Mockingbirds

by Ridiculosity

Summary

When Molly and Sherlock met is a very good question, especially since Molly has finally begun to believe that the boy she knew as a child was someone else - because the Sherlock Holmes she knew might as well have forgotten their history. Molly/Sherlock. Kid!Lock. (There will be little smut and more progression of characters).

Notes

I wrote this story simply because kid!Lock with Molly was something that was too hard to resist - and I've tried to keep them in character, really have - please, please tell me when they go out of character. It's essential. Sherlock and Molly progress as characters in real time as well as through their childhood, and no, it does not have a lot of smut.

I own Sherlock just as much as I own the Great Wall of China.

See the end of the work for more notes.
The woman with brown hair and a plain face ran through the rain, trying to hide under the awnings, avoiding getting wet. Needless to say she wasn’t very successful. She hadn’t anticipated an evening rain in the middle of July – it hardly made sense.

However, she crossed the street, trying her best to remain dry. She made her way to her apartment – the guard was sleeping at the door. He jolted awake, and she said nothing to him, apart from giving a swift smile. He tried to look ashamed, to his credit. She ran past, climbing the stairs, eager for a bit of warmth and the company of her cat.

Her apartment was a mess of chaos – she opened the door to find the smell of familiarity which hadn’t been touched since morning. Living alone did that to apartments – they acquired a nasty habit of looking dark and unused when their owners had gone for work.

There was a faded sofa, a television set with cable. It certainly looked like the television was used frequently – the remote’s buttons were worn and the numbers fast disappearing. There was a giant bookshelf, with all sorts of books – she appeared to be a voracious reader. The kitchen had a smell of baking and cookies which hadn’t yet left – she must have been baking.

On the counter of the kitchen’s table tops was a very worn and battered copy of a book – it seemed to have a deep personal attachment to it – by virtue of the number of times it appeared to have been read. She looked at the book again, and for a second, she remembered when she had gotten it, who had given it to her, and why it meant so much to her.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* was one of her favourite books, and it always would be. But perhaps the person who had given it to her had a hand in making it so.

Molly would never know why Sherlock had done that.

He had been different then, though. The cynicism hadn’t yet set. He used to still believe in pirates and mermaids and Peter Pan taking him away to Neverland.

But even then, he was the sharpest boy she had ever met. He was always the smartest. The most intelligent. She hadn’t had a crush on him then – however, she did admit that puberty did a good job on him when she met him.

Molly didn’t know however. Was it really him, all those years back? When they met again, Sherlock hadn’t even mentioned it. Almost as if – he had deleted that phase. But to Molly, that made no sense. Those were some of her most cherished memories. Was it really him then, or just some other boy with Sherlock for a name and a brain that could be the making or breaking of the world?

“You’re a mockingbird, Molly Hooper. You’re going to give it your best and make everyone happy.”

“Going by the text you are referencing, I’d also end up dead.”

That was why when John asked her when she met Sherlock, she had looked at Sherlock searchingly, willing him to say something. Tell John what friends we were as children, Sherlock. Say what has been lying unsaid for so long.

But Sherlock peered into his microscope.
Molly cleared her throat and told John – three years back.

She thought she saw Sherlock twitch, make a sign of something forgotten, but she was sure she had imagined it. After that, she put her childhood behind. Sherlock wasn’t that boy anymore, and he didn’t seem keen on remembering. Who knows? Maybe it was someone else she had spent all those evenings with.

It was early Sunday when the girl had come. Sherlock had been watching the nightingales fly off early, tracing the patterns of flight in an effort to determine where they ate. He really wanted to catch a nightingale.

The attic was musty and dark and very unused, but it was his favourite spot. Mycroft didn’t bother him there, his mother couldn’t find him there and his father pretended he didn’t know where Sherlock had gone off to. Sherlock was grateful for that – he didn’t enjoy it at all when all of them came about fussing.

The truck arrived in the gathering light, filled with furniture and household trumpetry. Sherlock peered, briefly, through his binoculars to watch it come. A car drove up as well, a green one. He saw the little girl at the window – she looked just about his age. A year younger.

She jumped out of the car, and Sherlock saw in her hand a doll. Her brown hair was in ponytails, and she smiled nervously at her mother. “Molly, go inside,” said her Mother. “Pick yourself a room.” Molly nodded and walked off.

Sherlock snorted. People were so slow.

It was only when her mother disappeared from view that Sherlock saw something curious – she grinned brightly and tossed her doll in the air. “Honey honey, how he thrills me, aha! Honey honey!” she sang. For a very startled second Sherlock thought she had seen him.

She picked up her doll from the mud, and rushed into the field. “Mom!” she called. “I’m taking the room which is on the left of the landing! I’m going to the field.”

“Alright!” said her mother back. “Don’t be long, dear!”

“Never,” she said with a brighter grin. She was reveling in the sunlight. And then, before he knew it – she ran, like a flash of lightning, through the grass.

Sherlock crossed the attic and squinted through the sunlight – the girl was running, faster and faster and faster – through the field, at the speed which seemed to be defiant of her small and fragile form. She ran into the woods, and he saw distinctly – she was climbing the trees.

He wondered what had overcome her – she had been nervous and scared one second, and then, almost like it was a physical change, she had turned and become an agile and fast moving dog – alert to the world and everything in it. Sherlock made a split second decision to find out who this odd child was – the idiots in school didn’t account for this.

He climbed out of the attic window, scaling the walls down until he was lowered onto the ground.

He tramped through the field, spotting her red sweater among the tops of the trees. How did she get there?

“What are you doing there?” he asked her loudly.
And again – like a physical change – she went back to being nervous.

“I was – um. I was only… climbing.”

“I guessed as much,” he said with asperity. “Why?”

She went red to the roots of her hair. “It’s fun.”

“Climbing trees?”

She nodded juttingly, still red.

“How?”

“It makes you feel – very free.”

Was she another one of those idiots then? Sherlock was yet to understand the concept of free, even if he was made to learn the definition – how would this chit know what it meant?”

“That’s absurd,” he scoffed. “Freedom is something like being free to make your own choices. Like voting.”

The girl squinted from the top at him. “How old are you?” she asked childishly. She seemed shy.

“Seven,” he said.

“Then how do you know what voting is?” she asked even more shyly. She jumped down from the tree, facing him, her feet nervously making circles in the dirt.

“I’m smart,” he said dismissively.

“I suppose…” she said. She turned to the sun. “I dunno what voting or any of that means. I know what it means to go about running long distances, though. It makes you feel like no one can stop you.”

What a strange concept! Sherlock had never felt that before. “By running?” he asked.

She nodded. “I’m only six, you know,” she said shyly. “I wouldn’t know the bigger things – like voting.”

“There’s not much to know,” he said. “And besides, most seven year olds aren’t that fast.”

“Then how are you?” she asked curiously.

“I always was,” he shrugged. “I also know the meaning of metamorphosis.”

Her eyes went wide as saucers. Sherlock felt smug.

“Are you my neighbor?” she asked.

Sherlock nodded. “I saw your car drive up.”

“Would you – would you like to run?” she asked.

Sherlock searched her face.

She seemed so much smarter than the other children in school – she had a presence of mind,
seemed to be aware of things outside toys and playing. She seemed to have understanding which others certainly didn’t. And then – there were those bright, luminescent, brown eyes. They seemed to laugh intelligently at everything, and Sherlock found himself saying yes.

Before he knew it, they were running – through the field, and on. She was surprisingly agile and very good at running and jumping over obstacles. At one point, she screamed loudly and Sherlock found himself grinning. This was fun.

Molly was right, it did feel freeing – incredibly so. It felt as is no one could stop him, and that, in turn felt like he could do whatever was wished.

“That was fun, right?” she asked, her cheeks flushed red.

Sherlock nodded, surprised. He was red too, and he was smiling.

“What’s your name?” asked Molly.


She wrinkled her nose. “It’s long, but it suits you,” she said with a grin. “I’m Molly Elizabeth Hooper. I go by Molly.”

Sherlock’s face cracked into another grin. “Do you want to catch nightingales?” he asked.

“Why?” she asked, frowning.

“I wanted a good model of their wings,” said Sherlock, explaining fast. “But I don’t draw very well.”

“You’re interested in birds?” asked Molly.

“I’m interested in everything,” said Sherlock.

“Okay,” said Molly. “We can catch nightingales – I think. I’ll draw it for you.”

Sherlock’s eyes sparkled. “We can make a collection of bird wing spans and leaves and everything!” he said excitedly.

“That would be fun!” said Molly enthusiastically. “We should get notebooks and pens from the local stationary store. We can get started right away.”

Sherlock smiled at her again. “I know the store nearby,” he said at once. “We should go now.”

“Molly!” her mother was calling. “You need to begin setting your room up!”

“Oh no,” said Molly. “I have to go,” she said.

“Do you want me to help you?” he asked.

“Would you?” asked Molly, going red.

“I’d really like to go to the store today, so we can both get your work done faster,” explained Sherlock quickly.

“Alright…” said Molly.
They worked together on getting Molly’s room together. There was something personal about it, being able to help Molly in fixing her room. However, what Sherlock found among Molly’s things was oddly compelling.

She had quite a few books, for some reason – and not just picture books, but Children’s Comics. He had progressed to reading Asterixes and Tintins – he should lend some to her. However, Molly was only six, and while smart, she wasn’t like him. There was an impressive collection of Enid Blyton’s – with colourful covers and fronts with her trade mark signature on top.

Molly had many encyclopedias for some very odd reason – they didn’t look very read. Sherlock shrugged it off as one of the qualities of her children to buy stuff which they didn’t use.

What did look used, for some reason – were a whole pile of notebooks and notebooks. Molly seemed an avid doodler – there were doodles all over the notebooks. Sherlock squinted at them, looking at the crude pictures and small drawings. There were no revealing things in it – a lot of birds, a lot of girls in pretty homes.

Sherlock snorted.

There was an odd lack of dolls. There was a tea-set which did look extremely used. But there was only one doll. There were a couple of stuff toys and a few sheets, but Molly didn’t seem to have anything she deeply connected to.

Sherlock put it out of his mind.

Sherlock found a very able helper in his experiments.

That summer, Molly and Sherlock captured scores of birds, and made a crude encyclopedia of bird wing spans. They conducted experiments on the different birds and they ransacked libraries in an effort to find good books on the subject.

Molly was a born hero.

School hadn’t started yet, so Sherlock and Molly spent days on end together, in the fields and the woods. Sherlock had never seen anyone stranger than Molly – she seemed to possess a precocious belief in goodness and innate morality. He had never seen that in other children – other children went by moral compasses which followed the rules set by the adult world.

“But why can’t you come with me this evening?” he asked, whining.

“My parents want me to come with them,” said Molly apologetically.

“You can put them off, can’t you?” asked Sherlock demandingly.

Molly blushed red. “I don’t think so, Sherlock. They said I haven’t spent time with them for a long time. I’d like to go.”

Molly followed a compass of her own – she didn’t even realize she was using it. It was in-built. Birds weren’t to be hurt. People weren’t supposed to be told they were rude. She didn’t argue with her parents because she’d get punished, but because she loved them. She didn’t realize half the time that she was doing this – just like she didn’t understand how profound her theory was that
running felt like freedom.

Sherlock often felt stupider than her.

A feeling he was only accustomed to around Mycroft.

“What do you mean we can’t kill the bug?” asked Sherlock.

“It’s only a bug, Sherlock,” she said exasperated. “It’s not hurting you!”

“So?”

“Well –” Molly blushed red again. She hated conflict. “Look at it this way – if he was human, you wouldn’t kill him, right?”

“I suppose,” sighed Sherlock.

Sherlock, on the other hand, used her for his studies – she had a superhuman ability to absorb knowledge, and a unique characteristic of not being bothered by the issues of touching dead bodies and icky things. Sherlock was studying the concepts of child development of Piaget and Kohlberg when he realized that Molly was a lot more mature than him, even if he was smarter.

Their summer was spent like that, playing games. Molly’s favourite game was pretending she was a knight fighting an army.

“But why?” asked Sherlock curiously, when they had a particularly invigorating game and were relaxing at sunset.

“Because knights got to do such adventurous things!” said Molly, her face shining earnestly.

“So did Pirates,” said Sherlock dismissively.

Her face brightened even further. “Ohh, let’s play that tomorrow!”

“Molly,” said Sherlock, rolling his eyes. “Pirates will be boring! We don’t have a sea!”

“We can pretend the field is the sea,” said Molly pleadingly. “Oh please, Sherlock. Pirates are the best! – they are like the thing – thing between the goodies and baddies!”

Sherlock frowned. “What?”

“Pirates! They are like those – things! They aren’t good or bad!”

“Molly, pirates are most definitely bad. History says so,” said Sherlock patiently. He hadn’t revealed his own misgivings about the way adults classified good and bad. He didn’t think he was good, but he didn’t think he was very bad either. It really didn’t make sense.

Molly shook her head obstinately. “No, no! They are just – you know, doing their own thing. They don’t have a good or bad. It’s middle.”

“That’s impossible,” said Sherlock.

“No, it’s not!” Molly’s face was completely red. “Please, Sherlock?”

“Okay,” sighed Sherlock. “We’ll play pirates…”
They played pirates.

Molly was Morbid Molly, and her weapon was a cutlass – she wore an eyepatch on her brown hair. Except Molly got very impatient with her eyepatch, eventually removing it from time to time, off her brown hair – blowing her hair out of her eyes.

The first time Sherlock saw her do that, he had the most curious feeling in his stomach – he felt like pulling her cheeks, for a minute. Dismissing it immediately, he went on.

Sherlock was a born pirate.

It’s funny how a game of the past came to define him so completely. Sherlock reflected on it once or twice – it was those games of pirates with Molly that had finally settled all his dilemmas with the rights and wrongs everyone spoke about. Molly, only six years old, had managed to make him understand so completely the world of grey.
Before either Molly or Sherlock had a grip on their friendship, the summer was slowing to an end. Sherlock was forced to go school shopping with his brother, and finished all his homework. Molly was going to be new in the school and in Sherlock’s grade. He wasn’t particularly irritated by it, but he did realize something – Sherlock didn’t have friends of his own. If Molly spent time with him, she most certainly won’t have friends either.

He considered talking to her and telling her not to spend time with him, but Molly had that moral compass. She’d never accept.

Sherlock frowned, but said nothing. She had her own choices to make, after all.

Their summer could be summed in the many journals they had worked on. They had that diary full of wingspans, and plenty of encyclopedias which they had pored over, studying together. Sherlock had done psychology with Molly and she had been able to help him explain concepts, thus grasping them better. And now, it was the end of the idyll – school was starting.

Sherlock, Mycroft and Molly waited at the bus stop for the school. Molly was very nervous. “Who is our class teacher?” she asked him.

“Miss Walters. She’s like all other people – very boring,” said Sherlock.


Mycroft was simply reading a book and lifted an eye to look at Molly briefly.
The bus came and Molly and Sherlock sat together, somewhere in the front of the bus. Molly was nervously playing with the hem of her dress. She looked very much like a six year old in it.

The classroom was very typical – there were many large and useless posters, a big blackboard and a lot of desks. Molly was smiling at the posters. “I like it,” she whispered to him.

Molly got a seat and went for it. Sherlock decided to sit at the back. Molly threw him a confused look. He simply shook his head. “Don’t we sit together?” she asked.

“I like sitting at the back,” said Sherlock. “You can sit in front, you know.”

Molly bit her lip. “Alright,” she said. “In a bit then?”

Sherlock smiled. “Yeah.”

Molly grinned. “Honey, honey, how he thrills me!” she sang under her breath. Sherlock gave her a rare toothy grin.

She scooted to the front, while the teacher sailed in. “Good morning class, I’m Miss Walters.”

“Good morning Miss Walters,” chanted the class in characteristic childish enthusiasm.

“Let’s introduce ourselves?” she said brightly. Molly looked back and wrinkled her nose. Sherlock smothered a laugh.

“Let’s begin with you,” said the teacher, looking at Molly. “Give us your name, age and what you enjoy doing.”

Molly blushed to the roots of her hair again. “Hi. I’m Molly Hooper,” she said with a smile. “I’m six years old, and I’m going to be seven this Christmas. I like birds and their wingspans.”

“Birds and their wingspans?” asked the teacher curiously.

“Well,” said Molly, briefly glancing at Sherlock. “Sherlock and I like seeing how birds fly.”

“Sherlock?” she questioned.

“He’s um – that one,” said Molly, looking at Sherlock. Sherlock stared stolidly at the teacher while her lips became thin and eyes hard. “Oh,” she said.

The rest of the class continued with the introductions. There was Martha and Talia, and all sorts of odd named children. Sherlock paid little attention until it was his turn.

“My name is Sherlock Holmes,” said Sherlock. “I like people who aren’t stupid.”

The teacher glared at him. “Sherlock,” she reprimanded. “You can’t say things like that.”

“Yes I can,” said Sherlock dismissively. “It’s not like I hate everyone.”

“I fear you are going on that path, young man,” said Miss Walters, harshly.

“Of course not,” said Sherlock. “I don’t hate Molly. I like Molly.”

The teacher’s eyes went wide as saucers. “You do?” she questioned.

She looked extremely surprised by this, and Molly flashed him a bright grin. Sherlock smiled briefly back.

Miss Walters gave him a long stare. “Very well.”

Sherlock and Molly remained friends, despite having school. Molly had this tendency to stick to him, even if he wasn’t the nicest to her around other people. Sherlock could be extremely short tempered when others irritated him.

She bore it with patience, though. Molly made him feel better when the others called him a freak and when they tried to bully him. Sherlock wasn’t weak, but he was one child, and couldn’t fight multiple people. Sherlock sometimes felt discomfort over the fact that Molly didn’t have friends because of him, but she never said anything about it.

Besides, Molly did manage to make some friends. She was friends with a group of girls Sherlock didn’t particularly like, possibly because they had a tendency to make Molly feel less about herself.

They made her uncomfortable, and like all children who were a lot smarter than their peers, Sherlock and Molly were a little segregated from the other children. However, Molly would manage, as she was a little lower on the scales of extremely smart – Sherlock, on the other hand...

Sherlock had read the studies that had explained that gifted children often had a very hard time adjusting; almost as much as the ones who were mentally challenged. Sherlock accepted that this was the case with himself and Molly.

Sherlock only truly realized the extent to which Molly got bullied when he found her crying during recess one day.


“What happened?” asked Sherlock, kneeling down beside her, his voice rippling with anger.

“Nothing – those girls – they just tore apart that doll of mine. Said something about being a freak.”

Sherlock squirmed uncomfortably. “Molly… maybe we shouldn’t be friends in school. You’re going to be bullied because of me.”

Molly’s lip wobbled. “No!” she said angrily. “I like being friends with you! It’s dumb if they want me to not be friends with you because of that!”

“Come on Molly,” he said coaxingly. “We’d still play at home…”

“No,” said Molly stubbornly.

Sherlock left it at that. He was too selfish of her company to argue further.

October came, and with it the rains. The field which Sherlock and Molly used as a second home, along with the woods and the streams in them were invaded by a never ending army of showers. The grass and weed field flooded with water, making everything squishy and muddy, with frogs
erupting from every crevice. When it stopped raining, they could wade into the mud and capture the frogs, but that was rare.

The trees acquired a permanently washed down effect, and the world began to look like a painting which had been sloshed into far too much water – where the paintbrush had been haplessly dipped into the bowl of water and brushed all across, giving everything a mildly blurred feeling of wetness, along with a clean sharpness of colours.

Molly and Sherlock spent their afternoons and evenings in the attic of Sherlock’s home, where none disturbed them. Molly always insisted on getting homework done before anything else, which was why their games had slowed down in the past few months. They began to do their homework together in the afternoons in the attic – and after that, they played more pretend.

They’d pretend they were children in a haunted attic (a game Sherlock thoroughly despised), and they’d pretend they were explorers in a cave. They’d pretend they were trapped in a room by creatures of five dimensions (Sherlock invented that one. He had recently taken a liking to physics).

While they played pretend, they also began to study other things. It was then that Molly began to read books.

Sherlock never realized how slowly it just developed into something like that – one day, they were reading some Enid Blyton’s together (Sherlock had been bored out of his mind) and within a few months, they were dissecting Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland.

It began with Chronicles of Narnia.

Sherlock knew because Molly had asked shyly, if he would like to read it with her. She didn’t know some of the big words. It was most certainly a tactic.

However, when Molly began reading, her lilting voice filling the musty attic, he began to frankly enjoy the ridiculous books on animals who talked and other such antics. Sherlock got his own copy, and they began reading together. It was deeply enjoyable.

When they had finished with the Chronicles of Narnia, they moved on, deciding to read a set of children’s books by Roahl Dahl. Matilda was Sherlock’s favourite, as she seemed like an extremely smart girl. Molly, on the other hand, favoured Charlie and the Chocolate Factory because “It has so much of interesting chocolate!”

After that, their appetites for books became insatiable. While they did play together in the attics, and they dissected frogs, they coordinated their reading activities. Sherlock forgot about psychology and all about physics – he began to divulge deeply into the realm of literature. While he left Molly far behind, swallowing book after book, he made sure to coordinate his book reading with her. He was the faster reader, but Molly was a lot more patient, and derived a lot more from the book itself.

At least the October rains did some good to them.

They read Peter Pan, Alice in Wonderland, The Wind in the Willows, Nancy Drew, and Hardy Boys. They went deep into the childish stories of the boys in William and they enjoyed children’s fantasy fiction even further.

Sherlock’s interests were most peaked when he read the detective novels. Molly was always guessing, and she refused to accept a common stand until everything was over, but Sherlock guessed almost immediately, and was almost always right.
“You should be a detective,” said Molly once, admiringly. She was doodling in her notebook – Sherlock didn’t know if it was through her association with her, or if she was simply like that – but Molly had begun to draw a lot of small, dead animals. But there were also a few little doodles of the sun – the trees, and so on. Her attention to detail was becoming fascinatingly strong.

“I’m going to be a pirate,” said Sherlock.

Molly giggled. “That’s not a real thing anymore, Sherlock.”

“Of course it is! Just you wait!”

Christmas was fast approaching, and Molly and Sherlock had by this time decided, they were, in fact, best friends. Sherlock knew the theory had been clear in Molly’s head since the summer they spent together, but now, Sherlock also accepted it. However, with friendship came obligations. Sherlock was at a loss to know what to give Molly for Christmas.

“We’re friends, right, Sherlock?” asked Molly once.

“Yeah,” said Sherlock. “I thought it was fairly obvious.”

“I suppose,” said Molly. “Would you mind if I got you a Christmas present then?” she asked.

Sherlock frowned. “Isn’t that what best friends do?” he asked.

“I guess,” said Molly. “I just saw it and thought of you – so you know.”

“Are we best friends?” he asked her, demandingly.

Molly blushed. “If you wish it,” she said.

Sherlock looked at her scrutinizingly. The attic was quiet.

“Yeah, I think I do,” he said finally. “We’re best friends.”

Molly went red with pleasure. “Really?” she asked.

“Yeah, I think it makes it easier, right?” said Sherlock. “Now we can tell everyone in school and people will just ignore us spending so much time together. And now we get the benefits of being best friends – I can have bits of your lunch, you can buy me presents. It works.”

Molly grinned. “You can’t have my turkey sandwiches!” she declared.

“That’s not fair!” said Sherlock hotly. “Best friends share!”

Molly jumped up and danced about. “Shall not!” she sang loudly, while Sherlock chased her.

Christmas was coming, and with it Molly’s excitement peaked to the point of no return. Sherlock couldn’t help rolling his eyes.

Molly thrived in this weather – where the winter was there but not freezing the fingers off. Her brightness got very exasperating, especially when they were continuously playing games. Her
birthday was coming, and Sherlock knew Molly’s parents wanted her to have a party.

Molly wasn’t particularly partial to it herself, but she wouldn’t have minded it, he knew. Molly enjoyed cakes and presents like any other child her age. Therefore, she said yes. She sent him an invite as well.

“Molly, I’m not going to come,” said Sherlock.

“But it’s my birthday, Sherlock!” she pleaded.

“It’s not what I do best, Molly,” he said. “People don’t like me.”

“I like you,” said Molly. “Mycroft likes you, even though he pretends otherwise. Your parents like you.”

“But they are supposed to,” said Sherlock, exasperated. “I’m bad at friends.”

“I’m your friend!” said Molly. “And I don’t have to like you. In fact, I very much dislike you sometimes!”

Sherlock laughed.

Molly bit her lip. “Well, if you don’t want to come, don’t,” said Molly. “I really don’t mind. I understand. But um – can we at least play together?”

Sherlock brightened. “Yeah, absolutely.”

Sherlock watched the birthday from his room. Molly looked very nice, in a new dress. She seemed, however, supremely uncomfortable. Their schoolmates, who disliked Molly almost all through the year had come for food and goodie bags. Sherlock snorted. Molly opened the door, to let more classmates in – and as she ushered them in shyly, she briefly looked up at Sherlock’s window.

Even though his room was dark and it should have been impossible for her to see him, she grinned at him, as if she knew exactly where he was. Sherlock found himself smiling back.

The wrapped present given by Molly was staring at him.

Sherlock had never engaged in the childish custom of waking early to see his presents on Christmas morning. In any case, he knew what his parents had gotten. A chemistry set was something he desperately wanted, along with a collection of book. Mycroft had got him a particular book called *The Origin of Life* by Charles Darwin.

But Molly’s present eluded him. It was a small, inconsequential box which was lying there.

He woke up early to see what it was. Himself, he bought Molly a new set of stationary. He knew she liked that. Besides, he hadn’t saved up for more.

Christmas morning revealed exactly what Molly had brought. Sherlock ignored all his other presents – his curiosity needed to be satisfied.
It was a small magnifying glass – quite unlike the normal ones. It slid open and out.

The other thing inside it, however, was an eyepatch. The note said in childish handwriting – *For your future jobs.*

Sherlock smiled wolfishly.

It caused Molly physical pain when he used that magnifying glass.

It actually hurt all over her chest. She couldn’t help it. She felt like crying as soon as she saw it. The magnifying glass was the only proof that maybe Sherlock had known her for years before they ‘met.’

And right now – after the Moriarty episode. She felt like a stupid, desperate slag. Flirting with any other guy simply to get Sherlock jealous. And Moriarty – had been a bad deal altogether. She remembered when he had asked her all about Sherlock in the middle of kissing. The sex had been… brutal. He did make her reach her climax, but at the cost of so many – *bruises.* Some which were still not gone. Molly had cried after that, for ages, and ages.

“Something wrong, Molly?” asked Sherlock, staring intently at the body.

“Nothing,” said Molly. She pulled out one of her books, reading. John wasn’t here today, so there was no one, really, to speak to.

“Don’t you have work?” asked Sherlock, frowning.

Molly put her book down and said quietly. “No. I’ve done all my paperwork.”

“Oh,” said Molly. Her face flushed with pleasure. “Molly, don’t,” said Sherlock warningly.

It was the first indication she had received in three years of ‘knowing’ Sherlock Holmes, the great detective, that he may once have been Sherlock, the boy who played with her day in day out. An intense feeling of warmth seeped in – she hadn’t felt as free in years – Sherlock was someone *real.* He had come into her life and left, like all people. And now he was back. Inspiration struck her.

“Alright,” said Molly. She grinned slyly. “Hey Sherlock?” she said on an impulse.

“What?” he bit out, noticing a grin that echoed of stuff pressed between hide and seek games and fields of rains and ice creams.

“Like your magnifying glass,” she said, still grinning brightly. “But I think the eyepatch was pretty cool too.”

Sherlock didn’t have anything to say, and that was so new to Molly that she burst into laughter.
Chapter End Notes

There we go. I like reviews and comments a lot, just saying :)

See you in a week or even a half!
When Molly and Sherlock were eight years old, they had constructed a personal little kingdom for themselves. It was a lot to do with the fact that they had only recently read *Terebithia* together. But essentially, they created their personal little world.

Molly hardly ever understood the boy she was such good friends with. He ranged from having the sharpest tongue she had seen in her seven year old life, to becoming the gentle soul she knew so well. Molly liked Sherlock because of that – he didn’t ever judge her for her strange likings, her quaint behavior, and her tendency to burst into song.

Molly had repressed a lot of her madness over the years – her lack of friends had made it impossible for her to be comfortable around others. But Sherlock – she always felt comfortable around him.

So when they played together, she was happy. She liked having a friend like him – oddly, however, Molly found that while fitting everybody else who was seven into the category of friends was remarkably easy, with Sherlock it was difficult. He didn’t seem the kind to categorise people into friendships, hence Molly simply left it up to him.

In their little Kingdom – Sherlock had named it Valkyrie, after the Norse gods who chose who was to die in battle (he was on a mythology flair around the time) Molly and Sherlock weren’t king and queen. They agreed that being King and Queen made it far too easy, which was why they were vagabonds, plunderers, Robin Hoods, and Pirates. They chose their roles in accordance with the book they recently read, and going against the King and Queen appealed a lot more than being the controllers.

It was the best year Molly had.

Their constant games, reading, and whatnot was translating into something her small mind never really could comprehend, but through Sherlock, she saw the beauty that was the world.

Molly was grasping at something far away and out of her reach when she thought of this – it was like the magic of Matilda, she imagined. Something a little bit further – and she need only stretch her fingers out just a bit more. The only problem was, it was looking more and more impossible.

“Molly, I think you should read the *Origin of Species,*” Sherlock told her one day.
Molly frowned. “Why?”

It was a bright and sunny day, and everything was extremely hot. Molly’s increased preference for shorts could be related to the fact that she loved wading into the water during summers.

And the heat had never been worse.

It seeped into the houses, slowly and gently, making the flies lazy and drunk – the flowers drooped and the trees around them began to look extraordinarily dry and crackling. There were little leaves scattered everywhere, a lot like small slugs, brown and crinkly, and fun to jump on – they made a crunching sound when one did that.

“You’d like it,” said Sherlock.

“You only want me to read it because you want to discuss it with someone,” said Molly derisively.

Sherlock made an impatient sound. “Maybe a little,” he admitted. “But you will like it!”

“Discuss it with Mycroft,” prodded Molly.

Sherlock’s eyes became a little distant. “He doesn’t really speak to me a lot, Molly. He’s terribly smart though.”

“He’s pretty dumb if he’s ignoring the only person equal to him,” said Molly.

“We used to be friends,” said Sherlock. “But it was annoying. He constantly said I was stupid. I never realized I was smart until I met other people.”

Molly laughed. “Sherlock Holmes not know he was smart? As if!”

Sherlock grinned. “Shut up, Molly. And do read it. It really is interesting.”

“In another few years,” said Molly, dipping her hands into the cool spring they were sitting next to. “I’m already reading books I barely understand thanks to you. I’m not ruining this one because you wanted me to read it. You’re an annoying little clusterfib.”

Sherlock groaned. “For the last time, that’s not an actual insult.” He looked at her as she grinned at him. “Alright, but may I read something out to you?”

Molly smiled at him, nodding.

Sherlock jumped up, opening the book and ruffling the pages feverishly. “Aha!” he said. “Here it is! ‘Whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.’”

Molly’s eyes went wide. “What does it mean?” she asked curiously.

“It talks about the simplicity of evolution – that as we keep going forward, more and more species evolve, in more and more complex and inexplicable ways, and they are all beautiful,” explained Sherlock. “It’s a fantastic book.”

“Hmm,” said Molly, rolling the words around in her head.
When school started after the summer, Molly wasn’t looking forward to it at all. Sherlock was never looking forward to it – he treated it with the same disdain he did everything else. But Molly… she was having a harder time than normal.

Her friendship with Sherlock was not unnoticed. Molly suspected jealousy where a lot of the girls were concerned – she was just about the only girl to be such good friends with a boy. Additionally, Sherlock was not friends with… anyone. It did spark a little bit of competitiveness.

And Sherlock was a boy. He could sort it out with fist fights, even if the pain lasted, at least the emotional edge where boy fist fights was concerned was lesser. The cutting remarks of the girls, however – that was a lot harder to get over. And she knew Sherlock noticed.

He saw that she cried sometimes, and on those days, tried harder than normal not to be rude to her. A feat for him, she understood. And on especially tiring days, Sherlock tried to show something – very different than what she normally saw.

“Sherlock, I don’t want to play today,” she’d said. It had been an awful day.

Sherlock shuffled his feet. “Alright,” he said.

When Molly was alone in her room, she lay on the bed, and got a little bit of the crying out of the way. She did her homework, and wished for the company of her mother. However, Mom had gone out that evening, as happenstance. Before she really had a chance to contemplate finally going outside and finding Sherlock, the door opened, and a plate of cookies slid inside.

Sherlock really was a darling.

Molly’s pains were not ignored. Her friendship with Sherlock was a lot more rewarding than any other friendship she knew. They were best friends, and he was smart enough to challenge her into something better. He never judged her, ever. Molly enjoyed spending time with him – and creatively – he was her equal.

He was beginning to enjoy chemistry more and more.

Molly didn’t know where he acquired the chemicals, but he got some of the basic ones from somewhere. That October, when the rains came again, Sherlock and Molly did experiments in the attic.

It was always dark and musty in the attic, but now, things were starting to smoke as well.

That was the day Mycroft Holmes came into the attic.

Molly never forgot it, because while at the time it didn’t register, it was the marking of the beginning, she supposed. When she became a little older, and things went progressively downhill, it was that moment she cursed, out of sheer anger. She should have done something about it, but she did not.

“Sherlock!” his crisp, curt voice would cut through the smoke.

Sherlock shared a glance with Molly. She smiled encouragingly. He hated that he depended on her smile to face his brother.

“Mycroft?” he questioned.
“What on earth is all this smoke coming from?” he asked.

“We were experimenting on the different types of tobacco ash,” said Sherlock in a surly voice.

Mycroft scrutinized him for a second.

“I suppose you’ve become a little smarter,” he said. “That’s not a bad experiment.”

Sherlock smiled briefly. “Do you need something?” he asked.

“In fact, I do,” said Mycroft, “Mother and father wanted me to tell you we’re going for a vacation during Christmas this time. Our cousins have invited us.”

Sherlock frowned. “But I want to spend it here,” he said.

Mycroft, for some reason, glanced at Molly. “I can imagine,” he said, pulling his eyes away from Molly. “Molly won’t mind, right?” he asked.

“Not at all,” said Molly, shaking her head. “Sherlock, you ought to see your cousins! Cousins are fun!”

Mycroft grimaced. “I wish they were, Molly,” he said. Molly giggled nervously. “Apart from possibly Sherrinford, who is not half that bad. Either way, you don’t really have a choice.”

“I’ll get bored,” whined Sherlock. “It’s more fun with Molly!”

Molly blushed red.

“It’s alright,” said Mycroft soothingly. “Two of us are always bored,” he said.

“Not me,” said Sherlock stubbornly. “It’s fun with Molly.”

“Be that as it may, you’ll make do with me,” said Mycroft. “We can manage.”

Sherlock shut his eyes. “Alright,” he sighed.

Molly grinned at him. It would be lonely without him, but she wouldn’t mind a bit of quietness. And with Sherlock, she cried a lot more when he was rude to her. She was getting used to it, but it would be nice to have a break.

Mycroft left the attic, and Molly smiled at Sherlock. “Don’t worry,” she said. “You’ll have loads of fun.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes. “I doubt it.”

“Did you mean that?” asked Molly. “That you don’t get bored around me?”

Sherlock shrugged. “It’s always buzzing in my head, otherwise. When we play – quite a lot of it becomes occupied, you know. I don’t know – maybe the imagination part gets to me.”

“Oh Sherlock,” sighed Molly. “You make it sound like a math sum.”

“But Math is easy,” said Sherlock, confused. “This is far more complicated.”

“Addition is easy,” said Molly. “Subtraction takes me time.”

“Oh, Molly. You should learn Trigonometry. You’ll have a lot more fun with that.”
“Sherlock, not everyone is as smart as you!” said Molly hotly.

“True,” said Sherlock. “But I think you’re getting smarter, being around me.”

He grinned at her cheekily.

“I shan’t even miss you this Christmas,” declared Molly.

He pulled her ponytail childishly. “I shall make sure you do. Your Christmas present shall take you away!”

She punched his arm. “Don’t be mean,” she said. “I shall be nine this year. That’s really old.”

“And sadly, I am already nine,” said Sherlock, sighing teasingly. “What a burden this is.”

Molly slapped him again. “You’re a beast,” she informed him. “How fast the year went…”

“Relativity of time is a very important part of the human experience,” said Sherlock knowledgably.

“I wonder how long it will take for me to be a teenager?” sighed Molly. “It seems like ages away…”

“You’d be a nice teenager,” said Sherlock. “You won’t even rebel.”

“I shall too!” said Molly hotly.

“You can keep telling yourself that, Molly Hooper.”

“I hate you, Sherlock Holmes.”

Before Sherlock left, Molly’s birthday was coming, and unlike last time, this time, she did not force him to come. She only told him that her parents were doing another thing for her, even though she told them there were no particular friends she had in school. Her parents, however, wanted her to have the experience of an eight year old, and so, Molly agreed to it – for she did love the games.

Sherlock, of course, didn’t understand why – as they hardly ever challenged her intellectually and never ever challenged her imagination.

Molly was alright with him not coming. She was getting him something for Christmas, and since he was leaving the morning of her birthday – she had given it to him that morning.


“Oh, do be quiet, Sherlock,” said Molly, busy with the snow. “Anyone would think you hate Christmas.”

“I do,” he said angrily.

“Shush. Open it, if you wish. I’d like to see your reaction.”

Sherlock frowned at her. He then opened the box.
Molly had got him his own pen knife. It wasn’t a good brand, or a very nice one. The knives weren’t extremely sharp, but he knew Molly had bought it because it was exactly what he needed.

“This is so cool, Molly!” he said excitedly. “Thanks!”

He did something he hadn’t done before – he gave her a brief hug.

She blushed to the roots of her hair again. “My pleasure.”

It was madness. It was idiocy. It was the stupidest thing Sherlock had done.

“Sherlock? Are you going to Molly’s party then, dear?” came his Mummy’s voice.

“Yes,” sighed Sherlock, wearing something semi-decent.

Molly was his friend and she liked him, something that was rare. It always made Sherlock feel uncomfortable when Molly got bullied – she didn’t know what it was like to be constantly called a freak. She had seen her classmates at it, but they had stopped ever since she came, almost as if they were transferring it on to her. Sherlock understood the logic behind it. He had not let bullying get to him for a very long time, ever since he was five and had been thrown rocks on in the playground. Molly on the other hand… she was expressive. She gave bullies the response they needed to function.

He walked over in the cold to Molly’s house. Molly’s party was inside this time, even if some of the games led them outside.

You just need to give her your present and leave, thought Sherlock. Just go.

Molly was smiling and laughing with all the children. She held a drink in her hand, and she seemed a little more comfortable than normal.

In that moment, Sherlock felt a surge of anger towards all those idiotic children surrounding her for the day. Molly looked at him, and he saw the surprise. She grinned – one of those grins, reserved for him. Sherlock felt a surge of smugness. That’s right, Molly’s mine.

“I can’t believe you came!” she whispered conspirationally.

“I had nothing better to do,” he said stiffly.

“Don’t be so stuffy, Sherlock,” said Molly, laughingly.

Sherlock’s anger surged again. “Don’t be stupid, Molly,” he spat. “I don’t like parties and I had no inclination of coming to this one. You think you’re special but you’re not!”

Molly looked sharply rebuked – “Sherlock,” she stammered out, shifting from one foot to another. “Don’t be cranky…”

“Molly, don’t be a silly little girl,” said Sherlock, impatiently, bitingly. “They haven’t come because they like you, but because what you’re offering them – cake and goodies. They don’t like you. I don’t think anyone does.”

Tears pricked Molly’s eyes. Everybody was looking at the pair of them, wondering what had happened. “Sherlock don’t say such things,” said Molly. “I’m your friend…”
Sherlock let out a noise of frustration. Tears spilled in earnest from Molly’s eyes. She runs out of the room and up the stairs.

The anger rolls back, as he sees the number of giggles and looks he gets. A niggling sense of shame buries itself deep – Sherlock can’t see beyond Molly’s teared face. Nothing focuses beyond it. For a second, his entire brain is occupied by it.

He ran upstairs to Molly’s room, but it was closed. Sherlock hesitated. “Molly, can I come in?” he asked.

“No!” comes the fierce voice from inside.

“Please?” he asks.

“Sherlock, please go away,” comes the quiet pleading from inside. And Sherlock knows something horrible has happened, because Molly seems to have lost her ability to face him.

He could leave her, go away, and allow her to cool down. But something made him open the door and reach out for Molly’s squatting, hunched figure – hiding under the desk.

“Hello,” he said quietly, sitting down beside her.

Molly turned away.

Sherlock then did something uncharacteristic. He put his arm around her and said quietly, “I’m sorry.”

Molly sniffed. “You’re horrible.”

“I know,” said Sherlock. “And what I said was... untrue and unfair.”

Molly wiped her face, saying nothing. “Can I give you your present?” asked Sherlock.

Molly looked briefly swayed. “Alright,” she said.

Sherlock took it out of his pocket. Molly unwrapped the red coloured present.

“It’s not much,” he said sheepishly. “I thought of you when I saw it, so...”

Molly opened the box further, and a little punch machine popped out. It was in the shape of small flowers. “Oh, Sherlock,” she said with a sigh.

“I’m sorry, Molly.”

“It’s alright,” she said immediately.

Molly had always been stronger than him. She had always been better than him, and unlike him, she didn’t need people around him. Sherlock should feel thankful she voluntarily chose to spend time with him, because not a lot of people would be ready to do that.

“I also have your Christmas present...” said Sherlock.

Molly smiled. Sherlock handed her a purple gift.

Molly tore apart the paper, and gasped. “Operation!” she giggled. “That’s going to be fun!”

“Keep you occupied while I go away,” said Sherlock quietly.
“Thanks Sherlock!” she said. She gave him a tight hug, and to Sherlock’s intense pleasure, shock and fear, gave him a quick peck on the cheek.

Sherlock may enjoy having a companion like John at times, but there were times when he was a burden on Sherlock. Like now, inviting people to Baker Street for a Christmas party, of all things. It was highly annoying, but Sherlock had agreed to it – until he realized Molly was being invited.

It was terrible – **terrible** – he protested most vehemently against it. Especially after everything that happened with the Woman. Molly Hooper? Getting closer to him than she had in the last three years or so? He didn’t like it; he didn’t like it at all. And Christmas time – Molly had got him a present for every Christmas when they were small – it would bring out things best forgotten – Molly had suffered enough because of him…

Sherlock didn’t like to think about it.

It was a deleted episode. At least, he had tried to delete it. He couldn’t help it – Molly Hooper was inexplicably hard to delete from his mind. Everything she said reminded him of a time when he was actually happy.

John had made him feel that way again. Feeling happy, feeling a little less of care, feeling cheerful. Emotions he had almost forgotten. He had recognized it in John almost immediately. There was an unsaid number of things between them, in a way. But at least **sentiment** had yet to come and grip him. At least that had not happened.

In his mind palace – the sentiment – it was locked away somewhere at the bottom of the house. In a cellar. It didn’t interfere there. That was where metaphorical Molly lived.

He supposed it should mean that he loved her, but he didn’t explore it. If he explored it – things would become dangerous again.

Sherlock didn’t want to explore Irene Adler either, to be honest. The Woman wasn’t particularly appealing, but deeply admirable. And Molly, after all – she was hardly admirable for her **intellect**. She may be small, and appealing physically, but she wasn’t as smart as him… she was plain and normal, like she had always been… apart from her morbidity, he supposed – he did always know she was destined for something like this… Molly was smart that way, the authority on pathology… and she was accommodating…

*Stop it, you sentimental fool,* said Sherlock to himself.

And then she walked in.

The evening had been going tolerably irritatingly, until she walked. In her figure-hugging black dress and red lipstick – reminiscent of the Woman.

Sherlock could have grit his teeth in frustration. Molly – you’re not **supposed** to look like this. And then Lestrade did a stupid double-take and began flirting with Molly. Sherlock wanted to stomp his foot, take away the lipstick, smear it out. Press his lips to hers, drag her into the bed and keep her there until her irritating raspberry shampoo left her hair and she smelled only of him. Not let her leave him, with her silly morbid jokes and her ridiculous jumpers.

And then he opened his mouth.
“I see you’ve got a new boyfriend, Molly, and you’re serious about him.”

She always did this to him. Similarly with Jim Moriarty, similarly with every bad relationship she insisted on keeping.

“What? Sorry, what?” she had the audacity to look confused.

“In fact, you’re seeing him this very night and giving him a gift,” he went on.

“Take a day off…” muttered John, from behind him.

“Shut up and have a drink,” said Lestrade. Oh, of course, he would not want Sherlock tearing Molly apart.

“Oh, come on. Surely you’ve all seen the present at top of the bag, perfectly wrapped with a bow. All the others are slap-dash at best. It’s for someone special, then. Shade of red echoes her lipstick - either an unconscious association or one that she’s deliberately trying to encourage. Either way, Miss Hooper has love on her mind. In fact, that she’s serious about him is clear from the fact that she’s giving him a gift at all - that would suggest long-term hopes, however forlorn - and that she’s seeing him tonight is evident from her makeup and what she’s wearing - obviously trying to compensate for the size of her mouth and breasts…”

Every little word was hurting her more and more, he could see it in her eyes. Every little bit of it was crushing her. Sherlock took a sadistic pleasure in it – this is me, Molly Hooper. I’m no longer that boy.

He ripped the card out, looking for a signature - Love, Molly xxxx

“You always say such horrible things,” she whispered. He had done it again. He had beaten her down again, only for caring for him. “Everytime. Always. Always.” Her voice broke.

And Sherlock was a child again. Molly was crying, it was his fault, it was Christmas, and she was crying. He wanted to gather her in his arms. Bring her closer. Wipe it away. Take back his words.

He struggled for a second.

“I am sorry,” he said finally. “Forgive me.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw John look startled at the apology, just as he kissed her. She still smelled the same. Oh, the essence of the scent had changed, but it was all still Molly.

Of course the Woman had to interrupt.

“Oh! No, that wasn’t! – I didn’t!”

I know you didn’t, Molly. You wouldn’t.

“No, it was me,” he said.

“What, really?” said Lestrade.

“What?” asked Molly.

Sherlock felt like stomping his foot again. “My phone.”

He needed to get away from Molly Hooper.
That's that. See you soon! Please read and comment!
Lemons ahead, fair warning. Have fun with that... and um, the timeline is going to mesh a lot, please remember.

It's been difficult, writing this, but it's done. Please tell me what you think, and if something seems inconsistent.

The body in the morgue was beyond recognition by any standards; at least in Molly’s eyes. And she was the best pathologist they had – which really was not saying much, considering they had Dr. Davies as well. “You didn’t need to come in, Molly,” said Sherlock.

“That’s okay. Everyone else was busy with… Christmas. Ah, the face is sort of bashed up, so it might be difficult.”

Molly opened out the corpse, and waited for Sherlock to identify her. However, he asked her, oddly enough, to show the rest of the corpse, identifying her as Irene Adler as soon as Molly did so.

Oh. Oh.

Well, at least he was still William Sherlock Scott Holmes somewhere, thought Molly, sucking in a breath. Sherlock’s glance went to her briefly, but did not linger.

She had to ask, though. It was important.

“How did Sherlock recognize her from – not her face?” she asked Mycroft.

He wished he could tell Molly – nothing had happened between Irene Adler and himself. Nothing had ever happened between them. The idea of sleeping with anyone gave Sherlock a vague feeling of nausea and disgust. Why did they think he would?

“Look at them,” he said. “They all care so much.” Molly’s face swam into his face, crying. “Do you ever wonder if there’s something wrong with us?”

“All lives end. All hearts are broken. Caring is not an advantage, Sherlock,” Mycroft said.

There was a pause as they smoked together. “Of course you’d say that,” Sherlock finally said. “Because of you –” Sherlock paused, unwilling to go forward. “Molly is like that.”

Mycroft turned to look at him. “For that, I am truly sorry,” he said. “It was never intentional.”
The mole had woken up a little early that winter – it had something to do with the heavy tramping all over his hole. He blinked blearily at the girl responsible for it, but she paid him no attention. She was too busy standing there, enjoying the icy cold wind. The mole shivered briefly, and dived back into his hole. He cared not to see this silly little girl walking around.

Molly had been having a mildly lonely Christmas, and it suited her. She enjoyed herself, playing operation, reading books, insisting on more and more hot chocolate. She did miss Sherlock, but it was not like he had disappeared forever and would never return. Molly was perfectly content to wait for him while the world thawed itself.

She spent time with her parents, and they found it a relief and a nuisance to have her around them at all times. On one hand, her mother could now grab her and cuddle with her at any time – her father made snowmen with her and took pictures of her again and again. Molly loved it – but they got tired of it when they were busy and Molly insisted on a story or something like that.

“I think I’d like to be a witch,” she told her father one day.

“Why witch?” asked her father.

“No princess has brown hair and brown eyes. I might as well be a witch. They keep hurting the witches in the stories. I’d like to teach them a lesson on behalf of the witches.”

And it took its time – the snow first covered the ground like a giant sheet – a cocktail of ice in the air and stars in the nighttime fires. It was all sharpness and fire – ice had a tendency to burn more than freeze. Then, eventually, the snow began to become wetter and the air began to come in swirls. Warmth began to come in; and with it, Sherlock.

“Sherlock!” she grinned at him.

Sherlock smiled briefly. “Hi Molly,” he said.

She tackled him to the ground. “Don’t be stuffy!” she said. “How was it?”

He grinned at her, and then sobered immediately. “It was a – Christmas,” he bit out.

“That bad, eh?” she asked.

“It was horrible,” said Sherlock with relief.

They got up from the snowy ground. “It’s nice to have you back. It’s been lonely,” she said.

“Well, it’s better to have you around. The only person I can handle in my family is Sherrinford and Mycroft. And Mycroft is annoying.”

“Did you guys talk this time?” asked Molly, as they began walking to their spots in the woods.

“Yeah – usual things. He’s become a bit of a cynic,” he told her.

“Wasn’t he always?” asked Molly curiously, flopping down on dry ground by their favourite tree.

Sherlock seemed to be on the verge of words when he struggled with his sentences. His hand fluttered through his hair, and he looked up at the tree before looking at Molly again. “He said some curious things,” he said.
“Like?” asked Molly.

“I don’t know – he was – well. Something about not becoming too sentimental.”

“Sentimental?” asked Molly instinctively.

“I don’t know what it means either.”

“Hmm,” said Molly. “Well, what would you like to play?” she asked.

“I don’t really feel like playing,” said Sherlock in a hollow voice.

Molly’s eyes widened. “That’s kinda hard to believe,” she said.

“I dunno,” said Sherlock. “I’m a bit tired, you could say. I had to put up with tones of unnecessary social conversation.”

“Only you would find that tiring, Sherlock,” giggled Molly.

He smiled at her wanly. He sat down beside her, ruffled her hair a little. “You’re just as annoying as ever. I suppose you played tea parties while I was away?”

“Oh please,” said Molly. “You gave me Operation. I played Operation. It was fun.”

“Better than tea parties,” he said. “And better than relatives. Let’s sit here for a while and just… be.”

“I’m wondering when you’re going to stop talking in that grown up way of yours. I never understand it, you know.”

“Oh, I think you have a better grip on it than me, Molly. I just say it – you actually do it.”

That summer, Molly and Sherlock evolved a little. Molly noticed something off, but she didn’t realize what had happened for a while.

Molly didn’t realize the subtle change in both of them until it had fully happened. They didn’t spend all their time playing pretend any more – apparently, being ten had something to do with it. They spent more time playing games like hide and seek. Molly loved hide and seek – only Sherlock was annoyingly good at it.

“Oh, how did you know?” she asked dismally, when he found her easily.

“I looked at your prints, the plants and the fact that there’s a little bit of your jumper thread unraveling on that branch over there.”

Soon, Molly became better at the game, however. And it evolved into something very different.

Molly would change her hiding places again and again, making Sherlock run around for clues – and it was almost like a small chase for a criminal. Molly became good at misleading Sherlock and throwing him off her trail, so she’d leave deliberate crimes – and Sherlock would have to find her. It was the first game of murder they played, and it was fantastic.

Along with hide and seek, Sherlock and Molly began to use their bikes a lot. It gave Molly a sense of freedom she had not experienced since her random runs – and it was faster. The coming of
spring brought a new kind of gaming with it, and while pretend was fun, it was more fun when it spread wider.

When school started again, though, Molly found there was more than the games that had changed in him over Christmas. She wasn’t sure what was wrong, and she simply wanted to ask him – she wanted to make sure he was perfectly comfortable around her.

Because Molly dealt with the bullies just fine. It was alright. Except… Sherlock – who used to remain silent on these matters – suddenly began to find her more and more after a bully attack. And then the incident happened.

It started small. Before the summer started, Sherlock would only become broody after her attacks with the bullies. Molly didn’t address it, figuring something else was bothering him. Then right before summer started, he just glared at one of the people who had taken away her lunch.

Summer came, and Molly put it out of her head – they were having fun, even if it was punctuated with small days where he spent evenings with Mycroft. On those days, Sherlock’s face would be particularly stormy, and she always heard loud arguments from the attic.

Then, summer ended – and school started again. And Sherlock – he had been fine for three weeks. Molly hadn’t been bullied in a while. When she was, though -

“Are you okay?” he asked her, after Molly’s ribbons had been stolen. Sherlock didn’t usually do that, offering silent comfort over words.

Molly grinned. “I’m used to it. I got a spare pair.”

Unfortunately, Evan, the boy who had stolen her ribbons heard her. “Heard that? She says she got a spare pair!”

“Leave her alone,” said Sherlock, his fists clenched.

“Protecting your girlfriend, are you?” asked the boy grinning brutishly. The other boys surrounded them.


“Thanks cupcake,” said the boy before tugging the rest of her ribbons as well. He grabbed the badges on her bag and pushed her away. Sherlock glared for a second, and before Molly could say anything – he just – launched.

And before Molly knew it, he had hurt the boy over and over. He may have broken his nose with the sock he gave. “Sherlock, stop!” she screamed.

But Sherlock didn’t pause – he’d practiced this. Molly should really ask him where he had learned to fight so well – he was good at avoiding bullies.

And before Molly knew it, the poor boy was pulp – well – as pulpy as ten year olds get. He sported a good few healthy bruises and Molly had the strange urge to laugh.

The boys scrambled before Molly could apologise, and she turned to Sherlock, glaring. “What were you thinking?” she asked.

“Molly – you get bullied because of me. I have to do something!” he glared back at her.
“I get bullied because I choose to, Sherlock!” her eyes were burning.

“Molly, don’t be naïve!”

“I’m not,” she said angrily. “You’re being strange. It’s not your fault, or problem that I get bullied.”

“Yes it is,” Sherlock nearly ripped his curls apart while he strode across. “You would have made such normal friends, Molly. Don’t you know that? Are you that stupid?”

“I’m stupid? You just beat that boy to – well – I don’t even know what!”

“Molly – I – can’t.” Sherlock look so frustrated she could have hugged him. She edged forwards, and gently hugged him around the neck. “I can’t,” he repeated. He tore away from her and ran off.

They didn’t speak for a few days.

Molly had never felt like his house was further away – she’d stare at the attic, shake her head a little and walk off. She was at a loss as to what she was supposed to do. It didn’t make any sense. It was as if something had just overcome him – like he couldn’t bear anything anymore.

She didn’t see him, apart from the bus stops. She underwent a lot of bullying because of that. “Did you and your boyfriend break up?” “Poor little Molly Hooper, no one to save you now.” She was too distracted to make any sense of it, or even react. This left people gnashing.

She knew He had received a disciplinary hearing. She had eavesdropped on it – she wasn’t Sherlock Holmes’ best friend for nothing. Avoiding people was her strong point. No one noticed the brown haired girl listening diligently at the principal’s office.

“Mr. and Mrs. Holmes – we really think you should have Sherlock checked.”

“Why?” went Mrs. Holmes’ anxious voice.

“He’s extremely antisocial – he doesn’t like making friends. The only friend he has is currently not talking to him.”

“He’s been fighting with Molly? That’s impossible,” said Mrs. Holmes. “He dotes on the girl.” Molly’s heart may have exploded in her chest.

“Nevertheless, Mrs. Holmes –”

“My wife is right,” said Mr. Holmes. “Sherlock close to loves Molly. He’s never fought with her, and she’s the only other person who can keep him line.”

“Look – Sherlock has always been alone, antisocial, and a small menace at times,” said the Principal frankly. “But he made one friend, and Miss Gates reports that they haven’t been talking, even though Molly seems worried about him. He’s become increasingly unstable since then – even worse than before. I don’t know about you, Mrs. Holmes – you should have him checked – maybe the lack of friendship is harming him itself. Normally, it wouldn’t matter – they are ten year olds. But with Sherlock – well, it’s special enough that he made a friend. Something tells me losing his one friend may not go well with him.”

It was at this point that Molly slunk away – she was going to miss her bus.
She might as well have stayed, though. By the time she came, the bus had gone, and she had to walk home. Her countenance was extremely moody, and her mom recognized the problems at once.

She wandered aimlessly into the field, even though it seemed dumb without Sherlock. October’s first rains were looking like they were coming.

Molly kept walking around, uncaring. She glared at the clouds which were forming above, daring them to make a move. She should not have tempted fate.

“Molly, what is wrong with you?” came the loud voice. She recognized Sherlock’s voice even when the rain was beating down the earth, making the heavy sounds of a wet cloth being slapped across a river rock. It had started so suddenly, and it kept pouring, an endless tirade of sadness being dumped upon the world.

Molly stumbled across the log. “I’m lost!” she screamed back. “I don’t know – I was crying and…”

Sherlock grabbed her arm as she fell again. “Molly, you’re so silly sometimes,” he yelled over the rain. “Come on – let’s go.”

“I’m sorry Sherlock,” she said. “For whatever I did. Please let’s be friends.”

“It’s not your fault, Molly,” he said, dragging her out of the wood. Search lights were shining near Molly’s house. “Come on, Molly. We have to run now, you hear?”

Molly nodded. They dashed wildly across the field, like they had when they first met. She ran and ran, with the raindrops falling across her face and in her hair, trickling down her back and into her shoes. And she looked at Sherlock – and she screamed – because she was running again, and good God, it felt fantastic.

Sherlock looked at her incredulously before laughing – they crashed into Molly’s parents. “I found her in the woods, Mrs. Hooper,” he said quickly. “She was lost.”

She had disappeared from field, and Sherlock had felt uneasy.

She had been crying when she wandered into the woods, and Sherlock had begun to panic.

She hadn’t returned even until the rain started, and that made Sherlock want to curl up in fear.

Why didn’t she understand anything he said? Why didn’t she just get why he was avoiding her? Mycroft – he was right. Molly didn’t deserve him for a friend. Not that Mycroft had… directly said anything about it. He’d only – hinted.

And then she’d been lost. Her parents had been worried and scared, and it was raining cats and dogs and Sherlock hadn’t thought – he just ran for the woods. No one, not even Molly, knew the woods like him.
She was small and sleeping in her bed.

She’d had an awful fever and cold, and had skipped school for a few days. He came to visit in the evenings, and she helped him with homework, doing it with him. She laughed and grinned, and made Sherlock forget all his inner going ons of his brain.

“Sherlock, I know you’re thinking,” she’d said one day. “You know that this teenage brooding is meant for when you’re a teen? Not when you’re ten years old.”

“I’m smarter than everybody else.”

“That doesn’t mean you have biologically become just that big, right?” she asked, amused.

And she was sleeping right now. She looked small and very, very sleepy.

“Sherlock,” she smiled as she woke up. “You were there?” she asked.

“Yeah, I was,” he said, getting a warm feeling in his heart.

“Don’t go anywhere, okay?” she said, reaching for his hand.

“No,” he said. “I won’t.”

They began to play again, and Molly noticed that something had changed in him. He was distant and mildly closed off. Molly didn’t understand it, but she was understanding him less and less these days. He spent a lot more time in the attic with Mycroft these days.

Sometimes a sheet would fall over his eyes, and whatever Molly did didn’t work. She’d lie down on his lap, or try to make conversation – anything. But it didn’t work. At least he still played with her, and she liked that. She could see him clearest when they played together. And daylight never brought a darker creature than Sherlock Holmes thinking.

Sherlock also received something special on Halloween and Bonfire night – his uncle gave him a fantastic set of racquets for badminton. Molly was extremely envious, but she made it a point not to show it. She was careful around Sherlock these days, tip-toeing, anxious to avoid what had happened to him that time.

Molly also made a physical effort to avoid bullies from then on. She had to. She couldn’t afford to see Sherlock lose control like that, and she couldn’t afford to lose him. She’d never cry when they hurt her, she didn’t say anything that gave it away that they were after her, and when she was alone, she hid from them so that she wouldn’t start crying. She was bottling up a lot of it, but it was worth it.

On her tenth birthday, she had finally put her foot down for a birthday party. Her parents took Sherlock and herself to the Zoo, and they had one of the best days of her life. Despite his brooding disposition, he had not forgotten what it was to have fun, and although the animals bored him, making a raucous with Molly didn’t. And obviously, they both loved cotton candy.

With the coming of Christmas, Sherlock was supposed to be going to his cousins again – and Molly, desperate to not let him go this time, had asked him not to. He only shrugged his shoulders, and Molly said nothing – it was Sherlock after all.

Yes, she didn’t understand why he was acting strange. Yes, she didn’t understand what it was that
bothered him so much. But she understood him. She understood that he loved cakes almost as much as his brother. She understood his need to be looked at by the world as brilliant, because he was – in a way his brother wasn’t. She understood that he both admired and was jealous of his brother. She understood that intimacy scared him a little, but when he was in for it, he was in for the whole. She understood that he had a very odd curiosity for the world, and she understood that when he was far off and distant, forcing herself on him would chase him further and further away.

That Christmas, she got him something she felt sure he would like – a small microscope. She had saved up all her money for it, for the last three months or so.

Night time came, and she knew Sherlock was leaving the next morning. She had to give him his present even now… Molly yawned. She had her alarm set and she’d give it to him, she supposed.

“Psst, Molly!”

Molly jolted out of her bed and looked at the window. Sherlock grinned at her with the abandon he used to. Her heart thumped, and she opened the window. “What is wrong with you, Sherlock?” she whispered.

“Molly, want to go for a walk?” he asked softly. Molly smiled at him. “You’re an absolute pain,” she informed him. “I know,” he said. “Let’s take a blanket with us,” she said. She grabbed her present to Sherlock along with a blanket.

They clambered out of her window, and into the chilly wind. He hugged her close, and they tramped off – snow had set and it was freezing. But Molly didn’t mind it at all. They walked to the edge of the woods, and Sherlock seemed to have cleared some of the snow from one of their many spots.

Molly made a miniature bed for them, and they fell down to stare up at the stars. Silver glinted from the heavens, and Molly’s small fingers reached out for them. “Meteor shower for tonight, Molly,” said Sherlock quietly.

Molly’s eyes shined at the thought. It became desperately quiet for a second. The winter meant little to no animals, and even the crickets didn’t chirp into the night.

Her heart seemed to be waiting for something – Sherlock held her hand. There was something odd about this whole thing, something she couldn’t place her finger on. Sherlock was growing up before her, and she didn’t like it.

And then the sky exploded.

Diamonds rained upon them as they watched, an unconventional beauty of wildness and darkness that mixed together – crossing lines and barriers and making everything sharper. Molly watched in wonder, as the stars threw down their spears.

“Happy Christmas, Molly,” said Sherlock, pushing a present towards her.

“Happy Christmas, Sherlock,” she said, pushing her own present to him.

She opened her present, and something went very weird inside her. It was a black book, with the title ‘To Kill a Mockingbird.’

“Take your time with it,” said Sherlock. “It’s one of the best. It has the story of –”

But Molly had tackled him into a hug and Sherlock smiled sheepishly. He opened his own present, and became very silent. He took it out – the thing she had saved all her money for. “Molly
He smiled at her then, and hugged her tightly. Molly didn’t know why she felt odd and queasy.

She had never understood – never. Molly never understood how to not be expressive in front of bullies. Her heart was to empathetic, it reached out, it gripped people and it almost always got them.

But she didn’t have him. She didn’t have Sherlock Holmes from since they were children.

*That’s right, Molly Hooper. I beat you.*

Except it had never felt like a victory. It felt like he had lost something important – because Molly was strong, and she was so kind, and she was the parallel to him that he had never seen afterwards. Molly had been stronger than John or himself – John suffered from problems of the mind, despite being the heart of their team, and Sherlock – all his problems were emotional.

Molly – she was... she had always been – a Mockingbird.

She gave happiness to everyone and she was free – she had wings. She was a person beyond.

And she was sitting in front of a microscope, across him, saying nothing. “Well Sherlock, your cultures are done,” she smiled.

“You’re lying. Why’re you lying? You can just stay if you want.”

Molly flushed red. “I just feel like staying, okay, Sherlock?”

“Why? What’s wrong with your apartment?”

Molly was glaring at him.

“Leave it alone,” she whispered in a slightly deadly way.

“Is it the date?” he asked. “What is today?”

“Sherlock, don’t –”

But Sherlock had already checked the calendar.
“Oh,” he said.

“Oh, *fuck,*” said Molly. “Why did I ever think you wouldn’t know? Of course you knew.”

“Molly –” he said quietly.

“No, I don’t want to go home, Sherlock. Leave me alone.”

She stormed off into her office, and Sherlock said nothing. She deserved to be left alone, after all.

Today was the day her father had died.

Chapter End Notes

See you in a week or so? I think. I don't know. I have exams and everything. *sigh*

Don't forget to read and review!
Future heartbreak, lots of timeline meshing, angsty angsty angst. Can everybody please tell me when the time thingy gets confusing? I'm really worried about it, to be honest.

Present time, The Hounds of Baskerville

“Why would you listen to me? I’m just your friend,” said John, sarcastically.

“I don’t have ‘friends!’” exploded Sherlock – he didn’t need friends. He didn’t need Molly. He didn’t need John. He needed to be alone – he needed people to understand that he was no hero, no angel.

“No. I wonder why?”

Something like a prick hit Sherlock – Molly’s face came into view again. Don’t let this be like us, Sherlock. Don’t do that to John Watson.

That Christmas, when Sherlock left, it became unbearably silent.

Molly wandered around the field, she walked through the woods, exploring further and further until there was nothing left to explore. She made snow men and spent time with her parents. And above all, she read the book Sherlock had given her.

She couldn’t get enough of it. She read it again and again, until the words were practically memorized by her. She could see why Sherlock picked it out for her, and she certainly agreed with his taste – it was one of the most fantastically written book she had ever seen. It was, however, Scout and Jem’s relationship that really made her understand exactly what was happening –

Jem was growing up. Scout was growing up as well, but not like Jem – because Jem was older. It didn’t fully register then, but Molly understood slowly over the year. Sherlock was growing up, because he was smarter. Molly knew exactly when she understood it as well.

And when Sherlock returned the silence didn’t go away.

Molly could not understand it – it never made sense to her. But it did not go away. Sherlock would fall silent a lot more, even while they played their games. They spent time on their homework together, which increased quite a lot since they reached fifth grade.

Sherlock finally broke out the racquets he had been given on Halloween – Molly and Sherlock
played badminton and got better and better at it. At times, his wolfish grin would come and his competitiveness returned. Molly had been thrilled to see that, so much so that she got him a football for his birthday, and the game broke out again.

Mycroft gave Sherlock something far more curious – a violin. No one asked Mycroft where he got the money, but Sherlock’s eyes had been shining the way they had when Molly had given him the microscope.

But it was Sherlock’s parents that outdid everyone – they got him a little puppy. Molly remembered him staring at it like it was an alien, something from a different planet. A little like he had looked at Molly when they had first met.

It was a unilateral decision to name the little thing Redbeard. Sherlock completely bulldozered over her absolutely perfect ideas like ‘Scamper’ from Secret Seven (‘Molly, we’re not naming my dog after the idiots in a series of books who could not solve crimes which were threes and fours in a matter of minutes, its unacceptable.’), or ‘Shadow’ (“What? Why? What for? A ghost story set in Shimla? Oh Molly, ghosts don’t exist. And we’re not naming him that anyway.”), or ‘Panic’ (“Molly, I’m reminding you that panicking is one of those things that are under the heading ‘Human Error.’”)

When Sherlock finally looked upon the puppy – brown, with shades of red. “Oh, I know!” he said. “Redbeard. Every pirate needs a feel good animal.”

“Sherlock, that animal is usually a parrot,” said Molly, frowning.

“Parrots are idiotic, not to mention carriers of diseases. He’s a Redbeard.”

Present time, between The Reichenbach Fall and the Hounds of Baskerville

Not even John knew that Sherlock hadn’t received a formal education in the Violin for a very long time. Another one of Molly’s favourite memories was sitting all those afternoons, watching Sherlock decode the Violin all by himself. They biked to the town and got him books for it after school, and they studied the musical theory like nothing else. Molly first began to appreciate music with Sherlock’s violin.

Even now, Molly’s varying tastes in music was rooted to Sherlock first playing a very scratchy Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.

From there, Molly had gone deep into music, only she did not realise it until Sherlock had left her. When seventh grade came, she began with bad pop music numbers – a contrast to the previously classical tastes she had acquired. She went from there onto Jazz, a natural successor to what had happened to her and from there even further – Rock, Alternative, Reggae, and so on.

However, this was also punctuated by their return to school. Sherlock – he took an interest in swimming, and Molly would see him go for evening swims instead of join her in the bus. Molly never said anything, preferring to use the time to go for ice-skating classes instead.

His mind was becoming increasingly distant from Molly. There was a time when Molly could read his mind like the back of her hand. But as she saw him become colder, Molly only got touches of what he was thinking. She knew what could hurt, she knew what made him
unbearably happy – but he was becoming unreadable at times.

Summer came, and she had ice skating lessons again. That Christmas, she was going to have a recital, and she was extremely excited about it.

“Sherlock!” she yelled when he came back from his swimming session.

“What is it?” he asked.

“I was selected for an ice skating recital!” she said, running forward and hugging him tightly.

“That’s excellent,” he said with a genuine smile.

“It’s before Christmas!” she said happily. “You’ll come, right?” she asked.

“Sure,” he said easily.

“I’ll buy you a ticket?” she asked eagerly.

He nodded – his thoughts had floated away somewhere she didn’t recognise. She didn’t mind, in that moment.

As the summer progressed, Molly’s ice skating classes became intense, while they perfected their recital. Molly had no solo, but she was fairly happy without it. That’s when her parents suggested Piano classes. She had a feeling they wanted her to not concentrate on her father – who had been sick for some time – and Molly had a tendency to zoom into an overactive imagination.

Molly’s eyes had perked at the idea. She agreed immediately, and climbed up to Sherlock’s room to tell him.

“Hi!” she said breathlessly – however, someone else was in his room.

It was Mycroft.

“Oh, hi Molly,” said Sherlock. “Mycroft had a bit of a proposition.”

“Oh,” said Molly her face falling.

“Maybe I will tell you in a while,” said Mycroft glancing at Molly.

“Oh, shut up, Mycroft,” said Sherlock, annoyed. He patted Redbeard’s head, for he was snuffling into Sherlock’s hands. “It’s Molly. What do you want?”

Mycroft’s eyes hardened. “I’m doing an experiment in Chemistry. I was wondering if you wished to sit in. It’s quite an interesting one.”

“Obviously, it is far ahead of my level – but teachers, you see. It suits you perfectly, on the other hand.”

Sherlock grit his teeth. “Is that all you can ever do? Insult me?” asked Sherlock.

Sherlock waved him away. Molly laughed nervously. “You should probably be a little less rude.”

“He deserves it.”

Molly sat down on Sherlock’s bed. “It’s exciting though. Can I read the file too?” she asked.

Sherlock nodded. Molly flipped through it – it was extremely high level for someone in tenth grade – a study in compounds which could probably evolve into something bigger.

Molly understood very little, but she had no doubt Sherlock understood it perfectly. Sherlock was looking at her oddly.

“He’s becoming stranger,” said Sherlock quietly. “I know he has contacts which are getting him a lot of power – and he’s working ruthlessly. I don’t know if he has a heart anymore.”

“He’s always know what is right, however – even if it is only through a morally skewered compass,” said Molly.

“Molly, my compass is morally skewered,” said Sherlock patiently.

“What I’m saying is – I know Mycroft has principles which he works with.”

“I’m sure he does,” said Sherlock.

“And he always takes care of you,” Molly pointed out. “Always.”

“I’m sure. The only thing I agree with him on is that one should not become too sentimental.”

Molly squirmed uncomfortably. “Where do you get that from?” she asked.

“Being attached to people makes it hard for you to concentrate on what you’re doing,” said Sherlock, staring out of his window.

Molly chose to ignore that. Their unnatural distance was enough to put up with. She had a lot to think about, apart from her damaged relationship with Sherlock - besides, her father was not feeling well these days – he had been sick for quite a while – Molly had plenty on her plate without Sherlock’s personal epiphanies.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you!” she said excitedly. “My parents say I can take piano classes!” she said.

Sherlock continued staring out of the window. “That’s great, Molly!” he said with artificial cheerfulness. “Aren’t you happy?” she asked, her face falling.

“Yes, I am. I just don’t see why I should get excited about everything you do,” said Sherlock.

Molly bit her lip. “I know – I just – you know, you play the violin – so –”

Sherlock didn’t say anything.

“Sherlock –” she asked tentatively. “Are we best friends?”

Sherlock turned away from her and didn’t say anything. He said quietly, “You’re a mockingbird, Molly Hooper. You’re going to give it your best and make everyone happy. And that doesn’t work with me.”

“Going by the text you’re referencing, I’d also end up dead,” said Molly wryly, wrinkling her nose.
Molly didn’t see Sherlock’s face blanch.

Present time, between the Reichenbach Fall and the Hounds of Baskerville

The notes filled the night air, curling into the air as smoke floating into the atmosphere. Molly’s music had always been something quite different from what his was – he should have guessed she never stopped playing the piano.

_Fur Elise_ by Beethoven was playing through the doors and windows – she could see that her neighbours enjoyed her playing as much as Molly herself enjoyed it. Molly never understood why they’d give her food, they’d invite her over on Christmases. Sherlock knew why – they heard the melodies that left the apartment, like clouds of ink colouring water.

And she had an interpretation unlike anything else. It was terrifying the way she played. He knew her favourite was Mozart. He wished sometimes – he wished he had had the chance to play with her.

They spent such little time after that, Molly realised sadly. Sherlock’s violin could be heard at all times, and where Molly was learning simple melodies to play, progressions and songs which were easy to practice, Sherlock was learning his Violin with a tutor – his parents had finally convinced him to get a tutor. Sherlock had thrown a tantrum, and asked that he select his tutor himself.

It had been reasonably funny, watching the man come in and receive a scrutiny by Sherlock, before he rattled off a series of complicated questions based on his study of musical theory, leaving the poor man stunned. After a lot of fighting, a lot of interviews, and a lot of mess, Sherlock finally agreed upon a man called Mark White, and Violin tuitions began.

Molly herself had other things to concentrate on. While Sherlock did all the donkey work for Mycroft’s project and the brothers spent more time together, Molly had a dance recital to practice for along with her piano. Molly and Sherlock – they barely had any time together.

Molly put all her effort into her recital – she had to do it fantastically – Sherlock had promised to be there, and she’d perform for _him_.

Molly was entering a danger zone, and Sherlock knew it. He never understood why she was friends with him, and now – well – it was imperative that she understand what she was in for.

Sherlock never told her of all the times he had been bullied – of the time he had been found with ‘FREAK’ written on his forehead, somewhere on the school playground. He did not see the bullying happening in school anymore – but he knew Molly was hiding it to avoid another episode.

This fear of Molly being hurt had not happened out of the blue, unfortunately – like everything in Sherlock’s brain, it was a progression which had been triggered by a warning – just as he understood when a political upheaval was going to take place before the adults told him, just like he understood when Molly was going to care for him more than anyone else.
“Well, Sherlock – what is this I hear about you having a new girlfriend?” asked Sherrinford.

Mycroft snorted. “She’s his ‘best friend’ apparently.”

Sherlock glared at Mycroft. “She’s our neighbour,” he clarified.

Sherrinford had looked extremely amused. “Be careful, Sherlock. Don’t be as cynical as Mycroft – but remember that who you become friends with is always in danger of attacks. People aren’t the same as us, you know. They have a lot of sentiments attached.”

“I can’t be friends with a soldier, can I?” asked Sherlock with asperity.

Sherrinford grinned. “Maybe you should wait until you meet a soldier who can handle you before becoming friends with anyone.”

Sherlock did not say anything, but all he could remember was Molly’s face when she cried after being bullied.

Sherlock knew that the bullying was slowing down these days – but one could never tell.

Molly didn’t get to spend time with Sherlock outside of school, but she was busy. She had a sport to practice, music to keep going at, and her studies to work on. She was doing a science project on decaying matter. Her father was sick again, and her mother was beginning to get worried – but they promised to come for her recital. On top of all that, the bullying was increasing again.

Molly was in despair – she’d thought that period was going to be over – but the children had picked up more vicious forms of bullying.

Sherlock wasn’t always with her anymore, so Molly need not worry about hiding too much – all the same – she had no one to confide in. Everything she thought of was bottled up inside her: her worries about Sherlock, the damage she seemed to have done to him (he couldn’t even look her in the eye anymore), the bullying, the fact that her studies were still happening, her father, and her lack of friends. Molly was beginning to seriously doubt Sherlock’s Mockingbird theory.

Christmas holidays were approaching and Molly wasn’t very happy – she had a very rough day, as her school work had been going down as a result of the stress she was putting on herself. Molly wrapped all her stuff up, prepared to go home and have some hot cocoa – maybe look longingly at Sherlock’s house – she hadn’t seen his place in many days. And Sherlock was not in school – he was working on Mycroft’s project.

And that was when she realised that the whole class was suspiciously silent. She looked around, to find the girls and boys glancing at her ever so often.

Molly had not returned from school. Sherlock glanced at the bus stop, but the bus had already gone, and no red jumper had gotten off.

Odd. Maybe she had practice, and walked to the ice skating rink.
It had been over an hour, and Sherlock was beginning to feel a little uneasy.

He glanced at the road every few minutes, hoping to see brown hair and a red jumper.

It was over two hours now. Sherlock was beginning to feel a little worried. He knew Molly’s father was at the Doctor’s, and her mother at work – they judged Molly smart enough to take care of herself.

Two and a half hours later, Sherlock put on his coat and hat and asked his mother to drive him to school.

World renowned Mathematician Alice Holmes looked up from her book and asked her son gently, “Why?”


“Sherlock, why aren’t you speaking to her these days?” asked his mother firmly.

“Because – because – Mummy please, not now!”

Mrs. Holmes got up, adjusted her shawl, picked up the car keys and walked to the door. “You better explain on the way, William Sherlock Scott Holmes.”

“She should have a better friend,” muttered Sherlock, finally, looking outside the window.

His mother said nothing.

“She’s small and if she wasn’t friends with me – Mum, she’d have tonnes of friends if she wasn’t friends with me.”

“Sherlock, you really are a goose,” sighed his mother.

They found her in the school basements.

She was small, and curled up in an abandoned room, among a lot of papers. She had been tied up and left, clearly – the marks were there on her arms.

“Molly!” yelled Sherlock when she was spotted. His mother had been held up by an argumentative janitor.

He turned her face upwards, and on her forehead, in childish, capital letters were the words
They took her home, and Sherlock fished her home keys from Molly’s bag. His mother carried her gently, when she woke up. “Mrs. Holmes?” she muttered.

“Yes dear?” said his mother calmly.

“Tell him not to worry,” she said quietly before falling off again.

They wrapped her up, and Sherlock went downstairs to make some hot chocolate – cinnamon, sugar, two marshmallows – just the way she liked it. Molly didn’t seem to have anything wrong in her, apart from having spent an unnecessarily long time in a dank basement, trying to get out of her locked room. The tear stains told Sherlock that she had been crying. He took a sponge to wipe out the words that were offending him more than her red jumper.

Her face was all quiet, however. It was extremely artificial – Molly did not sleep like that. She just... went everywhere.

Anger surged again, and Sherlock quelled it.

“Well, I’ve called her mother. She’s in a right state,” said his Mother.

Sherlock did not say anything. They waited for Molly’s mum to come home, in a flight of hysterics.

“What happened, Alice? Oh, goodness – this is the second time!”

“Calm down, Margaret,” said his mother gently. “She’s perfectly fine. She’s been subject to a rather vicious incident of bullying.”

“Oh,” said Molly’s mum, unable to find words. “How did you find her?”

“Locked in a cold basement, with that written over her face.” The traces of the words remained.

“I mean, how did you find her?” asked Margaret impatiently. Sherlock’s eyebrows went up – clearly, Molly had been having incidents like this regularly, and she had been telling some to her Mum.

“Sherlock got worried when she didn’t come home two hours after school,” said his Mother calmly. “I drove, we found her.”

Margaret Hooper turned to see Sherlock. “Thank you,” she said. “She’d been telling me of all the horrible things. I thought you didn’t care, though.”

Sherlock swallowed.

“Sherlock?” came the soft voice.

Sherlock looked up from his book. Molly woke up, finally, after having slept for quite sometime.
“You’re not going to stick around this time, are you?” she asked sadly.

Sherlock swallowed. She’d always known him before he knew himself.

Molly started crying again. “Please tell me what I did wrong,” she said, tears going down her cheeks.

“You get bullied because of me, Molly. I can’t let you just – take it anymore.”

“I don’t mind it, do I, Sherlock?” she begged. “Please – p – please – I have an ice-skating reci-”

She dissolved into tears. Sherlock wanted to cry himself, but he forced himself. “Molly, it’s not worth it. I have to keep worrying over you – and – and –”

“Please,” she whispered again. “We were g-going to play together – the p-piano and the v-violin...”

“Molly...” Why was she crying? He hated it when she cried.

“I won’t make you come for my birthday parties, I won’t even ask you to be my best friend,” she promised, still crying. “Please – just come for my recital. You promised. You said you would!”

“Bye Molly,” said Sherlock. It took all the effort in the world to not run out of the door and start crying. As it happened, Sherlock made it to outside the house before he ran off.

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**Present time, The Reichenbach Fall**

Molly’s shift was finally over, and she was looking forward to meeting Harry. Her hair were in a ponytail, and she was wearing what Sherlock would only call a hideous jumper. Toby had been sick, and she had to take him to the vet yesterday, afterwhich he proceeded not to let her sleep all night, which was why she was slightly woozy.

“Molly!” Oh dear.

Sherlock walked through the door she was just going to leave from.

“Oh, hello!” she said. “I’m just going out,” she said, as Sherlock forcefully steered her in the opposite direction. “No you’re not,” he said firmly.

“I have a lunch date,” she clarified.

“Cancel it,” said Sherlock easily, not bothering with his puppy dog act. “You’re having lunch with me,” he added, waving a few packets of crisps.

“What?” she asked, keeping up with them.

“Need your help,” he said, unconcernedly. “It’s one of your boyfriends. We’re trying to track him down. He’s been a bit naughty.”

“It’s Moriarty?” asked John incredulously.

“Yes, of course it’s Moriarty,” said Sherlock, opening the door.
“Jim wasn’t actually my boyfriend,” said Molly, looking mildly flustered as well as proud. She thought she saw a flash of something in Sherlock’s eyes. “We went out three times. I ended it.”

“Yes, and he stole the Crown Jewels, broke into the Bank of England and organized a prison break at Pentonville. For the sake of law and order I suggest you avoid all future attempts at a relationship, Molly.”

Molly was left, standing there, as Sherlock Holmes whooshed out of her life once again.

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**Present time, the Reichenbach Fall**

She carried the files into the room – Sherlock seemed to be in a bit of a state at the moment. She could see it in his quick moves, in the speed with which he was talking. Being bored was one thing, this time, he was genuinely scared.

She fiddled with the test tubes and beakers as Sherlock spoke to John – she liked this part of her job – figuring out the reality of everything. This was enjoyable.

“Alkaline,” she said quietly during one of the tests.

“Thank you John,” said Sherlock.

Molly flinched momentarily. “Molly,” she corrected without letting it hurt her.

“Yes,” said Sherlock, without looking up from his microscope.

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**Present time, the Reichenbach Fall**

“Glycerol Molecule,” he muttered. “What are you?”

Whatever it was, it really did have him in a fix, thought Molly as she continued her tests.

“What did you mean, ‘I owe you’?” she asked, glancing at him briefly. “You said – ‘I owe you’?” she asked, gingerly. She didn’t know where she stood with Sherlock anymore. “You were muttering it while you were working?”

“Nothing,” said Sherlock curtly. “Mental note.”

Molly looked at her slide again, and decided to dive right in. She wouldn’t break any code that they had put up in an unsaid way between each other, before the Christmas party where she realized she was not going to be an important part of Sherlock Holmes’ life anyway.

“You’re a bit like my dad.”

She saw him blink briefly into the microscope.

“He’s dead,” she added. “Oh, sorry.” Sherlock knew. He knew her father had passed away a long time ago.

“Molly, please don’t feel the need to make conversation, it’s really not your area,” said Sherlock quickly, curtly. The armor was back on.
As if it has been down in the time you have known him.

Molly bit her lip, took a breath in, avoiding Sherlock’s face for a second. But she’d like to talk about this. “When he was dying, he was always cheerful. He was lovely.” Her father’s crinkly face blinked in front of her eyes.

“Except when he thought no one could see,” she said, watching his face. He had the same look on his face, the way her father had always looked.

“I saw him once. He looked – sad,” she said.

“Molly,” he said waringly. Irritated. Uncaring.

“You look sad,” she ploughed on. “When you think he can’t see you.”

Sherlock’s eyes briefly flitted to John.

He looked at Molly – her small, determined face. “Are you okay?” she finally asked. She was his friend, after all. “And don’t just say you are,” she added, as his mouth looked ready. “Because I know what that means – looking sad when you think no one can see you.”

“You can see me,” said Sherlock slowly.

“I don’t count.”

Chapter End Notes

There's that. I don't know when I'll do the next chapter, but soon. I'm having troubles with Sherlock.
Sorry it's been a while! My exams are lining up like a Parade on Independence Day. It's awful. You get rid of one colourful, heavily loaded, and attention necessary exam and another shows up, dancing it's way through your eyes, leaving you with a mild sense of satisfaction and a lot of exhaustion.

Now, the thing is, my next set of exams are starting in a month, the ones on which my future depends. So the gaps between the updates are going to stretch a bit. Terribly sorry, guys, can't be helped.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I don’t count.

Absurd. Stupid. Silly.

I don’t count.

What was wrong with her?

I don’t count.

Molly flashed before his eyes – small, six years old, laughing at everything intelligently, bright, sunny, running for freedom.

I don’t count.

Seven year old Molly taught him how to be a pirate. She taught him greys and whites and blacks.

I don’t count.

She was eight when she bought him that magnifying glass. He still used it. She was red in the face, his best friend.

I don’t count.

When she was going to be ten years old, she had loved animals and birds and everything dead.

I don’t count.

She was crying because of him. He had humiliated her for the first time.

I don’t count.

Molly Hooper smiled at him, sitting in the make shift bed in the woods, with the heavens falling from above.

I don’t count.
She was crying again, begging him to stay. She wanted him to be there. And he walked off. He saw the scene like a ghost, and as eleven year old Sherlock walked off from Molly, Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective tried to get the boy to stay. Because there was nothing like Molly Hooper.

Molly practiced and practiced and practiced.

Sherlock was coming for the recital, she knew he was. He just had to. He had promised.

In school, life had come to an easy low. The children had received one of the worst punishments for their treatment of Molly, and had been impressed on by their parents what a disgusting crime they had committed. Well, for the most part. Molly spent her time in school studying, no longer bothered by bullies – for a while anyway.

Her lunch, which used to be spent with Sherlock was now by herself. Sherlock went off by himself, and Molly kept to herself. She liked a spot under an old Oak tree in the playground, where she sat and ate her lunch.

In the last week of school, school seemed to be becoming a bit of a chore. She could not wait for her recital, as she was confident in Sherlock’s coming. She sat by herself under the Oak, watching the other children.

“Hello,” said someone.

Molly looked up, surprised. It was a female voice, so she knew it was not Sherlock.

“Hi,” said Molly uncertainly.

“You’re that girl – the one they locked in the basement.” The speaker was black haired, with an olive complexion. Her lack of tact was a refreshing change. “Oh – sorry.”

Molly didn’t say anything for a while. “That’s okay,” she said. “I’m fine now.”

“Really? That easy?” asked the girl.

“It’s dumb to drag things out,” said Molly, shrugging, uncomfortably.

The girl’s face cracked into a grin. “I’m Meena.”

“Molly Hooper,” said Molly with a smile.

When the Christmas holidays did come, Molly was nervous. She had been completely alone in school, apart from Meena who spent some of her breaks with Molly, and chatted with her. She came home, did her homework, and went for a cycle ride, normally – it made her feel free.

Her father wasn’t well, so in the evenings, she’d spend some time with him. Her mum had an extremely strained look these days, and Molly was worried about her by this time. She ignored it for a while, because sometimes, it was her own troubles that came to the forefront.

Molly was relentlessly practicing for her recital, determined that Sherlock was coming. He had
promised. She’d given him a ticket – she tried to speak to him sometimes, but he ignored her, spoke to her curtly, and avoided her most of the time.

When the day of her recital came, she was extremely nervous. Would Sherlock like her white dress, or would he call it silly, she wondered.

By evening time, the rink was lit up with fairy lights. Their instructor smiled at them brightly, his teeth gleaming. Molly suspected he used teeth whitener.

“Come on girls, show time!” he said.

Molly took her position, and scanned the crowds. No Sherlock. No parents.

“Molly, your parents are calling,” said her instructor.

“Hello, mum?” said Molly, taking the receiver.

“Molly, dear, are you alright?” she asked.

“Yeah, what’s wrong?” her mother sounded unusually strained and in pain.

“Molly – your father –” Molly’s heart sunk further. “He’s really sick. I’m taking him to the hospital.”

“Alright,” she said immediately. “Do you want me to come?” she asked.

“Do your recital, dear,” said her mother gently. “I’ll come pick you up after.”

“Alright,” said Molly. Her lip trembled.

“I love you, alright? I’ll take a video from Ramona’s parents and watch you, promise.”

“Yes Mum,” said Molly.

So that was two people who would be watching her down. Was Sherlock there?

The crowds were devoid of Sherlock. Molly shivered – it was freezing, and they were in nothing more than dresses. She huddled into her cardigan, and made a split decision.

She ran out, in the wind and cold, and walked across to the stands. She bumped into thousands of people, who all dodged her, walked by her, but no Sherlock.

Molly gave a frustrated groan. “Molly?” came a voice.

“Meena?” said Molly. “What are you doing here?” she asked.

“My sister is performing,” said Meena. “Why are you outside?” she asked.

“I’m –” Molly blushed. “I’m looking for Sherlock.”

“He’s not here, Molls,” said Meena. Molly did not register the brief use of a nickname. “Are you sure?” she asked.

“Our family was the first to come. I would have noticed.”

Molly had to make another decision at this point. Hear the call of her instructor, do her dance, or walk off?
“Molly?” asked Meena.

Oh, sod it, thought Molly, using her first mental abuse. There was no one left to dance for but herself, and nobody was going to stop her on that. If Sherlock had decided to grow up ever so early, it was his own bloody fault.

She was burning on the skating rink.

Sherlock was watching from behind the stands – Molly Hooper came on with the remaining girls, and he was mesmerized. She didn’t look small, or helpless, or needing help – she stood up, tall (despite her height), her eyes were flashing – Sherlock was close to awed when he saw her.

*Molly Hooper, you’re a force of nature.*

And she was – her body was on fire, as she did one sequence of steps after another.

And it was when she stared directly at the stars and sky, once she was done, that Sherlock knew that Molly Hooper would be fine on her own.

Molly spent her Christmas with her father, in the hospital. He had cancer.

He was going to return by the time New Year’s came around, and Sherlock wasn’t around for her. She was bristling with the pain of his lost, but she steadfastly ignored the hollow, empty feeling in her stomach. She ignored it and focused on her father instead, who was laughing at some really bad joke of her mum’s.

Her mum was in a bad shape, and Molly didn’t need to ask her to know that. Sometimes, at night, she heard restless padding, and found her Mum, sitting in the dining room, staring at a photograph of their family in cold horror. Molly would swallow, and walk away.

Molly understood death even then. She knew the finality of it, because it had fascinated her for so long, and she’d played with dead things for so long – well, it made sense.

Molly’s soft toys and cushions had been subject to her cut up and operations when she was five. It had been Sherlock who had taught her how to channel her talents in a way that made sense to her.

And despite everything Molly Hooper understood about death, she wished, beyond hope, that her father was not dying.

Molly was beginning to pray at nights. She wasn’t sure who she was praying to, because God had never played a more important role in her life, and she didn’t care. She was sending out any and all telepathic signals, hoping that *someone* was listening. *Anyone.*

Margaret Hooper had always known her daughter to be precocious, smart beyond other children. When she became friends with that Sherlock boy, she had been so glad, because Sherlock finally seemed like someone up to her speed.
True, Margaret didn’t like the bullying she received due to her friendship with the boy, but he was a good child, and he had broken it off with Molly because of everything. Margaret missed him a little, to be completely honest. Molly had seemed so much happier around him. Margaret sighed, and decided it really was time for bed.

She was going to go into Molly’s room, switch off her lights and tell her daughter to go to sleep, like she had done ever since Molly slept in her own bed – Margaret pushed the half closed door, and she saw the small figure of Molly bent over her bed, hands pressed together.

“Dear universe,” whispered the girl. “Hi. It’s me again.”

Margaret pressed her lips together.

“I’m just checking in. Seeing how all of you are doing. I hope it’s going well, God. Don’t punish Lucifer too much; I don’t think he’s completely evil. He’s more like... the grey area. I don’t know. Anyway. I’m sure you’re perfectly fine, God. I mean, you’re all powerful. I don’t think you need the goodwill of an eleven year old to help you along.”

Margaret would have told Molly how strongly God needed the help of anyone willing, but she said nothing, watching.

“I hope – um. I hope Billy’s fine. And please look over Sherlock. I have a feeling his cousins aren’t very nice to him. And tell him I miss him, please. Well, anyone who is listening can just tell him. That would be nice.”

Margaret didn’t know her daughter perfectly. She knew Molly had an intense inner life which not a lot of people were privy to, and she did not know Molly’s beliefs in God. It was only when she saw her small little daughter praying that Margaret realised how much Molly had grown up in the last five years or so.

“And, um. Please, anyone who is listening?” said Molly, her voice cracking. “My Mum’s not well.”

Margaret started crying.

“My father’s going to die, I’ve come to terms with that. Death... happens. It kind of sucks, but it does. No one can do anything about it. And he’s sort of – okay with it. He says he’ll miss seeing me growing up, but I don’t think that’s going to be his primary problem. Cause he’s going to go into chemo soon. And. Well. I dunno. It’s kind of hard.”

Marga Hooper had never loved her daughter more.

“It’s mum I’m more worried about,” said Molly quietly.

She was crying fully now. She bit her lip to stop herself from gasping.

“She’s not happy at all. People die all the time, that’s truth. Shakespeare understood that, so I don’t see how that’s a very new theory. I think it’s the fact that the person is sort of – missing – that gets everybody else. And Mum – she’s not well. I think it hurts her to think that Papa won’t be around very soon. She’s doing this thing – she just stares at photographs in horror, like she can’t believe what’s happening. Someone’s got to talk to her, but it can’t be me. If she knew how smart I was, she’d expect me to do better in school.” Molly gave a nervous chuckle.

“So can everybody just help her out? I don’t know how many people are checking in right now, but you know – all of you listening. I think God might broadcast the message. He can’t directly intervene; I think he has enough on his plate. There’s children dying, there’s planets collapsing in...
other galaxies and there’s blackholes to take care of. I don’t know. But all of you in our little praying thing here, you can help. We’re a support group. Like when last week, I think Rosie Wester heard – and she gave Mum some cookies. That was nice of you, Rosie. I’m glad you’re all there, you know. It gets pretty lonely sometimes.”

Margaret Hooper couldn’t take it anymore. Molly was so – she was so – she was so small.

“Thanks universe. I hope all of you are happy. Keep the gas in, Jupiter.”

When Molly went back to school after the Holidays, she had Meena to meet, first thing in the morning.

“Hi!” she said brightly. “Come sit with me!”

Molly smiled gratefully, as Sherlock was right behind her, and waiting for a seat. Molly couldn’t take sitting all by herself. She noticed the frown on Sherlock’s face and felt like she had scored an unforeseen point.

Meena chattered about her Christmas holidays, and Molly interjected every now and again. They found that they watched the same TV shows, specifically one Doctor Who and enjoyed a lot of the same books. Molly was glad to have found one other person who had read *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

“I say, you’re fun!” said Meena. “To think that I’ve been twaddling around with these idiots who can only think about who the next person they are going to peck on the cheek is.”

She thought she saw Sherlock twitch, but she said nothing when she smiled and agreed to be friends with Meena.

They went for class, and Molly helped her with her remaining homework before the teacher came in. Meena actually even took a desk next to Molly, a fact that Molly was deeply pleased about, even if it perplexed her to no end.

It was during break that the explosion occurred again. She hadn’t been noticing Sherlock, and she bitterly reflected that he had probably been scowling at Meena throughout.

“So, how was your Christmas?” asked Meena, sitting down beside her, at her desk, while Molly munched on some sandwiches. The rest of the class had gone off somewhere else, and there was no one there.

She saw Sherlock grit his teeth. Pursing her lips, Molly said simply, “Kind of lonely.”

“Oh. Why?” asked Meena.

“Really?” exploded Sherlock. Both the girls stared as he jumped to his feet. “She’s an idiot, and a gossip, to boot. She’s being friends with you because her Mum told her that dear sweet Molly’s having a bit of a hard time. She’s terrible at her studies – you can see it by the pencil marks on her fingers, and the hair under her nails – lots of nights of pulling her hair out over math sums. She’s going to use you for her studies, and who wants to know about your boring Christmas anyway? With your boring mother and equally boring father, who probably got you another hideous jumper!”

Molly stared at him for a beat. Another beat. Meena looked at Molly anxiously.
Her eyes narrowed, became small little slits.

“My father is dying,” she said at last.

Sherlock’s face went completely blank, but Meena’s remained unsurprised.

“You like deductions so much, do you, Sherlock Holmes? Well, let me deduce her, I assure you, I will do a better job. She’s been nice to me ever since the bullying incident because she felt guilty, and her Mum gave her a good talking to. But she’d liked me since then, yes she has trouble with math, but she didn’t ask for help, I offered. Her mum probably recently told her that my father was dying, so she decided to go all out, because she likes me. From before.”

“And what about you, Sherlock? You left me all by myself. I’m here, standing, right there. It’s your choice to be friends with me, you know, and your own fault I’m looking for friendship elsewhere. I’m alone, Sherlock, and it’s no thanks to you!” Her voice was rising in pitch and she was beginning to get very, very angry. “You left me while my father was dying. You left me. It’s your own problem! Don’t come around and destroy what I have left because I’m not going to be happy.”

Molly stormed out of the classroom, and Meena smiled nervously at Sherlock. “Bit of a firecracker, innit? Well, I’m sure it will be fine.”

Sherlock seemed to be not listening to Meena, so she walked out as well. She didn’t see Sherlock huddle in on himself, in quiet shock.

The days began to speed by all over again. Molly went to school, came home, did her homework, and spent time with her father in the evenings. Her father was a lot weaker now, and hairfall wasn’t an improved look on him, but he refused to get a wig.

Molly and her mother didn’t particularly mind – as long as he was happy, cheerful, fine. As long as he was healthy, none of the little details registered in their heads.

Molly had noticed that her Mum no longer came to her room to tuck her in. Molly didn’t question why, as she was grateful her mother hadn’t stumbled upon Molly saying her prayers.

Meena had been the best help Molly could have asked for. The girl was saucy and daring, and kept Molly on her feet all the time. She’d dare Molly to come to school with her clothes on backwards, she’d actually come to school with her clothes on backwards. She made Molly laugh endlessly, and Molly really needed laughter.

It was a curious quality of time to just whisper by, without letting you know. The minutes vanish without recognition; the hours are shuffled off in corners of Molly’s room, between books and hidden in the niches of her toys. The days rushed off, without pausing to think, disappearing into an oblivion that Molly couldn’t see, and the stars began to dim as her head could not look that far up anymore.

No matter how the days went by, the small, invisible hole that Sherlock left in her heart refused to be cemented. Everyday it just stayed, mainly because he stayed. Molly saw him everyday, and Molly heard him talk everyday. Molly’s windows were not immune to the melodies he played on his violin, or the hisses of his chemistry set. It was as if he was in another dimension, and Molly could do nothing but stare as he continued on as if nothing had mattered to him.
“What happened between you two?” asked Meena, on a sleepover, eating a cookie.

Molly looked, automatically at Sherlock’s house. “He didn’t want to be friends anymore.”

“What?” she pressed, curiously.

Molly didn’t say anything, looking away from Meena.

“Let’s play truth and dare!” said Meena suddenly.

“What? No!” said Molly.

“Yes, absolutely.”

“Definitely not,” said Molly.

“Okay, your turn. Pick one. You have sixty seconds to make a decision, or I will give you both.”

“This is insane.”

“Fifty eight seconds.”

“Meena!”

“You have forty five seconds.”

“Don’t be silly!”

“Thirty seconds.”

“Fine! Dare!”

Molly trembled.

Meena grinned slowly, in a very Cheshire Cat way. Molly trembled.

“I dare you to go into the woods, by yourself.”

Molly laughed openly. “The woods aren’t that scary, to be honest. I’ve spent one too many nights there.”

“You have?” asked Meena curiously.

“Of course I have,” said Molly. “Sherlock doesn’t like anything which is boring, and woods in the dark are not boring.”

“Hmm,” said Meena.

“I can take you, as a dare,” said Molly cheerfully.

“Ooohh, lets!”

Sherlock grit his teeth and glared at the two girls heading for the woods. Those were his.

Well, theirs. Molly had ownership, but only with him.

Molly was making friends, and Sherlock really should have been happy. At least, this was what
he had wanted. But it was hard, watching Molly laugh because of someone else, watching her walk away with someone else in the woods.

Molly was going to grow up, and maybe in a few years, they were going to part. She was going to date someone. She was going to fall in love. She was going to have someone else to share half her mind with. She was going to glide down the aisle, with a bunch of tulips, her favourite flower. She will probably trip on her way. She was going to be somewhere else.

It filled Sherlock with restless longing.

As school came to an end, the summer was starting. Molly’s parents were taking her to Ireland, where their Grandparents lived. Molly’s Dad wanted to see Ireland again.

She was missing Sherlock, even now. Meena was something else, but she missed all their evenings together. All those afternoons. Molly sighed.

In the last week of school, she noticed something odd. The Holmes house was in a bit of a mess – there were things everywhere, and boxes all around. Sherlock’s Mom was not going to work at all, instead, ordering boxes around. Maybe they were going for a holiday as well, Molly thought idly.

When the last week of school finally came, Molly was ready to rush home and make herself some hot cocoa. It was only then that she saw the wrap under which Sherlock’s house stood. She realised without pondering – he was leaving.

Mycroft Holmes looked at her as he stepped into their car. He gave her a pitying smile. Molly only glared back. “You’re an idiot,” she added.

He only smirked at her. “You’re going to get him in trouble,” she said. “He’s not you, you know. He’s Sherlock.”

“I’m aware. And he’s at his smartest alone. As it is, he is slow enough.”

Molly snorted.

Sherlock came outside the house. “Molly?” he said unconcernedly.

“You’re leaving then?” she asked, without wishing for an answer.

“Yes.”

“Fine. Stay away from trouble. Wait for an opportunity to be a detective, don’t just go around deducing. And don’t be mean to others. Don’t be a clusterfib.”

“That’s still not an insult, and you’re not my Mum,” said Sherlock defiantly.

“No,” sighed Molly. “Sherlock – tell me what’s wrong.”

For a second, he looked at her. “I’m okay.”

“If you say so,” she sighed again. “Goodbye Mrs Holmes,” she said, spotting Sherlock’s mother. “I’ll miss you.”

“I’ll miss you too dear,” said the woman. “Take care of yourself, yes?”
“I’ll try, Mrs. Holmes.”

She patted Molly fondly on the cheek, and Molly gave her a tight hug. She shook hands with Sherlock’s father, smiling at him brightly.

“Bye!” she said, as they all sat down in the car. Molly’s mum came outside, wiping her hands on an apron.

Sherlock steadfastly ignored her.

“I’d ask you to keep in touch, but I don’t think that is happening,” muttered Molly.

“I don’t count.”

What did she mean by that? She didn’t count? She had kept his heart for so long, the keeper of his sentiment. She was hidden away in the cellar of his mind, along with all his other memories. He didn’t need to hide it in front of Molly. Shouldn’t that make her understand that perhaps she counted the most?

She was the only one he didn’t notice – he didn’t have to behave around her. He had to do so around so many people, but Molly never demanded it. Molly never called him a machine, which almost everyone had, in their worst times. She had only ever displayed what was true about his character – that he was far too human sometimes, and he avoided it.

Are you okay? And don’t just say you are, because I know what that means – looking sad when you think no one can see you.

Of course she’d ask that. Of course she would. She was gentle, kind Molly Hooper, who had cared for him from when he was seven years old. She was brave to the point of madness, and she didn’t need anyone, not like Sherlock. Sherlock depended on the people he befriended, Molly did not.

Looking sad when you think no one can see you.

She used to watch him, when he was sad. As a child, She’d simply look, and Sherlock never needed to explain, and she never asked. He never held back.

“What I’m trying to say is that if there’s anything that I can do – anything you need – anything at all – you can have me.”

There it was again. Unconditional.

“No, I just mean –” she was flustered. She didn’t need to be. He understood perfectly. “I mean – if there’s anything you need – it’s fine,” she said.

“What could I need from you?” he asked. What could he? She’d given him everything. What was left?

“Nothing,” said Molly. And he saw it again. That little bit of a hole in her eyes, like something was missing. Like her arm had been cut off and she still could feel it there. “I dunno.”

“You could probably say thank you, actually,” she said, nodding shortly.
Sherlock’s face twitched. “Thank you?” he said.

“I’m just gonna get some crisps – do you want anything?”

Sherlock opened his mouth to say something. “It’s okay, I know you don’t.”

She didn’t believe he needed her.

“Well, actually maybe I –”

“I know you don’t.”

Chapter End Notes

Reviews are the best form of love.
Vigilante for Death

Chapter Notes

Hello, it's been a while. Lot's of stuff going on right now, exams notwithstanding. And Sherlock's been giving me trouble. Can all of you please tell me if they are in character?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was shocking, how surprised he was when she told him she didn’t count. She didn’t know what he was expecting, but clearly, he didn’t think of that.

To Molly, it didn’t matter. She shrugged it off, as another one of those Sherlock things. He was more worried than ever right now, and while she didn’t count, she could still see it. Oddly enough, she sent out the little prayers that she used to when she was a girl.

Anybody listening? Sherlock really needs help.

“Hello universe,” said Molly. “It’s me, Molly Hooper.”

There was silence from outside. The crickets chirped.

“I’m in Ireland right now. Father wanted to see it one last time, I suppose. When you know you’re dying, things come to the forefront. Well, the things that you had missed out on for a while.”

The wind blew across her window, ghosting on.

“I’m fine, I don’t really need any help. Meena might need some help with math, so can someone please help her? I think God doesn’t really care about Principal Amount and Simple Interest – so um. If you know, someone like Robby Graves is listening – please help her out. She doesn’t understand math. And, um, can everybody please help Billy’s parents? They’re not well at all. He’s passed away finally, and it sucks, but we need to help whoever is left, right?”

Molly didn’t know why she did this. It helped her tap into the world, she supposed.

“And can anybody listening just tell Mycroft I’m sorry? I didn’t mean that, and I’m truly sorry. Can everybody take care of Sherlock? Make sure he’s eating enough? Not running away from Mrs Holmes? Because Mrs Holmes can only do so much.”

Molly’s eyes pricked with tears.

“Everybody around me is sad. They think I’m not because I don’t understand what is happening, but they don’t know – someone has to be strong. You can’t just – can’t just – fall apart.”

Her tears began to fall in earnest.

“And I need all of you to concentrate a little, because I’m asking for help for my grandparents. I thought my Mum was bad, but she’s relatively okay. My grandparents have to see their son die,
and I have a feeling there’s something vaguely unsettling about it. Mum is strong these days, she’s really helping me a lot. I think whatever all of you did really helped. But right now – right now – please can I have a little more help? Because I can’t do this for longer.”

“There’s so much silence, all the time. Sherlock’s not there, so the silence doesn’t go away. It’s never leaving, it’s so conspicuous, and it’s so there. It’s driving me crazy. Can everybody lend me a little strength? I’m not very courageous, or very strong. I really need it. I don’t know if there is a God, but something has been broadcasting my messages, and I think it may be him.”

“I don’t know if anyone’s listening anymore,” she whispered. “It’s so lonely in my mind.”

It had been cold when Molly saw her father sad.

October had come, and as usual, the rains had come with it. And with it, cold, moisture clung onto everything. She had been laughing with her father as he joked with her about something else. Her Mum had called her, wanting her to take a mug of chocolate for her father. Molly had complied obediently.

It was when she was returning that she saw him, looking out of the window.

He looked like he was missing something essential. Like an arm, or a leg. Only Molly couldn’t give it to him, just like she had gotten him this mug of hot chocolate.

When Christmas came, he was beyond recognition. The disease had eaten away at him, taking away his life. He was frail, thin, coughing, vomiting, peeing incessantly. Molly stuck with him, until he whispered it to her – “Molly. Convince your mother.”

Molly didn’t need to ask him about what. She went ahead, deciding that it really was time. Christmas had come and gone, and Molly was sure her father didn’t want her memories of New Years’ tainted.

When Molly was dropped home, given dinner, Molly spoke slowly, softly. Her mother listened.

“Molly...” she said.

“Mum. Please don’t make him drag it out. He deserves better. He enjoyed life. Life shouldn’t bring him down to his knees, without dignity, without any sense. Please. He wants it.”

Molly’s mother agreed, but after a heavy fight. Molly watched from behind the glass doors as her Mum raged against her father, screaming, shouting, begging him to stay for the New Year. Molly only stared at her very pink shoes.

When the fighting finally died down, her Mum was crying on her father’s shoulder. She glanced at her father. He nodded briefly.

Molly searched for a nurse – she was called Whitney, that was it. She told her, as calmly as possible, what she wanted.

“Dear, you don’t know what you’re talking about,” said the nurse with a nervous laugh.
Molly watched the woman. She bit her lip, and came with her. Molly’s Mum went out of Molly’s father’s room. Molly watched at midnight – she was twelve years old when she saw her father pass away, and she never let death have power over her after that.

Meena gave her a tight hug that morning. That was when Molly finally started crying.

She couldn’t be weak in front of her mother – her mother needed her. But Meena allowed it. She smiled at the girl gently. “There now,” she said. “It’s alright Molly Hooper. You’ll be fine.”

The funeral was small, by some standards. Their neighbours and friends came, their family members. Molly’s Mum held her hand throughout the service. Meena was sitting beside Molly, occasionally saying things that made Molly feel better, like, “Molly, your uncle is a bit of a nut,” or “Molly, you know, you have a scar shaped like a star. Maybe you’re on your way to change the destiny of the planet.”

Molly entered her teen years that Winter, and her Mum and Dad had insisted on taking her shopping – well, her Mum had taken her. Dad had been at the hospital when Molly’s birthday had come. That had been before Dad passed away, though. Funny how things which should be exciting just became bland. Molly was given new bras for her birthday, and her first ones, at that. They were a little loose for her, but her Mum assured her she would grow into them. Meena could only be envious of the idea.

Her Mum was heartbroken, and Molly noticed the sleeping pills she was taking. Molly never said anything.

Occasionally, Molly would think of Sherlock. She’d stopped praying now, but she sent her telepathic messages to Sherlock through her day sometimes. *Hi Sherlock. It’s a little boring without you. The Oak tree by the bridge fell down, did you know? It feels a little empty there.*

Molly liked to think he was sending messages back. *It’s dull without you too, Molly. There’s an idiot in school, and his mother is having an affair with the PE teacher. If you’d have been there you would have stopped me from giving out this fact in front of the class, as apparently, saying these things is ‘wrong.’*

That sounded like him.

Meena didn’t contact too much during the winter. Meena seemed to understand that Molly needed a breather. She needed to mourn for sometime. She called over New Year though.

“It’s going to be awful in school, Molls,” groaned Meena. “Oh, god – it’s gonna suck.”

Meena was developing a tendency to use bad words, Molly noted amusedly.

When school started, they found themselves in sixth grade, with a lot more homework and a lot
more work in general. Meena and Molly tackled their school life together, laughing uproariously at all the girls who tried make-up at the age of thirteen. They boycotted everyone else, and had an amazing time by themselves. Meena managed to convince Molly to continue with ice-skating and Piano, and that was a plus point.

It was then that Molly took a supreme interest in the sciences.

Meena enjoyed teasing Molly about it, and Molly took it in goodnaturedly. Meena wasn’t particularly good at studies, no matter how good she was at hobnobbing people on the Football field.

“What do you want to do when you grow up?” asked Molly one day. They were staring at the summer sky, lying in the field.

“I don’t know Molls. I think I’d like to do art, or something similar. Maybe psychology.”

“That sounds interesting,” said Molly, looking at the clouds.

“So, how’s your mum?” asked Meena.

“Still crying at nighttimes. But it’s become a little lesser,” sighed Molly. “She’s been wearing nicer clothes, finally. I thought she’d never stop mourning in her smock.”

Meena gave a short laugh.

“People should mourn while wearing nice clothes,” decided Molly. “Wearing nice clothes gives the dead person the feeling that you’re really putting effort into the mourning, you know. Being fashionable.”

“Molly, I’m asking you to wear suede boots and the most expensive coat you can buy when you come for my funeral,” said Meena. “I’m daring you.”

Molly’s eyes glittered. “Absolutely. And I’ll wear large sunglasses, with painted nails. And red lipstick.”

Meena laughed. “Thank God I became friends with you.”

Molly was a lot better after that. The first summer of Sherlock not living across the yard was a little weird, as she wasn’t used to that much free time by herself. Meena went on vacation, calling her occasionally. Molly was left to her devices, by herself in the field.

She spent most of her days waking a little too early for anybody’s liking, going biking across the field, and taking walks into the woods again and again. She began to study her seventh grade course outside, in the summer heat. The weather worked for her solitude. Her Mum would come outside many times, spend some time with her. Molly even got her first period during the summer, and grimly reflected on the fact that it was a good thing Sherlock wasn’t there anyway.

Then again, Sherlock would have probably mapped out her menstruation cycle in a few minutes. That would have been convenient.

Molly noticed how her father’s death was putting a strain on her Mum. She finally got rid of her father’s car, and no longer had to pay for the maintenance. Molly’s Mum got an endless supply of casseroles, after her husband’s death, and a lot of her friends would drop by from time to time.
Molly knew her Mum was grateful, but Molly wished they would leave her alone from time to time. The only friend she genuinely liked of Mum’s was Sarah, and Sarah never bothered dropping in from time to time to see how she was doing. She’d call ahead, tell her Mum that she needed a place for some dinner. Or that it was time to go out for some drinking.

And Molly spent her time making friends with the outside, and rereading her books. She dragged her Mum far too often to buy more and more books – her appetite had become quite literally insatiable. She finished books in days.

They reminded her of something – like something she was missing, but something she had never had anyway.

When seventh grade came, she was asked out for the first time by a boy. A small miracle, because Molly was going through her lots-of-acne stage. Molly blushed, stammered, stuttered, gave a mental prayer to anyone listening, and said no.

“But why?” whined Meena. As predicted, they were having a sleepover.

Molly went red. “I don’t know – I didn’t like him. We’re thirteen, Meena. I don’t particularly want a kiss which is you know – flat.”

“Mollyyyyyyyy,” whined Meena again.

Meena had no reason to whine, Molly reflected – she was perfectly fine with as many boys as could be counted asking her out. Meena even told her what kissing was like.

“It’s like – well, I can’t really describe it. It feels a bit like a slug in your mouth,” she said, wrinkling her nose.

“Ew,” said Molly.

“It’s kind of awful, yeah,” said Meena. “I wonder why people like it.”

“Haven’t the slightest.”

Molly’s Mum taught her about sex, and Meena and Molly giggled at the magazine they found while they tried to figure out exactly what the whole thing meant. It was kind of odd, but they accepted on faith that sex was amazing.

Molly used her first swearword during this time, in a way. She dropped something, and spilled water everywhere while Meena was sitting with her, and Molly went – “Fu-frick.”

Meena burst into peals of laughter. “Go on, complete it!” she egged.

Molly blushed completely red. “Fuck,” she said, and buried her face into her hands.

The anniversary of her father’s death finally came. Molly and her Mum went to visit the grave together, and they lay some flowers on it. Tulips had a wonderful quality of being just there.
When the summer came again, Molly was fourteen, and going onto her eighth grade. For the first time, exam pressures were going to be real, but she was not particularly fussed about it at the moment.

Meena did not go anywhere that summer, so they spent weeks on end at each other’s houses. They learned how to wax for the first time (Molly’s Mum was helpfully obliging). And Molly finally agreed on going on one date with one of Meena’s friends. It was delightfully horrible, as the only thing the boy did was show exactly how fourteen year old he was. And Molly wasn’t impressed at all.

Meena only laughed at Molly’s expressive face when she exploded about the boy and his antics. Molly had a curious tendency to be shy all by herself, and then explode when needed.

That Christmas, when she became fifteen years old, she confronted her Mum on her inability to date someone. In a very typically Molly fashion, she stuttered her way through all the harder bits of confrontation.

“Mum – um. Do you have any plans?”

“Hmm? Plans? Why, do you want to go shopping?” asked her Mother.

Molly bit her lip and shook her head. “No – you should be, you know – going out.”

Her mother raised her eyes. “Molly –”

“It’s just that – it’s been two years, Mamma,” said Molly, exasperated. “You need to go out now. I mean, we’ve mourned enough.”

“Molly, I don’t think it is your place –”

Needless to say that her advice was ignored until the coming New Year when Molly’s mother said tentatively – “Molly, dear – there’s a man from work –” to which Molly blushed, smiled sheepishly and said “Go!”

Molly’s shy and awkward teenage years were only a lot shyer because of her innate personality. Meena was boisterous and explosive, but she couldn’t cure Molly of what was her, and she never tried to. Molly’s fashion sense was fairly decent, except for the hideous jumpers she wore at home. But it was forgivable, because she was cute in them.

When Molly rejoined school after the winter holidays, everybody was cooing over the new school edgy hot guy. He was sixteen already, apparently, and very good looking. Molly was invited to her first party by Meena, who was popular, despite having Molly for a best friend.

And that was the first time Molly fell for a bit of a dark prince. Because when Christopher Marlow offered a cigarette, Molly took it, and he smiled at her, saying simply, “Live a little, Hooper. You only get it once.” Molly coughed her lungs out, was never able to handle cigarettes, but she was able to handle a first romance.
She really should have known what Meena was trying to do, but how on earth was she to guess the boy liked her back? It wasn’t Molly’s fault; it really wasn’t as she vehemently kept repeating in his house, because she’d been helping him with his science experiment. It sort of – slipped out that he liked her.

“So – um – you have the prokaryotes and the eukaryotes, and they further divide themselves – you get – erm, fungi. And then you have – ah – the plant kingdom. And, well – the animal kingdom. The plant kingdom is fairly easy –”

She heard him mutter something about this being far too much effort.

“Sorry?” she asked.

“Nothing – please continue.” Molly stared at him, and said, “If you don’t want to study, why did you ask for help?”

“Oh, don’t get upset,” he said, a little flustered. “I’m not!” clarified Molly. “I’ll just be on my way then?” she asked. “No – don’t go – okay, um – so, no I didn’t ask for your help, I think Meena made it up –”

“You didn’t ask for my help?”

“No – Christ – look,”

“I’ll go then?” Molly asked faintly. “Molly – would you like to go out sometime?” he asked desperately. Molly blinked, gathering up her books. “What?” she asked.

“Well – why not?” “Is this some sort of joke?” she asked.

The poor boy didn’t understand, of course. And when Molly flounced off to get angry about him to Meena, she only said in a timid voice – “Molly – darling. He likes you. He asked me to help with asking you out.”

And that’s how Molly Hooper first dated, had her first kiss, and fell in love for the first time. Thankfully, thankfully, it reached Molly’s expectations.

That was when they shifted in Molly’s grandma’s house.

Molly’s Mum’s Mum was a fearsome old lady, and a cause for all the self consciousness Molly later faced. “Sit straight, Molly!” “If you think I do not see the speck of dirt on your shirt, you need thicker glasses than me, dear!” her crisp voice was edgy, and Molly knew her mother did not enjoy meeting Grandma a lot. But Molly’s mum was out of options – it was hard keeping their old house up. So, they rented the place out to some strangers, packed their bags, and left.

It was hard, after all, keeping their old home. Plus, letting the house out to rent allowed her Mum to keep the house and still generate an income which allowed her to keep paying the house off. That would be a fantastic good point, except Molly’s Grandma...

Well, she had a tendency to make people uncomfortable.

“Molly, do not touch stuff there, okay?”
“Yeah Mum.”

“And be polite.”

“Alright.”

“She’s paying for your school fees, okay?”

“I know.”

Molly could see where her Mum’s commanding nature came from. Molly’s Grandma met her in the living room, and surveyed Molly from up to down. Molly could forgive her Mum for being overprotective, especially after she had to live for years with a Lady who could not handle a spoon out of place.

“How old are you now?” she asked sharply.

“I’m fourteen, ma’am,” she said politely.

“Your posture is terrible,” barked her Grandma.

“I’m sorry?” said Molly meekly.

“You need lessons in etiquette, dear girl.” Molly went red.

“Take out the books in your bag. I’d like to see what you’re reading.” Well, at least she liked women who read. Molly’s Mum didn’t like her reading as much as she did.

“Goodness. What is all this? Why on earth are you reading this trash?”

Molly went red at the spines of all her romance novels. There really wasn’t much in it – *To Kill a Mockingbird, Bridge to Terebithia, The Great Gatsby*, some Mary Shelley, a lot of romances (trashy ones), *Robin Hood, Chocolat, The Source*, Enid Blyton, and this new book called *Harry Potter*. Okay, there were some more in her boxes, but her Grandma didn’t need to know that.

“Goodness, no. Go to that shelf and pick up the third book on the right.”

Molly nervously picked up the book indicated, and read the cover. *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen.

“Now that’s real romance, my girl.”

For the first time in many years, Molly remembered Sherlock. He would have laughed. She could hear it right now.

It didn’t take her Grandma a week into shoving Molly into etiquette lessons. Living with her Grandma was... difficult.

Molly’s Mum and her Grandma had constant, never ceasing shouting matches. Ever present, about everything. Molly’s Grandma usually got the better end of the stick, and her mother always reminded Molly’s Grandma that they didn’t technically need her assistance. Besides that, her Grandma, like Molly’s Mum was harshly critical of Molly. At least Molly’s mother gave hugs.
That sort of thing didn’t happen around Grandma.

But her Grandma liked seeing Molly read. “Remember Molly, learning etiquette is useless if you are not a woman of thinking. A woman should rule the world and still look beautiful doing it.”

The unease Molly felt in her Grandma’s house was also because none of it – nothing in the house belonged to her. She felt out of place, out of the house. Her favourite place became a little bench hidden behind the weeping willows outside.

Molly took up a habit of wearing the most hideous jumper she could find, when she went for her etiquette lessons and particularly in front of her Grandma. It was her way to rebel, but it soon became her. And when she went for her first etiquette lesson – well, that was the second time she remembered Sherlock in many years again. He would have laughed.

It was dark, really dark. The lab glistened with Molly’s expert cleaning – she never trusted the interns enough. It always got her overworked. The handwriting on the charts was like Molly herself – it was small, precise, and seemed to flourish on the page.

He did not see her switch the lights off, adjust the bag on her shoulder, or sigh plaintively. Her hideous jumper did not hide her frame – she had curves, and was pretty, whatever else may be said about her. He sensed it, just as he always had, as he had always been aware of Molly Hooper.

As she opened the door, he stopped her, without looking at her. Without thinking about it.

“You’re wrong you know.”

He had startled her. The door shut behind her, and she watched him. Her heart rate was still elevated, and did not calm down.

“You do count,” he said, continuing to address a point in obscurity, refusing to look at her eyes, eyes which would be filled with concern.

“You’ve always counted and I’ve always trusted you,” he went on. Heart rare still elevated, but pleasantly now. You win, Molly Hooper. I was an idiot to think that I had a chance in stopping you.

“But you were right,” he went on. “I’m not okay.”

I’m not okay, Molly. I wasn’t okay when I was leaving. I’m not okay now, when he’s going to kill all my friends. And it hurt him – he blocked it out all the time. He invested his sentiment away from himself and he kept it away because it didn’t help his functioning. He needed Molly right now, so desperately, like he had never needed her before. He needed her to calm him down, to make him control a force which he had never tangled with, believing it to be beneath him. Because Molly knew how to work with emotions, far better than anyone else he knew.

“Tell me what’s wrong,” she said, in the exact same tone she had used all those years ago.

He saw her prepare herself, her heart rate calm – she was ready to go into battle, he realised.

“Molly – I think I’m going to die,” he said, and he let her see it – the fear. Terror. Pain.

“What do you need?” she asked, unaware of her role in this. Stupid woman.
“If I wasn’t everything that you think I am,” said Sherlock slowly. “Everything that I think I am – would you still want to help me?” Molly, you have the option. It’s your choice to step away now.

“What do you need?” she asked softly. Well, he should have known.

What could I need, Molly Hooper?

He took another step forward. She didn’t flinch. She never had.

“You.”

Chapter End Notes

See you in a week! Reviews are amazing :)}
HI EVERYBODY. I'm terrible sorry this took so long, but Sherlock gave me SO MANY troubles. It was so hard writing him minus Molly, and I eventually reached a compromise for it. You'll see that.

Since this took so long, I wrote an extra long one. WOOHOO.

Also, the first part of this chapter is John Watson appreciation. Their friendship is super cool. And I love every one of the commentors, kudosers, and bookmarkers. You're all amazing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“She’s dying! You – you machine!”

It hurt a little, but this had to be perfectly orchestrated. John did not need to know how his heart had started beating at the idea of Mrs. Hudson being shot. It's a lie, Sherlock. You know it is.

It felt like an inglorious deception to John – the whole thing reeked of Sherlock pretending to Molly all those years back that she didn’t matter in the slightest. He didn’t want to be doing this again. Didn’t want to be pretending again, that he didn’t care at all.

But Sherlock had to this time. Molly was facing small minded bullies, John was facing a criminal mastermind. And besides, he wasn’t cutting John off. Not from himself, anyway. He’d done that with Molly, tried to make it all like she really didn’t count. This time – he was deceiving John alone, not himself.

“Sod this. Sod this. You stay here, if you want, on your own.”

“Alone is what I have. Alone protects me.” Fact.

“Nope. Friends protect people.” Hmm. Also fact.

His phone buzzed.

“Your only three friends in the world will die. Unless –”

“Unless I kill myself. Complete your story.”

“You’ve gotta admit, that’s sexier,” said the lunatic, with feeling.

“And I die in disgrace?” he asked. Oh god, John. John’s going to kill him if he survived this anyway. You know what happens when people go it alone, Sherlock. Your bloody arse is going to get whooped.

“Of course, that’s the point of this. Oh. You’ve got an audience now. Of you pop. Go on. I told
you how this ends.” Sherlock stepped on the precipice. Will you jump, Sherlock? Asked Molly’s voice gently. What are you doing here? He asked, agitated. Reminding you that John’s not going to be hurt, neither are you.

“Your death is the only thing that’s going to call of the killers. I’m certainly not going to do it.”

“Can you give me one moment please?” Molly he didn’t need to worry about. He hoped John would be okay. “One moment of privacy. Please?” He would miss John terribly, more than anyone else.

“And of course.”

And then when Sherlock started laughing. This whole situation was utterly, completely, mind bogglingly ridiculous. Molly was always right. They were going to be fine.

“What?” turned the lunatic. “What is it? What did I miss?” He practically hoped down from the precipice. “You’re not going to do it?” asked Sherlock. “So the killers can be called off then? There’s a recall code, or a word or a number. I don’t have to die. If I’ve got you.”

“You think you can make me stop the order? You think you can make me do that?”

“Yes. So do you.”

“Sherlock, your big brother and all the King’s horses couldn’t make me do anything I didn’t want to.”

“Yes, but I’m not my brother, remember?” He wasn’t, he understood that now. Mycroft could shut off his emotions, he had always been that much smarter than Sherlock. That’s why he fit better in society. Sherlock – he had always cared too much. Blame it on Molly Hooper from his childhood, and John Watson from recently. “I am you. Prepared to do anything. Prepared to burn.” And I would, for John, thought Sherlock fiercely. “Prepared to do what ordinary people won’t do.”

Which was why when Moriarty shot himself in the head, the only thing Sherlock thought was – well, one more adventure together, John Watson. And goodbye for now.

The boy was tall, well built (surprisingly), and with curly hair. He had a blue scarf around his neck, and a very proud demeanor. The customary Belstaff we will know him by in his later years was yet to come up, but essentially, this was Sherlock Holmes, in college.

His dormitory was dark and predictably, there was a mess there. It was filled with endless books – and nothing of the literary orientation. There was a book on trains, hundreds on chemistry, another hundred on murders, thirty or so on psychology, and a good few on physics. There was a single mattress in the corner, as if sleeping was of no consequence. The fridge was filled with samples of all kinds.

His major was chemistry and he was a man with cold, calculating eyes. He had recently begun to dabble recreationally in drugs, but never anything that could be particularly harmful. There were rumors about his man. They said he could tell the stories of everyone just by looking at them.

As such, Sherlock had a small clientele of people seeking his assistance. However, it was nothing like murders. These were simply small time clients with missing objects, secrets to unveil, and irritating little experiences they needed explanations to. Sherlock had no qualms about ensuring
them of their own stupidity. How he got to this point, however, was a curious story. Sherlock often thought about it with disdain – how on earth was he friends with someone as dimwitted and silly as Molly Hooper? It was a good riddance, that one.

First summer without Molly was difficult, particularly with his brother being the only playmate Sherlock had for company. He did not ever think about her, but for some reason, he had the oddest sensation that someone was talking to him, through the wind. And funnily enough, he found that he wished to answer the things it said.

But it vanished too soon. He could never decipher them.

“Mycroft, I’m bored.” They were walking in the small wood by their house.

“Go study, Sherlock. I’m busy.”

“You’re always busy,” muttered Sherlock mutinously. He patted Redbeard on the head.

“What do you want me to do?” he asked long sufferingly.

“I don’t know!” Sherlock was frustrated. He stabbed the ground in anger. “You’re so annoying and superior. Can’t you just do something?”

Mycroft sent prayers to whatever gods were listening.

“Alright,” said Mycroft, eyes glimmering suddenly. “We’re going to play monsters in the woods.”

It wasn’t the most enjoyable experience for Sherlock. Redbeard stuck by his side, throughout. They went deep into the wood, and while Sherlock had a sense of where he was, it felt like they were lost. And then Mycroft did that thing – “Run Sherlock, run. There’s monsters all over the wood. Everywhere.”

“Run Sherlock. East Wind is coming. It’s coming to get you!”

Needless to say that Sherlock did not search for Mycroft again when bored.

It was now that Sherlock began to tramp across the country, finding more dead birds and plants and animals and insects all over. It wasn’t his fault that the fertilizing industry has poison in its supplements. That’s what he kept repeating when the police confronted him about it.

That’s what Sherlock had always liked. Small puzzles, things that challenged him.

It was almost enjoyable, if a little lonely, finding puzzles. The sand that did not fit the mud. The tree that had been felled with no explanation. Irish tourists coming to run from the Government. Sherlock almost managed to put the seedy background where Molly lurked out of his mind. Redbeard was the companion who managed to get Molly out of his head. He dismissed every thought about her, or at least – he tried, when Redbeard was around.

He couldn’t help it. He had to speak to someone. He spoke to her once or twice.

*Molly, I just performed a fantastic new chemistry experiment. It was adequately enjoyable. You’d have liked it.*

And sometimes, he could swear someone like her was replying. *That’s amazing Sherlock! But*
He didn’t realize how important Molly had been in being able to go through a typical school day. Sherlock’s head nearly exploded with buzzing; he couldn’t help it. When he got irritated, he started deducing. When he started deducing, things went downhill very soon.

“Your Mum is obviously lying to you, you idiot. She has a lover. She’s cheating on your father with her – accountant? No, her secretary. Additionally, she lied about being straight.”

Carl Powers had gotten on his nerves, he really had. “What is your name, new kid? Why the fuck don’t you talk to anyone?”

Sherlock had shrugged the boy off. “I didn’t want to talk to you,” he said, pissed off.

“That’s high and mighty of you,” leered the boy with his friends.

Sherlock rolled his eyes and said dimly, “I didn’t want to talk to you because I’m bad at talking.” That seemed like the right thing to say.

Except the boy kept going at it, again and again, and again some more. “Oh really? Fancy yourself too smart, do you? Didn’t you know all the answers in class today?”

“It’s not my fault you’re about as stupid as your Mum,” said Sherlock, not bothering to keep his voice down when he told Carl Powers exactly why he was as stupid as his Mum.

“What on earth are you doing?” asked Sherlock, when he stumbled upon his brother concentrating deeply, and staring at the wall.

Mycroft said nothing at all.

“Yes, the wall is clearly deeply interesting,” said Sherlock sarcastically. He hadn’t had a very good day. School had been particularly taxing.

Once again, ignored.

Sherlock rolled his eyes and left him at it. Mycroft was best left alone, or he would proceed to tell Sherlock in clear terms of the East Wind and how it was plucking off the unworthy.

“Done!” came his voice finally. He glanced upon Sherlock, surprised to find him there. “Good afternoon,” he said evenly.

“What were you doing?” asked Sherlock, hating himself for his curiosity.

“I was building a theoretical mind palace. Took me an hour. I think I’m getting slow.”

“A mind palace?”
Sherlock researched the concept until he could do no further. The theories of memory that spanned across the centuries were something he had never bothered studying all those years ago when he dabbled in Piaget’s cognition. However, right now, he decided having a memory palace would be useful.

Mycroft did not seem to need a memory palace – however, he did occasionally build one for tests and exams, as it was too much effort to actually study for things, when you can just store up everything needed to get full marks in every test.

Sherlock was looking for something a little more permanent.

“Mycroft?” he asked one day, when he had been unusually quiet.

“Yes?” asked his brother, who was applying for colleges.

“Are mind palaces good for separating your feelings from your mind?”

Mycroft pondered the boy for a second. “Yes, they are.” No other instruction was given.

The result was almost always a crumbling palace which could not sustain itself, while Sherlock would grit his teeth in frustration.

“Concentrate!” he told himself.

He built it again – slowly, gently. Not a brick should fall – the entire thing came into his mind’s eye again – a giant manor with a giant door. Alright, thought Sherlock, now just place your stuff inside the different rooms. He began to organize himself – the different rooms with different things, until, once again, after an hour’s work, the whole thing began collapsing.

“No, no, no!” he yelled, running in the different rooms.

“Worthless,” sneered the Mycroft of his mind. “You can make small mind palaces, but you cannot do something as simple as this?”

“I’m trying!” yelled Sherlock, glaring.

“Sherlock?” the voice is small, gentle, kind. Molly was in front of him. “I think you’re going about this all wrong.”

“How would you know?” spat Sherlock cruelly. Molly of his mind recoiled a little.

“I’m just saying – I think you’re imagining the whole thing at once, that’s why. Why don’t you… start small?” she looked at him hopefully.

Sherlock’s nostrils flared.

“Come on, I’ll help you. Like when we did that experiment on the salts and how they should be distinguished? You taught me about cations?”

Sherlock was staring at her. “Funny, that. Cations, that is. And anions. Now how about that mind palace?” she asked.

“Alright,” he said.
She grinned at him brightly, mischievously. Like she used to. “Think of something familiar,” she said. Sherlock pictured his bedroom when he still lived next to Molly. “That’s good. Make it a bit bigger, Sherlock? You tend to stash information.”

Sherlock’s face twitched. He imagined his old house, properly. Every nook and cranny. “Now begin keeping stuff in it,” said Molly. “You can’t make separate rooms for everyone just yet, but it really wouldn’t take you long, once you get the basics. For now, just stuff people you know in one room. Memories in one room. School in one room. And cases in the largest room of them all.”

Sherlock opened his eyes – she was staring at him, smiling. The whole thing didn’t collapse into pieces at all. Sherlock stared at her incredulously. “Keep building on that,” she said.

It was small, but a few hours after that, Sherlock had a functioning Mind Palace. He was thirteen years old.

The days began to run past, with Sherlock’s Palace increasing in structure and in efficiency. Carl Powers still got on his nerves. He still had a tendency to lash out at his bullies in anger – two affairs, one father in the Secret Service, sister doing drugs, and three divorces – and he still got into a lot of trouble for it.

“Mr. Holmes, can you explain how you knew all that?” asked the principal.

Sherlock stared at the clock.

“Mr. Holmes?”

“I knew because I pay attention!” Sherlock said, in anger. “Didn’t you notice the state of their rings? Constantly taken off, put on again – and dirty, dirty as anything. My parents clean their rings everyday, did you know, Ma’am? His father has a very open tell – I thought they trained the Secret Service or something!”

His nostrils flared in anger.

The principal stared at him for a minute. A pause. “Your parents are out of town, and they told me to call your brother, who I understand is coming home for the Holidays in two days time.”

Sherlock groaned. Wasn’t it enough that Mycroft came home for college?

“Mother’s been in an accident,” was what Mycroft had said.

It is a curious tendency of the mind to go into an overdrive, imagining every dark and desperate situation until more information is supplied. Mycroft had only called him in school, informed him of the circumstances, and told him to stay put. Sherlock had promptly been driven into a frenzy.

“Calm down,” Mycroft of his mind told him darkly.

The mind palace built by Sherlock had grown since Molly had taught him how – it had only been a year, but it had developed fantastically. He spent an hour in it everyday, keeping up maintenance, and retreating into it during school. It had finally grasped the large manor he had wished for ever since he had begun making it.
“Calm down,” Molly of his mind told him. “Separate your feelings from your mind,” she told him gently. “That was the purpose of this whole thing.”

Sherlock took a deep breath, concentrating. He examined everything that caused him to get into this state of frenzy, and pushed it, bit by bit, into another room.

Sherlock’s Mind Palace had become large. It was gigantic. He salted away all the facts he could possibly find. He even managed to have different rooms for different people, finally.

It was when the O’Sullivan’s House was burnt to the ground that the Police first noticed Sherlock Holmes. Needless to say, it has been an uneasy relationship ever since.

The fire had happened the night before, and Sherlock was walking across the site in question, (Redbeard in tow) when he was shooed by a Police Officer.

“Go away, son. This is police business.”

Sherlock surveyed the site in one quick sweep. “You’re looking in the wrong place,” he said dully.

“What?”

“Those bushes. Trampled. Look there. I assumed you’ll find a small silver fastening. It’s part of a collection by Traubert’s. Very fancy stuff – the house had a set of papers, very important – the research he was conducting, all insured for a lot of money. He burnt the house. You’ll find the shoes in –” Sherlock paused to look at the stricken man in the suit. “A ditch, ten miles off, near a pond.”

It took far too long to explain why and how Sherlock knew.

The girl was looking at him like a cat trying to be sly. Sherlock paid no attention to her.

“You’re Sherlock Holmes, right?” she asked. She fluttered her eyelashes irritatingly.

“Yes,” he said without feeling.

“I heard you can do a magic trick where you manage to know everything about the person in front of you,” she said demurely, smiling at him with sharp, white teeth.

Sherlock groaned in frustration. “It’s not magic,” he said.

“I’m sure. I’m Joan,” she said, by way of explanation.

Joan seemed suitably irritating. Sherlock’s mind was buzzing again, and he really needed to shut it up. Especially since now, his genitals seemed to have a mind of their own. Sherlock was constantly struggling to control his impulses, to shut himself out, but like most of his schemes with the mind, they didn’t always work.

“Feelings again, Sherlock?” asked Mycroft of his mind.
“Shut up,” Sherlock rolled his eyes.

Then again, if he went through with his desires, maybe the craving would leave in a few years. It would not take too long – as soon as the hormonal changes were out of the way, his body would be sated.

Well, it was a theory.

He hated it, in his own way – the kisses, the tongues, the bloody orgy of the flesh. Whenever he engaged in it, there was sensory overload, and he would detach himself from the experience itself – look at it clinically, while his body responded enthusiastically.

Occasionally, he would feel a spurt of something in his heart. But he ignored it. In his mind palace, Molly Hooper was increasingly not seen anymore, hiding away for months on end.

He found that he didn’t mind it. Separating the important things made it easier for him to concentrate on what really mattered. No one would get hurt this way.

“Go away, Molly, I need to concentrate,” he said to Molly of his mind. He thought he saw a look of brief hurt on her face. It didn’t matter, more important things needed focus.

“Why do you care so much about how Carl Powers died, Sherlock?” asked Mycroft of his mind smugly.

“Because something doesn’t fit,” said Sherlock, pacing. The words popped out of his mind without thought, without pondering.

Mycroft raised his eyebrows at him. “Good,” he said. Sherlock nodded briefly.

“What doesn’t fit?” asked someone else. Odd. Carl Powers was in his head. How irritating.

“Well, something doesn’t,” snarled Sherlock. Think. Think.

His large mind palace – now the manor he had always wanted had a specific room, made essentially for the recreation of murder scenes. Sherlock was at the pool then, with the body of the sixteen year old dying. Drowning. He bent over the stools, the tables, the pool itself. “Nothing wrong with the colour of the pool,” he muttered.

“Oh Sherlock, don’t be stupid,” said Mycroft, walking in behind him.

“What? It’s a theory!” defended Sherlock.

“No, it’s an impossibility. Nobody else died because of the pool. You were always so stupid.”

“Oh, shut up, Mycroft,” said Sherlock.

“What about the boy itself?” came the timid voice of Molly Hooper.

Sherlock turned around, snapping at Molly at once, “Molly, this isn’t a bloody feeling fest. We don’t care about the boy – does it matter that he was a sloppy, indecisive, irritating little bully who cared for nothing more than his sh –” Everything became quiet.
“What did you say about me, nerd?” asked the menacing voice of Carl.

“Your shoes!” shouted Sherlock. “Ah yes, the shoes!”

The police refused to get involved any more, ruling the death as a drowning. But for the first time, Sherlock found his blood racing, his head filled. The buzz the murder had given him was possibly not normal, but then again, neither was he. It was the first time he thought about how Molly had told him to be a detective. The girl might have some sense, after all.

“It’s alright, Sherlock,” Molly of his mind said.

“Go away,” said Sherlock coldly.

“Look –” Molly said desperately.

“He’s dead!” shouted Sherlock. “You didn’t even have the decency to die before you left me. Redbeard didn’t deserve that.”

“All they said was they were sending him to a –”

“Molly are you really that stupid?” asked Sherlock. “He’s dead!”

Redbeard, the consummate survivor had finally left Sherlock. Sherlock’s mind palace was all messy at the moment. His legs had begun to wobble. He had stopped wanting to go out on walks, gradually. Sherlock’s parents had told him he was going to a farm to get better.

“He’s dead!”

“See what happens when you care, Sherlock?” Molly had gone, to be replaced by Mycroft. Sherlock grit his teeth. “How do I stop it?” he asked, determinedly.

“Caring is not an advantage,” said Mycroft softly. “You must accept that. Sentiment has to go.”

He had to accept it. It was too much to care about the things he was helping – it always came in the middle. It didn’t help anything. Mycroft was right, in a way. Sentiment was a chemical problem, it wasn’t an issue that required too much thought. All he needed to do was put his emotions where they wouldn’t interfere.

Sherlock shut his eyes as tight as possible. He hunted down every memory, every emotion he had ever held, everything – they were hiding in nooks and corners he had not accepted. He pushed everything away, cornered into a small little room. It had been shifted at the bottom of the house, behind the cellars, and into a dungeon. Molly Hooper followed him there. “Sherlock, please,” she said.

Sherlock was now seventeen years old. When they were children, Molly had always been taller than him. Right now, she was in front of him – twelve years old, in a red jumper, begging, like she had. He towered over her, his eyes cold, glistening, hard.

“Sentiment,” he said quietly, locking her away in the dungeon. If that’s what it took to get Molly
Hooper out of his head.

If college ever brought anything good for him, it was Victor Trevor. Possibly the only boy Sherlock could tolerate on a daily basis. The man was snarky, irritating, high almost all the time, but funny. And he fed Sherlock’s habits, which was always good for Sherlock.

However, he had a tendency to force Sherlock into uncomfortable situations – such as now, when Sherlock had been unceremoniously dragged into the musty heat of a dance club.

“So Sherlock,” said the man in question. “Anything catch your eye?”

Sherlock looked at him appraisingly. “No thank you,” he said lowly. “Not my area.”

“Come on,” urged Victor. “There must have been someone you liked, even if you are a machine now days.”

Sherlock’s muscle twitched.

“Aha! So there was someone, am I right?”

“No. No!” said Sherlock at once. “There was never anyone – I indulged in intercourse once or twice, but once it wore off, I decided it was not worth the effort. Sensory bloody overload.”

Victor squinted at Sherlock. “I’d believe you,” said Victor slowly, “If there was even the slightest possibility that whoever you liked was the one you engaged in ‘intercourse’ with. The most likely possibility is that you didn’t even touch her. Ha! You’re thinking about her right now.”

Sherlock really hated clubs for a reason. But at least the drugs were readily available.

He was only having coffee – studying, for once. It was terribly late in the night. Apparently he had to give this exam, or the University was going to toss him out. The woman at the counter smiled at him briefly. Brown hair, brown eyes. She looked like Molly. The name tag read Wendy, though, so whoever it was, didn’t know him.

Besides, Sherlock had a lurking feeling Molly would recognize him without thinking twice.

Sherlock’s capacity for drugs probably had something to do with the constant buzz of his mind – it was refusing to shut up, ever. Constantly – the woman who’s marriage was crumbling, the boy who was going to break up with his girlfriend. Overload, overload, overload. He needed to concentrate on his bloody exams, or even the University was going to push him out. Victor had originally been impressed by how much he could stomach these days, but Sherlock could spot the worry now. Trevor was worried about Sherlock’s drug intake. Ironic? Probably.

The woman – Wendy – happily married (It caused a jolt in Sherlock’s mind, for a second) – her shift ended. She smiled at the owner, wore her coat, and walked off into the street. Sherlock looked at her briefly – before the drunk driver slammed into her.
Everything slowed down in Sherlock’s mind. Everything – the woman, definitely dead. And in her dead figure, he spotted more and more similarities to Molly. The small hands, the delicate features, the small voice, Oh God, Oh God, Oh God, - he dragged her to the ambulance, but she was already gone. People surrounded him and Sherlock couldn’t breath.

*Shut it out. Shut it out. SHUT IT OUT.*

*Stop thinking, stop thinking.*

*Sherlock, you don’t have to –*

*Fuck all this –*

Sherlock needed to get high. He really needed it.

It didn’t matter, he supposed. After University, Victor had gone – pursuing a career in journalism. Relatively quite clean, and only indulging very occasionally. Sherlock, on the other hand…

When Sherlock Holmes met Molly Hooper once again was a curious thing. He was shivering, out of cold, out of withdrawal, after having been found OD’d.

“Good evening, Miss Hooper. The body is through here,” said the Lieutenant.

Sherlock’s head snapped up, without thinking.

“You can call me Molly, you know Sally,” said the woman nervously. Her back was turned, so Sherlock could see nothing more than the small stature, the brown hair.

“Yeah, sure,” said Sally. “Some other day. Do you want the file?”

Molly turned, ever so slightly, and Sherlock could do nothing more than stare.

*Good God, what happened to you?* He asked himself. She had become – taller. The profile showed the features he had known so well – the small lips, the dark eyes – brown, as ever. She was wearing a ridiculous jumper (when did her taste get so bad?) and she was smiling in the same, nervous sort of way. But there was something missing – something that used to be there when she was seven years old.

“We’ve had this freak in, you know,” said the woman conversationally. Molly bit her lip, and Sherlock knew she disapproved. “Been spouting all sorts of crap – seems to know everyone’s story.”

It was as if he was aware of it – her heart rate spiked. “I knew someone who could do that,” said Molly smiling nervously. “Don’t tell Dr. Maloney this but – I don’t think Mr. Donnel died of a heart attack – the extra drugs in his system do not make sense. He was dying, definitely, but someone deliberately put the chemicals that caused the heart to fail. What about this new one?”

“Dead lady,” said Sally. “She was found in an alley, stabbed.”

Molly was glancing over the files and picture in them. “The Detective says we should call it an alley way robbery gone wrong.”

“Oh no, there’s definitely intent to kill,” said Molly, her eyes becoming round. “Look here –” she
pointed at something in the file. “This stab wound is deliberate – into the gut, clean, sharp. All the others are accessories.”

Sherlock had no idea when she left, but now – he knew exactly who Molly Hooper was.

He was curled up in the corner of the office, with his brother sitting close by. “Idiots,” he muttered under his breath.

“He has been spouting a lot of stuff about the different cases we get,” said Lestrade delicately. “And he keeps calling the Police incompetent.”

“Forgive me, he does have a tendency to do that,” said Mycroft.

“It’s a pity you’re such a mess, Mr. Holmes. We could use abilities such as yours.”

At that, Sherlock’s ears sparked upwards. “Could you? Would you?”

Lestrade looked momentarily taken aback. “If you clean yourself up,” he said conditionally.

Sherlock looked at Mycroft deliberately. Molly’s face swam into view. “I’ll clean up. I’ll get myself fixed. If they allow me to take cases.”

Molly smuggles him into her flat, and he’s still not sure how. Suffice to say that Molly Hooper is a lot more resourceful than expected. Especially considering he’s heavily injured and hurt all over. She sneaks him into a van which he still isn’t sure how she acquired, pushes him into her flat, and says breathlessly, “I won’t be long. I have to perform your autopsy right now. Have to forbid everyone from coming in, have to make sure no cameras are switched on. You know. The daily thing.”

She laughs briefly and even Sherlock feels like smiling. It’s quite funny, after all.

He looks around Molly’s home. *So this is where Molly Hooper has been living all this while.*

It’s so… Molly.

The books – each and every neatly kept and codified stack of it, the food, the thumbed over recipe book of confectionaries. The hideous number of jumpers (he still wonders where that trait surfaced from. Her jumpers used to be quite reasonable), her clothes, her piano. It’s so… Molly.

Chapter End Notes

Reviews are cool ^.^
Hi everybody! *waves*

Yes, this got done a lot sooner than I thought possible - maybe it's all Sherlock the kid's fault - he's so hard to write. Blame the delay in the last two chapters on him. Now this one, on the other hand, went smoothly to fault. Also, this one is actually quite an amusing chapter, something this fic was lacking. LESS ANGST FROM NOW ON FORWARD, because all this angst makes me sort of sad. Happy endings galore! *throws confetti*

Also, I know some of you are worried about the jumping timelines - let me assuage your fears (is that the proper way to use that word? Nevermind) we're reaching present time, so timeline jumping will soon be ceasing. Fun times, am I right? And anyway, for this time, I have included the time present in bold, worry not.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Six Years Ago

Even the world had leaned in conspirationally to witness the second proper ‘meeting’ of Sherlock Holmes and Molly Hooper. It just smelled of ridiculous, Molly felt – the whole thing reeked of destiny and all the other crap she refused to believe in. However, it did happen, and Molly got the intense feeling that she was part of a large cosmic joke.

She was twenty four years old when she met Sherlock Holmes again. It was easier when she was six to talk to him. He used to be shorter than her then.

And now he towered over her.

A little context, in this scenario, would have been greatly helpful. You see, Molly had been having one of her better days – Dr. Maloney had reprimanded her for nothing (a relief), and there was a very exciting body in the lab, which Dr. Maloney was graciously allowing Molly to cut up. Exciting times were indeed ahead, until Molly’s naivety was crushed – it all started with the loud voices she overheard in Dr. Maloney’s office. Mother always said eavesdropping got people into trouble.

“Certainly not, Stamford!” came Maloney’s voice. Molly shuddered. The man lost temper enough as it is.

“Come on, it’s only one autopsy.”

“I have met the man twice, and he is unbearable. I am not going to open out the bodies for him.”

Well, there was something fishy there.

“He’s just out of rehab, come on,” said Mike Stamford easily. “He’s an old friend from college, you know. He’s not half bad.”

“I will not be accommodating him.”
Molly got the impression Stamford was pinching the bridge of his nose. “What about your trainee? She’s won’t mind, right?”

“She’s a bright girl, but I refuse to let force her into that man’s presence. She’s far too gentle.”

“She is?” asked Stamford.

Dr. Maloney groaned. “Yes, she is. Very smart, though. She’s already impatient with whatever I analyse. Don’t know what I am supposed to do once she takes over.”

“You’re letting her take over?” asked Stamford, surprised.

Molly went red at the unexpected praise, deciding to slink out of the way. Whatever this unpleasant man may be, Molly would be glad to take him off Dr. Maloney, for whom she had felt an unexpected burst of affection. Maybe she would make him some cookies.

She wandered into the morgue, and for some strange reason, found a live body there.

It was a dark coat, a blue scarf (traces of it) and a phone being tapped on by a set of fingers. She wondered who this was – the unpleasant and unbearable man, perhaps?

“Hello?” said Molly gently. She saw his fingers stop.

“Erm – are you here for that police investigation? I kind of eavesdropped on Dr. Stamford and Maloney.”

The man turned around – in a very dramatic fashion. Molly looked him up to down – oh, wow. He was handsome. High cheekbones, wonderful height, curls all over, and the Belstaff was annoyingly sexy. Molly looked into his eyes, and saw a very, very striking blue green.

Oh, fuck.

“No,” she whispered.

“Yes, I am here for the investigation,” said the high baritone. Woah, thought Molly, when did that happen? “Please show me the body of Miss Larkin.”

“Um, alright,” said Molly quietly. “Just out of curiosity, what is your name?”

“Sherlock Holmes,” said the man, without pausing, looking into his phone again.

“Right,” said Molly, biting her lip.

“Are you not going to ask me for some papers? Maybe an ID card for access?” asked the man. He looked mildly curious.

“Uh – erm. I think – I think I know what you’re good at – sort of – um, are you working for the police?”

“Yes,” said the man, bored. “Lestrade and I have a deal.”

“Oh – I like Greg. He’s nice,” said Molly with a smile. She blushed further.

“The other pathologists are extremely incompetent,” the man adds as an afterthought. “Your superior has good work, but he’s too tedious. He seemed to have been very good at some time, but he’s getting old. You seem competent. I shall work with you.”
Well, fuck. Wasn’t one friendship with Sherlock Holmes enough? And Meena later said that she looked like she’d seen a ghost.

“He was there!” Molly said, practically yelling.

“Molly, you do need to calm down. You’re sounding hysterical.” Damn Meena and her sensibility. The woman could waltz throughout college caring not a dime for life, sleeping with every second boy, and suddenly she was the figurehead of calm.

“I am hysterical!” Molly whispered hysterically into the phone.

“How about you come over to my place later? We can talk there. Explain whatever ghost you have seen.”

Molly snorted. She agreed to the invitation, and tried to concentrate on the different autopsies. She could barely concentrate on that very exciting that she could not longer remember for the life of her. Molly’s head was hurting. She wished her Mum was here.

Later, when she was at Meena, Meena had once again shown her sensibility, by getting enough Vodka to drown Molly.

“I mean, I don’t see him for years,” Molly blubbered, “and he just shows up.”

“Easy, girl,” said Meena amusedly.

“I have just had my heart jolted out of stasis,” said Molly, pointing accusingly at Meena. “And why did he have to become so hot? He’s a fucking hottie. I hate him. Fucking cheekbones…”

Sherlock wasn’t very impressed with Molly arriving with a hangover the next day.

If that wasn’t enough, Mr. Holmes was currently driving her mad.

Not only was she about eight percent sure she was harboring a secret crush on the man, but he seemed to know it as well, and was exploiting the fact unceremoniously.

He’d changed so much. He’d become all cold, and calculating. Manipulative, and terrifying. Molly couldn’t help being aroused by the way his deep baritone deduced everything around him, and more than once, she found herself in the need of just blurting out their past.

But none of them mentioned it at all. Molly didn’t because she feared his reaction, she had no idea why Sherlock mentioned nothing.

Sherlock Holmes just had to grow up to be hot. Life wasn’t fair.

“Um, Sherlock, I have the blood work panel that you wanted,” said Molly.

“Thank you,” said Sherlock, fiddling with his microscope.

“No problem,” she said, going red. “Are you working on Mrs. Davies?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Sherlock briefly.

“She’s got bloody medical abnormalities all over the place,” complained Molly under her breath. “More irritating than effing Cecilia Gregson. And she was the one who was constantly giggling around my high school boyfriend.”
She could have sworn she saw him smile briefly.

Molly Hooper had developed morbid humor. Well, that certainly was not something he was expecting. She actually managed to make him laugh occasionally. And, she was just as devoted to him as she was when she was seven years old. This time, fuelled additionally by her obvious infatuation.

It gratified Sherlock enormously that Molly Hooper was infatuated with him. He could use her very easily through that – she did everything he asked her to (one of the reasons why he didn’t deliberately try to insult her, like he did Lestrade). And whenever she looked like she was wavering, he would compliment her about facts about herself dressed in prettier language.

It was a convenient little relationship they had.

“Molly, could you assist me with an experiment?” asked the commanding voice of Sherlock Holmes.

“Oh – erm – I was just about to –”

“I hope you have the time,” said Sherlock in a more pleasing tone. “Man’s alibi depends on it.”

Molly glanced around the lab. “I have a date –”

“Oh. Well, alright,” said Sherlock. “Another time, maybe?”

Molly bit her lip. “No, I’ll cancel it,” she said with a brief smile. “Set it all up, Sherlock. Hang on.”

He heard her talking on the phone a few seconds later, “No, work just showed up, I’m so sorry. Can’t help it – man’s alibi depends on it, apparently.”

He smiled to himself.

It was on the case of the Dancing Men that Molly really came through. It was the first drug cartel case he had taken up since his return from rehab, and Molly had been at the crime scene with him.

“Well, Sherlock, I think you should leave,” she said, with as much firmness as she could muster.

“What? Why?” asked Sherlock, concentrating on the small bags which were in the crates of the warehouse.

“Because –” she took a breath. “Look, I know about your stint in drugs and all – and, um, I’d like you to not relapse.”

Sherlock’s cold and calculating blue eyes had simply stared at her, drilling through her soul. Molly was a bit scared of it, but she focused right back, despite the red blush that rose at her cheeks. She had no reason to fear. He couldn’t do anything about it; besides, she was only concerned.

“Later,” he said briefly, picking up one of the packets – cooked heroine, maybe?

“Woah, what are you taking that for?” asked Greg immediately, a wary look arriving on his face.

“I’m going to analyse it. And don’t worry about it, Lestrade – Molly shall be with me.”
Molly smiled briefly, and hurried after Sherlock’s stride.

Molly bit her lip nervously at Sherlock analyzing the heroine.

“Look, I can do it,” she said. “You shouldn’t be exposing yourself to that.”

“Molly, do shut up,” said Sherlock. “If you are that worried about it, then let me put your fears to ease – while I was high almost constantly, I was doing so because of lack of stimulation of the mind. I have enough stimulation to not go high for a while, particularly since the case requires my full attention and drugs do not help in that scenario.”

Molly stared into his eyes, and Sherlock again got the feeling that she was reading his mind – learning of all those nights without being able to think – the pain, the constant buzz which did not quiet down.

Molly bit her lip again. On an impulse, she went down to the fridge, and picked up a small cooler. “Here,” she said, thrusting it at him.

Sherlock looked up briefly from his experiment.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Open it,” she said easily.

Sherlock gave a long suffering sigh, and opened the little container. Inside was a small human hand.

“Don’t get high, okay,” said Molly. “Take it home, experiment on it, I don’t care. Don’t tell anyone I have given it to you though – I could probably lose my job.”

Sherlock smiles at her, and he has a strong suspicion it isn’t even faked.

Sherlock had not expected Molly to not be in the lab, particularly when he had told her he was coming. He had not expected her to be in the morgue. He had not expected her to be crying.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” she sniffed. “I thought you were coming in half an hour.”

Sherlock said nothing, offering her a handkerchief.

“I’m just coming, Sherlock – I just sort of received some bad news, and there were Doctors flooding the washrooms – so I just –”

Sherlock waved her away. “Someone died?” he asked.

Molly hiccuped at his tactlessness. She laughed a little. “Grandma.”

“Ah,” said Sherlock.

“Yeah, Mum just called. I didn’t like her a lot, you know – she was really rude to me when we lived together. But I dunno – I got fond of her. She expanded my library a lot. Apparently, she’s left everything to me.”

“Hmm,” said Sherlock noncommittally.
“Well, I will have to go home now,” she sighed, finally getting up. I’ll take my paid vacation, I suppose.

It suddenly flashed in Sherlock’s mind – Molly Hooper wouldn’t be there for autopsies.

Well, as anyone would have ever guessed – disaster was the word.

Apparently, and according to everyone in Barts, Molly better come home soon, because from day one, Sherlock was being unbearable. Molly felt like screaming into her pillows – *she was one of the people Sherlock was unbearable to.*

Why couldn’t people just learn to live with Sherlock Holmes?

And he wasn’t particularly kind to her either, Molly would have disparagingly told everyone. But in her heart of hearts, she knew that Sherlock regulated himself. Whether this was because of their prior connection or the fact that he didn’t want to upset the pathologist that gave him body parts for experimentation (Molly didn’t even need to explain how illegal and against hospital policy that was).

Well, Molly grit her teeth together – Barts was just going to have to cope. Her Grandmother had died, and her Mother wasn’t in a very good shape, for god’s sake.

“Dear, what are you going to do with the stuff she has left you?” asked her Mother one day.

Molly shrugged – “I was thinking about getting tenants,” said Molly.

Her mother had moved back to their old house when Molly had left for university. Molly knew this was because she could only handle living with her Mother for so long – and now, the strain of keeping it up was getting to her Molly’s Mum. Molly’s entire course had been expensive, despite the scholarship.

“That’s a sound idea,” said her Mum. “Or you could simply leave it, you know. Hire a caretaker. I don’t fancy someone else touching all of Mother’s stuff.”

“No, you’re right,” said Molly. “I’ll get someone to take care of it.”

The funeral has just gotten over – and Molly *did* have tear tracks on her face. She looked around the house, where she had spent a lot of her youth, hiding away from her Grandma, since she was mildly scared of the woman. But her Grandma did have a fantastic taste in literature. Additionally, the stern old woman taught her many things in life, including the necessity of having a man understand exactly who you were.

She was a force of nature. It had been hard enough seeing her mellow down to nothingness in her old age. But Molly had faced worse.

Her mother was the same – slightly strict, demanding, wrinkled, and less loosened up than anyone else and terribly sad.

“So, are you seeing anyone?” asked her Mother.

Molly grinned ruefully. “I wish. But there’s a fellow at work I’ve met, I suppose.”

“Is he nice to you?” asked her Mother.

Molly stared at the handkerchief Sherlock had given her. “He can be. Occasionally.”
“That’s the second time you’ve fallen for someone who was not very nice to you. Maybe it’s in the genes,” said Molly’s Mum thoughtfully.

“You didn’t fall far one,” Molly pointed, half in accusation.

“Your Grandma did,” said Molly’s Mum pensively.

“She did?” asked Molly, surprised.

“My Father abandoned us when I was four,” said Margaret.

“I did not know that,” said Molly. “You told me my Grandfather was dead!” she was indignant.

“And so he was,” said Molly’s Mum. “He died when I was seventeen years old. Left us enough money to get me through college.”

Molly did not know what to say at that. “Are you seeing anyone?” asked Molly after a pause.

Her Mother sighed. “I really don’t have the inclination for it, dear.”

"Molly? Are you there?"

“Greg, it’s one in the night!” said Molly. She was in her apartment for now. Her trip home had been relatively uneventful.

“I know, but I need you to speak to Sherlock – he’s being a pain in the arse.”

Oh, what now? Thought Molly.

“Molly, there’s a man with poisoning –”

“Symptoms?” cut Molly, getting out of bed and into her dressing gown.

Sherlock recited some symptoms for her, and Molly sighed once again. “Sherlock, I think you’re describing Antimony poisoning,” said Molly.

There was silence on the other end.

“Of course!” said Sherlock, and the phone clicked.

Molly sighed, stirring the pan she had made some tea in. The man was driving her crazy.

Sherlock and Molly had formed a sort of uneasy acquaintanceship – when Molly said uneasy, she meant it in an I-have-no-idea-what-to-call-this-let’s-just-call-it-uneasy way. She had no idea what they were. Were they the best friends they used to be as children? Were they work friends? Were they even friends? Were they just some strangers with some memories?

Ugh, that last one sounded nauseating. Molly needed to read something besides Paulo Cohelo. She was still at a loss to know why she was reading him, because she hadn’t liked any of the stuff she read so far. And he came so highly recommended.

But she could acknowledge – no matter how much she wanted to interpret any data concerning Sherlock Holmes and social situations cautiously – that Sherlock had a level of comfort around her that she didn’t quite as often see. It had been one year of being – something – with him, and he did seem to not mind her as much as he minded the human population. Which really wasn’t saying much.
He didn’t think much of her head, though. And in Dr. Maloney’s old age, he had slowly been handing over control to Molly. It was extremely gradual, but, here they were. Molly was glad the old man was retiring soon. The Head Pathologist position was going to her, and she was apparently the youngest person to have gotten it. Comfort, that. Didn’t put any pressure on her at all.

Molly really hated her life sometimes.

Dr. Maloney finally passed the mantle onto her, and Sherlock did not come to the party. Molly was glad. She had enough of trouble facing the job itself, not to mention being the youngest one to do it.

And he really was taking her for granted these days. Pathetically enough, Molly couldn’t do anything about it anymore – being so used to not denying him. When did it happen that the nice seven year old with demands that didn’t go beyond copying her homework disappeared into this horrible man and his demands that went beyond supplying body parts?

Molly didn’t care to know. However, on the first day of work, she walked into her new office, with a box of essentials, to find him bent over his favourite microscope (he didn’t have favourites, he insisted. He simply liked routine).

“I had to tell you, Molly,” said Sherlock, suddenly. Molly looked up hopefully. Maybe today was the day she got a date with him. “Your worries about being incompetent are baseless. All humans are incompetent, but you manage reasonably. Please do not let your work slide, for my work depends on it.”

There was a small pause. “Thanks?” asked Molly. “Oh, and –” said Molly. “I won’t be around for your birthday,” she said, as she dug through her bag. “I made you this,” she said brightly.

It was only some muffins with icing. Molly liked baking. Baking made her feel better.

“Thank you?” asked Sherlock.

“No problem,” said Molly sunnily. “Um – I also have a bit of a – ah, request – if I give you – erm – an entire head – you can even keep the skull, promise – would you please – please – not bother the people of Barts? I really need this vacation with Mum – and I don’t want to be called in because – um – because you set fire to one of our friends.”

Sherlock stared at her. Molly twitched under his gaze.

“How large?” he asked.

“Sorry?”

“The head. How large?”

“Oh – standard. Should I show it to you?”

Molly and Greg had formed a funny friendship – out of taking care of Sherlock, and because they both seemed to have some sort of idea on how to do it. While Sherlock was a lot more patient with her, it was Greg who was the Dad in the whole deal. And like a Dad, he was constantly wary, tired, and mildly out of air. It was after over two years of friendship with Sherlock that Greg was finally beginning to ask Molly to handle Sherlock for a few days.
But at least he could pull of silver hair like Sherlock could cheekbones.

“Molly, I really, really need you to give him an experiment for a few days,” said Greg one fine day to her.

“Oh no – why?” asked Molly, chewing her lip.

“Because he’s driving me on the edge. I’m going to commit murder very soon. And then I’d have to catch myself. And put myself in the locker. Do you want that, Molly? Do you?”

Molly grinned. “Alright, I’ll find him something.”

Mycroft Holmes was a man of few words. In fact, most of the words he used usually required a lot of decoding, a few linguists, and one Sherlock Holmes. He was riddled with all sorts of intricacies, double meanings, and multiple syllables that could cause war at any moment.

That being said, Mycroft Holmes was often at a loss where Doctor Hooper was concerned. Or as he liked to call her – the Other Doctor.

Molly Hooper had been best friends with Sherlock Holmes when they were six years old. She had been his companion for three years before John Watson came in. She had been twenty four when she met him, if he remembered correctly.

He did not remember Molly the child very well. All he remembered was that she was a small girl, and he had no idea why she was so interested in Sherlock. Or even that devoted. Conversely, he did not understand what his little brother saw in her either. She only weakened him.

Mycroft was mildly embarrassed with the role he played during those days – pushing Sherlock away from Miss Hooper. It had been deliberately cruel, after all. And Sherlock had become openly malicious without Molly, and Mycroft had a hand in it, after all. Which was why he did not interfere when Sherlock met Molly again. After all, this time, Sherlock made the choice to keep her at a safe distance.

And he thought nothing of her. He had a background check run on her, but it was a pointless cause. He’d kept an eye on Molly Hooper ever since they had parted ways all those years back, when Sherlock was twelve. But Molly Hooper had grown quite a bit, and Mycroft hadn’t anticipated seeing a brown haired, small, but pretty woman in the black and white picture that was at the top of the file.

When Molly Hooper performed the autopsy on Irene Adler, Mycroft had wondered what was wrong with the woman. He wondered how she could be so lonely, that she’d perform autopsies. It felt odd – Molly Hooper certainly did not seem like the kind who would not have friends. Yet, devoted to his brother. It would always baffle him, he supposed.

And then The Fall happened.

It was necessary for Miss Hooper to save Sherlock, and for that, Mycroft was perhaps, most grateful. And the unflinching way in which she carried out what needed to be done, was remarkable. When he met her, he expected a blubering mess that she had been when she was five.

“What do I need to do, Mr. Holmes?” she asked, looking at him directly in the eye.

Well. That was a pleasant surprise.
“Miss Hooper, you will have to listen carefully. And when I say carefully, I mean follow the details exactly. Are you capable of this?”

Molly looked at him, smiled a little, and chuckled nervously. “You’re all terribly dramatic, aren’t you? Regardless, I can do whatever you wish, Mr. Holmes. I wouldn’t have stuck with your brother for over ten years if I couldn’t.”

Mycroft gave a half smile and looked the woman over. Well, it depended on this, did it not? When Molly Hooper determinedly called up the assassin aimed at John, offered him a cup of tea and spoke to him calmly about his options, Mycroft was impressed. When she replaced Sherlock’s body as quickly as possible, Mycroft looked at Molly Hooper with mild admiration. When Molly Hooper snuck a van in, took Sherlock out while providing him the necessary medical attention to her flat, Mycroft could frankly say that she was possibly the most iron hearted woman he had seen.

“You did well Miss Hooper,” said Mycroft slowly, while Sherlock slept on the couch. His arm was fractured, along with one leg. He had sustained some head injuries, but they were minor.

“Thank you, Mr. Holmes. And do call me Molly.”

“Miss – Molly,” said Mycroft, not offering her the same privilege.

“He’s going to be fine, isn’t he?” asked Molly anxiously.

“He’s going to be perfectly fine,” said Mycroft. “I’ll tell some of the Homeless Network to drop a word here or there – rumors – it will make some choice followers of his believe he is alive. That’ll make the shock easier to bear. For London, that is.”

“What about John?” asked Molly quietly.

Mycroft did not say anything for a while. The woman was inquisitive. “He will – heal.”

“I suppose,” said Molly. “When will the funeral be held?” asked Molly.

“I don’t know,” said Mycroft. “We’ll have John decide the particulars. He was, after all, his best friend.”

Mycroft really should have been more tactful. Especially when Molly had been Sherlock’s best friend so long back. He wondered what it would have been like for her, to see herself replaced. “I’m sorry Miss Hooper,” he said quietly.

“No, it’s alright,” sniffed Molly. “It wasn’t supposed to be, I suppose.”

The oven dinged. Mycroft wondered what she had been baking. There was a smell going, of something extremely chocolaty. Something clearly very delicious.

Molly smiled. “Would you like to stay for some tea?” she asked. “I’ve made some chocolate cake.”

Mycroft’s mouth watered. He really shouldn’t. He was on a diet.

But the cake came out of the oven, and unfortunately for the United Kingdom, the British Government was floored.

It was fantastic.
And Molly Hooper, Mycroft realized, was a seriously important woman.

“Oh good, we’re all eating,” said Sherlock dully.

Molly jumped out of her skin. “Sherlock!” she said. “Lie back down at once. You have a bruised rib!”

Sherlock rolled his eyes. “I will not,” he said. “I have to go out of England –”

Molly muttered under her breath, and for a second, Mycroft wondered what she was going to do.

“For fuck’s sake,” said Molly finally, out loud. Both the brothers were astounded. “You can fucking forget it, Sherlock Holmes. Not only are you not shifting from that couch, you’re also going to eat the cake. Why are you going to do that, you ask? Well, I have a syringe of morphine. I actually keep morphine around my flat,” her face was red again, and her hands were twitching in nervousness.

A beat. “Impressive, Molly,” said Sherlock flippantly. “But you cannot imagine I’m staying –”

“Erm - either you retreat to the country with your brother’s escorts and doctors, or you stick around here and I’ll make you chocolate cake everyday. Your pick.” To Doctor Hooper’s credit, she only stuttered a little.

Sherlock glared at her. “Molly, you can’t possibly imagine you will make me st-”

Molly raised a syringe threateningly. “You need to fix yourself. You’re taking down no criminal network in that condition,” she said in a low voice.

“Why aren’t you saying anything?” said Sherlock out of frustration.

“I find myself at a loss of words,” said Mycroft, taking another sip of tea.

Sherlock gave a frustrated groan. “More like you’re planning on installing a camera at once to know exactly when Molly bakes. Fine! I choose to stay here. Now everybody shut up. I need a breather.”

“Good. I’ll help you plan exactly where you should begin,” said Molly hesitantly. How a woman like her became nervous around Sherlock was beyond him.

“And how would you help me?” asked Sherlock, irritated.

“I still have access to files,” said Molly, twitching, like she normally did. Mycroft had a strange suspicion his brother enjoyed it.

Chapter End Notes

I love reviews, did you know that? Yeah, I love them. I get high on reviews. I'm coming off as mildly creepy. I will shut up now.

Don’t forget to review!
Hi guys.

My exams have started in full finality, and I find myself in the need of a hiatus. I really need it, because my future depends on these exams and all that. I shall see you after March ends, promise. Forget not!

Much love,
Ridiculosity

Miss Hooper had insisted on going for the funeral. The church was small, relatively empty. Greg Lestrade had come, and Mike Stamford. For some reason, Molly’s friend Meena had come as well, but Molly had not seen her – she simply stood in the back and walked out before the service was over. John was there, and did not comment on the absence of Sherlock’s family. It mattered little.

What really did make him curious was why Molly Hooper had come.

Sherlock and Miss Hooper’s previous connection had never been found, and could not be exploited – no one would suspect her or think less of her for coming. Molly knew that Sherlock was alive – it did not make sense, in his eyes, for Molly to come.

However, he could chalk it up to sentiment. She could possibly want to see her friends. That also meant that she was lying through her teeth in front of them.

What were the motivations behind Miss Hooper's coming, he wondered. Well, it would be an exercise in his mental powers.

Perhaps not sentimental, perhaps she simply wished for a sense of closure. On the other hand, she knew Sherlock was alive. What would she need closure from?

The mystery was reasonably satisfying, but Mycroft could not resolve it from throughout the tedious ceremony. Funnily enough, she did seem slightly stony – numb, cold, and... humming?

She was humming, in small, sad sighs. He wondered what the song was.

Mycroft was thoughtful.

“I can’t go back to the flat again – not at the moment.” John was staring at the gravestone as if there was something there that wasn’t dead. Absurd.

Mrs. Hudson gripped his arm tighter. “I’m angry,” said John. He said it in a matter of fact way. John had always been a soldier – numb in grieving where others could cry. He could see that emptiness in John’s face.
“It’s okay John,” said Mrs. Hudson. “There’s nothing unusual in that – that’s the way he made everyone feel.” She paused, to think about the many wrongs Sherlock had done to her. “All the marks on my table and the noise. Firing guns off at one in the morning.”

“Yeah,” muttered John.

“Bloody specimens in my fridge. Imagine! Keeping bodies where there's food.” Really was unreasonable, how they kept harping on about that. “And the fighting! Drove me up the wall with all his carryings on!”

“Yeah, listen I’m not actually that angry,” said John. “Okay?” “Okay,” nodded Mrs. Hudson. “I’ll leave you alone to – you know –”Sherlock had a strong suspicion she was crying.

And now, Sherlock supposed, was the time for the soliloquy. John prepared himself, as if going to battle – for someone a lot more in-touch with his emotions, John did have a hard time expressing himself. “Uhm – mmh.”

“You – you told me once – that you weren’t a hero.” That was an odd way to begin. “Uhm – there were times I didn’t even think you were human, but – let me tell you this – you were – the best man, and the most human – human being that I have ever known, and no one will ever convince me that you have told me a lie.”

It was a weight off Sherlock’s shoulders. No, he’s my friend – let me come through please. He’s my friend.

John Watson believed him. The most human – human being.

“Yeah, so –” John was struggling with heavy emotion. “There. – I was – so alone. And I owe you – so much.” He paused. “Please, there's just one more thing. One more thing. One more miracle, Sherlock, for me. Don't be... dead. Would you do that, just for me? Just stop it, stop this...” The soldier had broken.

As he watched John walk away, briefly pausing – as if in the middle of a salute. Demons run when a good man goes to war, Mr. Moriarty.

And this time, he had John Watson by his side.

She had seen John and Mrs. Hudson walk to the cemetery, to the black gravestone. It was a good choice – Sherlock wouldn’t have liked anything too heavy anyway. John might as well have erected a glorified statue of Sherlock to annoy him into the afterlife, but that had not happened.

She waited until both of them left – the two people who had known Sherlock more closely than she had ever had privilege to. She squeezed John’s shoulder briefly, patted Mrs. Hudson on the back. Mycroft looked at her curiously. She shook her head at him – and indication for him to leave.

That was when Molly made her way to the gravestone.

It was a nice spot, she decided. The birds were chirping – the tree was whispering. Other such romantic nonsense was going on – for nature was vain in her creation. She couldn’t help making herself beautiful even in destruction.
Even while the dead man lived, Molly couldn’t help feeling this emptiness. London was mourning the death of Sherlock Holmes, and so was she. Closed up in her apartment, he was quiet these days. He did have the occasional insults to throw, but Molly took them in good humour.

She looked onto the grave. Sherlock would call her silly – the grave did not contain him. The religious beliefs that had placed it there were baseless.


“It’s been a while, but it feels a lot more natural talking to all of you than speaking to the man between the worlds of living and dead.” There was no sound. Everything was quiet.

“Yeah, it’s the return of the Silence,” said Molly with a dry chuckle. “It’s been a tough few days, you know. But um – John’s the one who needs help, I think. He was alone, and now he is alone again. Maybe someone will listen. And Sherlock has a lot ahead of him. And don’t tell Mycroft this, but I think he’s a bit fussied about the whole affair as well. I can’t handle all of them. Oh, and Greg. Greg’s… going to need beers. And football games.” Molly sighed. “I’d like to apologize to John,” she added, more to herself than anybody else. “I was so… jealous of him. I almost hated him. Almost. I don’t envy him now.”

“And while we’re at it – I know I don’t normally ask for help, but for all intents and purposes, Sherlock Holmes is going to be my flatmate for the next month or so. I think I need a little assistance.”

By the time a week had passed, Sherlock was considering Mycroft’s offer on going into a country safehouse. It didn’t take much of Molly Hooper to waver him into such decisions – she was making him eat, for crying out loud. It was absolutely absurd.

However, Molly did make him eat – she expectantly made him a plate of food, and did not even look like she had imagined him to say no. Sherlock could not help it – she seemed to have unending patience where he was concerned. It was infuriating.

So he ate. And then she got him pajamas, telling him that sleep really was necessary. It would help him think.

Sherlock snorted.

Molly smiled nervously. It hadn’t even taken her long to give up the privacy of her room…

“Um – you should – take the bed,” said Molly after a pause. It was odd enough with Mycroft’s presence – now that he was gone, nothing seemed to fit.

“No, no – it is your room. I am only a guest.”

“You have injuries,” said Molly, squaring her shoulders. “Go ahead and take it. You won’t fit on the couch anyway – I shall make myself a bed, don’t worry.”

And so he found himself in Molly Hooper’s bed, staring at the ceiling, smelling of her.

Boring, boring, boring.
Sherlock was bored. Molly had gone for work again.

Why do people do that anyway? Wasn’t it enough that she went once? How much money does one need to survive? John used to know. John took care of things like that.

God, how dependent he was on John Watson. It was bloody irritating.

Sherlock looked around the apartment. It was curious. Small. Terribly Molly. Well, since there was nothing more to do – he might as well deduce Molly Hooper.

Facts at hand – used to be my best friend when we were children. Small, brown hair, brown eyes, cares far too much, has an irritating habit of laughing nervously, twitches a lot, cream with one sugar, has had many boyfriends, but all of them wrong for her, likes reading, adequately sufficient at the autopsy table, mother, dead Grandmother, cat –

Well, there might not be so much to deduce after all.

But he could always rife through her bookshelf, see what she picked up over the years.

The first thing he noticed was a battered set of *Harry Potters*. He smiled to himself. Then, there were a number of romantic novels, including *Pride and Prejudice*. She seemed to have a section for the cheap, leather bound classics one could find at any other book store. There were endless Enid Blytons, some copies which he recognized from their childhood. *Their*? There was Neil Gaiman, Terry Pratchett, and some other authors. Tolkien was sitting there, on the shelf, *The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings*, and all.

Then there were dystopic novels – *1984, Brave New World, Lord of the Flies, Hunger Games* was lying there, but Sherlock got the feeling Molly didn’t like it very much, it was simply lying at the bottom of the shelf. There was a lot of fantasy fiction, funnily enough. And – goodness – science fiction. Isaac Asimov, HG Wells, and whatever else she seemed to have gotten her hands on.

Molly’s bookshelf was simple – it had a lot of the genres she liked. There were a few novels on philosophy, and some papers on literature, and a shelf devoted to medical novels. It was a very well stocked bookshelf, and Molly seemed to have expanded her list more and more since she parted ways with Sherlock Holmes.

The whole place was littered with bloody photo frames. Molly and her Dad, Molly and her Mum, Molly and her Grandparents (Father’s side) and Molly and her Grandma. Molly and Meena, funnily enough.

But there, on the corner of one of the coffee tables, was a small photo frame, featuring a boy with curly hair and Molly Hooper. They both looked eight. Sherlock frowned for a bit, until he realized with a jolt – that was him.

It seemed to have been another day that they had been pirates. On a rock, pretending it was their boat. Sherlock was smiling, and so was Molly – she was positively glowing. Behind the photo frame, it was written in Molly’s handwriting – *Best Day Ever, with Sherlock Holmes. That boy with the blue eyes.*

He found himself smiling fondly, and he grinned around the room, feeling an unbidden sense of accomplishment.
Sherlock really wasn’t fooling anyone, snooping around Molly Hooper’s apartment. Mycroft would have rolled his eyes – *which he did* – and told him not to indulge in what was not to be, however, for now, he would simply have to watch his brother through a black and white camera.

He owed Molly Hooper something – he wasn’t quite sure what, but he did. He had been the catalyst for the end of her relationship with his brother, and while he maintained it was for the good of Sherlock, it may not have been for the good of Miss Hooper.

Therefore, he said nothing. Sherlock could stay with Molly Hooper for a month or so, fix the injuries he had, and move on to heavier missions. Mycroft simply had to watch.

Molly had, at least brought home some files from work. The insights into Molly Hooper’s life had been interesting, but nothing terribly compelling. He required a few murders to look into.

“Brother did it,” he said, handing Molly a file back. She made a few notes on the margins.

He flipped open another file. “The neighbour. Look for a debt in gambling,” he rattled off. “And for a stash of money – I’d say under the floorboards of his bed.”

Molly nodded briefly, scribbling down more notes.

“Alright, that’s a small haul for a typical London day,” said Sherlock, getting up, pacing. Molly stared outside the windows. “London’s in shock,” she said.

She had said it very quietly, very distantly, as if making a remark to herself. He wasn’t sure if she had meant for him to listen.

“Don’t be silly, Molly – cities cannot be in shock, no matter how much politicians insist otherwise. The prevailing atmosphere of rain does not change at all.”

Molly shrugged. “It’s become all quiet everywhere,” she said.

And then she did something extraordinarily odd. She started singing to herself, staring at the window. Sherlock felt deeply uncomfortable, for it seemed terribly – *terribly* – private.

“Sleep, don’t visit – so I choke on the sun. And the days blur into one. The backs of my eyes – hum with things I have never done.”

He listened without paying direct attention to it.

“*Sheets, are swaying, on an old clothesline. Like a row of captured ghosts, over old dead grass. It was never much, but we made the most.*”

It was a lovely tune. Sherlock found himself wishing for his violin.

“*Welcome home.*”

Whatever it was, it was haunting.

It was unbelievably quiet in Molly’s apartment. Tony – whatever his name was, had disappeared
into Molly’s room, claiming it for his own. Sherlock looked around the small apartment.

What else did Molly stash away in her apartment, he wondered? The closet seemed like a very nice place to start, however, he abandoned it in favour of the kitchen.

The fridge was predictable – convenient, small, and filled with groceries of all sorts – Molly really liked cooking, for some odd reason. He had not perceived that trait when she was a child. The top of the fridge had tiny notes all over it: *Dentist’s, at nine! You need to buy some shampoo. For fuck’s sake, Molly, get your act together around Sherlock. He’s a man, not a Greek God.*

Sherlock smirked at that one. He looked further.

*DO NOT EAT THE COOKIE BATTER. YOU ACTUALLY HAVE TO COOK IT.*

*Meena needs to have her knickers stolen. She’s being unbearable.*

*Remember Sherlock’s friend’s name, please, Molly.*

*Mum’s coming tomorrow! :D*

Emoticons, snorted Sherlock. Annoying.

*BUY SOME SHAMPOO, FOR GOD’S SAKE.*

*TAKE DOWN THE BLOODY CHRISTMAS LIGHTS.*

*Mrs. Norris’ (still can’t get over her name) Mum just died. Bake her cheesecake, she likes that.*

*OH MY GOD THE NEW HARRY POTTER MOVIE IS COMING.*

*Friendly reminder to Molly, for a good day – Romione is CANON.*

Romione? What on earth was that? What did canon mean? Was Molly speaking in code to avoid people snooping into her apartment? Was she being deliberately tantalizing? What on earth did she mean? Sherlock glared at the offending sticky.

The fridge also had various fridge magnets from the places she had visited – which had been a fair amount, he now noticed. It seems Meena and Molly had hitchhiked through Europe after college. It seemed to have been a fun trip, judging by the pictures.

He opened her cabinets – scores and scores of ingredients. And another few scores of cookbooks. On the sides of the recipes, and into the margins, Molly had scribbled her own little notes. Another combination of wit, shyness, and an intense inner life – he wondered how she bottled it all up and presented a presentable face in front of people.

The door creaked open, and Molly entered, holding grocery bags. “Hi Sherlock,” she said.

She seemed a bit put down. Ah, yes. Mourning friend in a Hospital intent on giving her friendship.

“How was your day?” she asked, trying to smile, but coming of as a grimace.

“Boring,” he said. “Do you have any files?” he asked.

“Not today,” said Molly, grimacing again. “No murders. London is quiet.”

Sherlock groaned in frustration. Molly fiddled with her hair.
“Sherlock – um – would you mind if I – if I –” she stumbled with her words.

Sherlock waited.

“Could I play my piano?” she finally asked. “I’ve – I’ve had a bad day. John was there – and Lestrade and I – I can’t –”

She silenced herself, finally, waiting. Sherlock watched her thoughtfully. “Go ahead,” he said. “It’s your home.”

Her shoulders slumped, and she made her way to her piano. He watched her – she kept the grocery bags on the counter, and took off her coat, laying it on the couch. She opened her hair out, and sat down, poised, ready, waiting for something.

And then the notes filled the air – they were everywhere. One of Chopin’s, if he recognised correctly. She played the delicate tunes fantastically well, the way Chopin’s progressions spoke of a little bit of life. She was a very good player, he had always known – but he did not realise how much of that lay in her interpretation.

Molly was small as she played, but she did not fall into the music, become part of it, as many of the books romanticized. She made the notes part of her, as if she herself had composed them. The progression changed, and it had become one of Beethoven’s symphonies. Fur Elise again. Well, it was one of his favourites too.

Once again, her interpretation surprised him. She was playing it not as the tune itself – which was beautiful, of course, but as something else. Sherlock had the image of the mysterious Elise that it had been written for – whom no one had ever discovered the identity of. She had a mysterious smile, a pen poised on a letter, and dark hair. He shut his eyes.

Once again, the tunes changed. Molly paused – she was thinking of something. Her eyes flicked to the corner, watching Sherlock. He was looking outside the window. Mozart began to play.

Oh, so she knew his favourite composer.

He had wondered if she did. Apparently, she did. The tunes, notes, rose high in the air, and Sherlock found himself looking down a very long memory lane, into somewhere where Molly had been a long time back.

Finally, the tune changed one last time.

It seemed familiar – he could not recognize, though. Was it her own composition? No, the notes were very different from who Molly was. He realised it in a while – it was the song she had been singing that one time.

She was humming it now, playing with all her soul. Everything was pouring out into the music – the notes filled her, enveloped her, and he got the heady feeling that Molly Hooper was turning into the music itself. The tune rose, slowly, gently, falling again – the song had a taste of something so foreign, something different, something Sherlock had never seen before.

The final notes faded, and silence filled the apartment. Sherlock stared out of the window.

Molly was muttering to herself nervously. “Better – much better,” she said quietly. “Shower now, maybe... yeah.” She padded out of the room, leaving Sherlock to contemplate the loss of his violin.
Um... Mr. Holmes? x Molly

MISS HOOPER, WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU? – MH

Could you maybe... get Sherlock a violin? x Molly

... A VIOLIN? – MH

Yeah. I think he is missing music. I was playing some symphonies today, and he was – well, I think he misses having something to play. x Molly

VERY WELL, MISS HOOPER. A VIOLIN SHALL BE DILEVERED TO YOUR OFFICE TOMORROW. IT WILL BE AMONG OTHER PACKAGES OF FOOD AND CLOTHING, SOME FOR YOU AND SOME FOR SHERLOCK, SO AS NOT TO LOOK SUSPICIOUS. ALONG WITH IT WILL BE A SECURE PHONE FOR YOU TO CONTACT ME ON. WE CANNOT RISK YOUR SAFETY. – MH

Thank you, Mr. Holmes. Sherlock will appreciate it – he has a good brother. x Molly

Well, that last bit was certainly odd. Miss Hooper had an odd tendency to be kind to everyone, and see the best in them too. It was mildly irritating.

Molly was taking far too long.

Sherlock stared down at her. Her face was pleasantly flushed, her lips red due to all the biting. She was doing it again, and fingerling the rack.

“But if I put it in there...” she muttered to herself.

“For God’s sake, Molly!” Sherlock exploded. “It’s only scrabble.”

“Patience is a virtue, Sherlock!” said Molly, at once, eyes flashing. “Shut up. Concentrate on your tiles.”

Sherlock’s fingers drummed on the table. Molly pursed her lips, lifted her fingers. Sherlock looked up expectantly. However, Molly pursed her lips again and lowered her hand.

“Just make a word!” Sherlock said loudly, jumping to his feet.

“Don’t be a clust – a git,” said Molly. Sherlock’s heart jolted a little at her old insult. But he ignored her. There was nothing else to do, and he really did have to be grateful to Molly. She had wrapped up his broken arms and bruised cranium. She had even smuggled Bill the skull back so that he wouldn’t be lonely.

“Done!” she said triumphantly. “R-A-C-Q-U-E-T. I make nearly thirty five points, ha! What do you have to say to that?”

“I say that you clearly have only the skills to play nonsensical games like this.”

“Do be a better loser, William,” said Molly, absentmindedly.

Sherlock stared at her. Well. It had been a while since she called him that.
You only have yourself to blame for her not calling you that.

She seems... happier, thought Sherlock. Her cheeks were read, and her face was lit up. There was a strange sort of contentment which he hadn’t seen in her.

The only thing that had changed in her life was his arrival on the scene. Oh. Oh. She had missed spending time with him.

Trust Molly Hooper to hold onto maudlin sentiments like that. Sherlock really did not know what to make of it – sentiment – he thought grittingly. It was irritating, annoying, pestering, the reason for his downfall into Molly Hooper’s life. If he kept staying here, among the pictures, and the memories, he was going to be enveloped in – and Sherlock Holmes would be dead for good.

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Molly bit her lip as she examined him. “One more week, I should think,” she said gently.

Sherlock groaned in frustration. “I need to leave now!”

“Sherlock,” said Molly carefully. “You’re a lot better now, but you need to not exert yourself and be in perfect health so that you’re able to handle what is coming next.”

Sherlock growled. “Do you really think the criminals who are going to try and bomb me, use thumbscrews on me, kill me, torture me, are going to pay attention to my health, Molly? Must you always be so silly?”

Molly looked at him, and said quietly, “I don’t believe they will care about your health, but I think you should – it will give you the medical advantage over them.”

Sherlock ‘Pah’ed loudly.

“William,” said Molly sternly.

“Stop calling me that,” snapped Sherlock.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” flared Molly. “I’m just trying to make sure you don’t die within the first few days of your ever so dangerous operation.”

Sherlock didn’t say another word, choosing to walk off into her bedroom, and slamming her door shut.

She rapped on the door. “Don’t do that,” she said, exasperated. “Come on. I need my pyjamas.”

Sherlock opened the door and glared at her through the crack. “Sherlock, it’s just a week more,” she stammered.

Sherlock let out a long suffering sigh. “Fine. I am going to begin preparing for immediate departure.”

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The nights had become cooler now. Molly stared into the ceiling.

She knew she could not detain Sherlock for anytime longer. He was leaving in a few days more.
It was only when confronted with the reality that he would not be spending time with her anymore, that Molly realised how much she had missed his company from when they were children. Molly had missed his sardonic humour, she had missed the way his eyes would heat up at the mention of a mystery, and Molly had missed the unconditional acceptance he gave her. She wished she had a little more of that.

“Well, goodbye, I suppose,” said Molly, laughing nervously.

“Molly, conversation is not your area,” he informed her, tightening his coat.

“I know,” she said. “Look. I’m – I’m just trying to say – Sherlock – be careful, please?”

Sherlock didn’t say anything, preferring to keep his back to her. “I shall endeavour to succeed,” he said finally.

“Yeah,” nodded Molly. She looked into the distance. “When you go there,” she said suddenly, in an almost whisper – “When you go there,” she continued. “Remember the grey area,” she finished. “That’s where all the pirates are, and the knights.”

“Molly, I don’t think comparing this to a fantasy game is going to help,” said Sherlock testily.

“I know,” she said. “But you’re going to be doing some horrible things, Sherlock. You’re going to need your strength. You’re going to need to remember the grey area. The Mockingbirds. The stars. Please, keep that with you. Remember that you’re not a machine. You’re – well, you’re just the anti Moriarty.”

She had said it to the window, not him.

“I shall return, Molly Hooper,” said Sherlock.

She nodded jerkily. "Yeah. Please do. Have you kept your supplies? The violin Mycroft sent?"

Sherlock nodded. "Enjoy your bed," said Sherlock slowly.

Molly laughed shortly. "Goodbye Sherlock Holmes."

Chapter End Notes

While I may be on hiatus, reviews are always welcome! :D
An Interlude

Chapter Summary

HI EVERYBODY.

Yeah, no, don't mistake it for a coming-out-from-hiatus chapter. My exams end on 30th March. You shall have to wait till then for me to get out of this. If anybody wants to know, they've been going okayly. I took Darthsydious' advice and I am very nice to my brain.

I punched this in as a small interlude to the hiatus, so you know - I don't like abandoning you people for so long. Well, enjoy!

Chapter Notes

Love them reviews!

PS: The thing is, the phrase 'You're thinking about your English girl' is a reference from the Historical novel by Ken Follet called World Without End. It's really nice, second part to Pillars of the Earth. I really like the phrase.

One year passed without note. Molly went about her life, after Mike furnished her with a short leave to mourn. Molly had a feeling it was more because Dr. Stamford needed to mourn by himself as well.

Molly’s senses were extraordinarily sharpened ever since Sherlock had left. She had heard nothing from him in the year of his absence, but Mycroft had been in steady communication with her throughout. Molly had been the one to initiate it, using the secure phone Mycroft had supplied her with to text the man she was too afraid to make a phone call to.

How is our mutual friend? x Molly

HE LIVES. – MH

Mycroft was careful never to give away exactly where Sherlock was, however, Molly received information of a very different nature from him, which normally brought him closer to her than ever.

THE VIOLIN IS BEING WELL USED, MISS HOOPER. IT WAS A GOOD IDEA. – MH

HE HAS MADE A FRIEND, RECENTLY. – MH

JUDGING FROM THE PICTURES, MISS HOOPER, IT LOOKS LIKE THE SANITARY CONDITIONS ARE NOT VERY GOOD. – MH

Molly had laughed at the last one.
Molly had invited him for tea a few times, but Mycroft had declined, preferring not to raise suspicions. Molly did not wish to argue with the British Government.

Greg Lestrade had initially worried her a lot. A lot more drinking, an inquiry into his work, and finally, finally he wasn’t fired or demoted. Molly had provided a testimony for him, and while being under the staring eyes of the number of officials waiting for her to give a verdict on how the DI could trust a man who was a proclaimed sociopath, not to mention a fraud, she had said only:

“Whether the man was a sociopath or a fraud should be irrelevant —” she said, “He still solved more cases than the Scotland Yard put together, and he may not have been a genius, but none can deny he was excessively smart.”

It looked a lot pleasanter for Lestrade after that.

Meanwhile, Molly was trying to pick up the pieces for all the others – she visited Mrs. Hudson once a week. The old woman was in a bit of a hassle – after the funeral, John had not come to visit her anymore.

“He’s a big man, I know,” sighed the woman, “But one phone call should not be too hard.”

“It feels terribly cold, doesn’t it, Mrs. Hudson?” asked Molly softly.

“Freezing,” said the woman. “It was never warm when he was here, no, but it was never this cold either.”

Molly stared out of the window.

“He was fond of you, you know?” said Mrs. Hudson. “I don’t know – I have never quite seen him stick it out with another person for that long.”

“No, Mrs. Hudson,” said Molly. “He wasn’t fond of me.”

“Oh, dear, he had to have been fond of you – why, I remember that Christmas…”

There were too many pieces left to be picked up.

Molly couldn’t meet John – the man was in no good state for it. However, everyone else was left. It was a year later that Sherlock knocked on her door.

And by knock she meant barging in.

It was evening time and she had just finished playing on her Piano – some of Tchaikovsky – and she was settling down for a night of bad movies and wine. It was a standard between herself and Toby that she liked honouring. However, somewhere in the middle of Pretty Woman Molly must have fallen asleep, the glass of wine lying abandoned on the coffee table. That is when the tumblers of her lock begin turning.

Molly woke up at the sound. She stared at the door, and reaches for the bottle of wine, paused, then stopped. Instead, she begins picking up a cricket bat that lies under her couch. The door opens, and Molly jumps to her feet, bat poised in her hand.

“Do put that down, Molly,” said the irate voice which opened the door. “I assure you, a woman of your stature will not be able to make much damage even with a cricket bat you haven’t used since you were thirteen.”
Molly relaxed. “It’s good to see you too, Sherlock,” she said sighing with relief.

“Yes. If you say so,” said Sherlock stepping inside. He was not in his customary dress pants and suit – he was dressed in an odd assortment of jeans and a shirt. He looked bruised and unshaven. “Get new locks, Molly, this was dangerously easy to break into. You could be murdered in your sleep and none will know.”

“Mmh,” said Molly. She put the bat under the couch, and looks up at him. “Hungry?” she asked, automatically heading to the kitchen.

“Yes,” said Sherlock testily, “I don’t normally just show up at people’s apartments, you know. I do want something in return.”

“No need to be grumpy,” muttered Molly quietly. “I will get you food.”

Molly took out some mutton from the fridge. “Do you mind?” she asked Sherlock, “It’s not defrosted, you know, so the meat might be a little tough.”

Sherlock stared at her for a full minute, before saying, “Molly, I have been surviving on boiled grasses and stale bread. Anything would be good – and your cooking is fairly good.”

Molly blushed red. “Really?” she asked.

“You cannot have not known it,” said Sherlock. “This may be one of those inane functions of the human brain to validate themselves through praise. I assure you, Molly, your cooking is very good.”

Molly grinned. “Since you asked nicely,” she said. She put the mutton in the oven to defrost it a little, after rubbing it down with oil and garlic and some other herbs to make it spicy and hot. She buttered some bread and fried it in a pan – it was a little thing she enjoyed a lot. She heated some of the soup she had made for herself and handed Sherlock a bowl. He took it without comment.

“Watching bad movies with wine?” asked Sherlock.

“Well, a woman has to live,” said Molly while stir frying some vegetables.

“I have seen many horrible forms of living, and this certainly does not qualify as one.”

“It’s a lot better than not having wine and bad movies,” said Molly easily. “So how goes it?”

“Decently,” said Sherlock fairly. “I have more to do, and, I have dismantled many of the lesser branches. However, my work is attracting some eyes.”

“Do be careful,” said Molly anxiously.

“I am. Molly you are really irritating.”

“I am also the one feeding you.”

“If you intend to squeeze out some gestures of good will because of that, you do not know me.”

“You could try to be nice, William,” said Molly.

Sherlock stared away. “I brought you something,” he said, suddenly. Molly was careful to avoid his eyes. He pushed a packet on the coffee table, and as Molly served the man his meal, she picked it up.
It was a bunch of assorted fridge magnets. Molly smiled at them, and thanked Sherlock, pausing to squeal a little when she saw some blue ribbons and hairslides.

“They’re just ribbons, Molly,” said Sherlock, rolling his eyes as he chewed into the vegetables and meat.

“Why did you get them?” asked Molly.

“One of my accomplices left them for me. I decided to give them to you – suits you more.”

“Well, thank you anyway. How long can you stay?” she prodded.

“I have to leave soon. Tomorrow, possibly – if she shows up.”

Molly felt a stab of jealousy. A she. Well, he had never expressed interest in Molly either way.

“Will you stay for lunch tomorrow?” asked Molly. “I have an off day. I can cook something nice.”

Sherlock’s icy eyes surveyed her. “That would be appreciated.”

Molly smiled at him. “Mycroft has been keeping me updated about you,” said Molly idly, sitting down on the couch. Sherlock was still eating.

“He has?” asked Sherlock, a bite in his tone.

“Yes, he did,” said Molly. “You needn’t give me that look. I like your brother.” Sherlock’s eyebrows disappeared into his hairline. “Oh, shut up. He never gave anything away. He’d just tell me that you were using your violin, or whether you made a friend. I’ve asked him to tea a few times, but he says it will raise suspicion. He likes pastries, right?” asked Molly.

“Impressing that spider will get you nowhere, I hope you know, Molly,” said Sherlock chewing a bone.

“Don’t call him that,” admonished Molly. “I asked because I would like to do something nice for him.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes. “Is your bed made? And thank you for the meal, Molly, it really was the best I have had in many months.”

“Thank you,” said Molly. “It’s made. You may have to shove Toby off, though.”

“I shall take care of that proud little feline,” muttered Sherlock under his breath.

“Morning, Molly.”

“Sherlock, it’s seven in the morning on a Saturday,” said Molly, her voice muffled due to her face down posture.

“Irrelevant. You should wake up.”

“Sherlock!” said Molly. “I’m sleeping.”

“Then how are you talking?” asked Sherlock. “Do not engage me in empty rhetoric.”
Molly groaned into her pillow. “I hate you.”
“I’m sure you do. Now wake up.”

She picked up her covers and hid under them.

“Molly,” said Sherlock warningly. “I am hungry.”

“Make food for yourself.”

“I will sooner burn your kitchen.”

“Go away.”

“I still have a store of all your ticklish points, Molly Elizabeth Hooper.”

That woke Molly up. “You wouldn’t,” she said, uncovering her head.

“Would you take that chance?” asked Sherlock.

“God, I hate you Sherlock.”

His face cracked into his first smile.

Molly glared at him openly, proceeding to make the two of them some omelets. She chewed on hers for a bit. “So, do you need supplies?” asked Molly suddenly.

Sherlock pushed a list towards her. Molly raised her eyebrows. “Well, anyway,” said Molly. “I shall endeavour to get as many as possible.”

So Molly went shopping.

She was cooking when Sherlock came out of the shower. He was back in his suit (she had no idea where he had gotten it from. She suspected he had left one set in her closet), and looked shaved and more himself.

“I made shepherd’s pie, would you like that?”

“Perfect,” said Sherlock, “I feel a lot better.”

“I have heard of many things a hot bath can’t cure but I have never encountered them.”

“Nonsense, Molly. Hot baths cure nothing.”

“It was a quote, genius. Well, a mutated version. Sylvia Plath said it.”

“Who?” asked Sherlock.

“She’s an American poet.”

“Poetry too, Molly?” asked Sherlock, clearly irritated.

“Poetry is wonderful, Sherlock Holmes,” said Molly indignantly.

“I’m sure you remember it as well as you remember the names of the finger bones,” said Sherlock,
Molly glared at him wholeheartedly. “Tiger, tiger, burning bright, in the forests of the night, What immortal hand or eye, Could frame thy fearful symmetry?” she recited, without pausing. “In what distant deeps or skies, burnt the fire of thine eyes? On what wings dare he aspire, what the hand dare seize the fire?”

Sherlock stared at her. “You remember some verses of one poem –”

“Between my finger and my thumb, the squat pen rests, snug as a gun –”

“Molly, please, rattling off some poetry will not –”

“Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox, it enters the dark hole of the head, the window is starless still –”

“Molly, you are really being silly, I understand that you remember some poetry –”

“Once we had a country, and we thought it fair, but –”

“Molly!”

“Auden. That’s exquisite.”

The new voice did not belong to either of the occupants of the room. Molly and Sherlock looked up to find a woman – a very beautiful woman, thought Molly – standing at the door. Her hair were sleek and shining and Molly could honestly have said she had never seen such a sculpted face.

“What on earth are you doing here?” asked Sherlock, angry. “I thought I told you we were meeting – elsewhere.”

“My position was compromised,” said the woman easily. This was Sherlock’s accomplice?

“She can stay, Sherlock, I don’t mind,” said Molly nervously.

“You’re a pretty thing,” said the woman, her voice dropping, rolling over her words deliciously. “I could do things to you that would make you scream – I haven’t met someone as tempting as you in a while, you know.”

“I’m flattered?” said Molly. “Hang on – you’re the woman on my slab. The one Sherlock recognised by not-her-face.”

Sherlock stiffened. “How did you guess?” asked the woman, giving a side along glance to Sherlock.

“That woman had the exact same bone structure – it’s hard to hide that.”

“I went to great lengths to find a body that matched perfectly,” said the woman. “Irene Adler.”

“Molly Hooper,” blinked Molly. “I wonder if death is a thing that actually happens around here. Do you like shepherd’s pie?”

Irene smiled at her luxuriously. “I happen to love it. Now, you were quoting our favourite twentieth century poet – Auden?”

“Oh, yes,” said Molly, nodding enthusiastically, taking out a dish of cheesiness. “I quite like
Auden – *Unknown Citizen* is my favourite –”

“Personally I have always preferred *As I Walked Out One Evening,*” said Irene.

“Molly, she can’t stay,” said Sherlock rudely.

“What?” asked Molly, cut short. “Why not?”

“She’s dangerous,” said Sherlock, gritting his teeth.

“I can see that, Sherlock,” said Molly, exasperated. “But you’re dangerous as well. And so is your brother. John is definitely dangerous. Greg is dangerous. Honestly, I am surrounded by dangerous people everywhere. Besides, don’t be rude – she looks famished.”

Irene smiled at Molly crookedly. Sherlock glared at the Irene.

“Goodness, Miss Hooper,” said Irene in a drawl. “You’ve got him in a twist.”

“Well, he can suck it –” said Molly, lifting her chin. “It’s my home. I can choose to invite her in, Sherlock.”

Sherlock switched his glare to Molly. Molly blushed pink, but did not let go of the stare.

Sherlock let out a noise of frustration, stomping off.

What on earth was Molly thinking, inviting *the Woman* to dine with them?

Sherlock couldn’t help it, he was angry and frustrated. He had hoped to have Molly to himself, to tell her about his doings – the eastern section of the network down, the accomplices he had made in Bombay, the unending, everlasting, infinite exhaustion of being a wanderer across the world. The Mark of Cain stayed with Sherlock, and it would not go – something some of his accomplices had noticed.

“What is you’re thinking of?”

“Thinking of how best to take down Dalal.”

“No, you’re thinking of something else, my lovely little liar. Something far away.”

“Thinking about something far away would be irrelevant.”

“An English girl, then.”

Sameera had always been unusually perceptive. Whenever Sherlock got a distant look in his face, that what she would call it – “You’re thinking about your English girl.”

Molly had a tendency to intrude into his mind again and again, whenever he found himself without anything to think about. She appeared when he was ready to sleep, she would be in his dreams. While on a mission, he thought of little else – but Molly – why, she stuck, and she refused to let go.

His brief interlude in England had been a desperate grip – before he left for the Middle East, he had to see Molly. He had to.
“Take these blue ribbons, my little liar. A tourist gave them to me a long time back – give them to your English girl.”

He needed to see if she thought of him. If she was safe. If she was thinking of him as often as he was of her.

“I wonder if she can love as well as I can, your English girl.”

She looked well – some of her colour was back. She was flushed, and happy, and she didn’t seem to be seeing anyone. Something of her seven year old self had come back.

“Well, Miss Hooper – do you happen to like the Romantics, then?”

Molly had surprised him again, by how cultured she was. She could speak easily about endless poets, about different phases in literature, and she seemed to have done an elective in English during uni – something he had not accounted for, or deducted.

“Well, I do have a fondness for Keats,” said Molly honestly. “However, I find the poetry of the twentieth century a lot more compelling – I mean, we had Hughes then.”

“Oh,” said Irene, delighted, clearly. “Mr. Holmes, I do like this pathologist of yours.”

He bared his teeth at her. “Good. Leave her alone, if you know what’s best for her.”

“Sherlock,” said Molly. “Don’t.”

“Protective, are we?” said the Woman.

If looks could kill was going to come true now. Science would have a field day.

“Tell me, Mr. Holmes, do you share a room? I see only one bed.”

“Another example of your slowness, Miss Adler – do you not notice the unmade bed on the couch, or are you being deliberately slow? I assure you, you’re quite a natural at it.”

“Stop it, both of you,” hissed Molly. “Have your lunch, for God’s sake, Sherlock.”

“Molly, she’s a little minx.”

“Ooh, I am flattered,” said Irene.

“Really? It in the list of a few adjectives which would be a lot more flattering, in that case.”

“Oh, Mr. Holmes, tread carefully. Miss Hooper will certainly not like your lack of experience in certain arts – using experience loosely, of course. And she wouldn’t like my first hand experience.”

“The same experience that cost you several million quid from the British Government?”

Irene glowered, and Molly had to back away a little bit. Goodness, she could look fierce.

“Perhaps you would like a stepping stool to feel tall where I am concerned, Mr. Holmes?”

“Oh my god,” said Molly, slamming a dish of caramel custard down. “If both of you really want to flirt, do not do it in front of me. And if you want a room, I will leave the apartment. This is not the time to play Sassy McSasserson.”
“Sassy McSasserson?” questioned Irene.

“Flirting?” asked Sherlock.

“Isn’t that your mutated version of it?” asked Molly, slicing into the dish and giving everyone a bowl each. “Whatever, I don’t want to hear of it.” Molly walked off into her room, slamming her door shut for good measure.

“There you go, Mr. Holmes. You’ve upset her.”

“It’s your fault. You never did learn to keep well enough alone,” said Sherlock.

“Compliments on compliments. Miss Hooper seems to make you a better person.”

He coolly stared at her, ignoring the truth of her statement.

“Oh. Oh.” Irene seemed mildly astonished. “So she does make you a better person.”

“Go away, Miss Adler.”

“After I have seen your bizarre mating ritual – I do intend to.”

“To what?” Molly had wandered back.

“Nothing, my dear. But we do have to leave,” said Irene, relaxing in her chair.

“Alright,” said Molly, clearing the table. She handed Sherlock a back pack. “Your stuff,” said Molly cheerfully. “I’ve packed as much food as possible, along with clothes and other necessities. Irene, would you like something?” asked Molly.

“No, darling.”

“Oh, go on,” said Molly easily. “I can tell you need hair clips. One can never have enough hair clips.” She wandered away again, and returned with a cardboard box. It was decently small.

“Can I know a little bit of where you are going?” asked Molly.

“The middle east,” said Sherlock, looking out of the window.

“Oh. You’re going to need sunglasses,” said Molly, reaching to a shelf. “And sunscreen. Irene, I hope you’re carrying other... necessities?”

“Molly, stop it,” said Sherlock. “We need to go.”

“I shall wait outside while you say goodbye to Miss Hooper,” said Irene, pausing, briefly, to press a kiss on Molly’s cheek. “Au Revoir, Miss Hooper.”


“Sound advice,” muttered Sherlock, as Irene shut the door.

“I try,” said Molly wryly.

“Molly, I will be careful. I will not die. I will return. Now that that’s out of the way, thanks for your hospitality.”

“Oh, pish to that,” said Molly. “It’s a bolthole, isn’t it?”
“Well –”

“Sherlock,” said Molly.

“A little bit,” said Sherlock.

“Well, being friends with you was always a hazard,” sighed Molly. She reached out, hugging him. “Be careful, yeah?”

“I thought we got this over with,” said Sherlock.

“Call it an obsession,” said Molly. “People are waiting for you over here.”

Sherlock watched her, as she stood in front of him. Her eyes, bright, her face, flushed, her mouth, smiling. The straight way she was holding herself while looking at him. Her open and messy hair. The soup stains on her cardigan. The dirt on her trousers.

*You're looking for your English girl.*

“Molly Hooper,” he said, finally.

“Yeah?” asked Molly.

He bent down, slowly, deliberately, kissing her gently on the cheek. His breath ghosted on her cheek – it was unimaginably soft. “Goodbye,” he said.

Molly seemed momentarily befuddled. Sherlock walked out of the apartment.

“I’ll miss you,” heard Sherlock, almost a whisper.

_________________________________________________________

“Chemical defects do have a tendency to be beautiful little disasters, don’t they?” asked Irene. Sherlock did not say anything, staring out of the blurring rush of the English countryside. Sherlock fingered the back pack, feeling something very rectangular and hard. He frowned.

He opened the pocket slowly, extracting Molly’s copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird.*

Molly’s handwriting was neatly fitted into a small note – “*Grey areas and other such necessities.*” Sherlock smiled.
The knock on Molly’s door was urgent, rapping, demanding her attention. Molly blearily looked at the offending door, glaring at it in good measure. There were only two people who would show up unannounced at her home without regard to the fact that she may have been sleeping.

One of these people was Meena, who was away at a convention, somewhere in New Castle. And while Meena did have a penchant for ditching responsibilities, she had become a lot better at doing what was necessary. The other person was someone who had visited her six months ago, brought a dominatrix with him, and woke her up early on a Saturday morning. Tom she had only been dating for four months – they hadn’t reached heavy comfort levels yet.

Molly sighed. *Stop complaining, Molly,* she told herself.

She opened the door, expecting what was to come. But no tall-and-agitated man walked in, belligerently telling Molly of his exploits. The man in question was Sherlock, no doubt, but he was extremely quiet, ashen faced, and he continued to stand at her door.

He looked at her, and for a second, Molly could not imagine what he was thinking. Molly watched, nervously – his expression had never held the intensity that she was seeing now. Not for a long while.

“Sherlock?” she asked. “What’s happened?”

There was something curiously off about the way he was looking at her, and Molly toyed with the idea that he was sleepwalking. The explanation did not fit his behaviour, for the stare he was giving her was burning her with the intensity.

“Is everything all right? Are you back?” she asked, hoping for a reaction.

“Molly,” he said quietly. Molly watched, nervously, warily, as he stepped forward. She did not take any steps back – she had a vague suspicion that this was a strange sort of test.

“May I?” he asked. Her heart was beating extraordinarily fast, and even though she could not comprehend what he was asking permission for, she consented.

His hand reached, cradling her cheek. Molly breathed in sharply – this was so surreal. A cold feeling slipped down her back, and she wondered, her head cottony with speculation, whether this was not an odd sort of hallucination.

*He* looked so dazed.
“She dwelt among the untrodden ways, Beside the springs of Dove. A Maid whom there were none to praise, And very few to love,” he recited, continuing to bore into her soul.

Oh, this was definitely a hallucination.

“A violet by a mossy stone, Half hidden from the eye – Fair as a star, when only one is shining in the sky.” His eyes stared into her, uncomprehendingly eating a mystery that Molly was unaware of.

Molly stared at him, her mind buzzing with the number of possibilities. Most of these possibilities included brain damage.

“She lived unknown, and few could know – When Lucy ceased to be; But she is in her grave, and oh,” Sherlock took a sharp breath in. “The difference to me,” he finished. Molly felt a lump in her throat as he continued to burn her with the intensity of his eyes.

“Sherlock?” she whispered.

His thumb gently traced her lips, and Molly took another deep breath. Her heart thumped, threatening to tear out of her chest at the rate it was going.

He never used to say things – Sherlock’s expressions of love were so scattered, based heavily on actions. Molly looked into his eyes: always changing, from green to grey to blue and on and on, dizzying her with colours she could not comprehend.

She was expecting something to happen; however, what did happen surprised her so much that she almost tripped over herself.

Sherlock’s lips pressed down on her, demandingly, hungrily, asking her for whatever she could give. Molly did not stop him – this was so often a scene in her fantasies that she could not help open her mouth for his, as his tongue pushed through, his arms snaking around her, gripping her. Molly whimpered softly against his lips, Tom forgotten, everything forgotten.

Breathe, Molly, she said to herself. Stop this now. He doesn’t know what he’s doing, and he might regret it later.

That did snap her out of it. It was one thing for her to lose her senses and do what she would; Sherlock would never forget.

He stopped, and Molly stared at him, her eyes wide, her breathing ragged, her pulse wild. “I’m sorry,” he said, suddenly. “For all of it. Everything.”

And before Molly could stop him, demand an explanation, make sure he slept properly and snapped out of whatever he was going through, he was gone.

Toby purred from the kitchen counter, and Molly looked at him, dazedly. The little feline stretched, meowing at Molly again. Molly laughed weakly at Toby. “Sherlock and Wordsworth, eh?” said Molly, her voice croaky. “Who would have thought it?”

Her shoulder was being uncomfortable.

Molly groaned, shifting the irritating shoulder in its socket. The discomfort being experienced by the shoulder should perhaps be the indicator to something (after all, it could be a sprain or
something dangerous), but Molly had no evidence to support this. The only thing that could have logically happened was that she fell asleep in an uncomfortable position and her shoulder took on the discomfort as well.

Molly later forgot the pain in her shoulder, of course, but it came back to her once or twice. Pain in the elbow, or other parts of the body was supposed to be an omen: something untrustworthy this way comes. She should have heeded the pain in her shoulder, for that was the day Sherlock returned.

She hadn’t heard from Sherlock, no. There was a stony silence on that end. Mycroft had not given her any information about where Sherlock was since then. Mycroft had been very, very silent.

Molly did not understand it – he waltzed into her home in the middle of the night, recited poetry, and kissed her, leaving with his head held his and an unknown apology on his lips.

Meena was insisting that Sherlock used to love her. Before he ‘died,’ that is. But she didn’t understand. Sherlock didn’t love. He... became attached. Molly wasn’t kidding with herself – he wasn’t a bad boy going after a nerdy left over. This was not a high school chick flick.

This was... Sherlock.

And Sherlock was intense.

When Molly was eight years old, Molly used to like imagining how Sherlock’s head was. All of that information, entering, all the time. When Sherlock used to play with her, his focus never wavered – he blocked all else out to be with Molly.

Sherlock was odd, and weird, and strange, and intense, and...

Standing in front of her.

Why was Sherlock standing in front of her?

Another hallucination?

And in his Belstaffed, curly-haired, grey-green eyed glory. Molly did not notice him, preoccupied by the shoulder and her locker. He simply appeared in the mirror of her locker.

“I –” Molly took a deep breath. “Hello,” she said, finally.

“Hi,” said Sherlock. He was stiff as a poker, but his eyes were lively. His hands were behind his back.

“Are you back?” asked Molly.

“Yes,” he said. There didn’t seem to be anything wrong with him.

“Are you all right?” asked Molly, twitching.

“Perfectly fine,” said Sherlock.

“Yeah?” asked Molly. “Because the last time you were here...”

“That was – a bad day,” said Sherlock slowly. “Someone threatened something of mine. I required refuge.”

“That’s alright,” sighed Molly, with relief. Sherlock being in love with her would be something
she couldn’t quite handle. Meena was wrong. “And you’re right on time too. The people found out your innocence.”

Sherlock gave a short bark of laughter, running his hand through his hair.

“I ought to go now,” said Sherlock. “People to meet. Punches to sustain.”

“I guessed John did that,” nodded Molly, eyeing the nose and the lip.

“Well,” said Sherlock. “I’m glad you didn’t punch me,” said Sherlock.

“As if my punching you would make much of an impression,” scoffed Molly.

Sherlock laughed again. There was a small pause between them, and once again, Molly got the uneasy feeling that she was being tested. “We shall see about that, Molly Hooper,” he said finally, before disappearing.

As Molly saw the Belstaff swish, and the door shut, she looked around the locker room.

“I really ought to stop him from doing that,” said Molly dazedly.

Meena tapped the glass gently; the pattern of her tapping was very repetitive. Molly peered unconcernedly out of the window.

Molly sipped her wine. “Yeah,” she said, looking back at the glass.

“You helped him fake his death?” asked Meena.

“Yes,” said Molly.

“You just met him?” she prodded.

“Yes.”

“Did you meet him before this? I mean, during the two periods of his death?” questioned Meena.

“Well...” said Molly. “He arrived at my apartment one day. I’d been dating Tom for a while. You wee gone somewhere else, so I assumed it was him.”

“He walked in your apartment?” asked Meena.

“Yes,” nodded Molly.

“At twelve?”

“The witching hour,” confirmed Molly.

“I’m not quite clear on what he did next,” said Meena.

“He...” Molly struggled for words. “He was watching me. For a long time. And then... he asked for my permission for something. At that point, it didn’t make sense why he was asking for permission. After that...” she trailed her thought process into a distance. “He recited poetry.”

Meena’s wine spilled a little on her skirt.
“Poetry”? repeated Meena.

“Wordsworth,” acknowledged Molly, nodding jerkily. “One of the Lucy poems. I can’t figure out
why Wordsworth. Hughes would be far more appropriate for his style of... well, life. Or even
Owen. Maybe Sassoon? I don’t know.”

“Molly,” said Meena patiently, “I think you are in shock.”

“What?” asked Molly, baffled. “No, I’m not,” she added, automatically.

“Sherlock Holmes – the seven year old who was friends with no one, who used to deduce his
teachers, who believed only in pure science, recited poetry to you. And you’re worrying about
what his taste in poets is.”

“Well, Wordsworth was a romantic!” said Molly defensively. “And Sherlock hates the romantics.
Also, Wordsworth is the least likely of the Romantics that Sherlock would like! The only poem he
maybe would like from the Romantics would be ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.’”

Meena sighed impatiently, covering her face in her palms. “Molly. What else happened?”

“Well...” said Molly. “He kissed me?”

Whatever wine was left was spat out promptly. Molly glared at Meena. “You need to be taught
some manners!” said Molly angrily.

“You know, you’re trying to be angry, but you’re only chalking up points for you being in
shock,” said Meena. “Molly, focus! He kissed you!”

“He seemed really dazed. I don’t think he knew what he was doing...” said Molly. “And yeah, I
am a bit in shock. I don’t quite know how to react?”

Meena sighed again. “Knowing you, you’re probably wondering when you are waking up. Come
on, Molly. He kissed you. He was your best friend. He didn’t have other friends. Put the pieces
together.”

Molly looked at Meena quizzically.

Meena let out a frustrated groan. “He is in love with you,” she supplied finally.

There was a small pause. Molly stared at her incredulously. “You’re funny,” she scoffed.

Meena groaned again. “Molly, please. Now is not the time to pretend he can’t like you. Save it for
the really bad chick flicks.” Meena sighed again. “And here I thought Christopher Marlow was
going to be your worst time in flirting.”

Molly did laugh at that one.

Molly tapped her fingers impatiently. She glanced at her phone. She decided to bend back down
on her paperwork, her pen scribbling away.

Her office remained remarkably silent. Nothing stirred. The pen scratched onto paper. Squiggles
which made sense appeared on the sheets.

Molly shut her eyes, once again. Her fingers made a pattern which looked a little like a symphony.
She sighed deeply, and then checked her phone.

**MOLLY, I WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF YOU DROPPED BY BAKER STREET THIS MORNING – SH**

Her breathing hitched.

What did that even *mean*?

Molly tapped her fingers again. She glared at her phone as if it had personally offended her.

“Oh, fuck,” she said, leaning back on her chair, her forehead all crinkled up.

This was *annoying*. This was *irritating*. This was *not fair*.

He had no right to do such things. He dropped one hint, then went another direction. He decided on one path and then took the other.

She tapped her fingers again. She paused her paperwork. Glanced at her phone. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Eventually, she dialled a number. The phone rang, and someone answered.

“Oh, hi,” said Molly, without pausing for a breath. “He’s called me to his place, that’s what. I’m not sure what he wants... No Meena, he’s not going to declare his love for me, no matter what you think... What should I do?”

There was an indistinct murmur on the other side, before Molly frowned and glared into the distance. “You know Meena, there is no need to be so rude! Of course I will go! You make it sound like I have half a brain!” Pause. “I do not have half a brain!”

Sherlock wasn’t quite sure what he had been expecting when he decided to call her in to help him with murders. Number one, he was lacking a companion, and he was too accustomed to John to be of any use without an audience to ooh and ahh.

That part was obvious. He dearly wanted to have someone else doing this duty, though. Molly Hooper was... dangerous.

For one thing, he was finding himself unable to delete that little episode with Wordsworth. It had been a bad day, as he had explained. He had been exceptionally lonely. But he wished he could explain to himself why he had wanted to see her.

His reaction to his apology for his behaviour was what had made him more curious. She *loved* him. Romantic precedent, media and other such sources dictated that she should have reciprocated the kiss. And she had, he couldn’t fault her that. However, she only responded briefly, before engaging in the act of stopping him. A rather horrified part in him had not wanted her to stop him, and another part in him reminded him that if she hadn’t stopped him, there was no knowing what else would have happened that night.

*Why* had she stopped him?

He needed to focus on cases instead. He needed to thank her for everything, and he needed a companion.
And when she did end up coming to solve murders with him, she was terribly excited. He could see it in the way she sat down in front of his clients, the way she smiled, the way she shared jokes.

“You’re not being John, you’re being yourself.”

He had been telling the truth. Molly and John were in... very different compartments.

She was thrilled, he had seen that. And the way she asked questions, he could tell what had happened: they were back in the giant field, they were playing games together.

Solving murders together. Except this time, he had her expertise, and she had his.

“She had a condition, Sherlock. Can’t you tell? Early stages of Jaundice. She probably poisoned her brother so that the family fortune went to her children?”

And then there was her general happiness. She was positively glowing – his year away had done her good. She had a fiancé, she seemed cheerful. She had smiled when she entered, with a deceptive, “You wanted to see me?” She hadn’t agonised over it, she had turned up, in a particularly colourful jumper and scarf.

He could see how much she had liked his clients. The liars, the thieves, the bullies, and the broken. Molly Hooper had always felt a kinship for the strange, and he shouldn’t have been surprised. She felt a kinship with the dead, after all.

She took the lead more often. “Male, forty to fifty – I’m sorry, did you want to –?”

“No, be my guest.”

And then there was John, egging him on. He needed John back. Molly was a poor substitute for John Watson. Molly was... something else.

It was curious how she could shut up him up with looks. One look of disapproval and he was apologizing to the train weirdo.

“What was today about?”

“Saying thank you.”

“For what?”

For everything.

“So, what happened at your day with Sherlock?” asked Meena.

Molly sighed. “It was fun. We solved murders. My kind of day. It was like we were playing games together again.”

Meena raised her eyebrows. “That’s all?” she questioned.

“He didn’t confess his undying love to me, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Pity,” said Meena. “I wish he’d get a move on.”

Molly rolled her eyes.
Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry it's not longer. I felt like it needed a break because we're seriously fast forwarding after this.

Reviews are fantastic.
England Calls

Chapter Summary

We're nearing the end of the story! Maybe one or two chapters more. I'm so in love with all of the reviewers that I just want to continue writing forever. The writer does very little compared to what the audience can achieve, and a serious number of you saved the story from being orphaned.

Chapter Notes

Reviews are the highest form of love :)

"Regrettably Lady Smallwood, my brother is a murderer."

With those words, Mycroft knew that he was committing his brother to a death sentence. It was unavoidable; practical; smart; intelligent.

It also broke his heart.

Mycroft dismissed most of his appointments, and Anthea didn't say anything. Her hair were in a pony tail, something she didn't do unless she knew that serious work was afoot.

Mycroft had six months to plan, after which, time would run out. But before any of that happened – before he transformed himself into the ice man again, planning the return of his brother by any means necessary, there were a few things he had to take care of.

Sherlock was not Mycroft. He understood that now. Sherlock loved, even if his method of showing this was twisted. Sherlock enjoyed the company of his chosen few, and enjoyed bestowing this honour to people who understood its weight.

He made a few calls, making sure Mary Watson's ties to her enemies were snapped permanently. It was a day's work, and he missed a few important meetings to make sure that the Watsons were secure. Sherlock would want that – Mycroft made sure the Watson girl would never be in need of a mother. Mrs. Hudson would have a permanent position in 221B. That took one phone call and nothing more. DI Lestrade could take care of himself.

But Molly Hooper would need an explanation.

And Mycroft had no idea how to go about it.

She stepped into the abandoned warehouse, aware of her surroundings. "Hello," she said nervously.

"Miss Hooper," greeted Mycroft.
"You are far too dramatic, Mr. Holmes," she said, chewing her lip.

"I've been informed," he told her simply.

"Well?" she questioned.

Mycroft pondered what he needed to say. "I have not prepared this in the slightest, I assure you. But you will find out, through sources that Sherlock is to be sent for some undercover work in Eastern Europe. Before he leaves, I have to do what I feel is necessary, especially since a conscience is a rare thing."

"Mr. Holmes, you're rambling," Molly pointed out curiously.

"I would like to apologise for my behaviour to you when you were twelve years old, Miss Hooper," he said.

Molly Hooper stared at him, waiting.

"It was unacceptable. I was young and unable to understand my brother. I understand him a lot better now, and I understand you a lot better now."

"Mycroft, please stop," she said. "Stop. He's going to die, isn't he?"

Mycroft did not need to confirm it. She could tell.

Sherlock was going to die.

The thought seemed surreal. After everything Molly had done to ensure that he lived – after everything she had done to make sure that he came back alive. She could not consider the idea that he would die.

The clock struck twelve, and Molly continued to hear the lone cars move. The stars were out, but she could not see them. Her home was a mess and for a moment, so was her life.

Sherlock was going to die.

The clock donged again, and Molly considered watching a few movies to pass the time. They wouldn't affect her, but at least they would distract.

There was a knock on the door, and Molly wondered which one it was – Meena or Sherlock. She wished it wasn't Sherlock.

The door opened unceremoniously, and Molly knew who it was.

"You really need new locks," said Sherlock, annoyed.

Molly didn't say anything, choosing to cuddle closer to her knees.

"Been drinking again? You need to slow down, Molly. You're almost becoming an alcoholic, and you're not that old yet – you will find someone to marry."

At that Molly snapped her head upwards. She smiled, and Sherlock immediately frowned.

"What's wrong?"

"You killed a man," said Molly casually.
"I'm aware," said Sherlock evenly.
"You did drugs," she added.
"You slapped me for that," supplied Sherlock.
"And now you're in my apartment."
"In the flesh. Tell me, was it Mycroft that gave it away?"
"He apologised for his behaviour from when we were kids. It wasn't a hard deduction."
"You're becoming good," said Sherlock.

Sherlock squinted suspiciously. He stepped closed, and Molly dragged him down to the sofa.
"Give me some company," she said. "I'm terribly drunk, already half in mourning for a man that was supposed to live. And I need someone to remind me of grey areas."

"I think I need it more," said Sherlock wearily.

"No, you will be fine. You will leave without telling John, or Mary. He can read you very well sometimes, so I don't know how you will go about it. You will die, in six months, by yourself, and have the benefit of knowing that you did everything to secure their futures." She cuddled up in the crook of his neck. "I will wait here, staring at the horizon in true dramatic fashion – something to rival your brother. I will wait to know when it happened, when you left. And once again, alone in my mourning."

Sherlock stroked her hair.

"Stop giving me your secrets, Sherlock Holmes," she whispered. "I'm tired of keeping them. I'm tired of loving you, and I'm tired of not knowing whether you do. God, I'm so lonely as it is."

She fell into his neck again. The amount of alcohol in her system was making it impossible for her to keep herself in her senses. He gripped her by the shoulders, and looked into her brown eyes.

His face was so close, and Molly could write that thesis she had wanted on the biology behind his eyes and their changing colours. Her brain wasn't blanking, she could continue watching.

His lips were close, and then coming closer. His hands held her by the nape of her neck, and he kissed her, gently, softly. His teeth nipped into her bottom lip, and Molly's brain went pleasantly blank. Her hands in his curly hair, she could feel their texture. she could feel the way his long fingers combed into her hair. A Violinist's hands.

His lips shifted, to the corner of her mouth, and Molly took a breath. He was back again, and she had to forget breathing. His tongue did not shove itself into her mouth – it was touching her teeth gently, and Molly knew that this was possibly the best kiss she had ever had.

His hands went between her thighs, carefully massaging her where she knew her sweet spot was. He pushed her shoulders back, and continued to kiss her, and she could feel a frenzy that was locked away.

Molly stopped, panting, without having done anything serious. "I'm sorry. I'm drunk. And I don't know why you are suddenly wanting this."
"I suppose I don't need yet another reason to say," said Sherlock distantly. Molly could feel an underlying bitterness that she ignored.

"Who needs me now?"

"England."

The team assembled in 221B was varied in nature. DI Lestrade had not needed the armed escorts to explain where they were taking him, he instead called shotgun and jumped into the front seat. Mary and John were pushed into Mycroft's car with Anthea, and Sherlock stepped in as well.

"Call Molly," he told Mycroft immediately.

"She's already on her way," Mycroft said.

"What next?" asked John.

"Get everyone to begin working on the technical aspects instantly," said Sherlock.

"Done," said Anthea.

"Send a copy of the screening to me – I will try to find discrepancies to show that it is a fake. Meanwhile, the body needs to be found. Mycroft?"

"Yes," said Mycroft.

"Get Molly to bring us the autopsy report."

"She has the brains to do that herself," Mycroft said.

"Good point," said Sherlock.

Mary pursed her lips, suppressing a smile. John frowned, but said nothing. They drove up to 221B, and found the rest of their people assembled.

Sherlock ignored everyone, taking the stairs two at a time. Mary and John followed closely behind. "The broadcast," Greg pointed out, shoving a recording into the telly.


"John, tear down the current stuff on the wall," said Sherlock.

"Right," said John, beginning.

"Mary, you'll find the Moriarty files in a box in that shelf. Get them out, at once."

"All right," said Mary, rushing.

"Mycroft?" added Sherlock.

"Specialists have been at it for a while now." Sherlock walked impatiently, from one end to another.

"Sherlock, stop pacing," said John tersely.
"What wonderful advice, John, I can see why they made you a doctor," said Sherlock, continuing his pacing. Molly bit her lip, and glanced at John, who simply looked exasperated. "Sherlock, think aloud," she advised.

Sherlock spared her a brief look, before deciding her advice was understandable.

"Moriarty's body was examined by someone not Molly, so we can assume with ease that they made a mistake. The rest of you knew of his death simply because I told you of it, and we need to understand what he is going to do before he does it. Virtually impossible, but I suppose we can try: Moriarty's M.O is normally a fate worse than death, which narrows down a substantial amount. But I suspect this is a very serious copy cat – potentially more dangerous, but at least we can tell that it's a similar pattern."

"Last time he used information given by Mycroft," said Mary, "what do you think he will do now?"

Sherlock stopped on his tracks for a second. He ran his hands through his hair. "Mycroft, are you sure you gave away nothing about – well, our friend?"

"Are you talking about John?" asked Molly. "I'm sure he already knows what is to be known there. You and John are an open book."

"Nothing was given away," assured Mycroft.

"Which friend are you talking about?" asked Greg. "Victor Trevor? He's out of the country."

"No, Trevor will be fine – but we should make sure he is safe. I'll send him a message," Sherlock grinned toothily. "Tell him he owes me for that December in Uni."

"But which friend are you talking about?" asked Mary impatiently.

Mycroft's eyes lingered to Molly for half a second.

"A school friend. Someone who is reasonably important."

"Reasonably important?" said Sherlock scathingly.

"Who is this friend?" demanded John.

"Rest assured, she will have the highest security," said Mycroft, and Molly knew that he was giving her identity to everyone else.

"And I'm sure your tongue slipped, Mr. Holmes," said Molly sarcastically. Mycroft smiled at her, in his best British-Government-Knows-Best way. "Of course, Miss Hooper. I make mistakes."

"A she?" said John, incredulous.

"A she," repeated Molly dully. She surveyed the room, and before anyone could stop her, snorted.

"Molly," reprimanded Sherlock.

"I'm sorry," she said, and broke out into laughter. "It's absurd. It's nothing I had expected. Six years I waited for this moment, and here we are." She continued to laugh as if her life depended
on it. John stared at her like she had finally lost her mind.
"Molly, stop it," snapped Sherlock.
"You stop it, William," returned Molly, collapsing on one of the chairs.
"William?" asked John.
"Isn't that his name?" she said. "William Sherlock Scott Holmes'? Pompous brat."
Mary suddenly looked like she could have burst with excitement. Sherlock glared at Molly. "Molly!" he said angrily.
"Oh, don't be a clusterfib," said Molly dismissively. "They might as well know."
"That insult did not work when I was seven and it will not work now!" said Sherlock.
"You don't work now," said Molly pettily.
Sherlock pinched the bridge of his nose. "Molly I have told you a thousand times, come-backs which are based on functionality –"
"Are automatically inconsistent with reality, and hence, pointless. I know. I attended your lecture on witticisms," said Molly with a grin. "I have elected to ignore your advice in the face of your discomfort."
"Hang on a tick – you're the best friend from school?" asked John.
"Don't be slow, John," said Mary, excited.
"Neighbours. Played pirates together. He was a dick then, so don't worry, John – it's his natural state of existence."
"I was not!" said Sherlock.
"You told everybody in your introduction to first grade that 'you don't like stupid people.'"
"I was telling the truth!" said Sherlock, exasperated.
"You told me I should try trigonometry when were nine because subtraction was easy," Molly pointed out.
"Molly, you have to admit, subtraction is easy, and you should have tried trigonometry," said Sherlock, rolling his eyes.
"It's like seeing a bizarre nature documentary," muttered John to Lestrade. Greg laughed briefly.
"What about the time you designed an elaborate chemistry experiment which was made to explode and make me pink?"
"To be fair, Miss Hooper, that one was very good," said Mycroft idly.
Mary, John, and Lestrade stared at Mycroft while Sherlock and Molly still engaged in a battle of wits.
"That's not fair!" declared Sherlock. "You did things like that to me as well. You sneaked into my room when were eight and dyed my favourite shirt purple!"
Molly glanced tellingly at Sherlock. "I can see that the tradition is upheld. You continue to have a purple shirt."

"Okay!" said Lestrade loudly. "While this is all very enjoyable, I think we need to focus on what is necessary. Jim Moriarty and Molly's childhood pictures of Sherlock."

Sherlock whipped his head to Greg, glaring. Molly laughed.

"Absolutely. As soon as this mess is over – I have a picture of him wearing an eye-patch."

"Really?" asked John eagerly.

"Molly!" said Sherlock.

"I'm sorry; you were the one who didn't tell them that we knew each other from before six years. I have rights," said Molly.

"She's right," said Mary nodding gleefully.

"And by the by, you'd be a fool to think Moriarty didn't figure out who I was in your life if he's back after three years," said Molly shrewdly. "You had two years to break his network apart, and you did. What do you think he was doing?"

"A criminal mastermind does not simply give up his network," said Mycroft.

"Moriarty isn't a criminal mastermind, he's a man getting bored. It's adequate stimulation to destroy Sherlock again from the roots and give up an empire that is going to take him time to rebuild. Time enough to keep him stimulated at least for five years," said Molly.

Everybody stared at her. "I did date him, you know. There was something beyond green underwears and Glee that I liked about him," said Molly.

"He watched Glee?" asked Greg.

"I made him watch a couple of episodes," said Molly with a shrug. "He liked the whole gay-and-singing angle."

Sherlock blinked, wheeling around to face her. Mycroft's eyebrows must have gone to another dimension.

"You made Moriarty watch Glee?" asked John weakly.

Molly nodded, uncomfortable under the sudden scrutiny of so many people. "Before I dumped him, yes."

Mary, who had been smiling for quite some time asked Molly, "Why are we not better friends? John should be slapped for under-explaining you."

"Yes, well, beyond making friendships," snapped Sherlock. "What are we to do?"

"Mr. Holmes, did you do it?" asked Molly. "It would save us a lot of trouble."

"That's a fair question," said John. "There are only four people who would be able to pull this off, and three of them are dead."

"Which four?" asked Molly, with a frown.
"Mycroft, Moriarty, Magnussen and Adler," rattled John off. "Adler's dead as well, so I dunno."

"Magnussen we can safely rule out," said Sherlock. "Adler, as well."

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"Well, you should probably call her in. She could help," said Molly thoughtlessly.

"Irene Adler?" asked John. "She's dead."

Molly glanced at Sherlock, laughing nervously. "Didn't you know?" asked Molly nervously.

John opened his mouth, part shock, part anger."No. Does anybody die anyway? Or do we all just fake our deaths?" said John grumpily.

"What about Mycroft?" asked Mary.

"He has the power to do it and the motive," Molly pointed out. "His brother gets to stay out of the Eastern Europe thingy."

"'Thingy'?" repeated Sherlock.

"Miss Hooper is referring to your death mission," quipped Mycroft helpfully.

This caused another mini-uproar. Molly shut her ears as John and Greg started yelling simultaneously, while Mrs. Hudson gave a small shout and Mary went completely white.

"I don't believe this –"

"You told us it was undercover work –"

"Where do the lies end?"

"Thanks, Molly," said Sherlock sourly.

"I didn't say anything this time!" said Molly defensively.

Sherlock ignored all of them. He glanced at the video, and the way Jim Moriarty's jaw wobbled as he continued to mouth 'Did you miss me?'

There was something curiously haunting about this ghost which continued to return, again and again. Sherlock frowned at his face, as people continued to yell. His mind became numb to the voice outside. Through the mad eyes, through the reflection, through the suit, he could see something. Something that told him Jim Moriarty was beyond this.

This was flamboyant. This was a parade. This was... showing off.

Jim Moriarty had once shown that he could let out prisoners of the Pentonville Prison, steal crown jewels, and rob the bank of England simultaneously.

Was this another statement, then? 'I can hack into your television screens even when I am dead?' It didn't tie. It wasn't a major breach of security.

Moriarty's methods didn't align with this behaviour. He had tried to kill Sherlock slowly, to destroy everything he held dear. He had crippled England in one, swift, blow and then stood to
show off. God only knew that he loved showing off – where Sherlock's Achilles Heel was loving complicated puzzles, Moriarty's was needing an audience which was more than just one to two liked it when a lot of people knew bits of his victory, while he showed the totality of his victory only to those which had lost.

Sherlock could imagine Moriarty wanting to announce his return, crippling England again, without being detected. Leaving a note.

This was someone trying to scare the living daylights out of everyone else.

Which also tallied with Moriarty, but something about this was... off. Sherlock couldn't place his finger on it.

"There's something about this that doesn't smell like Moriarty," said John. And for once, Sherlock completely agreed with John's deductive reasoning.

End Notes

There’s that! Please read and review, next chapter will be up in a week!

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