The Art Of Love Is Largely The Art Of Persistence

by afteriwake

Summary

After everything that had happened to her in London Molly’d had enough. When she got the opportunity to leave London for a new job and a new life in California she took it and didn’t
really look back. Most of the time. Except she wasn't really living all that much better of a life in California than she'd had in London. When Sherlock arrives and informs her he's not going back to London until she comes back with him it's a battle of wills between them to see who bends first. But things don't work out how either of them expected them to, and they both need to figure out if there's some happy medium between what each of them wants when it comes to the other.

Notes

And while I really should be writing my original novel, this all got inspired by a conversation with friends about how my personal headcanon and a prompt from my enabler friend Kayla that Molly's a Pride & Prejudice fan and that she saw Sherlock as her own personal Mr. Darcy. It's a WIP but hopefully it won't languish like my other one has. The title comes from a quote by Albert Ellis.
Chapter 1

She had always been a romantic at heart. Ever since she realized people could fall in love with each other she'd wanted to fall in love. She'd wanted to spend the rest of her life with someone who cared about her and only her, someone who held her up above everyone else. Not worshiped her, because that would be a bit on the strange side, but someone who thought she was special. She immersed herself in stories where the girl got the perfect man for her in the end, the one who would love her until she died. She wanted that for herself more than she wanted anything else for the longest time. As time went on, though, she started to think it wouldn't happen for her. She may have had a romanticized view of dating, and had high expectations of every man she dated, but dating itself was hard and frustrating and the men she chose always let her down. She despaired of ever meeting her very own Mr. Darcy, or at least she had until she met Sherlock.

He was exactly like Mr. Darcy, she realized. Prideful and arrogant, and he treated others with a type of disdain. She saw herself as Elizabeth Bennett in the story she'd constructed for them, even though Elizabeth spoke her mind and was brave and smart and everything she really wasn't. And with each interaction she hoped and prayed that, one day, he might show a softer side, a side that showed he cared. She never saw it, though, not even after years of knowing him, and slowly she gave up hope of ever seeing it. In her head and in her heart she knew he would never be the man she wanted him to be. When the Christmas party happened, however, she thought that might be a change, but it didn't appear to make much of a lasting impact, the moment where he treated her well. It wasn't until the day he asked for her help that she realized his opinion of her had changed, that he actually appreciated her. And after the incident on the roof, when he was at her home recovering and getting ready for his journey to take down the whole operation that Moriarty had left behind, she had known that at the very least they could be friends. And then he was gone.

Years passed, though, and she heard nothing from him. Not a single thing to let her know he was okay. She knew he was alive; his brother had said he would tell her if the absolute worst had happened, at any rate, so as long as Mycroft didn't pay her a visit she knew he was still alive. But she had to move on, had to have a life of her own where she was happy. She couldn't pine after him, couldn't keep waiting because if she kept waiting life would pass her by and she didn't want that. She had already let that happen for so long, and one day there wouldn't be a life to have. It would pass her by and as she lay dying she'd wonder if it had all been worth it. She had met Tom and thought maybe she could be happy. Oh, she knew he was a poor substitute for Sherlock; that had been part of the appeal, at first. But she had grown to like him, to care for him, to love him. When he proposed she had said yes without a second's hesitation. She could finally be happy, she told herself.

And then Sherlock came back and that was the beginning of the end of her happiness. But after the wedding she realized she hadn't been quite as happy as she had thought. Everything at the wedding had shown her that, indeed, Tom hadn't been the best choice. And then everything else happened, with Sherlock using drugs again and Mary's secret coming out and the murder and all of it, and she realized that no matter what happened her life was always going to be one upheaval after another as long as Sherlock was in her life. It was going to end up costing her more than she wanted to pay if she stayed in London and kept working for St. Bart's and kept him close. So when the opportunity to work in San Diego came about, she took it. It had been hard to leave, but there had been promises to keep in touch, to write and visit, to keep friendships strong. She even thought that maybe they'd keep it up for at least a year, maybe more. But she knew deep down that she might never be close to any of them again.

It had been three months now and she'd settled into a routine. She hadn't made many new friends. None, really, but she resolved to actually try, and one day she actually might. She'd been at work late
into the night; working for the police in California meant there was always work to do, always autopsies to perform. She had chosen to work the morning to afternoon shift but sometimes she couldn't help it if it spilled over into an evening or early morning. Today had been no exception, and she yawned as she made her way to her apartment. It was nearly one in the morning now, and all she wanted to do was crawl into bed so she could get some rest and enjoy her day off. She put her key in the lock and opened the door, looking into her apartment. She stilled after a moment. Something was...off. And when she heard the sound come from her kitchen she knew she wasn't alone. She slowly slipped her mobile out of her pocket and began to call the police.

“You're home,” she heard a familiar voice say from the kitchen. She held her phone warily and slowly made her way into her home more before relaxing. As much of a surprise as it was she saw it was only Sherlock. He was holding up a cup of tea and then he took a sip. “I made tea,” he said when he was done.

“I can see you made yourself at home,” she replied with a sigh before going back to her front door and shutting and locking it. She came back into the kitchen at that point. “Do I want to know why you're here?”

“I want to persuade you to come back,” he said quietly.

“That's not going to happen,” she said, shaking her head. “I needed a fresh start. I'm starting to have a life here. I don't want to chuck it all away and leave, scurry back to London because I can't make it here, or because someone wants me to come home.” She looked over and saw he had poured her a cup of tea. She picked up her cup and took a sip. He had made it just the way she liked it, too.

“You don't have much of a life here. You have no social life, no friends to speak of. You have no boyfriend, not even a lover. You live for work, which is actually worse than you were at home,” he said before he took another sip of his own tea.

She rolled her eyes. “That's certainly something I don't miss,” she said quietly.

“That's the truth, though.”

“I know it is. I just don't want to have it thrown in my face, and you always do that.” She looked down at her tea. “I had thought we could be friends. I had thought that, perhaps, I could keep you involved in my life even after everything. But when you're around it's one upheaval after another. I can't keep doing it, I really can't. So as much as you want me to come home, keeping distance between us is best.”

“I'm not the only one who wants you to come home,” he replied.

“I know,” she said quietly. “Greg asks me about it once a week. Mary wants me to come back as well.”

“You could easily go back,” he said.

“No, Sherlock, I can't. It's easy for you to up and leave and then drop back in like nothing's changed, but I can't do that. Things have changed, and you don't even see it.” She had some more of her tea. “Do you have a place to stay tonight?”

“You're changing the subject,” he said narrowing his eyes.

“Yes, I am. It's one in the morning and all I want to do is sleep. It's been a very long day. So do you have a place to stay or not?”
“I don’t,” he said.

“I'll go get some pillows and a quilt,” she said, setting her tea down. She turned to make her way to her bedroom.

“I'm going to stay until you change your mind,” he said.

She stopped in her tracks, turning around to look at him with wide eyes. “Please tell me you don't mean to stay here. With me. Indefinitely.”

“That's exactly what I mean,” he said. “I'm going to convince you to come home.”

“No. No, no, no. You are not allowed to camp out on my sofa until you give up.”

“I'm not going to give up,” he said, crossing his arms. “You know I'm incredibly stubborn. And if you don't let me stay here I can find my own lodgings. I am not destitute, after all. But I'm going to stay in this city until you decide it's best if you go back to London.”

She pinched the bridge of her nose. “What did I do to deserve this?” she murmured to herself.

“You left,” he said.

“That was a rhetorical question,” she said, rolling her eyes once she looked up. “What about John? And Scotland Yard? And your life in London? Aren't you actually needed there?”

“Everyone can do without me,” he said with a slight shrug. “They've done it before. And at least this time they all know I'm alive.”

“Well, I'm not going home,” she said, crossing her own arms. “So all I have to do is wait you out. Eventually you'll give up.”

“I spent two years going after the web Moriarty left behind, and the only reason I stopped was because my brother forced me to. I doubt this time anyone will force me to leave California right now, because each and every one of our mutual friends completely supports this.”

“I'm going to hurt them all,” she said, glaring at him.

“No you aren't. You aren't that type of person.”

She stared at him for a long minute and then sighed as he showed no sign of backing down. “You can stay here tonight. But tomorrow you go home.”

“No. Tomorrow I'll find a flat of my own, but as I said, I'm not leaving until you agree to come back to London with me.”

“Why is it so important I go back?” she asked, uncrossing her arms. “It's not as though everything is falling apart. It's not as though I don't talk to everyone. I mean, I'm a phone call and a few flights away. I am not that important that you should be here trying to convince me to go back to a place I no longer want to be in.”

“You are important, Molly,” he said quietly. “More than you realize.”

She shook her head. He didn't understand. When she thought about London she thought about bad choices and losing hope and loneliness. At least here she could make a fresh start if she wanted. Sherlock may have been right that she lived for her work but that wouldn't always be the case. It didn't have to be. And she knew if she ever wanted to convince Sherlock to go home she needed to
actually make an attempt at having a fulfilling life here. “I'll go get you the pillows and quilt now,” she said, turning around again. He said nothing as she went into her bedroom, grabbing two of the pillows off her bed and getting a spare quilt from the chest at the foot of her bed. When she had it all in her arms she took it back into her sitting room and put it on the sofa.

“Tomorrow morning I'll start doing a better job at convincing you to come home,” he said, moving out of the kitchen towards her.

“All you're going to do is irritate me until I try and have you deported,” she said.

“It won't work. Mycroft isn't going to allow me back until you agree to come with me, and he'll throw the weight of the government behind that decision.”

Her eyes widened. “Your brother wants me back as well?”

“As I said, I am not the only one who wants you to come home.” He looked over at her. “Get some sleep. I'll continue in the morning.”

“Fine,” she said with a sigh. “But if you wake up in four hours like you did the last time we shared a residence and you wake me up you might go back to London in a body bag.”

A slightly amused grin crossed his face. “Very well. I will let you sleep.” She turned away from her sofa and began to head towards her bedroom again. “Good night, Molly.”

“Good night, Sherlock,” she said. She made her way back to her bedroom and caught sight of herself in her mirror. She had the feeling the frown currently etched on her face was going to stay on her face for quite some time. She hoped Sherlock would give up in a few weeks, a month at most, but realistically she knew she was in for a very long wait with him to see who bent first. All she knew was this time, it wasn't going to be her. She'd be damned if it was her.
When she woke up later that day the sun was streaming in her window. At least he had let her sleep, she thought to herself as she sat up in bed. He had probably only slept a few hours, if he had even gone to sleep at all. That was one thing that had driven her batty when he stayed with her all those years ago; if he was awake then she was awake, whether she wanted to be or not. After Sherlock had returned and her part in all of it had come out she’d asked John if he’d experienced the same thing and she wasn’t surprised when he told her yes, he had. So getting to actually sleep in had been a surprise.

She got out of bed and went to her closet, pulling down her yoga mat. She usually slept in a camisole top and sleep shorts because it was so much warmer here, and she could do her yoga poses in that just as well as she could the yoga pants and vest she did in class. On some of the rare occasions she chatted with other people it was before or after the yoga classes she took on her days off. It was very much a thing to do here, but she found she quite liked doing it. Not only did it help her focus on something other than work, it gave her time to clear her mind and not have to think about anything. She was fairly sure if Sherlock saw her doing it he would tease, so that was why today she planned on doing it in her room. She spread the mat on her floor and began to do the series of poses in a fluid motion. She had actually gotten the hang of it all quite well, she realized as she did each pose perfectly the first time.

When she was done she debated rolling the mat back up again but even though she was a little more clearheaded she decided a cup of coffee was in order. She went to the back of her door to get her dressing gown before she slipped it on, and then she made her way out to her sitting room, expecting to find Sherlock sitting on the sofa or attempting to make himself something to eat in the kitchen. When she saw neither of those things she went to the back of her sofa and looked down, her eyes wide with shock. He was actually still asleep. She glanced at her clock on the wall and saw it was nearly nine in the morning. She had fully expected him to be up and moving around hours ago, so to find him sound asleep on her sofa was quite a surprise.

She hesitated before deciding she didn't want to wake him up. If he was still sleeping she'd let him sleep. She went back to her room and quickly changed out of her sleep clothes into denim trousers and a snug fitting T-shirt. That was one thing that had definitely changed as well; she didn't dress to hide herself. She had a bit more confidence, even if it didn't manifest itself into anything more than taking care in the clothing she wore, making sure it wasn't armor these days. She went back to her sitting room and got her purse off the kitchen counter. That had been a risk, leaving it there for him to rifle through, but it appeared to be untouched. She dug out her keys and let herself out of the apartment, making her way to the coffee shop down the street. She went inside and ordered two coffees, a cafe mocha for her and a black coffee with two sugars for him, and some croissants before making her way back home.

It took a minute to balance the two drinks and the food and get the door open without making a lot of noise, but somehow she managed. She shut the door behind her and locked it before going into the kitchen and setting it all on the counter. Then she took her coffee and picked up a croissant, taking them to one of the stools on the other side of her counter, and began to eat, waiting to see how long it took him to wake up.

She had just started on a second croissant when she saw him sit up. “When did you go to sleep last night?” she asked as he stretched slightly.

“Shortly after three o'clock,” he replied, turning away as he began to get off the sofa.
“Six hours of sleep. I think that's the most I've ever seen you get,” she said with a smile when he stood up and turned to face her.

“Your sofa isn't as uncomfortable as I thought it would be,” he said, coming over towards the kitchen. He nodded towards the other cup of coffee and she nodded back, and he reached over to pick it up. He took a sip. “Black, two sugars,” he said approvingly.

“I do still remember how you take your coffee,” she said before taking a bite of her new croissant. “You told me often enough through the years.”

“And are any of those for me?” he asked, pointing to the bag the croissants were in.

“If you want some,” she said. “I only got four, though.”

“Two will suffice.” He reached over and took one, taking a bite out of it. After he was done chewing and swallowing he looked at her. “Freshly baked.”

“This is why I go to a local coffee shop and not the Starbucks in the opposite direction. Better coffee and better food.” She took another bite of her food. “I didn't see any luggage, but I'll admit I didn't look very hard.”

“It's in your linen closet,” he said with a slight shrug. “I'll buy more of what I need as I need it.”

“Well, hopefully you'll give up soon and it won't be an issue,” she said before drinking some more of her coffee.

“I'm not leaving until you decide to come home,” he said pointedly. “I can be quite persistent.”

“Trust me, I know,” she said with a sigh. “You might as well start looking for a place of your own because I think you're going to be here a while. A very long while.”

“That's fine,” he said with a nod. “As it stands, I already thought about that. I had your super show me an apartment down the hall when I first got here, as a pretense for getting into the building. I think that will suffice, once I get some furniture.”

She stared at him. “You're going to move into this building?” she asked. “Can't you find another place to live?”

“The closer I am the easier it will be to convince you that you can do just as well back in London,” he replied.

“How are you going to afford to live here? I doubt the sheriff’s department is going to let you consult, and I know you aren't made of money.”

“I do actually have a decent sum of money,” he said. “I can take some time away from consulting. Quite a bit of time, actually. And I do have other interests. If I'm going to be here for some time I can pursue those for a bit.” He had some more of his food. “No matter what you say I'm going to stay. It's not as though I have much going on in London at the moment anyway.”

“Oh?” she asked.

“John is busy with his wife and his child, and Lestrade managed to do quite well without me all these years. I don't consult much anymore.”

“Is that why you came? Because you don't have as much tying you to London?” she asked
shrewdly, narrowing her eyes at him.

“Partly. But there is also the fact we had become close, and I'm tenacious. Those three aspects made me the logical choice to get you to come home.”

“Well, good luck. I think you're going to need it,” she said as she tore off some more of the croissant and popped it in her mouth. “You were right last night. I live for my work, and that's worse than it was back home. So whether you're here or not I'm going to try and have a life here. Make new friends, maybe go out on some dates. Do things and enjoy the fact I'm near beaches and museums and interesting places. I'm going to have an actual life, and that's all thanks to you.”

“It will be interesting to see if your taste in men has improved,” he mused.

She glared at him. “You, Sherlock, do not get to crack jokes about my love life. Ever. You do not get to interrogate any potential boyfriends I may have. You do not get to ruin any dates I may have. You attempt to do any of that and I will murder you and get away with it. We've had that discussion before, and I remember the entire plan we discussed.”

He had been about to eat when he lowered his food. “You actually remember the conversation?”

“Every last word,” she said with a nod. “You and I talked long into the night about how to commit the perfect murder and I could conceivably do that. So don't cross me.”

“You really have changed,” he murmured.

“I've had to,” she said with a slight shrug. “I am not the same woman I was when you lived with me the last time, or the woman I was when you came back, or even the woman I was when you left again. I've been through so much that you don't understand.” She tore off some more of her food but didn't put it in her mouth. “Why do you want me back, Sherlock?”

“You're missed.”

“By you?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “And others.”

“I don't care about anyone else,” she said, waving, her hand holding the torn off bit of croissant. Then she pointed her food at him. “I care about you. Why do you want me back?”

He was quiet for a moment. “Things aren’t the same anymore,” he said finally.

“Even if I go back, things won’t be the same. Don’t you see that? It’s not ever going to be the same. And frankly, I don’t want it to be the same.” He opened his mouth to reply but she held up her hand. “Sherlock, really, I know what I want for my life, and I know about what’s best for me better than you or anyone else. If you're going to stay here then eventually you’ll see the same thing, so I'll just wait you out.”

“Then I will be here a very long time, because I really don’t plan on leaving until you agree to come home,” he said. He had some more of his coffee. “So I suppose as soon as I’m done with breakfast I should see about getting lodgings and furniture. If you don’t want me to share your home much longer it’s best if I start sooner rather than later.”

“I have a car. I can take you where I got my furniture from. If you buy it early enough they’ll even deliver it today.”
“So it’s settled. We’ll start taking care of that shortly.” He went back to his breakfast and they both lapsed into silence, and she briefly wondered just how much of a headache he was going to cause in her life and just how long he actually intended to stay. But she pushed them aside after a moment. Her main concern at the moment was going to be getting him situated because if she didn’t she was terribly afraid she’d never let him leave, and that thought surprised her, and it also concerned her. There was a reason she had put thousands of miles between them. She just hoped her life didn’t get overly complicated now that he was here. She didn’t want that at all.
Chapter 3

He ended up with the apartment right next to hers. She should have known, knowing her rotten luck, that he was going to stay nice and close. The walls were not the thickest in the world and so she knew chances were she would occasionally be banging on his door in the middle of the night to yell at him to stop playing the violin because she had work. She was almost sure he'd do it just to convince her that the two of them living in two different places would be how it was if she went back to London. She had the feeling she'd have some very vivid daydreams of getting him back to London without her or committing the perfect murder, depending on how foul her mood was. The less time he stayed the better.

She had to admit, though, she'd been curious to see what he wanted when it came to furniture and other things. She had always assumed that Mrs. Hudson's furnishings had been what filled 221B Baker Street's sitting room, and all the decent cookware and kitchen gadgets had been either hers or John's. They did the furniture shopping first, and the sheer amount of money he ended up spending to furnish the entire apartment had surprised her. He'd insisted on going to three different stores and spent what felt like an hour at each, picking a few things from each store. It was time consuming and she was getting just a bit envious, and when he had his back turned she talked to the salesperson about ordering a new mattress for herself, as well as a solid walnut bedroom set which had caught her fancy, the Queen Anne set with the dual nightstands and vanity and dresser and a four poster bed. She didn't have the money at the moment, but it would be worth saving for.

Then she drove them to Bed Bath & Beyond for the other things he might need. IKEA was closer but frankly that store always unnerved her a bit. At least she knew she wouldn't have to put everything together if she went to the other store. He also spent a lot of money there, getting many good quality items for the kitchen and linens for the bed, plus other things she hadn't considered. She glanced at the credit card he was using to pay for all of this and saw it was some bank's black card, and her eyes had widened. Apparently Sherlock had quite a bit of money now, enough to have a card with a credit limit she could only dream of. She guessed it was either given to him by his brother or somehow he'd acquired a lot of money in the last few years. She'd have to ask him about that.

They went back to their building and he went into his apartment to direct the people delivering the furniture on where to put everything. She didn't join him, feeling she'd only be in the way, but she did offer to make him an early supper since she had food and he didn't, and he'd nodded before turning back to what he needed to be paying attention to. She went back to her home and began making something that could give the both of them leftovers, ending up with making the stew she'd planned on making later in the week. She could always run out to one of the local grocery stores and get fresh garlic bread to go with it. After an hour there was a knock on her door. She went to open it and saw one of the furniture movers there. “Are you Molly Hooper?” he asked.

“Yes, I am,” she replied, slightly confused.

“We have a delivery for you. We'll take your old one out and set this one all up for you, if you want.”

Her confusion grew more. “A delivery of what?” she asked.

He looked down at the clipboard. “Queen Anne bed with the memory foam mattress. There was also a note attached to the order.” He pulled something off that had been paper clipped to the order and handed it to her. “I think it's a gift of some sort? They also bought the bedroom set, but we were told you might not want that.”
Her eyes widened and she turned her head towards Sherlock's apartment, but when she didn't see him she looked down at the note and opened it. “Your bed is hard as a rock and your bedroom furniture doesn't seem quite you. This was the set you were lusting after at the store, correct? If it is, then consider that a gift for what I know you're viewing as an inconvenience. You can thank Moriarty for it later.” She turned the note over but there wasn't any more writing on it. Then she looked up. “What will happen to my old furniture?”

The man handed her a pamphlet. “Depending on its condition they can see about fixing it up and donating it to a needy family who can put it to good use.”

She took the pamphlet and skimmed over it. It actually seemed to be a very good cause, something she might support in other ways if she could, and then she looked at the man and nodded. “I need to empty out my dresser and nightstand, and strip down my bed. I'll need some time to do that.”

“We can just move it all into the living room until we can clear your bedroom out,” the man said.

Molly nodded, opening the door more widely. “I suppose I accept this gift. Bring it in while I work on the room.”

The man moved aside, and she looked out into the hallway to see more men out there, and then Sherlock came out of his apartment. He moved over to her. “I see you decided to accept my gift,” he said quietly.

“If you think I'm going to look at this as an enticement to go back to London you are sorely mistaken,” she said. “I'm going to look at this as a balm for the chaos you're bound to bring back into my life.”

“Well, I slept on your bed when I first got here. I'm surprised you don't wake up with a sore back every morning. And your furniture seems so dour and depressing. When I saw you linger near that set I decided to order it as well. You can always have it shipped to London when you return.”

“Or I can keep it here for years and years to come,” she said, looking up at him and crossing her arms.

“I have much to make up to you,” he said quietly, looking down for a moment. “This is a start.”

“Don't think you need to buy my friendship or affections,” she said, moving closer and putting a hand on his face, cupping his cheek slightly. He looked up at that point. “You don't ever need to do that.”

“Well, in your point of view I am making your life infinitely harder, and at least in small ways I would like to make it easier. There will be other ways I do that.”

“This was not a 'small ways' gesture, Sherlock. This is my dream bedroom set. This was a very grand gesture,” she replied, though she had a faint smile on her face as she said it. “But I had a question about the note. What did you mean to thank Moriarty for it?”

“The British government decided to thank me for taking care of their problems involving Moriarty by throwing obscene amounts of money at me,” he said with a slight shrug. “After all, my public image was tarnished and I had to go across the world to put an end to a major threat. And they weren't the only government who decided to reward me for cleaning up their messes. I am a millionaire a few times over now.”

“Was this the case when you came back?” she asked, her eyes wide.
"No. The amount of money I've been given has varied by each country but they've all been substantial amounts staggered out over the course of the last few years. This is part of the reason I don't need to consult right now. I can completely finance my stay here on my own without having to actually work."

"You're going to be bored in a week, though, and then you'll be insufferable," she said as she shook her head.

"Actually, I have a plan," he said. "I'm going to pursue my master's degree. I just haven't picked out which field, considering I'm an expert in many. I'm leaning towards science, but I'm also debating on doing something in the criminal justice field."

"Forensic sciences, maybe?" she suggested. "You were always better at noticing the details than I or the crime scene techs were. You could always give Phillip a run for his money when you return home."

"The only way that will happen is when you go back to London and resume working at St. Bart's," he said.

"Then I guess we'll never get to see it." She looked back towards her apartment. "Supper should be ready soon, but I want to get some garlic bread for it. I made stew."

He nodded. "I need food as well."

"We can go pick up enough groceries to last you for a while, then, just because you shouldn't always have to drag the groceries home in a cab. Those are just as expensive here as they are back home."

"You used cabs?"

She nodded. "And public transportation, at least until I got my car."

"How long have you had it?"

"Three and a half weeks. It took me some time to learn the traffic laws in California and learn to drive the way they do here. I try and avoid the freeways if I can because there's times the drivers on them scare the bloody hell out of me."

"I stayed silent for just that reason while we were out," he said.

"Today wasn't so bad, surprisingly. Sometimes they're worse," she said, tilting her head slightly. "I can imagine."

"I need to clear out my bedroom for this gift," she said. "How much more furniture do you need to have brought in?"

"Not much. Just my dining room furniture and my sofa," he replied. "That was from the third store, and their delivery people are running late."

"Ah. Then I'll get back to getting my bedroom cleared out and you can go wait for them. Whenever you're done just come over and knock if the door's closed."

He nodded. "I will." He made his way back to his own apartment and she turned and went into hers. It didn't take her long to get everything cleared out, and soon the furniture movers were busy taking out all of her furniture and moving the new set in. When they were done they took her old furniture
out of her apartment once and for all and she glanced around her bedroom. The entire room looked different in the best possible way, and she made her way to the bed and sat down on the edge of it. Sherlock had been right; compared to this mattress her old one really had been as hard as a rock. She smiled slightly and then shifted to lay down on it. As much of a nuisance as she thought he was going to be, this really had been a very nice gesture. She'd find some way to make it up to him.

A knock on her door caused her to reluctantly get off the bed, and she made her way to her door. She opened it and saw Sherlock standing there. “Was it delivered?” she asked as she moved out of the way.

He shook his head. “Just my sofa. Apparently someone else ordered the same dining room set and they only had one in the warehouse. They're refunding my purchase and giving me the option to get another set at a steep discount, so I need to go back.”

“Well, let me turn off the heat to the stew. It can keep for a while. And we can go get some food for your home on the way back when we pick up the garlic bread.”

“What kinds of places are there here to purchase food?” he asked as she moved towards her kitchen.

“There are a lot of corner markets, but most of those cater to people from Mexico around here. There are a few that are organic stores and things of that nature, though. There are also some major supermarkets here: Ralphs, Vons, Albertsons...I prefer Vons for my meat and Ralphs for pantry items. The day I got my car I decided to explore a bit and I found a very interesting market for Japanese products called Mitsuwa. I go there once a week to get treats, like ramune and pocky, and lunch at their restaurant.”

“Your taste is evolving,” he said.

“I eat quite a bit more Mexican food here, too. It used to be a rare treat for me in London but here it's so inexpensive to buy the ingredients that I can make it all myself here at home. For example, I adore avocados. I think they're hideously expensive at home but here you can get small Haas avocados for a dollar each. I like to make homemade guacamole and get authentic tortilla chips from one of the bodegas when I just want a quick snack. I bought a small stovetop grill and I'll grill carne asada and chicken for fajitas and burritos, and I generally tend to have pico de gallo on hand to add to those. And if I don't feel like cooking there are authentic Mexican food restaurants all over the place. My favorite is at Park & Market.”

“I don't think I've had any of those things,” he said thoughtfully. “I always preferred Chinese food.”

“You know, we don't have to eat the stew now. I can put it in containers and send some off with you, and put the rest away for me to have as lunches and suppers after long days. Which furniture store do we need to go to?”

“Ashley's,” he said.

“I bet there's something there. And if there isn't we can hunt around until we find a place to eat. I'll even have it be my treat.”

He nodded. “Very well.” She went into her kitchen and turned the heat off of her food and find the lid for the pot, and when she turned around she didn't see Sherlock. It didn't take a genius to figure out he'd gone into her bedroom and so she went there, not at all surprised to see him looking around. “This is definitely more suited to your taste,” he replied. “It reminds me of your furniture in London. Why didn't you bring it with you?”
“Well, shipping it across an ocean and the entire United States would have been hideously expensive, so I just decided to get brand new everything. I had some money, but everything cost more than I had anticipated, so I had to scale back. I got what I could afford.”

“How do you manage to afford to live here?” he asked.

“I do actually make a tidy sum, you know,” she said. “And I’m very frugal. You saw that when you stayed with me. That hasn’t changed. I make it work.” She shrugged slightly. “It was just when I first arrived that I barely had two pennies to rub together.”

“And why did you chose this neighborhood? It’s a bit far from where you work.”

She shrugged. “It’s an interesting place in the city to live. I liked other parts of San Diego more, but the housing here was nice and less expensive, and there’s a lot to do, and it isn’t as dirty as downtown. Plus I enjoy the culture.”

“What culture?” he asked.

She laughed. “Hillcrest is the gay district, Sherlock. That’s why there’s rainbow flags all over the place. It’s never bothered me in the slightest, and one of my friends in London who lived here for a time recommended I look here first just because it would remind me more of the part of London where I lived. Does that bother you, Sherlock?”

“Not at all,” he replied. “Just because I don’t partake in that lifestyle doesn’t mean I hate it. John was mistaken for my boyfriend many times. If it ever bothered me I would have said something then.”

“Good,” she said with a nod. “Well, I suppose we should get going. You do need to get the last of your furniture, and food as well. And I would much rather avoid rush hour traffic. It’s quite a pain in the arse.”

“All right,” he said with a nod. “Let’s take care of these errands and then I can begin to settle into my new home.”

“Your temporary new home,” she said.

“My home for as long as you decide to reside in California,” he countered.

She shook her head. “Fine. I hope you enjoy it because you’re going to be here for a long, long time.”

“I’ll wear you down eventually,” he replied.

“You hope.”

“I do.” He motioned to the door. “After you.” She shook her head as she led the way out of her bedroom. This? This was going to get very interesting. She just didn’t know if it was going to be the good interesting or bad interesting.
The eight hour time difference between San Diego and London made calling her friends back home a tricky business, but she needed to make it a point to talk to someone to see why on earth they sent Sherlock to bring her home. She thought about calling Greg, since Greg did say on a regular basis how much he would like her back, but she decided in the end to call John and Mary. That way she could talk to both of them and figure out what the bloody hell all of them had been thinking. She went to work the third day Sherlock was there, anxious for her lunch break. She made her way through the autopsies she had, and when she was finally finished she went to the office in her morgue and pulled out her mobile. It was one in the afternoon for her, which meant it was nine in the evening for them. She hoped they were still awake; their child was still young and they probably wanted to get all the rest they could. She dialed the familiar number and waited.

Someone picked up after three rings. “Molly!” Mary said happily. “I'm glad you called.”

“Oh, you might not be glad I called when you find out why,” she said.

“I take it Sherlock has arrived,” she said in response, and it was obvious her good cheer had dimmed somewhat.

“Yes. And he's living in the apartment right next to mine. And he's threatening to stay out here until I come home. Mary, this is going to be a nightmare, I can just tell.” She leaned back in her chair. “I don't understand. Everyone seemed to be accepting of my decision to leave. In fact, certain people encouraged me. And then three months later all of you band together to send Sherlock here to drag me home. Why?”

“Because once it set in that you were really going to be gone, most likely for good, we realized how much we hated you not being here. I know it's a good opportunity for you, but we do all miss you, and we would all love it if you came back.”

“I can't do that,” she said with a sigh. “I just want Sherlock to give up and go home without me. Can't John talk to him?”

“John's the one who suggested it first,” Mary replied.

“I'm going to murder him,” she said darkly.

“No, you aren't. I love my husband too much to let you dismember and dissolve him.”

“I never should have told you about that conversation.” She sighed. “I'm not coming back, Mary. I can't. I just...I can't.”

“He was miserable, you know,” Mary said quietly.

“Who was?”

“Sherlock. He'd fake it, of course, but two weeks after you left he'd stopped taking as much of an interest in things. He wouldn't admit why, not for a very long time. Finally John got him absolutely pissed and he admitted he missed you greatly. And that was when John suggested he try and convince you to come home. And then everyone else latched onto it and a week ago Sherlock decided to do it.”

She was quiet for a moment. She hadn't thought she was all that important to Sherlock, even after
everything. Apparently she was wrong. Still, she couldn't do it, and she had to make all of them understand. “I'm not coming back,” she said firmly. “And the sooner everyone accepts that, especially Sherlock, the better. There's too many bad things in London for me to live there again. Here it's a fresh start. There isn't so much baggage, so many reminders of bad choices and hurt and all of it.”

“I understand,” Mary said. “Probably better than most.”

“You would,” she said, relaxing slightly. “Would you please talk to John and the others about convincing Sherlock to give up and go home without me?”

“I can try, but I don't think I'll be successful. You know Sherlock. Once he latches onto something he'll see it through until the very end. He's tenacious. And...” She trailed off.

“And what?” Molly asked.

“And maybe it's best if Sherlock stays there for a while. Maybe he needs a fresh start, too. Or at least that's my opinion, and I think it's a valid one.”

Molly was quiet for a few moments. She hadn't thought about that, about what London might be like for him. Maybe it would help him to have some time away from that city, those places that held bad memories. Maybe if he wasn't always actively trying to convince her to return he could begin to take an interest in things that didn't involve her. “I hadn't thought of that,” she said finally. “I suppose you're right.”

“I do hope you don't keep him there for too long, though, before you can persuade him to give up. I think if he decided to make the move permanent I might have to convince my husband it's a horrible idea to join the both of you in California.”

Molly chuckled. “I don't know. It's quite nice here. The weather is much better, for a start.”

“But I really like London,” she replied. “And I wouldn't know what to do with that much sun and warmth.” She paused for a moment. “John needs me. I don't think it's terribly important, but whatever he needs help with is going to involve both of us and I doubt I'll be able to keep a hand free to keep talking.”

“No, that's all right. It's late for you anyway. Tell John I said hello, all right?”

“I will. Call me soon and tell me how bad the homicidal urges are getting. I'll talk you out of doing anything that might cost you your freedom.”

“I promise, I'll call you before I do anything drastic.”

“You do that. Bye, Molly.”

“Bye, Mary.” She pulled the phone away from her ear and ended the call, then shut her eyes. She had hoped she might be able to convince the others that Sherlock needed to come home without her but she didn't think she'd have much luck now. If they all shared Mary's opinion they not only wanted him to succeed in his endeavour but they also wanted him to be the man he used to be, or at least the version that was nicer to all of them and took an interest in things and didn't mope. She wondered, though, if that would ever happen if she decided not to go back and actually convinced him to give up. She didn't want him to go back to how he had used to be, but she wasn't going to sacrifice her happiness for his.

She got up at that point and made her way out to get her lunch, eating it at the restaurant instead of
bringing it back to the office. It was a little hole in the wall Mexican restaurant, one of countless many all over the county, but the mere fact she wasn't eating in her office was a step in the right direction to having a bit more of a life. Now she just needed friends to eat with and she'd be all set. When she was done she went back to the morgue and began to get back to work. She found concentrating on her work made the thoughts swirling in her head less prominent, and that helped.

Soon she was done for the day and she made her way back home. Sherlock's apartment was before hers when you entered the hall and she could hear violin music coming from his apartment. She stopped at his door, listening for a moment. He really was quite talented, she thought to herself. She hadn't really gotten to listen to him play before; when he played at the Christmas party he'd done it before she arrived and when he stayed with her he hadn't been allowed to have his violin with him, and there really hadn't been other times when he'd had it. She hesitated a moment, wanting to knock on his door and chat for a bit, but if he was concentrating on his music he probably didn't want to be bothered, and so she made her way to her front door before digging her keys out of her purse and letting herself in.

She could tell within a moment he'd been in her apartment again. That was going to get quite annoying, she decided. She'd tell him to stop a little later, but first she looked at the note that was taped up to her mirror by her door. She pulled it off, recognizing it as Sherlock's handwriting as she read it. *You treated me to three meals yesterday. It's only right I return the favor. Come over at seven. By then you should have had a chance to relax after work.* She glanced at her watch. She'd hit some unexpected traffic on the way home so it was just after six now. That gave her enough time to take a soak in a bath and change out of the clothing she wore when she wasn't in her scrubs, and it also gave her the chance to have a fortifying glass of wine. She decided to get the wine first and take it into her washroom with her.

She went into her kitchen and then stopped, looking at the stack of small boxes on the counter. That, like the note, hadn't been there when she left that morning. She went over and grinned as soon as she saw what they were. Somebody else had been to Mitsuwa, apparently, when she saw the boxes of pocky in the pile. She selected a box of chocolate almond pocky and then went to her refrigerator to get the wine, only to see there were now some bottles of ramune in there. “Oh, Sherlock,” she said quietly, shaking her head. Wine would be more fortifying but the ramune was just too tempting, especially since it was cold. She took one of the bottles out and shut the door, carrying box and bottle to her washroom.

She drew her bath, pulling her hair up into a lopsided bun on the top of her head to keep it out of the water, and she added some Epsom salt and bubble bath for good measure. Then she got undressed, laying her clothing on her toilet before grabbing the food and getting into the tub. She looked at the bottle of ramune and opened it, pushing the marble holding it closed and then taking a long sip. She hadn't gotten to go to that market this week so it was nice to have it on hand, even if she was just slightly put out that he had gone into her apartment to deliver it. Then she opened both the box and the foil packet the pocky was in and took out one of the sticks, biting into it. This was an absolutely superb way to relax, she decided.

She soaked in the bath for quite some time, until her toes and fingers had gone a bit pruney and the water got colder, and then she got out and wrapped a towel around her body. She had taken her watch off when she got in the bath and when she checked it she was surprised to see it was 6:53. Her eyes widened and she quickly made her way to her bedroom, pulling out fresh undergarments and then moving to her new dresser, pulling out denim trousers and a soft snug-fitting T-shirt. She changed quickly and when she was done she moved to her closet and slipped on a pair of flats. She left her bedroom and headed to the table at her front door, grabbing her keys and letting herself out. Once she locked up behind her she walked over to Sherlock’s apartment and knocked.
It took him a moment to answer, and when he opened the door her eyes widened slightly. He didn't look quite the same as he usually did, as she was always so used to seeing him. He wasn't wearing a suit, instead wearing a button down shirt and denim trousers. She had to admit, he didn't look that bad at all. He caught her staring and shrugged. “It's too hot for a suit, I found.”

“Well, it's May and averaging nearly thirty degrees Celsius on a daily basis,” she said with a smile as he moved out of the way for her to come in. “It's just going to get hotter as summer nears, from what I've been told. And it's been quite muggy the last few years.”

“It's going to take some getting used to,” he said once she got inside. He shut the door behind her and she moved around his sitting room. She'd seen all the furniture he'd chosen, but not all together, and she had to admit it all worked quite well together. “Did you appreciate the gift?”

“I did. But Sherlock, you can't always let yourself into my apartment. You can always leave a note on the door and keep whatever it is you need to give me here.”

“But what if someone takes the note?” he asked.

“Then you can call me. You do have my mobile number,” she replied.

“I don't want to interrupt you at work.”

“That's why voicemail was invented.” She stopped and looked at him. “Promise me you'll only let yourself into my apartment if it's an emergency, all right?”

“Very well,” he said with a sigh. “I promise.”

“So your note said something about how I treated you to three meals and you wanted to return the favor?” she asked. He had stools at his kitchen counter and she drifted over to them, sitting down in one.

He nodded. “I thought I would cook for you tonight.”

“You can cook?” she asked, raising an eyebrow slightly.

“Why does everyone think I can't cook?” he asked in a slightly exasperated tone. “I had to survive before John, and after he left as well. I may not be a gourmet chef, but I can make food well enough to survive.”

“It's just that you never really took good care of yourself when you lived alone,” she pointed out. “Or at least you didn't before you met John. You did better when you came back.”

“Well, I can cook,” he said in a slight huff. “And I thought I'd cook for you.”

“Then I'll be glad to enjoy a home cooked meal I didn't have to make myself,” she said, giving him a grin. “What did you make?”

“Lancashire Hot Pot,” he said.

“Oh, it's been quite a while since I've had that. The price of lamb here is ungodly,” she said as her smile widened. “But considering you have a lot more money than I do I'm not surprised you can afford it.”

He nodded. “There's a shop where they sell meat. I believe the term is carniceria?” She nodded. “I don't know much Spanish but there was someone there who could translate for me and I was able to
get some very good cuts of meat from them very cheaply. They didn't have lamb, though, so I had to travel farther afield for that. But I would recommend that place for the next time you feel like making Mexican food at home.”

“You'll have to show me where it's at,” she said.

“It was recommended to me by my driver today,” he said.

“Are you getting chauffeured around town?” she teased.

“Not in the way you're implying. Or rather, I do, but there's no guarantee I'll get the same driver. Have you heard of a service called Uber?”

She nodded. “I've heard the cab drivers around here hate it, but that's all I know about it..”

“I had a very knowledgeable driver this morning. He told me good places to get clothing that would help me fit in here more, told me where the carnicería was and drove me to Mitsuwa. I used the service many times today and was quite impressed with it. It is definitely better than the cabs back home. Until I can get a vehicle of my own I'll use that.”

“Can you drive here in the States?” she asked.

“Yes. When I was gone I spent time in America and driving was something I had to do quite often. It will only be a matter of weeks until I can get used to the regulations for driving in California.” He went to his oven and opened the door, pulling out a dish with hot pads. He set it on top of the stove. “I'm going to explore a bit, see what there is here that appeals to you so much.”

“Don't you need me to go with you for that?” she asked in an amused tone.

“Only if you want to. You are planning on having a life to prove to me you should stay here. I could sabotage that by taking up all your free time, but I know if I did that you would grow to resent me even more than you do now.”

“I don't resent you, Sherlock,” she said with a sigh. “I resent that you and all the rest of our friends want me to come home so bloody badly, but I don't resent you. Other than breaking into my apartment when it suits you you haven't done anything for me to resent you for, and you already promised to stop doing that.”

“I know you want me to leave, but I do think it would be best if you came home with me,” he said quietly. “You're...needed.”

She shook her head. “I can't go home, Sherlock. It would just hurt too much.” He opened up his mouth to speak and she shook her head, holding up a hand. He closed his mouth. “Let's not talk about it. Let's enjoy a nice supper and talk about other things and find out what you can do to fill up your time until you go home.”

“Very well,” he said. He changed the topic of conversation that point as he served up supper, and she could admit it was only with a smidge of hesitation that she took a bite. It was actually quite good, she realized as she quickly ate some more, and she watched him smirk for a moment before eating his own food. They kept up a pleasant stream of conversation, completely avoiding the whole reason he was there in the first place, and eventually the food was finished and he had taken the plates to his sink. He set them in it and then turned to look at her. “Do you want any of this for later?” he asked.

“I would love some,” she said with a smile. “Do you have anything for me to take it in?”
He frowned. “I still haven’t eaten the stew you sent over last night,” he said.

“I have some containers that are clean. I can get them from my apartment.” She got out of the chair and then paused. “Did you try any of the treats you got for me?”

“No. I just bought them for you,” he replied.

“Then that will be dessert,” she said with a grin. “Give me a minute and I’ll be right back.” He nodded and she dug her keys out of her pocket as she headed towards his door. She moved to her own apartment and opened the door, dashing into her kitchen to grab containers, two boxes of pocky and two bottles of ramune. She realized there was no way she could carry it all back without dropping things so she got a cloth grocery sack and placed everything in it before heading back to her door. She let herself out and then locked up again, and then she headed back to his home, opening up the door and stepping inside. “I brought some extra containers for you to store your food.”

“Thank you,” he said with a nod as she set the bag on his counter and began taking things out. “You don’t have to share the food.”

“It’s all right. You bought me quite a bit more than I usually buy for myself,” she said with a smile. “I can spare a box or two.” She began handing him the containers and he served up a generous portion in each, until the casserole dish was empty. “So I’ll take one of those home and the rest you can eat.”

“Take two,” he said. “I’ll eat the rest later, after I have some of your stew.”

“All right,” she said with a nod. Then she picked up one of the boxes and handed it to him. “These are a bit like chocolate dipped biscuits, except they’re very crunchy. I thought I’d start you with one of the plain chocolate ones.”

“Very well,” he said with a nod. He opened the box, and then opened the packet as she did the same with her strawberry one. He pulled out one of the sticks and then hesitantly took a bite of it. “This...isn’t so bad,” he said after a moment.

“I find them to be very tasty,” she said. “They have them at larger supermarkets, but usually they’re smaller and the sticks tend to be more broken and they only have plain chocolate and strawberry.” She pulled out one of hers and took a bite. “Mitsuwa has all the really good flavors.”

“I just bought you one of each, when I finally located them,” he said as he took another bite. “Are there any flavors you prefer?”

“The chocolate almond. I already finished off the box, when I was soaking in the bath. The chocolate hazelnut is also quite good.”

“Could I try one of yours?” he asked as he finished his stick.

She nodded. “As long as I get one of yours.”

“Fair enough.” She held out her box to him and he took one, taking a bite. He made a face almost immediately afterward. “Definitely not as appealing as the chocolate,” he said, setting the stick on his counter.

“It’s an acquired taste,” she said with a chuckle.

“How did you acquire this taste, if I might ask?” he asked.
“I was making homemade beef with broccoli and I ran out of soy sauce,” she said as he offered her his box and she took one. “I was in the Asian food aisle and I saw the boxes and I decided to try one. I fell in love with it almost instantly, and when one of my coworkers saw a box on my desk they told me about Mitsuwa. When I got my car that was one of the first places I went.” She took a bite of the chocolate pocky. “I’m trying to be more adventurous, a little bit at a time.”

“I can see that. You do seem to be at least a bit more confident.”

“Are you talking about the clothes?” she asked with a smile. He nodded. “I spend my time at work in hospital scrubs, and I started getting tired of hiding myself in jumpers and baggy trousers. So when I had a bit more money I could spend I went and got clothing that fit better and looked nice. I felt better and wondered why on earth I hadn't really done it before. I mean, I did a bit when I was with Tom, but not to this extent. And then when I ended things I went back to dressing in a sort of armor.”

He was quiet for a moment. “I never really understood why you ended things,” he said quietly when he finally spoke again.

“The wedding was a turning point, but it was a lot of little things that all came together at once,” she said, pulling out another stick. “The more I really thought about it the more I realized we really weren't a great fit, and the more I saw that the less I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him. If I get married I only want to do it once.”

“I don't see myself ever getting married,” he said thoughtfully. “The whole affair with Janine will probably be the closest I ever get to actually having a relationship.”

“Someone could always catch your eye here, you know,” she said, pointing her pocky at him. “You never know.”

“I sincerely doubt anyone would put up with me for more than a single date. Possibly two before they realize what a horrible choice they made,” he said with a slight grin. “I'm still rather off-putting, and arrogant, and I'm fairly sure you can fill in the blanks of other attributes to my character that are less than appealing.”

“But you can be kind, and thoughtful, and caring,” she pointed out. “You used to be someone I fancied but didn't actually like very much. Now I consider us to be quite good friends, and I never would have thought that was possible before...everything.”

“Before Moriarty,” he said quietly. “Before my fall.”

She nodded. “Yes. You've changed quite a bit since then, and I like these changes.” They lapsed into silence for a few minutes, lost in their own thoughts, and then she shook her head. “Enough maudlin thoughts. I suppose I should introduce you to ramune.”

“I looked at those bottles. How on earth do you open them?” he asked, setting his box of pocky on the counter.

“You take the top wrapper off, and then you press the marble down until it settles in the cavity at the top of the bottle. Then you drink it like you would a soft drink in a plastic bottle.” She reached over and handed him the bottle. “The ones you got me have a lemon lime flavor. I think there's other ones, but this is the one I like most, so you chose well.”

He looked at the bottle and then undid the plastic wrapper at the top. He set it on his counter and then set the bottle on the counter, pressing the marble firmly until it went into the cavity. He lifted the
bottle up then and took a drink. “This also isn't so bad,” he said when he was done. “A bit on the syrupy side, but no worse than a soft drink.”

“See? You're expanding your horizons too,” she said with a smile. “If you want to go back I'm planning a trip in three days, on my next day off. I want to have tankatsu at the restaurant and then I also want to get some bottles of jasmine green tea for work.”

He looked over at her. “Do you add milk and sugar to it?”

She shook her head. “No. I drink it plain.”

“That might be the most abhorrent thing I've ever heard,” he said, his eyes wide. “It's bad enough there's such a prevalence of iced tea in this country, but that at least can be sweetened.”

“It's the same tea you'd get if you went to a sit down Chinese restaurant,” she pointed out.

“Which is why I only get takeaway so I don't have to drink it,” he retorted.

“One day I will get you to try it,” she said with an amused grin.

“Not any time soon,” he replied.

“Well, on the subject of tea, you might want to make a trip to a shop called Teavana. They have gorgeous tea sets and loose leaf tea in a lot of different flavors, but they also have English Breakfast and Earl Grey. I don't go often but I know there's one up north in Escondido. I need to go there soon myself, actually. I'm almost out of Earl Grey.”

“At least you still have some taste,” he murmured.

She swatted at his shoulder. “Sherlock, do not insult me. I still enjoy a nice cuppa with milk and sugar and biscuits to dunk in it, but I also enjoy other flavors, too. If you stay here long enough you might as well.”

“I may be here for a very long time, but I do not plan to budge one inch when it comes to tea,” he said.

“One day,” she said.

“When hell freezes over,” he countered. They locked gazes for a moment, and then she watched the corner of his mouth hitch up slightly. She couldn't help the chuckle that escaped her lips, and she was pleased to see his own grin widen slightly. “I never expected us to get into an argument over tea.”

“Well, my tastes have evolved since I've been here,” she said with a warm smile. “You're still learning that.”

“I am,” he said with a nod. “But I think I might enjoy those particular lessons. I've come to realize I know you well, but not as well as I would like. As one of my few friends I don't think that should be the case.”

“Well, that is one perk of you and I being here without everyone else. We'll get to really get to know each other.” She took another sip of her drink. “You know, if we want to move the evening over to my apartment, I have a DVD player and some films, or we could watch something on the telly.”

His own grin widened slightly. “That sounds like a better evening than being here alone.”

“Then it's settled. We'll head over there and figure out something to watch for a while.” She gave
him a wide grin before moving around him to the containers of food. She put two of them in his refrigerator as he took the other two and put them in her bag. She was rather glad he decided to invite her over, she thought to herself as they finished getting things ready to head next door. Good food and good company made for a drastically different evening than she usually had, and so long as he didn't try and push her into going home she thought it would be a good thing to enjoy his company a little longer tonight. Having at least one friend here, even if it was a friend who wanted her to leave all of this behind, was better than having no friends at all.
She made it the next three days without any real problems. She was invited to Sherlock's apartment the evening after he cooked for her and he played the violin for her, something she quite enjoyed and hoped she got to hear more of. They had talked for a long while about a lot of different things, and she was surprised he didn't try and persuade her to go back to London more than three times. She had the feeling he was preparing to settle in for a long wait and bide his time. But that was fine; she'd accepted an invitation from one of her coworkers to go out for drinks with a few of the other women who worked in the building, and they ended up at the Belly Up tavern, listening to a very good cover band and chatting. The evening had ended with another coworker suggesting the whole group go out for dinner the next week, and Molly found herself agreeing almost immediately. So she was starting to have a bit more of a social life, and she was glad for that.

She woke up early on her day off to do her yoga. Since Sherlock wasn't camped out on her sofa she could do it in her sitting room with the music she was used to listening to. Sherlock had agreed to be ready by ten for them to go get a few things, and when she was done she realized she had forty minutes to go get some coffee and breakfast before they went out. She changed into a halter sundress in a bright shade of red and then made her way to her favorite coffee shop. She was standing there for five minutes waiting to place her order when she felt someone tap on her shoulder. She turned and saw a man around her age standing there, grinning. He had spiky hair with bright red streaks in it and small spacers in his ears. The edges of a tattoo were visible under the left sleeve of his T-shirt. He looked very familiar, but she couldn't place why. “Hello,” she said warily.

“I've seen you here a few times,” he said. “You always get a cafe mocha with two shots of hazelnut syrup and whipped cream on top, right?”

“I do,” she said slowly.

His eyes widened slightly. “I'm coming off as creepy, aren't I? I'm sorry. I'm one of the baristas here. The name's Jason.” He held out his hand. “You're Molly, right?”

“I am,” she said, relaxing slightly. She shook his offered hand. “Pleasure to meet you.”

“Pleasure to meet you as well,” he said with a grin, getting one from her in return. “I had a question for you, and I hope it isn't too forward of me. My boyfriend is British, and he's a bit homesick right now. I was thinking it might be nice to introduce the two of you. It would totally be in public places, and if you have any other friends who make you comfortable they'd be more than welcome to come too, British or not. But most of the British people he knows are...tossers? I think that's what he calls them.”

“Then he's meeting rubbish people,” she said with a chuckle. “I don't have time right now, but if he wants to arrange something I won't say no. I'd love to meet more of my fellow expats.”

“Oh, he's at work anyway. I had just told him you seemed very nice and very British and you could maybe help him be reminded of home.”

“I would love to make new friends. And I'll see if I can bring my other friend from home. He just moved here a few days ago,” she said with a nod. “How should we arrange things?”

“Email? Once you're sure he's not a homicidal maniac or something then we can exchange phone numbers.”
She smiled at him. “Well, I have a business card which has my personal email address on it for me to hand out to people I’ve had interesting conversations with. I don’t think I’ve ever used them before, so this is quite an honour.” She dug around in her purse and pulled one out, handing it to Jason. “There you go.”

“Great! He and I can talk and come up with some times that might work and we can see if we can get our schedules to sync up.” He put her card in his back pocket, then pulled out a small carrying case and gave her one of his. She looked at it and saw he was a DJ. “I work here opening shift and then in the evening I go spin at gigs. What free time I have I spend with my boyfriend.”

“What type of music?” she asked as the live edged toward the counter.

“Techno. Electronica? Sometimes drum and bass, sometimes dubstep. But I can also do a full set of house music and I do enjoy trip hop.”

“That all sounds so foreign to me,” she admitted. “But I’d love to hear it. It’s always nice to discover new music.”

“Well, if you’d like, there's a club I'll be spinning at next week where I'll be doing a house set. I mean, it's a restaurant with a dancing area that opens up at night. It's the Cabo Grill, up in Oceanside. I can always put you on my guest list, if you want to have a listen. That's more like music you can dance to.”

“I'd really enjoy that,” she said with a nod.

“Then I'll give you more details later.” She got up to the counter at that point and he leaned forward to talk to the barista. “Her drink's on the house, okay? She can have my freebie. I'm just getting my usual muffins this morning.”

She placed her order, and when she tried to pay for the pastries the barista shook his head. She looked back at Jason. “You really didn’t need to do that,” she replied.

“Hey, you didn’t run screaming from having a random stranger come up and talk to you about meeting their boyfriend,” he said with a grin. “Most people would think it's a really bad pick-up line for someone wanting a threesome.”

“I suppose they would,” she said with a chuckle. She turned back as the barista handed Jason a small paper bag. “Well, hopefully I'll hear from you soon.”

“I'll send out an email tonight.” He lifted up the bag, giving her a slight wave with it. “Talk to you soon, Molly.” And with that gesture he turned around and left.

She moved out of the line and then waited for her order to be called. Once she had it she began to make her way back home. It didn't take her very long to get there and she ate one of her pastries while sipping her coffee and waiting for Sherlock to come over. At ten on the dot there was a knock on her door. She dusted the crumbs off her dress and went to the door, opening it. “I should have expected you to show up at ten exactly,” she said with a smile.

He looked at her for a moment, his eyes slightly wide. “I don't think I've seen you in a dress since the wedding,” he replied. “And this one is much nicer.”

“Well, I have quite a few dresses now,” she said with a smile. “I just never tend to wear them because I never go anywhere. Though that's starting to change. I'll be having dinner with coworkers at some point next week and I also got an invitation to see a DJ at a club.”
“You really are going to attempt to make a life here,” he said quietly.

“Yes. Yes, I am,” she said with a nod. She moved out of the way for him to come in. He was still dressed more casually than she was used to seeing him dressed. This time he was in a maroon T-shirt and a different pair of denim trousers. “You know, you actually look quite nice like that. It's a very drastic difference from home, but a pleasant one.”

“Well, you aren't the only one who needs a change, apparently,” he said with a slight shrug. “I don't expect I'll keep all these changes when I go home. It depends on how long we're here.”

“How much did you actually bring with you?” she asked as she went back to her coffee table to pick up her empty cup of coffee to throw away.

“Enough clothing to last a few weeks and my violin,” he replied. “I hadn't anticipated the need to buy an entire new wardrobe or furnish an apartment.”

“Do you have anything to swim in?” she asked.

He shook his head. “I wasn't planning on it, either.”

“That's a shame. I could have suggested a trip to the beach at some point. They have much nicer beaches here than at home.”

“You've actually been to one?” he asked.

She nodded as she took her cup to her rubbish bin and threw it away. “Not to go in the water, not yet. It's still too cold. But I have gone to walk along the boardwalk at Pacific Beach. It's quite interesting. There's a small amusement park there and a lot of restaurants and a few shops.”

“Maybe we can go at some point,” he said slowly.

“I think it could be quite fun. But not today. Today I have errands to run, and I'm sure you probably need to get a few things as well.”

“Yes,” he said. “What errands did you need to run?”

“Grocery shopping and clothes shopping, mostly, though I need to go talk to my mobile company about getting a new phone. Mine has started to cut out when I'm in the middle of calls. I don't know if it's the phone, though. It might be the fact they're international calls. What do you need to do?”

“I need to see about purchasing some appliances for my kitchen that I've realized would make my life easier, and I suppose it wouldn't hurt to get more clothing. And I need to replace my laptop. It got damaged during my flight and now it won't turn on.”

“Then we should probably head to Best Buy for the electronics. They have a bit of everything there, and if you bring your laptop with you they can transfer the data off your old one to your new one. Where did you go for your clothing already?”

He thought for a moment. “I went to a very large shopping centre called Fashion Valley. I went to a few different stores in it.”

“Then we should go back there. I like quite a few places there as well, and my mobile carrier has a store there. We should do that first, though. Once we get the appliances and your new laptop we won't want to leave them unattended.”
He nodded. “That makes sense.”

“Let me get my purse, then, and we can be off.” He moved back towards her door and she got her purse off the table by her door. Once she got it he opened the door to let them out, and when they were in the hallway she locked up behind her. “Have you done any exploring since we talked last time?”

“I've walked around the neighborhood, and explored some of the restaurants and shops on Fourth Avenue. I was planning to spend time on Fifth Avenue tonight if we got back early enough.”

“I might join you for that,” she said with a smile. “I've wanted to look at those two clothing resale shops there, see if there's anything worth buying.”

“You'd wear clothing someone else has worn?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

She nodded. “Sometimes you can find very good vintage items there. And besides, I like unique clothes with a bit of history.”

“I'll go in with you, but don't expect me to buy anything.”

“I won't.” They made their way out to where she had parked her car and they got in. It took them quite a while to do everything they had planned, and soon her car was packed with purchases. They'd decided to unload her car first before they decided to explore the neighborhood a bit. Finally they were finished and she met him outside of her apartment. “So we can walk or we can hope I find parking on Fourth Avenue,” she said as he got done locking up his apartment.

“I have no objection to walking,” he replied.

“All right then. I'll try to limit my purchases to what I can carry.” They made their way out to the sidewalk, and she looked at him as they walked. “You haven't tried to convince me to go back to London at all today.”

“Well, I assumed you wouldn't want to hear it all the time,” he said with a slight shrug. “I'll bring it up when you look particularly homesick.”

“Speaking of homesick, I talked to a lovely man today who knows someone who's from England,” she said with a smile.

“Were they looking to set you up on a date?” he asked.

Her eyes widened. “What? No, not at all. He was one of the baristas at my coffee shop, and he said it was his boyfriend who was homesick. I thought it might be nice, and I thought you might enjoy meeting him as well.”

He thought it over for a moment. “It's not as though I have anything else to do right now,” he replied.

“What about going back to university?” she asked, tilting her head slightly.

“It will have to wait until the fall semester. The professor in charge of the program I decided on is out of town until three weeks before the new semester starts.”

“I'm sorry to hear that,” she said. “What are you going to do in the meantime?”

“There is an orchestra here that was holding auditions yesterday for their summer program. I'm the new first chair violinist.”
“Really? That's wonderful!” she said with a smile. “Are you sure that's going to be fulfilling enough for you, though? I mean, it's not solving cases or anything like that.”

He shrugged slightly. “I haven't consulted on a case since you left. Lestrade tried, but I didn't want to.”

She looked at him closely. She remembered what Mary had said, that he had stopped taking an interest in things. She had thought that meant he had just gone through the motions of solving cases, but knowing he hadn't done it at all was surprising. “Oh,” she said quietly.

“I'm fairly sure by now at least one of our friends have told you I spent a lot of time moping and not caring about things.” He paused after he said that. “You are more important to me than I had thought, apparently.”

“Well, I'm flattered by that in a way, but I didn't realize it had gotten that bad. I mean, I still would have left, but I would have made it a point to talk to you more if I'd known. You seemed perfectly fine when we spoke, and no one told me any different.”

“I thought I had been doing a better job pretending things were fine, but apparently I hadn't. But I assume they didn't tell you because they didn't want you to worry. There wasn't much you could do from thousands of miles away.”

“Is that why you want me to come back so badly?” she asked gently. “So things will go back to the way they were before?”

“Yes, though I suppose even if we both go back that won't be the case,” he replied. “There's no guarantee either of us will go back to what we had been doing before. I can already see you are a different person than when you left.”

“Knowing that, do you still want me to go back?” she asked.

He nodded. “Yes, I do. And I'm willing to wait to see how your attempt to have a better life here goes. If it ends badly I'll try harder to convince you to go back.”

“And if it doesn't?”

“Then I'll go back without you,” he said quietly. “But I'm willing to wait quite a while until that happens.”

“I can live with that for now,” she said. After a moment she stopped and looked over at him. “Sherlock?”

“Yes?” he asked, stopping in his tracks.

She hesitated a moment, then moved over and embraced him. He stiffened slightly at first, but then he embraced her back. “I'm sorry things were hard for you,” she said.

“It's all right,” he said quietly. “I think for the moment they will be better.”

“Good.” She felt him rest his chin on top of her head and she found at the moment she didn't care that they were on the pavement and that anyone could see. She needed to do this and she felt he needed to know she did care about him, that she wanted him to be okay again, just like the rest of their friends. They stayed that way for a few minutes before she pulled away. She looked up at him and gave him a wide smile. “Come on. We have exploring to do.”
“All right,” he said with a nod, giving her a faint grin back. She started to walk again and he followed, and she knew then that getting him to be back to normal was going to be something she was going to work very hard at, even if it ended with him going back home and leaving her alone in California. Right now that was what she wanted for him more than anything else.
Chapter 6

Molly was taking her break in the break room where she worked four days later. She'd taken a partial shift because a coworker had needed the afternoon off for an unexpected doctor’s appointment and he was going to take her entire shift the next day, so she was looking forward to having this evening and all of the next day to relax. She'd been sitting for just about ten minutes when her mobile began to buzz, signaling a text message. She picked up her phone and saw it was from Sherlock. Plans tonight?

She smiled slightly as she keyed in her response. Takeaway, glass of wine, sappy romantic comedy movie marathon on the telly. You?

His response came quickly. Got tickets to a play tonight. Attend with me?

What play? she replied.

The 39 Steps. It's a comedy.

Her smile widened as she read that. Sherlock willingly wanted to see a comedy? She couldn't pass that up. That could be fun. Where is it?

In San Marcos at Palomar College.

All right, then. What time does it start?

Seven. End of shift?

Three.

There was a bit of a lag in response. That is a strange shift.

I'm only covering part of a shift. At the latest it will be four that I get to leave.

Dinner as well? Supposedly there are restaurants there. Good ones.

She hadn't been to that city at all before so this would be interesting, exploring a bit. I'd love that.

Text me when home. I'll be next door.

All right. She closed out the text messenger on her phone and looked back at the clock. She had ten minutes left of her break and she wasn't quite sure what to do. Some of the other employees had commandeered the telly and she wasn't interested in what they were watching, and she didn't see anyone else in the room she wanted to talk to. She could always call someone in England while the times weren't too bad, but she wasn't sure who. After a moment she decided to go on Facebook and see if there was anything interesting there. She saw colleagues back home talking about various things, and there were a few status updates from Sally and Phillip, one from Greg, three from John and Mary had uploaded photos of her and John's anniversary party. She looked over all of it with a sad smile. There was so much she was missing back home, but she knew if she went back she'd be even more miserable. It was a horrible predicament to be in. Finally she closed the app and put her phone back into her pocket with a sigh, heading back to the morgue even though she had a few minutes left of her break.

She began to work on the body she'd received right before she took her break, focusing on that. It
was easier to focus on work than it was on her life outside of work. It took her some time due to some unforeseen complications, but she finished an hour and a half later, just in time for the coworker whose shift she was covering to come in. She gave him a wide smile. “Aaron! You're back early. I wasn't expecting you for at least another forty-five minutes.”

Aaron Kleinman gave her a grin back. He was an older gentleman, at least fifteen years older than her, and he was one of the few people she'd really gotten to know. She'd met his wife a few times, and one of his daughters who also worked with them. Roseanna had been one of the women who she had gone out with at the tavern. “Well, it was your day off. Rebecca suggested we also get lunch before I came back but I thought you'd appreciate getting back to your day.”

“Well, I wouldn't have minded. My plans for the day aren't until later,” she said, leaning in.

“You actually have plans that aren't sitting at home?” he asked in a teasing voice. “I'm shocked.”

She chuckled. “I don't know if I told you, but a friend of mine from back home has decided to move here and convince me to go back home. He's insisting he can wait me out. I don't think he quite believes me when I tell him I don't plan on leaving here. But anyway, we have plans to see a play and have dinner tonight.”

“Like a date?” he asked.

“God no,” she said, shaking her head. “Sherlock doesn't date. I don't think he has that kind of interest in anyone, especially me.”

His eyes widened. “Sherlock? As in, Sherlock Holmes?”

“One in the same,” she said with a nod.

“Oh, I followed that blog his friend wrote religiously,” he replied. “I'd always hoped to meet him at least once, and then he died. I'd wanted to pick his brain about some of the cases he'd done. You know, to get the details that were left out of the blog. And then it was all over the news that he was still alive and I thought maybe I'd get lucky and it might happen one day.”

She tilted her head slightly as she thought. “Well, he's a bit more sociable these days. I'm sure he wouldn't mind, especially if I say you're a friend of mine. Maybe the three of us can get lunch sometime.”

“I think that is an excellent idea,” he said with a smile. “Well, since you haven't started another autopsy you should get going while the getting's good. I'll make sure I'm here tomorrow for your shift.”

“I appreciate it,” she said, beginning to head to the office. Then she stopped and turned around. “Oh! How did your appointment go?”

“Well, there were a few tests they wanted to run, but the doctor wasn't too concerned. I go back for the tests in two weeks.” He made a shooing motion with his hands. “Go on now. Go have a life, Molly.”

She chuckled. “Fine, fine. I'll go. Bye, Aaron.” He waved in response and she went into the office to take off her lab coat and hang it on the peg. Then she made her way to the locker room. She'd brought a change of clothes so that she could pick up a few things from the store before she headed home, and as soon as she got her locker open she began to change. She had set her phone on the bench in front of the locker and was out of her scrubs when it began to ring. She picked it up and saw it was Sherlock. She frowned as she answered it. “Sherlock? Is something wrong?”
“Has the super called you yet?” he asked.

“No. Why?” she asked.

“The electricity is out in an entire twenty block radius. There’s no clue when it’s going to be back up. I thought you might want to see about finding some way to store your perishables.”

“Well, I’m off work now. I can go purchase an ice chest and some ice and salvage what I can. Are you going to do the same?”

“Yes. I could do it for you as well.”

“Use the key this time,” she said. “No picking the lock to let yourself in.”

“Very well,” he said with a sigh, and she smiled slightly. He must be bored to have wanted to pick her lock. “Is there anything you have that's frozen that you need me to try and save?”

She thought for a moment. “Well, I doubt the ice cream will survive, but that's all right. It was only a pint. I'd like to keep the frozen berries, though, and the meat. But don't put them in the same container. If you have to buy two of them for me then I'll reimburse you for both.”

“I don't mind. As it stands, I don't have much in my refrigerator I can't afford to lose. I can just buy three and put the meat in one and use the other two for whatever it is we need to keep between both of ours that isn't frozen.”

“Then let's do that. Thank you, Sherlock. I appreciate it.”

“I'm just glad I arrived home when I did,” he said. “So I will see about getting them. There is that chemist nearby. I'll get them from there, as well as the ice. I believe I saw they had ice chests there when I went in last time.”

“How are you going to get them all home?” she asked curiously.

“I purchased an automobile today since I wasn't working. It's not what I had expected to own but the dealership was recommended to me and the vehicle is superb, and I'm happy with it. I'll show it to you when you get home.”

“Well, it shouldn't take me that long. For all I know you'll still be in my apartment when I get there,” she said with a slight laugh.

“That could very well happen,” he replied.

“I'll see you in a bit, then.” She hung up at that point and finished getting ready to go home. It was a bit of a drive but not too much, and when she pulled up to the complex she could see a new car in the spot designated for Sherlock's apartment. Curious, she got out and took a look. He could afford just about anything he wanted with the money he had and he had bought a car she couldn't immediately recognize but knew was more on the expensive side. She saw it was a black BMW with leather seats and a very nice navigation system. Her own car was a gently used Volkswagen Jetta that she was making payments on and was mostly happy with, but she wondered what it would be like to drive a car like this.

She pulled herself away after a few moments and made her way up to her complex. She was glad they had keys to let themselves in as well as codes, and she put her key in the gate and opened it. She made her way up to her apartment and put the key in the lock. With no air conditioner that meant it was going to be a bit unpleasant, she realized as she got her door open. It was humid today but not
overly hot, but she could tell by the time she got ready for the theatre she'd be sweaty and icky feeling. She could hear movement in her kitchen and made her way over there to see Sherlock moving things into an ice chest. “I'm back,” she said, setting her purse on the counter.

“When was the last time you went grocery shopping?” he asked, not turning to look at her as he continued to work.

“The last time I took you,” she replied. “I had planned on picking a few more things up today after work since I hadn't bought much last time.”

“You have very little in the way of things that absolutely have to be refrigerated,” he said. “But you have quite a bit more meat than expected.”

“Well, there was a sale,” she said, going over to the refrigerator. “It's going to get very unpleasant since the air conditioner doesn't work.”

“I had a thought about that,” he replied. “The tickets for the play can be used today or tomorrow, and since it's only two in the afternoon and I don't think you want to have such a long day I thought we could do something else today, somewhere where it's cooler.”

“We could go near the beach, to Belmont Park maybe?” she said.

“Will it be cooler?” he asked, turning to look up at her.

“It's right by the ocean. And I'm sure some of the attractions are in air conditioned rooms, like the arcade. Plus there are restaurants there. I've eaten at a few of them before and they're quite good.”

“I'm not going in the water though,” he replied, going back to what he was doing.

“One day I will get you in the ocean,” she said with a chuckle.

“No bloody likely,” he said quietly.

“Oh, trust me, this is something that will happen. At the very least I'm going to get you into swim trunks to spend time with me at the beach. I plan on going a few times this summer, and if you're here I'm going to drag you with me.” She looked into her refrigerator. “Did you get the things you're trying to keep cool?”

He nodded. “As I said, there wasn't much. I suppose I'm still of the mindset where I buy what I need for a few days and just go get food more often.” He finished getting the things out and depositing them in the cooler. “Also, your ice cream isn't quite melted. Your freezer was still cool when I opened it. You might want to eat it now, though.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” she said with a nod. She went to her drawer with her silverware and got a spoon out. Then she paused. “Would you like some as well? It's a full pint.”

He thought for a moment, then nodded. “Not much, though.”

She got another spoon out, then went to her cabinet and got a bowl. She handed him the pint, the bowl and the spoon. “Take as much as you want.”

He set the bowl on the counter and then served up some. “I've seen this brand before but never tried it,” he said.

“Ben & Jerry's is quite good. There's an actual ice cream shop at Horton Plaza. That was where I
first tried it. The woman who worked there suggested the flavor I ended up getting, and then she told me other ones that were sold at the grocery that I might enjoy. This one is Cherry Garcia, but I also enjoy Chunky Monkey and Hazed & Confused.” She watched him finish serving himself, and then he handed her back the pint. It was a little bit melted, but not much, and if she didn't finish what was left it wouldn't be a complete waste. She took her spoon and took a bite as she watched him do the same. “Well?”

“It's definitely interesting,” he replied. “Not something I would generally pick for myself, but not unpleasant.”

“Well, I'm glad you don't hate it.” She took another bite. “I saw your car. It looks very nice. What type of car is it?”

“It's a BMW 435i coupe with manual transmission,” he replied. “I had not planned on purchasing it because I had not wanted an expensive car since I'm hoping I won't be here for very long, but it was quite enticing. And it was more practical to buy it than lease it.”

“I imagine if you take good care of it you can get a decent sum when you sell it,” she said. She really didn't want to get into him wanting her to go home and her wanting to stay at the moment. She just wanted to enjoy her afternoon. She glanced over at him and he nodded slightly, appearing to take the hint that she didn't want the conversation to go in that direction. She looked back down at her ice cream and ate some more of it. “I hope the electricity is back on when we get back. I had thought if we didn't get back too late from the play that I could watch a film tonight since I don't have to go into work tomorrow.”

“Well, if it isn't and you aren't tired of my company we could go to the cinema,” he said. “There's one at the Fashion Valley shopping centre, correct?

She nodded. “And there's also one at Horton Plaza and a few others downtown, which are closer but parking costs more.” She had another bite of her ice cream. “But do you trust my taste in films is the question.”

“As long as it is not a romantic comedy I think I can handle it,” he said before having more of his own ice cream. “I don't generally watch anything fictional, but I suppose it wouldn't hurt to expand my horizons. I know our other friends might appreciate that.”

“Well, we can see what's out. Do we want to do that before or after Belmont Park?”

He thought for a moment. “Before, I think. Depending on what film we want to see, if we can agree on one, it might be best to go to the amusement park when it's later so it's cooler.”

“Then that's what we'll do,” she said with a nod. “We should finish this and then go. You can check on the way there to see what's out and see how long we'll have to wait.”

“Or you can check while I drive,” he said. “You spend more in petrol to get to and from work then I believe I'll spend. The least I can do is drive when we want to go do something together.”

She gave him a wide grin. “I think I would like that a lot. I've never been in a car like that before.”

“Can you drive a manual transmission?” he asked. She nodded. “Perhaps I will let you drive it.”

Her eyes widened. “Oh, I don't think that would be a good idea. I mean, if I damage it then that would be a hassle for you, and I don't think I could afford to reimburse you.”

He waved a hand slightly. “I have enough money to afford at least ten more, so having to get it fixed
if it's in a hypothetical accident is not going to hurt my pocketbook. And I wouldn't make you reimburse me anyway. If I choose to let you drive it then I take full responsibility for anything that might happen.” He pulled his keys out of his trouser pocket and held them up. “You know how to get to the shopping centre better than I do. You should drive.”

“If you're sure,” she said slowly.

“I am,” he said with a nod.

She moved over and took the keys. He was actually trusting her with a car that probably cost more than her yearly salary. If she harmed that car in any way while he'd owned it for less than twenty-four hours she'd be completely mortified. She set the keys down on the counter and went back to her ice cream, as did he. When they were finished he placed his bowl and spoon in the sink and she did the same with her spoon before throwing away the cardboard container. She picked up the keys again with a sense of hesitation. “Sherlock, what if I--?” she began, but he held up his hand.

“So long as neither of us die or are gravely injured in this hypothetical accident it will be fine, Molly,” he said. “I trust you and your skills as a driver.”

She nodded, then went over to her purse and picked it up off the counter. She put it on her shoulder and took a deep breath. “All right. Let's go.” She moved to her door and opened it, letting Sherlock out first.

“Are you really that nervous about driving it?” he asked as she stepped out of her apartment and locked the door behind her.

“I'm terrified,” she said. “Exactly how long have you owned the car?”

“Approximately five hours,” he said.

“And it's expensive, yeah?”

He nodded. “A bit, yes.”

“If I wreck it I'd never be able to look you in the face again. You'd be out a lot of money and it would all be my fault.”

He studied her closely. “But you'd like to drive it,” he replied.

She sighed. “Yeah, I would.”

“Then let me propose a solution. I pay off your car, you sell it to me and I give you mine.”

Her eyes went wide. “Sherlock? You're bonkers. You're absolutely bonkers.”

“Well, if it's your car you won't feel as bad if you're involved in a wreck,” he said.

“But you just bought it. I mean, it's what you went to a dealership and drove and liked, and then you decided to put down what I assume was an obscene amount of money on this vehicle. My car isn't even new and it's a few models older.”

He crossed his arms. “Well, if it sounds like an irrational plan it's only because it's the appropriate way to deal with an irrational fear.”

“No. Getting a brand new BMW into an accident is not an irrational fear because I'll be so bloody nervous driving that I'll just be calling awful drivers towards me.” She pulled his arms apart, opened
up his hand and put the keys on his palm. “Maybe later, once you've had it for a bit.”

He was quiet, looking down at his hand. “I was serious about one bit,” he finally said in a quiet tone of voice. “About me paying off your car.”

She glared at him, leaning over to swat his shoulder. “Sherlock, did you go through my mail?”

“The letter was opened and out of the envelope and on the counter when I got there!” he said defensively. “Molly, the amount of money you pay per month to own your car is obscene. You got a very bad deal. I can help with that. If I pay it off for you then you own the car and you can upgrade if you want, or set more money away for something else you might want or need.”

“As I said before, you don't need to buy my friendship,” she said tersely. “I'm already your friend.”

“And friends help friends. You should in no way be paying that much for a car which is a few models old. You don't even get any perks with what you're paying. Why on earth would you buy a car like that?”

She sighed and looked down. “I saw it in the lot all the time when the taxi drove by as I went to and from work. It was there and every once in a while on my way home I made the driver wait while I got out and took a good look at the car. And then one day it wasn't there. So I went into the dealership and they said they were going to send it to another dealership in hopes it would sell there and I blurted out I wanted to own it. They tried to make it a good deal but really, I had some things against me when it came to credit history and they looked at how long I've been here and employed at my current job so I took the best deal I could get. I can't afford any extras.”

He moved over towards her. “Do you like your car?” he asked.

“Yes, I suppose I do,” she said with a nod, without looking up. “It's nice and functional and has good gas mileage, though it isn't as nice as I'd hoped when I had initially seen it.”

“And you'd like to make improvements,” he said quietly.

“I'd like a better sound system. The speakers keep cutting out. I'd like to be able to plug in my iPod and listen to music I like. I'd like better seats, and a better air conditioner. And I'd like the paint freshened up.”

“Then we'll do it all today after it's paid off. Drive us to the dealership.”

“Sherlock, you don't have to do this,” she replied, finally looking up. “Honestly, it's all right.”

“I do not like seeing my friends get raw deals, especially when I can fix them.” He made his way down the hallway and she followed, trying to keep up with his quick pace. “This is not me 'buying your friendship,' Molly. This is me fixing something that has ended up costing one of my friends more than I would like. I've done similar things for others back home.”

“Such as?” she asked.

“I bought John and Mary their own home. They own it outright. John didn't ask me to do it, and neither did Mary, but it came up in conversation that the home they wanted was too expensive and I offered to help cover the rest of the costs. Then we looked at the actual home and there were repairs and upgrades that were needed, and I told them to put their money towards that and I would cover the cost of the home. It's just not something the three of us talk about very much. I also helped John set up a trust fund for his son, and I've offered to do that for any other children he might have.”
“That’s very nice of you,” she replied as they made their way to the gate.

“I’ve helped in other ways, too, though not where they actually know I was the one helping. I’ve covered the costs of a few things anonymously for Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson, and on one occasion each Donovan and Anderson.”

Her eyes widened. “You don’t really like either of them very much.”

He shrugged as he opened the gate, and he let her go by first. “We may not be fond of each other personally but both of them were involved in reversing what Moriarty had done to my reputation. I felt I owed them something for that. Mind you, those instances didn’t cost me much out of pocket, but I do know they were both attempting to figure out who had done it. I’m sure by now they’ve figured it out, as has Lestrade. None of them are idiots.”

“Still, that’s an awfully big thing for you, thanking people you don’t like.”

“I suppose it’s a sign of growth,” he said. “I am not quite the same person I was when we first met.”

“Not quite the same? Sherlock, that’s one of the biggest understatements I’ve ever heard,” she said with an amused smile. “When we first met you barely tolerated me. Now we’re actual friends, and good ones, at that.”

“I did treat you badly for a long time,” he said quietly.

“You treated everyone badly, but you got better,” she replied. “Don’t think on it too much. I don’t.” She nodded over towards her car. “If you’re bound and determined to take care of all the things with my car then we should get going so we can still do things today.”

“All right,” he said. They got to her car and she let him in and then got in herself. They made their way to the dealership, and got the information on exactly how much she owed. Sherlock arranged to have the money taken out of his account to cover it, and in the course of the conversation the man they were dealing with said since she now owned the car outright she could always trade it in for a newer model with all the improvements she wanted even though she had just bought it. She hadn’t been sure that would be a good idea, but she agreed to walk around the lot just to see. It was not a dealership dedicated to one particular car company, so there was a lot to choose from. The man had told her how much the car was worth and she walked around the lot, avoiding the ones that were too expensive. Sherlock noticed after a moment. “You’re only looking at the cars that cost less than what your car is worth.”

“You just paid it off completely, Sherlock. I’m not going to ask you to pay more to get me a better car,” she said. She looked around the lot and then saw a car that caught her eye. It was a convertible in a dark purple, and she moved up to it to take a closer look. It was a Ford Mustang, and it had leather seats and what looked like a way to sync up her music player to the stereo system. She moved over to look at the price and her heart sank. It wasn’t much more, but she couldn’t afford the difference. “Never mind.”

“It’s only ten thousand more,” he replied.

“And I don’t have that, and I really don’t want to go back to making payments,” she replied.

He looked at her intently. “Do you want to test drive it? Because if you like it I’ll make sure you can get it. I know you don’t want me to, but I’m offering.”

She thought for a moment. He really didn’t need to do this, already having done so much. And she would feel the need to repay him and she didn’t even know how to begin to do that. She was already
at a loss for how to do that for what he had already done. But this was a newer car, and it would be nice to own something like this, especially since it was a convertible. She hesitated a moment more, then nodded. “All right. But I swear, I will find a way to make this up to you.”

“I won’t even insist that you going home will be repayment enough,” he said with a grin, and she grinned back. “I’ll go get our salesman so you can test drive it.”

“Thank you,” she said with a nod. He made his way to get the salesman, and when he got there with the keys she got behind the wheel and he and Sherlock got into it as well. Already she could tell this was an improvement to what she had owned, and when she started the car and got out of the lot she admitted she really liked this car. Her other car had been nice but this one was far superior. She drove with the top down and she enjoyed that so much. It seemed far too quick that they made their way back to the lot, and then the three of them got out. She looked over at Sherlock. “I’d like it.”

“You know, I was doing some calculations while I was in the office,” the salesman replied. “There are some deals we could work out where you’d only end up paying a thousand dollars more than your trade in. Two at most. The payments would be a fraction of what you were paying before, if you go that route.”

She nodded. “Then that way you don’t have to put any more money towards my vehicle, Sherlock.”

“If that’s the way you want to go then I don’t mind not paying the rest,” he said with a nod. “But you’re satisfied with the vehicle?”

“Very much,” she said.

“Then let’s get the paperwork signed and transferred over to you,” the salesman said with a grin. “We’ll get everything ready for you to drive it home once you get your stuff out of your old car.”

“All right,” she said with a wide smile. They went back into the office and she filled out the paperwork, and soon was carrying her things out of her old car to her new one. There was a smaller trunk, but it was still large enough to hold what she needed it to hold. They had gotten the price off the windshield and take the information packet off the driver’s side window, and she once again got behind the wheel of the car with Sherlock in the passenger side. “I can’t believe this is mine,” she said, buckling her seat belt.

“Well, I think it’s a better car than your old one. It certainly handles better and was a much smoother ride,” he said as he got settled.

“And it’s a convertible, which is nice,” she said with a smile as she put her key in the ignition. She paused and then looked at Sherlock. “So. Where to next?”

He glanced at his watch. “We should probably postpone the trip to Belmont Park, but a film and dinner sounds like a good idea.”

“Then that’s what we’ll do,” she said with a nod, turning her car on. She smiled at the sound of her engine practically purring. “Fashion Valley, then?”

“Or we could go to Horton Plaza. I believe I’d like to go explore some of the restaurants in the downtown area that are closer to home. I’ll cover parking.”

“Oh no you don’t,” she said, beginning to get them out of the lot. “I’m covering everything tonight. You aren’t paying a dime more than you have to.”

He gave her an amused smile. “And you’re going to insist?”
“Absolutely,” she said with a nod. “If you want to buy anything from the shops at the shopping centre then that's on you, but I'm not allowing you to pay one cent towards anything we do tonight and that's final.”

“Very well. If you insist.” He settled into his seat and she drove them back towards downtown San Diego, keeping up an easy stream of conversation. She went to the shopping centre and parked in the lot and then they went out to the shopping centre itself. It was an open air centre, divided onto multiple floors, and the cinema was next to the food court. They looked at the different film choices and decided on one, but the next showing didn't start until after six. Sherlock nodded over to the different restaurants nearby and they looked at each of them. “So the ice cream shop is near here?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yes. They have some flavors that aren't available in stores, just like there are a few available in stores that they don't carry.” She looked around and then grinned. “How do you feel about Japanese food?”

“It's not something I've eaten much of,” he replied. “I usually prefer Chinese.”

“We should try it, I think. I've had sushi every once in a while, but not much. I think it might be nice to expand our horizons.”

He nodded slowly. “I could agree to that. Is there anything you've had that you would recommend?”

“Not that I can think of off the top of my head, but I'm sure the people who work there can recommend something.” She began to walk into the small restaurant and he followed. They looked at the menu and the person helping them had suggestions, and soon they were sitting down with their meal in the outside seating area. She took a bite of her food and shut her eyes as she savored it. When she opened them again she saw Sherlock looking at her. “What is it?” she asked.

“It's just interesting to watch you do things,” he replied. “You try your best to find joy in everything you do. I don't do that as often as you do, and probably not as often as I should.”

“Well, I make a conscious choice about it sometimes,” she said, tilting her head slightly. “I'm trying to do things I don't normally do, and it can be thrilling to find something new to enjoy. I probably should have been doing it before you came, and I regret it, in a way, that I didn't start until now.”

“There are days I almost wish you hadn't,” he said quietly. “It's going to be harder to convince you to return home.”

“You're right. It will be,” she replied. “It doesn't mean that it will be impossible, though. For all you know a few months along the line something will happen and I'll decide to go back, or things here will be ruined and I'll have no choice but to go back.”

“I don't want it to happen that way,” he said. “If in the end you choose to go back I want it to be because you want to, not because you have to.”

She was quiet for a moment. “Have you considered maybe staying here, if I decide not to go back?” she asked.

“I don't think I would do well here permanently, and I don't think you would want me intruding on your life very long afterward if you do finally convince me you'll never go back home.”

“You wouldn't be intruding,” she said. “You're my friend, Sherlock. I'd never think you're intruding.”
“You say that now,” he replied. “It could change.”

“I don’t think that would change,” she said. “No, scratch that, I know that wouldn’t change. Even if I decide not to go home I wouldn’t want you to leave thinking you were going to intrude on my life. If you go back home without me then I want you to be absolutely certain that I enjoyed having you here.”

He ate some of his food. “You really want me to stay if you decide not to go back home?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said with a nod. “But I don’t think you want to.”

“I’m not sure it would be best.”

She thought for a moment, and then she came to a decision. “You know, just like you’re trying to convince me to go home I’m going to try and convince you to stay here. I think you could do very well here if you decided to stay. It might be hard on our friends, but I think for you it could be good. It would be a fresh start, for one thing. A chance to leave a messy life behind. That’s why I came here.”

“I suppose both of our lives got quite messy,” he mused. “I didn’t like that you left but I can admit I can see why it was appealing.”

“See? And maybe it would be a good thing for you to do the same. So it’s settled. You can keep trying to convince me to go home, but I’m going to try my hardest to get you to want to stay here in California.”

“It will be interesting to see which one of us is successful, in the end.” He looked down at his watch. “We might have enough time to look around briefly, if that would interest you.”

“Well, it’s been a bit since I’ve been here, so it would be interesting to see if there are any new shops,” she said. “And if we miss the film it’s all right. It’s not as though we bought our tickets already.”

He nodded before eating some of his food. “I enjoy this, you know. Doing things with you. You are good company,” he said when he paused.

She finished chewing what she had eaten. “I feel the same way. I would say we should have done this back home, but I don’t think it would have been the same. I think we’re both very different people than we were when I left.”

“We are,” he agreed. “Or rather, you are fundamentally the same, in all the important ways, but different in others. I, on the other hand, have made fundamental changes to who I am. I think it was starting before you left, but it was more profound afterward.”

“I honestly didn’t think I was that important to you,” she admitted.

“You were, and you still are. When I came back, John had a whole life that didn’t involve me, and while I was able to reintegrate myself it was never quite the same. You had one as well, but you made room for me where you could. And I owe you a great deal, for everything after the fall from the roof.”

“It’s all right, Sherlock. Honest,” she said, reaching over and laying a hand on his arm before squeezing gently. “I owe you as well.”

“How could you possibly owe me?” he asked, surprised.
“At the hospital, before you jumped, when you told me that I counted. That I’ve always counted. It meant more to me than you can possibly imagine. Knowing I actually meant something to somebody, especially somebody like you, gave me a sense of confidence I didn’t really have before, and I think I needed that.”

“I should have told you earlier, not just when I needed your help.”

“It's all right. The fact you told me at all was enough.” She gave him a smile and let go of his arm. “We keep getting sidetracked. If we don't finish this soon it will get cold.”

“Good point,” he said with a faint smile, and the two of them went back to their food. When they were finished they walked around the shopping centre, occasionally going into the shops and making a few purchases. They skipped going to the cinema and around eight had explored everything they wanted to explore. Once she paid for parking and they left she drove up Third Avenue with a sense of trepidation, but as she saw more and more buildings with lights on she relaxed. They got back to their apartment complex and she saw many of the lights were back on. “It appears as though it’s been fixed,” he said as he got out of her vehicle.

“Thank God. Hopefully our food is still cold,” she said.

“I hope it is as well.” They got their purchases out of the back of her car and made their way to the gate. She keyed in the code and opened the gate and they made their way towards their apartments. “I'll put these in my apartment and be over to get my food back,” he said as he stopped at his door.

“All right. I'll see you in a few minutes,” she said before going further down the hall. She let herself into her apartment and turned on the lights. It was wonderful that the electricity was on, she thought to herself. She left the door unlocked and went to set the clothing and other items she had bought in her bedroom. When she was finished she went back to her kitchen and opened up the first ice chest. It appeared as though there was still solid ice but most of it was water. She saw this one had her meat, and she began to put it back into her freezer. She'd gotten it halfway empty when she heard her door open. “Sherlock?”

“You really shouldn't leave your door unlocked,” he replied. “I have a key, remember? Just as you have one to my apartment.”

“I know, but I knew it would only be a few minutes until you came over,” she replied, straightening up as he came into her kitchen. “That took longer than I'd thought it would.”

“I wanted to put the clothing away so it didn’t wrinkle,” he said. He moved closer to her. “Is anything salvageable?”

“The meat is partially frozen still, but I haven't checked on anything else. You're more than welcome to do that while I finish putting the meat away.”

He nodded and went to one of the other ice chests, opening it up. He pulled out a half gallon of milk and touched it. “There's still ice in here, and everything appears cold.”

“Good,” she said. “Now I don't have to replace everything. I may just toss out what we didn't fit in there that should have been put in and replace that later.”

“I don't think I'll have to do that, thankfully.” He straightened up and then leaned against her kitchen counter as she went back to putting her meat back in the freezer. “While I was in my bedroom I glanced at the tickets for the play. There was a note from the person who gave them to me that the parking at the college requires a permit and they didn't know if there were exceptions
made for performances. I thought it might be best if we make use of a driver for the evening so we don't have to worry about that.”

“That sounds fine to me,” she replied. “Who gave you the tickets, anyway?”

“One of the neighbors. She'd been putting up a note about them when I went to see about the mail. I offered to pay her for them but when she found out I would be taking you if I went she just gave them to me. Apparently she's quite keen about you.”

“What was her name?” she asked.

“Matilda or Melinda, I believe.”

“Melissa?” she asked after a moment.

“That could be it,” he conceded.

“She and I have talked on a few occasions,” she said with a smile. “Not too much, but a bit when we run into each other. Her mum was British, and I think she likes talking to me because of my accent. It reminds her of her.”

“Yes, I did notice she had traces of one when we spoke,” he said.

“She's very interesting. She's the only person here I've really spoken to, though. Everyone else keeps to themselves mostly.” She finished with the meat a moment later and went to the next ice chest. “I think that's why this complex is so quiet. It makes me a little sad, to be honest. I'd like to be able to know the other people here, but I don't know if my overtures would be welcome.”

“At least you know one of your neighbors well,” he said, and when she looked up she saw he looked amused.

“That's because you moved 8,000 miles away from home just because I was here,” she said with a chuckle. “You don't count.”

“I'm hurt.”

“No you're not,” she said, shaking her head before she began transferring the contents of the second chest into her refrigerator. “Was this the one that had your food in it?”

He looked over into it. “Yes.”

“When I'm done taking my things out you can probably head back to your apartment. You don't need to stay any later.”

“I meant what I said earlier. I enjoy your company. I won't do to you what I did to John for so long, taking up all of your time, but I would enjoy spending as much time with you as you'd allow,” he said.

“Well, I'm going to spend tomorrow evening with you at the theatre,” she said. “But if you really want to stay longer I suppose we can watch a film. You can go pick one out if you'd like.”

He moved away from the counter and went out into her sitting room. She had quite a few movies in both Region 1 and Region 2 format. One of the first purchases she had made was to buy a Blu-ray player that was region free so she wouldn't need to replace all the ones she had brought from home. She had just moved on to the third ice chest when he spoke again. “You seem to enjoy historical
“I think history is fascinating. It was my favorite subject aside from science,” she replied. “There were so many interesting stories all throughout time, and not just in England. Though I will admit, we do period pieces better.”

“You also have a lot of action movies.”

“I know. I honestly think they're more fun to watch at the cinema, but there's a few I absolutely love and had to own at home.”

“And I see you have the extended versions of the Lord of the Rings. I've never seen those versions, just the theatrical ones.”

She straightened up and looked at him. “You actually saw those?” she asked, surprised.

He nodded. “My grandfather knew Tolkien, actually. He used to tell me stories that his father had told him from World War I involving the two of them. Because of that I read The Silmarillion, The Hobbit and the entire Lord of the Rings trilogy. To this day those are the only fantasy novels I like. When the movies came out I made it a point to watch all six of them. I'm fairly amused one of the actors in the Hobbit movies so closely resembles John.”

“Oh, thank God I wasn't the only one who thought that,” she said with a smile. “You know, I don't have the extended edition of the third Hobbit movie, just the theatrical cut, but maybe if I get two days off in a row we could watch all of them in order? Start with the Hobbit trilogy one day and then do Lord of the Rings the next.”

“I think I could agree to that,” he said with a nod. “I'll pick something else tonight.”

He turned to go back to looking through her collection, and she went back to putting the food away. When she was done she saw he was still looking at them. “Still haven't found something to watch?” she asked as she got closer.

“It's more that I can't decide between two of them,” he said, handing her two DVD cases.

She took them and took a closer look at them. He'd handed her Clue and Now You See Me. “Well, Clue is a very interesting comedy based on the board game Cluedo,” she said. “It's quite funny with many great performances. Madeline Khan's is one of my favorites, and I think the fact there's three different endings is brilliant. But I can see you spotting all the twists a mile off, and I don't know if you'd enjoy that.”

“I can try and suspend disbelief for the length of the movie,” he replied.

“Now You See Me is also interesting,” she replied. “It's about a group of people gathered together because they're all great magicians of one type or another, and there's someone who's trying to prove they're frauds and another who's a cop who wants to catch them. It's got a lot of great twists as well, but once again I'm sure you'll spot them quite easily. But it's a fun movie, and the magic bits are impressive.”

“Which would you rather see tonight?” he asked.

She thought for a moment. “When did you want to leave for the play tomorrow?”

“Around five, I suppose. That would give us a half hour to get to San Marcos, an hour or so to eat, and then time to get to the play.”
“We could always watch them both. I don’t believe Clue is two hours long. So if you don’t mind staying up for a bit we could fit them both in and be finished around midnight.”

“It’s not as though I sleep very much as it is,” he said. “Which should we start with?”

“Clue,” she replied. “You need to pay closer attention to that one because there’s all sorts of jokes that fly over your head otherwise.”

“I get the feeling you’ll need to explain some of them to me,” he said.

“Well, I’ve seen the movie at least fifty times. I can certainly explain every joke in the movie,” she said with a chuckle. “Why don’t you take your food back to your home and put it away while I start making us some popcorn?”

“All right,” he said with a nod. They went back into her kitchen and he picked up the ice chest that had his food in it. “I’ll be back shortly.”

“I’ll be waiting,” she said with a smile. “And this time I promise I’ll lock up behind you.”

“Good.” They both headed towards her front door, and she opened it for him. He stepped out into the hallway and she shut the door behind him, locking it. Then she went back into her kitchen and began to make the popcorn. She was honestly surprised they had spent so much time together since he got there and not gotten sick of each other. She was quite pleased with this development. She had had a social life in London after he had left the first time, and had missed it here. Even if it was just spending time with him it was nice to not be alone most of the time. She just hoped that when he finally gave up on trying to get her to go home she could manage to convince him to stay. She knew if he went back home she might very well follow because she was getting quite used to being near him, and while it wasn’t cause for panic yet it could be in the future. She just had to wait and see what the future held.
Chapter 7

She had been quite excited to go out and experience something she hadn't gotten to do since she was in London, which was going to see a play. She knew it wasn't as though it was a play at the West End or even at the Old Globe Theatre or the La Jolla Playhouse; it was just a play at one of the small colleges in the northern part of the county. But she had decided to dress as if she was going somewhere more prestigious. She had bought a few dresses to wear if she had wanted to impress someone on a date, and she put one of those dresses on that evening. She had been quite pleased to see Sherlock gawk for a minute when she opened the door. It was the reaction she had hoped he would have all those years ago at the Christmas party, and while she knew nothing romantic would ever happen between them it was nice to know that she looked pretty enough to elicit a response like that from him.

They had left for dinner first and enjoyed a nice meal at one of the restaurants in Restaurant Row before they went to the play. It was an excellent play with a very talented cast, and when it was over they returned home, chatting about it up until they got to the complex. She hesitated before going to the gate while Sherlock moved to it, opening it up before realizing she wasn't behind him. “Molly?” he asked, turning around.

“I don't think I'm ready to end my evening quite yet,” she replied. “I mean, I don't get this dressed up very often. I think I might attempt to see if there's an interesting place to go have a drink.”

“I would join you, but I have business to attend to early in the morning,” he said after a moment.

“I didn't know you actually drank alcohol,” she said, slightly surprised.

“Not often. It dulls my senses and I don't like that. But every once in a while I will have a drink.” He thought for a moment, as though debating something. “If you want, I can go with you.”

“You don't have to, Sherlock,” she said with a smile. “If you have something you're doing tomorrow morning then go get some rest. I'm probably not going to stay out very late as it is. I have work in the morning.”

“If you're sure,” he said slowly.

“I am.” She moved closer to him and then leaned in and kissed his cheek. “Good night, Sherlock.”

“Good night, Molly,” he said with a nod as she pulled away. She turned around and headed back towards the pavement outside the complex. It would be a bit of a walk to where all the nightlife was, and considering she didn't know the bars or anything well she'd have to hope she could find a place or get a cab to take her towards the downtown area.

She had made it half a block away from the complex before she heard someone behind her. She turned and saw Sherlock walking quickly towards her. “You really don't have to come with me,” she replied.

“I went to get the mail and there was a notice from the police about it being dangerous to be alone in this part of the neighborhood at night,” he said, handing her a sheet of paper. She moved more under a street light to read it. It appeared as though there had been an increase of muggings in the area, and they wanted people to be alert. “You probably have one with your mail as well.”

She sighed. “Well, I'm not really in the mood to drive somewhere because then I wouldn't be able to drink.”
“I have the card of the driver who took us to San Marcos,” he replied. “He had said if I needed his services again tonight he’d be getting supper nearby. You can call him and at least that way you aren’t walking at night and you don’t have to attempt to find a cab.”

She gave him a wide smile. “That sounds like a good idea. He was quite pleasant.”

“And he would probably know a place you might enjoy.” He nodded back towards the complex. “I can wait outside with you while you wait for him.”

“All right.” They made their way back to the complex in silence, and when they stopped Sherlock pulled out a business card, dialing a number and talking to the driver briefly. He hung up and looked at her. “He should be here soon.”

“I suppose he just sat down to eat,” she said with a smile.

“Well, he ordered his food, at any rate. I didn't think you would mind if he took the time to eat it.”

“No, not at all. I may stop and get a bite to eat myself before I have a drink.” She pulled her wrap around her more. It was a bit chilly tonight, a contrast from the heat earlier in the day. “I went to a place called Belly Up Tavern last week with some coworkers. If I could find a place like that that would be nice.”

“I'm sure he'll know of something,” he replied with a nod.

She was quiet for a moment before she spoke again. “What business do you have tomorrow?” she asked, tilting her head slightly.

“I need to have an extended conversation with my brother, and with the time difference and his busy schedule I have to talk to him very early in the morning.”

“How early?”

“Around two in the morning,” he replied.

“Can't he talk to you later in the morning like a normal person?” she asked.

He gave her a slight smile. “He's already allotting two hours for this phone call. I doubt he would be able to set aside that much time later in the day, and he does not like to do business in the evening, as much as that would be easier for me.”

“Is there a problem of some sort?” she asked.

“Possibly. I can't discuss it completely, but he's in some negotiations with someone and the British government asked for my help with an investigative manner, knowing Mycroft is my brother. It's very delicate but if it comes to a satisfactory end it could benefit both governments involved greatly.”

“But what about the orchestra position?” she asked.

“Rehearsals for the summer session don't begin until next week so I would spend this week helping my brother and then I would go back to the life I choose to have here.” He shrugged slightly. “My brother is calling in the favor I owe him for keeping me out of prison after everything. I can't say no.”

She nodded. She still didn't know all the details about exactly what happened when Sherlock had killed Charles Augustus Magnussen, and she wasn't really sure she wanted to know them. She believed he had his reasons, and they were important, and that more or less settled the matter in her
He looked over at her. “I don’t want to put a damper on your evening,” he said quietly. “Perhaps we should change the subject. Have you heard from the man whom you exchanged email addresses with yet?”

“You mean Jason?” Molly asked, and he nodded. She smiled at him. “Yes, I did. His boyfriend has a project going on at his post but we're getting closer to pinning down a time for lunch. It's more a matter of Thomas tearing himself away from the project long enough to enjoy a meal he doesn't have to eat at his desk. But they’re both pleasant people, at least as far as I can tell from the emails we’ve exchanged.”

“That’s good,” Sherlock replied. “Perhaps if I can make time I could join you.”

“Well, if you don’t join me for that luncheon one of my coworkers would like very much to meet you. Aaron was a huge fan of John's blog. He wants to, and I quote, 'pick your brain' about some of the cases you've solved.”

“I suppose I could do that,” he replied after thinking a moment. “I know I have fans, but I generally avoid them. Too much hassle. It could be interesting to chat with someone about what I used to do.”

“Then when you get some free time let me know. I'll see if I can talk to him tomorrow at some point and make tentative plans. If whatever it is you're doing for your brother takes up all of your time this week, perhaps we can do it next weekend.”

“That would be acceptable.” He glanced at his watch. “How late do you think you're planning to stay out?”

“An hour or so?” she said. “I don't have to be at work until ten tomorrow, but if I'm only having one or two drinks and I'm home by midnight I shouldn't be tired in the morning. Why?”

“I was just wondering if you'd want company after all. I would still be here in time to take Mycroft's call if you decide to come back by midnight.”

“You really don't have to if you don't want to, Sherlock. And...” she began, but she trailed off.

“And if you walk into a bar with me people are going to assume we're together in a romantic way,” he said quietly.

“Well, yes,” she replied. “Part of the reason women go to bars when they're dressed up like this is to flirt and get noticed. Not that I think that will happen tonight, but I'd like to at least try and see if I'm wrong.”

“Any man who doesn't notice you is blind,” he said. “And probably an idiot to boot.”

She laughed. “Well, I will take that as a compliment, Sherlock.”

“As you should. Considering the way I am if I can notice you look quite exquisite tonight than other people should as well.”

“Yes, that look you had when I opened the door made me feel quite confident,” she replied with a warm smile. “If you had given me that look at the Christmas party I think things might have turned out very differently.”

“Lestrade gave you the look I imagine I had on my face,” he replied.
“Really?” she asked, surprised.

Sherlock nodded. “Yes, really. I was honestly surprised he never attempted to pursue something with you once he began the process of ending his marriage.”

“Well, I think while he might have appreciated how I looked he realized I was still infatuated with you at the time,” she said quietly. “And it probably would have ruined not only our friendship but our working relationship if things had gone south.”

He was quiet for a moment. “Did you move away from that before my fall or after?”

“My crush on you?”

“Yes.”

She thought about it for a couple of minutes. “I started to before your fall. Not entirely, but enough. But I knew if your plan was going to work I’d have to act completely heartbroken at your death. I could have continued with that all those years until you came back, but something happened.”

“What happened?” he asked.

“I realized I had spent so long waiting for you to notice me that I didn't even consider that other men might notice me. When you told me I counted I realized you had in fact noticed me, but not in the way I wanted. And not in the way I deserved. So after you left my home I gave myself a few months to pretend to mourn before I decided I would spend time noticing others and seeing where it led.”

“And you noticed Tom?”

She smiled a slightly sad smile. “Actually, he noticed me first. I was rather surprised by that. I didn't think anyone would, to be honest. But he began doing little things to let me know he was interested, and then we went out on a date, and then another, and soon enough we were exclusive.”

He studied her closely. “I'm sorry to have brought it up.”

“No, it's all right. I miss being in a relationship. There's a comfort to it that I enjoy. I just thought he was a man I could spend the rest of my life with, and it still hurts to know I was wrong.”

“One day perhaps you'll find that man.”

“Not if you keep hanging around,” she teased.

“All the more reason for me not to stay if I finally accept you're not coming home,” he said quietly.

She laid a hand on his arm. “I didn't mean it like that, Sherlock. I was quite serious when I said I was going to convince you to stay. And any man who doesn't accept that you're a good friend and I'm going to spend time with you is not a man I want to associate with for long. I already got to know you quite well when you stayed at my home, and I've gotten to know you even more since you arrived here. I might go so far as to say you're one of my best friends now.”

“Really?” he asked, looking at her in surprise.

“Yes, really.” She squeezed his arm gently as she looked up at him. “If a potential boyfriend can't see that you're an important part of my life then he's not the man for me.”

“You wanted nothing more than to get rid of me when I got here,” he pointed out.
“Yes, I did. But you've changed quite a bit since I left and I like the changes now that I've really gotten to see them. I like having you here, so now I don't want you to leave.”

Sherlock started to reply when a car pulled up to the complex. “I believe your ride is here.”

She looked away from him. “I suppose it is. Do you want to join me?”

He debated it for a moment, then shook his head. “Not tonight. You deserve a chance to get some attention from someone other than me.”

“All right.” She stepped away from him, giving him a slight wave before turning away and heading towards the waiting car. She hadn't expected any of the conversation they'd just had, but perhaps it was overdue. It had cleared the air between them a bit, and perhaps that was what had needed to happen before either of them began to seriously work on convincing the other to do what they wanted. At least this way there would be no misunderstandings. And as she got into the car and gave a glance back to the complex, watching Sherlock finally turn and go back to the gate, she thought that was for the best.
Chapter 8

Sherlock stayed quite busy for the entire week. She didn't see him often, but when she did he didn't seem the way he had used to be when he would have a case to solve. Before he'd had a sort of vibrancy about him, an almost manic edge to his personality. Even when he had been annoyed he'd seemed to enjoy what he did. But the more the week went on the more she saw that it wasn't the same. It didn't seem to bring him any joy to go back to what he had done.

He had slipped a note under her door at some point Sunday night letting her know the business was finished. He must have wrapped everything up late in the evening to give her a note instead of knocking on her door or calling her. The note had also suggested meeting at his apartment for dinner Monday evening at some point around six. She imagined he probably wasn't going to cook since he had told her when they'd talked more about his new position that rehearsals went until five, but that was fine. She had the day off so she thought it would be nice to surprise him with dessert, and around three she took a trip to one of the grocery stores to get the ingredients for it. It took her a little bit of time, but when she got home she began to cook and she was pleased when it was all done by five thirty.

She made her way over to his apartment at six, balancing the dessert dish in one hand while she knocked on the door. He opened it and gave her a small smile, one that got wider when he saw what she had in her hand. “You didn't have to bring anything,” he said.

“You've looked like you've had a rough week,” she said as he moved out of the way so she could come in. “I figured apple crumble would be something you'd enjoy. Sweet, but not too sweet.”

“That is generally something Mrs. Hudson would make when she thought John and I needed a pick-me-up,” he said as she came in.

“Well, we'll have to see if mine is just as good.” She made her way into his kitchen and set it down. “It will probably be cold by the time we actually get to eat it. It's room temperature now.”

“We could always start with dessert first,” he suggested. “I was going to call for takeaway but that will take some time to get here.”

“Then that sounds like a plan. And if you want, I have vanilla ice cream in my apartment.”

He shook his head. “That would be too sweet, I think.” He went to his cabinets and pulled down two bowls. Then he went to a drawer and pulled it out, picking up a spoon and two forks. “I heard there is a city here renowned for their apple pies and such.”

“Oh, you mean Julian,” she replied with a smile. “It's in the mountains. I'd like to go there at least once. I've heard it's a very pretty place.”

“If they're known for their apples the best time to go would be in the fall, I'd think,” he said as he brought everything over to the apple crumble dish.

“I was thinking the same thing. Apparently a big thing here in the fall is fresh pressed apple cider. That's what I'm excited to try.” She watched him serve up a portion of the dessert, and when he offered her the bowl and a fork she took it. He served up his own and she waited for him to take a bite. “Well?” she asked.

“Yours is marginally better than Mrs. Hudson's,” he said when he was done swallowing. “And considering hers is quite good you should be pleased.”
“Oh, I am. And I promise never to tell her you like mine more.” She took a bite of her own portion of food. “You look better today than you did Saturday.”

“I don't have to deal with the case anymore, for one. And getting to play the violin for hours today was quite soothing, even if I had to stop and start due to other people’s mistakes.” He took another bite of his food. “Mycroft said I can go into some of the details of the case with you, if I wanted. But not all of them, since some of it is a matter of national security.”

“It was a very big case, then?” she asked.

He nodded. “It involved embezzlement, extortion and attempted murder.”

Her eyes widened. “Dear God.”

“It was an interesting case to solve, I suppose. There was a business owner who wanted a contract with the government. Because of the negotiations both the American and British governments are in the midst of there are a lot of people involved in making decisions. One of the major players in the business decided the best way to get them the contract would be to embezzle funds from the company and bribe a government official. The official alerted Mycroft, and he asked me to find out what the bloody hell was going on.”

“There was more?” she asked.

Sherlock nodded. “Someone found out what the person had done so they began blackmailing the person who stole the money, so the only way to pay him was to steal more money. But the embezzler didn't want to do that so he began to find out who was blackmailing him. Eventually there was an attempt to murder the blackmailer, but they'd gotten the wrong person.”

She shook her head. “That sounds awfully convoluted.”

“It is. To be honest, everyone involved in the mess at the company are absolute imbeciles. I don't expect the business to survive the scandal, but then again I could be wrong. America can be a strange country when it comes to what they let their corporations do.” He had some more food. “I'm just happy it ended well for Mycroft. Now I think my debt has been repaid.”

“I hope so as well.” She watched him for a moment. “Was this case the final nail in the coffin of your old career?”

“I think it might have been, yes,” he said with a nod. “I've taken quite a bit of time away from consulting, and it's surprising to find I don't miss it. I think after everything that happened with Magnusson it wasn't the same anymore.”

“I suppose not,” she replied.

“You don't want to know what happened that day, do you?” he asked quietly.

“Not really, though if you ever want to tell me I'll listen,” she said after a moment. “I know you well enough to know you only would have done it if you'd had a good reason. If you hadn't I doubt John or anyone else would talk to you, and I also doubt your brother would have done his level best to keep you out of prison.”

He looked down at his bowl. “That means a lot, you know.”

“What does?”
“That you don't think I'm a horrible person for what I did. That even without knowing the details you believe me to be a good man.”

“Well, you are,” she replied emphatically. “I won't ever doubt that unless you do something that hurts someone and you have no justification for it.”

“Thank you,” he said with a nod. He used his fork to pick up more of his food. “We should change the subject, I think.”

“That would be a good idea,” she said. “Am I going to get to hear you play in the orchestra?”

She could see him visibly relax with her question. “I will make sure you have a very good seat,” he replied. “Something near the front and in the center.”

“How many performances are you going to have?”

“Three, I believe.”

“Are you going to keep doing it after those performances?”

He shook his head. “No. The professor in charge of the program I want to enter into returned to town much earlier than expected. Apparently whatever it was he was going to be doing this summer isn't happening. He understands I have rehearsals so he's making time to speak with me on Saturday about the program and everything I will need to do in order to obtain my Master's degree. He is aware of what I used to do and was actually quite surprised I haven't attempted to do the same thing while I am here, or that I'm not going into forensic sciences.”

“So what did you finally decide on?” she asked before eating more of her food.

“I'm going into the biochemistry field. I'll be attending the University of California San Diego in La Jolla. I may have to take some classes again to qualify for the program, but I don't think there will be too many. That's what I'll be talking to the department head about on Saturday.”

“What happens if you decide to go home?” she asked.

“I may postpone it until I finish, if it turns out I excel in the program. If you do decide you no longer want me to be near you I can move out of this complex and reside closer to the university.”

“Sherlock, I'm not going to want you to go,” she said with a sigh. “I like having you here, remember?”

“That can always change,” he pointed out. “I could still wear out my welcome.”

“Only if you go back to being an absolute arsehole to me,” she countered, pointing her fork at him. “How long have we known each other?”

He thought for a moment. “Five years, give or take. I don't quite remember.”

“That sounds about right. In five years, you went from treating me like a tool to be used to treating me like a person to now treating me like a friend,” she replied, using her fork to emphasize her points. “And in those years between when we met and your fall I put up with a lot of abuse from you, and yet when you needed my help I gave it to you. If you backslide all the way back to how you were when we first met I'll wash my hands of you, but only then.”

“But--” he began, but she glared slightly and he stopped.
“No buts, Sherlock. I will tell you this time and time again if I have to, but realize the more I have to say it the more annoyed I will be.” She jabbed her fork into her bowl to spear an apple slice and then lifted it up, and she could see he had a slightly amused look on his face. “I don't think it's funny.”

“I very rarely see you annoyed or angry,” he said. “I think the last time before I arrived in California was when you slapped me.”

“And you deserved each and every slap that day, too,” she said.

“I suppose I did.”

“There is no 'suppose' about it. You did.” She ate the apple slice on her fork, and when she was done she looked at her bowl. “I ate all my food.”

“I'm almost finished with mine as well. I think this might be a sign we need to order dinner,” he said. “What are you in the mood for?”

“Chinese?” she suggested. “Unless we want to go somewhere else to eat, and then we could try the Greek place on Washington Street. Daphne's? Or possibly one of the Mexican food restaurants.”

He thought for a moment. “I hadn't planned on leaving, but we could if you really want to.”

“No, if you want, we can stay here. Is there a Chinese food place that delivers, though? There's the Panda Express nearby, but I think you have to actually go in to get your food.”

“Well, that is fairly close, as is Daphne's. Which would you prefer?”

“Are we going to sit there to eat?” she asked.

“Most likely,” he said as he nodded.

“Then let's do Panda. Then I can have multiple servings of their passion fruit tea.”

He made a face. “I think you've become less British since you moved here.”

She moved over to swat him in the shoulder. “I have not, Sherlock. I just decided to expand my horizons. One day I will get you to do the same.”

“You can try,” he said. “You will find I'm not likely to cooperate.”

“Well, then let's make a bargain. I won't make you have the tea there, but I'll owe you one favor if you let me make you a cup of the green tea blend I get made especially for me when I go to Teavana.” She held out her hand. “Deal?”

He looked down at her hand. “Any favor I want?” he asked.

“Within reason,” she replied. “No asking me to do anything illegal or immoral. And nothing that will hurt anyone in any way.”

He extended his own hand and shook hers. “Deal. I'll hold this favor in reserve until I feel it's a good time to collect.”

“All right then. Food first, then tea,” she said when she let go of his hand. “Are we each buying our own? If so, I need to get my handbag.”

“No, I invited you over. I'll pay for the food.” He ate his last few bites and then moved closer, taking
her bowl from her, and then set all the dishes in the sink. “Should I stick that in the refrigerator?”

“I would. Do you have anything to cover it with?”

He nodded, then went to a drawer and pulled out some cling wrap. He tore some off and covered the dish, then put it in his refrigerator. Then he paused. “Did you want to take any of it home?” he asked.

“No, it’s all right. You can eat the rest so long as you bring my dish back to me when you’re done with it.”

“I’ll put it in smaller containers when we get back and give you back your dish tonight,” he said as he straightened up. “I’ll even wash the dish for you.”

“That would be nice,” she said with a smile. “So, food now?”

“Yes, food now,” he said with a grin of his own. “We should probably walk there, I think. Less issues with parking.”

“Yes. There aren’t many parking spaces behind the restaurant.” She moved out of his kitchen and he followed, and when she got to the front door she opened it and stepped into the hallway. Once he got out there he locked up behind them. They chatted as they left their building and made their way towards the restaurant, stopping when they saw the line out the door. “That’s unexpected,” she said.

“It appears they have a new entree,” he said, peering in through the window. “Do we want to wait or go somewhere else?”

She moved over towards the curb on Washington Street and looked around, moving a bit away from the Panda Express. Then she grinned as she caught sight of Bronx Pizza. “How do you feel about New York style pizza?” she called back towards Sherlock, pointing at the small restaurant.

He moved closer to her. “I've never had it,” he said as he looked where she was pointing.

“They have pizza by the slice, I think. We could each get one and that way if you don't like it you won't have spent much money on your meal.”

“I suppose we could try it,” he said with a nod.

“Then let's get over to the light and cross over to it,” she said with a nod. They began to walk towards the nearest intersection and were almost there when she spoke again. “I’ve been here for just over three months and I don't think I've explored many of the restaurants in this area.”

“I have seen quite a few on Fifth Avenue, and a few more on Fourth,” he replied. “Perhaps we can make it a point to visit a few of them.”

“That sounds like a good idea. Spend some time learning our neighborhood better.” She got to the intersection first and pressed the button for the crosswalk. “I'll admit, Bombay looks very interesting. I haven't had good Indian food since I left London. And don't you dare say that's a reason I should go back.”

“Well, it would be a perk,” he said. “But if you'd like we could go to Bombay tonight. It isn't that much of a walk, and we'd need to cross the street anyway.”

“Are you sure you still want to cover the meal?” she asked, frowning slightly. “I don't know if you wanted to spend a lot on our evening meal, and I don't know how expensive the restaurant is.”
“It's all right,” he said as the light changed and they were able to walk across the street. “If that's where you want to eat then that's where we'll eat.”

“Oh, I think I'm going to enjoy that so much,” she said with a wide smile. “And maybe next time we can go somewhere you want to go.”

“We can make a sort of standing date, I suppose,” he said after a moment's pause. “On Mondays, schedules permitting, we eat at one of the establishments around here.”

“I would definitely agree to that,” she said with a nod. “And next week I'll pay.”

“I'm thinking next week I might like to try that pizza parlor, actually,” he said. “It was a very rare event when I would eat pizza back home. Usually if I was going to eat anything remotely Italian I would go to Angelo's restaurant.”

“The one John said you went to when you were going after the cabbie killer the first day you met?” she asked.

“Second day, but yes. That restaurant.”

“John said he thought you two were on a date,” she said with a smile as they got to the other side of the street and she pressed the button to cross in the other direction. “You two got that a lot, didn't you?”

“Yes, quite often,” Sherlock said with a nod. “He always protested about that very loudly. I didn't care, to be honest.”

“Well, thanks to her no one considers you to be gay anymore back home,” she said.

He raised an eyebrow. “You really do dislike Janine, don't you?”

She crossed her arms. “I do. I understand you were using her to get to her employer, and that wasn't very nice but that was necessary. Selling you out to a tabloid was tacky and petty.”

“She could have always said I was gay, you know,” he pointed out. “Which still wouldn't have bothered me, just as I'm not bothered by what she actually did say.”

“Yes, well, I don't like her and nothing in this world is going to get me to change my mind,” she said in a slight huff. She glanced over at him and saw he looked amused, and she glared. “Keep that up and I'm ordering everything off the menu.”

He shook his head, still wearing a faint smile. “If it means nothing to me it should mean nothing to you, Molly. Besides, for the time being neither of us are in London. The opinion of people there doesn't matter. When I return then it might matter, but for now I have a sort of anonymity and I'm going to make the most of it.”

“You've told me what it was like with all the attention,” she said, her glare softening as she uncrossed her arms. “I can imagine it's quite different here.”

“And that's part of the reason I don't want to go back to what I did before,” he said. “If you do keep attempting to convince me to stay, which I still think is unlikely past when I get my Master's degree, the fact I'm not hounded by the press here would be a key argument I would use if I were you.”

“Thank you for the advice, Sherlock. I'll remember that.” The light changed once again and they crossed the street, heading towards Fifth Avenue. They stayed quiet as they walked, until the
rounded the corner to go down Fifth Avenue. Then she spoke again. “Will it take you a long time to get your Master's degree?”

“It depends on how many classes I need to take or retake,” he said. “It's an internationally respected school so I'm sure they have experience with students coming from other countries for post-graduate work. There's two different tracks I can take to get the degree, but I'll have to start with the coursework track. But it's been a few years since I was in university so it might not hurt to take refresher courses. I'll know more on Saturday.”

“But more than a few months?” she asked.

He nodded. “If I stay for the entire process it would probably be a few years. But for all either of us know circumstances will change and I'll be unable to finish it.”

“Did you tell your brother your plans?” she asked.

“I did. He was supportive enough. John hasn't taken it as well, however. He was really hoping I'd be back in a few weeks, or a few months at most. I don't think he expected for you to be quite so determined to have a life here, or for me to consider continuing my education. Mary took my side, though.”

She smiled slightly. “When I talked to her a few days ago she mentioned that. When I spoke to her a few days after you arrived she said she thought it might be good for you to stay here for a time, but she also hoped it worked out so either both of us or just you returned soon so that John wouldn't get any ideas about moving here.”

He chuckled slightly. “I'll do my best to help Mary convince him it would be a bad idea then.”

“I think you would do well here. Everyone else? Not so much. They have lives that would be hard to leave behind.” She thought for a moment. “Well, except maybe Sally. She does keep threatening to run away to a tropical island when it gets particularly cold and dreary in London, especially when she has to be at a crime scene in the pouring rain.”

“Well, I hope she does not decide to move here,” he replied as they neared the restaurant. “Not because I particularly dislike her, but because if anyone we know from home were to make this their new home I'd prefer it to be John and Mary.”

“I suppose,” she said. Then her eyes widened. “Oh! She figured it out.”

“Figured what out?” he asked with a slight frown.

“That you helped her out. She wasn't sure you'd want her to thank you herself, but she did ask me to pass on her thanks. But Phillip and Greg know now, too. Phillip hasn't said one thing or the other about it yet, though.”

“Anderson wouldn't,” he replied with a shrug. “But as it stands, I knew Lestrade knew. He told me three days ago when I called to ask for some information from Scotland Yard about someone involved in the case. He was quite thankful.”

“What did you do for him, anyway?” she asked, tilting her head slightly.

“I added money to his retirement plan, and I paid for his daughter's schooling here in the States. Full tuition plus money for lodging and books for four years. He had been quite proud she'd gotten accepted to Yale but he had worried about how to pay for it. When I did it I asked for the school to tell him she had qualified for a full ride scholarship.”
She stopped just outside the door of the restaurant. “Sherlock, that's a lot of money. Four years at an Ivy League school? Plus room and board and books? That's more than I think you're going to spend on your own education. Quite a bit more.”

“He never believed Moriarty's lies,” he said quietly. “I owe him for that.”

She nodded slowly. Sherlock could still be abrasive and stubborn and not a pleasant person to the general public. She had seen glimpses of the old him pop up on occasion when they were in public and he was frustrated. But the way he was with her, and the way she imagined he was with the other people he had chosen to keep close as friends, showed just how much he had changed. She was quite honored to be in that group. “Then that shows you're a very good friend to have, Sherlock.” She gave him a smile and opened the door. “It smells delicious in here. Let's get inside and eat, shall we?”

“All right,” he said, stepping inside. She followed him and in her own head she vowed that one day she would do something exceptionally nice for Sherlock, something that could in some way show just how much she appreciated his friendship. It probably wouldn't be a grand gesture like the ones he had done, but she would make sure it meant something to him.
Chapter 9

Three days after Molly decided that she was going to do something incredibly nice for Sherlock she got an email from Thomas saying he was finally done with his project and he felt like celebrating with her and Jason. After a few more emails between the three of them they agreed to go have dinner and drinks at Shakespeare Pub & Grille in Little Italy. She had never really explored the area so she wasn't quite sure where it was or what to expect, but Thomas had assured her it was one of the best English pubs in the county and she'd feel right at home there. She'd asked Sherlock to come along but he had declined, saying he needed to work on a piece for the orchestra, so she got ready, wearing denim trousers and a blue shirt with a scarf around her neck. As soon as she was ready she called the same Uber driver who took her and Sherlock to the play and shortly afterward she was pulling up to the building, seeing Jason and Thomas waiting outside.

“Molly!” Jason said, grinning widely when she got out of the car. His hair was blonde now with blue streaks in it, and the spacers in his ears looked just a bit bigger. He was dressed in a black T-shirt and maroon skinny jeans. She gave him a wide grin as she got closer. “So. Official introductions. Molly Hooper, Thomas Monroe. Thomas, Molly.” He gestured between her and Thomas. He was a tall black man with short hair and a very wide smile, wearing a long sleeved white button down shirt rolled up to the elbows with a suit vest over that and dark blue trousers.

“It's very nice to meet you, Molly,” Thomas said, offering her his hand. He had a West Country accent, and if she had to guess she'd say he grew up somewhere in Bristol.

“Pleasure to meet you as well,” she said, shaking his hand.

“Are you from London?” he asked. “Or have at least spent enough time there to pick up the accent?”

She chuckled. “I've been there a really long time. Are you from Bristol?”

He nodded. “Most people don't realize there are places other than London, and certainly most people don't guess Bristol off the bat.”

“I worked with a few people from there,” she said. “The nice part about working at a hospital in London is there's people from all over the country, even if I was in the morgue most of the time.”

He grinned widely and then turned to Jason. “I like her. You did a good job, love.”

“I'm always looking for praise from him,” Jason said towards Molly with a laugh. “He's stingy with the love.”

“I am not,” Thomas replied.

“I'm joking,” Jason leaned in and gave him a quick kiss. “I'm allowed to tease.”

“You'll scare her right off,” Thomas countered.

Molly laughed a bit at that. “I'm friends with Sherlock Holmes. I don't scare easily.”

“I still can't believe that,” Thomas said. “He's a bloody genius. And he chucked away all that fame and the interesting cases and the whole 'only consulting detective in the world' thing to come here and bring you home? You must be a really good friend.”

“I am, apparently,” she said with a nod. “And he's changed a lot. He definitely isn't the man he used
“In a good way or bad way?” Jason asked. “Because Thomas kept up with all the gossip coming out of London and he always seemed to be kind of a pompous asshole to me.”

“That's not a polite thing to say about him in front of her,” Thomas pointed out.

“It's all right. For a very long time he was a complete arsehole,” she replied. “So the changes are definitely for the better.”

“Well, maybe one day I'll get to meet him. I promise I'll try not to fawn over him too much,” Thomas said with a chuckle. “So! Let's get inside, shall we? There's a quiz night going on tonight. Should make it a bit more interesting.”

“We never participate, but it's always nice to watch the competition,” Jason said as they turned and made their way inside. “Some of these people are really serious about it.”

“They approach it like QI or University Challenge, most of the time,” Thomas said. “There's some bitter rivalries involved.”

“Oh, just like home then?” she asked with a smile.

“Pretty much,” Thomas said with a nod. “And then they also do special things here for football season. Our football, not the American version. It can get even rowdier at times, especially when Arsenal is playing. Best to avoid the place those days.”

“Well, I'm not an Arsenal fan,” she replied as she looked around. “I don't have a particular favorite team. I was quite impressed by Chelsea last season, though.”

“We should pop around for a match if tonight goes well,” Thomas said. “It's about the only place to get a decent English breakfast in the area, if you can ignore the hooligans.”

“They're a problem everywhere,” she said with a chuckle.

“And I'm just going to go back to thinking about the Chargers and how much they've sucked since LT left,” Jason said with a chuckle.

“Football is one of the things we will never agree on,” Thomas said with a laugh of his own. “So it will be nice to have someone to watch proper football with, if you're game.”

“That sounds quite nice,” she replied with a wide smile.

“It's a seat yourself kind of place,” Jason said. “We know some of the people who work here, and...there's Jessica.” He pointed to a blonde woman who gave them a wave. Thomas and Jason waved back. The woman pointed to a table and then held up five fingers. “If we sit where she pointed she'll get to us in five minutes, give or take.”

“It's almost like she saved us our usual table,” Thomas said, narrowing his eyes slightly as he looked at his boyfriend. “Did you tell her we were coming, Jason?”

“I may have mentioned we were trying to impress one of your fellow expats,” he said.

“I do love you sometimes,” Thomas said, replacing the accusatory look with a look of adoration.

“Only sometimes? I'm hurt,” Jason said with a mock pout. Thomas reached over and squeezed his hand before the three of them moved over to the table and sat down. “The food here is really
freaking good. I usually get the fish and chips or steak and mushroom pie.”

“Oh, but there's so much more,” Thomas said. “There's steak and kidney pie, curry, bangers and mash and my all time favorite, the pasty. Not to mention the desserts, if you still have room.”

“That all sounds so wonderful. I could really grow to love this place,” Molly said. She thought for a moment. It all sounded so good, but she could always come back and try more later. Right now it was time to figure out what meal she missed most from home. Finally she made a decision. “I think I'll do fish and chips tonight. It's been quite a while since I've had that, and mine don't come out nearly as well.”

“You won't regret it,” Jason said with a grin. They chatted until Jessica came up to take their orders, and then continued to talk until their food was delivered. Molly quite enjoyed the fish and chips, as they did remind her of home, which she enjoyed with a pint of Bass Pale Ale. She and Jason still had a bit of room left so she ordered a banana blintz on Jason's recommendation. By the time she was done with all of it she felt full and sated. “Thomas, I am definitely inclined to come back and enjoy a few football matches with you,” she said when she pushed her plate back. “I adore this place. And the food is superb.”

“If you come just for a pint or two there's also pub grub here that's worth checking out,” Thomas said.

“I'll have to do that another time. I think if I eat any more I'll explode.”

Jason chuckled. “If you're up for another pint the quiz night is about to start.”

“Absolutely,” she said with a nod. Jason signaled for Jessica to come back around and the three of them settled in with fresh pints all around. This time she had a Strongbow Cider, and she had to admit it tasted exactly the same as when she would order it back home. They all watched the competition, which was focusing on music, and she felt cheered on all the people participating. Too soon for her taste the competition was over and the pints were finished. She checked her watch and saw it was later than she had expected. “And I think now I have to start getting home,” she said, standing up.

“We can help you get a cab,” Thomas said. “We need one too, at any rate.”

“You know, we all live in Hillcrest. Maybe we can share one?” Jason suggested. “Have Molly dropped off first, then have it take us home.”

“Would you be up for that?” Thomas asked, looking up at her.

“That sounds fine,” she replied with a nod.

“All right. Let's pay the bill and go find us a cab,” Jason said.

“Well, I have the number of an Uber driver that Sherlock recommended,” Molly said.

“Nicer car than a cab,” Jason said after a moment.

“And that alone makes it worth the extra cost,” Thomas said. “We'll go pay the bill while you get us a ride.”

She nodded and stepped outside to make the call where it was a little quieter. She pulled out the card and dialed the number, and the driver said it would take twenty to thirty minutes to get to her from
where he was at. She stepped back into the pub and saw Jason heading out towards her. “Get the car yet?”

“It'll be twenty to thirty minutes,” she said.

He grinned. “Well, we could always get another pint while we wait.”

“You can. I think two is my limit tonight,” she said with a chuckle.

“Two is Thomas's limit too, and it's no fun to drink on my own.”

“You two seem to be quite happy,” she said with a smile.

“Oh, we are. We've been together...six years?” he said after thinking for a moment. “We met at a gay pride rally at San Diego State University. There was a man who kept hitting on me even when I kept telling him I wasn't interested, and Thomas came over and said ‘Sorry I'm late, love,’ and kissed me on the lips. The man took the hint and I offered to take Thomas out for a drink after getting the jerk to back off. We've been together ever since. We're actually planning on getting married in the next year.”

“That must be exciting,” she replied.

“It is. I don't want to be with anyone else.” He grinned at her. “What about you? Do you have a boyfriend?”

She shook her head. “I haven't really dated since I ended my engagement to my fiancée. That was a while back.”

“I'm so sorry,” he replied.

“It's all right. I'm just glad I realized it wasn't going to work out before we'd actually gotten married. As it stands, there's no one in my life at the moment, and I'm completely okay with that.”

“Then that's good for you,” he said. “Maybe one day the right guy will come into your life and sweep you off your feet. And make sure you tell Thomas you're okay with being single, otherwise he'll try and set you up on blind dates with his straight friends. He's a total romantic at heart.”

She chuckled. “I will, I promise.” She looked behind Jason and saw Thomas coming up to them. “It'll be about fifteen to twenty-five minutes, give or take.”

“Well, we can at least wait outside,” Thomas said with a nod. “It's not like it's London and we'll freeze without coats on.”

“Oh yes,” Molly replied. “That is definitely a perk of living here. Though I arrived in February and it seemed quite warm for the winter.”

“It's been like that the last few years. February of 2013 was bitter cold. Every year since has been extremely mild. Good news for people who enjoy the weather, bad news for the environment,” Thomas said. “There are times I wish we could just get a few heavy rainstorms around here. It'd be more like home, for one, but it would also help with the drought.”

“Bite your tongue,” Jason said, acting aghast. “It's perfect beach weather all year round now.”

“The ocean is still too bloody cold to go into right now so a few massive rainstorms wouldn't hurt all that much. July and August would be another matter, but it's the middle of May and we could use it,”
“That is true, I suppose,” Jason said after a moment's thought. Then he turned to Molly. “Have you been to the beach yet?”

“Only to Pacific Beach, and just along the boardwalk,” she said.

“When the water gets warmer we should go, all three of us. And Sherlock too, if he's willing,” Jason said.

“Oh, he vehemently refuses to buy swim trunks and actually go lay out on the beach,” she said, shaking her head. “I'll try and talk him into it, even if I have to owe him a favor.”

“I wouldn't mind owing him a favor,” Thomas said. “A completely non-sexual favor, at least.”

Jason chuckled. “You didn't need to clarify. We all know he doesn't swing that way.”

Molly laughed as well. “Well, he'd have to meet you first to decide if he wants to be owed a favor by you. But if the both of you hit it off with him three people can wear him down faster than one.”

“I really do like the way she thinks,” Thomas said with a laugh. Then he nodded towards the door. “We should probably head outside to wait for our ride. Don't want someone else to snatch it away because we weren't out there.”

“Sounds good,” Jason said, and Molly nodded. The three of them made their way outside, continuing their conversation. When the car arrived ten minutes later they all got in, and after Molly gave the driver her address they continued to chat. It seemed much too quickly that she returned home, and as she was getting out of the car they were attempting to figure out another time they could all meet up. Finally they decided on Saturday at the Hard Rock Cafe, and Thomas asked her to see if Sherlock wanted to come as well. She said she'd try and then she shut the door and they were off.

She made her way to the gate and unlocked it, and then she made her way towards her apartment. She heard violin music coming from Sherlock's apartment and she stopped to listen. It was a bit late, but since he was still up she thought it might be nice to say goodnight before she went to her own home and got some rest. She knocked on the door and the violin music stopped. A few minutes later the door opened and Sherlock looked over at her. “You seem to be in a good mood,” he said, moving out of the way so she could come inside.

“Well, it was good food, good drinks and good conversation,” she said with a smile. “I think you would have enjoyed yourself.”

“Perhaps another time,” he said as he shut the door behind her.

“We made tentative plans for Saturday at the Hard Rock Cafe, if you want to join us. They'd both like to meet you. Thomas is a bit in awe of you.”

“That might make it a bit awkward,” he replied.

“I don't know. He said he'd keep himself reined in, and Jason will help. But if you don't want to you don't have to.” She moved into his living room and sat on his sofa. A moment later he joined her. “But we went to a wonderful pub over in Little Italy. The food is wonderful. It tastes just like what they have back home.”

“I may have to check that place out,” he said. “While I enjoy the variety here there is good food from
home that I miss.”

“Then maybe I can take you sometime,” she said. She leaned back into the cushions. “I had a really
good time, though. It was nice to make new friends.”

“Yes, I can imagine.” He was quiet for a few moments, as though he was debating something in his
head. Finally he spoke. “Do you think I should attempt to make friends here?”

“I don't think it would hurt,” she replied slowly. “Even if you do have to leave here unexpectedly or
you give up trying to convince me to go home it wouldn't hurt to have more people to count among
your friends. And that way if I'm not available to do something you can have other people who
might want to do it with you.”

“And it wouldn't come off as if I'm looking for a replacement for the friends I left behind in
London?”

She shook her head. “No. You still talk to them, right?” He nodded. “Then they're still your friends.
And your new friends don't have to be your best mates. They don't ever have to be as close as John
is, but they can be close.”

“Then you don't mind if I spend time with people other than you?” he asked.

“No, I won't mind at all. I'm not demanding you be available whenever I want you to be. Why
would you think that?”

“It's not important,” he said. “As it stands, a few members of the orchestra have expressed interest in
going to other performances around the county, and there is one on Sunday that sounded somewhat
appealing. I thought I might join them for it.”

“I think that's a good idea,” she said with a smile. “It doesn't hurt to get to know the people you work
with better.”

“I'm not used to working with people in this way, where there are so many of us. But they seem
decent enough, I suppose.” He paused for a moment. “Maybe for one of the other performances
they'd like to attend I could take you.”

“That would be nice,” she said with a nod. “Though truthfully I'd rather go see more plays. I like
music, but plays just interest me more. I like being transported somewhere else for a few hours.”

“I did enjoy the one we did get to see,” he said thoughtfully. “I wouldn't be adverse to seeing more.
But no musicals.”

“Then I'll go see those on my own.” She yawned after that, and shook her head. “I didn't think I'd be
so tired. It's not that late.”

“Did you have any alcohol?” he asked.

“Two pints, she said, nodding.

“That will do it. Go home and get some rest. We can talk more tomorrow night, if you're inclined.”

She stood up at that point and so did he, and they made their way to the door. “Do you think you'll
want to have dinner with Thomas, Jason and I on Saturday?” she asked once she'd opened the door.

He nodded. “I'll have dinner with the three of you.”
“Excellent,” she said, giving Sherlock a wide grin. “We decided we’d meet up at five.”

“Where is it at?” he asked.

“Further downtown, near the Gaslamp Quarter,” she replied. “It’s near the hotels and the Convention Center.”

“It will be interesting to see the place,” he said. She stepped out into the hallway. “Good night, Molly.”

“Good night, Sherlock,” she said, and once she began to make her way to her apartment she heard him shut and lock the door. She went to her own door and unlocked it, stepping inside. Overall, today was a splendid day, she thought to herself. She just hoped Saturday went well as well.
Chapter 10

Molly had been nervous the closer Saturday got that Sherlock was not going to get along with either of her new friends. She almost made herself sick with worry as it got closer to five, but once they were all at the restaurant and actually began talking she was surprised that Sherlock got along quite well with both Thomas and Jason. She relaxed as the evening wore on, and when the meal was finished Jason suggested they walk around a bit to take in the city. It was a bit crowded with the four of them on the pavement but they managed. Right now Thomas and Sherlock were talking about the best violin to own that wouldn't cost them more money than they ever dreamed of, and Jason and Molly were walking behind them, amused smiles on their faces.

“If I had known Sherlock was a violin aficionado I would have suggested we start the evening off talking about that,” Jason said to her.

“But look at them. We're being completely ignored,” she replied with a chuckle. “We'd have ended up the third wheels straightaway if we'd brought up music first.”

“Well, Thomas likes all sorts of music, but he prefers orchestral arrangements. He says he works better when he's listening to the greats. But he's also quite patient when I'm setting up a playlist for a gig. I got very lucky that he doesn't complain when I play the same songs over and over to get my timing down.”

“And I still need to watch you do that,” she said.

“It looks as though I'm getting a few more gigs the next two weeks, fingers crossed. Most of them are up in LA but I think there's going to be another one at Cabo. Or at least I hope so. I think I killed it the other time I played there.”

“I would love to go to the one in Oceanside, I think. Less chance of getting lost.”

“Yeah, it's pretty much straight up the 5 or Coast Highway,” he said with a grin. “Parking is a pain in the ass there, though. There's a million pay lots right by the beach and one free parking structure but most of them want you out by two or four, I can't quite remember. If you go up there maybe we can split cab fare and then just walk back to the transit center to get one of the waiting cabs there to come back.”

“I think that's a very good idea,” she said with a nod. “Then I can enjoy myself.”

“I have a few mixes I've recorded as a single track, if you want to listen to them,” he said. “They're up on Soundcloud. That way you can get an idea of exactly what kind of music you'll be hearing.”

“That would be lovely,” she said, giving him a smile.

“I'll email you the links tonight,” he replied. Then he took a quick step closer to Thomas and Sherlock. “Hey, sorry to interrupt.”

“Yes?” Thomas asked, stopping. Sherlock did the same a step later.

“Didn't you say you wanted to stop off at Eyes On Fifth?” he asked.

“Are they even open?” Thomas asked with a slight frown.

Jason nodded and pointed to his left. “Looks like they're still open.”
“Then I should see about getting the frames now,” he replied.

“You need spectacles?” Sherlock asked.

Thomas nodded. “I usually wear contacts, but they've been irritating my eyes quite a bit more than usual. I decided it would be best to switch back to spectacles, but my other pair looks very ugly. I want something more modern looking. Plus they also have sunglasses here. Wouldn't hurt to get a pair of those as well with my prescription if I can.”

“You know, I was considering getting a pair of spectacles as well,” Molly said. “I wear contacts too, but it's always nice to have a pair in case something happens to my contacts. It wouldn't hurt to look around.”

“Then let's head inside,” Thomas said with a nod. Jason opened the door and the four of them stepped inside. There was a woman behind the counter and she gave them all a smile and welcomed them. Thomas went over to talk to her with Jason nearby while Molly began to browse with Sherlock beside her.

“I didn't know you wore contacts,” he said.

“Well, if you rummaged through my medicine cabinet you wouldn't,” she said with a smile. “I keep them by my bedside in the drawer of my nightstand. I keep my solution there as well.”

“How bad is your vision?” he asked, picking up a pair of sunglasses.

“It's not too bad. I'm not blind without them, at any rate, but everything looks fuzzy when I don't have them in.” She glanced over at the sunglasses. “Those are quite fetching.”

“There is a good deal more sun here than there is in London. It's irritating sometimes,” he replied, setting them down. “I suppose this would be another item I need to buy to survive in this city.”

“Well, I don't need prescription ones quite yet. I got my pair from Buffalo Exchange and they work out quite well.” She moved around the store more. “I need to go get my eyes examined again soon anyway. My prescription expires in a few weeks. I'm just not looking forward to having my eyes dilated. I won't be able to drive home afterward.”

“I could take you, if you'd like,” he replied. “You'll just need to tell me how to get there.”

“First I need to find out where to go. I have insurance, but I don't know who accepts it.” She looked at a set of frames more closely. “Oh, those are lovely.”

“They do look quite nice,” he replied, picking up another pair of sunglasses. He glanced at the price, then after a moment's hesitation he put them on and looked at Molly.

“I definitely think those are flattering,” she said with a smile. “How much are they?”

He pulled them back off and looked. “A hundred dollars.”

Her eyes widened. “I would never spend that much on a pair of non-prescription eyewear.”

“Well, I do have the money,” he said with a shrug. “But that is a bit much. How much are your frames?”

She glanced at the price and sighed. “Much more than I'm willing to spend. And don't you dare suggest buying them for me.”
“If you insist,” he said with a nod.

She began to look around some more. “I do. I want to start making some of it up to you before you give me something grand again.”

“You don't need to make anything up to me,” he said, setting the sunglasses down.

“Well, I want to. You're going to let me, right?”

He gave her a slightly amused grin. “I suppose I will, even if I really do feel that you are not in any way indebted to me.”

“Good,” she said with a nod. She looked over at the sunglasses and saw a pair that looked very nice for Sherlock. She picked them up and then handed them to him. “Try these on. They're a bit more reasonably priced, and I think they would look good.”

He nodded as he took them from her and slipped them on. “Well?”

“You look smashing,” she said with a grin. “The question is if you like them, though.”

“They aren't too bad,” he replied, moving over towards a mirror. He took them off after a few minutes and looked at the price. “And you're right. They are more reasonably priced.”

“Then you should get them,” she said.

He nodded and moved over towards another woman who worked there. Molly glanced over at them and saw the girl begin to act a bit flirty with him. The more she watched the more a reaction she had shoved down deep in her gut came to the surface: jealousy. If she wanted to be honest that was a large part of the reason why she had hated Janine so much. Oh, she'd wanted to go up to Janine and verbally tear into her over what she did to Sherlock. She had been absolutely truthful when she had told Sherlock she thought it was tacky and petty, even if a very tiny part of her thought he might actually have deserved it. If she'd actually had the brass ones to confront Janine she probably would have used phrases that would have shocked each and every one of her friends, but she had never been that type of person and in the end she decided to try her best to let it go as much as she could. But the larger reason why she had hated Janine was Janine had been with Sherlock while she hadn't.

That jealousy had also been a factor in why her relationship with Tom had ended. If she got jealous of another woman for being with the person she had to admit she still fancied then it did not bode well for her actual relationship working out, because she never would have given Tom all of her love. Of course, him acting like a prat hadn't helped his case; even if she'd managed to convince herself she was 100% over Sherlock Tom would still would have wanted her to avoid any contact with Sherlock. There had been one huge row between them and at the end of it she'd handed him back her engagement ring and told him to get out. Within three days there was no trace of him left in her home.

She turned away for a moment, and then for her own morbid curiosity looked back. He acted completely oblivious to her charms, and she could see as the interaction continued on she got less flirty and more resigned. By the time she went to the back room to get something for him her smile looked quite forced. She turned away again and began browsing until she heard someone come up to her. She expected it to be Sherlock but it was Jason instead. “Are you all right?” he asked.

“Me? I'm fine,” she said, giving him a smile.

“Can I be blunt?” he asked, and she nodded. “You would be an absolutely shitty poker player. Your face is way too expressive. You were jealous that she was flirting with Sherlock, weren't you?”
She bit her lip slightly. She really didn't want to admit it to anyone, but she found herself nodding. “Yes, I was,” she said quietly.

“I won't say a word to him or Thomas, I promise,” he replied. “But look on the bright side. He didn't flirt back.”

“Yes, well, he doesn't flirt with me either so I'm in the same position the saleswoman is,” she said with a sigh.

He looked at her for a moment, then slung an arm around her shoulders. “He traveled eight thousand miles for you. Uprooted his entire life for you and if the discussion at dinner is any indication he's not going back for a long time. A really long time. He may not admit it for a while but I don't think he thinks of you as just a friend. So keep that in mind.”

“You shouldn't be giving me hope in the matter,” she said. “Even if it is true he'll never admit it and I'll go back to pining after him and not having a remotely fulfilling life.”

Jason was silent for a moment. “You remember what I said on Thursday? How you should tell Thomas you're happy being single so he won't set you up on blind dates?”

“Yes,” she said with a nod.

“Have him do it anyway. If you think Sherlock isn't going to come around then do whatever it takes to find someone who likes you, wants to spend time with you and won't get jealous that you care for Sherlock a lot. Or at the very least try and get laid.” Her eyes widened and then she pulled away and smacked Jason's shoulder. “What?”

He grinned at her, and after a moment she grinned back. “You aren't supposed to say that to someone so bluntly,” she said.

“Well, are you going to be holed up in your apartment like it's a nunnery or are you going to attempt to have a more active social life that could be beneficial for you and some lucky guy?” he asked.

“You're incorrigible,” she said, shaking her head.

“It's worth a shot, at least. And who knows? You might even get a reaction out of Sherlock.”

“We'll see,” she said. “For now I'll stick with focusing on making new friends. Romantic entanglements can come later.”

“Suit yourself,” he said. “Thomas is almost done, and he suggested hitting one of the bars when he finished up here. Don't know if Sherlock's going to want a drink since it doesn't seem to be his thing, but since none of us drove and there's cabs all over the place we thought it could be fun.”

“I suppose we can do that,” she said as her smile widened. “Have any specific places you want to go?”

“Not really. We can just walk until we find a place that looks interesting. Make it a little adventure.”

“I think I'd like that,” she said as she glanced over at Sherlock and the saleswoman, who looked rather grim faced when he wasn't looking at her. He finished what he was doing and when he looked up she flashed him a very fake smile which quickly disappeared when he turned around and came back to them. “Would you fancy a drink, Sherlock?” she asked.

He thought about it for a moment and then nodded. “I probably won't have anything alcoholic, but I
don't see a problem with keeping all of you company.”

“Good,” Jason said with a grin. “I'll tell Thomas and then we can go back out and see where we want to end up for the evening.” He moved back towards his boyfriend, leaving Sherlock and Molly alone.

“I'm glad you're going to join us,” she said with a smile towards him.

“They're both interesting men. I think you made an excellent choice in beginning a friendship with them. And I thank you for introducing me to them. If I'm going to attempt to form friendships here Thomas and Jason are good friends to start with.”

“I was terrified you'd hate them, to be honest,” she said.

“I will admit, I was a bit apprehensive of meeting the two of them, especially after I caught a glimpse of Jason,” he said with a slight smile.

“Yeah, he does look different than what you're used to,” she said with a laugh.

“Actually, there were members of my homeless network that looked like Jason. There were usually the ones who were the least pleasant to deal with, though. Jason doesn’t have the same temperament, which made it easier.” He glanced over at the other two. “I think the phrase 'opposites attract' definitely applies to them.”

“Oh, most definitely,” she said with a nod. “But they give me hope.”

“How so?” he asked.

“That maybe one day something will happen and I'll meet someone and I'll get to be as happy as they are.”

“Perhaps one day,” he said with a nod. “You have a better chance of that happening than I do. I don't think there is a woman in the world who would tolerate me for long.”

“You never know,” she said quietly, her smile faltering slightly. She was about to say more before Thomas and Jason came over, and she made sure her smile looked brighter. “So! Ready to go?” she asked.

“Very ready,” Jason said. He offered his arm to Molly and she laughed as she took it. “Come on. We have a town to paint red.”

“Yes, we do,” she said, and with that the two of them led the way out of the store. She didn't want to ruin her evening with thoughts that she didn't really want to think so she decided she was going to stow them away in the back of her mind and just enjoy whatever happened that evening. At least this way she could enjoy herself and maybe, if she was lucky, the good mood would carry over even when she was by herself again.
The rest of the month of May went more quickly than she had thought it would. June rolled around and she found she'd definitely started to have more of a life than she'd expected to have. She spent quite a bit of time with Thomas and Jason, and they introduced her to other people they thought she'd hit it off with and she slowly expanded her group of friends that way. She also started spending more time with coworkers of hers, and now it seemed she wasn't taking her lunches by herself anymore. And there was Sherlock as well, which she was glad for. He seemed to be settling into a new life here quite well, and it gave her hope that he really would decide to stay in California because she knew she didn't want to leave. Her life in San Diego was good, and she didn't want to give it up.

It was the end of the first week of June, and she'd decided to call old friends from home. She was friends with most of them on Facebook so they saw her status updates. Almost all of them seemed happy that she was doing things and actually having a life, and a few of her new friends in California had begun chatting with her old friends in London via her status updates. She'd called Sally and Greg already, though she only got to talk to them briefly because they were working on a case at the moment. Sally had said they needed a break and she'd gotten to chat with them for about ten minutes each, and even though part of the conversation had been about work when Greg asked for her opinion on the autopsy report she still felt their conversation had been good.

Now she was going to call John and Mary. She hoped they were at home and not dealing with anything that would keep them away from having a lengthy conversation with her. They hadn't talked much in the last few weeks since Sherlock had arrived and she had missed it. She pulled up their number on her mobile and hit send and waited. Someone picked up on the third ring. “Hello?”

“Hi, John,” she said, relaxing slightly.

“Molly!” he said. “I'm quite put out with you at the moment.”

“That was the worst way to start a phone call,” Mary called out in the background.

Molly was still rather stunned, and after a moment she got her bearings. “Why are you put out with me, John?” she asked.

“He's planning on staying out there. Possibly for a few years. I'd hoped he'd get you and return to London within a few months at most. I wasn't expecting him to decide to do what he's doing.”

“Sorry?” she said. “The schooling was his idea, though, not mine. Before everything I would have been perfectly fine with him being here for a time and not putting down any sorts of roots until he decided to give up and leave.”

“What do you mean, before everything?” he asked.

“I may have said I'd try and convince him to stay just like he was trying to convince me to go back home.”

John sighed. “And now he's got it in his head that it's in his best interest to stay out there. I'm going to lose my best mate all over again.”

“That's not true, John. It's not as though he's cut off from all of us again. He can call you and come visit. And you can always come out here. Just to visit, though, because I think Mary would be quite upset if you decided to move here.”
“Yeah, I know,” he said a bit grimly. “But I want him here.”

“You're being selfish,” Mary said in the background.

“Maybe I am, but that doesn't change the fact I miss him,” John replied. Then he paused. “Talk to Mary for a bit. She's hovering because she thinks I'm ruining what's supposed to be a good phone call.”

Molly chuckled. “Only if I get to talk to you again when we're done.”

“I can agree to that.”

“Talk to you soon then.” There was a pause on his end and then he heard Mary tell John she wouldn't be long. Molly chuckled again. “It sounds as though he's very lonely,” she said after Mary was done speaking to John.

“Oh, he is,” Mary said with a laugh of her own. “He sulked for an entire day when Sherlock told him he was going to go into the biochemistry program at that university. That dashed all his plans.”

“And just what were John's plans?” Molly asked as she leaned into her sofa cushions more.

“That Sherlock would convince you to come home and the two of you would come back to London and things would go back to close to how they had been before.”

“I don't think that would have happened. I don't think I could have gone back to St. Bart's and I know Sherlock wouldn't have gone back to consulting,” Molly replied. “He had a case here a few weeks back and he seemed absolutely miserable. He seems to enjoy the orchestra position more.”

“I think it all wore on him,” Mary replied thoughtfully. “And coupled with the fact he was unhappy about you leaving I think it just left a sour taste in his mouth.”

“I suppose.”

“Enough about Sherlock. I saw pictures of you with two very handsome men on your last status update. Anything you want to tell me?” Mary teased.

“Oh, there's no romantic interest with either Jason or Thomas. They're quite happy with each other. But the photos were from a trip the three of us took to Shakespeare's Pub & Grille. It's a nice bit of home in this city. If you ever come visit I'll take you there.”

“I would enjoy that.”

Molly relaxed slightly. “I really do like it here, Mary. I know I should do a better job of talking to all of you back home, but I'm starting to expand my social circle and actually do things. I have quite a few friends now.”

“I'm really glad for that, Molly,” Mary replied. “Yes, I would like to talk to you more, but you were miserable by the time you left, and you didn't sound very enthused when I spoke to you after you moved. Even just seeing what you're doing on Facebook has made me feel you're finally happy again. And you really do deserve to be happy.”

“I suppose I do,” she said. “I could be happier, though.”

There was a long pause on Mary's end before she spoke again. “Do you still fancy Sherlock, Molly?”
“Don't say that around John!” she hissed.

“I moved into the bedroom, love. He's in the sitting room.”

“Oh,” she said. Then she sighed. “Yes, I suppose I do. I really like how he is now. He's different. I'd even go as far as to say he's better than how he used to be. The more time I spend with him the more I wish he'd notice me in a more than friendly way, and that's just going to make things awkward if we go back to how things used to be, where I pine after him and he's oblivious. It will ruin everything.”

“Have you even broached the idea at all?” Mary asked.

“No. And I don't know how. The only relationship either of us have ever seen him in was simply to get close to a dangerous man. If he actually entered into a proper relationship with me I don't know what would happen. I don't know if it would actually work out for the best.”

“But as you said, he's a different man now,” she replied gently. “He moved all the way out there to try and bring you home. And remember, you insisting that you were going to have a life out there happened before he made the decision to stay. If all he wanted was to get that degree he could easily do that here. I think he's doing it in California because he wants to be near you. You should really talk to him about it, if you can figure out a way to bring it up. I think his answer might surprise you.”

“Maybe,” Molly said glumly.

There was another pause, though this time it wasn't as lengthy. “I think it might be a good idea to change the subject again,” Mary said after a moment. “Tell me more about what you've been doing and the people you've been meeting.”

“All right,” Molly replied. She talked to Mary for another twenty minutes, and then Mary gave the phone back to John and they chatted for another fifteen minutes. John didn't even bring up Sherlock once, and she was glad for that. By the time she hung up she was glad she'd gotten to have a lengthy conversation with them. She glanced at the clock on her phone and saw it was only noon now. Sherlock was at work, as were Thomas and Jason, and she was rather at a loss for what to do until seven when the three of them came over to her home for supper. She was still debating what to do ten minutes later when her mobile began to ring and she saw it was Sherlock. She answered quickly. “Hello, Sherlock.”

“Apparently rehearsals are ending early today, and we probably will not be having them tomorrow, either,” he said. “Our conductor had a personal emergency and a member of his family is in the hospital for surgery right now.”

“Oh, that's horrible,” she said. “I hope everything works out for him and his family.”

“As do I. But this leaves me with an entire afternoon free. Did you have plans?”

“Well, I need to start cooking around five so I was thinking I might stay at home and watch a film or two and call for pizza for lunch. I wasn't sure, though. Was there anything you wanted to do?”

“Not really. Tomorrow it might be nice to go somewhere, but I suppose you have to work.”

“No, I have two days in a row off. I agreed to work over the weekend so Aaron could have his anniversary and the day after off. He's covering my shifts today and tomorrow.”

“Well, the first chair flutist had extra tickets for the zoo that needed to be used by tomorrow. No one else wanted them, so I could ask her for them before she leaves.”
"The zoo sounds like it could be fun," she replied. "I heard they have more koalas there than anywhere else except Australia. And they're doing something special at night as well."

"Then I'll get them from her. Give me a moment." She waited patiently, listening to him talk to someone else on his end. After five minutes he spoke again. "She'll drop them off at my apartment tomorrow morning at eight because she hopes to take her children to Sea World that day. If you want to be at my apartment by then we can head out immediately afterward."

"That sounds like a plan," she said.

"It will take me a bit of time to get back, but I'll go by your apartment when I get home. Go ahead and order the pizza now."

"Just cheese on your half, right?"

"Yes. I suppose you're getting yours with pineapple and ham?"

She laughed softly. "Of course. I didn't think I'd take to that combination but it really is quite tasty. I'll make it extra cheese for both halves, though."

"All right. It shouldn't be more than forty-five minutes until I get there."

"I'll be waiting, then." He hung up at that point and she went to her refrigerator and looked at the number for Bronx Pizza. She called in the order and they told her it would be ready in a half hour. She decided to drive down to pick it up instead of having it delivered so she spent a half hour just killing time until she got in her car and drove down there. She got the pizza and then drove back home, trying to ignore how delicious it smelled. She went back to her home and set it on her counter, and then after debating for a few minutes she decided to eat one of her slices while it was still hot. She'd just taken her first bite when there was a knock on her door. She opened it, slice in hand, and saw Sherlock was standing there. He gave her a faintly amused smile. "I was hungry," she said as she moved out of the way.

"I see," he replied as he came in. She shut the door behind him and locked it again before going out into the kitchen. He had gone to her cupboards and pulled down a plate for himself. She was rather amused by the fact that he felt so comfortable in her home that he acted like it was his own place. Of course, it went both ways since she did the same thing in his home. He opened the box and pulled out a slice for himself. "Was there any film in particular you were wanting to see today?"

"Well, we haven't done the Hobbit and Lord of the Rings marathon we had talked about yet, but if we're going to the zoo tomorrow it wouldn't be a good idea to attempt it," she said after thinking for a bit. "We'd be up all night trying to finish them and be exhausted tomorrow."

"Fair point," he said with a nod. "Have you gotten any new movies since the last time we watched some."

She nodded. "I did get the extended edition of the third Hobbit movie, and I also have all the Marvel films now. We could always watch the two Captain America movies and Avengers Assemble. I quite enjoyed those."

"Will we have enough time?" he asked.

"Well, we can watch the first Captain America film and then Avengers Assemble before I start cooking, and then after supper we can watch Winter Soldier. I know Thomas is a fan so maybe he and Jason could join us for that one. And if we want to really make a night out of it, we can also
watch Guardians of the Galaxy. That one we can watch on its own, since it isn't really connected to
the ones that take place on Earth.”

“I think that could be an interesting way to spend the evening,” he said with a nod before taking a
bite of his pizza. “Though I will admit I've never watched any of those films. Comic books were
never something I was into.”

“I was,” she said with a grin. “I always preferred DC over Marvel when it came to the comics,
though. I had wanted to be Wonder Woman when I was growing up, and later I wanted to be Black
Canary or Oracle.”

“I know vaguely who Wonder Woman is, but not the other two.”

“You know, there was a series on the telly years ago that had Oracle in it. It wasn't really like the
comics but it was interesting. I actually have the single series they made on DVD. It's called Birds of
Prey. One of my favorite actors is in it, actually, Shemar Moore. I watch the television show he's on
now every week here.”

“What show is that?” he asked.

“Criminal Minds. It's a show about a group of FBI agents who are in the Behavioral Analysis Unit.”

Sherlock made a face. “Profiler.”

“You don't like them?” she asked, tilting her head slightly before taking a bite of her food.

“They can be useful, I suppose, but generally any time someone with that skill set was brought onto
a case I was working on we would always rub each other the wrong way. And nine times out of ten
the profiles they gave were incomplete or ridiculously vague. The work I did produced more results.”

He had another bite of his food. “I suppose they solve every case?”

“Most of the time,” she said with a nod. “But not always.”

“And when they do it's usually on the first try?”

“No. Sometimes there are more victims or the profiles are wrong or there's other complications.”

He looked a little surprised. “So they aren't perfect,” he said slowly.

“No, not at all. I have all the previous seasons on DVD, if you want to watch them sometime. See if
it compares to your experience with them.”

“That may be something I attempt to do at some point. I just find the sheer amount of police
procedurals here to be repetitive and they are all completely unrealistic. At least at home they seem
more...real. While a bit on the overly dramatic side I could see some of those things happening with
the people I worked with, like Lestrade and Donovan.”

“Did you watch any of the ones at home?” she asked before taking another bite.

He shook his head. “Not many. The only one I found interesting was Endeavour, but that was
because it wasn't a modern era show. I find I like the portrayal of Inspector Morse better on
Endeavour than I do the series that came out before. And I suppose Hercule Poirot was decent
enough, though Poirot's accent tended to grate on my nerves at times.”

“I always enjoyed Midsommer Murders and Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries,” she said with a smile.
“I had most series of those two shows on DVD before I came here. It's part of the reason I got a region free player, so I didn't have to buy them all over again.”

“I've heard of the first one but not the second,” he replied.

“If you like ones that aren't modern era I think you'd enjoy it. It takes place in 1920's Australia. That's one of my favorite eras in the past.”

“How many episodes are there?”

“Thirteen episodes a series. It's a bit long by our standards, but shorter than American shows. Those usually have somewhere between twenty-two and twenty-four. We could start on series 1 of that, if you think you'd like to give it a shot.”

He thought for a moment and then shook his head. “Perhaps another day where we can devote the entire day to it.”

“Well, we might want to stretch it over two days if you like it. I have series one and series two.” She lifted up her pizza slice. “Let me finish this slice and then I'll put on the first Captain America film.” They ate for a few minutes in silence before she finished. Then she went over to her film collection and pulled out the DVD. Sherlock came over to her sofa a few moments later, and when she glanced at his plate she saw he had another slice of pizza on it. She set up the movie and pressed play, then went back to her kitchen and pulled down a plate before putting two slices of pizza on hers. She went back over to the sofa and sat down next to Sherlock as the previews began to start. “How often do you watch films?” she asked.

“Not very often before I came here, and generally the only time I watch them now is when we watch them together,” he replied. “I also generally tend to avoid the telly. Most shows here seem repetitious or stupid, especially with the proliferation of reality television. And the adverts are especially grating. I don't think I've seen a single one that has prompted me to try the product they want to sell.”

“I remember a few weeks after I arrived the Super Bowl was on the telly, and everyone made such a huge deal about the adverts that ran during the game,” she replied as she pulled her legs up under her. “Companies spent millions for thirty seconds of air time. It's insane. A few of them were interesting, but there weren't any that really caught my eye.”

“There are some especially annoying ones when I attempt to watch the news,” he said. “The car dealerships are the worst. I do not care about Cal Worthington or Pacific Nissan.”

She laughed. “Oh, those two are horrid, but they're earworms. Once you hear them they're stuck in your head.”

“Annoying adverts do not make me inclined to buy anything from them. In fact, I'll outright avoid them.”

“Well, the only one I like is for Del Mar. The 'where the surf meets the turf' one? I'd like to go to the racetrack when it opens. Or later this month, for the fair. Everyone calls it the Del Mar Fair but I gather the name changed a few years back and most locals hate the new one.”

He nodded. “They do. It's called the San Diego County Fair now but I haven't heard a single person refer to it as such other than to mock the name. I know there are a few people in the orchestra who are excited for it. One of the other violinists said if you don't mind huge crowds that it's best to go on July 4th to see the fireworks.”

“It feels very strange to be celebrating the Fourth of July, being British and all,” she said. “But I
would like to see the fireworks, I think. I doubt it will be like home on New Year's Eve, but it could
be nice.”

“We could go, if you want,” he said. “I'll admit the idea of large crowds is off-putting, but I do know
we will not have our rehearsals that day since it's a national holiday here so I'll be free.”

“I would love that,” she said with a wide smile. “So it's a date?”

He blinked slightly. “I suppose.”

She cursed herself in her head for saying it that way. Of course it wasn't an actual date; as much as
she fancied him she was nearly sure he only saw her as a friend, and would never see her as anything
more than that. “I didn't mean it as an actual date,” she said.

“I know how you meant it,” he said, giving her a reassuring smile. She relaxed a bit at that. “It feels
strange making plans this far in advance. I think I've realized I'm going to be here for quite some
time, at least while I attempt to continue my education.”

“Yes. John is not happy about that, either. He completely blames me for it,” she said wryly. “But I
tried to tell him it's not my fault.”

“No, it was my decision, and eventually I hope he will understand that,” he said. “I've thought about
things. I could have easily done this back home. But I think I'm staying here for the same reason you
are. It's a fresh start, and I think I needed one. Whether I stay past when I'm done with this degree I'm
not sure yet, but this gives you ample time to convince me to.”

“Do you want me to try?” she asked, looking at him intently.

“It depends. Are you going to consider going home?” he asked quietly.

“No,” she said, shaking her head. “I really do have a life here now, one that I like much more than
the one I had in London. It would take something very drastic for me to go back home, and
depending on what it is I don't know if I'd stay there permanently.”

He nodded in response. “I see.”

“Are you going to keep trying to convince me to leave?” she asked.

“I don't think I will,” he replied. “But it will be some time until I finish my schooling here. Things
could always change in the meantime.”

“Yes, they could,” she conceded. “But I don't think it will matter. I don't want to leave, and I don't
want you to leave, either. I don't think that will change even years down the line.”

“I suppose you win, then,” he said giving her a small smile. “Though I think I should work harder at
having a more active social life. I do appreciate having friends in Thomas and Jason, but I could do
with more.” He took a bite of his pizza. “And I suppose with my personality changes I could attempt
to date. There might be at least one person who finds me appealing.”

She knew her mouth was hanging open slightly. “You? Date? Really?”

“I don't suppose it would hurt,” he said with a slight shrug. “And I don't think I'm as hard to get
along with as I used to be.”

“I see,” she said quietly.
“I suppose you’ll be doing the same thing eventually,” he said.

She didn't know quite how to respond to that. She had hoped if he ever did decide he might be interested in a romantic relationship with someone he would think of her first, but apparently she wasn't even being considered. That left her feeling more depressed about the idea than she had thought it would. Still, she wouldn't let him see her sadness over his statement. “Actually, I was going to ask Thomas to set me up on some blind dates tonight,” she said, pasting on a smile. “I suppose it's time to look for a boyfriend again, and if someone else is setting me up at least I know they’d have my best interests at heart.”

“I think that might be best for you,” he said with a nod.

“Probably,” she said with a nod of her own. She turned her attention back to the television and saw the previews were over. “It's about to start now. We should pay attention.”

“All right,” he said. She turned back to glance at him and saw him settle into the sofa more. She would have to try very hard not to show that she would much rather date him than date random men that her friends thought would suit her. It would hurt more in the long run, especially if he turned around and started seeing someone else, but she would soldier through it as best she could. If she couldn't have a romantic relationship with him she'd have to settle for a friendship. She just hoped after this conversation she didn't push him away, and sadly that was something she was very worried she might do.
Chapter 12

She'd spent just under a month going out on two or three blind dates a week and half the men she'd been out with on dates had only wanted to get into her knickers while the other half were just not her type and had either been boring or not interested in her. She really wasn't cut out for dating, she'd slowly realized. It was now July 1st and she knew if this date didn't work out she was going to beg Thomas to stop setting her up with the men he knew. She didn't want to do it anymore. It was disappointing and frustrating and not at all remotely worth the hassle.

The only thing she was thankful for, really, was that Sherlock hadn't gone out on any dates with anyone, or at least any he had mentioned to her. She didn't know if he was actively trying and not succeeding or not trying at all, but as far as she could tell no one was interested in him and he wasn't trying to pursue anyone at the moment. If that had happened she was fairly sure she'd be miserable. It was hard spending time with him now, and she knew she was a bit more withdrawn. She wasn't sure if he'd noticed or not, but it seemed that maybe he was distancing himself as well and she hated that. She enjoyed his company, enjoyed his friendship, and if that was all she ever got then she was just going to have to fight harder to make sure they stayed friends.

That was the last thing on her mind right now, though. As it stood, she was running late for the date she had been set up on tonight and she hoped her date for the evening, a man named Carl, hadn't decided to leave her high and dry. They'd agreed to meet at LOUNGEsix, which she had found out was a rooftop bar. She hoped she had dressed warmly enough she thought to herself as she made her way to the bar. She got close enough and saw a man who met the description she was given: tall with sandy hair and blue eyes, wearing a nice suit. "Carl?" she asked as she got closer.

The man turned and shook his head. "Sorry, I'm not him."

"Oh," she said, slightly disappointed.

"Are you Molly?" the bartender asked. She turned to him and nodded. "Your date got a call that one of his patients needed to be rushed into surgery. He left a note for you and asked me to apologize for him."

She sighed. "He could have called me himself."

"Do you want to see the note?" the bartender asked.

"I might as well read it," she said as she sat down at the bar. The bartender went over to the side and then came back with a piece of paper that was folded over. She opened the note and read it. Carl apologized for having to leave and told her he's opened a tab if she wanted to use it in his place. He also hoped she would take his call to reschedule for another time. When she was done she folded the note back up and tapped it on the bar. "How big a tab did he open?"

"Seventy-five dollars," the bartender replied. "Most of the drinks are expensive but because you got stood up and he couldn't be bothered to call you I'll charge you half price."

"You're a godsend," she said with a smile. "What would you recommend?"

"Well, if you feel like having more than one drink, I can think of three. A French 75, a piña colada and a mudslide."

"Piña coladas I've had before, but they are good," she said. "Any particular order I should have them?"
“The order I listed them is probably best,” he replied after a moment's thought. “It will still leave money on the tab, though.”

She turned to the other man. “What are you drinking?” she asked.

“Gin and tonic,” he replied, lifting up his glass.

“Then I'll get all three drinks, in that order, and he can have another gin and tonic when he's done with that one,” Molly said with a nod.

“On it,” the bartender said.

She turned to the other gentleman. “I'm Molly.”

“I heard,” he said with a grin. “My name is Rick.” He held out his hand. “Nice to meet you.”

“You as well,” she said, going over to shake his hand. She let go after a moment and looked around. This really would have been a fun place to have an actual date at, she thought to herself, but if she couldn't have a date at least she could have some alcohol that she didn't have to pay for. Within a few minutes the bartender had placed a glass in front of her. “What's in this?” she asked as she picked it up to take a sip.

“Gin, lemon juice, sugar and champagne. It's one of our more expensive drinks.”

“I like it,” she said with a grin. “Never really gotten to have champagne before.”

“It's kind of overrated,” Rick said. “Or at least the really expensive stuff is. Champagne is best for an actual celebration, not just to impress a date.”

“I was going to have a champagne toast at my wedding,” she said after a moment. “I think if I ever get married we'll toast with this instead.”

“That good, huh?” Rick asked with a grin.

“You should try it.”

He turned to the bartender and pushed his empty glass forward. “Make my drink on her tab a French 75.”

“Is that okay?” the bartender asked.

She nodded. “That's fine.” The bartender turned and began to make the drink for Rick and she watched until the drink was given to the man. She watched him take a sip. “Well?”

“This is actually pretty good,” he replied. “Better than a gin and tonic.”

“Well, I'm glad you enjoyed it.”

“Is the guy who stood you up your fiancée?” Rick asked.

She shook her head. “I ended my engagement some time ago. Carl was yet another blind date I was being set up on.”

Rick winced slightly. “Worst kind of dates to get stood up on.”

“Exactly,” she said, having more of her drink. “But they'd all been rather shite, to be honest. I think
“this is going to be the last one I allow myself to be set up on.”

“Well, it could be worse,” he said.

“How so?” she asked, tilting her head.

“You could have been stood up and had to buy your own booze.”

She laughed a bit at that. “Yes, that could have happened.”

“Are you going to give him another chance?” Rick asked.

“Maybe. Possibly. I'll see how this evening goes.” She had some more of her drink. “So since we've established I have an open tab and half-price drinks, and I'm not currently sitting here alone, how about we get to know each other as we run up the tab?”

“I could agree to that,” Rick said with a nod. “You start.”

“All right.” Molly started to talk about herself, about the things she was interested and the things she did and what she thought of the entire dating scene in general. And as more drinks were served to the both of them she learned interesting things about Rick. He was quite charming, really, more charming than the other men she'd been set up with. And he seemed smart, especially when he told her he was a detective in the police force. Maybe not Sherlock level genius, she decided, but certainly more intelligent than some of the other people she'd talked to lately. He seemed like a nice man.

They'd had three drinks each when the bartender looked at her. “You have ten dollars left on the tab,” he said. “And I think I have the perfect drink for you.”

“All right,” she said, giving him a wide smile. “What is it?”

“Sex on the Beach. Vodka, peach schnapps, creme de cassis, orange juice and cranberry juice.”

“I'll take one,” she said with a nod. In the back of her mind she knew she probably shouldn't have any more to drink because she was quite buzzed as it was, but one more wouldn't hurt too much. The bartender mixed her drink and put it in front of her and she took a sip. “This is delicious.”

“It's an easy drink to make,” the bartender said with a laugh. “But most people can't order it with a straight face. I usually get my kicks watching them debate whether they're going to order it and then doing it in a rush or really slowly.”

“Well, I'll order it from you again with a wide smile,” she said.

“I think I'd like that,” he said with a chuckle.

She was halfway done when Rick stood up. “I think I need to go take a break,” he said. She could see he was leering at her, and for the first time that evening she felt uncomfortable. “Be right back.”

“All right,” she said quietly.

The bartender watched him leave and then leaned closer to her. “Are you thinking about leaving here with him?” he asked.

“Not after that look he just gave me. It felt...off,” she said, her mouth forming a small frown. “Why?”

“He had some drinks before you got here. And that wasn't the first time he's leered at you. I've put
the bare minimum of alcohol in his drinks. I'm planning on cutting him off when he gets back, and I don't think that will end well. I'm not getting a good vibe from him. Do you have a friend who you can call to come get you?"

She thought for a moment, which she found was rather hard to do. Thomas and Jason were in Los Angeles right now, and she really didn't want Sherlock to see her like this. She could call Aaron, but he lived farther away from downtown than she did. After a moment she nodded. "I'll call Sherlock, I suppose."

"Is he close?"

"He's my friend. The one who moved here from England to try and get me to come home? I just really don't want him to see me like this because it's pathetic."

"I meant does he live close?"

"Oh," she said. "Yes. He's in Hillcrest, in the same complex I live in."

"You make the call and I'll go get some coffee to sober you up. And you're going to drink it in the break area because I don't think I trust your new friend."

She nodded again, and that was really hard. "What about this drink?" she asked, lifting it up.

"You come back here when I'm working I'll make you one on the house," he said. "Just ask for Eric."

"All right." She got off the stool and stumbled slightly. She'd had quite a bit more to drink than usual, and as she took one unsteady step and then another Eric came out from around the bar to help her.

"Just follow me," he said, putting an arm around her shoulders. He guided her to another area where people were hard at work prepping things. "Cover the bar?" he asked one man, who nodded and made his way out to where they had come from. Eric moved Molly over to a table and helped her sit down before kneeling in front of her. "Do you have your cell phone?"

She opened up her clutch and pulled it out. "Yes."

"You said your friend's name is Sherlock?"

"Yes. He's in my contacts."

"I'll call him for you. I really hope he picks up. In the meantime let me get you some bread to eat and water to sip, and a couple of aspirin if I can find some. It'll help."

"Thanks." He moved away from her and then came back with a plate of warm bread, a glass of water and two aspirin five minutes later. Then he moved away again, scrolling on her phone until he found the right contact, and then putting her phone to his ear. She took the aspirin first and then concentrated solely on the bread, which made the churning in her stomach lessen, and sipping the water when the bread tasted too dry.

A few minutes later Eric came back with her phone. "He's on his way," he replied. "Did you drive here?"

"No, I took a cab," she said.

"Good. Stay here and eat the bread. I'll bring you some coffee in a minute. Can you drink it black?"
“If I have to.”

“All right. Get your stomach settled as best you can.”

“Thank you,” she replied.

“Hey, it's my fault. I should have cut him off and I didn't. Least I can do is make sure he doesn't leave here with you. Your friend should be here soon if he's coming from Hillcrest.” Eric gave her a grin. “Just eat and drink the water. Everything will be fine.”

She nodded slightly and went back to the bread. Soon a cup of coffee was put in front of her and she began to drink that as well. When she was done with the bread and the coffee she felt a bit better but she knew she was going to regret drinking this much in the morning, especially since she'd been drinking on an empty stomach. She continued to sip the water until that was gone too. She wasn't sure how much time had passed before the door opened again and she saw Sherlock come in with Eric. “God, I must look pathetic,” she said with a sigh.

“I wouldn't say pathetic,” Sherlock said, shaking his head. “Do you feel well enough to get into a car?”

Her eyes widened. “Don't tell me you drove here in your car.”

“No. I took a cab, which is waiting downstairs. I don't think you would forgive yourself if you ended up vomiting in my vehicle. Do you feel steady enough to walk?”

She stood up and took a wobbly step, but she didn't think walking out of the room would be nearly as bad as it had been walking into it. “I think I'll be fine.”

“The man's still out there, and he's not happy he's not getting free booze and that she's not out there. I think he thought he was getting laid tonight,” Eric said. “I'll distract him while you get her out of here.”

“Thank you,” Sherlock said with a nod.

“Give me five minutes,” Eric said as Molly got over to Sherlock.

“All right.” Eric left and Sherlock turned to Molly. “I take it this is another date gone badly?” he asked.

“I got stood up,” she said. “And instead of calling me to explain he left me an open tab. What else was I supposed to do?”

“I think if I had been in your position I might have done the same thing,” he said with a small grin. “I'll take you home and stay with you tonight.”

“You don't have to,” she said. “Don't you have rehearsals tomorrow?”

“I do. I can skip them, just this once. Do you have to go to work tomorrow?”

She shook her head and then instantly regretted it. “No, I don't.”

“Then I'll stay with you overnight and be there to help however I can when you wake up.” He was going to say more but the door opened and Eric gestured for them to come out now. Sherlock put a steadying arm around her and guided her out of the room. They made it almost all the way around the bar when Rick noticed them and got up to block their path. “Get out of my way,” Sherlock said
in a steely voice.

“I think she wanted me to go home with her, not you,” he said, reaching over for her arm, as if to pull her towards him.

“Lay a hand on her and I'll make sure you regret it,” Sherlock replied.

“Oh yeah? Do you know who you're threatening? I'm a cop,” he said.

Sherlock moved away from Molly and straightened up, advancing on the man. “Yes, I noticed the vehicle you use for the course of your job parked downstairs. Tell me, are you supposed to be on duty right now?” Rick looked down for a brief moment and Sherlock nodded. “Ah. You are. In that case, the first thing I'm going to do is find the senior officer at your precinct and tell him that instead of doing your job you're at a rooftop lounge sucking down drink after drink, and attempting to chat up women to take them home. As is evidenced by her condition I think if she gave consent it would be dubious at best, but you would abuse your position and force yourself on her and then threaten her to keep her from saying anything. I imagine you do this quite frequently, though you always change the bars or pubs you frequent.”

Rick advanced on him. “Yeah? You think you know me? You're full of bullshit.”

“No, I know very well I'm right. I've met enough policemen like you to know.” He crossed his arms. “And if you think I will hesitate hitting a policeman who was going to take advantage of a friend you are sorely mistaken. If you don't move and I knock you out and you attempt to retaliate I will end your career and find women willing to testify, hopefully causing you to be locked up for your crimes. And you know what they say about cops in prisons, don't you? You'd do so well there.”

Rick stared at him in abject horror, and immediately he dropped his arm. Then he glared at Sherlock. “You're a fucking bastard.”

“That is among one of the mildest things I've ever been called,” he said with a shrug. “When you come up with a more creative insult by all means, feel free to share it. And just know if you do attempt to find me to make my life hell, I have friends in the British government who have close ties with people in the American government. They will not hesitate to do far worse to your life than you could possibly do to mine.” He moved back over to Molly. “Let's get you home,” he said quietly.

“You're giving up the chance at a real man,” Rick said towards her. “He's not a better man than me.”

“No, actually, I am a better man than you, despite my faults,” he replied. “And if she wants to take a chance on a quote unquote real man than I'm more than willing to nominate myself.” Her eyes widened slightly at that but then Sherlock had his arm around her shoulders again. “Come on.”

“He's going to try and ruin your life,” she said when they moved away from the bar.

“Try being the operative word. Mycroft will ensure he's not successful if he's idiotic enough to attempt it.” He began guiding her towards the lift. “Do you feel at all better?”

“I don't feel as nauseous,” she said. “And a bit more clearheaded.”

“That's good. The cab should still be waiting for us downstairs, and as soon as we get back to the apartment complex I'll let us in. Do you want to sleep in your apartment or mine?”

“Yours is closer,” she replied.

“Then I'll let you in and get you settled. I can loan you a shirt to sleep in, or I can go to your home
and get pyjamas for you.”

“I won't be sleeping in much if I'm in a shirt,” she said.

“I'll be spending the night on my sofa,” he said once they got to the lift and he pushed the button.

“I really don't want to sleep alone,” she said.

His eyes widened slightly. “I don't think that's a good idea.”

“It's probably not, but I really don't want to sleep alone.” She looked up at him. “Please stay with me?”

He looked at her intently for a moment, then nodded slowly. “All right. But nothing happens tonight.”

“Nothing happens,” she said with a nod of her own. She moved closer to him and he tightened his grip around her shoulders until the lift doors opened. They stepped inside and then took the elevator down to the ground floor, and he took her out to a waiting cab. She got in and buckled herself in, which took a few tries, and once Sherlock got in and got himself settled they were off. It didn't take very long for them to get to Hillcrest and even less time after that to get to their complex. He paid the driver and then got out before helping her out, and once again he steadied her. He guided her to the gate and keyed in the code, and then took her to his apartment. He had left his lights on and she was glad she was not stumbling on the way to his bedroom.

He moved away from her to find a shirt for her to wear, and she looked around a bit as he did that. She knew what his furniture had looked like since she was there when he'd bought it, but seeing it in his bedroom was different. It fit him very well, with the simple, clean lines and dark wood. She watched him open drawers and go through things with a sigh. Finally he turned to her. “Where in your bedroom are your pyjamas? I don't have anything that will fit, I don't think.”

“They're at the foot of my bed,” she replied.

“Sit down on my bed. I'll be right back.” He left the room and she sat down on the edge of the bed as she heard him open his front door, trying to get her bearings since she still felt a little ill. She wasn't sure this was a good idea, but she didn't feel like sleeping alone right now. As she waited her mind drifted back to what he had said to Rick's last statement. If Sherlock actually did fancy her then that changed things quite a bit. She waited patiently until she heard his front door open again, and then he came into his bedroom with her pyjamas in his hand. “Here,” he said quietly.

“Thank you,” she said as she took them from him.

He went back to his drawers and grabbed some clothing for himself. “I'll change elsewhere. Let me know when you're done.”

“All right.” He moved to the door and left the room, and she looked at what he had handed her before setting it on the bed. After a moment she stood up and unzipped her dress before moving the straps off her shoulders and letting it pool at her feet. She stepped out of it and then began to get dressed in her sleep clothes. When she was finished she bent down to pick her dress up and then not knowing what else to do with it she folded it up and set it on the nightstand closest to her with her clutch on top of it. She moved to sit back down on the bed and after a few moments she heard a knock. “I'm finished,” she called out.

Sherlock came back in, in a T-shirt and sleep pants, and he made his way over to the bed. “Are you ready to sleep?” he asked.
“Yes. I think I just want to sleep as long as I can and put this miserable day behind me.”

“All right.” He moved to the opposite side of the bed from where she was and pulled back the covers. She stood up and began to do the same, and soon they were both in bed. She rolled over to her side, facing the edge of the bed. “Is this enough space?” she heard him ask.

“You can sleep closer to me. I’d prefer that, actually,” she said quietly. He didn't move or say anything for a moment, and then he moved very close. After a moment he tentatively put an arm around her waist. In response she snuggled against him. “Thank you, Sherlock.”

“You're welcome,” he said, his lips near her ear. “In the morning, we should talk.”

“Yes, we should,” she said, bracing his arm with hers. “Good night.”

“Good night,” he said softly, and at that point she shut her eyes. Tomorrow was going to be very interesting when they finally decided to talk. She had no idea how the conversation was going to go, but at least for tonight she had him close and she could savor that and keep it close in case everything went to hell in the morning.
Chapter 13

She woke up many hours later and was surprised he was still close. She had turned at some point the night before and now she was facing him, and she saw that he was still sound asleep. His arm was still around her waist, though not quite as tightly as it had been before. She almost didn't want to move because she didn't know how soundly he was sleeping, but she needed to get up and use the loo. She lifted his arm up and set it down next to her, then moved away from him and got out of bed, quietly making her way to the door.

She made her way to his washroom and did what she needed to do, and then she debated what to do next. She could always slip back into bed with him and enjoy that a little longer, but as her stomach rumbled slightly she realized she needed food and some coffee. She moved into his kitchen and went to his coffeemaker, pulling the pot out to fill it with water. Once she had it full she went and poured it into the coffeemaker, then quietly began opening his cupboards to find his coffee. After a few minutes she frowned, unable to find it.

“If you're looking for my coffee it's in the freezer,” she heard him say from the hallway, and she started slightly. He was yawning as he came closer. “It stays fresher that way.”

“I didn't mean to wake you up,” she said, moving to his freezer and opening it.

“I started to wake up when you got out of bed,” he replied.

“I'm sorry,” she replied.

“It's all right.” He came into the kitchen as she set about making them coffee. “How do you feel?”

“My head hurts a bit and I'm famished,” she said, turning to look at him. “But I think I could feel much worse.”

“You did have quite a bit to drink,” he said with an amused smile. “I'm surprised you didn't vomit.”

“I had bread, water, aspirin and black coffee before you arrived. It helped.” She turned back to the coffee. “Thank you for coming to get me last night. I appreciate it.”

“It wasn't a problem.” He leaned against the counter, and she could tell he was watching her. “We should talk.”

“Coffee first,” she replied.

“All right. I'll get you some more aspirin as well. Give me a moment to call the conductor and let him know I'm not coming in today, and then I will go get it for you.”

She nodded, finishing the coffee. She turned the machine on and then went to go look in his refrigerator to see what he had that she could put in it. She was slightly surprised to see there was a bottle of the flavored creamer she liked there before she remembered she had come over very early for the zoo trip a few weeks ago and he'd mentioned that she could have some coffee if she wanted. She hadn't had coffee that morning but he must have anticipated her wanting some at some point. She pulled it out of his refrigerator and set it on the counter. She had a general idea of where his coffee mugs were from looking for the coffee, and she was rewarded with finding them on her first try. She pulled two down just as she heard him come back into the kitchen. She turned and saw he had a bottle of aspirin. He handed it to her. “Thank you.”
"You're welcome," he said with a nod. He moved around her to get her a glass, and he filled it up with water. She tapped out two pills from the bottle once she got it open, and then set the bottle down to take the glass. She popped the pills in her mouth and swallowed them with some of the water. "You should feel better soon enough."

"I hope so," she replied. She leaned back against the counter. "Was your conductor upset?"

"A bit, but I said I'd gotten sick last night and I didn't think it would last more than a day. I don't think he quite believed me, but this is more important. I can't miss any more days, though."

"I won't do anything like this again, I promise," she replied, giving him a small smile.

He was quiet for a moment. "I know you wanted coffee before we began to talk, but I have a question to ask. Why did you allow yourself to be set up on the blind dates?"

She bit her lower lip slightly for a moment before she spoke. He deserved the absolute truth, whether she wanted to give it to him or not. If their friendship was absolutely ruined because of her being truthful then maybe they weren't as close as she had thought they were. "Because I wanted to be in a relationship again, and feel loved and wanted again. The day I asked Thomas to set me up on blind dates you had mentioned trying to date, but you acted like you didn't want to be anything more than my friend. If I couldn't date you then I'd try and see if there was someone else who would actually want to be in a relationship with me."

He moved slightly so he was next to her, leaning against the counter. "I've never understood why you've been attracted to me. Especially before I jumped off the roof. I treated you horribly. To this day I'm still surprised you helped me. You had every reason to refuse and you would have been completely justified, and yet you didn't."

"I may not have fancied you as much at that point, but I couldn't just let you die. That would have made me a horrible person and I never would have been able to live with myself," she said, turning to look at him. "I couldn't do that to someone I still cared about."

"But why did you care about me? That's what I don't understand."

"I don't know if I can explain it very well," she said before thinking for a moment. "Have you ever read *Pride & Prejudice*?"

"A very long time ago," he said with a nod.

"It's my favorite book," she said. "In my own head, I always thought of myself as Elizabeth Bennett. I was never as clever, never as ready with a quick retort, but I admired her. I wanted to be her. And I wanted to find my own Mr. Darcy. When I met you, I thought you fit the role perfectly. But it never worked out the way I wanted. You didn't notice me until you did, and then it wasn't in the way I wanted, and then you were gone."

He nodded slightly. "I see. And Tom?"

"As I told you before, he noticed me. I didn't think any man would notice me. And the more he turned out to be like you, only nice, the more I liked him. But when you came back I knew it wasn't going to last much longer. He knew I had fancied you, and as long as you were dead he knew he could have my heart. When you came back, I think he knew he was going to lose it."

"He must not have been happy you knew the truth the whole time."

She gave a slightly humorless smile. "No, he wasn't. But he convinced himself, and me too for a
time, that I had fallen in love with him even after knowing the truth and it would work out. But it
didn't. We had a huge row not long after John and Mary's wedding, and I gave him back the ring and
told him to leave. Within three days he was out of my life completely, and our mutual friends all
blamed me for it. And they were right to blame me.”

“You wouldn't have been happy, though. You of all people deserve to be happy,” he pointed out.

“I tell myself that all the time. One day I might actually believe it.” She looked down at the floor.
“When you began seeing Janine I got so irrationally jealous. I knew exactly how Tom felt in that
moment. But there wasn't anything I could do about it. And then everything happened and I just
knew I had to go, had to get away from everything in London. When the job here fell into my lap I
decided that was my chance. I left everything behind and decided to start fresh thousands of miles
away. And then you showed up and everything changed. I'm happy here, but not completely happy.”
Then she sighed. “And now I think I've mucked it all up.”

“You haven't,” he said quietly. “I have come to realize I felt exactly how you felt when I began that
relationship with Janine the moment you came back from that first blind date. Every time you went
on one I hoped you would find fault with whoever it was you were seeing that night, and the more
bad dates you went one the more I hoped you'd eventually give up. But then I realized I hadn't given
you any reason to consider me. I thought that in your eyes we were simply friends and nothing more,
and my behaviour hadn't done anything to change that perception.”

“Oh God, what a pair we make,” she said, looking up at him again with a small smile. “We should
have just talked to each other, long before last night.”

“I don't think it would have worked out quite the same way if we had attempted to have this
conversation before you actively began dating,” he said with a grin of his own. “I think I needed to
come to a few realizations about how I felt towards you first.”

She moved her hand closer so her fingers brushed against his. “So what do we want to do now?” she
asked.

He moved his hand to grasp hers, and then he ran his thumb over her knuckles. “We could attempt to
go out on a date once you feel better,” he said. “I have the entire day free now, as do you.”

“I would like that a lot, actually,” she said with a wider smile. “Maybe go somewhere we haven't
yet?”

“Do you have any suggestions?” he asked.

She thought for a moment. “Well, when I went to Oceanside with Jason last month I kept seeing
signs for something called a Sunset Market. We could go there for that and spend time at the beach
there. We don't even have to go in the water. There's a pier and an amphitheater and other things,
and quite a few restaurants as well.”

He nodded. “We could just make a day out of it. Go up there after we've eaten, see what there is to
do there, then attend the Sunset Market in the evening.” He paused. “And, if you want, we can
spend some time on the beach.”

“You'll actually get swim trunks and go in the water?” she asked, her eyes wide.

“We'll see about going in the water. But yes, I will buy them and wear them, if you'd like that.”

“I would,” she said with a nod. “And this means you get the chance to see me in my swimwear. I've
actually never worn it past trying it on.”
“I think I could enjoy that,” he said with a grin. “Do we want to eat first?”

She tilted her head slightly. “We could get something on the way. There’s a Jack In The Box nearby and I usually get breakfast from them when I’m in a rush. I think a steak and egg burrito and hash browns sounds very appealing right now.”

“I’ve been here a few months now and I don’t think I’ve ever eaten there,” he mused.

“It’s definitely worth it. They have an interesting array of choices, most of which you wouldn’t expect from a hamburger place, but everything I’ve had is quite tasty.” She pulled away slightly as she heard the coffee finish. “I have travel mugs, if we want to take the coffee with us.”

“That sounds like a good idea. We can leave it alone for a bit while you go get what you need from your home. I suppose there are places in the city to buy what I need?”

“There’s a surf shop nearby the restaurant where Jason was DJing at. I think they would have what you need,” she said.

“Then I’ll purchase something there. Whose car do we want to take?”

“Mine, I suppose. A beach day would be best if we drove with the top down.”

He let go of her hand and she pulled away more. She went into his bedroom and got her clutch and her dress off of his nightstand, and then she went back out into the kitchen. “It won't take me long,” she said with a smile. “I'll be back in ten minutes at most.”

“I'll be waiting,” he said with a nod.

She gave him one last grin and left his home before making her way to her own apartment. She unlocked it and let herself in, then went to her bedroom, opening up drawers to get what she needed. She stripped out of her clothing and placed it in her hamper before pulling out her bikini. She’d bought it on a whim in April and hadn’t worn it yet, despite the fact it was the beginning of July now. It was a skimpy thing, cobalt blue with a white floral lace overlay, but she’d actually felt rather sexy when she’d put it on and decided it was worth the money. Over that she put on a pair of cutoff denim shorts and a camisole top, and she slipped on a pair of comfortable sandals. She grabbed one of her larger handbags and put in a cotton dress, a pair of knickers and a pair of flats, and after a trip to her linen closet she added a rolled up beach towel. After a moment she went back and grabbed a second one for Sherlock, just in case he didn’t feel like buying one. When she was done with all of that she went into her kitchen and pulled down two of her larger travel mugs before transferring over the few things she needed from her clutch to the handbag and then she was finished. She went back over to Sherlock’s apartment and found he had left the door unlocked for her. “You always chide me when I leave the door unlocked,” she said as she went into his kitchen.

“If anyone was foolish enough to come in I was right here, and I'm very good at defending myself, especially since I'm in the kitchen and I have sharp knives,” he replied. “I thought I would wait until you were back to get ready.”

“Well, I got a towel for you, in case you want to lay out on the beach or go in the water,” she said. “I can make up our coffees for us while you change.” He nodded and made his way to his bedroom as she took the mugs to the coffeemaker. She made her coffee first, using the creamer she had left on the counter, and then she made his coffee with a bit of sugar. It didn’t take her long, and she found herself waiting a few minutes before he emerged. He was wearing a white T-shirt and denim trousers. “You're going to overheat,” she said with an amused smile.
“I suppose eventually I will need to buy clothing which is more conducive to warm weather than what I already have, even if I do spend most of my time in air conditioned rooms,” he said. “I’ll start with the swim trunks and see what else they have there.”

“It will probably cost an arm and a leg,” she replied.

“It’s not as though I can’t afford it,” he said as he got closer to her. “Which reminds me. As this is a date, I do actually plan on paying for everything today.”

“Well, I insist on breakfast and covering the cost of petrol. I need to fill my tank today anyway. But if you want to pay for everything else I won’t stop you.” She paused. “Today, at least.”

“I can agree to that,” he said with a nod. “Shall we be off?”

“Let’s go,” she said. She handed him his coffee before picking up her own cup, and with that the two of them headed out into the hallway. He locked up behind them and they made their way to her car. She lowered the top of the car before they got in and then she drove them to the fast food restaurant. She was curious to see what he would order, and she chuckled slightly when he ended up ordering the same thing she did because he trusted her opinion. Once they had their food she drove them down the street to the gas station and filled up her tank, and then they were off.

It took a little over an hour and a half to get to Oceanside due to traffic and them taking the wrong off-ramp, but soon enough they were parking her car on the top level of the parking structure by the transit center. When she and Jason had gone to the city a few weeks prior she hadn’t really gotten to explore but she had a general idea of where they needed to go. She put the top back up on her car and locked it, turning on the alarm as well. “Where exactly are we supposed to go?” Sherlock asked, adjusting his sunglasses.

“Well, to the ground floor, for a start. It looks like there’s a lift over there.” She pointed to the corner of the structure. She and Sherlock began moving in that direction, and before they got there he surprised her by reaching over for her hand. She gave him a wide grin and grasped it tightly as they walked. They got to the lift and got in when the doors opened. Once they got out on the ground floor they walked around to the intersection. “We just go down this street and then across and then up the hill. I think it’s right next to the Mexican food restaurant Jason and I ate at.”

“All right,” he said with a nod. They made their way across the street. “Do you know what else is here?”

“There are a lot of restaurants and a few shops around here, and I think there are more of both in a two or three block area,” she said. “Everything was closed when we got done, but I did notice there’s also a cinema here.”

“We’re going to be here for a while,” he said. “I suppose if you want we could catch a film.”

“That could be nice, when we’re done with the Sunset Market.” They passed by a sushi restaurant. “That could be interesting for lunch.”

“Is your stomach up to it, though?” he asked.

She thought about it a moment. “Well, maybe for dinner,” she said with a laugh. “But it looks like a nice place.”

“We have the entire day to explore,” he replied. “We don’t need to make any decisions right now.”

“True.” She looked around and spotted a sign above a store. “That’s the shop I was thinking of,” she
said, pointing across the street.

Sherlock nodded. “We can head there first, then.” They went across the street and then halfway up the block to Asylum Surf Shop. Sherlock entered first and she followed, taking the place in. It was filled with just about anything one might need to go out into the water, including surf boards. Sherlock went up to one of the sales associates and began to talk to him while she continued to look around. There was some rather cute clothing for women from some surf companies she had seen before and a few things from brands she'd never heard of. She picked out a few things that looked to be in her size. When she was done she looked around and saw Sherlock wasn't there. After a moment she saw him come out of a changing room, and he motioned for her to come over. “Well?” he asked.

She took in the view. He looked very appealing in the swim trunks he had on, and she gave him a wide smile in response. “I think you look quite fetching. They're simple and very much you.”

“Then I'll take these,” he said with a nod. “I just need to go try on the other things I picked out while you were browsing.”

“Well, I don't need to try any of these on. They should all fit,” she said. He nodded and went back to the changing room, and she waited. Each time he came out she told him what she thought, and within twenty-five minutes he'd decided on the swim trunks and three pairs of shorts. She went to go pay for her own purchases but he told the sales associate to just ring everything up together. She grinned at him and when the sales associate was done she took her bags off the counter. Once he had his own they made their way out the door. “You were quite serious about paying for everything, weren't you?” she said as she pulled her sunglasses out of her handbag and put them on her face.

“Yes, I was,” he said with a nod. “I was told farther up the hill there's another clothing store for women on the right and then on the left there are a few other clothing stores.”

“Did you want to look at getting more clothing?” she asked.

“I had thought about it, though I'm not sure if there's anything I would like.”

“We can always go look. Let's start with the ones on the left. I don't think I want to have to make you wait while I look at dresses and shoes and things.” He nodded and they made their way up to Coast Highway and turned left. The store closest to them didn't have anything appealing, but as they made their way further down Molly caught sight of something the next street up. “It looks as though there's another market,” she said, pointing. “Could we go look?”

“If you want.” They made their way to the intersection and then crossed the street. It was a farmer's market that stretched for a few blocks up the hill. There were fresh fruits and vegetables stands, people selling art and clothing, floral stands, stands where there was fresh food to eat and a huge book sale put on by the public library next to them. They made their way up, starting on the side opposite from the library and then going to the other side and making their way back down the hill. She found quite a few things that interested her, and each time Sherlock paid for it. He picked up a few things for himself as well, and by the time they'd visited each stall they had even more to carry. “I think before we do anything else we should deposit all of this in your vehicle,” he said.

“I think that's a good idea. It's quite heavy. But we should take the blanket with us and save the towels for in case we go in the water.”

He nodded, shifting his hold on the blanket. “Apparently if we were to go down to Mexico there would be more merchandise like this, and probably much cheaper.”
“Well, I've been told it's still quite dangerous for tourists in Tijuana,” she said. “But San Ysidro is on this side of the border and supposedly there's a lot of places that sell things like that there.”

“Maybe we can make a trip down there then.” They made their way back to the parking structure, looking at what else was available to them on the way, and then once they got to her car they put everything in either the backseat or the car boot. She looked at the blanket for a moment. “If we do go in the water where are we going to put our things? I don't really want to leave them out in the open.”

“There is a special pocket in my swim trunks designed to hold keys,” he said. “If you don't turn on your alarm and you leave the keypad in the glove compartment we can put your keys and some of the cash in the pocket and leave everything other than the blanket and towels here.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” she said with a nod. She took the alarm keypad off of her keys and then handed them to him. He handed her his wallet after taking the cash out and she put that and the alarm keypad in the glove compartment. Then they put her purse in the car boot before locking it back up and heading back to the intersection but this time made a left instead of a right. The followed Mission Avenue down to where it stopped and then over towards the pier entrance. She looked down at the beach. “There are so many people here,” she said.

“The associate who helped me recommended we walk farther down the beach. Supposedly if we go north there are less people on that portion of the beach,” he replied.

She nodded and they made their way down the steps to the lower level of the pier. She glanced at the different shops and stands underneath before they began heading north. After five minutes of walking she saw there were significantly less people there. Finally she nodded towards the beach. “We can go over there,” she said, pointing towards the sand.

They turned and went out onto the beach and moved near one of the lifeguard towers. She laid out the blanket on the sand and then when she was done he set the towels on it. She watched him pull off the shirt he had been wearing and she took a moment to appreciate the view. She hadn't really seen him without a shirt on, except when he stayed at her home in London, and he looked much more muscular now. He caught her staring and she flushed slightly before turning her attention to taking off the clothing she wore over her bikini. She was a bit nervous, but when she was done she caught the look on his face and immediately felt more confident. “You know, you do look very...” he began, trailing off slightly. “Nice,” he then finished lamely.

She chuckled. “You look quite attractive yourself, Sherlock,” she said with a smile.

“Did you think to bring sunscreen?” he asked.

Her eyes widened. “Oh! No, I didn't,” she said.

He glanced back at where they had come from. “It's a bit of a walk back to the shops. I suppose we'll just have to hope we don't burn,” he said.

“Well, if we go out in the water I don't think it will be too bad,” she replied.

“I just hope it's warm enough,” he said.

“I think it will be considerably warmer than the beaches at home,” she replied. She began to walk towards the water, and realized she was a few steps ahead of Sherlock. “Are you coming?” she asked as she turned around. He nodded and then moved more quickly to catch up with her. She still
made it to the water first, and she let the waves lap over her feet. The water was cool but not cold, and she made her way farther in. When it was up to her waist she turned again and saw Sherlock get closer. “See? Warmer than home.”

“I suppose,” he said with a nod as he moved next to her. She grinned and after a moment bent down slightly and put her hands in the water. Then she splashed Sherlock in the face. He looked at her, sputtering as she laughed. “I see,” he said when he was done.

“Well, there isn't much else to do here since we don't have boards of any--” She didn't get to finish because he retaliated, splashing water in her own face. “Oh, this is war,” she said. The two of them took turns splashing each other, which was honestly something she hadn't expected him to do, and to escape him she moved further into the water. After a moment he followed. When he got close enough he moved closer to her. “Are you having fun?” she asked.

“Surprisingly, yes,” he replied. “I never really did any of that as a child and I doubted people could enjoy themselves doing it.”

“Well, I'm glad you're having fun.”

“I am very tempted to pick you up and throw you further into the water,” he said, moving even closer.

“That wouldn't be fair. I can't retaliate,” she said.

“Well, I could always make it up to you later,” he replied.

“If you do that I might be cross,” she said.

“ Might be?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“It depends on how long it takes me to come back up to the surface.” He moved very close to her at that point and she looked up at him. “I wouldn't, if I were you.”

“Perhaps some other time then,” he said. It appeared as though he was considering something, and after a moment he put his hands on either side of her waist. She looked up at him, glaring slightly. “I promise, I'm not going to throw you.”

“So what are you going to do?” she asked.

“I was thinking I might kiss you,” he said.

She nodded slowly before moving her hands up to place them on his chest. “I think that would be a lovely idea,” she said, giving him a wide smile.

He pulled her closer against him and she slid her hands up so she could put her arms around his neck. She leaned in and up slightly as he leaned in, and after a moment he pressed his lips against hers. It was a very soft kiss, very tentative, and it almost seemed like he was waiting for her to show she approved. After a moment she pressed herself closer and increased the pressure of the kiss, and he slid his arms around her as he kissed her back. For a first kiss it was actually quite wonderful, she realized, and they stayed like that until she pulled away to catch her breath. “That was quite different than the last time I did that,” he said quietly.

“Better different or worse different?” she asked.

“Definitely better different,” he said with a grin, eliciting another smile from her.
“Well, you could always do it again,” she said.

“I think I just might,” he murmured before leaning in again. This time the kiss wasn't nearly as tentative, and she found she was having to hold onto him tightly to stay up. It continued until a particularly large wave hit to both of them. “If we do that again it might be best to do it out of the water.”

She laughed. “Yeah, that's probably a good idea.” She moved away from him and he frowned slightly before she began making her way back to the shore. He followed her, and they made their way over to the blanket and towels. She bent over to pick up one of the towels and she began to dry herself off and after a moment he did the same. When she was done she dropped the towel back on the blanket and then sat down before stretching out. “I'm not sure I want to go back into the water for a while,” she said when she was settled.

He sat down on the blanket next to her. “Do you want to lay out on the blanket?” he asked. “Or do you want to do something else?”

“I'm not sure at the moment,” she replied, reaching over for her sunglasses. “We don't have sunscreen on so it's probably not a good idea to lay about too long, but I don't think I would mind a little bit of time under the sun. But maybe we could look at what films are out and see if there's anything that appeals to us.”

“I think that could be interesting,” he said with a nod. “I will admit, coming to the beach and spending time in the water wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it would be.”

“I am so glad I was able to convince you to try it,” she said with a smile. “We should definitely do it a few more times before it gets too cold.”

“I could be game for that,” he replied. “Did we still want to go to the fair in two days?”

“I would like to,” she replied. “I've been to a few smaller fairs back home, but I think the one here is much larger. And I've been told there's something called funnel cake that I absolutely have to try. Preferably with strawberries and whipped cream on top.”

“I've been told the same thing,” he replied. “I do have rehearsals tomorrow so I can ask about other things we should do. I think if I tell them it's a date they'll be surprised but eager to help me decide on things to do.”

She chuckled. “I suppose they think you find dating abhorrent?”

“Possibly. Though anyone who has listened to me complain about your blind dates probably thinks I liked a specific woman who wasn't interested in me.”

“Oh, but I'm quite interested in you,” she said, turning to look at him. “So it worked out well for you in the end.”

“I suppose it did,” he said with a grin. “We'll have to see how it develops, though. I don't have much experience in relationships.”

“Well, you had to be somewhat good at them in order to keep Janine convinced you cared,” she pointed out. “As much as I hate to say it, if you act the same way with me you'll be fine.”

“At least with this relationship you know I'm not out to use you, though. My feelings are much more genuine.”
She reached over and touched his hand, and after a moment he grasped it. “Yes, I know you care about me. As a few people have pointed out in the last month or so, you traveled eight thousand miles away from home for me. So I know I mean more to you than she did.”

“I think I cared about you as more than a friend before I ever came out here, but I didn't want to admit it. Or rather, I didn't realize it. I just knew you were gone and I wasn't happy that you were gone, and when John suggested I try and bring you home I latched onto the idea because then you would be in my life again. I didn't expect any of this to happen, though. I didn't expect to decide to stay here or for our relationship to move in this direction. I thought I would stay here a few months and wear you down and then we could go home and go back to how things used to be.”

“But now you realize even if I had gone back it never would have been the same,” she said.

He nodded. “Yes, I do. Neither of us are the same people we were when you left.”

“I would have hated you, if I'd gone back,” she said thoughtfully. “If you had worn me down and I didn't have a legitimate reason for leaving I would have resented you very much. Especially if you'd wanted me to go back to what I had been doing. I enjoy what I do, but if I'd had to go back to St. Bart's I would have felt like a huge failure and I would have pushed you away because I would have blamed you.”

“I'm glad I wasn't successful, then,” he said.

“But I've convinced you to stay here?” she asked hopefully, letting go of his hand and sitting up.

“Yes, you have,” he said. “Provided things do not end badly between us. If they do then I'll stay long enough to get my degree and then I'll go back home.”

She moved closer to him. “Then let's aim for things to stay good between us, all right?”

He nodded before reaching over and tucking her wet hair behind her ear. “All right.”

“I am honestly surprised you are actually getting close to me and doing things a boyfriend would do,” she said with a smile. “I approve, don't get me wrong, but I'm surprised.”

“I didn't like doing any of these things, but I wouldn't have been able to convince Janine that I wanted to be in a relationship with her if I hadn't. I think because I knew I didn't care about her I had to force myself to do them. But with you I don't mind doing them. And I find I actually want to be close.”

“I'm glad,” she said, moving closer. “I missed all of this after I ended things with Tom. It's been quite a while since I've actually let anyone get close to me.”

“You didn't let any of your dates kiss you?” he asked, slightly surprised.

She nodded. “A few tried, but I usually pulled away or turned my head. You're the first person I've actually kissed since Tom.”

“Oh,” he said. “I'm glad for that.”

“I am too,” she said. “And if you want, you can do it again. I mean, now that we don't have to worry about a wave knocking us over it would probably be better.”

“Or this time you can kiss me,” he said, grinning a bit.
“I can do that,” she said, leaning in and kissing him. She knew they were out in public and it would not be a good idea for things to get too heated, especially since she knew it would be an absolutely horrendous idea for it to go any farther than kisses at the moment. But she had been honest when she said she missed being close to someone, and she was quite happy that finally, after all these years, it was Sherlock that she was kissing. He moved a hand to her cheek and then moved it to cup the back of her head gently, deepening the kiss, and she grinned against his lips slightly. It felt much too soon when he actually pulled away from her. “You really are a very good kisser,” she said as she tried to catch her breath.

“I'm glad you think so,” he said with a slight chuckle.

“I would suggest we stay here and do that for a while but I think maybe we should stop before someone actually tells us to stop,” she said as she pulled away. “And I'm getting rather hungry now.”

“I wonder what time it is,” he said.

“Well, we got into Oceanside just around ten, and I think so far we've spent at least an hour or so shopping, and maybe another hour down here at the beach. So I would guess it's around noon?”

“Do we want to change out of our swimwear now or wait?” he asked.

“Well, the dress I brought to change into is in my car so I need to wear this for a little while longer,” she said. “I don't want to put on my clothes while my bikini is still wet, though. So let's lay out in the sun and get a bit of a tan and then go see about getting food and watching a film.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” he said with a nod.

She moved away from him again and stretched out on the blanket again. They began to talk, keeping up an easy stream of conversation, and after about forty-five minutes she turned over onto her stomach to let the other side of her bikini dry in the sun. Forty-five minutes after that she felt dry enough to the touch and so she sat up. “I think I'm dry now,” she replied.

“And a bit red,” Sherlock replied as he sat up and took a good look at her. She frowned. “Oh, that's not good.” Then she sighed. “I suppose I'm one of those people who burns instead of tans.”

“Well, if you did burn I'm sure we can figure out some way to ease the inevitable pain.”

He stood up and then offered her his hands to help herself up. She grasped them and he pulled her up off the blanket, but instead of letting her go he moved closer. She grinned up at him in response. “So I take it you really like kissing me,” she said.

“Yes, I do,” he said with a nod. “To be honest, for the last month I've been thinking that I would much rather have you kissing me than anyone else. I just didn't think you actually would.”

“Well, I'll do it as often as you want, within reason,” she said. “But just kissing for now.”

“I can live with that,” he said with a nod. He leaned in and kissed her again, and she realized that so far this day was absolutely perfect. She had never expected to actually have a day like this with him, to have a relationship like this with him, and she felt so happy she could burst. Finally, she could say she was completely happy with everything in her life, and that was the best feeling in the world.
Chapter 14

The trip up to Oceanside had continued to be good throughout the day, and she had to admit it was probably the best date she'd ever been on. They had arrived back to their complex around ten and once everything was sorted and he'd taken his things back to his apartment he had come back to her home and they'd settled in to watch a film together. She had honestly been surprised they'd actually watched it as opposed to being distracted, but it had been nice to be close to him and not sitting on opposite sides of the sofa like they had before. She had walked him to the door and had gotten a very nice goodnight kiss, and then when he had left she had damn near floated off to bed.

Mary had been the very first person she called with the news the next day and Mary had been quite happy for the both of them. They had talked for a time before they ended their call, and ten minutes before she was supposed to go back to work Thomas called and asked what her plans for the Fourth were. She said she had a date, and Thomas's response when he found out it was with Sherlock was a chuckle and a “Finally.” Then he revealed he'd pried it out of Jason that she fancied Sherlock so he'd purposefully set her up on horrible blind dates in hopes that she and Sherlock would just talk to each other about how they really felt. He felt bad when she told him about what almost happened with Rick but she told him not to worry about it. Thomas said he and Jason were thinking of hitting the fair as well and they made tentative plans to meet up at some point during the day, and he also told her to see if she could get five days off of work at the end of the month because he had gotten passes to Comic Con through a friend for her and Jason, and Sherlock as well if he wanted to go. Then she ended the call and went back to work.

She'd got home a few hours later and just as she was getting settled there was a knock on her door. She opened it and saw a man standing there with a bouquet of some of the most beautiful flowers she'd ever seen. She was grinning widely as she took them and the card from the deliveryman and then she set them on her kitchen counter as she read the card. It said rehearsals were going to run late since Sherlock had not been the only one to miss rehearsals the day before and that he hoped she might be up for a late supper. She sent him a text saying she'd cook and thirty minutes later she got a reply back with an affirmative response. She made a quick trip to the store to get the ingredients for chicken fajitas and then waited for him to arrive at her home. He looked quite tired when he got there at nine thirty, having told her he hadn't gotten much sleep the evening before, and he started to nod off on her sofa as she made their meal. She finished cooking it and then realized he was asleep so she put the food away and then went into her room, getting a quilt for him and draping it over him. Then she did the last few things she needed to do before retiring to her bedroom and getting some sleep herself.

She woke up the next morning to hear movement in her kitchen. She smiled to herself and stretched as she got out of bed before making her way out into the living room and kitchen area. She moved over to the counter and leaned against it, watching him rummage through her refrigerator with an amused smile still on her face. “You know, we really do make ourselves at home in each other’s homes,” she said.

“I had hoped you would actually stay asleep as I attempted to make you breakfast,” he said with a sigh as he straightened up and shut the refrigerator door.

“I can always go back to bed if you want,” she said in a teasing tone of voice.

“It's all right. You can keep me company out here,” he said, moving towards her.

“Was the sofa comfortable enough?” she asked.
He nodded. “Thank you for not waking me. I had actually planned on sleeping more than the hour I got the night before but I spent the majority of my evening awake helping Mycroft with a problem he had. It was quite a miserable rehearsal because of that and all I could think about was getting home, spending some time with you and getting some rest,” he said. “I'm just sorry I didn't actually spend much time with you last night.”

“Is it something to worry about?” she asked with a frown.

He shook his head. “No. It had to do with the case I solved for him in May. He needed me to go over every detail because the company involved was trying to claim I had made mistakes. They wanted to shift the blame to me instead of accepting that they were in the wrong and attempting to salvage what they could from the situation.”

“I'm so sorry,” she said, putting her arms around him when he got close enough. He held her close for a few minutes, resting his chin on the top of her head. “Couldn't Mycroft have done it later in the day?”

“If he had tried I would have been unavailable, and it was a matter of some urgency,” he said. “I just hadn't expected to have to go over some details multiple times. That was what took so long, and when we were done there was no point in attempting to go back to sleep.” He let go of her then. “I'm sorry I wasn't good company last night.”

“It's all right,” she said with a smile. “Why don't you go sit on one of the stools and I'll cook for us?”

“I can do it,” he said.

“No, let me,” she said. She moved behind him and pushed him slightly out of the kitchen. “Is there anything you're in the mood for?”

He looked back at her with a slightly amused grin before he went around the counter and sat on one of the stools on the other side. “I was simply going to make omelets, but I'm happy with whatever you want to make.”

“I was thinking pancakes might be nice. And I have some fresh blackberries I picked up at that farmer's market that I can put in the batter, if that sounds appealing.”

“I think I would like to try that,” he said with a nod.

“Well, then that's what I'll make. I'll set up the coffee first, though. I think you could use a cup.” She went to the cabinet above her coffeemaker and pulled down her coffee. “Do you still want to go to the fair today?”

“I had thought that might be nice,” he said as he leaned forward more. “It is the last day it's open. Did you not want to?”

“No, it's not that. Thomas and Jason might be going as well so Thomas and I made tentative plans to meet up at some point. I would have told you last night but you started nodding off the minute you got on the sofa.”

“I don't have a problem with spending time with them today,” he said.

“All right. I'll let them know when we're done with breakfast.” She scooped out the coffee into the coffeemaker. “By the way, Thomas admitted he set me up on horrible blind dates on purpose. He made Jason tell him about the fact I fancied you so he decided to prod us both along to admitting how we felt.”
“That is actually quite evil,” Sherlock said thoughtfully. “How did he know it would work?”

“Well, he didn't, but he'd hoped. He and Jason thought that because you moved all the way here to get me to come home I must be extremely important to you, and if you got irritated at the fact I was going out on all these dates and then you got jealous you would do something about it. And then there was always the chance I would get frustrated with all the tossers and then I would do something about it. So either way they had hope one of us would bring it up to the other, though I don't think they expected it to happen quite the way it did.” She finished what she was doing and then went to fill up the coffeepot with water before pouring it into the coffeemaker. “As it stands, I was about to tell Thomas no more dates after that last one. I think if you and I hadn't had our conversation the next morning I would have just sworn off dating no matter how lonely I got.”

“Well, I'm glad you don't have to do that now,” he said with a grin.

She gave him a grin back. “Trust me, I am too. I'm actually quite happy with how things turned out.” She turned on her coffeemaker and then began moving around her kitchen, pulling out ingredients. “New topic. How many other people skipped out on rehearsals that day?”

“Nine. Apparently there was a huge celebration for something in Leucadia the evening before and many of the orchestra members attended. Some of them were very hung over the next morning so they also said they were sick. With so many people not showing up they just canceled rehearsals that day, and when we showed up yesterday morning we were told we were going to stay much later than usual as a result, which was not what I had hoped to hear.”

She winced slightly. “I am still really sorry.”

“I think it was well worth it,” he said with a shrug. “For a first date I would say the day had gone well.”

“It went very well,” she replied. “Definitely the best date I've ever had.”

“Now I'm going to have to come up with a way to top that,” he said thoughtfully.

“You will find I am very easy to impress,” she said with a chuckle. She finished pulling down what she needed and then went to her refrigerator for the cold ingredients. “Are we going to get to stay for the fireworks tonight?”

“I had planned on it. I was told parking is a nightmare, but I suppose we'll have to deal with that. I don't feel like navigating public transportation for the first time today.”

“The Coaster is actually quite nice,” she said. “Jason and I decided to use that to get up to Oceanside to save a bit of money since we were going to have to take a cab back here. And apparently sometimes you can use the Amtrak as well. But the other public transportation in North County I'm not sure about. I know I took the trolleys down here to explore a bit and found them to not be so bad. Did you know there's a trolley line that cuts through a graveyard?”

“That's surprising,” he said.

She nodded as she put the rest of her ingredients on the counter. “The Orange Line has a part of their route going right through the middle of a very large graveyard. It's a bit unnerving the first few times, but once you get used to it it's very interesting when you really observe it.”

“One day I might have to see that for myself.”

“As I said, it's quite interesting,” she said with a smile.
“Are there other things you would recommend that we do?” he asked.

“There are quite a few museums in Balboa Park. There’s the Museum of Man, the Museum of Art, a planetarium and a few more. Usually on Tuesdays during the summer one or two of them are free to the public. And one of my coworkers told me about the Children’s Pool in La Jolla, where you can see seals. There’s a bit of controversy around that one, I gather, about whether humans are going to be allowed on the beach or whether the seals will be protected.” She paused for a moment. “Oh! Thomas said he got passes for Comic Con later this month.”

“You mean the event where it’s nearly impossible to get into and the crowds are supposedly in the tens of thousands? The one every single person I work with has started talking about and won’t stop talking about?” he asked.

She nodded, an amused smile on her face. “Thomas knows someone who had four passes through his company that no one was able to use. He has to register them by Tuesday, I already said I wanted to go, and Jason is coming. There’s a pass for you as well if you’d like one.”

“When is it?”

“The second to last week in July, from Wednesday to Sunday. You don’t have to go every day, but even going one day would make me very happy.”

He was quiet for a moment. “I may not be able to go the first three days, since our performances are the next week, but I suppose I could go on Saturday and Sunday, if you want me to,” he said finally.

“I would,” she said with a wide smile. “And if I go the other days I’ll know what’s worth going to and what isn’t by the time you get to go.”

“I think if the people we know back home hear that I’m attending a comic book convention they’ll think I’ve lost my mind,” he said.

“Then I’ll just tell them I dragged you there, kicking and screaming,” she said, chuckling.

“I don’t think you need to go that far,” he said with a small grin. “But is it just comic books?”

“Oh, no, it’s more than that. Jason got to go two years ago, and he said there are all sorts of things there. Movies, television, video games, regular books...anything you can think of that's pop culture, really. There are panels with celebrities and creators who are involved with those things, where they talk about their projects and answer questions. And there’s all sorts of free things being given away, and booths inside the Convention Center where you can buy things. I gather over the last few years it's gotten to be quite huge, as there are groups that have taken over Petco Park to have things for people who can't get inside the actual convention. And the Gaslamp Quarter usually has a few things as well.”

“I don’t think it's something I will enjoy as much as you will, but I will try to at least not complain too loudly,” he said.

She moved away from her side of the counter and moved over to where he was sitting. He turned to face her, reaching over for her and pulling her closer. She leaned in to kiss him softly when she was close enough. “That would make me quite happy,” she said when she was done.

He gave her a small smile. “Well, if it's something that will make you happy and all it will cost me is time among a crush of people then it will be worth it, I think.”

“Well, it could cost some money, if you decide you want to buy some things for yourself, and maybe
if you want to have lunch or dinner at one of the nearby restaurants,” she said with a smile. “But I plan on bringing my own money to spend. Even if we consider both days a date you shouldn't have to pay for everything.”

He was quiet for a moment. “Is my paying for things something that bothers you?” he asked.

“Not always. Sometimes I don't mind. But other times I want to do something nice for you and not have you do something nice for me.”

“Well, then I won't insist on paying for everything all the time,” he said with a slight nod. “But if it's going to be very expensive I might insist.”

“On those occasions I will probably let you,” she said.

He ran a hand up and down her back. “You know, you do in fact do things that I appreciate that don't involve money,” he replied. “I enjoy your cooking quite a bit, for one, and I'll admit that I can actually have an enjoyable evening watching films with you instead of going somewhere. The fact you want to spend time with me instead of pushing me away means more to me than anything you can buy for me.”

“Well, I like having you here,” she said, beginning to play with the collar of his shirt a bit. “And I think I like you being here even more now. I mean, now that we've started dating.”

“You think?” he teased, raising an eyebrow.

“You know what I mean,” she said.

“I do,” he said as he nodded.

“I should probably go back to making us breakfast soon, if we want to get to the fair sooner rather than later,” she replied.

“Well, I wouldn't mind another kiss first,” he replied.

“I can do that,” she said, leaning in and kissing him. This kiss lasted longer than the other one, and if she wasn't so hungry she would have just continued to do that for the rest of the morning. Soon enough, though, she pulled away to catch her breath. “Okay. Now I need to get back to making us breakfast,” she said.

“If you're sure,” he said with a grin.

“Oh, you don't know how tempted I am to just stay here for another hour or so and kiss you as much as I can. But I'm hungry.” She pulled away even more and he let her go, and she moved back to the other side of the counter and began to measure out ingredients and mix everything together. When the coffee was finished he got up and made himself a cup, and since she was busy he made her a cup as well. She was pleased to see he made it just the way she liked. They chatted as he made up the cups of coffee, and continued when she pulled out the griddle she had bought and began to make the pancakes. Soon she had a stack of them on a plate, and she served some up to him after going over to a cabinet and pulling down some syrup. She watched him take a bite before she reached into a different cabinet for a plate of her own. “Well?” she asked.

“I think I could get used to having these for breakfast,” he said when he was done eating.

“I can occasionally make them for dinner, you know,” she said with a smile. She served some up for herself, and then she reached over for the syrup, drizzling some over the pancakes. “Mashed bananas
“I’m not sure I want to try that particular addition,” he said. He took another bite. “When they weren’t terribly expensive John would occasionally add blueberries to the batter when he made them. I miss that.”

“I can do that next time,” she said as she drizzled syrup on her pancakes. “Blueberries are usually less expensive than blackberries anyway. I’d just happened to pick up three packages of the blackberries for a very low price, and I’ve mostly been snacking on the strawberries I bought.”

“The fruit here is quite inexpensive, I’ve noticed,” he said before taking another bite of food.

“Especially strawberries. I’ve heard up in North County there’s a few places where you can go pick your own. And there are roadside stands scattered all over the county as well. Strawberries grow quite easily around here.” She paused to take a bite of her pancakes. “This was definitely a good use of those blackberries,” she said when she was finished.

“As I said, I wouldn’t mind these types of pancakes more often.” He was quiet for a minute or so as he continued to eat. “Do you want to get ready to go to the fair when we’re done?” he asked when he was halfway done.

She nodded. “Do you want to take a quick shower this morning?”

“That might be best,” he said after thinking a moment. “Or at the very least I should shave.”

“I don’t know. I kind of like it,” she said with a smile. “Even if the stubble did scratch my face a bit.”

“Well, I don’t,” he replied, and with that she laughed. He raised an eyebrow and she let her laughter taper off. “I don’t know why you’re so amused.”

“I’m sorry. You just seem to be very upset about having stubble,” she replied with a warm smile.

“Stubble is very annoying. I find it to be worse than an actual beard. At least with that it didn't cause me to want to scratch my face all the time, once I was used to it.”

“You've had a beard?” she asked, surprised.

“Part of my disguise while I was gone, towards the end of my time away,” he said with a nod. “It was quite a relief when I got it shaved off. It was very unkempt, as was my hair in general. I don't think I want to go back to looking that way again for the rest of my life. Clean shaven is much better.”

“I suppose I can accept never seeing you with facial hair,” she said. “But a bit of stubble wouldn't bother me, if you forget to shave for a day.”

“I will remember that,” he replied. They lapsed into silence as they ate, and when he was done she reached over her counter and got his plate before taking it to her sink to go with the other dishes. She turned back and saw he was watching her intently. She raised an eyebrow at him and he grinned. “I'm just appreciating the view.”

“You saw me in less clothing than this at the beach,” she pointed out.

“And I appreciated that view too,” he replied.

She shook her head, though she was grinning. “I suppose I should be glad I have your attention.”
He looked a bit more serious for a moment before he stood up and came into the kitchen, standing closer to her. “I should have given you my attention much earlier. That was my fault.”

“Well, it just took you some time to figure things out,” she said.

“Five years is a bit more than ’some time,’” he pointed out.

“I was thinking more since I left,” she said, moving into his personal space. “I know up until your fall we weren't friends, and then we were sort of friends. It wasn't until I moved here that I think you started to think of me as a friend, and then eventually as more than a friend, even though you didn't realize it at first. So...” She thought in her head a moment. “Five months isn't too bad. It's better than five years.”

He nodded, then reached over to touch her face. “I thought of you as a friend by the time I came home.”

“I didn't realize that,” she said. “I probably should have, though. But it took you some time to think of me in a more than friendly way.”

“You've waited a very long time for us to get to this point, though. I may not have felt this way towards you until recently, but you were attracted to me for years.”

“I suppose if you look at it that way then it was a very long wait,” she said quietly. “But I think it will be worth it, and that's the important part.”

“I suppose it is.” He leaned in and kissed her then, and she moved her hands to his chest as she kissed him back. This really was what she had wanted for so long, and she didn't think he would ever fully understand just how happy she was. She would try and explain it, of course, but she didn't think she could put it into words that would accurately describe exactly how she felt. Too soon for her taste he pulled away from her. “I should probably go home and get ready,” he murmured.

“You probably should. As much as I would like to continue what we were doing if there's going to be crowds and traffic the earlier we leave the better.” She moved her hands away from him and then she took a step back before making a slight shooing motion with her hands, which caused him to grin. “Besides, if you do stay here I don't think we'll actually go anywhere, and that would be a shame.”

“All right, I'll go get ready,” he said before turning around. “Go ahead and let yourself into my apartment if you're done before I am.”

“I will,” she called after him. She waited for him to open and close her door, and then she heard him lock it behind him. She grinned and then went back to the dishes. She rinsed everything off and then put it all in her dishwasher. When she was done she left the kitchen and went back to her bedroom, trying to decide what was appropriate to wear. She had never been to the racetrack before but she knew it was a coastal area and there might be a breeze. In the end she decided on a sleeveless purple dress and a pair of flats with a wide brimmed hat to keep the sun off her face. It didn't take her very long to get ready, and once she checked her handbag to make sure she had everything she needed she left her apartment, pulling out her keys. Her mobile rang just after she closed her door, and it was the distinctive ringtone she had for Thomas. “Please tell me you're still going to the fair,” she said as soon as she answered.

“Well, our ride decided to go to a block party in Mission Beach instead so that put the kibosh on Plan A,” he replied. “We still want to go, though, so I thought I'd ask if you'd give us a lift if you're still going.” He paused. “You haven't already left yet, have you?”
She chuckled. “No, I haven’t. I’m still at home.”

“Oh, good,” he said with a sigh of relief.

“I have enough seats in my vehicle for you and Jason to come with us,” she replied. “As soon as Sherlock gets ready we can head over to your home and pick the two of you up.”

“That’s what I was hoping you'd say. Jason seemed quite upset about possibly not getting to go. Cab fare to Del Mar and back would be too much, and I'm not in the mood to deal with all the people on the train and the public shuttles for the entire trip up there and back. Jason wouldn't mind, but then he never does. And we'd miss the fireworks besides, and that's something we both wanted to see. This is Jason's favorite time of the year, with the fair and Comic Con. He’s such a child at heart and I absolutely love that about him.”

“I do too,” she said. “Oh! Speaking of Comic Con, Sherlock said he would go, but only on Saturday and Sunday since he's getting ready for his performances that week. I don't think he wants to brave the crowds but he knows that would make me happy so he's agreed to go with me those two days instead of relaxing before he has to perform.”

“Are you going to go all five days?” he asked.

“Absolutely. I'm just waiting to get my vacation days approved. I should know in a week or so, and if I don't get them off I'll see if I can swap shifts with people.” She shifted her hold on the phone so she could lock up her apartment. “Depending on when Sherlock finishes getting ready we should be over to get the both of you in a half hour or so.”

“We'll be ready. And we'll pitch in for petrol and parking.”

“You really don't have to.”

“No, I insist,” Thomas said. “We were going to do that for our other friend. It wouldn't be fair if we didn't extend the same offer to you.”

She chuckled as she locked up and then moved down the hallway to Sherlock's apartment. “Then I'll take you up on your generous offer. And this also solves the problem of finding the correct way to get there. I'll have people there who can give directions.”

“See? We can be especially useful,” he replied. “We'll be ready in a half hour. Just ring us up when you're outside.”

“We'll see you soon then.” She hung up at that point and then selected Sherlock's key before letting herself in. She could hear the shower running and then stop a few minutes after she locked the door behind her and drifted towards the living room. She sat down on his sofa and made herself comfortable. When she heard the washroom door open she spoke. “I'm here already,” she called out.

“I shouldn't be more than ten minutes,” Sherlock called back.

“We're picking up Thomas and Jason, but they'll be able to tell us how to get there better,” she replied.

“Then I'll try and dress more quickly,” he said in response. She settled into his sofa, pulling out her phone for a moment as she browsed through the various status updates on Facebook. Sherlock came out nearly ten minutes later, dressed for the warmer weather. This time she was the one appreciating the view before he went over to the low bookshelf in his hallway and picked up his wallet. “Are you ready to go?” he asked.
She nodded and stood up. “Yes, I am.” They made their way to the door and out into the hallway, pausing so he could lock up. They were almost to the gate when her mobile rang again. She glanced at it and saw it was a number she didn’t recognize. She really didn’t want to answer it, but with a sigh she pulled out her phone and answered it. “Hello?” she asked as Sherlock stopped.

“Molly?” she heard a familiar voice ask. It was Tabitha, Aaron’s wife. She sounded worried.

“Tabitha? What is it?” she asked with a frown.

“Aaron had a heart attack,” she said, and Molly’s eyes widened.

“Is he all right?” she asked.

“Yes, he's fine, but they had to do surgery,” Tabitha replied. “I’m calling his friends to let them know he’ll be in the hospital for a few days if they want to come visit. I didn’t want to tell anyone until he’d woken up from surgery and I was sure everything was all right but he’s awake now.”

“Of course I’ll come visit,” she said. “What hospital is he at?”

“UCSD, in Hillcrest.”

“I live in the neighborhood near there,” she said. “Is he able to have visitors now?”

“Yes.”

She looked over at Sherlock, who nodded and pulled his own mobile out of his pocket and pulled up a contact before moving away. “We’ll be there soon, then. I mean, I will.”

“Oh dear. Were you in the middle of something?”

“I was, but it’s not important,” she said. Then she paused. “Since he’s awake, ask him if he still wants to meet Sherlock.”

There was a muffled conversation on the other end, and then Tabitha spoke to her again. “He would absolutely love to meet Sherlock. I think that’s the widest smile I’ve ever seen on his face all week.”

“Then we’ll be there soon, I promise.”

“All right. We’ll be waiting.”

Molly hung up and looked over at Sherlock, who was still on the phone. “If you’re on the phone with Jason or Thomas tell them it won’t be long. We just need to make a trip to the hospital.”

Sherlock nodded and relayed that to whoever he was talking to, and after a few more seconds he hung up. “Thomas said that’s fine and to take as long as we need to. I imagine something happened to a friend?”

“One of my coworkers who I’m close to, Aaron, had a heart attack. He’s the one that wanted to meet you. He's awake now, and he can have visitors.”

“Then this will be a trip that I don’t mind making,” he replied. They began to move towards the gate again. “I’m honestly surprised we didn’t do this before now.”

“Well, he usually works weekends, and you aren’t available during the week and the few times he's had weekends off he's had other plans. All of our schedules never quite synched up.” She opened the gate for them. “This isn't how I expect he wanted to spend his holiday.”
“No, I can't imagine anyone wants to have a heart attack. Did he have surgery?”

“Yes, though I don't know what kind.” She paused for a moment “I wonder if his daughter will be there. She's become one of my good friends. She must be worried sick.”

“I can imagine,” he said with a nod. They began to move towards Molly's vehicle. “Do you ever think of what might happen if you were to be injured or become gravely ill?”

“Well, I have some plans for it. I have you listed as my emergency contact,” she said, and she noted he looked surprised. “You're here and you know how to contact everyone back home, which makes you a good choice. I'm still debating whether I want to give you the authority to make decisions if I can't.”

“I haven't done any planning like that,” he said thoughtfully. “I probably should.”

“That would be smart,” she said.

“Would you allow me to use you as my emergency contact?” he asked as she got to the passenger side and unlocked it for him.

“I wouldn't mind,” she said, giving him a quick smile as she moved away from his side and went to her side. “And whatever level of authority you want to give me is fine. I'll do my best to follow your wishes, if you want me to make decisions for you.”

“It's strange, talking about this. It's not something I generally think about.”

“Well, I had to,” she said. “When I saw my doctor for the first time they asked for all of that information. I didn't know who to put down and they recommended I not have any of my friends in London because of the differences in phone numbers, and then the nurse pointed out they wouldn't really be able to make any decisions in my care unless they were out here if I gave them authority to make decisions. So until you decided to stay out here I couldn't think of anyone to have as a contact. I probably should have asked you first, now that I think about it.”

“It's all right,” he said as she unlocked her own door.

They got into the car and lapsed into silence as she drove them over to the hospital. They went into the parking lot and parked in one of the spots, and then made their way over to the hospital. There were a lot of buildings but she guessed he was at the main building, and she was rewarded with being told she had in fact gone to the right place. They were both given visitors passes and then they made their way up to his room. Tabitha was sitting near the bed with a book, and Aaron appeared to be dozing. Molly knocked on the door softly and both of them looked over in their direction. “I must look horrible,” Aaron said with a wry grin.

“No, at all,” she said with a smile before coming into the room and giving him a hug. He hugged her back as much as he was able to for a moment and then looked behind her. “I brought a guest, so let me make introductions. Aaron, this is Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock, this is Aaron Kleinman.”

“I'd shake your hand but with all these tubes it's a bit hard,” Sherlock said with a grin as he settled back on the bed.

“You're quite a bit taller than I imagined. Either that, or John Watson is very short,” he said with a grin as he settled back on the bed.

“John is shorter than I am. I don't know if I would say quite a bit, but it's noticeable,” Sherlock said
with a slight grin of his own. “I understand you’re a fan of his blog?”

“I am. I was rather in awe of what you did. You seem quite brilliant.”

“Well, I am, but John would tend to play it up a bit more in the blog posts. Some of the cases I solved were quite simple and I was surprised the police even called me in to consult,” he said. “He wrote about all the cases, even those and the easily solved ones brought to me by the general public. He said that everyone should know about all the cases.”

“Ah. And are you consulting while you're here?” Aaron asked.

Sherlock shook his head. “No. I've decided to pursue other interests while I'm here. I sincerely doubt I will go back to consulting again, even if I do not remain here for a long time.”

He looked surprised. “Why, if I might ask?”

“Quite a few things happened to me over the last few years that have changed me as a person. Consulting didn't give me the same satisfaction anymore. When Molly moved here to California I had more or less stopped consulting by that point, and I've found the one time I've had to go back since then I was unhappy with it all.” He was quiet for a moment. “I don't mind talking about old cases, though, if you would like to.”

“Well, I don't want to take up your whole morning,” he replied.

“We can spare some time,” Molly said with a smile. “We were just going to go to the fair with some friends. They've said they can wait a bit.”

“If you're sure,” Aaron said.

“I think we can spare an hour or so, if you're not too tired,” Molly said, and Sherlock nodded.

“All right,” Aaron said. “The most interesting case I found was the one that involved the dominatrix that was known as The Woman. Could you tell me more about that one for a start?”

Sherlock looked slightly pained for a moment, but he launched into the story. Molly listened intently; even though she'd read John's blog it was interesting hearing the story from Sherlock's perspective. Aaron asked about a few more cases after that, and even when they went past the hour she didn't stop either of them from talking about them. It was nearly two hours later when Aaron began to look tired. “We can continue this some other time,” Sherlock said when he finished relating the story of the Chinese assassins’ case. “If you're going to be here tomorrow I can come by then.”

“I would enjoy the company,” Aaron said. “Thank you for coming today. It was a pleasure to meet you, Sherlock.”

“You as well,” Sherlock said, inclining his head towards Aaron.

Sherlock stood from the chair he had been sitting in and joined Molly, who had moved towards the door. She gave Aaron a smile and a wave. “I'll come visit too,” she said.

“I feel horrible. We completely ignored you, Molly,” Aaron said.

“It's all right. You two looked as though you were enjoying yourselves. I'll come at a different time, I think, so we can talk.” She paused, then moved away from the door and went towards his bed, leaning over and giving him a kiss on the cheek. “Feel better,” she said when she pulled away.
“Have fun at the fair,” he said with a smile, and then Molly moved away and went back over to Sherlock.

The two of them made their way back out towards the car. Molly called Thomas to tell him they were on their way because Sherlock appeared to be lost in thought, and he waited until they were in the car to speak again. “He seemed quite interested in my former career,” he said. “The only real fans I've been used to dealing with, if you can really call them that, were Irene and Moriarty, and they had ulterior motives. It's an interesting experience to talk to someone who is genuinely interested in the cases.”

“Well, he's a very sweet man,” she said as she got them to the pay station to pay for parking. “And I suppose he's like me, in that he picked this career because helping to solve mysteries appeals to him. Getting to talk to someone who solved extremely complicated cases is a bit of a thrill.”

“Was it a thrill for you?” he asked

“I suppose.” She thought for a moment as she paid for parking and they pulled out of the lot. “I was a bit different, in that I fancied you very much. I got more of a thrill having you in the same room until you opened your mouth most times,” she said with a slightly wry smile. “And then you'd go and I'd stew about it and forgive you and then it would start all over again the next time you came to see me for autopsy results.”

“I'm sorry,” he replied.

“It's all right, Sherlock. Honest,” she said, her smile becoming brighter. She turned her attention back to the road as she made her way away from the hospital and began to head towards Thomas and Jason's home. “It's all in the past.”

Sherlock settled into his seat more. “Did you read John's blog?”

“Oh, all the time. I'd read John's blog every time he updated and learned all about the cases you solved that didn't involve me or learned full details of the ones that did. It was quite a fascinating read.”

“You had one a blog as well,” he said.

She winced. “It wasn't anything special. If you'd read it you would probably think it was pointless drivel,” she said quietly.

“Actually, when I was gone and I could I would read the entries, just as I would read John's posts about our cases. It was a way to remember home.”

“I stopped updating long ago, though,” she replied, slightly surprised.

“I understand why you stopped updating it but I had rather hoped you would continue. At least then I would have known you and the others were all right. I was almost completely in the dark the two years I was gone. Mycroft filled me in on quite a bit when he collected me but there was a lot he didn't say as well.”

“How much did he say about me?” she asked curiously.

“I knew more about you and John than the others, and so I knew about what had been going on with your career and your personal life. I knew all about Tom and how he resembled me before the day at my home, at any rate,” he said. “Mycroft didn't appear to judge you for choosing him, which was surprising. I think he knew when it came to you I would have been cross if he'd made snide remarks..."
about it. Either way, I was informed of the basic details of what had happened to you before I arrived at St. Bart's. I filled in the rest with the conversation we had that evening."

“That is actually something I should have expected but feel slightly unnerved about,” she said. “Mycroft does an awful lot of spying on people, doesn’t he? Especially people involved in your life. I mean, I would think he feels an obligation to because he wants to protect you.”

He nodded. “The phrase 'Big Brother is watching' takes on an entirely different meaning when it comes to me,” he said. “Mycroft has eyes and ears everywhere. I think he prefers spying on people than actually getting involved. He usually has me do all the dirty work once he has the information and he stays nice and safe in London. He complained quite bitterly about having to extricate me from what I was doing himself.”

“Serves him right,” she said, flashing him a quick smile.

“You know, I feel the same way about it,” he said. “I have always enjoyed tweaking his nose when I can. I get a rather perverse pleasure out of it.”

“I don’t know. I thought all little brothers were supposed to be annoying,” she mused. “He was probably told to expect it as the eldest brother.”

“Well, he’s not the eldest so I don’t think he quite expected it to turn out the way it did,” he said thoughtfully.

“You have another brother?” she asked, surprised. “You’ve never talked about him before.”

“I don’t talk about him at all, really,” Sherlock said with a shrug. “I think he was six years older than Mycroft, and Mycroft is older than me by almost ten years. Or he was six years older, I suppose. I don’t even know if he’s still alive.”

“How can you not know how old your brother is? Or whether he's still alive?” she asked with a look of confusion on her face. “I mean, he's your brother.”

He was quite for a moment. “I was an unexpected surprise to my parents, and whatever happened with my eldest brother happened while my mother was pregnant with me. To be honest, I didn't know about him until I snooped around when I was seven. I still don't know much of anything related to him because when Mycroft began getting groomed for the government position he has now he basically destroyed all traces of my eldest brother, and no one in my family will acknowledge his existence. No matter how hard I dig I find nothing. I have no birth date or birthplace, no exact age, just a general guess at those. All I know is his name.”

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covering up criminal activities, would be a good direction to move in.”

“You could have gone an entirely different route in life if you were a bit more evil about it,” she replied.

“It's much more risky to be a blackmailer than to be a consulting detective. Irene Adler nearly lost her life because of the secrets she kept on her phone.”

“But she is dead,” she said slowly.

“Actually, she's not. It's the one case John got wrong. There are three people in the world who know she's still alive.” He paused. “Four now, because I'm telling you. When I got that text message at the Christmas party I received the phone that she kept her blackmail on. That was what I picked up off of the mantle. Then I contacted Mycroft and told him to be on the lookout for her body.”

“But what about the woman you identified?”

“The woman I identified in the morgue all those years ago was not actually Irene. She had faked her death because, as I told Aaron, dangerous people were after her. I knew it wasn't her but I played my part in maintaining the fiction by saying it was her. John can attest to the fact it wasn't really her; she showed up at our flat a time later and got me to decipher a code which she then sent to Moriarty, ruining one of Mycroft's plans. Anyway, she attempted to extort money from the British government but I foiled her plan by cracking her phone's password and unlocking all her secrets. After a while Mycroft had a meeting with John and told him she was dead, and he gave John things of hers, including the phone she had kept all her secrets on. But Mycroft and I both knew the truth, that I had rescued her from terrorists a few weeks prior and that she was still alive and off somewhere with a new identity.”

“And where is she now?” she asked, turning to glance at him with a curious look on her face.

“I haven't the faintest idea,” he said with a shrug. “She's hidden herself quite well and I really have no inclination to look for her. I suppose I could find her again if I had reason to, but I'd prefer to keep that chapter of my life in the past. She beat me twice and I still get irritated by the whole affair.”

“That explains the look on your face when Aaron asked about that case. You really didn't want to talk about that one,” she said, turning back to the road.

“No, I didn't. But he didn't know why so I went over the version of events most of the public knows from John's blog.”

She was quiet for a few minutes. “Thank you for trusting me with the truth. That actually means a lot to me.”

“You've already proven you can keep a secret quite well, and I don't think you would do anything to willingly put her in jeopardy,” he replied. “You aren't that type of person.”

“Well, I won't say a word about it, not even to John,” she said.

“I would appreciate that,” he said with a nod. “We should probably change the subject now, since even though I am friendly with Thomas and Jason I don't want them knowing either of the things we've just spoken about.”

“All right,” she said as she nodded. “Why don't you call them and tell them we should be there in about ten minutes, and to make sure they're out front?”
“I can do that,” he said as he pulled his mobile out of his pocket. He made the call while she concentrated on driving, and soon they had pulled up in front of the complex where their two friends lived. Jason and Thomas got in after Jason begged for her to put the top down, and soon they were off, heading towards Del Mar. The traffic they encountered astounded Molly, and it felt like it took them forever to actually get to the racetrack and parked in one of the lots designated for people attending the fair. They got on a shuttle to take them to the actual fair and eventually got to the main entrance. Molly had been around a crush of people before, but there were so many people here that she was surprised they were still letting people into the fair.

Once they got inside Jason began directing the other three towards certain things he wanted to see, and they spent quite a few hours together before they separated. It was nearly four when Molly and Sherlock found themselves left alone. Neither of them were in a real hurry to see anything in particular, and they both took the time to explore the food booths and the exhibit halls. When the load of purchases got to be too much to carry they left the fair and headed back to her vehicle, depositing their purchases before going back in and looking around some more. It was already dark when they made their way to the rides at the back of the fair. Jason had mentioned some of the ones that had sounded interesting and so when they got their ride coupons she pulled Sherlock along, much to his amusement. The more she looked at the rides the more she thought she wanted to do as many as she could. It had been a very long time since she'd been on carnival rides. But it appeared as though everyone else had the same idea, as the queues were quite long. “We should have come here earlier,” she said after a few minutes.

“Well, we could always chose the ones that look the most appealing and do those now and then come back after the fireworks,” he replied. “The fair is open until midnight and I doubt everyone will be staying that late. And we already know Jason wants to stay until the very end.”

“Good point,” she said with a chuckle. She looked around and then pointed at the Ferris wheel. “Let's do the Ferris wheel first. If we don't do anything else I'd like to do that today.”

“All right,” he said. They moved towards it and then made their way to the queue, settling in for the wait. “Are you enjoying yourself?” he asked.

She nodded. “There are a lot of things to do here. I think next year I'll come more than once so I can really do more of everything and not squeeze it all into one day.”

“I didn't realize it was quite this big,” he said. “Or that there was so much to experience.”

“I'm glad we thought to leave and go back to my car to take the things we purchased here,” she replied. “We should have extended the same offer to Thomas and Jason, but I believe Jason said they were mostly going to concentrate of food and rides.”

“Well, we did leave them room in the car boot if they need it,” he said. He reached over for her hand and she grinned as she grasped it. “I'll admit that this is fairly enjoyable, even if it does feel like the entire county is here.”

“I'm glad you're having fun even with the crowds,” she said. “And you have tomorrow to recover.”

“Yes, I do,” he said with a nod. “As do you.”

“Actually, I don't,” she said. “While you were getting food earlier I got a call. I'm being asked to come in at ten tomorrow since Aaron is in the hospital. I'll be working a few longer shifts and extra shifts to compensate for us being down a coroner until he's cleared to resume work. But my supervisor said if I do this for a few weeks she'll make it a point to give me the five days off I requested for Comic Con, so I'm more than willing to pitch in.”
“Then perhaps we shouldn't stay so late,” he said with a frown.

“It's all right. I don't want to ruin anyone else's fun,” she said, shaking her head. “Jason is working at the coffee shop in the morning and I'll just ask him to put extra espresso in my coffee, and I'll get a larger one than I usually get. I don't think he's actually going to go to sleep tonight since he has to be there at six in the morning, but I'll try and get at least a few hours rest.”

“If you're sure,” he said slowly.

“I am.” She gave him a smile. “Besides, I've decided I like very long dates with you. I don't want to the evening to end until it absolutely has to.”

He gave her grin back. “You really do enjoy my company.”

“Quite a bit, actually. I think you're going to get tired of me before I get tired of you.”

He stepped closer to her. “Somehow I doubt that,” he replied. “I traveled eight thousand miles to be in your company again, remember?”

“Why yes, you did,” she said with a laugh, leaning in and kissing him softly. It wasn't a very long kiss, but it was still nice. When she pulled away she still had a smile on her face. “I'll try and remember that if we ever have a fight.”

“I've always found there's a difference between a disagreement and a fight. I would prefer us to have disagreements rather than fights,” he said.

“When you lived with John did you have more disagreements or fights?” she asked.

“Disagreements. He'd go off to a pub and have a pint or I'd go into my room to play the violin for a while, but generally one of us was able to forgive the other and forget about it after a bit of time. Usually he was the one doing the forgiving and forgetting, but generally we didn't have screaming matches. We've only had one real fight, and that was purposefully on my part.”

“What fight was that?” she asked.

“The day I met Moriarty on the roof. The day I fell,” he said quietly. “I purposefully acted cold and uncaring and he yelled for a few moments and left. I did that to get him away from the hospital, but he came back. I had hoped he wouldn't be there to see what I knew I was going to have to do, but when he arrived again I had to change plans to make sure he saw what I wanted him to see.”

She let go of his hand and wrapped her arms around him, and after a moment he embraced her back. “But you kept him safe,” she said quietly.

“I know. Still, he spent a long while believing that one of the last things he had done in regard to me was speak ill towards me. He regretted that for a long time. I know it worked out for the best, but I still caused him pain.”

“You didn't want to, though. That has to count for something,” she replied.

“It does. Now that he knows the truth he understands why I did what I did. But that doesn't take away from the pain I caused him.” He let go of her then. “The queue has moved forward.”

She nodded and let go of him, then reached over for his hand. “I think we should change the subject, don't you?” she asked.
“That would be a very good idea,” he said with a nod. “I was thinking I might cook for you tomorrow night. Do you know when you should arrive home?”

“Probably around seven or seven-thirty. Aaron usually works from nine to five, but since I'm coming in at ten I'll be there at least until six, and then I might hit traffic. If you aim for seven and I have to wait then that's not a problem.”

He nodded. “Then I'll do that. I've been in the mood for beef wellington lately and I thought I would make that for our meal.”

“Oh, that sounds lovely,” she said with a smile.

“And since I'll need to get a bottle of red wine for it, I'll get something you might actually like to drink in case you want a glass with the meal.”

“You know, you really are quite considerate,” she said with a smile, stepping close to him again. She leaned in and gave him a very quick kiss, if only because she was worried the line would move again and the people behind them would get angry if they held up the line. “But if you want, I actually have a very nice vintage in my apartment, the Paloma 2001 Merlot. It's supposed to be one of the best. I haven't had a chance to open it yet so you can take it home with you and use it tomorrow.”

“I will make sure there's enough left for you to have a glass,” he said. Then he paused. “I may try a bit of that myself.”

“I thought you didn't drink alcohol,” she teased, smiling at him.

“I will on rare occasions. What few times I have had alcohol have usually been ale of some sort or bourbon my brother forced on me. Wine is not something I've had a lot of. Getting to sample a superior vintage would be something I think I should experience at least once.”

“Since I moved to California I've thought about just taking a long holiday and going to Napa Valley and visiting a lot of vineyards for wine tastings,” she said. “I enjoy wine more than any other type of alcoholic drink. I just never seem to have the time off when I have the money, or the money when I have the time off.”

He tilted his head slightly, as though he was thinking. “Well, if it's something you truly want to do, I don't mind taking you if you can get the time off. I think this would fall under one of the very expensive dates, so I wouldn't have a problem covering the expenses.”

“You'd really do that for me?” she asked, her smile getting wider. He nodded slowly and she moved close and kissed him again. Other people in the queue be damned, she was going to show she really appreciated the gesture and give him a kiss he deserved. He settled his hands on her waist as he kissed her back, and they pulled apart quite a few minutes when someone behind them cleared their throat. “I think we need to move forward again,” she said with a chuckle.

“I believe so,” he said with a nod as he let her go. He took her hand again and they moved forward in the line. It seemed to be going at a fast clip, and soon enough they were in one of the seats. “I don't think I've ever been in one of these before,” he remarked.

“It's quite a bit of fun,” she said. “I did it when I was very young. I hope they pause when each car is at the top so you can get the view.”

“That would be interesting,” he said with a nod. “I suppose it might have been a better view if we'd done this at sunset, however.”
“Probably,” she said, smiling. “But it will probably be interesting getting to view the whole area lit up at night as well.” They began to move at that point, and as they rose higher she used the opportunity to look around, taking in the fair as a whole and the other rides in particular. “I'm seeing all sorts of other things I want to try that we haven't gotten to yet.”

“We have...” He glanced at his watch. “Four and a half hours. If we stay in this area for the rest of the night we can probably get quite a few of them in.”

“But I don't want to miss the fireworks,” she said.

“It's still a bit of time until the fireworks. As they draw nearer we can leave this area and go somewhere with a better vantage point, and then come back when they're over.”

“That sounds like a good plan.” She leaned over and put her head on his shoulder. “Even with this morning not going quite according to plan, it's been a very good day. I'm glad we got to come here.”

“I'm glad we did too,” he replied. Then he nudged her head up with his shoulder and pointed to his side. “Look. There are a few fireworks.”

She grinned. “Jason said some people shoot off illegal fireworks at the beaches.”

“I suppose he would be doing that if he could?” he asked in an amused tone.

“Oh, most definitely,” she said with a laugh. “But he told me apparently it's legal to shoot off fireworks in Los Angeles, so maybe next year if we don't come here we can go up there and try our own hand at having a fireworks display.”

“I will leave that up to the two of you. I'm not in the mood to blow myself up.”

She snuggled closer to him. “Well...maybe I'll just watch him do it.”

He was quiet for a moment. “It feels strange, making plans for a year in advance. Things could always change and they won't happen. One or both of us might not be here, or we may no longer be in a relationship if we do both stay.”

“But then there's always the chance we'll both be here and we'll still be together,” she pointed out. “None of us know what's going to happen next, but if we live like we're afraid of whatever the future might bring then that's not a life worth living. It's not a life I want to live anymore, at any rate.”

He nodded. “I suppose you're right. So let's make tentative plans. If we're both still here and want to be in each other's company we'll either come back here or we'll see about making some other plans that most likely involve fireworks. Preferably not ones we're shooting off ourselves.”

She laughed and then leaned in closer to him. “Deal,” she said with a smile.

He looked at her intently. “I know we're supposed to be taking in the view but I would like to kiss you right now.”

“By all means, go ahead,” she said with a nod. “I won't say no to that.” He gave her a slight nod and leaned in and kissed her, and as she kissed him back she found herself hoping that come next year they were still together and could make plans for the next year, because she really didn't want to think there might be a point where they weren't near each other. She was quite happy now, and she wanted to stay happy with him as long as she could, and she rather hoped he felt the same way about it. Only time would tell.
Molly threw herself into her job for the next two weeks, working long shifts and shifts she normally didn't work and not taking many days off. The day Aaron finally came back to work everyone at their job showed up to greet him, herself included, and when the impromptu celebration was over she made her way home. Her superiors had come through and given her the entire five days she had requested off for Comic Con, but they felt she needed a break after putting in more hours than anyone else and so she had the rest of the day and the next day off. What she really wanted to do was sleep for a few hours and then spend the rest of her time at home relaxing but she also wanted to spend time with Sherlock since she had basically ignored him most of the time she'd been working so hard. She went to her apartment and saw a note taped to the door. She pulled down the note and recognized it as Sherlock's handwriting, and so she began to read it. She frowned as she finished it and then turned to her side and went to his apartment, knocking on the door. He answered a minute later and she gave him a confused look. “Where are you sending me off to?” she asked, holding up the note.

“A spa, so you can relax for a few hours,” he said.

Her eyes widened slightly. “You don't have to. Honest.”

“You've looked dead on your feet the last few times I've seen you, and you've appeared to be stressed. I thought you might enjoy the chance to be pampered before we spent any more time together,” he said. “And the spa also has a hair salon so you can look your best for the date I have planned for us.”

She gave him a wide smile. “A spa day and a date. That is a very nice surprise,” she replied.

“There are two other ones in your apartment. One is hanging in your closet and the other is on your nightstand,” he said.

“How long have you been planning this?” she asked, surprised.

“Four days,” he replied. “When you mentioned that you hoped we could have an actual date where we got to go somewhere nice for the evening the last time I saw you I thought I might actually make that a reality. I hope you like the dress. One of the women I work with suggested a shop to look at and I had help picking it out, but there is always the chance you won't think it suits you.”

“Do I get to know where we're going?” she asked.

He shook his head. “It's a surprise.”

“Well, it's a good thing I like surprises,” she said, nodding slightly. “How am I getting to this spa?”

“At noon there is going to be a car to pick you up. You get to stay for five hours having any treatments you want, and then a car will bring you back here and wait while you get ready and then it will take you to where we'll be having dinner.”

“All right.” She moved closer to him. “One day I am going to find a way to do something very nice for you in return for the nice things you've done for me.”

“Well, I enjoy making you smile,” he said. “As long as you continue to enjoy my company you don't need to do much more than that.”
“Oh, but it's something I want to do,” she replied. “And I think you'll enjoy my attempts as well.”

“I probably will,” he said as he pulled her closer. “To be honest I thought you might be upset. I don't know if you had any plans for what you wanted to do today.”

“Well, I had hoped to sleep a bit and then spend time with you. But this is a nice way to spend the day, too,” she said, moving her arms so she could put them around his neck. “And besides, I haven't gotten to go on a very nice date with you yet. I think this is a better way to spend my day. I'll be much happier and more relaxed tomorrow.”

“I suppose I can't argue with that logic,” he replied.

“That just shows you are a very smart man,” she said before leaning in and kissing him softly. When she pulled away she gave him a smile. “Are you going to give me any hints at all as to where we're going for our meal?”

“It's in San Diego County,” he said with a grin.

“That leaves any number of places,” she said.

“I know.”

“So it's a place that has reservations and it's in San Diego,” she said, thinking for a moment. “And it's some place nice, or else you wouldn't have me looking my best. I think I can narrow it down if I use the browser on my phone.”

“No trying to cheat,” he said. “That defeats the purpose of the surprise.”

“All right,” she said. “I promise I won't try and figure it out.”

“Thank you,” he replied. “I like the idea of being able to surprise you.”

“Trying to surprise you would take a gargantuan effort, I think,” she said. “But if I could pull it off I'm sure it would be worth it. So I may try that at some point.”

“Well, if you tell me it's a surprise I will try my best not to suss it out,” he said. “Just because you won't want me to.”

“Good,” she replied. “Can you at least tell me where the spa is?”

“It's the Bellagio Salon & Day Spa in Mission Valley,” he said.

Her eyes widened. “Oh, I've heard that place is quite nice. All sorts of massages and things like that.”

“One of the women in the orchestra was surprised with a two hour visit there from her husband. I asked her for more particulars and when she told me I thought it might be something you'd enjoy. Thomas and Jason said they'd also heard good things about it from their female friends who have gone as well. And supposedly it keeps getting ranked as the best day spa in the area,” he said.

“Well, then I'm sure I'll quite enjoy it. Did they say if there's any specific treatments I should get done while I'm there?” she asked.

“My coworker mentioned something called a Brazilian Blowout that they do there. She had it done and there was a noticeable difference in her hair afterward.”

“I'll have to ask more about it, because I'll admit I don't know anything about treatments for my hair,”
she replied. “Usually I just get a trim and maybe a bit of styling.”

“Whatever you want done is covered,” he said. “You’ve worked quite hard the last few weeks and you deserve to have some time being pampered.”

“I don’t think I’m going to be able to say thank you enough,” she said.

“Simply saying thank you will be enough, I promise,” he replied. “Though also spending time with me tomorrow would be nice, especially if you cook.”

She gave him a wide smile. “Well, then I’ll spend all day with you tomorrow, and I can definitely cook for you.”

“Is there anything you particularly want to do tomorrow?”

She thought for a moment. “I was thinking just a day in. Go rent a bunch of films and spend the day on the sofa, only getting up long enough to eat.”

“You probably wanted to do that today,” he said after a moment.

“I had thought about it, but I think I’ll like this much more,” she said reassuringly. “And this way I’ll actually be nice and relaxed instead of sore and stiff like I am now.”

“If you’re sure,” he said.

“I am very sure,” she said before she leaned in and kissed him again. True, she had wanted to sleep, but this was really quite thoughtful, and she knew she would probably feel so much more refreshed afterward. After a minute he pulled her closer and she felt herself grin slightly into the kiss. She really had missed spending time with him, and it was quite evident he had missed her as well. This made her feel quite happy, she realized. Finally she ended the kiss and looked up at him, her eyes bright. “I should probably see about getting something to eat. I only had a quick bite before I headed out,” she said.

“Supposedly there’s a lunch involved. And champagne,” he said.

“Oh, I definitely think I’m going to like this place,” she said with a chuckle. “Well, then I’ll just spend some more time with you, then.”

“You should probably go take a look at your dress before you go,” he said.

“Do you want to come over while I take a look?” she asked.

He nodded. “I could do that.”

“All right.” She let go of him and then the two of them left his apartment. She’d been so preoccupied with talking to him and being close that she had completely forgotten they’d only been just inside his apartment and the door had been open the whole time. She felt a bit bad about that, but he hadn’t seemed to mind. They made their way to her apartment and she let them in. “It’s in my closet?” she asked as she shut the door behind him.

“In the garment bag,” he said with a nod. She made her way to her bedroom with him behind her, and she saw the bag hanging up in her closet just like he had said. She pulled it out and laid it on her bed, and then she unzipped it. She took the dress off the hanger and looked at it, her eyes wide. It was a black and white cocktail dress that looked like it would end just above the knee. The dress itself was white and a heavier fabric than silk but still felt silky, and it would have been a strapless
dress if the top of the dress, from the shoulders to the black sash around the waistline, hadn't been covered in a fine black lace. It was beautiful and definitely something she would have picked out for herself if she'd been given the chance. “Do you like it?” he asked quietly.

“Sherlock, I love it,” she said, looking away from the dress to see him leaning in her doorway. He seemed to visibly relax and she smiled at him widely. “I think I even know the perfect pair of shoes to pair with it.”

“There had been another dress the sales associate had suggested but since I only knew your dress size and not your preference when it came to shoes I held off on buying it,” he said. “It was a purple one and I wasn't sure you'd have anything else to wear with it.”

“Well, maybe if you tell me where you went for the dress I can see if I like it and what I might wear with it,” she said as she began to put the dress away again. When she was finished she looked up at him. “You said I had something else here?”

“The clutch on your nightstand,” he said with a nod. She moved over to it and she saw a black clutch with a black lace overlay and a black stone on the clasp that kept it closed. “Just in case you didn't have something that went with your dress already.”

“I did but this one is even lovelier,” she said as she picked it up. She opened it and saw there was enough space for her mobile, some lipstick and her keys and not much else. She set it down again and went over to Sherlock. “You really are very good to me,” she said.

“I will always try to be,” he replied. “I know I have treated you very badly I the past, and I feel I have much to make up to you.”

“It's in the past,” she said, stepping close and framing his face in her hands. “I don't dwell on it, and neither should you. Promise me you won't, all right?”

“I'll try,” he said, moving his hands to her waist.

“Good,” she said with a nod. She moved her hands and hugged him tightly. “I will make you something really excellent for supper tomorrow, I promise.”

“I would honestly be happy with anything you feel like making,” he said with a chuckle. “I'm actually a lot easier to please these days.”

She pulled away and looked at him. “You know, you really are. I've been quite surprised by that.”

“I think the laid back attitude most people have here is rubbing off on me,” he mused. “If you'd gone to Los Angeles or New York, someplace more...” He trailed off as he tried to think.

“Uptight?” she suggested.

“Not the word I was thinking of, but it will do,” he said. “If you'd gone to a place like that I think I might still have the same attitude I did in London. But here I'm actually taking time to slow down and relax.”

“And it's doing you a world of good,” she said with a smile. “I liked the changes before I left, but I like you even more now. You seem to be much less like the human robot you were when we first met and more human. It's quite nice.”

“So I came off as a human robot?” he said with a wry grin and in a teasing tone.
“You've used that analogy yourself,” she pointed out. “Don't tease me for turning those words around and using them back at you.”

“All right,” he replied.

“John did quite a bit to turn you into the person you are today. I think I owe him greatly,” she said thoughtfully.

“That is true,” he replied. “But don't underestimate how much of an influence you've had. John was a big influence, I agree, but you were too. You treated me well regardless of how badly I treated you, and that stuck with me. I think it was just around the time of the Christmas party that I started to see you as more than just someone I could walk all over.”

“That party had been a complete disaster,” she said. “Though now that I know what actually happened that night a lot of the things I didn't quite understand makes sense.” She paused for few seconds. “And thank you once again for trusting me with the truth.”

“You're welcome,” he said. “If we're both still here for Christmas perhaps we can try to give a Christmas party another go?”

“Why wouldn't we be here?” she asked with a frown. Surely he didn't expect their relationship to only last a few months, or for him to leave again? She didn't want to think he felt they were going to have so little time together.

“Well, since everyone back home knows the both of us are planning on being here for quite some time it might be expected for us to go back to London for a bit to visit. It would be a logical time and it would give you the chance to see old friends you hadn't seen in nearly a year,” he said. “What did you think I meant?”

“It's not important,” she said, shaking her head.

“No, it is. Please tell me,” he asked quietly.

“I just thought you'd been thinking our relationship wouldn't make it to Christmas, or else you'd leave before the end of the year,” she said softly, looking down.

“Molly, I want this relationship to work,” he said, and she looked up at that. “I haven't had much experience with them, that’s true, but after what happened with Janine I decided if I ever did get into an actual relationship I would never do it to use someone again. I would do it because I respected that person, I cared about that person, and I wanted to be around them. As long as you're willing to make sure that we stay in this relationship I promise I'll do the same.”

“Really?” she asked, her smile wide.

“Yes. I know at the fair we made tentative plans for next year, but I'd like to start making plans that are less tentative eventually. You've convinced me this would be a good place to stay for a time. Possibly a very long time. And I don't really want to stay here if you aren't around. So while there is always the chance that we might not last, let's act like we will be together for a very long time.”

“I can agree to that,” she said as she nodded. “I would love to stay with you for a very long time. That's something that would make me very happy.”

“And it would make me happy too,” he replied, running a hand up and down her back. “So it's settled. We work on staying together and then handle anything that comes up in a way that strengthens our relationship as opposed to tear it apart.”
“I can definitely do that,” she said. “I think that maybe this time this relationship will be better than either of our last ones.”

“That is the hope.” He pulled her closer to him. “I think we'll do just fine, though, since we are both determined to make this relationship work.”

“I think so too,” she said. “We're going to have problems, because everyone does, but if we don't run away from them or make them something worse than we can handle them. I have faith in us.”

“I do too,” he said quietly.

“I'm very glad for that,” she murmured before leaning in and kissing him. It was a soft kiss which she knew could turn passionate at any moment, but for now she saw it as a seal to their agreement. Then she pressed closer and he deepened the kiss, and soon she was clinging to him to hold on. She knew if this kiss went on much longer they might do things they'd regret later, and she didn't want regrets. He seemed to sense it when he pulled away from the kiss. “If we're not careful we'll take things further when we're not really ready to,” she said as she tried to catch her breath.

“I will let you set the pace for that,” he said. “I am willing to wait until you think we're ready to move forward, whether it's a few days or a few weeks or a few months. I don't think you'd be cruel enough to make us wait a year.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Cruel to you?”

“I was thinking crueller to you. I can definitely go long periods of time without intercourse. I've done that for years. It's enjoyable, I suppose, but not a necessity to me. But I don't think you feel the same way.”

She chuckled slightly. “No, I don't,” she replied. “I think I'll know that it's time to move forward when we're supposed to separate for the night and I find I don't want to let you go, and the urge to not let you go is stronger than the urge to let you leave. I don't know how close I am to that point. It could be some time, but I won't make you wait a year, I promise. I don't want to wait a year myself.”

“Then that is good news,” he said with a grin. “I think we should separate and move to the sofa and see if there is anything to watch on the telly that will fill up the time until you're to be picked up.”

“Or I could make up something quick to eat and we could just play music and talk,” she countered as he let her go and she pulled away.

“That works too,” he replied with a nod. “Where is your iPod?”

“In my handbag,” she said. “I had it plugged into my car on the way home.”

“I can make you something to eat while you get your music set up,” he replied as they made their way to her living room and kitchen area.

“If you want to,” she said with a nod. “I was just going to make scrambled eggs with tomatoes and cheese.”

“Well, you have a little under two hours until the car gets here,” he said. “I can make you an omelet instead of scrambled eggs since there's no rush.”

“I'd actually like that,” she said as she went to her handbag. “Mine never turn out very well.”

“All right. I'll start now.” He went into her kitchen and began to pull things out while she went to her
handbag for her iPod. When she got it she took it to her charging dock that had the speakers and set it in, then found one of her relaxing playlists and hit play. Music began to fill up the apartment and she felt herself grin. Sherlock still didn't like most modern music but she didn't think he'd object to any of this music since it was almost all classical. He noticed after a moment. “This isn't what you normally listen to,” he said as she went over to the stools on the other side of her counter.

“That's not true. It's on my iPod so I do listen to it,” she said with a smile. “But I thought you'd like to listen to something you'd generally prefer.”

“We can listen to what you want,” he said with a frown.

“I do actually like this music,” she replied. “When I do yoga in the morning I tend to listen to classical as opposed to the music that is generally associated with it. It's usually something soft and quiet, though I have more than that on my iPod.”

“I didn't realize that,” he said as he began cracking the eggs into a bowl.

“Well, the few times you've spent the night on my sofa I haven't generally done yoga the way I usually do,” she replied. “I didn't want to wake you.”

“Ah,” he said with a nod. “I'll have to remember that for future reference.”

“That would be a good idea,” she said with a grin. She caught his eye and he grinned back. The implied intimacy of their conversation didn't escape her, and maybe a long while ago she would have blushed and stammered at the implication, but between this conversation and the one they'd had in her bedroom she realized she felt completely at ease with Sherlock, and things that would have made her embarrassed before didn't right now. She was quite glad for that.

They chatted easily as he cooked for them, after asking if he could have an omelet as well, and after taking some time to eat they settled on the sofa and continued to talk until there was a knock at her door. Sherlock promised her would clean up and then lock up behind him, and with one final kiss she made her way out the door and to a waiting car. It was a black sedan and the driver was a very pleasant man who told her he'd be her driver the entire day. As he drove her to the spa they had a nice conversation and she felt completely at ease about being in his hands. It didn't feel as though it took long to get to the spa, and soon her driver was opening the door and she was stepping out and going inside.

The staff at the spa was absolutely lovely, and she picked out two spa treatments that sounded like they would be just what she needed, a sixty minute Bellagio Signature Massage with the additional steam package and a Bellagio Signature Facial. She also decided to get some waxing done as well. She knew she had five hours to pamper herself, and once the Brazilian Blowout was explained to her she decided that would be what she wanted to do. It all took nearly four and a half hours, and so she topped it off with a new haircut as well. She was running a little late but by the time she was done she felt like an entirely new person. She made her way home and began to get ready. She decided to wear her hair down since it was much sleeker than it usually was, only pulling back the sides with jeweled clips. She did her makeup with care and then put on the dress and her heels. She stood in front of her mirror and thought she looked simply smashing. After she had transferred what she needed to her new clutch she made her way down to her driver. He gave her a wide grin and said she looked great, and she grinned back, suddenly quite eager to show Sherlock how she looked.

It seemed to take some time to get there, and she realized that they were all the way in La Jolla when the car finally stopped. She stepped out and looked at where she was, a restaurant called The Marine Room. She'd never heard of this place, but it definitely looked as though it was a very nice place. She made her way inside to the lounge and looked around, spotting Sherlock almost immediately. He
appeared to be at the bar, sipping a drink which she assumed to be something nonalcoholic. She made her way over to him, feeling just a bit shy. Finally she was next to him. “Sherlock?” she said quietly.

He turned and looked at her, giving her a very wide smile. She blushed slightly but smiled back. “You look exquisite,” he replied, standing up.

“Thank you,” she replied. “You look quite dashing yourself.” And he did, having gone back to wearing one of his suits that he had always looked so sexy in. It had been quite a while since she had seen him in it because he didn't wear them here in California, but it was nice to see.

He offered her his arm. “I was worried you might be late. The driver said you took a bit longer at the spa than anticipated.”

She took his arm and smiled at him. “I know. But I wanted to get a haircut as well as the treatment for my hair. I made up for it when I got home and I got dressed very quickly, though.”

“Well, if you had been late I would have gone to the table and waited for you there,” he said as they moved away from the bar.

“Don't you want your drink?” she asked with a slight frown.

“It's only water,” he said. “I told the bartender that I would be driving home tonight and he understood.”

“Ah,” she said, nodding. “I didn't realize you drove here.”

“I thought it might be best in case we decided to linger for a while. There was no point in making the driver wait for a long while if we stayed through to dessert.” They made their way to where the maître d' and Sherlock gave him his name, and they were led to a table. The man pulled out Molly's chair for her and sat down, and after a moment she glanced at the menu. Everything was quite expensive, and some of it had ingredients she didn't quite understand. “I'm thinking it's best if we ask for recommendations,” he said after studying his own menu.

“I think that might be a good idea as well,” she said with a nod. “Everything is quite fancy here.”

“Well, I had hoped to impress you,” he said with a faint smile.

She smiled back. “I'm quite impressed, and I haven't even tried the food yet. I haven't even tried the food yet. I haven't been out on many fancy dates before. Tom attempted a few, but they never seemed to work out quite right. I think that was why he didn't propose at a fancy dinner like most men do.”

“Was it memorable?” he asked.

“Not really,” she said, shaking her head. “I think he had made other plans but he said the moment was right when he did ask, even though it rather came out of the blue. I never did ask what his actual plans had been.”

“I'm sorry,” he replied.

“It's all right,” she said. “It's probably for the best that it wasn't. If anyone else ever proposes to me they can make it memorable and I'll remember that over my first one.” The moment she said that she panicked a little inside. She hoped he didn't think she meant he had to propose to her in a memorable way, or propose to her at all. That would be much too fast to even imply it.
“I’m sure the next time it will be better,” he said, his smile widening slightly, and she relaxed. He didn't take it as a hint. That was good. “Would you like a glass of wine with your meal?”

“I think I would. I’ll have to ask for a recommendation on that as well, though. I'm not as good at pairing my wines as I should be.”

“I don't think they'll have a problem helping,” he said. They lapsed into a companionable silence and soon a waiter arrived. Sherlock asked for his recommendations and the waiter was quite helpful. They decided to skip the appetizer dishes and each have the lobster bisque, and then for their entrees Sherlock selected the filet mignon and Molly had the Maine lobster tail and a glass of Chardonnay. The waiter left and Sherlock turned to Molly. “Are you enjoying your day so far?” he asked.

“Yes, very much,” she said with a nod and a smile. “It's been absolutely lovely. Thank you so much for the surprise.”

“If you enjoyed the spa I may be inclined to send you back when it looks as though you need a pick-me-up,” he said with a grin of his own.

“I wouldn’t mind that. I can afford some of the treatments, but not everything,” she replied. “Though I think I'm going to pamper myself regardless of whether I go back there or not. I don't do that often enough.”

“I don’t think that would be a bad idea. You do work quite hard. I don’t think I ever realized quite how much.”

“Yes, you were usually more interested in the results of my work than the process,” she said with a slight laugh. “It takes time to do a thorough autopsy and get the results typed up and ready to be used in the pursuit of the people who committed the crimes I was helping to solve. I still do quite a few of those types of autopsies, but here there seem to be more people who have ‘suspicious deaths' which generally aren't.”

“It must be a nice change of pace,” he said.

“In a way. I don’t generally speak to the people in charge of the criminal cases, though, like I did back home with you and Greg and the others. I submit my reports and they only call if they need details clarified or if there’s anything specific they need me to look for. I do miss that aspect of things.”

“Do you miss working at St. Bart’s?” he asked.

“At times. I had good friends there, and it was nice to be a little more hands on with the case solving aspect. And here it seems as though there’s never a real break. But I do enjoy being here and working here in the States.” She looked over at him. “I know you don’t miss consulting, but do you miss London?”

“Sometimes,” he said with a nod. “But not as much as I thought I would, which is rather surprising. I think my brother was not planning on me staying here for an extended period of time.”

“Oh?” she asked.

“He called me this morning asking me if I would come back to London to consult on a case.” He paused. “I don’t know if I would call it asking, actually. It was more of a demand. And I told him that no, I wouldn’t. He then told me he had expected me to convince you to return home by now and that perhaps my powers of persuasion were not up to par anymore.”
She frowned at that. “Did he threaten to have you deported just so you would come home?”

“He might have hinted that he was extremely unhappy and he was thinking about taking drastic action. I reminded him, however, of all the problems I tend to cause and how that since I am no longer in the same country as he is there are less problems for him to get involved in. I also told him Lestrade is more than capable to handle the matter on his own, and he grudgingly agreed. Though if it does get out of hand I may need to fly back home for a bit.”

“I hope it doesn’t come to that,” she said. “Our friends might not let you come back.”

“If I came back without you they would,” he said with a small grin. “That was the whole point of me coming here in the first place. But I will try my best not to let it interfere with our plans, at least for next weekend.”

“I’m quite excited for Comic Con,” she said with a wide grin. “Thomas’s friend is going to try and get us into a few of the panels we want to go to because she’s working for the convention and has access to any panel she wants. And Jason gifted me with an autograph book in case I get to meet anyone famous.”

Sherlock’s grin got wider. “I think you’re going to have a good time. Probably more of one than I will.”

“I don’t know. There might be something that interests you.”

“Perhaps,” he said with a slight nod. “I just tend not to be interested in many fictional things, and I don’t know if there would be anything for the things I am interested in.”

“Did you just not enjoy things that were fictional growing up?” she asked, tilting her head slightly.

“I was encouraged not to,” he said. “But between living with John and spending time with you I’m starting to see the appeal.”

“Good,” she said with a smile. “When we go together we don’t need to do a whole lot inside the convention enter if you don’t want to, though there is supposedly a presentation for one of the new Marvel films on Saturday that Jason and I want to go to at eleven.”

“I did actually enjoy the ones I’ve seen from that company,” he mused. “I’ll most likely join the two of you for that one.”

“Excellent!” she said enthusiastically. “I’ve been told everyone and their mum is there on Saturday, so aside from the panel we can avoid the actual convention center and see what’s outside at Petco Park and the Gaslamp Quarter, and then spend time at the actual convention on Sunday. It will be open less time, but Jason said generally Sundays are less crowded.”

“That sounds like a good plan,” he replied. “Is there anything else you’re planning on doing before I join you?”

Molly nodded. “Quite a few things.”

“I’d like to hear about your plans,” he said, leaning forward.

She gave him a wide smile and then launched into the plans she had made with Thomas and Jason, continuing even when their bisque arrived and then into when their entrees arrived. They took the time to eat and she had to admit, her food was superb. She had a second glass of wine with her meal and by the time she was finished she felt she had just enough room for dessert. She watched him
push his plate forward slightly. “The food was excellent.”

“It was definitely unique, but yes, it was quite good,” he said with a nod. “Did you want to have dessert as well?”

She nodded. “The Tahitian Vanilla Crème Fraîche Panna Cotta sounds interesting. Are you going to try anything?”

“No, though I may take a bite of yours,” he said with a grin.

“I won’t mind,” she said with a smile of her own. “Really, Sherlock, this is a spectacular date. Thank you so much for it.”

“As I said this morning, I like to make you smile,” he said.

“You know, you can actually be very good with words when you try to flatter people,” she said.

“I had practice. Though I will admit, with you it isn’t so much flattery as it is speaking the truth. You don’t need to be flattered so much as you deserve to be told the things I appreciate the most about you.”

She blushed slightly and picked up her wine glass, taking a sip. “I could probably stand to tell you the things I appreciate about you as well.”

“I’ll admit, I would like to hear them,” he said. “But you don’t need to get into them now.”

“I’ll tell you soon, though.” The waiter came back at that point as the dinner dishes were collected, and Molly placed her order for the dessert, and they were left alone again. “I think I’d like to come back to La Jolla during the day,” she said after a moment.

“It could be a nice trip,” he said. “And I know you mentioned the Children’s Pool.”

“I would love to go see that,” she replied. “Plus there seemed to be some interesting shops I saw on the way that I would love to check out.”

“We don’t need to end our evening any time soon,” he said.

“Oh no. I want to get out of this dress before anything happens to it,” she said, shaking her head with a smile. “And while I like these heels they are not meant for walking in.”

He gave her an amused grin. “Then maybe in a few weeks.”

“It’s a date,” she said. “But tomorrow I demand breakfast and lunch I don’t need to cook, something simple for dinner and films the rest of the time.”

“I could always bring food and coffee with me when I come over,” he mused.

“I would adore you forever. And probably because I’m in the mood to indulge my sweet tooth, I want doughnuts.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Doughnuts?”

“Chocolate doughnuts,” she said with a nod. “Or jelly filled. I would be happy with either.”

“I get the feeling I will be attempting to find a bakery tonight,” he said. “But I will bring you doughnuts in the morning.”
“Thank you,” she said. “Though if you find a bakery that has ham and cheese croissants I will take one or two of those in lieu of dozen doughnuts.”

“Would you like any doughnuts, in that case?”

“Maybe two? A chocolate glazed one and a raspberry filled one.”

“Then I will try and make that particular request come true tomorrow,” he said with a nod. “What time do we want to start?”

She thought for a moment. “Maybe ten? That gives me a chance to sleep in. It’s not like you haven’t already seen me in my pyjamas before, if I answer the door still wearing them.”

“Then I will be there at ten with either of the two breakfast combinations you want.”

“I will appreciate it.” She motioned for him to lean closer, and when she did she leaned in and kissed him softly. “You are a very good boyfriend,” she said when they pulled apart.

“I am trying very hard,” he said with a grin.

“Well, you’re succeeding beyond my wildest expectations. I just hope I’m being a good girlfriend, what with ignoring you most of the last two weeks.”

“Well, I understand having to work that hard,” he said. “And it gave me some time to enjoy the company of other people. I actually went to Shakespeare’s Pub & Grille with Jason and Thomas last week.”

“Oh, what did you think of it?” she asked.

“I enjoyed it. It was definitely reminiscent of home.”

“Then we’ll definitely have to make that a more regular thing,” she said with a nod.

“Perhaps we can go after Comic Con on Sunday?” he suggested.

“If I’m not worn out from five days at the convention,” she said with a slight chuckle. “And I rather hope I don’t get what Jason called ‘con plague.’ I can’t afford to get sick.”

“Knowing my luck I’ll get it and have to do the performances while ill.”

“I hope that isn’t the case.” She reached over and grasped his hand. “And just so you know, you only got me tickets to the first performance but I bought tickets to the other two as well. So I’ll be there all three nights.”

“I will be glad for that,” he said. “It does actually mean a lot that you want to see me perform.”

“You’re quite talented, and I’m assuming everyone else is as well. It will be a pleasure to see it all put together with all the other instruments, I think.” She gave him a wide smile. “Now then. It’s still early, so when dinner’s done I think I want to go home, get out of this dress and these heels and just relax. Would you like to join me on my sofa for a film?”

“Even though we’ll be doing that all day tomorrow?” he asked in an amused tone.

She nodded. “Even so.”

“Can I pick out the film?” he asked.
“Of course.”

“Then I would very much like to come over.”

“Good,” she said. He grinned back and she squeezed his hand. Today had been an absolutely spectacular day and she was fairly sure the rest of her weekend was going to be just as good.
Molly hadn’t quite been able to contain her excitement the closer Comic Con got, and she knew it amused Sherlock very much to see her so excited for things. When Wednesday finally rolled around she was pretty close to bursting. She met up with Jason and Thomas near the Convention Center at ten to grab a bite to eat before they got to work. Thomas's friend had gotten them vendor passes, and the only thing the three of them needed to do as repayment for them was help set up the booth that his friend was going to be at, bring in the merchandise each morning and then get all of the merchandise back in her van in the evening each day of the convention. His friend hadn't minded Sherlock not coming to help because three people would get it done fairly quickly, and so at eleven they were inside the Convention Center and headed towards where the main vendors were. Molly's eyes were wide as she took everything in. The building was huge and there were so many different booths. She knew it was going to take quite a bit of time to experience everything, but she was up to the challenge.

When they were done the three of them drifted to the Gaslamp Quarter and went to the restaurant that the SyFy channel had taken over and dubbed Cafe Diem. Molly had been a fan of A Town Called Eureka when she was in the UK and it was wonderful to see all the different menu item for the various shows on the channel. They enjoyed a good meal, and after they left Jason showed he had swiped one of the menus. Thomas admonished him for it but Molly was quite amused. And then they went back to the Convention Center to take in all the booths once they were set up. Preview Night had certainly lived up to her expectations, and by the time it was over and they were back at the booth to transport the merchandise back to the van she had an entire large bag filled with freebies.

Thursday and Friday they followed the same routine: get to the Convention Center early, bring in the merchandise, leave and grab a bite to eat and then go back in when it opened, roam around the convention until it was over and then help Thomas's friend out, and then hit up an after-hours event. Molly got the feeling she would be quite exhausted by the time Sunday evening rolled around. When Saturday dawned Sherlock came over early in the morning and they made their way to the nearest bus stop and took the bus down towards downtown. It wasn't her favorite way to travel but she didn't want to pay an arm and a leg for parking. Thomas and Jason met the two of them at the 12th & Imperial trolley station and then they got on the trolley to the Convention Center station before making their way into the building.

It took the four of them much less time to transport the merchandise to the booth since they had an extra set of hands, and by nine they were finished. They went to grab a quick bite to eat and then went straight back to the Convention Center to make sure they got into the Marvel panel. They got to sit in the very front, near the side where the actors would wait for the panel to start. Molly had managed to attend nearly every panel she had wanted to but this was the one she was most excited for. Before the panel started she and Jason attracted the attention of the actors, which was a huge thrill for her. Then they all settled in and when the panel started she paid rapt attention to what was being said. It certainly didn't disappoint, and when she would glance over at Sherlock she saw he looked interested in what was being said. Jason even got up and asked a question which got a good laugh out of the actors on the panel and a thunderous round of applause from the audience. Molly knew that had probably just made his year.

When it was over Molly and Sherlock said their goodbyes to Thomas and Jason and they made their way out to the convention floor to exit the building. Sherlock reached over for her hand as they walked. “There are certainly a lot of people here,” he said as they made their way around a large group of people in Batman and Batfamily costumes. “I don't think I've really ever seen this many people in one place.”
“Oh yes, it's quite a crush,” she said with a nod.

“Is there anything you want to do here that can't keep until tomorrow?” he asked.

She thought for a moment, then shook her head. “Not that I can think of. I haven't gotten to experience anything in the Gaslamp Quarter or at Petco Park yet, and I think that would be worth doing today.”

“All right.” He looked around and pointed at one of the Starbucks kiosks near the Convention Center doors. “I think I could use another cup of coffee first.”

“That sounds like an excellent idea, and the queue doesn't seem nearly as long as some of the other ones I've been in so far,” she replied.

“So there's a lot of waiting?” he asked as they headed in that direction.

“Of, yes. It's a matter of balancing schedules and of picking the things you want to do most. We have a bit of a cheat when it comes to panels, and Jason got us to the front of the line for a few exclusive freebies Thursday and Friday so we got something before they ran out.” Then her eyes widened. “I forgot to mention I got you something. Or, rather, I traded someone something for it.”

“Oh?” he asked.

“Well, one of the freebies I got yesterday had to do with an anime called Sailor Moon. Apparently they only had a hundred of them for the entire convention and I was very lucky to get the last one. One woman saw I had gotten it and they offered to trade me anything they had for it. She had bought these gorgeous Lord of the Rings bookends that I thought you would love, and she was quite eager to trade them for the Sailor Moon merchandise. So you have a set of bookends waiting for you at my home.”

“It must have been something very special to trade something they had bought for a freebie,” he mused.

“It was a small figurine of the lead character, I believe. Not incredibly tiny, but they were an exclusive to the convention and each one was numbered so it was a very big deal. And I had stumbled into the line by accident. I had thought I was standing in line for something else, to be honest, so it wasn't something I particularly wanted. I think it worked out well for both the woman and I.”

“Yes, I think it did.” They got into the queue for their coffee. “Are you going to miss getting anything for free that you wanted today?”

“One or two things, but Jason said he would try and remember to get them for me. He had no interest in going out of the Convention Center and he knew I wanted to explore. And if he forgets it's not something I'll be terribly upset over. I promised him if there was anything worth getting outside of the convention I would get it for him in return.”

“I doubt I will be keeping many of the free things I keep being handed, so he can have my items,” he replied.

“Then that works out well.” She shifted her hold on the bag she had been given to carry her things in. She was quite pleased to have gotten it because she enjoyed the television show that was being advertised on the front. She'd already had three people ask to trade but she was keeping a tight grip on it. “Did you enjoy the panel?”
“It was quite interesting,” he said. “I think I might actually be looking forward to the movies they talked about.”

“I know. I'm quite excited for both of them,” she said with a grin. “And I was honestly surprised that the actors had been gracious enough to sign my autograph book when we caught them before the panel. I thought for sure we would be told to sit down and leave them alone.”

“Yes, Jason did look like he'd died and gone to heaven,” Sherlock said with a chuckle. “You are going to be quite the envy of quite a few people because of that. Have you met other celebrities?”

“Quite a few,” she said with a nod. “Some of them stayed after panels to sign autographs until they absolutely had to leave, and a few others were walking amongst the crowds. I have pictures with a few of them on my mobile that I can show you later. Is there anyone you're hoping to meet?”

He shook his head. “I'm not generally a fan of an actor enough to hope to meet them in person. Though I suppose I would like to meet Ian McKellan. I think he was the perfect choice for Gandalf and I would like to ask him about the role.”

“I don't think he's here this year, but if he was I would like to meet him as well. I think he's a superb Gandalf and I greatly enjoyed him as Magneto in the X-Men movies too.”

“I don't think we've watched those,” he said after thinking for a moment.

“If we haven't we can spend a day watching them later. There are quite a few of them. Some of them are prequels to the original trilogy, and others are sequels. One of them has both the old and young X-Men in it. It's a very interesting universe.” They moved forward more in the queue. “And I suppose at some point we might want to watch both sets of Spiderman movies, though I do prefer the second ones to the first.”

“Two different Spiderman movies?” he asked.

She nodded. “There is a trilogy with Tobey Maguire as Spiderman and then another set of movies with Andrew Garfield as Spiderman. I like Andrew’s performance much more. I'm not as big a fan of those as I am the Marvel Cinematic Universe movies, though.” She caught his frown and she chuckled. “Iron Man, Captain America, Thor...those movies. The movies that Marvel Studios puts out fall under the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The panel we just got out of was for movies in that universe.”

“I see. I suppose I'm not as knowledgeable about them as you are.”

“Well, it's all a bit complicated knowing who owns what. But the stories I love most are all put out by the same studio. And you’ve seen all of those by now.”

“I am definitely expanding the amount of fictional things I am being exposed to the more time I spend with you,” he said. “And I don’t find it to be that loathsome.”

“Good,” she replied with a grin. They moved forward more and she looked over at him. “Do you still think of it as cluttering up your mind palace?” she asked.

“At times,” he replied with a nod. “Though it hasn't been as bad as I'd thought it would be, getting into things that are fictional. At any rate, it's helping me interact with others when I can at least catch some pop culture references. I will probably use it more once I go back to school, though, so we'll see how much information I retain.”

“That’s coming up soon, isn’t it?” she asked.
“Yes,” he replied. “At the end of August. They were able to take most of my units from university but there are a few courses I need to take first before I can start the program. Thankfully all of them are offered this term.”

“So I should take advantage of my time with you for the next month,” she said with a grin. “Before I don’t have much of your time anymore.”

“I think that would be a good idea,” he said with a smile of his own. “I have courses Monday through Thursday, and I’ll have coursework to do at home as well.”

“Then I’ll make every moment count,” she said before leaning in to kiss him. He kissed her back for a moment before he pulled away, and she gave him a quizzical look. “Sherlock?”

“We’ll be able to place our orders next,” he said.

“Oh! Right,” she said a bit sheepishly.

“We can pick up where we left off after we have our drinks,” he said with a grin. She grinned back and once they’d placed their orders and received them they made their way to the convention hall doors. It was incredibly hot once they stepped outside, even though they were close to the bay. “So where are we heading now?”

She looked around, glancing at all the things between the trolley station they were closest to and the Gaslamp Quarter trolley station. Then she pointed to the crosswalk in front of her, looking towards Seaport Village. “That way. We’ll walk to the Gaslamp Quarter, look around and then take the trolley back to 12th & Imperial and then walk to Petco Park.”

“You have this all planned out, don’t you?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Day four of the convention,” she said with a smirk. “I think I have it down to a science.”

“Apparently you do,” he said with a grin. He took a sip of his coffee. “Was there anything in particular you wanted to do outside the convention?”

“I heard there was laser tag over at Petco Park, and there’s something for Sleepy Hollow nearby there as well. I quite enjoy that show.”

“Then we’ll make sure we do both before we have to come back.” He looked over at her. “I was curious, though. Why does the vendor we are helping take her merchandise with her at the end of each day? I’m assuming there is security who would watch it.”

“Some of the merchandise is quite valuable, and she’s on the hook if anything happens to it. Better to keep it close than to lose it.”

“I can see that point,” he conceded. They got closer to the crosswalk and Sherlock looked around. “It looks as though there are all sorts of things to do here.”

“There are. It’s as though there are a million things trying to grab your attention. Some of it you tune out and some of it just captivates you.”

He motioned to the people holding religious signs and talking into megaphones. “And I assume those are people you tune out?”

She nodded. “Some people talk back, but generally it’s best to ignore them. They’re here every year, apparently.”
“I’m not a religious person myself but I absolutely despise it when someone tries to shove it down other people’s throats,” he said as they got closer.

“I do too, but they’re mostly only at the trolley station crosswalks,” she said. “They make me feel uncomfortable, in that it all seems too confrontational.”

“I thought you were religious,” he said.

“I am, but I’m lapsed. I don’t attend church and I haven’t since before I ended my engagement.”

They made their way to the crosswalk and waited for the woman directing traffic to tell them to cross. “May I ask what happened?” he asked.

She was quiet for a moment, and only spoke when they were allowed to cross the street. “I usually worked on weekends, so that my coworkers with families could have time with their children when they weren’t in school. When I started dating Tom he respected that, but the longer we were dating the more he pushed me to go to his church. I went after we got engaged, but I didn't like the tone of the sermons or the messages in them.”

“What was one in particular that turned you off?” he asked.

She nodded. “It was that all women should be obedient to their husbands and no one else. Basically it was implied that all wives should stay at home, not have lives or careers of their own. And I refuse to do that. I've worked too hard to give up my career just because it's expected of me in my role as a dutiful wife. When we began to plan for where we wanted to have our wedding and who we wanted to officiate we argued over that quite a bit. That was what started the fight when I ended our engagement, actually.”

“Well, if our relationship progresses that far I promise I will never ask you to give up your career or your friends or any of that,” Sherlock replied. “You are passionate about those things and that's something I admire about you.”

She gave him a warm smile and reached over for his hand as they got closer to the other side of the street. “I'm glad to hear that. And the same goes for you. I don't want you giving up the things that make you happy either.”

“Then I'm glad we’re on the same page,” he said as they finished crossing the street. He lifted up his hand with the coffee and pointed. “Should we start by looking at that area over there that it appears the History Channel is running?”

“That sounds like a great start,” she said, moving in that direction and pulling him slightly. He chuckled and let her pull him along. They looked at that area for a while, then went back to the main walkway from the Convention Center trolley station to the Gaslamp Quarter one, looking at the various things there. Once they got to the Gaslamp Quarter they decided to get lunch, and so Molly took him to Cafe Diem and they got a quick bite to eat. Then they walked around the Gaslamp Quarter for a time before getting on the trolley and heading back to 12th & Imperial to go to Petco Park. There was more to do there than she had imagined, and she was having such a good time that she wished she had gone the day before as well.

It was nearly 6:30 when they made their way back to the trolley station to take it for the two stops so they could get back into the Convention Center. The trolley was extremely full and Molly ended up having to sit on Sherlock's lap for the ride. She looked over at him with a grin on her face. “Did you have fun so far?” she asked.
“I have, surprisingly,” he said. “I think a lot of it had to do with the company I kept.”

“I'm glad to know I'm good company,” she said with a chuckle. “So what do we want to do after we're done helping pack everything up? There might be some after-hours events worth going to.”

“I was thinking dinner and a film,” he said. “Something away from the crowds.”

“I could enjoy that,” she said. “Maybe takeaway and curling up on the sofa together?”

“That sounds like an excellent suggestion,” he said.

“Occasionally I have great ideas,” she said with a smile. “I have a very good one right now, actually.”

“Oh?” he asked.

She leaned in and kissed him softly. He began to kiss her back after a few seconds and for a few minutes she completely forgot they weren't at home, that they were out in public where everyone could see them. And she got lost in the kiss too, only pulling away when the need to breathe became apparent. Then she frowned. “We missed our stop,” she said with a slight groan.

“Where are we at?” he asked.

“Santa Fe Depot,” she said.

“Do you think the pedicabs come up this way?” he asked as she got off his lap.

“They might,” she said. “I'm not sure, though.”

He stood up and they quickly exited the trolley before it pulled away from the stop. They made their way from the actual trolley station to the street on the other side of the station, and she spotted a pedicab driver that looked like he was about to leave. Sherlock saw him as well and sprinted over to him while she hurried over. After a minute the pedicab driver nodded as she got to the two of them. “He'll take us back over to the Convention Center,” Sherlock replied.

“Oh, thank goodness,” she said with a grin towards the driver. He grinned back and she and Sherlock got in the pedicab. “This is definitely something I had hoped to get to do this weekend.”

“I'll admit, it is rather nice not to have to walk back or wait for another trolley.” He put an arm around her shoulders and she snuggled closer. “It seems rather reminiscent of a carriage ride.”

“I've never been in a carriage before,” she said. “That's on my list of things to do before I die.”

“And what else is on this list?” he asked.

“Well, going to the wine country is one item, but I told you about that already,” she said. “Um...do something to conquer some of my fears, like skydiving or rock climbing. Go to as many other countries as I can. Learn another language besides French and Latin, one that's just for fun. Go snorkeling or scuba diving. Watch all one hundred of the greatest films of all time. You know, things like that.”

“I don't have a list like that,” he mused. “Maybe I should make one.”

“I think it would be interesting to see what's on your list,” she said.

“It will probably be vastly boring things,” he said with a slight grin. “I've done enough things that
would be considered exciting. Though...”

“Though what?” she asked.

“I may accompany you if you choose to do something to get over your fears. One of the few things I do miss about my former career is the adrenaline rush I would occasionally get. That was always a perk.”

“I might definitely be more inclined to do it if I'm not doing it alone.” She lifted her head up. “What else do you see being on your list?”

“I've done quite a bit of traveling, but I'd like to go back to a few places simply as a tourist, though I don't know how possible that might be in a few cities. And I'm considering going all the way for my doctorate, one I get my Master's degree out of the way.”

“Those are both very good things to put on your list,” she said with a smile.

“I'll probably think of a few more later,” he said. “And I could always steal a few of yours. The hundred greatest movies one sounds like it could be appealing in our spare time.”

“We should give ourselves a year to do it, and start from number one hundred and work our way up,” she replied. “I think that would be a fun goal to reach.”

“Then why don't we start August 1st?” he suggested. “That way we have until July 31st to finish them all and it's an easier date to remember.”

“I like this idea,” she said with a nod. “So this will be a mutual thing to cross off our bucket lists.”

“Yes, it will.” She set her head down on his shoulder again and he shifted to keep her close. They stayed quiet for a few minutes before he spoke again. “I want to thank you for something,” he said quietly.

“What do you want to thank me for?” she asked, lifting her head up again.

He turned to look at her. “I have spent most of my life alone. As a child, as an adult until I met John...I didn't let myself make connections with people. I didn't have friends. I didn't really let myself be happy. I started to after I met John, but I wasn't entirely happy. And here, with you, I think I actually am happy. So I wanted to thank you for that.”

“I'm glad you're happy here,” she said with a wide smile. “And I'm glad I could help.”

“Are you happy?” he asked.

She nodded. “I am, actually. For the first time in a really long time I'm quite pleased with my life. I'm actually more pleased now then I was back home before you came back. A lot of it has to do with our relationship, but I also have good friends here and back home that I'm close to and I'm happy with where I am professionally. Life is quite good right now.”

“Hopefully it will stay that way for quite a long time.”

“I hope so, too,” she said with a smile before leaning in to kiss him. The idea that he was happy with her and his life here was something she had guessed but getting confirmation made her feel that they were definitely on the right track to have an actual future together, and that was the best news she had gotten in a long time.
Chapter 17

Once Comic Con was over it was time for Sherlock's performances with the orchestra. She attended all three of his performances and had enjoyed herself immensely. The orchestra was quite good and she found herself hoping he did something like that again. Listening to him play on his own was one thing but listening to all the different instruments played together in harmony was something else, something better. And he had made it a point to introduce her to the people who had heard so much about her. The comments that he had seemed much happier and relaxed after the first week in July had pleased her more than he really knew. She'd even accompanied them for celebratory drinks and made a few new friends herself.

When things settled back into her normal daily routine Molly found herself hitting a sort of stride. Everything was going well, far better than she had anticipated. She went to work, spent time with her friends in San Diego ad spent time with Sherlock. She spent more time with Sherlock simply because she knew once he started school she wouldn't have nearly as much of his time and she wanted to take advantage of it. There was a time or two she felt selfish, ignoring her friends for him, but as Thomas had said at one point they were still in the honeymoon stage of the relationship, where everything was perfect and all they wanted to do was concentrate on each other. He assured her everyone most likely understood.

Soon it got closer and closer to the start of his fall term, and then suddenly it loomed right in front of them. In two days he would go back to his studies and their time together would be limited. He was one of the smartest people she knew so she hoped it wouldn't take him too long to get through the coursework he would need to bring home with him, but biochemistry had not been her focus and she had no idea what his course load would be like. So she had decided to enjoy this weekend with him and be prepared for quite a bit less time with him, just in case.

It was six in the evening and they had just returned from a trip to La Jolla. They had gone there a few times in the last few weeks and she had to admit she quite liked it there. This time he had been able to take her onto the UCSD campus to show her around a bit, and she had to admit she was impressed. It looked as though it was going to be a very good place for him to be at, and he had seemed to be rather excited to go. She found herself happy that he seemed so eager. They had topped it off with a trip to the Children's Pool, some shopping that she wanted to do and supper at a nice restaurant, and on the way back they had decided to spend the rest of the evening at her home watching films. She let them into her apartment and then put her handbag on the table near her door.

“I think you're even more eager to go back to school now than you were when you first thought about entering the program,” she said with an amused smile.

“I have talked about it quite a bit, haven't I?” he said thoughtfully. “I'll try to curb that in the future.”

“Actually, I find it quite charming,” she said with a laugh. “And besides, you put up with all the chatter about Comic Con from me. I have no problem listening to you talk about something you're obviously excited for.” She watched him move over to her DVDs before she made her way into the kitchen. “Would you like popcorn?”

“That could be nice,” he said with a nod before he began going through her films. “Did you get any more of the movies we're trying to cross off our list?”

“No. I ordered the next two but they're not here yet,” she replied. “Soon, though. If you get a free evening later this week maybe we can watch one of them then.”

“I don't think my evenings will be quite that crowded,” he said. “And remember, you generally tend
to work on Fridays and I don't have classes that day. I can always work on my coursework or do my labs then and leave my weekends free since you usually have them off. So I won't be holed up in my apartment ignoring you.”

“Good,” she said with a nod, going over to her popcorn maker. She'd decided to invest in one as opposed to spending a small fortune in the microwaveable bags, considering how many movie nights the two of them had had recently. She began to set up the popcorn. “Is there a film that you're particularly interested in seeing?”

“Well, I was thinking we might try one of your television shows,” he said. “We had decided to spend tomorrow in so we can start something now and then continue it tomorrow.”

“Which one caught your eye?” she asked.

“Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries,” he replied. “That was the one set in 1920s Australia, correct?”

“Yes,” she said. “I've thought about rewatching the first season so I think that will be a good way to spend the rest of the evening. And depending on how late you feel like staying over we could watch quite a bit of season one and maybe get into season 2 tomorrow.”

“I don't mind staying late,” he said.

She was quiet for a moment. Over the last week or so she'd started to get to the point where she was finding it harder to let him go for the night. She didn't necessarily want things to move in a direction he might not be comfortable with, but they had shared a bed together once and she wouldn't mind doing it again. “Or you could stay over tonight,” she said when she finally spoke. “Nothing needs to happen, but you and I could share a bed and that way we can get up around the same time tomorrow and start early.”

She looked over at him and saw him think it over for a moment, and then nod. “I could do that,” he said.

“Okay,” she said, giving him a smile. “Why don't you get something to sleep in while I finish making the popcorn?”

“All right,” he said, leaving her DVD collection. He made his way to her front door and left her apartment, and she began to finish what she needed to do to make the popcorn. When she was done she debated for a moment whether she should change into her pyjamas, and then she decided to go ahead and do that. It wasn't as though he hadn't seen her in them before. She went into her bedroom and pulled them out of her dresser, changing quickly as she heard her front door open again. She went back out and saw he was in the kitchen, stealing some of the popcorn. She cleared her throat and he turned around, grinning when he caught sight of her. “So I should change now?”

She came over and gave him a soft kiss. “It's much more fun to lounge around in pyjamas to watch the telly,” she said with a laugh when she pulled away. “I can put the first disc in while you change.”

“Then I'll go change,” he replied. He moved away from her as she pulled the bowl out from under the popcorn maker. She added a bit of salt and then took the bowl to her sofa and set it on her coffee table. Then she moved over to her DVD player and picked up the case he'd left on it, putting the first disc in. She'd just gone back over to the sofa when he came out, holding his folded clothes. “Where should I put these?”

“You can put them on the nightstand without the alarm clock,” she said. “I usually don't sleep on that side of the bed.”
He nodded and then went into her bedroom, coming back out a few moments later. She'd started the DVD and it was going through the other series that the company who produced the series put out. He settled onto the sofa next to her and she reached over for the bowl of popcorn, offering him some. “Thank you,” he said, taking a small handful.

“I think I should have suggested this weeks ago,” she said. “We’ve spent quite a few hours at a time watching films in whatever we happened to be wearing that day. Pyjamas are much more comfortable.”

“They are,” he said after eating his popcorn. “And I'll admit, there have been a few times I'd much rather have shared a bed with you for the evening rather than going back to my apartment, even if it is close.”

“Why didn't you say anything?” she asked, a small frown on her face.

“I wasn't sure you'd want to let me,” he said. “You're setting the pace for things. I didn't want it to seem too forward.”

“Well, now that we've established this is something I would actually like to have happen maybe we can do it more often,” she said. “Because I really liked sleeping next to you the one time we did. I missed sharing a bed with someone I care about.”

He thought for a moment. “I don’t necessarily have to stay over here all the time,” he said slowly. “You are more than welcome to stay with me on occasion.”

“I think I'd like that,” she said with a smile. “You have a very comfortable bed.”

He grinned back at her. “I'm glad you approve.”

She moved closer and burrowed next to him, and he put an arm around her shoulders. She was very glad this was happening tonight, she realized, and as she picked up the remote from where she had put it on the sofa and turned on the first episode she realized this was a next step of sorts, and it was a good one to take. She might even be ready to go further, she realized. The idea of being intimate with Sherlock had crossed her mind with just a bit more frequency lately, and if it did end up happening soon, whether it was tonight or tomorrow or whenever, she realized she would actually be happy with that change in direction too.

They stayed on the couch watching the episodes for hours, with one of them only occasionally getting up for one reason or another, and by the time it was two in the morning she was starting to yawn more than she wasn't. She would honestly be quite content to just sleep right where she was but it wasn't fair to him because she was stretched out slightly and he wasn't. When the tenth episode was finished she lifted her head up and looked at him. He didn't seem tired at all, but she supposed that was typical. “I think I need to go to sleep now,” she said, punctuating her statement with a yawn.

He looked down at her. “You have seemed to be yawning more often than not,” he said.

“Well, on the bright side there's only three more episodes this series and if we get up early enough we can probably tackle all of series two as well,” she said as she pulled away from him. She put her feet on the floor and stretched slightly. “You do seem to like this program.”

“As I said, I like programs that are not modern era. I think I actually like this one more than Endeavour,” he said. He stood up, and after a moment offered her his hand. She took it and stood up as well, and he pulled her closer to him. She smiled up at him. “I'm glad you made the suggestion I stay over tonight.”
“I'm glad I did too,” she said. She leaned in more and kissed him softly. She had intended it to be a brief kiss, but once again she got caught up in it as he pulled her as close as he could. It was getting harder each night to stop doing this, she had realized a week prior. And now that he was staying over tonight there was a very good chance it would lead to something more. After a few more minutes she pulled away to catch her breath. “It's getting harder to stop,” she said a bit breathlessly.

“I feel the same way,” he said quietly, resting his forehead against hers.

She was quiet for a moment. “If it were to go farther, I wouldn't mind,” she replied, moving her hands to place them on his chest. “But only if you feel comfortable with it. If not, we can just sleep next to each other. Nothing has to happen.”

“Aren't you tired?” he asked.

“I'm not quite as tired as I was before, for some reason,” she said. “I know you said you would leave it up to me but it goes both ways.”

He didn't reply for a moment, and then he kissed her again. She curled her fingers slightly into the fabric of his T-shirt, and he ran a hand up and down her back before beginning to move them out of the living room. It was a bit more complicated in that he didn't know the pathway to her bedroom as well as she did and after a minute he pulled away from her. “I'm afraid I'm going to slam us into a wall,” he said with an embarrassed grin.

“Well, fortunately there is such a thing as waiting until we're in the bedroom to go back to kissing,” she teased. She pulled farther away and reached over for his hand before grasping it and leading him towards her bedroom. Her light was off and so she turned it on with her free hand before he pulled her close again. “I'm a bit nervous,” she admitted.

“I am too, which is something I generally hate to admit, but since you feel the same way I don't mind in this instance.” He looked at her intently. “Are you absolutely sure this is what you want to do tonight?”

“Yes, I am,” she said with a nod. “I’ve thought about it more the last week or so. I mean, I thought about it before that. Quite a few times before that. But…” She trailed off. “I'm rambling.”

“I have no problem with that,” he replied. “I actually enjoy it when you do that.”

She laughed softly. “Well, I’ll remember that for later.” She moved her arms up and put them around his neck. “Do you want to?”

He nodded slowly. “Yes. Very much.”

“All right.” She leaned in and kissed him again, a very slow and searching kiss. She knew there would be no rush tonight; while things could get very passionate between them they had nothing but time this evening. After a few minutes he moved his hands under the bottom of her camisole top and slowly began to inch it up. His hands were quite warm, she realized, and when he got it high enough she pulled away and let him take it off of her. After a moment she reached for the bottom of his shirt and pushed it up slightly off his waist. She was bare to the waist herself and it was only fair if he was in the same position. He reached for the hem when she got it halfway up his chest and pulled it off of him, and once he’d tossed it to the side she moved her hands to his chest. She already knew he was muscular; she’d seen it when they’d gone to the beach and felt it when they’d been close. But tonight she just wanted to touch him as much as she could, and so she ran her hands down his chest, her fingers lightly skimming his skin.
“That actually feels quite nice,” he said quietly, and when she looked up she had seen he’d shut his eyes.

“That can go both ways, you know,” she replied, pressing against him. “You are actually allowed to touch me.”

He nodded, opening his eyes and looking at her before he kissed her again. She wasn’t surprised when he put his hands on her waist and then began moving them towards the bed. She used her hands to grip his shoulders to stay close, and when she hit the bed she accidentally dug her nails into his shoulders. She could feel him shudder slightly and she grinned against his lips in response. This was something she would definitely remember if she felt adventurous. When he pulled away from the kiss she made her way onto the bed, moving back until her head was on her pillows. He joined her a moment later, covering her with his body. She framed his face with her hands before sliding them to her shoulders. “You are quite beautiful,” he murmured, looking down at her.

She felt her cheeks warm at the compliment. “Thank you,” she said.

He gave her a grin before moving slightly and pressing a kiss to her neck, right over her pulse point. She shut her eyes and tilted her head back as he grazed his teeth on her skin slightly. Soon he moved lower, kissing her collarbone and then the top of her chest. She was more than happy to let him explore because it felt incredibly good. He made his way to the valley of her breasts and she let her hands move, letting her fingers tangle in his hair slightly. He moved to the left slightly and then hesitantly bit down on her breast. She gasped slightly, opening her eyes, and he stopped. “I hurt you,” he said, looking up.

“No, not…that felt very good,” she said. “I’m just not used to someone doing that.”

“So you want me to continue?” he asked, a slow grin spreading on his face.

“I’ll be very put out if you stop,” she said, and she got a chuckle in response before he dipped his head back down. He repeated his actions on the other side and this time she moaned in response. Eventually he moved lower, and he nipped at her skin slightly as he moved down her abdomen. Eventually she wasn’t able to hold onto him anymore and she put her arms above her head, gripping the pillow. This was not something she was used to; the men she had been with before had generally either treated her like she was fragile or taken what they wanted without making sure she was satisfied. She was getting quite excited and hoped he didn’t stop anytime soon.

When he got to the point where he encountered the shorts she wore to sleep, he lifted his head up. “Lift up your hips,” he said.

She nodded slightly then lifted her hips off the bed. He shifted his position and then reached for the waistband of the shorts, pulling them down and leaving her only in her knickers. Then he carefully hooked his fingers in the waistband of those and slowly peeled them off of her. She didn’t feel embarrassed at all. She actually felt quite desirable under his gaze. When he was done he moved back in towards her, pressing a kiss to the skin on her left inner thigh. She shut her eyes again and tilted her head back, and as he made his way higher she felt a clench of anticipation finally he pressed his lips against her core and she moaned as he began to use his tongue to tease her. She tightened her grip on the pillow and writhed slightly. She hadn’t been with many men and not a single one had done this before, and she found this was probably even more enjoyable than most of the other sexual experiences she’d have. When he added a finger to tease her, then another, she could feel tension build inside her and then suddenly she felt wave after wave of pleasure as she had what she hated to admit was the first real orgasm she’d ever had. She was panting slightly when he lifted his head up to look at her. “That was…” she said, trailing off as she tried to catch her breath.
“Adequate?” he asked.

“Spectacular,” she said. “I’ve never actually had that happen before.”

“Never?” he asked, a surprised look on his face.

“I can count the number of men I’ve been with on one hand, including you,” she said. “And not a single one of them has actually ever attempted to please me like that.”

“Not even your fiancée?” he asked.

She shook her head. “No, not even him.”

“I will admit I’ve been with probably just as many women but making sure my partner was pleased was practically drilled into my head,” he said incredulously.

“Well, then I really do want to thank whatever woman told you that,” she said.

He shook his head but he had a grin on his face. “And I honestly thought I’d have much to live up to.”

“You raised the bar several meters higher than anyone else I’ve ever been with and then jumped right over it,” she said with a laugh, propping herself up on her elbows. “I find I’m actually quite eager to know if you can top that.”

“Well, I suppose there’s only one way to find out,” he said, getting off the bed. He finished getting undressed and she took a moment to appreciate the view.

“You look quite magnificent,” she said with a smile, crooking a finger towards him once he got back on the bed.

“I’m not going to let that go to my head,” he said as he covered her again.

“I don’t know. I think it’s perfectly all right for you to have a bit of an ego right now,” she said. “But just a bit.”

“I’ll make sure it’s just a bit,” he said before he kissed her again. She could taste herself on his lips but that didn’t bother her. She moved her hands to his neck and then down to his shoulders as he pulled away from the kiss and positioned himself. When he entered her she gasped. He was quite a bit larger than she had expected, but not so large it hurt. “I didn’t hurt you, did I?” he asked.

“No,” she said, moving back to frame his face. “I’m fine.”

He nodded and then kissed her again for a moment before pulling out of her and thrusting back in. He slowly began to build up a rhythm, taking his time and she could readily admit that it felt absolutely wonderful. She moved her hands to his shoulders and dug her nails in after a moment, and with that as a sign of encouragement he began to pick up the pace a bit. She shut her eyes again and tilted her head back as the speed and depth of the thrusts began to increase. She could feel the tension building again and she knew some she was going to have another orgasm. He seemed to sense that, increasing the speed and intensity until she was having on for dear life. And then she came almost with a shout, and soon enough she felt him go rigid as he joined her in release. If she’d thought she was breathless before that was nothing compared to now.

After a few minutes they both seemed to catch their breath, and he leaned in and kissed her again. She moved her hands away from his shoulders as she kissed him back, and then after a moment he
pulled out completely and then rolled onto his back. She turned her head to look at him, giving him one of the widest and most satisfied smiles she had ever had on her face. “So, I did well?” he asked, giving her a grin back.

“You did exceptionally well,” she said with a nod. “I was very impressed.”

“Well, as long as you were impressed,” he said.

“Oh, yes. I’m fairly sure when I bring this up to people who read the tabloid reports I will be gloating.” He chuckled at that and she rolled over onto her side to look at him, placing a hand on his chest. “I am very glad this happened, Sherlock,” she said in a more serious tone.”

“I’m glad it did too,” he said, picking up her hand and kissing her palm. She gave him a grin but it ended with a yawn. “You’re still tired, aren’t you?”

“Tired and incredibly sated,” she said.

“Then you should get some rest,” he said.

“You aren’t going to leave me alone in bed because you get bored, are you?” she asked.

“Despite appearances I’m a bit worn out at the moment,” he said. “I was thinking it would be a good idea if I get a quilt of some sort to put over us and we just go to sleep.”

“That is an excellent idea,” she said, watching him sit up. “I have them in the chest at the foot of the bed.”

He nodded, then got out of bed. She definitely took a moment to appreciate the view. Soon he had one of her quilts and he got back on the bed, draping it over the two of them. She rolled onto her side and he pulled her against him, putting an arm around her waist. She braced his arm with hers and snuggled against him. “Good night, Molly,” he said, his lips near her ear.

“Good night, Sherlock,” she said as she yawned and shut her eyes. It didn’t take long for her to fall asleep, and her last thought was that the entire day had been absolutely perfect, and she couldn’t wait to see what tomorrow brought with it.
She woke up slowly, very much aware that Sherlock was still asleep right beside her. If she had to have guessed he hadn't moved at all while they'd been asleep since his arm was still locked around her waist. She grinned slightly as she tried her best to roll over onto her other side so she could look at him. He literally had a death grip on her waist, she realized. And then after a moment he tightened his hold on her even more and she had to wonder if he was actually asleep. “Are you awake?” she asked quietly.

“Yes,” he said.

“How long have you been awake?” she asked as he finally moved his arm so she could turn to face him.

“An hour, give or take?” he said after thinking a moment.

“You didn't have to stay in bed while I slept,” she said.

“I didn't want you to wake up in bed alone,” he said, moving his hand to her waist and running it up and down. “That probably would have left a bad impression.”

“But an hour of laying here and doing nothing?” she asked, raising an eyebrow. “I would have been completely fine if you'd gotten up and kept yourself occupied.”

“Well, I was also enjoying being close to you,” he said. “Though if you weren't awake in another half hour I was considering getting out of bed and making breakfast to entice you to wake up more quickly.”

“Oh, breakfast in bed actually sounds lovely,” she said with a smile.

“I could do that, if you want,” he said, grinning back.

“That is quite tempting,” she said. “But I like having you here more for the moment.”

“If you change your mind I'm still offering,” he said. “We didn't talk much last night.”

“Considering we spent most of the evening watching the telly and it was closer to three in the morning than two when we finally went to sleep I'm not surprised,” she said. “But we can talk now.”

He was quiet for a full minute. “Were your prior experiences really that sub-par?” he asked curiously.

She nodded. “I've been quite used to not really getting much out of the experience since my first experience,” she said. “Tom tried, at least, but never really succeeded. But most men took what they wanted and that was that.”

“I have had a tendency to be quite selfish in my life, but my first partner very firmly told me if a man is selfish when he's intimate with a woman it will end up costing him more in the long run. At the time I wanted to impress her so I paid attention to what she told me. I just hadn't put it to use very much.”

“How many women have you been with?” she asked.

“Three,” he replied. “And there was quite a long gap between my first partner and Janine.”
“How long?”

He thought for a moment. “Nearly fifteen years.”

“I feel I should be surprised by that but I'm actually not,” she said thoughtfully. “Before I got to
know you I always rather thought you were one of those people who didn't care one way or the
other about shagging but if you did you'd excel at it.”

“Well, to be honest, if I hadn't been faking a relationship with Janine the gap probably would have
been longer and I would have been perfectly fine with that,” he said. “With her it was something I
needed to do to keep up pretenses.”

“And with me?” she asked quietly.

“It's something I actually want to do,” he said. “As you noted last night, it had been getting harder to
end things each night. Most of the last week I've gone straight home and taken an ice cold shower
before I attempted to go to sleep, and sometimes not even that helped.”

“I did not realize I had quite that effect on you,” she said with surprise.

“I was actually starting to regret letting you set the pace for our relationship,” he said with a slight
grin.

“Well, I'm glad you did,” she said. “Though I had been starting to really hate it when you left. If we
had actually talked about this we might have taken this step earlier in the week.”

“Which is further proof that neither of us are perfect at this relationship business,” he said.

“I don't know. I think we're doing fairly well,” she said with a laugh. “Some communication issues
aside, at least.” She reached over and placed a hand on his chest. “But that's something we can work
on.”

“I'm glad you're patient with me,” he said. “Once I realized I did in fact want a relationship with you
I started to think that it might not work out because I'd had one actual relationship and one fake
relationship in my life and that was it.”

“It's true I may have had more relationships but most of them were fairly unfulfilling and quite short.
Tom was the man I had been with the longest, and after that ended I was starting to wonder if there
was something wrong with me because of who I kept choosing.”

He was quiet for a moment. “I don't think there was something wrong with you, but I just assumed
you settled for what you felt you could get. At least that was what I saw with Tom.”

“There's definitely some truth to that,” she said with a nod. She moved closer to him and he slid his
hand away from her waist to run it up and down her back. “I think, though, if things hadn't worked
out exactly the way they did both of us would be miserable right now. I think if I hadn't decided to
move here and you hadn't decided to get me to come home we never would have started a
relationship. We would have been alone for an awfully long time.”

“I tend to agree,” he said. “And I'm much happier with things as they are now than I would be if I
was still alone.”

“I am too,” she said with a wide smile. She moved her hand to touch his face and then leaned in to
kiss him. He pulled her flush against him in response as the kiss got more passionate, and soon he
rolled her over onto her back. When he pulled away from the kiss she chuckled. “And I think that
signaled the end of that particular conversation.”

“I thought that was a good stopping point, yes,” he said with a grin.

“I couldn't--” she began when she began to hear a mobile ring. She frowned. “That's yours.”

“I'm going to ignore it,” he said.

“But what if it's important?” she asked.

He looked at her for a moment and then sighed, rolling back over. His mobile stopped ringing as he picked it up, and he waited a moment to see who had called. He frowned slightly as he looked at the number. “It's Jason.”

“Call him back,” she said.

He sat up after a moment and called Jason back. “Did you need something?” he asked a moment later. Then his eyes got wide. “Slow down, Jason. What happened?” There was a lengthy pause and he glanced over at Molly, mouthing the word accident. “Did anything happen to you?” The pause was shorter this time. “All right. What hospital are the two of you at?” This time the pause was mere seconds. “No, Molly's here with me. Give us time to get dressed and we'll be there soon. A half hour at most. Just keep calm, all right? We'll get there as quickly as we can.” He pulled the phone away and ended the call.

“What happened?” she asked, her eyes wide.

“Jason and Thomas were in a friend's car and there was a nasty accident,” he said. “Thomas is alive but severely injured and Jason is panicking. They're at the hospital here in Hillcrest. Jason's in the ER at the moment. He just got done having his arm put in a cast.”

“Oh God,” she said. “We should hurry.”

“I'll just put on what I wore yesterday,” he said, pulling the quilt back and putting his feet on the floor. “The sooner we get there the better I'll feel.”

“Me too,” she said. She made her way to the other side of the bed and then moved over towards her dresser as Sherlock came over in her general direction to get his pants. They got dressed quickly and left her apartment in fifteen minutes. Sherlock had his car keys out before they even got to the gate and she followed him over to his car. They got in and then made the short drive to the hospital, parking his car in the lot. As soon as they got out she reached over for his hand and they made their way into the ER. Molly spotted Jason almost immediately. “Jason,” she said as she got closer. She gave him a warm embrace. “What happened?”

“The other car came out of nowhere,” he said, holding her close. “Thomas's side got hit and my friend and I got out and we were mostly okay but Thomas wasn't conscious.”

“He'll be okay,” she said soothingly. “Are they going to let you see him?”

“I don't know. We aren't married yet so if they insist on family only I don't know what will happen. I have the right to make medical decisions for him so they might let me in. I just...I don't know. No one is talking to me.” He pulled away from her. “I'm scared.”

She glanced over at Sherlock, who nodded and moved over to the nurse's station to see if he could get some answers. Then she gestured for Jason to sit back down and she sat next to him. “No matter what happens we'll stay here with you until we know something for certain, all right?”
"I'm sorry. I know this isn't how you guys were planning on spending your last day before Sherlock went back to school," he said.

"This is vastly more important," she said, reaching over for his castless hand and squeezing it. "You're our friend. Both of you are. It's better to be here for you when you need us."

He nodded, and she sat there with him, waiting for Sherlock to get back. When he came closer he looked at Jason. "Apparently the nurse has a preference for British accents and told me things she otherwise wouldn't," he said. "She told me he's stable and he's in surgery, and when that's done he'll be moved to the ICU. They're going to be restricting his visitors to strictly family." Jason looked defeated. "However, since you have the rights to make his medical decisions and he happened to carry that information in his wallet I informed them that you're here and someone is going to get you to take you to the surgery waiting room until he's brought to a private room, and then you can go see him. Molly and I won't be allowed to join you, but I'm sure you can call us with updates."

"Thank you," Jason said gratefully.

"We can stay with you in the other waiting room until you're allowed to see him, or at least until a doctor can come out and give you an update," Sherlock replied. "Just to make sure you're not alone."

"I appreciate it," he replied. "I just started to panic and they weren't telling me anything."

"It helps I used to lie to people on a fairly regular basis to get information," Sherlock said with a slight smile. "I can usually get information from any source, whether they're supposed to give it to me or not." They heard someone clear their throat and he turned to see a woman gesturing for them to come closer. "That would be the nurse I spoke to."

"Come on. Let's go wait," Molly said as she and Jason stood up. The three of them were led to another waiting area and told to sit down, and both Molly and Sherlock did their level best to distract Jason as much as they could. Finally forty-five minutes later a surgeon came out, asking for Jason and telling him that the injuries were severe but Thomas wasn't paralyzed and he would be making a full recovery. All three of them relaxed as the surgeon pulled Jason aside to go into a bit more detail. Molly looked over at Sherlock. "That's probably the best news he could have gotten," she said.

"Yes, it is," he said with a nod. "I suppose once he tells us what he can he'll go into Thomas's room and wait for him to wake up."

"I'd assume so, yes," she said. She leaned over and put her head on his shoulder. "At least we were able to be here with him when he needed us."

"Yes. I think it could have gone much worse if he hadn't thought to call me," he said, putting an arm around her shoulders. "I think when we do leave I want to go back to your home and stay close and attempt to do what we had originally planned to do today."

"I think watching the telly will be a good distraction," she replied. She was quiet for a moment. "Do you ever worry something like this could happen to one of us?"

"I do," he said. "It's not a constant worry, but it is in the back of my mind. I'm just thankful for the moment that it wasn't us, though I won't voice that particular opinion around Jason."

"I think that might be best," she said with a nod as Jason came back over. "Well?"

"He's got three cracked ribs, a concussion, his right leg and arm are broken in two places each and there was some internal bleeding that they had to stop, but he's on the mend now. He's going to be in recovery for a while, and they're saying he's probably going to have to have physical therapy to go
through once his bones heal. But he's alive.” He gave both of them a grateful smile. “Thank you for being here. I really appreciate it.”

“It really wasn't a problem,” Sherlock said, and Molly nodded.

“I have to go back to his room now, but I'll call you guys when he wakes up.”

Molly and Sherlock stood up, and Molly went over and gave Jason a hug. “When we can come by and visit, let us know, all right? I'm going to buy him the gaudiest teddy bear I can find.”

“Oh God, he'll hate that,” Jason said with a grin as he let go. “But I'll get a kick out of it.”

“I'm sure he'll love it regardless,” she said with a smile. She reached over for Sherlock's hand. “See you soon, Jason.”

“Bye,” he said before going back to the waiting nurse.

She and Sherlock made their way out of the waiting room towards the lift. “That was a more eventful morning than I had expected us to have,” Sherlock said.

“I know. But it could have gone much worse.” She looked over at him and after a moment squeezed his hand. “I think we should stop off at Jack in The Box and buy breakfast. I'm not really in the mood to cook and I don't think you are, either.”

“Not really, no,” he said. They lapsed into silence, each lost in their own thoughts, and stayed that way until they got to the fast food restaurant. Once they got their food they returned to her home and she let them in, placing her handbag on her table. She took the bag of food into the kitchen and then paused when she realized Sherlock hadn't joined her. She went back towards her front door and saw he was lost in thought still. She moved over towards him, moving into his line of vision, and he seemed to snap out of it. “I'm sorry.”

“Are you all right?” she asked.

“I was just lost in thought, that's all,” he said. “I was thinking what my reaction would have been if you were the one who was hurt.”

“What would you have done?” she asked gently.

“I think I might have been panicking far more than Jason did,” he said quietly. “Especially if I wasn't allowed to see you.”

“Well, you would have been,” she said, moving close enough to embrace him. “I gave you the rights to make decisions about my care, remember? I don't have family, just close friends and you, and I trust you to do what's in my best interest.”

“I know,” he said, embracing her back. “There's something I should tell you, though.”

“What is it?” she asked, pulling away slightly to look at him.

He let go of her and began pacing slightly. “You are quite important to me,” he said. “More important than most other people I know. Even more important to me than John is, and I owe him so much. And I'm not sure how to say what I want to say because I actually haven't actually felt this way towards anyone before. I feel quite strongly towards you, and I...” He trailed off and ran a hand through his hair. “I'm mucking this up.”
“Sherlock, do you think you're in love with me?” she asked quietly.

“Yes,” he said, stopping in front of her. “And I don't think that's the way it should have come out. You deserve--”

She cut him off by leaning in and kissing him softly. He was surprised for a moment but then he kissed her back, moving his hands to settle them on her waist. The kiss stayed soft, and after a few minutes she pulled away from him, looking up at him with a wide smile. “I love you too, you know,” she said.

She watched the grin spread slowly on his face. “So I didn't tell you in the absolute worst way?”

“Well, it would be nice if you said the actual words,” she said with a chuckle.

“I love you, Molly,” he said.

“I'm quite glad to hear that,” she said, putting her arms around his neck. “And if I wasn't starving I would suggest we adjourn to my bedroom and I show you exactly how glad I am to hear that.”

“We can eat quickly,” he said.

“Yes, I suppose we can,” she said with a laugh. He let go of her with some reluctance and they made their way into the kitchen. While there had been some downsides to the morning the mutual admission had filled her heart up and given her hope that this relationship would do well and thrive and that it would be the beginning of something that would last for quite a long time, and that made this morning almost as perfect as the night before had been.
Chapter 19

The first week Sherlock was back in school the tone was set for how the rest of the semester would be. He ended up spending a large chunk of each evening at his home studying and doing what he needed to do. Tuesday night he called her to let her know he had quite a bit of coursework to do and he probably wouldn’t get to spend much time with her until the weekend so Wednesday night she came over at seven with supper for him, just to make sure he ate. By the time Friday evening came he said he was ready for some time away from his schoolwork, and so she invited him over for supper and a film as soon as he was done.

It was seven when he came over, knocking on the door softly instead of simply letting himself in. She went to answer the door with a frown on her face which quickly became a smile when she saw him with a pizza box in his hands and a six pack of her favorite cola on top. “You didn't have to buy supper,” she said as she moved out of the way.

“No, actually yesterday I ordered a pizza and they completely botched the order, so the manager said I could have a free pizza today as a replacement,” he said, taking it all into the kitchen. “I thought I would share it with you. It's half pineapple and ham and half cheese with extra cheese all over it.”

“Thank you,” she said before giving him a quick kiss when he was done. “I had taken some chicken out but I can save that for tomorrow.”

“I think I would greatly appreciate a home-cooked meal tomorrow,” he said. “It's been Panda Express and fast food this entire week, except when you brought me a meal.”

“At least you're eating,” she said as she got them plates. “I was worried you wouldn't.”

“Well, they are demanding classes, and I don't feel like cooking by the time I'm done, but I also don't want to take horrible care of myself.” She handed him a plate and he took it. “Food I don't have to cook is better than no food at all.”

“Why don't I cook some meals for you?” she suggested. “Tomorrow we can go and buy some cheap plastic containers and I can spend Sunday cooking and send food home with you. You can freeze some of it and keep the rest in your refrigerator.”

“I would appreciate it, but you don't have to,” he said as he took a slice of pizza out of the box for himself. “And don't you want to spend time with me?”

“I fully expect you to be here with me while I do it,” she said with a smile as she took her own slice. “But I honestly don't mind. I'd much rather have you eat things that are healthier than takeaway and fast food and pizza most nights. I think if I make three meals on Sundays that should suffice. Then I can have leftovers for lunch as well.”

“Thank you,” he said with a grin. “I'll buy all the ingredients for whatever it is you make.”

“I'd appreciate it,” she replied. She set her plate down and pulled out a glass. “Would you like any of the cola?”

He shook his head. “I don't mind Coca Cola, but Dr. Pepper is one I'm not fond of.”

“Now, I can't stand Coca Cola,” she said as she took her glass to her refrigerator and got some ice from the dispenser in the front. “It's too strong. But Dr. Pepper is mild and I enjoy that more.”
“I’m more in the mood for water tonight or else I would have bought some cola for me,” he said.

“Would you like water now?” she asked, and he nodded. She put the cup under the water dispenser and filled it up before going to him and giving him the glass. Then she pulled down a cup and went to get more ice. “And thank you for buying the cans. One can a day is more than enough.”

“If I’d thought about it more I would have gone to Mitsuwa today and stocked up on ramune and your tea for you,” he said as he headed towards her sofa.

“We should do that soon,” she said thoughtfully as she pulled a can of soda out of the plastic rings holding them together. “Maybe not this weekend, but soon.”

“I wouldn’t mind doing it Sunday, if you think you’ll still have enough time to cook what you want to cook,” he said.

“I can cook into the night. What time is your first class on Monday?” she asked, opening her soda and pouring it into her glass.

“Eleven,” he said. “I purposefully picked classes that started later since I have a commute. I usually leave around nine to make sure I can get parking closer to where my classes are, though I generally still need to use the shuttles.”

“At least that’s an option,” she replied. “I can imagine it would be horrible to walk all over the campus to get to your classes.”

“I would be in a much fouler mood if that were the case,” he said as she took her food and went over to join him. “But I do find the courses interesting, even if I am taking more than the average student.”

“How many classes are you taking?” she asked.

“I'm enrolled in eighteen units this semester. Generally twelve is the maximum but even though I started the Master’s degree program this semester I needed to take more classes in order to continue it next semester. I’m in a more unique position than most students in the program since there’s been a gap in between university and now so they're letting me go over the maximum this semester.”

Her eyes widened. “I'm surprised I'm even getting to see you this weekend.”

“I work late into the night, and then I did all my labs today, which is why I got here so late. I wanted to make sure I got to spend the entire weekend with you.”

“Well, I appreciate it,” she said with a smile.

“I do get to stay over, don't I?” he asked.

She chuckled. “Yes, you do. I rather like sharing a bed with you and I missed doing that this week.”

“If it won’t be too much trouble I can call you when I’m done some evenings, if it isn’t too late at night, and you could come over to at least sleep next to me,” he suggested.

“I would like that very much, if you don’t mind waking up earlier so I can get ready for work.”

“I don't mind,” he said. “I missed sleeping next to you too.”

She moved closer to him as they sat on the sofa. “That wasn’t the only thing I missed. And before you say it’s shagging I missed it’s not that. I mean, I missed that too but mostly I missed spending time with you, being close to you.”
“I missed that a lot too,” he said. “I think all we have to do is make it to December and we should be fine after that. Most of the courses I’m taking this semester are for my Master’s degree so I’m in the program already, so as long as I’m back by the tenth of January, I think, I can continue into the actual program next semester. I don’t think I’ll end up staying in London for too long during the holidays.”

She was quiet for a moment. “Do you really want to go home for Christmas? I mean, I might not be able to get the time off since everyone’s going to want the time off to go be with their families, so it may be just you going.”

“Do you want to stay here?” he asked, looking at her intently.

“It could be nice,” she said. “I mean, if you want to go home I’ll see if I can arrange for time off, but it might not be a lot. And I’d just rather go home when it wasn’t Christmas, just because I don’t want to intrude on any plans our friends might have.”

He appeared to think it over for a few minutes. “I don’t mind postponing a trip back home,” he said finally. “I’ll have a week or so off in the spring, if you feel like waiting that long.”

“I think I’d like that better,” she said with a smile. “And we could try and do something here with our friends.” And then her eyes widened. “I might not have been able to go in December anyway.”

“Why not?” he asked with a frown.

“Monday afternoon Jason called me and said Thomas got moved out of the ICU and was in a room of his own so I went to go visit him. He and Thomas said they are going to try and get married in December, when Thomas is completely healed again, and they wanted me to be in the ceremony. And you as well, but they weren’t sure how busy you were with everything this week or they would have called to ask you yourselves. They’ll probably officially ask you tomorrow. I said you would definitely be available then.”

He nodded. “That sounds like a good reason to stay here in California. Hopefully this wedding will go more smoothly than John and Mary’s.”

“I hope so, too,” she said with a chuckle. “Thomas asked for my help planning it, and I told him I didn’t mind doing that even though I don’t really know much about weddings. Mary talked about planning hers a bit, but not much. She did that mostly with her wedding party.”

“You two got to be much closer later, didn’t you?” he asked.

She nodded. “We were friendly before you came back, but because I knew you weren’t really dead it was hard to be around John at times. After you came back we got to be closer, but it took time. And I was quite upset with her when I was told she’d shot you, but when it was explained why I understood.”

“That’s not a time I particularly like to look back on,” he said.

“I know,” she said gently. “So why don’t we change the subject, all right?”

“That sounds like a good idea,” he said with a nod.

“The next two movies in the list came in this week,” she said. They had decided to do the most recent version of the list, the one that was put out in 2007, and she had printed out the list and stapled the pages together. Every time they watched a movie she crossed it off. “So if you want to watch ‘Titanic’ and ‘Sunrise’ I have them both. I ended up having to buy ‘Sunrise’ on EBay and it cost me more than I had expected. I didn’t realize it was so hard to come by.”
“Then let me purchase the next two,” he said with a nod. “Which ones come after that?”

She went over to her DVDs and picked up the list. “The next two are ‘Spartacus’ and ‘The Apartment.’”

“I’ll see about ordering them for next weekend,” he replied. “Which one comes first for the ones tonight?”

“‘Titanic,’” she said. “I’ve seen that one before. It’s a tale of two people who fall in love and can’t be together. It’s a good movie, I suppose, but the ending is incredibly depressing.”

“This will make for an interesting evening,” he said.

She chuckled softly at that. “At the rate we’re doing we can watch all one hundred of these movies and then watch the movies on the other list we haven’t seen yet,” she said with a grin.

“I think that could be interesting. Where there many differences between the lists?”

“Quite a few. So why don’t we finish this list and then go back to the 1998 list after that?”

“All right,” he said with a nod. “Are there any movies on this list you don’t particularly want to watch?”

“Two of them. ‘Silence of the Lambs’ is a movie I’ve avoided for years, and I would much rather skip ‘A Clockwork Orange.’”

“We can skip both of them,” he said.

She shook her head. “No, I’m determined to get through this list. I’m just going to expect you to stay very close to me the evening we watch ‘Silence of the Lambs.’”

“I had a case one time where someone attempted to emulate Hannibal Lecter,” he said. “Lestrade told me to watch the movie as research but I refused, mostly because I didn’t want it to interfere with finding the killer. And I’m glad I didn’t. If I had I would have been chasing the same trail of breadcrumbs he and the other DIs were following.”

“I remember that case,” she said. “One of my coworkers did all the autopsies for it. He said it was the most disturbing case he’d worked on.”

“I know you want to watch all the movies, but we can skip just that one,” he said. “I don’t think ‘A Clockwork Orange’ is quite as bad, if you want to attempt to watch that one to make up for skipping ‘Silence of the Lambs.’”

She thought about it for a moment. “All right. We’ll skip that movie.” She opened up the DVD for ‘Titanic.’ “I’ll admit, I was one of those people who saw this movie more than once hoping the ending would change. It’s silly, I know, but I was so angry with the ending the first time I watched it. After it left theaters I generally ignored it because I didn’t like it. But it’s got some very good actors doing a fine job. I became a big fan of Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio because of this movie.”

“Do you have other movies they’ve done?” he asked.

“A few,” she replied with a nod. “‘Inception’ is my favorite movie with Leonardo in it, and ‘Sense & Sensibility’ is my favorite of Kate’s.”

“Maybe we can watch both of those this weekend,” he said. “I don’t mind sitting through a period
piece if you enjoy it.”

“I promise I won’t make you sit through the miniseries version of ‘Pride & Prejudice’ with Colin Firth,” she said as she put the DVD in. “I’m not that mean.”

“I reread it after you told me that you thought of me as your Mr. Darcy,” he said. “It’s actually not that bad of a book. When I read it as a child I didn’t comprehend it very much, but then I was seven at the time and bored and I’d read all my pirate books. I wanted more books about things that interested me.”

“I can imagine,” she said with a chuckle.

“How old were you when you first read it?” he asked.

She thought for a moment. “Nine, I believe? I asked a teacher for a book she thought I might enjoy and she told me to read as much Jane Austen as I could. That school year I read everything that I could find. I enjoyed them all, but *Pride & Prejudice* was by far my favorite.”

“I wouldn’t mind watching the miniseries, if you want to do that tomorrow,” he said. “Because I’m assuming you prefer the Colin Firth version to the book version?”

“Well, yes, in a way,” she said. “He’s very close to how I pictured Mr. Darcy when I was reading it. But I also like the version with Matthew Macfadyen, and I quite enjoyed Daniel Vincent Gordh in the modernized version that was on YouTube, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. I have all of those DVDs as well,” she said as she moved back to the sofa and settled next to him. “But you know which one I like best?”

“Which one?” he asked.

“The version I like best is the one I’m sitting next to on the sofa because he’s mine.” She said with a smile.

He gave her a grin. “Well, I will take that as a high compliment,” he said before reaching over to pull her closer.

“You should,” she said before leaning in and kissing him softly. She kissed him for a few minutes, and she was almost tempted to shelve the idea of watching a movie and just taking him to bed and staying there for a while. Reluctantly she pulled away from him. “If we want to watch the movie we should stop,” she said, trying to catch her breath as he ran his fingers along her spine.

“We could always watch it in a few hours,” he said. “You have my undivided attention for the entire weekend, so we can stay up late tonight.”

“But if we shag now I’m going to want to curl up next to you and go to sleep and then we’ll have to put off the movies until later,” she said, shaking her head slightly.

“Perhaps we can only watch the one tonight?” he suggested.

“I could live with that,” she said with a smile. She moved away from him just slightly and curled up next to him after she picked up her plate of pizza. The remote was next to him so he picked it up and skipped the previews for other movies. All in all this was shaping up to be a good evening, she decided, and she hoped it got better the more it went on.
“So, how are things going with you and Sherlock?” Mary asked when she called Molly during her shift on Monday. She hadn’t gotten to speak to any of her friends back home the entire week, but Mary had surprised her with a phone call and since she’d only been typing up reports she had decided to take it. It wouldn’t hurt to take a bit of an extra break, she thought to herself.

“Well, he’s quite busy with school, but otherwise it’s very good. I got to spend the whole weekend with him, so that was nice,” Molly said, leaning back in her office chair slightly.

“Did you do anything exciting?” Mary asked.

“We watched a lot of films, did a little shopping, spent quite a bit of time in bed together…nothing too exciting,” she said with a grin, waiting for Mary to catch what she’d implied.

There was silence on the other line for a moment. “Did you and Sherlock…?” Mary asked, trailing off.

“We did,” she said.

“And?” Mary prompted.

“Remember how I would complain that there was one department most of the men in my life did poorly in? Sherlock is definitely better. Much *much* better.”

“Oh, you are very lucky,” Mary said. “I mean, based on what Janine had told me I could imagine he was. But I’m very glad it holds true for you. You definitely deserve to have a better sex life than you’d had.”

“We haven’t shagged much, to be honest,” Molly said. “It only just happened for the first time a little over a week ago, and we literally spent Monday through Thursday asleep in our own beds. It was mostly this weekend we did. And I stayed at his apartment last night when I was done making meals for him for the week, which was nice. He actually slept through my alarm, which surprised me because normally he’s up before I am.”

“That must have been a new experience for you, slinking off while your partner was still asleep,” Mary said with a chuckle.

“Oh, it was. I’m used to it being the other way around.”

Mary was quiet for a moment. “Were you and…?” She stopped. “I mean, you don’t have to answer, but did you and Moriarty…?”

“No,” Molly said emphatically. “He got a few kisses, that was all. But on the third date I could tell he didn’t really want to be there, so I ended things. He’d gotten what he wanted from me and there was no need to pretend anymore.”

“Does Sherlock know that?” Mary asked.

“Yes, he does. I think he was quite pleased it hadn’t gone very far. It might have changed his opinion of me slightly if it had, but I don’t think it would have been much. Moriarty was a master manipulator and I think Sherlock would have assumed he’d manipulated me as well. But it did set him at ease.”
“It sets me at ease, too,” Mary said. “That man was a vile bastard and I didn't even meet him.”

“I know,” Molly said quietly.

“I shouldn't have brought it up. I'm sorry.”

“It’s all right,” Molly replied. “I'm fairly sure most of my friends have wondered, at one point or another.” She was quiet for a moment. “Do you still talk to Janine?”

“Occasionally,” Mary said. “Not as much as before. She's unhappy with the fact I’m still friendly with Sherlock. She feels I should have chosen her side, but...”

“But John is your husband and Sherlock is his platonic soul mate,” Molly said wryly.

“I don't think I could have put it better myself,” Mary said with a slight chuckle. “She also doesn't know what he did for us. I don't think Sherlock would particularly care if people knew, as everyone here has figured out he's done some grand gesture for them at one point, but outside of you I don't talk about it with anyone, even Janine. Why did you want to know?”

“I'm just curious,” Molly said.

“She knows about the two of you, if that's what you were curious about,” Mary replied. “When it was over, after she went to the tabloids, I went to her flat and just listened to her vent. Even then she knew if he ever really considered letting someone into his life the way she thought she had been it would have been you.”

“I didn't know that,” Molly said quietly.

“To be honest, I was genuinely surprised about the whole thing with Janine. I understand why now, but I was so sure he would do everything in his power to get you to end your engagement to Tom much earlier than you actually did. She saw the same thing but she had enjoyed what they had while they had it. You do hold a very special place in his heart, and him traveling eight thousand miles away to come fetch you and bring you home rather solidified it for most of us.”

“Did all of you think we were both going to come back?”

“John did, and Greg did too, for a while. I had the feeling if you were really determined to make a life for yourself there neither of you would be coming back for a very long time. I just didn't share that opinion with many people.” She paused for a few seconds. “Though since I was right I feel quite vindicated.”

Molly chuckled slightly. “Well, I wouldn't crow about it too much. John's ego might be bruised.”

“And we wouldn't want that now, would we?” Mary said with a laugh of her own. “Are you two planning on coming back for the holidays?”

“Most likely not. I know the people I work with have families they would like to spend the holidays with, and I would feel bad going back to London and dropping in and not really getting to stay for long. And besides, I'm going to have a wedding to attend.”

“You mean those two adorable friends of yours, Thomas and Jason?” Mary asked.

“Yes, them. Thomas was in a very bad automobile accident and they decided sooner was better than later for them to get married.”
“Is he all right?” Mary asked, sounding concerned.

“He's got broken bones that need mending, and probably physical therapy for a while, but he'll be fine. They're planning it for around Christmas, and considering they've both been disowned by their families I want to be there with them when they do this. Jason said I'm as close to them as a sister, and they really are like family to me. Not that all of you in London aren't as well, but...” Molly trailed off.

“I understand,” Mary said gently. “I don't think John will, but I do. And I'll make him understand. But you two are going to come back home and visit at some point? I mean, you aren't going to stay out there forever and never come home, right?”

“We're aiming for Sherlock's spring break, though if I work over Christmas and New Year's we might be able to come for a week before he has to do what he needs to do for his program. I'm honestly thinking of just surprising him with tickets to London and hotel reservations, if I can. I know he's happy here with me, but he misses John.”

“And John misses him too,” Mary replied. “If you are able to do this I'll help plan the surprise reunion, so long as Sherlock doesn't spoil the surprise himself.”

“I'll take away his phone until we're in London and he's face to face with John,” Molly said with a laugh. “But I think if I tell him it's a surprise he'll cooperate. We both know it would be a surprise John would welcome.”

“It definitely would,” Mary said. “So when do you think you might be able to come visit?”

“Sherlock said something about needing to be back by the 10th of January, so possibly the 2nd to the 9th? If I can get any time off earlier I will, but I took five days off in July and Sherlock has asked me to see if I can get Thanksgiving weekend off. They may not let me take more than a week off.”

“I would think that everyone at your work would want that particular weekend off, considering what a major holiday it is there,” Mary said.

“One of my coworkers has said he'll cover a few shifts for me as thanks for picking up so much slack after he'd had his heart attack. While Sherlock wants me to have the full four days off I'm almost thinking I should hold that promise in reserve to see if we can actually spend New Year's in London. That was something I really wanted to go back for.”

“I say ruin Sherlock's plans and give him the surprise,” Mary said.

“Who knows? I may get both. Or at least maybe a three day weekend around Thanksgiving. If Sherlock would only tell me why he wants me to be free those days I would be more inclined to ask for them off.” Molly was quiet for a moment as she listened outside her office. She thought she had heard the morgue doors open. She waited, and then heard footsteps. “I have to go. I think someone has brought another body for me to autopsy.”

“Of course. I'm surprised you took time out of your workday to speak to me for this long,” Mary said. “Take care, love.”

“You too.” She hung up at that point and made her way out into the morgue. There was, in fact, someone there with not one but two bodies from a double homicide, and Molly took the paperwork and signed for them, then got the bodies situated and began to work. She had just finished those autopsies when she got a suspicious death, and since she knew Sherlock was going to be putting in a late night she decided she'd stay after her shift had ended to finish it, even when her relief arrived. It
was only four when she finished, and she asked if her relief had any objections to her staying in the office and finishing her reports. When he said he didn't she went back in and spent another three hours typing up the reports.

As soon as she was done she went to the locker room and began to change out of her scrubs into the outfit she had brought with her. She had just gotten her skirt on when her phone rang and she saw it was Sherlock. She sat on the bench in front of her locker as she answered his call. “I'm in the middle of getting dressed,” she said.

There was a pause. “That would be something I would much prefer to see at the moment,” he said.

She laughed. “Well, what are you doing right now?”

“Reading from two text books at once,” he said. “I'm giving myself a headache and I thought I could use a momentary distraction.”

“If you let me finish getting dressed I could always come over and give you a much more interesting distraction,” she pointed out.

“As tempting as that is I would neglect the work I need to do for the entire evening and that would be a very bad idea. It would mean a longer evening tomorrow.”

“Do you think you want me to come over tonight?”

“As it stands I don't think I'll be done until nearly midnight, though you are welcome to come over and sleep while I finish. It might provide motivation for me to finish faster.”

“Don't rush and make mistakes,” she chided.

“When do I make mistakes?” he asked, and he almost sounded affronted.

“It's been known to happen from time to time,” she replied.

“Name one time.”

“Two words: Irene Adler,” she said smugly. “And then there was how badly you miscalculated John's reaction to you returning from the dead. And do we really want to start in on the whole idea that you could wear me down in a month or so to come home?”

He was quiet for a full minute. “Point taken,” he said with a sigh. “I just usually don't make mistakes.”

“Well, don't start because of me. I do not want to be a bad influence. But if you really want, I'll come over and keep you company without distracting you until I need to get some sleep. And I won't even be upset if you ignore me.”

“You are a far more understanding girlfriend than I deserve,” he said.

“Well, I encouraged you to stay to do this. If I wasn't supportive that would make me a horrible girlfriend and a very bad person in general. And really, I do want you to well. If you think me being there would be better than me being home by myself then I'll come over. So let me get off the phone and finish getting dressed and I'll be over soon, all right?”

“Very well.” He paused. “I should probably tell you more that I love you.”

She smiled, even though he couldn't see it. “That would be wonderful to hear, but it's all right if you
forget sometimes. And for the record, I love you too.”

“I'll see you soon, then,” he replied.

“All right. Bye, Sherlock.”

“Bye.” She hung up at that point and quickly finished getting dressed. She left work and stopped only briefly to pick up something to eat since she had skipped lunch and it was probably going to be too late to cook something at Sherlock's home. She made her way home and then grabbed her food and went to his apartment. She let herself in and took in the sight of him at his table, with his laptop and one of his textbooks on the table and the other one on his lap. He looked up when she came in and gave her a small grin. “I was just about to throw this book in frustration,” he said, lifting up the book in his lap. “The print is so small.”

“Do you think you might need glasses?” she asked.

“I might,” he said with a sigh, setting the book down on his table. “That just makes me feel like I'm getting older. I'm only in my mid-thirties!”

She chuckled. “Just remember, I wear glasses when I'm at work,” she said, setting her bag of food on his counter before coming over to him. “I have a pair of glasses that I wear when I'm at work. They're actually quite neat. When I pull the sides they come apart in the middle, and I wear them around my neck. If you ever see an episode of the television show CSI: NY they're exactly like what their coroner wears.”

“I'm actually surprised by that,” he said. “I would have thought you'd get something classy.”

“Well, the ones I wear at work are more for function than anything else. And it's easier to have them hang around my neck. Though the optometrist did say it wouldn't hurt if I wore a pair all the time, so I may get a second pair for use when I'm not at work.” When she got close enough she gave him a soft kiss. He kissed her back and she might have been content to let it continue if he wasn't studying. Very reluctantly she pulled away. “I think you would look quite dashing with a pair.”

“I'll look like an old man,” he said with a frown.

“I think the term you want to use is 'sophisticated,’” she said with a laugh. “It's more flattering. And I, at least, will not consider you an old man.”

“At least that's something,” he said. “Have you eaten?”

She shook her head. “I picked up something on the way. I wasn't sure if you'd want me to cook tonight. Have you eaten?”

“Yes. I had some of the chicken parmesan you made yesterday,” he replied. “You were right in that it was better for me to make the noodles when I ate it as opposed to having them underneath the chicken and in the refrigerator. I think it improved an already good recipe.”

“You flatter me,” she said with a smile.

“I should do it more often,” he said quietly, reaching over for her hand and running his thumb over her knuckles.

“I would enjoy it,” she said, giving him a warm smile. “So is the estimate still midnight for when you'll most likely finish?”
“Closer to eleven now, as long as I don't get a headache,” he said. “I hit a stride with the first paper I have to write and it's mostly finished. Then it's just a matter of doing another paper, but I don't anticipate it taking quite as long. That particular paper is on a subject that I'm an expert on. The only worry I have is that my professor will only want the information in the book, which happens to be outdated.”

“Oh, this professor is going to love you,” she said.

“Well, I've reached out to the acquaintance I know who verified my research results. We co-published an article on the subject, and he's tracking down which volume of the scientific journal it was published in so I can get a copy and turn it in with the paper.”

“Just don't irritate the professor too much, all right? I don't like you as much when you're in a foul mood, and a professor who hates you would be enough to put you in a foul mood.”

“Actually, she seems to be impressed with my grasp of the subject. I think if I show her evidence that the theory in the book is outdated she'll be pleased that I had the forethought to challenge it.”

She nodded. “Well, as long as she doesn't fawn over you too much I can live with that. Your ego isn't as bad as it used to be but...”

“I know. It's something I work very hard on,” he said with a grin. “And, just in case you were wondering, she's old enough to be my mother.”

That got a soft laugh out of her. “I wasn't wondering that, but I suppose if she takes a special interest in you I won't get jealous.”

He looked up at her and then pulled her hand towards him, kissing her knuckles. “And on that note, I should get back to work. I would give you a better kiss than that, but I think it would be very hard to stop once we started.”

“I can live with what I got,” she said with a smile. “Is it all right if I bring my food to the other side of the table?”

He nodded, letting go of her hand. “There is plenty of room.” She moved away and he picked up his book again. “What did you get to eat?”

“Greek food,” she said. “It probably won't fill me up since I skipped lunch, but it's healthier.”

“I believe I have the ingredients for a salad, if you'd like to add one to your meal. I know you like eating them so generally I keep at least a few ingredients on hand.”

“Oh, that's a good idea,” she said, moving towards the kitchen. “That will probably fill me up.”

“Then by all means, my kitchen is yours,” he said.

She grinned and then went into his kitchen, beginning to gather up everything she needed. Within fifteen minutes she had a fairly large salad ready, and she took that and her Greek food to the table and began to eat. She watched him work for a while once she was done. At about nine forty-five she stood up. “I need to go back to my apartment to get something to sleep in.”

He looked up. “You know, if you want, you are more than welcome to keep a few things here,” he said slowly. “I know we're neighbors but I imagine you won't want to run back to your home after getting settled here for the evening all the time.”
“I'll bring over some clothing, then,” she said, giving him a grin. “And you can keep some things at my home, too.”

He looked over at her. “This means we're more serious, aren't we?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yes. And I'm all right with that, as long as you are.”

“I wouldn’t have suggested it if I wasn't,” he said. “I just never really progressed to that point before with anyone else.”

“Then I'm glad to be a first,” she said, leaning over and giving him a kiss. He reached up and kept her close for a few minutes. Finally she pulled away. “Study, Sherlock. The faster you finish the faster we can do more of that.”

He gave her a grin. “All right.”

She grinned back as she shook her head, then she went to her purse to get her keys. She let herself out and locked the door behind her and then made her way to his apartment. She could take over more things later, but she figured two pairs of pyjamas, some of her scrubs, a few sets of her undergarments and three outfits would suffice for now. She got it all together and after a moment decided to bring over her spare toothbrush and what she needed for a shower. If she could take care of all of that at his home in the morning she could sleep in a bit. When she went back to his home she saw he wasn't at the table. “Sherlock?” she called out.

“I was just making room,” he said, coming back from the bedroom. “There is space in the closet and you have the top drawer. I can give you another one later, if you want.”

“One will be fine for now,” she said.

“You didn't bring much,” he said with a frown.

“Well, this is more than enough to carry for the moment, and I'd like to look at what I have that's clean before I decide what else to bring over,” she said. “But I got the necessities. Now go back and finish studying.”

“Yes ma'am,” he said.

“Start calling me ma'am and we'll see if I sleep next to you tonight,” she said, though she had a grin on her face. He moved out of the way and she went into his bedroom, putting her clothing away. When she saw how much room he'd given her she realized she could bring over quite a bit more, but she had enough for the next few days now without having to run back home. She took the opportunity to change into her pyjamas and after putting her things in his washroom she went back out to where he was. “New estimate?” she asked, coming up behind him and putting her arms around his neck.

“Less than an hour,” he said. “Maybe forty-five minutes?”

“Good,” she said before yawning. Then she hung her head. “I do not want to be tired.”

“Well, if you want to just sleep we can do that,” he said, reaching up for her arms. “There's always tomorrow.”

“I suppose,” she said. “I'll let you get back to work now and I'll meet you in bed.”

“All right,” he said with a slight nod.
She let go of him and made her way back to his bedroom, pulling back the covers and climbing into bed. She'd woken up earlier than she normally did so she could have time to shower and eat and it was catching up to her now. She set her alarm and then settled into what she hoped was her side of the bed before shutting her eyes. It didn't feel that much later before she heard his bedroom door open, and she sat up. “Has it been forty-five minutes?” she asked with a frown.

“Ten. I'll just finish the rest tomorrow night,” he said, getting undressed. “It's just a matter of citations now.”

“Are you sure?” she asked with a frown.

He nodded. “You're tired, and I'd like to at least be close while you fall asleep. If I get restless I'll go finish it later tonight.”

She nodded before putting her head back down on the pillow. After a few more minutes she felt the mattress dip and then she felt him put his arm around her waist. She smiled and snuggled against him before yawning again. “I'm sorry I left you alone this morning,” she said.

“I imagine you stayed as long as you could,” he said quietly. “And if it's the same case tomorrow that's fine.”

“Good,” she said. “I plan on staying as late as I can, whether you're awake or not.”

“Depending on if you want to wake up earlier I may be inclined to wake up as well.”

“That could be interesting,” she said, pulling away for a moment to set the alarm for an hour earlier than she had planned. “Especially since I need to take a shower before work, since I didn't take one tonight.”

“Then please make sure I'm awake,” he said. He pressed a kiss to her neck. “Good night, Molly.”

“Good night, Sherlock,” she said before allowing herself to attempt to get some sleep. Nothing was going to happen tonight, but she found she was quite eager to have a spectacular start to her day tomorrow.
Chapter 21

Molly got used to really only spending quality time with Sherlock on the weekends fairly quickly, and when she did see him she could see he was mildly stressed, but usually no more than he had been when he was in the middle of a complicated case. They continued on through September, and it was with a sense of eagerness that Molly began to look forward to October. There were a lot of things going on that month that she wanted to do. There was obviously Halloween at the end of the month, but she wanted to see if she could do the Haunted Trail in Balboa Park and there was supposedly something going on at the Del Mar Fairgrounds, and Jason was trying very hard to commandeer one of her Saturdays to go to Legoland in Carlsbad for Brick or Treat. Then there was also the fact she’d been invited to three separate parties for Halloween, which were all on different days closer to the end of the month. She was honestly having to look at a calendar to figure out what she wanted to do and whether she could fit everything in.

But there was also something else she really wanted to do, which was go to Julian for the Julian Apple Days Festival. Thomas had planned on going and had talked it up to Molly when he realized there was no way he would have a good time with the entire right side of his body in casts. She in turn had talked to Sherlock about it and they decided to make a weekend of it. Sherlock worked very hard at getting all of his work done before Friday and Molly arranged for that day and Monday off so they could have three days there. They drove north to Julian early Friday morning and only managed to get lost once, which amused Molly more than Sherlock since he was driving. He had made the arrangements for where they were going to stay, telling her it was going to be a surprise. Finally they arrived in Julian and he made his way to an older building. Molly saw the sign for the place not that long after they pulled up. “The Julian Gold Rush Hotel,” she said with a grin. “It looks nice.”

“I got us the very last reservation they had for this weekend,” he said as he got out of his car. She did the same on the passenger side. “There really weren’t very many places with open rooms, according to the person who helped me, because this festival is quite popular.”

“Well, I think this will be just fine,” she said as they went to the car boot. He opened it and they got their luggage out and then made their way to the front of the building. “Any idea which room we have?”

“One on the second floor,” he replied. He opened the door and they went inside, and he went up to the front desk. “I have a reservation for Holmes,” he said.

The woman’s eyes widened. “Oh.”

“Is something wrong?” he asked.

“There was a problem with the room you had booked,” she said. He hung his head at that point. “Oh, no no no, we have a room for you. We had someone who was supposed to stay here the entire three days who canceled, and so we’re giving you the room they booked at no additional cost, and we’re upgrading you to any of the packages you might want for your entire stay.”

He lifted his head up and then looked at Molly for a moment. “What packages?”

“Well, since you’ll be here for three nights, you could pick more than one package for each night. One is the Bed & Breakfast Hotel Package, the Apple Pie package, the Antiques & Collectibles package, the Romance package and the Winery package.”

“Could you go into more detail?” Molly asked.
The woman nodded. “Everyone here gets to have the breakfast in the morning, as well as afternoon tea, but each package comes with extras. The Bed & Breakfast one comes with a gift basket to take home as well as some of the cereal we’re known for, the Apple Pie package gets you a guidebook of the sights and a free pie, and the Antiques & Collectibles package gets you the guidebook and a gift certificate to the Julian Cider Mill. And since you’ve been upgraded to Honeymoon House you can either get the horse carriage ride with the Romance Package or the gift certificate to one of the wineries with the Winery package.”

Molly blushed slightly. “We’re not…” she trailed off.

The woman gave her a smile. “It’s actually much nicer than the room that Mr. Holmes originally booked. It’s a private detached cottage and it’s really quite nice. As I said, you’ll still be charged the rate for the room you originally booked as it’s our fault it’s not available.”

“Do any of the packages sound appealing to you?” Sherlock asked Molly.

“Well, they all sound good,” she said to the woman helping them. “Are there any you would recommend?”

“Are you going to the Menghini Winery for both days of the festival?” she asked.

“Possibly,” Sherlock said.

“Then I would probably skip the Winery package, since they’ll have wine tastings there. And if you’re not an antiquer you probably won’t want that package. I’d do the Bed & Breakfast and Romance packages myself, though I will warn you when you do the carriage ride it won’t be just the two of you.”

Molly thought for a moment. “That’s all right with me,” she said.

“Then we’ll do those two packages,” Sherlock said. The woman nodded and began to process their new reservations. Then she gave him the keys to where they were staying and told them where to go to get to the entrance. With that he and Molly left and made their way to the cottage. When he opened the door he looked around. “This is definitely an upgrade,” he said.

Molly took everything in with wide eyes, looking around before moving into the bedroom. “Oh, this is gorgeous,” she said. “I can’t believe we get to stay here for the next three nights.”

“Well, we’ll need to leave early Monday morning so I’m not late for my first class,” he said. “We need to be back in Hillcrest by nine at the latest.”

“You can always just drop me off and I can take your things to your apartment for you,” she said.

“I could agree to that,” he said with a nod.

“I am very lucky I managed to get today and Monday off,” Molly said. “Otherwise we'd only get to stay the two nights.”

“I was surprised by that,” he said. “When you told me we could stay Sunday night as well I wondered how you had managed that.”

“One of the coroners was looking for extra shifts to make up for asking for a week’s worth of vacation before his plans fell through. He jumped at the chance to take my shifts.” She moved over and fingered the post of the canopy bed. “I probably could have taken more days off, but you can’t really afford to miss school and I don’t want to sit around my apartment all by myself.”
“Is this going to impact anything for you?” he asked.

“I may not be able to get many days off around Thanksgiving,” she said. “But other than that, no.”

“Ah,” he said with a nod.

“What did you have planned that weekend, anyway?” she asked.

“A trip away,” he replied. “But since we’re doing a trip this weekend I can live with not doing anything that weekend.”

“Well, I already volunteered to work that day, but Jason said he’s planning on kidnapping you so you and Thomas can commiserate on how strange it is to celebrate Thanksgiving, being British.”

“It’s a shame you probably won’t be joining us,” he said with a grin as he moved over to her. He got close and put his hands on her waist.

“Oh, I fully expect to join you when I’m done with my shift,” she said with a chuckle, moving her arms to put them around his neck. “And there better be food left. I’ve eaten with all of you, and while you and Thomas are picky eaters when it comes down to it Jason is a human vacuum. I think he might inhale an entire pie simply because it’s a dessert, not to mention dressing and turkey and cranberry sauce. But I think you and Thomas would make sure he left me something.” She paused. “I’m honestly surprised Jason is as skinny as you are. He eats at least twice as much as you do. I will never understand men’s metabolism.”

“It can see where it would be amusing,” he said.

“Oh, it is, unless I want leftover food when I cook for all of us. I never had any brothers so I imagine this is how men stereotypically act towards food.”

“I definitely think Thomas and I are more exceptions to the norm than we are typical,” he pointed out. “Remember, John was always able to put away quite a bit of food. Jason is much the same as him.”

“Maybe,” she said. She moved a bit closer. “Speaking of food, I think after I kiss you for a bit I’d like to see where we could get something to eat.”

“That sounds like a very good idea,” he said quietly before he leaned in and kissed her. She grinned into the kiss as he pulled her as close as he could, and she savored it. Even though they had shared a bed most nights of the week he would come to bed when she was already asleep and she would wake up before he did on the weekdays. Getting to spend a long weekend away with him where they didn’t have to worry about anything was going to be lovely. He pulled away from the kiss a few minutes later. “Are you very hungry right now?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said with a nod, and he looked disappointed. A chuckle escaped her lips and he glared just slightly. “We have never been here before and I want to explore before I settle into spending most of our evening in bed. And besides, there is such a thing as delayed gratification.”

He made a face. “Psychology.”

She laughed a bit louder this time and pulled away. “Well, it’s true regardless.” She reached over for his hand. “We can put our things away later. Let’s look at what’s here before the big festival.”

“All right,” he said, grasping her hand tightly. They left the cottage and after he locked it up they went to the front desk again to ask for recommendations on where to eat. The woman who had
helped them say The Rongbranch Restaurant was quite good, and so was Mom’s Pie House. After
getting directions to where they were they got into the car and headed up Main Street to the
restaurant, ordering their meal there. Molly enjoyed the Creamy Artichoke Fettuccini she got while
Sherlock decided to have a steak. Molly still had room left so they decided on dessert. She ended up
ordering a slice of apple cherry pie with whipped cream on top that was larger than she had
expected, and at one point she had to slap Sherlock’s hand away because he kept stealing bites. They
both had some of the local apple cider and Molly had to admit it definitely put the apple cider she’d
known at home to shame. When they were done eating they walked around the area, looking at the
different shops and other restaurants they might want to try if they didn’t spend both days at the
festival, and finally around three they returned to the hotel.

“I think there’s quite a bit to do that we didn’t look at,” Molly said, setting down the things she had
purchased near her luggage.

“Well, there is the Witch Creek Winery Tasting Room to try, but that closes in two hours,” he
replied.

“It’s tempting,” she replied with a smile. “But maybe one day we can just spend more time exploring
and less time at the festival, and we can do it that day.”

“If that’s what you want to do I’m amenable to that,” he replied. “So what would you like to do
now?”

“I’m still rather full, so we can wait a bit for supper. But I thought you had an idea earlier?” she said,
her smile widening.

“You mean the ‘go to bed and not leave the bed’ idea?” he said with a grin.

“That one, as long as we do eventually leave the bed for supper,” she said with a laugh as he got
closer. “I don’t mind spending time with just you here in this lovely cottage.”

“I’m glad to hear that.” She reached over for his hand and then he pulled her closer, using his other
hand to tip her face up so she was looking at him. “I think it is a good thing we could get away for a
while,” he said quietly, running his thumb along her cheek.

“Yes, it is,” she said, settling a hand on his waist. “This might not to get to happen too often, so I’m
going to enjoy it while I can.”

“I am as well,” he replied. “With my course load we don’t actually get to see each other much, so
three full days where I can actually be awake and in the same room with you and be able to talk to
you is very welcome.”

“Well, I know you said next weekend you’ll be studying for your midterms so I’m going to spend
Saturday with Jason. He wants to go to the amusement park in Carlsbad with his friend’s children.
She works weekends and they really want to go to Legoland for the Halloween events. And if you’re
willing to either come with us or give up a day with me he wants to take them to Sea World the next
weekend, which also sounds interesting.”

“I might be convinced to go to Sea World. Possibly,” he said. “But I have absolutely no interest in
Legoland.”

“I know it’s meant for young children but there are three children in an age range from seven to
eleven so they’re just the right age,” she said. “I’ve seen Jason with children before and he treats them
quite well and he’s assured me these three children are quite nice, but they want to be there from
eleven to eight, and nine hours without another adult for company will drive him mad he said. So I'm there to help with the sanity, especially since the youngest has high-functioning autism. Apparently there's a special pass that lets you get to the front of the line which is supposed to help greatly.”

“You're braver than I am. I can't imagine having three children at an amusement park for nine hours,” he said. “If you have lost your sanity by the end of the day, however, I'll do whatever I can to help.”

“Oh you will, will you?” she asked with a laugh. “And just how will you do that?”

“I'll figure out a way. There might even be more to it than keeping you in bed all day.”

“I think staying in bed with you all day could bring me back to normal levels of sanity,” she said quietly.

“I'll have to remember that,” he murmured before he leaned in to kiss her. She shut her eyes and relaxed into the kiss, eager to see exactly where it would lead. She had been so used to things being one way when she was intimate with her partners, but she had found herself wanting to try new things when she was with Sherlock, and he had been most obliging. It made things vastly more interesting, she had found, and it definitely made her more excited when they were together. He reached behind her and moved his hand up along her spine, moving towards the zipper of her dress. When he found it he lowered it until her dress was open in the back. She pulled away from the kiss and he moved his hand, sliding one strap off her shoulder before kissing the skin there. He used his other hand to lower the strap on the other side and she let the dress slide off her arms and pool down around her feet. He took a good look at her, a wide grin on his face. “That is new,” he said, taking in the lingerie she had on.

“Yes, it is,” she said with a grin. “And I have two other very nice sets with me in my luggage.”

“It's almost a shame to take it off of you,” he said.

“I was considering, if you were interested, letting you watch me take it off at some point,” she said. “Maybe not now, but later.”

“I could be amenable to that,” he said with a nod. “But only if you feel comfortable enough.”

She reached over and undid the first button of his shirt. “When I'm with you I feel like the most beautiful woman in the world,” she said quietly, moving to the next button. “I feel confident and I feel sexy and I feel as though I can do anything I want to do. And if I want to try something different you're patient and encouraging. I feel comfortable with you, and safe. I feel like you won't ever hurt me.”

“I will try my absolute hardest not to,” he said, settling his hands on her waist as she got the third button undone. “You are very important to me.”

“I'm glad,” she said, giving him a smile. She leaned in and kissed him again as she continued to work on the buttons of his shirt. When she got to the waistband of his trousers she pulled his shirt out of them and finished unbuttoning his shirt. She reached up to push it off of his shoulders, and after a moment he pulled his hands away from her and shrugged out of his shirt. When it was off she moved her hands so that she could put her arms around his neck again, and he retaliated by reaching around and undoing her strapless bra, letting it fall to the floor before he pulled her flush against him. After a moment he pulled away from the kiss and knelt down. She let her arms fall away “What, exactly, are you planning on doing?” she asked curiously.
“Carrying you to bed,” he said as he picked her up. She laughed and when she was settled she placed her hands on his shoulders. “It’s easier than navigating an unfamiliar room.

“I suppose it is,” she said, leaning forward slightly and pressing a kiss to his pulse point.

“As much as I enjoy that I don’t think you want me to drop you,” he said, turning towards the bedroom.

“Is it that much of a distraction?” she asked.

“It is probably one of the things that excites me the most, especially when you add your teeth,” he said.

“I am filing this away as useful information to know next time I want to tease you,” she said, snuggling closer. “Anything else I should know about?”

“Running your fingers through my hair,” he said. “If you do both either at the same time or in rapid succession I will drop whatever it is I’m doing and turn all my attention to you.”

“I’m definitely going to remember that,” she said with a laugh. He got her over to the bed and gently set her down on it. “Have you figure out the things that excite me?”

“I have a list in my head,” he said. “But I know the one you enjoy most is when I stand behind you and run my fingers along the nape of your neck when I move your hair out of the way to kiss the side of your neck.”

“You are quite observant,” she said with a smile. “And you’re also very overdressed.”

“I can fix the last one,” he said, pulling away from her. She sat up a little more as she watched him finish getting undressed, and she had to admit it was a sight she wasn’t sure she’d ever get tired of. He moved back to the bed and got on it, covering her body with his and kissing her again. She moved her hands to frame his face as she kissed him back, savoring the kiss. Soon enough he pulled away and looked down at her. “Is there anything you particularly want to do right now?” he asked.

She moved her hands to run them down his chest, using her fingernails to scratch lightly. She was rewarded with feeling him shudder slightly. “Not really,” she said. “Later I might change my mind.” He nodded and then dipped his head down, kissing the curve of her neck. She tilted her head back and shut her eyes as he began to explore her, taking his time in what he was doing. He used his teeth at times, and the brief flashes of pain just turned her on even more. The lower he moved with his lips the more she arched up until he got to her naval. He reached for the waistband of her knickers and she lifted her hips up. He pulled them lower very slowly, and when he was done he began to kiss his way up her thigh. Then she got an idea. “Stop,” she said quietly.

He lifted his head up, slightly confused. “Why?”

“I changed my mind,” she said, giving him a smile. “Not about us shagging, but about what I want to. Lie down on your back.”

He nodded slowly and then rolled over so they were next to each other. He moved farther up the bed, and she changed her position, moving between his legs. She had been a bit more adventurous with Sherlock than she had been with her other partners, and after a moment she grasped his erection in her hand. She had done this before, when she had decided to explore his body one evening shortly after they had started shagging, but what she was about to do she’d never done before. She looked up and saw he had shut his eyes, which she knew would add to the element of surprise. After a moment she shifted a little more and then bent down, taking him into her mouth. The groan that escaped his
lips was encouraging, and slowly she moved up and down, curling her tongue around him, adding suction. “That...” he said, but he didn't seem to be able to say anything more. He reached down and tangled his fingers in her hair. He didn't push down or anything like that, but she took that as sign she was doing well, and she took him deeper before adding her hands to tease him. She continued for a few more minutes before he pulled her hair slightly, and she pulled her head up and looked at him. “If you aren't careful you aren't going to get anything out of the experience.”

“But I did well?” she asked.

“Exceptionally well,” he replied. He let go of her hair. “In this position we could try something new.”

“You mean me being on top?” she asked.

“Have you ever done that?” he asked.

“Once. It didn't work out very well,” she admitted.

“If you're willing to try again it could be better this time,” he said.

She thought for a moment before nodding. “All right.”

“Move farther up and then straddle me,” he said. She moved from her position and did what he wanted her to do. She expected him to move her to a better position but he moved a hand between her legs and began the tease her. This was something she hadn't expected but it felt quite good. He slipped one finger inside of her, and then a third, working up a rhythm as he let the rest of his hand rub against her clit. She shut her eyes and moaned softly. She could feel tension pooling inside her lower body, and when he added a third finger she knew she was going to have an orgasm soon enough. Then he shifted his hand just slightly and rubbed against her and she came apart, gasping as she did.

After a moment he moved slightly and then moved his hands to grasp her hips. She moved her hands to position him, and then she lowered herself onto him as he lifted his hips up at the same time. This time the gasp was louder. This was not how it had gone the last time she had tried this, and he actually went deeper than he usually did. After a moment she rose up on her knees again, and when she lowered herself he repeated his actions before, using his hands to push her down so he could thrust deeper. It took her a few minutes but soon they were building up a rhythm, and she was riding him quite hard. Finally she felt the tension in her lower body again, and she leaned forward just slightly so she could get some friction where she needed it. When she orgasmed this time it was actually more intense than the last one, and he surged up into her one last time before he came. She waited for her orgasm to subside and then she leaned forward, a hand on either side of his neck and her breasts brushing his chest. “That was a definite improvement,” she murmured.

“I'm glad,” he said, moving one his hands to trail his fingers along her spine lightly. “Is it something you would do again?”

“Yes,” she said with a slight nod.

“Good,” he said before he moved his hand up to cradle the back of her head, pulling her in for a kiss. She kissed him back but not for long, as she still felt breathless. “I don't think I saw a shower here, or else I would suggest sharing one.”

“No, there's a tub,” she said. “But it looked fairly large. Maybe we could share it?”

“I think that could be an interesting experience,” he said with a slowly widening grin. “At least it will
be something I've never done before.”

“Me either,” she said as she grinned back. She pulled away from him and disentangled herself from him before moving her legs so she wasn't straddling him anymore. He sat up and motioned for her to move closer, and when she did he tangled his fingers in her hair and pulled her in for another deep kiss, and she knew that no matter what else happened this weekend that she was definitely up for trying new things if she kept getting encouragement like this, and that was something that pleased her very much.
Chapter 22

The next weekend Jason and Molly were sitting on a bench in the Courtyard Theater at Legoland while their three charges were on the pavement in front of the stage. The three young girls had all hit it off with Molly immediately and since they were frequent visitors to the park they knew exactly where to go for everything. So far Molly had to admit that Legoland was interesting, though it was very much geared towards young children. They'd gone on quite a few rides, such as The Dragon and Coastasaurus, and Molly had even gone on Technic, which was the largest roller coaster she'd been on since she was a child. She didn't mind the first two but she put her foot down on going on the third one again. Right now they were taking time away from the rides and waiting for a play called “Mail Order Monsters” to start.

“Thank you for coming,” Jason said, leaning back on the bench. “Katrina really wanted them to be able to come this year and her job switched her schedule so she has to work weekends all month.”

“It's all right,” Molly said with a smile. “The girls are absolutely lovely, and it's been…interesting.”

He laughed slightly. “This is really a park for little kids, I know.”

“Well, I can say I went for Halloween at least one year,” she said with a smile.

“They changed how they were doing everything,” he said with a frown. “It used to be you could buy one ticket and stay all day. The buying two tickets is new. And thank you for doing that, by the way. I don't think Katrina knew about that.”

“It's fine,” she said. “I know the girls want to do everything, and having to leave at five would have been unfair.”

“I'll buy you any food or drinks you want to make it up to you,” he said.

“If you insist,” she said with a laugh. “But you don't have to.” She picked up the cup she had. They'd gone to Castle Ice Cream before they all settled in for the play and bought an iced mocha for herself while Jason had bought four souvenir cups for him and the girls. He said refills were only a dollar and she was considering buying one of her own later in case she wanted some cola. “What should we do next?” she asked.

“Well, Jamie wants to do The Dragon again, Katie wants to eat over at the Knights Table BBQ, and Lisa wants to play mini golf,” he said. “I was thinking we could do them in that order.”

“If Katie and Lisa don't want to go back on the roller coaster I can take them to the restaurant and we can wait in the queue to get our food. Since you have the pass and there's a long queue for the food we might all be done at the same time. Or I can get something for each of you.”

“Katrina did send along money for stuff,” he said.

“Well, let's let the girls spend it on toys,” she replied. “I think they'd enjoy having a bit more pocket change to spend on fun things.”

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Absolutely,” she said with a nod. “Even though I took time off last week I have more than enough to splurge on things since Sherlock said he would help with my groceries this week since half of what I cook goes to him for leftovers and evening meals.”
He grinned. “You take really good care of him.”

“I try to,” she said. “I care for him very much.”

“I'm the same way with Thomas, when he gets involved in a project at work that takes up all of his time and energy. I make sure he eats and relaxes when he can, and I let him vent when the project gets frustrating.”

“How is he doing now?” she asked. “He told me he was going to attempt to try and work since he was becoming very bored.”

“His company sent over some easy work to do from home, so he's happier,” he said. “It takes him forever to type it all up but what they sent over has deadlines that are farther away so it's okay if he takes his time. And since he's left handed that helps.” He paused. “Well, as much as being left handed is a good thing, I mean.”

“The world really is designed for right handed people,” she said with a chuckle.

“Oh yeah.” He picked up his drink and took a sip. “We have so much more to do at the park and we're going to be here for quite a while.”

“Well, I'm available for the entire day, or at least as long as the girls want to stay.”

“I doubt we'll be here till nine,” he said. “I mean, we'll see how long the lines get for all the stuff they're handing out, but if it's too long we'll just skip it. Lisa really doesn't do well in lines and her sisters understand that. Katie says she's getting too old for the things they give out here anyway. And I can always buy them some extra toys instead of them getting the free stuff, especially since you're paying for lunch and I can swing the three meals for dinner since kids eat free tonight. I think all three of them were just happy to get to come out in their costumes and go on all the rides and stuff.”

“I think that sounds fair,” she said with a nod. “The girls get along remarkably well, I've noticed.”

“They do. Katie and Jamie could really despise Lisa because she's special needs but they don't. They're her biggest cheerleaders and protectors. It's great.” He leaned forward again. “Someday Thomas and I want kids. We've talked about this. He makes a decent amount of money at what he does, and I'm thinking about going back to college to learn how to make my own music so I'm not always having to rely on gigs spinning other people's music. Thomas has said he'd totally support that since he knows it makes me happy. And once we get all of that settled then we can see about having a kid or two.”

“Are you thinking about adoption?” she asked.

“That could be pretty hard. I mean, it's easier here in California than anywhere else, but it's still hard. We were thinking surrogacy. A friend of ours, Meghan, did it for her sister and she's said she'd do it for us as well, at least once.”

“Is Meghan the brunette with the curly hair?” Molly asked.

Jason nodded. “Yeah, that's her.”

“She seemed like a lovely woman when I met her,” she said.

“She is. We decided if we do this we're going to use a donated egg, just so Meghan isn't biologically related to our child. It would probably work out best that way.”
“I can imagine,” she replied, taking another sip of her drink.

“What about you? Do you want kids?” he asked.

She was quiet for a moment. “I would like children at some point. Not now, because there is so much going on in my life with work and things like that. But maybe in a few years.”

“And Sherlock?” he asked.

“I don't know. If he does it probably wouldn't be any time soon, since he's trying to concentrate on his schooling. Having a child right now would be the absolute worst thing for us. But I don't know if he even wants children. He didn't really deal well with them before, the few times I saw him with them. But he is different now, so...”

“This might be something you want to talk about with him,” Jason said. “You know, just in case.”

“I suppose,” she said with a sigh, and suddenly there was music coming from the stage. “I think the play is about to start.”

“I think so too,” he said, turning his attention to the stage.

She did the same, though the conversation she and Jason had just had lingered in her head. When the play was over and the girls were done meeting the various actors who portrayed the monsters they all went back on the roller coaster and then got food before doing other things in the park. Molly's mind was taken off of the conversation more as she watched the girls enjoy themselves. Soon they decided to leave, and after dropping the girls off in Rancho Bernardo and Jason off at his home she made her way back to her own home. She had picked up a few things from the various shops at the park and she deposited them in her apartment before going next door to Sherlock. It was only nine thirty and she hoped he was still awake. She knocked, just to be on the safe side, and a few moments later he opened the door. “Hello,” she said with a smile.

“Hello,” he said with a grin back. “Did you enjoy your day?”

“I did,” she said with a nod as he moved out of the way for her to come in. Once he got the door closed he reached over for her and pulled her close for a kiss. She grinned against his lips as she kissed him back, winding her arms up around his neck. When she pulled away she smiled at him. “I can tell you missed me.”

“Yes, I did,” he said, running a hand up and down her back. “I've been particularly busy this week and I've missed your company.”

“Well, when you aren't studying tomorrow I'll be here,” she said with a smile. “How much more studying do you need to do?”

“Just two more classes worth,” he said, letting her go. They made their way over to the sofa and when they sat down she sat close to him. “Mostly it will be going over notes as opposed to the textbook. Both professors said that the questions on the midterm will mostly be pulled from class discussions. One of the professors told us exactly what part of the textbook any of those questions will be pulled from, however, so I will know exactly what to study.

“That's good,” she said with a nod.

“Enough about my schoolwork,” he said. “What was your day like?”

“Busy,” she said with a laugh. “Three young girls wanting to do everything in the amusement park at
least twice will take a lot out of a person. You probably would have been bored to tears, but it was enjoyable for me. I even went on a roller coaster with an eighty foot drop. I wouldn't let Jason buy the picture of that.”

“I'm sad I don't get to see that,” he said with a chuckle.

“Oh, it wasn't flattering at all,” she replied. “I bought some photos for the girls so they'd have some things to look at when they went home, and I ended up having a photographer take a particularly nice one of Jason and I, as well as one of me by myself. The one by myself I bought a print of as well as having it put on Legos.”

“I can't wait to see them.” He put an arm around her shoulders. “I can't imagine having to deal with three children at once, though. It seems an awful lot of work.”

“It is,” she said quietly. “But it was nice as well. I missed spending time with you, though.”

“I missed your company as well.” He reached up to touch her face gently before moving his hand to tangle his fingers in her hair as she leaned forward to kiss him. It made her happy that they were both on the same page for this. She lost herself in the kiss until she reluctantly pulled away to catch her breath. “I was thinking I could take a break from studying for the evening,” he said quietly.

“And just what would you want to do?” she asked.

“Well, I would like to take you to bed. But I also haven't had anything to eat since two this afternoon and it just hit me that I probably should,” he replied.

She shook her head slightly, though she had a grin on her face. “Now I regret agreeing to go to Sea World with Jason and the girls next weekend because if I leave you alone you'll skip meals and that won't be good. You'll starve before I come back.”

“I could always go with you,” he said. “I don't have midterms to study for that weekend.”

“You could,” she said with a nod. “But you would probably have to meet us there. Both of us can only fit five people in our cars.”

“I don't mind doing that,” he said. “But only if Jason and the girls' mother doesn't mind me being there.”

She played with the collar of his shirt. “The two older girls were quite curious about you. I don't think they would mind.”

“And why would they be curious about me?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Because you were doing schoolwork on a weekend,” she said with a chuckle. “They all turned their noses up at that, and Katie and Jamie wanted to know more about a person who is crazy enough to give up a weekend of fun to study.”

“Then I hope I don't disappoint them,” he said, giving her a grin.

“I don't think you will,” she said. “I suppose I should feed you now. Something quick, though, because I've missed you and I want to shower you with attention tonight, since tomorrow you'll be studying and I'll be busy cooking for you.” She got off his lap and made her way towards his kitchen. “Is there anything in particular you would like?”

“Do you have the ingredients for any Mexican dishes?” he asked.
“Oh, you are so lucky I made carne asada fajitas for supper last night,” she said with a laugh. “Do you have tortillas?”

He nodded. “Yes.”

“Then I'll be right back.” She left his apartment and went back to her own, getting the container that she'd put the marinated meat and vegetables in. She'd had more than she usually did since she had planned on snacking on fajitas for lunch the next day as she cooked. She locked up behind herself when she left her apartment and went back to his. “Did you eat all of the food I made for you last week?” she asked when she came inside.

He nodded. “I usually make it a point to try and eat three meals a day now,” he said as he moved towards the kitchen.

“Are there any you're finding don't taste as good frozen?” she asked as she went to his refrigerator to get his tortillas.

“I'd prefer more stews to freeze and other dishes to simply leave in the refrigerator. Though the lasagna froze well, I found.”

“I may have to make a trip to the market, then, and pick up the ingredients for a burgundy beef stew I'd considered making. It's a slow cooker recipe so I can have that simmer while I make other foods.” She straightened up once she got the tortillas and went to his cupboard to get a plate to warm them up on.

He watched her quietly for a moment. “If I ask you a question, I don't want you to think it's too forward,” he said when he finally spoke.

“What is it you want to know?” she asked.

“What kind of future do you see yourself having? With me, I mean.”

She stilled in what she was doing. They had talked about spending time together, quite a bit of time, but they'd never talked about exactly what kind of future they might want together. She knew what she wanted, what she had wanted for quite a long time and wanted even more now that they were in a relationship, but she didn't want to scare him off. But he had asked, so she supposed he really wanted to know. “I would like to spend a very long time with you,” she said quietly as she started moving again, putting the meat and vegetables into the microwave.

“Do you want marriage at some point?” he asked.

She nodded slowly. “Yes. And children, too. I'd like to be a mother before I'm too old to enjoy it.” She looked at him intently. “What brought this on?”

“I've been thinking about it,” he said. “Not all the time, not obsessively, but it's crossed my mind with more frequency lately. I wanted to know what you wanted out of our relationship.”

“Well, I've said what I want. What do you want?” she asked.

“I don't think I would be adverse to marriage,” he said. “I don't think I will find anyone else better suited to me than you, and I don't really want to look. Not now, though, because I know we both know it's too soon for that. But maybe in the future.”

She didn't speak for a minute or so, debating whether she wanted to ask the question at all. Finally she decided she should. “Do you want children, Sherlock? I mean, at some point in the future?”
“I think if I had been asked before I would say no, absolutely not. I would have assumed I'd be a horrible father, worse than my own parents,” he said quietly after a moment.

“And now?” she asked.

“I think I could see myself having a child or two,” he replied. “I don't think I'm as bad as I used to be, and I don't think I would damage any children I had. I don't think now is a good time, but if it does happen sooner rather than later I think we could handle it well enough.”

She relaxed at that. She had been on birth control since long before he had come out here, and that was why she didn't worry as much, but there was always the chance it could fail and they weren't taking any other measures to keep her from getting pregnant. If he thought they could weather through an accidental pregnancy this was good news. “I'm glad you feel that way.”

“Well, I'm just glad we seem to want the same things out of this relationship,” he said with a grin. “I think it would have been very awkward if we hadn't.”

“Yes, it probably would have.” She went back to making the dinner. “I think, at least with me, this was something I had wanted for a while. I wouldn't have agreed to marry Tom if I hadn't. But he wasn't sure he wanted children, which was another reason I was having doubts about whether I should marry him or not. I do want children someday. Preferably not too far down the line, though. As I said, I want to be able to enjoy being a mother.”

“How many children do you want?” he asked.

“Two. I'd love a boy and a girl, but I think I would be happy with two boys or two girls as well.” She looked over at him as she began pulling tortillas out of the bag. “How about you?”

“I think I would prefer girls,” he said after thinking for a moment. “I don't know if I would be able to raise a son very well, mostly because I would prefer if my son not be the way I was.”

“I think the person you are now would do a very good job raising a son, if it happened that way,” she said with a smile. “And you wouldn't be doing it alone. I would be there to help.”

“That is true,” he said. “Do you really think I would be a good father?”

“I do,” she said as she nodded. “From when I first met you to know you've become a better man. You're so strikingly different in all of these wonderful ways. You didn't become worse as you got older. You actually became a person who is...”

“Normal?” he asked with a wry grin.

“That wasn't the word I was looking for, but since you suggested it we'll use that,” she said, chuckling slightly. “But I would be very proud to raise children with you at some point in the future.”

“That is very good to know,” he said, his grin becoming warmer. “You know, I'm thinking I might skip supper after all.”

“Oh no you don't, Sherlock. I'm making you eat something tonight,” she said, pointing at him. “You have to eat at least two fajitas. After that we can see if you're still in the mood to abandon your studies.”

“I can tell you without hesitation I will still be in the mood to abandon my studies,” he said.
“Well, that's fine. But two fajitas before I consider it.” She gave him a smile and he laughed softly, which only made her smile more. She felt quite pleased they were on the same page with everything, and at least now she knew that if the unexpected happened he thought they could weather through it, and that he wouldn't leave her to deal with things alone. That was honestly the best turn the discussion could have taken, and she was extremely glad it had in fact gone in that direction.
There was a lot to be said for companionable silence, Molly had realized during her time at Sherlock's home while he was studying. Every once in a while it would be punctuated by a brief noise or comment from one of them, but generally she was doing things that interested her while he was working. And to be honest, she was happy to be there with him when he did inevitably call it a night and would either join her in bed or convince her it was time to get some rest. Tonight was no exception, and once again she had brought her laptop over to spend time on Facebook and other websites without having to be on her phone to do so.

Finally she heard a frustrated sigh from Sherlock. “This is impossible,” he said.

“What do you want to tell me what it is that’s impossible?” she asked from her spot on the sofa.

“I have to write a three page paper on a subject where there’s only enough information for a page and a half. Two at most. And the professor doesn’t want us using sources outside the textbook and classroom notes.”

“That does pose a problem,” she said, not looking up from her computer.

He was quiet, and then after a moment she heard him push his chair back and walk behind her on the sofa. “You seem to be concentrating on something far more interesting than what I’m concentrating on.”

“I am,” she replied with a nod. “Mary sent me a link and I’m going through and seeing how many of these things apply to you.”

“Are they bad things?” he asked, and only then did she tilt her head back to look up at him. He actually looked quite nervous about the prospect of her and Mary comparing the bad sides of their relationship. She decided to give him a wide smile as she shook her head. “Then what are they?”

She went back to looking at her screen. “It’s an article on Reluv called ’24 Things That Secretly Turn Her On.’ It’s actually quite fascinating. I can read them to you, if you can take the time away.”

“This could be interesting,” he said, moving from the back of the sofa to walk around it and sit down next to her. “All right. Go ahead and start.”

She went back to the start of the article. “Number one: confidence. You have that.”

“I would think so,” he said. “Does it give any specifics as to why that excites women?”

She nodded. “Basically it says women are drawn to men who are comfortable in their skin and aren’t afraid to show it. It also mentions that part of the attraction is because those men respect themselves and are happy with who they are.” She glanced over at him. “That’s you more now than it was back home.”
"I was comfortable with who I was in London," he pointed out.

"But were you happy with who you were?" she asked.

He was quiet for a moment as he thought. "Not as much as I would have liked," he admitted.

"So you had it, but you have more now," she said.

"I suppose. What's number two?"

"Independence. Basically it's all about self-sufficiency as an attractive quality. As they said, 'when a guy does not have to rely on others to support himself, girls get a sense that he may be a potential suitable mate who can provide for her.'"

"Well, considering I could easily afford to take care of myself, you, all of our friends in two different countries and possibly a few strangers as well for quite a bit of time, I'd say that applies to me," he said with an amused grin.

"Just realize the only way I'm going to stop working is if we have children, and even then I would probably just work less hours," she said with an amused grin. "I like being independent, too."

"And I find that to be one of the traits that I admire most about you," he said. "Even though I could easily support you you won't let me."

"Exactly," she said with a nod. "I've spent a lot of time having to take care of myself. I'm set in my ways. But it's not as though I fight you every step of the way when you want to do something particularly nice for me. I do like occasionally having nice things that I don't have to save up for for months. But only every once in a while."

"I will remember that."

She clicked for the next page. "Number three: he knows how to cook. Well, that's something you definitely know how to do, not that you do it much these days."

"When this term is over I plan on making this up to you by cooking every night for at least three weeks straight," he said.

"You don't have to make it up to me," she said. "I actually enjoy cooking. It's one of my favorite forms of stress relief."

"I'm interested in knowing the others," he said as he looked over at her.

"Shagging and writing," she replied.

"What do you write?" he asked, surprised.

"Poetry, mostly, with the occasional short story. Nothing very good, or at least I don't think it's very good. But if you'd like to see what I've written later, I might be inclined to show you." She looked over at him to see his reaction.

"I would be very honored to see what you've written," he said.

She grinned back. "Then I'll see if there are things I actually like and I'll show them to you." Then she turned back to her computer. "Number four: he's ambitious."

"That is certainly true," he mused.
“Oh, especially when the first line brings up furthering his education. You've said you might be interested in going for your doctorate, which is definitely something I approve of and also find very attractive.”

“That is encouraging,” he said.

“I think intelligent men are incredibly sexy,” she said. “I think aside from your physical attractiveness that was what I was attracted to most of all when I first met you.”

“Irene once said 'brainy is the new sexy,’” he replied. “I thought it was just her point of view. Apparently I was wrong.”

“Well, at least on that point she and I are in complete agreement. Which might be one of the few things we actually agree on. But it's true. Women like men who aren't idiots. Stupid men are usually only good for a handful of things, but intelligent men are so much more interesting.”

“And I suppose I'm interesting?” he asked.

“You're one of the most interesting men I've ever met,” she said, giving him a smile. “Just don't let it go to your head.”

“I won't, I promise.”

She turned back to her computer. “All right. Number five: he dresses well. Yes, you certainly do.”


“But most of the time I've known you you've looked polished and quite dapper. It's nice to see you more casual.” She paused. “Though I wouldn't object to more dates where we both have to dress up. There are times I miss the suits.”

“The next time you have a strong urge to see me in a suit let me know and I'll arrange for a reason to wear one,” he said.

“I want to see you in a suit next weekend,” she said with a wide smile.

“At least you're giving me a week's notice,” he said with a laugh. “I'll try and arrange something for Friday night.”

“Won't work. We have that party Thomas invited us to, remember?”

“I could always find a way to incorporate a suit into a costume since I don't have one,” he said.

“You still have a black suit, right?” she asked after thinking for a moment. He nodded. “Black suit, white shirt, sunglasses. Go as one of the Men In Black.”

“You mean from that film we watched last month?” he asked.

“Yes. Or you could go as a Secret Service agent. Oh! If you wear your tuxedo you can go as a spy.”

“I think I would be more passable as a spy than a Secret Service agent, since I doubt they allow British citizens on that detail. But I just might do that. I could always say I'm James Bond.”

“Just make sure if anyone asks you what you'd like to drink you ask for it to be shaken, not stirred,” she said in an amused tone.
“I will,” he said with a chuckle. “What are you dressing up as?”

“I’ve decided I’m dressing as Phryne Fisher,” she said. “I found this lovely vintage 1920s dress and hat, and all I have to do is get the wig and I’m set.”

“You know, if I go out and buy an older style suit, I could go as Detective Inspector Robinson,” he mused.

“Oh, that would be perfect!” she exclaimed. “I hadn't even thought to suggest that.”

“It's not as though you were suggesting we go as Dot and Hugh,” he said. “I don't think I would have been as keen on that idea.”

“But that would have been fun too,” she said.

“What is the next trait?” he asked. She went to the next page and then laughed. “What's so amusing?”

“Number six: he plays an instrument.”

“Well, we both know that I do, in fact, play an instrument,” he said with a grin.

“And you play well enough to be the first chair violinist in an orchestra,” she said. “I think you have major bragging rights right there. In the description they mention piano and guitar, but I think violin is much sexier.”

“I should play it again for you soon,” he said.

“I’ve noticed you haven’t picked it up when I've been here,” she said. “Is there any reason why?”

“I tend to get lost in the music when I play,” he said. “I'd start with the intention to do only one song, and five hours later I would still be playing. I would never get any studying done, or else you would spend the entire evening in bed alone.”

“Well, maybe this weekend you can play something for me,” she replied. “Give me musical accompaniment while I cook.”

“I could do that,” he said with a nod. “What is the next trait?”

“Number seven: he sings.” She looked over at him. “Can you sing?”

“I can, I just don't like doing it,” he said. “And I don't know many songs I can sing along to that you would enjoy.”

“One day I would like to hear you sing,” she said. “Nothing particularly fancy. I’d even be happy if it was simply 'Happy Birthday,' I think.”

“Maybe I will make a point to learn a song you enjoy,” he said thoughtfully. “If I can find something that doesn't grate on my ears, at any rate.”

“I am still surprised you let me listen to what I like an awful lot of the time,” she said. “I would have thought you’d hate the manufactured pop songs I tend to listen to a lot.”

“There are a few that are particularly aggravating, but most of them I simply take no notice of,” he said with a slight shrug. “I got very good at tuning out annoying noises over the years. It comes across as white noise most of the time.”
“If there’s ever a song in particular you don’t like, let me know and I'll avoid playing it around you,” she said before turning back to the website.

“I will.”

“All right. Number eight: he sends you things.” She paused again. “Well, you do do that, though not often.”

“Would you like me to do it more often?” he asked.

“You honestly don't need to. You buy me more than enough things that catch my eye,” she said with a smile. “I mean, if you want to I won't say no, but I'm not demanding it. And I like it when you surprise me with something. If you did it more often it wouldn't be a surprise. I'd expect it.”

“Well, then I will surprise you with flowers only every once in a while,” he said with a nod.

“You know, if you ever really want to order me something as a surprise, I would love some very nice chocolates. I can easily buy chocolate at a market, and some of the markets have very nice chocolates, but there's a thrill seeing a box that your boyfriend bought you to cheer you up or simply to make you smile.”

“Did Tom do that?”

She shook her head. “He was a flowers person, and even then it was only really for holidays and our anniversary, or when we had an argument and he wanted to make put me in a better mood before he apologized. But it was always the same types of flowers, a dozen red roses.”

“Do you like receiving flowers?” he asked.

“Oh, I do,” she said with a nod. “You sent me lilies two weeks ago and I grinned like an idiot for the entire day. And the time before that they were those gorgeous blue roses. I like that when you send me flowers it's not the same type over and over again. You pick arrangements that are different and unique, and you send them to me just because you feel like making me smile. I appreciate that quite a bit.”

“I'm glad to know that you approve,” he said.

“Should we move on?” she asked. He nodded, and then she turned back to her screen. “Number nine: he can dance.”

“That is one thing I sadly cannot do,” he said. “I have absolutely no sense of rhythm.”

“Is it really that bad?” she asked.

“I attempted to dance at John and Mary's wedding and someone thought I was having a seizure.”

“Oh, I would have paid good money to see that,” she said with a laugh. “I promise, though, I won't make you show me. I'll let you keep your dignity.”

“Thank you,” he said with a nod.

“Moving right along. Number ten: he holds your hand in public.” She nodded. “I very much approve of the fact you do that. I honestly thought you would hate all types of public displays of affection. When you took my hand on our first date I was pleasantly surprised.”

“I know you appreciate it when I do that,” he said. “And to be honest, with you I have no problems
being affectionate. Since I'm not forcing myself to do so it's much easier. If I just so happen to do it in public then that's simply because I want to be close and I don't care who sees.”

“That might actually be one of the sweetest things you've ever said,” she said with a smile. “I'm glad you feel that way around me.” He gave her a grin back before she turned back to the list. “Number eleven: he writes you.”

“I'm assuming text messages and the notes I leave on your door are not what they mean,” he said.

“No. When he writes you letters or poetry, he is showing you his honest and true self.”

“I don't think you would appreciate my poetry, if I ever thought I could write it. And I tend to do so much writing for my courses that I don't feel like doing it when I get home,” he said with a frown. “But I should. You deserve it.”

“You know what I would rather get from you instead?” she said as she looked at him.

“What?”

“I would love for you to compose a song for me. I think that would mean even more to me than a love note or a poem. That's something you can do, right?”

He nodded. “I have composed my own music before. It takes time, but I could compose a song for you if you would prefer that to a note.”

“I would really like that,” she said with a nod. “I think a man who will write me a song, even if it has no words, is definitely a keeper.”

“It probably won't be in time for Christmas,” he said. “I don't really have the time to do it now. But perhaps over my semester break I can.”

“Take your time with it. I'm not going to hurry you,” she said with a smile before turning back to the list. “Number twelve: he doesn't freak out easily. Yes, that is definitely you. I don't think I've ever seen you panic before.”

“I have, on some occasions, but it takes a lot for me to start to panic. Though if something were to happen to you I might, depending on what happened.”

“Well, I think that's understandable,” she said with a nod. “If something happened to you I'd panic too.”

“Then let us hope that never happens,” he said.

“Agreed.” She moved to the next page of the list. “Number thirteen: he is patient. I swear, that fits you to a T. Or at least it does now. You used to be quite impatient for autopsy results before.”

“I think a lot of it has to do with the laid back attitude that is prevalent here,” he said. “I am starting to realize patience really is a virtue. I don't need everything immediately. And even though I do not like anything dealing with psychology, there is definitely truth to the idea of delayed gratification.”

“You are learning the virtues of delayed gratification on a weekly basis, aren't you?” she asked in an amused tone.

“I really do hope next term I'm not drowning in coursework,” he said. “I would enjoy actually having much more time to spend with you when you're here instead of generally waiting for the
weekend."

“But it does give you motivation to finish everything as quickly as you can,” she pointed out.

“That is the one area of my life where I'm the most impatient these days,” he mused. “Waiting for the weekend so I can enjoy time with you.”

“And even then you generally tend to spend Sundays working on things while I cook,” she said.

“Saturday has quickly become my favorite time of the week,” he said. “Well, that and Friday evenings, mostly because I know for at least twenty-four hours I'm able to give you my undivided attention.”

“And I appreciate it,” she said with a smile.

He looked at her intently. “Sometimes I wonder if I'm doing you a disservice by asking you to be here to simply be in the same room as I am when I tend to ignore you.”

She moved her laptop off her lap and put it on his table before moving closer to him. “Sherlock, I don't mind. I really don't. If I wasn't here I would be alone in my apartment, watching the telly and being incredibly lonely. I don't mind doing that some nights, but I really do prefer being over here. Even if nothing happens I like being near you, and I like sleeping next to you more than I like sleeping alone.”

“So you don't resent being here to keep me company?” he asked.

She leaned over and kissed him softly. “No, I don't,” she said when she pulled away.

He nodded slowly. “That's good to hear.”

“Well, it's the truth.” She nodded towards her laptop. “Do you want to hear the rest of the list?”

“Only if you stay close to me,” he said.

She nodded and leaned over to get her laptop, and then settled in right next to him. “All right. Number fourteen: he is tall.” She grinned. “There is definitely a significant height difference between the two of us.”

“I calculated the difference between our heights one day,” he said. “It came out to just around 0.23 meters.”

“There are times I do wish you were a tad bit shorter or I was taller,” she said. “I have to stand on my toes to kiss you most of the time unless you lean down to kiss me, which it's why it's nice when I wear heels. Then I'm usually a bit taller.”

“I don't know. I actually like the height difference,” he said with a grin.

“On my toes, Sherlock,” she said with a wry grin. “About the only time that isn't a problem is when we're on the sofa or in bed together. Then it's much easier.”

“We could solve that problem by spending more time in bed together,” he suggested.

She shook her head, though she had a faint smile. “I like actually going out and doing things, so no. I'll just deal with the massive height difference when I feel like wearing flats or sandals or being in my bare feet. Now then. Should we move on?”
“All right,” he said with a nod.

“Number fifteen: he has beliefs,” she said.

“I’m not religious,” he said with a frown.

“It’s not that, not exactly,” she replied. “He doesn’t have to be a religious or spiritual person, but he has to have his own beliefs and a sense of conviction. He does not simply accept the way of the world. He believes there is more to life than meets the eye. His beliefs are guiding principles that shape him.” She turned to look at him. “You do have all of that. You’ve had them the entire time I’ve known you.”

“I suppose I have,” he said thoughtfully. “Granted, most of it has been in scientific things, things I could see definite proof of.”

“But you also believed in justice. It’s part of the reason you did what you did back home, right?” she asked.

“Yes, but really only a small part. Mostly I liked solving cases for Scotland Yard because they were complicated puzzles. The end result of criminals being caught was not something that always meant all that much to me, at least until I met John.” He paused for a moment. “Though I suppose that was when what I believed in began to change more. He got me to see that it was all right to have beliefs in things I couldn’t quantify and study.”

“I, for one, am quite thankful John is a part of your life. I think if he hadn’t come along I may have grown to seriously dislike you,” she said.

“I am very glad you don’t,” he replied, putting an arm around her shoulders. “But yes, he was a very good influence on me, and I’m fairly sure most people who knew me appreciate it.”

“Yes, we certainly do.” She moved just a bit closer to him. “Number sixteen: he is helpful. And at least the way it describes it you are.”

“How does it describe being helpful?”

“’You don’t have to be Superman and fix all her problems, because this is clearly impossible. A woman is not a damsel-in-distress who wants a guy to be her knight in shining armor. Rather, she just wants someone who is sensitive to her needs and does what he can to be there for her.’ And you do. When I’ve had a problem you haven’t swooped in to try and fix it all by yourself, which I appreciate. You’ve listened and made suggestions as to what I can do but mostly you’ve waited to see if I actually need help. That means a lot to me.”

“Well, I’ve thought if you specifically want me to help you’d ask me directly,” he said. “Over the years I’ve seen you becoming more direct in telling people what you want, aside from how you’ve felt about me in the romantic sense. Of course, I wasn’t direct with you, either, so it went both ways.”

“I found if I wasn’t then I didn’t get what I wanted or needed,” she replied. “But yes, the two of us dancing around wanting to be in a relationship was quite annoying at times.”

“I think I wasn’t sure when I figured out what I wanted if you still wanted the same,” he said. “I mean, you were going out on blind dates, and I thought for sure you would find one man you would prefer to me and I would lose my chance to see if we could have a relationship.”

“I only put on a front that I was enjoying the dates because you had said you were considering dating
but you hadn’t mentioned me as a possibility. I thought if I appeared to be happy then it wouldn’t hurt so badly when you did begin dating.”

“I think I’m quite thankful that the man at the bar made you and the bartender uneasy,” he replied. “If it hadn’t been for that phone call to come get you I don’t think I ever would have admitted that I wanted to pursue you. I would have just stewed about it and been miserable.”

“Oh, I think eventually you would have said something,” she said with a smile. “You would have gotten too irritated not to. I just don’t know if it would have had as pleasant an outcome.”

“So you wouldn’t have agreed to go out on a date with me?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Oh, no, I would have. But I think our first date was absolutely perfect and I don’t know if we would have had the same one if it had happened on another day.”

“It could have been better, though,” he said.

“Maybe, but I doubt it.” She turned her attention back to the list and then chuckled. “Number seventeen: he’s modest.”

“That is something that is usually never said about me,” he said with a grin as he shook his head.

“Well, you are more modest now. You had quite an ego for a long time. It was tempered by the time you came back from taking care of Moriarty’s criminal network, which I think we were all grateful for.”

“But I deserved my ego,” he said.

“You did, I’ll admit that, but it didn’t mean the rest of us liked it,” she said. “It’s very hard to be around a person who thinks he’s damn near perfect and everyone should constantly acknowledge how great he is.”

“I can see how that would be a problem,” he conceded. “But I really wasn’t that bad, was I?”

“Oh yes, you were,” she said.

“I am still amazed you had any fond feelings for me,” he said.

She tilted her head slightly as she thought about things for a moment. “I think I was starting to get quite annoyed before the Christmas party. And then when you humiliated me that night, I’d just had enough. I was going to reach my breaking point at some point, and it just happened to be that evening. But after that, your attitude towards me changed, and I appreciated it.”

“I had honestly thought you would let me walk all over you without comment until that night,” he said. “When you stood up for yourself I was quite surprised. But it did make me see I treated you quite poorly, and if I didn’t stop one day you would make me regret it.”

“Then I’m glad I showed you I have a backbone,” she said.

“I’m glad you did too.” He nodded towards the computer. “Next item on the list?”

She glanced at the screen. “Number eighteen: he knows when to quit.”

“That is something I don’t know how to do very well,” he said with a frown.

“In this context they mean more that you know when to take a break when you’re focused on
something, rather like you are now,” she said. “You’re much better at doing that now.”

“I am, aren’t I?” he said.

“Yes. I don’t have to worry you’ll be so focused on something that you’ll ignore everything else. Except for last Saturday. I was quite perturbed that you spent nearly eight hours without eating.”

“Well, that will not be the case this weekend. No midterm exams, and you’ll be with me both days,” he said. “You can ensure I eat.”

“Are you absolutely sure you want to go to Sea World?” she asked.

“I do. I think I would like to meet Jason’s young friends, and it is a place that has interested me. Plus I know you’re excited for it, and I think that’s something I would like to experience with you.”

“Jason was considering seeing about taking the girls to Disneyland in December,” she said. “He wanted to do it this month, but three amusement parks three weekends in a row is a bit much. But I think I’d like to go with them.”

“That may be something I could join you for,” he said. “And hopefully Thomas will be well enough to join us.”

“He should be out of his casts by then, though his doctor said he may need a cane for a while. But this could be something all of us do together that could be enjoyable.”

“I am willing to do just about anything you want to do if you think you will enjoy it,” he said. “As long as you are willing to do a few things I enjoy.”

“I don’t think I’d mind that,” she said with a smile. “Is there anything you really want to do?”

“There is an opera that I’m interested in seeing in Los Angeles next month,” he said. “Actually, there’s quite a few they’re doing next season I’d like to see as well, but the one next month is ‘Die Zauberflöte.’ It was written by Mozart.”

“Oh, that sounds lovely,” she said with a smile. “And I wouldn’t mind going at all. I’ve never been to the opera before, but I think that could be something I might enjoy.”

“We can perhaps make a weekend out of it. The performance I wanted to see was on a Friday night, so if you can get that Friday and your usual weekend off we could go there Friday afternoon and then stay through until Monday. It’s over Thanksgiving weekend, though. It wasn’t the trip away I had originally planned on, but it could be a worthwhile trip.”

“Well, Aaron said since I’m volunteering to work on Thanksgiving he’d be willing to work on Friday or Monday so I could enjoy a nice long weekend,” she replied. I can ask him to see if he’d volunteer to work that Friday.”

“I will definitely find a way to make it up to him,” he replied with a grin.

“I think telling him about more of your cases will be enough,” she said. “Have you done that recently?”

“Not in person,” he said. “But the last time I spoke to him before I began school we exchanged email addresses so we’ve been chatting that way. I could see about sitting down with him face to face once the semester is over, though.”
“I think he’d like that a lot.”

“Have you thought about what you want to do for the holidays?” he asked.

“I had a thought, but it’s a surprise,” she said. “But it would be after Christmas.”

“I almost want to know, so I can make sure I don’t plan anything that might interfere.”

“Are you sure you want to know?” she asked. He nodded. “I was thinking about taking a little over a week off, starting on the 30th, and going back to London for New Year’s Eve. I mean, at that point Christmas will be over, and it won’t feel like we’re intruding on anyone’s Christmas. But that way we can see old friends and spend time there.”

“I think I would have enjoyed that as a surprise,” he said. “But that is definitely something I’m interested in doing. I enjoy being here, but I do get a little homesick.”

“Well, Mary approved of the idea. We were thinking we could surprise John since he misses you terribly.”

“Then we should definitely do this,” he said. “And since I know now I can help get accommodations sorted and things like that.”

“That would be lovely,” she said. “I think I’d like to at least not fly coach.”

He chuckled slightly. “If you don’t mind me making the accommodations, I’ll make sure they’re quite nice.”

“I don’t mind,” she said. “Now I just need to come up with a nice present for you for Christmas, because that was going to be your big gift.”

“I’m sure I will love whatever it is you come up with,” he said. “Do we want to go back to the list?”

She nodded, turning her attention away from him. “Number nineteen: he’s a good kisser. I can say without a doubt that is very true.”

“Don’t sell yourself short, though. You are also a good kisser,” he said, grinning.

“Well, when we’re done with this list and you’re done with your paper maybe we can do that for a while,” she suggested.

“I’ve decided I’m just going to work on the paper tomorrow night. If I continue to work on it tonight I’ll get frustrated and be in a foul mood, and I don’t think you deserve that.”

“Do you have any other work to do?” she asked.

He shook his head. “The paper is the last bit I have to work on. I generally tend to do my work the evening it’s assigned rather than put it off until the next day. It’s still fresh in my mind that way. But just this once I can wait an evening.”

“Good,” she said before looking back at her screen. “Number twenty: he’s not a sore loser.”

“There is a reason we don’t play board games together,” he said. “If you win I know I would be a sore loser, and I don’t want to start a fight.”

She gave him a rather seductive smile. “I can think of a game we could play where it wouldn’t matter who’s better because it would be enjoyable for both of us.”
“I might be interested in this game,” he said. “What is it?”

“Strip poker,” she said. “Poker is one of the few card games I’m good at, aside from blackjack.”

“I don’t see you having a good poker face,” he said, slightly surprised.

“Oh, you would be surprised. I had friends in uni who hosted poker games on the weekends instead of going to clubs. They taught me everything I know, and they were quite good.”

“Then I think this is a game we need to play soon,” he said with a grin. “What else is on the list?”

She went to the next page. “Number twenty-one: he seeks companionship.”

He leaned over slightly to read the description. “I am much more improved in that area,” he said. “Mostly because I can admit I don’t want to grow old alone, and I’d like to grow old with you.”

“And I feel the same way,” she said with a smile. “I mean, I never thought you would want that, but when we talked about it last weekend it seemed very obvious to me it was something you had really thought about and considered. It wasn’t something I sprung on you and you weren’t ready to think about.”

“I was fairly sure you had thought about it, and that was why I broached it to you,” he said. “I’m just glad you had thought about it. I was worried it might have been too forward, though.”

“Jason and I had talked earlier that day about the subject of children, so it was already in my mind,” she said, reaching over for his hand. “It didn’t come out of nowhere, either. We’ve been together for a few months now. I expected it was something we would talk about eventually.”

He squeezed her hand back. “I’m glad the discussion went as well as it did, though. I was worried it wouldn’t.”

“I’m glad for that, too.” She let go of his hand for that to move to the next item on the list. “Number twenty-two: he’s in touch with reality. That is definitely something that applies to you.”

“Yes, it does. I’ve never really lived in a fantasy world, mostly because I wasn’t afforded the option to. And even if I was, I don’t think I would have chosen to do so,” he said thoughtfully.

“And I am very glad for that,” she said. She went to the next item on the list. “Number twenty-three: he has life experience.”

“I think we both have that in spades,” he said. “Neither of us are fresh faced young people anymore.”

“I think that’s a good thing, though,” she said thoughtfully. “We’ve been through enough to know what we want and what we deserve. We’re not naïve but we’re also not cynical. I mean, you used to be, but you’re not as much anymore.”

“I think it’s because I’ve allowed myself to be happy,” he said. “And not just with you. I am doing things that interest me, I’m making sure I have a life outside of my educational pursuits, and I try my best to make sure I really examine whether I have a need to be cynical and jaded in most situations.”

“And you’ve found you don’t?” she asked.

He nodded. “Yes. I think leaving my old life behind has helped me realize that I don’t need to view the world with suspicion and distrust most of the time.”
“I’m glad,” she said. “We have one last item on the list.”

“I can’t wait to see what it is,” he replied.

She went to the last page. “Number twenty-four: he has empathy.”

“I have more empathy than I did, but it’s something I’m working on,” he said. “It’s something I’ve been working on ever since I met John, I think.”

“Well, I think you’re coming along beautifully,” she said. “I’m glad that you have enough now to be a kind and caring person who actually makes it a point to understand other people.”

He nodded, and then reached over for her laptop, setting it on the table in front of them. “So, overall, I have most of the qualities women are secretly attracted to?” he asked, giving her a grin.

“Yes, you do,” she said with a grin as he pulled her closer. “But then you already know I’m madly in love with you.”

“One day I think it might be interesting to see if there is a list like that for what men find secretly attractive.”

“I doubt it, but we could look,” she said. “And then you’re more than welcome to go through the list for me.”

“Or I could simply tell you all the reasons I’m attracted to you,” he said quietly.

“Yes, you could,” she said with a slight nod. “But I think right now I’d much rather have you show me again just what a good kisser you are.”

“I can do that for you,” he said before he leaned in and kissed her. She stayed as close as she could, and she wasn’t at all surprised when he pulled away after a few minutes and stood up, offering her his hand. “I think it’s time to retire for the night,” he said as she stood up. When he could he pulled her close again.

“I think that’s a very good idea,” she said with a wide smile. “Probably the best one I’ve heard all night.”

“Well, you do like intelligent men,” he said with a grin of his own. He reached over for her hand and then led the way to his bedroom, and she followed quite eagerly. Going through that list with him had definitely been something she had enjoyed, and she got the feeling it was going to lead to a most enjoyable evening.
Chapter 24

After Halloween things went back to more like how they had been before. As the end of the semester drew closer Sherlock found the amount of schoolwork he was bringing home increased as all his professors piled on the work they needed to cram in before their finals. He was spending more time studying and less time with her, which he was extremely apologetic about, but she took it in stride. She remembered what it was like to have a full course load and attempt to have some sort of life outside of school. She told him not to worry and that he could make it up to her when the term was over.

It was now the day before Thanksgiving. The night before had been one of the rare nights she spent the night at her own apartment. She didn't enjoy it, but Sherlock had said he would probably be up until two in the morning and he would be ignoring her almost completely, so she decided to stay home. She had gotten very used to sleeping next to him, and since she was alone she'd had a much more restless night's sleep. She dragged herself out of her bed and made her way to her shower. She really didn't want to go to work today, but it was important that she go, and also important that she make the effort to at least be presentable. She took her shower and then made her way to work.

It was a fairly routine day until she needed to get something from a high shelf. The ladder was supposed to be stable, and normally she didn't mind doing it. But the minute she got up high enough to reach she realized she had miscalculated. She had stretched a bit more than she should have and before she knew it she had fallen off the ladder and come crashing to the ground. The pain shooting through her arm was excruciating, the worst pain she had ever felt before. She looked at her arm and saw the bone was protruding out and she felt nauseous as she looked at it. But someone had heard her fall and they came in and quickly assessed the situation, telling her to get a ride to the emergency room that everyone needed to go to if they got injured at work.

She went into her office and used her other hand to dial Sherlock's number on her mobile. He picked up after three rings. “Molly? Is everything all right?”

“I broke my arm falling off a ladder,” she said with a sigh. “I need a ride to the emergency room.”

“How bad is it?” he asked.

“Bad. The bone is protruding.”

He was quiet for a minute or so. “I just arrived home. Can you wait long enough for me to get a cab and get to you? That way we can drive your car and not need to leave it there until you're able to fetch it.”

“I can wait. But it hurts very badly and it only just stopped bleeding.”

“I'll try and be quick. Where can I pick you up?”

“I'll wait at reception,” she said. “I'm really sorry for this.”

“It's all right,” he replied. “I'll be there as soon as I can, I promise.”

“All right. I'll see you when you get here.” She hung up at that point and took the paperwork she needed to take with her and her things out to reception. The receptionist fussed over her, making sure she was comfortable until Sherlock arrived. His eyes widened slightly at the sight but he didn't say anything other than asking for directions on where to go. When they did leave and they got settled in her car she spoke. “This is going to cause so many problems. This is going to require surgery, and I
won't be able to work, and then there's all the hassles since it's a workplace injury.” She sighed. “I should have just called in sick.”

“Well, we'll make sure you're taken care of,” he said. “I'm honestly surprised they didn't call an ambulance.”

“As am I,” she replied. “I'm going to be out of work for quite a while, I think. There's recovery time from surgery, time spent in a cast or brace, physical therapy...it's going to be a disaster.”

He was quiet for a few minutes. “I don't know how compensation works with an injury that occurred at your post, but if you need help with things I can help until you're able to return to work. I know you don't like feeling like you're being supported, but I don't want to see you in dire straits.”

She gave him a small smile. “This would be one of those situations where I'd welcome the help,” she said. “Especially with the rent being due soon.”

“Then I'll help you however you need me to help,” he said. “Not just monetarily, but with other things as well, such as cooking and alleviating boredom.”

“Don't you dare pull yourself away from your schooling!” she said with wide eyes. “I don't think I'd forgive myself for you failing any of your classes this term because of me.”

“I can balance things well enough,” he said. “And we'll find a way to make everything work.”

“All right,” she said with a nod. They lapsed into silence as they continued to make their way to the emergency room. Once they got there Molly was taken into an exam room immediately, and soon enough she was being prepped for surgery. Sherlock was told to wait in the waiting room again and they would come get him when she was done. And then she was taken into the operating room, and that was the last thing she remembered until she woke up in a room and saw Sherlock sitting in a chair nearby, apparently dozing. “Sherlock?” she said quietly, still slightly on the sleepy side.

He opened his eyes. “You're awake,” he said, shifting his position slightly so he was leaning forward. “The doctor said the surgery went well. You have plates and screws in your arm, and you're going to be in a cast for at least a month and a half.”

“All right,” she said. “I suppose it was simply my turn to be in a cast.”

“Maybe,” he said with a slight smile. “Though neither Jason nor Thomas required surgery, so that makes you special.”

“Why was I the special one?” she said, her eyes fluttering closed again.

“Their injuries were caused by an impact. Yours was caused by a fall from a height,” he said, reaching over for her hand not currently in a cast. “They were completely different injuries.”

“I know,” she said.

“Get more rest. I'll let the nurse know you woke up but you're not completely awake,” he said, squeezing her hand.

“All right,” she said before drifting back to sleep. When she woke up again it was dark outside her room, and Sherlock was sitting in the chair, looking at something near her bed. She looked in that direction and saw it was a small ceiling mounted television. “How long was I asleep again?” she asked, feeling more awake.
“Only an hour,” he said. “The nurses weren’t surprised you went back to sleep because you should have slept a little while longer in their opinion.”

“Ah,” she said. “I’m sorry I made you miss doing your schoolwork today.”

“Thanksgiving is tomorrow,” he said. “All of my professors took pity on us and didn’t assign anything over the long weekend aside from things to read for important quizzes Monday and Tuesday. No papers, no labs.”

“That’s good,” she replied. “This ruins our plans for the opera, though, doesn’t it?”

“Well, if you aren’t up to it when can go see something else another time,” he said. “I’d rather make sure you’re comfortable and not pushing yourself to any limits.”

“Thank you,” she said, giving him a smile.

“I’ll let the nurses know you’re awake again so you can get your discharge papers and find out what you need to do for follow-up care,” he said, standing up. “Then we can get you back home and settled for the night.”

She nodded as he made his way out of the room. She glanced down at her arm. She was in pain, but she expected to be given a prescription for the pain soon enough. This was going to be quite the hassle, everything associated with this accident and the recovery time, but at least she knew Sherlock would help as much as he was able. That would make it easier. He came back in a few minutes later with a doctor, who explained to her what she needed to do next and gave her the prescriptions she needed for pain management. She thanked him and then when the doctor was gone she got out of the hospital bed and began to get dressed again. “I definitely won’t be able to drive for a while,” she said once she was fully dressed again.

“They gave you heavy duty narcotics,” he said, picking up the prescription and looking at it. “We should make it a point to pick those up before we get home.”

“We can go to the CVS near the complex,” she said with a nod. “That's where I usually get my prescriptions filled.”

“Then I'll go there first,” he said with a nod. “A nurse is going to get a wheelchair for you and then we can leave.”

“I can walk,” she said.

“Hospital regulations,” he replied, smiling slightly. “Once we get outside I'll bring your car around.”

“Fine,” she said, sitting on the bed. “Thank you, for doing all this. I appreciate it.”

“I imagine you would do the same if the situation was reversed,” he said, sitting next to her and reaching for her hand. “I panicked a bit on my way to you, though. I mean, you seemed to be fine, other than your arm, but I was worried you would go into shock or you would lose too much blood. I was thinking there were any number of things that could have gone wrong before I got there.”

She squeezed his hand back gently before resting her head on his shoulder. “I'm glad you didn't panic around me. I don't think I would have handled it well. But I'm fine now, aside from my arm.”

“I know. And I realized if I arrived that way it would make things unpleasant for you. I'm just glad you're on your way to getting better.” He moved his head slightly and kissed the top of her head. “Is there anything in particular you'd like to eat tonight? I have the feeling it might be best to take the
pain medication with food.”

“I'm not sure,” she said with a frown. “I don't have as much food in my apartment at the moment because I wasn't planning on cooking this weekend since we were going to Los Angeles. And I can't cook anyway because I can't hold a knife or a spatula right now.”

“We can pick up something, and if we do decide to stay in town this weekend I can always cook the meals,” he said.

“But don't you need to study?” she asked. “You said you had reading to do.”

“I do, but I'll manage,” he said. “So if we don't take our trip I'll cook. You have a slow cooker, correct?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Then we can do one meal in it Friday, one meal in it Saturday and one more on Sunday, and that will still leave me time to study. We can do this each week until you're able to cook again. And if we have to supplement it with takeaway it won't be often. Does that sound acceptable to you?”

“That does,” she said, lifting up her head and giving him a smile. “And if you'll come over and cut things up for me I can make other meals during the week so we don't have to do it all on Sunday.”

“I can do that,” he said as he nodded. “So we'll get this to work all right in the end.”

“Good.” At that point the nurse came in with the wheelchair and she got off the bed and got into it. Sherlock accompanied her and the nurse downstairs to the main entrance, and then he went to go get the car and brought it up to her. She appreciated it even though she knew she could have easily walked to the car. She got in and got settled and then he began to drive them back home. She spent her time staring out the window, watching the other cars go by.

He got them to the pharmacy a half hour before it was supposed to close, and the pharmacy technician took pity on them and filled the prescription even though they weren't supposed to take new ones. While their car was parked in the car park at the pharmacy they walked over to the Mexican food restaurant near the CVS and got food for their evening meal. Once they got that they got back in the car and drove home. “Your apartment or mine?” he asked as they got out of the car.

“Mine, I think,” she said. “It makes more sense to be there now to figure out what meals we can make from the food I have on hand now as opposed to tomorrow when we're going to start cooking.”

He nodded and pulled out his keys, letting them inside her apartment. She had spent the whole day in either her scrubs or a hospital gown, having left her change of clothes in the car while she was at the hospital, and right now she wanted out of them very badly. She went into her bedroom and selected a pair of pyjamas to change into, and she happily took off her scrubs and tossed them in the hamper before going back out to Sherlock. “Are you going to change into something to sleep in?” she asked.

“After I eat and shower,” he replied. “The food in the hospital cafeteria wasn't all that filling, so I would like to eat something that is actually going to fill me up.”

“Well, I do need to take these pain pills with food so I suppose I should sit down and eat,” she said, picking up her burrito from on top of Sherlock's cheese enchilada combo. She went to her table and sat down, taking the wrapper off of the burrito and taking a bite. “You know, this isn't so bad. It's better than the sit down restaurant by Panda Express.”
“I don’t mind that restaurant when I have time to sit and eat,” he said, getting a fork for his own food. “Which admittedly isn’t often, but I’ve had good service when I’ve been there.”

“I like this place’s California burrito better,” she said before taking another bite. “There’s more cheese, the pico de gallo is not too watery, the guacamole tastes magnificent and the fries are crispy.”

He gave her an amused grin as he sat down across from her. “One day I will try that type of burrito.”

“Oh, you really should,” she said with a grin back. “It’s better than a plain carne asada burrito.”

He opened his container of food. “Have you given any thought to what you want to do since you’re unable to work at the moment?” he asked before he ate some of his food.

“Not really. I suppose tomorrow I’ll join you for Thanksgiving supper with Thomas and Jason, but after that I’m not sure. You’re going to be busy with school, and the rest of my friends will be busy with work,” she said.

“You could always work on your writing,” he said. “The short stories you let me read were quite good.”

“I’m surprised you read them already,” she said, her eyes widening slightly.

“I do occasionally need distractions from my textbooks,” he said. “I think the detail you put into the gender flipped fairy tale made it better than the original story. You actually have a very compelling style of writing.”

“Maybe I will, if I can type well enough,” she said. “We’ll see how that goes tomorrow, maybe.”

He nodded. “I imagine it will be easier to type than it will be to do other things.”

“Probably. And there are other things I’d like to do. There’s movies I want to see, television shows I want to marathon, things like that. So I’m sure I’ll be able to fill up my time while everyone else is busy.”

“I can always join you in the evenings when I need a break from studying,” he said. “Not that I have much more of this semester left. Finals are in a little over three weeks. And then we’ll be able to spend more time together.”

She was quiet for a moment. “I’ve been thinking about something. And, I mean, you’re more than welcome to tell me it’s too soon or you don’t want to or any of that.”

“You saw that there’s a two bedroom apartment open upstairs too, didn’t you?” he asked.

She nodded. “Most nights of the week we’re in the same apartment. And it’s not like we live across town or anything like that. It’s not as though it’s a huge hassle to go from one apartment to the other since we’re right next to each other. But at this point it makes no sense for the both of us to be paying rent on two different apartments when almost every night of the week one of them is empty, especially if you’re going to be paying my rent next month.”

“I had considered it,” he said after a moment. “Even though we haven’t been together very long it does make more sense consolidating into one apartment. And I think it would be better, to be honest. We could share one bedroom, and either use the other one as a guest bedroom in case we want to have company over or make it into a place where I can use it to study or you use it to write.”

“We’d have to break our leases for these apartments,” she said. “We’d have to arrange for us to be
able to keep both vehicles, and then there would be the matter of deciding whose furniture we should keep. But if it doesn't sound like a bad idea to you, we could talk to the leasing office Friday morning.”

He nodded. “I think that would be a good thing to do. We've both paid our rent on time and we've taken good care of these apartments, so I don't see why they wouldn't lease a larger one to us.”

“All right, then. We'll see about doing that Friday, and maybe tomorrow we can sit down and figure out what we want to keep and what we don't,” she said with a wide smile. He grinned back and then they went back to their food at that point, and she realized that even with the horrible turn the day took the ending was better than she ever could have expected, and that made her the happiest she had been all day.
Chapter 25

Sherlock and Molly arrived around noon at Thomas and Jason’s home. The two of them had an apartment as well, though theirs was a three bedroom, with one bedroom as Thomas’s home office and the other as Jason’s studio. Molly liked going there because it had a lived in quality that hers didn’t really have yet. Even after all these months, her apartment didn’t quite feel like home, but she was hoping if she and Sherlock would be able to move in together in the larger apartment that perhaps it would in time.

Sherlock knocked on the door and Thomas opened it. Instead of a grin, though, he had a frown and a pleading look in his eye. “Please tell me you got Jason’s text in time and brought pie,” he said as he moved out of the way for them to come in.

“No, we didn’t,” Sherlock said slowly.

“Wait a moment. I had a text message but I didn’t check it,” Molly said. “What happened?”

“Jason found out the restaurant that he’d ordered the pies from was cited by the health department so we don’t have pie,” he replied with a sigh. “He’s quite livid about the whole thing.”

“Well, I was still rather groggy when I woke up this morning,” Molly said, lifting up her arm in the cast. “Anesthesia and pain pills will do that to a person.”

Thomas’s eyes widened. “Are you all right, love?” he asked.

She nodded. “It hurts quite a bit, but I’ll manage. I didn’t break it the same way you and Jason broke yours so I had to have surgery.

He came over and embraced her. “Are you going to be able to go to your post?”

She embraced him back. “No. I’m off work for at least two months. Probably longer, since I’ll need physical therapy.”

“What am I missing?” Jason said as he left the kitchen and came over. When he saw her cast his eyes widened and his jaw dropped. “What the hell happened?”

“I fell off a ladder at work,” she said sheepishly as Thomas let her go.

“I’m just glad a broken arm is the worst thing that happened,” as he came over, embracing her as well. “That makes my lack of pie problem pale in comparison.”

“Don’t you have a pie in your freezer?” Sherlock asked Molly.

“I do!” she said when Jason let her go. “Well, one pie and one cheesecake.”

“What flavor pie?” Thomas asked.

“Dutch apple,” she replied.

“My favorite, other than pumpkin,” Jason said with a grin. “And while I prefer fresh pies I don’t mind frozen. We can let it thaw before we cook it, if you want to share.”

“I can go back and get it,” Sherlock suggested. “And the cheesecake as well.”
“That would be ideal,” Thomas replied. “Then Jason can stop complaining Thanksgiving is ruined.”

“I’m sorry I have a sweet tooth,” he replied with a mock glare. Then he turned back to Molly. “But really, though. That would be fantastic.”

“Do you really want pumpkin pie as well?” she asked. “Because I got pumpkin puree to make pancakes with, and we can always try and find a recipe to make one.”

“We just need pie crusts and pumpkin pie spice,” Jason said. “I think I have everything else.”

“Why don’t I go to the supermarket and see what they have?” Sherlock said. “I believe the local one is open until one today so if they don’t have a frozen pie I can get the pie crust and spices.”

“You really don’t have to,” Thomas said.

“The one time I was in the States and had pumpkin pie it tasted horrid,” Sherlock said. “I’d be interested in trying a homemade one if I could.”

“Well, try and get the things we need, and if you can’t it’s not a big deal since we’ll have the apple pie,” Jason said.

“I’ll buy a new can of pumpkin puree if I can so I don’t have to rummage through your pantry,” Sherlock said to Molly. “You can pay me back by sharing those pumpkin pancakes.”

“Deal,” she said with a smile. Then her eyes widened slightly. “Oh! I also bought some strawberries to make a sauce for the cheesecake and my ice cream. I can walk Jason through how to make the sauce if you’ll bring those.”

“Do you need me to pick up anything else for that?” Sherlock asked.

“As long as I have sugar and cornstarch I can make it,” she said.

“I don’t think we have cornstarch,” Thomas replied, looking over at Jason, who shook his head.

“I can pick that up as well,” Sherlock said with a nod. He moved over and gave Molly a quick kiss. “I’ll be back shortly.”

“Be careful,” she replied when he moved away.

“I will,” he replied before heading back to the door and letting himself out.

Thomas went and locked it behind him. “Do you need to sit down?” he asked when he moved over to Molly again.

She shook her head. “I’m fine for now, and I have my pain pills with me if I need them.” She moved into the kitchen with Thomas. “So what exactly does Thanksgiving supper entail?” she asked.

“Turkey, homemade cornbread stuffing, candied yams, collard greens and green bean casserole,” Jason said. “I don’t do the yams with marshmallows on top, so you don’t get to experience that today.”

“Despite the look of the casserole it’s really quite good,” Thomas said with a grin. “You would never imagine those ingredients together would make something tasty.”

“And you are not allowed to eat all of it like you usually do,” Jason told him. “I may be doubling the recipe but there’s four of us today.”
“Do you usually do Thanksgiving alone?” Molly asked as Thomas went to the refrigerator and held up a can of non-alcoholic ginger beer. He had told her ordered quite a few favorite British foodstuffs and so she was always pleasantly surprised when she came over. She nodded and he brought it over. “I mean, it seems like a lot of work for just two people.”

Thomas shook his head. “We generally have a few friends who have no one to celebrate with, so we invite them over to get a slightly Southern Thanksgiving meal. Jason’s mother is from Georgia so these are all the foods he grew up eating, even though he grew up here.”

“Southern cuisine is the best food,” Jason replied with a grin before checking the turkey.

“Anyway, this year one of our friends decided to throw a big swanky Thanksgiving party in La Jolla, but Jason enjoys cooking a Thanksgiving meal too much so we decided to stay home and have it with the two of you. It’s always best to have a first Thanksgiving feast at home,” Thomas said, bringing her over her drink. “And besides, if I had gone I would have spent the whole night fielding questions about why I was celebrating Thanksgiving since I’m British.”

“Always annoying questions,” Molly said with a laugh.

“It’s worse on the Fourth of July,” Jason said with a laugh. “I think that’s why we like going to the fair that day. No one really questions it because they assume he’s a tourist here for the summer.”

“Well, I am glad not to be cooking today,” she replied with a warm smile. “It’s going to be hard doing that with my dominant arm in a cast.”

“We will definitely send you home with leftovers of anything you really like,” Jason said. “And I’m totally game with having you and Sherlock over for dinner more, or going over to your place to cook if that’s easier.”

Thomas nodded. “I don’t have a problem with that at all. The both of you have become very close friends.”

“I’ll see if Sherlock wants to do it, but if you come over to cook I don’t think he’ll have a problem with that. I can pull him away from his apartment at least for supper,” she said. “And it will save him from having to cook all the time, which I think he’ll appreciate.”

“Just remember the 19th no one has to cook,” Jason said as he put the turkey in the oven and set the timer. “Catering is a godsend.”

“I hope that the company you hired to cater your reception doesn’t shut down before the two of you get married,” she replied.

“Don’t even joke about that,” Jason said, looking scandalized. “This wedding is going to go off without a hitch. I’ll make sure of it.”

“Just make sure you enjoy yourself, love,” Thomas said. “I want this to be the only wedding either of us go through.”

“I just want to make sure it’s perfect,” he said.

“I know,” Thomas replied, going over and giving him a quick peck on the cheek.

Jason grinned at him before turning to Molly. “Do you have your dress yet? I know all of the women in the wedding had planned to go together.”
“We did,” she said with a nod. “You have some very lovely friends. And the best part is I can wear the dress again after the wedding. I greatly appreciated that.”

“That had been the plan,” Thomas said, grinning. “There’s no point in buying clothing for a wedding that you can’t wear at least once afterward, and not just as a Halloween costume.”

“Which is also why we picked basic black suits instead of tuxes,” Jason said. “Not everyone could afford a tuxedo, even if they were renting it. That, and tuxes aren’t really my thing.”

“Jason is actually going to dye his hair a natural shade,” Thomas said. “I felt if he was going to do that I could live without tuxedos.”

“I’m dying my hair black so that when I add streaks again it will pop more,” he said. “And that way it covers up the purple I have right now.”

“Well, I think it will make you look more handsome than you usually are,” she replied. “I just wish I didn’t have to show up with this cast on. My pictures are going to look horrid.”

Thomas was quiet for a moment, and he appeared to be thinking. “You know, we could always see about having all the women wear elbow length black gloves with the dresses, since they’re black,” he said to Jason. “And we could ask Katrina to make one to fit over Molly’s cast. She’s an excellent seamstress.”

“That’s a really good idea,” Jason said approvingly. “And we can have the photographer pose Molly on a side where it’s not as noticeable.”

“So see? Problem solved,” Thomas said with a nod. “You can feel like you look absolutely smashing that day, too.”

“I’m glad,” she said with a wide smile. “Did the two of you pick a location yet?”

Jason nodded. “It’s going to be at the San Diego Botanic Gardens in Encinitas. It used to be one of my favorite places to go growing up. I had wanted to go into botany when I was very young but I also wanted to go to SDSU and they didn’t have a botany or a horticulture program. But I loved it there. Anyway, there’s a huge waterfall in the middle of the gardens, and we’re going to get married on the middle level deck. Since we’re only having eight people in the wedding party and thirty guests we should all be able to fit.”

“Oh, that’s going to be lovely,” she replied.

“We’re going to do the rehearsal the afternoon before,” Thomas said. “And then for the rehearsal dinner we’re going to Kealani’s. Normally they don’t make reservations but we told them a general time when we’ll be there and that there will be ten of us, so they’ll reserve some tables for us.”

“I’ve never had Hawaiian food before,” Molly replied.

“I’ve found the food I enjoy most that’s popular around here is Hawaiian food, and that restaurant has the best food,” Thomas said. “And then for the reception we’re renting out a hall and having Mediterranean food, with some plainer chicken dishes for people who don’t want something exotic.”

“I can’t wait,” she said.

“You know, while we’re waiting for Sherlock, you can watch me set up the rest of the food,” Jason said to her. “It’s only going to take four hours for the turkey to cook, and this way if there’s anything it turns out you really like at least this way you’ll have an idea of how to make it. The collard greens
need to start now, and I need to be able to have the yams and the green bean casserole go in at the same time, plus if we’re making pumpkin pie it will take time to set all of that up.”

“I would love to help as much as I can,” she said with a nod. “Just tell me what I can do.”

Jason beckoned her over to the stove. As they cooked they talked about a lot, keeping up a very easy conversation between the three of them. Sherlock came back nearly a half hour after Molly started helping with the ingredients to make the pie from scratch as well as the food from Molly’s freezer. He seemed quite curious as to the various dishes that were being made and he watched Jason cook. It was around five in the evening when all of the food was done and ready to be served, and they all sat at the table and enjoyed what was done at that point. Molly liked everything she hadn’t had before, especially the green bean casserole and the collard greens. Everyone agreed that the apple and pumpkin pies would be more than enough so Jason went to serve a slice of each to everyone.

“This is actually quite good,” Sherlock said after he had a bite of the pumpkin pie. “Vastly better than the one I had before.”

“Was it homemade?” Molly asked.

“I don’t think it was,” Sherlock said, shaking his head. “It was very soggy.”

“Well, that’s a recipe I’m filing away for a later date,” Jason said before taking a bite of his apple pie. “So did you two enjoy Thanksgiving?”

“I certainly did,” Molly said with a nod. “We should do this again next year.”

“Well, there’s also Christmas and Easter,” Thomas said as he took a bite of his pumpkin pie. “We’re putting off our honeymoon until later since I have a presentation to make on the 24th. We’ll be going to Maui for a week on the 27th.”

“I don’t think we had any plans for the holidays, other than going home for a bit around the 30th,” Sherlock said. “We could spend Christmas together.”

“By then I might have mastered cooking with my cast on,” Molly said. “We could host supper that night, so long as Jason brings more collard greens.”

“I can do that,” Jason said with a laugh. “And I’ll even make green bean casserole while I’m at it.”

“Excellent,” Molly replied. “And hopefully by then we’ll be in the same place.”

“Back up a second,” Jason said, his eyes wide. “You two are moving in together?”

Sherlock nodded. “Tomorrow we’re going to speak to the manager of our apartment building and see about consolidating into one apartment.”

“That’s excellent news,” Thomas said with a smile.

“Since I’m unable to work for the moment I’ll take care of all the sorting while he’s at school, and then we’ll have professionals move everything in. Or possibly we’ll just buy new furniture for the entire apartment. We haven’t quite decided yet.”

“If you get new furniture would you be willing to sell us some of your things?” Jason said. “I love your dining room table, Sherlock. It’s bigger than this one.”

“If we keep the furniture I would prefer Molly’s table anyway, so I don’t foresee a problem with
that,” Sherlock replied. “I think the only thing I know for sure I want to keep even if we end up getting new furniture is Molly’s bedroom set. It’s the one she wanted and I like it quite a bit.”

“I’m kind of leaning towards new furniture. You know, things we pick out together,” Molly said. “Though I definitely want to keep my bedroom set.”

“Then we would be willing to give you any furniture you feel like taking, in that case, and then we can sell the rest,” Sherlock said to Jason and Thomas.

“We could redecorate the entire apartment that way,” Thomas said with a grin. “Both of you have excellent taste in furniture, so it would be a matter of simply choosing what fits our space.”

“Then it’s settled,” Molly said. “After we find out about getting the apartment we’ll start trying to figure out what to send over here for you.”

“And we’re calling professional movers this time,” Jason said to Thomas. “I’m not lugging heavy furniture up three flights of stairs again.”

“Well, that’s not a problem,” Thomas said with a laugh. “I don’t feel like doing it myself either.”

The conversation drifted back to other things, and soon enough Molly and Sherlock were bidding them a good night, armed with the cheesecake, the strawberries and nearly all the leftovers. Molly had protested but Jason said he’d be totally happy with both of the pies in exchange. They got back to Molly’s apartment at six thirty and after Molly put the food away she and Sherlock sat on the sofa, Sherlock’s arm around her shoulders. “I’m quite full,” she said.

“You did eat quite a bit,” he said with a smile. “But I did too.”

“It still feels so early,” she said. “But I don’t want to go to the cinema or out to do anything.”

“We could watch a film,” he suggested. “Are there any you own that we haven’t seen?”

“I got ‘Raiders of the Lost Ark,’ ‘The African Queen’ and ‘Network’ from the list,” she said. “Or we can watch the three Indiana Jones films I have. I’m not a fan of ‘Temple of Doom’ but that’s a prequel anyway. Do we want to watch those?”

“The three Indiana Jones films sound like a very good way to spend the evening,” he said with a nod.

“Then I’ll go put on ‘Raiders of the Lost Ark’ first,” she said, getting up. She went to her DVDs and selected the three films, then put the first one in. Once it had started she settled in next to him, content to spend the evening next to him watching some good films. It was certainly an excellent way to cap off what had been a very good day, considering what had happened the day before.
Chapter 26

Molly woke up to an empty bed the next morning and the smell of coffee in her apartment. She glanced over at her clock and saw it was nearly nine in the morning. The pain pills she took the evening before had knocked her out, she realized as she got out of bed. She went to the back of her door and reached for her dressing gown, putting it on and tying the sash around her waist before she made her way into the kitchen. Sherlock was in front of her stove, cooking something. She grinned at the sight. “If you were going to surprise me with breakfast in bed I think I ruined the surprise,” she said.

“Well, you can always go back to bed,” he said, giving her a quick grin.

“I can,” she said. “But if I do I think I'll take a cup of coffee with me,” she said as she moved over to her refrigerator to get her creamer.

“One day you will stay in bed long enough for me to surprise you,” he replied as he turned back to the food.

“Next time I wake up alone in bed I'll just stay there,” she said with a laugh.

“Good.” He reached over for some of her shredded cheese, which he had put on a plate on her counter. “I wasn't sure when you'd wake up so I went to the building manager's office at eight.”

“Oh,” she said softly. “I thought we were both going to go.”

He was quiet for a few minutes. “I just wanted to see what our options were,” he said quietly.

“I know, but I wanted to hear them too,” she said, going over to the coffee. She reached up to open her cabinet and get a mug, pulling down the one she generally used. “Just because I was asleep didn't mean I'd sleep all day.”

“I should have waited,” he said with a sigh. “I apologize.”

“Apology accepted,” she said after a moment. “What did the manager have to say?”

“There are actually three apartments open at the moment. There's the two bedroom upstairs, but there's also a two bedroom downstairs and a three bedroom upstairs.”

She thought for a moment. “I didn't even know there were three bedroom apartments in this complex.”

“There are only two, and they tend to go quickly,” he said as he turned off the heat under the food. When he moved the skillet to the plate she saw it was a large omelet. “The manager said that there was someone interested in the three bedroom but they had too many pets for the complex.”

“How many pets did they have?” she asked curiously.

“Four cats and two dogs,” he said. “The limit is two cats and one dog per apartment.”

She took her coffee to the table and sat down. “A three bedroom would be nice,” she said. “Then we could each get a room to do with what we want, or we could have one shared study and a guest bedroom.”

“There was something else the manager mentioned,” he said as he moved the omelet onto a plate.
“There are actual houses in this neighborhood as well. We could easily afford the rent on the three bedroom apartment, but for the same amount of money we could rent a house, which would give us more room.”

“That seems a bit more permanent,” she pointed out. “I mean, that's practically saying we're never going to go back home.” Then she paused. “Still, I've never actually had a home before. I've always stayed in dorms or rented apartments.”

“It's not an option we need to do now,” he said. “We would sign a year lease for an apartment here, and if we still want to stay here in a year we could consider it then.”

She watched him get silverware out of the drawer and then bring the plate to her. “What do you want to do?” she asked.

“I'm content to take the three bedroom apartment for now and see what circumstances we're in at the end of our lease,” he said as he set her plate down in front of her. He went back into the kitchen and got his coffee. “The manager said if we want to sign the lease for the apartment today they'll give us a week into December to move to the new apartment without charging us rent on either of these apartments. And since we're staying in the complex they'll only charge us half the fee for breaking the lease, which I'm prepared to cover for both of our leases.”

“Did you go look at the apartment?” she asked, beginning to eat.

He shook his head. “They're doing the last of the cleaning up today. The manager said we could go look twelve thirty.”

She ate her food for a few minutes as she thought. If there was a three bedroom she would prefer that, to be honest. But she wasn't quite sure about sharing a house with him. To her it felt like an even bigger leap to do that than to simply share an apartment. Still, it was an option, and she could at least consider it. “All right,” she said finally. “Let's take a look at it today. I'd much rather have three bedrooms than two.”

“I'll admit, I'd like to have a place to do my schoolwork that isn't the dining room table,” he said. “What would you do with the other room?”

“I'm not sure. It might be a good idea to use it as a guest bedroom. As much as I would like a study of my own I would like it if we could invite people over and have a place for them to spend the night if they need to.” She had some more of her food. “But it would also be very nice to have a place I can curl up and read a book and have some peace and quiet without disturbing you as you work.”

“I think a four bedroom apartment would be ideal at this point, but I don't think we'd find one,” he said with a slight smile. “And while we could probably find a house with four bedrooms that feels a bit...” He trailed off. “I don't know how to describe it well enough to get my point across.”

“I get what you mean, though, and I kind of feel the same way.” She thought for a moment. “We could take the second biggest room and make that the guest bedroom, and put a comfortable chair in there. If you'll let me decorate I could make it into a room that I could spend time in when we don't have guests.”

“That would neatly solve that problem,” he said with a nod. “To be honest, I was going to let you do most of the decorating. I'd probably make a hash of the whole thing.”

She gave him a grin. “Maybe, maybe not. But that would be nice.” She paused to take another bite of the food. “How much is the rent on the three bedroom?”
“$2,650,” he said.

Her eyes widened. “That's nearly the price of your apartment and my apartment put together!” she said incredulously. “It defeats the purpose of paying less to live together.”

“Well, it's also much larger. Technically it's considered a penthouse apartment,” he said.

“For that much I'd rather rent a house,” she said, shaking her head. “I mean, I know we live in rather upscale apartments, but...”

“Well, there are still the two bedrooms,” he said.

“I suppose,” she said with a sigh.

He looked over at her. “We don't have to stay here,” he said. “There are other apartments near here.”

“I know,” she said quietly. “I suppose this will be something we have to do when we get back from London at this rate.”

“Did you want to do this before we left?” he asked. She nodded. “Then we can look at the two bedroom ones.”

She was quiet for a few minutes, biting her lip slightly. “What is your favorite thing about having an apartment?” she asked when she spoke again.

“The fact that it doesn't have the upkeep of a house, I suppose,” he said thoughtfully. “Mrs. Hudson had to maintain everything for the home on Baker Street and it was more of a hassle than a convenience.”

“I think that's part of the reason I don't want a home, too,” she said. “But what about a condominium? I mean, we wouldn't be renting it. We'd own it. But it wouldn't be like owning a house. And I know there are quite a few in the area, even if it's moving out of this specific neighborhood.”

“That could be a good alternative,” he said thoughtfully. He got up and went into her bedroom, and a few minutes later came out with his phone. He began keying things into his phone, and then after a few minutes he spoke. “They're expensive,” he said.

“How expensive?” she asked.

“Well, the only one I've seen that looks appealing is a townhouse that's around $600,000,” he replied. She got up and moved over to his side, looking down at his phone. “The rest are more than that and don't look as nice. But there doesn't appear to be much in this area, to be honest.”

“We could take a look,” she said after some thought. “I wonder how much a house here is?” He moved his phone closer to him and pulled up a listing. Her eyes got even wider than they were before. “That's...that's more than we could possibly spend.”

“This is a very expensive neighborhood,” he said. “But if there is one you like I would be willing to spend the money on it.”

She looked over at him, then back at the phone. “I suppose you'll have to if we want three bedrooms,” she said. “Go back to the other listings and show me the $600,000 one?”

He pulled it up. “That's quite big,” he said.
“And it's gorgeous,” she said as he flipped through the photos of the home. “What exactly does it entail?”

He moved away from the photographs. “Granite counters, cherry cabinets and stainless steel appliances in the kitchen, hardwood floors, washer and dryer, underground parking for two, large balcony...it actually sounds very impressive.”

“But it's $629,000,” she said, looking at him again. “I mean, that's a lot of money.”

“Do you like it?” he asked, looking up.

“I do,” she said. “I certainly like it more than either of our apartments here. I mean, it's absolutely stunning.”

“Then let's take a look,” he said. “We can always decide to stay here in a smaller apartment if you don't like it if we view it in person.”

“But do you really want to spend that much money?” she asked, biting her lip again.

“I wouldn't mind,” he replied. “To put it in perspective, if we were to move closer to my university the price would be substantially higher. If we move closer to your post there is always the chance we won't find anything this nice, or it could be more expensive. We both have lengthy commutes, but this area is in between where we have to be, and we have friends here that we might not get to see as much if we move farther away. It's a good idea to stay in this area, and I would be willing to spend the money to stay here because I'm planning on being in school for quite some time and you enjoy being here and working at the post you have. I don't see either of us wanting to go back to London unless the relationship ends, and even then I probably won't. I'd simply move to La Jolla.”

She looked back at the listing, then to him again. “All right. Let's take a look. I can always try and talk you out of it later.”

He nodded, using his phone to contact the realtor as she went back to her food. He spoke to her at length, and she was finished with her food by the time she hung up. “He can show us the townhouse in a half hour.”

“I should probably go get dressed then,” she said, getting up and taking her plate to the sink. She rinsed it off, then went back into her bedroom and changed out of her pyjamas into something she hoped looked nice enough. She went to the bathroom and ran a brush through her hair before pulling it back into a bun, and then she joined Sherlock in the kitchen. “All right. I'm ready.”

He pocketed his keys from where they were hanging on the wall as she got her handbag and then they left, locking up after themselves. They went out to his car and she had to admit she was getting quite nervous. She had never entertained living in a place that nice before, but if she wanted to be honest she thought it was something she could get used to. If someone had asked her to describe her dream home here in California that might have been something she'd come up with. They got to the building and got out, and the realtor was waiting for them outside. “Mr. Holmes?” he asked. Sherlock nodded and he extended his hand. “Pleasure to meet both of you.” Sherlock shook his hand, and then Molly did as well. “Shall we go inside?”

Sherlock nodded, and the three of them headed inside. The realtor began talking, but Molly wasn't even paying attention to what he was saying, not really. The home looked even better than the photographs had led her to believe. It was brightly lit with natural light and very spacious with high ceilings, and the more she looked around the more she was impressed. She would glance at Sherlock from time to time, see him nod at something the realtor was saying, and then she would go back to
looking around. Finally the tour was over and the realtor gave them some time to chat by themselves. “What do you think?” Sherlock asked her.

She was quiet for a moment. “I like it quite a bit,” she said finally. “I mean, I thought I would be able to find something I didn't like about it and I could talk myself out of wanting to stay here but I really love everything about this place.”

“Do you want to live here, then?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yes, I do,” she said.

“Then I'll tell him we'd like to purchase it,” he said.

“All right,” she said. Sherlock went back over to the realtor and she watched as his smile grew wider when Sherlock was done talking. He reached over to shake Sherlock's hand again, and then Sherlock motioned for her to come over. The realtor told them everything they would need to do, all the paperwork they would need to fill out, but he said they could move in almost immediately. She wondered what had happened for them to move in so quickly, but soon they were being told where to go to meet with him and fill out the paperwork, and then they left and went their separate ways. “How are we getting to move in so quickly?” she asked Sherlock as they went back to his car.

“I'll be paying the price of the home by electronic transfer in full,” he said. “There won't be any waiting for a check to clear or approval of a mortgage. He was most impressed by that.”

“Can you actually get that much at once?” she asked, her eyes wide.

He nodded. “I transferred my funds to a local bank when I decided to settle here. The bank I'm with now has no problems doing large transfers of my funds, as I had to send a decent sum of money to John this summer when there was a problem with his home. If I were to go in and ask for cash that would take a few extra days, but I could do that as well, if I chose.”

“Mary told me about that. Those were expensive repairs,” she said.

“And they had the funds available the next day,” he said. “The same will hold true in this situation. I'll transfer the money today and the sellers will have it tomorrow, or Monday at the latest. Whatever day they get the funds we can move in about a week after that.”

“I'm quite excited about this,” she said with a smile. “I mean, this place is beautiful. I never thought I would live in a place this nice.”

“Well, considering we both plan to be here for some time it's a good investment,” he said as they got to his car. “And to be honest I appreciate the space. Our apartments are both on the small side, but suitable for one person. Since I'll be going back to sharing a home with someone the extra space will make it easier.”

“Which room did you want to take for your study?” she asked.

“The smallest one,” he replied. “That way you can make sure that the guest bedroom is furnished with things to make it comfortable for both you and any guests we might have.”

“I honestly think my bedroom set is going to be too small for the master bedroom,” she said as he unlocked her door. “I mean, it's quite large.”

“We could invest in bookshelves to line the walls,” he said as she got in. He moved around to his side and then got in. “I'm sure if we go back to the same store I got your bedroom set at we can find
bookshelves that will match."

“What are you going to do about your study?” she asked. “How are you planning on furnishing it?”

“I'm not quite sure yet,” he said thoughtfully. “I have a mismatch of shelves since I had to buy more when I had my things sent from London. I'd like to see if I can get the entire long wall covered in floor to ceiling bookshelves, and then put a desk on the wall facing it. I'll still have plenty of space, though, even if it is the smallest room. I could always get a comfortable chair for when I simply need to read something and I don't want to sit at the desk.”

“Are you still going to let me decorate?” she asked.

He nodded. “We'll both pick out the furniture for all the rooms except the three bedrooms, since I'll be doing one room for personal use and you'll have the other. And then we can pick other things to decorate. I suppose we can put art on the walls instead of having all the walls lived with bookshelves.” She turned to face him and saw he was grinning at her. “It was a joke.”

“But we need quite a few,” she said. “They're going to give us strange looks if we come in and order...” She thought for a moment. “Five bookshelves for your study, at least, four or five for the master bedroom, three or four for the guest bedroom and however many we want in the sitting room. Maybe six. So that's twenty at most and eighteen at the least.”

“Not quite that many,” he said. “The floor to ceiling bookshelves will have to be built. The large wall will be one solid piece bookshelf covering the whole wall, and then the shelves I want to put around the window will be smaller but still floor to ceiling. Where the window is I want to have a window seat with storage space there in case you want to join me and don't want to sit in the chair I'm keeping from my sitting room. That leaves me two walls to place the desk and maybe one more bookshelf on either side of that. But my bookshelves will be custom made. We could always do that for the other rooms, once you decide on whether you want to paint the walls or hang up art. Once we have the furniture picked out, know what woods and washes we want, we can have the shelves built to match.”

“That's going to be expensive,” she said. “Are you sure this isn't too much?”

He shook his head. “I have more than enough. As it stands, I have quite a bit of money coming in with the next round of dividends from my investments. That is primarily what I live off of, but I've made good, sound investments.”

“How much am I going to have to pay to live here?” she asked.

“As in rent?” he asked as he started the car. She nodded when he glanced over at her. “I wasn't expecting rent. I was hoping your contribution would be food, utilities, property taxes, insurance and any other things that might come up. It probably will add up to less than what you pay to survive now. And you won't be paying it to me. The bills would come in both our names but you would be the one to pay it.”

“It still doesn't feel like much,” she said as he settled in and began to drive. “I mean, we own this place, yes, but we also have to pay on it.”

“And I don't mind covering that,” he said. “If you take care of the smaller bills then I know they'll get paid and on time. That's a major contribution, especially since I tend to forget those things. And making sure we have food is important. The refrigerator and freezer are both larger so we can hold more food. So you will be making worthwhile contributions to all of this.”
She thought about it and then nodded slowly. “All right. I suppose that arrangement can work.”

“Good,” he said with a nod. “So why don't we get the paperwork started so we can move in faster? I don't know exactly how long it will take to get everything sorted, but he said probably no more than two weeks. We can start planning for things now.”

“I can agree to that,” she said with a grin. He quickly gave her one back and she settled into her seat, glad that things had gone so well. She hadn't expected it to go quite the way it had, but she had the
They were able to start moving in a week later, which surprised Molly. She had thought for sure they would have to wait at least two weeks or longer, and Sherlock would be back in school with finals at that point and unable to go shopping or make decisions with her about things or they would be going to London for New Year's and they would have to simply wait to get back. Sherlock encouraged her to go to some of the furniture stores and see what there was she liked for the bedroom she was going to decorate as well as the rest of the home, and to see if she could make the purchases with delayed delivery. He had transferred money into her account so she could make purchases with her own card, and she appreciated it.

She had chosen a brand new bedroom set for the guest bedroom with multiple matching shelves and a small desk that she could use when she wanted to write. She was still looking for a comfortable chair for the guest bedroom, because while the desk chair was nice it wasn't exactly what she wanted. She had also picked out the bookshelves to go into their bedroom that matched her bedroom set, and there was a living room set she had her heart set on that she wanted to show Sherlock. It was much larger than either of their living room sets, and it would fit the space perfectly. He had said she could buy what she wanted but she wanted to make sure he liked it too.

Once they knew when they would be able to move in Jason suggested a moving service who would do it on short notice. He and Thomas had already come over and picked out the furniture they wanted from the things she and Sherlock weren't keeping, because aside from Molly's dining room set and the chair from Sherlock's living room furniture the rest was either being given away, sold or donated. Jason and Thomas were taking Sherlock's bedroom set and dining set and Molly's sofa and chairs. Thomas had mentioned to his and Jason's friends that there was still some furniture left over as well as small appliances and cookware since Sherlock and Molly were consolidating their things, and they were able to sell most of the rest of their belongings for a decent sum of money. It certainly made packing much easier, Molly realized.

Just before noon on Saturday the furniture had been moved into their new home and Molly marveled at just how nice it was. They still didn't have the new sitting room set yet because she hadn't gotten to show it to Sherlock, and there was still art and decorations to buy, but she could do that on her own time without Sherlock being there. One thing they had done was buy a larger flat screen television and had it mounted on the wall where the sitting room was. Sherlock looked at the nearly empty room. “I think we should go look at that set before it's too late to have it delivered today,” he said.

“Think we have to be there by three,” she said with a smile. “But it's close.”

“There is still so much furniture we need to buy, as well as other things,” he replied. “Maybe I can look at the same store and see if there is a desk and chair for the study.”

“Well, if that store doesn't have anything we'll be home tomorrow so you can have something delivered then,” she said as they headed towards the garage. “But what else do we need at the moment?”

“Mostly things for the sitting room,” he said. “A sofa, chairs, a coffee table, bookshelves. And it wouldn't hurt to look into getting another dresser for our bedroom. We certainly have enough space in the room for one, and that will give us each a dresser of our own.”

“That's a really good idea,” she said thoughtfully. “That way we don't have to hang as much up in the closet.”
He nodded. “We could have them facing each other with a bookshelf flanking each side since we have the low shelves you bought directly across from the bed. That would be more symmetrical.”

“I think that would look nice, especially if we put one under the window,” she said as they got to his car.

“It’s starting to shape up to be a nice home for us,” he said as he unlocked her door.

“Yes, it is,” she said. She opened the door and got inside as he went around and did the same on the driver's side. “It's going to take some time to get used to have the washer and dryer in the garage. I'm not used to that. And the appliances are so much larger.”

“I think we'll adapt easily enough, though,” he said with a grin as he started the car. He used the garage door opener to open their garage and once the door was up he backed out. “This is definitely something I'll appreciate. It will be nice not to have to keep our vehicles out in the sun.”

“Oh yes,” she said with a nod. “We still need to go get my car, though. I don't think it's a good idea for me to attempt to drive.”

“We can take a cab to our old apartment,” he said. “We still need to break the lease anyway. And I'll still pay for doing that so that you can keep the money you have until your temporary disability starts.”

“It just started Friday,” she said. “I'll be getting a fraction of what I would actually make, but I don't know when I'll actually get my first payment.”

“All the more reason for me to cover the cost,” he replied. “This is part of letting me take care of you for the moment.”

“I know,” she said, giving him a quick grin. “I don't mind in this instance.”

“Do you know where you want to go to get the things to decorate our home?” he asked.

“I want to go to IKEA and look at things, but also Pier 1 Imports and Cost Plus World Market. They both have beautiful things and I want to see what appeals to me. There's a Cost Plus in San Diego I've been to before, and I think there's a Pier 1 up in the northern part of the county.” She paused for a moment. “I just hope I get things you don't mind.”

“As long as the items in the sitting room aren't neon bright I think I'll be fine with anything you choose,” he replied. “Though I'm fairly sure you'll get things to compliment the room as opposed to things that clash.”

“I would like some bright colors in the sitting room, maybe with some throw pillows and art,” she said thoughtfully. “ Mostly blues and greens, though. And maybe reds.”

“I could live with that,” he said with a nod.

“I definitely want to get bedding for the guest bedroom from the Cost Plus market,” she said. “It's much more vibrant and fun.”

“You can always use them in our bedroom, too,” he said with a grin. “We don't need to have plain bedding and accessories.”

“Are you sure?” she asked.
“I don't mind color if you would like it,” he replied. “Mostly I don't want all sorts of knickknacks in the bedroom. A few items that are tasteful is fine. I just really want room for the books I don't plan to put into my study.”

“What books would those be?” she asked.

“I do have a few pieces of fiction,” he replied. “There are a lot of stories I enjoyed when I was a child, and some books John was able to talk me into reading. Most of what I have is nonfiction, however. Not things I would read for cases, but books that caught my eye that were biographies and stories of various events in history. I will probably only need one of the smaller shelves in the bedroom because I don't have many of those types of books. The larger bookshelves can be yours because I've seen how many books you have.”

“I do have quite a few,” she said with a laugh. “How long is it going to take for your bookshelves to be built?”

“A week or so. The carpenter took all the measurements yesterday, and he said it won't take too long to build, but it's just a matter of telling him what the rest of the furniture will look like so he can stain the shelves to match. But he'll be assembling them in the room, so all he needs to do is get the wood and the stain.”

“How did you find him?” she asked.

“He's a friend of Jason's. He built the desk and bookshelves in Thomas's office,” he replied. “I was quite impressed with both. I'm almost considering asking him to build my desk as well. It would take more time, but it would be a sturdier piece of furniture.”

“What will you do in the meantime?” she asked.

“My final exams are the week after next, so it's not as though I need to study much more,” he said. “If this is something he can build over my semester break I can begin to use it next term.”

“Do you have an idea of what you want for a desk?” she asked.

“I do,” he said with a nod. “If he can build it I think that would be preferable.” He turned to her briefly. “Are we going to be near the Cost Plus market today?”

“I think so. I mean, it's not too far out of the way,” she said. “Why?”

“I'm thinking it might be nice to get a few things for our home together,” he said, turning back to the road.

“You know, I like that. 'Our home.' It has a nice ring to it,” she said with a grin.

“Yes, it does,” he said with a grin of his own.

“Well, to go back to the suggestion, I would love to do that. I think it might be best to get your ideas on what you want to put in the home. And tomorrow we can go to the northern part of the county and got to Pier 1 for anything else we might need.”

“Do you still want to go to IKEA?” he asked.

“Maybe. Let's see what we find at the other two places.” They lapsed into a brief silence at that point and then the conversation started again on a different topic. They arrived at the furniture store and Molly took him right to the living room set. He sat down on the sofa and she could tell he was
comfortable. After a few minutes he agreed that it was worth buying, along with two matching bookshelves and a long low shelf to put under the window. She also decided on the chair for the guest bedroom while they were there, and they had delivery scheduled for four in the evening, giving them plenty of time to shop for accessories at the Cost Plus market. They spent nearly two hours there, and both the car boot and the backseat of Sherlock's car were filled with purchases not only of accessories for the home but food and drink that they had both missed. They returned home and began lugging things into their home, and soon the guest bedroom was filled with plastic bags, since she didn't want to put them in the sitting room just yet. “I think we did quite well,” Molly said as she got a bag of food to take into the kitchen.

“I think there are other things I'd like to go back and get that we didn't really have room for,” he replied as he took two other bags of food. They moved into their kitchen and set them on the counter. “There were a few striking pieces I think would look good in my study and in the foyer.”

“We could always go up to Oceanside to go to the Pier 1 there,” she said. “The sales associate said they have another Cost Plus market close by to that. We can see if they have the same merchandise or new things.”

“We definitely need to get lighting for some of these rooms,” he replied. “I know we had some lamps from our apartments but I'm not sure it will be enough.”

“Well, we can look around tomorrow and see what there is,” she said as she began taking food out of the bags. “I think Pier 1 has lamps and things like that.”

“Tomorrow will most likely be the last time I'm able to help shop for things at least until my exams are over,” he said. “So the more of it we can get done now the better.”

“I agree,” she said with a nod. “This way our home is suited to both of our tastes.” She looked around the kitchen. “It's so much bigger than any other kitchen I've had before.”

“Once you get used to using your hand in a cast you can help me cook more,” he said with a grin. “And speaking of food, I'm quite hungry.”

“So am I. We should have stopped for something on the way back,” she said.

“Yes, but we could have missed the furniture delivery,” he pointed out. “I can see what types of restaurants there are in this area that deliver.”

“That's something we have to take care of too, getting a phone line and getting the cable hooked up and the internet,” Molly said as Sherlock pulled out his phone.

“It wouldn't hurt to do that as soon as possible,” he said thoughtfully, looking up. “And supposedly there are bundles we could get. If you want to include that in the bills you cover that would work, though I don't mind covering it myself.”

“I had the internet and cable and phone bundle at my apartment and I got the highest quality and the extra channels, like BBC America and the pay channels,” she said. “I can just have them transfer everything to this place and keep paying what I've been paying.”

“Then that's what we'll do,” Sherlock said with a nod before looking back at his phone. “I can't figure out who delivers, but there is a Mexican food restaurant nearby. I can go get food while you wait for the furniture delivery.”

“That works for me,” she said. “I want my usual.”
“California burrito, no sour cream, extra cheese and guacamole?” he said.

She chuckled. “I've ordered it once around you and you memorized it,” she said.

“I have a very good memory,” he said with a grin before heading towards the garage entrance. “I'll be back shortly.”

“Be safe,” she said.

“I will.” He left at that point, and five minutes later the furniture delivery showed up. She was still showing the men delivering it where to put everything when Sherlock came back with the food. It took another twenty minutes, but soon the sitting room looked exactly how they wanted it to and they could finally sit down and eat. “I think we have done a fairly good job making this place ours,” he said as he began to unwrap his own burrito.

“I think we have as well,” she said with a grin. “Are we just going to take care of our old lease tomorrow?”

He nodded. “I have a person coming from AMVETS with a truck to take the last of the furniture from our apartments to be donated, along with the kitchen supplies no one wanted and a few other things I decided I didn't want to bring over. They'll be there at eleven, so we can make sure the apartments are empty before we talk to the manager.”

“Was the manager upset we didn't take any of the apartments there?” she asked.

He shook his head. “Actually, she's quite thankful we're leaving. They apparently got quite a few people who were interested in apartments this week. The three we were considering are rented out now, and having the two single bedrooms open up will allow them to make more money. They can charge the new tenants a slightly higher rent if they choose.”

“That's a bit evil,” she said.

“But understandable. They need to make a profit.” He ate some of his food. “But we have this home and I think it's a vast improvement to the other residences where we've lived. Except possibly my home on Baker Street. That was home for a long time.”

“I'm going to make sure you spend plenty of time with Mrs. Hudson when we go visit,” she said with a smile. “Have you made our reservations yet?”

He nodded. “We'll be leaving very early on the 28th,” he replied. “I've booked first class flights on British Airways, and it will take about eleven hours to get there. Then we'll be staying at The Savoy for the duration of the trip.”

“Those are certainly nice accommodations,” she said. “I don't think I've ever stayed anywhere as nice.”

“Well, when our plans for Thanksgiving weekend fell through I thought it would be nice to do something exceedingly nice to make up for that,” he replied. “We might not stay at the same hotel next time we go. For all we know, Mrs. Hudson will insist we stay with her.”

“I actually wouldn't say no to that,” she said with a soft laugh. “I do miss everyone there.”

“I do too, though not enough to move back there.”

“I agree.” She ate some more of her food. “Now that we have a guest bedroom we can invite them to
stay here, you know. There's more than enough room in the guest bedroom for us to have a crib for William if we want to invite John and Mary here. I mean, if they feel like traveling with an infant.”

“That could work,” he said after thinking a moment. “Or I could have them stay in a nice hotel. That way they have an even larger place”

“That is true,” she said thoughtfully. “It's a large bedroom, but not incredibly large. But then it all boils down to whether they'd want to travel with William.”

“Perhaps when he's a bit older,” he replied. “But I do know the last time I spoke with Lestrade he said he was considering taking a vacation to escape the 'wretched, blasted cold,' in his words. We could invite him to stay with us for a week or so.”

“I'd love to do that!” she said with a wide smile. “I don't talk to him nearly enough.”

“I talk to him a few times a week. Mostly about his work, but sometimes about other things. We don't chat for long, but we do chat.”

“Are you helping him with cases?” she asked in a teasing tone.

“On occasion. Mostly he just likes having a different perspective on things. He's doing the actual case solving himself, so it's not quite the same as consulting, which is why I do it.”

“Ah,” she said before eating more of her food. Soon enough both of them were finished, and once they threw their trash away they gravitated towards the sitting room, sitting down on the sofa. “I think I'd like to watch a film or two. We still haven't watched the two movies that come after 'Raiders of the Lost Ark.'”

“I would enjoy that, I think,” he said with a nod. “I'm fairly sure we set the Blu-ray player up correctly.”

“Well, I just hope the television works,” she said, getting up and turning the television on. She went to the box that was holding the DVDs and rummaged around until she found “The African Queen.” “Let's hope this works,” she said, putting the DVD into the player. She pushed the disc in and waited, and then she was rewarded with the startup screen. “Excellent! It worked.”

“Good,” he said as she came to sit back down next to him. He put an arm around her shoulders and she snuggled close, glad to be spending time with him in their new home. She knew that it was going to be a good start to what she hoped would be a long time together.
“We should have a Christmas tree,” Molly said a week after they moved into their new home. Sherlock was in the kitchen making them breakfast and she was sitting at the counter on one of the stools there. “If we're going to have Jason and Thomas over for Christmas dinner it should at least look a little festive.”

“Are we going to want a real one, though?” he asked.

“We wouldn't be able to,” she said, shaking her head. “I have an allergy to pine. I've had a fake tree almost my entire life.”

“You did well the year of the Christmas party,” he said as he flipped the pancake he was cooking in the skillet.

“I had two antihistamines before I ever set foot in your home,” she said with a chuckle. “And I still had a slight allergic reaction. It was not pleasant.” She was quiet for a moment. “You know what getting a fake tree means, though. We'll need to brave some warehouse type store to get one.”

“Why don't you see where in the area there is that sells fake trees and decorations while I finish making breakfast?” he said.

She nodded and moved away from the counter. They had gotten the internet in their home three days prior and so she went into the guest bedroom and got her laptop, carefully carrying it out to the counter. She opened it up and then put in her password, and as soon as she could she opened up her browser and went to her default search engine, beginning to look. “Well, there's City Lights,” she said, looking at the website. “Apparently they have anything you could possibly need for Christmas, and it's a smaller business, which I'd feel better supporting.”

“Where exactly is it at?” he asked, moving the finished pancakes to a platter.

“It's in Linda Vista,” she said. “Though there's also Ace Hardware here in Hillcrest.”

“Do you feel like making the trip to Linda Vista?” he asked.

She scrolled through the website more. “I think I would. They have quite a few beautiful things, and we could get it all taken care of at once. They also have online ordering, if we don't want to leave.”

“It's only about a ten minute drive,” he said as he poured more batter on the skillet. “If you really want to go we can.”

“I think we should,” she said. “I can attempt to drive my car so we have the extra space to bring things home.”

“How many decorations are you planning on buying?” he asked, raising an eyebrow as he turned to look at her.

“I'm not going to go overboard,” she said with a laugh. “But fake trees come in very large boxes. We would most likely have to put it in the backseat, and neither of our car boots are exceptionally large.”

“If you pick out more than we can put in the car we can always attempt to have you take a cab home,” he said thoughtfully. “That way you can get as much as you want and still have your tree.”
“You're helping me pick the decorations out,” she said. “If we both have to stare at it for the rest of the month you get equal say in it.”

“I'd prefer to leave it mostly to you. Christmas is not one of my favorite holidays,” he said. “I had absolutely no hand in decorating any of the years I've been around anyone who celebrated.”

“Didn't you do it as a child?” she asked.

He shook his head. “Christmas wasn't a very big holiday in my family. Mycroft killed the idea that there really was a St. Nick for me when I was four years old, and my family generally didn't do much to celebrate after that point. When John and I lived together that party went horribly awry, and the Christmas after I came back didn't go very well, either.”

She moved away from the counter and went over to him, embracing him from behind. “We don't have to decorate if you don't want to,” she said. “But it might be nice if we do something to help reverse all those crap Christmases you've had.”

“Do you like Christmas?” he asked.

“I do. It's not my absolute favorite holiday of the year, but I do love being festive,” she said.

“What is your favorite holiday of the year?” he asked curiously.

“New Year's Eve. I always loved watching the fireworks over the Thames,” she said. “And the hospital always seemed to have a better party for New Year's Eve than Christmas.”

“Is that why you wanted to go back to London?”

“Yes. I mean, we could have stayed here but it's a nice opportunity to see our friends back home and do something I really enjoy.” She let go of him and watched him cook for a moment. “But back to what I was saying. If you don't want to have a tree or any of that we don't have to.”

“I suppose it wouldn't hurt,” he said slowly. “Perhaps this year might be better, since you would try very hard to make sure it doesn't go horribly wrong.”

“I'm glad you're willing to give it a shot,” she said with a smile, leaning in and standing on her toes to kiss his cheek. “Let's eat breakfast and change and then go to City Lights. It opens at nine.”

“I'm almost done,” he said with a nod. “These are the last three.”

“I can't wait to eat them,” she said. “They smell quite good.”

“Well, fresh blueberries don't cost much, so long as you don't buy organic ones,” he said as he grinned. “And I'll admit, I've missed them.”

“Do we have any left over for me to nibble on?” she asked.

“Sadly, no,” he replied. “They were all in the batter. But I did get strawberries for you.”

“How did I miss those?” she asked, moving away from the stove to go to the refrigerator. She opened the door and moved things around until she saw the container, and then she pulled it out. “They're big ones, too. I think I'd like some on top of the pancakes.”

“Do you want to make your syrup?” he asked.

“I think I would,” she said with a nod.
“When I'm done cooking these I'll cut them for you,” he replied. “As long as you promise to share the syrup.”

“I'll use most of the container, then,” she said with a smile, opening it and taking out a large strawberry. She took a bite out of it, shutting her eyes and savoring it. When she was done she set the stem in the lid. “I love the fact it's December and I can have fresh strawberries and not pay an arm and a leg for them.”

“That is definitely an added bonus of being here,” he said with a slight laugh. “While there are certain things that are more expensive here fresh fruit and vegetables do not seem to be one of those items, even if they are decidedly cheaper in the spring and summer.”

“I think it's because of the healthy lifestyle everyone here tries to live,” she said, eyeing another large strawberry. After a moment she picked it up out of the container and took a bite out of it. “No point in trying to eat more healthily if you can't afford it.”

“You will never get me to eat tofu, though,” he said as he flipped the pancakes over. “I draw the line at that.”

“Oh, but you already have,” she said with a wide grin.

He turned to look at her sharply. “When did I do that?”

“The last time I made chicken stir-fry. I didn't have enough chicken so I used up the extra firm tofu I had in the refrigerator to supplement it. You didn't even notice,” she said. “If you marinate it long enough and then you brown it before you add it to the vegetables it doesn't taste noticeably different.”

He stared at her for a moment. “That is quite evil,” he said finally before turning back to the food.

“Well, I enjoy it so you're going to see it in our refrigerator quite often. And it will probably be in foods you don't even realize.”

“I think I'm going to eye anything you make with suspicion from now on,” he said.

She reached over and smacked his shoulder with her good hand. “No you won't. You'll eat it because you know I make good food.”

“I didn't say I wasn't going to eat it,” he said with a grin. “I just said I was going to look at it with suspicion.”

“I can't wait until I can cook again,” she said. “I'm grateful Jason came over and cooked two meals on Monday for us because with you being a week away from your final exams you weren't at all able to cook anything. And next week is going to be worse.”

“But next week will be the last week and then I'm free until the end of January,” he pointed out. “And next term I will be taking fewer classes. Hopefully we won't run into this problem again.”

“Are you prepared for those exams?” she asked.

“Once again all of my professors told us exactly what will be on the exams,” he said, taking the last of the pancakes and putting them on the platter. “After we do this shopping and get everything set up I'm going to start studying for my exams. Not that I need to study too hard, since none of my exams are cumulative. I only need to know what we've been taught since our midterms.”
“That's good,” she said, moving over to the cabinet to get the things she needed to make the syrup as Sherlock moved in front of the strawberries after grabbing the cutting board. “It will definitely be nice to have your undivided attention for a while.”

“Aside from when we're in London,” he said, reaching over for a sharp knife. “But then I won't have your undivided attention either.”

“That is true.” She set the ingredients on the other side of the stove from Sherlock and then went to the hanging rack with their pots and pans. She pulled down the saucepan and took it to the stove. “It really is going to be nice to go home, so long as everyone doesn't try and convince us to stay.”

“They can try all they want but it's not happening,” he said as he began to cut the strawberries. “But I think by now they've realized our lives are here now. John might try, but even then I don't think he'll try too hard. Everyone seems to have more or less accepted it at this point.”

She went to a drawer and opened it, pulling out the measuring cups. “What about your brother?” she asked.

“I think even he has accepted it,” he said. “As much as we may have had our disagreements he realizes that I'm actually happy here, and he wants to keep it that way. I think in his mind a happy me causes less trouble for him, which is quite true. I think his only regret is that I've repaid my debt to him so he can't use me for his errands anymore.”

“Well, if he tries to get you to leave then I'll cause trouble for him,” she said adamantly.

“Which is exactly what I hope you do,” he said with a grin. “He's stayed fairly quiet lately, though, which I'll admit is unusual. He hasn't even attempted to irritate me.”

“Maybe he's moved past being an annoying twat,” she said thoughtfully.

He laughed at that. “I wonder if he knows how you actually feel about him.”

“Oh, I think he does,” she said as she began measuring out the ingredients for the syrup. “While you were gone I made it very clear he had no right to meddle in my life.” She paused for a moment. “Though I will admit, he did try and talk me out of beginning a relationship with Tom. That might have been the only time I should have listened to him.”

“But you were happy for a while,” Sherlock said quietly, his good mood dimming slightly. “And you did deserve to be.”

“I know. But I wasn't being completely honest with Tom and I think your brother realized that. I think he was trying to protect me from getting hurt when you were able to come back.” She shook her head. “Let's change the topic, all right?”

“Very well,” he replied. “Is there anything you would like to talk about?”

“We could start making plans for what we want to do when we get free time in London,” she said. “Not that I expect we'll get very much of that.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” he said with a nod. They began to discuss the things they would like to do as they worked on making the sauce, and when it was done they served up their food and went to the table to eat, continuing the conversation. By the time they went to get dressed they had a few things in mind that they definitely wanted to do when they were back home. It didn't take either of them very long to change out of their pyjamas and go down to the garage. They had decided to take Molly's car since her car boot was marginally bigger than his, and if the tree was large enough they
could drive back with the top down. She pulled up the address for City Lights on her phone and programmed it into her GPS and then they were off.

She wasn't quite sure what she had expected when they went inside the store but the place was filled with anything she could have possibly wanted when it came to Christmas decorations. She tried to reign in her glee and she felt she was moderately successful in doing that. The first thing they did was pick out a tree, and she found a prelit one she absolutely fell in love with that looked as though it would look quite good in their sitting room. She didn't even have to try very hard to convince Sherlock it was a good deal. Then it came time to shop for ornaments. Back home she'd had a blue and silver theme for the tree, and when she broached the idea to Sherlock he agreed it was a good idea as well. They got mostly simple ornaments, but any time she saw Sherlock pick up something that looked like it interested him she added it to what she was planning on purchasing. They did have a small disagreement about what should be on top of the tree, but finally Molly's saw a star tree topper that she thought looked nice and Sherlock said he wouldn't mind having that on top of the tree.

She picked out a few other things for the home, mostly things to decorate the counter and the table when they had Jason and Thomas over for Christmas dinner. She thought they were done when Sherlock suggested getting a few more items, and the fact that he had thought they were things they could use in their home was more than enough reason for her to agree to get them. By the time they left the store and loaded everything in the car there was absolutely no room left in the car boot or the backseat. Molly was not relishing having to carry all of it up the stairs from the garage. They got home quickly and it took them nearly thirty minutes to get everything into their home. The tree was the hardest to bring up but they managed to get it into the sitting room. When they were done, though, they collapsed on the sofa.

“I didn't realize fake trees were so heavy,” Sherlock said, leaning his head onto the back of the sofa.

“Oh, the large ones are extremely heavy,” she said, her back propped up against the arm of the sofa. She shut her eyes and after a moment Sherlock reached over and pulled her legs onto his lap so she could stretch out. “And we still have to get it out of the box.”

“At least we don't have to put it together,” he said. “I was honestly surprised we were able to fit it in the car, even with the top down.”

“Laying the box down at an angle was a good idea. I'm glad I thought to buy the ties and keep them in the car boot,” she said. “Otherwise we would have had to return it for a smaller tree.”

“You had your heart set on that tree, though,” he said.

“I know. But if we couldn't get it home there was no point in keeping it.” She opened her eyes. “Can we just sit here for a long, long while before we try and get the tree out?”

“I have no objection to that.” He lifted his head up as he looked at her. “I noticed you picked up every ornament I showed an interest in, even if it didn't match the color scheme. Thank you.”

“It's your tree too,” she said, giving him a smile. “If we're going to work on improving how your Christmases go I want to make sure at the very least you enjoy looking at the tree. And I'll even let you pick where they all go.”

“So I actually have to decorate?” he asked, giving her a grin.

“Yes,” she said with a nod. “But I can do most of the work, if you want.”
“It’s all right,” he said, moving his hands so he could massage one of her calves. “I almost suggested lights for outside, but I figured you wouldn’t want to be on a ladder putting them up, and I think that’s too much work.”

“No ladders for me, thank you very much,” she said. “If I never have to get on anything higher than a step stool ever again I’ll be happy for the rest of my life.”

“I’ll remember that,” he said. “We didn’t get anything to decorate outside, though.”

“I can purchase a wreath for the door somewhere else later,” she said, beginning to relax. “That feels quite good.”

“I rather thought it would,” he said. “Though probably not as much as the massage you got when I sent you to the spa.”

“No, but I like it a lot,” she said.

“Would you like to go back for an early Christmas gift?” he asked.

“Well, I already went and had my hair done again so I don’t need to go for that,” she said thoughtfully. “Why don’t we wait until after we come back from London? For all we know it might be so stressful that I need one.”

“I don’t think out friends will cause us that much stress,” he said with a frown.

“Not that. It’s an eleven hour flight each way, and then it’s going to be cold, which is something I’ve not missed very much. And there is always the chance we’ll get pulled aside for private conversations about how we are missed dearly and how wonderful it would be if we visited more. There may be guilt trips for us not coming back to visit sooner, or not staying longer, or even for choosing to stay here for the foreseeable future, though I doubt we’ll get many of those. Plus we’ll be starting our trip on the tail end of the holiday season. Supposedly that’s the worst time to travel.”

“Are you sure you want to go home?” he asked, raising an eyebrow as he paused in what he was doing.

She looked a bit sheepish. “I do sound rather pessimistic, don’t I?” she said.

“A bit, yes,” he said with a nod.

“I’m not meaning to be, honest,” she said. “I think it’s mostly nerves. I want this to go well. I don’t want to regret deciding to go home for a visit.”

“I don’t think you’ll regret it,” he said. “I’ll do everything I can to keep that from happening.”

She gave him a grin and moved her legs off his lap before moving from her spot on the sofa and settling next to him. She leaned over and kissed him softly. “Thank you,” she said quietly when she pulled away.

“You’re welcome,” he murmured in response. She shifted her position slightly and snuggled in next to him, and he put an arm around her shoulders and pulled her close. “At some point we have to attempt to get that tree out of the box.”

“Do we want to get that over with sooner rather than later?” she asked.

“That would probably be best,” he said. “But we can stay like this a little while longer.”
“All right,” she said with a slight nod, moving one of her arms so it was draped across his waist slightly. They stayed like that for a good twenty minutes before she reluctantly pulled away. “I think it's probably a good idea for us to stop putting it off.”

“Very well,” he said as she stood up. He followed suit a moment later and they both moved over to the box. He looked at it for a moment, then went over to the kitchen and got the pair of scissors there. He came back to the box and cut the ties they'd used to carry it in. “Is the stand nearby?”

She looked around and then went over to the bags, beginning to dig through them. Finally she found the bag that held it. “Here it is.”

“Where do we want to put this?” he asked.

She looked around the sitting room and then pointed to the corner near the bookshelves on the back wall. “Over there, maybe? A little further away from the corner?”

“That works,” he said with a nod. She took the stand over there and set it down so that when the tree was up they’d be able to get all the way around it to decorate the entire thing. He pulled the box over and then opened it completely. “All right. You'll have to help me get this out.”

She nodded and went over to him. They both reached into the box and pulled it up. The tree was quite large, larger than any other tree she'd had in her entire life, and it was quite heavy. Once they got it standing Sherlock reached around and lifted it up out of the box, carrying it the short distance to the stand. She got down onto the ground and then moved the stand so that all he had to do was lower it. Once he had she began to turn the screws to hold it in place as he stood there keeping it upright. Finally she got the last screw tightened. “All right. Let go.”

He let go of the tree and she crawled out from underneath. It was just a tiny bit crooked, but it wasn't completely noticeable. “I don't really want to adjust it,” he admitted. “Will this do?”

“This will be fine,” she said with a smile. She went to the bags and began digging around for the tree skirt. Once she found it she went back to the tree and knelt down, draping the skirt over the stand. Then she stood up and got a good look at it. “Okay. Now comes the fun part.”

“The actual decorating?” he asked.

She nodded. “Let's get the glass balls on the table so we can see exactly how many blue and silver ones we got. We'll put those on first.”

“As you wish.” They both went over to the bags and began pulling out all the ornaments. Instead of bringing over just the glass balls they brought over all of the breakable ornaments. When they had them on the table she counted the boxes. “Three boxes of each color, and there's twelve in each box. Where are the hooks?”

Sherlock went back to the bags and then dug through them until he pulled up two small plastic containers. “Why did we get two hundred of these?” he asked.

“In case we lose some,” she said. “Plus I think we have close to a hundred ornaments because it's a huge tree.”

He nodded. “So do we want to start with the glass balls?”

“Yes,” she said. “Try and space them out so we don't have huge chunks of just blue or just silver.” She went over and took the hooks from him and set them on the table before she opened it. She counted out twelve hooks and then opened up the top box of silver ornaments and put the hooks in
the lid before going to the tree. Sherlock watched as she picked up one of the hooks, put the loop of
the ornament on the smaller hook and then hung it on the tree with the larger hook. “See? Easy. Let's
try and get all the silver ones on first.” He picked up a box and then went to the hooks, pulling out
twelve, and then he joined her at the tree. She finished first and went back for the third box. She had
just counted out the hooks when she glanced at the tree and saw Sherlock staring at it. “Sherlock?”
she asked.

“Is there any particular order you want these in?” he asked, looking up.

She shook her head. “Wherever you want to put them. Maybe have a few in the front and a few
wards the back of the limbs, though. Space them out.”

“All right,” he said, taking one of the glass balls and putting it on the hook and then putting it on the
tree. He looked at it a moment and then pulled it off, repositioning. He grinned slightly at that and
then moved to another part of the tree. Molly watched with an amused smile before she went back to
the tree. When he was done he went to go pick up a box of blue ones, and she saw him studying the
tree carefully before he began to place more of the ornaments on it. When she was done with the last
box of silver ones she went for her own box of blue ones, and when she was done she stopped and
watched Sherlock. “Some of these don't look spaced correctly,” he said. “They can't all be seen
well.”

“It's all right. We mostly want to have the unique ornaments be seen better,” she said. “But if you
want to move them around, feel free. I'll let you add the last box of blue ones, if you want.”

“Thank you,” he said with a nod. He went back over to the table and got the last box of glass balls
and some hooks, and then he walked around the tree and methodically placed them at various points.
Every once in a while he would adjust other ornaments, but after ten minutes he looked satisfied. He
brought the empty box to the table and looked at Molly. “What's next?”

“The garland,” she said. “Some of the balls are going to be a bit more covered up, but that's all right.
They aren't the focus of the tree. Do you want to help me do all of the garland or just the top part that
I can't reach?”

“I'll observe and then do the top,” he said.

She went back to the bags and pulled out the lengths of silver garland they had bought. She took one
package and went to the tree. She draped it on the bottom row towards the back and then walked
around the tree, winding it around and then up. A quarter of the tree had been done when she ran out
of garland and so she got another package. She wound that one around and when she was done two
thirds of the tree was done. “Sherlock? Your turn.”

He nodded and then came over, taking another package of garland. He began draping it where the
last bit of garland had stopped and he made his way around the tree until he was out of garland. At
this point almost the entire tree was covered. “This looks acceptable?” he asked.

“It looks perfect,” she said with a wide smile. He grinned in response. “Okay, now we get to add all
the unique ornaments. You can add all of the ones we bought for you and I'll add the ones we
bought for me. Then we put the star on top and we turn it on to see if the lights work.”

“And I can put them anywhere on the tree?” he asked, moving back towards the table.

She nodded. “Anywhere they'll fit.” She went and began picking up the ornaments she had liked,
getting hooks for them and putting them on the tree. Within about fifteen minutes they had to open
up the other case of hooks and she began to realize there might not be enough room on the tree for all
of the ornaments. She stopped what she was doing and looked around. “Sherlock, keep putting your
ornaments on,” she said as she went to their mantle. She looked at it and saw that with a few nails
they could hang up ten ornaments and still have room for two stockings. “Do you want to hang any
of your ornaments on the mantle?” she asked after a moment.

“I’d prefer for them to be on the tree,” he replied.

“Then fit as many as you can and I’ll hang some of mine on the mantle. I just need a hammer and
nails.”

“Can you hold a hammer well enough to use it?” he asked with a frown.

She thought about it for a moment. “I suppose not,” she said with a sigh.

“I'll do it in a moment,” he said. “I'm almost done hanging all of mine up.” She waited for a few
minutes and then he came over. “How many ornaments do you want to hang up?”

“Ten,” she said.

He looked at the mantle. “Do we really want holes in the mantle, though?”

“Well, what would you suggest?” she asked.

“The last time I had to very quickly get things to hang the art with I saw these adhesive backed
hooks,” he said. “They're completely removable and they don't leave marks on the wall. And I saw
some that were clear, so it won't detract from the decorations.”

“That sounds like a very good idea,” she said with a grin. “Where do you need to go to get them?”

“Ace Hardware should have them,” he said. “I think that was where I saw them the first time.”

She nodded. “Well, get twelve of them, so we have ten for the ornaments and two for the stockings.”

“I still can't believe you made me get a stocking,” he said, shaking his head. He had a half grin on his
face as he did, though.

“I did, and I'm going to fill it up with smaller presents and the few pieces of candy you like and
maybe an orange and some nuts,” she said. “And you can do the same with mine.”

“I will,” he said. Then he moved away from her to the key rack by the garage door, picking up his
keys. “I'll be back as soon as I can.”

“Be careful,” she said.

He paused. “I hope you never stop telling me that,” he said.

“I'll tell you every time I can,” she said with a smile.

“See you soon,” he said before opening the door to the garage and then going inside. She went back
to the ornaments and picked out ten she wanted to hang on the mantle and then tried to find room for
the rest on the three. She was starting to get hungry and so she decided she was going to have a slice
of her leftover pizza from Thursday night when Sherlock didn't feel up to cooking. It had just
finished reheating when she heard the garage door open and she saw him come back in. “I got
sixteen, just in case.”

“Well, I finished adding the last ornaments to the tree that I could fit,” she said, taking her plate to the
counter and sitting on a stool. “I think you did an excellent job decorating it.”

He placed the bag on the counter near her. “Do you really think so?” he asked, looking at the tree.

“I do,” she said as she nodded. “We should plug it in and see what it looks like with the lights on.”
Then she frowned. “Though I don’t think the cord is long enough to reach the outlet.”

“Which is why...” He trailed off as he went back to the bag on the counter and pulled up an extension cord. “I bought this.”

“Oh, you really are brilliant,” she said with a laugh. “Do you want me to go plug it all in?”

He shook his head. “I can do it.” He undid the twist ties holding the cord to the cardboard and then went to the back of the tree, getting down on his knees and searching for the plug. Once he found it he plugged the extension cord in and then stood back up, grabbing the other end of the extension cord and taking it to the outlet. He plugged it in and the entire tree lit up. He came back around and joined her at the counter. “I think it looks very nice,” he said.

“I think it looks stunning,” she said with a wide smile. “And just think. That’s the first tree you ever decorated.”

“Then I’d say we did a good job,” he said, putting an arm around her shoulders.

She leaned into him. “I’d say so too,” she said. She was glad they’d done this, that he was going to let her try and convince him that Christmas wasn’t an absolutely horrible holiday. Hopefully they would have many more to come if this one went well.
Chapter 29

Sherlock's last week of term went much more easily than any since his first week, surprisingly. By the time he came home Thursday he seemed much more relaxed, and he had told her he'd made plans for them to celebrate. She had asked what they were but all he told her it was dinner and to dress nicely. She went to her closet and looked at what she had and decided it was probably best if she wore something new. She hadn't driven since she'd gotten her cast on and she didn't really want to try, but she also didn't want to have Sherlock drive her anywhere to go shopping. She ended up using Uber and went to Fashion Valley, walking around the shopping centre as she looked in the windows. Since it was nearly the holidays many of the nicer stores had dresses for parties on display. She went into a few stores but didn't see much she liked.

Finally she saw a gorgeous dress in the window at one of the stores that seemed to appeal to a younger demographic. She wasn't sure she should go in but the dress was absolutely stunning. It was a dark purple empire waist dress that was sleeveless and appeared to be made out of a silk material with a layer of gauzy material over it. It had a high neckline that had a wide ribbon in the same shade of purple at the top and then at the empire waist was another wide ribbon. She went into the store and located where the dresses were at, and then she found one in her size and went to try it on. It fit perfectly and she thought she looked quite smashing in it. The one problem is she had no shoes, jewelry or clutch that matched, but that should hopefully be easy enough to fix. She changed back into her clothing and made her way to the counter to purchase it. She hadn't even looked at the price and when she saw it she was quite pleased that it wasn't incredibly expensive.

When she was done she went to a few of the other stores and picked up the other things she needed to complete the outfit, splurging at one store for a pair of gorgeous drop amethyst earrings. At the last moment she decided to stop off at Victoria's Secret and pick up something nice to wear underneath. She felt incredibly sexy in that dress and wanted to wear something underneath that made her feel the same way. She had wanted something white but she wasn't sure that wouldn't show through, so she settled on a black bra and knicker set. The sales associate convinced her to add a garter belt and thigh high stockings as well, and by the time she left the shopping centre she had the feeling Sherlock was going to be quite pleased with how she looked. She finally got back home and saw Sherlock was on the sofa, doing something on his computer. “I'm back,” she said as she came in the front door.

“You took longer than expected,” he said when she got closer.

“Well, I wanted to impress you,” she said when she was standing behind him. “What are you doing?”

“The two classes where I had my exams on Monday have already posted the grades,” he said. “I got an A and and A- for them.”

“Even more of a reason to celebrate,” she said with a smile. “As long as you don't grouse about the minus part.”

“I was afraid I was going to get a B in that class. Possibly a B+. So an A- makes me quite happy,” he said with an answering grin. “We have reservations at five thirty. Is that going to give you enough time to get ready?”

“What time is it now?” she asked.

He looked at his computer. “Three ten.”
“I'll have plenty of time,” she said. “Are you going to tell me where we're going, or is that going to stay a mystery?”

“Bertrand at Mister A’s,” he said.

“I don't think I've heard of that restaurant,” she said.

“It's an American restaurant with French and Mediterranean influences. Supposedly it has one of the best views in the city when it comes to a fine dining establishment.”

“That sounds like we're going to have a fun time,” she said. “Let me go set these down in the guest bedroom and then I'll join you for a little while.”

“Why not put them in our bedroom?” he asked with a frown.

“Because you are not going to watch me get dressed,” she said with a chuckle. “I want your jaw to drop when you see me all put together, even with the cast on.”

“You got that nice of a dress?” he asked.

“And a few other nice things,” she replied with a nod. “All of which you are more than welcome to remove when we're done with our date.”

“I think this is going to prove to be a very interesting evening,” he said as she moved away from the sofa.

“I certainly hope so,” she said as she went into the guest bedroom. She hung the dress up in the closet, glad to see it hadn't wrinkled, and then she set everything else on the bed so it was all there when she got ready. When she was done she went into the washroom they shared and got her make-up, steam curlers and hair products and then brought them into the washroom in the guest bedroom. She was bound and determined not to let Sherlock see her until she was completely ready.

When she was done she went back to the bedroom and got her own laptop before going out to the sitting room. Sherlock had moved away from the center of the sofa and she sat down near him, turning on her laptop. “How long do you think it will take you to get ready?” he asked, looking over towards her.

“About forty-five minutes?” she said after a moment's thought. “I want to do something nice with my hair.”

“I don't know. I quite like it the way it is,” he said.

“You haven't seen me with actual curly hair yet,” she said. “Wavy hair, yes, but not curly.”

He studied her. “That could be an interesting look.”

“Well, if you like it I'll do it more often,” she said.

He nodded and when he was about to speak again his mobile went off. He picked it up off the table in front of them and glanced at the caller ID before sighing. “It's my brother,” he replied, moving his laptop onto the sofa and standing up. He answered the call with a curt “Yes?” before moving towards the bedroom. Molly watched for a moment before turning back to her own laptop. Sherlock was gone for nearly fifteen minutes before he came back. “We may need to go to London earlier than the 28th,” he said as he sat down.
“How early?” she asked.

“The 20th. Mycroft wanted me to come back on Monday but I told him I had plans on the 19th that I wasn't going to cancel. He tried to insist but I simply told him if he kept arguing he would have to wait until the 26th, and even then I might ignore him the entire time I was in London.” He turned to look at her. “I'm sorry this ruins our Christmas plans.”

“Well, we can host supper next year,” she said. “I'm just glad you insisted we stay for the wedding.”

“I wasn't about to leave two of my friends disappointed on their wedding day,” he said. “Mycroft wasn't happy about it, of course, but I do actually enjoy having friends here and I don't want to run the risk of losing them by ruining their big day.”

“I suppose we get to make other holiday plans, then,” she said.

“We could always find out what John and Mary's plans are,” he said. “But it would be best if you talked to Mary since we're planning for our return to be a surprise.”

“It's after midnight there, so I'll have to call her tomorrow,” she said. “But I think they had planned on hosting a Christmas dinner. I'm fairly sure Greg was invited, and possibly Mrs. Hudson as well. I don't think it would be too hard for them to include us. John will probably insist anyway.”

“Yes, he probably will,” Sherlock said thoughtfully. “I suppose this means I need to finish getting your presents and wrapping them.”

“I need to do the same. Though I may see if there's someone who can wrap them for me, since I can't use scissors at the moment.” Then she paused. “You haven't gone searching through our things for them, have you? Because I have your Christmas presents and your birthday presents bought already.”

“I swear I have no clue what they are, though I do know they're in the guest bedroom,” he replied. “Are you going to bring all of them to London?”

“Well, all but one, but that's because it's too large to take with me, and I haven't actually brought it home yet.”

“Is it a piece of furniture?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

She laughed. “No, it's a piece of art for your study. I saw it when Thomas and I went to look at an antiques shop since they're redecorating their sitting room and I thought you would enjoy it. Jason and Thomas have it in their care at the moment because it was something I wouldn't be able to hide well.”

He was quiet a moment. “You know, we don't actually have to celebrate my birthday while we're in London. Or at least you don't have to bring the gifts. We can do something on the day with our friends in London, and then we can do something here when we return. You can give me the gifts then.”

“I think you just want twice as many gifts,” she teased.

“I can buy anything I could possibly want,” he pointed out. “I don't actually need gifts. I could always tell everyone not to get me anything.”

“But that takes all the fun out of it,” she replied. “And then it would look very strange if I was the only one giving you gifts.”
“I suppose I won't insist. But I will ask that people not spend too much on them. I don't need anything extravagant.”

“Well, I got you a few nice things,” she said. “Mostly books, since there's far too much empty space on your bookshelves.”

“Anything you want to hint at?” he asked with a grin.

She laughed. “A few first editions of some things I think you would like. But that's all I'm telling you. The rest will just have to be surprises.”

“Fair enough,” he said with a nod.

“Is whatever it is your brother wants you to do going to take up all your time while we're in London?” she asked.

“I don't imagine it will,” he said. “Though for a few days I won't be in London.”

She frowned as she looked at him. “Are you going to be there for Christmas?”

He was quiet for a moment as he thought. “I should be back late Christmas Eve, if we leave directly after the wedding and get to London early in the morning on the 20th.”

“I just want you to actually be there for Christmas,” she said quietly.

“I will do everything I can to be there when you wake up,” he said.

“All right,” she said. “Are you going to see John before you go do what you need to do?”

He shook his head. “Most likely not. Which probably means if we want to keep our return a surprise the only person you should tell is Mary. I trust her to keep it a secret.”

“I'm going to be quite lonely being there without you and not being able to talk to anyone other than Mary,” she pointed out.

“Well, if you don't mind being in Cardiff for a few days you could always just accompany me there. We could fly into Cardiff Airport and you can explore the city while I take care of Mycroft's business there,” he said thoughtfully. “I'll still need to do more once we return to London but he's assured me the business will be taken care of no later then the 28th. The 29th if I take all of Christmas off, which is what I'm inclined to do.”

“Well, when were we planning on coming back again?” she asked.

“We'd fly back here on the 8th and arrive on the 9th,” he said.

“Then spend Christmas with our friends. Ten days is enough time to actually enjoy being back in London,” she said with a nod.

“Then let me change our flights around,” he said, picking up his laptop again. She turned to her own and began to surf the websites she frequented. About fifteen minutes later he spoke. “All right. We'll leave San Diego at six thirty and fly to Chicago and then on to Dublin and finally Cardiff. Then apparently when we leave Cardiff we need to fly into Newcastle and then either get on another flight to London or take the train. The plane takes just over an hour, the train will take three. Which do you prefer?”

“Let's save the return trip for whenever it is you finish your business in Cardiff,” she said after
thinking a moment. “We don't have to actually be in London Christmas Eve or before whatever it is John and Mary are planning, and we can see what lines up on the way back.”

“Very well,” he said with a nod. “Now I just need to make hotel reservations.”

“Hopefully you can make them, this close to the holiday. And change ours in London.”

“I should probably do that first,” he said, tapping at his keys for a moment. When he was done he reached over from where he had set his mobile and then keyed in a number. She tuned him out as he spoke to the person on the other line, and when he was done she turned back to him. “I had to get a more expensive room, but we were able to get an earlier reservation at the Savoy.”

“How much more expensive?” she asked.

“We had to upgrade to a suite,” he said. “But considering the amenities that come with it I consider it worth the money.”

“You know, I'm just going to count this as one of my Christmas presents at this point,” she said. “If you haven't bought many gifts for me then you really don't need to buy any more. You're spending quite a bit of money on this trip because I want to go home. I don't need anything else.”

“I can accept that,” he said with a nod. “There is one more gift that I would like to get you, though, for New Year's Eve. There is a celebration at the hotel that I thought might be interesting.”

“I suppose I won't stop you,” she said, smiling.

“Did you pick out any other nice dresses?” he asked.

“No, but there was one I was considering if we went somewhere really fancy. It’s an emerald green dress. If we are actually going to do something nice for New Year's Eve I can pick it up tomorrow. I have nice emerald earrings already that would pair well. They're small, but pretty.”

“Buy the dress tomorrow,” he replied. “And if you feel inclined, there might be one or two other things we could do that require dressing up. I think that would be a good excuse to buy some nice things.”

“I think you're just looking for excuses to wear your suits again,” she said with a laugh.

“Perhaps,” he said with a grin before turning his attention back to his laptop. “Now I just need to make hotel reservations for Cardiff. That one will be on Mycroft's tab, so I'm going to make sure he pays dearly for making us change our Christmas plans.”

She shook her head slightly. “It is quite obvious the two of you don't like each other much.”

“I just resent him thinking I'll bow down to his every whim still,” he replied. “That is part of the reason I put an ocean and an entire continent between us.” He continued to tap on the keys of his laptop and after ten minutes he was done. “We'll be staying in a master suite at The St. David's Hotel & Spa. And I fully encourage you to make use of the spa while I'm working.”

“If Mycroft is footing the expenses then I'll go every day,” she said with a nod.

“The best part about this is when he tries to argue with me about it and I inform him you're accompanying me he will stop arguing with me,” he said as he looked at her with a grin on his face. “I think he did actually feel bad that your holiday plans had to be changed. This will be his way of making it up to you.”
“Tell him I'll look at the stay in Cardiff as his Christmas gift to me,” she said with a smile. “Especially if the spa is a good one.”

“It's supposed to be one of the best in the United Kingdom,” he said. “So as I said, I hope you avail yourself to it as often as you can.”

“If I won't be seeing much of you I might as well. We're only going to be there three days, right?”

He nodded. “We should arrive in the late evening on the 20th. Chances are I will sleep on the plane and then begin doing what my brother wants me to do as soon as we're done checking in and getting settled, and I will be gone from early in the morning to late at night.”

“It's not dangerous, is it?” she asked, frowning.

He shook his head. “Not at all. I need to put my deductive skills to use to investigate something for him. The people involved don't know I'm coming, but there shouldn't be any danger. I would have refused if there was.”

“That makes me feel better,” she said with a nod. She looked at the clock on her computer. It was still a bit early to get ready, but she could always use the extra time to make sure she looked absolutely perfect. She began to turn her laptop off and set it on the table. “I think I'm going to start to get ready. I want to make sure I look my absolute best,” she said, leaning over and kissing his cheek. “It should take me just around 45 minutes to get ready.”

“Then I'll leave you in peace while you prepare for our date,” he said with a nod. She stood up at that point and then made her way into the kitchen to get some water for the curlers. When she had that she made her way towards the guest bedroom and into the washroom to get ready. She took her time curling her hair, making sure the curlers were cold when she took them out. She didn't take a brush to her hair but she ran her fingers through them, leaving them looking more natural. Then she went and put on the lingerie and the dress on before doing her make-up. She went for a more dramatic look this time, and she was pleased that she didn't get any of the make-up on her dress. She put on the earrings with just a small amount of difficulty, and finally she went back and put on the stockings, attaching them to the garter belt, and then slipped on her heels. She went back into the washroom and took a good look at herself in the mirror and grinned. She felt incredibly sexy, even with the cast on, and she was fairly sure Sherlock would agree.

She made her way back out to the sitting room but he wasn’t there so she knew he had to be in the bedroom. She opened the door and saw he was looking down at the cuffs of his shirt. She cleared her throat slightly and he looked up at her. His eyes were slightly wide and then he grinned. “So I take it I look nice?” she asked.

“Far nicer than I do,” he replied with a nod. He finished fixing one of his cuffs as she moved closer. “I think I should take you out more often, so you have a reason to look as exquisite as you do tonight.”

“I can always dress up just for you, you know,” she said with a warm smile. “I don’t have to show off for the world.”

“Well, I suppose you can, if you wish,” he said. “But I know you enjoy doing things like this, and I really don’t mind taking you places.”

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“There is also a rather perverse pleasure in looking at other men giving you appreciating looks and
knowing you’ll be coming home with me,” he said.

“I knew there was more to it than just making me happy,” she said with a soft laugh. She moved in front of him and began to fix the other cuff for him. When she was finished she took a step back as he reached over for his suit jacket that was on the bed. He slipped it on and looked at her. “You look quite handsome, you know. I’ll be the envy of every woman there.”

“I’m glad it goes both ways,” he said with a grin. “Shall we go?”

She nodded. “Yes,” she replied. They left the bedroom and made their way to the garage and got in the car. “I think I’m going to need a heavier duty coat for London, and here if it gets much colder.”

“I have my coat from home,” Sherlock said, turning the car on. “I didn’t think I would need it here when I first arrived, but I made sure it was included in the things that were shipped here. It hasn’t really been that cold until recently, though. Long sleeved shirts have sufficed with the occasional hooded pullover that are so popular here.”

“I have some jumpers but they aren’t all that warm,” she said. “They’re rather thin. I should probably see what type of warm winter clothing I can get here before we go home.”

“We can do that tomorrow, if you’d like,” he said as he began backing the car out of the garage. “I should probably get a few things as well.”

“Are you going to stick with the more casual look you’ve adopted here?” she asked.

“When I’m not taking care of Mycroft’s business I probably will,” he said. “I’ve grown accustomed to it since I moved here.”

She grinned at that. “It’s going to be a shock to our friends. I mean, they’ve seen pictures. But seeing it in person is going to be a whole new thing.”

“I suppose I’ll simply have to deal with the ribbing I’ll get,” he replied. “Are you going to dress in the style you favor here?”

She nodded. “Yes. I mean, not so much my warm weather clothing, but things that look nice on me.” She paused after that. “If John and Mary can find someone to watch William I’d like to go out to dinner with them one night. Maybe not anywhere extremely fancy, but somewhere where they can enjoy an evening with us and no one else.”

He thought about it for a moment. “I don’t see why we can’t do that,” he said finally. “If they’re willing we could make an entire evening of it, see if there’s an event going on somewhere that they might like to go to.”

“Like a play? Or a performance?” she asked. He nodded and she gave him a wide smile. “I would love to do that. And I think they’d appreciate the time to be adults and not Mum and Dad.”

“When you talk to Mary ask what it is she thinks she and John would enjoy and I’ll try and get tickets, as well as a reservation somewhere nice for us to eat,” he said. “I can include that as one of my gifts to them.”

“I think they’ll enjoy that,” she said as they pulled away from their home. “I had been the third wheel sometimes with them, so I think it will be nice to spend time out with them and not have that be the case.”

“Did you and Tom go out with them?” he asked.
“A few times. I think Mary liked Tom well enough but he rubbed John the wrong way. Soon enough Mary and I just started going on our own to places instead of bringing them along. It worked out better in the long run.” She paused. “Did you and Janine ever do that?”

He shook his head. “No. I knew if I had to act as though I was infatuated with her in front of John he would figure out something was amiss, and then he’d talk to Mary, and it would all come unraveled. Since I needed it to work I avoided having the four of us spend time together. That was something Janine wasn’t happy about.”

“Ah,” she said with a nod. “I could see that leading to an unwelcome complication. John knows you quite well.”

“Not as much anymore,” he said quietly. “Eight thousand miles apart will do that, especially since his life revolves around his work and family and mine revolves around school and you. I would honestly say you know me better than he does now.”

“I’m sorry for that,” she said.

“I’m not. We both still talk, and quite frankly we’re both happy, so it works out. I don’t think we’ll ever stop being friends, even if we’re not as close as we used to be.” He gave her a glance. “I’d like to change the subject for now.”

She nodded. “Of course.”

“Don’t mention that I’m doing something for Mycroft when you speak to Mary, at least right now. He may allow me to tell them when it’s over, but it’s very sensitive information. Just let her know since you’re not currently working we decided to go early, and we decided to make a detour in Cardiff before returning to London.”

“Once I tell her about the spa I think she’ll understand,” she said with a smile. “She was quite envious when I told her about the other time you treated me.”

“We could always arrange something for the two of you while I’m working for Mycroft,” he said. “She would probably greatly appreciate a chance to get pampered.”

“Or we could do it whatever day it is we decide to do the double date. You can spend time with John that day, just the two of you, while we go get pampered,” she said after a moment’s thought. “Though you would need to probably spend the day with your namesake.”

“I generally tend to avoid young children. This is going to be interesting,” he said.

“You did well with the girls at Sea World,” she pointed out.

“Yes, and they were older. William is just over a year old and I’m not used to that. I will probably be worried I’m going to harm him, just like I was when I was still residing in London. Mary was quite amused by that.”

“He was still so little when I left,” she replied quietly. “Mary would call me when he hit a milestone, but I felt so bad when he turned a year old and all I could do was send a present.”

“Do you miss being home?” he asked curiously.

“Sometimes,” she said. “But I really am quite happy here. Since you showed up on my doorstep things have improved greatly. I don’t want to give any of it up. It’s just that there are times I miss the people I’ve known for so long.”
“You don’t have to spend every moment with me, you know,” he said. “I know I’m not Donovan’s biggest fan, but I know you two are close. If she’s free one day even after I’m done with Mycroft’s job take advantage of it. The same goes for others you know. This trip home is so you can see all of your friends, not just our mutual ones.”

“It would be nice to catch up with Sally,” she said with a smile. “We don’t talk as often as I talk to Mary. And there are a few people from St. Bart’s I’d like to see, if they’re not terribly wrapped up in holiday festivities. It never hurts to strengthen friendships that have a added bonus of being good for networking.”

“Are you considering giving up your post once you’ve healed?” he asked in a surprised tone.

“Oh no. Not right now. But getting a promotion or moving to work in another location are also possibilities, as is maybe going into teaching. I’d like to stay in San Diego, but even if I went up to North County to work that’s only an hour long commute. And having people who are professional references will help.”

“I see,” he said with a nod. “I think you’d make a very good professor, if you ever looked into that. I think you could do a very good job explaining pathology in general and then tying it into the forensic sciences.”

“I will take that as a compliment,” she said, giving him a smile.

“It was intended as one,” he said, giving her a quick glance with a smile on his face. Then he turned back to the road. “I’ve started to think about exactly what I want to do for the next few years when it comes to my education. I think I’m going to see about going all the way for my doctorate, and then trying to get a position somewhere here in San Diego as a research scientist.”

“You don’t want to teach?” she asked, tilting her head slightly.

“I may have undergone some drastic personality changes, but within one semester I would be the most hated professor on campus,” he said, his grin becoming a wry one. “I would demand perfection and I’d be highly annoyed when I don’t get it. And it is not a good thing when I’m annoyed.”

“No, it’s not,” she said with a soft chuckle. “You haven’t gotten extremely irritated too often since you got here. Just mild irritation from time to time.”

“It helps that I have you here to help curb it. I find I don’t want you to be unhappy with me, so I try my best not to stay irritated for too long.”

“I’m glad to know I’m a good influence, then,” she said. “I’ll try to remain one for a long time.”

“I would appreciate it,” he replied. They lapsed into a companionable silence at that point as he drove them to the restaurant. It didn’t take too long for the car to be dealt with, and soon they were inside the restaurant and being led to their table. Molly had to admit, the view really was spectacular, even if the sun had set more than it would have if they’d come at five. The pinks and yellow and orange of the setting sun was a gorgeous backdrop. The maître’d pulled out her chair for her and they both settled into their seats. Sherlock looked at the menu. “I see quite a bit I would like to try.”

“Well, if we like it here we can always come back,” she said with a smile. She looked over her own menu. “I am glad I didn’t eat all that much today. There is so much that looks appealing.”

“What would you like to start with?” he asked.

“The seared blackened Maine scallops sounds appealing, as does the heirloom tomato salad,” she
said. “What were you considering getting?”

“The Grade A ahi tuna tartare,” he said. “Though the Maine lobster ‘strudel’ also sounds interesting.”

“Well, I think I’m going to go with the scallops tonight,” she said. “What were you considering for your main meal?”

He looked at the menu more. “The oven roasted baby rack of lamb & osso buco,” he replied. “You?”

“The crispy duck confit, sautéed duck breast,” she replied. “I’m feeling a bit adventurous.”

“I may have to try that another time if you enjoy it,” he said. “So I suppose now we just wait to place our orders.”

She nodded, giving him a wide smile. “This really is a very lovely place. I’m glad we came here.”

“I like being able to impress you,” he said.

“You don’t have to impress me a lot,” she said. “I like having lazy days with you at home. I like just curling up on the sofa and watching a film, or helping to cook supper. Though it is fun to look nice for you, I’ll admit that.”

“You certainly impress me each time you do that,” he said with a grin. “I don’t think I tell you often enough how beautiful you are.”

She ducked her head slightly as she blushed. “Thank you.”

He reached over for her castless hand, picking it up and playing with her fingers slightly. “I think one of the smartest decisions I have made was to come here and try and convince you to come home. And another was to admit to you how I truly felt.”

“I think another smart decision was to agree to stay here,” she said, turning her hand so she could grasp his. “I think if you hadn’t agreed with me that it was a good idea if you stayed then nothing else would have happened. You would have given up eventually and we would both be miserable.”

“I don’t want to be miserable,” he said, looking down at their hands. “I’m happy here. And I like being happy much more than I like how I used to be.”

She squeezed his hand. “Then I’m very glad you’re happy.”

He gave her a small grin in response. “Perhaps while we’re waiting we can start to think about things we want to do while we’re in London. I’m more inclined to follow your lead in it, so long as we get to spend time with our friends so they don’t think we’re ignoring them on our holiday.”

“All right,” she said with a nod. They began to make some plans, pausing first when their orders were taken and then again when the food began to arrive. It was absolutely delicious, and at the end of the meal she had enough room to try the gingerbread spiced crème brûlée, letting Sherlock have a few bites to taste it. By the time they were finished with their meal it was colder, and she was happy to be in the car with the heater on. They drove home in a companionable silence and when they got inside she headed towards their bedroom. She sat down at the vanity and took the earrings off. When Sherlock came in she looked at him in the mirror. “I had an excellent time tonight.”

“I’m glad,” he said with a nod, taking his suit jacket off. “It was nice celebrating the end of a very
long term.”

“I think it only seemed long because you were taking so many units,” she said with a chuckle. “Next term should hopefully be less draining.”

“I’m hoping,” he replied as she put the earrings in her jewelry box. Then she reached down and slipped off her heels before picking them up and taking them to where she kept her shoes. When she turned around she saw Sherlock was eyeing her. “I don’t think I’ve mentioned yet that I like the curly hair.”

“Well, when we go to London if we do something nice for New Year’s Eve I can get something similar to this style with just a curling iron. It will only last the night though,” she said as she moved over towards him.

“The hotel we’re staying at does something special,” he said. “We could look into that if you’re interested.”

“All right,” she said with a nod. “And I’ll go pick up the other dress I was considering tomorrow. It’s quite fancy. I just thought it might be too fancy for tonight. But if you come with me you can’t peek.”

“Very well,” he said with a slight chuckle as she got in front of him. She reached up and put her arms around his neck, and he settled his hands on her waist. “I think you mentioned before we left that I would get to undress you and see what new lingerie you bought when we were done with our date.”

“I did say that,” she said with a wide smile. “And if you enjoy this I can always pick up more for the trip, so long as you don’t come in the store with me. I want the element of surprise.”

“I’m sure I can find someplace else to browse while you’re shopping there,” he said with a nod. “Because I will admit, I enjoy surprises like that.”

“Good,” she said with a smile before raising herself up and kissing him softly. He kissed her back as they stayed in that position for a few minutes, and then he moved one of his hands up her back to the top of her dress. When he found the zipper he began to lower it, and when it was all the way down she pulled away from the kiss and took a step back. He reached over and gently moved the dress off of her shoulders. It fell down to her waist, and after a moment she pushed it down so it pooled around her feet on the floor. “Well?” she asked, giving him a grin once she saw the look on his face.

“I definitely approve of this,” he said quietly, in a tone of voice that seemed tinged with awe. Even though they had been intimate for months now and had been living together for a few weeks she actually hadn’t bought anything to impress him, lingerie wise, so it was nice to know she had succeeded. He stepped closer, putting his hands on her waist again, and ducked his head down slightly to kiss her bare shoulder. She had bought a strapless bra so she shut her eyes and tilted her head slightly as he made his way closer to the hollow of her neck. When he got there he nipped at her pulse point and she let out a soft moan as she reached over to hold onto him to steady herself. When he was done teasing her he moved a hand to her back and up to the clasp of her bra before pulling away. “That was unexpected,” he said with a frown.

She chuckled softly. “I probably should have told you it was a front clasp bra, shouldn’t I?” she said, giving him a smile.

“That would have been helpful,” he said with a nod, a grin of his own on his face. He looked down and studied the bra for a moment, then moved his hands towards the front. It took him a moment but
he got the clasp undone, and she moved her arms to let it fall to the floor. He let his hand skim down her side for a moment. “I think I am far too overdressed.”

“I can fix that,” she said, moving her hands up to his shoulders. She pushed the suit jacket off slightly and he removed his hands to help get it off of him. When he was done she reached up again, beginning to undo the buttons of his shirt. Once she got to the waistband of his pants she pulled it up and finished unbuttoning it. Most of the times they had been intimate since she got her cast on she avoided using that hand to touch him so she didn’t scratch him with the plaster cast, but today she let her fingers trail down his chest and abdomen slightly. “You’ll need to take your shirt off. I hate undoing the cuffs.”

“And it’s harder with your arm in the cast,” he said with a nod, bringing his wrists up as she pulled her hand away. He quickly got them undone and then began to pull the shirt off. When he was done he kneel down slightly and surprised her by picking her up. “I can finish getting you undressed while you’re on the bed,” he said with a grin when she looked up at him in surprise. “And there’s more I can do when you’re not standing.”

“Ah,” she said, settling in his arms more. He carried her across the room and gently put her on the bed. She moved up just a little to get into a more comfortable position while he moved toward the clips of the garter belt holding the stockings up. He undid the clips on one side and then the other, then moved to get to ones underneath when she drew her knees up to give him access. When they were undone he very carefully grasped the top of one of the stockings and peeled it off of her body slowly, letting his fingers graze her skin every once in a while. When he got them off of her he repeated his actions on the other side, and she could feel her anticipation build.

He then moved his hands to the garter belt, hooking his fingers under it. He pulled it down and she lifted her hips up so he could get it off of her. She kept her hips slightly raised so he could take her knickers off but he shook his head. She gave him a slightly confused look in response. “I thought I would save that for last.” She nodded, putting her hips back down on the bed, and he quickly divested himself of the rest of his clothing before joining her on the bed. He moved over her and kissed her, and she reached up with her castless hand to let her fingers trail along his shoulder. He kissed her for quite a few minutes before he pulled away, beginning to explore her mostly naked body. She shut her eyes and tilted her head back, arching up when he kissed or nipped at a particularly sensitive spot. At the same time he slipped a hand inside her knickers and began to tease her, and she could feel herself beginning to get wetter the more he teased. Once he had moved low enough to reach her naval he removed his hand as he pulled away slightly, and she lifted her hips up so he could take her now sodden knickers off.

When he had finished he moved over her again, positioning himself, and then slowly entered her. She opened herself more as he went as deeply as he could go, and then he began to pull out of her. Soon enough he was beginning to set a rhythm as he thrust into her again, and she knew he was going to take his time and draw it out as long as he could. She enjoyed it greatly when he took his time unless she began to get impatient, but she would try her best to make sure that was not the case tonight. She moved her hand to the back of his neck and then down to his shoulders, her eyes shut as she reveled in how good it all felt. Slowly he began to speed up, and she decided to further encourage him by raking her nails down his back. He took that as the hint it was and began to thrust harder, picking up speed even more. She used her good hand to try and hold onto him, but he fingers ended up sliding on his sweat slicked back so she moved them away to grip the headboard. Soon he was pounding into her and she was holding on for dear life as she began to tighten around him. And then she was coming, and a moment later he thrust into her one last time and was still, his entire body rigid. She moved her hand back to him, and when he began to relax she moved her hand to the back of his head and pulled him in for a leisurely kiss.
He only pulled away from the kiss when they needed to breathe, and he looked down at her. “I think I enjoyed my surprise very much,” he said, giving her a grin.

“Mmm, I think you did too,” she said with a wide smile. “And I certainly enjoyed you showing your appreciation for it.”

“One day I’m going to suggest that I be in bed and get to watch you undress,” he said.

“It’s much more enticing if I don’t have a plaster cast on my arm,” she said.

“I am a patient man,” he replied. “I can wait.”

“Well, I will make sure I have something very nice on for you to enjoy watching me,” she said as he pulled out of her. He rolled over onto his back and after a moment she curled up on her side and put her head on his bare chest. He began to run his hand along her side in response. “If I didn’t have to take a bath I’d suggest we clean up together.”

“We could attempt to see if the tub will hold both of us,” he said thoughtfully. “It is quite large.”

“No getting my cast wet, though. I only have to keep it on for three more weeks, I think. Maybe three and a half. If it gets wet I’ll get growled at by my doctor.”

“I will make sure it stays completely dry,” he said. “I promise.”

“I’m going to hold you to that,” she said, lifting her head up and looking down at him. His response was to move his hand to bring her closer for another kiss, and she lost herself in it. Finally she pulled away. “Come on. Let’s find out if the tub will hold both of us.” She got off the bed and gave him a quick backward glance with a grin on her face as she made her way to the washroom attached to their bedroom. Even if they found it wasn’t large enough it would be very interesting to try, at least, and would definitely make for an interesting evening.
Chapter 30

Jason and Thomas seemed to take the change in holiday plans in stride. They were more upset that Molly and Sherlock wouldn’t get to stay and enjoy all the festivities after the wedding but they both understood when Sherlock said it was a matter of national security. Thomas assured them that if they left before the cake was cut they would both be saved a slice, and they would arrange for the photographer to take the wedding photos at the reception before they left. Molly greatly appreciated that they were doing that because this was their big day that they’d been planning for months and they would have had every right to be put out with the both of them and Mycroft for the change in plans.

The rehearsal went off without a hitch, and Molly had high hopes that the next day would as well. Once Sherlock and Molly had gotten their new home Sherlock had suggested one of them stay in their guest bedroom the evening before so that in at least one way their wedding would be traditional, since neither man had wanted a bachelor party and they already lived together. After the rehearsal dinner Molly, Sherlock and Thomas made their way back to her home and stayed up late into the night talking. When Molly finally went to sleep it was nearly three in the morning.

She woke up to an empty bed and the smell of coffee coming from the kitchen. When she glanced at the clock on her nightstand she saw it was nine. It must have been nerves that woke her up, she realized, and she was sorely going to need a cup of coffee or two to get her through the day. She went and got her dressing gown off the back of the door and slipped it on, heading out into the kitchen. Sherlock was leaning against the counter and Thomas was sitting in one of the stools, both of them with a cup of coffee in their hands. “I’d hoped you’d get more sleep,” Sherlock said as she came closer.

“I’d hoped I would too,” she said with a smile before giving him a quick kiss. “Thankfully all I need to do today is stay awake long enough to get through the wedding, part of the reception and the flight to Chicago. Once we’re on our way to Dublin then I can sleep for a bit.”

“You can sleep on the flight to Chicago, too,” Thomas said. “That’s at least five hours if you’re going nonstop.”

She shook her head, going to the cabinet where they kept their mugs. “Then I’ll really get my days and nights turned around. I’ll sleep from Chicago to Dublin, and then once we get settled into our hotel room I’ll do what I can to stay awake until a more reasonable hour before I drop from exhaustion.”

Thomas chuckled. “I do envy the two of you getting to go home. I almost considered trying to convince Jason to have our honeymoon in London but he had his heart set on somewhere warm where he could surf. He did promise that we could go to London next year, though. He’s curious about exactly where I grew up.”

“Would going back have bad memories for you?” Sherlock asked before taking a sip of his coffee.

“Some places would,” he replied. “I definitely want to avoid my childhood home and a few other places where I spent time when I first realized I was gay, mostly because they’ll remind me of my first boyfriend and that relationship failed in a spectacular way. But once my parents divorced and I lived with just my mum things got better. I’ll show him those places.”

“Is your father still in London?” Molly asked as she began to prepare her coffee.
He shook his head. “He’s in Manchester now, with his harpy of a wife and his new perfect children. I hope he rots up there.”

“I hope he does too,” Molly said. “From everything you’ve said about him he sounds like a right git.”

“He is. My mum was a saint to put up with him,” Thomas replied. “My only real regret today is Mum won’t be there, and that she didn’t get to meet Jason. She’d have been trying to get us to get married years earlier within seconds of meeting him. Which sadly wouldn’t have been an option, but she would have tried nonetheless.”

“She sounds as though she was a very lovely woman,” Sherlock said.

“She was. I wouldn’t be nearly as well adjusted as I am now if it hadn’t been for her. She was the best mum I could have asked for.” He had some more of his coffee. “So. New topic. Before you woke up, Molly, Sherlock and I were debating what to do for breakfast. I offered to cook and he offered to cook. Which would you prefer?”

“Well, I think Sherlock should get a break because he has to cook everything at the moment,” she said with a smile. “And I’m interested in knowing if your culinary skills are on the same level as Jason’s.”

“Jason can cook a lot and cook it well, I’ll admit, but the one thing he can never get right is a fry-up. That is where I reign supreme,” Thomas replied. “Do you have all the ingredients is the question, though.”

Molly went to the refrigerator and opened it. “We have bangers and streaky bacon, eggs and mushrooms in the refrigerator, plus condiments,” she said.

“There’s a bag of potatoes under the sink, tomatoes on the counter and if Molly will share her bread from Sprouts we have a thickly sliced multigrain bread we can fry up,” Sherlock said.

“I will gladly share my bread for this,” she said with a smile. “We need to eat most of it anyway so it doesn’t go bad while we’re gone, since it doesn’t have preservatives.”

“Sounds like you have everything except the beans,” Thomas said.

“No, we have beans, but they’re Bush’s, not Heinz,” Molly said. “Every once in a while I get a craving for a fry-up so generally I try and make sure we have the bare essentials stocked.”

“We also have those ham steaks we bought in the freezer,” Sherlock said. “The largest one should give each of us a decent sized portion.”

“This just keeps getting better,” Thomas said with a wide grin. “Sherlock, if you’ll help, I think we can do a bang up job on breakfast this morning.”

“I have no problem with that,” Sherlock said with a nod. “Tell me what you want me to do.”

“As soon as I finish my coffee you can start with shredding the potatoes and then patting them dry,” Thomas said. “And Molly, you can keep us company while we cook.”

“That sounds like an excellent way to spend my morning,” she said with a smile. The three of them sat and drank their coffee and chatted until Thomas and Sherlock were done, and then the two men got to work getting the breakfast together while Molly chatted with them. Once it was all done and ready to be served they each prepared their own plate and then took them to the table. Molly had to
admit that Thomas did an excellent job making the food, and soon enough there was nothing left on her plate. “I may not have any room left for anything at the reception,” she stated before she pushed her plate away from her.

“Well, I thought for sure my eyes would be bigger than my stomach on account of nerves but apparently that’s not the case,” Thomas said. “I just hope Jason makes it a point to eat a hearty enough meal. It’s going to be a while until we’re able to eat tonight.”

“When does the reception start again?” Sherlock asked.

“Three. But before we can all eat there’s toasts and speeches,” Thomas said. “I imagine we won’t actually start eating until four, four thirty at the latest.”

“Which means we won’t get to eat, most likely,” Molly said with a frown. “I don’t even know if we’ll get to stay through the speeches. Our flight leaves at six, right?”

“Six twenty-eight,” Sherlock said. “Which means it’s in our best interest to avoid the reception altogether and leave after the photographer is finished with us.”

“Well, Jason and I already said we understood,” Thomas said. “And if anyone says anything rude about it I’ll say you had to go off to do something for Queen and country. That should shut them up.”

Sherlock gave him a faint grin. “It’s not too far from the truth, so at least you aren’t lying to them. So it’s settled. We’ll stay long enough to take the photos and then Molly can change and then we’ll leave to go to Lindburgh Field.”

“We talked to the catering staff and the first two pieces of cake served up to guests will be set aside for you and put into airtight containers, and Jason and I will take them home along with the top layer of the cake, so at least you get something,” Thomas said. “We’re doing that after the gifts are opened, since we don’t have too many being brought to the reception.”

“We gave you your wedding gift already,” Molly said. “Have you two opened it yet?”

Thomas shook his head. “We were planning on waiting until the reception. Jason is bringing it to put with the rest of the gifts, unless you both want us to wait until we’re home.”

“You can open it at the reception,” Sherlock said. “Just don’t misplace the envelope that is on top. That contains part of the gift. You’ll need it in Hawaii.”

“Now you’ve piqued my interest,” Thomas said with a laugh. “Is it anything fancy?”

“Just a gift certificate of sorts for something Molly thought you’d enjoy,” Sherlock said. “I didn’t arrange for a specific date and time for you to use it just in case the two of you decide to do other things.”

“I’m sure whatever it is we’ll make use of if you thought we’d enjoy it,” Thomas said as Sherlock stood up with his plate and utensils in hand. He went and got Thomas’s plate and utensils, and then got Molly’s as well and took them all to the sink. “At least let me help clean up. That way you don’t have to come back to a dirty kitchen.”

“It’s all right. I was just going to rinse it all and put it in the dishwasher until we get back,” Sherlock said.

“I can do that,” Thomas said, standing up. “I’m sure you and Molly have last minute packing to do.”
Sherlock paused and then nodded. “If you’re sure.”

“I am,” Thomas said, joining Sherlock in the kitchen. He took the dishes from him and then made a shooing motion with his free hand. “You two go finish packing. I can handle this.”

Molly stood up and smiled over at Thomas. “Thank you.”

“You’re quite welcome,” he said, grinning back.

Sherlock moved out of the kitchen and joined her at the table, and then they made their way to the bedroom. “How much more do you need to pack?” he asked.

“I just need to put my dresses into the garment bags and get my carry-on sorted,” she said. “My actual luggage has been packed for a few days now.”

“I need to get my carry-on put together as well,” he said. “But I suppose I can step out of the room when you transfer over the dresses.”

“You don’t have to do that,” she said. “They’re in the guest bedroom. Since we share a closet hanging them in there defeated the purpose because you would see them. I mean, I know you already saw the green dress for New Year’s Eve but I want the rest to be surprises.”

“Ah,” he said with a nod. He was quiet for a moment. “I’m sorry you don’t get to stay for the reception.”

“It’s all right. I’m not fond of wedding receptions anyway,” she said.

“You’re thinking about John and Mary’s,” he said with a frown.

She went to the closet and pulled out her carry-on, moving it towards the bed. “Not just theirs, though that was problematic for me. I just generally don’t like them much because usually I was alone and trying to fend off drunken groomsmen. And it made me think too much about the state of my love life. I was already engaged by the time John and Mary got married, but that was the start of me seriously rethinking my relationship with Tom.”

“This one wouldn’t have been the same,” he said quietly.

She moved away from the bed and went over to him, reaching up and cupping his cheek in her castless palm before giving him a smile. “I know that, Sherlock. I wouldn’t have spent the time wondering if I was ever going to be happy like the people getting married, or wondering if it would ever happen for me. We’ve talked about our future and I know the chances are excellent that you’re going to be the man I actually marry at some point down the line. I wouldn’t have that sadness or uncertainty at all. And I can guarantee I wouldn’t be regretting beginning a relationship with you by the end of it.” She then leaned in and kissed him softly, and he moved his hands to her waist and then around to her back to keep her close as he kissed her back. When they finally pulled apart she slid her arms around his neck. “You’re going to be stuck with me for a very long time, just so you know.”

“There are far worse things than that,” he said with a grin, keeping her close.

“Just make sure you remember that if we ever have a fight.” His hold on her tightened and she was fairly sure it had been involuntarily. “I do love you, Sherlock.”

“I love you too,” he said.
She smiled up at him widely. “We need to pack as quickly as we can. I know Thomas is getting ready here since the two of you are going to wait with the wedding planner so you both need time to do that. And I still need to curl my hair since Jason said he’d like to see it curly and I need to let my curlers cool before I pack them for London.”

“I thought you were taking the curling iron,” he replied.

“I was, but I don’t want to damage my hair and considering the plans we’ve made it would be better if I brought my steam curlers.” She tried to pull away but he pulled her closer. “Sherlock?”

“I just thought I could get another kiss first,” he said.

“I can do that,” she said with a wide smile before leaning in and kissing him again. This kiss was briefer, and when she pulled away he let her. “Okay. Now we need to pack.”

“Very well,” he said, moving away from her.

“Thank you,” she replied. The two of them began to pack in companionable silence, and when her carry-on was ready she took one of Sherlock’s garment bags into the guest bedroom and put the dresses into it. She was just zipping it back up when Thomas came into the room. “I’m just leaving.”

“Can I talk to you for a moment?” he asked.

She nodded. “Of course.”

“Jason just called me. Katrina had said something yesterday that I didn’t hear that made Jason upset. He asked her what exactly she meant this morning and they just had a huge row. Her husband is taking her side and they’re both refusing to come to the wedding.”

“Oh, I am so sorry,” she said, setting the bag down on the bed and going over to Thomas to hug him. “That’s absolutely awful, especially since you had picked them to be the maid of honor and best man.”

“They were our oldest friends and they just threw our friendship away over something stupid and trivial.”

“What was the fight about?” she asked, pulling away.

“That I had stayed here last night. She made a comment to Jason that apparently some of our friends were more important than others. She was hurt I didn’t stay with her and was staying with you instead, but they didn’t have a spare bedroom for me to stay in. That didn't matter to her, though.”

“I am so sorry,” she said with wide eyes. “If we had known it was going to be an issue we wouldn’t have offered.”

“No. No, I’m glad you did,” he said. “It just shows me what kind of friends they really were. But they have the rings, and they refuse to bring them to the wedding.”

“That’s absolutely horrid of them,” Molly said, beginning to get angry. “We need to fix this.” She pulled away and grabbed Thomas’s hand in her good one before pulling him into her and Sherlock’s bedroom. He had stripped off his sleep shirt and glanced up sharply at their entrance. “We need to go to a jeweler right now and buy wedding rings for Jason and Thomas.”

“What happened?” Sherlock asked.
“The gits who have the rings won’t give them back after refusing to be in the wedding,” Molly said. “We need to find a way to fix this, Sherlock.”

“Do you know Jason’s ring size?” Sherlock asked Thomas.

“I do,” Thomas said with a nod.

“Then we’ll go get ready and we’ll go to the nearest jeweler and get you both rings to use until you’re able to get your actual wedding bands back,” Sherlock said. “I don’t think you’ll have enough time to curl your hair though, Molly.”

“That’s fine,” she said. “But I’m not about to let this day be ruined any more than we’re ruining it.”

“You two not being there is not going to ruin the day,” Thomas said. “I swear, it’s fine. But thank you for getting us rings, Sherlock. It doesn’t do to get married without them.”

“You’re my friend. I can help and I’m not about to leave you in dire straits.” He nodded towards the door. “The quicker we get ready the better. Is the jeweler you went to nearby?”

“Yes. She’s near my home,” Thomas said.

“Then we’ll go there and see what she can do.”

“Thank you, Sherlock,” Thomas said with a relieved smile. “You’re a lifesaver.”

“Don’t thank me yet. She might not have anything we can use for today. But I’ll find something.” Thomas nodded and left the room, and he looked over at Molly. “Did you volunteer us to help?”

“Yes?” she said hesitantly.

“Good,” he said with a nod. “Anyone who chooses to willingly ruin a day like today for supposed friends is an abhorrent person. If I can help fix things I will.”

“I’ll get dressed quickly,” she said, going over to Sherlock and kissing his cheek. “I can do my hair and make-up at the gardens, I think. I hope.”

“I was fairly sure you would be able to,” he said as he stripped out of his sleep pants. “What brought on the sudden change of heart from Katrina and her husband?”

“Thomas’s sleeping arrangements. They thought Jason and Thomas prefer us over them.”

“That’s bollocks,” Sherlock said, shaking his head. “I know Jason asked them if they had an open room for Thomas and they didn’t. That was the only reason I suggested he stay with us.”

“Well, they took it as an affront,” she said, beginning to get undressed herself. “Supposedly she made a comment to Jason yesterday and he asked for clarification this morning and they had a huge row. I should give her a piece of my mind when we get back.”

“I would as well, and I can probably drive my point home far more viciously than you can,” he said.

“Oh, you’ve only seen me angry twice, Sherlock, and while I was upset with you I wasn’t nearly as livid as I am right now. If I confronted them I can guarantee you’ll see a whole new side of me.” She got out of her pyjamas and then went to the closet to get her dress. She took it to the bed and laid it out. It was a knee length black dress that was off the shoulder, with scalloped edging at the top and a crinoline slip sown into the bottom half of the dress that peeked out under the fabric of the skirt. Molly had found the vintage style to be quite lovely, especially when paired with the elbow length
gloves. “I just wish we didn’t have to leave quite so early. I feel horrible for abandoning them today right before the reception.”

“You know, we can always tell Mycroft there was a need to stay here later,’ Sherlock said thoughtfully as he went to get his suit. “If I can get a little time I can see if there is a later flight we can take. If I’m lucky I can get less of a layover in Chicago and we can make it there close to the time we had originally planned.”

“Oh, could you?” Molly asked hopefully.

“Let me finish getting ready and I’ll see what I can do,” he said, getting his suit out. He brought it to the bed and the two of them finished getting dressed as quickly as possible. He then went to his carry-on and pulled out his laptop, turning it on once he was sitting on the bed. Molly sat next to him, looking at the screen occasionally. Finally he looked over at her. “If we go on another airline we can leave here at nine and still make our connecting flight in Chicago to Cardiff. It will be close, though, and we’ll have to go business class.”

“Do it,” she said.

He nodded and made the reservation for them once he got his credit card out of his wallet. Then he closed his laptop and moved to take it back to his carry-on. “We can stay at the reception until seven, so we will at least be there for the speeches and the meal. We probably still won’t get cake.”

“It’s all right,” she said. “I’m just glad we can be there for the important part.” She stood up and smoothed down the front of her dress. “Let’s tell Thomas the good news.”

Sherlock stood up as well and the two of them went to the guest bedroom. Sherlock knocked on the door. “Thomas?”

“Give me one minute and I’ll be ready,” he said. “I was just on the phone with Jason. But I’m decent, if you want to open the door.”

Sherlock opened the door and saw Thomas standing in front of the standing mirror, fixing his tie. “Molly and I changed our flight. We’ll be able to stay for the reception.”

“Really?” he said, turning towards them. “Excellent. It doesn’t help to have the new maid of honor and best man skip out on the speeches.”

“You’re picking us?” Molly asked, her eyes wide.

“Yes. You’re going to make sure today isn’t a disaster of epic proportions. And if it looks as though Katrina was right in her opinion then who cares? She’s the one who put the whole day in jeopardy because she couldn’t accept we have other friends we care about just as much as we cared about her.”

“I’ll finish that,” Molly said, coming over to Thomas and beginning to fix his tie. “You really don’t need to. Surely you have other friends who deserve it more than we do.”

“I can guarantee the rest of our friends would simply tell us to get married without the rings. I mean, wedding bands are expensive, and I imagine getting them at the very last minute is going to cost Sherlock a pretty penny. But the fact you’re making sure we have them just solidifies that the two of you have become some of our closest friends.” He waited while Molly finished. “I think Jason wanted to ask the two of you the first time but he knew that would hurt their feelings. I know he’s closer to Molly than he is to Katrina, and since he’s claimed the maid of honor and bridesmaids as his side of the wedding party he would have preferred Molly be the one next to him. He was just
worried you wouldn’t agree.”

“Of course we’ll agree,” Sherlock said. “If it will make the two of you happy then that’s what’s important today.”

“I would be quite honored to be the maid of honor,” Molly said with a smile as she stepped back.

“Thank you both,” Thomas said. He went back to the bed and picked up the suit jacket, slipping it on. “Are you still going to take your luggage?”

Sherlock shook his head. “We’ll come back here and change first and then go to the airport. This way we don’t have to leave our luggage in the car unattended. But we will still need to leave before the reception is over.”

“Understandable,” he said with a nod. “So. Shall we be off?”

“Absolutely,” Molly said with a smile. The three of them left the guest bedroom and made their way to the door to the garage. Sherlock got his keys off the rack and then they made their way into the garage. They got in the car and Sherlock backed them out, and once they were out onto the main road Thomas began giving them directions to the jeweler. Molly was quite nervous that for one reason or another they weren’t going to be able to get the rings, and it gnawed at her stomach until they parked in front of the jewelers. And sure enough, the jeweler wasn’t going to open for another hour. Sherlock pulled out his phone and began to search for jewelers who were open and found one who was a ten minute drive away, and then they left.

They got into the jeweler’s shop and Thomas explained the situation to the owner, an older man. The man listened impassively and Molly was almost sure he wouldn’t help them, but he said he’d just married his husband the year before and he wasn’t about to let some assholes ruin a wedding like that. He told Thomas to pick any two rings he liked and they’d be charged at a discount. Sherlock told him to pick whatever he wanted, regardless of metal type, and Thomas chose two platinum bands that were similar to the ones he had shown Molly that they had picked out. The owner of the store said if Thomas and Jason wanted they could come in the next day and have them engraved free of charge, and once they were done the man wished them the best of luck and a happy future together. And with that the three of them got back in the car and began to make their way to the San Diego Botanic Gardens.

They got there at eleven eighteen, and Thomas and Sherlock went off to go find the wedding planner to explain what had happened while Molly made her way towards where the women were getting ready. She approached and saw Jason pacing in front of the door. He looked up and saw her and a wide smile splashed across his face. “You really are the best woman in the world,” he said, coming over and giving her a hug.

“Why, for making sure your day goes off with as few hitches as possible?” she asked, hugging her back. “It’s what good friends do.”

“Best friends. We’re best friends by now,” he said. Then he pulled away. “Are the rings nice?”

“They’re almost exactly like the ones you had. They’re platinum, though, not white gold.”

His eyes widened. “We owe Sherlock. Like, really owe him.”

“The owner of the jewelry shop didn’t want your day ruined so he offered Sherlock a hefty discount,” she said with a smile. “And I have more good news. Sherlock and I postponed our flight so we get to stay for the reception.”
“Really? That’s awesome,” he said, hugging her again. “I think today’s going to go beautifully after all.”

“I hope it does too.” She let go of him after a few minutes. “I have to go finish getting ready. I’m sorry I didn’t have time to curl my hair.”

“That’s absolutely fine. I’ll just see it some other time. You go get ready and we’ll start in forty-five minutes or so. One the wedding’s done we’ll get the photos here, then the photos at the beach, and then we can go to the reception.” Then he hugged her again, this time also kissing her cheek.

“Seriously. Thank you so much.”

“You’re very welcome,” she said with a laugh. He let her go and she went inside the room. The other women came over to her and hugged her and then agreed among themselves to do her hair and make-up for her so she could look her absolute best. Molly sat down in the chair they guided her too and the women got to work, with one of them doing her make-up and another curling her hair for her. They made quick work of it and thirty-five minutes later all of the work was done. The women sat there and chatted until there was a knock at the door. The wedding planner was on the other side, beckoning them to follow her, and as they walked she explained to them the changes that were going to be made. Once she got to the groomsman she paired everyone up, leaving Molly and Sherlock for last. Molly looked up at Sherlock. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen Jason look so happy.”

“He had Thomas move away from me so he could thank me as well,” Sherlock said. “I think he was terrified it was all going to be absolutely ruined beyond repair.”

“Well, I’m glad we could fix it,” she said with a smile. The music started for them to listen to before they were to walk onto the observation deck. “Sherlock?”

“Yes?” he asked.

“I love you,” she said as her smile widened.

“I love you too,” he replied with a grin of his own before they both needed to turn their attention to the ceremony. She turned to face the observation deck and kept the smile on her face. Despite the rough start she had hopes that today was going to be a very good day indeed.
Chapter 31

The wedding itself went off without a hitch. Molly teared up quite a few times, especially during the vows, which Thomas and Jason hadn’t shared during the rehearsal. They’d written them themselves, and it just proved that the two of them were meant for each other, she thought. When they were finally officially married there was a loud cheer when they kissed and she thought they looked the happiest she’d ever seen since she’d met them. The pictures took a while, only because Jason insisted on a photo with each bridesmaid and groomsman paired off, as well as one of her and Sherlock together. When the photographer heard about what had happened he insisted on a few photos of the four of them together as well, to celebrate “the saviours of the day” as he called Sherlock and Molly. Then the wedding party moved down towards the beach and took the more informal photos before they headed out to the reception. She and Sherlock managed to get to stay for all the toasts and eating the actual meal, and they even got to watch Jason and Thomas take their first dance as husband and husband, which made Molly very happy. Jason talked the DJ into doing another slow song soon after their first dance just so she and Sherlock could share at least one dance that evening. Sherlock managed to avoid stepping on her feet more than twice so really, it went very well in her opinion. Then they said their good-byes and made their way home, changing quickly and getting their luggage into the car and heading to Lindbergh Field.

They made it there and got to their terminal just as their area was boarding, and once they were settled Molly found herself beginning to doze off. She settled back in her seat and the next thing she knew they were in Chicago. They had a two hour layover and so they went to where their next flight was going to be leaving and she went back to sleep, head on Sherlock’s shoulder. She woke up when they began to board and then went back to sleep for part of the flight to Dublin. When she woke up Sherlock was still awake and they talked for a while until he started to yawn, and so she let him sleep the rest of the flight. By the time they got into Dublin both of them were awake and they explored the airport while they waited for the flight to Cardiff. And then it was one last very short flight and they arrived in Cardiff.

It wasn’t until they arrived in Cardiff that they realized all their luggage except their garment bags had been lost when they arrived in Dublin. She was quite livid about the entire situation but there really wasn’t anything they could do about it other than give the airline their information before leaving the airport. She just wanted to get to the hotel and begin getting used to the time difference and try and get her sleep schedule on track for the duration of their trip. They went out and hailed a cab and got in, staying quiet for a few moments as it pulled away from the curb. Finally Sherlock spoke. “I’m sorry about this. I made the reservations and it’s my fault.”

“It’s not your fault,” she said with a sigh. “I just...I quite liked the clothing I had in my luggage. And a lot of it was brand new. I’d bought it specifically for the trip, and I’d wanted the chance to wear it and show it off.”

“I suppose we have to purchase entire new wardrobes for our trip,” he said.

“Have you ever been to Cardiff before?” she asked. He shook his head. “When we get to the hotel we should find out where the best places are to shop for new clothing. We have the nicer pieces, which I’m thankful for, but you need shirts and shoes for your suits among other things and I need...well, everything. Or almost everything, at any rate. I have two outfits and some undergarments and a few other things in my carry-on.”

“I managed to pack enough that I have two casual outfits and two shirts in my carry-on, as well as one of my pairs of shoes. I have enough to get by until we can get to a store to replace what we need
“Then he paused. “Though I do trust your taste enough for you to shop for me, if you wanted to.”

“I wouldn’t mind doing that,” she said with a nod. “I’m fairly sure I have enough on the prepaid card I got to cover a few outfits for each of us.”

“I can always get you another one if you don’t,” he said. “I know this wasn’t an expense you’d been expecting to pay.”

“I would appreciate it,” she replied. She shut her eyes and was quiet for a moment. “This is not a good start to our holiday. I hope it isn’t a sign that the rest of the trip is going to be troubled as well.”

“It could have been worse,” he said. “We could have lost everything.”

“That is true, I suppose,” she said. “Hopefully they’ll be able to find our luggage in Dublin and get it back to us.”

“I hope they do as well,” he said. “There were things in there that I wanted to give you for Christmas.”

“I only had two presents of yours in my luggage,” she said. “I decided to give you the books for your birthday so I left them at home. The rest of your gifts are in my carry-on, because none of them were all that large, save one.”

“I suppose I will have to do some last minute Christmas shopping in between working,” he said.

“It’s all right, Sherlock,” she said, opening her eyes and giving him a small smile. “Take care of the business you have to do for your brother and after Christmas you can get me presents if you absolutely feel you must. We can always exchange gifts New Year’s Eve, if you think that would be better. And I can buy things for our friends from both of us to replace anything you had lost that you had planned on giving them.”

“I think that’s a good idea,” he said with a nod. “The only gift I had kept in my carry-on for our friends was John and Mary’s. Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson’s were in my luggage.”

“Well, are we still going to go to London early on Christmas Eve?” she asked.

“Most likely. But I’m sure there are shops here with things they would enjoy, if you don’t feel like putting it off.”

“Oh, I’m sure I can find things here that they would like,” she said, shaking her head. “I was just wondering if I should brave the crowds for a few specific things I know they’d like that I think are only available in London.” She settled into her seat more. “I want to get settled into the hotel room and go back to sleep for a few hours. Hopefully when I wake up again I’ll be in a better mood.”

“If you go back to sleep I can join you for a time,” he said. “I believe Mycroft said he wanted to speak to me early in the morning to go over particulars so I’m expecting a call in about four and a half hours, since I’m assuming he doesn’t want me to stay awake all night so I’m at my sharpest when I start.”

“What are you doing for him, anyway?” she asked.

“Investigating a group of suspicious people who have ties to a deal he’s working on,” he replied. “I can’t go into too much detail, but there’s a great deal of sensitive information that Mycroft is afraid is going to be leaked before the deal is finalized, and he doesn’t know exactly who is trying to broker a
side deal with the information. He has it narrowed down to four people, three of whom reside here in Cardiff. If it’s one of them then my business might be finished earlier than the 29th, so long as when we get to London I take the necessary steps to make sure no one else gets any bright ideas. If that’s the case we may have to leave here earlier and find some other place to stay until our accommodations open up.”

“I hope you finish earlier, then,” she said. “Which I have faith you’ll be able to do.”

“I’m glad you have faith in my skills as a detective,” he said with a small grin, reaching over for her hand that was closest to him.

“I’ve always known you were quite brilliant,” she said with a warm smile of her own. “Ever since the first day I met you. You got more from the initial observation of the body I was supposed to autopsy than I did and I was quite awed by that, even if you were being a bit of an arse about it.”

“I wanted to see exactly what you would let me get away with,” he said. “I was actually impressed by the fact you didn’t fall for me being a member of Scotland Yard. Most people don’t glance at the photo on the ID.”

“Well, I’m a pathologist. Paying attention to details is in my job description,” she said with a soft laugh.

“I know you certainly miss working,” he asked, playing with her fingers slightly.

“I do,” she said with a nod. “But I’ve also enjoyed the extra time with you, and I’m grateful I get to take this holiday for as long as I do. It will be nice to finally get this cast off and begin to start physical therapy so I can return to my post, though, even if it might take longer. Since I broke my right arm and that’s my dominant side I may have to relearn how to do the various things I need to do in order to complete an autopsy.”

“Have you thought about what you might do if you can’t?” he asked.

“I spoke with my supervisor two days ago, after my last appointment. She has hope that even if it takes longer that I’ll be able to return. If I can my job is waiting for me until I’m cleared to return to work. She said if I can’t get cleared to return to work she’ll put in a good word with some of the local universities to see if there is a teaching position open. There’s no guarantees, but it would be something. However, it probably wouldn’t be open until the fall term, if that’s what ends up happening.” She looked over at him. “I just hope I can return to work. I think I would be a good professor but I like what I do. I like being an active part of solving homicide cases.”

“I hope you can return to work too, then.” She gave him one last smile and the two of them lapsed into silence the rest of the way to their hotel. When they arrived Molly took a few minutes to really look at the building, staring at it in awe. When she was done she and Sherlock took what remained of their luggage inside and then began the process of checking into the hotel. It took a little time, but soon they were being given their key and led to their room. They let themselves in and went inside. It was quite a nice room, she realized, and even though they weren’t going to be there long this would be a comfortable place to spend some time. They made their way to the bedroom and paused once they opened the door and saw their visitor. Sherlock scowled at his brother. “Is there any reason you’re in our hotel room this early in the morning?”

Mycroft stood up and adjusted his suit. Molly hadn’t seen him much, but she had always been struck by the demeanor he had, which was a mixture of regality and haughtiness. Sherlock had been quite the same, actually, but since he had moved to California the one she had gotten used to from Sherlock these last few months was markedly different. She could see when she glanced at Sherlock
he was sliding back to how he usually was when mention of his brother came up, defensive and irritated, and that meant she was going to see a return of the old Sherlock at any moment. Though she did have to admit, Sherlock had quite a good reason to be irritated tonight. She felt much the same way at the moment. She watched as Mycroft approached them. “There has been a change in plans,” Mycroft said. “We have reason to believe the deal we hope to avoid will be made tonight as opposed to later in the week. I have it narrowed down to two people who will attempt to sell the information, and I need to go over it with you immediately so we can take steps.”

Sherlock’s stance softened just slightly. “All right. I don’t need to sleep at the moment so we can go over it now.”

Mycroft nodded, squatting down slightly to pick up a briefcase that was next to the bed. “I have it with me now. We can go out to the other part of the suite while Molly occupies the bedroom. Does that sound fair?”

“Yes,” Molly replied as Sherlock nodded. Then she turned to Sherlock. “I’ll put your things away.”

“Thank you,” he replied, handing her his garment bags.

“You did not appear to bring much luggage,” Mycroft said with a frown.

“Most of it got lost in Dublin,” Sherlock said as Molly moved further into the room with all the garment bags. “We have the nicer clothing and our carry-ons.”

“I will make it a point to have it found, and begin to replace what has been lost,” Mycroft said.

“I can do that myself,” Sherlock said, scowling slightly. “It’s not as though I’m destitute.”

“I was merely making a suggestion,” Mycroft said in a defensive tone, glaring at his brother.

“Sherlock, if he wants to, let him,” Molly said. Sherlock looked at her for a moment. “I think he’s trying to be helpful. You should encourage that.”

“But there’s always conditions attached,” Sherlock said.

“I don’t think there will be conditions attached this time, will there, Mycroft?” she asked.

“No, there will be no conditions attached to my offer,” he replied. Then gave her a slightly amused smile. “There is a reason I have been glad he associates with you. You are usually good at seeing the truth behind matters. As it stands, I know if you had not had to come here for this business your luggage would not have had to go to Dublin and it most likely wouldn’t have been lost, therefore I feel that I should replace it.”

“You’re being uncharacteristically nice,” Sherlock said to his brother, narrowing his eyes slightly.

“Part of it has to do with the fact Molly was affected as well. Her I like. If I can help make her holiday better since she’s already being inconvenienced then I will do it.” He made his way to his brother. “The sooner we go over this the better.”

Sherlock nodded, then moved to Molly and gave her a quick kiss. “I’m not sure if I’ll still be here when you wake up later in the morning, but if I’m not I will see you soon.”

“All right. And please be safe if you have to confront someone, all right?”

“I will,” he said. With that he and Mycroft turned and left the bedroom, and Molly began bringing in
the carry-ons and putting things away. It didn’t take her very long, and when she finished she went
to the bed and laid down on it. She considered changing into her pyjamas but she knew if she fell
asleep it wouldn’t be for too long, and since she had already gone to sleep in these clothes it didn’t
matter if she slept in them a little longer. She had gotten an adapter for her phone and so she plugged
it in and then plugged her phone’s charger in before getting her phone charging again. Once she
started that she adjusted for the time zone change and then set her alarm for a few hours from now
before shutting her eyes and attempting to get a little more rest.

She woke up to her alarm and after a moment realized that someone had draped a blanket over her as
she had slept. She pushed the blanket off of her and then put her feet on the ground. It was still early,
but she felt at least a little bit more like she’d adjust to the time difference now. She could smell
coffee and hoped there was some left for her as she made her way out of the bedroom. She saw
Mycroft sitting at a chair, but Sherlock was nowhere to be seen. He looked up and saw her come into
the room, inclining his head towards her. “Molly,” he said.

“Mycroft,” she replied. “Is there any coffee left?”

“Some, but I doubt there is enough for a whole cup. I can make more, if you would like, or you can
ask for some to be brought up with your breakfast.”

“I’ll have it brought up with my breakfast,” she said, moving to see if there was a room service menu
anywhere. When she found one she began to study it before deciding what she wanted to eat and
calling to place the order. When she was finished she sat down near Mycroft. “Where is Sherlock?”

“On a brief errand,” he replied. “He should be back in an hour or so. We’ll need to go over the
information he will have found, and most likely he will be coming and going all day until this matter
is settled.”

“Why can’t you do it?” she asked.

He picked up his cup of coffee. “I am too recognizable to the people involved. If they know I’m here
then the person making the deal will get skittish and do something we haven’t anticipated. While
Sherlock is well known, there are still many people who don’t realize he’s my brother, or if they do
know that they also know we despise each other. Most people would assume doing a task for me is
the last thing he’d agree to.”

“But don’t you want to stop the deal from being made?” she asked as she watched him take a sip. “I
mean, if they know you’re here then they’ll back out, right?”

“Or they could do it before I have the ability to have them taken into custody. Also, I do not know
exactly who the information is being sold to. I want to catch everyone in the act, because what they
are doing constitutes treason.”

Molly’s eyes widened. “I didn’t realize it was quite so important.”

“That’s because Sherlock has decided to withhold the particulars from you,” he said as he set his
coffee down. “Which is normally something I would encourage with the others he knows, but I feel
as though is something I should discourage when it comes to you. You don’t need to know every last
detail, but knowing some particulars wouldn’t be harmful. I know you are not the type to exploit
information like that.”

“I doubt I have the clearance for that, though,” she said.

“Actually, your level of government clearance is quite high,” he replied. “It has been since Sherlock
was in your care after he fell off the roof. You will never get to know all the specifics of the classified projects that Sherlock is involved in, but you can know more about them than, say, DI Lestrade. If I need to involve Sherlock in something like this again I will tell him specifically what you are allowed to know and what you aren’t. I know you won’t press any further if he tells you you can’t know something.”

“No, I wouldn’t,” she agreed. She looked over at him. “This business will be finished tonight, do you think?”

“Most of it,” Mycroft said with a nod. “We’ll need to clean up the mess afterward, and that may take time tomorrow, but by tomorrow evening my brother’s time will be his own. I can handle things in London without his assistance.”

“That’s good,” she said with a smile.

Mycroft studied her for a moment. “You know, his relationship with you is really the best thing that could have happened to him. I will admit I was put out at first when he informed me he would be residing in California from now on with no plans to return home, but the fact that he seems to have settled down is a very good thing. I believe I will not have to continuously pull him out of any trouble he gets himself into.”

She nodded. “He has a life there which is pretty trouble free. I don’t think you’ll have any more problems with him.”

“His attitude also seems to have improved since he began a relationship with you,” he said thoughtfully. “When I asked him to do this he was more concerned about ruining your holiday plans than he was refusing to spite me. And once I promised him I would do my best to make sure you had an enjoyable time he didn’t fight as much. Though I will admit I hadn’t expected for things to take the turn they did. I know he appreciates getting to spend more time with you and less time working. He has said so a few times while you were asleep.”

Her smile widened. “Well, he hadn’t been all that keen on doing this anyway. He really has moved away from that part of his life.”

“I’m still surprised by that, to be honest,” he said, having some more of his coffee. “It was such a point of pride for him that he was the only consulting detective in the world, that he solved cases that would otherwise remain unsolved. And yet now he has settled into the life of a student in a field wholly unrelated to criminal justice.”

“But look at everything that it cost him,” she pointed out. “Look at all the trouble getting tangled up with Moriarty and Magnussen caused. Think about what it could have cost him if circumstances in either situation were different. I mean, he got lucky in that I was able to help him fall from the roof without dying. If he hadn’t asked for my help he’d be dead now. And even though you had to get him out of trouble with everything that happened with Magnusen even you have to admit the world is a safer place because of what he did.”

“Does it bother you, that he killed a man in cold blood?” he asked curiously.

She nodded slowly. “Not often, though, because there really wasn’t any other choice. He and I talked about it and I have a better idea of why he did what he did, even if I don’t approve. But as I said, there wasn’t really any choice. He was too dangerous.”

Mycroft thought about it for a moment and then nodded. “I suppose you’re right. He has paid a steep price and not gotten much in return. But does he have regrets?”
“About what he did, or no longer being a consulting detective?” she asked.

“Both.”

“I think a part of him regrets what he did,” she said. “I think there’s a lot of things he did while he was taking down Moriarty’s criminal network that he regrets as well. But he lives with them, handles them well enough, and when they bubble up to the surface he knows he can turn to me and I’ll listen without judgment. As for leaving his former career behind, he still does a tiny bit of consulting, in a way. Greg will call him and ask for his advice on cases every so often, so he at least dabbles a bit. But as for regretting not doing it on a full time basis, I don’t think he does.”

“You would know better than the rest of us, I suppose.” Mycroft set his cup of coffee down. “Are you happy?”

“I am,” she said. “I’d be happier if I was working again, only because I love what I do, but hopefully that will happen soon enough. The cast is going to come off shortly after we get back and then it’s a matter of going through physical therapy.”

“But you are happy with Sherlock?” he asked, looking at her intently.

“Yes, Mycroft, I am happy with Sherlock.” She gave him a quizzical look. “Were you worried I wasn’t? Because if I wasn’t I wouldn’t be living with him, because that implies we’re going to have a long future together. Even you have to know that.”

“I do not want him to backslide to old habits, to old behaviours,” he said. “The person he is now is a good man, and I don’t want that to go away.”

She was quiet for a few moments. Despite what Sherlock thought his brother really did care for him. He didn’t want to simply use him for his own needs and that was all. He did want what was best for him. “If things begin to change and we have problems in our relationship I will work hard to get us to work them out,” she said finally. “I love him very much and I want to spend a very long time with him if I can.”

“So you do eventually want to marry him?” Mycroft asked, tilting his head slightly.

“Yes, I would like to marry him. We’ve talked about this a few times. He knows I’ve put up with a lot from him and I love him regardless and that’s very important to him. He doesn’t think anyone else will understand him the same way, and he honestly doesn’t want to attempt to look. And I think there’s a lot of truth to that. So when the both of us say we want to be together as long as possible we do mean that eventually there will most likely be marriage. And if there isn’t I can live with that, so long as we make a life for ourselves together.”

“I just thought you would want marriage and not be happy without it,” he replied.

Molly shook her head. “Sherlock hasn’t had much experience with relationships. Janine doesn’t count, and his first experience didn’t end well. So if he decides he wants to remain in a relationship with me but he never asks me to marry him I’m okay with that. I want him to be comfortable with whatever type of relationship we end up having. I think what was more important to me is that I want children and I didn’t think he did, but he’s fine with that at some point in the future.”

Mycroft looked surprised. “I had no idea about that.”

She chuckled slightly. “In October I spent some time with some lovely girls who were the daughters of my friend Jason’s friend. When I came back home that night Sherlock asked me about what kind of future I saw us having and children came up. He didn’t seem to loathe the idea of having children
with me, and he did say if it happened sooner than we might plan for we could handle that well enough. Having children together is a possibility that we’d both welcome, just not right now.”

“He used to abhor children completely. I thought John’s son would be the only one he ever chose to spend any time with,” he said, leaning back in his seat slightly.

“He did quite well with the three girls the weekend afterward, so I don’t think he has a problem with children any longer. Or at least I think he doesn’t mind children. He might have issues with one that’s a horrid brat, but if we have children together I think they would be better behaved. And just so you know, one of the girls he spent time together I think they would be better behaved. And just so you know, one of the girls he spent time with had high functioning autism, so I think even if we had a child who had special needs he would cope well. I think if it was his own child it would be hard but he would love our child regardless.”

“My brother really has changed,” Mycroft said thoughtfully.

“He has, but if you’d actually talk to him about things that weren’t just the latest crisis you need him to help solve you would know more about these things,” she pointed out. “He’s been gone quite a few months now and changed his personality in many significant ways and I don’t think you’ve really made any attempt to get to know him any better. You know of the changes but you haven’t really experienced them much. Admittedly he’s been the same way, but I think you both should make it a point to learn more about each other. Maybe then there wouldn’t be such hard feelings between you.”

“That is asking a lot of both of us,” Mycroft said, shaking his head. “I don’t think it will ever happen.”

“Well, it should,” she said. “When we’re all in London, at least have supper with him. I can be there too, just to make sure there isn’t too much hostility on either side, but I think I would like it very much if the two of you attempted to get along better.”

He sighed. “I wish you hadn’t phrased it that way,” he said quietly.

“Why?” she asked curiously.

“Because I have found that I, like my brother, do not want to disappoint you,” he replied. “If this is something you really want I will make the attempt. But only if you really want it, which I’m hoping you don’t.”

“Yes, Mycroft, I really want the two of you to attempt to get along,” she said, getting up.

“Very well,” he said glumly. She moved over to him and after a moment leaned over and kissed his cheek. He looked up in surprise when she pulled away, and she gave him a grin in response. “What on earth was that for?”

“For doing something I would like,” she said.

“It could still go horribly wrong,” he pointed out. “For all you know it will be an absolute wreck of an evening. We could be on each other’s nerves the entire night. You could walk away despising both of us by the end of the meal.”

“Oh, I don’t think I will,” she said. “I’ll make sure he knows just how much I want you two to get along as well. And remember, I’ll be there as a buffer. I’ll make sure you don’t end up rolling on the floor punching each other.”

“We haven’t done that since we were children,” he said, scoffing slightly.
“Then we’ll just have to make sure it stays that way, now won’t we?” She turned and went back to where she was sitting, sitting down when she got there. “I hope my breakfast gets here soon. I get the feeling I have a day full of shopping ahead of me.”

“I imagine you do, if you’re replacing clothing that was supposed to last you for three weeks, more or less,” he said. “Especially if you’re shopping for both yourself and Sherlock.”

“I know what he’s gotten used to wearing so I should be able to do well enough,” she said. “Though if this is all over tonight he can do most of his own shopping tomorrow. That might be best, I think.”

“I would imagine that would be a better idea,” he replied. “I’ll admit, I’m curious to see exactly what he wears now. If what he was wearing when he arrived is any indication, it is a much more relaxed style.”

“Well, he wears denim trousers and T-shirts a lot of the time. Even in December it’s still warm for most of the day so there’s no need for dressing in layers. And he wears hooded pullovers sometimes. It’s a very comfortable style. Most of the people who live there prefer it, not just the surfers and skateboarders.”

“You included?” he asked.

She nodded. “Oh, I love dresses too, and sometimes I’ll wear button down shirts because I enjoy them and regular jumpers as opposed to the hooded ones when I get cold, but generally I’m in the same type of clothing Sherlock is. When I’m not at work, I mean. When I’m at work I’m in scrubs.”

“I hope he can find clothing to his new tastes here,” he replied.

“If not, he’ll find something similar, I’m sure. I’m just hoping I can find clothing that’s warm enough. I forgot how cold it is here in the winter. I think even dressing in layers some of the clothing I brought was too thin.”

“Well, whatever you do decide to get, I’ll make sure the costs are covered,” Mycroft said. “I’ll even do it out of my personal account.”

“That is very kind of you,” she said as she gave him a smile. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” he said as he inclined his head. Then he checked his watch. “As much as I have enjoyed our conversation I have business I need to attend to.”

“Oh, I can occupy myself,” she said with a nod. “As soon as I eat I plan on showering, changing and going out to get the clothing. I’ll leave you in peace soon enough.”

“If you want to shower and change now I can accept your food from room service,” he replied.

“Are you sure?” she asked. Mycroft nodded and so she stood up. “Very well. I’ll see you shortly.” With that, she turned away and made her way back to the bedroom, shutting the door behind her. It had been a very interesting conversation, but now she had a better understanding of Mycroft, she thought, and he most certainly had a better understanding of her and her relationship with Sherlock, and she was sure this could only be a good thing.
Chapter 32

Sherlock and Mycroft did indeed catch the people involved in illegally selling the information that evening and then spent the next day cleaning up loose ends, but by three in the afternoon Mycroft had left Cardiff, leaving Sherlock and Molly with some unexpected free time together. Molly had spent the morning at the spa and after they spent a few hours getting clothing for Sherlock and gifts for their friends they went and had a relaxing dinner together at one of the restaurants near the hotel. They ended their evening by taking a walk and looking at things they wanted to do the next day before they left Cardiff to go back home to London. When they got back to the hotel Sherlock ended up going right to sleep, having been awake for more of the last few days than not, and Molly stayed up and read for a bit until she joined him to get rest herself.

After a day of sightseeing the 24th dawned and brought with it snow. Sherlock called to see if they would be able to make their flight out to Newcastle at noon and he was told to wait and see. As the time that they would need to leave the hotel neared Molly began to get nervous. As much as she had enjoyed her brief stay in Cardiff she wanted to get home as quickly as she could. Finally Sherlock called one last time and hung up with a sigh. “Our airline has decided to ground all flights,” he said.

She thought for a moment. “Do you think the trains might be running?” she asked.

“If the flights have been grounded I’m not sure the trains will be running, but I could check with the front desk,” he said thoughtfully. “It might not be a bad idea to go by train.”

She watched him get on the phone with the person at the front desk, and as she saw a small smile cross Sherlock’s face she relaxed. He hung up a few moments later and looked at her. “So we’re taking the train to London?” she asked with a smile.

He nodded. “The concierge is getting the tickets for us, but we’ll be going from Cardiff Central to London Paddington this afternoon. We’ll have to take whatever’s open, though, because I requested the seats be side by side. He said some of the trips are better to take than others because they are off-peak times. But if we have to stay past check-out he assured us we won’t be charged the extra day.”

“Well, the government is paying for it so I imagine if it comes down to a few extra hours that the room isn’t available they don’t want the government to be breathing down their necks for an extra day,” she said in an amused tone.

“I would imagine not. He said he would call back in fifteen minutes to let us know when our train would depart. It should take two hours to get there.”

“I think we should have done that in the first place. Less chance of losing our new luggage and clothing this time,” she said.

“I’ll admit, I started to think I should have considered it when we arrived here and were told our luggage had disappeared. We could have simply flown from San Diego to London on the nonstop flight and then taken the train. It would have taken far less time and there would have been only one place our luggage could have gotten lost,” he said as he sat down next to her. “But I saw the clothing you picked out for yourself while we were here. Some of it is quite nice.”

“Well, Mycroft told me cost wasn’t an object,” she said with a smile. “I wasn’t too extravagant, but I wasn’t cheap, either. At least with some of it. There are plenty of T-shirts and denim trousers in the luggage as well.”
“I’ll admit I took advantage of that myself,” he replied. “Though I did make it a point only to use his money to replace my clothes. The gifts for our friends I bought with my own money.” Then he paused. “Are you absolutely sure you want the three of us to share a meal when we’re all in London?”

“I am,” she said with a nod. “I hope to be around for a very long time and that means eventually Mycroft is going to be a member of my family, too. I want the two of you to at least attempt to get along for my sake.”

“You know I don’t like saying no to you and you’re using it to your advantage,” he said with a small grin.

“Oh, most definitely,” she said with a laugh. Then she leaned in more. “But I’ll find a way to make it up to you, I promise.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” he murmured before he kissed her. She kissed him back eagerly, because she enjoyed being able to kiss him. No matter how many times she did it it never managed to get old. After a few minutes he pulled her onto his lap and she pulled away, wide smile on her face. “What?” he asked.

“I just realized that everyone is going to be very surprised by you when we get home,” she said. “I mean, we did see how you were with Janine. You act differently with me. You like being close and you like touching me. And you smile so much more often. Not those fake smiles you used to give everyone that were really more scary than you thought, but actual genuine smiles. I think everyone is going to be surprised but very pleased.”

“I hope they are, because I find I like being this way,” he said, running a hand up and down her back. “I try very hard to be a better man because I know that is what you want.”

“And even if I wasn’t around, would you stay a better man?” she asked, her smile dimming just slightly.

“I would hope so, but it depends on the reason why you aren’t there,” he said after thinking a moment. “If our relationship ends on a bitter note I might not be. If it ends amicably I might stay this way. If it’s because something happens and I lose you I’m not sure I would get over that. I would at least try not to go back to how I was, though. It would also matter if there were children involved. I think if there were I would try to stay this way regardless of the reason why we weren’t together. It wouldn’t be fair to them if I changed drastically and went back to how I used to be.”

She nodded and then leaned in, kissing him softly. When she pulled away and looked at him she moved her hands to frame his face. “And that’s one of the reasons I love you so much. You have definitely grown from when we first met.”

“Well, you haven’t changed as much, but I do enjoy the changes I’ve seen,” he said with a grin on his face. “I think we’re well suited for each other.”

“I think we are too,” she said.

“Good,” he replied. She was just leaning in to kiss him again when the phone in the room rang. She got off his lap so he could get up and answer it, and then he hung up after a few minutes. “We’ll be leaving at three this afternoon. They’ve asked us if there is a chance we could leave the room at noon because the guests coming in tonight will be here at two thirty and they would like the chance to clean it. We can leave our luggage at the front desk until we need to leave if we want to explore the city more.”
“That sounds fine to me, though I don’t know what there is left that we really want to explore,” she said. “We hit almost everything yesterday. And there’s also the matter of how far away from here we want to travel, because we’ll have to come back to get our luggage.”

“Well, it’s only...” He glanced at his watch. “Ten thirty now. I could always stay here while you make use of the spa services again, and then take our things to the lobby and wait until you’re finished before we get lunch. Then we can leave and spend the rest of the time waiting at the station.”

“Or you could join me at the spa,” she said with a smile. “I think you deserve a very nice massage.”

“I could,” he conceded. “I’ll see what else they have to offer and what I might be interested in.”

“Then it’s settled. We take our things to the lobby and then we go to the spa,” she said. She stood up and went over towards him, giving him a quick kiss. She went to move away but he reached over for her and kept her close. “Yes?”

“We were doing something a moment ago that I would like to continue,” he said, looking down at her.

“As long as it goes no further than kissing, because then that would involve a shower and I don’t want wet hair right now,” she said, wrapping her arms around his neck.

“Your hair would dry well before we went outside,” he said.

“As tempting as it is I don’t want to,” she said. “But I don’t mind kissing you for a while.”

“I suppose I will just have to try and convince you harder once we’re in London,” he said.

“You could always spend the trip to London trying to scandalize old women and young children,” she said brightly. “I think that could make for an enjoyable trip.”

“I might not go that far,” he said with a chuckle. “I do have a reputation in this part of the world.”

“I never really thought about that before,” she said thoughtfully.

“Thought about what?” he asked, frowning just slightly.

“Your reputation. It’s very rare for someone to recognize you in California, but in London people are going to know exactly who you are. You still have fans there, and you still have people who think ill of you. And I don’t really remember you going out with Janine very much, so you having a girlfriend you go out on the town with might draw attention. This different you is going to shock people.”

He looked at her intently. “Are you regretting deciding to go home?” he asked quietly.

“What? No, of course not,” she said, looking at him with surprise. “I just never really thought about what all of that will actually mean for the both of us when we’re out, that’s all.”

He let go of her at that point. “I didn’t ask for the recognition. Most of the time I would be happy without it. My life would have been much easier if I hadn’t been plastered all over the newspapers and tabloids.”

“I can’t imagine it was easy,” she said. “But there’s still going to be a fascination with you, especially since you essentially dropped off the face of the earth.”
“Then maybe we simply shouldn’t go out in public together,” he said defensively. “It will lead to much less gossip.”

She looked at him for a moment. “Sherlock, do you think I’m going to be upset if I’m splashed across a tabloid in the morning when someone realizes you’re back and you have a girlfriend?”

“I don’t know. You’re the one who brought it up,” he said.

“I won’t. I promise, I won’t. All I’m concerned about is how you’ll react to it.” She moved closer to him. “Even though you’ve changed I can see you being greatly annoyed by the attention, and I don’t want it to ruin things for us.”

“You mean it would ruin it for you,” he said quietly.

This time she felt her jaw hang down. Was that what he really thought? That she would have an entire day ruined by his reaction to someone being persistent in wanting his attention? “I just...no, Sherlock, it wouldn’t.”

“But how do you know? You got fairly annoyed with me when I first got to California, when I was insistent I was going to bring you home. What if you get annoyed when I deal with someone who wants to ask questions or shove a camera in our faces? After all, that was what you were thinking about, right? What this would mean for your holiday?”

Now she was starting to get angry. And she knew she didn’t get angry very often, but she knew what she was like. She needed to leave and she needed to do it now. “I don’t want to talk about this,” she said, moving to where her coat was.

“Why not? You’re the one who broached the idea in the first place,” he replied. “You started this conversation. You should be here for the end of it.”

“I don’t want to fight, Sherlock,” she said. She got to her coat and slipped it on. “That wasn’t what I wanted at all. And if you really think it was then you know me less well than I thought.”

“Well, if I know so little about you then perhaps it was a mistake for me to--”

“Don’t,” she said, cutting him off. “If you say what I think you’re about to say you can just go to London on your own while I go home and attempt to find a new place to live.” He was quiet as she went to her purse and picked it up, putting it on her shoulder. Then she went for her luggage. “I’ll find my own way to London, and I’ll find my own lodgings while I’m there.”

“Molly...” he said, but she didn’t want to hear any more. She took her luggage to the door and then let go long enough to open it before rolling it out into the hallway. She was not going to be anywhere near him when the tears stinging the back of her eyes started to fall. This hadn’t been what she’d wanted at all. All she had done as wonder what it was going to be like for them with him being so recognizable. She made her way to the lift and pressed the button. They were high up in the building and the lift seemed to be on the ground floor. She just wanted to go somewhere and sob and the damn lift wasn’t going to give her the opportunity to do that. She dimly heard a door open up from the general direction of their room and she really hoped it wasn’t Sherlock trying to continue the fight. She refused to look in that direction even when she heard the person come closer. Finally they stopped a few feet away. “I don’t want to fight,” she heard him say quietly from her side.

“Please, just let me leave,” she replied, looking down. One of the tears fell down and she began to work doubly hard to keep from losing it all together.

“Would you really have moved out?” he asked, taking another step towards her.
“Yes, I would have,” she said quietly. “If you regretted starting a relationship with me there wouldn’t have been a point in trying to fix things. It would have just been easier to let it all end.”

“I shouldn’t have said that. I shouldn’t have thought that at all. I don’t know why I said it,” he replied.

“There must be some kernel of truth to it if you were going to say it,” she replied. She looked up and saw the lift was nearly there. “I’m just sorry I had to find out today of all days.”

He was quiet for a long moment. “I don’t want this to end. I don’t want to lose you over a stupid argument.”

“But it’s not a stupid argument, Sherlock,” she said, looking at him. “I hadn’t thought about your reputation because in California it doesn’t come up. But here? You’re a celebrity. People want every last tidbit of your life on display for their consumption. And I don’t care about that, but it just hit me that we hadn’t ever talked about what it could be like going home, and all you think I care about is not ruining this holiday.” The lift door finally opened. “The holiday is already ruined.”

She made her way into the lift and he hurried over, standing in between the doors and forcing it to stay open. “Please don’t go,” he said, in a voice that was nearly pleading.

“Why?” she asked. “You think it’s just a stupid argument. I think it just shows that even after all this time we still don’t know each other. So please, just let me leave.”

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “I don’t even think about my reputation in London. I find it to be annoying and the bane of my existence. But it’s not something I actually think about. I just accept it as an inconvenience I have to put up with. I hadn’t thought this was something that would even be an issue with you, and that folly is on me. But I don’t want to throw away our entire relationship over something that I don’t think you meant to start a fight over. I mean, that I started a fight over. I will never stop thinking that you agreeing to date me is one of the best things that ever happened to me. That falling in love with you was one of the best decisions I ever made.”

He hesitantly tilted her chin up more. “Please, don’t leave.”

She looked at him intently for a few moments. He seemed to be sincere. But what if it happened again? What if they had another argument and he actually said the words, that he regretted all of this between them? What if it turned out that was how he really felt all along? She looked him in the eyes and saw that he looked as though her leaving would truly break his heart, that he hadn’t realized just how much he had to lose until it was nearly gone. And it made her think that if they had a next time it wouldn’t be as bad. “All right,” she said quietly. “I won’t leave.”

The relief that washed over his face told her she had made the right decision, and he leaned in to kiss her in response. She let go of her luggage and moved as close to him as she could, and after a few minutes they felt the elevator begin to move. “We probably should have gotten out before we did that,” he said, looking down at her with a small smile on his face.

“That might have been best,” she said, giving him one in return.

He ran a hand up and down her back again. “I will try my very best never to purposefully hurt you again. I promise you, and I will do everything I can to fulfill this promise.”

“I will hold you to that,” she said, moving as close to him as she could. “I think we should go back to
the room and go back to what we had been doing before the fight.”

“I think that is a very good idea,” he said with the barest of nods. “I want to begin to make up for hurting you.”

“Then that would be a very good place to start,” she said before leaning in and kissing him again. They had come so close to losing each other over something that never should have been a fight in the first place. She believed him when he said he would try his best, and she knew she would too. She didn’t want to imagine what her life would be like without him in it. When she pulled away he rested his forehead against hers, and she began to think that maybe this holiday wasn’t ruined after all.
Once they got into London and got settled into their room at the Savoy they decided it might be best if they didn’t leave until the next morning, and Molly had to admit the adage that a make-up shag was one of the best things to come out of ending a fight was pretty true. She didn’t really want to have any more fights with Sherlock to see if it held true other times, but at least this once it was definitely something good to come out of the whole mess. After they ordered room service and ate that they went to sleep early, Molly at least eagerly awaiting the next morning.

She woke up a few hours later, with the sun just coming up, to find herself the only one awake. Sherlock usually got up earlier than she did, even when he didn’t need to be awake quite so early, but he appeared to be sleeping in today. This was perfect for her plans, she realized, and so she slipped out of bed and went to her luggage. She could pull out the rest of her gifts for him later but when he woke up she wanted to give him the one she thought he’d like the most. She picked it up and then went over to his nightstand and set the brightly wrapped gift on it before getting back into bed with a book.

It didn’t seem to take him very long to wake up, as she had only gotten through three chapters, but he rolled over onto his back and looked up at her. “Why are you awake so early?” he asked, yawning before he stretched slightly.

“It’s Christmas. I’m always awake early on Christmas,” she said with a smile. “It’s the only day of the year I willingly wake up before the sun comes out.”

“I see,” he said, sitting up. The sheets and blanket slipped down to his waist, and she took a moment to appreciate the view of a half naked Sherlock. “I will have to remember that next year.”

“Did you want to sleep in?” she asked, frowning slightly.

“I had hoped to surprise you while you were still asleep. I never quite seem to be able to do that,” he said as he shook his head. “You always wake up too early for me to pull it off.”

“Well, I got to surprise you,” she said, setting down her book and pointing to his nightstand. “I have more, but I wanted you to open up that one first.”

He nodded, leaning over to pick up the small package. He began to take off the paper in a very careful manner and soon he got all the paper off. He opened up the case and she relaxed when she saw him grin widely. “I was in definite need of one of these,” he said as he picked the watch up from inside. The watch was silver, and it had the numbers on the white face in black. There was also a section that had an digital readout with the current time on it. “Is the other watch face set to London time?”

She nodded. “That way you don’t have to calculate it out in your head if you want to call anyone here. You’ll know exactly how late or early it is.”

“I think that this is a very useful gift,” he said, turning his grin towards her. “And it’s not ostentatious like most other mens watches. I couldn’t have asked for a better choice.”

“Well, it’s also got a bit of history to it,” she said as she watched him put it on his wrist. “This watch used to belong to my father. He had always planned for it to go to a son but I was the only child my parents had, so when he passed he left it to me with specific instructions to give it to someone I cared about to pass on at a later date to any children they might have.”
“And you didn’t give it to Tom?” he asked, surprised.

She shook her head. “No. It’s never been given as a gift to anyone I’ve been with before.”

He looked down at it appreciatively. “I used to not care about things that had sentimental value, but I think it means a great deal more to me than one you had simply picked out would mean.” He looked over at her again and leaned towards her. “Thank you, Molly.”

“You’re quite welcome,” she said with a wide smile before leaning in and kissing him. She had meant for it to be brief but he reached over for her and pulled her closer to him, keeping the kiss lengthy. She only pulled away when she absolutely had to breathe. “I’m very glad you like it, Sherlock,” she said once she’d caught her breath.

“Did you think I wouldn’t?” he asked.

“No, I was fairly sure it was to your taste, but I wasn’t sure you’d feel strongly about the fact it had sentimental value.”

“If we have a son in the future it will go to him, to do what your father had intended,” he said. “So I will take good care of it until then.”

“Good,” she said. “I have more gifts for you, too.”

“I feel as though you should get at least one before I get any more,” he said as he let her go. He went to his luggage and moved his carry-on closer to the bed before pulling out a small gift and handing it to her. “This is one of the gifts I had bought in California and brought with me.”

She took the gift and then unwrapped it, not quite as carefully as Sherlock had, and saw it was a jewelry case large enough to hold a necklace. She opened the lid and her eyes went wide as she saw the necklace and earring set in it. “These are gorgeous, Sherlock!” she said, picking up one of the diamond and emerald earrings and looking at it more closely. There was a small circular emerald surrounded by diamonds, and then another small emerald underneath with a much larger one under that. Underneath the larger emerald and on the sides of it were columns of various shaped diamonds. The necklace had pearls on most of it, interspersed with diamonds shaped like flowers, and then for the main part had more square cut emeralds surrounded by diamonds interspersed with more of the flowers. “This might be the nicest jewelry I’ve ever owned before.”

“When I saw the dress you had picked out for New Year’s I knew you only had small earrings to wear with it. I thought you deserved something nicer,” he said. “You should have seen me trying to describe the dress to the jeweler. I think you would have been amused.”

“You must have spent a fortune on this,” she said, looking up at him. “I mean, there are a lot of diamonds.”

“It was expensive, but I felt it was a good investment,” he said. “Though I do promise the other piece of jewelry I have for you isn’t as extravagant. That is something you can wear every day.”

“I don’t know what to say other than thank you,” she replied. “I just hope you aren’t disappointed with the things I got you.”

“I don’t really have many people buy me gifts,” he said. “The fact that you got me more than one makes me happy enough. And the watch is a priceless gift compared to that one.”

“Look at you, getting sentimental,” she said with a wide smile. “I approve.”
“I’m glad,” he said with a grin.

“I almost want to thank you properly for this gift and just wait on opening everything else,” she said. “But I also really want to see what you think of the other gifts.”

“I don’t mind waiting. It might be best in the long run anyway,” he said. “But I believe it’s time for you to give me another gift?”

“It is,” she said with a nod. She got out of the bed and then went to her carry-on, pulling it over and setting it on the bed. She looked inside and then pulled out a large gift and handed it to him. “Here you go. This is the one that took up the most space in my carry-on.”

He took the gift and then opened it up, looking at it once he was done. “I like this much more than the one I’m currently using,” he said, giving her a grin as he opened the laptop case.

“Well, it’s large enough to hold your laptop, a notebook and at least one textbook,” she said. “And I thought you would prefer something that was leather since there was less chance of it breaking. I guessed on whether you’d want something that style, though. I thought with your more relaxed style these days you’d want something that wasn’t sleek and modern.” Then she turned it over for him. “And it’s got your initials on it.”

“I like the idea of getting useful gifts,” he said. “I always thought getting gifts that didn’t have some sort of use to them was pointless.”

“I may have gotten one or two like that, but not many,” she said. “I like to think I know you well.”

“You do,” he said with a nod. “It’s my turn now. I think I might as well give you the other piece of jewelry now.”

“I can’t wait to see what it is,” she said, grinning.

He got out of bed for a moment and put the carry-on holding his presents on the bed before rummaging around. “I admit I didn’t get you many gifts, only because you said to consider this trip a gift, but I did get you a few things. This I thought you would enjoy wearing often.” When he found the gift and handed it to her. She took the paper off and then opened up the jewelry case. Inside was a circular silver locket that had small leaves underneath a sunflower, and connecting it to the main part of the necklace was a smaller chain with a small yellow stone at the connection point. “It’s a yellow sapphire,” he said when she looked up. “It’s supposed to be the sun, I believe. The jeweler who I bought the necklace and earring set also had vintage jewelry and this caught my eye. I thought you would appreciate it.”

“I love it so much!” she said. “I want to put it on now, actually.” She took it out of the box and then swept her hair to the side before putting the necklace around her neck. It took her a moment to clasp it together but when she was done she looked down and smiled. “Oh, it’s perfect. I’ll have to add a photo to the locket when we get home.”

“So I did well?” he asked.

She nodded in response. “You did exceptionally well,” she said, her smile very bright. “I have six more gifts for you.”

He looked at his carry-on. “I have four for you, though there is one more thing I plan on getting from John and Mary’s tonight. I tried to get it sent internationally but it wouldn’t have arrived in time for the holidays,” he said. “Mary said she would order it and I believe it is already at their home, wrapped and everything.”
“Well, don’t give me any hints,” she said. “I want it to be a surprise.”

“I won’t, I promise.” He looked over at her. “Do we want to go back to exchanging gifts?”

She nodded. “I can give you two at a time, if you want.”

“That’s fine with me.” In response she handed him two of her gifts, a new wallet and a T-shirt she had seen him looking at when they went shopping for their clothes for the trip. The gifts he handed her next was a small leather bound copy of *Pride & Prejudice* and a black cashmere infinity scarf. Her next gifts to him were a set of cufflinks for the times he did wear a suit and a book of American slang, which made him laugh when he opened the gift. She was glad he appreciated the intent of the gift, though he did say he might actually use it to understand what his classmates would talk about. His last two gifts to her were a black handbag with a flower print on it that she had mentioned she’d liked and a journal with her initials on it because she had said one of her New Year’s resolutions was going to be keeping a journal. The final two gifts he opened from her were a new pair of sunglasses with a holder and a collector’s edition DVD of a movie he had mentioned he had liked that they didn’t already own. They were all lovely gifts, she thought to herself, and she was glad he seemed to like the gifts she had given him.

“I loved all of my gifts,” she said when she was done putting them away. The diamond and emerald jewelry set was going to be put in the hotel safe, but that could keep for a bit. She fingered the locket for a moment. “I think this was my favorite. I mean, both jewelry pieces were lovely, but the locket is very...me.”

“I had thought that would be your favorite,” he said with a grin as he sat next to her. “I hadn’t thought about buying it at first but the salesperson suggested I get it for you when I told her about you, and when I saw it I thought it was perfect.”

“It definitely is,” she said, leaning over to kiss him softly. He reached up and kept her close, deepening the kiss as he did. After a few minutes they pulled apart. “I really should thank you properly.”

“Yes, you should,” he murmured before kissing her again. She grinned against his lips as he pulled her onto his lap. She shifted her position to get comfortable and then pulled away from the kiss, looking down at him as he ran his hand up and down her back. “It would be quite interesting to see what you can do in that position.”

“Well, I have to get out of this position for you to get your pyjama bottoms off,” she said with a slight chuckle. “And then I have to get undressed. But we could always come back to this position.”

“We could,” he said with a nod. “And I think we should.”

“All right then,” she said with a smile before she leaned in to kiss him again. She was interrupted by her mobile beginning to ring. Frowning, she got off of Sherlock and went over to the other side of the bed to answer it. “It’s Mary.”

“Answer it,” he said with a frown of his own.

She nodded and answered the phone. “Is anything wrong, Mary?”

“What? Oh no, nothing’s wrong,” Mary said. “Did you...?” Then she paused. “Oh, I can see how you would think that. No, it’s just that John’s still asleep and I thought it might be nice if you two were here when he woke up. William’s awake but being very quiet for Mummy at the moment.”

“I think we can do that,” she said with a smile towards Sherlock, and she saw him relax. “We can be
there in about forty-five minutes? We need to get dressed and all that."

“Oh, of course.” Then she paused again. “I wasn’t interrupting anything, was I?”

“Not at the moment,” she said with a chuckle. “Almost, though.”

“Ah,” she said. “Well, I apologize.”

“It’s all right. I can always finish thanking him later. We’ll see you soon.”

“Knock when you show up. Don’t ring the bell or that will wake John up.”

“Got it. See you soon, Mary.”

“Bye,” Mary said, and then she hung up.

Molly lowered the phone and looked over at Sherlock. “John is still asleep, and she thought it might be nice if we were there when he woke up.”

“I thought something had gone wrong,” he said, standing up. “I think I would like to surprise John this morning instead of this afternoon.”

“Good, because I would too. We should get the gifts for them in a bag. How many did you get?”

“Two,” he said. “One for John and one for Mary, plus the planned double date. William’s gift was in my luggage.”

“Well, I have a few gifts for William, and two for John and two for Mary. The gifts to William are from both of us since I wasn’t sure if you had gotten anything for him.”

“I am glad you thought to get him things,” Sherlock said as he went to the dresser. “Should we bring the gifts for the others?”

She nodded. “Greg and Mrs. Hudson are both going to be there. And neither of them have any idea we’re back, either. As far as they know, John and Mary wanted to host a Christmas for dear friends this year. Mary made absolutely sure they were going to be there.”

“Good. I have a gift for Lestrade and two for Mrs. Hudson,” he said.

“And I have two gifts each. Mrs. Hudson’s were in my carry-on so I didn’t need to replace them.” She went to the closet to get to the outfit she planned on wearing. “I almost think we should bring wine.”

“This early in the morning we’d have to hit a store that’s open twenty-four hours, and I don’t think we have the time if we want to get there before John wakes up,” he pointed out. “If there is the need I can dash out later.”

“All right,” she said with a nod. They got dressed quickly, and Molly quickly transferred over the contents of her old handbag to her new one before they left their room. After putting the diamond and emerald necklace in the hotel safe they left the hotel and got into a cab, giving the driver the address for John and Mary’s home. The closer they got the more nervous she began to feel. Finally they pulled up, Sherlock carrying the bag with the gifts. He went to go push the doorbell but Molly pushed his hand down. “We’re supposed to knock.”

“Ah,” he said with a nod before knocking.
A few moments later the door opened up and Mary stood there, smiling at them widely with William balanced on her hip. “I’m so glad you’re here! John still isn’t awake yet,” she said. “I’m going to go bring him a cup of coffee while you two get settled in the sitting room.”

“I’ll take William,” Molly said, reaching over for the little boy.

“Thank you,” Mary said as Molly took William from her. Then she moved out of the way so Molly and Sherlock could come in. “We’ll be just a few minutes.”

“Take your time,” Sherlock said as he shut the door behind them. Mary led them towards the sitting room, and Sherlock gravitated straight to the chair Molly knew was his favorite. Molly went to the other one, putting William on her lap. She began to smile at the little boy, and started playing a game of peek-a-boo with him. After a few moments of that Sherlock spoke. “You seem quite the natural.”

“Well, William is my quasi-nephew,” she said with a smile. “I adore him.”

“But I think you would do well with a child of your own,” he said.

“I hope I will,” she said with a smile. “Maybe one day we can see how we’d handle children.”

“As long as they aren’t multiples. One at a time will be fine.”

She looked at him. “You want more than one?” she asked curiously.

“I’d like a boy and a girl, ideally,” he said. “But two sounds like a manageable number, regardless of whether we have a boy and a girl or two girls or two boys.”

“If I didn’t have William on my lap I’d get up and kiss you,” she said with a wide smile.

“Well, you can do that later,” he said as they heard footsteps coming towards them. They both looked to the entryway and when John looked into the room Sherlock looked over at him. “Enjoying your beauty sleep, John?”

John’s eyes were wide at first and his jaw was hanging down, and then he got a wide smile on his face. “Oh, God, it’s good to see you,” he said, coming into the room. Sherlock stood up and John roughly embraced him. “I didn’t think you were ever coming back.”

“Well, things happened and we’ve been in the UK since the twenty-first,” he said, embracing his friend back. “We wanted to surprise you.”

“It’s the best surprise I could have gotten,” John said when he let go. Then he turned and looked at Molly. “Don’t think I’m not glad you’re here as well, Molly.”

“Oh, I know you’re happy to see me too,” she said with a chuckle as Mary got William off her lap. John came over and gave a her a warm hug, lifting her up slightly as he did, and then he set her back down. “Mary thought it’d be a nice Christmas surprise to have us both here now.”

“She was right about that,” he said, letting go of Molly and then going over to Mary. He leaned over and kissed her. “How long have you known?”

“November?” Mary said after a moment’s thought. “Originally they were coming on the 26th, but the plans changed a week or so ago and I knew they were going to try and be here in London on Christmas. The plan was for them to show up for Christmas supper but when I woke up and you were still asleep I thought it might be nice for them to be here first thing.”
“You are the best wife ever,” he said.

“I will remember you said that if we have a disagreement,” she said with a laugh. “Anyway, I thought it might be nice for us to open our gifts together. Sherlock, Molly, we have gifts for you mixed in with the ones under the tree. I put them there last night after John went to bed.”

“We have gifts as well,” Molly said, more for John’s benefit since Mary had seen the bag Sherlock had carried in. “For all three of you.”

“Excellent,” John said with a wide smile. “Let’s start opening them.” He took William from Mary and then took him over to the tree, setting him down on the ground and sitting next to him before pulling a gift closer.

“He’s been more excited about Christmas than William has been,” Mary said from next to Molly with an amused smile on her face. “I mean, I enjoy Christmas as well, but this is John’s favorite holiday. And the two of you being here now made it infinitely better for him, I think. Last year was decent, better than the year before, but I think he was saddened that this year you two weren’t going to be here.”

Molly nodded. Yes, the Christmas two years prior certainly had been a rather interesting holiday, and not in an especially good way. It had been nice to have a normal holiday the year after, but she hadn’t really enjoyed herself. She had been sad and lonely and miserable and it had actually been Christmas dinner with Mary and John and her other friends that had convinced her it was time to leave London behind. She had started looking for new employment on the first of January and had interviewed for her current post a week later. When she got the news she had gotten the post the post three weeks after that she’d begun making preparations to leave, wanting to start fresh. And now she was back, and things were drastically different in the best of ways, and she was thankful that she’d made that decision a year ago that it was time to do something different.

Soon she was caught up in opening the gifts and watching the people she cared about so much open theirs, and there was no more time to think about the past. She hadn’t expected quite so many gifts from John and Mary, but Mary had gotten her a charm bracelet with a heart charm and a Tower of London charm on it as well as a trilogy of books they had talked about trying to read when they had time, and John had gotten her a bottle of perfume she liked that wasn’t available in the States and a fountain pen set for her journal writing resolution. Even William had given her a gift, which was a framed picture of Molly’s favorite public garden in the city. And she also received the gift that Sherlock had ordered for her, which was a lovely full skirted wool silk trench coat in navy from Burberry. She had to admit, it was much nicer than the coat she had chosen in California and she was glad he had bought it for her.

When the presents were all opened Mary insisted she cook for all of them and that she do a fry-up with “actual British food,” as she said. Molly had to admit it would be nice to have all the favorites from home, and when it was all done and served up she realized she had really missed the food in London. It also made her realize there was a lot she had missed about London, from friends to the food to familiar sights. When John and Sherlock went off to catch up on their own, Mary joined Molly on the sofa. The two of them watched William play with the wrapping paper for a few minutes before Mary spoke. “Penny for your thoughts, love?”

Molly was quiet for a moment. “I didn’t realize I was homesick until I was home. I love California, I do, but it’s still not home yet, even though I’m trying very hard to make it that way. I didn’t think there was so much about London that I missed, and I’ve only been back a little over twelve hours. And I’m worried that when it’s time for me to go back to California I’ll change my mind and want to stay here.”
“Ah,” Mary said with a nod. “Well, London is a very lovely city. It will always be home. But you aren’t from London, right?”

“No,” Molly said. “I’m from Bozeat.”

“And that’s home too, isn’t it?” Mary asked.

“Yes, it is.”

“You spent years and years at both. You haven’t even been in California an entire year yet. Give it time and it will start to feel like home. Just remember, California will have Sherlock, and London won’t. If you do stay here you’ll probably have to end your relationship with him because I think he’s going to go back.”

Molly turned to look at her hands. “We almost ended things yesterday. We had a fight and he started to say something and I told him if he finished the sentence we were done.”

“What was he going to say?” she replied, surprised.

“He started to say that he regretted starting a relationship with me,” she said quietly. “Or rather that if I felt he didn’t know me that well then it was a mistake. It was a huge fight about something that I hadn’t even wanted to fight about. I had just wondered what it would be like for us out in public here, with him being so well known.”

Mary nodded. “I see. It is true he’s more of a celebrity here than elsewhere.”

“All I did was wonder about it and it just turned into a huge row. We’ve talked about it, made amends, but for a few minutes I really thought I was going to have my heart broken and be alone again, that all the good that’s happened since we started dating would be gone and would never come back.” She looked up at Mary. “I think if we had I would have come back here. I would have left and just said fuck it all to the life I had out there.”

“Oh, Molly,” Mary said, moving closer and hugging her friend. Molly hugged her back, resting her chin on Mary’s shoulder. “Sherlock can be an insufferable prat when he gets in the mood. You’ve known that for years, longer than I have and longer than John has. Every once in a while he’s going to slip, and he’ll say something mean and hurtful. But the fact it’s been so long since he’s been that way is a very good sign. He’s trying very hard to be a man that you want in your life, and I imagine it’s gotten easier as time has gone on. But he’s human, and every once in a while everyone’s ugly side comes out. It will happen to you too one day.”

“It never happened with any of my other boyfriends,” she pointed out.

“That’s because I don’t think you cared about them as much as you care about Sherlock. Not even Tom,” she said as she pulled away. “If you get passionate about something in an argument I can guarantee you’ll be every inch as mean and nasty as Sherlock can be. It’s human nature. When you’re being caused pain you want to make the thing or person causing you pain hurt just as much. The question becomes how much do you let out before you do irreparable damage to your relationship. Do you stop yourself from saying something you’ll truly regret or do you let it out and run the risk of ruining the relationship? That’s what you need to figure out.”

“I suppose,” she said. “Are you and John like that?”

“Not often, but sometimes,” she said. “If he wants to make a particularly vicious dig I can see him start to remind me that I shot Sherlock and I knew that would hurt him. And there are a few choice things I can say to him, about things he’s done. But we love each other more than we want to hurt
each other, so we stop ourselves from saying the truly awful things and we walk away to cool down. When we don’t want to say hurtful things anymore we talk about things and then we fix it and move on.”

“I don’t know if we actually fixed things, though,” she said.

“Well, does it really bother you that here he’s a celebrity? That people want to know every facet of his life?” Molly shook her head. “So if he doesn’t have a problem with the attention, and you don’t have a problem with it, then I would say that it’s not really an issue. That could always change, mind you, but I imagine if it does it will just reinforce the reasons why California is the ideal place for the two of you to live.”

“You’re right,” Molly said as she relaxed more. “I think I was just overthinking it.”

“I think you were too. And just remember, if something like that happens again, you have a three bedroom home and a relatively safe neighborhood. You don’t have to stay in the same room with him if you think you’ll veer towards saying things the both of you will regret. And if it happens again I don’t care what time it is. Call me and I’ll listen to you vent about it. I’m fairly sure my husband would be getting a phone call around the same time, at any rate, so if it’s late we’d both be awake shortly.”

Molly chuckled slightly. “I suppose that would be what happens.”

“Oh, there is no suppose. That would be exactly what happens,” Mary said with a laugh. “But I think it is fairly obvious to anyone with working eyes and ears that the two of you love each other very much. Hopefully there won’t be too many instances like yesterday. Just remember, Sherlock is trying to be the good man he knows he can be, the one who can be happy and frankly deserves the chance to be happy. He does it for himself just as much as he does it for you. Keep that in mind if you two have another spat, because it’s a very hard thing to do.”

“You did the same, didn’t you?” she asked.

“I did,” Mary replied with a nod. “I tried very hard to be the woman John needed and soon I became the woman I wanted to be, the woman John deserved. So I understand Sherlock better than most in this regard.” Then Mary leaned over and hugged her again. “It’s in the past now, and today is a day to be happy. I don’t want a repeat of last year, with you at the table with melancholy thoughts.”

Molly cringed slightly. “Was it that obvious?” she asked as she pulled away.

“To everyone except Sherlock,” she said with a smile. “That’s why none of the rest of us were surprised when you took the post in San Diego a month later, and why it came as such a huge shock to him.”

“He saw, but he didn’t observe,” Molly said thoughtfully.

“That is quite an apt description of the situation. And I think he’d be proud of you for using his analogy,” Mary said with a soft laugh. “But yes. He didn’t observe what was so plainly clear to everyone else last Christmas. But he did eventually figure it out, and then he went to bring you home, and the rest is history.” Then she looked over at William, who was chewing on the wrapping paper he’d been playing with. “And I think we’ve been ignoring William a little too much now. Let’s lavish the darling boy with attention, shall we?”

Molly smiled and nodded, glad she and Mary had had the chat. They occupied themselves with keeping William from getting into anything until it was time to begin to cook. Molly helped, glad to
be able to be an active part of preparing the dinner this year, and it seemed like no time had passed when the doorbell rang. She could hear Lestrade’s exclamation of surprise moments later and knew Sherlock had either been next to John when he answered the door or had answered it himself. Just a few minutes later she heard three sets of feet head towards the kitchen. “Molly! Definitely a sight for sore eyes,” she heard Lestrade say before she turned around.

“Oh, it’s lovely to see you, Greg,” she said, going over and embracing him. He too picked her up slightly, and she laughed as he set her back on her feet. “How are you doing?” she asked when he pulled away.

“Same old, same old,” he said. “Still keeping the city of London safe, still going home to an empty flat. Except now I have a dog, thanks to Sally’s having a few puppies. I swear, it does not have any intention of ever becoming housebroken.”

Molly chuckled. “I think that’s just how puppies are.”

“You look much better than your photos have showed,” Lestrade said, taking a good look at her. “I especially like the shorter hair.”

“Well, I made a change a few months ago and have stuck with it,” she said. “I just went a little bit shorter this last time. It’s still long enough to pull back at work, which was the thing I was most concerned about.”

“And when are you going back to work?” John asked.

“Well, the cast comes off three days after we go back to California, and then it’s a matter of going through physical therapy to relearn what I have to relearn before I can go back to work. So a month and a half to two and a half months, I think.”

“I know you will be ecstatic when it comes off,” Sherlock said with a grin. “Then you can take showers again, and do all the cooking instead of just stirring.”

“Oh, doing both those things again will be lovely,” she said, giving him a smile in return. “I’m just worried how it’s actually going to look. I know I’ll have scars from the surgery and I don’t want my arm to look hideous.”

“Well, you’ll have one long scar where they inserted the rods,” John said. “The other scars won’t be very big, I think, except maybe where the bone protruded through the arm. But with the way surgery is done nowadays it could be barely noticeable.”

“I hope so,” she said.

“If it’s not, there’s always ways to reduce the appearance of them,” Sherlock said. “You’ll have them but they can be less noticeable. And as a last resort there’s cosmetic surgery.”

“That is true,” she said. Then she turned to Lestrade. “But really, Greg, we should catch up. I don’t talk to you nearly enough.”

“Sherlock, I’m enlisting you to help me prepare supper. You too, John,” Mary said.

“Very well,” John said with an exaggerated sigh before he winked at Molly. Molly giggled and then he turned to Sherlock. “Come on. You can prove to Mary once and for all you actually know how to cook.”

Sherlock nodded, then moved over to Molly and gave her a quick kiss. “I’m sorry I’ve been ignoring
“It’s all right. Spend as much time with John as you want,” she said with a smile. He gave her a grin back and then made his way to Mary and John. Molly turned to Lestrade, who had a wide grin on his face. “What?” she asked as the two of them moved towards the sitting room.

“I just never thought I’d willingly see Sherlock show affection, or smile quite that way, that’s all,” he said. “You have really been a good influence on him.”

“I suppose I have,” she said, heading towards the sofa. When they got to it they both sat down and faced each other. “I really like the way he is now.”

“I think we all do,” Lestrade said with a nod. “He always had the potential but never quite reached it, and it seems that because of you he finally has. I think that’s a brilliant thing.”

“I refuse to take all the credit,” she replied. “He did it because he wanted to, and not just to make me happy. He wanted to be happy.”

“And is he?”

“Yes, I’m fairly sure he is,” she said with a nod.

“And are you happy?” he asked.

“For the most part, yes. I’m a tiny bit homesick right now, so that’s clouding things.”

“I’d love to live in California,” he replied. “Somewhere where it’s warm and I don’t have to dress in bloody layers all through the winter. And where there are decent beaches. Not that we have bad beaches, but they aren’t as nice as the ones you must live by.”

“Actually, I live closer to the bay than a beach,” she said with a laugh. “There are beaches on Coronado Island, but normally if we want to go to a beach we drive north to Oceanside or Encinitas. But if you really want to you’re more than welcome to come stay with us for a bit. We do have a guest bedroom in our home.”

He rubbed his chin slightly. “After New Years I get some extra vacation time,” he said thoughtfully. “And I haven’t taken a vacation in years, to be honest. I have time saved up. Maybe end of January I could arrange something?”

“Well, the water at the beach will be too cold to go in, but it’s generally pretty warm these days. It’s like it’s not even winter,” she replied. “That would be a good time to come visit.”

“Then I’ll see what I can do. But I’ll have to amuse myself, won’t I? I mean, you’ll be at work then, right?”

She thought for a moment. “Probably not then. I may still be in physical therapy. I’m not getting the cast off until the 12th so we’ll see how much I need then. I’ll definitely need to work on rebuilding my muscles, I know that much, because I need to use both hands and arms to move the bodies onto my table and into the refrigeration unit. So I’ll probably still be working on that if you come visit at the end of next month.”

“Then we’ll aim for that,” he said with a nod. “How long are you and Sherlock here till?”

“The eighth. We’ll fly back that evening and get to San Diego on the ninth. That was the one perk of me getting injured, that we could plan a nice long trip. We were in Cardiff for a few days and arrived
here yesterday afternoon. Sherlock was doing something for his brother.” She leaned back in her seat slightly.

“I’ve been there a few times,” he said. “It’s not a bad place at all.”

“No it’s not, but I definitely think London is better than Cardiff. I’m going to take some time going to my favorite places while I’m here, reacquainting myself.” She smiled at him. “You should join me one day. Or at least for a few hours. We could go get a pint at the pub we went to when we’d finish a long day at work.”

“I would be game for an entire day,” he said with a grin of his own. “I had to twist some arms and make a lot of promises to get this evening off, but my regular day off is coming up on the thirtieth. I wouldn’t mind spending the day with you, provided I don’t get called in. Sherlock too, if he wants.”

“We’ll see how much time he’s going to spend with John while we’re here, but I think we could convince him to join us for a little bit,” she said. “Once we go back to California he won’t be available again until his break in the spring, and that’s provided he doesn’t have assignments to complete. The next time after that will be in May, I believe.”

“I definitely would prefer it if he’d spend time with John than me. John’s taken him being gone hard, and I think they both need it,” he said. “But if he joins us for dinner that evening I think that would be sufficient.”

“Then I’ll ask him,” she said with a nod.

“It was quite a shock seeing him here,” he said with a chuckle. “Especially when I saw how he was dressed. I imagined he’d be in his immaculate suit. It was quite strange seeing him in denim trousers and a T-shirt.”

“I’m used to it now,” she replied. “He’ll wear a suit for special occasions, but generally he wears what he’s wearing today. It’s simply too hot to wear a suit all the time in San Diego unless you’re inside where it’s air conditioned.”

“I noticed you look different as well,” he said. “Aside from the hair. You have a very polished look.”

“That has something to do with the fact Mycroft paid for the outfit.” She chuckled at the look on his face. “Our luggage got lost between Dublin and Cardiff, so Mycroft offered to replace it. I took advantage of the fact that I could buy things of higher quality without Sherlock footing the bill. I mean, I make a decent sum of money, but I’m frugal for the most part. Most of the very nice pieces of clothing I have at home were splurges because I couldn’t talk myself out of getting it, or they were gifts from Sherlock. So it was nice to be able to replace my wardrobe with items that I liked that were high quality.”

“I can imagine,” he said. “I wonder if my luggage gets lost on the way to see you and Sherlock if I could convince someone to do the same for me.”

“You wouldn’t need to do much to convince Sherlock,” she said. “In fact, he’d probably insist on taking you to Horton Plaza to replace all of it before you stepped foot in our home. And if I’m there when you arrive I may insist we go anyway to get you warm weather clothing. Do you even own short sleeved T-shirts?”

“A few, though I usually sleep in them,” he said. “I do have some warm weather clothing, but not a lot. I think stopping to get more would be a very good idea.”

“Sherlock made it two days in the clothing he had before he got clothing that wasn’t quite so hot,”
she said. “I made it three weeks, but that was because I had to wait for my first paycheck to get some clothing. I spent more on furniture and food than I had intended.”

“Is it very expensive out there?” he asked.

“It depends on what you’re paying for,” she said, tilting her head slightly. “On the whole it’s slightly less expensive than London, aside from rent and home costs. Our new home was less expensive than many others in the area, but it still cost a pretty penny. The other ones were all in the million dollar ranges, and we don’t even live in a very upscale part of the county.”

Lestrade’s eyes were wide. “A million dollars for a home?”

Molly nodded. “Yes. The one we got ended up costing around $600,000. So it was expensive, but when you see it you’ll see we got a very good deal on it. I can easily imagine it being more expensive.”

“It must be very nice for Sherlock to have that much money,” he said.

“It is,” she said. “Though once I get back to work and begin making my full pay again you’ll find I make a decent sum as well. And I have started investing some of it. Sherlock helped me start by introducing me to the person who he uses, and I’m hoping I’ll see some returns soon.”

“I’m grateful he helped me the way he did,” he replied. “My daughter had her heart set on going to that school, but tuition for international students is like having to give up both arms and both legs, and she wasn’t getting much in the way of scholarships. Having him pay for all the costs plus room and board was an immeasurable help. And she absolutely loves it there. She’s staying with friends in New York right now, but she’ll be home in less than a week for the rest of her break. It will be good to see her again.”

“I’m glad she’s happy,” she said with a smile. “And we’ve spent so much time talking about me that I really have no idea how you’re doing. So tell me about everything I’ve missed, all right?”

“All right,” he said, and then he launched into telling her about work and the friends at Scotland Yard she had left behind. At one point Mary came out to see if they wanted something to drink, and then they joined everyone else in the kitchen, all of them chatting about what had gone on since Sherlock had left for California. Dinner was nearly ready to be served when the doorbell rang again. “I bet that’s Mrs. Hudson,” Lestrade said.

“I definitely think Sherlock should answer the door again,” Mary said. “And Molly too.”

“I could agree to that,” Sherlock said with a nod, looking at Molly, who nodded as well. The two of them left the kitchen and when they were in the hallway he reached over for her hand. “I’m slightly nervous.”

“I am too,” she said with a smile, taking his hand in hers. “But you know she’s going to be pleased.”

“Yes, I know,” he replied. They made their way to the door and Sherlock unlocked it and then opened it. “Happy Christmas,” he said.

Mrs. Hudson had wide eyes for a moment, and then her face broke into the widest grin Molly had ever seen cross her face. “Sherlock! Molly! Oh, it’s so wonderful to see you both!” she said, setting her bag of gifts down and embracing Sherlock.

“It’s wonderful to see you, too,” he said, embracing her back.
When she pulled away from him she went and gave Molly a warm hug, which she readily returned. “When did you get in?” Mrs. Hudson asked when she pulled away.

“Yesterday,” Molly said. “We planned to surprise all of you.”

“Oh, it’s such a wonderful surprise,” she said. “I’m afraid I don’t have gifts for the two of you. I sent them off in the post a week ago.”

“It’s all right. We’ll get them when we get home,” Sherlock said. “But we have some for you.” He moved out of the way so Mrs. Hudson could come in, and when she had he shut the door behind her. “Lestrade’s already here, and supper is almost ready.”

“Then I arrived just in time,” she said with a warm smile. “It really is so lovely to see both of you. And you both look very different. I never imagined a day where I would see you in denim trousers, Sherlock.”

“I’ve been wearing them most of the year so I’m used to them now,” he said. “They’re much more comfortable to wear than my suits in California.”

“You’ll have to tell me all about what it’s like there,” Mrs. Hudson said, taking the arm Sherlock offered her.

“I promise I will tell you anything you want to know,” he said with a grin. The three of them made their way into the kitchen and Mary offered Mrs. Hudson a glass of wine. Once she had it and Molly had gotten hers refilled they made their way to the table and Sherlock looked over at her. “All right. What would you like to hear about first?”

“How is your schooling going?” she asked.

“All As this past term,” he said. “I’ve found I enjoy the subject matter and the professors are more than competent. I’m learning a great deal. I have one more semester of classes to take to learn new information in the field that’s come up since I graduated from university, but next year I’ll go more into the actual practice of what I’m learning.”

“Are you planning on going as far as you can, education wise?” Lestrade asked.

He nodded. “Provided I do well in the program I’m currently in, there’s the chance I can get into the doctorate program at the same university.”

“I hope you’re able to,” Mrs. Hudson said. “Even if that does mean there’s little chance of you coming back.”

“There’s always time in between terms,” Sherlock said. “But I’ve found I prefer living in California. There’s an anonymity there that is refreshing, and it’s nice being somewhere warm. Plus I don’t think Molly wants to leave, and I find I don’t want to be here if she decides to stay.”

“Oh, I quite enjoy California,” she said. “But we can try and come visit more frequently. You have spring break this term, and then there’s the summer break, unless you do the orchestra again.”

“I was considering it, but I will admit the appeal of coming back here is strong,” he said.

“Next time you visit you had best not make it a surprise,” Mrs. Hudson said. “And you have to come visit me frequently. Both of you.”

“We will. I promise,” Sherlock said with a nod. “And we can visit frequently now. We’re here until
the eighth this trip.”
“Then I insist you join me for tea tomorrow,” she said.

“Just because you insist,” he replied with a smile.

“Do you smile like that all the time?” Lestrade asked. “Because I’m not used to that. I’m used to the smiles that veer from fake and insincere to downright scary.”

“Yes, he does,” Molly said with a slight chuckle. “It is much nicer on his face, isn’t it?”

“It’s going to take some getting used to, I think,” Mary said. “But I think we can all agree that they are a much better sight on his face.”

“Oh yes,” Mrs. Hudson said. “Of course, I’m used to them. Sherlock knew better than to give me one of those smiles. I wanted the real thing.”

“No one refuses you,” John said with a grin. “Not even Sherlock at his most contrary.”

“Well, that’s because she’s like a mother to me,” Sherlock said.

“A mother you should certainly call more,” Mrs. Hudson replied. “Do you call your own mother this infrequently?”

“I call you more than her,” he pointed out.

“Are you going to see her while you’re here?” John asked.

Sherlock nodded. “Yes. I think she wants to get to know Molly better, which I will admit unnerves me.”

“Oh, we’ve chatted on the phone plenty of times,” Molly said, waving her hand slightly.

Sherlock looked surprised. “How did you get her phone number?”

“I didn’t. Your brother gave her mine. I’ll admit I was terrified when I realized who it was on the other end of the conversation, but the first thing she did was thank me for convincing you to stay in California. She said she worried less because you seemed more content. Then she began to give me the third degree.” Molly took a sip of her wine. “I hadn’t told you we’d chatted?”

“No, you hadn’t,” he said.

“I thought I had. We only started talking a few weeks ago, though, after we moved in together.”

Sherlock was quiet for a moment. “I should be upset about that, but strangely I’m not. I think if the first time you two really talked had been during this trip I’d be much more nervous. At least I know the two of you get along well.”

“We get along quite splendidly,” she said with a smile. “So you have nothing to worry about.”

“Now things in my last conversation with her are starting to make sense, though. She did seem overly familiar with you.” He shook his head. “Have you spoken with my father yet?”

“Once. He seems very nice.”

“I’m sure this is going to be an interesting supper,” he said with a slight sigh. “Probably just as
interesting as the one I’m going to have with Mycroft.”

“You’re willingly sharing a meal with your brother?” John asked, surprised.

“Molly insisted,” he said with a nod. “He’s not sure it will end well either.”

“I’m not asking for miracles, Sherlock,” Molly said. “Just a civil supper between the three of us. And since neither of you want to make me unhappy I’m sure it will go quite well.”

“I really hope you’re right,” he said. Then he turned back to Mrs. Hudson. “Is there anything else you want to know about?”

“If you and Molly are living together that means your relationship is quite serious, yes?” she asked.

“Yes,” Sherlock said slowly. Molly eyed the woman slightly because she had a very good idea of the direction this conversation was about to take. “We are quite serious.”

“How serious?” she asked.

Sherlock looked over at Molly. “You might as well get used to that,” she said with a smile before having more of her wine. “I’ve already gotten the same line of questioning from your mother. If you haven’t yet I’m sure you will by the end of our holiday.”

“Well, as it stands now we’re simply living together,” he said to Mrs. Hudson. “At some point there will most likely be an engagement. We’ll see.”

“Good. If you let her get away I’ll be very cross,” Mrs. Hudson said with an emphatic nod. “I may even feel the need to take steps.”

“That would be a sight,” John said with a grin.

“Well, regardless of whether there is an engagement or not, Sherlock and I do want to have a long future together,” Molly said. “So you don’t need to worry about that, Mrs. Hudson. I will take good care of him, and I’m sure he will take good care of me.”

“She’s so much better for you than the other woman was,” Mrs. Hudson said to Sherlock.

“That relationship was a sham,” Sherlock pointed out. “And remember, Molly was engaged to Tom at the time. So even if I had wanted to pursue her, I would have had to ruin her relationship first, and I don’t think she would have forgiven me for that.”

“Oh, you are absolutely correct about that,” Molly said with a nod. “I may have murdered you if you’d done that.”

“If you did what we’ve discussed your odds of doing so without getting caught would be nearly 100%,” he said thoughtfully.

“Yes, but getting access to the acid would have been the tricky part,” Molly said. “And where would I have dismembered your body?”

“You could have taken me to an abandoned warehouse by the river,” Sherlock said.

She thought for a moment. “That’s a good idea, but the real question becomes how would I have gotten you there? It’s not as though I can drag a dead body in a cab. And you would have been suspicious if I said I wanted to meet you at an abandoned warehouse. You are not an idiot.”
“Perhaps you could have drugged me,” he said.

“That wouldn’t work, though,” she said. “A cab driver would remember taking a woman and an unconscious man to the warehouses. No, I would have to involve someone else. Someone stronger who doesn’t ask a lot of questions, who I would trust implicitly.” She paused and then turned to Mary. “Mary, would you have helped?”

“Not if we weren’t planning for John to be next,” Mary said with an amused smile.

“See? Brilliant plan as it was, it never would have worked,” she said, turning back to Sherlock. “So I would have either stopped talking to you or snapped and shot you dead in cold blood.”

“You’d have to have much better aim than you do,” Sherlock said.

“Which means you’d still be alive and Greg most likely would have had to arrest me for attempted murder,” she said.

“Only if I actually told him, though. I could have called John and had him patch me up and not told anyone but him that you’d shot me.”

“Don’t bring me into this hypothetical murder/attempted murder situation,” John said, raising his hands up.

“But you would have done it if I’d asked, right?” Sherlock asked him.

John stared at him and then hung his head. “You know damn well I would,” he said with a sigh.

“So there. You would get your revenge and no one except the three of us would be the wiser,” Sherlock said to Molly.

“Except Molly is one of the worst liars any of us know,” Mary said. “I’m still outright shocked she lied about you really being alive. The guilt would have gnawed at her, and I could see her going to Greg and confessing. But I could also see you lying through your teeth that she was the one who shot you, Sherlock.” She paused. “Though I could see the two of you beginning a relationship after that, because Molly would feel completely guilty about what she did and you would use that to your advantage. Whether it was a healthy relationship would be a completely different matter, though.”

“I think I prefer the way it actually worked out,” Molly said with a smile. “Less blood and violence that way.”

“That is true,” Sherlock said, tilting his head slightly. “And it wouldn’t be a relationship started by subterfuge and guilt. That particular basis would probably lead to a resolution of the relationship more quickly.”

“Exactly,” Molly said with an approving nod.

“You two are definitely meant to be together,” Lestrade said with a laugh. “And to add my two cents, hypothetically I would have talked to Sherlock off the record, and when he lied to me I would have dropped it right there and let the two of you sort it out.”

“And this is why I enjoy doing things with all of you,” Mrs. Hudson said with a smile. “There are always the most fascinating conversations.”

“Well, I am glad you have enjoyed our hypothetical musings,” Sherlock said with a grin. “Let’s just hope they never come to fruition.”
“They won’t,” Molly said with a laugh. “I promise.”

A timer went off in the kitchen and Mary tuned to look. “Supper’s ready now, everyone. John, be a dear and get William? I’ll start bringing everything out.”

“I’ll help,” Molly said, setting her glass of wine on the table and getting up. The two women made their way to the kitchen as John made his way to William’s room. “I think that was definitely one of the more interesting conversations I’ve had.”

“It definitely showed that you and Sherlock are well suited for each other,” Mary said with a soft laugh. “You know each other very well.”

“We really do,” Molly said. “And I’m glad for that.”

“I think we all are.” They got into the kitchen and began to transfer the roasted goose to a serving platter and the rest of the food to serving bowls before taking it out to everyone. When all the food was on the table Mary sat down at one end with William as John sat on the other. “I think this calls for a speech of some sort,” Mary said as Molly sat down next to Sherlock. “John?”

John stood up. “I think Christmas is the best holiday of the year. I’ve thought that ever since I was a boy. There have been Christmases that were wonderful, and Christmases that were terrible. But it will always be a special day to spend with the people you love most. And I’m quite thankful that this year all of the people I care the most about are here under the same roof. So here’s to one of the best Christmases I think we’ve all had in the last few years.” He lifted up his glass. “To a terrific Christmas.”

“To Christmas,” everyone else chorused.

“Now then,” John said, rubbing his hands together. “Time to carve the goose.” And with that, John picked up the carving utensils and began to cut into the goose while everyone else began to serve up the side dishes, passing them around the table so everyone could get what they wanted. When enough of the meat had been carved everyone passed their plate up to John and he gave them some of the meat before passing their plate back. The food was absolutely delicious, and sharing the meal with some of her dearest friends made it an even better experience. Soon it was time for the crackers and Molly proudly woke her paper crown on her head, and the people at the table even convinced Sherlock to do the same.

Slowly there was less eating and more talking, and soon enough Sherlock, Greg and Mrs. Hudson left the table to get the gifts they were giving while Mary, John and Molly began to take the food back into the kitchen to put away. When they were done everyone went back to the table and gifts were exchanged. They all stayed and chatted for an hour after that before Lestrade’s mobile went off and he had to leave. Mary told him to wait long enough to take some leftovers back with him, and soon after that Mrs. Hudson made her goodbyes. Once William was taken back to his room to take a nap the four adults that were left went into the kitchen and began to put the meal away, chatting as they did. Molly volunteered to help with the dishes but Mary said no, that she and Sherlock should spend some time together on their own tonight. The two of them said their own good-byes and left the home, heading out onto the pavement and pulling their coats tighter around themselves.

“I think that went very well,” Molly said.

“I think it did as well,” Sherlock said with a nod. “I’m glad we were there most of the day. I didn’t realize just how much I missed being in the same room with my friends.”

“I know. I missed it too.” She reached over for his hand. “We’re still going back to California,
“No, you haven’t,” he said with a grin in return. “I think you should do that as soon as we’ve put our things away.”

“I can definitely do that,” she said before motioning for him to lean over. He did, and she met him halfway and kissed him softly. “Happy Christmas, Sherlock,” she murmured against his lips when she pulled away.

“Happy Christmas, Molly,” he said quietly in response, and when he pulled away more he put an arm around her shoulders and she snuggled in next to him. This was definitely an improvement on the last few Christmases, she decided, and while it still wasn’t over she didn’t see the evening ending on a sour note, and she was quite glad for that.
Chapter 34

Sherlock had gotten tickets for a play at the Barbican Centre on the 29th, and while it took some shifting John traded for the day off so he and Sherlock could watch William and catch up while Mary and Molly took a girl's day out. They'd started off with brunch at Balthazar, which had quite impressed Mary, and then gone shopping to get Mary the best outfit for the evening since Molly had brought hers from California. They'd settled on a black one shoulder A-line dress with gorgeous obsidian earrings and a matching bracelet, and once that was settled they went to the Gary Ingham Lifestyle Salon & Spa to pamper themselves. They had separate rooms for the body treatments and massages, but they finished at the same time to end up at the salon together.

“Molly, I swear, I will tell John that a trip here will be a suitable present every time a gift giving occasion comes up,” Mary said as the two women were taken to chairs next to each other. “The facial and the Chakra Balancing massage were absolutely splendid.”

“And we still have a manicure and pedicure coming up,” Molly said with a smile. “But I think it's time for a change, so I may not have enough time to truly enjoy one.”

“Oh?” Mary asked.

“I'm colouring my hair today,” she replied. “I thought it might be interesting to go to a darker shade of brown. I did the sensitivity test two days ago so that's what I'll be having done.”

“I think you'll look smashing,” she said with a smile. “I know I've grown my hair out but I miss having very short hair. I think I'll go back to that look.”

“Is John going to enjoy that?” she asked.

“I think he will, mostly because I won't be complaining about my hair being at the awful length where it's too short to pull back but too long to not bother me. And remember, I had short hair when we were dating. I know he finds that attractive.”

“Good point,” Molly said with a slight nod. “I know Sherlock approves of just about anything I do with my hair, so long as it's at least between chin and shoulder length for the same complaints. Plus I personally think he enjoys my hair when I decide to curl it, so having it long really shows the curls.”

“Are you doing that tonight?” Mary asked.

“Yes. I normally have something called a Brazilian Blowout done to keep it straight, but for special occasions I curl it. Tonight qualifies as a special occasion.”

“It's nice getting to go on a grown-up date with my husband and friends,” she said as the stylist began moving her head to start cutting it. “Ever since we had William they've been few and far between. We're just so busy and we don't have the energy.”

“I know the feeling, in a way,” Molly said. “This entire last term I spent most evenings in Sherlock's apartment on his sofa while he was studying. Even on his weekends we'd usually only go out Saturday evening, if he wasn't bone tired. And Sundays were spent cooking meals to get him through the week. I think it will be easier now that we live together and he's taking less classes next term.”

“I can't imagine attempting to balance school and a relationship when you're taking eighteen units,” Mary said. “He's a very lucky man to be dating you.”
“I don't need constant attention,” Molly said, blushing slightly. “I've spent a lot of my life on my own and I can occupy myself quite well. And I understand what it's like to do intensive schooling. Medical school and a residency take up an awful lot of time. It's not quite like Grey's Anatomy, after all.”

“Yes. I imagine Hollywood has very different ideas of what training to be a doctor is actually like,” Mary said. She was quiet for a moment. “Are you happier with Sherlock than you were with Tom?”

“I am,” Molly said. “I think that when you consider everything Sherlock and I had gone through before he came out to California he knows me quite well. He took the time to learn before he left the first time, when he was hiding out at my home. And I think he doesn't want me to change into someone more ideal. He loves me just the way I am. Tom didn't, not really.”

“I saw that in your relationship. I was always surprised you didn't try and make him more like Sherlock.”

“I loved Tom as he was. I mean, when it came to stylistic choices then yes, I may have nudged him to look like Sherlock. But personality wise, for the longest time I thought he was quite a good choice without wanting to make any changes to him. I didn't really see that he didn't quite think the same of me.”

“I could see he was jealous of Sherlock the day of the press conference, after Sherlock and John stopped the terrorist plot,” Mary said. “You seemed oblivious to it, though.”

“I suppose I was. I didn't really notice until he told me he didn't want me associating with Sherlock so much. I mean, it wasn't as though I was constantly popping out to get a bite or have coffee with Sherlock. I only really saw him at St. Bart's. But Tom still thought it was too much.” She shrugged just a bit. “Sherlock would never attempt to tell me who I can associate with or how often I can see them. I mean, I spent yesterday with Sally and he didn't bat an eye, and you know the two of them aren't exactly friendly. And Phillip asked me to lunch tomorrow and Sherlock didn't even make one snide remark when I told him about it.”

“Really? That's quite surprising,” Mary said in a shocked tone. “Are we absolutely sure Sherlock didn't get replaced by a pod person while he was in California?”

“He did not, I promise,” Molly said with a laugh. “I just think he's thought long and hard about the type of man he wants to be and he's changed accordingly.”

“I'm fairly sure he also considers that he should be the man you want him to be,” Mary said. “I honestly think he was already in love with you before he set foot on the plane to leave. It just took him a long while to realize it. If he wasn't I think he would have tried harder to convince you to come back to London. He saw you wanted to be there so he didn't push as much because eventually being there made you happy, and he wants you to be happy.”

“He does, doesn't he?” Molly said thoughtfully. “But I want him to be happy, too.”

“Oh, love, trust me. He's happy. It is very plain on his face,” Mary said. “Is he really not recognized there?”

“Sometimes, but not often. Not to the extent he is here. I mean, we were on a tabloid cover two days ago when he took me to lunch while he was helping Mycroft. That doesn't happen in California. He's generally left alone there, and I know he greatly enjoys that. And I do too, to be honest.”

“I saw that cover. I think there's going to be some rampant speculation about you for a time here.”
“Yes, well, I did have one rather cheeky person ask me to confirm whether Janine's accounts were true,” she said, grumbling slightly. “But I answered it with a smile and said I never kiss and tell.”

“Well, to be fair, she made quite a bit of it up,” Mary said. “So far as I know, there was only the once.”

“Yes, he told me that,” she said. “Though...she really wasn't off the mark.”

Mary laughed. “I might actually tell her that.”

“Oh God, don't,” Molly said, her eyes wide as she turned to Mary. Her stylist tut-tutted and Molly moved her head back. “Even though it wasn't all it seemed I really don't want our relationships with Sherlock to be compared any more than they already are.”

“Well, if it makes you feel better, she's quite happy with her cottage and her business and her new husband, so I don't think she'll be jealous of anything,” Mary said.

“She got married?” Molly asked.

“Yes,” Mary said. “Last month. I was invited to attend, though I wasn't in the wedding party. It was fairly obvious she's madly in love with the man.”

“Well, that's good. I'm glad.”

“You know, she is happy for the two of you,” Mary said. “I know you aren't especially fond of her, but she isn't a bad person. I think she was using Sherlock as much as he was using her, but she grew to be fond of him. I mean, if she wasn't she could have said truly awful things about him in the tabloids. But even though she said he was a prat she didn't say anything very damaging about him. So just remember that.”

“I will,” Molly said. She was quiet for a few minutes. “I'm more afraid I'll run into Tom than her, to be honest. Or friends of his who will say things about how I ended up with the man I wanted the whole time I was with Tom. I don't want anyone to cause a scene.”

“That would be problematic,” Mary said with a frown. “Especially since the tabloids made it very clear the two of you are in a relationship. But I don't think it will happen. London is a large city.”

“Why do I get the feeling you just jinxed it?” Molly asked with a wan smile.

“I did not,” Mary said. “You'll see. You'll get through your entire holiday and he won't turn up once. And then you'll go back to California and you won't be anywhere near him until the next time you come visit.”

“If you're sure,” Molly said.

“I am. Trust me on this,” Mary said.

“All right,” Molly said.

“Let's get your mind off of this and talk about other things,” Mary said. “I want to know everything I can about that wedding you and Sherlock went to. Those grooms are absolutely delightful when I chat with them on Facebook and I want all the details.”

“Oh, there's a lot to tell,” Molly said, her smile becoming wider. She launched into telling Mary everything as the stylists continued to work on them. Mary was finished first but her stylist let her
stay in the chair as Molly's stylist continued to work. When the start of the coloring was done the two of them went to get their manicures and pedicures, and then when they were finished it was time for the coloring to be finished and Molly's hair to be styled. By the time they were done it was nearly four, and they parted ways to go change and get ready for the evening.

Molly made her way to the Savoy and went up to her room, expecting to find the room empty. When she opened the door to the suite, however, she found two men and a small child there. She smiled as John looked up. “You look smashing,” he said with a grin.

“Why thank you,” she said with a smile as she took off her coat. “Your wife does as well.”

“I can't wait to see it,” he said with a wide grin as he picked William up. “And I take it this is a sign I need to get William back home as soon as possible.”

“It should all be taken care of by now,” Sherlock said. “But I doubt you'll get there first.”

“Ahh, well,” John said with a shrug. “As long as she likes it that's what matters.” He went to the pram which had been by the door and put William in it. “I'll see you both in a few hours, then.”

“Bye, John,” Molly said, her voice tinged with confusion. John gave them a wave and then opened the door and left. She turned to Sherlock at that point and then moved towards him, sitting down on the sofa next to him. “What's been taken care of?”

“Mary wanted an upgrade done to the kitchen. John told me about it on Christmas and we arranged for it to be done while the two of you were out. We just weren't able to stay in the home while it was being worked on. William was getting underfoot so we came back here.”

“What kind of upgrade?” she asked.

“New appliances,” Sherlock replied, putting an arm around her shoulders. “There was room for a larger refrigerator and the stove was old so that was replaced.”

“Oh, she will definitely enjoy that,” Molly said with a smile.

“I hope so.” Sherlock studied her for a moment. “Your hair is much darker than usual,” he said finally.

“Yes. I coloured it,” she said. “Do you like it?”

“I do, actually,” he said. “Is this something you're thinking about keeping up?”

“I think so, yeah,” she said with a smile. “I almost wish I'd thought to have it done before the wedding. I like this color a lot. And I like the way they did it, so I need to find an Aveda salon in San Diego to go to to keep it up.”

“That shouldn't be too hard,” he said.

“No, it won't be,” she said with a smile. “But I'm glad you like it. I thought you might have thought it was too dark.”

“The dark brown makes you look quite alluring,” he said. “Especially with it being curled.”

“You really do like it when I curl my hair, don't you?” she asked, leaning in.

“I do,” he said as he did the same, kissing her a moment later. He didn't tangle his fingers in her hair like she usually did, probably because he didn't want the curls ruined, she thought to herself. She
pulled away from the kiss and got off the sofa before straddling his lap a moment later and looking down at him. He began to run a hand up and down her back. “We have to get ready and if we do anything your hair is going to get ruined.”

“Well, if you can resist the urge to touch my hair I can still kiss you for a little while,” she said. “And if you can't then it's okay if my hair is a little messy.”

“I'm just thinking I might not want to stop when I should,” he said.

“Delayed gratification,” she said.

“Psychology,” he said, making a slight face. “We've had this conversation before.”

“And I win every time,” she said with a soft laugh. “But when the date is over I'm all yours and it won't matter if you mess up my hair.”

“You do realize I'm going to end up having to take a cold shower,” he said.

“I will make it up to you when we get back here,” she said, moving her face so her lips hovered over his. “I promise.”

“I'll hold you to that,” he said quietly before he kissed her again. It was a very passionate kiss, one of the types that would normally be considered toe curling, and she knew he had done that on purpose. He could go take a cold shower to calm down but she couldn't without ruining her hair. But if he wanted to play that game she could retaliate. She pulled away from the kiss and then gave him a grin before getting off of him completely. “That is unfair.”

“Oh, you're trying to get me hot and bothered, and it worked, so I'm going to go soak in the bath until the absolute last minute so you can't take a shower,” she said with a grin.

“This is quite possibly the most evil thing you've ever done,” he said, though he did look rather impressed.

“You were going to try and get me to change my mind,” she said.

“I bet I still can,” he said as he stood up. She stopped moving and turned to face him as he got closer, framing her face once he stood in front of her and kissing her just the same way he had a moment ago. She felt herself start to go weak in the knees as she grabbed the front of his shirt to keep herself standing up. He continued to kiss her until she pulled away to catch her breath. “Well?” he asked quietly.

“You paid for the trip to the spa, and if you're the one who ruins my hair then it didn't cost me anything,” she said with a grin before she kissed him again. She pulled him as close to her as she could get and he let go of her face, moving his hands to the small of her back to keep her close. He began to move them towards the bedroom and they were almost there when there was a knock at the door. He pulled away and turned to look at the door. “Were you expecting anyone?” she asked him.

“No, I wasn't,” he said with a frown when he looked back at her. “Were you?” She shook her head, and he sighed and let go of her, and the two of them headed towards the door. Sherlock got there first and opened it, groaning slightly when he saw who was there. “Mycroft, you told me the business was finished.”

Mycroft was quiet for a moment. “Whatever plans you had you need to reschedule them,” he said quietly. “We're needed at the hospital.”
“Who’s hurt?” Sherlock asked, his eyes wide.

“Father. Someone tried to rob them and he was shot. Mother told me to come get you personally.”

Sherlock opened the door more. “Come in and give me a few minutes. I need to call John and then grab my coat.”

“Very well,” Mycroft said with a nod as he came into the room. Sherlock moved away from the door and went towards the bedroom as Molly shut the door behind Mycroft. “I'm sorry this puts a damper on your plans.”

“It's all right,” she said. “This is important.”

“Sherlock is not terribly close to our parents, but he does care about them, in his own way,” he said. “If it is the worst case scenario, he should be there.”

“Of course,” she said with a nod. “I can stay here, or go to John and Mary's.”

“I had assumed you would come too,” Mycroft said with a frown. “He might need you to lean on.”

“I thought only family would be allowed,” she said.

“As far as I am concerned tonight you are family, and I will throw the weight of the government around if anyone wants to challenge me on that point,” he said. “Between our parents Sherlock is closer to our father than he is our mother, even though she wishes it was otherwise. I do not want to think about how he will react if the worst happens. If you're there I will feel better.”

“I understand,” she said with a nod. “I'll go with you both.”

“Thank you.” Molly went and got her coat and slipped it on before getting her handbag. Sherlock came out a few minutes later and went to his coat, slipping it on wordlessly. “There is a car waiting downstairs,” Mycroft said.

Sherlock nodded and reached over for Molly's good hand, and she squeezed it tightly as the two of them moved to the door. Sherlock opened it and they stepped out with Mycroft right behind them and they began to head towards the lift. They stayed quiet until they got inside the lift, and then Sherlock spoke. “Does this have anything to do with Moriarty or Magnussen?” he asked his brother.

“As far as we have determined it does not,” Mycroft said. “There has been an uptick in break-ins in the area and while the thieves were usually careful to be in and out while the houses were unoccupied this time Father and Mother came back before they were finished. Father knocked one of them out before someone else shot him and then roughed him up quite badly. Mother was hurt as well.”

Molly could see Sherlock's jaw was rigid. “And who's in charge of the case?” he asked when he spoke again.

“DI Masterson,” Mycroft said. “He's competent. And before you ask no, you may not assist. He is not a particular fan of yours.”

“Of course he wouldn't be. I told him his wife was having an affair with the nanny and he didn't believe me so I told him how to prove it without a shadow of a doubt,” he said. “He found it an insult to his manhood that his wife would prefer a woman to him. He slugged me in the face before he verified it. But if he thinks he can give this case the bare minimum of attention he is sorely mistaken.”
“I am ensuring he gives this case his complete attention,” Mycroft said. “As it stands, the robber who was unconscious is in police custody. If he knows what is best for him, he'll talk.”

“I'm certain you'll make sure of that,” Sherlock said. He was quiet for a few seconds. “How bad is it?”

“He was shot in the abdomen,” Mycroft said. “Just like you. He's in surgery now, but there was other damage from the beating. He was unconscious when he was taken into the ambulance, but he was alive.”

Sherlock nodded and then lapsed into silence. Molly edged closer to him and he squeezed her hand tightly in response. The lift made it to the lobby and the three of them exited the lift and made their way to the doors and out to the street. Mycroft moved in front of them and went to a car, and a man opened the back door for them. Mycroft got in first, followed by Molly and Sherlock, and they sat across from Mycroft, who sat with his back to the driver. The car pulled away and they settled into their seats, and after a moment Molly laid her head on Sherlock's shoulder. “I'm sorry,” she said quietly.

“Thank you,” he said, resting his head against hers. He shifted the position of their hands and threaded his fingers through hers. He remained quiet for a few minutes. “I may not return to California with you, if things don't...” he started, and then stopped. “I mean, I'll go back eventually, but I might be needed here.”

“I understand,” she said. “I'll stay as long as I can, put off getting the cast off a little while longer.”

“No, that's important. You being able to go back to your post is important,” he said as Mycroft's phone vibrated. “I just didn't want you to think I'd never go back if I don't go with you on the 8th. I will be back before the start of term.”

“Just promise me you won't push me away,” she said. “All right? Promise me that.”

He lifted his head up and kissed the top of her head. “I won't. I promise.” Mycroft cleared his throat as his phone vibrated again. “I'm sorry we're talking,” he said sourly.

“I'm ignoring your conversation,” he replied. “I just thought you would like to know that they caught the gunman and the other accomplice.”

“The man your father knocked out ratted out his accomplices already?” Molly asked, surprised.

“Yes, he did. He didn't realize that the man who was shot was the father of Sherlock Holmes,” Mycroft said. “He said Sherlock had solved his brother's kidnapping a few years back and gotten him back alive. He was quite remorseful and made a deal. The accomplices were picked up two minutes ago.”

“One less thing to worry about, then,” Sherlock said. “Now we just have to find out if our father is going to pull through.”

“Indeed,” Mycroft said. They all lapsed into silence until the car came to a complete stop and the driver tapped on the window. Mycroft looked out the window and then nodded to the door. “We're here.” Sherlock opened the door and got out, with Molly and Mycroft right behind him. The three of them made their way into the hospital and Mycroft took the lead, taking them to the lift and then up to the fourth floor. They got out of the lift and made their way to a waiting room which was occupied by only one woman. Molly assumed it was their mother, an assumption proven correct when Mycroft cleared his throat. “Mother.”
Mrs. Holmes looked up and relief swept across her face. “Oh, Mycroft. Sherlock,” she said, getting up. “No one has come out and told me anything yet. I just...I don't know what's going on.”

“I'll speak to someone,” Mycroft said before turning to leave.

She came up to Sherlock, who looked at her with an expression Molly couldn't really decipher. “I know you aren't fond of either of us, Sherlock, but I'm glad you're here.”

“I wasn't given a choice,” he said quietly. “But I would have come anyway.”

“Good. That's good,” she said. Then she turned to Molly. “You must be Molly. I wish we could have met under better circumstances.”

“I feel the same way,” Molly said with a small smile. “But it's a pleasure to actually meet you, Mrs. Holmes.”

“I told you before, please call me Violet,” she said. Molly nodded. Then she turned back to Sherlock. “I'm sorry your holiday is ruined. I know neither of you would have wanted something like this to happen.”

“It's fine,” Sherlock said, his voice still quiet. “It wasn't as though it was planned.”

Mrs. Holmes was quiet for a moment, looking at her son. “Would you like to sit down?”

“No,” Sherlock said.

“I would,” Molly said, letting go of his hand. “I'll sit with you.”

“Thank you,” she said with a small smile. Molly and Mrs. Holmes moved away from Sherlock, who turned to face the door the doctor would have to come through, and sat in chairs next to each other. Mrs. Holmes studied Sherlock for a few minutes. “He isn't taking this well.”

“No, he's not,” she said. “I haven't seen him like this in a very long time, since after he came back the second time, where he's put up his walls.”

“He's had them up for so long I'd forgotten what he was like without them,” she said. “At least until he began a relationship with you. Then I could see they were coming down, and the person I had always hoped he could be came shining through. I want that version of my son to stay. I don't want the other version to come back.”

“I know. I want the man I'm in love with to be the one who comes home,” Molly said softly.

“It's all my fault,” Mrs. Holmes said with a sigh. “We had gone shopping and we were halfway to the market and I realized I'd left my card at home so we went back. If I had just remembered to take it with me the only thing that would have happened would be that we lost some valuables.”

“You had no way of knowing,” Molly said, reaching over for her hand. “If it does help at all, Mycroft told us on the way here that they caught the man who shot your husband and his other accomplice.”

“Good. Hopefully they'll all rot in a cell for the rest of their lives,” Mrs. Holmes said fiercely. “Shooting a man and then roughing him up and not expecting him to...”

Molly squeezed Mrs. Holmes's hand. “Is he at all as stubborn as Sherlock and Mycroft?”

“No, that was me more than him,” she replied with a small smile. “Matthew has always been much
more accommodating to what any of us wanted. I think that's why Sherlock prefers him over me. I wasn't exactly the easiest mother to deal with, though I did try. But Sherlock was always different and I wanted him not to be when he was young.”

“And now?” Molly asked.

“And now I've grown to love him exactly as he is. When it came out that he was really alive I knew I'd gotten a second chance, and I made it a point to make the best of it. Sherlock has cooperated, to an extent, and that was more than I could have asked for.”

Molly thought back to the conversation she and Sherlock had had months prior about his other brother, and how he didn't trust his family. Maybe things had changed since that day and she hadn't seen it. “Well, I hope that it continues, that he lets all of you be closer even after this.”

“I hope it does as well,” she said. She moved her gaze to Molly. “He lets you quite close, and I'm glad for that. Mycroft told me quite a bit about you before he gave me your telephone number. I think my son made a good choice.”

“I'm almost afraid to hear what he had to say,” Molly said, shaking her head. “Mycroft knows every scrap of information about me, I think, including the things I don't want him to know.”

“Well, he didn't embarrass you,” she said. “He thinks quite highly of you, actually. He told us you were instrumental in helping Sherlock fake his death, and that you are highly intelligent and very caring and generally a good person.”

“It's good to know that,” she said, her cheeks warming slightly. “Aside from what we've talked about I'm afraid I don't know much about you.”

“I imagine Sherlock's been quite busy these last few months,” Mrs. Holmes said. “It's grueling being in the academic world. And I doubt he would have wanted to talk about his family before that. It's not his favorite topic of conversation.”

“That is quite true,” Molly said. “But I'd like to learn about you and your husband, if that's all right.”

“I wouldn't have a problem with that, since I think you will be around for quite a while,” she said. “What would you like to know first?”

“How did you and your husband meet?” Molly asked.

“Oh, that is quite the story,” Mrs. Holmes said before launching into the story. They had been talking for nearly ten minutes about various things when Mycroft came back into the room, but he shook his head and stood by Sherlock. The two women went back to their conversation until forty minutes later when a doctor came out into the waiting room. Mrs. Holmes stood up and moved over to her sons. “Yes?”

“The surgery went well,” the doctor said with a smile on her face. “The bullet has been removed and the internal damage has been fixed. There are a few broken bones that need mending, but there shouldn't be any lasting damage.”

“Oh thank God,” Mrs. Holmes said, relief in her voice. “When can we see him?”

“He's being moved to a private recovery room now, so perhaps twenty minutes while they get him settled,” the doctor said. “I'll have a nurse come get the four of you shortly.”

“Thank you,” Mycroft said with a nod. The doctor turned and left, and he turned to face his family
and Molly. “I can only stay until he wakes up. I have pressing business to attend to.”

“For once let the world flounder on its own,” Sherlock said exasperatedly. “Stay for a little while afterward.”

“I'm surprised you're advocating for me to stay,” Mycroft said with slightly wide eyes.

“Well, he could have died,” Sherlock said. “The least you can do is stay until he goes back to sleep again. If he's on morphine he won't be awake long. I know from personal experience.”

“Yes, we know,” Mycroft said. “I suppose I can take care of some of it here at the hospital while we wait.”

“Thank you, Mycroft,” Mrs. Holmes said. “I don't know about you, but I'd like to get a cup of tea soon. Do you think I could be back in twenty minutes?”

“The nurses have a break area on this floor,” Mycroft said. “We can go get some and be back in ten. I'll take you.” He motioned for his mother to follow him and the two of them left, leaving Molly and Sherlock alone in the waiting room.

Sherlock sank down into the nearest chair and leaned forward, hanging his head. “I never gave any thought to how my parents had felt when I was shot,” he said quietly. “I wonder if it was anything like what I've been feeling so far.”

“And what was that?” Molly asked, sitting down next to him.

“Tightly controlled panic, a great deal of sadness and quite a bit of anger, though not just at the people who hurt him. Anger at myself that I haven't really made as much of an effort to be close to them as I could have. If he had died there would have been no second chance this time.” He lifted his head up and looked at her. “What plans did you have for us while we were here?”

“Nothing that we can't do in the spring or summer,” she said, putting a hand on his shoulder. “Tomorrow I was going to spend the day with Greg and have lunch with him and Phillip, but I don't think they'll mind if I change plans, all things considered.”

“No, spend time with them,” he said. “You may not get to come back for as long as I can next year. I'll come here to the hospital or go to Mum's.”

“Then I'll simply bring you supper so you don't ignore your own needs,” she said. “And we can spend each day however you want us to. We don't have to go out and do a lot of things.”

“Thank you,” he said, giving her a faint smile. “I'm not sure if I'll want to do anything New Year's Eve, and I apologize for that.”

“As long as I get to see the fireworks and get a kiss at midnight then I'll be fine,” she said. “We can find some other swanky event to go to later, either here or in San Diego.”

“You are far more understanding than I deserve,” he said.

“Well, I just feel bad that Mary and John's evening took a turn for the worse,” she said.

Sherlock shook his head. “He had his and Mary's tickets, in case we ran late, and I called the restaurant and left a tab for them so they could enjoy the meal afterward. They still got to have a date tonight. We just weren't a part of it.”
“That's good for them,” she said with a smile of her own. “They deserve a night out.”

“You deserve one too,” he said. “I'll try and make sure that happens before we leave.”

“It's all right if it doesn't,” she said. “Honest. It's not as though we don't live in the same place. We can go out when we get back to San Diego. I just want to make sure you get to spend as much time with your family as you want to while we're here, since you won't have much of a chance again until May.”

He straightened up and she let her hand fall away from his shoulder. “I don't deserve you,” he said as he turned to look at her.

“We've had this conversation before,” she said. “You know that's not true.”

“I still feel that way,” he said.

“Well, then I'll just have to show you that you do,” she said, leaning forward to kiss him softly. It wasn't like the kisses they had shared before Mycroft had arrived, but that was all right. When they pulled apart he rested his forehead against her. “I love you, Sherlock. Remember that.”

“I love you too, Molly,” he said. He pulled away after a moment and she reached over for his hand, grasping it again. While this had been completely unexpected and not exactly welcome it could have been so much worse, and she was glad it had the best possible outcome, that his father was going to pull through, and that was all Molly could have hoped for.
Sherlock’s father had taken quite a few hours to wake up, and he had only stayed awake for twenty minutes. He spoke to his family and before she could be properly introduced he had gone back to sleep. Sherlock offered the second bedroom in the suite to his mother and so the three of them went to the Savoy when they left the hospital since the home was considered a crime scene. Mycroft said there would be an outfit waiting for their mother in the morning, even if he couldn’t get it from her home. When they got back to the room Molly said she was tired and was going to get some sleep, and then quietly told Sherlock to spend time with his mother before he joined her. She was quite pleased that it was nearly three in the morning when he did.

Both Sherlock and his mother were asleep when she woke up and began to get ready to meet Lestrade for the day. She thought she should wake Sherlock up but then decided to let him sleep, writing him a quick note on the hotel stationary after she finished getting dressed. She left the room shortly thereafter and made her way to the lobby. When she got there, she heard someone call her name. She frowned for a moment as she made her way over to the person behind the desk. “Yes?” she asked.

“There was something left for you and Mr. Holmes last night,” he said, handing her an envelope. “I believe it’s from a Mr. and Mrs. Watson.”

Molly smiled as she looked at the front of the envelope and recognized Mary’s handwriting. “Thank you very much,” she said. “I’ll let them know we got this.”

“You’re welcome. And if you could, please tell Mr. Holmes that his father is in our thoughts and prayers,” the concierge said.

“It’s all over the news, isn’t it?” she said, her smile dimming slightly.

“I’m afraid so. But it was good news, right? He’ll pull through?”

“Yes, he’ll pull through,” she said with a nod. “I’ll tell him, but you might want to tell the staff not to bring it up. I don’t think he’ll take it well.”

“I understand,” he said. “I’ll make sure they all know.”

She was quiet for a moment. “Is there any chance I could have flowers sent up to the room for his mother when they decide to get room service? I can pay for it on my own.”

“There’s no need. We’ll consider that on the house,” he said with a smile. “Any particular flowers?”

“Yellow roses and sunflowers, maybe? Something bright and cheery.”

He nodded. “And would you like to leave a note with them?”

“Yes,” she said with a nod. The concierge moved away from her and then brought over a small blank card and envelope, as well as a pen. Molly took the pen and wrote a quick note on the card before handing it back to the concierge. “Thank you very much. I appreciate it.”

“Enjoy the rest of your day,” he said.

“I will.” She shifted her hold on her handbag and turned around, leaving the lobby and then exiting the hotel. She hailed the first taxi she could and once she told the driver to take her to Jackson & Rye
she settled into her seat and opened up the envelope from Mary. There was a note written on the hotel stationary as well as two gift certificates to a local luxury cinema. Molly put the certificates back in and opened the note. Thank you both very much for the lovely evening, even if it didn't go according to plan, it said. While catching a film is not the same as watching a play it can still be fun. Use these before you go home and just enjoy yourselves. And at some point you have to come over for supper. We insist. Love, John & Mary. She smiled as she slipped the note back in. She was fairly sure she could convince Sherlock to do that, especially since the trip to the cinema would be a gift. When she was done she put the envelope into her handbag and watched London go by.

Lestrade was waiting outside when she got there, and he opened up the door as she paid the driver. “You know, if you'd wanted to cancel I certainly would have understood,” he said.

“No, Sherlock insisted,” she said as she got out. “I think he and his mum are going to go back to the hospital today, and Mycroft might join them. If he's still there when we're done I'll bring him a bite to eat.”

“Well, hopefully I won't be called in. Sally said as long as it's something she can handle on her own my mobile will stay blissfully silent,” he said with a grin. “Ever been here before?”

“No, I haven't,” she said with a smile. “What type of food does it have?”

“It's supposed to replicate the American diner experience,” he said. “I thought you might appreciate that.”

“Considering there are a few diners I've grown to love in San Diego I definitely have some things to compare,” she said with a smile. “Let's go in and see what they've got, shall we?”

He opened the door for her. “After you.” She stepped inside and looked around approvingly. It was a very nice looking place, and reminded her of some of the more upscale diners in California. They were seated shortly and then looked at the menus. “Lots of egg dishes,” he said.

“It's a good thing I like eggs,” she said with a smile. “Though the pancakes look tempting as well.”

“I think I'm going to go with the Prison Eggs,” Lestrade said. “I like my breakfast to have some bite to it.”

“Oh, then you're going to love Sriracha sauce and Tapatio, then, when you come to visit,” Molly said with a chuckle. “They're both too spicy for me but Sherlock enjoys them on occasion.” She studied the menu some more. “I miss avocados, but the pancakes look so tempting. I've never had orange and chocolate ones before.”

“Well, you can add avocado,” he said. “And other things as well.”

“Then I think I'll do that,” she said. “I'd like to be a bit adventurous.” They chatted a bit until the waitress came to take their orders. Molly ended up getting the pancakes, the sliced avocado and country style potatoes, while Lestrade got the Prison Eggs, potatoes and a sausage patty. When she left Molly smiled at him. “Have you ever eaten here before?”

“Once,” he said. “I got called to a scene at five in the morning a few blocks away and left without food. By the time I got to leave I was starving, and one of the patrol officers recommended this place. I missed breakfast and had to settle for lunch, but I was impressed. Don't get out here often enough to make a habit of it, but I thought you might get a kick out of it. And who knows? If I like breakfast I may make it a point to come more often.”

“I'm trying to balance between going to old favorites and trying new places,” she said. “I think I've
managed to hit all my favorites already, except for the pub. Sherlock doesn't really drink and I didn't want to go alone.”

“Yeah, he never did strike me as the type to unwind with a pint,” Lestrade said with a grin. “Does he drink anything at all?”

“Every once in a while he might have wine,” she said. “But only when we go out to supper and only when it's a superior vintage, and even then he doesn't always finish the glass.”

“I thought as much,” he replied. “Do you even have alcohol in your home?”

She nodded. “We have a built in wine cooler in the kitchen for the wine I drink, and we'll have ginger beer for our friend Thomas and Coronas for his husband Jason, just in case they don't want wine when they join us for supper.”

“Now Coronas I approve of,” he said. “Even if I am more an ale person.”

“When you come over I'll introduce you to an ale I like that I buy when I get the urge. It's called Arrogant Bastard Ale and it's brewed in Escondido, which is in the north part of the county. They also make Stone Ruination IPA and Stone Levitation Ale, which I don't enjoy quite as much but you might like. When I want a lighter ale I tend to buy the Stone Pale Ale. If you want, we can go visit the brewery when you come visit.”

“That would be something I think I could definitely enjoy,” he said with a grin. “And speaking of the visit, I got my time off. January 20th to February 7th, so just over two weeks. But I'm going to take my daughter back to university before I go to California so she can show me around for a day or so before she really starts classes. I think I'm going to be introduced to a young man she fancies, if he doesn't come out here with her tomorrow.”

“Are you going to let him stay with you?” she asked.

“Absolutely not,” he said. “She wasn't sure if he'd get done with his own family by then, but she said if he did come to London he'd stay in lodgings of his own. She says he's quite aware of the fact I'm a copper and I intend to be quite scary. But he seems like a good kid, from what she's told me. I don't think I'll have to put too much of a scare into him.”

“I can just imagine Sherlock if we ever have a daughter,” she said. “She'll have the most overprotective father in the world.”

“I don't doubt he'll be worse than me for a second,” he said with a chuckle. “And if he tells the boys that he can murder them and get away with it I think they should take him very seriously, which will put a damper on her social life.”

“Well, I will probably be much less scary,” she said with a smile.

“So he actually wants children?” Lestrade asked.

Molly nodded. “No more than two, though, and preferably a boy and a girl. Which signifies a change from when we first talked about it. He wasn't sure he wanted to have a son. There would be too much responsibility he'd have to live up to.”

“I honestly never thought he'd want to have one, let alone two,” he replied. “Granted, William was the only child I ever saw him around, and there were times he seemed to be at a complete loss as to what to do with him.”
“That is true,” she said with a nod. “I think if John and Mary’d had a girl like they’d been expecting Sherlock might have taken even longer to get used to her. Having William be his namesake made Sherlock feel it was more important to be a part of his life. Though now, being so far away, he isn’t as involved.”

“If you two do have a son are you going to name him after Sherlock?” he asked.

“Most likely not,” she said. “I had mentioned that if we had a son I would like to name him after my father and he seemed amenable to that, since William already shares his name. And I like to think it would have pleased my father to have his grandson named after him. If we have a girl we might name her after my mother, unless we come up with something we like better.”

“You two have put some thought into it,” Lestrade said.

Molly nodded. “He mentioned he wouldn’t mind a boy and a girl on Christmas morning, and when we left John and Mary's we talked about it. It will be a while till we start planning to have children, though. I mean, Sherlock’s going to be in school for years, but maybe once he has his Master's degree we'll try. If it takes him longer to get his doctorate I don't think he'll mind.”

“I almost wish the two of you were going to be here when that happens,” he said. “Sherlock as a father is something I'd like to experience firsthand.”

“Well, we'll see what happens in the future. We may come back someday,” she said.

“Is it bad I kind of hope you do?” he asked.

“A little,” she said. “There are downsides to living here. You saw the tabloid covers. I don't want that to be a constant part of my life. And there are people here I'd love to never see again.”

“I know,” he said. “But we all miss you both a lot.”

“I know you do,” she said, giving him a small smile. “Maybe we can get better at visiting, or there can be more of you visiting us.”

“Maybe,” he replied with a nod. Then he gave her a wider smile. “Let's change the subject, all right? What all did you want to do today? Aside from lunch with Phillip, I mean.”

“To be honest, I'm not sure,” she said. “Even though Sherlock told me to go out today I'm probably going to be a bit distracted.”

“Have you thought about acting like a tourist?” he suggested after a moment. “Buckingham Palace, Tower of London, maybe a museum? Things like that. Nothing that you really need to concentrate on.”

“I think that could be fun,” she said with a nod. “But do you want to do it is the question.”

“It could be interesting,” he said with a grin.

“All right, then we can do that,” she said. She was going to say more when her mobile alerted her to a text message. She pulled it out of her handbag and then checked it. “Well, part of the plans changed.”

“How?” he asked.

“Phillip had to cancel lunch. Said he has to do something to help someone,” she replied as she keyed
in a reply.

“If he's being vague chances are it's Mycroft asking him to do something in regards to the shooting,” Lestrade said. “I rather expected that.”

“Mycroft does use his services an awful lot, doesn't he?” she asked, putting her phone away.

“Phillip told me once that Mycroft collects people who are useful to him and having a former member of Scotland Yard trained in forensic sciences is something that is quite handy,” he said. “He's quite busy with government jobs because of that.”

“He doesn't talk about it much,” she said.

“Well, I don't think he was supposed to bring it up but because I am on occasion in the same position he felt it was fine to talk to me about it. And since you're probably going to be a part of the Holmes family in the future I don't think there's a problem bringing it up to you.”

“What types of things do you do for Mycroft?” Molly asked.

“I've done a few off the books things for him, and been the official liaison for certain cases with government involvement,” he said. “I think the type of things we did when Sherlock was here show that we have proven ourselves to be useful and trustworthy.”

“I wonder how Sherlock would feel about his brother using Phillip's services, though. They really aren't fond of each other,” she said thoughtfully.

“Despite Sherlock's insistence that Phillip is incompetent he's proven that he's not,” he said. “He did good work until his career ended, and I'm fairly sure he's proven to Mycroft that he is, in fact, more than competent or else Mycroft wouldn't make use of his services. Sherlock can't argue with results.”

“Well, I happen to agree, but if he's doing something with the shooting that might rub Sherlock the wrong way,” she said. “But I suppose Mycroft knows what he's doing.”

“Most of the time I agree with you,” he said. “Sometimes I wonder, though.”

She nodded and then her text alert went off again. She pulled her phone back out and saw Phillip had asked to reschedule, and she keyed in a reply. Instead of putting her mobile back in her handbag she set it on the table. “So since it's just the two of us today, anything you particularly want to do first?” she asked.

“Tower of London, definitely. That always has the biggest crowds.”

“Then as soon as we're done we can head out that way,” she said as she got another text message. This one was not from Phillip, however. She smiled when she saw who had sent it. “He just noticed I left. That's a record,” she said as she keyed in a response to Sherlock. She looked up and saw the grin on Lestrade's face. “Normally when I get out of bed he wakes up five to ten minutes later. It's been over a half hour now and he just woke up.”

Lestrade shook his head. “The joys of sharing a bed with someone.”

“Oh, but that's if he's not already awake by the time I wake up,” she said with a slight chuckle. “He still barely sleeps.”

“I think staying with the two of you is going to be interesting,” he said.
“We’ll behave,” she said absently as she got a reply. Then it hit her what she said and she looked up from her phone, her eyes wide and her cheeks warm. “I mean, we won’t keep you up all night. I mean, talking all night. We’ll be considerate. I mean...you probably...”

Lestrade laughed. “I got what you meant. I didn't think you were implying you two are usually pretty risqué,” he said. “What else did he have to say?”

“Well, he said he put in an order for room service and they said they didn't have the flowers yet. He wants to know what that meant.” She keyed in a response and then looked up again. “I asked the concierge to send flowers to his mum this morning before I left because she's in the second bedroom. I thought it might be nice to have her smile today.”

“That has always been one of my favorite things about you, that you continuously do nice things for people,” he said approvingly.

“Well, I try,” she said with a smile.

“Does the favor get returned often?” he asked.

She nodded. “At least by my friends. And Sherlock is always trying to do things to brighten my day, though I think part of that was because he felt bad for ignoring me so much last term. But it was nice. It’s certainly been nicer than my last relationship.”

“Tom didn't exactly strike me as the type of person to do things just because, if I can admit that,” he said.

“He wasn’t,” she said. “I mean, every once in a while he would, but the times had become few and far between by the time Sherlock came back. I missed it as time went on. I'm fairly sure the same thing will happen with Sherlock eventually, but for now I'm enjoying it.”

“I don't know,” Lestrade said, rubbing his chin slightly. “At John and Mary's I saw his face when he'd do or say something that got you to smile or laugh. I think he'll keep trying to make you smile for a really long time, even after you two get out of the honeymoon stage.”

“You think so?” she asked.

“Out of all of us who know him, aside from his family, you and I have known him the longest. Five and a half years now, I think. Maybe six. And in all that time I don't think I'd ever actually seen him happy, at least until a few days ago. I mean, I'd seen him be very into a case, and excited for the challenge, but not happy. Not fulfilled. He was dating someone else for a while, right?” She nodded. “I honestly couldn't tell. It didn't seem like anything was different in his life. But with you there are fundamental differences to who he is now, and he's better for it. He's head over heels for you and I don't think that's going to change for a really long time.”

“I hope not,” she said.

“I've watched him with you over the course of your entire relationship with him. John made some pretty big changes in his personality, thank God, but Sherlock didn't really treat you any better that I could see. And then after the Christmas party and the present incident he changed how he treated you. That was when I started thinking if he ever really let you get close, really got to know you, you'd make bigger personality changes in him then John ever could. And I'm happy to say I was right.” He picked up his water. “But don't tell John I said that.”

She laughed. “This conversation will stay between us, if you want.”
“Well, you can tell Sherlock. I think it will amuse him,” he said before taking a drink. “But yeah. I look at the relationship you two have from a slightly different perspective than the rest of your friends, just because I watched it all unfold from the start.”

“Did you ever see us dating?” she asked curiously.

“Honestly? No, not until you moved to California. I could always see you maybe becoming one of his best friends if he'd just let you close, though.” He set his water down. “I always thought he was a great man, and one day we might be lucky and he'd be a good one. I think he's more than that now, though. He's someone I'm proud to say I know, and you had a lot to do with that, you and John. John started it and you've kept it up.”

“One day you should tell him all this,” she said.

“I just might,” he said with a nod as she got another text message. She picked up her phone and her smile grew even wider. “He must have said something nice.”

“He said that he was extremely glad I had thought to make her smile today, and that just proved I was the best woman he knew,” she said. She keyed in another response and set her phone down. “They stayed up quite late last night talking. I don't know what type of conversation they had, but I hope it was something that helped their relationship. I think the whole family needs to lean on each other right now.”

“You didn't go to Sherlock's funeral, did you?” he asked.

She shook her head. “The night before the funeral was the only time I've ever seen him get pissed. He stayed up rambling for hours and begged me not to go, not to leave him alone. So I stayed home and helped him deal with the hangover and just talked to him about things that weren't his friends and what he was going to have to do.”

“His mother was devastated,” he said. “I mean, she was still kind of in shock, but you could tell that she wasn't complete, that a part of her had died with him. He may not have cared for her but she obviously had loved him.”

“They have a very complicated relationship,” she said, trying to think of a way to talk about it without even remotely hinting at what she knew about his second brother. “He didn't quite trust anyone in his family, and since he'd basically shut himself off from feeling any emotions he acted like his family was an annoyance. And I think that continued even after he came back, even though he tried a little harder than he usually had to let them in. But I think last night is going to change things.”

“To be honest, knowing Mycroft I'm not surprised that was how he viewed his family,” he said. “But for Sherlock's sake I hope things get better.”

“I hope so too,” she said. She decided now was a good time to change the subject, and they chatted about other things until their food arrived. The conversation stilled as they ate and when they were finished Lestrade paid the bill and they left the restaurant to go out on the town. They made their way to the Tower of London and looked around there for a while, and then left and decided to just walk around the area and see if anything else interested them. It was nearly three when his mobile began to ring, and she realized after a few minutes that it was Sally and their day of exploring the city was going to come to an abrupt end. He looked at her when he hung up. “Got called in on a case?”

He nodded. “Triple homicide in Notting Hill. One of the types of cases Sherlock used to love so much, actually. Sally decided I needed to be on the scene so duty calls.” He leaned over and kissed
her cheek, and she did the same in return. “We should still grab a pint at the pub at some point, before you leave.”

“Absolutely,” she said with a smile. “We can figure out a time later.”

“Then I'll call you,” he said. “See you later, Molly.”

“See you soon, Greg,” she said as he moved away from her to the curb to hail a cab. She watched him get into the first cab that pulled up before pulling out her phone. She pulled up Sherlock's contact and hit send. He answered on the second ring. “Doing anything at the moment?”

“I'm currently at the hospital with my mother, waiting for my father to wake up again,” he said. “Are you enjoying yourself?”

“I was, until Greg got called away on a case. Have you and Violet eaten yet?”

“Not since breakfast,” he said. “She doesn't want to leave his side.”

“Then I'll bring you both something. Any preferences?” she asked.

She heard him speak softly to his mother for a few moments, and then he stopped. “She'd like shrimp lo mein with an eggroll or two,” he said. “And I'm fairly sure you know what my usual is.”

“Kung pao chicken and fried rice,” she said with a smile. “With a side of potstickers.”

“You do know me well,” he said.

“Of course I do,” she said with a soft laugh. “I'll find a place near the hospital so it will be warm when I get it to you.”

“Have you eaten lunch yet?” he asked.

“No, so I'll pick up something for me as well,” she said. “I should be there soon.”

“Thank you for doing this,” he said. “I appreciate it, and I know she will as well.”

“It's not a problem,” she said. “You'd do the same for me.”

“All right. I love you.”

“I love you too, Sherlock,” she said before hanging up. She made her way to the curb and hailed her own cab, asking the driver to take her to a Chinese food restaurant near the hospital Sherlock's father was at. Sherlock's parents lived in the area inside the M25 London orbital road so he had been airlifted by London HEMS to Royal London Hospital, and she honestly thought that had been what saved his life. She knew the hospital well enough, having colleagues there, but she didn't really know the surrounding area well. The driver took her to a restaurant he said was a bit farther away but had better food, and he offered to wait without the meter on to take her to the hospital. She got out and got the food, which took some time, and then took the bag of cartons back to the cab before he took her to the hospital.

The nurses let her in but said only one person could eat in the room at a time so Molly left Mrs. Holmes's food with her and she and Sherlock headed to the cafeteria. He was quiet as he ate, which was unusual for how he was now, but she left him to his thoughts. He was mostly done when he finally spoke. “He still hasn't woken up again. I gather he had before we got here this morning, but nothing since.”
“Well, you know how painful a gunshot wound to the abdomen is,” she said, eating the last piece of beef in her beef and broccoli.

“Unfortunately,” he said. She knew the truth of what happened, of who shot him and how he had gotten through it without dying. It hadn't changed her opinion of Mary in the slightest, and she supposed a large part of it was because she knew she had only been doing what was needed to survive. The only real thought she had was that perhaps she should have shot Magnussen as well, and then things wouldn't have played out the way they did. Mary said she had felt much the same way after that Christmas where Sherlock had drugged them all. But that was neither here nor there at the moment. She waited for him to speak again. “I may be here late tonight, depending on how he is when he wakes up. Mycroft pulled strings to let us stay here past visiting hours. You don't have to stay.”

“I don't mind,” she replied. “I'd rather be here with you than at the hotel by myself, or intruding on John and Mary's evening.”

“Are you sure?” he asked, looking up at her. She nodded and he gave her a small smile in return. “Thank you.”

She set down her fork and reached over to put her hand on his. “The only way I won't stay is if you say you want privacy, if you want it to just be your family. I'll respect that that's your choice and I'll give you that privacy.”

“To be honest I'd rather have you here,” he said. “But I know you've missed London and there are things you'd much rather be doing than staying at a hospital.”

“Right now there isn't anything more important than being here for you,” she said, squeezing his hand. “I can just come back next year and spend more time exploring then. Though John and Mary did leave us cinema passes to use as thanks for the date yesterday, and I'd like to do that before we leave.”

“I could agree to that a little later in the week,” he said with a nod. “My mother has been trying to convince me to take you out somewhere tomorrow night. She's becoming quite insistent.”

“We honestly don't have to, if you'd rather be close to the hospital,” she said. “As I said, if I get to see the fireworks and I get a kiss at midnight that will be more than enough.”

“Let's see how the rest of today and tomorrow go,” he replied.

“All right,” she said as she nodded. She let go of his hand and then went back to her food, finishing after he did. When they were done they made their way back up to his father's hospital room, seeing Mrs. Holmes near the bed, holding her husband's hand. “Did you enjoy the food?” she asked once Mrs. Holmes looked up.

Mrs. Holmes nodded in response. “Yes. Thank you very much, Molly. It definitely hit the spot.”

“You should have shared,” Mr. Holmes said quietly from the bed, and his wife turned to look at him quickly. A moment later he opened his eyes and looked at the three of them. “I'm very glad to see you here.”

“Well, we weren't going to leave you alone if we could help it,” Mrs. Holmes said with a smile.

“Is Mycroft here?” he asked.

“He had business to attend to,” Sherlock said. “One of the robbers is attempting to disprove he was
involved. Mycroft was going to make sure that didn't happen, and he was personally overseeing it. He might be here later, though.”

“Ah,” he said with a nod. Then he looked over at Molly. “You must be Molly.”

She nodded, smiling at him. “Yes, I am,” she said.

“Wish we'd met under better circumstances,” he said with a smile towards her. “Sherlock, you're leaning on her, right? You're not shutting her out?”

“No, I'm not shutting her out,” he said, lifting up their joined hands as proof.

“How long have I been asleep?”

Sherlock glanced at his watch. “The nurse said you woke up at two eighteen in the morning and it is now four oh six in the afternoon, so...about fourteen hours.”

“Is it New Year's Eve yet?” he asked.

“No, that's tomorrow,” his wife replied.

“I don't want to sleep through most of the end of the year,” he said. “I'm tough. I can endure the pain. Lower whatever drugs they're giving me.”

“Are you sure?” Mrs. Holmes asked, a frown on her face.

“I am,” he said with a nod. Sherlock reached over for the morphine drip dial and turned it down for him. “Thank you.”

“I'm sure you want to have time with just Mum now,” Sherlock said when he'd straightened back up. “I can come back later.”

“You don't have to go,” Mrs. Holmes said to her son.

“I think it's best,” he said. “I will come back later, though. I promise.”

“Only come back if you bring Molly with you,” Mr. Holmes said with a grin.

“I'll make sure he brings me,” Molly said with a soft laugh. “You take care.” Mr. Holmes nodded, and with that Sherlock and Molly left to give his parents some privacy. He didn't say much as they made their way out to the lift, but he stayed close to her. When they got into the lift she spoke. “Do you feel better now?”

He nodded. “I do. Last night he seemed less coherent and alert. He seemed better now, and I think lowering the morphine will help.” He let go of her hand and reached over for her. She wrapped her arms around him and held him close. “I think I'll worry less now.”

“Good,” she said. “Did you and your mum get along well today?”

“We had a very honest conversation last night that we continued today,” he said. “We talked about a lot of things, even things I think she'd never expected us to talk about.”

“Such as?” she asked.

“I learned more about my other brother,” he said. “I learned what had happened to him and why no one would talk about him. He had a falling out with my mother over the fact he wanted to give up on
his education and travel around the world prior to her becoming pregnant with me. My mother wouldn't hear of it and so he ran away at fifteen. He cut off all ties and changed his name and appearance, and got mixed up with a cult. He was groomed by them to do some pretty horrific things, and he was so entrenched in it that when the police raided the compound he shot and killed a policeman. He was gunned down moments later. Luckily for my parents no one put two and two together that he was their son, and they decided to at first say the truth, that he had run away. But as time went by they decided it best if his existence in our family was erased, and when Mycroft was in the position to make it happen he did just that.”

“They were ashamed of him,” she said.

He nodded slightly. “When I started showing signs I was different my mother panicked. She didn’t want a repeat of past events, so she did everything she could to change me and make me more normal. She said when I overdosed during my gap year she realized what a mistake she had made, but at that point it was too late to try and fix things, and I had no interest in doing that anyway. I wanted to have nothing to do with any of them, especially her. And then when she thought I was dead she was certain I’d died hating her.”

“Do you feel better since you've spoken to her about all of this?”

“I do,” he said. “It doesn't make up for years of hurt and bad feelings, but it's a good start in putting it all behind me once and for all. I can't keep holding every grudge I have for the rest of my life if I want to actually be happy.”

“I'm glad,” she said, tightening her embrace. “Is she really all right with me knowing all this?”

“I told her you already knew about my other brother because I trusted you enough to tell you. She said if I trusted you that much then she could trust you as well with the whole story.” He was quiet for a moment. “There are a few other people who know the truth, like Mycroft's superiors. They know because they had to approve what he was doing. And she said I could tell John and Mary if I wanted to. She trusts them as well.”

“Good,” she said, lifting her head up slightly to give him a warm smile. “So what do you want to do now?”

“I think I would like to go back to the hotel and enjoy some time with just you before my mother returns for the evening,” he said. “Unless there's something you'd like to do.”

“No. Time with just you sounds like a very good way to spend the rest of the afternoon,” she said.

“I'm glad you agree then,” he said before he leaned in and kissed her. She kissed him back, forgetting for a moment they only had a tiny amount of privacy. She was simply thankful that things seemed to be taking a turn for the better even if the day hadn't gone exactly as planned.
Molly had insisted that as soon as everyone was awake they go back to the hospital since Mr. Holmes had seemed more coherent when they'd visited in the evening. Mrs. Holmes kept trying to get her and Sherlock to go out and do their original New Year's Eve plans, but Sherlock said he'd prefer a quiet night with Molly and his parents, so around eleven she stopped trying. There had been a lovely conversation going when Molly realized she was quite hungry. “I think I'm going to pop out and get something to eat,” she said, standing up. “I'll come back soon. Do you want me to bring you anything, Violet?”

Mrs. Holmes shook her head. “I'm fine.”

Molly nodded and then turned to Sherlock. “Would you like anything?”

“No, I'll eat later,” he said.

“Well, if you'd like to sneak something in for an old man who's stuck in a hospital bed, I'd like curry. The spicier the better,” Mr. Holmes said with a grin.

Molly chuckled. “I wasn't planning on Indian but I can go get you something if you'd like. I'll even be very discreet sneaking it back in.”

“I can come with you,” Sherlock said, standing up.

Molly shook her head. “It's all right. You stay here with your family.” She leaned over and kissed his cheek. “I'll be back soon.” She grabbed her handbag from next to her chair and then made her way out of the room to the lift. The lift was not near her floor so she pushed the button and began to wait. After a moment she heard a snippet of conversation coming from the nearby nurses station and she could have sworn someone said her name. She edged closer, still staying towards the alcove.

“I think the whole thing is an act,” one of the nurses was saying. “I mean, he disappears for a time, comes back, and then disappears again? And comes back with a girlfriend looking all different? I tell you, it's all an act to cover something up.”

“What, do you think Sherlock Holmes is gay?” another nurse asked.

“Well, no. The other woman made it very clear he wasn't, and he never said anything to rebut it so it has to be true. I think this new trollop is just using him for his fame and fortune. I mean, she's not even as pretty as the other one. She's got to have some blackmail over him and he's trapped in a relationship. Maybe he got her preggers for all we know and she's forcing him to stay with her.”

“I heard they've known each other for years,” a third voice said, and Molly thought it sounded familiar. “It could be that they were friends and it genuinely evolved from friendship to a romantic relationship. I mean, didn't the Mirror say she left first? He could have realized he wanted a relationship with her and went after her.”

“But why?” the first nurse asked. “It's not like she's anything special. She's marginally more than plain, she doesn't seem to be very witty, and for Christ's sake she spends her days cutting up dead bodies. It's creepy.” There was a pause. “He could do much better is all I'm saying.”

“What, like you?” the third nurse asked.

“Why not? My career isn't nearly as creepy and I've got interesting things to say. At the very least I
can look better on his arm than she does. I mean, of course, that's if I let him leave the bedroom.”

“I wouldn't mind a bit of his time,” the second nurse said. “I mean, Molly Hooper can't be that special. I could make him choose me in a heartbeat.”

“With just one kiss?” the first nurse asked.

“Oh yeah. And then the first shag will keep her out of his thoughts permanently.” The two nurses laughed as Molly began to shake with anger. “If it is all just an act I don't think it will be too hard to do. He can't possibly be in love with her.”

“Did you read about the bloke she was engaged to? Some reporter got him to talk and the truth came out,” the first woman said. “He said she'd wanted Sherlock all along and once the man came back she'd treated him like dirt. Said the end of the engagement was all her doing. He sounds like a decent enough man. She should have been happy with him. Set her sights lower, you know? She doesn't deserve Sherlock.”

“What, like you do?” the third nurse said, sounding disgusted. “I've met Molly more than a few times at functions between this hospital and St. Bart's. She's a lovely woman, very kind and considerate, very sweet and charming. I think Sherlock is very lucky to be dating her. And I honestly think the tramp who sold her story to the tabloids was all wrong for him because it's apparent she was just using him. Molly wouldn't do that at all. And by the way, that Tom fellow is a piece of work, trying to paint her in a bad light so he can get his fifteen minutes.”

“But the two of them would know the truth about Sherlock and that Hooper woman,” the first nurse said. “Why shouldn't they share it?”

“Have you ever thought they could have been lying so they could have a bit of fame and fortune?” the third nurse said.

“All right. Say you're right,” the second nurse said. “There's still the fact there's pictures of her out with another man yesterday. Sherlock's been here with his father and she was off on a date with someone else. And then she had the gall to come back here with food for his family and a smile on her face. We all know why she was smiling.”

“The man she was with was Detective Inspector Greg Lestrade of Scotland Yard,” the third nurse said. “He had a professional relationship with both her and Sherlock. It isn't that hard to imagine the three of them are friendly as well. Ever think maybe she was simply catching up with an old friend? Men and women can be friends, you know.”

There was a rustle of paper. “Then why is she kissing him?” the first nurse asked.

“For the love of...she's kissing him on the cheek,” the third nurse said in an exasperated tone. “I'd say that was fairly innocent.”

“I think someone should show this to Sherlock so he can see just who he's dating. Just accidentally drop it in front of him,” the second nurse said. “Or at the very least mention there might be more to her friendship with that other man.”

“No. If either of you step one foot into Mr. Holmes's room or do or say anything towards anyone who is coming or going I'll have you written up and suspended. Quite possibly sacked, if I can. Sherlock Holmes's personal life is his own damn business, despite what the tabloids think, and you will respect him and his privacy while he has reason to be here. Is that understood?”

“Fine,” the first nurse said with a sigh.
“I suppose,” the second nurse said.

“I'm glad we're clear.” The third nurse came out of the station as Molly began to move back to the lift. Molly recognized her as Adeline Barrington, someone who she’d talked to at a few functions who was on the level of business acquaintances. “Oh my God, Molly. I hope you...” she said, her eyes wide with shock.

“I heard every word,” Molly said quietly, looking down. “I've been ignoring the paparazzi in hopes they would avoid me. I guess I wasn't very lucky.”

“I think it's all nonsense, everything those bloody tabloids print,” Adeline replied. “You don't deserve to have your reputation sullied because of who you choose to date.”

“This is why I'm glad I no longer live here,” she said. “I can just imagine if we were still here it would be even worse.”

“Maybe, maybe not. But with his father here in the hospital the tabloids want to exploit that because it makes Sherlock even more newsworthy.”

"I suppose,” she said in response, sounding dejected.

Adeline put a hand on Molly's arm and squeezed it gently. “Can I give you a piece of advice?”

“All right,” she said.

“Don't let those leeches get a hold of you and drag you down to their level. Hold your head high, stay classy, and ignore the people like them.” She paused for a moment. “And while you're at it, rub it in the faces of people who don't think you're actually in a relationship with him, that it's fake. Show how much you care about him no matter who sees. I can see you and Sherlock are quite close to each other, that you care very much. The more you show that the less talk there will be.”

Molly looked up and gave her a small smile. “I suppose I can do that.”

“Those of us who have met you know the truth. We'll defend you.” She removed her hand from Molly's arm. “I'll let you get back to what you were going to do.”

“Thank you,” she said. “For the advice and for keeping them away from Sherlock.”

“It's the least I can do,” Adeline said with a smile.

“Perhaps we can get coffee or something if I can get away?” Molly asked. “You know, to catch up.”

“I think I would enjoy that very much,” she said with a widening smile. “Maybe tomorrow?”

Molly nodded. “All right. I'll give you my number when I come back.”

“I'll be waiting,” Adeline said before moving away from Molly.

Molly went over to the lift and pressed the button to call it to this floor again. It opened immediately and she stepped inside, selecting the lobby button and pushing it. The lift opened on other floors and let people in and by the time she got out she just wanted to forget the entire conversation she had overheard. She went out and hailed a cab and asked the driver to take her to the nearest Indian restaurant. When she got inside she ordered the food and waited for it, and when it was ready she made her way back to the hospital. She took the food to hospital room and then gave Mr. Holmes his. “Here you go,” she said with a small smile.
“Thank you, Molly,” he said with an answering grin.

She sat down and began to eat her own food. She could tell Sherlock was watching her and she kept her gaze down. After a few minutes she realized everyone was looking at her and she stopped eating and looked up. “Yes?”

“Normally you’re more talkative,” Sherlock said. “Did something happen?”

She started to shake her head no and then sighed, dropping her head again. “Yes,” she said. “I overheard some gossip about our relationship.”

“What type of gossip?” he asked sharply.

“That our relationship is a ruse, that I'm blackmailing you to date me, that you deserve better than me, someone who is prettier and more witty and doesn't have such a strange job. And apparently I'm seeing Greg on the side, thanks to spending time with him yesterday and someone catching a picture of me kissing his cheek when he had to leave. I also heard Tom did an interview with the tabloids and he didn't exactly paint me in the best light,” she said.

“Of all the...” Sherlock said, and she looked up and saw him run a hand over his face. “This was probably the worst case scenario you'd thought of.”

“Oh, no, this is worse than I'd thought,” she said quietly. “I'd thought there would be talk, that part I knew would happen, but I hadn't imagined I'd be painted as a cheater or Tom would be off telling his side of things for money. That I hadn't anticipated.”

“I'm sorry,” Mrs. Holmes said, reaching over to put a hand on her shoulder and squeezing gently. “I think it's absolutely despicable that he did that.”

“I should have expected it,” she said, turning and giving her a sad smile.

“I want to fix this,” Sherlock said.

“There's nothing to do other than ignore it,” Molly said.

“Unless Sherlock gave someone an interview,” Mr. Holmes said. “He could set the record straight.”

“It could work,” Mrs. Holmes said thoughtfully. “It would have to be with a respectable publication, though. Not any of the tabloid trash.”

“I would rather he didn't,” Molly said. “That would just add fuel to the fire. There would be talk that I put him up to it, that he's doing it to save face. There are already people who think I'm secretly pregnant and I'm holding that over him. People will just think that he's trying too hard.”

“Then what do you want to do, Molly?” Sherlock asked, looking at her.

She thought to what Adeline had said. “We go about our holiday and we do what we want and we show that we do genuinely love each other. We hold our heads high and we don't sink to Tom's level. And then we go home and leave the talk here.”

Sherlock nodded slowly after thinking it over for a minute. “All right. If that's what you want to do then that's what we'll do.”

She nodded in response. “I think it would be best.”

“You really should take her out tonight, though. Take her to a fancy party and have fun and show
off,” Mr. Holmes said to Sherlock. “Your mother and I can spend a night on our own. We've been doing that for many years now, you know, ever since you left for university. If you really want to show that all of this talk doesn't affect you, go live it up and enjoy yourselves.”

“The hotel we're at is doing something,” Sherlock said thoughtfully. “I had planned on attending that with her before everything got upended.”

“I think I could enjoy that,” Molly said with a smile. “But only if you really want to, Sherlock. We don't have to.”

“I think my father is right. I think we should do that,” he said. “I've never acted as though the tabloids have bothered me before. I shouldn't start now. Though I would very much like to have a word with Tom.”

Molly's eyes widened. “Don't you dare!” she said. “I don't want there to be any trouble.”

“Sherlock can always ask Mycroft to make his life more uncomfortable,” Mrs. Holmes pointed out. “He can do it without either of you being involved, and getting minimumly involved himself.”

“I'm not sure Tom won't realize what's going on, though,” Molly said uncertainly.

“I wouldn't be surprised if Mycroft's already started,” Sherlock said after a moment's thought. “He is fond of you. I don't think he would take well to your good name being dragged through the mud. If he hasn't I'll make the suggestion, but otherwise I'll leave it alone.”

“Thank you,” she said towards him.

“Well, stay and chat for a little while longer and then go get ready. And you make sure someone snaps a picture of the two of you for the society pages,” Mrs. Holmes said with a smile. “And don't worry about me intruding tonight. I can go back home now and I really should let the two of you have your space to yourselves.”

“We'll come back to visit tomorrow,” Molly said. “I promise.”

“You two have spent more than enough time in this dreary hospital,” Mr. Holmes said, shaking his head. “We'll have a proper supper when I'm released. We'll even see if Mycroft will come.”

“Tell him if he does I'll count that as my meal with his brother,” Molly said with a smile. Both of Sherlock's parents gave her a slightly confused look. “He promised he would share a civil meal with Sherlock and I when we were in Cardiff.”

“That's asking a bit much of him,” Sherlock pointed out. “Me and Mum and Dad?”

“Well, I would really like a meal with all of you,” she said. “I won't ask him for anything else, I promise.”

Sherlock shook his head and sighed. “Fine. I'll agree to have that be our meal if he will.”

“Thank you, Sherlock,” she said with a wide smile. She shifted and stood up, setting her food on her chair and then going over and kissing him softly. “I promise it will not be a disaster.”

“I hope not,” he said as she pulled away.

“Violet, I think we have found the key to getting our sons to get along,” Mr. Holmes said with a chuckle.
“I do believe you're right,” she said.

“Oh, would you both stop?” Sherlock said, rolling his eyes. “You do know what's going to happen next, Molly, right? They're going to use you to patch up our fractured relationship. You'll never get a moment's peace.”

“I honestly don't mind,” she said with a smile.

He reached over and pulled her onto his lap. “Well, you should,” he said looking at her.

She put her arms around his neck. “I plan on being around for an awfully long time. This will be a project I will put a great deal of time and effort into because I don't like fighting. And you won't make it hard for me, will you?”

“I suppose not,” he grumbled. “Unless Mycroft does.”

“He won't. I can almost guarantee it.” She leaned in and kissed him again. “It's not as though I want a weekly supper or anything. I realize there are going to be eight thousand miles between all of us and that is the way you and Mycroft prefer it. But when we're all in the same city, then we make an effort, all right? And you have to call him occasionally for things that are not projects he needs you to work on. If you do that, I'll be happy.”

“How long do I need to talk to him?”

“Ten minutes? I know he's busy and there's a time difference.”

Sherlock thought it over. “I can do ten minutes, I suppose,” he finally said with a sigh. “But only once a week.”

“That's perfectly fine,” she said, giving him a wide smile.

“Sherlock, the smartest decision you ever made was going to California,” Mrs. Holmes said with a smile as Sherlock and Molly both turned to her. “I am very glad you had the good sense to begin a relationship with her. She's going to do you a world of good.”

“She already has,” he said with a small grin, letting her go. She let go of his neck and then stood up, going back to her food. “About how long do you think it will take you to get ready for the event tonight?”

“When does it start?” she asked, picking up her food and sitting back down.

“Seven,” he said.

“An hour, maybe? I'd like to take a bath before I begin to get ready, and then there's if you want to shower.”

“We can leave here at five and then get the necklace and earrings from the safe and begin to get ready, then,” he said.

“That works for me,” she said with a nod before she began to eat again. This time there was more conversation between the four of them, and it stayed rather upbeat. At five Sherlock and Molly made their goodbyes, and Molly found Adeline to exchange phone numbers with her. The other two nurses were there and looked quite guilty, and Molly was sure Adeline had said something to them about her overhearing. Then they left the hospital and went back to the Savoy, picking up the jewelry before going back to their room. Molly went into the washroom and got undressed as she ran
He opened the door and came inside. “Are you absolutely sure you don't want me to do or say anything?” he asked, moving over to squat next to the tub.

“I am,” she replied with a nod. “I mean, if people ask questions tonight, answer them as you see fit. I'm fairly sure with an event like this there will be members of the press there trying to get snippets for the society pages. But you don't have to make it a point to give someone a full length interview. We're only here for a few more days and then we go home and we can put all of this behind us until the next time we come out here. I'll just ignore the talk until then.”

He looked at her intently. “I don't like that people think you're only interested in me for my fame and fortune, and I don't like people thinking you manipulated me into our relationship. I want to set those people straight.”

“As long as you and your family and our friends know the truth I'll try to be okay with the rest of the world being wrong,” she said, lifting her hand closest to him up and gently touching his face. “I know you really do love me exactly as I am, and I feel the same way about you, and that's what really matters. But if you want, act like you're madly in love with me in public. I know we haven't spent much time together in public here but if we make it a point to do things together maybe rumours won't fly as much.”

“Well, I had planned on doing just that before everything changed,” he said. “But if that's what you want then I'll do it. And it won't be acting.”

“You know what I mean. You're generally fond of public displays of affection when you're with me and you should just continue with them here, regardless of who's watching.”

“And you don't think everyone will think it's an act?” he asked.

“If they're that hellbent on not seeing it when it's that clearly plain then there's no hope for them,” she said. “But you can tell when a couple is fooling themselves and when they're really in love.”

He moved a hand into the water and began tracing shapes on her skin beneath the bubbles. “It will definitely shock people to actually see me happy. Most people are used to me being an arrogant arse who would never crack a smile while a camera was around.”

“To be fair, though, you didn't really have a reason to be happy when you first became famous,” she said. “Even with John in your life you were still closed off. You got better when you came back from faking your death, but there were still moments where you shut us out. And then you had to go off and take care of Moriarty once and for all and you just seemed so dejected and sad. But these last few months, you've had nothing bad happen. You haven't had any terrible burdens on your shoulders. And you've had the chance to take time to put what you want first and so you've become pleased with your life.”

“I don't think I would have been nearly as happy if you hadn't left,” he said. “Even if we had eventually begun a relationship things like what happened today would have destroyed it before it got far, and we both would have been sad and miserable.”

“I know,” she said. “I think I made the best decision of my life to take the job in San Diego, and you made the best decision to follow me and end up staying.” She sat up in the tub and leaned closer to him. “I am very glad you did decide that. I don't think I can ever tell you how much.”
“You can try as often as you like,” he murmured as he leaned in.

“I will,” she said as she kissed him softly. He moved his hand that was still in the water to her waist and she pressed against the edge of the tub to deepen the kiss. After a few minutes she pulled away. “If you keep distracting me I might ask you to join me for this bath, and then we'd be late for the party.”

“We wouldn't want that,” he said, though he didn't pull away.

“Well, kiss me one last time before you leave me in peace,” she said with a smile.

He didn't answer, kissing her instead. It was quite a passionate kiss, and she was sorely regretting deciding to take a bath instead of spending her time in bed with him. When he pulled away he looked at her. “Was that a good enough kiss?”

“That was a spectacular kiss,” she said. “That was a kiss that is making me regret taking a bath as opposed to being somewhere where you can kiss me more.”

“Normally I would say we should make sure you don't have any regrets but I think I should make a call to my brother to urge him to make Tom's life intolerable while you relax.”

“Or you could join me,” she said.

“I'm tempted,” he said. “But I don't think it's a good idea. Too much chance your cast will get wet.”

“I suppose,” she said with a sigh.

“We don't have to stay until midnight,” he said. “Or if you do want to stay, we don't have to go to sleep anytime soon afterward. And we can spend the entire morning in bed.”

“You promise?” she asked, and he nodded. “All right. I'll be out of the bath shortly and then I'll get ready. You go take care of what you need to take care of.”

“Very well,” he said with a nod before straightening up and heading towards the door. She soaked for another half hour until the water started to turn cold, then drained the water and stood up, reaching over for a towel. She went to the mirror and began to plug in her curlers and look at her makeup. Once the curlers were ready she began to fix her hair, and while she was waiting for them to curl she did her makeup. She decided on a dramatic yet sultry look, something she didn't normally wear. Then she took her curlers out and finished fixing her hair before leaving the washroom and going out to where her clothes were.

She put on the nice undergarments she had bought to wear with the dress and then went into the closet and got out the dress. It was a long strapless white and emerald green dress, made out of a gauzy material that floated around her ankles as she moved. The emerald green bodice looked as though it was woven together, crisscrossing at various points all the way to the waist, and then the skirt of the dress transitioned from the dark green to white at the bottom. She'd felt very elegant when she'd put it on and Sherlock had approved immediately, so she was sure he would enjoy seeing her in it again. She finished getting it on and went to the sitting area of the suite, seeing him already dressed in his tuxedo. “Well?” she asked with a smile, turning for him when he looked up. The dress flared out and then settled again once she stopped.

“You look very beautiful, but you're missing something important,” he said. He went to where the jewelry box was and picked it up, opening it as he moved towards her. Once he got to her he set it on the table and then lifted the necklace out. She swept her hair to the side as he moved behind her, putting the necklace on her and clasping it shut. When he took a step back she let her hair fall back in
place, and then she picked up an earring and put it on. She did the same with the other one and then turned to look at him again. He gave her a wide smile. “Much better.”

She grinned back and then moved over to a mirror, looking at her reflection. The necklace looked absolutely stunning, as did the earrings, and she knew once she got a look at her complete outfit she’d be highly pleased. “I think I’m ready, then,” she said, turning back to him.

He offered her his arm and she took it. “Shall we go ring in the new year then?” he asked.

“Absolutely,” she replied. With that the two of them began to make their way to the door and out to the area where the event was being held. No matter what, tonight she was determined to enjoy herself and the company of the man she loved most in the world, and to hell what everyone else thought about them. She loved Sherlock so much, and she knew he felt the same way about her, and that was all that mattered, really.
The event at the Savoy was spectacular. There was amazing food and dancing and she got into quite a few interesting conversations with other people who were there. It was true that there were a few people who just wanted to gawk or to get any information on her and Sherlock's relationship that they could, but there were fewer of them than she'd expected. Mostly she spent the evening with Sherlock, staying close and enjoying his company at such a lovely event. When it became time to count down to midnight he held her close, not counting along but running his hand up and down her back until everyone shouted for the new year, and then he leaned in and kissed her in a way that took her breath away. She wasn't surprised they retired to their room shortly afterward.

Neither of them set their alarms, deciding to wake up whenever they woke up. When her eyes fluttered open she found she was on her side, with Sherlock's arm braced over her bare waist. “Are you awake?” she asked quietly.

“Yes,” he said, loosening his hold on her so she could turn to face him.

“How long have you been awake?” she asked.

“Maybe twenty minutes? I haven't glanced at a clock,” he said.

“I'm surprised you didn't try surprising me in bed with breakfast,” she said, giving him a smile.

“I just wanted to stay close,” he replied, running a hand along her waist. “I want to do that as often as I can in the mornings until I have to go back to university and you go back to your post.”

“I have no objections to that,” she said, moving closer. “We haven't really gotten to do that much this holiday, have we?”

“No, we haven't. I know you have plans with other people this week, so I'd like as much of your time as I can get.”

“Well, I'm going to have lunch with Phillip on the third, and at some point I'd like to have coffee or lunch with an acquaintance who offered me some good advice yesterday,” she said. “And then I know Greg would like to have a meal with both of us, as would John and Mary.”

“Who offered the advice?” he asked curiously.

“A woman I knew from various functions between St. Bart's and her hospital, Adeline Barrington. She was setting the gossipy nurses straight in the conversation I overheard, and she told them they weren't to bother you or your family while your father was at the hospital. She's actually quite nice. We had interesting conversations the times we spoke in the past.”

“I should thank her as well,” he said. “I won't intrude on your time together, but I imagine if she hadn't been involved in the conversation your take on all of it would have been quite different.”

“I don't know,” she said. “It helped a great deal, knowing that there are people who don't believe the stories, but I was still angry and dejected. But Adeline's advice made sense, to hold my head high and not be dragged down by it. I think I would have felt worse if she hadn't said that to me.”

“Then I definitely need to thank her,” he said. Then he was quiet for a moment, absently running his fingers along her skin. “Do you regret entering into a relationship with me?” he finally asked.
“No, Sherlock, absolutely not,” she said, moving her castless hand to caress his cheek. “It hurts to hear people's opinions about me without them even knowing me, and it isn’t pleasant to be called plain or to hear that you deserve better than me, but the opinions of others don't matter to me. You make me happy. I don't think I've been quite so happy in a relationship in my entire life. Not even with Tom, and I'd agreed to marry him. I'll withstand the gossip while we’re here.”

“Good,” he said before leaning in and kissing her softly. She pressed against him to deepen the kiss, and after a few minutes he rolled the two of them over so she was on her back. Only then did he pull away from the kiss and look down at her. “I am very glad you agreed to date me.”

“I know you are,” she said with a smile. “I'm very glad we're in a relationship as well.” She was going to say more when she felt her stomach grumble, and then she chuckled. “We might have to postpone things for a bit until after I get something to eat.”

“I wonder what time it is,” Sherlock said as he got off of her, reaching over for his phone. His eyes widened. “It's nearly eleven thirty.”

“No wonder I'm hungry,” she said. “Do we want to order room service or go out to eat?”

He thought about it for a moment. “Do you have a preference?”

“Well, it is a weekend, which means if there are restaurants open for brunch that could be nice,” she said thoughtfully. “We could ask the concierge for suggestions.”

“I like the sound of that,” he said, getting out of bed and moving towards the dresser for a new pair of pants. “As long as we come back here afterward.”

“I can definitely agree to that,” she said with a smile, sitting up. She stretched for a moment, and then got out of bed and got her silk dressing gown, putting it on. “I want to freshen up a bit first, though.”

“All right,” he said, nodding. She made to move past him to go to the washroom but he reached over for her and pulled her close against him. She grinned up at him, putting her arms around his neck as he slid his hands to the small of her back. “When we come back we should pick up where we left off.”

“I would definitely enjoy that,” she said. “I don't think there will be many places open today as it is, so coming back to the hotel after brunch would probably be our best bet anyway. And then you are more than welcome to have your wicked way with me.” She leaned in and kissed him, attempting to keep it light, but he deepened it before he finally pulled away. She arched an eyebrow as she looked at him. “Are you trying to convince me to change my mind?”

“I'm not,” he said. “I just wanted to give you a very nice kiss.”

“You always give me very nice kisses,” she said as she pulled away. “I shouldn't take too long. I'm going to attempt a shower.”

“Are you sure that's a good idea?” he asked.

“I'll keep my cast dry, I promise,” she said. “Unless you'd like to help?”

He licked his lips for a moment. “I think I would be amenable to that.” She pulled away from him completely and then offered him her good hand before leading him to the washroom. “I'm assuming this will be strictly a shower?”

“Where is the fun in that?” she said, turning back to give him an impish grin. “We just have to be
quick, that's all.” He grinned back as they left the bedroom and made their way to the washroom. She turned on the water and adjusted it until it was at a temperature they could both stand, since she generally preferred hot showers while he took colder ones, and when it was ready she undid the knot holding her dressing gown in place and then let it fall to the floor. She stepped in first and after a moment he joined her.

He motioned for her to stand under the shower and get her hair wet, and she did, running her castless hand through her hair to make sure it got completely wet. “It's a shame you're washing out the curls,” he said when she turned around.

“I would suggest getting a perm but I had one when I was younger and it was a disaster,” she said as he got the bottle of shampoo and put some in her hair. She had rather gotten used to him washing her hair since she got the cast on and he was especially good at it. He began to massage the shampoo into her scalp and she shut her eyes, enjoying it. “That's about the only way I'd have curly hair all the time, and it wouldn't look quite the same. It would be really curly, with very tight curls.”

“I like the looser ones, I suppose,” he said.

“I'll curl my hair more often, if you'd like,” she said. “It really doesn't take too much time. But keep in mind I like having straight hair.”

“I also like when you have straight hair because I can run my fingers through it, so that's fine,” he said. He finished with her scalp and began getting the shampoo through the rest of her hair before turning her around. She put her head under the water and used her good hand to rinse her hair completely. When she was done she saw Sherlock had picked up the bottle of conditioner and she turned around again.

“You are quite good at doing this, you know,” she said as he put some in his hand and began to massage it into her hair. “I'm going to miss having an excuse for you to do this.”

“Well, next term I have the majority of my classes on Mondays and Wednesdays, with one class on Tuesdays,” he said. “So perhaps I can join you for a shower on the days I don't have to leave early for class.”

“I would love that, but aren't you going to want to sleep in?” she asked, turning to look at him.

He turned her head back and continued conditioning her hair. “I usually tend to wake up shortly after you get out of bed, if I'm not already awake in the first place. It's not a problem. And I'm sure you'd find that a more enjoyable start to your day.”

“Oh, I certainly would,” she said with a chuckle. “But every once in a while stay in bed so I can surprise you with breakfast in bed.”

“So long as you do the same,” he said. He worked on her hair for a few more minutes before pulling his hands away. She generally kept her conditioner in for a few minutes so they worked on switching positions so he could wash his own hair. He got under the spray to get his hair wet when she stepped closed and encircled him with her good hand. “That is going to be distracting.”

“I can stop,” she said as she began to stroke him.

“I would prefer if you didn't,” he said, forgetting about taking his own shower for the moment. He moved his hands to pull her closer, still giving her room to maneuver, before dipping his head and kissing her. She grinned against his lips and continued to stroke him, pleased when he began to get erect. After a few minutes he moved one of his hands between her legs and began to tease her, and
she faltered in what she was doing. She had realized some time ago he was quite skilled in how he used his fingers, and this morning was no exception. She moaned into the kiss when he slipped a finger inside of her, joined a moment later by a second one, as his thumb teased her clit. Soon she had to cling to him to keep upright.

She could feel a very familiar heat begin to pool inside of her when he pulled away from the kiss. She gave him a look but he motioned for her to turn around and then she grinned. She turned around and widened her stance slightly, bracing herself by putting her hands on the wall as she bent over, and he moved closer, grasping her hips tightly before slowly entering her from behind. He drove himself in deep and she gasped. They didn't do this too often and she forgot just how different it felt in this position, how deeply he could go. He pulled out just as slowly before entering her again, slowly beginning to build up a rhythm. “Oh, God, yes,” she said, shutting her eyes and enjoying every minute of this. He didn't respond, instead picking up speed, and she could feel the tension begin to build inside her. “Please, harder.” His response was to increase the speed until he was slamming into her and she felt herself tighten around him before she came apart, feeling wave after wave of pleasure. He thrust into her one more time and stilled.

“I take it that was adequate?” he asked, leaning forward slightly.

“Oh, that was more than adequate,” she said. “And the best part is we haven't even soaped up yet.”

“I don't think I'll be up for round two right away,” he said with a slight laugh.

“Not that! I meant we didn't get clean and then shag,” she said as he pulled out of her. She turned around to face him. “We would have had to do it all over again.”

“I could have enjoyed it,” he said, pulling her closer.

“Oh, I'm sure we both would have,” she said with a smile. She stood up on her toes and kissed him softly. He kissed her back for a moment before she pulled away. “You know...I was thinking next time, if we do this again...”

“Yes?” he asked.

“I know you like it when I bite your neck or when I scratch your skin, but if we're in this position again, maybe you could pull my hair? Maybe?” she asked, looking up at him.

“If you want me to,” he said with a grin. “I am always looking for a way to make you happy.”

“I think I would like to try that at least once.” She paused. “And maybe once I'm out of this cast we could do...more. I mean, only if you want to.”

“Anything you've done before?” he asked.

Her eyes went wide. “Oh no. I mean, I'd entertained a few ideas but never been with anyone I trusted enough to try them. I suggested one or two to Tom but he said no, it wasn't anything he was interested in so I just stayed quiet.”

“I think I'd like to hear some of these things you would like to try,” he said.

“Well, I'd thought it might be interesting to not be able to touch, or to see what was going on,” she said. “And maybe something that might cause a little more pain than I usually do?”

He looked down at her, nodding. “I think those are all things I could agree to, on two conditions.”
“What are those conditions?” she asked.

“One: that you let me do those things to you at least once. And two: no riding crops. I had an experience being hit with one that was unpleasant and I don't want to associate that memory with something I think I could find enjoyable.”

“I can definitely agree to both of those conditions,” she said with a wide grin. “Maybe we can start with not being able to see what you're doing tonight.”

“I think it will be a very interesting evening, then,” he said before kissing her again. The kiss lasted for quite a few minutes before he reluctantly pulled away. “I think we should finish this shower sooner rather than later since I'm assuming you don't want to go out with wet hair.”

“All right,” she said. They pulled apart and finished the shower ten minutes later. It would have been sooner put he kissed her again and she didn't really want to stop. When they were finally finished they got towels and dried themselves off. Sherlock wrapped one around his waist and left her in peace as she wrapped one around her chest and another around her hair. She found her hair dryer and plugged it in before undoing the towel around her hair and beginning to dry it, a task made more difficult by not being able to hold her comb well in the hand with the cast. Finally she was done and she went to where her clothing was, getting dressed under Sherlock's appreciative gaze. When she was finally dressed they got their things and left the room to head down to the lobby.

The concierge asked whether they were looking for something simple or posh, and Sherlock asked for suggestions on both. When the concierge suggested Berners Tavern Molly's eyes lit up. She'd always wanted to eat there, and brunch seemed to be the best time. Sherlock noticed and said that would be fine, and the concierge called to make them a reservation. It took some persuading but when the call was done he said a table would be waiting as soon as they arrived. They thanked the man for his help before they headed out to the street to catch a cab. They chatted as the cab took them to SoHo, and once they got there they got out and Molly looked around appreciatively. “This looks quite nice,” he said.

“I hope it's just as nice inside,” she replied. She reached over for his hand and they made their way in. Sherlock gave his name when asked and they were led to a table in what appeared to be the nicest part of the restaurant. Molly picked up the menu and her eyes widened. “Oh, this is quite posh.”

“It's not as though I can't afford it,” he said as he scanned the menu. “A lot of this looks very appetizing.”

“Some of those cocktails sound divine,” she said. “But it almost feels too early.”

“It's after noon. If you want one, order one,” he said. “I'm actually tempted to try one of them myself.”

“Oh?” she asked, looking at him with surprise.

“The Mead, Myself and Aye,” he said. “On the rare occasions Mycroft has persuaded me to share a drink with him it's usually brandy. The combination in that drink sounds interesting. I may not finish the glass but I think I'd like to try it.”

“That was what I was looking at, actually, but the wines look spectacular too. Maybe if you order that drink I could take a sip?”

He nodded. “All right. Are you going to get a glass of wine?”

“I'm thinking so,” she said with a nod. “Unless I get the Room With A View.”
“I’d say try the cocktail,” he replied. “If there's a wine that looks intriguing we can always see about getting it back home.”

“Good point.” She turned her attention to the rest of the menu. She almost wanted to see about coming back for supper at some point, once she looked at the menu, but then she zeroed in on the brunch selection. “If I said I wanted to try the baked lobster omelette...” she began, biting her lip after a moment.

“I'd say that's fine,” he said with a grin. “Mostly because nothing else sounds all that appetizing to me so that was what I was going to order.”

“Well, then that settles it,” she said, smiling back as she put her menu away. “Though I might see if I can get the yoghurt and granola to start. I'm really quite famished.”

“I think that might be a good idea,” he said with a nod as he set his own menu down. “I saw a few dishes I might like to try at a later point.”

“You too?” she asked.

“Perhaps we can arrange to have another meal with John and Mary and bring them here,” he said. “How many meals do we have invitations for?”

“Greg wants to go to our favorite pub for a pint, so maybe supper beforehand and then a trip to the pub. And then John and Mary want to cook for us one night, and then the family dinner. So three evening meals, plus I'm going to have lunch with Phillip in two days.”

“I suppose I'll find something to do to occupy my time that afternoon,” he said. “Though if he tells you anything about what Mycroft set him off to do I'd love to hear it.”

“So he is helping Mycroft with the evidence from the shooting?” she asked.

Sherlock nodded. “I may think Anderson's incompetent but apparently I'm the only one. He's Mycroft's pet forensic technician now. Though I will admit, Mycroft did say he'll look over everything with a fine tooth comb, so I suppose it's the best I can hope for.”

“You know, until he got sacked Phillip did good work,” she pointed out. “Greg and Sally can vouch for that. And he figured out you were alive before you came back. Don't forget that.”

“Yes, I know,” he said with a sigh. “That must have been hard for you.”

“Excruciatingly hard,” she said. “But I have a much better poker face than people realize. Even so, he realized I knew something.”

“Did you ever tell him how we pulled it off?” he asked.

She nodded. “I did. He said you'd already told him and he didn't believe you. When I verified it all again he was rather shocked you'd actually told him the truth.”

“I don't know why he thought I'd lie about it,” he said. “I mean, it's not as though it was as outlandish as some of his theories. It made perfect logical sense.”

“Well, you know how some people have their pet theories and can't let go,” she said with a smile. “But he knows I'm not the type of person to lie without a good reason, so he accepted it well enough in the end.”
“What was his pet theory?” he asked curiously.

“You had John hypnotized and came crashing through the window at St. Bart's,” she said. “And I believe at some point you snogged me.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes. “Now, *that* is an outlandish theory. If I'd smashed into one of the windows that would have given it all away. Anyone standing on the sidewalk would have seen it and put two and two together.”

“Yes, and I pointed that out to him. Still, he seemed quite taken with that theory.”

Sherlock was quiet for a moment. “It never would have worked without you,” he said when he spoke. “If you hadn't gotten the other body and realized what Moriarty had done, or told me the trick with the ball, it all wouldn't have worked.”

“I know,” she said, laying her good hand over his. “And I'm very glad it did. A real menace is gone and the world is that much safer now.”

He shifted the position of his hand to hold hers. “I should have done a better job of taking care of the threat the first time, though.”

“You didn't realize the Moriarty you'd dealt with had help like that, though,” she said, squeezing his hand. “We thought we'd outsmarted him but he had been one step ahead. One of them was bad enough but two? You couldn't have foreseen that.”

“I'm just glad there aren't any other Moriarty siblings running around that I'm aware of,” he said. “Hopefully if there are they didn't hold those two in high regard.”

“It's been a year. I highly doubt someone would have waited this long for revenge,” she said.

“I don't know though. It could be the perfect time, since I'm away from home and I'm happy,” he pointed out. “And remember, James Moriarty waited nearly three years to make his presence known, to inform me his twin brother had died on that roof instead of him. He was just waiting until Magnussen was out of the picture first.”

“Do you think about that a lot?” she asked.

He shook his head. “No, not often. I try my best not to think about it at all. But when my father was shot I couldn't help but think it was related until the other robber ratted out his coconspirators, so it's been on my mind more since then.”

“Well, I will just have to work harder to distract you,” she said. “And we'll start by changing the topic of conversation, all right?”

He nodded. “All right.”

“You know, I'm fairly sure the cinema John and Mary got us passes to is open today. Cinemas usually are open regardless of whether it's a holiday or not. We can always go see a film when we're done with brunch. And then we can go back to the hotel and spend some time together in bed before we have our evening meal.”

“That sounds like a good plan,” he said.

“Then it's settled. That's what we'll do today,” she said, giving him a smile. He gave her a small one in return and she squeezed his hand before letting go. “Anything in particular you want to see
“I don't even know what's out,” he replied.

“Well, I think I'm in the mood for action,” she said. “An explosion or two would be nice. And you'd probably enjoy it more.”

“I could live with that,” he said. Then he leaned forward. “Though I'd be willing to watch anything you want if you'd let yourself be blindfolded first.”

“If I'd known that I would have pushed for a period piece,” she said with a soft laugh.

“You still can.”

“I'm tempted,” she said. “But we'll see what's out before I decide what you'll have to endure this afternoon. It might be nice to try and see something that won't get a release in the States anywhere except DVD.”

“I'll leave it up to you, then.” At that moment the waiter came to take their orders, and they both told him what they wanted. Once the menus had been taken away Sherlock leaned forward. “Do we have to leave the hotel room once we go back?”

Molly chuckled softly. “No, I suppose we don't,” she said. “I think room service will be sufficient for an evening meal. Why don't you want to leave?”

“I think once we get back I want to spend as much time with just you as I can,” he said. “I don't want to have to worry about people trying to take a photograph of us or asking awkward questions or pointing and staring. We'll be out more over the next few days and I just want one day with just you for most of the day.”

“Well, we don't have to go to the cinema today,” she said thoughtfully.

“I don't mind doing that,” he said. “But I think tonight I just want to stay in once we go back and ignore the world.”

“Is something bothering you right now?” she asked with a frown.

“I can see three people covertly trying to take photographs,” he said. “And another who seems to be debating whether to come over to our table.”

“Ah,” she said. “Well, it's bound to happen every time we go out, especially if there was anything on us from last night in the papers today. But I'm just going to ignore it. I'm not going to spend the entire rest of my holiday hiding, because then I'll miss out on having an enjoyable time.”

“I'll do the same, I suppose,” he said.

She hesitated a moment, then stood up and moved to the seat next to him as opposed to across from him before leaning in to kiss him softly. He returned the kiss for a few minutes before she pulled away slightly. “Tonight, however, I'm all yours, however you want me,” she said before she pulled away completely, giving him a wide grin.

“However I want you?” he asked, grinning back.

“Well, within reason,” she said. “But I think you'll find there's a lot that I might consider within reason. Just with you, though. Don't get any ideas about sharing.”
“When it comes to you and your time in bed with me you'll find I have absolutely no intention of sharing or being shared,” he said. “I can promise you that.”

“Good,” she said with a nod. “I feel like being selfish when it comes to you.”

“And I will encourage that,” he said, leaning in again.

She leaned in as well. “I'll do the same for you.”

“I'm glad we're on the same page, then,” he murmured before he kissed her again. She smiled into the kiss, at the moment not caring if anyone was taking pictures or being thoroughly scandalized. The opinions of others didn't matter to her one whit right now, because she was very happy and nothing and no one was going to ruin that for her.
Chapter 38

It seemed as though everyone in London wanted to make plans with Molly and Sherlock now that the family crisis was over, and so a tentative schedule was worked out for the rest of their holiday when the two of them finally turned their phones on after the trip to the cinema. The second was going to be spent getting Sherlock's parent's home ready for the return of Mr. Holmes since he was going to be released the morning of the third, then the third Sherlock would occupy himself while Molly had lunch with Phillip before joining her for dinner and a visit to the pub with Greg. The fourth would be a day for Sherlock and Molly to catch up with friends and acquaintances on their own followed by supper with John and Mary and William, and the sixth would be the Holmes family dinner to celebrate Sherlock's birthday. That would leave two full days and part of a third for Sherlock and Molly to spend however they wanted together before they went back to California, though Mrs. Holmes was trying to convince them to extend their visit a day or two longer. As sorely as Molly was tempted, she really had started to miss California and she wanted to go back.

Things had gone quite smoothly so far, Molly thought to herself as she made her way back to the Savoy, with only a few hiccups. Mycroft had to be out of town until very late on the night of the sixth, so Sherlock's birthday was going to be spent with his friends and dinner with his family would be the next day. Mary said she and John would treat them to a night out, and Sherlock had suggested Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson be invited as well, so a small get-together had been planned involving good food, good drink for those who wanted it, and a chance to get all the good-byes done at once before Molly and Sherlock left again. The morning of his birthday Sherlock had said his parents wanted to have lunch with him since it was his birthday and they rarely got to spend any portion of the actual day with him, so Molly met Sally for an early lunch and a quick shopping trip for the occasion that went very much awry, thanks to ending up at the same place Janine was. They had nodded towards each other and been content to leave their interaction at that, but the paparazzi hounding her wanted more. There had been some rather embarrassing questions asked of her while the two of them were shopping, and she gathered Tom had said even more, which left her rather depressed and wanting to avoid the cameras and men wanting a reaction. Finally Sally pulled out her badge to make it clear that she and Molly were to be left alone unless they wanted to be detained for a while, and only then did they back off.

When she got back into the suite she saw Sherlock was sitting on the sofa, speaking to someone on the phone. Molly set the bags containing the things she had bought by the sofa and took off her coat, waiting for him to finish his phone call. It didn't take him long, and he looked up at her. “I heard you had a run-in with some people following you and Sally today,” he said.

“How could you possibly know that?” she asked, eyes wide as she sat down next to him.

“I got a rather unexpected phone call from Janine,” he said.

She sighed. “I tried,” she said glumly. “I don't think either of us wanted to make a scene, but it was out of our hands.”

“I know, and so does she. As far as the press is concerned she would have the best idea as to what our relationship is like, aside from him, and they want her opinions and any other salacious details she could give them,” he said. “And it's happened other times before today. It just so happened today was worse, due to her proximity to you.”

“Ah,” she said with a slight nod. “Why did she call you, though?”

“She was wondering how much longer I was planning on staying because the people bothering her
are getting quite determined to get a sound bite. I said we would be here until the eighth, and I told her if she wanted to say something that was entirely up to her, if she thought it would help.”

“Is she going to give a soundbite?” Molly asked curiously, tilting her head.

Sherlock shook his head. “Actually, she said she didn't plan on saying anything more about us. She'd gotten what she needed and she honestly wished me the best. She said she realized you and I are better suited for each other than she and I ever would have been if it had been real.”

She remembered some of the conversations she and Mary had had. As much as she still wasn't fond of the woman she had to admit this pleased her and made her more inclined to change her opinion of her. “I see,” she said. “I'm glad for that, I suppose. But what is she going to do about the people bothering her?”

“She's going to take a brief holiday of her own,” he said before he glanced at his watch. “In about an hour she's hopping on a plane with her husband and heading to the Bahamas for a week. Even though we'll be gone in two days I felt it was an appropriate gift for an apology.”

She gave him a small smile. “That was quite nice of you,” she said.

“I suppose,” he said. “She hadn't asked for me to, but I thought since my return put her in this position in the first place it was the least I could do. She just asked for warning next time we come back so she can make sure she's nowhere near London. I didn't think you'd mind that so I agreed.”

“I honestly had no clue she was being harassed,” she said as she relaxed into the sofa. “I didn't even know she was there with us at first until we ended up in the footwear department at the same time.”

“Well, after Sally threatened to have the paparazzi arrested they all pounced on Janine. It made her shopping experience rather unpleasant, and when someone asked for intimate details on our relationship she'd had enough.” He looked over at her as she moved closer. “Janine and I may have used each other, but she isn't a bad person. As was pointed out to me by both John and Mary, what I did to her was far worse than what she did to me. She could have gotten some vicious revenge and been well within her rights, and she portrayed me fairly decently in all of this.”

“Unlike how Tom has portrayed me to the press,” she said with a sigh. “He went and did another interview yesterday, this time with intimate details.”

Sherlock's jaw clenched. “That explains some of the questions Janine was asked. Do you know any particulars?”

“No, though I gather he intimated I was frigid, based on a few questions I got asked,” she said.

“I'm going to throttle him,” he said quietly, and Molly could see his fists were clenched.

Molly got up off the sofa and then straddled Sherlock's lap, facing him. She put a hand on either side of his face and after a moment he relaxed and moved his hands to her waist. “Don't do anything that will cause you to get arrested. It's not worth it. We have this evening and one more full day and then we go back to California at noon on the eighth for a nice long while, where it's you and I and relative privacy. Unless the tabloids want to send people to San Diego to shadow our every move we won't have to worry about them until your spring break or the end of your next term, whenever we decide to come back.”

“If I were to knock him unconscious Mycroft would ensure that I serve no jail time,” he pointed out. “If Lestrade didn't beat him to it, at any rate.”
“Sherlock? No,” she said. “I don’t want to have to take care of banged up knuckles or bloodied noses on my holiday.”

“He wouldn't lay a hand on me and I would feel better if I hit him,” he said in a slight huff.

“Well, I would feel better if you didn't,” she said. “He'll get his eventually.”

“Mycroft is all but ensuring it,” he said in response. “But it's not enough. It's one thing to say you were pining after me and that spelled the end of your relationship with him. It's another to start spreading intimate details of things you did together. I may occasionally do despicable things but even I know that's too much.”

“And that is why I love you and not him,” she said, leaning forward. “I misjudged him. I thought he was a good, honest man who genuinely loved me. I thought we had ended things well enough and I thought he knew it had to do with more than just you. I just didn't realize he was a bastard. I think you are definitely the better man.”

He began to run a hand up and down her back. “I do not normally let my emotions get the best of me, but right now I want to beat him to a bloody pulp. But as you seem to think I am the better man in this situation I will refrain from doing so.”

“Thank you,” she said, leaning in to kiss him. He used his hand to keep her close as he kissed her back, and when she pulled away from the kiss slightly breathlessly she smiled at him. “How long until we need to meet everyone?”

“Three hours,” he said. “How long do you think it will take you to get ready?”

“Maybe an hour?” she said. “I want to do something nice with my hair.”

“I personally would like for you to curl it,” he said.

“Well, since it's your birthday, I'll do just that,” she said with a smile. “So we should plan more for a full hour.” She made to pull away from him but he kept her close. “Sherlock?”

“This should all feel strange,” he said. “Being in a relationship, living with someone who isn't John, actually being like everyone else. I keep thinking it should feel strange, and it doesn't. I replay some of the conversations I have and they seem...normal. And I like them. I know even a year ago I would have balked at something as boring as going to share a meal with my friends to celebrate my birthday. And if I'd seen myself in a relationship with you I'd have assumed I was on some undercover case or that it was a very elaborate prank.”

“Well, I like to think you grew up,” she said, moving a hand to rest it on his chest.

“I was already an adult,” he pointed out.

“But you were also kind of a spoiled little boy in a lot of respects,” she said with a smile. “Even you have to admit that. You got what you wanted through whatever means necessary no matter what it did to other people. And then life happened and you couldn't do that anymore. You found you couldn't manipulate everyone, and that there were times you had to lean on others, and that maybe the small things really are important. Everyone goes through that. It just took you longer than the rest of us.”

“I bet you all were waiting for that,” he said.

“We were, but we didn't want it to have to happen the way it did,” she said, her smile dimming. “But
I will say one thing. I was infatuated with the spoiled little boy, but I love the man he became, and I would rather take a million boring evenings with him than spend my life waiting for the spoiled boy to notice me just once and send that thrill through me.”

He looked at her intently. “I think it's better to have a normal, boring, long life than to live one where it can all disappear in a moment.”

“Exactly,” she said as her smile brightened again. “And I think I should get your mind off things for a bit before we have to go.”

“I think that is an excellent idea,” he said with a grin of his own. “What did you have in mind?”

“It depends. How upset do you think they'll be if we're a little late?” she asked. “Because I'd like to kiss you for a while, and that leads to other things, and then we'd need to rest, and...”

“I don't think they'll mind much, so long as we're not more than a half hour late,” he said, moving his hand to the nape of her neck. She leaned in more and just as they were about to kiss her mobile went off. “Ignore it.”

“I was planning on it,” she murmured before kissing him softly. The phone rang a few more times before it went to voicemail, but Molly was more interested in kissing Sherlock than checking it. Five minutes later, though, the phone rang again and she pulled away from him. “It better be very important,” she said, leaning over to reach her handbag. She couldn't quite reach it from her position, though.

“I think you have to get off of me,” Sherlock said with an amused grin.

“Unfortunately,” she said with a sigh as the ringing continued. Finally she got up and went to her handbag, pulling out her phone just as the ringing stopped. She stared at the screen in outright shock, her eyes wide and her mouth open. “Unbelievable.”

“What?” he asked as she began to get angry. She didn't respond, handing him her mobile so he could see for himself who had called. She saw him look livid when he looked up. “He has the gall to actually think it's all right to call you?”

Apparently,” she said. Normally she deleted people's phone numbers when she stopped associating with them, but Tom had called continuously when they'd first broken up, trying to get her back. She'd put his number back in just so she could make sure to ignore it. But she'd been sure she deleted it when she got her new phone in California. Apparently she hadn't. She took her phone back from him. “I don't want to hear what he has to say. I just...I don't care.”

“Then turn your phone off,” Sherlock said. “And we can see if we can block him from calling you.”

Molly nodded, turning off her phone. She wanted absolutely nothing to do with him. When she found out he had done the first interview any vestiges of good feelings she'd had towards her Tom had disappeared. He'd decided to make a profit on their relationship and she felt that was one of the most despicable things a person could do. That was part of the reason she had disliked Janine so much, until Sherlock had told her the truth about it all. Tom had abused her trust in him and it had shown that she really had made the best choice in ending things with him. She tossed her mobile back in her handbag and sat down next to Sherlock. “I can't believe he thinks it's all right to call me.”

He put an arm around her shoulders and she moved as close as she could, draping an arm loosely across his lower chest. “Are you sure I can't punch him at least once?” he asked.

“Tempting as that is you shouldn't sink to that level,” she said with a sigh. “I'll just screen my calls.
“until I can block his number.”

“I'm sorry,” he said, reaching up to smooth her hair down slightly.

“I don't even want to know what's on the voicemail. I would be happy if I never have to hear his voice ever again, or see his face. If he'd just drop off the face of the earth that would be fantastic.”

“Mycroft has connections in MI-6,” Sherlock said thoughtfully. “He could legitimately make that happen.”

“No,” she replied. “No making him disappear to a tiny windowless cell to be tortured, and no killing him. He's a prat but he at least deserves his life, however miserable Mycroft is making it.”

“He's making it quite miserable, from my understanding,” Sherlock said. “He's quietly arranged for Tom's immediate neighbors to relocate and he's having very loud punk rock music blasted at odd hours of the night when he knows Tom is attempting to sleep. Scotland Yard has been told to ignore the complaints, and Lestrade is gleefully helping to ensure that's the case. If it hasn't already happened he will shortly be losing possession of his car and most of his assets will be frozen, or at least the portion that came from the interviews. I believe Mycroft is also ensuring that excruciating detail is paid to his entire life history so that he can find a pressure point to make him bend to Mycroft's will. And furthermore he's on every major watch list in multiple countries, so if he attempts to travel he will be rebuffed until Mycroft has him removed from those watch lists.”

Molly lifted her head up, her eyes wide. She hadn't entirely been on board with his life being made uncomfortable over it; he was a horrible person for doing it, but she could deal with it. But that had been before today, before the questions. Before he called her. She wasn't sure what kind of person that made her. Still, this seemed a bit like overkill. “Oh my Lord,” she said. “Isn't that a bit...much?”

“Mycroft is quite fond of you. He's probably more fond of you than he is anyone he's related to by blood. He did not take kindly to the first interview, and I doubt the second one has changed his opinion of Tom very much. If anything Tom may have even more troubles heaped upon him.”

Sherlock looked at her. “You can always tell Mycroft to stop, though. If you think it's excessive he'll find more mundane ways to make him regret saying anything.”

“I think that might be best,” she said quietly. “I mean, government watch lists seems a bit overly harsh.”

“Well, I would suggest calling him now,” Sherlock said. “You're more than welcome to use my phone.”

She nodded and he picked it up from where he had set it. He pulled up Mycroft's contact and then handed it to her. She took it and then pressed send before putting it to her ear. Mycroft spoke immediately after picking up on the second ring. “I am busy right now, dear brother,” he said.

“It's Molly. I'm borrowing Sherlock's mobile,” she said in response.

“Well, in that case, I can spare a few moments for you, Molly,” he said. “What is it?”

“Could you please take Tom off those watch lists?” she asked. “That's a bit much. I mean, I get that he's a prat but I think that's overkill.”

“I take it you have not seen the second interview,” he said.

“No. I'm avoiding it, just like I avoided the first one.”
“Trust me when I say the glee in which he gave those intimate details was sickening. Putting him on government watch lists is mild compared to what I would have rather done.”

She blinked. Now she was actually quite nervous about what he had said to the media. Still, she wanted to make his life uncomfortable, not impossible. “Nonetheless, I would appreciate it if you’d do it all the same. And no kidnapping, either, unless you’re going to deliver a stern talking to and then dump him on the outskirts of London.”

“Do I have to leave him a means to return home if I do that?” he asked curiously.

She was quiet for a moment as she thought about it. “I suppose not.”

“May I have him sent to the North without his wallet or shoes?”

That was actually quite tempting, she realized. “Take his mobile, too.”

“Very well. I will have him taken off the watch lists and we will see about sending him away and making it quite hard for him to return. Hopefully he will still be there by the time you leave.”

“Thank you, Mycroft,” she said. “I appreciate it.”

“You're welcome.” There was a pause. “Are you absolutely sure you still want a family dinner while you're here?”

“Yes, I'm absolutely sure. I know we couldn't do it today for Sherlock's birthday, but the dinner was promised to me and since I don't see you flying to California anytime soon and we leave in less than forty-eight hours then tomorrow is the only day it will work.”

“Very well,” he said with a sigh. “I know I had agreed to this, and I am a man of my word. I just hoped you would have seen the folly in it by now.”

Molly smiled slightly and shook her head. “I'm going to be around for a long time,” she said. “And I'm going to try very hard to make sure the two of you get along better, no matter how much you two resist.”

“She has a very intent look in her eyes, Mycroft,” Sherlock said loudly.

Molly shook her head and smacked him lightly. “Sherlock, stop.” Then she spoke into the phone. “I promise I will not be aggressive in trying to get the two of you to get along.”

“Then I suppose I can tolerate it,” he said. “Tomorrow at five, then?”

“That's what your mum said,” she replied.

“Then I will be there. Enjoy your evening, Molly.”

“You too, Mycroft,” she said before pulling the phone away and hanging up. She handed it back to Sherlock. “I somehow think it's better we're doing the family dinner tomorrow as opposed to today. At least this way you can have an enjoyable birthday.”

“To be honest I haven't really wanted to think about my birthday, much less celebrate it, but I suppose a night out with friends is more acceptable than spending it with Mycroft,” he said as she moved closer to him. He put his arm around her shoulders again. “It's been years since I've had a remotely decent birthday. Something always seems to go wrong, or else everyone ignores it. Personally, this year I would have preferred to spend the whole day lounging here with you.”
“Well, I can make it up to you when we get back to California,” she said.

“Hopefully this year is better than the last few,” he said with a nod as she settled in next to him. “Your birthday is coming up too, isn't it?”

She nodded. “It's in March, on the 11th.”

“We should do something,” he said. “Maybe take a trip somewhere one of the weekends around it.”

“We could go back to Julian,” she said thoughtfully. “Or do something in Los Angeles.” Then she grinned. “Or we could stay at the Hotel del Coronado for the weekend. I mean, it's not like we don't live close to Coronado, but we haven't actually gone there other than for a day trip. We don't have to take the ferry so I can meet you there after work if I'm working again by then. I can handle Barrio Logan to get to the bridge.”

“So a weekend trip to Coronado is what you'd like?” he asked. She nodded. “I think we can arrange that, then. It's better than trying to do it in the summer when all the tourists are there.”

“What are we going to do for your birthday when we get back?” she asked.

“Jason let it slip that he and Thomas are kidnapping us for dinner shortly after we arrive back,” he said. “To trade stories about our holiday and their honeymoon, ostensibly, but I'm fairly sure there will be exchanging of gifts as well. And a few other acquaintances of mine have broached the idea of dinners out as well, though I don't know if there will be gifts. I don't particularly need them, so there's that.”

“I get the feeling our social life is going to get a little busy when we get back,” she said with a smile. “At least until your next term starts.”

“I think so as well,” he said, grinning back. “I won't make any concrete plans until we get back and you get your cast off, though.”

“I'm not looking forward to how it's going to look,” she said with a sigh. “But I suppose being able to use my arm again will help me deal with any feelings I have towards the scarring.”

“Well, I won't care how it looks because I will be happy not to have to do all the cooking,” he said as his grin got wider. She lifted her arm up and swatted his shoulder again. “But really, I'll be glad because you'll be able to go back to your post. I know you've missed that.”

“I certainly have,” she said. “I just hope I'm able to. I mean, I know my job is waiting, but I'm worried the physical therapist will tell me it will take a really long time or that I simply won't be able to do it. I do love what I do.”

“I know,” he said, turning his head slightly to press a kiss in her hair. Then he pulled away again. “I feel like one of us should be distracting the other.”

“Well, despite not being quite as angry I think the mood has been ruined,” she said with a sigh. “Mostly I'm mulling over exactly what he had to say.”

“Then why don't you put away what you bought and then we can talk? I'm interested to know how elaborate your revenge fantasies can run,” he said.

“Oh, I can be quite creative,” she said, pulling away from him and getting off the sofa. “I got a few presents for you, among other things. They're wrapped already, but I got you two things. Don't try and guess what they are, either.”
“You're taking the fun out of it,” he said as she moved over towards her shopping bags. “Did you get anything interesting for yourself?”

“I got a few nice things,” she said. “A new dress with heels to wear tonight and a clutch to match, two pairs of earrings, a pair of flats I fell in love with and a watch to wear when I'm not at my post. I also found a necklace Mary would absolutely adore so I bought that for her, and I got William one or two things.”

“John is going to feel left out,” he said with a grin as he stood up.

“I can always figure out something for him,” she said, picking up the bags. “You know he's going to make it a point to see us off when we leave.” She made her way to the bedroom and he followed. She pulled the dress out of the bag first and laid it out on the bed. He made his way over to it and glanced down at it before touching it. It was a knee length burgundy lace dress with a nude lining, with a high scoop neckline and tiny sleeves. “Do you like that?”

He nodded. “Who picked it out?”

“Sally did, actually. I had walked right past it and she demanded I come back over and take one in my size to try on. I didn't think I would like it that much but I feel very sophisticated in it.”

“It is a very good dress,” he said. “Is it too upscale for what Mary arranged, though?”

“Not really. It's not an overly dressy place but this won't be too much,” she said with a smile as she went to go get a hanger for it. “I would love it if you would wear your charcoal grey suit. That one is my favorite.”

He moved away from the dress and picked up the clutch. “All right.”

She slipped the dress on a hanger and then took it to hang it up. Then she came over and plucked the clutch out of his hand, setting it on the vanity in the room. “I swear, at some point tomorrow we may have to buy another piece of luggage or two to get everything back home, depending on how many gifts get given to you tonight.”

Suddenly he remembered something. “Perhaps not. It appears as though the luggage we had originally brought with us on this trip was found.”

“Really?” she said, her eyes wide. “I thought it was lost for good.”

He shook his head. “The airline contacted me while I was at lunch. The person I spoke to said they were very strongly encouraged to find it before we returned to California. It's going to be delivered here to the hotel this evening, so we can pick it up when we're done with our evening plans.”

“Oh, that was just what I needed to hear,” she said with a smile, going back to her shopping bags. She pulled out four jewelry cases. He drifted over and looked over her shoulder as she opened each one. The two smallest cases held the earrings, which weren't very flashy. One of them was a pair of gold chandelier earrings with garnets dangling from them, and the other were a pair of diamond studs to wear when she wanted to wear earrings to work. The watch was a little more extravagant, being a silver watch with braided metal and dotted with Swarovski crystals. The face itself was silver with another crystal in the center. When she opened the case with Mary's necklace she handed it to him so he could look at it. It was very simple, a silver chain with a Y shape, and a small charm with an emerald heart in two hands underneath. “I couldn't resist that, what with it being William's birthstone. It was the only one there or else I would have told John about it for him to get for her.”

“He gave her a ring with an emerald and William's birthdate engraved in it for William's first
birthday,” Sherlock said. “Though I suppose he'll need to purchase a new one soon.”

Molly's eyes widened again. “How did John know she's pregnant again? She told me she just found out this morning and she was going to surprise him after your party.”

“He doesn't. I realized it a few days ago, when she had a similar reaction to the wine at our dinner together that she'd had at her wedding. I'm fairly sure that was when she realized it too. But there were other little signs as well.”

“If I ever get pregnant I think I'm going to have to tell you immediately so I have a slim chance at surprising you,” she said, shaking her head.

“Knowing me, I would be completely oblivious to the signs because it would be you pregnant with my child, and not me observing someone else who's pregnant,” he said with a small grin. “I do tend to have a harder time noticing things when they come to my own life.”

“Selective observational skills, maybe?” she asked with a smile, watching him set down the necklace on the bed.

“Perhaps,” he replied, moving over to her, standing behind her. He swept her hair to the side and pressed a kiss to her neck, and she shut her eyes and leaned into him. “Contrary to what you said earlier, I don't think the mood has been entirely ruined.”

“Oh, really?” she said.

“Yes, really,” he replied, moving his lips lower, closer to the curve of her shoulders.

“Mmm,” she said, not trusting herself to speak. He reached between them and she pulled away slightly, and he went for the zipper of the dress she'd worn out. He pulled it down and then slid the shoulder strap to the side, pressing another kiss on her skin. But then his mobile rang and he sighed. “You could always ignore it.”

“You know me better than that,” he said, pulling away slightly. He pulled his mobile out as she turned around to face him and frowned. “He got my number.”

“What?” she said, her eyes wide. He showed her his mobile and she could clearly see it was Tom's number. “Of all the...”

“I'll handle this,” he said, but before he could accept the call Molly grabbed his mobile out of his hand. Sherlock looked at her in shock.

“No, I'll handle this,” she said, accepting the call and putting it to her ear. “Of all the nerve. What makes you think you have a bloody right to talk to either of us after what you did?”

There was a pause. “Molly,” Tom said slowly, in a rather surprised voice. “I was...don't be upset.”

“No, I have every bloody right to be upset. Did you think I'd react well to you calling my boyfriend's phone when I wouldn't answer my own? You should have gotten the hint when you called my mobile repeatedly earlier and I turned it off. Most people would realize that when a person turns their phone off to avoid calls that they are being purposefully ignored. But no, you had to get a hold of us, and to call Sherlock's mobile is quite low. Neither of us want anything to do with you. Especially me. I want to ignore you because really, you're a bloody arse who thought it would be a good idea to tell the entire country things that I thought were between us. Those interviews were honestly the lowest thing you could have done, and the troubles coming from it are your cock-up. If you really thought I'd be inclined to make things easier then you're an idiot. I honestly think if you thought that
then your brains have dribbled out your ears. Did you really think you could get Sherlock to convince me to listen to you? He wants to beat you to a bloody pulp right now, and I'm the one stopping him, mostly because I don't want him to get into trouble, not because I have any love left for you. So let me tell you right now: whatever it is you want, neither of us care. You are lower than low, slimier than the slimiest scum on the face of the earth, and if your life is a shambles than you bloody well deserve it. Good bye and good riddance.” She ended the call and then turned Sherlock's phone off, tossing it onto their bed before crossing her arms and shutting her eyes to calm herself down. “What a tosser.”

“I am very impressed right now,” he said in an awed voice, and when she looked at him she saw he had a very interesting look on his face, something between immense respect and a bit of fear. “It's very rare you get angry, and it's truly a sight to behold. At least when you're angry at someone other than me.”

She shook her head. “He's just...I mean, I don't care what he wants, he deserves what he's getting.”

“Do you want to tell Mycroft to put him back on the watch lists?” Sherlock asked.

“No. I do have a heart, after all. If his life is impossible he'll just cry to the tabloids and paint himself as the victim of an oppressive government bureaucrat.”

“Mycroft would frame that article if it was in print, you know,” he said. “And if it wasn't he would record it and re-watch it whenever he needs to boost his ego.”

She smiled slightly. “Really?”

“Most likely,” he said. Then he moved over towards her again. “Why don't you go pin up your hair and soak in a bath for a while? When you're done I'll even attempt to massage some of the stress out of you.”

She considered it and then nodded. “All right. But only if you keep me company, and after I check however many voicemails he's left on my phone.”

“If they're threatening, don't delete them. I think Mycroft could find some use for them,” he replied. “I'll get your mobile and meet you in the washroom.”

She nodded and then finished getting out of her dress. She made her way into the washroom in her bra, knickers and stockings, and carefully she stripped out out of the stockings so as to not get a run in them. Then she sat in front of the mirror and pulled her hair up, securing it in an elastic band. She wrapped the ponytail around the base for a makeshift bun and when she was satisfied it would keep her hair up she went to the bathtub and began to draw her bath. Sherlock came in just as she was getting out of the bra and knickers. “I'm sorry I'm not facing you,” she said, looking over her shoulder and giving him a slightly seductive smile.

“I can appreciate this view just fine,” he said as he got closer. Once she was naked she got into the bath, careful not to get her cast wet. He waited until she was settled to turn her mobile back on. He knew the password to her phone just like she knew his, and he keyed it in with ease. He dialed her voicemail and then put it to his ear. “It said you had five voicemails.”

“Skip the first one,” she said. “It's an appointment reminder for getting my cast off.”

He nodded and pulled the phone away. He pressed a few buttons, and then after a moment put it on speaker. The automated voice said the date and time of the call, and it was definitely the first time Tom had called. His voice came out clearly a moment later. “Look, Molly, I'm sorry. I just...things
have been rough, and my ego was bruised, and the chance to make some money seemed a good idea. I know it wasn't, now."

“Because Mycroft showed him it wasn't,” Molly scoffed, sinking into the bath more.

“I've learned my lesson. Look, can we talk? I want to make it right. Call me, all right?” The message ended then, and after Sherlock skipped it the automated voice said there was another one left five minutes later. Tom's voice came on again. “I need to talk to you, Molly. I know you know it's me. Call me, all right? Sooner rather than later.”

“I wonder how incensed he got when you turned off your mobile,” Sherlock said as the automated voice gave options on what to do with the message. He pressed the button to skip over it.

“Oh, he didn't look it, but he could have quite a temper,” she said as the automated voice said she had a new message.

“Did he ever...?” Sherlock asked, his eyes wide.

“Hit me? No, never. He was never violent. But he could say cruel things, rather like you used to.”

“Ah,” he replied just as the next message started.

“Molly? Look, I understand you're angry. But you have to help me. Call the goon off. It's been days since I got any real sleep, and he's got the entire Scotland Yard under his bloody thumb. Greg's taking an absolute delight in not helping me, and no matter who I complain to they don't care. And I earned that money.” Molly let out a harsh bark of a laugh as the message continued. “He has no right to freeze my assets. You got me into this mess, you fix it.”

“He really thinks it's all my fault?” Molly asked incredulously as the message ended.

“Apparently,” Sherlock said, his jaw set as he skipped to the next message.

“You owe me,” Tom's voice said, anger quite evident in his voice. “You lied to me that you were over Sherlock. How do I know you weren't shagging him when we were together? You have to make this right, or else I'll find a way to make your life a living hell, just like you've made mine.”

“That is a threat,” Sherlock said, straightening up. “I'm sure Mycroft can make sure he regrets it.”

“I'm sure he can too,” she said quietly. “Could he actually do it?”

“I doubt he has the resources, and I think when Mycroft is done with having his chat with him he'll scrub the idea from his head,” he replied. “You'll be perfectly safe, Molly, I swear it.” He held up her phone. “I'm going to call my brother and share these. He may end his business early to take care of this personally, and if he does, I rather feel sorry for Tom.”

“All right,” she said, sinking further into the water. She shut her eyes and listened to Sherlock leave the room. She had hoped that things would die down from the initial flurry of activity around their arrival and Tom's first interview, but she wasn't that lucky. But to threaten her, to say he was going to make her life hell for his own stupid decision? Still, this was going to put a pall over the remainder of her holiday, and she hated that. The minutes ticked by, and she started to worry about things when Sherlock finally came back in. “How long were you gone?” she asked.

“Twenty-two minutes,” he said. “I had my own voicemail to come back to, and while I was on the phone with my brother I got a call from Tom. I allowed my brother to listen in and record it. When
Tom finally got frustrated enough to tell me to piss off and enjoy the punishment of being in a relationship with a harlot Mycroft informed me he'll be back in London in three hours and Tom is going to regret his decisions to act the way he had, and to expect to no longer hear from him, aside from a possible authentic apology at some point tomorrow. I told him you probably would not be interested in hearing it.”

“You're right,” she said sadly. “I want nothing to do with him, ever again.”

“Well, you will get your wish,” he said. He squatted down by the bathtub and dipped his hand in the water, moving it back and forth. “I vow, if our relationship ends, no matter how badly it ends, I will not do anything like this to you, so long as you do not do it to me.”

She reached over with her good hand and cupped his cheek. “I promise, I will not go blab all about our relationship to anyone who will print that trash.”

“Good,” he said with a slight nod. She sat up more and leaned forward to kiss him softly. He leaned in, his arm sinking further into the water to steady himself, and he kissed her back until she began to regret being the only one undressed. After a moment he pulled away. “Have you had enough of a soak?” he asked as he licked his lips.

She nodded. “Yeah, I have.”

“Then perhaps I should try and relieve some of that stress you have,” he said.

“And maybe I can relieve some of yours,” she said with a seductive smile, and she watched as a grin spread across his own face. “Help me out of the tub?” He nodded, and as he stood up and offered her a hand she realized that no matter what, she would much rather be with Sherlock than Tom, and even though it had taken quite some time she'd ended up with the right man after all.
Chapter 39

Molly smoothed down the front of her dress, running her hand down from the blue silky fabric that covered most of the dress to the embroidered red and white flowers that were on the bottom right corner up to the waist. The original plan had been for Mrs. Holmes to cook dinner for Sherlock's birthday dinner, but when Mycroft's out of town meetings caused them to postpone the dinner he offered to get them a reservation at Apsleys in exchange for the inconvenience. Mrs. Holmes had been quite excited at the prospect of going somewhere nice for a family meal, and Sherlock had conceded that they might actually be on their best behavior if they were in public. Molly had always wanted to eat there so she had agreed as well. But now that she was outside the restaurant she was quite nervous.

Sherlock noticed after a moment and reached over for her hands. “There's no reason to be nervous,” he said, grasping her fingers in his and running his thumb over her knuckles. “I promise I will be on my best behavior, and I know Mycroft will do the same because he made you a promise as well.”

“I know,” she said, giving him a small smile. “It's just that even though we're in public there's still a lot that could go wrong.”

“I would try your best not to think about it,” he said. “And just remember, tomorrow we fly back to California. If it goes horribly wrong you don't have to look anyone in my family in the face for quite a long while.”

Her smile widened. “That is true, I suppose.” She squeezed his hands before letting go of them and then reaching for one of them. She linked her fingers through his and then squeezed. “Come on. We shouldn't leave everyone waiting.”

He gave her a nod and they made their way inside. Sherlock gave Mycroft's name to the person at the front and she nodded before leading them to a very nice table in a more exclusive part of the restaurant. Mycroft, Mrs. Holmes and Mr. Holmes were already there, chatting quietly. The woman cleared her throat slightly and Mycroft looked up. “Molly,” he said with a nod. “Sherlock. Come join us.”

Molly gave him a smile. There was a seat open next to Mycroft with another seat next to it, and Molly sat down next to him while Sherlock sat next to her after giving his mother a quick kiss on the cheek. “This place is so fancy,” Molly said, reaching for the cloth napkin in front of her.

“It's supposed to be,” Mycroft said. “It's meant to impress.” He glanced over at Sherlock. “You both are late.”

“Fifteen minutes,” Sherlock said with a slight scowl. “We ran into traffic.”

“I see,” Mycroft murmured.

Sherlock glared at his brother and opened his mouth to say something, but he caught a glance from Molly and closed it again. He shut his eyes and took a deep breath. “How are you feeling now?” he asked his father when he opened his eyes again.

“I'm doing much better,” Mr. Holmes said with a smile. “I'm still very sore, but I'll manage.” He lifted up his glass of water and took a sip. “Are you both excited to go back to California tomorrow?”

“I am,” Sherlock said. “I've enjoyed being here somewhat, but it will nice to be home again.”
Molly warmed at the fact he referred to San Diego as home. It really had become home, she realized, and she was glad Sherlock saw it that way as well. She gave Mr. Holmes a warm smile. “I feel the same way. I've missed things there, and I'll definitely enjoy being out of the spotlight again.”

“Yes, the media presence must be quite annoying,” Mycroft said with a nod. “I'm sure it will be a relief for it to not be an issue anymore.”

“Oh, it will be,” Molly agreed with a nod. “And the further away from him I am, the better.”

“He should no longer be a problem,” Mycroft said. “I had a meeting with him yesterday that I doubt he will forget any time soon.” He reached over for his water. “If he does trouble you, however, please let me know.”

“Trust me, we will,” Sherlock said.

Mrs. Holmes looked back and forth between Mycroft and Sherlock. Finally she settled her gaze on her youngest son. “How was your birthday celebration, dear?”

“It was nice, I suppose. Spending time with my friends is something I don't get to do often anymore, so the more time I get with them before I leave the better,” Sherlock said. “And I enjoyed the gifts that I received from them.”

“Did you get anything nice?” his mother asked.

“Mostly clothing,” he said. “Things that they thought I could use in San Diego. John got me a monogrammed billfold, and Mary got me a rather expensive cologne that she thought I would enjoy.”

“I certainly enjoy it, at least,” Molly said warmly. “I think it smells very nice on him.”

“Are you wearing it now?” Mrs. Holmes asked. Sherlock nodded and she smiled. “I did like it, quite a bit. Mary has good taste.”

“Of course she does,” Sherlock said. “She had the good sense to marry John.” Molly laughed softly at that. He turned to look at her. “Well, it's true.”

“I know it is,” she said, reaching over and patting his hand gently.

“You have good taste as well, Molly,” Mr. Holmes said. “Sherlock is definitely a catch.”

“Yes, he is,” she said, giving Sherlock a wide smile. He gave her a grin back. Then she turned to look at Sherlock's parents. “I'm glad we were all able to have dinner tonight. It's nice to have all of us together.”

“It is, I suppose,” Mycroft said. “We don't seem to spend much time together as a family.”

“Well it's because we're estranged,” Sherlock said, reaching over for his water. “Being estranged means we don't talk.”

“Obviously,” Mycroft said, his voice sounding slightly annoyed. He came close to rolling his eyes but he looked at Molly and stopped. “But it's not something that needs to continue.”

“Well, I'm glad you see it that way, Mycroft,” Molly said, giving Mycroft an encouraging smile. “Family is important, after all. I should know, since mine isn't around anymore.”

“Not having family must be hard, dear,” Mrs. Holmes said.
Molly nodded. “It is. I miss my mum and dad all the time.” The waiter came over at that moment and began to pour wine for everyone. Mycroft must have ordered it before she and Sherlock got there. Both Mycroft and Sherlock put hands over their glasses, but as soon as her glass was poured she picked it up and took a sip. It really was a very excellent quality wine. “I just think that if you have family to be around you should make it a point to spend time with them, regardless of other things,” she continued when the waiter had left.

“We can spend more time together, when we're in the same area,” Mycroft said, giving his brother a look.

Sherlock nodded slowly. “I suppose it shouldn't be a problem.”

“As long as Molly is around as well,” Mycroft said.

“I would love to have that happen,” Mrs. Hudson said with a wide smile. “I very much enjoy having Molly around. She's like a ray of bright sunshine in Sherlock's life, and in our lives as well.”

Molly blushed at that. “I wouldn't say that,” she said, looking down.

“I would,” Sherlock said quietly. “My mother is right. You are definitely a bright spot in my life, Molly.”

Molly leaned over and kissed his cheek. “Thank you,” she said.

“I would love to see more of Molly as well,” Mr. Holmes said. “But I think that will require the two of you to spend more time here. Or...for us to go visit you in California. The weather out there is supposed to be very nice lately.”

“It is a nice place to live,” Molly said with a nod. “And we do have a guest bedroom. I know I would love for you to visit. All of you, actually.”

Mycroft studied Molly and his brother “I don't know if it would be a good idea for me to stay with you, but if I am in California I will make it a point to spend time with you both.” He had some more of his water. “Perhaps to share a meal.”

“You aren't in California often, though,” Sherlock said. “Most of your business is elsewhere.”

“Even I need a vacation once in a while, dear brother,” Mycroft said before sipping his water. “I'm due for one in a few months, I think. California might be a good destination for a week.”

“Well, that's one of the perks of being retired,” Mr. Holmes said with a wide grin. “We wouldn't have to schedule a trip around work.”

“But we should wait until you're more fully healed,” Mrs. Holmes said.

“And we do have someone else who's going to be staying over this month into next,” Sherlock said.

“Oh?” his mother asked, tilting her head slightly.

Molly nodded. “Greg is finally going to take a break. He's going to take his daughter back to her university first and then come to California for a few weeks.”

“I see,” Mycroft said. “Hopefully London will not fall apart in his absence.”

“I doubt it will,” Sherlock said.
“Yes. It certainly didn't fall apart in yours,” Mycroft said with a nod.

Sherlock shot his a slightly irritated look. “And what's that supposed to mean?” he asked.

“Merely that while you were an important cog in the wheel here in London you weren't the most vital one, which bodes well for you maintaining a life in San Diego with minimal time here,” Mycroft said. “Lives do not need to revolve around you.”

“We knew that when I faked my death,” Sherlock said, his voice tight.

“I suppose we did learn that then. But now we know it to be absolute truth.”

Molly reached under the table for Sherlock's hand and placed her hand over the fist on his thigh. He looked over at her, and when she gave a quick glance to the rest of the table she saw they, too, were looking at her. “Why don't we change the subject?” she asked. “I would love to hear more about your childhood. I mean, the parts you want to talk about.”

“There are a few of those,” Mycroft said.

“Yes. I suppose it wasn't all bad,” Sherlock conceded.

“All right then. But no fighting,” she said, looking over at Mycroft. “Because I won't hesitate to get up and leave if it gets unbearable, and neither of you will be happy if I leave this dinner displeased. Understood?” Mycroft nodded slightly as Sherlock said “Understood” on her right. “All right then,” she said. “And if you want, I'll tell you stories of my childhood in exchange.”

Sherlock's eyes brightened at that. “I think that seems fair.”

“You just like learning more about me,” she said, giving him a small smile.

“Well, I know quite a few stories and I hope I get to hear certain ones again,” he said.

“Anything in particular?” she asked.

“The first time you used a bunsen burner was quite amusing,” he said.

“To you, maybe. Walking around with one scorched eyebrow wasn't that nice at the time,” she said.

“That does sound like a fascinating story,” Mycroft said, sounding slightly interested. “Perhaps we could start with your story and then go to my and my brother's childhood.”

She thought about it for a moment and then nodded. “I suppose that would be all right.” She picked up her wine and took another sip. “My father knew I was going to be a budding scientist, and so he bought me a chemistry set with an actual Bunsen burner...” And then she was off, telling the story. It definitely amused everyone, and Mycroft shared a story about watching Sherlock try and interview his dog for a pretend case he was solving when he was a child. Sherlock seemed tense at first until he realized Mycroft didn't mean to tease him about it, and then he told a story of when the two of them had taken over the house as pirates and locked their parents out. Molly at first thought the two of them might try and embarrass each other but that didn't seem to be the case, which she was quite thankful for.

They all chatted through placing their orders and up until the food arrived, and then when they were finished they decided to have a dessert course to finish up the evening. Molly had to say, the food was quite excellent, and as the evening wore down and she and Mr. and Mrs. Holmes each enjoyed a nice glass of dessert wine it had shaped up to be a very pleasant evening. They were nearly done
when Mycroft's phone began to vibrate. He had taken it off the table earlier in the evening and put it in his suit pocket, and he pulled it out after it appeared he decided not to ignore it after all. “I need to take this,” he said, standing up.

“Go on,” his mother said with a nod of her head, and Mycroft put his mobile to his ear as he walked away towards somewhere with more privacy. She then turned to Molly. “I must say, I had a very nice evening. I think this is the most agreeable family dinner I've had since the boys were young. And I think it's all thanks to you.”

“I wouldn't say that,” Molly said, looking down as redness dotted her cheeks.

“I would,” Sherlock said. “I think this is the first time we haven't had all out war in over twenty years, and it really did have a lot to do with you, Molly.”

“Well, I had a lovely time. Next time we're all together we should do this again.”

“Yes, we should,” Mr. Holmes said as Mycroft came back.

“I have some business I need to attend to,” he said. “I need to bid you all a good evening. It was certainly interesting.”

“In a good way?” Sherlock asked, looking up at his brother.

Mycroft nodded slowly. “Yes, in a good way. I suppose I could do this again at a later date, if it is something that is wanted.”

“It is,” his mother said. “Perhaps next time Sherlock and Molly come to visit we can all share a meal. And that time I'll cook.”

Mycroft nodded. “I'll make room for it when the two of them return.” He went over to his mother and kissed her cheek. “Good night, Mummy.”

“Good night, Mikey,” she said, and Molly hid a smile when she saw him cringe at the nickname. He straightened up and then nodded to Sherlock and Molly before leaving the table.

Sherlock glanced at his watch. “Molly and I should probably leave soon, too. We have an early day tomorrow if we want to make sure we catch our flight home.”

“I do wish you'd reconsider staying just a few more days,” Mrs. Holmes said as Molly had some more of her wine. “We saw quite a bit of you, but a mother is greedy and wants all the time with her children she can have.”

Sherlock glanced over at Molly. “I'm not sure if Molly will be able to join me, but I suppose I could come back during my spring break. I believe it is at the end of March or beginning of April.”

“I probably won't be able to then, not if we want to spend two weeks here during your summer break,” she said in response. “But I don't have to be here.”

“Well, we could see about planning a visit to see the both of you during that break, maybe,” Mr. Holmes said. “That way we can see Sherlock as much as we want and you when you're available, Molly.”

“I like that idea quite a bit,” Mrs. Holmes said with a smile.

“I suppose we could do that,” Sherlock said with a nod.
“Good. Then we'll plan our trip to California for your break,” Mrs. Holmes said. “But do call us from time to time, all right? Both of you.”

“We will,” Molly said with a nod. She ate the last bite of her dessert and then finished off her glass of wine before looking at Sherlock. He nodded and the both pushed their chairs back and stood up. Molly went over and hugged Mrs. Holmes first, then Mr. Holmes as Sherlock kissed his mother's cheek. “I'm glad this was such a lovely evening.”

“I am as well,” Mrs. Holmes said. “It was a very priceless gift.”

“We'll call when we land in San Diego, if you don't mind it being at a strange time,” Sherlock said.

His father nodded. “I would appreciate it, and I know your mother would too.”

“Then we'll call when we get back,” he said, He offered Molly his arm and she took it, and the two of them walked to go get their coats. Once they were on they stepped outside into the crisp night air. “It seems rather early, in a way.”

“Oh?” she asked. “I thought we had an early morning.”

“We do, but we've been here for over an hour and a half,” he said. “I would like to have some of your time all on my own.”

“Well, you can have me all to yourself when we get back to our room,” she said with a smile. “I'm almost completely packed, and I can do the rest in the morning.”

“Good,” he said before pulling her close for a kiss. If anyone got a picture of this she didn't care, she thought to herself. She'd been wanting to do that for almost the entire dinner. They kissed for a few moments before he pulled away and got them a cab. They slipped inside and she initiated the next kiss after Sherlock gave the driver the name of their hotel. This kiss lead to a third, and it seemed no time at all until they made it to the Savoy. A bellhop opened the door for them and Sherlock stepped out of the car first.

He'd moved out of the way and Molly had just put her head out when her eyes widened at the person she saw advancing on them. “Sherlock!” she called out as she saw Tom raise his fist.

Sherlock must have known he was there because before Tom's fist connected with his face Sherlock grabbed it with his own hand. “Supposedly you had a meeting with my brother that should have convinced you this was a bad idea,” Sherlock told him as Tom struggled to get his fist out of Sherlock's grip.

“You say that as though you think you actually have power in this situation,” Sherlock said, releasing Tom's fist. “Point of fact, Mycroft decided to do whatever it was he did on his own. Molly actually talked him out of doing far worse.”

Tom snorted. “I doubt it. She's nothing but a lying bitch.”

Molly turned red but Sherlock grabbed him by the shirt and pulled him close. “The only person I know who has lied in this situation is you,” he said quietly in a controlled and very cold tone. A crowd was starting to gather, and she could see hotel security making its way towards them. “If I were you I would recant your stories to the tabloids and admit that you were lying.”
“And why would I want to do that?” Tom asked snidely.

“Because if you think my brother is unpleasant, I am worse,” Sherlock said, the volume of his voice dropping. “I would make sure you were taken much farther away and barred from returning to London at all.”

Tom had the decency to look frightened at that point, and when Sherlock released him he took a step back. Sherlock turned to finish helping Molly out of the cab when anger washed over Tom’s face as he realized he’d been publicly humiliated and he swung at Sherlock. The blow grazed his cheekbone but immediately afterward Sherlock took his own swing, knocking Tom out in one fluid motion. Molly got out of the cab and looked down at the unconscious man on the pavement before looking at Sherlock. “Are you all right?” she asked him.

“I’ll live,” he said, shaking his fist as security descended around him. He and Molly were ushered into the hotel by the concierge, who was apologizing profusely as they moved for allowing “that dreadful man” to get close enough to attempt anything. Sherlock assured the man it was all right, and asked if a plastic bag full of ice could be brought up to their room before he and Molly finally left. They made their way to their room and Molly opened the door before they stepped inside. “It’s been some time since I've done that,” Sherlock said as he cradled his fist.

Molly went over and gently took his hand. She tested his fingers to make sure they weren't broken, and when she was done she pressed a kiss to his knuckles. “I think they're just bruised,” she said.

“I'm sorry your evening had to end like this,” he said with a sigh. “You know what will be next. A visit from a policeman, questions, a night where I don't get to enjoy just your company...”

“It's all right,” she said. “I'm just glad he didn't have a knife. Or worse, a gun.”

“I am as well,” he said. He leaned over and kissed her forehead. “We might as well change and get comfortable before we see how long this will all take.”

She nodded but she didn't pull away quite yet. “He looked quite disheveled. I wonder what exactly it was that Mycroft did to him.”

“Whatever it was, I think Mycroft will be doubling his efforts to make Tom's life a living hell,” Sherlock said, shifting his position to put his arms around her.

“We should all just let it go,” she said, putting her arms around his waist. “If we still get to leave tomorrow, he'll be here and we'll be home and it won't matter anymore.”

“I'll leave a message for Mycroft while you change, then,” he said.

She nodded slightly and then pulled away, heading towards their bedroom. It had been a wonderful evening up until the very end, and she hoped Tom and Sherlock’s actions tonight didn't have any serious repercussions that would prevent them from leaving the next day. As much as she had missed home and had been glad to catch up with the people she cared about, the sooner she put this trip to London behind her the better.
Chapter 40

It was with much relief that the next morning came and Sherlock and Molly did the last few things they needed to do before they could go back to California. The night before they hadn't really been bothered by hotel security or the police about the incident with Tom. There had been enough witnesses to show Sherlock wasn't at fault, and Molly imagined the minute Mycroft was alerted to it he stepped in to sweep it under the rug. She didn't want to imagine the type of chat he might have with Tom now, because it had been obvious the night before that Mycroft had already had one with him and it'd had the opposite effect. But she found she didn't feel any pity towards Tom. If he'd left the situation alone eventually Mycroft would have seen he learned his lesson and then backed off, but she doubted that would be the case this time.

Their sendoff at the airport was quite lovely, even if there were tears among them. Mary gave Molly a book to read on the long flight and told her that there were a few things tucked in the pages for her to enjoy. Molly had hugged her for a long while, and John as well. At the last minute Greg had joined them, saying he'd used his badge to get over to them. It was nice to get to see them one last time before she stepped on the plane and went back to her new home. Greg had pulled Sherlock aside for a moment, and she assumed it had to do with the incident with Tom. She'd chatted with him as well for a few moments and then it was time for her and Sherlock to board their plane, so there was one last round of hugs and kisses and promises to write and call more. When the two of them got on board they sat in their seats and she turned to Sherlock and gave him a smile. He gave her a small one back, and then she settled into her seat for the long flight back to San Diego.

It was early afternoon Pacific time when they arrived in San Diego, and as she waited for their luggage to come through Sherlock made the promised phone calls to let people know they'd gotten back safely. The food on the flight had been decent but Molly was craving authentic Mexican food so before they got home they stopped off at one of the restaurants near their home and got food to eat. Sherlock suggested bringing it to the condo but Molly was quite starved, so they ate it at the restaurant. It was nice to sit down and eat at a restaurant without worrying about someone trying to take a photograph or ask a question. When they were done they finally made their way home, and as they pulled up to their home Molly felt a sense of peace wash over her. “Home sweet home,” she said as she opened the door on her side of the car once they had pulled into their garage.

“Yes,” Sherlock said, getting out of the driver’s side. Between the luggage they'd had to buy and the luggage that had been lost the car was packed full, and it took a bit of time to get it all up the stairs and into their bedroom, but when they were done they both laid down on their bed, Molly curled up next to him. He was running his hand along her arm as she rested her head on his chest, her castless hand over his heart. “I suppose we'll have to adjust to the time difference again,” he said after a few minutes silence.

“Well, that's why I'm glad you don't have school quite yet,” she said. “You get a few more lazy days with me first.”

“That will be quite nice,” he said with a relaxed look as she looked up.

“Were you able to get a hold of everyone in London?” she asked him.

He nodded at that. “Yes. They all know we arrived safely so they aren't worried. I didn't call anyone here in California, however. I wasn't sure if you wanted to relax for a time or not.”

“Maybe a quick nap wouldn't hurt,” she said thoughtfully. “As long as you stay here and take it with me.”
He tightened his hold on her. “I think that sounds like a very good idea,” he replied.

She smiled at that and shut her eyes. “It was a very interesting trip, wasn't it?” she asked.

“Yes. Chances are our next time there may be similar, unfortunately, having left on the note we did, ” he said. “And that depends on what else Tom decides to say to the media in our absence.”

“I know,” she said with a sigh. “Did you speak to Mycroft when we were at the airport?”

“Briefly, but not about Tom. I just informed him we'd arrived in California safely. He appeared to be in a hurry to get off the phone. It might have had to do with the business he'd had to cut short to have a chat with Tom in the first place.” He moved his hand to her hair and brushed it away from her face. “I would not be surprised if Tom finds his life intolerable for a time.”

“Well, if he'd had the good sense to heed whatever it was Mycroft had to say this wouldn't have been a problem,” she said. “But he's rather stubborn at times.”

“To a fault,” Sherlock said. “But his misfortune isn't our problem now. We have our lives here to concentrate on.”

“Yes, I know,” she said quietly.

“You miss everyone already, don't you?” he asked after a moment.

“I do,” she said, just barely nodding her head. “I know if I give it some time I'll be glad to be back here, but it was nice to be around home, even if it doesn't entirely feel like home anymore. I mean, it was wonderful to see old friends face to face and get to catch up and share good food and have good conversations without having to worry about an eight hour time difference. But while I was there, I wanted to be here.”

“I will admit, it was nice to be back,” he said. “However, there are many things I enjoy here more, like the anonymity, the weather, my family not being here...”

“People not trying to punch you in the face,” she said with a smile as she looked up at him.

He gave her a slight grin back. “I may have had some significant personality changes but that could always happen here,” he said. “The point is, to me, London hasn't felt like home in quite a while. I think when I came back the first time I was glad to be back. I was glad to be able to soak London in and let it settle over me like a second skin. The next time I left, though, it felt different. It wasn't as though it was a needed thing for me to be back. And I started to realize that there were so many tainted memories there, so many things that I looked on with distaste. You realized the same thing. You just realized it first.”

“And so I ran away, and you chased after me,” she said, setting her head back down on his chest. “And we both ended up thousands of miles away with a fresh start.”

“Exactly,” he said. “I think the next time you go back you won't feel nearly as strong of a tug to stay longer or go back more frequently. It will be a nice experience--”

“Hopefully,” she interjected.

“But it won't be as though you have to be there to feel as though you're home,” he finished.

“This place feels like home to you?” she asked.
“Yes,” he said, and she could vaguely feel him nod. “When I was in London I had no real roots. Baker Street was a home of sorts, but it wasn't mine. I rented from Mrs. Hudson. My parents live on the outskirts of the city and the home they live in hasn't felt like home since I was quite young. There wasn't any place I spent time at in my travels where I wanted to settle down at. But here with you, I feel as though I can actually build a life for myself.” He was quiet for a moment. “Though to be honest, it may not necessarily mean we need to stay here in San Diego. I think as long as I'm with you, wherever we decide to live will be home.”

“I think home is with you, too,” she said, lifting her head up and inching up towards him more. When she was close enough she leaned in and kissed him softly, and he brought a hand up to let his fingers play in her hair just above her ear. She let her castless hand run along his side, inching his shirt up slightly. “Do you really feel the need to get some rest?” she asked, lifting her lips away just slightly.

“Maybe after you do whatever it is you want to do,” he said. “But I want to take a precaution first.” He began to sit up and she moved away. He reached over to the nightstand where they'd tossed their mobiles and proceeded to turn them both off completely. “We have an unfortunate tendency to get interrupted when we want to be alone.”

“I think there are a number of times we should have done that in London,” she said, reaching forward to put her hand on his chest. “Especially the day Tom was bothering us.”

“We did do that that day,” he replied. “He just kept calling.” He moved forward and pressed a kiss to the side of her neck. “But right now I am in the mood to make you forget all about him.”

She shut her eyes and tilted her head to the side. “I thought I got to decide what we did right now?” she teased.

“I changed my mind,” he replied. “Last night didn’t go according to the plan I had in my head, and since we’re alone now I would like to take advantage of that fact.” He set his hands on her waist and pulled her onto his lap, and she smiled at him. “I’d thought it might be interesting to try something different.”

“Oh?” she asked, taking her castless hand and caressing his cheek. “What, exactly, would you like to try differently?”

“It won’t work exactly as planned, because you have one arm in a cast, but we do have a bed with slats in the headboard, and we just got back from being somewhere where we needed scarves,” he said as her hand moved away from his cheek and down to his chest.

She grinned a bit more widely at that. “Only if I get to do it to you at a later point.”

“I definitely do not foresee a problem with that,” he said. “But we’ll need to dig through our luggage.”

“No we won’t,” she said. “I have fashion scarves to wear here in San Diego. They’re thinner but they’ll work just as nicely. They’re in my top dresser drawer.” He appeared reluctant to move away from her to go get them. “Do you want me to go get them?”

They were both sitting up and he reached over for her to pull her closer. “I’d rather have you stay close,” he said.

“Mmm, we could do it some other time,” she said, shifting her position so she was straddling him, thankful she had worn a dress with a loose skirt on the way back. “Now that you know it’s
something that interests me.”

“That is true,” he said.

“Did I tell you about one of the cheeky gifts Mary slipped into the book she gave me?” she said, leaning over and kissing his neck, nipping at his pulse point above the collar of his T-shirt. “It was a bookmark with six different sexual positions worth trying. Three on each side.”

“That could be interesting,” he murmured, shutting his eyes. “Were there any that caught your interest?”

“One with me on my knees and leaning forward, and you behind me,” she said, moving her hand lower down his chest until she got to the top of his denim trousers. “Almost like when we’re in the shower. Another with my heels on your shoulders. Then there was a third with us on our sides and you behind me.”

“I don’t think I’d mind those positions,” he said, and when she moved her hand lower she could feel he was already growing hard. “But this could also be an interesting position, if we move to the edge of the bed.”

“I think it’s just a matter of who wants to do most of the work,” she said.

“If you take the reins now I promise I will return the favor tonight and do whatever you want,” he said as she began to caress his erection through the fabric of his trousers.

“Perhaps we could see about trying for one of the ones on the bookmark?” she suggested.

“Depending on how quickly I can recover we could spend the rest of the day and evening working our way through the bookmark,” he said, letting his hand move under her dress and inch towards her knickers.

“I think that sounds like a very good way to spend our first day back home,” she said, lowering her lips to his neck again and taking a bit of skin between her teeth.

“Now that we aren’t going to be around my parents or photographers you’re free to leave marks,” he said in a throaty voice, letting his fingers slip between the lace of her knickers and the warmth of her core. He ran a finger along her folds before slipping it inside her.

After sucking softly she released the bit of skin. “Distract me too much and I might hurt you,” she said.

“I’m prepared for the consequences,” he said, moving his finger out slowly before inserting a second finger the next time. “Though I think I would like to do more.”

“Yes?” she said, sucking in a breath.

“Take your dress off,” he said. She had picked a dress she could simply pull on and off to wear, to be more comfortable on the flight, and she removed her hand from the bulge in his trousers and reached for the bottom of her dress, pulling it up and leaving her only in her lace bra and knickers. He moved his hand up her back and she decided to beat him to it, reaching behind her to undo the bra and peel it away from her body. When she was done she flung it away in the same general direction as her dress and Sherlock leaned forward, taking one of her pert breasts in his mouth, rolling her nipple with his tongue as he continued to tease her with his fingers.

“Oh, Sherlock,” she breathed as she shut her eyes, his name coming off as a moan as she arched
slightly, enjoying the sensations. This felt absolutely wonderful, it truly did. The only thing that would be better was if his mouth replace his hand, lavishing her most sensitive parts with his tongue. She moved her hands to his shoulders, trying to hold on for dear life as she began to grind on his palm, wanting friction, wanting release. He gave it to her, rubbing the heel of his hand against her clit, and when she began to tighten around his fingers he gently bit down on her nipple and she shrieked at the intense wave of pleasure that washed over her as she came.

She looked down at him as her breathing slowed, but before she could reply she kissed him very deeply before moving her hands to the waistband of his trousers before undoing the button and carefully lowering the zipper. She felt an intense need to return the favor, to let him feel what she had just felt, and once he’d lifted up his hips and lowered his trousers enough to free his erection she grasped it in her castless hand and moved her knickers out of the way with the other before slowly lowering herself onto it. He filled her and stretched her and it felt so good, just like it always did.

She had wanted to take things slowly, tease him and torment him until she had him to the brink but he had other ideas, moving his hands to her hips and lowering her down. They could take their time later, she realized. Right now they didn’t need to, and it could be quick and naughty and just the sort of thing you would imagine a quick shag in the afternoon would be, hot and mind-blowing and intense. She began to ride him for all it was worth and he surged up to meet her each time, driving himself deep inside her as she dug her nails into his shoulders through the fabric of his shirt. It didn’t take long for her to feel herself tighten again, for her to spill apart and shatter into a million glorious pieces and for him to stiffen up as he came himself. Soon they were panting to catch their breath, her looking down at him with a very satisfied smile on her face.

“I think I like the idea of a quick shag in the afternoon,” she said.

“I may find ways to arrange our schedules to make this a more regular occurrence,” he said, pressing a soft kiss to her throat. “Perhaps we should see if there could be anything else might happen if we were to share a shower.”

“Mmm,” she said, shutting her eyes. “You are a bit overdressed at the moment.”

“Then by all means, feel free to help me disrobe,” he said, nipping at her skin slightly.

“Only if you promise to keep doing that when I’m done,” she said, reaching for the bottom hem of his T-shirt. He didn’t have much time left before he had to go back to his schooling, but she had the feeling they would both plan to make the best of the time they got and spend as much of it together as they possibly could.
Chapter 41

Not so surprisingly, Jason and Thomas had extended their honeymoon, having been absolutely entranced by Hawaii. Molly and Sherlock had both chatted with them when they could while they had been in London but it had not been often due to the time differences, but the two men assured Molly when she called them the morning after she and Sherlock came back to California that they would be back on the twelfth, and they made plans to celebrate her getting her cast off with dinner. Sherlock and Molly filled up the time while they waited with other friends of theirs and time alone, as well as making a trip to UCSD to find out exactly which textbooks Sherlock would need for his next term and taking care of getting his parking pass and student ID. Molly could tell he was excited but not quite as excited as he had been the last time, and she was surprised by that. She wanted to ask him about it, but she wasn’t sure if he even realized it himself. In the end, she just let it go.

The twelfth dawned a colder day than the others had been, and it was overcast when her alarm went off at eight in the morning. She reached over and turned it off before snuggling next to Sherlock more. “Ten more minutes,” she said sleepily.

“I’ll let you sleep for ten minutes while I go make some coffee,” he said with a slight yawn.

“But I want to spend the ten minutes with you,” she said, moving to put an arm around his waist.

“Well, maybe I can stay for ten more minutes,” he said, shifting slightly. She lifted her head up and put it on his bare chest, and he moved his arm so he could play with her hair. “Your cast is going to be off in a few hours.”

“I know,” she said. “I’m not sure I’m going to want to see how ugly and deformed my arm is going to look.”

“I am just happy that your arm will be healed,” he said. “You could have been hurt much worse and you weren’t, and once the cast is off then it will be easier for you to move forward, and me as well.”

“But I’m going to have scars,” she said, lifting her head up to look at him.

“I will kiss those scars every night if I have to until you feel comfortable with them,” he said. “And if you don’t we’ll see about finding a way to get surgery done to make them less noticeable.”

She smiled at him. “I am so glad you’re the way you are now,” she said, leaning in. “Before you probably would have made a derisive comment about them, without caring if it hurt me. After we became friends, you might have just ignored them and not tried to make me feel better. But the fact you’re trying to make me feel better means a lot.”

“Well, I am in love with you,” he said. “It helps to show it.”

“It does,” she said, leaning in to kiss him. She knew they couldn’t get carried away because they still needed to get their coffee and breakfast and drive to the hospital to get the X-rays to make sure everything was okay before they removed the cast, and she needed to be there by a certain time. But it really was quite lovely to start her day off this way. After a few minutes she pulled away and set her head back on his chest. “Do you know when Jason and Thomas are getting here?”

“They said their flight arrives at one and they’re taking a cab back to their apartment. I told them I cleaned out their refrigerator for them yesterday and restocked it with the food on the list Thomas emailed me, so they said dinner should be ready around six.”
“Provided they don’t fool around too much first,” she said with a laugh.

“I believe that was why they extended their honeymoon,” he said. He went back to running his fingers in her hair. “Do you think about any of that?”

“You mean, weddings and honeymoons?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said.

“Not really,” she said. “I mean, I consider a few things every once in a while, but it’s not something I make concrete plans for. For all I know, we may decide not to get married. We may just live together in sin for the rest of our lives.”

“You would be all right with that?” he asked in a surprised tone, the movement of his hand slowing.

She lifted her head up again. “Sherlock, as long as I’m with you and we’re together, that’s really all I need. There are practical reasons to get married, financial reasons and legal reasons, but…it’s not something we absolutely have to do. It’s not something I’m going to demand to be happy. I was going to be married before and that didn’t work out, remember? Maybe it will with us. Maybe we’ll have a fabulous wedding, or maybe we’ll just have a domestic partnership because it’s too much of a hassle to plan. We’ll just see where the future takes us, all right?”

He nodded slowly. “All right.”

“Good,” she said, giving him a smile. “However, there is one thing you should remember.”

“What is that?” he asked.

“Whether we’re married or not, when I’m with you, wherever we are, that’s home. That’s more important than anything else.”

“That is very important,” he said, bringing her in more for a kiss. She savored the feel of his lips against hers, relished the closeness, and when he rolled them over so he was hovering over her she smiled against his lips but pushed at his chest. He sighed when he pulled away. “We don’t have time.”

“Sadly, not for a quick shag if we want to make our own breakfast,” she said. “But we could get something from a fast food restaurant’s drive through if you want to be very quick about things.”

“I would much rather take my time with you,” he said. “But perhaps I could kiss you for a few more minutes?”

She smiled widely. “I think Jack In The Box sounds very good for breakfast this morning,” she said, moving her hands to the back of his head and pulling him in for a very passionate kiss. She probably wasn’t going to have enough time for a cold shower but it would be well worth it, she decided. The make-out session lasted for nearly twenty-five minutes before they reluctantly got out of bed to begin getting ready to head to the hospital. Molly hid a smile when Sherlock went straight into the washroom to “take care of some things,” he said. She began to get dressed, debating between a short sleeved T-shirt and a long sleeved one before deciding on the short-sleeved one and a long sleeved button down flannel shirt to wear over it in case she couldn’t stand the sight of the scars.

When Sherlock emerged he got dressed quickly and when they were ready they went to the garage and got into his car. They made a stop at the fast food restaurant and placed their orders and then Sherlock got them onto the freeway to head to the hospital. Molly was hungry but she was also nervous, and she found her nerves were making it hard for her to eat. She managed to finish her meal
by the time they got to the car park, and once she and Sherlock got out they made their way to the hospital.

The process went by rather quickly, which surprised her. She was taken in for the X-rays almost immediately, and then it only took forty minutes for her doctor to come in and tell her that her bones had healed properly and the cast could come off. Then twenty minutes later a nurse came in with the saw to cut the cast off. Molly turned her head, ignoring the scent and sounds as best she could, and when it was over she cautiously took a peek. There was a five inch scar on the inside of her arm where her radius had pierced the skin, and it had been elongated by the surgeons. There were marks from where the staples were, and it was all a very pinkish color. It could have been much worse, she knew that, but it still looked rather ugly. At least it’s on the inside of my arm, she thought to herself, looking at her muscles next. She was definitely going to have to work on rebuilding those.

The doctor gave her the name of the physical therapist she would be working with and his contact phone number, and she went back out into the waiting area to find Sherlock. He was sitting there, keying something into his mobile. She’d put the flannel shirt on over her T-shirt and was cradling her now castless arm as she approached him. He looked up and studied her. “It doesn’t look good, does it?” he asked.

She shook her head. “Not really.”

“Then I won’t ask to look,” he said, standing up. “May I at least hold that hand? I missed doing that.” She let go of her arm and lowered it until her fingers brushed his outstretched hand. He gripped her fingers tightly and then looked over at her. “I think what might be best is a distraction.”

“What type of distraction?” she asked as they made their way out of the waiting room.

“I thought we might want to go to Balboa Park and go to some of the different museums there,” he said. “We’d made plans to go during the summer when there was free admission but never did. Now would be a good time, I think. Most of the children and teenagers are in school at the moment, so it will be relatively quiet.”

“Could we go to the Museum of Art? And the Museum of Man? And maybe the Rueben H. Fleet Science Center? And the Japanese Friendship Garden?” she asked, perking up.

“We can go to as many of them as we can fit in either before they close or before it’s time to go see Jason and Thomas,” he said.

She leaned over and kissed his cheek softly. “Thank you, Sherlock. I appreciate it.”

He squeezed her hand. “As long as we start with the Science Center I’ll be content.”

She gave him a slightly wider smile when she pulled away and they stayed hand in hand as they made their way back to his car. When they got in she used the GPS to get direction on how to get to the Science Center, and once Sherlock had paid the parking fee they were on their way. It didn’t take them very long, and she was very excited when they made their way towards the domed building. It was definitely geared for children, and Molly thought he would be bored, but Sherlock seemed to be content with the optical illusions and the hands on experiments. They managed to get to watch the presentation that was showing and they both bought a few things at the gift shop as well. Molly was not surprised Sherlock bought more than she did.

Once they had taken their things to the car they debated where to go next. They decided to get the Museum of Art done first, and it was quite nice to walk around and look at all the lovely pieces of art that hung on the walls. She had gone to quite a few of the art museums in London when she was
visiting and while they were much grander than this one it was nice to know there was a place in San
Diego that would give her the same sense of contentment that being at those museums did. Sherlock
seemed to be more bored, though, and so she spent less time in the gift shop than she would have
liked before they went to the Japanese Friendship Garden. It was a very tranquil and serene place,
and she enjoyed it very much.

She was looking around when Sherlock came up to her. “What are you thinking about?” he asked,
placing his hands on her shoulders.

She leaned back into him. “How much I would love to come here more frequently to explore,” she
said with a smile. “I definitely want to spend more time at the Museum of Art.”

“It’s not exactly my cup of tea but you seemed to enjoy yourself,” he said, pressing a kiss on top of
her head.

“I did,” she said. “I think we have enough time to squeeze in the Museum of Man, but I’m also
hungry and I’d love to go get something to eat.”

“We could always head home and you could cook something, if you want,” he suggested.

“Let’s let me start physical therapy first,” she said with a frown. “The muscles in my arm are quite
atrophied.”

“I’m sorry I made the suggestion,” he said quietly.

“Well, I could maybe help you cook,” she said. “If you want to cook, I mean. Or…we could go do
something else. Something entirely different. Maybe go somewhere we haven’t gone to eat before?”

He thought about it a moment. “How far are you willing to go?”

“Well, it’s…” She pulled her mobile out of her handbag. “It’s 1:43 now. We need to be at Thomas
and Jason’s by six, correct?” Sherlock nodded. “We could go downtown, park in one of the lots and
see about taking the trolley to Seaport Village. I think seafood sounds like a good late lunch.”

“Was there any place in particular you wanted to go eat at?” he asked.

She shook her head. “Let’s just walk around and see what catches our eye.”

“All right,” he said. He let go of her and they left the garden and went back to his car. After looking
at the parking situation in downtown they decided to try their luck in Seaport Village itself and found
it to be better than expected. They parked at East Plaza and got out, walking hand in hand, and not
soon afterward found themselves at Buster’s Beach House & Longboard Bar. Sherlock looked at the
restaurant. “This looks promising.”

“I think so too,” she said with a smile. “Let’s go inside.”

They made their way into the restaurant and Molly instantly realized they’d made the right choice. It
smelled enticing in there, and the food she could see the other customers eating looked really good.
Soon she and Sherlock were at a table looking at menus. “It all seems quite tropical,” she said, seeing
that a lot of the food was flavored with ginger, jasmine, sesame, hoisin or chutney.

“It’s definitely distinctive,” he said, looking over his menu.

She studied hers and saw so many good things on it. She decided to start with an appetizer since she
was starving and got The Green Flash, with a swordfish and seafood kabob as her main dish.
Sherlock was also apparently hungry as he ordered the fried calamari strips for his appetizer and the Island Mahi Mahi for his meal. Molly decided if she had room left she was going to order dessert and get either the coconut profiteroles or the tempura banana fritters, as both sounded excellent.

Once their orders were placed she looked over at Sherlock. He seemed to be not very relaxed, not very happy. She frowned. She had thought he was enjoying himself. “Is something wrong, Sherlock?” she asked.

“It’s fine,” he said, reaching over for her hand. “Why do you ask?”

Molly gave him the one that had been in the cast and he grasped her fingers in his. “I don’t know. You just seem…you don’t seem as excited for this upcoming term as you were for the last one,” she said.

He was quiet for a moment as he ran his thumb over her knuckles, looking down at their hands. “I don’t want a repeat of last term where I rarely get to spend time with you,” he said. “I know things are different, where we reside together now and I’m taking fewer units, but I don’t want to get so overwhelmed with school work that I push you aside. You don’t deserve that.”

“Sherlock,” she said, squeezing his hand tightly. When he looked up she gave him a small smile. “Getting this degree is important to you, yes?”

“No as important as other things,” he said. “But yes. It’s something I definitely want to obtain.”

“Then I will support you one hundred percent, and if that means I get less of your free time than so be it,” she said. “And I’ll support you all the way to your doctorate, if that’s what you want. Being the supportive one in this relationship isn’t just your job. It goes both ways. If I can’t do it for you, then I’m being selfish.”

He studied her for a moment and then he seemed to relax. “You never have been a selfish person.”

“And I don’t intend to start being one now,” she said as her smile got wider. “We’ll make things work, I promise.”

“I’m going to hold you to that promise,” he said.

“I’m counting on it.” She squeezed his hand and then let go. “Let’s talk about other things for a while, all right?”

He nodded. “All right.” They began to talk about the things they had seen at the museums, and talked until their food showed up. The meal was excellent and she knew she was going to make it a point to come back to this restaurant more frequently if she had the chance. Once she and Sherlock were done they paid their bill and made their way back home to relax for a bit. It was very nice to be home, and she hoped she and Sherlock could spend some more time there since she only had just a little over a week of Sherlock’s time left before his new term started.

It was nearly five when Sherlock’s mobile rang. Molly had decided to change into something nicer and had pulled off the flannel shirt and T-shirt when she stopped, listening to Sherlock’s side of the conversation. After a few minutes he hung up. “I take it dinner is cancelled?” she asked.

“It’s more like they’re treating us to dinner out,” he said with an amused smile. “Apparently the food for their next door neighbor’s pet snake escaped this morning and has been wreaking havoc all over the floor.”

“Oh no,” she said, trying not to laugh. “Not exactly what you want to come home to.”
“No,” he said. “They thought we’d rather eat somewhere else than risk running across a stray mouse.”

“That seems like a good idea,” she said. “Are we going anywhere fancy?”

“Jason said he wanted to go to a diner of some sort, and Thomas said if we didn’t mind the drive we could go to Oceanside to the Pier and eat at Ruby’s,” he said. “I remembered you had thought about going there when we had our first date but we ate at Colima’s instead.”

“That sounds like a lot of fun,” she said with a smile. “I’m still a little full from lunch, but by the time we get there I think I’ll be ready for dinner.”

“Then I’ll call Thomas back and tell them we’ll be there shortly.” His gaze fell on her arm, and after a moment she realized he could see the scar. She moved her arm slightly but he moved over toward her and touched her shoulder. “May I?” She hesitated, and then after a moment lifted up her arm so he could see it. He ran his finger along the scar for a moment. “It healed well. I think, in time, it will fade quite a bit. Maybe not entirely, but it won’t be as noticeable.” Then he brought her arm up and pressed a kiss on the scar.

She gave him a small smile. “You really think so?” she asked.

He placed another kiss farther up on the scar. “I do. You’ve seen some of the scars on my body. Many looked like this when I first got them. Now they’re much fainter. Just give it time.” He lowered her arm and then stepped closer to her, reaching out to pull her as close as he could. She moved her arms up around his neck, her smile growing bigger. “I almost wish I could find a reason to cancel.”

“I wish you could too,” she said. “But I have missed them.”

“I have as well.” He ran a hand up the bare portion of her back. “Tomorrow, why don’t we just stay in bed all day? Ignore the world outside and just spend the entire day in each other’s company here at home.”

“I like that idea quite a bit,” she said. “I want to spend as much time with just you as I can before you go back to school and Greg comes out to visit.”

“Then we’ll enjoy our time with our friends tonight but tomorrow,” he said before leaning down and kissing her softly. She shut her eyes and melted into the kiss. He didn’t need to finish the sentence because she knew the next day she was going to be all his and he was going to be all hers, and there would be no way she’d rather spend her day.
Chapter 42

Time went by quickly as it got closer to Sherlock going back to university. Too quickly for Molly’s taste, she realized as each day passed. She wanted more time with him, but she knew at least this term they were sharing a home so she would get to sleep next to him every night, wake up with him every morning, and be there when he was home. Hopefully it would be better this time.

It was Sunday morning now and Molly lounged next to Sherlock, half awake and half asleep. Her arm was draped across his waist and her head was on his chest as she slowly woke up. Sherlock was running his hand up and down her arm and that was making her much more inclined to wake up. After a few minutes she lifted her head up and looked at him, a grin on her face. “You don’t want me to sleep anymore, do you?” she asked.

“It’s my last day before I go back to university and I’d like to spend as much time with you as possible,” he said, moving his arm up to smooth her hair back.

“I could get behind that idea,” she said before leaning in and kissing him softly. He moved his hand to the back of her head and kept her close before rolling them over so she was on her back. She moved her leg up, rubbing it against his thigh when her mobile began to ring. Sherlock pulled away from the kiss and hung his head, and she gave him a shake of the head and pushed him up. When he rolled back onto his back she leaned over and got her mobile off her nightstand. “It’s Jason.”

“Answer it,” he said, shifting his position slightly so he could put his hands behind his head.

She nodded and then answered the call. “Hello, Jason,” she said.

“I didn’t wake you up, did I?” he asked.

“No,” she said. “We were awake.”

He paused. “So I interrupted something,” he said slowly.

“Mmm-hmm,” she said with a slight laugh. “But it’s all right. What is it?”

“Well, I got tickets to the Chargers versus Colts game this afternoon,” Jason said. “Four tickets, field corner, Chargers side. These tickets usually go for anywhere from $118 to $220 for a single game, and that’s during the season. This is a post-season game so I think they’re worth even more. I know it’s really last minute but Thomas said he’d go and you guys have never been and do you want to go?”

“Chargers. That’s the American football team here, right?” she asked, watching Sherlock raise an eyebrow.

“Yeah. I know I joke around a lot about you guys and my football being better but it’s kind of a big thing. The Chargers have the chance of maybe going to the Super Bowl if they don’t screw it up. And you guys haven’t ever been to an American sports event so why not make it this one?”

She looked over at Sherlock. “He would really like us to attend a football game with him. I think he’s about two seconds away from begging.”

“More like one,” Jason said in her ear.

Sherlock considered it. “It wasn’t how I envisioned spending my day, but if it would make him
happy, I suppose it wouldn’t be so bad. But I reserve the right to leave if I’m bored to tears.”

“Tell Sherlock I heard it all and absolutely, as long as he at least gives it to halftime,” Jason said to Molly.

“Jason said to at least give it to halftime,” Molly said.

“Fine. When do we need to be ready?” Sherlock asked.

“The game starts at one twenty-five so figure if we take the trolley to Qualcomm Stadium we want to be there by twelve forty-five to get our food and get to our seats, and we can just catch the trolley at 12th and Imperial to get there at…” There was a pause. “Eleven fifty-one?”

“We need to be at the 12th and Imperial Transit Center by eleven fifty-one,” Molly told Sherlock.

“It’s nine forty-five now,” he said with a frown. “That doesn’t leave us much time.”

“I’ll make it up to you guys for being super short notice with dinner at Shakespeare Pub tonight,” he said. “That way you can be all British to erase the Americanized football from your heads.”

“He’ll treat us to dinner at Shakespeare’s tonight,” Molly said.

Sherlock nodded. “That’s an acceptable bribe for disrupting my plans.”

“What were his plans?” Jason asked.

“I think they involved spending his last day before his new term started having his wicked way with me as often as possible,” Molly said with a grin.

“Shit, that’s right. He does go back to school tomorrow, doesn’t he?” Jason said. “I am so sorry.”

“It’s all right. I doubt a chance like this would come along again if we decided we wanted to go another time,” she said. “And as this is an afternoon game, there may still be a little time for some of his plans to come to fruition later this evening.”

“I hope so, because I know it’d probably make you both pretty happy,” Jason said with a chuckle. “I don’t know if you’ve realized it by now, but Chargers colors are navy blue and gold. Colts colors are royal blue and white, so try and wear some gold to differentiate.”

“I’ll try, but I make no guarantees about Sherlock,” she said. “We’ll meet you at the trolley station by eleven forty-five, all right?”

“All right,” Jason said. “See you there.”

She hung up the phone and looked at Sherlock, who was giving her an amused look. “What?” she asked.

“There were more to my plans than simply having my wicked way with you,” he said. “Since you were actually awake for me to tell you to stay in bed, I was going to bring you breakfast in bed.”

“You’ve been trying for months now and you have yet to succeed in that endeavour,” she said with a smile.

“One day,” he replied. “What was it that you couldn’t make any guarantees about in regards to me?”

“That you would wear the local team’s colors today,” she said.
“I have a navy T-shirt I could wear,” he said. “Or a white T-shirt and my navy hooded sweatshirt partially zipped up. It’s cool enough.”

“I say wear the white T-shirt and bring the sweatshirt,” she said. “I think I have a white and gold striped T-shirt and very dark blue denim trousers I can wear.”

“I’m surprised in your zeal to fit in here you didn’t immediately buy Chargers merchandise,” he said.

She made a slight face. “I know I’m going to a game but…it’s just not real football.”

Sherlock sat up more. “I’ve heard sometimes one of our teams come to Los Angeles to play against their major league football team. I believe it’s Manchester United? If they do that at some point this year, we can see about trying to go.”

“Really?” Molly asked, her face lighting up. Sherlock nodded, and she threw her arms around his neck. “Oh, it would be so nice to see some ballers from home. And to see an actual football game again, up close and personal instead of watching it on the telly…that would be brilliant.”

“If you miss football so much we can see about getting passes to Galaxy matches,” he said as he embraced her back. “They’re supposedly the best in their league. And there’s also a rather good collegiate team here as well, I’ve heard. The Aztecs, I believe?”

“That’s San Diego State University, I think,” she said, pulling back slightly. “I wouldn’t mind collegiate matches every once in a while. But shouldn’t we see if your university is doing anything as well?”

“We’ll make it a point to go to things that both universities do,” he said. “This is the city we’ve adopted for our home now, so we should start learning to like the sports and teams that are here, I think. I may eventually be partial to UCSD but for now I’m keeping an open mind.”

“I’ll keep an open mind too, then,” she said. She leaned in and gave him a very quick kiss before pulling away completely. “We don’t have too much time. Why don’t you arrange for us to get a ride to the trolley station while I start work on our breakfast? I’m not sure what the food will be like at the stadium so we should have at least one filling meal in us.”

He nodded and she got out of bed and got her dressing gown from the back of the door, slipping it on before leaving the bedroom. She’d done a little bit of cooking since her cast had come off and knew what her limitations were, but she figured she was up to doing waffles since the only real work would be stirring the batter. She set the waffle iron to heat up and then began to make the batter, deciding on making vanilla yoghurt waffles with raspberries and blackberries mixed in. It didn’t take long to get the batter set up and in the waffle iron for the first batch of waffles. She had managed to make three waffles by the time Sherlock came out, clothed in denim trousers and the tight fitting white T-shirt. “I decided against a shower,” he said, moving into the kitchen.

“I may have to do the same thing,” she said.

“Well, I decided not to take one so you could,” he said with a grin, moving behind her to kiss her neck. “I know you prefer to take yours in the morning.”

“After breakfast, then,” she said with a smile. She took the fourth batch of waffles out and then separated them onto plates. Sherlock took one of them to the table and then she followed with the other plate. She went back and got silverware for both of them and brought it to the table. “There’s also coffee.”

“I’ll get a cup later,” he said, beginning to eat his breakfast. He took a bite and then nodded.
approvingly. “These are very good.”

“I tweaked the recipe slightly and added some cinnamon,” she said with a smile, taking a bite of her own food. “And I mashed up a few of the berries when I added them so they’re spread throughout the batter more.”

“I wouldn’t mind these more often,” he said.

“Well, it’s going to be another month before I’m able to go back to work, at the very least. There was a mix-up with my insurance and the referral they gave me is no good,” she said.

“Oh?”

“Apparently the physical therapy providers switched over but the doctor I was seeing about the broken bone didn’t know better. I was told that the doctor I had made the appointment for wouldn’t be covered, which is a shame, since she seemed quite nice.”

Sherlock studied her. “Would they be upset if you paid to see her privately?” he asked.

She thought about it a moment. “I’m not sure, to be honest, since it’s worker’s compensation. But I can look into it tomorrow. Are you thinking about covering it?”

He nodded. “If you think the two of you will work well together then it would be worth it,” he said. “But only if it’s allowed.”

“Well, then I’ll look into it,” she said, giving him a small smile. They went back to their breakfasts and when they were done she went back to their bedroom she got undressed and went to take a shower. It was wonderful to be able to take a shower again. She relished it every chance she got. She finished her shower twenty minutes later and then began to get dressed, putting on a gold and white striped T-shirt and dark blue denim trousers. She grabbed a dark blue jumper to wear if it got cold, as well as Sherlock’s hooded sweatshirt, and then went out to Sherlock. “Are we driving to the transit center?”

He shook his head. “An Uber driver should be here soon.” He took his sweatshirt from her. “I’m hoping we don’t regret this.”

“I don’t think it will be that bad,” she said with a smile, going forward and smoothing the front of his T-shirt once she stepped in front of him. “And Jason is fine with us leaving at halftime if you’re bored. But if you do make it through the game and dinner at the pub, I’ll find a way to make the rest of your evening very interesting.”

“Oh, will you?” Sherlock asked with a grin, pulling her closer.

“I will,” she said, placing her hands flat on her chest. “What time is your first class tomorrow?”

“Nine, unfortunately,” he said. “This term I managed to get all of them on Mondays and Wednesdays, though, so Tuesdays and Thursdays are going to be spent studying and doing lab work, but that leaves me Fridays and my weekends free.”

“Definitely an improvement on last term,” she said with a smile. “Provided you don’t have many professors who want to torment you with heavy workloads over the weekend we can actually do things.”

“We can work around that,” he said. “I want things to be better this time.”
“I think they will be,” she said before leaning in and kissing him softly. He kissed her back and they stayed that way for a few moments before she rather reluctantly pulled away. “Is it going to be long until the car is here?”

“Not much longer,” he said.

“Good,” she said with a grin before kissing him again. He grinned into the kiss as he kissed her back until they were alerted to the car arriving. They got in and the car took them down into downtown San Diego and dropped them off at the parking area by the buses at the 12th & Imperial transit center. They saw Jason and Thomas immediately. Jason had on denim trousers and a Chargers jersey with a 21 on it and the name Tomlinson on the back, and he had somehow managed to persuade Thomas to dress down, as he was also in denim trousers and a dark yellow T-shirt. “How did you manage to talk Thomas into wearing denim trousers and a T-shirt?” she asked as she came up to the couple, giving Thomas a hug.

“I promised I’d cook a gourmet dinner for a week,” Jason said with a grin. “But you forget, he was in casual wear the whole time we were in Hawaii. I have photos to prove it.”

“I need to see them,” Molly said with a wide smile when Thomas let her go and she moved over to embrace Jason. “The only ones you showed us he was rather dressed up.”

“I have some on my phone,” he said when they separated.

“I swear, you only have them for blackmail,” Thomas said, shaking his head, though he did have a grin on his face as he said it.

“No, I have them because I had the best honeymoon ever and I want to be reminded of it,” Jason said with a grin, leaning over to give his husband a quick peck on the cheek. Then he turned back to Molly. “We never asked if you two had pictures from London.”

“Are we talking personal or tabloid?” she asked wryly.

“Personal,” Thomas said. “I know you mentioned they were bad, but they weren’t _that_ bad, were they?”

“Horrible,” Sherlock said. “Mostly in part to interviews her former fiancé gave to line his wallet. He painted her in a bad light, and when we were out people decided to be nosy.”

Jason’s jaw set. “Thomas…”

“No, you can’t fly to London and beat his arse, love,” Thomas said, patting his husband on the back. “Not unless I get to come with you.”

Molly gave them both a fond smile and then went between them and put her arms around their shoulders. “I love you both, you know that, right?”

“We know,” Thomas said, leaning over and kissing her cheek. “But really, are you all right?”

“Tom is eight thousand miles away now, and I think Mycroft is going to deal with him severely, if he hasn’t already,” she said. “And I doubt that the paparazzi give a damn about my relationship with Sherlock now that we’re no longer in London. It may be an issue if we go back but I don’t think it will be a problem at the moment.”

“If it does become a problem, I’ll take care of it,” Sherlock said. “But you’re more than welcome to offer moral support.”
“And booze,” Jason said, eliciting a giggle from Molly. “Lots of booze.”

Sherlock cracked a grin at that. “I’m sure Molly will appreciate that.”

“Oh, I certainly will,” she said with a nod as their trolley pulled up. The four of them got on board the rather packed trolley, managing to get seats together by sheer luck, and they chatted all the way to Qualcomm Stadium. They got to the stadium and Jason handed out the tickets, and they made their way to their seats. They were very close to the field, and even though she wasn’t sure what to expect or if she’d even like the match she was starting to get excited. She leaned in towards Jason. “There are so many people.”

“It’s a playoff game,” he said, leaning in towards her. “They’re trying to make it to the Super Bowl. If they win this game and the next three then they’re in. It will be the first time since 1994.”

“That’s actually quite exciting,” Molly said with a smile.

“It is, isn’t it?” Jason said.

“I never asked how you got the tickets,” she said.

“I got them in a trade,” he said with a grin. “Thomas and I got four passes to Disneyland that don’t have blackout dates as a wedding gift, and a friend of ours wanted to take his girlfriend and her best friends to the park and propose to his girlfriend today outside Cinderella’s castle since it’s her birthday, and he offered us these Chargers tickets for the use of our passes.”

“That’s a very good trade,” she said. “I think you both got equally good deals out of it.”

“Yeah, I think we did too,” he said with a grin. He turned his attention to the game. “If you or Sherlock have any questions, feel free to ask. I’ll answer them.”

“Thank you,” Molly said. She turned away from Jason and then turned to Sherlock on her other side. “Jason said if we have any questions about the game we can ask him.”

“I’ve memorized all the rules and such for the game,” he said. “When I was gone the two years, I spent a lot of time in the States during their football season. I couldn’t help but be around it and I ended up at a pub with someone who was a fan and they explained everything to me.”

“Did they have a favorite team?” she asked.

“Certainly not the Chargers,” he said with an amused grin. “They’re a team that is something of a laughingstock in some circles. She was a Patriots fan.”

“She?” she asked, an amused grin crossing her face.

“Yes, she,” he said, leaning over. “And she had a very healthy relationship with the female bartender who was serving me my drinks that evening.”

“In other words, I shouldn’t get jealous,” she said, chuckling softly.

“No, you shouldn’t,” he said, leaning over and kissing her softly. She framed his face gently and kissed him back for a moment. When they pulled apart she rested her head on his shoulder. “We’ll let Jason answer any of Thomas’s questions. I can answer yours.”

“Okay,” she said. She settled in for the game, standing when the National Anthem was sung and then sitting down again, staying close to Sherlock. It wasn’t a really boring game, she realized. It
wasn’t as interesting as the football from home but it was interesting. Sherlock would explain various things to her about how the points system worked, what the various offenses meant, the different types of plays the teams were doing. She was picking up quite a bit and really enjoying herself.

She happened to be glancing at the Jumbotron when she saw her and Sherlock on the screen and saw that they were on the kiss cam. She grinned and nudged Sherlock, pointing, and when he saw it he leaned in and gave her quite a passionate snog. She heard a cheer go up from the crowd and she felt herself blush but she didn’t stop kissing him until he pulled away. “I think that’s a first for me,” he said, running his thumbs on her cheekbones. “Kissing for an audience this big.”

“Definitely different than kissing for the tabloids,” she said with a laugh before kissing him again, much more quickly this time. When they were done they went back to watching the game and stayed until it was over and the Chargers had won, 21 – 7. Jason was in a very good mood as they made their way to Shakespeare’s Pub and insisted on paying for the meal and drinks on his own.

It was nearly nine when Sherlock and Molly finally made it back home. Molly took off her jumper and tossed it on the chair, and a moment later Sherlock came up behind her, sliding his arms around her. “Did you enjoy yourself?” he asked, resting his chin on top of her head.

“I did,” she said, putting her arms over his. “I actually think American football is rather interesting. I mean, not as good as our football, but not bad, either.”

“Should I get you Chargers memorabilia for your birthday, then?” he asked.

“I could maybe do with a T-shirt. Possibly a jersey,” she said. She pulled away just slightly to turn in his arms. “I’m just sorry we didn’t get much time to ourselves. How late can you stay up tonight?”

“I doubt I’ll sleep much anyway,” he said, ducking his head slightly. “So we have some time.”

“Good,” she said, leaning in and kissing him softly. Tomorrow there was going to be a shift in how things were going to work, new schedule for them to get used to, but for tonight they had some time together, and she was going to make sure they made the most of it.
Chapter 43

Molly had spent Sherlock’s first week back in university getting their home ready for their impending houseguest. Lestrade was going to arrive in San Diego in the early evening on Friday, to give Sherlock a bit of time to recover from his first week of term, and stay with them for just about two weeks. Molly had asked exactly how long it had been since Lestrade had taken a holiday and he had chuckled and said aside from a few times where he’d dipped into it for special occasions with his daughter he’d avoided using most of it since the early 1990s, working his trips around bank holidays for the most part, when he was able to take them. She’d been slightly gobsmacked at that because he had to have months of vacation stored up at this point, and he’d said he had about three months worth left after the three weeks he was taking now. She hoped that meant she’d get to see more of him.

She had just finished her first appointment of physical therapy when he called. She was relying on Uber to travel because her arm was still a bit weak and she hadn’t wanted to drive quite yet, though the physical therapist told her today that in about a week or two she could. The car she was in pulled away from the office where her therapy appointments took place as she answered the phone with a smile. “Greg! Having fun in Connecticut?”

“I was. Louisa, however, not as much,” he said with a chuckle. “I think she expected me to stay one day, two at most. Not four and a half. So I left New Haven last night.”

Molly frowned. “Are you here in San Diego already?” she asked.

“No, no. I’m in Las Vegas. I figured, it’s on the way so why not? I’m having quite an interesting time, actually. It really is a gaudy as people say.”

She laughed at that. “I wouldn’t know. I’ve never been there.”

“You might enjoy yourself, I suppose. But if you want to gamble, I suppose with Sherlock’s money you could go somewhere much more upper class. But it’d be fun for a weekend away with mates from work or something, I bet.”

“Probably,” she said. “So I take it that means you’ll be coming here on a different flight?”

“There are loads more to choose from, or I could drive there, though I’m not quite sure I want to do that,” he said.

“I wouldn’t. It’s not summer but the desert’s still bloody brutal to deal with, and you’re British.”

“Good point.” He paused. “I can pick a flight that gets me there around the same time, or earlier. Or later, if the two of you want more time alone.”

“Well, I had planned on going to the farmer’s market in Hillcrest on Saturday to pick up some things and take a look around so it’s still best if you come on Friday. And I think Sherlock wanted to take us all out for dinner somewhere, so maybe pick a flight that comes in around the same time or earlier? He’s doing all of his lab work and studying today so tomorrow he’ll be free. I think anything that comes in after…” She thought about it a moment. “Two should be fine. Give him a chance to sleep in a bit.”

“Then I’ll see what I can arrange and then I’ll text you with when I’ll get into the airport,” he said.

“All right. And don’t gamble away all your money, Greg, all right?”
“I’m barely taking any and I’m avoiding the tables,” he said, and she could tell he was grinning as he said it. “Personally I’m enjoying the entertainment here more than the slot machines. Besides, isn’t there gambling in your neck of the woods?”

“At the Indian reservations, yes,” she said. “We could always go to one if you want. I’ve never been, but it could be interesting.”

“Then I’ll refrain mostly until I’m with you. Then you can keep me in check and I’ll do the same for you.”

She chuckled at that. “All right. And be careful with your drinks. You don’t want to end up in some quickie marriage, either.”

“No need to worry about that,” he said. “No amount of alcohol can get me to go back to being married again, at least not now. If ever, I suppose.” There was a pause. “Have to run. Looks like the show’s about to start. Take care, and see you tomorrow.”

“All right. Have fun, Greg.” She hung up and shook her head, smile on her face for a moment before she turned and looked out the window. She was very glad she wasn’t single anymore, because she did love Sherlock with all her heart, but she did miss the freedom that came with not being in a relationship, or at least the freedom that came with not living with your significant other. Though, she supposed, if she wanted to jet off for a weekend in Vegas with some of the women from work she doubted he’d mind much. He didn’t cut her off from her friends or demand all her time. He encouraged her to have a life that didn’t revolve around him, actually. She was quite lucky in that regard.

And she should do the same with him, she thought. School was one thing, obviously, but she should encourage him to spend time with people from the university he might have connected with, or for him to spend time alone with Jason and Thomas. Or even develop hobbies away from the house that she didn’t share. Something where he didn’t spend all his time focused on school and her. It would be good for him, if he’d go for it.

She was nearly home when she got a text from Sherlock. *Made reservations for dinner tonight. 7PM. Island Prime in Harbor Island. Dress nicely. SH*

She smiled and texted him back. *Curly hair or straight?*

She got a response almost immediately. *Curly please. SH*

She stowed her mobile and asked the driver if she could take her to Buffalo Exchange instead of back home. She’d wanted to go to the resale shop for a little while now, see what there was at the store, and a “dress nicely” date was the perfect excuse for a visit. It wasn’t too far out of the way, and when Molly got out and went into the store her eyes went wide as she saw what she thought was the perfect dress on a dummy in the window. It was lavender and was about knee length. It had no sleeves and there was a floral lace panel covering her upper chest and then the fabric on the bodice of the dress that continued to the waist, and then the skirt had a scalloped lace pattern all around. The skirt flared out slightly and Molly was instantly in love. The saleswoman came over with a grin. “We just got it two days ago,” she said. “It’s a vintage 1950s dress.”

“I love it,” Molly said. “And it looks like it’s my size.”

“I could take it off the dummy and you could try it on?” she suggested.

Molly nodded enthusiastically. “Yes, thank you.”
The saleswoman carefully took the dress off the dummy and then handed it to Molly, who went to the back of the store and then tried it on. It was just a tiny bit big in the waist but nothing noticeable, and if she ate a large meal that would be perfect. She stepped out and saw the saleswoman standing nearby with a pair of heels and a clutch. "The woman who brought it in had a whole outfit planned for it. I don’t know if the shoes are your size, but…” Molly took the heels from her and checked. They were her size, thankfully. She slipped them on and then looked in the mirror, turning around. "Do you have a date?"

She nodded. "My boyfriend is taking me out to dinner tonight."

"I think you’re going to knock his socks off with this," the woman said with a grin.

"I think so too," Molly said with a wide smile. "I want to do more shopping, but I definitely want the dress and heels and clutch."

"I’ll set them aside for you when you’ve gotten them off," the saleswoman said with a nod.

Molly went back to change and then took the dress to the counter before looking around. She made a few more selections and after about another hour felt she’d tried on everything she wanted to and paid for her purchases and left. She walked around a bit, debating where to eat her midday meal, when she caught sight of a pair of earrings in a shop window. They were a purple stone she had never seen before, decorated with purple gemstones and diamonds. She went in and found out the stone was jadeite, and that the earrings, while pricey, were one of a kind. She debated it for a moment, but decided to purchase them. She’d be back to work soon so if she was frugal it wouldn’t be too much of a hit to her finances. And they would certainly pair well with the dress tonight.

She went to Bombay for lunch, as she wanted something spicy and exotic, and then arranged for the Uber driver to pick her up and take her back home. By the time she arrived it was nearly three thirty and Sherlock wasn’t back yet. She took her clothing and accessories into the bedroom and began putting them away, and then took the book she’d been reading into the sitting room to sit on the sofa and read for a while.

It didn’t seem much time had passed before she heard the garage door open, and she set her book aside as Sherlock walked in. He looked to be in a rather good mood, and he came into the sitting room, leaning down and giving Molly a very enthusiastic kiss, which she eagerly returned. "I missed you," he murmured when he pulled away, still staying close.

"Well, you did leave before I woke up and could give you a proper send-off," she said, reaching up to grab his T-shirt lightly. "I’m not sure I can make up for that now. What time is it?"

"Five forty-eight," he said. "I encountered traffic on the way back from La Jolla."

"You know, next time you can make reservations in La Jolla and I can meet you out there," she said, letting go of his shirt and pulling away.

"I may do that next time. Especially while Lestrade is here."

"Oh, did you talk to Greg today?" she asked, getting off the sofa when he straightened up.

He shook his head. "Other than when I texted you I’ve had my phone off all day."

"He’s in Las Vegas right now," she said. "He’ll be flying in tomorrow at 3:28 instead of 5:17."

"Why on earth is he in Las Vegas?" Sherlock asked with a frown.
“His daughter thought he was starting to cramp her style, I suppose,” she said with a smile. “And he wanted to experience it. He’s been there since last night. But I thought I’d tell you about the change in plans if he hadn’t.”

“I’m glad he planned to come tomorrow instead of today,” Sherlock said, following when she made her way into their bedroom. Molly had left the dress and accessories laid out on the bed and Sherlock nodded approvingly. “That’s very nice.”

“Wait until you see it on me,” she said with a wide grin. “I spent a bit more on the earrings than I should have, but they’re one of a kind, made by Erica Courtney. I just fell in love with them.”

“They are very nice,” he said. “Are you going to put the dress on first?”

She nodded. “I can do my make-up without getting it on my dress now that the cast is off, so I’ll slip the dress on and then go curl my hair for you, do my make-up while the curlers are cooling, then finish getting ready and then we can go. It shouldn’t take too long.”

“All right,” he said. She began to get undressed, taking the time to put everything in the hamper, and then went for the dress. She knew he was watching her and enjoying every minute of it, but since she was in a bit of a hurry she didn’t tease him too much. She didn’t need a brassiere with the dress so she slipped it on when she’d gotten down to her knickers and then zipped it most of the way up. Sherlock stepped closer after a moment and finished it. “You were right. It does look much better on you.”

“Glad I was right,” she said with a smile, turning around and staying close. He put his hands to her waist and then slid them around to her back, running the top one up and down. He was studying her, it seemed, and after a moment she gave him a curious look. “Sherlock?”

“Tonight is our last real night of privacy and we aren’t spending it here at the house with me trying to make sure you’re quite pleased and very vocal about it,” he said. “I’m trying to figure out what’s wrong with me.”

She laughed and then kissed him for a moment. “We have all evening to do that,” she said when she pulled away. “But tonight’s the last night we have for two weeks to go have a date by ourselves. that’s why we’re going out.”

“I knew there was a reason,” he said with a grin. He reached up and ran his fingers through her hair. “You don’t need to curl your hair tonight if you don’t want to, if there’s not enough time. It would look just as nice pulled back at the nape of your neck.”

“Well, if you’re sure, then I’ll do it tomorrow before we go get Greg,” she said. “But I do want to do my make-up first. That will only take about twenty minutes.” She leaned in and gave him a longer, more leisurely kiss. “Start getting ready.”

“All right,” he said as she pulled away. She went into their bathroom and began to very quickly do her make-up before pulling her hair into a low not at the nape of her neck. When she was done she went back into the bedroom and went for a pair of thigh high stockings that could hold themselves up and put those on, followed by the heels. Once she was done with that she put on the earrings, then transferred a few things into the clutch before turning to Sherlock. “Ready when you are.”

He had changed into a suit and he nodded, moving next to her. She exited their bedroom first and he followed, placing a hand on the small of her back as they walked to the door to the garage in the kitchen. They made their way into the garage and got into his car. “Are you going to get to drive soon?” he asked as they slipped into their seats.
“In a week or two,” she said with a smile. “I’ve missed it.”

“I’ll have someone check out your car before you use it, just because we haven’t used it much in the last few months,” he said as he started the car.

“Thank you,” she said as he opened the garage door so that they could leave. He backed the car out and soon they were on their way, chatting about various things as they made their way to Harbor Island. Molly had no idea where Island Prime was and she was surprised to see the restaurant was sitting atop stilts in the San Diego Bay. They made their way inside and Sherlock gave his name, and after a short wait they were taken to a table. Even though it was dark the cityscape was stunning.

“The view is amazing.”

“I had thought it would be,” he said, studying the menu. “The food is supposed to be exquisite as well.”

“I hope so,” she said with a smile. She looked at her menu as well, looking at all the different items. So many different things sounded good that she was having a hard time deciding. After a bit she and Sherlock decided to split a dozen oysters on the half shell as an appetizer while Sherlock decided to get the Island Primes Filet Trio for his dinner and she ordered the lobster tail, prosciutto wrapped asparagus and smoked wild mushrooms with a Sangria Del Presidio cocktail to drink. She lifted up her glass of water and smiled at Sherlock, and after a moment he lifted his up as well. “To a wonderful date and a very interesting last night of just us.”

“I can drink to that,” he said with a grin, tapping his glass against hers. She took a sip of her water and caught the heat in his eyes when he was done. Oh yes. Tonight was definitely going to be one very interesting night before they had to behave for the next two weeks. She couldn’t wait.
Lestrade’s flight was coming in a bit earlier than they had originally planned, arriving at noon, and so Molly and Sherlock made it to the gate to wait for his plane’s arrival at eleven thirty-five. Sherlock had grumbled slightly at the loss of extra time with her, but not too much, and she wasn’t sure he entirely meant it. As it was they were both waiting there when airport security boarded the plane, and then after a bit the passengers began to disembark, and at the very end Lestrade got off the plane, talking to the captain. They shook hands and then Lestrade made his way over to them. “Interesting flight?” Sherlock asked.

“Oh, you could say that,” Lestrade said with a grin. “A passenger got drunk and belligerent and threatened to storm the cockpit. I had to babysit the man.” A moment later the airport security came off the plane with a man who was yelling curses and struggling with them. “But the airline representative that the captain talked to felt they owed it to me to upgrade me on my flight home, which will be nice. Business class isn’t so bad but I’d like the leg room.”

Molly gave him a grin and shook his head. “Can’t escape the job even on holiday, it seems.”

“No, I can’t,” he said before giving her a hug. “I know it’s only been a few weeks since I saw you but you honestly look much happier here than you did in London.”

“Well, here is home now,” she said, hugging him back. “And there’s no one trying to take pictures or hounding my every move.”

“That’ll do it,” he said before letting go of her. Then he turned to Sherlock. “And you?”

“And me what?” he asked with a grin.

“How was the first week of classes?” he asked.

“I think this term will be easier than the last,” he said with a nod. “Less classes, for a start, and only two days worth. Provided I don’t have large projects or many papers to research I should have my weekends mostly free for my leisure.”

“Good. I want to see you at least part of the time I’m here,” he said. “So! Where do we collect my luggage?” Sherlock indicated the direction they needed to head and the three of them went that way, chatting easily. Lestrade’s luggage had made it in one piece, though the actual luggage looked a bit worse for wear, and he said he’d check it when they could get to a chair. They moved to the side and he unzipped the luggage, frowning. “I could have sworn I had more clothing.”

“Are you sure you packed it all?” Molly asked.

Lestrade turned the bag over and then groaned. “Luggage got ripped,” he said, indicating the hole in the other side. “It could have fallen out anywhere.”

“Was there anything important in there?” Sherlock asked.

Lestrade shook his head. “No. The gifts from everyone are in my other suitcase. Same with the gifts I’m taking back. This was just my clothing.”

Sherlock looked over at Molly. “Fashion Valley?” he said.

She nodded, and then smiled. “Oooh! One of my friends suggested the restaurant at Neiman Marcus.
The Zodiac, I think it’s called. It’s only open for lunch. If we can get a table we could eat there?”

“Are you hungry?” Sherlock asked Lestrade.

“Starved. There were snacks on the flight but I was too busy to eat,” he said.

“Very well then. We’ll head to the shopping centre, see when Molly can get us a reservation if we need one, and then fill up the time before and afterward if needed getting you clothing for your stay here,” Sherlock said. “And don’t worry about the cost. I’ll take care of it.”

“Told you he’d say that,” Molly said with a laugh, shaking her head.

Lestrade frowned for a moment, and then chuckled. “You did, didn’t you?” he said.

“I did.” She leaned over and kissed Sherlock’s cheek. “You can cover buying his clothes. I’ll cover lunch, all right?”

“If you insist,” he said.

“I do.” They got the rest of his luggage together and carefully took all of it out to Molly’s car in the parking lot. Molly had thought he would appreciate being driven around in a convertible. They stowed his luggage in the boot and then got in, Sherlock slipping behind the driver’s seat, and headed towards the freeway to take them to Friars Road. Molly got them a reservation for one, and since they made good time Molly dragged both men to The Art of Shaving first, since they had continuously walked by and never went inside. Both men were fascinated by the place and spent a decent amount of money there, and then they made their way to Neiman Marcus and the third level. Molly had requested patio seating and so they got a very nice view of the area.

“This seems like a rather large shopping center,” Lestrade said.

“It is,” Sherlock said, studying the menu. “It’s a rather upscale one, too. There are all sorts of stores here that are higher end, though not high end.”

“I know. I saw an Armani Exchange,” he said, almost wistfully.

Sherlock looked at him. “In the mood to impress someone?” he asked.

“Not that, so much as I recently got told I looked frumpy by Sally,” he said as Molly stifled a laugh at that. “Frumpy is a term you use to describe a housewife whose let herself go, not a man who’s only slightly past his prime.”

Sherlock considered things. “I don’t see why you only need to buy wardrobe items you can wear on your holiday,” he said thoughtfully. “If spending some money to improve your work wardrobe will make Donovan eat crow then I find that a worthy cause to support.”

Molly reached over and lightly smacked his shoulder. “Sherlock.”

“What?” he said. “If Lestrade wants to look more polished and Donovan has to eat her words then I consider it my duty as his friend to help.”

Molly shook her head and studied her own menu. “You’re eight thousand miles away and you still like tweaking her nose.”

(Some amusements are too good to pass up,” he said with a small smile. “But it wouldn’t hurt. Just because I’ve decided a more casual look works better for me here doesn’t mean a more polished one
won’t do Lestrade well back in London. And besides, it might entice some females to give him a second glance.”

“No,” Lestrade said, shaking his head. “I have no need to date again.”

“Who said you needed to actually date said females?” Sherlock said, not looking up from the menu.

Lestrade cracked a grin at that. “Oh yeah. California is definitely good for you,” he said.

Sherlock appeared to be resisting the urge to roll his eyes before he looked over at the Molly. “Do we have any limitations?” he asked Molly, who was biting her lip. “Because it seems to be a bit…” He trailed off.

“Try more than a bit,” she said, catching his meaning. The food and drinks were much more than she had expected. “I mean, it says a bloody cookie is four dollars. And the boxed mix is twenty-two!” She shook her head and then looked at Sherlock. “I can cover the purchases at the farmer’s market tomorrow.”

“I’ll cover the meal,” he said. “So long as if you decide to try one of those cookies you let me have a taste.”

“Deal,” she said with a nod. She looked over the menu some more, this time ignoring the prices. The French Dip sounded good, but so did the roast salmon salad. She settled on the salad and a Spring White Sangria when the waiter came to take her order. Lestrade got the filet mignon and a Belgian Chimay Triple White Label beer, and Sherlock ended up getting the French Dip so she’d get to see if it was worth ordering if she ever came back along with an iced tea.

Lestrade looked at Sherlock as if he’d grown a second head as the waiter left. Sherlock noticed after a moment and gave his friend a confused look. “What?” he asked, brow furrowed.

“Iced tea?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I’ve gotten used to it, I suppose,” Sherlock said with a slight shrug.

Molly grinned. “It took a while. He still won’t touch green tea. We have to have two separate containers in the refrigerator for the iced tea. One has his black tea, and the other has my orange dragon fruit jasmine green tea.”

Lestrade shook his head. “Next thing I know you’ll be telling me… I don’t know, you eat granola for breakfast or something.”

“In between classes, sometimes,” Sherlock said absently. “Usually mixed nuts, though. More protein, which means they’re more filling until I hit the stretch at 1:30 where I can actually sit down to eat.”

“I may have spoken too soon about California being a good thing,” Lestrade said, though it was clear he was teasing.

“If you don’t like the changes you are more than welcome to go back to England,” Sherlock said. “Where it’s cold, rainy and you are in the same vicinity as Anderson and the assorted imbeciles at Scotland Yard.”

“On second thought, I’ll stay here for the rest of my holiday,” Lestrade said.

Molly rolled her eyes. “Oh, stop it, both of you. Trust me, we still have plenty of British food in our pantry and I think between the three of us we’ll do just fine. Plus, there’s Shakespeare’s Pub. We’ll have to take Greg there at least once.”

“A pub, eh? I like the sound of that,” Lestrade said with a grin.

“It’s a nice bit of home,” Sherlock said with a nod. “And I believe Jason and Thomas said they’d like to meet Lestrade this weekend so I was thinking we could all go Sunday.”

“Those are your friends who got married the day before you went to Cardiff, right?” Lestrade asked. Molly nodded. “Mary said I was to interrogate them for her. Nicely, of course.”

“This will be interesting,” Sherlock remarked.

“Nothing intimidating,” Lestrade assured Molly when her eyes widened. “She just wants, as she said, to know all the juicy bits on how the two of you are really doing here and she thought they’d know best. And I think she also wants to learn more about them. But they seem interesting, so I won’t scare them off.”

“Good. I like them, just as much as I like all of you in London,” Molly said. The conversation shifted then, but Molly didn’t completely relax. She wasn’t in the mood to have her old friend be territorial and scare off her new friends. Hopefully it didn’t come to that or she’d regret inviting Lestrade to stay with them, and she really didn’t want to do that.
Sherlock, Lestrade and Molly had a late start Saturday and spent the day at Coronado Island, enjoying the various sights there and browsing the shops in the downtown area during the late morning and afternoon and then having dinner at Brigantine Seafood Restaurant before going back to Sherlock and Molly’s home and staying up late reminiscing about old cases in London.

The next morning was the farmer’s market in Hillcrest. Sherlock had said he wanted to sleep in but the afternoon before Jason had called her and said he and Thomas were thinking about going, so she made arrangements with Lestrade to be up and ready by eight to get an Uber ride to pick them up and then get to the market. Jason said he’d make coffee at home since he had everything to make Molly’s favorite coffee at home and share it with them. He just needed to know how Lestrade took his coffee, which Molly passed along to him.

It started at nine, and they got to Jason and Thomas’s at eight twenty-six. Jason was standing outside with two travel mugs. “Hey, Molls,” Jason said with a grin, leaning over and kissing her cheek.

“Thomas grumbled at the early hour. He stayed up late doing paperwork so he’d be free for Shakespeare’s Pub tonight so I’m letting him sleep.”

“Ah,” Molly said with a grin, kissing his other cheek. “Jason, this is Greg Lestrade. Greg, this is Jason Monroe-Townsley.”

Jason handed one of the coffees to Molly and then reached over to shake Lestrade’s hand with the other. “Pleased to meet you,” Jason said with a grin.

“Pleasure’s mine,” Greg said with a grin of his own. “Molly’s talked a lot about you. Good things.”

“I’m glad,” Jason said, feigning relief. Molly rolled her eyes at that and Jason chuckled. “In all seriousness, though, she’s said a lot of good things about you, too. You’re one of her closest friends from back home. It’s going to be good to get to know you.”

“Well, I’ve been told by other friends of mine to interrogate you,” Lestrade said with a grin. “But I don’t think I’ll need to do that. I get the feeling we’ll be just fine with friendly chats.”

“Oh good,” Jason said. “Not that I mind cops, considering I’m friends with a few, but interrogations suck.”

Lestrade chuckled. “Yeah, they do.”

Jason handed him the other cup. “Anyway, here’s your coffee. Dark roast, three spoons sugar, and I hope just the right amount of half and half.”

Lestrade took a sip and then shut his eyes. “That’s the best coffee I’ve had in my entire life,” he said.

“Well, my paying job is a barista at a coffee shop;” Jason said with a chuckle. “I’ve had the practice.” He gestured to the car. “So should we get going?”

Molly nodded. “Yes, let’s.” The three of them piled back into the car and then they made their way towards the Hillcrest Farmer’s Market. Molly and Jason had been around there loads of time and Molly looked over at Lestrade to see his reaction. “Well?”

“This is a lot like the Sunday Up Market,” Lestrade said approvingly, looking at some of the stalls. His gaze narrowed towards one offering massages. “Now that looks inviting.”
“It does,” Jason said with a grin.

“Go on, you two,” Molly said with a smile. “I’ll keep looking around.” She left the two men and wandered around. She picked up some balsamic vinegars, olive oil and honey at the Farmers’ Daughter stall, and then browsed the different products offered by Nicolau Farms, settling on some goat cheese to use for cooking. She saw that there were Moroccan Gold Medjool dates at the Andrea Hankins stall and many imported and local cheeses from The Cheese Store, and she spent more money at both stalls than she probably should have. She was browsing the selections of orchids at Orchidanica’s stall when the two men rejoined her. “Relaxed yet?”

“Quite a bit,” Lestrade said with a grin.

“Well, it’s just about lunch now. Do we want to start looking at the prepared food stalls?” Molly asked. “I mean, aside from the ones offering food for me to take home with me.”

“I can’t wait to look around more,” Jason said with a grin. They began to move around the market more, stopping at the various booths. Lestrade’s eyes widened when he saw the stall for California Cheesecakes by Vonda and the kettle corn at Pop n’ Mama. They ended up having their lunch at Doggus and Pupusas before going back to look at more of the artisan booths. Lestrade spent more of his money there, getting things for the various people back in London. Their last stop was seeing who was there for the Visiting Chef series, and by the time the demonstration was over their arms were laden with purchases, and they dropped Jason off at his apartment to get his things put away and get ready for an early dinner at Shakespeare’s Pub before going back to her home.

Sherlock was sitting in the sitting room typing on his laptop when they came in and he looked up. “Did you buy up the whole market?” he asked, giving them a small grin.

“Just about,” Lestrade said with a chuckle. “I’m going to need extra luggage to get everything back, I think.”

“I’d mail back the glassware you bought for John and Mary from Vitreum Glassware,” Molly said, gesturing to the box he was carrying with her hands just slightly, as she could barely lift them since they were burdened down with bags. “It’ll probably arrive in better condition.”

“You know, I could probably mail a lot of it back,” Lestrade said thoughtfully. “It’ll save me on luggage fees.”

“I’ll help with that, if you want,” Sherlock said. “Or at least the cost of packing supplies if you do it all yourself.”

“I’d appreciate it,” he said with a nod. “It really is hot here, even in January. I think I’ll take a shower, freshen up before I have to subject Jason and his husband to my company in enclosed spaces.”

“Enjoy yourself,” Molly said with a smile before Lestrade made his way to the guest bedroom. She moved to set her purchases down next to the sofa and then sat down next to Sherlock. “You should have come with us. I think you would have enjoyed watching Jason and Greg bond.”

“So they like each other?” he asked, setting his laptop on the coffee table and putting an arm around her shoulders to pull her against him.

“Like they’ve been friends for years,” she said, placing a hand on his chest as she curled up next to him. “I think he’ll get along with Thomas just fine. Probably even better, actually, since Thomas is actually British. But we’ve been invited for dinner Tuesday night at Jason and Thomas’s home.
Jason figured six would be late enough for you to get back from La Jolla?"

He nodded slightly. “Six should work out fine.”

“Good.” She leaned over and gave him a kiss that she’d intended to be brief, but he reached up and tangled his fingers in her hair to keep her close. She grinned against his lips before she pulled away slightly. “If you behave during dinner and you can promise to be very quiet, maybe you’ll be rewarded for being patient.”

“I don’t think I’m the one who needs to worry about being quiet,” he murmured before kissing her again. After a moment he pulled her onto his lap. “Lestrade does have his own bath area, and ours is in our bedroom. We could share a shower, if you’d like.”

“Mmm, that is tempting,” she said, running a hand down his chest. “Very tempting.” Her hand was down to the waistband of his trousers when she heard a noise as the guest bedroom door opened and so she turned quickly, looking towards the guest bedroom, but Lestrade didn’t come out towards the sitting room. “I definitely think we should take this to our bedroom.”

“Good,” he said. She got off his lap and stood up and he joined her after a moment before they headed towards their bedroom. Once they were inside and Sherlock had locked the door behind them they began stripping off their clothing, trying to get close in between taking off various articles. Once they were naked they made it to the washroom and he pulled her close. “You have the choice between shower and bath.”

“I choose the shower,” she said, trailing a finger down his bare chest.

“I had hoped you would,” he said before capturing her mouth in a passionate kiss. She responded by reaching between them, about to begin stroking him, when there was a knock at their bedroom door. She pulled away from the kiss as Sherlock groaned. “Of all the…”

“I suppose we should see what’s wrong,” she said with a sigh.

Sherlock went and got a towel, wrapping it around his waist, before going to their bedroom door. He was gone for a few minutes before he poked his head back into the bathroom. “The other bathroom has no water, it seems. Take a shower while you can; if we have to call a plumber they’ll probably turn off the water. When you’re done I’ll take one and then we can let Lestrade take one.”

“We can take a shower together without fooling around,” she said. “That way Greg doesn’t have to wait long.”

“I’ll tell him, then,” he said. Molly went and turned on the shower, adjusting it to a temperature they’d both find comfortable, and then stepped inside, getting her hair wet. A moment later the shower doors opened and he joined her. He picked up her bottle of shampoo. “Let me.”

“Thank you,” she said, waiting for him to massage the shampoo into her scalp. When he did she shut her eyes, enjoying the sensation immensely. When he pulled his hands away she rinsed it out and he did the same with her crème rinse. “That feels so good.”

“I thought it might,” he said in an amused tone.

“I will definitely find a way to reward you tonight,” she said. “You’ve more than deserved it.”

“I look forward to it,” he said. When he was done she rinsed it out as well, then stood under the spray to get wet. She then moved out of the way to let him get cleaned up while she put soap on her loofah sponge and soaped herself up. When he was done she moved back under the spray to rinse
off and then they both got out of the shower. They made their way to the bedroom and got dressed quickly before relinquishing the shower to Lestrade.

By the time they were all done it was nearly 4:45. Molly said she’d call a plumber the next day and wait around for him instead of going out. They got into Sherlock’s car and made their way to Shakespeare’s Pub. Sherlock got them parked and they took Lestrade inside. He got a wide grin on his face as he looked around. “Oh yeah. This is definitely a piece of home. I can see why you like it.”

“Wait until you try the food,” Molly said with a grin. Molly had changed into a dress, a vintage sleeveless bateau necked navy blue dress with cherries on it and a thin red leather belt around the waist, and she smoothed it down. She saw Jason and Thomas already there, sitting at a table. She smiled as the three of them approached. “You’re early too, I see.”

“Well, we figured we’d grab a table before it was too late,” Thomas said. He offered his hand to Greg. “I know I should let Sherlock and Molly make the introductions but my husband had nothing but glowing words to say about you, Gregory. I’m Thomas.”

“Pleasure to meet Jason’s better half,” Lestrade said, shaking Thomas’s hand.

“Better half, eh?” Thomas said, looking at Jason.

“Well, it’s the truth,” Jason said with a grin. Sherlock, Lestrade and Molly sat down and Lestrade looked at one of the menus. Molly and Sherlock didn’t need to bother, having been there quite often. Jason chuckled at the grin that spread on Lestrade’s face. “Just wait until you taste the food.”

“And the brews?” Lestrade asked.

“Top notch,” Thomas asked. “Just like the best pubs back home.”

“I may have to come back multiple times,” Lestrade said. After a little bit they were able to place their orders. Sherlock and Molly got their usuals, steak & mushroom pot pie for him and homemade fish cakes for her, while Lestrade took advantage of it being Sunday and got the traditional Sunday roast, opting for the Chef’s “roast of the day.” Sherlock opted for a 7-Up while Molly had one of the signature drinks, an Apples & Pears. Lestrade took longer to make his drink choice and then in the end said to hell with it and got the Shakespeare’s Draught Sampler so he could taste a little of everything, starting with the cask conditioned “Real Ale.” When their drinks arrived Lestrade lifted his up. "To making new friends."

"I'll toast to that," Thomas said with a grin, raising his own glass.

"Here here!" Jason said as his own glass went up.

Sherlock nodded. "To new friendships," he said, giving Molly a grin as they both raised their glasses. They tapped them against each other as she grinned back. All in all today had gone splendidly, and she had high hopes for the rest of Lestrade's visit.
Chapter 46

Lestrade had decided to stay at the house with her while she waited for the plumber even though she insisted it was more than fine if he went out and explored Hillcrest while she waited. He had laughed and said it wouldn’t be any fun without a tour guide, and so after Sherlock had left for classes and she’d made breakfast for the two of them they’d settled in to watch the morning news until the local plumbing company that Jason had recommended opened up. The person she talked to said someone would be there no later than noon, and so she and Lestrade settled into the sofa to watch the telly as the morning talk shows were coming to an end.

“Oh, give me good old British telly any day of the week,” he said, flipping through the channels as the soaps started.

“Trust me, American soap operas are rather boring,” Molly said with a laugh. “But we have a multi-region DVD player, and I brought over all my DVDs from home. Plus I get as many things as I can. We have a pretty decent DVD collection, I think.”

“Do you?” Lestrade asked, getting up from the sofa and going over to the shelves holding the DVDs. Molly knew he hadn’t really taken a good look before and she smirked when his eyes widened. “This whole bookshelf is filled with them?”

“Double stacked,” she said with a nod. “Sherlock and I have been trying to go through the 100 Greatest Movies list, and we’re actually nearly done. We bought most of the ones on the 2007 list. We’re probably going to do the ones on the old list as well.”

“You’re turning him into a film buff?” he asked.

“Trying to,” she said.

Lestrade starting going through the films and television shows before he got a wide grin on his face. “Oh, I haven’t seen these in ages,” he said. “And it looks like you have all of them.”

“Which ones?” she asked, getting up.

“Poirot,” he said, holding up a DVD. “I used to drive my wife mad wanting to watch them. Had a lot of the episodes on videotape. She couldn’t stand David Suchet. She said his accent got on her nerves.”

“Well, those were one of my birthday gifts to Sherlock,” she said with a smile. “He told me once that when he was young he used to admire Agatha Christie’s novels and he used to pester his parents to let him watch the episodes when they were on the telly. He was rather touched by the gift. We marathoned the entire series not that long before you came to visit.”

“So I suppose you don’t want to watch them again?” he asked.

She shook her head. “I’m a Miss Marple person myself, but I like Poirot. Though…” She got up and went to the DVDs and pulled one out. “Have you ever seen this version?”

He set down the one he’d been holding. “‘Death on the Nile,’ with Peter Ustinov,” he said. “No, I don’t recall having seen it.”

“It’s a bit melodramatic and cheesy in some spots but I personally love it,” she said. “And it’s got Angela Lansbury in it and I adore her. Did you know she was Miss Marple in a movie once? I have
that one, too.”

“Maybe we should watch both of those,” he said.

“Well, if we don’t get around to watching the David Suchet Poirots while you’re here at least I know what to get you for your birthday,” she said, taking the DVD out of his hands and taking it to the player. “That’s coming up in, what, May?”

“May tenth,” he said with a nod as he went back to the sofa.

“Then you might want to clear room in your home because I think David Suchet will be done with the new episodes of Poirot by then,” she said.

“They’re making more?” he asked, eyes wide.

“Or made more. I’m not sure. All I know is they haven’t been released here in the States so I couldn’t get them for Sherlock, but as soon as I can I will.” She put the DVD in the player and then pushed it in before going back to the sofa. “They’re supposed to be Poirot’s final cases. I’m actually excited for it.”

“I am too, now that I know about it.” He looked over at her once she got settled. “You’d think we’d be tired of murders by the time we get home, but here we are, me on holiday and you on sick leave, watching a Poirot movie that has…” he paused. “How many deaths has this got?”

She thought for a moment. “Four, I think. Four or five. It’s been a while since I’ve seen it.”

“There must be something wrong with us,” he said, shaking his head.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said, picking up her remote to get through the previews. “I think we can appreciate a quality murder so long as we know it’s fictional. It’s when people start replicating it that there’s a problem.”

“I suppose.” She made her way to the main menu and then started the movie. “Sherlock doesn’t seem to miss it all that much.”

“No, he doesn’t,” she said. “It caused him a lot of grief, and I think he’s glad to have washed his hands of most of it. And besides, he helps you out from time to time. That seems to be enough.”

“Will it always be, though?” Lestrade asked.

“I don’t know. We’ll see,” she said with a slight shrug as they turned their attention to the movie. She turned most of her attention towards the movie, though Lestrade’s question lingered in the back of her mind. When the first movie was finished she got up and put in the Angela Lansbury movie, “The Mirror Crack’d,” and then went back to watch it. The plumber showed up nearly a third of the way through and she got up and showed him where the bathroom was. He looked at the situation and told her it would take a few hours to fix and that he’d have to turn the water off throughout the house. It was nearly eleven thirty at that point and Molly suggested they leave quickly to get some water and get carryout from her favorite Mexican food restaurant.

When they came back they settled at the table and unwrapped their burritos. She’d gotten Lestrade interested in the California burrito and she watched him take a bite. He moaned in delight. “Why don’t we have these back home?” he asked, shutting his eyes after he swallowed.

“It’s a Southern California thing,” she said with a chuckle before taking a bite herself. “But you could probably make it yourself. I mean, you don’t have carne asada in London, but skirt steak might
work nicely, or any type of strip steak. Like the type you’d use for beef with broccoli, maybe. Just marinate it in beef broth, and then grill it.”

“And then large tortillas—” he began.

“Just make sure they’re flour ones,” she said.

“Large flour tortillas, cheddar cheese, guacamole, chips and…?” He took another bite. “I know there are tomatoes and onions, but what else?”

“It’s called salsa fresca,” she said. “It’s actually quite simple to make. I can send you the recipe I use when I want to make it from scratch. You just have to make sure you have cilantro on hand. And you want sour cream as well, though I usually don’t get that on mine. I don’t like it very much.”

“And if I want spice?” he asked.

“Ah, then you want some of one of these two sauces,” she said, setting her burrito down and getting up. “Sherlock discovered them when he was in the Southwest going after Moriarty’s network and he has a fondness for them, so we usually have them on hand.” She went to the cupboard and pulled down two glass bottles, one large and one small, before setting them down in front of Lestrade. “The small bottle is Tapatio. It’s a more mild sauce. And the larger bottle is Sriracha. That one’s got more of a kick. Sherlock says they taste great on eggs, but you’ll have to take his word on it. I won’t touch the stuff.”

“May I?” Lestrade asked, gesturing to the bottles. Molly nodded. Lestrade picked up the bottle of Tapatio and let a dab fall on his finger before sucking on his finger. He made a speculative face. “Not bad.” Then he did the same with the Sriracha sauce and a wide grin spread across his face before he put some on his burrito. He took a bite and then nodded. “Oh yes. This is perfect.”

“If I can send it to you in London, I’ll try and send you a bottle a month,” Molly said with a laugh. “But why do I get the feeling you’re going to put it on everything you can?”

“Because you’ve watched me eat before?” he said with a grin before taking another bite.

“I forgot,” she teased. She picked up her burrito and took a bite of her own. “When the plumber’s done, is there anything you’d particularly like to do? Sherlock should be back around six.”

“I suppose we could look around the downtown area,” he said. “I know there’s Hillcrest, and there’s more to it than we saw at the farmer’s market, but aren’t there other areas?”

She nodded. “There’s the Gaslamp Quarter and Seaport Village and Petco Park and City College…I mean, the downtown area is pretty big but not all of it is worth going to. There are a lot of homeless people around and a lot of dilapidated areas and vacant storefronts. But we can stay in the nicer areas.” She thought for a moment. “Why don’t we just stay in Hillcrest for now? I mean, if the plumber takes a few hours to finish, we may only have four hours or so to explore, and the rest of downtown is pretty big.”

“All right, then,” he said with a nod. He gave her a grin and they went back to eating. When they were done they went back to the DVD and finished the movie, and when it was over she let Lestrade pick out his favorite episode of Poirot to watch. It finished at the same time as the plumber, and once she had made sure the shower worked well and she paid the plumber she and Lestrade got in her car and made their way to downtown Hillcrest, parking in the shopping area near Buffalo Exchange. They walked around that area, with Lestrade looking around at the various shops and them occasionally making purchases.
Sherlock called at four forty-five and asked if there was any chance they could have dinner at home that evening as he had school work to do that he couldn’t put off until the next evening. Molly and Lestrade drove to the nearby supermarket and Molly picked up some fresh boneless skinless chicken breasts to make chicken cordon bleu and fresh broccoli to steam for dinner. When they got back to her home Lestrade kept her company as she cooked, and by the time she heard the garage door open dinner was just about ready to be served. When the door from the garage to the house opened and Sherlock came in she gave Sherlock a warm smile. “Long day?” she asked.

Sherlock nodded. He came over and gave her a quick kiss before setting his bag down at the table. “I’m taking another class with the professor I had last semester who took a shine to me. She asked for my assistance with something for one of her other classes but she needs it by Wednesday. If I help her she’ll let me choose one of my assignments to skip at a later point in the term.”

“That sounds like a fair trade off,” Lestrade said from where he was leaning off the counter, sipping from a bottle of ale. “Put in a little extra work now, get a reward later.”

Sherlock nodded. “Well, I had proven something she was teaching in the class wrong and had the published paper to back it up, so she’s asked me to come up with a lesson to teach the new theory. I need to spend tomorrow morning replicating the experiment, if I can. And right now I need to contact the person I ran the experiment with before it gets much later in Oxford.”

Molly nodded. “Well, dinner will be ready in ten minutes, whenever you’re done,” she said. Sherlock made his way to his bedroom, pulling his mobile out of his pocket as he walked. Molly went to check the water she was boiling to make parmesan and garlic egg noodles to go with dinner. It was ready so she added the noodles to it to start cooking them. By the time she got it all put together Sherlock had come back out. “Did you get a hold of your colleague?”

Sherlock nodded, sitting down at the table. Lestrade joined him a moment later. “He’s emailing me the information now. I’ll work on the lesson plans tonight and then try to replicate the experiment tomorrow.”

“Are you going to be able to get the rest of your work done?” she asked, beginning to bring everything to the table.

“I’ll find a way,” he said. “Even if I have to stay up late tomorrow.”

“I suppose it will be worth it,” Molly said with a smile as she began serving dinner to the two of them.

“Did the two of you have a good day?” Sherlock asked.

Lestrade nodded. “Yeah. Got to see a bit more of the Hillcrest area today. If you’re going to be busy all day tomorrow and Molly’s willing, we’ll go explore the rest of downtown tomorrow.”

“I’m thinking Seaport Village and Gaslamp Quarter,” Molly said. “We’ll go farther afield in the county later in the week and then do the really interesting stuff when you can join us.”

“That sounds like a good plan,” Sherlock said. He picked up his fork and knife and began to cut into his meal before taking a bite. “This is quite good.”

“Thank you,” she said with a smile. She finished serving them and then served herself before sitting down to eat. They moved into an easy conversation throughout dinner, with Molly and Lestrade and Sherlock going into more of their plans for the rest of their week and Sherlock telling them a bit more about the lesson he was going to write. When they were done Sherlock and Lestrade went and rinsed
the dishes and put them in the dishwasher before Sherlock retired to his study to work on the lesson plan and Molly and Lestrade watched more Poirot.

Eventually it got late and Molly decided to call it a night, leaving Lestrade to her DVD collection. She had the feeling he would be up all night getting his Agatha Christie fix, but she supposed if that led to a change in plans in the morning that was all right. As long as he was enjoying himself that was the important part. It was his holiday, after all. She went to her room and had just stripped out of the denim pants and long sleeved shirt she’d been in all day when her bedroom door opened and Sherlock came in. He grinned when he saw her and she shook her head. “What?” he asked, coming closer.

“You’re just staring,” she said with a grin, shaking her head.

“Well, you’re a very exquisite sight,” he said, coming up behind her and sliding his arms around her waist. He pressed a kiss to her neck and she shut her eyes. “I suppose with Lestrade wide awake nothing is going to happen tonight.”

“I don’t know,” she said. “How quiet can you be?”

“I can be very quiet,” he said. “The question is how quiet can you be?”

She turned in his arms and looked at him, sliding her arms around his neck. “Why don’t we find out?” she murmured, rising up to brush her lips against his. He moved his arms and pulled her close, nearly crushing her against him. She wanted to enjoy this moment, but for some reason, the question that Lestrade had raised earlier that morning came unbidden in her mind. He seemed content with her and with the life they had here in California, the life that was so vastly different than their life in London, but how long was it going to be enough? But then he deepened the kiss, sliding his hand up her back and undoing the clasp of her bra and she managed to push it aside for the time being. For the moment, he wanted her, and that was all that mattered.
Chapter 47

Molly and Greg had managed to get through all the interesting parts of downtown San Diego by Wednesday afternoon, as Molly had figured they would, and so Molly suggested Thursday they go to Escondido to go to Stone Brewing Co. to do a tour of the facility and taste some of the samples, and then maybe have a meal at the Stone Brewing World Bistro & Gardens afterward. Greg tried to convince Sherlock to join them but he’d declined as Molly had known he would. He said if they did the 4 PM tour, though, he would leave campus early and join them at the bistro for dinner. Greg had suggested inviting Jason, and he in turn had convinced Thomas to use one of his half days from work for the occasion.

The four of them met up at Shakespeare’s Pub at half past one for a late lunch, not wanting to go to the brewery with an empty stomach. They killed a bit of time in downtown San Diego before using Uber to get a ride to Escondido, arriving in time for the 4 PM tour, which Molly had reserved their spots for the night before. She could see Lestrade was getting quite excited the closer it got for their tour to start. Finally, at four, their Indoctrination Specialist took them through the facility, giving them a very detailed explanation of the process in how the beer was brewed and in beer culture. Molly had to admit she found it to be quite fascinating. At the end of the tour she got to taste four of the beers, including one of the Special Release beers.

When they were done they made their way to the Stone Brewing World Bistro & Gardens to find Sherlock was already there, waiting for them at a table. She sat next to him, setting her souvenir cup on the table before leaning over and kissing him softly. “For the house?” he asked when she pulled away, nodding at the cup.

She shook her head. “Jason, Thomas and I are sending them all back with Greg,” she said with a grin, picking up her menu and studying it. “That way he’ll have a full set. I mean, we live here, and the tour is only three dollars. We can come any time.”

Sherlock looked surprised. “I thought it was more than that.”

“It’s only more than that if you do a private tour,” Thomas said. “Then there’s a deposit and a per person charge if you’re over a certain amount of people. My business came here once to impress a British company. Cost almost a thousand dollars, but it was an interesting day.”

“Hmm,” Sherlock said. “Did you enjoy the brews?”

“They really are quite good,” Lestrade said. “Just about as good as anything back home. I definitely would love to get my hands on some Stone Ruination Double IPA back home, actually.”

“If you ever want to try some, I usually have Stone Pale Ale in the refrigerator,” Molly said to Sherlock.

“I’ll consider it,” Sherlock said. “Very rarely I get the urge to have a good ale.”

“Well, if you do, this company makes some of the best in the area,” Thomas said. “I mean, you could always go to Shakespeare’s for a bit of home, but in a pinch, Stone’s will do.”

“It’s a good thing you have Shakespeare’s around, though,” Lestrade said. “I mean, don’t you ever just really miss London sometimes? I would, I think.”

“I do, sometimes,” Thomas said. “But there’s enough bad memories there to have soured the place that I prefer being here, where I have more good memories.”

“At least you aren’t here alone,” Lestrade said. “I’d go crazy if I had to leave London and I was somewhere alone.”

“I didn’t really get much of a chance to be here alone before Sherlock decided I should go back home,” she said wryly.

“And then you convinced me to stay here,” he said.

“So what about you, Sherlock?” Lestrade asked. “Do you miss London?”

Sherlock didn’t answer, and before he could be prodded to answer a waiter came to take their orders. Lestrade, Thomas and Jason all got their favored ales that they’d sampled and Molly decided to try the strawberry vanilla cream soda while Sherlock got Red Rooster iced tea. For dinner she and Jason both got the yakisoba while Thomas got the coconut green curry salmon & mussels, Lestrade got the short rib birria and Sherlock got the wagyu top sirloin. When the waiter left the topic of conversation changed but Molly wondered for quite a while as to what Sherlock’s answer would have been.

Jason suggested they follow up the evening with a film at the cinemas in Escondido and while Lestrade was game for that both she and Sherlock decided they simply wanted to head home. Thomas said Greg was more than welcome to stay the night with them so that if they kept him out late he wouldn’t accidentally wake them and so Molly went to Sherlock’s car and they left the brewery and eventually got on the I-15 to start heading back home. She looked out the window at the cars driving by them. “Do you miss London?” she asked quietly, so quietly she wasn’t sure he heard her over the softly playing music on the radio.

“Sometimes,” he said, and she turned to look at him. “There are times I miss the fog and the rain, and the quiet early in the mornings. There are times I think it’s too bright here, too warm. There are too many sunny days, not enough cold ones. There are times I miss my friends, my old life. I miss the cases, miss the excitement. There are times I want to go back.”

“So…why do you stay?” she asked.

“Because it’s not home,” he said simply. “I don’t miss those things often, but I know if I were to go back, I would spend every day missing the warmth and the sun. I would spend every day wanting to be in our home, curled up on the sofa with you, or in my study learning something new, or holding you close while you sleep, or just being here. I don’t want the cases, I don’t want the fame. This life is much better than the life I had before. I’m happier here, with you.” He paused for a moment. “It’s as I said before. Where you are, that’s home. And right now, this is where you are, so this is home. If you ever decide to go back to London, then London will be home again. Though…”

“Though what?”

“Though I’m hoping it’s a long while, if ever, that you do. As Thomas said tonight, there are enough bad memories there to have soured the place. If San Diego isn’t going to be home anymore, I’d prefer if we make a fresh start somewhere else.”

She smiled at that, then gently placed her hand over his on the gearshift knob and squeezed it. “I’ll remember that if I ever start looking for another place for us to call home,” she said. He gave her a quick look and a grin before turning his attention back to the road, and she felt at ease. He really didn’t want to go back to his old life. He liked what they had. She just had to keep remembering that.
“Sooo…did you have any plans for us tonight?” Molly looked up from the book she’d been reading. They had made plans to take the ferry across to Coronado and rent bicycles and go ride along the bike trail in the city for a bit and explore, since Lestrade had said he wanted to do something stereotypically Californian while he was there, but they had woken up that morning to a moderate rain. She supposed it was a good thing, as it had been a rather hot and dry year prior without very many rainy days, but that had put a damper on their plans and she had to admit she was disappointed. Any chance she had to go to Coronado she loved to take.

She shook her head and then saved her place in her book and set it to the side. “Sherlock had already left for class when we got up but I know he’ll be busy studying like he usually is. I thought we could just have a quiet evening in, but I take it you got invited somewhere?”

“Well, we both did. And Sherlock too, but Jason was pretty sure he’d be busy studying with school and all,” Lestrade said. “He said his alma mater’s men’s basketball team is playing UNLV, I think, and he thought we might like to go to the game with him. I gather he was supposed to go with a group of friends but they cancelled on his so he has the tickets and doesn’t want them to go to waste.”

“Who was he supposed to go with?” she asked.

“Some people who were supposed to be involved in his wedding originally, and then some mates from his work. They’re good seats, supposedly. Chair back seating in Tier 2, Section R, if that means anything to you.”

She felt a tinge of anger at the people who almost ruined his wedding. Even after all this time she was still quite livid at them. “You know what? I’m game. I think that sounds like a very fun way to spend the evening. When does the game start?”

“Eight,” he said. “I’ll tell Jason you’re game to go and then we can start working out the details.”

“All right,” she said. She glanced outside the glass door leading out to the balcony and looked at how heavy the rain was. It appeared to be letting up slightly, which boded well, but she didn’t want to go out just yet. She also wasn’t quite in the mood to cook, though, either. “What are you in the mood for for lunch?” she called out.

He thought for a moment. “Not sure. Do you have any preferences?”

“I was thinking pizza,” she said. “Half and half. And if you mock me for the fact I like Hawaiian I may do something drastic.”

He chuckled and shook his head. “Your tastes have definitely changed since you’ve moved here,” he said.

“Expanded,” she corrected. “They’ve expanded.” She went for the landline and then looked on the refrigerator for the magnet with the number to Bronx Pizza. Both she and Sherlock had been pleased to find out that they could get pizzas delivered from the restaurant at their new home. “What do you want on your half?”

“Pepperoni, sausage, black olives, mushrooms, extra cheese, and diced tomatoes if they have them,” he said.
She nodded and dialed the number, putting in their order, along with a few sides. She’d make sure to tip the driver well for coming to them in the rain, because she wasn’t sure she wanted to go out into this weather until she absolutely had to. She’d been a bit spoiled by the rather lovely weather in California, she’d realized. When she was done she motioned towards Lestrade’s mobile. “Did you get a hold of Jason?”

He nodded. “Thomas won’t be able to join us, as he’s working late tonight to have a three day weekend free to take Jason up to Los Angeles for an event they both wanted to go to, but he said he’d arrange for a ride.”

Molly rolled her eyes. “Remind him I have a car and I’m no longer an invalid in a cast,” she said. “Even if there’s alcohol at the event I can abstain from drinking. You two can imbibe all you want but I’ll stay sober.”

He nodded and went back to his mobile while she drifted back to the sofa. After a few moments he spoke again. “He said he forgot.”

“I assumed as much,” she said with a soft laugh. “When do we need to be ready?”

“He said the best idea would be to be ready by six, pick him up by six thirty, and then get to the Viejas Arena by seven fifteen or so to get parking taken care of and get to our seats. He promised he’ll cover parking. And he said the school colors are black and scarlet, in case you wanted to dress accordingly.”

Molly grinned and shook her head. “Jason is a huge sports nut, just so you know. When we went to a Chargers game with him, he filled the gaps with tons of sports trivia about the Chargers, the team they were playing against, the game in general…he’ll talk your ear off.”

“Considering I know nothing about basketball or either of these teams I think I could stand to learn a thing or two,” he said with a grin. “I’ll just tell him to sit in the middle and lean towards me rather than you if it gets too annoying.”

“I might appreciate that,” she said. “So while we kill time, feel up for watching some Poirot?”

He nodded. “I think that sounds good.” He went to the collection of DVDs and selected a series he hadn’t watched yet and they settled in to watch them. Molly only got up to get the pizza when it was delivered and to serve it up to the two of them. Around four thirty, when Sherlock usually got ready to leave the campus, she called and told him what their plans for the evening were, and so he said he’d arrange dinner for himself and occupy himself with his studying.

Jason had told him there were concession stands at the stadium but if they wanted to leave earlier they could get a bite to eat somewhere, so Molly had agreed to pick him up at five thirty instead of six thirty and they headed out towards the arena to see what was in the area. The minute Jason saw the Denny’s on Hardy Ave. he leaned over towards Molly. “Can we please eat at Denny’s?” he asked. “But not that one.”

“He’s a huge Denny’s fan.” She asked.

“Bad memories,” he said. “There’s one that’s kinda close, on Alvarado Road, though. It’s better, I promise. Trust me.”

“Diner food?” Lestrade asked.

“Oh yeah,” Jason said with a nod. “Not as good as Ruby’s, but I love it. It’s the good cheap kind all the college kids love. I’m a hardcore Denny’s fan.”
She glanced at the clock on her dashboard. It was just after six and they were in the area, so she didn’t see why they couldn’t go a little farther away to go to a restaurant Jason would prefer. “All right. Just make sure you give me good directions, all right?”

“I will. Promise,” he said with a grin before leaning back into his seat. He began to give her directions and they made their way to the other local Denny’s in a rather short amount of time. The three of them got out and were seated in a booth quite quickly. Jason gave the menu a quick glance, mostly looking at the inserts for the seasonal items, but he seemed to already have his mind up. Lestrade raised an eyebrow. “I’ve been coming to Denny’s pretty much since I was a little kid,” he explained. “Ever since I stopped eating off the kids menu I’ve more or less gotten the same thing: the Build Your Own Grand Slam.”

“What is that?” Lestrade asked. Molly grinned because she had eaten with Jason at Denny’s already on a few prior occasions and knew the full history already.

“Way back in the day, the Original Grand Slam was two buttermilk pancakes, two eggs made however you wanted them, two strips of what Thomas says is the streaky bacon and two of your bangers, except they’re the puny little bangers that Thomas turns his nose up at.” Molly chuckled at that description. “These days, though, they have this thing where you can make your own combination from a list of choices. You get four items to start with, and then you can add more to them if you want. It used to be unlimited but then they gave it a limit of two, which is stupid. Plus some of the stuff you have to get by a certain time. Like, I can’t get my usual grits since it’s after two.”

“That sounds appealing,” Lestrade said appreciatively before glancing back at his menu. “I may have to consider it.”

“Have I dragged you to Denny’s enough times to have a usual yet, Molly?” Jason asked.

“You haven’t taken me near enough times to sample everything on the menu yet so no, not yet,” she said, studying her menu. “Though I do have a usual soup. That is one thing I have decided on.” She frowned when she looked at the soup listing. “Unfortunately it’s not on the menu tonight.”

“Which one is it?” Jason asked.

“Loaded Baked Potato,” she said, turning away from that part of the menu. She wasn’t a particular fan of the vegetable beef and she wasn’t really in the mood for chicken noodle so she’d have to see what else caught her eye tonight. She went back to the breakfast portion of the menu and perused it again more thoroughly. In the end she decided to construct a breakfast entirely of side dishes, choosing two poached eggs, a grilled ham slice, two buttermilk biscuits, a hearty breakfast sausage and the Everything Hash Browns. It was almost a fry up, but not quite, and she felt that should sate her appetite for the duration of the game, at least for the most part. Jason looked at what she had ordered and then almost sheepishly told the waiter to just give him the same thing except with scrambled eggs, which amused her to no end. Lestrade ended up doing the Build Your Own Burger option, asking them to hold the pickles and tomato and loading his burger up with the beef patty, the cheddar bun, the cheddar cheese, mayonnaise, sliced jalapenos and grilled onions, with the fresh avocado option on the side. She was 100% sure if there was Tapatio or Sriracha sauce anywhere in the restaurant that, too, would find its way onto his burger as well. He also decided to upgrade to the seasoned fries, just to give them a taste.

“You know, if you like Denny’s, there’s the one on Rosencrans St. by the Harbor,” Jason said to Lestrade. “I drag Molly there all the time. We can go at least once or twice before you go back to London.”
“I get the feeling I’ll make it a point to go there,” he said with a grin. “There were a few things on the menu that caught my eye that I’d like to try.”

“Breakfast, lunch or dinner foods?” Molly asked with a smile.

“All of the above,” he replied.

“We can go quite a few times,” she said. “I like that restaurant, to be honest. The food is good and for the most part the service is great. Plus, it’s nice not to do a lot of cooking. My arm is still rather weak.”

“How’s physical therapy?” Jason asked.

“I’ve only had a few sessions, so it’s slow going,” she said. “But I have exercises I do at home. I have to work on getting the strength back in my muscles, and that’s going to take time. And patience, because as much as I’d love for it to happen sooner it’s just…not.”

“But you’re job’s waiting for you, yeah?” Lestrade asked.

She nodded. “They’ve brought in temporary help, but the person filling in knows it’s temporary. Once I’m back to 100%, they go back up to Riverside County. But everyone misses me. My friend Aaron says it’s just not the same there without me. They want me back as quickly as they can get me, but it’s at least a month, if not longer. I have to be able to maneuver dead bodies of all shapes and sizes, so my arm needs to be fully functional.”

“Well, I hope it’s not too much longer,” Jason said. “Otherwise you’ll go mad with cabin fever once Greg leaves.”

“I don’t know,” Molly said. “I can find something to bide my time. There’s volunteering, there’s picking up a new hobby…there’s all sorts of television programmes to binge watch.”

“Don’t get stuck in that trap,” Jason said with wide eyes. “Totally not worth it. Becoming a couch potato is the last thing you want to do.” He thought for a moment. “Have you considered getting a pet?”

She was quiet for a moment. “I haven’t really wanted one since my cat died,” she said. “Sometimes it seemed like Toby was my one true friend in the world, the only one who was there for me regardless of anything else.”

“I’m sorry,” Jason said. “Maybe a pet that isn’t a cat, then?”

“Perhaps, though Sherlock had a dog when he was a boy and…I don’t know if he’d want another one,” she said. “The loss of his dog hit him quite hard.”

“That would be a problem,” Jason said. He thought for a moment. “People here in California get weird pets all the time. You guys could get…I don’t know. A snake, or a turtle.” And then he got wide eyes and grinned. “Or a ferret!”

Molly laughed. “Can you really see Sherlock and I with a ferret?” she asked.

“No, but it’d be cool,” he said.

Molly shook her head. “Maybe one day we’ll get a pet,” she said. “We’ll see.” The waiter arrived with the drinks they had ordered when they had first arrived, which had been coffee for Lestrade, a Strawberry Banana Bliss smoothie for Molly and Dr. Pepper with a cherry flavor shot for Jason.
After that the conversation shifted to the game and Jason launched into facts about the arena the
game was taking place at, statistics about the Aztecs basketball team, facts about the various
traditions the university had and the mascot and their fight song. Jason seemed to be quite proud of
being an alumnus of the university and was very eager for the game tonight, and she found his
enthusiasm was rubbing off on her.

When their meal was done they got back in the car and drove back to Viejas Arena, which, she had
learned over the course of their dinner, had been opened in 1997, encompassed part of the original
Aztec Bowl stadium site and had been originally called the Cox Arena until 2009 until one of the
local Indian tribes took over naming rights, which Jason was fairly sure they would hold until 2019.
She had to admit, it was quite nice. She wasn’t sure if Sherlock’s university had anything similar,
whether they had sports teams on par with SDSU or not, but this was quite nice. She’d have to make
it a point to come for other events, be them sporting events or perhaps musical concerts.

They made their way to their seats and she saw they had a very good view of the basketball court, as
Jason had said it was called. He had agreed to sit between them and to leave the open seat for his
unclaimed ticket on Molly’s other side to give her some space so that no one bothered her. She was
quite grateful for that. They got settled and, having arrived much earlier than they had planned, Jason
began going over statistics of some of the individual players they would be seeing that evening as
well as more particulars of the sport. She listened, giving it some of her attention, but she was more
interested in people watching and kept getting distracted.

Eventually it was time for the National Anthem to be sung. She still didn’t know the words; one day
she might learn but she still had no real reason to, but she stood respectfully and listened as the singer
sang with a rather lovely voice. And then, once the crowd was seated, the game began. While
American football had been interesting this sport was also quite fascinating. She had a basic
understanding of the scoring structure and where players had to be to make shots to get certain
amounts of points, but some of the shots they made were simply jaw dropping. She was absolutely
enthralled by what she saw on the court. By the time half-time came around she had the feeling she
was going to become quite a bit more invested in learning about basketball.

Jason got up to get them refreshments, as neither she nor Greg seemed to want to take their eyes off
the game, and he seemed to be quite amused by it. When the game was finally over and the Aztecs
had won by literally ten points, Molly had been yelling and cheering for them so loudly her throat
hurt and her voice was hoarse. It had been close and she’d been on the edge of her seat, but she’d
been quite happy the home team had been triumphant, and it was with good cheer that they made
their way back to her car and headed back to Hillcrest.

Jason and Greg felt like heading to Shakespeare’s and grabbing a pint, and Jason called Thomas on
the way and Thomas said he’d join them since he’d like to unwind over a pint after a very long day
and Greg could crash with them again overnight. It was quite late by the time she got back to her
home and she half expected Sherlock to be sound asleep, but when she got inside and made it to their
bedroom she saw he was in bed with the lamp by his bedside on, reading. “Studying still?” she
asked, coming into the room more.

He nodded. “I thought it might be more comfortable to lie in bed than to be hunched over my desk,”
he said, closing the textbook and putting it on the nightstand. “I have an instructor who insists on
giving us the most diabolical quizzes on Wednesdays.”

She winced. “Oh, poor you,” she said, reaching for the bottom hem of her shirt and pulling it over
her head. “Didn’t you study for it earlier?”

“Monday I got asked to do another lesson plan,” he said. “I worked on that for most of today.”
She paused once the shirt was over her head but not off her arms. “Is that going to interfere with your studies?” she asked.

“If it does start to, I’ll tell her to give me more notice before she needs them so I can do them over the weekend, if you don’t mind me cutting into my time with you,” he said.

“I don’t suppose I mind too much, so long as you get something out of it, such as extra credit or something,” she said, finishing removing her shirt. She moved her hands to the button of her trousers and undid them, slowly pushing them off her hips and down to her knees. “But once Greg goes home, I want time alone with you again.”

He licked his lips slightly as he watched. “We seem to have time alone now,” he said. “And my morning class got cancelled, so I don’t need to be on campus until eleven.”

She grinned as she stepped out of her trousers and then made her way to the bed. “Well, it seems to be your lucky evening, then, because Greg will not be coming home tonight, she said, pulling the bedding away from the lower half of Sherlock’s torso.

He sat up more. “So we don’t have to worry about being very quiet tonight?” he murmured as he leaned in towards her.

“No, we do not,” she said, meeting him the rest of the way before kissing him passionately. He reached over for her and pulled her on top of him and she felt herself grin against his lips. Oh, this was going to be an excellent capper to what had been a very good evening, she could tell, she thought to herself as she felt his hand snake around to the clasp of her bra. And she absolutely couldn’t wait to see what was in store.
Chapter 49

For Lestrade’s last weekend in San Diego Sherlock said he thought they might want to experience a weekend away from their home, even if he had already done some gambling in Las Vegas. Lestrade had been game and Molly had been quite excited, having never been to an actual casino before. She’d done bits of gambling over her life, played the occasional games of poker in university and placed some friendly wagers on a few things over the years. But going to an actual casino? That was something she had never done before. He had made arrangements for them to stay at Barona Resort & Casino. Lestrade was going to take a flight back to London Sunday evening so this was their last hurrah, and they were going to make the most of it.

They drove to the resort early Saturday morning to check in. Sherlock had gotten two rooms for them, though since he had gotten them on short notice they were not next to each other even though they were on the same floor. They were both Deluxe Canyon View rooms with king beds and Molly had to admit they were quite nice. “It’s almost a shame we’re only staying one night,” she said as she and Sherlock began to put away their things.

“I may have been told to sign up for a Club Barona membership when I made the reservations last week,” he said. She gave him a look of surprise. “A few of my fellow older classmates spend time gambling at the various casinos in the county and talked this particular casino resort up. They mentioned the membership was a good idea. And if you make use of it if you come here with your friends on occasion supposedly it could upgraded to higher levels with more perks. I didn’t do it but you might look into it.”

“So you think I might develop a gambling habit?” she asked with a smile.

He shook his head. “No, but I don’t think I’d mind occasionally indulging a weekend trip for you and your friends here if you felt the need to have a girls weekend away. There’s an excellent spa on the premises, and supposedly the gambling facilities are the best in the county.” He moved behind her and embraced her. “It’s probably safer than Las Vegas.”

Her smile got wider at that and she chuckled a bit. “That is true. And to be honest Vegas seems a bit too…gaudy for my taste, I suppose. I wouldn’t mind a girl’s weekend away here every once in a while.” She turned around and gave him a soft kiss. “Now, about that spa…”

“Well, Lestrade had wanted to try his hand at the golf course here so I thought while we were doing that you might appreciate pampering yourself,” he said.

“I didn’t realize he played golf,” she said, her tone one of surprise. “We could have gone to Torrey Pines while he was here. Not that I play, but he could have gone with Thomas. I know he does.”

“Well, they can save that for another time. I’m sure Thomas and Jason will work quite hard to ensure he takes another holiday here at some point,” Sherlock said with a grin. “But I think Lestrade would like to prove he can beat me at something and he may get his chance with this.”

“You mean there’s actually something in this world you’re not good at?” she asked.

“Golf was something my father and Mycroft enjoyed more than I did,” he said. “It was one of the few things they were able to bond over. Therefore I hated it and refused to learn more than the basics. Lestrade has a membership at a golf club outside London and does a round when he can. Something he picked up when I was pretending to be dead, apparently. He’s not half bad from what I understand. So we’ll see if it’s actually something he can lord over me or not.”
“Well, if he does beat the pants off of you, I’ll soothe your bruised ego later,” she said, smoothing the front of his shirt. “In the meantime I take it I’m to be shuttled off to the spa?”

He nodded. “Our tee time is at noon, so your spa appointment is at the same time. As it was a surprise gift to you, I told them you would need to decide what services you wanted when you arrived.”

“Well, it’s a very thoughtful gift,” she said, leaning in to kiss him softly. He kissed her back but they were careful not to get too carried away; she knew neither Sherlock nor Lestrade had golf equipment so they’d need to get that sorted and that would take time. With reluctance she pulled away. “I suppose I should go see about signing up for that membership and then entertain myself until my spa appointment.”

“I suppose you should,” he said, letting her go. She took her handbag and her keycard and made her way down to the first floor. She made her way to the casino portion of the resort and talked to a friendly person there about the membership and it didn’t take long to get that sorted at all. She then moved to the slots area to spend some time there. Sherlock had said she could use money from the joint account they had decided to get when they had returned from London for things like bill paying as well as fun things. She wasn’t going to spend too much money now, as there was only a half hour until she needed to go to the spa and so she settled in front of a video slot game and tried her luck, keeping a close eye on the watch on her wrist to make sure she wasn’t late. Luck was on her side, it seemed; when she left to go to the spa she was forty dollars better off than she had been when she started. That would make a nice tip for services, she decided.

She went to the AmBience Day Spa and immediately fell in love with the place. She looked at all of the treatments and was told she could choose anything she wanted, no matter the cost. In the end she went with the Diamond Deluxe special package upgrading the manicure and pedicure to French manicures and pedicures. It would take nearly five hours, so she asked if word could be sent to the golf course's pro shop for her boyfriend that she would be busy until then and she was told that was fine.

The services she received were absolutely heavenly. The facial had been lovely, and she almost wanted to come back on a biweekly basis at least to get it done, especially when paired with the vitamin A mask and the eye treatment. She’d never had a hot stone massage before, and she found she enjoyed that quite a bit. She got to have a sugar scrub as well and she realized her skin hadn’t felt quite so soft in a very long time. The person doing it said it was rather easy to replicate similar results at home, though it was nicer getting them done at the spa and she had to agree with that. And after she had the manicure and pedicure she even splurged on having her eyebrows waxed with an arch, which took a little longer but she was pleased with the result.

She got word back that Sherlock and Lestrade were going to meet her at the Barona Oaks Steakhouse at six for dinner before Lestrade tried to get in on a poker game. That actually sounded like a bit of fun, to be honest, so she went back to her room and dressed up a little bit for the occasion, pulling her hair back in a French twist and putting on the dress she’d brought with her, a white dress that had straps close to the neck similar to a halter, leaving her shoulders bare, decorated at the top with white and navy blue flowers on a vine interspersed with gold flowers that trailed down the front stopping two-thirds of the way down the dress and leaving the skirt of the dress white. The skirt stayed close to her body and went down mid-thigh. She paired it with medium sized silver hoops and put on a red lipstick before slipping on the white pumps and grabbing the white clutch that went with the dress and going to meet Sherlock and Lestrade.

They were already seated and waiting for her when she arrived. “You look much more relaxed,” Lestrade said with a grin as Sherlock got up and pulled out her seat for her.
“I am,” she said, returning his grin with a smile of her own as she sat down. “This spa is fantastic.”

“You’re more than welcome to come back, even if you make no uses of anything else at the casino,” Sherlock said as he sat back down. He and Lestrade had changed into semi-casual clothing; button down shirts and nice trousers. “There are gift certificates available, or you could make use of the joint account.”

“I might,” she said. “I mean, maybe once a month or so. There was the other spa I liked as well.”

“I do have the money to spare,” Sherlock said. “If it makes you happy, then let me treat you.”

“You spoil me,” she said, shaking her head.

“Because I want to,” he said. “If you don’t want me to though, I’ll stop.”

“Maybe in moderation?” she asked. “Or you could let me spoil you a bit.”

He thought for a moment. “I’ll let you spoil me more,” he replied.

“Okay,” she said with a smile. She began to look over the food choices. “I never expected this type of food at a casino. Escargot? Calamari? I’m impressed.”

“Lestrade and I already have an idea of what we want,” Sherlock said.

“I’m really late, aren’t I?” Molly said, cringing slightly.

Lestrade shook his head, his grin widening. “Nope. I just kicked Sherlock’s arse at golf pretty handily. It went much more quickly than anticipated because he gave up at the eighth hole.”

“It’s not my sport,” Sherlock said with a shrug.

Molly smiled at that. “Did you enjoy the rest of the course, Greg?”

Lestrade nodded. “Oh yeah. It’s fantastic. I think next time, though, I’m going to bring Thomas. At least then it’ll be a challenge. But maybe we’ll go to a different course. I’ve heard there’s loads out here.”

“If you come back out, next time we can arrange for you both to go to Torrey Pines,” Sherlock said. “I believe I should have a way of making that feasible if Thomas doesn’t. The weather will be better in the spring or summer.”

“With all the vacation days I have left I may plan my trip around the Farmers Insurance Open,” Lestrade said. “If you can pull strings and get me into that, I’d be pretty grateful.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Sherlock said with a nod.

Molly looked up from the menu. “I think I know what I want,” she said, setting it aside. “There’s so much good food on here.”

“And so many other good places to eat,” Lestrade said. “I almost wish I didn’t have to go back. I kind of want to stay a little longer. But this was good. Better than I gather your time in London was.”

“It had its good moments,” Molly said. “But yes, I think you’ve had a better time.”

The waiter came then and they placed their orders. Sherlock had said price was not an object so Lestrade got the filet mignon, the baked potato and the 14 oz. Australian lobster tail off the Surf &
Turf menu with a Twisted Manzanita Prospect Pale Ale to go with it, Sherlock got the prime porterhouse steak & potato puree with horseradish cream and peppercorn sauce and a side of roasted mushrooms and Molly got the Veal Porterhouse “Oscar” with a side of roasted mushrooms and a glass of 2012 Ferrari-Carano Chardonnay as well. Molly raised her eyebrow at Lestrade, who looked a bit sheepish. “I doubt I’ll ever get the chance to spend that much on a meal again,” he said.

“Yes, but are you going to eat it all?” she asked.

“If I don’t I can take the rest up to my room for snacking on late at night,” he said.

Molly laughed softly at that. “Fair point, I suppose,” she said. Then she leaned forward slightly. “I heard you’re going to play poker afterward.”

He nodded. “I was going to see about getting into a game, though it might be a bit complicated. There’s other table games, though, like Blackjack, Roulette, Craps, Mississippi Stud, and then there’s an area called Dragon Alley where they have Baccarat, Pai Gow and something called Asia Poker.”

He leaned forward slightly as well. “Feel like trying your luck?”

“I am feeling a bit lucky today,” she said with a smile. “I already won forty dollars at the slot machines.”

“Impressive,” Lestrade said with a nod and an approving look on his face. Then he turned to Sherlock. “What about you? In the mood for some fun?”

“Gambling isn’t my thing,” he said with a shrug. “Though I might try my hand at it.”

“You can be my good luck charm,” Molly said with a smile.

“Or you can be mine,” he replied with a grin. Her own smile got wider at that. He’d behave tonight, she knew it. She doubted he would cheat too much tonight if he wanted her to be able to enjoy herself there more often, and she slipped her hand over towards his grasping it. And she’d reward him amply for it, too. After all, he’d deserve it. But she had the feeling that it was going to be a very interesting evening all the same.
Chapter 50

It took some getting used to not having Lestrade at their home anymore, she realized. It had been quite nice having him there. But there was a lot to be said having their home back, and with Valentine’s Day coming up, she was trying to figure out what plans Sherlock might make for them, or if he didn’t, what plans she should be making. She rather wished he’d give her a clue so she could get an idea of what she should get outfit wise.

It was the Sunday before Valentine’s Day and she had slept in later than she had thought she would, waking up to an empty bed. She was just about to get out of bed when the bedroom door opened and Sherlock came in, carrying a tray. She gave him a wide smile. “You actually managed to get me breakfast in bed,” she said, sitting up and pulling the sheet up to cover her chest.

“This looks wonderful,” she said, picking up a fork. She used the fork to cut off a section of the pancakes and then took a bite. They weren’t quite as light and fluffy as hers were but they were still good. She shut her eyes as she savored it. “This is quite good, Sherlock.”

“I knew eventually I’d manage to get you to stay in bed long enough to surprise you,” he said, sitting next to her legs and reaching over for the second cup of coffee. He took a sip of it. “Did you have any plans for this afternoon?”

She shook her head. “No,” she said. “I was just going to do some baking, but I can put that off. Why?”

“One of the women in one of my classes takes tango lessons, and she mentioned that there’s a free beginner’s class at her academy and I thought it might be interesting to take a lesson,” he said.

She grinned at that. “You want to actually go tango dancing with me?” she asked.

“I have some skill at it,” he said, looking down. “Even if it has been a long time since I’ve done it. But… I thought it might be interesting going out dancing on Valentine’s Day and having a lesson under your belt would be helpful.”

“That sounds like a wonderful date,” she said, eating a little more of her food. “Where will we be having the lesson at?”

“There’s a place called Tango Del Rey near Mission Bay, off the I-5,” he said. “If it’s something you find interesting, they offer beginners lessons multiple times a week, apparently.”

“And will you take those lessons with me?” she asked, eating some more of her breakfast.

“Possibly, if I can work it around my studies,” he said, having some more of his coffee. “So, this sounds like a good way to spend the afternoon?”

She nodded. “I think it sounds lovely,” she said. She gave him another grin before going back to her food. She enjoyed every last bit of her breakfast and then set the tray on Sherlock’s side of the bed before motioning for him to come closer. He moved closer, setting his empty mug on her nightstand before she pulled him in for a soft kiss. She was smiling warmly when she pulled away, her eyes
sparkling. “This was a wonderful surprise. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” he said, running his hand along her side.

“I suppose I have a kitchen to tidy up?” she said.

He shook his head. “No. I am fully capable of cleaning up after myself,” he said with a grin.

“Mmm, I should reward you, then,” she said, running her hand down his chest to the bottom hem of his T-shirt.

“As much as I would love to, I do have some studies to take care of,” he said. “But later. There is that deferred gratification you’ve mentioned before.” He leaned in and kissed her again. “But perhaps you could do that baking you’d planned on doing later now.”

“I suppose I could,” she said. “Though could I at least have a little more of your time before you go off to your studies?”

“I suppose,” he said with a grin before leaning in to kiss her again. She grinned against his lips as she kissed him back, careful not to get too carried away. She knew if he needed to study it would be wrong to distract him so she did her best to keep things from becoming too passionate. Eventually, though, they separated, with Sherlock going to his study and Molly going out into the kitchen. She’d planned on trying her hand at making different types of muffins, starting with banana oatmeal muffins and maybe following up with pumpkin carrot cake muffins. She was also considering trying out a recipe for granola cups, for Sherlock to take with him to eat between classes.

She ended up getting so lost in her baking that she was surprised when Sherlock cleared his throat, leaning against the wall near the stove. “Oh my God, what time is it?” she asked, glancing at him with wide eyes.

“Just about half past one,” he said, eyeing the counters, which had multiple cooling racks with baked good on them. “Please tell me we’re giving some of these to Jason and Thomas.”

“And Aaron and his wife. He’s got a sweet tooth,” she said with a smile. “And Roseanna said she’s absolute crap when it comes to baking so I thought I’d surprise her with a few muffins when I meet her for lunch in a few days.”

He nodded. “Good.” He eyed the granola cups. “These I hope will be staying here, though.”

She chuckled. “Yes. If you like them, I’ll make them more often, but I thought they’d be an improvement over the nuts you snack on.”

He picked one up and nibbled on it, and then nodded. “Definitely an improvement.”

“Well, I have one last batch of biscuits in the oven but when they’re done I’m finished,” she said. She looked at the timer. “They only have four minutes, though. I’ve got to let them cool on the sheet for a few minutes, but then I can transfer them to the cooling rack and start to get ready.”

“I can do that,” he said.

She raised an eyebrow at that. “I haven’t ever seen you bake before. How do I know they won’t end up crumble on the counter?”

“I think you have to be more worried they’ll end up in my stomach, to be honest,” he said.
“That doesn’t make me more inclined to leave you out here alone with them,” she said with a frown.

“On my honour, I swear they will all survive,” he said. “And that I might only eat one. Perhaps two.”

She gave him a small smile and shook her head before leaning over and shook her head. “Limit yourself to two, Sherlock, all right?”

“Two, I promise,” he said with a nod.

She made her way to their bedroom. She was usually very good about staying clean but her arm was still weak and she had had trouble with lifting a few of the heavier things she needed to move around, like the heavy canisters of flour and sugar they had in their pantry, and so she’d spilled a decent amount on her. A quick shower would take care of that, however. She got undressed and rinsed herself off, careful not to get her hair wet, and then wrapped a bath sheet around her and went back into the bedroom to see what might work for tango lessons. She settled on a vintage dress she had picked up in London when she had gone out with Sally. It was a blue and green vertical striped dress, with each stripe having a pattern on it, and it had a lovely scoop neck and a short pleated skirt that flared out slightly and a white light blue ribbon around the waist. She felt it might not be very flashy but she wasn’t sure she was supposed to be flashy at an introductory lesson.

She made her way out to the kitchen to find Sherlock nibbling on a biscuit. He had on nice trousers and one of his button-down shirts. At least he was looking more casual than his old formal self; that made her feel better. She turned for him. “So, do you approve?” she asked.

He set his half-eaten biscuit on the cooling rack and then moved over towards her, reaching for her. “I almost want to go back to your suggestion from this morning to properly thank me for breakfast in bed, to be quite honest,” he said.

She smiled. “Well, you’ll have time to do that later,” she said. “But the lesson does sound like fun, so we should go.”

“If you insist,” he said with a nod. “But afterward, I think you should thank me for the breakfast.”

“And the lesson,” she said with a smile, reaching up to caress his face gently. “And a million other things I can come up with in the meantime.”

He gave her a smile back as he slid his hands around to the small of her back. “You’re happy here, aren’t you? With me?”

She was surprised at the question, just for a moment, but then she brightened her smile and leaned in. “I am quite happy, Sherlock. Happier than I have been in a very long time,” she said before kissing him softly. He pulled her close against him as he kissed her back, and she enjoyed the closeness before they pulled apart with some reluctance. She moved her hands from his face to the collar of his shirt. “I look forward to spending a very long time with you, Sherlock. Don’t doubt that.”

He nodded, reaching up to grasp her hands in his. “You promise?” he asked, his voice quiet as he ran his thumbs along her palms.

She nodded in response. “I do, Sherlock. Whether we ever make it a legal arrangement or not, I’m not going to run off and leave you.”

“If I said I might want to, at some point, though?” he said, a bit hesitantly.
Her eyes widened at that. “You would want to marry me?” she asked, her tone surprised.

He nodded slowly. “I’ve considered it. Not now. We haven’t…it hasn’t even been a year. But you’ve talked about not wanting marriage, when before, with Tom, you wanted it. And part of me wants to be happy with you in my life regardless of whether there’s a piece of paper confirming the legality of it all but there’s also a part of me that would, one day, like to have the opportunity to call you my wife.”

She felt a curious feeling inside her. Part of the reason she had adopted the rather blasé attitude towards marriage was she wasn’t sure he would ever want it. And another part of it was being terrified that they would agree to get married and then it would be a repeat of what had happened with Tom. But hearing it, now, from Sherlock, that he wanted to marry her at some point…that was different. “There are a lot of different things I’m feeling right now,” she said. “But…if you want to, if you would really want to and you don’t see it ending as horribly as it did with Tom and you don’t see it all being such a mess between us, I’d strongly consider it.”

He nodded. “That’s all I wanted to know,” he said. “Because I would like to, at some point, do my best to sweep you off your feet and embarrass you with some gushing proposal and then try and bed you until you have trouble walking for a few days afterward.”

She laughed at that, and then pulled her hands away and framed his face again, pulling him down a bit more. “Sod the lesson, Sherlock. I think I’d like to see if you can do the last part of that plan now. You already managed to do the first.”

“Sweep you off your feet?” he said.

She nodded. “Yes,” she said, leaning in more. “I do love you, you know.”

“I know,” he said, leaning in more. His lips hovered just above hers. “I love you too.” And then he kissed her, pulling her close against him, and she realized just how incredibly lucky she was to have him in her life.
She had not expected to wake up on Valentine’s Day and find herself not only in an empty bed, but also in an empty home. The night before she and Sherlock had gone to dinner with Jason and Thomas and there had been a bit more wine than she’d anticipated flowing that evening, so that explained why she had slept through him leaving, but she was disappointed that he hadn’t attempted to do anything to surprise her for the holiday. The sound of rain outside wasn’t cheering her up any.

She got out of bed, wincing a bit at the light, and it wasn’t until she’d walked by the closet door that she saw the garment bag hanging there with the note on it. She pulled the note off and looked at it, smiling as she read it. *I thought you might enjoy something high class to wear on our date tonight,* he said. Even if he wasn’t there for the morning, at least he had plans for their evening. She took the garment bag down and unzipped it, and her eyes widened at the dress, a red and black Oscar de la Renta dress. She had seen a picture of it in a fashion magazine and shown it to Sherlock as something she thought was nice looking. She hadn’t expected him to get it for her. She had a lovely garnet pendant that would look nice with it, too.

She zipped the bag back up and then made her way into their washroom to freshen up before she headed into the kitchen to make herself something to eat. She treated herself to waffles, using some raspberries that they had picked up from the farmers market that weekend, and was just settling in at the table again with her second mug of coffee when the door to the garage opened and Sherlock came in. She didn’t hear him first, though; she heard the small whining of a dog first. She got up and came over to him, looking at him. “Sherlock?”

“I didn’t intend to get a puppy,” he said, holding the wriggling white, black and brown mutt towards her as they both dripped on the tile floor. “I had trouble sleeping and I was going to get up to try and make you breakfast in bed and I heard a whining outside. I’ve spent the last hour trying to convince her to come inside.”

“Keep a hold of her while I get you both towels,” she said, setting her mug on the counter and dashing to the linen cabinet. She grabbed three towels, one for the dog and two for Sherlock. Sherlock looked as though he was soaked to the bone and the poor dog appeared to be shivering. Once she handed Sherlock his towels she took a towel and wrapped it around the dog, and only then did she realize the dog was pregnant. “Oh, the poor thing. Pregnant and out in the rain like that.”

“She must have been out there for some time,” he said, using the towel to dry himself off a bit before beginning to strip out of his clothing. “She’s sick, too. I…don’t know how sick, but I think she’s quite ill.”

She nodded, and then looked at him. “Aren’t you supposed to be in class today?” she asked.

“I was going to play hooky just this once,” he said. “As it’s our first Valentine’s Day together, I thought it would be nice to spend the entire day together. Though I think now we might need to take a detour to the veterinarian.”

She nodded and then realized she felt warmth on the towel. “Sherlock…I think she’s having the puppies now.”

His eyes widened slightly. “We need to get her someplace warm and comfortable, and we need to try and get her dry without disturbing her,” he said once he got his trousers off.

Molly nodded and then looked around for something. After a few moments she found an empty box
and set it in the kitchen, then went back to the linen cupboard and got more towels, setting them in the bottom and then arranging a bed for the puppy. Once she was done she set the puppy in and then looked at the towel before setting it on the counter. “Go take a shower to warm up and I’ll keep an eye on her.”

Sherlock nodded and leaned over to give her a quick kiss. “I’ll be quick,” he said. He gathered his wet clothing and then made his way to their bedroom to go to the washroom. She went over to the dining room table and pulled up a chair to keep an eye on the dog. After a few moments she went into the bedroom to get her mobile and to look up what to do for a dog having puppies, and started getting things ready.

She’d had one puppy by the time Sherlock came back out, naked except for a towel wrapped around his waist. “She’s had one,” she said.

“Are we going to spend the day keeping an eye on her, or do we want to take her to a veterinarian?” he asked.

“I think we should take her to a vet,” she replied.

“Then I’ll go get dressed and we’ll find one and make sure she’s all right,” he said. He looked down at the dog and then back at her. “How many of these puppies are you planning on us keeping?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “I suppose we should see how many survive, first, and if their mum makes it, and then if there’s any I especially bond with. Or you do.”

He nodded. “I hadn’t expected for the day to go like this. I’d had…other plans. But I suppose this is what I get for making plans.”

“I’ll make sure our evening plans stay intact, Sherlock,” she said with a smile, motioning for him to lean down. When he did she kissed him softly. “You did a good thing by saving the dog, Sherlock. I think it was a very noble thing.”

“I couldn’t leave her out there, not when I realized she was pregnant,” he said.

She smiled up at him, cupping his cheek. “And that’s one of the reasons I love you so much.”

He gave her a small smile and then straightened up. “Let me go get dressed and then we’ll take her somewhere to get looked at.”

She nodded and then he moved away. She kept a watch on the dog and the newborn puppy until he returned, and then he picked up the box and put it in the backseat of his car. By the time they got to the nearest veterinarian’s office the dog had had another puppy. The technician who took their information took one look at the dog and said she’d take it in right away because she needed serious care, and they would update them throughout the day about how she and the puppies were doing. Once they were done with that they headed back to their home. They had just pulled up when she got a phone call. “Apparently the dog has been microchipped,” she said, a bit dejectedly. “They reached out to the owners and they were overjoyed that their dog was found.”

“I’m sorry,” Sherlock said.

“However, they weren’t happy about the puppies. They were under the impression she had been spayed. They asked if they could have our number in case we were interested in having one or more of the puppies,” she said.

Sherlock was quiet for a moment. “Depending on how many she has, I might be interested in more
than one,” he said.

Molly turned to him. “Really?” she asked.

He nodded slowly. “She looked small for a pregnant dog. If she only has a few puppies, four or less, we could take two or three. We have space here in the home and between the two of us we can make time for their needs. And Jason and Thomas expressed interest in owning a dog. They could have one as well. That would take care of most of them.”

“Oh, if I didn’t already love you that would do it,” she said, leaning over to hug him tightly. She had honestly felt a small hole in her heart at the loss of Toby, and when she had thought she might be able to have the dog and her puppies she’d gotten excited. Even if she couldn’t have the dog, being able to have a few puppies would still be nice. She called the veterinarian’s office back and said it was fine for them to give the owners their number.

They settled in for an enjoyable morning and afternoon in. A good majority of it, unsurprisingly, was spent in the bedroom, but towards the later afternoon they made their way out to the sitting room and enjoyed a film together. Eventually, though, it was time to get ready for the date. Sherlock had given her no hint the entire evening as to what the hint would consist of or where they would go, and every time she asked he’d find a way to distract her most pleasantly. Apparently he was bound and determined to make it a surprise.

She slipped on the dress and found it was a perfect fit. She loved the way she looked in it, especially paired with the pendant and the heels. She could tell Sherlock approved too, by the heated look in his eyes. He came up behind her and kissed her bare shoulder. “Part of me wants to change my plans.”

“Oh, please don’t,” she said, turning to face him. “I haven’t gotten to go out on dates on Valentine’s Day very often, and certainly never in anything as lovely as this.”

“I suppose I can hold off, then,” he said. She had curled her hair and simply pulled it back with silver combs, and he swept the curls away from her neck to kiss it. “But don’t be surprised if I say we spend less time dancing and come home early.”

“We’re not going tango dancing, are we?” she asked with a frown. “I mean, we never had that lesson.”

He shook his head. “Not tango. It’s a jazz concert at Humphrey’s Backstage Live, after dinner at the restaurant.”

“Oh, I can’t wait,” she said with a smile. She’d heard many things about Humphrey’s By The Bay and had wanted to dine there for quite some time. Of all the places they could have gone on dates, that was one they hadn’t gone to yet. This made her even more eager for the date.

They finished getting ready and then got into his car, and he easily navigated the traffic to get them to the restaurant. When they got there he gave them his name and they were taken to a nice table with an excellent view of the lights on the bay. She looked at the menu and looked at all the different things on it. She settled on ahi tuna tataki for her starter and scallops for her main dish with a side of wild mushrooms. Sherlock decided on American Wagyu beef carpaccio for his starter and skirt steak & frites for his main dish. He had teased he was going to spend $375 on a bottle of Piper-Heidsick, "Rare" champagne and Molly shook her head at that, but he ended up getting her a half bottle of 2009 Grgich Hills chardonnay instead.

Once her wine was brought to her as well as his water, he raised his glass. “To what I hope will be a very pleasant evening,” he said.
She tapped her glass against his. “I’ll drink to that,” she said before taking a sip. She gave him a smile when she was done and got one in return. While the day hadn’t gone entirely as planned, it was still one of the better Valentine Day’s she’d ever had, and hopefully the evening would continue to be just as good.
Molly was surprised when a few days later she heard from the veterinarian’s office again as opposed to the owners of the dog that Sherlock had found. Molly had listened to what the veterinarian had to say and then waited for Sherlock to come home, but not before making a decision that she hoped he wouldn’t mind that involved using that charge account he said she could use. When he came back from class she was rather nervous, and he spotted it right off. “Molly?” he asked. “What is it?”

“The veterinarian called today,” she said before biting her lip. “They determined the puppy had loads of medical problems, and her owners, when they were told the cost, decided they just didn’t want to cover it and they didn’t want the dog anymore.”

She watched as his face got a hard set. “I see,” he said.

“So…I arranged for us to cover the cost, and the care of the four puppies that survived, who are all a bit undernourished and need care, and when they’re all healthy, they’ll come home with us. And…I may have put it on your card, since it was a bit more than I have at the moment until I get my next disability payment without tapping into my savings?”

He set his laptop bag down on the chair in the sitting room and then came over and sat stood over her and leaned over, kissing the top of her head. “Jason and Thomas get to pick one of the puppies, though, right?” he asked.

She relaxed and then looked up at him with a smile when he pulled away. “Roseanna, too. She said it’s about time she gave in and got a dog, and she’d rather get one from a friend than one from a shelter to start with.”

“Good. A dog and two puppies are better than a dog and three.” He moved away into the kitchen. “I didn’t smell anything cooking. Did you have plans for this evening?”

She shook her head. “I was so nervous you might be upset I wasn’t thinking about anything like that. I mean, the bills were rather large. Thousands of dollars. Poor girl had been on the streets for some time.”

“I had imagined so by her state,” he said. He thought for a moment. “I could cook for you. I mean, I’d need to pop out to Vons or Ralphs or something.”

“Not Trader Joe’s?” she asked.

“The selection isn’t as good when I just want to grab a few items,” he said. “Mostly I just want to get some meat that’s fresh and isn’t exorbitantly priced, some makings of a salad that don’t cost an arm and a leg and a few other items and milk. I had the last of that when I had cereal for breakfast this morning.”

“I already popped to the corner store and got more or that,” she said with a smile, getting up. “You aren’t the only one who likes cereal in the morning.” She came over and looked at him. “What kind of meat were you thinking of?”

“Steaks, maybe?” he suggested. “I’m not particularly hungry tonight. But if you are, I could whip up something else.”

“Why don’t we just do takeaway?” she suggested. “Then neither of us has to go out. And I can go pick up steaks and salad making later. And who knows? Maybe even a grill.”
He raised an eyebrow. “A grill?”

“Most people here have one. We should too. Maybe a little one, though. I can go to Lowe’s or Home Depot and get one since they’re a bit out of season, since it’s only nearing the end of February. If they have them.”

He was quiet for a moment. “We’re really settling in here, aren’t we? We’ve bought this home, we have a Christmas tree with decorations, we’re getting a dog and puppies, now we’re talking about a grill…this is home.”

She nodded, moving closer to him so they were nearly shoulder to shoulder. “Yup. This is home now, for better or for worse.”

“There are definitely worse places to call home,” he mused. “Colder places.”

“Rainier places,” she said with a smile.

“Places where my older brother resides.”

“Places where the paparazzi is all over you.”

He reached over for her, turning them so they faced each other. “Places where I can’t really snog you in public without everyone in the country knowing about it.”

She smiled up at him. “So this is a good place, then, I think.”

“I think it is, too,” he said, settling his hands at the small of her back. He leaned in and kissed her. “I think this is the place I’d like to stay for a long time, even after I get my degree.”

“Good,” she said before giving him another kiss. After a few minutes he shifted his position to lift her up and she wrapped her legs around his waist as he carried her to their bedroom, smiling against his lips as she kept kissing him. Yes, she could definitely build a home with him here, she realized, and the fact they both wanted to build a home here filled her with a sort of happiness she couldn’t really describe. She was just glad she felt it.
Soon she and Sherlock settled into their new routine for what it was going to be like for them while she was trying to regain her strength and the full use of her arm. It was going more slowly than she had hoped, and she had been worried that her job was going to go away because of that, but her superiors assured her that as long as she attended her physical therapy sessions and the decision to return to her post was made by her therapist they would hold her position for her. As her boss had said, they wanted her back at her full capacity because they didn’t want anything to happen that would cause her to end up having to leave and never be able to return. They all loved her too much for that. That had been very heartwarming to hear.

In the meantime, though, she had needed to find ways to fill her time. With her friends working and Sherlock spending most of the week either in school or on campus studying, she was alone much of the time. She looked around the city and started considering various volunteer organizations and also looked into different types of community classes she could take at different centers in the city. She slowly started to fill up her time with different activities and found herself meeting new people and even a few new friends.

It was the beginning of March, a little over a week until her birthday, when the veterinarian called again to let her know that unfortunately the mother of the puppies had not survived. She had been quite saddened by the news, but the veterinarian said that the mother hadn’t been able to nurse the puppies and they’d had another dog who had been nursing who had lost most of her puppies, and would they be interested in adopting her, as the dogs had bonded with her? Because it was such an unusual situation they would offer a discount on the bills, but Molly said don’t worry abut it, she’d come in and take a look.

She got in her car and drove to the vet’s office with a sense of trepidation. She’d grown a bit attached to the idea of having the other dog, and was saddened by its loss, but if the puppies had bonded with the other dog she didn’t want to separate them. The veterinary technician led her to the back and she was shown a gorgeous springer spaniel dog with five puppies, one who looked like her and four who looked like the dog that Sherlock had found. “This dog was found by the side of the road,” the technician said. “She’d been hit by a car and dragged herself to her puppies. The rest of them had died from exposure but this little one was tough. She kept hanging on.”

Molly reached over and put her hand out for the older dog to sniff. She did, and then ducked underneath for Molly to pet. Molly did, scratching her behind the ears, and the dog seemed to be quite content. Molly grinned at that. “She seems quite friendly.”

“Oh, she’s a doll,” the technician said with a smile. “If you’re willing to take her, I think the deal that the vet clinic is willing to make is to just have you cover the bills for her care and the care for these five puppies, and then you can take all six of them home today.”

“I don’t think my boyfriend would have a problem with that,” she said with a smile as she moved her hand to scratch under the dog’s chin. “Have you given any of them names?”

“You’ve been calling her Jasmine,” she said.

“I like that,” Molly said. “I think it’s beautiful.”

“I know it’s a bit short notice, but there’s a Petco nearby, and you can get a large carrier for all of them, and if you want, we can provide you with the food we’ve been feeding Jasmine. We have it for sale here”
Molly nodded and then pulled her hand away and stood up. She went to take care of the bill. It wasn’t nearly as large as the other bill would have been though it was quite substantial. She signed off on it and then got in her car and drove to the pet store, talking to the store employees and telling them the situation to get the best carrier. They also recommended other supplies so she wouldn’t need to make more than one trip. The vet had said the puppies they had rescued could be weaned away from being nursed soon, being able to start eating solid food in two weeks and being fully weaned another two weeks after that, and that would give her and Sherlock enough time to decide which puppies they wanted to keep and which ones they would be willing to let their friends take. The puppy that the dog they were adopting had had was ready to start eating solid food now and would be fully weaned in two weeks.

She went back to the veterinarian’s office and they loaded Jasmine and the puppies into the carrier, and someone helped her get the large bag of dry food and the cans of soft food for the puppy into the boot. She had texted Sherlock and he said if she could get the dogs inside he’d get the rest when he got home. Once everyone was settled she drove them all back home, driving a bit slower than normal just to be safe. She got home and then got the car in the garage, and then attempted to get the carrier out. It didn’t work quite as well as she had hoped. Eventually, she just opened up the carrier and carried Jasmine and each of the puppies inside, letting them run around the sitting room and explore. She was still watching them, occasionally trying to corral them to one general area, when Sherlock came in through the garage door. She could smell Chinese food and she scrambled to get up, coming over to him. “You read my mind,” she said with a smile.

“I assumed if you had brought the dogs home your mind wouldn’t be on supper at all,” he said, setting the two plastic sacks on the counter. His eyes widened slightly and then he looked down. “That does not look like one of the puppies that would have been born.”

“She died,” she said. “There’s a lot I didn’t tell you, but we have a different dog and an extra puppy.” He looked at her a moment, raising an eyebrow. She looked slightly abashed. “I know I should have asked, but Jasmine was so pretty and so friendly, and Jason and Thomas did say they’d take two puppies...”

“Start from the beginning,” Sherlock said, beginning to unload the sacks.

“The puppy that you rescued had been too ill to nurse the puppies, so another dog who had lost most of her puppies was nursing them, and unfortunately, she died,” Molly said, moving onto one of the stools. “So the veterinarians offered us the option of adopting the dog who was nursing the puppies and the puppy she had that survived. She’s got a broken leg but she’ll be fine. And they’re all here. The little one who was rubbing up against your leg is her puppy. He is a springer spaniel.”

He finished taking the containers out and then picked up the white and reddish-brown puppy, looking at it and then scratching it behind the ears. “I think I rather like this one,” he said as the puppy nuzzled his hand.

“I haven’t come up with names for any of them yet, except the mother,” she said with a smile. “But I rather like him. If you do too, we can definitely say no one can take him.”

“Well, we’ll wait and see how we deal with all of them.” He set the puppy back down on the floor. “Do you want to eat out of containers or on plates?”

“Containers,” Molly said. “Less mess.”

Sherlock went to get utensils for them to eat with. He handed Molly a fork and then began pushing containers towards her. She opened up one of them and saw that it was cashew chicken, and she
smiled before spearing some of the chicken and taking a bite. “How much will I be bringing into our home from the car?”

“The carrier, some toys, the food...there’s a large bag of dry food for Jasmine and wet food for the puppy who should be starting wet food and then for the other puppies in two weeks...and then a bed for all of them, if we can get them to sleep on it.”

He gave her a small grin and then opened up his own container and speared some of his Szechuan beef. “I get the feeling you are going to spoil these puppies.”

“Well, I am definitely a pet person,” she said with a smile. “You probably knew that from the way I was with Toby.”

“I did,” he said with a nod. “I had expected, eventually, we would have at least one pet. I actually fully expect we’ll end up with a cat at some point, and possibly fish, and maybe some other pets.”

She chuckled at that. “Well, we’ll see.” She looked down and saw another one of the puppies had come over to her stool, and she pulled away from her food and got off the stool to pick it up and show it to Sherlock. “I like this one. Or at least I think it was this one,” she said, holding up a white and black puppy that had small splotches of brown on its legs. “They’re all really friendly. I think they’ll all be wonderful pets.”

“I hope so,” he said, reaching across the counter to scratch this one behind the ears. “I suppose tomorrow we should invite our friends over for dinner so they can meet their potential pets. And your friend Roseanna, too.”

Molly nodded. “Or perhaps we could wait until this weekend and have an actual dinner party?” she suggested. “I mean, it’s almost my birthday, and since we’d planned to spend the weekend in Coronado and I wasn’t sure if you’d wanted to do anything with anyone else...”

He thought for a moment. “If Jason wants to help, maybe the two of you could whip something up.”

“I think he might be willing,” Molly said with a smile. “I’ll call and ask him when he’s done with dinner. And I have a few friends from the classes I’m taking I’d like to invite. There’s a bloke who I think Roseanna might like.”

He chuckled. “Trying your hand at matchmaking?” he asked.

“Maybe,” she said, her grin widening. She had another bite of her food. “I think this could be real fun.”

“I think it could be too,” Sherlock said. His grin had widened at that and she felt even more excited. They hadn’t really done anything like this and if it all went well, maybe it would be something they could do in the future. She rather hoped it could be.
Chapter 54

Sherlock and Molly had decided to have the party Saturday night so he could be more involved but also so most of their guests would not have work the next day, and they would have time to let them all know and make plans and arrangements to attend. Jason had almost started bouncing at the chance to help Molly whip up food for it. He said he had been talking to Thomas and while he had thought about going back to school to do something in the music industry Thomas had suggested perhaps culinary school might be something he look into. Jason said he hadn’t even considered it but the more he was looking into it the more he was thinking it might be something he’d do really well at, and he could still do his DJing on the side. Molly had to admit, she definitely agreed with Thomas that it was something that might really suit Jason.

She and Jason settled on a menu by Wednesday night, when he wasn’t being distracted by the puppies. He bonded with the mostly black one almost immediately, and she had the strong suspicion that one would be one of the two going home with him and his husband. Thomas had come over as well and she wasn’t quite sure which one he favoured, but it wasn’t the two that she and Sherlock had taken a liking to, she knew that much, and she was grateful for that. To be quite honest, he seemed partial to Jasmine, and she was almost thinking she might be willing to let him take her if he really wanted her and just keep three puppies, if Sherlock was amenable to the idea.

The next time she saw Jason was Friday, and they spent the day driving all over the city of San Diego getting the various ingredients for the dishes they were going to get at the best prices. He had lived with a British person long enough to have a taste for British food, but he also had a Southern flair, and he knew that there were foods from Mexico that were good to have on hand. It was going to be a bit of a multicultural smorgasbord, but it was all going to be quite appetizing and Molly thought that was the most important part. One of the groomsmen from Jason and Thomas’s wedding, Robert, had offered to bar-tend for a hundred dollars and any tips he might make that night, which Jason said was a good deal, as he usually charged three hundred. Jason said that Robert was still impressed by the fact she and Sherlock had stepped in to buy wedding rings at the last minute so things weren’t ruined and any time they threw a party and needed a bartender he’d offer them that rate. Molly had been quite touched by that.

Jason and Thomas came by early Saturday morning to help her and Sherlock set things up for the party. They brought their changes of clothes and stored them in the guest bedroom to change into before the party, and she, Thomas and Jason went to work on cooking the food while Sherlock worked on his school work so he could have the evening to socialize, as the professor he was assisting had asked for him to help her prepare an assignment for the next week. It was quite fun to work with them in the kitchen, she realized, like it had been during Thanksgiving only better since she wasn’t doped up on painkillers and actually able to help more. Soon the counters were littered with scrumptious looking food, and there was more in the refrigerator.

“So I think everything is done,” Jason said, surveying everything. “Mostly everything else just needs to be warmed up closer to when the guests are going to arrive, and we just need to do a store run to make sure we have enough ice and then I think we’re good.”

“I can do that while you two shower,” Thomas said. “I barely did any work in the kitchen while you two did the majority. And it wasn’t the canister of flour that dropped on me.”

Molly chuckled and shook her head. “I am sorry about that, Jason,” she said. “My arm is still rather weak.”

“Hey, no big,” he said. “We have an hour until Robert gets here and then another half hour after that
until the guests are supposed to get here, and unlike some people I grew up in the land of the
droughts so I take quick showers.”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “It is not my fault I like to take long showers,” he said, though he was
grinning.

“This is why I made sure you paid the water bill before we got married,” he said with a chuckle
before he leaned over and kissed his husband quickly. Then he looked at Molly. “Do you have ice
chests somewhere?”

She nodded. “We had the power go out at our old apartments so Sherlock bought two chests.
They’re in the garage. I can go get them, if you need them?”

Thomas nodded. “We’ll see how big they are and I’ll buy enough ice accordingly. Jason and I have
thrown enough parties at our home to know that ice is the first thing you run out of, so you should
always overestimate. If nothing else, if you get too much and can’t fit it in your freezer, your potted
plants can get some extra water when it melts.”

“Then let’s head into the garage and I’ll show you while Jason heads off to the shower,” Molly said.
She and Thomas went into the garage and they found the containers easily, and then Thomas left and
said he would go get ice and perhaps some more alcohol, just in case, asking Jason if there was
anything he could think of that anyone might want. Once he left Molly turned to Jason. “Do you
think this will be a success?” she asked a bit nervously.

“It’ll be fine,” he said, moving over towards her and putting his hands on her shoulders, squeezing
them. “You remember when you and Sherlock first met me and Thomas, how nervous you were that
Sherlock wouldn’t get along with us? I don’t think he’s that kind of guy anymore, that he’s an
antisocial kind of guy. I mean, he might not be super cheerful and talkative, but he won’t be a grump,
either. And if nothing else, one of the three of us can be near him if it comes down to it. Act as a
buffer.”

“That might help,” she said.

“I honestly don’t think he’ll need it, though. I mean…” He was quiet for a moment. “He knows
tonight is something you want to go well, that it’s important to you. And if something is important to
you, then it’s important to him, you know? So he’ll do everything he can to make sure it goes well.”
He pulled her close and gave her a hug. “Besides, there’s a ton of people here who are friends of
both of you already. The ones who aren’t already friends of his should be by the end of the night. Or
at the very least, they’ll like him, or they’ll see why you’re madly and passionately in love with him.”

She shook her head. “Oh, Jason.”

“What? You are,” he said with a soft laugh. “But hey, I’m madly and passionately in love with
Thomas, so it’s cool. People like us, we’ve got to stick together.” He pulled back and then reached
up to wipe a smudge of flour off her face with her thumb. “Now you definitely need to take a
shower. I got flour on you.”

“Thanks,” she said wryly.

“You’re welcome!” he said cheekily before heading to the guest bathroom.

She shook her head and then headed towards the master bedroom, running into Sherlock at the
doorway. He looked at her, a grin on his face. “I thought the flour was supposed to go into the food,
not on your face.”
“A small mishap,” she said. “Which will soon be rectified by a shower.”

“Well, I will not distract you, since I don’t need one,” he said, pressing a kiss in her hair before opening the door to their bedroom.

“I’m almost disappointed in you,” she said. “But at the same time I should probably thank you because a bath sound lovely.” She looked at her flour covered clothes and began stripping out of them, knowing full well Sherlock was probably watching and not minding in the slightest.

“Are you sore?” he asked from the end of the bed, where she saw he was sitting after she had gotten her shirt off.

She nodded. “We did an awful lot of cooking and that meant handling heavy pots and pans full of food and doing more lifting and bending than I’ve done in a while. I’m surprised I only dropped the canister of flour once, to be honest. I mean, Jason and Thomas did a lot, but I wanted to help as much as I could.”

“And perhaps you overdid things,” he said in a tone of understanding. “If you’ll take a hot shower rather quickly, I’ll give you a massage. And I promise, no hanky panky. This will strictly be to put sore muscles at ease so that you aren’t in any discomfort tonight in front of the guests.”

She gave him a grateful look, moving over towards him and not caring that she was in her trousers and her bra. She reached up and caressed his face before leaning in and kissing him softly. “It’s reasons like this that I love you so much,” she murmured when she pulled away.

“Well, I know you want this evening to be successful, and I’ll do whatever I can to help ensure that,” he said, settling his hands on her hips. “So finish getting undressed and take your shower, and then come out here. I can use the massage oils that Mary slipped into your bag as a parting gift and give you a twenty minute massage, so if you take a twenty minute shower that will give you time to get ready, and I can deal with our bartender and the final preparations if you aren’t quite ready by the time Robert arrives.”

Molly nodded. “That sounds like a good plan,” she said before leaning in the give him another kiss, though a much quicker one this time. She pulled away after that, and he made no attempt to keep her close, which she knew was simply because time was of the essence, and she made her way to their washroom to finish undressing and start her shower. She felt much more confident about the evening now, she realized, and it was because of what Jason and Sherlock had to say. It would be a success, and, she hoped, the first evening like this of many.
Chapter 55

The closer Molly’s birthday got the more excited she became for it. Sherlock had indeed remembered she just wanted the spend the entire weekend in Coronado. She had thought for sure he’d try and talk her into doing something else, like going up to the wine country or going to Los Angeles or back to Julian, but he said if she wanted to spend her birthday in Coronado that was what they’d do. She’d been absolutely taken with that part of the city the first time she’d stepped foot on the island and tried to go over there as often as she could, and the idea of getting to stay at the Hotel Del for two or three nights had been something that had just been such a thrill for her.

Thursday morning she woke up in bed later than she usually did alone, as she had expected; she knew Sherlock was going to be at the school working on his studies, even though he didn’t have class. He was still doing work for the professor for her classes, and if he wanted to have all of his classes free he still had work to take care of today. What she hadn’t expected was to see the vase of flowers on her nightstand with the folded note in front of it. She could see pink roses and lilies and alstroemeria and other flowers she didn’t recognize, and the arrangement made her smile. She reached over and picked up the note. I know it’s not your birthday yet, it read, but I made the hotel reservation starting for this afternoon reservation through to Monday morning. I thought you would enjoy that more. Meet me at the hotel lobby at six for dinner. Dress nicely. You may check in at four PM if you so choose.

She sat up more and sniffed one of the roses, a wide smile on her face. She hadn’t expected four nights at the hotel. She really did love the man more than she would ever be able to tell him. She got up and went to take a shower before making herself breakfast. It was half past nine now; she had quite a bit of time to kill, though she did have things she could do. She started off by taking care of the dogs, who were all quite happy to see her. It had been decided that Jason was going to take the puppy he’d bonded with and Thomas was going to take Jasmine, because he really had fallen for the dog, and Aaron and his wife had fallen for one of the puppies and their daughter had absolutely adored one of the other ones. She didn’t mind only keeping two of them because there was only one that she had absolutely refused to part with aside from Jasmine’s puppy that had attached itself to Sherlock. The two of them were still trying to come up with names for them, though she was leaning towards calling hers Persephone if it was a girl or Hades if it was a boy, after her favourite Greek myth.

When she was done with that, she made herself breakfast before getting ready to go do one of the volunteer projects she was getting fond of doing. There was a hospice center nearby that had people come in and visit with some of the people there. The people that she talked to there were terminal, and they said most of the people who visited seemed just a tad bit uncomfortable with the fact that all of them were going to die but she wasn’t and they appreciated that, and she said she had a slightly different familiarity with death than most. It seemed that a lot of the people there were quite interested in the particulars of her job, and some of the stories of the things she’d done at Barts and what she’d done with the coroner's office here in San Diego. It was a bit morbid, but she found she enjoyed the people, and if it made them happy it was well worth it. This was something she planned on continuing even when she went back to her post.

Once she had fed herself and gotten showered and dressed, she made her way to the hospice center and went out among her “regulars,” as she called them. They were all still there, though one or two were in worse condition this week. She made sure she spent extra time with them, to let them know that she enjoyed their company, that in case this was the last time she got to see them their chats had been meaningful and important to her, and that they were people that meant something to her. It was sad, in its way, but it also felt like a part of her was healing in some way from the sadness of her
father’s passing. She felt that perhaps she should have done this some time ago.

It was nearly two when she was done, and she went back home to begin packing for her mini-vacation. She had a few nice dresses Sherlock hadn’t gotten to see that she’d bought when shopping with Sally and Mary in London so she decided to put those to good use, putting them in a garment bag to bring along with the appropriate accessories, as well as some regular clothing for anything else he could have planned. She rather hoped it included a bicycle ride around the island and part of San Diego like she had wanted to take Greg on but hadn’t been able to, but that wasn’t really Sherlock’s thing so she wasn’t getting her hopes up. Still, this was a weekend where he was intending to spoil her so she never knew.

Once she had her suitcase packed she looked and saw it was only three twenty. She supposed she could get there early, check her bag in and wait in the lobby. Sherlock had forgotten to say under whose name the room was booked in but she doubted it would be a problem when she got there if she gave both of their names. She took her suitcase to her car, putting it into her backseat without too much trouble, and then got into the car and drove to the freeway and then onto the Coronado Bridge to make her way to the Hotel del Coronado. She decided to take advantage of the valet parking and had her suitcase taken out of her car for her and then looked up at the hotel. Oh, it was such a grand place.

Once she had a grip on the handle she wheeled her luggage inside and went in to go see about her room. Sherlock had made it easy and put the reservation in her room. She found out they had a room at the Hotel Del itself, one of the Signature Suites in the Victorian Building. She had been quite pleased by that. She would have been happy with anything on the premises, really, but having something in the building with the most history had been a pleasant surprise. She was led up to the room and looked around in amazement. It was absolutely gorgeous. There was a dining area and living area as well as the bedroom, and when she stepped out onto the balcony she had the most stunning view of the Pacific Ocean. Once she had tipped the bellhop she looked around more. There was a small refrigerator and bottled water and a coffeemaker with coffee and tea, though she was dismayed it was the bagged stuff. The bathroom looked luxurious, and the bath products looked very nice. She had the feeling she was going to enjoy staying here quite a bit.

She went about getting ready for her date, whatever it was Sherlock had planned. She had on a sleeveless sapphire blue floral lace dress with a scalloped V-neck that came to the knees with thin matching ribbon crisscrossing the waist and dark grey strappy slingback heels to pair with it. Jewelry wise she paired it with a burnished silver and faux sapphire necklace she’d inherited from her mother and matching earrings, and she pulled her hair back with burnished silver combs after curling it. She thought she looked rather nice and she was sure Sherlock would agree.

She went back down to the lobby at five and saw Sherlock standing there waiting for her in a suit and looking almost a little nervous. She smiled and went over to him, laying a hand on his arm. He turned and looked over at her, his eyes wide. “You look absolutely gorgeous,” he said, leaning over to kiss her cheek.

“Thank you,” she said, smiling even more. “So! Where are we eating tonight?”

“Primavera Ristorante,” he said. “Based on everything I’d read about in the area, it seemed the best bet for a nice meal that had the best service. I thought for the rest of our meals, except on your birthday, I’d simply let you choose, but tonight I wanted to surprise you.”

“Well, Italian sounds like a good surprise,” she said with a nod. She slid her hand down his arm to press her palm against his and lace her fingers in between his, and then the two of them left the lobby. “The room is lovely.”
“I almost got us one of the beach cottages, but I thought you’d appreciate being in the Victorian building more,” he said.

“I do,” she said with a nod. “Perhaps next time.”

“Perhaps,” he said. “On your birthday, I hope you don’t mind company for dinner.”

She chuckled. “If you were planning on throwing me a surprise party, Sherlock, you just blew it.”

He shook his head. “No, there wasn’t really going to be a surprise. Everyone wanted to be sure you wanted them there.”

“As long as I get my evening with just you, I don’t mind if I have to share you during my meal,” she said when they got out to the valet. She leaned over and gave him a proper kiss, one that he rather eagerly returned for a moment. “I’m almost afraid to see what you got me for a present, after all of this.”

“Who’s to say I got you anything?” he teased.

“It is all right if you didn’t,” she said.

“No, I did,” he said, reaching over to keep her close. “A few things. One or two that are not meant to be opened in polite company.”

She felt a shiver of anticipation run down her spine at that and she reached up to play with the top button of his shirt. “Do we need to wait until my birthday for me to get one of those gifts?” she asked.

“Perhaps not,” he said, running a hand up her back. “But we do have reservations to keep.”

“I suppose we can behave,” she said.

“Or we can take the opportunity to steal a few kisses every chance we get,” he said.

“There is that,” she said, stepping closer and pressing her lips against his again, keeping it soft as she lightly gripped his shirt in her fist. Oh, this man drove her wild, he did, even when he didn’t touch her. He could drive her wild with words and innuendo and promises. She had the feeling this weekend was going to be quite interesting indeed...
She woke up in the bed of the suite to find that she was not alone, but that Sherlock was awake, running his fingers through her hair. At some point during the night she had turned onto her stomach to sleep and her hair was splayed across her back, and he was running his fingers through her hair and then down her back. It was actually a very nice feeling, and unfortunately, he stopped when he realized he’d woken her up, though he leaned over and pressed a kiss on her bare shoulder. “I didn’t mean to wake you,” he said.

“It’s all right,” she said, giving him a smile. “That felt nice, though.”

He lifted his hand up and began the soothing motion again. “Was there anything in particular you wanted to do today besides cycling? If we do that in the morning it will be cooler.”

Her smile grew wider. “We can go our for a ride all the way around the island?”

“As long as we stay on the island,” he said. “I don’t want to go back to San Diego proper, but...I know how much you wanted to do the activity with Lestrade when he visited so I had planned on doing it either today or on your actual birthday tomorrow. Today might be better, though. Less tourists.”

She nodded just slightly. “Maybe while we’re out cycling we can see what there is to do,” she said. “And we could spend some time in the downtown area as well?”

He thought for a moment. “Do you want to rent bicycles or would you rather buy one for yourself?”

She thought for a moment. There were pros and cons to both ideas, really. “Why don’t we rent them today, and then unless there’s something I fall madly in love with we buy them later.”

“They?” he asked, raising an eyebrow with an amused smile on his face.

“I’ll make you go cycling more than just today, Sherlock Holmes,” she said with a mischievous smile. She motioned for him to lean over more and she kissed him softly. After a moment she gently pushed up, nudging him over until he was on his back and she was hovering over him. She pulled away from the kiss and then grinned down at him, letting her hand moved down his chest towards his abdomen. “I should provide some enticement.”

“You should,” he said, his voice throaty as her hand continued to make its way lower, finally encircling his shaft. She wasn’t surprised he was already beginning to get hard after the kiss they’d just shared, and so she began to stroke him, taking her time and giving him nice, leisurely strokes. She watched as he shut his eyes and his mouth opened slightly.

“You like that?” she asked, already starting to shift in the bed and move lower.

“Yes,” he said, tilting his head back more when she used her thumb to smear the precum at the tip around a bit.

“I think I know something you might like more,” she said, stroking him a few more times before she was in position to take him in her mouth. He groaned at that and his hands moved forward as his legs parted slightly to accommodate her better. He tangled his fingers in her hair as she moved her head up and down on him like her hand had been doing, curling her tongue around him, using some suction while she moved her hand to play with him. She didn’t mind if he got off and she didn’t; he’d more than make it up to her in a similar fashion, she knew that. He was a considerate enough
“Molly,” he got out, and she could feel his balls tighten beneath her deft fingers as he began urging her up. She lifted her head up, her lips smacking when they pulled away from his shaft, and within moments she was on her back and blankets and sheets were being pushed out of the way and he was returning like for like, burying his face between her thighs, licking and sucking at her most intimate parts as she tilted her head back. She gasped at how quickly they had gone from her pleasuring him to him pleasuring her and she knew he wanted to be buried inside her when he came, but he wanted to make sure she was ready for him.

But all thoughts slipped from her minds when he began to use his fingers, sliding them in and out of her with such practiced movements as he began to tease her clit, causing her to moan and whimper. “Oh, please,” she said quietly, wanting him, not just his fingers. “Please, Sherlock, please.”

He didn’t oblige, continuing to tease her until she could feel the tension coil inside her and her abdomen clench and her thighs begin to shake, and when she came she gave a soft shout of his name, and only then did he pull away from his ministrations and enter her, oh so slowly. She gasped when he did, he body still riding the effect of the orgasm, but he set a slow rhythm and positioned them to enter her with slow, deep strokes and she had never felt anything so fantastic before, not even in all of their lovemaking. He leaned forward, his lips towards her ear. “I can go as long as you want me to,” he said. “Bring you to as many orgasms as you want and not have one myself.”

She gasped as she felt another one start. “Oh my God...” she said. “Sherlock...”

“Just tell me when you wish to leave the bed today,” he said.

She would have smiled but the intense wave of pleasure overtook her and the only word that escaped was his name on her lips. She somehow had the feeling her plans for the day might be postponed for a time, but if the morning was spent like this? It would so be worth it...
After such a wonderful start to the day, the rest of the day had been just as good. Molly had a wide smile on her face throughout the entire day as Sherlock did whatever it was she had wanted to do with almost no complaint. She had appreciated that almost as much as the fact that they were getting to do all sorts of interesting things. She had offered to let him choose their evening activities, even if all he wanted to do was go back to the hotel and have a repeat of the morning’s activities, but he’d shaken his head and said no, he’d made arrangements for something for them to do that he’d thought she’d enjoy.

And now, after a detour to pick up a basket of food from the Hotel del, they were at Grand Caribe Causeway and she was being told she was going on a sunset gondola cruise with Sherlock with The Gondola Company. She had never pictured herself on one but really, it was such a wonderful idea she wanted to kiss him senseless. “This was really a brilliant idea,” she said as they got on the gondola.

He gave her a small grin. “I had heard a news broadcast around Valentine’s Day on one of the local stations about this company,” he said, “and I thought it might be an interesting gift for your birthday since you wanted to be in Coronado anyway.”

She leaned over and kissed his cheek. She could kiss him senseless when they got back to the hotel. “It’s a brilliant idea, as I said,” she replied.

“They provide ice buckets, glasses, and a bottle opener, and so I brought your favourite wine,” he said. “I also got a selection of finger foods for us.” He indicated the basket. “Grapes, cheeses cut into cubes, crackers...there will be an actual dinner later, but I thought the Sunset Cruise would be the one you might prefer so we should do that one regardless of whether we had eaten or not at the time.”

She snuggled in next to him. “How long is the cruise?”

“Fifty minutes,” he said as the gondola moved out into the water. “It goes through the canals and waterways of the Coronado Cays, which is a small community approximately four miles south of Coronado Village. If you enjoy this, perhaps at some point in the future we can go to Venice and experience an actual Italian gondola ride.”

“That might be nice,” she said with a smile. He settled an arm around her shoulders as she began to delve into the contents of the basket. There were other things in it as well, such as strawberries and blackberries, and she pulled out a strawberry to eat. “It would probably have to wait until you’re done with your schooling, though.”

“Perhaps,” he said. “Or perhaps instead of returning to London we take a vacation of just the two of us and go during spring break, provided my schoolwork is not too great, if you’re not back at work by then. I don’t think you’ll be back in April?”

She shook her head. “Probably not until just after your break is over, I think. But that would be nice. I mean, your parents are coming in the beginning of June, right?”

He nodded. “As I understand it, yes, that’s still the plan. So my spring break is still available to us to spend as we wish.”

“Then Italy would be nice,” she said with a smile. “Or anywhere, really.”

He was quiet for a moment. “If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?” he
“Anywhere?” she asked, pulling away slightly to look at him. He nodded. She thought about the question for a few moments. “Part of me would love to go somewhere tropical, like Jamaica or the Bahamas. I’ve never done that. Or go on a cruise, perhaps? But I’ve always wanted to go to Greece, too. And then I’ve also always wanted to go to Norway. I was a mythology buff growing up, and I loved Greek and Norse mythology. But...also Egypt? Because that’s an interesting place as well.” Then she shook her head. “I’m probably no help because I also forgot France.”

He chuckled at that. “So basically the world,” he said.

“Yeah, basically.”

“My spring break is only a week, so...why not stick with Italy?” he said, tilting his head. “You can probably do a lot more in Rome or Venice in a week than most of the other places, and we can plan for other trips later.”

“A week in Rome sounds nice,” she said with a smile. “Or, if we don’t want to go so far afield, you could take me to the wine country like I’ve always wanted to go. I think I’d love that quite a bit too.”

“I could,” he conceded. “It probably would only cost an arm, as opposed to an arm and a leg and some internal organs.”

She smacked his arm lightly. “We don’t have to go anywhere at all, you know,” she said, shaking her head.

He reached over and tucked her hair away from her face. “I was only teasing. I want to take you everywhere in the world you want to go, Molly. And if we have children, I want to take them too. I want to have...better memories of the places I had to be before, and I’d like those memories with you. If there’s a way we can make it work so you can travel the world and see all the places you want to see then I want to make it happen. I want to give you the world because that is what you’ve given me.”

“Oh, Sherlock,” she said, leaning forward and kissing him softly. She loved this man so dearly, she really did. And as he kissed her back, she could tell he loved her just as much, if not more, and that made her feel as if she was queen of the world.
Chapter 58

Sherlock had booked the Oceanview Room at 1500 Ocean, one of the restaurants at the Hotel del Coronado, for her actual birthday dinner. Molly had actually been surprised that so many people had wanted to spend her birthday dinner with her, but it had been a pleasant surprise. Jason and Thomas were there, as were Aaron, Tabitha and Roseanna, and other people Molly knew from her work and volunteer position. There were also friends that they had made through Jason and Thomas, and so the room was quite packed and almost at the limit of twenty-five people.

Sherlock had said he was waiting to give her most of her gifts with everyone else that evening, but the one he had given her for the dinner was a gorgeous designer dress that he said was a gift he’d picked out with Thomas and Jason by Zeina Kash from the 2016 ready to wear line, since purple was one of her favourite colors. She was wearing it now, the strapless purple and white dress that came below her knees that had purple lace at the bodice and in stripes below the waist and on the skirt. She’d paired it with white peep toe pumps and a simple amethyst necklace and earrings set. She felt absolutely stunning, and from the looks Sherlock kept giving her she knew he wholeheartedly agreed.

They all had the Four-Course Tasting Menu plus a dessert, and there were so many wonderful items to choose from. Molly had pored over the menu and studied it intensely before deciding on Market Oyster for her first course, Santa Barbara Spot Prawns for her second course, California pencil asparagus with lemon aioli for her side and after Sherlock told her cost didn’t matter for her meal tonight, Surf & Turf for her main course. The food was absolutely excellent, everything she had expected it to be, and the cocktails that the restaurant had were magnificent as well. She especially became fond of the Dark & Stormy.

Soon the food was eaten and they were all lingering over their desserts. The gifts had been opened already and she had gotten so many lovely things, and as she ate some of her pistachio crème brûlée she laughed at a joke that Thomas made. Thomas had drunk a wee bit more than was probably good for him, but he was an amusing drunk so it was all right. Jason was rolling his eyes and patting his husband’s arm. “We should have cut you off a few drinks back, shouldn’t we?” he said with an amused grin.

“But love, that was a funny joke,” Thomas said with a pout.

“I’m not saying it wasn’t, but it’s the third time you’ve told it.” He leaned over and pressed a kiss on Thomas’s temple before looking over at Sherlock. “I don’t think he’s in any condition to go home, and he drove.”

Sherlock shook his head, grinning slightly as he took a sip of his water. “He is really happy with that new car of his, isn’t he?”

“Drives every chance he gets,” Jason agreed. “Of course it would have to be a stick, and I can only drive an automatic.”

“Maybe they could stay here for the night?” Molly suggested. “And then we could do brunch together at the Crown Room. I mean, I know it’s nearly an extra two hundred dollars, but-”

“Two hundred dollars a pop?” Thomas exclaimed, his eyes bulging. “That’s bloody highway robbery.”

“Admit it, Thomas, you’ve always wanted to come here for it,” Jason said fondly. “And if you
weren’t drunk as a skunk you’d be so giddy right now.”

“Well, I suppose,” he said.

“If Molly wants you both to come to brunch with us tomorrow, I have no problem with that,” Sherlock said. “Plus, I believe there will be Bloody Marys there, which may be a comfort to Thomas.”

“Oh yeah,” Jason said with a laugh. “He’ll appreciate that.” Jason nudged Thomas slightly. “I’ll drag Thomas to the front desk and we’ll get us a room.”

Sherlock shook his head. “I’ll take care of it,” he said. “It’s no trouble.” He stood up, and then leaned over and gave Molly a kiss on the cheek. “I’ll be right back.”

She nodded, looking up at him with a smile before watching him leave. Then she turned back to Jason and Thomas, who looked at her with knowing smiles. “What?” she asked.

“He is absolutely bonkers for you,” Thomas said. “Like, you could ask him to jump into a volcano and he’d fly off to the nearest one and just jump.”

Molly grinned more and then shook her head. “I know he cares about me, and that he loves me, but bonkers?”

“Oh, Molly, he would do anything you ever asked him to do without any hesitation,” Jason said with a chuckle. “Even if you didn’t intend to, you have him wrapped around your little finger.”

“Well, I absolutely didn’t intend to,” she said.

“We know you didn’t,” Jason said. “It just kind of happened.” He had some more of his own dessert. “You two are pretty perfect for each other, though. I mean, really, with all the things that you two have been through, before you came here and since you’ve been here, maybe you two were destined to be together. I can’t think of anyone better for you, and I can’t think of anyone better for him than you.”

“Maybe,” she said, looking down a bit.

“I just hope that you two stick around for a long, long, loo00000ong time,” Thomas said, putting his arm around her shoulder.

“Well, we plan on it. Sherlock wants to get his Masters and possibly his doctorate, and I have my job here to go back to. We plan on staying here for a while.”

“Good,” Thomas said, leaning over and kissing her cheek. “You two are our best mates. Don’t want to lose you.”

“We don’t want to lose either of you, either,” Molly said, resting her head on Thomas’s shoulder. The conversation then switched over to other topics until Sherlock came back to tell Jason and Thomas they had one of the Victorian Rooms, and that he had expanded the reservation for Chefs Table to include all four of them for brunch the next day at 10 AM. Jason led Thomas out of the dining area, as Molly began to say good-bye to the rest of her guests, and then she and Sherlock began gathering up her presents to take to their suite. Once they got them all in and put away well enough, they both collapsed on the bed, side by side. She turned to look at him. “So far, this has been an amazing birthday, Sherlock. Far better than I ever could have expected.”

“I was trying my best,” he said with a grin, reaching for her hand and pulling the back of it to his
“You have succeeded beyond my wildest expectations,” she said. “And we still have tonight and tomorrow night in the suite, and all day tomorrow in Coronado.”

“We do,” he said with a nod, not letting go of her hand. He shifted his hold on it, threading his fingers through hers. “Is there any particular way you’d like to spend the rest of your birthday?”

“We could start with kissing and then see where it goes,” she said with a smile, scooting closer to him.

“I think that would be a most enjoyable way to end my evening,” he said with a grin of his own, using his other hand to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear before leaning in to kiss her softly. She sighed contentedly into the kiss and then moved close enough so that their bodies were pressing. If all her birthdays went like this she would never dread another one so long as she lived, she thought to herself.
Two weeks after her birthday the puppies that were born to the dog they had tried to save were able to be separated from their adoptive mother. She and Sherlock had decided to keep the puppy that Jasmine had given birth to, the springer spaniel puppy that was white with brown spots, as well as one of the puppies from the other litter, and even after all this time with the dogs Sherlock still wasn’t sure what to name his puppy, which they had found out was a boy. Molly had found out hers was a girl and so she decided to name hers Persephone after all. Her puppy was the white one with the splotches of black and the brown on the legs.

Roseanna was taking one of the other puppies, a white puppy with a few black spots but mostly brown marks that was a little boy, and Jason and Thomas were taking the mostly brown female puppy and Jasmine. That left one other puppy that someone Molly volunteered with had said they were interested in, the male runt of the litter, who was mostly black with a few white and brown splotches, but Molly had decided if they changed their mind she and Sherlock were going to keep him and he’d be Hades. Sherlock had already said it was fine. She was almost half tempted to say the puppy wasn’t available anymore because really, she loved him just as much as she loved Persephone.

Roseanna had already come and gotten her puppy, which she said she was naming Aragorn after her favourite character in Lord of the Rings, and so they were just waiting for Jason and Thomas to come and get their puppy and Jasmine. Jasmine’s leg was almost completely healed, and Sherlock had told the two of them he would finish paying the vets bills for it because he had started the care, which Thomas had said wasn’t necessary but Sherlock has insisted. Jason told Molly later that Thomas was grateful for that because he wasn’t sure if it was still super expensive and after having bought the car finances were just a smidge tighter than he’d expected, but he loved Jasmine all the same and he’d have made it work even if they’d have been reduced to ramen for a while. Molly had assured him that wouldn’t have been the case because Sherlock had developed a fondness for Jasmine as well.

The knock on the door pulled her out of her thoughts and she set down her book as Sherlock moved his laptop off his lap and Persephone jumped on the sofa as soon as Molly stood and nestled into her spot. “We talked about this, Persephone,” he said sternly, picking the puppy up out of Molly’s spot. Molly smiled as she made her way to the door. “You know they’re going to steal our sofa, Sherlock. Just give it time,” she said over her shoulder.

“Not if we train them young,” he replied.

She shook her head and opened the door to see Jason and Thomas there with a carrier in each hand as well as bags. “We figured if we were coming over we may make a visit of it,” Thomas said. “So we brought their collars and other things and takeaway as well.”

“Oh, bless you,” Molly said, her smile growing wider. “I don’t even think we thought about supper tonight.” She moved out of the way so they could come inside. “What is it?”

“Mexican, from La Fuente,” Jason said, lifting up his bag. “We think we have a handle on your favourites.”

“Let’s see, shall we?” Molly said, shutting the door behind them. The three of them walked into the house and Jason and Thomas set their dog things down in the living room as Sherlock stood up to see what they had brought for dinner.
Once the dog stuff was out of the way, Jason and Thomas brought the bags with the food over to the kitchen and set them down and then Thomas started digging through them. “Chiles relleno burrito for Sherlock, California carne asada burrito with extra cheese and no sour cream for Molly, carne asada chimichanga for Jason and a Surf & Turf burrito for me. Plus sides of rice and beans for all of us to share,” he said.

“You do know our taste in food uncannily well,” Sherlock said with a grin.

“We’ve only known the two of you for...what, almost a year now?” Jason said, taking his chimichanga from his husband and unwrapping it.

“It has been almost a year, hasn’t it?” Molly said, tilting her head. “You showed up in April, I think, and I officially met Jason not that long after you got here, Sherlock, and then met Thomas a few weeks later, I think? And then you met them not long after that.”

“We should do something for the anniversary, if you aren’t busy with school,” Thomas suggested. “Go back to the Gaslamp Quarter and have dinner there again, for old times sake.”

“I wouldn’t say no to that,” Sherlock said before taking a bite of his burrito. Once he was done chewing and swallowing, he looked at Molly. “I suppose we should celebrate the anniversary of me letting myself into your apartment as well?”

“I think that would be a good anniversary to celebrate,” she said with a smile. “We can add it to our list.” She had some of her burrito. “Maybe this time I won’t make you sleep on the couch.”

“That would be nice,” he said, returning her grin.

“So much has happened in the last year,” Jason said. “It just seems insane, you know? I mean, there was our car accident, Molly’s accident at work, the wedding, you two dating and moving in together, the crap that happened to you when you went home, Sherlock going back to school...”

“And then there’s all sorts of little things,” Thomas said. “It seems to be a year full of events, both monumental and seemingly insignificant, though not to the people experiencing them.”

“Well put,” Molly said with a nod.

“And I have one more for the more significant events,” Jason said with a grin. “I got accepted to San Diego Culinary Institute for the next round of classes.”

Molly’s eyes widened and she set her burrito down on the table to lean over and give him a hug. “Really? That’s wonderful news, Jason!”

“Congratulations,” Sherlock said warmly.

Jason hugged Molly back, careful not to drop his chimichanga. “It’s in La Mesa, but I’m going to do the commuting thing. But they have classes starting year round so I’m going to start in the next round that starts this spring and take the day classes so I can keep my evenings free to DJ since I make more money doing that and I’m getting more work doing that. I’m going to keep my job as a barista until classes start, then go to school full time and then see what I can do about working as a chef.”

Thomas looked at his husband proudly. “I got a promotion at work when we got back from our honeymoon and we had decided what the hell, Jason wants to do this and he’s bloody good at it, so when you had your party he put in the application and they got back to him fairly quickly, which surprised us. He did his interview a few days before your birthday and he must have impressed them because they were eager to have him come on board as soon as possible.”
“I’ve qualified for some financial aid, but I think we can manage the rest,” Jason said as Molly pulled away. “It’s actually a reasonably priced culinary institute, and one of the best in the nation.”

Sherlock looked over at them. “With the one car between you, will that be enough?”

“It will be tough,” Thomas conceded.

“Would it be easier with two?” he asked.

Jason’s eyes widened. “Are you offering to buy me a friggin’ car, Sherlock?”

“I could, if you want,” he said. “I bought Molly one.”

“Be happy he’s not offering to pay the tuition,” Molly said with a smirk. “He’s paying Greg’s daughter’s way through uni right now.”

“Dude, seriously, you don’t have to, but...that’d be awesome,” Jason said, looking at Thomas, who nodded.

“I got the car I always wanted,” Thomas said. “Helping Jason get the same would be an amazing thing to do.”

“Then we can leave the puppies for now and then see about getting you a car to get you to and from classes,” Sherlock said.

“I swear, I won’t get anything extravagant,” Jason promised, a wide grin on his face. “I won’t even get anything new. I just...I’ve had a license for years and I’ve never been able to save up for a car and, like...I’ll actually be able to have my own car now. No more bummimg rides, no more having to walk to the damn coffee shop buttfuck early in the morning if I can’t get a ride...it’ll be great.”

Molly moved over to Sherlock and kissed his cheek. “You are a very good friend,” she said softly, giving him a warm smile. “I think you just made his entire year.” He looked up and gave her a small smile before she went back to her seat to finish her food. Sherlock had changed so much over the last few years, she realized, and in such a good way. The man he was now was such a kind, loving, caring man, and she was glad to have him in her life. She hoped he stayed in her life for many years to come.
Chapter 60

She had noticed a few days after Jason and Thomas had taken their dogs and her friend had decided not to take Hades that Sherlock seemed...off. He had a cough that he couldn’t quite shake, he seemed to want the temperature of their home to be ridiculously warm, he was congested and he said his muscles ached, he was stealing all the blankets, and he was ever so tired. And then one morning she took one look at him and saw quite plainly that he had come down with the flu. She watched as he tried to get ready for class but after a moment, she gently plucked his clothing out of his hand and ushered him back to bed. “But...class...” he said.

“You, William Sherlock Scott Holmes, neglected to get your flu shot this year, didn’t you?” she said, pulling back the covers on his side of the bed so he could climb back into bed.

“I don’t like shots,” he said, pouting slightly.

She shook her head. “Well, if you’ll let me access your email I’ll tell your professors you’ll be out for a few days under the care of your personal doctor and ask that they send you any work you’ll miss. And that you’re not to work on any of it until at least Thursday. Understood?”

He gave her a half-hearted smile. “Are you my personal doctor?” he asked.

“Well, I do have the title ‘Doctor’ in front of my name,” she said with a smile. “And I did go to medical school, so even though I perform postmortems I do know a thing or two about the human body.” Once he was in bed she pulled the covers up to his chin before moving to her side of the bed. She went to her nightstand and opened the drawer, pulling out the notepad she kept there and a pen, and then sat on the bed, pen poised over the pad. “Now then. List all the symptoms you have, and the varying degrees of discomfort that you have with each one, and the type of symptom you have. The more specific the better. It will help me determine the best over-the-counter medication to get for you.”

Sherlock began listing his symptoms and the type and severity of each one as she wrote them down. When he was done she went back around and gave him a quick kiss before going to the garage and getting in her car to drive to the nearest pharmacy to get medication for him. She picked up cough medicine, decongestants, throat lozenges, and anti-inflammatory pain relievers. Then she went to Vons and picked up some of his favorite juices and some of the American ice lollies he had grown to like from the previous summer when the heat had been extraordinary, as well as some of the signature soups that the supermarket put out that she knew he liked. He was going to be miserable so she also picked up one or two treats for when he felt a little bit better.

She loaded it all into the boot and then made her way back home. Her arm was getting much better; the physical therapy was helping greatly and she found she was able to do more, lift heavier loads and do more with her arm than she had before. She had high hopes she’d be able to go back to her old position with relative ease within the next month. It would be strange to go back to work after so much time off, but as her doctor and her physical therapist had said, it had been a nasty break and she’d had the cast on for a long time, and for a job like hers that could mean moving a body that weighed upwards of 200 pounds with very little help, they needed to make sure she was at her optimal peak before she went back to work so that she didn’t re-injure herself and lose the chance to ever be able to go back. As much as she knew transitioning from not working to working again would be strange, she couldn’t wait, but she would because it was what was best.

She got back home and lugged the groceries in, being careful not to trip over Persephone, Hades or Faraday, as Sherlock had decided to call his puppy, after the Faraday constant. They all immediately
ran to the garage door any time one of the cars pulled into the garage, barking excitedly to see who was coming home. They did it every evening that Sherlock came home from school and she had to admit, it was rather cute, even if it felt like walking through a minefield when they did it to her.

She put the purchases on the kitchen counter and then went to check on her patient, finding him sound asleep. He must have been more tired than he had thought, she realized. She didn’t want to imagine him on the I-5 in that state. She went back into the kitchen and began to put the soups in the refrigerator and the juices in the pantry and then waited for him to wake up to see just how cranky her patient was.

It was nearly five hours later when Sherlock shuffled out of the bedroom wearing his flannel pyjama bottoms and a long sleeved T-shirt and his flannel dressing gown and having the quilt that was usually in the chest at the end of the bed wrapped around him. He looked at her staring at him in amusement and glared. “I’m cold,” he said. Then he took in the camisole top she wore as well as the denim capris and bare feet. “Why aren’t you bloody freezing?”

“Because I got my flu shot and therefore don’t have influenza,” she said, setting down the remote. “And don’t think of adjusting the temperature of the house, I’m not in the mood to have to strip down to my skivvies.” She patted the sofa, and once he sat down she stood up. “I got some TheraFlu for you, and there’s tea and throat lozenges and those Fudgecicles you like, the sugar-free ones. And I have loads of juices and soup from Vons and I have medications for you to take and if you argue with me about any of it I’ll glare and make you sleep in the guest bedroom, understood?”

He looked up at her with wide eyes. “You wouldn’t.”

“I’ve heard stories of you being cranky when you’re sick, Sherlock, and I’ll have none of it. I’m not John or Mrs. Hudson. I’m not your mum, either. I’m your significant other, and I love you, and while I’ll tolerate your being a whiny baby a bit, you got yourself into this situation because you didn’t want to get a quick shot in the arm and maybe have flu-like symptoms for a few days. But, because I love you, I want you to get better. So don’t be an arse and I’ll help you get better. Okay?”

“I’m not going to like it much when you play doctor, am I?” he grumbled.

“When I play doctor, Sherlock, that’s an entirely different matter,” she said, leaning over so her lips were near his ear. “And when you’re well enough, if that’s a scenario you’d like to try in the bedroom, then perhaps I might be willing to give it a go. But only if you behave when you’re my actual patient. Understood?”

He perked up at the mention of potential enjoyable activities in the bedroom and then nodded as she pulled away. “Understood, as long as you cut me some slack. Old habits are hard to break, after all. I am still set in some of my ways.”

She chuckled and shook her head slightly. “Some slack, Sherlock. But not so much you have me at your beck and call. So! Food first, or juice? I thought you could start with either loaded baked potato soup and chicken noodle soup, depending on what you're up to.”

He thought for a moment. “Chicken noodle soup, and a glass of cranberry apple juice?” he asked.

“Coming right up, along with the medication,” she said.

“And then perhaps you’ll stay on the sofa with me and watch Poirot?” he asked tentatively.

“That sounds like a superb way to spend my afternoon,” she said with a smile before moving to the kitchen. Hopefully, if the cranky, crabby, arsehole of a patient version of her boyfriend popped up
he’d disappear just as quickly, and then she could lord it over John. That’d be a lovely phone call to make or email to send. But really, the sooner he was better the happier she would feel. She hated seeing him feel miserable, and as long as he didn’t make *her* miserable as he got better she didn’t think she’d mind playing nursemaid...much.
Chapter 61

As his spring break got closer, Sherlock began planning for the two of them to go to Napa Valley for the week that he had off from school. She had thought that he would keep all of it secret from her so that it could be surprises, but he asked for her input as he found various things for them to do. They decided they wanted to go around the entire valley as best they could, but to leave their own cars at home in San Diego and fly up and rent a car when they got into the Sonoma County Airport.

They had a list of things they were going to see: the Castello di Amorosa, the Sterling Vineyards, the Beringer Vineyards, the Grgich Hills Estate, the Clos Du Val Winery, the Chateau Montelena Winery, Copia, the Beaulieu Vineyard, the Heitz Wine Cellars, the Stags’ Leap Winery and because Molly saw there was a petting zoo and she loved animals as well as trains the Sonoma TrainTown Railroad. They were even going to attend a performance at the Napa Valley Opera House, to make up for the performance that they had missed seeing in Los Angeles when she had broken her arm. They were staying at the Silverado Resort for their stay there, and then if they ended up getting caught somewhere where they couldn’t get back in time Sherlock would see about them staying elsewhere for an evening.

The thing she had looked forward to the most was the Wine Train. Sherlock had managed to get two bookings for two different train tours, the Quattro Vino their first day there for a day of wine tastings and a 3-course small bites meal, which included tours of the Robert Mondavi, Charles Krug, Merryvale and V. Sattui wineries, and the Romance on the Rails ride in the evening later in the week. She loved trains, the elegance of them, and to have them paired with being able to go to wineries and have such scrumptious meals were just amazing. He had mentioned that had a Murder Mystery train ride and she almost suggested they try and take that one but he said he would probably ruin it for the other passengers, but if she really wanted to go after she went on the other rides then perhaps she could take some friends up there later for a weekend and they could do it as his treat.

When they arrived and the holiday actually started, she was amazed at all of it. It was an absolute dream come true. From the resort where they were staying to the first few wineries they went to, she was soaking it all up and enjoying every minute of it. Sherlock had told her when they went to the Charles Krug Winery on the Quattro Vino train tour that they would be coming back for a special event that the winery was holding the next afternoon, and she was quite excited for it. She could see them making preparations for it, and the more she learned about it the more excited she became. There were going to be wine tastings with Howell Mountain wines, food pairings, silent auction, prizes and live music from noon to 3 PM, and then from 3 to 5 there were to be more Howell Mountain wines, desserts and a live auction. Sherlock had said they could stay for the whole event.

The day of the event they lingered at the resort in the morning, taking advantage of some of the amenities there, and then made the drive to the winery. When they got there, Molly found out that Sherlock had gotten the two of them a VIP table, and she was quite impressed when she saw where they were situated. “Trying to impress me?” she teased.

“That had been a thought of mine,” he said, pulling out her chair for her.

“Well, I am quite impressed,” she said, looking up and giving him a smile when she was seated.

“Good, because this table was nearly two thousand dollars,” he said as he pushed her chair in.

Her eyes went wide. “That’s quite expensive!” she said, her voice nearly a hiss.

“It goes to a good cause, an educational fund,” he said. “I thought you would approve.”
“Oh,” she said. “Well...yes, that is a good cause.” She smoothed down the front of the Marchesa Notte dress from one of the the 2016 ready to wear collections that she was wearing. It was a vibrant blue with a high bateau neckline that would be a sleeveless dress if it wasn’t for the applique that covered the shoulders and the curve of the breasts and came in across the waist. It went to the knees and moved as she walked, and she absolutely loved it. It had been one of the dresses that Mycroft had allowed her to buy when he clothing had been lost in Wales and she felt today was the perfect occasion to bring it out.

He nodded. “I felt for something that was a good cause, I could be a bit extravagant. Plus I thought that for the auctions, there might be nice things to buy as gifts. After all, I have more friends to think of now, as do you. It might be nice to tackle some shopping for the holidays and for birthdays now.”

She chuckled at that. “Ever the pragmatist.” She listened and heard some music playing. “If there’s dancing at all, would you share a dance with me today?”

“I would be honoured to,” he said. “That reminds me, we should see about continuing the tango lessons once you go back to work. You’ve definitely picked it up quickly.”

“It helps that we have a good teacher and I have a talented partner,” she said with a smile. “And that it’s fun. I’m just surprised you like it so much.”

“I like any reason to be close to you,” he said, leaning forward to kiss her softly. She kissed him back, but only for a moment before the auctioneer got their attention to let them know the silent auction would begin shortly. When they pulled apart she reached over to grasp his hand. “Are you enjoying your holiday so far?”

She nodded. “Yes, very much, even though we haven’t done much,” she said. “But we still have a few more days. And even if we don’t do everything, it’s all right. We’ll have done plenty. There will be other times.”

“I’m sure there will be,” he said, leaning in for another kiss. She grinned and kissed him back, heedless of who was watching. They would separate before the auction started, of course, and they’d go off and enjoy the wine and the food and everything else that was offered, but for now she wanted to lose herself in the kiss because she loved his kisses so much. There was nothing in the world she loved so much as his kisses, really, and any chance she got to get them she took full advantage of.
Chapter 62

She wasn’t sure if Sherlock was enjoying their holiday quite as much as she was but he seemed to be having some fun. He wasn’t actively complaining about things, at the very least, and she was quite thankful for that. She was tasting so many exquisite wines, and while not all of the wineries were living up to what she expected most were, and she was glad for that. It had been everything she could have hoped for and more, to be quite honest. Perhaps even more than that.

She didn’t think it would have been quite as fun if she had taken this holiday on her own, or even with friends. Being here with Sherlock was making it even more special, even if it wasn’t something he would have planned for himself. She knew she would have to find some way of making this up to Sherlock, even if he didn’t insist on it. He absolutely spoiled her rotten, and it was quite obvious now what Jason and Thomas had meant when they said he was bonkers for her. Well, it went both ways; she was bonkers for him, too, and she wanted to show him.

They were doing the Romance on the Rails train ride now, Saturday night before they had to go back to San Diego. They had arrived at the train depot at 5:30 and boarded the train at six and then gone to the Vista Dome and gotten to see the sunset there. It had been spectacular. When they had gotten to their booth they had each been given a glass of sparkling wine, and then they had been given the meal with two glasses of wine. The meal had been absolutely scrumptious and they’d had choices for each course. She’d chosen the porcini encrusted chicken and a glass of the recommended Reata “Three County” Pinot Noir 2013 to go with it for her hors d’oeuvre then the soup du jour for her first course and roasted beef tenderloin with bok choy, roasted root vegetables, mushroom toast and pomegranate Cabernet reduction as her entree choice with the recommended glass of Jamieson Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon 2013. So far it had all been absolutely divine, and now she was lingering over dessert and coffee as the train was making its way back to Napa.

“You absolutely spoil me, you know that?” she said, giving him a smile. “One day I’m going to do that for you, I swear.”

He gave her a small smile and shook his head, picking up his coffee and taking a sip. “You already do more than enough for me by simply tolerating me. By putting up with the quirks that I know I still haven’t rid myself of and still continuing to care for me. By loving me despite them.”

“Yes, but Sherlock, you treat me like a bloody queen,” she said. “I mean, you do. You shower me with gifts, and rather extravagant ones at that, and you take me to wonderful restaurants and then there’s things like this...and I can’t do that for you. I want to, and one day I will. That’s all I’m saying.”

He set his coffee down and reached over for one of her hands, grasping it lightly and playing with her fingers. She looked down at it, having the feeling he was going to tell her something rather important. “When I came to San Diego, I was hell bent on taking you back to London,” he said. “I knew that I was miserable, that something important was missing from my life, and that you needed to be back in London for me to figure out what it was. It wasn’t until I was here for a time that I realized the important thing that was missing was you. And you seemed so much happier here, once you started to make an effort to be happy in California. I knew I wouldn’t convince you to come back, and I started to feel sad about that, like I had lost the chance to have something good in my life by my own idiocy. And then you said you would try and get me to stay.” A small smile tugged at the corners of his lips. “That evening at the Japanese restaurant I had decided then I would stay.”

“So you protested for nothing?” she said with a smile.
“You were so determined to stay and I decided there wasn’t much point in going back to London without you,” he said. “I’d put up a token fight but really, you had won the battle in that instant.” He pulled her hand towards his mouth and kissed her knuckles. “I just wish I had realized I felt more towards you at that point. We wasted time that could have been spent better.”

“Oh, but then I wouldn’t have had all those rubbish dates,” she teased. “And Jason and Thomas wouldn’t have a wonderful story to tell at our wedding, if we ever have one.”

He chuckled, lowering her hand. “They will have an amusing story, won’t they?” he said. “They did a better job at matchmaker than John and Mary ever did.”

“Oh yes,” Molly agreed with a soft laugh. “You know, one day I’d like for all of them to meet. I mean, I know Greg likes them, but I think Mary would adore meeting them in person and not just over the internet. And I think John would like them, too.”

“Perhaps it can be arranged,” Sherlock said. “Maybe next time we go to London, we can see if Jason and Thomas want to accompany us, and we can arrange a dinner between all of our friends.”

“That would be wonderful!” Molly said with a smile.

Sherlock let go of her hand and then picked up his coffee again. “If it would make you happy, I’ll see what I can do.”

She gave him a fond smile. “And there you go, spoiling me again.”

“And I’ll continue to spoil you for the rest of your life, if I have any say in the matter,” he said with a small grin before sipping his coffee. She smiled back and went back to her dessert. Oh, what had she done to deserve a man like this? She wasn’t quite sure, but she was thankful nonetheless.
Eventually, Molly was deemed well enough to return to work, though it was on a partial time basis. After talking to her superiors, they decided the best way for her to do it was to work shorter shifts instead of coming in for full shifts on fewer days, and they would keep her relief around in case she needed help. She met the woman who had been filling in for her, a pathologist named Carol, a few days before she returned to her position and she felt they would get along well and be able to work together. And Carol seemed eager to get to know “the great Molly Hooper” that everyone talked about. That boded well.

She was slightly nervous the Monday when her first shift approached. She woke up, expecting to find Sherlock getting ready for his day, but he was lingering in bed, waiting for her to wake up. She gave him a small smile. “You’re going to be late for class,” she chided.

“I’m cashing in one of the many chips I’m owed,” he said, reaching over to pull her close against him. She snuggled against him. “I have a test on material I know like the back of my hand and since this is the class taught by the professor I do the lesson plans for I arranged to take the test in private tomorrow during her office hours when I explained today was your first day of returning to your post and I wanted to be here to make sure you had a good start.”

She looked up and gave him a wide smile. “You didn’t need to,” she said.

“I wanted to, though,” he replied. “So I was thinking I would help you cook a good breakfast, something you can keep down but that you enjoy, or we could go somewhere since you get a bit of a late start today. Your choice.”

“A homemade breakfast sounds good,” she said. “But going out sounds nice. We don’t get to go out for breakfast often.”

“Usually because we both like our sleep,” he said. He gave her a soft kiss that she eagerly returned. When he pulled away he nodded towards their bathroom. “Make use of the shower first and get ready. I won’t distract you, and then we can see about going to either Hash House a Go Go or Snooze, whichever one you’d prefer.”

“I’ve heard good things about Hash House a Go Go from Jason and Thomas, from post-party binges,” Molly said. “The portions are supposed to be huge, and while you’d think I’d be so nervous I can’t eat I’m actually ravenous.”

“They’ll go there,” he said with a nod, letting her go. “Go do what you need to do and then I’ll get ready.”

She reached over and put a hand on his chest. “You know, we have shared a shower and not fooled around,” she said. “And I would very much love to have you wash my hair this morning.”

He gave her a half grin, the corner of his mouth edging up. “Are you absolutely sure?”

She nodded. “Absolutely.”

“I suppose I can join you with the minimum of fooling around,” he said.

She leaned in and gave him another kiss, this one albeit a much quicker one. “Good.” When she was done she pulled away and pulled the covers off, getting out of bed and padding into the bathroom, beginning to run the shower. She really didn’t plan on fooling around...much. The idea of going out
to eat and sharing a meal somewhere that wasn’t at home with Sherlock was quite lovely and she really wanted to do that, and she knew if they got carried away in the shower they’d run out of time. She began to strip out of her pyjamas and get into the shower, and after a few minutes, he joined her. They managed to get through the shower with only some very passionate kisses and some creative use of their hands and fingers and some promises for more intimate activities later that evening, but once they were out and dried off they began to get ready for the day.

They took separate cars since they would be going in separate directions when their breakfast date was over, but they arrived at Hash House a Go Go at roughly the same time. She had seen it multiple time driving up Fifth Avenue but never gone inside, so this was going to be a treat. Even this early in the morning on a Monday it was busy, but they managed to get a table fairly easily. They looked at the menu and she decided if the food was as good as Jason and Thomas had said it was she would have to come back multiple times to try various items because there was so much that caught her fancy. Finally, she placed an order for the HH Famous Meatloaf hash on the recommendation from their waitress while Sherlock got the sausage gravy pot pie.

She saw that they had different menus for other meals and then leaned forward to look at Sherlock. “We have to come here more often if the food tastes as good as it smells,” she said.

“I get the feeling if we do we’ll have to bring Jason and Thomas,” he said with a small smile.

“I won’t mind,” she replied. “There’s still so much in this area we’ve never explored. I rather wish we hadn’t given up on our date night of exploring restaurants in the area.”

“We could go back to it,” he said thoughtfully. “Just move it to Fridays or the weekend.”

“Could we?” Molly said. “I would love that.”

He nodded. “We should get to know this area well if we’re to call it home for the next few years. And not just Hillcrest. More of the downtown area as well.”

“I like that idea,” Molly said with a smile. “And not just the really expensive places. If I remember correctly, I was supposed to pay for some of these dates, too.”

“Then I’ll pay for the expensive restaurants and you can pay for the less expensive ones,” he said, holding out his hand to her. “And we’ll try and alternate, unless there’s a special occasion. Deal?”

She nodded. “Deal,” she said, reaching over to shake his hand and seal the agreement. Soon, though, their food came, and she had to admit, it really did taste as good as the restaurant had smelled. This was definitely a place she was adding to the “visit as often as possible” list. They chatted as they ate, but soon the food was gone and their drinks were finished and it was time for him to head to class and her to head to work. Sherlock had said he’d have a surprise for her when he got back from class and to pick out a nice dress for the evening, and she nodded before giving him a kiss and getting in her car and driving to the coroner’s offices.

When she got inside she wasn’t surprised to see Roseanna there at the receptionist’s desk, a wide smile on her face. “Welcome back, Molly!” she said, giving her friend a wide smile and coming out from behind the desk to give Molly a hug.

Molly hugged her back as she laughed. “You just saw me here on Friday,” she said.

“Yes, but now you’re officially back, even if it’s part-time,” Roseanna said. She pulled away and then took Molly’s hand in hers, leading her towards the break room. “You never did tell me how the week in Napa was.”
“It was great,” Molly said. “We went to a lot of the vineyards, got to go on the Wine Train a few times, went to a charity event at the Charles Krug Winery and got a few things at the auction. Which reminds me, there’s a trip for you to Napa that I need to talk to you about, since I know you’ve wanted to go. I have to give it to you before Christmas, so...happy early Christmas.”

Roseanna’s eyes got wide. “Really? You’re the best, Molly. You and that boyfriend of yours. I’ll have to give him a hug when I see him.”

Molly laughed. “Well, not sure how much he’ll enjoy it, but I think he’ll appreciate the sentiment.” They got to the break room and Roseanna opened the door, and Molly looked in to see everyone in the coroner’s department standing there, saying “Welcome back, Molly!” all at once. There were balloons in the room that had the same sentiment on them, and a sheet cake on the table, and even a few gifts on the table. She felt tears come to her eyes. “Oh, really, you shouldn’t have! I mean, gifts?”

“They’re things to make the job easier,” Aaron said, coming over to give her a hug. “Tabitha and I have a friend who’s a physical therapist and she suggested a few things that might help you out and we told the others and we bought them for you.”

Tears of gratitude fell down her face and before she could dash them away with the back of her hand Roseanna came to her side with some Kleenex. “Oh, I don’t know what to say,” Molly said, dabbing the Kleenex at her eyes.

“We’re just really glad to have you back,” Roseanna said, putting her arm around Molly’s shoulder and squeezing. “We really missed having you here at the department. You’re like a ray of sunshine.”

“It’s true. You’re the brightest thing to have come out of England, we think,” Aaron said with a fond smile. When Roseanna removed her arm he moved to hug Molly, and she hugged him back. “Carol got called out on a family emergency today, so for your partial shift today I’m going to be assisting you. I hope that’s all right. I had to beat the other coroners off with a stick for the privilege.”

Molly laughed at that. “No, I’m quite glad,” she said.

“Well, let’s have some of the cake and then you can change into your work clothes and we can get down to business and you can make a man out of me, as they sing in that song in Mulan that my granddaughter played all weekend,” Aaron said. Molly laughed again, and then went to the cake as Roseanna began serving it up. Aaron began handing her the presents, seeing that they were all useful things that she could use either at the office or at home to help continue to rebuild the muscles or to soothe the pain that might flare up to help stabilize the muscles she’d rebuilt while she was at work. She also saw some of her coworkers who went to Mexico frequently had given her some Arnica de la Abuela Pomada, which the assistant to her physical therapist had recommended as an herbal remedy for muscle aches that she hadn’t been able to find. She wanted to hug the co-workers who had thought to get it for her because that was one of the things she hadn’t been able to find was a reliable rub for muscle aches. She had at least six tubs of it with the promise of more if she needed it, and while they were small she was told she didn’t need much for it to work.

When the cake was eaten she went to the locker room and changed and then got down to work. It was nice to be back at the job, and she was immensely glad for the help. She found she was able to do quite a bit of it on her own, which was good, but she still didn’t have quite enough strength to move the bodies on her own, and some of the other aspects of the job were tricky as her arm wasn’t used to doing it again. But she had the feeling with repetitive practice she would get back into the routine fairly quickly.

She stayed at her post for five hours, only because one of the autopsies was a bit trickier and she
wanted to make sure she finished it so there would be no way anyone could claim anything when it eventually went to court because it was definitely murder, and then she let Aaron finish the rest of them for the day. It was incredibly fulfilling to have put in even a partial day at her post and she felt better than she had in quite a long time.

She decided to take a quick shower and then stop by the hospice to see her friends there before going to Fashion Valley to get a dress for this surprise Sherlock had for her. She found that one of the people she was close to had died over the weekend, which was saddening, but the people at the hospice said that because she had visited so much and they’d had the conversations they’d had she wasn’t afraid of the end, and Molly took some comfort in that. The fact she had made someone’s end better was something she had never expected to do, and she knew even now that she had gone back to her post she wasn’t going to stop going to the hospice center. The woman had left her a few things and she collected them to look through when she got home, but the one thing the nurses made sure she knew about was an emerald bracelet that had been a gift from her husband before WWII, and she decided whatever dress she got tonight she would buy to match that bracelet and wear it in honour of her friend.

She went and bought her dress from one of the stores at the mall, a knee length emerald green lace dress that had a high neckline and short sleeves. The lace panel that covered the shoulders and arms was sheer and showed a hint of cleavage, and had a floral pattern. The hem was scalloped, and she paired it with heels that had a strap at the ankles that were nearly the same shade of green. Both the shoes and the dress matched the dress perfectly. By the time she got home Sherlock hadn’t arrived yet, so she took the time to straighten her hair, and then figured she could pull it back with silver combs if she chose or just wear it down.

She heard him arrive back not that long after she had finished with her hair, and she went out to meet him. He set his bag on the kitchen counter, and then his eyes zeroed in on the bracelet, which she was wearing on the arm that she had broken. “A treat?” he asked.

She shook her head. “One of my friends at the hospice passed this weekend,” she said. “This was one of the things she bequeathed to me. I thought tonight I would wear it in honour of her.”

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly, coming over to embrace her.

“She didn’t have any other family, so I was glad I was able to give her some comfort before she passed. She gave me photos and diaries as well. I’m going to look through them later.”

“We don’t have to go out tonight if you don’t want to,” he said.

She pulled away slightly and shook her head. “No. I used to tell her all about you and she said I was lucky to have someone as devoted to me as you were. She said you reminded her of her husband, and if I was smart I would never let you go.”

“Well, you are one of the most intelligent women I know,” he said with a smile, tucking some of her hair behind her ear.

“Thank you,” she said. “If you’ve cooked up a surprise, we should do it.”

“It’s not much of a surprise,” he said. “I just thought we could go to Carlsbad since I know you’ve wanted to go see the Flower Fields and then go have dinner at Vigilucci’s Seafood & Steakhouse. And perhaps a walk on the beach?”

“We don’t have to go to the Flower Fields today,” she said with a smile. “We can do that on the
weekend or something. But Vigilucci’s and a walk on the beach sound wonderful.”

“Then let me change into something nicer and we can leave and drive up to Carlsbad,” he said with a nod before pulling away. She went over to the sofa and then picked up the book that she had been reading over the last few days, reading a few more pages while Sherlock got ready. When he came back out he was in one of his suits, and then he came over to her. “Are you ready?”

She nodded, getting up and getting the wrap she had picked up to go with the dress. It wouldn’t do much to ward off the cold, but it was a lovely lacy thing that was silver so it matched the setting of the bracelet. “Yes,” she said, laying the wrap over her arm. They headed towards the garage, Sherlock’s hand at the small of her back, and then they went into the garage and into his car. Once they were settled Sherlock exited the garage and they drove until they were on their way to the I-5. They chatted easily, with Molly telling him about her first day back and the warm welcome and the autopsies she did, and Sherlock listening intently and asking questions. They got off at the Carlsbad Village exit and then made their way down to the restaurant on Carlsbad Boulevard.

When they got to the restaurant Sherlock gave his name and they were seated quickly. Molly had to admit the view of the ocean outside was lovely; she couldn’t see the actual beach but the ocean itself stretched out as far as she could see, once she could see past the busy street to the side. After admiring the view for a moment she picked up the menu and studied it. There was so much to choose from, so much that looked amazing. It looked pricey, though, and she looked over at Sherlock. “Order whatever catches your fancy,” he said. “This is to celebrate you being able to go back to your post. This Friday will be your date night.”

She grinned at that and then looked back down at the menu again. She decided on getting the Ostriche al Forno for her appetizer, Gnocchi con Aragosta for her main course with a side of sautéed wild mushrooms and baked asparagus, and a bottle of Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars Hands Of Time Chardonnay, as that was one she had gotten to taste in Napa that she had loved that even Sherlock had enjoyed. It was going to cost Sherlock an arm and a leg, especially considering what he ordered for himself, but he didn’t seem to mind.

When they were done with their meal, which was every bit as scrumptious as she had hoped it would be, she decided against ordering dessert, as Sherlock said if they walked on the beach there may be other places in Carlsbad Village they could go to that had something that might interest her, and they drove their car to the parking area in the village closer to the transit center. They walked around the Village Faire complex for a bit and wandered into Vinaka Cafe to get coffees to ward off the chill that was coming in as evening was coming on, and Molly ended up getting a Mexican mocha to take with her as they walked on the beach.

They walked down the street to the public access to the beach, then down the steps to the sand. They could have easily stayed on the concrete walkway above, but Molly really wanted to walk in the sand. She had taken off her heels and was carrying them in her hand that wasn’t holding her coffee. She looked over at the sunset. “There aren’t sights like this in England,” she said, a smile on her face.

“There are nice sights,” he said.

“Yes,” she conceded. “But you have to admit, this is spectacular.”

“Though not as spectacular as the woman I’m sharing it with,” he said.

She laughed. “Oh, that was smooth,” she replied.

He gave her a smile. “You are a spectacular woman, though, Molly. I don’t even know if you quite realize it. I think I should make it a point to tell you more often.”
“It might be nice,” she said, returning his smile. “You’re a spectacular man yourself, you know. You have been the entire time I’ve known you.”

“And I let it go to my head,” he said.

“A bit, perhaps. But now...I like this you. A lot.” She moved closer to him. “I like this you enough to love you and want to spend the rest of my life with you, married or not.”

“What did I ever do to become so lucky?” he asked, leaning over and kissing the top of her head as he put an arm around her shoulders.

She watched as the sun continued to slowly slip behind the horizon. “I don’t know, but I often ask myself the same thing.” She rested her head against him. “Whatever it is we did, though, I’m glad we did it.”

“As am I,” he said. “As am I.” They sank into a contented and comfortable silence then, watching the sun continue to set, and she hoped that there were many more moments like this, just simple, quiet moments between them. If she had a whole lifetime left of these moments, she didn’t think she could be any happier.
Molly had just gotten to the locker room after her second shift back at work when her mobile began to ring. She was still in her scrubs but when she saw it was Sherlock she sat on the bench and took the call. He never usually called in the middle of the day. “Is something wrong?” she asked right off the bat.

“No,” he said slowly. “I didn’t mean to alarm you. I just wanted to know if you’d had any thoughts about traveling at all this summer.”

“No,” she said. “We went to Napa a few weeks ago, and your parents are planning on coming here. I had thought perhaps if we did travel for longer than a three day weekend we could see about going back to London next spring, perhaps.”

“Good,” he said. “Rachel asked for my help in being her teaching assistant not just next school year, but also in helping to revamp the curriculum during the summer break, and I’m inclined to say yes. She’d hoped to have an answer by the end of the day.”

She knew that was the professor he did the lesson plans for who had taken an interest in him and a small smile etched itself on her face. “I swear, she’s trying to steal you away from me,” she said in an amused tone.

“She really isn’t,” he said.

“I’m teasing, Sherlock,” she said with a laugh. “Do you want to do it, as opposed to trying to do the orchestra again?”

“Well, I’ve had thoughts as to what I want to actually do with these degrees once I have them. Rachel says that I could be a decent professor, and if I stay on track at UCSD for my doctorate around that time there should be some faculty who will be leaving, and if I stay her TA throughout the duration that would look good at giving me the chance to teach there. It wouldn’t be the loftiest position, but it’s not as though I would be doing it for the money.”

“No, that’s certainly not the reason,” she said. “But I remember you said you didn’t want to be a professor. What changed?”

“It’s been interesting crafting the lessons,” he said. “Knowing that what I’m setting down on paper will be taught to others, and the knowledge will be used to further the field of study. I had thought that perhaps, so long as I’m educating university students, perhaps I could handle that.”

“Well, whatever you want to do, I’m willing to support you,” she said. “You’ve been willing to support me through everything I do and I’ve said I’ll do it for you as well and that’s the truth. If you want to stay in San Diego and help teach this summer term, then that’s what we’ll do.”

“Then I’ll go back to her office after my afternoon classes and tell her. She said she would be there until five and my classes are over at half past four.”

“So I should expect you later tonight?” she asked.

“Most likely. Would you like me to bring home dinner?”

“I can make something if you give me an approximate time that you’ll be home,” she said. “It’s one of the perks of my have partial shifts at the moment. I’m home much earlier than you are.”
“I’m in the mood for steak and kidney pie, I think,” he said.

“I can marinate the meat for a bit and make sure it’s ready by six thirty if you think you’ll be home by then, and I can leave it in the oven to warm in case you’re not,” she replied.

“That sounds like that will work,” he said. “I love you, Molly.”

She felt her smile get wider. “I love you too, Sherlock. Good luck with the rest of your classes today.”

“Thank you. I’ll see you when I get home tonight.”

He hung up on his end and then she hung up on hers and then went about getting ready to leave. She wouldn’t have long to let the meat marinate, maybe four hours at most, but it would be something. She still had to pick up the ingredients but there was a good place on the way back from the coroner’s office that she had liked to go to that was hopefully still in business that had the best cuts of meat. Once she was ready she got in her car and drove there, thankful to find it was indeed still in business, and got the meat she needed before heading home. She set the meat to marinade and then occupied her time with reading her novel until it was time to begin assembling the pie. It was harder work than usual because her arm was still just a tad weak and she was still tired from her post, but she managed, and she got it in the oven to cook around five thirty.

It was done at nearly quarter to six, just in time for Sherlock’s car to pull into the garage. She took the pie out of the oven and went to the vegetable she had made while the pie was at the end of cooking, some asparagus that they’d bought that needed to be used before it went bad, and got it out of the steamer. She wasn’t sure Sherlock would want any, but it would be a shame for it to go to waste. She made sure she got the mustard out in case he wanted some but other than that she figured it would best be left to its own devices.

He came into the house just as she was bringing everything to the table. “It smells good,” he said, leaning over to kiss her cheek.

“It’s been a while since I made it,” she said.

“Well, I’m sure it’s as good as it was the last time you made it,” he replied, setting his bag down in one of the other chairs at the table before going to get plates and silverware for them. He brought them to the table. “Rachel was quite pleased I took her up on her offer. She’s going to start the paperwork tomorrow. As it’s a paying job, there are some forms I need to fill out and I need to enroll in a class for the lab to move to the different track for my Masters next term, I believe. She wasn’t clear on that.”

Molly grinned. “A working man again. I’m so proud of you.”

He gave her a bit of a smirk. “She wants me to do it all of next school year as well, so she can keep me nice as close, as my faculty advisor.”

Her eyes widened at that. “That’s new,” she said.

He nodded. “She’s taken a professional interest in me. I think the fact I proved a theory that she’s presented as fact for years wrong and she hadn’t even realized it, and then I showed her how to teach the corrected theory to others without being an arse about it impressed her. She sees potential in me. She wants to nurture it.”

“And if you go on to do great things, then you can thank her,” Molly said.
“Well, you do that with the professors who helped you, do you not?” he asked.

“I do,” she said with a nod. “I’m not saying this is a bad thing at all, Sherlock. It’s good that there’s someone taking a personal interest in you, especially someone who sees potential in you.”

“She wants to meet you, by the way,” he said. “She’s quite keen to meet you, actually.”

“You talk about me that much?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

He looked slightly embarrassed. “I may brag a bit.”

She moved over to him and kissed him softly. “I adore the fact that you brag,” she said with a smile. “When would she like to meet me?”

“She said her husband is having a barbecue this weekend, on Saturday. Nothing very formal, but she wanted to invite us. She said if we could bring some good English ale, her husband would be most appreciative. There will be other professors there and some former and current students and their spouses and significant others, so it should be a rather low-key affair. Most of them are from the various sciences departments, but there are a few from the literature department as well, which is where her husband teaches.”

“That sounds like it could be fun,” she said. “I’d love to go.”

“Good,” he said, relaxing slightly. “I wasn’t sure if you would agree, so I told her I would tell her after class tomorrow morning.”

“Well, I’ve enjoyed the barbecues we’ve been to with Jason and Thomas, so this should be just as interesting,” she replied. “Now then. Are you ready to eat?”

“Starved,” he said.

“Go ahead and sit, and then I’ll serve you dinner,” she said, giving him another kiss for good measure before he sat down. She had to admit she was a little nervous, but not much, and if this would help him then she would do it. She would do anything to help him, just as he had done so much to help her. Fair was fair, after all.
Chapter 65

Molly was actually quite nervous for the barbecue at Sherlock’s professor’s home. He might be quite friendly with his professor after nearly an entire school year under her tutelage but she had never met the woman, and even though Sherlock assured her that Rachel was quite eager to meet her she was still worried that she’d make a bad impression and the woman would hate her. After all, if she wanted to be quite frank, even though Sherlock didn’t need to work after he got his degrees she knew if he wanted any sort of good position in the academic community it helped to make the right sort of connections now, and she played a role in that as his significant other. She needed to play her part to perfection.

They had picked up two cases of the Newcastle Werewolf variety pack of Newcastle ales from BevMo on their way to his professor’s home in Solana Beach, just to give a variety of a brand she rather liked. She honestly felt she’d be too nervous to even finish a bottle if she opened one, but at least this way she knew there would be something there she liked. They got to the home in the nice but not overly nice neighborhood about forty minutes after Rachel had said to arrive, having gotten lost on the way due to not knowing the city well. Molly got out of her car and smoothed down the front of her navy V-necked knee length dress with the red and white stripes before getting the case of ale she was carrying out of the boot. “Do I look all right?” she asked.

“You look fine,” he said, leaning over to kiss her cheek before getting his own case of ale. “Rachel is as down to earth as Lestrade and Mary and John, I promise. You’ll get along splendidly.”

“Yes, but I have an impression to make.”

“Molly, have I ever given two shits about any impression I make to anyone ever, unless it’s someone you or any of my other friends consider important?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

She was quiet for a moment. “No, I suppose not.”

“Then you shouldn’t worry about the impression you make,” he said firmly. “Be yourself. If they don’t like you as I do, then their opinion doesn’t matter to me. Alright?”

She gave him a small but firm smile, nodding. “Alright.”

The two of them then headed toward the home where the barbecue was being held. Even though they were late they were able to park nearby, and when they got to the front door Sherlock shifted his hold on the case of ales and pressed the doorbell. After a moment the door opened and a dapper older gentleman greeted them with a warm smile. “You must be Sherlock Holmes!” he said. “Here, let me get that.”

“It might be best to get my girlfriend’s,” Sherlock replied. “Her arm is still a bit weak.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” the man said with a nod as Sherlock moved out of the way so he could get to Molly. “And you must be...Dr. Hooper, right?”

“Please, call me Molly,” Molly said with a smile as she handed the case to the man.

“And you can call me Winston,” he said with a smile. “Rachel said she wanted to man the barbecue for a bit so I was on door duty. I think she just doesn’t want me to overcook the chicken kebabs since she doesn’t want hamburgers.” He turned and led the way inside the house, and Sherlock and Molly followed with Molly shutting the door behind her. “She’s going all out today. Originally there were supposed to be a lot of our colleagues here but there was some function at the university that most of
them wanted to attend so it’s mostly current and former students and family today, thank God.”

Molly felt herself relax even more at that. “What kind of function was it, if I might ask?” she asked.

“A series of lectures on something to do with molecular biochemistry,” Winston replied. “Makes them look good if they’re there. Rachel wanted to go but she likes spending time with her students more so she decided to go on with the plans. Plus she likes my colleagues a lot and...well, it’s not an English department thing, really.”

Sherlock chuckled slightly. “Would have been an interesting topic but I’ve seen the lecturer speak before. Rachel would have been asleep within a half hour. If his head researcher had delivered the lecture, it would have been more entertaining. She’s much more eloquent and witty. I’ve carried on correspondence with her for a few months.”

“You’ll have to tell her. She won’t be so disappointed,” Winston said with a laugh. “Come on. I’ll start introducing you around. Everyone’s dying to meet the TA that may stick around for a few years and the lovely pathologist he keeps bragging about.”

Molly blushed slightly but followed Winston into the kitchen to deposit the ales into tubs of ice, and then she found someone had brought ales from Stone Brewing Company and she selected a brew she liked before she began walking around with Winston and Sherlock, meeting many of the guests that were there. Some were her age, some were older and some were younger, but all were very laid back and relaxed, and the nervousness she had felt had quickly dissipated as she was pulled into many interesting conversations with a variety of people. Most already had a vague idea of who she was because apparently Sherlock had met quite a few of them and talked about her a lot. She was rather pleasantly surprised by that.

Within an hour she had drifted over to the barbecue and saw a grey haired bespectacled woman wearing a pair of denim trousers and a blue and red plaid button down shirt over a vest, keeping a close eye on the food that was being cooked on it. She looked up to see her and Sherlock approach and a warm smile spread across her face. “Sherlock! You came! You got lost, didn’t you?”

“Afraid I did,” he said with a nod, moving his hand to the small of Molly’s back as he moved closer, in an effort to keep her calm, Molly knew. “Molly, this is my faculty adviser, Rachel. Rachel, this is my girlfriend, Molly.”

Rachel set down the tongs in her hand and then held out her hand to shake Molly’s hand, and Molly did so. “I’m quite pleased to meet you. Sherlock’s had a lot to say about you. All of it absolutely glowing, I assure you.”

“I’ve come to realize that in the last hour,” Molly said with a smile in return. “Apparently I didn’t know he bragged about me so much.”

“Ah, I think he’d rather toot your horn than his own, which I gather is a far cry from how he used to be?” Rachel asked, a smirk on her face.

Molly chuckled and nodded. “I take it you’ve heard stories?”

“I did some research on my unexpected star student after he surprised me by disproving one of my favorite theories,” Rachel said. “I wasn’t expecting to realize he was an international star and a tabloid sensation. Seems to have tempered it down a bit the last few years, though, but I won’t pry. I just care about how I can abuse him of that glorious brain for the benefit of having the best curriculum in the department.”
“Which, I assure you, will be the case for the remainder of my tenure in the program at the university,” Sherlock said.

“Good boy,” Rachel said fondly. “But I’d love to chat with Molly about what you do. I once flirted with the idea of going into forensic pathology before I went into the research scientist route.”

“Really?” Molly said with a wider smile.

Rachel nodded. “It was looked down on at the time in the area I grew up in. I mean, the idea that a young woman would rather put her hands into dead bodies and dig around wasn’t very ‘ladylike,’ so my mother dissuaded me from going into that field. But it’s still an interest. I read some of the papers put out in the field. In fact, I’ve actually read a few of yours. You have quite a way with words. Are you planning on continuing to publish?”

Molly shook her head. “Not at the moment, mostly because my job here is so hands on. But perhaps in the future, if I run across anything interesting in the field. It would bring acclaim to the department.”

“A shame,” Rachel said. “The world lost a good researcher in you. But as long as you continue to help bring criminals to justice, that’s still a very good thing.” She picked up the tongs again to turn the kebabs on the grill. “I do hope you like kebabs. I think we have nearly sixty. Chicken, beef, shrimp...even vegetarian for those who prefer meatless. We’d expected a bigger crowd but I prefer it being more intimate.”

“As do I,” Sherlock said. “Not that it wouldn’t have been interesting to chat with others in the department but most of them are blowhards and I prefer the company here.”

Rachel laughed. “Oh, I’m glad you agreed to be my TA. I’d made a mistake with my last one and it was two years of gritting my teeth. I think you and I will get on delightfully.”

“Yes, Keith was a prat,” Sherlock agreed.

“One of the few mistakes I’ve made in my tenure,” Rachel said. “And I’m usually such a good judge of character.” She looked over at Molly. “Why don’t we let your boyfriend go mingle and we chat a bit more about forensic pathology? My husband isn’t interested in my ‘morbid little hobby,’ as he calls it, but I’d love to talk to someone else about it.”

Molly nodded. “Oh, that would be nice, I think.” She leaned over and gave Sherlock a quick kiss. “Will you be all right on your own for a bit?”

“I think I’ll survive,” he said, though he had a small smile.

“If you get frightfully bored, come find me. You can regale her with stories too about odd cases from the old days,” she said. He nodded and then moved away, leaving the two women alone. Molly watched him leave before turning to Rachel. “And to think, I was nervous about today.”

“Which, I assure you, will be the case for the remainder of my tenure in the program at the university,” Sherlock said.

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“I think it would have been worse if more of the department was here,” she said. “Though I took care to invite less of the assholes in the department. I mean, not all of them are the greatest once they’re a bit tipsy, but they know enough to not get too drunk. It probably would have been good for Sherlock, but to be honest, most of them are already impressed by him.”

Molly took a sip of her drink. “You are obviously quite impressed.”

“Well, it’s not often we get people who are Oxford educated come here after so many years between getting their undergraduate degree and then have done so much in the field without having done it on
a professional level,” she said. “To be quite honest, I knew who he was the first day he was in my
class. I had read his blog and was a fan of it, on a purely scientific level. I had a vague inkling of the
other blog, the one his friend had run, but his own blog had been quite fascinating. There are quite a
few professors on campus who had been fans.”

Molly smiled at that. “So he had fans who weren’t fans of him because of his status as a consulting
detective?”

Rachel nodded. “Oh yes. I’d read quite a few of his published papers and been very impressed. I
knew that when it came time for him to need a faculty adviser I wanted to be it and I’d actually go
toe to toe with every other professor on campus to get Sherlock as my student. Having him be my
TA was just a delightful bonus.” She smirked. “Trust me, there was almost a small war over him. It
could have gotten quite ugly if I hadn’t used my influence and there hadn’t been the fact he took a
liking to me.”

“Does he know all this?” Molly asked.

“No, but I’ll tell him in good time. I gather he had quite the ego so I’ll save this information for a time
when it actually needs stoking,” she said. “So for now, let’s keep this between us, shall we?”

Molly chuckled, nodding. “All right.”

Rachel grinned at her. “He’s absolutely right about you, you know. You are a wonderful human
being. No wonder he’s head over heels for you.”

Molly blushed slightly. “He said that?”

“I think you two are lucky to have each other,” she said. “You both remind me of Winston and I. I
think you two will be lucky enough to have a nice, long future together.”

“Oh?” she asked.

Rachel nodded. “When Winston and I first met, we were a bit adversarial? But slowly we became
friends, and then I went away for a year to study abroad, and I had considered making the move
permanent. Winston came out to visit, and said that he had realized he cared as more than a friend,
and if I stayed he would stay as well, because if being there made me happy he wanted me to be
happy. We ended up coming back to the US, but we weren’t parted after that, and it’s been...oh,
nearly thirty-three years now, and him coming after me was the best thing he ever could have done.
We’ve never been happier.”

Molly smiled at that. “I hope Sherlock and I can have a future like that.”

“Oh, I don’t think that will be a problem at all,” Rachel said with a smile. She looked at the kebabs
and flipped them over again. “So now then. Why don’t you tell me about some of the more
interesting cases you’ve had? Either with or without Sherlock. I’m sure you have loads.”

“Oh, I have quite a few,” Molly said before taking another sip of her drink. She was glad she had
come to this barbecue now, she realized. Her nervousness was gone now, and she had the feeling that by the time she left she’d have made a friend in Rachel as well, and that was going to be a very good thing for both her and Sherlock.
Chapter 66

Slowly, the weeks went by and Molly’s shifts went from half time to three quarter time. While she was doing that, Sherlock was gearing up for his finals and they were getting used to spending less time together. It was slightly jarring, but she knew she would need to get used to it anyway if she was going to continue to work and he was going to stay in school, though when he eventually switched to the Thesis MS since he had a faculty advisor now it might be easier. But for the moment it was a bit stressful to not get to spend as much time with him.

One evening, the week before he was supposed to start his finals, she had come home from her post and changed into her pyjamas, curling up on the sofa and curling up with an old favourite television show, Pie In The Sky. She had used to watch the show with her father when she was growing up and wanting to go to Crabbe’s restaurant and try his steak and kidney pie, which she imagined was quite good but never as good as her father’s, no matter what the characters on the show said. She had all five series on DVD, and decided to start from the beginning.

She was halfway through the episode where the surveillance team intrudes upon the restaurant to “catch” the patron suspected of bribing the member of Parliament when she heard the garage door open. She was quite surprised because it was earlier than usual for Sherlock to be coming home, especially for a day when he had class. She paused the DVD and then lifted her head up, waiting for him to come in. When he did, she got off the sofa and came over to him. “Is everything okay?”

“My professor took pity on us and let us go early,” he said. “We had gone over what was going to be in the exam in a half hour so she said to go, and I managed to beat rush hour traffic.” He gave her a lengthy kiss, smiling against her lips. “I see you’ve made yourself comfortable.”

She nodded. “I decided I was going to do a marathon of Pie In The Sky for nostalgia’s sake. You’re more than welcome to come join me.”

“Pie In The Sky?” he asked, confused.

“Crime drama with Richard Griffiths, Maggie Steed and Malcolm Sinclair. Well, it’s sort of a drama, It’s kind of a light drama, partly. There’s humour to it, too. It’s about a copper who also runs a restaurant? I used to watch it with my dad when he was sick.”

“Well, if you give me time to change into something more comfortable, I’ll join you for a viewing,” he said. “We can get takeaway and just relax.”

“I like that plan,” she said with a smile. “What are you in the mood for?”

“Chinese?” he said. “My usual.”

“I’ll order it while you get ready,” she said. He gave her another kiss, much quicker that time, and then moved around her to head to their bedroom. Molly went to grab her mobile from the table next to the sofa and then went into the kitchen where the menus were. She picked up the one to their favourite restaurant that delivered and called in their order, getting a few extra egg rolls and wontons for the two of them, and then went back to the sofa to back up the DVD to the first episode. Within a few moments Sherlock came out in a T-shirt and pyjama pants and sat down on the sofa, and she curled up into him. “The food should be here in about forty minutes.”

“Good,” he said, putting an arm around her shoulders.

“Fair warning: this show will make you hungry,” she said with a smile. “Half the scenes take place
in a restaurant, so there’s always shots of food. And usually it’s good stuff, all stuff from home we’d eat all the time if we could.” She paused. “Also fair warning: Freddy Fisher is an arse. If you ever watch the entire show you’ll hate him by the end. He’s a smarmy piece of shite.”

“Who is he, exactly?” Sherlock asked as Molly pressed play on the remote.

“Crabbe’s boss. He manipulates things to keep him from taking early retirement because he’s an utter incompetent and he wouldn’t close nearly as many cases without Crabbe,” Molly said. “I mean, if you think Scotland Yard was bad when you were involved with them, with all the politicking, my dad said this was exactly what the police force was like when he was in it.”

Sherlock absently began stroking Molly’s hair back. “You haven’t talked about your father much,” he said quietly.

“I suppose I don’t,” she said. “He was a copper, in a small place like the one on the show. Not a really small village, but a decent sized town. He’d made it to DCI before he was too sick to work. He was quite a bit like Crabbe, actually. He used to joke that someone on the writing staff must have shadowed him and based the character off of him and he waned royalties.” She smiled a bit. “He was tall and burly and had sandy hair and warm hazel eyes and a kind smile. He was like my own personal knight protector. But the cancer treatments made him shrink, and the kindness seemed to dim, and the warmth seemed to dim too.”

Sherlock tightened his hold on her slightly. “And he looked sad when he thought no one could see,” he said quietly.

She nodded. “But I saw. And it broke my heart. I think he knew I could see but he allowed himself just a moment before putting on the front because he knew I could bear it.”

“It’s because you’re a strong woman,” he said, leaning over to kiss the top of her head. “The strongest woman I know.”

“Even when I run off and go eight thousand miles away?” she asks.

“Even then.” They lapsed into silence as the villain of the piece came into play, and Molly snuggled into Sherlock more. It wasn’t that it hurt to talk about her father, she just preferred not to. Even now there was an ache there, a void that wasn’t quite filled. She missed him, missed his presence, and wished he was there to see her now that she was so happy.

Sherlock watched the show with only the minimum of commentary, most of which amused her, and when the first episode finished the food arrived. The DVD was set on a loop so as the second episode started she went to get the food and pay for it, and then brought it into the living room. She set it on the table in front of the sofa and then went to get forks for them before going back to Sherlock and curling up next to him, though not as much so she could eat. He seemed to enjoy the show well enough, so that was good.

They ate in near silence, minus his comments, and when they were done she snuggled in next to him more as his arm went around her shoulders again, and the rest of the DVD progressed as Crabbe’s motley crew of family began to form. She knew it would change drastically as the seasons continued; just the next season Nicola would come on staff when Linda left, and then John and Steve would leave and Gary would come in, and eventually Sally would be there at the end at the restaurant. And while Cambridge would be there for a long, long time even she would go eventually, and then there would be Morton and Guthrie. But the constant ebb and flow was rather indicative of real life, she supposed. She had thought once that her family would be Lestrade and Sally and Anderson, and then later John, and then maybe Sherlock and definitely Mary, and now almost all of them were a
continent and an ocean away and her family here was Sherlock and Jason and Thomas and other people.

One never knew what the next day would bring, she supposed.

When the first disc was done Sherlock disentangled himself and put in the second disc. Around the time when the episode involving the businessman who was going to revamp the posh community was halfway done she felt her eyelids start to flutter and she began to yawn, and she started to fall asleep. She hadn’t planned on it, but even easing back into work was tiring after having not worked for so long.

She didn’t know how much later it was when she felt herself being jostled, and she dimly realized she was being carried to bed. “Sherlock?” she asked sleepily.

“We both fell asleep,” he said. “The sofa is comfortable but sleeping sitting up is not. I thought you would prefer the bed.

“What time is it?” she asked.

“Nearly one. I grabbed your mobile so you would have your alarm for the morning.” He moved easily through their darkened living room to their bedroom. Soon she was being deposited on the bed, and after a moment’s shuffling around Sherlock had pulled the covers out from under her and then tucked her in. He pressed a kiss to her forehead. “Good night, Molly.”

“Night,” she murmured before drifting back to sleep, feeling more comfortable in bed than on the sofa, especially when she felt Sherlock pull her close moments later. It had been a good evening, and she had hope that even with him working this summer term perhaps they’d get more evenings like this once his studies were over.
Eventually, Sherlock finished his exams and his term was over. The Friday afterward he had slept in and then surprised Molly that evening with dinner at Cafe Chloe. She had never been there before but he had had it suggested as a good local French restaurant and thought it might be a nice place to go to for a more elegant evening. They had capped off their evening by walking around the Gaslamp Quarter and seeing what else caught their fancy and ducking into OMNIA to go to the rooftop lounge. She hadn’t been to a club like that since she had been to LOUNGEsix the night before she and Sherlock began dating, and it was much nicer to go this time under better circumstances.

Molly had a bit more to drink than she usually did, though not so much that she was drunk, and it was late when they returned home and even later when they finally went to sleep, deciding to spend some time pleasuring each other, and so the general idea had been to sleep in as late as possible on Saturday. When her mobile rang at the ungodly hour of nine AM she groaned as she lifted her head off of Sherlock’s bare chest. “I’m going to murder whomsoever is calling,” she said.

“Ignore them,” he murmured.

“What if it’s an emergency?” she asked.

“Still ignore them,” he said.

She debated it and then sighed and pulled away from him and answered her mobile. “Yes?” she asked pointedly.

There was a pause. “You were so in the middle of something, weren’t you?” Jason said. “Oh my god, please tell me you weren’t getting laid.”

Despite her annoyance, Molly smiled slightly as she sat up, clutching the blanket to her bare chest. “No. I didn’t go to sleep until late and I was asleep. We were celebrating the end of Sherlock’s term last night.”

“What did you want to ask?” she asked.

“Well, remember how Thomas got the promotion a while back that helped him get the car? You know, how he got the small raise and then after a while he’d get the larger raise? His larger raise kicked in this week and they told him what his new pay was, and we can get a house now. Like, we can own a house. So we were going to go house hunting today. We thought you and Sherlock might want to come with us, offer your opinions.”

Sherlock had sat up at that point, and Molly pulled the mobile away to look at him. “Jason wants us to go house hunting with him and Thomas,” she said.

“Not the way I had planned on spending my day but I suppose it won’t hurt,” Sherlock said, leaning over and dropping a kiss on Molly’s shoulder. “When does he want to leave?”

“When do you want to leave?” Molly asked.

“In an hour?” Jason said.

“In an hour,” Molly replied.
“Fine,” Sherlock said.

“Can Sherlock drive?” Jason asked. “Right now we don’t want to lose the spaces we have here at the complex since parking is a bitch on the weekends. And I know his car has GPS.”

“Jason wants to know if you can drive,” Molly asked.

Sherlock nodded. “I don’t mind,” he said. “But he has to treat us to breakfast.”

“Tell him I heard that and I said that’s fine,” Jason said. “If you guys want to come get us soonish we can go to Snooze since I know you haven’t gotten to go there yet.”

“He says that’s fine and if we go get them soon we can go to Snooze since we haven’t gotten to go there yet,” Molly said.

“That sounds fair,” Sherlock said. He pulled away from Molly and got out of bed. “I’ll go start our shower.”

“Go have fun in that shower and we’ll see you when we see you,” Jason said with a chuckle.

“Pervert,” Molly said with a laugh before hanging up. She set her mobile on the nightstand and then stretched for a moment as she watched Sherlock walk stark naked to the loo, grinning at the sight. She had the feeling even though plans had changed from what they had been, it was going to be an interesting day nonetheless. After a moment, she got up and went into the loo to join Sherlock, and after a shower with only the minimum of fooling around they quickly got dressed. Once they were dressed they got in Sherlock’s car and Molly called Jason to let them know they were on the way. When they arrived outside the building Jason and Thomas were outside, and they got into the backseat. “So, how many houses are we looking at today?”

“Four,” Thomas said. “Possibly five. We haven’t really come to an agreement on what we want.”

“We can afford a decent place, but unfortunately, most decent places would mean we would need to rent,” Jason said. “To buy most places would be out of our price range. But there were five that were within our budget.”

“Buying in Hillcrest is bloody expensive for a three bedroom,” Thomas said as he shook his head and Sherlock drove them towards the restaurant. “We didn’t realize quite how much, and it’s best if we stay here for my job.”

“And we need three bedrooms for Thomas to have an office and us to have a room when we get around to having a kid of our own,” Jason said. “We’ve talked about it a bit. We only really want one for now. Maybe we’ll decide we want a second one down the line later, but one is enough for now.”

“Are you still going the surrogacy route?” Molly asked.

“Well...” Thomas said. “Possibly not.”

“Oh?” she said.

“Remember Isabella, from our wedding?” Thomas said. Molly nodded. “She’s preggers, but she doesn’t want the baby. But she’s willing to go through with the pregnancy if we want the baby. And we’re thinking we do.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful news!” Molly said, turning in her seat to look at her friends. “How far along is
“Six months,” Jason said. “She had planned on giving the baby up for adoption to another couple but it fell through, and we got to talking and she just asked us and we told her a few days ago that we’d have to think about it but if we can find a home we’ll tell her yes. It will be an open adoption so she’ll be involved, but that’s why we’re hoping to find a place today. Sooner we find a place, sooner we can get the ball rolling on all of this.”

“Congratulations,” Sherlock said. “If you need help with anything today, I’ll be willing.”

“Thanks, mate,” Thomas said.

They lapsed into a more general conversation as they made their way to Snooze, and once they got inside they got a table and looked at the menu to decide what to eat. Molly had to admit so much of the menu looked good, but in the end she went with the Pineapple Upside Down Pancakes and a side of hash browns and one egg and for the hell of it had one of the boozy coffee drinks, a Mayan Mocha, since she was a wee bit hungover from the alcohol she’d consumed the night before. Overall she was greatly impressed and decided to add it to her list of places to come back to, especially when she found out the menu was seasonal.

When they were done they got back in the car and Jason gave Sherlock the address for the first home they were to visit. When they arrived Molly could tell both Jason and Thomas were disappointed and she should have realized that was going to be a running theme for the day. At most of the places they visited, there was something that would disappoint one or both of the two men, and, in the end, they would leave, even more disheartened. By the time they had gotten done with the fifth home Thomas looked absolutely defeated. “This was a bloody waste of a day,” he said with a sigh. “There isn’t a single place in the whole bloody city that will work for us.”

“Just one more?” Jason pleaded. “I know it’s more expensive, but...”

Thomas looked at his husband and then nodded. “All right. One more,” Thomas said. “Where is it?”

“On Herbert Street,” Jason said. He leaned over and gave his husband a kiss. “You’re the best.”

“Well, just remember. We can’t go over $3,700 a month for the mortgage,” Thomas said.

“Trulia says it’s only $3,686 a month,” Jason said.

“This must be a really nice place,” Thomas said, raising an eyebrow.

“Three bedrooms, four baths, garage, balcony area with a fireplace, contemporary design which you’d like, bold paint colors, hardwood floors, lots of windows, granite counter tops...” Jason moved away slightly and pulled out his mobile phone and after a minute pulled up a listing. “I may have scheduled us a viewing at four.”

Thomas took his husband’s mobile and flipped through the pictures, nodding at each one.

“This...actually doesn’t look bad,” he said approvingly. “Yeah, I think we can go to the showing.”

Molly looked over his shoulder. “Oh, that does like nice.” Then she turned to Jason. “Tell us how to get there and we’ll go now.”

“I have the exact address for the GPS,” Jason said.

“Give it to me,” Sherlock said as they headed towards his car. Once they were inside, Jason gave Sherlock the address and he keyed it into the GPS, and then they were off. It didn’t take them long to
pull up to a duplex, and Molly looked up at it with wide eyes. Sherlock gave it an approving nod. “Impressive.”

“Hopefully the inside holds up to the pictures,” Jason said. He and Thomas went up to the estate agent and chatted for a moment, and Molly and Sherlock hung back.

“I’m glad it was easier for us,” Molly said, leaning into him slightly.

“Oh yes. Not that this hasn’t been interesting but this wasn’t how I had planned on spending my first weekend of freedom,” he said, wrapping his arms around her and setting his chin on her head. “I didn’t realize the two of them would have such different taste when it came to a home to share. I wonder how on earth they managed to agree on their apartment.”

“Possibly it was a matter of necessity,” she said with a chuckle. “That can be the only thing I can think of. I love the two of them, but they are really like oil and water on this.”

“Well, hopefully this place will be perfect for them,” he said. The estate agent moved to let Jason and Thomas into one side of the duplex and Sherlock let Molly go and reached over for her hand and they followed them. The photos of the home didn’t do the house justice; it was bigger than she had realized and so much better lit, and the colors of the walls were so much more vibrant. To be honest, if she didn’t love her own home so much she would have loved to own this place.

It was fairly obvious that Jason and Thomas loved this place as well, by the wide smiles on their face. Smiles that were only dimmed when the estate agent told them how many other people were interested. Sherlock stepped forward at that point. “How eager are the owners to sell?”

“Quite eager,” the estate agent said. “It’s been on the market for months and it’s only been since the price was lowered that the interest was piqued.”

“What was the original price?” he asked.

“$869,000,” the agent said.

Jason looked over at Sherlock with wide eyes. “You already bought me a car, you can’t buy us a house,” he said.

Sherlock shook his head. “No. I was simply considering offering the difference between the original price and the current price in cash if they’d sell to you. As a bonus, perhaps.”

The estate agent looked at Sherlock. “Can you do that?” he asked.

Sherlock nodded. “If not cash, then a cashier check. But either way, they can have the original full asking price with $100,000 within twenty-four hours if they’ll sell to my friends.”

“I don’t think they’d have a problem with that at all,” the estate agent said, reaching for his mobile. “Let me call them.”

The estate agent moved away and Thomas gave Sherlock a wide grin. “If they take the deal we really can’t make it up to you, mate.”

“Just don’t ask us to go house hunting with you again,” Sherlock said, and Molly stifled a giggle.

“Is he being serious?” Jason asked her.

She nodded. “Yes, I think so. We honestly think you two would never agree on a place. If you really
like this place, just stay put as long as you can.”

“I can agree to that,” Jason said, looking at Thomas.

“Maybe we’ll toss in naming our first son after you, too,” Thomas said.

“I could agree to that, too,” Jason said with a nod. He glanced back at the estate agent, who was nodding emphatically. “He looks excited.”

“He certainly does,” Molly said as the estate agent hung up the phone.

“Good news!” the estate agent said. “They’ll take the deal. You’re the only ones who’ve offered to pay the full original price and they don’t want to wait and see if anyone else will, so if you want it, this place is yours.”

“Excellent!” Thomas said. He looked over at Sherlock. “I suppose we should go talk financial matters?”

Sherlock nodded. “I think so,” he said. The two of them moved away towards the dining room table with the estate agent, leaving Molly and Jason alone.

Molly went over and hugged Jason. “Your own house,” she said. “You must be so happy.”

“Yeah, it’s pretty cool,” he said with a grin. “I think we can even keep most of our furniture, which will be nice.”

“And there’s room for both of your cars in the garage, which means you don’t have to alternate with guest parking at a complex,” she said with a smile. “Plus you’re actually closer to Sherlock and I, which is nice.”

“It is. And there’s more room for the dogs, too. I mean, there isn’t a huge yard in the back, but there’s room here in the house for them.” He looked down at her. “We totally have to throw a housewarming party with you and Sherlock as the guests of honor. And you have to stay over at least once.”

“Depending on when you throw it, maybe we’ll stay over that evening,” she said.

“I’ll make sure it doesn’t interfere with your job or his school stuff,” he said. Then he hugged her again. “Seriously, though. Sherlock is the best. One day we need to do something really nice for him.”

“Yes, we certainly do,” she said with a nod. She absolutely agreed that they should. The problem, however, was in figuring out exactly what that should be.
Chapter 68

It was the day after Jason and Thomas had asked them to go house hunting that Molly had realized that she had no idea when Sherlock’s parents were supposed to come to California for their visit. If they were coming in June like they had said they would it was fast approaching; it was already a third of the way into June, and so they would be coming any day now, supposedly. Shouldn’t they be getting ready?

She went out to the living room and saw Sherlock was sitting on the sofa, tapping something into his laptop. She went to the back of the sofa and wrapped her arms around his neck, leaning over him. “Soooo,” she said slowly. “When are your mum and dad coming to visit?”

“Did I not tell you?” he said, tilting his head back. “They’re postponing their trip until the end of the month. They’ll be coming on the 23rd. They were intrigued by the idea of seeing the Fourth of July celebrations here, and even though I’ll be doing work for Rachel’s class for the summer break I can still occupy some of their time. Rachel was understanding as she said to put family first. We’ll do the bulk of our work after the Fourth of July.”

She shook her head. “You could have told me that, you know,” she said.

“I’ve been a tad preoccupied with university,” he said.

“I suppose that is true,” she conceded. She let go of him and then moved around the sofa to sit next to him, peering down at his laptop. “Anything interesting?”

“I was considering kidnapping you next weekend for a trip somewhere,” he said. “Leave Friday night, come back Sunday night.”

She smiled. “You are always doing things for me and spoiling me. One day I need to spoil you.”

“You already do,” he replied. “By simply being here, being with me. Putting up with me.”

“Is that what you think I do? Put up with you?” she said, her jaw hanging slightly. She reached over and took the laptop off his lap, setting it on the table, and then moved so she was straddling him. He looked up at her as she framed his face in her hands. “William Sherlock Scott Holmes, I love you, unequivocally and completely. Don’t ever doubt that. It’s more than just ‘putting up with you.’ You’re so much different now. You’ve grown so much, and you are such a good person. And I am so proud to be here with you. I want to spend ever day with you, as many days as I can.”

“You mean that?” he asked quietly.

“Every bloody word,” she said with a nod. “And I will tell you over and over until you understand it.”

He reached up and tangled his fingers in her hair. “I don’t need physical things,” he said. “I don’t need things money can buy. If you want to spoil me, just give me you. Just give me your love and your kind words and your assurances and your kisses and you. That’s all I want.”

“You can have me whenever you want,” she said quietly before leaning in to kiss him softly. He used his hand tangled in her hair to keep her close, not making the kiss any more demanding at first, but soon her hands began to move, sliding down to his chest and clutching the fabric of his T-shirt. When she did that the passion of the kiss slowly began to increase as he moved his other hand to press her closer to him.
Soon she was pulling up at his shirt, needing to touch his skin, and he was doing to same with her, moving his hand from her hair to the bottom hem of her shirt. She was inordinately glad she had decided to wear a skirt today, she thought to herself as she realized the direction that this snogging session was quickly moving towards. He allowed her to pull his shirt off first, breaking the kiss, and seconds later her shirt went off in the same general direction. A moment later, after minimal fumbling, her bra was off as well.

Instead of going back to kiss her again he took one of her breasts in his mouth, rolling her nipple with his tongue, and she moaned at that, reaching forward and grasping the curls on his head and tugging slightly. “Oh, God,” she said when he lightly bit down.

When he released her breast from his mouth he murmured “Turnabout is fair play.”

She gave him a mock glare which disappeared when he repeated his actions on the other breast, adding his hand to the mix by slipping one of them into the front of her knickers and beginning to palm her sensitive parts. She lifted herself up to give him room to maneuver, feeling herself get wetter the more he teased her. She wished there was something she could do to tease him but the sensations she was feeling were quite overwhelming and she desperately didn’t want him to stop.

In the end, she took one of her hands and kneaded her other breast, tilting her head back slightly, a low moan almost continuous in her throat. When he inserted a finger inside her the moan got louder and he pulled his mouth away, shifting to tease her neck. “Tell me what you want,” he said, nipping at her pulse point.

“I want you to take me,” she said.

“You can be more vulgar than that,” he said, slowly inserting another finger inside her. Oh, he was being a demanding arse but bloody hell if it wasn’t a turn on. “Now tell me what you want.”

“I want you...oh!” she said as she felt her orgasm begin. “Oh please, don’t stop, Sherlock. Don’t stop.”

“I won’t stop,” he said, continuing the in and out motion of his finger and the motion of his thumb on her clit. He kept teasing her until her orgasm washed over her, and when it was over she felt herself go boneless. “You liked that?”

She nodded. “Yes.”

“Was that enough?” She shook her head and, still raised up, reached for the waistband of his trousers and undid them, then lowered the zipper. She knew for a fact today he hadn’t bothered to put on his pants, and was satisfied a moment later when his cock was freed. She stroked it a moment, eliciting a groan from him, then lifted herself up and positioned herself before lowering herself onto his cock, taking him in. “God, Molly,” he said.

She took him in as deep as she could, moving slowly, and then raised herself up. Soon his hands were on her hips, and then next time she lowered herself he lifted his hips up as he pushed her down and she gasped at how deep he went. He let her set the pace and she rode him slowly at first, but soon she could see he was close. At that point she rode him hard and fast and oh lord, it was incredible. She felt another orgasm begin to start, and just as she came she felt him stiffen and he held her in place for a long moment before sinking bonelessly back onto the sofa. She leaned forward and kissed the tip of his nose. “That was not how I had intended my question about your parent’s visit to go,” she said before resting her forehead against his.

“I think that was a much better outcome to the question than anticipated,” he said with a smile,
stealing a quick kiss. “Certainly a more enjoyable one.”

“But a messier one,” she pointed out.

“Then I suppose we’ll have to take a shower or a bath and get each other clean,” he said.

She pulled back and looked at him, raising an eyebrow. “Already?” she asked.

“You underestimate the appeal your naked figure has on my libido,” he said before pulling her in for another kiss. She wasn’t quite sure if anything at all would get done today, if they would even leave the bedroom once they went there, but if they didn’t? She didn’t suppose it would be a bad thing at all...
Chapter 69

She had been on break at her post a week later and chatting with Mary on Facebook when Mary asked if it was all right to call her. Molly said it was fine and soon her mobile was ringing with a call from Mary’s home phone number. “So what was it that you couldn’t tell me via Facebook IM that was so important you had to call?” Molly asked, leaning back in the chair she was sitting in in the break room.

“John finally got a decent amount of time away from the surgery,” Mary said. “And we were thinking of taking a holiday. Perhaps...a holiday abroad?”

“Oh, that sounds lovely,” Molly said. “Where to, exactly?”

“Sunny California?” Mary said in a teasing voice. “You and Sherlock talk about it so much, John said he wants to see for himself what all the fuss is about. I mean, I know we can’t stay with you if we want to stay for the Fourth of July holiday, obviously, but we can be in the area. And William’s old enough that a long flight like that...well, I think he can handle it.”

She grinned even though Mary couldn’t see her. “It’d be lovely to have you here. I mean, chances are by then I’ll be back to full-time so you’ll see more of Sherlock than me, but you will see me. When were you thinking of coming?”

“Well, Sherlock told John his mum and dad were coming on the 23rd, which is coincidentally when we were thinking of arriving,” she said. “Though also perhaps on the 24th. But we get three weeks, I think, and his parents are only staying for two, yeah?”

“Yes. His father is still a bit weak, even after all this time, so he didn’t want to stay away from home too long. But they were going to leave their return date a little open-ended, just in case the weather here does him well. Or at least they will if everyone gets along, though Sherlock has said after almost losing his father he seems to be on better footing with both his parents. And, to an extent, even his brother.”

“I never thought I’d live to see the day,” Mary said with a laugh. “Well, if you can grab an extra day off here and there to show me all the wonderful places you like to go, I’ll be pleased.”

“I will try, but no guarantees,” she said. “It all depends on when I’m deemed okay to go back to work full time. For all I know, it may not happen until the middle of July, which would benefit you.”

“Well, here’s hoping.” Molly could hear a baby cry in the background and then Mary let out a small sigh. “William needs me. I need to run, but I’ll see you on the 23rd, all right, love?”

“All right,” Molly said. “Bye.” She hung up and then tapped her mobile on the table slightly. Sherlock had a saying about coincidences, mostly that there was no such thing. The fact that John and Mary and their son would be visiting at the same time as Sherlock’s parents wasn’t planned, was it? It certainly would make things easier, entertaining out of town guests at the same time, if everyone wanted to do the same sorts of things. And she had the feeling they all would. But she had to wonder if something was being planned here. Maybe it was a surprise for her and Sherlock’s first anniversary. If that was the case...well, she wasn’t about to spoil it. It would be nice to have old friends with new anyway.

Soon her break was over and she had to get back to the short end of her shift. Her days were going by quickly being on three-quarter time, and she did rather hope she stayed on it until after her guests
went back to England. That way she could spend more time with them. She made her way back to
the house and wasn’t surprised to find Sherlock and the dogs gone when she got there. Three
puppies with three tiny bladders and eyes wider than their stomachs meant they were walked quite
often, and as Sherlock seemed to enjoy that activity he did it more often, though she snuck in her fair
share of it as well. She could see he had nothing out for dinner so she assumed either they were
going out to eat or they were ordering in.

She had just finished changing into something more comfortable when she heard the front door open
and close and the excited barking of three puppies fill the home. She went out and saw Sherlock
leaning down to take Persephone, Hades and Faraday off their leashes so they could run around the
living room. “Did you enjoy your walk?” she asked with a smile once he got the leash off the last
puppy and they all came over to her. She knelt down and began showing them love and attention.

Sherlock nodded. “I did. It will be quite interesting as they get older. I get the feeling the pulling
might wrench my arms out of my sockets.”

She laughed and sat on the floor instead of kneeling and let Persephone crawl into her lap to have the
area behind her ears scratched. A moment later, Sherlock sat down next to her and began to stroke
Hades’s fur as Faraday tried to get under his hand. “I’m glad we kept all three of them,” she said.

“As am I,” he replied. “Though I am also glad we do not allow them in the bedroom, despite the
damage done to the bedroom door already.”

“What damage?” Molly asked, turning to look at him.

“Scratches on the bottom,” Sherlock said. “Nothing paint can’t fix. We should start with some
obedience lessons, I think.”

“That could be interesting,” she said. “Do we want to do classes?”

He shook his head. “I can learn well enough off the internet and train them myself. With your help,
of course.”

“Of course,” she said. She turned her attention back to Persephone. “Mary and John are coming to
visit us. They aren’t staying here, obviously, but they’ll be here the same time as your mum and
dad.”

“Good. It’s been far too long since I’ve seen them,” he said with a nod.

“So you didn’t know?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

He shook his head. “I merely told John my parents were arriving at the end of the month and if he
were to be available to come visit that might be the ideal time,” he said. “I didn’t think he actually
would be able to get the time to come see me.”

“I see,” she said quietly. Perhaps there was no planning to this, after all, she thought to herself.
“Well, maybe we’ll do something nice with everyone for our anniversary, and then when they all go
home we can celebrate in private. I mean, I doubt we’ll get up to much with your parents in the guest
bedroom.”

“Don’t presume to know just what I’ll get up to while under the same roof as my parents,” Sherlock
said, leaning over and pressing a kiss to Molly’s shoulder. “You’ll just have to be quieter than
normal.”

She grinned at that. “That’s quite hard,” she said. “Maybe I need some practice.”
“I could perhaps give you some tutelage,” he said.

She removed Persephone from her lap and then turned to Sherlock, moving closer to him. “I think that sounds like a good idea,” she said before kissing him. It was going to be quite interesting, these weeks having a full house again, but as long as they managed to have a bit of fun every once in a while she didn’t think she’d go mad.

She hoped.
Chapter 70

That weekend, Jason and Thomas had their housewarming party at their new home. The owners had changed their mind on the price and instead decided to take the reduced price even though they were still getting the $100,000 in a cashiers check, so the monthly mortgage payment was a bit lower than they’d anticipated, which made Jason and Thomas happy. It turned out the owners of the house were fans of Sherlock’s, which had come as a surprise, and they’d take the chance to get the check from him in person instead of the extra money. Jason had said he never realized that his friend’s fame could come in handy but Sherlock had said he was glad to help, so Jason and Thomas had taken a little bit of the extra money to put into rejuvenating their furniture and making their new home look nicer.

Molly and Sherlock had each given a gift for the house prior to the party. Molly had gone with Jason to the Hillcrest Farmers Market and bought him a piece of art for the living room that he had his eye on, and Sherlock had bought them a nice refrigerated wine cabinet for the home since he knew Thomas had a taste for it and they could do a better job entertaining people, plus some vintages Molly had recommended from their trip to Napa to put in it. She had the feeling many of them would be drunk tonight, but probably not by her. She’d noticed when she tried to drink anything alcoholic lately it tasted...off. She was thinking tonight she might try something non-alcoholic. If their friend who had bartended her and Sherlock’s party was the one bartending theirs, she knew he made fantastic drinks with no alcohol in them.

She was wearing a vintage midi dress she had picked up at Buffalo Exchange, a spaghetti strap dress that had multicolor stripes all over it in soft pastel colours, and her hair was pulled back in a knot at the nape of her neck. Jason and Thomas had asked the two of them to come by early to show them around before the rest of the guests arrived, and when they got there with an extra bottle of wine Jason greeted them at the door with his flame red hair streaked with blonde and a black shirt and trousers and a relieved grin on his face. “Oh, thank God,” he said.

“Problems?” Sherlock asked.

Jason nodded. “There was a temporary power outage in the neighborhood. Some idiot got into an accident, hit a pole, so the refrigerator was out. All the food...gone. We're trying to figure out what the hell to do.”

“Can anyone cater on such short notice?” Molly asked, her eyes wide.

“Thomas and I have been on the phone for hours. The power’s only been back on for two hours, but nothing is super cold because it’s been off for five.” He sighed. “And we haven’t been able to cook. But I think we have some stuff sorted. But we need help running out to get things, so an extra car will help.”

“My chariot awaits,” Sherlock said. “And you have at least one bottle of chilled wine tonight.”

“Thank God for that,” Jason said, taking the bottle from him. “Well, Molly, could you stay here and wait for Robert and help him get set up while we run out and get the food and ice and all the crap we need to replace?”

Molly nodded. “Of course.” She leaned over and gave him a quick hug. “Everything will be fine, Jason. I promise.”

He hugged her back quickly and then gave her a small smile when he pulled away. “I hope so.
Thomas already left, so I’ll write down the addresses I need you to hit and then we can hopefully get everything and be back before guests arrive.”

“We’ll make good time,” Sherlock said. Jason moved inside and Sherlock looked over at Molly. “Not quite what we expected, was it?”

“No, but it does seem to be the way things go,” she said with a small smile. “Nothing ever goes according to plan.” She reached over for his hand and squeezed it gently. “But at least they got most of it taken care of on their own. We’re just helping to fetch things and minding the home to let in the people who need to be let in.”

He nodded. “It could have been much worse.”

“Yes,” she said with a nod of her own. “For their sakes, I’m glad it wasn’t. And I have hopes it will all turn out brilliantly in the end.” After a few more moments Jason came back with a sheet of paper. “So I’m only letting in Robert and then helping to set up if any of you come back?” she asked Jason.

Jason nodded at her query. “Yeah. We got everything else pretty well set up, so there’s nothing else to really do. Feel free to have a look around, if you want. If you want to use the wi-fi on your phone, we’re ‘Across The Pond’ and the password is ‘bangersandmash,’ all one word.” He grinned. “Thomas’s idea.”

“I approve,” Molly said with a chuckle. “You two take care of what you need to. I’ll be fine.”

“Thanks.” Jason gave her a quick kiss on the cheek and headed into the garage to get to his car, leaving her and Sherlock alone for a moment.

“I’ll be as quick as I can,” Sherlock said.

“Just promise you’ll be careful,” Molly said.

He stepped closer and kissed her, letting it linger for a moment. “I will, I promise,” he said as he pulled away.

“Good,” she replied. He gave her a small smile and then headed back to his car, clutching the list in his hand. She shut the door behind him and looked around the home. It was definitely decorated to Jason and Thomas’s tastes, and it looked as though it suited them nicely. She was pleased to see they had kept the wall colours the same, as she had quite liked them. She walked around the house a bit, taking everything in, before settling on the sofa and pulling her mobile out of her handbag and logging onto the wi-fi and going on social media. About a half hour later she heard a key in the lock and then the door from the garage opened and she saw Thomas with his arms full, struggling to come in. “Let me help,” she said.

“Thanks, love,” he said as she took some of the packages out of his arms. “I have more in the boot, if you can help me unload it?”

“Of course,” she said with a nod. Once they got what was brought in on this load put down they went into the garage and began to unload the boot, and then a few items out of the backseat as well. When it was all inside Molly looked at it all. “How many people are you expecting?”

“Thirty or so, but some have voracious appetites, including my husband,” Thomas said with a smile. “And it’s better to have too much food than not enough.”

“That is true,” Molly said. “Is there anything I can do?”
“Well, I mostly got the platters for the food,” he said. “Hence all the bags from IKEA. But we can arrange things, and make sure there’s still space for Robert to do what he needs to do.”

“Right,” she said with a nod. “You tell me what to put where and I’ll do it.” Thomas nodded as well and soon he was directing her on where to put things. They were halfway done when Robert arrived, and he began setting up his supplies where he needed and let them know what he would need, most of what wasn’t already there were among the things Jason was getting. Eventually, Jason and Sherlock came back with the rest of the food, drink and supplies and they managed to get everything sorted and ready just minutes before the first guest arrived.

Within a half hour, Molly was sure that the party would be deemed a success. Everyone was very impressed by the house and Jason and Thomas had wide smiles on their faces as they showed it off, and everyone was having a grand time. The upstairs fireplace was an especially well-liked feature, and she had found herself drifting up there to get a breath of fresh air. After a little while, Thomas joined her, sipping a glass of wine. “Looks like this bash is a success,” he said.

“My sentiments exactly,” she said with a smile, taking a sip of her virgin piña colada. “I think this place suits you.”

“I’m glad,” he said. “Though we’ll have to do a bit of rearranging in about three months.”

Her eyes widened and she smiled. “The adoption is going through?” she asked.

He nodded. “Yeah. We reached an agreement with Isabella. When she has the baby we’re going to do a private adoption and she’s going to be allowed to see the baby and we’ll raise him as our own.” He took a sip of his wine. “We went to the sonogram yesterday and it was quite exciting. She says she should have just asked us straight away but she wasn’t sure if we wanted a child when we’d just gotten married. But the other couple was putting on too many restrictions and it was turning into a clusterfuck, pardon my language. She wanted out.”

“Did they make it hard for her?” she asked.

Thomas shook his head. “They threatened to, but a friend of her said if they did she’d bury them in court proceedings for years and bankrupt them, and bring them up on charges to make sure they were deemed unfit to ever take in a child. That got them to back off.”

“Bloody hell. What kind of people were they?” Molly asked with wide eyes.

“The type of people who really shouldn’t be parents,” Thomas said. “But this child will be more loved by the three of us than he ever would have by those two.”

“They weren’t going to let her see him?” she asked, aghast.

“No,” Thomas replied. “They had said they would, initially, but they started showing her they were going to cut her out. She hadn’t planned on having this child and she knows she’s in no position to do a proper job of taking care of him, but she wanted to be a presence in his life. And we want that too. We want him to know his mother, especially since Isabella is one of our best mates. So we won’t deny her the chance to be a part of his life.”

“I’m so glad,” she said with a wider smile. “So in a few months that guest bedroom is going to disappear and a nursery is going to take its place?”

Thomas nodded. “Yeah. Though we will put it to good use at least once first.”

“Oh?” she asked.
“Yeah. We’re having a friend come by for a visit in a few days. Should be interesting.” He gave her a grin and she swore there was a knowing look in his eyes. “Should be very interesting.” He looked around and then moved away from her. “Well, I suppose I should go mingle again. I’ll talk to you later, year?”

She nodded. “Of course,” she said. She looked down at her drink and then took a sip. Something was going on, she realized. That look in his eyes...that was a knowing look if she’d ever seen one, and that could only mean one thing: their upcoming house guest was Greg. There was no other explanation.

Her friends were planning something.

She was almost sure of it.
Chapter 71

She waited until the next day to confirm her suspicions, as it was far too late to phone the evening of the housewarming party. She offered to take the puppies out on their walk, saying she needed some fresh air, and once she had Persephone, Hades and Faraday on their leashes and she was at the nearby park she waited until they had done their business before she sat down on a bench and dialed Lestrade’s number. She wasn’t sure if he was on call or at a scene or otherwise engaged, but she damn well hoped he answered.

He picked up on the fourth ring. “Molly! This is a surprise,” he said.

“Oh, I just thought you might have some news to share,” she said slowly. “Perhaps about an upcoming holiday in California?”

Lestrade chuckled. “Thomas and Jason went and lagged, didn’t they?” he said.

“Thomas may have mentioned it last night at his housewarming party, yes,” Molly said. “Let me guess: you’re coming on the 23rd?”

“Yes,” he said. “Best day to buy tickets, apparently.”

“Tell me the truth,” Molly said. “Sherlock is planning something, isn’t he? For our anniversary?”

“To be honest, Molly, we all just missed you, and Mary thought it might be nice to go around that holiday the Americans all seem to love. I was planning on staying at a hotel but then Jason said he and Thomas were getting a house and for the time being they had a guest bedroom. Trust me, you and Sherlock are not the only ones who have talked up the festivities of a summer in California since your friends have become friends with us. And if it just so happens your one year anniversary to Sherlock is two days before the Independence Day festivities that Jason seems so eager to drag us to at that San Diego County Fair, then that’s just a bonus.” He paused. “But really, we’ve just missed you. The few weeks in December wasn’t nearly enough.”

“I suppose,” she said. She couldn’t quite shake the feeling of collusion between everyone, but at least the way that Greg was talking about it it just seemed it was a way to make sure all of them had a holiday at the same time so that she and Sherlock didn’t have to take a lot of time away from their busy lives to entertain guests by all coming at once. She supposed that made sense. “So how long are you staying for?”

“Three weeks, same as John and Mary. I have loads of time to take.” He was quiet for a moment. “To be honest, I’m highly considering making the move more permanent myself.”

“What?” she asked, surprised.

“Well, it’s not that I don’t like it here in England, but to be honest, California is quite nice. I know it’s expensive, but I have a tidy sum saved up. I mean, it wasn’t enough to send my daughter to an Ivy League school in the States, but I’ve invested well. And I’m at a retiring age. I could get my full pension if I leave this year. I don’t think I’d live where you and Sherlock and Jason and Thomas live, it’s too expensive for that, but a little further up north...that could be nice.”

She leaned further against the bench. “Do John and Mary know you’re considering it? Does Sherlock?”

“Well, John and Mary do. They understand, I suppose, but I don’t think they entirely like it. But they
do know I have bad memories here, just like Sherlock did. A lot of the same memories, plus other
ones he didn’t. And moving out to a cottage in some village somewhere doesn’t really appeal to me.
So I was going to nose around a bit while I was out there this time, see some of the other cities in my
spare time, see if there are places that appeal to me. Oceanside was quite nice, actually, when we
went up there. Wouldn’t mind a place nearby the beach.”

“It’d be nice to have you here,” she admitted. “But are you sure?”

“Not entirely, but I’m getting closer every day,” he said. “But it’s still a time off. Can’t officially
retire until October anyway, so I have a little while. So there’s time for me to be talked into or out of
things.”

“Well, you know Jason and Thomas will try their damnedest to talk you into moving here,” she said
with a smile.

“I know. And I think they’ll be quite persuasive. We’ll just have to be how persuasive Mary is at
talking me into staying.” There was a faint noise on his end and then he spoke again. “Have to dash.
There’s a break in my case. But I’ll see you soon, alright?”

“Alright. Be careful on the case, alright, Greg?”

“I will. Promise,” he said.

Molly hung up then and then gathered up her puppies leashes in her hand and began to make her
way home, her head swimming slightly. Greg was thinking about moving to San Diego County? Not
that she wouldn’t be happy to have him here, but that was quite a bit of a shock. She hadn’t realized
he was quite so close to retirement, or that he was actually considering it. Maybe she was more
disconnected with her old friends than she had thought. Maybe she should stop worrying about
whether this was all some elaborate plan of some sort and simply take the opportunity to reconnect.

She let herself in to see Sherlock at the stove top, cooking something. She let the puppies off their
leashes and then came over and embraced him from behind for a moment before kissing his cheek.
When she pulled away he gave her a quizzical look. “Not that I mind, but what was that for?”

“For somehow suggesting that all of our friends come visit at once,” she said.

He looked at her for a long moment. “So you don’t mind?” he asked slowly.

She shook her head. “I’ll see if I can stay on three-quarter time until everyone goes home so I can
spend as much time with them as possible. And I’ll see if I can ask for one or two extra days off as
well. It’s not often we’re all together and we should make the most of it.”

“I’m glad you feel that way,” Sherlock said, and it was obvious he felt relieved. There must have
been some plan of some sort, but it didn’t matter now. She was going to make sure she enjoyed as
much of her friend’s visit as she possibly could. “Lunch should be ready soon. I thought I’d try my
hand at making fajitas with the meat you had marinating and then taking you out for dinner tonight.”

“Sounds perfect,” she said with a smile before giving him another quick kiss on the cheek. Whatever
his plan was, she would make sure she was pleased by it, so long as it wasn’t anything that was
overly embarrassing. He’d put in some effort, after all. It was the least she could do.
Soon the 23rd rolled around and it was time for everyone to arrive. It appeared, however, that none of them were taking the same flights, which was unfortunate, and would necessitate multiple flights to Lindbergh Field. His parents would be arriving first on a 2:55 flight on British Airways, Lestrade would be arriving at 4:39 on a flight from Iberia airlines and John and Mary would be arriving last at 6:35 PM on a nonstop flight on British Airways airlines. Molly had gone back to a half shift that day to make sure she was off work by 12:30 so that she could be at the airport with Sherlock to meet his parents and get them situated at their home before going back to Lindbergh Field with Jason and Thomas to meet Lestrade and then dropping the three of them off at her home and picking up Sherlock to get John, Mary and William to drop their things off at their hotel before having dinner at their home. It was going to be a long afternoon, and she hoped everyone was up for it, but she was quite excited to see everyone again.

She met Sherlock at the house and the two of them drove in his car since it was a smidge bigger, and they made their way to the gate where his parents would be arriving. It didn’t take long for them to de-board, and they greeted Sherlock and Molly with hugs. Sherlock hugged them back a bit awkwardly but Molly hugged them back enthusiastically, quite glad to see them. “Welcome to San Diego,” she said warmly.

“Oh, it was such a horrible flight,” Sherlock’s father said. “The food was absolutely ghastly.”

Sherlock looked over at Molly. “Do you have time to get a bite with us before you meet up with Jason and Thomas?” he asked.

She nodded. “If we stick close to downtown you can always just drop me off back here and I can catch a ride with them to the house.”

“Then we could go somewhere nice for lunch, I suppose,” Sherlock said thoughtfully. He pulled out his mobile and began looking through some search results. “If you’re in the mood for Mexican, Coasterra sounds promising.”

“I think that sounds lovely, dear,” his mother replied with a smile. “There are Mexican restaurants in England but I doubt they’ll hold up to more authentic Mexican food.”

“That works for me,” Molly said. “If I go with you I can just meet Jason and Thomas at one of the coffee shops here at the airport before Greg’s flight comes in and then we can walk to his gate together.”

“Then let’s get your luggage and put it in the car and head to the restaurant,” Sherlock said with a nod. “I’ll see if I need to reserve us a table.”

Sherlock walked a bit ahead, leading the way, while Molly walked back with his parents. “So how has it been since you’ve come back?” Violet asked.

“Oh, much more pleasant without the paparazzi presence,” Molly said with a smile. “And my arm is healing quite well. I’m back to work at three-quarters time right now, so you won’t see as much of me as I’d like, though I’m swapping some shifts with co-workers while the two of you are here to take an occasional shift for the next few weekends in July and August so that I can have a few extra full days off.”

“Oh, that’s lovely!” Violet said, reaching over and squeezing Molly’s hand. “I can’t wait to spend
more time with you. We didn’t spend near enough time together in London.”

“No, we didn’t,” Molly agreed. Then she turned to Sherlock’s father. “Was there anything you had your heart set on doing?”

“I wanted to go see some of those splendid museums that you have here,” he said.

“Oh, we can definitely do that,” Molly said with a nod. “On Tuesdays certain museums have free admission during the summer, but we can go to whatever ones you want on whatever days you want.”

“And the beach as well?” Violet asked.

“I’ll have to make sure we go to Mission Beach, then,” Molly said, smiling. “It’s got a nice little beach-side amusement park with a boardwalk of sorts.”

They continued chatting and Sherlock joined them when he was done with his call, and then they got his parents luggage and they made their way to his car in the short term parking. Once they were settled he drove them to the restaurant on Harbor Island Drive, and they went inside to be immediately greeted with wonderful smells. “Oh, this smells divine,” Violet said.

“Common trait of Mexican food establishments,” Sherlock said.

“And you never get tired of it?” his father asked.

Sherlock shrugged slightly. “Not noticeably. I do have my favourites from the local restaurants, though I don’t think I’ll find them here.” He motioned to the patio. “Patio dining only at the moment. There was no need to make a reservation for it. We’re a bit early for Happy Hour, but it will be starting shortly.”

“With a view like that, I don’t mind,” his father replied.

Molly looked at her watch. “I may miss Greg’s flight,” she said, biting her lip.

“Well, we could always text Jason and Thomas and tell them to join us,” Sherlock suggested.

“Let me do that,” Molly said with a nod. She pulled her mobile out of her handbag and sent a quick text to Jason, and a few minutes later got a text back. “Jason said that’s fine. Thomas has had a long day at work and he’d enjoy a cocktail.”

“Oh, one of those sounds heavenly,” Violet said with a smile.

“Feel free to order whatever you’d like, Mum,” Sherlock said. “I’ll make sure to get us a table big enough to accommodate three more guests.”

Sherlock went to go speak to someone about getting a table for seven on the patio, and when it was arranged they went and sat down. Molly looked at the menu and decided to get ceviche de mariscos for her appetizer, but when she looked at the drinks her stomach lurched again, as it had at Jason and Thomas’s party. That was odd. She ended up asking if there was a way they could make non-alcoholic versions of some of the cocktails, and when she was told they could she had a Strawberry Sueno margarita. She saw Sherlock give her a strange look for a moment but then look away as he placed his own order.

Eventually, the others joined them and she gave Lestrade a huge hug. He looked a bit thinner and more haggard but otherwise not too bad, but the smile on his face when he saw them made him look
as though a few years had melted off his face. He was introduced to Sherlock’s parents and then ordered a few of the appetizer dishes and a draft beer, saying his food had been crap too. He and Jason and Thomas got swept up in the conversation quite easily and time seemed to fly by.

Soon, though, it was time to go pick up John and Mary. Molly looked over at Sherlock. “You know...” she began.

“Yes?” he said.

“If the trend continues, chances are they’ll have had crap food as well, and dinner’s being served now,” Molly said thoughtfully. “You have enough to leave a tremendously large tip on this order. We could stay here and eat dinner here instead of going home to eat since you haven’t had a chance to start anything like we’d planned.”

Sherlock tilted his head. “That isn’t a bad idea,” he said. “Should I pick them up or should you?”

“I think John would prefer to see his best mate,” Molly said with a smile.

“Then I’ll be back shortly,” Sherlock said, leaning over and giving her a quick kiss. “I do hope they’ve got a rental.”

“Mary said they would. Have them follow you here,” she said. She watched him leave. “So, I suppose more drinks and we all hope we didn’t load up on appetizers.”

“Trust me, long flights with crap food means I’m starved,” Lestrade said with a grin. “I’ve got room for a proper meal. And I’m sure Mary can eat more than plenty. She’s at that stage in her pregnancy where it’s quite obvious where she’s eating for two.” He grinned. “Or more.”

Molly’s eyes widened. “What?”

“She’s expecting twins this time around,” Lestrade said with a nod. “But don’t tell her I spoiled the surprise, not that it won’t be spoiled when you see her. She looks like she swallowed a planet.”

“Why didn’t she tell us?” Molly asked, leaning back in her seat.

“She wanted to surprise you in person,” Greg said. “Which I know I just cocked it up, but...I’ve known for a week and it’s been hard to keep a lid on it.”

“Well, I’ll act surprised anyway,” she said. She grinned as she signaled for a waiter to get more drinks for everyone at the table. Mary was having twins? That was such huge news, no pun intended. She was so happy for her friends. It was going to be hectic with a toddler and two infants in the home, but she imagined they were chuffed at the news.

The six of them lapsed into conversation, and about an hour later they were joined by Sherlock, John, Mary and their son. Lestrade was right; Mary did indeed look huge and Molly appreciated even more that she had crossed an ocean and a continent to come and see her. She got up and hugged her friend. “You do not look surprised to see I’m as huge as a house,” Mary said when she pulled away, giving Lestrade a mild glare.

“I tried, I did, but ale loosened my tongue,” Lestrade said with a laugh.

“God, how I wish I could have a drink,” Mary said as another table was pushed to their and chairs were brought over. Once it was ready she sat down while John got William situated in the high chair that was brought to them. “The flight was a nightmare. William was an angel but there was another child who was the devil incarnate.”
“I swear, it was all I could do to keep from losing the last vestiges of my hard earned calm,” John said. “I had thought I’d be prepared if William wailed throughout the flight. Someone else’s child? Wasn’t ready for that.”

Mary picked up the menu and stared at it with an approving smile. “The food just wasn’t top notch, either. This looks much better.”

Molly stifled a laugh. “I knew this was a good idea,” she said to Sherlock.

“Apparently,” he said. “How many more drinks did all of you have while I was gone?”

“Just one round each,” she said. “And we had some more appetizers that we split. Trying to save room and all. I think we’re going to stuff ourselves silly tonight.”

“Well, I suppose the enormous bill will be worth it for a well spent evening,” he said, leaning over and giving her a kiss on the cheek. She grinned at him and gave him a kiss back before turning back to her friends and Sherlock’s family. Yes, this seemed a good start to the visit from all of them, she decided. A very good start indeed...
Chapter 73

When Mary had mentioned William had a fondness for all things aquatic while they were all eating at Coastra Jason had suggested Sea World, having just taken Jamie, Katie and Lisa a few weeks prior for a fun day trip. He said he had a good idea of what the adults could enjoy and what would be appropriate for a toddler, and so he and Mary spent the day before poring over a list of attractions and shows working out a tentative schedule. It was determined fairly early on that the adults who wanted to could go off and spend most of their time at the Seven Seas Craft Beer & Food Festival, which had luckily been extended this year and was going on its last day when they went to the park. For everyone else, there would be various times and places to meet up if they so chose.

Molly and Sherlock decided to stay with John, Mary and William, and so did Sherlock’s parents. Jason had said if William had cooperated it would be nice to stay throughout the day so they could end the evening with a trip on the Sky Tower and get a good view of San Diego at sunset and perhaps fireworks if they were lucky, but if not it would be worth it to try and get as much done as possible. They had started the day at the Sesame Street Bay Of Play so William could have some fun, and a bit later the adults went on two of the major rides, Manta and Journey To Atlantis, and then drifted over to the sea lions so William could interact with them.

Jason had said most of the shows would probably scare William by being loud and noisy, even if he was fascinated by aquatic animals, but there was a cute show about pets called Pets Rule that would be good to see at noon that had cats and dogs and pigs and even an ostrich. Mary had approved of that one and so Molly found herself sitting between Mary and Sherlock in the front by the spouts, with Jason, Thomas and Lestrade on the other side, watching the act with a smile on her face.

“So Jason suggested the arcade next,” Mary said, leaning over and adjusting her hold on William, who was on her lap. “William’s getting a bit tuckered out and there’s a cafe of some sort nearby where we can get a bite, I think, and the boys can go waste their money to try and win all sorts of silly prizes.”

“That sounds fine,” Molly said with a nod. “I’m actually quite hungry.”

“I am too,” Mary said. “And while I could probably kick everyone’s arse at any shooting games if William wants to take a nap that would be the best time to grab a bite.”

“I don’t know,” Violet said from behind them. “If you want to show the boys up at any shooting type games they might have, I can keep an eye on your son for a bit while you do that. My son may grouse for a bit, but I think it’d be worth it.”

“I will not grouse,” Sherlock piped up. “I already know Mary’s a better shot.” He turned to Molly. “We could put a wager on it between you and Lestrade, however. He doesn’t know how good you are.”

“That’s just mean, Sherlock,” Molly said, swatting at his shoulder. “I forbid it.”

“Take away all my fun,” he said.

“Well, I’m sure there’s some game there you can beat the odds of to win me a ridiculously huge stuffed animal at,” she said with a smile. “Unless you want to wait for the fair, since Jason said he wants us all to go for the Fourth of July.”

“But why only get you one stuffed animal when I can get you two?” he said with a grin.
She shook her head and then leaned over and kissed his cheek. “You’re incorrigible,” she said with a chuckle.

“If we don’t eat our evening meal at the park, where do we want to go?” Violet asked Sherlock.

“I was thinking Flavors of Mayura,” he said. “It’s supposed to be good for groups, and as I’ve eaten there before I know the Indian cuisine is very good. It’s closer to the Sports Arena so it’s a bit of a drive but not too bad, but I thought it might be nice.”

“Oh, we haven’t been there in ages!” Molly said, her smile widening. “Their meen polichathe is fantastic.”

“I can make reservations,” Sherlock said.

“We’ll ask everyone when the show is over,” Mary said as William began laughing and clapping. “And I think I’m being reminded I should give it my full attention again.”

Molly laughed again and then leaned her head on Sherlock’s shoulder. “You know, I’m glad you colluded with everyone to get them to come here and visit,” she said.

“Are you?” he asked, slipping an arm around her shoulders.

She nodded slightly. “I am. I missed everyone more than I realized. I mean, they’ve only been here two days and already I just feel so much better with them being here, you know?”

“I know,” he said. “Perhaps if we’re able, we’ll arrange for more visits between all of us. Though as Lestrade said, he’s considering moving here, and I have the feeling Thomas and Jason are hard at work convincing him that a decision in that direction is in his best interest.”

“It would be nice having him here,” she said. “Then we just have to convince John and Mary.”

“Were you being serious?” he asked.

“Partly,” she said with a soft laugh. “I think it would be harder for them.”

“Perhaps. John is not particularly close to his family, and Mary is alone in the world. They would have to let go of friends, but...”

“Hmm,” she said. She lapsed into silence for a moment. “Would they be happy here, do you think?”

“Possibly,” he said. “I don’t think I would try too hard to convince them, not with Mary giving birth to twins in three months. But who knows? Things may always change. We never know what tomorrow will bring.”

“No, I don’t suppose we do,” she said, settling in next to him and turning her attention to the show. She would love to have all of them here. Whether it could ideally happen or not was another matter but if it could, that would be wonderful. That would be her fondest wish. But for now they were visiting, and she would enjoy the time she had with them now.
Chapter 74

Three days after the trip to Sea World she had an unexpected staff meeting at noon, and as she had to give up her lunch for the nearly two-hour meeting she was allowed to leave early afterward. She relished the chance to have an even earlier day than usual and decided to surprise Sherlock and their house guests. He had said that he and his parents would be staying at home that day as John and Mary were taking William to the zoo and they weren’t interested, and Thomas was working so Jason was taking the opportunity to take Lestrade out to look at various neighborhoods in the North County where he could potentially live. Everyone was going to meet up around five for John and Mary to drop off William with Jason and Thomas so they could get used to “having a little one around,” as Thomas said, and then the adults were going to go out to have an evening of dinner and dancing at Humphrey’s By The Bay.

She changed quickly in the locker room and then went to the front desk, spotting Roseanna. The other woman gave her a warm smile. “Freedom?” she asked.

Molly chuckled. “Freedom,” she said with a nod, adjusting the handbag on her shoulder. “Though I’m off to surprise Sherlock and his parents.”

“Oooh, that sounds serious,” Roseanna said.

“Well, I spent time with them when I was in London,” Molly said. “His father was hurt badly so we spent time with him in the hospital, and then had a very interesting family dinner later when he was better. I quite like his parents. They’re very nice.”

“That’s good,” Roseanna said. “But it must be interesting having them staying with you. I mean, them being around twenty-four seven.”

“I suppose,” Molly said. “We’re just...quieter.”

Roseanna laughed a rather hearty laugh. “I sometimes wonder exactly what that hunky boyfriend of yours is like in bed. You should spill the details over drinks sometime.”

The thought of alcohol made her stomach lurch. “Maybe not over drinks, but how about tomorrow we try and get lunch at the Mexican place down the street at the same time and I’ll share as many intimate details as you want to know. Deal?”

Roseanna nodded. “Deal,” she said with a smile. “You’d probably better get going before someone brings in a triple homicide or something and they decide they desperately need your magic hands, Molly. Have fun tonight, alright?”

“I plan to,” she said as she headed towards the employee parking lot, giving Roseanna a wave as she left. Once she got out to her car she settled into the driver’s seat and then set about lowering the top. It was a lovely day, why not let the wind go through her hair? Before she pulled out of the lot she hooked up her iPod to the car’s audio system and set it to her driving playlist, then pulled out of the lot and made her way home.

She blasted her music and sang along until she was nearly home, about two blocks away, and then she turned it off before opening the garage door as she pulled up to her home. She drove her car into the garage and then parked it before gathering her things and making her way up the stairs and letting herself in. It seemed quite quiet inside except for the telly going on, but when she got into the living room she only saw Sherlock’s father watching it. “Hello,” he said with a grin.
“Hello,” Molly said with a smile back. “Where’s Sherlock and Violet?”

“Conspiring in the guest bedroom,” he said with a smile. “Don’t know what about.”

She gave him a strange look, tilting her head slightly, and then nodded. “Ah. Well, I thought we could go do something. Not sure what, but something.”

“Splendid,” he replied. “They’ve been whispering and plotting like thieves all afternoon.”

“Well, I’ll go see if they’re interested in leaving the house,” she said, turning and heading to the guest bedroom. When she got there the door was partially open, and she could see then looking through a box of some sort, and Violet was picking things up out of the box. Sherlock was shaking his head, but suddenly he started nodding vigorously. She knocked on the door and he started. “Sherlock?” she called out. “I was let off early today due to a staff meeting. I thought we could go somewhere?”

“Oh, um...that’s a good idea,” he said, sounding a bit flustered, and not at all like his usual calm and collected self. He turned and looked at her as his mother moved away, the box in her hand, and moved to her luggage. He came over and put a hand to her side to guide her away from the doorway. “Where were you thinking of going?”

“The meeting wasn’t catered and I haven’t had lunch, so I was thinking Shakespeare’s Pub? We can take John and Mary later, though I know Mary won’t be drinking, but I thought your parents might enjoy it,” she said, her brow furrowed. “What was going on?”

"My mother was showing me trinkets from excursions, things she thought I might want as family heirlooms in the future, should we ever have children,” he said smoothly. She narrowed her eyes slightly. It sounded true, but not completely true. He made a slight waving motion with his hand. “There was also some jewelry she thought you might be interested in receiving as gifts. She approves of you, and as Mycroft will remain a steadfast bachelor to the bitter end, she would prefer for you to have it than his PA. At least that way it will go to someone who is loved.”

“Oh,” she said quietly, feeling surprised. “You don’t have to, though. I mean, I know we have plans for a future, but--”

“It’s what she wants,” he said quietly, stopping and turning to face her. “I was simply telling her which pieces I knew you would appreciate most. She’ll give them to you later, but you mustn’t tell her I told you.”

“All right,” she said. He leaned in and kissed her softly, but something didn’t feel quite right. There was a sense of almost reservation in the kiss. He was keeping something from her, she could tell.

The question was, what?
The more days went by, the more of a feeling Molly got that everyone was conspiring about something. She had the feeling that come the day of her and Sherlock’s one year anniversary, she was, most likely, going to end up with a marriage proposal. And she didn’t mind that, because she did love Sherlock and she wanted nothing more than to spend the rest of her life with him, but she just wished everyone would stop acting so damn secretive about things. She was this close to ruining the surprise if people didn’t stop acting so shifty about it.

The Saturday before their anniversary the decision was made to take everyone to Belmont Park. She had realized in the entire year or so that Sherlock had been in San Diego she had mentioned the amusement park to him multiple times and never managed to convince him to go, so the excuse of having friends and family there who had never gone either was the perfect enticement. She had gone a few times in the past few months with Jason and Thomas but Sherlock had always been too busy to enjoy the roller coaster and the games and the attractions there, so she was sure everyone would have a good time, especially if it was capped off with some time at Mission Beach and a dip in the ocean.

She had bought a new swimming costume a month prior and put it on and realized it felt a little snug. She had been eating a bit more than usual, because she’d felt more voraciously hungry these days, and that saddened her. With a sigh, she tugged down the tankini top to cover the slight pudge around her midsection. Sherlock took that opportunity to come up behind her and slide his arms around her waist. “You look fine,” he said.

“It doesn’t fit right,” she said with a frown.

He looked over at her. “Has your cycle been regular?” he asked.

She nodded. “I haven’t missed one, if that’s what you mean. I mean, it’s been lighter, but it hasn’t stopped.”

“Then perhaps it’s just overindulgence in good food,” he said. He pressed a kiss to her neck. “Though if you were, it wouldn’t be a bad thing.”

“But you have plans,” he said. “You have another year at least for your Masters. Or two, if you switch tracks. And then your doctorate...”

“I can petition to go to university part time if you end up with child,” he said, swaying from side to side slightly, pulling her with him. “They don’t usually allow it but if you choose to return to your post I would take the lengthier time to get my degrees to spend time parenting. There must be a creiche nearby the campus that we could agree on for our child. Or if Lestrade moves here, he might volunteer to help. We have options. We would make it work.”

“But maybe I’m not,” she said.

“Maybe you’re not,” he agreed.

She was quiet for a moment. “Do you want me to be?” she asked, turning in his arms to face him.

“I wouldn’t mind if you were,” he said. “The idea of fatherhood is appealing. I see John with William, I see the joy that the prospect of it brings to Jason and Thomas and I find that I would like it as well.” He pressed a kiss to her forehead and pulled away from her. “Whatever the situation is, we’ll deal with it together. Alright?”
She nodded. “Alright.” She reached over for her denim shorts and pulled them up over the bottom of her swimming costume. “Are your parents ready?”

“Yes,” he said with a nod. “We’re all meeting at Great Maple for breakfast and then heading over to Belmont Park. Thomas called and said that he and Jason and Lestrade already have a table for us at the restaurant.”

“Wonderful.” She went and got a camisole top from her drawer and put it on over the top of her swimming costume, and then went into the bathroom and quickly pulled her hair up into a bun on top of her head. It was a bit messy, but it didn’t need to look particularly neat. When she was done she got the bag that she always had ready for beach excursions out of the closet and then went over to Sherlock. “Ready when you are.”

“Your car?” he asked.

“Always best for a beach day,” she said with a smile. She went out to the living room and saw Sherlock’s parents ready in the beach wear they had purchased for them the day before at Fashion Valley when they had gone with everyone because Lestrade had insisted it was the place to go to update wardrobes. “We thought we might take the convertible today,” she told them.

“With the top down?” his father asked.

Molly nodded. “But of course,” she replied, her grin wide. She led the way to the garage and unlocked the doors and everyone piled in, and then she lowered the roof of the car before opening the garage door. It wasn’t that far of a drive to Great Maple, but when they got there they saw John, Mary and William had already joined Jason, Thomas and Lestrade. “Oh, we got a nice spot,” she said.

Thomas nodded. “Good thing we made a reservation,” he said. “That way they were able to accommodate our large party. But we’re here in time for weekend brunch, so we should make the most of it.”

The new arrivals got settled and Molly looked at the menu. So much of it looked good and she had to admit she was starving. She started off with Table Side Powdered Sugar Beignets which she shared with Mary, who was sitting next to her, and then she had peanut butter and fried banana Silver Dollar Pancakes with bacon and two eggs. When she was done with all of that she was still a bit hungry so Sherlock gave her the Potato Scallion Cake that had come with his meal. The conversation flowed well between all of them and they all had a good time, and as soon as the food was done they got back into the cars they had come in and made their way to Belmont Park. Jason had talked about the roller coaster and the laser tag arena and FlowRider and FlowBarrel and the Escapology Escape Rooms, and so the atmosphere among them was one of excitement.

They were lucky to find parking near the amusement park and relatively close to each other, and Molly and Mary went out to the beach and secured a spot on the sand for them all to have that was fairly close to the water but not too far from the boardwalk either. Molly had stopped off at Walmart to get a covering for them so that they weren’t in the sun all day and Sherlock, Lestrade, John, Jason and Thomas set it up before they decided to head to the amusement park with Sherlock’s parents. Molly wanted to go first, but Mary asked her to wait and stay back with her and William for a bit, keep them company, and so the women sat down on two of the many folding chairs that they’d brought with them. “Yes?” Molly asked.

“So how are you?” Mary asked.
“Perfectly fine,” Molly asked, confused.

“How?” Mary asked.

Then it dawned on her. “You think I’m pregnant,” Molly said.

Mary nodded, rubbing her own very extended belly. “Yup.”

“I’m still having my cycles,” she said.

“You can still be pregnant, if you’ve only had one or two and they’re not normal cycles,” she said. “You know that. You’ve been to med school.”

Molly bit her lip. “Sherlock and I talked about this earlier this morning.”

“Would he be upset?” Mary asked.

“No,” Molly said, shaking her head. “He’d be pleased.”

“And what about you?” Mary asked gently.

“I would be too,” she admitted.

Mary grinned at her. “Well, maybe when you get home today you should do a test. You know, make a discreet run to a chemist and go pick one up. Or go get one now and then do the test when you get home. William and I can handle being on our own for a bit.”

Molly chewed her lip a bit more. “Are you sure? I’ll lose my spot.”

Mary tilted her head. “That is true. Do it when you get home, then. Just pop out to the store quickly, buy a test or three and some cranberry juice, take it home to the privacy of your bedroom and then wait and see. And then call me and tell me. I promise I’ll do a better job of keeping the secret than Greg did of keeping mine.”

Molly smiled at that. She knew she should find out. It had been gnawing at her for some time now, and she was nervous, but it was good to hear someone say that they wanted to hear if she was. Finally, she nodded. “All right, I’ll do that.”

“Good. Now come help me get some water in those plastic pails Thomas and Jason were kind enough to bring for William so we can see about making a brilliant sandcastle to impress everyone when they get back.” Mary knelt down to look at her son. “Right, love?” William looked up at his mother with a wide smile and in that instant, Molly realized she wanted that. She wanted that with Sherlock more than anything, really, even if it screwed up any plans they might have for their own personal futures. She wanted to be carrying his child and raise that child with him even if it took a few extra years for him to finish his degrees and even if it meant she left forensic pathology behind for good. She hadn’t really realized how much she wanted it until she really thought about it but she did want it.

They went about their time to build the sandcastle, and they were joined by Sherlock and his parents first, and then later by John, and then the others. Soon they went to the various food stalls and restaurants to get things to eat and played in the ocean as well. Sherlock was extraordinarily careful with her, she noticed, as though he still suspected she might be pregnant, but she didn’t mind, and then when William began to tire they began to pack things up and started the trek back to Sherlock and Molly’s home to relax there. Sherlock’s parents had said if the little boy still needed to rest he could stay in the guest bedroom.
When they all got there Sherlock decided that takeout would be best and everyone could make use of the master bathroom to clean up, which put a damper in Molly’s plan. So she bided her time, but eventually the extra guests went home and she managed to sneak out to the local CVS and pick up a few pregnancy tests. She came back in and saw Sherlock was preoccupied with his parents, watching a film on the telly, and so she went to the bedroom on the pretense of relaxing with a book for a bit and then went into the bathroom. She drank the juice out of the bottle and looked at the tests. The best bet would be to pee into a cup and then pour it over the tests.

She made her way out and walked into Sherlock. “Molly?” he asked, looking at her, and then down at her hand. She looked down and saw she was still holding one of the tests.

“I thought I should…check,” she said quietly.

He nodded. “Have you yet?” he asked.

She shook her head. “I was going to get a cup to…’ She waved her hand. “Then I was going to disperse it among the tests. Just so I don’t have to drink the whole bloody bottle of cranberry juice. I should have gotten cranberry pomegranate or something.”

His mouth quirked up in a smile. “I’ll get you a cup, and then I’ll wait out here.”

“But your parents…?” she asked.

“They decided it was time to retire for the night,” he said. “Too much sun today.” He leaned over and kissed her forehead. “I’ll be right back.”

She nodded and watched him leave. Soon they would know if she was or not, and if she was, their whole life was going to change. A few minutes late he came back with one of the paper cups that she kept in the kitchen for when she didn’t want to use a cup she had to wash. “Thank you.”

“So now we wait?” he asked.

“Yes, but not long,” she said. “I drank nearly half the bottle.”

“Ah,” he said. He moved away to sit on the bed, and she joined him seconds later. “Why didn’t you tell me you were going to do the tests?”

“I wanted them to be a surprise,” she said with a sheepish smile. “This morning you seemed almost excited, and then Mary and I talked about it at the beach, when all of you went off to the amusement park, and I thought if I was I could surprise you and make you pleased, and if I wasn’t I wouldn’t disappoint you.”

“I see,” he said. “Well, if you aren’t now, do you want to try for a child? Even if we aren’t married?”

“Do you?” she asked, looking up at him.

“Perhaps we should,” he said.

“Maybe we could start tonight,” she said with a smile. “After I empty my bladder.”

“Of course,” he said with a smile of his own. He reached over and tangled his fingers in her hair. “I want a future with you, Molly. We’ve been together for nearly a year, and I want all the rest of my years with you, whether we’re legally bound or not. I want at least one child, preferably two, and I want a life with you and them. Will you allow me that?”
“Yes,” she said before leaning in to kiss him softly. The kiss grew more passionate and would have continued into quite the snogging session but then Molly felt the need to use the loo. She pulled away and reached over for the cup she’d set on the nightstand. “I suppose we’ll know in a few minutes.”

“I suppose we will,” he said as she stood up. She made her way into the bathroom and did her business, and then opened all the tests and used the urine she’d collected to activate them. She bit her lip and paced in the bathroom as she waited for the results, and slowly they started to work. She picked one up and took it out to Sherlock, who looked at Molly. “Well?” he asked.

“Congratulations, Dad,” she said with a wide smile, handing him the digital test. He took it and stared at the small plastic object in shock, and then tossed it on the bed and stood up quickly, picking Molly up and twirling her around. “Sherlock!”

“You’re really pregnant?” he asked when he lowered her to the ground.

“You can go in and look but yes, all three tests say the same thing,” she said with a nod. “I can go have blood work done later in the week but I’m fairly sure I am definitely pregnant.”

He leaned in and kissed her, a passionate, head spinning kiss, and she held onto his shoulders for dear life. “You have no idea how happy I am,” he said.

“I have some idea,” she said with a soft laugh. “So are we telling everyone else?”

He was quiet for a moment. “Let’s tell them on our anniversary,” he said. “Except Mary, since she’s already guessed. Tell her tomorrow. If she hadn’t talked to you about it you may not have taken the tests and we wouldn’t know now.”

“We’d have known eventually,” she pointed out.

“Yes, but not now,” he said before kissing her again, more briefly this time. “And I think now, I want to celebrate.”

“Oh?” she said, sliding her arms around his neck.

He nodded. “Yes,” he said before leaning in again. “I think this deserves some celebration, don’t you?”

“Most definitely,” she breathed before closing the gap and kissing him this time. Oh, she was glad he really was happy, she realized. Yes, everything was going to change, she knew that, but it was a good change, one of the best there ever could be, and they were so very lucky. She was so thankful right now and so happy and life couldn’t possibly get any better.
Chapter 76

The next day was the night before their anniversary and Sherlock decided to take everyone out to dinner in the Gaslamp Quarter. By “everyone” it included even more people than just the visitors from home; he’d invited Aaron, Tabitha and Roseanna as well as Rachel and Winston, and much to her surprise Mycroft and Anthea had arrived at their home that afternoon, saying they were in California for the week on business and Mummy had requested they have supper with them at least once and tonight was the only evening their schedule was free.

Something was going to happen tonight, but she assumed it was tonight that Sherlock was going to tell everyone they were expecting a child so she didn’t mind too much. She’d been brimming with excitement at sharing the news since the only person she’d gotten to tell was Mary, who had been quite excited for the two of them. Mary had promised to keep her lips zipped, even against her husband’s prodding, so she simply assumed Sherlock was going to tell everyone tonight so he could have the satisfaction of seeing his brother’s face in person when he shared the news instead of waiting for their anniversary tomorrow.

They went to Dobson’s Bar & Restaurant, which Sherlock had heard was highly recommended, and when they got there Molly realized that Sherlock had planned this quite a while in advance. They had private dining just for themselves, with personalized menus and floral arrangements and candles on the tables, and private servers and attendants, and the founder of the restaurant, Mr. Paul Dobson, was on hand to meet them and chat. Molly was overwhelmed that Sherlock had gone to all of this trouble, and it wasn’t even their anniversary.

That was when she realized that all of this, even down to Mycroft’s arrival, had been planned in advance. There was going to be something big going on tonight, and she had a fairly good idea what. It all made perfect sense now.

Not that she was about to turn him down, of course.

They enjoyed the delicious food and everyone else except her and Mary enjoyed the good wine that went with it, and she simply waved off the questions with a simple “Not in the mood.” She’d wait for Sherlock to ask his very important question before she revealed her pregnancy.

When they were done the sun had set and they began to stroll along the Gaslamp Quarter. She had been quite surprised he hadn’t proposed while they were at the restaurant, but when they found themselves outside the building that held LOUNGE six she leaned in towards him. “Now I know which anniversary is more important to you,” she said with a grin.

“I thought it was fitting that we return to the place where I admitted I had more than friendly feelings towards you in the anniversary of the day I admitted that,” he said with a grin of his own. Then he turned to everyone else. “I do realize that a certain member of our party is unable to imbibe alcohol at the moment, but there is a reason I’ve brought all of you here tonight. There’s a story to tell. Shall we?”

“If you make me drink coffee tonight, so help me, Sherlock...” Molly teased as they made their way inside to get to the lift.

“I’m sure there should be some non-alcoholic drink you could enjoy while we have the drink you had ordered for yourself that evening,” she said when they got to the lift and he pressed the button to call it to their floor.
“So it’s a rooftop lounge?” his mother asked.

Sherlock nodded. “It has a rather special connection to Molly and I, but if I tell you what it is I’ll get ahead of myself,” he replied. “But the bartenders here are phenomenal and the view is spectacular, I assure you.” The lift doors opened and he studied it. “I think most of you can board this one. Molly and I will get in on the return trip. Get us a nice place to sit, would you, brother dear?”

Mycroft rolled his eyes. “I am not your servant.”

“Please, Mycroft?” Molly asked.

Mycroft looked over at Molly and the glare he was about to deliver to his brother softened. “All right,” he said.

She leaned over and kissed his cheek before they boarded the lift. “Thank you.” The barest blush brushed the apples of Mycroft’s cheeks and the tips of his ears and he turned and got on the lift. She turned and looked at Sherlock. “Now, why are we here all by our lonesome?”

He pulled her close against him. “I wanted some time alone with you. I haven’t had it almost all day.”

She smiled up at him and wound her arms around his neck. “You’ll have all the time you want after you ask me to be your wife. I’ll make sure of it.”

His eyes widened. “What?”

“That’s why we’re here, isn’t it? For you to propose?” she asked with a slightly smug look.

He looked slightly defeated. “It was supposed to be a surprise.”

She laughed and leaned in, kissing him softly. “Oh, Sherlock, it was such a horribly kept surprise, but I do appreciate it. Don’t worry, I’ll act suitably surprised and I’ll still say yes.”

“So you will marry me?” he asked, relaxing.

“Of course I will,” she said. “I want all my years to be with you. I want to raise this child with you, and any more we might have, and when they’ve grown up and left the nest I want to spend the rest of my life going off and trotting the globe with you and exploring new places and being happy with you. However long I have, I want to have it with you.”

He grinned and then leaned in and kissed her again, a leisurely, loving kiss. “I should just give you the ring now,” he murmured.

“And take away from your mum getting to see you give it to me? She’d murder you,” Molly said with a laugh. “No. Do the proposal you planned and I’ll agree and you can put the ring on my finger then.” She was quiet for a moment. “Your parents...they go home at the end of the week, right?”

“Yeah,” he said.

“Could we convince them to stay an extra week or so, maybe?”

“Why?” Sherlock asked slowly.

Molly tapped her fingers on the back of his neck. “Well, with Independence Day in two days, the timing’s a bit shite, but if we were to go get a marriage license, we could get married while they’re here.”
He pulled away slightly. “You want to get married now?” he asked, his eyes wide.

“Why wait?” she asked with a shrug. “Almost all our friends are here. I mean, I’d love for Sally to be here, but I think I could be okay without her. But if we can get the license soon and find someone to marry us, we could have a quick civil ceremony, and then if we go back to London in December, do the big fancy wedding there. I mean, I’ll be as big as a house and all, but I don’t care about that. We’ll already be married, so it’ll be more a vow renewal at that point. Won’t need to do it in a church, really.”

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Quite,” she said, nodding. “Do you want to wait, Sherlock?”

“Not particularly,” he admitted. He pulled her hands down from around his neck and grasped them in his. “If you really want to do this, we’ll see what we can do, alright?”

She gave him a wide smile. “Alright,” she said before leaning in and kissing him again. So she didn’t quite get the proposal yet, but that was okay. She’d get that shortly. But the fact that he wanted to get married as quickly as she did made her quite happy. All that mattered is they both wanted to spend their lives together and they didn’t want to waste time before they made it happen. That was how she knew she had chosen the right man to give her heart to.
Chapter 77

Chapter Notes

Sherlock and Molly's wedding vow came from this website.

It was a scramble to get everything done in time. John and Mary were going back on the 15th and Lestrade was going back on the 16th and none of them could extend their vacation time at all, and with the holiday cutting into the week to make appointments to get the marriage license they were cutting it close. But on the Monday Sherlock managed to get them an appointment on the 13th at three in the afternoon at the San Marcos office. Once the appointment was made they began to make plans.

Jason and Thomas had plenty of friends who had become able to perform marriage ceremonies when Proposition 8 had been repealed in order to perform marriages between gay couples and quite a few who were friendly with Sherlock and Molly volunteered to officiate the wedding. In the end, they went with the same person who had officiated Jason and Thomas’s wedding. Molly had hoped they could get married at the same gardens as Jason and Thomas but there were weddings all day the 14th, but Sherlock managed to be able to pull strings for them to get married in La Jolla. One of Thomas’s friends had eloped and wanted a beach side wedding and recommended a company who did most of the planning, and Sherlock and Molly took advantage of their services to take some of the pressure off.

Even Mycroft did his part, pulling strings to arrange for Sally to get to California as quickly as possible to be part of the festivities. Molly had nearly tackle-hugged her future brother-in-law when he had said that DI Donovan would most certainly arrive in time to be by her side as a maid of honor. Mycroft had not known how to handle that but had taken it with some level of grace. Sherlock had stayed off to the side, trying hard not to laugh too loudly.

Finally, the day was upon then. Sherlock had gone to John’s hotel room the night before while Mary had stayed with her. It had been strange to share a bed with someone who wasn’t Sherlock after so long, but she and Mary had stayed up talking long into the night. She knew the men had had a stag night, though she hoped it didn’t have the same aftereffects of John’s, but due to both her and Mary being pregnant the women had chosen to forgo a hen night, instead staying at the house and watching films of varying ratings and gorging on sweets and decadent food. Sherlock had put his parents up in a hotel suite for a few nights so that Sally could stay in the guest room for the duration of her stay. That was interesting, but she and Sherlock weren’t sniping at each other, which was nice.

Molly eased herself out of bed and looked at her wedding dress. She hadn’t wanted anything extremely fancy, and so she had a strapless gown tied at the waist with a white ribbon the had a skirt that flowed out with a plain lace overlay that had floral lace detail on the edge. She felt quite elegant in it and very lovely, and she was sure Sherlock’s jaw would drop when he saw her. She fingered the lace on the skirt and then pulled the dress away from where it was hanging. Today she was going to get married. It was really a very momentous occasion. She was more excited than she could contain, really.

“I remember that feeling,” Mary said, and when Molly turned she was sitting up in bed. “Just make sure you eat. I was too nauseated from William and nerves to eat much.”
“To be honest, I think I could eat my entire weight in a fry up,” Molly admitted.

Mary laughed. “Let’s rouse Sally and see about making at least a small portion of that much, shall we?” she said.

Molly nodded. “Good idea,” she said. Mary eased herself off the bed and the two of them made their way out to the kitchen, only to find that Sally was already up making coffee. “Oh, you’re a godsend.”

Sally grinned at her. “Still not used to the time difference,” she said with a shake of her head. “Plus my hours are all wonky since my promotion. I mean, I knew it was hard work being a Detective Inspector, but with Greg being on holiday...”

“What on Earth did Mycroft say to get you here too?” Mary said, moving to lean against the counter.

“All my superiors were told was it was a matter of the utmost urgency. It wasn’t until I’d left the Yard that he called and said to pack for California and that I’d be attending an impromptu wedding,” Sally said as the coffee finished percolating. She began pulling down mugs and then looked at Mary, who nodded. “You can have coffee?”

“One small cup a day,” she said with a nod. “I was such a coffee addict that my doctor said it would be detrimental if I cut it out completely, so I can have one cup a day. But today I may cheat and have two. We did stay up awfully late.”

“But it was worth it,” Molly said.

“Do you regret not having a full hen night bash?” Sally asked, beginning to pour her cup of coffee while Molly went to get her creamer.

Molly shook her head. “No. I just feel bad neither of you got to experience one Stateside.”

“I’ve been to more than my fair share of hen nights,” Sally said. “I doubt there would be much difference between one in London and one here.”

“I haven’t been to many but it’s no fun being six months preggers at one, I’d imagine,” Mary said with a laugh. “Besides, I had fun with Roseanna and everyone here last night. Critiquing the porn while they were all sloshed on wine was quite amusing.”

Molly laughed. “Please tell me they all got taken out of here when we packed our guests off in cabs,” she said. “I don’t think I want Sherlock or his parents stumbling across any of those DVDs after the wedding.”

“Are you two having a honeymoon?” Sally asked as she moved away from the coffee so Mary could make hers.

Molly nodded. “After everyone goes back to London, yeah. My co-workers are arranging to give me a week and a half off, and Sherlock and I are going to go to the Bahamas. We figured once I have the baby a honeymoon won’t be an option and everyone’s rather agreed, so we thought sooner rather than later would be a good idea.”

“Very smart,” Mary said with a nod. She poured her coffee in a mug and then went for the sugar. “It’s going to be so sad going back to London, having come out here. I’m almost half tempted to suggest moving out here myself. But,” she said, glancing at Molly’s hopeful face, “it would be a time off, I think, before John would seriously consider it. I mean, with Greg considering moving here and all, and you having a child of your own, there’s more temptation, but he’s solidly British. It might
take a bit more for him to crack.”

“But he might?” Molly asked.

“You once said Sherlock and my husband were platonic soul mates,” Mary said with a slight smirk. “John just happens to be the more stubborn one these days. Eventually, he could be swayed, I think. Especially after enough crap winters and having to watch our children grow up apart. I have more than enough money set aside to support us if need be.” Mary sipped her coffee as she moved aside so Molly could make hers. “There had to be at least one perk to my former life.”

“I’m sure,” Sally said with a small grin. “Well, I suppose we should get cracking on breakfast. We don’t have much time before everyone comes back and the stylists show up to do our hair and make-up.”

“That is true,” Molly said, pouring her creamer into her mug before going for the coffee. She and Sherlock were getting married at La Jolla Cove Park since she loved that park and they wanted to have quite a few people in attendance because over the year or so that they’d been there between them they’d managed to make quite a few friends. They were getting married early in the morning as the wedding and pictures had to be wrapped up by noon since that was when their permit expired. Their reception was going to be held at Georges At The Cove. Sherlock had managed to convince the restaurant to let them adjust the menu slightly since they were having 52 people in their party, even though he’d had to pay extra since they were doing it so quickly and she’d been quite happy with the choices they had made.

It was only seven twenty-six but Sally was right; there wasn’t much time since the wedding was set to start at 10:30. Sally and Mary ushered Molly out of the kitchen so they could cook, and almost no sooner had they done so had her doorbell rang and she went to answer it to see Roseanna there, slightly hungover. Molly invited her in and while Sally and Mary were cooking Molly went to work making a Bloody Mary for Roseanna. Molly had one other bridesmaid who needed to arrive, but the stylists were supposed to arrive at 8:15 and then the limo that was going to take them to the park would arrive at 9:15. Each woman was getting her own stylist team so they thought an hour should be sufficient time to get ready, or so Molly was told. Sherlock was sparing absolutely no expense on making sure she looked as good as she could even though they were doing this so very quickly.

Once breakfast was ready Molly’s other bridesmaid, a fellow pathologist named Heather, arrived, looking much better off than Roseanna, and she joined everyone for breakfast. Molly practically inhaled her food and went back for extra helpings on some of it. When they were finished the doorbell rang again and this time it was what seemed like an entire army of stylists, all of which took one woman under their wing and went to a section of the house to work their magic. Molly, being the bride, got her vanity, and she watched in amazement as they put on her makeup and fixed her hair and made her look like an absolute princess. By the time it was nearly nine she was able to put on her dress, which was her something new, and the diamond necklace and earring set from Sherlock’s mum, which was her something old, as well as the diamond bracelet from Mary as her something borrowed and got a good look at herself in the mirror.

“He’s going to cry,” Sally said from the side in the sapphire blue bridesmaids dress she wore. Molly had found a store that had a line of bridesmaids dresses all in the same colour and fabric but in different styles and let her bridesmaids pick out the ones that flattered their figure best. Mary had been especially pleased by that, picking an empire waist spaghetti strap gown with an A-line skirt. Sally had picked one that resembled a sleeveless cocktail dress with ruching at the waist and a nice but not too revealing V-neck. “If he doesn’t I’ll smack him.”

“No, that’s my job as the matron of honour,” Mary said from the other side with a smile. She held up
the sapphire blue garter belt she had gotten the night before from the women. “Now just slip this on and you’ll have your something blue and you’ll be all set.”

Molly moved to the bed and lifted her skirt up before propping her foot on the bed, and then lifted her foot up a bit to put the garter on over her foot before sliding it up to her thigh. When she was done she set her foot down and then turned. “Now I just need my heels and we can go.” She went to her closet and got her heels, slipping them on, and gave herself one last look in the mirror. She felt she looked absolutely perfect, and she hoped Sherlock agreed.

Soon the women made their way to the waiting limousine and got inside and then they were on their way to La Jolla. It was only then that nerves set in. In less than an hour and a half, she’d be married. She wanted this, she did, but it was all happening so fast, and while she was leaving it in the hands of professionals she was still worried that it would all get cocked up somehow. They’d only just managed to get the license the day before, for Christ’s sake! They’d planned everything in just ten days and there were so many chances for things to go wrong.

Mary reached over and grasped her hand. “It will be all right, love,” she said soothingly. “You’ll see. Your day will go more smoothly than mine did.”

“You promise?” Molly said, turning to look at her.

Mary nodded. “I promise.”

Molly felt a bit calmer at that. The other women chatted but she stared out the window, watching the cars they passed on the freeway as they made their way to La Jolla. When they finally arrived her bridesmaids and then Mary got out, and finally it was her turn. The wedding coordinator met her and told her where to wait before she could walk down the aisle, and she saw everyone other than Sherlock gathered there. Aaron had offered to walk her down the aisle and he beamed when he saw her. “You look absolutely lovely.”

“You think so?” she asked, tears threatening to leak from her eyes. She was so glad she had on waterproof make-up, she really was.

“Oh, you look absolutely stunning, love,” Thomas replied.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you look more beautiful,” Lestrade said with a smile, moving over to give her a hug.

“Sherlock is a lucky man,” John replied with a grin nearly as wide as Lestrade’s.

“Seriously, Molly, you look breathtaking,” Jason said. When Lestrade was done embracing her he moved over to her. “You look even better than you did at my wedding.”

“Oh, please stop,” she said. “I’m going to start crying.”

“I have a handkerchief,” Mary said, moving towards her husband. “If you need it.”

“I just might,” Molly said with a smile. Then she looked at John. “How was Sherlock?”

“Part nervous wreck, part pillar of utter calm,” John said with a grin. “Fluctuated between the two extremes. But now that we know you’re all here and you all look smashing we’ll go join him and get in place and this can all get started soon.” He moved over to give her a quick peck on the cheek. “I think this will go a long way to calm any remaining nerves he may have.”

Molly nodded. “Go reassure him. We’ll see you in a few minutes.” The men went and began to take
their places at the front of the guests, under the arch, and Molly turned to her bridesmaids and Mary and Aaron. She took a deep steadying breath as the wedding coordinator brought the flower bouquets for everyone, and she grasped her flowers tightly. She looked at them all. “Ready?” she asked.

She got nods from everyone and assorted responses and Mary looked at her, taking a hand away from her bouquet to put on Molly’s arm. “Are you ready?” she asked.

“As I’ll ever be,” Molly said with a nod of her own. After a moment a song the wedding march began to play and her first bridesmaids began to walk down the aisle, and then the next, and soon enough it came time for her to make her way down on Aaron’s arm. It was a short walk, she knew that, but it felt long. But the first thing she did was lock eyes with Sherlock. She could see his eyes water a bit, and a wide smile form on his face when he saw her, and the look of love and adoration on his face was enough for her even if tears didn’t stream down his face. She felt a sense of utter calm wash over her as a wide smile settled on her face. When she finally made it up to him she turned and gave Aaron a hug, and then handed her bouquet to Mary before giving her hands to Sherlock. “Hi,” she said to him.

“You look stunning,” he said quietly, grasping her hands lovingly.

“You don’t look so bad yourself,” she said, causing him to chuckle softly.

The two of them had agreed on a non-denominational service, as Sherlock wasn’t particularly religious, and their friend who was presiding over their service talked about love and overcoming obstacles and things like that, and how the art of love is largely the art of persistence and that when you put an effort into making a relationship work it can be so much more meaningful, and then it was time for the vows, which Molly had found online and taken a liking to, and Sherlock had thought were fitting to them.

“Today I make the most sincere promise one heart can make to another,” he said to her. “I vow to be your constant love and support; your devoted partner in life; to allow myself to grow through your remarkable love for me. I vow to be your home; to be your place of comfort and calm; to have faith when our journey is effortless, and when it is challenging. And when we face adversity, we will never do so alone; because today I promise you, my ‘person’ and my best friend, that I will never give up; that I will always believe in us; and that I will love you completely for all of my life.” His grin was so wide when he said those words to her that she was almost afraid his mouth would split, but that was alright because she was worried the same might happen to her.

She grasped his hands more tightly and looked up at him, her heart brimming with love. “Today I make the most sincere promise one heart can make to another,” she said, her voice cracking slightly with the weight of the emotion behind it. “I vow to be your constant love and support; your devoted partner in life; to allow myself to grow through your remarkable love for me. I vow to be your home; to be your place of comfort and calm; to have faith when our journey is effortless, and when it is challenging. And when we face adversity, we will never do so alone; because today I promise you, my ‘person’ and my best friend, that I will never give up; that I will always believe in us; and that I will love you completely for all of my life.”

He squeezed her hands at that and she subconsciously moved forward slightly, and then it was time to exchange the rings. The engagement ring his mother had given him to give to her had been a gorgeous antique gold ring with a diamond in the center and decorated with leaves that had smaller diamonds in them, and Sherlock had gotten them wedding bands in the same finish of gold. John came forward with the rings and handed Sherlock the one to slide on Molly’s finger, and when he put it on he said, “With this ring, I thee wed.” She had never felt happier than to hear him say those
When he was done, John came to her and she took Sherlock’s ring out of the box it was in. Sherlock held up his hand and with her hands trembling only slightly she slipped his ring onto his finger. “With this ring, I thee wed,” she said before looking up at him, smiling so widely she thought she might crack her face.

Then she heard the words she’d longed to hear all morning: “I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.” Sherlock stepped forward and pulled her against him, tipping her chin up. “Congratulations, Mrs. Holmes,” he said.

She laughed, reaching up to caress his face. “Shut up and kiss me, husband,” she replied, and he did just that to the cheers and applause of their assorted guests. She had never felt her heart so full or felt so happy, she realized, and she hoped this feeling never ever went away.

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