It Takes a Village

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Summary

It takes a whole village to raise a child...and John and Mary have quite the unique village to help them bring up their daughter, whether they always desire that help or not. But when tragedy hits home, how will everyone react? Contains flashbacks following the daughter as she grows up, and those that help her along the way. BAMF!John, Mary, Sherlock aka over protective godfather.

Notes

A little prelude. This isn't going to be a OC centered story. It involves the daughter, but focuses on each individual equally. This is just how I wanted to open this. This story contains BAMF John, Sherlock, Mary, well...just about everyone. Hehe. The story starts off a bit slow, but picks up once we hit the present!

I know the daughter idea has probably been done to death. So forgive me. Plus, there a LOT of layers and new ideas I haven't seen before in this one!

Title is obvious, but if you don't know, it's from an African proverb that means it takes a whole village/community to raise a child.
Daughter

Family units are never perfect.

No matter how polished they can appear in a photograph or how well everyone behaves at Christmas dinner.

The equation of father, plus mother, plus 2.5 children, plus dog, plus two story home, surrounded by a white picket fence was something left for old films.

It didn't mean that some families weren't happy.

No, her family was quite happy indeed. Well, most of the time.

There was that one time where her uncle threw a fork at her other uncle from across the kitchen. And the time her grandmother walked in on her father and mother - well, she didn't exactly enjoy thinking about that.

Of course, those men weren't truly her uncles. And the woman was not necessarily her biological grandmother.

But it was so simpler to say they were. To explain her entire family history to anyone was a bit, well, exhausting.

And that was if they actually believed her.

To tell someone that your father was a doctor in the military, your mother was an assassin - well, she never actually really told anyone that part as she wasn't technically supposed to know that little fact either - and your godfather is a consulting detective. Let's just say it didn't quite roll right off the tongue.

And that was just her immediate family.

She could continue on about her uncle who ran the British government. Her other uncles who were a Detective Chief Inspector and a forensics scientist. Her aunt who spent her time with dead bodies for a living. Her grandmother/godmother who - again, she wasn't supposed to know this - once helped her husband run a drug cartel.

It was a rather colorful bunch.

And definitely, absolutely, positively not perfect.

But they were family. All of them. Each of them connected by something tremendously thicker than blood.

And she loved them all.

Well, normally, usually, most of the time anyway.
Someone asked if this is going to be a bunch of random oneshots, or actually have a plot. Well, BOTH. There will be a storyline that will run sort of underneath the chapters. But memories, etc, are going to be splattered in quite a bit. It's the current story, and the story of the little Watson's childhood, growing up years, etc. (And some pre-birth fun too with the parents and Sherlock - from picking out baby names to decorating the nursery, all that jazz. Just imagine Sherlock as he helped plan the wedding, x10) You get about a one sentence clue to the present time plot line in this chapter. Read carefully. Basically, the daughter is in danger. Surprise, surprise. We're going to go through flashbacks of the daughter, and some other times the daughter was in danger, or other things. For example, John is afraid for his daughter. Here we look back at another time John was afraid. Get it? The flashbacks won't be in chronological order. They will mostly be centered around one character per flashback. Again, this chapter focuses on John, so the following flashbacks are going to focus on John. (And might I say he is a pretty BAMFJohn. Not too much. We'll save that for later! But you do get to see Captain!John and Doctor!John.)
John Hamish Watson never imagined he would be a lot of things.

After a childhood of being told time and again he would never be worthy of even shining his father's army boots, he had earned a pair of his own.

After being brutally bullied for his stunted height and unimposing stature, he would go on to incapacitate men twice his size with a flick of his wrist.

His first college professor told him that he had far too big of a heart to seek a career in the medical field, and far too small of a brain. Yet that apparent big hearted, little brained man saved more men and women and children in his days as a doctor than he could count.

The idea of marriage had always appealed to him, but he never envisioned himself in the role. He had watched his parents tear each other apart, and then watched Sherlock Holmes tear his dating life down. So when Mary Morstan quite literally crashed into his life - well, technically, he had bumped into her and knocked her over, which, by the way, she never let him forget - he hadn't expected it to last. He had waited silently for the other shoe to drop. For one of his horrid habits to scare the woman away. For when she finally had enough of his grieving over the friend she never met. Yet she never did. And when John said "I do" he thought that that was the greatest moment of his entire existence. He had proved a lot of other people wrong in his life, and this time he had done so to himself.

He would prove himself wrong again, when 8 months later John Hamish Watson became something else entirely. Something he had never, not once, even dreamed of becoming.
A father.

*Father.*

Such an odd thing really. How a single word, two little syllables, one title, could change a man so completely. The word “father” had always left a poor taste in his mouth. It had left him internally cringing, waiting for the next blow from his long since deceased dad’s hands. Father had meant fear, anger, abuse, abandonment and loathing.

And yet, in one solitary moment, that word started singing quite a new song. It had a different ring to it now.

*Father.*

Him, John Watson, a father. Of course, at first, it terrified him. It brought about all those awful adjectives to the forefront of his mind. But in that same second, he realized something. Something other people might take lifetimes and several children of their own to do. He knew in that moment that he was not his own father. He was going to be the father of his own child. His and Mary’s child.

And suddenly the word had a whole new meaning.

Hope, joy, love, anticipation, and yes, still a little twinge of fear. Okay, so maybe a whole bucket of fear. But it was a different kind of fear. Not terror for himself. But trepidation for his new role. Anxiety over the safety of his child. A good, exciting kind of fear.

Being afraid was not something Captain John Watson readily admitted to. He didn’t talk about his childhood trauma. He didn’t let on to Mary that he was secretly internally shaking.

There were times, though, when true terror tore through the father’s stony and brave armor.

Times like now.

It's amazing how life or death situations can spark such sentiment and nostalgia.

*John Watson was quite used to having guns thrust into his face by now. Of course he didn’t desire to die. He most certainly feared death and dying, even after coming so close so many times. It would be worrisome if he didn’t. But between life with Sherlock Holmes and spending years getting shot at in Afghanistan, the man had learned to tell the difference between “imminent death” scenarios, and cocky criminals.*

So when one of the murderers that the detective and blogger had been tracking for nearly two weeks pulled a pistol and aimed it only centimeters from John’s forehead, the former soldier didn’t even blink.

“Turn around, Doctor Watson,” the smug voice ordered.

“Or let me guess,” John sighed sarcastically, “you’ll shoot me?”

“This isn’t a joke, doctor,” the killer warned.

“Do I look like I’m laughing?” John retorted.

“I mean it, doc,” the gunman grunted. “Turn around and walk away.”

“I have a better idea,” John stepped forward. “You, give me the gun, and my friend behind you won’t put a bullet in the back of your skull.”

“You’re bluffing.”

“Oh, no, I’d say he’s quite correct.”

*The criminal stiffened at the low voice behind him.*

*John smirked at Sherlock as the detective drew closer to the man pointing the gun at his face.*
Sherlock was carrying John's own military firearm. The soldier had lost it in the shuffle preceding the current stand off.

He harbored no sympathy for the now shaking man. The killer had murdered twelve people in two weeks with this same gun that he had pointed at John. Two of his victims had been children. No, John wouldn't have batted an eye if Sherlock pulled the trigger. He never would wish anyone dead, but he didn't necessarily have to care if they died.

The criminal began turning, keeping his weapon trained on John as he tried to face Sherlock.

"If you shoot me, I'll shoot your doctor friend here."

"Did you hear that, doctor?" Sherlock was addressing John, but his voice was taunting the killer.

"Oh, yes." John smiled thinly.

"What the hell are you smiling -"

The man didn't get to finish that sentence. With two swift movements from John, the criminal was disarmed and down on the ground, unconscious before he even hit the floor.

"I think you should change the name on your blog, doctor," Sherlock sniffed. "None of the criminal class seem to remember the part where you're a soldier."

"They do seem to forget that bit," John chuckled.

"Bad for them," Sherlock commented, uncaring.

"Good for us," John finished.

They were still laughing together when the police sirens sounded and Lestrade and his team funneled into the building.

"Ah! Finally!" Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Better late than never, is it, with you lot."

Sherlock and Greg exchanged words while John checked the unconscious criminal's vitals. He was just standing back up from the body when his phone buzzed in his pocket. Turning away from the crowd, John retrieved his mobile and read the message.

And then read it again.

And then was pretty positive he stopped breathing.

"Sherlock."

John stared down at his mobile, his wide eyes never leaving the screen as he attempted in vain to get the younger man's attention.

Sherlock was locked in some debate with, from the sounds of her condescending voice, Sally Donovan. He could hear the baritone belittling the woman, but couldn't make out the words. Not because he couldn't hear them. Sherlock was only standing across the room from John. No, John couldn't hear anyone's words. Not Sally when she made some rude retort. Not Greg when he asked John if he was okay. Just sound. Distant, vague, muffled and blurred noises. As if he was underwater.

Somewhere in those depths of panic, John knew there was only one person there that could save him from drowning. Could pull him to the surface.

If he could only get the insufferable twat's attention.

"Sherlock," he repeated, raising his volume and giving the name an enunciated edge.

The detective finally whirled around, abandoning Donovan midsentence. He crossed the room in a fluid motion of steps and whirling coat fabric.
He reached his friend in under two seconds, immediately cataloguing the man’s appearance and firing off deductions. John’s arm was stiff, holding his mobile at chest level, fingers curling around the device with enough force to turn his knuckles white. Much more pressure and the military man would break the phone.

John’s eyes were rounded and glinting with a fear Sherlock very rarely saw his assistant possess. His gaze never once flickered from the screen of the nearly crushed mobile. There was also something else playing behind his irises. A certain shimmer that only ever shown when he was thinking about Mary.

So, Mary. Something with Mary. Something that had John terrified. Sherlock mentally checked his calendar. It couldn’t be that. Not yet. But all the signs were there.

“When?” Sherlock addressed his friend calmly.

“She went into labor five minutes ago. Mrs. Hudson called an ambulance.”

“Eight minutes,” Sherlock nodded. “It’s not far. We can make it before they leave.”

Sherlock turned to leave but skidded to a stop when he noticed John not following him. In fact, John wasn’t moving at all. Except, of course, his chest. It heaved at an abnormal speed for the normally cool and controlled doctor.

“John?”

“31 weeks,” John swallowed. "Sherlock, Sherlock, she’s only 31 weeks. She’s early. She’s premature. She’s –”

“She is your daughter and she needs her father,” Sherlock stated sternly. “Just as Mary needs you.”

John finally snapped his sight up to meet with Sherlock’s serious stare. That was all it took. The horror of the situation. The anxiety of the reality of finally, actually being a father. The dread of not being there. None of it mattered. And Sherlock knew that that was all he would need to say. John would always be there for others, especially those he cared about. He put the people he loved ahead of himself, no matter what. Sometimes it was a characterization of his friend that made Sherlock furious, like when the assistant risked his skin to save the detective. But right then, he could use it to his advantage. John would worry later. And the man would never forgive himself if he fell into a panic attack and wasn’t there for his wife and daughter.

With a short and sharp nod, John pocketed his mobile and sprinted out the door alongside his friend.

Having Sherlock Holmes as your guide, one could navigate the city far faster than most on four wheels. They didn’t waste time trying to hail a cab. Sherlock took off down an alleyway, and John didn’t pause to question the route.

They would never beat the ambulance, but, factoring in the at least three minutes it would take to securely and safely move Mary, they just might make it. Sherlock had considered going straight to the hospital, but John would want to be with his wife every step of the way if he could. Mary was also quite stubborn. She would likely throw a bit of a fit and demand that they wait for her husband. The detective internally smiled at the image. Her struggling and protests would give them at least another two minutes. If he was lucky, Mrs. Hudson would try to shower the paramedics with stories and questions. Another sixty seconds.

But as Sherlock rounded the final corner to Baker Street, he realized that all his calculations were void. He had been so focused on the route, he hadn’t heard the sirens. Hadn’t smelled the smoke.

Hadn’t seen the fire.
Daddy

Chapter Notes

So here you get to see the birth of baby Watson! I really was going to make it mostly normal. Maybe have John rush off from a case to go to the hospital. But then I remember how much you people like your drama, suspense, angst, etc. And I really loved how much we got to see of Doctor!John in Season 3. He is such a strong character. I thought I'd let him deliver his own daughter into the world, surrounding by lots of dramatics of course! It's Sherlock! What would the show be without a little over the top drama?!

But as Sherlock rounded the final corner to Baker Street, he realized that all his calculations were void. He had been so focused on the route, he hadn't heard the sirens. Hadn't smelled the smoke.

Haven't seen the fire.

The block of flats across from 221 were currently ablaze.

Well, they certainly didn't have any luck, Sherlock thought, remembering Moriarty's bombs and the supposed gas leak.

This appeared to be yet another explosion, but on a larger scale. Cars had swerved during the blast and the street was a mess of tangled metal.

This couldn't be a coincidence. Balance of probability. A massive blast. On their street. At the exact time Mary went into labor.

He didn't have time to speculate though. John had already come upon the scene and was cursing.

"Mary."

It was the last word he uttered before he took off. The name was like the compressed spring of a revolver, driving the hammer, John, forward. He tore down the street, stopping only for a screaming and bleeding woman.

"You!" He hollered at the man he presumed to be the wailing woman's dazed husband that was crawling out of his car. "Put pressure on her abdomen. Get her to lie down. Now! Don't let her move."

He didn't wait for a response. John aimed again for 221 when he nearly tripped over a crying child.

The young boy was holding his head, which was currently leaking crimson. John bent down and examined it hurriedly.

"It's okay," John assured the child, "heads bleed more than the rest of the body. You're just fine. Just a scratch." He spun around to Sherlock. "Find his parents! The medics will care for these people first. Check everyone," John ordered. "Run triage. You're not a doctor, but you know enough. See who needs the most help, who's in critical condition, and make sure they get help first. It'll save the medics' time. I need to get to Mary!"

Sherlock couldn't help but swell with pride at his best friend. The man, who despite minute ago was nearly suffering an anxiety attack, whose wife was in labor, still managed to stop and help others. He admired the way John jumped to take control in these situations. It was even more remarkable considering that the former soldier was most likely somewhere in his mind flashing back to Afghanistan with the amount of wreckage, fire and chaos. Sure, he had his moments of fear. But when it really and truly matter, John Watson faced that fear head on, kicked it in the shins, and then marched right over it.
The detective, surprisingly, did as he was instructed without protest.

"Go to her," he nodded seriously and watched as John raced away.

John said a silent thanks to his landlady as he reached the flat. The front door was propped open for the paramedics and John didn't need to fight with the lock. He burst through the threshold and barreled down to 221C.

His heart seized a bit when he hurled his way into their flat. Mary was on the floor atop one of Mrs. Hudson's flowered towels, and she was cringing and crying in agony. It seems as though Mary had already instructed their landlady as several stacks of towels and blankets were nearby, along with pots of water and a bowl.

His wife was laying on her side, panting and following the breathing techniques she herself had taught so many others. Mrs. Hudson had already helped rid her of her trousers and pants. Stubborn Mary, though, was doing all she could to keep the baby inside.

"John," the weak gasp was so out of character for his strong wife that it nearly sent the man to his knees. "John, something's wrong."

Something was most definitely wrong. John didn't need to be the world's only consulting detective to figure that out. An explosion across their street. An explosion across their street, while they were on a case not far from home. An explosion across their street, while they were on a case not far from home, right when Mary went into labor. It wasn't as though it was Mary's due date either. Far from it. And Mary was a nurse. She would've recognized the signs.

Something was very wrong.

Something that boiled John's blood.

Someone, somehow, for some reason, was attacking his family. His daughter hadn't even taken her first breath in the world yet, and someone was using her against him.

He shook the thoughts away. They were questions and concerns for another time. A time when his wife was laying on the floor of their flat about to deliver their child.

John swiftly shed his jacket, tossing it carelessly across a chair and hurried toward the kitchen.

"Mrs. Hudson," he began firmly as he washed his hands, "start a fire. Turn up the heat. We need to get it warmer in here."

The landlady did as she was told as John quickly made his way to his wife's side.

"John, what happened?" She gasped. "What was all that noise outside?"

"Don't worry about that right now," John shook his head. "Just concentrate. Stay calm."

"She's early, John. She's too early," Mary swallowed.

"No, she isn't. 31 weeks. 96% survival rate. She'll be fine. She's got a nurse for a mum and a doctor for a dad. We'll get her through this."

"Where's the ambulance, John?" Mrs. Hudson piped in as she returned to the couple's side.

"It's, it's not coming," he started slowly, "not yet. It'll be here, soon."

"Not in time though," Mary finished the thought he wouldn't verbalize.

The pair shared a serious look for a moment before Mary grunted.

"It's too fast," Mary breathed. "It shouldn't hurt this much."

"Mary, tell me what happened."

"I was sleeping. It woke me up. There wasn't time --" she cut herself off with another groan.
"Mary, what are you – no, Mary. You can’t."

Mary was now holding her breath, her eyes clamping closed.

"Mary, you have to breath. The baby is coming now. You know it is. I don’t know what’s happening, but she’s coming. Our daughter is coming. You have to let her come. She’ll be okay. I’ve got you. We’ve got her."

"I can’t do this," Mary was weeping now – his Mary, tough, unflappable, Mary. "I’ve been trying to be so strong. I thought I was strong. I thought I was ready. I can’t be a mum. Not me. Not after everything –”

"Yes. Yes you can. You think I know what I’m doing here? I don’t have a clue how to be a dad. It doesn’t matter what you did. All that matters is this. Right now. I might not know how to be a father, but I know how to be a doctor. We can worry about all that other stuff later. We have the next eighteen years to screw up our kid.” He chuckled and smiled when she coughed out a short laugh. "You don’t have to any of that now. All you have to do today, is breathe, and push. You can do this, Mary."

Mary merely nodded as she finally allowed herself to return to those practiced breaths. Ever so carefully, John began shifting his wife off of her left side and onto her back. There was no more holding off the delivery. No positions or breathing or lack thereof were going to stop it now. Their baby was coming.

And it was in that precise moment that Sherlock decided to come charging inside.

"The explosion came from somewhere outside the building," he reported almost breathlessly. "Took down parts of the wall, started the fire and caused at least five car accidents, but no deaths."

"Explosion?" Mary sat up. "What explosion?"

"Sherlock!" John ground out, not looking back at the man.

"Oh my! Sherlock! What have you done?" John could hear Mrs. Hudson’s frantic voice from beside them.

"Why does everyone assume everything is my fault?" Sherlock huffed.

"Well, you are carrying a body, dear," Mrs. Hudson fired back.

"He – a what?" John snapped his head around to finally lay eyes on his friend, who indeed had a limp figure draped over his arms.

"I called Lestrade," Sherlock informed them. "This isn’t the only explo – incident," he corrected himself after a glare from his blogger. "It’s going to take the ambulances longer. I successfully deduced that one of the drivers in the accident was a medical student. She is uninjured and is tending to the other wounded as I instructed."

"And him?" John nodded impatiently at the teenager in Sherlock’s arms.

"You said to find those in critical condition and assure that they receive help first," Sherlock spoke as though the question was offensive. "He was critical but there was no one to treat him. I fear the medical student was out of her depths with him. I do also think he has stopped breathing."

"Jes – Sherlock," John swallowed, "get him on the ground, now. Lay him flat.” He paused as Sherlock followed his orders. "Now, get over here and hold my wife’s hand."

"You want me to what?" Sherlock’s eyebrows practically joined his hairline.

"Just do it!" John bellowed.

"Why am I doing this?" Sherlock was hesitant as he joined them and let Mary wrap her fingers around his.
"Because our daughter's coming and you just brought a dying man into our flat," John hollered. "Because Mary is about to have to push and she is going to squeeze your hand, and part of me, Sherlock, hopes it hurts."

"John –"

"Sherlock, I saw you read those stacks of baby books. There had to have been something in there about delivery. Now just shut up and do as I say." John spoke in his captain's voice as he turned over to the teenager. "Mrs. Hudson, the baby should be on her way out soon." He was already pumping the stranger's chest. "If I don't get him breathing in time, I need you to –"

"Oh, I know, dear," Mrs. Hudson waved a hand and knelt in front of Mary. "I've been around a long time, John. There was this one young woman, went into labor right in the middle of the café –"

"Not now Mrs. Hudson!" John interrupted as he began rescue breathing.

Mary screamed just as the teenager gasped. The stranger's eyes flew open as he sucked in eager breaths. Without hesitating, John flipped positions and was at Mary's side instantly once again.

"Mrs. Hudson, make sure he stays awake," John directed the woman to take his place. "Tell me immediately if he stops breathing again. Here, use this," he handed her two of the towels from the pile. "Keep pressure on the wounds to his chest and leg. Get him talking. Ask him his name." The doctor promptly turned his attention back to his wife.

"No wonder the clinic is boring to you," Mary teased tightly.

"Ready?" John looked into his wife's eyes.

"I don't think she's giving me much of a choice in the matter," Mary joked again.

And then it was happening.

John had of course delivered babies before. It wasn't something he did on a regular basis between Afghanistan and working in clinics, but it certainly wasn't anything new. And yet, this time, it was. Everything about it was new and terrifying and exciting and different.

And not because there was a barely conscious stranger laying on the other side of him. Not because a bomb had just gone off down the street. But because this wasn't some stranger. This was his wife. His child. His daughter. He was delivering his own daughter.

It wasn't just new or terrifying or exciting or different. Despite everything else, what John felt the most, what flooded him in that moment, was joy. Absolute, pure, joy.

His daughter's head peaked out first, soaking dark blonde locks making him laugh in elation. She was here. She was really, actually, properly on her way out to the world. Not just some picture on a scan. Not some ball of fists or kicks underneath Mary's belly. A baby. A child. He could touch her. Feel her. Nothing ever had felt more real and nothing had ever made him feel more alive than her life.

John guided his baby girl into his hands, all the while talking to his wife, comforting her. He gave Mrs. Hudson instruction as he unwrapped the umbilical cord from around his child. He directed Sherlock to hand him towels as he checked his child for breathing.

His silent child.

"She's not crying," he heard Mary's fear laden voice. "John, why isn't she crying?"

John stared down at his baby before practiced hands wiped and dried her, wrapping her tiny body in layers of towels. Her skin was wrinkled and tinted a sort of reddish-purple. He could faintly see the blood vessels underneath the thin skin as well and it made his stomach clench. She wasn't making any noise and her eyes remained shut. To an untrained eye, she seemed, well, John wasn't even going to think that.

Because she wasn't.
Because his daughter, his beautiful, newborn, little girl – was breathing.

He felt his own chest rise and fall a bit more rapidly at the sight and couldn't help the trickle of tears that worked their way down his cheek.

"She's breathing," he swallowed, nodding and smiling, and – was he laughing? "She's breathing."

"She is?" Mary's relief and joy practically sang through those two words.

"Yeah," John chuckled and moved to place his child on her mother's chest.

Lifting up her shirt, John unwrapped his daughter enough so that she could lay on Mary. The skin-to-skin contact would keep the baby warmer and provide the newborn comfort. He also knew the mothers needed it just as much as the infants. Covering his daughter once again now that she was laying safely on Mary's chest, John leaned over to place a quick kiss on his wife's forehead.

"She's beautiful," Mary cooed.

"Good thing she got all your looks," John teased.

"She's," Sherlock paused at John's glare.

"Don't say it Sherlock," John shook his head. "They're supposed to be messy and –"

"I wasn't going to say that," Sherlock interrupted seriously. "I was going to say, that she is perfect." He paused and shared a smile with his friends. "Although, perfect is a variable adjective. She –"

"Just, shut up, and say congratulations," John scoffed.

"Congratulations."

And John knew by the look in Sherlock's eyes that the detective meant it.

Another miracle to add to the day's list.
Abigail Grace Regina Abbot never imagined she would be a lot of things.

After a childhood of living on the streets, she had finally find a home.

After being brutally beaten and forced into a life of crime and carnage to survive, she would go on to escape that horror and become Mary Morstan.

Her first "trainer" told her that she was far too weak to stay alive in the field. Yet that apparent weakling of a woman rose to the top of her trade.

The idea of marriage had never appealed to her and she certainly never envisioned herself in the role. She had watched her parents nearly kill each other, and then her. So when John Watson quite literal crashed into her life – no, really, he bumped right into her and knocker her over, which, by the way, she was most certainly never going to let him forget – she hadn't expected it to last. She had waited silently for the other shoe to drop. For one of her horrid past secrets to be revealed and scare the man away. For when he came to his senses and released that she wasn't worth any amount of his love. Yet he never did. And when Mary said "I do", and became Mary Watson, she thought that that was the greatest moment of her entire existence. She had proved a lot of other people wrong in her life, and this time he had done so to himself.

And it was something good. So incredibly, wonderfully, good.

She would prove herself wrong again, when 8 months later Mary Watson became something else entirely. Something she had never, not once, even dreamed of becoming.

A mother.

Mother.

Such a strange thing really. How a solitary word, two tiny syllables, one title, could alter a woman so entirely. The word "mother" had always filled her with anger and sorrow. It had left her internally wincing, awaiting the next slap and cut from a far too expensive diamond ring that certainly wasn't coming from her dad's day job. Mother had meant fear, anger, abuse, grief and guilt.

And yet, in one single moment, that word started singing quite a different song. It had a new ring to it now.

Mother.

Her, Mary Watson, a mother. Of course, at first, it had her panicking. It brought about all those dreadful adjectives to the front of her mind. But in the same second, she realized something. Something other people might take lifetimes and several children of their own to do. She knew in that moment that she was not her own mother. Leaving her past life, meeting John, had transformed her. Given her new life. She didn't need to be her mother. She didn't need to the person she once was. She was going to be the mother of her own child. Her and John's child.

And suddenly the word had a whole new meaning.

Hope, joy, love, excitement, and yes, still some fear. Ok, so possibly quite a whole big barrel of
fear. But it was a different sort of fear. Not fright for her own life. But apprehension for her new role. Anxiety over the safety of her child. A good, stirring kind of fear.

There were times, though, when true terror tore through the mother's practiced and poised exterior. Times like now.

When that daughter he had held so much horror over her birth, was possibly facing death.

It's amazing how life or death situations can spark such sentiment and nostalgia.

When Mary had awoken to a sudden sharp pain in her stomach, she nearly had thought nothing of it. Another kick from the baby perhaps.

But then it happened again.

Not a kick.

Contractions.

Contractions at 31 weeks.

If the aspect of being a mother petrified her, the possibility of failing her child before she had even been born was enough to push her over the edge.

She couldn't do this. Not alone.

She needed John.

Mary's hand slapped against the bedside table frantically, sliding about the surface in search for her mobile. Instead, she simply succeeded in knocking over the lamb and shoving the clock onto the floor. She had to find. Had to call John. Needed to -

She wasn't expecting herself to scream as she tried to sit up, but there it came, slipping from her throat outside of her volition. Another yelp escaped as she tried again.

This was too sudden. Too painful. Too soon.

She didn't even need to be a nurse to know all that. Being a nurse didn't do her much good at the moment anyway as panic flooded her brain.

"Mrs. Hudson!"

Never before had Mary been so incredibly grateful for the flat's paper thin walls. She vowed never to complain about being able to hear Sherlock's violin in the middle of the night again if her landlady could hear her.

As if on cue, the woman came bustling in, straight through to the bedroom without hesitating.

"Oh my! Are you alright, dear? Why, of course not! Silly question. Shall I call an ambulance?"


"Where, dear?" Mrs. Hudson called from the sitting room as she had already scurried off in search of the device.

"By the door," Mary called, cringing as she finally succeeded in sitting up.

"I'm afraid I don't see it."

The landlady was muttering something else from the other room but Mary didn't hear. Pain washed over her, dulling her senses as she shakily stood. She shuffled slowly to the doorway, clinging to the threshold, and then pushed herself into the living room.
“Do you want to use mine?” Mrs. Hudson turned and gasped at the sight of the pregnant and panting woman - and the puddle of liquid dripping out underneath her. “Oh, Mary! Your water just broke!” The landlady could nearly hear Sherlock making some obscene comment about stating the obvious in the back of her mind. “You shouldn’t have gotten up! Here, sit down.” She began directing Mary to the chair by her elbow.

Mary could do little else but comply. She was nearly sitting when another contraction came over her and she staggered sideways.

“There,” Mary gasped, weakly pointing to her mobile perched on the mantle before grinding her teeth together in a groan.

“That’s it,” Mrs. Hudson stood and hurried to fetch the phone. “I’m calling an ambulance.”

“I need John,” Mary repeated raggedly.

“What you need is an ambulance,” Mrs. Hudson reprimanded. “Don’t worry, I’ll let John know.”

Mrs. Hudson quickly explained the situation and gave her address as she raced out of the flat and out to the front door, propping it open for the paramedics. Upon her return to 221C, she had already hung up and fired off a text to the father to be. Sherlock had schooled her on text messaging years prior.

“Ambulance and John are both on their way, dear,” Mrs. Hudson assured the younger woman. “Now, tell me what you need.” Her voice between those two sentences, shifted from gentle mother, to commanding grandmother.

“I’ll be fine,” Mary shook her head.

“You’re worse than Sherlock,” Mrs. Hudson admonished. “You look like you’re ready to drop this child any second. Tell me.”

“Blankets and towels,” Mary conceded after a long pause. “Lay one on the floor for me to go on. John put together a baby bag for the hospital last week. Um, there’s a hat for the baby in the nursery. It should be with the bag. We’ll need a - a bowl of warm water and some plastic bags. There’s a syringe in John’s bag by the door.” She was still ticking items off as Mrs. Hudson ran about when another contraction took control.

Much too fast.

Her baby was coming and she wasn’t ready.
Mommy

Much too fast.

Her baby was coming and she wasn't ready.

It wasn't ready.

Could the baby even survive?

It was terribly premature, but there was definitely something wrong. The speed. The suddenness. The pain. Oh, the pain. Mary never remembered feeling agony like this every before in her entire life. And she had endured her fair share of physical pain.

Her training hadn't been a walk in the park. If gang initiations where they beat you so you won't break were bad, what she had endured was horrific. She had never cared about the pain before. Of course she felt it. Of course she screamed. But it was nothing compared to this. This agony was all consuming. And it wasn't just about her. So, even though this pain was so incredibly worse. It was better. Because it mattered. It was to bring her child into the world.

And that was more than worth the suffering.

Mary couldn't deny the sudden weight that seemed to float off her shoulder upon her husband's bursting entrance into the flat.

There was still the pain – so much pain. And still she harbored that shaking terror. But somehow, when John walked through the door, she knew it was going to be okay.

She had been waiting for him. Knowing he would make it in time. Because that was the man that he was. Loyal to the very end. He would never allow her to go through this alone of his own volition.

She was trying so desperately hard to keep this baby from coming. As a nurse, she knew the foolishness and futility of such ambition. As a birthing mother, she quite frankly didn't care.

And then they heard it.

The explosion.

A blast and screams and car horns and metal against metal.

"Oh my," was all Mrs. Hudson managed to gasp.

"Go, see," Mary prompted the woman.

"I'm not going anywhere," Mrs. Hudson shook her head stubbornly. "I don't care if it's the end of the world out there. I'm staying right here, with you."

"Thank you," Mary whispered earnestly, squeezing her landlady's hand.

As if on cue from the blast, she felt it happening. Her baby was coming. Her daughter wasn't going to wait for her dad.

She desperately tried the techniques she had taught others, lying on her side and breathing practiced breaths.

Minutes that to the mother felt like hours later, a frantic and winded John Watson came crashing through the door.

"John," the weak breath was all she could muster for a moment. "John, something's wrong."

She watched as a patchwork quilt of emotions blanketed her husband's features. She saw him quickly find his resolve and hastily rip his jacket off, walking purposefully toward the kitchen. He
exchanged words with Mrs. Hudson, but Mary wasn’t listening. She was too busy noting the dust and dirt decorating John’s trousers, and was that blood he was washing from his hands?

"John, what happened?" She gasped when he drew down to her side. "What was all that noise outside?"

"Don’t worry about that right now," John shook his head. "Just concentrate. Stay calm."

"She’s early, John. She’s too early," Mary swallowed and couldn’t stop the fearful words from spilling out.

"No, she isn’t. 31 weeks. 96% survival rate. She’ll be fine. She’s got a nurse for a mum and a doctor for a dad. We’ll get her through this."

Mary smiled softly and sadly at her husband’s strength and reassurance. She knew just as well as he that he was internally probably panicking too. He was being strong for her. And she loved him that much more for it.

And then he told her the ambulance wasn’t coming. Not in time, at least. This was definitely not what she had pictured how her pregnancy would come to an end. She had been dreamily hoping of white sheets, an uncomfortable hospital bed and the stale stench of disinfectant.

"It’s too fast," Mary breathed. "It shouldn’t hurt this much."

"Mary, tell me what happened." John’s eyes were driving into her own.

"I was sleeping. It woke me up. There wasn’t time –" she cut herself off with another groan as she felt the pain explode once more.

John was here, yes. But she still didn’t want to have this baby here, at home. It was irrational. It was dangerous. But she wasn’t exactly thinking clearly.

She knew all the complications that could arise from homebirths. She knew the luck that she and her husband seemed to have. The baby had a better chance of survival if they could just wait until the ambulance came.

"Mary, what are you – no, Mary. You can’t."

Mary was now holding her breath, her eyes clamping closed defiantly. It was like nothing else she had ever experience in her life. The pain was almost enough to push her into unconsciousness.

"Mary, you have to breath. The baby is coming now. You know it is. I don’t know what’s happening, but she’s coming. Our daughter is coming. You have to let her come. She’ll be okay. I’ve got you. We’ve got her."

John’s words seeped into her soul, stirring everything she was trying so hard to repress.

"I can’t do this," Mary was openly weeping now and couldn’t stop it if she tried. "I’ve been trying to be so strong. I thought I was strong. I thought I was ready. I can’t be a mum. Not me. Not after everything –"

She had done so many terrible things. Too many terrible things. She didn’t deserve any of this. Not a husband that loved her this much. Not a daughter. She would ruin this. She would fail this child.

"Yes. Yes you can." Mary felt his firm hand take hers. "You think I know what I’m doing here? I don’t have a clue how to be a dad. It doesn’t matter what you did. All that matters is this. Right now. I might not know how to be a father, but I know how to be a doctor. We can worry about all that other stuff later. We have the next eighteen years to screw up our kid." She couldn’t stopper the short laugh that escaped at that. "You don’t have to any of that now. All you have to do today, is breathe, and push. You can do this, Mary."

Mary nodded up at her husband as she finally allowed herself to return to those practiced breaths. Ever so carefully, John began shifting her off of her left side and onto her back. She tried to help where she could but only managed to cause herself more pain. There was no more holding off the
delivery. No positions or breathing or lack thereof were going to stop it now. Their baby was coming.

And she came.

Despite Sherlock’s appearance with a dying teenager and his hesitation to hold her hand. Despite John having to save a life as he was also trying to bring one into the world. Despite the chaos going on right outside their door and within their walls. Despite her worries that everything would go wrong.

Her baby was here.

Mary had of course assisted in deliveries before. It wasn’t something he did on a regular basis working in clinics, but it certainly wasn’t anything new. And yet, this time, it was. Everything about it was new and terrifying and exciting and different.

And not because there was a barely conscious stranger laying on the other side of her husband. Not because there just had been some sort of explosion outside. But because this wasn’t somebody else giving birth. This was her. Her child. Her daughter. He was giving birth to her own daughter.

It wasn’t just new or terrifying or exciting or different. Despite everything else, what Mary felt the most, what filled her in that moment, was joy. Absolute, pure, joy.

John was laughing and Mary could see hair peeking out from amidst her husband’s hands and the mass of towels and fluids. She could see her daughter. She was here. She was really, actually, properly in the world. Not just some picture on a scan. Not some ball of fists or kicks against her belly. A baby. A child. She could reach out and touch her. Feel her.

Her child.

Her silent child.

His silent child.

"She’s not crying," Mary could do nothing to help the panic that returned, pulsing through her voice. "John, why isn’t she crying?"

"She’s breathing," she watched him swallow, nodding and smiling and laughing. "She’s breathing."

"She is?" Mary’s relief and joy practically sang through those two words.

"Yeah," John chuckled and moved to place his child on her mother’s chest.

Mary readily accepted the new weight against her breast. Now she could properly touch her. Feel her. Nothing ever had felt more real and nothing had ever made her feel more alive in her life.

Mary gazed down at her baby with loving and tender eyes reserved only for a mother and her child. The baby’s skin was wrinkled and tinted a sort of reddish-purple. She had a mess of hair for a newborn, especially being premature.

"She’s beautiful," Mary cooed, gingerly rubbing the infant’s back to stimulate the sound she so desperately desired to hear, but new would be driving her mad within weeks.

"Good thing she got all your looks," John teased.

"She’s," Sherlock paused and Mary didn’t need to look away from her daughter to know the man was receiving one of her husband’s looks.

"Don’t say it Sherlock," John scolded. “They’re supposed to be messy and –”

"I wasn’t going to say that," Sherlock interrupted seriously. “I was going to say, that she is perfect.” He paused and Mary glanced up to smile at him. "Although, perfect is a variable adjective. She –"
"Just, shut up, and say congratulations," John scoffed.

"Congratulations."

And Mary knew there was no fibbing or sarcasm or double meaning behind the detective's eyes. That was when she realized she was still holding his hand with the one that wasn't caressing her child. She wondered how hard she had gripped and almost felt guilty. She gave the man's fingers one last gentle squeeze before lifting her hand to his face. They shared a moment as she mouthed her thanks.

Bringing that hand up to the baby's back, Mary reached out with her other arm that had been on her child and took her husband's hand in hers. They all watched expectantly as Mary continued to rub the newborn's back.

And then, like a sweet song, a soft cry rang out through the flat. The subtle noise built up to small screams and Mary had never been so happy to hear a baby cry before. So maybe she wouldn't complain in the weeks and months and years to come when her child cried. At least she liked to think she wouldn't. Because, in that moment, it was the most precious and rewarding sound she could imagine.
The Godfather

Chapter Notes

Time for some baby fun with Sherlock! You know you were all waiting for this! The Sherlock/babyWatson chapters are the ones I pretty much had ready from the start! I love the idea of Sherlock trying to deal with a baby. I hope you enjoy this as much as I enjoyed writing it!

William Sherlock Scott Holmes never imagined he would be a lot of things.

After a childhood of being told time and again by his elder brother that he was inferior and an "idiot", he had gone on to test at genius levels in school.

After being brutally bullied for his lanky frame and abnormal intelligence and behaviors, he would go on to become a martial arts master and take down criminals.

His first teacher told him that he had far too small a heart to be anything more than a sociopath, and far too big of a brain to not be considered normal. Yet that apparent small hearted, big brained man saved more men and women and children in his days as a detective than he could count. And no matter what anyone said, even Sherlock, it wasn't always just about the case.

The idea of friendship had never appealed to him and he certainly never envisioned himself in the role. He had watched Mycroft isolate himself, and then watched as other children only feared or hated him for his curse – gifts, Mummy called them. So when John Watson quite literally limped into his life, he hadn't expected it to last. He had waited silently for the other shoe to drop. For one of his horrid habits to scare the man away. For when he finally had enough of his midnight violin or kitchen experiments or crime centered profession. Yet he never did. And when John called Sherlock his best friend, Sherlock just thought that that might have been the single most shocking moments of his entire existence. He proclaimed to abhor sentiment, but there was no shielding himself from it that day. John's declaration had undoubtedly moved him. Even if he would never fully confess the weight of the words on his heart. He had proved a lot of other people wrong in his life, and this time he had done so to himself.

He would prove himself wrong again when 8 months later William Sherlock Scott Holmes became something else entirely. Something he had never, not once, even dreamed of becoming.

A godfather.

Godfather.

Such a tediously peculiar thing really. How a sole word, two trivial syllables, one title, could change a man so absolutely. The word "godfather" wasn't something he had ever truly known. He supposed he had a godfather in one of his various uncles that he never cared to see. The only attributes he had accredited to the word were dull, useless and sentimental. And something about a famous film he cared nothing about learning about.

And yet, in one lone moment, that word started playing quite a new song. It had a different ring to it now.

Godfather.

Him, Sherlock Holmes, a godfather. Of course, at first, it appalled him. It brought about all those abhorrent adjectives to the forefront of his mind. But in the same singular second, he realized something. This wasn't some arbitrary title to some stranger. This wasn't a word he was studying in some book. He was going to the godfather of his best friend's child. John and Mary's child.

And suddenly the word had a whole new meaning.
Anticipation, happiness, gratitude, honor, pride, and yes, a trickle of fear. Okay, so maybe a downpour of fear. But it was a different kind of fear. Not dread at sentiment or terror for himself. But consternation for his new role. Concern over the safety of this child. A good, thrilling, kind of fear.

Being afraid was not something Consulting Detective Sherlock Holmes readily admitted to. He didn't talk about his scare at Baskerville. He didn't let on to John when he was actually, secretly, truly fearful for their lives during a case. And he never even considered hinting to the expecting parents that he was internally properly petrified at the idea of his best friend having a child.

There were times, though, when true terror tore through the self proclaimed sociopath's stoic and cold defenses.

Times like now.

When that daughter of his best friend he had held so much horror over her birth, was possibly facing death.

When he felt utterly helpless in the face of impending tragedy.

It's amazing, Sherlock thought, and quite appalling, how life or death situations can spark such sentiment and nostalgia.

John paced the floor of 221C, mobile pressed up against his ear. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see his daughter trying desperately to crawl - off the end of the coffee table. How she got atop it, he hadn't the foggiest.

He was still vaguely listening to the voice on the other end of the line as he rushed over and scooped his child up in his free arm and placed her on the floor by his feet.

"Yes, yes, I'm still here," John grunted. "No, I can't." A beat. "I can't come in." Another pause while John listened to the desperate woman and he blocked his baby from rolling right into the wall. "Because I already told you. We don't have anyone to watch -"

"Please, Doctor Watson -"

"John, who is it?"

John glanced up as his wife hurried out of the bedroom and began gathering her purse and coat. John put the phone against his chest.

"They want me to come in."

"What? Today?" Mary sighed. "Do you want me to stay? This is your first day off in weeks."

"And it's your first day back since you had the baby," John added. "Besides, then they'd just be short another person. Mickey's kid was in a car accident, Rachel went into labor in the middle of her shift and Doctor Benson's out with laryngitis." He brought the phone to his ear again. "Yes, yes, hold on Carol." He dropped the phone to his side as he lifted his daughter into his available arm just before she could start crying from the lack of attention. "Where's Mrs. Hudson?"

"With her sister for the weekend, remember?" Mary reminded him as she slipped her shoes on. "Molly?"

"Working," John shook his head.

"What about Mrs. Turner?" Mary smiled.

"Already tried ringing her," John huffed. "I've tried everyone. Course, there's always asking Mycroft for a favor. He could probably get us the best nanny in London, but I'd be worried he'd have her being trained for the secret service before she's out of diapers."

"Well, what about," Mary let her words drop as she glanced up at the ceiling with a nod.

"Oh, come on, John," Mary rolled her eyes as she pulled her coat on. "He's been around her since she was born."

"Yes, but with one of us or Mrs. Hudson present," John argued. "He wouldn't even agree to it anyway. I know him." John looked down as he heard a muffled voice and suddenly remembered his phone. "Sorry, Carol, yeah. Still here. Just trying to get things sorted. Yeah, Mary's on her way in now. I still don't think i can -"

"Sherlock!"

John was too distracted to have noticed Mary exit their flat until she was already hollering up the stairs. She was using that tone too. John would scream his flatmate's name until his throat was dry, but if Mary used that conspiratorial I-need-a-favor-and-it-regards-John-and-something-he-doesn't-want-to-do tone, the man came happily running.

The detective in question appeared in the threshold mere moments later, sporting a pair of safety goggles and an apron.

"Sherlock," Mary started before John could object, "John and I both have to go to work and we need you to watch Billie."

"Uh, no," John cut in, adjusted his grip on his daughter and mobile, "no, we don't."

"Yes," Mary reached over and plucked her child from her husband's arms and proceeded to hold her out to a reluctant but ready Sherlock. She didn't give either man time to react as she pressed Billie into the detective's arms. "We do."

"I don't have to go in," John protested and then winced as he heard Carol's shrill cries from the other end of the line. "We - we can find someone else."

"John," Mary sighed.

"You have to watch her, Sherlock," John voiced from the other room. "And I mean, watch her. You can't just get bored of her like everything else. Don't go off into your mind palace while she wanders outside."

"John," Mary prompted again.

"She's crawling now," John continued. "Kids can get into a lot when they start crawling. Rubbish, electrical cords, outlets, cupboards. Fall down stairs. Keep that door on the kitchen locked!"
"John -"

"And I swear, if you just pawn her off on someone else, like a neighbor or one of your bloody homeless network, I will throttle you."

He was back in the sitting room now, tugging on his coat.

"If you need something, or have questions, or if anything happens, call us. If you can't reach us, call Mrs. Hudson at her sister's. Call Molly Hooper or Lestrade or Mike. Call Mycroft. Call your own parents. Call someone."

"John!"

John whirled around to face his wife, who was half scolding, half smirking.

"Are you sure you can handle this?" John sighed, turning to his friend.

"John, as encouraging as your lack of faith in me is, I am quite positive I am capable of playing nursemaid for a few hours without endangering your child as you so fear."

"Have you every actually done this before?" John added.

"I once had to carry the baby of a victim while on a particularly intriguing criminal chase," Sherlock reminisced. "All was going well until the infant's cries gave away our hidden location. I had to fight off the man with only one of my arms -"

"How - " John cut himself off and shook his head. "Nope. I don't even want to know. Just, look after her." He met his friend's now serious gaze and then dropped his eyes to his daughter. "Be good. Don't listen to a word he says."

Sherlock huffed and John grinned and followed his wife out the door. Of course the father wished to protest. Leaving his only child in the hands of one Sherlock Holmes wasn't the most preferred of situations, but there was no arguing with Mary though. And, on some level, John knew she was correct. Sherlock was the baby's godfather. John had been overbearing around Sherlock and his child, to say the least. Sherlock may have been a self-proclaimed sociopath, but this was his daughter. He wouldn't do anything to put her in danger, would he?
More Sherlock/baby Watson cuteness. This is a flashback WITHIN a flashback. Let me know when you start getting confused or feeling trippy.

Sherlock stood stiffly in the threshold of 221C for a total of sixty four seconds.

It was on the sixty fifth second that the little lump of a human in his hands began to squirm.

Sherlock had scrupulously studied his best friend's daughter in the nine months, three days she had been in this world. He knew her every tick, tantrum, gesture, facial expression - and their subsequent meanings. Probably better than the girl's parents. He had even said so aloud once, and promptly received a swat on the arm with a magazine from Mrs. Hudson and a glare from said parental units.

There was the time when John was in 221B with Billie while trying to let Mary have a lie-in. They had only been home from hospital one week and the newborn still required special care and both men could see how draining it all had been on the mother who had barely been able to break to breathe since the birth. Well, technically, she could have. She was pushed to rest while in the hospital, but usually refused, opting to stay with her daughter, tend to her needs and plan for future care. She was stubbornly wearing herself down.

So that morning, or more accurately, middle of the night, John had switched off the alarm, surreptitiously slipped out from under the covers and carried a thankfully slumbering baby Watson up the stairs to 221B where Sherlock was, for a unique change, actually himself sleeping. John wrapped his daughter across his chest and laid back on the sofa, softly reading to his child. Six days in a row, baby Billie had awoken in the 3 o'clock hour of the morning shrieking louder than John had ever thought her little lungs could manage. He knew he had to act ahead of schedule if he was to keep Mary from being disturbed. There it was, like clockwork, not fifteen minutes later, the bundle on his chest began to stir. She was starting to scream when John stood and began swaying and singing to her. He wasn't exactly a fan of waking Sherlock either, but the man could survive on little to no sleep and would hardly mind. He would simply wake up, mumble some sort of halfhearted complaint, and then go off to work on an experiment or musical composition.

John had hardly thought this when the man did indeed shuffle bleary eyed from his bedroom. If he was surprised by his flat's middle of the night guests, he didn't show it. Without more than a muttered word, the detective disappeared into the kitchen. John was almost speechless when he returned, two cups of tea in hand.

"Nice plan," Sherlock commented casually as he thumbed through his troves of books, "but Mrs. Hudson's walls, or floors in this case, aren't exactly sound proof."

"Well, I was hoping I could get her to stop," John grunted as he rocked the newborn. "She cries. Mary gets up. Five minutes later, she's not crying. I thought, you know, she just held her."

"Not your best deduction, then," Sherlock nodded. "I'll take the case."

John threw his head back.

"My daughter isn't a case, Sherlock."

"Mmm," Sherlock made a disinterested noise and began walking circles around John and the baby.

"Sherlock? Sher -" John spun to face the man. "What are you doing?"
"She isn't hungry. Not tired, obviously. Definitely not a fan of the whole - rocking - thing you are doing."

"Who? You?" John asked, already annoyed.

"I think having a child has somehow lowered your I.Q., John." Sherlock rolled his eyes. "No. Of course not, me. Her. She doesn't like it."

"What?" John scoffed. "How can you possibly know that?"

"I don't know. I notice." Sherlock huffed. 

"Yeah, yeah. So you always say. She's a baby, Sherlock. You can't deduce a baby."

"Well, apparently, I can." Sherlock bit back.

"Okay, then," John sighed. "Fine. Your the Baby Interpreter now. So, tell me what she wants."

"Well, it is proven that sometimes infants simply cry for no reason. Tedious. This isn't the case here. I said, no rocking."

"Babies like that," John argued.

"Well your baby doesn't." Sherlock quirked his brow. "So, not hungry. Not tired. I don't see any signs of physical discomfort to indicate colic or -"

"Hey, I'm the doctor here." John cut in. "I'd think I'd know if my own kid had colic."

"Apparently you don't know when your own child doesn't want to be rocked though." Sherlock smirked. "She isn't too warm or too cold. Her nose isn't doing that flattening - thing. She doesn't like the tension you're creating in the room by arguing with me."

"So, this is my fault?" John clipped.

"Not initially, no," Sherlock waved off the comment. "But you're certainly not helping. It obviously isn't a cry of wanting to be held. You can tell by her brow and the fact that you holding her is doing absolutely nothing to stave off the insufferable noise. Maybe she prefers Mummy instead."

"Hey!"

"Separation anxiety common among infants, doctor. You should know that. No need to feel threatened or offended by a baby. Really." Sherlock sighed. "But I don't think that is the case either." He glanced at his watch. "Babies have an annoying tendency to wake throughout the night. It's attributed to -"

"I know all of this," John huffed. "I'm a father and a doctor. I know the facts. Now stop quoting baby books and actually help me."

"3:17." Sherlock stated simply.

"What?"

"3:17," Sherlock repeated.

"I know what time it is, but what does that have to do with helping me?" John questioned, exasperated.

"Everything, John," Sherlock smiled smugly and went to the window with a flourish.

Begrudgingly, John followed.

"Mrs. Turner's 'married ones', one of them works for some broadcasting company," Sherlock started quickly, as if explaining a murder case suspect. "News, or something. Unimportant. Every morning, for the past three years, he has gone outside between the hours of 3 and 3:30 to go for a morning jog with their dog before returning to get ready for work. Always leaving by 4. His route
Moro reflex, or startle reflex. When a stimulus causes the baby to startle, the legs flex and the arms stretch out. This stimulus can be a loud noise, an unexpected touch, bad dream - or a dog barking. The reflex lasts only a few seconds but can wake a sleeping baby. How does Mary put Billie to sleep at night?"

"She signs to her," John shrugged.

"Hmph," Sherlock shook his head. "And you two call yourself medical professionals."

"Sherlock," John warned.

"The use of 'props' is the most common reason to cause babies to awake during the night," Sherlock started, going to the shelf and opening it to a specific page to show John. "She also did this when Billie was in the womb to settle her if I remember correctly. Anything the child grows to rely on when she falls asleep, she will also need when she wakes up in the middle of the night. She will not be able to soothe herself back to sleep, without that particular 'prop'."

"I should've never let you read those," John shook his head.

"Then you'd be stuck with a crying baby and no remedy," Sherlock spun around on his heel and crossed the room.

"Remedy? What remedy? The whole point of this was to quiet her without waking Mary."

"I never said we were going to wake her," Sherlock tutted. "Do keep up. The more you uselessly talk, the longer your child is crying. The longer your child is crying, the higher the probability that Mary will wake or that I will grow far too frustrated with that noise and be forced to wake her myself." He paused and, with a flourish, picked up his violin and bow. "I have a theory."

"No, no. You are not playing now," John groaned. "I thought we were trying to keep Mary asleep."

"The two of you have both spent enough nights in the building to have grown accustomed to the sound of my playing," Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Believe me, I've tested that theory."

"Tested it?" John asked suspiciously. "Tested it how?"

"By playing outside your bedroom door of course," Sherlock said as if it was the most simple answer in the world.

"Sherlock!" John hissed.

"Oh, please, John," Sherlock moaned. "I didn't go in your bedroom. I know how you like to go on about privacy. But it proved my point then, and it proves it now. Neither of you woke. And I did this experiment more than once to make sure the data was accurate."

"Sherlock -"

"I think Billie is picking up on your anger, John," Sherlock frowned. "You really should learn how to control your temper around infants. Especially your own."

John huffed and held his breath, along with a colorful retort.

"It isn't Mary's voice, but the principal is still the same. Besides, music has been proven to help soothe -"

"I told you to stop quoting those books," John sighed. "Just - just play. Try it."

Sherlock took up his bow and began stroking the strings delicately. It took a few measures, but eventually the squirming and screaming bundle in John's arms settled into soon-to-be slumber. Sherlock watched the infant drift rather smugly and continued to play as John carefully sat down in his old chair, closing his eyes in exhaustion.

It was a soft melody that John vaguely recognized as a lullaby of sorts. He wasn't going to even
ask how Sherlock knew lullabies. It seemed to be a similar song to those that the detective had once played for his blogger when the former soldier was in the throws of a particularly plaguing nightmare. They didn’t talk about those nights though.

John was pretty sure they wouldn’t talk about this night either.

And that was the last coherent thought the father had before he himself sank into the soothing and sweeping song and was swept away into sleep.

Sherlock smiled at the slumbering pair in the armchair before bringing the number to a close. With practiced and possibly somewhat hesitant movements, Sherlock gingerly plucked the newborn from her father’s grasp. Cradling the child in his arms, Sherlock allowed himself to gaze down at his best friend’s daughter with a look he would not share in the company of others, or at least, those who weren’t sleeping. Draping a blanket over John with his free arm, Sherlock quietly exited the flat and crept down to 221C.

Pushing the door open, he slipped soundlessly inside. He crossed the sitting room with a noiseless nature he had perfected in his years as a detective. Upon reaching the bedroom, he propped the door that was already slightly ajar open with his foot, peering in on the thankfully still deeply slumbering Mary Watson.

Both parents desperately needed the rest. He had nearly considered slipping a compound into their food, especially Mary’s, so that they would fall, and stay, asleep. He had decided against it at the last minute, but did dose the mother with some perfectly harmless sleeping pills. She wouldn’t have woken to the baby crying that night, or to a truck driving straight through their bedroom wall for that matter. He wouldn’t drug John again. Not after what happened - last time. He also hadn’t known of the man’s plans to bring Billie up to 221B. In the end, it had worked out as Sherlock had hoped. Both parents were asleep, and judging by the label on the medication and the exhaustion written all over his best friend’s face, they would remain that way for quite awhile.

Bringing the baby into the nursery, Sherlock settled the infant into her crib. The movement caused the child to stir and Sherlock acted quickly before she could begin another crying catastrophe. With no violin at his disposal, he did the only thing he could.

Sherlock Holmes, sang.

“Well I’ve never been a man of many words. And there’s nothing I could say that you haven’t heard. But I’ll sing you love songs ’till the day I die. The way I’m feeling, I can’t keep it inside. I’ll sing a sweet serenade whenever you’re feeling sad. And a lullaby each night before you go to bed. I’ll sing to you for the rest of your life. The way I’m feeling, I can’t keep it inside. No, I can’t keep it inside.”

Despite John’s proclamations, Sherlock wasn’t entirely obtuse when it came to children. Yes, he had ready every single baby book available in London so he had the factual knowledge. But he had other experience as well. Mummy always did so love being the good Samaritan and neighbor. And she enjoyed motherhood far too much. Her two boys apparently weren’t enough for her. When Sherlock was a teenager, his mother had taken up playing nanny to the neighbor children and oftentimes was roped into helping her. He would never admit these events to John, of course.

But, eventually, he would prove to John that he was willing, and capable, of living up to his title as godfather.
Babies were boring.

Or at least, that's what Sherlock would tell someone if asked.

But, in secret, to the genius, they were absolutely fascinating. Minds to mold. Blank canvases. And not vacant from years of disuse or stupidity. Ignorance and unintelligence were entirely different. Even Sherlock recognized this.

Children didn't balk at his abilities. Sometimes older ones were actually quite captivated by it. He found that odd. When he himself had been young, his peers had thought him to be a freak. Now that he was an adult, children at that same age instead assaulted him questions and intrigue. Not all of them were like Archie, would he still secretly exchanged emails with, and were necessarily fond of the more grotesque side of his work. But the majority seemed enthralled by his observations and attitude.

Mary had once teased that it was because Sherlock was still a kid himself.

Billie was an infant and couldn't exactly express interest in his particular skill set, but she still seemed to be raptured by him nonetheless.

And as he was with her.

She would calm at his deep voice and just stare up with wide eyes at him as he spoke with others, to himself or read aloud.

Sherlock used this to his advantage. Most kids were only this captivated for so long before they started to grow older and waste their brains away on silly games and telly, and soon enough relationships and sex – and more telly.

Mary and John were already above average in Sherlock's standards. They were both clever and therefore Sherlock knew their daughter was already going to be ahead of the curve. And he was going to do everything in his power to push her even further.

His first endeavor in babysitting had barely begun and he had already taken Billie up to 221B, settled the two of them in his chair and had gone over several pages of The Children's Encyclopedia by Arthur Mee when he switched to The Lamplighter by Maria S. Cummins. A sentimental novel, but a classic nonetheless. He already had lesson plans in place for the first several years of the child's existence, with correlating selected books and articles. He had found sticking to one thing in particular to be tiresome in his youth and often needed to switch between books or activities, if not do them simultaneously, to keep his brain stimulated. Therefore, he had transferred this into his instructions. He would spend time on the sciences, literature – Shakespeare, classics and the like; nothing with silly storylines or ridiculous illustrations, and so forth.

"‘Good God! to think upon a child/That has no childish days,/No careless play, no frolics wild,/No words of prayer and praise.’" Sherlock paused. "That was a quote, at the beginning of the book," he explained casually to the infant. "Authors do that sometimes. Quotes, poems. Simply more sentiment. But, on with it," He cleared his throat. "‘It was growing dark in the city –’"
then thought that it could be John or Mary asking for updates. If he didn’t respond, one of them could surely come charging through the front door, assuming he was using their child for experiments.

It was, in fact, neither of the parents.

The first was a text message from Lestrade, the second a file containing information on a new case. He skimmed the details. It was certainly interesting. Three victims in two days. No definable cause of death. No connection between victims. 32 year old female, American. 65 year old male, Australian. And 18 year old female, Pakistani. Completely different countries. No records as to how they ended up in London. Intriguing.

He glanced from his phone to the bundle on his lap, then back to phone.

"Sherlock," Lestrade spoke the single word slowly. "What is that doing here?"

"That," Sherlock scoffed, "is an infant. Not an 'it'."

"I know what – my go – Sherlock, is that Billie?"

"Excellent deduction work, Lestrade," Sherlock rolled his eyes.

"You brought John’s kid to a crime scene," Greg ran a hand over his face. "You’re barely allowed here, I can’t clear you havin’ a kid with you. And I don’t think John would think too keenly of you doin’ this. Does he know?"

"Stop bothering me with boring questions, Lestrade," Sherlock waved the chief inspector off. "She is perfectly safe."

"She’s a baby, Sherlock," Greg pressed. "She shouldn't be seeing stuff like this."

"She won’t be seeing anything except the inside of the cab," Sherlock huffed. "I've paid the driver a handsome amount of money to look after her."

"John told me you had the entire neighborhood screened before she was born, and now you're just handing her over to some bloody stranger," Lestrade shook his head.

"People are quite motivated by money," Sherlock shrugged. "The cab will remain on the side of the street, where I can see it at all times. Now stop worrying and show me the body before it decomposes."

Reluctantly, the Detective Chief Inspector led Sherlock over to where a very bloody, beaten and blue corpse was posed behind the skip. It was the third one in under 48 hours. Not a single trace of physical evidence left on any of the victims. No obvious cause of death, even with the blood. Because it wasn’t the dead party’s blood. Not a single mark decorated the victims.

It took Sherlock less than ten minutes to solve the puzzle.

Rather smugly, Sherlock straightened himself and smoothed his coat. That arrogant air vanished, though, as his eyes drifted toward the street.

The empty street.

Greg followed the man’s shockingly stricken gaze and was just making the connection when he noticed Sherlock sprinting down toward the mouth of the alley with alarming speed. Lestrade hastily followed, calling out orders along the way.

He came upon Sherlock just as the man was digging his fingertips into his temples. Lestrade had seen this enough to know what the consulting detective was doing and to not interfere. After several seconds, Sherlock took in a breath and snapped open his eyelids.

"Come on," Greg gestured toward his car.

"No!" Sherlock was already breaking into a run. "Faster on foot!"
"Damn it," Greg glanced back at his team and then and the fleeing man. "Sherlock!"

Throwing back his head, Lestrade took after the madman. He was still trying to catch up as he radioed for backup.

They turned down side streets and cut through alleyways, Sherlock never once wavering in his direction. Lestrade fell further behind as Sherlock scaled and leapt over a fence with impressive swiftness and skill.

Sherlock couldn’t help but be pulled back to that first night after he had met John. Of chasing down the cab, down streets and across rooftops. Of proving the point of his friend’s psychosomatic limp. John hadn’t hesitated before pursuing the suspect with the detective he had barely known. Their relationship had been set in stone the evening John killed the cabbie, but it had sparked that night while scrambling across London. He recalled John’s laugh before outrunning the police, and then again once safely back at Baker Street. Remembered the unfamiliar feeling of camaraderie, of friendship.

Sherlock had inflicted enough damage upon John Watson over the years, both intentionally and unintentionally to have fractured any other friendship. But somehow, John stood by him.

The detective was sure that would most certainly change if anything happened to his daughter under Sherlock’s care.

And Sherlock would have no one to blame but himself.

And he would. For the rest of his sorry existence, he would know exactly what he had done.

To John. To Mary.

To Billie.

Because Billie was as much of a part of his heart now that John was. She was a piece of his best friend, and therefore and piece of Sherlock himself. He would never openly admit it, but the child had someone squirmed past his stony defenses.

So yes, losing Billie would destroy John and Mary.

And it would destroy Sherlock for destroying John and Mary

But it also would destroy Sherlock to lose Billie.
Adventures in Babysitting, cont.

Chapter Notes

I seriously can't get enough with putting Sherlock and the baby in scenes together. This is going to turn into the Sherlock & babyWatson show if I'm not careful!

Sherlock cut through a café and then successfully dodged a passing cyclist. It was only after another alley before he finally caught sight of his target.

This wasn't the same cabbie that had taken lives by way of deadly pills. He might not just stopped for Sherlock banging on the hood of the vehicle and flashing a badge.

What did he know about the stranger?

Balding. Mid 40s. Married. Unhappily. 20 years, give or take. No children. New to his position by a few weeks. Depressed. Using new job to avoid wife.

Coward.

No. This man wouldn't put up a fight. But he wouldn't stick around if confronted by the police. He would be a runner. He would bolt at the first sign of trouble.

But he had spoken friendly to Billie and had thought Sherlock's payment was too generous. It wasn't guilt talking. He hadn't planned on taking the baby then. This wasn't premeditated. He had genuinely been flattered and kind.

So, a nice bloke that just suddenly decided to steal a baby.

Oh. Of course!

Obvious.

Sherlock now fully well knew the man's motive and his most likely reaction to a confrontation. But he was still a good person.

The Good Samaritans were always the easiest to play.

He propelled his legs forward, sticking to the sidewalks and shadows to conceal his pursuit from his prey. As he ran on, he quickly seized a hat off a stranger's head, followed by a scarf from another, while lifting a pair of sunglasses from a businessman's shirt pocket. The cab entered a rather congested street and Sherlock smiled. He spotted a homeless man he recognized on the corner and promptly paid him to hold his coat and scarf. Shedding them, he swiftly traded the beggar for his ragged jacket and slapped on the strangers' scarf, sunglasses and hat. He turned hastily caught up to the car that was still sitting in traffic and managed to actually get ahead of it. He kept to the side until the vehicle's pace was able to begin to pick up once more, though not desiring to wait until it was at top speed. He had left Billie securely strapped in the backseat, but still didn't desire her coming to even the slightest possible harm from the man slamming on his breaks.

For that is exactly what the kidnapped did, as Sherlock had expected, as the detective flung himself in the middle of the road, as if tripping. He made a show of pretending to be severely struck by the car that had barely scraped him. The performer staggered and spun until hitting the climax of his act and plummeting onto the pavement.

His eyes snapped closed as he heard the car door open and the man shuffle to his side.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" The cabbie declared as he knelt beside the victim. "Are you alright? Can you hear me? Sir, -"
The man wasn't allowed another word. Or breath.

Sherlock's arm shot straight up, his hand clamping around the kidnapper's throat. The driver was still in shock and just started to gasp when Sherlock ripped off his sunglasses with his other hand, his eyes exploding open in fury.

"There is a rather moralistic detective chief inspector on his way, followed by a small fraction of Scotland Yard. They'll catch up to us in about four minutes. That's four minutes I have to hurt you. Any preferences?"

"Please, I'm sorry." The man choked and sputtered as Sherlock slackened his grip to allow the man speech. "My wife –"

"Yes, yes," Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Your wife desperately wants a child. The pair of you have been trying for years. Judging by your guilt and idiotic need to steal a child to right the matter, it's you who cannot have kids. But you've somehow been hiding that from her and she only just recently found out. She resents you for it. You tried to go the scientific route, but even that failed. She miscarried just before she was to give birth. You let her down again. Oh, if only you could find some way to make it up to her. To give her the baby she's always wanted. And then what should happen? A stranger leaves you in charge of an infant. You're a good person, no doubt, but depression, fear, loneliness, love – sentiment – oftentimes can get in the way of rational thinking."

Sherlock paused at this and retightened his hold. A crowd was beginning to form now. He didn't have long.

"For example, the infant you just decided to take. That is my best friend's daughter. My goddaughter. What emotions do you think are getting in the way of my current rational thinking?"

"Are you guys okay?"

"Hey, let him go!"

"What's going on?"

"Do you need an ambulance?"

The voices and crowd were beginning to grow. Sherlock spun the stranger and leapt up all in one fluid motion so that he was now standing, but the cabbie was pinned against the hood of the car. He finally released the man's throat and the kidnapped coughed and sucked in eager breaths.

"I'm sorry. Thank you –"

"Don't thank me," Sherlock hissed as he reeled his arm back, planting his knuckles into the man's cheek. "Thank the witnesses." He whispered.

He shoved the man against the side of the car and seeped to snap his teeth like a wild animal.

"Why is it always the cabbie?" He grunted to himself.

Sherlock spun around, raising his hands to the onlookers in a nonthreatening gesture.

"It's quite alright. I'm with the police. This man is a kidnapper. And no, I don't need an ambulance. His arms were still raised and he didn't try terribly hard to hide his elbow coming backward to clock the staggering man in the nose. "You can call one for him, but personally I'd just let him bleed all over himself."

As the driver crumpled to the ground in a pile of pain and sobs, Sherlock turned away from the crowd and opened the backseat door to a wailing child. Seizing the shouting infant in his arms, Sherlock glared down at the kidnapper with a glower that screamed 'death'.

The detective deeply desired to pummel the man within an inch of his worthless life, but the flurry of people that had annoyingly congregated around the scene had stalled his hand. He also had wanted to assure Billie's safety above all else.

He was still searing the cab driver with his stare when Lestrade broke through the small
He didn't even need to ask any questions as he thankfully took in the sigh of the unharmed child and the bleeding kidnapper.

He was honestly surprised the man wasn't far worse off.

The sounds of sirens drew closer as Sherlock drew away from the crowd to calm the child. Greg shortly joined him on the sidewalk after advising his people upon their arrival. He didn't stick around to watch the kidnapper being hauled away and was a tad stunned Sherlock hadn't either.

"I honestly half expected him to be hanging from a roof or being thrown out a window," Lestrade teased as he approached the detective who was currently whispering to his goddaughter.

"I can't really hide this from John if it's all over the news, now can I?" Sherlock quirked an eyebrow.

"Sherlock, you can't seriously hide this from John. I'll need your statement. You have to take Billie to get checked out –"

"And that can all happen without informing John," Sherlock snapped, but his serious stare was so piercing that Greg paused.

It wasn't his normal stabbing glare. It was almost – pleading.

"Alright, alright," Lestrade shook his head and lifted his hands. "Fine. I won't tell him. I'll keep your names out of the papers, but I can't stop him from finding out some other way. And if he does, I had nothing to do with this, Sherlock."

"Thank you, Greg."

Greg's head snapped up in absolute shock. But Sherlock was already facing away and marching off in the opposite direction. Lestrade smile to himself.

A good man indeed.

Another good man on the other side of London was on his coffee break when he saw the odd news report. Something regarding a kidnapping. An infant. Cab driver.

And a suspected spotting of the infamous Sherlock Holmes.

The doctor nearly dropped his beverage as he flung himself out of his chair and bolted from the break room.

A rushed explanation to the staff about an emergency, a text to his wife who was currently with a patient, and a cab ride later, John Watson found himself flying through the door of 221B, sweating and panting – and staggering to a stiff shocked stupor.

Incredible relief and surmounting surprise met him at the door in the image of one Sherlock Holmes, seated casually in his usual chair, a book in his hands. And then John's child, comfortably, and quite happily, propped in the man's lap.

"'How much she came in time to love that kitten no words can tell. Her little, fierce, untamed, impetuous nature had hitherto expressed itself only in angry passion, sullen obstinacy, and hatred. But there were in her soul fountains of warm affection, a depth of tenderness never yet called out, and a warmth and devotion of nature that wanted only an object upon which to expend themselves.'"

Sherlock glanced up unconcernedly from the text.

"Ah, John," he greeted, "you're home early. Judging by the time I would say coffee break. But judging by the limited time you are permitted on such things and the state you seem to be in, I'd say you've come to check up on me. Well, do I pass the test? No, don't answer that. You've come at the perfect time anyway. I need to use the toilet, and I believe she already has. You can take care of that."
Sherlock had already stood while speaking and passed the child off to her father before the still winded man could form a response. John watched with wide eyes as Sherlock deposited his baby in his arms and then proceeded to pad off down the hall to the bathroom.

And as Sherlock snuck away to wash the satin stains off his knuckles he had been so skillfully hiding with Billie’s blanket, the detective couldn’t help but sheepishly smile to himself.

He could grow to quite enjoy babysitting.
My Uncle, the British Government

Chapter Notes

Yes I totally made up the name at the beginning. Mycroft tells his mother that Mycroft is the name she gave him, so it's his first. Then I just threw two other more common names in the middle. Sorry if you hate it. If you can't tell, I'm following a bit of a pattern with this story and names. Not every chapter is like this, obviously. Here's a little Mycroft for you. Just a snippet. More to come. Some protective Mycroft too will be seen.

Mycroft Benjamin Anthony Holmes always imagined he would be a lot of things.

He spent his childhood imagining that his little brother was inferior and an "idiot", even if he never would admit how much he cared for and desired to protect his younger sibling. It was only after meeting other children did the elder Holmes realize that compared to average people, Sherlock was a genius. And Mycroft, well, Mycroft was something else entirely. It wasn't a necessarily traumatic adjustment. He was still above his brother and the rest of the world, and that quite suited the boy.

He knew from the start that he could utilize his advanced intelligence in order to propel him even farther upward and onward.

While Sherlock was bullied for his rather large brain, but mostly large mouth that came attached, Mycroft approached his gifts at a different angle. The elder Holmes never had to concern himself with childhood chastisement. He practically ran his school. Bullies worked for him instead of working him over.

His ideas of power and control only expanded from there. From school leadership all the way up to a top secret place of authority in the British government,

There were three things in the world Mycroft Holmes cared about.

He never thought anything or anyone else would ever break into that circle.

It was one of the very few things that he would prove himself wrong on when Mycroft Benjamin Anthony Holmes became something else entirely from anything he had been before. Something he had never, not once, even dreamed of becoming.

An uncle.

Uncle.

Well, not by biological standards, of course. Sherlock wasn't going to be making children anytime soon.

He always thought such sentimental titles to be tedious really. But, nonetheless, the child had taken it upon herself to deem him worthy of the endearing term. Peculiar really. How a solitary word, two meaningless syllables, one title, could change a man.

At first, he took the position in the child's life as a formality. She was the daughter of John Watson. And John Watson was the best friend of Sherlock Holmes. And Sherlock Holmes was the one thing Mycroft cared for the most. The protect Sherlock, he would protect the child. It was logical.

And yet, over time, that word started shifting into a new song.

Uncle.
Him, Mycroft Holmes, an uncle.

And eventually the word had a whole new meaning.

Honor, pride, and yes, a smidgen of fear. Okay, so maybe a jetliner of fear. But it was a different kind of fear. Not dread at sentiment. Perturbation for the safety of the child. Of the sanity and wellbeing of his baby brother in relation to said child. A fear he was not akin to.

Being afraid was not something British government man Mycroft Holmes readily admitted to. He didn't talk about the day Sherlock shot Magnussen. He didn't let on to his little brother when he was actually, secretly, truly fearful for his life during a case.

There were times, though, when true terror tore through the pompous and powerful walls.

Times like now.

When that daughter of his brother's best friend he had held so much horror over her birth, was, when taking the balance of probability into account, most likely no longer alive.

When he felt pathetically powerless in the face of such devastation and destruction.

When the man he had swore to protect his brother from, was now threatening them all.

It's intriguing, Mycroft thought, and quite appalling, how life or death situations can spark such sentiment and nostalgia.

"I want answers, Mycroft!" Sherlock let his first crash down on the desk.

"I told you, I have people looking into -"

"I don't care about your people," Sherlock spat. "What have you found?"

"We cannot locate him, Sherlock," Mycroft sighed, as if bored by the conversation, and the tragedy behind it. "Myself, or my people. Not even you. You know this. He doesn't want to be found."

"I don't care what he wants! I want him dead!"

"Stop acting so childish, brother," Mycroft folded his hands and leaned forward. "Losing yourself now is not going to help matters."

"Nothing is going to help," Sherlock snapped. "He drugged Mary."

"And you've drugged John," Mycroft pointed out with a smirk.

"You think this funny? This isn't a game, Mycroft."

"Sherlock, you know I don't play games."

"Then don't start now," Sherlock's voice was dangerous. "He drugged her. He induced labor! Why? Why? What's the point? A few weeks earlier, that would be logical. But the child was far enough along in the third trimester with a 96% survival rate. Why not at 24 weeks, where this is only 50% chance of survival? Why not before then? Why not just kill the baby, or Mary? What is his purpose in all this?"

"You know very well that sometimes this man doesn't, in fact, always have a purpose," Mycroft leaned back in his chair.

"Some men just want to watch the world burn!" Sherlock mumbled.

"What was that?" Mycroft arched a single eyebrow.

"Just some quote from a rubbish film John made me watch with him." Sherlock spoke as though in far away thought. "I found one of the characters rather - relatable - to him." Suddenly, Sherlock sprang from his chair and began pacing. "He wants to watch things burn, alright. Bombs,
explosions, the fire on Baker Street. To watch me dance. Dance in the flames. I'm the target here. Not her! Not John! He's using them against me - again!"

"This won't end here," Mycroft said seriously.

"I know," Sherlock bowed his head.

"You're going to have to protect them now," Mycroft warned sternly.

"I know," Sherlock repeated and then let slip a rueful smile. "I am the godfather, after all."

"You, a godfather," Mycroft grinned haughtily, "who would have guessed. Our parents will be so proud. Mummy still so wants grandchildren, you know."

"Well then," Sherlock spun toward the door on one heel, "better get on that, brother."

And without another word, Sherlock disappeared from the room as quickly as he had burst into not thirty minutes earlier.

As the door closed, Mycroft's stiff shoulders slumped. His features faltered and then fell. Placing his head in his hands, he released a slow sigh.

He had been correct, of course. They would never find him. Not again.

He had been presumed dead for two years. Even after Sherlock's rise from the grave and return to the public eye, he had remained hidden. Over a year later, the madman finally decided to make his presence known.

But that was it.

A mass media interruption.

And then silence.

A laugh in the face of all those who oppose him.

And a warning.

Of course he wouldn't strike right away. He would wait. Let his prey worry and fret and chase their tails searching for an invisible man. Let them sweat. Wait until they've worked themselves insane. And then quite possibly even longer. Maybe pounce when they were most fearful, or delay his attack until they were comfortable. Apart from all the predictable, boring goldfish of the world, James Moriarty wasn't one of them. He was entirely unpredictable. Changeable.

Terrifying.

And how did he make his first move?

By hiring someone to slip into Baker Street, drug a very pregnant Mary Watson, and induce labor. Oh, and then simultaneously setting off a bomb across the street.

Well, he certainly liked the unique and the dramatics.

Not exactly subtle.

But nothing earth shattering like they had been expecting.

So, there was one thing for certain at least when it came to Moriarty and his oh so "changeable" ways.

This was only the beginning.
The Eleventh Hour

Chapter Notes

A little bit of Lestrade. I find him difficult for me to write so I apologize for his lack of appearances. Even in his own chapter he isn't granted much screen time. Whoops. Please forgive me. You did get protective Sherlock! Because Sherlock just keep sneaking into ALL of my chapters now! His relationship to Billie is far too cute for him not to. The present events will be picking up soon. The present timeline/danger is actually going to be a bit dark. Hence the flashbacks with all the fluff and humor for some comedic relief.

Gregory Rupert Lestrade never imagined he would live to witness a lot of things.

And yet there they were, burned on his brain. Seared forever into his memories.

The time when a little boy had hauled him by the hand clear across a park, down the street and to his yard, all the while insisting that his best friend had climbed up a tree and gotten too scared to come back down.

Lestrade had the puppy on the ground less than five minutes later without one word of complaint.

At least, that time, there had been a dog.

There was the instance, of course, where another young boy had begged him to come help his friend. He had told the new recruit to Scotland Yard that "Joey" and he had been playing games in an abandon house when part of the floor broke away. Joey had fallen and then been trapped by the wreckage. Wanting to show his stripes and now immediately call for backup, Lestrade had sprinted off after the child.

Never before had he been so happy he hadn't called for backup.

"Joey" turned out to be an imaginary friend. But when he discovered this, the officer didn't even blinked. He continued to dig through the debris until the child shouted that he saw his "friend". Together, they pulled "Joey" out from the heap and, according to the boy, he was okay, except for the bump on his head. Lestrade waited with the crying child until "Joey" finally "woke up". He bid them both goodbye and to play safe from now on.

There was the time, years later, when the tired detective after an excessively long day, had walked in on Sally Donovan and the new forensic scientist snogging in the bathroom. That was certainly a shock. Of course, so was Anderson growing a beard.

He certainly never saw his wife leaving coming. Well, maybe he did. Sherlock sure did. And if Greg really looked back and challenged himself, he was pretty positive he had seen it too. Maybe it had been denial. Maybe it was guilt now for not doing anything to stop it from happening. Maybe it was anger at her for cheating on him. He had stopped dwelling on it a long time ago.

And then there was one of the biggest, most satisfying shocks of all.

Sherlock Holmes.

He often remembered what he said to John Watson all those years back.

"Because Sherlock Holmes is a great man, and I think one day, if we're very very lucky, he might even be a good one."

And for all the insults the consulting detective had thrown at the older man for not being observant, Greg had been right all along.
Even if he had been hoping for it, doesn't mean that it didn't knock him off his feet.

It had taken quite some time, but finally Sherlock had revealed why he had jumped from the roof that day. He told John, and John, in turn, revealed the truth to Greg.

Sherlock Holmes - self-proclaimed uncaring bastard - had faked his own death - for them.

If that wasn't proof enough, Greg wasn't sure what was.

And then, came the little Watson.

Not only was Sherlock now a great man, but a great godfather.

And somehow, in the crazy world that was his life, Lestrade had become an uncle.

Neither Mary or John had much of a family to show for. Greg knew from Friday night pints with John about Harry and her absenteeism in his life. The doctor and nurse's parents were all long since passed away. And neither had any extended family that they ever mentioned or saw, apart from a few cousins and distant aunts and uncles on John's side at the wedding.

But just because the baby lacked a biological umbrella around her, didn't mean she lacked a family. Even if it did consist of a consulting detective, a government - what the bloody hell did Mycroft do - man, a Chief Detective Inspector, a landlady, a pathologist and a forensics scientist.

And that family would do anything and everything for that child.

From running late and enduring Sherlock's insults because of it, to something much more dangerous.

Gregory Lestrade had been late twice when it concerned the daughter of John and Mary Watson.

Both times involved kidnappings.

It's quite heartbreaking how life or death situations can spark such sentiment and nostalgia.

"One person at a time," Sherlock snapped from the threshold of the nursery as the guests began pouring in to 221C.

It was a little over a week after Mary's return from hospital after having the baby and they were throwing her and the daughter a "Welcome Home" party, much to Sherlock deafening disgust.

"Oh, Sherlock," Mrs. Hudson swatted the man's arm as she walked by to place a platter of sweeties on the table.

"I am being very serious, Mrs. Hudson," Sherlock sniffed. "Too many faces and noises can overstimulate a child and -"

"Been reading the baby books again, has he?" Molly quipped from the couch, smiling at John.

"Tried reading them to me once," John chuckled.

"It was only for your education and oh, I don't know, the care and safety and upbringing of your own child," Sherlock spat sarcastically.

"I know how to take care of my child," John shook his head.

"Right," Sherlock huffed. "That's what every parent says, and yet we still have billions of people running around the world without brains in their heads."

"I thought you said care and safety, not brain capacity," John rolled his eyes.

"And upbringing, John," Sherlock crossed his arms, "I said upbringing. We want to make sure we surround your daughter with the proper people. Put her around too much stupid, and she could end up like you lot."
“Sherlock,” John warned.

“That’s not,” Sherlock cleared his throat. “You all are above average to me. That is why I have allowed you to be here.”

“You’ve allowed,” John scoffed. “This is my daughter!”

“I think he just gave us all a compliment, John,” Mary mused, her voice floating out from behind Sherlock in the nursery. “I think we better take it before we never see another one.”

“Yes, well,” Sherlock glanced at his watch, “I may be excluding Lestrade from that list seeing as he apparently doesn’t possess enough intelligence to arrive on time.”

“Alright,” John stood, “time to see the baby. Before you go off on one of your rants about punctuality and proper etiquette when you can’t be bothered to separate clean dishes from experiments in the sink and you show up whenever and wherever you bloody well please.”

“Fine,” Sherlock mumbled after a sustained breath. “But, like I said. One at a time. And you will wash your hands before entering. The baby doesn’t need whatever pathogens you are carrying.”

And so, one after another, friends and coworkers all took their turn to see the little Watson up close. Each and every one of them under the suspicious and scrutinizing eyes of Sherlock Holmes.

Molly and Mrs. Hudson were the only two guests left several hours later and were helping clean up the flat when a disheveled and dirt stained Greg Lestrade burst through the doors.

“Sorry, Lestrade,” Sherlock spoke quickly, “the party is over. So sorry. You’ll have to go home.”

“Sherlock!” John hissed.

“Greg,” Molly stood, “are you alright?”

“She’s right, dear,” Mrs. Hudson approached the man, brushing off his jacket while making disapproving noises. “You look dreadful.”

“Feel it too,” Lestrade shuffled tiredly into the room and collapsed into a chair. “I’m bloody beat. Some right bastard kidnapped a kid. A kid. Didn’t have him for long though. Only couple a hours. Almost called you in, ” he gestured to Sherlock, “but then we figured out where he was heading.”

“Surprisingly efficient police work,” Sherlock rolled his eyes.

“We got him Bisham Woods.” Lestrade continued, unaffected by the comments he had grown so accustomed to. “Had a place all built up to hide until he could get out of the city. Ingenious son of a bitch.”


“Had us in a bit of a chase once we found him,” Greg pressed forward. “Kid’s safe at home now and that bastard is behind bars.”

“I’m certain I could’ve deduced the kidnappers actions much more quickly and still made it on time,” Sherlock waved his hand.

“I’m sorry I’m late guys,” he directed this toward John, not Sherlock. “I still wanted to stop by and see how you both were doing and say hi to the little one.”

“Thanks, Greg,” John nodded. “Mary and the baby are right through there,” he pointed past Sherlock’s, who had somehow moved in front of the door again after Lestrade’s entrance.

“Ugh, no. Nope.” Sherlock shook his head. “There is no way you are going anywhere near that child. You are filthy and who knows what you picked up in the woods. Germs, diseases, insects.”

“Alright,” John rose to his feet, “that’s enough, Sherlock. You read all those books. Babies need to be exposed to dirt and bacteria. We’re not keeping our daughter in a bubble.”
"But -"

"No, Sherlock. She is my daughter and if Greg wants to see her then he will see her. I get what you're trying to do, and I appreciate it, I do. But you're turning into one of the paranoid, neurotic, mothers that I see in the clinic."

"Fine," Sherlock snapped rather sharply. "But he washes his hands."

Greg lifted said hands in mock surrender and wandered to the kitchen. He scrubbed his fingers, all the while stealing glances at the detective and the doctor. If Sherlock had been protective of his best friend, he wasn't sure there was a word to describe how he was going to be toward the man's daughter.

A good man indeed.
Molly Elizabeth Hooper never imagined she would be a lot of things.

After a childhood of continual clumsiness and attempted awkward friendships, she had grown accustomed to being alone. That didn't include the teachers who thought she was socially slow because she was too shy to ever show her secret intelligence off of paper, or the bullies that took advantage of her brain. She had almost let them win, had it not been for her father's urging to go to university and use that brain she had grown so ashamed of.

She still was quite shy and chose working with corpses over living humans. Dead bodies didn't berate you or make you do their homework or tell you all the reasons you were never going to get a boyfriend, like her Aunt Sylvia always liked to point out.

But she had defied the bullies, and her own low expectations of herself and had become a Histopathologist.

A word her Aunt Sylvia probably couldn't even say, Molly would often think to herself smugly.

But it was only in her head where Molly Hooper was ever smug.

So when Sherlock Holmes literally barged into the morgue one day all those years ago, making demands and casually tossing out insults, she hadn't had the nerve to throw him packing. Not to mention the initial attraction.

Her own low self-esteem had made it far too easy for the pompous prat to manipulate her. She knew what he was doing. She always knew. But she never challenged him.

Not until later.

Something else she never thought she would be; brave.
It wasn't much. It wasn't like those years later when she would slap him across the face. She had just spoken to him. And then hadn't stopped when he told her to. She had recognized something in him then, something that she had seen in her father.

And it wasn't long after that that Molly Hooper became yet another thing she never imagined she would be; needed.

Sherlock Holmes had needed her. Mousy Molly.

And that's when things really changed.

Molly slowly came to realize that she was intelligent, and that she did matter. And that she wouldn't take Sherlock's, or anyone else's, belittling or bullying any longer. She would do favors for him, yes, but only because she wanted to. Not because he manipulated her. Not anymore.

Well, almost not anymore.

There were two times that Molly Hooper allowed Sherlock to use her again.

To make her something she absolutely, never, thought she would be.

A babysitter.

The first time, Molly had found after climbing her mountain of horror at the thought of being responsible for a live being, instead of a dead one, had actually turned out to be quite fun for the pathologist.

It was the second time that had ended in disaster and despair.

And quite possibly death.

It's quite heartbreaking how life or death situations can spark such sentiment and nostalgia.

"John, it's been weeks since there's been a good case," Sherlock practically pouted as his friend slid into the backseat of the cab.

"I'm sorry, Sherlock, but I actually like to think that a couple weeks without somebody being murdered is, oh, I don't know, a good thing," John reached for the door as he spoke.

"Come on, John!" Sherlock stopped the door from closing with his arm. "They left a note. Only the good ones leave notes."

"You mean serial killers," John's features were as flat as his voice.

"Yes!" Sherlock replied with far more excitement than the doctor would have liked, but was also far too used to to say anything about it.

Apparently, the detective took his blogger's moment of silence as conceding as he suddenly slipped into the back of the cab next to his friend.

"Sherlock?" John reluctantly moved to grant the man room. "What are you doing?"

"We are going to Bart's."

"No," John lifted a finger and shook his head. "I am going to pick up Billie from the McKenzie's."

"Yes, John, you already told me all of this," Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Mary working late. You having to pick up Billie from the sitter. Boring. Irrelevant."

"Irrelevant? Sherlock, I have to pick up my daughter."

"I never said you couldn't," Sherlock shrugged.

"But you -" John sputtered until Sherlock hastily cut in.

"Oh, do keep up. Miss McKenzie lives approximately five minutes by cab from Bart's. We can pick
up Billie, and stop at Bart's on the way back to Baker Street. It's on the way, John."

"Oh, and what about when you find some clue on the body and then want to run off to Scotland Yard or God knows where?" John crossed his arms. "Will that be 'on the way'?"

"Uh, sorry to interrupt," the cab driver peered curiously into the mirror, "but where am I takin' you two?"

Sherlock spat out the address and John wanted to ask if he had all of his daughter's sitter's addresses memorized. Probably. Of course, there were so few of them that even passed Sherlock's initial screening. Most of the time, John and Mary could find someone among their circle of friends to take on the task, but not always. Today it had fallen to a young medical student the parents knew through work connections. She was a bright girl with a good head on her shoulders and a desire to eventually go into pediatrics. She even passed Sherlock's interview with flying colors.

"Then to Bart's Hospital, please," Sherlock added quickly.

"No," John repeated as the driver departed from the curb.

"Come on John, we both know you miss this," Sherlock squinted, his eyes and voice a challenge.

"What I miss is spending time with my daughter," John struck back.

"You see! Perfect!" Sherlock clapped his hands together. "You get both."

"Perfect isn't the word I would use," John grumbled but neglected to argue any further.

The doctor knew the detective far too well to know he could win. There was a murder and Sherlock wouldn't leave it for a second now. John was just happy Sherlock had remembered Billie at all in his case centered frame mind.

John left Sherlock in the cab while he went and collected his daughter. Billie was thankfully slumbering deeply and he managed to maneuver her into the back of the cab without waking the infant.

"Just Bart's and then straight home," John reaffirmed in a harsh whisper as the vehicle took off once more.

Sherlock didn't comment and John could only sigh.

They arrived at the morgue without any more words being exchanged until they found Molly.

"Ah, a female, perfect," Sherlock greeted the woman.

"Excuse me?" Molly whirled about in the hall to face them. "John - what are you doing here with her? Is she okay?"

"Unless you count the fact that she has an uncle who is absolutely mental," John huffed, "she's fine."

"Sorry - what?" Molly turned to Sherlock. "Female?"

"Yes, female, as in woman, as in you," Sherlock rolled his eyes.

"Me? What about me?" Molly glanced from the detective to the doctor curiously.

"Billie needs a babysitter," Sherlock answered apathetically.

"Babysitter? And you think that because I'm a woman - Sherlock - I'm at work."

"So are we," Sherlock sniffed, seizing the carrier from his friend and thrusting it in Molly's arms. "And you might want to take her out and hold her now."

"What?" Molly furrowed her brow.
"She's about to wake up," Sherlock deduced, pointing to some facial gesture the baby was making that Molly wasn't sure actually exited that apparently cued this awakening. "We've managed to rid her of the annoying habit of having to be sung to when she wakes, but if she isn't held with twenty seconds of waking, she cries."

"Oh, um, okay," Molly hesitantly freed the child from the straps and took her into her arms, who, just as the detective predicted, was stretching and blinking. "Uh, hi."

"Your mothering skills are remarkable," Sherlock said sarcastically.

"Sherlock," John snapped.

The baby was stirring now, and Molly made a deformed face to settle the child and prompt a laugh. Instead of giggles, she received tears for her troubles.

"It's okay," John spoke before Molly - or Sherlock - could. "She just doesn't know you yet. Here."

John reached into her carrier and revealed a plush puppy. Its long floppy ears had obviously been the victims of frequent child chewing. The brown fur was half covered by a red and white striped shirt and there was a pirate patch sewn over one of the eyes. Molly had a strong suspicion that Sherlock had been the culprit behind that addition to the toy. She almost giggled to herself imagining the man sewing.

"Sherlock gave her this when she was born," John explained to which Sherlock suddenly looked distracted with the wall. "Should help. Just, talk to her. That's what Sherlock does and if she can grow to like him," John let the sentence drop but offered Molly and smirk.

She smiled back and took the toy, presenting it to Billie.

"Right then," Sherlock sighed. "If you two are quite done, we have work to do. Come along, John."

John granted Molly an apologetic glance before hurrying after the already fleeing detective.

Molly stood awkwardly alone in the hall for a few stalled seconds before she stared down at the baby. The child was still working her way up to an impressive wail and Molly desperately tried rocking and bouncing her as she spoke nonsense.

"Oh, this isn't working," Molly sighed and then smiled. "I know."

All the while trying to shush the littlest Watson, Molly made her way through the morgue and finally came to the room she knew Sherlock would be in. There had only been one body brought in from a murder that day. It wasn't difficult to guess.

She stood at the window, angling the child so that the infant could see her father beyond the glass, but not the dead body he was standing over.

"Do you know how lucky you are?" She started softly. "You see, that's your daddy and he's very strong and courageous, but he is also the kindest man in the world. And he puts up with Sherlock, so there's that. Remember that he will always forgive your mistakes and love you. He's a doctor, so he's the one who saves the lives. And, here, there's your godfather. You were named after him. He's your daddy's best friend and the most intelligent man in the world. He's also very strong and he can be kind, sometimes, but also very cold, that's the curse that goes with such intelligence and his job, you know. I'm sure he will always be kind with you though. He's the one who solves the cases. But he also saves the lives in his manner, he just doesn't care that much about that. Or, at least, that's what he likes everyone to think. I think he's a good man, just like your daddy. Two good men. Who love you. You really are lucky."

And by the end of Molly's short speech, Billie had finally quieted. She rested snugly against the pathologist's chest, nibbling away at the stuffed dog's ear, blissfully ignorant of the dead woman on the other side of the glass, or the important part her murder would play in the child's future.
“Don’t you guys usually have Moll - I mean - Dr. Hooper help you?” The young pathologist edged his way around the slab.

“Yes, well, she’s busy with important work,” Sherlock waved a hand. “I have her on another assignment. Therefore, we’re apparently stuck with you. You’re new and your running late for your cigarette break. Go ahead and take it.”

“I - I’m not supposed to leave you alone with the body,” he replied unsteadily.

“Then stand in the corner and don’t speak unless I speak to you,” Sherlock stated sharply.

The younger man glanced at John who could only offer him a soft, apologetic smile and a nod to do as the detective asked.

The door had hardly opened when Sherlock perked up.

“Ah, Lestrade, finally.” He greeted without looking. “Took you long enough.”

“Greg,” John grinned in welcome at the Chief Detective Inspector, both men accustom to ignoring Sherlock.

“John,” Lestrade nodded. “Passed Molly with Billie on the way in,” he gave a questioning look to the doctor.

“Someone couldn’t wait to see the bloody body,” John glared across at his friend.

“A body that I should have seen at the original crime scene, Inspector,” Sherlock snapped. “Why wasn’t I called in sooner?”

“We don’t call you for every murder,” Greg crossed his arms.

“Fine,” Sherlock huffed, “now tell me the real reason.”

“Do you even know who this is?” Greg asked incredulously.

“A female murder victim,” Sherlock fired off. “Long blonde hair. I’d say to her waist. Underwent multiple plastic surgeries on her face and breasts. Evidence of a previous eating disorder. Going by that and a collection of other evidence that would be wasted on you lot, I’d guess model. Judging by your inability to bring me in sooner, I’d say famous model.”

“She’s one of the most famous models in England,” Greg rubbed the back of his head. “This is gonna be bigger than the Connie what’s-her-face murder.”

“Sorry,” John stepped forward, ”you said 'long blonde hair', Sherlock?” He pointed at her shoulder length locks.

“It’s been recently cut,” Sherlock explained. ”It wasn’t sloppy or with a knife, but someone in her profession wouldn’t just get her hair cut like that. And see there, it’s not even. So, not sloppy, but not professional.”

“You’re saying the killer cut her hair?” John cocked his head to the side.

“Precisely,” Sherlock nodded. ”But why. That’s always the question. Why does anyone do
anything. Maybe so that she would be a better surrogate for whoever the murderer really wanted to kill. Maybe something happened, and there was evidence in the hair. Could be a way of shaming her. She was a woman whose work surrounded her beauty. Could be a message. Considering the way she was killed that is what it would suggest."

"And how was she killed?" John promoted.

"With a fork," Sherlock stated as he pulled the sheet lower to reveal numerous puncture marks decorating the woman's abdomen.

"A fork?" John repeated, followed by a short disbelieving laugh. "You're joking?" He shook his head as he examined the distinct wound.

"She was stabbed seven times," Lestrade sighed.

"That would've taken awhile for her to bleed out," John said slowly.

"Exactly," Sherlock nodded. "This wasn't a murder or weapon of opportunity. This was planned. The fork was purposeful."

"So, is it like you said," John crossed his arms, "a message? Cutting her hair? Using a fork? You said she had an eating disorder."

"That would be the obvious choice," Sherlock peered over the body. "Someone making a statement against the industry."

"But?" John pressed, sensing Sherlock's doubt.

"The message." Sherlock straightened and looked poignantly at Lestrade.

"It wasn't really a message," Lestrade replied. "Just left on the body."

"Of course it was a message," Sherlock rolled his eyes once more. "Not all messages are in writing, Lestrade. That would too easy, even Scotland Yard could figure it out. So, what was it again?"

"A black bird's feather - and a chicken bone," Greg shook his head.

"I told you to have them analyzed," Sherlock crossed the room.

"It's definitely a chicken bone," Greg nodded.

"And the feather?" Sherlock asked impatiently.

"Said it was from a Raven." Lestrade shrugged. "That mean anything to you? What the hell is a Raven's feather, a chicken's bone, a fork and some chopped hair got to do with anything?"

Sherlock closed his eyes and they remained that way for some time. John wondered briefly if the genius had retreated to his mind palace, and, if so, that this would be his chance to make a run for it with his daughter. He figured he could probably bring Billie home and come back before Sherlock even noticed.

Finally, Sherlock's eyes snapped open.

"I - I don't know."
When it came to babysitting Billie, Molly Hooper wasn’t always exactly on hand when Sherlock Holmes wanted to fly off to one of his cases.

Of course, that did little to stop him.

He had been in the middle of reading Treasure Island to the child when the call came.

“You’re going to want to come down here,” Lestrade had said as way of greeting.
"Something finally interesting for me?" Sherlock had sighed dispassionately.

"Raven's feather sound familiar?"

Sherlock paused, his memory flashing back to nearly a year ago. The strange, still unsolved case.

"Is anything else the same?" Sherlock prompted.

"Another stabbing," Greg cleared his throat. "Seven times, again. This time, with a knife."

"A little more typical," Sherlock shrugged. "He's getting boring."

"A butter knife," Lestrade finished.

Sherlock's brows knitted together.

"Tell me that's not a coincidence," Greg grunted. "A bloody butter knife and a fork. It still doesn't make any sense, but it's another connection."

"The victim?" Sherlock pressed.


Sherlock chanced a glance at the contently sitting and staring baby.

"I'm on my way."

Sherlock made quick work of gathering his own bag of "Billie supplies" he had put together himself after his one time babysitting trial run had turned into a regular event. He slung the satchel over his arm and crossed the room to where the girl was now guiding her stuffed dog over and around the terrain of pillow piles. Sherlock had blanket ed the floor with pillows and blankets ever since during one babysitting adventure Billie had decided to perform a swan dive off the coffee table.

The little girl saw the man approaching and immediately ceased her make believe quest. Her round eyes drifted to the bag before finding his serious ones.

"Go now?"

"Yes, we are leaving, Billie," Sherlock answered the child, smirking at her smarts.

"Up, please!"

Sherlock didn't stop the smile from spreading across his lips as he leaned down and swooped the child into his arms.

And that was how he showed up at the crime scene. A baby bag hanging loosely over one shoulder, a child in his arms, and a dog dangling from the little girl's hands, holding onto the stuffed creature for dear life.

"Sometimes, Sherlock, I honestly think that you're trying to get me fired," Lestrade said in way of greeting.

"Oh, relax, Inspector," Sherlock rolled his eyes. "I'm sure one of your lot can manage to watch her for five minutes without causing too much damage."

"They're not your babysitters," Greg crossed his arms.

"It's that or you're condoning subjecting an innocent child, John and Mary's, innocent child, to graphic images of violence that she will most likely subconsciously carry for the rest of her life." Sherlock lifted his eyebrows.

"Sherlock -"
"I'll watch her."

"What?" Both detectives spun and spoke in unison.

"I said, 'I'll watch her'," Sally Donovan repeated, striding forward with a smug, yet amused, smile on her face.

"You sure?" Lestrade glanced suspiciously from Sally to Sherlock.

"If it's that or let her be traumatized by the freak here, then yes," she smirked.

Sally and Sherlock didn't have a sparkling relationship after his return, but there was something different in their interactions. Sally's usage of "freak" wasn't as derogatory as it once had been. It was almost that of a brother-sister banter. There was name calling and insults, but they were almost playful and not possessing the poison of previous years.

"Fine," Sherlock nodded.

"What? Really?" Lestrade turned to Sherlock with wide eyes.

"Sergeant Donovan is the eldest of six siblings. Four boys, two girls, including her. The second oldest child of the family is already eight years younger than Donovan. I'd say she's had practice. She won't be subject to my usual interview, as even I believe she can take care of Billie for five minutes while I am just in the next room."

Sherlock set Billie on the ground and Sally reached for her hand. Tentatively glancing back at her uncle, Billie took the outstretched arm. Donovan's demeanor drastically shifted as she directed her attention to the child. She smiled and spoke to the girl, all the while leading her away from the door to the room of the murder.

Sherlock watched Billie disappear around a corner before whirling around and bounding into the room. It was only after his crossed the threshold did he give pause.

There, lying on the floor, was the body.

But this wasn't just another corpse.

This was a child.

The first underage victim Sherlock had laid eyes upon since Billie's birth.

They were years apart, and yet, for some strange reason Sherlock couldn't quite place - and that was quite annoying - the sight somehow affected him.

Swallowing down the sentiment, Sherlock stalked forward, circling the body.

The young boy was on his back, his face pulled up into a sort of laughing smile, and if Sherlock just looked at his features, he would say he was merely sleeping, the middle of some fanciful dream. But then the detective gazed down at the stab markings that decorated the child's chest and knew better.

Squatting next to the prone form, Sherlock prodded the boy's face.

"Yeah," Greg spoke what he knew the detective was thinking. "Anderson said that his mouth was pinned like that."

"Postmortem too," Sherlock spoke softly. "Just the feather this time? No bone."

"Nothing else," Lestrade shook his head even though the man neglected to lift his gaze from the child.

"Was he already dressed like this?" Sherlock gestured to the angelic costume that clothed the body.

"The school across the street was doing a play," Greg informed him.
“Why the smile?” Sherlock leapt up from the ground. “You won't find any connection between the victims.”

“So don’t focus on the victims?” Greg crossed his arms.

“No,” Sherlock paced, “focus on the victims! It isn’t about any connection, but these aren’t random. A person who goes to such lengths to orchestrate these murders, to plan and wait an entire year between kills, wouldn’t just pick anyone by random. There’s something significant about the victims. Cutting the hair, making him smile. I was right! The fork wasn’t a message to the model.”

“So her profession doesn’t matter?” Greg scratched his head.

“No! It matters! Everything matters!” Sherlock snapped. “With a killer this intelligent and organized, no detail is dull. The victims, the murder, the weapon, the feathers, everything, all of it. They’re clues! Oh, yes! Brilliant! It’s a message! To who? The care he takes, of course the killer is having fun, but it’s not just about that. He’s probably killed dozens or more people that we don’t even know about. But these victims aren’t just to fulfill his desire to kill. These are different. Special. Designed to be a message.”

“But for who?” Lestrade stepped forward. “If they were meant for someone, then wouldn’t the killer have left them somewhere in public, or to be found by the person themselves.”

“Precisely, Lestrade,” Sherlock smiled. “Surprisingly accurate deduction! The killer is leaving the messages to be found by his intended recipient. I highly doubt any of your lot have gotten on the bad side of a criminal of this scale.”

“So it’s for you?” Greg finished.

“Correct again,” Sherlock said, with only a sprinkle of sarcasm. “You’re on fire today.”

“Who would want to leave you a message?” Lestrade pressed. “You don’t think -?” He let the question fall.

“Oh, I know,” Sherlock hissed.

“Moriarty?” Greg shook his head. “Well, what the hell is he up to? This is pretty different from strapping people to Semtex and blowing up a block of flats. Last time he went after you, he forced you off a bloody roof, Sherlock. This seems, subtle, for him.”

“Moriarty doesn’t care about small or big,” Sherlock waved a hand. “He doesn’t even want credit. The consulting criminal. He killed Carl Powers and never told a soul. He just wants to play the game. To have his fun.”

“And what’s his fun gonna be this time?” Lestrade sighed slowly.

“I - I don’t know.”
Chapter Notes

oh the drama! it wasn’t going to originally be this dramatic! it was supposed to be a simple story filled with lots of fluff and then some suspense! now there is a big subplot and craziness happening! don’t worry, i’m not just TOSSING things together without care! I’ve been doing research, etc. Kura06 from Tumblr has been bouncing ideas back and forth with me and she is responsible for a lot of the amazing ideas, including this chapter. She suggested this and I wasn’t sure about it, not because it was a bad idea, but on myself writing it and fitting it in the story without making the story TOO dramatic. But then I thought, you guys LIKE the angst/drama! So, why not? And she helps me so much, I thought I’d put it in for her! you’re probably getting sick of Billie being in danger, but I still wanted to write her idea! hope the rest of you enjoy it too!

"I - I don't know."

*Sherlock had barely freed the reluctant words from his mouth when the entire structure shook.*

*The detective bolted for the door, skidding to a shocked stop in the hall.*
An entire corner of the building was gone.

Or rather - blown up.

If Sherlock had possessed any doubts - which, of course, he hadn't - over whether this was Moriarty's doing or not they certainly evaporated now.

He could vaguely hear Lestrade barking commands and calling out on his radio.

And then one name hit his ears and his senses sharpened.

"Donovan? Donovan, do you copy?"

No response.

Every single cell inside Sherlock exploded at once.

Donovan. Sally Donovan. Sergeant Sally Donovan.

Who was watching Billie.

Billie.

Sherlock stared wide eyed at the rubble and chaos for a solid second, as if he couldn't will his body into motion even if he tried. And then, just like that, he was off. Springing into a fit of action and shouting and running.

"Billie!"

People were scrambling about, helping each other and searching the debris for others.

"Sherlock! Over here!"

Sherlock snapped his head to the sound of Lestrade's calling, spinning on his heel and sprinting to where the man was bent over a body.

Sally Donovan was at the center of the blast, her head raining red liquid and her eyes not entirely a part of this world.

"Donovan?" Greg checked the woman over briefly and then called for help. "Can you hear me?"

"Yeah," she mumbled, blinking heavily.

"Where's Billie?" Sherlock demanded, panic rather than poison in his voice as his eyes scoped the surrounding area.

"I gave her to Simmons," Sally gasped. "I thought - I heard something -" her voice cracked and she let out what sounded like an agonizing cough. "I told Simmons to take her, just in case. I took Erickson and went to check it out. That's - when I saw it."

"Saw what?" Greg prompted.

"The bomb," Sally breathed. "I found it and didn't even have time to get word to you before it blew. I'm sorry."

"It's alright," Greg nodded and glanced up to see Sherlock already frantically searching again.

"Lestrade, it's Erickson," Anderson called out. "He's, he's dead."

Sherlock was barely listening. In truth, he had forgotten Anderson was still there among the small group of stragglers from the crime scene. A few hours earlier and the place had been packed with police. A few hours later, and it would've been crawling with photographers. This strike was deliberate. Timed.

No. Stop. Focus!
The case wasn't important right then. All that mattered, all he could fill his mind with, was Billie. Finding Billie. Keeping her safe. Safe.

She had to be safe.

Please be safe.

His shoe connected with something soft and Sherlock glanced down.

And that was when the detective was nearly medically certain that his heart quite actually stopped.

There, on the ground among the rubble, laid a stuffed dog, dressed as a pirate.

Sherlock dropped to his knees as he spotted a patch of skin underneath a downed door. Pushing it aside, he gave an internal gasp.

Simmons was on his back, his eyes wide and staring up at Sherlock. But not really. Those eyes wouldn't look at anyone, or anything, again.

He was dead.

Sherlock sprang to his feet like a wild animal, his head spinning every which way. Somewhere in his shouting for the child, he managed to claim Lestrade and the other's attention toward the dead man. Most of them were now too searching for the lost little girl, as everyone else had been located. Talking, shouting, debris being moved. So much noise. In his head too. Thoughts, fears, all screaming out. He couldn't concentrate. Couldn't focus. He felt as though he was spiraling, falling, into an abyss. Maybe he was screaming too. He couldn't be certain anymore.

"Sherlock?"

Anderson was in front of the detective now, desperately attempting to draw his attention.

"Sherlock!"

Sherlock's eyes skidded across the surface of the scene and then seemed to lift, finally settling on the man standing next to him.

"Stop," Philip said in a way Sherlock didn't know he could speak. "Stop, Sherlock. Calm down."

"Calm down?" Sherlock spat. "Are you -"

"Be quiet, Sherlock," Anderson cut in far more boldly than he ever had before. "Everyone be quiet!" He turned to the team of people.

When several didn't listen, Greg stepped toward the pair.

"That's an order!" Lestrade repeated Anderson's command and the scene fell silent.

"Listen to me, Sherlock," Philip continued, keeping hold of Sherlock's steady stare. "Think. You're the great detective, Sherlock Holmes! High functioning sociopath, remember? Put it all aside, and think."

Sherlock's eyes seemed to finally come into focus.

"She's obviously not in the debris," he began as though he hadn't almost had an entire mental breakdown not a full second earlier.

"Right," Anderson nodded, encouraging him.


"I used to hide cupboard under the stairs," Anderson supplied.
"No, she hates wardrobes and closets," Sherlock shook his head. "Locked herself in one when she was learning to crawl."

Sherlock fell silent and that's when they heard it.

A cry.

A baby's cry.

Billie's.

Sherlock turned and bolted toward the sweet sound permeating from behind a small closet door. Anderson didn't even think about offering a remark at his correct guess as the worried godfather ripped open the door and scooped up the weeping child in his arms.

He only let her away from his chest to properly examine her.

She was safe.

For now.
A Grim Fairy Tale

Chapter Notes

we're picking up the pace now! leading you up to the present! don't worry! once we get to the present, there will be even MORE fluff flashbacks. These have gotten more suspense/dark flashbacks. But there are PLENTY of fluffy ones on the way! Kudos to Animalfeelings and Superster for guessing correctly about the the fairy tale aspect!

"I hate missing kids," Greg ran a hand over his eyes as he read over the report again.

How many times had his eyes burned over the words already? He had lost count.

"And people say I'm a psychopath, really, Lestrade."

The weary Detective Chief Inspector pulled his head up from the paper and somehow managed a tired glare at the man who had just walked right into his office without warning.

"These kids," Greg gestured to a pile to his left, "all went missing just this year. This year. We just spent three months chasing clues for Grace Peters. For what? To find her, dead, with her damn hands cut off and with another one of those bloody feathers. How much you bet Moriarty knows where half 'a these kids are right now?"

"Probably more than that," Sherlock added as he took the seat across from Greg's desk.

"Great. Thanks." Lestrade rubbed the back of his head. "John told me. Said he isn't gonna post this one up on the blog. Can understand that. Suppose this one hits a little close to home for him."

He sighed. "Do you have any idea about what Moriarty is doing here, Sherlock? I mean, first the woman. Then the boy. Now another kid. Poisoned her. And then cut off her hands! At least he cut them off after she was already dead."

"Same poison he used on Carl Powers," Sherlock nodded. "More messages. More clues. They're dots I'm supposed to connect."

"Well, you better start connecting them," Lestrade shook his head. "Anything on the feather?"

"Still working on it," Sherlock steepled his fingers under his chin. "It's the only consistency in all three murders. It must mean something. Everything else means something, but if I could just figure out this, it could reveal so much more. Raves are already symbols of death, an ill omen, you might say. So are so many other things. Why did Moriarty choose the raven? There are good omens attached to it as well. Poems, songs, stories. I've cross referenced them and still -"

Sherlock suddenly drew in a sharp breath. "Not dots. Breadcrumbs!"

"Sorry?" Lestrade leaned forward.

"Before," Sherlock began, "the kids with the candy. The apple. Leaving us the envelope of breadcrumbs and the book."

"What sort of kidnapper leaves clues?"

"The sort that likes to boast, the sort that thinks it's all a game. He sat in our flat, and he said these exact words to me: 'All fairy tales need a good old-fashioned villain.'"

"A good old-fashioned villain," Sherlock mumbled to himself. "Of course! I saw pieces of it before but I cast them aside. I thought a man like Moriarty would not be one to repeat himself. Oh. Oh. Oh. It all makes sense. The first victim, he cut her hair."

"Yeah? And?"
"Oh, come on! Think! This is an obvious one."

"Rapunzel?"

"Well done, Inspector, but maybe I should take it from here to spare us any further delay, hmm? The chicken bone. Could be Hansel and Gretel or The Seven Ravens."

"The raven feather?" Lestrade added.

"There are two Grimm fairy tales that have ravens," Sherlock explained, "if we're assuming Moriarty is going to restrain himself this time to only Grimm tales. I think any fairy tale that suits his purposes would do really. Going with Grimm Brothers, it could be The Seven Ravens, or The Raven. I doubt it was a coincidence that he tied the chicken bone and feather together. Everything else is random, but he made sure those two were linked. So, The Seven Ravens." At Greg's confused expression, Sherlock continued. "A man and woman have seven sons and finally one daughter. But she is born ill. The brothers are sent to fetch water, but drop the jug into the well. When they didn't come home, the father assumed they had been being foolish and playing. He feared his daughter would die and cursed the boys to turn into ravens. When the daughter had grown, she went off in search of her brothers. She is given a chicken bone as the key to where her brothers are. She loses the bone and cuts off her own finger instead to use as the key."

"So does that explain this girl without her hands?" Greg squinted.

"Details, Lestrade," Sherlock shook his head. "She cut off her finger. Moriarty is pulling bits and pieces of stories he likes, but he wouldn't be purposefully careless. Almost exactly what you just said is the story. The case is the story. The Girl Without Hands."

"Why am I not surprised that you know nothing about the solar system, but know every sick and twisted fairy tale?" Greg rolled his eyes. "So, anything else? What about the poison?"

"There are countless fairy tales where people are poisoned. The fact that it is the same poison he used on Carl Powers is just his way of waving and saying hello. The fork and knife are interesting. Could mean Hansel and Gretel, but I'm not so sure. Could be Sleeping Beauty. Could be Snow White."

"So does any of this actually help us find or stop him?" Lestrade sighed.

"It's not supposed to," Sherlock grumbled. "It's part of the game. Watching me dance. I still think our focus should be on the clues left."

"You just said everything is a clue," Greg massaged his temples.

"Yes it is, but the raven feathers, the bone, they're the extra," Sherlock stood. "Everything else has to do with the victim or the method of murder. The feathers and bones aren't part of either. Especially the feathers. They're important. Everything else is a clue, but the feathers, the feathers are the message. Ravens, sign of ill omen. Death. A message. In this case, a message to me. But not just of death. We already know that. Too obvious."

"Something to do with the story, then?" Greg surmised.

"Precisely." Sherlock rubbed his hands together. "But what fits? Brothers? No. Seven, though. Seven brothers. Seven. Numbers, Lestrade. Numbers are important. Always important. Codes, clues, latitude and longitude on a map, ciphers, phone numbers, lock combinations, always something. Now the number seven. That's definitely an important number. Religions, folklore, fairy tales, it's there. So, what does it mean to us? We have seven skies, seven heavens, seven seas, seven days in the week, seven dwarves, seven deadly sins, seven sacraments, seven days of creation, Snow White was driven from her home when she was seven, seven wonders of the world, the seven hills of Rome, The Pleiades, seven years - there's too many possibilities."

"We've had almost one victim every year for three years now, could it be years? Seven years, seven murders?"

"It's a possibility," Sherlock breathed, "but then why not keep it consistent? The same day every year. If it is seven years, then there must be an endgame like we've never seen before. All that
time, building up to something massive. Maybe it’s not on the same day every year, because that would give it away. Maybe there’s a specific day in that seventh year he doesn’t want us to know about. When he’s going to make his final move. His grand finale.”

Neither spoke after that for a long moment.

Every time Moriarty had surfaced, his plans and actions had been bigger and ended in more destruction than the last time. To think of what he was possibly building up to over seven years, well, neither of the men wanted to picture that grim fairy tale.
"And you're sure?" Mycroft turned his nose up at the corpse before them.

"Positive," Sherlock clipped, nodding at Molly.

The pathologist pulled the sheet back up over the man's body dutifully, peaking up at the two Holmes brothers.

"So he was one of Moriarty's then?" John sighed. "Thought all his people were behind bars. Thought that's what you two spent two years doing in secret."

"So did I," Sherlock hissed.

"We also thought Moriarty was dead," Mycroft reminded them ruefully.

"Yes, thank you," Sherlock spat sarcastically.

"So, Moriarty breaks one of his people out of prison," John crossed his arms, "only to kill him? That doesn't make any sense."

"It doesn't need to if you're Moriarty," Sherlock squinted, "it just needs to be fun."

"Who was he?" John questioned curiously. "He almost looks - familiar."

"He should," Sherlock explained, "he sang at the pub you and Stamford frequent."

"He what - wait - how do you know - did you follow - nope. Nevermind. I don't want to know."

"Remember the character of Richard Brook that Moriarty created?" Sherlock was speaking faster now. "He created that fiction for his game. But that isn't always entirely the case. The majority of his people lived and worked right under our noses. Hiding in broad daylight. All with clever and extensive covers. He had people in major corporate and political positions, and others living in boxes on the side of the street. This is Jeremy Calhoun, singer-songwriter and local performer. Doing quite well for himself too. Of course, he's also Derrick Shepherd. Convicted conman. Lost his house, wife and children six years ago when he went to jail. A year later, Moriarty offered him a new life. Jeremy Calhoun. Singer, songwriter, conman, murderer."

"I still don't understand why Moriarty would break him out of jail, again, to kill him," John repeated.

Sherlock furrowed his brow before mumbling something under his breath.

"Come again?" Mycroft asked impatiently.

"Cat and Mouse Partnership," Sherlock whispered.

"Oh, I know that one," Molly said excitedly. "Where the cat and the mouse are friends and live together, but the cat keeps sneaking off to eat the fat that they had stored away, until it is all gone. When the mouse figures it out, the cat eats her too."

"Bit of a stretch, brother mine," Mycroft sighed.

"So are your trousers," Sherlock rolled his eyes, reaching into his coat and pulling out rolled up piece of paper.

Mycroft extended his hand, but Sherlock instead thrust the item at the doctor. John unrolled the document to reveal a poster advertising for one of Jeremy Calhoun's upcoming performances. It was at a club, the logo for which was a cat and mouse.

"Left on our doorstep this morning," Sherlock answered his friend's unspoken question. "Like the envelope of breadcrumbs."
"Daddy! Daddy!"

The group turned and gaped as a bouncing blonde head of hair came crashing through the door. Mycroft, Sherlock and John all stepped in front of the body in unison.

"Billie?" John stepped forward, still angling his body to block the child from the form under the sheet. "What are you doing in here?"

"Hide 'n seek!" Billie cheered. "With Mummy!"

"Did you tell Mummy you were playing?" John crouched down to his daughter's level.

"Uhm," the girl bit her bottom lip and bowed her head.

"How many times do I have to tell you," John sighed, "that when you play hide and seek, you have to tell the person you're playing with?"

"But then they know!" Billie implored dramatically, tossing her arms to her side. "Too easy! This is more fun!"

John didn't miss the subtle smirk on his friend's face.

"If this is something you taught her, Sherlock," John stood, "I swear -"

"There you are!" Mary burst through the door. "I am so sorry. I turned around for two seconds and she was gone."

"Apparently she was playing hide and seek," John shook his head. "Without telling anyone. In a morgue."

"Believe me," Mycroft cast a sidelong glance at his brother, "it could have been much worse."

"If you're referring to the time I broke into the morgue when I was ten it was only to measure the -"

"No," John interrupted the detective. "Do not finish that sentence in front of my daughter."

"What are they doing here anyway?" Sherlock sniffed.

"Nice to see you too, Sherlock," Mary smirked before walking around to offer Molly a hug. "Good to see you."

"You too," Molly smiled.

" Haven't seen you in awhile," Mary nodded. "Sherlock been keeping you busy as much as he has John?"

"Which," John plucked his daughter off the floor, "is why I asked Mary to meet us here. Well, not, here, in the morgue. Upstairs."

"Meet us here?" Sherlock wrinkled his nose. "Why?"

"Because," Mary looped her arm in the detectives, "we're going out tonight."

"Out? Where? Why? We have -" he started pointed to the body when John cut him off.

"A case, I know," John nodded. "We've had cases for weeks straight. You haven't stopped. And now this? I don't want to know how long it's been since you've eaten. So, you, me, Mary, Molly and Billie are going out. Lestrade's waiting for us at the restaurant. Mycroft, you're welcome to come too."

"No, thank you, John," Mycroft straightened. "I best be going." He turned to Sherlock before heading for the door. "I do expect you to keep me updated on this one."

He didn't offer his little brother a chance to argue before the elder Holmes was out the door.
"Come on, Sherlock," Mary pulled on the man's arm that she still had wrapped in her own.

"You go on ahead, I'll meet you there."

"Yeah, right," Mary scoffed. "That has got to be one of your worst lies."

"You're not coming?" Billie's small voice and bent lip took perfect aim at Sherlock's heart.

The stony detective submitted to the staring contest with the child for several seconds before breaking.

"Fine."
A little break from the doom and gloom and crime scenes. FLUFF! Just for reference, Billie would be about 4 years old in this chapter. I think her conversational skills would be a bit advanced, as her intelligence as a whole would be. Mary and John are both very smart, but then she's got a genius godfather. And, as you'll see here, Sherlock talks to Billie like an adult, so that would help her development.
As Billie grew older, she no longer needed the violin to sleep. But that didn’t mean she stopped asking for it. Of course, now she could do so with words instead of the screaming cries of an infant.

When Billie heard Sherlock playing in his flat, every time without fail she would pester one of her parents until her mother or father took her to upstairs to listen properly. Sherlock didn’t mind. He was actually satisfied with himself for instilling the love of the music in her, and quite pleased she would rather listen to classical than the so called “music” children were subjected to. He was certain Mozart could do much more to stimulate her brain cells than a colorful dinosaur or dog singing about counting and shapes.

Most times Billie would plop herself right down on Sherlock’s chair, if he was pacing while playing. If he was already occupying his chair, she would crawl on his lap or sit by his feet, leaning against his leg and staring up at the instrument.

She rarely spoke while he played and that was something he appreciated. It was as if the man and child held an unspoken bond. A toddler understood the quirky detective better than most grown adults. It was as if she knew that the music was helping him think and didn’t want to disturb his process.

It was the same when Sherlock would enter his mind palace. He had explained his ‘mind palace’ in the most simplest of terms to the child at an early age and somehow she seemed to comprehend. Billie would remain silent the entire time until her godfather opened his eyes. Sherlock often did so only to find his goddaughter perched precariously on his lap, studying his face. Other times, she would be sitting across from him, imitating his steepled fingers under her chin.

“How can anyone have a Mine Place?” Billie had asked once.

“Mind Palace,” Sherlock corrected as the child crawled onto his lap. “I suppose. But most people are too dull to do so. Why?”

“I think I got one,” she whispered in her godfather’s ear as though it were a secret.

“You do?” Sherlock’s lips twitched. “And it’s ‘have’ one.”

Billie nodded excitedly, if not proudly.

“How can you tell me about it?” Sherlock questioned, truly interested to hear what she had to say.

“Snot a palace,” she beamed brightly, “it’s a castle.”

“Really?” Sherlock was definitely smiling now.
"Mhm," Billie bobbed her head again. "I keep everything important there. Like - like uh - words I like. Funny words you say. I keep them so I can as' what they are later. Stuff 'bout Mummy. How she smells so pretty. She's the Queen. Daddy's the King. Big 'n strong. And you're a knight!"

"I thought I was a pirate," Sherlock smirked.

"That's when we play pretend," Billie threw her arms up dramatically, as if it was the most obvious piece of intelligence in the world. "This is for real."

Sherlock chuckled softly but the girl failed to notice as she happily continued explaining the castle inside her head.

"And I'm the princess!" She smiled, still speaking in hushed tones, as though she was telling Sherlock the wonders of the universe. "There's also - uh - stories and things you and Mummy and Daddy teach me. Things I want to 'member forever."

"Remember," Sherlock amended reflexively as always. "So, what does this castle look like, hum?"

"It's a castle, silly!" Billie giggled. "You know castles."

"Yes," Sherlock nodded, "but this is your castle. You can make it look however you like."

"How 'bout pink?" Billie clapped.

"Let's at least be a smidge realistic, shall we?" Sherlock lightheartedly reprimanded.

"'Snot pink," Billie laughed. "Here. I can show you."

The child closed her eyes and reached her hands to connect with Sherlock's face. Her palms rested against his cheeks delicately and he resisted snickering.

"Billie, this is your castle. It's in your mind. Not mine." Sherlock explained, yet the girl didn't flinch. "Only you can see it. I can't."

"Daddy says you're the smartest man in the whole wide world," Billie huffed impatiently. "So try."

Sherlock wondered if John's concerns about the detective rubbing off on the child were actually legitimate as the girl practically replicated his tone with her final two words. He was flattered by his friend's apparent statement to his daughter and the imitation.

"Close your eyes," Billie instructed seriously, "like you told me when you e'splained what a mind place is."

"Palace," Sherlock repeated.

"Shh," Billie hushed him. "Are your eyes closed?"

"Yes," Sherlock smiled.

"Nuh uh!" Billie peaked one eye open. "Close!"

Sherlock obeyed and Billie shut her single open eye.

"Tell me what you see, Billie," Sherlock prompted, already knowing where the girl was going with this game.

"Castle," Billie grinned. "Big 'n tall 'n really big. Giants could leave here. They don't. That'd be silly. The castle is on a big hill and there's uh - water - that - it -"

"A moat," Sherlock provided.

"Yeah, that!" Billie squeaked. "There's a - a pirate ship in the - the mo - moat."

"A pirate ship and a castle?" Sherlock questioned, playfully skeptical.
"The castle is the Mind Place," Sherlock could tell Billie was rolling her eyes behind her closed lids by the tone of her voice. "The ship is outside. It's protec - protec - protection."

"Pirates offering protection?" Sherlock chuckled.

"These are good pirates," Billie explained earnestly. "You - you were a pirate. But then I made you my knight. 'Cause I wanted you in the castle with me and Mummy and Daddy."

"Your knight?"

"Stop talkin', Uncle 'Lock," Billie whined. "You're gonna ruin it. You got to be quiet. 'S what you said. Quiet 'n think. Picture it. See it?"

"I thought I wasn't supposed to talk," Sherlock smirked.

"Just say yes or no, 'k?" Billie huffed with a theatrical shrug of her small shoulder.

"Mmkay," Sherlock hummed.

"See it?" Billie repeated expectantly.

"Yes," Sherlock smiled.

"Kay," Billie took in a climactic breath before continuing. "So, you go over the water - there's a bridge. And go inside. And there's a giant room. All the rooms are giant 'cause it's a castle. There's all kinds of stairs and rooms too. I like Mummy's room. Warm and bright and smells like Mummy. I can hear her singing too. I go there when I'm sad."

Sherlock opened his eyes and stared at the toddler. What this little girl had to be sad about, he didn't know, but he did know that this child was incredibly intelligent and perceptive. She didn't possess the genius that he had already had at her age, but she did hold a different kind of wisdom about her. Just like her father. Mary was clever, of course. Much more clever than the average person. But John was wise in another way, a warmer way. It seemed Billie had absorbed both of these traits from her parents. She was certainly going to be one intelligent, gifted and empathetic human being.

"Daddy's room. Smells like his face when he kisses me good morning."

"Aftershave."

"Shh. I go to his room when I'm scared. And then - your room! Lots of books! So many. I don't know what they are. You do. And pirate stuff like on the ship 'cause you were a pirate, 'member I said you were a pirate? Billy's there. Not me. Not me Billie. Billy. The head."

"Skull."

"Shh! Music too! And you singing! Your via - vi-lin. And the song. The song you sing to me. 'Member? Sing it!"

"Right now?" Sherlock chuckled.

"Yes!"

Sherlock was amused at how easily Billie could switch or lose focus. But the girl wouldn't settle until she heard the song now that it was on her mind.

"Well I've never been a man of many words. And there's nothing I could say that you haven't heard."

"But I'll sing you love songs 'till the day I die," Billie's soft voice joined in for this line and she tried to continue but stumbled over her words.

"The way I'm feeling, I can't keep it inside. I'll sing a sweet serenade whenever you're feeling sad. And a lullaby each night before you go to bed. I'll sing to you for the rest of your life. The way I'm feeling, I can't keep it inside. No, I can't keep it inside."
"Mummy sings the sunshine song," Billie beamed. "Sometimes I play them for the whole castle to hear! It makes me happy."

"What else is in the castle?" Sherlock asked curiously.

"Horses and doggies," Billie listed on her fingers. "Oh! And Peter's room!"

"Peter?" Sherlock furrowed his brow. "Who's Peter?"

Sherlock knew every single significant person that crossed the child's path, and that name was nowhere to be found in his mental records.

"My best friend!" Billie giggled. "He's funny and smart 'n, 'n, nice, and tell jokes. One time - one time - he saved me! He plays games with me - like you! Sometimes he - he's at my window. He says he can fly! And do magic tricks! I dream 'bout him too. He takes me flying all over! He tells me all 'bout fairies 'n fun things! I really like him."

"Hmm. I'd like to meet him," Sherlock said, trying to hide the skepticism and humor from his voice.

"You can't," Billie shook her head. "He's only my friend. Plus, he's a secret," she whispered emphatically. "Only I can see him."

Sherlock smiled fondly. Of course someone with such a vast imagination such as Billie would have an imaginary friend.

"Now," Billie jumped off Sherlock's lap with a hopeful, yet demanding smile, "play me a song!"
And so Billie spent a lot of time in 221B, even when she wasn't in need of a babysitter.

When Detective retreated into his Mind Palace, she escaped to her castle. When the genius was engrossed in a book, Billie would lounge nearby until her godfather would start reading it aloud to her. And when the musician pulled out his violin, she would close her eyes and listen to the sweet sounds.

Until one night.

One night when she didn't simply close her eyes and listen until she fell asleep in his chair or on the floor as was the norm.

One night, when she did something Sherlock never saw coming.

It was well past midnight, and certainly hours past Billie's bedtime, when the man heard a subtle shuffling of footsteps from the hall. A small person was ascending the stairs at a slow and unsteady pace. Whoever it was, was also dragging something soft against the wood floor as he or she made the climb.

Sherlock ceased his stroking of his violin and sat so that he was facing the door. Smirking, he simply waited for what he knew was to come.

The doorknob jiggled, and then twisted, and then turned. Jiggled some more. Twisted. Turned.

Sherlock would have to work on door knobs with Billie. She was most certainly far more clever than the average child of her age, but some things still escaped her.

Finally, the door fell slowly open and in stepped a paisley pajama clad four year old dragging the patched and well worn puppy pirate plushie behind her. Sherlock had seen the girl shortly after waking on countless occasions and knew all of her tired mannerisms. Now, there were no slumped shoulders or sluggish feet. Billie appeared as fresh as Sherlock during a case. Which, technically, the detective was in the middle of one at the moment. He truly had been playing his violin to work through the triple murder in his head.

Billie seemed to skip over to Sherlock's side, dropping onto the floor with crossed legs and staring up at his expectantly. She didn't even say a single word to her godfather. She knew he would understand what she was waiting for.

Sherlock didn't waste time asking her if John or Mary knew she was out of bed, if she was allowed to be up here in the middle of the night, or awake in the middle of the night - all of which he assumed would be no's. He didn't even satisfy his curiosity of how she managed to slip away undetected from a former soldier and intelligence agent, even if he was quite curious indeed, and secretly impressed.

Instead, Sherlock dutifully picked up his instrument and began playing one of Billie's favorite pieces.

The girl hugged her stuffed dog to her chest and watched the musician's hands closely. Her eyes followed the bow and then his fingers. She stared at the instrument and its master in innocent
Suddenly, Billie bounced up from the floor and began spinning and twirling, using her pretend pirate canine as a dance partner.

"What are you doing?" Sherlock smirked, hiding his fascination and excitement.

"Saw it on telly today," Billie explained.

Wordlessly, Sherlock stood from his chair, setting his violin and bow down gingerly on the table. Apparently the momentary lack of music didn't stop the little dancer as she continued to hum and sway. Still without speaking, Sherlock moved to his music player and selected one of his own recorded songs. Billie, of course, didn't recognize it, but it was a piece Sherlock would never forget.

The waltz he wrote for John and Mary's wedding.

Without warning, Sherlock scooped Billie off the floor and into his arms. The plushie pressed between them now, the godfather took his goddaughter's hand in his own and slowly danced in circles with her. After the song finished, another waltz began. This time, Sherlock set Billie atop his own two feet, her little legs spreading to reach. Keeping hold of her hands, he guided her about the flat. She grinned and giggled and then would suddenly sharply focus on Sherlock's feet and their movements, before returning to laughing and smiling, until she once again bowed her head to study his steps. The cycle continued for several songs until Sherlock felt the girl begin to sag. Lifting her once more in his arms for the final piece, Sherlock danced with his goddaughter until she was sound asleep, and still continued for a short time after. He hummed along with the melodies he knew by heart while the child slumbered in his grasp.

Sherlock continued to hum and sway as he carried Billie down to 221C, only stopping when she was securely under her covers. Planting a delicate kiss on the girl's forehead, Sherlock stood and crept from the room.

It was that night that Sherlock began composing a new piece for the first time since the wedding.

A song for Billie.

That wasn't all he did that night though.

For when Billie awoke the next morning, it was to find a new pair of ballet slippers hanging from her doorknob.

John and Mary weren't even out of bed yet before she had tried them on, ran upstairs to thank her godfather and practiced a few steps.

It was only when John shuffled groggily up to 221B in search of his missing daughter that he found out the events of the previous night - and that Sherlock already had Billie enrolled in dance classes.

Somehow, seeing the smiles on both the godfather and goddaughter's faces, he couldn't bring himself to be anything but happy for his daughter and grateful to his friend.

Not to mention he was thankful this gift from Sherlock wasn't another "play" crime scene kit.
Dance of the Raven

Chapter Notes

we are getting quite close to the dramatic reveal and present time!

There were two people in the entire world that had ever witnessed Sherlock Holmes execute a pirouette. The first, was Janine.

The second, was Billie.

Sherlock had taught himself the arts of ballet and ballroom dancing in secret. He had pretended to begrudgingly teach John how to waltz before the wedding, claiming that he didn't want his friend to look like a complete idiot. In reality, he had quite enjoyed the lessons.

Now he was giving new lessons, to John's daughter. Even as a child, she was far more nimble toed than her father had been. Of course, the girl had her own private instructor that Sherlock picked out and paid for, but they still practiced together. Sometimes they did so in the flat and on other occasions Sherlock would take his little protégée to the dance studio when he knew it would be unoccupied. Often, Billie would ask for Sherlock to dance for her as she would take a break sitting on the floor. He didn't quite fancy a picture of himself performing a grand jeté circulating in the papers next to the ghastly photographs of the detective in the deerstalker.

She was doing remarkably well for her age, Sherlock had to admit. She picked up things so quickly it even surprised him. With a highly skilled former intelligence agent for a mother and a doctor who happened to also be a veteran as a father, the genetics were definitely in the girl's favor. Not to mention Sherlock patted himself on the back a bit for her advanced intelligence and talents.

Billie did have time with peers though as well, much to Sherlock's chagrin. The girl had begged until finally she was put in an official dance program with other students. The studio was run by her private tutor. Sherlock still practiced with her on the side and she regularly received her private lessons, just less frequently.

It was nearly Christmastime, another reason for Sherlock to moan, but this year he actually had something to look forward to.

Billie was going to be her dance company's production of The Nutcracker. Every student that attended lessons at the studio was involved, no matter age or talent. The little ballerina had been bouncing with excitement for weeks now. John and Mary caught her on several occasions wearing her dance attire around the flat when she wasn't practicing. She even dressed her pirate plushie in pink ballet garb. She constantly requested Sherlock to play pieces from the production for her while she hummed and danced along. She swore that one day she would play the part of Clara, but would settle for the Sugar Plum Fairy when she got better until she was old enough for the leading role.

December third, opening night.

John and Mary weren't sure who was more nervous and excited, Billie, or Sherlock.

The parents and godfather were, of course, in attendance, along with Mrs. Hudson, and yes, even Mycroft. He had protested quite vehemently when asked by his brother, but proceeded to give in fairly easily when met with those big blue eyes of a certain blooming ballerina.

It was only when they were approaching the theater that the excitement began to extinguish. Police cars and an ambulance were pulled up to the building as people were being blocked from entrance. There weren't too many people as it was mostly parents dropping off their children before the production. John, Mary and the others had all decided to accompany Billie and then...
simply wait. Of course, Sherlock had had plans of sneaking backstage before the show with a little present for his pupil.

Instead, they were being pushed back by a crowd of people and police. That was, until the consulting detective spotted another certain detective leaving the theater. The grey haired man was bringing his mobile out of his pocket and beginning to type when he received an incoming text.

'Don't bother. Already here. - SH'

Sherlock watched as Lestrade snapped his head up and surveyed his surroundings, obviously looking for the sleuth.

'I won't even ask how or why.'

'Billie. - SH'

'Damn. I forgot. Show's cancelled. Get her home. Now.'

"Sherlock?" John questioned the man as he continued to wordlessly fire off messages.

The detective merely offered a quick nod at his blogger and nothing more was needed to be said.

"Mrs. Hudson, Mary," John turned to his wife, "take Billie home."

There was no question in the military man's voice. Sherlock knew Lestrade, John knew Sherlock, and Mary knew John. This was all the exchange that was necessary. They all understood from the other that this was something serious.

"But what about my show?" Billie's lips and voice wobbled.

"Oh, sweetheart," Mary picked her daughter up in her arms, "we'll put on a whole show right at home. Promise."

"Sherlock, what have you done now?"

The group turned as Mycroft approached. He, of course, had elected to come on his own accord.

"Don't act like you don't already know what happened," Sherlock spat. "Get a car and have your people take Mrs. Hudson, Mary and Billie back to Baker Street."

Surprisingly, Mycroft obliged with little more than a crinkle of his nose.

"It will be around the corner," he advised the two women.

John gave Mary and his daughter a kiss goodbye before they parted ways. Sherlock impatiently elbowed his way through the crowd. He knew very well Mycroft could have cleared a path for him, but pushed ahead nonetheless. The elder Holmes and John followed with a quick exchanged glance.

"What happened?" Sherlock asked in way of greeting as he approached Greg.

"Virginia Preston." Lestrade sighed. "Dance studio director -"

"I know," Sherlock clipped, yet lacking his normal venom. "And Billie's private instructor. How?"

"You're not gonna like it," Greg rubbed the back of his head and walked over to one of his fellow officers, retrieving from them a small evidence bag.

Inside, was a Raven's feather.
Someone on FF.net (a guest so i can't reply) commented about my choice of name of the daughter.

"Uhh... Ew! HATE the name choice. Their daughter should have had a much girlier name. What made you want " Billie" anyway? I really don't think the real John and Mary will name their child a such distasteful name."

"Girlier name" - The name Billie, spelled with "ie", is a girl's name.

"What made you want Billie anyway?" - I took it from Sherlock's name "William Sherlock Scott Holmes" as a joke from the line in His Last Vow, "We're not naming our daughter after you." Billy, with a y, is the name of Sherlock's skull and of Bill ("Billy") Wiggins, the character in His Last Vow. Wiggins was also a canon character and leader of the Irregulars.

I spent a long time debating the daughter's name, knowing I couldn't possibly please everyone.

The name carries significance that I actually have yet to touch on. As you may have noticed, the earlier chapter started with the characters' full names, including middle names.

There will be a chapter (soon) when we catch up to the present that will reveal Billie's full name. Who knows, maybe you won't like that either, but it has a LOT to do with the story (and Moriarty's plans...that's a pretty big hint if you're following the clues). There are actually scenes already written dedicated to her name, where it came from, John and Mary's decision, etc.

I honestly didn't like "Billie" at first. I had a few ideas and I accidentally posted a chapter with the name as a placeholder and then just ended up keeping it and it grew on me.

I just wanted to give you guys some back story on the name.

Thanks "Guest Sophie" for your review and I hope that helped clear things up. I am being sincere. I truly appreciate ALL feedback; good, bad, etc. My apologies if you still find the name "distasteful".

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

*Sherlock bounded up the stairs to 221B, Lestrade and John following behind. They entered the flat where Mrs. Hudson and Mary were watching Billie dance in the center of the room.*

"*Mrs. Hudson,* " Sherlock instructed before he was even properly through the threshold, "*take Billie downstairs, please.*"

"Are you gonna watch me dance, Uncle 'Lock?" Billie bounced.

"Of course," Sherlock bent down to kiss her forehead. "Later."

Billie went with Mrs. Hudson out of the flat without complaint. Sherlock made certain she was out of earshot before closing the door and turning to the others.

"What is it?" Mary rose from the couch to stand next to her husband.

"*Miss Preston,* " John sighed, "was murdered."
"What?" Mary gasped, lowering her voice.

"Do you have anything Sherlock?" Greg rubbed his forehead. "I'll take whatever you got."

"He's getting closer," Sherlock paced. "He moved from strangers to someone I would recognize as one of his people that Mycroft and I put behind bars, and now to someone I know personally."

"But why her?" John crossed his arms. "Last time, Moriarty targeted me at the pool, and then me, Greg and Mrs. Hudson."

"I don't doubt he still won't," Sherlock straightened. "Unfortunately, when it comes to Moriarty, it could be anyone. Everyone I've ever known, come in contact with, is in danger."

"That's a long list," Lestrade shook his head. "I can't keep tabs on all of London."

"Fortunately, Mycroft can," Sherlock rolled his eyes. "There has to be something he's good for. He's going to tighten the net, shall we say. Keep close surveillance on the people I come in contact with on a regular basis, especially those closest to me," his eyes flickered over John, Mary and Greg individually.

"Is that really going to make a difference?" Lestrade asked earnestly, if not worriedly.

"Let's hope so, shall we?" Sherlock's gaze was hard and downcast, but there was a hidden hue of fear in those irises.

"I still don't understand why he chose her," John shook his head. "The hundreds of people you know, and he picked her. Why? What's his reason?"

"Does he have to have one?" Mary questioned. "He's Moriarty."

"No," Sherlock spun on his heel, "John's right. Every victim has meant something. Part of a clue. Part of a fairy tale. Not with this murder. Why? The only evidence that connects her to the others is the feather. Nothing else fits. But something does. It has to. I'm missing something. Something staring right in front of me."

As he finished his sentence, Sherlock sprang out the door and up the stairs to John's old bedroom. The others quickly joined him, all three pausing momentarily in the threshold to take in the sight, and a collective gasp.

The room had been completely transformed. At first, after John's departure from 221, the room became simply storage. Stacks of books and paperwork had hidden the floor alongside filing cabinets and labeled boxes. The clutter had somehow been cleared away and John was curious as to where exactly it all disappeared to.

Now, the small space was another form of organized chaos. Maps and diagrams clung to the wall. Photographs of each of the victims were hung together, all corresponding to a printed page of a fairy tale and illustrations of the story. There was an entire wall dedicated to ravens, their mythology, appearance in literature and folklore and facts and images of the black bird. Some of the fairy tale excerpts had drawn lines or string attaching them to others. Certain ones were circled or highlighted. In one corner, stood separated stacks of books of fairy tales. One was strictly tales from the Grimm Brothers. And others looked to be separated by country of origin and subject matter. In the opposite corner were books reviewing, discussing and dissecting fairy tales. Another wall was plastered with material pertaining solely to Moriarty and his possible movements, locations and contacts. There was a calendar that documented the dates of each murder, with mathematical equations scribbled nearby illustrating time passed between kills and estimated future murder dates.

And John thought Sherlock was obsessive over a case when he blanketed the wall above the couch.

The detective dove into his research without a word to the others, disappearing into documents and his own thoughts. John could only guess how often his friend did this, escaping to this room or his mind palace, studying and deducing every inch of this case, forgetting about time and all else beyond that door. The other three exchanged a glance before they too immersed themselves.
It was only when John started nodding off while his bleary eyes tried to read a Danish fairy tale that he realized how long they had been hiding away in that room. He wiped his face and realized he didn't remember a thing he had just read from the story. Glancing at his watch, he groaned at the time.

"What is it?" Mary was sitting on the floor next to him.

John merely handed his wife his arm. She got the message and held his wrist, gasping at the late hour.

"Billie," she briefly closed her eyes, internally cursing.

"I'll go check on her," John grunted, lifting himself off the ground. "Sure Mrs. Hudson put her bed hours ago."

"I'll come too," Mary stretched as she stood.

Lestrade looked up at the couple and then over at Sherlock. Greg wasn't too sure how much he really wanted to spend a night in a small room with Sherlock. The sleuth had been silent thus far, but one never knew when it came to Sherlock.

"I should be going," he started slowly, waiting for a reaction of any kind from the man he was eyeing but receiving nothing.

Sherlock simply kept his nose pressed up against a particular file and didn't even appear to notice anyone had spoken. Greg rolled his eyes and turned to the others.

"John, Mary," he nodded to them, and with one last quick glance at Sherlock, left.

The husband and wife locked eyes before their gazes wandered knowingly over to their friend.

"Goodnight, Sherlock," Mary called with a smirk, also receiving no reply.

John shook his head and smiled, remembering nights like these in 221B all too well. The two made their exit, John shutting the door behind them with a soft chuckle.

"We'll see if he reemerges in the morning," he teased as they made the descent down to 221C.

The pair entered their flat and were not surprised to find Mrs. Hudson dusting their mantle. This wasn't the first time she had watched Billie late into the night while there was a case underway.

"Oh," she beamed, turning around, "I was wondering if the two of you were ever coming down. You're just like I'm not your typical old lady, you know. Never needed much sleep. Too much to do! Thought I'd busy myself by cleaning up a bit. At least you keep clean. And with a little one! I'm impressed. Sherlock is the only one in that bloody flat and somehow makes the mess of ten children."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hudson," John offered her a genuine smile.

"Oh, it's no trouble, really," she waved her hand as she started for the door. "Just don't make a habit of it. I'm your landlady, not your nanny, dear."

It didn't matter that she said this every time, or that every time, she came running to babysit when asked upon, John still smirked fondly at the woman.

"Thank you," Mary drew her into a hug, offering a kiss on the cheek. "Have a good night."

Mrs. Hudson closed the door and the couple headed towards their daughter's room. John paused when he stepped in front of the door. The entire flat was oddly quiet. Too quiet for his liking.

Billie had a tendency to talk in her sleep. She would have entire conversations with herself. She also tossed and turned quite often.

Now there was only silence.
The father and soldier in him both reacted readily. Cupping the knob in his fist, John pushed door open cautiously, his limbs already tensing into an offensive position.

He wasn't met with an intruder or empty bed though.

He allowed a sigh to escape him and shuffled casually into the room, bending down beside his daughter. Mary followed, perching on the edge of the bed.

"Alright," John whispered, "come on, you."

"You can't fool us," Mary added with a smile.

It was only a few seconds later that their daughter finally began to roll over to face them. Tear tracks tarnished her rosy cheeks.

"Hey," John wiped at the markings, "what's wrong?"

"You can tell us," Mary prompted when the girl seemed to shrink into her pillow.

"I - I was - tryin' to be - brave. I was a - good girl. I listened. You said - to go. That I couldn't - couldn't do the ballet. And you - and Uncle Lock - were all sad. Somethin' - somethin' was wrong. Right? Gran'ma won't tell. But I - I was - brave. I didn't - be mad - like you tell me. I wanted - wanted to be good and brave. But I - I really wanted to be in the ballet. And - and -"

Billie was swept up in sobs now, her own words not making it to her parents' ears.

John glanced over at his wife and then stared down at his daughter. Sometimes he forgot how mature his little girl was. She hadn't argued or thrown a tantrum like other children. She always seemed so in tune to the world around her. She knew when her parents were upset. She knew when something was wrong during a case. She didn't question it most times if she suddenly had to be escorted from a room or building without explanation. She didn't know everything that her parents and godfather did, and John was thankful for that, but she understood enough.

Children had a right to get upset and be selfish sometimes though. And now was definitely one of those times.

"I'm sorry, Billie," Mary rubbed her daughter's hand and then held it. "We both are. We know how much that ballet meant to you. There'll be others though." She grinned encouragingly. "Not just at Christmas. There's the Winter and Spring recitals. And you put on a show for Easter. Lots more. And then next Christmas, you can be in The Nutcracker again."

"But I wanted to do it this Christmas," Billie swallowed.

"I know you did, sweetheart," Mary squeezed her child's hand.

"How's this?" John patted his daughter's shoulder. "You put on a show for all of us, hm? Mummy, me, Sherlock, Mrs. Hudson."

"That's not a very big aud-audience," Billie sniffed and John chuckled.

"Alright, we can invite whoever you like?" John smiled. "How about for your birthday next month? We can have a big party and you can put on your show. Your friends, your family. Who else?"

"Molly," Billie sniffled again, but her voice was slowly losing some of that sadness.

"Anyone else?" Mary smirked as her daughter began to sparkle instead of sulk.

"Greg," Billie nodded. "Uncle Mike."

"Mycroft?" John arched his brow. "Really?"

Mary shot him a reprimanding, yet lighthearted, glare and he dropped his shocked and skeptical eyebrows.
"Oh!" Billie clapped. "And Peter!"

"Right," Mary nodded, smiling knowingly at her husband, "Peter. Can't forget him."

"This is gonna be great!" Billie beamed.

"Good," John smiled, kissing his daughter on her forehead. "Now that we've gotten you all excited, time to sleep."

"I can't sleep now," Billie protested in full Sherlock fashion.

"You have a whole month to plan the birthday party of your dreams," Mary too pressed her lips delicately against the girl's head. "Right now, you should be having real dreams. Okay?"

"Okay," Billie huffed but smiled.

The parents bid their daughter goodnight before silently taking their leave, heading to their own bedroom for some much needed rest. And as John laid his head down on his pillow, he could hear the gentle voice of his daughter, talking once again in her sleep.

Billie's bedroom was dark, but Billie didn't see it that way. In her mind, she saw balloons and presents and dancing and cake. She saw streamers and her friends and more dancing. Music and her family - and more dancing.

And she saw Peter.

He wasn't part of the pretend party though.

He was sitting right next to her, right where her father had just been seated.

Her friend was silent as he stared down at Billie. He was always quiet at night. But Billie wasn't. She talked and talked to him and Peter always listened, even if he didn't respond with spoken words. Peter listened better than anyone.

This time, as he looked down at her, he extended a hand to her face, gently wiping away a tear stain John had missed.

Chapter End Notes

I know, another long note. Kura06 on Tumblr was helping me with a chapter title and these were her hilarious suggestions. YOU SHOULD READ THEM AND LAUGH

"being brave"
"frustration"
"wish"
"who the hell is peter" "peter you creeper"
"we're getting closer guys"
"Sherlock please notice Lestrade"
"Prepare your nuts for the next chapter"
"Hehehehe"
"Fairy tales"
"Backstage (after the show)"
"Behind the (crime) scenes"
"Late"
"PLEASE SOMEONE STOPS THE TRAIN"
"Yes there's a plot"
Dancing wasn't the only thing Sherlock's violin playing inspired in young Billie. Her love of the music spilled over into other areas, and eventually, she insisted on learning an instrument herself.

Sherlock was almost more excited than the child and was already thinking of the best violin to purchase for the girl when she dropped the devastating blow.

Billie wanted to learn the piano.

John, on the other hand, was honestly and secretly quite pleased to be spared of the scratching and screeching. Not to mention the cost. Still, as it turned out, money wasn't going to be an issue, again. It seemed, despite his childish protests, Sherlock was tightly wrapped around Billie's little finger.

The small family unit was enjoying a quiet evening at home after both parents had endured holiday shifts when John received the text.

'Upstairs. At once. - SH'

Hardly a second passed before another message beeped through.

'Bring Billie and Mary. - SH'

John just shook his head at his phone. He had barely finished sighing when another impatient note appeared.

'Now. Please. - SH'

John chuckled and stood from his chair, setting his book aside. Mary glanced at his mobile and then at his face.

“What is it?” She questioned, closing her own novel.

“Sherlock wants us upstairs for some reason, all of us,” John shuffled to Billie's room.

“For what?” Mary smirked.


John peeked in his daughter's room where the little girl was currently instructing her stuffed pirate dog on how to perfect a pirouette.

"No, no, no," she threw her head back. "You have to do it right. Peter's coming for rehearsal."

"Hey," John grinned at he knocked and entered. "What are you up to in here?"

"Practicing," Billie responded rather officially. "Peter is coming over tonight and I wanted to show him the new dance I'm gonna do for the party."

"Well, you have a whole month before the party," John laughed lightly, “think you can take a break from practicing for a bit and come upstairs with us?"

Billie bounded for the door without a word or question. She never hesitating in going upstairs. She knew exactly what that meant and Billie never passed up an opportunity to visit her
The three went into the hall, Billie nearly toppling Mrs. Hudson right over.

"Oh," the woman chortled. "John, Mary, the racket Sherlock was making earlier today while the pair of you were at work. You'd think there was an elephant stomping around up there."

"An elephant?" Billie questioned excitedly. "Cool!"

Before anything else could be said, the girl sprang forward, rounding the corner and leaping up the steps, even as her parents called after her. John and Mary gave an apologetic glance to their landlady before chasing after their overly eager little one.

"What?"

The duo heard their daughters exclamation before they reached the top of the stairs. Finally, upon entering Sherlock's flat, their internal dialogue and reaction was pretty much the same.

There, tucked against the wall where one of the bookshelves used to be, was a beautiful upright piano. Books, of course, were already stacked on top, but the instrument itself was pristine and polished.

"Better than an elephant!" Billie declared as she hurried toward it.

"I would have gotten a baby grand, but there is only so much room. I tried to get one in the upstairs room, but the movers were infuriatingly insistent that they wouldn't be able to do it. I hope this will suffice."

"Suffice?" Mary stepped forward. "You bought our daughter a piano? I think that more than suffices."

"Sherlock," John shook his head, "you really didn't -"

"Ah, John. No need for that now. You already gave me the lecture when I paid for Billie's dance lessons. These are gifts. Hence why they are called gifts. I have the money and no children of my own in my future, thank goodness, so I am certainly capable to spending it. Besides, it was logical. Billie wants to learn, I can help her, just as I do with dance. I will accompany her on violin. And I know a few things about the piano. It is, basically, simple mathematics. A piano would never have fit in your flat and I doubt Mrs. Hudson would've allowed me to have it in hers or the hall. See? Logical."

"Thank you, Uncle Lock!" Billie practically pounced on the man.

"Merry Christmas, Billie," Sherlock cradled a single arm around her form.

"I don't have your present ready yet!" Billie pulled back, her face one of childhood horror.

"Quite alright," Sherlock smirked.

"Christmas isn't for another three days," John reminded her. "Don't worry. Sherlock just likes to do things in his own time."

"Well," Sherlock took Billie by the shoulder, "we have a few hours before bedtime. Shall we?"

Billie snapped her enlarged eyes at the instrument, whipping her head back to her parents for their approval.

"Go ahead," Mary nodded with a laugh.

"Just make sure she's back downstairs before too late," John chuckled.

John made to take his wife's hand, but she hesitated.

"Do you mind if I join you?" Mary grinned at Sherlock and Billie.
"Do you play Mummy?" Billie bounced up and down.

"Not since I was a little girl," she said with a faraway look in her glistening glaze.

There was something in the way she spoke that told of a story behind her words and Billie somehow sensed it, like she did everything else. She padded to her mother's side, staring up at her, waiting patiently and with rapt interest for her to continue.

"When I was really small, younger than even you," Mary began with a swallow, "I used to live down the road from this little music shop. It was beautiful. I remember walking past it one day and seeing all the pretty instruments inside. I didn't even know what they all were. But I snuck away one night and went to see. The owner lived above the store and heard me downstairs. Sweet old woman. She let me stay. Every night she would let me in and teach me a little on the piano. That was until - until we moved," she glanced up at her husband warily.

"And you stopped playing?" Billie pressed, a bit sadly.

"Yeah, I guess I did," Mary frowned. "But I always regretted it. I loved the piano. And I know that you will too. Now, come on."

Mary pushed Billie toward the instrument and her mention of it worked to distract her daughter from any further questions. She exchanged knowing looks with both John and Sherlock and then the three dutifully put on their masks for the girl.

Mary had to admit that it felt nice. There was so much from her past that she could never talk about, let alone allow herself to even think about. If she did, if she let all of that in, it would destroy her. And Billie, well, Billie could only know so much. Maybe when she was older, they would tell her the basics, but not now. Innocence only lasted so long. And for once, Mary actually had been able to reveal something about her own upbringing to her child. It was a rare occasion and one that filled the mother with a certain warmth and spread a smile across her face.

John was grinning fondly too as he watched his friend and wife both take seats beside his daughter on the bench. He hadn't heard that story before. He heard very little of anything of Mary's life before she became Mary Morstan, and then Mary Watson. And he was alright with that most of the time. She had a past. And that past and those problems were hers to bear and keep. She shared pieces with him, of course. But no matter what she did or didn't tell him, John refused to stop loving her no matter what. Love was a choice, after all. Sure, it started out as pure emotions. Sentiment. Chemicals. Whatever you wanted to label it. But after those first stomach butterflies, in all relationships, there came hurdles, and you chose to continue to love the person, despite the downs. He had forgiven Mary long ago, but this snippet of her past brought it back to his mind. What she went through. The childhood she missed out on. The person she was forced to become. It was nice to know that his wife had been granted at least some small moments of happiness. Of youth and that innocence.

He wanted Billie to have a hundred of those moments. A thousand. He desired for his little girl to remain a little girl for as long as possible.

He had no idea how much that dream was going to be dashed.
When Billie Watson wasn’t perfecting her one-woman, or rather, one-girl, dance show for her birthday, she was plunking away at the ivories. Mary and Sherlock turned turns helping her learn, even though Sherlock did hire a personal instructor as well. The woman would come to Baker Street to give her lessons, usually under the critical eye of Sherlock, who sometimes liked to cut in. Even John had a hand in helping his daughter with learning how to read the music. However he did refuse to dust off his clarinet, no matter how much Mary insisted, though it was usually through giggles she was doing so.

The little family was having a truly joyful holiday season and new year. They even almost forgot about the foreboding shadow hanging over their heads.

There weren’t many cases that came calling or knocking, but, for once, Sherlock didn’t seem to mind. Or really notice.

He was far too busy helping Billie prepare.

It had been decided, and by decided that really mean declared by Billie as happening, that Sherlock and Mary would play the music for Billie’s ballet performance. So when Sherlock wasn’t helping Billie practice, he was doing so himself. As was Mary.

John would often sit on the sidelines, enjoying the simple pleasure of watching the three people he cared most deeply about just being happy. With the chaos that was their lives, between cases and long work days and overnight shifts and merely knowing Sherlock Holmes and everything else that cluttered their days, it was nice to be able to be just be a ordinary family.

Well, almost ordinary.

Because, well, most ordinary families didn’t have a godfather, who had a brother, who had his fair share of financial wealth. Who had said godfather that could plan a big event, just like he had the wedding, just as well as he solved murders.

Sherlock was putting together the birthday party of dreams. Probably of legend. All John could do was shake his head at the sheer enormity and ridiculousness of it all. The man had rented out a small local theater for the performance. And that was just the icing on the cake.

The day of Billie’s birthday, everyone had their designated jobs, given to them by Sherlock, with detailed instructions, of course. Sherlock, Mary and John were going to the theater to oversee the decorations, stage set up and a few other surprises that John just wasn’t even going to ask about. Mrs. Hudson had been instructed to retrieve the cake from a nearby baker who owed Sherlock a favor. And Molly was set to spend the beginning of the day babysitting Billie while the finishing touches were made.

All was going precisely to Sherlock’s perfected, and even printed out, plan.

And then came the call.

John was watching with amusement as Sherlock criticized one of the decorator’s abilities to hang streamers when the detective’s mobile sounded from his pocket. Retrieving it with a huff, Sherlock scanned the screen, stopping his sentence before the insult was even finished. John saw his friends’ features drop instantly and stepped toward him.

“What is it?” He asked in a low voice as to not alert the decorators.
“Lestrade,” Sherlock said simply, followed only be another name. "Moriarty."

"Moriarty?" John parroted. "But it's barely been two months. Is he moving things up?"

"I don't know," Sherlock frowned, "but it seems so."

"Who?" John asked, closing his eyes.

"They haven't identified her yet," Sherlock informed him in a whisper. "There was no I.D. found on the body and it was just discovered. Lestrade contacted me straight away this time."

"But you said it was going to be someone you knew?" John furrowed his brow. "Someone close to you?"

"Still could be," Sherlock bit off. "We have to go."

If it were any other case, John would argue. In fact, with how much effort Sherlock had poured into this party, if it were any other case, even he probably would have declined.

But this was Moriarty.

Moriarty, who was most likely targeting Sherlock. And when the madman targeted Sherlock, he threatened the lives of every single person in Sherlock's circle.

There wasn't time.

"What's going on?" Mary approached the duo, having spotted their somber faces from across the room.

"We have to go," John rushed to explain, "but we'll be back."

"Go? Why? What happened?" Mary glanced back and forth from both men.

"Moriarty," Sherlock repeated icily. "He's killed again."

She didn't speak for a second as the shock hit her.

"You better be," she hugged her husband, leaning in to whisper in his ear. "Do you have your gun?"

"Yep," John whispered back. "Yours?"

"At home," she responded softly.

"Then take it."

"Didn't need you to tell me that," Mary smiled against his cheek. "Be careful."

Finally, they parted Mary spoke at normal volume.

"Take care of him."

"I will," both detective and blogger answered in unison, to which Mary stifled a laugh.

Mary watched as the duo ducked out of the theater, briefly letting her lids fall as she swallowed a strengthening breath. She had let them go off without protest because it was what she had to do. Moriarty was too dangerous to be kept waiting. And yet, Mary couldn't seem to quell the stirring of something in her stomach. Whether it was a woman's intuition, a mother's instinct, assassin's training, or from years on the run, something about this one didn't sit well with her. A dark cloud was floating inside her chest, warning her of danger.
And if Mary knew anything about surviving after life of constantly being just beyond death’s door, it was that to never ignore such a feeling.

Spouting off instructions to the head of the event planning and decorating team, Mary grabbed her coat and fished her phone from her pocket, following the exit the two men had just taken, but heading in a much different direction.

The three of them had no idea that they would never set foot back in that theater that night.
Mary wasn't the only one with a screaming gut.
Sherlock wasn't one for trusting superstitions or feelings. But instinct, that was something else entirely. He still preferred to rely on logic, but that wasn't always a luxury he was granted.

Something about this murder felt different already and they hadn't even gotten to the crime scene yet. He couldn't help but worry that something else was coming. Something big.

The body had been discovered in a music shop and as their cab sped toward the scene, Sherlock mentally calculated who he knew that lived or worked in the vicinity, or would have a connection to the store.

Part of him was thankful that he at least knew most of those closest to him were still safe. He had half expected Moriarty to go after John again for the sixth murder, after doing so twice.

Lestrade didn't recognize the victim, so that narrowed down the options. Sherlock was rapid fire texting Mycroft, who confirmed that the body didn't belong to his mother, as he had surveillance on their parents. But there still was a long list of past clients, members of his homeless network and more.

As they finally pulled up to their unfortunate destination, Sherlock practically threw himself out of the cab, leaving John to hurriedly pay their driver and then sprint after him.

"Give me everything," Sherlock demanded, as he burst through the doors.

"Found with another feather," Greg informed him in lieu of greeting.

"And this," Anderson handed the consulting detective an evidence bag containing a small vial of clear liquid, clearly marked with the number "42".

"42?" John squinted at the markings. "Another clue?"

"Mean anything to you Sherlock?"

It definitely meant something to Sherlock. In fact, it clicked right away. But he was far too busy gaping at the body, and his own abhorrent negligence and stupidity to say anything.

There, propped up as if playing one of the pianos, was the body of one Angela Basset.

Former homeless network contact. Turned her life around with Sherlock's help.

Became a piano teacher and used the income to get off the streets.

Became Billie's piano teacher.

This wasn't about Sherlock. Well, yes, technically, it was always about Sherlock. Moriarty was targeting Sherlock.

But not directly. Not in the way Sherlock had assumed.

There was someone else in the madman's scope.

Shoving the evidence in his coat pocket, despite Lestrade's admonishing, Sherlock whirled
around, taking off toward the door.

John barely had time to collect himself before following after the running man. Sherlock skidded to a stop on the sidewalk, flagging down a cab with a frantic wave.

"Sherlock, tell me what you know." John demanded. "What did you figure out?"

The detective didn't talk as he leapt into the cab, instructing the driver to head to Baker Street, and quickly, but with a bit more colorful vocabulary to motivate the man.

"Baker Street?" John stared at his friend. "Sherlock, tell me, right now, what is going on."

Before Sherlock could open his mouth, the small television screen in the cab flickered. The image stayed black, but sound began to seep out. Not just any noise though. A waltz.

A waltz, Sherlock most definitely recognized.

"Stop the cab!" Sherlock shouted immediately and then he began to push John toward the door before the vehicle had even started to slow. "Get out! Get out!"

The cab was barely to a crawl before Sherlock was out of the vehicle and banging on the driver's window. He half expected to see a pair of mad gleaming eyes staring back up at him.

"No charge."

He shook away the memory as he looked down at the stranger who was most certainly not Moriarty. But he definitely worked for him. Just as John pulled himself out, the driver deliberately sped off down the street.

"Tchaikovsky" Sherlock whispered with wide and then narrowed eyes. "Of course! How could I not see it? I've been blind, John, and I'm sorry."

The apology was so sudden and genuine that it shocked and shook the good doctor.

"Why? What are you apologizing for?" John was trying his best not to panic at the rare sight of stoic Sherlock Holmes looking afraid. "Sherlock, what's going on?"

"No time," Sherlock grabbed his blogger's forearm, "run!"

The pair were charging through through the sidewalks, side alleys and streets now, Sherlock leading the way back to Baker Street.

They were nearly there when a bulky man stepped out from behind a building, blindsiding John in the process. Sherlock helped pull his friend off the ground as the pedestrian mumbled his apologies.

The military man had been given no warning as to what to expect inside the flat, but knew Sherlock well enough to know when they were heading into danger. As the detective threw the front door open, John pulled his gun, readying himself for anything.

At least, he thought, anything.

Because the sight that greeted him when they finally burst into 221C was one John would never forget.
if you get confused, don't worry, all will be explained later. for example, why did Sherlock run off? what did he figure out? well, Sherlock has this tendency to not let others in on his plans or deductions sometimes in these types of situations. if you're wondering why/how something happened, it will be explained in either dialogue or flashbacks later. this is paced like an episode would be, like time skips, etc.

Mycroft Holmes was just finishing reassuring his little brother of their mother's safety when one of his staff burst through his office doors.

"Baker Street's down," he panted.

Mycroft's glare told the man to explain, but quickly.

"We lost the feed."

"How?" Mycroft demanded, pulling his mobile out once again.

"We don't know, sir," he shook his head. "We're working on it."

"Then work harder," The elder Holmes snapped. "Did you dispatch a team?"

"Not yet, sir," he swallowed. "Came straight here to tell you."

"And you can't manage to do more than one thing at a time?" Mycroft practically barked at the sniveling man. "What are you being paid for? Get a team there, now."

Mycroft rolled his eyes as the man whirled around and skittered out of his office. Any other time he would have hoped and assumed that this was just Sherlock taking out his cameras to annoy his older brother.

But not now.

Not when it came to Moriarty.

To the safety of those Sherlock held most dear.

He was just about to hit send on a text to the man when a message from said brother popped up on his screen.

'Moriarty. Baker Street. Now. - SH'

So it seemed Sherlock had caught on. His little brother had most likely spotted a clue at the most recent crime scene, a hidden message, something, that alerted him to Baker Street.

Of course, Sherlock didn't know about the downed surveillance.

With the lost feed and the text from Sherlock, Mycroft was certain.

Something very big, and very bad, was happening at Baker Street.

Gregory Lestrade was still trying to figure out exactly what Sherlock had seen to make him react in such a way. The inspector had debated following the man, but once he had hit the sidewalk, Greg had no clue as to where the consulting detective and blogger had disappeared to.

He was just turning back to his crime scene when his mobile chirped.
Glancing down at the screen, Lestrade nearly dropped the device.

'Moriarty. Baker Street. Now. -SH'

So that was where Sherlock was heading. And in such haste? Without explanation? That couldn’t mean anything good.

"Baker Street." Lestrade verbalized the text to his team in way of an order. "Now."

"But what about-?"

"I don't care about protocol," Lestrade interrupted one of the officers. "Keep officers here at the scene. But I need backup to Baker Street, now." He turned toward the door before motioning for his forensic's team member. "Anderson, with me."

Philip wasn’t a cop, but it wasn’t as though Greg hadn’t already broken a hundred different rules and policies for Sherlock Holmes. Besides, over the years, Anderson had grown into a close friend of the inspector’s. And he had also grown into quite the forensics worker. He had always been sharp, no matter what Sherlock had said, but now he was even better. And he, too, had stake in the lives of those that resided at Baker Street. He may not have been as close as Greg to them, but Philip had almost taken on the role of yet another surrogate uncle to the Watson’s child. Something just told him to bring the man.

Something told him to bring every man he could.

Because something very big, and very bad, was happening at Baker Street.

Mary made it to the bakery in record time, somehow, and quite thankfully, avoiding the speeding ticket she had well earned. She wasn't going to detour, but the bakery was on the way home, and she couldn't just leave Mrs. Hudson alone.

Still, she had that nagging in her gut that was telling her to get to the flat.

She found Mrs. Hudson seated inside near the window and ran up to the woman.

"Oh, Mary, dear," she started with a smile, "you didn't need to come. They're just having a bit of trouble, I guess. Said it wouldn't be much longer."

"I'm not here for the cake," Mary took her landlady's hand, "we need to go."

"Go? Where? What about Billie's cake?" Mrs. Hudson followed the mother, though the continually looked back at the bakery as they left.

"We can come back for it," Mary answered hurriedly, pulling the woman along and then practically pushing her into the passenger seat.

"Mary, what is going on?" Mrs. Hudson shook her head as the younger woman peeled out into traffic.

"I'll explain everything when we get there," Mary replied, digging in her pocket and pulling out her phone.

"Oh, you really shouldn't use that thing while driving, dear," Mrs. Hudson warned.

Ignoring her landlady's well meaning words, Mary lifted the device, listening with an anxious ear and heart to the ringing on the other end.

"Molly's not answering," Mary said, more to herself, as she tossed down the mobile and sunk the pedal even deeper into the floor.

What she would've given to have her gun on her right then.

She was now almost quite sure she would need it.
Because something very big, and very bad, was happening at Baker Street.
i don't think i know how NOT to end on a cliffhanger. jarlcarriers called me Moffat's apprentice in their review of the last chapter. mwahahaha. the chapter comes from my friend who read this chapter and said molly was rapunzel and mary was batman. thought i'd add some humor to all the drama and danger!

Molly Hooper wasn't a former soldier or assassin. She wasn't a detective inspector or consulting detective.

But that didn't mean she wasn't a formidable opponent.

Molly wasn't just some little mouse anymore. Years ago, yes, maybe she had been. But not now. Not after everything she had seen and been through. She had grown from a girl who blushed when a man mentioned her lipstick, to a woman who would slap Sherlock Holmes across the face, more than once.

She might not have been a crack shot or trained in martial arts, but she wasn't one to cower in the corner.

So when the pathologist heard suspicious sounds from the hall, Molly grabbed Billy, and a frying pan.

She assumed that John or Mary, or both, had a gun in the flat somewhere, but there wasn't time to go on a search. Besides, she told herself, she was probably just being paranoid.

But when you worked with Sherlock Holmes, you never knew what to expect.

Bending down to meet Billie's questioning eyes, Molly took the girl's shoulders.

"Go hide under the bed," she instructed the girl, keeping the quaking that threatened to break her voice at bay. "Take this," she handed Billie her mobile. "If you hear anything out here, fighting or screaming, call 999, okay?"

Billie clutched the phone in one hand, while her other hugged her pirate plushie close, nodding bravely.

"After you call, just stay under the bed and stay quiet, can you do that?" Molly prompted.

Again, the child nodded.

"Stay there until I come get you. Okay, go."

Molly pushed Billie toward the bedroom before gripping the pan and turning toward the door. This could still all be an overreaction, but something was churning in her stomach that told her otherwise. She had thought of texting Sherlock or Greg or John or Mary, but worried about not having time to do so and still get Billie hidden with the phone.

Flattening herself against the wall, Molly listened with baited breath to the distinct sounds of someone picking the lock.

Now she definitely was wishing she had texted one of her friends.

The door creaked open and Molly struck without even looking. She felt the pan make contact and swung it again. This time, her arms were caught and she was shoved back against the wall she had been hiding against.
Molly released an involuntary squeal as two men held her flailing body, a third bringing a needle up to her neck.

"Molly!"

The pathologist's eyes flashed across the flat to see little Billie Watson, still clinging to both the phone and dog as she shouted for her friend and babysitter.

One of the men turned and headed toward the child, spurring Molly to writhe all the more.

"No!" She screamed, no longer concerned with her own well being, but now solely focused on Billie.

Billie was too kind of a child. Of course she would come running when she heard Molly in trouble. She was far too much like her parents. Molly thought of John running after Sherlock, thoughts of his own safety often forgotten. Flying headlong into battle and danger right behind the detective's coattails.

Billie threw the mobile at the man's face and turned, screaming and running for her bedroom.

Molly watched in horror as the attacker approached the little girl's door.

She didn't get to see what happened next though, as the needle she had forgotten about penetrated the skin of her neck. The effect was instant, her body and mind slipping away from her. The arms that held her down abandon her and she felt herself vaguely sliding down the wall, her face coming into contact with something soft, yet hard.

And then nothing.

Mary heard the terrible scream before her feet had even hit the pavement. It was a voice she would never not recognize, but a sound she had never desired to hear it make.

"Call the police!" She shouted back at Mrs. Hudson. "Stay in the car!"

She was bolting for the building as she yelled, the front door already hanging horribly open.

She wanted to cry out to Billie, the mother in her desperate to get to her daughter. But it was the intelligence agent in her that kept her silent. She navigated the hallway with soundless steps, peering into 221C without detection. She was just in time to see Molly crumpling to the ground. Retrieving the blade she kept tucked in her belt at all times, Mary readied herself. Kicking the door fully open, it hit the two henchmen. The blonde and bulkier of the two stumbled forward while the other nearly tripped while trying to turn around mid blast to face the sudden intruder. It wasn't her best entrance, but time was of the essence. She would have much rather slunk in undetected through the window, but a stranger was pursuing her daughter into her bedroom and the mother bear instincts just sort of took over everything else.

She blocked the redhead's attacks with ease, landing her foot square in his chest before bringing a fist to meet his face. Her eyes darted to their bedroom, where she knew her gun resided. There wasn't time to retrieve it now.

With Ginger already on the floor, Mary turned her attention to Blondie. He had much more formidable fighting skills than his partner and managed to knock the knife from her grasp, only after getting a taste of it on his cheek. He was swiftly taken down though with a few blows center mast and an elbow to the neck. Leaving the men groaning on the ground, Mary hurried to the aid of her daughter. The third man was already backing up to kick down the door. Mary tackled him from behind, locking her legs around midsection before instinct and training, and that mother bear inside her, took hold of his head. His neck was broken before he hit the ground.

Leaping to her feet, Mary ripped her daughter's bedroom door open.

There, huddled in the corner, clinging to her stuffed dog, was Billie.

But the animal wasn't all that the girl was clutching.
There was someone else standing in front of her, one hand wrapped in Billie's little one.

“You?”

Mary barely had time to gasp before she felt the prick of a needle breaking the skin of her neck. The shock had momentarily hindered her focus and she failed to hear one of the men coming up behind her. She didn't even have enough time left to turn around to face her attacker or call out to her daughter before the drug swooped her up in its arms, carrying her none too gently to the floor.
Mrs. Hudson watched with worried eyes and a hand over her heart as Mary charged up to the front door. She would think she would be used to such situations by now, what with her late husband and current tenants.

The landlady grabbed the mobile and began dialing.

Her finger was hovering over the 'send' button when the car door was ripped open.

All she saw as she struggled was the phone as it fell from her hands to the floor - and the muscular arm that reached inside, holding her down. She felt a prick on the side of her neck and promptly saw and felt no more. Her body tipped over, crumpling into the driver's side seat.

Sherlock seized his entire body's movements as he crossed the threshold. It was only a fraction of a second as his brain processed the scene in front of him, but, in his mind, it felt like minutes.

He scanned the sitting room with machine like accuracy. He noted Molly's slumped over form on the floor, and the way she was still breathing indicating blow to the head or drugged. With the lack of visible weapon or injury, he was going with the latter. He then took in the second shape that was sprawled on the ground, this one definitely no longer breathing. Broken neck. He also had markings decorating his face and when Sherlock's gaze found the Watson's frying pan on the floor he had his answer. The facial disfiguration was Molly's doing. From her position, she had been laying in wait for her attackers. So she had heard them coming. But the snapped neck? That definitely didn't come from Molly Hooper.

He vaguely remembered seeing a vehicle outside upon their arrival, but his focus had been elsewhere. His memory of it wasn't sharp as it normally would be, but he would have been willing to bet it was Mary's.

The injury could most certainly have been caused by the trained assassin. But where was she now?

At the thought of Mary, Sherlock whirled around to her husband.

John had leaned over to check Molly's pulse a full 2.4 seconds ago, but had yet to make a sound since doing so.

There, beside Molly now, lay a lump that was one John Watson.

Sherlock internally cursed. It was obvious, again. The man on the street. The one that had blindsided his friend had most definitely injected the man with something. The adrenaline had held back the effects for as long as it could, but John had been fading before Sherlock had helped pull him back up.

This was so perfectly planned Sherlock almost was impressed.

But then he remembered it was John and Molly lying there drugged in this perfect plan. That it was Mary somewhere in the flat.

That it was Billie.

Sherlock bent down to retrieve John's gun just in time for a foot to smash into his face. He hadn't
heard the man in the hall and berated his error as he tumbled backward, away from the weapon. A heel connected with his rib cage and he curled in on himself. As the stranger stepped toward him again, Sherlock grabbed the man's leg, pulling him to the ground. The detective pounced then, ramming his fists into his attacker's face. He didn't see the man's silent companion come up behind him until he felt a pressure in his flailing forearm. Whirling around, he ripped the syringe from his arm and threw a punch at the redhead. Struggling to a fighting stance, Sherlock managed to get to his feet, facing down both men now on wobbly legs and with teetering vision. He still held his own for quite some time, managing to get the ginger down on the ground and unconscious before the drug started dragging him under. He crashed to his knees, still waving his fists in the air in a futile attempt to fight off the remaining man.

The blonde bent over Sherlock, reeling a meaty fist back.

But before it ever met his face, a deafening gunshot rang out in the flat.

The blonde attacker tilted sideways before staggering to a final fatal fall.

Sherlock squinted up at his savior and, despite the drugs, felt his vision instantly crystallize, his eyes and heart simultaneously sharpening and shattering.

There, just outside Billie's bedroom, stood James Moriarty.

In one arm, he held an aimed pistol.

In the other, he gripped Billie's hand.

Or rather, she gripped his.

Sherlock could see a form on the floor that resembled Mary through the now open bedroom door. Billie was staring back at her mother with a watery and heavily lidded gaze, but as she turned her head toward Sherlock, her eyes exploded open.

"Peter!" Billie shrieked up at the madman as another brute barreled through the door.

Moriarty didn't hesitate to put the man down with a bullet.

The danger cleared, Billie made to break away from Moriarty and run forward.

"Uncle Lock! Daddy!"

Moriarty caught the girl's arm, exchanging the gun in his free hand for a syringe from his pocket. He dipped the needle into Billie's shoulder and the girl went limp in his waiting arms. The criminal, in what would appear to the casual observer as a loving and fatherly embrace, lifted the child in his arms and cradled her against his chest, whispering sweetly in her ear.

His words and voice may have been sweet, but every other fraction of his body language screamed of the psychopath he truly was. Stalking forward triumphantly, Moriarty smirked and leaned over the detective. Sherlock was currently blinking back the darkness as he tried feebly to crawl toward John, and the gun. He reached out for the weapon, but Moriarty stepped none too gently on the man's arm.

"Uh, uh, uh," Moriarty teased. "No, no. Now, don't spoil it."

Moriarty put a cold finger to Sherlock's lips.

"Sh, sh, sh. Don't want to wake Sleeping Beauty, now, do we?"

Sherlock's mouth opened, but he couldn't force any words out. His vision was slipping so that all he could see was the silhouette of his enemy. Even his mind was failing him in that moment. He grimaced as Jim bent down even closer, still clinging Sherlock's goddaughter to his chest.

"Sweet dreams, Sherlock."
SEVENTH chapter in less that 24 HOURS! Bow down people! I could be giving you these cliffhangers and leaving you with them for WEEKS! Do you see how unbelievably kind I am? If you're totally confused about Billie's name, don't worry. It's all on purpose. Everything has a rhyme and reason.

Height = 101 cm = roughly 40 in
Weight = 17 kg = roughly 37 1/2 lbs

Dawn Mary Elizabeth Watson.
AKA: Billie
Age: 5
Height: 101 cm
Weight: 13 kg
Hair: Blonde. Short.
Eyes: Blue
Abducted.

The word seemed to scream out off of the paper at Lestrade as he stared helplessly down at his notes. He had taken down so many similar words before. But this was so very different.

This was his friend's daughter.
His friend’s daughter, with the word “abducted” penciled in underneath it.


Gone.

They all meant the same thing right then.

Greg allowed himself to close his eyes briefly before continuing.

Suspect: James Moriarty. Unidentified accomplices.

Witness: Molly Elizabeth Hooper.

Molly.

The woman had awoken and had been little more than a mess of guilt, apologies and tears since having done so. The poor pathologist was putting this all on herself. There would be time to console and correct her later, though.

Witness: Martha Louise Hudson

The landlady’s aged body had taken awhile to recover from the effects of the sedative and when she finally came around she was saddened to say she had little to offer. She reported hearing the scream, but that almost all she could attest to. She tried to comfort Molly, but ended up falling apart herself in the end.

Witness: Mary Elizabeth Watson. Mother.

The woman had been an astonishing show of concealed emotions and forced bravado since her awakening. She wasn't pretending to be a sociopath like Sherlock did, she was simply remaining strong for her daughter. Greg couldn't help but admire and respect her.

Witness: John Hamish Watson. Father.

John barely remembered anything after taking the hit in the street, so, sadly, his statement hadn't given them much. The soldier was also perfecting stoicism quite well. And, although Lestrade admired and respected that part of him as well, there was the other aspect. The piece of John that was blatantly blaming himself for the kidnapping. He was a former soldier. He was her father. Her protector. And the fact that he had been put down so swiftly only added to the biting bitterness.

Witness: William Sherlock Scott Holmes

The detective's testimony was the most promising, of course, but Sherlock certainly didn't see it that way. No one could really blame him for not being happy he was the one that saw Moriarty physically take Billie. He had been the first to regain consciousness and the fallout that followed, well, it wasn't pretty.

Lestrade brought his vehicle to a screeching and sharp stop outside 221 Baker Street. Both he and Anderson were on the sidewalk in record time and heading for the door.

"Wait," Philip spoke suddenly, though with a soft voice. "Look."

Anderson nodded toward the vehicle Greg had parked behind and Lestrade immediately recognized it as Mary's.

“There's someone inside,” Anderson continued, drawing closer to the car. "It's Mrs. Hudson!"

Greg hurried to the door and peered through the window.

“That bastard," Lestrade spat as he watched Anderson open the door and examine the woman.

“She's alive,” the forensics man reported with a relieved sigh.

For anyone else, Anderson would have told the man that he, too, should be waiting for the backup. But this was Moriarty. Whenever things involved Moriarty, time wasn't really a luxury they could afford.

So, instead, Philip just nodded, urging Greg to go and pleading with the man to be careful all with just that one look.

Lestrade turned and did his best to make a stealthy entrance. His weapon at the ready, the chief detective inspector glanced up the steps and down the hall, unsure of which path to choose.

A low groan sounded and decided his direction for him.

Greg drew forward, toward 221C, attempting to mentally prepare himself for whatever, or whoever, he just might find beyond that door.

As he slipped inside, his jaw and heart momentarily dropped.

He wasn't sure what he had been preparing himself to walk in on, but it definitely wasn't the people he cared most about unconscious and crumpled on the floor.

Well, one of them wasn't unconscious.

Sherlock was sluggishly struggling to lift his eyelids and body simultaneously. Neither seemed to be working in his favor. Greg rushed to the man's side, supporting the majority of his weight as he wavered on his knees and then on his feet. Lestrade guided the consulting detective backward and onto the couch as he finally seemed to succeeded in sustaining keeping his eyes fully open.

It took the genius approximately a full second for his brain to catch up to speed. As soon as it did so, Sherlock was launching himself off the couch, staggering for the first few steps. Greg took his arm and steadied the slurring man. It appeared as though the last thing to recover was speech.

Greg secretly wondered if Sherlock's mind had just overpowered the drugs effects and awoken before his body though was ready and able to do so.

"Billie," he finally managed to blurt out. "Billie. Where is she? Where's Moriarty?"

"Sherlock," Lestrade stepped in front of the man, who had started to shuffle forward. "Tell me what happened."

"He took her," Sherlock spat. "Moriarty." His speech was clearing, rage crisping the edges of his words. "Moriarty took Billie."

"What?" Lestrade's shocked stare flickered over to the girl's bedroom. "Why would he do that?"

"Because of me," Sherlock explained impatiently. "Of course, because of me. And because I'm an idiot for not seeing it sooner! It was staring me right in the face! How could I have missed this? Missed her?"

Sherlock seemed to be scolding and questioning himself more than talking to Lestrade.

Stopping his speech short, Sherlock too glanced at the bedroom. Then, without warning, he charged toward the door.

"Sherlock," Lestrade implored, "you need to sit down."

He knew the command was in vain, but still felt as though he needed to at least try. Of course, there was a part of him that was pushing Sherlock to solve the case right then and there and bring Billie back before she was barely gone.

Lestrade followed Sherlock into Billie's bedroom, nearly crashing into the consulting detective when he quit walking abruptly.

Peering around the man, Greg saw just what Sherlock was gaping at.

Perched precariously on a the bed sat a small antique spindle with two items attached.
A box - and the seventh Raven feather.
some readers guessed correctly who Peter was. If you did as well, good job! Here are some flashbacks to some of "Peter’s" antics.

"Peter!"

Billie’s voice cut through the haze the drug was turning his mind into.

Peter.

Moriarty.

Peter was Moriarty.

Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.

Yet another thing Sherlock had somehow missed.

"Sweet dreams."

Peter - no Moriarty - whispered, his voice echoing inside his mind, bouncing off his brain alongside Billie’s scream.

And then Sherlock watched, helpless to anything else, as Billie’s not so imaginary friend carried her away.

Peter.

As Sherlock slipped under the black blanket, he definitely wasn’t granted sweet dreams.

No, these were nightmares.

Memories.

Of Peter.

Of Moriarty.

Moriarty playing with Billie. Sneaking in at night to sit at her bedside. Holding her hand.

Years.

Peter had been Billie’s imaginary friend for years.

James Moriarty had been Billies’ friend for years.

If he had been awake, Sherlock would have been tearing his hair out. Punching a wall. Knocking over a chair. Screaming. Anything.

Instead, he was trapped in the nightmare.

The memories.

The first two times Billie went missing had been in Sherlock’s care while at a crime scene. Both had nearly ended in disaster.

But there was a third time.
This one wasn't at a crime scene, but it was just as terrifying.

John and Sherlock were picking her up from one of her first ballet practices. It was one of the detective's least favorite tasks. It wasn't the actual action, it was the people, that bothered him. Gaggles of little girls giggling and screaming and running about while parades of parents flocked in the building to retrieve their children. Some of the adults even attempted to make small talk with Sherlock when he was there. Not to mention the woman who presumed he was a single dad and fawned over him. After his third request for a date, Sherlock refused to pick up Billie for John and Mary again, at least not alone.

The duo had just finished a case and instead of Sherlock slipping home after their near ritual post case dining out, he decided he could endure tagging along.

Sherlock searched the small faces once inside the building, hoping to collect Billie and make a quick and clean get away before another unfortunate conversation. When he had scanned each girl with no sign of Billie, Sherlock furrowed his brow. John seemed to be noticing his daughter's absence too if his wrinkled features said anything.

"Excuse me," the doctor approached the instructor, and Billie's personal dance tutor, with a disarming smile.

"Oh, John," Virginia Preston grinned warmly. "Good to see you. And Sherlock?" She smirked. "I thought you said you refused to set foot in my studio again. Shame too. Kelly Walters and Beth Peterson really had their eyes on you." She laughed teasingly until she saw their drawn faces. "What is it?"

"Have you seen Billie?" John asked not unkindly.

"She was right over -" Virginia spun around, hand half ready to point to where two other girls were sitting and laughing. "Huh. She was just with Jody and Rachel."

John and Sherlock both whipped their heads around. With the nature of their work and lives, it was almost second nature to assume the worst.

The studio was one floor of a building of several. There were other businesses and such inside as well. There was no telling where the girl would have wandered off to, and that was if she didn't venture outside.

Sherlock suggested the most logical path of going out to the street. They could check through the windows and count the floors. The genius was mumbling something about an equation with the amount of floors and probability, taking into account Billie's height, gait and walking pace. John was hardly listening as he followed the man out the front doors.

Craning their necks, the duo began to examine the building, both sets of eyes coming to a startling stop at the same moment.

It turned out, there was no need for Sherlock's mental math.

Because there, hanging from one of the balconies, was a pink pair of tiny feet.

"Stay here," John instructed Sherlock. "Get under her and get your arms ready, now."

Sherlock nodded as his eyes darted across the windows.

"Sixth floor, second room to the left," the detective informed his friend. "Go."

It was several nervously sweating minutes later that the father managed to track the child, finding her perched just on the edge of the window balcony.

"Billie!" John exclaimed through what sounded like a gasp and a sigh combined. "Come away from the ledge, sweetheart, please."

Billie frowned, but did as she was told.
"What are you doing up here?" John panted, taking his daughter in his arms.

"Jus' talkin' to Peter," she shrugged.

"Peter," John shook his head, "right. Okay. Well, you can talk to Peter without wandering off - or hanging out of a window. We didn't know where you were."

"Peter wanted to come here," Billie explained with a smile. "He likes it. High up. Said he likes the - the - v - v -"

"So he likes the view, does he?" John finished for her, to which Billie nodded. "Well, you, and Peter, can enjoy the view, with me or Sherlock or Mummy or Miss Preston. I don't want you to ever go near the ledge of a window or anything like this again, okay? It's dangerous. You can hurt yourself. And I don't want you off alone without a grown up."

Sherlock swam in the darkness as the memory faded.

John had told him about the conversation after the fact.

Sherlock had been so focused on his goddaughter, he couldn't even recall if there had been even a shadow of someone next to her up in that balcony.

Peter had been a grown up the entire time. Billie trusted him because they basically told her to. They of course taught her not to follow or talk to strangers. Only adults that she knew. But then, Billie thought she knew Peter. He had been with her for who knows how long. Had grown up with him as her friend.

Finding Billie by a window, practically on the ledge and near toppling over, now that they knew Peter's true identity, sent shivers through Sherlock's soul.

The view.

It certainly explained the next nightmare that assaulted him.

A memory that had happened not a week later.

At a young age, Billie was already not only intellectually and musically curious and inclined, she also liked to explore outside of her mind. She had a vast imagination, but also an adventurer's spirit. Usually, they combined to create wonderful journeys and games. She would scour every inch of a park, watch and help with Mrs. Holmes gardening with eager eyes and hands, have grand quests through the trees and scale small hills that in her head were mountains.

This was why, when Billie decided to climb a tree, it was no surprise to the three that had taken her to the park.

It was only when she declared that she was going to jump, that her guardians sprung to action.

"What?" John practically shouted.

"Sweetheart," Mary instructed calmly, "just climb back down."

"Peter said I can fly!" Billie boasted from the top most branch.

"Great," John grunted more to himself than anyone else. "He's bloody Peter Pan."

"Statically speaking, at that height, if she jumps -"

"Sherlock," John rounded on his friend. "Not now."

Before anyone could say anything more, Billie's foot slipped. Even she wasn't ready as her arms flailed. Her tiny scream ripped through the park and their hearts.

John was the quickest as he launched himself underneath the tree. Billie's body crashed into his
awaiting arms, the father instantly pulling his daughter closer.

After the embrace, the doctor promptly examined his patient as Mary tucked the child's hair behind her ear, kissing Billie's cheek.

"He said you'd catch me if I fell," Billie spoke proudly to her father.

John's mouth was too busy hanging open to respond.

"I wasn't thinking happy thoughts," Billie continued to explain far too calmly for a kid who nearly crushed her skull. "That's why I fell."

"Off you pop."

Four times, Billie had nearly been taken from them.

By a desperate cabbie, by a bomb, a window and a tree.

And each instance was connected to Peter.

To Moriarty.
221 Baker Street carried a somber silence with it all through the rest of the day.

Despite, the heavy amount of in and outgoing foot traffic, it still seemed hushed. People spoke in subdued voices, if they spoke at all. Whether it was police officers or paramedics, all somehow knew the gravity of what had occurred there that day.

Once the initial questions had been asked, photographs had been snapped, evidence taken, and each member of the household had received a physical once over, the occupants began thinning out until it was only the flat residents, Mycroft, Lestrade, Anderson and Donovan left.

Walking over to the window where Sherlock was standing, John glanced at his laptop. He wasn't sure he would ever be able to rid himself of the image that had been projected on it just earlier that day.

Along with the black feather that accompanied every crime scene, this time there had been a small box. Inside the packaging was a memory stick. Plugging it into his computer, the whole group had watched wordlessly as the kidnapper appeared on screen.

"Good morning my little sleeping beauties. I hope you all had a nice little nap. And I do hope you enjoyed the bedtime story. For the ordinary minds in the audience, Sherlock, you might want to explain the story to them seeing as they still might be trying to catch up. You're not now, though, are you? So slow, Sherlock. Boring. And here I was actually pulling for you a teeny tiny bit to figure it all out sooner. Well, okay, maybe not. This is so much more fun! Now, we get to finish the story. Here's the cliff notes for those who have been naughty and haven't been paying attention."

Here, Moriarty opened a large book dramatically and began reading with a theatrical quality to his voice.

"Once upon a time, there lived a king and queen who had a daughter. The king was so happy, he had a big celebration and invited all the fairies who lived in his kingdom. After the ceremonies were over, all the company returned to the king’s palace, where was prepared a great feast for the fairies. There was placed before every one of them a magnificent cover with a case of massive gold, wherein were a spoon, knife, and fork, all of pure gold set with diamonds and rubies. But as they were all sitting down at table they saw come into the hall a very old fairy, whom they had not invited, because it was above fifty years since she had been out of a tower, and she was believed to be dead."

"The king ordered her a cover, but could not get her a case of gold like the others, because they had only seven made for the seven fairies. The old fairy angry. Then all the fairies began to give their gifts to the princess. The youngest gave her for gift that she would be the most beautiful person in the world; the next, that she should have the wit of an angel; the third, that she should have grace in everything she did; the fourth, dance; the fifth, singing; and the sixth, music. The old fairy’s turn was next and she said that the princess should have her hand pierced with a spindle and die of the wound. This terrible gift made the whole company tremble, and everybody fell crying."

Moriarty mocked a large frown.

"But then, the last fairy said, instead of dying, the princess would only fall into a deep sleep."


"Sorry, kids, no happy ending this time. There are just so many versions, it is really difficult to get it right. Oh well. Here's your part in the story. When the princess fell asleep, so did the rest of the castle until she would wake. Now, I wasn't going to keep you asleep for that long. It's no fun if you're not awake to suffer. And besides, I'm making my own edits to the story. It is a bit dull, isn't it? I promise you, the little princess will be kept perfectly safe. Well, alive and awake. But, if you come after me, try to find me," he shook his head and made a disapproving noise with a click of his tongue, "I will put the princess to sleep. As long as you stay away, she is under my protection. Oh, but you all know how changeable I can be. Don't upset me. Don't try to trick me. I gave you
your choice at a happy ending. Oh, I gave you all the breadcrumbs in the world to follow, Sherlock. But the game is over. I win. You lose. The end."
A Hero

John internally shuddered at the memory as he joined Sherlock at the window. The genius uncharacteristically had hardly spoken a word since the initial viewing of Moriarty's message. John couldn't help the bits of bubbling anger at his friend that were boiling deep within him. His daughter was missing. Kidnapped. Gone. Why wasn't the famous detective leaping into action? Where were his master plans? His case solving deductions?

The enmity was but a small piece of the storm surging inside of him though. The soldier was suffering a multitude of unwanted sentiment, of course. For once, he wished he could be the sociopath. That he could turn it all off. The rage at Moriarty. The anger he harbored at himself. The guilt, sorrow, confusion, brokenness, all of it. Part of him wanted it just to be gone.

But that meant Billie was gone too.

Because he couldn't erase those emotions, couldn't forget everything he was feeling, without losing her too.

And he wasn't about to let that happen.

His daughter was worth all the agony in the world.

Sherlock listened but neglected to look as his former flatmate approached. Of course John would want to seek answers from him. They all did. He could sense their stares, hear their screaming questions from behind their skulls.

But that was the problem.

Sherlock didn't have the answers.

Maybe to some of their questions, sure. He understood now the game he had been playing all these years. He could clearly comprehend Moriarty's design and direction. He could look back on each crime scene in his mind and pinpoint every single clue he had missed or misinterpreted.

But that didn't do any of them any good.

It didn't do Billie any good.

All of his intellect, all of his skills, none of it mattered now. The breadcrumbs had been left to taunt Sherlock. Only before the kidnapping could he have stopped it from happening. Would Moriarty have possibly allowed it had Sherlock figured it out sooner. The madman hadn't left clues for the princess' rescue. Because there wouldn't be one. If Moriarty didn't want to let go of Billie, he wouldn't. He wasn't playing anymore. He was right. He had won.

Last time Moriarty targeted Sherlock, the detective thought he had managed to get ahead of him. He thought he had finally succeeded in outsmarting the serpent. But then, the snake had rose from the dead. Just like at the pool, the psychopath was two steps ahead of Sherlock.

There was no phone call to spare them this time. No elaborate faked death.

Nothing.

"Sherlock."

The taller of the pair held his glowering glare out the window. His name was spoken again, but the man offered no hint of having heard it.

In fact, he hadn't flinched since retreating to the window.

"If we just knew where he was," Lestrade sighed bitterly.

"Even if we did, what good is that?" Sally interjected. "You saw the video. Besides, how can we find him? We thought he was dead for years."
“Sherlock can find him,” Anderson cut in confidently. “Can’t you, Sherlock?”

“Do you know where he is, Sherlock?” Greg rubbed his temple.

“No.” It was one of the first and last words that had left the detective’s mouth in some time. "I don't know."

The whispered phrase fell like a slicing shout over the room, piercing the silence.

And that was when Sherlock turned without speaking and stood at the window, a statue against the soft city light seeping in.

"Ah, you see,” Philip spoke after several staggering seconds, "I knew it. He's going to his mind palace."

John just stared after his friend, knowing how wrong the man was.

John knew his best friend better than that. There was a difference when the detective disappeared into his mind palace and when he was refusing to speak. He had endured his fair share of experience with both. During the former, there was little hope of successfully communicating with the genius. John had oftentimes wondered if the man would notice a bomb blast in the next room over during these times. But then there were the other moments. When Sherlock wasn't lost in his own head. John knew that his friend was quite coherent. The detective was simply refusing to speak out of disinterest, distaste or in hopes of being deceptive. Maybe wounded pride. Sometimes it was stubbornness. And then sometimes, sometimes it was sorrow.

John couldn't blame him really. The father didn't feel all too much like uttering any intelligible words just then. In fact, the only communicating he really desired to do was his fist screaming at a wall or furniture - or Moriarty's face. He had already put his hand through the hallway downstairs when he thought no one was looking.

No one dared ask him about his satin stained fingers when he had returned to the room. Mary didn't comment either when she had, after much reeling and wordless protests from her husband, bandaged his blood knuckles.

She was being remarkably strong and stoic over losing her only daughter. John would have been impressed if he wasn't worried. How long before his wife broke?

How long before Sherlock did?

Before he did?

They were all walking a thin line. Standing silently on a precipice. Eventually, the string would break. The cliff would crumble.

Well, John could do that later. The wall had already absorbed some of his cracking surface strength. He was the medical and military man. The solid and steady soldier who did whatever it took to survive. The caring and selfless doctor. When combined, he became the ultimate caretaker, concerned with all others’ health and safety before his own. He would shield and protect, and heal and comfort, no matter his own pain.

And right now, he had two patients.

Sherlock would surely shoulder the blame. Moriarty was targeting him after all. And as much as the father secretly wished he could cast stones at the detective, he could not. Sure, John still harbored that deep and undulating anger somewhere inside of himself at the man. But it was illogical, to coin a favorite Sherlock phrase. In the past, there had been times where John had doubted his friend. Wondered at the possible sociopathic behavior.

"There are lives at stake Sherlock. Actual human lives. Just-Just so I know, do you care about that at all?"

"Will caring about them help save them?"
"Nope."

"Then I'll continue to not make that mistake"

"And you find that easy, do you?"

"Yes. Very. Is that news to you?"

"No. No."

"I've disappointed you."

"Good. That's good deduction. Yeah."

"Don't make people into heroes John. Heroes don't exist and if they did I wouldn't be one of them."

John had been wrong then. Sherlock did care. It was just covered in layers of protective shell, a self-proclaimed sociopathic facade and feigned detachment of sentiment.

Sherlock cared. Sherlock cared so much that he faked jumping off a building. That he ran into a burning pyre. That he shot a man in the head. That he became the best and most caring godfather John could have asked for for his daughter.

And Sherlock had been wrong that day too.

Because heroes did exist.

Sherlock had saved John, Mary, Billie and so many others more times that the good doctor could count.

Sherlock Holmes was a hero.

So when John stepped up to the man, repeating Sherlock's name again, the repressed anger was all but gone. He knew his friend. The hero. He trusted Sherlock completely, despite his own desperation and depression. Despite everything else.

Sherlock would save Billie.
Sherlock listened as John drew closer, internally berating himself. He had been too slow. Too distracted. Too confident. Too everything. And now his best friend was coming to him for the answers when he didn't have any to offer.

He was quite surprised with the lack of sentiment seeping from the man, both parents in fact. John was repressing rage of course. Only a fool couldn't see that. But he was still, as always, steady.

And Sherlock could lie to the world, but he couldn't trick himself. His own emotions were exploding internally.

Sherlock wished he truly was a sociopath.

That he could turn it all off. The rage at Moriarty. The anger he harbored at himself. The guilt, sorrow, confusion, brokenness, all of it. Part of him wanted it just to be gone.

But that meant Billie was gone too.

Because he couldn't erase those emotions, couldn't forget everything he was feeling, without losing her too.

And he wasn't about to let that happen.

His goddaughter was worth all the agony in the world.

"Sherlock."

John was still there.

John Watson, friend, soldier, doctor, father. The caretaker. The selfless servant to all those in need.

Because before, where his tone had been seeking answers from the genius, now it was wrought with worry. Worry for him. Sherlock should have been the one reassuring John. And yet still the blogger was looking after his detective.

"Don't make people into heroes John. Heroes don't exist and if they did I wouldn't be one of them."

John had been wrong then. Sherlock did care. It was just covered in layers of protective shell, a self-proclaimed sociopathic facade and feigned detachment of sentiment.

And Sherlock had been wrong that day too.

Because heroes did exist.

John had saved Sherlock, Mary and Billie and so many others more times that the detective could count.

John Watson was a hero.

He knew his friend. The hero. He trusted John completely, despite his own desperation and depression. Despite his own stubborn pride and compulsion for constant and complete control of his circumstances. Despite everything else.

John would save Billie.

Mary watched wordlessly as her husband approached the man.

The detective and the blogger. The genius and the doctor. The sociopath and the soldier. The best friends.
Her boys.

Her heroes.

Sure, Mary had spared and then saved her fair share of lives toward the end of her career, leading to its tremulous termination. But she would never consider herself a hero.

Not like the duo in front of her.

She had shot Sherlock, and still he did everything in his power to defend and free her. To save her.

And then there was her husband. Her John. The soldier who risked his life to rescue men on the front lines. The doctor who refused to give up on his patients. The man who had forgiven her. Had saved her.

Because, no matter how lonely and lost John had been after Sherlock was gone, Mary had been suffering just as deeply. She was alone and running, flooded with guilt and fear. And then John came along and everything changed. She could be redeemed in him. Saved with him.

They were heroes, the pair of them.

She knew them. The heroes. She trusted them both completely, despite her own desperation and depression. Despite her own stubborn pride and the broken promises of her past. Despite it all.

John and Sherlock would save Billy.

Mrs. Hudson had lived in the same building as Sherlock Holmes and the Watsons for enough time now that she recognized those faces.

She watched as John as he looked to Sherlock, and then as Sherlock looked to John, and then as Mary looked to the both of them.

Each had consummate faith in the other, and yet so little in themselves.

Martha knew them better than that.

They would save Billie just how the saved and solved every other life and case.

Together.

All of them.

Every single person in that room had a stake in this now. From the parents and godfather, to the godmother grandmother, to the surrogate aunts and uncles.

From the moment they moved into her flat, Mrs. Hudson never doubted her boys when it came to something as important as this. Now it wasn't just her boys.

They were a family. Each and every one of them drawn and threaded together by love and a precious little girl.

And they would save that precious little girl and the family.
"I know this is difficult," Greg cleared his throat finally. "But anything you guys got, anything at all. Don't think about doing this on your own, Sherlock. Not this one. Not this time."

Greg watched the detective, and his blogger who was still staring up at the taller man. In fact, all eyes were on the genius. All ears open and waiting.

"If my brother is incapable," Mycroft lifted his brow in a challenge, even if Sherlock couldn't see it, "I can certainly shed some light on -"

"I'm quite capable, Mycroft," Sherlock spat, spinning around to glare at his brother with eyes like slits.

And that was all it took. As Sherlock took center stage of the room, he failed to see his sibling's small smirk of victory.

"How did you know?" John prodded, now that his friend was speaking again. "At the crime scene, how did you know? The bottle, the one with 42 written on it?"

"Correct," Sherlock pointed at the man. "Before my confrontation with Moriarty on the rooftop, he used fairy tales to taunt me. You remember. He alluded to certain stories with numbers. Just more clues. 42 refers to another specific story. He's kept from being specific unless absolutely necessary. Even in the video message, he was mixing the Grimm and Charles Perrault versions. But a number, that's specific. There are countless things numbers can refer to, especially in fairy tales. This one was fairly obvious. Some versions are different, granted. I've had this one in particular since before the murders. Before I started collecting them, studying them. So he knew all along which edition I possessed. Moriarty had been in this flat before. He knew which book I owned."

Sherlock paused and plucked a book off the table from a mess of literature and articles he had snatched from the upstairs room after the events in 221C. Flipping it open, he displayed the page for all to see.

"Number 42, 'The Godfather,'" He spoke and then set the book down. "A message, for me. He could've picked any number of stories. Last time, he chose several, but the one he used to reference me, was Grimm's #8. The Strange Musician, also translated as The Strange Violinist and The Wonderful Violinist in some editions. It is about a violinist looking for a companion. The violinist's music attracts three wild beasts. He outsmarts them, and they try to kill him in revenge. One of those beasts is a fox. Moriarty was wearing a fox pin on his tie when he came here to give me his 'IOU' riddle. This time, though, this time, he chose not the title of musician or something else to describe me, but godfather."

"So that's when you knew it was about Billie," Greg nodded.

"That, and the final body," Sherlock responded readily.

"Final?" Sally crossed her arms curiously. "So you knew it was the last one by looking at it? How?"

"The video! Were none of you listening? The story Moriarty tells us. Sleeping Beauty. The seven fairies. Seven for Perrault, twelve in Grimm. But we know it's seven."

"That's what the feathers were telling us this whole time?" Anderson shook his head.

"One of the many things they were telling us," Sherlock answered. "The first murder," Sherlock paced, "model. The first gift to the princess -"

"Beauty," Mary finished for him.

"The cutting of her hair was just a nod at Rapunzel, a warning that this was going to be about fairy tales. And remember, she was killed with a fork. The next victim, with a butter knife. The
gold silverware that the old fairy wasn't given."

"Which gift was the second victim?" Sally prompted not unkindly.

"Child, dressed as an angel," Sherlock started.

"Wit of an angel," Mary gasped.

"And then there's the explosion," Sherlock continued. "I thought it was Moriarty's way of saying hello to me. But it wasn't. Every time I brought Billie to a crime scene, she was put in danger. The cabbie, the bomb. When I was alone or with John, nothing happened. Another warning that I missed," he hissed. "He wanted to deliver the message, but he didn't want Billie dead."

"How could he be sure she wouldn't be hurt in that explosion?" Sally pressed. "Simmons and Erickson both died, and Simmons was with Billie. How could Moriarty be absolutely positive that Billie wouldn't die too?"

"Because he was there," Sherlock stated darkly, prompting a sharp, but short silence from his audience. "Simmons wasn't with Billie, not the whole time."

Sherlock spoke as though he was standing right in the rubble of the explosion, which, in his mind, he probably was.

"I was careless. I didn't see it then. Simmons was on his back, eyes open. But he was facing the wrong way, toward the bomb. He should have been running away from it and found on his stomach. He died from a blow to the head, but not from debris. Billie's dog was found with him, so she should have been right next to him. Simmons may not have been killed by the blast, but there certainly was enough debris around him to cause him injury. Had Billie been at his side, she most definitely would have been severely injured, if not killed. But she wasn't. Billie was always a smart child, but not that smart and not that quick to get herself across the room and inside that closet. Someone moved her there. Someone killed Simmons before the bomb exploded and then moved Billie to safety."

"He would've had to be quick, really quick," Sally shook her head. "I barely had time to hand her off and investigate before it armed itself."

"And if he did grab her so quick, why didn't Billie scream?" Lestrade questioned. "Why didn't she say anything after the explosion?"

"Moriarty could've easily made Simmons death look like an accident, or hidden it from Billie when she wasn't looking as Simmons was trying to make their escape. Billie's distracted and then someone picks her up and takes her to the closet, fast enough that she drops her dog. She never went anywhere without that."

"Greg's right, though," John furrowed his brow. "She would've screamed. She's smart."

"Precisely." Sherlock clapped. "There's our biggest clue. Why didn't she scream? Why didn't she struggle?"

"Because, she knew whoever it was," John formed the sentenced slowly.

"Exactly," Sherlock slapped a hand on the table.

"Peter," Mary said knowingly.

"Her imaginary friend, who has already been visiting her," Sherlock shook his head in disgust. "What better way to gain her complete trust than by saving her life?"

John's fists curled as he leaned against the table.

"Years," he seethed as he spoke. "Years. Practically her whole life. He was there. Waiting, watching. Her friend. In our own home. Right under our bloody noses. And we didn't see. How could we not have seen?"

His entire frame was on the verge of subtle spasms, the rage radiating off of every fiber of his
being as it pulsed from his very core.

Mary crossed the room and enveloped her husband in a tight embrace. It was quick and when she backed away, they shared a strong look that spoke more than words could. Taking each others' hands, the couple returned to the conversation. It was the briefest of moments, but it was all either would allow themselves to have just then.

Billie was priority.

Both parents knew how to stow away sentiment in favor of completing a mission, whether from a soldier's or assassin's viewpoint, it didn't matter. This was the briefing. The war room. You didn't break down until you returned to your barracks and your bed.

And there was bound to be quite the breakdown.
Chapter Notes

eva-christine on tumblr has this great post/meta that talks in detail about the fairy tales used in TRF. Granted this was posted between S2 and S3 so there are some theories in it as well, but it is very interesting and I used it during the research for my story. I can’t post the link here, but just google "sherlock the reichenbach fall fairy tales" and it is the first result entitled "IOU Explanation..."

"So the third victim," Anderson prompted patiently after a moment. "The poisoned child. Where he - you know - cut off her hands."

"That was just like cutting the model's hair," Sherlock explained. "Another allusion to a fairy tale, but not necessarily an important clue. That's the trick with Moriarty, figuring out which clues are actual clues, and which are just him showing off and having fun. Even though that clue did lead me to realize the fairy tale aspect of all the murders."

"But which gift is she supposed to be?" John crossed his arms.

"Grace," Lestrade closed his eyes with a sigh. "Her name was Grace."

"The fact that the victim was previously a missing child is another taunt." Sherlock bowed his head as he turned on his heel. "Not meant for then, those years ago, but for now. Right now. For me to look back, like I am, on all the details I missed. He's foreshadowing his own kidnapping of Billie years ahead of time."

There was another drop of silence filled with heavy breathing and stowed sentiment.

"The fourth," Lestrade gingerly broke the hush.

"Derrick Shepherd," Mycroft said almost as though he was bored. "One of Moriarty's men. The gift of song."

"This is where he starts going out of order," Sherlock added. "I only saw the whole picture at the last crime scene, when I finally realized they were all clues to the seven gifts, and then realized that they were out of order. He didn't care about the order, he cared about the meaning. He wanted them to slowly gain more meaning to me. I was right in that regard. He wanted the victims to be closer to me. I don't doubt he would have found someone else I know that plays an instrument or dances later on, but it just so happens that he got lucky. That Billie would both take interest in dance and music, therefore providing him with his next victims, and, as a bonus, they were directly related to both me and Billie. It was so obvious," he ground out the last word disdainfully.

"Something's missing."

Each of the room's occupants turned and looked at the source of the small voice.

Molly Hooper stood uncertainly, tiredly, but still somehow steadily, just outside the threshold. From her stance and knowledge of the conversation, she had been hiding in the hall like that for some time.

"Molly," Greg stepped forward, "I thought one of my men were taking you home after the hospital."

Molly had been the only one not to pass the paramedic's examinations. The medical team had insisted that they all come in for blood work and testing from the drugs, but each of them had refused. They had finally promised that they would all be in the next day. Not tonight. They couldn't leave the flat tonight.
Molly, on the other hand, had apparently suffered a concussion from being thrust against the wall. John had been the one to notice the symptoms as she was answering the officers' questions after the attack. So when the paramedics arrived on scene, he forced her into their care and had Greg make certain she went to the hospital.

"I couldn't," she shook her head as she softly spoke. "I had to - wanted to - be here. To help."

"He's right," John addressed her kindly. "You shouldn't be here."

"My head's fine," she sighed and added when the doctor gave her a knowing look, "okay, so maybe a bit fuzzy. That's all. I'm okay." She paused and straightened slightly. "Look, Jim was my boyfriend. He got into your lives because of me. And don't say he didn't. I know he would've found another way. But he didn't. He used me to get to you. And then tonight, he did it again. I was the one watching Billie. I know you'll all say this isn't my fault, but I have to be here. I need to help."

No one spoke for a moment after her small speech.

"I think you already did," Sherlock was the first to break the silence.

"Wh - Sorry?" Molly stumbled once again over her words, the strength and confidence from her previous speech somehow evaporated. "I did?"

"You said 'something's missing'," Sherlock repeated her words for her. "What?"

"Oh, well," Molly bit back against the growing blush at all eyes on her. "It's just, there were seven feathers, for seven deaths. Or, well, now we know, for seven attacks. You said they represent the seven gifts. But there weren't seven gifts."

"What?" Sally lifted her brow.

"There were eight," Molly finished. "The first six, the old fairy, and then -"

"Of course!" Sherlock practically jumped for joy in the air where he stood. "Brilliant."

In only two bounding steps, the detective had crossed the room, and promptly planted a kiss on the pathologist's forehead.

"Wait," Mary stepped forward toward Sherlock, a subtle smile threatening to creep across her lips. "You don't think Moriarty would actually do that, do you? Allow that?"

"Do what?" Lestrade glanced back and forth from the sets of suddenly grinning people in the previously somber room. "What's missing?"

"The eighth gift," Sherlock repeated with a crooked and proud smirk.

"The last fairy," Anderson suddenly understood.

"She said that instead of death," Molly nodded, "that the princess would fall into a deep sleep."

"Moriarty said he'd 'put the princess to sleep'," John repeated, now too unraveling their line of thinking. "He never said anything about killing her. Do you really think he wouldn't?"

"Could he have just been saying sleep instead of death?" Lestrade spoke soberly, not exactly happy with the question he had just proposed.

"Sherlock, be sensible," Mycroft sighed. "He said himself he was making his own revisions."

"Oh, come now, Mycroft," Sherlock had that smug glint in his eye once more. "Moriarty didn't spend all these years planning and then performing that plan just to end the show so quickly! He has been working on this for longer than we know. Mary's induced labor? Someone broke in here and drugged her, despite all your surveillance and security. Why right then? Why not earlier, when Billie would surely have been far too premature to survive? The odds of her survival were good, very good. Enough for Moriarty to bank on them. He probably even had people on standby in case John and I didn't arrive at the scene quick enough. The bomb was a distraction. His true
intentions weren't even the early birth. The whole thing was a rehearsal. Whoever got in and got to Mary had done so before the bombs went off. They weren't needed. Just an add of flare. It was the break in that was the practice. To see how easy it would be to get past your people. To see how to do it again all these years later tonight."

"No," Sherlock continued, arms flying and feet wearing a whole through the carpet. "Moriarty wouldn't do all of this, spend all of this time, just to end it so quickly. This isn't the end. He has something else planning. Something that requires Billie to be alive. He's going to keep her."

"And this is a good thing?" Sally asked skeptically.

"Oh, yes," Sherlock rubbed his hands together. "When he told us not to come after him, it wasn't a warning, it was a challenge. He lives for the chase, the game. He never wants to stop playing. Doesn't want to be bored."

"So what does this all mean?" Mrs. Hudson spoke for the first time, a tinge of hope brimming the confusion in her voice.

"It means," Sherlock glanced meaningful from Mary to John, "that we can get Billie back."
Similarities and Coincidences

look at me, leaving you with a little hope at the end of a chapter instead of a cliffhanger! hmm..i wonder why i did that. you know my methods...remember all the fluff preparing you. remember season 3, and how the first 2 episodes were light and funny to prepare us for HLV...or maybe i'm just kidding at it's all roses and cotton candy from here...who knows...

honestly, though, after all the happy comments I got on ff.net after that last chapter I feel like a "back-stabbing, heartless, manipulative bastard", to put it in Janine's words. I promise I won't rip your hearts out entirely. I did say there was no major character death. But I never said how long it would be before Billie was found...

Also, I've never been an assassin or anything close to it. So pardon me for improvising with Mary's past a bit here.

Sherlock descended the steps from the upstairs room of 221B quite heavily. Exhaustion reached all the way from the caverns of his mind palace to the tips of his sluggish feet. The detective still refused to sleep while on a case, and he certainly wasn't going to cease that routine now. He had kipped on the couch here and there when his body could endure no more and just shut down. And by that, it mostly meant that he passed out with his head in a book while locked away in that upper room or starting tipping sideways mid-conversation and was dragged to the couch afterwards. He had finally eaten after practically being force fed by John, Mary, Mycroft, Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson on separate occasions.

He couldn't afford such trivial bodily distractions while on the case.

Not this case.

Not Billie's case.

He was making the journey downstairs in the middle of the night to finally give into another unfortunate bodily requirement.

He came in through the kitchen and was turning towards the bathroom when he noticed it. He had almost missed it and cursed his subdued senses from severe lack of sleep.

Diverting from his original path to the toilet, Sherlock crept closer into the sitting room, a curious expression clouding his face in the dark.

There, sitting almost entirely curled up in John's old chair in the blackness, was Mary. She remained silent and still as he approached. Her eyes were sharp, alert, and yet focused faraway on some distant point beyond the fireplace she was staring so intently at. The former assassin had surely heard the man's footfalls, but she made no gesture to acknowledge his presence.

This was odd indeed, thought the detective.

It had been nearly two weeks since the abduction. Almost fourteen days and they were no closer to finding Moriarty or Billie than they had been that night. Their days were spent on the search, distracting themselves from sentiment. They craved action, to be out there doing something, anything. So that is what they did. They sprang at the slightest of leads. Picked them apart piece by piece.

Coworkers didn't comment when John and Mary took leaves at work. No one spoke a word when John started frequenting the gym. They all pretended that they didn't notice when Mary would sneak off to the shooting range. For once, Sherlock didn't bark at his brother when Mycroft would periodically "stop by". The younger sibling didn't complain when the elder set up new
surveillance or posted security detail outside the flat and to follow them. Greg, Molly, Phillip and even Sally would also frequently "pop in" as they were "in the neighborhood". Even John and Mary's friends and coworkers found themselves suddenly passing Baker Street more often, and they somehow always just happened to have casseroles or cakes with them when they did so. Still, no one mentioned it.

They talked about finding Billie. About ways to track Moriarty. Of plans. They dissected clues and discussed options.

But nothing broke the surface.

They talked about Billie, but not about her.

It was all superficial. All strategy and stony faces.

But then even behind closed curtains and doors, rarely did those facades crack.

As he approached the statuesque figure of his friend, Sherlock had the sinking feeling that something had finally fractured one of their worn walls.

He was honestly quite surprised it was Mary sitting there and not her husband. John might have been a soldier, but he certainly had his breaking point.

And yet here she was, the former hardened trained killer, staring into his fireplace, two tear tracks scratching down her cheeks.

Sherlock swept passed her, rounding and folding gracefully into his own chair, eyes falling and remaining on the woman. She had still yet to even glance his way. Placing his fingers underneath his chin, Sherlock studied her briefly, waiting for the moment he knew she would eventually speak and release on him whatever weight she was carrying.

"Seven years."

Sherlock’s gaze on Mary sharpened as she finally spoke, though the woman's eyes remained locked away somewhere else entirely.

"We've been trying to find out why Moriarty would be keeping Billie. Where, what for. There's one theory, one option we haven't considered. Of course, well, I know you've considered it. You and your brother, I heard the two of you the other day. I've been thinking it too. Since the day that he took her, I've been thinking it. Fearing it. Trying to deny it. But I can't."

At this, she finally turned her head, hard and hurting eyes finding Sherlock's penetrating stare.

"I heard what you said to your brother. About how Moriarty might be trying to train her, to use her. The absolute revenge on you. Turning your best friend's goddaughter into an assassin to hunt you down. That's a plan Moriarty would definitely be willing to take his time on. Something that would justify all the time he put into it."

"I know why you haven't told John, or me. I've heard your other theories too, Sherlock. You're keeping everyone else in the dark about the more, well, dark, ones. The ones that you're too afraid might actually be true but they're too terrible to tell to the child's parents. But I also know why you've kept this one so secret."

Her eyes had drifted downward again and now she shot them back up to meet Sherlock's.

"Because of me."

Mary paused, not to wait for a response though as she was most certainly not finished.

"You just might be right," she started slowly. "More than you know." She swallowed here, once more averting her gaze from his, lost in a memory beyond the fireplace. "There's something you should know. Because seven strikes isn't the only thing those feathers could've symbolized. I honestly didn't think about it until after Billie was taken, I swear."

Ever so briefly, Mary closed her eyes and took a breath.
"Seven years, Sherlock. That's how long I was in 'training.'"

"That could be a coincidence. How would Moriarty know about your past?"

"Let me finish," Mary protested over Sherlock's interjection. "And besides, you know exactly what Moriarty is capable of and I know exactly what you think of coincidences. I understand what you're trying to do, and while I appreciate the rare show of a comforting side to you, Sherlock, this isn't the time. Some people don't deserve comfort." Now her voice was distant, matching her stare.

"There's another similarity," she continued, forcing strength behind her voice again. "Another coincidence."

She waited a beat, drawing her eyes up and locking with Sherlock's one final time.

"I ran away on my sixth birthday."
like I said, I am no assassin or military or cia expert. i am just making things up here for mary. don't worry, i'm not just pulling it out of a hat. there is actually thought and, you know, work, going into it.

The name Dokka Mogilevich comes from 2 Russian mobsters/terrorists names from the CIA's most wanted list, just combined together. And yeah, a lot of this is stretched. Just, use your imagination kiddos.

Abigail Abbot was not the typical child. She wasn't sticking her nose in encyclopedias or spewing facts like a vending machine like other little geniuses her age. But she certainly wasn't occupying her free time with dolls or playing pretend.

Maybe she would have spared time for such activities, had she been born into a different life. She was sharp, intelligent, but she wasn't opposed to a bit of fun.

Sadly, little Abby Abbot wasn't going to be granted many opportunities for "fun".

For being one of the brightest children of her age, maybe running away on her sixth birthday wasn't exactly the most intelligent route to take. Perhaps living on the streets when she should have been in primary school wasn't the most brilliant plan. Maybe talking to a strange man with an odd accent and forced friendly smile on the corner of some forgotten road wasn't the wisest action to take.

But maybe, just maybe, when you've just turned six years old and instead of presents your parents give you a bloody nose, fractured finger and another bruised rib, even the smartest child doesn't consider the other options.

So, with a few coins in her jeans that she nicked from her mother's purse and a pack slung over her shoulder, the barely six year old girl took to the darkened streets seeking sanctuary.

What she found instead, was an entirely new life.

The strange man had spotted her successfully picking a pocket and apparently watched her for some time from afar. He appraised her thieving skills and even was an audience to quite a remarkable evading of the police by the small child. It was after this impressive chase that he finally approached her.

It was quite honestly easier to kidnap children and force them into the lifestyle, but this girl was different. She was already intelligent and talented and obviously on the run from more than just the law. Parents probably at that young of age and by the bruising he could make out from his hidden watching posts.

Even if it was sometimes simpler to just snatch the kids, he wanted to handle this one differently. Children could be incredibly loyal. If this girl thought of him as a surrogate father and mentor instead of a kidnapper, the "training" would not be nearly has laborious or painful for either parties. A willing worker was always preferable to the slave in his eyes.

Not to mention the glint in the girl's eyes. The spark that told him that not only was she doing this for survival, but that she got a charge from it as well. he saw it in her every time she snaked her little hand into a fruit cart or wallet or bag. He swore she was smiling as she escaped the police's pursuit. He imagined that this one would take very little convincing to join him.

And it didn't.

The promise of family and safety was enough of an incentive for Abigail to take the bait right from
The next seven years of Abby Abbot's life were marked only with pain and rewards. She was taught, bred. Hand to hand combat, weaponry, everything to mold her into the perfect killing machine. If she succeeded, she was awarded the simple pleasures of food and sleep and verbal praise; the last one something she had never experienced before. If she failed, however, certain disciplinary actions were swiftly brought forth. It wasn't the senseless abuse she had been born into though. At home, it did not matter to her parents if she was perfect or not. Merely existing wrought her punishment. This was different. And, eventually, her mind justified it. She began to understand, to appreciate the penance. She learned quite quickly and after a short time received far more praise than pain.

When she crested childhood and tipped over into the teenage years, the thirteen year old was given her first missions. They were all unofficial, of course. There was money in Columbia with the paramilitary and drug gangs and for a brief period Abigail Abbot was known as Natalia Moreno and worked among the local 'sicarios', helping to train the other teenagers. It took her little time to perfect the accent and language and, given her skill set, no one questioned her ethnicity.

She was hauled all across different countries, working wherever her surrogate father told her to, in whatever culture or capacity that required.

When she was an adult, they forged the proper documentations and accents and took up residency in America.

It was two weeks after they settled into their new little home when her handler was killed.

Abigail scoured the states to find the criminal, but never could trace him.

Dokka Mogilevich was her target. He wasn't the man who had physically put a bullet into her mentor's brain, but he was the kingpin. The head of the snake. A Russian mob boss and part time terrorist when it suited him. Her surrogate father and the man had had a deal that went south a few years prior. It was the true reason why they had suddenly took to moving every couple months instead of years.

Her handler's head had been on the chopping block, not hers. She was safe.

But not for long.

She was going to go after the man, no matter what it took.

Without her mentor, she lacked the connections and funds to do this by herself, though. Still, she had a plan. Abigail did have enough skills to fake her own records though and suddenly 18 year old Cathleen Bennett from Kenosha, Wisconsin was enlisted and quickly climbing the ranks of the US military. She bid her time and continued her own personal planning and preparation on the side of the new vigorous training she was receiving. She excelled, of course, with her intelligence and already honed talents. From US Navy petty officer to US Navy SEAL to her final goal. She was assigned to perform covert missions for the Central Intelligence Agency until she was fully recruited and became an official agent, or, more specifically, assassin. She was getting paid to do what she was good at; what she had been bred nearly her entire life now to do. It was all she knew. And killing Mogilevich was all she could think about. Every face she erased from existence, she pictured as his. Every heart that she stopped, was his. Each body brought her nearer to her enemy, and gave her new ones along the way. She cared little for the adversaries against her that she was building up. She only sought out one.

Every day she was getting closer, scaling the proverbial ladder until finally she was put on the one mission she cared about.

Dokka Mogilevich.

They found lackeys and arrested accomplices, but always he remained out of their reach.

Until one day.
The day she put a bullet in the man's skull.

The joy and relief and sense of victory she had expected after all this time was surprisingly not what came then. The revenge didn't make her whole again, didn't bring the only person she ever considered as family back.

She was alone.

She was empty.

And it was killing her.
Leaving the CIA wasn’t something someone just did so easily. A secret centered organization wasn’t too keen on their agents suddenly disappearing. Because that’s what she did. Cathleen Bennett dropped herself off the face of the earth with a new name, new voice, new hair, and new home.

Before she had runaway, she had spent the first six years of her life moving. She figured it was one of the reasons it came so easy to her later in life. Her father was quite the successful businessman and it took him to all kinds of corners of the earth.

And that’s where she was going to go. Everywhere, anywhere. Keep moving. Keep running. From the CIA. From the enemies she had already made.

From her past.

From herself.

From France to Ireland, and then to Canada for a spell. She visited Chile and did some work in Poland as well. She executed a few jobs in Mexico and then Nicaragua. From Burma she traveled to Germany and then Denmark.

And that was where everything changed.

Being freelance, Abigail Abbot went wherever the work was. Throughout her entire career, her hits had always been fellow criminals. Drug lords, murderers, mobsters, and the like. She had simply been taking out the competition for the highest bidder. There were a few questionable kills during her time underneath her handler, but she had always trusted him, despite her hesitancy to finish those particular jobs. But, on her own, she had always made the choice to refuse work that targeted innocents. The assassinations were justifiable in her mind. People that she went after deserved to die. And as long as she could justify it, she could keep from losing her sanity every time she looked down at the blood on her hands.

But now, the job description and pay mattered very little. As long as she was moving, working, it was alright by her. Because if she stopped, if she paused for even a moment’s rest or breath, she would feel that emptiness. And she wasn’t sure she could survive that.

Her next employment was closely related to a secret terrorist organization. She wasn’t given many details on the mission. She was simply told to infiltrate a specific and well secured building under strict surveillance, set the explosive, and leave. When she inquired as to the targets of the attack, she was informed only that the victims would be a group of white collar businessmen, with not so white and clean secret second lives.

More criminals.

But her eagerness blinded her to the vague and questionable nature of the mission and she pursued her task with perfection.

And when the body count came in, Abby found much more than dirty middle aged men.

The floor underneath the one she had targeted had been the company’s daycare.

The one below that was the cafe, where many spouses were meeting their working partners for lunch.

Men, women and children all were lost to the explosion.

A handful of innocent people, dead, because of the bomb.

Because of her.
She had to know more. Had to know exactly the damage she had done.

Quite easily, she acquired lists of those who were caught in the blast. She drown herself in the names of the dead, the lives she had cut short.

Until she came to two names that she recognized all too well.

Howard and Regina Abbot.

Her parents.

She wasn't proud to admit it, but along with all the guilt from the list, these two gave her a flicker of satisfaction, before the true horror set in. Because it didn't matter what they had done to her, how they had hurt her. They were her parents.

And she had killed them.

Abby found herself digging into the lives of the two people she had left behind, and with each new piece of information, found her guilt slowly suffocating her.

According to her research, after she ran away, Howard Abbot nearly went bankrupt trying to find his lost daughter. Whereas before he spend his wealth on liquor and cigars, it now all went to locating her. From his financial records, it appeared as though he had put down the bottle completely.

Regina Abbot was admitted to hospital after attempting suicide on Abigail's eighth birthday. She eventually recovered, receiving treatment and therapy all the way up until her death. Once well, she too devoted much her time to the search for their missing child.

Her father dabbled in a few dirtier deals to gain more money and further connections as to aid in his search. He had been in Denmark only a week for a new position in the company after one of his new shadier business partners offered him a tempting transfer. Along with the job, came information. Details of his little girl's whereabouts. Somehow, someone, somewhere, knew Abby was still alive. And knew right where to find her.

It didn't take much more sleuthing to find a name.

Charles Augustus Magnussen.
this brief interruption of our story will conclude shortly. i apologize. mary's backstory is taking up more chapters than i originally anticipated. please stay tuned. i promise, it will be relevant. just like in sherlock, everything in this story is relevant.

Charles Augustus Magnussen.

After Abigail had learned the name, she wasn't granted any time to pursue the man.

He, in fact, had already been pursuing her.

No sooner had she discovered his connection to her father did he make his first contact with her. His first, but most certainly not his last.

Somehow, this stranger knew of all of her past identities. He possessed detailed reports of nearly every single crime she had committed, every single hit she had delivered. He could have the police on her doorstep within minutes. And her enemies there within the hour.

So Abigail Abbot did one of the two things she knew how to do.

She ran.

It was fight or flight. Kill or run. All she knew.

But it wasn't all she wanted to know anymore.

The terrorist group had used her, tricked her into ending the lives of innocent men, women and children.

This was what her life had become. Dodging blackmailers and escaping enemies was nothing compared to trying to survive the guilt that consumed her day and night.

She would see their faces in her nightmares. Her parents came to to her in every dream, searching for her, only to find her with their blood on her hands. Finally reuniting with them after all these years, as they pour apologies for her childhood at her feet and all she does in return is embrace them while the world around them explodes. Seeing them begging for help in the rubble, only to walk away. Standing outside the building with the trigger, seeing her parents in the window a second too late after pressing the button.

She wanted to end it all. But what would that do? How would taking one more life, her own, fix anything? Change her past? She could never atone for her sins, but she could at least do something with the rest of her life to try. She would no longer hunt people, but help them.

She couldn't save the lives she had taken, but she could save other lives, future lives.

It wasn't tipping the scale in the slightest.

But it was something.

So she fled.

But this time it was different. She wasn't changing names and countries for a job. She was quite truly starting over.

The physical changes weren't difficult. She had altered her appearance so many times she almost forgot what she originally looked like. With new chopped blonde hair and color contacts, she set out for England.
Mary Morstan became her name, taken from a stillborn. Another way of giving a lost soul life.

The framework of her new life story was fairly simple as well, as she had practice. Orphan was always an easy route. And the documents were not difficult to acquire.

Then came the career. The part of her new life that was truly changing. Sure, sometimes she had held down jobs as covers, but this was different. She wouldn’t be sneaking off from the office or the bar or the restaurant on a mission. A previous hit a few years prior in Poland had been quite extensive. She had taken up a cover occupation as a medical assistant. So receiving the proper training and obtaining the job as a nurse also proved to be quite easy.

With her intelligence, she could have probably excelled in the field and gone on to be a doctor. But something stopped her. Being a nurse and helping people, aiding the other professionals in saving a life, was one thing. Having the person’s survival in her hands was something entirely different, dangerous and terrifying. She didn’t want to taste that power again. To put herself in that position.

Not to mention that she needed the extra free time. Not for doing dirty jobs or anything of the sort. But she still did try and keep tabs on Magnussen. He had threatened her after all and she wasn’t exactly fond of living in the blackmailer’s shadow. She stayed close, only moving to London. It was far enough away from his home, but close enough to keep her eye on him as much as possible. She knew all too well the truth of the old adage of keeping one’s friends close, and one’s enemies closer.

Of course, Mary didn’t really have friends to keep close. Not unless you counted Janine, who she had only befriended due to her position working for Magnussen. That wasn’t to say she didn’t like the woman. Over time she actually grew quite fond of her new friend.

Her first friend.

She had been isolated for so long, too long. Practically her entire life. She hadn’t known friendship and now that she had found it, she discovered herself desiring more. So, despite her better judgment and the warning in her gut, the former assassin attempted to have some semblance of a social life. She would’ve had to cave eventually anyway. The other nurses continually were hounding her to join them on their pub or dancing nights. When she finally accepted, she was surprised at how much she was honestly enjoying herself. She could dance and smile and flirt and laugh and none of it was for show.

For once, she enjoyed what were considered "normal" things, like buying new clothes; not outfits to fit whatever personality she was pretending to portray, but pieces that pleased her for a change. Going to the market was a new simple joy. Bit by bit, she granted herself “me” time. She didn’t stop glancing over her shoulder or watching out for Magnussen, it didn’t consume her. She was able to work at a job she loved, and live a life she was happy with.

It took some time, but she even found herself opening herself up enough to not just go out for herself or with friends, but on dates.

She wasn’t sure when the last time she had felt so truly happy had been.

So when Doctor John Watson hurriedly turned a corner at the clinic on his first day and knocked the nurse right onto the floor, taking a tray and stack of charts with her, she actually laughed. Her forehead was cut open and dripping and yet she was sitting there on the tile, surrounded by the mess, and snorting.

She had been in the middle or reminiscing about a date she had just went on with her then boyfriend and relishing in that joy she had never known when it happened. The previous feelings of happiness, mixed with the utter hilarity of a trained agent being so easily taken down by a short blonde man who appeared to be in a hurry to be somewhere but nowhere at all, in addition to the look on the doctor’s face, all culminated in quite the giggling fit.

She was sure this man was going to think her to be absolutely insane with her reaction, but instead the doctor bent over, hastily helping her to her feet. He then proceeded to pick up the items that had been knocked over as he sputtered apologies. When he finally drew himself back
up, he was standing merely a few measly centimeters from her face. Her laughter stopped short
and she hid the breath that caught in her throat with a friendly smile.

Clearing his throat, the dashing doctor offered another apology and then implored that she let
him stitch up her forehead.

And even though she had changed her identity far earlier, Mary knew that it was right then that
her new life had truly begun.
Stop.
Before you read this, go to tumblr. That's right, do it.

Find user Kura06. Look under her fanart.
She has done some incredible artwork for this story. Go check it out. I think I might make a masterpost of all of it because there is other art she has privately sent me, but given me permission to post. I have done so for some on my own tumblr, but not all of it yet.

Seriously, go check it out. It's fantastic.

"You pretty much know the rest," Mary swallowed, subtly stoppering tears that were struggling to breech her stony surface. "So that's it. That's everything. I was six, Sherlock. I ran away exactly on my sixth birthday. Billie was taken on hers. If Magnussen found out about me, it isn't difficult to think that Moriarty could have too. Magnussen was one of the most powerful men in the country, and Moriarty is one of the most powerful criminals. Even if Moriarty didn't find out about me on his own, Magnussen could've shared the information with him for the right price. I don't want it to be true, but I can't ignore it. You say Moriarty likes to play games. This seems like just the sort of game he would play."

Sherlock was silent for a moment, his deep gaze seeming to swallow everything she had just laid before him, and everything it meant for Billie.

"Even if that is the truth," Sherlock started slowly, "which there are multiple other theories we have yet to explore, but even if it is, I plan on getting her back. We will get her back."

"Don't make promises you can't keep," Mary responded with a hollow smile.

"I don't," Sherlock replied readily, leaning forward as his cold, yet certain and somehow comforting eyes found hers.

They didn't need to exchange any more words after that really. They didn't speak to each other that way. What went unsaid and what was communicated through their looks, was more than enough.

Neither spoke for a lingering moment, the weight of all that they carried on their shoulders and minds hanging in the air.

"Why did you come to me?" Sherlock questioned curiously. "Why didn't you go to John? Tell him this?"

"I gave him the opportunity to learn about my past once," Mary sighed softly. "He didn't take it. Didn't want to know. I never wanted him to know either. But this isn't about him, or me. This is about Billie." She paused, a small smirk twitching at the corner of her lip. "And I know he followed me up here and has been standing just outside the door ever since you walked in."

"So it was him I heard," Sherlock grinned playfully. "Couldn't be certain. Mrs. Hudson does so like to eavesdrop."

The pair looked up as the man in question somewhat sulkily shuffled into the room.

"The two of you," he let the sentence drop off as he shook his head.
They all shared a rare smile before the moment passed and they remembered what had kept them from smiling for so long now.

"Come here," John commanded his wife softly, reaching out his hand for hers.

Taking it, Mary rose from the chair and walked into her husband's opening arms.

"You told me once," John started slowly, clearing his throat, a bit more uncertain of his words than before. "You told me, that if I knew about your past, that life, that I wouldn't love you anymore. You were wrong, Mrs. Watson."

Their kiss hid Mary's silent and soft tears.

"Thankfully," Sherlock broke the silence, smirk edging across his somber voice, "we're not all our parents. If that were true, Mycroft and I would be sentimental fools, running about taking holidays and the like." He crinkled his nose in distaste toward the end.

"And I'd be a complete dick," John huffed, his once sad voice tinted with humor.

Mary didn't have to respond. She understood and squeezed her husband's arm and smiled at Sherlock in appreciation for the unique words of comfort. Billie didn't have to grow up to be Mary. And the mother was going to do everything in her power to see to that.

"The same applies to ourselves, and our pasts," Sherlock spoke knowingly. "John is no invalid, and I am not a junkie."

"That's only 'cause I'm here to kick your head in if you do something stupid like that," John teased.

Through the jest, like they always did, the message still rang loud and true.

Not only did Billie have to grow up to be Mary, but Mary didn't have to be Abigail. She needed the reassurance for herself almost just as badly as she needed it for her daughter.

Mary clasped Sherlock's hand briefly as they shared a sad smile before once more folding into her husband's arms.

"I'm going to get her back, Mary" John whispered into his wife's ear.

"I know," Mary nodded into his shoulder. "We both are."

"All of us," Sherlock correctly seriously.

The couple parted and looked over at their friend, exchanging knowing looks that conveyed so much more than what they were saying.
Worse

Chapter Notes

More details on the dog later! And now...and John chapter...my favorite character

Apart from the police and Sherlock, no one had entered Billie's bedroom since the night of her kidnapping.

Well, no human, anyway.

Blackbeard remained faithfully and protectively perched on the edge of the bed nearly all hours of the day and night, quite often right next to his stuffed animal lookalike.
The puppy was the smaller spitting image of Sherlock's childhood canine companion, Redbeard. It had been intended as Sherlock's present for his goddaughter's sixth birthday. Everything had been arranged ahead of time and the dog arrived at Baker Street with a box right on time, hours after the kidnapping. Confident of returning Billie home, Sherlock had taken the puppy in himself, even if it ended up being Mrs. Hudson who tended to care for the creature the most.

Sometime after Billie was taken, Blackbeard somehow got himself down to 221C, jumped and pawed at the doorknob enough to twist it, and was found hours later by Sherlock. The pup was curled up on Billie's bed, but toward the bottom, as if he knew there was someone else that was supposed to be in the blankets with him.

After finding his new spot, the dog barely left it. He would emerge for food or walks or to go to the bathroom, but nothing else. Another oddity was that when the dog did finally decide to leave his new home, he never bothered the humans that were just right down the hall. If he wanted to go outside, he would leave the bedroom and purposefully make the struggling climb to 221B. It was as though he didn't desire to disturb the grieving parents. As if he knew.

It was because of this that Sherlock had dog doors installed on several of the doorways. He put one on Billie's door, on the entryway to 221C, and on one of the two doors to 221B. He was almost surprised how neither John nor Mary said a word about it. Had he done so before without asking, they would surely have complained, at the very least. Now, they hardly seemed to notice. They didn't ignore the new animal pattering around their flat, but they also didn't actively engage with him either. He was meant for Billie. And something about him being there without her, didn't seem right.

So, other than the small flap in the bottom, the door was kept dutifully shut.

Like Blackbeard; not ignored, no. Not forgotten.

Waiting.

Because they were going to get her back.

But seeing inside that room, even knowing they were going to save her, was just too difficult for both the assassin and soldier.

Their eyes would sometimes drift across its frame as they walked past it. Other times, they glanced away.

It all depended on the day.

Today was not a good day.

Not for John Watson, at least.

Well, very few days were "good" days since Billie had gone missing. The periods of twenty four hours were more often categorized into "not so bad", "bad" and "worse".

So, on that scale, today was "worse".

There was nothing substantially significant to make this day separate from the others. To warrant it such a title. They received no ill news. They didn't have any unexpected visitors or have to make a trip to Scotland Yard for more questioning.

Absolutely nothing stood out about the day.

Well, almost nothing.

Because this day, this was the day John Watson opened his daughter's bedroom door.

Again, nothing special sparked this sudden sentiment. He just, finally, did it.

Mrs. Hudson and Molly had finally gotten Mary to leave the flat and they were taking her out for the entire day. Sherlock was out for a case alone.
John didn't join him on the few other cases the detective briefly consulted on anymore.

John didn't do much of anything anymore.

Two months, that door had remained shut. Two months, the room inside had gone undisturbed.

And as the father twisted the handle, pushed and stepped inside the threshold, it was as though those two months disappeared.

He breathed in the dust and sniffed the scent of disuse, the stale smell mixed with a trace of canine, rubbing roughly against his nostrils. But if he inhaled again, he could get past the must and mutt and the months gone by. He could take in the beautiful bouquet of wax crayons and plastic dolls, of strawberry shampoo and sweets. He followed each aroma to its place of origin, eyes slowly swallowing the unmade bed, the ballet slippers tucked away underneath, the dolls in the middle of a tea party, the pirate patch hanging off her chair, the piano books stacked in the corner, her "hidden" stash of candies in the bottom of one of her slippers. And then he found the crayons. They were sprawled on her desk, as they always were. She drew so much there was never any point in putting them away. He smiled at the memory and let his gaze drift up to dance across the plethora of pictures adorning the wall. He found himself nearly chuckling at her interesting and interpretive artwork, until he saw it.

He hadn't thought of it, hadn't remembered. It never had been a cause for concern before. Now, they knew the truth.

And it made John sick.

Because there, standing alongside John and Mary and Sherlock in Billie's drawn "family portraits", was Peter.

Moriarty.

He was mostly a scribbled figure with dark hair and a bright red smile.

The smile wasn't the only thing that was red.

Because, right then, it was the only color John could see.

Crimson rage blinded the man as he charged forward, arms already out and ready before he reached the wall. The pieces of paper crumpled and shredded in his angry hands, falling to the floor in disfigured fragments of their former selves.

It wasn't until the wall was torn clean that John realized what he had just done.

They were not only images of Moriarty that he had destroyed. He had permanently turned his daughter's beautiful drawings into debris. Pictures of John and Mary. Sketches of Sherlock sitting in his chair. Coloring's of Mrs. Hudson in her kitchen. Pages and pages of pictures of Redbeard. Scribbles resembling the inside, and outside, of the flat. There were even cartoons of Molly, Greg, Mycroft, Anderson, Donovan, the Turners, Angelo, her dance instructors and friends, and just about anyone else that the little artist came in contact with. But most of them, were of her family. And now they were in ruins at his feet. His daughter's deepest expressions of how much she loved all of them, shredded.

And, not only that, but they were Billie's.

And anything, no matter how small, of hers now seemed so much more significant. So much more valuable. Every article of clothing, each photograph, every video of her ballet, and every drawing.

He wanted to, needed to, treasure anything of hers he had left.

Because, no matter how much they swore otherwise, it was very possible they were never getting anything more from her than these physical echoes of her life.

Sinking to the floor, John hopelessly gathered the scraps in his arms, desperately trying to find any that were even somewhat salvageable. There were a few faces still recognizable among the fragments and he clutched those close to his heart. He then went on to sort out any that captured
the figure of Peter. Those, well, those he made sure were never recognizable again.

Taking the selected few of the family, John finally pushed himself up off the floor and padded painfully out of the room. Going to the small safe underneath his bed, John opened the box, placing all but one of the pieces of paper inside. The last one, a crayon creation of John, Mary, Sherlock and Billy all crowded around a Christmas tree, he slipped inside his wallet.

Shuffling back slowly into the bedroom, John suddenly noticed something that he hadn't before. Smelled something that he hadn't before.

Traces of an iron scent.

Spatters of blood.

Maybe he had noticed them before, but he hadn't wanted to admit their presence as he had been allowing himself to go back in time.

Now, there was no going back.

Moriarty had left more than a small spindle with the video message for them to find. The child's once innocent room was now tainted with the satin substance.

He couldn't leave it like this. Even if they never got their daughter back, John couldn't leave his little girl's room in such a state. It deserved better.

Billie deserved better.

She deserved to be clean, not dirtied by this madman. Not stained by him as they rest of them had been over the years. She should have been spared this.

It was like some horrific metaphor for the entire situation.

Her room was no longer innocent.

Billie was no longer innocent.

Even if they somehow got her back, which was becoming less and less likely as time moved forward without her, she would never be the same. She would never be granted that innocence again. Moriarty would have branded her somehow, left a scar in his wake, a stain, like this one.

John couldn't let that happen.

He couldn't save his daughter, but he could at least do this.

Finally, after weeks and weeks of chasing dead ends, tireless research and sitting on his thumbs, John could do something, no matter how trivial.

With a vigor he hadn't possessed for some time now, save for the brief rage just before, John went about gathering supplies and working on freeing the floorboards from the satin substance.

His muscles were aching from disuse as he violently scrubbed against the stain. He rubbed and washed and brushed and scratched until his fingertips were beginning to bleed, and still the dried liquid stubbornly stayed.

He wasn't sure how long he was like that, kneeling on the ground, hunched over and mopping with all of his might and malice.

At some point, the malice melted to mourning. He was no longer shaking with fury, but with sobs.

And that was how Sherlock found him, hours later, still bent over.

Broken.
John, this is the most simplistic and dull case I have ever been forced to listen to. Even you could solve it. - S

Lestrade just spilled hot coffee on his hand. - S

This is the most exciting our meeting has been. - S

He is now showing signs of annoyance at me having laughed at him. - S

Perhaps signs of pain. - S

He won't let me look at it. - S

John, please promptly inform Lestrade that I am perfectly capable of treating a second degree burn. - S

You taught me. - S

After the experiment in the kitchen, remember? - S

I burned my arm, John. I'd hope your memory isn't failing already at such an early age. - S

Johh? - S

Are you ignoring me again? - S

Answer immediately or I will assume you are in some sort of danger. - S

Danger it is. - S

I am on my way. - S

Lestrade is coming too. - S

I tried to stop him. He can be annoyingly stubborn. - S

Like you. - S

Please answer, John. - S

Tell me if you are hurt. - S

If you are hurt or kidnapped, I hope you know I will never forgive you. - S

If the person receiving these messages has one, John Watson, you are advised to let him go. Now. - S

Refusing will result in severe consequences. - S

Quite possibly your death. - S

We are almost there. - S

Lestrade drives aggravatingly slow, even while speeding. - S

We are here. - S

I am here. - S

Sherlock could hear Blackbeard's small barks as he thrust open the front door of 221 Baker Street. As they crossed the threshold, the pup was already anxiously at their feet. Offering the animal a
reassuring pat on the head, Sherlock stealthily stepped forward. Motioning with this hand for Lestrade to check upstairs, Greg surprisingly followed the unspoken order as Sherlock slipped down the hall toward 221C.

Briefly closing his eyes, Sherlock turned the knob with tethered trepidation.

He wasn't sure he was prepared for what he might find beyond the door.

Billie had already been taken from them. The detective didn't think he would survive losing his best friend as well.

He had deduced that Moriarty would not strike again while he had Billie. Had he been wrong again? Had he once more missed some crucial clue as he had with her?

There was only one thing for certain in the detectives's mind.

If he had, and something had happened to John, Sherlock would never forgive himself.

Sherlock could hear the soft scratching once inside the sitting room. The sound was seeping out from behind Billie's bedroom door.

No one went in Billie's room.

Blackbeard was out in the hall and therefore it certainly wasn't him.

And then he heard another noise.

A grunt, a groan, and then a gasp.

All so small that had Sherlock not been stretching his senses, he probably would never had heard them.

But he did.

And he recognized them.

John.

John was in pain.

Forgetting stealth, Sherlock bounded toward the slightly ajar door and proceeded to push it all the way open, practically charging inside. He stopped short, his entire body's movements seizing to a halt before he was even fully over the threshold.

There, in the middle of the floor, slumped over with shaking shoulders and silently sobbing, was John Watson.

John, the stoic soldier, the unflappable father, determined doctor and fearless friend - broken and bleeding.

The skin on the man's fingertips, knuckles and palms were rubbed raw and stained satin in some spots. The floor beneath him was covered in chemical liquids and soapy water, and blood. Eyes moving up, Sherlock could see the man's stiff and strained muscles, his soaking clothing, and then, his face.

This was where Sherlock actually had to momentarily glance away.

He had never seen his best friend's face in such a state.

He didn't want to know the deductions behind that haunted and horrible expression.

But John needed him now.

So, Sherlock lifted his eyes once more, forcibly blocking out the rapid fire deductions - red eyes, evidence of dried and new tears, trembling limbs, difficulty breathing, pallor, sweat on brow - that were simply coming naturally, firing off inside his head.
Keeping the awful adjectives at bay, Sherlock stepped slowly and cautiously forward, yet with a certain command still in his stature. It was what John needed just then. The former army doctor wouldn’t want words of comfort or pity or cliches.

John was spiraling, and more than anything else, he needed structure. Orders. The soldier was always there underneath the skin, ready and waiting to leap into action or take commands. It was a part of John's nature. Of course, he was no doormat. He didn't just ask how high if Sherlock told him to jump. But in his current state, it was exactly what he required.

Sherlock squatted down in front of the cracking man.

The detective swallowed down all of his own sentiment and fixed his friend with a stern and assertive glare, only allowing a flicker of compassion and concern to bleed through.

"John."

The father failed to make any movement or take even a hint of notice at the other man's presence.

Sherlock repeated the name until he finally placed a firm hand on John's still scrubbing ones, forcibly holding his friend's arms in place.

"John."

This time, the soldier snapped his head up to meet Sherlock's penetrating stare. The older man appeared as though he truly hadn't known Sherlock had been there until that very moment. The surprise on John’s face was fleeting and soon replaced by the expression Sherlock most hated. It took everything in Sherlock's power not to avert his eyes.

"John, look at me. Be calm and look at me. Stop."

John's gaze began to drop down toward the stain until Sherlock's decisive voice stopped him.

"No. Look at me. I said 'stop'.” Sherlock's words were strong and emanating authority. "John, focus. Breathe. You're breathing is erratic and shallow. Another minute like this and you will pass out. Your hands are injured. We are going to go into the kitchen and get your medical bag. Now, stand up."

John made a weak move to do as instructed and shifted his line of sight toward the newly barren wall as he did so.

"John," Sherlock spoke sharply. "I said, 'look at me'. Look at me, right now. You're going to keep looking at me. We are going to leave here, and go into the kitchen and you are not going to stop looking at me until we get there."

And that was exactly how they left that place of pain, Sherlock shutting the door behind them as they once again shut away Billie's room and the memories and grief contained within.

Lestrade found them in the kitchen, John sitting silently while an equally and uniquely wordless Sherlock was set to the task of bandaging the doctor's hands. Taking in their expressions and silence, Greg didn't dare ask any questions. John wasn't missing or suffering some fatal injury and Sherlock wasn't making a show of whatever had happened, so an explanation could obviously wait. Without speaking, Lestrade turned back and made to head up to wait in 221B, allowing the friends to have their privacy.

"I can't do it."

Greg and Sherlock both stopped short at the small voice.

It was the first John had spoke since the detective had found him and his voice sounded as broken as he looked.

"I can't do this, anymore.” He sighed sorrowfully.

"There is still .."
"Don't," John interrupted the younger man, shakily standing. "Just, don't. Don't try to tell me something that will make this alright. That's not you and that's not true. How can this be alright? How could any of this end okay? I can't do this again."

There was a question in Sherlock's eyes until he suddenly figured out the answer. It was too late, though, because John was already replying.

"Two years, Sherlock," John ground out, his weary voice strengthening as he found purchase on the one emotion that would hold him together in this breakdown, anger. "Two years. You were dead. No question. No doubt. No hope. You were dead. And it bloody hurt. But you were gone, forever. It wasn't the same and it was never okay, but, eventually, I moved on. I had to. I could. Because you were dead. Billie isn't dead, is she? Or is she? That's the problem! We don't know. We have no idea where she is or what she is going through. And that - that is so much worse. I can't move on. Not after two months, not after two years. I can never move on, because there is always a chance that she is out there and sheneeds me. But what am I doing? Nothing!"

"We are doing everything we can, John," Greg supplied soberly from the doorway.

"We have to be careful," Sherlock warned. "Although we don't believe Moriarty will kill her if he finds out we are pursuing him, we don't want to risk it."

"You expect me to just sit here and do nothing?" John was shouting now, the fury in his face finally pouring out over his voice. "She's my daughter, Sherlock! He has her! I was a soldier, damn it! I won't do nothing! I am her father! It is my job to protect her! Just like it was my job to protect you. And don't say it wasn't. How many times am I going to be forced to stand aside and do nothing while the people I love are hurt? I watched you fall and did nothing. It's the same thing. I'm doing nothing."

With one swipe of his arms, the chair he had been sitting on and the array of medical supplies on the table all went crashing to the ground.

"I can't do it. I can't be here. It's like spending those two years standing on the street below Bart's, staring up at the rooftop everyday, waiting for it to change. I keep looking at her toys and expecting her to be there. I wait to hear her singing in the bathtub. Everything here is her. But she isn't here. It's not right. Not without her here and I can't do it again. Not this time."

And that was how John and Mary moved out of 221C.

Mary didn't question it. She secretly had been silently suffering and detesting the flat without its third occupant.

The couple packed up and moved, right upstairs into John's old bedroom. It wasn't ideal or spacious or private, but it was good enough for them, and still close enough. Because, even if they were leaving the flat, it didn't mean they were giving up on Billie.

Like the bedroom now, the flat remained closed off.

Not ignored. Not forgotten.

Waiting.
When it came to finding a new home for himself, his wife, and his soon-to-be daughter, there were only three things John Watson looked for.

Two bedrooms.

Good neighbors.

Safety.

He wasn't a particularly picky man, nor did he quite enjoy house hunting.

After Sherlock's 'death', it hadn't taken John long to decide to move out of 221B. He couldn't wake up every day to silence instead of explosions, gunshots, or the screeching of the violin. He couldn't sit across from the chair that had once belonged to his best friend.

In fact, all the furniture had been Sherlock's, even John's chair. All the ex-soldier had brought with him was a rucksack of clothing, a box of books and medical supplies, his laptop, RAMC mug, and his gun. But nothing more. Everything outside of John's bedroom screamed Sherlock's presence and there was only one thing John could bear to do. Shut the door and lock the screaming inside.

It took John less than an hour to pack his meager possessions. And it was just like that, with his soldier's stiff shoulders and gait, that he marched down the stairs and out of 221B for good.

Or, at least, so he had thought.

Mycroft was apparently going to keep up on the rent, claiming it was his form of an apology and offered it to John should he ever wish to move back in. Now John knew better. Still, even without the money, or cover story, John suspected Mrs. Hudson would not have been able to bring herself to rent it out again to anyone else.

So when John moved out of 221B, all he was looking for were three things.

Proximity to clinic.

Proximity to tube station.

No Sherlock.

John found the cleanest, most modern, flat he could in walking distance of work. There were no stacks of texts. No organs in the freezer. No antique furniture or distinct scent of dust and chemicals. The most non-Sherlockian place he could find.

Of course, he would never admit that.

Then Mary had moved in, bringing with her a touch of femininity and décor. John didn't mind. After all, she was putting up floral prints, not the period table. She added shelves to the wall, not bullet holes.

Now, though, John's priorities had certainly shifted.

Even still, he only had three requirements.

Two bedrooms.

Good neighbors.

Safety.

Sherlock and Mary both apparently had many more.
Mary would ask questions about if she could paint the walls and hang items. Sherlock would demand background checks of everyone on the street. Mary was particular about room size. Sherlock was particular about CCTV cameras in the area.

After Sherlock had pointed out two neighbors that were having an affair with each others' spouses, deduced the alcoholic lifestyle of one landlady, and discovered a hidden body in one flat, John finally forbade the detective from tagging along.

Still, Sherlock always managed to find them, even when they purposefully mislead him to where they were going. And even sometimes showing up before the couple.

And if having the controlling consultant present wasn't enough of a headache, each property was becoming more and more problematic.

There was the drug dealer neighbor, the leaky ceiling, the insect infestations, the moldy bathroom, the cracked wall, and so on. John couldn't keep up. Mary observably was losing steam, but maintained her cool. Sherlock was far more outspoken about his frustration.

And every day they didn't find a home, was a day closer to their baby arriving into the world without one.

Mycroft and Sherlock had both subtly offered to help, but Sherlock wasn't the only proud and stubborn half of the detective-doctor duo.

But he just may be the most conniving of the two.

John might never have asked for help, but that certainly didn't mean Sherlock wasn't going to forcibly give it.
Sherlock Holmes knew John Watson would never ask for help.

That didn't mean the detective wouldn't give it to him.

John was stubborn, but his friend was too. And once Sherlock had gotten Mary aboard his little plan, he knew John wouldn't be able to say no.

The timing would be perfect. John had been at work for the past nine hours and Mary was on maternity leave. Checking the clock, the detective knew his friend would be just making his way out of the building and onto the street to start his walk to the Tube station.

The younger man was practically twitching in anticipation as he watched his landlady make the phone call he had scripted for her. The woman really was quite the actress when called for. Sherlock always remembered that fact for future use after the ordeal with the CIA.

"Hi, John," she started pleasantly, "is Sherlock with you, dear?"

A beat.

"Oh, he must be off running around on one of his cases. You know how he is. Can't be bothered to answer the phone."

Another pause.

"Oh, it's nothing, John, really. Probably just me being silly. But with being landlady to Sherlock Holmes, you start to grow suspicious of every little thing. I was coming in from the hall and I could have sworn I heard something coming from the other flat. I am the only one with the key and the only other way in is through the window. I was going to go and see, but –"

She trailed off perfectly nervously and Sherlock could hear John's murmuring.

"I thought they were voices, but I think I'm just overreacting. You know, after those years ago when someone broke in and put those shoes in there. And then that business with those Americans. I'm sure I'm just being paranoid, dear. Nothing to worry about."

More muffled mumbling.

"You don't have to do that, John, really."

–

"Oh, thank you, dear. That'd be wonderful. I really appreciate it. I don't know when Sherlock will be back and –"

–

"Okay, see you soon, John. I'll have some tea and biscuits ready for you. Bye, now."

The landlady and her troublesome tenant shared a mischievous glance as Mrs. Hudson ended the call and set down her phone.

"Everything ready?" The woman asked with a sly smile.

"Just do your part, Mrs. Hudson, and everything will go exactly according to plan," Sherlock nodded and stood from his chair. "I'll be downstairs."

He offered her a quick wink before making his exit. Mrs. Hudson couldn't help but giggle and shake her head. It was going to be so nice to have her boys back together again. Not to mention the fact that Sherlock's experiments had been particularly messy and noisy since John moved out. She couldn't help but hope that his presence would force the detective to keep his chemical compounds a bit more contained.
It was roughly fifteen minutes later that the woman found herself making a show of looking busy in her kitchen when John walked through the door. He offered her a pleasant grin as greeting. She missed that smile.

"John, you really didn’t have to do this," Mrs. Hudson sighed through a smile of her own.

"I wanted to," John shook his head. "It's no trouble, really. Never can be too safe. Could be just some kids."

"Or it could be an old woman's imagination," Mrs. Hudson chuckled.

"Either way, I'm glad you called. I wouldn't want you getting hurt."

John stepped aside and allowed his former landlady to lead the way down to 221C. His fingers instinctively ghosted over the gun tucked away in his coat pocket. He now never left home without it. After Sherlock had made his dramatic return from the dead and John had been kidnapped for the third time in his life, he had made it a point to always have the weapon on his person, wherever he went.

John strained to listen beyond the door as Mrs. Hudson twisted her key in the lock. Motioning for her to step back, the former soldier slipped inside. One hand shining a flashlight, the other gripped and nearly began to draw the gun when the flat flooded with bright light. John just barely stopped himself from pulling out the weapon and shooting at the people suddenly standing in front of him.

Sherlock and Mary were side by side, both smiling. Yes, Sherlock Holmes, was smiling.

The doctor was still reeling from the rare expression on his friend’s face when his eyes actually began properly taking in his surroundings. His very familiar surrounds.

The flat was almost entirely different from the first and last time he had set foot inside of it. But there some very familiar features.

Like, for instance, his furniture.

The wallpaper was new, as were the drapes and carpeting. But he certainly recognized the striped couch, brown oval coffee table, the grey armchair, the television, all of it. And a few pieces he didn't. A curved mirror hung above the fireplace. Below, on the mantle, rested a collection of photographs from the wedding. John was happy to see one with Sherlock had been slipped in the collection. He suspected that was Mary's doing. There were a few empty frames, one of which was decorated with a carved title of "The Watson Family". Another was entitled their unborn daughter's name.

Wordlessly, John moved farther into the flat, now coming to the kitchen. It was smaller than the one in 221B, but had a small alcove off to the side for a simple set of table and chairs, which apparently had also been relocated. He couldn’t help but smile as he spotted his RAMC mug perched on the countertop.

Shaking his head, and knowing perfectly well the answer, John turned around toward his wife and former flatmate.

"What – what is all this?"

"A simple solution to a simple problem," Sherlock answered swiftly. "You and Mary need a place to live and raise your daughter. Mrs. Hudson had an empty flat. It was logical. I require your assistance on cases. Mrs. Hudson will make for an excellent nanny. There are two bedrooms. I don't have to worry about the possibility of dull or annoying neighbors moving in in the future. The damp Mrs. Hudson was so worried about has been taken care of with the installation of proper air ventilation, fans and a dehumidifier. Of course, your wife claimed it to be an eyesore so I took the liberty of having it integrated into the ductwork. You will, of course, be fully welcome in 221B. Although, I have installed a locking mechanism on the kitchen doors for when your offspring starts to crawl. I don’t need an infant tampering with my experiments. I’ve converted your old bedroom into storage. Feel free to use that as well. See, simple? You and Mary have a home. I have my assistant close at hand. And Mrs. Hudson gets the grandchild she always
John couldn’t quite tell if he wanted to be outraged or grateful. He was beginning to think that all those faults they found in the previous properties had been planted by a certain former flatmate. He was most certainly touched once again by his friend’s actions. Other men might loathe surprises or not having a say in the matter, but John found himself quite happy in fact. Sherlock and Mary knew him far too well. John had allowed Mary to conduct all of the decoration decisions for their previous place. He wasn’t particular about those sorts of things. This certainly met his three small stipulations. It had two bedrooms. He already knew the neighbors.

And when it came to his daughter’s safety, well, that was a bit of a catch 22 really. Living anywhere near Sherlock Holmes was always going to be dangerous, but so was simply being associated with him. It had been a fear from the start of all this that someday, someone would try to use his child to get to the detective and doctor, just as John had been used to get to Sherlock. But then again, John couldn’t think of anywhere safer than 221 Baker Street, save for the occasional explosion, CIA break-ins, and sidewalk kidnappings. It sounded fairly ridiculous in his head and he knew others would think him insane if he ever uttered it aloud.

His daughter was going to be a part of this life now, whether he liked it or not. He couldn’t just leave Sherlock. Not after everything they had been through. And John had seen what just a month of dull suburban life did to him. He was a former army doctor who worked for a detective. The child’s mother was an assassin in a past life. The girl’s godfather was a consulting detective who chased criminals for fun. The last thing he desired was for his daughter to be in danger, but this wasn’t something he could just brush under the rug. They couldn’t run off to hide in some middle class mediocre life. They couple would go crazy and Sherlock was sure to follow suit.

Besides, he had meant what he thought. He honestly couldn’t imagine a safer place than right there in that building. Despite everything that had happened to him inside those walls, John always felt safe there; felt home. Baker Street was home from the moment he shook Sherlock’s hand on the sidewalk, and forever now would be. Anywhere else just seemed wrong.

And being under the roof of a crack shot former army man, ex-assassin, and a master of martial arts – and that was monitored by the British Government through Mycroft’s not-so-secret surveillance – this daughter was going to be more than well protected.

John just chuckled as he let himself collapse onto the couch. He wasn’t even a little flummoxed at how natural it felt to be sitting in the new flat. Just because it had a C, instead of a B, it was still home.

“I’m not surprised, seeing as you pulled off faking your death, but how did you manage this? I’m pretty sure my furniture was in my old flat this morning when I left. I’m going to guess, homeless network?”

“Quite correct, John,” Sherlock smiled, internally quite pleased at how John had already began referring to his previous dwellings as his “old” flat. “We waited until you were at work, and then we began. Myself and Mary were present, of course, to ensure all went according to plan. I had hired a truck to arrive at a precise time. We were on a tight schedule. Once everything had been transported here, Mary took charge. She refused to listen to any of my input. Personally, I was against the idea of so many photographs and the frankly appalling lack of books. Once everything was in place, it was down to Mrs. Hudson’s surprisingly convincing acting capabilities. She is far better than you, that is for certain.”

“Well, not everyone can cry on cue to gain information from witnesses,” John remarked, unable to feign frustration for long after listening to Sherlock explain the events of the day as though he was excitedly retelling one of his many rooftop escape scenarios.

“Do you like it?” Mary grinned, reaching out her hand, which John readily took as she sat down next to him.

“It – it’s perfect,” John nodded. “Absolutely fantastic.”

With that, he leaned over and let his lips meet his wife’s. They parted and he whispered a quiet word of thank you to her before glancing back up at Sherlock, who simply stood, eyes averted from the open display of sentiment.
"Thank you," he repeated, louder and this time directed at his friend.

"Don't thank me yet," Sherlock lowered his head as he spoke.

John didn’t have time to question the statement as the door to his new home flew open and a parade of people poured in. He hadn’t even noticed Mrs. Hudson had left. Now she was back, bearing armfuls of trays of treats. She was followed inside by the grinning duo of Greg Lestrade and Molly Hooper. Mike Stamford was close behind, his wife hanging onto his arm, and their two children hanging onto her. A couple of John and Mary’s co-workers from the clinic stepped around the kids. Each guest was bearing food or some sort of gift.

“What is this?” John chuckled.

“A housewarming party,” Mary grinned, squeezing her husband’s hand.

“Her idea,” Sherlock quickly added. “There was nothing I could do to stop it. She won’t even let me leave.”

“Of course you can’t leave,” Mary smiled and stood to wrap an arm around the detective’s shoulder. “It’s called human interaction, Sherlock,” she teased playfully.

“Dull,” Sherlock sighed, making a disgruntled noise in the back of his throat but then a peculiar gleam glinted over his eyes. “But there is one more surprise.”

“What?” Mary stepped back from him. “No there’s not. This was it.”

“Oh, I always have something extra up my sleeve,” Sherlock cocked his head to the side.

At his last word, a handful of the homeless network, some of the same crew that had participated in the move, entered the flat, all holding brightly colored balloons and streamers. The last one to come through the threshold was carrying a cake.

Molly drew forward, pulling Mary into a hug and presenting the mother-to-be with a large gift bag.

“A housewarming party and a baby shower, since you never had one,” she explained eagerly.

“Sherlock,” Mary turned on the man, “this was your idea?”

Both Mary and John exchanged shocked glances at the idea of Sherlock coming up with something so – sentimental.

“My idea, no,” Sherlock nodded toward the pathologist, “that would be Molly. She came to me with the suggestion and I orchestrated it into our plans for today. It’d be rather tedious, and annoying, to have two gatherings, after all.”

“And on that note,” Greg grinned, slapping Sherlock on the shoulder, “let’s start the party.”
MAJOR TIME SKIP! I'm sorry. I know you hate them. And you thought the time skip forward in His Last Vow was bad! Please don't hurt me...please

Anything new? - SH

Followed the whispers. No new information.

Then keep following. - SH

You know I will.

You know this isn't going to end well too.

For anyone.

Do what I ask. I don't need your tedious commentary. - SH

Someone's cranky.

I can change that.

Let's have dinner.

Let's get back to you getting the information that I need. - SH

You should prepare them for the truth.

You know as well as I do how this is going to play out.

Exactly how Moriarty wants it to play out.

Which is never pretty.

Yes, thank you. Do shut up now. - SH

Sentiment is a chemical defect found in the losing side, remember?

"Am I distracting you, brother?"

Sherlock pocketed his phone, glancing up at the man who had moments ago been rambling about something. Sherlock couldn't remember. Well, actually, he hadn't been listening at all.

"Not all all," Sherlock shrugged smugly. "I was simply multi-tasking. Though, of course, the term does imply doing more than one thing at a time and I really honestly wasn't paying attention to you at all."

"You asked for my help, Sherlock," Mycroft straightened.

"And seeing as you have yet to be able to give it to me," Sherlock spat, "I am starting to wonder just how much good you are to the country when you can't even locate one single person for your own brother."

"We have our top people looking. We are doing everything we can, Sherlock." Mycroft crossed his arms.

"If this is everything the British government can do, I seriously worry for the fate of Britain."
Sherlock arched his brow.

"We have been working -"

"For years, Mycroft," Sherlock spat, interrupting his brother as he launched from his chair. "Nearly seven years, now. Seven. If he is going to make a move, he is going to do it this year. Every month, we have these meetings, and every month you tell me the same thing. No new news. No new information. No sightings. Nothing. There can never be nothing. There is always something."

"Applying common terms and ways of thinking when it comes to James Moriarty isn't wise," Mycroft unfolded his arms.

"And neither is wasting my time speaking with you when you obviously have nothing to offer me," Sherlock snapped, slipping into his coat and storming off toward the door.

"Keep an eye on them, Sherlock," Mycroft warned just before his younger brother crossed the threshold.

"Of course," Sherlock sniffed, as though offended.

"If Moriarty had planned on waiting seven years, and Billie is still is alive, this could get very ugly, very quickly."

"I know," Sherlock ground out, though most of the rage was riddled with a deeper raw concern.

"I'll increase security and surveillance for the week," the elder Holmes added. "Am I correct in assuming that they will be out of town again this year?"

"No, not this time." Sherlock replied darkly. "They want to be here. In case."

John and Mary had left London this time of year, every year, since the kidnapping. Sherlock oftentimes accompanied them, strictly on a protection detail basis, he would inform them. Mrs. Hudson collected all of the cards and gifts and casseroles and flowers that were sent to Baker Street, hiding or destroying them before the parents returned.

They didn't need the reminder.

The date itself was enough of a screaming miserable memo.

Billie's birthday.

"Goodbye, Mycroft."

Sherlock was again making to leave when a sweating and stuttering man in a suit came half stumbling, half sprinting toward Mycroft's office. Beside him, Anthea was calmly, yet quickly, keeping up with his pace, without falling over herself of appearing affected by whatever news the duo were bringing to their boss' desk.

Sherlock stepped backward, allowing the pair entrance and himself and his curiosity access to whatever important information was about to be delivered.

While the man made a not so graceful entrance, Anthea remained poised and professional, if not a little proud, as she shut the door behind them. Her sharp eyes flickered across Sherlock's and he knew immediately what information they were carrying.

"What have you found?" Sherlock addressed her before Mycroft could speak.

"Sir," the man approached his boss. "We were monitoring a specific city closely after obtaining some new information. The intelligence didn't seem important at all, at first, at least. Well, we took a look again. A listen, actually."

"Oh, stop your inane babbling and get to the point!" - "For goodness sake, the point!" Both Holmes brothers declared in unison.
It was Anthea who stepped forward then, a small smile shaping against her lips.

"There's something you should see."
Billie was turning thirteen today.

A teenager.

Her entire childhood gone, captured away by a madman. He didn't just steal her, he stole her innocence.

Even when they got her back now, what would be left of her?

Would she even be Billie anymore?

So much of a person was shaped in those youthful years. What had Moriarty molded her into?

Years had passed but no one heard of Moriarty nor Billie since the day she was abducted. Even though Sherlock, John, Mary and all their surrounding family and friends never ceased looking for them, for her.

221C still, to that day, remained unoccupied. Dormant. Waiting. Her room stayed as she had left it. Her toys and ballet slippers still waiting for her return.

But she would be too old for toys now, too big for those shoes.

And something else was still waiting in that room.

Or rather, someone.

Blackbeard was getting older now. The puppy had disappeared far too long ago now and in his place remained a grown dog, still awaiting his master's return.

Billie was turning thirteen today.

And they were going to get her back.

No longer was it, "if", now it was only, "when".

And somehow that terrified them just as much.

Because it really was true. That they didn't know what or who they would find when they did. Would she be alive? Would be she be sane? Had some life altering wound been inflicted upon her? Had Moriarty brainwashed her? Left her in isolation? Would she even remember them?

Would she even want to be found?

All of these questions and fears were spinning inside their skulls and yet, in that moment, none of it mattered.

They were getting her back.

And, for now, that was far more than enough.

"At first we just thought it was a technical problem," the still sweating man in a suit stammered. "Some sort of interference or white noise. Just static."

"Yes, yes," Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Enough excuses for your lack of intelligence."

Mycroft shot his little brother a disapproving glance.

"Continue," the elder Holmes addressed his employee. "But quickly, please."

"While we were running diagnostics, we had it run through several different filters," Anthea explained. "It wasn't static."
"And what was it?" Sherlock questioned impatiently.

Anthea rose a single brow in his direction as she leaned forward and clicked a few buttons on the computer screen. A far too familiar tune began to seep from the speakers.

"Tchaikovsky." Sherlock ground out. "Sleeping Beauty Waltz. He played it for me in the cab the night he took her."

"How did he do this?" Mycroft demanded. "Have you traced it back?"

"We don't know how he did it. We have people working on it and trying to locate the source," Anthea informed him.

"How long has this been happening?" Mycroft shook his head.

"A few days," the man replied warily. "We only were able to hear the music today."

"No," Sherlock corrected coldly, "you only thought to check the static and then heard the music today."

"There was something new today," Anthea continued coolly. "More static, more music, but different. It just came through fifteen minutes ago when we were analyzing the other samples. We ran it through the filter with the others and then immediately came to inform you."

"Inform me of what?" Mycroft prodded curiously.

As an answer, Anthea reached over again and pressed a different button. A similar song began but shortly something else was added.

"It's layered," Sherlock stated swiftly. "It's made to sound similar to the first piece, even holds Tchaikovsky's musical style, but it's something else. A song underneath the waltz."

"Correct," Anthea replied, and for the first time, she actually wavered in her emotionless expression.

She seemed almost softly sad at Sherlock's deduction and Sherlock gave her a curious glance.

"Well, what is it?" Mycroft pressed.

Wordlessly, and with that somber expression still shadowing her face, Anthea clicked one final time.

And the song that greeted them then was enough to make Sherlock's boiling blood run icily cold.

"Happy Birthday," Sherlock whispered through clenched teeth.

Letting his lids fall closed, one could see the detective's eyes still moving rapidly underneath.

"It's not a full orchestra like the waltz." He listened closely and explained aloud, keeping his eyelids drawn down in concentration. "Seven. Seven instruments. Seven notes in a musical scale. Seven feathers. Seven years." His eyes shot open and he locked gazes with his brother. "Seven days."

"Sorry?" The man mumbled.

"Seven days until Billie's birthday."

There was a pregnant pause after Sherlock repeated it distantly and then came suddenly and sharply back into focus.

"Keep listening," he instructed Mycroft's workers. "Don't stop listening. Twenty four hours a day, don't stop for a single second. When that interference comes through, do not hesitate to translate it." He turned to Mycroft then. "Send it to me immediately. There's going to be more. These are just the beginning breadcrumbs. I want copies of everything. If you keep anything from me, Mycroft, believe me, brother, you will regret it."
"Wouldn't dream of it," Mycroft responded a bit apathetically, though there was something going on behind those indifferent irises. "You do realize that this could very well be a trap."

"Yes, thank you," Sherlock rolled his eyes, "the idea never crossed my mind. I. Don't. Care. We just said, if we're ever going to get a chance to get Billie back, it's going to be this year. This is it. The final act. The last chapter of Moriarty's story. If there is even a shred of a possibility of getting her back, I don't care about the risks. Just get me the information and get me it quickly. I'll expect copies of what you have already to be there when I get home."

"And where are you going?" Mycroft tilted his head.

"Errands," Sherlock waved flippantly before heading for the door. "Just some errands."
Billie was turning thirteen today.

They were getting her back.

Or, at least, they were if they could decipher all of the clues that had been compiled from the "static" over those last days.

"Seven clues for seven days," Sherlock muttered to himself as he paced the sitting room floor of 221B. "He alluded to The Seven Ravens again, why? We already know the feathers are just counters, symbolic, nothing more. Why would he point us to that particular story again?"

"Maybe there's something else in it," John shrugged, "something you missed the first time."

"I don't miss -" Sherlock cut himself off short, seizing both his breath and his bodily movements.

"Yes, John! I didn't miss it the first time. I knew it meant something, but I didn't know what then! Of course!"

"Sherlock, you want to let us in on this discovery of yours?" John leaned forward.

"Moriarty is leading us to Billie, to find her, rescue her," Sherlock explained with a rapid tongue. "Everything about the murders, her abduction, the clues, have all been related to fairy tales. So, of course, her rescue would have to be the same. Dramatic, dangerous, right out of a fairy tale!"

"What does that have to do with the raven story?" Mary pressed.

"In the story, the sister is given a key of bone to open the glass mountain to reach her brothers." Sherlock continued.

"Didn't Moriarty leave a chicken bone with the first victim?" John narrowed his brow.

"Exactly!" Sherlock practically lifted into the air. "The feathers were the message, the cutting of the hair and fork were the clues, but the bone, the bone wasn't meant for either. It's not just a piece of the puzzle, it's literally a piece of the puzzle. A tool. A prop in Moriarty's play. A key. The key."

"So, you're saying that we need this bone for some sort of key to get to Billie," Mary interjected.

"Precisely," Sherlock clapped his hands together and pulled out his phone.

"One of the seven clues was no police," John warned. "You're texting Lestrade to get you access to the evidence, aren't you?"

"I am simply advising him of a possible break in that he may or may not want to turn a blind eye to," Sherlock smirked, his eyes finding Mary. "I can do that," she nodded confidently.

John glanced at his wife, but spoke no words of protest. He wasn't exactly fond of the idea of the woman he loved breaking into police evidence lockers, but this was for his daughter. Not to mention that he and Sherlock had broken into their fair share of places over the years.

"So, we get the key," Mary rose off the couch, "then what? A key isn't any good unless we know what it opens."

"Oh, I think we're going to be needing more than the key." Sherlock lowered his gaze. "There was one other item that Moriarty left on a murder victim besides a feather. One other prop we need. Something else required for the rescue."
"The - vial?" John questioned slowly, his mind reaching back through the cases.

"With the number 42." Sherlock reminded him.

"The story of the godfather," Mary's eyes sharpened in understanding. "Oh my -"

"The water to heal the sick," John recited, remembering. "You told us it was just water. What is it? An antidote? Medicine? An inhibitor?"

"I didn't want to say anything at the time," Sherlock sidestepped.

"Didn't want to - Sherlock, this is our daughter!" John leapt up from his seat. "I'm a bloody doctor!"

"And I'm a nurse, and her mother," Mary added. "We had the right to know whatever it is."

"I had the tests run, of course," Sherlock quickly explained. "It didn't make any sense. It was an unknown mixture of chemicals. Physostigmine, along with other parasympathomimetic alkaloids and inhibitors. A cocktail, if you will."

"And you didn't think that was important for us to know?" John was shouting now. "It makes sense alright. You know exactly what that looks like. It's a cocktail to combat another bloody cocktail! An antidote to an overdose! He overdosed my daughter! And we're supposed to what, use the vial, to help her? So, right now, our daughter could be bloody overdosing on some sick drug that Moriarty thought it would be fun to experiment with? And that's not important?"

"I didn't want to cause you to panic," Sherlock lifted his hands. "I received the results shortly after she was taken. I knew he wouldn't do anything to her right away. I knew he would wait, take his time. There was no need to give either of you more to worry about."

"More to worry about?" John almost laughed. "More -"

John was about to unleash some more colorful vocabulary when Sherlock's mobile sounded, pulling all of their attention to the small device.

"Greg?" Mary prompted.


"You sent out more than just a text to Lestrade, didn't you?" John inferred.

"Mass message to my homeless network," Sherlock explained, finger swiping at the screen. "In one of the seven clues, Moriarty mentioned 'the King's castle'."

"We still haven't figured out what that means," John shook his head.

"Correction," Sherlock ceased his scrolling and flipped his phone so that John and Mary could see the picture on the screen. "You haven't figured out what that means. I had a hunch."

Without a word of warning, Sherlock charged into the kitchen, swiped a small object from one of the cabinets, seized his coat and took off toward the hall. The couple followed him until Sherlock turned abruptly on his heel, nearly knocking into them.

"What we're about to do is going to be extremely dangerous," he warned in a low, yet firm voice. "We are going to get Billie back. I promise you that, but it will not be simple. I suggest both of you suit up for battle."

"And what about you?" John gestured to the jacket. "Not exactly bullet proof."

"The only weapon I need is up here," Sherlock tapped the side of his skull. "Besides, between an ex-assassin and a military man, I know one of you has an extra."

He winked infuriatingly and bounded toward the door.
"You have five minutes," he called back over his shoulder. "I'll be in the cab. Do hurry."

They didn't need the full five minutes. John and Mary had been ready for something like this for weeks, well, for years. They had never lost hope and had always knew they might have to leave at the drop of a hat, or a word from Sherlock. They had even grown more prepared leading up to Billie's birthday. All the weapons and items they required were packed and waiting for them at the foot of their bed.

Sherlock was once again nose deep in his phone when they entered the cab, their outfits and gear disguised underneath their jackets. The driver took off once the door was shut and the three rode in shared silence until John couldn't take it any longer.

"Sherlock, where are we going?" He pressed impatiently, receiving no answer. "You said you had a hunch, about the castle?"

"In Sleeping Beauty," Sherlock started, as though he had never stopped talking, "the princess is rescued after being locked away asleep in the castle."

"Locked," Mary began, "like the glass mountain with the bone. And asleep -"

"You think that's the reason for the vial?" John paled. "She's asleep? He put her in a coma?"

"You said it yourself, John. Overdose. Given enough, she could fall into a coma. A sleep."

John clenched one fist with his other hand cradling Mary's fingers.

"And the castle?" John prompted, barely containing and controlling himself.

"King's castle," Sherlock lifted a finger and tapped the screen.

"So what is this place?" John shook his head. "Who's the king?"

"You are."

John visibly stiffened and then knit his brow together.

"What? Explain, Sherlock."

"A long time ago, Billie told me something. She said she had a mind palace, like mine. Expect her's was a castle. I was a knight, Mary, the queen, and you, John, the king." He paused. "If she told me this, she could've told her imaginary friend too. Even if she didn't, if Moriarty is playing by the book with Sleeping Beauty, you two would be the king and queen anyway. So, the king's castle."

"My home?" John questioned. "She's not downstairs. She's not at my parents' old house. It was tore down to make room for a road."

"As I said before," Sherlock continued, "he may be playing by the book, but he isn't following all the rules. Moriarty would need somewhere to keep Billie for all this time. That may or may not be separate from where he has put her to be rescued. But, think! Your castle, John. Not a real castle. Too many tourists. And I think even Moriarty would want some semblance of modern day plumbing. So, not your home, not your real castle. A place he could keep her, hold her against her will. Administer drugs. Something that is close to you."

"A hospital!" Mary gasped.

"You think he's at the clinic, or Bart's?" John swallowed.

"No," Sherlock pointed at the screen again. "He's proud, but not careless."

"So, you think he's here?" John eyed the photograph. "Looks abandoned."

"It is abandoned," Sherlock grinned. "It's also a military hospital. Coincidence? Highly unlikely. Just another way of Moriarty waving at us. The hospital was named after a prince and opened in the late 1800s. Closed in the 90s. I sent the word to my homeless network. Had them looking for
specific locations. This hospital had already risen a red flag on my radar. I just needed more data. More proof. This hospital used to be a hot bed for homeless and drugs, once people figured out how to get around the fairly lax security. Now, no one can get in. In the last several days, the doors and windows have all been boarded up and locked and the whole building is heavily guarded. People just assumed it was the police and military finally cracking down. People don't think."

"You think it's Moriarty?" Mary said hopefully. "You think that's where Billie is."

"Oh, I don't think," Sherlock smiled. "Too many coincidences. There's one more thing about this place. There have been rumors for years about underground tunnels and a secret and hidden hospital underneath the army cemetery right next to the building."

"An entire hidden hospital," Mary whispered. "No one would ever find them."

"Especially if Moriarty had hired hands," Sherlock nodded, "not including the already staffed security that he paid off."

"I can handle them," Mary assured them with a short nod and swift glance at the cabbie.

"Don't doubt it," Sherlock smirked, "but, first things first."

The car pulled to a stop and John and Mary both checked out the windows to find themselves idling a block away from Scotland Yard.

"In and out, Mary," Sherlock nodded, to which Mary returned the gesture.

The wife kissed her husband and then slipped out the door, leaving John and Sherlock inside the cab. The two men watched the woman disappear down the street and then around a corner.

After seven years, the game was on.

Chapter End Notes

The military hospital mentioned is based on a real military hospital. Things are heating up! Getting fast paced. I hope I don't lose you. I skipped over the seven clues over seven days, as they were all translated from the static and would've been boring dialogue. You hear what they are in this chapter.
The Rescue

After breaking into several government agencies, penthouses, high security companies, and even a president's home once, slipping in and out of Scotland Yard was like yawning for Mary.

Locating the container containing the evidence pertaining to Billie's case was even easier.

The most difficult part of the entire process, though, was opening that box.

Because she knew what would be in there.

Feathers and silverware and a vial and a chicken bone she could handle. But there would also be the spindle. The item left in Billie's bedroom. The object that someone had deliberately placed on her daughter's bed. The piece of evidence that was sure to take her reeling back to that night. The night she failed to save her own child.

But she had a chance to rectify that now. She knew it didn't make up for the lost years, the pain, but it was something. They were going to get Billie back. There was time later for guilt and memories.

Lifting the lid, Mary sifted through the items. She quickly found the two labeled bags she was searching for, but the contents inside were not what she was expecting.

"It's gone," Mary reported before she was even entirely seated in the back of the cab. "The vial is gone. The bag was empty."

"I only sent you in for our key. I never told you to retrieve the vial," Sherlock responded readily, pulling out the small bottle he had pinched from the kitchen earlier, "because I already had it. I've run my own tests, of course. This is the original," he tapped the number on the side and then revealed three more vials from his other pocket, "these are my creation. Couldn't be sure Moriarty's little mix would still be as effective after all these years. Besides, now, if we get split up, each of us will have one."

He handed both John and Mary a bottle and the three exchanged a knowing look.

"There was something else, too," Mary fingered the other bag she had lifted from inside her jacket. "Look."

Sherlock took the offered item, smirking. "Clever," he mumbled. "I was a bit unsure of how exactly a chicken bone was going to work properly as a key."

There, inside the bag labeled as the chicken bone, was a rusted key.

"He switched them," John shook his head.

"This key is one hundred years old, at least," Sherlock examined it through the plastic.

"Why do I have the feeling that this is not going to be as easy as sticking a hundred year old key in a hundred year old lock and leaving?" John sighed.

"It will be difficult," Sherlock conceded, "but not impossible. Moriarty wouldn't do all of this to make it impossible. He wants us to save her. For us to see - what he did to her. Death has always been to easy, too kind, for Moriarty for those he considers worthy of his attention. Watching us live - and suffer - is his victory."

"Well, he won't get that victory," John cleared his throat, taking his wife's hand. "It doesn't matter what he did. We're getting her back. We're going to save her, from Moriarty, and from whatever he did to her. We won't give up."

"No," Mary offered her husband a sad smile. "We won't."
Stepping out of the cab, the trio stared off into the magnificent, and yet now malicious, building in front of them.

"Where do we start?" John questioned. "The tunnels under the cemetery?"

"We're rescuing a princess, John," Sherlock answered. "Look. Think."

John's eyes scanned his surroundings and the building until they came to rest on the tall tower in the center of the aged hospital.

"That seems a bit too easy," John muttered.

"Appearances can be deceiving," Sherlock hummed.

"This is it then?" John shrugged. "We're just to walk right in? No big plan?"

"If we try anything elaborate, Moriarty will know," Sherlock sighed, his next words sounding physically painful for him. "This is his game. We play by his rules. For Billie."

And that was all it took. Two two simple, yet so strong words.

They would wait seven years.

They would turn London upside down.

They would storm this hospital teeming with guards.

They would do anything and everything.

For Billie.

Splitting up wasn't exactly any of the rescue team member's favorite plans of action, but it was still the most logical when thinking of safety. Not their own safety, of course. But Billie's.

So, they didn't exactly walk right through the front doors as John has imagined Sherlock had been suggesting. There may not have been a grand plan, but they still wouldn't volunteer for an easy execution.

To say the building was crawling with hired guns and traps was a bit of an understatement as each of them quickly found out.

John slid his way through a ground floor window, gun at the ready. His knife and second firearm were tucked safely away in his belt and ankle holster. Still, he tried to discharge his weapon as little as possible. Even if Moriarty knew they were coming, John wasn't one to abandon at least some semblance of stealth.

The first two thugs the former Army Captain had down with simple blows to the back of the head with the butt of his gun. The next weren't so easy.

When a bearded beast of a man launched a right hook toward the doctor's face, John stepped forward with his left foot and blocked the blow with his forearm. Without hesitating, he was already delivering a return punch to his attacker's throat. Pivoting, John wrapped his right arm around his opponent's waist, grasping the stranger's belt. Locking his knees, John hoisted the man over his hip and then slammed him into the ground. With his opponent of his back and John still gripping the man's arm, the soldier sent a swift kick to his attacker's side of the head, quite effectively rendering him unconscious.

Mary was meeting just as many opponents and obstacles as her husband, and taking them down just as effectively. She too, was choosing to rely on her own body as a weapon, instead of the plethora of them she had hiding on her person. Grabbing the arm of one of her attackers, Mary swept her leg underneath his. She smirked as he swiftly crashed to the ground. She didn't see one of the men around a corner as she finished knocking the other unconscious. Before she could
react, a body slammed into hers. As her back hit the ground, Mary stretched her knee. Seizing him with both of her hands, the former assassin lifted and tossed her opponent over and behind her head.

Sherlock may not have been a crack shot like John or Mary, but when it came to hand-to-hand, he was indeed quite skilled. He hadn't spent time earning a first Dan degree in Judo for nothing. Still, Sherlock enjoyed utilizing his surroundings as weapons. He managed to render one of his attackers unconscious by slamming a door in his face and knocked another out with his own gun. He also was able to use one of the deadly traps that was laid out for them on one of the hired hands. He dove down the hall just after pushing the man over the trip wire.

Shots were being fired now over and around their heads, ricocheting off walls and down stairwells. The time for silence was over and the trio were now exchanging gunfire with their enemies, Sherlock using the pinched firearm from one of the fallen attackers. They were closing in now, drawing nearer to each other, and the tower.

And that's when they heard it.

The shot was nothing new. Their ears were ringing with gunfire.

No, it was the constrained, cut off cry that followed it.

The familiar voice, vocally reacting to the pain, despite obvious attempts to suppress the shout.

The sickening sound that someone only made after being shot.
John crashed forward to meet the floor, agony erupting in his leg like an angry volcano. The painful lava spread over the entire limb, its heat reaching each and every far corner of his body. Crimson magma exploded from the new opening, seeping down, staining his trousers.

It was a suffering sensation he had once experienced before, except that time it had not brought him helplessly to the ground. He attempted to stand again, and cringed as his vision flashed white. He collapsed once more, barely missing a bullet to the back of the brain. His attacker was still behind him and fired off another shot as John rolled out of its path. Now on his back, the former soldier didn't hesitate before squeezing the trigger and planting three of his own bullets into his shooter's chest. As the threat crumpled to the ground, John let his head fall back as his teeth ground together.

"John!"

The man opened his eyes just in time to his wife rounding the corner, and the man behind her, taking aim.

"Mary!"

Mary was busy lifting her own gun above her husband's head. Neither of them knew the dangers behind themselves. The couple fired in unison, the man behind Mary reeling backward before staggering to the floor. John heard a thump behind him and craned his head to see another attacker tipping over, Mary's bullet fresh in his forehead.

Without a moment's hesitation, Mary sprinted and slid to the floor at John's side. She still kept a vigilant watch on their surroundings as she examined her husband.

"John!"

The pair glanced up as Sherlock now made his way far more quickly than he usually moved down the hall. There was panic in his pace, voice and eyes. Mary's own stoic mask was faltering as she worked over the man she loved.

"Give me your scarf, Sherlock."

Sherlock had already been unraveling the blue fabric from around his neck and had it in Mary's hand before she had finished the request.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," John continually repeated as the duo troubled themselves over him. "It's a scratch. A graze. Go on ahead. Go. Find Billie."

"Not without you." Sherlock nodded.

"There," Mary spoke as she finished tying off the scarf she had fashioned around John's leg.

The woman seized a tourniquet out of one of her packs and shoved it into John's hands.

"In case you need it later," Mary nodded.

_In case I'm not around to give it to you._
It was a bit of an extreme, sure, but a former soldier, assassin, and detective were not ones to take chances.

Neither of the men seemed surprised that she just so happened to have had one in her plethora of weapons and supplies that were zipped or fastened to her wardrobe. Even John had one stashed away on his person among some of the old Army gear he had thrown on.

"Don't forget to tighten it if the bleeding doesn't stop," Mary instructed. "Do you have proper bandaging?"

"I am a doctor, you know," John managed a smirk.

Both Sherlock and Mary helped heave John off the floor. The wounded man merely grimaced as he accidentally put weight on his leg.

"Looks like after all these years I'm finally going to properly need a cane after all," he tried to tease.

"Oh, don't be so dramatic," Sherlock rolled his eyes. "It won't be for long. Can't have you being an old man yet."

The trio moved forward together. John kept his pistol in one hand, while his other arm was slung around Sherlock's shoulders. The detective also left a hand free for shooting, while the other stayed tucked under his friend's arms. In front of the half-limping, half-dragging duo, Mary led the way, weapon at the ready. Her movements were slow so that she could stay close to the others but precise. She was poised to defend or attack now more than ever. John almost pitied any person who came across them now. With one man down and the other man distracted they seemed like easier targets. John knew it was quite a different story. They had already been more than motivated before. Billie was enough motivation for them to swim across the ocean or jump into fire. But now the enemy had hurt one of their own. Mercy hadn't been an option they were offering before to anyone involved in Billie's kidnapping. Now, that unforgiving spirit was coupled with one of revenge. Yes, John knew, even injured, they were now more dangerous than ever.

Mary proved this not two seconds later when another set of lackeys came barreling through a door and towards them. The ex-assassin took them down, granting them one bullet each to the brain. Had there been time, John was almost sure his wife wouldn't have allowed them to die so easily.

Finally, they reached another door. A different door.

The door.

The door, that behind it, would be Billie.

It was almost anticlimactic, even after the firefight.

Each of them hesitated for the briefest of moments.

They would've thought they would be breaking the door down and hurtling themselves inside with superhuman strength and speed.

Instead, though, they just stood there.

It was only for a second, but that second spoke volumes.

This was it. No more years of searching, of waiting. No more wondering. They were going to see Billie. Rescue Billie.

The magnitude of the moment itself gave them pause.

Not to mention their hearts.

Were they ready for this? What was behind the door? Who would they find inside? Would it be Billie? Or would it be another girl, with Billie's face but nothing more? Would she even remember them? Would she be alive? What if it was Moriarty waiting for them, laughing at them? How -
All of their questions were cut short as Sherlock finally began to move. He carefully and slowly shifted John's weight, handing Mary his stolen gun and then rummaging in his pocket. With a soft swallow, he pulled the key out, fingering it thoughtfully before sliding it into the lock. With a controlled breath, he turned the key and listened for the click. The tiny sound was just about the loudest noise any of them had ever heard.

With a nod to both John and Mary, Sherlock lowered his hand and turned the handle.

Sherlock pushed the door open, but it was Mary who entered first, gun drawn and ready. She was still clearing the room when she saw her. It was about that same time that Sherlock helped John through the threshold and they, too, saw her.

It was a good thing John was leaning on Sherlock because even without the bullet lodged inside his leg, he probably would've wavered, if not collapsed completely at the sight. It was as though a tidal wave of relief and joy was washing over him like the volcano previously had. He thought he breathed her name in a broken whisper, but wasn't sure if anything intelligible had actually come out.

Beside him, Sherlock was stiff, nearly unflinching in posture of expression. Inside, a different, chaotic and confusing story was being told, but on the outside, the man remained forcibly strong. He couldn't surrender to the storm of sentiment, not when John and Mary needed him, both physically and emotionally. He clung tighter to his best friend, keeping the man standing suddenly becoming far more difficult and he guessed it had little now to do with the wounded leg.

In front of them, Mary too was rigid. Her back to her husband and friend, she allowed the emotions to overwhelm her face. She quelled tears of sorrowful elation though, as she suddenly sprang forward to her daughter's side.

A teenager was in the place of where their little girl had once been. They could still see Billie in her though. Her hair still shined with the same golden hue. Of course, it was now darkened by dirt and time locked away from the sun, but they would only ever see it as gold. John took in Mary's cheekbones while Mary noticed John's ears. Sherlock could still spot the same curved mouth of her mother and was sure if the girl's eyes were open, the father's swimming blue irises would still be there. How much else of Billie was left, though, they did not yet know.

Laying in an aged hospital bed, wires and tubes extended from the girl's arms. Her still supine form nearly made her appear as though she was - no. None of them would or could bring themselves to even think it.

Billie was alive. Alive.

Unconscious, but alive.

Asleep.

They weren't granted enough time to properly allow the shock to have its full effect. They weren't given the luxury of a regular reunion.

Because flowing through those tubes was Moriarty's devilishly devised chemical compound. The side effects of the different drugs alone were dangerous. Combined, well, none of them desired to imagine what the concoction was doing to her.

Mary was the first to take action. In a sudden sweep of movements after those first several stiff seconds, the mother had freed her daughter from the IVs. She had just retrieved the antidote from one of her pockets and administered it to Billie when the girl began suddenly screaming. Billie's body seized as Mary momentarily covered her mouth.

"Sherlock," John was barely keeping himself from shouting as he nearly launched across the room on his invalided limb.

The sudden pressure caused a shriek of pain to go screaming through his entire being and Sherlock barely caught his collapsing friend in time.

"She's seizing," The medical man and soldier were shining through, despite the obvious agony.
"Mary."
The one word command was enough for the mother to take a backseat and the nurse to take the
steering.

Mary hastily loosened her daughter's clothes and began turning the girl on her side just as
convulsions wracked her thin frame.

Even from across the room, the doctor was examining his daughter.

"Was it poison?" He directed his question to Sherlock without looking at him.

"I - I don't -"

And once again, Sherlock didn't have an answer. Once again, he had failed Billie.

"Do something!" Mary ordered.

"Sherlock," John put as much military force behind his words that he could, knowing he needed
to pull the detective out of his mental spiral. "She's either poisoned or overdosing."

Sherlock's eyes seemed to suddenly double in size. Securing his hold on John with one arm, he
used his other to reach into his friend's pocket, pulling out John's antidote. His gaze was dark and
scrutinizing, eyes dancing dangerously over the small object.

"He switched them!"

"What?" Now John was shouting.

Sherlock carefully leaned John against the wall as he stalked over to the bed, examining the
equipment with precise hand and eye movements.

With the man's back turned, Sherlock didn't notice when John's shoulder's severely slumped, or
when his eyelids fluttered.

"They're the same," Sherlock bit off suddenly. "It's not poison, it's an overdose. He was already
overdosing her to induce a coma and we just gave her more of the drug."

"What about yours?" John asked and no one noticed the whisper his voice had now become.

"He could've switched mine too," Sherlock grunted as he dug his hand into his pocket.

"No, no, he didn't," Mary shook her head. "He wouldn't."

"What?" Sherlock furrowed his brow. "How do you know?"

"Because it's the story!" Mary implored. "Both stories. In Sleeping Beauty, we're asleep. The king
and queen. We couldn't save the princess. The knight did. You're the knight, remember? That's
how you figured all this out. You're the knight, and, you're the godfather. The godfather had the
cure. The knight saved the princess. It has to be you."

Sherlock stared curiously at his own antidote now in his hand.

"Of course," he shook his head. "You were correct, John! And Mary, oh, clever, Mary! An
overdose. He planned this. He knew one of you would be the first to administer your copy of the
antidote."

Slowly, Sherlock stepped forward, kneeling down at the bedside of the girl who had long ago
been his princess. He would be her knight again. He would save her. He had to.

"The cocktail contained physostigmine, along with other parasympathomimetic alkaloids and
inhibitors. The chemical breakdown was fascinating. Genius, really. The amounts would have to
be absolutely precise."

He found himself unknowingly holding his breath as he administered the drug with practiced
hands. Gradually, the girl ceased thrashing and her breathing fell into an even pace.

"Benzodiazepines," Sherlock sighed with a small smile. "They were in the antidote too."

"How long before she wakes?" Mary glanced from her husband to her daughter, stroking the girl's hair.

"The effects won't be immediate, it -"

Sherlock’s explanation was promptly cut off as shouting filled the halls beyond the door. Apparently, some of the previously unconscious guards were not so unconscious any longer.

"Go," John ordered the pair, grabbing his gun with a grunt. "I'll stay with her."

Sherlock hauled his friend from where he had practically slid all the way to the ground and brought him across the room. Gingerly, he placed John at the end of the bed, below Billie's feet.

Mary hesitated only long enough to plant a lingering kiss on her daughter's forehead and then another on her husband's lips.

"Don’t take pressure off that," she warned. "Be safe."

"You too," John offered her a soft smile.

"Five minutes," Sherlock warned. "If we're not back yet, barricade the door," his glance dropped to John's leg, "if you can. Try not to die of blood loss too quickly before we get back." Sherlock's smirk was lacking something.

"Try not to shoot my wife when you're aiming for them and miss," John replied in kind, a tired, yet teasing glint to his eye.

"She shot me, remember?" The detective quipped.

"Boys," Mary reprimanded, nodding toward the hall.

Sherlock laid a firm hand on his friend's shoulder and then turned and followed Mary out the door. It wasn't long before John began to hear the screams and gunfire. He tried not to panic. Tried not to think about his wife or best friend possibly shot. Or the fact that he was a literal sitting duck. Or how much blood he had already lost. How dizzy he was. Or about his daughter, laying beside him. So close. They were so close. They couldn't lose her now.

He was already glancing at his watch before even a minute was up. He hadn't told Sherlock that he might not be conscious in another five minutes. That they might come back to him passed out in his own blood.

He had to make the decision. John could wait the five minutes and hope and pray that Sherlock and Mary came back. He could bank on the luck that had kept him alive all these years while at Sherlock's side and believe that, just maybe, he would have enough strength to make the barricade then. But what if he was wrong? Then again, if he acted now, he could be inadvertently locking his friend and wife out as he bled to death. Or, using his leg and strength to do so, might actually cause him to lose consciousness faster. There wasn't exactly a glaringly positive option.

Forcing himself off the bed, John limped his way across the room, clawing at the wall with each agonizing step. There was a small bookshelf along the way and John used whatever strength was left in him to push it in front of the door. He ended up on the floor, crawling and pushing and groaning. He did the same with an aged filing cabinet and chair. When he was finished, he practically collapsed at his daughter's side once more. He had done the action enough on the battlefield that it came without hesitation now. Sticking his finger in the wound, John grunted as he tried to stopper the bleeding. He seated himself directly across from the door, protectively positioned in front of her. Tightening his grip on his gun, John stared down the door, ready for whatever came through.

He had no idea that the true danger was lying right behind him.
Now Comes the Dawn

Chapter Notes

What do you guys think of the rescue? I didn't want to make it too complicated and elaborate, as the story's murders, etc already have been confusing for some. But is it really that simple?

John wasn’t sure how much time had passed as he anxiously awaited his wife and best friend's return.

The adrenaline was fading far more quickly than John would have liked. Minutes earlier, he had finally properly applied and tightened the bandages when it was obvious the bleeding wasn't going to give up. It was helping, but it couldn't save him.

For only a moment, John drew his trained attention from the door to his daughter. His soldier senses were still on high alert, as even though he turned away, his eyes continually returned to that threshold.

Brushing a hand over the girl's face and hair, John didn't dare to try and stop the single tear that escaped, drawing a jagged line down his flushed face.

He just needed to do this. To touch her. Mary and Sherlock had both gotten to, but John hadn't. He needed to feel her. To know that she was real. His daughter. Alive. Real.

So many nights he had dreamt of seeing her again, holding her, only for her to be ripped away by Moriarty or waking before he could. Sometimes she would turn to dust or a wisp of air in his arms. Other times, she would be just out of his reach. In all those years, he never had been able to touch her in those nightmares.

Now he could.

It was quite possibly the most glorious and joyful sensation he had ever experienced.

But that joy was soon to be quickly interrupted.

John was still tucking some stray hair behind her ear when he noticed it. His watery eyes barely caught the flicker of movement. He was almost positive his heart and breath had both paused as he stared down intently at his daughter's hand, waiting. And then it happened again. The girl's fingers, just two, flinched. That was more than enough for him.

The doctor promptly went to work checking his daughter's vital signs, setting his firearm on the small table closest to the bed. Indeed, she was waking. Slowly, but waking nonetheless. If seeing her just like this was enough to stop his heart, he wondered vaguely what watching her open her eyes for the first time in years would do to him.

He remained like that for some time, closely watching and mentally cataloging the signs. Each finger spasm. Every variation of breath. He even spoke to her, gently urging her to wake up.

"Billie," he said softly, the name sounding like heaven on his lips after so many years of disuse.
"Can you hear me? It's alright. You're safe now. You can wake up now. It - It's - Dad. It's your father. We found you. Oh, Billie. We've been so lost without you. We need you. I need you. Just, please, be alright. Can you hear me? If you can hear me, Billie, move your fingers."

This was hardly the first person John had witnessed and helped break back through to consciousness. From criminal mishaps where Sherlock was knocked over the head, to unconscious near-victims, to the occasional addict that came through the clinic - oh, and that one time a father-to-be slipped in his own spilled coffee as he waited for his wife to give birth to their twins. He ended up being unconscious for the entire delivery, and the first two days of his sons'
lives.

"Billie," John prompted again, "if you can, squeeze my hand."

There was a bang against the door and John snapped his head toward his barricade.

His eyes were still sharply fixed on the door as he reached for his gun.

His gun that was no longer there.

Spinning his head back around in confusion, John Watson was met with one of the most terrifying sights he had ever witnessed.

There, sitting up in the bed, awake, and pointing his own gun at his face, was his daughter.

Sherlock and Mary were silently regretting their initial stealth approach as most of the men they had previously knocked out were now wide awake and all gathered together against them. It wasn't exactly a fair or even fight, but then again, numbers weren't everything. Moriarty's men were fighting only for money and their lives. Sherlock and Mary, on the other hand, were fighting for far more than their own survival. They were fighting for their own lives, for each other's, for John's, for Billie's. If a mother can lift a vehicle off of her child with pure adrenaline, then Mary and Sherlock could most certainly take down this hoard of henchmen.

Only one had gotten to the door, but that was merely because his body had slammed against it on its way down to meet the cold ground.

By the time all of their opponents were permanently on the floor, Mary was doubled over and panting, and Sherlock was leaning against a wall as he tended to his shoulder. The bullet had barely grazed him. He had also taken the wrong end of a knife to his face, but that too had just been deep enough to leave him with a line of crimson across his cheek and not much else. Mary had suffered a significant blow to the abdomen and was merely trying to regain her breath. She too had met an angry blade, the back of her hand barely bleeding, and a fist to the face where there was sure to be a shiner in the morning. The punch Sherlock had failed to block to his own face was already leaving swelling in its wake. A bulky elbow to his stomach just about ensured a bruised rib. Overall, they were in a lot better shape than they had anticipated.

They were sharing a smile when they heard it.

Another gunshot.

But this one hadn't come from the hall.

This one came from behind the door.

From inside the room.

Despite their exhaustion and their injuries, both Sherlock and Mary ran for the door. Mary was already banging on the old wood while Sherlock searched his pockets for the key. He had locked it as they had left, just in case they hadn't been able to stop Moriarty's men. He heard the lock disengage and immediately gripped the handle, practically ripping the old fixture right off.

Except the door didn't open.

Sherlock internally cursed himself for his last instructions to John. Of course the former soldier had somehow summoned the strength to barricade the door, even with a bullet wound in his leg.

The pair were shouting for John and Billie now, demanding answers, ordering someone, anyone, to open the door.

Sherlock's mind was whirling. There wasn't enough information to deduce what exactly had happened. He blinked and in that split second reviewed what he had seen in the room for those few minutes. Was there a closet he had missed? A form hiding under the bed? A figure in the shadows? He remembered nothing of the sort. But what were the other options? Either John had fired the gun at someone, or -
They had discussed this possibility ages ago, but Sherlock never wanted to believe that it could actually be true. He never should have left John alone with her. Not before they knew who exactly was waking up in that bed.

"John! Answer me right now!" Mary pounded her fist against the wood.

Sherlock slammed his entire body against the door then, Mary soon joining him. Sherlock had heaved himself against the blockaded entryway three times before he realized that Mary was longer at his side.

It took him less than a second to find her on the floor.

And even less time than that to notice the blood.
John stared down the barrel of his own gun, being aimed at him by his own daughter.

"Billie -"

"Who are you?"

For a moment, John couldn't speak. The bombshell of seeing his little girl turned teenager was one thing, but the combined shock of seeing said daughter wake up, train a gun on him, and then hear her voice for the first time in seven years, well, that was definitely enough to steal any words he might have had. Not to mention the added stinging - no, stabbing - sensation of having that daughter not know who he was.

Speechless, John simply stared in confusion, awe, horror and pain at the girl he had once known so well.

"I asked you a question," she repeated. "Who are you?"

"I - I - I'm your - father."

"You - what? No." She answered and then spoke again far too quickly for John to recover from the emotional whiplash. "Where's Peter?"

"Peter?" John was definitely sure now he was no longer breathing. "Moriarty."

"Peter's my father. As good as is. He takes care of me. Where is he? What have you done to him? What did you do to me?"

"Nothing, please, listen -"

John flinched as the crack of a bullet breaking free from the gun filled the small room. It slit through the air and into the wall.

"No more lying. Where am I?" She demanded, brandishing the recently fired gun.

"You're at a military hospital is Aldershot, Hampshire," John answered carefully, trying to be completely honest with everything that he could and give her the facts she was grasping at.

"Why?"

"We found you here," John swallowed.

"Found me?"

"Yes," John cleared his throat, his brain ticking away even as his heart has slowly stopping. "Someone, a man, took you. Kidnapped you. He brought you here."

"Why didn't Peter come for me?" The questioned was precariously balanced between hurt and anger.

"He - he sent us." John supplied, not entirely lying.

"Us?" Her still somewhat sluggish gaze tracked across the room.

"Yes," John nodded. "My friends, and I. They're right outside. The - the men who took you, they found us. I - I stayed here. To protect you."

"Then why did you say you're my father?" She pressed, suspiciously.

John opened his mouth to answer, a curse instead escaping his lips as he accidentally moved his leg.

"You're bleeding," she spoke softly, yet still with a guarded edge, as her wandering eyes landed
on his leg. "You're shot?"

"I'm alright," John lied through a grimace. "It was worth it. To get to you."

"But you don't even know me," she shook her head.

"Billie -"

"Who's Billie?" The teenager furrowed her brow. "You called me that before? Why are you calling me that?"

Whatever calm and trust John had managed to instill in the girl evaporated. She was unstable, at best. He had no idea what had been done to her in those seven years. One thing he could deduce, though, was that, even if she knew exactly who she and John were, she still wouldn't be exactly in her right mind. The drugs were still meddling with her mind. He could see their aftereffects in her eyes and sometimes stalled movements. The way her gaze would flicker for a fraction of a second to somewhere else, as if she was seeing something that wasn't there. John guessed she probably was.

"Peter," John began, practically choking on the poisonous name, "he told us to. He said this was a - uh - secret assignment. He didn't tell us your real name."

John didn't want to lie to his daughter, but, above anything, in that moment, he needed to get her to lower the gun. Once he did that, they could get her home. Even if they had to force her to go with them. They would do whatever it took. They would get her help. The prospects were grim, but anything was better than not having her at all.

"I've never seen you before," she said skeptically.

"Like I said," John continued, "this was a secret assignment. Classified. Your da - Peter, he only uses us for the secret missions. No one is ever supposed to see us, that's the point."

"So, who are you?"

"I'm Captain John Watson." The former soldier thought adopting his military moniker might deem him more trustworthy.

"Like the Army?" She didn't notice that she was lowering the weapon.

"Yeah," John nodded with a small smile, "formerly. Now I work on - cases, like yours."

"And your friends?" She glanced at the commotion outside.

"Sherlock Holmes," John started, watching for any sign of recognition in his daughter's eyes. "Consulting Detective. He also works on special cases like yours. And Mary is my wife. She - she was - an intelligence agent."

"What does that mean?"

John was spared answering that question as the noise beyond the door suddenly ceased and both of them drew their attention to the barricaded entry. Sherlock and Mary had returned and were trying to gain entrance. Their efforts were going to be a bit hindered by John's impromptu barricade. Without thinking, John moved to stand and walk toward the door. He ended up not doing either of those things.

John had hardly moved before his body gave way underneath him and he crumpled to the floor.

Billie leapt off the bed and joined the man on the ground, poking and prodding the now unconscious stranger. The teenager implored her protector to wake up in vain. The people outside were shouting. They screamed the soldier's name - and her's - or, at least, the name for her they had been given.

She wanted to scream too. Peter was gone. She was alone. She didn't know if she could trust these strangers. Her own body and brain were betraying her. The room seemed to be tilting and her thoughts intertwined and tangled. She couldn't seem to focus her sight or her mind. She could feel
sweat pouring off of her skin and all she desired to do was crawl back into that bed and sleep for days. Even the panic that was pulsing through her couldn’t put off the disturbing drowsiness.

There was another, louder, slam. The noise hammered against her skull, sending the room spinning as the barricade shifted, the cabinet collapsing sideways, and the door partially peaking open.

Everything was so loud. Too loud. Even her own heartbeat. She had a vague and disturbing desire to check to make sure that it somehow hadn’t been ripped out of her chest. The voices outside the door were like drums, their words becoming nothing more than indecipherable noise.

Before she could even organize her thoughts enough to properly understand what was happening, her body reacted. Lifting the gun, her finger instinctively squeezed the trigger.

At least the pounding and screaming stopped.

Sherlock dropped to the floor at Mary’s side, hands hastily moving to cover the new wound that decorated the woman’s lower body. He didn’t even offer any attention to the bullet that had pierced her chest and was now embedded in her vest. All three of them had armed themselves with bulletproof vests and yet it was their life and luck that had two of them down with wounds to the leg.

The detective glanced in a near panic from Mary to the door. Having no other choice, he momentarily abandoned the already unconscious woman. Readying his weapon, Sherlock slipped inside, immediately lowering the gun as he saw who exactly he was pointing at.

"Who are you?" Billie demanded.

"I'm - Sherlock," the man revealed, keeping his voice calm despite the chaos within him.

"You're Sherlock?" She lowered her weapon warily. "The detective. The one with him."

Billie nodded to John’s motionless form and Sherlock noticed his unconscious friend for the first time since stepping back in the room. Momentarily forgetting about the unstable teenager with a gun pointed his way, Sherlock made to charge forward.

"Don’t," Billie ordered shakily. "Just - stay where you are."

"Please,” Sherlock uncharacteristically implored, lifting his hands in a sign of surrender. "I promise I will not harm you."

She hesitated until finally she nodded, her weapon though still at the ready.

"I didn’t do anything to him," she spoke as she backed away from the pair. "He fell. He’s been shot."

"I know," Sherlock’s tone was far away as he examined his friend, desperately searching for signs of life.

The detective delicately placed two fingers on the doctor’s neck and couldn’t contain his breath of relief when he was met with the, weak, but very much beating, pulse.

"John," he implored, gripping the man’s chin, "John, wake up. This isn’t time for a quick kip. Your wife needs you. Come on."

It wasn’t until Sherlock started slapping the man’s face as he spoke that John finally, albeit slowly, started coming around.

"Sher - lock?"

"Focus, John," Sherlock was practically biting down on the words, using his commanding voice to pull the soldier out of the wounded and weary man. I need you awake. Mary needs you awake."
"Mary?" John still slurred the name.

"She's been shot."

John didn't notice Sherlock's briefest of glances toward Billie, but she definitely did.

"What?" John was almost entirely alert now. "Where is she? How is she?"

Sherlock was already dragging John up and across the room with one arm while he used the other to dial on his mobile.

"One shooting victim at a time, shall we?" Sherlock swallowed as he pulled John along. "Give me your diagnosis."

*How much time do you have left?*

No. He couldn't think about that. But he also needed to keep the man talking as they moved.

Sherlock watched as John furrowed his brow, the man attempting to catalog his own condition.


Neither of them needed to say what that meant.

*How much time - not a lot.*

*Not enough.*

*And Mary has less."

The two men dropped down to Mary's side, John choking back a howl of pain as he did so.

"Jes - Mary," John breathed as he stared down in horror at his wife.

There was only that moment of shock before the soldier sprang into action. The captain took control while the husband was hidden away.

"Keep pressure on it," he ordered. "Damn it," his eyes swept over the pool of crimson surrounding the limb. "The bullet hit the femoral artery."

That definitely answered Sherlock's question of how much time.

*Three minutes, if she's lucky.*

Sherlock and John both shook off the haunting thought.

"She's already dead."

The two men snapped their heads up in unison at the voice.

If they were keeping a tally to how many times something could stop their hearts that day, this would have been about the hundredth.

Billie stood above them, once more aiming John's gun at their faces.
"Billie," Sherlock started slowly, though not removing his hands from Mary's leaking limb.

"Stop calling me that." The girl hissed. "It's not my name and it's not the name Peter gave you. Peter didn't tell you anything. He didn't send you. He sent me."

There was a pregnant and piercing pause.

"He told me you would come, all three of you." Her voice was deceivingly steady, but her slightly shaking hands gave away her internal struggle. "Told me your names. Said you'd lie to me."

"And then he told you to kill us, is that it?" Sherlock cocked a deceptively lazy eyebrow. "Let me guess, you're first assignment, correct? He's been training you, hmm?"

John didn't have a single word in his mind or vocabulary to express anything that was going on inside his heart or head. They had known this was a possibility, had prayed it wouldn't be a reality. But here it was. His wife was lying next to him dying, as he too was fading, while their daughter held a gun to their heads.

"Except you haven't yet," Sherlock continued almost casually. "Why is that? You had John alone after you woke up. He was unconscious. And yet you didn't even try. Pretty poor assassin if you want my opinion."

"I - I was waiting," she swallowed. "I needed all of you. That's what he said. I had to make sure you were together."

"Right," Sherlock nodded, "so we could watch each other die."

"No," Billie shook her head. "He isn't cruel, unlike you. He's a hero. He would never do that. Even when he kills people, he does it quickly."

"Then why did he want us together?" Sherlock pressed. "Besides, even if he did or didn't say that, it doesn't matter. You still hesitated. And not just when you had John alone. You're hesitating right now."

"No, I'm not," Billie brandished the gun.

"Then pull the trigger," Sherlock challenged.

"Sherlock," John whispered.

"Oh, come on, make Peter proud," Sherlock was practically taunting the girl now.

"Stop it," Billie ground out.

"You've had plenty of time," Sherlock shrugged. "For your first assignment, you've been pretty sloppy. You even gave me a chance to phone the police. Well, text. Semantics. The whole thing's sloppy really. What about all of those men? The one's guarding you?"

"They were part of his plan," Billie waved the pistol emphatically. "Part of the test."

"Why would your test include bodyguards?" Sherlock squinted.

"Not my test," Billie shook her head with a small smirk that made John sick. "Yours."

"Oh, right. So, we're being tested. You're being initiated. That sounds perfectly logical, doesn't it, John?" Sherlock sniffed. "Far too many details. Only lies have details. Throw in enough of them, and you won't question it. Why would you?"
"Shut up," Billie tightened her grip on the weapon. "Stop trying to confuse me!"

"Why? Because this is making sense? Because for the first time in as long as you can remember, someone isn't lying to you?"

"He never lied to me!" Billie shouted. "I know exactly who you really are. My parents."

Another heavy silence slammed over them, the weight of her words a crushing blow. If John hadn't already been on his knees, he was almost certain he would've collapsed at the statement, and the sheer venom behind the single word.

"And you," Billie cocked her head at Sherlock. "Sherlock Holmes. The fake detective. Killing all those people just to make yourself look good. My mother," she nodded at the woman on the ground. "An assassin. Another murderer. You are the liars. Telling me that Peter sent you. You've been lying to me ever since I woke up."

"Yes, woke up," Sherlock narrowed his brow as he made to slowly stand, "from a drug overdose he gave you."

"He didn't give me anything," Billie retorted. "I took it."

"You - what?" John interrupted now. "Willingly? You willingly overdosed?"

"Peter and I practiced it," Billie shrugged. "It was the perfect plan. He knew you would come running to take me back. To play the hero. Just like you pretend to be. Peter knows the truth. And so do I."

"Do you?" Sherlock arched his brow, carefully moving forward.

"He has proof," Billie argued.


"So, this is it?" John shook his head incredulously, looking up at his daughter with something akin to heartbreak in his eyes. "You're just going to kill us. We're your parents. Your family!"

"Peter is the only family I have." Billie rounded on him. "The only family I need." Billie straightened, her arm steadying.

"The only thing you need right now," Sherlock spoke dangerously, "is a time out."

Before Billie could react, Sherlock was upon her. John's distraction had been just enough. He had the girl by the arms, the gun hanging uselessly at her side. She was still screaming at him when the detective jabbed a small needle into her neck. Billie's body went limp, Sherlock gingerly bringing her to the floor.

"What did you just do?" John demanded. "Oh my - was that the drug? Sherlock! We don't have another antidote."

"Relax, John," Sherlock nestled the girl next to her mother and then turned his focus back to the older woman. "I merely picked your pockets."

John felt around his clothing and packs.

"My med bag?"

"I slipped a sedative in before we left," Sherlock answered, "to be prepared."

To be prepared.

To be prepared to put down my daughter.

My daughter, who wants to kill us.
John was trying desperately to banish these thoughts from his mind. Within minutes, though, he soon found himself in no need of pushing away any thoughts as they all turned over to darkness. John's mind fell into the black, his body sagging with it.

Sherlock lunged toward the doctor, supporting his friend as he lowered him safely to the floor.

Deja vu wasn't ever anything Sherlock took the time to consider as it deemed it unworthy of such thought. And yet, as he stared down in mild panic at the three bodies before him, he couldn't help its heavy presence. He was brought unwillingly back to that night, all those years ago. Once again, the king, queen, and princess were asleep.

Once again, it was the knight who was left alone to save them.

Chapter End Notes

Originally, I was going to have Billie come back home and be "happy" to be rescued. She would seem like her old self, but Sherlock would notice small differences. After awhile of gaining their trust, she would then try and kill them, but Sherlock would foil her plan. I thought that was a bit predictable, though.
Sherlock Holmes was convinced that only two people as stubborn and as strong as John and Mary Watson could have survived the previous day. The previous seven years.

There existed a part of his mind, despite the illogical nature of the action, that prayed that Billie had inherited those characteristics. That she, too, would survive the previous day. The previous seven years.

Of course, Sherlock already knew Billie was both of those things. At least, she had been. How much had Moriarty changed her? Could she really recover?

Billie didn't possess possibly fatal physical injuries as her parents did. The drug had long since been purged and her only visible wounds were several years old. Sherlock couldn't even bring himself to think about those yet. No, the injuries Billie would have to endure were those of the mind. And the mind was such a far more difficult thing to mend.

Sherlock had yet to be allowed to even see her after the ambulance had carried her away. As both the girl's biological parents were in their own hospital rooms battling for recovery, Sherlock was granted full briefing of her condition and updates, but nothing more. He doubted even John or Mary would've been allowed to see her. So far the only people to have entered her room were her doctors, a child psychologist, a specialist, and a police officer – who irritatingly wasn't Lestrade. The child psychologist and police officer had been rewarded for their efforts with a tray being thrown at their heads. Even while cuffed to the bed, Billie had managed to send the specialist out with a bleeding shoulder. *Bitten*, Sherlock deduced.

Is that what Billie had been reduced to by Moriarty? A wild animal? A feral child?

But then something happened.

Something that had Sherlock bounding down the hospital halls like a madman.

Billie had asked for him.

And apparently had been ever since she had awoken.

It wasn't until the bitten specialist did they finally allow his access to her though, supervised, of course. It took Sherlock approximately two and a half minutes of shouting, and a thirty second phone call to Mycroft, before they let him go inside alone, posting a nurse and officer outside the door.

The door fell closed at an irritatingly slow pace. Sherlock pushed it closed to put an end to the infernal squeaking, and to angle his back toward Billie. He was showing her he trusted her without using words. He could feel the intensity of her gaze on his shoulders and could only wonder if she understood the subtle message.

Straightening his features, Sherlock almost casually turned around, not speaking a word as he strolled smoothly to the awaiting chair by the bed. Before sitting, though, Sherlock leaned over and unfastened her bindings.

"I imagine you've been in enough of these," Sherlock spoke nonchalantly, eyes flicking over the faded marks on her wrists.

"Your parents are alive," he cleared his throats and crossed his legs. "Not that you've bothered to ask, which would lead me to believe you don't care either way. Except that if you truly wanted them dead, you would've asked, to make sure you'd finished the job right. You also haven't asked for Peter, which tells me that you think he's coming for you eventually. To *rescue* you. Just like he rescued you all those years ago. You see, I figured it out. I never quite understood how a toddler got safely into a closet during an explosion when a grown man didn't. Peter saved you. He put
you in that closet and rescued you. Just like he did from those people the night he took you away. You think he's going to save you again now, but here's the thing. You never needed rescuing. He put you in danger so that he could save you. He risked your life to play a game against me. A game where you were only a pawn. You asked for me. Have been asking for me. So, either you remember me, trust me, or are going to try and kill me. Or, well, Moriarty will. That's the plan, right? Get me alone, in here, with you. So, who's going to do it? You, or him? Please do hurry. My two best friends, your parents, are out there fighting for their lives. Personally, as fun as a good challenge is, I'd rather be with them in here fighting for mine. So, quickly, please. If you will."

Without a word of warning, Billie reached under the sheets and made to lunge forward at Sherlock. It was only when she saw that her hand was empty, that her entire frame froze.

"Looking for this?" Sherlock smirked as he twirled a scalpel between his fingers. "Took it off you when I undid the cuffs. Thought Moriarty would've taught you better, quite honestly."

"He did."

Billie's ears perked and her eyes darted to the door.

"Oh, right. If you're waiting to hear the sounds of Moriarty's men taking out the people at the door, I'm afraid you're out of luck. I thought you might have some way to communicate with him still, so I had your room and clothing checked for bugs. I'd be willing to wager that we found some on you that even you didn't know about. But we did leave the one. That was for you. And Moriarty. You're an observant girl, I knew you'd notice the hospital logo on the staff shirts and equipment. Probably sent word to your boss straight away. But Moriarty's clever. He'd expect a trap. A trick. He's so fond of them himself, you know. He'd check the hospital, but also Mycroft's connections. Several of his men have already been spotted at one of the government's facilities. You see, we had a long time to imagine and plan for this day,"

Billie twitched and eyed the window.

"I really wouldn't try. You may have been trained as an assassin for seven years, but I have extensively studied six different forms of martial arts since the age of twelve. And besides, I do so like sharing my intelligence with someone. Seeing as your father is in surgery and your mother is in a coma, well, that just leaves you. So, where was I? Right. My brother and I devised 42 different scenarios Moriarty might play out. We then narrowed it down to the most likely thirteen. For seven years, Mycroft and I, along with only his most trusted employees, have been working on constructing a series of plans and building various locations. Safe houses, hospitals, you understand. They were divided among different people, so not one single person outside your parents, myself, or my brother, knew all their locations. And no, your parents are not here. While you were unconscious, we moved you twice in case of a leak or follower. I guarantee, M16 provides a much better security detail than the one Moriarty staged for you."

"Speaking of which, I know firsthand that Moriarty had much more skilled men at his disposal that he could've utilized. That lead me to also believe that you were meant to be found. Obvious."

It was here that Sherlock paused and stood, brushing his jacket lazily.

"I probably am not the best person to tell you this, considering my aversion to sentiment, but we are the good guys. And those two people you saw yesterday are your parents. I am not entirely pleased with this situation, but I have to keep my friends safe. You will be kept here, for your safety and theirs. You will be guarded and monitored. You will submit to psychological evaluations. You will receive psychological and medical care. I understand the irony of freeing you from being held against your will, even if you didn't see it as such, only to keep you once again against your will. We will make you as comfortable as possible. I realize that you are confused and you don't trust me. You may not trust anyone ever again. I can't say I wouldn't blame you. But this is for your own protection as much as it is for your parents' and mine. You're obviously going to have questions, and you will be answered honestly, just as we will have questions for you, which we expect honest answers to. The fact that my brother is involved in this, we are avoiding much of the annoying legal aspects of this, for now. Failure to comply with any of our stipulations, and they may just pose a threat. I hold no satisfaction in seeing my friends' daughter sent to jail or locked away in a mental institution, but I promise you, I will do whatever it
takes to keep them safe."

Chapter End Notes

Sherlock may seem OOC, but there is a reason for that. Isn't there always?
Hello! Just like the series, I seem to be back from hiatus! Perfect timing. Long story short - I found my old FLASHDRIVES!!!!! I had lost them and abandoned a lot of my stories because I was missing the drives (AND the handwritten stuff that hadn't been typed up yet) Well, both were recovered when I visited my folks and cleaned out my storage area! I don't know if anyone is even still interested in this story after two years, but one can hope.

“She’s my wife, damn it, and I’m a bloody doctor!”

“I understand, but, as a doctor, you know why I can’t let you in right now.”

“I’m not some civilian,” John pushed, fists curling, “I was a bloody Army doctor.”

“I still can’t, especially in your condition -”

“I know my own condition, thank you,” John snapped. “Where the hell is Mycroft?”

“He knows the situation and has agreed that you need to stay here right now. For everyone’s safety.”

“You’re not going to be very safe in a minute,” John warned. “You sure you’re a doctor? You sound more like a politician, or one of Mycroft’s lap dogs.”

“It is because of Mycroft that you and your wife are alive and being treated.” The doctor shook his head.

“Lap dog, then,” John crossed his arms.

“You’re beginning to sound dreadfully like my brother.”

John stiffened at the familiar voice and turned to properly glare at the embodiment of the British government.

“Let me see her,” the soldier bit down on each individual word.

“In case you’ve forgotten, I do not take orders from you, Captain,” Mycroft lifted his eyes to the ceiling.

“In case you’ve forgotten, that’s my wife in there,” John stabbed a finger behind him. “She’s been in surgery for twelve hours.”

“Of which, you have been awake for one of those hours,” Mycroft rolled the words around in his mouth. “After all this trouble for a family reunion, do you really wish to ruin it by overexerciting yourself and putting yourself in more danger?”

“How is she?”

Mycroft didn’t need to ask to know the female subject of the conversation had shifted.

“Alive,” Mycroft informed him far too casually for the father’s liking. “Physically, she is quite alright.”

“I need to see her,” John leaned forward.

“She isn’t here,” Mycroft sighed.
“Then take me to her.”

“And leave your wife in her time of need?” Mycroft rose his brow.

“You won’t let me see her anyway!”

“And I will not let you go to Billie either!”

It was the first time either of them had used her name since the rescue. If John possessed Holmes brother powers of observation, maybe, just maybe, he would’ve noticed the flicker in Mycroft’s voice.

“This is my wife and daughter, Mycroft,” John swallowed, steadying himself.

“Yes, and if you want both of them safe, you’ll remain here,” Mycroft repeated.

“I spent seven years looking for her, damn it!” John’s fist twitched, itching to punch a wall, a table, Mycroft.

“So you can spend seven hours more.”

“You bastard,” John whispered in a small voice that was far more startling and chilling than any shouting would be.

“Name calling is well beneath you, John,” Mycroft danced right onto that thin ice.

“You’re going to be beneath my boot in a minute, Mycroft.”

“While in that chair,” Mycroft waved at the confining contraption the former soldier was currently sitting in, “I hardly think so.”

“Don’t underestimate me, Mycroft,” John tipped his head, wheeling the chair ever so closer to the man.

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Mycroft replied airily before making his decisive, yet slow, exit.

“You owe me, brother mine,” Mycroft slipped down another hallway, cradling his mobile to his ear.

“You always think that. For what this time?” Sherlock’s annoyance seeped through the device.

“John Watson believes it is under my orders that he is not allowed to see his own daughter,” Mycroft cocked his head as he spoke.

“You didn’t tell him?”

Mycroft didn’t say anything about his brother’s momentary verbal hesitation.

“The man’s wife is in critical condition, Sherlock. John himself narrowly missed dying. Even a soldier has a breaking point.”

“I will not lie to him.”

“Oh, because you haven’t before?” Mycroft was part sarcasm, part arrogance.

“Not about this, Mycroft.”

“Very well. But you can tell him yourself then.”
“You’re afraid of a man in a wheelchair?” It was far more a statement than a question, and Mycroft could hear his brother’s internal snickering.

“Don’t underestimate him,” Mycroft echoed the man’s words seriously.

“I never do,” Sherlock answered with just as much sincerity.

“He deserves to hear this from you,” Mycroft sighed.

“No, Mycroft. He deserves for none of this to have happened. All of them do.”

There was a soft beep of Sherlock hanging up on him and Mycroft frowned at the device.

“Neither do you.”
“We have a problem,” a petite man in a suite approached Mycroft.

“When do we not?” It was more of a word filled sigh than a question.

“Moran.”

Mycroft arched a single brow.

“Sebastian Moran. I am well aware that we have collected him from Moriarty’s little web in this whole mess. I instructed you to get him talking, not to make problems. If the next words out of your mouth are that he escaped, I will -”

“No, no,” the man lifted his hands and shook his head. “He is talking. Don’t ask me what we had to do to get him to talk, but we did. After Moriarty figured out the fake clues to the wrong hospital that we gave him, he sent his boys out a second time. They were looking for specific patients. A woman in a coma following a shot to the abdomen. A man in surgery after a bullet wound to the leg. And a teenage girl.”

Mycroft’s eyes darkened.

“He knows.”

“Knows what, sir?”

Mycroft neglected to answer as he turned on his heel and marched in the other direction, pulling his mobile from his pocket once more.

“He knows,” Mycroft said in a way of greeting. “Mary and John’s conditions.”

Sherlock stiffened before shrugging.

“I don’t have time for your problems.”

He was seated in a chair opposite of Billie’s door, legs crossed and fingers tapping together just below his mouth. He altered between this pose and then clicking his nails against the arms of the seat, as if making a show of his impatience would hurry things along.

“My problems are currently your problems,” Mycroft hissed.

“No,” Sherlock stood as Billie’s door opened and a rather rattled third therapist stumbled out. “Your problems have always been, your problems.”

The younger sibling didn’t give the other time to respond as he stalked across the hall and into the room before the door even closed.

“I’ve been informed that you are no longer speaking,” Sherlock spoke casually as he made his way across the room. “Peter taught you that, didn’t he? Taught you a lot of things. Lies. About me. About your parents.”

“Peter never lied to me.”

Sherlock paused his movements as his lips twitched upward.

“I had a hunch that you’d speak to me,” he let the smirk contort his face. “When I was a child, my parents sent me to several psychologists. They called themselves doctors.” Sherlock scoffed. “I adopted the same method of defense as you are using now. I stopped talking. Mummy nearly had
me committed. She thought I’d gone mad. My brother knew different. He would talk to me, even when I didn’t answer. Until, one day, I did. They’ll put you in an institution too, if you keep this up."

Billie shrugged.

“You see, the thing is, I didn’t just stop talking to be stubborn. Though, that was a significant reason. I also ceased speaking, because, that is what I had been taught.”

Sherlock stopped for a moment. If he was someone else, he might have cleared his throat or adjusted his posture. Maybe even shown a flicker of vulnerability in his gaze. But Sherlock simply stopped.

“My first doctor was a cruel, old, man - who liked to hit children. When we met, I told him his wife was going to leave him and deduced that he had been hurting the other children in his care. I also insinuated that he liked to do, other things, with the girls. He hit me so hard, I woke up in hospital two days later.” He paused again. “I think Peter taught you like that.”

“You don’t know anything about Peter,” Billie spat.

“Unfortunately, that is not true. In fact, I know a great deal about him. More than you.”

“You’re lying. He said you were a liar. A fake genius. He’s a real genius.”

“He’s a criminal.”

“He’s a good man.”

“You want to know what else I think?” Sherlock challenged. “I think you’re starting to doubt that. Hmm?”

“Stop lying,” Billie glared up at him underneath drawn eyelids.

“I’m not.”

“Prove it.”

“Very well.” Sherlock fixed the girl with a piercing stare as he folded himself into the chair beside her bed, taking up his hands underneath his chin. “Billie Watson was raised by two of the most loyal and loving parents I have ever known. She grew to be just as loyal and loving as well. A good girl. A clever girl. Put those character traits together, and you’ve got one very difficult to corrupt child. So, Moriarty had to devise a plan. A plan to twist the truth enough to make you believe it. Lies always are more believable when you add a grain of truth. So, he told you the truth, some of it. He didn’t contradict John and Mary to be your parents. He used it. He could have tried to make you believe he was your father, but he didn’t. He could change the facts, but he couldn’t change the most important factor; you.”

“Billie Watson. Kind. Clever. Not going to turn her into a criminal. So, what do you do? You turn the parents into criminals. Use her good nature against her. But she resisted at first. She trusted her imaginary friend, but missed mummy and daddy. So, he had to teach you to listen. To believe. To behave.”

“You were young, scared, confused. You may not even remember it. But he hurt you. The physical evidence is quite clear of that.”

“He didn’t,” Billie shook her head. “He wouldn’t.”

“Then explain these,” Sherlock sprang to his feet, seizing Billie’s wrists, running swift, but gentle, fingers along the old scars that decorated her skin.

“From training.”

“No,” Sherlock gripped her forearm, just below the evidence of a previous burn. “That is from training.” He then grabbed her fingers, rubbing her rough knuckles. “These are from training.” Again, he took her wrists. “These, these are from torture. Burn on your arm from firing a gun, at
least two years old. Bruises on the knuckles, and obvious evidence of previously broken fingers, left over from hand-to-hand training. You had extensive bruising on your abdomen and your ribs had sustained injury as well. Also byproducts of learning to fight. Some of the marks are only a few weeks, months, old, some go back a few years. These, though,” he cupped her wrists, “are the oldest. Many years. Seven. He chained you up. Called it discipline. I won’t even tell you about what we found on your back and feet. He punished you for disobedience, rewarded you for good behavior. It’s basic psychological manipulation. After awhile, you learned to do as you were told. Began to forget about the lessons. Forgetting is always easier than remembering. The human brain is capable of deleting things for us. It thinks it’s helping us. Riding us of memories that are too painful to keep. He trained you. Like a dog. You were nothing more than a pet. A pawn. He used you. He used you, to get to me. To hurt me.”

Here, Sherlock’s stiff posture and speech faltered.

“Get out.” Billie kept her head down as she bit down on the words.

“You’re a good actress,” Sherlock lowered his gaze somewhere between glaring and gentle. “Almost as good as Moriarty. But I can see it, in your eyes. The doubt. The questions. What did he reward you with, hmm? You said that I am a fake. How did I know that? How did I know any of that? I deduced. It’s what I do. Just like Moriarty deduced exactly how to manipulate you.”

Because you’re alike, Sherlock thought to himself darkly. So very alike.
An Experiment

Chapter Summary

It's been awhile since we've had a nice, fluffy flashback. So, here you go.

Living in 221 Baker Street, or even having any sort of relationship - even acquaintance - with Sherlock Holmes, quickly made a person become accustom to the madman’s experiments. From eyeballs in the freezer to tongues in the microwave. From finding him plucking soil samples from your shoes, while you were still wearing them, to watching him mix unnamed chemicals - and remembering to stand back.

It wasn’t even entirely uncommon to find oneself as the experiment. John Watson - knowingly and unknowingly - acted as Sherlock Holmes’ guinea pig on many more than one occasion. It wasn’t until John missed an entire Wednesday that he put his foot down. Or fist. Even that incident, though, was quite quickly forgiven.

There was one individual, though, that was very much off limits to Sherlock’s physical and psychological meddling. One person the detective was never, under any circumstances, allowed to use in his experiments.

Billie.

Sherlock Holmes never was one to follow rules though.

“Sherlock, did you take our -”

John stopped short in the threshold, his sentence and feet stalled by the sight before him. Sherlock sat curled in on himself in his chair reading a book while Billie played in the corner with her dolls, and something else.

“Is that your -”

Sherlock held up a finger to silence his friend. Setting the paperback aside with his other hand, the detective lifted a small silver bell from his pocket, ringing it. To John’s complete confusion, and amazement, his daughter bounced up off the ground and waddled haphazardly over to her godfather. Without a word, she deposited an item in his palm. Sherlock used his free hand to pluck a piece of chocolate from his other pocket, unwrapped it, and placed it in Billie’s gaping, waiting, mouth. With a brush of her hair, Sherlock fired off a text. A text from the mobile phone. A text from the mobile phone Billie had given him. Once finished, Sherlock handed the device back to his goddaughter. After a pat on the head, she went wobbling back to her spot.

“What was that?” John asked after a prolonged pause.

“Fairly obvious,” Sherlock shrugged. “I do hope your eyesight isn’t already failing you. You can’t be an old man yet. We have far too much work to do. Speaking of which,” Sherlock halted mid sentence and leapt up, somehow unfolding his long limbs in a show of grace and speed; strikingly dissimilar to his previous position.

“Did you -”

Again, Sherlock poised a finger as he practically skipped into the kitchen just as the microwave timer sounded. John watched wordlessly as his friend opened the door and casually revealed a plate of eyeballs.

“Jes - Sherlock,” John scolded, softly, yet sharply. “Haven’t you done enough bloody experiments on eyeballs? And in front of my daughter?”
“One,” Sherlock sniffed, “this is for an entirely new experiment for the case I am currently working. Two, I am neither in front of, nor near your daughter.”

A similar noise to the bell Sherlock had rung before sounded from the sitting room. John recognized it as his old flatmate’s text tone. Sherlock shoved the eyeballs back in the microwave and slammed the small door shut. It was only when John heard his daughter’s unsteady feet approaching when the man realized why Sherlock had hidden them. Again, John could only watch as Billie handed Sherlock his phone. Once more, Sherlock offered her candy, read and then sent a text, and gave the mobile back. Once Billie was out of earshot, John whirled around on his friend.

“Please tell me you didn’t do what I think you did.”

“You’re going to have to be more specific, John.” Sherlock rolled his eyes, opening the microwave again.

“The bell,” John clenched his teeth.

“It’s a simple behavior -”

“I know what it is,” John snapped. “My daughter is not a dog, Sherlock.”

“Really, John. It’s a proven method of training for animals and humans.”

“Billie doesn’t need training!”

“All children require training,” Sherlock slipped John a pointed look. “Otherwise, we would all be running around in diapers and babbling. Of course, that would prove an interesting situation. A prime example for natural selection to take place. Perhaps I could -”

“Whatever you’re about to say, don’t.” John lifted his hands. “No more. No more ‘training’ my daughter like this.” John sighed. “Have you taught her anything else I should be worried about?”

“We just started today,” Sherlock sulked.

“And you’re ending today,” John nodded sharply. “You what, just decided it’d be a good idea to teach her to give you your phone. She isn’t here for your benefit, Sherlock.”

“Well, you’re not around to do it anymore,” Sherlock shrugged. “It was logical.”

“No,” John shook his head. “Logical is using your bloody pocket or walking across the room, you lazy sod.”

“I fear you are overreacting, John -”

“No, Sherlock. This isn’t overreacting. This is me, knowing what comes after these little ‘trainings’. You’ll get bored.”

“Do you honestly think I would experiment on my own goddaughter?” Sherlock rolled his eyes.

“You experimented on your own flatmate,” John countered. “Besides, this, this is an experiment, Sherlock.”

“This is harmless.”

“This is wrong.”

Not ‘A Bit Not Good. Wrong. John had said it.

Wrong.

For John to say such a thing to Sherlock after all this time, made the detective pay attention.

And so, that day, he dispensed of the bell, changed his text tone and surrendered the sweets to
Mrs. Hudson to spoil the child with in her own time. And Sherlock never again used Billie in any of his experiments.

Well, almost never.
The Great Escape

“She is my patient - “

“She is my -“

“She’s unstable, at best! Going in there and attacking her like you just did isn’t going to help.”

“And what will help, hmm? You’re certainly doing her worlds of good. Mycroft said you were the best. You have no idea how to handle this!”

“This is a young girl. Not a case you can solve. I’ve had over twenty years of experience with kidnapped and abused children. I know what I am doing. It takes time.”

“Do not lecture me about time!” Sherlock threw a single finger in the man’s face. “We spent seven years searching for her! Seven years!”

“Yes, seven years that she was in the hands of a dangerous criminal,” the doctor was failing to retain his composure. “You cannot seriously expect -”

“What I expect ,” Sherlock whirled around, his brother’s sudden presence behind him in the room already deduced. “Is that when I put you in charge of finding London’s best, you actually do it.”

The brothers held each other’s stony glares as neither moved or spoke. The doctor seized his opportunity and slipped past the warring statues and from the room.

“You’ve always loathed psychologists,” Mycroft sighed dramatically. “No matter who I picked, you would’ve reacted in the same manner as you are now.”

“And how am I reacting? ” Sherlock stepped forward, a dangerous challenge in his words.

“As you usually do,” Mycroft sneered. “Like a child.”

Before Sherlock could throw an equally acidic remark back at his brother, a rather sweaty male nurse came sprinting toward them.

“She - she’s gone!”

“I beg your pardon,” Mycroft clipped, holding out a hand to stay his brother from strangling the man, though Sherlock surprisingly neglected to even flinch at the news.

“She escaped,” the nurse panted. “We tried to reach you on your mobile -”

Mycroft dug in and patted his pockets, bringing his head swiftly up to glare at his brother.

“Where is it?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Sherlock answered readily and icily. “But I do believe a missing person is far more important than a missing phone.”

Mycroft pointed at a passing guard.

“You, get me Anthea.” He turned on his heel back to the nurse. “Lock this place down, now.”

Mycroft was still barking orders as Sherlock began slinking away.

“Where are you going?” Mycroft rounded on him. “I know you had a hand in this, Sherlock.”

“Don’t let me distract you,” Sherlock arched his brow.

“Do not make me hold you here.”

“You do that and Billie is dead,” Sherlock dropped all pretenses as he lunged forward, their noses all but touching.
“I’d warn you against doing something stupid, Sherlock, but I fear you already have.”

“Trust me, Mycroft.”

“Trust me, John. I need you to trust me. Can you do that?”

“We spent years crafting these safe houses,” Mycroft seethed, “for you to ruin it all now?”

“The safe houses were always necessary to my plan,” Sherlock explained impatiently.

“How can you know, Sherlock? How can you know it will work?”

“Your plan?” Mycroft straightened. “These have been our plans.”

“Not this one.”

“I have a plan, John. I’ve always had a plan.”

“I can follow you.”

“And here I thought you hated leg work,” Sherlock sniffed. “No, you’ll play your part here.”

Sherlock was halfway down the hall when two of Mycroft’s men seized him. They struggled with him until finally they gained control, hoisting him around to face a somber Mycroft.

“I’m sorry, brother mine. This is for your own protection.”

Mycroft could still hear his brother’s screams as they locked the door four floors below his feet.

“Missing?” Lestrade shouted into his mobile. “What the hell do you mean, missing? Again? Where’s Sherlock? What about John? Him too? You’ve got to be kidding me!”

“Sir,” Donovan knocked and then barged in, “Call just came in. Triple homicide.”


Lestrade glanced up at Sally. “Get Dimmock on it.”

“He’s on vacation.” Donovan informed him with haste. “This one’s bad, boss.”

“Do you have people on this?” Greg hollered again into the phone. “Of course you - I wasn’t - I’ll be there as soon as I can. Until then, keep Sherlock on a leash, will you? God knows what he’ll do.”

Greg shoved his mobile into his pocket and sprang to his feet. He was already barking orders as he left his office.
It was one of the consulting criminal’s men that lead Billie to the abandoned factory. To Moriarty.

On the outside, the battered building appeared as though it was attempting an impersonation of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Billie wondered if the struggling structure would collapse just from stepping inside. The thought failed to provoke any fear from the girl, though. Her own safety was not a priority.

There were many other things Billie was about to face once she crossed the plastic curtained tattered threshold. If one of them were to be her death, well then, at least her story would have an interesting ending. Isn’t that what mattered to Peter anyway? He had always wanted things to be interesting, but Billie had just never known how far the man went to guarantee a good show.

Well, Billie would give him a good show. A good story.

Confronting the monster at the end of the book. But that wasn’t quite right, was it? Monsters were vicious, feral, unintelligent creatures. Moriarty was a genius. A master manipulator.

Her master.

And if he was her master, then Billie was, in fact, the monster.

The madman’s creation.

Peter had given her the story to read. He always gave her stories. If what these new strangers were telling her was the truth, then that was all he had been giving her for the past seven years. What felt like her entire lifetime.

Stories. Just stories.

No.

Lies.

Stories were far too kind a word to grant the years of perverse prevarications that Peter had force fed her.

It was possible that these people, these doctors and supposed family and friends, were too only offering her lies. Meddling with her mind. And yet, she couldn’t escape, couldn’t deny, that nagging voice that had been gnawing, clawing, devouring her. The doubt. The questions.

And then there was that other thing. The thing she even refused to admit to herself.

The sense of, familiarity, with these strangers. No, that wasn’t the proper word. Something else. Something stronger. Deeper.

None of it mattered just then, though. She was done being confused. Being lied to. Her questions were going to given answers.

Her story was going to be finished.
The monster was going to meet its creator.

As she approached the entrance, Billie scanned her surroundings on instinct. She had done her best to ensure that she was not followed. She had overheard Peter’s man on the phone, mentioning the disappearance of John Watson shortly after she had fled.

John Watson. Her father. The man she had nearly killed.

She had to push such thoughts from her head. She had to banish all emotions, all hesitations and fears. If her father had somehow heard of her escape and had tried to go after her, it would make little difference now. He obviously hadn’t caught their scent and followed them here. And even if he figured it out, it would be too late.

Billie planned on making this quick.

Peter never did like long endings.

So when Peter’s assistant escorted her into the building and Billie laid eyes on her long ago imaginary friend, she didn’t even hesitate to breathe. Breaking into the gun store before contacting Peter’s web after her escape had been child’s play. Knicking new clothing from the department store around the corner had been even easier. Hiding the pistol in a holster against her stomach underneath a loose shirt, revealing it and knocking the unnamed escort unconscious in one fluid movement, well, that was just good training.

The body hadn’t even hit the ground before she trained her weapon on her creator.

“I thought I taught you so much better,” the silky voice tisked. “Only point that at someone you’re ready to kill.”

“Taught you.”

“He taught you.”

“So, is that it? You’ve come here to kill me? Have you really let yourself be manipulated by Sherlock Holmes already?”

“No one is manipulating me,” Billie swallowed. “Not anymore. I need the truth.”

“Hmm. The truth.” Peter frowned in mock consideration. “How’s this?”

Before Billie could react, the man was grabbing the girl’s arm, forcing the gun to point skyward. His other hand wrapped itself around her neck.

“You were supposed to kill Sherlock Holmes and his little friends. One task. I gave you one assignment. Seven years of my time. And you couldn’t do it. You want the truth?” Peter was now a breath away from her face. “Once you killed them, I was going to kill you.”

The last words were whispered, and yet they fell louder than screams upon Billie’s ears.

“I always was one for dramatics,” Moriarty laughed. “What’s the point of murder if it’s not fun? Watching Sherlock play my games. Watching him dance. Oh, that was delightful! The tears. The self-loathing. Now, though, I’m bored. You failed and I’m bored. Do you what I do when I’m bored?”

The grip around Billie’s throat tightened and she used her free arm to lash out, punching her attacker as she brought her knee up to his groin. Moriarty sidestepped and slammed the struggling girl against the wall.

“It’s not dramatic,” Moriarty shrugged. “This isn’t how my game was supposed to end. But, oh well. I still get some fun in this. Some satisfaction. I know your daddy’s coming for you. What fun it’ll be to watch him come all the way just to watch you die. Oh,” he giggled, “the tears. Maybe this is fun! All those years, just to lose you again. Daddy, Mummy, Sherlock, all destroyed with one crushed windpipe. Yes, I quite like that. How about you?”

Moriarty paused, eyes alighting.
“Ah, yes! Showtime! Daddy’s home. Why, hello, Johnny!”

Moriarty angled himself and Billie around so that they were facing the form that had been sneaking up behind them.

“Aurora has been a very, very naughty girl,” Moriarty clicked his tongue disapprovingly. “Would you like to punish her, or shall I?” He paused at the brief look of confusion on other man’s face. “Oh, she hasn’t told you, has she? Your precious little Billie is long dead, Johnny boy. Sorry. This is Aurora. My own creation. Do you like?”

“Shut up,” John hissed.

“Oh, come now, John. It fits just so, doesn’t it? Our very own little Sleeping Beauty. I doubt your small brain ever even made the connection, hmm? I bet Sherlock figured it out, but just didn’t tell you. ‘A daughter was born and they called her Aurora. Yes, they named her after the dawn for she filled their lives with sunshine.’ Aurora means dawn, doofus! See? You did this. You did all of this. You named her Dawn. You gave me the perfect idea. The perfect plan. And then, just like the King and Queen in the story, you couldn’t save her,” Moriarty mocked a frown. “It really does fit quite perfectly, doesn’t it?”

“I am going to kill you,” John’s voice was barely above a growl.

“The soldier,” Moriarty spat. “Brave and stupid ‘til the very end, is it?”

“Let her go,” John ordered, raising his own gun toward the criminal.

“Oh, Johnny. I don’t think you’re in much of a position to be giving orders, do you?” Moriarty waved a hand at the wheelchair.

“My arm is working just fine,” John leveled the weapon.

“So is mine,” the psychopath purred, jerking Billie by her neck.

“I will drop you.”

“Yes, and then your daughter will be dead. Not very clever, are we, Johnny?” Moriarty was giggling.

“I’m a lot better bloody shot than you think,” John grinned dangerously.

“So are they.”

And just like all those years ago, red dots decorated John’s chest, sending his mind flashing back to swimming pools and explosives.

“Are you really so predictable? Do you really think you got in here, in that,” Moriarty’s eyes roamed over the metal chair, “without my say so? I wanted you here, Johnny.”
When Skies Are Grey

“I’m a lot better bloody shot than you think,” John grinned dangerously.

“So are they.”

And just like all those years ago, red dots decorated John’s chest, sending his mind flashing back to swimming pools and explosives.

“Are you really so predictable? Do you really think you got in here, in that,” Moriarty’s eyes roamed over the metal chair, “without my say so? I wanted you here, Johnny.”

“Are you really so predictable?” The former soldier tilted his head.

Before Moriarty could answer, the crimson lights began to disappear.

“Oh, oh, oh,” Moriarty chuckled. “Well, isn’t this fun? Brought some back up with you, did you? Sherlock’s brother’s men?”

“Close enough.”

Moriarty whirled around, still keeping Billie close. His eyes glittered with both surprise and amusement.

“Well, well. The Ice Man himself.” The criminal was grinning like the Grinch, as if it surely was Christmas for him.

Mycroft didn’t offer a verbal retort as he finished crossing the threshold.

“Ah, ah, ah,” Moriarty pulled Billie backwards with him. “Now, now. That’s quite far enough. So, is baby brother in the wings, then? Hello Sherlock! Why don’t you come down and play?” He shouted to the ceiling.

A scarlet circle blinked against the consulting criminal’s shoulder and Moriarty swiftly backed himself behind Billie and against a wall.

“Now this is fun!” Moriarty trilled. “Who will fire first? Kill me, you kill dear little Aurora too.”

“Her name is Billie,” John spat.

“Oh, it doesn’t really matter when it’s decorating a tombstone, does it?”

The man had hardly finished his sentence when Billie brought her head backwards. Her skull connected with her captor’s nose and he stumbled sideways, though still keeping his hold on his hostage. Without hesitation, Billie followed the blow with a twist of her body and a thrust of her elbow and leg. The consulting criminal was still staggering as she swept his legs out from underneath him. As she turned to run, the man caught her ankle. The two tumbled together, making a shot by the marksman impossible.

The entire take down and scuffle happened so swiftly and suddenly, neither man on the ground had time to properly react. Mycroft tensed and just as both he and John were moving toward the fight, it ceased.

Billie was on her back, coughing and panting, while Moriarty rested on shaky knees, the girl’s secondary gun that had previously been holstered to her ankle now in his hands. He already had it aimed at her before they had finished breaking apart. Billie and the others froze.

Four guns were now trained on Moriarty.

One now on Billie.

The numbers mattered little.
It could have been one hundred snipers versus a single handgun. None of them would risk Billie’s safety.

Except, perhaps, Billie.

“Do you think I care if you shoot me?” Billie’s laugh sounded more like a sob. “You already killed me!”

“So dramatic,” Moriarty rolled his eyes. “Teenagers.”

“Everything you told me was a lie.” Billie spat the words with both figurative and literal blood. “I trusted you! Everything I thought, that I believed, was a lie. I don’t even know who I am because of you.”

“Like I said,” Moriarty glanced at John playfully, “teenagers. Seven years I had to put up with you. Children. So forever needy. I was ready to kill you myself. Honestly, Johnny, I did you a favor. Sparing you from all that torment. ‘Where’s my mum?’ ‘I want to go outside.’ ‘Read me a story.’ Here’s a story. Once upon a time, your family was too late and stupid to save you. Everyone dies. The end.”

“I like that ending,” Billie smiled darkly. “Everyone dies. Including you.”

“Everyone, hmm?” Moriarty grinned. “How about we start with dear old dad?”

Moriarty’s aim shifted, coming steadily toward the man in the wheelchair.

“Go ahead,” Billie challenged.

“Billie,” Mycroft began calmly.

“That’s not my name!” The girl screamed. “I have no name. No parents. No family. Friends. Nothing. I have nothing. Except revenge.” She leveled her gun on the consulting criminal.

“Be calm and .”

“I have to do this,” Billie cried out, interrupting Mycroft.

“It’s okay,” John swallowed, in the face of death still attempting to console his lost daughter. “It’s alright.”

“Billie.”

Everyone gave pause at the consulting detective’s voice. Moriarty spared a glance at his chest, now empty of the threatening red dot.

“You have friends. You have family. Two parents. Uncles and Aunts and a grandmother. All of whom would rather die than see you hurt.”

The man hesitated, swallowing, waiting. Finally, Billie turned her head and their eyes locked.


“Godfather?” Billie’s mouth unhinged, her eyes growing into oval orbs of shock, with an undercurrent of other raging emotions.

“I know you remember us,” Sherlock urged. “All of us. Even yourself.”

“No.” Billie was already shaking her head before he finished speaking. “I don’t.”

“Yes, you do. Seven years you were locked away. But something else was locked away too. Those memories. You told me a long time ago that you had a mind palace. Of course, you called it a mind castle. You said you kept things there. Memories. Now, unless you deleted them, I think they’re still there. Locked away. But not forgotten.”

“I - I never told anyone - about my castle,” Billie’s gaze narrowed now, suspicion, and something
else, flickering there.

“You told me.” Sherlock bowed his head, never breaking eye contact with the girl.

“Well, this is getting boring!” Moriarty sighed dramatically.

“Find them, Billie,” Sherlock whispered.

“Time to choose,” the psychopath sange. “Revenge or daddy?”

“You can do this,” Sherlock nodded.

Hesitantly, Billie closed her eyes. Her brow dipped and her forehead tightened.

The castle was darker than she remembered, shadowed by age and neglect and a blackness that had crept far into her soul that it had even touched this secret and sacred place. Tried to poison it, too. The sky had turned over to a grey ash and the pirate ship was falling in on itself. The castle had always been there all that time. In those first years, she could vaguely remember retreating to this place for some semblance of safety and comfort. Why? What was here that had been so important for her to keep? To lock away so that no one, not Moriarty, not even herself, could hurt? What had she let herself forget?

Even approaching the decrepit building now, she could feel the warmth spread over her and somehow, it was familiar. Safety. Comfort. Love.

Eventually, she had abandon finding those things here, having thought to have found them in Peter.

“Three,” Moriarty bit off.

She stepped inside the castle, the darkness giving way to bright and welcoming light. The outside walls might have been tarnished and tampered with, but the inside had remained whole and untouched. She walked, no, ran, to the stairs.

“Think,” Sherlock commanded.

“Can anyone have a Mine Place?” Billie had asked once.

“Mind Palace,” Sherlock corrected as the child crawled onto his lap. “I suppose. But most people are too dull to do so. Why?

“I think I got one,” she whispered in her godfather’s ear as though it were a secret.

“Two.”

“Daddy’s room. Smells like his face when he kisses me good morning.”

“Aftershave.”

“Shh. I go to his room when I’m scared. And then - your room! Lots of books! So many. I don't know what they are. You do. And pirate stuff like on the ship 'cause you were a pirate, 'member I said you were a pirate? Billy's there. Not me. Not me Billie. Billy. The head.”

“Skull.”

“Shh! Music too! And you singing! Your via - vi-lin. And the song. The song you sing to me. 'Member? Sing it!”

“Remember.”

“Well I’ve never been a man of many words. And there’s nothing I could say that you haven’t heard.”

“But I’ll sing you love songs ‘til the day I die,” Billie’s soft voice joined in for this line and she tried to continue but stumbled over her words.
“The way I’m feeling, I can’t keep it inside. I’ll sing a sweet serenade whenever you’re feeling sad. And a lullaby each night before you go to bed. I’ll sing to you for the rest of your life. The way I’m feeling, I can’t keep it inside. No, I can’t keep it inside.”

“One!”

“You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,” Mary held Billie tight against her breast as she rocked the young girl on her lap. “You make me happy when skies are grey.”

Here, Billie tried to sleepily join in. She would yawn and slip over the words as she breathed in the scent of her mother. The scent she would later store in that Mind Castle.

“You’ll never know dear, how much i love you.”

John came in from the kitchen, slinging a towel over his shoulder and picking up the dozing toddler from her mother’s arms. She nestled into his neck and warmth and the funny word Sherlock would later teach her. Aftershave. She’d store that in her castle too. Along with the warmth. The safety.

“So please don’t take my sunshine away.”

“Wait!” Billie’s eyelids snapped open as she screamed. “Just, wait.”

Billie glanced from Moriarty to Sherlock, and then to her father. Taking in a measured breath, Billie lowered her weapon.

She had barely finished that breath, though, when Moriarty suddenly shifted his aim. The gun came glaring at the girl. If anyone had blinked, they would have missed what happened next.

Moriarty’s gun fired just as the seemingly wheelchair bound John Watson sprang forward. His body collided with the criminal. In the same moment, both Sherlock and Mycroft leapt and grabbed Billie, holding her to the ground and out of the line of fire. Moriarty brought the pistol up against the side of John’s head right after delivering a star inducing punch to the face. The soldier’s brief disorientation was enough to grant Moriarty the opportunity to break free. No sooner had he done so, though, was John on him again. Moriarty struggled and shifted, intending to shoot the soldier. Just as his finger was about to squeeze the trigger, another shot fired.
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Moriarty’s body froze above John’s, straddling the doctor. The doctor, whose finger was still squeezing the trigger of the gun he had rammed in the consulting criminal’s ribcage. The doctor, whose face was now spattered with red specs, like some grim modern art. John spat the madman’s blood from his mouth and shifted underneath the fresh corpse, watching in cruel satisfaction as the psychopath tilted and then crashed sideways to the cement, three vacant holes staring back at him.

Everything and everyone was silent as John struggled to shove the limp form off and away and then he just sat there next to the body, staring at it. It was as if they were all trying to catch their breaths after over 10 years of war with the enemy. To take in what had finally just been done.

The monster was slain.

Moriarty was dead.

No tricks. No games. No illusions.

Dead.

Mycroft slipped off to a corner, whispering into his mobile. It was the crack that broke the dam. Sherlock crossed the room, offering John his hand. The Captain refused it, pushing himself up off the ground with a grunt. Sherlock wasn’t even sure his friend had noticed him standing there.

Once John was able to tear his gaze away from Moriarty, it seemed he only had eyes for his daughter. He might have been limping, but it looked far more like a soldier’s march to everyone present.

The girl was still gaping at the body on the floor when her father's arms found her. His strong embrace enveloped her and she was pulled away from the corpse by that warmth and safety and - Aftershave.

Billie’s head snapped toward her father, their eyes meeting in a moment neither would ever forget. They held each other’s gaze for a long time, neither speaking, until Billie’s body turned to butter in her father’s arms, melting into him. The pair crumpled to the ground together, John safely holding and guiding his daughter, putting weight on a leg warm with blood. If he noticed, he didn't show it. It was worth all the pain in the world to have that moment. To have her.

Sherlock watched from a distance, blinking back emotions. It wasn't until he heard the clattering from above that he woke from his trance. It was over. She should have come down by now. Clearing his throat, the detective moved across the room, pausing for only a moment to clasp a quick hand on his blogger's shoulder as he walked. He could hear the faint repetition of apologies mumbled against tear soaked cotton. He climbed the metal staircase briskly, coming to a stop at the top.
"Where is she?"

Chief Detective Inspector Gregory Lestrade holstered his weapon as he leaned over a body, fingers finding a pulse.

"Other side," the man panted, nodding all the way across to the other side of the warehouse. "They're all down. Inside and out. Told the boys to hang back out there. Figured you guys would all want a moment."

Lestrade was still speaking when Sherlock took off down the catwalk, jogging through the metal maze around swinging chains and weapons and unconscious bodies. He was being irrational, he scolded himself. Sentiment. No one else could have made that shot. But had it all been too much? He had been reluctant regarding her involvement in this. He knew he -

"Mary."

Sherlock breathed the name like a prayer as he knelt down next to the crouched woman. Her rifle was still poised, her body still taut with tension.

"Mary," he whispered it again when the woman didn't respond.

Mary moved from her scope to stare at the man and Sherlock read it all right there in her eyes. She wasn't in shock or pain. She was watching. Watching John and Billie huddled together on the ground.

"Go to them."

Mary closed her eyes briefly and then frowned.

"I can't."

"Mary, I know you're scared but -"

"Sherlock -"

"- no matter what happens now, she's safe and -"

"Sherlock."

"- she's going to need her parents, both of them to -"

"No, Sherlock!" Mary hissed. "I appreciate the pep talk, but I can't. I can't move. My crutches are over there and my leg has been asleep since I got into position. Now it's just numb."

Sherlock blinked once and then smiled.

"Oh, right. Well, then, Mrs. Watson, would you like to see your daughter?"

The detective held out his arms as his smile turned playful.

"No way am I letting you carry me, Sher-lock!" She was still screaming his name when the man lifted her body off of the floor and into his arms.

"You could've just gotten my crutches for me," she rolled her eyes as they moved across the catwalk.

"And when one of them gets stuck in this poor metal grating and you take a tumble over the edge? John would never let me live it down."

"He's never going to let me live this down," Mary swatted the man. "Now put me down. I took care of six of Moriarty's men in those crutches. I think I can handle walking."

"Think? That doesn't sound entirely confident, Mary. Let's wait until we get down and see your husband for a doctor's opinion."

"I'm a nurse."

""
"And I'm a consulting detective. Now that we've got that settled, why don't you go see your daughter?"

Mary had been too busy arguing to notice that they had already made their way across the catwalk and down the stairs. Once on the ground floor, Sherlock did, in fact, lower Mary to her feet. With one arm around her waist, he led the mother slowly to her child. The closer they came, the farther Mary pulled away from his support until she was limping on her own, just like John. Sometimes their strength surprised even Sherlock.

Mary was still several paces away from her family when Billie glanced up. Breaking away from her father, the girl sprung to her feet and sprinted the short distance, crashing into her mother. Mary kissed her daughter's forehead and cheeks, cupping Billie's face in her hands before twisting her arms around the girl's shoulders. John staggered to stand, Sherlock coming to his aid. The father wrapped his arms around both women. Sherlock made to move away again but was tugged backward. He turned and looked down in confusion before seeing his friend's familiar hand on his jacket sleeve. And that's how they stayed. Billie nestled between both her parents while Sherlock rested his hands along both his friends' backs. He felt them falter every now and again and steadied them when they did. He would stay there until they no longer needed him. Holding them up so that they could hold up their daughter. This was his family and Sherlock Holmes would always hold it together.

Chapter End Notes

Please please please leave a REVIEW and let me know what you think! I had about four different versions of this confrontation and then the rest of this story in mind...and I'm still doubting the one I picked! Originally, Mary was going to be killed, sacrificing herself for Billie right at the end when they thought Moriarty was dead and everyone was taken care of. A henchman was going to wake up and start shooting. After making you all wait TWO YEARS, I decided to play nice and do some editing to give a happier ending. Another version had Billie killing Moriarty and then having to deal with that, but I like the idea of Mary and John both shooting him in the end. Sherlock was the knight earlier and had to save them before. Finally the King and Queen get to take Moriarty down. Just seemed fitting. I also had a version where Moriarty is taken down, but not killed, just imprisoned and then comes back again in the story for one final time between just him and Billie or Billie & her parents or Sherlock. LET ME KNOW if you liked what I finally picked :)

Oh, and yes, the idea of Mary fighting with crutches is absolutely ridiculous, but how awesome would that be to watch, right?
Watch Over You

Chapter Notes

I know the big climax and everything is over, but please stay tuned. These characters still have a lot to deal with now. Just a handful of chapters of how they cope and come together, with some fluffy flashbacks and dramatic moments thrown in.

They didn’t need a safe house or underground hospital room anymore and when the small family finally was ready to break apart from one another, they rode together to Bart’s in the back of an ambulance. Protocol didn’t exactly take precedent when Mycroft Holmes and a Chief DI were present. Sherlock followed in one of his brother’s cars, while the ambulance was escorted by two police vehicles, and a few more discrete ones of Mycroft’s doing. There was still a chance there were stragglers out there, followers of the madman who might still carry out his wishes. Chances were slim, though, and they all breathed freely on the way to the hospital.

Mary was admitted and was going to need to stay in hospital for another two days, at least. For their own sakes, thankfully none of the doctors tried to scold their patient about running around and taking out Moriarty’s cronies not 24 hours after major surgery. Molly came to visit and looked a little jealous that she hadn’t seen the feat for herself. She made Mary promise to teach her proper self-defense once the woman recovered. Ever since being overtaken by the men that night Billie was kidnapped, Molly had signed up for every self-defense and fighting class she could. None of it compared to kicking the crap out of full grown men with a pair of standard hospital issued crutches.

John received new stitches and a cane, again. He also had a couple threads put through his cheek from where Moriarty had delivered quite the punch.

Greg got a bandage for a bump on his forehead and some cream for a nasty cut on his hand after bracing himself on a twisted piece of the metal railing during his scuffle on the catwalk.

The small family was crowded into Mary’s private room. For once, Lestrade had been privy to a plan prior to it taking place and therefore was free from having to take statements for now. He was back at the crime scene with the Yard and Mycroft, tying up loose ends. This wasn’t going to be tidied up and swept away by the eldest Holmes and the British government. Not after everything they went through. Sure, Sherlock’s name had been cleared and Richard Brook proved to be Moriarty years ago, but there was more the world needed to know. They were going to throw Moriarty’s death into the spotlight and see which rats went skittering for their corners, rounding up any stragglers in the madman’s network.

Sherlock would leave tearing down the new web that Moriarty had built up since his return from the grave to his brother. He was needed elsewhere. And, if he was being honest with himself, there was no place he would rather be.

“We knew there had to be one of Moriarty’s men in Scotland Yard,” Sherlock continued his explanation of the plan as Billie listened. “We needed Moriarty to believe that you would come to him, alone, and that John, only John, had followed you. Mrs. Hudson placed the fake call the police about the triple homicide, making certain Lestrade would appear to be out of the way. Mary was busy being ‘in a coma’ and Mycroft was busy ‘keeping me locked up’. All for the sake of the show. While Mary and Lestrade took care of Moriarty’s snipers in the building, a very select group of trusted MI6 and Scotland Yarder’s secured the perimeter, in case Moriarty had backup. We couldn’t risk having anyone we didn’t trust inside that building.”

It had been Billie who had broke the silence after the first waves of doctors and nurses and visitors passed and left the four finally alone. It was the first time she had spoken since leaving the warehouse.

“How did you - I mean - what -”
She had looked to her father, but Sherlock had delivered the explanation.

“I can’t believe it all actually worked,” Mary shook her head, reaching over from the hospital bed to hold her husband’s hand.

John had taken up residence in the chair next to his wife while their daughter slouched in another seat right next to him, head lolling against the crook of her father’s shoulder.

“After seven years of beating us,” Sherlock huffed, “he got cocky.”

There was a long stretch of sobering seconds where they stood and sat together in silence, soaking in everything that had happened and what it all meant now. With each moment that passed, Sherlock watched as Billie’s features and posture shifted just so subtly as she inched herself further from her father. The trauma, fear, adrenaline, it was all fading, and those walls that he had pushed so hard against back at the safe house were rising once more.

They slept together in Mary’s room that night, none of them refusing to be apart from each other. John and Sherlock took the chairs while Billie was brought a small cot. The girl had long since started to doze in her chair. Sherlock and John both worked together to move her more comfortably onto the rollaway. Mary was next to drop off, thanks to a new IV of morphine administered upon her husband’s demand once he had noticed her wincing. John fought sleep for awhile after that, but eventually he too slumped over from exhaustion, joy - and some of his own pain medication - one hand one his wife’s shoulder, while his other cupped his daughter’s fingers.

Sherlock didn’t sleep. He didn’t move. He remained watchful over his little family. The ever loyal knight standing guard over the king and queen and their princess.
Chapter Notes

a little slow, yes, but I think this interaction is important

and for all the Mary haters out there, there was a version where she was killed protecting Billie. I actually quite liked it. It was incredibly dark and emotional yatta yatta yatta. But after making you all wait so long I decided to go with the other version I had wrote. Not to mention, I wasn't sure exactly how Billie would recover after everything she has been through and then losing her mom....considering what Billie went through, I think it's important to have Mary around because she can relate so well. But don't worry - it's pretty much 100% John/Sherlock/Billie from here on out since Mary's stuck in hospital.

The little family spent the entire next day locked away from the rest of the world in that hospital room. Molly popped in before and after her shift, bringing coffee and biscuits both times. Greg and Mycroft each stopped by in the afternoon, making small talk and hedging around anything that had to do with the media circus that was Moriarty’s death. The men were keeping Sherlock updated via text, but the detective warned them not to say anything of the madman in front of Billie. By the time Mrs. Hudson and several others were sending messages of their desire to visit, Billie had already slowly worked her way to the other side of the room over the hours with excuses of restlessness and having to use the bathroom six times. If John and Mary noticed, which Sherlock was sure they did, neither parent said anything. The room was small and crowded with a seemingly revolving door of doctors and nurses and MI6 members letting them know they were changing shifts. Sherlock sent off a quick text to all, barring any further visitors. They were keen enough not to challenge the order. Mrs. Hudson replied that she would have sweets waiting for them when they returned home and nothing more. The self-proclaimed sociopath didn't blame the girl for needing her space. In fact, if he had been in her place, he most likely would have climbed out of the window when no one was looking by now.

“John,” Mary patted her husband’s hand after they had finished their mixture of hospital food and takeaway for dinner. “Go home.”

She was rubbing his arm, but staring at her daughter. Sherlock wasn’t the only observant one in the room.

“It’s getting late and I don’t think any of you really want to spend another night trying to sleep on chairs or a rollaway. You need a proper night’s rest. All of you.”

“Mary,” John glanced between his daughter and his wife, features torn. “I can’t leave you, alone .”

“What? Are you kidding? I’ve got Heckel and Jeckel right outside this door.” She didn’t mention the 9mm stashed under her pillow.

John smiled softly down at his wife. He could see right through that plastered brave face and loved her all the more for putting it on. Of course, the mother wanted more than anything not to be separated from her daughter after all this time. But she also knew Billie needed space, time, rest. A decent bed.

“And I’d appreciate you taking Sherlock home before he burns a hole through the floor of my hospital room.”

“You - live with them?” Billie peered up at the man.

“Sort of,” John replied at the same time Mary said, “yes.”
“What - what about me?” Billie found something interesting on her shoe. “Where do I go now?”

“Now,” John sighed, looking at his daughter with such gentle affection in his gaze it burned. “You come home.”

“What? Really?” Her head snapped up and she looked more skeptical than hopeful. “I thought - maybe - I shot - and hurt - aren’t I going to be arrested?”

“No,” John stood up, crossing the room. “No. We would never let that happen. And everything you did, none of it, was your fault.”

Billie glanced at Mary before their eyes met and the girl looked away. And that was when Mary realized that this was the first moment her daughter had looked at her since the warehouse.

“I’m sure Mycroft can take care of the legal tape,” Sherlock waved a hand dismissively. “I’ll arrange for Lestrade to come by the flat to take our statements another time.”

“That is,” John started slowly, “if you want to. We’re not Moriarty. We won’t make you do anything you don’t want to.”

“No,” Billie shook her head, “I do.”

“Can I have a moment with my daughter?”

They were avoiding her name whenever they could, having noticed the girl’s discomfort every time it was said.

John leaned over and planted a soft kiss on his wife’s forehead, before lowering his mouth to meet hers. Grabbing his cane, John limped from the room and out the door his friend was holding open for him. Sherlock smiled and nodded at the woman before closing the door.

Mary watched as Billie seemed to fold in on herself, arms wrapping around her stomach and head sinking lower with each passing second. A single sneaker tapped against the tile.

“Oh, my darling,” Mary began, “one day, when you’re ready, you and I are going to sit down together and share our stories. You know - you were told - about who I was. What I used to be. Who I used to be. Her story ended when I met John Watson, and Mary Morstan’s story began. I thought my story - my life - couldn’t get any better. That I didn’t deserve it. And then we had a beautiful, amazing, sweet, daughter, and it did. Oh, so much so. Your story, my beautiful girl, is far from over. I promise you. I just need you to know that I am, and always will be, here, when you’re ready to tell it. I love you, my sweet, and nothing you have done or ever will do could possibly change that, please understand. Please.”

“And as for those two boys out there, they love you just as much. They’ll smother you and probably won’t leave your side, but know that it is love. And if they bother you too much, just tell me and I’ll set them straight. They’re men. They like to fix. But I want to tell you something and you need to hear it right now. You don’t need fixing. You are allowed to feel whatever you feel. You are allowed all the time in the world. You are allowed to just be. Okay?”

It was a long moment before Billie nodded, still studying her shoes.

“Now,” Mary cleared her throat, not allowing her daughter to hear the tears that she was choking on, “off you go, my darling.”

Billie hesitated and then obeyed, shuffling out the door. Only when it was shut did Mary finally peel her gaze away from her daughter and turn her head toward the wall, letting it bear silent witness to her sobs.
Sherlock and John allowed Billie her silence as the trio walked out of the hospital and toward the street. Sherlock had interrogated the girl at the safe house to protect them all and the therapists had been Mycroft’s idea - *insistence*. Since the warehouse, though, not a single soul had pressured or prodded her about her time spent with Moriarty, or much else for that matter. When it came time for meals, they asked her what she wanted. John had even limited the doctor and father in him to inquiring after her health only twice.

“What was it like?”

The men turned to face the girl beside them as she shuffled her feet and sunk her hands deeper into her coat pockets. She didn’t need to look up at them to sense their confusion.

“When I - all that time - what was it like?”

It was such a broad and yet specific question with so many, too many answers. Moriarty had filled his daughter’s head with so many lies that he had vowed he would never be dishonest with her. And yet, how was he to answer this without upsetting her? How was he to answer this at all? Words and emotions crowded his heart, stretching its walls until it was hard to breathe. Silently, he directed his daughter to a nearby bench and together they sat, Sherlock hovering just behind John’s shoulder, right where his friend needed him to be.

John cleared his throat once, then twice, rubbing sweaty palms against his knees.

“After - after we found out - you were gone - I - didn’t want to feel anything. I was so angry at - him - at myself. Terrified. Confused. It was a back and forth between being overwhelmed and entirely numb, because I was trying *so* hard, *not* to feel. All I could was think about how scared and alone my daughter must be. About what was going to happen to her. Part of me just wanted it all gone. But that meant you were gone, too. I couldn’t get rid of those emotions, couldn’t forget everything I was feeling, without losing you too. And I wasn’t about to let that happen. You - you were - *are* - worth all of the pain in the world.”

He paused, shoulders stiffening for a moment while he breathed. He was flinging himself right back into that day and into those emotions. Terrified he was telling his fragile daughter too much. But she had to know, didn’t she? Had to know just how much they cared. How much she mattered.

“Time was - different. In a way, I forgot about it completely. It passed so slowly and yet too quickly because every second that passed, was another second you were gone. It was too long, too slow. But the faster it moved, the more time you had been missing and that terrified me. Your mother and I didn’t sleep those first few nights. I felt like I was at war, again. Our fighter instincts had taken over and we couldn’t stop, even for a minute, a second.”

And then Sherlock was squeezing his shoulder and the doctor realized he hadn’t said any of this aloud. And he knew, he knew he wouldn’t be able to repeat any of it, not without crumbling to the sidewalk. He would tell her all of this, and more, one day soon. She would ask again and this time the father and daughter would sit on the couch and John would go through it all again, for her.

Swallowing, John opened his mouth, sure speech would come out this time.

“Like holding our breath.”

John wiped a hand over his mouth and dared to place his other on his daughter’s knee.

“You had our hearts with you, all that time. And we were here, holding our breath. What was it like? It was like - nothing. Because we were *nothing*. We weren’t living, with our hearts with you and our breaths held, we weren’t alive until we saw you again.”

No one spoke and three of them remained there in the silence until Billie stood on shaky legs. She didn’t respond or ask any more questions as they made their way to the street once more. Billie
may have been avoiding speaking about her life those past seven years, but she wanted to know about theirs.

And that was a start.

“How did it happen?”

Again, both men turned toward the girl.

“When he - when I was taken. How did it happen?”

And just like that, all of John’s vows of honesty crashed down on him. He couldn’t just tell her about that one night, all those years ago. She would hear the story on the news or from a stranger sooner or later. But tonight wasn’t the appropriate time or place to tell his daughter of all the death and destruction that a man, a man she had loved and watched die, had wrought. Instead, he looked over at Sherlock, the struggle shining in the soldier’s eyes.

Sherlock took the reigns without question or complaint, offering the abbreviated history in a grand total of five clipped sentences. They wanted to reward and encourage her questioning and curiosity, but couldn’t lay all of that on her fragile shoulders.

“What about -”


Billie didn’t respond, but instead fell back in step with them. Sherlock hailed a cab while Billie failed to suppress a shiver. Without a word, John shed his coat and draped it over his daughter’s shoulders. Billie jerked away before apologizing.

“Nothing to apologize for,” John shook his head, hiding the pain in his voice.

The cab ride was a silent one. Billie kept her distant gaze out the window while Sherlock’s eyes scanned their surroundings at every stop and turn. John, though, couldn’t peel his own eyes away from his daughter.

His daughter.

There, with him. Safe. Going home.

Home.

For the first time in seven years, that word felt right again. Whole.
The Most Important Case

As they stepped out onto Baker Street, both Sherlock and John exchanged glances as they watched Billie for any sign of recognition.

“Speedy’s Cafe?”

“Mrs. Hudson,” John fumbled for his keys in his pocket, “the landlady, your godmother, owns it.”

Billie’s nose was wrinkled and she squinted.

“What is it?” John stopped fighting the locks.

“Nothing,” she shook her head. “Just something about that smell. Like I know it.”

Sherlock and John caught each other’s gazes.

“Listen, Billie,” John started, noting the wince at the name, “when - after - well - I couldn’t live in - in our home - anymore. It’s been years. I can take care of - your room - tomorrow. I just - tonight, you can have our room and -” he paused as his friend went down the hall instead of up the stairs. “Sherlock? Where are you going?”

“To your flat,” Sherlock responded a bit patronizingly.

“Did you not hear anything I just said? Have you forgotten that Mary and I have been living with you?”

Sherlock didn’t reply and so, with a sigh, John followed his friend, Billie close behind.

When he came to the threshold, though, John found himself frozen. Or more appropriately, back in time. The kitchen and sitting room were decorated the same. All of the furniture and pictures had been thoroughly dusted and cleaned. Like the flat had been holding its breath all this time right along with them.

“Sherlock, what did you -”

“Called in some favors when we first received the message hidden in the static.”

“But - what was a whole week before we - before we found her.”

“I’m aware.”

It was Billie’s turn to stiffen.

“You - you were that sure you’d find me? That you’d bring me home?”

John’s legs felt like they were going to buckle underneath him as she called it “home”. He caught the detective’s gaze as the man spoke.

“Always.”

For just a flicker of a moment, John thought he saw a small shadow of a smile fighting against Billie’s lips.

“Your room is there,” Sherlock pointed. “You’ll have to forgive me. I do not know what teenage girls fancy. I did, however, have help. I hope it’s to your liking. Anything can be changed though.

Billie floated cautiously toward the ajar door. John desperately desired to follow her; partially to not let her out of his sight, and partially out of curiosity as to what Sherlock’s idea of a female teenager’s bedroom was.

He was about to offer a word of gratitude when he heard the scream.

Both men bolted to the bedroom in time to see Billie backing wildly out of it.
“What is it?” John tended to his daughter while Sherlock swept the room.

“The dog,” Billie breathed.

“Blackbeard?” Sherlock came out of the room and furrowed his brow.

“I - I don’t like dogs.”

And just like that, they could see the little girl Moriarty had taken. Underneath the false bravado and assassin’s training, there was someone else entirely.

“It’s okay,” John reassured her, though not pressing for answers. “Sherlock.”

The detective obeyed the single worded instruction, taking the old canine out of the bedroom and the flat.

“Are there anymore?” Billie asked tentatively.

“No,” John shook his head. “Just Blackbeard, the old boy. Sherlock bought him for you for your - your birthday. You never got to meet him.”

“He - he bought me a dog?”

“Does that surprise you?”

“No - yeah. He - he just - he scares me.”

“Sherlock?”

Billie nodded.

“Billie, Sherlock is your godfather. Other than your mum and me, there is no one that loves you more. When you - when Moriarty took you - we all blamed ourselves. But I think Sherlock the most. Moriarty was his enemy. He thinks Moriarty took you to hurt him. That all this, is his fault. And he’s right. If I had never met Sherlock, I would’ve never stayed in London. Never would’ve met your mother. Never had you. That I blame and thank Sherlock for entirely. Nothing else. Moriarty is a madman. What he does isn’t Sherlock’s, or your, fault.”

“Does he hate me now?”

“Jes - no, no. Never. He was just - scared. He might not look like it, but Sherlock was really scared. Worried. About you. Me. Your mum. Sometimes Sherlock, he, he doesn’t show his feelings well. The git pretends and swears he doesn’t have any at all. We know better. You did, especially.”

“Me?”

“I’m pretty sure Sherlock fell head over heels for you the moment he saw you, maybe even before that. We all did. The two of you,” he shook his head and laughed, “like peas in a pod. I was honestly jealous sometimes.”

“He still scares me,” she swallowed.

“That’s alright. I’m sure a lot scares you right now. And that’s fine. Just tell us when something does. It’s okay to be scared.”

“No it’s not.”

“Did Peter tell you that?”

Billie nodded.

“Well, he lied. You can be scared. You were so brave for so long. I think you can be afraid now. But I want you to know that we’re never going to let him hurt you again. Alright? We’ll talk more tomorrow. This’ll take time. And that’s okay. I’m right in the other room and Sherlock is just
upstairs. So is Mrs. Hudson. Just holler if you need anything. Okay?”

When John flipped the light and closed the door, he nearly shouted as his nose nearly crashed against Sherlock’s.

“Jes - Sherlock. You’re lucky I don’t have my gun. See you’re eavesdropping.”

“See your daughter’s scared of me.”

“Well, you could work on your bedside manner a bit. You practically threatened her at the safehouse.”

“I acted in the best interest of everyone’s safety. Besides, my methods worked. Moriarty is gone. Billie is safe -”

“Yeah, I know. And you know I’m bloody thrilled and grateful, but she needs to feel safe here. We’re probably lucky she doesn’t remember being taken. She might’ve not set foot in this flat again.”

“Your safety, along with Mary’s, is also important to me. I had to be -”

“I get it, Sherlock. I do. But the plan’s over. Moriarty’s gone. Like you said, it worked. It wouldn’t kill you to turn down the act a bit.”

“What act ?”

“The I’m Not Human act,” John rolled his eyes. “It’s bollocks. We all know it. But Billie doesn’t. You won’t look at her. You barely speak .”

“I spoke directly .”

“To explain your plans. You’ll share your genius with a skull, Sherlock. And then that explanation of what happened? You were telling her the story, granted the shortest version possible, of how she was taken and why, and it sounded like you couldn’t bloody well care less. She needs to see something . Fear, happiness, something, anything.”

“Have you been seeing your therapist again, John?” Sherlock sniffed, sticking his nose toward the ceiling.

“Don’t. Don’t turn this on me like you always do. Things get real, emotions turn up, and Sherlock Holmes has to insult someone lest anyone actually think he cares for a change!” John’s shout was capped in a whisper.

“What would you suggest, hmm? Sit at her bedside, reading her stories and giving her warm milk?”

“That’s not what I meant .”

“Then tell me what to do!”

Sherlock, for the first time, was neither sarcastic nor teasing. The sheer sincerity of his words hit John like a slap to the face. For a long moment, he found himself incapable of speech.

“I am - unfamiliar - in these areas,” Sherlock swallowed. “I know how to convince her Moriarty was lying. That was easy. Basic psychology and logic. There was evidence of his lies. I plan, John. I make plans. I solve cases. Use data. Logic.”

“She isn’t a case,” John shook his head.

“I know that,” Sherlock snapped. “But she was .”

“Oh my -” John’s eyes blew wide. “You never cried. Never grieved. I just assumed it was because - well - you’re you. You made her into a case. One of your cases.”

“The most important case,” Sherlock corrected. “It was the only way I would solve it.”
“Will caring about them help save them?”

“Nope.”

“Then I’ll continue to not make that mistake.”

“Emotions are distracting,” Sherlock bit off.

“But I saw you get angry.”

“As much as I think sentiment is useless, anger can offer a sharp focusing .”

“I saw you more than angry, Sherlock.”

“As much as I pride myself in reason over emotion, yes, there were times. But I merely - pushed them aside, as best I could. It was the only way. But now, now -”

“Now you can’t.”

“The case is over,” Sherlock repeated distantly. “And I’m - I’m feeling . Scared. Angry. Happy. Sad. All these tedious emotions. I don’t know what to do with them. I - I don’t know what to do with Billie. She is - no longer a case.”

“She was never just a case. Not even you could manage that. Maybe you buried your feelings, but you didn’t delete them. This is normal.”

“I do not think I like normal,” Sherlock frowned.

“No one does.”

“But what do I do ?”

“Your best, Sherlock. You just do your best.”

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