed at that, and then, out of nowhere, I asked, “Mycroft, have you ever been in love?”

He stopped laughing and looked at me warily. “Do – do you mean with an omega? Why do you ask?” he replied cautiously.

Evidently I had overstepped his boundaries again. “Sorry,” I said, running my hand through my hair. “I’m still a bit drunk. Forget I asked.”

“No. It’s… alright.” He heaved a sigh and looked down at his fine-boned hands as they gripped his water glass. “As a matter of fact I have been. I mean sort of.” He shifted on his stool, getting comfortable as he prepared to tell his story.

“I left Eton at the top of my class. I had been accepted to Oxford, but I decided that I would put my gap year to good use. I’ve always been interested in politics, but I was well aware that with my middle class background, I lacked the connections necessary to rise to a position of any influence. So I applied to be a page at one of the royal palaces. They accepted me right away. So while most of my former classmates were sailing around the Caribbean or hiking the high Himalayas, I sorted mail and answered the telephone at Kensington Palace.”

“Oh, is that how you met the Queen?” I asked in fascination.

“That is… and it’s also how I met… well, let’s just say a high ranking female omega. I suppose the highest ranking female omega in the land, actually. I was delivering her post, and she just called me in for a chat. At first I was ridiculously tongue-tied; you see, I had had a crush on her since I first became an alpha. That first meeting left me with the impression that she was very kind, but very unhappy with her husband and life in the public eye more generally. So I brought her fruit juice and cakes, and listened to her tales of woe, and in return she had me appointed as her special equerry.”

He paused and looked up at me again.

“You have to understand that I was very young, Greg. Just eighteen. And shamefully inexperienced with omegas. Plus I was quite star-struck with my life in the Palace. Thanks to her, I came to be acquainted with all the central members of the Royal Family, not to mention the Alpha Court. I’ve relied on those connections ever since.”

He gave a wry laugh and rubbed a hand through his thinning hair. “I fell for her in an instant. She was charming and beautiful, and told me that she was in love with me. She said that she wanted to run away with me to Cuba or Romania. As ridiculous as it sounds, I thought that I – an eighteen-year-old page – would be a much better mate for her than her husband.”

“Did you ever…?”

“Yes. She seduced me. But I don’t think it took much effort on her part, I wanted her so badly. All she had to say was that she liked ginger alphas, and then I was all over her. And thereafter whenever we were alone together for a few moments we’d… well… you know…. Never during her heats though; those were reserved for her husband.”

“So what happened?”

“Of course it couldn’t last. All our talk of running away together was total fantasy; there was no way she would give up being a princess just for me. I learned that she was very petty and insecure. If I ever expressed reluctance to spend the night, she accused me of being unfaithful, and threatened to
tell his Highness about our affair. And though she said that she loved me, she displayed absolutely no interest in me, or my life, or ambitions. It soon became clear to me that our… liaisons were meant to punish her callous, uncaring alpha husband, and nothing more. To her I was just a… plaything, to be discarded when she got bored of me.”

Here he gave a sad sigh and continued hurriedly, “I showed up to the Palace one morning only to be told that she had had me transferred to the Duke of Edinburgh’s staff at Sandringham. I tried calling and writing, but she never responded.”

Mycroft silently regarded his empty water glass for a few moments. “She broke my heart, Greg. Completely. I was devastated. It was all I could do to show up at Sandringham every day. I almost burst into tears any time I saw her name on official correspondence. Sometimes, if I was sorting the post alone, I would surreptitiously kiss her name or signature. It was – I was – truly pathetic.”

Mycroft sniffled and wiped his eyes with the side of his hand.

“Later on I learned that I was far from the only one. That she had been playing the same game with young alpha officers and polo players since the start of her marriage. Almost all of them gingers. Somehow that – learning that I wasn’t special or unique – hurt most of all.” He sniffled a few more times, then looked up at me again.

“And then she died. A few years later, in a car wreck in Paris. And that was the end of that. Since then I’ve totally sworn off of omegas,” he said briskly. “Can I get you more water?”

“Sure, but… Mycroft, are you saying what I think you are? That you had an affair with…. I trailed off.

“Hmm? Yes. Try to keep up, Gregory.”

“You dog, you!” I grinned. “See, this just proves my point. Falling for omegas leads to nothing but trouble and misery. Like you, I’m totally giving up on the fairest sex. Maybe love in general, while I’m at it.”

Mycroft looked up from where he was filling up my glass from the tap. “Oh no, Greg. Please don’t copy my mistakes!”

“Why not?” I asked as I took my glass back and downed another gulp. “Do you think it was a mistake to give up on omegas?

“I’m starting to,” he admitted. “I mean, I look at you and the relationship you have with your pups, and I can’t help but be jealous. And before he left even Sherlock had a more exciting love life than I do – and how sad is that? By avoiding romance I sometimes feel like I’ve… missed out on... the most fascinating, challenging part of life. It would be ten times worse if you chose that path for yourself as well.”

“Why ten times worse?”

Mycroft shrugged and looked away. “Because you’re lovely,” he whispered. “And I hate to think of you being alone.”

For a few moments, neither of us said anything. The only sound was the dripping faucet.

“I hate to think of you being alone too,” I admitted in a harsh whisper.

Mycroft scoffed, “Yes, but I’m used to it.”
“You shouldn’t have to be. Alone, I mean.” I stood up and walked around the counter to where he stood. “You don’t deserve to be lonely.”

Mycroft looked like he was about to roll his eyes – his usual expression of impatience. But instead he whispered seriously, “Why not?”

“Because you’re lovely too.” I tilted my head, grasped Mycroft by the back of the neck and kissed him deeply. He gave a startled squeak, but he didn’t pull away. After a few seconds, I felt him grab a handful of my shirtfront, and relax into the kiss.

A few minutes later, we both pulled back to gasp for air. I noticed that Mycroft’s smooth-shaven cheeks were red from stubble burn. It was a very appealing look on him. His clear, grey eyes blinked open. He looked dazed and surprised.

“That – that was… indecent!” he gasped.

I was taken aback. If the swelling in his pyjama bottoms was any indication, Mycroft had thoroughly enjoyed our kiss. “What?” I frowned.

“No, that’s – that’s not what I meant,” he ran a hand through his now messy hair. “I mean, two alphas? It’s illegal! Gross indecency. You know that, Greg!”

Indeed I did know it. Before I was assigned to Homicide and Serious Crime, I had spent two years in Family Law, where I had arrested several dozen alpha couples for doing nothing more than what we had just done.

I shrugged and ran my hand down the side of Mycroft’s freckled cheek and neck. “Maybe tomorrow I’ll care,” I said defiantly. “But tonight I don’t. How about you?”

Mycroft looked at me searchingly for a few moments, his pale, grey eyes tracing over my face. He was breathing hard, and chewing on his thin, pale lips. Finally, he whispered. “Fuck it. I’m tired of being the sane one. Time to do something reckless.”

With that he took hold of my hands, and led us to his bedroom.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay. It's a challenge to put myself in another character's head for a while. This was supposed to be just one chapter, but I found that there is more to their developing relationship than I had thought.

Anyway, thank you all for reading, commenting, and leaving kudos. We will return to Sherlock's POV in Chapter 34.
The Ballad of Greg and Mycroft, Part Two

Chapter Notes

Hi all, sorry for the delay. It's been a busy summer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mycroft’s house was huge. Getting to his bedroom took several minutes. It would probably have taken far less time, had we not been pausing every few feet to kiss and tear off each other’s clothing. No matter how windy the hallways were, I knew that I would have no trouble finding my way back to the kitchen – because all I would have to do was follow the trail of socks and underpants.

Between kisses I saw that we passed a disused gym, a tastefully decorated dining room and lounge, a hallway that probably led to Sherlock’s private domain (judging by the level of disorder that seemed to be unique to the younger Mr. Holmes), and Mycroft’s cozy but cluttered office, which I had first visited about six months prior.

Finally, we burst into Mycroft’s spartan, pristine bedroom. It was so clean, so free of his alpha smell, so lacking in little porcelain figures of German children, I could hardly believe that it was his room.

“My. My,” I mumbled between his sloppy, enthusiastic kisses. “Is this really your bedroom?”

“Hmm? Oh yes,” he replied, nipping at my throat. “But I hardly ever sleep here.”

As his tongue stroked along my jugular, my head fell back and I groaned, “Then where do you usually sleep?”

“In my chair,” he said, licking up towards my ear. “In the office.” He paused and looked me in the eye. “Is that odd?” From previous experience I knew that Mycroft would be terribly hurt if I thought him unusual.

“Not at all,” I said holding him tight and kissing his hairy shoulder. “It’s very practical. Just like you.”

He smiled at that and stepped away to flick on the bedside lamp and turn down the white coverlet. When the lights came on, I finally got a look at Mycroft’s naked body. His neck, arms, and legs were long and scrawny. Like all alphas, he was covered in a thick pelt of fine body hair. Because he’s a natural ginger, the colour of his hair ranged from a brilliant gold fuzz on his arms and bottom, to bright, coppery wires on his chest and legs, to a deep burgundy fur on his shoulders and soft little tum. (Over the years, you see, I have come to be quite the connoisseur of the textures and shades of Mycroft’s body hair.) Like all alphas, he was gifted with an impressive set of genitals, which were currently dangling heavy between his legs, the colour a deep shade of purple.

Objectively, I suppose that Mycroft’s body was typical for a middle-aged, desk-bound alpha. However, I was not looking at him objectively. As I was coming to realize that night, I had grown quite fond of my strange, socially inept friend. Now that death had parted Marguerite and me, I was beginning to understand that my feelings towards Mycroft Holmes were not entirely platonic. Judging by the enthusiasm with which Mycroft had been kissing me, his feelings towards me weren’t purely nonsexual either. Having been trapped in a loveless relationship for so many years, the idea
that someone might be attracted to me was unfamiliar, but very welcome. I felt myself smiling affectionately at Mycroft as he stood next to his unused bed watching me hungrily.

“What?” he asked quizzically.

“Nothing. I’m glad we’re doing this. Finally.” I stepped towards him, and kissed him deeply.

After a long moment, Mycroft pulled back. “Greg, ermm…” he said, looking down at his long, narrow feet. “You should know that I haven’t done this in a long time.” He glanced up at me to gauge my reaction.

“That’s fine. Me neither,” I said, bending to catch his lips again.

“But you – you were married. You had marital rights,” he gasped between kisses.

“That didn’t matter to Marg, god rest her soul,” I replied, placing my palms on Mycroft’s furry chest, and pushing him backwards onto the bed. “And I’m not the sort of alpha to force the issue.”

Mycroft reached up and pulled me on top of him. We continued kissing, and I found myself grinding my entire body against his. The texture of his masculine alpha body hair rubbing against my skin was strange – because until that point, my sexual partners had all been hairless omegas – but very erotic. I growled as I felt my cock begin to thicken and swell between my legs.

“Also,” Mycroft sighed as I sucked a love bite on his collarbone. “You should be aware that this is my first time with an alpha.”

“Mine too,” I growled, licking a path between his pectoral muscles.

“Do you know what to do?” Mycroft gasped as my tongue trailed over his soft belly.

“What do you mean?” I asked before dipping my tongue into his navel.

Mycroft whimpered a bit before replying, “I mean – I mean what goes where? What do two alphas do?”

I sat back and looked down at Mycroft lying dazedly on the pristine bed, his large cock stiff and pulsing between his skinny thighs.

The strongest argument that social conservatives can make against alpha-alpha relationships is the biological one: that an alpha-alpha pairing is unnatural because they simply don’t fit together naturally. Without putting too fine a point on it, there aren’t a lot of orifices on the human body into which a fully erect (let alone knotted) alpha penis can comfortably fit. Certainly the male or female omega vagina or mouth, and some well-lubricated beta female vaginas, but any other place is a real stretch – quite literally. Until one of us could conduct a little research (obviously on the sly) it seemed that penetrative sex was off the cards for the pair of us. I bit my lips in worry because I was well aware that most alphas would consider penetrative sex the only type of sex worth having. I hoped that Mycroft wouldn’t leave our first time together disappointed.

“We can always…” Mycroft leaned up and grasped my cock in his freckled hand. I gasped when I felt his thin, alpha lips place an inexpert kiss on the head. “I mean, I don’t know quite how to…. I looked down to see him tilt his head left and right, trying to figure out how to fit the entire glans in his mouth. Though the kisses and licks he deposited there felt wonderful and tickly, it was clear there was no way the whole thing would fit. Finally he gave a frustrated sigh and looked up at me. “Have you got any better ideas?”
I ran a hand through my grey hair, and shook my head in befuddlement. “No…. I mean maybe one. Lie on your side.” Mycroft obeyed, and I lay facing him, our cocks trapped between our bellies. “Erm. Maybe lick your palm,” I suggested, then licked my own. I did my best to grasp both of our erect penises together, though there was no way my hand could stretch enough to wrap around both. Mycroft copied me, and together we slid our slick palms up and down our hard, sensitive cocks. Mycroft gave a deep, alpha moan, and his hips bucked reflexively against my own. I wrapped my free arm around his buttocks to pull him closer and soon we were grinding and wanking against each other at a frantic pace.

I suppose that with two healthy, virile alphas involved, the expectation would be that our first sexual encounter would be pornographic in its athleticism, duration, and imagination. After all, alphas are supposed to have formidable sexual prowess and endurance, both of which are necessary to satisfy their nearly insatiable sexual appetites. However, you must recall that both Mycroft and I were middle-aged, and long past our sexual primes. That – combined with our inexperience with alpha-alpha intercourse, and the poor standards of physical fitness we both maintained – meant that our first time was very brief, very sweaty, and very, very awkward.

We both came – far too soon for my preference – all over each other’s stomachs and hands. I lay breathing heavily for several minutes, before I cracked an eye open. I saw that Mycroft was watching me with just one eye open as well. I couldn’t help but laugh. Mycroft laughed back – his sniffling, snorting snicker had never been more appealing.

After several seconds of shared laughter, he leaned back to retrieve a handful of tissues from the box on his bedside table. As he mopped at the mess on our bellies, I asked him, “Was that good for you? I mean, did you enjoy yourself?”

“Yes, it was very nice.” His smile faltered as the tissues snagged and tore on our chest hair. “Look, this isn’t working. I think we’ll need a shower.” He gave me a wary smile. “Care to join me?”

“I would,” I smiled and took Mycroft’s proffered hand. We washed each other tenderly, then returned to his bedroom to change the sheets. Afterwards, we climbed in together, and lay cuddled together in each other’s arms.

“You know this is really illegal,” Mycroft sighed. “We could both lose our jobs. And end up in jail.”

“I don’t care,” I murmured sleepily.

“You would if they sentenced you to chemical castration.”

I winced at the thought. “I suppose we should try to avoid that outcome.” I looked down at Mycroft’s face as he watched the sun rise over the apple trees in his back garden, his grey eyes tired and thoughtful. “Mycroft, does that mean you regret this? I mean, what we did?”

He looked up at me in surprise. “No! Not at all! I mean… do you?” The latter was a worried whisper.

“No!” I bent down and kissed his thin lips. “It was the best thing to happen to me in a long time…. You’re the best thing to happen to me in a long time.”

“How terrible for you!” he joked and sat up a bit. “But in all serious, Gregory, if – if this is going to happen again, we will have to be very, very careful…. That is… if you want this to happen again.”

“Of course I do!” I exclaimed. “And, yes, we’ll be careful.” Though it was difficult to refrain from smiling, I made a serious face and wagged my finger at Mycroft. “That means no personal calls at
work, no leaving toothbrushes in each other’s bathrooms, and, above all, no sexting, Mr. Holmes.”

“Sexting? God, I don’t even know what that is!” Mycroft laughed and flopped back down on the pillow.

“It’s when you send an, ahem, naughty text message.”

“And that’s off the table now? What a shame!” We both laughed at that. We spent the morning negotiating the terms of our relationship. We agreed that for the time being, no one but the two of us could know about the true nature of our association – at least not until we were sure that the individuals we might confess to wouldn’t grass us up to the police. I didn’t like the idea of keeping secrets from my pups, but there was always a possibility that they would see my relationship with Mycroft as an act of disloyalty to their mother’s memory. As for Mycroft, he wasn’t the least bit troubled about keeping our secret from his brother: “Sherlock is the last person we have to worry about telling, Gregory. The way he goes on about him and John you’d think he’s the only person in the world who’s ever been secretly in love with someone. It would simply never occur to him that his swotty older brother could have a relationship without him knowing. And even if he did find out, he’s so self-absorbed he wouldn’t care in the slightest.”

“But he’s a detective! Couldn’t he, you know, deduce it?”

Mycroft snorted and rolled his eyes at that. “Not likely. You’ll see: when he gets back from Eastern Europe, he’ll be so wrapped up in his own melodrama, he’ll have no clue what’s going on. I’ll bet you a steak dinner that he’d never figure it out without help.”

“You’re on! I’m looking forward to this steak dinner!”

(Of course, Mycroft was right. With all the drama in his own life, Sherlock never even suspected that Mycroft and I were a couple, no matter how many hints I dropped. In the end, John Watson had to tell him.)

We talked for hours that morning: about the funeral, about Sherlock (who is never far from Mycroft’s thoughts), and mostly about us. Thus began what was, in my opinion, the best and most important part of our long relationship: the intimacy that came from sharing our thoughts and feelings. You see, at the start, the sex left a lot to be desired. Neither of us were the least bit experienced with alpha-alpha relations, and I am embarrassed to admit how clueless the pair of us were about pleasing the other. Far more fulfilling for both of us was the long conversations we had afterwards while cuddled in each other’s arms. Both of us had high pressure jobs and significant family obligations, and for a long time neither of us had had someone we could turn to vent our feelings. It was wonderfully therapeutic to tell Mycroft about my frustrations with Donovan (who had become impossibly smug and bossy since Sherlock’s fake suicide) and have him tell me, “Maybe you could remind her that her former lover is obsessed with Sherlock now. I think he even founded a ‘Sherlock Lives’ club. Knowing that Philip Anderson thinks that Sherlock is better than her even in death might take her down a peg or two.”

I imagine that it’s probably disappointing to learn that my relationship with Mycroft has never been wholly, or even primarily, based on sex. We’ve never, ever been ones for lust-fueled marathon fucking sessions. (Come on, who has the time or energy for all that?) Rather, our relationship has always been more… well, I suppose you’d call it mature – and by that I mean that it’s based on mutual respect and kindness, meeting each other’s needs, and, above all, communication. In my humble opinion, that’s a far superior foundation on which to build a loving, long-term relationship, to one based on passion – which, both of us knew all too well, can be turbulent, fickle, and ultimately very painful.
About a year after we started our secret relationship, I dropped by Mycroft’s house in the middle of the night (as was the norm). I let myself in the back door, and kissed him hello as he stood pouring us each a tumbler of whisky in his scorched kitchen.

“What are we celebrating?” I asked as we clinked glasses.

“New laws!” he replied excitedly. “That Lady Smallwood is a treasure! There was a vote in Parliament today, and now omegas can take science and math! Do you know what this means?”

“That soon even omegas will be better at figuring out train fares than me?” I asked with a confused grin.

“No!” Mycroft rolled his eyes. “It sets a precedent! Parliament is no longer going to tolerate blatant discrimination against omegas. By this time next year, omegas will be able to attend university, and have access to a wider range of prescription drugs. It’s the start of a new era, Gregory!”

“I take it that you had a hand in this?”

“Naturally!” He happily sipped his drink. “It’s for Sherlock, of course. For when he gets back.”

“I didn’t realize that you had that kind of power.”

“Well, now you do.” He winked and bent to kiss me.

A year to the day after I first spent the night with Mycroft, we went for our anniversary dinner at a local gastropub at the south end of Hampstead Heath. Afterwards we went for an evening stroll around the Highgate ponds. As is typical for London in March, it had been cold and rainy all day, but the sky had cleared at dusk. However, it was still chilly and damp, so we were the only people out walking. We passed a large oak tree whose bark was marred by a hastily carved inscription: “JAKE LUVS MANDY,” it read.

Mycroft pointed at it with his whangee-handled umbrella. “Isn’t that terrible?”

“What, that? I think it’s sweet. Clearly this Jake character really cares for the lovely Mandy, and he wants the world to know.” I smiled at him.

Mycroft replied loftily, “The last time I checked, vandalism was against the law.”

“Uh-huh. And since when does the law stop you from following your heart, Mr. Mycroft Holmes?” I nudged his shoulder with my own. (Such tiny gestures of affection were all we dared to make in public.)

In the waning light, I saw Mycroft blush a bit. “Still,” he persisted. “That scrawl will be on that tree forever. In a hundred years, when no one remembers either Jake or Amanda, park visitors will still have to read that.”

“I think that’s the best part,” I said thoughtfully. “Wait here a moment, will you?”

Though I was wearing my best dress shoes, I tramped through the wet grass and mud towards the stand of oak trees. I hopped onto a rock next to a tall tree, and fished in my pocket for a penknife.

“Gregory!” Mycroft hissed. “What are you doing?”
“You’ll see. Keep an eye out for any coppers, eh?”

“I see one right now. An impossible, unpredictable, totally mad one.”

“Shush you,” I murmured, engrossed in my task.

“If we get caught, I’m going to testify against you,” he muttered fretfully.

I continued carving in silence for several more minutes. The sky was almost totally dark when I called Mycroft over to the tree. He grumbled and swore as he slipped down the muddy embankment. I reached down to pull him up onto the rock next to me. Without letting go of his hand, I pointed at the tree bark. “There. That’s for you. And in a hundred years when no one remembers either you or me, park visitors will still be able to read that.”

In the dim light, Mycroft leaned forward and squinted at the tree bark, where I had carved as neatly as I could “GL + MH = TL 4EVA.”

“But what does it mean?” he frowned in confusion.

“’What does it mean?’” I repeated incredulously. “It means ‘Greg Lestrade plus Mycroft Holmes equals true love forever,’ you twat!”

“That’s so… juvenile!” Mycroft rolled his eyes.

“What?” I said angrily. “I pour my heart out to you, and you call it juvenile?” I hopped off the rock into the wet grass, and began marching towards the footpath.

“No, no. Wait, Greg!” Mycroft jumped off the rock, and stumbled down the embankment towards me. “Will you just wait a moment so that I can explain?” I paused at the edge of the path, and Mycroft clambered after me. All of a sudden, he slipped on a patch of wet leaves, and fell on his bottom in a large puddle. His pinstriped suit was soaked with mud.

My anger instantly dissipated, and I picked my way down to the puddle to help Mycroft to his feet. “Are you okay?” I murmured.

“I’m fine,” he said, using a handkerchief to wipe his hands. “Please allow me to explain, Gregory: It’s the format I find juvenile; the message itself is… appreciated.”

“Appreciated?”

“Yes, appreciated…. And reciprocated.”

“Mycroft, are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

“I think so,” he smiled hopefully. “I love you, Greg.”

“I love you too.”

As it was dark, and there was little chance that anyone could see us, we kissed tenderly. Where I was grasping his lapels, I could feel the mud soaked into Mycroft’s suit. “Come on,” I sighed. “Let’s get you out of those wet clothes.”

“Mmm. What an anniversary this is turning out to be,” Mycroft chuckled lasciviously.

*
Just a few days before Mycroft left to fetch Sherlock from Serbia, he and I were cuddling in his armchair in front of the fire. Not for the first time I was teasing Mycroft about his Hummel collection.

“They’re bizarre, My! All those round faces, and lederhosen, and apple cheeks! I can’t believe that you of all people would be so sentimental about something so useless and tacky!”

“Come on, they belonged to my grandmother!”

“But all they do is collect dust! What practical use can they possibly have?”

“They remind me of Grandma Lynn. And they make me happy. And that’s plenty!”

“I suppose I could use them for target practice the next time I’m at the shooting range…”

“Don’t you dare, Gregory!”

“Or we could use the one with the two little boys as a topper for our wedding cake…”

For a long moment, Mycroft did not respond. Finally, he mumbled, “Sorry, what?”

I reached behind me to take the figurine down from the shelf. “We could use this one as a cake topper. When we get married.”

Mycroft sighed. “Don’t be silly, Greg. Just…. There’s no point in even thinking about that.”

“Will you marry me, Mycroft?”

Mycroft shook his head sadly. “It can’t happen. You know that.”

“I love you. And I want to spend the rest of our lives together.”

“I love you too, Greg. You know that,” Mycroft sighed. “But it’s… it’s impossible. So let’s just enjoy what we have and – ”

“I’m tiring of hiding our relationship. I want everyone to know that we’re in love with each other.”

“It’s impossible, Greg,” Mycroft rolled his eyes. “We could be imprisoned just for kissing each other! There’s no country in the world that would recognize our union, and no religious or legal authority who would perform the service. It just can’t – ever! – happen!”

I was surprised at the vehemence of his response. “Couldn’t – couldn’t you do something about the laws? At least in Britain?” I asked after a long pause.

“What do you mean?” Mycroft raised an eyebrow.

“Well, you got all those omega laws changed. Can’t you do the same for alpha marriages?”

Mycroft looked thoughtful for a moment, before shaking his head in resignation. “The two situations are entirely different. There have been interest groups pushing for changes to omega education and employment policies for decades. There just hasn’t been the same level of public support for alpha-alpha marriages – “

“But surely there’s something you could do to create that support…”

“Plus the omega campaign had a well-known public face in Lady Smallwood. There’s no one who could fulfill that function for alpha marriages.”
“Couldn’t you do that?”

Mycroft looked at me as if I was crazy. “Wouldn’t that look self-serving? Plus, the public aspect of politics really isn’t my natural mileu.”

“Not your natural mileu? You know what this sounds like to me?” I unwrapped my arms from around Mycroft’s shoulders and crossed them across my chest.

Mycroft noticed me withdrawing and said warily, “What?”

“Like you’ll bend over backwards, go to the ends of the earth, and stop at nothing to change the law to help your bloody selfish brother,” I grumbled angrily. “But you won’t even try – not even a little – to change the law to help the two of us!”

Mycroft’s mouth fell open in surprise. “That’s – that’s not true! I’m just being realistic – “

“Realistic, my eye!” I huffed. “You’ll do anything for Sherlock, but god forbid you should have to step out of your precious comfort zone for me!”

“Gregory, please! Anything we do to draw attention to our relationship could end up ruining our lives.”

“Anything!” I bellowed. “Mycroft Holmes, I’d do simply anything for you! And I thought you felt the same for me.”

Mycroft was silent for a few moments, before quietly admitting, “Well of course I’d do anything for you, Greg. That… you… there shouldn’t be any doubt on that score.”

“Then you’ll do it? Make it possible for us to get married?”

Mycroft gave a heavy sigh. “Yes. I mean, I’ll try. It’ll be more difficult than you think though. And it will take a long time. But, yes, I’ll do my best.”

I let out a merry whoop and bent forward to kiss him soundly on the mouth. I extracted myself from the comfort of the armchair, took Mycroft’s hand in my own, and knelt before him. “Mycroft Holmes, will you make me the happiest alpha in the world and marry me?”

“Yes. Eventually. But, yes.”

“And we’re using the Hummel as a cake topper.”

“Anything for you.”

*

Like I said, Mycroft brought Sherlock home from Serbia just a few days later. Just as Mycroft had predicted, he was so preoccupied with the drama of his own life, he took absolutely no notice of my deepening relationship with his brother. Mycroft, however, was terribly worried about his brother’s emotional state. It seemed that his plan to create some distance between Sherlock and John had failed miserably; Sherlock was still hopelessly hung up on John, but now John was engaged to a beta named Mary. Plus John was understandably furious with Sherlock for faking his death. To put it mildly, Sherlock was brokenhearted. Then, to top it off, the DCI insisted that we couldn’t allow unaccompanied omegas into our crime scenes. This meant that until he found another alpha or beta to assist him, Sherlock was relegated to cold case duty. Even though it would surely put a damper on our own relationship, Mycroft invited Sherlock to move back in with him. Predictably, his stubborn,
independent brother refused the offer.

Nevertheless, John and Sherlock seemed to have made up sometime prior to John and Mary’s wedding. In fact, John asked Sherlock to be his best man. To my surprise (and Mycroft’s disgust) Sherlock accepted his request. As we had been friends for some years, John sent me an invitation to his wedding. Though John himself did not invite Mycroft to attend, Sherlock asked Mycroft to come several times. Every time Mycroft refused. One evening, over a shared supper of beans on toast, I asked him why.

“I hate weddings. The mingling, the dancing. Yuck.” He gave an exaggerated shudder.

I laughed at his response. It was so typically Mycroft. “But I’ll be there! It’ll be nice for us to see each other in a public setting for once.”

“No, Gregory.”

“And I for one would like to dance with you.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes at that. Sometimes he has no patience whatsoever with sentimentality.

“I think Sherlock would really like it if you were there,” I said between bites of toast. “You know yourself that he’s having a tough time dealing with John getting married. A little show of support from his family alpha would go a long way, I think.”

“Gregory, no. I can’t.”

“Well, I’m going to check the plus-one box on the RSVP card anyway. That way, if you change your mind, there’ll still be a place for you.”

Mycroft grumbled discontentedly at that.

On the morning the wedding, I left for Bristol still optimistic that Mycroft would change his mind and appear just in time for the ceremony. When he didn’t, I told myself that he must have had to put in a few hours at the office, and that he would show up for the dinner. When that didn’t happen, I told myself that my love – my own fiancé – would never disappoint me like this; he would arrive just in time to share one dance with me. When that didn’t happen, I simply left.

As I pulled out of the parking lot, I noticed Sherlock trudging heavily up the roadway. I had kept an eye on him all day. Though he smiled in the pictures, and gave a very moving speech, it was plain to see that he was just miserable. Plus one of the alpha bridesmaids had been hitting on him all day, and it had clearly made him very uncomfortable. I had to remind myself that Sherlock had only been outed as an omega two years previously; clearly he still wasn’t used to the aggressive sort of attention that young, single alphas lavished on attractive omegas.

I drove Sherlock all the way back to his flat on Baker Street, before heading to Mycroft’s house in Hampstead. To my surprise (given Mycroft’s appreciation for sleep) the lights were on. Mycroft was in the kitchen eating a piece of chocolate cake – undoubtedly his favourite comfort food.

“Oh, hello, Gregory!” he said around a mouthful of cake. “I wasn’t expecting you until tomorrow. What a pleasant surprise!”

“I have never been so disappointed in you,” I said without preamble. Mycroft’s face fell.

“What? Why?” he wiped chocolate frosting from around his mouth with a napkin.
“Why? For not showing up to John and Mary’s wedding, obviously. Jesus, you should have seen your brother: he was on the verge of tears all day. The one time he asks you – begs you! – for your support, and you refuse him. What kind of a family alpha are you?”

Mycroft recoiled as if I had slapped him. We argued so infrequently, I am sure he was quite bewildered by my unexpected attack.

I continued my tirade: “And it’s not just your brother who wanted to see you today. You and I have so few opportunities to be together socially, and we had the perfect excuse with this wedding. Damn you, Mycroft, you know I was looking forward to dancing with you!” My voice was raising to a heated alpha snarl.

“Greg, I’m sorry. Please let me explain,” Mycroft said quietly.

I, however, had no intention of allowing him the chance to speak. “And why? For what oh so important reason did you have to disappoint the two people who supposedly mean the most to you? Because Mycroft Holmes doesn’t like weddings! Because dancing and mingling aren’t his natural milieu! God damn it, Mycroft,” I shouted angrily, “You’ve said that you’d do anything for me, but if you can’t even show up to a fucking wedding when I ask you to, I don’t know if that promise means anything at all!”

“That’s not fair!” Mycroft shouted back at me. I blinked in surprise because Mycroft rarely ever raised his voice at anyone except Sherlock.

Mycroft stared me down, his gaze cold and intense. I was forcefully reminded that my lover was no shrinking omega or obedient beta; rather, he was a powerful, dominant alpha male. I averted my gaze, and dipped my chin in submission.

“Now, if you’ll let me explain,” he said, his voice returning to its usual soft, pleasant tones. “My refusal to attend John Watson’s wedding has nothing to do with my hatred of weddings, or my refusal to leave my comfort zone. I have attended hundreds of weddings over the years, and I am well-practiced at smiling and wishing the happy couple all the best, even when I can deduce that the marriage won’t last a year.”

I snorted a quiet laugh at that, even though I continued looking at my dress shoes.

“Far less was my refusal to attend driven by an absence of regard for you, or a lack of concern for my brother’s well-being. You know full well, Gregory, that I love you both with all my heart.” I couldn’t help but smile a bit. Mycroft is usually so reticent, on the rare occasions that he does articulate his feelings for me, it never fails to warm my heart.

“Rather, I refused to attend John fucking Watson’s wedding to that beta…” I could hear Mycroft’s voice begin to shake with emotion. “…Because I can’t – I just can’t keep watching my brother’s heart break over that man!” I looked up to see that Mycroft’s eyes were full of tears.

“Sherlock has been in love with John since they met.” Mycroft’s thin lips were wobbling. “And John has never, ever returned his feelings. I’ve done everything in my power to help him get over that alpha, but nothing’s ever worked. And so he keeps getting hurt, over and over again. I just can’t keep watching him going back for more!” Mycroft drew a heaving, sobbing breath, and I stepped forward to take him in my arms.

“Did you know that John asked him to be his best man? Though he knew full well that Sherlock had feelings for him? What a fucking cruel thing to do!” Mycroft cried. I held him tightly, and kissed him on the temple. “And I’ve tried to talk to him, but he won’t listen to me! I’m at my wits’ end, Greg!
What can I do? I am honestly afraid that Sherlock will end up dying over this!"


Mycroft nodded miserably.

“But that’s pretty rare these days, right? I mean, the omega has to be really, really hopelessly in love, they say.”

Mycroft shrugged. “If anyone could manage it, it’s a drama queen like Sherlock.”

I held Mycroft tightly, as his tears slowly diminished, and his sobs devolved into wet hiccups. Finally he whispered hopelessly, “What do I do, Greg? What do I do?”

“Well, let’s see,” I sighed pensively. “Sherlock’s a logical man, right?” Mycroft snorted at this, but I continued. “So maybe now that John’s married he’ll finally realize that he’s got no chance with him, and he’ll see that he needs to move on. Right? Let’s give him a chance to decide for himself that it’s time to get over John, okay?”

Mycroft shook his head sadly and whispered, “He’s known it was hopeless for years, Greg, but he’s so stubborn he refuses to see it.”

“Oh, well then, let’s give him a few weeks, and if he doesn’t snap out of it, I’ll—I guess I’ll go talk to him. Man to man. If doesn’t listen to you, maybe he’ll listen to me. Alright? Sound like a plan?”

Mycroft looked dubious, but eventually he gave a small nod. “I don’t know what I would do if Sherlock died, Greg,” he whispered. “If I lost him it would break my heart.”

“I know.” I kissed Mycroft’s forehead firmly. “I know it would. But I won’t let that happen.”

As Mycroft had predicted, in the weeks following John’s wedding Sherlock remained depressed and despondent. As I promised, I paid him a visit in order to encourage him to snap out of his disconsolate state. To my surprise, he wasn’t even aware of the dangers of omega pining. His landlady, Martha Hudson, and I spoke seriously to him about the necessity of moving on, and when I left Sherlock appeared to have been frightened into taking our advice.

Two weeks later, Mycroft received a text from Sherlock that read: “Brother Dear: Are you free to join my lady friend and I for dinner Saturday next? Of course you are. Bring dessert. Try not to eat it in the car on your way over. –SH”

When Mycroft showed me the text, I said, “There. You see? Same old Sherlock. He’s gotten over John already. All I had to do was give him a bit of a kick in the backside.”

“That or he’s been kidnapped, and he’s suffering from Stockholm syndrome. Either way, as long as he’s not pining,” Mycroft grinned. I could tell that he was greatly relieved that his brother was finally making some progress.

Mycroft returned from his dinner with Sherlock and his lady friend with the following report: “She’s delightful, Gregory. I simply can’t see Sherlock doing any better. And I don’t mean that as an insult, for once. I really, really like her. She’s reasonably intelligent, and funny, and most importantly, she is terribly kind to Sherlock.”

I fluffed my pillow, and crawled into bed next to Mycroft. “See? I told you so. All he needed was a bit of a push, and now he’s found himself a great alpha to be his mate.” I pulled the coverlet over us.
“Do you think she knows about Sherlock’s, you know, past?”

“Yes, I think so.” Mycroft wrapped his arm around me, and lay his head on my chest. “And, remarkably enough, it doesn’t seem to bother her. She seems very protective of him.”

“Good. God knows he needs more people to protect him. You’ve been carrying that burden by yourself for far too long.”

Mycroft tilted his head to look me in the eye. “I’ll never stop protecting him, Greg.” He whispered vehemently.

“I know.” I bent to kiss him on the crown of his head. “You know what?” I yawned. “I’ve always had a thing for gingers. Why don’t you let your hair grow out?”

“Ugh. Haven’t you heard that gingers have no souls?” Mycroft shuddered.

“Oh, we both know that’s not quite true,” I sighed, hugging him tightly to my side.

* 

We decided that the two young lovers deserved some time to themselves, so for three weeks, neither of us got in touch with Sherlock or Janine. When we hadn’t heard from either of them in all that time, I decided to send Sherlock a text asking about his progress on my cold case files. For two days he didn’t respond. Always assuming the worst, Mycroft decided to pay Sherlock a visit at his Baker Street flat.

I was at work when I received his frantic call. “Hey, I thought we said no phone calls at work,” I said, closing my office door so that no one could overhear our conversation.

“Greg, Sherlock is missing!” came Mycroft’s panicked reply.

“Missing? Since when? Have you gotten in touch with Janine?”

“Yes. Mrs. Hudson says that she hasn’t seen him in nearly a week. She said that she assumed that he and Janine had gone on holiday together. But I called Janine, and she told me that the two of them had broken up.”

“Oh god!” I sat on the edge my desk. “Do you have any idea where he could be?”

“No, well, maybe. I – I’m going to check the morgue at Saint Bartholomew’s, and then under Vauxhall Bridge.”

“Vauxhall Bridge? Why?”

“That’s where I found him before. I’ve got to go, Greg.”

“Okay, keep me posted.”

Mycroft ended the call, and I ran my hand through my hair. “Fuck,” I said. I sat thinking about how to find Sherlock. Mycroft was clearly panicking, and in no state to think clearly about where his brother might be. So it would fall to me. I decided that I should start by speaking to the people who had seen him last.

“Donovan!” I shouted, striding towards her desk. “You’re in charge. I’m out for the day!”

My first stop was the Baker Street flat. I knocked, and Mrs. Hudson let me in. “Hullo, Martha. I’m
looking for Sherlock.”

“Thank goodness you’re here! I just had Mycroft here, and he’s in an absolute tizzy! He does care for his brother so. I just wish the two of them got along better. I suppose it’s both their faul—“

“Mrs. Hudson,” I said, interrupting her nattering. “Can you please tell me when you last saw Sherlock?”

She paused to think. “Saturday last. He asked me how to make a shepherd’s pie. I think he and Janine had a special evening planned. I heard them later that night. They were… you know.” She winked suggestively at me. “And then I heard them talking, and the front door close. And… that was all.”

“Can I look around his flat? See if anything’s missing?”

“Oh, Greg!” Mrs. Hudson trotted to her kitchen to fetch the spare keys.

Sherlock’s flat was a smelly tip, as per usual. There were two empty wine glasses on the coffee table, and Sherlock’s Cluedo game was down from the shelf. The kitchen sink was full of dirty, crusty dishes. His bedroom smelled strongly of alpha and sex, and there were damp towels on the bathroom floor. A quick glance through Sherlock’s wardrobe and meticulously indexed sock drawer revealed that there were no clothes missing. Indeed, all of his tailored suits were tidily hung in his wardrobe, only one in need of dry cleaning.

“Oh, Greg,” Mrs. Hudson said worriedly. “Where do you think he could be?”

“I don’t know,” I said, though I was starting to worry that Sherlock had done something foolish. “Mrs. Hudson, you’ve known Sherlock for a long time. Is there a place he’d go if he was, you know, really unhappy?”

Mrs. Hudson shook her head. “No, I can’t think of…. Well, maybe there’s one. Come downstairs and help me find my old address book; I need to make a few phone calls.”

A half hour later, I stopped my car outside a run-down building on Rossington Street. The junkies wandering about outside instantly recognized me as a copper. Mrs. Hudson exited the passenger side door, and a man in his fifties rushed out of the building and kissed her hand. “Madam, it’s so nice to see you again!” he said fawningly. “The organization has missed you dearly. Did you receive our Christmas card?”

“Yes, thank you, Donald. You look like you’re doing well for yourself.” That was a patent lie: this Donald character looked like a sleazy drug pusher in a cheap polyester suit.

Nevertheless, Donald preened at her compliment, “We’ve had a good couple of years, it’s true…. Now I’ve had the boys clean up a bit, so if you’d like to go inside….” He bowed, and I followed Mrs. Hudson as she marched imperiously into the drug den.

As we entered my alpha nose was overwhelmed by the stench of urine, heroin, body odour, and human misery. I tried to hold my breath, but each room seemed to smell worse than the last. I was glad that I had never spent time in the Drugs Directorate. The walls of each room were lined with dirty mattresses and pallets made of old towels and louse-ridden blankets. On each lay one or two (or sometimes three) passed out junkies. Some leaned against the crumbling walls, rocking back and forth and staring at nothing. We checked each one to see if it was Sherlock. Finally, we found him on a shit-stained mattress on the third floor, looking like nothing so much as a crushed bug. He stared at us confusedly, the razor sharp intelligence that normally lit up his eyes completely absent. Mrs.
Hudson gestured at him, and two terrified cartel employees carried him downstairs to my car. Mrs. Hudson and I followed. As soon as I made sure that Sherlock was securely buckled in the back seat, I sent Mycroft the following message: “Found him! Meet us at NSY!”

He replied, “I love you.”

*

Later that afternoon, Mycroft and I sat side by side on the coffee table in my office, watching his brother snoring away on my dingy little sofa. Mycroft blew his nose gustily; he had been crying for some time.

“I can never come close to repaying you, Gregory,” he said emotionally.

“Repay me? Don’t be ridiculous; I’m your fiancé!”

“You know what I mean. You saved him. I was running around like a stupid omega, and you found him.”

I shrugged at that. “What are we going to do about him?” I asked. Mycroft looked at me with a raised eyebrow; it was not lost on him that I had said ‘we’ instead of ‘you.’ “What? He’s my fiancé’s brother. That makes him family. So I ask again, what are we going to do?”

Mycroft’s gaze returned to his brother, whose normally angelic features were stained by a layer of sweat and filth. “He needs to get off the drugs first, obviously.”

“I can help there,” I said. “I’ll have our drugs squad sweep his flat. See if he’s got a stash there.”

“Good idea. Make sure they get rid of everything,” Mycroft said, fishing his phone out of his pocket. “As for me I think I’ll have a long overdue talk with Doctor John Watson.”

I kissed Mycroft goodbye, and left the office to arrange to have a drugs squad meet me at Baker Street.

I didn’t hear from him for the rest of the day, so after work I drove to his house, and let myself in the back door. Mycroft was standing at the kitchen sink.

“Oh, Gregory,” he looked over his shoulder at me. “I’m glad you’re home. Can you come here? I need your advice.”

As I approached, he turned around and held his hands in front of him. His knuckles were bruised and cut. Some of them were still bleeding. “You have more experience with this sort of thing than I do,” he said calmly. “Do I need stitches?”

“Mycroft, what happened?” I exclaimed. “Did – did you get in a fight?”

“Yes. Well, sort of,” he shrugged. “It was quite one-sided, so I suppose it qualifies as more of a beating than an actual fight. As the old saying goes, ‘you should see the other guy.’ Ha ha.”

“So you won?”

“Well, of course I did!” he sniffed indignantly. “I am a fierce alpha warrior, you know.”

“I didn’t know you were that fierce! Give me your hands.”

I gently wiped my lover’s battered knuckles with a damp tea towel. He hissed in pain a few times,
but was otherwise silent.

When I was finished, I said, "They’ve more or less stopped bleeding, so they probably won’t need stitches. But you’ll need them bandaged up. Have you got a first aid kit? And some iodine or peroxide?"

"In the bathroom cabinet."

I fetched the necessary supplies, then spent several minutes carefully bandaging my fiance’s hands. "There. All done," I said. "Now no more brawls for you until you’re good and healed up, young man." I finished by kissing him on the temple.

"Thank you, Gregory. I don’t know what I’d do without you."

"Uh-huh. I take it that the unlucky recipient of the beating was John Watson."

"Yep," Mycroft said, making the ‘p’ sound pop. “He didn’t even see it coming."

"Can you tell me what happened?"

"If you pour me a drink, certainly."

I obediently poured each of us a glass of Strathisla, and carried them to the office. Mycroft followed me, gingerly holding his hands to his chest. When we had settled ourselves in the armchair, he allowed me to hold his glass to his lips so that he could take a sip. Suitably fortified, he began his story:

"Well, you know I called John to ask him to meet me at the Baker Street flat. He was there when Sherlock and I arrived. So I asked Sherlock to go upstairs while I had a chat with John."

"Right. And then what happened?"

"Well, then I just… you know… punched him,” Mycroft shrugged. “In the face.... Right in the nose, as a matter of fact.

"Without any warning? You suckerpunched him, My? Wow, what a cheap shot!"

"Was it a cheap shot? He should have known I would be angry. So really it’s his own fault for not taking adequate precautions."

"If you say so. Then what happened?"

"Well, he was on the floor, and I didn’t know what to do at that point. So I sort of climbed on top of him and began scratching and punching him some more."

"Wow, you fight dirty, Mycroft Holmes. Remind me not to get into a scrap with you."

"As if you ever would."

"And what was John doing this whole time?"

"Well, trying to cover his face, and yelling at me to stop."

"Did he get in any shots of his own?"

"No, I don’t think so."
“Jesus Christ, John’s a soldier and you handed his ass to him. You are one bad-assed mother fucker, Mycroft Holmes.” I couldn’t help but smile; Mycroft sometimes surprises me in ways I couldn’t have imagined.

“So did you at least tell John why you were so angry with him?”

“Am I? Don’t tell anyone, but this was my first fight, Gregory. Well, except for Sherlock, but he hardly counts,” he snickered.

“Finish the job? What’s that supposed to mean?”

He shrugged again. “I deliberately left the threat open-ended.”

“So now we wait for one or both of them to get in touch.”

We waited all evening for either Sherlock or John to call or text. By the next morning neither had contacted us. I remained hopeful, however. “You never know,” I said. “Maybe they had a late night, and they’re still in bed.

“Ugh. Don’t make me think of that,” Mycroft rolled his eyes.

When neither had called by that evening, Mycroft sent Sherlock the following text: “Brother Mine: I understand that you might be feeling poorly today. Would you like me to bring by some Methadone? –M”

After a half hour, Sherlock’s reply came: “No thank you, Brother Dear. This time I am trying to get by without it. – SH”

A few seconds later, another text arrived: “P.S. – Give my best to Lestrade. – SH”

“Well!” said Mycroft. “It looks like I owe you a steak dinner. Sherlock finally noticed that we’re together.”

“Probably not without help though,” I admitted. “John figured it out a while ago. I’ll bet that he told Sherlock.”

“Hmm. Maybe the army doctor isn’t as obtuse as he seems. How do you think he figured it out?”

“Well,” I said sheepishly. “He – he said that he smelled you on me. I guess that’s what we get for having a quickie over lunch.”

“Right,” Mycroft grinned at the memory. “Next time we’ll be sure to have a shower before going back to work.”

“Anyway, if Sherlock’s back to sassing you via text message, it must mean that he’s in a more positive frame of mind, right? So maybe he and John were able to work things out after all.”

Mycroft shrugged. “I hope you’re right. If I were to lose Sherlock to pining, I would never forgive John… or myself.”
Over the next few days, Mycroft sent several more texts to Sherlock, asking whether he’d like any special treats to help him get through the heroin withdrawal. Sherlock’s replies to each message were prompt and funny – though he refused all offers of assistance. They encouraged us both to believe that Sherlock had finally turned a corner, and that he was once again becoming the sharp-witted, independent young man we both loved so dearly.

Imagine my shock, then, when I received the following text message just five days later: “G, come to St. Barts omega annex ASAP. Sherlock has had a miscarriage. – M”

Chapter End Notes

As ever, lines of dialogue taken from Ariane Devere's livejournal.

If you want to see the Hummel figurine that Greg wants to use as a cake topper, here it is:

http://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/11096481_hummel-figurine-two-boys-123

Now, don't get mad, but next week at work is going to be super busy for me, and then I'm going to be hiking in the Canadian Maritimes for three weeks. So I don't foresee Chapter 34 being posted before the first week of October. *Quietly tiptoes out of the room before readers can attack*
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

My initial reaction to my realization that I might be pregnant with John’s litter was denial: My heat had stopped because I was going into withdrawal, I reasoned. The doctor in Belgrade told me that I was infertile, so there was no way I could actually be carrying pups. And yet, even as I told myself that, a tiny voice reminded me that the Serbian doctor had actually said that I couldn’t carry a litter to term; she had never said that I couldn’t get pregnant.

“Oh god,” I whimpered, pulling the duvet over my head and cuddling into the pillows. John’s lingering scent calmed the panic that was brewing in my chest. I fished my phone from my trouser pocket, and sent him a text: “John, come at once if convenient. If inconvenient, come anyway.” He did not reply.

I lay in bed for most of the day. Mrs. Hudson knocked on the sitting room door around noon. Though the pregnancy hormones building in my body urged me to seek comfort from the senior omega, I knew that she would be able to detect the milky smell of pregnancy on me. And I just couldn’t handle having her (or anyone) know just yet. So I lay perfectly still in bed, silently begging her to leave. A few minutes later I heard her push a piece of paper under my door. Around supper time, I heard the front door open, and I dashed to the front window to see Mrs. Hudson leave in a taxi. I retrieved the piece of paper from the floor. It was a note addressed to me.

“Sherlock (It read): It sounds like you and John had a nice evening together. ;-) I hope that you two were able to work things out between you. I understand that you might not be feeling well on account of the heroin withdrawal. I am planning to spend the next week with Edna, but if you need anything at all, please call me there. I know that you’re used to handling these things on your own, but there’s no need to carry that burden by yourself. Love to you and John, Mrs. Hudson.”

Though part of me was tempted to call Mrs. Hudson at her sister’s house, and beg her to come home, a larger part was glad that Mrs. Hudson wouldn’t be home for a few days. That meant that I could continue to avoid the question of what I would do if I actually was pregnant.

I was overcome with a craving for chocolate, so I put on some pyjama bottoms and thundered downstairs to raid Mrs. Hudson’s biscuit tin, and returned to bed. As I crawled under the covers, I noted with disgust the dry semen on my sheets. I quickly stripped the bed, and dashed downstairs to Mrs. Hudson’s utility room to wash the bedclothes. I sat on the dryer munching chocolate biscuit after chocolate biscuit.

When the sheets were clean and dry I bundled them upstairs again, and tugged them onto the bed, spending an inordinate amount of time fussing over the hospital corners. I smiled in satisfaction when they were finally perfect. Then I looked above the bed to my framed judo diploma, which was dusty and covered in fingerprints. I sighed in irritation, and stomped to the kitchen in search of a Swiffer, glass cleaner, and kitchen rolls. After dusting the frame and cleaning the glass, I turned my attention to my framed periodic table, and then the childhood picture of Mycroft and myself. Thereafter I dusted and polished the wardrobe. Then I sat down to alphabetize my CDs, still gulping down Mrs. Hudson’s biscuits.

As I was dragging the Hoover up the stairs – another packet of chocolate bikkies purloined from Mrs. Hudson’s pantry under my arm – I suddenly paused. I had never cleaned 221b before, not even when John had put me in a Full Nelson and threatened to break my arm if I didn’t remove all traces
of a foot fungus experiment from the shower. I gasped and dropped the Hoover when I finally figured it out: I was nesting – making a den to shelter my pups. Often the first behavioural change to be observed in a pregnant omega. I sat down hard on the steps and cried.

* 

And yet I still refused to seek help. The possibility that I might be pregnant with John’s litter was so overwhelming, I simply couldn’t confront it. So I stayed in bed eating chocolate cookies. The heroin withdrawal didn’t help matters. It was nowhere near as bad as it had been the first time, but I still felt absolutely wretched. But at least the diarrhea, nausea, and itchiness distracted me from thinking about the fetuses growing in my uterus.

Mycroft texted me with an offer to bring me some Methadone. Though I longed for something to take the edge off my withdrawal symptoms, that tiny voice in my head reminded me that Methadone had already caused irreparable harm to my uterus, and that further use might cause untold harm to my babies. Plus, the last thing I wanted was for Mycroft to figure out that I was pregnant – by John, no less! So I decided that I wouldn’t give him any reason to drop by Baker Street. My reply to his text was dismissive and cheeky – classic Sherlock. Evidently, he was satisfied that I was coping well enough; though he offered to bring me treats like iced lollies and Cadbury Flake Bars, he gave no indication that he planned to stop by to check up on me.

Of course I texted John again. My omega biology compelled me to seek out my alpha so that we could be bonded and he could take care of me and my pups. “John, it’s important. Please get in touch ASAP,” I wrote. “John, I need you.” “John.” “John.” “JOHN!!” “John, please!!!!” Still he did not reply.

A week after he left me at Baker Street, John finally responded: “Hey Sherlock, sorry I haven’t been in touch sooner, but I wasn’t sure how to say this. Look, you know I think you’re amazing. And I understand that, for whatever reason, you have feelings for me too. And if things had worked out differently, we might have been together… though I’m fairly certain you’d have gotten tired of me pretty quick. But you have to understand that I’m a married man now. Whatever feelings I might have for you, I vowed to be faithful to Mary, and I have to take that vow seriously from now on. Even more importantly, Mary is having my baby. I am determined to be a good husband and father, Sherlock. I’m starting to think that Mary knows what happened between us because she’s been paranoid and snippy all week. So, as much as it pains me to say this, I don’t think you and I should see each other for a while. At least, not until things are okay between Mary and me again. I really hope that you understand. Love (and I really do love you), John.”

As I read the e-mail – as my alpha soundly rejected me, leaving me and my babies helpless and alone – I felt a terrible swooping, plunging sensation in my stomach. I threw my phone at my bedroom wall, and watched with grim satisfaction as it broke and the pieces clattered to the floor. “Fuck, fuck, fuck,” I groaned, scrubbing my face with my hands in despair. All of a sudden, the swooping sensation transformed into a fierce cramping in my lower abdomen. I cried out, and fell to my knees. I crawled into the bathroom and used the towel rack to haul myself to my feet. I looked at myself in the full-length mirror on the shower door. My eyes were wide and terrified. Then I noticed a patch of fresh blood growing on the crotch of my pyjama bottoms.

“Mrs. Hudson!” I screamed. God, I hoped she was at home. “Mrs. Hudson, I need you!”

A few seconds later, I heard her footsteps on the stairs. “Sherlock, is that you?” she asked as she let herself in the sitting room door. “Goodness, I didn’t know you were at home. I just got home from Edna’s this morning. She wanted my help painting her kitchen. She wanted to paint it avocado green. Can you imagine? Thank goodness she has an omega for a sister, is all I can say. I convinced
her to go with aubergine in the end. By the way, do you know what happened to the Hoover? I found it – “she stopped as she saw me standing in the kitchen, blood now soaking my pyjama pants and puddling on the floor.

“Sherlock, what happened?” she gasped.

“I think I need a doctor, Mrs. Hudson.” My voice was a shaky whimper.

“Yes, yes, of course. I’m calling an ambulance.” She hobbled downstairs as fast as her dodgy hip could manage.

As soon as she got off the phone with Emergency Services, Mrs. Hudson placed a call to Mycroft’s office. In between cramps, I managed to drag myself downstairs. Mrs. Hudson rode with me in the back of the ambulance as it sped to the omega wing at Saint Bart’s.

“Omega miscarriage, coming through!” the paramedics shouted as they pushed my gurney through the door of the A&E department.

“Here!” I heard a nurse respond. I felt someone pull the blanket off my body. “What’s his name?”

“Sherlock,” I heard Mrs. Hudson pant. Rushing through the hospital had clearly left her out of breath.

“Sherlock,” the nurse said in a professionally calm voice. “We need to take your pyjamas off. Can you help us? Lift your hips a bit?”

I nodded mutely, hooking my thumbs under my waistband, and pulling down my pyjama bottoms.

“Jesus,” the nurse whispered. I looked down and caught a quick glimpse of oozing blood and thick, black clots. I let out a horrified sob.

“No!” I found myself moaning.

“Oh, Sherlock! How?” I heard Mrs. Hudson cry from the corner of the room.

Just then, I heard the scuffling sound of someone in leather-soled wingtips running down the hall towards my ward. “Billy!” It was Mycroft. I heard him approach my bed, and gasp as he deduced what had happened. “Was it John?” he snarled after a moment. “Did he do this to you? I will kill him. I will fucking murder him!” I had never heard Mycroft sound more angry or out of control.

“Sir, are you this omega’s alpha?” the nurse asked Mycroft sharply.

“What? No. I mean, I’m his brother and family alpha, but not his mate.”

“Do you know where his mate is? The father should be here right now.”

“I – I don’t have a mate,” I sobbed, gesturing at my unbitten scent gland.

“Oh,” said the nurse awkwardly. “Sir,” she said turning her attention to Mycroft once again. “Do you know how to get in touch with the father?”

“I do,” Mycroft bared his teeth. “In fact I would like nothing better to get my hands on the father right now!”

“Mycroft, no!” I reached out to grasp his wrist. “Leave – leave John alone. He didn’t do anything wrong!”
Mycroft scoffed, and brushed off my hand as he turned to leave. “Pleathe, Mycroft! Don’t go!” I shrieked.

“Why are you still protecting him?” He shouted at me. “Look what’s he done to you!”

Though my chin dipped in submission in the face of Mycroft’s fury, I did not relent. “Mycroft, pleathe!” I bleated wretchedly. “I need you here! Pleathe stay with me.”

Thank god that Lestrade showed up just then. He strode into the room and took a long look at the scene in front of him: Me in a hospital bed sobbing my heart out, my naked crotch soaked in blood. My hands clutched weakly at Mycroft’s sleeve while he snorted and snarled like an angry bull. The omega nurse watched my brother in terror, my bloody pyjama bottoms gripped tightly in her hands. And poor Mrs. Hudson sat in the corner of the room, crying into a handkerchief.

“Hey, everybody, let’s just – let’s just calm down.” Lestrade held up his hands placatingly. “Can you please give us a moment?” he smiled at the omega nurse, who was only too glad to scurry out of the ward.

“Hey, hey,” he said, gently patting Mycroft on the shoulder. “That’s enough. I’m here now. Take a deep breath now, alright?”

I watched in wonder as Mycroft obediently took a deep breath, then grabbed Lestrade in a tight hug, and sobbed into his neck. So John was right: they were in love. I caught Mrs. Hudson’s shocked, confused look. At least I wasn’t the only person who didn’t know.

After a few minutes, Mycroft had calmed down considerably. I wondered whether Lestrade had training as a hostage negotiator, because he was quite adept at diffusing tense situations.

“Okay,” Lestrade said quietly. “So Sherlock’s had a miscarriage. Has he seen a doctor?”

“No,” I said weakly, pulling a corner of the sheet over my bloody lap. “Just the nurse.”

“All right. My, why don’t you go find the doctor?”

Mycroft shook his head. “No. I’m going to find John. This is his fault, and he needs to be held responsible.”

To my surprise – because no one but me ever, ever argued with my brother – Lestrade squared his shoulders, thrust out his chin, and stared Mycroft down. “No, you won’t,” he said, still calm. “Your brother needs you here. So please go find him a doctor.”

Mycroft sighed and muttered, “You’re right.” He left the room and returned a few moments later with a middle-aged beta he introduced as Doctor Linda Evansworth, the Head of Omega Obstetrics at Saint Bart’s.

“I know you’re feeling poorly, Sherlock. So I’m going to give you a quick exam, and then something to help you sleep, alright?” Something to help me sleep? Oh yes, Mycroft’s policy reforms meant that omegas could be prescribed all manner of medications now.

“I’m – I’m a recovering heroin addict,” I whimpered sadly. “I shouldn’t take narcotics.” The doctor gave me a pitying look. An omega drug addict who had gotten pregnant out of wedlock and lost its babies? How pathetic I must have looked to her.

Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson left the room during my internal exam. Mycroft stayed to hold my hand. Doctor Evansworth was kind and gentle with me. Finally she told me that I could put my knees
down. “Well,” she said, wiping her bloody hands with a towel. “It doesn’t look good.” I felt tears flood my eyes again. “You’ve got a lot of scar tissue down there, and it’s made it virtually impossible for the blastocysts to attach to the uterine wall. So I think we’ll move you to an observation ward for a few days. You can have a shower right now, and I’ll give you an ultrasound scan in the morning. Then we should talk about a hysterectomy, because I think it would be dangerous for both you and your babies for you to get pregnant again. Alright?”

“Uh-huh,” I sniffled. “Thank you, Doctor.” Goodness, why was I crying? I didn’t want children! And John didn’t want anything to do with me anymore. Once again I had dodged a bullet, I told myself firmly.

Nevertheless, in the shower I cried and cried until I just couldn’t cry anymore. When I felt like I was utterly empty of tears, I turned off the taps, and dried myself off. Mycroft was waiting for me in the chair next to my bed.

“I sent Mrs. Hudson and Gregory home. They’ll drop by tomorrow.”

“Who’s Gregory?” I asked, clambering wearily into my bed.

Mycroft rolled his eyes in exasperation. “Gregory Lestrade! He’s my – my…. you know….,” Mycroft said with a pointed look. I noticed a blush bloom on his cheeks.

“Boyfriend?” I smiled at my brother’s discomfort.

“Fiance, if you must know.” He sniffed haughtily.

“Congratulations, Mycroft,” I smiled weakly, though inside I felt an ugly stab of jealousy.

“Thank you.” His smile was warm and sincere. Mycroft, of all people, really was in love. “Now get some sleep. I’ll be right here if you need me.”

*

Doctor Evansworth arrived early in the morning to conduct the ultrasound scan. Mycroft hovered protectively by the window while she inserted the wand into my still-tender vagina, and pressed it to my cervix.

“Right,” the doctor said thoughtfully as she watched the display screen. “Just as I suspected. There’s a lot of scar tissue here. Probably from Methadone, right?”

I nodded sadly. Mycroft looked over at me, his expression stricken with guilt.

“Well, like I told you yesterday,” Doctor Evansworth continued, still moving the transducer wand this way and that inside my vagina. “All that scar tissue makes it difficult for embryos to implant. I know this isn’t much of a comfort, but you’re actually lucky to have lost them so early in the pregnancy. It would be much more difficult – both physically and emotionally, I mean – to lose them at a later stage of dev – ”

Just then she paused and squinted at the screen. “Wait, what was that?” she murmured. Doctor Evansworth moved the transducer a tiny bit, and returned her attention to the screen, where I could now see a small, black, circular image. She typed a command into the keyboard, and I could see bright blue and red marks appear at the centre of the circular mark.

“What is it?” Mycroft asked curiously from the other side of my bed.
“It’s an embryo. A single healthy embryo,” the doctor breathed in astonishment. “Mr. Holmes, there’s still a baby in there.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all of you for sticking around despite my long absence. I promise that I won’t abandon this story. (How could I at this point?)

Again, dialogue taken from the transcripts at Ariane DeVere's livejournal.
I was, of course, dumbstruck by Doctor Evansworth’s discovery. She wittered on for several minutes about the current health of the embryo. Despite the difficulties it must have encountered in finding a place to implant itself that was free from the thick, twisted scar tissue that marred much of the interior surface of my uterus, the shape and consistency of its zona pelludica, trophoblast, blastocoel, and embryoblast indicated that it was in perfect health. There must be a very determined little person in there, I thought absurdly.

Finally, the doctor extracted the transducer wand from my vagina and allowed me to remove my feet from the stirrups. She typed a command into the scanner’s keyboard, and the printer below it whined as it made copies of several of the images taken from the screen. As she removed her latex gloves, Dr. Evansworth said in a quiet, serious voice, “I suppose that you and your family alpha would like to start discussing options.”

“Options?” I said in a voice that was still weak from shock.

“Mm-hmm.” She sat down in the chair next to my bed. “Sherlock, though the embryo is healthy, your uterus is not. You saw in the monitor that there’s a lot of scar tissue in there, and scar tissue doesn’t stretch the way a normal uterus would. That means that your uterus may not be able to accommodate your growing baby.”

“Oh,” I whispered. I felt Mycroft lay a comforting hand on my shoulder.

“In a sense, you’re very lucky that there’s only the one embryo in there. If this were a typical omega pregnancy – with, say, three to six pups – there’d be no way you could carry them to term. As it stands,” she shrugged resignedly. “I’d say that there’s a better than even chance that you’ll lose the baby before the fetus becomes viable. And an even greater chance that the growing baby will create tears in the uterus, which could lead to internal bleeding. That could easily kill both you and the baby.”

“Oh,” I whispered again.

We were all silent for a few moments before Mycroft said in a choked voice, “You said something about options, Doctor?”

“Yes. The way I see it, you have two: The first is a highly interventionist approach.”

I looked up at her sharply, wondering what she was implying.

“That means that we do everything possible to help you bring the baby to term. So, to start with you’d be on bed rest for the remainder of the pregnancy. That’s just under four months now, so we’re looking at, oh, mid-November, I’d say. And I’d have to insist that you have a check-up at least once a week, more if things don’t go well.”

The doctor sighed hard and continued, “And if there are any problems, I think that it would be wise – and safer for both you and the baby – to do a c-section as soon as the baby is viable. And probably an ovo-hysterectomy while we’re in there. There’s a good chance the baby will be in the NICU for quite some time afterwards. And of course there are later health issues that premature babies are prone to. Like cerebral palsy and asthma, as well as cognitive disabilities and all sorts of
gastrointestinal problems.”

Doctor Evansworth must have noticed how my face paled in response to her grim prognosis. “I’m sorry,” she smiled sympathetically. “I’m just trying to give you a realistic idea of what you’ll be facing. In all honesty, even if we do try the interventionist approach, there’s still a good chance that you’ll lose the baby.”

“I see,” I said, clearing the lump in my throat. “And the second option?”

The doctor looked away in discomfort. “The second option is to…. Let nature take its course, as it were.”

“You mean?”

“We do nothing. In all likelihood, you’ll miscarry the remaining embryo sometime in the next few weeks. I’d still like to do the ovo-hysterectomy though. You really shouldn’t be having pups.”

I scrubbed my hands through my curls, then rested my face in my hands. “There’s not a lot of good options there, Doctor,” I said through my fingers.

“I know. I’m sorry.” she said kindly. “How about I let you discuss what you want to do with your brother? And why don’t you give me the contact information for the father? Legally, he has the final say over this decision, you know.”

“Thank you, Doctor,” I said. “It won’t be necessary to get in touch with the father. He – he’s made it clear that he doesn’t want to be involved.”

“Oh.” It was Doctor Evansworth’s turn to be dismayed. “I’m sorry.” She stood up to leave. “Wait a sec. Don’t let me forget to give you these!” she said, remembering the printouts sitting in the printer tray.

She handed them to me before stepping out of the room. They were images of the embryo currently growing in my uterus. My baby. John’s and my baby.

“You know, there’s a third option,” Mycroft said quietly as he strolled over to the window again.

“What’s that?” I asked, distracted by the pictures of the little ball of cells.

“For me to find someone like Professor Alvarez again….,” Mycroft’s gaze remained fixed on the window.

“Professor Alvarez? What – “ I suddenly understood what Mycroft was implying. “Oh! But why?”

“Why not?” he replied impatiently. “You’re in the exact same situation you were the first time: unbonded, pregnant, and, in the eyes of the British public, ruined. The best you can hope for is to bring an unwanted, bastard child into a world that will judge it and discriminate against it – and you! – for the rest of its life. And you’ll be a single parent, Sherlock, a single parent who is solely responsible for feeding, and housing, and nurturing a child. With those sorts of responsibilities, you simply won’t be able to live the reckless, chaotic life you’ve enjoyed until now. And that’s the best you can reasonably expect. You heard the doctor: It’s just as likely that it won’t be born alive, and there’s every chance that this pregnancy will kill you.”

Mycroft’s frank words hit me like a slap in the face. Rather than let him see the tears in my eyes, I returned my gaze to the printouts in my lap. Running my fingers over an image of the little dark circle, I murmured, “It’s not like the first time, My. Not at all.”
Mycroft snorted and said, “No? How do you figure?”

“Well, first of all, I’m older now. I was just a dumb kid then; now I’m thirty-eight.”

Mycroft snorted, “That doesn’t make you any more mature or capable of taking care of another human being.”

“Plus, I was just a student then,” I persisted, growing increasingly angry with my brother’s dismissive attitude. “Now I’ve got a career, for which I’ve earned an international reputation, I might add.”

“A dangerous career you’d need to give up….”

“And most importantly,” I shouted furiously at Mycroft. “The first time was an act of – of violence and savagery, pure and simple. This time, this baby was – was conceived in love!”

“Conceived in love? Do you hear yourself? What difference can that possibly make?”

“It makes all the difference in the world!” I bellowed ferociously.

Thank god that Lestrade showed up just then. “What’s going on?” he said, holding the door open for Mrs. Hudson. “I could hear you two shouting all the way down the hallway.”

“It’s Sherlock,” said Mycroft. “He’s still pregnant with a single pup.”

“Oh, Sherlock!” Mrs. Hudson clapped her hands together delightedly. “I’m so happy for you!” She rushed over to hug me tightly.

“It’s not all good news,” Mycroft rolled his eyes. “There’s a good chance he won’t be able to carry the baby to term, or that the pregnancy will kill him.”

“What? That’s terrible!” Lestrade said, moving to stand next to Mycroft. “Is there anything they can do?” I noticed the two of them briefly, surreptitiously grasp each other’s fingertips.

“They can either put him on bed rest for the duration of the pregnancy,” Mycroft replied. “Or we can find a doctor to terminate the pregnancy right now. Or we can just sit back and let nature take its course, whatever that might be.”

“Uh-huh. And which are you leaning towards right now?” Lestrade asked Mycroft and me.

“Well, I favour the middle option, but for a variety of foolish, specious reasons, Sherlock doesn’t see the issue as clearly,” Mycroft said scornfully.

“What about John?” Mrs. Hudson asked me. “As an alpha father, isn’t he supposed to have the final say?”

I looked again at the pictures in my lap. “John’s not in the picture, Mrs. Hudson.” I murmured. “He made it clear that he doesn’t want to be part of my life anymore.”

“Oh, Sherlock,” she bent to hug me. “But surely he’d change his mind if he knew that you were pregnant, wouldn’t he? John’s a good man, and I’m certain he’d want to do what was right for both you and the baby.”

Lestrade cleared his throat. “Can I say something? You all know I was on the Family Law unit for two years, right?” Mycroft and Mrs. Hudson nodded; I shrugged. “Well, we had a case where a married alpha assaulted an omega in heat, and the omega’s injuries were so bad she wasn’t expected
to live if she had to continue with the pregnancy. But the alpha father’s wife wanted the baby for herself. And the judge sided with the alpha: even though the omega and the alpha were total strangers, the omega was forced to carry the baby to term. In the end the omega died and the alpha and his wife took custody of the baby.”

“What a terrible story, Gregory!” Mrs. Hudson exclaimed. “Why on earth would you tell us that?”

“Because you’ve all got to understand that the legal system surrounding parental rights is heavily weighted in favour of the alpha.”

“Jesus Christ, Mycroft,” I said peevishly. “You were able to change all those omega employment and health care laws. So why didn’t you change the custody laws while you were at it?” I picked up a paper cup from my bedside table and threw it at his head.

Mycroft ducked, and the cup missed him by inches. “Changing parenting laws isn’t as simple as extended the same health care or workplace rights to a wider portion of the populace, Sherlock,” he said as he stooped to pick up the cup. “It’s a zero-sum game. I would be taking away the custody rights that alphas have enjoyed for centuries. They wouldn’t stand for it.” Mycroft threw the cup back at me. “And also because I couldn’t have anticipated that my idiot brother would go and get himself up the duff by his ex-roommate.”

“Ouch,” I said as the cup connected with my head. “You shouldn’t throw things at a pregnant omega, you brute.”

“Ladies, please,” said Lestrade. “Let’s focus. If you’re going to tell John about the baby, you need to be prepared for him to exercise his right to make a decision regarding the fate of the baby that you might not agree with. A decision that might result in both its death and Sherlock’s.”

“John would never do that to me,” I said without hesitation.

“Maybe not, but what about Mary? She’ll likely have some input into his decision. How much do you trust her to do what’s right for you and your baby?”

I lay back down on the pillows, deep in thought. How well did I really know Mary? Though she had never been unkind to me, I was well aware that she was quite possessive of John. Furthermore, as John had indicated in the text he sent the day before, she was already suspicious of our relationship. Would her possessiveness and distrust evolve into spitefulness when she was made aware of John’s infidelity? Would she demand that John exercise his rights as an alpha father in a manner designed to hurt me or the baby?

“John can’t know,” I decided.

“Good,” said Mycroft. “Now should I go ahead and find a doctor to terminate the pregnancy?”

I sat up and quietly flipped through the pictures for several seconds. At Mycroft’s mention of a doctor, my thoughts had returned to Professor Alvarez, and the few words of wisdom he had imparted to me while we were still in touch.

“No,” I said with quiet determination. “I want to keep the baby, Mycroft.”

“Be reasonable, Sherlock,” Mycroft sighed with impatience. “You of all people can’t raise a baby alone!”

“I won’t be alone, Mycroft. It’s taken me a while to fully comprehend this, but human beings are pack animals. Whether or not we choose to acknowledge it, we all depend on each other. And that’s
not a bad thing at all, because the only way that any of us can accomplish great things is if we can rely on each other as a pack. And you, and Mrs. Hudson, and even George here – “

“It’s Greg!” Lestrade snapped.

“– Even Greg here are all part of my pack. So, no, I probably can’t raise a child all on my own. But I’m confident that all of us together could.”

“Bravo, Sherlock,” Mrs. Hudson hugged me tightly. “Of course, I will help you in any way I can. Midnight feedings, nappy changes, whatever you need!”

Lestrade grinned. “Good on you, mate. Having pups is the best thing that ever happened to me. I’d be glad to lend a hand. You know, teach it to play football. Cricket, even.”

Our collective attention turned to Mycroft, who was standing by the window, arms crossed defensively across his chest. “Pack animals, eh? That’s pretty profound, especially for you.”

I shrugged in response. Mycroft sighed discontentedly “I suppose you think that I’ll take care of you while you’re pregnant, hmm? Drive you to doctor’s appointments, and buy you folic acid, and all that, hmm? And then when the baby comes you’ll want me to babysit, and go to its violin recitals, and teach it to ride a bicycle, hmm?”

“I need you most of all, Mycroft.”

He closed his eyes and gave a tiny nod of assent. “I’ll tell Dr. Evansworth that we’ll take every measure possible to help you to bring the baby to term.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for reading!
Four months in Autumn

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“And just think: when you move back you’ll have a brand new baby with you!” Mrs. Hudson smiled wistfully as she kissed my cheeks.

“I’ll miss you, Mrs. Hudson. Don’t throw away the petrie dishes in the back of the fridge, okay?”

I had spent two weeks at Saint Bart’s before Doctor Evansworth released me into Mycroft’s care. Everyone had agreed that I ought to move back to Mycroft’s house for the duration of my pregnancy (largely because I wouldn’t have to navigate any stairs there) and for once I didn’t argue. Mycroft himself took a leave of absence from the Home Office so that he could stay home and watch over me. Though I agreed with the wisdom of his plan, I knew that his overprotectiveness would drive me crazy. Thank god that Lestrade would be there – over the previous two weeks he had consistently proven himself to be a level-headed and kind-hearted peacemaker, and I had already come to rely on him to run interference when Mycroft acted like a mother hen. I was glad that he was now part of our odd little family.

At that moment, Mycroft and Lestrade were bickering with each other as they struggled to maneuver my old armchair down the stairs and into the boot of Lestrade’s BMW.

“Tilt it to the left. No, to the left! Not my left, your left! Your other left!” Mycroft snapped.

“Alright, alright! No need to shout,” Lestrade grumbled in reply. After chipping the woodwork and gouging the wallpaper twice, the pair of them finally heaved the chair into the car, and it was time for me to leave Baker Street. As the car pulled away, I stared wistfully at the windows of my beloved flat. I waved sadly at Mrs. Hudson, who was standing out front, wiping her eyes with a handkerchief. It occurred to me that I might never see 221b Baker Street again.

In all honesty, living with Mycroft again wasn’t as bad as it could have been. For certain, he followed me around the house constantly – always offering his hand when I needed to stand or sit, or preparing me a healthy snack or a glass of milk, or rushing off to fetch me a blanket if I looked cold – but I could tell that he was doing his best to limit his nagging, and especially any disparaging comments he might make about John. I’m sure that I had Lestrade to thank for that.

I was, however, horribly, horribly bored. I had apparently reviewed all of London’s cold case murder files of the past forty years, and my website didn’t offer any new mysteries that I could solve from the comfort of Mycroft’s office. Though I recognized its necessity, my forced inaction rankled terribly. This was doubly unfortunate because there had been a spate of high-profile assassinations in the London area that August. Naturally, the Metropolitan Police had been unable to solve them, though they were fairly certain that the killings were carried out by the same lone individual, judging by the consistent modus operandi.

One warm, humid evening, when Mycroft was out buying me chocolate ice cream (Oh, how I craved chocolate!), Lestrade removed several portfolios of crime scene notes from his briefcase.

“Sherlock,” he whispered. “These are the files from the assassinations of that ambassador, and that newspaper publisher, and Lady Smallwood. Can you please look through them when you get a chance, and tell me what you think? We’re totally stu –.”
“Gladly!” I interrupted him and snatched away the files. I was craving murder cases as much as I craved chocolate just then.

“Thanks. But I think this should be our little secret, alright? Your brother doesn’t want you to get too excited about anything.”

I pored greedily over the crime scene photos, witness statements, and forensic reports. Unfortunately, whoever was taking photos on Lestrade’s SOCO team was completely inept, and there wasn’t much that I could deduce about the killer. From the shoe size, I guessed that the killer was a woman, but that’s all I could determine. In fact I wondered whether a single person really was responsible for all three assassinations, because, judging by the depth of footprints found in the mud near all three crime scenes, the assassin’s weight appeared to have fluctuated wildly over the past few months. I guessed that the murderer was a professional assassin, but that conclusion was based solely on how little physical evidence had been found at the crime scenes – something that was just as likely to be the result of the persistent incompetence of Lestrade’s team.

“Sorry, Galen, but unless your team starts taking better photos, or you let me show up at your crime scenes again, that’s all I can tell you.”

Lestrade groaned because neither of those developments seemed particularly likely. “Well, is there anything you can tell me about the motive? Or maybe what links the victims?”

“Nope. I might be a genius, but I’m not a miracle worker.”

By the end of the month, the assassinations had come to a halt. I surmised that the killer had been engaged by some crime kingpin to eliminate certain troublesome individuals. Having accomplished that task, the assassin had once again disappeared into London’s underworld. Who knew when we’d encounter her again?

*

I couldn’t help but notice that Lestrade was less of a visitor to and more of a resident of Mycroft’s Kidderpore Avenue house. After his workday ended at eight in the evening, he would drive to Hampstead and park a few blocks away. Under cover of darkness he would let himself in the back door, where Mycroft usually greeted him with supper and a kiss. As my rapidly inflating body was surging with omega hormones that were making me clingy and needy, I was insanely jealous of their tender and mutually supportive relationship.

“Can I ask you something?” I asked one evening in early September when Lestrade and I were sitting at the breakfast bar, while Mycroft was out picking up some takeaway curry. I had spent the afternoon looking at my growing belly in the mirror, and despairing over the fact that I could no longer fit into my tailored suits, so I was not in a pleasant mood. On top of that, seeing the easy, pleasant intimacy with which Mycroft and Lestrade interacted with each other was making me feel lonely and resentful.

“What’s up?” Lestrade sipped on his glass of Strathisla whisky.

I sipped my own glass of milk, and said, “What do you see in him?”

“In who? Mycroft?”

I nodded in reply, “Yeah. I don’t get it. Your relationship, I mean.”

“Well, it’s like this,” Lestrade began in a thoughtful voice. I couldn’t help but notice the way his craggy smile softened when he thought of Mycroft. “He’s hard to get to know, but once you get
underneath his protective layer, you see that he’s probably the kindest, wisest, bravest man in the world. Or at least that I’ve ever met. I feel really privileged to be one of the few people who’s gotten to know the real Mycroft.” Lestrade cleared his throat and looked away, suddenly uncomfortable.

“Mycroft? Kind? Are you kidding me?” I looked at him searchingly, wondering if he was having me on.

“Yes! The kindest man I’ve ever met. There’s nothing he wouldn’t do for someone he loves. Especially you, Sherlock.”

“Hmm,” I said, thoroughly unconvinced. “I still don’t get why you’re together.”

“Why’s that?” Lestrade took another sip of whisky and smiled at me. He’s known me far too long to be offended by my occasional tactlessness.

“Well… See, you’re a regular bloke, and Mycroft’s…. I struggled to explain.

“Mycroft’s what?”

“Well… he’s Mycroft!” I finished lamely.

Lestrade snorted and laughed heartily. “That he is, young Sherlock. That he is.” He slapped me on the back, and I frowned because I still couldn’t understand what the two of them saw in each other.

“Look,” Lestrade said, pouring himself another drink. “Sometimes it’s hard for outsiders to understand what a couple sees in each other. The connection between two people in love isn’t always apparent to other people.”

I opened my mouth to argue, but Lestrade continued, “So, there’s no point in trying to dissect what makes some relationships works, because you’ll just never know the participants the way they know each other, because you don’t know what they’ve been through together. You just have to accept them. Do you understand?”

“I guess so,” I said glumly. “But I still think that you could do better.”

“Nope. There’s no one better,” Lestrade said firmly.

* 

The next morning, Mycroft noticed that I could no longer fasten the buttons on my trousers. I was two months pregnant, and, probably because I had been so skinny beforehand, I was already showing. Because I was only carrying one pup, I didn’t expect my belly to grow to the same enormous proportions that an omega carrying a larger litter might. Nevertheless, the changes to my figure served as a reminder to me – and a clear signal to strangers – that I was a pregnant omega.

“Why don’t we go to a maternity store? Pick up some new trousers for you? Maybe some new shirts too?” Mycroft suggested. I jumped at the chance to leave the house.

We first visited a cute little boutique near Covent Garden. I sneered at the frilly, lacy décor and huffed at Mycroft, “Why did you choose here, of all places?”

“Oh, Sherlock. All omega maternity stores look like this. Get used to it.” Mycroft rolled his eyes and stepped over to a rack of muumuus.

Without exception, all the omega maternity shirts in the shop included some combination of the
following features: high lace collars, enormous bows, ruffles, puffed sleeves, or the phrase ‘Yummy Mummy’ stitched in sequins. Mycroft handed me a pile of unbearably girlish blouses and pushed me into a fitting room to try them on. I pulled on one over my head. As I recall, it was a sort of smock with a huge, floppy bow at the neck. The fabric was a pattern of pink, orange and red balloons. I took one look at myself in the full length mirror, and burst into tears.

“Sherlock? What’s the matter?!” Mycroft asked fearfully from the other side of the door.

“It’s – it’s absolutely horrible, Mycroft!” I sobbed.

“What is? What’s happening? Do you need to go to the hospital? Dammit, Sherlock, open the fucking door!”

I obediently unfastened the lock, and Mycroft stepped into my cubicle. He looked me up and down, then burst into hysterical laughter.

“It’s not funny!” I squawked indignantly.

“Oh, yes, it is,” Mycroft chuckled, fishing around his pocket for his phone. He held it in front of me, and I heard the camera click. “There. Perfect. That made my day.”

“Mycroft! How could you!” I sobbed again.

“Alright, alright, calm down,” he sighed. “I don’t know why you’re taking this so seriously.”

“Be-becauthe I don’t look like m-me anymore! I look like – like a thilly, ridiculouth omega whotothe th-thole purpothe is to p-pop out litter after litter ‘til I’m dead!” I hiccuped.

Mycroft nodded sympathetically. “Tell you what. We’ll go back to my tailors, alright? The man’s a miracle worker. I’m sure that he’ll be able to make you some trousers and shirts that will fit your new shape.” Then he grinned craftily. “And if that doesn’t work, you can wear some of the shirts I wore when I was chubbier. I still have a few in the back of my closet.”

I couldn’t help but laugh at that. “Your shirts? I don’t want to look like you!” I stuck my tongue out at the thought.

Mycroft laughed again. “I’ll try not to take that personally.”

In the end, Mycroft’s tailor – who had indeed known that I was an omega all along! – was able to make me several pairs of pregnancy trousers (each of which featured an elastic panel in the front) and shirts that I could wear untucked when my belly got larger. I was immensely relieved that I could both be pregnant and continue to look like Sherlock Holmes.

* 

Except for the brief visits Mycroft and I made to his tailor, my only regular outings were my weekly check-ups at Dr. Evansworth’s office at Saint Bart’s. Against all odds, I encountered few problems with my pregnancy. The fetus grew at a normal rate, and an amniocentesis revealed that it was free from known chromosomal abnormalities. Still, Doctor Evansworth worried that my uterus wouldn’t be able to accommodate the growth spurt that the pup was due to experience in the final three weeks of pregnancy. On her advice, we planned to have a c-section and ovo-hysterectomy sometime in the first week of November. I was not sad that I would be saying goodbye to my omega organs or my heats, which, I felt, had brought me nothing but trouble. Well, I corrected myself, trouble and a baby of my own.
The worst part of my trips to Saint Bart’s were the curious and often judgemental stares I received. For just as my small, neat baby bump served as a clear indicator of my gravid state, my unmarked neck gland told observers that I was also unbonded. Luckily, either Mycroft or Lestrade accompanied me to my appointments. Anyone stupid enough to gawp at me, or worse make an unkind comment, found themselves receiving either a devastating, hurtful deduction of all their faults and secret sources of shame, or a huge parking ticket, courtesy of the Metropolitan Police.

Lestrade and I were leaving an ultrasound appointment one morning in mid-September, when we turned a corner and ran into Molly Hooper, almost literally. (By which I mean we crashed into her while we were strolling at a slow, leisurely pace; Lestrade wouldn’t allow me to walk any faster.)

“Oh, I’m so sorry, ma’am,” Molly began, before she realized who it was.

“It’s fine, Molly,” I smiled at her gracelessness. Ah, Molly, please never change.

“Sherlock!” she gasped in surprise and delight. She looked me up and down, and when she noticed my rounded tummy, she gasped again. “Sherlock, you’re having a litter?”

“Just one,” I corrected her.

“But – but how did this happen?”

“Well… the usual way, I suppose, Molly.” I gave her a wry smile.

“No, that’s – that’s not what I meant,” she blushed, but continued to stare at my belly. “I mean, who – who’s the father?” Then she saw Lestrade waiting beside me. “You, Greg?” she sputtered disbelievingly.

“What? Me? No! No, this isn’t the Holmes for me,” Greg grinned.

“It’s John’s,” I said to Molly.

“Oh! Of course!” she said with a smile. A few seconds later, her smile fell. “Oh dear. What does he think about this? Wait, is this why John and Mary moved away?”

“What?” I asked. John had never mentioned that he and Mary were thinking of moving. And even though he had made it clear that he wanted to maintain some distance between us, I thought he’d at least have the decency to let me know he was leaving London.

“Oh. Oh, didn’t you know?” Molly replied uneasily. “Just a few weeks ago. There – there was a party. Mike and I wondered why you weren’t there…..”

I cleared my throat. “I’m – I’m sure it was just an oversight. Where’d you say they went?”

“Well, that’s the funny part,” Molly adjusted her clipboard awkwardly. “John told Mike they were going to Cardiff, but Mary told me Birmingham, and she told Mike Liverpool. And they told us they’d send their new contact information, but they haven’t yet. So I really don’t know where they went. And moving to a new city right when Mary’s due to have a baby is a pretty weird thing to do, isn’t it?”

“ Weird, yes.” Their behaviour strongly suggested to me that John was going to extreme lengths to avoid someone. And I couldn’t help but assume that that someone was me.

“Well, um, congratulations, Sherlock. When the baby arrives, I’d be happy to help organize a shower for you.”

She said her goodbyes to Lestrade and me, and headed off to the cafeteria in search of a pastry.

Lestrade clapped me on the shoulder and whispered, “You’re better off without him in your life. You really are.”

*

One evening in late September, while Mycroft, Lestrade, and I were enjoying a game of Risk in front of the fire, the doorbell rang. Barely a second later it rang again. Then again.

“Alright, alright,” muttered Mycroft as he extracted himself from the combined comfort of his cozy armchair and Lestrade’s arms. “Keep your shirt on.”

A few moments later, Lestrade and I heard raised voices from the front foyer – Mycroft’s and a female alpha’s. We waited in apprehension until Mycroft returned to his office, looking ruffled and worried.

“Sherlock, you have a visitor.”

“Alright,” I said hauling my noticeably rounded body to its feet. “What’s the matter, My?”

“Oh, you’ll see!”

Mycroft followed me as I shuffled to the front door, a protective hand resting on my belly. Waiting there, looking extremely agitated, was Janine.

She whirled around when she heard my footsteps, and I saw how her eyes focused on my abdomen. “So it’s true then,” she said in an angry, strangled voice. “You’re having pups.”

“Just one,” I replied. “How did you find out?” I noticed Mycroft leaning on the wall behind me, obviously guarding me from Janine.

She dug around in her purse, and pulled out a printout of what was clearly a proof of a newspaper article. She handed it to me, and I held it so that Mycroft and I could both read it. The title said, “Omega Detective Secretly Pregnant: No Father in Sight!” There was a picture of me leaving the omega maternity shop, looking red-eyed and disheveled. I sighed, and Mycroft growled.

“It’s from one of my boss’ papers. The one that all the people on the Tube read. They’re supposed to publish it tomorrow.”

Mycroft groaned at that.

“For god’s sake, Sherlock, why didn’t you tell me?” Janine asked in a hurt voice. “How could you do this to me?”

I raised an eyebrow, and shoved the article back at her. “I don’t see how it’s any business of yours.”

She let out a disbelieving laugh at that. “None of my business? It’s my pup, isn’t it?”

“As it happens, it’s not.” I sniffed with as much dignity as I could muster.

Janine blinked with surprise, and her fine, dark eyebrows drew together while she thought. “Ohh,” she finally breathed. “It’s John’s, isn’t it? Oh, you poor thing.” She raised a hand to stroke my shoulder, and I took a step away.
“It’s – it’s fine. If the baby lives, I plan to raise it myself.”

“If the baby lives? What are you getting at?”

“There’s a fair chance there’ll be complications.”

“Oh, you poor thing,” Janine said again. “And then you’ll be a single mum. That’ll be hard.” She looked at me with loving concern for several seconds. Finally she turned to Mycroft and said, “Could you leave us alone for a minute? I promise to behave.”

Mycroft looked to me, and I nodded my permission. “Fine. Sherlock, I’ll be in the office.”

“Yep. Don’t let Lestrade mess with my armies.”

As soon as he stepped out of the room, Janine knelt on the floor in front of me, took my unresisting hand in hers, and said, “Sherlock, will you marry me?”


“Because I still love you,” Janine shrugged, though the tears in her eyes belied her casual tone. “And because it’ll be so difficult to raise a child on your own. Plus it’s good for pups to have an alpha-figure in their life.” Perhaps out of politeness, she did not mention the fact that marrying her meant that my pup would not suffer the stigma of being a bastard love-child – the accidental outcome of its slag mother’s affair with a married alpha.

It was a good offer – the best I could possibly hope for, in fact. Not only would I have Janine to take care of me for the rest of my life, she was offering to raise my pup as her own. Any other omega would jump at the lifeline she was throwing to me.

However, I responded, “Thanks but I won’t be alone. I have friends and family to help me. And it will have an alpha in its life: my brother.”

“It’s not the same,” Janine shook her head.

“I know that, but we’ll make it work.”

“Is the prospect of marrying me really so repugnant to you, Sherlock?” Janine said, rising to her feet.

“No, but I just don’t love you, Janine. You know that.”

“And you don’t compromise when it comes to love, do you?” Janine sighed and gave me a sad smile. “Still, I’ll ask my boss to kill the story.”

“That’s very kind of you, Janine. But you don’t have to do that.”

Janine looked at me like I was crazy. “But, Sherl, if they run the story, everyone will know you’re pregnant and unbonded!”

“I know that,” I shrugged. “People would figure it out sooner or later anyway. And if I don’t try to hide from their knowing, the scandal loses its power over me.”

“I guess so,” Janine replied skeptically.

“I’m not ashamed of being unmated and pregnant, Janine. And I certainly won’t ever be ashamed of my pup.” I said determinedly.

“I’m not ashamed of being unmated and pregnant, Janine. And I certainly won’t ever be ashamed of my pup.” I said determinedly.
Janine smiled wistfully and kissed my cheek. “You are a wonder, you know that?” She turned, and opened the front door, but paused before leaving. “I could tell you that if you ever change your mind, you know where to find me. But, you won’t ever change your mind, will you?”

I smiled and shook my head. Without another word, she stepped out the front door and into the brisk evening air.

*

One chilly afternoon in mid-October, I was sitting in my armchair in front of the fire, while Mycroft sat at his desk, apparently watching videos at his computer and occasionally making notes.

“What are you doing, Mycroft?” I asked with a yawn. (During those last few weeks, I was always tired.)

“Work,” he mumbled distractedly.

“What do you mean ‘work’? You’re on leave.”

“I know that. It’s actually for Greg. He asked me to do something for him a while ago, and I haven’t had time until now.”

“Oh? What is it?”

“Well, if you must know,” he said, pausing the video he was watching. “I’m reviewing surveillance footage of alpha Members of Parliament to see which of them may be in secret romantic or sexual relationships with other alphas.”


“Because I need to change the marriage laws to allow for alpha pairs to marry each other,” Mycroft explained, leaning back in his desk chair. “And in order to do that I need to create support for such measures within Parliament itself. Currently, four hundred and twenty-three of the United Kingdom’s six hundred and fifty Members of Parliament are alphas. I estimate that between five and ten percent of those individuals may be in closeted relationships with other alphas. If I can figure out which ones, then I can ask them for their support for my proposed changes. If they express any reluctance to go along with my plan, I’ll simply reveal to them what I know about their personal lives, and remind them that they too would benefit from changes to the law. If I can convince enough MPs – and in particular a few cabinet members – it shouldn’t take more than a few months to enact the changes. Clever, eh?”

“But – but Mycroft,” I said in a horrified voice. “That’s blackmail!”

“Hmm, so it is,” he shrugged.

“How could you do that to people…. People like you?”

“It’s for their benefit too. I’m sure that some of them will understand.” Mycroft waved his hand dismissively.

“But why are you doing this?”

“Because Greg asked me to. We want to get married, you see,” Mycroft said simply. “Now if you’ll excuse me, there’s some footage of our Trade Minister at a club in Brighton that I need to watch.”
I continued to observe my brother for some time. I had long known that Mycroft was ambitious, even ruthless, but I had always assumed that he had some respect for law and order. After all, how could someone with a career in the British civil service not have some regard for the law, considering it was the purpose of the civil service to implement laws? However, I could now see that Mycroft in fact saw the law as something to be manipulated in the service of other, more important goals. And for Mycroft there was no higher or more important goal than the happiness and well-being of the people he loved. Lestrade had been right about that. As I sat in my armchair watching my brother grin while he viewed a video of a cabinet minister dancing to Kylie Minogue, I found that I was grateful and deeply honoured to be one of the few people on whom he bestowed his loyalty and love.

*

One morning just a week before I was scheduled to have the c-section, I was sitting in Mycroft’s burnt kitchen eating a pan of chocolate brownies and thinking about John. A tiny part of me had hoped that John would see the story about me in the tabloid, and give me a call, but he had made no attempt to contact me. This saddened me, but not as much as it would have four months earlier.

You see, something changed when I decided that I would keep my pup: I now had a purpose. So rather than wasting my time mooning over John, I was focused on doing whatever was necessary to ensure that I delivered a healthy, happy baby. Nothing else mattered. And so, to everyone’s relief (especially Mycroft’s), I had stopped pining over John.

Now that there was some distance (both literal and figurative) between John and me, I was able to examine our relationship with an objective and critical eye. Though I still cared for John, I could now appreciate how impossible it was for us to be together. As regrettable as it might be, John had his own family, and, with any luck, I would soon have my own as well. And though I had thoroughly enjoyed our one night together, I could now see that it was nothing more than a one-night stand orchestrated by my well-meaning, but misguided idiot brother. It couldn’t happen again.

But there was no point dwelling on that anymore. I had a baby to care for. And I would throw myself into that task with all the same intensity I had once devoted to crime-fighting, and all the same love I had once devoted to John.

Chapter End Notes

Things seem to be looking up for Sherlock now, don't they? But what can John and Mary be up to, eh?
On Guy Fawkes Day, I went to bed early. Mycroft, Lestrade, and I had met Mrs. Hudson and her sister Edna at the Church of St. John at Bethnal Green for a bonfire, but I was too tired to enjoy myself, so I insisted that Mycroft take me home. At around eleven, I awoke with a sore back and an upset tummy. Though I was still very tired, and I wished I could sleep for several more hours, I knew enough to take these symptoms seriously. As I swung my long legs out from under my duvet and onto the floor, I noticed a dark patch on the sheets. A feeling of dread started forming in the pit of my stomach as I fumbled for the switch of my bedside lamp. The light revealed that the patch was in fact bright red blood.

“Mycroft!” I shrieked. “Mycroft!”

He did not respond, so I heaved myself to my feet, and began to shuffle down the hall to his bedroom. My progress was inhibited, however, by a terrible contraction, which caused me to cry out and fall to my knees in the hallway. I felt a warm trickle between my legs.

“Mycroft!” I screamed at his door. “Mycroft, I need you!”

There was a rumbling sound, a panicked whisper of “Get off! Get off! Get off!” and a heavy thud, as if someone had thrown a large, lumpy duvet onto the floor. Barely a second later, Mycroft flung open his door and rushed over to me, dressed only in his worn-out plaid dressing gown.

“We have to get to the hospital, My. Something’s very wrong!” I hissed in pain.

“Okay, can you stand? Let’s get you into the car right away,” he said with a tremor in his voice.

“I’m on it.” I blinked in surprise as Lestrade strode down the hallway to Mycroft’s office, completely naked.

Mycroft set me on the bench in his front foyer while he rushed about gathering my overnight bag and coat, and Lestrade spoke with the doctor in the office. Another huge contraction seized my abdomen, and I noted with dismay that the blood leaking from my vagina was staining the fabric. Oh well, I thought, it was time that that bench was reupholstered anyway. “H-hurry, My!” I gasped.

“I – I’m looking for y-your scarf! I wouldn’t want you to get cold!” Mycroft shouted in a shaky voice.

“My scarf? I don’t need a scarf; I need you take me to the hospital!”

Then Greg stalked around the corner dressed in his clothes from the night before, but looking completely alert and none the worse for wear. “Right,” he said. “I’m getting my car. That way we can use the siren and run some red lights.”

“Cool!” I grinned in spite of my growing feeling of unease.

“Mycroft, get your brother out to the kerb! But first put some goddamn pants on!”

“Right. Right,” Mycroft breathed and rushed down the hall to get dressed. I was momentarily
surprised that Lestrade should be the one to take charge, while Mycroft had apparently dissolved into mindless panic. Well, maybe it shouldn’t be a surprise, I thought; after all, Lestrade was a copper, and he had doubtlessly been through far more dangerous emergencies than this one in his long career.

Lestrade drove like a demon to Saint Bart’s, arriving there less than ten minutes after we had left Hampstead. While Mycroft was pushing me through the double doors of the omega annex’s A&E department, I experienced another, much stronger contraction. I grunted as I felt another gush of cherry red blood run down my legs.

“Help! Help, help, help!” Mycroft said to the charge nurse. “My brother! Please help! I – I can’t – I can’t –”

“Alright, I’ll admit your brother now, sir. What’s his name?”

“It’s – it’s – it’s Sh-Sher – “

“It’s Sherlock Holmes,” I said, irritable now that the contraction was over. “Jesus Christ, Mycroft, get it together!”

“Right,” the nurse smiled as she took the handles of my wheelchair and pushed me down the hall. Mycroft trotted behind, still carrying my overnight bag and scarf. “Sherlock, what’s your doctor’s name?”

“Linda Evansworth. We’ve called her and she’s on her way. You should know I’m considered a high risk pregnancy because of the scar tissue in my uterus. I was due to deliver by c-section on the ninth, but I started experiencing back pain at approximately ten fifty-eight, and soon after I started bleeding. The symptoms and the scar tissue suggest placental abruption, and the volume of blood would seem to indicate that this is a particularly bad case. Probably Grade Three, which is associated with a high risk for both fetal and maternal death,” I said in a rush, though I felt inexplicably calm.

“Erm, that’s right,” the nurse said, nonplussed. “I see you’ve done your research.”

“Trust me, I’ve looked up everything that could possibly go wrong with this pregnancy,” I said impatiently. “Though I admit that this was one of the worst scenarios I imagined.”

“Right, so while we’re waiting for Dr. Evansworth, let’s do a quick ultrasound and check the fetal heart rate.”

Dr. Evansworth arrived just as the nurse – a very capable omega who introduced herself as Amy – had begun the ultrasound. It confirmed our suspicions – a detached placenta. “Sherlock, look at me” Doctor Evansworth said as she attached the pads for the fetal heart monitor. “We knew something like this could happen, right?” I could suddenly hear the pup’s heartbeat. Instead of the steady rushing sound it had made during our regular check-ups, it was fast and irregular. Panicked. Like my own. “Your baby’s not getting oxygen, and it’s in distress. We need to get it out right away, okay?”

I gave a firm nod.

“You can have your brother in the theatre, but he’s got to get changed, alright?” she looked over at Mycroft, who was standing in the corner looking frozen and pale, my scarf still clutched in his hands. “Alright?” she said again to Mycroft.

Mycroft was silent for a few seconds before he choked out, “Al – alright.”

The very capable Amy gave me a spinal block and quickly shaved my tummy. After confirming my
blood type – AB Positive – she arranged for a blood transfusion. “Just in case,” she said. “You’re losing an awful lot.” When Mycroft finished fumbling over his scrubs, she wheeled me into the theatre.

To my lasting disappointment, they pulled a curtain over my abdomen, so I was unable to see them perform the c-section. “Mycroft!” I hissed at my brother, who was silently watching the nurses and doctor rushing about. “Tell me what’s going on!”

Mycroft looked me in the face then. I had never seen him look more lost or uncertain. “Oh-okay,” he stammered, and returned his gaze to my tummy. “They’re – they’re m-making an-an incision,” he gulped.

“Where? How big?” I said, angry at how little detail Mycroft was giving me.

Mycroft looked down at my incised belly and said in a quiet, distant voice, “Oh, not too big. N-now they’re d-draining the blood with a sort of suction thingy…. I saw Mycroft sway a bit on his feet. “Gosh, there’s a lot!” he said in an uncharacteristically high-pitched, thready voice.

I felt a bit of tugging, and Mycroft said in that same voice. “Oh, they’ve just pulled out something big and squishy and yellowy. What is it?”

“The placenta,” Dr. Evansworth said with a smile in her voice.

“The placenta,” Mycroft repeated. Then his eyes rolled back in their sockets, and he slumped to the floor in a lifeless heap.

“Fainter! We’ve got a fainter!” a nurse shouted. “He’s bleeding. Someone get him out of here!”

“Mycroft, get up! I need you to narrate!” I shouted at his motionless form. A nurse held some gauze to Mycroft’s head, then helped him to his feet and out the door.

Just then I felt another tugging sensation, and Doctor Evansworth stood up, something tiny and blue in her arms. “Let’s get those airways open, people!” she said. The nurses surrounded her.

For the ten worst seconds of my life there was an awful silence.

Then I heard a thin, shrill cry, and Doctor Evansworth turned towards me again. She was wrapping a tiny, squirming pink pup in a purple blanket. “Congratulations, Mr. Holmes,” she smiled with tears in her eyes. “You have a beautiful, healthy baby girl.”

“A baby girl,” I said in wonder as the doctor placed the little baby in my arms. “A baby girl.”

Absurdly enough, at that very moment I found myself thinking of James Moriarty. He too must have felt the same rush of love and protectiveness that I was experiencing. How absolutely horrible it must have been for him to have his newborn pups taken away soon afterwards! And to have to go through that with five separate litters. No wonder he had gone mad! Even after being acquainted with my pup for just three seconds, I knew that I would lose my mind if I ever lost her.

“Oh, you beauty,” I said through my tears as I kissed her perfect (though disgustingly sticky) forehead.

*  

The delivery and blood loss had left me absolutely exhausted, so after they stitched me up and wheeled me to the recovery room, I slept for several hours. When I awoke, it was early morning, and
I was already in a ward.

“Coo-ee,” an elderly omega nurse called as she knocked at my door. “Mr. Holmes, there’s someone here who wants to see you!”

I painfully levered myself to a sitting position, wondering who might be visiting at this hour. To my delight, however, the nurse was pulling an incubator behind her. Swaddled in purple blankets and snoozing peacefully was my baby. As the nurse handed her to me, I noticed that she had already been given a bath. Peeking out from her little yellow hat were a few wisps of bright red hair. To my surprise, my daughter was a ginger like Mycroft. He would be appalled, I knew, but I couldn’t have been more pleased. Her face was still mushed a bit from its time in utero, but I thought that she had my nose and chin. Though she was fast asleep, from the shape of her brows and eye sockets, I could tell that she would have John’s kind, serious eyes. I decided that she had inherited the best of our features, and was therefore absolutely perfect. Very, very small, but absolutely perfect.

“I’m Coco, the hospital lactation consultant,” the elderly nurse introduced herself. “I expect that your little girl’s hungry, so I thought we’d get you started on breastfeeding right away.”

“Oh, thanks, but I think we’ll go with formul – “ I started, but Coco shook her head at me.

“There’s nothing more nutritious than omega breast milk, Mr. Holmes. Especially at this early stage. Just give it a try, eh? For her?”

“Well, okay,” I said uncertainly. “For her.”

Coco helped me pull down my hospital gown, and I was alarmed to see that I had grown breasts overnight! They were small, but tender and hard, and already leaking milk.

Coco showed me several positions in which I could hold my baby. “With a single birth it’s important to alternate between nipples. Otherwise you’ll end up lopsided. And if you haven’t already, you need to double your calcium and vitamin intake right away.”

“Why’s that?” I said while practicing feeding different positions.

“Because breastfeeding drains all your vitamins and minerals. That’s why it’s so healthy for newborns, and why omegas usually have such brittle bones. With just the one pup, you probably won’t have a severe case of osteoporosis, but a little extra calcium can’t hurt, can it? Now let me show you how to get the baby to latch on.”

Nurse Coco showed me how to give my breast a gentle squeeze so that the baby could get a good mouthful of areola. Rather nervously, I held my tiny pup against my chest, and pushed my nipple at her face. To my relief, she opened her mouth wide and sucked my nipple into her little mouth.

“Oh, she did it!” I exclaimed. “Clever girl! That – that feels… wonderful actually!” My eyes filled with tears yet again.

“See? What a marvelous mum you’ll be!” Coco patted my arm gently.

Just then, my door opened, and Mycroft entered carrying an enormous stuffed bee. “It’s from Mrs. Hudson,” he explained, positioning it in a chair next to the bed. “She says congratulations, and she can’t wait for you two to move home.” He watched me feeding my wriggling baby for several seconds – a soppy grin plastered across his face, and a bandage on his forehead from where he had gotten stitches the previous evening.

“I’ve just been talking to Dr. Evansworth,” he began. “She wants to keep her in the neonatal
intensive care unit for just a couple of weeks. That’s lucky.”

“Does she have any particular concerns?” I asked worriedly.

“Just her lungs. That’s common for premature babies, apparently. She might end up with asthma, but that’s it.” Considering the drama of the previous night, it was a good prognosis. Miraculously good, in fact. I sighed in relief.

“Do you know whether they did the ovo-hysterectomy? I was kind of out of it last night,” I said, switching the baby to my other nipple.

“Yes. It went smoothly. The doctor says that she’ll talk to you about hormone replacement in a day or two.”

“What for?” I asked.

“As I understand it, without your ovaries, you’ll gradually start losing your omega characteristics.”

“So I’ll just be like a beta again?”

“I suppose.”

Hmm. That was something to think about.

“I also brought this,” Mycroft said, pulling a folded sheet of paper from his breast pocket. “It’s the form for the birth certificate. Do you want to fill it out now?”

“Sure,” I said. “Hand me a pen.”

Mycroft obediently handed me his fancy Montblanc fountain pen, and said, “Remember what Lestrade told you.”

“Uh-huh,” I replied, struggling to unscrew the cap with just one hand. A few weeks earlier Lestrade had told us that if we were worried that John or Mary might one day try to gain custody of the baby, their case would be weakened if John wasn’t listed as the father on the birth certificate. Though his failure to get in touch when my pregnancy had become public knowledge would seem to indicate that John wasn’t interested in taking responsibility for my baby, in the box marked ‘Father’ I nevertheless wrote UNKNOWN.

“Have you decided on a name?” Mycroft asked, watching the baby while absentmindedly stroking the bee stuffy.

I nodded. In fact I had decided on the first name the previous evening, immediately after Dr. Evansworth had handed me my baby. But I had chosen the second name a month earlier; I thought it was important to name my pup after the one alpha who could be counted on to be there for her for her entire life. The only one whom I could trust to raise her properly, to see that she was happy, healthy, and fulfilled, and the only one who would even lay down his life for her.

“Yes,” I said decisively. “Her name is Jamie Mycroft Holmes.”
Have I mentioned lately how much I appreciate your interest in my story? No? Well, I am immensely gratified that all of you would take the time to immerse yourselves in my weird, melodramatic little world. Thanks so much for reading!
The life of a single mum

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“’It’s not too late to change your mind, you know.’”

“Nope. I like it. It’s distinguished, and it suits her.”

“I’m very flattered, of course, but Mycroft is a boy’s name.”

“And Sherlock is a girl’s name. Can you get the bee? My hands are full.”

It was the twentieth of November, and Jamie’s and my sojourn at Saint Bart’s was finally over. The previous morning, Doctor Evansworth had given the pair of us a final examination, and declared us free to return home. She also gave me prescription of mild omega hormones, which were necessary, she said, to maintain milk production.

Jamie had put on a whole pound while in hospital, and while she was still very small (even for an omega’s pup), she was surprisingly healthy and alert. Though at that moment – as I was wrestling her seat out of the back of Mycroft’s car – she was fast asleep and snoring softly.

“Sherlock! Welcome home!” Mrs. Hudson opened the front door of 221 Baker Street. “Greg and I moved your chair into your bedroom, just like you asked. Though I don’t know why you couldn’t just pick up a cot at Ikea.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Hudson. Who’s Greg?” Mycroft rolled his eyes at that. “And my chair will make an excellent cot for Jamie. All we have to do is put some sheets in it, and push the seat front against the wall.”

“And here she is, the little darling!” Mrs. Hudson turned her attention to the bundled form in the car seat. “Oh, does she ever look like John!” she exclaimed, provoking a frown from Mycroft. Belatedly realizing that she might have committed a faux pas, Mrs. Hudson whispered, “Sorry.”

“It’s fine,” I said matter-of-factly, “She does. Especially around the eyes.” Though her thoughtful, serious eyes were still that dark grey that newborns tend to have, I knew that within a few months, they would be John’s distinctive navy blue colour.

Just then Lestrade exited the front door and said, “There you are! Everything’s inside. I left the extra boxes of nappies in the attic bedroom.”

“Thanks, Gareth.” I smiled. “Not just for that, but for, you know, everything.”

“Anytime,” he grinned. “Now, if you need help, just text me. I’ve raised three happy, well-adjusted pups – one of each gender – and I’d be glad to lend a hand in any way I can.” Lestrade’s smile seemed particularly wide. No doubt he was looking forward to having Mycroft to himself for a while.

“And we’ll see all three of you for Sunday dinner at Edna’s house,” said Mycroft.

“Uh-huh. And thank you too, My,” I said, rather uncomfortably. (The two of us often have difficulty expressing positive emotions, especially gratitude and affection. On the other hand, negative emotions, like resentment and exasperation, present no challenge whatsoever for us.)
I gave Mycroft an awkward one-armed hug, and he replied, “I didn’t do it for you, I did it for my niece and namesake.” He bent to fondly pat Jamie’s shiny red hair. “Feel free to visit anytime, Jamie,” he said in a soft, sing-song voice. (Apparently Mycroft’s difficulties in expressing affection did not extend to my daughter.) “If you want, you can bring along your idiot mother.”

And so it was that Jamie and I moved back into the Baker Street flat. Though neither of us had any experience with child-rearing, Mrs. Hudson and I somehow muddled through those first few months. We were greatly assisted by Jamie’s remarkably tolerant and forgiving disposition, and Mycroft’s willingness to step in whenever I was overwhelmed with crying, and nappies, and responsibility.

Jamie’s birth also allowed me to rekindle my troubled and distant relationship with Mummy and Daddy. Ever since Moriarty had publicly revealed that I was an omega in disguise, things had been tense between my parents and I. Not particularly because they were disappointed that I was an omega (Though I suspect that’s part of it) but because they were hurt that I hadn’t seen fit to take them into my confidence. (And they hadn’t found my explanation for my failure to confide in them – which was to argue that I hadn’t told the person I loved more than anyone in the world that I was an omega, so why the hell would I tell them? – particularly mollifying either.) Anyway, Jamie’s birth gave Mycroft an excellent excuse to mend fences, and he brought them over for tea on Boxing Day.

“Oh, doesn’t she look like Mycroft!” Mummy exclaimed as she picked up Jamie from her makeshift bed.

“It’s just the hair,” I frowned, annoyed at the comparison. “Jamie is already much better looking. And smarter.”

“No, she’s got Mycroft’s smile,” Daddy said.

“That’s just wind,” I insisted.

“I say, do you think this could mean she’s an alpha too?” Daddy asked excitedly. “Wouldn’t that be something?”

Though there was nothing mean-spirited about the question, I felt my stomach drop. Though their beliefs were entirely typical for middle-class Britons, my parents’ clear preference for alphas recalled my own upbringing. It was through my parents’ praise of Mycroft’s alpha qualities and their subtle disparaging of omegas that I first learned to value alphas more than omegas. This, you may recall, contributed to the crippling self-loathing I experienced in my twenties, which I later had to work so hard to overcome.

I took Jamie from their arms and announced, “I will love Jamie the same no matter what her secondary gender is. And even if she’s an omega, I’ll raise her to know that she’s just as smart and capable as anyone else!” I felt myself tearing up – lousy post-partum hormones!

“Alright, son!” said Mummy. “Take it easy. Goodness, you can be so dramatic!”

“I’ll – I’ll send her to uni,” I continued fervently. “And I’ll let her study anything she wants. And – and then she’ll be independent. And when she falls in love, I’ll tell her to love herself first, and – and to be honest about who she is, and to not be frightened to act on her feelings before it’s too late! By god, I’ll do everything in my power to make sure that Jamie is proud of who she is, and that she respects everyone, regardless of their gender.”

I think that my parents were quite taken aback at the intensity of my reaction. At any rate, they left Baker Street to return to Staunton soon after Mrs. Hudson’s mincemeat tarts were served. And though we promised that we would see each other more frequently – for Jamie’s sake if not mine – I
knew that during our future visits I would always be on guard to make sure that Jamie didn’t inherit the same damaging prejudices that had made my early adult life so unhappy.

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I approached raising my daughter as rationally and systematically as I could, which is to say that I treated it as a grand experiment whose purpose was to conclusively determine which parenting techniques, foods, products, and general approaches worked best towards producing a healthy, happy, intelligent child. (At least, which worked best for one Jamie Holmes; I knew that with just one case study, my conclusions would have little external validity.) When I was up late feeding her, I would catalogue my observations in an elaborate spreadsheet file. When she’s grown up, I will try to publish my findings in a pediatrics journal.

However, despite my efforts at gaining useful scientific knowledge out of parenting, I was occasionally bored as a single mum. Reading books on very hungry caterpillars and green breakfast foods just isn’t that stimulating when you have to do it over and over and over again. (Still, at least my audience was consistently appreciative.)

So, when Lestrade showed up at our door one cold afternoon in January, saying, “Sherlock, that assassin’s back. We need your help.” I couldn’t have been more excited or relieved.

“Fantastic!” I smiled at him. “Can you come through to the bedroom? I have to change Jamie.”

“Of course,” he grinned at Jamie. “Hello, you. Do you have a smile for your Uncle Greg?” (She did.)

“It’s like this,” Lestrade said, pulling some photos from a folder and setting them on the edge of the changing table. “Last week someone tried to shoot that Danish newspaper owner, Charles Augustus Magnussen, in his office. He survived, though the bullet nicked his aorta. So he’s still in the hospital. Here’s the weird bit, Sherlock: he’s not helping the investigation, and we don’t know why.”

“Charles Augustus Magnussen, you say? What a coincidence,” I murmured as I tossed Jamie’s soiled nappy in the Diaper Genie.

“What’s a coincidence?” Lestrade extracted one of the crime scene photos from Jamie’s fist.

“Magnussen. He – my ex-girlfriend Janine is his personal assistant.”

“Janine Delahunty? She’s the primary witness. She doesn’t know much though – the assassin knocked her out.” Lestrade was making faces at Jamie, who responded by giggling delightedly. (Her snorting snicker sounds disturbingly like Mycroft’s, actually.)

“Well, let me flip through your file. Maybe I can shed some new light on the investigation,” I said, taping up the sides of Jamie’s nappy.

Lestrade followed us out to the kitchen, where I took a seat at the kitchen table – which was then cluttered with baby toys and scientific bric-a-brac alike. I noted with dismay that the witness reports were incomplete and featured both poor grammar and spelling, while the crime scene photos weren’t even in focus.

I sighed in irritation, and moved Jamie to my shoulder. “Lestrade, you’re giving me nothing to work with here.”

“Yeah, sorry,” Lestrade replied, moving a breast pump so that he could sit opposite me. “We have some new people on – betas, all – and Donovan hasn’t been able to whip them into shape yet.”
“Well, that’s it then. Unless you let me visit the crime scene myself, I simply can’t help you anymore!”

“But – but, Sherlock, you know the Superintendent’s policy on omegas….”

“I don’t give a toss about the Superintendent’s policy. If you want me to help on this case – or any other case – you need to let me attend the scene of crime. I can’t let you handicap me like this anymore.”

“But, Sherlock…” Lestrade sighed.

“How badly do you want to catch this assassin, Lestrade? Better yet, how badly does the Superintendent want it solved?”

“Pretty badly….” He admitted grudgingly.

“Well then, it’s settled; we’re going. And from now on you’re letting me attend your crime scenes, even if I’m never accompanied by another alpha or beta again.”

“But, Sherlock, what will Mycroft say? He’ll be pretty angry if you put yourself in danger. To say nothing of the little Jamie.” Lestrade tried to reason with me.

“You yourself said that the attack happened last week. Surely the assassin’s left by the scene by now!” I winced as Jamie grabbed a fistful of my hair.

“But – but, what about Mycroft? What’ll he say?”

“Lestrade,” I said with amused condescension as I extracted Jamie’s tiny fist from my hair. “Surely you’ve noticed by now that Mycroft refuses me nothing. And I know for a fact that there’s nothing the pair of you wouldn’t do for each other as well. So Mycroft would do anything for me, and you would do anything for Mycroft. The transitive property would therefore seem to dictate that there’s nothing you wouldn’t do for me either. So there’s no use in arguing; you’re letting me in your crime scene.”

Lestrade groaned defeatedly as he followed my logic. “I’ll get your coat,” he grumbled.

“Give me twenty minutes. I need to feed Jamie.”

We arrived at CAM Tower a half hour later. To my disappointment, Jamie took entirely no interest in her first crime scene, as she was full of milk and snoring loudly in the Baby Bjorn. Though the crime had been committed a week earlier, the penthouse office and private apartment above were still cordoned off by police tape. I growled in irritation as I glanced about: So many people had traipsed through the crime scene, any remaining evidence left to be found would have been thoroughly contaminated.

From the upstairs apartment there was a shuffling sound. Lestrade and I ascended the stairs to discover Janine kneeling on the champagne-coloured carpet, sorting through files.

She looked up when she heard us. “Sherl? What are you doing here?” she asked with a surprised smile. “Oh, and is this the little one?” She rose to her feet.

“Yes. Janine, may I introduce my daughter Jamie?” I asked with pride.

Janine peered into the Baby Bjorn and exclaimed, “Oh, she’s like a mini John, isn’t she? Just like the other one. Well, except for the hair, of course.”
“Other one?” I asked, my affectionate smile fading.

“Yes. Erm, you see I had coffee with Mary about two weeks ago,” Janine said uncomfortably. “I hadn’t seen her since the wedding, and she just called me up out of the blue. We met at that place where you and I first had coffee together. She showed me pictures of her new baby. Another little girl; looks just like yours, except for the hair. I forget the name though. Something with a V. Veronica? Viola? Something like that.”

“And – and John?” I asked in a choked whisper.

“He wasn’t there. Mary said he’s fine though. Enjoying Edinburgh and all that. I did most of the talking though. She’s always been interested in my job, you know. She thinks that Mr. Magnussen is just a fascinating character, and she loves to hear all about his jet set life. I guess it seems glamorous to her. Anyway, it was a brief visit. She seemed a bit, well, frazzled, actually. I suppose that’s common enough among beta mums; they’re not all natural mums the way omegas are.”

“I see,” I said thoughtfully. So after all the confusion over Birmingham, Liverpool, and Cardiff, it turned out that John and Mary had relocated to Scotland. I cleared my throat and returned my attention to the matter at hand. “What are you doing here, Janine?”

“Hmm? Oh, just a little errand for Charles. He asked me for some information on the families of the victims of some similar assassinations from years ago.”

“Oh? What sort of information?” Lestrade asked while extracting a notebook from his breast pocket.

“Their contact information, actually. He wanted me to find out whether the phone numbers and e-mail addresses he had on file for them was up-to-date.”

“How unusual! Do you have any idea why he might want to get in touch with them?” I asked.

“No, and I don’t know why it can’t wait until he’s feeling better either,” Janine griped. “What could possibly be so important that he would need to get in touch with them before he even leaves the hospital?”

“Hmm. I know that Mr. Magnussen has refused to speak to Scotland Yard about the incident,” I said thoughtfully. “But do you think that he’d speak to me?”

Janine shrugged. “Maybe, but I doubt it. He can be pretty tight lipped sometimes. He’s never been one to go to the police when there’s been trouble.”

“Right, and can you tell us what happened the night of the attack?” Lestrade asked as he scribbled notes in his little book.

“Sure, but I don’t know much: I was working late preparing Charles’ schedule for the next week. I remember that I went to get a glass of water at the cooler next to the elevator, and the next thing I knew, a police constable was patting my cheek and asking me to open my eyes. Someone had whacked me on the back of the head with something.”

“Did it leave a mark? Can I see?” I asked

“Sure.” Janine turned around and lifted her heavy dark hair so that I could see the back of her head.

“It’s faded quite a bit, but from the angle I can see that the assailant was left-handed, and on the short side. Well, medium sized for a beta woman, I suppose,” I murmured.
“A woman?” Janine asked.

“Yes, but keep that to yourself for now. The shape of the bruise suggests that the weapon was a SIG Sauer P226.”

“That’s odd.” Lestrade looked up from his notebook. “The P226 is a combat handgun used by police services, intelligence agencies, and the like.”

“I know,” I replied. “Remember I mentioned that I thought that the assassin was a professional? It seems that she received her training while in the employ of a government agency.”

“But which one?” Lestrade asked.

“Could be any. The Germans, the Israelis, the Canadians…” I shrugged. “I have no idea at this point.”

Lestrade and I continued our investigation of the apartment and office. In the plush carpeting next to the water cooler I found some footprints that seemed to match those left by the assassin at the earlier crime scenes, but again there was some discrepancy with the weight: This time, the assassin appeared to have been at least twenty pounds lighter than she had been at the scene of Lady Smallwood’s murder.

After changing and feeding Jamie, Lestrade, and I paid a visit to Magnussen’s hospital ward. As Janine had predicted, he refused to answer my questions. “Don’t you want your attacker to see justice?” Lestrade asked him.

Magnussen gave him a sinister, dead-eyed grin and replied, “There are different ways to achieve justice, Inspector. Now I am afraid that I must bid you gentlemen adieu; I am still recovering and I need my rest. Oh, and Mr. Holmes? Congratulations on the birth of your daughter. I was so glad that it was one of my papers that first publicized the joyous news of your pregnancy.” I didn’t like the predatory way in which he looked at Jamie, so I clutched her tightly to my chest, and left the room.

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When he found out that I had taken Jamie with me to meet Magnussen, Mycroft was furious.

“How could you, Sherlock?” he shouted, for once giving his alpha temper free rein. “Imagine, taking a baby to a crime scene and an interrogation! This is by far the stupidest thing you’ve ever done!” Mycroft glanced at my bedroom door briefly, momentarily anxious that his outburst might wake Jamie from her evening nap.

I sniffled and ducked my chin submissively. “Squealer!” I hissed at Lestrade through my tears. “And after all the assistance I lent you today!”

“Hey, don’t blame me! You knew I didn’t want to bring her, and you know I don’t keep secrets from Mycroft,” Lestrade said indignantly. “And need I remind you that you haven’t actually given me any new leads yet?”

“No, you needn’t, but don’t worry. There must be something linking the four victims, and I mean to discover it.”

“Not if it means taking Jamie with you to another crime scene, Sherlock!” Mycroft snarled. “I simply cannot allow that.”

“Actually, I was going to start with Google,” I shrugged.
“I’m serious, Sherlock. You can’t be this reckless or selfish anymore. Think of how you would feel if Jamie came to any harm in the course of one of your silly investigations.”

“They’re not si – “ I began, but the lump that coalesced in my throat when I actually thought about how terribly heartbroken and guilty I would feel if Jamie was ever hurt as a result of my thoughtlessness prevented me from saying anything further. After several seconds, I choked out, “I’m sorry, My. It won’t ever happen again.”

“And have some care for yourself too for once. You’re a mother now! What would Jamie do without you?”

I hung my head in shame at that. As much as I loved applying my massive intellect to criminal investigation, clearly my priorities would have to change. And yet, without cases to solve, I feared my brain would wither and die.

“So I can’t help Lestrade at all anymore?” I said in a tiny voice.

“Huh? Now – now, let’s not be too hasty….” Lestrade said in alarm. “Maybe there’s some way you can help while keeping you and Jamie safe.”

Mycroft snorted at that. “Hmph. You just want Sherlock to keep helping you!”

Lestrade replied, “Damn straight I do! But Sherlock’s right: just looking at the files doesn’t work, ‘cause it doesn’t let him find any new evidence.”

“Well,” Mycroft sighed, sinking onto the sofa. “Let me think about it.” As the evening progressed the three of us hashed out an arrangement that would allow me to continue to investigate crimes, without putting Jamie in harm’s way. We resolved that I would only be allowed to visit crime scenes after the Metropolitan Police had definitively secured the area. Jamie was not allowed to attend any more crime scenes or interrogations, and I was not to give out any personal information about her in conversations with suspects or witnesses.

“But Mycroft, what am I supposed to do with Jamie when I’m busy on a case? Mrs. Hudson babysits, but she’s an old omega now. She hasn’t got the energy to care for Jamie for an extended period of time,” I argued.

Without hesitation, Mycroft responded, “You can give Jamie to me. I’ll take care of her.”

“What about when you’re at the office?”

“Then too. I’ve told you before that the Home Office is accommodating when it comes to alphas with family responsibilities. She can play in my office, or go to the crèche on the second floor.”

Thus we negotiated the terms by which I would return to work as the world’s only Consulting Detective. I confess that I was skeptical that the system would work, but Mycroft proved to be an eager and devoted babysitter. He would carry Jamie to meetings of national importance in a Baby Bjorn strapped to his chest, and glare balefully at anyone who dared look sideways at him for doing so. When my cases required me to leave Jamie in Mycroft’s care overnight, the pair of them would sleep cuddled up together in his cozy old armchair. Indeed, for years Lestrade used a picture of them snuggled together in this manner as his phone’s wallpaper.

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For four and a half years, this was our life. I helped Lestrade on his murder inquiries and other major crimes (though I was unable to find that elusive assassin). After a while I began to accept mysteries
submitted to my website as well. Whenever the Work took me to a potentially dangerous locale, or away from home overnight, I would entrust Jamie to Mycroft’s care. Consequently, the two of them grew very close. Jamie even began to acquire some of Mycroft’s less endearing habits, including nagging me when she felt I was being irresponsible, and rolling her eyes at me when she thought I was being illogical or silly.

I remember once meeting the pair of them for a picnic lunch at Hyde Park after the successful conclusion of an abduction case. They didn’t see me as I approached them from behind their picnic table.

Mycroft was saying to Jamie, “And what may we deduce about that beta in black?”

Jamie narrowed her deep blue eyes and after long consideration said, “That no one loves him, My-My?” (Her nickname for Mycroft is My-My; you just can’t make these things up.)

“What makes you say that?” Mycroft grinned. I don’t know why he’s so forgiving of Jamie’s tactlessness, when he’s only ever been intolerant of my own.

“’Cause of all the white stuff on his coat. No one brushes it off.”

“It’s called dandruff, Jamie love. What else?”

“’Cause no one’s told him about the egg salad on his cheek.”

“Brava! Anything else?”

“’Cause of the way he looks at all the ladies. He wishes they loved him.”

“And ironically enough they’ll find that level of neediness off-putting, and they won’t look twice at him. Now what can you deduce about that omega standing behind us?”

“That he’s a dirty eavesdropper! Hello, Mummy! Did you find the kidnapper?”

I kissed her hello while reflecting on my brother’s interaction with my four year-old daughter. I could remember sitting with Mycroft in the churchyard in Staunton and learning to read people when I was at a similar age. It occurred to me that Mycroft saw his duties as a big brother (and now uncle) as primarily instructive, which is to say that he enjoys sharing the tricks he’s used to succeed in his schooling and career with the young people in his charge. Naturally, I didn’t appreciate that when I was a child; rather I saw his natural inclination towards teaching as nothing more than bossiness, and I rebelled against it accordingly. As I took my seat across from Mycroft and Jamie and retrieved a chicken sandwich from the package between them, I began to see that it was my rejection of his odd form of nurturing that first introduced a measure of distance and animosity to our relationship. I felt a stab of regret at that, though I was very glad that Mycroft was forgiving enough to try again with my daughter as his pupil.

Lestrade, I think, was Jamie’s only chance at normalcy. (You might think that it would have been Mrs. Hudson, but, no doubt as a result of her long career with the drugs cartel, she is astonishingly amoral! I swear that she lets Jamie do anything she wants, as long as the two of them don’t get caught. Once I found the two of them eating cake frosting for dinner. For dinner! Honestly!) Lestrade was level-headed, compassionate, and affectionate with my daughter, and under his influence Jamie acquired these same qualities. I remember one incident when Jamie was three and Mycroft and Lestrade had taken her to a neighbourhood birthday party in Hampstead. A boy had called her a spotty carrot, and she ran over to her uncle and his ‘special friend’ in tears.

As Lestrade later recounted to me, Mycroft – who himself had been teased mercilessly throughout
his childhood over his colouring – had gone deathly pale and told Jamie in a quiet, icy voice, “Don’t you worry, my lovely. He’ll never tease you again.”

“Why not, My-My?” Jamie sniffled.

“Because this time tomorrow he and his entire family will be fighting for their lives in the midst of a civil war. Give me five minutes to make the arrangements.”

“What? What’s the matter with you? You can’t keep solving family problems by deporting people, My!” Lestrade bent down to give Jamie a firm hug. “That was a very unkind thing to say, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Jamie sniffled. Mycroft says that Jamie cries just like me.

“Yeah. Well, I know it hurts but sometimes other kids say mean, thoughtless things, and you can’t take it to heart. Because they are just kids, and sometimes they don’t think before they speak. And just remember that your mummy, and My-My, and Mrs. Hudson, and I all love you very much, and we all think you’re beautiful. So, ask yourself, whose opinion is more important to you: ours or that silly little kid’s?”

Jamie gave a watery smile and said, “Yours. Thank you, Uncle Greg.” (She’s always called him Uncle Greg; god only knows how she came up with that name.)

Under Mycroft’s and Lestrade’s guidance Jamie grew to be a kind, thoughtful, and quick-witted young child. (And from Mrs. Hudson, she learned a certain indifference towards rules and prevailing social mores.) Though I can easily detect their influence in her gestures and the turns of phrase she uses (and my own in the shape of her face, her tip-turned, retroussé nose, and her fascination with murder mysteries) there are certain things that she does, certain expressions that she makes that are all John. The look of stubborn disapproval that she gives me when I leave petrie dishes full of bacteria samples all over our kitchen table is identical to his; so is the way she sticks her tongue out when she’s playing on the laptop. I see him in her fearlessness, her loyalty to her weird little family, and the funny way that she runs. Thus, though I had done my best to forget John – or at least put our time together on the highest, most inaccessible shelf in my Mind Palace (I couldn’t delete it completely) – he was never, ever far from my thoughts.

Still, I often reflected during this time, with help from Mycroft, Lestrade, and dear Mrs. Hudson, the life I built for Jamie and myself was anything but unhappy. Jamie wanted for nothing – least of all, positive alpha role models – and I was content with the way my life had turned out.

Deeply content.

Chapter End Notes

Contentedness is pretty much the same thing as happiness, isn't it?

Thank you all for reading! The event that you've all been hoping for is coming pretty quick!
“Well, the results of your bone density test are good. Very good for a forty-three year-old omega, actually. I think that’s due in equal parts to your active lifestyle, and the fact that you’ve only had the one pup. How’s she getting on, by the way?”

“Jamie? She’s just fine. Starting Primary One in September.”

“Already? How time flies!”

“You’re telling me! Mycroft’s already got her in violin lessons and advanced maths tuition. And she’s doing really well in football too.” That last bit had come as a surprise, because both Mycroft and I had always been pants at team sports. No doubt Jamie’s mad skills on the pitch were due to Lestrade’s patient, enthusiastic coaching.

“How is your brother? Has he still got that scar on his forehead?” Doctor Evansworth asked in amusement.

“Ha! Yes, and it’s been a cause for some consternation because Mycroft wants the photographer to Photoshop it out of their wedding pictures, but Lestrade won’t let him because he thinks it makes Mycroft look rakish and dangerous!” I rolled my eyes as I recalled the argument.

“Wedding pictures? Oh, that’s right; your brother was one of the first alphas to apply for a marriage license under that new Equality of Marriage Act, wasn’t he?” Doctor Evansworth asked distractedly as she finished the notes she was writing in my file.

“The very first, actually. He’s been nauseatingly smug about it, but I think the stress of wedding planning is getting to him now.”

“Aren’t you helping? Isn’t that what omega siblings are supposed to do?”

“Of course! Mrs. Hudson too. And it’s a good thing we are helping because neither Lestrade nor Mycroft have any sense of style whatsoever. Can you believe that they wanted their colours to be red and gold? With Mycroft’s colouring? It boggles the mind,” I said in exasperation.

“And when’s the happy day?”

“Erm... Third week of October? You’ll have to ask Jamie; she’s the flower girl, and she’s very excited about it,” I smiled fondly.

“Of course. And are you the best man?”

“Yep.” I made the ‘p’ pop. “And I was looking forward to it too until Mycroft demanded that I give him editorial control over my speech.”

“Aww, what a killjoy!” Doctor Evansworth laughed before turning serious again. “Sherlock, before you go, let’s talk about your hormones. Jamie stopped breast-feeding over three years ago. So there’s really no practical reason for you to keep taking them. I can keep writing you the prescription, but you should think about whether you want to keep taking them indefinitely.”
“Hmm,” I said thoughtfully. “Are there any health risks associated with continued use of synthetic omega hormones?”

“Not really,” she shrugged. “You’ll carry on much as you have done for the past five years.”

“And if I stop?”

“Well, then there’ll be some big changes,” she sighed. “You’ll probably start to resemble a beta male again – that means you’ll have more upper body strength, and you won’t have submissive reactions to alphas anymore. Your features will start to look more typically masculine too; that means more body hair, and your lips will change shape. No more pouty cupid’s bow or voluminous curls, I’m afraid. But your genitals won’t change, so don’t expect your testes to grow back or your vagina to close up.”

“Well, it’s not like I’ve been using it lately, so it might as well close up,” I grinned as I stood up from her examination table. “Thank you, Doctor Evansworth. It was lovely to see you again.” I stuck my hand out so that she could shake it. “I’ll get back to you about the hormones, and otherwise I’ll see you next year.”

I left Doctor Evansworth’s examination room and found Jamie where she was reading an Anorak magazine in the waiting room. She set the magazine aside, hopped to her feet, and said, “All set?”

“Yep. Postman’s Park is just around the corner. Would you like to go there for an ice cream?”

“Sure,” Jamie grinned, taking my hand and leading me to the door. “Did Doctor Evansworth talk to you about the results of your bone density test?”

“Yes. Everything’s fine.”

“But you should keep taking your calcium, right?”

“Yes, Ma’am. Whatever you say.”

As Jamie and I walked hand-in-hand across King Edward Street to the tiny, urban park, I mulled over Doctor Evansworth’s suggestion that I stop taking omega hormones. Of course she had first raised that possibility immediately after Jamie was born, but I had continued taking the hormones for far longer than was biologically necessary to maintain milk production. I’m not sure why I kept taking the daily pills; maybe subconsciously I didn’t want to face the question of what it would mean for my identity and self-image if I decided to stop. However, now that it had been put directly to me, I decided that I wouldn’t delay my decision on the matter any longer.

On the surface, it was a simple decision: In the course of my investigations (to say nothing of my life as a single mum) a little extra upper body strength would definitely come in handy. Maybe I’d once again be able to pick up Jamie and put her to bed whenever she fell asleep helping me sort through police reports. And I’d always hated it when I cowered and sniveled when Mycroft shouted at me. Most compelling of all, maybe the Scotland Yarders – or indeed the British public in general – wouldn’t treat me like an irrational, uneducated, unintelligent child if I looked and acted like a beta again.

I paid for two Ninety-Nines, and Jamie and I sat down on a park bench. As I so often did since becoming a mum, I considered the impact my decision would have on my daughter. On the one hand, I wanted her to think that I was a smart, brave, capable, and even heroic person. Not so much for the sake of my own ego, but so that she would have a positive role model to emulate as she grew up. (I mean a role model besides bloody Mycroft! She’s already so much like him, it’s like there’s
two of them. Two red-haired, freckled, Hummel-loving, eye-rolling bossypants!)  

Jamie interrupted my thoughts by standing up and handing me her half-eaten ice cream (I noticed that the Flake bar was already gone). “If you’re not going to talk,” she said primly. “Can I go play tag with those kids?”

“Certainly, but I can’t guarantee that your ice cream will survive for long.”

“That’s fine, Mummy. I only wanted the Flake.” She kissed me on the cheek and ran full tilt at the small herd of children thundering around the park.

As I listened absently to the laughs and shouts of the children, my thoughts returned to the matter of my omega hormones. Though I certainly wanted Jamie to be proud of her mum, you may recall that I had long ago resolved to teach my daughter to respect people of all genders equally. Imparting these values was no mean feat, as it required me to challenge the stereotypes and hierarchy of genders that most Britons accepted uncritically and heedlessly perpetuated every day of their lives. I began to wonder what impact my decision would have on the values I labored to instill in my daughter. Would electing to live as a beta demonstrate to Jamie that people are allowed to express their identity as they choose, and that they have the right to live as whatever gender they please? Or would choosing to live as a beta undermine my oft-repeated axiom that one’s gender doesn’t determine how smart, or capable, or accomplished someone will turn out to be? Would choosing to stop taking omega hormones show Jamie that those words had been meaningless because I clearly thought it was better to be a beta? And what impact would rejecting my secondary gender have on Jamie’s self-worth if she herself turned out to be an omega?

My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a child’s scream coming from around a corner of the little park. “Muuummm-mmmyyyyy!” It was Jamie!

I stood up and dropped our half-eaten ice cream cones on the pavement. Before I could take a single step towards the source of the frightened voice, however, Jamie came sprinting around the corner.

“Muuummm-mmmyyyyy!” she sobbed, running into my arms.

“What’s the matter? Are you hurt?” I asked, kneeling to check the soundness of her arms and legs.

“N-no!” she sobbed. “Th-there’s a man!” She pointed in the direction from which she had come. “A stranger! H-he tried to talk to me.”

“A strange man tried to talk to you?” I asked, fighting back panic. “What did he say?”

“He c-called me Violet, and he tried to drag me away,” she sniffled and buried her face in my neck. I felt my stomach drop as a thousand scenarios flashed through my mind, none of them good. The strange man could have been just a run-of-the-mill pervert or baby-snatcher looking for a ransom – a horrible enough possibility, to be sure – but it could also have been any number of former adversaries looking for revenge. Kidnapping my only daughter would certainly be an effective way to burn the heart out of me.

I gulped and said in an exaggeratedly calm voice, “Okay. It’s okay; you’re safe with Mummy. Tell you what: let’s take a taxi to Uncle Gordon’s office, alright? Do you remember what the strange man looked like? You’ll need to give a description.”

Jamie sniffled and rolled her eyes, “It’s Uncle Greg, Mummy. Honestly! And the man was little, and he had a cane, and a beard, and I deduced that no one loves him.”
“Good. That’s good. Now let’s get out of here. Can you walk?”

“Uh-huh,” Jamie hiccuped. “Wait, Mummy, there he is!” Jamie was pointing to the far end of the park.

A man was walking towards us. He had a strangely familiar, wide-legged walk that was quite impeded by a limp.

“Excuse me!” I heard him shout. “I think there’s been a dreadful misunderstanding!” He waved an old military-issue cane at us, and continued his slow shuffle in our direction.

As he got closer, I pushed Jamie behind me and held her there, while I stared at the short, limping man. With a beard as thick as a rhododendron bush, he was undoubtedly an alpha. And Jamie was right that it looked like he had no one in his life to care for him: that thick beard was dirty and unkempt, and his silvery hair stuck up in all directions. His clothes were rumpled and unwashed, and above that horrid beard his blue eyes looked desperately unhappy.

Then the scent of his unwashed body hit me in a wave. Underlying the funky smell of filth and stale sweat, was the odour of pine forests and gun metal.

When he stopped a few feet away from us, staring at me with wide eyes, I felt my throat go dry.

“J-Ohn?” I choked.

“Sherlock? Jesus, it’s you. It’s really you!” John replied.

Chapter End Notes

There! He’s back! But what happened to poor John?

In case you've been doing the calculations, the events of this chapter take place in July of 2019. The future is here!

Thank you all for reading. You know how I love to leave you with a cliffhanger, and today is no exception. I'm going away for four days, and I don't expect to update for a week or so.
John and I stared at each other for several seconds.

The spell between us was broken by Jamie tugging on the back of my shirt and saying in a tense, worried voice, “Mummy, come on. We need to go to the police station.”

With several rapid blinks and quick shake of his head, John brought himself back to the present. “What? No, don’t!” he said. “I mean, please don’t. It was a misunderstanding, I swear. It’s just that your girl looks just like my Violet – well, except for the hair of course –” John stopped short, and blinked several more times. “Sherlock, did – “John swallowed hard. “D-did she just call you Mummy?”

I stepped to the side, so that John and Jamie could see each other. “Yes, John,” I replied. Though I tried to sound cold and haughty, I noticed a slight tremble in my voice. “This is my daughter,” I said with a definite emphasis on ‘my.’ “Jamie Mycroft Holmes.”

John stared at her with open-mouthed shock. Jamie glared back with a thin-lipped, displeased frown that she could only have inherited from her father… the man currently watching her in astonishment. “Jamie,” I said, resting my hand on her shoulder in a comforting gesture. “This is Doctor John Watson. He is – that is to say, he was – a friend of Mummy’s…. A good friend at one time….”

“A daughter! Oh, Sherlock, she’s lovely! She really is the spitting image of my Violet, you know.” John paused as the penny finally dropped. “H-how old is she?” he asked me in a choked voice.

Always one to answer for herself, Jamie said suspiciously, “In November I will be five years old. Though I don’t see what business it is of yours.”

John nodded, and I could see his focus turn inwards as he mentally counted backwards. Then he closed his eyes as if in pain, and said, “So – so sh-sh-she’s m-”

“Yes, John,” I said, hurrying to cut him off before he finished the question.

“I mean, I’m – I’m her –“

“Yes, John,” I cut him off again. There was no way that I would let Jamie discover that this relative stranger – whom she had no reason to like or trust – was her father. At least not yet. Not without considerable preparation beforehand. “Precisely that.”

“Oh, Sherlock,” he said, and I was surprised to hear his voice wobble. “How could you – Why didn’t you tell me?”

My mouth dropped open in shock and outrage. I turned to my daughter and said, “Earmuffs, Jamie.”

“But Mummy!” she cried indignantly. “I want to hear you deduce the man!”

“Earmuffs, Jamie,” I said again. “Please.”

She huffed an aggrieved sigh (so much like Mycroft’s) and obediently put her hands over her ears. I returned my gaze to John, who blinked in surprise when he saw how angry I was.
“Why didn’t I tell you, John? Believe me, I tried! I must have texted you a dozen times when I first figured out I was up the duff. And what was your response? A single text saying that you and I shouldn’t see each other anymore! As far as I’m concerned, with that one message you gave up any right you might have had to be kept informed about any children you might have fathered with me!” To my dismay, I could feel tears building behind my eyes. What was it about this one ordinary little alpha that he could reduce me to tears so easily? And why did I keep letting him?

“Sherlock, please. I – I…. That summer, 2014, was such a bad – “

“I had a miscarriage because of you!” I hissed cruelly. “That message made me feel so – so lost and alone, I had a miscarriage.”

“But – “ John started, looking at Jamie.

“Jamie was the only survivor. I had to be put on bed rest for the duration of my pregnancy. And in the end her placenta detached anyway. It almost killed the pair of us.” I noticed with some satisfaction how miserable John looked. There were tears in his eyes too.

“Oh, Sherlock. I didn’t know! I swear I didn’t know!” he rubbed his hands through his scruffy grey hair. God, it had gotten so grey in the past five years!

“How could you not know?” I roared. Jamie looked at me worriedly, and stomped her foot in frustration that she was not allowed to listen in on the conservation. So I continued in a calmer voice. “How could you not know, John? There was a front-page article about my pregnancy in that tabloid you read on the Tube. Everybody knew after that!”

“But I didn’t see that, Sherl, I swear! That was such a – a bizarre summer. We moved to Cardiff and – “

“So it was Cardiff after all, was it? By the way, thanks for telling me that you were leaving,” I growled sarcastically. “We were best friends once, and you didn’t even send me an e-mail!”

“Send you an e-mail? After what you told Mary?” John shouted in reply.

That caught me wrongfooted. I couldn’t recall communicating with Mary at all that summer. “What am I meant to have told Mary?”

“That you didn’t want anything to do with our family anymore. That the baby and Mary and I were having would only distract me from helping you in your investigations, and that it would only be a source of vulnerability for me.” John stopped when he saw my look of confusion. “Do – do you mean that you never said that?”

“No, John. Never. I’d never say that…. I’d never even think that.”

John heaved an angry sigh and hung his head. “So that was a lie too?” he muttered. “God, Mary, what a web you’ve weaved!”

“A lie too? John, what are you talking about?”

“It’s Mary. She – she lied to me… probably for a long time. And then she disappeared with my daughter.”

“Can I help, John?” I asked with concern, my anger with John having entirely dissipated as it became clear that his absence from Jamie’s and my lives hadn’t been voluntary.
“If anyone can, I think it’s you. Oh, thank god I ran into you today, Sherl!”

Unable to resist helping my injured little army doctor, I said, “Let’s go for a coffee, and you can tell me what’s happened.”

*

We settled on the Starbucks at Paternoster Square. Jamie had a chocolate milk; John had a latte, and I had a regular coffee – black, two sugars. While Jamie normally had no problem sitting in her own chair, on that afternoon she insisted on sitting in my lap, where she could continue to glare mistrustfully at John. Her little pout was identical to the angry frowns that John had levelled in my direction on any number of occasions during our time together. I could almost laugh at the irony of it.

For his part, John tried to break the ice between my daughter and himself by giving her a winning smiling and saying, “Jamie Mycroft, eh? So you’re partly named for your uncle? But what about Jamie? Is that a family name too?”

In response, Jamie steepled her long, delicate fingers beneath her pointed chin, and narrowed her eyes at John. “You slept on a park bench last night. I can tell from the pattern of creases on the arm of your coat. And you used a newspaper as a blanket. There are still ink smudges on your cheek and ear.”

John huffed – half amusedly, half sadly – and said to me, “I can see that she inherited your charm and tact, Sherlock.”

“And her father’s protectiveness of me,” I murmured. John nodded in understanding, and Jamie looked back and forth between us in frustrated confusion. She could tell that she had missed something, but she didn’t know what. “Why don’t you tell me what happened between you and Mary, John? Start from the beginning.”

“Well, trouble is,” John said as he thoughtfully sipped at his latte. I couldn’t help but notice how the foam caught in his overgrown whiskers. Adorable. “Trouble is, I don’t know quite when the beginning is. I mean, I don’t know when the lies started.”

“What was your first indication that something was amiss, John?”

“Right after the wedding, Mary started acting completely paranoid. You know, checking the street before leaving the house, never walking home the same way twice, checking under the car before starting it up, and never answering the phone. Instead she’d always let it go to voice mail, and then she’d call the person back.” I recalled that John had mentioned that Mary had been acting unusually in the text he sent me after I got pregnant.

“At first I thought that Mary might have guessed that you and I had –”

“I see,” I said, cutting him off. No need for Jamie learn of our hook-up just then.

“And then, later in the summer she’d disappear all night with no explanation. Once for two whole days. I thought she might be having an affair of her own – you know, maybe out of revenge – so I didn’t push her too much on it.” John shrugged and finished his latte. The speed with which he had consumed it indicated to me that he was probably quite dehydrated.

“Then out of nowhere at the end of August she announced that she wanted us to move away from London. Said she wanted a fresh start and a bigger house for the baby. By then it was pretty obvious, even to me, that something was terribly wrong. I asked her – begged her! – to tell me what was going on so that I could help her. I even suggested that she and I talk to you. I said that if she had a
problem, we could trust you to help us. But that’s when she said that you had told her that you didn’t want anything to do with us anymore.”

“John, you have to know,” I said fervently. “I’d never say that. I’d always be there for me if you needed me, no matter what had happened between us.” I reached out and patted his hand in what I hoped was a comforting gesture, but probably came off as terribly awkward.

“I know,” he smiled sadly, placing his own hand on top of mine. “I mean, I know that now. But that summer… I didn’t know what to believe.” He cleared his throat and continued, “Anyway, within a week, I had quit the practice and put the house on the market – even before we knew where we were moving. At first we talked about Edinburgh, then it was Birmingham, then Liverpool. Mary just couldn’t seem to settle on a place. Finally, we decided that we’d put our stuff in storage and go on vacation to France for a few weeks while we settled on a place. At first I was totally against it – Mary was due to give birth in November, and there was no way I’d risk having my baby born a Frenchman!” John laughed a bit in spite of himself.

“But Mary insisted. She said, over and over again, ‘John, if you love me, you’ll do this for me. And you won’t ask any more questions.’ So how could I argue with that? Anyway, we ended up travelling all over France, and Spain, and even Portugal. We returned to England at the end of October – just a week before Violet was born. While we were away we settled on moving to Cardiff. It was just far enough away from London for Mary’s tastes.”

Here John gave a miserable sigh, and began to pick apart his paper cup, his destructiveness betraying his inner anguish. “At first Cardiff was okay. I mean, we had the baby, and Mary seemed happy enough over Christmas. But then she started up with the paranoia again. At first I thought it was post-partum depression – you know how betas are prone to that sort of thing, right? – but then she disappeared for a week. Just up and left me and Vi with no warning or explanation. Of course I was beside myself. I called the police in Wales. And I thought about calling you, Sherl, I really did.” His eyes were full of tears as he looked up at me. “I just – I just, at the time, I didn’t know who I could trust!”

John cleared his throat and continued, “But then, she came back. Looking angry as a wet cat. Of course, I demanded that she tell me where she’d been, but she kept shtum. That was a bad time between us. Mary stayed inside the house all the time. Wouldn’t go near the windows, wouldn’t answer the phone. She even told me to tell people that I was a widower. Even now I can’t figure out why she’d want me to do that. To somehow relieve her guilt over her ongoing affair? Who knows?”

John scratched at his beard, “She became a virtual shut-in then. Like that Howard Hughes guy. I begged her to see a therapist, but she wouldn’t leave the house. I was at my wit’s end, and it was starting to affect little Violet. And then, out of nowhere, just before Christmas, they disappeared.”

“Who disappeared?” I asked.

“Mary and Violet. I came home from work one evening, and they were gone. Nothing missing, as far as I could tell. Their passports were still in my sock drawer, as was this.” Her fished a crumpled post-it note out of his trouser pocket.

I flattened it out, and turned it around so that I could read it.

“If you love me, you won’t call the police,” Jamie read. “Hmph. That’s bad advice. You should always call the police if you’re in trouble,” she instructed John with a sanctimonious nod of her head. “It’s their job to help people.”

“Well, I didn’t,” sighed John. “Even though I’m not sure she left the note there when they
disappeared. Seeing as how odd she had been behaving, it’s possible that she could have put the note in my drawer any time in those last few months.”

“And that was the only sign you had that their disappearance was voluntary?” I asked John.

“Yeah,” he sniffled, stuffing the note back in his pocket. “Why? Do you think it was an abduction, Sherlock?”

“I’m not sure what I think yet,” I said, steepling my fingers beneath my chin. “Finish your story, John.”

“Well, that’s pretty much the end. I’ve never received a ransom note or anything like that. Of course I’ve looked and looked for them. All over England. It – it consumed me. I took a leave of absence from my job to try and find them. And when I didn’t go back to Cardiff, the clinic fired me. But I didn’t care. Then last year I got behind on my mortgage payments, so I started living in my car. What cash I still had, I used to pay for petrol so that I could go from town to town, looking in malls, and hospitals, and parks for any sign of them. Then two weeks ago, my car got towed because I forgot to renew the registration, and I don’t have the money to get it out of the impound lot. So I’ve been living rough since then. And when I saw Jamie, she – she looked so much like Violet. A bit older, of course, but Violet would look older now too….” John’s voice trailed off, and he hid his face in his ink-stained hands. Jamie and I shared a worried look as he let out a broken sob. “Jesus! Jesus, god, I’ve mucked it all up! And now here you are, Sherlock!” John gestured emphatically at me. “As large as life and with a daughter of your own! And I’ve missed out on all that too!”

“It’s alright, John” I murmured, a small part of me surprised at how quick I was to forgive him. “You were… preoccupied.”

“It’s not all right!” he shouted. “God, it must have been so hard for you, raising a baby as a single omega mum. It must have been just awful dealing with… everything on your own!”

I frowned at John’s presumption that, in his absence, my life with Jamie had been nothing but abject misery. As ever, however, my daughter rushed to my defence: “Excuse me, Mr. Watson,” she said with a haughty glower she could have only learned from Mycroft. “Mummy and I are very happy together. He has good bone density,” she said pointing at me with her thumb. “And I can play Twinkle Twinkle on my violin. Plus I already know my nine times table. We do just fine, thank you very much!” She ended her heated tirade by crossing her arms across her chest and fixing John with an indignant scowl.

John stared at her for several seconds, before bursting into laughter. Not a wry, cynical laugh, but the merry, good-hearted giggle I remembered so fondly from our time together. “God, she’s a pistol, isn’t she? Twinkle twinkle indeed!”

I kissed Jamie’s cheek fondly, though she continued to stare daggers at John. “Sometimes a hard nut to crack, but I wouldn’t change her for the world. But, you’re right that it’s a shame that you didn’t get in touch sooner, John.”

“Oh yeah?” John said, using a paper napkin to wipe away tears of both sadness and glee from his overgrown beard.

“Mm-hmm. Not because Jamie and I were languishing in your absence – as you’ve heard, I have good bone density, and she can play Twinkle Twinkle –“

“And I know my nine times table!” Jamie interrupted me.
“And she knows her nine times tables. But rather because I’m starting to think I can help you find your wife and daughter, John.”

“What?” he asked in astonishment. “You do? I mean, you can?”

“I think so. In fact, I’m surprised the explanation didn’t occur to me sooner. I’ll have to check something on my brother’s computer. Maybe I can do that tomorrow….” I murmured thoughtfully.

“Tomorrow? Just like that? Jesus, you’re a marvel, Sherlock!”

“I know,” I smiled smugly, though John’s admiration warmed my compliment starved soul to its very core. “But first you need to come with me.” I set Jamie on her feet, and stood up myself.

“Okay? Where?” John stood up, once again assuming his role as my sidekick and helpmate with no hesitation whatsoever.

“Back to Baker Street, of course. You need a shave and a shower, Doctor Watson. Your smell is an affront to my delicate omega nose.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it took me so long to update! I got sick while I was away, and it really knocked the stuffing out of me. The internet tells me that it might be bronchitis, but I'll have a doctor confirm that.

Did any of you guess what had happened to John? And what do you think that Mary's up to?

Thanks to you all for sticking with my story! Forty chapters, already! When I started, I thought it would be sixteen chapters! Holy crow, was I wrong!
As was her habit, Jamie threw open the door of the taxi as soon as it slowed down at 221 Baker Street, then bounded over the pavement and through the front door before I could even fish my wallet out of my pocket. (There was no question of asking John to pay.)

“Jamie, put the kettle on,” I called after her as she thundered up the stairs. “I expect that Dr. Watson is parched.”

John closed the front door behind us and paused to take a deep breath and a wistful look around. “It still smells the same. Like a mixture of grapefruit and lemons, and violets and cherry blossoms.”

“That’s my scent and Mrs. Hudson’s.”

“To me it’s the smell of home,” John sighed. His attention was suddenly diverted by the sound of shuffling steps. Mrs. Hudson slowly opened her kitchen door and limped out, leaning heavily on a cane.

“That girl,” she muttered. “I’ve warned her and warned her about running up and down those steps….”

“Why, speak of the devil! Hullo, Mrs. Hudson!” John exclaimed cheerily.

Mrs. Hudson turned slowly towards us and peered closely at John, who grinned back at her (though I could tell he was trying to conceal his concern for how much she had aged since they had last seen each other.) Finally, her face split into a wide grin and she cried, “John Watson, as I live and breathe! I could hardly recognize you under that beard! You need to shave it off; it ages you so!”

“Haven’t had time…” John muttered self-consciously.

Mrs. Hudson continued her scrutiny, however. “‘And that hair! Heavens, it’s gone so grey, hasn’t it? Remember what a lovely shade of blonde it used to be, Sherlock? It needs cutting too. If you want, I’ll give it a trim myself. Always did my Frank’s. I wish Sherlock would let me do his. He keeps it too long and fluffy. He’s in his forties and he looks like an omega teenager.”

“Erm, maybe tomorrow,” John said. “I see you’re using a cane now, Mrs. H. Is your hip still acting up?”

“It’s these brittle old omega bones. I can hardly get up the stairs anymore,” Mrs. Hudson complained. “And you’re one to talk, John. Why are you using your old cane again? I thought that Sherlock proved that your limp was all in your head.”

“It was. I mean it is. Psychosomatic, that is. But it still comes back when I’m, emm…”

Mrs. Hudson lost patience with John’s waffling. She turned to me and said, “And look at you, smiling like a Cheshire cat ‘cause your John has finally come home to you.”

“Huh? Oh, no, Mrs. Hudson, you’ve got the wrong end of the stick –“ I started.

However Mrs. Hudson wasn’t listening. (I sometimes think either her hearing or her mind is going.)
“It’s like I always told you,” she continued. “‘If you love something, set it free –’”

“No, it’s not like that, Mrs. Hudson,” John tried to interrupt her. “Sherlock is helping me –”

“‘ – And if it comes back, it’s yours to keep.’”

I raised my voice a bit so that Mrs. Hudson could hear me. “John’s still married, Mrs. Hudson. He’s just staying here while I help him find his wife and daughter.”

“‘And if it doesn’t, it wasn’t yours to begin with,’” she concluded. “‘Not that that latter bit is relevant anymore. But what about Jamie, does she know that John is –’”

“Shhh!” I hissed at Mrs. Hudson. “She doesn’t, and I’d like to keep it that way for now.”

“Well, my lips are sealed,” Mrs. Hudson shrugged. “But that girl is a clever one. Don’t think you can keep it a secret for long.”

“I know,” I sighed. “I just want her to warm to John a bit before we drop that bomb. Actually, Mrs. Hudson, I’m more concerned about Mycroft’s reaction to John’s being here. If you speak to him, could you please not mention that John is back?”

Mrs. Hudson frowned. “I’d’ve thought that you’d have learned your lesson about the dangers of keeping secrets, Sherlock.”

I winced at that, and said, “Please? Just while John is staying here?”

Mrs. Hudson gave a reluctant sigh and muttered, “Fine, but I think it would be better if you just told Mycroft.”

I scoffed, “Mycroft despises John, Mrs. Hudson. You know that.”

“Pfff. It’s all in the way you tell him. Now you just have little Jamie bat her eyes at him and call him My-My, and he’ll melt like butter.”

John guffawed at that “My-My?”

“Don’t you laugh,” Mrs. Hudson scolded. “Jamie has her uncle wrapped around her little finger. It’s the sweetest thing I’ve ever seen. Now Coronation Street is about to start, so I’ll let you two get back to reacquainting yourselves with each other.” She gave us a naughty wink. “I’ll drop by to cut your hair tomorrow morning, John.”

We ascended the stairs to 221B. As we passed the threshold of the flat, I again noticed John pausing to gaze wistfully at the familiar surroundings. Well, familiar except for the toys and children’s books scattered everywhere.

Jamie was standing on the arm of my chair (which had long since become her chair) retrieving a picture book from the shelf above. She hopped down and announced, “Kettle’s just boiled. I’m going to brush my teeth and go to bed.” She picked up her purple blankie from the chair seat, trotted over to me, and hugged my legs. “I love you, Mummy. You’re my favourite person. Good night.” I bent to kiss the top of her head, and she trotted towards the stairs to her room.

John cleared his throat and called after her, “Good night, Jamie. It was nice to meet you.”

Jamie paused on the stairs, and turned around to look at John appraisingly for a long moment. Then, without a word, she fled upstairs to her room.
“Ahem. Don’t worry about that, John. Sometimes it takes her a while to warm up to strangers.”

“Right, of course. She’s that age,” John murmured, though I could tell he was hurt.

“Well, how about that tea?” I suggested, turning towards the kitchen.

“Got anything stronger?” John asked tiredly.

“Ermmm, maybe,” I replied, rummaging through our perpetually messy cupboards. Finally, behind a half-empty box of Weetabix (both Jamie and I loathe Weetabix) I found a dusty bottle of scotch whisky. It suddenly occurred to me that the last time anyone had opened this bottle was the night of John’s stag party, when I had thought that I was about to lose John to Mary forever. And yet, here he was, again sitting in his old red chair (which had long since become my chair) while we prepared for bed. What a funny old world, I thought as I poured John a large tumbler of whisky.

“Here’s your drink,” I said to John. “I’ll go find you some sheets and pillows for the sofa.”

I rifled through the spare linens I kept in a chest in my room until I came up with a set that would fit on the sofa, along with a pillow and some extra towels.

“I hope these are okay,” I said, stretching the fitted flannel sheet over the sofa cushions. “They’re Jamie’s. She loves My Little Pony, especially Rainbow Dash. She’s the blue pegasus with the rainbow hair, you know. So for Christmas, Lestrade and Mycroft ordered her these online and – “ I paused when I noticed John standing right behind me with a sad, wistful smile on his face. “What?”

“Nothing. It’s just seeing you like this… and her… and the sheets…. John cleared his throat. I noticed that he had already finished his drink. “You’re a good mum, Sherl. I guess that shouldn’t come as a surprise though.” He cleared his throat again. Always a sign of emotional turmoil in my John.

I couldn’t think of a reply, so I returned to my task. When I finished stuffing the pillow into a sham that read “Twenty percent cooler in ten seconds flat!” I turned to John and said, “Right. That’s it. I’ll let you get into the shower now. There’s an electric razor in the medicine chest; please feel free to use it. And if you want, you can just drop your clothes in the hallway. I’ll throw them in the wash before bed, and they’ll be clean by morning. Oh, I suppose I’d better find you some pyjamas! No sense in traumatizing Jamie if she wakes up in the middle of the night, which she sometimes does.” I paused in my chatter to dash down the hall to retrieve a spare set of pj’s and a dressing gown for John. Goodness, what was I doing rabbiting on and on about linens and pyjamas? Clearly, I was nervous about having John back, however temporarily.

When I returned to the sitting room, I noticed that John had retreated to the kitchen where he was pouring himself another large glass of whisky. I cleared my throat to attract his attention. When he looked up at me, he seemed very weary, and very sad. I couldn’t help thinking of Jamie’s pointed deduction that no one cared for John.

“Well, I think that’s everything,” I gave him a reassuring smile. “Feel free to use the Bvlgari body wash in there. It works as shampoo too. And if you need anything else, well, make yourself at home.”

“I will. Thanks Sherl.” John’s voice was thick with emotion. “I – I don’t know why you’re being so good to me when I left you alone for so long….”

Ah. Well, truth was that I didn’t understand myself why I was so quick to forgive John. After a long pause I said, “Good night, John. I’m glad you’re here.”
I was awoken by the feeling of the mattress dipping as someone sat down next to me. This did not disturb me because Jamie frequently crawled into bed with me. I shifted over a bit, so that she would have room to curl up in my arms. To my surprise, however, I felt my duvet being flipped away from my body. Then a warm hand slid into my pyjama bottoms and gently grasped my cock.

“No!” I squawked, kicking away towards the far side of the bed. I flung my hand out in search of my bedside lamp. Flicking it on, I saw John sitting on the edge of my bed. He looked (and smelled) much cleaner, but his hair and beard were still overgrown and unruly, and his eyes were red – from tears or drinking, I couldn’t tell.

“John?” I whispered, very conscious of my daughter sleeping just above our heads. “What are you doing?”

“S-sorry, Sherl,” he whispered back. “I forgot that you m-might not like that. I j-just wanted to talk to you for a minute.” His breath would seem to indicate that the whisky was responsible for his reddened eyes, and yet he sounded quite overwrought with emotion as well.


John shifted closer and rested his hand on my knee. “I wanted to tell you how g-grateful I am that you’re letting me back in your life, and – and that you’re going to help me find my family. I know that you have nothing to gain from assisting me like that.”

“It’s fine, John.”

“And – and that I’m so glad that you never actually rejected me. God, you have no idea how m-much it hurt when Mary told me that. Nearly broke my heart, I think.” John’s hand moved up my thigh.

“I’d never, John. You know that.”

John turned so that he was kneeling on the bed. He slid his hand under my shirt and over my ribs. “God, I’ve missed you so much.” He pushed my shirt up and bent down to kiss my belly.

“John?” I squeaked, rather surprised at the turn of events.

I allowed John to tug my t-shirt over my head. He ran his strong, calloused palms up and down my sides, and bent to take a nipple in his mouth. Breastfeeding had left my nipples far more tender and sensitive than they had been before, and I gasped out loud.

“Your body’s changed,” John murmured, licking my other nipple. “You’ve got stretch marks down here.” John moved down to run his tongue over the pinky-purple marks on my lower belly.

“I know,” I whispered, self-consciously moving my hand to cover my tummy.


“John,” I gasped beseechingly.

“And what’s this?” he said, rubbing his thumb over a thick white scar a few inches below my navel.

“That’s from my c-section,” I whispered, watching for John’s reaction.
He blinked and murmured, “Oh. Right. Because you both almost died in childbirth.” He looked up at my eyes and sighed guiltily, “I’m so sorry, Sherlock. I’m so sorry I wasn’t there. Please forgive me.”

“It’s – it’s fine,” I whispered.

“It’s not,” he said, dipping his head to kiss the scar. “But I’m going to make it up to you. Starting now.” John crawled further up my body, and took my cheek in his strong palm. He opened his mouth, tilted his head to the side, and pressed a wet, open-mouthed kiss to my lips. I gagged at the taste of whisky, and pushed John off of me. “J-John!” I squawked as quietly as I could. “You don’t have to do this!”

My resistance suddenly dissolved, however, as I felt John’s warm, wet mouth envelop my flaccid cock. “John!” I squeaked in surprise. I covered my mouth with my hand so that Jamie wouldn’t hear.

John’s flicking tongue and expert use of suction soon drew my little prick to a hard, throbbing erection. As I felt John dip two fingers into my vagina, and begin to stroke its walls, I had to bite my hand to stop myself from groaning out loud. God, it had been so long since I had been with anyone!

I felt my knees draw up so that my legs were holding John’s head and shoulders in place while he continued to use his mouth and fingers to fuck me. I used one hand to stroke my sensitive nipples, and the other to continue to muffle my moans and whimpers. In far too short a time, my body tensed then shuddered all over in a massive, intensely satisfying orgasm.

As I lay drifting on an endorphin high, I felt John move up my body again. He turned my unresisting head to the side and began licking and nibbling at my neck. A particularly sharp nip startled me from my drowsy afterglow. “John? What are you doing?” I hissed.

“Just this,” he said, lapping and sniffing at my neck. “You want this, don’t you? You’ve always wanted this.” It suddenly became clear that John meant to bite my scent gland, thereby marking me as his mate.

“John, no!” I shoved him off of me and onto the floor. “Are you crazy? You’re a married alpha!”

John sheepishly climbed back onto the bed and hung his head in shame. “I’m sorry, Sherlock,” he said to the floor, evidently because he couldn’t look me in the eye. “I – I don’t know what I was thinking.” John clutched at his head and began to weep. “It’s just…. I’ve been alone for so long!”

I found my t-shirt and pulled it over my head while John continued to whimper and sniffle. Finally I said, “Look, it’s alright. I know that you wouldn’t try to force that on me if you were thinking clearly.”

“Fucking hell,” John’s voice was wobbly and miserable. “That was a shitty thing for me to pull with you. What with your past and all. And after you took me in tonight. Please understand, Sherl, I’ve just been so, so lonely. And I feel like there’s nobody I can trust. It’s no excuse, I realize, but I want you to understand – ”

“And I do,” I interrupted his drunken, miserable rambling. “Look, is there something I can do, you know, for you? To help you sleep tonight? After all, you… took care of me. I’d be happy to return the favour, as it were….” (God, is there an elegant way to offer to give someone head?)

John evidently understood what I was implying because he looked down at his crotch. However, instead of lying back to take me up on my offer, he blushed furiously and stood up. “N-no, that’s alright. I’ll – I’ll just head back to the couch.”

“Are you sure?” I said, reaching towards his waistband. I had never heard of an alpha turning down
an omega’s offer of a blow job.

John shoved my hand away and snapped, “Look. You don’t have to—“ Seeing my hurt and confused expression he sighed and hurriedly explained. “It’s not that I don’t want to, but I can’t—I mean it can’t—it doesn’t work, alright?” John’s blush had turned an ugly shade of purple, and he stared at me defiantly.

“Oh,” I said. “How long has this been going on?”

“I don’t know. A while now,” he growled. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I’ve been humiliated enough for one night. I’m going back to the sitting room”.

“John, wait,” I whispered after him.

Just then, there was a voice from upstairs, “Mummy! I heard a sound! Is everything alright?”

I sighed and reached for my dressing gown. “Yes, everything’s fine, lovely!” I replied. “Do you need a glass of water?”

My conversation with John would have to wait.

Chapter End Notes

Poor John's more messed up than we thought! What can Sherlock do to help him?

Thank you all for your kind comments, your kudos, and most of all for reading!
The next morning I was awoken by the smell of fresh brewing coffee and a metallic buzzing sound – both coming from the kitchen. I slipped on my dressing gown and slippers and shuffled out of my bedroom to see what was going on.

I was greeted by the sight of Mrs. Hudson wielding hair clippers and gazing thoughtfully at John, who himself was sitting on a kitchen chair with a towel clothespinned around his shoulders. His full beard had been shaved off, and his hair was again trimmed in a short, military style. Were it not for his lingering expression of worry and despair, he would look just like the same old John. He smiled when I entered the kitchen, though he couldn’t quite make eye contact with me.

“It needs to be shorter in the back,” said Jamie, who was standing on another kitchen chair, watching the process intently. “More like Uncle Greg’s.”

“Ah, of course,” Mrs. Hudson murmured, bringing the clippers to John’s head again.

I poured myself some coffee, added plenty of sugar, and sat down at the table.

“What are we doing today, Mummy?” Jamie asked, climbing into my lap. I noticed that in John’s presence she was very possessive of me.

“I’m going to have a shower, and then we have to go to My-My’s office for a bit,” I answered.

“What for?” Jamie asked as she played with the fingers of my left hand, while I held my coffee cup with my right.

“I need to look up something for Dr. Watson on My-My’s computer.”

“And Mycroft won’t have a problem with you helping me?” John asked while Mrs. Hudson made sure his sideburns were even.

“Actually, I’m sure he will have a problem with it,” I sighed. “Which is why I need someone to create a diversion so that I can use his computer without his knowing. Don’t you worry about that though; I’m putting my best man on it.”

John chuckled in confusion. “You expect me to distract him? How would that work?”

Jamie hopped down from my lap and said to John, “Mummy means me. When he says ‘I’m putting my best man on it,’ he means me.”

“Oh.” Though John said it softly, I could still hear the disappointment in his voice.

*  

“My-My!” Jamie exclaimed as we let ourselves into his office in the sub-basement of the Home Office building on Marsham Street.

Mycroft hung up on whoever he had been speaking with, and bounced over to pick up Jamie in a tight hug. “Oh, hello! What a lovely surprise! What are you doing here?” he asked her while completely ignoring me.
“I wanted to take you for a coffee and to see the paintings of the Pine Ministers.” Jamie batted her eyes fetchingly.

“What a fine idea!” Mycroft smiled. “And what about your mummy? Does he have to come with us?”

“Don’t mind me; I’ll just check my e-mail.” I grinned from behind Mycroft’s desk.

“You don’t know the password to my computer,” Mycroft countered.

“Is it still GLplusMHequalsTL4EVA?” I asked.

“It won’t be after today,” Mycroft grumbled.

“Come on, My-My!” Jamie said, tugging on Mycroft’s hand. “I want to see the painting of the scary witch. She’s my favourite!”

“Really? I’ve always preferred Lord Palmerston to Thatcher.” Mycroft allowed my daughter to escort him down the hallway. Behind his back, she gave me a wink, to which I responded with a furtive thumbs-up.

As soon as they were gone I worked quickly. John had interpreted Mary’s failure to take their passports with her when she and Violet had disappeared as evidence that the pair were still in the United Kingdom, but I rather suspected that it meant that Mary and Violet had left the country under different names, using different passports. I logged into the Passport Registry on the internal Home Office website, and began to enter search parameters. I knew that I was looking for passports issued at the same time to a mother and young daughter, and that the passports would have been applied for after Violet’s birth in November 2014, but before their disappearance in December 2015. I reasoned that no father would be listed on the baby’s passport, in order to avoid awkward questions by vigilant UKBA agents about why the father wasn’t travelling with the family. I entered Mary’s approximate height, and Violet’s eye colour as blue. (Mary could change the colour of her own eyes using contacts, but it was unlikely that she could do the same for a young child.) I clicked on ‘Execute Search,’ and waited for the results.

I was delighted to see that my search came up with forty-three results, complete with small, blurry thumbnail pictures. I deleted the files with pictures that bore no resemblance to Mary, and printed out the ones that might be them. This left me with seventeen possible candidates. Now all I had to do was find out where each of these mother and daughter pairs were. In all likelihood, one was bound to be Mary and Violet Watson.

As I was gathering up my printouts, I heard a sad whimpering in the hallway. I quickly logged out of the Passport Registry, and stuffed the papers down the back of my trousers. Just as I was seating myself in one of Mycroft’s guest chairs – a look of innocent curiosity carefully affixed to my face – the door to his office opened. A suited security officer led my daughter in by the hand, while she bawled wretchedly.

“Jamie!” I gasped. “What’s the matter? Where’s Mycroft?”

Jamie’s only response was another hard sob.

The security officer cleared his throat and said to me, “Mr. Holmes asked me to return his niece to you. He said that he had urgent business to take care of.”

“What sort of business?” I asked.
“He didn’t say,” the security officer shrugged. “Though I think it’s off-site; I heard him call for his car.”

“Mummy, I’m so sorry!” Jamie’s voice was wobbly and miserable. “I ruined your plan!”

“No, no, you didn’t,” I reassured her. “See? I got all the information I needed.” I showed her the printouts. “You did a great job!”

“No, I didn’t!” she sobbed again. “My-My figured it out!”

“What do you mean?” I asked as my stomach flipped uncomfortably.

“It’s the hair! My-My asked where it came from, and I couldn’t think of a lie!”

“Wh-what hair?” I asked in a choked voice.

“This hair!” Jamie pointed to the sleeve of her jumper, which was liberally sprinkled with short, grey hairs. Evidently Jamie had gotten too close to John’s morning haircut. And from her evasiveness about the source of the hairs, Mycroft must have surmised that we were concealing a visitor from him.

“John!” I gasped, grabbing Jamie by the hand and dragging her to the taxi stand. Luckily, the chivalrous alphas in the Home Office taxi queue were kind enough to allow a frantic omega mother and his blubbery daughter to cut ahead of them, and within a few seconds we were speeding back to Baker Street.

Mycroft’s car was double-parked outside number 221, and his chauffeur was trying to direct traffic around the obstruction. I tossed a few bills at the taxi driver, and dragged Jamie – who was still weeping disconsolately – through the front door. Above our heads, I heard growling alpha voices followed by a loud thud.

“Sherlock!” Mrs. Hudson called after us, as we galloped up the stairs. “What’s happening upstairs?”

“Mycroft knows about John!” I replied. “We might need an ambulance!”

I skidded to a halt just inside the sitting room door. Mycroft and John were grappling with each other on the sitting room rug. Mycroft was using his weight to press John’s face into the carpet, while John twisted and kicked frantically underneath him. Mycroft drew back his fist and gave John an inexpert but still solid punch to the kidneys. John groaned and tried to flip over, only to receive a hard blow to his ribs.

“Mycroft!” I shouted. “Leave him alone! It’s not what you think!”

Mycroft turned his furious gaze at me and bellowed in his loudest alpha voice, “You! You stupid little omega!” He sounded like a ferocious, charging bull. “How dare you bring him back here! Now sit down and shut up!”

To my horror, I felt tears spring to my eyes and my chin dip to my chest. Damned omega biology! I could no more resist a direct order from my family alpha than I could resist gravity. My knees buckled, and I sat down heavily on the sofa, which was still made up with Jamie’s My Little Pony sheets. “Pleathe, My!” I begged (it was really the only thing I could do to help poor John). “Pleathe d-don’t hurt him!”

“I don’t know why you’re still defending him, Sherlock! After everything he’s done to you!”

Mycroft shifted so that his knee was in John’s back. He grinned maniacally when John gasped in
“Mycroft, pleathe!” I sobbed helplessly. “Pleathe don’t!”

Mycroft grabbed a handful of John’s hair and twisted his head to the side. He then drew back his closed fist, preparing to punch John in the face. I saw John squeeze his eye shut and stiffen in preparation for the blow.

Mycroft’s assault was interrupted however, by a plaintive wailing coming from the sitting room door. It was Jamie, sobbing her little heart out. “My-My, stop! Don’t kill him! Please!”

Like a popped water balloon, all of the fight drained out of Mycroft. He let go of John’s hair and scrambled to his feet. Abandoned by his attacker, John groaned and rolled himself into a protective ball by the desk.

“No, no, lovey!” Mycroft said to Jamie in his softest, gentlest voice. “I wasn’t going to kill Dr. Watson. I was only going to… hurt him. And only a little!” He knelt in front of Jamie, and opened his arms wide.

Jamie, however, refused to hug him. “Why?” she bawled. “Why do you want to hurt Dr. Watson?”

Mycroft struggled to explain the situation in terms a child could understand. “Because - because he was not nice to your mummy, and I can’t forgive him for that,” Mycroft shrugged. “I’m sorry I frightened you, but I don’t think that Dr. Watson should be welcome here. For your poor stupid mummy’s sake.”

Jamie sniffled and whimpered, “And what about my sake?”

Mycroft shifted on his knees, “What do you mean?”

“I mean Dr. Watson’s my daddy, right?” Jamie rubbed her nose on her sleeve. “Wouldn’t it be nice if I could get to know him?”

“Wha – Who? Who told you that?” Mycroft choked. “Did you tell her that?” he said to me in an angry voice.

I shook my head, still too overwhelmed with submissive hormones to speak clearly.

“Did you?” Mycroft said to John, who was currently lying on his side clutching his stomach.

“No,” John groaned. “I didn’t say a word.”

“You did, My-My!” Jamie piped up. “You and Uncle Greg.”

“Wha? No, I – “ Mycroft started to deny it, though I could see a guilty blush forming on his freckled cheeks.

“Yes, you did. I’ve heard the two of you talking about my daddy lots of times. You called him John.”

“But, there are lots of people named John, Jamie. How did you know it was this one?” Mycroft gestured to John, who was struggling to sit up against Jamie’s arm chair.

“Because you made fun of him for being short, and you said he looked like a hedgehog,” Jamie said guilelessly.
“Oh, ta very much for that, Mycroft!” John coughed. “I don’t know what hurts more: being suckerpunched in the gut or being called a hedgehog!”

“Oh. Erm… Sorry, about that, John,” Mycroft mumbled sheepishly.

Jamie stepped forward and threw her arms around Mycroft’s neck. “So can my daddy stay, My-My?” She blinked her lovely, deep blue eyes at him. “Just for a little while? So I can get to know him?”

“Well, I don’t know….” Mycroft mumbled, though I could see his resistance start to crumble. What kryptonite is to Superman, Jamie is to Mycroft.

“Please? For me?”

“Alright. For you, Jamie love,” he finally sighed.

Jamie giggled and squeezed Mycroft tight. “Thank you, My-My! You’re the best!”

“Yes, well,” Mycroft murmured, suddenly self-conscious about his devotion to Jamie. “I – I think I’ll be going now. Gregory and I have to meet with the caterer tonight.” He picked up his coat and umbrella from where he had dropped them by the door. “I’ll see you on Sunday for Jamie’s football match.”

I stood up and wiped my nose with my sleeve. “Thank you, Mycroft,” I said quietly.

“I didn’t do it for you!” he hissed waspishly. “I did it so that Jamie could get to know her father. If he ends up hurting you again, that’s your problem! But if he hurts Jamie, it’ll be the last mistake he ever makes!” Threat made, Mycroft turned and left.

Except for Jamie’s and my sniffles, there was silence in the flat for several seconds. Finally I said, “Come on, Jamie. Let’s clean up a bit.” I took her hand and led her to the kitchen. While I rinsed some tea towels in cool water, Jamie clambered onto the worktop next to the sink. I wrung out a tea towel and wiped off her tears. Jamie took the other one and dabbed at my own face.

“Are you alright?” I asked her in a quiet, soothing voice.

“Uh-huh,” she sniffled in a matter-of-fact way. “Are you?”

I was taken aback by my daughter’s rapid recovery from what had been a very emotional scene. “Are you sure you’re okay?” I persisted. “If you’re still upset, that’s perfectly alright.”

“I’m fine, Mummy!” She rolled her eyes. “And I wasn’t really upset.”

“No? What about all those tears? You were crying as much as Mummy.”

“I was just doing what Mrs. Hudson said,” Jamie shrugged nonchalantly.

“What do you mean?” I asked, arching an eyebrow.

“Yesterday. I overheard her speaking to you. She said that all I had to do was bat my eyes at My-My and he’d let Dr. Watson stay.”

“Ah. Clever girl.” I couldn’t help but smile (though I made a mental note to pay closer attention to the morality lessons Mrs. Hudson was teaching my daughter). “But are you sure that you want Dr. Watson here?” Jamie hadn’t been at all welcoming of John’s presence so far.
Jamie shrugged. “I guess so. I would like to get to know him better. But I don’t want to call him Daddy. Not yet, anyway.”

“Fair enough,” I replied. “But I thought that you didn’t like him.”

Jamie grinned shyly. “I like him better without the beard.”

“Me too,” I laughed. “Loads better!”

“Hey, I can hear what you two are saying about me, you know!” John muttered indignantly from the sitting room. “Bloody Holmeses.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh, that Jamie's as sneaky and manipulative (and tactless) as her mummy!

Thanks everybody for reading. If you haven't left a comment before now, why not do it today? I'd love to hear from you.
“See? We’re not late; everyone’s still stretching.”

“Uncle Greg said that we need to show up twenty minutes before kick-off.”

“Well, you’re the one who couldn’t find her jersey. Go and join your team; I’ll be standing with My-My.”

Jamie trotted off to the corner of the field where Lestrade was showing his team how to stretch their hams. He waved at me, and I waved back.

“You’re late,” Mycroft said as I joined him next to a cooler of ice water and orange slices.

“No, you’re just early.”

“Well, I do have a thing for the coach.” Mycroft’s eyes remained fixed on his fiance’s bottom as he stretched his quads. Lestrade’s short shorts seemed almost indecently revealing to me, but my brother appeared to like them.

“I need you to do me a favour,” I said to Mycroft as Jamie’s team rose to their feet and started to jog around the field.

“What else is new?”

“Starting Tuesday, can you take Jamie for a couple of weeks?”

Mycroft turned to me. “A couple of weeks? Why?”

“I have to go out of town. For a case.” I smiled and waved as the Hampstead team trotted past us. Jamie paused at the corner of the field to use her inhaler, then scrambled to catch up with her teammates.

“Liar,” said Mycroft. “I know for a fact that you haven’t taken a case since John returned. You’re going to find his wife, aren’t you?”

I shrugged. What was the point of denying it?

“And is John going with you?”

“No, he’s got an appointment with his Army psychiatrist. Plus he’s got to meet with the General Medical Council to talk about getting his license to practice reinstated.”

“And John’s choosing to do that instead of joining you in your search for his wife? I’m surprised.”

The team took up their positions on the field; Jamie was on left defence.

“Actually, John doesn’t know why I’m going away. I told him it was for a case. He’ll be staying at Baker Street if you need to get a hold of him though.”
“I can’t imagine why I would need to get a hold of him….”

The whistle blew, and the Hampstead team took possession of the ball.

“I thought that it might be nice if you and Jamie and Lestrade invited him for dinner once or twice. Depending on how long I’m gone.”

“Oh, did you?” Mycroft said in an annoyed tone of voice.

“It would be good for Jamie. She’s still not too sure about John.”

“It would seem that my niece is a better judge of character than her mother,” Mycroft remarked. “And why haven’t you asked John to take care of Jamie? He is the girl’s father, as you keep reminding me.”

“Well, like I said, Jamie’s still not too sure about John,” I admitted reluctantly. “And also, John’s not entirely well yet. I mean he occasionally falls into these bleak, depressed states, and it’s difficult for him to get out of it. That’s why he’s resuming his appointments with the psychiatrist…. Anyway, I thought that taking care of Jamie might be too much for him.”

“I see,” said Mycroft. “That sounds like a wise decision. And where will you be going to search for Mrs. Watson?”

“Canada,” I replied. Posing as a Home Office bureaucrat, I had telephoned all of the mother-daughter pairs that the Passport Registry search had found for me. All of the pairs save one were living straightforward, mundane lives in the United Kingdom. But that one remaining pair had proven impossible to get in touch with because, over the past three years, it had been skipping from country to country: France, Germany, Ireland, Hong Kong, Costa Rica, and now Canada. Never staying in one location for more than six months; never giving the same back story to their new friends and neighbours; and never leaving a valid forwarding address or phone number. It had to be Mary and Violet.

“Canada’s a big country, you know. Where specifically are you searching?”

“The last address I had for them was in the province of Manitoba. But that was eight months ago; they could have moved since then. That’s why I’m not sure how long it’ll take me to find them.”

“Ah,” said Mycroft. We paused our conversation to politely applaud a near goal by the Wandsworth team. “And has it occurred to you that Mary Watson might not want to be found? Especially by her erstwhile husband’s erstwhile lover?”

“I’m not entirely sure that Mary knows about John and I. He never told her about us,” I replied. “But, yes, I did notice that she’s gone to elaborate lengths to avoid being discovered.”

“Hmm. Far too elaborate for an unremarkable beta who’s simply walked out on her husband, Sherlock.”

“What do you mean, My?” I asked as one of the Wandsworth strikers started dribbling the ball down the field towards Jamie. She easily stole the ball and passed it to one of the Hampstead midfielders.

“Well done, Holmes! Well done, number five!” Mycroft shouted, though he knows very little about football. “What I mean is that you need to consider the possibility that Mary Watson is more than what she seems. Phoney passports? Constantly on the run? Seems to me like a professional spy or at the very least a member of an international crime syndicate.”
“That had occurred to me,” I replied, clapping as the Hampstead team scored a goal on Wandsworth. “But what’s she running from? And what’s her interest in John? Why did she lie to him, marry him, have his baby, and then disappear on him?”

Mycroft shrugged, “Perhaps you’ll get an answer to those questions when you find her.”

I cleared my throat. “If she is a professional, that means this could be a dangerous mission for me.”

Mycroft paused before replying, “Yes, I suppose it could be.”

“If – if I don’t come back, you’ll take care of Jamie for me?”

Mycroft looked at me searchingly for a second. “Of course, as Jamie’s family alpha, it would be both my duty and my pleasure. But can I ask you something?”

“What’s that?” I asked, watching a Wandsworth forward execute a graceless corner kick.

Mycroft turned to look me full in the eye. “You don’t even trust John to take care of your child, and yet, by your own admission, you’re putting your life at risk for him. Why would you do that? Do you really value your own life so little?”

“I… No, it’s just – “ I struggled to explain. “John misses his family so…” I finished lamely.

“So tell him where they are, and let him go find them!” Mycroft was starting to raise his voice. “You have a daughter to think about, for Christ’s sake! Why do you have to be the one to find them?”

Lestrade, who until this time had been watching the game near the halfway line, noticed Mycroft shouting at me and started jogging towards us.

“Because I’m a detective. I’m smarter so I’m more likely to find them,” I stammered. “As a friend I’m happy to do this favour for him.”

“Bullshit, Sherlock! Bullshit!” Mycroft snarled. “You’re doing it because, even after everything he’s done to do, you’re still in love with John Watson. And that’s the only thing that matters to you!”

“I – “ I tried to deny it, but I couldn’t. To my dismay I felt tears at the corners of my eyes. Damn Mycroft!

“And what happens if you do find Mary and Violet? Will you just bring them back to England with you so that John can live happily ever after?” Mycroft shouted. “What will happen to you then? Not to mention Jamie? Will they want her around? That little permanent reminder of John’s infidelity? Jesus, Sherlock, why don’t you think these things through?”

“Hey, what’s going on?” Lestrade suddenly appeared at Mycroft’s elbow. “The girls can hear you, you know.”

“It’s Sherlock,” Mycroft sneered. “He’s still in love with John Watson, so he’s going on a life-threatening mission to the wilds of Canada to find his missing wife and daughter for him!”

Lestrade gave me a pitying look. I looked away.

“Gregory, I’ve had enough of this.” Mycroft threw his hands up in exasperation. “Please tell my brother that he’s an idiot, and that if he’s going to moon about after an alpha who’s totally beneath him, we’re not going to support him anymore.”

Lestrade cleared his throat. “No,” he replied firmly.
‘What?’ Mycroft looked at his fiancé incredulously.

‘I said no,’ Lestrade said, half-turning to watch the progress of the game. ‘I love you, My, but you’re wrong on this one.’

‘Wh - ?’ Mycroft started, utterly at a loss for words. Lestrade rarely ever disagrees with him.

‘Sherlock and John have been through a lot together,’ Lestrade explained, still watching his players. ‘So of course he knows John differently from how you know him. And that’s why you don’t understand why Sherlock’s in love with John.’

‘That’s an understatement!’ Mycroft turned back to me. ‘Please enlighten us, Sherlock! How can you still be in love with the alpha who abandoned you while you were pregnant, hmm?’

I opened my mouth to attempt a reply, but Lestrade interrupted me. ‘Don’t you dare answer, Sherlock!’ he said resolutely. ‘You don’t owe an explanation to him or anyone!’ I shut my mouth, and looked at Lestrade in wonder: I had honestly not expected that he of all people would defend me from Mycroft’s derision.

‘But John’s –’ ‘Mycroft persisted.

‘Your objection to Sherlock’s association with John has been noted, Mycroft,’ Lestrade said pointedly. ‘Amply noted, I should think. Now you need to put a sock in it, and accept that this is what Sherlock wants.’

‘But he’s making a mistake!’ Mycroft groaned in frustration. ‘He’s acting like an idiot, and you’re condoning it!’

‘You have to let Sherlock make his own mistakes,’ Lestrade rested his hand on my brother’s shoulder. ‘And, yes, you still have to be there for him if he gets hurt. That’s the nature of family, My.’

Mycroft heaved an aggrieved sigh, crossed his arms, and turned away from us. If I didn’t know better, I’d say he was sulking. ‘Romantic tripe,’ he muttered crossly.

‘You know,’ Lestrade said to Mycroft’s back. ‘I once explained all this to your brother, and he understood right away. That’s why you don’t hear him objecting to you and me.’

Mycroft turned around at that. ‘Why on earth would Sherlock object to us? We’re perfect for each other,’ he said perplexedly.

‘Not everyone thinks so. As you well know,’ Lestrade said pointedly. I noticed a blush begin to grow on Mycroft’s cheeks. He looked away towards the playing field again, his expression now more sad than angry.

‘Who objects to your relationship?’ I asked quietly.

Mycroft answered, his gaze still fixed on the football match, ‘Just Mummy and Daddy. They – they’ve refused to attend the wedding.’

‘Oh,’ I said. ‘Oh. Mycroft, that’s – that’s…. But why?’

Mycroft looked down at his feet. ‘They don’t approve of my ‘carrying on with another alpha.’’ Mycroft said using air quotes. ‘They said it’s perverted. They said –’ Mycroft’s voice hitched. ‘They said that I’m setting a poor example for Jamie.’ My mouth fell open in shock for there was no more
hurtful thing our parents could possibly have said to my brother.

“That’s patently untrue, My,” I said, awkwardly placing my hand on his back. “Jamie couldn’t ask for a better family alpha than you. And there’s no better example of a loving, supportive relationship for Jamie to follow than yours and Graham’s.”

“It’s Greg! Honestly, Sherlock!” Lestrade rolled his eyes. “There. See, My? Your brother has supported our relationship even when your parents – to say nothing of the law – called it indecent. It’s time for you to return the favour.”

Mycroft shuffled his feet. The referee blew the whistle, indicating it was half time. “Fine,” he finally sighed. “On one condition,” he said to Lestrade.

“What’s that?” Lestrade asked warily.

“That Sherlock promises to be home by the wedding,” Mycroft said to Lestrade again.


Lestrade gave Mycroft a tender smile, enfolded him in a gentle hug, and kissed him on the temple.

From the pitch there was a collective gasp from eleven little girls, as the Hampstead team noticed their coach kissing his fiancé. “That’s my uncles,” I heard Jamie say to the goalkeeper. “Aren’t they sweet together?”

Chapter End Notes

So Sherlock’s leaving to find Mary finally. How will that turn out, I wonder?

Thanks, everybody, for your kind comments, your kudos, and above all for reading!
Nothing more flexible or fragile

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I gritted my teeth in irritation as the little rental car bounced over another pot hole. God, the roads in rural Newfoundland were terrible – simply terrible!

I was driving north along Highway 437 towards Cape Onion at the northernmost tip of the island of Newfoundland. It was the twenty-ninth of August, and I had been searching for John’s missing wife and child for the better part of five weeks.

My search had begun in Churchill, Manitoba, where Mary and Violet had first settled after fleeing Limon in Costa Rica, nine months earlier. However, Mary and Violet – who were then using the names Janet and Holly Doyle – had left Churchill scarcely two months after their arrival. Only one former neighbour was able to give me a hint as to where they might have gone: An elderly woman living next door had overheard Mary making hotel reservations in the town of Rocky Mountain House, Alberta.

Mary and Violet had spent just a month in Rocky Mountain House, before abruptly pulling up stakes and moving to Prince Rupert, British Columbia. Then it was Nipawin, Saskatchewan; Thunder Bay, Ontario; Oromocto, New Brunswick, and now the remote northern end of Newfoundland.

Thus far my search had been frustrating and satisfying in equal measures: Frustrating when I found out that Mary and Violet had skipped a town I had just arrived at; satisfying when a tiny clue offered by a former neighbour or workmate revealed where the pair had gone next.

Mrs. Hudson once shared an old saying about omegas with me; she said that there’s no more flexible or fragile thing on the planet than a human omega. It was during my search for Mary and Violet that I began to recognize the wisdom of that statement. Searching for the Watson women certainly required me to be flexible. Firstly, I had to adapt to the changeable and unpredictable weather conditions. Though I arrived in July, I half-expected it to be snowing in Canada. I was unpleasantly surprised to discover that it was hot and humid in Manitoba. (And the mosquitoes were simply unbearable!)

Secondly, and far more importantly, I found that I had to adjust my attitude when interacting with Canadians. Whereas I have always found the British to be tolerant of my standoffishness and occasional rudeness (or at least they are resigned to it), I found (again to my unpleasant surprise) that Canadians would have none of it. At first I thought it was funny when I would bump into them and they would say ‘sorry’ to me. Canadians are so excessively polite, I had thought, they’ll apologize even when they’re not in the wrong! However, over the duration of the summer I began to realize that their apparent excessive politeness is actually a subtle form of passive aggression. For when a Canadian apologizes to you when you bump into them, they’re not doing so just because they’re excessively nice people, but rather in order to call other Canadians’ attention to the fact that they – the people being bumped and apologizing anyway – are several degrees of magnitude more polite than you – the boor who did the bumping and did not immediately apologize. Normally this would not bother me in the slightest. However, I soon began to realize that Canadians would be more reticent about answering my questions and less helpful to me in my search if they thought I was rude. Therefore, for the first time in my life, I was compelled to be nice! To get Canadians to open up to me, I had to hold doors for them, laugh at their jokes about Americans, listen to their endless highly improbable stories about the encounters they (or some unnamed cousin or ‘buddy’) have had with moose or grizzly bears, and, above all, hurriedly and excessively apologize if I came within a foot of
bumping into someone. It was truly the most challenging acting feat I have ever attempted, and surely an excellent example of the flexibility of the omega gender!

The fragility of my gender was most evident during my nightly Skype chats with Jamie. We had been apart before: once a case took me to Inverness for four days, and when she was three she spent Easter weekend with my parents. And usually she loved spending time at Mycroft’s house. She and Lestrade once constructed a tree fort in one of the crooked, overgrown oaks in the back garden, and Mycroft is a surprisingly skilled braider of little girls’ hair. (It’s his hands, I think; they’re so much finer and more delicate than my own.) But, as Jamie made clear in every conversation we shared while I was away, she missed me terribly (in large part, I gathered, because Mycroft bought the wrong flavour of toothpaste, and because she had to knock on Mycroft and Lestrade’s bedroom door and ask permission to enter before she was allowed to sleep in their bed). I found her tears terribly difficult to endure. She made me promise over and over that I would be home by the third of September so that I could walk her to her first day of Primary One at Paddington Green. As that was only six days away, I hoped with all my heart that I would find Mary and Violet in Cape Onion.

As I approached the tiny village, my compact rental (it was a Chevrolet Cruze, as I recall) rounded a blind corner, and I was unable to avoid yet another pot hole. I swore to myself and made a mental note to check the tyres and axles for damage the next time I stopped. I had spent much of my time in Canada on the road, driving from one tiny rural village to another. Of course I had flown whenever I could – for example, that morning I had flown from St. John, New Brunswick to Deer Lake, which was about a five-hour drive south of Cape Onion. But Mary seemed to have a preference for remote locales, far away from major airports. Understandable, I suppose, if she was trying to avoid being discovered. But discovered by whom, I still wondered.

When I wasn’t being wracked with guilt for leaving my daughter, I spent much of my time on the road thinking about John. It was a luxury I had not allowed myself since I first discovered that I had not miscarried all of my babies, and then decided that I would keep Jamie and raise her on my own, without John’s help. Now, given the nature of my mission, it was impossible to avoid thinking about him.

As much as I hated to admit it, Mycroft was right: I still loved John, and I still allowed that love to manifest itself in reckless acts of devotion. For example, finding his wife and daughter for him, even though doing so could result at best in my losing him again, or at worst in injury or even death. As my little car trundled northwards, I sighed in irritation – but this time at myself and not at the roads. Nothing I did, nothing that ever happened to me, seemed to disrupt my love for John. Two years spent dismantling Moriarty’s network in Eastern Europe proved incapable of diminishing my affection, and five years spent raising John’s daughter in his absence had accomplished even less. In a rare moment of poetic weakness, I decided that my love was like a blowfly, forever and inexorably drawn to the bloated corpse that was John. (It’s a grim metaphor, I admit.) You can try to hide a body any way you want: cover it with leaves, wrap it in bin liners, dump it in the Thames, bury it in a shallow grave. But the blowfly will always find it. Always come back to it, again and again. I only hoped that my love for John would never result in Jamie being hurt.

My Chevy Cruze’s GPS announced that I had reached my destination, and I pulled over to park the car on the side of the road. A quick glance at the tyres revealed that I had lost a hubcap. I stood up to survey the tiny hamlet of Cape Onion. There was just one road – a narrow asphalt track winding between the garages, boatyards, and brightly painted saltbox houses. In the warm afternoon sun, the village looked shabby but surprisingly inviting. The wind howled fiercely from the northwest, kicking up a constant spray from the ocean, which sparkled magically in the sunlight.

I was brushing the droplets of salt water from my curls when I noticed some movement on the other side of some large, granite boulders to my left. I stretched my neck and saw a small, rusty play park
nestled between a pile of lobster traps and an old woodshed. There was a single child in the park, a tiny girl sitting at the top of a dented slide. When she moved her hand to push her scraggly windblown hair out of her face, I gasped out loud: the little girl looked exactly like Jamie! Well, except for her hair colour, which was a pale, luminous blonde instead of Jamie’s fiery red. And her expression, which was dull and empty, whereas Jamie’s was perpetually animated. This could only be Violet Watson, I decided.

Rather than frighten the little girl by approaching her, I hurried back to my car and adjusted the rearview mirrors so that I could watch her without her knowing. She slid down the slide, and ran up to the top again. There she paused and faced the warm sun, her pale hair again blowing in her face and obscuring her features from my gaze. She slid down the slide twice more, then abruptly left the play park in the direction of the old woodshed. I fiddled with the mirrors to allow me to observe the little shed. The little girl didn’t reappear, so I guessed that she was inside the shed.

I continued surveilling the shed for another hour and a half. When it was getting dark, a rusty white pick-up truck stopped out front, and a woman emerged. Though she was much thinner than the last time I had seen her, her face was careworn and sunburnt, and her hair was short and dark, I recognized her right away. I exited the car and trotted towards the woodshed, where I found the woman unlocking the door.

“Hello, Mrs. Watson,” I said. “It’s been a long time.”

She dropped her keys and spun around. “Sherlock!” she cried. “What are you doing here?” Her accent had changed, I noticed. It was now a fair approximation of the sing-song inflection that is unique to rural Newfoundlanders.

“I’m here to find you, obviously,” I smiled in what I hoped was a reassuring manner. “John misses you and Violet terribly.”

“Is he here with you?” she asked as she stooped to pick up her keys. “John, I mean?”

“No, he’s at home in London.” I walked a few paces closer to Mary. She turned the key in the rusty lock.

“No? What about your brother?” As she opened the door, I could see that the old woodshed was in fact a tiny, shabby house. The first room was a small, dark kitchen with a large pot rack and several aged appliances. A long rag rug ran from the tiny kitchen to the even tinier sitting room, which was dominated by a cast-iron pot-bellied stove.

“No, I’m here by myself. I’m hoping you’ll talk to me.”

“Ah, well you’d better come in then,” Mary sighed and entered her house. “Can I get you something to drink?”

I followed Mary into the dark, close interior of her little house. As I had spent much of the day in the bright sunshine, it took a while for my eyes to adjust.

And that’s why I didn’t see Mary swing the heavy iron skillet at my head.
I know how you all love cliffhangers.....

Thanks again for reading! It delights me to no end that you're sticking with my story!
Interlude: John for the win!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Are you sure he likes pot roast?” Jamie asked skeptically.

“He’s an alpha,” I replied. “All alphas like pot roast…. And Yorkshire puddings. Speaking of which, love, you’d better check the oven.”

“Just a second,” Mycroft replied distractedly from the kitchen table. “I’m almost finished the left plait…. I just need an elastic band.”

“Use the Rainbow Dash one, My-My!”

“Erm, I see Pinkie Pie and Princess Celestia, but no Rainbow Dash. You must have left it in your Mummy’s bathroom.”

“Well, come on then!” Jamie sighed impatiently. “Follow me and don’t let go of my hair!”

It was the evening of the twenty-ninth of August, and the three of us were preparing to have John Watson over for dinner. Jamie wouldn’t admit it, but I could tell she was both nervous and excited to see John again. Since Sherlock had left for Canada, she had warmed considerably towards the idea of having a father, and she was no doubt looking forward to peppering the former Army doctor with endless curious questions. Though he wouldn’t admit it, Mycroft was anxious too: Now that he understood how important it was to both Sherlock and Jamie that we maintain a cordial relationship with John, he was uncharacteristically worried about how he might improve things between John and himself. In his senior position at the Home Office Mycroft rarely ever has to worry about what others think of him (though I know that he secretly frets about that quite a lot), so he was at a loss as to how to make John like him. And though I’d never admit it, I was apprehensive as well: On the one hand I knew John to be a friendly, honest sort of bloke, but on the other I was still uneasy that Sherlock would allow John back into his and Jamie’s lives so easily. During my time in the Family Law division I had seen dozens of cases where an alpha father – who had once been regarded as a nice, easygoing man or woman – had nonetheless surprised the omega mother of his or her pups by seeking custody – even though the alpha had previously given no outward indication that he or she was interested in playing a parental role. I couldn’t help but worry that John might do the same, especially now that it was possible that Mary might be back in the picture soon.

To summarize then, all three of us were edgy and apprehensive.

The doorbell rang just as I was taking the tray of Yorkshire puddings out of the oven. “I’ll get it!” I shouted, though I could already hear Jamie’s thundering footsteps as she raced down the hall towards the front foyer. She arrived there just before I did. The shaky way that she smoothed down her French braids as she took hold of the door handle betrayed how nervous she was.

“Good evening, Doctor Watson,” she said using the formal manners Mycroft had taught her. “Please do come in.”

“Erm. Thanks… Jamie. It’s – It’s nice to, ermm, see you again,” said John. It was reassuring that we weren’t the only ones who were nervous. “Have you heard from your mum lately?”

“He’s in Newfoundland. That’s in Canada,” Jamie replied. “We’re going to Skype him tonight at bedtime.”
“Ah.” John frowned. “Because he hasn’t been in touch with me and I thought – “

“John, how are you?” I smiled, as I approached the door.

“Fine, Greg. Very well, in fact. I’m getting my medical license reinstated.”

“Oh, that’s terrific! Let me take your coat.”

“Yep. Just have to complete a few more weeks of counselling first. The GMC was quite understanding, all things considered.”

“Then it looks like things are looking up for you now!”

“Yeah,” he smiled, though even I could detect a touch of sadness behind it.

Then Jamie piped up. “But if things are looking up for you, why are you still sleeping in Mummy’s bed?”


“You smell like the chinchilla blanket on Mummy’s bed. You’ve been sleeping there. A lot,” Jamie explained.

“Well, it’s more comfortable than the sofa, isn’t it?” John tried to smile.

“But that’s not why you do it!” Jamie persisted. “You do it because you like the sm-“

“That’s enough, Jamie,” I said, placing a quelling hand on her shoulder. “Nobody likes a know-it-all.”

“That’s not true! You do! That’s why you’re marrying My-My!” she replied.

I sighed and said to John, “Come back to the kitchen. Can I get you a drink?”

“Just some fizzy water or juice, Greg. I’ve given up drinking.”

Jamie heaved a frustrated sigh and followed us to the kitchen.

*

Dinner was just as awkward as everyone had feared. To his credit, Mycroft had been on his very best behaviour. Unfortunately, the smile he had plastered on his face was as phoney as a three-pound note, and every time John said something he disagreed with, he would respond with an insincere and vaguely threatening “Hmm, quite so.”

Jamie on the other hand kept up her habit of asking John awkward and intrusive questions while watching him with a hawk-like intensity she could have only learned from Sherlock.

“How did you meet Mummy?” she asked John, while he chewed his roast.

“A mutual friend named Mike Stamford introduced us in the lab at Saint Bart’s. Twice actually, almost two decades apart –“

“And why did you move in with him so quickly?” Jamie interrupted him, having already lost interest in his reply.
“Ermnn, well we were both looking for a roommate –”

“So you moved in with a stranger? That doesn’t seem safe to me,” Jamie shook her head disapprovingly.

“Well, we seemed to have hit it off at the lab….” John trailed off. “You know, I’m a bit surprised you don’t know this already. Didn’t your mum ever tell you about me?”

Jamie shook her head. “Mummy never even mentioned you. My-My and Uncle Greg sometimes talked about you, but that’s it.”

“Uh-huh, and I’m sure they said only the nicest things about me,” John said wryly.

“Ah-ha-hahh,” I tried to laugh (and failed miserably).

“Hmm, quite so.” Mycroft smiled menacingly.

“Where did you go to university, Doctor Watson?” Jamie asked.

“Kings College London. And you can call me J –”

“And how many GCSEs did you get?” she asked. I sighed inwardly. This was another habit she had learned from Mycroft: to judge people by their educational accomplishments.

“Erm, I got six A*s….” John said modestly.

“Six?” Jamie’s pale eyebrows flicked upwards in surprise. She turned to Mycroft. “My-My, that’s how many you got, right?”


Jamie turned to me. “And it’s way more than you or Mummy, right?”

“I was busy with football….” I murmured, but Jamie’s attention had already returned to John. I noticed that he was looking a bit more confident now.

“And you’re also a soldier, right?” she asked.

“I was, yeah. Attached to the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers,” he grinned, and this time there was nothing forced about it.

“Why’d you join the Army? Why not just be a regular doctor?” Jamie asked around a bite of broccoli.

“Well, at the time, I saw the Army as the tip of the spear of British foreign policy, as it were. I thought that we were doing important work spreading democracy, and preventing atrocities, and whatnot, and I wanted to be a part of it…. Plus, I was hoping for a bit of adventure.”

“Hmm, quite so,” Mycroft smiled. “Of course, there are a lot of ministries involved in carrying out British foreign policy, and thousands of people ranging from the lowliest bureaucrat to –“

“Yeah, but it’s one thing to sit at a desk and file papers for MI5,” John interrupted him, quietly but fervently. “It’s really quite another to put one’s life on the line in service of King and Country.”

“Hmm, quite so,” Mycroft said again.
“Hmm, quite so,” Jamie echoed him. In keeping with both her mother and her hero, Rainbow Dash, Jamie valued no quality more highly than physical bravery. It was apparent that she was suddenly quite impressed with John. “Were you ever in a battle, Doctor Watson?” she asked him.

“Yeah, a couple,” he smiled at her. He too could easily detect the fascinated respect with which she was now regarding him. Just like her mum, I thought.

“Were they scary?”

John shrugged. “Maybe a little. At the time I was too busy trying to get my mates to the field hospital, and that’s the only thing I was thinking about. But if I look back at it I can see how much danger I had been in at the time.”

“Wow,” whispered Jamie.

“Hmmph.” Mycroft stood up. “Well, since everyone’s done their supper, why don’t we move to the office for dessert? Gregory made a lovely coconut cake. And maybe we can play a board game while we’re there? Risk, perhaps?”

“Yay, Risk!” Jamie jumped to her feet. “That’s my favourite! And My-My’s too!” She informed John.

I groaned in dread. It is no exaggeration to say that a lot of Mycroft’s self-worth and identity is wrapped up in that bloody game. From what I gather, he and Sherlock played a lot of board games when they were kids, ranging from Candyland, to Operation, to Battleship, to Cluedo, to Fireball Island, to the Great Game of Britain. It’s how the pair of them got to be so competitive, I reckon. Indeed, they took their games so seriously their mother had barred them from playing Monopoly because that particular game had led to far too many bloody noses and split lips. I think that Sherlock likes Cluedo best, but for Mycroft it’s always been Risk. In fact, I think that Risk is the reason that Mycroft pursued a career in foreign policymaking. He loves all the intrigue, the planning, the deception, the risk-taking, and especially the alliance making and breaking. And he’s good at it. Bloody good. Only Jamie comes close to Mycroft now.

When Sherlock stayed with us while he was pregnant with Jamie, the three of us played Risk all the time. At first I was taken aback by the cool ruthlessness with which Mycroft played. He and I would frequently make an alliance, and then in the middle of the game Mycroft would sandbag me, and take out almost all of my armies in one spectacular round. “Sorry, love,” he’d smile victoriously. “That’s the nature of the game.” I tried not to take it personally.

Sherlock took the game just as seriously, but while Mycroft’s game was one of cool intellect and merciless forethought, Sherlock played with hot-headed passion and recklessness. Even a non-expert like me could see that he’d make all sorts of mistakes. He’d always rebuff his brother’s or my attempts to forge an alliance with him, arguing that he didn’t anyone’s help to win. And he seemed to have a sentimental (and entirely foolish) attachment to Europe; even though that continent is the second most difficult to defend, he’d always try to capture and hold it, even if it meant the decimation of his armies. Consequently, Sherlock always lost, and Mycroft always won. And in the minds of the players that outcome could only serve to reinforce Mycroft’s oft-repeated assertion that he really was the smart one. In fact, I think that conclusion is why Mycroft always wanted to play Risk when Sherlock came around. And why he wanted to play it with John that evening.

“Yeah, Risk, fine,” John said, placing his napkin on the table. “I haven’t played in years though. Mind if I take a look at the rules first?”

The four of us sat around an old, green felt card table that I had erected in front of the fire in Mycroft’s office. Jamie was setting up the board while Mycroft ate his cake and John read the instructions on the box lid.

“Hmm. Yeah, okay. Seems straightforward enough,” John murmured.

“Shall we begin then?” Mycroft smiled from his chair.

“Yeah!” Jamie winked at Mycroft and made herself comfortable on his lap. Clearly the pair of them had already made an alliance.

The game started in the usual manner with each of us placing our infantries on unoccupied territories. I placed most of mine in North America, Mycroft placed his in South America, Jamie in Europe, and John in Australia. As per usual when Mycroft and Jamie had forged a secret alliance, the pair of them united to take out my armies in Greenland and Central America. Soon after my little empire fell, and I was out of the game. Jamie and Mycroft high-fived each other and turned their attention to defeating John. However, while the two of them had been concentrating on eliminating my poor, hapless armies, they had failed to notice that from his base in Australia, John had slowly but steadily advanced across Asia, and was now making inroads into Africa. As such he was on the verge of taking possession of three continents.

“Fuck!” Mycroft muttered as he suddenly comprehended the dangerous position he was in. I could see Mycroft’s mind work frantically as he searched for a move that would allow him to snatch victory away from John. “Fuck!” he growled.

“What do we do, My-My?” Jamie asked.

Mycroft thought for several more seconds, his fingers tapping frenetically against the arm of his worn-out club chair. For his part, John said nothing and continued watching my increasingly rattled fiancé with calm determination.

Finally, Mycroft sighed and said to Jamie. “I am sorry, lovey. It’s the nature of the game....”

“What? Why?” Jamie exclaimed as Mycroft moved his armies into Jamie’s territories in the Western and Eastern United States. “My-My, no! What are you doing?” Jamie’s jaw dropped. Though she and Mycroft often played as a team; this was the first time he had ever stabbed her in the back.

“I’m sorry, love, but it’s the only way I can defeat him – “

“Hmph!” Jamie glared at him furiously, then scrambled to her feet. Crossing her arms across her chest, she flounced to the other side of the card table, and plopped herself down on John’s knee.

Mycroft blinked, the significance of Jamie’s move was not lost on him. “I – I am sorry, Jamie,” he began. “It’s how one plays Risk.”

Jamie pointed her nose in the air and refused to make eye contact with Mycroft. “You could have helped me to beat him.”

“But then I…. Yes, I suppose I could have,” Mycroft admitted quietly. “I’m sorry.”

“Let’s just finish the game, shall we?” John suggested, placing his hand comfortably on his daughter’s back.
Mycroft narrowed his eyes at that. “Yes, let’s,” he growled threateningly.

There was an epic battle over the control of Europe, but Mycroft just didn’t have enough continents to defeat John. The game was over in little more than a half hour.

“Well, I guess that’s it,” John gave us a shy, modest smile.

“Well done, John!” I clapped him on the back. “What an upset!”

“That was incredible!” Jamie jumped to her feet. “I thought you said you hadn’t played in a long time.”

Mycroft sat staring at the board in silence for several seconds, before looking up at John. “Yes. Erm... Well done, John,” he whispered. Even in the firelight he looked pale.

“Well, it’s getting on ten-thirty. I’d better get back to Baker Street. Got an appointment with the trick cyclist in the morning.” John rose to his feet. “Thanks for the fun evening, Mycroft, Greg.”

“I’ll get your coat,” I said as I led the way to the hall closet. Mycroft followed me in silence.

“That was amazing!” Jamie bounced around John’s feet like an eager puppy. “I’m telling Mummy about this when we Skype tonight!”

John snorted with laughter at that. “Please tell him I say hi,” he said to Jamie as he slipped his coat on.

Jamie hesitated for just a second, then to everyone’s surprise threw her arms around John’s waist. “Thank you for coming to dinner,” she mumbled into the brown corduroy fabric. “I’m happy you’re my daddy.”

“Oh. Well, I – “ John stammered, his voice momentarily wobbly. “I’m glad too... That – that you’re my – my... pup.”

We said our goodbyes, and John walked out to his little hatchback. Jamie skipped down the walk after him. I heard her tell him that she had another football game on Saturday, and that lots of daddies attended.

I turned to Mycroft. His grey eyes were wide and staring, and his freckles stood out on his pale skin. He looked devastated. I wrapped my arms around him. “Come on, love,” I whispered in his ear. “Let Jamie talk to Sherlock. I’m taking you to bed.”

“Uh-huh,” he murmured. He disentangled himself from my arms when Jamie entered the house. “Jamie, I am so sorry I broke our alliance,” he said earnestly.

“Hmm?” Jamie said, turning round to wave at John’s car as it drove off up Kidderpore Avenue. “I know, My-My. It doesn’t matter.” Remarkably (considering who her mother is) Jamie didn’t sound like she was holding a grudge. “Isn’t he amazing?” she sighed in wonder.

“Who? John?” I asked, still stroking Mycroft’s back, while he leaned his head on my shoulder.

“Mm-hmm. Captain John Watson of the Fifth Northumberthumbs Fuzzy Ears,” she tried out the big words for the first time. “My daddy!”

Chapter End Notes
If you want a quick summary of Risk, there's a pretty good one at Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Risk_(game)#Setup. I myself haven't played in years and years, so I can only help that my description of the gameplay actually works.

Also, if you haven't got a little kid (or brony) in your life who's obsessed with My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic, here's the show's Wiki: http://mlp.wikia.com/wiki/My_Little_Pony_Friendship_is_Magic_Wiki

Thanks again for reading! Now let's get back to the action in Cape Onion....
Remember how I mentioned that my trip to Newfoundland reminded me of the time when Mrs. Hudson told me that there’s nothing so flexible or fragile as an omega? Well, it was actually when Mary swung the heavy iron pan at my head that I was forcibly reminded of that statement. For as soon as I heard the pan swishing towards the right side of my face, I swung myself violently down and to the left. Thus, my flexible omega bones and joints allowed me to escape a blow to the head that would surely have incapacitated me, if not killed me altogether.

However, though the skillet missed my skull, I didn’t escape injury entirely. As I twisted away from Mary’s attack, I threw my right arm up to protect my face, and the pan made solid contact with the point of my elbow. I felt a burning, exploding pain as the bones there shattered. My first reaction was annoyance: my doctor had assured me that my bones were as strong and healthy as could be hoped for in a middle-aged omega, and yet they were apparently quite fragile!

As I rolled to the side and out of reach of the skillet, Mary overbalanced and dropped her makeshift weapon with a metallic gonging sound. I fell heavily on my bottom in the doorway, while Mary turned and fled into the house.

“Holly!” I heard her exclaim. “Holly, get your things! It’s time to leave!”

I rolled to my knees and tucked my already numb right arm to my side. Mary was frantically running through the kitchen towards the sitting room. “Holly! Now!” she shouted.

I noticed she was standing on the edge of the long rag rug running from the kitchen doorway to the sitting room. I took hold of the rug in my left hand and gave it a firm yank. Mary stumbled and fell sideways, her temple landing hard on the corner of the old cast-iron stove. She fell onto the wooden floor with a groan, and was still.

I stood up slowly, and walked unsteadily to Mary’s supine body. I gave her side a tiny kick with the toe of my shoe, and she drew a noisy, gurgling breath, but otherwise did not react. I retrieved a tea towel from the kitchen and knelt on the floor to roll Mary onto her side. With great difficulty considering I was working with just one hand, I pulled Mary’s arms behind her, and used the towel to tie them together. She groggily returned to consciousness just as I was fastening the ends of the towel together with a sturdy knot.

“No…. Holly……” Mary mumbled weakly. “Holly, help.”

“I swear I’m here to help you,” I hissed.

Just then there was a metallic click from the opposite corner of the sitting room. I looked up to see Violet Watson – whom Mary had been calling Holly – pointing a handgun at me.

I could tell at a glance that it was a Mossad-issue SIG Sauer P226, which Violet must have retrieved from the drawer of the end table next to the threadbare sofa. Violet clumsily cocked the hammer, and I instinctively raised my hands above my head.

Mary laughed, “Oh well done, baby! Now come over here and untie me. If the omega tries anything, you can shoot him.”
I raised my hands even higher and continued staring at John’s other daughter. Up close I could see that even though her eyes were just the same as Jamie’s – eyes that both girls had undoubtedly inherited from their mutual sire – there were subtle differences in their appearances. Besides the obvious difference in hair colour, Violet had a rounder chin and cheeks, and a downturned mouth that gave her a look of unhappy determination. As I had noted earlier in the day, her expression was different too: while Jamie’s face was constantly switching between looks of happiness, curiosity, exasperation, mischief, and bossiness, Violet’s expression was an unchanging cold, grim poker face. I found that I couldn’t read what she planned to do, and it worried me. “I – I really am here to help you two!” I pleaded with her.

I glanced down at the pistol, and by chance saw that it was missing a key part. A quick look at the empty drawer from which Violet had retrieved the weapon confirmed my suspicion. “Oh, for heaven’s sake!” I groaned as I swiped my uninjured hand to snatch the pistol away from the little girl. Before I could take the gun from her, Violet pulled the trigger; however, to her surprise, the pistol clicked emptily.

“You forgot the magazine!” I showed her the empty magazine chamber. “Sloppy, Mary,” I said turning to Mary, who was now kneeling behind me, a trickle of blood on her temple. “An unloaded pistol isn’t much use in an emergency.”

“I’m hardly going to keep a loaded firearm within reach of a four-year old,” Mary replied. I noticed that her affected Newfoundland accent was fading. “And besides, it’s enough to frighten away people who don’t know a lot about firearms. Now tell me, Sherlock,” Mary said as she rolled awkwardly to her bottom. “Why are you here?”

“I told you: I’m here to help you. You and Violet.”

“Seriously? Why?”

“Well… for John actually.”

“Did he send you to find me?”

“No, he doesn’t know where I am, or why I left.” I admitted reluctantly. “But my brother knows exactly where I’ve gone, and that I’m looking for you,” I hastened to add, just in case Mary was still entertaining the notion of murdering me and hiding the body.

“Uh-huh. So if John didn’t ask you, why are you trying to find me?”

“Because John misses you – both of you – quite a lot.”

“And that’s enough reason for you to risk your life to find me?” Mary raised an incredulous eyebrow.

I shrugged and gave a small nod.

“Oh-ho!” she leaned back and narrowed her eyes at me. “So it’s true: you are in love with my husband! He always was so funny about you. At first I thought it was just a matter of an alpha being protective of his little omega friend, but I guess it was a bit more than that, eh?”

I looked away guiltily.

“And what’s John’s opinion on that? By any chance does he share your feelings?”

I gave another small nod. “I think so,” I whispered. “But he loves you two very much as well. That’s
"Why I’ve been trying to find you."

"How selfless of you!" Mary sneered. "So tell me, how do you plan to help Holly – Violet – and me?"

"I’m – I’m not sure, actually," I admitted. "I know that someone’s trying to kill you – probably for reasons related to the assassination or attempted assassination of four individuals in 2014 and 2015 – and that the two of you are on the run because of it. I thought that I might help you to stay hidden… or at least help your daughter lead a normal life, even if you can’t."

Mary peered closely at me for several seconds before turning to Violet. "Baby," she said with a brave smile. "Why don’t you go to your room? Mr. Holmes and I need to talk for a while. Don’t come out until I tell you."

Violet glared at me suspiciously for a moment before nodding at Mary, and running to a small bedroom at the far end of the sitting room. I realized that I still hadn’t heard her speak.

"Alright. You can untie me," Mary sighed tiredly. "I think it’s too late to help me, but maybe you can help my daughter."

"First tell me who’s chasing you and why," I said as I leaned over to untie the knotted tea towel.

"Well," said Mary as she rose to her feet. "You were right that it’s in relation to those three assassinations in 2014."

"And the attempted one in 2015? The Danish newspaper owner?"

"Magnussen?" Mary walked over to the sink and began filling the kettle. "Yes, he’s involved too, but his case is a little different."

"How so?" I asked as I seated myself at the rickety kitchen table. The movement caused a terrible pain to flare in my right elbow. I groaned quietly and clutched at my poor arm.

"He’s the one who ordered me to kill the others." Mary noticed my pain and set a bottle labelled Tylenol in front of me.

I frowned in confusion. "I don’t understand."

"Let me explain from the beginning." Mary took down two mugs from the cupboard above the sink. "As you’ve probably guessed, I used to be an assassin. For Mossad."

I nodded, as this only confirmed my earlier suspicions.

"I was the best of the best. Once I was given orders to kill someone, you could bet they’d be dead within the month. And I never got caught. That is, until about five years ago when a Danish newspaper reporting on some of the political assassinations I was involved with leaked my name."

Mary sat down across from me. "God only knows how they found out!" she threw her hands up in frustration. "Anyway, that was it for me. My superiors knew that the families of the victims would stop at nothing to find me and kill me. I was forced into retirement, and sent to England to hide."

I managed to open the Tylenol bottle with one hand, and shook three tablets onto the tabletop in front of me. As Mary continued with her story, I swallowed all three dry.

"At first I hated it," she chuckled. "I thought it was so cold and dreary. Then I met John," she smiled to herself. "And I thought, ‘here’s someone I can rely on to help me when the chips are down.’ And
then England didn’t seem so bad.” The kettle whistled, and Mary stood up to pour the boiling water into the teapot.

“For a while I thought I was free and clear.” She brought the teapot over to the table. “Then at the wedding I got a telegram from the owner of that Danish newspaper.”

“Wait,” I interrupted her. “Do you mean Magnussen?”

“Yep,” Mary brought a box of sugar cubes over to the table. “Charles Augustus Magnussen. C. A. M. It was at that point I knew I’d never be free from my past.”

Mary retrieved a carton of milk from the refrigerator. “Magnussen blackmailed me. He said that if I didn’t work on his behalf – you know, if I didn’t assassinate his enemies for him – he’d give my contact details to the families of my previous victims, and they’d come after me.” She poured me and then herself a hot cup of tea. “That didn’t concern me too much at first, because I knew how to disappear. But then I discovered I was pregnant. So I started worrying about what might happen to the baby and poor, clueless John if they found me.”

She added milk and sugar to her tea and sighed. “So that summer – 2014 – I was virtually a slave to Magnussen. He had me kill the head of a rival newspaper firm, and then a Danish ambassador and British politician who had called for an investigation of his business practices.”

“The latter was Lady Smallwood?”

“Yes, I think so. Did you know her?”

“No, but my brother did. She helped push through changes to laws governing health and educational practices for omegas.”

“Ah. Well, pretty soon I figured out that he’d never stop using me to get rid of his opponents. And that with every assassination he was gathering more incriminating evidence that he could later use against me. So that summer – even though I was already six months pregnant – I convinced John that we had to leave London. I made up some cock-and-bull story about wanting to raise the baby in a bigger house, and John – poor, trusting, stupid John – bought it hook-line-and-sinker. That summer we moved all around Europe trying to evade Magnussen, though we did return to Cardiff so that I could give birth. John insisted on returning to Britain.”

Mary sipped her tea. “At first I thought I had given Magnussen the slip, but then just after Christmas he sent me an e-mail, ordering me to assassinate some bureaucrat. Well, your brother, in fact.”

Even though this particular threat to my brother was long past, I felt the blood drain from my face. “Mycroft? Why him?” I whispered.

Mary shrugged indifferently, “Who knows? Maybe something to do with his private investigations into the personal lives of alpha MPs? I think that Magnussen worried that he might figure out which of them he had under his control. Or maybe blackmailers just don’t like competition.”

I sipped my tea and asked, “So why didn’t you murder my brother?”

Mary shrugged again, “I had had enough. I didn’t want to spend my life under Magnussen’s thumb. So I took the train to London, and got his schedule from Janine Delahunty. Are you and her still in touch? She’s his PA, you know.”

“I know,” I murmured as used my left hand to lift my teacup to my lips. My right arm still burned with pain – the Tylenols had had little effect so far – and I continued holding it tightly to my side.
“Yeah, I got his schedule from her, and I went to his suite late at night to shoot him.” Mary sighed angrily, “I didn’t kill the fucker though, more’s the pity. Nicked the old bastard’s aorta, but he didn’t die.”

Mary took another sip of her tea. “Of course, I knew I was in real danger then. Undoubtedly, he’d have his revenge one way or another. I lay low in Cardiff for a couple months, but deep down I knew that it was only a matter of time before Magnussen found out where I was and told the families of my earlier victims where they could find me. So I knew I had to get out of Dodge.”

“So you used the names of Janet and Holly Doyle – a mother and baby who had been killed in a car accident in the autumn of 2014 – to apply for British passports,” I said.

“Yes,” Mary said with surprise. “How did you know?”

“It’s an old enough technique for people in your line of work,” I grinned.

“Yes, I suppose it is,” Mary smiled back. “Is that how you found me? You followed my passport? I mean, Janet Doyle’s?”

“Yep. Until Churchill, that is. After that it was simple detective work.”

“Well, good for you. I went to a lot of trouble covering our tracks, so I’m sure it was a lot of work to find us.” Mary paused before adding, “Though if you found us, it means others can. So I guess it’s time to leave again.” She looked around the room and sighed unhappily. No doubt she was thinking about how inconvenient it would be to find another bolt-hole for her and Violet.

“Mary,” I interrupted her troubled thoughts. “There are two things I don’t understand about your story.”

“What’s that?” Her attention returned to me.

“First, why didn’t you ask me for help? You knew that I’m a consulting detective, and that I have connections to the Home Office. And yet, not only did you not come to me for assistance, John says that you told him that I didn’t want anything to do with him anymore. That’s a blatant lie, which I can only assume was motivated by a desire to ensure that John didn’t approach me for help.”

Mary looked at me incredulously. “You’re asking why I didn’t ask you for help? You? My husband’s drippy omega friend?”

I frowned angrily at that. It always rankled me when people disdained my gender. “Well,” I responded heatedly. “Omega or not, I am the one who found you. Doubtless a hundred alphas and betas have tried, but it took a drippy omega to follow you all this way!”

“Granted,” Mary conceded. “But when I knew you, you didn’t seem all that capable. At least I wasn’t impressed.”


“Come on!” Mary laughed. “You were always forlornly mooning about after my husband. Jesus Christ, Sherlock, you spent our whole wedding day on the verge of tears! You seemed like a typical immature, pitiful little omega. Forgive me if I didn’t take you seriously as a source of advice or assistance!” she scoffed.

I felt my cheeks redden, though I had to admit that I could see her point. The time from which Mary had previously known me – this being the period of her engagement to John – had been a low point
in my life. I had spent those early months of 2014 yearning pathetically for her fiancé. Evidently she had taken notice and thereafter dismissed me as a useful ally.

“Hmph,” I replied. “But even if I couldn’t have helped, my brother could have.”

Mary shook her head. “Nope. No way I was going to place myself under the control of another government agency.”

I nodded at her wisdom, for I had no doubt that Mycroft or his equally ruthless bosses would love to have a pet assassin under their thumbs. “The second thing I don’t understand is why you would do all this to John?” Mary looked at me in confusion. “Why would you marry him? Why get him involved in your plans? What possible advantage would that offer you? It doesn’t make sense,” I explained.

Mary stared at me blankly for several seconds before blurt out, “Because I love him, Sherlock. It’s just that simple. I fell in love with him, and I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him.” I opened my mouth to argue, but Mary continued, “Surely you of all people would understand that love makes you do irrational things, Sherlock! After all, we’ve already established that you put your life at risk in order to find me and Violet for John. There’s nothing rational about that.”

Though her response shook me to the core, I carried on. “But if you love him, why did you take his baby away from him?”

Mary sighed and turned to look at Violet’s closed bedroom door. “I guess because I love her more than John, and I wanted her with me so that I could protect her…. I don’t suppose you know what that’s like, do you? Loving a child like that?”

“As a matter of fact, I do. I have a daughter of my own,” I admitted. Though I was reluctant to tell a trained assassin whom I didn’t entirely trust about my daughter, I couldn’t help but feel some empathy for Mary. After all, both of us had loved John and our children – his children – enough that we had been compelled to perform incredibly stupid, dangerous, irrational feats of love and devotion. It would seem that my greatest rival was actually a kindred spirit. A bit like James Moriarty, actually.

“Oh!” Mary said with surprise. “I didn’t know you had a mate!”

“Erm, I don’t.” I squirmed awkwardly. “Actually – actually John is the father. We’re not mated though.”

“Oh,” Mary said. “Oh.” She stared at me in shock, our moment of kinship broken. “Well, I’m glad he hasn’t been pining away in loneliness.”

“Yeah, ermm, but back to the matter at hand,” I said, changing the subject to something less uncomfortable. “Surely you can see that your plan to protect Violet isn’t working.”

“What do you mean?” Mary responded coldly.

“This life on the run might be alright for you, but it can’t possibly be healthy for a young child.”

“I do my best for Violet!” Mary narrowed her eyes at me. “We always have food on the table; she always has a warm bed – “

“Children need more than that,” I interrupted her. “You know that, Mary. They need friends, relatives, stability – ”

“Violet has me! I’m all the friends and relatives she needs!” Mary snarled.
“She’s supposed to start school soon, isn’t she? How is that going to work if you’re always on the run? Is she just going to start a new school every few months? What good can that possibly do for her development, to say nothing of her education?”

Mary looked down at her now-empty tea cup. I could see tears sparkling in the corners of Mary’s eyes. “Well, what do you suggest I do?”

“You said that you took Violet with you because you love her, Mary,” I reasoned. “If you really love her, you’ll let me return her to her father so that she can have some stability in her life. And when she’s safe and sound at home in London you’ll be able to go into hiding again. And if you don’t have to worry about keeping her safe, you’ll be able to turn your full attention to eliminating the people who are hunting you… maybe even Magnussen himself.”

“Let you return her to John?” Mary laughed grimly. “How would that work? As soon as you two step off the plane, they’ll follow your tracks back to me. Or kidnap her in order to draw me out. How do you suggest I avoid that?”

“Well, it just so happens,” I smiled smugly. “That I have some experience in avoiding my enemies’ attention – as well as any acts of revenge they might attempt on my loved ones – while simultaneously taking down their empires.” I couldn’t help but chuckle wryly at the humour of the situation. After all, who’d have thought that the experience I had gained in faking my own death would ever come in handy again?

* * *

The two of us worked late into the evening, hatching plots and forging documents. My arm throbbed mightily. Mary fashioned a makeshift sling for me out of a bath towel. We both agreed that it was badly broken, and that I would have to visit a hospital as soon as I returned to London. Now, however, we had to concentrate on getting Violet back to John.

At around midnight, we completed our preparations. “Mary, before we leave, can you tell me one thing?”

“What’s that?” Mary replied distractedly as she stuffed a phoney death certificate into an envelope.

“What’s your real name?” I asked.

Mary looked up at me. “Adina,” she replied, her expression pensive and sad. “Adina Gavirola Raisa Abramowicz. From Tel Aviv. How d’you do?”


Mary nodded and walked over to her daughter’s bedroom. “Holly, dear.” She opened the door. “Can you please come out? Mr. Holmes and I need to speak to you.”

The little girl shuffled out, rubbing her eyes sleepily. I guiltily recalled that she hadn’t had supper yet.

“Mommy?” she mumbled in a tiny voice. “What’s going on?”

Mary took a deep breath and said, “You need to get dressed and pack a bag. You’re going to take a trip with Mr. Holmes here.”

Violet frowned, “Why?” she asked. “Where are we going?”

“You’re going to see your father.” Mary tried to smile.
“What about you, Mommy? Aren’t you coming too?” Violet looked at her mother searchingly.

“No, baby. No, I can’t.” Mary’s smile was beginning to falter.

“Why not?” Violet pouted.

“Be-because I’m not – “ Mary’s voice hitched. “Because I’m not your mommy.”

“You’re not?” Violet’s brows knitted in confusion. “Who are you then?”

Mary opened her mouth to speak, but no sound came out.

I stepped in. “Mrs. Doyle is your foster mother. She’s been caring for you until I could come to take you back to your father.”

“And where’s my mommy?” Violet asked me worriedly.

I regarded the little girl with pity, fully aware that I was about to shatter her world. “Your mother is dead,” I said.

Chapter End Notes

So it's finally explained. Now Sherlock just has to get Violet back to London.

Thank you all for your comments, kudos, and support. We're entering the home stretch now.
The drive from Cape Onion to the regional airport in Deer Lake was, to say the least, uncomfortable. Violet cried loudly and piteously the entire way. I suppose that was understandable – seeing as how she had just been told that her entire life had been a lie – but I was at a loss for how to help her. It’s not that I was inexperienced in dealing with crying children – Jamie scraped her knees and took unkind comments to heart the same as any other pup – but I found that my daughter tended to get over these hurts as soon as she received a hug from me or one of her uncles, or, better yet, when she was distracted by the possibility of another new adventure. Violet Watson, however, seemed to have an unlimited supply of tears in her arsenal, if that five-hour drive was any indication.

The ticket agent at the tiny airport regarded the inconsolable little girl with pity. “What’s the matter, sweetheart?” she cooed.

Violet rubbed her already snot-encrusted sleeve across her face and turned away to pointedly ignore the woman.

“She’s moving to England today,” I replied. “It’s going to be a big change, I think.”

“I suppose,” said the ticket agent, not entirely convinced that the prospect of an international relocation would be enough to move a child to such a display of abject misery. “Have you got your passports?”

“Yes, of course,” I smiled. I retrieved a pair of passports from my breast pocket. One was mine, of course, but the other was Jamie’s. In a moment of prescience, I had decided to take it with me when I left England to search for Mary and Violet. More than once John had mentioned how much Jamie resembled Violet. Though I could now detect several differences in the two girls’ appearances, I hoped that the grainy photo of Jamie looked enough like Violet for her to enter the United Kingdom without raising suspicion. Luckily when Jamie had her photo taken she was wearing her hair tied back in a tight ponytail, so its distinctive colour wasn’t too noticeable. Furthermore, Jamie’s passport was already two years old, so any differences between the photo and Violet’s current appearance might be explained away as the result of ageing. As the ticket agent peered at our passports, I was, I am ashamed to admit, a tiny bit glad that Violet had spent that long night’s drive sobbing her eyes out, because that seemingly endless crying jag had turned her face to a swollen, sticky, purple mess. No airline employee or border agent could have definitively determined whether the miserable creature in front of them was the same as the one in the photo.

To my relief the ticket agent appeared satisfied with the passports. Still, she looked at me with concern and asked, “What happened to your arm?”


“Well, Newfoundland can be a dangerous place for omegas. Especially down by the water. Your alpha should keep a closer eye on you when you’re by the shore.”

I fought the urge to roll my eyes at that.

“Speaking of which,” she continued. “Why isn’t your alpha travelling with you?”

I frowned and reminded myself that Canada hadn’t yet undergone the same reforms to omega laws
and norms that the United Kingdom had experienced over the past seven years. I replied, "He trusts me to bring his daughter back to him safe and sound."

“Oh, that’s nice,” she replied patronizingly. “But if you need help – you know, if you can’t read the Departures board, or even if you’re just a little overwhelmed with the responsibility – please feel free to contact our ground staff or one of the flight attendants, and they’ll be happy to assist you.”

“Thanks,” I grumbled ungraciously. How I longed to yell at this well-meaning beta that I had just spent a month tracing a former Mossad assassin all over this godforsaken country, to her hideout in the middle of nowhere, where I managed to single-handedly subdue her and devise a plan to bring her daughter safely back to Britain. I most certainly did not need help reading the bloody Departures board! However, not wishing to attract attention to myself or Violet, I stifled a tart reply.

“Alright then: I have you booked on the first flight from Deer Lake to Saint John’s, and then on the seven a.m. flight to Heathrow. Happy flying, sir… miss,” she said to me and Violet.

As we waited for our flight in the Departures lounge, I texted Mycroft: “Mission accomplished. Pls tell JMH I am sorry for missing our talk last nite. Meet me @ LHR T2 1710h. First stop St. B’s. Tell JHW to meet us there. -SH”

Mycroft’s reply came just as we were boarding the plane: “Saint Bart’s Hospital??? Why? What’s the matter? Are you hurt???”

However, I had to switch my phone to airplane mode, so I could not reply.

On the flight into Saint John’s, Violet’s uncontrollable weeping slowly (and thankfully) became quieter and less violent, though her appearance remained just as pitiable. I tried to coax a smile out of her with doughnuts and chocolate milk at the Saint John’s airport Tim Horton’s. Having forgotten that Canada still didn’t allow omegas to purchase caffeinated beverages, I first tried to buy myself a cup of tea. That certainly did not go over well! The shop attendant glared at me disapprovingly and told me that even though I was clearly too old for further breeding, I ought to consider what sort of example I was setting for my daughter or younger omegas. I decided that there was no point in arguing with this backwards colonial yokel, so I changed my order. God, I couldn’t wait to get home to England!

Probably due to a combination of exhaustion and dehydration, Violet finally stopped crying as we were boarding the plane to Heathrow.

“Say goodbye to Canada, Violet,” I said as I helped her to buckle her seat belt. “Next stop, London.”

She looked out the airplane window for a few seconds (Though I prefer the window seat, I graciously allowed her to have it) before turning to me. “Why did you call me Violet?” It was the first thing she had said to me (though by no means the first sound she had made) since Mary and I had explained to her that her mother was deceased and she would be returning with me to England.

“That’s your name. Violet Watson. Your parents named you that when you were born.”

“It’s not Holly Doyle?” Violet’s voice was hoarse and unusually deep for such a tiny thing. I found her Newfoundland accent terribly difficult to follow.

“No, that’s the name your, erm, foster mother gave you.” The flight attendants were performing the safety demonstration, but we ignored them.

“OH,” Violet replied. “Did you know my mommy? Before she died?”
“Yes. Well, I knew her a long time ago. When she and your dad first got married.”

“What was she like?” Violet asked.

I hesitated as I was reluctant to denigrate the woman who had just given up her only daughter so that the little girl could have a better life. “She loved your dad very much,” I began. “She was clever, capable – very capable, in fact – independent, adventurous, funny…. I thought she was a great match for your dad, actually.” I decided to be diplomatic and not mention Mary’s deceptiveness or intermittent hard-heartedness.

Violet watched me closely, her expression identical to the one Jamie made when she was puzzling over her next move in a board game. “What was her name?”

“Your mum’s? Mary Elizabeth Morstan…. Then Mary Watson when she married your dad.”

“What happened between her and my father? Did they get a diff – div… diff-forks?” She stumbled over the unfamiliar word, which she had probably overheard once or twice, but didn’t entirely comprehend.

“A divorce?” I asked. She nodded. “No. They were married to the end.” I paused to gather my thoughts as the plane lifted off. “I – I’m not entirely sure what happened between the two of them to make her leave him,” I admitted. “I know they loved each other very much, but then things changed between them. Your mother was under… pressure, and she withdrew from your dad. And they didn’t entirely trust each other, either. In the end, I think that your mom was just too independent, and she saw your dad as… well, a bit more of a homebody than she had originally hoped. A source of vulnerability, even. I think she thought that if they remained together someone might hurt him in order to get to her. So she decided that she could solve her problems – and protect both you and John – better without him around.”

It struck me that the explanation I had offered for Mary’s abandonment of John had much in common with the reasons I had given for faking my own death and leaving John in order to take down Moriarty’s empire. Of course I could have been projecting my own thought processes onto Mary – who might have left John in the lurch for any number of selfish, ignoble reasons – but if it was true, it meant that I had much more in common with Mary than I had ever realized. It also renewed the guilt I felt for leaving John. For if John’s reaction to my faked death had been even half as severe as his reaction to Mary and Violet’s disappearance, I had done him a great injury indeed. I suddenly felt a lump in my throat. “She – she didn’t understand how overrated independence is. How much it hurts the people who love you,” I concluded in a choked voice.

If Violet noticed the tears in my eyes, she didn’t comment on them. Rather she asked, still in her sing-song Newfie accent, “So what happened after Mommy left my father? How did she die?”

“She took you travelling for a while,” I said, liberally sugar-coating the truth. “Then she decided to settle in Canada. She was killed in a car accident in Alberta about two years ago, however. That’s when Mrs. Doyle took you in.” The previous evening it had taken Mary and I over an hour to find an article that could establish our cover story. In my suitcase I now carried a printout of a newspaper article from the July third, 2017 edition of the Red Deer Advocate. Its title read ‘Mystery Woman Killed in Horrific Accident on Hwy 22! Baby Daughter Survives!’

“I don’t remember my mommy at all,” Violet said sadly. “Just Mrs. Doyle.”

“Well, that stands to reason,” I replied. “You were very young when she died.”

“And what’s my father like?”
I found that I couldn’t help but smile at the thought of him. “John Watson? He’s – he’s the bravest and kindest and wisest alpha I have ever had the good fortune of knowing.”

Violet smiled at that. How it lit up her pale, drawn features! “Is he your friend?”

“My best friend, I am proud to say! And currently my roommate too. You’ll absolutely adore him, Violet. There’s nothing he won’t do for you… or me, for that matter.” I suddenly realized that I was gushing effusively about John. However, my audience was quite attentive, so I didn’t bother stopping. In fact, I decided that it was an appropriate time to tell Violet about her sister. “John’s also the father of my little girl. Her name’s Jamie. She’s about your age. I think you’ll like her.” I grinned, already planning picnics in Hyde Park for the pair. Did Violet like football, I wondered? I had already noted that she carried a My Little Pony backpack similar to Jamie’s. It was encouraging that they already had that in common.

However, Violet frowned when I mentioned Jamie. “I don’t like other children,” she announced.

“Oh, Jamie’s not like other little kids – “ I started.

“I said I don’t like other children. They’re dumb. Mommy – Mrs. Doyle – says I don’t need to be around them if I don’t want to.” Violet crossed her arms and looked out the window.

Though I was taken aback at her rejection of my beloved daughter, I couldn’t help but sympathize with Violet. After all, I had spent much of my own childhood, to say nothing of my young adulthood, snubbing the company of other human beings. Of course Violet’s reasons differed from my own: her solitude was probably the product of her itinerant life and a mother who had discouraged her from interacting with the neighbours lest she let something slip about their past, while mine had been due to the influence of my socially awkward and overprotective brother and, later, my desire to keep my gender a secret.

I patted her shoulder. “Jamie’s not dumb,” I said gently. “I hope you’ll give her a chance.”

Jamie hmph’ed dubiously in reply.

“Would you like to hear more about your dad? I’d love to tell you all about our adventures together,” I suggested.

Violet turned to look at me again. “Adventures?” she asked with a gleam in her eye that she could only have inherited from John. “What sort of adventures?”

I spent the remainder of our flight regaling the little girl with stories about my life with John, before I had ruined everything between us by faking my death and leaving him. It was a delight to finally unlock that precious if well-worn room in the tallest tower of my Mind Palace, and share its priceless contents with an appreciative audience. For Violet hung on my every word. Finding out that her previously unknown father was not only a brave and stalwart soldier, but also a clever and accomplished doctor, and a selfless and loving friend must have seemed like a fairy tale to her lonely and isolated little soul. Though she was surely still apprehensive about her new life in England, she was clearly looking forward to getting to know the amazing Doctor John Watson. I had to congratulate myself for making Violet’s transition just a little bit easier.

I was finishing my story about the elephant in the room, when Violet peered at me searchingly and asked, “Are you in love with my dad, Sherlock?”

“What?” I found myself blushing furiously, astonished that such a little girl could read a human being so easily. Maybe she had inherited that from John too. “What are you – It’s not—” I stammered.
Violet laughed. It was John’s laugh. His infectious little giggle. “It’s okay,” she grinned conspiratorially. “I won’t tell him.”

“I’m pretty sure he knows,” I rolled my eyes in a self-deprecating manner.

“Do you want to marry him?”

I mulled over my response for several seconds. Finally, I told her, “It’s not that easy. Your dad’s got a lot of… baggage. Emotionally, I mean. So do I, I suppose. I expect he’ll want to work through it before committing to anything…. And when he does work through it all, he might not want to marry me at all.” It was hard to put my deepest fears into words. “The two of us have changed so much over the past few years, he might find that he’s not too fond of the new me. Granted, he might be grateful to me for bringing you home, but that’s not necessarily enough to form a stable basis for a marriage. And I have to consider what marrying John would mean for Jamie. She’s had me to herself for her whole life, you know; she might not want to share my affection with anyone…. Plus, I can’t have any more children. That might be a real problem for an alpha – “ I stopped short when I suddenly realized that I was pouring my heart out to a small child.

“It’s okay,” Violet said sagely. “It will all work out.”

I found her naïve words strangely comforting. Just then, I felt the plane dip as it prepared to land at Heathrow. I found that I was tired – exhausted, really. After all I hadn’t slept at all the night before – and my poor arm still hurt terribly. I poked at it through the sling, and it responded with an angry throbbing pain. High time to have a doctor take a look at it.

The plane touched down a few minutes later. We taxied for a few minutes before coming to an abrupt halt, still far away from the terminal.

The pilot came on the PA: “Ermmm, this is your captain speaking. We’re going to be here for just a minute, folks. Looks like some of our passengers will be, ermmm… disembarking early.”

I saw red and white flashing lights, and glanced out the window to see several police cars and a single ambulance racing across the tarmac to surround the plane. Judging by the worried murmur that arose just then, several other passengers had noticed them too. “Oh, for heaven’s sake,” I muttered. “Violet, gather your stuff. This is our stop.”

A few seconds later, the airplane’s door burst open, and a dozen burly alpha police officers dressed in black and carrying MP5 sub machine guns stormed on board. “Everyone down!” They shouted as they swarmed towards my seat. “That’s him! Grab him and let’s go!”

“The girl is with me,” I calmly informed the alpha who picked me up and threw me over his shoulder, fireman-style. I hissed as the movement jostled my injured arm. “Watch it! That smarts!” I scolded him.

From my vantage point on the alpha’s shoulder I could see another police officer pick up Violet and throw me over his shoulder, fireman-style. I hissed as the movement jostled my injured arm. “Watch it! That smarts!” I scolded him.

The police officers carried us down a flight of air-stairs that had been positioned next to the plane. At the bottom, the ambulance stood waiting for us. And in front of the ambulance, silhouetted by its flashing lights, stood Mycroft.

“Hello, brother dear!” I drawled nonchalantly as I was set on my feet, and a pair of paramedics
began to look me over. “How’s tricks?”

“Enough of your games, Sherlock!” he snarled, using anger to cover up his obvious concern. “You said you needed to go to the hospital! Are you hurt?”

“Just my arm,” I said, untying the sling so that the paramedics could take a look. “Bit of a kitchen accident. Still stings a little, so I thought I’d better have someone take a look at it.”

Behind me Violet snickered. Mycroft leaned to the side to look at her. His eyes widened when he saw how much she looked like Jamie.

“Mycroft, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Violet Watson, formerly of Cape Onion, Newfoundland, and now of Baker Street in London.” I turned to Violet. “Violet, dear, it gives me no pleasure at all to have to introduce to you my brother – my much older brother – Mycroft Rudy Holmes.”

Violet stuck out her hand so that Mycroft could shake it. Though her expression remained icy and withdrawn, I thought I could see a flicker of amusement in her eyes. “Pleased to meet you, sir,” she said. Mycroft’s pale eyebrows screwed up as he struggled to comprehend her unfamiliar accent.

“So, no Mary then?” he asked me.

Just then, one of the paramedics cleared her throat and said to us, “There’s a bad fracture in the proximal radio-ulnar articulation of the omega’s right arm. It’s pretty bad. It’ll need surgery, probably some pins. We should get him to the hospital right away.”

“Marvelous,” I replied sarcastically. “But before we go, I need to have a word with my brother.” With my left hand I grabbed Mycroft’s sleeve, and led him a few feet away from the ambulance. It really wasn’t necessary to go further as the sound of the airplane engines would drown out anything I had to say.

“Mycroft, how’s Jamie?”

“She’s fine,” he said with a perplexed look on his round face. “She’s at home with Gregory at the moment…. She’s still a little peeved that you missed your chat last night, of course – “

I cut him off. “And did you tell John to meet us at Saint Bart’s?”

“Yes… that’s what you wanted, isn’t it? But surely there’s a better place for him to meet his daughter than the A and E department – “

I cut him off again. “After you drop me off at the hospital, I need you to go back to Baker Street.”

“Why?” he asked suspiciously.

“I need you to destroy every picture of Mary Watson you can find. I don’t think there’ll be that many because John lost his wedding album when the bank took the house in Cardiff, but look anyway. Check his computer too. And his blog. And any social media accounts you can find. Make sure Mrs. Hudson doesn’t have any pictures of her either.”

Mycroft shook his head in confusion. “Wh-why, Sherlock?”

“Just do it!” I snapped. “Tonight! Get Lestrade or your goons at the Home Office to help you if you have to; just make sure it’s done before John leaves the hospital.”
Mycroft narrowed his eyes and watched me closely. I saw him blink when the penny finally dropped. “So that’s how you’re going to play it? Seems a little dangerous to me.”

“Actually, it’s the best way to avoid suspicion, and to give her enough room to maneuver so that she can take out Magnussen and the people who’re after her.”

“The hunter becomes the hunted and vice versa, eh?”

“Something like that, yes.”

“Well, as you wish,” he shrugged. We returned to the waiting ambulance. “By the way, welcome home, Sherlock.”

“Thanks,” I replied. “Can we stop along the way? I’m gagging for a cup of tea.”

Chapter End Notes

One line is taken from the Sherlock transcripts on Ariane DeVere's livejournal. You know which one.

Thanks, everyone, for reading!
Two pegasuses

Chapter Notes

Certain parts of the dialogue will make much more sense if you're familiar with My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic. If you're not acquainted with the show and its characters, I suggest that you watch a few episodes on YouTube before reading. Don't worry, we'll wait for you to catch up.

I was in the A&E department at the Saint Bart's Omega Annex when John arrived. Mycroft had left for Baker Street after the on-call omegapaedic surgeon had come by with my x-rays. To no one’s surprise they showed that the distal end of my humerus, and the proximal ends of my radius and ulna had been shattered into a dozen razor-sharp fragments. Apparently one such sliver of bone was just milimetres away from my brachial artery, while another came close to piercing the skin on the inside of my elbow. The surgeon, a beta whose nametag read Doctor Pravin Singh, decided that immediate open reduction and internal fixation surgery was necessary to repair the damage caused by Mary’s skillet.

Doctor Singh sighed as he returned the x-rays to their protective envelope. “Omega or not, I find it hard to believe that a ‘kitchen accident,’ could cause so much damage,” he said skeptically. “How did it happen again?”

“I told you, I tripped in a doorway and fell on my side,” I grunted as I pushed myself to a sitting position in the uncomfortable little bed. “You can ask her if you don’t believe me.” I gestured at Violet who was sitting quietly in a chair at the head of the bed.

Violet was again functioning in silent mode as she watched all the goings-on of the busy hospital ward; that same blank, impassive expression – which had briefly dissipated during our flight to London – was again fixed on her face. Her only response to the surgeon’s questioning look was a minute nodding of her head.

“Hmmph,” he said. “I guess I can’t make you tell me the truth.” I couldn’t help but sympathize with the poor young doctor; after all, despite continued changes to laws, omegas were still frequent victims of domestic violence. Either out of shame or fear of retaliation, many of them lied instead of admitting that their alphas were responsible for their injuries. “Well, I’ll send the anesthesiologist by in a minute. See you in the theatre.”

A few moments later, there was a sound of running feet outside the curtain surrounding my bed, and then John rushed in. I found myself sitting up higher in my bed, a soppy, eager smile on my face. Violet too, I noticed, was watching him intently, though her expression barely changed.

“Jesus, here you are, Sherlock! I’ve been looking for you for ages! Mycroft told me to meet you here at eight, but he didn’t say where. Or why. And then the nurses couldn’t tell me where you were until you were formally admitted.” John glanced briefly at the chair where Violet sat watching him. “Hullo, Jamie. Where’s your uncles?” he asked before returning his attention to me. “So where’ve you been, Sherl?” he asked. “Did you finally crack that case? And what happened to your arm?” He bent down to examine my chart, before resuming his chattering. “You’ve broken all three bones in your elbow, you realize. God, that must hurt! How’d it happen? Get into a fight with a vicious
“Are you going to be a murderer again?” He smiled to himself as he continued reading the surgeon’s notes on my chart.

“Anyway, thanks for letting me stay at Baker Street. I’ve cleaned the place up a bit. Had a bit of time on my hands while I’ve been waiting to get my license to practice reinstated. Plus I got my car out of the impound lot in case you need to do some shopping. Did they say when they might let you out of here, because if you’re here for a while I thought I might take Jamie here to her next – “ He looked up at Violet and paused.

For several seconds, the pair of them just stared at each other: John in openmouthed shock; Jamie with that same cold, blank look on her face.

Finally, John made a sound. “Whu – “ he said.

I sighed. “Violet, this is the man I was telling you about. This is your father, Doctor John Watson.”

Violet continued staring, though I could see that her expression had evolved to one of complete awe.

“Violet?” John squeaked like an omega. “Is it really you?”

True to form, Violet stayed silent, though she gave the slightest nod in response to his question.

“Yes, of course it’s her,” I said impatiently. “Why would I bring back the wrong girl?”

“Is this where you’ve been all this time?” John looked up at me briefly before returning his gaze to his daughter. “Searching for my daughter?”


“My birthday’s in July, you clot.” The insult was softened by a fond smile. “But thank you. You’re amazing.”

I couldn’t help but blush and smile at that.

“Where’d you find her?” he asked. “And where’s Mary?” John looked around the curtained ward in search of his beloved wife.

Violet’s gaze dropped to her feet. John noted that reaction and looked at me questioningly.

I cleared my throat and told him. “Mary’s dead, John. She died in a car accident near a town called Red Deer in Alberta, Canada over two years ago. Violet’s been living in foster care ever since. I found her foster mother in Newfoundland, and she’s allowed me to return Violet to you.”

“Dead?” John gulped. He took a few deep breaths – obviously trying to stave off tears – and began to rub the back of his head in a familiar gesture of disquiet. “I can’t – I mean…. It’s not…."

He sniffed loudly then, and looked up at Violet again, a brave – yet ultimately quite pathetic – smile on his face. “I’m so glad you’re home, baby.” His voice broke. “I’m your papa. Do you remember me?”

Violet glanced at me questioningly. I shrugged and tilted my head at John, the gesture conveying both that I didn’t know what she ought to say, but also that she should say something to John. “No,” Violet said in her oddly deep voice.

“Oh, well, that’s alright, I guess,” John sniffled. “Have you got a hug for your papa?” He opened his arms wide.

Violet, however, had no intention of rushing into his arms. She leaned away from him and looked up
at me pleadingly. “Maybe not just yet, John,” I suggested. “She’s been through a lot. Give it time.”

“Oh. Right,” John said shamefacedly. “Who’s going to be taking care of her?”

“You are, I suppose,” I sighed. “I’m going into surgery in the next few minutes, so I can’t. And you are her father, after all. Why don’t you take her back to Baker Street? She can stay in Jamie’s room, and you can keep sleeping in my bed.”

“I’m not – I mean, I haven’t been… not every night, that is….” John stammered.

“It’s fine,” I said. “I don’t mind. It looks like I’ll be here for a couple of days. You two could use that time to get to know each other before Jamie and I come back.”

“But does she – does Violet even want to stay with me?” John asked me worriedly.

“Oh, more than you think,” I winked cheekily at the little girl, who responded with the tiniest of smiles. “She’s shy, but it doesn’t last.”

Just then, the anesthesiologist – a tall female alpha – entered the curtained ward.

“Hullo, Mister Holmes!” she said cheerily. “I’m Jessie Andrews. Doctor Singh sent me by to speak with you – she stopped short when she saw John.

“Um, hello?” John smiled warily.

The anesthesiologist narrowed her eyes threateningly at John. “Are you this omega’s alpha?”

“Ermm… No, not really. I mean, I am the fa – “

“You don’t sound too certain about it,” the alpha growled. “Are you sure you’re not trying to conceal your relationship with this omega?”


“In order to conceal the fact that you’re responsible for his injury!” The anesthesiologist squared her shoulders and faced down John.

“That’s preposterous!” John’s hands curled into fists, and he glared at the much taller woman. “I’ve never laid a hand on him. I don’t even know how he hurt himself!”

“It was a kitchen accident,” I said weakly – already I could see that this stand-off could end badly. “I tripped.”

The anesthesiologist laughed cynically at that. “A kitchen accident! You don’t know how many omegas we get in here with catastrophic injuries caused by ‘tripping,’ or ‘slipping,’ or ‘walking into a door.’ You’re not fooling anyone, you know!”

“Really,” John started. “I don’t – “

“Doctor Singh said that there’s no way this omega’s fracture could have been caused by a fall, not with bones like his! He says that there’s every indication he was attacked with a blunt weapon!”

“Honestly!” John shouted. “I haven’t even seen him in a month! I have no idea what happened!”

“You make me sick!” the anesthesiologist snarled at John. “Omegas are sweet, gentle, loving human beings! They deserve to be treated with respect. If it was up to me, they’d toss you in prison and
throw away the key!"

John was shaking his head in astonished bewilderment. Even the perpetually aloof Violet was looking worried. Time to take matters into my own hands then.

“Doctor Andrews, please!” I hollered. She turned to look at me. “I do appreciate your concern. But if you really respect omegas, please respect my word on the matter: John is not responsible for my injury.”

“But there’s no way that a fall would cause that sort of injury,” she insisted. “This has all the hallmarks of a domestic beating! You don’t have to protect your alpha like this, you know!”

“He’s not my alpha at all! See? I’m not mated.” I turned my head so that she could see my unmarked neck. “He is, rather, the father of this little girl – the one you’ve been frightening with your ranting.” Doctor Andrews had the good sense to look guilty at that. “Now it’s getting late, Doctor,” I said reasonably. “And he needs to take his daughter home to bed. And then you and I have an appointment with the surgeon, don’t we?”

“I – I’m sorry,” she said sheepishly. “I forgot myself. By all means, let’s get moving.”

“It’s fine,” I concluded our conversation and turned to John and Violet. “Well, wish me luck.”

“Of course,” John grinned, relieved that I had saved him from the anesthesiologist’s righteous ire. “You’re strong; you’ll do fine. We’ll come by tomorrow afternoon, alright?”

“Fine,” I replied, turning to Violet. “Now give me a hug, and then go home and get some sleep.”

Violet nodded and hopped onto the bed to give me a hug and a kiss on the cheek. John coughed in surprise. When she clambered down, I turned to John and said, “Now you.”

“What?” he said in confusion.

“Come here. I need a hug.” I opened my left arm to him.

John coughed again. “A h-hug? You?”

“Yes. Hurry up, John.”

“Oh. Oh – okay.” John leaned over and gave me an awkward manly hug, which I returned as tightly as I could manage with just one arm.

“Thank you,” I said, sliding my hands under the blankets. “Now, Doctor Andrews, if you’d be so kind as to roll me to the operating room?”

“Of course,” she smiled at me, before turning to glare at John once more. John returned her look, but there was something in his expression that suggested doubt, maybe even suspicion.

As Jessie Andrews pushed my bed down the hallway towards the operating theatre, I retrieved John’s wallet and mobile phone from where I had hidden them under my blanket after I had pickpocketed him during our hug. With my left hand, I began to rifle through the few pictures he kept in his wallet. There was just one of Mary.

“What have you got there?” Doctor Andrews asked as I crumpled the photo in my fist.

“Hmm? Just a bit of trash. Can you deposit this in the rubbish bin?” I handed her the photo.
“Sure,” she said hesitantly while I typed John’s passcode into his phone and set about deleting any remaining photos of Mary.

I awoke the next morning to a steady thumping sound. As I slowly regained consciousness, I found that I could also detect the sound of rain, along with some voices quietly murmuring, one of them definitely Mycroft’s. I opened my eyes to see Jamie sitting on the window ledge next to my bed, drumming her heels on the wall beneath her. She looked quite lovely, surrounded by bouquets of flowers and reading an Asterix comic. Even though she was sitting down I could tell that she had grown at least an inch since I had left a month earlier.

“Hey, baby girl,” I tried to say, though it came out as a harsh, garbled whisper.

Jamie turned her head to look at me. When she saw that I was awake and struggling to sit up, she dropped her comic, leapt to her feet and drew a deep breath. “He’s awake!” she shouted at the top of her lungs. “My-My! He’s awake!”

I flinched at the loudness of her voice. That tiny movement was enough to make my poor arm throb with pain. Just then I heard Mycroft speaking from outside the door. “So I can pick him up tomorrow morning, then?”

To which Doctor Singh replied, “Absolutely, Mr. Holmes. And you can schedule his physiotherapy appointments at the same time.”

“Wonderful,” I could hear Mycroft smile. “Goodbye, Doctor.”

Then Mycroft entered my room, followed closely behind by Lestrade. I smiled at them, and manipulated the bed controls so that I was sitting more upright.

“He’s awake!” Jamie told Lestrade while she hopped and skipped around the bed. “I watched him like you said. And when he woke up, I saw and I told you, like you said to do.”

“Good job, Jamie,” Lestrade ruffled her hair and took her place on the window ledge. Meanwhile Mycroft remained standing at the foot of the bed, and Jamie climbed onto the bed so that she could sit next to me.

“Goodness, Jamie,” Mycroft gently scolded. “Your mummy’s still very sore!”

“I don’t care!” she said, cuddling up to my uninjured left side. “I haven’t seen mummy in forever, and I want to sit with him.”

“It’s fine,” I said to Mycroft, as I leaned down to kiss the top of my daughter’s head. God, I had missed her!

“I heard you speaking to the doctor. How’d the operation go?” I asked my brother.

“It was a complete success… though you’ll have to undergo quite a lot of physiotherapy to regain full use of the arm”.

“They fixed it with bone from a cadabra!” Jamie told me with wide eyes. “Isn’t that cool?”

“A cadabra?” I replied. “Oh, a cadaver! That is cool!” I smiled down at my well-wrapped arm. I turned to Mycroft, “And your assignment from last night?”
“Taken care of,” Mycroft said casually. “As you said, there weren’t many, and he isn’t very good at choosing passwords.”

Lestrade frowned suspiciously at both of us. “What’s your plan when you get out of here, Sherlock? I mean, will you be moving in with us for a while? Because we could use your help with the seating plan and the chair bows – “

“No, I think it’s straight back to Baker Street for Jamie and me,” I said before taking a sip from the glass of water in front of me.

“Won’t John and Violet still be there?” Lestrade asked.

I shrugged in response. Jamie – who had hijacked my water glass and was now gulping it down – asked, “Who’s Violet?”

Mycroft and Lestrade grimaced uncomfortably at each other. I decided, however, that nothing could be gained from hiding the truth from Jamie, if for no other reason than that she had already demonstrated that she was capable of unearthing family secrets on her own. So I told her, “Violet Watson is your half-sister. She’s John’s daughter, but her mother was a beta woman named Mary Morstan. I went to Canada to bring Violet home to John.”

“Oh right,” Jamie shrugged indifferently. “Doctor Watson told us about her, didn’t he? That time at Starbucks?”

“Yep. Anyway, they’ll be staying with us for a while. In fact, if it’s alright with you, Violet might share your room.”

“Like a real omega litter?” Jamie’s eyes lit up. I was surprised at her reaction: I had had no idea that Jamie might want siblings. Though I suppose it was understandable: every other pup with an omega mother we knew had at least three, and sometimes as many as six brothers and sisters.

“And how’s Violet taking all this?” Lestrade asked then. “The last few days must have been quite the upheaval for her. It could be quite… traumatic for a little one.” I recognized Lestrade’s questions as the product of his short tenure in the Family Law division, where he had undoubtedly witnessed the effects of family break-ups and parental deaths on hundreds of children.

“Ermeee, well, tough to say,” I admitted. “She’s shy. Silent as the grave, sometimes. But she’s smart. And when she gets to know you, you can tell she’s quite kindhearted,” I said, recalling our conversation the day before.

“Yeah, that’s understandable,” he sighed before looking at my daughter, who was then running her fingers through my overgrown curls. “Jamie,” he said. “Who’s your second favourite pony?”

“Fluttershy,” she replied distractedly.

“And why’s that?” he continued. I looked at Mycroft quizzically. From his expression it was clear that he couldn’t tell where Lestrade was going with this line of questioning either.

“Because she’s a pegasus like Rainbow Dash. And because she’s nice and brave, even though you can’t always tell because she’s so quiet and shy.”

“Right. Well, Violet – John’s other daughter – is kind of like Fluttershy,” Jamie looked at Lestrade with sudden interest as he continued, “She’s quiet and shy, but that doesn’t mean that she’s not also kind and brave and fun too. If you want to be her friend, you’ll need to be caring and patient with her, and not push her to do things she doesn’t want to do. Like how the other ponies treat Fluttershy.
Do you think you can do that?” he asked the little girl, whose rapt attention he now commanded. I had always maintained that Jamie’s only chance of becoming a caring, empathetic person lay with Lestrade, and here was yet further proof.

“Of course, Uncle Greg!” she whispered emphatically. Jamie thought silently for a few seconds before asking Lestrade, “If Violet is like Fluttershy, which pony am I like?”

“I should think that’s obvious,” he replied. “Rainbow Dash. Because you’re brave and fun.”

“Yeah!” she grinned at that. “And My-My? Which pony is he?”

Mycroft rolled his eyes, and said primly, “I don’t know what ponies you’re referring to – “

“Give it a break, My,” Greg grinned. “You’ve seen just as many episodes as Sherlock or me.” Lestrade paused to think before telling Jamie, “I think My-My is like Twilight Sparkle. Because he’s clever and a good leader.” Jamie vigorously nodded in agreement. “And which pony do you think I resemble?” Lestrade asked Jamie.

She thought for a moment before proclaiming, “Applejack, definitely. Because you’re loyal and honest with everyone.”

“Applejack, good,” Lestrade laughed. “Now which one is Mummy?” he asked with a mischievous glint in his eyes.

Jamie thought for just a second, then began giggling hysterically. “Rarity. Mummy is just like Rarity.” Lestrade roared with laughter at that, and even Mycroft snickered a little.

“I don’t know what you’re implying,” I said haughtily, though even I was having difficulty concealing my own smile.

Just then the door opened. It was John and Violet. “Hey, what’s all the racket?” John asked us. “We could hear you laughing all the way down the hall.”

Jamie gasped dramatically when she first clapped eyes on her half-sister. She stood up on the bed next to me and gawped at Violet in wonder. Violet returned her gaze, but, to my dismay, I thought I could detect an element of hostility in Violet’s cold glare. I remembered what she had said about not liking other children. For our part, the adults in the room remained silent, anxiously waiting to see what sort of first impressions the two little girls would form of each other.

Then Jamie clambered awkwardly over my legs, hopped off the hospital bed, and stopped right in front of Violet, where she continued to stare at her half-sister. Close up I could see that Jamie was at least half a head taller than Violet, which was a significant difference considering both girls had been born in the same month in 2014. (Though whether that was due to differences in nutrition or just plain old genetics, I couldn’t have said.) Just as Violet’s cautious stare was beginning to morph into a defensive glower, Jamie hopped forward and grabbed her sister in a tight bear hug. Violet’s eyes widened in shock.

Then Jamie whispered in Violet’s ear, “Did you know that we’re both pegasuses?”

Chapter End Notes

I know what you’re all thinking, and, actually, it’s not at all clear what the proper plural
form of pegasus ought to be. Yes, they're often called pegasi in literature, but since Pegasus is a proper name and not the name of a species, the plural should actually be Pegasuses. However, I doubt that a four year old (even a precocious one like Jamie Holmes) would know any of that, which is why she calls them pegasuses. Which is cuter anyway.

Thanks one and all for reading!
“Why don’t you have a bit of a lie-down?” John told me as we ascended the stairs to 221b. “I’ll get you some paracetamol and some juice to wash it down.”

“Al-alright,” I whispered as I sat down shakily on the sofa, which was once again made up with Jamie’s sheets.

It was the morning of the third of September, and John and I had just returned from dropping the girls off at their first day of Primary One. I had long ago promised Jamie that I would walk her to her first day of ‘big girl school,’ come hell or high water. So, despite the agonizing pain in my arm, that morning I allowed John to waken me at seven. We fed the girls a breakfast of cereal, fruit, and yogourt, and the four of us set off for Paddington Green. At Jamie’s insistence, the two little girls had skipped all the way from Baker Street, to Marylebone Road, and finally up Edgeware Road. As nerves set in somewhere on Crompton Street, their gleeful skipping had slowed to an anxious, unenthusiastic – and for a few moments, tearful – march, but after a few hugs and words of encouragement from John and myself, the pair had recovered their courage enough to enter the front door of their school, where they were greeted by an Assistant Headmaster.

I noticed the middle-aged beta female looking askance at the little girls’ hair-dos. With my right arm still in a cast, Mrs. Hudson’s arthritis flaring up something awful, John being useless with little girls’ grooming matters, and Mycroft already at work and unable to drop by to resolve a minor personal care crisis, there were no adults around who could style the girls’ hair properly. Nevertheless, with all confidence Jamie had assured us that both she and Violet could brush and style each other’s hair for their first day of school. The result was probably less than what she had hoped for – Jamie’s long, thick red hair had been fashioned into three lumpy, crooked braids that stuck out from her scalp in an unbecoming manner, while Violet’s flyaway blonde hair had been tugged and coerced into one gigantic, knotty ponytail on the left side of her head. No matter however; both girls were terribly proud of their accomplishment – and it was nice to see them getting along already – so who was I to take that away from them?

“That’s right; easy does it now,” John said, helping me to set my empty juice glass on the coffee table. “Don’t worry about the girls. I’ll go fetch them when their lessons are over…. When’d you say that was again?”

“Two – two forty-five,” I whispered as John helped me to lie on my left side.

“Alright. Two forty-five,” John stroked my hair back from my brow. “Sleep now.” I felt him tuck his duvet over my body.

I had been discharged from the hospital the previous morning, which meant that John had had to vacate my bedroom and take up residence on the sofa again. My bedclothes still smelled like John – that masculine, indisputably alpha odour of cool gun metal and summery pine forests. When my arm began to throb viciously the previous evening, his scent enveloping me in my comfy bed had soothed and comforted me more than any painkiller could.

Or at least, any of the painkillers I had been prescribed. Due to my history of narcotic abuse, Doctor Singh had refused to allow me to take anything stronger than extra-strength paracetamol, which, in my opinion, did nothing more than make me drowsy and maybe, if taken at the maximum dosage,
take the edge off the worst of the pain. Consequently, barely three hours after waking up, I had already reached the maximum recommended daily dose.

I listened to John puttering around the sitting room and kitchen. He ran the taps – evidently in order to wash our breakfast dishes – and threw a load of laundry in the washer. Probably Violet’s clothes; she didn’t bring too many outfits with her when we left Newfoundland, so she was already running out of clean pants and tops. And even though Jamie was somewhat below the average size of other girls her age, her clothes were still too large for Violet. Before I drifted off to sleep I resolved to take both girls shopping on the weekend. If my arm felt better.

*

The sound of two little girls chanting “Daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy!” woke me from my slumber. I looked at the mantle clock: three fifteen. I had slept all day. I sat up awkwardly and gazed blearily into the kitchen, where John stood at the cooker stirring a pot of something that smelled like peas, while both of his daughters bounced around him like circus monkeys.

“Daddy!” Jamie exclaimed. (Since when had she started calling John ‘Daddy,’ I wondered.) “Watch me! Watch me! I can climb real high! She pushed a kitchen chair up to the cupboards, clambered onto the worktop, scrambled up the kitchen shelves, and placed the palm of her hand on the ceiling. Oh, so that’s where the handprints on the ceiling came from, I thought. One of the greatest mysteries of Mrs. Hudson’s long life was finally solved!

“Watch me, Daddy!” Violet said in a softer but no less urgent voice. “I can do a summersault!” John helped Jamie down from the worktop, and together they watched Violet – still with her awful side ponytail – execute a clumsy but determined roll on the kitchen lino.

“Great job, girls!” John applauded softly. “But you’re woken up Mummy. And he really needs his sleep if his arm’s going to get better.”

Completely unapologetic, Jamie shouted, “Yay! Mummy’s awake!” The two girls bounded into the sitting room.

“Guess what? Daddy’s making tea!” Jamie announced as she hopped onto the sofa next to me. “I didn’t believe him when he said he could make mushy peas, but he said he could, and he can!”

“Would you like a glass of milk, Sherlock?” Violet patted my knee gently, as if frightened that a more forceful touch might shatter more of my bones.

“Yes, please, Violet,” I said to her. She raced back to the kitchen. “How was school?” I asked Jamie.

“Okay,” said Jamie, running her fingers through my hair. “Some of the kids didn’t believe me when I said that Violet was my sister, but then we had a maths quiz, and I tied for first place, so that made up for it.”

“Good job!” I grinned. Evidently the maths tutoring Mycroft had paid for over the summer was paying off. “Whom did you tie with?”

“Me,” said Violet as she handed me a glass of milk. I blinked with surprise at her; she responded with a tiny shrug.

Perhaps a bit jealous of the attention I was giving to Violet, Jamie hopped off the sofa and ran back to the kitchen. “Daddy, watch this,” she said to John. “I can spin real fast!” She held her arms to the side and began to twirl around.
“Very nice, but do it in the sitting room. The cooker’s on,” John smiled.

Jamie obediently whirled into the sitting room.

“Me too! Me too!” Violet said in a tiny but excited voice. She joined her sister on the rug, and the two of them began spinning ‘round, ‘and round, and ‘round.

John turned off the cooker and strolled into the sitting room. We exchanged fond, amused smiles as John sat down in his old chair to watch the show.

All too soon, however, the girls began to grow dizzy. Jamie’s footwork faltered, and she tripped and fell headfirst into the corner of the desk.

“Jamie!” I gasped.

She fell on her backside and held a hand up to her forehead. “Muuummm-mmmyyyy!” she wailed and ran into my waiting arms – well, arm; my right arm remained immobile.

“Let me see. Let me see,” I said, prying her hands away from her forehead while she sobbed wretchedly. There was a purple mark, but no blood. “I think you’ll have a bruise, maybe even a bump,” I said, gently prodding the mark with my left thumb. “But you’ll live.”

I smiled at my daughter, and her tears sniffled to a halt. However, rather than resuming her spinning, she said in a watery voice, “Kiss it better, Mummy. Please?” When I obediently kissed her head she sighed with pleasure and cuddled against my chest.

Violet watched all of this. She had stopped spinning as soon as Jamie injured herself; however, when Jamie burrowed into my arms, she started up again. Violet completed just two turns before collapsing dramatically on the rug. “Ow, my arm!” she wailed with pretend tears. “Sherlock, kiss it better!” she whined.

Violet ran over to the sofa, climbed over Jamie, and shoved her elbow in my face. I dutifully kissed Violet’s nonexistent injury better, and, because Jamie had fastened herself to my torso with all the strength and tenacity of a baby chimp, lay down across my lap. Thus, despite my terribly painful injury, I found my body thoroughly smothered by two little girls.

I glanced up to see John watching me from his chair. He was slouched back in it, leaning his cheek on his fist, and smiling at me in an affectionate, relaxed manner. As I returned his smile, I found myself thinking for the very first time that this – this odd little collection of mismatched and broken pieces we found ourselves assembling into a family – might actually work.

Chapter End Notes

A short, fluffy chapter before a long, important one.

Thanks everyone for reading. I can hardly believe it, but we're almost at the end!
Questions in the middle of the night

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Having spent much of the day in blessed unconsciousness, I found that I couldn’t fall asleep that night. Instead I lay in bed allowing my thoughts to rush and bounce around my Mind Palace in much the same manner as Violet and Jamie had rushed and bounced around the sitting room that afternoon. Chief among my worries was our living arrangements; John said that he didn’t mind sleeping on the sofa, but I knew that it wasn’t that comfortable – even for someone as short as John – and the sitting room didn’t offer him a lot of privacy, so eventually we’d have to find another place for him to sleep – that is, if John planned on staying. Maybe Mrs. Hudson would let us fix up 221C? The basement flat was cold and mildewy, but maybe with some nice wallpaper and new wall-to-wall it would be suitable for human habitation. But if John moved downstairs, would Violet want to go with him? Currently, she was sharing Jamie’s bed upstairs. If the amount of giggling that had filtered through the ceiling late into the night was any indication, the two girls were delighted to share a room. But how long would that last? Would the girls want to continue sharing a room as they grew older? And one day would John want to move out and buy his own place again? And if that happened, would Violet – who was already so attached to Jamie and myself – go with him?

I sighed and rubbed my eyes with the heels of my hands; there was no way that fretting about those questions in the middle of the night would help me to answer them.

The other issue I had to consider was whether I wanted to continue taking omega hormones. It was a question that Doctor Evansworth had put to me back in July, but, in all the drama of John’s return and my trip to Canada, I had avoided coming to a definitive answer on it. That evening I had used the last of my hormone pills. If I wanted to continue taking them – which is to say, if I wanted to continue living as an omega – I would have to refill the prescription the next day. Or get John to do it; my arm still hurt terribly. However, I didn’t know exactly where my prescription form had disappeared to. I thought I had left it on the fridge, but it wasn’t there. Maybe it was on the desk? Maybe John had thrown it out when he cleaned the flat prior to my return? Since I couldn’t sleep I decided I would search the flat for it.

I opened the door to my bedroom only to hear quiet sniffling coming from the sitting room. It was John; he was crying. In all my excitement over coming home, I had forgotten that John was in mourning.

He was sitting on the sofa in a ratty grey t-shirt and a pair of green pants. On the coffee table in front of him was a glass a quarter full of dark liquid. “Oh, John,” I whispered disappointedly; he had been so proud that he had stopped drinking. I sniffed the contents of the glass, and was surprised that I did not detect any alcohol.

“It’s just Diet Coke,” he murmured, swiping his eyes with the back of his hand. I stepped around him to turn on the lamp in the corner. “No, leave it off,” he whispered to me, evidently embarrassed to have been caught sniveling alone in the dark.

I sat down on the coffee table to observe John. Even in the dark, I could see that his eyes were red and watery, and his cheeks sticky and tear-stained. “I’m – I’m sorry,” he murmured in a wobbly voice. “I know I should just be grateful that I have Violet back – and I am! – but I – I still miss Mary. I – I still have no idea why she left, you know. Why she was behaving so oddly beforehand. God, I can hardly believe she’s dead!” John blew his nose on a tissue.
I sighed and ran my left hand through my curls, knowing full well how much pain I was about to cause myself. Though Mary and I had agreed that no one but the two of us could ever know she was still alive, I knew that I could not keep her secret. My friendship with John had once been built on an unstable foundation of secrets and lies, and when they began to crumble, I had almost lost him forever. No matter how much I stood to personally benefit from keeping Mary’s continued existence a secret, I couldn’t keep lying to John.

“She’s not dead, John,” I whispered quietly.

“What?” John asked, still rubbing his nose with the wet tissue. “What was that?”

“You can’t tell anyone, but Mary’s still alive,” I whispered again.

John peered at me closely before growling, “What are you talking about, Sherlock?”

I looked down at my left hand, which was plucking uneasily at the sling holding my right arm. “I’m sorry I told you she was dead, John. It really was necessary for our plan… and I wanted you for myself,” I admitted.

“Plan? Our plan? You mean yours and Mary’s?” John’s voice sounded angry.

I nodded, but kept my gaze focused on my hands. “She’s being hunted by a newspaper owner and the relatives of some people she killed. I found her and Violet at her most recent hideout in Newfoundland. She agreed to turn Violet over to me so that she could concentrate her efforts on escaping from her enemies, and not have to worry about taking care of Violet. For that to work – especially if we didn’t want Violet to become a target – we had to fake Mary’s death.”

There was a pause while John processed this. “People she killed?” he asked. “She killed people? Wh-why? How? When?” He was starting to raise his voice.

“Shhh!” I raised my hands placatingly. “Don’t wake the girls! Yes, she was an assassin, John. The newspaper owner figured out she was responsible for certain high-profile fatalities, and he used that information to blackmail her. Then she tried to kill him, and in retaliation he told the families of the victims about her. They’ve been hunting her, and she’s been hiding from them ever since.”

“An assassin!” John fell back against the sofa cushions. “An assassin!” John was quiet for several seconds. In the dim light, I could not make out enough of his expression to deduce what he was thinking. Finally he said, “Did she – did she explain to you why she didn’t tell me about any of this? Why she didn’t let me help? I mean, I would have done anything to keep her safe if I knew people were after her. I’m a good shot, after all. At the very least, I’d have asked you – begged you – for help, even if I still thought you didn’t want anything to do with me. Hell, I’d have even gone to Canada with her. So did she say why she left me in the dark?”

I hesitated because I didn’t want to tell John what I suspected was the truth: that Mary had left him because she saw him as only a source of vulnerability. That she thought she was more capable of keeping Violet safe if she was alone, than if she had John around slowing her down. “I – I think because she loved you very much, John,” I lied. “And she didn’t want any harm to come to you.”

“What harm!” he scoffed indignantly. “As if I don’t know what it means to come to harm! I’m not some delicate omega who has to be protected from all the bad stuff and mean people in the world!”

Knowing that John was upset, I let that little remark slide. “I know, John, but –“

He interrupted me, “So she loved me so much she thought it would be better to abduct my daughter and disappear without a word of explanation, or the slightest bit of concern for what that would do to
me psychologically.” John was openly weeping again – this time angry, bitter tears. “Jesus, I thought that her being dead was bad enough. But this – this…. revelation that she actually left me of her – her own volition for s-some bullshit reason, well that – that is – is so much worse!” He stifled a sob with his fist.

“I’m sorry, John,” I whispered. And I was; in order to salve my own conscience I had caused John immeasurable pain. I felt terribly selfish. “But you have to understand that you can’t say anything about this to anyone, right?”

“What?” he asked wiping his nose again.

“For your own safety, and more importantly for Violet’s, you have to keep pretending that you think Mary is dead.”

“She is dead. Dead to me, anyway,” he said heatedly.

“I’m serious, John,” I laid a hand on his bare knee. “You have to keep up the pretense of mourning her. And you can’t tell anyone that she’s alive. If any of the people chasing Mary get one whiff of a possibility that she’s alive, they’ll kidnap Violet in order to draw her out.”

John sighed angrily before reluctantly admitting, “You’re right, Sherl. You’re right.” He drew a few steadying breaths before falling silent again, lost in his troubled thoughts. I did not wish to disturb his moment of reflection, so I sat quietly and watched his turbulent emotions flicker across his features.

“Did she have anything to do with you breaking your arm?” John asked me tiredly.

“Yes,” I admitted. “She hit me with a skillet. But that was before she knew I was there to help her, so I can’t really blame her.”

“God damn it, I knew you were lying!” He shook his head ruefully. “I knew it, but I just – I just didn’t want to face the truth. That is so typical of me. God damn it.”

“I’m sorry, John,” I whispered again.

A car drove by outside. John cleared his throat and said, “What did you mean earlier when you said you wanted me to yourself?”

“Oh, I, ermm, I…” I stammered, caught off guard by the change in topic. “I – I just like the idea of you and Violet staying here with me and Jamie. I think it could work. For all of us. It seems sensible anyway.”

John gave me a long, considering look. Then, out of nowhere and with no word of warning, he asked me quietly, “Will you marry me, Sherlock?”

I made a coughing, laughing sound. “I’m serious,” John said, moving to kneel before me. “You and me, we always miss our chance to be together. And I’m not going to pass up another opportunity to be your mate when one falls in my lap.” He took my left hand in both of his hands and looked up at me. “Come on. I love you, and you love me. It couldn’t be simpler.”

“Wh-what’s brought this on?” I asked, thoroughly stunned by John’s proposal.

“Well,” John shifted a bit on his knees. “I started thinking about getting married when you had left on your trip. I thought that when you got back I’d petition for a divorce on grounds of abandonment. But now that Mary’s effectively dead, there’s no reason we can’t be mated right away.”
“There’s – there’s every reason we can’t!” I stood up and spun away from John.

“Like what?” he asked quietly, warily.

“Like, Jamie, for example! I can’t make a lifelong commitment to someone without consulting her first!”

John snorted and climbed to his feet. “Have you not seen how Jamie acts around me and Violet? She adores us! Now if that’s your only objection – “

“It’s not. In fact, of far greater concern is how much the two of us have changed since we last lived together.” John gave me a quizzical look, so I explained, “John, it’s been five years since you married Mary, and seven since we last lived together. So much has changed between us, and we too have changed as individuals. I mean, besides us both being parents – “

“Change is a part of life, Sherlock,” John said calmly. “Everybody changes. And good marriages can accommodate that.”

“But what if – ” I turned back to him. In the dimness his eyes looked flat and serious. “But what if you don’t like the new me?” My voice broke. “What if after a month of living together you find that you preferred the old Sherlock? The one who doesn’t exist anymore?”

John tilted his head like an inquisitive dog. “Did it ever occur to you that I might have already noticed how you’ve changed? And that I like the new you even more than I did the old one?”

That threw me for a loop. “You…. You do?” I squeaked in proper omega fashion.

(Of course I do! Of course,” John huffed a laugh. “Jesus Christ, Sherlock, not only did you find my daughter for me, you’ve become a wonderful mum, and you’re working cases again. Single-handedly, even; you don’t need help from anyone. God, you’re a wonder! How can I not like that?”

“To be fair,” I murmured as I processed what John just told me. “Mycroft has helped a lot with childcare when I’m on a case. And I do like your help with investigations even if I don’t really need it.”

“Well, ta.” He shrugged, and then in too casual a manner said, “Of course, I could ask you the same question: Do you like me now that I’m older, and sadder, and broke, and a drunk.”

The question was so preposterous I struggled to make a coherent reply. Finally I whispered, “Of – of course, John. I’ll always love you. Always. I couldn’t change that even if I wanted to. I mean, god knows I tried – several times, in fact – but it never lasted. You’re the love of my life.”

In the light cast by the streetlamp outdoors, I saw tears sparkle at the corners of John’s eyes. “Now, enough of this,” he whispered. “Come on, I’ll make an honest omega out of you.” He grinned and held out his hand to me, but I shook my head.

“If you want me to be an honest omega, there’s something I should tell you.”

John groaned, “Not another secret, Sherlock…. “

“No, it’s not. I just haven’t mentioned it to you yet. But I think you deserve to know.” I drew a deep breath and started to explain, “You know I had a c-section, right? Well, when they did that, they also performed an ovo-hysterectomy, because my womb really wasn’t up to carrying any more litters. So that means I’ve had to take replacement omega hormones, because otherwise my appearance would revert to that of a beta. More importantly, however, it means that I can’t have any more pups, John. I
realize this must come as a disappointment because alphas are supposed to have big families. But, on the other hand, if you’d prefer that I live as a beta I can stop taking the hormones and then – “

“Stop. Just stop, Sherlock,” John interrupted my increasingly anxious babbling.

“I’m sorry, John,” I whispered as I fiddled with my sling. “I’ll understand if you don’t want to marry me. I’m not much of an omega after all.”

“Shut up, Sherlock,” John replied. I looked up at him worriedly. He was shaking his head sadly at me. “Do you really think – do you really think that your inability to give me any more babies would change my mind about you? Do you really think so little of me?”

I shrugged. “You’re an alpha….” I started.

“Jesus, Sherlock, Jesus.” John rubbed his hand through his grey hair impatiently. “It’s not about gender. It’s never been about gender! Yours or mine!”

I frowned in confusion, and John rushed to explain. “When I met you, I thought you were a beta. And even though I wasn’t into beta males, I fell for you hook-line-and-sinker. I mean, that came as a surprise – that I would fall for a beta man – but it didn’t stop me from loving you. Because I was never in love with you because of your gender, but because you were, well… you, you big idiot. And when I found out you were an omega, that didn’t really change how I felt either. Well, that’s not quite true,” John said thoughtfully. “It did change how much I respected you, because you had accomplished so much despite the limitations placed on your gender. So in effect, I loved you more not merely because of your gender, and not even in spite of your gender, but because your gender helped to mold you into the person you were. And you’re still that marvelous, brilliant, totally mad person. In fact you’re a better you than you’ve ever been.”

I found that I was holding my breath. John poked me hard in my uninjured shoulder, “So don’t give me that crap about understanding that I won’t want to marry you because you can’t have any more pups. Not only have you already given me one fantastic pup, your ability to provide me with kids never, ever figured into all the reasons I loved you. And don’t – “ He poked me again in the shoulder, and I stumbled back a step. “Assume that my wants and interests are determined solely by my gender; that’s no more true for me than it is for you. And don’t – “ He jabbed me one last time. “Tell me that you’ll live as a beta if I want you to because – one more time – you can be any gender you want and I’ll still love you regardless!”

John’s words floored me. Could I have spent the last twenty years of my life so hung up on how my omega gender was affecting my life that I had missed how irrelevant it was to John? Pensively, I rubbed the sore spot on my shoulder where John had been poking me. There was still one more thing I wanted to ask him. Something so painful I had difficulty thinking about it, let alone enunciating it.


“Another question?” he asked wearily. “What else can I possibly say or do to convince you that I love you, that I’ll always love you, and that we ought to get married?”

“This one’s important, John.”

“I thought they all were.” He sat down on the sofa again, and I sat next to him so that I wouldn’t have to look him in the eyes when he answered my question.

“If you h-had a choithe,” I began, my lisp betraying my anxiety. “Whom would you marry, me or Mary?”
John turned and frowned at me in confusion. “I don’t understand,” he said shaking his head.

“Am I – am I your thecond choithe, John? Are you only marrying me becauthe you can’t be with Mary anymore? Be-becauthe I don’t think I could marry you if that’th true. I couldn’t be your thecond choithe – your thilver medal, if you will. To come thecond to thomeone who thought tho little of you that she’d leave you and break your heart without hethitation or regret…. Well, I’d never get over that.” I sniffled, still avoiding eye contact with John.

“Is that what you think? That in my eyes you’re just a second best replacement for Mary?” John croaked.

I shrugged, the casual gesture concealing my deep worry.

“Look at me, Sherlock,” John whispered as he tilted my head towards him. His blue eyes glinted in the light of a passing car, and his mouth was set in a firm, determined line. “Listen,” he began, “I did love Mary a great deal – “ I turned my head away in pain, but John gently tugged it back towards him. “I did love her. And that’s why I asked her to marry me. But also because I thought you were never coming back. You see, Sherlock, it’s like the moon when the sun comes out. The moon is lovely and it seems bright, but that’s only when the sun’s gone down. When the sun is out it completely overwhelms the moon. You can’t even see the moon, ’cause the sun is so bright and warm and wonderful.”


John gave me a disbelieving look. “It represents you, you berk! Jesus, this is what I get for trying to be poetic!”

“It really doethn’t thuit you,” I agreed.

“The point is,” John said with an exasperated smile. “You’re the love of my life too, Sherlock. I see that now. If anything, Mary was a replacement for you – and a poor substitute at that – and not the other way around.”

I sniffled once more, then leaned forward to mash my lips against John’s in a desperate, artless kiss. John moaned in surprise, then set about returning the kiss with vigour. Awkwardly, given my broken arm, I climbed onto his lap and continued kissing him deeply. John growled appreciatively and cupped his hands around my buttocks to pull me closer.

There was nothing elegant or graceful about our kissing – our teeth clacked; I accidently bit John’s lip, and in return he licked my eye. But for the two of us it was glorious – nothing less than the melding of two souls and two bodies that had for too long been denied of each other’s company.

Our messy, urgent kissing continued unimpeded for several splendid minutes. Finally, however, John turned his head away. “Wait, wait,” he whispered as I turned my attention to his earlobe. “Does this mean yes?” he asked, holding up a hand to momentarily block me from licking his neck.

“Yes?” I repeated in a lusty haze.

“Yes, will you marry me, you daft pillock?” he asked me tenderly.

“Such flattery.” I laughed. “You have such a way with words, John! How could a naïve little omega like me turn down such a beautifully worded proposal?”

“Arse.” John smiled.
“Yes,” I smiled back. “Yes, after a suitable period of mourning for your dearly departed wife, I will bond with you and marry you, John Hamish Watson. Yes.” I leaned forward to lick John’s collarbone. “Yes, of course.”

A few moments later, as I was nipping John’s ear and he was sucking my neck above the knot of my sling, I felt a stirring beneath the crotch of my pyjamas. I wriggled my hips and discovered that there was definitely a hot, hard lump in John’s pants. I pulled away from our kiss to look at John with surprise. His pupils were blown wide, irises invisible in the darkened room. “You don’t have to – “ he began. However, that thought was cut off when I started grinding down hard on his crotch.

“Oh, Sherlock! Oh, love!” John groaned while I rubbed my clothed vulva harder and faster over his erection. “Oh, please don’t stop!”

I felt my own much smaller penis becoming hard and sensitive. With my left hand I pulled down the front of my pyjamas so that it could bob freely between us as I bounced frantically on John’s lap. John took hold of my rigid little willy in one of his strong, square hands. I moaned out loud, then glanced guiltily at the door, hoping that the impassioned grunts and sighs that were surely emanating from the sitting room wouldn’t wake the girls.

A few seconds later John threw his head back and gasped loudly. I felt a flood of hot liquid underneath me, and then I too was coming, my clear omega ejaculate spurting onto John’s hairy tummy. We sat that way for a few minutes – me with my left hand braced on John’s shoulder; John with his hands squeezing my bottom – catching our breath in the still darkness. I looked out the window and saw that it had started to rain.

Then John said, “Look, I need to clean up a bit.” Of course: his pants and chest hair were soaked with semen, both his and mine.

“You can borrow some of my pyjamas,” I whispered as I unstraddled his lap. To John’s amusement my actions were shaky and unsteady, no doubt from post-orgasmic clumsiness. “They’re in the dresser, second drawer on the left.”

“Thanks,” he whispered. “I’ll just have a bit of a wash in the kitchen. You can use the loo if you like.”

“Thanks,” I stood up and bent over to give John a chaste kiss. “Goodnight, John. I love you.” It felt so good to say it out loud.

“I love you too,” he grinned. It felt even better to hear it.

I had never felt so loose or relaxed as I strolled lazily to the bathroom. I clicked on the light and stripped off my damp pyjama bottoms. Then I noticed a crumpled piece of paper tucked into the frame of the mirror above the sink. I opened it to discover that it was the prescription note for my omega hormones. I had almost forgotten about it. Well, I decided as I soaked a flannel to give my genitals a bit of a wash before returning to bed, now was as good a time as any to choose whether I wanted to continue living as an omega.

I glanced up at the mirror and was taken aback by my reflection. My cheeks were flushed becomingly, my hair was attractively mussed, my eyes gleamed like I had a wonderful secret to share, and my lips were red and smiling. I looked like an omega in love.

Just then I remembered all the other times I had stared at my reflection in the mirror like this. All those times in the middle of the night, after my gender had first revealed itself, when I was so frightened and alone. I remembered hating my reflection, hating the bruises and scars left over from
that brutal attack in the library basement, hating my newly emerging omega features, hating how my heats turned me into a mindless animal, hating how my new gender had ruined my life.

As I stood there, observing my reflection on the night John proposed to me, I found myself wondering how I could have hated something that was so lovely. How I wished I could go back in time and tell that miserable young man not to be afraid! That one day he’d have good and loyal friends, that he’d get a Master’s degree in Organic Chemistry from Imperial, that he’d build himself an immensely satisfying career as a Consulting Detective for the London Metropolitan Police, that his relationship with his brother would be loving and mutually supportive, that he’d have a marvelous and brilliant daughter, and that he would find love with the kindest, bravest, wisest man he’d ever have the good fortune of knowing. But he probably wouldn’t have believed me.

With tears in my eyes yet again, I looked down at the prescription note in my hand. John was right: Though my adult life had so far been full of challenges – many of them a product of my gender or the admittedly poor choices I had made in disguising my gender – I had prevailed over them all. And it was that enduring struggle, and not just my omega nature, that made me the person I was. The person whom Jamie, and John, and Mycroft, and Lestrade, and probably even Violet loved so much. The person I was now proud to be.

I decided there and then that choosing to live as a beta would be quite the snub to my omega biology – which had heretofore been so obliging as to present me with more than my fair share of trials and tribulations to overcome. So I would continue taking hormones, and go on being Sherlock Holmes, the Omega Detective.

I started giggling then, partly out of sheer giddiness over the realization that one day soon I was going to marry John, but mostly over the irony of the situation: for when I was a young man I had hated being an omega so much I would have done absolutely anything to be a beta again. But now, here I was, turning down that very opportunity out of a powerful sense of gratitude to my omega nature. I laughed out loud; life is funny like that sometimes.

“Everything all right in there?” John asked from the kitchen.

I grinned at my reflection and wiped away the tears of joy that had accumulated in the corners of my eyes. “Everything is perfect, John!”

Chapter End Notes

So now everything is perfect for Sherlock and John. I’m sure nothing will ever change that, right? Right?

Just two chapters left. Thank you all for reading.
I yawned and shifted Violet’s sleeping form in my arms. According to the clock on the wall of the hall, it was eleven-thirty. Kenwood House was on the far north side of Hampstead Heath: even if we were lucky enough to hail a taxi right away, it would still take John, Mrs. Hudson, the girls, and I at least a half-hour to get back to Baker Street. It was raining hard too – hardly unusual for London in late October, but it would certainly make getting home an ordeal.

Still, I thought glancing around at the paintings adorning the walls of the stately home, Mycroft and Lestrade had chosen a fine venue for their wedding. Mrs. Hudson, Lestrade’s pups, John, and I had spent the previous afternoon decorating the pretty eighteenth century home with bows and bouquets in shades of aqua blue and silver – colours all the omegas in the family agreed would complement both grooms’ colouring.

Violet sniffled, and I patted the back of her white chiffon dress. She hadn’t been terribly enthusiastic about being a flower girl, but when Lestrade’s omega son Rory had sewn yellow pegasus wings to the back of her dress, she had come around. Our little family had had a long day: Jamie and Violet had spent the previous night at Mycroft and Lestrade’s house, waking early so that Rory and Ange could style their hair in elaborate, Regency-style braids – tight, uncomfortable hairstyles that had hardly lasted through the pictures before both girls had unpinned them.

John had done a fine job keeping the girls entertained and quiet throughout the ceremony and reception. He and Jamie were currently on the dance floor: John was doing the Robot to a Daft Punk song, while Jamie enthusiastically tried to copy him, her blue pegasus wings bobbing up and down with every move.

I had spent my day attending to my duties as Mycroft’s best man. Initially, Mycroft hadn’t trusted me to write my own speech. “There’ll be people from the Home Office, Sherlock,” he warned as he gave me a typed copy of the speech he had written for me. “I don’t want to be embarrassed in front of my colleagues.”

As I ascended the podium in front of the assembled guests, I glanced through his prepared speech, and to my dismay found that it was replete with empty buzzwords like “paradigm shift,” and “dynamic management style.” Mycroft’s prepared words were boring, nauseatingly sycophantic, and dreadfully impersonal – so I decided that I would deviate from the script.

Giving Mycroft a cheeky wink, I crumpled up his speech and dropped it on the floor. His face fell, and I turned to the microphone. “A wise man once told me that my brother, Mycroft Rudy Holmes,” (He hates his middle name, so I resolved that I would repeat it as many times as possible.) “Is the kindest man in the world. At the time I didn’t believe him. Indeed, I think most people here would have trouble believing that, because we all know my brother to be lazy, deceitful, antisocial, controlling, petty, and, above all, insufferably arrogant. He is all of those things,” I smiled and turned to the happy couple – one of whom was laughing, while the other buried his blushing face in his hands. “But he is also so much more. That same wise man told me that there’s nothing Mycroft Rudy Holmes wouldn’t do for someone he loves. I didn’t believe that either, but, looking back at the role he’s played in my own life, I can see that that is true too. Because, more than any other individual, I have benefitted from my brother’s well-concealed love and generosity.”

At this point Mycroft looked up at me curiously. I proceeded to tell the assembled guests about how,
after I was attacked in the Manchester University library, Mycroft had not only taken me in, he had devised a plan to help me disguise my gender so that I could finish my education, and had even had one of my attackers deported. (I did not mention that he had also procured an abortion for me; that was a private source of pain and guilt that I still did not wish to share.) There were laughs when I told the guests about Mycroft buying me a box of dildos and pornography, and tears when I explained how Mycroft had rescued me from my addiction to cocaine and heroin. I thanked Mycroft for paying my rent on the Baker Street flat, an act of generosity which allowed me to meet the love of my life. I even thanked him for his overprotectiveness and distrust of John. “I forgive you for twice beating up the man I love, Mycroft,” I told him. “I know that you only wanted what was best for me. That you only ever wanted what was best for me. And, honestly, I was impressed that a weedy swot like you could get the better of a former soldier like John. Not once but twice! Well done, you!” I noticed John frown disgruntledly at this, while Mycroft gave me a crafty smile.

My deepest thanks, however, were reserved for the assistance he had rendered in raising Jamie. “Mycroft, I know that you always wanted to be a family alpha with a large pack looking to you for guidance and leadership,” I told him. “Please allow me to reassure you that Jamie couldn’t have asked for a better family alpha than you. All pups should be so lucky to have a role model like you in their lives.” At this point Jamie hopped up from her seat next to John, and rushed over to give Mycroft a messy kiss, leaving a smear of pink strawberry lip gloss across his cheek (a smear no one thought to tell him about for the rest of evening). Though I knew that Mycroft worried that he would be shunted to the side as John assumed a larger parental role in Jamie’s life, it was clear that Jamie had no intention of giving the brush-off to her precious My-My.

I concluded my speech by raising my glass to the happy couple. “Mycroft, thank you for everything. You deserve all the happiness in the world. And you, Greg,” I said, turning to a surprised-looking Lestrade. “You too deserve to be happy. Better yet, you deserve my brother, because, when everyone else, including myself, saw only his more objectionable qualities – which he admittedly has in spades – you saw through his frankly unpleasant exterior to the kindness underneath. I think that you alone fully appreciate my brother for everything he is. That you love him anyway seems like a miracle to me. A miracle each of us should be so lucky to experience at least once in our lives.” Here I glanced over at John, who was watching me intently, no doubt thinking of our previous evening together. “To the happy couple,” I finished quickly, my throat suddenly tight. “To love.”

Mycroft and Lestrade’s guests raised their glasses and dutifully echoed my words. I rushed to sit with John and the girls before either groom could stand up to thank me, not because I didn’t wish to speak to them, but because I didn’t want Mycroft to look too closely at my neck. All day I had been avoiding his attention and deductions, a task that hadn’t been too difficult considering he had been distracted by his own duties.

John and I had gotten married the previous evening, you see. The previous week he had come home late from the clinic with a marriage license in hand. And then yesterday afternoon, while we were tying bows to the backs of the chairs in the reception venue, I walked up to him and whispered, “Marry me, John.”

“I will. You know I will,” he replied distractedly as he tried to revive a crushed aqua bow.

“I mean today,” I whispered. “Let’s find a registry office and just do it.”

John looked up at me in shock. “Y-you mean it?” he stammered. “What about the girls? Should we bring them along?”

“Erm, better not. Jamie would never be able to keep this secret from Mycroft, and I think we should put off telling him for now.”
“Why’s that?” John surreptitiously glanced over at the head table where Mycroft and Lestrade were discussing the seating chart.

“If I got married the day before him, he’d accuse me of stealing his thunder. He’s always been jealous like that. Come on; Jamie and Violet are spending the night at Mycroft’s so if we skip the rehearsal dinner, we can have the whole afternoon and evening to ourselves.”

“What about witnesses?”

I stood up and scrutinized the friends and family members that Mycroft and Lestrade had pressed into helping decorate the hall. “Mrs. Hudson would do it in a trice,” I said. “And let’s ask Lestrade’s daughter Ange. She’s secretly engaged to a…. an alpha male that her dad doesn’t like. In fact, judging by the engagement ring she’s carrying around in her jeans pocket, the alpha’s already asked her to marry him. I’m sure she’d be glad to help… if only because she might need someone in her corner if she decides to elope.”

So when everyone else left Kenwood House to return to Kidderpore Avenue for the rehearsal dinner, Mrs. Hudson, Ange Lestrade, John, and I piled into his beat-up old hatchback and snuck down to the Kensington and Chelsea Register’s Office on King’s Road. Mrs. Hudson had the forethought to steal a bouquet from one of the tables for me. As we ascended the front steps to the Register’s Office she lamented, “I can’t believe you’re wearing a suit to your own wedding, Sherlock!”

“Why shouldn't I?” I said, extracting a flower from the bouquet to pin to John’s lapel. “This is how I always dress.”

“That’s exactly my point,” she sighed. “An omega’s wedding outfit is supposed to be white and have lots of lace and beading. I’ve never heard of one dressing like an alpha to his own wedding!”

John laughed at that, “Sherlock’s defied convention in far worse ways that this, Mrs. H!”

“I suppose that’s true,” she sighed. “But at least let me put some flowers in your hair, Sherlock. It’s traditional.”

Though John rolled his eyes, I allowed her to adorn my head with a crown of tiny orchids, which she had fashioned from blossoms taken from the table arrangement. “There,” she said with satisfaction. “Now let me look at you.”

I raised my head only to see Mrs. Hudson watching me with tears in her eyes. “Mrs. Hudson?” I asked worriedly.

She shook her head and said in a shaky voice, “You’re beautiful, Sherlock. I’m so happy for you. It looks as though you were right after all.”

“Right about what?” I asked.

“Don’t you remember? When we first met – when I was still doing Frank’s books, and you were moving drugs for him – I explained to you that an omega’s life is invariably full of unhappiness and disappointment. You insisted that that was all rot – even though you had just overdosed on sleeping pills and you were still so lost, and alone, and miserable – and you said you would prove it to me.” She stroked my cheek tenderly. “And you did, Sherlock, you did. You’ve finally gotten everything you’ve ever wanted.”

We shared a tender smile, then Ange – undoubtedly the most practical of Lestrade’s offspring – cleared her throat and said, “Did anyone remember a ring?”
“Oh, ermmm…no,” I mumbled.

“Shit!” John hissed.

“Oh, here,” Mrs. Hudson said, giving her ring finger a mighty tug. “You can have mine. I don’t need it anymore.” She pulled again, and her wedding ring finally slipped over her knuckle. She handed the worn band to John. Judging by the whiteness of the skin on her finger, the ring probably hadn’t left her hand since she had married Big Frank over sixty years previously.

“Mrs. Hudson!” John looked down at the plain, scratched band. “We couldn’t possibly!”

“Yes, you could, John! I insist!” She kissed him on the cheek. “Frank always liked Sherlock; I’m sure he wouldn’t mind.”

Maybe Frank would mind, I couldn’t help but think, if he had known I was directly responsible for his arrest and later execution.

The wedding – our wedding – was over just a few minutes later. I was so nervous I don’t actually remember that much about it, except for the smell of the orchids, the honking sound Mrs. Hudson made whenever she blew her nose, the flash of Ange’s camera phone, and the dampness and shakiness of John’s hands as he struggled to fit the much-too-small ring on my finger. Evidently he was even more nervous than I was.

Immediately after the ceremony was over we returned to Hampstead to drop off Ange at Mycroft’s.

“Ange, please give our apologies to my brother and your dad. Could you please tell them that we took Mrs. Hudson home because her arthritis is acting up?”

“Sure thing, Sherlock,” she replied as she squeezed out of her seat in the back of the car. “And congratulations to both of you.”

“And to you,” I winked at her.

Ange’s eyelashes fluttered in surprise, and she blushed deeply. “Is it that obvious?”

“To me it is,” I grinned while John put the car in gear. “If you two need witnesses, John and I would be glad to return the favour.”

Ange laughed and waved goodbye as she strolled up the walk.

Mrs. Hudson was exhausted by the day’s adventure, so John helped her to hobble to her bedroom for a nap.

“One day you’ll have to help me to bed too,” I told him as we ascended the stairs to our flat. “My bones will be just as brittle as hers.”

“It would be my privilege,” John replied. “Speaking of which, shouldn’t I be carrying you?”

“What do you mean?” I asked, pausing at the landing.

“Shouldn’t I be carrying you across the threshold? Come on,” John smiled as he held out his arms. “Climb aboard.”

“Oh. Ermmm, alright,” I replied as I considered how best to clamber into John’s waiting arms. Though the staples in my right arm had been removed almost two weeks earlier, my arm was still weak and tender, and I did not wish to risk re-injuring it. “Maybe if I just – “ I mumbled as I
wrapped my left arm around John’s left shoulder, and hiked up my left leg so that he could pick me up under my knees.

“That’s – that’s not going to – “ John grunted as he tried to take my weight. “Christ, you’re just too tall for that, Sherl! Your head’s going hit the banister.”

We grappled and wrestled with each other for several minutes, struggling to find the most comfortable position for John to carry me up the stairs and across the threshold. John dropped me twice, once right on my sore arm. “Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, John!” I hissed. “Stop making this more difficult than it needs to be!” I was sure that Mrs. Hudson would be listening and wondering what was happening on her staircase.

Finally John settled the matter by placing both of my arms around his neck, and picking me up with one hand around my waist and the other under my bottom. “Now wrap your legs around me and hold on,” he mumbled into my shirtfront. The omega in me thrilled at the feeling of his strong arms holding me tight. I bent my head to sniffle at his hair, his alpha scent growing stronger as he sweated with the effort of carrying me up the stairs. “Can’t you at least wait until we’re inside?” he asked with a smile in his voice. John kicked open the sitting room door and unceremoniously dropped me on the sofa.

“Phew!” John said, breathing hard. “Who’d’ve thought that a skinny thing like you would weigh so much!”

“You brute!” I laughed. “Imagine making fun of your omega’s weight on your wedding day! This had better not be a sign of things to come!”

John laughed and sat down heavily next to me. He took my left hand in his right and looked at my new ring, which didn’t even fit over my knuckle. “I guess we’ll have to go shopping for a new one,” he sighed.

“What for? I like this one,” I replied, trying again to push the ring down to the base of my finger.

“Stop that; you’ll just cut off the circulation,” John said. “Obviously you need one that fits better.”

“Then we’ll just have this one resized. Mrs. Hudson said I could keep it, and I appreciate its… sentimental value.”

John snorted, “I never thought I’d live to see the day when you cared for sentiment.” He leaned over to remove my flower crown and kiss me tenderly.

“John,” I whispered when we paused in our snogging. “Do you – do you know what to do?”

“Do about what?” he asked, pulling back to look me in the eye.

“About, you know, bonding. Have you ever tried it before?”

“No, you know I haven’t. I – I assume I just, well, give the gland a bit of a nip and… and hope for the best,” he finished lamely.

“Great, and then I’ll just go ahead and die from septicemia, shall I?” I frowned at his lack of preparation. “Isn’t there some alpha you could ask?”

John sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “The only one who comes to mind is Lestrade, and I’m sure even he’d be suspicious if I called him out of nowhere to ask how to deliver a bond bite,” John noticed my irritation, which I’m sure he understood was just a thin disguise for nerves. “Look, if you
want, I can ask the alpha specialist at the clinic on Monday.…”

“No, our marriage won’t be consummated until the bonding. I want it done today.” I stood up from the sofa. “I suppose there’s only one thing to do.”

“What’s that?”

“Research, John!” I grinned. I strode over to the bookshelves. “I’ll go through my old omega pamphlets, organic chemistry notes, and your medical texts; you look up ‘omega bonding’ on those porn websites you favour. Try OmegHub first.”

“Hey, that’s priv – “ John started.

“Not anymore,” I smiled, excited over the prospect of solving a problem through research. “We’re married.”

Predictably, the pamphlets I had been issued when my gender first revealed itself offered an anodyne, highly romanticized perspective on the mating process. “Your beloved,” one pamphlet stated. “Will, at the height of passion, pluck your flower, and from then onwards your love and life will be complete! Don’t listen to the stories other omegas will try to tell you about the pain: it’s just a little pin-prick, and your alpha will instinctively know what to do to ensure that your bonding is safe and permanent!”

“Well, that’s not at all helpful,” I muttered.

John’s old med school textbooks gave a brief, technical overview of the bonding process: the alpha used his or her sharp canine teeth to puncture the edges of the omega’s neck gland. An enzyme in the alpha’s saliva would enter the gland through the wounds and gradually cause the odour released by the gland to change, thereby alerting other alphas to the fact that the omega was now off-limits. My old research notes from Man U gave further details on the chemical reaction: not only would the omega’s scent become ‘richer’ and ‘more mature,’ the mated alpha would grow more attuned to subtle shifts in the omega’s odour occurring at different stages of the omega’s heat cycle, or even as a result of the omega’s changing mood. Even though my heats were a thing of the past, I still found it fascinating that John might learn to detect my feelings just by my scent.

However, the results of John’s research into mating pornography were far from encouraging – at least for omegas; the alphas involved seemed to enjoy mating a great deal. The videos showed powerful, muscular alphas pinning down struggling, whimpering omegas, and then subduing them with vicious bites to the necks. There was a lot of snarling on the part of the alphas, crying on the part of the omegas, and worst of all blood everywhere.

“It can’t possibly be as bad as all that,” John said when he noticed me gulp fearfully. “Still, maybe I should brush my teeth first. No need to risk an infection.”

We watched a few more videos. Despite the horrors they depicted, I noticed John growing aroused. To my surprise, I felt my own little prick growing hot and stiff in my pants. As long as I live, I thought, I will never fully understand my omega biology.

We resumed our snogging, and though I was still terribly apprehensive, we soon retreated to the bedroom. To John’s credit, he was as gentle as he ever was with me, and he made sure that I enjoyed myself, despite my persistent trepidation. Still, at the moment of my climax, when he fitted his powerful jaws over the edges of my neck gland and bit down with one hard chomp, I couldn’t help but cry out and struggle feebly to throw him off of me.
“I’m so sorry, Sherlock!” he gasped in horror and jumped to his feet, his hard, unrelieved alpha cock still bobbing between his legs. “I didn’t think it would hurt so bad! Let me get the Bactine!”

“N-no!” I held a corner of the sheet to my neck and struggled to sit up. “It might affect the enzymatic changes.”

“Then at least let me bandage it up. As an Army doctor, I’m no stranger to traumatic injury, you know.”

I smiled weakly at John’s lame attempt at levity. The truth was that the bite had hurt far more than I had expected – like a dozen bee stings all at once. And it was still oozing blood and clear fluid. “At least it’s done,” I said loudly so that John could hear me from the bathroom, where he was rooting around for the first aid kit. “And we’re now a married and fully mated pair.”

“But you shouldn’t have to endure that kind of pain,” John sighed as he knelt in front of me. “No one should.” He wiped my neck clean with a damp flannel. “You know I never bought all that crap about omegas having to lead lives of suffering and disappointment either. The only reason that tends to be their lot in life is because alphas like me accept it and don’t work to change it.”

I blinked with momentary surprise at John’s unexpected compassion for omegas. How could I have ever thought that that he was just a typical sexist alpha? I leaned forward to kiss his forehead, more confident than ever that I had chosen a good one. As I contentedly rested my cheek on his head, John chuckled, “Come on, I’m not done yet, and you’re going to get hair in the wound.”

The bandage that John had gently taped to my still-weeping neck gland was neatly covered by the high collar of my dress shirt. However, the wound had been throbbing all day – throughout the ceremony, the dinner, and now the dancing – and by a quarter to twelve, I was desperate to get home so that John could examine and clean it again. I caught his eye on the dance floor, and gestured at my wristwatch, the universal signal for ‘time to go.’

John acknowledged my gesture with a nod and finished his dance with Jamie. Though Jamie stomped her foot and whinged that she wanted to keep dancing – a sure sign that my normally indefatigable daughter was getting tired – she soon gave in and followed John to the table.

“Time to get going?” he asked, taking Violet from me. “If you call for a taxi, I’ll go collect Mrs. Hudson.”

With Violet still dozing in his arms, John walked over to the bar to find Mrs. Hudson. Jamie sat down heavily in her chair and rested her weary head on her folded arms. I took my morning coat from the back of John’s chair and searched through the pockets for my mobile.

From behind me came a slurred voice, “D-don’t tell me y-you’re going home already!”

I turned around with a grin; drunk Lestrade is my favourite Lestrade. “Yes, Greg, the girls have football practice in the morning.” I nodded at Jamie, whose eyelids were already drooping heavily. Maybe I’d ask Lestrade to carry her to the taxi for me.

“Greg. I knew you knew it,” he hiccupped and weaved a bit on his feet. “All these years you’ve j-just been having me on.”

I shrugged and hid my hand behind my back. Lestrade was so happy that I got his name right, I didn’t want to admit that I had actually written ‘MEMO TO SELF: LESTRADE’S NAME IS GREG,’ on the back of my hand.

“Congratulations, Greg,” I stuck my other hand out so that he could shake it. “I hope that you and
Mycroft are very happy together.”

Lestrade gripped my hand firmly. “I guess congratulations are in order for you too, eh, young Sherlock?” He said, nodding at my neck.

“How did you - ?” I started.

“I told you: I’m a copper. And a bloody good one!” He gave me a slow, drunken wink.

“Does Mycroft know?” I asked uneasily.

“No, and don’t you worry: I won’t tell him,” he grinned sloppily. “But speaking of Mycroft, he told me to give you this.” Lestrade extracted two folded pieces of paper from his breast pocket and put them in my hand. “I gave it to him as sort of an – an early wedding present. It was a lot of work to find them, but I knew it was something he’d wanted for a long time. But then My said that I should give them to you. Let you choose what to do about them.” Lestrade shrugged and concluded, “Just let us know what you decide to do, alright?”

“Alright,” I said bemusedly. Why would I want Lestrade’s wedding present to Mycroft?

“Alright, g’night then. And goodnight from Mycroft too. He’s in the loo still – a bit sick from all the cake and champagne. But I know he’d want to thank you for your speech. We both thought it was ace.”

“Anytime. Good night, Lestrade.” I sat down to read the two pieces of paper.

Both pages were labelled ‘Greater Manchester Police Arrest Record,’ and dated 4 October 2019 – just two weeks earlier. Why had Lestrade given me these pages, I wondered. Was there a mystery in them that he and Mycroft wanted me to solve? The tiny, black and white head shots depicted a pair of alphas – a male and a female – both in their fifties, and both in pretty rough shape, judging by their bad teeth and pockmarked complexions. Both seemed vaguely familiar to me. I glanced at their names, wondering who they might be. The first name, Ethan Williams, meant nothing to me at all. But when I read the second name, I suddenly felt faint.

Because it read ‘Carol Phillips.’

Chapter End Notes

You all know I love the cliffies, but who saw that coming? And who remembers who Carol Phillips is?

Just one chapter left. If you have any longer questions or comments to make about the story, why not leave them now, and I’ll respond when I post the last chapter.

Thank you all for reading. Your continued support means so much to me!
Well, this is it. I hope you enjoy.

Sorry for the delay in posting the last chapter. I'm quite sad to have to say goodbye to these characters and their little universe. Like playing with dolls for months and months, and then putting them away forever.

When we returned from football practice the following morning, it was still raining. The girls were soaking wet, and Violet in particular was covered in mud. Much to John’s and my surprise, sweet, shy, diffident Violet was turning out to be a fierce, even vicious, competitor on the pitch. While Jamie was certainly a skilled little footballer, it was clear that she played because she thought it was fun to run around outdoors for a few hours and socialize with children her own age, and especially with Coach Greg. Violet on the other hand… yikes! She played with a competitive ferocity that struck fear in the hearts of the other squad, and even a few of her own teammates. She snarled at the other players; she never backed down from a confrontation, and when the ref wasn’t looking she tripped and shoved anyone who got in her way. However, what she lacked in finesse or sportsmanship she more than made up for in grit and determination. Unlike many players her age, she never shied away from shoulder tackles, or pushing other players off the ball, or galloping through mud puddles with nary a thought for the state of her uniform. It was clear to me that football offered Violet an outlet to vent the hurt and confusion she must still be working through in the wake of the great upheaval she had experienced at the end of August. Thus, though I agreed with Lestrade that Violet would need to learn some sportsmanship sooner rather than later, a part of me hoped that she never lost her fire.

“Phew! What a morning!” John sighed as he closed the front door to 221 Baker Street behind him. “Girls, I think you should have a shower and put on some warm clothes before we have lunch.” As the four of us were peeling off our soaking wet coats and hanging them up on the hooks behind the door, Mrs. Hudson stuck her head out her door.

“Is that you, boys?” she asked. “Don’t tell me you actually went out in this weather!”

“Yes, Mrs. Hudson,” I replied. “The girls had football practice… even though the coach never bothered to show.”


John chuckled at that, “Partook of too much champagne last night? I suppose that means they didn’t, ahem, rock the casbah on their first night as a married couple?”

“Yuck.” I stuck my tongue out. “I don’t even want to think about that.”

Mrs. Hudson laughed and then gasped loudly, “Oh, before I forget!” she said turning towards her door. “A package was delivered for you this morning. It was left on the front step,” she shouted over
her shoulder. “So it’s a bit wet… and slippery. I’m afraid I dropped it, but I don’t think it’s terribly damaged.”

John followed Mrs. Hudson into her kitchen. “Mail delivery on a Sunday morning?” he said suspiciously. He returned to the hall a second later carrying a squashed, damp package addressed to ‘Violet Watson c/o J & S Watson-Holmes, 221b Baker Street, London NW1 6XE.’ There was no postmark or stamps.

“Sherlock, think it might be a – “ John mouthed the word ‘bomb.’

“Only one way to find out,” I said, taking the package away from John. I gave the soggy parcel a vigorous side-to-side shake. John instantly ducked to the side, protectively shielding the girls under his coat. Though I could feel the contents of the package shift around, there was no explosion.

“Are you insane?” John squawked, straightening up. “Jesus, Sherlock, if that had been a bomb, you would have killed us all!”

I laughed and said, “It’s far too light to be a bomb, John. Probably something made of fabric, maybe paper. And besides, Mrs. Hudson said that she dropped it earlier. If it was a bomb, don’t you think that’s when it would have gone off?”

“Still….” John sighed.

“Give me some credit, John. God knows I’ve encountered enough bombs in the course of my career.”

“Well, we still don’t know who’s going around delivering parcels to Violet on a Sunday morning.”

“Is it for me?” Violet asked, hopping up and down to peer at the typewritten label. “Is it for my birthday?” Violet’s birthday was on the Monday after next, just a day before Jamie’s.

“Maybe,” said John. “Let’s go upstairs and I’ll unwrap it while you two are getting cleaned up.”

We opened the kitchen door to see Mycroft and Lestrade sitting at our table drinking identical vente caramel macchiatos from Starbucks. Both looked a lot worse for wear: Lestrade was unshaven; his eyes were bloodshot, and he was wearing tortoise-rimmed spectacles instead of his usual contact lenses. Mycroft looked even worse: beneath his freckles his skin had an unhealthy pallid green tone. And he was wearing a much too-large Crystal Palace football jersey, which I reckoned must belong to Lestrade. I was shocked to see my brother in such a state of… dishabille. While I had seen him lounging around his house in his pj’s and robe any number of times, in public he was always kitted out – at the very least – in a dress shirt, pressed trousers, tie, and waistcoat.

“And just where were you two this morning?” Jamie shouted as she bounded into the kitchen.

Mycroft flinched at her strident tone and gave a tiny moan. Lestrade patted his new husband’s shoulder as he rubbed his clammy forehead with a shaky hand.

“My-My’s feeling a bit peaky this morning,” Lestrade murmured quietly. “I thought we could have a bit of a lie-in.”

“Daddy says that a wedding is no excuse for missing practice!” Jamie declared.

“Assistant Coach Patsy had to run the practice by herself, you know,” Violet said, shaking her head disapprovingly. “Did you think of her when you were sleeping in?”
“I’m sure they didn’t. And that’s enough girls. Leave the poor alphas alone,” John said as he placed the wet package on the table. “Jamie, please run upstairs and get some clean clothes for you and your sister. Violet, you’re filthy; you get in the shower right away.” Both girls scrambled to follow John’s orders. I don’t know how he does it; I had spent five years being relentlessly bossed around by my daughter, but she’ll do anything John tells her to do with no hesitation or backtalk whatsoever. I suppose that’s what it means to be a family alpha.

When the girls had left the kitchen, John grinned at Mycroft. “Not feeling too clever this morning, My-My? You know what might help? A nice fry-up. With some nice greasy bangers and fried eggs, maybe even a little black pudding?” Mycroft gagged a bit, but John continued regardless, evidently enjoying this rare opportunity to torment my brother. “No? Then we took some wedding cake with us last night. The piece with the Hummel cake topper actually. You could have it. It’s in the fridge behind a jar of eyeballs. Careful though; they’re not too fresh, and they’re starting to smell.”

Mycroft heaved again and moaned pathetically, “Stop, please stop. It’s not funny.”

John rolled his eyes and started to use the largest blade on his Swiss Army knife to carefully cut through the seams of the soggy package.

“If you’re both so hungover, why did you bother coming by?” I asked.

“I wanted to apologize,” Lestrade admitted sheepishly. “For being so, well, indecent about the news about the arrest in Manchester.”

“And I wanted to tell you congratulations,” Mycroft said to me.

I glowered at Lestrade, though, realistically, I shouldn’t have expected him to keep such a secret from Mycroft.

“You’re not angry we didn’t tell you?” I asked my brother.

“No. Not really,” Mycroft shrugged. “In fact I’m thankful that we don’t have to go through all the wedding planning rigmarole again. You and Mrs. Hudson may have enjoyed it, but I for one found it unbearably tedious and stressful.” He took a sip of his coffee. “Have you told the girls?”

“Yes,” I replied. “In the car on the way to practice this morning.”

John laughed as he recalled their reactions, “Jamie was glad to not have to wear her, and I quote, ‘stupid, itchy flower girl tights’ again, and Violet just shrugged and said that it was obvious it would happen sooner or later.”

“Well, I’m glad for you. For all of you,” Mycroft said, taking a sip from his coffee. “Did you invite Mummy and Daddy?” he asked, entirely too casually.

“No,” I said. “It never even crossed my mind.”

“Good,” Mycroft sniffed. “Now about the arrests. It’s them, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I think so. How did you find them?”

“Greg did, actually,” Mycroft smiled fondly at his new husband.

“Greg?” I asked incredulously. “As in Lestrade? As in this man?” I pointed at Lestrade in disbelief.

“Yes, me!” Lestrade frowned crossly. “Don’t sound too surprised. As I’ve told you at least a
thousand times, I’m a bloody good copper.”

“Of course you are, darling!” Mycroft patted his arm soothingly. “No one’s ever thought otherwise.”

“How did you find them?” I asked Lestrade. “I didn’t even know you were looking for them.”

“Well, your brother once told me what had happened to you in – in the library.” Lestrade began uncomfortably. “And – and he said that he’d give anything to get his hands on those alphas. That was quite a while ago. When we first started, you know, seeing each other, I think. Anyway, ever since I’ve been looking for an alpha named Carol Phillips who fit the description you gave. Whenever I had a spare moment I’d search a police database, or put in a call to a colleague in another unit. For a long time, there was nothing. Seems like she’d never been arrested, let alone charged, for anything.” Lestrade paused to take another sip of his coffee. It suddenly occurred to me that he and Mycroft took their coffee the exact same way. Just another indication of how compatible the two of them were. If it wasn’t my brother, it would be cute.

“Then two weeks ago,” Lestrade continued his explanation. “I got a call from an old friend from the Family Law Division who had moved to Manchester a couple of years ago. She remembered me asking about this alpha and her hunting partner. Turns out the pair of them had been arrested for attacking the newly presented omega niece of the Minister for Justice. She was just walking to school, totally unaware that her heat had started, when they found her. She’s gonna live, but they beat her up pretty good. Dunno if she’ll ever have pups though.” My stomach churned as Lestrade related the details of the attack. “Anyway,” Lestrade suddenly grinned. “Turns out they picked the wrong omega at the wrong time, ‘cause her uncle intends to campaign on greater protection for omega victims of sexual assault, and he wants to throw the book at this pair. Use this case to set a new precedent for how cases of omega rape are treated. So now the Crown Prosecutors are building their case against ‘em. And actually, Sherlock, that’s where you come in.”


“No, no. Of course not,” Lestrade shook his head sympathetically. “It’s starting to look like this pair of alphas have been assaulting omegas – dozens of them, maybe even a hundred or so – all across the North for at least a couple of decades. But they’ve always made sure that there weren’t any witnesses – I mean, besides the victims themselves – so they never got picked up. Anyway, the Prosecutors are looking for former victims, ‘cause they want them to make a statement, or even testify in court. If you wanted to do that too, it could really help strengthen the case against them. Get ‘em locked up for even longer.”

As I was processing this, Mycroft whispered, “There is another option, you know.”

“Not this again!” Lestrade growled impatiently. “I keep telling you that you can’t solve all your problems by deporting everyone you don’t like! It’s just not feasible.”

“I don’t see why not!” Mycroft said, crossing his arms across his chest. “And there is one other alternative we haven’t considered yet.”
“What’s that?” I said.

“For me to see to it that the suspects disappear from police custody.” Mycroft’s pale eyes were cold and deadly serious. “Permanently.”

I blinked in astonishment, but Lestrade shook his head irritably. “You want to make them permanently disappear? Are you mad? Do you listen to yourself when you say stuff like that? Jesus, My, this is a democracy. We have a little thing called the rule of law here. That means government employees can’t just go around murdering people whenever they feel like it. Everyone is entitled to due process, whether or not you like it.”

“Well, pardon me for being a concerned family alpha!” Mycroft threw his hands up in exasperation. “My baby brother was raped and beaten within an inch of his life! For twenty years I’ve been yearning for some sort of justice. And now when it’s within my reach, you want to me to wait on the outcome of a criminal trial that might not even result in a guilty verdict, let alone a substantial prison sentence, instead of doing what any family alpha in my position would want, which is to murder the attackers with my own bare hands!”

“Shh!” I hissed. “The girls!”

“Technically,” Lestrade said to his husband in a calm but pointed voice. “You aren’t Sherlock’s family alpha anymore. John is. So it’s up to him to decide what sort of justice we ought to pursue.”

“And technically,” John said, just as calmly and just as pointedly. “Sherlock is a grown man, and perfectly intelligent and capable of making his own choices besides. So it’s really up to him to decide what sort of justice we ought to pursue.”

Lestrade and Mycroft looked suitably chastened. John grinned smugly at them and returned to his careful opening of the mysterious package. He had removed the brown paper covering the shipping box, and was now extracting the contents from their nest of protective Styrofoam peanuts. “What have we got here?” John murmured. “Looks like a greeting card, a dressing gown, and a newspaper.”

“Let me see,” I said, taking the robe from John. It was yellow and child-sized, with a yellow and pink pegasus embroidered on the pocket. Clearly it was a birthday present intended for Violet. I would have to find a matching one for Jamie, I thought absently, otherwise there’d be hell to pay for sure.

John handed me the newspaper. It was one of the tabloids that people read on the Tube, dated Friday the twenty-fifth of October, 2019 – just two days earlier, and the day of John’s and my wedding. The headline read, “Tragic Death of a Newspaper Titan!” Quickly scanning the article, I soon realized that the newspaper’s owner, Charles Augustus Magnussen, had suffered some sort of fit while driving his Jaguar home to his estate in Kent. He had driven off the road and was killed instantly. Still, the police had ordered an autopsy – to be performed at Saint Bart’s in London – to rule out the possibility of foul play.

“Magnussen?” Lestrade said from across the table, where he had been reading the paper upside-down. “Remember we talked to him when we were investigating that string of assassinations a couple years back? Creepy bloke, eh?”

“I do remember,” I mumbled thoughtfully. “Hand me the card, John.”

The envelope was addressed to ‘John and Sherlock Watson-Holmes.’ I tore it open. “It’s a wedding card,” John said gesturing at the cartoon on the front, which depicted a male omega and a male alpha
kissing each other against a background of falling flower petals. “But who else knows we’ve gotten married?”

Inside the card, beneath the generic greeting of ‘The best is yet to come!’ someone had written in nondescript block letters, “CONGRATULATIONS JOHN AND SHERLOCK. I HOPE THAT YOU AND THE GIRLS ARE VERY HAPPY TOGETHER.” It was signed simply, AGRA.

“Agra? Who’s that?” John asked. “I don’t know any Agra, do you?”

“There’s a city in Pakistan named Agra, isn’t there?” Lestrade shrugged.

“In India,” Mycroft murmured as he watched me with narrowed eyes. “In Uttar Pradesh.”

“So an entire city in northern India sent us a wedding card?” John laughed. “What’s going on, Sherl?”

“I’ll tell you later,” I said, already thinking that I might need to ask Molly to doctor her autopsy records.

“Hmm,” Mycroft said suspiciously. “And have you decided what you’d like to do in regards to the alphas currently sojourning in Strangeways?”

I leaned back and thought about it for a few moments. “I have, actually. Can you take care of the girls tomorrow, My? I’ll drop them off at school, but can you pick them up and fix them their tea?”

“Of course,” he shrugged. “Why though? What are you planning?”

“I’d like to go to Manchester to talk Miss Phillips and Mister Williams.”

All three of the alphas at my kitchen table exchanged expressions of disbelief and dread. “Are you sure that’s wise?” Lestrade said carefully.

I shrugged, “Maybe not, but it’s what I want.”

John cleared his throat and said, “I can try to have Sarah cover my shift tomorrow. That is if – if you need me to come with you.”

“No, John,” I said rising to my feet. “I don’t need you to come with me.” John looked crestfallen. I marched to the sitting room to retrieve my phone from the pocket of my coat. As I composed my text to Molly, I returned to the kitchen and said to John, “…But I would like it if you came with me.”

*

Despite my earlier bravado, I was extremely nervous on the train ride to Manchester. The two alphas in police custody had, after all, once shattered my sense of security, my sense of self, my entire life – all in one brutal attack twenty years earlier. How could I not be a little jumpy?

“Calm down,” John said from his seat across from me. “You’re starting to make me nervous too.”

“Can you smell it?”

“Smell what?” John looked confused.

“My nervousness. As my alpha you’re supposed to be able to detect changes in my mood by my odour. I’m just wondering whether you’re able to do that already.”
John sighed, “I think it takes more than – what’s it been? Three days? – for the pheromonal changes to occur.”

“Still, could you check?” I asked, arching my neck towards John.

John shrugged. “If it’ll distract you for a minute, sure.” He leaned forward and sniffed deeply at my neck.

“And?” I asked curiously.

John twitched his nose thoughtfully. “Yeah,” he finally said. “I mean, maybe a little. Your smell’s a bit different. Sort of fuller, more grown up, I’d say. And it’s a bit, ermmm, is acrid the word? I think that might be the adrenaline. Or maybe you’re just sweating more than usual ’cause of nerves. But I don’t need to smell you to be able to tell you’re thinking twice about visiting these alpha bottom-feeders.”

“You don’t?” I said, leaning back in my seat.

“No,” John leaned back and folded his hands in his lap. “Sherlock, we’ve been friends – close friends. Closer than I’ve been with anyone, including Mary – for almost a decade – “

“There have been significant gaps where we were apart,” I said, interrupting him.

“I know,” John continued. “But my point is that no matter how unobservant you think I am, over the years I have kept an eye on you, and I do know a little about how you do your deductions. Nowadays I think I could read your moods better than anyone, including your brother… Including you, for that matter. And I don’t need to rely on some… vestigial biological mechanism to do it. I just need to, well, care for you – love you – the way I do. The way I have done for a long time.”

Uncomfortable with this rare public declaration of love, John cleared his throat and returned his gaze to the passing scenery.

I blinked at him with some surprise; it had never occurred to me that John watched me with the same intensity with which I watched him. It was oddly gratifying to learn that his love for me manifested itself in the same manner as my love for him.

“Are you sure you don’t want me with you at the gaol?” he asked, changing the subject.

“I’m sure,” I said emphatically. Though a large part of me wanted John’s gentle but oddly intimidating presence beside me when I spoke to my attackers, the previous evening I had decided that I needed to confront them on my own. I needed to prove to them (and myself) that I didn’t need an alpha beside me to stand up to them. “You can wait outside. Or go to a pub. I might be a while.”

We met Lestrade’s former colleague, a beta DI named Hayley Rider, at the gates to Her Majesty’s Prison Manchester in Strangeways, just a few minutes north of my old flat on Edge Street.

Predictably, John refused to leave me, even though DI Rider had assured him that there was a great pub on the corner of Empire Street and Cheetham Hill Road.

“No, it’s fine,” John shook his head emphatically as he took my coat and sat down in a plastic chair outside the visitation room. “I’ll wait for my mate right here.”

DI Rider led me to one of a dozen metal tables screwed to the floor of the cold, poorly lit room. “Just knock twice when you want to leave,” she said, gesturing at the heavy steel door. “You’ve got an hour.”

“Thanks,” I said, sitting down at the table. My hands were shaking so badly, I decided to sit on them.
After what seemed like a hundred years (but was probably no more than five minutes) another guard led the two prisoners in and shackled them to the table in front of me.

I hardly recognized them. Where once the female alpha – Carol Phillips – was stunningly beautiful, now her face and hands were covered in pucker papular, lumpy white scars that stretched and twisted her formerly handsome features into a disfigured mess. I could tell at a glance that many of the scars on her arms and hands were bite marks, made by small teeth set in delicate jawbones, while those around her face were fingernail scratches. It was not difficult to deduce that several of her victims had fought hard to protect their honour. When I had last seen this woman, her hair had been long, and straight, and thick – a beautiful mane for an alpha. Now it was frizzy and had fallen out in patches. I looked closely at the palms of her hands where they rested on the tabletop. The ugly copper penny rash there confirmed my growing suspicion that the alpha had syphilis, and a pretty nasty case at that. I felt quite sorry for the omegas who might have contracted the disease from her; hopefully they had received adequate health care after their ordeal.

“See something you like?” she asked, evidently noticing my scrutiny. Her voice had changed too. Whereas it had once been deep, and rich, and mellifluous, now it was scratchy and thin, partly due to the syphilis, but also, I deduced, because she had once been punched hard in the throat. Undoubtedly in some brawl with another alpha. I wondered whether they had been fighting over an omega.

“Do – do you know me?” I asked both alphas, trying my best to disguise my unease.

The male alpha – Ethan Williams – stayed silent, his eyes blank and uncomprehending, but the female shrugged and said, “I know lots of omegas. Not too many as pretty as you though. Even though you’re a bit old for my taste.” She licked her lips lustfully, and I could see that several of her teeth were broken or missing. Maybe lost in fights with other alphas, maybe fallen out as a result of a longtime drug addiction. That would also explain her greasy complexion and the glassy, sunken look to her eyes.

“What about you?” I said, turning to her hunting companion. “Do you know who I am?” His eyes flickered towards me, but I couldn’t say for sure whether he understood the question. Like the female alpha, his dark hair had fallen out in patches. Where he had once been powerfully muscled, now he was thin to the point of emaciation. His skin was covered in a weeping red rash.

“Don’t bother asking him. His brain’s rotted through with the syphilis,” Phillips said, confirming my suspicion. “Stupid, useless bugger,” she rolled her eyes with no affection whatsoever. “He’s the reason we got caught. And the reason I got the syph. I should have ditched him years ago when he first got sick. If I had a younger, healthier partner I’d still be out there meeting omegas.” I found Phillips’ lack of loyalty to the person who must have been her friend and hunting partner for over twenty years terribly saddening. I could never think of John like that; nor he of me, I was certain.

I paused in my ruminations to ask her again, “So you have no idea who I am?”

Phillips shrugged and leaned back in her chair in a manner that might have once seemed casually elegant, but now, given her deteriorating physique, just looked pathetic. “I might not recall your face,” she grinned a wolfish alpha grin. “But I never forget an omega’s smell. Come on; lean over. Let me get a whiff.” She crooked her index finger at me. I could see that it was missing its fingernail – undoubtedly lost in yet another brawl.

I remained still; there was no way I would allow myself to get any closer to this abhorrent creature. Undeterred by my refusal to cooperate, she took a long, dramatic sniff of the air. “You smell a little familiar…. Oh, you’re mated,” she frowned crookedly – a scar from a bite mark in the corner of her mouth didn’t give her lips a full range of motion. “That doesn’t matter though,” she winked. “I won’t
tell your alpha that we had it off if you don’t.” She laughed hoarsely at her own joke.

“That’s not going to happen,” I said coldly.

“No? Like what you want matters, you little bitch!” In an instant, Carol Phillips went from casual lasciviousness to furious hostility. “I’ve had thousands of omegas, you know!” She gnashed her teeth at me. “Some of them thought they were too good for me too. But they sure didn’t when I was done with them!”

I was taken aback by the extraordinary malevolence of Phillips’ reaction to my rejection. I suppose that I had gotten used to dealing with polite and respectful alphas like Mycroft, Lestrade, and John; I had forgotten how nasty many alphas could be to omegas. “No,” I murmured weakly, ducking my chin in the face of Phillips’ anger. I was dismayed, horrified at the feebleness of my response. How could my body betray me like this? I thought. Why did it have to ruin my chance at confronting the alphas who had attacked me by forcing me to bow submissively to them? “No, you won’t touch me again,” I whispered, fighting hard to stop the hot tears that were gathering in my eyes.

“How dare you refuse me?” she roared. “You should be fucking grateful that any alpha is still interested in a tired old omega like you! If I were your mate I’d wring your useless neck and replace you with an omega half your age who knows how to treat an alpha with respect!” Phillips tried to lunge at me, but her shackles kept her in her seat.

I breathed hard through my nose, fighting with all my might to stop my head from bowing to the monstrous alpha. My jaw and neck muscles burned as I struggled to override my instinctive reaction to an alpha’s wrath. Don’t give in to her, I told myself. She’s not your mate! She’s not your family alpha! She’s nothing at all to you. She’s nothing at all. She’s nothing. She’s just; she’s just…. Oh.

Then I understood.

In moment of epiphany it occurred to me that the raging monster and the pathetic creature before me were just as much the product of their encounter with me as I was the product of my encounter with them. But what a difference in outcomes!

Their lives of domination, violence, and terror had turned this pair of alphas into the twisted, sorry excuses for human beings before me. In spending their lives brutalizing omegas, Phillips and Williams had squandered every privilege, every advantage they had enjoyed as alphas. From their superior strength, they had made nothing. Though they were likely as fertile as any other alphas, they had no families to call their own. No mates, no pups who called them daddy. Though they had enjoyed access to educational and employment opportunities that omegas could only dream of, they had accomplished nothing. They had nothing at all to show for their lives.

I, on the other hand, had had to work hard to overcome endless prejudices, challenges, fears. In the process I had earned an education, friends, family, love, and had become a better, wiser, more compassionate person.

I suddenly understood that a life of privilege is no privilege at all, if the privileged use their advantage without care for their impact on other people. All privilege gives them is greater means to ruin their lives and the lives of people around them.

I could almost feel sorry for them.

I sniffled once and stood up, my chair scraping across the concrete floor of the visitation room.
“Where are you going?” Phillips asked. Her companion continued staring blankly at the wall; his brain irreparably damaged by his raging syphilis infection.

“I’m leaving. Obviously.” I said, turning towards the door.

“You can’t just go!” Phillips shouted in outrage. I rolled my eyes. She had just been threatening me; why would I want to stay? I chalked her reaction up to the typical alpha sense of entitlement – they could say any unkind thing they wanted to omegas, but they still expected omegas to stick around and take it. What a shock it must have been for her to have an omega refuse to put up with such shabby treatment.

“Why did you come here?” she screeched as loudly as her ruined voice would allow. “Just to stare at us and ask whether we recognized you? Stupid omega! Why would you waste our time like that?”

“I came here seeking justice, maybe even a little revenge,” I admitted with a shrug. “But I can see now that nothing I could possibly do to you would ever compare to what you’ve already done to yourselves.” I smiled and turned towards the door.

“What do you mean? Where are you going?” Phillips sputtered in confusion and anger.

“Home to my pups,” I said, knocking twice at the visitation room door. “Good day to you, madame, sir. Best of luck with your upcoming trial.”

I winked cheekily at her as DI Rider opened the door for me. As it closed behind me I could hear Phillips continue to roar at me. “Come back here!” she screamed. “I’m not finished with you yet!”

“Jesus!” John exclaimed as he rose from his chair. “What’s going on in there? You alright? Are you done already? It’s only been ten minutes.”

“I’m fine, John,” I said, taking my coat from him. “Let’s go home.”

THE END

Chapter End Notes

Thank you -- all of you -- for commenting, leaving kudos, and most of all just for reading!

This is the first story I've ever written (except like in Creative Writing in High School) and I am so pleased that it's received such a warm response.

I'm not sure what's next for cuddlefish. Probably another Johnlock story, but probably not an ABO one.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!