The Full House

by Emcee

Summary

When Sherlock asked Molly to help him, she never thought she'd be given a more difficult task. Until what he asked for next.

Notes

Thanks to Pablo and Lexieken for their beta work.
Doctor Molly Hooper had the humility to admit she wasn't a genius. Especially with the number of absolutely brilliant people who seemed to be walking into her life lately. She was, however, fairly bright. Thus it caught her by surprise when she got two important facts wrong in the most spectacular fashion possible in rapid succession. Unfortunately, these erroneous facts were interconnected.

The first was that helping Sherlock Holmes fake his own death would be the hardest thing in the world for her to pull off.

The second was that the most wonderful thing in the world would be to live with Sherlock Holmes.

She had her part in Sherlock's plan. She knew it by heart. She knew not to get a second of it wrong or else the entire ruse might fail. That he had so much trust in her warmed her heart, even though it would mean she would most likely never see him again.

She had gotten that wrong too. Sherlock had been very vague on the details of his plan once Molly's part in it was complete. He had said the less she knew, the safer she would be. He didn't want her to know where he was going after everything was said and done. He had just assured her he would be safe and far away.

So she was surprised when- after helping Sherlock escape Barts and faking his autopsy results-she found him sitting on her sofa, idly stroking Toby.

"You should have a better lock on your door," Sherlock commented impassively, not even bothering to turn his head to look at her. "You are a young, single woman of moderate attractiveness. That makes you a prime target for home invasion and potential sexual assault."

Molly darted her gaze around her tiny flat. "Um." She bit her lower lip. Despite her shock, she felt the flutter in her chest at the notion Sherlock found her to be 'moderately attractive'. "I'm sorry. What are you doing here?"

Sherlock finally raised her head, piercing blue gaze seeming to stare right through Molly. It made her stomach do that odd flip-flop it always did when he was looking at her. "Hm? I have had to revise the scenario of my demise. Even with Moriarty and myself dead, his syndicate may still be targeting my associates. I must keep an eye on them before I leave the country. As you are the only person who knows I am still alive, I will need to remain in your domicile until I can ensure the safety of those around me."

Molly furrowed her brow, several things about Sherlock's statement confusing her. She chose to focus on what in her mind was the most important. "Are you asking if you can live with me?"

Sherlock tilted his head, pondering the situation. "I do not actually recall making it a request. However, I suppose it one of those social niceties I am often told I gloss over." He pulled himself to his feet and moved with a feline-like grace to Molly, leaning in towards her. "Molly Hooper, may I remain in your domicile until I can ensure the safety of those around me?"

Molly's breath caught in her throat and she let out an odd sort of squeak. Why was she unable to get words out around him?

Sherlock's smile was absolutely dazzling. "Good then." He threw himself back down onto the couch, causing Toby to let out a yowl and dash off before long legs squished him. "Make a pot of tea."

"Wait..." Molly put a hand up, shaking her head. "Sherlock, I only have the one bedroom."

Sherlock turned his head towards her as he lay sprawled out on the sofa. "Of course. You have dirty clothes strewn all over your bedroom floor, indicating you have not had a visitor in quite some time, especially not of the male gender. You overfeed your cat to compensate for the love and affection you cannot lavish upon a human- I assure you, it is overrated. There is a bottle of wine on the counter that you take a single glass from every night when you get home- stop feeling so guilty about it, it is your only Vice and a pitiful one at that. You have several messages from
your best friend on your answering machine informing you of her upcoming nuptials and her desire for you to be her Maid of Honour. You should reply, despite the fact you are sick of being a bridesmaid after the five times you have done it previously, judging from the taffeta nightmares you have hanging in your wardrobe.” Finally, he took a breath. Molly wondered how in the world he was able to get all of that out without fainting. "A second bedroom would be a waste of money that would only remind you that you have no one to fill it. You are a remarkably stereotypical portrait of a woman who has resigned herself to spinsterhood. I would rethink getting that second cat."

Molly’s cheeks burned in a mix of utter humiliation and just the tiniest touch of fury. "You went through my things and listened to my answering machine?"

Sherlock looked away and placed his head against the armrest of the sofa. "I was bored. Do not concern yourself with the social implications of sharing a flat with me with only the one bedroom. Even in my own home I prefer sleeping on the sofa. When I sleep at all. How did the post-mortem go?"

Molly was feeling absolutely overwhelmed by the situation and had only just realized she had yet to remove her coat. She finally did, hung it on the peg on the door next to Sherlock's own coat and sank down into one of the hard wooden chairs in her kitchenette. She glanced the bottle of wine on the counter.

"Do not let my presence interrupt your routine," Sherlock crossed his arms over his chest. "But while you are indulging in that plonk... Tea?"

Molly got back to her feet and went to the kitchenette, filling her electric kettle with water before taking out a glass and filling it with the inexpensive wine she favoured. "Your autopsy went fine. I said you had broken your neck and—"

"Not my post-mortem!" Sherlock said irritably, sitting up. "Moriarty’s! You must have been the one who performed it. Despite your previous dalliance, no one would have believed it serious enough to force you to recuse yourself."

"Moriarty’s?" Molly shook her head. "I don't understand..."

"Oh, do stop being tiresome!" Sherlock snapped. "Moriarty's post-mortem would have been conducted right after mine when his body was discovered..." Molly had never seen surprise on Sherlock Holmes's face, but it was unmistakable. It was also a little terrifying. "You have no idea what I am talking about. Because there was no post-mortem on Moriarty. Because his body was never found. As inept as the police force is, they would have examined where I had fallen from in order to discern the entire situation. Which means Moriarty's body was no longer there. Which means he is still alive." He shook his head. "But that is impossible. I was inches away from him when he shot himself."

He raked a hand through his dark, curly hair. "But no. I am him. And he is me. The only person who could have fooled me like that is me. Ergo, he would be capable of it." He raced towards the door, grabbing his coat. "Forget about the tea! I have to go!"

"Sherlock!" Molly called after him. "What do you think you're doing?"

Sherlock had paused in the middle of putting on his scarf. "I am going to investigate. It is what I do."

"It's what you did, Sherlock," Molly pointed out. "You killed yourself this afternoon, remember?"

Sherlock nodded slowly. "Right. I suppose that would make things slightly more difficult, wouldn't it?"

"Just a bit," Molly sighed.

Sherlock beamed at her. "It was getting a bit dull. Good to have a change."

Before Molly could say another word, Sherlock was rushing out the door.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Molly attempts to adjust to having a supposedly dead genius detective as her flatmate.

Molly fretted about Sherlock for the next three days. Of course, she knew he was all right. Someone who so easily faked his own death would have no problem maneuvering around after said death. She had been reading the papers cover to cover to find out if Sherlock had been discovered alive. It was silly of her to do so. Sherlock Holmes still being alive would be front-page news. The papers were still filled with SUICIDE OF FRAUD DETECTIVE.

Molly still had things to do besides worry about Sherlock. She had to complete her part in the ruse of his demise. She had to take care of the unclaimed body that they had used to fill in for Sherlock's still animate one. She made sure the body was boxed up and sent off to the crematorium before anyone got a good look at it. She had stopped by 221B Baker Street to check on John Watson. He hadn't answered. Mrs. Hudson had found her outside on the stoop, ringing the buzzer. She gave Molly a cuppa and explained that John had not taken any visitors since Sherlock's death. She then asked how Molly was holding up. Molly couldn't think of a time she had felt worse. Mrs. Hudson reminded Molly far too much of her grandmother and lying to her—even with the best intentions—made her feel dirty. Still, she did her duty and feigned shock and sadness and all of the other things you're supposed to feel when you've lost someone you love.

"He really liked you, dear," Mrs. Hudson had said as she poured Molly another cup of tea. "I could tell. I know he had funny ways of showing it, but he did."

Molly averted her gaze. "He liked that I let him into the lab."

"Don't be silly," Mrs. Hudson replied. "Brilliant man he was, but he was like a seven year old. The only thing he knew to do with a girl was pull her pigtails."

Molly couldn't help but blush and thought that Sherlock had enjoyed pulling everyone's pigtails. Still, he had said she that she counted and he trusted her. She supposed that was the Sherlock equivalent of liking someone.

She hadn't known what else to say to Mrs. Hudson and had taken her leave of her. She returned to her home, a bag of takeaway curry in her hand. She let out a small start when she saw Sherlock sitting on her sofa, fingers steepled. His normally full curls had been severely slicked back and she saw a hat and sunglasses on her kitchen table, no doubt part of a disguise.

"We know Moriarty is alive, but I haven't been able to find any sign of him. He has gone underground. Very underground. He has spent years cultivating the ability to disappear without a trace. It is likely he will not resurface until he wants to. But what does he want? What is he waiting for?"

"Are you talking to me?" Molly asked, confused as she set her bag of takeaway down onto the table.

"No, I am not speaking to you," Sherlock replied, correctly her not so subtly. "I am speaking to Toby."

Molly arched a brow. "You're speaking to my cat?"

"Hm. Yes." Sherlock nodded. "He is rather more responsive than my skull, but less argumentative than John. I believe I have found the perfect balance at last." He got to his feet and began to pace, walking over Molly's coffee table without breaking stride. "However, I have reached the apex of assistance a feline can give me. What does Moriarty want now?" He reached into his pocket and drew out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. He lit one of the cigarettes and inhaled deeply. "He has already discredited me and he believes I am now dead. What will be his next move?"
"You can't smoke!" Molly exclaimed.

Sherlock cocked his head towards Molly curiously. "I am dead, Molly. I am hardly in any danger."

"That's not how it works, Sherlock," Molly replied. "Besides, my landlord will..."

"Your landlord allows you to keep Toby, meaning he is very lax on the air and cleanliness policy within the complex. He is also growing cannabis in the boiler room."

Molly waved her hands ineffectually before she finally settled on placed them on her hips. "Well... Maybe I don't want my things to smell like smoke."

Sherlock blinked at Molly. "Are you standing up to me?"

Molly let out a small squeak. "I... Well..." She then straightened herself up. This was her home. She wasn't going to allow Sherlock to ruin her things just because he felt like it. "Yes." She crossed her arms over her chest, though the movement was highly unnatural and awkward for her. "I am. I don't want you smoking in my flat."

Sherlock blinked once again. "Interesting." He threw himself down onto the sofa. "You will need to go to the chemist's and get me patches then. I can't walk into shops anymore. I will require ten boxes. For now."

Molly sat down at the kitchen table. "How did you get cigarettes if you're not able to walk into a shop?"

"One of your neighbors is hiding from his wife that he has begun smoking again. He is stashing them on the front stoop." He sighed. "Moriarty has no need to hide. I was the only one who was aware of his apparent suicide and he was able to clear his name by posing as Richard Brook. What possible reason could he have for continuing to hide?"

Molly wasn't sure if Sherlock was really speaking to her or Toby or if he were just speaking out loud. "Well, you said Moriarty is like you..."

Sherlock sat bolt upright. "Of course! It was right in front of me!" He put a hand up in front of his face. "It was so close to me, I wasn't able to actually see it! Oh, that almost never happens. Rather exhilarating. Molly Hooper, you are brilliant!"

Molly frowned slightly. "What did I say?"

"Moriarty is like me. I was able to figure out he faked his death, he figured out I faked my own. Now Moriarty is trying to figure out a way to prove I'm still alive by luring me out using the mystery of how he was able to fake his death."

Molly rested against her hand and looked at Sherlock askance. "How do you not get a headache being you, Sherlock?"

"That was what the morphine was for," Sherlock muttered absent-mindedly. "Moriarty is like me. I was able to figure out he faked his death, he figured out I faked my own. Now Moriarty is trying to figure out a way to prove I'm still alive by luring me out using the mystery of how he was able to fake his death."

Molly frowned. "Pardon?"

Sherlock waved a hand dismissively. "Never mind."

Molly bit her lower lip as she looked over Sherlock. "So... What are you going to do? If Moriarty is trying to lure you out using the mystery of what happened to him, you shouldn't go after him."

One of Sherlock's eyebrows rose slightly. "Or I should find him first."

"But Sherlock..." Molly started to protest.

Sherlock shook his head. "If I don't find him first, if I don't try to lure him out using my own continued existence, then he'll up the game. He'll go after John, Mrs. Hudson... He knows what will bring me out."

Molly frowned deeply. "So you're going to save him the trouble."
“Moriarty and I are playing a constant game of chess. We are both looking at the same board. It is just a matter of finding an opening before the other.”

Molly nodded and smiled sadly at Sherlock. “Does that make me a pawn?”

Sherlock seemed to consider this question. He then turned back to the couch. "I believe I am tired. I suppose five days is a long time to be awake. You should get some rest yourself. You are one of the few in the Pathology department with any idea what they are doing. With me unable to solve crimes your job will be much more difficult.”

Without another word, Sherlock threw himself down onto the couch, back facing away from Molly. She sighed deeply, walking towards her bedroom. "Just don't get yourself killed for real. I'm having enough problems with you being fake dead."

(Art by Lexie)
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

While he attends his funeral, Sherlock gives Molly several tasks-- including speaking to John Watson.

Molly had never paid any mind to the innuendo that John Watson and Sherlock Holmes were a couple. Three weeks into living with Sherlock, she was starting to wonder if there was some fact in that rumour. One would have to be in love with Sherlock to live with him.

He kept odd hours- if he slept at all. He would carry on conversations with no audience save for Toby- when Toby felt like paying attention. Despite her continued protests that he would get himself caught, he persisted in leaving the flat in order to get a lead on Moriarty. He would also snoop in her things and become highly personal ("Molly, you must go to the chemist's to prepare for your upcoming menses."). He barked orders and told her things she was doing were dull or dim-witted.

He was more Sherlockian than normal, if that were possible. Molly knew deep down it was because he was frustrated by his inability to move around freely, to find Moriarty and- most importantly- to see John. But did that mean he had to take it out on her?

The day of Sherlock's funeral finally arrived. It had been delayed to let the furor of his demise die down. It was to be a small ceremony. Sherlock's brother had pulled many strings in order to keep it out of the press. Molly dressed in a conservative black dress, one she hadn't the heart to wear since her father's funeral.

When Molly stepped out of her bedroom, Sherlock looked up from applying another nicotine patch to his arm. "You look nice."

Molly turned red in the cheeks and quickly looked away. "Well... Umm... Th-"

Sherlock pulled himself to his feet and moved in close to Molly. "Why do you look nice? You are not advertising what little assets you have, so you are not going on a date. That dress style has not been popular in about five years, yet it's only been worn once. You have bad memories of that dress. It is black and very understated. You wore it when your father died. You think of it as your funeral dress. Seeing as the only person you know who has died recently is in fact standing in front of you, I repeat my initial question... Why do you look nice?"

After three weeks with Sherlock, Molly had gotten a bit better dealing with the copious amounts of information he liked to heap out in one dose. "Everyone's going to notice if I'm not there. They might start to catch on."

"I thought I was supposed to pretend you are dead," Molly pointed out. "Everyone's going to notice if I'm not there. They might start to catch on."

Sherlock shook his head, turning away from Molly and picking up a pile of paperwork she had brought home to work on, most likely looking for things she had missed. "Everyone knows you are highly emotional and had an infatuation with me. Call John in tears and tell her you were too distraught to attend the funeral." He tossed the papers down onto the kitchen table. "You did not take into account the puncture wounds between this man's toes. It was murder, not a heart attack. Given John's current emotional state, he won't check on you at home. I require you to do something that will be most easily accomplished while both John and Mrs. Hudson are away from Baker Street."

Molly was about to protest that playing with John's feelings even more was cruel, but she didn't feel like having Sherlock argue with her until she relented. "What do you need?"

"I need my violin," Sherlock replied. "As scintillating a conversationalist as your pet may be, my
deductive reasoning has been handicapped by the loss of my instrument. While you are there, you can also retrieve some of my own clothes. The continued donning of clothing a former lover left here is getting to be quite tiresome, especially as he was at least three inches shorter than me."

"That's breaking and entering," Molly pointed out.

Sherlock shook his head. "Of course it isn't." He held up a key. "I still have a key. It is just entering."

Molly took the key from him. "You want me to go to John's flat without asking and take something that he has told me you play at all hours?"

Sherlock just stared at Molly. "I enjoy that our increased interactions have allowed you to stop stammering so much in front of me. You are almost interesting when you are not tripping over yourself." He reached into the pocket of his borrowed trousers— a pair of denim jeans that looked patently ridiculous on him. He pulled out a note. "While you are on Baker Street, I need you to find a boy. He lives on the street near the tube station. His name is Wiggins. Give him this note. It contains a stipend for the continued care of John and Mrs. Hudson I arranged prior to my death."

"Why do you think you can just order me around?" Molly asked desperately.

"Because I live with you," Sherlock replied, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. He thrust the note into her hand.

Molly looked down at the note she now clutched. "Is this what John went through when he was living with you?"

"No." Sherlock replied. "He did not have a regular job. I can hardly rob Barts of its only competent in Pathology."

With a resigned sigh, Molly headed towards the door. As she left, she wondered how it took thirty-five years for someone to try to kill Sherlock Holmes.

221B Baker Street was in an absolute state. It had never been the most organized of flats. Sherlock always had numerous experiments in the works in order to keep himself from becoming bored. When he did become bored, things like the smiley face etched into the wall in bullet holes occurred.

It seemed Sherlock's absence from the flat was even worse than his occupation of it. Half-finished experiments had been tossed around the flat in a rage. Dishes and clothes were strewn all over. John had obviously not been taking care of himself properly.

Molly gathered a few items of clothing from Sherlock's room. She hoped they would go unnoticed. As smart as John was, he was not Sherlock and would not be acutely aware of absolutely everything, especially given his current emotional state.

Sherlock's violin was another matter entirely. It was sitting on the kitchen table, utterly pristine. The case was still open, as if it was just waiting for its owner to pick it up once again.

There was no way in the world John would not notice it had been taken from the flat.

Molly took out her phone and texted Sherlock at the new mobile he had insisted she buy for him. She wrote about the situation regarding the violin. A heartbeat later, she had received her reply:

Take it anyway.

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Sighing, Molly shut the case and slipped the violin into the shopping bags she had acquired to carry out Sherlock's things. This seemed like a bad idea. Then again, very few things regarding Sherlock ever seemed like a good idea.

Molly clutched the bag tightly to her chest as she left the flat, careful to lock the doors behind her. She rushed towards the tube stop, keeping the bags close to her chest.

She stopped when she heard a melodious sound coming from the street corner. There was a young man sitting on the corner. He couldn't have been more than eighteen. He was rail thin and wearing
an oversized, threadbare coat that bore a striking resemblance to Sherlock's own despite the many years of wear on it. He was playing a mouth organ, a ratty looking waxed paper cup in front of him. She knew she had seen him before but had never paid him any mind. Now that she thought about it, it seemed patently ridiculous she should miss him. He stood out, seemed somewhat out of his time, an almost Dickensian look to him.

"Spare change, Miss?" The boy asked as he took the mouth organ away from his lips. "Play you a pretty song for it."

"Are you Wiggins?" Molly asked, knowing what the answer would be before she even asked the question.

The boy looked around furtively before narrowing his gaze on Molly. "Who's askin'?"

Molly fished in her pocket and drew out the note. She placed it in Wiggins's cup. "That's for you." She rushed off, trying to get her Oyster card out of her pocket.

"You knew 'im then?" Wiggins had pulled the note out and read it, tucking the billfold included into his pocket. "Must've trusted you a lot."

Molly considered this statement. "I was his Pathologist," was the only answer she could give.

"I'll keep my boys on Missus, but we 'eard rumblings about the Doc. Might not be able to keep an eye on 'im."

When Molly returned to her flat, Sherlock was pacing the living room, hands clutched behind his back. When Molly entered, he stopped his pacing and turned to face her. "Going to your own funeral is something I suggest every person do. It provides the most honest reflection of the role you have played in the lives of those around you."

Molly shook her head fractionally. "You sent me to Baker Street and made me miss your funeral so you could go yourself and risk being seen by everyone?"

"Clearly I was not seen. It was far more important that I go to my funeral and gauge the wellbeing of my associates than for you to pretend to snivel and cry." He snatched the bags from Molly's hands. "Now I need you to go out, find John, have coffee and pretend to snivel and cry."

"Wh-" Molly brought a hand to her forehead. "But- I just got back from getting your violin!"

"It's irrelevant," Sherlock replied, tossing the bags aside haphazardly. "John told Mrs. Hudson he would not be returning to Baker Street. He will not notice the violin is missing."

Molly arched a brow. "You didn't want your violin. You just wanted to give John an oblique indication you're alive."

Sherlock quickly glanced towards Molly. "Oblique? Good show, Molly. I believe I am having an influence on you. I didn't want him to be certain, but I wanted to give him a sign. Anyway, I need you to find John and find out where he is going if he is not returning to Baker Street."

"Wiggins said something about that," Molly reported. "Said he didn't think he'd have to keep an eye on John."

"He would," Sherlock said distractedly, beginning to pace anew. "He was always one of the most useful in the Homeless Network. Well? Go!"

Molly shook her head. "Sherlock, you can't just... Well..."

"I can't what?" Sherlock asked.

"Well... Umm..." Molly looked down and wrung her hands.

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "I rather thought we had past your stammering when you yelled at me for testing trajectory patterns using your brassiere as a makeshift slingshot."

"You can't expect me to run all over London doing things for you!" Molly suddenly exclaimed. "You already had me commit a felony for you today!"
"I hardly think retrieving my things at my request will get you sent to prison."

Molly huffed out a breath. "Well... You had me fake your death."

"Faking your death is not a crime in of itself in the United Kingdom unless one fraudulently collects insurance," Sherlock pointed out. "I did not have life insurance. I wanted to make sure Mycroft would be forced to foot the bill for the entirety of my funeral."

"My part was illegal!" Molly protested. "At the very least, I could lose my license! Get sacked!"

"Fine." Sherlock smiled tightly at Molly. "Don't do this for me then." He spoke through gritted teeth. "Do it for John. You like John and if you were in his position, you would feel bad, wouldn't you? Make sure he is all right."

Molly nodded. "Fine. I'll do it for John." She picked up her phone and sent off a text message. Five minutes later, there was a response. She looked at it. "He wants to meet me at the café now."

Sherlock threw himself down onto the couch. "I will see you when you return."

Molly turned towards the door.

"You know," Sherlock's deep velvety voice drawled, causing Molly to look over her shoulder. "If the situation were reversed, I'd ask him to look in on you."

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Molly sat in the café across from John. He looked absolutely wretched, dark circles under his eyes, his mouth curved down in a permanent frown. She wanted to jump up and tell him that Sherlock was still alive, was fine and bothering her something awful in her flat. But she knew she couldn't.

"I'm sorry I missed the funeral," Molly murmured softly, throwing in a couple of sniffles. She had forced herself to think of the worst things she could in order to produce some tears. In the end, she hadn't needed to try so hard. The fact she was lying to John and Mrs. Hudson was enough to make her cry. "I just... I lost my head a bit. Was all ready to go." She gestured to her black dress. "I just couldn't... Get out."

"You didn't miss anything," John replied listlessly. "It was only Lestrade, Mrs. Hudson and Mycroft. Mycroft didn't even let their mother attend. Too worried about her. His headstone was revealed. They told stories about him. That was it."

Molly reached across the table and grasped John's hands. "Are you all right, John? Is there anything I can do?"

There was a strange spark in John's otherwise deadened eyes. "Tell me there was something odd about his autopsy. Something you hadn't expected. Something... Out of the ordinary."

Molly pulled her hands away. "John, he jumped from a roof." Her stomach twisted even as she told the half-truth. Sherlock had jumped from a roof, but his autopsy had been out of the ordinary for being completely fictitious.

John sighed. "I know. I wasn't expecting you to say anything different." He looked down. "There's nothing else you can do. I'm afraid I won't be here for you to help."

"What do you mean?" Molly asked. "Where are you going?"

"Africa." John replied. He let out another sad sigh. "I have joined Médecins Sans Frontières. I need to get out of London."

"But John."

John shook his head. "I need to get away for now." He leaned in and pressed a kiss to Molly's cheek. "Thank you, Molly. I'll write you."

Maybe living with Sherlock had influenced her. She could read behaviour better now. She could tell he had no intention of coming back, no intention of writing to her. And as John left the café, Molly noticed he was walking with a slight limp.
Chapter 3
"He must really trust you."
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Molly has an awkward encounter in the shower... And a frightening one at the morgue.

Molly wasn't sure what to expect when told Sherlock John was leaving the country for Médecins Sans Frontières. All she knew is she hadn't expected what actually occurred.

He took the news very well. Remarkably well. Ridiculously well. He simply said that John's relocation would help satisfy his need for danger and helping people, while removing him from Moriarty's direct line of fire.

For the next few weeks, things between Molly and Sherlock were almost... Domestic. In a way, it was what Molly had dreamed of when she had thoughts of living with Sherlock, except he was still an aromantic, insensitive jerk. Mostly, Sherlock kept to himself. Molly had brought things home to keep him occupied. She's drawn the line at any body parts from the morgue, despite his repeated requests.

He hardly needed Molly to keep him occupied, most of his time spent on the mystery of Moriarty's faked death. For a few days following the acquisition of his violin, the constant playing had bothered Molly. She pointed out that it would draw attention to his presence to continue on. He had seen the logic in her argument and had actually listened, something that Molly chalked up as a minor miracle. Since then, he had stuck to just plucking at the strings idly. That she could deal with.

Strangely, Molly rarely saw Sherlock leave the flat any longer. He was there when she left for work and always there when she returned home. When she was there, they both tended to keep to themselves. Sherlock would mutter to himself or Toby, occasionally yelling at Molly for her opinion. Molly had gotten better at reading Sherlock's moods and actually was starting to find him rather predictable. She would make tea without prompting and every few days they would share a meal together. She picked up new nicotine patches from the chemist for him. Sherlock had given her a bankcard he had intended to use while abroad, one with more than enough money to take care of Sherlock and- as he had insisted- anything she herself needed. The entire situation was starting to look much better in Molly's opinion.

Then, they had the Incident. Molly couldn't think of it as anything but. It also needed to be capitalized in her head. That was how important it was.

She was in the midst of her morning showering, shampooing her hair, when she heard a rustling behind her. At first, she thought it was Toby playing with the curtain. Then, she realized there was a very tall presence behind her.

Molly let out a squeak and flailed a bit. Wet hands reached out and grabbed her, steadying her. "If you are not careful, you will crack your skull on the porcelain and you will probably take me with you."

"Wh-What are you doing in my shower?" Molly asked, throwing her hands over herself to cover her nude body. She realized she didn't have nearly enough hands to cover her vital regions.

"I am having a shower," Sherlock replied impassively.

"But- but... I'm in here!" Molly squealed and lowered her head. Her still lathered hair got in her face and stung her eyes. "Oh bollocks!" She scrubbed at her face with her hands and realized she was no longer covering herself and her cheeks turned a furious red.

Sherlock grabbed a washcloth and pressed it to Molly's face, wiping the cleanser out of her eyes. "You only possess one shower. As you are still in it and I require its use, we are in it together." He pushed her under the spray of the shower to get the shampoo out of Molly's hair. "I know my lack
of appetite and somnolence have been of great amusement to my acquaintances, however I am fastidious when it comes to my personal hygiene.”

Molly squeezed her eyes shut tightly. "But you're naked!" She couldn't help but squeal again.

"It is advantageous for bathing,” Sherlock replied. "Really, Molly. You spend all day with undressed bodies."

"But I'm wearing clothes at the time,” Molly replied meekly.

Sherlock moved Molly out of the way so he could get under the shower. "You complain even more than John."

"You showered with John?" Molly's eyes snapped open to look at Sherlock. She was too shocked by this pronouncement to even register she was seeing him very naked, very wet and very, very fit. Well, maybe she registered it a little bit.

"Only once,” Sherlock replied. "He was also taking too long in the shower. He threatened to shoot me if I tried again."

"We-well,” Molly stammered. "Maybe... Umm... I'll do that."

"You have neither the fortitude nor the army training to make that a credible threat,” Sherlock replied.

Her cheeks absolutely burning, Molly stumbled out of the shower and grabbed for the nearest towel she could.

"Oh Molly?" Sherlock called out, his voice muffled slightly by the pounding water. "You have atrocious taste in clothing."

Molly could feel her face become redder. Not only was Sherlock embarrassing her, he was going to insult her.

"Your clothing is incredibly unflattering to your actual figure."

Even as Molly's heart did somersaults in her chest, one thought rang through clear in her mind: Sherlock Holmes had been locked up for so long, he was starting to go insane.

Molly had finished dressing and exited her bedroom when Sherlock strode out of the bathroom. He was already dressed himself and looked immaculate and, in a word, gorgeous. Molly hated him a bit for his ability to do that.

"Can you please not do that again?" Molly asked. "You have the entire flat to yourself when I go to work. You could easily shower then."

Sherlock shook his head. "Can't. I go out when you leave for work. I always do."

Molly wrinkled her nose. "But... You're always here when I get home."

Sherlock nodded. "I know. You're the only companionship I have. While I am not the most social of beings, I would like to take advantage of what I do have."

Molly cracked a small smile. "Oh?"

"Perhaps I should have asked you to get my skull from Baker Street as well,” Sherlock said absent-mindedly.

Molly bit her lower lip. "I have to get to work. Don't get killed, all right?"

"You of all people should know I am quite hard to kill, Molly Hooper."

On her way towards St Bartholomew’s Hospital, Molly passed by a number of leaflets that had been haphazardly and abundantly plastered to the walls of the buildings around her. She paid them very little mind. Most likely, they were advertisements for a club or a band appropriate for
As she got closer to work, she realized the billets were becoming more frequent. She paused to look at what exactly was so important to repeat at least five hundred times on one street.

It was a picture of Sherlock with the phrase I BELIEVE IN SHERLOCK HOLMES written on top of it. Others read MORIARTY WAS REAL.

Molly couldn't help but smile when she saw this. She had heard rumblings about this trend already in the weeks after Sherlock's death. Fans of his who could not believe that the man they had read about in John Watson's blog was a fake. There had been the occasional bouquet of flowers set at the place he fell, but this was the biggest display yet. Molly had tried to tell Sherlock about the growing sentiments, but he had patently ignored it.

When she got inside of Barts and put her things in her locker and began to put on her lab coat, she heard a laugh behind her.

"Been busy, have you, Molly?"

Molly glanced over her shoulder at her supervisor, Doctor Hughes. "What do you mean?"

"Everyone around here knew how you fancied the barmy bloke. You telling me you have nothing to do with all of the flyers up around where he flattened himself?"

"Just go to work!" Molly snapped waspishly. This took Doctor Hughes by surprise. No one at Barts had ever seen mousy Molly Hooper lash out. Then, no one at Barts knew she had been living with the most impossible, infuriating man on the planet with whom she was very inconveniently in love with for the past month and a half. Her surprising reaction caused Doctor Hughes to scamper off without another word.

"Very nice, Molly. Never thought you would be able to do that." A slow clap echoed through the room. "Then again, I do believe you have been quite the missed factor in my equations. That is something I plan to remedy."

Molly didn't recognize the voice, but it sent a chill up her spine all the same. It was cold and arrogant with just a touch of mania. She looked around. "Who are you?"

"I Believe in Sherlock Holmes," the voice said slowly. "You can't blame your colleagues for thinking you'd do that. Even I could see how desperately in love with him you were when you were trying to get over him using me."

Molly's stomach began to churn and she became thankful she had started to pick up Sherlock's unfortunate habit of skipping meals. If she had breakfast in her stomach, she most likely would have thrown it up right then.

"Don't recognize me, yet? I suppose I did sound different the last time we saw each other." His voice changed- the accent was completely different, inflection was lighter and friendlier- but it was terrifying all the same. "Does this sound better, Moll?"

"Moriarty," Molly breathed.

James Moriarty stepped out and Molly felt her blood run cold. He smirked at her. "You know, I never underestimated Sherlock. I was so sure I had him. But..." He held up a finger. "I underestimated you. It's funny, how the smallest cog can muck up the machinery. If only I had realized you had managed to bumble your way into his blackened heart and put an assassin on you... Well, all the world would be different."

Molly shook her head. "I have no idea what you're talking about." Even as she spoke, she reached into her pocket to try to blindly phone Sherlock.

"Oh, you're experimenting with lying now. He is turning you into quite the naughty girl, isn't he?" He walked deliberately towards Molly until she was backed up against the lockers. He grabbed her wrist. "Knights in shining armour have phone plans now, do they?" He extracted the phone from Molly's hand and held it out in front of him.
“Molly? Why are you calling me?” Sherlock’s voice came through the speaker.

“Molly can’t come to the phone right now,” Moriarty replied. When Molly tried to move, he pulled out a gun and pointed it at her. “But I think you would rather speak to me anyway. I am a much better conversationalist.”

“Gotten tired of our game so quickly?” Sherlock asked.

Moriarty laughed. “I just thought I would up the stakes a bit. You have gotten quite domestic with Mousy Hooper here. I was starting to worry you were never going to find me.”

Sherlock paused for a long moment. “Is she alive?”

Moriarty rolled his eyes and held the phone out to Molly, wordlessly telling her to speak.

“-I-I’m here, Sherlock,” Molly stammered. “I’m not dead. Well, I suppose that’s obvious.”

Moriarty grabbed the phone back. “But she won’t be for long if you try to come anywhere near here. I just thought we should have a little conversation. Have you figured out how I did it yet?”

Sherlock went quiet.

Moriarty laughed heartily. “It’s driving you absolutely mad, isn’t it?”

Again, Sherlock did not reply.

“I must admit I’ve been trying to figure out how you pulled it off yourself. All I’ve been able to figure out is you had the help of our friendly little Pathologist here.”

Sherlock finally spoke. “This is between you and me.”

“Of course it is!” Moriarty replied angrily. “I’m just getting rid of the people who stand in our way. Doctor Hooper’s the only one left, isn’t she? At least for now. I’m getting bored with all of this sneaking around, Sherlock. We need to make things much more interesting.”

With that, Moriarty hung up the phone. He moved in close to Molly. “I have something for you to give Sherlock from me.” He mashed his mouth against hers. He pulled back and grinned. “He’ll know what it means.”
Chapter 4

"He'll know what it means."
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

With the reappearance of Moriarty, Sherlock recruits assistance from an unlikely source.

Phoning back Sherlock immediately after Moriarty left did little to calm Molly's nerves. He ground out every word, his teeth obviously clenched. He told her to finish her day at work, to act as if nothing out of the ordinary was going on. This seemed like an absolute impossibility for Molly, but she did her best. She jumped at every single noise and, despite skipping breakfast, had been unable to get a bite of lunch down.

Relief washed over her when she was finally able to go home. Hopefully, Sherlock would be able to assuage her frayed nerves. Then, it was Sherlock Holmes she was thinking about. Most likely, he would just put her more on edge.

"Are we going to talk about what happened today?" Molly asked wearily.

"Well," a smooth, decidedly feminine voice said from her sofa. "I did think we could get to know each other a bit better first."

Molly jumped and squeaked. She was facing not Sherlock, but a very beautiful woman in a very revealing red dress. She rose to her feet and slunk like a predator across the room. She cupped Molly's chin. "Oh... The things I could do to you. You're a screamer, I can tell."

Molly let out a small squeak and backed up. "Who are you?"

The woman raised a neat eyebrow. "You mean he doesn't talk about me? Well, that is a blow to the ego, isn't it?" She draped her arms over Molly's shoulders. "Then, I might want to keep all attention on you were I in his position."

"That... Umm... Well... Didn't really... You know... Answer my question."

The woman purred and smiled at Molly. "You and I are very rare individuals, Doctor Hooper. Highly distinguished. I'm the only woman to beat Sherlock Holmes..." She pulled Molly closer. "Then, you're the woman who killed Sherlock Holmes. I believe you have a distinct advantage."

The door to the flat opened and Molly relaxed slightly, knowing instantly this new presence was Sherlock.

"You are frightening my Pathologist, Woman. Perhaps you could take a few steps back?"

The woman's ruby lip jutted out as she glanced to Sherlock. "Oh, you're no fun. I don't bite." Her gaze slid back to Molly and looked absolutely hungry. "Unless, of course, that's what you like."

"Wh-What's going on, Sherlock?" Molly's voice quivered in the imposing presence of this new arrival.

"Molly Hooper, Irene Adler. With Moriarty asserting his presence again, I thought we required help. As I am the only person who knows Irene is still alive, I was certain I could trust her with my own status amongst the living."

Molly managed to squirm away from Irene. "Why didn't you call John or someone else who isn't faking their own death so they can move around like a normal person?"

Sherlock looked at Molly askance. "That is what I have you for." He waved his hand dismissively. "John has moved on. Moriarty will also use him if he knows John has come back into the country. Irene is quite capable of being unseen."

Molly looked Irene up and down. "I doubt anyone could not look at her."
Irene smirked. "Oh, I could eat you up, Doctor Hooper."

Sherlock began to remove his coat. "Irene will be staying here while we figure out how to apprehend Moriarty."

Molly sighed. "One bedroom flat, Sherlock."

"Oh, that'll be fine," Irene replied, putting an arm around Molly's shoulders. She leaned in close. "I can bunk with you. It'll be quite cosy. Just us girls."

Sherlock edged a hand between Irene and Molly, pushing the stunning woman aside. "You will be on the sofa. I think that will be much less distracting for all parties."

Irene arched a brow as she glanced at the sofa. "That looks to be terribly uncomfortable."

Sherlock looked at her coolly. "You have made a good living for yourself bringing discomfort to others. Time you had some yourself."

Irene brought a hand to her chest. "Oh Mister Holmes, you should have just said. I do have a couples rate, you know." She glanced to Molly. "I would even give you a discount for her. She would break so pretty."

Sherlock glared at Irene wordlessly.

Irene smiled back. "Don't like to share your toys, Mister Holmes?" She purred. "Mm. Makes it all the more tempting."

She slid past Sherlock towards the door. "I have some leads I can check up on. I'll let you fill in Doctor Hooper."

With that, Irene sauntered out of the flat, leaving Sherlock and Molly alone.

"Are you all right?" Sherlock asked softly.

Molly looked up at Sherlock. Her mouth was curved down in a frown. "Since when does Sherlock Holmes care if someone is all right?"

"I care if you are all right," Sherlock replied. His brow lifted as he leaned in towards Molly. "You had a gun pointed at you today by a criminal mastermind."

Molly flinched, looking away from Sherlock. "I've been alone with Jim before."

"You were alone with Jim," Sherlock repeated, emphasizing the name. "Today, you were alone with Moriarty. And he had a gun."

Molly's hands shook slightly. "I've been trying not to think about it. You told me to get through my day. If I thought about it, I'd cry."

Sherlock cleared his throat. "I'm not good with crying people."

Molly glanced up at him. "Is there any one you are good with?"

Molly was taken by surprise when Sherlock pulled her in and pressed a comforting kiss to her forehead. It was a surprisingly tender move, considering the man. Then, she knew how he treated Mrs. Hudson. Perhaps he was starting to see her in a similar fashion. "You have ice cream in your freezer. You have a scoop of it when you've had a bad day at work or when you are on the cusp of your menses."

He pushed her away as quickly as he had pulled her in. "I suggest you take two scoops today, seeing as you are suffering from both."

While he strode off towards her bedroom, Molly had the distinct urge to throw her shoe at his head.

Hours later, Molly had not gotten up the courage to go to her bedroom. She sat on the sofa in the sitting room.
Sherlock was still in the bedroom. He had been awake for the past few days. Most likely, he would need to get some sleep tonight. In her bed.

She had to get up for work early in the morning, but she wasn't sure if she could quite deal with the idea of sharing a bed with Sherlock. Oh, it was platonic, of course. And it was not like Sherlock hadn't seen her in compromising positions already. It had only been this morning he'd jumped into the shower with her! Yet this seemed even more intimate.

"It's funny, you know."

Molly jumped slightly at the sound of Irene's voice. She hadn't heard the door open.

"Wh-what's funny?" Molly asked, folding her legs up and hugging them close to her chest.

"I have very little use for men, unless it was a financial arrangement," Irene removed her shoes and crossed the room. "The first time I did, he had even less use for women." She shook her head. "Funnier still... He's fond of you."

Molly blushed deeply. "He's- He's... Ummm... Not fond of me. He trusts me."

"He's trusting you now," Molly pointed out.

Irene shook her head. "Big difference between trust and blackmail, Doctor." She turned her back to Molly and unzipped her dress, letting it fall to the ground and leaving her nude.

Molly let out a strangled shriek and jumped to her feet.

Irene glanced over her bare shoulder. "Don't leave on my account. We can share the sofa. Can share as many things as you'd like."

Molly shook her head. "I- Well- Uhhh..."

"You're getting tongue tied, Doctor. " Irene stalked towards her, draping her arms over Molly's shoulders. "Would you like me to help you loosen it?"

"Somewhere in Africa, John is smiling without the faintest idea why," Sherlock commented dryly from the door of Molly's bedroom.

He strode out into the sitting room and removed Irene's hands from Molly's shoulders. He took hold of Molly and directed her towards her bedroom. "Molly, unless you wish to have difficulty sitting down tomorrow due to the welts on your backside, I do suggest you come to bed. Irene, we shall send Molly out tomorrow to pick you up a nightdress."

Irene rolled her eyes. "Mister Holmes, if you're not going to use it, someone else will."


Irene examined her nails. "I would make sure she's put back together again."

"Tell me what you have found out in the morning," Sherlock replied dryly, pushing Molly into her bedroom. "Good-night."

Once Molly and Sherlock were in her bedroom, he closed the door behind her. "I know you have atrocious taste in men, but if you switch to women I do suggest someone other than that woman. You are entirely too fragile for what she feels is a good time."

Molly shook her head. "She's just trying to make me feel uncomfortable."

"I assure you she is not," Sherlock replied. Sherlock stood in front of her, towering over her. "Irene Adler likes women. She likes women she can break. And she could definitely break you."

His voice seemed to darken. "I need you in one piece, Molly Hooper."

Molly flushed deeply and turned away from Sherlock. "Don't be silly, Sherlock." She shook his head fiercely. "Even if she is... I'm not... I have no interest in..."
"Oh, I know you don't." Sherlock threw himself down onto the bed. "But I doubt she will give up so easily. She likes you."

"She likes you too," Molly replied. She kept her back turned to Sherlock as she changed into her nightclothes before padding towards the bed hesitantly.

Sherlock had his eyes closed. Molly doubted it was to help her preserve her modesty. More likely, it was just boredom. "I had picked up on that."

"And...?"

"And I do not concern myself with women," Sherlock replied. "They are generally not to be trusted. And if I have very little interest in eating and sleeping, how do you think I feel about other biological urges?"

While this made Molly's heart sink just a bit, it did make it easier to sit down on the unoccupied side of the bed.

Molly looked over at Sherlock. "So... If you're not interested in that sort of thing, does that mean..."

"What, Molly?" Sherlock drawled.

"You've never..." Her cheeks were absolutely burning. "I mean... Well... Sex..."

"During my adolescence I did read about the subject," Sherlock replied. "I suppose every boy of that age is curious. It seemed overly complicated and distracting."

Molly shook her head. "I'd hardly say that."

Sherlock's eyes suddenly snapped open and he sat up, looking at Molly. "You are... What? Thirty-two years old? Let's say you became interested in the opposite sex at the age of twelve. How much time in those twenty years have you devoted to trying to find yourself a companion? Yet here you are- still single. Now think of everything you could have accomplished in all of the time you spent on your primal urges, which have always resulted in you crying into a container of ice cream. These ridiculous mating rituals are also primarily for the purposes of propagating the species. Now in this day and age the entire process can be accomplished without the parents ever having met, let alone engaging in some pointless courtship."

Molly could feel tears stinging her eyes. Sherlock still hadn't learned his lesson when it came to saying horrible things. "Well... What about love?"

"Poetic twaddle invented for the sole purpose of making humanity feel above other animals."

Molly actually smiled when he said this.

"What?" Sherlock asked slowly.

"I just never thought I'd see the day when Sherlock Holmes was wrong." She leaned in towards Sherlock. "Love is real. And it's wonderful."

Sherlock's light eyes scanned Molly's face. "Are you in love with me?"

"What?" Molly squeaked, she pulled back. "Well- Ah..." She could feel her cheeks flushing again. "I..."

"A simple 'yes' would suffice. It is plainly obvious." He arched a brow. "Now tell me, Molly Hooper... When have I ever made you feel 'wonderful'?"

Molly's mouth fell open. She shook her head and turned away from Sherlock. She stewed in silence, trying to force herself to sleep.

She may have loved Sherlock Holmes, but sometimes she really didn't like him.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Molly runs into trouble at work, forcing a shift in her relationship with Sherlock.

The dynamic of the small apartment changed greatly with the presence of Irene. Sherlock still went out to investigate when Molly went out to work and he was still always home by the time she arrived. But now, there was Irene as well. Irene left in the mornings with them, but would not return home until much later. She tended to come back with interesting bits of information that Sherlock took a great deal of time to decipher. Despite the handicap of being dead, Irene had a great number of people she could call on to give her tips.

The biggest change was the presence of Sherlock in Molly's bedroom. He did not sleep every night, but would always be in her bedroom with her. He would sit on "his side" of the bed and work at his computer, phone or else pour over papers Irene had procured. On the nights when he was too exhausted to continue his investigations, he would lay down with her in bed.

Molly unabashedly loved those nights. Despite Sherlock's protests that he had no interest in women, Molly always woke up with Sherlocks arms wrapped around her. He was more than cool about it. He was downright ice cold, sliding out of bed as soon as he had woken up and telling Molly she moved around too much while she slept.

Molly kept resisting, but Sherlock had continued to join her in the shower. Every time, she blushed and cursed and glared at him with as much contempt as she could muster- which was not much. Sherlock was very calm, explaining if he didn't join her, Irene most certainly would. With Sherlock, Molly would be able to actually shower.

It stopped when Molly bought two locks for the bathroom door. Sherlock had utterly obliterated any fantasy she had of sexy shower scenarios. She wanted to hate him a little for that. Her fantasies of him were all she was ever going to have.

Three months after Sherlock's death, the biggest change in Molly's life occurred.

She had come into work, same as always. She was about to put her lab coat on when Doctor Hughes placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Doctor Hooper, please come with me."

Molly turned to him. She frowned slightly, pointing towards the morgue. "I have to-"

Doctor Hughes shook his head. "No, you don't. Please come with me."

Molly had a sinking feeling deep in her stomach. Shaking slightly, she followed after Doctor Hughes into his office.

"Sit down, Doctor Hooper." He gestured to a chair. There was another man standing by Doctor Hughes's desk, glaring at her.

Molly sank down into the chair, unable to meet this man's gaze. The horrible sick feeling in her would not abate. She was in trouble, no question.

Doctor Hughes looked at his hands. "Doctor Hooper, would it surprise you to know you have been under investigation for the past three months?"

Molly nodded slowly. "Uhn."

The other man spoke now. "You associated with Sherlock Holmes while he was still alive. As his deception has come to light, your actions regarding him have been questioned."

Molly shook her head. "I did my job..."
"It was your job to give an amateur unfettered access to the mortuary?" The man questioned. "To allow him to abuse bodies donated to science..."

"He was conducting experiments!" Molly protested.

"Unsanctioned ones," the man replied. "You also gave him body parts to take home?"

Molly looked up at the man finally, meeting his gaze. "Just who do you think you are?"

"Sebastian Moran," he replied. "I have been working with Internal Affairs."

"I'm being sacked," Molly said, stunned.

Doctor Hughes held up a hand. "Molly, it is a suspension... An... Indefinite one."

Molly nodded. "Sacked."

Moran arched a brow. "Did you really think you could get away with what you did, Doctor Hooper?"

Molly put her head in her hands. Doctor Hughes rose and put a hand on Molly's shoulder. "Molly, I'm sorry about this..."

"You're wrong about this," Molly replied.

"Molly, everyone knows about you working with Sherlock Holmes," Hughes sighed.

"You're wrong about him," Molly replied. "You didn't have any problem with me working with him when you thought he was helping people. And he was."

Moran's eyes flashed dangerously. "Why don't you prove it, Doctor Hooper?"

Things seemed to blur. There was a flurry of paperwork and more discussion, but soon enough, Molly was walking through the hallways of Barts with a box of her possessions in her arms.

"Molly," Mike Stamford said, walking along beside her. "This is going to be straightened out."

Molly shook her head. "No it won't," she murmured.

As she walked through the front, the new receptionist, Eva, stood up. "Molly?"

Molly turned to look at the redhead receptionist. "It was nice knowing-" She stopped at Eva walked to her, looking closely at Molly's tearstained face.

She had never looked at Eva closely. She had only been there for about a month. She was unassuming and quiet. Now that she was close to Molly, she could see the good looks behind the thick glasses. The wig was very convincing.

"What are you doing here, Irene?" Molly whispered desperately.

"Keeping an eye on you," Irene replied. "Why do you think Sherlock wanted me here? He's more than capable of investigating on his own. What's happened?"

"Leave me alone, Irene," Molly begged. "Tell Sherlock to do the same."

Molly didn't know how long she had been at the pub. She had started measuring time by how many glasses she'd drunk, but she had lost count of that a while back.

She was leaning heavily against the bar, her head in her hands. The box of her things was on the floor next to her feet.

She felt a hand on her shoulder. "Do you know how long it took me to find you?" The dark voice had an annoyed edge to it. Unless she was so drunk she was mistaken, there was also a note of concern in there.

Molly didn't need to look at the man to know who it was. Besides, he was so good at disguising
himself now that glancing at him wouldn't help confirm his identity. "Leave me alone," Molly whimpered.

"How did it take me so long to find you?" Sherlock demanded.

"I turned my phone off so you couldn't use bloody GPS," Molly slurred slightly. "I took five cabs so I could get as far as I could." She gulped down the rest of her drink. "I don't even actually know where I am right now."

"You are not as good as you think," Sherlock said, grabbing Molly around the waist and forcing her off her stool. "You're on Baker Street."

Molly struggled to get away from Sherlock as he threw money down onto the bar to pay for Molly's drinks. "Wha? But-"

Sherlock grabbed Molly's box of things. "Even when they try to be unpredictable, humans are creatures of habit. You paid five cab drivers to bring you somewhere you knew, somewhere I knew."

Molly whimpered softly. "It's not fair..."

Sherlock kept her close, walking her out the door and onto the street, which was now dark. Had she really been in the pub that long? "I am the world's only consulting detective, Molly Hooper," his voice was very soft, almost comforting. "You should not feel bad about being unable to get away from me."

"That's not what's not fair!" Molly shouted, pulling herself away from him and nearly falling over. Her balance was off. "My life isn't fair!"

"Is anyone's?" Sherlock asked.

Tears began to fall down Molly's cheek. "That's not what I meant. It hasn't been fair since..."

"Since I imposed myself on you," Sherlock finished for her, looking put out.

Molly shook her head. "No! Since you came into it in the first place!"

Sherlock's eyes widened in surprise. Realizing Molly wasn't going to stop shouting as she stormed down the street, he grabbed her and pulled her into an alley.

"I lost my job," Molly's voice trembled slightly, Sherlock very close to her, looking her over carefully.

"It was a job," Sherlock replied coldly.

Molly poked Sherlock in the chest with one slender finger. "You're quick to point out how I don't have much else going for me. I loved my job. What if you couldn't be a Consulting Detective anymore?"

"I cannot be a consulting detective anymore," Sherlock replied back tersely. "I died, remember?"

"You're still doing a lot of detecting," Molly pushed away from Sherlock. "But you're not trying to find a way to get your name cleared or take down Moriarty. You just want to know how he faked his death!"

Sherlock opened his mouth to say something, but Molly shook her head. "Don't act like that's not what's bothering you. I know you better than you think, Sherlock."

Sherlock looked ready to say something once again, but Molly continued on, "I would do anything for you. Her voice shook as she looked up at Sherlock defiantly. "And you know it. And take advantage of it. But I still do it. Because I love you." She swallowed hard. "But you don't care."

"You think I do not care," Sherlock repeated slowly. "I told you..."

"You said I counted," Molly replied. "I was important. But only because you could use me. Because I would do anything. But now my life is being torn apart because I love you and you
don't even care about me."

Sherlock pulled back. "How can you think that?"

"You call yourself a sociopath," Molly replied scathingly, pushing Sherlock back further so she could get past him. "Sociopaths don't care."

"You do not seem to understand what 'important' means when it comes to me." Sherlock watched her walk away. "Do you think I could not find my own accommodations, Molly Hooper? That I need to stay at your hovel? I am walking the street I walked every day while I was alive without compunction. I could manage quite fine on my own."

"Then why don't you?" Molly demanded.

"Because you wouldn't be there!" Sherlock hissed back angrily, grabbing Molly's wrist, halting her. "I never financially needed John to be my flatmate. I wanted company." He paused. "I still do."

Molly didn't meet Sherlock's gaze. "So you're using me to replace John."

Sherlock shook his head. "No. He was my blogger. You're my pathologist."

"Not much of one," Molly sniffled. "Got sacked, didn't I?"

"You're still my pathologist," Sherlock insisted. "Molly, what happened to you, it was because of-" "It was Moriarty," Molly finished with a sigh. "Sherlock, I'm not that thick. Of course I know Moriarty had something to do with it."

Molly stumbled slightly as Sherlock pulled her to him. He looked down at her, the look in his light eyes intense. "I am going to find Moriarty. I will reveal what he's been doing. I will get you back into Barts. You are the only competent in the morgue." He pulled her back towards the street. "Now let me get you home."

Molly allowed Sherlock to drag her along towards a cab. They rode in silence to her flat. Once inside, Sherlock dropped the box of Molly's possessions on the floor. He made a move to step away from her, but Molly pushed herself towards him.

"I'm sorry," Molly murmured.

"For yelling and drawing more attention to us than I need?" Sherlock asked. "It is understandable. You are quite inebriated."

"For saying my life wasn't fair since you came into it," Molly whispered into his coat. She looked up at him. "I quite like my life with you in it. Most of the time."

"I understand I can be quite difficult to be around," Sherlock said tersely. "The current situation is hardly one that would lessen that."

Molly bit her lower lip, glancing up at Sherlock. "Does being important to you really mean you care?"

"It means you're my pathologist," Sherlock replied.

Molly shook her head. "Not a pathologist right now."

Sherlock shrugged slightly. "Would you prefer to be my Molly?"

Molly's eyes widened. "Your Molly?"

Sherlock's brow furrowed. "What would you have me call-"

Molly had gotten onto her tiptoes, sliding her fingers into Sherlock's hair and pulling him down to her. She pressed her mouth to his.

She found him unyielding, stiff from shock. Molly continued undeterred, opening her mouth and
letting her tongue lap at his lovely lips. Sherlock's mouth parted slightly allowing her entrance.

She felt the brush of his hands at her side, as if he were unsure what to do with them and was just moving them ineffectually.

Finally, Molly broke the kiss. She continued to look up at Sherlock, who stared down at her with wide blue eyes.

"You are quite inebriated," Sherlock repeated his earlier statement.

"Why do you think I had the courage to try that?" Molly asked.

Sherlock looked away from Molly, lost in thought. "Interesting..." He looked back to Molly for a moment, focusing on her mouth. "Interesting..."

Molly suddenly went pale, running off towards the bathroom. Sherlock was so lost in thought he didn't register the sound of her retching.

The next morning, Molly awoke with a roaring headache. She groaned and rolled out of bed. She was still dressed in her clothes from yesterday, but they were rumpled from restless sleep. She squinted as sunlight filtered in through the window.

Sherlock was sitting up straight on his side of the bed, his rigid back to Molly. "We need to talk."

Molly winced at the sound of his voice and shook her head. "No, no talking," she muttered, padding towards the door. "No noise of any kind."

"Molly-" Sherlock started.

Molly waved her hand to dismiss him and continued to the bathroom. She leaned heavily against the sink as she brushed the vile taste out of her mouth.

When she looked up she gave a jump as she saw Sherlock was standing behind her.

"I need to speak with you," Sherlock said firmly.

Molly blinked blearily. "And I need about fifty aspirin and a very strong cuppa." She shuffled past him. "I am-"

She squeaked as hands were wrapped around her waist and she was lifted up against the wall. Before she could protest, Sherlock's mouth was pressed to hers. His lips moved experimentally, testing. Memories of what she had done the night before flooded back to her. She'd yelled at him. She'd kissed him. How could she have done that? How could she have gotten that drunk?

But now he was the one kissing her.

At any other time, Molly would have found it lovely. Sherlock's hands were on her hips and her body trapped between the wall and his slender frame. His mouth was eagerly exploring hers. But at the moment, she was hung over and her head ached. She couldn't say kissing was high on her list of priorities.

Sherlock pulled back, letting go of Molly. "You taste like spearmint." He licked his lips.

Molly swallowed hard. "Just brushed my teeth."

Sherlock nodded slowly. "That was not how it was described," he whispered breathlessly.

Molly rubbed her temples. "What? Kissing? Sherlock, how do you not-" She trailed off and blinked up at him. "Being a virgin I can understand, but you've never kissed? Not even as a teenager?"

"Teenagers are insipid," Sherlock replied dismissively.

He trailed after Molly into the kitchen as she put on the kettle and got out a bottle of aspirin, taking several and downing it with a large glass of water. "Can you explain to me?"
"Explain what?" Molly asked, her voice small and kittenish. She sat down at the kitchen table and rested her head on the hard wood, covering her face with her hands. "I don't know... You're weird and don't like people?" She wasn't exactly sure what he was asking of her.

Sherlock took hold of her wrists and pulled her hands away from her face. "Whenever people describe being kissed, they say their mind goes blank. My mind was not blank when you kissed me. It was racing."

"You've never kissed anyone before?" Irene sat up on the sofa. She was only covered by a thin sheet. Despite Molly purchasing her a nightgown, she'd refused to wear it. She got up, leaving her sheet behind. She smiled at Sherlock. "I never took Moriarty's nickname for you to heart, Mister Holmes. My mistake." She put her hands on his chest. "If the good doctor is unwilling, I offer myself as a test subject."

Irene had grabbed Sherlock, pressing his mouth to hers. Molly felt a surge of jealousy through her, but even at her best, she wouldn't have the courage to attempt to stop them. Sherlock did it himself. He gently pushed Irene away from him and glanced down at Molly.

"Don't be jealous, Doctor Hooper. I'd never leave you out." Irene smirked. She swooped down and kissed Molly firmly.

Just as quickly as it had started, it ended as Sherlock grabbed Irene by the shoulders, pulling her away from Molly. "Get dressed, Woman."

Molly whimpered and covered her face once again. "Will everyone just leave me alone, please?"

Sherlock looked about to say something, but Molly just got up, shuffling back to her bedroom and throwing herself back into bed. She pulled the covered up over her head. She just really wanted to be left alone.

After about ten minutes, she heard the tinkling of china. She peered out from beneath the covers. Sherlock had placed a teacup at her bedside. "Milk. Two sugars. I hope you were not exaggerating when you said you wanted it strong." With that, he turned and swept from the room.
Chapter 60

Molly uncharacteristically loved these moments.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Sherlock explores his feelings for Molly after their encounter.

"So you are in love with Doctor Hooper," Irene commented calmly as she poured a cup of tea for herself. She sat across from Sherlock at the small kitchen table, her legs crossed primly. She was still stark naked.

Sherlock paid no mind to her state of undress. His fingers were steepled, resting on top of the table. "What in the world gave you that ridiculous idea?"

"You kissed her," Irene replied.

Sherlock continued to stare at the wall. Toby was by his feet, pawing at his cuffs. He shooed the cat away with his foot. "I kissed you as well."

"No, Mister Holmes. I kissed you." Irene leaned in. "And in my professional opinion, you were not terribly engaged by it."

Sherlock arched a brow. "While I pay little attention to social niceties, I am aware enough to know it is in bad taste to kiss a gay dominatrix in the home of a woman you have just kissed."

Irene leaned in closer still, her mouth only centimetres from his now. His fingers flexed. He was irritated by her closeness to him. She had been this close before. In fact, she made it a habit. It bothered him now.

Irene's smile was wicked. "Since I have arrived, you have been sleeping in Doctor Hooper's bed. Even when you don't sleep, you still bunk with her. You even showered with her until she developed enough spine to lock you out of the room."

"Molly is fragile and you are not to be trusted," Sherlock replied.

Irene laughed. Sherlock could feel anger bubbling up inside him. He loathed to be mocked and Irene's laugh was definitely mocking. "I like things rough, Mister Holmes... Not unwilling. Besides, I don't do virgins."

Sherlock's gaze finally turned to Irene. "Molly Hooper is not a virgin."

"She is how it matters to me," Irene replied coolly. "Any interest I've expressed in Doctor Hooper is solely because I can't resist yanking a chain of any kind. The Consulting Detective must have been aware of that. You chose to patently ignore it because you loved sharing a bed with her, watching her lather herself up, the water dripping down-" She traced a finger over the curve of her naked bosom. "-Her pale, slender body."

Sherlock narrowed his gaze on Irene. "Why do you care so much about my relationship with Molly Hooper?"

Irene uncrossed her legs and rose to her feet. "Because I can't stand to see someone starving."

Sherlock leaned back in his chair. "Then why don't you ask me to dinner again?"

"You're not the one who is starving," She glanced over her shoulder. "Besides, I told you I don't do virgins." She strode towards the bathroom. "Now that I'm no longer required at Barts, I will be going out with Anthea. The trail has become a bit clearer."

"Mycroft doesn't know yet, does he?" Sherlock asked.

Irene glanced over her shoulder once again and smiled. "Not as far as I know."
Sherlock took up his violin and plucked at the strings. "He's slipping."

He stared at the closed door to Molly's bedroom as he continued to produce quiet, melodious noises with the delicate instrument.

Hours after Irene had departed from the flat, Sherlock was still seated at the kitchen table, his violin in his hand.

Molly exited her bedroom, looking far better than she had in the morning. Her hair was loose and she wore an oversized t-shirt bearing the name of a football club. A former lover's? No, he doubted Molly would treasure something belonging to one of her former paramours. Her father's.

Molly's lower lip jutted out in a pout as she threw herself into the seat across from Sherlock. "You're really smart. Can you please predict when I'm going to get pissed and stop me from doing it?"

"I would have stopped you yesterday had you not shut off your GPS," Sherlock commented dryly. He carefully raked his gaze over Molly.

Blush in her cheeks. She was staring at him. At his lips in particular. Feeling better, she was allowing herself to think about the events that had transpired the night before and his response to them.

"I am married to my work," Sherlock said suddenly. He even surprised himself with his sudden speech.

Molly was similarly taken aback. She blinked at him. "Excuse me?"

"My brain-" He tapped his temple with his finger. "-Needs to be completely focused on the work. I have no room for anything else."

Molly nodded slowly. "All right..." She looked away quickly. She was hurt by this.

"However..." Sherlock drew the word out longer than was necessary. "Due to my current circumstances, my work and I are estranged. It is very frustrating to me. But it has allowed for other things to filter into my hard drive. Things you have brought to my attention."

Molly looked at him once again. Her eyes widened slightly. "Like kissing."

"It is..." Sherlock rubbed his lower lip with his thumb. "More enjoyable than trash television."

Molly frowned slightly. "Thank you?" She sounded terribly uncertain and possibly slightly peeved.

"I meant what I said before," Sherlock continued. "I had heard the act of kissing caused one's mind to blank. However, I rather experienced the opposite effect."

Molly cocked her head. "How much do you know about kissing, Sherlock?"

Sherlock looked away. "I have deleted most of it. It was unnecessary. My conclusions found it to be an superfluous act, not worthy of practical study."

Molly bit her lower lip. "When you kiss, your facial nerve sends a message to your brain that- oh my god, I'm kissing. And your brain decides to flood your body with hormones. Serotonin, which relaxes you, makes things so much easier to sort through. Dopamine, which is our body's own reward. One that you are most likely very fond of, given your former use of cocaine."

Sherlock looked at Molly in shock. How long had she been aware of his drug abuse? He had always assumed had she known, she would write him off. She rolled her eyes at him. "Sherlock I did you 'autopsy'. I had to read your medical records to fake your corpse."

Like Moriarty, he had underestimated Molly Hooper. That annoyed him. However, he was rather enjoying her clinical explanation of kissing. He obviously knew the science that went into kissing, yet he still enjoyed hearing her explain it in these particular terms. He could hear John now: Only you would prefer talking nerdy to dirty, Sherlock.
He shook off the voice of his friend in his head- and the stab to his chest the thought seemed to produce- and concentrated on Molly.

"You can't forget the adrenaline. You wouldn't do your particular job if you weren't an adrenaline junkie. You like the rush in your head, the thrum of your heartbeat." She sighed. "Of course, the body also produces oxytocin, which I assume you are rather scornful of, given its association with pair bonding."

"The love hormone," Sherlock snorted derisively. He slid his hand to her wrist, placing his fingers against her pulse. "Is that it, Doctor Hooper?" His voice had deepened slightly. While deducing oneself was a near impossibility, he was not unaware of why it did so. He decided to voice his thought. "I like when you speak to me like a Doctor... You stumbled over yourself too much with me."

"You make me nervous," Molly replied, averting her gaze.

"Still, Molly Hooper?" Sherlock shook his head. "You would think you would be over me by now. I have tried dreadfully hard to drive you away."

"I still like you," Molly's blush deepened.

"You are a masochist," Sherlock shot back. He could feel her heart rate increase. Or was that his own? "Perhaps I should allow Irene free reign with you... Maybe you would like it..."

"I like you," Molly insisted.

"Yes... Yes you do." Sherlock's brow furrowed. There had only been three people he could remember who had ever cared for him, in spite his supposed flaws and quirks and everything else that made him brilliant: his mother; Mrs. Hudson, who was like a second mother; John, who was closer to him than his own brother and whom he liked a damned sight better. Now there was Molly. And she was... just Molly.

Molly had every reason to believe him a fraud, but had never doubted him. Had sacrificed her reputation and career for him.

Sherlock hissed in a breath. He pulled himself to his feet and strode away from Molly. "Sentiment is a chemical defect found in the losing side," he recalled his words to Irene what seemed like ages ago. She had lost because of her feelings for him. He did not allow feelings to cloud him.

"Only if you can't trust the person on the other side," Molly replied softly.

Sherlock turned quickly. He glided to stand before Molly, grabbing her by the waist and lifting her up. He crushed his mouth to hers. It was sloppy and inelegant. He could feel her trembling in his arms, her hands slowly sliding up into his hair as she had done when she first kissed him. He'd enjoyed the sensation of her slender fingers tangling in his curls. Sherlock wondered if he could feel the moment his brain released the chemicals Molly had described.

Mousy, Molly Hooper. Molly Hooper who loved him. Molly Hooper who was his only sanctuary.

Sherlock jerked back. "Of course."

"Huh?" Molly asked dumbly, blinking up at him. Her face was flushed and her lips were swollen.

"He underestimated you last time," Sherlock murmured, keeping his arms locked around Molly's waist. "He is angry at such an oversight. So he wants to focus his attention on that. His new plan isn't just to draw me out. He wants me to be turned in." He locked eyes with Molly. "By you. He showed himself to you at Barts. Threatened you with a gun. He didn't need me to know about him. I already knew. He just wanted to frighten you. Then he saw that your job was taken away. He is trying to break you, Molly Hooper. Let you think that all your problems would go away if you just revealed to everyone I am still alive. That I am not worth it."

Molly sighed softly. "That has to be the dumbest plan I've ever heard."

Sherlock shook his head. "It is actually not bad. And very fitting to Moriarty's modus operandi of having others do his dirty work."

Molly's fingers sank deeper into Sherlock's hair and she leaned in. "You two have the exact same
Molly's fingers sank deeper into Sherlock's hair and she leaned in. "You two have the exact same blind spot." She beamed at him. "I will never, ever think you are not worth it, Sherlock Holmes."

Molly brought their mouths together once again. This time, Sherlock's mind didn't race. He was not concentrating on sorting out all of the confused rooms in his mind palace. Instead, he focused on the warm lips pressed to his.

It was... Enjoyable.

Suddenly, Molly pulled back, her eyes wide with surprise. "Sherlock, do you always get this excited about finishing a deduction?"

Sherlock glanced down at the bulge that was pressing insistently at his trousers and Molly's midsection. "Well... I do... Enjoy it..." He drew out the words. "But no... That outcome is actually... Highly unusual."

Molly slipped her hands out of Sherlock's hair and took a step back. "Guess I should take it as a compliment then?" She laughed nervously and smiled.

Sherlock remained perfectly still. "I... Suppose."

Her pupils were dilated. He had felt her heart thundering when she was pressed against him. But, no- he couldn't judge. His own heart seemed to be racing. That would cloud the results.

"I require a shower," Sherlock said quickly. Something inside him wanted to kick himself for this pronouncement, but he pushed it aside. "This was a very interesting experiment, Doctor Hooper." He reached out and shook her hand very awkwardly. "This was not something I had ever considered to aid my cognitive reasoning. I should perhaps give it further thought."

With that, he turned and swept towards the bathroom. He quickly stripped off his clothing and climbed into the shower. He turned the water on ice cold and leaned against the wall, letting the biting spray hit his body. His mind warred with himself. Should he really give it further thought—or just delete it entirely from his hard drive?
Chapter 7

"I like when you speak to me like a doctor..."
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Sherlock and Molly decide to indulge in some experimentation.

To say things had been tense would have been an understatement. Sherlock hadn't spoken to her for days. There were used nicotine patches abandoned all over the flat. Sherlock had begun playing his violin again. Molly had tried to explain this away to her landlord as a renewed interest in classical music. She wasn't entirely sure he had bought it. She hadn't the fortitude to ask Sherlock to stop. There was an aura that surrounded him that told Molly to keep her distance. She was trying not to take it personally. Sherlock did not seem to regret kissing her. Rather, he seemed to be unsure how to proceed with the information he'd gathered from doing so.

That was how he would look at things. How to proceed with the information. Very Sherlock. He would not be thinking of it in terms of how it made him feel.

Four months ago, Molly would have been hurt by that notion. However, things had changed. She understood Sherlock better now. As much as he tried to deny it, he did have feelings. He just needed to turn those feelings into some sort of empirical data he could break down and analyse.

In her darker moments, Molly regretted deeply letting herself fall in love with a robot like Sherlock. Then, it was not like her relationships with emotionally available men turned out any better.

Molly was starting to feel a bit boxed in. She had not left the flat since she had lost her job. Sherlock had not left either. She was not surprised. With this new theory that she was the target of Moriarty's plan, he would want to keep a close eye on her.

Irene came and went with great regularity. She had taken to spending her nights out. This at least relieved some of the tension surrounding Molly and Sherlock, as he had taken to sleeping on the sofa again when he was tired. Molly wasn't sure if she would have been able to deal with everything were Sherlock in her room at night.

Irene was the only one Sherlock would speak with, whispering things to him. He would hiss back instructions Molly could not hear. When Irene left again, Sherlock would pour himself into his work on the computer.

Sherlock was sending Irene to do his legwork. This was somewhat disturbing to Molly. Sherlock did his own investigations. Yet he remained at the flat with her.

Molly wondered if he resented her for that yet. No doubt, he would eventually.

A week after they had kissed, Sherlock set down his violin and strode over to Molly where she sat on the sofa. She had been reading a book and stroking Toby idly.

"I became sexually aroused when you kissed me," Sherlock stated plainly.

Molly looked up and nodded. "I had... Noticed." Her voice squeaked slightly.

"I do not concern myself with sexual arousal or emotional entanglements," Sherlock continued.

Molly nodded. She did not really believe him on the second point. After all, would he have faked his death in the first place if he didn't care about emotional entanglements?

"I have put a great deal of energy into an attempt to delete the experience from my mind." Sherlock narrowed his gaze on Molly. "I believed it to be far too troublesome to deal with."

Molly's heart sank. Of course, she should have known nothing with Sherlock could go farther than an experimental kiss.
"However..." Sherlock continued. "I seem to be unable to erase this particular data. It seems getting rid of the memory is far more distracting to my cognitive functions than it would be accepting it."

Molly drew her lower lip up between her teeth. "What are you saying, Sherlock?"

Sherlock’s gaze moved over her quickly. She knew that look. He was trying to figure something out about her. "I would not be adverse to continuing the experiment we began last week."

Molly stopped worrying her lower lip. Her tongue darted out to soothe the place she’d been abusing. She could feel Sherlock's eyes riveted to her as she did so. "I didn't think it was much of an experiment, Sherlock."

Sherlock nodded. "I am aware. It is the term I have chosen."

"But Sherlock-"

Molly had meant to tell him she wasn't a bloody Petri dish he could poke and prod at as he wished. But he'd swooped in and kissed her soundly. He had a great deal more confidence in the action than previously. Molly mewed softly and slid her fingers up into Sherlock's lovely, soft hair.

She felt herself being swept up. Sherlock had taken her spot on the sofa and she was now straddling his lap. She sighed softly into his mouth and delved deeper into the kiss.

Somewhere deep inside, a voice screamed out this was not the proper way to do things. You didn't just passionately make out with a man you hadn't dated.

Of course, she had been living with Sherlock for nearly four months. She had known him for over two years. Was there really anything to benefit from going out to dinner and a movie?

She thought about what a date with Sherlock would be like. Watching her eat silently, not indulging himself because he had eaten two days ago. Going to a movie and pointing out all of the shallow plots and unrealism. She let out a small, muffled giggle.

Sherlock pulled away from Molly, scowling slightly. "Am I doing something you find amusing?"

Molly shook her head. "No. I... Ah... Sorry." She leaned in and attached her mouth to the side of his slender throat.

This seemed to distract Sherlock from his line of questioning as a deep moan fell from his lips. Oh, she liked that sound.

She felt Sherlock's fingers ruck up her blouse, sliding over the skin of her bare back. She mewed softly and pressed down against Sherlock's lap. She could feel the stirrings of his arousal.

This experimentation was going to move quickly, wasn't it? Not that Molly was really complaining. It had been years since she'd had sex. Not to mention having sex with Sherlock Holmes had been her most frequent- and most treasured- fantasy since she had met him.

She wanted to touch him in return, but reality crashed around her and she pulled away from Sherlock. "I need to wash up," she whispered regretfully.

Sherlock frowned slightly. "Right now?"

"I was petting the cat," Molly replied apologetically.

Sherlock moved her back off his lap and rolled his eyes. "Go wash your hands."

Molly got to her feet and hurried to the bathroom, shutting the door behind her. She washed her hands furiously, getting rid of any of the cat dander that might have still been there.

It probably was not strictly necessary. Toby was very clean and she had not touched him much. Now that she put the thought in Sherlock's head, she bet he would insist she washed up every time they had sex (would they have sex again after this?). Mostly, Molly just needed a moment to herself to analyse the situation.
Dear, she was starting to sound like Sherlock. He was the one who was supposed to 'analyse situations'.

Molly leaned against the sink and took several deep, controlled breaths. When she felt herself stop shaking, she pulled herself up and exited the bathroom.

Sherlock was no longer in the sitting room. Had something come into his brilliant brain that he needed to investigate immediately, regardless of his state of arousal? Such a notion was hardly unbelievable when it came to Sherlock Holmes. The only unbelievable thing that he had given into arousal.

"Molly?"

Molly hissed in a breath as she turned at the sound of the voice. Coming from her bedroom.

There was Sherlock, waiting for her. He had removed his jacket and folded it neatly over her mirror. He had begun to unbutton his shirt, revealing the flesh beneath.

Molly took hesitant steps towards him. She brought up a hand to where he was fiddling with his shirt buttons. "May I?"

Sherlock's brow furrowed, clearly puzzled by Molly's request. She just looked up at him wordlessly, biting her lower lip.

With a small sigh, Sherlock allowed Molly to continue his work unbuttoning his shirt.

She had seen him naked before. This was something else entirely. She could actually appreciate it now. Sherlock was, in a word, beautiful. She pulled his shirt from him and attached herself to his neck once again, licking and sucking at that pale skin. Sherlock hissed in a breath and his hands grazed her side before slipping beneath her blouse and lifting it over her head. His fingers then trailed up to her bra, fumbling with the clasp.

Sherlock pursed his lips as he found it difficult to unhook it immediately. When he managed one of the clasps and then proceeded to rehook it in his attempt to work off the other one, he abandoned the attempt and glared at Molly. "Just who in the world invented this ridiculous contraption and why do you feel the need to wear one? You hardly have anything to support!"

Molly glowered at Sherlock. "But you still want free access to them."

Sherlock nodded. "Yes. That is why I am frustrated."

Molly reached back and unhooked her bra. "A suggestion: Don't insult the woman who is about to sleep with you."

Sherlock ran a finger up Molly's side. "Are you so insulted you are going to stop this endeavour?"

Molly's toes curled at the feeling of Sherlock's fingertips just barely grazing sensitive skin. "No," her voice squeaked. She leaned in towards him, burying her face in his bare chest. "I... I think I want to keep going."

Sherlock pushed Molly down onto the bed and she found him looming over him. Goodness, was he always so tall? He was imposing, hanging over her. He sought her mouth for a kiss.

"I have seen a wide variety of pornographic material while perusing John's laptop." Sherlock's hands smoothed over her torso and he seemed to take note of every spot that caused her to mewl and focused on them. "In my attempt to delete our prior experience, I researched more realistic forms of human intimacy."

Molly squirmed beneath him, sliding her hands over his shoulder and down to that wonderful backside she'd ogled whenever he'd been without his long coat. "You researched sex?"

Sherlock looked slightly embarrassed. "In hindsight, it was not the most effective way to disregard our encounter."

Molly lifted her hips to allow Sherlock to slide down her trousers. "Was that all you did this week? Try to forget what happened and researched sex?"
Sherlock sneered even as he continued to undress Molly and himself. "Of course not. I have done quite a bit of research into Sebastian Moran and his potential connection to Moriarty, which I am nearly entirely certain is not just 'potential.'" Sherlock mimicked the action Molly had performed, paying attention to her neck. She let out a small cry and slipped a hand into his hair. "Sebastian Moran is a former army Colonel, retiring under rather suspicious circumstances. He is an avid huntsman. I suspect Moriarty finds great use for him as an assassin."

Finding Sherlock was greatly occupied with his explanations, Molly flipped them over to take control of things. She ran her hands over his chest and followed the path with her mouth. Sherlock continued to speak, although his words were punctuated with moans.

"Nothing in his personality profile suggests an interest or aptitude in administrative affairs at a hospital." He hissed in a breath as she laved her tongue over his chest. "He has only been working with Internal Affairs since shortly before my demise. I believe his resume was forged and he was installed by Moriarty specifically to keep tabs on my work within Barts. If he was entrusted with such a responsibility, no doubt he was..."

Molly looked up at Sherlock from his navel. He was now looking down at her, his light eyes widened. She could see Sherlock's Adam's apple bob as he swallowed hard. "...You find this inappropriate talk for an intimate encounter?"

Molly shook her head slowly. She then paused, tracing an idle pattern on his stomach, causing the muscles to tighten. "Well, it's not normal as such." She bit her lip. "But to tell the truth, as long as you're not deducing me... I find it a bit... Well... Sexy."

Sherlock grabbed Molly and hauled her back up, kissing her firmly. "Well, Molly Hooper... This may just work out."

(Art by Lexieken)
Chapter 9
Chapter Summary

Sherlock deals with his emotions and Molly's reaction to the morning after.

Sherlock Holmes was not a romantic. It was one of the few statements he could make and have absolute universal agreement on. Of course, others would try to throw in colour commentary such as 'Holmes is barely human.' or 'Who in the world would want that freak anyway?'

Not being a romantic, Sherlock did not expect to feel any different when he woke up after having intercourse for the first time. He was correct- as usual- in his assessment. He had not been gripped with the desire to bed Molly again as soon as possible nor to run out to buy her a ridiculously large diamond ring.

That wasn't to say he had no desire to do it again, per se. While he didn't eat often, that didn't mean he didn't enjoy it when he did it. He could see how incorporating this act into his routine could be advantageous.

While impractical- and symbolically binding- jewellery was out of the question, Sherlock had no want to expand his experience with other women. While a proper experiment would include a control group, he found the thought... Unseemly.

Bedding down with one woman was enough of a stretch for him. Besides Molly, the only other woman to show honest interest in him was The Woman. While he did find her attractive, he knew she could bury a knife in his back any time she thought it would serve her best.

As he looked down at the woman still asleep in bed, he realized the main reason he had no desire to seek other companions: He did not want to hurt Molly. That surprised him. He gave little thought to the emotional state of those around him, hoping they would take his cue and disregard them entirely.

Somewhere down the line, he had come to be fond of the tender feelings Molly held for him. He couldn't say he honestly returned them. He had cut himself off from as many feelings as he could. He did care for her; he could admit that much. But he sincerely doubted he was capable of puppy love.

Not that he would describe Molly's feelings for him as 'puppy love'. At one time they had been. She had been blinded by him- how had John described him?- 'being all mysterious with his cheekbones and turning up his coat collar so he looked cool'. She was the quintessential Type II fan. In fact, she had been his prototype.

She did not look at him with doe-eyed admiration any longer. He had ruined any romantic notions with his humiliating deductions of her life. He knocked himself off the pedestal. She saw him as just irritable, annoying Sherlock.

Yet affection remained. It was different now, but it was still there. Sherlock hadn't realized it until she'd spoken to him before his death. It had been the first time she'd spoken to him as he really was and not the object of insipid fantasies. She had deduced him. It had taken him by such surprise, he'd stammered as she was apt to do with him. She cared for him for what he truly was.

He knew it went to the point of love with four simple words:

"What do you need?"

His reputation had been in tatters. Everyone had turned against him. Yet Molly stood by him. Silly, mousy Molly Hooper believed in him no matter what. Not as a deerstalker wearing symbol or some romance novel hero. Whenever she pointed out the "I Believe in Sherlock Holmes" campaign, he'd dismissed it. Only two people really, truly knew Sherlock Holmes and still believed in him.
And, despite much speculation, he had no desire to bed John Watson.

Sherlock looked down at the woman in his arms. When they had shared a bed previously, he had put the blame on her for their closeness in the mornings. This had been a deception on his part. He knew in fact he was the one who had drawn her in. He didn't sleep much, because his mind was always racing, never allowed him a moment of peace. He found some peace in her warmth. It was not disconcerting to him, although a part of him told him it should be. When he pulled her to him, he found himself truly able to rest.

Molly let out a small, sleepy moan and Sherlock jumped slightly. He realized he'd been running an idle hand up and down her bare arm. His lip curled in disgust. What had he been doing?

"You were analysing the data you'd acquired," Sherlock muttered to himself.

He was lying to himself now. And he was doing so poorly. It made him sick.

With a slight sneer, he pulled himself out of the bed and put on his dressing gown, striding out into the sitting room. Irene was sitting on the sofa, stretched out far too comfortable and posed to be anything but a display for him. She must have just arrived from her night out.

"It appears Doctor Hooper has another on me," Irene said with a smile. "The woman who brought you death... Twice."

Sherlock glared at her. "Molly hasn't killed me."

Irene purred softly. "Just a little death, Mister Holmes."

"Have you found anything?" Sherlock asked, brow arching. "Or are you just wasting my time with witty wordplay?"

"I would really be of more use to you if I wasn't forced to masquerade as other people. I do so hate it when my hands are tied." Irene stood up and strode to Sherlock. "Sebastian Moran only worked at one hospital prior to Barts. However, it was embroiled in a bit of a scandal, involving some shady plastic surgeries. But those charges seemed to have disappeared."

Sherlock nodded slowly. "If he ever walked in that hospital, I would be very surprised."

"Now, Mister Holmes..." Irene played with the collar of his dressing gown. "Not that I am trying to put a damper on your new interest in women- God knows I enjoy them myself- but are you giving in to the good doctor out of genuine interest?"

Sherlock's gaze narrowed and he shook his head at Irene. "Why else would I?"

"Moriarty is determined to get Doctor Hooper to turn on you. You're not... Giving her incentive to stay on your side, are you?"

Sherlock's brow furrowed. "My experiment plays no part in my game with Moriarty." He pulled Irene's hands from his dressing gown. "Nor is it any of your business."

"Just looking out for you." Irene reached around and gave Sherlock a smack on the backside. "You know what they say about a woman scorned."

Sherlock studied Irene's face. "I would have thought you would have been the woman scorned."

"You taught me my lesson well, Mister Holmes," Irene replied coolly. "I don't plan on making that mistake again. I am only here because we have a deal. I expect you to hold up your end of it."

Sherlock walked past Irene towards the bathroom. "Getting mixed up in my personal life is hardly part of our deal."

Irene laughed throatily. "Do you know how many people would give their eye teeth for a front row seat to The Courtship of the Consulting Detective? Good opera is so hard to find these days."

Sherlock continued to stride away. "It is not a courtship."

Irene nodded. "Right." She laughed. "It's an 'experiment'."
Sherlock turned back briefly. "I never do anything but," He then closed the door to the bathroom.

When he emerged from the bathroom, Irene was gone. Molly was now in her place, sitting on the sofa.

She looked uncertain. Nervous. It was the Molly of old once again, not knowing how to handle herself around Sherlock. It bothered him. While Sherlock's experience was limited to one, he thought it was inappropriate for a woman to be nervous in front of a man whose penis had been inside of her.

"How many acts of intercourse do you believe it will take for you to return to your former state around me?" Sherlock drawled from the door of the bathroom, rolling his eyes slightly.

Molly jumped from her place on the sofa, looking at Sherlock wide-eyed. "Huh?"

"You," Sherlock nodded to her. "You are behaving with a level of discomfort you have not displayed in front of me in nearly half a year. I greatly preferred you the way you were. The only thing that has changed is we have now engaged in intercourse. How many times will we need to repeat the act before you are comfortable with the change in our dynamic?"

Molly's mouth fell open. Her eyes widened and she continued to stare at Sherlock. Suddenly, she looked away, her chin to her chest. "So... Does that mean you don't... Regret it?"

Sherlock was about to respond scathingly, that the very idea was asinine, but he quickly rethinked it. Clearly, Molly was only nervous because she thought that would be his response. "No, Molly. I do not. I would not offer to repeat the act if I did."

Sherlock went to the kitchen table and picked up the newspaper. He began to scan through the articles, looking for anything important. His gaze briefly flicked over to Molly. "I am sure you found the experience to be pleasurable."

Molly looked away. "It was good."

Sherlock lowered the paper slowly. "Good?" He repeated. "You have been in love with me for two years, Molly Hooper... And your reaction to our physical joining is 'good'?"

Molly grimaced. "Good isn't... Good?"

Sherlock rose to his feet. "Clearly it is not based on your reactions." He gestured to her. "I have disappointed you with my performance."

Two emotions warred within Sherlock: One was regret over the experience. If he was unable to do it properly, what was the point of doing it at all? The other was annoyance that they had to discuss it. He would have much preferred just pretending the experience had never happened.

Until they did it again. Sherlock- unlike Molly apparently- had enjoyed it quite a bit.

Molly jumped to her feet and grabbed Sherlock's hand. "Sherlock, don't get the wrong idea! I was with you and being with someone you... Well... You know... It makes all the difference in the world, even if it's..."

Sherlock jerked his hand away from Molly. "Bad?" His lip curled in a snarl. He really shouldn't have been so quick to tell Molly he hadn't regretted the experience.

"It wasn't bad!" Molly cried. "You were just sort of... Overthinking it."

Sherlock glared at her. "There is no such thing as 'overthinking',."

Molly sighed. She got up on her tiptoes and threaded her fingers into Sherlock's hair. He wanted to push her away, but he still enjoyed the feeling. "Sherlock, it is never anything more than 'good' the first time. I mean, when you first started playing the violin, were you great at it right away?"

Sherlock scowled and finally pulled Molly's hand away from him. "I would appreciate if you did not speak to me like I am a child."

"Go along with me," Molly sighed. "The first time, you're unsure and trying to get to know each
other... But you keep doing it and it gets better.”

Sherlock narrowed his gaze. "You are saying we need to continue having sex.”

Molly smiled nervously and looked down. "I mean, if you wanted to.”

Sherlock eyed Molly. She was blushing, her gaze drifting up for only a moment towards him. Clearly, the experience hadn't been that poor. "It would... Be a very sloppy experiment to run only one trial.”

Molly made a happy little noise that pleased Sherlock much more than it honestly should have. She threw her arms around him and gave him a sound kiss.

Sherlock ended it abruptly, pulling away from her. "We have things we have to do, Molly Hooper. Get showered and dressed.”

Molly looked confused, shaking her head. "What's going on? What are we doing?”

Sherlock smiled at her. "We are going to see an old friend.”
(Art by Lexie)
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Molly enlists the help of Greg Lestrade to bring down Moriarty and Moran.

Molly let out a small whine as she walked through the halls towards the office. She pulled out her phone and wrote a quick text:

This isn't going to work.

In a few heartbeats, there was a reply:

It will if you just keep your head. Just do everything I told you. Don't tip your hand.

Molly scowled at the phone before tucking it away in her coat and continuing to the office. She rapped lightly on the door. "Hello?"

Detective Inspector Greg Lestrade looked up from his work and gave Molly a small, weary smile. She had not seen him since before Sherlock’s 'death'. She had heard that Lestrade had been on suspension for several months and even now was still relegated to desk duty. Normally, Molly would have come by to see him, but she had been so preoccupied with Sherlock most of the other aspects of her life had been shunted aside.

"Molly," Lestrade stood up and sighed as he looked the woman over. "Come in, please."

Molly stepped hesitantly into the office, holding a file folder. "I told Sergeant Donovan I had some papers for you from the mortuary."

Lestrade nodded. "I guess Sergeant Donovan hasn't been kept up-to-date with Barts. I heard what happened, Molly. I'm sorry. Please... Sit."

Molly nodded and sat down across from Lestrade. "Well... I suppose I'm not the only person who has taken abuse because of Sherlock."

Lestrade sighed and sat back down. He ran a hand through his greying hair. "Could have been worse. I'll get out of the dog house eventually. What can I do for you, Molly?"

Molly opened her mouth to respond when her mobile dinged. She smiled apologetically and read the message.

Don't say anything about Moriarty's 'suicide'.
I was the only one who knew about it.

Molly rolled her eyes, thinking this was obvious and put her phone away again. "I actually wanted to talk to you about my dismissal from Barts."

Lestrade shook his head fractionally, his gaze narrowing on Molly in confusion. "I don't know why you would come to me, Molly. That is an internal matter with the hospital."

"Molly worried her lower lip, her fingers digging into the file she held. "I don't think it was entirely on the up and up. The man who was investigating me, Sebastian Moran. I don't think he really works for Internal Affairs." She squeezed her eyes shut. "Well, he does... But I think he's... I don't know, infiltrated."
Lestrade arched a brow. "Infiltrated?"

"I have reason to believe that Sebastian Moran works for James Moriarty," Molly said quickly, holding out the file folder to Lestrade. "I have evidence that..."

Lestrade took the folder, but held up his free hand. "Molly, James Moriarty doesn't exist, remember?"

Molly sighed, shaking her head. "Detective Inspector... You know that's not true. You of all people!"

Lestrade looked away, his hand tightening into a fist. "As far as Scotland Yard is concerned, James Moriarty doesn't exist. I've gotten into enough trouble as it is, without digging further into it."

Suddenly, Molly's mobile dinged again. She looked down at the text.

*If he's resisting, try flirting with him. He thinks you're cute.*

SH

Molly didn't think flirting was really going to help with the situation. Just then, a second text came in.

*It always worked on you.*

SH

Molly felt herself start to turn red.

"Molly," Lestrade said firmly, "Just who in the world-" His expression changed to a mixture of shock and fury. "That bloody bastard is still alive, isn't he?"

"What?" Molly squeaked. She shoved her phone deep into her pocket. "What are you talking about? What bastard?"

Lestrade rose to his feet and loomed over Molly. "Molly, don't play around with me."

"I don't know what you're-" Molly jumped up as Lestrade strode out of the office. "Where are you going?"

Molly trailed after Lestrade, feeling a pit deep in her stomach with each step. This was not at all a part of the plan. Sherlock had told her on no uncertain terms not to hint that he was still alive.

Of course, if Sherlock had just trusted her to do her bloody job, maybe it would have worked!

Lestrade burst out of the department. Sherlock had done very little to disguise himself, only donning a hat to cover his dark curly hair. Even then, he still wore his signature coat. At least he had omitted the scarf. He held his phone in front of him.

"Ah, Detective Inspector," Sherlock said, not even looking at Lestrade. "I had a bet with myself as to whether or not you would figure it out. Come with me."

He started to walk, still not looking away from his phone. "So did you flirt with him, Molly?"

"What?" Molly was still in a state of confusion. Was Sherlock jealous? "No... Uh..."

"Good, you are rubbish at it." He waved a hand in dismissal. "Come on, you two. Probably not best for the dead, disgraced detective to hang around outside Scotland Yard."

"Hey, wait a minute!" Lestrade bellowed. He sped up, managing to get in front of Sherlock and stopping him in his tracks. "Do you mind telling me what the hell is going on here?"

Sherlock finally looked up from his phone. He tucked it away in the pocket of his coat. "I sent Molly here with evidence as to Sebastian Moran's connection to James Moriarty in an attempt to clear her name and to bring to light Moriarty's crime syndicate, which I do assure you, Lestrade, is very much *not* an invention of my own making."
Lestrade poked Sherlock in the chest with a finger. "You are supposed to be dead."

"Clearly, I am not," Sherlock replied.

Lestrade's gaze shifted to Molly. "You?"

Molly couldn't look Lestrade in the eye. In fact, she shielded herself so she was shielded by Sherlock's tall frame.

"Do not blame Molly, Lestrade... It is impossible for her to say no to me." He glanced over his shoulder at Molly. There was a gleam in his light eyes and a small smile on his lips. "For anything."

Molly felt herself turning red anew. Was Sherlock Holmes flirting? Really and properly?

"Should put you in cuffs right now," Lestrade said firmly.

Sherlock shook his head. "But you won't. You'll come with me. We have a lot to discuss."

They found themselves in a dingy pub several blocks away from the department. Sherlock had his back to the crowd, keeping his face mostly obscured.

Despite asking about a dozen times before they sat, Sherlock refused to give away the secret to his continued existence. Molly took her cue from him. If Sherlock was not going to answer, she was not going to give anything away either.

Molly had her own questions for Sherlock. She glanced over at him, shaking her head. "Why did you have me do that?" Her voice was slightly squeaky from panic. "If you knew the Detective Inspector was going to figure out you were still alive, why didn't you just contact him yourself, rather than drag me into it?"

Sherlock's light blue gaze raked over Molly. "Are you not enjoying this? I thought you would like being included in my investigation."

Sherlock's reason for everything became crystal clear and she thanked every deity she knew it was dark enough in the pub that her blush was hidden.

This was the Sherlock version of a date.

"I..." She looked down. "You could have given me some warning."

Sherlock arched a brow at her. "Seemed more fun this way."

Lestrade looked back and forth between Sherlock and Molly. "Can one of you please explain just what's going on? All right, so you don't want to tell me how you faked you death... Do you want to explain to me why... And why the hell you chose to let me in on the fact that you did?"

Sherlock leaned in close. "You are a good man. And you are a good detective. You know what they said about me doesn't make any sense. You've always known. You might have entertained the notion for a moment, but after everything we did, you couldn't believe it."

Lestrade remained quiet, just watching Sherlock.

"I needed to fake my death, to allow Moriarty to think he had won. Give myself time. I don't need time anymore. I need you. Very soon, Moriarty and I will have our final meeting. I need the only detective in London I trust on my side."

Lestrade looked down at his folded hands. "Sherlock, I just got off suspension for working with you before. I'm still on desk duty!"

Sherlock's face was impassive. "I would think bringing in the most notorious criminal in London would go a long way to polishing your tarnished reputation. Like it or not, our notoriety is interconnected. If I'm vindicated, so will you."

Lestrade looked through the file folder Molly had given him. "This Sebastian Moran... You really think he has something to do with all of this?"
"I do," Sherlock replied. "A man of his calibre makes no sense in administration at Barts. I believe him to be one of Moriarty's lieutenants. Moriarty is quiet upset at Doctor Hooper. He underestimated her abilities and Moriarty hates to be wrong, as it happens so rarely."

Lestrade shook his head. "Molly, I don't mean offense, but... As long as people believe Sherlock is a fraud, your dismissal is not unexpected. I thought I might lose my own job!"

"Molly never did anything wrong," Sherlock insisted, his voice dark and dangerous. "And Moriarty has made it clear to me he is focusing his attentions on her."

"It sounds like you're making some incredible leaps again," Lestrade said with a sigh. "Not really helping clear your name. What proof do you have that Moriarty is coming after Molly?"

"The gun he put at my head," Molly piped up. Lestrade's eyes widened as he looked to Molly. "What?"

"He came to Barts," Molly explained. "Put a gun to my head." She leaned in to Lestrade, taking his arm. "Everyone wanted to disbelieve Sherlock because he's-" She looked to Sherlock for a moment. "An arrogant, horrible prat."

She caught the faintest hint of a smile on Sherlock's face before she turned back to Lestrade. "I think you do believe Sherlock. But if there's a little bit of doubt still there, then believe me. I would never lie to you about something like this."

"Just about Sherlock still being alive," Lestrade sighed. He then nodded slowly. "What do you want? You want me to bring in this Moran?"

Sherlock shook his head. "Not yet. There's not enough to hold him and we can't let Moriarty know we've met."

Lestrade swallowed hard. "All right. What do you need from me?"

"I need you to be there when I call you." Sherlock got to his feet. He looked to Molly and she scrambled up to follow after him. "I'll be in touch, Lestrade."

With that, he swept from the pub, Molly close on his heels.

They made their way back towards Molly's flat. They remained silent until they arrived at the door of her flat. As she fumbled with her keys, Sherlock glanced down at Molly and gave her an appraising look. "You did well today, Molly."

Molly looked up as she opened the door. "I thought that's what this was for you." She let out a small laugh. "Then how many dates did you and John go on?"

"I never did this with John." Sherlock leaned in and pressed his mouth to Molly's. She let out a happy sigh against his mouth as he guided her into the flat.

They parted as the door finally closed. Sherlock pulled himself back up to full height. "You know, I don't know how much longer this game will last, Molly. I have the feeling something big will change soon."

Molly worried her lower lip and gave a small nod. She was not worried about the outcome. She knew, in the end, Sherlock would win.

What worried her was the aftermath. What would happen to them when their lives returned to normal?
“He put a gun to my head...”

(Art by Lexie)
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Molly and Sherlock explore their new relationship and Sherlock reveals something of his past.

Despite Sherlock's prediction, nothing had changed much in the past month and a half, aside from the lack of the Woman's presence. She had a promising lead abroad.

"Besides, Mister Holmes... I don't want to spoil your 'experiment'."

The Woman or no, the experiment was progressing smoothly. Sherlock had worried Molly would become a simpering, cloying moron when it came to sex and attachments. She did seem like the type to fall for such romantic twaddle.

In truth, very little of their arrangement had changed. He did his investigations and experiments and she would become annoyed if he made some sort of arbitrary social taboo. She did insist on kissing him in the morning and before she went to bed. Were it up to Sherlock, he would not have been so regular in their affections, but that was not to say it was unpleasant.

Nor did he mind when she would card her fingers through his hair while he was working on her computer or plucking at his violin. It seemed to help his concentration.

Of course, there was also the addition of sex. It was not what he would call a common occurrence. Then, Sherlock wasn't entirely certain what was considered 'common'. It tended to happen on the nights when he would finally give in to sleep, his mind and body craving rest. He had thought just sleeping in Molly's arms was a balm on his restless mind. It was nothing compared to finally resting after allowing himself pleasure.

It reminded him of when he would take morphine, the calm that would come over him. Yet they had one or two encounters- when Sherlock was frustrated by lack of leads or annoyed by boredom- that made his cocaine highs pale in comparison.

Perhaps he should have begun having sex when he had tried to get clean. Maybe he wouldn't have relapsed so much.

He had surmised that Molly had been correct and practice did make perfect even with something as base as intercourse. At least if her red cheeks and barely contained grins were anything to go by.

Sherlock was conflicted. He was enjoying it all, but that disturbed him. He wasn't supposed to be content playing house with a cheerful pathologist. He longed for his old life back, yet he did not want to give up these new additions.

It was a peculiar situation. One he needed to ponder further.

"Do you mind if I ask you a question, Sherlock?" Molly was lying on her stomach on her bed, looking up at Sherlock as he dried himself off after his shower. She was already dressed for the day.

Sherlock went to work drying off his hair. "Well, I suppose it depends on what it is. Will I find it banal?"

"I don't know," Molly replied, giving a slight shrug and an embarrassed smile. "You find funny things to be 'banal'."

"All right." Sherlock nodded. "Ask."

Molly's smile widened and she let out a small giggle. "Why do you have 'VR' tattooed on your backside?"
Sherlock winced slightly. He'd thought of having the damn thing removed many times. "How long has that been bothering you?"

Molly blushed and looked away. Clearly, it had been on her mind since she'd first glimpsed it, probably when he'd started jumping into the shower with her. Yet she hadn't the courage to bring it up. Their current relationship made her much more relaxed about things.

"Why don't you tell me," Sherlock suggested, eyeing her. "You've deduced me before. Why don't you have another go?"

Molly's eyes widened. "What? You want me to..." She shook her head and let out a nervous little twitter. "How do you expect me to...?"

"You are a pathologist. I'm sure you've had to identify bodies using tattoos before."

Molly shook her head. "That's not really how it works or even what you're asking."

He gave her a smile. "Indulge me."

He liked when Molly showed off her intelligence. In the past, he had insulted her breasts and mouth—both which he realized now were just fine the way they were—but really, they didn't matter. For him, it was her intelligence that attracted him.

"Brainy is the new sexy," he recalled the Woman telling him once.

Molly bit her lower lip and her cheeks turned pink. "I... Ummm... I need to... Well..." She twittered nervously again. "Get a better look at it."

Sherlock pulled the towel from his hips. "You just want to get a good look at my backside, don't you, Molly Hooper?"

Oh, he was flirting. And he meant it. He was disgusting himself. When had that become so easy to do? Still, he turned and allowed Molly to do her investigation.

He felt her fingers trace the elaborate letters and a shiver went through him.

"I'd say..." Molly said quietly. "Based on how much the ink has faded, it's at least ten years old. And you haven't had it retouched. You regret having it done. But you haven't had it removed, which is normally what someone does when they regret having a tattoo. So you leave it there as a reminder. It also looks like it wasn't done at the most reputable place, considering how sloppy the edges are..." She hummed softly in thought. "You had it done while you were high on cocaine and you leave it as a reminder not to fall back into it."

Sherlock smiled down at Molly and gave her a nod. "Good show, Molly." He threw himself onto the bed. "What made you say cocaine rather than morphine? I did use both."

"You would have used morphine to knock yourself out. Cocaine is the drug that makes you do mad things. Besides, I know you preferred it." She went quiet, running her fingers over Sherlock's calf. She was pensive and Sherlock knew why.

"I'm clean," he said softly. "I've been clean for years now. Longer than you've known me."

It felt strange, to try to ease Molly. He had always been unapologetic about the things he had done. But he didn't want her to worry about him relapsing.

"I'm a doctor," Molly said quietly. "I know it's not as easy as all that. The addiction doesn't die, it's just... Asleep."

Sherlock turned himself around so he was closer to Molly. "I have willed the addiction away with the power of my mind."

Molly shook her head. "That's impossible."

Sherlock scoffed. "My mind can do anything." He was lying. Molly was right; the addiction never did truly go away. But he didn't want to tell her that. He wanted to make her feel better.

So few had ever been concerned about him. There were even fewer he tried to assure. And fewer
still he wanted to think well of him, despite all his flaws.

When had Molly Hooper become one of them?

He lightened the mood by leaning in and pressing a kiss behind Molly's ear. She shivered slightly, which Sherlock found endearing, despite still being slightly uncomfortable with such a gesture. "You've left one important detail: Why is it VR?"

"I've been trying to figure that out," Molly admitted with a slight frown. "If it were anyone but you, I'd say it was a lady's initials. But doesn't make any sense."

"There's always the one thing," Sherlock commented with a shake of his head. "It actually is a lady's initials."

"Wh-What?" Molly sat up quickly, her eyes going wide. "B-But..."

Sherlock leaned in and placed a finger to Molly's lips. "Victoria Regina. As in Queen Victoria."

Molly pulled away from Sherlock's finger and cocked her head in question. "Why in the world would you get Queen Victoria's initials tattooed on your backside?"

Sherlock sighed. "I haven't the faintest. I had a reason at the time, but I've forgotten what. I was very high."

Molly looked down at Sherlock. "So... Do I get a prize for my wonderful deduction?"

"A prize?" Sherlock's brow furrowed. "I do wonderful deductions all the time and I don't get prizes. Why should you?"

"You get paid," Molly pointed out. "And people do give you things. Diamond cufflinks and the hat the police bought you..."

"Do you want the hat?" Sherlock asked. "I can't stand the thing."

"I think you look cute in it," Molly said with a blush.

"It's ridiculous!" Sherlock protested. "Why would a hat need two fronts and earflaps?"

Molly blinked at him. "Well, it protects both the face and the neck from the sun. And you wear the flaps down if it gets cold. Important things to keep in mind when you're deerstalking."

Sherlock's nose crinkled. "How do you know that?"

"I know things," Molly replied, a touch of indignation in her voice.

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Okay, why would you know that? How useless is that information? When in your life have you ever gone deerstalking?"

"I..." Molly blushed deeply. "Well... I... Ah..."

Molly becoming flustered was something that was waning more every day, but occasionally she still succumbed to it. Sherlock was beginning to learn it was Molly's equivalent of John telling him he was being an arse. He leaned in and cupped her cheek. "Forget that damnable hat. I could give you... A naked Sherlock Holmes in your bed."

"Oh." Molly giggled, trailing her fingers up Sherlock's chest. "I do seem to have a naked Sherlock Holmes in my bed."

Sherlock leaned in towards her. "Congratulations, Molly Hooper." He pressed a kiss to her cheek, trailing towards her mouth. "What would you like to do with your prize?"

It was too easy to fall into it all. The comfort of being with Molly. The pleasure she offered him. The warmth he got from her smile or her laugh. Part of him wanted to rail against it, fight the things that felt so unnatural to him. But he had lost so much when Moriarty had forced his hand. If he had found something that made him happy, even if it felt alien, should he really avoid it?

Molly Hooper actually made him happy.
Had he known that was going to happen, he might have honestly jumped. She still made him so uncertain and he did not like uncertainty.

But it was hard to find anything wrong while she was kissing him firmly, sorting out the jumble of rooms in his mind palace, reducing them to just the salient thoughts. Which at the moment was that it was quite pleasant for him to be a prize.

There was a rap at the door. Molly pulled away from Sherlock with a small frown. "I've got to get that."

Sherlock shook his head and tried to draw her back to him. "It's got to be one of the neighbours complaining about some rubbish. You've already paid the landlord, so he won't be by for rent. Can't be a proper visitor. You don't have any friends."

Molly gave Sherlock a light shove as she scowled. "And for that you can put your trousers on."

Sherlock rolled his eyes as Molly got off the bed and strode out of the bedroom towards the door. "What? It is not like I didn't say anything that is not true..." He grabbed his pants and trousers and tugged them up his long legs. "What we were doing was much more interesting that anything that is behind that-"

He heard a muffled shriek and then the slam of the front door. His eyes went wide and he raced out of the bedroom.

"MOLLY!"

(Art by Lexie)
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Molly is faced with her kidnapper, whose motivations are not at all what she expects.

Everything was a blur until Molly found herself standing alone in a dingy warehouse. She hugged her arms and her gaze nervously darted around, looking for the face from her nightmares. Certainly, he must have been the one behind her kidnapping.

"I do apologize for the dramatics, Miss Hooper," a cool voice said from behind her. It was a cool voice that most definitely did not belong to Moriarty. "I have been wanting to speak with you for a long time, but you are so rarely out of Sherlock's company these days, it was difficult for us to get a moment alone."

"Sherlock i-is d-dead," Molly said feebly, trying vainly to keep up the deception. Molly turned to face the man who had abducted her. She recognized him immediately. Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock's brother. "You are incredibly loyal, Miss Hooper. It is of no doubt why my brother trusted you with his demise."

"How long have you known?" Molly asked, worrying her lower lip. "I have suspected since his funeral," Mycroft replied. "I found it peculiar that you would not attend, despite your obvious infatuation with him. His violin was also missing from Baker Street. And despite Anthea's dalliances with Miss Adler, she is still loyal to me. How disappointed Miss Adler would be." He laughed, shaking his head. "It seems she hasn't learned her lesson and leaves herself vulnerable when it comes to attraction."

Molly took a deep, gulping breath. "So you know Irene is alive too."

"I don't plan to do anything with the information of her continued existence, nor Sherlock's for that matter," Mycroft said, looking down and stepping closer to Molly. She could see regret clear on his face. "I owe Sherlock. I played not a small part in this entire mess. I wish to rectify that."

Molly bit her lip. "And you're doing that by kidnapping me? I don't really think your brother is going to be too pleased about that."

"You will be returned to him unharmed, I promise you," Mycroft insisted. "Sherlock would never accept my help. You must do it for him. Whatever his plan is for taking down Moriarty, I will do everything in my considerable power to assist."

Molly wrung her hands. "Why don't you just talk to him?"

"A big family reconciliation?" Mycroft shook his head. "Now isn't really the moment. I told you. He will never accept my help. But you will. You know what I can accomplish and you have his best interests at heart."

"I won't go against Sherlock," Molly insisted.

Mycroft smiled, but it was a fake smile that made a knot form in Molly's stomach. "I am not asking you to, Miss Hooper."

"It is Doctor Hooper, Mycroft." Sherlock strode out purposefully. He stopped at Molly's side, took her by the shoulders and moved her two paces back from Mycroft. "It is always best to keep your distance from Mycroft, Molly. You never know when the fangs are going to emerge."

Mycroft sighed. "Oh Sherlock. I did hope you would allow me some time with Doctor Hooper. It is in your best interest."

Sherlock glared daggers at Mycroft. "It is in my best interest that you kidnap my Pathologist?"
Mycroft blinked at Sherlock. "Oh, you must be joking. You're sleeping with her."

Molly had never seen him so before, but she was certain Sherlock was flustered as he shifted slightly and looked away. "Pardon?"

"Doctor Hooper has rid you of that pesky virginity." Mycroft's lip curled. "It is plainly obvious. And you still call her your Pathologist? How decidingly kinky." He wrinkled his nose in disgust. "You don't make her call you 'her Consulting Detective', do you?"

Sherlock scowled. "Shut up, Mycroft."

Mycroft gripped his umbrella. "Mummy will be pleased to hear you've found yourself a nice girl." Molly didn't like the emphasis Mycroft placed. He picked up his umbrella and poked Sherlock with it. "You did hurt her so with your suicide. I don't know how I will break the news to her when this all falls to pieces. You'll have to crawl on glass to get back in her good graces after this stunt, little brother."

Sherlock swatted the umbrella away peevishly. "I did what I had to, no thanks to you."

"As I was telling your Pathologist," Mycroft used the word as if it were a horrible insult, though Molly was certain it was aimed not at her profession, but Sherlock's inability to describe her as anything closer to the truth. "I wish to make amends for my indiscretion. I wish to assist you in taking down Moriarty."

Sherlock moved Molly behind him and got close to his brother. "And why did you not just come to me directly?"

Mycroft sighed. "I rather thought you would say no."

Sherlock smiled tightly. "No one could ever claim you an idiot Mycroft. Um, no."

Sherlock turned, putting an arm around Molly's shoulders and directing her along with him.

"You know I can help," Mycroft called after them. "I can help things move much faster. Or do you like things the way they are, Sherlock? Playing house with Doctor Hooper, while the rest of the world thinks you dead? Not being able to be a detective. Breaking John Watson's heart day after day."

Sherlock stopped dead in his tracks.

"Doctor Hooper hasn't heard from him, has she?" Mycroft continued. "He said he would write me as well, but I haven't heard a word. He is all right though, in case you still cared."

Sherlock glanced over his shoulder. "What can you do?"

"I can tell the truth," Mycroft replied.

Sherlock's brows rose as he turned around. "Really? Are you actually capable of that?"

"I know what Miss Adler is acquiring. That will only help with one of your problems." Mycroft stepped up to Sherlock. "Your name is still mud. I can clean it up. Tell everyone where 'Richard Brook' got his information."

"Your own standing will go down a bit," Sherlock replied.

Mycroft straightened up, his nose slightly upturned. "It would be only temporary. I am far too valuable to suffer a long disgrace."

Sherlock considered this silently for a long moment. He turned away from Mycroft once again. "I will consider it."

"Before you leave, you should know I have been paying your rent at 221B. I know you are a creature of habit and would throw a hissy fit were it rented out from under you. I also had Mrs Hudson keep your things. Told her it was—" he let out a cold laugh. "-Sentimental reasons. Now that Moriarty, Lestrade and myself are aware of your continued existence, go back there. That dreadful flat you are residing in would wound Mummy even more than the fact you faked suicide."
Sherlock was quiet on the ride back from the meeting with Mycroft. His brow was knit in deep thought. Molly only hazarded brief glances at him. When she lingered too long, Sherlock shot her a deadly glare indicating her mere gaze was enough to break his concentration.

When they got back to her flat, Sherlock began to pack the few belongings he had. Molly sat herself down on the sofa and picked up Toby, petting him while trying to force herself not to frown.

"So... You're going to take Mycroft up on his offer... Yeah?" Molly bit her lower lip and shifted in her seat.

"I have not decided yet," Sherlock replied as he closed the lid on his violin case and slipped it into a shopping bag. "It would do a great deal to clear my name, but I'm not sure..."

"Not that one." Molly looked down. "You're going to go back to Baker Street."

"Of course," Sherlock replied. "Mycroft is right. It has been nearly half a year since my demise. No one is paying any attention except those who are already aware I am still alive. It is my home. It has my things in it. I will be permitted to play my violin again. Mrs Hudson has not yet been told I am alive, but I trust her."

Molly nodded. "All right. Well..." She let out a small, sad laugh. "It's been really nice having you here, Sherlock." She could feel tears starting to threaten. "I mean, I know this wasn't the most pleasant place you could be, but it wasn't all that bad, us being together."

Sherlock halted in mid-stride and cocked his head at Molly. "You are aware you are babbling, aren't you?"

Molly nodded. "It had come to my attention."

Sherlock scowled slightly. "Why aren't you packing?"

"Oh..." Molly pushed Toby off her lap and began to look around the apartment somewhat helplessly trying to find something of Sherlock's to pack away. Here he was, breaking her heart by just walking out as soon as he had a better offer and he expected her to help. "I guess I could help you find your stuff."

"You are coming too, Molly," Sherlock said slowly, as if he were speaking to a child.

Molly's eyes went wide. "I am?" she squeaked.

Sherlock sighed in exasperation. "Of course you are. Moriarty is still targeting you. I need to keep an eye on you. And this apartment is really atrocious. And you are unemployed at the moment and will soon be unable to keep up on the rent. And-"

Molly's eyes widened further. "And?"

Sherlock pulled Molly to him, kissing her with furious intensity. As quickly as it started, he ended it. He ran a hand through his hair and nodded. "Right. So pack everything up and we'll get ourselves to Baker Street by midnight. Do be careful with Toby at 221B. I'd hate for him to eat Basil."

"Basil?" Molly repeated.

"Mouse," Sherlock explained. "Lives in the wall. I've done experiments on him a few times."

Noticing Molly was about to protest he rolled his eyes. "Behavioural only. Anyway, I've become rather use to him." He hummed in thought. "I do hope he hasn't died while I've been away."

Molly giggled softly and went to work collecting her things. She felt very little sentimentality at leaving this place. It was the best she could get and Sherlock was right, it was a bit atrocious. It would be even worse were Sherlock to leave while she remained.

As she began to packing things up, she felt Sherlock standing close behind her. "You really thought I was just going to abandon you?"
Molly nodded. "Sherlock Holmes isn't big on sentimentality."

Sherlock leaned in closer, sliding his arms around Molly's waist and sending a shiver down her spine. His voice was like black velvet against her ear. "Silly girl. I didn't give you your prize yet."
"I haven't given you your price..."

T. Arthur Chui

(Art by Lexie)
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Sherlock and Molly adjust to the move to 221B and Sherlock confesses something to Molly.

Mycroft was right. Sherlock was a creature of habit. 221B Baker Street fit him like a glove. No, it was like the Persian slipper he often used to stash his emergency cigarettes. Bizarre to all who looked upon it, yet just right for him.

The only thing missing was John, who was still thousands of kilometres away. It was with a pang to his heart that he returned to the home they'd shared for a year and a half and found him not there.

Molly's presence had been a comfort to him, although he would never have admitted it to anyone. Giving her the prize he'd promised in his own bed- which was by far more comfortable than her assemble-your-own eyesore- had done a great deal to keep his mind off the ghost of John Watson in 221B. So looming was the spectre, he'd engaged Molly again in the morning. He needed to keep his mind off memories of John shoving him awake to yell at him for keeping body parts in the refrigerator or whatever small transgression he'd supposedly committed. He did not wish to delete them, but he also did not want to concentrate on them.

It had not worked as well as he had hoped. Once they finally left the bedroom, Sherlock had gone straight to his violin and began to play. Molly busied herself making tea. Neither of them had showered or dressed yet, Sherlock in his pyjamas and bathrobe, while Molly had donned his button-down shirt from the day previous.

In Sherlock's opinion it was ridiculous- not to mention unhygienic- to wear someone else's worn clothing. Although he had to admit she did look charming.

"Hoohoo." There was a knock at the door and Mrs Hudson bustled in, carrying the paper with her. "What was all that racket you were making last night, Sherlock? All that bashing about. I do need to get my rest."

Sherlock looked up from his violin and gave her a genuine smile. He hadn't set eyes on her properly in half a year and he had missed her presence in his life. Clearly, she had as well, as the situation had not yet sunk in. "Sorry about that, Mrs Hudson. Had a few things to move. I'll do my best not to disturb your beauty sleep again."

"Look at all these boxes," Mrs Hudson sighed. "What could you need them all..." Mrs Hudson went still.

Ah. There it was.

Her eyes went wide. "SHERLOCK!"

Sherlock set down his violin. "Yes. The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated. I apologize deeply for the deception, Mrs Hudson. I assure you it was necessary for your safety." He swooped in and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "But the time has come to settle myself back into Baker Street. It has not been the same while I was away from you. But I am back now and-"

Sherlock yelped as Mrs Hudson rolled the newspaper in her hands and began to swat him on the backside. "How dare you, Sherlock Holmes! You! Terrible! Man!" She punctuated each word with another smack.

"Ow!" Sherlock flinched away. "Mrs Hudson!"

"You broke my heart!" Another smack. "You broke John's heart! You broke Mol-" She looked to the kitchen and saw Molly trying to sneak out towards Sherlock's bedroom, tugging the hem of Sherlock's shirt down.
"Molly?" Mrs Hudson's eyes widened.

Molly raised a bashful hand to wave. "Hullo Mrs Hudson. Sorry it's been a while." She shifted awkwardly. "I'm going to get some bottoms on." With that, she scampered off.

While she was distracted, Sherlock attempted to edge away from Mrs Hudson. However, she recovered quickly and resumed her assault on him. "You dragged Molly into this? Made the poor girl help you fool all your friends?"

Sherlock sighed, and grabbed the newspaper before Mrs Hudson could smack him again. "I assure you, Mrs Hudson, I had to do it. Moriarty made sure of it. I did not wish to deceive any of you." He gripped Mrs Hudson's shoulder. "But I am back now. Only a few people know I am alive, so you will have to keep it a secret. But soon- very soon- that will change."

"Does John know?" Mrs Hudson asked softly.

Sherlock shook his head. "No. I am aware he is in Africa. If he were to find out the truth, he would return. It is safer for him to remain there until I can defeat Moriarty."

Mrs Hudson shook her head. "Oh, you hurt him so badly, Sherlock."

Sherlock nodded. "I know. I want to tell him. I will the moment it is safe for him. But for now, he needs to stay where he is."

Mrs Hudson glanced towards Sherlock's bedroom. "Now, Sherlock... Molly?"

"Ah." Sherlock cleared his throat, averting his gaze. "Molly. Right. Molly helped me fake my death and I have been living with her at her flat since."

"It really was more of a question as to why Molly Hooper was wearing your shirt without her knickers."

Sherlock felt like a teenager caught with a girl in his parent's bed. It was a horrible sensation. He hoped never to repeat it. "Well..." He took a deep breath, rubbing the back of his neck. "We were living together and things... Progressed..."

"Oh Sherlock." Mrs Hudson clasped his face and gave him kisses on both cheeks. "My Sherlock, Sherlock, Sherlock. She's such a nice girl. And she's been mad on you for ages. Oh, I am sure she will be such a good influence on you. Maybe you won't make such a ruckus. John did indulge you so."

Sherlock straightened up. "Molly is not going to stop me from doing anything."

Oh, silly boy," Mrs Hudson laughed. "Having a girlfriend changes a lot of things."

"I-I do not have a g-girlfriend!" Sherlock stammered. He was started to get flustered and sounding disturbingly like Molly during her worse moments. "I-I... I have a pathologist!"

"I wouldn't say things like that around her, dear." Mrs Hudson gave Sherlock a pat on the cheek. "You treat that girl right, you hear me? I'm not saying you have to dash off to the altar, but do keep her feelings in mind. Not many girls enjoy being called 'pathologists'."

She turned and walked back towards the door while Sherlock stood motionless, helpless, in his spot. "But she is a Pathologist."

Sherlock remained glued to his spot. He closed his eyes tightly. It had been easier when it had just been the pair of them at Molly's flat with only occasional appearances from the Woman. There was a sense of unreality to it. Now, hearing it from Mrs Hudson's lips, he knew he couldn't ignore it.

He needed to sweep into his bedroom, the one she was changing in, and declare their experiment over and move her into John's old bedroom until the threat was over, at which time she could go back to her own dreadful flat. But that idea caused a twist in his stomach, not just because he had become use to Molly's company, but because John's room was John's room.

Then, he heard her voice from the door. "I don't mind," she called out.
Sherlock opened his eyes to look at her.

"Being your pathologist," Molly replied, a shy smile on her face. "You don't do things like other people, Sherlock. I know that. I don't expect anything else from you."

Sherlock was about to say it was done now. They were finished. But as he looked into her eyes, he found himself unable to. "You know... Your skills with pathology fulfill all of my requirements." He swallowed. The subtext was hardly 'sub'. "I have no desire to find another pathologist."

Molly's smile widened. "Well, there's only one Consulting Detective in the world, so..." She laughed. "Guess I got lucky." She took a step towards Sherlock and reached for his hand. "So... Things wouldn't change if you had your blogger back?"

Sherlock's eyes widened and he pulled his hand away from Molly's. "You are aware John was just my blogger, right?"

Molly shook her head. "No he wasn't, Sherlock. Maybe it doesn't have the same implications as being your pathologist, but... I know you miss him. Everyday. And I know whatever has happened between us wouldn't have happened if he had been here."

"It's really neither here nor there." Sherlock turned to pick up his violin once again. "Nor is it your business."

"I'm your pathologist," Molly replied, placing a hand on Sherlock's shoulder. "If there's something bothering you, it's my business. Everyone who matters knows, Sherlock... Why don't you call him?"

"I need to keep him-"

Molly stepped in front of Sherlock and shook her head. "John can take care of himself. As it is, I'm in danger and so are Lestrade, Mrs Hudson, Irene and your brother. That's not what this is about."

Sherlock couldn't meet Molly's sad brown eyes. "I could handle lying to Lestrade, Mycroft and even Mrs Hudson..."

"You're afraid he won't forgive you." Molly reached up and threaded her fingers in Sherlock's hair.

"I did it to save him," Sherlock murmured. He shook his head. "But he won't see it that way. He'll just see that I lied. That I intentionally hurt him."

"You love him," Molly said gently.

Sherlock sneered. "I told you, Molly..."

Molly shook her head. "No, Sherlock... You love him. I'm not implying anything. He made your life better for being in it. You hate the idea of him hurting, but you're willing to do it yourself as long as it means he is safe. You would kill for him. You would die for him. You did die for him. You're just clever enough to find away around it. That's what love is." She paused. "I know. It's... It's how I feel about..." She blushed and looked away.

Sherlock nodded. He brought up a hand to take one of Molly's. He brushed his thumb over the back of it. "You would kill for me?"

"I already did," Molly whispered. "Killed you, didn't I?"

"I'm not ready to tell John yet," Sherlock admitted. He sank down onto the sofa. "Even after everything I told him, he thinks well of me. That will change the moment he finds out I'm still alive."

Molly frowned. "He'll just be happy to have you back." She smiled awkwardly. "Okay, maybe he'll punch you. But after that he'll hug you."

"Not yet," Sherlock murmured. He steepled his fingers and began to ponder when exactly he was
going to be ready to let John in on his secret.

Molly's fingers carded through his hair briefly before she started walking back towards the bedroom.

Sherlock warred with himself for a moment, pressing his mouth to his fingers. Finally, he sighed. "You're right."

Molly paused and turned back to him. "Sorry?"

"You're right," Sherlock sighed. "What happened. Our experiment. It wouldn't have happened were I around John. If my life had not changed so drastically."

Molly nodded.

Sherlock ran a hand through his hair. "That does not mean I regret it... Nor am I willing to toss it aside should my life resume its previous course."

Molly's cheeks reddened slightly. "You think your life can handle that sort of experiment?"

Sherlock rose to his feet. He crossed the room to stand before Molly. He slipped his hands around her waist. "I think we are both too clever to continue with silly euphemisms." He swallowed hard. His emotions were raw from their talk of John. "It was never just an experiment. And you were never just my pathologist."

Molly shyly looked away. Sherlock cupped her chin and forced her to look up at him. "You make my life better for being in it. I do not like to see you hurt..." He gave her a small smile. "Even though I am often the one who seems to cause it. I would kill for you, Molly Hooper. And if you had not been the one to kill me, I would have died for you too." He pressed his forehead to hers. "Taking into account all that evidence, I can only come to one conclusion."

He couldn't say the words. Not directly. Admitting this much was already testing him. But he had been stripped so bare by their discussion. He needed to tell her, not because she needed to hear it, but because he needed her to hear it.

"Oh." Molly's eyes widened and her cheeks reddened.

Sherlock press a light kiss to her lips. "Go finish getting dressed." He pulled away from her and picked up his violin once again.

He peered over his shoulder to look at Molly. She hadn't moved from her spot. It appeared his deductions had stunned someone yet again.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Molly deals with the reality of being in a relationship with Sherlock Holmes as he plans how to take down Moriarty.

Molly gave a slight start as there was a loud crash in the flat above her. Mrs Hudson paid no attention to it, calmly pouring tea into two cups. "Haven't missed that racket," Mrs Hudson tutted. "Was he this irritable when he was staying with you?"

Molly shook her head silently. She had heard stories from Mrs Hudson and John about Sherlock's raving moods, when he wasn't occupied with a case or particularly frustrated by a slow one. While he'd stormed around at her flat, it seemed to be reaching new heights back at Baker Street.

It was familiar to him. He felt comfortable tearing the place apart. Molly also knew the absence of John was pulling at him even harder now, memories of their friendship all around him.

They had been at Baker Street for over a month. Irene had not returned, although Sherlock received texts from her, which Molly had come to recognize from the familiar orgasmic noise that accompanied them. How Irene had gotten that ringtone onto Sherlock's new phone was beyond Molly. Yet there had been no sign of the dominatrix. Molly only knew she was out of the country, but was not in the same country she had been before they had moved. Whatever she was onto, it was important.

Maybe it was being in Baker Street or perhaps it was the length of time everything was taking, but Molly could only describe Sherlock's mood was mercurial. Oh, he would be pleased with her using that particular word.

Moods like the one he was currently in were becoming increasingly common. Sherlock would only become angrier if Molly tried to go out alone to let him stomp out his mood, thus she spent a lot of time with Mrs Hudson, having tea or else watching telly.

There were also the sullen silences. When he would do nothing but play his violin and look around the flat, his light eyes riveted to the mementoes of John's presence. He tried to hide it, but Molly could see the conflict on his face, the desire to contact John, but the inability to bring himself to do so. Occasionally, he would mutter things to Molly or Toby about the case, but he didn't seem to need or even want a reply.

Yet there was another mood. She had seen the nascent stages of it in her apartment, during their 'experiment'. There was no mistaking it now. They were always brief, but well worth it. When he would suddenly wrap himself around her, pulling her close to him. They would have quiet conversations, such as Sherlock talking about his interest in bee keeping or Molly telling a story about her family, Sherlock showing amazement one could actually like their siblings. Once, Sherlock had joined her in watching a movie on the sofa. He'd bitten his lip throughout most of the film, trying to suppress his natural urge to point out the flaws. Occasionally, a mumbled derisive comment had escaped. When it finally became too much, he just snogged her soundly. Molly had made a mental note to watch films Sherlock would not particularly enjoy in the future.

These moments were always painfully short and ended as abruptly as they began, but it was something.

Somehow, Molly Hooper had ended up in a relationship with Sherlock Holmes. It in no way resembled her former fantasies. She thought this was better. It was real. The moments where Sherlock resembled a real, proper boyfriend were brief, but that made them all the more special.

This was definitely not one of those moments, as something else was tossed about in 221B. It must have come too close to Toby, as there was a yowl and the cat streaked down the stairs, taking shelter underneath Mrs Hudson's table.
"Oh my," Mrs Hudson sighed, looking to Molly. "Isn't there anything you can do, Molly dear?"

Molly's lower lip jutted out in thought. If she yelled at Sherlock, he would just yell back, probably saying something very unkind. The last time she'd tried to calm him sweetly, by running her hands through his hair the way she knew he liked, he'd pushed her away and irritably asked her if that was all she ever thought about.

But when Mrs Hudson looked at her pleadingly, she couldn't resist giving it another go. With a sigh, she rose to her feet and ascended the stairs to Sherlock's flat.

She stopped in the doorway and frowned. "What in the world did you do to my cat?"

"I was not aiming for him," Sherlock responded tersely. He stalked to Molly and glared at her. "Why in the world would you want to have such a standoffish creature around you that is as likely to claw you as it is to show you any affection?"

Molly shrugged and let out a nervous laugh. "Guess I have a type?"

Sherlock waved his hand dismissively and began his pacing anew.

Molly stepped into the flat and brought a hand to her nose. The room reeked of cigarette smoke. "It's going to be like kissing an ashtray."

"Oh?" Sherlock smiled. "Does this means you will be leaving me alone for once?"

Molly lowered her head and slumped her shoulders. "It's just... The patches seemed to be working for you..."

"And now, they are not," Sherlock snapped waspishly. He brought his fingers to his mouth, tapping them against his lip. "Lestrade knows I'm alive, but he's not letting me in on any cases. No clients because everyone thinks I'm a fraud - and oh yes - dead." He shook his head. "The only case I have is Moriarty. But there's nothing. Nothing!" He swept his arm, knocking over a pile of papers on the kitchen table.

Molly jumped and let out a small cry. Sherlock paused for a moment at the sound. He then turned to face her slowly, his eyes narrowed. "You're afraid."

"What?" Molly squeaked, shaking her head. "I..."

"Don't lie," Sherlock insisted. "Don't ever think you are capable of lying to me. You're afraid. You're afraid of me."

"It's just..." Molly shut her eyes tightly.

Sherlock's demeanour changed. Rather than manic energy, there was smouldering intensity. He cradled her face. "Never be afraid of me."

"Sherlock..." Molly started softly.

Sherlock moved his hands away quickly. "I know I can be unkind, Molly. But never, ever be frightened by me. I will not harm you."

His brow furrowed in question. "You managed to hold yourself together while a madman held a gun to you. Why would you be scared with me?"

Molly averted her gaze.

"I will never take back what I said to you, Molly." There was a passionate burn in his light blue gaze. "You know who I am. You know I do not say things like that lightly. But I cannot change this." He gestured to himself. "If you cannot deal with that, you may leave. I hope you can accept it."

Molly threw her arms around Sherlock's neck and pressed her mouth to his. The taste of stale tobacco made her cringe slightly, but she tried to ignore it as best she could. Molly could feel that Sherlock's mood was still not terribly accepting of a kiss, but she did feel his hand slip around to the small of her back. She knew he was relieved she had not taken him up on the offer to leave him.
"Hoohoo," Mrs Hudson called out in her usual greeting, knocking on the door as she brought in the tray of tea. "Thought I heard things settle. Oh!" She turned her head quickly when she saw the pair embracing. "Sorry Luvs! I'm still getting used to having a lady-friend, Sherlock."

Sherlock took a step away from Molly and whatever tenderness he'd shown her a second ago was immediately replaced by staunch stoicism. "Yes. Well. One does become accustomed to the habits of others."

Mrs Hudson set the tray of tea down. She frowned deeply as she picked a cigarette butt up off the kitchen table. "What is this, Sherlock Holmes? You're smoking in my flat? You quit ages ago! And putting them out all over the place..." She gave him a smack on the arm. "How you got a nice girl like Molly to put up with you, I'll never know."

"Yes, Mrs Hudson... I am well aware of my purported deficiencies," Sherlock said quickly. He started to hustle her out of the flat. "Do send Toby up when he has decided to forgive my transgression."

Once his landlady was out of the flat, he walked past Molly and threw himself down on his back onto the sofa.

Molly padded across the floor and settled herself down next to the sofa. Sherlock turned his head to look at her impassively.

"You're frustrated about not being able to do anything about Moriarty," Molly said simply. Sherlock's eyebrows briefly raised in chilly concurrence.

Molly rested her chin on Sherlock's arm. "There's not a whole lot you can do while you're dead. And now that so many people know, they're doing things to help. But you and Moriarty are playing a game and you don't like that so many people are playing for you. So you're trying to find stuff to do yourself and you're driving yourself up the wall because you can't find anything."

Sherlock leaned back on the sofa and sighed. "No wonder so many people tell me to piss off." He scrubbed his face with his hands. "I know I have expressed pleasure at your deductions in the past, but this is irritating."

"You're going to be the one who defeats Moriarty," Molly insisted. "And you'll be wonderful and brilliant. Everyone is going to realize just how wrong they were and come crawling back to you with the mountain of cases that have been languishing while the consulting detective has been away. You'll be working non-stop for ages."

Sherlock turned his head to Molly again and gave her a small smile. "You can kiss me again now."

"Not until you brush your teeth," Molly insisted, getting back to her feet. "Tea?"

"Mm," Sherlock hummed in agreement.

Molly went to work preparing the tea Mrs Hudson had brought up. Sherlock remained lying on the sofa, his fingers steeped and pressed to his mouth.

She returned to his side with two cups of tea, placing one down on the coffee table. "Sherlock..."

"I'm not ready yet," Sherlock replied, keeping his eyes shut.

"When are you going to be ready to call him?" Molly asked.

"Never." Sherlock shook his head. "I can't just ring him up and say 'Hello John, guess what? Remember when I swan-dived off Barts? I was having you on!'" He rolled his eyes. "Besides, he's in some backwater. Not many phones."

Molly sighed. "You know I'm just worried about you. It's my job."

Sherlock sat up. "Your job?"

Molly nodded and looked down. "I'm your pathologist, Sherlock."
Sherlock’s brow was furrowed in thought. "No, you're my heart."

Molly’s eyes went wide. "Oh!" She turned very red. "Are we saying... Things like that now?"

"I will burn the heart out of you," Sherlock muttered absently.

Molly’s nose wrinkled in question. "What’s that then?"

"People get so sentimental about their pets," Sherlock continued to mutter to himself. He rose to his feet, tapping his fingers against his lip. "John may be out of the way, but he would see you as a pet..."

"What?" Molly frowned, not really liking where the conversation was going.

"No!" Sherlock knelt down beside Molly. He gripped her shoulders. "This is it. This is perfect. Because he's watching us. Oh, he might not know yet, but that doesn't mean he won't..."

Sherlock was getting excited in a way Molly hadn't seen him do in a while now. He began to pace. This was not a restless, irritated movement, but one of barely contained elation. "He used my cleverness against me. But he's clever too. And he has to show off that cleverness. But there's one thing I have that he doesn't and oh..." He grinned. "That's going to win me the game."

The throaty moan came from Sherlock's phone, alerting them to a new text from Irene. Sherlock grabbed the phone and checked the message. His grin widened. "Oh, good show, Woman." He began to type back. "You'll have it ready in time, I'm sure."

Molly got to her feet, wringing her hands. "Sherlock, what is going on?"

"It's going to end," Sherlock told Molly. "The game. The one I've been playing with Moriarty. I know how to end it and I know how I'll win." He gripped her shoulders. "I need you, Molly. But you are going to have to be very brave."

After Sherlock explained his plan, he collapsed in a chair and went deep into thought, wanting to go over every variable of his plan. Molly had taken the opportunity to return the tea service to Mrs Hudson and collect Toby from where he was hiding.

At least that had been what she had told Sherlock. It was hardly necessary. He was so deep in thought he would not have noticed her leaving. But Molly always told Sherlock where she was going before she left, even if it was just to Mrs Hudson's.

When she was out of earshot of their flat, Molly took out her phone and dialled. She closed her eyes tightly and waited for an answer.

"Miss Hooper," the cool voice answered.

Molly felt her heart speed up slightly. "Mycroft," she squeaked.

"My brother is unaware you are calling," Mycroft deduced quickly. At first Molly thought it was her voice that gave her away, but then she realized Mycroft knew as well as she did Sherlock would never approve of her calling.

"Sherlock has a plan to take down Moriarty," Molly said quietly.

"It is a long time coming." Molly could almost hear his toothy smile. "You are uncertain of it?"

Molly swallowed hard. "You're the only person who can help, Mycroft. If you don't, he's going to get himself killed."
"You're the only person who can help, Mycroft."
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Molly attends her friend's wedding and is drawn into a dangerous dance.

Two weeks later, Sherlock found himself striding down Baker Street, Molly falling several steps behind him but doing her best to keep up. He was wheeling a suitcase behind him. Molly was dressed in a pale blue dress that was thankfully free of taffeta. Mrs Hudson had done her hair, pinning it up with a decorative flower, only a few tendrils framing her face. Despite her pretty outfit, she looked very put out.

Sherlock dropped several bills into Wiggins's cup on the way past the boy. Molly reached out a grabbed Sherlock's wrist tightly. She looked up at him pleading. "This is not a good idea."

"I don't have anything but good ideas," Sherlock insisted. He looked around before dragging Molly down into an alley. "Why do I have to explain everything in minute detail? Do you know how tedious it is for me?"

Molly bit her lower lip and looked away.

Sherlock sighed deeply and rolled his eyes. He reached out a hand to her. "I am sorry. You know I didn't-" He sighed. "No, you know I did mean it. But I did not mean it like that."

"I don't want to go away," Molly insisted. "You said you had to keep an eye on me. Moriarty is gunning for me."

Sherlock huffed out a breath. "That was before." He touched a hand to Molly's cheek. "That plan is never going to work, is it? I think you have quite a bit of incentive to keep me around." He was flirting shamelessly.

Molly blushed and leaned in to Sherlock's hand. "Now you're trying to distract me."

"It's working too," Sherlock smiled. He trailed his finger over her lower lip. "This is for the best, Molly. Go to your friend's wedding. And then stay gone until I text you."

"But he doesn't know..." Molly insisted.

"He will," Sherlock insisted. "It's only a matter of time. Moriarty will strike me where he thinks I am most vulnerable. Moriarty sees sentiment as vulnerability."

"So do you," Molly replied morosely.

Sherlock nodded. "Unfortunately, I lack his ability to rid myself of it completely."

Molly clutched at the lapels of Sherlock's coat. He tried to extricate her fingers from the fabric. "Molly, we're in public."

"And in ten minutes I'll be gone," Molly breathed softly. "And I don't know when I'll be back."

Sherlock took a deep breath. "As soon as I can get you."

Molly fingers move up, sinking into Sherlock's hair. His eyes fluttered shut as he allowed himself to give into the sensation. Finally, he relented and he leaned in, kissing her deeply. When he withdrew, the corners of his mouth twitched up in a smile. "Definitely as soon as I can."

He pulled her out of the alley and went to the curb, flagging down a cab. He opened the door and ushered Molly into it. Before he shut the door behind her, he looked over her. He gave her a small smile. "I didn't mention it before... You look beautiful."
He had never said that to Molly before. In fact, Sherlock could not recall ever saying something like that to anyone before. But he'd meant it. He wasn't going to hold back now, not with what he was doing.

Once her cab was out of sight, his expression turned to one of cold resolution. He pulled his phone out of his pocket. He began to walk back towards 221B. After a few moments, he smiled coldly. "Brother dear. I have decided to take you up on your offer. Oh, as soon as you can manage. We don't have long."

Being at a wedding while Sherlock was in the midst of carrying out a plan to defeat Moriarty was not really high on Molly's list. Being at the wedding at all wasn't high on her list. At one time she had loved the romantic ceremony, the joining of two people. The older she got, the more depressed weddings made her. Each wedding was just another reminder her friends were finding the one they loved and she was still alone.

She supposed she could have taken some comfort in that she was in a somewhat lengthy relationship now. However, she doubted things with Sherlock would ever progress to the point of marriage. Being able to say she was in a relationship with Sherlock at all was a miracle! Anything legally binding seemed like an utter impossibility.

Truthfully, Molly was all right with that. Sherlock was what she wanted, ring or no.

At least Meena had been generous and picked rather nice bridesmaid's dresses. How many ridiculous ones had Molly been forced to wear over the years?

The ceremony had been lovely. Molly had needed a handkerchief, despite her annoyance with weddings in general. But now that it was over and she was stuck at the reception, she didn't really know what to do with herself.

It felt so... Alien. Being around all of these normal people, while two mental titans were clashing in their final game. This feeling must have been why Sherlock always felt out of place.

Molly just sat at the table, sipping her champagne and clapping when someone made a speech.

"You look smashing," a voice said behind Molly. He grabbed her hand and jerked her out of her chair and towards the dance floor. Molly tensed when she set her gaze on Moriarty. "Or should I say fabulous!" "Wh-what are y-you..." Molly stammered, trying to pull away from him.

"Come on, Molly," Moriarty insisted. "Dance with me." The DJ began to play a song from Glee. "Oh, you have to now. They're playing our song!"

Molly closed her eyes and allowed Moriarty to direct her around the dance floor.

"Come on, Molly," Moriarty taunted. "Have a little courage. I'm not going to crush you... Not right here."

"Why are you here?" Molly asked, voice shaking.

Moriarty sighed. "Well, I was coming to advise you that helping out Sherlock is really not in your best interest. That I would leave you alone if you would just turn that freak into the police." He cocked his head, eyeing Molly malevolently. "But I don't think my pitch is going to work, is it?"

Molly bit her lower lip and looked away.

"Good golly, Miss Molly," Moriarty pulled her closer. "I wasn't sure if the surveillance photos were right, but... You did it, didn't you?" He laughed. "You popped Sherlock's cherry."

"Please don't," Molly begged.

"Sorry darling." Moriarty danced her towards the door. "I'm a jealous ex. I can't stand the idea of him having you. I will have to kill him." He then laughed. "Oh, like anyone's really going to believe that."

Molly's belly tightened as she felt the gun pressed into it. "You see, Molly... Sherlock Holmes doesn't love. Until he does. And when he does... Oh boy, watch out. You've seen him with his little boy toy. Oh, did I enjoy messing with John to get to Sherlock. I guess he's decided to use you
as a replacement goldfish. Only this time, there's ladyparts involved so he can get over himself enough to actually have sex with his pet. It's... Well, it's operatic."

When Moriarty dug the gun deeper into her stomach, she complied and moved towards the door. "You'll never get away with this."

"Oh, charming," Moriarty laughed. "Wonderful line reading. You're making me feel like I should be twirling a moustache and tying you to a railroad track." His voice turned cruel, angry. "Of course I'm going to get away with it. What am I going to be arrested for? Killing a dead man?"

Once they were out into the parking lot, he ran the gun up to Molly's cheek. "I ruined Sherlock Holmes with just a few words. The police wanted him brought down so badly, they were willing to let me go. But you took the joy of killing him away from me. But now you've generously offered it again."

He shoved her into a car and climbed in beside her. He pulled out his mobile and looked at the message just waiting to send:

*Come and play.*
*Bart's hospital rooftop.*
*JM*

*PS. Got something of yours you might want back.*
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

With Molly being held hostage, Sherlock confronts Moriarty.

Sherlock sat on the edge of Bart's roof. He glanced down at his phone when the message came in for him.

Automatically, knowing his role, he replied:

*I'm waiting...*

*SH*

He held out his phone and hit the song, the voices of the Bee-Gees filling the air. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, filtering out the sound of the inane music and concentrating on the access door.

The door opened and his eyes snapped open. Molly was being led out, a gun pressed to her back.

"Good boy, Sherlock," Moriarty said, peering out from behind Molly. "You played your part perfectly."

Sherlock stood up slowly. "I have played this scene before." He glanced to Molly. "Of course, last time we were alone."

"Had to get you here some-how, Sher-lock," Moriarty sang out, waving his gun in the air. "Been hiding yourself and that's been getting so boring. Knew Molly was going to be a part of all this, but I never thought it would be in this role." He grinned. "So. How was it, Sherlock? It's not everyday the Consulting Detective gets lucky."

"Let Molly go," Sherlock insisted.

Moriarty sighed. "Now, why would I do that?"

"You don't need her anymore," Sherlock insisted. "You used her to get me here. I'm here. She is really not necessary anymore."

"No..." Moriarty purred. "I suppose she's not."

He placed the gun to Molly's temple. Sherlock flinched. "Wait."

"What do you not get?" Moriarty snapped. "She's not important, Sherlock! Oh, this is so disappointing. You're attached. You've made yourself like every other person. Caring. Having feelings. Making yourself vulnerable." He waved his gun in the air. "You cared so much, I used her as bait."

Sherlock's lip curved in a small smile. "Wrong." His gaze locked with Molly. "I used her as bait."

Moriarty's eyes widened. Before he could react, Molly's elbow connected hard with his stomach. He was so shocked by the hit, his finger reflexively squeezed the trigger, firing a bullet into the air.

Molly ran to Sherlock. Her eyes were wide and she was shaking like a leaf. "I just hit a criminal mastermind who was holding a gun."

"Yes, you did," Sherlock said quickly. "And now, you have to run." He reached up, smoothing a hand over Molly's hair. "Go. Now."

Molly ran towards the access door. She flung it open just as Moriarty took another shot, this time aiming for her retreating back. The bullet pinged off the metal door.
Moriarty sighed and threw his hands up in the air. "Well... That was... Exciting." He shook his head. "Why didn't you just ask me to come play, Sherlock?"

"You wouldn't have come," Sherlock replied, clasping his hands behind his back. "Not unless you thought you had the upper hand."

"So you made me believe you were in love with her." Moriarty slipped his gun into his coat and slow clapped. "Now, I'm embarrassed. That lie really is so transparent."

"Wrong," Sherlock said firmly. "I may have arranged to let you witness the scene, but everything else was real. The most convincing lie is the truth."

"Really," Moriarty adjusted his tie. "Well. That is a surprise."

Sherlock's light blue eyes burned with fury. "You used the people I care about against me once. Now I'm using the people I care about against you."

Moriarty stretched his arms out. "But it's just you and me here now, Sherlock. You're out of people who care. You're dead and disgraced and I never existed. What kind of battle can we have? Or should we just exchange barbs until the end of time?"

"You exist," Sherlock insisted. "You told me how you got rid of your identity and arrange the Richard Brook one. Easy enough to bring it back."

"I never-" Moriarty started. "All it takes is some willing participants," Sherlock echoed Moriarty's speech from this roof seven months previous. "That's what you said about your robberies. You deleted your identity and created Richard Brook the same way. You left yourself open, Moriarty. You left a trail of people."

Moriarty shook his head. "No... You wouldn't be able to find them. Not while you were dead."

"Maybe not alone," Sherlock replied. "But I know someone. She knows people in high places."

His phone let out the throaty moan. He took his phone from his pocket. "Well, she knows what they like."

He looked down at the text he'd just received. "Those 'willing participants' have become quite willing to talk when threatened with prison."

He tapped the screen to send the text message he had waiting before slipping his phone back into his pocket.

Moriarty sneered. "It's not enough."

"Isn't it?" Sherlock snapped back. "What about Mycroft admitting to Scotland Yard his part in your deception? He's doing that right now."

Moriarty glared daggers at Sherlock. "Your brother is too proud to admit something like that. He wouldn't disgrace himself just for you."

Sherlock sighed. "You really don't understand, do you? For all his bluster, he's my brother. Besides, a slap on the wrist for giving information on me is hardly worse than his own brother being considered a criminal fraud."

Sherlock held up the flower decoration that had been in Molly's hair. He had slipped it from her hair when he'd smoothed it. "And there is this." He turned it, showing the bug attached to it. "Recording your kidnapping of Molly, threatening her... And... Talking quite a bit. I have mountains of evidence against you, Moriarty."

Moriarty shook his head slowly. "You made your own girlfriend wiggle on a hook for me."

Sherlock's expression remained impassive. "She was a willing participant." He moved in close to Moriarty. "You said I was on the side of the angels... You forgot just how capable the angels can be."

Moriarty nodded slowly in approval. "Well... That is... Impressive. Not at all what I expected."
Maybe you're not as ordinary as I thought."

The sound of sirens began to grow closer. Sherlock glared at Moriarty. "That's the police. They're coming for you."

Moriarty held out his hands. "Well, you've done it, Sherlock. You've beaten me. Once and for all. Bravo." He cocked his head. "But just one question for you..."

Sherlock narrowed his gaze.

Moriarty's smile grew maniacal. "How did I fake my suicide?"

Sherlock went stock-still. He eyes remained locked with Moriarty's.

"You don't know yet, do you?" Moriarty's lip curled in a mocking laugh. "It's eating away at you, isn't it? Not knowing." He jumped up onto the edge of the building. "I guess this is truly our final problem, Sherlock."

Sherlock growled, rushing towards the edge.

"Do you think I'm going to be taken? You think I'm going to let you win free and clear? Go with the authorities? Better a bang than a whimper." He leaned in towards Sherlock. He sang softly, "An-nd you-Il... Ne-ver... Kno-ow."

The world seemed to speed up in that moment. There was a noise like a gunshot behind Sherlock. He couldn't see what it was, but Moriarty could. He grabbed Sherlock's hands. "It's just like flying," he hissed, allowing himself to fall backwards. His weight pulled Sherlock over the edge.

As they tumbled over, Moriarty let go of Sherlock's hands. Sherlock reached out and grabbed the edge of the building. He could feel his shoulder dislocate, pain shooting through him. He let out a cry and his fingers began to slip.

A hand grabbed his wrist. Sherlock realized what that noise had been. It was not a gunshot. It had been the access door banging open.

"Give me your other hand," a voice said. Sherlock felt his breath catch. He struggled to reach his other arm up. His saviour grabbed it and pulled hard.

Sherlock stumbled back onto the roof, panting. He put a hand to his injured shoulder. He took a moment, taking in deep breaths before looking over the edge. He could see Moriarty's body on the ground, already being swarmed by police.

Finally, Sherlock looked up at the man who had saved him from a similar plunge.

John Watson shook his head slowly. "You unbelievable bastard."

Sherlock winced as doctors looked at his shoulder. "Both John and Molly are around," he said peevishly to Lestrade. "Why do I have to have strangers poke at me?"

"Both of them are giving their own statements," Lestrade pointed out. "Not to mention Molly-who specializes in dead bodies, by the way-is shocked to pieces over being shot at."

Sherlock's brow furrowed as concern crept into him. He did his best to keep it off his face. "Where is she?"

Lestrade pointed a finger at Sherlock. "Wouldn't even be appropriate for her to do any doctoring on you, not with what I heard on that wiretap."

Sherlock's gaze slid away from Lestrade. He let out a small sigh. It was going to come out eventually, he supposed. "Well. Would you consider leaving that out of your report?"

Lestrade grinned cheekily. "Well, it's a very important piece of information, don't you think, Sherlock? I wouldn't want to give people the wrong idea as to how you defeated James Moriarty."

Sherlock's lip curled and he irritably pushed one of the paramedics away with his left arm as soon
as the right was put in a sling.

"Kidding aside, don't cock it up," Lestrade said seriously. "Not many women wouldn't try to shoot you themselves, let alone nearly take a bullet for you."

Sherlock scowled. "Why does everyone think I'm going to 'cock it up'?"

Lestrade arched a brow. "You have met yourself, haven't you?"

Sherlock rolled his eyes and got to his feet, striding towards John. He pushed Donovan aside with no compunction. "Look out, dead man walking."

"We're in the middle of something, Freak," Donovan said tersely, scowling at displeasure at the thought Sherlock Holmes was still alive.

Sherlock smiled tightly at Donovan. "John was only on the scene for about five minutes. I was there the entire time. I have given my statement while getting medical attention. Surely he must be finished. Come on, John."

Sherlock and John walked down the street side-by-side. "So," Sherlock gave a small nod. "Coming all the way from Africa just for a rescue. Impressive."

"Yeah, well," John paused. "Do what I can."

"How did you know?" Sherlock asked.

"Mycroft," John replied, looking down. "Brought a team out to Africa to pick me up. Told me what was going on. Said you'd gotten yourself into a mess. Needed to make sure you didn't get yourself killed."

Sherlock frowned deeply. "Hm. Mycroft told me my plan wasn't bad. Usually he loves to point out any flaws he sees."

"He wasn't the one who was worried." John pointed down the street.

Sherlock looked to where he was pointing. Molly approached hesitantly. She was still in her bridesmaid's dress, which looked worse for wear. Her hair was loose on her shoulders now.

"You took your hair down," Sherlock commented, as if it were the most pressing matter.

Molly smoothed a hand over her hair. "You messed it up when you took the bug out." She worried her lower lip. "You nearly fell off a building."

Sherlock cocked his head, appraising her. "You nearly got shot."

John jumped back in surprise when Molly slid her fingers into Sherlock's curly hair, pulled him down and kissed him fiercely.
(Art by Lexieken)
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

John and Sherlock discuss what happened after Sherlock's fall.

John tapped his fingers on the kitchen table in 221B Baker Street. Sherlock could tell he was trying to get to know the place again after being away for so long. "I thought Mrs Hudson would have gotten rid of all your stuff while you were playing dead."

Sherlock shook his head. He tried to remain calm, but inside his stomach was knotted at finally revealing all to John. "No. Mycroft kept up the rent until I came back. Figured out at the funeral I was still around."

John's brow furrowed. "At the funeral? Where I was? Why didn't he say anything?" Irritation was clear in his voice. He hadn't needed to be torn away from his life, but Sherlock's choices meant he had been.

Sherlock just shrugged noncommittally. He had to continue to stick to ice. "I suspect he thought I had a good reason for keeping it a secret from you and it was up to me to tell you the truth."

John strode to the sitting room and sat down chair. He folded his hands and pressed them to his mouth. He was trying to control his emotions, but was not nearly as good as Sherlock at masking them. "But you didn't tell me. I heard it from Mycroft, who was sent by Molly."

"Yes." Sherlock sighed. He gave another small shrug. "I suppose since she was responsible for my death, she felt the need to control my life." Again, he was playing things cool.

"At least someone told me," John said, his voice shaking. His emotions were beginning to have an affect on his vocalizing. Before it had simply been body language. "Do you have any idea what I've been through?"

Sherlock nodded slowly. "Yes. I do."

He paused for a long moment. He'd confided to Molly as to why he continued to keep John in the dark. But it seemed so much harder to tell the man himself. "And that is why I could not bear to tell you the truth. No matter what I told you when I died, you still thought I was a good man. If you knew I was still alive, you wouldn't have thought so anymore."

Sherlock saw it coming. Of course he knew it was. John rose from his seat and clocked him in the jaw. Sherlock didn't avoid the hit at all. John deserved it.

"You miserable sod," John said, shaking his head and his voice thick with tears. "You..." He stopped and pulled Sherlock into a hug.

They parted quickly, both of them tearing up and trying very hard to pretend they weren't. John sat back down in his chair, not meeting Sherlock's eyes, both uncomfortable with the emotion.

There was a small meow and the brown and white tabby circled around Sherlock's feet. "Hm. I suppose you haven't been fed yet, have you?" Sherlock picked up Toby awkwardly with one arm. "Criminal masterminds do disturb proper feeding. MRS HUDSON!"

John frowned as he cocked his head to look at the furry thing in Sherlock's hold. "Sherlock... Is that a cat?"

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Obviously it is a cat."

John's brow furrowed deeper. "I moved out... And you got a cat."

"Don't be ridiculous, John," Sherlock scolded him. He set Toby back down on the ground. "I got a Pathologist. She brought Toby with her."
John sank deeper into his chair, shaking his head fractionally. "You replaced me with Molly Hooper."

"No one could replace you," Sherlock replied almost absent-mindedly as he threw himself down onto the sofa. Toby jumped up on top of Sherlock and curled up on his stomach. "It seems Mrs Hudson is asleep. You will have to wait until Lestrade brings Molly home."

"But you still moved Molly in here," John stressed. "Jesus, Sherlock. Did you fake your death just so you could have a pathologist take over my room?"

Sherlock lifted his head to look over at John, careful to not disturb Toby. "Your room is still your room. I knew you would come back eventually. Besides, putting Molly in there would have made sex entirely inconvenient."

"Sex?" John spluttered, eyes widening. "You mean that kiss at Barts wasn't just her giving you a 'We nearly got killed, but hurray we didn't' snog?"

Sherlock's brow knitted. "Well, I think it was that still. But that does not change the fact Molly and I have been having sex for three- No, three and a half- Months."

"You." John's eyes went wide. "You have been having sex. For three months. With Molly Hooper."

"Three and a half," Sherlock corrected him.

"Thought girlfriends weren't your area." John folded his hands and looked at Sherlock appraisingly.

"I never died either," Sherlock replied. "I made quite a few changes." He glanced over at John. "It has come to my attention I owe you an apology."

John nodded. "You faked your death in front of me. I think 'sorry' hardly begins to cover it."

"Not for that," Sherlock said, giving John a small smile. "For giving you such difficulties about your insistence on dating. The companionship of a woman is not nearly as dull as I originally believed. It is actually... Invigorating."

John scrubbed his face with his hands. "You know, I don't think I want to hear it."

Sherlock went quiet. He stroked Toby in silence. Finally, after a long moment, he spoke up. "About my death..."

"I know," John cut him off, nodding. "You did it to keep us safe. I know about Moriarty's plan now. For the most part. You're going to have to explain the rest later."

"But you ended up leaving the country to escape the memory," Sherlock continued on.

John shook his head. "Don't think on it. I was rough off for a while, but things got better. I did some good work with Médecins Sans Frontières." He averted his gaze and fiddled with the cuff of his shirt.

"What's her name?" Sherlock's mouth curled in a smile as he glanced at John sideways. He was already shifting in his seat and looking uncomfortable. Oh, it was too obvious.

"Mary," John replied. "Mary Morstan. She's a teacher working with the VSO."

Sherlock leaned back. "Hm. And you'll be returning to be with her and continue treating underprivileged children?"

"I've only been back for about six hours," John commented, shaking his head. "But I've already been witness to a suicide and an attempted murder."

"Hm." Sherlock hummed softly, scratching Toby behind the ear absent-mindedly. "Good to know you have your priorities straight." He knew John was not going anywhere, no matter how much he protested. He sighed. "Moriarty's gone now. But he still had that one thing. The one mystery I couldn't figure out. How he faked his death right before my eyes."
"You still haven't told me how you faked your death right before my eyes," John pointed out. Sherlock's brow furrowed deep in thought. He continued to run his fingers down Toby's back.

"Sherlock?"

"Hm?" Sherlock looked at John. "Oh. I haven't told anyone. I'm the only one who knows."

John nodded slowly. "You and- of course- the Missus."

Sherlock wrinkled his nose. "Shut up. She's my Pathologist."

John pursed his lips. "Does she call you her Consulting Detective?"

"Mm."

Sherlock nodded. "I told her to say it around Mycroft. It does annoy him so."

He paused thoughtfully for a moment. "She did say it once in bed."

John grimaced. "Sherlock..."

Sherlock glanced around John's general location. He cocked his head slightly as he remembered. "Come to think of it, it wasn't bed. It was that chair."

"Ah!" John leapt to his feet. He waved a hand at Sherlock. "I- I do not like this side of you."

Sherlock cracked a smile. It had been far too long since he had John to annoy. He had never let anyone know how much he really enjoyed doing that. He was about to retort back, when the door open and Molly came in, escorted by Lestrade.

"Ah, Molly." Sherlock shooed Toby off of his lap and smiled. "Your pet has not been fed while you were busy being kidnapped and is being affectionate with me expecting dinner."

"Why didn't you feed him?" Molly asked. The cat mewled and darted across the room to his mistress.

"While you're at it, I could use some food myself. I am sure John could as well."

Molly sighed. "Sherlock, I was kidnapped and shot at." She paused while Sherlock narrowed his gaze on her. "But you nearly fell off a building and can be horribly predictable." She held up a bag of take-away.

Sherlock grinned and accepted the bag of food. He leaned in slightly towards Molly, but stopped himself quickly, glancing to Lestrade.

"Just kiss your girlfriend, you tit," Lestrade said with a roll of his eyes. "I'm off. I've got a pile of reports to do. Not to mention a whole queue of apologies coming from everyone on the force."

"Some of those should be coming my way," Sherlock called after Lestrade.

"I wouldn't hold your breath!" Lestrade retorted before shutting the door behind him.

Finally, Sherlock leaned in and brushed his mouth against Molly's. John leaned in and narrowed his gaze to observe the display of affection. He shook his head slowly. "It's like a nature documentary. Unbelievable and a little disgusting, but... There you have it."

Sherlock pulled away from Molly and sighed. "John, I never gawked while you interacted with your significant others. Perhaps you could do me the same courtesy?"

"Never gawked... Just invited yourself on my dates." John muttered, but held up his hands in surrender. "I just want to make sure you're not having me on."

Molly moved towards the kitchen, Toby close on her heels. "It's good to see you, John."

John stopped Molly and gave her a hug. "It's good to see you too." He leaned in close to her. "Thank you. For taking care of him."

Molly blushed. "Well, I got something out of it."

"I hear." John said with a nod, looking around the sitting room and grimacing at the chair... And
wondering if Sherlock had desecrated any other furniture.

Sherlock brought the bag of food Molly had brought in to the dining table. He set the packages down. "Well, shall we?"

The pair dug into the takeaway that had been brought for them.

After a few minutes, Molly came out of the kitchen, drying her hands off. "I'm going to get changed and head to bed. Being kidnapped in a bridesmaid's dress is not the most fun I've ever had." With that, she disappeared into Sherlock's bedroom.

Sherlock watched her leave, his fork paused partway to his mouth.

John dropped his fork into the container of pasta he was eating. He brought a hand to his brow. "Oh dear Lord."

"What?" Sherlock asked defensively.

"You." John nodded to his best friend. "You want to go have 'Thank God we're alive' sex."

Sherlock's lip curled. "Thank G-" His brow furrowed deeply. "What in the world is that?"

John looked vaguely ill. His eyes were squeezed tightly shut. "It's all adrenaline and life affirming and 'Oh, you hurt your shoulder' and 'You nearly took a bullet for me'..." He waved his hands. "I saw the look. And you want it and..." John cradled his head. "This is a lot to deal with."

Sherlock sighed. "John, I am a fully functioning male. If I wish to have sex- Any sort of sex, not just an incredibly specified version of your own invention- I do not see what is so disturbing about it." He sat up straight, looking down his nose at John. "Besides, I never said I desired anything of the sort."

John sighed, waving his hand. "Just go."

Sherlock remained still for another moment. His eyes were trained on John, his brow knit in a scowl. Very briefly, his gaze flicked towards his bedroom door.

John wordlessly jerked his head towards Sherlock's bedroom.

Sherlock huffed out an annoyed breath at being deduced by his friend before rising and rushing off towards his bedroom.

John turned and watched Sherlock leave, slamming the door shut behind him. He nodded slowly. "Never not going to be disturbing."
CH. 17
"Thank you for taking care of him..."

(Art by Lexiiken)
Chapter 18

Sherlock, Molly and John try to figure out what happens now that Moriarty is dead.

Sherlock slept- really slept- for the first time in what seemed like ages. Since he had formed his plan to take down Moriarty, his mind had been racing. Sleep came very little, eating even less so. Now that his archenemy was gone- the final problem had been solved- his mind had settled. His body was now demanding attention. He had found rest finally with Molly nestled against him, sleeping long into the day.

His stomach was growling, craving sustenance after having left the takeaway Molly had purchased in favour of the John-dubbed 'Thank God We're Alive' sex. Sherlock believed in no deities, but there was something fitting about the moniker. His blood had been pumping from the danger of the night and he had been desperate to study Molly closely, to make sure she was truly all right.

When he finally made his way out of his bedroom, still in pyjamas and dressing gown, he found Molly curled up with Toby on the sofa, watching television. She smiled brightly as she looked up at him. "Hi."

"What are you watching?" Sherlock asked.

"News," Molly replied. "Talking about you and Moriarty. Do you want to watch?"

Sherlock shook his head and Molly shut off the television. He walked to the side of the sofa and glared down at the tabby cat. "Move." His voice was glacial as he addressed the feline.

He shooed the cat physically off his mistress's lap when it refused to listen to his vocal command. Sherlock then slid onto the sofa, lying down and placing his head in Molly's lap. He sighed deeply, allowing himself to relax against her.

"John went out to pick up some things," Molly said softly. Her hands slipped into Sherlock's hair, working through his curls. He'd hoped this would be the progression of things were he to set his head in her lap. "He was asking me some things about... Well, everything. I was avoiding. What should I say if he asks again?"

"Tell him whatever you like," Sherlock sighed, letting his eyes shut. "I know he's got a million questions. About how I survived. About what we did. About what we are. I doubt he will let it go until he gets all of his answers."

Molly's fingers continued to comb through his hair, massaging his scalp. Sherlock let out a small sigh as his muscles relaxed. His shoulder was throbbing with pain, but he did his best to put it out of his mind.

"How did everything go at Barts?" Sherlock hummed softly. Molly had returned to 221B late because of her want to speak with her supervisor at Barts about returning, now that Sherlock and she had been vindicated. He knew it had been an excuse. She wanted to give him and John some time to talk. He had let it go. He had wanted to speak with John and the sooner Molly was back at Barts the better.

"Not as well as I had hoped," Molly sighed, letting one of her fingers slip down around the shell of Sherlock's ear. "It's been over three months. They've hired someone else in the morgue and there are some budget issues."

Sherlock's lip curled. "You were on indefinite unpaid suspension. Why would they hire someone else?"

"People died in the interim," Molly pointed out. She let out a small laugh. "How rude of them."
Sherlock did not find Molly's feeble joke to be amusing. "You are my Pathologist. I need you at Barts."

Molly blushed and bit her lip. "You know Sherlock, we might need to find a new word." She let out a small laugh. "Because being your pathologist and your pathologist could get very confusing if I'm starting work again."

Sherlock rolled his eyes and sat up. "This has nothing to do with that!" He knew he was sounding irritable. Because he was terribly irritated. "Wanting you at Barts has nothing to do with you being my girlfriend." He sighed and rolled his eyes again. "Yes. Oh my God, Sherlock called me his girlfriend! I told you I was finished with silly euphemisms. Please stop having a celebration in your brain. It has been the truth since... Well, I believe I began to have romantic feelings for you after you successfully deduced I was trying to hide my worry about Moriarty from John. And yes, I said romantic feelings and that is setting off another mental parade in that little Molly head. All of this does not matter in light of the fact when I start taking cases again- which I suspect will be very shortly once people have time to catch up with the news- I will need a Pathologist. Whenever I go to Barts, I wish to work with you, not whatever dullard they have hired in your stead. It is because you are talented at what you do and I am used to you!"

Molly leaned in and kissed Sherlock firmly. He jerked back and eyed her suspiciously. "That is a new reaction to one of my diatribes."

Molly smiled brightly. "Well, you called me your girlfriend and talked about your romantic feelings. And... Well..." She blushed, looking down. "You want me to help with your work. Really, truly want me to help. Not just because I'm convenient. Not because I'll let you get away with things. Because you want me."

Sherlock shook his head fractionally. "Why do you seem pleasantly surprised by that?"

"You're married to your work," Molly reminded him. "I'm-" Her blushed deepened. "Well, what you use to keep yourself occupied when you're not working."

Sherlock's brow furrowed in confusion. "I told you I had no intention of ending our union even when I resumed my cases." His eyes widened when Molly leaned in and nuzzled her nose against Sherlock's. That was new. Not bad, Sherlock just wasn't sure what the point of it was. "You're brilliant, Molly. I would not be with you if you were not. Why wouldn't I wish for your assistance still?" He let out a small grunt. "Which I can't get if you're not at Barts!"

Molly sighed. "They said they can give me some part time work until something better opens up. I'll be first on the list."

Sherlock scowled deeply, shaking his head. "It's not good enough. What if you're not working when I need you?"

"I usually wasn't," Molly pointed out. "Not really. That's why you were able to pull me away. How many times did I really help you with a dead body?"

Sherlock remained silent. He had taken advantage of Molly terribly. He had stopped her from taking lunch or kept her late. Most of the experiments he had her assist with were far from the morgue. She helped all the same. "You did all of those things because you were in love with me?"

He was sceptical. What a silly reason to do those things.

Molly nodded. "Well, I found it all interesting too. But I think that sort of went with it... With the being in love with you. I mean..." She giggled. "You're dead gorgeous, Sherlock. But it was... Seeing you work. Seeing you be brilliant. That's why I liked you."

Sherlock pondered this. "So even if you're only working part time and if I text you because I need something done at Barts..."

Molly sighed resignedly. "Oh, forget being your girlfriend... You might as well just stick to calling me your pathologist."

Sherlock leaned in and pressed a kiss to Molly's jaw. "You would get jealous if I worked with someone else." He settled himself back down in Molly's lap, waiting for her to begin stroking his hair anew.
"Of course, I won't be able to afford my own place on part-time," Molly pointed out. "I don't need to be protected from Moriarty any longer. And John is back..."

"So?" Sherlock closed his eyes. "You sleep in my bed and do not encroach on John's space at all. It will also be terribly inconvenient if you are across town whenever I feel like being with you."

Molly nodded. "You want me to stay so I can be at your beck and call because it's inconvenient for you if I'm not here?"

"Yes." Sherlock picked up the sarcasm in Molly's voice, but he wasn't quite sure why it was there. Was there a problem with him wanting her to be convenient for him? When Molly stared at him in shock, not combing her fingers through his hair, he took her hand and moved it to his head.

"We still have Moran to deal with," Sherlock said as Molly's fingers slipped into his hair once again. He'd grown tired of the previous topic and a new thought had crept into his head. "He's gone off the radar according to Lestrade. No doubt he will be attempting to move into Moriarty's former position."

Molly let the hand that wasn't sliding through Sherlock's hair run over his chest. He knew she could feel his ribs. He hadn't been this thin since he'd first met John. "Do you want some breakfast?"

"Mm. Not yet." Sherlock hummed. He closed his eyes and sighed. "I need to think. Just... Be quiet and keep doing that."

Molly's fingers continued to play with his curls. The sensation seemed to sharpen him as he went over all of his cases:

Sebastian Moran: Open case. Location Unknown.

James Moriarty: Open case. Moriarty dead, but network in operation and in chaos with lack of leader. Will take time to reorganize. Expect to intersect with Moran case shortly.

Police cases: Nil. Will be approached by Lestrade with cases the department has struggled with during absence. Allowing time to recover and to sort through mess made by their incompetence. Also most likely needs to convince supervisors it is in their best interest to give access once again.

Client cases: Nil. Upon checking email, will find three dozen messages of congratulations on not being dead and asking to take cases. All will be boring. Potential clients all pay too much attention to sensational media.

John Watson: Has not updated blog in seven months. Will want to write an update with the latest information, giving a true account as to what occurred. Will need to discern true circumstances. Make sure he leaves out personal information and strongly discourage his posting at all.

Irene Adler: On route from Czech Republic under the identity of Eva Khan.

Mycroft Holmes: Who cares.

Molly Hooper: Should not be part time. Find out who has taken her job and systematically destroy them. When she becomes annoyed, play up sympathy for shoulder. Have sex again, particularly after a particularly dangerous case when one inevitably comes up.

Sherlock opened his eyes when he heard the door open. He looked over to see John come in with several sacks of groceries.

He stopped still, looking at the scene in front of him. He shook his head. "What on Earth is going on?"

"Helps me think," Sherlock replied, closing his eyes once again.

John dropped the groceries on the kitchen table and gestured a hand to Molly. "And you just do that for him?"

Molly shrugged, but did not cease her movements, to Sherlock's great pleasure. "It's either him or Toby."
"You hear that, Sherlock?" John said, nodding. "You're a cat."

Sherlock arched a brow. "I know you two are attempting to mock me. However, I do no know what is insulting about being equated to Toby. I would rather have Toby's help than that of the whole detective force in London."

John gave up with a shrug. He began to pull newspapers out of one of the sacks. "Thought you'd want to see the news." He held up each paper one by one, reading out the headlines. "Boffin Holmes Alive and Well... Reichenbach Hero Vindicated... We Believe in Sherlock Holmes..."

"It's easy for them to believe in me now. They know I'm innocent." He was curious as to what the papers had said about him now, but he was very comfortable in Molly's lap and his want for that overrode his desire to read the press on himself.

John began to skim through one of the papers. "This one got a picture of you, Molly."

Molly's eyes went as wide as saucers. "Huh?" Her voice went squeaky.

John turned the paper so Sherlock and Molly could see. It was a clear photo of the pair kissing at the crime scene.

"Oh!" Molly's hand flew up to her mouth. "My brothers are going to see that..."

"You haven't seen them in at least seven months," Sherlock pointed out. "You are obviously not that close to them."

"I've been a little preoccupied," Molly retorted. "And essentially under house arrest. They're going to want to meet you."

Sherlock didn't reply. He closed his mouth tightly. Molly had family, didn't she? He was so used to having her to himself. Wasn't she content with that? He could tell by looking at her she wasn't and wrinkled his nose at the thought of visiting her brothers.

John read from the article. "...No word yet on how confirmed bachelor John Watson is reacting to Boffin Holmes's Bodybagging Babe... Oh for the love of-

"Don't," Sherlock said firmly.

"Don't what?" John asked, continuing to read through the article.

Sherlock adjusted himself in Molly's lap, turning his head to glare at John. "Don't write about Molly and me in your blog so you can disperse these notions you and I are a couple. Write about your own companion."

"Oh!" Molly smiled. "You were seeing someone in Africa, John?"

"More serious than just 'seeing her,'" Sherlock looked over John appraisingly. "He is planning to ask Miss Morstan to marry him." He glanced down to John's trousers. "You have a box in your pocket. You purchased a ring while you were shopping. Gold and sapphire. Untraditional, but Miss Morstan has been serving in areas that have been greatly affected by conflict diamonds and would not appreciate that particular sentiment." He glanced through the paper. "I would rethink the ring, John. It is an impulse purchase brought on by your decision to stay in London. I think when you look at it again, you will find it is gauche. A little soon anyway, isn't it, John? You have only known this woman a few months and you were under extreme duress. Your relationship might not survive leaving Africa and returning to your real life."

"Sherlock!" Molly admonished. She pushed him hard out of her lap. Sherlock groaned as his injured shoulder complained at the treatment.

"Actually," John said tersely. "We're already engaged. Just hard to get a ring when you're in a place where the nearest hospital is six hours away."

"Congratulations!" Molly jumped to her feet and gave John a hug.

John pulled away from her after a moment and looked to Sherlock. "Are you okay with this?"

Sherlock sneered. "Why wouldn't I be okay with this? I killed myself and you got engaged. These
things happen."

"Sherlock..." John started.

Sherlock just stared at John. "You're not leaving."

"You can't command I stay here," John snapped back.

"I'm not commanding," Sherlock said calmly, lifting a brow. "But you're not leaving."

(Art by Lexieken)
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

John tries to come to terms with the changes in Sherlock.

The Personal Blog of Dr. John H. Watson

January 20th

THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

It has been over seven months since I updated this blog. Honestly, I did not think I would ever update it again.

I wrote that he was my best friend and I would always believe in him. I still do. However, I would also like to punch him in the face. Again. I already did it once, but I do not believe it was enough.

There is much from my own life I could write about, however I doubt that is why this entry is being read. Thus, I will leave that until the end and skip to "the good parts".

There is a great deal of speculation as to the events that led to Sherlock Holmes plummeting from the roof of Barts and what happened afterwards. It has been assumed by many I was right in the thick of things. I am afraid this was not the case (which directly led to the punch in the face).

James Moriarty had placed assassins on myself and several others close to Sherlock. He would have us killed if Sherlock did not commit suicide.

He still has not told me exactly what he did. I consider this a miracle and not even a minor one, as Sherlock loves to tell people in exacting detail how brilliant he is.

Having successfully faked his own death, Sherlock then set about revealing that "Richard Brook" was in fact James Moriarty and the leader of a large crime syndicate. He did this all while hiding from the world... Right under our noses here in London.

Again, not all of the details have been revealed to me as of yet. Only that several people whose names cannot be mentioned were involved.

What is probably of greatest interest to my readers- should any remain around- is a more detailed account of Sherlock's relationship with Molly Hooper. This is actually something I can give some information on, although my friend has made it clear I am not to reveal the details of his personal life.

Doctor Molly Hooper is a noted pathologist whom I met at Barts the same day I met Sherlock for the first time. When I first met her, she was bringing Sherlock a cup of coffee, looking at him with the doe-eyed expression of a girl obviously infatuated. Sherlock, with his usual tact, insulted her without even realizing it.

Over the year and a half I was investigating cases with Sherlock, Molly was a valued ally at Barts and one of the closest things Sherlock had to a friend outside of myself, Mrs Hudson and our favourite Detective Inspector. She was often on the sharp side of one of Sherlock's barbs. But then again, who wasn't?

During the extended period I was away, Sherlock and Molly began a relationship. Despite the tabs insistence, I could not be more delighted.

I am however also completely flummoxed. I was starting to doubt Sherlock was capable of maintaining a romantic relationship. Based on comments from his brother and the Woman, I am not the only one who thought like this.

This relationship has definitely changed Sherlock. He is still the eccentric and annoying git of a
that has been my friend, but I can see he's been affected. I never thought I would walk into
the flat and see Sherlock having his hair petted as if he were a housecat! (Which we have also
acquired via Molly's inhabitation of 221B. Sherlock is surprisingly fond of Toby, adding another
shockingly change to my friend.)

It is still to be seen how the dynamic between Sherlock and me will change. Not only is he
different, but I am as well. I have spent the last six months in Africa with Médecins Sans
Frontières.

In the first week I was there, I met Mary Morstan, a primary school teacher working with the
VSO. She had been working there for several years and offered to show me the ropes. While it
may sound cliché, it was love at first sight. Mary and I started seeing each other a month ago,
I asked her to marry me.

When Mycroft came to me and informed me that Sherlock was still alive, I had to return to
London. However, I am uncertain if I will remain here. Sherlock claims I will. I still have two
months left on my commitment to MSF. Mary is also waiting for me. I have now purchased an
engagement ring for her.

Yet I know there will be cases here that Sherlock needs help with. Sherlock may have another
Doctor by his side now, but I am uncertain Molly Hooper will want to run around London with
her boyfriend solving crimes. I'm not sure I want to leave him alone. He gets into too much
trouble.

John closed his laptop with a sigh and looked over at Sherlock, who was on his own computer,
Boring." Each proclamation was punctuated by a clack of the key.

It felt exactly like old times at 221B, save for the cat that was curled up comfortably in Sherlock's
lap. Every once and a while, Sherlock would reach down and stroke the cat's head.

Sherlock Holmes was a cat person.

Two days ago, John Watson was in Africa and he thought Sherlock Holmes was dead. Now,
John Watson was in London and he was sitting with Sherlock Holmes. And Sherlock Holmes's
cat.

No, not Sherlock's cat. Sherlock's girlfriend's cat. That was more unbelievable than Sherlock
being a cat person.

It had been obvious to John that Molly was in love with Sherlock. It had been obvious to anyone
with a pair of eyes. Yet when Sherlock had first met John he had said girlfriends weren't his area
and he had always treated Molly with callow indifference.

"Okay, I'm going to need you to explain some things," John blurted out, not realizing he was
voicing it aloud until Sherlock was looking over at him, blinking.

"Where would you like me to start?" Sherlock asked. "I supposed you want to know how I faked
my death. I would rather you left it out of your blog, of course..."

"Sod that!" John cried. He shook his head. "I don't need to know how you faked your death or
even how you defeated Moriarty. I want to know what you were doing. Just how in the world did
you end up Molly Hooper's boyfriend? And someone who apparently likes to pet cats."

Sherlock leaned back in his chair. "I had neither you nor my skull to talk to, so I talked to Toby.
The repetitive movement of my hand against him while he purrs is relaxing."

"And Molly?"

The corners of Sherlock's mouth curled up in a small smile. "I enjoy her reactions to being petted
even more than Toby's."

John grimaced. "Not what I was asking. Just... How. How did it... happen?"

Sherlock brought a hand to his hair, ruffling his dark curls. "Molly deduced me. The day we were
searching for the Ambassador's children. She knew I was worried about Moriarty and I did not want you to find out about it. She offered herself to me."

John's lip curled in horror at this idea. "Like for sex?"

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Unlike you, that would not have captured my interest. No. For support. And I took her up on it. I probably wanted more from her than she had initially intended... Anyway, when I faked my death, I'd planned to go away. Track down those who had set up Moriarty's fake identities. But..."

Sherlock rubbed his temples with his good hand before shooing Toby off his lap and getting up. He went to his violin. He then looked at his dislocated shoulder in disgust and threw himself down onto the couch.

John was concerned by the look on Sherlock's face. There was confusion and just a touch of disgust there. Clearly, he didn't really understand what had happened.

"I told myself I was protecting you, Mrs Hudson and Lestrade. That Moriarty's people could still be after you. But I had lost everything. Save for Molly. That was Moriarty's critical mistake: underestimating Molly. I could not do that as well. I felt something when she deduced me. I wanted to understand why I felt like that. Then I found out Moriarty was still alive. And he was focusing his efforts on Molly. I needed to protect her."

Sherlock's lip curled and John could tell he was uncomfortable discussing this. No, he was uncomfortable even acknowledging these feelings existed. Or any feelings existed.

Maybe it was different for him when he was with Molly. Maybe she saw another, more emotional side.

Yeah. Not bloody likely.

John frowned slightly. "So are you two like... Or is it just..."

Sherlock blinked. "Would you care to finish a sentence, John? When Molly would stammer like that, I had to make a rule for her to stop."

"Are you in love with her?"

Sherlock gave John a very wearied expression.

Oh. That answered that question. John grinned at Sherlock. This was certainly surprising. He'd thought maybe it was a bit of fun- an 'experiment' Sherlock would put it. It was certainly past that now. Sherlock glared daggers at John, realizing he was caught. The piercing glare of his friend could do nothing to wipe the expression from his face.

"So." Sherlock tapped his fingers against his mouth. "You and this Ms Morstan."

John straightened up, his brow furrowing. "What about it?"

"Well." Sherlock sat up. "You have been interrogating me about my relationship. It is only fair I do the same. You are also changing our dynamic significantly by getting married."

John scowled. "You changed it first by dying!" He sighed. "I met Mary while I was on assignment. She's a primary school teacher. She's been working for the VSO for six years. I asked her to marry me last month."

Sherlock nodded slowly. "And will Ms Morstan be willing to move back to London?"

John scrubbed his face with his hands. "I haven't said I'm moving back yet, Sherlock."

Sherlock opened his mouth to reply when Molly came up the stairs, mobile to her ear. "Alfie, I couldn't tell you what was going on. He was pretending he was dead, remember? And there was a criminal coming after me... No, that doesn't mean I should leave him... Well, it wasn't his fault! No. It wasn't!" She walked past Sherlock and John into the bedroom.

John frowned slightly as he watched the woman retreat. "Wonder what that was all about."
"Her eldest brother," Sherlock replied. "He has read the paper and found out about Molly's involvement with me and is worried. All of her brothers are." He rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Molly is the youngest and only girl in her family. Mother died in childbirth with her, which is why she is so awkward with her feminine side, despite a deep desire to show it. Three elder brothers. Father died five years ago. They were all incredibly protective of her while she was growing up. They hate that she is living in London. No matter what my attitude is towards them, they will hate me on principle as no man is good enough for their sister."

John sighed. "It's been a while since I've heard you deduce like that. Missed it."

"Deduce?" Sherlock's brow furrowed. "I didn't deduce that. Molly told me."

John's eyes went wide. "What? But... You don't talk to people."

"I talk to people all the time!" Sherlock protested.

John shook his head. "No. You interrogate people. Or you talk at them. You don't exactly get chatty over a cuppa."

Sherlock let out an exasperated sigh. "I have had my penis inside of several of her orifices. Do you really think I would not wish to discuss her life with her?"

John shuddered. That was a mental image he did not need to have in his head. "NO!" He shook his head fiercely. "No, no... Don't say stuff like that, Sherlock. Not now, not to anyone. EVER."

Sherlock got up and went back to the computer, continuing to delete email. He smiled tightly. "That in no way counts," John pointed out. He rubbed his eyes with his hands, as if he could scrub the image out manually. "Never, ever tell anyone what Molly is saintly enough to let you do to her. There is not a single person in this world who wants to hear it."

"Oh, I could stand to hear a little bit more," a throaty voice purred from the door. Smiling wickedly, Irene Adler strode into the flat. "Sounds like the experiment is going well, Mister Holmes. I do hope you make her scream. If not, I can give you some pointers..." She leaned in towards Sherlock. "Maybe even give a demonstration."

"Irene, please don't encourage..." John trailed off as his brain caught up with his mouth.

Irene Adler was standing in their flat. Irene Adler was very much alive and standing in their flat.

"Do people actually die anymore?" John demanded. He looked between Sherlock and the Woman. He pointed an accusatory finger at Sherlock. He didn't need to be the great Consulting Detective to figure this one out. "You helped her fake her death."

"Nothing gets past you, John," Sherlock said, sarcasm dripping from his voice. "Miss Adler has been of great assistance in dealing with Moriarty."

Irene straddled Sherlock's chair. "I also like to think I helped you and the delicious Doctor Hooper get together. You injured your shoulder." She smirked and very intentionally pressed against it.

"Does it hurt good?"

Sherlock hissed in a breath and John leapt to his feet to assist. But at that moment, Molly walked in. She let out a squeak at the sight of Irene on top of Sherlock.

Sherlock glared daggers at Irene. "Would you mind terribly not aggravating my injury in front of my girlfriend?"

"Girlfriend?" Irene slipped off of Sherlock's lap. "Never thought I would hear those words from your lovely lips."

Irene sauntered over to Molly. "Well, Doctor Hooper. You must have some very special talents. Congratulations." She grabbed the small woman and kissed her soundly.

Oh. Well, that was a bit of all right. John smiled, despite the shock at the sight.
"WOMAN!" Sherlock bellowed. Irene pulled back and sighed. "Possessiveness is very unattractive, Mister Holmes." She looked around the flat. "Well, I have just flown in from the Czech Republic. I am exhausted and I refuse to sleep on your sofa."

Sherlock grabbed a set of keys and threw them to Irene. "We've put Molly's furniture in 221C. Down in the basement." He smiled tightly. "Think of it as your own personal dungeon."

"Already had one of those," Irene retorted as she deftly caught the keys. She strode towards the door. "I'm sure this one won't compare."

John watched Irene leave with a sway of her hips. He turned back and was about to comment on the sheer ridiculousness of the situation, but Sherlock wasn't paying any attention. Molly was standing behind Sherlock now. His head tilted back as Molly stroked his curls. The pair seemed completely oblivious to John's presence. "We'll be rid of her once we take care of Moran."

"Well then... Find him soon," Molly replied softly. "I'd rather not be randomly snogged by a dominatrix."

"I think John is enjoying it," Sherlock commented. John scowled at the correct assumption.

"I was going to give you these before I went to sleep anyway, but I think you could probably really use these now." Molly slipped her hand into her pocket and pulled out several pills.

Sherlock accepted them with his good hand. "I am perfectly capable of handling my own pain medication, Doctor Hooper."

"I'm supposed to trust a former drug addict with painkillers..." Molly let out a small laugh. "I'm keeping them hidden."

"Jewellery box," Sherlock replied tersely.

Molly scowled. "Then I'm going to move them."

"Under your knickers."

Molly went quiet, but her wrinkled nose clearly showed her irritation. "I'm going to bed."

"Mm." Sherlock kept his head tilted back. "I'm going to keep going through my emails. Maybe something interesting has finally come in. So far, it's all been tedious and mundane."

"Well, if you get tired." Molly leaned in and gave Sherlock an upside-down kiss. John wanted to look away, but was still horrifically fascinated by the idea of Sherlock being affectionate. "You know where I'll be."

Sherlock sighed. "Unlikely." He pressed another kiss to Molly's lips. "That one is new. Hm... Interesting. I enjoyed that."

Molly smiled and pulled away. Finally, she noticed John was still there and turned a deep crimson. She bit her lip and gave him a shy smile. "Night John." She quickly moved towards Sherlock's bedroom.

Once the door had closed, John shook his head slowly, a horrible realization setting in. "My God..."

Sherlock's brow furrowed. "What? Are you going to complain about how disturbing it is again?"

"No..." John gaped open mouthed at Sherlock. "You two are... A normal couple."

Sherlock glared. "You take that back."

When John awoke the next morning, he found seventeen messages on his blog:
I let you punch me in the face once. Why would you feel the need to do so again?
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:01

You do realize you are hardly setting the record straight, as it were. You have even less information than the newspapers.
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:05

Why should my relationship be of greatest interest to your readers?
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:10

You make her sound like an insipid schoolgirl with a crush, John.
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:13

Molly is a published doctor. Her credentials are actually better than yours.
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:15

I did not insult Molly. What did I say again?
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:17

Again, I do not routinely insult Molly. Why would she be in a relationship with me if I did?
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:20

What makes you think my brother and the Woman are at all informed about me?
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:24

I told you not to write about things I do with Molly! It is really no one's business.
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:29

Why should it be surprising I am fond of Toby? Have I ever given any indication I am anti-feline?
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:34

You've given personal information about my own relationship, but you've only skimmed the surface of your own. If you are planning to marry this woman, shouldn't you be gushing far more than anyone needs about her supposedly wonderful qualities?
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:38

I am not claiming. I made an observation.
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:41

Molly has already assisted me on cases. You've said so yourself. Why would she not wish to continue?
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:43

Please do not describe me as a 'boyfriend'.
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:44

Delete this immediately.
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:48

Did I not tell you that you are staying?
_Sherlock Holmes_, January 21th, 12:51
(Art by Lexieken)

THE PERSONAL BLOG OF DR. JOHN H. WATSON (Photoshop by Emcee)
Molly and Sherlock are forced to confront the reality of their relationship when Mycroft issues a summons.

Molly frowned slightly as she picked up the kettle full of boiling water and poured it into the warmed teapot. "So you're saying you think I could be a serial killer."

Sherlock flipped through the morning paper idly, only half reading the articles. "Hardly. You are far too empathetic."

Molly shook her head. "Well, then what are you saying?"

Sherlock tried to wave off the plate of breakfast Molly set in front of him. "I am saying that you could be a particularly efficient serial killer should you so desire. You are medically trained. You are comfortable with dead bodies due to your time in the morgue. You worked with your father in his butcher's shop, meaning you have practical knowledge of dismemberment. Female serial killers are rare, but are far cleverer than their male counterparts. Their body counts tend to be quite a bit higher and it is thought by some that female killers are not as nearly as rare, it is just few of them are caught."

Molly pursed her lips as she finished making the tea and put a cup in front of Sherlock. "It sounds like you want me to become a serial killer, Sherlock."

"Of course not," Sherlock scoffed. He curled his good arm around Molly's waist, pulling her into his lap. "However, were you to do so, I would like you to be the most effective serial killer possible."

Molly let out a small laugh. "I'll stick with the pre-made dead bodies that come to me, thank you very much."

Sherlock sighed dramatically, something Molly had come to realize was a sign his ever-changing mood was turning sour.

"Why don't I have a case yet?" Sherlock whined. He sounded like a child when he whined. "Lestrade should have been by days ago with something."

"He probably wants you to get some rest," Molly sighed, running her fingers through Sherlock's hair soothingly. "You did nearly fall off a building and dislocated your shoulder. There's nothing on the website?"

Sherlock sneered. "I keep getting messages from people asking me to tell them about you," contempt dripped from his voice. "They want me to gush purple prose on how wonderful the world is when you have that special someone." He rolled his eyes. "I want a case."

"Things aren't going well with Moran?" Molly frowned deeply.

"He's not nearly as interesting as Moriarty," Sherlock replied. "From what I can find, he's still trying to gain a base amongst Moriarty's followers and won't do anything until he has. How dull."

"Something will come up," Molly assured him. She leaned in and kissed him soundly. Sherlock responded eagerly, deepening the kiss.

"If you are not careful, Miss Hooper," An icy voice said from the door. "Something else entirely will come up."

"Go away, Mycroft," Sherlock muttered against Molly's mouth.

Mycroft ignored his little brother, striding in. "Ah, young love... Quite the little harem you have
acquired, Sherlock. Miss Hooper, Irene Adler... John.”

Sherlock shooed Molly off of his lap and pulled himself to his feet. He sauntered over to an easy chair and threw himself down. He picked up his computer. "I am terribly busy right now, Mycroft."

"Busy satiating the sexual curiosity one should have at fourteen, perhaps... But you are still lacking any substantial cases," pure distain dripped from his voice with the word.

"And I suppose you have something for me," Sherlock replied, not looking to his brother.

"No." Mycroft's lip curled in a smile. "I haven't. You have been summoned."

Sherlock looked away from his computer. "When am I expected?"

"This evening," Mycroft replied. "Will you have time to properly dress Miss Hooper?"

"Doctor Hooper," Sherlock corrected him. "And she is not coming."

Molly bit her lower lip. She was very confused. She was getting used to Sherlock and Mycroft sniping at each other and very often not making sense when they did it. "Excuse me? Going where?"

"Nowhere," Sherlock insisted.

Mycroft however, turned his attention Molly. "To meet our mother. She is expecting you for dinner."

"NO," Sherlock said fiercely.

"Sherlock, you pretended to kill yourself," Mycroft pointed out. "Mummy was so beside herself, she couldn't even bring herself to attend your funeral. I did say you would have to crawl on glass to get back into her good graces."

"Fine," Sherlock replied, his voice tightly. "I will. But Molly will not."

Mycroft smiled once again. "Sherlock, if you did not wish Mummy to meet Miss Hooper, you should not have kissed her in front of The Sun, The Mirror, The Mail..."

Sherlock glared daggered at Mycroft. "You should not have given Mummy copies of The Sun, The Mirror, The Mail..."

Mycroft smiled toothily. "Yes. They really are not the most reputable papers. But I could not deprive Mummy of your domestic bliss."

Molly worried her lip. "Sherlock, what's wrong with me meeting your mother?" The question slipped out unbidden. She looked away quickly, realizing she wasn't positive she wanted an answer.

"What is wrong with it, Sherlock?" Mycroft mocked. "You seem very happy sharing your bed with Miss Hooper, sharing your work, having crass displays of public affection... Why should you hide her away from Mummy? Is it because you are ready to end your affair? Or are you ashamed to bring home the butcher's daughter?"

It felt like Molly had been punched in the gut. She didn't move, trying to hold in the flood of emotions that washed over her. Of course, that did not escape Sherlock's notice. Very few things did. He finally put his computer aside and got to his feet. "Molly-"

"Well..." Molly took a deep breath. "No- Sorry- I've- Sorry." With that, she raced off towards their bedroom, not wanting either of the Holmes boys to see her like that.

"MYCROFT!" She could hear Sherlock shout from the sitting room. "Look what you did!"

"What I did?" Mycroft replied, his voice still calm. "Sherlock, I do not believe I factor into Miss Hooper's emotional state in the least. You on the other hand, rule it with an iron fist."

Molly threw a pillow over her head so she didn't have to hear the brothers continue to fight with
one another. Her whole body shook as tears continued to fall.

She could hear muffled footsteps. She moved the pillow slightly, just enough to hear Sherlock speak.

"You never have to apologize for anything, Molly. Especially not to Mycroft."

Molly didn't move from her spot. She couldn't look at him. Not right now.

She then felt him settle onto the bed next to her. She remained still, her head buried under the pillow.

"Molly." She wanted to pull the pillow down again at the sound of his deep voice. "Please speak to me."

She still did not move the pillow, so Sherlock did it for her. Molly gave up and rolled herself over to look up at Sherlock. He frowned down at her.

"I told you I do not do well with crying people," Sherlock admonished her.

"Maybe you shouldn't have made me cry then," Molly replied, furiously trying to dash away her tears, not wanting Sherlock to see her like that.

Sherlock sighed. "I did not say anything disparaging towards you. Mycroft did."

Molly sat up and averted her gaze. Sherlock reached a hand up and paused for a moment, seemingly uncertain of how to proceed. Molly realized that this was probably the first time Sherlock had ever done something like this. "You believe I've thought something disparaging though. You believe what Mycroft said was true."

"Isn't it?" Molly asked.

"Of course it is not," Sherlock insisted. "Molly, if I had any desire to end our relationship, I would not keep that information from you. I most certainly would not be pulling you into my lap and kissing you. Since you seem to require me stating it plainly: I am very content being with you."

Molly sniffled. "Well... I thought..." She let out a bitter laugh. "You probably think I'm an embarrassment."

Sherlock sneered. "Molly Hooper, you are a noted pathologist who has achieved more in your field than people twice your age. I allow you to help with my experiments, something I only allow people I trust to do. You helped me fake my death and defeat Moriarty. No one else did that. You did. Please enlighten me as to where in all that there would be something to be embarrassed by."

Molly's lower lip quivered. "Then why don't you want me to meet your mother?"

Sherlock sighed. He moved stiffly, but he wrapped his good arm around Molly, pulling her against him. Both of them were tense at the action: Molly due to her emotions, Sherlock to inexperience. He ended up turning her slightly so her back was to his front, mimicking how they slept together. This seemed to relax both of them and Molly leaned back, head against Sherlock's uninjured shoulder. He brushed his nose against her cheek. "I know my mother will not approve of you."

Molly tensed again, but Sherlock's arm tightened around her. "My mother also does not approve of me being a Consulting Detective. Her opinion matters very little to me in terms of what I do with my life."

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Molly frowned slightly. "You and your mother don't get along?"

Sherlock's brow furrowed as he seemed to consider this statement. "She is my mother. While we do not see eye to eye on everything... She is my mother."

"And you love her," Molly murmured, turning her head to face Sherlock.

"Love is not something often discussed in the Holmes household," Sherlock replied. "I do not need her approval. Nor am I ashamed of you." He took a deep breath. "Surely you have noticed my bluntness is something of a genetic trait. My mother is no different."
Molly sniffled and averted her gaze, moving out of Sherlock's embrace. He brought a hand up and wiped the tears from Molly's cheek with his thumb. "I know you are emotional. I did not want my mother to wound you."

"Sherlock..." Molly whispered.

Sherlock took a deep breath. "I only wanted to protect your feelings. Is that not what you said one does for their companion?"

Molly sighed. Sherlock was still trying to understand how this relationship thing worked. "I am going to have to deal with it eventually, Sherlock. She's your mother. You and I are together."

Sherlock sighed in exasperation. "Molly, if I put stock in my mother's wishes and opinions, I would be playing first chair in the London Symphony by now."

"She's still your mother," Molly replied. "I can't avoid her."

Sherlock scowled. "Fine, Molly... Would you care to come with me to my mother's tonight for dinner, even thought she will almost without a doubt be absolutely terrible to you?"

Molly leaned in and kissed Sherlock gently. "With an invitation like that, how can I refuse?"

"I really wish you would," Sherlock sighed. He pushed away from Molly. "Well, if we are to do this, I really need to find a case. I'm going to need something to focus on while Mother is lecturing me."

Molly got to her feet. Her hurt was replaced by utter nervousness. "You do that. I have something I've got to do before then."

"Are you all right?" Sherlock asked suspiciously.

"If I wasn't, don't you think you'd be able to tell?" Molly replied. It wasn't entirely the truth and both of them knew it. But Molly wouldn't back down from this challenge. There was just something she had to do.

Irene opened the door to 221C and looked at Molly. "To what do I owe the pleasure, Doctor Hooper? Sherlock usually tries to keep your as far away from me as possible."

Molly wrung her hands nervous. "I need you to... Well, dress me."

Irene arched a brow. "Dress you? Hm. That sounds rather interesting. Why?" She stepped out the way to allow Molly to enter the basement flat.

Molly walked in, unable to meet Irene's gaze. "Well, Sherlock's mum has summoned him for dinner and I'm going and..."

"Ah." Irene nodded. "You wish to impress Dame Holmes." She let out a throaty laugh. "Sherlock Holmes bringing a girl to meet Mummy. Doctor Hooper, you continue to astound with you uncanny ability to do the impossible with that man."

"Can you please just help me?" Molly asked desperately. "Sherlock's already told me she's going to hate me no matter what, but I'd rather give her as little ammunition as possible."

Irene made a noise low in her throat as she circled Molly like a carrion bird. She then stopped in front of her. "All right. Strip."

Molly let out a small squeak. "That's not what I was asking!"

Irene rolled her eyes. "I do need to see what I'm working with." Her blue eyes were burning with intensity. "STRIP!"

Molly jumped a bit at the barked order and began to remove her clothing. Irene laughed once again. "Oh, you are wasted on Sherlock, Doctor. I could have so much fun with you."

Turning a furious red and trying to ignore the implications, Molly continued to remove her
clothing. She was suddenly very aware of her undergarments. She was very utilitarian in them, almost always sticking to white cotton knickers and bra. Sherlock didn't seem to mind- or even notice- her choice of undergarments. Yet in front of Irene, it felt like it mattered.

Despite Molly's concerns about her underthings, Irene was smiling as she began to circle once again. Molly could feel the dominatrix's gaze on her. "Oh yes... I do think I can work with this." She moved in close, her lips almost against Molly's ear. "Does Sherlock even know what a pretty pretty prize he has?" She gave Molly a sharp slap on the rump.

Molly let out a squeal and squeezed her eyes shut tight.

"Irene, your door was open, I was just-"

Molly's eyes flew open at the new voice. She turned around and she set her gaze on John, who looked like a deer caught in headlights. Once his brain seemed to catch up with what he was seeing, he turned on his heels.

"Not the one I expected to walk in," Irene laughed. "But fun all the same. I don't need anything, John. You can run along."

John nodded, still keeping his back to them. "Yeah. I think I'll be doing that."

Molly could feel the heat rising in her cheeks. "John, it's not what you think!"

John shook his head. "It's really none of my business." With that, he strode off, shutting the door tightly behind him.

Molly let out another small squeak. "Irene!"

"Forget about him," Irene commanded. She grasped Molly by the chin. "I do think I can work with you, Doctor Hooper. But you will have to listen to what I say. I can dress you up all respectable, but it will do you no good without the right attitude. You are a mouse. You *squeak*. It took you nearly three years to lure Sherlock into your bed because your squeaks were so quiet, he could not see what an intelligent, pretty girl he had in front of him. And now you are up against an even more formidable opponent: The woman who raised him. If you want Dame Holmes's respect, you must *command* it."

Molly gulped. "You'd probably do a lot better meeting Sherlock's mother than I would. I'm- as Mycroft pointed out- a butcher's daughter."

"I'm a dominatrix," Irene snapped back. "Hardly someone to bring home to mother. Besides, it's all artifice. Everything we present to the world is just an illusion, a prop which we use to play the game."

Molly shook her head. "That's not true."

"Isn't it?" Irene asked. She leaned in close to Molly once again. "Molly, I'm not British."

Molly frowned and looked to Irene in surprise. "What? But you are-"

"What?" Irene's accent had changed. She sounded American. New York, maybe? "Do you think I show anyone who I really am?"

Molly's eyes went wide once again. "Are you telling me the truth?"

Irene smiled and she smoothly went back to a British accent. "Does it really matter? It's all a masquerade, Doctor." She licked her lips. "Now let's put your mask on."
CH. 2D
"You and your mother don't get along?"
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Sherlock brings Molly to meet his mother. After, he receives his first mystery after his reappearance.

Sherlock had spent the afternoon working on notes for an experiment he wished to conduct measuring the decomposition of charred human flesh. He could not move past his theory. He was still lacking in samples. Once Molly began work again, he would be able to get something to bring home. He wondered if their relationship would help or hinder. Obviously, she was eager to please him. However, she was now in the flat and would be as squeamish as John was.

While he had abstained from keeping samples at Molly's flat, they were now at 221B. That was Sherlock's domain.

Sherlock was starting to see a disadvantage in being outnumbered by his flatmates.

Eventually, he put aside his notes to get ready for dinner at his mother's. She would no doubt be very critical of his attire. She would be critical of absolutely everything, given that he had faked his death. He would not provide his mother with any more ammunition than he absolutely had to.

Then, he was bringing Molly with him. He had thought that was a criticism he would be able to avoid for slightly longer. Of course, he knew eventually his mother would be forced to meet Molly. He had hoped he could at least delay it until his mother was in a better mood.

Molly had told him that a part of attachment was trying to avoid hurt for your significant other. Meeting his mother would no doubt bring her pain. Yet Molly seemed just as hurt by the prospect of not meeting her.

There was absolutely no right answer. It was perplexing. It was a paradox. It was one of the things Sherlock thoroughly disliked about being in a relationship.

As the time for the dinner approached, Sherlock began to pace the flat, wondering where Molly was. She had left to 'take care of something'. What did she need to take care of? She had no friends. Her brothers were nowhere near London. She had not renewed her employment as of yet. Her entire life revolved around Sherlock. So where had she gone?

Just as Sherlock had pulled out his mobile to text her and ask exactly where she was, the door opened and Molly entered.

At least, he thought Molly was somewhere in there. There was very little trace of his mousy little pathologist. Her light brown hair was gleaming, pinned up neatly. Her makeup was done artfully, definitely not done by Molly herself. There were always slight mistakes in Molly's makeup, her hand shaking as she constantly second-guessed what made her look good. This was flawless.

The suit she was wearing- a light blue- fit her well enough, however was slightly too big for her, particularly in the bust. She also seemed uncomfortable wearing it, as if she were a little girl playing in her mother's clothing.

The Woman.

"Why are you dressed like that?" Sherlock asked, not able to keep the irritation out of his voice. He could not deny it: this would be more acceptable to his mother. Something more polished than the rumpled girl who tended to dead bodies all day long.

But she wasn't Molly. Sherlock didn't like that.

"I just thought..." Molly looked away, biting her lower lip. She would ruin the light pink lipstick Irene had applied. "Your mother... Maybe she would... Like this better."
"She will," Sherlock replied. His brow furrowed slightly as he took a step towards Molly.

"Do you..." He could hear the hitch in Molly's voice. The uncertainty. "Do you like it better?"

Sherlock shook his head. He tilted her head up. "You were correct in your assumption regarding my mother. However, I would like to make it very clear as atrocious as your own dress sense is, it is yours. I am in a relationship with Molly Hooper and not a facsimile of that woman. My mother will be able to see through this forgery. Hurry up and get changed into your own clothes."

Molly stood her ground. "I went through a lot of trouble to dress nicely to meet your mother."

Sherlock sighed. "I highly doubt it will work. I also do not believe you will be able to continue such a masquerade every time we meet with my mother, despite that being very infrequent. Would you rather not just... Get it over with?"

Molly scowled at him.

Sherlock sighed. His mother would perhaps be in a better mood the next time she met Molly. Maybe then would be a better time for her to see Molly for what she really was. "If you insist. It's your body. Clothe it how you wish."

Molly smiled. "But you like me how I really dress better."

Sherlock gave Molly a withering look. "I told you. I am with Molly Hooper. That includes appalling clothes."

Molly wrinkled her nose in a way Sherlock had grown to find endearing. "I think there was a compliment in there somewhere."

"Again, a reasonable deduction." Sherlock leaned down and kissed Molly gently. While he knew he would further ruin Molly's lip makeup, he would ruin it less with the act of reassurance than Molly continuing to worry her lower lip.

Sherlock glanced out the window and Mycroft's limousine pull up outside of 221. "You can still remain here," Sherlock said to Molly. He cupped her face. "I will think no less of you."

Molly smiled up at him, in a way that made her look so much more like herself and less like the woman's clone. "This can't be any worse than being shot at by a madman, can it?"

Sherlock did not reply, simply taking hold of Molly's wrist and pulling her out the door. He heard a small voice in his head- one that sounded very much like John- telling him that dragging Molly by the wrist was not the way one walked with one's girlfriend. He wasn't sure he was entirely comfortable with the alternative. Despite his intimate familiarity with Molly Hooper, hand-holding was not something Sherlock Holmes did.

Mycroft's hatchetwoman stepped out of the limousine and briefly looked up from her mobile to give Sherlock and Molly an appraising look. "I will be working with Irene tonight. She enjoyed your time together. But I have been told to tell you she would like to buy you undergarments."

Sherlock frowned slightly as he got into the limousine along with Molly. "Undergarments?"

Molly's cheeks turned pink. "Don't ask."

The drive to the Holmes estate was spent in almost complete silence. Sherlock had been tempted to talk the entire time, sniping at Mycroft, but he could feel the waves of tension coming off of Molly. When Mycroft had opened his mouth to make a comment about Molly's choice of dress, Sherlock had been forced to give his brother a swift kick to the shins and an absolutely venomous look. Mycroft actually took the hint and restrained himself, leading Sherlock to believe Mycroft might actually be fond of Molly or at least thought she was a good influence on Sherlock.

Without his banter with Mycroft and Molly quietly stewing with her nerves, Sherlock was left to analyse the current situation in his head.

Mycroft is texting. Unusual. No doubt, something important is happening, but he does not want Molly or me privy to the details. Coup d'état. Definitely. When away from Molly, make sure to
prod Mycroft with fact I am fully aware of his current activities.

Molly is fidgeting. She is uncomfortable in the clothing the Woman chose for her. She does not feel like herself. She is not herself in them. She is still frightened that Mummy's opinion bears more weight on me than I said. She also wonders still if I prefer her dressed like this. Why does she think I would lie to appease her? Is that common in relationships? Relationships are rubbish if so. I will not acquiesce to such a ridiculous notion.

Sherlock began to come up with ideas for after dinner, to strip Molly of the ridiculous costume Irene had put her in, but he quickly realized he was straying out of the area of deduction and into that of fantasy.

He felt slight irritation at Molly for unlocking that part of himself. Taking his mind off cool deduction and bringing in base desire. He quashed that, reminding himself fantasies- if actually executed- were just plans.

Plans were fine. He liked plans. Especially if it ended with hands buried in his hair and soft moans in his ear.

Perhaps that would be a good time to ask Molly to procure an arm for his experiment. Yes. She was always quite agreeable during their intimate moments. He liked hearing the moaned Yes come from her mouth. The God part he wasn't too fond of.

When the car stopped, Sherlock waited for the door to be opened and slid out. He then held a hand out to Molly, helping her out. Her brown eyes went very wide at the sight of the Holmes Estate.

Was she impressed? No, she was overwhelmed. He could almost hear the thoughts in her head as if she were speaking them aloud.

*Sherlock's mother is going to tear me apart.*

*Why would Sherlock want me?*

*I'm not good enough for Sherlock.*

Sherlock pulled Molly to him. He looked deeply into her eyes. "Do you think I wouldn't want a woman who would give me a severed head to experiment on?"

Molly opened her mouth to say something, but Sherlock just continued to look into her eyes.

"If you two are done with your..." Mycroft sneered. "Touching moment. Mummy is waiting."

Sherlock led Molly into the house. The shoes the Woman had put her in clicked against the marble floor.

Sherlock immediately released Molly's wrist and folded his hand behind his back when he saw his mother approaching.

Dame Violet Holmes was a formidable woman. She was nearly as tall as her sons. She had the same piercing blue eyes as Sherlock and curly white hair set rigidly. She was dressed in a prim suit of dark indigo. She held out her arms to Sherlock. "Sherlock. You're alive."

"Mummy." Sherlock strode quickly to her.

The slap across his cheek echoed through the large foyer. The sting went straight through Sherlock. He brought a hand to his face.

"I suppose I deserved that," Sherlock muttered.

"Do you know what you did to me, Sherlock?" His mother said sharply, her gaze fixed on him. "I thought my son was dead. The entire world thought he was a fraud. Do you have any idea what that did to me?"

Sherlock nodded slowly. He swallowed hard. This was going to be a harder night than he originally thought. His mother was always his blind spot when it came to deduction. "I am aware. I deeply apologize mother. It was necessary."
"Necessary, yes." His mother smiled tightly. Her gaze slipped over to Molly. "It certainly gave you time to do new things. Don't be rude and introduce us, Sherlock."

Sherlock stepped back from his mother and took Molly's wrist, leading her up. "Mother, this is Doctor Molly Hooper. Molly, this is my mother, Dame Violet Holmes."

Molly fidgeted. Sherlock could feel her pulse racing. She was also breathing quickly. He was slightly worried she might have a panic attack.

He was saved the trouble of catching a fainting Molly by his mother turning on her heels and striding towards the dining room. "Mycroft, Sherlock... Your phones better be off."

Sherlock shared a rare look of commiseration with his brother. It was only when in the presence of their mother that he felt any real camaraderie with Mycroft. Both took out their phones and turned them off as requested.

They sat down to their dinner. Molly looked overwhelmed by the food, by the place settings. Sherlock muttered to her just to start from the outside and go in.

Dinner was spent in stony silence. Normally, a dinner with the Holmes family meant the two brothers sniping at each other and their mother criticizing both for decisions they had made. But neither Mycroft nor Sherlock were going to speak before their mother did. She did not speak, her expression ice cold.

Anyone else would want a detailed explanation of Sherlock's whereabouts and goings on while he was dead. Not his mother.

When dinner was finished, Sherlock's mother rose to her feet. "Sherlock, join me on the veranda."

Sherlock looked briefly to Molly. With a cold smile, Sherlock's mother gestured for him to follow her. "Mycroft will be more than happy to keep Doctor Hooper company. Come now."

Sherlock followed after his mother onto the veranda. She took an elegant gold cigarette case from her pocket and drew a long cigarette out. She held out the case to Sherlock.

Sherlock shook his head. "Molly doesn't like it when I smoke."

His mother gave him a cold smile. "Then I insist."

Sherlock took the cigarette and took out his lighter. He lit his mother's first, then his own. He closed his eyes tightly, letting the smoke fill his lungs before exhaling it into the night air.

He had missed it.

"I suppose you will go back to your little detective game." Sherlock's mother's ice blue eyes were trained on him.

Sherlock nodded. "As soon as I get a case. People seem reticent to enlist me due to my shoulder. Funny, considering it is my brain that is of most use to them."

Sherlock's mother was quiet as she smoked her cigarette and shifted her gaze towards the sky.

Sherlock cleared his throat. "Mother, I deeply apologize for-"

"You will marry that girl over my dead body," Sherlock's mother said darkly, not even turning her gaze to look at him.

This had not been what Sherlock was expecting. Then, his family was always what he had the most difficult time analysing. "You have not spoken a single word to Molly."

Sherlock's mother continued to look into the distance. "And do you believe my opinion would change were I to speak with her? The mousy butcher's daughter who spends her days elbow-deep in corpses? I have seen Mycroft's reports on her. She is utterly unworthy of your attentions."

Sherlock let out a sigh. "I have absolutely no intentions of marrying Molly, Mother." He took another drag on his cigarette. "In fact, I have no intentions of ever engaging in that outdated
financial agreement which is denied to one-tenth of the population based on nothing but silly religious doctrine. However, I will remain emotionally and physical faithful to Molly. I will share with her everything I have to offer: my bed, my life, my money." He sighed. "I fail to see why I am required to place a ring on her finger to do things that are perfectly within my grasp as is."

"Why do you insist on being so difficult?" Sherlock's mother asked coolly.

"It is never my objective," Sherlock replied. "I would like you to be content with my decisions. However, if you are not, we are at an impasse and I was raised to believe one did not compromise."

Sherlock's mother put her cigarette out in the ashtray. "Well then. I suppose we are the same as ever, Sherlock." She finally looked to her son. "I am pleased you are not dead."

With that, she swept out.

Molly let out a sigh as she stumbled into 221B. "That was the most uncomfortable evening of my entire life."

Sherlock followed in after her, guiding her along. To ease the tension in her, Molly had a bit more to drink than she normally would have. Sherlock couldn't say he blamed her. She had comported herself admirably during the dinner itself. But now that she had been walking, the alcohol had begun to affect her system.

"She didn't say anything mean to me," Molly said quietly, turning to face Sherlock. She looped an arm around his neck. "In fact, she didn't say anything to me at all. So does that mean she didn't mind me?"

"It means she hated you even more than I thought," Sherlock replied bluntly.

Molly tried to pull herself away from Sherlock, her brow furrowing. "What? But-"

Sherlock kept a firm hand on Molly's back, pulling her back in close. He leaned in and gave that lip a light nibble. "I would think you should be more concerned with what I think of you. And I like you quite a bit."

"You do." Molly kissed Sherlock. "You smoked."

"Mother insisted," Sherlock sighed. He nuzzled his nose against Molly's hair. "I hope you will not hold it against me."

Molly pressed herself up against Sherlock and he remembered his plans from earlier. Was Molly so drunk that executing those plans were a mistake? No, she was just slightly tipsy. Perfectly able to consent. It would actually be an interesting experiment to see how intercourse was different when Molly's inhibitions were lowered slightly.

"I do not like this suit on you," Sherlock intoned darkly, running his hand down the buttons of Molly's jacket. "It is not you."

Sherlock grasped the fabric and tore it open as best he could with only arm with full range of use. Buttons flew off and hit the floor. Sherlock was not overly concerned with ruining the Woman's wardrobe.

"Do you like me wearing anything?" Molly asked, slightly exasperated.

Sherlock knew she was commenting on his continued slights at her dress sense. He ignored the true meaning of the question and smiled wolfishly, running his fingers over the soft skin of her belly. "No, I do not like you wearing anything. I like you wearing nothing."

Molly's fingers slipped into his hair. Sherlock sighed and trailed kisses over Molly's jaw. "No... I like to see you in my shirt. It is strange. You wearing my soiled clothes should be disgusting. However, you are at such ease in them. With your hair down." He reached up and took her hair down, letting the light locks cascade over her shoulders.

Sherlock continued to pull Molly's borrowed clothing from her, leaving her in just her undergarments.
He remembered Anthea's comment about the Woman not liking Molly's underthings. He took a moment to examine them. Cotton, white, clean, without any tears. Why would she require anything else... Besides perhaps a brassiere that did not have the infernal clasps on it?

Molly smiled up at him. "You are wearing too many clothes now, Sherlock Holmes."

Sherlock took off his sling to allow Molly to remove his jacket. His shoulder still hurt, however it was cumbersome to what Molly was doing. Besides, it would be interesting to see what range of motion he could manage with a dislocated shoulder.

Molly was in the midst of unbuttoning his shirt when Sherlock wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. He let out a hiss as pain shot through him. That was an interesting sensation while he was experiencing pleasure.

"Don't use your arm," Molly admonished. "You're healing."

Sherlock ignored Molly and kissed her insistently. Molly's protests were quickly forgotten and Sherlock began to stroke up and down her back, fiddling with her bottom.

"Sherlock, is that you?" John said from his room. He came down. "I haven't been able to- Oh dear Lord."

Sherlock did not pull far away from Molly's mouth. "I know your abilities of observation are limited compared to my own, but certainly you can see I am occupied."

"In our sitting room," John replied, covering his face with his hand. "How many times today do I have to see you in your knickers, Molly?"

Sherlock pulled back and frowned. "When did you see Molly in her knickers today?"

John kept his hand over his eyes, shaking his head. "Just forget it. I was going to tell you Lestrade has a case for us..."

"Really?" Sherlock grinned and immediately began to rebutton his shirt. "Wonderful! Why didn't he text me?"

"Your phone is off," John replied. "I thought you'd died... Again."

Sherlock righted his clothing. "Well, get your things. We have to go." He glanced to Molly, who was still standing in the middle of the room, looking a bit dazed.

"I would invite you to come with, Molly, but you are slightly inebriated and probably will be of little use on the case." Sherlock waited for Molly to give him a kiss, as she always did when he left somewhere. When she did not, he frowned. "What is it?"

She let out a small squeak.

Sherlock finally took the initiative, swooping in to kiss Molly soundly. He had grown so used to the press of their lips when one of them parted, he didn't want to leave without it. "You should get some rest, Molly. Tomorrow's your first day back at Barts, isn't it?"

John was keeping his gaze averted as he walked past Molly. He stopped by her side for a moment. "I would say I'm sorry... But you're the one who thought he would make a good boyfriend."

Molly buried her red face in her hands. "Honestly, I kind of saw this coming."

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "What are you two on about? Come on, John! We have work to do."

Sherlock was knelt down beside the dead body. It was an open and shut case. Lestrade was clearly calling on him just because he'd felt sorry Sherlock lacked cases. While he had been desperate for work, he had been quite happy with Molly. He would have to amend his rating system.

Woman. Late fifties. Well-off. Apparent robbery. Yet clearly, this was not the case. There were no defensive wounds. She had been stabbed quickly, but it had not been a blitz attack. She had been
talking to the person who had robbed her. A ruse to get her to let her guard down? No. She had pepper spray. Obviously, she was very mindful of her safety, even disregarding the law to do so. She would not have stopped for a stranger. She was missing all of her valuables. The ring that should have been on her left ring finger had been removed long before this robbery. She had a tan line, but the indentation was not very clear. She had just separated from her husband.

Sherlock spoke his observations out loud, but realized there was no one listening to him. He turned around to look at John and Lestrade. "I am being brilliant. Would you kindly pay attention?"

Lestrade burst out into laughter, while John tried to get him to quiet down.

Sherlock scowled. "There is a dead body. I thought laughter was inappropriate at such a time?"

Lestrade knelt down beside Sherlock. "Did you really leave Molly Hooper in her knickers to come here and look at a dead body?"

Sherlock cocked his head slightly. "I would have brought her with, but she was fairly drunk."

Lestrade shook his head. "How a man like you got a sweet girl like Molly Hooper..."

Sherlock scowled deeper still. "It was her husband. She left him several weeks ago. However, she is the one with the money. Find out who she is and you'll know who the killer is."

"Marilyn Russell," Sgt Donovan said, striding towards Sherlock. "Her name is Marilyn Russell."

Sherlock pulled himself to his feet. "Then, Marilyn Russell's husband is your killer. How did you find out her identity? Did your junior detective kit finally arrive?"

Sgt Donovan smirked. "Because her husband Prescott Russell has just been found shot in their home. Nice work, Freak."
Ch. 21
Molly was under there somehow.

(Art by Lexie)
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Molly helps Sherlock with his case and tries to settle back into Barts after her return.

There was something incredibly comfortable about Sherlock's bed even when he was not in it. Molly never had any trouble falling asleep. Sherlock would tell her it was because his bed was simply better than the IKEA bed Molly had in her flat. He would roll his eyes at her suggestion that even without him there, Molly could feel Sherlock's presence with her.

Curled up in the bed with Toby with her, Molly realized sleepily that the presence of Sherlock she was feeling at the current moment was not just metaphorical, but quite factual. He was curled around her, his front to her back. He had leaned in, murmuring in her ear. From any other man, she would have thought this sign of desire. However, Molly was dating Sherlock Holmes.

"A woman dies. Appears to have been mugged to the untrained eye. It is obviously her husband, killing her to retain the lifestyle he is accustomed to after their separation. But husband is found dead at their home."

Molly whined softly and shifted, burying her face in her pillow. Toby got up and gracefully leapt off the bed to avoid her moving form.

"Sherlock?" Molly murmured sleepily, her eyes fluttered open. She yawned and reached a hand up, rubbing her eyes. "What are you doing?"

"A woman dies. Appears to have been mugged to the untrained eye. It is obviously her husband, killing her to retain the lifestyle he is accustomed to after their separation. But husband is found dead at their home."

Molly looked at the clock to see the time. She blinked blearily. "Sherlock, it's three o'clock. I have to work in the morning!"

Sherlock burrowed closer to Molly. "I'm working now." His breath was warm against her neck. "I needed to think."

Molly yawned once again. "And you thought the right way to do that was to play spoons?"

"A woman dies. Appears to have been mugged to the untrained eye. It is obviously her husband, killing her to retain the lifestyle he is accustomed to after their separation. But husband is found dead at their home."

Molly rubbed her eyes once again. Sherlock was bouncing ideas off of her. "Where's John?"

"I said his theory was foolish. So he told me to piss off and went to work with Lestrade." Sherlock nuzzled Molly's neck. "A woman dies. Appears to have been mugged to the untrained eye. It is obviously her husband, killing her to retain the lifestyle he is accustomed to after their separation. But husband is found dead at their home." He went quiet for a moment. "Was it humorous for me to take a case while in the midst of foreplay?"

Molly scowled slightly. "No, it was not humorous."

"John and Lestrade seem to think so." Sherlock replied. He nudged Molly gently. "You're angry."

"Little frustrated. But it was bound to happen sooner or later." Molly closed her eyes and let out a sigh. "Do you think the husband killed himself out of guilt?"

"No gun. No powder. It was also a high-powered rifle shot through a window." Sherlock made an annoyed grunt low in his throat. "He would have to feel very guilty to pull that off."

"You sure he killed his wife?"
Molly was still half asleep. She reached back and ruffled Sherlock’s hair. "Well, maybe he killed his wife. Then someone else killed him completely unrelated."

"That is what John thought," Sherlock replied. "A husband and wife are not killed on the same night without it being somehow related."

Molly wrinkled her nose as Sherlock basically called her foolish as well. She decided to focus on something else. Like what she felt against her back. "Sherlock, are you still wearing your coat?"

"Yes."

Molly squeezed her eyes shut. "Sherlock, are you still wearing your scarf?"

"Yes."

Molly frowned deeply. "Sherlock, are you still wearing your shoes?"

"I'm going to go out again as soon as I figure this out." Sherlock pressed a kiss behind Molly's ear. "Stroke my hair, Molly?"

"I'm asleep, Sherlock," Molly whined softly.

"Clearly you are not. We are conversing. It helps me think," Sherlock replied. "I can't play my violin because of my shoulder." He leaned in closer, trying his best to sound pathetic. "My shoulder really hurts, Molly."

Molly struggled to sit up, while Sherlock rolled over onto his back. She looked down at him with a slight scowl. "Don't know why I put up with you."

"You like to see me be brilliant," Sherlock breathed as Molly began to slide her fingers through his curly hair. He was truly like a cat when like this, his body relaxing as Molly stroked his head. He closed his eyes. She wondered how soon he would begin to purr.

"Of course, if you let me sleep, I'd get you the bullet in the husband to play with when I go into work." Molly pursed her lips. She really wanted to sleep, to be ready for work. As much as she liked playing with Sherlock's hair, it was somewhat less romantic when he made it a part of his meditative thought processes.

"You'll do that anyway," Sherlock replied. He opened his eyes for a brief moment. "When I finish the case, we'll pick up where we left off. Does that incentivise you?"

"Have you looked into the husband's associates? The wife's?"

"Of course," Sherlock scoffed. "They were utterly and completely normal. Sickeningly normal."

"Too normal to be for real?" Molly joked.

Sherlock sat up quickly. "Definitely. Of course." He leaned in and pressed a kiss to Molly's lips before leaping out of bed. "Going out." He stopped at the door and frowned at her. "You should really get back to sleep. You have work in the morning."

As soon as Sherlock had dashed out the door, Molly collapsed back onto the bed. That man was going to be the death of her.

With Sherlock's interruption of her sleep cycle, Molly found herself exhausted at work the next day. She was rubbing her eyes and drinking a cup of rather vile coffee. It was strong, however, which was the important part.

Molly was stuck doing assistant work. Her replacement was in and just needed a second set of hands. Molly had been present for the autopsy on Prescott Russell though. High-powered rifle shot to the head. The bullet was just waiting for Sherlock to examine, not that there was a lot left of it. Besides that, Molly was mostly doing paperwork.

"If it isn't Boffin Holmes's Bodybagging Babe," Mike said as he clapped a hand on Molly's
Molly grimaced. She had expected someone to bring up the nickname. "Oh, stop it, Mike."

"It's true, is it then? Know John said it was in his blog, but I thought he might just be continuing the joke..." Mike sat down next to her. He shook his head. "Have a hard time picturing it." He held up a hand. "I mean, not that I don't think Sherlock could find you attractive." He then rethought it. "Well, to tell you the truth, it's kind of hard to think of him finding anyone attractive."

Molly blushed slightly and kept trying to keep her focus on her reports. "Well, it's not exactly normal. Nothing he does is." She bit her lip. "It is true though."

Mike leaned in almost conspiratorially. "Now, Molly... Do you think you could settle a bet between me and some of the blokes?"

Molly sighed. Of course her relationship with Sherlock was hot gossip. "What?" Her nose wrinkled.

"Is Sherlock... Secretly... Nice?"

Molly considered this for a moment. She smiled, knowing what answer Sherlock would want her to give. "Not really."

Mike frowned slightly. "Then why would a nice girl like you want to be with him?"

"Maybe I'm not as nice as you think," Molly pointed out.

Mike frowned and his expression clearly communicated the thought: Are you kidding me?

Molly sighed. "It was worth a shot." She gave Mike a smile. She knew the answer Sherlock would want her to give. "Sherlock is utterly brilliant."

"Doesn't explain why you're with him."

Molly giggled. "Doesn't it?"

Mike narrowed his gaze, looking at Molly sceptically. "You're having me on."

"Which is more likely?" Molly asked, going back to her typing. "Sherlock Holmes is secretly a teddy bear or I am accepting to the point of obscenity?"

"Does he really like you to pet him like a house cat?"

Molly laughed. "Oh, he's going to murder John."

"Why did you have to include that?" Sherlock demanded, walking alongside John, a scowl on his face. "The entirety of the police force and whole of London don't need to know what I do in the bedroom!"

"You don't do it in the bedroom," John protested, his own irritation growing. "You do it in the sitting room. In plain view of me. Because it helps you 'think.'" He looked up at Sherlock. "It's not like I blogged about finding you stripping her down to her knickers before dashing off on a case."

Sherlock's scowl deepened. "Only because we've been on that case since it happened."

"Fair cop." John said with a shrug. "But still, it's hardly the most intimate thing I could have written about you. People want to know about Molly. They like to know you're human."

"No," Sherlock replied tersely, glaring absolute daggers at John. "They want something sordid and tawdry. So they just love the idea that genius Sherlock Holmes actually likes a girl to stroke his hair and... Do other things. And my best friend is encouraging them!"

"I will never, ever write about the other things," John insisted. "Sherlock, Molly has three brothers! Do you think they're not going to check out my blog to see what kind of guy their sister is dating? Besides, I don't even want to think about you doing them myself. I'm still trying to delete the memory from my hard drive-" he intentionally used Sherlock's own terminology. "-of
you fondling her arse."

"What?" Sherlock snapped defensively. "I happen to like Molly's backside."

For some reason, this made John laugh uproariously. He shook his head. "Oh, Sherlock... I really never thought I'd see this side of you."

"Can we just get back to the case?" Sherlock asked hotly, his piercing eyes still glaring down at John.

"You're the one who has been moaning since Anderson took a jab at you," John reminded him. He pushed open the door to the morgue. "Come on. We'll see if the Missus has anything."

He saw Molly looking over a body in the morgue and smiled brightly. "Morning Molly! Have you found anything out about the Russells?"

Sherlock continued to scowl. "John, that is obviously not Molly."

"What are you talking about?" John shook his head. "That's-"

"Her hair contains reddish highlights, is two centimetres shorter and she weighs five pound more than Molly."

John rolled his eyes. "I'm sorry I don't know your girlfriend as well as you do."

Sherlock cocked his head. "Has nothing to do with that. I just pay attention."

The woman turned around. John could see now she was not Molly, but the resemblance was rather striking. She took off her gloves and held out a hand. "Oh! I'm sorry! I heard you were coming in. I'm Veronica Adair. Wow, Sherlock Holmes and Doctor John Watson... I've read about you in the papers."

John shook her hand, but Sherlock continued to stare at the woman with barely masked contempt. "Where is Molly Hooper?"

"Molly?" Veronica pointed towards the office. "I have her filling out some paperwork. I'm..."

Sherlock took a step towards Veronica. "Doctor Hooper is not some low-level grunt."

John rubbed his forehead. "This from the man who used to make her get him coffee."

"She always offered," Sherlock snapped. He then turned his attention back to Veronica. John felt sorry for the poor girl. She was young, fresh out of medical school. Sherlock's girlfriend losing her job wasn't her fault. "When I work at Barts, I work with Molly. You can just run along. Take your lunch break. Or you could quit. That would be the most preferable option. You really are just taking up valuable space."

"Listen, pal!" Veronica shouted. John's eyes went wide as the small pathologist began to poke Sherlock in the chest. "I got this job fair and square. Your girlfriend lost her job because she helped you out when everyone thought- rightfully so- you were a criminal. Just because you like shagging her doesn't mean I'm going to let her have the morgue back!"

That had not been the reaction John expected. Veronica looked so much like Molly, he expected her to act like her too.

The door to the office opened and Mike Stamford stuck his head out. "Thought I heard a ruckus in here. Come on, boys. Think Molly has something for you."

Sherlock and Veronica stared at each other with the deepest loathing for another moment, before he strode towards the office. John trailed behind him, stopping beside Mike and shaking his head. "Good to see you again, mate."

"You too," Mike replied. "Congratulations are in order."

John smiled. "Thanks."

"You heading back to Africa?"
John went quiet for a moment. His gaze shifted towards Sherlock, who was now looming over Molly as she was on the computer.

"You should not just be filling out paperwork," Sherlock insisted.

Molly shrugged. "What am I supposed to do? The paperwork has to get done and I like working at Barts."

"I don't want to deal with that girl," Sherlock replied. "I want to work with you."

John sighed, shaking his head. "I really don't know... Bit afraid to let him out of my sight."

(Art by Lexieken)
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Despite being deep into the Russell case, Sherlock craves attention from Molly.

The case had been languishing for a week.

At least half of it was. Marilyn Russell's husband had indeed killed her. Sherlock had been sure of it, but it was not until the knife used to kill her was discovered at Prescott Russell's crime scene was it considered 'closed' by Scotland Yard.

However, who had killed Prescott Russell was still a mystery. There had been several theories put forth, all of which Sherlock had immediately dismissed.

No, the Russells- both of them- were into something. Something they kept very well secret. All of Sherlock's time had been devoted to the endeavour. He hadn't eaten in days. The rare times he did sleep, it had been on the sofa.

Eight days after Marilyn Russell's body was found, Sherlock was sitting in his chair, plucking at the strings of his violin. John was eating breakfast and chatting to him about something inane. Something involving Mary Morstan. Sherlock wasn't paying attention. Something was bothering him. Something was interfering with his ability to fully focus on the case.

Suddenly, Sherlock put down his violin, got to his feet and strode towards the bathroom silently.

John's brow furrowed. "Sherlock, you know that Mo-"

Sherlock paid no attention, striding into the bathroom purposefully. He slammed the door shut behind him and yanked the curtain open.

"Sherlock!" Molly squeaked, jumping slightly. "I just got in here. You can't be complaining about how long I've been. And you've already show-"

Sherlock grabbed Molly tightly, jerking her to him. He kissed her hotly, his tongue exploring the recesses of her mouth. His suit was getting wet both from Molly's body and the spray of the shower. He couldn't manage to care in the least.

He pulled Molly out of the shower, crushing her to his body. His hands slipped down her spine to her backside.

"Sherlock, I have to get ready for work," Molly whispered, but she didn't pull away from Sherlock. Rather, her eager fingers went to work tugging at his now sopping clothing.

He let out a soft hiss as his skin was bared and Molly revelled in touching, kissing and licking every bit of exposed flesh. He pushed her against the wall.

"I knew this would happen," Sherlock growled darkly. He lifted Molly up and she obligingly wrapped her legs around his waist. He was dimly reminded of the first time he'd kissed her in the bathroom of her old flat.

His shoulder ached with the effort to hold Molly up, but he needed... He just needed. "I have my work. My work keeps me going. But now, I have other things in my mind."

He pressed eager kisses to her jawline. He and Molly hadn't shared anything more than light affection- initiated primarily by her- since he'd gone on the case. It felt like bomb had gone off inside of him. He craved her, the desire stronger than any of his former vices.

In that moment, he hated Molly a little bit. He hated that he needed her. He hated that she had changed him so much. His life had been so much simpler when he'd just gone from case to case.

Now, he had a mousy little pathologist who gave him stupid, sweet smiles and stroked his hair and
was warm against him when he fell asleep. He knew he cared for her. He couldn't deny the evidence right in front of him. If ever she were to leave him, it would feel like he'd lost a limb.

He didn't like that, the dependence on someone else. He'd already made that mistake with John and it had nearly destroyed both of them. It was even worse with Molly. John was an undeniable asset to his work. While Molly-the-Pathologist was quite helpful to him, Molly-the-Girlfriend was a horrible distraction. Not to mention he'd survived being without John. Being without Molly seemed like something else entirely.

Yet when he heard her sweet moan in his ear, he couldn't hate it. He revelled in it. He made a noise low in his throat that was sure was supposed to be her name but came out a strangled groan. He then sank to the floor, still clutching Molly close to him.

"What brought that on?" Molly asked, panting. She stroked her thumb over his cheek.

"I-" Sherlock shook his head. "I don't know. I just..." He shook his head again, more savagely. "I needed..."

Molly smiled at him and she looked so sweet, Sherlock wanted to say something mean and stalk out of the room. But instead, he pulled her closer to him and pressed a kiss to her shoulder.

"It's okay, you know," Molly murmured. "Wanting me even if there's a case going on. You don't have to completely throw yourself into everything."

"That's how I do things," Sherlock insisted. "Prescott Russell is fascinating. I need to figure out why he died." He nuzzled his nose against her skin. "You are not fascinating. We have had sex dozens of times. The denouement is always the same. Why do I need it?"

Molly just urged his head up and pressed a light kiss to his lips. "Sherlock, stop feeling guilty about actually being human."

"I don't feel guilty," Sherlock insisted. "I feel annoyed."

Molly sighed and slipped out of his arms. "Of course you do. Just let it go. It's really not as bad as you think." She paused for a moment, looking uncertain. "Is it?"

Sherlock got to his feet. He cupped Molly's face. "It was really good. It always is." He kissed her gently. "Stop being you, Molly Hooper. I have a job to do."

Molly sighed softly against his mouth. "A suggestion Sherlock: Us mere mortals do not bottle things up until we can't contain it anymore so we don't have odd outbursts when our significant others are trying to get ready for work. I'm going to be late."

Sherlock's brow furrowed.

"It's fine," Molly sighed. "It's not like Veronica is going to let me do anything interesting. I'd much rather be pinned to the wall by you. But really... Just let go a bit. Your case may be interesting, but Prescott Russell is dead no matter what. You can live a little."

Molly got back into the shower and Sherlock pulled his rumpled, sodden clothes back on. He wandered into the kitchen and sat down across from John calmly. He picked up the paper and began to read.

John sipped his coffee. "You just had sex with Molly in the shower."

Sherlock did not look away from the article he was reading. "Your skills of observation are sharpening again."

John frowned slightly. Sherlock sighed softly, eyes still remaining fixed on the paper. "You are not going to tell me how disgusting my love life is again, are you?"

John shook his head. "I've started to get used to it. And you seem..." He furrowed his brow. "Well, you seem human. And that is frankly a comfort to know."

Sherlock set down his paper and gave John a withering look before pouring himself a cup of
coffee, adding two lumps of sugar and taking a sip. Why was it so hard to believe he was human? He ate, slept and breathed like everyone else. "It should have already been patently obvious to you that I am. The fact I am now involved in a relationship should not change anything."

Molly rushed out of the bathroom, her hair still wet and pulled up so it did not drip down onto her clothes. She grabbed her bag and jacket. "Oof... You've made me so late for work! I don't even have time to eat!"

She made her way to the table and grabbed Sherlock's coffee mug. Sherlock had half a mind to chastise her for the action, but as she drank, her fingers played with his curls. He calmed, deciding it was his- and his frustratingly distracting libido's- fault.

She drank deeply and winced as at the taste of the hot coffee, untempered by the cream she usually took. She was really in a rush. "I'll probably end up having to stay late." She put the cup down. "Sherlock, can you do me a favour?"

Sherlock arched a brow in question.

"Eat something today, okay?" Molly pleaded. "It's been days."

Sherlock sighed. "I've already appeased my body. It doesn't get anything else until the case is solved."

Molly pouted. "That's life-affirming, not life-sustaining. I don't want you to end up on my slab, Sherlock Holmes."

"Fasting keeps my mind sharp," Sherlock insisted. He knew exactly how far he could stretch his body before it became detrimental.

"Please Sherlock," Molly begged, her lower lip jutting out further. "It doesn't have to be anything big. I made you a sandwich. It's in the refrigerator next to the arm."

Sherlock scowled slightly. He didn't like how her large brown eyes stared into him with such worry. He looked away. "Well. Since you already went through the trouble."

Molly smiled brightly. "Thank you. Now I've got to dash."

"Hey!" Sherlock caught her wrist as she started to run off. He'd become so used to Molly's goodbye ritual, it bothered him to have her ignore it in her haste. He tugged her down to him, kissing her firmly. He knew logically it made no difference if he kissed Molly before she left, but the idea of not doing so was troubling. "John and I will probably be in later. I have some experiments I need to run."

Molly sighed. "Oh, Veronica is going to love that." She gave Sherlock another quick kiss before running out the door.

Sherlock turned back to his paper and coffee. He spied John looking at him, a smirk on his face. "Oh, you haven't changed one jot."

"Married, Sherlock!" John rubbed his temples with his hands. "I'm getting married. Mary is going to be my wife. We're going to want to live together!" He shook his head. "Why would you want me to stay here anyway? You've shacked up with our Pathologist!"
"My Pathologist!" Sherlock snapped back, before he realized what he was saying.

John held up his hands in surrender. "Sorry. Your Pathologist. But the point still stands. You have a girl." He gestured to Sherlock. He then gestured to himself. "I have a girl. We can't just keep living together pretending nothing has changed. Everything has changed."

Sherlock drummed his fingers on the table. "If you were going to come back just to swan off with your wife, you should have just stayed in Africa," he said dourly.

"It's not like I'm never going to see you!" John insisted. "You're going to be the Best Man at my wedding. We can go on double dates. I bet Molly and Mary will get along really well."

Sherlock's lip curled in a snarl. "Your idea of a date does not conform to my own."

John cocked his head. "What do you and Molly do on dates?"

"We've gotten in contact with Lestrade about my faked death... Done in-depth research into Sebastian Moran... Confronted Moriarty... Conducted numerous experiments on cadavers..."

John blinked at Sherlock. "Just how many dates did you and I go on together?"

"When I'm with Molly, dates end with intercourse," Sherlock replied tersely. "Happy?"

John shook his head. "Not really. No. Disturbed, actually. You two..." He gave a sharp nod. "You really deserve each other."

Sherlock got to his feet and began pacing. "I can't believe you are just going to walk out, just as we've started to get cases again. We've got Sebastian Moran to take care of, the Prescott case, my email is full. There must be something in there of interest..."

"I'm getting married," John stressed. "I have to get a real job. Mary's not going to be able to support both of us! I need to make money!"

Sherlock went very still, considering this statement. "I can pay you."

John's eyebrow shot up. "Excuse me?"

"I can pay you." Sherlock sat back down at the table calmly. "I am paid for my cases. The money that went into paying your part of the rent and your food intake can go to you to support your wife."

"You're serious about this?" John said, still staring at Sherlock in shock. "You want to pay me... To be your friend?"

"I need you to be my assistant," Sherlock insisted. "You seem to think Molly can fulfil all of your functions, but she cannot follow me around all day or shoot a gun and frankly, based on this morning, I see her potentially being very distracting to my cognitive processes." He scratched his chin. "I believe I need to rethink my hypothesis that kissing may increase my mental activities. While my mind does race, these days it is all focused on one single section of my mind palace that is... Not particularly conducive to investigation."

John smirked. "Molly's got a room in your mind palace now?"

Sherlock scowled. "Shut up."

John's smirk widened. "Is it the bedroom?"

"Shut up."

John let out a laugh. "Perhaps it's the shower now..."

Sherlock glared daggers. "You really need to shut up."
With their relationship public, Molly has to deal with Sherlock's fans.

Molly Hooper

~30 January~

It's been ages since I've written anything my diary. I did say I was abandoning it completely, but I have things I want to write now.

Things have been crazy. So crazy, I can't even begin to write it all down. John did a much better job of that himself on his blog. Anyone who wants to know should look at that instead!

I'm with Sherlock now. Before I would have been turning cartwheels over writing that. Don't get me wrong! I am extremely happy. But it feels normal now. Like it would be wrong if I wasn't with him. I know he doesn't want me saying much about us, but I needed to say something. Everyone asks me what Sherlock is like with me. He's like he is with everyone. He's brilliant and mad and can drive you crazy. But he's mine.

I've moved. Toby is adjusting well to it all. He likes having more people to pay attention to him. Mrs Hudson loves to give him catnip! He's so funny rolling in it! He also likes trying to find Basil, the mouse that lives in the walls. Sherlock doesn't like that and threatens to throw Toby out onto the street. But Sherlock likes him too much and knows it would make me unhappy.

Sherlock wants me to be happy. I can actually write that now.

When she'd done her online diary in the past, Molly had always felt guilty about doing anything in it at work. She'd done it anyway. That was how she and Jim- Moriarty- had ended up dating, chatting through her reply box.

Molly had no guilt writing the first blog entry in two years at work. She might if she had anything to do. However, Veronica was still being stubborn and territorial about the morgue.

Once she was done with her entry, Molly had actually tried to venture back into the morgue. That did not go well.

Molly sighed as Veronica lectured her on how things were to be done in her morgue.

Molly was starting to get very sick of it. She wanted to snap back that she had been working at Barts for three years now. That Veronica was now in her former position. She knew perfectly well what she was doing.

Despite having lived with her impossible boyfriend for eight months and confronting a psychopath, Molly couldn't seem to stand up to Veronica. Maybe it was because she was still virtually a stranger. Maybe it was because she did have a striking resemblance to Molly but was as bold as brass with everyone she met. It was rather intimidating. Like Molly was a Veronica cover band.

As Veronica continued to rant, Molly recalled her conversation with Sherlock about the girl. She had been helping him with the rehabilitation exercises for his shoulder, which he was very reluctant to do, always feeling he was too busy. While she was far more comfortable with her patients being dead, John had thought Sherlock would be much more agreeable with her assistance than his. It was true, but Sherlock still tried to rebuff her any time she approached him about it.

"It is painfully obvious Veronica was hired as a cheap imitation of you, Molly. Your presence was missed in the mortuary, so they found the first girl with a degree that resembled you in the
slightest. Probably that cretin in H.R. who had a crush on you. Only he managed to find the most loathsome creature imaginable. She has none of your charm. As for the uncanny likeness John keeps going on about, you are far more visually pleasing. It is patently ridiculous that Barts feels the need to keep her around now that you are employable once again..."

Molly’s only response to Sherlock’s rant had been to kiss him and offer to perform something that made her blush crimson and even made Sherlock’s eyes widen for her boldness.

She felt herself start to turn red anew at the memory, pressing her lips tight to stop her grin. Had John not chosen that moment to walk into the flat, she would have been turning even redder and maybe Sherlock wouldn't have had been so desperate for affection.

That made her think about her encounter with Sherlock in the bathroom and her cheeks flushed deeper. That had been something new.

Molly had no complaints with Sherlock as a lover. Once he’d gotten past the initial virginal stage, there was nothing bad Molly could really say about the experiences. He was eager to learn, discover what exactly would get the best reaction from her. He often brought science into it, naming all of the chemicals released by the body during the act in a panting voice, guessing what the body's levels would be. Molly would eventually have to kiss him to get him to be quiet.

The morning had been different. It had been animalistic want. Molly felt a shiver go up her spine at the memory of the look in his eyes.

Sherlock had emotions. She knew that better than most people. But he kept a tight hold on them. When he did truly give into them, it was overwhelming.

"Are you paying any attention to me?" Veronica demanded.

"Huh?" Molly looked up, eyes wide. "Oh. Of course, Veronica. I'll stay out of the morgue until you tell me to go in."

Veronica scowled at Molly. "Don't just tell me what I want to hear, Molly! I really don't care if you're spreading your legs for the great Consulting Detective! As far as I'm concerned, you shouldn't have a job here. You broke the rules. The only reason you're back is because management was threatened into it."

Molly wasn't sure she agreed with that. She knew the Holmes influence had a great deal to do with her reinstatement. However, it had been the Holmes influence that had gotten her sacked in the first place. Molly deserved to be at Barts. She deserved to have Veronica's position. She wouldn't say it, but in her heart, she agreed with Sherlock's assessment.

He always was smart about this sort of thing. She really did appreciate his deductions when she wasn't on the receiving end.

Molly was about to come up with some sort of response when her phone vibrated in her pocket. She gave Veronica an apologetic smile. "I'm going to get that. Then I'll go right back to the paperwork. Promise. Won't step foot in the morgue until you tell me."

"Hey."

Veronica was starting to protest, but Molly just turned, walking away and pulling out her phone.

Delete it.

SH

Molly frowned slightly, sending a quick text back.

Delete what?

Very quickly, a response came back:

Your blog entry. Delete it.
Don't read it. Just get rid of it.
All of it.

SH

Oh. He was mad about her posting on her online diary. But... No. He wanted her to get rid of her
entire diary. That was what he meant by 'all of it', wasn't it?

Her curiosity getting the better of her, Molly went to the computer and loaded up her diary. Her eyes went wide.

There were over a hundred responses on her latest entry. The entry she had only posted an hour previously.

She began to scan through the messages, her eyes widening with every comment:

* I don't know why Sherlock is interested in you. You're boring.  
  *Anonymous*, 30 January 10:25

* She's ugly too.  
  *Anonymous*, 30 January 10:27

* Sherlock can do so much better.  
  *Anonymous*, 30 January 10:28

* I wish Moriarty had killed you.  
  *Anonymous*, 30 January 10:29

* Do everyone a favour and jump off Bart's roof.  
  *Anonymous*, 30 January 10:30

The messages continued on like that, becoming more frequent and even more vicious.

Molly's stomach twisted as she read through them all. She then remembered what Sherlock had told her. To delete all of her previous diary entries. She clicked on the last entry she had made, well over two years ago.

It previously had no comments on it. There were now hundreds, dating back to when the photo of her and Sherlock had been put in the paper. They were as horrid as the one on her newest entry.

Her mobile let out the tiny meows of a kitten. She picked up the phone and saw on the screen a photo she never saw on her caller ID.

It was one she had set ages ago, of Sherlock in his deerstalker. But Sherlock never actually called. He always texted.

Molly answered the phone, putting it to her ear.

"Why did you go and look?" Sherlock asked harshly. "Why couldn't you just listen to me?"

"How did you know?" Molly asked.

Sherlock went quiet. Molly knew he was making that face that indicated he was utterly annoyed at his companions forgetting how brilliant he was.

"You knew people were doing this, didn't you?" Molly whispered. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I didn't want to draw attention to people being unkind to you," Sherlock replied. He paused. "I'm coming in."

"Please don't," Molly pleaded. She wiped the tears away from her cheeks. She hadn't realized she'd begun to silently cry.


"I'll be fine," Molly insisted. "I should have known better than to write anything about us. They're just jealous."

"I'm coming in," Sherlock repeated.

"I really wish you wouldn't," Molly whispered. "Veronica's already been yelling at me today. You know she'll really lay into me if you come in."
Sherlock went quiet again.

"There were experiments I wanted to do."

Molly frowned deeply. "Not today, Sherlock. I" She bit her lower lip. "I have a headache."

Before Sherlock could respond, Molly hung up the phone. She also turned it off for good measure.

There was only one thing to be done at the moment. Molly clicked off her blog and then set to work on the filing Veronica had left for her.

Molly was rather shocked when she finished up her shift and Sherlock had not shown himself even once. She knew he was dying to come by. Yet he had actually listened to her wishes! Molly had left behind the idea of being surprised by Sherlock after he kissed her. Still, this was something momentous. She just wish he listened to her under more pleasant circumstances.

When she got outside, she found John standing on the sidewalk. He smiled when she stepped out.

Molly paused and narrowed her gaze on him. "Did he send you?"

John shook his head and held his hands up in surrender. "I'm a free agent, I swear. He's pretty distracted right now. New case."

Molly cocked her head. "New case? But he's still working on Russell and Moran."

John smiled. "This time it's personal." He looked to the side. "He's trying to track down your harassers through their IPs."

Molly furrowed her brow before she began to walk down the street. "I wouldn't think he would know how to do that."

"He doesn't," John replied, walking alongside Molly. "Do you know Wiggins? He has a degree from LST."

"Wiggins?" Molly repeated. "You mean the boy with the mouth organ? He has a degree?"

John nodded. "Yeah. By sixteen. He was headhunted by a bunch of tech firms, but flamed out spectacularly. Decided he'd rather be a homeless busker. I think it's the reason Sherlock likes him so much."

Molly actually smiled. "He doesn't like anyone who is normal, does he?"

John sighed. "Considering who he's chosen as his best friend and his girlfriend, I'd say the answer is 'no, he doesn't'."

Molly sighed softly, looking over at John. "So why are you here, John? Are you just checking on me?"

"A bit," John admitted. He smiled broadly at Molly. "But mostly, I know Sherlock is going to be working with Wiggins all night. You and I haven't gotten to spend any time together since I got back. Let me take you out to dinner."

"John, you don't have to be nice to me..." Molly insisted.

"I'm not," John insisted. "Well, not for the reasons you think. Come on, Molly. We used to go out all the time without Sherlock. I've missed it." He took a hold of her slender wrist. "Don't make me beg. It'll be humiliating for the pair of us."

Molly smiled and relented, taking John's arm and allowing him to lead her along.

Molly accepted the glass of wine John had just poured her. "John Watson, if I didn't know any better, I'd think this was a date."

John laughed, shaking his head. "I've heard what you and Sherlock consider dates. Don't this
could be mistaken for anything of the sort.” He paused for a moment. "Did I ever tell you I considered asking you on a real one?"

Molly's eyes widened. "Really?"

John nodded. "Yeah. Seems safe to mention it now, all things considered. Got over the idea pretty quickly. Around the time I realized you didn't know my name."

Molly gasped and her hand went to her mouth. "Oh John! I'm so sorry! I remember that! I was nervous because of Jim and Sherlock and everything..."

John waved his hand in dismissal. "It was for the best. Like you were ever going to see anyone but Sherlock. Lestrade complained to me about that more than once."

"Oh!" Molly blushed. Sherlock had said Lestrade had fancied her and of course- being that the source was Sherlock- she had believed him. But it seemed more real being said by John.

"Think he finally gave up his crush at our Christmas party when you couldn't take your eyes off Sherlock."

"Again for the best. He's back with his wife now," Molly commented, taking a drink. "She's pregnant too."

"Seriously?" John picked up his own glass. "I'd heard they'd gotten divorced."

"They have," Molly replied. "But they're masochists with a co-dependent need for one another..." She let out a small giggle. "Sherlock has funny ideas about conversation during cuddling."

John sputtered, nearly choking on his wine. "Sherlock cuddles?" He shook his head. "Him having sex... Okay, biological urge. The hair stroking I can also understand as a weird Sherlock concentration thing. But... Cuddling?"

Molly cheeks turned red and she averted her gaze. "Just forget I said anything."

"That's not going to happen," John insisted. "You've seared it into my brain. Just... How?"

Molly's cheeks reddened further and she mumbled into her glass. "He likes to play spoons."

John became pensive, staring into his glass. "You're really good for him, you know that, right?"

Molly bit her lower lip. "I don't do anything extraordinary."

"Sherlock has too much extraordinary in his life," John replied. "If he has any more, he's going to have to move to Mars."

John went quiet again. He looked up and met Molly's eyes. "Don't let him push you around, Molly. One thing I've learned about him is he'll walk all over you if you let him. But he needs you to rein him in. You might even be better at doing that than I was."

Molly blushed again. "You make it sound like you're leaving John."

John shrugged. "It's not going to be the same. Me with Mary. You with Sherlock. I worry about him. He doesn't seem to be reacting to the news well. But... I feel a lot better about it with you around." He sighed. "But then, I guess I shouldn't worry at all. You took care of him for seven months. And half of those without having sex to hold over him."

Molly giggled. "I don't think I can ever hold sex over him. It is Sherlock, after all."

John laughed. "Yeah, I can see that being a problem. But still- he does listen to you. And he needs someone to watch after him. He'd be stuck in his brain all the time if he didn't."

"You sound like his mother," Molly commented. She thought back on her meeting with Dame Holmes. "Well, not his mother. Mrs Hudson... Maybe Mycroft if you were snarkier about it."

John smiled. "Yeah... Well. Suppose someone has to do it."

Molly beamed. "Come on, let's not talk about Sherlock all night. Tell me about Mary! You're
getting married, John! I want to know about her. When is she coming to London?” She paused. “I mean... She is coming, right? You're not... You know, going back? I know you've been debating it.”

John looked down. "I never debated it." He sighed. "I knew. The moment I agreed to go with Mycroft's men. I wasn't going back." He smiled wryly. "Had another few months on my service, but Mycroft took care of that. I feel bad. I was doing good work, but..."

Molly nodded silently. She understood better than anyone how much Sherlock needed John.

"Anyway," John took a deep breath. "Mary's service is ending soon. She's decided not to extend it. Coming back."

Molly smiled softly. "So you said in your blog it was love at first sight."

"I did," John replied. He looked a bit bashful. "For me, at least. I didn't want to admit it... Knew Sherlock would read it and take the mickey. For the first two weeks... Well... Mary thought my name was James."

Mary stifled her laughter with her hand. "Oh no! That's not the best start."

"It worked out," John replied. "Aside from the initial stumbling block. She understood. Got that I had lost something." He shook his head, smiling a bit sadly. "She saved my life, really. I can't imagine being without her. Now if only your boyfriend could get that through his thick skull."

Molly smiled warmly at him. "Good luck with that. He had you first."

Later that night, Molly and John made their way back to 221B Baker Street, both laughing from high spirits and wine imbibed.

Sherlock stood up when they entered, looking them over. "Where have you been?” He asked, looking them over. He frowned as he made his deductions. "John, why did you take my Pathologist on a date?"

Molly got up on her tiptoes and wrapped her arms around Sherlock's neck. "It wasn't like one of our dates. It was a friend-date."

Sherlock looked down at Molly. "I ate the sandwich you left for me."

"Thank you.” Molly gave him a light peck on the lips before pulling back.

Sherlock nodded decisively. "Right. Wiggins have managed to locate a number of your harassers. I was about to take the list to Lestrade."

"Oh Sherlock,” Molly sighed. "Don't bother. It's not like they're doing anything more than saying rude things. If it goes further, we'll do something. But for now, just drop it."

Sherlock looked suspicious. "If you are not upset by it now, then why would you not speak to me? Or let me do my experiments?"

Molly noticed Sherlock's gaze drift behind her, to where John was standing. Molly's brow furrowed. "John's behind me mouthing 'women' and shrugging, isn't he?"

Sherlock's eyes lit up. "Doctor Hooper..." He sounded impressed and just a bit excited. "Very nice deduction." He leaned in, kissing her firmly.

"And that's my cue," John said, shrugging off his jacket before heading towards his bedroom.

Molly managed to pull herself away from Sherlock and smiled at him brightly. "Thanks for taking me out tonight, John."

John jogged back towards the pair and gave Molly a swift kiss on the cheek. Molly noticed the unhappy look on Sherlock's face at this gesture. She gave him a smack on the chest. "He's your best friend. And engaged. Don't get jealous."

Rather than look insulted, Sherlock smiled. "Unlike you, Doctor Hooper, I do like when you
deduce me.” He leaned in once again.

"Not in the sitting room!” John called out as he walked towards his door.

Molly beamed up at Sherlock. "Shall we go to your bedroom and snog soundly?"

Sherlock looked thoughtful. "That seems like an agreeable course of events."

With that, Molly dragged Sherlock towards his room.

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**The Personal Blog of Dr. John H. Watson**

January 31st

**THE CREEPING FANS**

Sherlock has very little patience for his fans and is not afraid to show it. This reached its pinnacle recently with the harassment of Molly Hooper on her blog.

Sherlock had been aware that his fan club would be displeased with his involvement with Molly. It was foresight of this that made Sherlock request I not write about her. I should have realized it was not embarrassment but practicality that he wanted to avoid the topic of his relationship.

Molly Hooper is able to put up with Sherlock Holmes as a romantic partner. This should earn her a medal. Or sainthood. At minimum some sort of recognition from the Queen. She should not be threatened because of it.

Harassment over the internet is a crime. While it is not one that would be particularly interesting to Sherlock under normal circumstance, he is quite motivated. Anonymous won’t save anyone from the Consulting Detective.

And I will be right there with him. Molly is my friend. I won’t tolerate this.

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**MOLLY HOOPER’S BLOG (Photoshop by Emcee)**

**THE PERSONAL BLOG OF DR. JOHN H. WATSON (Photoshop by Emcee)**
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Sherlock takes the next step in his relationship with Molly: meeting her family.

Sherlock crossed his arms over his chest, staring at John. They were in the sitting room of one of the Holmes family's several country estates. Mycroft was nearby, speaking on his mobile. Sherlock was trying to listen in to the conversation, sure whatever Mycroft was planning was more interesting than whatever John was trying to impart.

"Listen to me, Sherlock," John insisted. "Honestly, truly. Nothing I have ever said to you is this important."

The disbelief was plain on Sherlock's face. "John, you are not seriously trying to educate me on something, are you?"

John gave Sherlock a withering look. "Yes." He nodded. "I am. And this is something you will not want to delete."

Sherlock scoffed. "I highly doubt it."

"You are meeting your girlfriend's brothers," John pointed out. "This is something you have absolutely no experience in."

"Oh, and how much do you have?" Sherlock asked irritably, looking down his nose at John. "Have you ever had a relationship last long enough to meet her family members?"

John went very still. He blinked several times before nodding. "Well. For that, I should really leave you up to your own devices." He glared at Sherlock. "You are aware Molly has three brothers. As you said, all of them are incredibly protective of their little sister. Molly's also told me they're all rugby champions."

"What are you insinuating?" Sherlock asked irritably. "You believe that Molly's brothers will threaten me with physical violence? Please. As if I couldn't handle myself."

Mycroft hung up his phone. "I would listen to him, Sherlock. Your social graces leave a lot to be desired. If you wish your union to Miss Hooper to continue unabated, you will at least need to feign civility with the in-laws. I do not particularly like Winifred's family. However, I do manage to be cordial."

"Oh, what do you know, Mycroft?" Sherlock snapped. "You barely ever see your wife."

"Yes, but her family still approves of me," Mycroft replied smoothly.

Sherlock rolled his eyes. He wasn't particularly looking forward to this. Spending the weekend at the Holmes country estate, Molly's entire family coming to visit her. There were so many better things he could be doing. He could feel a break coming in the Prescott Case. He just needed to push a bit harder.

It had been Mycroft's idea to arrange this meeting. At first, Sherlock wondered if Mycroft was just trying to make him uncomfortable. However, when Sherlock heard Molly's delighted shriek at the news, he realized the truth.

Mycroft was trying to be nice. Sherlock did not know whether it was because he still felt guilty over his part in Sherlock's downfall or because he liked Molly. Perhaps a mixture of both.

Finally relenting, Sherlock rolled his eyes and looked to John. "All right. What is your utterly imperative advice?"

John gave Sherlock a stern look. "Do not- under pain of death- give Molly's brothers any
indication you have touched any part of her body that is not in possession of fingers, barring a quick snog after a life-or-death situation that accidentally got photographed. As far as her brothers are concerned, their sister is an utter saint who has never had an impure thought in her head."

Sherlock arched a brow. "Your advice is to lie?"

"Like a Persian rug," John said with a nod. "Don't tell me this is the one time you have a problem with it."

Sherlock sighed. "It is patently ridiculous, John. Molly and I have been living together for eight months. Over four of which we have been having sex. While all evidence indicates Molly's brothers are not nearly as intelligent as she is, I doubt they will believe our relationship is entirely chaste. Molly and I are sharing a room here!"

"They won't believe it," John replied, rubbing his forehead. "But you don't need to be running your mouth off about the fact you are having copious amounts of sex in the most inappropriate places- and for the love of sweet Jesus can you please stop doing that? I live with you too!"

Sherlock looked impassively at his best friend. "I like to keep things interesting, John."

John scowled. "Fine! Just focus on the not telling Molly's brothers part. They will try to destroy you if you don't. Maybe you'd be able to take them, but that'd make Molly really unhappy. Just try to get along with them."

Before Sherlock could reply, Molly walked into the room, having cleaned herself up after their drive. Unlike their meeting with his mother, Molly was dressed in her own clothing, a long cream coloured skirt and red jumper. Yet she looked different to Sherlock. Younger, in a way.

"Mycroft, this place is amazing!" Molly said, slightly breathless. She looked hesitant for a moment. "You're sure your mum won't be here this weekend?"

Mycroft smiled tightly. "Surprisingly, Mummy felt it is a good time to travel abroad."

"Oh." Molly grinned and got up on her tiptoes, pressing a kiss to Mycroft's cheek. "Thank you for doing this. This was a wonderful idea."

Mycroft's eyes widened and his body stiffed at this gesture. "Yes." He took a step away from the happy woman. "Quite, Miss Hooper. Anthea should be arriving shortly with your family."

Sherlock was definitely leaning towards the 'Mycroft liked Molly' scenario. He made a mental note to deploy Molly in future against Mycroft.

Molly skipped over to Sherlock, throwing her arms around his neck and pulling him down. "Are you ready for this, Sherlock?" She sighed happily. "You've had a bit more time to prepare for this than I did with your mum, but then... I've got all three brothers, plus their wives and their kids..."

"I will be perfectly fine," Sherlock insisted. He looked her over. "I do not believe I have seen you so high-spirited in a long time."

"It's my family," Molly replied, giving him a quick peck. "I haven't seen them since this whole mess started. They've been begging me for ages to come to visit. And when one of them would threaten to come see me, I had to beg them off. But you know, my brothers are all I have left."

Sherlock felt an ugly, dark twisting in his stomach. All she had left? What was he supposed to be then? He tried to suppress the emotion, knowing expressing it would do nothing but wipe the smile from her face and he did not wish to do that.

"MOLLYWOBBLES!" A loud voice bellowed.

Molly absolutely ripped herself away from Sherlock and turned around quickly, letting out a small squeak of happiness.

Three men were barrelling towards Molly. Each of them was nearly a foot taller than her and probably had at least fifty kilos on her. Each however possessed the same light brown hair and dark eyes.

The one in the lead- obviously the eldest, Alfred- grabbed Molly around the waist and hauled her
up in a very undignified hug. He spun her around and Sherlock started to wonder if he was showing affection or demonstrating a wrestling move.

"Put me down!" Molly squeaked as she was passed between the three brothers, each of them spinning her around. "I'm a grown up, you clods!"

"Don't look that grown-up to me, Wobs," the thinnest of the three-Gavin, if Sherlock remembered correctly which of course he did-commented. He put a hand on Molly's head. "Think you shrunk there."

Sherlock took a step forward, flashing a dangerous look to the man. "She said to put her down."

Gavin set Molly down on her feet and squared up against Sherlock. He had a slight height and weight advantage, but Sherlock would not shrink in front of this ape of a man. He wondered how Molly could possibly share genes with these sub-humans. "Molly always says stuff like that."

"And in thirty-two years you have not gotten the hint?" Sherlock challenged. He felt John's elbow smack against his back. He let out an aggravated sigh.

He wouldn't have been able to respond anyway, as the thundering of multiple, small footsteps echoed against the floor. Four children, with ages ranging from approximately nine to four raced into the room. "Auntie Molly! Auntie Molly! Auntie Molly!"

Molly knelt down and opened her arms, accepting hugs from the excited children. "Look at how big you guys have gotten!" Molly said with a bright smile.

Three women entered, each of them with another child, ranging in ages from three to a little over a year old. The youngest were being carried by their mothers while the eldest was tugging his mother along.

Molly looked up at the women and beamed. She extracted herself from her nieces and nephews, moving to stand beside Sherlock. "Oh my..." She brought a hand to her mouth, trying to hide her obvious grin. "I'm just... Wow..." She then reached for Sherlock's hand, gripping it tightly.

Sherlock stiffened, uncertain of this affection, especially in front of so many people. "All of you, this is Sherlock Holmes."

"Yeah, got that bit," Gavin said, his voice full of contempt.

Molly let out a barely audible sigh of relief and pressed forward. "This is Sherlock's best friend, John Watson and Sherlock's brother, Mycroft." She then gestured to each of her family members. "These are my brothers, Alfred, Sheldon and Gavin; Alfie's wife Joanna, Sheldon's wife Laurel, and Gavin's partner Roselyn; Alfie's kids, Bonnie, Katy and Edward; Sheldon's kids Jack, Dwight and Abby and Gavin's son Lawrence." She took a deep breath. "Dear, that was hard to get through."


"Of course." Mycroft smiled toothily. "Tea has been set out in the dining room. Perhaps we should adjourn there?"

"The kids have been cooped up in the car," Joanna pointed out. "Laurel, Rosie and I will stay with them in here if that's okay. Let them run around a bit. Give Molls and the boys some time together."


They moved to the dining room. Molly sat on one side of Sherlock, while John sat on the other.
All three of Molly's brothers sat across. Two glared daggers at him, while one looked calmly apprehensive. Mycroft took the head of the table, looking over the group imperiously.

One of Mycroft's servants came in to pour the tea while everyone looked over each other. Sherlock could see all the contempt and loathing on the faces of the Hooper boys. He tried his best not to show similar himself, although he could feel it threatening to burst.

"So I gotta know," Sheldon was the one to break the silence. "Did you make Molly some sort of game between you and Moriarty?"

"Shel!" Molly gasped out.

"We have a right to know, Wobs," Sheldon insisted. "First Moriarty starts dating you to get to him. Then he gets you to do whatever you did to help him die and he starts dating you. Then Moriarty kidnaps you. Seems like you're a ping-pong ball between them."

Sherlock grit his teeth. "Seeing as Moriarty is dead and I am still with Molly, your hypothesis does not seem very logical."

"It's stupid," Molly squeaked out. She looked to her brother. "Shel, please."

Alfred put a hand on Sheldon's shoulder. "Sorry, Wobs. But we're worried about you. He's gotten you kidnapped and shot at and lost you your job."

"Doctor Hooper is quite hearty and lives to tell the tale," Mycroft commented idly before sipping his tea. "She has also reacquired her position at Barts. All in all, my brother has not been all that detrimental to her."

Gavin sat up. "We're a bit overprotective of Wobs. Bet you know what that's like. We know that-"

"Why do you call her that?" Sherlock exclaimed before he could stop himself.

Alfred furrowed his brow, seemingly surprised by this sudden line of questioning. "When Molly was a kid, she was really shy. And her knees would do this knocking together thing, so..."

"She is a grown woman with a medical degree," Sherlock pointed out.

"It's okay, Sherlock," Molly insisted quietly, giving him a hard poke in the side. Sherlock could see the utter distress on her face.

Sherlock sighed and forced himself to smile. "Childhood nicknames. Of course. I had some choice ones for Mycroft."

Mycroft shot Sherlock a deadly look.

"Think the important question," Gavin stressed, locking his gaze with Sherlock in something of a challenge. "What are your intentions towards Molly?"

"Intentions?" Sherlock repeated.

"Don't be ridiculous, Gav," Molly whined softly.

"It's a fair question, Wobs," Sheldon said. "He's had you kidnapped for eight months."

"I wasn't kidnapped!" Molly squeaked.

"You weren't allowed to come see us and wouldn't let us come see you because of him." Gavin pointed to Sherlock. "Know you've been over the moon for him for ages now. Rosie's told me what you've said about him. Now I want to know what his feelings are towards you."

"My feelings for Molly are between her and myself," Sherlock tersely. The entire situation was growing quite tedious. "We are residing together, a situation which we plan to continue for the foreseeable future. Aside from that, it is really none of your-"

Molly's foot came down hard on his.

Sherlock scowled and shut his mouth. When John snickered, he gave his friend the hardest of
The afternoon continued with tension in the air between Sherlock and Molly's brothers. They would never find any common ground when it came to Molly, Sherlock was certain of that. While all of them desired Molly's happiness, their ideas as to what would bring her happiness were decidedly incompatible.

The Hooper Boys also gave him uncomfortable memories of his childhood. When he was awkward and too thin Sherlock, who made startling accurate and often devastating observations, chased around by his burly classmates who didn't like that Sherlock could see through them.

In the early evening, Mycroft retired to deal with some business. Sherlock noted how favourably Mycroft had been speaking of him, even mentioning how many times Sherlock had been threatened with knighthood.

Definitely feeling guilty still. He would have to take advantage of that while it lasted.

Despite their dislike of Sherlock, the Hooper Boys seemed to like John quite a bit, talking to him about football and several of the trashy television shows he watched with Mrs Hudson. Molly was talking to her sisters-in-law and playing with her nieces and nephews, lavishing them with gifts to make up for her absence for the past eight months. She had the youngest in her lap, making ridiculous faces at him.

Sherlock was a foreigner. He had nothing in his mental arsenal for dealing with the situation before him. He just stood by the doorway and watched the proceedings.

"Is it worth it, Sherlock?" Mycroft asked.

Sherlock glanced over his shoulder. Mycroft stood behind him, his mobile still in hand, fresh off a call. "This is not a situation you can extricate yourself from neatly."

"The weekend will end," Sherlock replied.

"That was not the situation I referred to," Mycroft replied. He stepped up closer to Sherlock. "I knew when you came to her aid what the future lay in store for you. You are ill equipped for it. For what she needs."

"All she needs is me," Sherlock replied tersely.

"Is it?"

Sherlock clenched his jaw and looked at Molly as she laughed with her nieces and nephews. It had all been so much simpler when it had just been them. When he had been dead and she had locked herself away with him.

He had always believed Molly Hooper had no one. She was alone with her cat. But had he really believed that or had he just wanted it to be so? She loved him with such intensity he'd believed he was truly the only thing in her world.

Their world was so much larger now.

Turning on his heels, Sherlock strode to the door, grabbing his coat as he went.

"Going to the usual spot?" Mycroft called out.

Sherlock did not reply. There was no use. Mycroft didn't need an answer.

'The usual spot', as Mycroft had termed it, was a corner of the back garden surrounded by oversized shrubbery and an iron trellis covered in ivy. When he was a child, Sherlock had pretended to be a pirate there. He's pretended the oversized stone bench was his ship and the stones were the ocean around him.

Over the years, it had become exclusively Sherlock's spot. No one dared disturb him there. Even his mother never ventured past the bushes. She always called him- or rather, had the maid call him- from the start of the stone walkway.
It had been his spot. The place he could escape from the arguments of his parents, from Mycroft's barbs. Even now, it was the only place he could think of seeking sanctuary.

He wrapped his coat tighter around himself. Night in February was not the best time to be out in the garden.

But he needed time. He needed air. He needed quiet. Honestly, he needed a cigarette as well, but knew he would have hell to pay with Molly if he indulged himself.

He heard footsteps and his body tightened up.

"Sherlock?"

Molly peered around the shrub, biting her lower lip. She was not at all dressed for being outside, having not grabbed her coat. "Is everything okay?"

Sherlock looked up at her and tilted his head curiously. No one ever ventured this close to his spot.

And yet he was glad she was there. He gestured for her to come closer.

"It's freezing out here, Sherlock," Molly pointed out, moving into reach. Sherlock grabbed Molly's hand and pulled her to him without a word. He opened his coat and set Molly into his lap, wrapping his coat around her to shield her from the cold.

Molly's arms slipped around his waist and she let out a tiny sigh, nestling into his chest. The warmth of her body permeated Sherlock, warded off the chill of the night.

Sherlock closed his eyes and inhaled deeply, taking in her scent. Nothing had ever felt wrong about his sanctuary before. But now, it felt right in a way it never had before.

"I hate your brothers," Sherlock admitted softly.

Molly nodded. "I know. They hate you too." She paused for a moment. "I hate your mother."

Sherlock now nodded. "I know. She hates you too."

Molly sighed and curled up closer to Sherlock. "So what does that mean?"

Sherlock rested his chin on the top of Molly's head. "That family gatherings will be quite uncomfortable. However, that is par for the course in the Holmes household. I suspect it is different for the Hoopers."

He could feel Molly's hands fist in the material of his shirt. "I love my brothers. I do. But they're very... Loud. It's hard to think around them." She wrinkled her nose. "And I hate it when they call me 'Mollywobbles'. Always have."

"How did that happen?" Sherlock asked. "How did you end up so different from them?"

Molly gave a slight shrug. "I've never fit anywhere. Not really. Why should my family be any different than the rest of the world?"

Sherlock shut his eyes and thought of all of the ways Molly fit in his mind. He had told John that Molly had her own room deep inside his mind palace. It had been a lie.

Molly could no longer be contained in a single room, made into a small niche. She slipped into ever corner as easily as she slipped into his arms.

"I can think around you," Molly whispered, looking up at Sherlock. "I think around you a lot. So much, I can't always get the words out."

Sherlock looked down at the woman in his arms who was smiling up at him. His heart seemed to constrict as he realized he felt the same way.

He thought around her so much, he couldn't get the words out either.
Cl. 15
"I need your
brother."

(Hand-drawn image of a couple hugging)
Molly understood that after spending the day with her family, Sherlock needed time to himself to delve into his mind, into the scant number of cases he had.

She did not feel slighted at all by it. She had received more attention than she had expected that evening from Sherlock in the garden.

They had stayed in silence for almost half an hour, just holding one another. Occasionally, one of them pressed a small kiss to the other's skin, but it never went any farther than that. They just enjoyed the silence, being in each other's presence.

Her heart fluttered at the memory. Sherlock could be quite cruel in his want to be alone, demanding people leave him. But in that moment when he needed time to himself, he needed it with Molly. She could feel it. He could be alone when he was with her.

In the past, that idea would have made her frown. It would have meant she did not matter. Now, it was completely different. She fit in a special place in his mind.

Leaving Sherlock alone in his bedroom, Molly decided to take a walk around the house. She wasn't tired yet. Eventually, she would crawl into bed. No doubt, even while he was working on his cases, Sherlock would lie against her. She'd grown used to that, doing her best to shut out the sounds of his mumbling and the glow of his mobile as she drifted off.

As she walked through the corridors, she came across Gavin, who was cradling his son in his arms, walking him back and forth.

"Hey," Molly whispered, a smile on her face.

Gavin frowned, looking at what Molly was wearing. "That's his dressing gown, isn't it?"

"Oh." Molly touched the silk of the blue dressing gown that she seemed to end up in with great regularity. "Mine was really ratty and it seems to have disappeared in the move." She looked to Lawrence. "Everything all right?"

Gavin nodded. "Yeah. Larry here is just having some trouble getting to sleep. Isn't that right, buddy?"

Molly placed a hand on the toddler's head, giving it a gentle stroke. "Come on, Larry. You've got to let your Daddy get some sleep."

"Actually." Gavin looked over his younger sister. "This might not be a bad thing. Give us some time to talk."

Gavin and Molly were only a year apart, as opposed to Molly and her other brothers. They had been closer growing up. This made Gavin even more protective of Molly- and often more annoying.

Molly leaned against the wall, letting out a small sigh. "What about?" She didn't know why she bothered asking. She knew exactly what was was about.

"What are you doing with this guy?" Gavin asked.

Molly crossed her arms over her chest and wrinkled her nose. "I thought we had a rule that we never talked about what I did with a guy."
"WOBS!" Gavin hissed softly, trying to show displeasure while also not disrupting his son. "Not what I was referring to. I mean, really... Sherlock Holmes?"

"He's brilliant, Gav," Molly stressed. "He really is."

Gavin rolled his eyes. "Yeah, brilliant at being a git and ignoring you for years."

Molly slumped down slightly. She knew her brothers weren't going to like Sherlock on principle, but it certainly went deeper than that. "He's not ignoring me now. That's the important part. Like he said, he doesn't make a good first impression." She sighed. "It's just his first impressions last a very long time."

"Molly," Gavin's voice was very serious. "He's not good for you."

"Please don't say that," Molly begged. "There so much you just don't know about him. He..."

Molly bit her lip. "He protects me. And... He makes me laugh. He likes to make me laugh. He shares things with me he doesn't tell anyone else, not even John."

Gavin pressed his lips tightly together, cocking his head to look over Molly even as he continued to rock his son. "Where do you think this is going to go, Molly? Do you think Sherlock Holmes is going to marry you?"

"What does it matter if he does?" Molly asked desperately. "You and Rosie aren't married and you're perfectly happy! Who says I even want to be married? I just want to be with someone who loves me!"

"Has he said he loves you?" Gavin asked.

Molly shut her mouth tightly. He hadn't said that yet. She didn't know if he would ever be able to say it. He'd alluded to it and she felt he showed her he did. But he could never simply get the words out. "I know he does."


Gavin stayed quiet for a long time, just eyeing Molly silently. "You know Dad wouldn't approve of him."

"Dad didn't approve of anyone for me," Molly replied. She shook her head. "You know, between him and you three, I didn't have a single date until I went to medical school."

Gavin sighed. "Fine. Putting aside the fact I think he's a git who doesn't deserve you. What about your safety, Molly? Sure, Moriarty is gone... But what about the next one? And the one after that? From everything the papers say he's never going to stop being a Consulting Detective."

"I don't want him to stop," Molly replied. "I fell in love with a Consulting Detective. Yes, it's dangerous and I worry about him, but it's a part of what he is!"

"It's nearly gotten you killed already," Gavin stressed. "Nearly got John Watson killed too. The people around him aren't safe and you're as close around him as anyone can be."

"I don't care." Molly pushed away from the wall finally. "I love Sherlock. I can't imagine not being with him, Gav. Even if there are terrible people out there after him... For me, it's worth it, because we're together."

Gavin nodded slowly. "Well, I guess that's that, then, isn't it?"

Molly nodded. "Yeah. I guess it is."

Both brother and sister turned in opposite directions, striding towards their respective rooms.

The door across from hers and Sherlock's opened and John stuck his head out. He gave Molly a small, bashful smile. "Sorry. I thought I heard talking. Is everything okay?"
Molly frowned slightly. "Yeah. Just... Sibling stuff. I'm sure you know how it is."

John nodded in sympathy. "Yeah. Definitely. Tomorrow I'm heading out to see Harry." He stepped out of the way for Molly to step into his bedroom. "Come on in for a minute."

Molly frowned slightly. "If you're asking me in, clearly you heard more than just 'people talking'."

John sighed. "Yeah. I suppose I did." He nodded his head towards the door Sherlock was behind. "Bet he did too. Want to sort out your thoughts a bit before you're grilled?"

"Molly stepped into John's room and he shut the door behind them. Molly sat down on the edge of John's bed and let out a great sigh.

"You're going to hear it a lot, you know," John commented, keeping his back to Molly. "I always used to get it. People not understanding him. Thinking you're putting yourself in danger."

"I know that," Molly rested her chin in her hands. "It's just... They don't understand, do they? I know he's not normal. I don't want him to be normal. I want him to... Be Sherlock."

"It's your relationship," John said with a small shrug. "It's not really anyone's business why you want to be with him. Just keep on reminding yourself that, Molly."

Molly nodded and gave John a small smile.

John remained quiet for a long time, looking over Molly. "Has he told you that he loves you?"

Molly looked down, gripping the fabric of her dressing down in her slim fingers. "Well... Not in so many words. He's... Implied it. But you know him, John. I don't expect it from him."

John sat down next to her, putting an arm around her shoulders. "But you want to hear it, don't you, Molly?"

Molly bit her lower lip. "Doesn't everyone?"

John leaned in slightly. "I know it's not the same... But I know he does. Seen him with you now and... I never thought I'd see Sherlock ever like this with anyone."

"Everything in its own time, I guess," Molly whispered pitifully. "I mean, maybe... Someday."

She gave John an overly cheerful smile. "I should get to bed. Night John."

John got to his feet. "Molly, you know if you ever need to talk about anything."

"I know, John." Molly smiled. She then crossed the few steps between them and gave him a peck on the cheek. "You're a good friend. To both of us."

John looked away, his expression slightly bashful. "Well, I try. Lord knows he doesn't make it easy."

"Night John."

With that, Molly left the John's bedroom, returning to the one she was sharing with Sherlock.

He sat on the edge of the bed, eyes riveted to his phone. He didn't even look up when she entered.

"I left my crime scene photos in the suitcase," Sherlock said absent-mindedly, gesturing wildly towards the corner. "Could you get them out for me, Molly?"

Molly rolled her eyes and went to Sherlock's suitcase, opening it up. "All right. But after this, I'm heading to bed. I actually require sleep." She rooted through his things. "Only you would bring crime scene photos to meet my fa-

Suddenly, there were hands on her waist and she was turned around. Sherlock looked down at her, his head cocked to the side curiously. His light blue gaze was filled with question.

His lips were parted slightly, as if there were a query on the tip of his tongue that he just couldn't get out. It was so very much unlike Sherlock to not be able to say whatever was on his mind.
His expression changed, conflict passing over his features. Sherlock could read everyone, but he tried to keep his own feelings and thoughts hidden behind a cool mask. Yet Molly could read him. He would let her read him.

She knew what question was on the tip of his tongue. Knew he had overheard her conversations-no, not overheard. Eavesdropped. Part of her wanted to be angry about that, but she couldn't bring herself to. Not when she could tell the other thing he wanted to say.

He brushed his lips against hers in the most tender of gestures. His hands sifted through her hair, loose over her shoulders.

He guided her back towards the bed and laid her down before gentle hands removed her dressing gown and the t-shirt she wore underneath. Hands and mouth trailed over her with the utmost care, as if he were mapping out her body and committing it to his impressive memory.

She was surprised when he didn't undress himself. When he didn't take it any further than soft caresses and kisses over every centimetre of her body.

When he finally finished his exploration, he sat back on his heels and looked down at Molly. His normally cold eyes were widened, his eyebrows raised in question. He swallowed hard, but still did not speak. Molly was sure he was still unable to find words for what he had just done.

She wasn't looking at the great Consulting Detective in that moment. This was Sherlock Holmes—the man—stripped as bare as he had ever been. She'd seen glimpses of him, never more prevalent than when he'd admitted his vulnerability over John's absence. Just a flicker had been present when he'd held her in the garden. That flicker had become a blaze now, no doubt spurred from his eavesdropping.

"What do you need?" Molly whispered, recalling their conversation so many months ago. She brought a hand up to touch his cheek.

"You," Sherlock replied, his voice rough with emotion as he leaned into her hand. He covered her hand with his. "Is that enough?"

Molly let out a small sigh. "Sherlock, I didn't ask for..."

"Is that enough?" Sherlock repeated.

What had happened to Sherlock to make him so unable to express his emotions? To make him want to hide them under layers of logic, reasoning and bitter words?

Molly wrapped her arms around Sherlock and drew him close to her. He let out a sigh against her and shifted their positions, arranging them so Molly's back was pressed to his front. She felt him nuzzle her neck as he wrapped his arms around her. It was if he didn't want her to see his face as he held her.

Molly closed her eyes tightly as she was enveloped in his warmth. "Sherlock?" Molly breathed softly.

Sherlock just shifted closer, acknowledging her with his embrace.

"I love you," she whispered, placing her hand over his.

There was no response, not verbally. She hadn't expected one.

But when Sherlock entwined their fingers, she knew— at least for now—it was enough for her.
Ch 24
"what do you need?"
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Sherlock is stunned to realize his relationship with Molly is affecting his work.

The sun had not yet risen and Sherlock was still awake. This was not an unusual circumstance in the least. Sherlock was often awake for days on end.

What made this particular circumstance unusual was he was in bed, in his pyjamas, his arms wrapped around Molly. Her small, warm body pressed up against him, her back to his chest. The hand he'd draped over her waist had found hers, entwining their fingers.

Holding hands was a foreign concept for him still. Yet there was something pleasurable about the sensation. Far more innocent than the other expressions of affection he and Molly shared.

He wasn't sure quite what had compelled him to climb into bed with Molly, despite not needing sleep quite yet. He'd done so a few times since they'd moved to 221B. He always had an excuse for it. Molly was still getting used to the flat. Moriarty could choose that night to attack Molly. He wanted to conduct an experiment on Molly's sleep patterns. The temperature in the sitting room was too cool.

He could think of no excuse on this night. He simply wanted to be in her presence, even if she was somnolent.

In the close quarters of Molly's apartment, with Irene sleeping on the couch, he hadn't needed an excuse. He was forced to share a bed with Molly. Even when he'd stay up late working, he'd urge her close to his body, her unconscious form nestling against him.

He'd worked a bit in bed, still hashing out details of the Russell murder and continued to trace the location of Moran. He had come up with little in the way of leads on either. Eventually, he gave up, put his computer aside and simply wrapped himself around Molly.

Spoonling. That's what she had called it. What the mind-numbing websites on the Internet had called it. What a ridiculous term. Yet he liked doing it. He liked feeling this woman- his woman, his Pathologist, his Molly- against him.

He liked to watch her sleep. He'd never had opportunity to observe another person as they slept. It was fascinating. Her mouth would twitch and she'd let out soft noises. He wondered if the small, happy sighs that escaped her lips had anything to do with him, if there was a fantasy version of Sherlock Holmes in her dreams.

How long had Molly dreamt of him? Years, he would guess, based on her own admission of how long she'd been in love with him. With his arms around her, he wondered how he could have denied her for so long.

Relationships were illogical, irrational and quite frustrating. Yet the warmth in his arms made those detriments seem less detrimental.

He leaned in and pressed a kiss to Molly's neck. She let out a small, sleepy squeak and shifted slightly. Sherlock liked this response, so he repeated the action. Molly let out another noise that he was sure was supposed to be his name and her fingers gripped his hand tighter.

He gave her one final kiss before he reached for his phone, tucked behind Molly's pillow. He'd discovered early on that when spooning (he would have to find a more suitable phrase), the arm trapped beneath Molly would become quite painful if he remained that way all night. Thus, he'd begun extended it over her head. This had the added advantage of allowing him to use his mobile when sleep eluded him but he did not wish to part from Molly.

He turned his attention to his mobile. He had no new texts since the last time he'd checked. He'd begun muting it when he went to bed with Molly when Irene's distinctive alert noise had
terminated a thoroughly enjoyable encounter.

Despite the silence of his phone, he felt Molly shifting in his embrace as he typed one-handed, signalling she was waking.

She turned herself over, burrowing into his chest. Sherlock brought a hand up, smoothing down her hair.

"Are you texting?" Molly murmured against his t-shirt.

"Mm." Sherlock smoothed her hair again. "Go back to sleep, Molly. You don't have to be up for hours yet."

Molly blinked the sleep from her eyes and looked up at Sherlock. "The screen glow woke me up, you clod."

Sherlock scowled and looked down at her. "Did you just call me a clod?"

Molly blushed and looked away. "I... I might have."

Sherlock looked down at her for a long moment. He studied her carefully. She looked slightly scared. She thought he might respond in some way unkind.

Instead, he kissed her. That she would insult him over a minor irritation showed how comfortable she was with him now. She also looked beautiful, wearing one of his t-shirts to bed, her hair down and rumpled from sleep.

Molly squeaked and pulled away. "Sherlock, I need to brush my teeth! I've just woken up!"

Sherlock pulled away and sighed. Self-conscious Molly once again. Her appearances were less and less, but still cropped up every once in a while. "Are you awake, Molly?"

Molly wrinkled her nose. "You're the Consulting Detective. You tell me."

Sherlock gave an exasperated sigh. "I thought I was not supposed to deduce you. I was only asking if you are fully awake and do not plan to go back to sleep. You have oft claimed to have been asleep despite speaking to me."

Molly gave a soft sigh. "Yes. I am awake."

"Okay," Sherlock said quietly. "How about you brush your teeth since you are so self-conscious about morning breath... Then I shall join you in the shower." He made a contented noise that sounded disturbingly like a purr. "We have several hours before you need to be in to work. We could run an experiment in how long the hot water holds out."

Molly gave Sherlock a stern look. "John's not going to like that."

Sherlock looked down at her blankly. Molly just continued to stare up at him reproachfully.

"Oh!" Sherlock nodded. "I'm supposed to care."

Molly slipped out of bed, her cheeks slightly pinked. "Well, I suppose John is still asleep."

Sherlock placed his phone on the nightstand, but paused before getting up. The screen had illuminated once again. There was a new message for him:

**Outside 221B. Come now.**

Molly draped her arms over Sherlock's shoulders, leaning in and giving him a kiss behind the ear. "Well, are you coming?"

"Rain cheque," Sherlock murmured, furrowed his brow. "Something's come up."

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When Sherlock arrived outside of Speedy's Cafe, he found Mycroft waiting, leaning against his umbrella.

"I'm surprised you texted," Sherlock commented idly.
"I did not wish to wake Miss Hooper," Mycroft replied. "However, I thought you should be informed promptly."

"What is it, Mycroft?" Sherlock asked irritably, crossing his arms over his chest.

Mycroft held out a file. "I have no idea what game you are playing with your little harem. However, this situation needs to be brought under control immediately."

Sherlock accepted the file and looked down at the pictures. "Where did you get this, Mycroft?"

"That nearly ended up in the hands of Scotland Yard. I had it intercepted for obvious reasons." Mycroft took a few steps to stand before Sherlock. "Do you own legwork, Sherlock. I do so hate taking care of it myself."

With that, he strode off back towards his car.

Sherlock was sitting on the sofa that had once been in Molly's flat when Irene strode back into the basement flat.

"Have a good night?" Sherlock drawled, his eyes fixed on the woman. His fingers gripped the file by his side.

Irene stilled, looking him over. She gave him a cool smile as she slipped off her jacket. "Well, Mister Holmes... You do seem a bit irritated. Things not going well with your case?"

Sherlock stood up, looking down on Irene. He grit his teeth for a moment as he observed her cool demeanour. "Prescott Russell was having an affair. At least, that's what his wife believed. She had been having him followed by a private investigator for weeks. When she felt she had confirmation, she left him. But Marilyn Russell had the money. She would have left him completely broke. He couldn't deal with that, so he confronted his wife. They spoke- heatedly- and he took the only option he had left to him and stabbed her, making it appear to be a robbery."

Irene sank down onto the sofa and crossed her legs. She arched a brow at him. "I thought you had figured out the murder of Marilyn Russell weeks ago, Sherlock. Why are you telling me all of this now?"

"I didn't listen to myself," Sherlock said, bringing up his hand, holding out the file. "The murder of a husband and wife in the same night had to be connected. But there was one piece I neglected. It didn't seem important. It was just sex, after all. Nothing more than a catalyst for Marilyn's dismissal of her husband. I did not look at the mistress. She was unimportant."

"She was very important," Sherlock intoned darkly, taking a step towards the relaxing woman. He tossed the file down at his feet. The pictures inside scattered, revealing the photos contained within. "She was you."

Irene pursed her lips. "Hm. A bit late to the party, Mister Holmes... But at least you got there eventually." She paused for a moment. "You are aware I didn't kill him, are you not?"

"I never said you did," Sherlock replied. He began to pace. "I've been thinking. Why would you be having an affair with Prescott Russell? It does not make any sense. Despite your personal identification, you are fluid with your gender preference. But you are incredibly selective when it comes to male partners. Prescott Russell does not conform to what you would find appealing. You were never his mistress. His wife merely thought you were. However, that begs the question... What were you?"

Irene uncrossed her legs and leaned in towards Sherlock. "You already know. And you're dying to tell me."

"You would not stick your neck out for a mere affair. You goal for the last seven months has been to uncover information about Moriarty's network. This means Prescott Russell and his wife were both members of the network. Not surprising. Their reputations were far too clean to have belonged to anyone but career criminals. You would not have pursued Russell as a lead were he
not only a member, but a highly placed member."

Irene continued to look at Sherlock coolly. "Interesting."

"Moran has not yet asserted power of the network. He is still trying to rid himself of rivals. Prescott Russell was one such rival. Sebastian Moran murdered Russell."

Irene finally rose to her feet. She bridged the gap between herself and Sherlock, placing her hands on his chest. "Mister Holmes... Brilliant deduction as usual." She smirked. "But honestly, I thought you would have figured this all out weeks ago."

Sherlock felt the bitter anger welling in his stomach. He glared at the woman with as much loathing as he could muster.

"Why should I have needed to deduce what happened?" Sherlock asked, the words coming out a low and dark hiss. "You've known since he was killed. As you and I are working together, you should have told me."

"Why should I have done that?" Irene demanded. "My God, Mister Holmes... What's happened to you? Are you stupid?"

Sherlock's hands clenched and unclenched as he continued to glare daggers at the woman. "What is so stupid about wanting to solve a mystery?"

"You don't want Sebastian Moran caught yet," Irene pointed out. "Moriarty's network is in chaos right now. Chaos is good. You'll never be able to take down the entire network. It's impossible. What you have now is an opportunity. Let Moran take out the high-ranking members. Then, you take him down. It's the only way to go about things."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Sherlock raged.

Irene glared back at Sherlock with just as much malice. "Because I thought I was working with Sherlock bloody Holmes and he would be able to figure it out for himself!" She pointed a manicured fingernail at him. "You've slipped. Do not take it out on me!

Sherlock narrowed his gaze on Irene. "I should just turn you over to the authorities."

"You won't," Irene intoned darkly. "Don't be so betrayed. You knew you couldn't trust me. I'm just of use to you."

Sherlock eyed Irene for another moment silently, regarding the woman. He then turned on his heels, striding back out of the flat.

Upon his return to 221B, Sherlock immediately took up his violin and began to play. He thought over the Russell case and his conversation with Irene.

Really, it should have been obvious to him much earlier. He shouldn't have needed Mycroft to point the way for him. He should have looked into the mistress, discovered Irene's involvement and thus that of Moran.

Had he been away from cases for so long that the answers no longer came easily to him? Had he grown rusty during his repose, pretending to be dead?

But... No. He'd been engaged in a battle of wits with Moriarty the entire time. He had not been at rest. It had been a long game, but it hadn't dulled him at all. Moran was nowhere near as clever as Moriarty.

What had changed?

The violin nearly slipped from his fingers. Of course. It was obvious.

He was distracted by brown doe eyes, a warm body and sweet kisses. That's what had changed. He was so concerned with his body's physical satiation, with protecting Molly from his insipid fans, with meeting her family, playing house.

A wave of disgust passed through Sherlock. How had he let it happen? How had he allowed
Molly to dull his senses?

He set down his violin and closed his eyes, searching through his mind palace. There she was, in every nook and cranny. That silly, nervous laugh. Slender fingers carding through his curls.

Sherlock cradled his head and let out a growl.

She was like a cancer, spreading through his mind palace, choking off all of the pertinent information, making it harder for him to reach.

Sherlock went to the washroom. He turned on the faucet and splashed cold water onto skin that felt too hot.

As he wiped his face with a towel, he looked into the mirror.

He looked different. He hadn't noticed it before. No, he had noticed. But he'd let it slide each and every time.

He'd gained weight. He thought bitterly of when he'd mocked Molly for her own weight gain.

*Domestic bliss must suit you.*

His cheeks no longer appeared nearly as angular, his face lacking the ethereal aura he'd always taken advantage of to make himself stand out.

He turned away from his reflection and noted how neat the bathroom was. When it had just been him and John at 221B, everything was thrown haphazardly around. This new neatness was spreading all over the flat. How many times was he unable to find a file or experiment because Molly had put it away?

He stalked out of the bathroom and back to the sitting room as the self-loathing filled him to the brim.

He had let it go too far. It had been an experiment. It had been something new, something he hadn't tried before.

The walls of cool logic and deduction had crumbled in his mind.

He was concerned with feelings- not just hers, but his own.

He was dull. He was average.

He was in-

No, he refused to let himself even *think* the word.

He'd come so close to saying it. Implying it with a deduction of his actions towards Molly, while vulnerable over John's absence. Had tried to physically show it in the dark of night at the family country home, *pleading* with her silently to understand like a lost puppy.

What had happened to him?

Why had he crossed that line?

Sherlock took a deep breath and sank down onto the sofa. He rested his head in his hands. There was only one thing he could do.

He crept slowly through his mind palace. He found all of the mentions of Molly- hiding amongst the information he needed- and locked them away.

He didn't know how long he sat on the sofa, picking apart the presence of Molly Hooper in his mind. But when he finally opened his eyes, he found Molly standing in front of him, giving him a small smile.

"I didn't want to interrupt you," Molly said. "I just got home from work. Fancy some dinner?"

She leaned in to press a kiss to his mouth, but Sherlock turned his head to the side, slipping past
her without a word. He grabbed his coat and scarf, leaving the flat in cold silence.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Sherlock's new cold attitude forces a confrontation between him and Molly.

"He just... Gets like this... Sometimes..." John assured Molly as they sat together at the breakfast table. He wasn't looking at her directly. Molly could feel her stomach do flips.

"I know he can get sullen," Molly whispered, worrying her lower lip. "But this is... Well, this is more, isn't it? He's cold."

It had been a week since Molly had woken up with Sherlock's arm wrapped around her as he texted. Since then, it had been like a switch had been turned off in his mind. A switch directly leading to his feelings for her.

He hadn't kissed her. He hadn't allowed her to kiss him. Sherlock being within 221B was a rarity in of itself these days. He'd only shared a few tense words with her and mostly they had been 'goodbye'.

"You haven't done anything," John assured her, placing a hand on top of Molly's. "I don't think he's angry at you. He's just being... More Sherlock than usual."

But it wasn't Sherlock, Molly was sure of it. Not anymore. John had not been witness to Sherlock's change, not the way Molly had. John had not been exposed to how Sherlock was in private: trying to make her laugh with a wry joke or by tickling her, warm smiles meant to draw one from her and passionate wet kisses leading to so much more.

At first, she thought the Prescott case was just getting to him, the inability to solve it. Then John had told her the case was closed.

Despite John's assurances, Molly was sure that she had done something was the only explanation. But what? The last time they'd really spoken, he'd been eager to make love to her in the shower. He'd only been distracted by something on his phone.

She'd been around detectives long enough to know what her only course of action was. If Sherlock wouldn't talk to her and John had no clue what was going on, she would have to find out for herself.

John excused himself, giving her a reassuring kiss on the top of her head. He had flats to look at to prepare for Mary's arrival in London.

With Sherlock in the shower, it was time to go to action. It was the only opportunity she would have to get a hold of his phone. He'd left it on his desk, not caring who had access to it. She felt a gnawing guilt in her stomach, but her curiosity overwhelmed it.

She searched through the texts, finding the one that had arrived the morning of their aborted encounter.

It had been from Mycroft. It had been cryptic.

At least it hadn't been Irene. While she had become somewhat fond of the enigmatic dominatrix, Molly didn't trust her farther than she could throw her, especially with regards to Sherlock. Not that she distrusted Sherlock, but if something had happened, it could have been an explanation for the cooling of his affections.

Molly put down Sherlock's phone and took out her own. She needed to keep following the trail of clues. That was what Sherlock and John would have done. She felt a small pang in her heart,
trying to put herself in Sherlock's shoes. She didn't much want to be in the shoes of a man who was patently ignoring her.

"Miss Hooper," Mycroft's voice greeted her after only one ring. "I was not expecting to hear from you. Has my brother gotten himself into more trouble I need to extricate him from?"

"No," Molly whispered, swallowing hard. She began to pace the length of the sitting room. "I was just wondering... Well... Ah... You texted Sherlock last week... You wanted to meet him." She bit her lower lip. "What was that about?"

"The Prescott Case," Mycroft replied. "He had been floundering too long on something so simple. I needed to impose myself on his work. I do hope I will not have to do so again. Not the type of business I care for."

"That's it?" Molly frowned deeply and stopped pacing. "Are you sure?"

"Quite," Mycroft replied. "Miss Hooper, I assure you I have done nothing to dissuade my brother from his feelings for you. Any rough patch you are experiencing is a matter between you and him."

"I really hate how both of you are able to do that," Molly replied.

"I'm sure." Mycroft paused for a moment. "Miss Hooper, my brother does not experience the world as others do. I am quite shocked you have managed to ensnare him for as long as you have. Caring is not an advantage. Perhaps he is remembering this."

Without saying anything else, without even saying good-bye, Molly hung up on Mycroft.

"You could speak to me directly," Sherlock said coldly from the bathroom door.

Molly turned around to face Sherlock. He his gaze was impassive as he looked over her, his eyes grey and cold.

"What did I do wrong?" Molly asked softly. "Tell me what it is and I'll stop." She fought furiously against the tears that threatened to well. "Please."

"What could you possibly have done?" Sherlock asked, his voice shaking.

Molly took a step back at the harsh sound of his voice. She shook her head. "Then what's wrong, Sherlock?"

"There is nothing wrong!" Sherlock snapped. His hand was now shaking. "I am just like I've always been."

"No, you're not," Molly insisted. She clasped her hands together, clutching them to her chest. "This isn't you."

"Of course it is!" Sherlock replied. "You've known me for three years. Is what you see really that different? I haven't changed at all. I am exactly as I've always been. Nothing about me has changed. It doesn't need to change. Why would it? I am exactly as I want to be."

Molly bit her lip. "You're speaking really fast, Sherlock. You're not okay."

"Of course I am!" Sherlock snapped. "This is who I am."

"It's not the way you've been," Molly pleaded. She looked away from Sherlock, unable to meet that cold glare any longer. They were no traces of affection for her in those eyes. "You've been different. You've been... You wouldn't ignore me like this."

"I told you if I grew tired of our arrangement, I would tell you outright. I suppose I owe you that much. This is no longer working for me, Doctor Hooper."

Molly stared at Sherlock, not wanting to believe what he had said. But no... Could she really say she disbelieved it? Hadn't she been expecting this since the moment he'd first kissed her? She'd only hoped they could hold out a bit longer. She shook her head sadly. "...No."

Sherlock stepped close to her, leaning in, invading her personal space and making the hairs on the
back of her neck stand on end. "It is not really your decision... Now is it?" He leaned in close to her ear. "Did you think because I had sex with you, everything about me would change? That I would turn into the man of your dreams? You knew what I was when you climbed into bed with me."

Sherlock didn't flinch when Molly slapped him across the face. She knew he had seen it coming, how his words were going to affect her.

"You liar," Molly whispered. "You fucking liar." Normally, Molly didn't swear, but there was nothing else strong enough for how she felt right now.

Sherlock's nostrils flared as he took in a breath. "Am I?"

"You told me," Molly's voice was shaking as she spoke. "You told me your feelings weren't going to change. That you didn't want to give up what we had when we went back to our lives. What? Did you realize that was inconvenient for you? That because of me you weren't nearly as clever?"

"You have gotten rather good at deducing," Sherlock replied coldly, not looking at Molly. "I thought you would be content being in my bed. But you continue to take more and more and more and there's nothing left of me besides Molly Hooper's boyfriend. I will not have that."

"That was never what I wanted!" Molly cried. "Don't put words in my mouth, Sherlock! This is your problem!"

"And I'm fixing it!" Sherlock bellowed. "That's what this is all about, isn't it?"

Molly closed her eyes. She didn't want to cry in front of Sherlock. She couldn't allow herself to. Her body betrayed her as tears began to slip down her cheeks.

She hazarded a glance to Sherlock. She thought she saw something in his stony expression waver. The moment was fleeting.

Molly wiped the tears away with the palm of her hand. "Stay away from me," she said firmly. She did not waver. "You just stay the hell away from me, Sherlock Holmes!"

She turned and walked out of the flat with determination. She slammed the door shut behind her and started the trek down the stairs.

Each step felt like another nail in the coffin of her relationship with Sherlock, another knife into her heart.

When she reached the bottom step, she couldn't go any further. She sank down and covered her mouth with her hands, letting out a cry.

The tears that had begun in the flat were now falling freely. She hated herself with every fibre of her being, but she sobbed. It felt as if she'd never be able to stop.

How many times had she cried over Sherlock Holmes? She swore to herself this would be the last time. She knew it wasn't true, but the idea of finality gave her permission to let the tears fall.

"Molly?" Mrs Hudson poked her head out of her flat. "I heard shouting and... Oh. Oh dear."

Suddenly, warm arms were wrapped around her and the matronly landlady was hugging Molly. Molly buried her face in Mrs Hudson's shoulder as he body was wracked with sobs. As she cried, she felt everything begin to unravel: her relationship with Sherlock directly tied with her friendships with John, Mrs Hudson and Irene. They had begun to build a life together. In an instant, it was gone.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Sherlock tries to adjust to his life without Molly.

"What do you mean 'No'?' Sherlock looked at John with a mix of bewilderment and disgust. "That's what we do. We take cases."

"We've been on cases non-stop for the last two weeks," John pointed out, crossing his arms over his chest as he stood in the middle of the sitting room of 221B. "Every single case that has come through your email, you and I have been investigating. Cases you wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole have suddenly become priorities."

"What are you insinuating?" Sherlock asked, shaking hand reaching into his pocket and drawing out a cigarette, lighting it and letting the smoke join the acrid scent that hung in the air of the flat continuously now. John had tried protesting Sherlock's renewal of his smoking habit, but Sherlock had been ferociously- almost violently- determined to blacken his lungs once again.

"I'm not insinuating anything," John glared at Sherlock. It was easy to read the annoyance on his face. Yet Sherlock also knew John was trying to ascertain his own frame of mind. "I'm saying it flat out: You're trying to distract yourself from the fact you chased Molly away."

"Don't be absurd!" Sherlock snapped back, inhaling the cigarette deeply. "I am trying to sharpen myself. Doctor Hooper dulled my reasoning. My mind is out of shape. I need to get it back to its full capacity."

"Look at yourself, Sherlock." John waved a hand at him. "You're a complete mess. You do nothing but take cases, but you pointedly avoid Barts. I haven't seen you sleep at all. I'm sure you must have at some point. Otherwise you'd be dead by now. You're not eating."

Sherlock's gaze snapped to meet John's in a look of extreme annoyance. "I'm not on drugs."

John shook his head. "I didn't think you were. I thought you were pining over your girlfriend who you were stupid enough to chase out."

"I am not pining!" Sherlock shouted, getting to his feet. "I am trying to get you to come out on a case with me. That is what we do, John. Or did spending seven months working with filthy orphans make you forget that? We. Solve. Crimes. I am paying you now, aren't I? So get your gun and let's go!"

"No." John shook his head. "I'm not going anywhere. Mary is arriving in tomorrow. I am not going to let her come to this flat in this state." He gestured around.

Sherlock looked around the flat. Molly's cleaning was nowhere to be seen. He'd gone out of his way to leave his things wherever they happened to fall. It looked like a tsunami had passed through 221B.

Just the way he wanted it.

Yet the flat was not perfect. There will still traces of Molly within it. He'd begun locking each and every Molly-thought away in his mind palace, but it was not as easy getting rid of the presence of her around 221B.

The jumper with daisies on it balled up in the corner. Her spare set of glasses on the bedside table. The pink toothbrush next to his in the bathroom. The vanilla scent that clung to the dressing gown she'd favoured. The cat that continued to show up at the door, wanting to be let in. Mrs Hudson was caring for Toby. Molly had obviously gone to a hotel and could not care for the feline yet.

Sherlock finally turned his attention back onto John, his voice ice cold. "Do whatever you like. If you feel you must make things presentable for your fiancée, I don't care. I've worked without
you."

"Sherlock!" John sighed in exasperation. "You can't do this to yourself! Just admit you miss Molly!"

"I do not miss Molly," Sherlock insisted. "I simply need to get Molly out of my system. She was a distraction!"

John pointed a finger at Sherlock. "She made you happy!"

"Cocaine made me happy," Sherlock retorted. "I got over that."

It was that easy, wasn't it? At one time, he had let drugs plague his life. He'd originally started using them to stimulate his mind. But eventually, he needed more and more, until they had swallowed him whole. That was like his relationship with Molly. It would be as easy to rid himself of her.

John's expression went cold with Sherlock's proclamation. He nodded sharply. "Right then. Well, if that's your opinion, you did the right thing in breaking up with her Sherlock."

Sherlock was about to thank John for his agreement, when the punch to his jaw sent him stumbling back. His eyes widened in shock at John. How had he not seen that coming? Hadn't he been sharpening himself again?

"What." He wiped the blood from his lip.

"Because Molly Hooper can do better than you!" John bellowed. "Molly is my friend." He shook his head in disgust. "You've always treated her like rubbish, but this, Sherlock... Saying she's like drugs? You don't say things like that about people! Especially not the woman you love and don't pretend like you weren't in love with her, Sherlock. You're not as cool as you think you are. I could tell. You're destroying yourself by pushing her away."

"She was destroying me!" Sherlock exclaimed. "My work was suffering. My brain was rotting! All I have is my work! What am I without it?"

John just stared at Sherlock, disgust still plain on his face. "You would have still had her."

Sherlock took a deep breath, averting his gaze. Even if he had been willing to give it up to be with Molly, what would have been there to keep her? Without his mind, he had nothing. She would have grown bored. He had nothing to offer besides brilliance.

It was better for both of them this way.

Sherlock turned and strode to the door, grabbing his coat and scarf, putting them on. Without another word, he left the flat.

As soon as Sherlock strode into Lestrade's office, the Inspector was on his feet. He shook his head. "No. We're not going to be doing this."

Sherlock furrowed his brow in confusion. "What are you on about, Lestrade?"

Lestrade pointed a finger at Sherlock. "I am cutting you off, Sherlock. You've been in here every day since you and Molly broke up."

Sherlock crossed his arms over his chest, scowling. "John told you, did he?"

"As it so happens, no." Lestrade crossed his arms over his chest, mirroring Sherlock's stance. "He didn't need to. You might as well have a placard!"

Sherlock shook his head savagely. "Yes, well my relationship status is really neither here nor there. I need a case, Lestrade. I am sure your force is far too incompetent to come to logical conclusions on all of the cases you have on hand at the moment. I can tell from your frown lines there's at least two that have you at your limited wit's end."

Lestrade cocked his head at Sherlock. "I am not going to hand them over to a lunatic who is suffering from a broken heart!"
"Broken heart? I have been reliably informed- by you- I do not have a heart." Sherlock let out a bitter laugh. "Everyone seems to have a much more lofty opinion of my relationship with Molly Hooper than was reality."

"You are joking, right?" Lestrade's eyes widened. "Sherlock, do you really think anyone's going to believe you would ever enter any sort of relationship unless you were head over heels in love? That you would waste your time with someone you weren't crazy about?"

"Crazy being the operative word, Inspector. I would like to point out that I am not, in fact, insane. If I were in love with Doctor Hooper, I'd still be with her, wouldn't I?" Sherlock glanced over Lestrade. "And I am hardly going to go over the finer points of relationships with a man who impregnated his former wife and is already raising three children with her, only two of which are actually his."

This time, Sherlock saw the punch coming and was able to get out of the way. He shook his head and sighed. "People keep doing that today."

"I'm not giving you any cases," Lestrade insisted, his voice shaking with barely contained rage. "You have completely lost it. Pull yourself together! But until then, get the hell out of my office!"

There was one last resort for Sherlock. He had been avoiding the building for the last two weeks. He'd deleted her schedule from his memory, a part of his attempt to purge her. Yet as she was still working part-time, the odds of her actually being scheduled right then were in his favour.

Of course, Veronica would probably be very unwilling to work along with him. She'd made her dislike for him clearly known, feelings that were entirely mutual.

His fingers were twitching as he approached Barts. He needed something- anything- to sharpen his mind.

Stamford. There was Stamford. He didn't need to see Molly. It didn't have to be a body he experimented on. It could be some sort of sample he examined under a microscope.

He walked through the corridors, pulling out his phone to send a text to Stamford, telling him he was coming up.

"Oh," he heard the soft breathy voice and his train of thought was lost.

He looked up from his phone, his gaze sliding over Molly.

Her hair was pulled back, parted in the centre. He had told her once he preferred it parted to the side. While it had been a ruse to get her assistance, he had meant it. Of course, his real preference was her hair down and loose over her shoulders, but that was hardly practical for work. She wore her glasses. He'd never gotten to tell her he enjoyed seeing her in them. It reminded him of the librarian that had been his one and only infatuation when he was thirteen. She wore an extra-thick jumper, most likely compensating for waking up in a cold hotel room with neither Toby nor himself to keep her warm. Her trousers were rumpled and needed a washing. Most of her things were still at 221B. John and Mrs Hudson had retrieved a few things for her use but not nearly enough for the long term. She was worrying her lower lip and her eyes were slightly glassy. She was debating whether or not she wanted to cry or hit him.

All of the barriers in his mind began to crumble. The locks that warded out the memories of Molly began to tumble out unbidden. Sherlock cursed himself for his weakness.

He had his arms around her in an instant, burying his face the crook of her neck, inhaling her scent. There was something off about it. Using hotel shampoo. Hers was still in the bath at 221B, taunting him with every visit. Molly let out a small, whimpering protest, but her own small hands fisted in the lapel of his coat.

His mouth seared against her and the dams broke and the flood washed over his mind. Every moment, every touch, every single bit of Molly Hooper dominated him once again.

He was an addict and he needed another hit of his drug of choice. He directed her with their
embrace, pressing her up against the wall and exploring the recesses of her mouth. He paid no heed to the fact they were in public and that someone could walk past any moment. He just needed to drown in her.

She was just as eager, her fingers finding purchase in his curls and the wave of pleasurable nostalgia continued unabated.

The moment seemed to last forever but not nearly long enough. He soon felt Molly's hands slip from his hair, clenched into fists and pound on his chest.

He withdrew, his breath ragged from the intensity. He looked down at the- his- pathologist and found her looking up at him, ferocity in her eyes.

Again he felt the stinging of her slap against his cheek. Her lips- reddened and inviting from the hungry kisses- were parted as she tried to breath.

"How could you do that?" She asked, her voice a mix of desperation, confusion and anger.

"I wanted to," Sherlock answered, rubbing his smarting cheek.

"You can't just want to!" Molly cried. He could see tears shining even with her anger. "You can't-
" She paused, gulping for breath, trying to speak despite her fluster. "You just can't snog me whenever you want, Sherlock! I'm not a toy you can pick up whenever is convenient for you!"

She shook her head. "What? You decided you were randy, so you want to give old Molly a jump?"

"You were kissing me back," Sherlock said evenly.

"Force of habit," Molly gasped. She shook her head again. "Nostalgia. Backslide. I don't know! I just know I'm not going to let you jerk me around anymore! Five minutes from now, you're going to decide I'm ruining your deductive reasoning and shut me out again!"

She stumbled back away from him. "I told you to stay away from me and I meant it! Don't come here anymore, Sherlock."

"But-"

Tears began to fall down Molly's cheeks. Sherlock was torn between two feelings. One was to draw her to him and dry them. The other was to make her angrier so she would stop.

She held her hands up, waving him off. "I'm not your pathologist any longer."

As Sherlock walked back to Baker Street, he berated himself in his head. How could he have been so stupid? How could he have fallen into the trap of Molly Hooper once again?

He'd relapsed on cocaine five times before he'd gotten clean. Would getting Molly out of his system be that difficult?

Of course it wouldn't. Cocaine had never said no. She had made it perfectly clear he was to stay away from her. As the supply of Molly Hooper was limited to one, it would be much easier to avoid than drugs had been.

But drugs had not given him so many memories to cloud his mind. Memories that had been set free by that simple act of brushing lips.

He remembered it all.

It would have been simple if he just remembered the sex. Base biological impulses. Easily explained away as by chemicals and physical stimuli. But that was not what his mind was focusing on.

The small sighs she would make as she slept, his body curled around her, shielding her from the night.

Her laugh as she lay on the floor beneath him. He'd inadvertently discovered she was ticklish and
had been determined to locate all of the spots where she was sensitive. He'd said at the time it was purely a scientific examination of gargalesis. Now that he thought back on it, he just found the sound of her laugh pleasing.

Watching her as she studied medical textbooks. She'd been determined not to let her knowledge atrophy while she was suspended from work. She'd curl a lock of her hair around her finger as she concentrated.

The look of determination on her face as she nodded and agreed to help him with his plan to defeat Moriarty. Fear had flickered in her dark brown eyes, but she'd quashed that quickly. That she could look that determined even as he knew she was terrified made it all the more admirable.

*What do you need?* Both times she had said the phrase to him. The first time, when he was lost and alone and needed an ally. The first time, when he thought he might have romantic feelings for her. The second time, when he'd foolishly fumbled through physically displaying his affections. The second time, when he'd known he'd had romantic feelings for her, but was too ill equipped to properly voice it.

*Caring is not an advantage.*

Mycroft's words broke through the memories of Molly. His own words quickly followed it:

*Sentiment is a chemical defect found in the losing side.*

He'd said it once to Irene and she'd heeded his words. But he'd also said them to Molly.

*Only if you can't trust the person on the other side* had been her response.

It was not her he could not trust. It was himself. He could not have those feelings, not while being everything he was.

Molly was right. He did need to stay away from her. For both of their sakes.

As soon as he opened the door to 221B, he was met with another punch to the jaw.

"I'm getting sick of being abused today!" Sherlock cried out.

John glared at Sherlock, rage in his eyes. "I just talked to Molly. What the *hell* were you thinking? You went to Barts?"

"I relapsed!" Sherlock shot back, striding into the flat and shedding his outerwear, abandoning it on the back of his desk chair.

"Relapsed?" John echoed, following after Sherlock as he continued through the flat. "I already told you, Molly isn't an addiction! She is a woman. A woman who is trapped in an emotionally abusive relationship with an overgrown child!"

Sherlock stopped dead in his tracks. He did not turn to look at John. He couldn't bring himself to.

"I am..." He paused. "I am not emotionally abusive to Molly."

"You are joking, aren't you?" John grabbed Sherlock by the shoulder, jerking him to try and force him to turn, but Sherlock held his ground. "You led her on for months. You treated it like it was an experiment. You left her wondering when the axe was going to drop. You think she didn't tell me how terrified she was of it? Then, once you lulled her into a sense of security, you dropped it! You broke her heart in just about the most spectacular way possible. And now you've gone sniffing around for more. Because you're... What? Bored? Horny?"

"My father was emotionally abusive," Sherlock hissed.

"Guess the apple doesn't fall far."

It was John's turn to stagger as the well-laid punch landed against his jaw.

"You can stop worrying about Molly," Sherlock said, his voice shaking. "I'm going to stay away from her. I needed to know for certain."

"Needed to know what?" John asked.
"That we're both better off."

With that, Sherlock swept to his room. He shut the door tightly behind him before picking up his violin and several blank music sheets.

There was only one thing he could do now. Sherlock closed his eyes and began to play an unknown melody.

He needed to give in to the thoughts, to the emotions. Everything he had felt for Molly. He needed to pour them out of his head into the music and delete them entirely.

As he played, another quote- from Mycroft once again- drifted through his thoughts:

*All hearts are broken.*

(Art by Lexieken)
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Molly confide in John about her feelings of loss following her break-up and receives news from Irene.

Sherlock's hand slipped up her neck, moulding against her cheek. Molly let out a small moan and turned her head to kiss his palm.

They were wrapped in each other on the sofa of 221B, the light filtering through the windows and casting an ethereal glow on Sherlock's pale skin.

The visage of Sherlock like this- logic forgotten and emotion unbridled- was one Molly covetously protected. It was for her and her alone. Those changeable eyes burning with passions unknown and lips parted in a groan of pleasure. His skin was hot and slick with exertion against her.

"Molly," he gasped against her throat. "Molly..."

Molly's eyes shot open and she found herself overly warm in a room far too cold. A whimper of longing and regret escaped her.

A dream. Just a dream.

No, not a dream. A memory. That made it all the worse.

It had been during their first week in 221B. Sherlock had been playing his violin while Molly prepared tea. As she bent over to set the tray down, Sherlock had cast aside his violin and grabbed her by the waist.

After, they had lain on the sofa together for two hours, the tea stone cold and completely forgotten. Sherlock's slender fingers had sifted through her loose hair as he nuzzled against her.

For a man she had once found so cold and methodical, he was so warm and affectionate with her when no one else was looking.

No.

Had been.

She was no longer in the warm embrace of Sherlock Holmes.

She was alone in a hotel room, one that under normal circumstances was far out of her price range.

Sherlock had made it a habit of dumping money into her bank account at his whim. She wouldn't even pretend not to know how he'd figured out her PIN number or gotten a hold of her card.

He'd always provided far more than she had needed for normal maintenance of the pair of them. She had a sneaking suspicion Sherlock's concept of monetary value was deeply lacking.

She'd protested the money at first. Sherlock had argued that the money would also be used for him and thus she should have no problem with it. Eventually, she gave up. Sherlock didn't want the money. He wanted her to have it.

Now that they were no longer together, she was determined to burn through it as quickly as possible. It was nonsensical. But it was the ex-girlfriend's prerogative to be irrational.

She knew she should have used the money to secure herself a proper flat. She just couldn't bring herself to do it yet. Getting a new flat would be admitting she and Sherlock were completely
finished.

But weren't they? Hadn't she closed the door on it forever? Slammed it, in fact.

In moments of higher rationality, Molly knew that months and months of 'data' showed her one truth: Sherlock Holmes loved her. Actions always spoke louder than words, and while Sherlock had no qualms about dropping words like acid rain, he never wasted action. Everything he did was to a firm and solid purpose, and every action towards her were proof of affection, of caring, of...

She gasped in a breath, the tightness in her chest building.

Higher rationality wasn't her strong suit. For all that she was sure in her heart, Sherlock's words were eating away at her, snaking into her thoughts and shaking the truths she thought she knew. The tone of his voice sent a clear message. Sherlock Holmes would never change. He was married to his work. She had been nothing but a dirty mistress, used just for the physical pleasure his wife could not provide.

Molly couldn't bring herself to get out of bed yet. She laid back on the pillows and let out another whimper.

She hadn't always awoken with him when they'd been living together. More often than not, she didn't.

But she'd always been able to feel him. Sense his presence. Smell his lingering scent on the pillows.

Molly curled herself up in bed and felt the tears begin to stream down her cheeks. She'd been allowing herself this every morning: a good cry over what she had lost. After that, she would get up and go about her day as normal. The indulgence allowed her to keep on going.

Everything about her felt wrong now. Her life, her work, her feelings, her very skin felt wrong.

She let herself think about going back: walking into 221B and pulling Sherlock to her. Telling him that she would do anything he needed her to do if he would just hold her again, kiss her. That she would endure anything he said as long as he would always show her that she counted.

Molly mentally shook herself for that. She couldn't do that. Maybe Sherlock would let his brain catch up to his heart and be able to actually fully be in love with her the way she was with him. But she wasn't about to sit through the abuse of it if he wasn't even going to try.

She needed to just move on. She needed to get her own place. She needed to have more regular work. Maybe in a different city. Somewhere she wouldn't be reminded of him every time she turned a corner. Where he could not just stride into wherever she was and kiss her, making her forget her resolve.

She needed her life to regulate again. It had been shaken to pieces by Sherlock's faked suicide. The only constant she had then had been him and she'd clung to him tightly. If she had all of the things she'd had before back, the sting of losing him would gradually ebb away.

Finally wiping her cheeks, Molly took a shaking breath and pulled herself out of bed. She couldn't wallow in her loss. She had to carry on.

She padded towards the bathroom to shower when she heard a knock on the door. Frowning slightly, she paused before grabbing her dressing gown and covering her nightclothes.

For a tense moment, she wondered if it might be Sherlock. She'd been dreading him showing up. She'd registered under her maternal grandmother's maiden name, but that could hardly stop the world's only consulting detective. Not to mention John and Mrs Hudson knew where she was.

The memory of his mouth hotly plundering hers, his body pinning her to the wall of Barts, was seared in her memory. Who knew when another wave of nostalgia would bring him looking for affection? Would she be able to stop the next time it happened?

"Who is it?" She called out, looking through the peephole.

She saw John, distorted through the glass. "It's John," he replied.
She saw John, distorted through the glass. "It's John," he replied.

She opened the door and gave him a small, weak smile. "Hi John. You're here early."

He held up a duffel. "Well, I thought you might need some fresh clothes. I was able to sneak these past Sherlock."

Molly accepted the bag. "They're my clothes. I can have them if I want. He can just go get stuffed," Her voice sounded stronger than she felt. "Thanks John." She stepped out of the way to let him enter "Come in for a minute. You want some coffee?"

"Sure," John replied. He walked into the hotel room and sat down, while Molly tossed the duffel onto her unmade bed. "I can't stay long though. I've got to meet up with Mary for brunch."

Molly took the coffee decanter and went to the washroom, filling it with water. "Mary's not staying with you?"

John let out a bitter laugh, shaking his head. "Are you kidding? Haven't even introduced her to Sherlock yet. You think I would expose Mary to Sherlock the way he is now?"

Molly stopped dead in her tracks, eyes widening as she looked at John.

"Shit," he swore, getting to his feet and gripping her shoulders. "I'm sorry, Molly. I wasn't thinking."

"No. It's okay." She brushed him off, busying herself making coffee. She then paused, worrying her lower lip. "How is he doing, John?"

"Honestly?" John sighed and he went back to his chair and sat down. "He's... A mess."

Molly sighed. "Still working on cases non-stop?"

John shook his head. "Opposite. Hasn't taken a case since he saw you at Barts, with the exception of Moran. Don't think he's left the flat either. Or properly dressed. It's been a parade of dressing gowns. Running about two dozen experiments. Torturing his violin... And me. And everyone in a one block radius. Considering a secondary career as a chimney."

Molly finished preparing the coffee in silence. She then walked across the room and sank down onto the edge of her bed. "Really?"

John nodded. "He misses you, Molly. He won't say it, but I know he does."

Molly just nodded, feeling the tears threatening again.

"You miss him too," John commented, noding to her. "You've been crying."

Molly furiously wiped her eyes, cursing the puffiness that betrayed her secret indulgence. "Yeah, actually. I do. I really do," she admitted, something loosening as she admitted it out loud. "He's been in every day of my life for months, John. It's just a lot to deal with. It still feels fresh. I'll get over it." She rallied herself into the most cheerful smile she could manage, doing her best to reassure him.

"He won't," John said gravely.

Smile dropped, Molly suddenly stood up and began to pace. She shook her head quickly. "John, I- He's the one who ended things."

"Because he's an idiot," John spoke up, his voice serious. "And emotionally stunted and socially inept. And that's just his more shining qualities."

Molly shook her head at him. "Please don't joke about this, John. Sherlock decided that I was ruining him. That I was dulling him. That I was... That I was..."

Suddenly, John was on his feet and his hands were cradling Molly's face. She let out a sob and buried her face in his chest. "I don't understand, John. Everything he did, everything... Am I crazy? Was I just...deluding myself into thinking that I was more to him than just some sort of experiment?"
John spoke quietly, rubbing her back in soothing motions. "You were never-there's never 'just' anything with Sherlock. Molly. You aren't crazy. Anyone with a pair of eyes could see that he cared for you. And as someone who has known Sherlock for a while now, I can tell you that he loves you."

"So why," she asked against his chest. "WHY- does he say the most awful things?" Her voice dropped low and she kept her face buried in John's chest, hoping he wouldn't hear her. "Why do I let him hurt me like this?"

John sighed deeply. "Molly, you scare the hell out of him." A hand slipped up to stroke her hair. "You're something different. He can't quantify you. He doesn't know what to do with all of the things he can't explain or fit into little notebooks or put into sequence. You make him feel too much and his brain can't take it. The only way he knows how to deal is to push away- to push you away- the best way he knows how." There was a pause. "He's just bloody terrified."

Molly pulled away from John, still sniffling. "So... What? You think I should just forgive him?"

John shook his head. "Lord, no. Personally, I think you should torture him for a while."

Molly looked at John's face, so hopeful for his friend.

"I've been waiting for him, John. Waiting for him for years. I was ready for this, I was. But he's obviously not. And I can't do it anymore," Molly whispered, shaking her head. "I can't go back and forth, hot and cold with him. I can't let me life revolve around his anymore, holding onto a hope for something that he might not ever be ready for."

Her breath hitched and she felt tears begin to well up. "I think it might break me."

John sighed. "Molly..."

"I know he's your best friend, John. But... It won't work."

John sighed, shaking his head. "I don't know, Molly. I just know he was never happier than when he was with you. And the same goes for you. Something sparked between you two."

Molly sniffled. "Yeah. And that spark ended up burning me pretty damn badly." Molly shifted uncomfortably. Her stomach was writhing and she could feel tears starting to threaten once again. "You know, Mary's probably waiting for you. How about we have coffee another time?"

John nodded. He bridged the gap between himself and Molly, placing a kiss on her forehead. "Take care of yourself, Molly. Instead of coffee, how about we have dinner together? Mary is dying to meet you."

Molly forced herself to smile, nodding. "All right. That sounds lovely. I'll give you a call."

Molly ushered John to the door. As he left, she noticed the newspaper that had been left by the hotel staff. She picked it up and looked at the cover. In the bottom right corner there was that photo- the famous one of Sherlock in his deerstalker- along with the headline **Where is Sherlock Holmes?**

Molly grit her teeth and tore the paper to shreds before slipping to the ground, cursing herself as she allowed herself her third cry of the day.

Molly was biting her lip in deep concentration as she carefully cut through the chest cavity of the cadaver in front of her.

Working was good. Work kept her distracted. It was almost meditative for her. She made notes into her recorder as she went through the post-mortem. She removed each organ one-by-one, measuring their weight and commenting on the condition.

When she was at work, the sting of her breakup lessened. She was focused. She remembered who she was and what to do. She wasn't Sherlock's girlfriend then. She was Bart's Pathologist.

*My Pathologist*, the dark velvet voice echoed in her mind.
She swore to herself. The last thing she needed to do was think about him again. Yet she found him continually pushing his way into her thoughts even as much as she tried to avoid it.

Just like him, really. Imposing himself somewhere he didn't belong.

*Focus Molly,* she chastised herself.

Taking a deep breath, she proceeded with her work. She fell into the familiar routine.

How long had she been alone? Years. She had been fine with it. If she had work and Toby and her brothers and her few friends, she was just peachy. She just needed to remind herself that there was a time when her world did not revolve around Sherlock bloody Holmes.

Just as Molly was finishing up, stripping off her gloves and washing her hands, Veronica strode into the mortuary, an irritated look on her face. "Have you finished?"

"Yes." Molly gave Veronica a large smile. Maybe if she just tried being nice to Veronica, she would warm up.

"Stop beaming at me. You look like an idiot," Veronica said with a roll of her eyes. "You shouldn't have visitors at work."

Molly went still, her eyes widening. "Visitors?"

She gulped. He wouldn't do that. He wouldn't come by again.

Veronica nodded. "Some blonde American."

With a small frown, Molly rushed out of the mortuary. She saw Irene- at least, she thought it was Irene- waiting in the corridor for her.

"Molly." Irene looked grave. "I need to speak with you."

Indeed, Irene was affecting her American accent... Or was it she was not affecting her British accent? Molly still wasn't sure which Irene truly was. Then, Irene seemed to prefer to be enigmatic.

"What's going on?" Molly asked with a wearied sigh. "If this is about me and Sherlock, I already talked to John this morning and I-"

"I don't care about you two," Irene replied. She crossed her arms over her chest. "Whatever you two want to do is up to you. I actually figure this little spat could work to my advantage."

Molly couldn't stop the jealousy from writhing inside her at the idea of Irene and Sherlock together. "Oh. Well... If you think he'd be up for it, I guess it's his decision."

Irene rolled her eyes. "Oh please. Don't even pretend that you don't care, Doctor Hooper." She sighed. "Besides, I believe our boy may have a single target sexuality." She paused for a moment. "Well, you and possibly John."

Molly scowled at Irene. "Why did you really come here, Irene?"

Irene nodded. "All right then." She took a step towards Molly, looking deep into her eyes. Molly was taken aback by the grave look in her blue eyes. "I've found some information about Sebastian Moran."

Molly's brow furrowed and she drew her lower lip up between her teeth. "Why are you telling me? Why aren't you telling Sherlock?"

Irene's hands went to Molly's shoulders, gripping her. No, bracing her. "Sebastian Moran is close to taking over Moriarty's network. Soon he's going to be executing the second phase of his plan."

Molly shook her head slowly. "I still don't understand why you're telling me all of this. I'm not a part of this. Not anymore."

"You are," Irene insisted. "Moran was Moriarty's right hand. His very close right hand. Do you understand me?"
"They were..." Molly said slowly, nervously. She sighed. "Oh. Well. Suppose Sherlock will give me an _I told you so_ about that." She felt a stab in her heart as she remembered Sherlock wouldn't be telling her much of anything since she'd demanded he leave her alone. "I sure know how to pick them."

Irene pursed her lips. "I've heard Moran was... Attached. And looking for payback. You need to watch yourself. Once he's got himself secured as head of the network, he's going to be coming after those who took down Moriarty. You're going to be top of that list, Dear."

"Oh."

"Oh. Molly wrung her hands together. "Well. That's..." She nodded. "Thanks for telling me, Irene."

"You know what would be safest for you," Irene said softly.

Molly nodded once again. "I know. But I can't do that."
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

John forces Sherlock to be honest about his feelings for Molly.

"This must be serious indeed." Mycroft said from the other end of the phone. "My brother actually using a phone for its intended purpose? I was beginning to believe you had selective mutism when confronted with the inventions of Alexander Graham Bell."

"Very droll, Mycroft," Sherlock responded dryly. "I have a favour to ask of you."

Mycroft let out a chuckle. "Again, will wonders never cease? What would you like me to do for your erstwhile paramour?"

"You've been having her followed?" Sherlock questioned.

"Since your funeral," Mycroft replied.

"Step it up." Sherlock intoned darkly. "A bodyguard would not be amiss while you are at it."

"I will assume Miss Hooper is to be kept in the dark about these measures?" Sherlock could hear the smirk on his elder brother's face. "Or is this part of a grand romantic gesture to get back into her good graces? Stalking is a crime, Sherlock."

"Sebastian Moran," Sherlock replied. "I have reason to believe he will be targeting her."

"Of course." Mycroft chuckled. "I should have known it would only be pragmatism on your part and not mawkishness."

"Is that disappointment I hear, Mycroft?" Sherlock asked mockingly. "You did seem to have a bit of an attachment to Doctor Hooper."

Mycroft sighed. "I assure you, while Miss Hooper does have her charms, the status of your relationship is of little concern to me. While you did seem to take greater care of yourself with her presence, you did have a worrying amount of sentimentality."

Sherlock went quiet.

"I am rather surprised you have come to me. I thought you would be informing your friend the Detective Inspector and your... Irregulars."

Sherlock remained quiet for another long moment. "Who is to say I didn't?"

With that, he hung up the phone and took up his violin. He began to play the stirring song that had been on his mind for weeks. He had completed it a week previous. He had not played anything else since. He felt compelled to play the same melody over and over again.

He had tried to drive the emotions out through the song. Yet still they lingered. Maybe if he played the song one final time, he would finally be purged of the memories. They would finally turn into the notes on the paper and be gone from his mind forever.

Sherlock moved the violin away from his chin as he heard the voices outside the door of 221B. John was outside with Miss Morstan.

"Do you want to come in?" John asked, hesitance clear in his voice.

"He doesn't want me in there," Miss Morstan replied. "I'll meet you back at my hotel later tonight."

There was silence for a moment as Sherlock was sure John was kissing his fiancée goodbye. His nose wrinkled and he turned his attention back to the violin.
The door finally opened and John entered. Sherlock glanced back over his shoulder at his best friend, who was glancing over the filthy flat critically. "How come this place can't stay clean for more than an hour?"

Sherlock went back to his violin. "Because Mrs Hudson only comes up to give me my daily smack to the head." He brought his hand to his hair, ruffling the back of his curls. "I am getting very tired of it. Molly and I parted over a month ago. You would think she would have gotten over it by now."

"She wanted grandtenants," John replied. He was beginning to tidy up the kitchen table. "And she thinks you were a gigantic prat. We all do."

"I am not going to get into this once again," Sherlock said with a sigh, finally putting his violin down, wrapping his dressing gown around himself and throwing himself down onto the sofa. "Molly and I have ceased our romantic relationship. Everyone will have to come to terms with that. I have no wish to reconcile."

Toby let out a mewl and jumped up onto Sherlock's chest. The cat kneaded at Sherlock with his paws. Sherlock reached up and scratched the cat's ears.

"Then what's that?" John pointed to the cat on Sherlock's chest.

Sherlock sighed. "Just because I am paying attention to Molly's cat does not mean I have a secret desire to get back together with Molly."

"It's not secret, Sherlock," John sighed. "You listened to Against All Odds for two days straight after you saw her at Barts."

"It was an experiment," Sherlock replied, averting his gaze, focusing on the cat sitting atop him. "The internet suggested it was effective when dealing with the end of a romantic entanglement. And Toby is simply used to this flat as his home. It was getting tedious trying to keep him outside."

John shook his head, holding up the pages of sheet music. "Well, then how do you explain this?" He waved around the papers. "You wrote a bloody concerto for her!"

"It is not for her," Sherlock snapped back in response. He ran a hand through his hair. "It is about what I was thinking about."

"Which was her," John supplied.

Sherlock shot him a dirty look. "I needed to get those thoughts out. Delete them from my mind by putting it in... That." He waved his hand dismissively.

"Did it work?" John asked.

Sherlock went quiet.

If anything, writing down everything he felt for Molly had made things worse. He reimagined her within his mind palace. No longer was she a jumble of disconnected memories and feelings that could be locked away. It was like ivy spreading across the walls of his mind palace- so much like the ivy that surrounded his special place at his family's country home. As much as he tried, he could not cut those vines down. They only grew back stronger.

"It is irrelevant," Sherlock muttered.

Sherlock could feel John's intense stare on him. He growled low in his throat, uncomfortable with the unwavering gaze. "Right. Fine. Not only the world's only bloody consulting detective, but also the world's biggest idiot. You're so sodding smart, Sherlock... But you can't figure out what it takes all us normal people only seconds."

Sherlock pointedly ignored John's gaze, focusing instead on busying his hands stroking Toby's ears. He didn't like the implications of John's statements.

"Why, Sherlock? Why is it so important that you cut Molly out?"
Sherlock grit his teeth and kept his gaze averted. He hated when those around him tried to deduce him. Except when Molly had done it, in their private moments together.

No, he was not going to think about that.

"Why Sherlock?" John repeated.

A growl escaped Sherlock's throat.

"Why Sherlock?"

Finally, Sherlock couldn't deal with the question any longer. Sherlock rose to his feet, Toby jumping off his chest with a hiss. Sherlock whirled around to face John, unable to contain the bitter frustration inside of him. "Why do you care? It makes no difference to you. Stop it, John. You cannot deduce me. You cannot manipulate me into 'revealing truths' that you seem to think are buried deep inside me," his voice was a snarl as he towered over John.

John pulled back, his eyes widening slightly in shock at this outburst. Sherlock realized his mistake when he saw John's brow knit and mentally braced for another punch to the jaw.

But it didn't come.

"Yes I do bloody well care, Sherlock. I care about that girl. That girl that's done nothing but be kind and gracious and possibly the bravest person I know. She saved your life. You trusted her above everyone else. And God help me, I care about you. So stop this. Stop this now, Sherlock."

Sherlock scoffed, looking down his nose at the shorter man. "All those private little meetings with Molly and as usual, you see but you do not observe, John. You've missed the critical piece of information in this entire endeavour."

Sherlock turned from him, carefully putting away his violin.

"Missed something, have I?" John question. He gave a firm nod. "Right then, genius, let's have it."

Sherlock felt his outburst of rage fizzle out. "She..." Sherlock swallowed thickly. "She will not have me."

There was silence as the weight of what he'd uttered out loud settled in the sitting room. John had berated him for saying Molly was like cocaine. Sherlock knew he'd been right. She wasn't an addiction at all. Molly was deeper than any of that had ever been. She was running in his blood, pumping through ever fibre of his being, illogical and relentless. He had believed that pushing her away, cutting her out completely was the only way to be rid of her. All it did was wound him.

"I had believed that the best way to hold on to myself, to who I am was to be rid of her," Sherlock found himself voicing his thoughts, addressing John's original question. "It was the only way to continue working on my cases, it was the best way to keep us both protected. But it was a miscalculation. I have not been able to pursue my cases without her."

He traced his fingers over the notes he'd hastily written on the sheet music John had dropped back on the violin stand. It really was a sentimental thing. "She has made it very clear that she does not want me near her. I made sure that whatever she might have felt is gone now."

Sherlock stood up straighter and placed his hands behind his back as he turned to face John again. "And it's done, isn't it? We're both better off this way."

John was looking at him with something akin to awed bewilderment. "You really are an idiot."

Sherlock opened his mouth to respond, but John continued on. "Yes, I have been talking to Molly. And I've known her as long as I've known you. She's been in love with you for three years. You think she's going to be able to stop so easily?"

Sherlock threw himself back down onto the couch, slumping down. "She told me she did not wish to see me anymore. Than she was no longer my pathologist. Why would she say that if she didn't mean it?"

John snorted. "Because you have never said anything you didn't mean." He sat down next to
Sherlock. "She's angry at you. And for good reason. You're a crap boyfriend. I know you're scared."

Sherlock glared at John for that, ready to come back with a scathing comment, but John held up his hand to stop him. "Don't. I know you are. That's what happens in relationships. But I think you can get past it. You need to find her and show her that you can do this. That she can trust you."

"Trust. Trust is earned, John. I haven't done anything to earn that," Sherlock bit out, resisting the urge to pout.

John shook his head, standing back up. "No. No. You're not going to pull that crap. You're human, Sherlock. Stop trying to be anything else. Find her. Apologize to her. Tell her how you feel. Get down on your knees and beg her to take you back and then pray you never act like such a git again."

Sherlock crossed his arms over his chest. "I thought you said it was a good thing I broke up with her."

"It was," John replied. "You needed to grow up. It's time to put on big boy trousers, Sherlock. You want to be with her, you've got to be with her. Let her know how you feel. Stop taking her for granted."

Sherlock went quiet. He brought his hands up, burying his face in his palms. "I don't know how to do this."

He knew John couldn't hear him. That made it easier to say. Even then, it was still one of the most difficult things he'd ever gotten out.

"I'm sorry?" John frowned, cocking his head. "What was that?"

Sherlock pulled his hands away from his face and looked to John. "I don't know how to do this!"

He threw himself down on his back on the couch. "Do you know how many functioning relationships I have been witness to in my life, John?"

John opened his mouth to reply, but Sherlock continued to rage on unabated. "None! None, John! How am I supposed to know what to do if I have absolutely no empirical data on the subject?"

John nodded. "I know that, Sherlock. I'm sorry. I really am. But relationships aren't about data. They're about feelings. There's no pattern. No formula. Just a terrifying leap with someone. Do you understand what's actually happening right now?" John stepped closer. "There's a woman out there- a good, decent woman- who is willing to be with you, despite all the crap that you'd put her through. It's not going to be easy. In fact, it's going to be really hard. You're going to have to work on it every day, but she's willing to do it with you. Don't mess it up, Sherlock."

Sherlock sighed, looking to John. "So what am I supposed to do?"

John shrugged. "I don't know. Go to her hotel room and play the concerto you wrote for her?"

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Please. I might as well go there with a tape deck over my head."

John blinked. "Did you just reference Say Anything?"

"If that was the name of that film. Molly made me watch it," Sherlock sighed. "Incredibly dull. She enjoyed it though and I reaped the benefits."

John rubbed his temples. "You watched a romantic comedy-drama and you're only now getting comfortable with the idea of being in a serious relationship with her?"

"John," Sherlock said firmly.

"Just go over there and tell her how you feel! You have no problem saying every other little thing that comes into your head!"

Sherlock shook his head. "This is not a little thing, John."
"You're right." John nodded. "It's not. But you want to tell her. So what's stopping you?"

Sherlock went quiet. He considered what John had said. He then pulled himself up off the sofa. "I should go inform her of Sebastian Moran's plans. She will need to be properly informed if she is to protect herself."

John nodded. "You can start there, fine. But remember... The other stuff." He paused. "Do you want me to write down where she's staying?"

Sherlock scoffed. "Please, John. I knew before you did."
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

Sherlock and Molly finally have an honest talk about their feelings.

Molly felt her stomach writhe when she heard the knock on her door. Somehow, she knew who was on the other side.

She wasn't expecting John or Mrs Hudson. They were the only ones who knew she was at the hotel.

No, of course Sherlock knew she was there. It was *Sherlock*, for pity's sake.

Then, maybe she was overreacting. She always thought Sherlock was on the other side of every door.

She looked through the peephole and let out a small gasp. She turned her back to the door, leaning against it as if to fortify it from his entry.

"I can hear you in there, Molly," Sherlock sighed. "Open the door."

"No!" Molly called out. "I'd really rather not."

She turned to peer through the peephole once again. Sherlock was standing with his arms crossed over his chest. "I can wait here, you know. All night."

"Don't be creepy!" Molly called out. "I'll call the front desk and they'll have you removed!"

Sherlock sighed. "Molly, I need to speak with you."

"No!" Molly shot back. She bit her lower lip, shaking her head despite him being unable to see it.

"I'm not taking a booty call from my ex-boyfriend just because he's feeling randy!"

"I am not-" He paused and despite not looking through the peephole any longer, Molly could envision the look of disgusted confusion on his face. "Booty call?"

Sherlock knocked on the door once again. "Molly! It's very important! It's about Moran!"

Molly sighed and opened the door finally. She pulled herself to her full height. "Irene already came to Barts and told me about Moran. He's going to be trying to kill us. So I'm well informed and you can just go..."

Sherlock pushed past her into the room. He immediately took his scarf and coat off, folding them over the chair.

"What are you doing?" Molly insisted. She pointed towards the open door. "I just said-"

"I should tell you are being followed now. Mycroft. I want to make sure Moran does not get a chance at harming you."

Molly slammed the door shut and crossed her arms over her chest. "Now? I'm being followed now?" She gave him a stern look. "Then how do you explain Wiggins following me around for the past month?"

Sherlock paused, eyes widening slightly. "You noticed?"

"I did live with the world's greatest detective for eight months. You pick up some things." She glowered. "Besides, it's pretty hard to miss a ginger with a mouth organ wearing your old coat everywhere I go!"

Sherlock looked down at Molly imperiously. "Well, if you're so upset about it, why didn't you
complain to John about it?"

Molly opened her mouth to speak, but could come up with no adequate explanation. She then shrank down. "Well... It's not like you were following me around."

"You told me to stay away from you," Sherlock murmured. Molly knew that voice. It was his 'hurt puppy' voice, the voice he used to try to make himself sound pathetic and loveable.

"You had to know I knew about Moran already," Molly said with a sigh. She couldn't look directly at Sherlock. He had dressed in one of his nicest suits, with the turquoise shirt he knew she thought he looked fetching in. "Irene would've told you. So why did you come?"

Molly hazarded a glance, while Sherlock looked away. It seemed like they were in a battle not to meet each other's gaze. "I've been feeding Toby while you have been gone."

Molly frowned slightly. "But Mrs Hudson..."

"Toby is far more comfortable in our flat," Sherlock replied. "It seemed easier to allow him access rather than have him pawing at the door. So I have been caring for him."

Molly cocked her head. "But... You don't know how to open a tin."

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Yes, it was a very trying minute while I figured it out. Honestly, Molly..."

"If you're going to be rude, you can just leave!" Molly shouted, pointing towards the door once again. "Can you not be- for just two minutes- you are so..."

"I love you!" Sherlock snapped.

Molly's eyes widened and it felt like all of the air had gone out of the room. It might have been a minute, it might have been an hour before she could move. But when she did, she curled her arms around herself and walked past Sherlock to sit on the bed. She kept her eyes downcast. She was dizzy. She couldn't have heard right.

Sherlock sank to his knees in front of Molly, looking up at her, forcing her to catch his gaze. His ever-changing eyes were wide and... Vulnerable. It was disconcerting to see him like that. "That's what you needed to hear, isn't it?"

A part of Molly wanted to cry yes and just fall into his arms. But there was another part of her- an overwhelming part- that made her shake her head. The tears began to slip down her cheeks. "No, Sherlock."

Sherlock's eyes widened further. "But..."

"I don't need to hear you say it." She swallowed hard. "I need you to say it because you need me to hear it."

She felt Sherlock's hands on her face. She wanted to push him away, but his thumbs were caressing her cheeks, wiping away her tears. "I've made you cry."

"You've made me cry every day," Molly admitted. "Do you know how much you've hurt me?"

Sherlock nodded slowly. "There is very little logical reason why you should allow me into your life again, Molly. I have brought you a lot of pain and you have done the rational thing by shutting me out..."

Molly shook her head. "You're the one that ran Sherlock, not me! You said it wasn't working! You pushed me away!"

"I-" Sherlock started, but the words seemed to catch in his throat and he looked away. "Forgive me."

Molly continued to cry and Sherlock continued to brush his thumbs over her cheeks, dashing them away. "Sherlock, you know that I love you..."

Sherlock now looked up at Molly, a hopeful expression lighting up his features.
Molly swallowed hard. "I don't know if I can trust you. You hurt me. You ignored me. You said horrible things to me."

"I wasn't saying them to you," Sherlock admitted. "I was saying them to myself. I wanted to believe they were true."

"Why?" Molly begged. "Why would you want all of those horrible things to be true?"

"Because I know how to do that!" Sherlock's voice was laced with desperation. Molly could see the self-loathing in his features, both from admitting it and having done it in the first place. "I don't know how to be... What you need. I don't like it when I don't know things, Molly."

Molly shook her head. "I never asked you to be anything but what you are."

"What am I?" Sherlock demanded, pulling away from Molly, picking himself off the ground and beginning to pace. "I've been slipping. It took me forever to find out what happened to Russell and I only stumbled onto that because Mycroft held my hand!" He took a deep, shaking breath. "The only thing that has changed since my death is you and I. It had to be the reason I wasn't deducing as well as I had..."

Molly felt the anger well within her. She stood up and was about to speak, but Sherlock continued to talk. "But that wasn't all that changed. Moriarty. That was a change." He let out a bitter laugh. "Molly, I think I may have been..." He paused, the next part obviously hard for him to say. "Stupid." He swallowed hard. "A-Arrogant."

Molly now laughed, hers just as bitter as Sherlock's. "You? Arrogant? Perish the thought."

Sherlock shook his head. "I was so full of myself, I was getting sloppy. What could be as important as taking down Moriarty? So I was lazy. And became dull. I needed something- someone- to blame. I took it out on you. Not because I ever blamed you. I was..." He swallowed hard. "All I've ever had to offer you was my brilliance. If I didn't have that..."

"Stop it," Molly hissed. "No."

She put a hand on Sherlock's shoulder, forcing him to turn around. "If you're going to talk to me, talk to me. Look at me."

She felt her breath catch when Sherlock turned to her. He stared down at her intensely. His eyes appeared slightly glassy, as if he were trying to hold back his own tears.

"Sherlock..."

"I'm not a good man, Molly Hooper," Sherlock whispered. He brought a hand up to touch her face. "You of all people know what my flaws are. The only thing I can be for you is clever. But what if I can't even be that anymore? What if that alone isn't enough?"

His hand slipped up, moulding against her cheek. She was reminded of their intimate encounter at 221B so many months ago. "Everyone tells you how you can do better than me. They don't hesitate in telling me as well. They're probably right."

He moved in closer to her, his breath warm against her skin. "But I'm selfish. I need be the one who holds you when we sleep. I need to be able to talk to you. I need to do experiments with you. I need to see your smile. I need to make you laugh. I need all these things and a million more. I need... Everything." He took a deep breath. "I need to love you, Molly. I don't know how to do it like everyone else... But I don't know how to stop."

Molly was crying again. She covered her mouth with her hands and she looked away. She remained quiet before hazarding a glance in Sherlock's direction.

"Please dismiss me quickly," Sherlock said, his hands shaking. "I cannot..."

The tears kept streaming down her cheeks. "You said it right that time."

"Then why are you still crying?" Sherlock asked.
"You idiot," Molly whispered. "You beautiful idiot." She threw her arms around his neck and pulled him down, finding his mouth.

Sherlock's whole body relaxed against hers in the embrace. He let out a soft sigh of relief.

When they parted, Molly licked her lips. "You taste like spearmint."

"I brushed my teeth," Sherlock replied, averting his gaze. "Before I came over. A lot. I've been smoking again."

She felt Sherlock's arms slide around her. He buried his face in her neck. "Come home with me."

Molly stiffened slightly, trying to pull herself away from Sherlock, but he held fast to her.

"Sherlock," Molly murmured. "I'm willing to try to work things out... But there's a lot more we have to talk about."

"Why can't we do that at home?" Sherlock asked.

Molly ran a hand through his hair. She had missed the soft curls. "Because... Agreeing to go right at this minute would be falling right back into old habits. I know you're sincere, Sherlock. But... I need to... Think. We both need to. We can't just fall back into what we were before. That's doesn't work for me. If we're going to do this- really do this- we need to be careful about it."

Sherlock opened his mouth to say something, a petulant and confused look on his face. Like what Molly had just said flew in the face of the concept of them getting back together.

Molly could tell he wanted to pout about having her right back where she had been immediately. But she couldn't do that. She was still scared and she knew deep down, he was too. "We need to do this right, Sherlock."

Sherlock nodded, somewhat reluctantly. "The methodical approach is one I can... Appreciate."

Molly gave him a grateful smile, pulling away from him. "We'll start seeing each other. You can visit me here. I can visit you at Baker Street. You can even come in and see me at Barts. We'll... Work ourselves into each other's lives again, all right?"

"Can I stay here tonight?" Sherlock asked suddenly.

Molly blinked and took another step back. "That's not taking things slow, Sherlock. That's the opposite of taking things slow."

"I don't need to have intercourse," Sherlock said softly. He reached out and took Molly's hand. "I need to sleep."

Molly frowned slightly as she looked into Sherlock's face. She could see the weariness in his handsome features. "When was the last time you slept, Sherlock?"

"Four days ago," Sherlock admitted. "For an hour or so."

Molly gave him a stern look. "When was the last time you had a full night's sleep?"

He gave her a look. She sighed, shaking her head. "Are you kidding?"

Sherlock always went with very little sleep and John had told her he had been even worse than usual of late. Now that Molly was allowing her affection for Sherlock back out, she felt a flutter of worry for his wellbeing.

Sherlock gave a small shrug. Molly frowned for a moment, before turning towards the bathroom.

"Where are you going?" Sherlock asked.

"I'm going to change for bed. You're going to have to sleep in your pants. I don't have anything for you to wear."

"I have seen you naked before, Molly," Sherlock called out. "You can change in front of me."
"Not this time!" Molly called back.

Molly went into the bathroom and closed the door behind her. She stripped out of her clothes and slipped into her father's old football club shirt. It was really the only thing she had to wear, now that she was without Sherlock's t-shirts.

Once she was changed, she leaned against the sink and took several deep, controlled breaths. Something about the situation made her nervous and gave her a strange sense of *déjà vu*. When she felt herself stop shaking, she pulled herself up and exited the bathroom.

Sherlock was waiting for her, stripped down to his underwear. She felt her stomach do another flip at the sight.

"...Although, I would not be *opposed* to intercourse, if you desired it..." Sherlock commented, reading Molly's body language.

"Just get into bed," Molly muttered, climbing in on one side of the bed.

Sherlock slid in beside her. She felt his arms wrap around her and he let out a sigh.

"I am in need of a good night's sleep," Sherlock murmured against her neck.

Molly entwined their fingers and couldn't help but smile. "I missed you too, Sherlock."

She glanced over her shoulder and saw he was already deep asleep.

When Molly awoke the next morning, she was alone. She wondered if everything that happened had been a dream. She let out a small sigh. Her dreams were certainly getting more detailed, if that were the case.

But she noticed her mobile displaying a new text message alert. She grabbed it and clicked to the message.

*Had to run. Come to Baker Street when convenient.*

-**SH**

There was a second text that following it:

*I refuse to state my emotions in textual form, however please be assured what I conveyed last night remains true.*

-**SH**

Molly wouldn't have smiled broader even if Sherlock had left a rose on the pillow.
(Art by Lexicken)
John had not seen Sherlock for the past two days, not since he had gone to Molly's hotel to speak with her. He worried about his friends, knowing that their relationship was at a critical juncture. But he could not hang over them while they tried to work things out. He'd done all he could, trying to prod them back together with advice and encouragement.

After Sherlock had gone to see Molly, he'd gone to Mary's. He'd texted Sherlock in the morning to see how things had gone, but had only received back a terse text:

*Out on case. Buy nicotine patches.*

*SH*

While it gave John no clear answer what was going on with Sherlock and Molly, the fact Sherlock wanted to quit smoking again was a good sign. Sherlock had only begun again in spite of Molly. Of course, it would be annoying to have to deal with Sherlock while he was trying to quit. Still, better than the alternative.

While he was out with Mary looking at flats, John received a second message from Sherlock.

*Stay with Mary tonight.*

*SH*

Staying at Mary's was hardly a taxing request for John. If he had his way, he would be spending all of his nights with Mary. Of course, he would much rather they were together at the flat than in a hotel room.

To be even more honest, he would rather have Mary in their own flat. However, John was still dragging his feet a little. He did not want to abandon Sherlock while he was in such a state.

He knew their relationship was unhealthily co-dependent, but he owed Sherlock so much. His very life. Before Sherlock, he had been alone, a shell of PTSD and loneliness. Even when Sherlock appeared to have died, he had been able to move on, to meet Mary. It never would have happened had Sherlock Holmes not come into his life.

With Sherlock falling apart so spectacularly with his breakup with Molly, John felt compelled to stay near his friend. Sherlock had been having enough trouble dealing with the idea of John moving on and getting married when Molly had still been around. John couldn't just abandon him.

The morning after Sherlock's request for John to stay away from 221B, John sent him another text, asking how things were proceeding. When he received no response, he decided it was time to return to Baker Street.

Being best friends with the world's only consulting detective meant one was able to put things together fairly quickly. When he entered the flat, he saw the signs.

The flat had actually been tidied up, Sherlock's papers and books and experiments put away, as they had been when Molly had still been living with them.

The only thing John had seen Sherlock working on in the past few weeks that remained out was his violin, along with the concerto he'd written on the music stand.

There were candles spread out over the flat that had been burned down to the nub. John supposed it was no more of a fire hazard than Sherlock's habit of chain smoking and leaving his cigarettes in strange places while he experimented.

There was food left on the table: Strawberries, almonds, bananas, figs. John was surprised to find
no chocolate on the table. Then, perhaps Sherlock had enough foresight to realize that Toby could make himself quite sick on it. There were two glasses of champagne partially drunk.

Most tellingly, there was a trail of clothing leading from the sitting room, through the kitchen, towards Sherlock's bedroom.

John gave a sharp nod. "Right then. Worked things out. Definitely."

Sherlock's bedroom door then opened and Molly walked out backwards, thankfully fully dressed. She was, however, attached at the lips to Sherlock, who was most certainly not fully dressed, only a sheet draped around himself.

"I have to go," Molly said between kisses, slipping her fingers through Sherlock's curly hair, still damp from a shower. She let out a moan of disappointment.

"No," Sherlock groaned, sliding an arm around Molly's waist, tugging her to him. "No, you don't. The morgue is cold and Veronica hates you. My bed is warm and I like you."

Molly whined softly. Neither of them seemed to have noticed John's presence yet. "You have already tested my resolve enough, Sherlock."

Molly then wrapped her arms around Sherlock's neck and pulled him down to kiss him with a passion John had not witnessed between them before.

"Ahem." He cleared his throat. He did not much want to witness such passion between them and worried if they were not aware of him soon, it would go further.

Molly pulled away from Sherlock turned and blushed. "Oh. Hi John." She grinned. "I was just heading to work."

John nodded. "I see that."

Molly turned her attention back to Sherlock. "I'll text you later." She gave him another quick peck on the mouth. She hurried towards the door, biting her lip to stop her grin.

After the door had swung shut, John smirked smugly at Sherlock. Sherlock just ignored him, turning around and striding to his desk and picking up his mobile, presumably going through his messages.

"Must have been a big night," John commented, the grin not leaving his face. "You didn't take your mobile with you into your bedroom."

Sherlock continued to stare avidly at his phone screen. "I did have more pressing concerns."

John nodded and smirked. "Yes. You did seem to be doing some pressing." He went to the kitchen to make coffee. "So you and Molly are back together."

Sherlock just set down his phone and stepeled his fingers beneath his chin. "I'm afraid I can give you no credit for that deduction, John. Seeing me kiss her good-bye after a night of sexual activity is hardly a vague clue."

"I'd actually figured it out before I saw that." John leaned back into the sitting room, gesturing around. "It looks like you copied every single step in 'How to Plan the Perfect Date at Home' from Cosmo."

Sherlock went quiet and shifted around for a moment before focusing intently at his phone again.

John smiled. "No." He chuckled. "Seriously?"

"It is not as if I have a great deal of knowledge on this particular subject," Sherlock snapped irritably. "I needed to do... Research. Besides, you would only know that if you had done it yourself."

"Right." John opened up the refrigerator to retrieve something to eat. He frowned when he saw all of the food in there. "Sherlock, you went shopping."

"I required provisions for my evening with Molly," Sherlock replied plainly.
"You never go shopping," John insisted.

Sherlock let out an irritated sigh. "Why does everyone believe I am incapable of caring for myself? I did not live with you until I was thirty-three years old. I managed on my own just fine."

John walked back into the room solely to furrow his brow at Sherlock.

Sherlock scowled. "For the most part. Anyway, I needed specific things. The article indicated different foods would have different... Reactions."


Sherlock sighed. "You may eat those. As it turns out, Molly is allergic to shellfish. I'm rather ashamed I never realized that before. However, the observation of eating habits is something I have overlooked for the most part."

John shook his head and laughed softly. "You know that stuff doesn't really work, don't you, Sherlock?"

Sherlock finally looked away from his computer to smirk at John. "All evidence does point to the contrary."

"Make-up sex, Sherlock." John nodded sharply. "Best aphrodisiac there is. You know, I'm really surprised there's no chocolate."

"There was," Sherlock replied. "Melted. Ostensibly for the strawberries, but..." He cleared his throat. "We consumed it." He shifted. "Unorthodoxly."

"And we're done speaking now," John commented, turning back to the kitchen and striding to the coffee. "Coffee?"

Sherlock didn't reply.

John sighed and turned. "Sherlock, I said-"

He gave a small start when he realized Sherlock was standing in the archway to the kitchen, his sheet still draped around him. He had a very serious look on his face. "She wants to date."

John frowned and cocked his head slightly. "Well, I would hope she would if you were getting back together."

Sherlock shook his head. "No. She just wants to date. She does not plan to move back here. She wants me to... He paused. "Court her."

John paused for a moment and just looked over Sherlock. He could see the misery clear on Sherlock's features. "This is a good thing, Sherlock," John assured him. "Two days ago, Molly wouldn't talk to you."

"I did everything you told me to!" Sherlock snapped irritably. "I went to her hotel, I apologized to her and I told her that I-" Sherlock paused. He eyed John for a long moment. "That thing."

"And then you had sex last night," John pointed out, rolling his eyes. "This falls firmly in the 'good' category."

He wondered how on Earth Sherlock had managed to be in a relationship with Molly for three and a half months before he came back. He felt like he had to hold the idiot's hand.


He felt like he had to hold the idiot's hand. "I had thought she was adverse to engaging in a sexual relationship again, but clearly that is not the case. However, she made it clear she does not plan to move back in yet."

"Sherlock," John sighed. "Are we really talking about your relationship while you don't have any pants on?"

Sherlock pulled his sheet tighter around himself. "How can I convince her to move back in?"

"By dating her, you prat!" John shouted. "Molly's told you what she needs. She wants you, but she doesn't want to jump back into things. You freaked out on her last time. Scared the hell out of
her. You two have to go about things slowly..."

Sherlock scowled. "But the sex..."

"You just said sex isn't important," John pointed out. "Considering how much you two have done it, yeah... It isn't."

"We lived together for nine months," Sherlock retorted, giving John a look of challenge. "You would think that wouldn't be much of a big deal now."

"It is a big deal." John turned and began to busy himself with the coffee. "Things are going to be different this time, Sherlock. If you're going to go about this with Molly, you've got to be serious about it this time. She wants it to be forever."

Sherlock went strangely quiet.

John furrowed his brow as he added two lumps of sugar to one of the coffee cups. He then turned, facing Sherlock again, studying his expression. "It's forever for you too, isn't it?"

Sherlock accepted the coffee and drank deeply. "Logically, it can't be forever, given the average lifespan of a human being and the statistical probability of accidental death or illness."

John sighed. "Fine. For the rest of your mutual lives then."

Sherlock again went quiet.

John looked away, studying a spot on the wall carefully before turning his attention back to Sherlock. "Are you going to..."

"I plan to do everything in my power to make her happy," Sherlock replied earnestly. "Whatever that may entail."

"Right." John nodded. "Well, for her right now, happiness entails dating. If you are going to take that step eventually, you need to go about things right. Slowly."

Sherlock let out an aggravated sigh. "You are engaged to Miss Morstan. You have only been seeing her romantically slightly longer than I have Molly. You are also disadvantaged by not having known Miss Morstan for years platonically."

"Well, every relationship is different, Sherlock," John pointed out. He sighed deeply. "And unlike you, neither Mary or I require emotional training wheels. If Molly needs time, give her time. Frankly, you need it too. Okay, you want it to be forever? You're going to have to get ready for that. Just try to do things like a normal person this time. Take her out to dinner, a film."

Sherlock wrinkled his nose. "A film?"

John nodded. "Yes. A film. Don't pretend like that's so hard for you, Sherlock. You already told me you've watched films with Molly." He sighed deeply. "You two have to get to know each other on a completely different level."

"I know Molly on every level," Sherlock insisted. "You seem to forget I am an expert in human behaviour. Besides, Molly and I have been intimate many times."

John shook his head slowly. "I haven't forgotten. Like you would let me forget either of those things. This isn't about just noticing things about her. And it's not about sex. It's about blending your lives together. Since you two have gotten together, Molly's been changing herself to suit you. She's fitting into your life, but you're not fitting into hers. It can't be that way, Sherlock. Not if you want it to be forever. You need it to go slow."

Sherlock seemed to consider this for a long time. Before he could reply, there was a knock at the door.

"Hoo-hoo," Mrs Hudson called out. She came in, carrying the paper with her.

When Mrs Hudson made a beeline for Sherlock, John shook his head. "It's all right, Mrs H. You don't have to hi."
Mrs Hudson gave Sherlock a squeeze. "Oh, my Sherlock. Put some trousers on, you silly boy. Now, how did things go last night?"

"Very productive," Sherlock responded. He gave her a kiss on the cheek before turning on his heels and striding towards his bedroom.

John frowned slightly as he looked to Mrs Hudson. "I thought you were still smacking him upside the head."

"Why would I do that?" Mrs Hudson asked. "I know he and Molly have sorted things. Poor boy needed my help with dinner. When I found him, he was trying to melt chocolate with a Bunsen burner."

John chuckled and nodded. "Well, he would, wouldn't he?"

Mrs Hudson handed John the newspaper. "I'll fix you boys some brekkie. Sherlock! Is Molly still here?"

Sherlock stepped out his bedroom, now pristinely dressed in a suit. "No, Molly had to go into work already." He was grinning. "But she was here this morning."

Mrs Hudson gave him a light smack on the arm. "Look at you, all giddy. Now you treat that girl right this time, you hear me, Sherlock? I don't want to find out you've mucked it up again."

Sherlock gave Mrs Hudson another kiss on the cheek. "Oh no, Mrs Hudson. Not this time. If I muck things up, I'll never get her out of that damnable hotel."

John's eyes went wide as he scanned through the newspaper. "Sherlock, you're going to have to get her out of the hotel now."

John put the paper down so both Sherlock and Mrs Hudson could read along with him. There was a picture under the headline. It was the now familiar photo of Sherlock and Molly kissing, only it had been digitally split in half.

**Trouble in Paradise: Sherlock Split?**

*For weeks the question 'Where is Sherlock Holmes?' has been spreading throughout London. Now, we must ask ourselves: why has Boffin Holmes gone into hiding? The answer seems to lay in his love life.*

*While Holmes is notoriously tight-lipped on the subject, his relationship with body bagging babe Molly Hooper has been public knowledge since he spectacularly appeared back on the scene two months ago. Now, it seems his relationship has hit a snag.*

*Holmes was spotted out on Saturday night, going to Regents Park Hotel. There, he is reported to have forced himself into one of the rooms. According to anonymous sources within the hotel, Doctor Hooper has been residing there for the past month.*

*Is Doctor Hooper unable to deal with the strain of Holmes's fame? Has their relationship strained now that the supposedly engaged John Watson is back on the scene?*

John stopped reading, letting out an aggravated sigh. "Supposedly. Right." He looked to Sherlock. "Molly can't stay at that hotel now. They're going to be all over her."

Sherlock grinned. "You're right, John. She really can't, now can she?" Sherlock raced to the door and grabbed his coat. "The only place she'll be safe is at 221."

John let out a groan, following after him. "No, I know what you're thinking... Sherlock!"

"The important thing was to get her out of the hotel," John pointed out as he carried Molly's bags into Mrs Hudson's flat. "Now will you help me with Molly's things?"

Sherlock had his arms crossed over his chest and to John's eye was downright pouting. "This is absolutely ridiculous! Mrs Hudson doesn't even have a spare bed."

Molly gave Sherlock a sharp look. "You don't have a spare bed either, Sherlock."
"I don't need a spare bed," Sherlock pointed out, walking to stand in front of Molly and placing his hands on her hips. "My bed is big enough for two as you well know."

"I don't want to move back in yet, Sherlock," Molly sighed. "I want to take things slow."

Sherlock leaned in towards her. "The shirt missing its buttons on my floor indicates you can be quite impatient, Doctor Hooper."

John wrinkled his nose, hearing the statement plainly. "Sherlock!"

Evidently, Mrs Hudson heard it as well. She gave Sherlock a smack. "Sherlock Holmes, you don't say things like that to your girlfriend. If Molly wants to stay here, she's more than welcome. Now you behave yourself."

Sherlock scowled.

"Would you rather I stay with Mrs Hudson or with Irene?" Molly asked.

Sherlock sighed deeply. "All right. Stay here then."

John shook his head. It seemed things around 221 Baker Street were going to be very interesting.
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Sherlock makes some progress on his pursuit of Moran, meets Mary Morstan and asks Molly out.

Sherlock wondered exactly how people could find any pleasure from being beaten with a riding crop by Irene Adler. He had been under the tender mercies of it nearly two years ago. While he'd been drugged to the gills at the time, he recalled it being terribly unpleasant.

It didn't look to be very enjoyable to the low level thug who was currently being whipped by the dominatrix.

"I do believe you have subdued him, Woman," Sherlock commented idly as he rifled through desk drawers.

"What would the fun in that be?" Irene asked, another careful flick of her crop made the thug cry out anew. "Do you realize how long it has been since I've been able to ply my trade?"

Sherlock located the mobile and gave it a small flip-toss before catching it deftly and slipping it into the pocket of his coat. "I would have thought with the amount of time you've spent with Anthea you've had the opportunity."

"Anthea takes enough punishment from your dear brother." Irene smirked at Sherlock. "Our encounters are more... Mutually beneficial. Would you like to hear about it?"

Sherlock continued to go through the desk. "Hm? Oh, you needn't waste your time. John might be interested if you're compelled to tell the tale. Just tie him up and I'll call Lestrade. He has several warrants out for his arrest."

Irene produced a pair of handcuffs and lashed the thug to the radiator. "You are absolutely no fun, Mister Holmes. No wonder the good Doctor got sick of you."

Sherlock glared at Irene as she strode to stand before him. His lip curled in a smug smile. "As it so happens, the Good Doctor and I are seeing each other again."

Irene arched a brow. "Oh are you now? About time. You were becoming pathetic, Mister Holmes. Pining doesn't suit you."

Sherlock scowled at Irene. "I was not pining."

"The other residents of 221 and Mister Phil Collins would disagree." Irene let out a small laugh. "For a moment I considered fetching a revolver, Mister Holmes. Putting us all out of your misery."

Sherlock continued to glare at Irene silently. He pulled his phone out and sent off a terse text to Lestrade:

I've found something you've been looking for. He's of no use to me anymore.
-SH

He followed this with the directions. He then gave Irene another hard look before striding out the door.

"So what exactly were we looking for?" Irene asked, trailing after him. "Not that I need a reason, but I am curious to know."

Sherlock shoved his hands into his pockets. "That man you just flogged within an inch of his life... On top of being a notorious arms dealer has been acting as Sebastian Moran's personal secretary..."
Well, the closest someone like Sebastian Moran can manage. His mobile contains quite a bit of pertinent information on both Moran and his associates."

Irene stopped cold, putting her hands on her hips. "I've been infiltrating the network for months. How come this is the first I've heard about him?"

Sherlock glanced over his shoulder to look at her. He gave her a tight smile. "You have proven to be quite untrustworthy when it comes to sharing information about Moran. Your skills with a riding crop are quite useful while John is otherwise detained, however I will handle investigations by myself from now on."

Irene sighed and continued alongside Sherlock. "You know I had a point, Mister Holmes. Sebastian Moran was quite useful in eliminating the most dangerous of the network."

"And now he is in charge," Sherlock replied coldly. "I would rather he not become comfortable in that position."

Irene slipped a hand up Sherlock's arm. "Is this because he is targeting Doctor Hooper?"

Sherlock turned to Irene and glared. "On top of many other things. He was one of the assassins sent after my friends. He is in charge of Moriarty's network. He would like to see me dead. And yes, him targeting my pathologist is something that is a bit irritating."

"Don't get stroppy with me. I'm not the one who is trying to hurt her," Irene said firmly. She then smirked. "Well, not in ways she wouldn't immensely enjoy."

Sherlock continued to glare at Irene, not speaking a word.

"You really do love her, don't you?" Irene said with a smile. "The great Consulting Detective... Falling head over heels in love with a mousy little Doctor who plays with corpses."

Sherlock's gaze narrowed. "What is your point?"

Irene leaned in and pressed a kiss to Sherlock's cheek. "Sentiment and all that. I did not think I'd see the day when you would willingly step into that."

Sherlock grabbed Irene by the shoulders and forced her to step back. "You have done enough damage to my relationship without inflicting any more, Woman."

"Your rough patch had absolutely nothing to do with me," Irene replied smoothly. She strode ahead. "You know you better not mess things up again, Mister Holmes. I doubt Doctor Hooper will give you a third chance."

Sherlock paused for a moment as he walked into 221B and saw the woman in the sitting room. She was in her mid thirties. Her skin was tanned from the sun, but was naturally very pale. Her blonde hair was lightened from exposure to sun. She was quite comfortable in 221B, sipping coffee. Not a client.

"So this is the illustrious Miss Morstan," Sherlock commented idly. "I was beginning to think John has just made you up."

"You're as good as John has boasted," Mary replied. Her accent was muddled. She had spent many years abroad even prior to her stint with the VSO. Yet he could detect the traces of Hampshire.

"I suppose I should be glad John is no longer concerned about my wellbeing," Sherlock commented as he strode into the kitchen, adding two spoonfuls of sugar into a mug and adding coffee. "He was quite concerned that my mood during my estrangement from Molly would affect my first impression on you."

"He didn't have to worry quite so much," Mary replied, giving Sherlock a small smile. "I heard you make terrible first impressions regardless of your romantic status."

Sherlock arched a brow.
Mary let out a small laugh. "Besides, I know you and John are ridiculously co-dependant and if I want to keep my fiance, I'm going to have to force myself to like you regardless."

Sherlock paused for a moment, looking over Mary. He then gave a slight nod. "Forthright. I appreciate that. No doubt it is a quality John also appreciates in you, as I do have it in spades and he is quite accustomed to it. I'm sure the fact you were raised in a military family also appealed to him."

Mary arched a brow. "John told me how you did things like that. What gave it away?"

"Identification tags," Sherlock replied, gesturing to Mary's neck. "Your father's."

Mary's expression changed quickly as she reached up and touched the tags tucked beneath her blouse. "Yes."

"Was he killed in the Gulf or the Balkans? There weren't many British troops killed in either, but clearly you were a teenager when he died."

Mary shook her head. "Neither. He was on leave. I..." She swallowed hard. "I don't know what happened to him."

Sherlock cocked his head and took a step towards Mary. "Well, Miss Morstan... I find the idea of John moving out to be repellent. However, I am relieved he's found one with at least a modicum of intrigue."

Mary met Sherlock's gaze unwaveringly. "Please, Sherlock... We're in love with the same man. Call me Mary."

Sherlock nodded. "Mary it is then."

The door to the flat opened and John came in carrying a tray of toast and jam. "I'll have to go to the shops later. The only food we have in the fridge is left from Sherlock-" He trailed off as he saw Sherlock standing next to Mary, his brow arched. "Sherlock. You're here."

"Yes. While you were busy being domestic, Irene and I managed to gather the intel I required."

Sherlock smiled tightly at John. "I assume from the tray, you are not finished being domestic."

John shook his head fractionally at Sherlock. "I... We're engaged. I'm never going to be finished..." He shook his head once again. "You know what? Nevermind. I had hoped to be here when you two met."

"Why would that be necessary?" Sherlock asked, turning his attention back to Mary. "It is obvious who this is. I don't require an introduction. Mary seems rather savvy herself and I am sure she's seen my picture in those clippings you've kept of our cases."

Mary let out a soft laugh. "He wanted to make sure we got along, Sherlock. He's worried I'm going to leave him if I don't like you."

Sherlock gave Mary a small smile. "That's the type of thing John would tell me not to point out."

Mary gave Sherlock a smile. "He's not allowed to tell me what not to point out. One of the advantages of this. She held up her hand to show off the engagement ring.

Sherlock took Mary's hand and examined the ring closer. He pursed his lips. "Seeing it now, this seems like an adequate choice if one must have an engagement ring."

Just then, Sherlock's phone buzzed with a text. He pulled it out of his pocket. "Lestrade needs to see us, John. Can you tear yourself away from Mary?"

John crossed the room and placed the tray of breakfast on the kitchen table before going to Mary and kissing her on the cheek.

She gave him a smile before kissing him on the lips. "You shoot them before they shoot you, all right?"

"Yes dear," John said before following after Sherlock to the door.
Once on the other side of the door, John looked to Sherlock. "Sherlock... Thank you."

"What for?" Sherlock asked, he looked back to the door of 221B. "I'm just relieved you found one I can finally stand."

Sherlock strode into the morgue, John close behind him. He smiled when he saw Molly preparing to put her gloves on.

He strode up to her and whirled her around to face him. Without say a word, he slipped his arms around her and leaned in, kissing her deeply. She made a small squeak and dropped her gloves, sliding her fingers into his hair instead.

Sherlock felt himself getting lost in the kiss when he heard John's loud cough behind him. He pulled back reluctantly and smiled down at Molly.

"That so I'll let you see the body?" Molly asked.

Sherlock shook his head. "You'll let me see the body no matter what. I just thought that might be enjoyable."

"Good deduction," Molly breathed. Her cheeks were pink. Since their reconciliation, Sherlock was making an honest attempt to be more open with Molly with regards to his feelings. While he had not plainly stated them as he had the night they got back together, such gestures were not detrimental.

"What are you doing here, Holmes?"

Sherlock scowled at the sound of that unpleasant voice. He smirked as he turned to face Veronica. "Inspector Lestrade sent me over to look at the body that was brought in."

"Doctor Hooper isn't doing the post-mortem," Veronica insisted. She swept past Sherlock and Molly, pulling on gloves.

"Why not?" Sherlock asked, feeling the anger swelling within him. He hated everything about Veronica, right down to the smug look on her face. "She is more than qualified..."

"I am in charge around here," Veronica insisted. "You shouldn't even be here, so I fail to see how your opinion would change my mind."

Rolling her eyes, Molly stalked over to the covered body and pulled back the sheet.

Sherlock sighed as he saw the man revealed. He had seen the body alive, being lashed to a radiator by Irene only two hours previous. There was a massive headwound now from a high powered rifle shot. "He was in police custody at the time?"

Molly nodded. "That's what Lestrade said. He was being brought in and as soon as he hit the street..."

"Doctor Hooper!" Veronica hissed. "I'm going to have you reported for this."

"Oh get stuffed, Veronica," Molly snapped irritably. Sherlock was very tempted to give Molly another searing kiss.

"I have to go see Lestrade." Sherlock looked to John. "This is definitely Moran's work. Most likely, there was something he knew that I didn't know to look for. Moran couldn't afford to have him brought into the police."

Without another word, he strode towards the door.

A second after they entered the corridor, the door to the morgue opened again and Molly ran out. Sherlock turned and frowned in confusion at her.

Molly seized him by the lapel and pulled him down, kissing him passionately. He gave in to the display of affection easily. After a long moment, they parted. "What was that for?" He asked, slightly breathless.
“You're going to end up investigating,” Molly panted. “And I wanted to remind you what you'd be missing if you did something stupid like get yourself killed.”

Sherlock nodded slowly. “I am thoroughly reminded.” He paused for a moment, considering his next query carefully. “Would you come out with me tonight, Molly?”

Molly's brow knit. “Like on the case?”

Sherlock shook his head. “No. Like on a date. Dinner.”

Molly's smile lit up her whole face, but she shook her head in confusion. “But... You're going to be on a case.”

Sherlock nodded. “And I believe it will be going cold around half seven. So dinner.”

Molly nodded. “All right.”

Sherlock smiled back at her. “I'll text you the address. Now don't back down from Veronica when she gives you trouble. She deserves everything you have to give her.”

Molly beamed and went back into the morgue. Sherlock turned back to John, who was smirking.

“Why are you smiling like that?”

John nodded in approval. “You're not doing too badly this time around.”

By the time they met up with Lestrade, Sherlock was still grinning.
Chapter Summary

Sherlock makes an honest attempt at courting Molly with a date in London.

The prospect of spending the evening with Sherlock made Molly grin like a fool for the rest of the day and she didn't pay the slightest attention to any of the abuse Veronica hurled at her. As much as Veronica tried to protest it, Sherlock had clearance from the police department and from the British government courtesy of Mycroft. Molly felt butterflies in her stomach at the prospects of a date with Sherlock.

After John had teased her about what she and Sherlock classified as dates, Molly had claimed she thought real dates were rubbish. It had been a lie. She liked the idea of doing something silly and romantic with Sherlock. She had just been certain he would be utterly- and vocally- miserable doing anything of the sort.

Sherlock had already proven her wrong on that, preparing dinner for her the night after their reconciliation.

It had been utterly ridiculous- almost a parody of a date from a women’s magazine. But she knew Sherlock. He was so out of his element when it came to dating, he had copied everything from some sort of relationship website.

She hadn't meant to sleep him, having resolved to hold out, to take things slow like she had told him they should. But walking into 221B, with candles lit, food everywhere and Sherlock playing a violin concerto written for her...She didn't have willpower strong enough to resist. Thankfully, she'd managed gain some of her resolve back and make it clear that what had happened had been an exception. Sherlock had been so desperate for her approval, he'd agreed to any terms that she set.

Now he had invited her out to dinner, on a real proper date out in the world. It felt different than dinner at home, as wonderful as it had been. There was something more real about it. Like being seen outside of the walls of the flat made the relationship solid and tangible in a way that it hadn't before.

She knew he was just trying to make up for his behaviour during their break-up. A dark part of Molly was happy about that. Sherlock had treated her terribly. He might have been able to admit he was in love with her, but that still didn't make everything that had happened right.

When she arrived back at 221A, she found Mrs Hudson and Irene having tea together. It was only after moving in with Mrs Hudson that Molly had become aware this was a ritual for the two women since Irene had moved into 221C. She had been too preoccupied with Sherlock- and then their breakup- to notice.

"Molly dear," Mrs Hudson smiled warmly at Molly, gesturing for her to sit down. "Would you like to join us?"

"That would be lovely," Molly replied, sitting down beside Irene. "I can't stay long though. I need to get ready."

Irene smiled and arched a brow at Molly. "Do you have a hot date tonight, Doctor Hooper?"

Molly felt the heat flood her cheeks and took a deep gulp of the tea Mrs Hudson had just finished pouring her, burning her tongue a bit. "Well... Actually... Yes, I do. Sherlock asked me out tonight."

Mrs Hudson clapped her hands together. "Oh dear! That's just wonderful!" She paused for a moment, frowning. "Wait... He's not dragging you out on another one of his investigations, is he?"

Molly shook her head. "No." She bit her lip, trying to stop herself from grinning like a complete
idiot. "He's taking me out to dinner."

"Dinner with Sherlock Holmes..." Irene tapped a manicured finger against her lip. "Again, I marvel at your amazing talents, Doctor Hooper. And getting him to ask you. When I first met you, I never thought you had it in you."

Mrs Hudson patted Molly's hand affectionately. "He is really trying hard to make it up to you. Oh, he was so precious trying to make you dinner! He wanted to impress you so much."

Molly felt her cheeks redden at the memory of their date, Sherlock greeting her at the door, a look of breathless anticipation on his face as she stepped in, the need for approval from her more than evident.

"It worked," Molly replied with a small smile. She had to remind herself that she and Sherlock were taking this slow, at her own insistence.

It was just so easy to fall back into it again. To being with Sherlock. Too easy. Her resolve would only go so far and it had failed her before. She reached out and grabbed Mrs Hudson by the arm. "Mrs Hudson, I need you to do me a really big favour."

Mrs Hudson frowned slightly, tilting her head. "What is it?" She gave Molly a gentle pat on the hand that gripped her arm. "Are you all right?"

Molly bit her lower lip and felt her cheeks begin to turn red. "I need you to make sure I don't go home with Sherlock."

Before Mrs Hudson could reply, Irene was laughing uproariously. "You need a chaperone? Oh! Doctor Hooper..." She shook her head.

Molly could feel her cheeks grow even hotter. "Sherlock can be... Very persuasive. And stubbornly persistent. He wants things to go right back to the way they were, but they can't."

Mrs Hudson frowned slightly. "Now, not that I'm trying to discourage a young lady from maintaining a sense of decorum... But didn't you spend the night with Sherlock a few days ago?"

Molly covered her face with her hands and Irene laughed once again.

"Oh, Doctor Hooper... Is Sherlock really that irresistible?"

Molly glared at Irene. "Didn't he cost you several million quid from the British Government?"

*That* made Irene shut her mouth and Molly was very pleased with herself for her boldness. "I thought I would be able to handle myself, but I gave in. He was really sweet. He made dinner. He played his violin. And... I cracked. Just slipping once isn't a big deal. It's not like Sherlock and I haven't..." She cast a glance to Mrs Hudson, suddenly feeling very awkward discussing the situation with the matronly woman.

"Oh Molly." Mrs Hudson sighed. "You think I haven't heard girl talk before? And I knew full well what you and Sherlock were getting up to while you were living together. His bedroom is right over mine, dear."

Molly felt the heat in her cheeks anew. "Okay, we've slept together. A lot. And being able to get past everything we went through and just... Be together... Was really nice." She smiled at the memory. "Really, really nice. But if we keep doing it, then I'm going to keep spending the night with him, then I might as well move back in with him! We can't do that yet. We're not ready." She sighed. "Since I can't trust myself to be able to resist him, I'm going to need help."

Sherlock was waiting by the door of the restaurant when Molly's cab pulled up. He bounded to the door, opening it for her and pulling her into a kiss. "You're two minutes late," he murmured against her mouth.

Molly rolled her eyes and pulled away from him. "Not everyone is so ridiculously knowledgeable on London traffic to know exactly how long a particular cab ride is going to take, Sherlock. Isn't the important part that I'm here?"

Sherlock considered this for a moment. He then grabbed Molly by the hand, pulling her towards
the restaurant. "I hope you're in the mood for Italian."

Molly allowed Sherlock to pull her into the cozy restaurant. Sherlock was greeted by the busboy- Billy- who obviously knew him well. It seemed this was one of the restaurants Sherlock frequented when he could trouble himself to eat.

Billy led them to a corner booth. There was a small sign on it with the words 'Reserved' on it.

"Sherlock," a large, bear-like man came up to him and shook his hand. "Good to see you. And you brought your girlfriend."

Molly was enveloped in a hug from the man. "She's even prettier than the pictures in the paper."

"Yes," Sherlock responded tightly, extracting Molly from the man's embrace. "Molly, this is Angelo. Angelo, this is my Molly."

Molly felt her cheeks heat at being referred to in such terms. He had referred to her as such before, but it seemed different this time. Perhaps because he was saying it to another person.

"Let me take your coat, Molly," Angelo said, helping Molly remove the knee-length coat she'd worn. "You are a very lucky girl. This man-" He pointed to Molly. "He's a great man. Got me off a murder charge."

Sherlock removed his own coat and scarf. "Several years ago I-" He paused as Molly's coat was removed. He eyes widened slightly as he gazed travelled over her.

Molly smoothed down the material of her tight black dress. She had bought it specifically to get that particular reaction from Sherlock. Two Christmases ago. It had failed spectacularly then.

That was not the case at the moment.

Sherlock's gaze slipped- seemingly reluctantly- away from Molly to Angelo and he gave a small nod.

"I'll get you two a candle," Angelo said before rushing off.

Sherlock turned his attention back to Molly. "Maybe you should keep your coat on. It is a bit cold in here."

Molly frowned slightly. Sherlock seemed to like her wearing that dress. Why did he want her to cover up?

Then she noticed his gaze dart around the restaurant. "What's going on?" Molly asked.

"There are seven couples besides us in this restaurant," Sherlock muttered. "Three of the men are looking at you. And one of the women."

Molly couldn't stop herself from grinning. "Sherlock, are you jealous?"

Sherlock glowered. "At least none of them are leering as obviously as Lestrade was when he saw you wearing that. I thought we might have to throw cold water on him."

Molly slipped into booth beside Sherlock. "I bought it for you."

Sherlock nodded. "I know."

Molly worried her lower lip. "You didn't... You didn't react to it last time."

Sherlock looked away for a moment. "I didn't." He ran his fingertips up her bare arm. "I didn't think of you like that then."

Molly shifted uncomfortably in her seat. It didn't surprise her that Sherlock hadn't thought of her as a sexual being back then. Molly knew she was not attractive like Irene or the women on television.

Sherlock's fingers paused on her arm. "No, you're not." His voice was soft and Molly felt her heart drop. Of course he was able to figure out what she was thinking.
"You do not conform to the popular standard of great beauty."

Molly frowned deeply, looking away from Sherlock. He brought a hand to her chin, forcing her to look at him.

"I have never had much use for those who do conform to the popular standard of great beauty. They are far too concerned with retaining that great beauty. They are insipid and dull."

"But Irene-" Molly started.

Sherlock shook his head. "That Woman used me. She is cold. Her physical presence does nothing to me. You saved my life. You are warm." Sherlock ran his thumb over her cheek. "You are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

Molly could feel tears stinging her eyes.

Sherlock turned himself away from Molly. "However, I am not sure how to feel about you not only deliberately dressing to stir desire in me with no possibility of fulfilment once our date is over, but to recall an uncomfortable time for us in order to punish me for my treatment of you."

Molly's jaw dropped. "I did not-"

"Please," Sherlock turned his attention to the menu. "As if it's not plainly obvious. I suppose it is your prerogative to make me suffer."

"I didn't do it on purpose," Molly whispered.

Sherlock frowned slightly. "Hm. That's a shame. It would have been quite the devious plan, as it is working. But I suppose it does go against your nature."

Molly kept her eyes down, trying to study the menu. But there was something gnawing at her about the way Sherlock was acting, about the way he had been acting since their reconciliation.

"You know, you don't have to say things like that."

She hadn't meant his tease about her ability to torture him. She also knew Sherlock knew that.

He reached over, brushing the pads of his fingers against the back of her hand. "Why shouldn't I? I have a reputation for saying what I think."

Molly shook her head. "You don't call people beautiful. That's not how you work."

"But I mean it," Sherlock insisted. His eyes fixed on Molly. "I've thought it for a long time now. Is there harm in me saying it?"

Molly shook her head. "No, it's not that. It's just..."

Sherlock leaned in towards her. "I thought I was going to have to change for this relationship to work. How can I change if every attempt I make is met with question?"

Molly frowned slightly. "You're not uncomfortable with it?"

"I stated a fact," Sherlock replied. "I quite enjoy stating facts."

Angelo came back to the table and took their orders. When he returned with their food, Angelo made certain to tell Molly all about how Sherlock had cleared his name. Sherlock stayed quiet, allowing Angelo to gush. Molly could tell one of the reasons Sherlock chose this particular restaurant was so that Angelo would extol his virtues, making him seem more appealing to Molly and she would move back. It was endearing, even if it was a fruitless endeavour... For the moment.

They sat together, eating dinner and making idle chatter. Sherlock was telling Molly about his cases, while Molly told him about work, complained about Veronica and got slightly too graphic detailing a post-mortem. Sherlock was, however, the first date she'd ever had who instead of grimacing at her ramblings about work, leaned in closer, encouraging her with questions.

Partway through their meal, Sherlock's phone rang. He picked up his phone with a small frown.
"Lestrade."
Molly felt her heart drop. Most likely, this meant Sherlock was able to rush out of the restaurant, all thought of her out of his head.

He listened for a few minutes before shaking his head. "Not interested."

He hung up without another word. He then dropped his mobile back into his pocket and turned his attention back onto Molly, continuing his story about a case he’d received through his website, involving a nanny employed by a man who was making strange demands on her.

"That wasn't a case?" Molly asked, nodding her head towards his phone.

Sherlock furrowed his brow. "I'm out with you."

"But..."

Sherlock shifted closer to Molly. "I won't lie, Molly. I'm going to leave on cases sometimes. That's just how I work."

Molly bit her lower lip. "But not today?"

Sherlock hand slipped down to Molly's hip, tracing an idle pattern. "Nothing less than an eight."

"Do you really rate your cases?" Molly asked.

Sherlock nodded.

Molly leaned in towards Sherlock. "And I'm not worth leaving for less than an eight?"

Sherlock's gaze slid over Molly. "Possibly higher. Given the situation."

Molly slipped off her shoe, running her toes up Sherlock's calf. She blushed at her boldness. "Is that right?"

Sherlock's back stiffened and he sat up straighter. "A nine," Sherlock replied, his voice slightly strained.

Molly couldn't help but giggle at the slight reddening of Sherlock's cheeks.

The night air was chilly as Molly and Sherlock walked down the streets of London. Molly shivered slightly and took a hold of Sherlock's arm, hugging it.

He looked down at her curiously. She blushed, realizing just how bold she was being in the gesture. But it felt so natural to snuggle close to Sherlock, even if they were out in public. She began to pull away from him.

"You're cold," Sherlock commented.

"Mm." Molly nodded. "Just a little."

Sherlock turned around to face Molly, looking her over critically. Finally, he slipped the scarf from his slender neck and neatly looped it around Molly's throat. He smoothed it down and gave her a small smile. "How is that?"

"Better." Molly touched the scarf fondly. Sherlock's scent was on it.

"Come on then." Sherlock turned to walk down the street once again.

Molly started to follow after him, but Sherlock stopped and frowned. "I thought you wanted to hold my arm."

"I..." Molly started. "I... Well... Umm..." She could feel her cheeks start to heat up despite the chill of the night.

Sherlock took hold of Molly's arm, slipping it under his. She bit her lip and hugged close to him.

"There's really nothing quite like London at night," Sherlock commented as they walked along.
He let out a sigh. "There are other big cities. Other places that never rest, but they're all a pale imitation of this."

Molly could feel Sherlock's eyes on her. "I thought about taking you to a film. Or the theatre or... A dozen other tiresome places John suggested." He sighed. "But nothing seemed to compare to just walking through London with you."

Molly let out a small giggle.

Sherlock smiled down at her. "So. Is there anywhere you want to go?"

Molly was about to answer when she heard the text alert on Sherlock's phone once again. It had pinged several times during dinner.

"I want to go to the crime scene," Molly said earnestly, looking up at Sherlock. "Lestrade's not going to stop bothering you until you go."

"I'm out with you," Sherlock insisted.

Molly stopped, causing Sherlock to halt in his steps as well, turning to face her. Molly looped her arms around Sherlock's neck, forcing him to stoop slightly and bringing them level. "Sherlock, it's really sweet how hard you're trying. I know you want to make things up to me. And I know you want to change. But you're not going to stop being a Consulting Detective just because you're with me. We both know that. I am giving you permission to go. As long as I get to go with you." She hit her lower lip. "I'd like to see you work."

Sherlock smiled boyishly. "You can be my assistant tonight, Doctor Hooper." He leaned in and pressed a kiss to her lips. "Ooh. I rather like that idea actually."

"Well, look at that," Sgt Donovan said as Sherlock and Molly approached the house. "The Freak has brought a date."

"Doctor Hooper is a well-respected pathologist," Sherlock replied casually to Donovan. "As she happened to be with me when I was beleaguered by texts due to your ineptitude, it made sense to bring her."

Donovan narrowed her gaze on Molly. "I had heard rumours you'd done the sensible thing and sent him packing. Now here you are. You might even be more of a freak than he is, putting up with him by choice."

Molly could feel the heat rising in her face. Sherlock opened his mouth to speak, but she beat him to it.

"Is it really freakish to be in love with one of the most brilliant men in the world?" Molly asked acidly. "Not to mention one of the most gorgeous. And completely unattached as well..." Molly gave Donovan a small smile. "Do say hello to Anderson for me, Sergeant."

Sherlock put a hand on the small of Molly's back, leading her into the house. He leaned in close to her ear. "You are aware it would be terribly indecorous of me to snog you at a crime scene."

Molly glanced back at him. "Why would I want you to do that?"

"You are being remarkably tempting," Sherlock replied.

Lestrade met them at the door. He eyed Molly. "Sorry to interrupt, but Miss Cushing was insisting to speak with you."

"We will have to work out a system," Sherlock muttered under his breath.

Lestrade led them to the sitting room, where a woman in her fifties sat, a shock blanket over her shoulders. Sherlock removed his coat and looked around the room. He saw a box sitting on the coffee table.

Molly made to take off her coat, but without even looking back Sherlock snapped, "Molly, keep your coat on."
Molly frowned slightly. "You're grumpy."

Sherlock looked towards her. But no, his gaze was on Lestrade instead.

Molly felt her cheeks grow hot. "Sorry Greg," she muttered. She guiltily felt a bit of a thrill at Sherlock being jealous over the idea of Lestrade seeing her in her dress.

Sherlock slipped on a pair of latex gloves before picking up the package on the coffee table. "Hm." He picked it up and held it out to Molly.

Molly looked into the box and let out a small squeak. There were two ears contained inside, packaged in salt. Working in a morgue, body parts did not faze her, but she had not been expecting to see them.

"I've been trying to explain to Miss Cushing this is a prank. She had some medical students living with her that she evicted a few weeks ago," Lestrade explained. "Can you please tell her that's what's going on?"

"I wish I could, Lestrade," Sherlock commented as he pulled the box away from Molly and looked into it again. "But I don't think that's the case. Molly?"

Molly shook her head. "Those aren't surgical cuts, Detective Inspector. Medical students would be able to do better."

Molly could see a brief look of approval in Sherlock's light eyes. "And packing them in salt. Incredibly amateurish." He closed up the box and looked at the address label. "Misspelling on the address. Obviously not someone who has ever lived here. You're looking for someone who murdered two people- a man and a woman- in Belfast in the past week." He leaned in and sniffed the box. "Fisherman."

Miss Cushing let out a small cry, covering her mouth with her hand. "My sister... Her husband..."

Sherlock nodded. "My condolences," he did not sound the least bit sincere. "Your sister is dead. Along with the man she was having an affair with."

Sherlock picked up his coat once again, slipping it on. "Do keep my name out of this one, Lestrade. I'm embarrassed by the idea of being connected to it. This was far too easy."

Sherlock took hold of Molly's hand and pulled her out the house without another word.

Molly gasped as she found herself pressed up against the wall outside of Mrs Hudson's flat. "Sorry," Molly gasped. "For making you go out to the crime scene." Her hands slipped up into Sherlock's hair.

A groan escaped Sherlock as he pressed up against Molly. "I would have gone after I dropped you off," Sherlock admitted. "Besides, I would have missed you telling off Sergeant Donovan."

He nipped at her lower lip. "That alone was worth the trip."

Molly moaned as Sherlock latched onto the tender skin of her throat, licking and sucking. She tilted her head back to give him better access.

"Bedroom," Sherlock murmured, picking Molly up by the waist and carrying her towards the stairs leading up to 221B.

Molly let out a small squeak, but felt herself getting swept up in Sherlock. He'd been so wonderful to her and had so brilliantly deduced the crime and...

"Oh Molly!" Mrs Hudson's door had opened and she stepped out of her flat. "I was wondering when you were going to get home. Well, come on, dear. I need to lock up."

"Not now, Mrs Hudson!" Sherlock snapped irritably.

"Yes now, Sherlock Holmes," Mrs Hudson insisted, giving him a swat. "Unhand Molly. It's curfew."

Sherlock blinked. "I beg your pardon? We're in our thirties, Mrs Hudson. And just your tenants."
Molly reluctantly pulled away from Sherlock. As tempting as it was to go up to Sherlock's bedroom, she knew she couldn't. She knew she would have this temptation and that was why Mrs Hudson was at the alert. "Goodnight Sherlock."

"But Molly..." Sherlock started, looking at Molly with a hint of desperation in his eyes.

Molly pulled Sherlock down and gave him one final peck on the lips. "Goodnight, Sherlock."

She smiled as she left her boyfriend standing in front of the stairs, looking more than a little frustrated at his current situation.
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

Sherlock finally catches up to Sebastian Moran, with surprising results.

Sherlock and John had been investigating the leads on Moran for two weeks. He was close now. He could feel it.

He hadn’t much time to spend with Molly while he was investigating. It was a bit of a relief that he and Molly could still maintain their relationship while he delved into cases again. He had made a mental note to text Molly to tell her that he was still alive at least once a day. She always responded back the same way:

I love you.

When he did manage to get back to Baker Street, she would rush out of 221A before he managed to get up the stairs, greeting him with happy and relieved kisses. He accepted them gratefully and no matter what the time— they would spend the next few hours talking through everything he’d been through and what his next step was. Eventually, talk would turn to what Molly had done while he was on his cases. They would pepper their conversation with light affection. Sherlock felt there was now a balance in his life he had lacked before. His flat felt friendlier to him and he felt an eagerness to return home after investigation.

But it was not perfect yet. Molly was still sleeping on Mrs Hudson’s sofa. He looked on John and Mary covetously. John had deemed Sherlock capable of handling Mary’s presence in 221B and she had left her hotel, moving into the flat. Sherlock suspected John was engaging in crass displays of affection with his fiancée to pay Sherlock back for the times he’d walked in on him with Molly.

It was not the sex that Sherlock missed. Yes, he had become used to the regular release, but he could live without it—he had for thirty-five years. It was knowing that Molly would always be there, that 221B was her home as much as it was his.

At least he had managed to have Molly sleep with him when he felt the need for somnolence. It was no mean feat on his part, even if one only took in consideration Mrs Hudson and Irene’s attempts to keep them chaste. Molly had admitted to employing them as a method of control, something John had charmingly termed the ‘Cockblock Brigade’ when trying to tease Sherlock after he confided to his best friend. He had the tendency to not arrive at the flat until late, until Mrs Hudson was sure to be asleep, but Molly would still rush to meet him, staying up from worry about his well being. He still had Irene to deal with, but he found that if he said ‘please’, Irene would allow them to do what they wanted, just content with the power play of Sherlock asking for permission. It irritated Sherlock to no end, but it was worth it as Molly would inevitably fall asleep on his chest on the sofa. She was still refusing his offers to go to his bedroom even for something as innocent as sleep, still citing ‘temptation’, even with her squad protecting her. Of course, they still awoke to Mrs Hudson thumping Sherlock.

He needed to get his mind back on the case. He could hear John calling his name behind him, but Sherlock didn’t slow.

Moran was close. He knew it.

For two weeks, he’d tracked down every criminal he could on the network, gone through all of the addresses and notes on the phone he’d claimed from Moran’s “secretary”.

The leads had brought them to an office building in Croydon. From all outside appearances, it was an accounting firm. Investigations had revealed it to be a money launder in Moriarty’s- Moran’s- network.

Sherlock had told John they were going to interrogate the head of the firm. But he knew this
wasn’t the case. He knew he’d reached the end of the trail.

He reached the office belonging to the head of the firm. He opened the door and looked at the man sitting behind the desk.

“Sebastian Moran.”

Moran smiled at Sherlock, arching a brow. “Hello Darling.” He jerked his head towards the door. “Shut and lock that behind you. I don’t want your little friend interrupting us.”

Sherlock did as he was told, but he slipped his hand into his pocket to the gun he’d brought with him, stolen from John.

Moran was wearing a well-tailored suit. Westwood. Moriarty’s preferred designer. He did not look entirely comfortable in it. He’d not worn suits like that prior to Moriarty’s death. He’d gotten his hands dirty rather than pulled the strings of a hundred different puppets. He had a smattering of stubble on his jaw, a sign of the man he once was. He had a good ten years on Moriarty.

Sherlock narrowed his gaze on Moran. “Tell me, did Moriarty awaken you to your sexuality, repressed through years of military service… Or was it the reason you were drummed out?”

“We’re not going to talk about Jim,” Moran said calmly. Sherlock noted how his hand gripped the table. It had definitely been more than just simple sexual release from Moran’s side.

Moran tilted his head, looking at the hand Sherlock had in his pocket, wrapped around the handle of his gun. “We’re also not going to have you with your hand on a gun.”

He raised his hand, pointing the gun in his own hand at Sherlock. “Of the two of us, who do you think is the faster shot?”

Sherlock pulled his hands out of his pockets and held them up in mock-surrender. “All right then. You know I’m not going to let you leave here, Moran. Why did you let me find you?”

Moran let out a laugh. “Like the great Sherlock Holmes doesn’t know the answer to that.”

Sherlock’s lip curled in a small smirk. “You want to make a deal.”

Moran gave a slight shrug of his shoulders. “I am a business man.”

Sherlock shook his head. “No. You’re a bloodthirsty and unrepentant assassin whose lover died as a direct result of my actions.” Sherlock took a step closer. “Would it help you at all if I told you Moriarty didn’t care at all about you? You were just of use to him?”

Moran’s eyes narrowed on Sherlock. “You could say the same thing about your girlfriend. Has she told you all the things she and Jim got up to together?”

Sherlock grit his teeth, forcing himself to look impassive, despite the swell of anger that rose in him at the idea of Molly and Moriarty together. “They didn’t do anything.”

“Easier for you to believe that, isn’t it?”

Sherlock took in a deep breath as he continued to glare at Moran. “Why did you want to see me?”

“You’ve already guessed.”

“I don’t guess,” Sherlock replied tersely.

Moran smiled, setting his gun down. “All right. You already know I wanted to make a deal. You see, things are a little bit sticky with you on my trail. People are starting to worry.”

“And you have no idea how to run things as competently as Moriarty,” Sherlock replied.

Moran stepped out from behind his table. He steepled his fingers. “Words hurt, Sherlock. I’m doing the best I can at a new job. And I can’t let the peons think I’m entirely preoccupied with you. I have to move on.”

Sherlock arched a brow. “Then how about we just get this over with.”
Moran shook his head. “No, I don’t think we will. I have to move on. You probably have a lot of other cases that are interesting you… I’m just suggesting a temporary ceasefire while we both refocus our attentions.”

Sherlock laughed, shaking his head. “And just why would I do that?”

Moran tilted his head. “Because as soon as you walked into the building, security started trailing you. And I’m sure they’ve caught up to Doctor Watson by now.”

Sherlock swallowed hard. “John can take care of himself.”

Dimly, behind him, he could hear someone pounding on the door. John had arrived finally.

Moran smirked. “What about Doctor Hooper? You know, she does look fetching today. Wearing a very nice purple shirt. Yours, I believe. Does she just do it for fashion or to drive you mad? Because it doesn’t take a genius to figure out you’re desperate from sexual repression.”

Sherlock felt something deep and primal inside of him. An urge to lunge across the room, wrap his hands around Moran’s throat and choke the life out of him.

“I wouldn’t suggest that,” Moran said with a harsh rasp. “I’ve seen that look in men’s eyes before, Sherlock. I know when a man wants to kill. If I don’t walk out of here after this is over, at least one of your precious Doctors will be dead.”

“Moriarty already tried to ransom my allies,” Sherlock hissed. “It didn’t work.”

Moran bobbed his head in agreement. “Right. So this time, I’m proposing something much simpler. You back off.” He stepped towards Sherlock. “You know, Jim didn’t like to get his hands dirty. Let other people handle it for him. That’s why he had me. I have no problem sending you parts of John Watson. I have no problem making your bit of trim wish she were dead before I finally put a bullet in her brain. But I’m resisting. To quote a great philosopher: The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. I have people to think about. So just stay away from my network and you can keep your friends in one piece.”

Moran locked onto Sherlock’s gaze. “You know, you didn’t have to find me. I did this as a courtesy. I thought we should do this in person. Face-to-face like. Let you know just how serious I am. Jim always did like to keep things nice and proper.”

Without another word, Sherlock turned and unlocked the door. He didn’t need to say anything more. Moran knew what his answer was.

He opened the, stepping out in the corridor. He reached out and grabbed John before he threw himself at the now open door once again. There was a frantic expression on his face. “Sherlock? What the hell is going on? What were you thinking?”

Sherlock let go of John and just strode down the corridor.

“Sherlock?” John asked, shaking his head. “What the hell is going on?”

Sherlock continued towards the lifts, John chasing after him. “Sherlock!”

Sherlock was lying on the sofa, his finger steepled beneath his chin. One of his sleeves was rolled up. He could feel the pleasant tingling of the nicotine coming in contact with his skin. He was wearing three patches as he went over his encounter with Moran in his head, making note of every thing the assassin did and filing it away.

He heard the door open and the sound of light footsteps. Not John. He walked heavier. He didn’t flinch- didn’t even open his eyes- knowing exactly who had just come into the flat.

He felt the gentle weight against the sofa as Molly straddled his hips. He still had not moved.

“Give me your arm, Sherlock,” Molly demanded.

Sherlock let out a sigh. “I’m thinking.”

“I know that perfectly well,” Molly replied. Her soft, slender fingers wrapped around his wrist.
“And you’re doing it in the most unhealthy way possible.”

Sherlock finally opened his eyes, looking up at his lover. He tried to choke down the protective instincts that gripped him as he looked at her. She must have taken her hair down when she entered the flat, as the sandy brown locks were framing her face as she leaned in. “I do have to disagree. This is in fact the third unhealthiest way. I’m avoiding the second by using the patches. The first—”

“—you won’t even think about the first,” Molly cut him off. She pulled his hand to her, pressing kisses to Sherlock’s callused fingertips and palm. She took hold of one of the nicotine patches, peeling it off Sherlock’s skin and dropping it onto the coffee table. She proceeded to the next one, leaving Sherlock with only one patch left.

“It is a three-patch problem,” Sherlock insisted.

Molly reached up and ran a hand through Sherlock’s hair and he let out a soft groan at the feel of the delicate fingers carding through his tresses. “I’ll make up for the other two patches.”

Sherlock traced a finger over Molly’s cheek before outlining the edge of her lips. She let out a small mewl and captured the digit in her mouth. Sherlock groaned softly, his body recalling the feel of Molly’s mouth on other extremities. He pressed his hips upwards against her, causing her to release his finger with a small squeal. “Sherlock!”

Sherlock slipped his hand behind her neck, pulling her down towards him and taking her mouth. “Perhaps you would be a better way of clearing my head…”

Molly responded to his kiss, fingers gripping at the fabric of his shirt. “I did…” She gasped. “Mean stroking your hair.”

Sherlock nipped at Molly’s lower lip playfully. “But you straddled my lap and performed wanton and suggestive acts on my fingers.”

He pressed a kiss to her forehead. He had no real desire to take things further. His mind was preoccupied with Moran. He pulled Molly down onto him. She allowed him to position her, her slender frame moulding against his. Her head nestled neatly beneath his chin. Just having her against him helped.

He let out a small, contented sigh. How could he ever have believed this was a bad idea? That Molly would be detrimental to his life? Deep inside his head, something told him that the fact he let Moran walk away because he threatened Molly was detrimental. It seemed something of old logical self still remained in his mind. He talked himself out of his handily. Such stoic gestures only worked in bad movies.

Sherlock’s hand slid over her long, soft hair, smoothing down the locks. He was compelled to ask her to come back home, but he knew what the answer would be. He didn’t want to get into a row about it.

“Mrs Hudson is seeing her ‘gentleman caller’ from Chiswick again,” Sherlock commented idly, curling a lock of Molly’s hair around his index finger. “You didn’t want to be alone in her flat.”

“She is,” Molly replied. She tilted her head and pressed a kiss to Sherlock’s throat. “But that’s not why I’m here. I just wanted to see you.”

“I found Sebastian Moran,” Sherlock murmured. He’d considered keeping the information from Molly. He knew it would worry her to know exactly what had happened, maybe make her ashamed that he’d gone along with the deal. But he needed to share his burden. “We had a nice little chat.”

Molly lifted her head up. “Oh my God, Sherlock… Is he… Did he get arrested?”

Sherlock shook his head. “He’s made a contingency plan if I attempted anything against him.” He guided Molly back down to her spot against his chest.

“He threatened me and John, didn’t he? If something happened to him?”

Sherlock felt a swell of pride that his lover was able to deduce Moran’s plan so quickly. “Yes. It
did work well when Moriarty threatened those around me. Shows how little imagination Moran has.”

Molly sighed softly and Sherlock’s could feel her warm breath against his skin. “Isn’t Moran planning to kill me regardless?”

Sherlock’s arms slipped around Molly and he gripped her a bit tighter than he intended, causing her to squeak. “He… Suggested he would be very creative about it.”

Molly pressed closer to him and closed her eyes tightly. “Sherlock.”

Sherlock’s sighed softly as he felt Molly’s breath against his throat. He carded his fingers through her hair again. “I’m going to ask Mycroft to up the protection on you. Do you mind?”

Molly let out a small laugh against Sherlock. “Would you care if I did?”

“Fair point.” Sherlock knew she was scared. There was nothing he could say to reassure her. “I just need you to be safe.”

Molly pulled herself up and smiled down at Sherlock. “I feel safe with you, Sherlock. As crazy as those sounds and as much as my brothers may hate it…”

Sherlock brushed a thumb over Molly’s cheek. “So they finally called you about the newspaper article.”

Molly nodded. “Sheldon. I had to lie and say that of course we never broke up and that the newspaper just liked to make things up about you if they were having a slow news day.”

Sherlock let out a weak chuckle. “Very naughty, Doctor Hooper.”

Molly’s lower lip jutted out in thought. “So what are you going to do now, Sherlock? That you have to back off Moran?”

Sherlock sighed. “I’m not sure. I suppose I’ll take Miss Hunter’s case. Taking up other cases more seriously will show Moran I’ve backed off him. After a while, I’ll start to investigate him again. For now, I’ll settle for Irene. Her infiltration remains unknown to him.”

Molly leaned in and kissed Sherlock on the nose. “And what are you going to do right now?”

Sherlock ran his hands over Molly’s hips. “I was going to sit here and make a plan for dealing with Moran.” Sherlock lifted Molly up and shifted their positions so she sat on the couch. He put his head into her lap before handing her the remote. “You watch whatever crap television you’d like while I think.”

Molly ran a hand through Sherlock’s hair. “You’re going to be able to think we me around watching telly?”

Sherlock nodded. “Hm. I can block out the noise. I want you here while I think, but I don’t want you to be bored.”

Molly leaned over awkwardly to kiss Sherlock’s forehead before beginning to stroke his hair gently.

“Of course,” Sherlock sighed. “If I am unable to come up with any course of action, I might give up on the endeavour for now and simply snog you.”

Molly gave Sherlock a slight nudge. “Or else you’ll just end up watching with me.”
“I highly doubt that will happen.”

Three hours later, Sherlock was curled around Molly, scowling at the television. “What kind of crime scene investigators are these people? Even Anderson would do a better job than this! Is Miami really so bereft of forensic scientists? And why is he wearing sunglasses at night?”
Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

While Sherlock goes off to investigate the case of Violet Hunter, Molly is left in London to make plans with Greg and get to know Mary.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

PART THIRTY-SEVEN

Molly was sitting at a computer in her office, carefully transcribing Veronica's notes from her last post-mortem.

The door swung open and she smiled when she saw Sherlock stride in, carrying something behind his back. She gave him a warm smile as he immediately swooped in and pressed a kiss to her lips.

"Mm," Molly hummed happily. "That certainly breaks up the monotony of work. Thank you."

Sherlock jerked his head to the supply cupboard. "Give me ten minutes and I could completely obliterate any workplace ennui."

Molly giggled in a way that was entirely too girlish and she really didn't blame Sherlock when he rolled his eyes at her.

"It was just a joke, Molly," Sherlock assured her. He brought his hand out from behind his back, holding out a colourful gift bag to her. "This is for you."

Molly accepted the bag warily. She narrowed her gaze on her lover. "What have you done?"

Sherlock frowned, tilting his head. "What makes you think I've done something?"

"You're giving me a present for absolutely no reason," Molly replied. "That suggests to me you've done something I'm not going to be happy about."

She considered the situation for a moment.

"Okay, you've been pouring yourself into cases to show Moran that you're backing off him and show yourself that you're capable of working even with our relationship. This morning before I left, you'd gotten an email from Violet Hunter, so... You're going to Hampshire and you want to make sure I'm not upset about it by giving me a present."

Sherlock's lip curled in a half-smile. He leaned in close to her. "Doctor Hooper, are you sure you can't take ten minutes in the storage cupboard?"

Molly arched a brow. "Got it right, did I?"

Sherlock gave her a gentle nudge. "Open it."

Molly opened the bag and peered into it. She frowned slightly, pulling out the jar inside. She turned it, looking at it from every angle, at the organ perfectly preserved inside. "Sherlock... This is a human heart."

Sherlock smiled at Molly. "I had to use connections at another morgue. I wanted to surprise you and Veronica would never assist me in such an endeavour."

Molly shook her head slowly. "It's a human heart."

Sherlock seemed to deflate. "You don't like it."

"I didn't say that!" Molly protested. "It's just... Unexpected. I've never heard of a boyfriend giving a human organ preserved in a jar."

Sherlock nuzzled Molly's neck. "Would you have preferred flowers? I thought this was more
personal. I was also under the assumption- given your profession- you would appreciate the real thing rather than an inaccurate representation."

Molly laughed, despite the fact there was a pricking in her eyes. It was actually a terribly romantic present. But it was something that only Sherlock would ever do, making it all the more meaningful.

She got up from her seat and slipped a hand behind his neck, guiding him down to press their mouths together. "Thank you, Sherlock," she murmured against his lips. She then pulled back, giving him a small smile. "It's wonderful. Do you think you can do me a favour?"

Sherlock's brow furrowed in question.

"Can you keep it in 221B? I don't think Mrs Hudson will care for it and I'll get in trouble if I have it at my desk at work."

For some reason, this request made Sherlock absolutely beam. "You can keep anything you want at 221B. It can go on the mantel next to my skull."

Molly's hands slipped down Sherlock's coat, grasping his lapels. "As for the case, I'm not angry, Sherlock. It's work. I understand that. There are horrible things happening all over England that need the brilliant brain of Sherlock Holmes working on them. I'm not going to keep you in London if you're needed."

Sherlock nuzzled his nose against Molly's hairline. "Mycroft's men will be keeping a close eye on you. I don't want Moran to get any clever ideas while I'm away."

"I'll be fine," Molly insisted. "Mary and I can use the time to get to know each other better." Her fingers tightened on his lapels and she looked up into his eyes, which appeared greenish in the light. "Just... Be careful. Come back to me."

Sherlock brushed his lips against Molly's forehead. "Of course." He cupped her cheek, stroking it gently with his thumb. "Stay at 221B while I'm gone."

Molly's brow furrowed. "Sherlock..."

Sherlock's gaze was intense on her. "Molly, the only reason you are avoiding 221B is because you do not yet want to co-inhabit with me again. However, if I am not present, you will simply be inhabiting. My bed is far more comfortable than the sofa in Mrs Hudson's sitting room. Do look at this logically."

Molly considered it for a long moment. It really did make sense. She gave Sherlock a silent nod of agreement and he smiled. He pressed another kiss to her forehead before pulling away. "John is waiting for me. We've got to catch the next train." He tilted her head to kiss her lips once again, lingering against her mouth. "I'll send you a text."

Sherlock strode out of the office without another word and Molly went back to the desk to go back to work. After a moment, the door opened once again and Sherlock poked his head in. "Molly... You got one thing wrong. I always have a reason to give you a present."

Molly beamed at him. "There's always one thing, right?"

Sherlock winked before disappearing once again.

Molly curled up on the sofa in 221B. Toby was snuggled next to her, purring softly as Molly stroked his back. She held the phone to ear, listening to the rings. After a moment, it picked up.

"Molly, hi!" Greg answered. "Sorry. You caught me in the middle of paperwork."

Molly smiled. "I'm really sorry to bother you at work, Greg."

Greg laughed. "Not a bother... Like I said, you caught me in the middle of paperwork."

Molly gripped the phone a bit tighter. "I just thought... Well, I don't know if you know that Sherlock is out of town."
"I know," Greg replied. "He contacted me before he left. Wanted me to keep an eye on you. Moran and all."

"Did he?" Molly felt torn about this pronouncement. She didn't want to be followed around... Well, she supposed she was being followed by Mycroft's men, but they were very subtle about it. But there was also something nice about the idea that Sherlock wanted to make sure she was protected while she was away. In the end, she would come down on that side. She didn't want to be sore at Sherlock. Besides, things were very dangerous, even if Moran claimed to have made a deal with Sherlock.

"I didn't get to tell you before... But I'm really glad you and Sherlock have worked things out."

That rather surprised Molly. She wouldn't have thought Greg would have any opinion on her relationship with Sherlock other than morbid curiosity. "Really?"

"Of course," Greg replied. "That git was absolutely intolerable without you. He was going to drive us all spare."

Molly smiled softly. "I really should not enjoy that so much." But she did. The idea that Sherlock fell apart without her gave her a perverse pleasure. It amazed her that he really did truly need her.

She hesitated for a moment, uncertain she wanted to make her request. "Umm... Greg... Remember what I mentioned to you the last time we went out?"

Greg had been pretty pissed that night. That was the usual drill when it came to Molly and Greg going down to the pub with John and Stamford. But there was something about the silence on the other end. Greg knew exactly what she was talking about.

"Here I was hoping you were too drunk to remember that," Greg sighed. "Molly, are you really sure about this?"

Molly hugged her legs tightly. "I am. It's not like I want to do it... But it's never going to get any safer around here, is it? Not unless Sherlock suddenly he decides he wants to pursue beekeeping professionally."

"...Beekeeping?"

Molly sighed and rolled her eyes. "Don't get me started. Anyway, Sherlock does dangerous things and he gets a lot of dangerous people mad at him. I've had a gun pointed at my head twice because of him! John had bloody Semtex strapped to his chest! I have to be able to do something if I ever get into a tight spot."

Greg sighed deeply. "Have you talked to Sherlock about this, Molly?"

"Oh Lord no." It was not that she thought Sherlock would disapprove. On the contrary, he would most likely find it useful. But the truth was, she was uncomfortable with him knowing. It would be too tempting for him. He would think it a sign she wanted to investigate with him in a more active capacity than simply being his Pathologist.

Greg was silent again for a good while. Finally, he sighed. "Molly, I'm going to ask you just one more time: Are you sure about this?"

Molly swallowed hard. She really didn't want to do this, but it seemed like the wisest choice if she was really choosing to live a life with Sherlock. "Yes."


Molly smiled. "Thanks Greg. I owe you."

"You're as mad as he is," Greg grumbled. "Night Molly."

"Goodnight Greg." Molly hung up, just as the door to the flat opened and Mary entered, a miserable look on her face. Molly and Mary were still getting used to each other. They'd had dinner and coffee several times along with John. Now they were also both living within 221. It was still strange, without the buffer of the boys around. However, the look on Mary's face suggested she didn't at all need any awkwardness.
Molly immediately got to her feet, scaring Toby off with her movements. "You look like you could use a drink." She walked to the kitchen and poured a glass of wine from the bottle she'd already taken a drink from. She went back to the sitting room and offered the glass to Mary.

"Ta very much," Mary sighed before collapsing into John's favourite chair.

"Are you all right?" Molly asked, slipped back into her spot on the couch.

Mary rubbed her temple. "I got lost... And I nearly got run over by a cab."

Molly's hand went to her mouth. "Oh my God! Are you all right?"

Mary nodded before taking a gulp of the drink Molly had given her. "Just a bit shaken. I'll be fine." She sighed deeply. "I've been living in Africa for six years. I'm still suffering a bit of culture shock. To top it off, the interview I went on didn't go nearly as well as I had hoped."

Molly crinkled as she picked up her own wine glass, still half-full. "You didn't get the job?"

"Didn't feel my experience would translate well to their school." Mary sighed. "I spent six years working with children whom needed to be taught English before I could do anything else. You think I'd be able to handle some privileged little swots."

Molly idly ran her finger over the rim of her glass as she stared down into the red liquid. "You wish you hadn't left, didn't you?"

"I really liked the work I was doing," Mary admitted. "But I love John. And I have come to terms with the fact that he loves Sherlock. You of all people should know if you're in a relationship with one of them, you're in it with the other as well." She shook her head. "Besides, six years is a long time. It was probably time for a change. It's just going to take me a while to acclimatize. I just hope Sherlock is paying John enough that we can get ourselves our own flat."

"Don't feel you have to rush to move out," Molly said, a bit quicker than she meant to.

Mary arched a brow. "Just how long do you plan on holding out, Molly?"

Molly hesitated, finishing her glass of wine in one swallow. Her cheeks reddened. Whether it was from the alcohol or the question, Molly didn't know. "It's not like I have a set timetable on this whole thing. Being with Sherlock is wonderful. But it's... Intense. And after everything we've been through, I think we just need to take things slow. Wait for it to feel right."

"It feels right to him already," Mary commented with a small laugh. "You know he's been taking the things you had stored down in Irene's flat out and putting them in here." She pointed around the room.

Molly looked around and he eyes widened. She hadn't noticed that. How had she missed it? Some of her books were on one of the shelves next to Sherlock's. A photo of her parents on their wedding day was sitting on one of the end tables. The corners of her mouth curved up in a smile when she set her gaze on the preserved heart next to the skull. "That cheeky bugger," Molly said fondly.

Mary leaned back in her chair. "The truth is, I think he's starting to get excited about the idea of John and me moving out so you two can have the place all to yourselves."

Molly shook her head. "It's like training a labrador puppy." She sighed. "I don't know what I'm going to do with him."

"You're going to move in with him," Mary replied, shaking her head. "It's just a matter of time and you know it."

Molly thought about the statement. Really, it was true. Now that she and Sherlock were together, she couldn't see any other way than for it to be for keeps. But they had to tread carefully. She smiled again at the preserved heart on the mantel. "He needs to learn some patience still."

Molly let out a soft moan as she snuggled deeper into the pillow that smelled like Sherlock's shampoo. She could dimly hear the sound of her ringtone, which at this time of night was far too
chipper. She blindly reached to the bedside table, trying to locate it. She knocked over her glasses in the process and they clattered to the floor. "Dammit," Molly murmured, still half-asleep. Finally, her fingers brushed against the phone and she picked it up, answering. "'Lo," she yawned.

"Miss Hunter's employer has made some very strange requests of her with regard to her personal appearance. She has gone along with them. However, they do not at all relate to taking care of a child. In fact, in many ways, some of the changes could be considered ill advised for a child care worker."

Molly rolled over so she could nuzzle into the pillow once again. "Sherlock? Are you continuing a conversation you were having with John? Because I'm Molly. John's probably asleep." She reached a hand up to rub her eyes. "I'm probably asleep too."

"You wanted me to let you know I was still alive," Sherlock replied innocently. "This is your notice I am still fully functioning."

"You said you would send a text," Molly closed her eyes and felt herself warmed by Sherlock's voice in her ear. "I decided to call you instead."

Molly smiled despite her weariness. "You know, most men start a late night call to their girlfriend with 'What are you wearing?'"

"Why would it matter what you are wearing?" Sherlock asked. Molly could almost hear his eye roll. "That's a ridiculous detail to know for a phone conversation. Your state of dress makes absolutely no difference to me. Besides, you are asleep, meaning you wear what you always wear for sleeping. So Mr Rucastle is a widower with a six-year-old son..." Sherlock trailed off. "What are you wearing?"

Molly's smile grew. She briefly buried her face in the pillow before going back to the phone. "One of your t-shirts."

Sherlock went quiet for a moment. "That's not a lot of information, Molly."

Molly's smile became a full grin. "That's not a lot of clothing, Sherlock."

"Oh." Sherlock's voice raised in pitch slightly. "OH." He cleared his throat and his voice returned to his low purr. "You're not wearing anything else?"

"Not even a little bit," Molly stretched in the bed. Her toes curled into the sheets. "You're only wearing my t-shirt and you're sleeping in my bed." Sherlock stated plainly. "You would never be so free in Mrs Hudson's sitting room."

Molly let out a small giggle. She felt somewhat mischievous, alone in the dark with nothing but Sherlock's voice. "I am in your bed. It feels strange not having you here with me in it."

Molly could hear Sherlock swallow. "You sleep without me often."

"I never like it though," Molly replied, closing her eyes. "I like feeling your arms around me. Feeling your warmth."

"Molly Hooper," Sherlock's voice had grown deeper. "You need to stop this right now."

"Stop what?" Molly asked innocently.

"I am on a case," Sherlock replied. "I cannot be distracted. I need to keep my mind clear. You are muddling me."

"Am I?" Molly asked breathily.

"Molly..."

"I'm just talking," Molly teased.

"No, you are making me want to come home," Sherlock replied. There was still a strain to his
Molly couldn't help but smirk. "But if you came home, I'd have to go back and sleep on the sofa."

Sherlock groaned. "Then let's not start something we cannot see through. I believe that is called being a tease."

Molly giggled. She had never in her life been called a tease. There was something very empowering about the idea of being able to cause this sort of reaction in Sherlock. "Maybe I should hang up then, if I'm so distracting," Molly sighed. "I was in the middle of a very good dream. It was you... and me..."

"Molly," Sherlock said firmly.

"What do you dream about, Sherlock?" Molly asked innocently.

"Pirates," Sherlock replied. "I dream about pirates."

"Am I in your dreams?" Molly cooed.

Sherlock paused for a long time. Finally, she heard in take in a sharp breath. "Yes."

"What do we do in your dreams, Sherlock?"

Sherlock groaned. "I have to get back to the case, Molly. I'm still alive. That should be sufficient."

"Mm," Molly closed her eyes and felt the weariness begin to take over her again. "Thank you for still being alive. Stay that way."

"Molly, I-" Sherlock trailed off. He sighed. "Good night."

Molly pouted slightly. She'd been hoping that he would say something else. "Good night, Sherlock."

"I-" Sherlock started once again. "-Hope to return to London by the end of the week."

Apparently, he knew what she was expecting and was trying to tease her now.

"I-" Sherlock again trailed off after the first word.

"I'm going to hang up, Sherlock," Molly sighed. "I need to get some sleep."

"I love you," Sherlock finally said.

Molly smiled. She knew those words would not come often and would treasure them when they did. "I love you too, Sherlock. Stay safe."

Molly hung up the phone and set it back on the nightstand. She curled up in the bed. It was comfortable and warm, but without Sherlock with her, it felt far too big and empty.
Chapter End Notes

In my brain, Sherlock dreams “The Pirate and the Doctor” by Petra Todd. Which if you haven’t read... WHY HAVEN’T YOU? It's amazing. BTW, one fic character dreaming about being another fic character is what we call “Fic-ception”.

(Art by Lexie)
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

Sherlock delves deeper into the case at the Copper Beeches, which takes a disturbing turn.

When Violet Hunter came into 221B with questions about her potential employer, she looked like an ordinary woman not long out of uni. She had dressed conservatively in a cerise cardigan and worn jeans. Her chestnut hair had gone mid-way down her back. John had commented that she was an attractive woman, something John was wont to do whenever they had a comely client. Sherlock had reminded John that Mary would be displeased to hear such comments about someone so young before checking his phone to see if Molly had replied to his text.

Looking upon Miss Hunter now only a scant few weeks later, one would be hard-pressed to believe they were the same woman. None of the changes made sense for a woman who was employed as a nanny. Sherlock remembered his own nannies from childhood and how they were expected to look presentable. Everyone who worked for the Holmes family was expected to carry themselves with as much decorum and class as the family itself. Mrs Hudson herself had been reprimanded more than once for her lax attitude back when she had still been in the family employ. Sherlock suspected the strict rule of his mother was one of the reasons Mrs Hudson had chosen to leave as soon as it she was financially able to.

Instead of the demure and conservative young woman he had met, Miss Hunter now wore a short black dress and a leather jacket. Her long tresses had been sheered to her shoulders and were now an alarming shade of electric blue.

Sherlock already had several theories as to why Miss Hunter had been instructed to reinvent her look for her new job. They were hampered by Miss Hunter's inability to let him and John into the Copper Beeches, the estate Miss Hunter was staying at. Instead, she met with Sherlock in the lounge of the bed and breakfast he and John were staying at.

She looked thoroughly miserable, her arms crossed over her chest as she relayed her activities.

"The boy I'm suppose to look after is absolutely ghastly," Miss Hunter told John and Sherlock. "When I first arrived at the Copper Beeches, he gave me a dead bird."

Sherlock nodded. "Fascination with dead animals is not in of itself an indicator of personality defect, as I vehemently told the doctors I was taken to."

John furrowed his brow. "You..."

Sherlock gave him a look. "I was attempting to quell my scientific curiosity. It was dissection, not vivisection. They were dead when I collected them."

"He shot this bird," Miss Hunter insisted. "He wanted it to suffer."

Sherlock nodded. "Well, that is a more troubling characteristic. However, I do not believe you've brought us all the way up from London to discuss your charge. It is rather his father that has you worried. He is the one who has insisted upon your physical change."

Miss Hunter nodded. "As soon as I arrived at the Copper Beeches, he asked me to start dressing like this and change my hair."

Sherlock folded his hands beneath his chin. "Just why did you agree to take the employment, Miss Hunter?"

Miss Hunter gave a small shrug. "I've got a lot of loans to pay off for school and it's tough to find work. It seemed like a small price to pay considering the money Mister Rucastle was offering."

Sherlock let out a derisive snort. It seemed a stupid reason to take a job that was obviously so
disconcerting. Then, as John and Molly had pointed out to him, money had little meaning to him due to having it. But choosing this job over all the other choices? He thought about if Molly had been unable to reacquire her job at Barts. He would have forbidden her from taking this sort of employment.

Sherlock eyed Miss Hunter carefully. "Mister Rucastle has a daughter. Recently left the family home."

Miss Hunter nodded. "Yes. He does. She's studying in America. How did you..."

John sighed, shaking his head. "Don't even bother."

"He's dressing you in a manner to replace his daughter," Sherlock replied quickly, ignoring John's interruption. "It is does seem a curious thing for a father to have such a relationship with his daughter to want to replace her when she leaves his home. Not at all natural."

Miss Hunter wrung her hands. "There are stranger things still. There's been... A man. Outside. He scales the fence and is outside the window. I can feel him watching me."

Sherlock's eyes lit up. "Why didn't you mention this earlier, Miss Hunter?" he leapt to his feet. "Don't you get it? It's so obvious!"

John shook his head slowly. "What's obvious, Sherlock?"

"Miss Hunter isn't a nanny. She's a decoy. Mr Rucastle's daughter, I'm sure she left the country quickly."

Miss Hunter nodded slowly. "It seems so, yes."

"The man outside is Miss Rucastle's stalker. You're replacing her so he doesn't realize she's left."

John's brow furrowed. "That seems overly complicated. If she was being stalked, why not just call the police?"

Sherlock snorted. "The police? Do you know the success rate of complaints against stalkers? Most of the time, the complainant will get so police attention until they are physically harmed or else killed. A much wiser plan on the part of Rucastle."

"Am I in any danger?" Miss Hunter asked, her eyes going wide.

Sherlock gave a curt nod. "Yes. Considerable. A man who has progressed to the point of stalking will do anything to be with the object of his affections and getting rid of anyone who stands in his way. As the decoy for Miss Rucastle, you stand in the way. He might even inflict particular torment upon your for the temerity to impersonating his obsession."

Miss Hunter's eyes widened. Without another word, she fled the lounge.

Sherlock sat back down in his chair, pressing the pads of his fingers together, tucking his hands beneath his chin as he became to think about the next course of action. Of course, the simplest solution was for Miss Hunter to leave the employ of the Rucastles. That resolution was lacklustre. While Sherlock wanted to declare the mystery solved and return to London- and Molly- he couldn't shake the feeling there was something he was still missing.

"Sherlock," John's voice was laced with irritation.

Sherlock arched a brow and looked to his companion. "Why do you say my name like you're irritated with me?"

"You-" John started. He then shook his head. "Never mind. I'm going to go after Miss Hunter. I'm going to get her a room here for the tonight. We're going to watch after her."

"If you feel that's a necessity," Sherlock murmured, not really listening to John.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see John wave his hands at him in annoyed dismissal. Sherlock closed his eyes and began sorting through his mind palace, planning out the next step in his investigation.
He would be heading out to the Copper Beeches before eleven. Once John had calmed down Miss Hunter, she had told them this was around the time the stalker was showing up at the estate.

Sherlock let himself fall back onto the bed in his small room, the phone to his ear. He had thought about just texting her to tell her about his wellbeing, but he felt an ache to hear her voice. It had been nineteen hours and twenty minutes since they had last spoken. If he waited until he returned, it would be over a day since he spoke to her.

"Sherlock?" Molly said. He could hear other voices in the background. Three of them. Laughing. The voices were getting fainter.

"You are socializing with Mrs Hudson, Irene and Mary."

"We went out shopping today. I had the day off."

Sherlock felt some regret that Molly's day off work was spent with Mrs Hudson, Irene and Mary rather than himself. He closed his eyes and allowed himself to focus solely on Molly's voice. "Did you have fun?"

"I bought a nightdress."

Sherlock's brow furrowed in confusion. "Why do you need a nightdress? I have plenty of shirts for you to wear to bed."

"Because it's pretty," Molly replied simply.

Sherlock let out a sigh, opening his eyes and sitting up. "What does it matter if it is pretty, Molly? It's something you wear when it's dark and you are asleep. You are neither able to see it nor aware you are wearing it."

"It makes me feel pretty."

He could now hear a hurt tone in Molly's voice, but continued on. "My point is still valid. Molly, you are pretty. I don't see how a piece of clothing is going to make any difference to your self-image while you are sleeping."

He heard Molly let out an exasperated sigh. "It's not for sleeping, you clot. It's for you."

"For me? Why would I..." Then, it hit him. He laid back on the bed again, his eyes wide. "Oh. Really?"

Molly broke into a fit of bashful giggles. "Irene helped me pick it out."

Sherlock chuckled. Based on the way Molly was giggling and most certainly blushing, it seemed like he might have something to thank Irene for. "Doctor Hooper, are you trying to seduce me?"

Molly giggled again. "Maybe."

Sherlock wasn't sure how this fit into the celibacy Molly had enforced. It seemed she was much freer when it came to verbally expressing herself, as long as they were not making eye contact. A part of him wanted to end the communication. He had a case to focus on. Yet he wanted to explore this deeper. "What does it look like?" He noticed his voice had dropped an octave. His heart was thundering. Not really the state he wanted to be in while Molly was over a hundred kilometres away.

Molly's giggles had subsided. "Guess."

Sherlock sighed, rolling his eyes. "Molly, I have no data and I do not guess."

"You have data," Molly purred. Sherlock took a sharp intake of breath at the sound of her voice. "You know me. What would I pick out to drive you wild?"

Sherlock squeezed his eyes shut and his hand gripped the phone just a bit tighter. "Molly, I'm on a case." The idea of deducing what Molly had bought to entice him was tempting. But he knew it would lead to nothing but frustration if he were to give in.
"Oh." He could hear the disappointment in Molly's voice.

Sherlock sighed. He didn't want to hear that discontentment in Molly's voice. The truth was, he really did want to figure out what she would buy for him. She so rarely let him use his skills on her. "Perhaps this is merely wishful thinking, but there are no clasps on it? Anything that would make it difficult to remove?"

Molly's voice brightened considerably. "No. It just slips over my head."

Sherlock exhaled, his imagination running wild: slipping his hands beneath the garment and dragging it up her body, making sure to caress the flesh beneath before tugging it over her head and abandoning it on the floor. He squirmed on the bed. "It's satin. Light pink. With lace. Falls to mid-thigh. The neckline is favourable to your bust, but I will be focused on your neck. You have a lovely neck, Molly."

Molly let out a laugh. "This is compared to yours? All long and pale with your open collar... Mm. You're just asking for a love bite."

Sherlock groaned, tilting his head back to expose his neck, despite knowing rationally that Molly was not there to take advantage of it. "Wear it when I come home?"

Molly went quiet.

It was plainly obvious what she was thinking.

"Molly are you trying to tell me you have absolutely no problem trying to turn me into a sweaty mess over the phone, but you wish to cling to some sort of non-existent maidenly virtue when I return home? Despite the fact you have employed our landlady and a dominatrix... As well as I suspect my best friend and his fiancée... In order to reign in your own hormones?"

Molly sighed. "Sherlock, I don't want to move back in yet."

Sherlock sighed. "Molly, at the risk of sounding ungentlemanly, right now I don't give a toss about you moving back in. I just want to shag you into the mattress."

Molly went quiet once again.

"Molly?" Sherlock groaned inwardly. He was still unused to taking people's emotions into account.

"You got one thing wrong," Molly finally said.

Sherlock sat up. "Oh, did I? There's always one thing..."

He could hear Molly smiling. "It's black."

With that, Molly hung up unceremoniously.

Sherlock fell back onto the bed and let the phone drop down beside him. He let out a sigh. He was so confused about the new dynamic of his relationship with Molly. He wanted to traverse it properly, to get to the intended destination, but it all seemed to taking much too long.

He realized only after a minute it was the first time he'd talked to Molly during a case when he did not bring up the case in question. He was surprisingly okay with that fact. He wouldn't have traded the mental image of Molly's new nightdress for anything in the world. He closed his eyes to allow himself to fall into the picture he had created in his mind.

He would have allowed himself to indulge further, except there was a knock at the door. He took a deep breath, trying to gain control of his body once again. "Just a minute, John."

"Mr Holmes?" It was Miss Hunter. "It's Violet."

Sherlock rose to his feet and opened the door. "May I help you, Miss Hunter?"

Miss Hunter stepped into the room. She smiled at Sherlock. "I'm sorry. Am I bothering you, Mister Holmes?"
Sherlock grabbed his long coat, holding it in front of himself while he waited for the problem Molly had wrought to subside. "I was going to be going to Copper Beeches to intercept your- or rather, Miss Rucastle's- stalker."

Miss Hunter's smile widened. "I wanted to thank you. For everything you're doing."

"It is my job, Miss Hunter. You hired me to discover why Mr Rucastle was..."

Sherlock stopped when Miss Hunter reached back and unzipped her dress, letting it fall to the ground. Sherlock stared at his now nude client impassively. "You'll catch a chill like that, Miss Hunter."

"You could keep me warm," Miss Hunter replied.

Sherlock remained cool. "Perhaps you are confused as to what services a consulting detective provides."

"I'm just trying to show my gratitude." Miss Hunter stepped towards Sherlock, placing her hands against his chest. She leaned in, brushing her lips against his.

Sherlock jerked back. "Many of my clients favour sending a tin of biscuits at Christmas." He took a hold of Miss Hunter's hands, moving them away. "I have a girlfriend."

"Oh." Miss Hunter looked down. "I heard that wasn't an issue anymore..."

"The papers are hardly a reliable source of information," Sherlock replied. He donned his jacket. "You may redress yourself while John and I go to Copper Beeches."

Sherlock was almost out the door when suddenly Miss Hunter yelped. "Oh! Mister Holmes! Be careful of the dog!"

"Dog?"

Sherlock jumped back as the giant mastiff leapt at the bars of the gate, snapping and biting in a vain attack.

"Afraid of dogs?" John said with a small smirk.

Sherlock glowered at his friend. "I've preferred felines ever since Baskerville."

He then went stock straight, hearing footsteps approaching. He put a hand on John's shoulder. "There's someone coming."

He dragged John back into the bushes, watching the figure approach.

He was a young man. No more than twenty. His hair was dyed black, but even in the dim light of the night Sherlock could see roots coming in where he was blonde. His style of dress matched that of what Violet Hunter was now forced to wear.

The boy reached into the satchel he carried, taking out a piece of meat wrapped in butcher's paper. He threw the meat to the dog, distracting him while he started to scale the fence.

Sherlock darted out of the bushes and grabbed the boy by the waist, pulling him off the gate. The boy writhed in his arms.

"Hey!" The boy demanded. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Why are you stalking Miss Rucastle?"

"What?" The boy yelped. "Stalking? What are you talking about? Where is Alice?"

John stepped in front of the struggling boy. "We're going to take you to the police. Stalking in a crime."

"I'm not stalking my girlfriend!" The boy protested.

"Oh, she's your girlfriend?" Sherlock mocked. "A common enough response for a stalker."
Believing he has a relationship with his target he does not...

"I do!" The boy stopped fighting with Sherlock. "I can prove it to you!"

Sherlock finally let the boy go, intrigued by this new development. Perhaps the boy was telling the truth. Or perhaps he would just show Sherlock something that would confirm his suspicions.

The boy took something out of his pocket and held it out. Sherlock accepted it, looking it over. It was a photo of the boy and a girl who looked very much like Violet Hunter- Alice Rucastle.

"A lot of men stalk their ex-girlfriends," John insisted.

"She wasn't my ex," The boy insisted. "We were going to get married."

"Why should we believe you?" John asked.

"Because it's the truth!" The boy insisted.

Sherlock held up a hand. "John," He looked down at the boy. "When was the last time you saw Miss Rucastle?"

"A month ago," The boy replied. "She asked me to run away with her. Her dad doesn't like me."

"Any particular reason why?"

The boy shrugged. "He's protective of her. Has been ever since her mum died seven years ago."

"Seven years ago? But Alice's brother is-" It was like something sparked in Sherlock's mind. Suddenly, all of the pieces were falling into place. He looked to John.

"Figured it out, have you?"

Sherlock nodded slowly. "This may be only time I've ever hoped I'm wrong."
Chapter Summary

While Sherlock is away, Molly attempts to have a normal life, only for things to take a dangerous turn.

With her part-time position at Barts, Molly found herself with another day off. She felt a deep sense of regret Sherlock was not back in London to spend the day with her. She imagined what they would have done were he there. Sherlock would have woken her with gentle affection, a desire for more curling in her stomach as Sherlock's hands slipped over her. Later, they'd find themselves in the sitting room. Sherlock would be working on one of his experiments, while Molly typed on her laptop. She'd been working on a paper, her first one in over a year. Sherlock had effectively swallowed her life after his death and she hadn't the time to work on any research.

But instead of waking up with Sherlock, she awoke alone.

She was still able to work on her paper. In fact, without Sherlock there, she was able to get proper work done on it. Sherlock wasn't hanging over her shoulder, making comments on everything from her methodology to her grammar. After criticizing her, Sherlock always became disdainful of the peer review process. He had more than once suggested she just post her papers on a blog that 'was not covered in kittens and flowers'. Despite his disparagements about the process, Molly reading from her paper was the definitive way of getting a snog from Sherlock. She felt a thrill at finding a partner who did not just tolerate her braininess, but had a fetish for it.

Her train of thought was interrupted by the sound of the door opening. Irene strode in, dressed as Molly had never seen her before.

She looked... Normal.

She did not look like a poised and perfect dominatrix. She was wearing baggy trousers and a shapeless blouse. She wore another wig, this one matching Molly's own hair colour.

Molly arched a brow as she looked over the woman. "Uhh..." She scrunched up her nose. "Is this a joke at my expense?"

"No," Irene said carefully, smoothing down her blouse. "It's an homage. You don't like it?"

Molly bit her lip. "I'm just a bit confused as to why this is happening."

"Well," Irene smirked and the illusion of her likeness to Molly was ruined, the dominatrix clear once again. "I've had absolutely no luck seducing your boyfriend. I thought this might help me out. He is ever so fond of you."

Molly cocked her head. "Do you ever get tired of making everything a sexual innuendo?"

Irene seemed considered this query. She then shook her head slowly. "Not really. No. When people think I'm just a silly sex worker, they underestimate me. That's a powerful weapon to have at your disposal. You should know all about that, Doctor Hooper. People underestimate you all the time. Look at what you've done."

Molly looked down. "Oh. Well... Why are you really dressed like me?"

"For lunch," Irene replied. "You said we were going out with your friend Meena and I thought it would be a good cover to be your cousin."

"Um." Molly moved her laptop onto the coffee table and got to her feet. "No offense Irene, but I did mean I was going to lunch with my friend Meena."

"But I'm bored," Irene replied, a slight pout in her voice. "I've not had any leads on Moran and Mycroft is keeping Anthea busy... I'm not just going to stay around this flat. Besides, you're going
to be talking about Sherlock. Do you think I would miss that?"

Molly cocked her head, eyeing Irene. This seemed like a disaster waiting to happen.

Ever the clever one, Irene was able to read Molly's look. "Oh please, Doctor Hooper... Like I don't know how to comport myself around..." She laughed. "Average people. I promise your friend will have absolutely no idea that I am a dominatrix criminal who is supposed to be dead."

Molly eyed Irene uncertainly. "I really don't know about this..."

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Molly stood in the restaurant, Irene by her side. "How did this happen?"

Irene leaned close to Molly and gave her a grin. "Oh, Doctor Hooper... I did best your boyfriend at one point in a matter far more serious than this. You think I couldn't talk my way into lunch with you and your friend?"

"Molly!" Meena called out from the corner table. She was on her feet, making her way towards Molly and Irene.

Arms wrapped around Molly and hugged her tightly. Molly hugged back, feeling a wave of guilt. It was the first time Molly had gotten the chance to see Meena since her wedding. They had attempted to go out several times, but something- usually Sherlock- always seemed to get in the way. When had Molly become the type of girl who ignored her friends in favour of her boyfriend?

"It's good to see you," Molly said as Meena pulled back.

"Cousin actually." Irene's voice was different. It was not her American accent, but rather something close to Molly's own. Less posh that the one she typically used. Irene really could be all things. "Renee. It's great to meet you, Meena. Molly's told me so much about you!"

Molly gave Meena a small, apologetic smile. "I should have told you. I'm sorry. It was last minute."

"Oh don't worry," Meena waved her hand. "The more the merrier. I just hope Renee hasn't heard so much about your boyfriend she gets bored. You have to tell me absolutely everything."

"Everything?" Molly repeated nervously as they sat down at the table. "Everything is... A lot."

Meena held her hands up. "Molly Hooper, do not even pretend this isn't a big deal. You went on about the man for three years. He is also a famous Consulting Hottie. Yeah, we're going to talk about how you've been shagging the smart of out him for nearly a year and you didn't say anything."

"Not a year," Molly said, shifting in her seat. "It's only been... Nine months?" That hardly sounded better. "Besides, you need to tell me how married life is."

Meena waved her hand dismissively. "I'm married, boring in the default setting. And you've already heard me go on about Tim. Come on, Molly! Sherlock Holmes. What's he like in the sack?"

It felt like Molly's cheeks might catch fire with the heat in them. "Meena, I don't know if Renee..." Molly glanced to Irene, who leaned against her hand, a smirk on her face. "Oh well...

"I think you're going to have to answer the question, dear cousin," Irene giggled.

"It's..." Molly looked down. "It's well, you know."

"Stop," Meena said flatly, rolling her eyes. "I'm blushing. You've been mad on this man for years and all you can say is 'it's you know'?"

"Oh look, a menu," Molly said quickly, picking up the menu and focusing intently on the list of dishes.

"You are no fun, Molly," Meena sighed.
Molly glanced up. She frowned slightly as she caught sight of a woman who had been seated next to them. "For good reason."

With Sherlock's obsession with sharing his observations, Molly began to notice things as well. She was not as keen as he was. She doubted anyone- save perhaps Mycroft- were.

She had been on the street when she and Irene had been walking to the restaurant. She was typing on a laptop, but kept on glancing back at the table. In particular, she was looking at Molly.

Molly got to her feet and walked to the woman. Now face-to-face, she recognized the woman.

"Not exactly the big scoops you were getting a year ago, is it, Kitty?" Molly said firmly, closing the woman's laptop. "Of course, you're really lucky to have any sort of career after the mess you made with Moriarty."

Kitty Riley got to her feet and smiled at Molly. "Well, a girl's got to do, Miss Hooper. Why don't you answer your friend's question? Or are you a bit shy, since you and Sherlock have broken up?"

Molly shook her head. "What makes you think I would dignify anything you asked with an answer?"

Meena was on her feet, coming to stand behind Molly and gripping her shoulders. It was nice to have someone supporting her, as Molly felt her knees shaking at standing up to the reporter. She understood Irene not coming to her aid. She was infamous and supposed to be dead. The best thing for her was to blend into the scenery.

"If you didn't want the public gasping for information about you, then you shouldn't have helped Sherlock Holmes fake his death and then start boffing him," Kitty replied airily. "Really, Miss Hooper- don't be naïve."

"It's Doctor Hooper," Molly replied venomously. "And my relationship is absolutely no one's business. And if I was going to give an interview, you better believe I would pick a reporter that isn't the scum of the Earth."

"You know Rich told me about you," Kitty said, moving closer to Molly. "Said you two had a bit of thing."

"Jim was gay," Molly pointed out. "Get your facts right."

Kitty smiled tightly. "Believe me, Rich was not gay. I was quite thorough in my research there."

Molly laughed coldly. "Hardly something to boast about." She turned to look at Meena. "Come on. I don't think I like the look of this place anymore."

Molly could feel Greg's hands on her shoulders, keeping her braced as she fired the gun at the target. Her arms already ached from the recoil of the weapon. She just wanted to focus on the lesson, but she found her mind going back to her encounter with Kitty Riley.

Once Molly was done unloading the clip, she frowned when she saw she'd entirely missed the target, instead hitting around it.

Greg moved the protective muff from her ear slightly. "Come on, Molly. Let's take a break."

He led her away from the firing range. Once away from the sound of gunfire, Molly slipped off her earmuffs and goggles, looking to Greg with a frown. "I'm doing awful, aren't I?"

Greg shook his head. "No, Molly, you're-" He paused for a moment. "Well, all right. You're crap. But it's your first time out. It could be worse." He furrowed his brow. "Is everything all right? You seem to be a bit... Off."

Molly sighed, shaking her head. "It's nothing, Greg. I just had a bit of a run-in with a reporter. It wasn't pleasant."

"That might go a ways to explaining your difficulty," Greg said, running a hand through his hair. "When you're shooting, you've got to keep yourself calm."
Molly shook her head. "If I'm going to be firing a gun, I'm not going to be calm. I'll probably be screaming my head off."

Greg gave Molly a stern look. "You've got to force yourself to be calm. Take a breath, hear your heartbeat. Keep steady and fire."

Molly nodded, knowing if anyone knew how to shoot a gun it was Greg. Well, she supposed John did as well. But John wouldn't be able to keep it a secret from Sherlock. Not that she thought it would be a secret for long anyway.

"Why do you want to learn to shoot anyway?" Greg asked, his brow knitting as he looked at Molly. "I know Sherlock's got enemies, but..."

"But what?" Molly challenged. "He'll always be able to protect his 'little woman'? You know that's not true. And I don't want him putting himself in danger to protect me because I can't do it myself. I'm not going to start prowling the streets of London with him, but if someone comes to our flat looking for trouble, I want to be able to protect myself."

Greg shook his head. "You know, I don't know a lot of women who would not only put up with what Sherlock does, but actually try to make things easier for him. I mean, Christ... My job's not nearly as mad as Sherlock's and still Becca wants me to quit."

"How's everything going with you two?" Molly asked.

Greg shrugged. "Well, we got married again."

Molly smacked him on the shoulder. "What? Are you serious? How come this is the first I've heard about it? Congratulations! You didn't invite us?"

Greg laughed, shaking his head. "We didn't invite anyone. Come on, getting re-married to the woman I divorced a year and a half ago? We just went off to registrar's office. No need to make a fuss out of it."

"Still you could have told." Molly beamed at him. "So I guess things are going well."

Greg grimaced. "Actually, Becca's not talking to me right now. Dayton's decided to become a cop. She's none too happy."

Molly's smile quickly faded. "Oh Greg. I'm sorry."

Greg shook his head. "Ah, she'll get over it eventually. Police work is in the family blood. Probably pregnancy hormones to boot. Those things are deadly." He laughed. "Kind of look forward to Sherlock having to go through that with you."

Molly's eyes widened and her mouth gaped. "Whu? No... Ahh..."

Molly was spared the awkwardness of continuing the conversation when Greg's mobile went off. He held up a hand. "Half a mo, Molly." Greg went into his jacket and pulled out his phone, putting it to his ear. "Lestrade."

He took a few steps away, talking low so Molly couldn't hear. He then suddenly looked up, turning back to her. "I'll be in soon."

He hung up and walked back to Molly.

"Work?" Molly sighed. "I understand. Kind of getting used to men having to run out on me because of a murder."

The expression on Greg's face was grave. "Molly, the reporter you had the run in with today... Was that Katherine Riley?"

Molly nodded. "Yeah. Kitty. You would think she would get over reporting on Sherlock, considering that whole mess with Moriarty got her fired. Why-" She trailed off. "She's dead."

Greg nodded.

Molly bit her lower lip. "Right. It was Moran."
Greg shook his head. "Doesn't match his M.O. It was intimate. It was... Messy."

Molly recalled what Kitty had said about her relationship with Jim. She took a deep, trembling breath. "Believe me, Greg... It was Moran."

Greg gripped Molly's shoulders. "Baker Street is on my way. Let me drop you off."

Molly felt a surge of gratitude towards Greg even as the horror twisted her stomach. It seemed despite his détente with Sherlock, Moran was still watching her closely.
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

The case at Copper Beeches reaches its climax and Sherlock tries to comfort Molly about the murder of Kitty Riley.

Chapter Notes

For this chapter alone there are TRIGGER WARNINGS for Imprisonment and mentions of rape and incest.

Sherlock could count on one hand the number of times he wished he had been wrong about a hypothesis. While being right in any situation gave him a deep sense of satisfaction, there were some things even he could gain no pleasure in predicting were fact.

This was one of those rare occasions.

After apprehending Alice Rucastle’s fiancé- Hayden Fowler- from the Copper Beeches, Sherlock and John had spent the next few hours interrogating him for any more information.

At the end of their interview, Sherlock became even more sickeningly sure of his theory.

He did not share it with either John or the Fowler boy. Fowler would just become irrational and attempt to lay siege to the manse, most likely getting himself arrested in the process. John would have insisted upon calling the authorities.

As much as he wished he were not right, Sherlock was positive he was and despite the repulsive circumstances, he wanted to see things through to the end.

Further interview with Miss Hunter revealed that Rucastle was an amateur photographer, having a dark room in the Copper Beeches he kept locked at all times.

A highly unlikely scenario. Even the most fastidious of photographers were using DSLRs in lieu of traditional film cameras. Just acquiring the proper equipment for a dark room would have been quite difficult. While it was not an impossible scenario, when matched against the other evidence, it was the only solution that made sense.

Getting into the Copper Beeches during the day would be nearly impossible. Miss Hunter insisted that Rucastle allowed no visitors, most likely fearing the discovery of his unsavoury activities.

As luck would have it, Rucastle had decided to spend the evening at his club. This left only the servants to stop their entry. With the help of Miss Hunter, they would without a doubt be able to enter the estate.

Sherlock sat on the bed in John’s room, his long legs stretched out before him and his fingers pressed together beneath his chin as he went through all of the variables of their investigation. Dimly, he heard John loading bullets into his gun. While it was unlikely he would need to use it, it was a wise decision to bring it. Considering what Rucastle was doing, were he to interrupt their break in, he would react violently.

The biggest wild card in their attempt was Hayden Fowler. The boy was slavishly devoted to Alice Rucastle. He had gone to the home every night since her disappearance. Stupid boy.

But... Was he? Could Sherlock honestly say he would not doggedly pursue Molly were she snatched from him?

No, of course he would doggedly pursue her. But he would certainly do more than stand outside
her home, mooning like a schoolboy. He would also not be stupid enough to mistake another girl for her.

Sherlock opened his eyes as he heard his mobile jangle. He reached into his jacket to pull out the phone.

He noticed John stop loading his gun to look at him curiously.

"What?" Sherlock asked as he glanced down at his phone screen. It came up with a picture identifying the caller. He had only bothered giving one of his contacts a personalized image. It was a photo of Molly reading, wearing her glasses and her hair down, taken covertly at 221B.

"Just surprised you're answering your phone," John replied casually, going back to his gun.

"It's Molly," Sherlock replied tersely.

This just made John smirk.

Sherlock swung his legs off the bed and pulled himself to his feet. "Oh shut up." He answered his phone as he strode out the door, taking the few steps to his room next to John's. "Molly, if you have purchased another piece of alluring nightwear, this really isn't the best time. John and I are about to go out-"

He heard the shaking intake of breath. He went into his room and leaned heavily against the door. "What's wrong, Molly?"

"I just wanted to hear your voice." Molly's voice was small, weak. Tears were evident and based on the rasp of her voice, she had been crying for at least twenty minutes.

"What's wrong, Molly?" Sherlock repeated. "Is everyone all right?"

"It's Moran."

Sherlock immediately straightened up, hand poised at the door. Damn Rucastle and his obsession with his daughter. John would call the authorities from the train station. "I'm on my way."

"He's killed Kitty Riley."

Sherlock stopped. He sat down on the edge of his bed. "Is that all?" He let out a small laugh.

"Molly, why is that upsetting you?"

"Sherlock," Molly sobbed.

Sherlock sighed. Of course Molly would be upset. Molly would become upset if she heard a hiker in Outer Mongolia took a misstep and broke his neck. "What happened?"

Molly took a quavering breath and Sherlock wished he were there with her so he could hold her as she cried, trying to stem the flow of tears rather than ineffectually listening to them over the phone. "I went to lunch with Meena and Irene."

"Irene?" Sherlock snapped irritably. He didn't like the idea of the Woman socializing with Molly, which she seemed to be doing at every opportunity. "Why was she there?"

"Does it matter?" Molly sighed. "Anyway, Kitty had followed us and I told her off."

Sherlock felt a swell of pride at his lover. It seemed Mousy Molly was becoming a thing of the past. "And?"

"Well, then I was out at the shooting range with Greg."

Sherlock was on his feet in an instant. "You went out with Lestrade? And since when do you call him Greg?"

Molly sniffled. "Sherlock, that really isn't the issue..."

Sherlock began to pace. "I think it's a very important issue. I'm here trying to solve a case, meanwhile you're cavorting with Greg."
"Don't be a jealous twit!" Molly cried. "Greg is just a friend and he was doing me a favour. He and his wife just got remarried!"

"A friend that openly ogles you and believe me when I tell you the status of their marriage has never stopped either of the Lestrades from exploring outside opportunities." He paused for a moment, thinking back on what Molly had said. "Why were you at the shooting range?"

Molly went quiet. Her tears had abated and Sherlock reminded himself that the quickest way to stop Molly crying was to make her angry.

"Molly?" Sherlock asked quietly. "Why were you at the shooting range?"

"Greg is teaching me how to shoot a gun," Molly replied. "You keep on doing mad and dangerous things that get me into mad and dangerous situations. I'd like to be able to defend myself."

Sherlock wanted to tell Molly he'd always protect her. But he knew it was an empty promise to make. Molly had recognized this better than he had and taken precautions. Again he felt a sense of assuredness in his choice to pursue his romantic relationship with Molly. He also felt a sense of relief that she'd chosen this path rather than asking him to leave his work behind. He didn't know what he'd do were he faced with that decision. "You could have asked John. He's a better shot than Lestrade."

"John would have told you," Molly said quietly.

Sherlock found himself smiling. "But you told me."

"I didn't mean to."

Sherlock's brow furrowed. "Why didn't you want me to know?"

Again, Molly went quiet.

"Molly?" Sherlock lowered his voice the tenor he knew Molly found soothing.

"I thought you would take it as a sign I wanted to dash about London with you solving crimes."

Sherlock sighed. He couldn't say that the idea wasn't tempting to him. "I know you don't want that. You're far more comfortable in your morgue."

"Besides, John would get jealous," Molly said with a small, hollow laugh.

"So what happened with Kitty?" Sherlock asked, his free hand tightening into a fist when he heard Molly's soft whimper.

"Greg-Lestrade- got a call in the middle of my lesson. He told me Kitty had been found. You know, dead. It sounds like it was brutal."

Sherlock let out a small sigh and brought his free hand to his hair, ruffling his curls. "Molly, a woman like Kitty Riley had a lot of enemies. You can't jump to the conclusion it was Moran."

He could almost hear Molly worrying her lower lip. "When I saw her at lunch, Kitty said she had sex with Jim."

Sherlock took a deep breath. "All right. Moran killed Kitty." He sighed. "Molly, it's not your fault. Moran has an obsession with James Moriarty. Of course he's keeping an eye on you to make sure I keep up my end of the bargain. It's not your fault that Kitty decided to brag about the fact she had sex with a psychopathic criminal mastermind."

"Are you going to take the case?" Molly asked.

Sherlock snorted. "What case? Molly, you figured out who killed Kitty. There's nothing for me to investigate. I'm not about to put you in danger breaking my deal with Moran to bring her murderer to justice."

"Are you saying my life is more important than hers?"
Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Well yes." He shook his head. "Your life is more important than everyone's in my estimation."

"Everyone's?" Molly repeated.

Sherlock swallowed hard. "A case might be made for John. However- I-" He was starting to feel very uncomfortable. "I'll be home tonight. We're going to wrap up this case as soon as I get off the phone. We should be able to get the last train back to London."

Molly sniffled. Sherlock closed his eyes, wanting to shut out the noise of her sorrow. "Just stay at 221 with Mary, Mrs Hudson and Irene. I'll be back soon."

"Be safe, Sherlock."

"Molly?" Sherlock's tongue darted out, wetting his lips.

"Yes Sherlock?"

Sherlock took a deep breath, he then sighed. "I'll tell you when I come home."

"Just make sure to come home to me."

Sherlock hung up the phone and steeled himself, going to the door. He was more determined than ever to wrap up the case at the Copper Beeches.

The interior of the Copper Beeches was just as ominous as the grounds. It seemed out of time, the location of some Victorian murder mystery rather than the disappearance of a girl who- judging by the tattoo Miss Hunter has faked- was a fan of Killing Joke.

"Toller is already drunk," Miss Hunter whispered to Sherlock as she led him and John down the corridor. "His wife is taking care of him. You should have three hours before Mister Rucastle returns home." She pointed down the corridor. "Mister Rucastle's dark room is right down there."

"We won't need nearly that long," Sherlock said confidently. "Miss Hunter, I do suggest you go to your room. I highly doubt you will want to see what is in Rucastle's dark room."

"What is in there?" Miss Hunter asked.

"We'll take care of this."

Miss Hunter retreated and John eyed Sherlock suspiciously. "Sherlock, you've been being really cagey about the dark room. You don't really think..."

Sherlock arched a brow. "I don't really think what?"

"I mean, why would Rucastle keep his..."

"What are you doing here?" A small, dark voice asked.

Sherlock turned back around to face a young, dark-haired boy. Obviously the Rucastle boy. Sherlock leaned over to get on level with him. "It is rather late for a six year old to be awake."

"I'm seven," the boy said, standing up straight, defiance in his features.

Sherlock broke into a wide grin. "Is that what they told you? I suppose that does make sense. They would need to make up the discrepancy somewhere. He must have made a slip when he hired Miss Hunter. Very sloppy. Now... Can you show me to where your father keeps Alice?"

The boy shook his head. "My sister isn't here."

Sherlock cocked his head. "So you think of her as your sister," He straightened up and strode away from the boy. "Miss Hunter," he called out. "Your charge is loose."

John hurried up to Sherlock. Sherlock had knelt down by the locked door the dark room. He then dug into his pocket, extracting a lock picking kit. He took out a torsion wrench. He then shook his head as he examined the lock. "It will only take a half-diamond pick. Incredibly sloppy. One
might think his guilt is causing him to leave openings for him to be caught.”

John leaned down close to Sherlock. He shook his head. "Sherlock, you're not suggesting that Rucastle is..."

Sherlock glanced up at John, arching a brow. He reached into his pocket again and fished out his mobile, holding it out to John. "Call the authorities. I would rather not have to linger here once we free Miss Rucastle."

"Daddy!" Sherlock heard the Rucastle boy call out. "There are some men here!"

"Pardon?"

"Mister Rucastle!" Miss Hunter let out an alarmed shriek. "What are you doing home?"

"I left my wallet. What the hell is going on, Violet?"

Sherlock continued to calmly pick the lock as he heard the footsteps storming towards them.

"What the hell are you doing in my home?" Rucastle demanded.

"Opening your 'dark room'," Sherlock replied, his gaze just momentarily flicking to the red-faced man.

"I'm going to call the police on you!"

Sherlock heard the click of the lock. He looked up and then pointed to John, the mobile pressed to his ear. "My companion already has that covered. I think they will be very interested to see what is inside this room, do you not?" Sherlock's brow knit. "They would also be interested to run a DNA test on your son. I suspect they'll find the results to be fascinating."

"He's my son!" Rucastle bellowed.

Sherlock nodded before he stood up, folding his hands behind his back. "Well, yes, of course. That's not in question. What is in question is who is his mother, considering your wife died a year before he was born." He cocked his head. "Well, I say a year... Seven months actually. Now you are going to prison for a great number of horrific things... Is murder also included on that list of charges? Did your wife find out you'd impregnated your daughter? Is that why she had to die?"

"You-" Rucastle took a run at Sherlock, but was held back by John raising his gun.

"Sherlock," John said evenly, keeping his gaze- and gun- trained on the fuming Rucastle. "Open the door."

"Right." Sherlock turned his attention to the door. "The girl."

Sherlock opened the door and ventured slowly into the alleged dark room.

"Alice?" Sherlock called out. "Are you restrained?"

What had appeared to be one room was in fact several, all dark. Each new room had a locked door Sherlock had to pick. An entire wing of the house seemed to have been devoted specifically to the imprisonment of Alice Rucastle.

Finally, Sherlock came to a door that was locked and chained from his side. He opened the lock and unchained the door.

The girl on the bed was the very close in appearance to Violet Hunter, but with distinct differences. She scrambled back on the bed when she heard the door open, but paused when she set her gaze on Sherlock. "You're not my father."

Sherlock shook his head. "You won't have to see him again. There's rather substantial evidence against him."

Dimly, he could hear the sounds of the police arriving. "He's going to be taken in within a few minutes."
It was nearly four in the morning when Sherlock and John finally returned to 221B. The first order of business upon arrival in London was to go to Scotland Yard to discover the details of Kitty Riley's murder.

He was honest with Molly. He did not care in the slightest about the murder of Kitty Riley. She was an abhorrent creature whose death did not surprise him in the slightest.

However, Molly did seem to care about her death. He would at least take a preliminary look at the evidence.

He agreed with Molly's assessment of the situation. Sebastian Moran did seem to be the perpetrator. The file from Scotland Yard laid out a grisly murder scene. Moran had taken his time torturing Kitty Riley, inflicting a great deal of pain upon the woman before allowing her the release of death.

With any other criminal, he would have thought killing Kitty Riley was unnecessary and sloppy. Sadistically torturing a disgraced reporter for the transgression of having sex with James Moriarty seemed- no pun intended- like overkill.

But that had been the point, hadn't it? Even with his obsession with Moriarty, Moran was still calculating. He would not lose control simply because Kitty had told about sleeping with him.

It was a warning. A memento mori. A reminder for Sherlock not to pursue him, lest the same fate befall Molly or John.

At least that loathsome Doctor Adair took care of the post-mortem. Sherlock did not want Molly dealing with the reality of what had happened to Kitty Riley. She felt enough guilt without knowing the true extent of Moran's depravity.

When he entered his bedroom, he found Molly curled up on his- their- bed. She had not changed into sleeping clothes. Sherlock shooed Toby off his side of the bed and slipped into bed with her, not bothering to change out of his suit. He leaned in and inhaled her scent. He'd never felt such a sense of homecoming before after returning from a case.

Sherlock curled himself around Molly. He was able to cover both of Molly's hands with only one of his own. He felt her fingers slip around his and her breathing changed.

"Sher-"

Sherlock pressed his nose against her throat. "Just go back to sleep, Molly."

But Molly did not listen. She turned her head and looked at him. In the dim light, Sherlock could see the traces of tears on her cheeks. He rolled onto his back, guiding Molly with his hands to nestle against his chest. From this new position, she would hear the steady thrum of his heart. He brushed his lips against her temple. "I love you, Molly." He had promised to tell her when he returned home and that was a promise he wished to break.

Molly's eyes shut again and she let out a small sigh. "Welcome home, Sherlock."

He slipped a hand into her loose hair as he shut his eyes. He wasn't going to leave Molly alone again until Moran was defeated once and for all.
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

With the case of the Copper Beeches solved, Sherlock wants nothing more than to be with Molly and have “dinner”.

Chapter Notes

I would just like to thank everyone who nominated for this fic for the Sherlock and Molly Fanfic Awards. It picked up Best Drama, Best Sherlock and Fan Favourite for the K-T rating. It means so much to me that people like this story so much.

Also, GeekBehindTheGlasses and I are holding the Ladies of Sherlock Promptathon over at Livejournal. Please check it out at http://sherlock-ladies.livejournal.com

PART FORTY-ONE

Molly sat at her desk, headphones on as she transcribed the notes left by Veronica of the Riley autopsy. She cringed as Veronica gave a particularly gruesome description of the injuries inflicted upon Kitty Riley. She was used to the grisly aspects of her job. In fact, she has a sneaking suspicion her colleagues left the more brutal deaths for her to take care of due to her association with Sherlock. Yet this death was different.

Molly felt a hand on her shoulder and she gave a jump, pulling the headphones off her ears. She looked up at Sherlock, who blinked down at her. He held out a mug to her. "Coffee. Milk. Two sugars."

Molly pressed a hand to her chest, trying to calm her pounding heart. "Sherlock, you nearly gave me a heart attack."

Sherlock's brow furrowed in the way that Molly knew meant he was scrutinizing her. His lip then curled in snarl. "You would think that Veronica would be capable of transcribing her own notes." He grabbed a chair and pulled it up beside Molly, grabbing her hand. "I had hoped you wouldn't find out the details of Kitty's death."

"It's all right," Molly sighed, giving Sherlock's hand a squeeze. "My imagination was filling in things pretty well all on it's own."

"It's not your fault, Molly," Sherlock insisted.

Molly rolled her eyes. "Sherlock, I'm not thick. I know it's not really my fault. Still. I feel guilty about it. I mean, maybe if I hadn't talked to her..."

"Kitty is the one who followed you," Sherlock reminded her. "You cannot be held responsible for what she did or what Moran did because of it."

Molly let out a sigh. She finally looked to the mug Sherlock had brought her. "You brought me coffee."

Sherlock nodded. "You haven't decided to be whimsical and take it another way, have you?"

Molly shook her head. "No. I'm just wondering what you want."

"I-" Sherlock averted his gaze. "I just thought you would like a cup of coffee."

Molly arched a brow. "So you came all the way from Baker Street to give me one? Why aren't you off with John working on a case?"
Sherlock scowled. "I just finished a rather lengthy, out-of-town case, Molly. John is out with Mary looking at flats."

Molly eyed Sherlock suspiciously. "And you don't have anything to work on?"

"There are several cases I could be paying attention to, however..." Sherlock hazarded a glance to Molly. He straightened himself up.

Molly's mouth tugged up in a small smile. "Sherlock, did you miss me?"

"Of course I did," Sherlock muttered irritably. "I thought that was plainly obvious in that I kept calling you."

Molly nodded. "Were you worried about me?"

Sherlock scowled. "You were very upset the last time we spoke on the phone. We have not been able to discuss everything that happened while I was away."

Molly took hold of the lapels of Sherlock's jacket, pulling him close. She pressed a light kiss to his mouth. "For a 'high functioning sociopath' you can be really sweet." She pressed her forehead to his. "I'm fine, Sherlock. But I really need to work. I haven't been in for the past two days. I'll be home in a few hours. Let's have dinner."

For some reason, this made Sherlock grin boyishly. "I've been starving for days."

Molly rolled her eyes as she turned back to her computer screen. "You should really eat when you're on a case, Sherlock. I'll bring takeaway home. Now go do one of the million and five things I know you're neglecting being here with me."

Sherlock got up with a sigh. "All right then. And you're welcome for the coffee, by the way. Hm. And people call me rude."

"I-I didn't mean..." Molly felt her cheeks turn red. "It's very sweet of you, Sherlock. It really is..."

Sherlock sighed. "I was making a joke, Molly." He kissed her forehead.

"Thank you for the coffee." Molly tilted her head to capture Sherlock's lips. Their mouths melded together for a heated moment before she withdrew. "But I really do need to work. Veronica will ride my arse if I don't finish this."

Sherlock arched a brow. "I had the distinct impression that was my job."

Molly's cheeks heated once again. "Sherlock! How could you say..."

Sherlock smirked at her. "Just teaching you to be more careful with your choice of words, Molly." With that, he slipped out the door.

He was really very lucky she resisted the urge to throw something at his head.

Molly arrived back at 221B with several bag of food in her arms. She kicked her foot against the door. "Open the door please? My hands are full."

The door opened and Sherlock stuck his head out, narrowing his gaze. Molly shrank down at the look he gave her. He definitely looked displeased. "Have I done something wrong?" She squeaked before she could stop herself. What in the world could she have done wrong? She had been at work all day!

"They're all here," Sherlock said flatly.

Molly rolled her eyes and pushed Sherlock aside. She looked around the sitting room. John and Mary were cuddled together on the sofa, while Irene poured a glass of wine for Mrs Hudson. Mycroft was on his phone in the corner.

"Well, of course they're all here," Molly said with a smile. "I texted to find out what everyone wanted. But..." She frowned slightly. "I didn't text your brother."
Mycroft slipped his phone away. "Ah yes. Miss Hooper. I stopped by to discuss something of a rather sensitive nature with Sherlock."

"Do you ever discuss anything that isn't of a sensitive nature?" Molly laughed.

Mycroft laughed. "Very amusing, Miss Hooper. John mentioned you were bringing dinner and..." He glanced to Sherlock. "Seeing how eager my brother was, I couldn't say no."

Sherlock took one of the bags from Molly and glared at Mycroft. "I doubt dinner will agree with you, Mycroft. Still on the diet?"

Mycroft grinned toothily at the dour expression on Sherlock's face. "I should think a few dumplings wouldn't hurt."

Sherlock let out a grumble and strode into the kitchen. Molly followed after him. She set her bag down on the kitchen table between Sherlock's microscope and the salt and pepper shakers. She looked up at him. "Why are you so tetchy?"

Sherlock scowled. "I thought we were going to have dinner."

Molly frowned as she began to remove containers from the bags. "We are having dinner. Sherlock, would you mind moving the microscope? I don't want to accidentally knock it over."

Sherlock slipped his arms around Molly's waist from behind and leaned in, nuzzling her neck. "That was not what I meant."

Molly sighed, letting her eyes slide shut. "That is not dinner, Sherlock."

Sherlock let out a huff of irritation against Molly's neck. "We could have eaten. I'm not saying intercourse is a necessity, although you were teasing me quite a bit over the phone. But I've spent the last few days without your company. Is it so unreasonable to want you all to myself? Mrs Hudson, Irene and Mary have had you." He tightened his hold on her. "And I never want to interact with Mycroft."

Molly reached back and threaded her fingers in Sherlock's hair. "I have a late shift tomorrow."

Sherlock moved away from Molly's neck. "Meaning...?"

Before Molly could answer, the crowd that had been congregating in the sitting room flooded into the kitchen, getting out plates and grabbing containers of food.

Sherlock scowled and strode out of the room. John gave Molly an apologetic shrug. "Sorry Molly. I thought about telling you what Sherlock had in mind..."

Molly waved her hand. "Oh, don't fuss about it, John. He's just going to have to learn to deal with... Well, people."

John winced. "I don't know, Molly. That might be a tall order. It is Sherlock we're talking about."

Molly fixed a plate of food and went into the sitting room. She gave Sherlock a small smile, which he did not return. He was sitting with his hands steepled in his armchair. Molly settled herself into his lap and picked up a dumpling with her chopsticks. "You are eating, Sherlock Holmes. You've been starving yourself for days now."

Sherlock rolled his eyes but obligingly allowed Molly to feed him. He seemed to perk up a bit at the gesture.

"Really, brother?" Mycroft arched a brow as he looked over the scene. "Hardly proper etiquette for dining."

Sherlock slipped an arm around Molly's waist and pulled her closer. "Jealousy is such an ugly thing, Mycroft. It's not my fault you married a cold fish you haven't seen in six months."

Sherlock picked up a dumpling between thumb and forefinger and held it out to Molly. She smiled and took it into her mouth, playfully swiping her tongue over his thumb.

"I have to agree with Mycroft, Sherlock," Mrs Hudson tutted. "It's really not appropriate for
company, is it?"

"I didn't invite any of you," Sherlock grumbled.

"It might be better if you at least use chopsticks," Molly suggested, holding out another set to Sherlock.

John groaned and buried his face in his hand. "Oh, here we go..."

"Chopsticks are the most ridiculous invention on the planet, Molly," Sherlock snarled. "I do not much care to pick at my food with what is essentially a pair of pencils."

Irene laughed. "You don't know how to use chopsticks, do you, Mister Holmes?"

Sherlock's scowl deepened and his lip curled. Molly was certain she was not going to be able to get him to eat any more food given his demeanour. She slipped out of his lap.

"You've gone and frightened off your pathologist. Honestly, Sherlock," Mycroft sighed. "Chopsticks have been used since before forks were invented. You would think you would be able to manage."

Sherlock glared at his brother, his bad mood palpable. Molly frowned deeply. Sherlock pulled himself to his feet and strode towards his bedroom, slamming the door shut.

"Oh, he's in a temper now," Mrs Hudson sighed.

Molly set her plate down and started after him. John frowned. "Molly, it might be a good idea to let him be. You know how he can get."

Molly shook her head. "No, I think I've got a better idea. Might want to clear out of the flat though." She headed in the direction of Sherlock's room. Instead of going straight in, she went into the bathroom. She quickly changed clothes. She pulled one of Sherlock's dressing gowns on before exiting, going into Sherlock's room.

Sherlock was holding his violin, about to begin playing most likely some loud and torturous song. He turned to look at Molly with a frown.

Molly frowned back at him.

Sherlock eyed her warily. "You're in my dressing gown."

Molly nodded. "Good observation."

Sherlock sighed. "I know what you're trying to do. You think it will pick up my mood to wear-"

Molly let the dressing gown slip off her shoulders, pooling at her feet and revealing the black satin and lace nightdress she wore beneath it. Her toes curled as she bit her lip and studied Sherlock's expression.

His mouth was gaped and his eyes had widened. He lowered his violin as he cleared his throat. "I was wrong."

Molly blinked. "Wrong?"

Sherlock set his violin back into his case. "I said that you didn't need a nightdress." He crossed the room to place his hands on Molly's hips. "You definitely need that. That is most definitely needed."

Molly smiled as she got onto her tiptoes, threading her fingers in Sherlock's curls. "No, you were right. It's not the most sensible purchase. Especially since it won't stay on for long."

Sherlock slipped one of the straps down to press a kiss to Molly's shoulder, making her shiver. "It will be on long enough." He pulled back to gaze down at Molly. "But you were wrong too. You're not pretty, Molly." He swept her up and set her down on the bed. "That is hardly an adequate description."

He slipped on the bed with her and cradled her face. Molly sighed and let her eyes flutter shut.
She did feel more than pretty. She sighed happily as Sherlock paid attention to her throat, his hands slipping beneath her nightdress.

"Are you sure?" Sherlock rasped.

Molly opened her eyes to glance at him. "Hm?"

Sherlock looked up at Molly, the longing on his face clear. "You have been refraining from intimacy with me, employing our companions to stop yourself. You have not felt emotionally ready. Are you sure you are now?"

Molly rolled Sherlock onto his back and straddled his hips. She leaned down and kissed him. "What does that tell you?"

Sherlock grinned up at her. He tilted his head to take another heated kiss from her lips. "I should warn you, I will be more theatric in my reactions to your ministrations, in order to drive everyone out of our flat. I would appreciate if you would respond in kind, lest it be thought you do not enjoy our couplings as much as I do."

Molly let out a small giggle and began to unbutton Sherlock's shirt. "Consider it done. But I did warn John..."

Both of them groaned when there was a soft knock on the door. "Molly dear?" It was Mrs Hudson. "Is everything all right?"

"It's fine!" Molly called back. Sherlock and I are just going hang out in here!"

"Are you sure?"

Sherlock sat up as Molly pulled his shirt and jacket off. "Yes, Mrs Hudson, I'm sure!"

"Molly..."

"She said she was sure!" Sherlock snapped. "GO AWAY, MRS HUDSON!"

"I'm just doing what was asking of me, no need to shout," Mrs Hudson said, her voice growing softer. "I'm your landlady, not your chaperone."

"She could have fooled me," Sherlock sighed, leaning in and trailing kisses over Molly's collarbone. "Really, getting everyone we know to stop us from-"

Molly's mouth covered Sherlock's. "Do me a favour, Sherlock," Molly murmured against his lip. "Hm?"

"Just shut up."

Molly sighed happily as she snuggled against Sherlock's bare chest. His arms were wrapped around her as he recounted the details of Hunter case.

"Miss Hunter informed us of the time the Fowler boy tended to come around the estate. I then called you and you teased me mercilessly. Miss Hunter then came to my room and stripped, offering me sexual favours to thank me for my help. John and I then went to the Copper Beeches. Rucastle had the most unpleasant dog."

Molly sat up, pulling the covers up to cover herself. "Wait... WHAT?" Had she heard Sherlock right. She stared down at him in shock.

Sherlock sighed. "John and I went to Copper Beeches..."

Molly shook her head furiously. "No, no, no... The naked part. Don't pretend you didn't know I was referring to the naked part."

Sherlock sighed and ruffled his hair. "What does it matter? It was hardly the most interesting part of the case. It was just a naked woman!"
Molly pulled the sheets tighter around herself. "Your client got naked and offered to... Do stuff to you."

Sherlock's brow furrowed. "Yes. That's what I said. This is not the first time that's happened. Very annoying."

Molly gaped at Sherlock. She then looked away, hugging her knees to her chest. She didn't want to think about all of the women who had gotten their kit off for Sherlock, offering themselves up. She most definitely did not want to think about how many women would do it in the future.

"It bothers you," Sherlock murmured.

"You think?"

It was not that she didn't trust Sherlock. But she wondered how pretty the other women were. Irene displaying herself for him was bad enough. She thought about how her own body stacked up against the mysterious clients. She winced at the terminology. Stacked indeed.

Sherlock sat up and brushed Molly's hair off of her shoulder, pressing a kiss to the bare flesh. "It bothers me."

Molly looked back at Sherlock. Her frown lessened. "Really?"

Sherlock nodded against her. "You're the only woman I want to see naked. You're the only woman I've ever wanted to see naked. You were the first- the only... I've never felt... It was always just an irritation before. Women trying to push themselves physically onto me. But you... I love seeing you strip bare. I love stripping you bare. I love what I can do with you when you are bare. And only you."

Molly reached back to slip her fingers into Sherlock's hair. "I still don't like it."

"Neither do I." Sherlock kissed Molly on the cheek before guiding her back down to rest against his chest. "We're in agreement."

Molly sighed and ran a hand over Sherlock's arm. She waited for him to begin his story again. Instead, he gripped her a bit tighter. "Molly, did you have sex with James Moriarty?"

"Excuse me?" Molly yelped and sat up. "What brought this on?"

"When I saw Moran he suggested you might have." His brow was furrowed in irritation. "I didn't give it any thought until you told me about Kitty. And I wanted to ask. But judging on your reaction, I would say no."

"Of course it's no!" Molly cried. "You can tell all of this amazing stuff about everyone, but you actually have to ask me that outright? Besides, Jim was gay!"

"I didn't think you had," Sherlock replied. "But I thought it may have been wishful thinking on my part. And James Moriarty's sexuality cannot be categorized. He was an opportunist. And you were an opportunity. Why are you getting so defensive?"

"Because I nearly did!" Molly snapped.

Sherlock sat up, his eyes widening.

Molly looked away, ashamed to look him in the eye. "I had planned to sleep with Jim that night. But I broke up with him instead."

"What brought this on?"

"When I saw Moran he suggested you might have." His brow was furrowed in irritation. "I didn't give it any thought until you told me about Kitty. And I wanted to ask. But judging on your reaction, I would say no."

"I didn't think you had," Sherlock replied. "But I thought it may have been wishful thinking on my part. And James Moriarty's sexuality cannot be categorized. He was an opportunist. And you were an opportunity. Why are you getting so defensive?"

"Because I nearly did!" Molly snapped.

Sherlock sat up, his eyes widening.

Molly looked away, ashamed to look him in the eye. "I had planned to sleep with Jim that night. But I broke up with him instead."

"What changed your mind?"

Molly nodded. "After what you said about him. It's not that I thought you were right. That he was gay. But I thought... Maybe you were jealous. You weren't, were you?"

Sherlock went still. "I..." He paused. "I was simply making an observation of your companion."

"It's all right that you weren't," Molly assured him. She took a hold of his hand. "I know you
"I never liked your companions," Sherlock murmured. "I had thought it was because you had miserable taste in men. However..." He sighed. "That might have been inaccurate."

Molly smiled. "You were jealous."

Sherlock just took hold of her again, pulling her back against him. "So Rucastle had this terrible dog..."
"You don't need to do this," Molly whispered as Sherlock stood behind her, hands on wrists as he guided her through the movements. "I should be fine with my lessons from Greg and John."

Sherlock nose wrinkled at the mention of the Detective Inspector. He didn't much care for the fact that Molly had steadfastly refused to stop learning marksmanship from Lestrade despite John also taking up the cause. Sherlock leaned in and pressed a kiss to the back of Molly's neck. "Molly, you do not carry a firearm with you. Thus, lessons in marksmanship will be quite useless. Judo is far more suitable."

"I'm feeling sore, Sherlock," Molly whined softly, reaching back to slide her fingers into his hair. "Can't we do this later?"

"Later I will be tending to my mould cultures." Sherlock allowed Molly to lower her arms. "If we don't do this now, we won't be able to do it for several days."

"That's fine by me," Molly sighed. She made her way across the floor and collapsed onto the sofa.

Sherlock frowned and knelt down beside her. "Are you all right?"

"Mm," Molly closed her eyes and nestled into the pillow. "Think I've been working too hard lately. Body's not feeling right."

Sherlock leaned in and pressed a kiss to Molly's forehead. "Go lay down in bed. I'll take care of my cultures."

Molly hesitated and Sherlock sighed. It had been two months since they had renewed their relationship, but still Molly was resistant to the idea of moving back into 221B. It was becoming very frustrating, as Molly spent most of her free time in the flat and had several times given into the temptation of sexual intimacy. It seemed pointless to continue the charade of 'dating'. But Sherlock respected her wishes. "Or you could go downstairs and lay on Mrs Hudson's sofa."

"Can I stay right here?" Molly asked with a sigh. "I'm very comfortable right here."

"You can do whatever you like," Sherlock replied. "That is my usual course of action."

Sherlock rose to go into the kitchen to look in on his experiment when there was a light knock on the door.

"Hoo-hoo," Mrs Hudson greeted cheerily. "Sherlock, you've got a client. She was wandering around outside."

Sherlock frowned. "Mrs Hudson, Molly isn't feeling."

"Oh, Sherlock," Molly said, forcing herself to sit up. "Look." Her voice sounded syrupy sweet.

A girl, around seven years old, peeked out from behind Mrs Hudson.

"Mister Sherlock?" The girl said. "Can you help me?"

Sherlock sighed. Cases from children were rarely interesting. He always heard them out. A child could be delightfully naïve to intriguing details and- unlike adults- Sherlock did not enjoy belittling them. However, his brain was rarely challenged by the mysteries they presented.

"Mister Sherlock," the girl straightened herself up, looking up at him. "I need you to help me. My
cat has gone missing."

Sherlock knelt down in front of the girl. "Cats rarely leave much evidence for me to follow."

"Please?" The girl asked desperately. "He's been gone for two days now and I'm really scared."

Sherlock heard Molly let out a small squeak. She put her hands on Sherlock's shoulders. "Sherlock... You know I'd be completely beside myself if Toby disappeared."

Sherlock glanced up at her. "Would you like to take the case?"

Molly frowned at him. "Maybe I would." But she looked incredibly tired and worn.

The girl looked up at Molly. "Would you? Please, Mrs Sherlock?"

Sherlock's gaze snapped to Molly at these words. He wanted to gauge her reaction.

Flushed cheeks. Breathing increased. Heartbeat most likely also elevated. Mouth slightly gaped. She's surprised, but... Not unpleasantly so? Emotions are so much more difficult to analyse.

Molly smiled at the girl. "A-Actually..."

"Actually I'd love to take your case Miss-" Sherlock looked down at the girl questioningly.

"Olivia," the girl replied.

Sherlock nodded. "All right, Miss Olivia. I'll find your cat." He reached down to take her hand.

"Molly, you need to rest. I'll text John to join me at the scene of the disappearance." He leaned in and gave Molly a kiss on the cheek. "I'll try not to be back too late."

"Don't get killed," Molly said, almost teasingly.

"Yes Darling," he replied in a similarly teasing tone, but he found he actually liked the way the word sounded. He gave her another smile before allowing Olivia to drag him out the door.

"Well, that was certainly invigorating!" Sherlock said as he entered 221B alongside a weary looking John. "A lost cat leading to a group of diamond smugglers? Brilliant!"

John shook his head slowly. "How did you know that? When you took the case, how did you ever figure out it was going to lead to that?"

Sherlock waved his hand dismissively. "Oh, I had no idea."

John brow furrowed. "Why did you take the case then?"

Sherlock paused and looked at his friend who studied him carefully. He didn't want to admit the reason why he'd decided Olivia was worth his time. It seemed... Embarrassing. Not something he should share with anyone else. Except perhaps Molly. But even then, he didn't want to share it until he could completely discern how she felt on the matter.

He turned his attention to Mary, who had just come out of the kitchen. "Ah! Mary! I've brought your fiancé back in one piece." He eyed her carefully. "And I see your job prospect was fruitful."

John's expression changed to one of cautious happiness. "Really?"

Mary nodded. "I'll be starting come September."

"That's great!" John broke out into a grin. "Have you girls been celebrating?"

Mary grimaced. "Not so much."

If on cue, the sound of vomiting came from the bathroom. Mrs Hudson exited the bathroom, a frown on her face. "It's going to be all right, dear. Just get it all out. I'll get you a glass of water."

She went to the sink to get a glass of water when she spotted Sherlock. Her look of concern was now elation. "Oh Sherlock!" She set down the glass and strode to him, cradling his face. "My Sherlock!" She gave him kisses on both cheeks. "Oh-" She released his face to press both hands
to her mouth, trying to obscure her smile. "You better do right by them, you hear me?"

"By who?" Sherlock asked. He looked to Mary and John for explanation. They seemed to be sharing significant looks. Sherlock was unable to discern the meaning of them, yet they both seemed to understand what the other was wordlessly saying.

"I'll go get her that glass of water." Mrs Hudson said cheerily. "Oh, she's going to be in a right state, but OH!" She made another happy squeal.

"Give us a mo, Mary?" John asked his fiancée, before taking Sherlock by the shoulders and pulling him aside. "Sherlock, have you and Molly been careful?"

"Obviously we've been careful," Sherlock sighed. "You've seen how hesitant Molly has been to delve into a permanent relationship. I've been doing my best to court her as seems proper..."

John shook his head. "Not that, Sherlock. Have you been careful when you're together?"

Sherlock narrowed his gaze on John. "What are you on about?"

"Are you using condoms, you prat?" John snapped.

"What?" Sherlock's lip curled. "It was redundant. Molly is on the birth control pill and both of us are clear of STIs."

John put his head in his hands. "Sherlock, the pill isn't one hundred percent effective."

Sherlock went very still. He swallowed hard, going over the evidence. He then pointed towards the bathroom. "You mean Molly is-"

John gave Sherlock a stern look. "Examine the evidence, Detective."

Sherlock let out a breath. He hadn't considered this. Having a child with Molly.

The idea... Was not repellent.

He had never thought of himself having a child before. But until a year ago, he had never considered a romantic relationship. Wasn't a child the natural course for such a joining? He imagined what Molly would look like, her stomach swollen with pregnancy. She would look beautiful.

He then imagined what their child would be like. Molly's upturned nose, his mouth. He couldn't quite decide whether or not they would inherit his blue eyes or her brown. Oh, but the child would be clever. So very clever. There hadn't been a Holmes who wasn't. With Molly as a mother, the child would have a sweetness the family had been lacking.

Sherlock strode across the room and through the kitchen. He went into the bathroom, ignoring the muffled shout of protest from the floor.

Molly was resting heavily against the toilet. Sherlock looked to Mrs Hudson, who was hanging back worriedly, still clutching the glass of water she'd retrieved for Molly.

Sherlock took the glass from Mrs Hudson. "I'll take things from here," he said softly.

Mrs Hudson beamed at Sherlock and gave him another kiss on the cheek. "Look at you, my Sherlock..."

Mrs Hudson bustled out of the room and Sherlock slipped down onto the floor, sitting behind Molly and smoothing a hand over her back as she leaned back into the toilet to vomit once again. Sherlock winced at the sound and the scent, but he tried to push it aside. This was, after all, his doing and he was not going to shirk his responsibilities. Already he was making plans in his head.

"I hope I am not incorrect in assuming this will change our dynamic," Sherlock said softly.

"Go away Sherlock," Molly groaned. "I don't want you to see me like this."

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Molly, this is a matter of course. You will be experiencing this illness for several months still and I will have to experience it eventually."
Molly looked up at Sherlock, her eyebrows rising in shock. "God I hope not!"

Sherlock frowned. "As a doctor, you should be informed as to how this progresses. Of course, you deal primarily in cadavers..."

"Sherlock, what are you talking about?" Molly asked, pushing her hair back from her face.

"I must admit I am not incredibly well-versed in the subject, but I know the first trimester can be incredibly trying..."

"WHAT?" Molly yelped. She seemed to try to jump up, but then appeared dizzy, just clutching the toilet. "Sherlock, I'm not pregnant!"

Sherlock blinked. "You're not?" He frowned. "Are you sure?"

Molly glared at him. "I'm pretty sure I would be the first one to know." She shook her head. "Since I think we've reached the threshold of disgusting in you watching me puke... I got my period yesterday. Which is by the way making this a lot more fun." She rested her head against the toilet bowl. "I've got a stomach bug. A couple of people have been out at work with it."

"Oh." Sherlock's shoulders slumped. He felt a strange sense of loss at this news. He'd already grown used to the idea.

Molly pointed a trembling finger towards the door. "Wait... They all think?"

Sherlock nodded. "It would seem so."

Sherlock let out a weak groan. "Well this is just-" She lunged back into the bowl and continued to vomit. "Please just leave," Molly murmured between heaves. "You really don't need to see this."

Sherlock set down the glass of water and pulled Molly's hair back off her face with one hand, rubbing her back gently with the other. "This is hardly the most disgusting thing I have seen in my life, Molly Hooper."

Sherlock sat with Molly for the next half an hour, allowing her to continue throwing up at regular intervals. When she had respite, she would lean against him and he stroked her hair gently, soothing her.

Sherlock did not often get sick. The last time he remembered vomiting was when he was detoxing. The morphine withdrawal had caused him severe nausea. He'd been alone when that happened. But he remembered the few times he was sick in childhood Mrs Hudson comforting him in such a way. She had only been the family housekeeper, but she had brought him more comfort than his mother or any of his nannies. Molly seemed to appreciate the gesture as much as he had back then. She seemed thoroughly miserable and he hated to think how much more miserable she would be without him there.

Finally, Molly seemed to have nothing left to get out of her. Sherlock scooped her up into his arms, carrying her towards his bedroom. She let out a small moan at being jostled, but then just snuggled against him.

When Sherlock set Molly down on their bed, he went about the task of removing her clothing. She tried to still his hands.

"Molly," Sherlock said evenly. "I am not trying to do anything untoward. I thought you would simply be more comfortable in one of my dressing gowns."

"I should go down to Mrs Hudson's sofa," Molly murmured.

Sherlock sighed, shaking his head. "Molly, do not be ridiculous. You will be far more comfortable in my bed. Besides, if you are downstairs, it will be more difficult for me to take care of you."

"Take care of me?" Molly repeated. She was allowing Sherlock to pull off her clothes now, as limp as a ragdoll. "But..."

"I just finished a case," Sherlock replied, knowing what she was going to say. That taking care of her was 'boring'. True, it did not rate high on his list of mental stimulants, but what else was he
supposed to do? Allow her to take care of herself while she was ill? He was supposed to be her lover. It would be a sad state of affairs if he left her on her own.

Sherlock went to the closet and got out his blue dressing gown, the one Molly favoured over all his others. He slipped it on her, tying it loosely around her waist. He leaned in and pressed a kiss to her forehead. "You just rest, Molly. Call me if you need anything."

Molly let out a small moan and snuggled against the pillow. As Sherlock got up, Toby leapt gracefully onto the bed and curled up close to his mistress's stomach.

Sherlock watched her for a moment before striding out into the sitting room. He went right to John, who was sitting with Mary on the sofa while Mrs Hudson sat in the armchair. He crossed his arms over his chest. "Do you think you could do some proper doctoring, rather than making wild deductions about my Pathologist?"

John blinked up at Sherlock. "Molly is-"

"She has a stomach virus," Sherlock snapped irritably. "Everyone around here shouldn't jump to such wild conclusions." He pointed towards his bedroom. "Now would you please go in there and fix her?"

John got to his feet. He held his hands up defensively. "Listen, Sherlock... I'm sorry if I was ill informed. I'll take a look in at her, but you know there's not a whole lot I can do for her. If she's got a bug, the best thing for her is rest and fluids."

Mrs Hudson got to her feet. "Oh dear... Poor girl. Oh I'm sorry, Sherlock. It's my fault." She waved her hands. "I'll make her a nice cuppa."

Sherlock shook his head. "No. I'll take care of it."

Sherlock rolled his eyes at the shocked expression from the three people in the sitting room. "What? I am perfectly capable of taking care of my sick girlfriend."

He went to the kitchen and prepared a cup of weak tea for Molly and a stronger one for himself. He took the tray into his bedroom, setting it down on the nightstand. He slipped into bed beside Molly, pulling her against him.

"Mm?" Molly murmured tiredly.

"I've brought you some tea." Sherlock stroked Molly's hair.

"Thank you," Molly sighed, closing her eyes. "I guess you're happy that it's just a bug and I'm not pregnant."

Sherlock was quiet for a long moment. He then laid back on the bed so Molly could get more comfortable. "So you'll never believe what happened when John and I were looking for Olivia's cat..."
Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

Molly realizes how her relationship has evolved when Sherlock nurses her back to health.

It went without saying that Molly hated being sick. What person actually enjoyed having their body rebel against them? She also hated how tetchy and irritable she became. Her normally sweet disposition completely evaporated when she wasn't feeling well. While on normal days, the loneliness stung her, when she was sick, living on her own was an advantage. She was allowed to completely give in to her sickness and not put on any airs.

But now, she was living at 221 Baker Street.

She would have initially thought that she would be left as alone during her illness as when she'd actually lived on her own. Perhaps John would check in on her, but certainly Sherlock would find her 'boring' while she was ill and keep his distance, pouring himself into cases and experiments.

But no. As with everything that had happened since they had begun their relationship, Sherlock surprised Molly. Instead of keeping his distance, he was by her side, unless he was off fetching something for her.

To make matters worse, her illness was not a cold. That would have been a bit easier to deal with. Coughing and sneezing- while annoying and disgusting- were not nearly as bad as what she was experiencing now. Her stomach was churning and she was evacuating herself in every horrific way with frightening regularity. She'd spent most of the last two days lying on the floor in the bathroom. While Sherlock tried to get her into his bed several times, she found it easier just to stay there. Eventually, he gave up trying to move her and just laid a blanket out on the floor for her. She remained lying by the loo, waiting for the disgusting moment when her stomach would again decide it was not yet through torturing her.

At the very least, John and Mary had left for the duration of her illness. Once Sherlock was satisfied that there was nothing having a doctor at Molly's beck and call would do to help her, he gave John money for a hotel room for the duration of Molly's illness.

While Molly appreciated having two less people around, it left her and Sherlock in the flat by themselves.

Molly was still curled up on the floor of the bathroom. She felt dirty, nauseous and overly hot. The blanket beneath her did little to cushion her from the hard floor.

Sherlock was stretched out on his side beside her. His long fingers were sifting through Molly's hair, which to her felt disgusting and rough. She hadn't showered since she'd gotten sick. She hadn't the energy.

Molly had her eyes shut and she tried to rest as best she could on the floor of the bathroom. Anything resembling proper sleep had eluded her for the past two days. She wondered how Sherlock managed it.

Dimly, she heard Sherlock murmuring to her, a story about going to Devon to investigate a 'demon dog'. She remembered reading about it on John's blog, but it was interesting to hear the story from Sherlock's perspective. While she did wish to be alone in her misery, there was something very comforting about the presence of Sherlock with her. Were he not there, she might end up dehydrated just from lack of energy to get herself anything to drink.

She felt Sherlock shift away from her and her eyes opened. "Hm?" She lifted her head to see exactly where he was going.

Her eyes went wide when she saw Sherlock go to the toilet. "What are you doing?" Her voice
rose in volume and pitch.

Sherlock’s hands were on his fly. He looked down at Molly, his brow furrowed. "What does it look like I'm doing, Molly?"

"It looks like you're about to use the loo," Molly replied, trying to sit up but finding herself a bit dizzy.

"Marvellous deduction," Sherlock replied, rolling his eyes. "May I get back to it now?"

Molly tried to pull herself off the floor. "Just give me a second, Sherlock..." Finding it difficult to get up, she settled for crawling towards the door.

Sherlock took his hands off his fly and knelt down next to Molly. "Molly Hooper, you are not seriously trying to crawl out of the bathroom."

"You're going to pee!" Molly pointed out, wishing her voice wasn't nearly as squeaky as it was.

Sherlock nodded. "Yes. I do that sometimes."

"But I'm in here!" Molly squirmed uncomfortably.

Sherlock nodded once again. "Yes. You said you were more comfortable on the floor, so I ceased trying to move you to my bedroom. However, because of that, I've not had the opportunity to use the facilities in private."

"But..." Molly started lamely.

Sherlock rolled his eyes once again. "For the last two days, I've seen you vomit and while you've shooed me out when you've been gripped with diarrhoea, I've certainly heard you."

Molly groaned, covering her face with her hands. "Sherlock!"

Sherlock rolled his eyes once again. "All human beings defecate, urinate, vomit and a host of other hideous biological functions. To pretend differently is naïve. My romantic feelings do not blind me to your human tendencies. Rather, it makes me able to endure them."

Molly relaxed slightly and Sherlock sighed. "May I please urinate now?"

Molly nodded and Sherlock went to the toilet. Molly laid back down on her makeshift bed and sighed. She'd never been with a boyfriend for long enough for him to be comfortable enough to do this in front of her. In some ways, it was nice. Sherlock was no longer this fantasy creature she only dreamed about. He was a real, live man who was comfortable around her.

Once Sherlock washed his hands, he curled up around her once again. "Are you feeling any better?"

"Tired," Molly sighed. She could feel Sherlock's hand stroking over her side gently. "You must be bored. Why don't you call Lestrade to see if he has any cases?"

"He texted this morning," Sherlock replied. "Murder in Bethnal Green."

Molly turned her head and opened her eyes once again. "Hm? Why are you still here then?"

Sherlock looked down at Molly, frowning slightly. "You're ill. There was something questioning in his statement, like he was shocked she would even suggest him leaving her.

Molly smiled weakly up at Sherlock. Sherlock could take her out on a thousand dinners, give her a million hearts in jars, but she didn't know if there would anything more romantic than him turning down a case in order to lie with her on the floor of the bathroom.

Two days later, Molly was finally off the bathroom floor. She had not yet returned to work. She was instead curled up on the sofa in the sitting room of 221B, watching a bit of crap telly. Sherlock was in his chair, rosinig his violin bow.

"You don't need to stay with me," Molly said quietly. She pulled the thin blanket she'd brought
with her up. "If you wanted to go out and work a case, I won't be offended."

Sherlock glanced to her briefly, before turning his attention back to the television. "This seems a rather ineffectual way to discover if one's partner is being unfaithful."

Molly snuggled against the pillows. "I don't think they really care one way or the other, Sherlock," Molly sighed. "They just want the chance to be on telly."

Sherlock set aside his bow and crawled onto the sofa with Molly. He shifted her so that instead of resting against the pillow, she rested against his chest. "If you ever believe I am unfaithful, please do not turn to a television crew."

Molly sighed and adjusted the collar of his shirt. "Mm. Sherlock, you're just barely interested in having sex with me."

Sherlock ran a hand up and down Molly's back. "I assure you I am quite interested in you. But only you. So television crews are completely unnecessary."

"And if you believe I am being unfaithful?"

Sherlock snorted. "Like I will need anyone to tell me if you are."

Molly smiled softly. "We're able to joke about this because we both know it could never happen in a million years, right?"

Sherlock adjusted Molly so her head rested against his thigh. He began to stroke her hair, as she often did for him. "You know I really wish I could kiss you right now, Molly Hooper. But I don't know if you're still contagious or not."

Molly remained quiet, just enjoying the feeling of Sherlock stroking her hair and snuggling against his thigh.

"You are a very interesting woman, Molly," Sherlock murmured.

Molly smiled. "Well, that's better than being boring, isn't it? Especially considering the man I'm with does not suffer boredom well."

Sherlock's fingers sifted through her hair. "I just mean that I was led to believe that women make a big deal of our days like today. It is interesting that you don't."

Molly sat up. She frowned slightly. She had to admit, she didn't quite know what day it was. Everything had gotten a bit jumbled with her illness. "What day is it?"

Sherlock blinked at her. "You don't know?"

Molly shook her head. "No, I honestly don't..." She glanced down at the coffee table, at the display on Sherlock's phone.

Oh.

It was her birthday.

Molly turned to look back at Sherlock. "Oh."

Sherlock nodded slowly. "Oh."

Molly's cheeks flushed red. "It's my birthday."

Sherlock continued to nod. "Yes, it is. Due to your illness, I did not pick you up a cake." He paused. "Of course, you never have cake on your birthday. Rather, you have a piece of Banoffee Pie with your lunch at the morgue. It's an indulgence you only allow yourself on special occasions. I will get you a piece once you are feeling better."

Molly looked down. "You know that about me."

"I know a great many things about people," Sherlock replied honestly. "And you are... Somewhat more intriguing to me than others." He kissed her forehead.
Molly wanted to respond with something sweet and loving, but she remembered something. Her last birthday. The last time she'd had a lunch date, she'd rescheduled it to the day after her birthday, as she did not know how serious she was with the man she was seeing. It definitely was not serious, as she could no longer recall what his name was. Kenneth or Kurtis or something like that.

"It was almost a year ago," Molly murmured. She bit her lip. "The fall. It happened a few days after my birthday."

Sherlock studied Molly carefully for a moment. He then looked away. "Yes, I suppose you're right. That anniversary is coming up. I would much rather celebrate your birthday than that however."

Molly smiled awkwardly. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean... I shouldn't have brought it up. It's just... It did happen at the same time."

Sherlock nodded. Molly could see his Adam's Apple bobbing as he swallowed hard. "I'd rather not think about the fall. I'd like to think about your birthday." He looked to her. "Or the anniversary of when I became yours."

"You weren't mine for another few months."

"Do you really believe that?" Sherlock asked. He took a hold of Molly's hand. "I was yours back then, Molly. Why else do you think I came to your home?"

Molly sniffled. "Why do you say this sort of thing when I can't kiss you?"

Sherlock leaned in. "I will take my chances." He pressed a kiss to her cheek, just on the corner of her lip.

"Don't be stupid, Sherlock," Molly breathed. "The last thing we need is you throwing up."

Sherlock pulled away from her. "I didn't get you anything. For your birthday. To be honest, I don't really celebrate these sorts of milestones. But it seems like something your companion should do for you."

Molly wrinkled her nose. "You've spent the last four days taking care of me while I've been sick. I don't think you need to get me a birthday present."

Sherlock drew Molly back to him. "John has been quite clear with me I am to act as a proper-" He winced. "-boyfriend. A proper boyfriend would get you present."

"Well, I'm letting you off the hook this time." Molly snuggled to Sherlock. "You're still learning, aren't you?"

Sherlock smiled down at her. "How am I doing?"

Molly smiled back up. "You're not doing bad at all."
Three days later, Molly was back at Barts working. Sherlock and John were left in the flat alone, as Mary had reconnected with a friend of hers from uni and they'd gone out for lunch together.

Normally, Sherlock would have been eager to take cases with just him and John in the flat, but circumstances were transpiring against it. There was a slew of reporters outside of 221 Baker Street. It was the anniversary of Sherlock's fall and they all wanted a quote as to how he felt a year later.

Sherlock had not a whit's desire to give into their demands. It had been, after all, a member of the press who had helped facilitate his downfall. True, the one responsible was now dead, but there was very little difference in the members of the press. They did not care for the true story. Only what was most sensational.

"Care for some tea, Sherlock?" John called out from the kitchen.

"Hm. Yes." Sherlock took up his violin and began to play a fast-paced song. He hoped to drown out the noise of the reporters. If they did not clear out within the next hour, he would call Lestrade.

"What's this?" John called out.

Sherlock stopped playing his violin and frowned slightly. "What is what?"

John entered the sitting room, carrying a piece of red paper. "This was on the refrigerator."

"Oh!" Sherlock pointed his bow at the paper. "Came in the post from Olivia Green. The girl we found the lost cat for. I thought Molly would appreciate it so I put it on the refrigerator."

John's brows shot up. "You thought Molly would appreciate a thank you card from a little girl you helped... So you put it on the fridge."

Sherlock gave a curt nod. "Yes, why is this so hard to understand?"

John looked down at the note. "Dear Mister Sherlock, Doctor John and Mrs Sherlock... Thank you for finding Angel for me. From, Olivia."

Sherlock pursed his lips. "Is there a problem with it, John? She did spell 'thank' without the h, but other than that, the sentiment is admirable."

"Mrs Sherlock?" John repeated.

"So?" Sherlock asked, setting his violin back into its case and pulling back the curtains to glance out the window at the reporters still milling on the street. "Molly was here when Miss Olivia came in. She was the one who prodded me to take the case. Lucky I did, as it led to something far more interesting."

John grinned. "Did Olivia call Molly 'Mrs Sherlock' here? Before you took the case?"

Sherlock frowned in thought. "You know, now that you mention it, I believe she did. Not an uncommon mistake for a child to make, believing that two people of the opposite gender who are not siblings, yet who live together, are married."

John nodded, still grinning broadly at Sherlock. "And the mystery of why you took Olivia's case is solved."

Sherlock smiled tightly at John. "Well, that was quite the mystery for you, John. You should be
very proud of yourself." He perked up at the sound of the whistling in the kitchen. "Kettle's boiled."

John went back into the kitchen and Sherlock continued to gaze down onto the reporters outside.

"When are you going to ask her?" John called out.

"Hm?" Sherlock looked back over his shoulder. "What are you talking about?"

"Molly," John replied as he walked back into the sitting room. He set the tea tray down on the table next to his chair. "When are you going to ask her?"

Sherlock crossed his arms over his chest. "I have no plans to ask Molly anything."

"Sherlock-" John started.

"I don't," Sherlock insisted. He sat down in his chair and pressed his fingers together under his chin. "Not until I know that is her want. She's still hesitant to live here. I've not made any demands of her to come back here. The last thing I am going to do is scare her by telling her that I not only wish for her to move in, but for the arrangement to be legally binding."

John gave a nod of agreement and seemed pleased with Sherlock's answer to the question. He glanced towards the window. "Should I give Lestrade a call? Get them to back off?"

"Do you have anything to say about it?" Sherlock asked suddenly, his gaze meeting John's. "One year after?"

John blinked at his friend. "I..." He coughed and shook his head. "I don't know what you expect me to say."

"Of course you do," Sherlock said quickly. He leaned forward before jerking his head in the direction of the window. "Those reporters are outside because it is the one year anniversary of my faked death. You were there, John. You saw me plummet from the roof of Barts. Do you really have nothing you want to say to me about what I did?"

John went quiet. He turned his attention to making tea. It was plainly obvious he was stalling for time. Sherlock continued to appraise him silently.

"That was-" John started. He held out a cup to Sherlock. Sherlock accepted it, but did not drink, just holding the cup and saucer in his hands.

John did not meet Sherlock's eyes. "I've seen battle. I've seen people die. I've seen friends die. I haven't been able to stop friends from dying, no matter what I did. But seeing you up there was the worst. You were my best friend and you were telling me that you were a fraud. And then you threw yourself off that bloody building. You not only killed yourself, you killed the life we had."

John finally raised his head to look at Sherlock. "But what you did that day, God Sherlock... Look at everything that's come out of it. It was horrible, but it had to happen. You saved me. You saved Mrs Hudson and Lestrade. I didn't think I was going to recover from it, but I did. I met Mary." He took a deep breath. "Mary is... I can't imagine what my life would be like without her. And I have you to thank for that. You and your stupid faked suicide." He gestured to Sherlock. "And look at you. You're in love. You and our bloody Pathologist- no, sorry your Pathologist- have been together for nearly a year. You killed yourself and you were reincarnated as an actual human being."

John shook his head. "I don't want to think about that day ever again. But if it wasn't for that day, the whole bloody world would be different."

Sherlock gave John a small smile. "I was human before, you know. You said so yourself. The most human human being you ever knew."

"Not nearly as human as you are now," John shot back. "After all, you're thinking about asking-" He paused. "How did you know what I said..." He shook his head. "You unbelievable bastard."

"I believe we should call Lestrade," Sherlock said quickly, pulling himself to his feet. "I would like to get some work done today. There was a message that came in on the blog last night that seems promising. Secretary in Ealing. Has some suspicions her employer is up to nefarious things.
Think it might be worth looking into. However, that will require us leaving the flat."

John nodded and picked up his mobile.

While he dialled, there was a light rapping on the door. "Hoo-hoo," Mrs Hudson called out. "Sherlock?"

"Don't worry, Mrs Hudson," Sherlock said, pulling back the curtains to look out the window. "We're calling Lestrade. He'll clear the reporters out of here."

Mrs Hudson waved a hand. "Oh, I'm sure you boys will clear that mess up. As it is, Speedy's is selling coffee by the pot to them. No, I've just come in from doing the shopping and one of the reporters gave me this."

Mrs Hudson held out an envelope to Sherlock. He felt his insides go cold at the sight of it. He remembered seeing an envelope like it before. Bohemian, containing a pink phone. His name was scrawled on it in a different handwriting. Obviously, Irene had been the one to address the previous envelope. This was someone else entirely.

"Who gave this to you?" Sherlock demanded.

"I don't know, dear," Mrs Hudson said with a smile. "It was thrust into my hands and they were gone before I saw who did it. Probably a plea for an interview."

Sherlock shook his head as he accepted the envelope. "No, this is Moran."

John lowered the phone. "Moran? But you two had a deal."

"Clearly he's altered it," Sherlock replied. "Or else he's discovered that Irene has been infiltrating his network. Either way, I think whatever arrangement we had is no longer valid."

Sherlock carefully opened the seal of the envelope and drew out the contents. It was a series of photographs. He felt his breath catch in his throat. They were surveillance photos. He had known Moran was keeping an eye on Molly and this was just the proof.

There was scrawling lettering over each photo, the ink blood red: I O U. The O formed a target over Molly's face.
Sherlock let the photos fall from his hands and he was immediately on the move. He grabbed his coat on the way out, not bothering to take his scarf.

"Sherlock!" He heard dimly behind him. John, his voice laced with worry. He'd clearly seen what was in the photos now. But Sherlock couldn't stop, wouldn't stop. He needed to get to Molly.

He thundered down the stairs. He knew John was close behind him. He only hoped the Doctor had been sensible enough to grab his gun before he went.

Sherlock's mind was clouded. He could only concentrate on one thing: He had to get to Molly. He had to know she was all right. He needed to keep her safe.

The reporters converged upon him as he emerged from the flat. Sherlock pushed them aside, weaving through them to get to the street. "Out of the way," his voice was a low growl.

He continued to push them back with one hand even as he flagged down a cab with the other.

Once he'd slipped into the cab, he looked beside him, seeing John climb in after him. John had his phone out. "What do you want me to tell Lestrade?" John asked.

Sherlock felt something dark creep up in him, something he'd never felt before. "Tell him to get to Barts. And if Molly Hooper is dead, he better turn a blind eye to whatever happens to Sebastian Moran."

He'd taken the ride to Barts a thousand times before and this one felt like it was as long as all of them combined. When they finally arrived, he didn't bother to pay the driver. John would understand having to take care of that. He needed to get to her. He needed to know she was all right.

The morgue was the obvious place to look for her. He burst through the doors, but found the room empty. "Molly!" He called out desperately, despite knowing she wasn't there.

Worry gnawed at him, a sickening, painful feeling like he hadn't felt in a year, when he'd been held hostage by Moriarty; John, Mrs Hudson and Lestrade's lives in the balance.
"Sherlock," he felt John's hand on his shoulder. Despite his frantic pace, John was doing a good job of keeping up with him. "You need to calm down. Lestrade and his men will be here soon."

"I need to find her," Sherlock insisted. He strode back out into the corridor and grabbed the first person he saw: Doctor Hughes.

Gripping him by the lapels of his lab coat, Sherlock pushed the man up against the wall. "Where is she?" He demanded.

"What are you doing, Holmes?" Hughes snarled, trying to feel himself from Sherlock's grasp. "Are you talking about Molly?"

"Where is she?" Sherlock repeated, the anger and panic flooding him.

"She was in the lab upstairs," Hughes replied, "with Doctor Adair. What's wrong with you?"

Sherlock immediately let him go. He had no use for the man any longer. He was off running. He could hear John's footsteps behind him.

The blood thrummed in Sherlock's ears. His mind always raced, but this time it raced with a singular thought:


He looked into the labs and found them empty or as good as, none of the people inside the one he was looking for.

Finally, he came to a locked door. He peered through the glass. He saw one of the windows was open and the lights were bright. Someone was inside.

As he looked down, everything seemed to still. The someone that was inside was sprawled out on the floor.

Blood spattered across the linoleum. Light brown hair was spread over her face.

His heart was no longer racing. It felt like it had stopped.

"Sher-" John started. He must have seen past Sherlock, having cut himself off. "Oh my God."

He needed to get into the room. He needed to get to her. Maybe she was still-

No, it had been a clean shot to the head. There was no way she was still-

He still needed to get to her. He needed to hold her, even if she was-

Sherlock knew John was speaking, but he couldn't hear him. He grabbed a fire extinguisher from the wall. He bashed it against the window, attempting to break through the glass.

"SHERLOCK!" His name penetrated the haze he was in.

He felt John's hands on him, trying to halt him. He shoved the smaller man away. He didn't have time to wait. He needed to get to her.

He repeatedly pounded the fire extinguisher against the door. Somewhere inside, he knew it wasn't the best way to smash open the door. It was full charged and could explode on him with the repeated hits.

"Sherlock." It was a new voice. Lestrade. It was about time Scotland Yard arrived. "What the hell are you doing?"

Sherlock didn't respond. He just kept pounding on the door. The glass had barely cracked.

"Sherlock!" Lestrade barked again. Sherlock felt hands- both John and Lestrade- trying to stop him. He swung his arms madly, knocking them away. He couldn't stop He had to get to Molly.

He turned to Lestrade, panting for air. He moved faster than Lestrade could react, grabbing his gun.
"He's armed!" Donovan yelled.

Lestrade held up a hand. "Don't shoot! Sherlock, what are you-"

Sherlock took aim at the door. He fired, blowing out the lock. He kicked open the door and raced in.

He fell to his knees next to the body. He gingerly lifted her, bringing her to his chest. He closed his eyes tightly. She was still, just as he expected.

She was dead.

"Sherlock, look at her," John said calmly behind him. "Really look at her."

Sherlock took a deep breath, steeling himself for what he was going to see when he looked down. He pushed her hair out of her face and-

It was Veronica Adair. His stomach writhed even as he felt himself relax and he could finally breathe. He pushed her aside without a thought. "Veronica," he said, nodding. He got back to his feet. Tears pricked his eyes. "Yes. Of course. I..." He looked to Lestrade. "Terribly sorry, Lestrade. I need to..."

And then, there she was. Behind Donovan. Sherlock pushed past the officers and was in front of her in a heartbeat. He enfolded her in his arms, revelling in her warmth and the thrum of her heart.

"Sherlock...?" Molly asked. She hadn't yet seen what was in the lab. "What's...?"

"Don't look," Sherlock murmured into her hair. "Just don't look. Just... Stay right here."

Moriarty had promised him once that he would have the heart burned out of him. It wasn't until that moment that Sherlock truly understood what that actually meant. He set his jaw as his grip on Molly tightened. Right then, he resolved to make sure once and for all that it would never actually occur.
Chapter 45

Chapter Summary

Sherlock and Molly deal with the aftermath of Veronica's assassination.

Molly didn't know what was going on. She had gone to the machine to get some crisps. She'd only been gone a few minutes. She found her path to the lab blocked by police. Sherlock was in front of her, his large hands framing her face, fingers running over her skin reverently.

She could see his eyes shining. He leaned in and pressed his lips firmly against her forehead, then against her mouth. It was a bruising and possessive gesture. Molly gave a small shriek, not used to Sherlock being so affectionate in public. She felt his mouth trail over her jawline to her ear. "Don't leave me," he murmured against her ear. "You can't leave me."

"I'm not going anywhere," Molly said, her voice filled with confusion.

She felt the breath go out of her as the situation began to make sense.

There were police swarming all over. Sherlock was gripping her to his chest, as if she would slip away at any moment.

"Where's Veronica?" Molly asked, her voice shaking.

Sherlock crushed her closer. Molly gasped for air, but did not pull away from him. She felt him bury his face in her hair. "Don't look, Molly." His words were not a command, but a please. "Don't look."

Molly knew what she would see if she looked past Sherlock. She couldn't help it. She needed to see it, needed to sear it into her mind.

She moved to look past Sherlock. She took in a sharp intake of breath at the sight of Veronica sprawled on the ground.

Molly felt her stomach writhe. The similarities between herself and Veronica seemed heightened as the woman lay dead on the floor. Molly felt a twinge of guilt at thinking of herself, with Veronica dead not more than a few minutes.

But Veronica was dead because of her, wasn't she? Their resemblance. It did not take the analytical mind of Sherlock Holmes to figure out Sebastian Moran had mistaken the two women.

"Why did you look?" Sherlock asked harshly, cupping her cheek. His face was lined with anguish. It unnerved Molly to see him so emotional. The only time she had seen him like this was when he was begging for her forgiveness after their breakup. This was different. This was supposed to be his area of expertise, dealing with dead bodies.

Molly looked up at Sherlock, but did not speak. She didn't need to. Sherlock knew what she was thinking, what she had figured out. It was the only thing that made sense. Sherlock thought he had lost her.

Sherlock closed his eyes and pressed his forehead against Molly's. "I... Was not thinking with the highest amount of rationale. Moran told me he was going to attack you and then I found Veronica..."

"Molly, we're going to need to get you to Scotland Yard," Lestrade said gently. "We're going to need to take a statement."

Sherlock straightened himself up. "You-You," he stammered and Molly felt her stomach writhe again. This was not how Sherlock was supposed to be. She knew he hated it as much as it frightened her. "You can't let the news of Veronica's death out. Or let anyone know Molly is still alive."
"This wasn't simply murder," Sherlock said firmly. Now that he was speaking to Lestrade, he was beginning to recover his poise. "This was an assassination. And Molly was the target. Doctor Adair had the misfortune of resembling her too closely. If he believes he was successful, I will have time."

"Why should we listen to you?" Anderson asked irritably. "The Detective Inspector should be dragging you in for attacking him and taking his weapon."

"Anderson," Donovan said firmly, to the surprise of a great number of the gathered people. "Lestrade's not going to arrest him." Donovan looked over to Sherlock and Molly. Sherlock was pulling Molly close to him again, stroking her hair. "For good reason."

"Take a statement from Molly," Sherlock said softly to Lestrade. "But get her into protective custody, witness protection- anything. If Moran finds out she's still alive, we'll have another body on our hands and this time, it'll be her. Mrs Hudson should also be put under protection. I assume, John, you will not go?"

John shook his head. "Not on your life."

Sherlock nodded. "I doubt she is in any direct danger, but Mary Morstan should also be protected, if only so she is not used to lure out John to get to me."

Lestrade nodded. It was a testament to how grave the situation was, that Lestrade was agreeing with Sherlock with absolutely no comment to how bossy Sherlock was being. "We'll take Molly to Scotland Yard and keep her under cover. I'll send officers over to pick up Miss Morstan and Mrs Hudson."

"Good," Sherlock said with a nod. He turned his attention back to Molly, who continued to stare at him. He leaned in and kissed her gently. "Molly, Darling," his voice was barely a whisper. "I'll be right behind you. If I'm seen with you, Moran will know you're still alive. Will you be all right?"

Molly nodded mutely. She didn't trust herself to speak at the moment.

"John and I will be right behind you," Sherlock assured her once more, kissing her on the forehead. His eyes- which still shone with tears- burned with ferocity. "I swear I am going to end this, Molly."

Things were a blur as soon as she left Sherlock's side. Lestrade escorted her out of the building through the back, her head obscured by his jacket. She had given a statement and was now waiting in an interrogation room. It had been an insistence from Sherlock. A room without windows, in case Moran was keeping a closer eye than they thought.

Molly was now waiting for Sherlock, who was giving his own statement. John was with Mary and Mrs Hudson. They'd offered to sit with her in the interrogation room, but she'd declined. She wanted to be alone. Besides, if John were to be seen with Mrs Hudson and Mary but without her, maybe Moran would believe he'd succeeded.

Sherlock's statement was taking longer than expected. Apparently, Moran had forewarned him of his plans, but just barely. Not giving him enough time to intervene. To save her.

No, not her. Veronica. Veronica was the one who died, not her. Veronica died because of her.

She had been holding herself together. It took all of her energy, but she hadn't yet given into the emotions that were flooding her.

She couldn't hold them together any longer. She buried her face in her hands and began to sob.

"Why are you crying, Molly?" Sherlock's voice was low and comforting. His fingers sifted through her hair.
"Why do you think I'm crying?" Molly blubbered. "Veronica is dead."

"Well, you will be able to get your former position at Barts back," Sherlock responded far more cheerfully than should have been allowed.

Molly pulled herself away from Sherlock fiercely. "You did not just say that, Sherlock!"

Sherlock blinked at her. "What? It is the truth."

Molly wiped the tears from her face furiously. "A woman was killed because Moran thought she was me."

"It wasn't you," Sherlock replied. He brought a hand to Molly's face. "That's all that matters. Does that bother you?"

Molly allowed Sherlock to draw her back to him. She clutched tightly to him, letting out a small sigh. "No one deserves to die for having the wrong face. But, to be honest... You caring this much is a shock."

Sherlock kissed her forehead. "I can't care about Veronica. There's too much..." He pulled her closer. "When I saw her..." He shuddered. "Molly..."

Molly knew she should be disturbed by Sherlock's inability to care about anyone outside of his small circle. But that circle covered more people than it had when she first met him. In fact, she didn't know if there was anyone who really mattered to him back then. It was only after meeting John that he allowed himself to open up.

And now, he cared about her. Sherlock looked at her with such passionate, ferocious protectiveness. Molly knew Sherlock himself didn't truly understand the breadth of his feelings.

"I'm okay, Sherlock," Molly murmured. She clutched at his coat, burying her face in his chest to take in his scent. It kept her grounded, knowing he was there, holding her in his arms. "He didn't get me."

"Not for lack of trying," Sherlock intoned darkly.

"We'll just have to be careful now," Molly replied.

Sherlock looked down at Molly. "I'll just have to kill him before he gets another chance."

"What?" Molly squealed. She looked around. As an interrogation room, someone could very well be listening in. "Sherlock, you can't say that! We're in Scotland bloody Yard!"

"And Sebastian Moran murdered a woman thinking she was you," Sherlock's voice was icy. "After he previously held a gun to John's head. Which was after he strapped Semtex to John's chest. If there is any man who has run out of chances, he is it."

"And if you kill him, you'll be the one who gets arrested," Molly said firmly. "You're not above the law, Sherlock."

Sherlock remained quiet. It was unlike him to resist the urge to respond to... Well, anything. But the look on his face spoke volumes. He wanted to be above the law. For a moment, she was frightened.

She wondered what Sherlock would have done after his 'death' if he hadn't come to her. If he had been alone.

No. She refused to let herself go down that path. She was there. He had her. Now, he had John back. He was grounded.

"Moran thinks you're dead," Sherlock stated plainly.

Molly nodded. "Yeah. I got that bit."

Sherlock pressed his forehead against Molly's. "Until I can get to him, he's going to have to keep thinking that. Everyone will. It's the only way you can stay safe."
Molly nodded again, but she felt her stomach writhing. "Sherlock, I don't want to leave you alone."

"I won't be," Sherlock assured her. "John's not going anywhere. I've also got Irene. Keep Mrs Hudson and Mary safe."

"And did you tell them to keep me safe?"

Sherlock moved back from Molly slightly. "Veronica's death is going to be kept out of the media. 'Yours' won't be reported either, at least for the time being. You will not have to explain to your brothers. I will find Moran," Sherlock promised. "He believes me to be a man lost in grief."

Molly felt Sherlock's hands grip her tightly. Her heart clenched at the notion that he would have been had Moran succeeded. The cold, calculating Sherlock Holmes loved her so much, he let himself give into his emotions. He would have lost himself without her.

"I want to come home," Molly blurted out.

Sherlock tilted his head, looking down at her curiously. "You can't come home, Molly. Moran will be keeping an eye on me. He needs to believe you're dead."

"No," Molly murmured, biting her lower lip. "I mean... When this is done, when Moran is in jail... I want to come home. I want to live at 221B. With you."

Sherlock's brow furrowed as he studied Molly's face. He ran his thumb over her cheek. "You..." He started, before clearing his throat. "You have been staying at 221B since your illness. Even before that, you stayed in the flat often. I have been systematically moving your things in." The corner of his mouth tugged up in the faintest hint of a smile. "I believe you have already come home."

"Well, then... Officially," Molly said firmly. "I want to be with you, Sherlock. For good."

There seemed to be conflict in Sherlock's expression as he looked down at her. Triumph, but there was this indefinable fire in his eyes. Like there was something Sherlock wanted to say, but was holding back. Instead. He just cradled her face and kissed her urgently. "Then I am going to end this as soon as possible, Molly Hooper."
Chapter 46

Chapter Summary

Sherlock makes plans to take down Moran.

Molly Hooper had been dead for a week.

It was gruesome terminology to use, certainly, but it was most effective in keeping Sherlock on task.

The tension at 221B was high. There was no longer Molly, Mrs Hudson or even Mary Morstan to calm the nerves of Sherlock and John. Rather, they had Irene Adler, who was quite good at ramping up the discomfort.

For thirty-five years, Sherlock Holmes had avoided emotional attachments. He needed to keep his mind clear, remain focused on what was important: his work. When his work had been lost, he'd allowed himself to open up to the idea of exploring the avenues he'd so effectively blocked off. Every single one of his concerns about romantic entanglements had proven true.

He had been made vulnerable. He'd left himself open for attack, given himself the disadvantage.

He'd allowed himself to become less rational. He no longer looked at everything as a life-sized puzzle for him to solve. No, now he wanted blood. He was going to make sure that Moran would be the one to suffer the consequences of his deficiencies.

The assassination of Veronica Adair had at least allowed Sherlock to share the breadth of his plans with John. So much of what he had been doing along with the Woman had been done in secrecy.

Until now Sherlock had believed that John's strong sense of morality would not abide all of their plans.

But now, the names and faces of every single person in Moriarty's- now Moran's- network were displayed on one of the walls in the sitting room. Each night, after they returned to the flat, names were crossed off the list, having become either irrelevant or non-existent.

Sherlock stared at the map of names and faces, deciding whom the next target would be. He didn't look away even as he heard the door open and the umbrella tap against the floor.

"Being the avenging angel doesn't suit you, Sherlock," Mycroft said coolly.

"I should never be mistaken for an angel." Sherlock's lip curled in a cruel smile as he glanced over his shoulder finally. "Moriarty made that error."

"Moriarty killed himself in the end though, didn't he, Sherlock?" Mycroft tilted his head to the side. "You are being much less merciful this time."

Sherlock turned to fully face Mycroft. "I'm doing what I have to. Besides, in your position, you are hardly one to be casting stones."

Mycroft chuckled. "I suppose 10 Downing could be considered something of a glass house, but I assure you, I do leave the wet work to others. It's just so... Wet."

"I don't have that luxury," Sherlock replied. He took a step towards his brother, raising his chin to try to even out the slight height difference. "Perhaps if you were to be more generous with your resources."

"I have real problems to deal with, Sherlock. The most I can do is keep your record clean while you do your dirty little work." He smiled toothily. "But the survival of your girlfriend is hardly a matter of national security."

"Moran should be," Sherlock intoned darkly, narrowing his gaze on Mycroft.
Mycroft chuckled, shaking his head. "You know as well as I do, Sebastian Moran is not nearly as dangerous as James Moriarty. The situation is well under control."

Sherlock's lip curled in a snarl as he took a step towards Mycroft, getting nearly nose-to-nose with him. "Do you really want to speak to me about the control you have over situations, Mycroft? You thought you had Moriarty under control, didn't you? Look what happened there."

Mycroft bristled, taking a step back from Sherlock. As much as Mycroft tried to hide the affect the words had on him, Sherlock could read him, knew him too well.

Mycroft took a deep breath, hand gripping his umbrella tighter. "I've come here to ask you what your plan is."

Sherlock tilted his head to the side. "I would have thought that would be very clear."

"I meant after you have taken care of Moran. In what..." He laughed. "Whatever manner you see fit. However, I would take it as a kindness if he were brought into custody. He could be a useful source of information."

"Of course, the Network," Sherlock replied.

Mycroft nodded. "Naturally. As many people as you've crossed off, you know a hundred more remain. Once Moran is out of the picture, someone else will take over. It will continue on endlessly. It can't be stopped. Something this complicated can't just be dismantled."

"I suppose not," Sherlock murmured. He turned away from Mycroft to look at the wall covered in pictures and names once again. Steepling his fingers, he pressed them against his mouth. "But I have some ideas. The priority is removing Moran from power. Amongst the Network, he and Moriarty are unique. Moriarty didn't care about money. He wanted stimulation. Distraction. It was just a means to relieve his tedium. That was why he focused on me. But for Moran, it is a matter of sentiment. Because of his affections for Moriarty, he is pursuing me for revenge."

Mycroft chuckled. "And you would know nothing about pursuit out of vengeful sentiment, would you, Sherlock?"

"It's not revenge," Sherlock insisted. "It's protection. As long as he is allowed to remain where he is, we are all in his crosshairs. Anyone who would take his place will not have the same obsession with me."

"There will always be someone," Mycroft's voice was full of warning. "She will never be safe, not as long as you are insistent on continuing your-" He let out a derisive snort. "-profession. There will always be someone who wishes to cause you harm. As long as you are with Molly Hooper, there is a danger someone will use her to get to you."

"I know," Sherlock replied. "You think it would be a noble and loving gesture for me to let her go, to free her from my dangerous lifestyle."

Mycroft laughed along with Sherlock, just as bitter and mocking. "You could also retire. Take a less perilous career path for the benefit of Miss Hooper."

"The reports of my nobility are greatly exaggerated," Sherlock replied. "Besides, Doctor Hooper would never accept either option. She can be decidedly stubborn when she wants to be. She also entered this relationship knowing what I was."

"Of course." Mycroft nodded. "Will you be going out with Miss Adler again tonight?"

Sherlock nodded. He reached to the wall, plucking off a picture. "Yes. There are many more to take care of."

"I know two-" Mycroft paused. "-Specialists. I'll send them out with you tonight. I believe they will come in handy."

Sherlock looked back over his shoulder at his brother. "You really believe I should let Moran live?"

Mycroft nodded. "Like I said, the avenging angel does not suit you, Sherlock. What would Miss
Sherlock closed his eyes and remained still as he listened to the sound of footsteps and the door closing behind Mycroft.

Once he was alone in the flat once again, he took up his violin and began to play. He needed to think, to sort out his mind.

He began to play the concerto he'd written for Molly. He'd not titled it. Everything seemed too mawkish. Besides, it didn't need a name. All it had to be was hers.

There was a dull ache in his chest as bow and fingers slid over the strings.

Molly Hooper had been dead for a week, he reminded himself.

When he'd realized it was Veronica who had been killed and not Molly, he felt something primal inside of him. He was gripped with a territorial hunger. He wanted to touch her, to make sure she was real, warm, alive.

He was painfully reminded of John's casual teasing after Moriarty's death: *Thank God We're Alive* sex.

This was something beyond that. He wanted to mark her, brand her as his. Let it be known to everyone that anyone who harmed Molly Hooper would have to deal with him.

He wanted to know she was alive, that she was with him. He wanted to shield her from those who would harm her. He wanted her to remain his constant, the calming balm to his restless mind. As much as his friends would like to believe John was capable of such a thing, John Watson was an enabler of his wilder tendencies, using them to allow himself adventure. Molly was the only one able to make him stop, make his mind calm.

But he was denied her company. She was whisked away, supposedly safe from Moran. But she was not with him. He felt himself spiralling, his mind racing and there was nothing to buoy him.

Sherlock stopped playing when he heard his phone ring.

He set down his violin carefully and reached into his jacket, drawing out the mobile and putting it to his ear.

"Yes," he said warily.

"When is the funeral, Sherlock?" The dark voice mocked. "I would like to know where I should send the flowers. I do feel a touch responsible for this whole mess."

Sherlock's back stiffened. "Moran."

"You had to know I'd call," Moran replied. "That I'd want to know exactly how you were doing with your unfortunate loss. I see you're trying to keep it quiet. Wouldn't want the adoring public to know that the great Sherlock Holmes failed the woman he loves. You know you're just putting off the inevitable."

"Why?" Sherlock demanded. "Why'd you break our deal?"

Moran chuckle. "You're the detective. Deduce me, Sherlock. Show me you've still got it."

Sherlock took a deep breath and closed his eyes. "It was the one year anniversary of my fall. You believe, because I remained alive, Moriarty ended up dead. You regret not shooting John when you had the chance."

"I must admit that shooting Miss Hooper was a bit more satisfying." There was a groan of pleasure in Moran's voice. "That little bitch had it coming. Watson... Oh, that would've hurt you. But she needed to go. She's what kept you alive. She's what killed Jim. Oh, you should have seen the blood spatter as the shot went through her head. I'm an excellent marksman. I do wish I'd been able to draw it out a bit though. Maybe leave her like I did Riley. Listened to her scream your name, begging for you to save her."

Sherlock tightened his grip on his phone. His insides twisted. "I hope it is obvious to you that your life is now forfeit. The only reason I stopped pursing you was for the safety of my friends, but have broken that bargain now."
"Friends," Moran spat. "Such a cold way to refer to the woman who shared your bed, Sherlock. And you seem to forget." Moran's voice raised, the anger clear. "YOU NEVER STOPPED PURSuing ME."

Sherlock set his jaw as he listened to Moran rant.

"Do you think I don't know about Adler?" Moran demanded. "Do you think I haven't always known about Adler? I let it go. I needed you to think I didn't know. I needed to wait for the right moment. You underestimated me, Sherlock. And I killed your bitch."

"This is going to end very soon," Sherlock growled. "I promise you that, Moran. And it will not end well for you."

"You try to sound so calm," Moran hissed. "So in control of yourself. You want me to believe you're the same man you've always been. But she's gone, Sherlock. Dead. The only woman you've ever cared about."

"So is it just revenge?" Sherlock asked, taking deep, even breaths. "Trying to avenge Moriarty? Or do you want to bring me down to your level? Try to turn me into a base, violent animal?"

"Oh well... That would be a sight to see, wouldn't it?" With that, Moran hung up.

Sherlock took a few more deep breaths, his insides still churning.

He felt something brush against his leg. He looked down and saw Toby there, nuzzling against him. Sherlock crouched down, slender hand slipping over the feline's spine and making him purr. Using his thumb, he rubbed the cat's ear and Toby leaned into the caress.

Molly Hooper was alive. Once this problem of Moran was resolved, she would be coming home to 221B. He'd been wrong before, trying to remind himself that she was dead. Molly was alive and that's the thought that would get him through this.

"Sherlock?"

John was now in the sitting room. Sherlock kept his head turned away, knowing his expression would betray him. "I've been talking to Lestrade."

John trailed off. Sherlock could feel John's careful observation of him.

"Used to think you were some sort of machine," John said softly. "That you weren't able to feel anything. I was wrong, wasn't I? It was never that you felt nothing. You felt too much. You had to shut it all down to stand it."

"I never wanted any of this, John," Sherlock murmured. "It was all simpler before. Before my Fall. Before you. You know if you hadn't come around, it never would have gotten to this point."

"Don't blame me. All I wanted was a flatmate." John crouched down beside Sherlock. "She's safe. She and Mary and Mrs Hudson. We've just got to keep it together."

Sherlock nodded. He straightened himself up, tugging down his jacket. "You know, John... What I am..." He cleared his throat. "The things I will do... You don't..."

John shook, nodding. "I'm with you. Whatever you have to."

"Right." Sherlock nodded. "Yes. Good."

"Lestrade's been interrogating Fredrick Raines," John said quickly. "He hasn't been able to get out much, but..."

Sherlock waved off John. "Don't worry about that. It's not important. I didn't expect him to have much."

John followed after Sherlock as he strode out of the flat and went down the stairs, all the way to 221C. He didn't bother to knock on the door.

At the kitchen table that had formerly been in Molly's flat sat Wiggins, working away at a
computer. Irene had her arms draped over his shoulders, looking at his work. She looked up at Sherlock. "Oh, Mister Holmes." She smiled. "Your ragamuffin is just wonderful. You and Doctor Hooper should really just adopt him."

Sherlock arched a brow. "I don't think Wiggins would care much for that. He rather enjoys being free of rules."

Wiggins glanced back at Irene, giving her a smile. "Might let you adopt me, Miss. Could enjoy your rules."

"Oh, you're cheeky." Irene laughed, ruffling Wiggins's bright ginger hair. "But the boy is brilliant."

"Wish I could disagree with 'er," Wiggins said with a smirk. "But I 'ave taken the information Miss Adler 'ad and managed to track down some more players. 'Ope you don't mind, but I 'ave already anonymously contacted the authorities. A bunch of 'em are in other countries. Would be 'ard for you to get to 'em all."

Irene dug her nails into the back of Wiggins' neck, causing the boy to wince. "I didn't tell you my name."

"Wiggins is the most savvy of my own Network," Sherlock said, giving the boy an approving nod. "Were he so inclined, I suspect he could make a good detective."

Irene's grip on the boy lessened.

Wiggins grinned at Sherlock. "Thanks there, Sherlock. Wish I could say that was my keen skills. Truth is, I 'ad Miss Adler's website bookmarked through all of uni."

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "You were only in University for a year, Wiggins."

Irene pinched Wiggins's cheek. "Well, I do make an impression, don't I? You will keep me secret, won't you, Dear?"

"Secret's safe with me."

"Secret's safe with me." Wiggins shrugged. "The only person who'd be interested in that.-" He pointed to Sherlock. "-already know."

"Have you had any more luck with Moran?" Sherlock asked, moving past Irene to look over Wiggins's shoulder. "We still haven't been able to find him."

Wiggins shook his head. "Sorry. 'e's keeping 'imself well undercover."

"He called me before," Sherlock could not keep the growl out of his voice.

"He did?" John piped up, blinking at Sherlock in surprise. "Why didn't you say anything?" John was obviously still figuring out what had caused Sherlock's mood.

"Would it have made a difference?" Sherlock snapped. "We spoke. He taunted me for the murder of Molly. I promised to kill him."

Wiggins frowned. "I really wish you 'ad said something." He raked his fingers through his hair. "'Ad you come down while you were on the mobile, I might 've tracked it. Mean, 'e might 've countered against it, but..."

Sherlock waved his hand dismissively to shut up Wiggins. There was no use going over what he could have done. "Forget it. He would have guarded against it. Keep working, Wiggins."

He looked to Irene. "Well, Miss Adler, are you ready to go out for the night?"

Irene purred, slipping up beside him and taking his arm. "I have been getting a bit bored sitting around here."

Sherlock started towards the door when he noticed John was still by his side. He looked to his friend, cocking his head.

"You're a bloody idiot if you thought I was going to stay behind," John said simply. "I told you. I'm with you on this. All the way. "
Molly had never craved danger. Oh, she did have a certain taste for adventure. When she was in medical school, she had considered going off and joining Médecins Sans Frontières in order to see the world, have adventure and help people. Then, her father had become sick. During his long illness, she had turned her focus to Pathology in order to understand what was happening to him. In truth, it had been a better fit for her.

But the interest in adventure remained. It had been that which had made Sherlock so attractive to her in the first place. He had a way of making her job exciting, even while she was stuck in a morgue with nothing but corpses. When John returned from his own tenure with Médecins Sans Frontières, Molly enjoyed hearing about his time there and wondering what her life would have been like had she gone down that path.

But living vicariously through Sherlock and John was completely different than wanting danger. She didn't get the same rush as they did being up against a criminal. The only time she had really, truly been exposed to the world they lived in- when she'd allowed Moriarty to kidnap her- she thought her thundering heart would give out before Moriarty had the chance to kill her.

No, she was fine without dashing about being a headstrong fool. She could help Sherlock from the safety of the lab or the morgue.

Yet now that she was actually safely tucked away, safe from the dangers of their lives, Molly was beginning to feel more like a prisoner.

Sherlock was desperate to protect her. As stupid as it was considering his occupation, she wanted to do the same. If he were to go into danger, she wanted to be there with him. Especially with the current case. She was tied so closely to the situation with Moran, she felt it her place was at Sherlock's side.

But he would not let her.

A year ago, Sherlock had needed Molly to help him fake his death. She had been the only one with him as he combated Moriarty. Together, they had managed to bring an end to the Consulting Criminal. It had been that case that had made them fall in love.

Now- because of that very love- Molly was secreted away.

She had seen the terror in Sherlock's face when he'd believed she'd been killed. She couldn't blame him for wanting her to be safe.

That didn't make her feel any better. That didn't make her feel any less like mousy Molly Hooper, secreted away until the danger was done and it was time for Sherlock's post-case shagging.

Molly laid back on the tiny bed she had been using at the safe house. Initially, she had believed Scotland Yard would be responsible for her protection. She had underestimated Sherlock, who had gone instead to Mycroft.

Sherlock was willing to ignore his deep dislike of asking Mycroft for favours in order to keep her safe.

Molly rolled onto her side to pick up her phone. She glanced down at the screen despite knowing there would be no change since the last time she looked. Her text alert would have gone off.

It had been the only contact she had with Sherlock for the past nine days: a simple text every day. He never went more than twenty-four hours, but it was only a single text.
Plans are in motion.
-S

Been told I am being reckless. Assure you I am not.
-S

John is trying to force me to sleep.
-S

-S

I suspect Toby senses the unrest. Need to experiment in the awareness of felines.
-S

Your absence is felt.
-S

John is making me sleep again. The bed is cold.
-S

You know how I feel. Tell you when I see you.
-S

Molly smiled sadly as she read through the old texts. She rolled back onto her back, her phone clutched to her chest. She felt the ache deep inside of her. Sherlock was off trying to track down an assassin. He wasn't alone. He had John and Irene with him...

But he didn't have her.

She knew her presence wasn't necessary. It was downright suicidal for her to be with him while Moran believed she was dead. But that didn't change what she wanted.

She wanted to always be with Sherlock for better or for worse. As long as he was a Consulting Detective, his life was going to be perilous. If there was anything she could do to help, she wanted to be able to do it.

She sighed, reminding herself that what was going to help Sherlock the most at the moment was for her to stay safe and out of the way. His emotions would get in the way.

That was why he had avoided love for so long, wasn't it? Why he had rebelled against it.

Molly felt her stomach flip in guilt. One of the most brilliant men in the world, the keenest analytical minds and she'd compromised him.

No, she wouldn't let herself think like that. She'd done nothing wrong. She'd developed feelings for a man and he'd developed them in kind. There was absolutely nothing wrong with that.

She needed to get her mind off things. However, it seemed an impossible task. She didn't have work to keep her occupied. What was she supposed to do? Watch crap telly?

She could have joined Mary and Mrs Hudson in the sitting room. But her conversations with them had been limited to Sherlock and John. They were all too worried to discuss anything else.

Molly jolted up when her phone buzzed with a new text message. She lifted her phone to read the new message. She smiled when she saw the phone identified the send as Sherlock. She clicked into her messages:

Come to 221B immediately.
-SH

Molly took a deep breath as she read over the message several times. She then replied:

What do you need?
-M
After a heartbeat, she received her reply:

You.
-SH

Molly stared down at the text for a long time. She bit her lower lip, wondering what she should do. Should she respond back to the text? Or should she just do what it had asked her?

Molly let out a long breath and hopped off the bed. She shoved her phone into her pocket. She raced for the door.

There was a bodyguard staying at the house with them. While he wasn't a prison guard, he wasn't about to let them wander around London freely, even with Sherlock's text. But as he wasn't a prison guard, it wasn't as if he was sitting at the front door. He was in the sitting room with Mary and Mrs Hudson, while Mrs Hudson gabbed about her gentleman caller, trying to keep the mood light.

Molly sprinted to the front door and ran out before anyone was the wiser.

She caught a cab and found herself on the way back to Baker Street, on the way home. She took deep, calming breaths, hoping this would mean everything would be over soon.

When the cab came to a stop, Molly paid the driver and ran out and into the flat, up the familiar steps towards her home. She could hear the strains of violin playing from inside.

Molly opened the door to 221B and gulped at what she set eyes on.

Sebastian Moran set a tray of tea down on the table, smiling at her. "I'm sorry. Were you expecting someone else?"

Molly was frozen in the doorway. "I-" She started.

"I'm sorry. I was a bit naughty. I spoofed Sherlock's number. Didn't think you'd accept my invitation otherwise. Come in," Moran urged her, gesturing for her to enter. "The kettle's just boiled."

Molly felt every muscle in her body tighten. "Why-why should I-I do that?"

Moran reached into his jacket and pulled out a gun. "Because I'll shoot you if you don't."

Hesitantly, Molly crept into the flat. Moran gestured with the gun for her to sit down. She obeyed, settling herself in Sherlock's chair.

"Well, it has been a while since we've seen each other, isn't it?" Moran said conversationally as he sat down across from Molly in John's chair. "But I suppose this is really the first time we've met, isn't it? Really, truly gotten to know one another."

Molly wrung her hands. "How...How..."

"How did I know you were alive," Moran finished her question for her. He laughed, shaking his head. "Oh, Miss Hooper... I always knew you were alive. I meant for you to be alive."

Molly's eyes widened. "You killed Veronica on purpose."

Moran nodded. "Yeah." He shrugged. "I did. Convenient, having a girl who looked like you at the morgue. Could make Sherlock believe I was stupid. See, he has trouble with anyone he doesn't think is as clever as he is, which I suppose is everybody. He tries to think down and he doesn't give them enough credit." His voice became cold and crisp. "He didn't think about the fact I'm a bloody assassin who knows well enough not to hit the wrong person."

Molly brought a trembling hand to her face, pushing her hair over her ear. She shook her head. "Why?"

Moran tilted his head. "So I could get time with you. I wanted to understand you. What makes you so special?" He leaned in towards her. "Now why don't you be a good girl and pour the tea."

He waved his gun. "My hands are full. We'll talk about why you're such a exceptional lady."
"I'm not," Molly murmured, picking up the sugar bowl. "Sugar?"

"Two," Moran replied. He nodded. "You know, I don't really think you are myself. But here you are, living at 221B Baker Street with the extraordinary Sherlock Holmes. His one and only love, with perhaps the exception of Doctor Watson. But you're not just that." He waved his gun at Molly. "Jim found you so very interesting. He didn't need you to get into Barts. He pursued you to understand you. Why you were so devoted to Sherlock Holmes."

"You don't like it," Molly whispered as she added sugar to the teacups.

Moran's eyes were dark. "I know Jim did things he thought were necessary. Things that I didn't like." His lip curled in a snarl. "I want to know if you were one of the things he did, Miss Hooper. Did Jim figure out how Sherlock felt about you? Did he want to beat him to the punch? Take what he thought Sherlock would never had the courage to do himself?"

Molly gulped, averting her gaze.

"You did," Moran gritted out. His brow furrowed deeply as he glared daggers at Molly, but he tried to keep his calm. "Have you told Sherlock?"

"He asked," Molly squeaked out. "I told him I didn't."

Moran barked out a harsh laugh. "And he wanted to believe you. How much ruin have you brought good men to, Miss Hooper? The Great Sherlock Holmes. One of the great minds in the world. The only one who could compare to James Moriarty... And you've destroyed him. He couldn't see through your lie, just like he hasn't been able to see through mine."

Moran got up from his seat and moved in close to Molly, crouching down to be eye-level with her. "I want you to know that. Before I kill you. Sherlock Holmes is going to die. And it's all your fault."

"He'll surprise you," Molly whispered. She swallowed hard, acting fast. She whipped the top off of the teapot. "So will I."

Before Moran could react, Molly had thrown the burning hot liquid at him, hitting the lower half of his face and his chest. He howled, dropping his gun to clutch at his face. With the impact against the floor, the gun went off, a bullet burying into the hearth.

While Moran screamed, Molly grabbed up the gun. Her hands shook as she pointed it at him. "You should know... I-I told Sherlock I didn't..." She took deep, gasping breaths. "Because I never did. But he wanted to. I just dumped him before he got the chance."

"You miserable bitch!" Moran screamed.

"By the way," Molly's voice was growing in strength. "It's Doctor Hooper."

Moran pulled his hands away from his face. His skin was red and blistering. "I've been in wars, Doctor. You think I can't handle pain?" He looked to the gun, still shaking in Molly's hand. "And you're not going to fire that."

Molly's knees felt like they were made of jelly as she took a step back. "I still have it and you don't."

"What are you going to do?" Moran demanded, struggling to his feet. "You're here with me, all alone. And I can kill you without a gun."

"There's Sherlock," Molly replied, taking another step back.

"Sherlock is out looking for me," Moran crept closer to Molly. She could see how his teeth were grit, trying to hold off his pain of his burns.

Molly shook her head. "No, he's not. He's coming for me. I told him I'm here."

Moran paused. "What?"

Molly had moved back so far she found herself pressed against the wall. "Everyone's being underestimated, aren't they?" Molly shook her head, still trembling. "I knew it was you. Sherlock
doesn't include the H when he texts me. I've just got to keep you occupied until he gets here."

Moran lunged towards Molly. She let out a scream. She tried to remember all of the things that Greg and John had taught her, but it all seemed to jumble together in her head as she squeezed the trigger of the gun clutched in her hands. Moran staggered backwards in shock. "YOU SHOT ME!"

Moran moved his hand away and looked to his arm. The bullet hadn't even penetrated his clothes. "You shot at my arm!"

"I was aiming for your chest," Molly whimpered.

Moran pounced on Molly, dragging her to the ground.

Molly kicked and thrashed against her attacker. He wrenched the gun from her hands and tossed it aside. "I think we can do this without weapons," he hissed.

Fingers wrapped around Molly's slender throat. She gasped as her airways constricted. She flailed against him ineffectually, his heavier body weight pinning her down. He leaned in close to her, letting her see up close the damage she'd caused to his face. "Been a long time since I choked the life out of someone. I'm going to enjoy this."

Molly closed her eyes tightly, feeling the tears begin to well. She wasn't going to be able to stop him. She didn't want him to be the last thing she saw. She continued to ineffectually writhe beneath him, desperate for a reprieve. Her mind continued to cry out one thing as she struggled:

Where was Sherlock?
Chapter 48

Chapter Summary

Sherlock and John must rush to Molly while she grapples with Moran.

One thing Sherlock had always loved about his mind was his ability to read a situation with only a few clues. At that very moment, he was finding it to be a horrible burden.

He and John were fifteen minutes from Baker Street in ideal traffic when he’d received the text from Molly:

_I'm at 221B. I love you._

The second he’d read it he was on the move. He flagged down a cab and climbed into it, John following him without explanation. Sherlock felt the same sick sense of anxiety deep in his gut that he had when Moran had sent him the pictures of Molly.

Going to Baker Street was one of the stupidest things Molly could attempt. Without a doubt, Moran had eyes on it. Molly Hooper was decidedly _not_ stupid and would not risk going there for something trivial. In the unlikely event he was wrong, Molly certainly would not text him to tell him about it. He would have become angry with her for leaving her protection.

While Molly telling Sherlock that she loved him was not in of itself odd, saying it in this situation was. Paired with her earlier sentence, it had a morbid sense of finality.

She knew exactly what she was going into upon entering their home. Moran had discovered she was still alive.

But no, of course not. Moran was an expert assassin. He would not have mistaken Veronica for Molly.

He’d thrown Sherlock off balance. He’d been so wrapped up in nearly losing Molly, he hadn’t realized what Moran had done.

Killing Veronica was psychological warfare. It allowed Sherlock to experience the horror of losing Molly, without Molly’s actual death. It also separated them so Moran could take his time with her, play with her.

Sherlock felt his stomach lurch as he thought about Moran and Molly together at 221B. How had Moran lured her out? Had he kidnapped one of her brothers? How much damage could Moran inflict upon a body in fifteen minutes?

"Sherlock?" John’s voice broke him out of his panicked thoughts. He looked to his friend, swallowing hard. He then reached into his pocket, fishing out his mobile.

Sherlock selected the number and put the phone to his ear. It took far too long for an answer. "Lestrade," Sherlock said, not waiting for the other man to speak. "Get everyone you have to Baker Street. Moran has Molly."

Lestrade didn't have time to reply before Sherlock hung up, slipping his phone away. He looked back to John, who was staring at him in abject horror.

John’s brows were knit as he stared at Sherlock. "Is she..."

"For now," Sherlock replied.

After what seemed like an age, the cab pulled up at 221 Baker Street. Sherlock threw a handful of notes at the driver, not caring how much it was exactly. He bounded out of the car, John close behind him.
It had been sixteen minutes and thirty-two seconds since he had received Molly's text when he burst into his flat and set eyes on Sebastian Moran. The former Colonel was pinning Molly to the ground, his hands wrapped around her throat.

Sherlock lunged at the man, using his long, lean body to tackle him away from Molly. While his slender frame was widely believed to be weak, he had quite a bit of strength in him, strength that was singularly focused on doing as much damage to Moran as physically possible.

He could hear John behind him. "Molly! Molly, come on, stay with me!"

Sherlock knew he should go to Molly. He should make sure she was all right. But he couldn't tear himself away from Moran, pinned beneath him now. Sherlock's heart was pounding, the blood rushing in his ears. He hands wrapped around Moran's throat, squeezing.

He would make the man know what he'd done to Molly. He would feel the breath leave him, his life smothered out. Or perhaps he could haul him to his feet and throw him out the window. He knew just the way to throw him out to kill him. He could die the same way his beloved Moriarty had. A thousand ideas of how to bring Sebastian Moran's demise went through his head. He wanted to do them all.

He had killed before. When he had saved the Woman, it was the only course of action. Scotland Yard had not apprehended everyone in the Network that Sherlock had confronted. Some would not be taken alive. This was different.

It was a curious sensation. Knowing what all of those men he'd brought to justice had felt. The pure, unadulterated bloodlust. The absolute craving to murder another human being.

Then, Sherlock heard it. The voice was small and raspy, but penetrated all the other thoughts in his mind. "Sherlock?"

Hands still wrapped around Moran's throat, Sherlock turned his head to look to John and Molly. She was sitting up, staring at him with wide, bloodshot eyes. There was blood trickling from her nose and her throat was a livid red.

It only took that moment of distraction. Moran took the opening. Sherlock's breath was knocked out of him by the punch to his gut. While he tried to regain his bearings, Moran used his strength to flip them over. He looked down at Sherlock, fire in his eyes. He reached over and picked up the gun that had been abandoned on the floor.

"Felt good, didn't it, Sherlock?" Moran hissed, his voice raspy from Sherlock's strangulation. He smirked at the gun in his hand. "Trying to kill me. Shame you weren't able to follow through..."

Before Moran could point the gun, John had rushed over, clutching the table lamp. He brought it down hard on the back of Moran's head. Moran groaned as he fell hard down onto Sherlock.

Sherlock struggled to breathe with the heavy weight of the unconscious man pinning him down. He pushed hard on Moran. John dropped the lamp and helped pull the assassin off of him.

"A lamp, John?" Sherlock panted.

John shrugged. "First thing I grabbed."

Sherlock nodded. "That was..."

John nodded along with him. "Yeah. I know."

Sherlock didn't reply to John. He couldn't. He was now preoccupied by Molly, sitting about ten feet away. He scrambled to her side, pulling her into his arms. "Molly..."

Molly didn't respond. She just let out a strangled sob and buried her face in Sherlock's chest.

He was only given a moment to hold her before Lestrade barrelled through the door flanked by officers. Sherlock sighed, rolling his eyes. "About time you got here, Lestrade."

He gingerly helped Molly to her feet. "I'll be interested to see what the full list of charges will end up being."
Sherlock approached the hospital room, his hands shoved into the pockets of his coat. He hadn't been able to go with Molly to the hospital, needing to stay behind at 221B while the mess of the evening was sorted through.

Moran had regained consciousness just in time to be taken from the flat in handcuffs. Sherlock watched him go with equal parts smug satisfaction and grim regret that he had not been able to end his miserable life.

He did not spend much time lingering on thoughts of Moran. It was done now. Closed case. What was important was Molly. As soon as he was able, he had flagged down a cab and went to the hospital.

He looked through the window at her, laying back in bed. He thought she'd seemed all right when she had been wheeled into the ambulance, but he hadn't been certain. There was always the chance of some unknown neck injury that had been exacerbated by sitting up.

He strode into the room and stopped a few feet from her bed. Molly turned to look at him, trepidation in her eyes.

He wanted to yell at her for being stupid enough to go after Moran on her own and nearly getting herself killed. He wanted to fall to his knees in front of her and thank every deity he didn't believe in that she had made it through relatively unscathed.

"What does your doctor say?" Sherlock asked, trying to keep the emotions running rampant through him from coming through in his voice.

"I'll be fine," Molly replied, her voice slightly drowsy from painkillers. Her fingers were clutching at the thin sheet covering her. "They just want to keep me over night to make sure. But... There shouldn't be any permanent damage."

"You're an idiot," Sherlock blurted out. His gaze travelled over her throat. Bruises from Moran's throttling were livid against her pale skin.

Molly nodded. "I know."

Sherlock swooped in and captured her mouth. "A complete moron," He punctuated each word with another kiss. "Utter imbecile."

He continued to murmur insults about her intellect as he kissed her desperately. Molly wrapped her arms around his neck, her fingers threading in his hair.

He wanted to be furious with her. He was furious. She had willingly confronted Moran and nearly gotten herself killed for it.

Yet at the same time, he was utterly certain of his affections for Molly Hooper. His love for her. He wouldn't hide from it, not even in his own mind. Molly Hooper- silly, mousey Molly Hooper who had blushed and stammered in front of him for three years in the morgue- had rushed headlong into a confrontation with a psychopathic assassin.

Sherlock pulled back and cupped Molly's face gently in his hands. He looked down into her deep brown eyes, feeling the swell of conflicting emotions deep inside of him. But there was one thing that kept coming out clearly. Something he could admit to himself he'd desired for a long time.

"Molly, I-"

"I do hope I'm not interrupting anything," Mycroft said from the doorway.

Sherlock pulled away from Molly and turned to Mycroft, glaring daggers at his brother. Mycroft's expression changed. No longer did he wear his normal smug smile. Instead, he blinked at Sherlock. He obviously knew what Sherlock's intent had been. "Well, it seems I did interrupt. I need to speak with you, Sherlock. Perhaps you should say goodnight to Miss Hooper. Her Doctors tell me she will be released tomorrow. You will not be bereft of her presence for long."

Sherlock turned away from Mycroft, feeling something he hadn't felt in a long time. Embarrassment. He felt bashful at being caught with Molly in that situation. He pressed his forehead against Molly's.
“Visiting hours are over,” Molly murmured softly, running a hand over his hair. “Besides, I'm sleepy. They gave me something that's making me feel bloody wonderful... But I'm not the best company. I'll see you tomorrow.”

Sherlock gave Molly a brief kiss before pulling back. He strode past Mycroft, stopping briefly to give his brother a withering look.

Mycroft followed Sherlock into the corridor. "My my, Sherlock... I never thought I'd see the day."

"You haven't yet," Sherlock grumbled. "Not since you interrupted."

"I thought you should know that Sebastian Moran has already been removed to... Less comfortable accommodations."

Sherlock lip curled in a cruel smile. "If you ever have any difficulties with him, I do volunteer my services."

"We do still have the issue of Moriarty's criminal Network..." Mycroft started.

Sherlock shook his head. "Won't be a problem." He strode ahead of Mycroft, pulling out his phone and tapping out a quick text.

Mycroft halted, watching Sherlock retreat. "What have you done, Sherlock?"

Sherlock looked back over his shoulder. "I kept a bargain."

---

She was waiting outside of the hospital, leaning against the sleek black car. Her hair was pinned up and she wore a jet-black, figure hugging dress. Ruby red lips parted in a smile as she saw Sherlock approach. "There are police swarming 221. I can't retrieve my things."

Sherlock arched a brow at Irene. "Is there anything you really need from there?"

She shook her head. "Not really, I suppose. I am quite well equipped now. But if you go through everything in 221C and you find something you believe I will miss, please send it to me."

"Care of Renee Norton, yes." Sherlock nodded. "Of course, it's not really proper for me to be interacting with criminals."

Irene laughed throatily and ran her hands over the door of her car. "But Mister Holmes, without you, I would have none of this. It was your idea for me to take over the Network. That's why you brought me here in the first place. What we've been working towards for a year. It's such a lovely gift for me."

"Your position is convenient," Sherlock replied. "The Network is never going to be brought down. I am far more comfortable with you running it than I am anyone else."

Irene smirked. "The devil you know."

Sherlock gave her a tight smile. "I also doubt you will be attempting to blow people up. You are far more... Subtle in your approaches."

"I just want the life I am accustomed to, Mister Holmes." Irene sauntered to Sherlock, pressing her hands to his chest. "But I do feel I owe you."

Sherlock looked down at her. "And what do you owe me?"

Irene's eyes sparked as she met his gaze. "Last chance at dinner."

Sherlock took a hold of Irene's hands, pulling them away from him. "Perhaps instead you can make sure you never get on my radar again," Sherlock suggested. "Should we cross paths again, things won't be nearly so cordial."

Irene nodded slowly. "I suppose you're right. But before I disappear into the night, away from your life once and for all... Tell me one thing, Mister Holmes... Was there ever a chance?"

Sherlock remained silent.
Irene chuckled softly. "I suppose in another life perhaps." She nodded. "I may always be the Woman... But she'll always be your woman."

Sherlock remained still. "Goodbye, Irene Adler."

Irene reached up, cupping Sherlock's face. "Give this to Doctor Hooper from me." She leaned in and pressed her mouth to Sherlock's.

She pulled away after a moment, striding to her car. She opened the door. She turned back briefly, smiling. "Oh, and tell your brother he will need to get a new PA. I am taking his with me."

"I will pass on the message," Sherlock replied.

Irene slipped into the car. "Goodbye, Mister Holmes."

Sherlock watched silently as the car started down the road and Irene Adler disappeared from his life once again.
Chapter 49

Chapter Summary

With Moran in custody, John does a write-up in his blog and gets call from Sherlock on an important issue.

The Personal Blog of Dr. John H. Watson

30th June

THE FULL HOUSE

Sherlock once told me that alone was what he had. Alone protected him. He has never admitted he was wrong, but there is a tacit understanding between us that he was.

Nothing proves this more than the events of the past few months in which we dealt with Colonel Sebastian Moran: the personal assassin, lieutenant and lover of James Moriarty.

Moran's personal vendetta against Sherlock and his rise to head of the criminal network that Moriarty had previously run was a threat to everyone in ours lives. It is only recently I discovered it was Moran who strapped Semtex to my chest and was later the gunman holding me in his sights while Moriarty threatened Sherlock to jump from the roof of Barts.

While Moran taking over the network made it far more violent than it was under its original head, Sherlock's reasons for defeating the Colonel were entirely personal. Moran wanted vengeance for the actions that lead to his lover's suicide. He was trained on Sherlock and those around him, in particular myself and Molly Hooper.

But even before Moran came to power, Sherlock had set things in motion with a known ally to undermine him. It seems they have been fairly successful.

Since Sherlock's "resurrection", 221 Baker Street has changed significantly. Mrs Hudson was the only woman to live under its roof, our reliable landlady and never our housekeeper. Slowly but surely, the house was overtaken by women.

First came Molly Hooper. Then an old friend (is friend the proper term?). Finally, my own fiancée joined the bursting household.

It was domesticity like neither Sherlock nor I had ever experienced before. I revelled in it, while Sherlock initially rebelled, believing he would not be able to maintain his analytical mind.

If this incident with Moran had proven anything, it is that he has not been hindered, but helped by the addition of a female influence.

While he has not said so, I believe Sherlock sees Moran as the second most dangerous man he has ever dealt with. Certainly, Moran came very close to harming those within our inner circle. One only has to look at the murders of Kitty Riley and Veronica Adair to see what he was capable of.

Yet Molly proved herself to be the ideal choice for Sherlock by not running from the threat of Sebastian Moran. Rather, she faced him head on, without anyone else by her side. She was nearly killed for her efforts, but without her Moran might still be on the loose.

It has been several days since Moran was taken into custody. I have no idea what his ultimate fate will be, other than I sincerely doubt he will become a threat to us again.

Molly is now out of the hospital, given a clean bill of health after her encounter with Moran. She has returned to her former position at Barts; it being vacated by the unfortunate death of Veronica Adair.
Sherlock and I have already resumed our regular caseload, answering the backlog of requests for our services that we have neglected until now while focusing on Moran.

Now that the case of Sebastian Moran is closed, the dynamic of 221B will change once again. Sherlock's old friend has already disappeared to parts unknown without so much as a good-bye.

There is also the matter of Mary and myself. While we have been content staying with Sherlock and Molly, the time is rapidly approaching that we find our own home.

I wonder how my friendship with Sherlock will change once he and I are residing separately. I wonder how he himself will change, with Molly his only flatmate. I suppose only time will tell.

As it is, Mary and I still have not found a suitable

John stopped pecking at the keyboard when he heard his text alert go off. He pulled out his phone and glanced down at the screen. It was a text from Sherlock. He had gone into Barts with Molly in the morning and had not been back to Baker Street yet.

I need to see you immediately.
- SH

A text with an address about a ten minutes walk from Baker Street followed. Knowing if he ignored it, another text would come demanding his presence, John put aside his laptop and got to his feet. He wondered exactly why Sherlock was summoning him. Was it possible Sherlock had found a case so close to their own flat?

John could see Sherlock waiting outside a terraced house as soon as he turned the corner onto the street he'd been told to meet his friend. It was impossible to mistake Sherlock, with his dark, curly hair and the wool coat he wore even in the heat of the summer.

"Ah! John!" Sherlock said, smiling as he raised a hand in greet. He waved John over. "Come on, then. We haven't got all day."

John walked to Sherlock, shaking his head slightly. "What are we doing here, Sherlock? I thought you were at Barts."

Sherlock wrinkled his nose in distaste. "It seems my presence was not welcome in the morgue if I have no purpose for being there."

John smirked. "Molly kicked you out?"

Sherlock's expression hardened and he looked away from John quickly. The smirk faded from John's face. "You know it's her job, Sherlock. You can't tag along with her just because you want to protect her. She's got to be able to live her life."

"She had a nightmare again last night," Sherlock muttered. "It's... Not surprising, given what happened. Something similar occurred after the final confrontation with Moriarty. However, it was not this severe."

John nodded. "Let me talk to her. I can give her Doctor Thompson's number."

Sherlock finally looked to John. "That would be..." He nodded. "That may do Molly some good. Yes. Thank you."

"But that doesn't mean you can follow her around and make a pest of yourself," John insisted, pointing an accusatory finger at Sherlock. "I know how you feel about her. I also know things have been rough for you too. But she's got to be able to live her life."

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Sherlock rolled his eyes. "I am a very large part of her life, if you have not noticed, John. Besides, I have completely valid reasons for being at Barts. She shouldn't have kicked me out."

John's crinkled his forehead as he eyed Sherlock suspiciously. "Did you tell her what she was doing wrong?"

"Come on, John!" Sherlock said quickly, side-stepping John's query. He bounded up the step to the terrace house. "We need to go in!"
John followed after Sherlock into the house. "Why are we here, Sherlock? Are we on a case?" He looked around. "There are no police here."

Sherlock opened the door to the first floor flat, gesturing for John to go in. "Just come on, John."

John entered the flat and cocked his head curiously at the interior. There was something very familiar about the sparse furnishings.

After a moment, he realized why they looked so familiar. He had seen them several times when he'd had to go down to 221C. It was the furniture that Irene had been using, what had formerly been in Molly's flat.

"Sherlock? What is this?" John asked, although he suspected he knew what the answer was going to be.

Sherlock didn't meet John's questioning gaze. "Well, Molly's furniture will just go to waste now that the Woman has left. I've already discussed it with Molly. There were several things Molly wished to keep and will be moved into 221B. You and Mary are of course free to do as you like, but I thought it would be helpful to you to have something to start off with until you're able to purchase furniture of your own choosing."

"So you're kicking me out then?"

Sherlock finally fixed his light blue eyes on John. "We are both well aware of the fact you and Mary have wanted to reside on your own since her arrival in London. It's time, John. You don't need to keep dragging your feet for my benefit."

John frowned slightly as he looked at Sherlock. "So you decided to just choose our flat for us?"

Sherlock looked around the flat. "Is it not to your liking? I find that highly unlikely. I know of what both you and Mary are looking for in a residence. This flat has two bedrooms. One for yourselves and one for guests or any offspring your marriage may produce, although I must admit, I have not given much thought as to what your stance is on reproduction. Anyway, the plumbing and electricity is up to date. It is well within your price range." He paused for a moment. "I have also taken care of first and last month's rent for you. The landlord is not nearly as accommodating as Mrs Hudson, but then, who is? I don't foresee any difficulties between you and him. The location is ideal for both your work with me and Mary's once she begins. It is also not far from the clinic and yes, I am also aware you have been in contact with Sarah Sawyer-Mills for work. It is interesting you feel comfortable working with her, but I suppose it has been several years since your break-up and she is now married and you will shortly be as well. You know it really is not necessary to supplement your income. We will have plenty of cases. But I suppose you do desire to keep your skills as a doctor sharp."

John looked around the flat while Sherlock continued to ramble on. It did indeed fit every requirement he and Mary had laid down in the search for a new flat.

"I really need to talk to Mary about this," John murmured, sitting down on the sofa.

Sherlock held out his phone to John. There were pictures of the flat on the screen. "I already sent Mary pictures and a description. She seemed very pleased with the choice. She'll be by in an hour to take a closer look."

John nodded and smiled at Sherlock. "Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Realtor?"

Sherlock sat down next to John on the sofa. "It's going to be up to you to tell Mrs Hudson you're finally moving out. She's not going to be pleased. She already misses the Woman."

John nodded. "Put that on the list of sentences I never thought you would say." He sighed. "I also never thought you would be the one pushing me to get out of the flat."

"You never really wanted to come back, John," Sherlock replied. "I know that. I changed things and they can never go back to the way they were."

John nodded solemnly.

The corner of Sherlock's mouth twitched in a small smile. "Change just means things won't get
boring. It'll be very interesting to see how it all goes."

John narrowed his gaze on Sherlock. "Are there any other changes I should know about?"

"One or two," Sherlock replied cryptically. "I'll keep you up to date on the situation."
Chapter 50

Chapter Summary

With their lives now quiet, Sherlock and Molly make a decision about what to do next.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Molly sighed as she walked through the silent flat. She was still getting used to 221B being so quiet. She had just gotten in from work and only she and Toby were in. Sherlock had not returned yet from his case. Molly had gotten home from Barts so late that Mrs Hudson had already gone to bed.

It had only been a week since John and Mary had moved out. The pair had been very happy with the place Sherlock had found for them and within two days they had moved from 221B.

It was odd to suddenly not have any flatmates. The house, which had once been so lively with activity, was now quiet. Well, it was never truly quiet, not with Sherlock Holmes as a resident. But everything had changed now. It was the first time Sherlock and Molly had lived together alone without some huge case hanging over their heads or some psychopath trying to kill them both.

It was... Fun. With the newly acquired privacy, Sherlock had made it his mission to shag Molly in every room of the flat, starting with John's former bedroom. At Molly's insistence, the bedroom was being converted into a laboratory. Sherlock had been reluctant about the idea at first. He liked being able to work in the kitchen. However, Molly also liked to be able to cook once and a while.

Sherlock's things had been shunted up to the bedroom and Molly insisted Sherlock buy Mrs Hudson a new kitchen table that was not covered in stains from various chemicals and marks Molly was nearly certain had come from some sort of sword. A refrigerator was on order and expected to arrive any day now. Molly took full responsibility for providing Sherlock with body parts. She was not going to hypocritically cease the practice just because she was living with him. But now that they had the extra space, she wanted to make certain she didn't accidentally grab a bag of toes instead of the bangers.

Molly went into the newly cleaned kitchen and retrieved a wine glass and a half-empty bottle of wine. She recalled Sherlock pointing out her habit of having a glass of wine after a long day at work. It seemed like a lifetime ago that Sherlock had invaded her flat and announced he was moving in. It was amazing how much could change in a year.

Molly poured herself a glass and walked into the living room, curling up on the sofa with the television remote. Toby mewed and jumped up next to her, kneading at her thigh before settling down with his head against her leg. Alan Carr was about to introduce his next guest when the door opened and Sherlock strode in. He shucked his coat and scarf, throwing them down onto the back of his easy chair.

Molly turned off the television and beamed up at him. "How did it go?"

"I suspect John will have a blog entry up about it by tomorrow morning," Sherlock replied.

"What if I want to hear it from you?" Molly countered, shooing Toby off the sofa and patting the now vacant spot beside her.

Sherlock slipped onto the sofa and leaned in, kissing Molly gently. "Honestly, it wasn't all that interesting. Lestrade seemed very happy to have him in custody." He gave Molly a light nip on the ear. "Burglaries are quite boring compared to murder."
Molly frowned down at Sherlock as he repositioned himself so his head was in Molly's lap. She reached down and began to stroke his hair obligingly. "It sounds to me like you are encouraging people to murder."

"I am not!" Sherlock protested. "But given that the human race is predisposed to committing violent acts, I would like to benefit from a good mystery involving the demise of a person. I would think you would support me on this. Having a case involving an autopsy invariably means you will be involved, as your colleagues leave murder cases in your very capable hands due to their unwillingness to work with me. That is beneficial to both of us, as I know you get a thrill from being exposed to my work and I am sexually aroused when you display your extensive knowledge on pathology. Well, I suppose that final point really is not an advantage when it comes to working on a case. I do need to keep myself focused. But it does make my homecomings all the better. What is it that John said when we were investigating Rucastle? 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder'? Even if it is just a matter of a couple of hours, the pent up desire I feel for you paired with the adrenaline of a good case..."

"Marry me," Molly blurted out, interrupting Sherlock. Her eyes went wide even as the words left her mouth. She hadn't meant to say it. She'd only meant to think it. She took her hands out of Sherlock's hair and clapped them over her mouth. She couldn't believe she had said it out loud.

Sherlock's brow furrowed and he sat up. He turned slowly to face Molly. "You just asked me to marry you." He pursed his lips. "Well, actually you rather demanded I marry you. There was not much of a question to it."

Molly remained perfectly still, her hands still clasped over her mouth.

Sherlock tilted his head in question. "Molly Hooper, did you mean to say that?"

Molly shook her head slowly.

Sherlock narrowed his gaze, clearly trying to read her mood. "Do you wish to take back what you said?"

Molly neither nodded nor shook her head. She just remained staring at Sherlock in abject horror.

Sherlock took a hold of her wrists and pulled her hands away from her mouth. "How about you use your words, Molly. Do you want to take it back?"

Molly bit her lower lip as she continued to stare at Sherlock. "Yes. No. I don't know." She grimaced. "It depends. What do you say?"

Sherlock leaned in, his lips moulding to Molly's smoothly. He then nuzzled his nose against hers. "I say you rather ruined my plans, Molly Hooper."

Molly withdrew from Sherlock and eyed him curiously. "Your plans?"

"I have been concocting a proposal for you for a while now. I wanted to wait until I was sure you were over the shock of what happened with Moran. John has also been offering quite a bit of unsolicited advice on the matter. He believed you would appreciate some sort of romantic spectacle. I'm not sure I agree with him entirely, but I was at least going to take you out to dinner. I also had not decided whether or not to buy you an engagement ring and if so, what kind you would like."

Molly clapped her hands over her mouth once again, this time to try and hide her smile. She could not believe what she was hearing, her stomach filled with butterflies at the notion. "I don't want a ring. I just want you," she murmured behind her hands. She could feel the tears stinging her eyes. "Ask me now."

Sherlock took a hold of her wrists once again, moving them away from her mouth. He smoothed his hands down to take a hold of hers. "Molly Hooper, will you be my wife?"

The tears began to fall freely as Molly nodded. "Yes, Sherlock."

Sherlock broke into a boyish grin. He pulled Molly to him, kissing her fiercely before enfolding
her in his arms. As she clutched to him—her fiancé—she realized that of all of the things she had never expected to happen, this one was the best.

Chapter End Notes

And thus comes to an end the longest fanfic I’ve ever written. I just want to thank every single person who has commented or given kudos on the story. I wish I could list you all, but there are so many of you. You are all lovely! You have kept me on-point and never let me give up on this story.

Much love to Lexie and Pablo for betaing this monster. Also love to Nocturnias and PetraTodd for their support.

For those of you who are sad to see the end of "The Full House", there is a sequel. Please check out "The Party of Four" to see the continuing adventures of Sherlock, Molly, John and Mary!

Works inspired by this one: Proper House Rules by Amalia Kensington (amaliak01)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!