

The Mysterious and Baffling Case of the Girl

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The Mysterious and Baffling Case of the Girl

by [Rosencrantz95](#)

Summary

She walked in and out of 221 B Baker Street in under five minutes. But it would take Sherlock far longer to solve her case. She may even solve it for him. See trailer on Youtube, entitled "The Girl a BBC Sherlock fanfiction"

The Girl

The Mysterious Case of The Girl

Sherlock was bored. Which meant he was bothering the hell out of me as I tried to concentrate on writing up the story of our latest case: The Actual Horse of a Different Colour. I sat there, typing furiously while he made a great deal of noise in the kitchen. I knew that I had very little time before Mrs. Hudson stormed up those stairs and scolded us both for the noise, so I kept my head down and stayed where I was rather than give Sherlock a piece of my mind. It wouldn't do any good, anyway. I had given him a piece of my mind of several occasions and he always threw it back in my face.

“Oh. Oh this is completely brilliant! John, come have a look!” Sherlock shouted to me. I debated ignoring him, then decided that would only cause him to come to my desk and read over my shoulder—which I absolutely despised.

So instead, I replied with as much patience as I could muster. “What have you done now? I swear I'm not cleaning up your messes anymore. You do know I don't live here, anymore, right?”

“Oh don't be difficult. Just come have a look.” Sherlock actually laughed. I wondered briefly if I had recently checked his hiding places. He had seemed perfectly sober when I had first entered 221B Baker Street earlier that morning. And he had sworn that he'd been clean for quite some time. Still, I knew better than to trust his word when he didn't have the distraction of a case. Reluctantly, I stood and walked to the kitchen to see what the fuss was about. I saw before me my dear friend, Sherlock Holmes, grin manically at a three-foot tall purple flame blazing on the stove.

“Jesus! Sherlock!” I shouted, rushing to smother the flame. However, he grabbed my arm before I could reach a towel.

“But don't you see?! This means I was correct to assume that the substance we lick on envelopes is in fact composed almost entirely of potassium!”

“What does that matter?” I didn't wait for an answer. I just shook off his grip and grabbed the nearest towel to put out the flame, which was getting dangerously close to the wooden cabinets just above the stove. Completely unfazed that his flat nearly went up in flames, Sherlock just looked at me quizzically.

“Well of course it doesn't matter. What matters is I was right.”

“Yes of course... why didn't I guess....” I muttered sarcastically.

“You seem angry with me.” It wasn't a question; as always, he was just observing.

“Frustrated, Sherlock. The word is frustrated.” And the more he stared at me, the more frustrated I became. “How did you even get the flames up that high? If you wanted to test

something, couldn't you have... I don't know! Done something a little less pyrotechnic?"

"Well I did." He said simply, "But once the liquidized glue from the envelopes caught the flame, it grew much more quickly than I had anticipated." He looked so impressed with himself. "Didn't I tell you it was brilliant?"

"Sherlock, I'm not a fan of the idea of you doing meaningless experiments like this when you seem to have absolutely no perception of your surroundings!"

"Don't be ridiculous! I have *excellent* perception of my surroundings! It's part of what I do!"

"I don't want to hear it!" I shouted. "I *know* what you do—I don't care. You need to be more careful."

"It could be worse." He said shrugging, completely unaffected by my tone. He started out of the room. "I could be shooting up."

"Sherlock, that's not funny." I warned.

"Oh please, John. Don't get excited. I haven't used anything since yesterday morning--."

"Wait—Yesterday morning? Sherlock, when I came here this morning, you told me you had been clean for *weeks*!"

"Well, obviously, I was lying." Perhaps it was because I was tired from the late night with Mary and the new baby; or perhaps I was ready for a reason to yell at him... but I started seeing red.

"Sherlock, are you serious? You can't just lie about that! You swore, to me and Mycroft, you swore you'd tell us!"

"You can stop your yelling. Molly already scolded me last night."

"You told *Molly* the truth, but you lied to me—to my *face*."

"Yes. Why?"

"You selfish bastard—!"

Suddenly there was a timid knock at the door. Mrs. Hudson stood in the doorway.

"Now really, boys! We have neighbors! And it breaks an old woman's heart to see you two fighting like this."

We were both silent. We muttered apologies, but didn't look at each other.

"In any case, you have a client." Mrs. Hudson stepped to the side to reveal a girl with startlingly blue eyes and curly black hair pulled up into a messy ponytail. She wore an overlarge emerald green sweater, with the collar of a white button down shirt sticking out. Her dark jeans were simple and straight and were met with a pair of black combat boots at

her feet. I thought for a moment that I recognized her face, but I knew I had never seen her in my life. She couldn't be more than 16 years old.

I pulled up a chair for her as Mrs. Hudson left us to our business. As I sat in my usual chair and Sherlock in his, I noticed she was staring quite intently at Sherlock. He, however, gave her a quick glance, and then made a face that I knew meant he wasn't interested in taking her case. He grabbed the news paper from the table and began reading, his face completely covered by the paper. I didn't care if Sherlock wasn't interested; I knew the only way to be sure he wouldn't do anymore dangerous, meaningless experiments or go off and get high was to get him a case to solve. I'm ashamed to admit it, but I was silently praying that this girl was here to tell us of a murder. However she didn't. In fact, she didn't say anything. She just continued to stare at Sherlock.

"So...erm... How can we help you?" I asked, trying to get her attention.

Without even glancing in my direction, she asked quietly, "Are you Sherlock Holmes?"

"No." Sherlock said as I said, "Yes."

The girl looked over at me, confused.

"Well, I mean, yes *he* is." I explained.

She smiled at me and stared at me for a moment before rising to her feet. "Thank you," she said, "you've been very helpful." Then she strode from the room confidently.

"What was that?" I asked Sherlock, staring after the girl.

He turned the page of his paper and replied, "Boring."

Alert Scotland Yard

Chapter 2

Mary was going back to work and we had yet to find a sitter for Amelia. Mrs. Hudson had offered to babysit any time we needed her, but she was about to go out of town visiting some relative or another. We had run out of options, and I had run out of vacation days.

“Just ask him!” Mary was looking at me with that impish smile of hers. She found my frustration amusing, apparently.

“I don’t know that he’s ready.” I said quickly. All I received in return was another knowing smile. Mary knew as well as I did that Sherlock was surprisingly great with Amelia. He’d been around her plenty of times, but Mary and I had always been present for that.

“It’s cute that you’re so worried,” Mary said, kissing me on the cheek, “but we really have run out of other options, John. Besides, what do you think he’s going to do? Stick the baby in the microwave?” She chuckled as she walked to the bathroom to finish getting ready for work, but suddenly all I could think of was the image of Sherlock sticking my baby daughter in the oven or otherwise doing something else completely stupid and unsafe. I shook the thought out of my head.

Over in the corner of our little bedroom, Amelia’s crib sat. She was awake and bright eyed. She caught my eye and smiled an irresistible, toothless smile. My heart seemed to skip a beat. Over the past few months, I had experienced a great many moments of overwhelming joy, just from looking at her—even more so when I watched Mary rocking her, or playing with her. I lifted Amelia into my arms. She fussed for a moment, then her pudgy hands were suddenly grabbing at my face and she giggled as she pulled on my hair.

“What if he’s busy?” I called to Mary, really reaching for some excuse.

“You said yourself that he’s not. You’ve been looking for a good distraction for him...” She came back into the bedroom, adjusting her earrings before breaking into a wide smile at the sight of Amelia. I transferred the baby into Mary’s arms. “What could be more distracting than these chubby cheeks?” She gave Amelia kisses until she squealed with delight. Mary looked at me and seeing the doubt in my eyes, she said seriously, “John, honestly. How many times have you trusted Sherlock with your life?”

“This is different....”

“And how many times have you trusted him with my life?”

“A fair few....”

“Then you need to be able to trust him with this. It’s just for a couple of hours, and I know he can handle it. My only concern is how well you’ll be able to handle leaving her with someone who isn’t you or myself.” As usual, I knew she was right.

“You’re right. Of course, you’re right.” I kissed her gently and conceded, “I’ll take Mia to Baker Street on my way to work. You go on ahead.”

I hesitated in front of 221 B. Amelia was already sound asleep again in her carrier. I sighed. I knew it was silly to be so worried. I knew I could trust Sherlock with this. There was a part of me that knew the real reason I was so apprehensive had nothing to do with Sherlock’s babysitting abilities. I was worried about him. *Really* worried. He couldn’t keep living this way, jumping from distraction to distraction just to avoid doing something stupid. When we shared the flat, it was easier to keep an eye on him and his...habits.

I rang the bell and a moment later, Mrs. Hudson answered the door and greeted me with a cheery smile and a warm hug. After exchanging the usual pleasantries, I asked her if Sherlock was upstairs.

“Of course he is.” She shook her head, “Hardly goes anywhere else these days.” I nodded, unsure what to say. I felt guilty that I had been moving on and living life while he still seemed stuck here. “I’ll just head up to see him, then, shall I?” I said, giving Mrs. Hudson a quick smile before heading up the narrow staircase.

I balanced the handle of the baby carrier in the crook of my arm, careful not to wake Amelia. After a moment, we reached the top of the stairs at the first landing. As usual, the door was wide open. I knocked sharply as I poked my head in.

“Sherlock? Are you here?” I called.

“Obviously. To come up here, you must have talked with Mrs. Hudson and she in turn would have informed you that I’m in.” Sherlock walked into the living room from the hall, buttoning up the last few buttons of his shirt. He didn’t look up at me as he grabbed a book and sat in his usual spot. “Otherwise, you would not have proceeded up the stairs to my flat.”

“You know, a simple yes or no is fine every now and then.” I said as I entered the room with which I was so familiar. “Or even a ‘Hello, John! How are you?’ would be nice.”

“So you need me to watch after Amelia but you’re not sure you want to leave her here with me.” He closed the book with a snap and with his finger resting on his lips in a quizzical fashion, he studied me.

“Okay. How could you have possibly *observed* that?” I asked incredulously, eyeing Amelia out of the corner of my eye as she squirmed in her sleep.

“I didn’t. Mary called.” There was no indication that he was upset or hurt by my reluctance. I hoped he knew without me having to say it that it had nothing to do with my trust in him, but rather my concern for his well-being. We were both silent for quite some time as we sat there observing each other. Although, as usual, I had the feeling that he was far more comfortable with the silence than I was. It was like having a staring contest with a statue—a statue I happened to know very well; I knew I would lose, but I’d be damned if I didn’t at least try.

“Oh sod this.” I finally broke, as we both knew I would. I thought for a moment I saw a flicker of satisfaction cross Sherlock’s face, but I ignored it. “You know I trust you. You have to know by now that I trust you.”

He simply nodded.

“Will you...” I sighed, angry with myself for being so concerned, “Will you look after Amelia today?”

“No.”

“No?” Well I certainly wasn’t expecting that, “What do you mean, ‘no’?”

“If it is against your better judgment to do so, then you shouldn’t.”

“Sherlock, it’s not against my better judgment! For God’s sake, I ended up with you as my best friend—and with everything that happened with Mary... I think we can safely say that I don’t appear to have a better judgment.” I was chuckling and shaking my head by then end of my explanation.

“Then ask me again.”

“What?”

“Ask me again—only don’t be afraid of it.”

“Are you serious?” I stared at him. His icy blue eyes were unwavering. He said nothing. “Fine. Sherlock?”

“Yes, John?”

“Would you watch Amelia today for Mary and me?”

“Yes of course, John.” And before I could comment on how infuriating he was, Sherlock was crossing the room and lifting Amelia up into his arms.

“Sherlock, wait, she’s asleep--.” But it was too late. Amelia starting crying, and then she started *screeching*.

“What? What have I done? Why is she doing that?” Sherlock asked quickly, completely confused.

“You can’t wake a sleeping baby, Sherlock.” I said patiently, trying hard not to laugh at his expense. I took Amelia from his outstretched arms and started to bounce her gently. “It’s like...it’s like if Anderson were to--.”

“Oh say no more. I understand.” Sherlock made the face that could almost exclusively be associated with Anderson.

Amelia started to quiet down and was quickly falling asleep again. I held her and rocked her and when she was finally out, I stared at her, smiling as her tiny little nostrils flared in her sleep. It was several moments before I realized that Sherlock was staring at me.

“What?” I asked. I was used to him studying me; he had been doing so since the moment we met. However, he rarely ever did so with any sort of expression of emotion.

“You seem genuinely happy, John.”

“Well, I am.”

“How do you get that way?” He approached the question like he approached anything: with the attitude of a scientist... an obnoxiously arrogant scientist. But I understood what he meant. Sherlock spent his life searching for distractions—ways to put his over-active mind to use. He hardly ever stopped to enjoy a moment of victory or mourn a loss. I suppose that’s what you get when you’re a sociopath. Excuse me, a high-functioning sociopath.

“It’s not a formula, Sherlock.” I started to explain as I gently placed Amelia back in her carrier. “It’s different for everyone, I suppose. What makes me happy might not someone else happy at all. In fact, it might make them miserable or...bored.” When he didn’t say anything, I wondered if he was asking this because he was actually envious of the life I was building with Mary. “Or, if they tried it, they could be genuinely happy too.” He didn’t seem to understand that I was referring to him. “They might even find someone as... intelligent as themselves?” Still no response. I honestly didn’t have time for this, and even less patience. “You could find someone, Sherlock. You could make someone very... erm... very happy. I’m sure of it.”

“Oh I highly doubt it, John. I hardly make a good friend.”

“I’m not arguing with you there.”

“I certainly wouldn’t do well in any other sort of domestic relationship. Nor do I have any real desire to pursue one.”

“It’s just a thought, Sherlock. I’m not saying it’s the only way to be happy.”

Sherlock looked like he was about say something else, but there was a knock at the door. We both turned to look and saw a pale woman standing in the doorway, looking quite out of place. She was dressed in a very expensive grey skirt suit. Her brown hair was slicked back and twisted perfectly into a tight bun. But the expression on her face was the most noticeable feature. This woman, whoever she was, did not want to be here. And she stared long and hard at Sherlock. It was instantly clear that they knew each other. Or at least, it was clear that she knew him.

“Sherlock. It’s been a while.” She said with her lips pursed. I wasn’t surprised. Sherlock had quite a talent for pissing people off. I just wondered what he had done this time.

“Has it?” Sherlock asked, still confused.

“Don’t tell me you don’t remember me.”

“Clearly I don’t have to tell you. You seem to have deduced as much. Unless you would like me to verbally confirm that I don’t know who you are. I would be happy to do so.” He sat there with one eyebrow raised, his eyes fixed calmly on the woman standing in the doorway, completely unaware that he was making an awkward situation far worse. I had yet to be acknowledged. So I decided to interject before steam could start shooting from the woman’s ears.

“So. Well. Right. Do you have a case for us or...?” Both of them turned to look at me as if they finally realized I was sitting there.

“Not exactly.” She said, turning back to Sherlock, but directing her words to me. “A young girl came by here the other day. I’m hoping you can remember that far back, Sherlock?” Sherlock said nothing, but looked at me quizzically.

“Yes.” I answered, “But she hardly said a word and she left rather quickly.”

Suddenly this woman smiled. “Yes. That sounds like Charlie.”

“Charlie?” I don’t know why, but I had expected to put a more elegant name to the face of the girl.

“Yes. Charlotte. My daughter. She doesn’t have a lot to say when she’s busy thinking. She prefers to watch other people—she says people reveal a lot more with their behavior in an awkward silence than they do with conversation.”

That sounded remarkably familiar. I turned to look at Sherlock and see if he reacted to this. He sat quietly with his hands together like he was praying to himself. His eyes were fixed straight ahead. I couldn’t tell if he was even listening.

“I was just wondering...” The woman said, bringing my attention back to her, “What did she say to the two of you? What did you say to her?” The second part was directed at Sherlock.

His expression changed, though I couldn’t read it, and he still said nothing.

“Well, she left before we could say much of anything.” I answered after a pause. She seemed quite relieved to hear this. She sighed and relaxed into a chair. At this point I knew I was missing something, and I was getting frustrated with the silence.

“*Marianne Russell!*”

I nearly jumped out of my skin, startled at Sherlock’s outburst. Amelia started crying again, so I picked her up and walked to the hall just off the kitchen so I could calm her down. Trying desperately to listen to their conversation, I shushed Amelia and craned my neck in the direction of the living room.

“So you *do* remember me.” Marianne said, clearly unamused as Sherlock laughed.

“Oh I knew I would. I just had to do a little digging.” He seemed very pleased with himself.

“Then have you *deduced* why I’m here, Sherlock?”

“You seem anxious, though most of our clients appear that way when they come to us. However, your anxiety is depicted almost entirely with your excessively erect posture. So, you’re defensive. This is a personal matter—one that you want taken seriously. However you do lack the look of pathetic desperation in your eyes that is inevitable when clients come to a private consulting detective—.”

“Sherlock. I’m not here as a client.” Marianne interrupted. Clearly, she was experienced with Sherlock’s high-speed, blunt observations.

“Of course not. I was obviously getting to that.”

“Sherlock, why don’t you skip the part where you’re an ass and ask her why she is here?” I called impatiently from the hall. Amelia cried louder and I immediately felt guilty. “Mia, my love, it’s alright.” I whispered to her and kissed her forehead.

“Sherlock,” Marianne said seriously, “Charlotte was here... because she was apparently solving a case of her own.” She took a deep breath before continuing; “I only just heard about it from her. Well I read it, actually. She left me a note before she came into London. I’ve hardly seen her since. I think she’s been researching you. She said meeting you in person was essential to fitting the last piece in the puzzle.”

It was suddenly dawning on me why the girl—Charlie—had seemed...*familiar* to me. I returned to the living room and stood there frozen, staring at Sherlock. He didn’t seem to be catching on.

“How exactly do you two know each other?” I asked, trying to keep my voice level.

“Oh he hasn’t told you? Of course he wouldn’t. We were together—engaged actually. For the sake of a case, Mr. Holmes here fooled me into loving him just long enough for him to get the information he needed.”

“Oh that was fourteen years ago! What reason have you got to be upset?”

“It was sixteen years ago, actually. And I didn’t say I was still upset, though believe me I have plenty of reason to be, Sherlock.”

I approached Marianne cautiously and stared at her, “You can’t be serious. I mean. Are you implying...? Surely not.”

“It’s amazing isn’t it?” Marianne laughed, though there was no humor in it.

“What?”

She indicated Sherlock sitting there looking confused, “Genius crime solver. Private consulting detective extraordinaire. And he can’t pick up on what is likely the most shocking bit of information that is staring him right in the face.”

“What on Earth are you going on about?” Sherlock, as always, took great offense to being accused of missing any key bit of information. “What have I missed?”

“My God.” I finally breathed, unsure if I should smile and congratulate my friend or if I should mourn for humanity. “Sherlock.” I said, “It’s a girl.” I started to laugh. I simply couldn’t help myself.

“What are you laughing about? What do you mean it’s a girl, obviously she’s a girl... she’s... she’s... What exactly do you mean?” I could see it was starting to sink in.

“Someone should alert Scotland Yard,” I chuckled, “Because the infamous Sherlock Holmes has a daughter roaming the streets of London.”

How?

Chapter 3

“Is he alright?” Marianne asked, watching Sherlock carefully. Sherlock was sitting there, completely frozen, his eyebrows furrowed and his icy blue eyes staring straight ahead. He hadn’t said a word for quite some time.

“Erm. Yes. I think so. He gets this way some times.” I said remembering when I had asked Sherlock to be my best man. I stared at him for a moment, trying to determine if I should be concerned. Deciding it was best to just wait for him to come to terms with the news, I nodded to myself and settled Amelia back in her carrier. “It may take awhile.” I said to Marianne, “Shall I make us some tea?”

“Oh,” Marianne seemed surprised at my hospitality, “Yes, that would be lovely. Thank you.” I gave her a quick smile and headed to the kitchen. Not surprisingly, there wasn’t much in the kitchen that would be considered safe for ingestion.

“Just gonna have a look downstairs.” I told her, “Mind watching, Mia?”

“Of course.”

I went down the steps and saw that Mrs. Hudson had already left for her trip. I made my way into her kitchen and checked the cupboard where she usually kept the tea. I grinned, glad that I still knew my way around the place I used to affectionately call home. When the water was good and hot, I brought the kettle upstairs with three empty cups and plenty of tea bags. I got back to the sitting room to find Sherlock right where I had left him and Marianne watching closely over Mia. I suddenly felt a surge of sympathy for this woman. Yet another person Sherlock had mercilessly used for the benefit of a case.

“Here we go.” I got her attention and headed to the kitchen table. I set the tray down and cleared the rest of the table off to make space for us both.

“Oh. Thanks very much.” She said and moved into the kitchen. She sat across from me and we both made our own tea. I made Sherlock his tea and placed it on the coffee table in front of him, then returned to the kitchen.

“Wow.” She said and I looked up.

“What?”

“You must know him really well.” She wasn’t angry or jealous, just surprised.

“Well. Yes. I suppose I do. Better than most at, least.” That was the best answer I could come up with. And it was true. But there was more to it. Sherlock had said before that I saved him—that through my friendship, he had been saved. The truth is he saved me too. I told him this

at his grave—at least what I thought had been his grave. And here I was, years later, having forgiven him for putting me through that hell and for countless other things since.... I always found a way to forgive Sherlock Holmes. The man sitting before me had given my life purpose again. He had changed everything over and over again. So yes, of course I knew him well.

“You must have a lot of patience,” she laughed, drinking her tea.

“Sometimes, yes.” I chuckled, “Sometimes none at all.”

We sat quietly and watched Amelia sleeping in her carrier at my feet. After a long pause, I had to ask the question that had been nagging at me since she walked in and glared at Sherlock. “So. How exactly did you meet Sherlock? How did you two end up ...erm... together?”

“Oh. That.” She laughed, “Well, I used to be the manager of this restaurant and he just kept coming in and ordering the same thing: one glass of water, no ice. Finally I just got fed up with him coming in and not getting anything else. I mean he was taking up table space and not even paying for anything! So, I approached his table one afternoon with the intention of telling him off. But when I got there, he had the audacity to smile at me.” She laughed fondly at the memory. “Before I could say I word, he said, ‘It’s about time you came over here to take my order.’” At this, I joined in with her laughter.

“That sounds like Sherlock.” I said, smiling and shaking my head.

“Yeah. Well.” She said with a sigh, “I was quite smitten with him after that. And of course he acted like he was smitten with me.” It was the first time since she entered the flat that she looked a little sad about her connection to Sherlock. Her anger had been replaced with a pair of the saddest eyes I’ve ever seen. Though she said nothing, I could hear her aching clearly. However, I had a hunch that it wasn’t love for Sherlock that made her feel that way, but rather general loneliness.

“And you’re absolutely sure that your daughter is... his? Sherlock’s?” I broke the silence, hoping she’d continue with her story. I also hoped that though Sherlock had yet to move, he was listening to our conversation.

“Yes.” She said simply. “You see we started going out. We weren’t together very long, but we were having a marvelous time. We were both very young, of course. He kept showing up and surprising me in my office in the back of the restaurant. I always told him I had to work late and he always said he didn’t mind. And he’d sit there, and sometimes helped me with my paper work so I could get done faster and we could go back to my flat.” She paused, gave me a tight smile, then looked down and idly stirred her tea as she continued. “I found out much later... that he was investigating my boss—the owner of the restaurant chain. Apparently he was lying on his tax forms and stealing money from his own business and some other nasty stuff. Anyway, Sherlock caught him...but not before he broke things off with me. I had done my part, you see.”

I nodded; unfortunately, I did see. I’d seen him do it before. However, I was still confused about a few things, “But how did....”

“How did I end up pregnant?” She asked, smirking. “Well, he’d been very sweet and gentlemanly about not rushing into sex. But then there was this one night... we shared a bottle of liquor in my office as we went through the paper work...and, I don’t think he intended for it to happen, but right there on my office floor—well we had quite a good time.” She laughed now, genuine and reminiscent. “We were never officially engaged, but he talked about it nearly every day. I was convinced that it was going to happen any day... and then suddenly he’s sitting me down, cold as ice, telling me that he was only using me to get the information he needed. I mean... at least he told me to my face. I suppose that’s... I don’t know, comforting?”

“That makes sense.” I said, though most of my will power was going into not appearing as outwardly baffled and amused as I felt.

“Anyway, I was completely furious at him, and when I found out I was pregnant, I panicked. After everything that had happened, the very last thing I wanted was to see Sherlock again. I figured a man like Sherlock Holmes got that way from his parents or something awful that happened to him. So I became a single mother and did my best to raise her well....”

“Why on earth would you tell her about me if you wanted her to be nothing like me?”

We both jumped, completely startled; we hadn’t noticed Sherlock get up, or that he was now standing right behind our chairs.

“Jesus, Sherlock!” I exclaimed.

“Not now, John, you’ve had your opportunity to interview our guest. It’s my turn.” He said all of this very quickly and pulled another chair up and squeezed it between Marianne and me, shoving me roughly out of the way.

“Alright then,” I grumbled. Sherlock said nothing else, but stared intensely at Marianne. I had witnessed his intensity before, many times. But this was different. He seemed angry, or frustrated, or...something. It was hard to tell exactly. It struck me that he might actually be reacting like a normal human being who had just received the news that they’re a parent. He and I waited for her answer.

“That’s the thing, Sherlock.” She answered sharply. “I never mentioned you. I made up stories of some imaginary man who was, believe me, a much better man than you.”

“Don’t act like that’s some great feat—it isn’t difficult to be a better man than I, or even to invent one, by society’s standards.” Sherlock snapped back, searching for an answer that he couldn’t seem to find for himself.

“I never talked about you, Sherlock! I never mentioned your name, I never told her where you were, where we met—nothing!”

“Then how! How did she find me?” He yelled, getting angrily to his feet. There was a pause as Marianne watched him helplessly. It was clear she hadn’t expected him to react this way. She likely assumed he would act as passive and indifferent as always.

“Sherlock, you don’t get it. She’s your daughter.” Marianne finally said quietly.

“What does that mean—that doesn’t answer my questions--!”

“It means... she’s *your* daughter. She found *you*.”

At this, Sherlock froze. He understood. How it took him that long to get it, I’ll never fully comprehend. Apparently the idea that he had not only fathered a daughter, but a daughter who had evidently received his brilliant, overactive mind, was just too much for him to take in. I couldn’t exactly blame him for this. Imagining another Sherlock Holmes in the world was a frightening thought to us all. He didn’t move for a while.

Then, Marianne sighed and stood up. “I should leave. I shouldn’t have come in the first place.”

“Here I’ll walk you out.” I said, leading her down the staircase. I could think of nothing to say to her, and it appeared she was having the same struggle so she left in silence, and I closed the door behind her. As I headed back up the stairs, I took out my phone and noticed that I had missed 3 calls from Mary.

“Ah shit.” I checked her voicemails and they each consisted of her asking where I was, and telling me to leave Sherlock alone, etc. I hit redial and put the phone to my ear. I stood there on the stairs, waiting for her to answer. I didn’t want Sherlock to overhear the conversation.

“About bloody time!” She exclaimed without a greeting.

“Mary.” I said quickly, “I’m sorry, love, but I am definitely not coming in to work today.”

“But John you can’t just--.”

“No Mary I know. Just cover for me okay? It’s important. Amelia is fine, but... well our *other child* isn’t in the best state at the moment.”

“Is he alright? Should I come by?”

“I think he’ll be fine. I just want to stay with him for a while to be sure. I’ll try and come in late if I can. If anyone asks, just lie and tell them it’s a family emergency.”

“Well, it is a family emergency. There’s no lie there.”

I smiled, glad that she thought so too.

“Okay, I’ve got to go. I love you.”

“I love you, too. But I swear if you are with my baby and you don’t answer your phone right away, I’ll divorce you.”

“Of course,” I chuckled, “Yes, dear.”

Click

When I walked back into the room where I left Sherlock, I was shocked to see that he was not still there. And neither was Amelia, I noticed.

“Sherlock?” I called, terrified.

“In here.” He said, sounding quite calm. I found him sitting at his desk in front of his laptop. He was bouncing Amelia on his lap as he vigorously typed something into his computer.

“She started to fuss and you were busy calling off work again.”

“Well... I... erm.... Are you alright? Just a moment ago, you--.”

“Yes yes, fine. Now I need to think. Feel free to stay, but know that I am remarkably busy.”

Surprised, I tried to look at what he was typing, but he pulled the computer away.

“What? Have you got a case?”

“Yes.”

“Well can I see?”

“No.” he hesitated, handed Amelia to me, then stood and carried the laptop down the hall to his room. I distinctly heard him say, “Not yet.”

One Week Later

Chapter 4

It was a glorious Saturday morning, about a week after discovering my best friend had a little more life experience than he had ever let on. I stretched and quietly got out of bed. I took a look out the window and was pleasantly surprised to see a beautiful morning. I stared at the sky. It was marvelously blue; there wasn't a cloud in sight. Mary and the baby were still sleeping and I fancied a cup of tea and a bit of fresh air. So I wrote Mary a note for her to find when she woke up telling her where I'd gone and promising her I'd pick up a warm biscuit for her while I was out.

I left as quietly as I could, moving slowly out of our flat and through the hall to the front door. The air was crisp and I could still see my breath as I walked. However, the sun shining on my face felt wonderful and I could tell it would be a refreshingly warm day in London.

It was fairly quiet once I reached a café shop that looked acceptable and sat myself down outside. I was glad it wasn't crowded; it was hardly a few minutes after I ordered that a waiter came by with my tea. I noticed a stand offering a copy of the morning paper so I grabbed one and opened it to read while I enjoyed my morning tea. I was just getting into a story about some sort of break-in at an art gallery in central London when...

"Good morning, John."

"Christ!" I spilled my tea, drenching the paper and my coat. I looked up to glare at Mycroft Holmes. "Mycroft, is it completely necessarily for you to show up like this if you want to speak with me? I do have a phone, you know. And an email..."

"Messages and phone calls can be easily ignored." Mycroft smiled his usual tight smile. "And matters of importance are better discussed in person, in my professional opinion."

"For some, perhaps. Others might prefer a little warning or the opportunity to ignore certain people."

Mycroft didn't answer. He simply glanced at the road. I followed his gaze and saw that there was of course a black car waiting for us. Without another word or even a glance in my direction, he got up and walked to the car. I knew I was expected to follow him, but there was so much in me that wanted to just stay put and refuse to do what Mycroft wanted. After all, he had just ruined a perfectly lovely morning, and robbed me of a delightful cup of tea. Not to mention, my coat was likely ruined from the stain. All the same, if Mycroft wanted a private conversation with me that could not be conveyed over text, I knew it meant that Sherlock was causing some sort of concern.

Sherlock hadn't been responding to me and every time I had stopped by Baker Street, there was no answer so I was very pointedly not reaching out to him. So I hadn't heard from my

friend at all after the shocking news about Charlotte. Mycroft's sudden appearance did instill a bit of worry in me. So I rose and joined Mycroft in the back of the car.

"So what's he done this time?" I said curtly after a long while of silence.

"I don't know."

"Then why am I here?" I stared at him, confused.

"The problem is, John, I don't know what he's doing. He's not in your company. He's been away from Baker Street nearly every day for a week now—."

"And you've been trying to follow him."

"Of course. Without much luck, unfortunately. My brother knows me too well. He would always return to Baker Street quite late in the evening—or rather, I should say early in the morning. However, I do know that he did not return to Baker Street last night."

"Oh." I couldn't think of anything else to say. Now I really was concerned. I immediately felt guilty for how stubborn I had been over the past week. I should have tried harder to reach him. I should have known better than to leave him alone after the news he received. My mind was set. I would simply have to do everything in my power to find Sherlock.

"So what do we do? Check the...erm bolt holes?" I tried to hide my concern; I didn't want to make a big deal of the situation before we actually knew anything. However, it was hard to keep myself from thinking about the last time we had to search all of his "secret hiding spots"; he had nearly died twice.

"I don't think that will be necessary just yet." Mycroft said idly. I pursed my lips, trying not to snap at him for his usual arrogant indifference. He continued, "I think first we should return to Baker Street."

"What? Why?"

"I find it more productive to let the target come to you—especially when you are reasonably certain that the target will return to the place they are most comfortable."

"Yes. And as usual, referring to your brother as the *target* is terribly heart-warming."

Mycroft said nothing, though I didn't really expect him to respond. After all the years I had known the Holmes brothers, I still hadn't really scratched the surface of their changeable relationship. We sat in silence the rest of the way to Baker Street, and I grew more and more anxious. As we got out of the car in front of 221 B, I tried to match Mycroft's calm, somber stride. I knew Mrs. Hudson would still be asleep, so to avoid waking her and causing any worry, I used my own key.

Mycroft led the way up the stairs and I followed closely behind. When we finally made it into the flat, I noticed the light was on, and busily sorting through paper work and reference three or four laptop computers was Sherlock.

“Here you are, brother dear. I’ve found the Doctor as you requested. Now will you please act your age and return my phone to me?”

“Ah yes. Fine. Here.” I stood dumbfounded as Sherlock left the room and returned moments later with Mycroft’s phone in hand. “Why do you need two phones anyway?”

“One is for work, the other for…”

“For checking up on me?”

“…for personal use.”

“We both know I’m the only person you talk to outside of work.”

“Goodbye Sherlock. Dr. Watson.” And with that Mycroft left in an angry huff.

I waited for a moment to see if Sherlock would explain himself before I erupted with rage.

He did not.

“So did I hear that correctly?” I said coldly, crossing my arms and glaring hard at Sherlock.

“Hmm?” He wasn’t paying any attention. I could see his icy blue eyes flittering over an illuminated screen as he searched on one of the computers.

“Sherlock!” I demanded.

“Hmm, yes what?”

“Did your brother really just trick me into coming over here?” I was losing my temper, but I didn’t care.

“I hardly find it necessary to answer a question to which you already know the answer.” He was completely unfazed by my rage—which of course made me even more furious.

“Then I’ll rephrase it then, shall I?” I snapped, “*Why* did you have Mycroft scare the hell out of me—saying that you’re in some kind of trouble? Why the *hell* would you do that? I honestly could—I swear I will, too—don’t tempt me—!”

“John, do calm down. There’s no need for you to start frustrating yourself trying to find the right words to tell me off—I had to get you here. You were clearly ignoring me.”

“Me? I wasn’t—No. No, you will not make this my fault. You didn’t answer any of my calls or texts! You’re the one who made it clear you didn’t want to hear from me!” I paused, positively fuming. “My God, we sound like secondary school girls…”

Sherlock tried to hide a smirk and we both started chuckling.

“Well in any case, my phone hasn’t been working properly.” Sherlock finally said, resuming his obsession with the computers and piles of paper work.

I saw his phone sitting on the kitchen table, so I went over and picked it up. It clearly hadn't been used in a little while.

"When's the last time you gave it a charge?" I called into the other room.

When he didn't respond, I assumed he had been just as preoccupied with his work all week as he was now. He probably never heard his phone go off, and he probably let it sit there on the table and the battery drained. While I was glad to see him focused on a case, his behavior was still unhealthy.

I found his phone cable in its usual drawer, and plugged his phone in. Then I returned to the other room, determined to figure out what he was really working on.

"Sherlock. What are you-?"

"John, yes of course. I apologize for not filling you in earlier, but I was quite certain you wouldn't approve of what I needed to do and I really couldn't afford you attempting to slow me down...."

"Yes. Well. That... Isn't exactly comforting." I stood completely perplexed, waiting for him to continue.

"Yes, well. I can now tell you what I've been up to. But first and foremost, please go let our guest in."

"Guest—?"

Right then there was a dull sound of a doorbell downstairs.

"How did you—?" I started, but he cut me off and muttered quickly, "I was a bit anxious so I might have calculated the exact amount of time it would take for her to arrive."

"Her?"

"Yes. Now will you please go let her in?"

Though he posed it as a question, I knew I didn't really have a choice. So I pursed my lips, swallowed as much of my pride as I could, and I went down the steps to open the front door.

"Marianne?" I said, startled. After I saw her out the door the other day, I did not expect to see her back at Baker Street again any time soon.

"Oh. Hello Dr. Watson." She said. I noticed she looked just as perplexed as I was. I opened the door wider so she could step inside. "So, do you have any idea why I'm here?"

"I'm just as confused as you are," I admitted, "Actually, probably more so."

She smiled and nodded, and then we headed up the stairs together.

I honestly had no clue what Sherlock was working on or how it involved Marianne Russell. I didn't know whether to be concerned or amused, so as usual, I settled for a silent mix somewhere in between.

A few minutes later, the three of us were settled in the very same spots we had taken the first time we all met. And just like that particular meeting, this one began with quite a lengthy moment of painfully awkward silence. I was not going to be the one to start the conversation. I kept my mouth shut and let the silence go on a little longer—until Marianne spoke up. I could hear my own annoyance echoed in her voice and I suppressed a smile.

“Honestly, Sherlock. What is this all about? You message me, saying it's about something horribly urgent... and then we sit and stare at each other? What the hell is going on?”

Couldn't have said it better myself, honestly. We both stared at Sherlock, waiting for an answer. He seemed to be wondering whether or not he should tell us. It seemed to me that he had finally gotten the two of us here and he didn't know where to go from there. However, I learned a long time ago to never assume what is going on in Sherlock's head.

“Alright.” He said finally, getting very suddenly to his feet. “This is very difficult for me, so please just allow me... to... erm... to say it.” He took a deep breath and looked directly at Marianne, his hands pressed together under his chin. “I want to meet Charlotte. Properly, I mean.”

I don't know that I can say that I was surprised; frankly, I didn't have any kind of guess as to how he would eventually respond to the prospect of having a daughter, so I suppose any response would have been a surprise to me.

“You-? You do?” Marianne stared at him, sitting rigidly in her chair.

“Sherlock, are you sure this is something you want? I mean. I'm completely with you if this is what you want to do... but why all the secrecy and hiding around? I don't understand what this has to do with all the work you've apparently been up to.”

“I understand your confusion, John. I suppose I should explain. I needed you here John because I have, in fact, been working on a case. It's honestly different from any case we've taken on before and I do believe I work better with you in my company.”

“Oh.” I said, stunned by the compliment. Not that he'd never acknowledged me before, but it was still quite rare.

“But what does that have to do with my Charlie?”

Sherlock hesitated. He was lost for words again, apparently.

“I mean, of course you can see her.” Marianne said quickly, “I just... I guess I didn't expect you to want to see her...”

Then it hit me.

“Wait a moment.” Sherlock turned his attention to me. “Sherlock... why do you want to see her again, exactly?”

“Well... she’s. She’s my....I guess I just....”

“Sherlock. Why did you need Marianne and I here together?” I snapped, trying to get him to just spit it out. I knew my friend well enough to see when he was up to something that he knew he probably should be doing. He wasn’t being emotional; he was being deceitful.

“Sherlock.” I repeated.

“Marianne. You said that... that your daughter... that Charlotte was quite like me, despite your best efforts. Well. I’d like to try a little experiment.”

“*What?*”

“Perhaps ‘experiment’ isn’t the appropriate word to use. Rather... I would like to utilize her keen mind to assist John and me on a case.”

“Christ...” I muttered.

“Are you *mad?*” Marianne stood up furiously. “Do you think for one moment that I haven’t been doing my research on you since she started this an hunt for her father? Do you really think that I haven’t seen what kind of work you really do as a ‘consulting detective’? Do you think I would even consider letting you take my fifteen year old daughter on some adventure where she could get killed?”

“Well. I thought it would be appropriate to ask you, first. But I’ll be honestly, I thought for sure you’d say yes.”

“Any *why* would you think that, Sherlock?” I asked, completely exasperated at this point.

“I don’t know—you never say no to joining me on a case. I just figured this would be similar.”

“But what we do—running about, recklessly trying to solve crimes— It’s no place for a child! I don’t know if you’ve noticed over the years, but it’s dangerous, Sherlock!”

“Well that never stopped you! I always told you it would be dangerous! And that always seemed to be the thing to sell you on it the most... Besides. It’s a little late.”

“Late for what?” Marianne asked cautiously.

Sherlock checked his watch and said without looking up, “John, would you please go and let our second guest in?”

The Game Is On Again

I sat in an awkward silence across from Charlotte as Marianne tore into Sherlock just outside in the hall. I didn't want to make her uncomfortable, but it was difficult to look away from her face; it was so like Sherlock's. She had inherited so many of his features: his piercingly blue eyes, his shaggy black hair, his sharp cheekbones, and apparently his brilliant mind. I hoped that she didn't also share his arrogance.

The fact that she wouldn't stop staring at me also made it quite difficult to look away. She seemed completely unfazed by the uncomfortable situation that we now found ourselves in. Her hair was hanging loosely at her shoulders this time. She was wearing black dungarees folded up at the cuff and a large faded black and green flannel shirt. It was a drastic difference from the last time I'd seen her. I wondered if everything was alright, or if such a diverse wardrobe was normal for her.

"So...." I finally said, finding it too difficult to avoid a conversation. However, before I could say a word more, she gently interrupted me.

"It's quite alright if you don't feel comfortable speaking to me, Dr. Watson. You don't have to feel obligated to strike up a forced conversation."

Needless to say, I was taken aback, but before I could even attempt a response, the door into the flat opened loudly and Sherlock strode in, ignoring a furious Marianne Russell sputtering behind him.

"I think it is only fair—," Sherlock said loudly, in an effort to shut Marianne up, "it would only be fair if Charlotte makes her own decision here."

I glanced over at Charlotte and she looked down and pointedly away from her mother. I realized then that Sherlock had already told Charlotte about the case and his hopes that she would join him in solving it. But as sure as I was of this, I was just as confused about what her response would be.

"Sherlock! She is a child—she is *my* child!" Marianne forced Sherlock to face her. She was getting emotional now; I could see hot tears getting ready to spill over and down her cheeks. "You bring me here expecting me to just allow you *of all people* to take my fifteen-year-old daughter on some adventure?"

"Well—"

"And you want to use her for an experiment? For *what?! To see if she's as good as you?* Not my daughter, Sherlock Holmes. No. Absolutely not." She finished short of breathe and flushed with rage.

Charlotte still refused to look up and her hair was hiding her face from my view, so I couldn't

tell how she was handling this. I was a little concerned, truthfully. Child of a sociopath or not, it can't be easy to sit here listening to her mother scream in the face of the father she only just met. I then looked over at my friend, trying to understand what might be going through his mind. I prayed that he wouldn't be rude; in heated moments like this, he always seems to find a way to be so excessively rude and I figured that was not something his daughter needed to see.

I tried to get Sherlock's attention, but he was completely focused on Marianne.

"Sherlock? Sherlock perhaps this isn't the best time or place for this conversation?"

I received no reaction from either of them. I looked over at Charlotte and noticed her anxiously running her fingers through her hair, her eyes shut tight like she was trying to block everything out. Apparently not as unfazed as I'd thought....

"Hey. Are you alright?" I asked her gently, putting a hand on her shoulder. She opened her eyes and looked up at me thoughtfully. I recognized a certain sadness in her eyes—the signs of a troubled mind. For the first time since finding out Sherlock had a daughter, I was not at all amused. Here was this young person, completely scared and confused, just looking for answers. I feared that she had the same addictive personality Sherlock had. I knew what a difficult weight that was on Sherlock on a daily basis... and imagining a teenage girl enduring that troubled mind invoked an intense amount of concern and compassion for Charlotte. Perhaps it was because fatherhood had very recently become a very prominent part of my life, perhaps it was because I had seen Sherlock fall victim to himself too many times to watch his daughter fall as well without at least trying to help.... perhaps it was because she reminded me so much of my dearest friend, whom I have nearly lost countless times due to his own bad habits... but I felt immensely protective of Charlotte in that moment. I turned my attention back to the argument, with my hand still on Charlotte's shoulder.

"Well she's not been given the chance to speak, has she?" Sherlock was saying, "Children will always ultimately do what they want. Why not just let her?"

"Regardless, that is not up to you!" Marianne spat, "You have no say in this. You have no right to her! You don't even know her-!"

"*Yes you made sure of that, didn't you!*" Sherlock shouted, losing his cool, aloof demeanor.

The room was suddenly filled with an icy cold silence.

"I...I didn't think you'd want to... I mean, I didn't want to...." Marianne tried to regain her rage and her higher ground.

"That much is quite clear. But the fact that I do not know Charlotte is no one's fault but yours. For you to blame me for that is illogical on all counts."

"Of course I didn't tell you about her! Why would I want my daughter to turn out like you? Why would I want her anywhere *near* someone like you?"

“Well it seems your plan didn’t work out too well. You never were very good at reading personalities or your surroundings, or really noticing anything. You must not be a very good parent because somehow she did turn out like me, and she came looking for me-.”

SLAP

I should have seen it coming, but I still started a bit. Sherlock’s face was still turned to the left from the force of the smack to the face. His mouth was a tight line. Marianne was flushed bright red with rage and hot tears were spilling freely down her face. I honestly couldn’t blame her. Sherlock rarely felt any genuine guilt or regret; to compensate my own conscience I usually took on his guilt for him. So naturally, after what he just said, I felt awful. I could feel Charlotte shaking a bit under my hand with anxiety.

“That’s enough now.” I said in a low voice, glaring at Marianne and Sherlock.

“John, please stay out of this.” Sherlock said quickly.

“No.” I said firmly, standing and walking up to the pair of them. “I said: that’s enough *now*. The two of you can sort out differences later if you so choose, but enough is enough.”

Sherlock looked like he was about to make another comment, but when he saw my hard glare, he closed his mouth again and nodded.

With a final hateful glare at Sherlock, Marianne turned away and said firmly, “Come along Charlie. *Now*.”

Charlotte hesitated then got up from her seat and followed her mother out of the door and down the stairs. Before she reached the bottom of the stairs, Sherlock called to her

“Charlotte, we will be in contact.... if you’d like us to be.” She didn’t respond, but I almost thought I saw a smile on her pale lips.

“And Charlie,” I found myself adding, “If you need anything at all... well you know where we are. Don’t hesitate to reach out....”

She genuinely smiled this time. “Thank you, Dr. Watson.” Then she walked out onto the street and closed the door behind her.

Sherlock and I both took a moment to let what had just happened settle in our minds. We both stood there in the doorway at the top of the stairs, with our eyes fixed on the front door where Charlotte and her mother had just left. Without a word, Sherlock walked back into the sitting room and sat down at his computer and started typing furiously. After a minute, I turned to him and wondered quietly to myself if he knew just how badly that went as a “proper” meeting with his daughter.

“What the hell was all of that about?” I asked when it seemed clear that Sherlock was not going to say a word.

“It’s pointless.” He seethed.

“Pointless?”

“Yes, John! Completely pointless. All that work. It’s all for nothing--!”

“What are you going on about?”

“Unless...” Sherlock had reached the point where my confusion—in fact my very presence in the room—was lost on him. “Oh... well. That could work.”

“Sherlock, would you mind not leaving me in the dark, for once?” I sighed heavily, crossed my arms, and closed my eyes tightly as he rummaged through papers and completely ignored me. “Sherlock.” I pressed, but he didn’t answer.

“Oh that’ll be risky. Marvelously risky.”

I was about to snap at him again and demand he respond to me when he was suddenly grabbing my arm and pulling me toward the door.

“Thank you for stopping by, John. It’s always a pleasure, but now you must leave. Thank you very much. Goodbye.”

I hardly got a chance to glare at him before he was slamming the door in my face. I heard the lock click and knew there was no chance I was going to convince him to let me back in.

“So, you’re saying that he wants to try an experiment on his own daughter?”

“Yes.” I sighed, “I mean... I guess I can see where he would think it’s not a big deal... but it is! I mean she’s only fifteen!” I sat back in my office chair and closed my eyes. I tried not to show just how aggravated I was, but my fists seemed to clench due to their own free will. Even if I could have controlled the outward expression of anger, Mary would know. Mary always knew.

“Yes, love, I know; you’ve told me.” She said, sitting on my lap. She stroked my arm gently and kissed the top of my head.

I do not deserve Mary. Or maybe I do, but I certainly can’t see how. Either way, there she was, loving me despite my temper and despite my association with a narcissistic sociopath who apparently wants to put his own daughter in harm’s way just to see if she was really as smart as he. I suddenly couldn’t help myself; my lips found hers and I pulled her closer to me. She slipped her hand under my shirt—

But before things could get any further, the intercom on my desk buzzed:

“Dr. Watson, you have a patient waiting.”

“Wait what?” I pulled away from Mary slightly, thinking.

“Aren’t you on break for a bit still?” Mary looked just as puzzled as I felt.

“I’m supposed to be....”

After we pulled ourselves together, I responded to Jessica at the front desk, “Yes, thank you Jessica. Walk in, is it?”

“Yes, Dr. Watson. She says it’s an emergency.”

“Oh. Alright then. Erm... send her on in I suppose.”

Mary blew me a kiss and went back to her own office while I waited for my next patient, trying to look professional.

There was a quick knock at my door and suddenly, Charlotte Russell walked right into my dull, fluorescently lit office.

“Wait... Charlotte? I mean Charlie. Wait What’s happening? Are you alright—Is Sherlock alright?!”

“Relax Dr. Watson.” She said with a grin, “Everything is just fine. You can just call me Charlotte, by the way. I’ve always loathed it when mother calls me Charlie.”

“What?” I said blankly.

“If my mother wanted to call me Charlie, she should have named me so. But she didn’t. She chose Charlotte. She could at least stick with one or the other. It’s annoying. And I prefer Charlotte, anyway.”

Though I hadn’t seen near enough of her personality to judge, the speed at which she talked was completely reminiscent of Sherlock. She sat down opposite me and looked at me with a bemused smirk upon her lips. I suppose I must have looked foolishly confused, but I couldn’t understand why she had sought me out. Three and a half days previously, her unfortunate excuse for a father had made the horrible mistake of trying to entangle both Charlotte and myself in a new case. I thought the matter had been dropped. Surely it had been. Marianne certainly wouldn’t allow her daughter to go through with something like this....

But Charlotte looked so pleased, almost mischievous. And when I had last talked to Sherlock, he seemed in much better spirits than usual.... *Surely not*....

“Oh Christ.” I said, without voicing my thoughts.

“He did say you’d get there eventually. You just needed a little push, he said. He may seem abrasive, but he really is quite fond of you, Dr. Watson.”

It took me a moment to realize she was talking about Sherlock.

“Wait just a moment.” I said sternly, “Do you mean to tell me that Sherlock convinced you to join him in this stupid case? How the hell is your mother okay with that?”

“I wouldn’t know.” She shrugged and let her hair curl around her index finger idly, “She isn’t aware. Nor does she need to be.” Very suddenly, she hopped to her feet and went for the door.

She was almost completely out of the room, but just before the door clicked shut, she put her head back in, “Come along, Dr. Watson!”

“No. Absolutely not. I am not getting involved in this. You can just go back to your fath—to Sherlock, and tell him I am not interested.”

“But, Dr. Watson, you are already involved.”

“What?”

“Your secretary saw me. She knows I was here. There are security cameras everywhere. I made my presence very known here. When my mother does come looking around here to find out what I’ve been up to... and when she finds out that you didn’t tell her that I was in potential danger... well let’s say it wouldn’t look good for you Dr. Watson.”

My mouth was gapping open at this point.

“So I do suggest you follow me. Because honestly the best you can do now is either join me and the Great Detective for an adventure, or you can sit here in your bleak hospital, doing your bleak job, waiting for the police to come and arrest you for withholding information.”

Again she left the room, but not before calling after me for a second time, “Come along, Dr. Watson!”

I sat for a moment, frozen. I didn’t know what to do. But there was also a burning curiosity in me. What was Sherlock up to? It also occurred to me that if Sherlock and Charlotte were working this case alone, Charlotte could get hurt. Surely someone responsible should be looking after the pair of them. Yes... yes someone should at least go along with them in case anything dangerous went down. And to possibly help solving something....

Before I realized that I had made my decision, I was already out of my seat and headed for the door.

“Shit.” I muttered as I grabbed my coat. Perhaps I knew that I was only trying to convince myself that I was going along to keep an eye on Sherlock and Charlotte, but truthfully my heart was racing with excitement at the thought of finally pursuing a new case.

I raced down the stairwell and when I reached the revolving front doors, I saw Sherlock and Charlotte waiting there, standing in front of a cab, looking remarkably similar in stance and in smug expression.

“Welcome back to the team, John.” Sherlock said, opening the cab door for Charlotte and me. As we all clamoured in, I knew I was going to regret this—maybe not right away, but I certainly would, and soon enough.

An Art Thief

The three of us sat there, squished together in the back of the cab. I sat between father and daughter and bit my lip. Sherlock was glued to his phone and Charlotte kept staring from Sherlock to myself.

“Well. I was right.” I said, staring straight ahead.

“Wait, what?” Sherlock finally looked up and glanced over at me. “You were right? Finally? When? About what? Did I miss it?”

“Shut up.” I snapped.

“Right about what, Dr. Watson?” Charlotte translated Sherlock’s snarky remark.

“I already regret this.”

Then Charlotte laughed. She giggled and it was positively adorable. It took me completely by surprise, and I turned to see Sherlock was equally shocked. She continued to laugh at our bemused expressions until I joined her and chuckled. She turned away to look out the window, still smiling. I took that chance to glance over at Sherlock. He noticed me out of the corner of his eye, but tried to avoid returning the look.

“What?” He muttered, annoyed.

“Nothing.” I said smirking. He did not respond, but I saw him smile. I wondered what might come of my friend were he to see as much of himself in this girl as I saw. Granted, I have always said that while Sherlock is impressively observant about some things, he is quite frankly oblivious to others.

Sherlock remained completely glued to his phone as he texted furiously. Charlotte was equally attached to the window as she watched rain droplets slither and snake across the cab window. Unable to guess what either of them were thinking, I turned my own attention to my phone. I was relieved to see that there were no messages so far. I just saw my screensaver; a picture I had snuck of Mary playing with Mia about a week ago. I smiled and stared at the image, still baffled at my luck to have found such happiness with Mary. Then, I immediately felt a pang of guilt as I thought of the trouble I might be jumping into by, once again giving in to Sherlock’s whims. I put my phone away and remained silent for the rest of the cab ride.

About twenty minutes later, we pulled up in front of what I assumed was our destination. As I stepped out of the cab, I was definitely not where I expected us to be for a “crime scene”. The three of us stood in front of an eerily abandoned plaza with stone steps stretching across and leading up to an equally impressive stone building with columns and a domed roof.

“Isn’t this the...erm...?”

“National Gallery of London.” Sherlock finished for me. “Yes, yes it is John. How wonderfully cultured you are.”

I was too curious as to why we were there to bother firing a retort back at him. Before I could voice my curiosity, Charlotte explained the situation.

“A friend of Sherlock Holmes has requested assistance due to several missing pieces of art.” Then catching my gaze wandering and searching for any people, she continued, “It doesn’t open to the public until 10 am, and it’s a week day so the plaza being quite deserted isn’t abnormal.”

“Ah.” I said, nodding in response. Though she was not rude about pointing out my missing the easily observable details like Sherlock, she still made me feel like an idiot. Somehow, however, she made it seem endearing.

“So I guess we’re dealing with an art thief.” I said, realizing too late that I was simply stating the obvious.

Surprisingly, instead of another snide remark about my “simple mind,” Sherlock responded with, “Yes, but the problem is, whoever it is never sets the alarms off, yet never disables them.”

“Security Cam-?” I started, but Sherlock beat me to the punch.

“Yes there’s plenty of them, of course, but the thief is never seen on any of them... Somehow seven different million-dollar works of art are missing, but there is no indication of a culprit. My friend, Alexander Macready manages the museum and he rightly assumes that the police at Scotland Yard will be of no use to him. So naturally, he called me. Since Charlotte enjoys art and knows quite a lot about it, I thought I’d ask her to join me...that way we could also see just how alike we are.”

While I was relieved to hear that we weren’t bringing Charlotte into a situation where we would be dealing with a murderer or something else far more dangerous, part of me was a little let down because surely this case would be easily solved for Sherlock...and it wouldn’t likely be very exciting at all.

We began walking up the grandiose marble steps toward the entrance. It was a long climb so I took the advantage of talking to Sherlock privately. I grabbed his arm lightly and said kindly to Charlotte “Ladies first, of course.” and allowed her to walk ahead of us a little.

“How did you know she likes art?” I asked him pointedly.

“She has paint residue under her fingernails. Her hands have lotion on them that is especially made for dry skin, but her face and upper arms are not dry-nor do they have lotion—this suggests that she washes her hands frequently.”

“Okay...” I pressed, hoping he would mention that he actually had a conversation with his daughter rather than just “observing” her.

“There’s also the fact that when she first came in and looked around the flat, her eyes scanned through my books and her eyes always paused a fraction more on a book that had anything to do with art.”

“How could you possibly-?!”

“John, are we ever going to reach the point in our relationship where you are no longer surprised by the extent of my observational skills?”

I had hit a nerve, I wasn’t sure where, but I was starting to notice that his new role of father was making him quite tetchy. So I let him catch up to Charlotte’s pace and I followed swiftly behind.

When we finally reached the top of the steps, I realized the plaza wasn’t completely abandoned. In front of the museum entrance stood three men, two of which were very stern looking blokes in shamefully expensive suits. The third was standing a good yard apart from the other two. He had a stark white receding hairline, a mismatched tweed suit, and an expression that implied he was not particularly fond of the other two.

We reached them and Sherlock smiled and extended his hand to the man in the tweed suit who I now gathered must be Mr. Alexander Macready.

“Sherlock, thank you so much for coming!” he said, positively beaming. I tried not to snigger as I deduced based off his reaction that he didn’t know Sherlock very well. There was just no way he would be that pleased to see him if he had spent a significant amount of time with him. Hell, he’s my best friend and I love him dearly...but I also hate the bloody bastard.

“Happy to help, Alex.” Sherlock extended his hand to his “friend” and smiled amicably.

“This is my good friend, Dr. John Watson,” he continued, indicating me. I shook Alexander’s hand. Then Sherlock turned to introduce Charlotte and he froze. In that split second, I felt protective paternal instinct come over me and I jumped in to save Sherlock from embarrassment, and Charlotte from hurt feelings.

“This is Charlotte, our assistant. A bit like a student intern, if you will.” I grinned and placed a friendly hand on Charlotte’s shoulder. Sherlock looked exceptionally confused and stood there still quite frozen. Luckily, Alexander and the suited men were already pushing past the awkward pleasantries and straight into the business at hand.

“Yes of course, John Watson, I thoroughly enjoy your blog!” Alex said quickly, and then quickly turned to take on the unpleasant task of introducing his two shadows. “These are my attorneys, Henry Winters and James Darkwood. They’re here to ensure my assets...which is to say the erm...missing pieces... are to be recovered.”

The men nodded their heads curtly and we did the same. We were then led into the empty museum. The six of us walked in and looked around, squinting as the florescent lights flickered on. The gallery was massive—a truly marvelous spectacle to see. We did not get to see much of it, however, because we followed quickly behind Alexander Macready as he hurried across the glassy floor to his office.

I had to admit I was impressed with work that was displayed. I'm no artist by any stretch, but I can certainly appreciate good art when I see it. If nothing else, watching Charlotte admire the work displayed was certainly entertaining. It reminded me of the expression on Sherlock's face when he would compose a new piece for the violin. I smirked, continuously amused at the similarities between my friend and his daughter.

Upon entering Macready's office my smirk vanished. It was difficult to tell if the place had been ransacked or if Alexander was just a perpetually messy person. Massive piles of paper work and books upon books of what I assumed were catalogues of pieces of art currently and previously displayed in the museum. It seemed that a paper shredder must have exploded at some point and then some massive bird came along and made some sort of nest from the scraps of paper left over. We couldn't get all the way into the room without having to shift boxes or books or piles of blankets. Blankets? Was Macready sleeping here?

"Please excuse the mess," he said. Ah. So he's just messy.

He went on, "It's been very difficult to keep things tidy and organized recently. As my lawyers will tell you, I have a rather bad habit of losing track of important things. I've sort of been frazzling myself searching for what I might have misplaced in here."

The suits were unnaturally still. It was incredible how intimidating they were just by standing there. I felt the strong urge to punch them both square in the face, but I just clenched my fists and stuffed them into my jacket pockets. Obviously, Sherlock noticed and grinned knowingly. I sent him a look that I hoped conveyed, "don't you start with me." He seemed to get the point and he turned around to address Alexander again.

"Not to worry at all, Alexander. Now, which pieces are you missing exactly?"

"Well. The problem is, I don't know exactly which ones have been taken and which ones I might have just misplaced."

I may have been mistaken, but I could have sworn I saw a vein in Darkwood's forehead pulse with frustration.

"Why don't you just tell us all of the pieces that you can't find? Then we can go from there." I interjected, hoping to spare Alexander from the wrath of his attorneys.

"Right. Good. Yes, of course." Alexander muttered to himself, and began fumbling through a bin of old photo reels. When he found the one he was looking for, he said quickly, "Come with me please" and sped out of the cramped office.

He led us to an alcove off of one of the galleries. Here, there was an old projector on a dolly and a large, stark white projection screen pulled down. There were a few chairs lined up facing the screen. He gestured for us to have a seat, so we did.

Alexander fumbled again with the photo reel as he struggled to get it fit into the projector. Finally we heard a click and a triumphant grunt from Macready, and then flickering light from the projector flashed across the screen.

"When I started to notice the pieces were not in storage, I compiled a list of them along with photographs of the artwork. These photos were sent to me to insure that everything was in perfect condition before it was sent here from the seller." Alexander explained. He quickly

clicked through several images of exquisite paintings and began speaking with far more confidence than he had been up to this point.

“Various—seemingly random—pieces have disappeared.”

“Seemingly?” I inquired.

“Well, erm, you see none of these painting have the same thing in common. Not origin, artist, style, anything! So I’m thinking it’s far too random to be accidental.”

“Intentionally random. Yes, I’d have to agree.” Sherlock said, pressing his hands together under his chin. I tried not to roll my eyes.

“Yes, and for the past week, these paintings have gone missing—one at a time, every night.” There was definitely a note of panic in his voice now. Though, I could tell it wasn’t just about money; Alexander Macready cared a great deal about his work. He was emotionally charged because he might be responsible for losing timeless works of art. Suddenly, I felt an enormous pang of sympathy for him. I also better understood why he was in such a fit of anxiety; he was worried that another painting would be stolen tonight.

As if reading my mind and wanting to beat me to the punch, Sherlock blurted out, “Of course we’ll volunteer to have a guard of some kind posted here at the museum.”

Just as I was about to comment on how generous that was of Sherlock, he rose from his chair and said “Don’t worry John, I’ll call Mary and tell her you won’t be home tonight.”

“What?”

“Charlotte, you know what to do. Whatever excuse you can come up with to fool your mother.”

Charlotte nodded and stepped out of the room with her cell phone.

“Sherlock!” I snapped, but before I could tell him off, Sherlock said happily, “Great. Marvelous. Mary says it’s fine!”

“Really?”

“Well. In a manner of speaking. I told her you’d explain everything.”

“Explain WHAT?” I sputtered, “I don’t even know what the hell is going on! How am I supposed to explain that to Mary?!”

“Well that’s hardly my business, John. She’s *your* wife after all.”

I could have killed him. But before I could say another word, I was suddenly standing in the alcove alone while the rest of them had left to make the arrangements for that night’s “stake out”.

That evening, we all went our separate ways to prepare. I only needed to grab one thing. Once I had my pistol secured in my coat’s inner breast pocket, I walked to the living room

and waited for Mary to get home. I had already relieved our nanny for the day, so I sat there with Amelia and watched as she delighted herself with the apparently amusing task of ripping up a piece of paper. I watched her closely and smiled. I would be lying if I said I didn't get a thrill from my adventures with Sherlock Holmes, but it was moments like this with my daughter that I wished things could be simpler. As this thought crossed my mind, the door opened and my lovely wife walked in. One might forget, given her charming sense of humor and natural elegance, that she was once one of the most highly coveted assassins in the world. However, when she walked into that room and glared at me the way only Mary can... I was very acutely aware of her history and capabilities.

"Now Mary, give me a chance to expla-!"

"What so you can tell me that you don't know what's happening? Save it, John."

"Mary, Please? If I didn't think Sherlock needed someone—needed me there to keep an eye out for him, I wouldn't go."

She ignored me and picked up Amelia then headed for the kitchen. I followed, but didn't dare to say anything more.

After a moment's pause, she placed Amelia in her highchair and turned to me. "John. You know I don't have a problem with you mucking around with Sherlock. I don't care about that. But you're letting him go about this whole thing with his daughter! It's not right. And you know as well as I do that there's no way her mother knows."

"Mary, it's not like that!"

"It just pisses me off thinking of you endangering our daughter—"

"Mary!" I crossed to her, enraged, "How could you say-how could you even think that?!"

"Why should it be any different with your best friend's daughter?"

It was then that I realized Mary wasn't just angry; her eyes were also threatening to spill over. Without another word, I wrapped my arms around her. She resisted at first and then relaxed.

"What is it?" I said stroking her hair.

"I don't want Mia to live that way" she said.

"And she won't." I insisted, "This is just babysitting. I'm making sure nothing puts him or Charlotte in danger."

"John."

"Okay yes, I do get off a bit sometimes on the danger, but I am also genuinely looking out for him."

"I know. Just... don't get distracted by the 'fun' bits, alright?"

"I promise."

“Good. Now fetch your gun and don’t forget a coat. It’s supposed to get chilly tonight.”

I grinned, loving her immensely. “Yes dear,” I said affectionately. I kissed her, then said goodbye to Amelia and left to meet back up with Sherlock before whatever the evening was about to bring.

Paternity Test

“What exactly are we waiting for, Sherlock?” I asked, shivering in my seat. We had been waiting in the dark in the security office, watching the dull black and white screens linked to the various security cameras we had placed ourselves in what Sherlock had deemed were “optimum, unexpected locations.”

To give off the impression that the museum was really closed, the heat was shut off and the whole place was darker than the night outside. It had been hours of just sitting, staring the the screens. We had been there so long that Charlotte had nodded off and was curled up in the corner of the room in an office chair, sound asleep.

“So, what are your theories?” I broke the silence, shoving my hands deeper into my coat pockets.

“What?” Sherlock asked abruptly. I had clearly interrupted a thought.

“Oh come off it. You’ve always got theories. So. What have you got?”

“I don’t always have theories.”

I rolled my eyes pointedly. I should have known better than to expect an actual answer.

Sherlock sighed and continued at a whisper, “Alright, fine. I don’t have theories this time; I know precisely what happened. I’m just waiting for confirmation.”

“Since when do you ever wait for anything?” I asked incredulously. I couldn’t help myself laughing.

Sherlock shushed me, indicating Charlotte sleeping in the corner. I shut up but he had brought up another interesting topic with his shushing.

“Sherlock... how are you handling all of this, really?”

“All of what?”

“It’s not unreasonable for me to worry. I mean you haven’t really processed this at all.”

“Processed—? Of course I have—!”

“Don’t get all hot and bothered, I only mean that this whole... situation... Well it’s not something either of us expected”

“So?”

“Well you seem fine with it.” I stressed.

“Well. I am fine with it.”

“How—how can you possibly be fine with it?” I was truly exasperated at this point. I was sure that whatever Sherlock said next would send me over the edge of exasperation and straight into cross. However, Sherlock didn’t get the chance to piss me off at that particular moment because apparently I had failed at keeping my voice down.

“What’s happening?” Charlotte mumbled. She stretched then rose and joined us by the monitors.

“Besides John proving that his fuse grows shorter with every passing day...”

I wanted to respond with something clever, and really put Sherlock in his place, but right at that moment the power shut off and sent us into utter darkness.

“Well. This is a new development.” Sherlock said, obnoxiously pleased as usual. I felt the strong urge to punch him in his stupid smug face, but I could see Charlotte watching us in the dim emergency lighting.

Suddenly, I heard the unmistakable sound of a bullet piercing metal. Sherlock and I stood simultaneously and turned toward the door.

“Lobby?” I guessed.

“Most likely.” He said, and he walked to peek through the glass in the door. “He must have broken the lock to one of the emergency exits; I can’t see any disruption by the front entrance.”

”Alright. What’s the plan?”

Before Sherlock could answer, Charlotte snuck past us an the door to the security office and out into the museum.

“Did she just?” I started, but Sherlock was already out the door going after her. I was so shocked, I just stood there for a moment. But only a moment.

“Jesus. Sherlock!” I whispered angrily, then rushed after them both. When I made it to the hall, I reached for my gun instinctively, but it wasn’t there. A few choice words slipped out as I tried to find any sign of Sherlock in the darkness. After a moment, I spotted his silhouette. I grabbed his arm to keep him from walking further away.

“Sherlock! What are you playing at? Why did you take my gun?” I asked, demanding his attention.

“What? I didn’t take your gun. I already have a gun.”

“When the hell did you get a gun?”

“Oh. Mary gave it to me. She had spare.”

“Mary?!” I almost shouted.

“John, perhaps you could bottle your rage, which I’m sure you think is perfectly justified, at least until we’re not in eminent danger?” Sherlock muttered quickly. He dropped his voice lower to see if he could hear anything from the lobby.

“Wait.” I had just realised something and my stomach dropped. “If you didn’t take my gun...”

We looked each other -Sherlock with a spark of euphoria in his eyes while I’m sure I harboured a much more dismal expression. Just then, we heard another shot.

Charlotte had my gun.

Sherlock took off toward the sound. Before he left my side, though, I could have sworn I heard him mumble something like, “That’s my girl.”

It was ominously quiet for several minutes. I was starting to think we were out of harm’s way, when I heard another series of shots. I picked up my pace and made for the gallery where the shots had come from. I tried to make my eyes adjust; without the emergency lighting from the security office or the moonlight from the windows in the lobby, the center of the museum felt impossibly dark. Eventually, I gave up trying to see, and tried focussing on what I could hear. Unfortunately, as dark as it was, it was just as quiet. I reached again for my gun and cursed at its absence. Very suddenly, I heard shuffling sounds just a few meters from where I was standing, quite frozen. Before I could decide what to do next, I heard the unmistakable sound of footsteps—sprinting footsteps. They were headed in the opposite direction from where I was, so without really thinking I took off toward the noise. Mary would have said it was my “adorable military instincts”—a phrase I’m still not sure I care for. Fortunately, I wasn’t running in the dark for too long. Very suddenly the lights came back on.

I wish I could say I was more graceful, but if I’m being honest (which I do aim to be with these narratives) I promptly tripped and crashed comically to the faux-marble floor. I cursed again, out loud this time—very loudly.

I looked up, wincing, my side and my pride badly bruised. I saw what I had tripped over just a short ways away from where I was sprawled out. A sculpture or statue of some sort had been smashed on the ground. It wasn’t made of marble or stone, though. I hobbled over to examine the remains more closely. It wasn’t terribly heavy, which explained why I couldn’t recall a crashing sound loud enough to belong to the destruction of a piece so large. When I held the broken fragments in my hand, they crumbled like sediment from a gravel drive up garage. It seemed like a rough mixture of cement and plaster. I could only imagine one explanation: this now shattered piece of “art” did not belong in this museum.

I hadn’t noticed right away, but very near to where I was standing, a small flight of stairs descended to an emergency exit. At the bottom of the stairs, her unruly hair covering her face like a mask, was Charlotte. She was clearly knocked unconscious. I ran down the steps, taking two at a time, stumbling as I went.

“Charlotte!” I said urgently, still trying to keep my voice low in case the intruders were still near-by. “Charlotte! Come on now, you’ve got to wake up.” She stirred and opened her eyes to look at me. For a moment I got chills. She had precisely the same eyes as Sherlock.

“Dr. Watson.” She snapped me out of my brief daze. “What’s happened? Have they gone?”

“I’m not sure. Let me have a look. Where did you get hit?”

She indicated the side of her head, just above the temple. A thin line of blood was trickling from the bruise, but it was fortunately already drying and clotting: She was going to be just fine. But I couldn’t feel relieved for too long; I had heard gunshots... And I hadn’t heard or seen a sign of Sherlock since the lights had come back on.

“Listen, Charlotte, I need my gun back. I need to find Sherlock—I mean your fath- well erm... yes.”

She handed me back my gun without another word.

“Stay right here. I’ll be right back.”

Having my gun back in my hands practically euphoric. Mary’s words rang in my ears. I knew she was right; I enjoy this part of the “adventure” far too much. I crept down the next hall, listening carefully. I glanced at the floor and noticed a set of several partial footprints. First, I thought it must be mud from outside... but the tracks were headed toward the door, not from it. I knelt down and realized I was looking at blood. Whoever had been injured made a run for the lobby. I left Charlotte in that wing and followed the markings on the floor to the front doors. Suddenly I heard shouting. I sprinted outside and immediately spotted Sherlock. He was chasing two figures who were already too far ahead. I could just make out their silhouettes as they loaded into a car and sped off. Still, Sherlock was shouting and chasing after them. He was far from his usual cool, calculating self.

“Sherlock! Sherlock, stop!” I caught up to him and tried to turn him to face me. His eyes were manic, completely filled with rage. “Sherlock, look at me, or I swear to God I will shoot you!”

“John, you don’t understand! What they did—! They weren’t supposed to—!”

“Alright. Alright! Just calm down a moment. What are you going on about? They weren’t supposed to do what? Did you know those... those.... Sherlock, you’re bleeding.”

“What?”

“You’re bleeding! What the- have you been shot?”

“What? No. No!”

“Sherlock! My God, you’re bleeding all over. Sit down. Here, let me have a look.”

Sherlock didn’t fight me. He sat down on one of the steps of the plaza. I pulled back the collar of his coat to inspect the wound. Fortunately, the damage done appeared to be mostly superficial. The bullet hole was shallow and as far as I could tell, there was no exit wound—which meant I could remove the bullet fairly easily and patch him up if I could get him to my office without arousing too much suspicion. Still it looked rough and it was bleeding freely.

“How did you not notice you’d been shot? This has to be painful.”

“Not at all.” He muttered sarcastically, wincing at my touch.

“You said they did something about ‘they weren’t supposed to’?” I tried to change the subject as I took off my scarf and wrapped it tightly around his shoulder to try and stop the bleeding and then around once more around his neck to make a sort of sling.

“I’d rather not say.” He mumbled, wincing more noticeably this time.

I glared at him, “Try me.”

I stared at him as he avoided my gaze. Sherlock may have a talent for avoiding his own emotions, but his impatience is often my advantage. I could out-wait him easily.

Sure enough, barely two minutes had passed and growled his answer reluctantly.

“They hit her.” He was so quiet.

I had almost forgotten about Charlotte, still in the museum. I suddenly imagined my little Mia. If anyone ever tried to hurt a hair on her head, I would become positively homicidal. I suppose because Sherlock was... well... Sherlock, and he showed no hesitation in bringing his daughter to a potential crime scene, I just didn’t expect him to react so strongly to something actually happening to Charlotte. I immediately felt awful. I had watched Sherlock risk his life and so much more for my sake and for Mary’s. I hated myself for assuming that he wouldn’t express at least some sort of reaction.

“Sherlock. Listen. Charlotte is going to be fine. I just checked on her. She’s right inside.”

“This wasn’t supposed to happen.” Sherlock said, mostly to himself.

“What are you talking about ‘supposed to’?”

I shouldn’t have been surprised that he didn’t answer me, but I still felt taken-aback when he used his good arm to push himself to standing and walked swiftly back into the museum. I caught up to him and followed him back to where Charlotte was. We found her sitting on the steps with her head in her hands.

Sherlock stopped in front of her and opened his mouth to say something, but then closed it again and began pacing. He stopped again and almost got a word out this time, but again started pacing. This happened a few more times before I finally made the suggestion that the three of us go sit down somewhere and talk about what just happened.

We walked to the nearest Underground Station. It was a long 20 minute ride to the Baker Street Station. No one said a word the whole way. The silence was especially deafening because, due to the lateness of the hour, the tube was completely abandoned apart from us.

Good old 221 didn’t come soon enough.

I held open the door to Speedy’s as Sherlock and Charlotte stepped inside and picked seats at the back of the diner.

After I ordered three cups of tea, I joined them. Still, both were completely silent. I was losing my patience.

“Alright,” I started, “I guess I’ll talk first.... What the hell happened back there? Charlotte, I know you’re rebelling against your mother or something along those lines, but you put yourself in some serious danger tonight. What if you’d been really really hurt? What if you’d been shot? I mean, we’re responsible for you right now, whether you like it or not. Sherlock, you might not respect that responsibility, but I—!”

“Would you please spare us of your overinflated sense of moral righteousness!” Sherlock snapped. “There’s more to this than you could possibly grasp, John.”

I closed my eyes tightly and tried to resist the urge to strangle my best friend across the table.

“Okay.” I said, struggling to keep my voice down. I took a deep breath. “Enlighten me, then.”

Sherlock opened his mouth, but to my surprise, Charlotte was the one to speak.

“Sherlock set up a fake investigation to test my deduction abilities. He wanted his own sort of paternity test.”

When she stopped talking, Sherlock and I just stared, open-mouthed. I turned slowly to look at Sherlock. From his refusal to meet my gaze, I realised what Charlotte said was actually true.

“Sherlock? Oh my God... Are you kidding—? What is the *matter* with you?! Are you insane? Well of course you are; you’re Sherlock Holmes!”

“John would you be quiet!”

“No! No I cannot be quiet. You put your own daughter in an extremely dangerous situation on purpose?!” My voice was shaking by now and the night staff was starting to stare curiously in our direction.

“No of course not!” Sherlock snapped then lowered his voice to a whisper. “I... did fabricate a...erm small investigation to... test Charlotte--.”

“I cannot believe you-!”

“He didn’t plan for the men who showed up with guns.” Charlotte cut in calmly.

“What?” I hissed.

“The men Sherlock hired never showed up.”

It was Sherlock’s turn to look confused.

“Wait. How did you know-?”

“It was pretty simple, honestly,” she explained, “I knew it was you when you told me which paintings were taken.”

“How....?” I started.

“The combined initials of the artists of the missing paintings spells out ‘it was me.’ Sighed ‘SH’.”

I glanced at Sherlock and I could have sworn he was trying to suppress a smirk. It was different than just his usual arrogant I-was-right-again smirk. It was like he was... proud of Charlotte.

“Alright, fine. If Sherlock planned this whole thing, but those men weren’t supposed to be involved... then who the hell were they? And why were they shooting at us...? How did they even know we were there?” But, unfortunately, neither of them had an answer.

For once, I wasn’t the only one in the dark. As nice as that change, was... Well it still left us all in the dark.

Concrete and Moss

Mary seemed odd as I filled her in on the events of the previous night. When I started out, she was clearly interested and attentive, but when I mentioned the men who gate-crashed Sherlock's fabricated case, her eyes lost focus and I could tell she was no longer entirely with me.

"Mary? Love, are you alright?" I asked, taking her hand. She stirred and with a blink she forced a calm expression complete with a little smile that did little to hide the worry in her eyes.

"I'm fine, John." She said, a little too quickly. Before I could press her further, she directed my attention elsewhere. "Amelia needs her breakfast now. Could you feed her? I need to...check something." Mary transferred our baby daughter into my arms and before I could say another word she had left the room.

I made a mental note to get to the bottom of whatever that was about. However, I decided to first give Mary some space. Marrying a woman whose past is quite literally filled with casualties gives a man perspective—and convinces him to give her plenty of space. So instead, I broke into a big smile for Amelia's sake and carried her to the kitchen for breakfast.

Sherlock refused to see a doctor about his wound, so as usual the task fell to me. I might have been annoyed if I didn't find it so amusing that he kept trying to stop himself from wincing.

"Sherlock, you don't have to pretend you're not in pain."

"I'm not doing that!"

"Alright fine," I held my hands up in surrender and tried not to laugh. I did not succeed. As I set to work getting the bullet out of his shoulder I was practically giggling. Sherlock did not appreciate this. Before I had made any progress, he jumped up from his seat and started buttoning up his shirt.

"Oh come off it! What? So you'd rather have a bullet lodged in your arm and get infected than have me laugh at you?"

"Shocking though it might be, Doctor Watson, I would in fact prefer you to leave it in. Your bedside manner is dreadful."

"Oh for Christ's sake!" I exclaimed, rising from my seat and grabbing his other arm firmly before he could leave the room.

"Sit." I demanded. And Sherlock sat, looking a little shocked. I resumed my seat and set to work. Soon, I had the offending little ball of lead trapped in my forceps. As I drew it out and made to throw it in the bin, Sherlock grabbed my wrist with his good arm and stopped me.

“What?” I asked.

“It’s evidence, John.”

“Right. Okay.” I felt rather foolish as I inserted the bullet in a plastic bag instead. When I had finished patching him up, I seized my chance to question Sherlock about what had happened the night before.

“So you really have no idea who those men were last night?” I hoped that questioning his observational skills would provoke him to correct me and perhaps he would give away more in effort to defend his pride.

“I would have told you if I did.” He answered curtly.

“Would you? Because you sort of left me in the dark about this whole thing from the start.” Sherlock didn’t answer this time and I was too tired to press the subject. I finished stitching Sherlock up and said he was free to stand and put his shirt back on. As I was clearing up the contents of the medical kit I had brought with me to 221 B from the desk at which I used to write, I noticed that he hadn’t moved an inch.

“Sherlock?”

“Shh!” He hissed.

“I was just asking if you’re alright.”

“SHH!” He repeated more adamantly. “I’m thinking.”

I grumbled something about what I was thinking at that particular moment, but he didn’t hear me.

He remained frozen there for some time. I wanted badly to interrupt just because I was cross with him, but the intensity of his expression warned me not to.

Complete silence. Then suddenly:

“Yoo-hoo! Sherlock, you’ve got a letter in the post, dear.”

“Dammit Mrs. Hudson!” Sherlock bellowed, making Mrs. Hudson and myself jump.

“Sherlock, calm down! There’s no need to shout at her!” I rose and crossed the room to Mrs. Hudson to check that she was alright. We’d never asked, but we were both aware that Mrs. Hudson’s anxiety was fragile and we had been careful over the years to not aggravate her sensitivities. I was surprised at Sherlock, but before I could say so, he snatched the letter from her hands and tore it open. He read hungrily and his face lit up.

“Yes!” he exploded. Mrs. Hudson and I jumped again. Sherlock flew about the room, grabbing his coat and scarf, wincing in his enthusiasm. “This is PERFECT!”

“Sherlock, what are you--?!”

“Thank you, Mrs. Hudson!” Sherlock was suddenly in front of her. To my surprise (and evidently Mrs. Hudson’s too) he grasped her by the shoulders and planted a dramatic kiss on her forehead, thanked her again, and bounded out the door and down the steps. We stood there with, confused, with our mouths slightly open. We slowly turned to look at each other.

“Should I erm...?” I started, not sure if I should bother following him.

“Yes. I think you’d best do.”

“Right.”

I ran out into the street and looked around. Surely I hadn’t lost track of Sherlock already. I doubled back, thinking he may have gone in the other direction, when suddenly a cab going in reverse nearly flattened me.

“Oh holy FUC--!”

“John what are you doing? Get in!”

Of course it was Sherlock.

“You absolute cock, you could have killed me...”

“Hardly. Didn’t even touch you. You tripped.”

“Because I saw a bloody cab coming right at me!” I grumbled as I got to my feet and joined Sherlock in the cab. Before I could say another word, the cab sped off at an alarming speed.

“Where are we going in such a hurry?”

“We still have a case to solve.” he said with the hint of a smile.

“What? But you said that it was you? You said you were testing Charlotte?”

“Well we stumbled upon another case, didn’t we?”

“We did? Oh. Oh yes I suppose we did.” I said, thinking. “Okay, so we’re going back to the museum, I guess?”

“Yep.”

“Okay.” Then I paused, making a realization: “I’m actually impressed, Sherlock.” I said with a smile, “You realized the danger and let the matter drop until Charlotte was safely out of the....”

The cab had slowed down as I was talking. I looked over just as Charlotte shut the door on Sherlock’s other side.

“Of course...” I pinched the bridge of my nose and shut my mouth for the remainder of the car ride.

We pulled up at the bottom of the steps of the Gallery just like we’d done the night before. This time it was crowded. We silently blended into the crowd and made our way inside. I was about to head back toward the security room where we had started out the previous evening, but Sherlock caught my arm.

“No, John. Take us to where you fell last night.”

“What? I didn’t-! Well I mean I tripped but I hardly see how that...”

“Surely they’ll have the section closed off due to the damaged property. Well where is it?”

I sighed and gestured for Sherlock and Charlotte to follow me.

However, it wasn’t very easy to find. Sherlock had been wrong about the museum sectioning off the exhibit I had accidentally destroyed the night before. This particular room wasn’t terribly crowded, but it certainly did look different in the lamp light. When I finally found the spot where I tripped, there was no sign of the remains of the sculpture like I remembered.

“I swear it was right here!” I exclaimed.

Without hesitating, Sherlock brought out his tool kit and bent down with his miniature magnifying glass.

“Sherlock what’re you...?”

He picked up what looked like some rubble. He held it close to his face and stared. He rubbed his forefinger and thumb together and the rubble crumbled like sand. A smile slowly spread across Sherlock’s lips. Wordlessly, he pulled on his sterile gloves and pulled out a small plastic bag. He scooped up as much of the remaining granules and poured them into the bag. Then he stood abruptly, pulled off the gloves, tossed them in a bin, and walked right back out of the exhibit, placing his tool kit and the evidence bag into his inner coat pocket.

I looked over at Charlotte and was glad to see that I wasn’t the only one who was utterly lost. I raised my eyebrows and shrugged and we both hurried after Sherlock.

Sherlock hailed another cab and Charlotte and I scrambled in after him.

“Bart’s Hospital, please.” Sherlock said to the driver.

“Bart’s? Sherlock, what’s going on?”

“Been a while since we’ve seen Molly, hasn’t it? Fancy a visit to our favourite mortician?”

I smirked and shook my head. I could tell from Sherlock’s excitement that he was onto something. I wasn’t entirely sure that was a good thing, but. I still couldn’t help but smile and reminisce. For better or for worse, this is where Sherlock really shines.

About twenty minutes later, the three of us were in the lab waiting for Molly Hooper to join us.

“Oh! Hullo!” Molly said when she saw us. Her eyes lingered on Charlotte and her eyebrows furrowed, just for a moment. “Solving another murder today, are you?”

“No, unfortunately,” Sherlock said quickly, “But the day is young and we can still hope!”

I prepared myself to apologise for Sherlock’s indelicate phrasing, but when I glanced over at Charlotte, I could see she was smiling, clearly trying to suppress a laugh. I wasn’t sure if I should be comforted by that reaction, but it made me chuckle too.

“For now,” Sherlock was saying, “We just need your assistance in identifying this!” And with a bit of a dramatic flourish, Sherlock extracted the evidence bag from his breast pocket.

“Oh! Well...alright. I suppose I could do that after I’ve finished my list for the day. I could get you results...tomorrow...or—.”

Sherlock was making a face—one that I knew too well as the face he reserved for Molly when he wanted her to do something for him and do it quickly. This was mostly because no one but Molly Hooper would fall for Sherlock Holmes’ “puppy dog eyes.”

“Or I could do that first.” Molly smiled and took the bag from Sherlock. “It’s not as though my ‘patients’ are on a tight schedule.” She giggled, referring to her list of bodies to examine. “I’ll need to grab my pH control kit from the office. I’ll be right back!” She left the room with a bit of a bounce in her step. Sherlock smiled after her then turned abruptly back to Charlotte and myself.

“Now.” He said, suddenly serious, “if this is what I think it is, then we’ve stumbled upon something very interesting.”

“Well, what is it you think it is?” I asked, crossing my arms across my chest.

“I was about to direct the same question to young Charlotte here.” Sherlock turned to her. Her icy blue eyes widened a little.

“Me? Oh. Erm...”

“I know you have some suspicions. I can assure you that, this time, nothing has been set up to test you. Now what do you suspect?”

Charlotte blushed and opened her mouth to speak, but just then, Molly returned with her testing kit and got to work. Luckily, this redirected Sherlock’s attention and I saw Charlotte let out a sigh of relief. If I didn’t know any better, I would say that she looked embarrassed. If that had been the expression playing across her face, I couldn’t be sure, because the next moment, she caught me looking and her expression changed completely.

It didn’t take long for Molly to reach a conclusion.

“Where did you say you found this?”

“Art museum.” I answered.

“Well that’s a bit odd.” She admitted, removing her latex gloves.

“Odd?” Sherlock cocked his head, “Why?”

“It’s definitely material used when making art—sculptures and such.”

“So...not that unusual to find it in an art museum?” I asked.

“Actually, yes. Very odd. See this isn’t marble or clay or pure concrete. It’s a sort of mixture of soft concrete solution and moss. It’s used to make replicas, forgeries.”

“And what’s the difference, exactly?”

“It’s cheaper to make and more affordable for the commonwealth.” Charlotte answered automatically.

“So the question is...” I started.

“Why would the National Gallery of London have a forgery?” Sherlock finished, meeting my eyes and nodding.

“What else can you tell us about the material?” Charlotte asked Molly, suddenly far more interested. “Is there anything that makes it unique?”

“Well, it’s very brittle. So I would infer that there wasn’t much mass to the piece. It would have to be sturdy enough to stand on its own like a genuine sculpture, but very easily broken apart with a minimal amount of pressure.”

“Why would anyone want a mock-up to be easily breakable?” I asked.

“My guess would be to conceal something inside it. The sculpture would have to be sturdy, but whenever you needed to reach what you hid inside, it would have to be easy to break it open to retrieve the hidden object.”

“The snakes!” Sherlock exclaimed suddenly.

“I’m sorry, what?” I asked, bewildered.

“The lawyers!” Sherlock explained impatiently, “Alexander Macready’s attorneys!”

“The museum curator?”

“Yes! They must be after the insurance money. But... it couldn’t be worth that much...if it’s a piece they didn’t examine close enough to see that it was a fake!” His hands flew to his temple and he shut his eyes. His frustration was evident. None of us dared to move, lest we disturb his thought process. After a moment, a cry of agitation burst from him, making all of us jump.

“No no no that can’t be it! What would they be hiding inside? How would that give them any sort of leverage?”

“Sherlock, would you mind clueing us in?” I said through gritted teeth, quickly losing my own patience.

“No time, John! I have to think! I can’t bother with you lot asking ridiculous questions!” With that, he gave a quick ‘thank you’ to Molly and hurried from the room. Charlotte and I glanced at each other.

“I guess that means we’re dismissed for the day.” I joked. Charlotte gave me a small smile in return, but I could tell she was rather disappointed.

“So Sherlock just left the two of you there?” Mary was asking as she changed after a long day of work.

Meanwhile, I was changing Amelia’s nappy before putting her down for the night.

“Yeah.” I answered, “I made sure Charlotte got home safely, then I went back to Baker Street to check in on Sherlock, but he wasn’t there. I’ve been texting him, but no nothing.”

“What about Mycroft?” Mary continued as she joined me in the nursery. “Hullo, Darling!” She cooed at Amelia, who giggled and smiled toothlessly.

“No, Mycroft is out of the country doing something terribly important, I’m sure.” I answered, also giving Mia a big smile. “Could you hand me a fresh nappy, love?”

She grabbed one, “I’ll do it,” she said, “She needs fresh night clothes anyway.”

“Right, so I just do the dirty work and you get to make her look cute?” I joked.

“Yeah. Are you going to do anything about it?” Mary smiled at me and I couldn’t resist answering her with a kiss.

I moved to the side so she could take over. I went to put the dirty nappy in the bin.

“Bin’s full.” I observed, “I’ll take it out with the rest of the rubbish, shall I?”

“Oh-!” Mary started.

“It’s alright Mary, I know my role here.” I laughed, leaving the room with the rubbish sack in hand. I walked out the back door and lifted the lid to the shared skip bin. I threw the bag in and almost let it shut before I spotted something rather curious. I took a closer look and saw three empty bags of what looked like concrete mix. I reached in and examined one of the bags. Beneath it was a tin of “Peat Moss.”

I pulled out my phone to take a picture to send to Sherlock. When the screen lit up, however, I saw that I already had a message from him.

“We need to talk to Mary.” It said.

My heart sunk. “What the hell?” I mouthed to myself. I was so focussed on trying to think of what Sherlock meant, I hadn’t heard the back door open again.

“John.”

I jumped, startled, still holding one of the empty bags of concrete in my hand, and turned around to find my wife standing there holding my baby daughter tightly to her chest. Mary looked stricken.

“John,” she repeated, her eyes locked on the bag of concrete mix, “I can explain.”

Severed Family Ties

Chapter 9

“I just need to know one thing,” I said, keeping my voice as level as I could. Mrs. Hudson was downstairs with Amelia, but I still didn’t want to risk waking her by raising my voice.

“Just one thing, Mary.”

Mary stood at the window, looking outside at the darkened Baker Street below. I hadn’t said a word until Sherlock answered the door 5 minutes previously. I didn’t waste any time getting to Sherlock—who clearly knew not only that Mary was hiding something, but also what that something was. At that particular moment, I wasn’t feeling particularly trusting toward my wife. I’d rather have Sherlock there to read Mary; make sure she was telling the truth. He sat in his usual chair and observed Mary just as intently as she was observing the street.

“Well go on then.” Mary said sharply. I could tell she was scared, but I also knew that she didn’t want me to know that. It was then that I realised we were in the same position we had been almost two years ago... nearly to the day. I had been ready to walk out the door and never look back. Christ, I’m glad I stayed. I felt a pang of guilt for my anger in the current situation. I still had my question, though, burning in my throat and mouth, ready to burst out and inflict pain. I took a breath, and chose to word my question differently:

“Mary, did you... did you know those men who shot at us?” I was glad to hear that my own voice did not come out with venom; it was still firm, but pleading instead of raging. She didn’t look at me. In fact, she hardly moved at all. Her only reaction was to shut her eyes tightly. This was not the response I had been hoping for.

“Mary?” I pressed.

“It’s okay, Mary. You can tell us.” Sherlock’s surprisingly gentle voice interjected.

“Do you know those men?!” I repeated, practically begging for her to look at me and answer—to tell me ‘no she didn’t know them.’ But she said no such thing. Instead, she slowly turned to face us, eyes still closed. Then, after a moment that seemed to last hours, she opened her eyes, looking only at me. Tears fell freely down her cheeks and her voice shook as she finally answered:

“Yes,” She said simply, “They’re my brothers.”

I was too shocked to be angry. My mind reeled with this new information and with that one question answered, about a hundred more flooded my mind. It was my turn to close my eyes. I shut them tightly and pinched the bridge of my nose.

“I think it’s time we took a closer look at this.” I heard Sherlock say. Then I heard the clatter of something small and plastic landing upon the side table next to Sherlock’s chair. When I opened my eyes and looked down, I saw the image that had haunted me for months

until I finally tossed it in the fire that Christmas at Sherlock's parents' house. It was that silver flash drive with the letters A.G.R.A. scrawled across it in permanent ink.

"Where did you find that?" Mary asked him, her hands wrapped around her as though she was cold, though her face was flushed.

"One of the so-called-attorneys left this behind in his rush to leave the museum with his companion."

"Okay..." I said, growing more confused by the second.

"I think things will become clearer if we take a look at the drive. Mary?"

I turned back to her and realised she was once again avoiding my gaze. Her cheeks were wet with fresh tears as she nodded slowly. Suddenly, any residual anger I had been feeling vanished. I crossed the room and grabbed her hand.

"Mary, we don't have to do this. I meant every word I said before. Whatever you did, whoever you worked with before, none of it matters to me. It has nothing to do with who you are now." I lifted her chin gently so she would meet my eyes.

"I thought so too," she said hopelessly, "but apparently they do. They have everything to do with what I am now...because they'll make sure I lose it all."

"What?" I breathed.

"Allow me to explain a little," Sherlock said, reminding me of his presence.

He had plugged the flash drive into his computer and was scrolling through a series of image files. He enlarged two of them. In the first, I recognised the alleged lawyers, the men I knew as Henry Winters and James Darkwood. I was shocked. Then I turned my attention to the second photograph and shock could not begin to explain how I felt. There was my wife, standing side by side with these terrifying-looking men, and she was dressed from head to toe all in black with weapons I hadn't even heard of strapped to her. The men—her brothers, apparently—were donning the same walking artillery.

"So they worked with you? Before?"

"Yes." Mary had composed herself a little and was staring at the images on the screen with unmasked loathing. "My brothers, Archibald and Richmond were the ones who picked me up from the orphanage. I was ten at the time, they were only a little older than that. Still, they picked me up with two superior officers under the guise of adopting me into their little family. Apparently they were recruiting. They needed fresh blood."

I swallowed hard, as though trying to consume this news orally because my mind couldn't take it. When neither Sherlock or myself said anything, Mary continued.

"My whole life from then on was training and killing...and stealing. Richmond and Archie looked out for me as much as they could, but eventually, they separated us. Intelligence agents usually don't usually work in groups, you see. We were sent off on our own missions and steadily, we lost touch. Years later, we ended up working for different countries and stumbled upon each other while on a mission. We were to obtain a disc and bring it back to

our superiors.” She let out a little laugh, sad and reminiscent.

“We nearly killed each other before we recognised one another! It was so good to see them again. Being reunited sort of sparked a little bit of morality in us, because we decided we needed to know what was on that disk before we decided what to do next.” Here, Mary paused. She closed her eyes tightly again and drew a long, staggering breath before continuing.

“It was awful. Truly. There were weapons trade agreements, maps, plans of attack on innocent villages... Everything from nuclear bombs weaponised gases. Obviously, at that point we realised that we were about to start a Third World War with this little disc. We couldn’t go through with it, so we decided to destroy it, return to our head offices and claim we never found anything. That would have been the end of it.” Now Mary’s eyes grew dark, “But there was a fourth spy. Gretchen. She was in our group when we were younger and in training. The four of us spent most of our lives growing up together. She was like an older sister to all of us. When she showed up and caught us about to destroy the disc, she went absolutely mental. When we explained how dangerous the contents were, she seemed to understand, but she convinced us not to destroy it, but to hide it somewhere only the four of us would know about. I hate myself every single day that I think of how I should have just broken it to pieces right then and there!”

She was suddenly overcome with emotion. Instinctively, I grabbed her hand and put my other arm around her shoulders.

“But we agreed,” she sniffed, “we agreed that we would hide it. We decided a small village just outside of Greece would do. There were plenty of ruins and old pieces of architecture that had been abandoned and unused for centuries. We hid it there in the rubble. But... erm.” She paused and looked at me balefully, “It turns out some of those bits of rubble were actually worth something.”

“Oh yes...” Sherlock muttered, his eyes alight with realization, “It was on the news, John.” he explained to me. “Our very own National Gallery of London acquired a few artistic pieces a few months ago. They were meant to go on display this week.”

Mary simply nodded, not meeting either of our gazes. “I knew Gretchen was always power hungry. I knew that as soon as the disc was in close proximity, she’d try to take it. I-I... I didn’t figure on her convincing Richmond and Archie to help her. They all think I’m dead.”

I stared at her. I knew she’d faked her death, and that she’d had a life before meeting me, but somehow learning that she had a family who must have mourned her passing made me queasy... reminding me of my own grief when I believed Sherlock to be dead. I had to snap myself out of my bitter reminiscing so I could keep up with Mary’s story.

“...so naturally, none of them came trying to recruit me” she was saying. “But I knew they’d go to the museum and try to retrieve that disc... So I broke in first, and I stole the bust. There was no way I’d be able to get the disc without smashing it, so I took it back to the house and smashed it open. To buy some time, I made a replica of the bust, and placed within it a blank disc—almost completely identical.”

My wife bit her bottom lip, which was quivering. It was unnerving to see her like this; Mary is not a particularly emotional person... but she was most certainly struggling to keep up her composure now.

Suddenly, she turned to me as angry tears spilled down her cheeks.

“John I am so sorry. GOD. I am so sorry.”

She turned fully into my embrace and cried in earnest.

“The question now, Mary,” Sherlock started, rising and replacing Mary’s post looking out the window, “is whether they know now that you’re alive...and that you have the disc.”

“I don’t think so.” Mary recovered herself and turned to face the detective.

“Well then, we’ll just have to tell them, won’t we?”

I gapped at him, “Excuse me...WHAT?”

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