

## Odalisque

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/472501) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/472501>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Explicit</a>
Archive Warnings:	<a href="#">Graphic Depictions Of Violence</a> , <a href="#">Rape/Non-Con</a>
Category:	<a href="#">M/M</a>
Fandoms:	<a href="#">Sherlock (TV)</a> , <a href="#">Sherlock Holmes &amp; Related Fandoms</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Jim Moriarty/John Watson</a> , <a href="#">Sherlock Holmes/John Watson</a> , <a href="#">Sherlock Holmes/Jim Moriarty</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Sherlock Holmes</a> , <a href="#">John Watson</a> , <a href="#">Jim Moriarty</a> , <a href="#">Molly Hooper</a> , <a href="#">Mike Stamford</a> , <a href="#">Sebastian Moran</a> , <a href="#">Greg Lestrade</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Dubious Consent</a> , <a href="#">Rape</a> , <a href="#">Mpreg</a> , <a href="#">Forced Pregnancy</a> , <a href="#">Abortion</a> , <a href="#">Domestic Violence</a> , <a href="#">Sexual Slavery</a> , <a href="#">Forced Marriage</a> , <a href="#">Forced Feminization</a> , <a href="#">Psychological Torture</a> , <a href="#">Gender Issues</a> , <a href="#">Sexual Shaming</a> , <a href="#">gender shaming</a> , <a href="#">Rough Sex</a> , <a href="#">Drugged Sex</a> , <a href="#">Bondage</a> , <a href="#">Shower Sex</a> , <a href="#">Clothed Sex</a> , <a href="#">all the sex</a> , <a href="#">slight medfet</a> , <a href="#">Justice Is Served (Eventually)</a> , <a href="#">Triggery Dialogue</a> , <a href="#">NOT Omega!verse</a> , <a href="#">Non-consent</a> , <a href="#">domestic abuse</a> , <a href="#">Moriarty is a Heinous Bastard</a> , <a href="#">It Can Always Get Worse</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2012-07-29 Updated: 2013-12-20 Words: 20,963 Chapters: 14/?

# Odalisque

by [PrettyArbitrary](#).

## Summary

Married off at 17, John's spent his adult life surviving his psychopathic demon of a husband. Jim wants John to carry his kids just as much as John doesn't. It's a hell of a balancing act, but John's managing to make it work...till Jim's new obsession, Sherlock Holmes, comes on the scene and fucks things up for everybody.

## Notes

Written for [a prompt on the kink meme](#), this is being posted there and here at the same time. The writers consider this to be a draft form, and have fond hopes of eventually going back through and tuning everything up once they've finished it. What a pair of dreamers they are.

This fic may not be for you if you like your Moriarty sympathetic or victorious in the end.

**WARNING:** This story is VERY TRIGGERING for sexual assault, abortion, and domestic physical, mental and sexual abuse. Please read with caution.

Additional chapter-specific warnings will be included as appropriate.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

# Chapter 1

i.

When John's days are his own, he lives a comfortable routine. His shifts at the surgery keep him occupied, despite the mostly bland assortment of sniffles and aches; evenings are split between pub nights with mates and quiet dinners with the telly. He makes trips to the library and to the shops. He reads quite a lot. Eats less than he probably should. Sometimes he goes to the range and empties a few dozen clips into the targets.

It's not exciting, but it's comfortable. John moves through his days with persistence and good humor, qualities which have always served him well. In those rare moments of weakness, of discontent and boredom, he has only to flex his left hand—four slender rings glinting, snug at the base of each finger—and he feels fervently privileged once more.

He feeds and dresses himself, after all. He has a job he earned for himself. He keeps up with his education. He has friends of his own, a real life outside the house.

Best of all—oh, but he can't think that way, can't let a shadow of it linger on his face. He isn't pregnant. Isn't chained down with a full belly and babes clamoring at his heels. John is a carrier, a rare commodity among men, but he has never borne a child to full term. It should be a devastation to him.

Instead, he twists the rings slowly on his fingers and smiles secretly, mirthlessly. He finds it difficult to muster real hatred when his days are his own, but he never once forgets.

ii.

*Be ready at 7 sharp, darling. We're going out tonight. XOXO*

Ten short words of text—

*P.S. Wear something sexy! XO*

—thirteen words, and the day is no longer his own. John reads the message again, a third time, and numbly puts his mobile away. There's a routine for this, as well. It isn't comfortable, but it's comforting in its own way. Routine makes it a bit more bearable. Knowing what's coming is half the battle, he tells himself.

He finishes up at the surgery and hands the last of the charting to Sarah. Exchanges his farewells with the same smile as always. He doesn't tell her that his husband is in town. He definitely won't mention that she might have to find someone to cover tomorrow's shift; John can work around pain, but he doesn't dare work against Jim's wishes.

The trip home isn't nearly long enough. When he steps through the front door, John's eyes are immediately drawn to the thick, opaque garment bag hanging from the coat hook. It's labeled

*Something Sexy!* He takes it and goes up to his room—their room. It's empty, as expected. He has one hour for himself. (It isn't really his.)

John showers, cleans himself thoroughly with a briskness born of pure muscle-memory. He shaves and trims and clips. He rubs cream into his skin. No amount of preparation will beautify the scars. His scars don't protect him, anyway.

The garment bag contains several items. New trousers, new shirt, new waistcoat, all perfectly tailored to fit John's small frame. Shades of grey and black and deep, deep red. A smaller bag holds the accoutrements: silk tie, matching pocket square, onyx cufflinks. New pants, of course. Snug and silken, solid black.

John dresses quickly, fine fabrics sliding over his skin like tepid water. The fit is exquisite, of course. Every angle emphasizes his trim build and narrow hips. There is a hint of dark, forbidden delicacy about him in this getup; surely that's intentional. Aggressive colouring, diminishing cut. Clues as to how Jim wants him presented tonight.

With that in mind, John goes to the vanity and selects two eye pencils. A slender sweep of shimmering gold across the top lashline, to catch the light when he blinks; thicker black smeared along the lower rim. His lashes are soft and blond by contrast. He looks decadent. Jim will like the added touch.

The clock reads 6:46 by the time John is satisfied with his reflection. Or satisfied that Jim will be satisfied, at least. He slips his rings onto his fingers and traipses back down to the kitchen, jacket slung over his arm. He thinks he has time for a quick cuppa before Jim collects him. Tea is his permanent standby. Dear Christ, but he will have to be careful not to spill.

He's just set the kettle on to boil when an arm coils round his middle, startling him so badly he nearly jerks away. A soft chuckle unfolds next to his ear. Jim squeezes him close, all amusement. "Have you missed me, darling?" he murmurs playfully. His lips graze the side of John's neck, just above his collar. "So sorry for the last-minute invite, it all came up so suddenly—I'll have you to myself later, promise."

When the arm around his waist slackens, John pulls away to lean back against the counter. It's not an attempt to put distance between them; Jim doesn't withdraw enough for that to be a question. He's dressed just as beautifully as John is, in silver grey and eggplant that turn him sleek as a shark.

Business, then.

John reaches up to straighten Jim's tie. It doesn't need it—Jim is impeccable—but the little domestic touches always please him. He's in a good mood and John wants to keep him that way, so he tips his head up obediently for the kiss Jim drops on his mouth.

"Is there anything I should know?" John murmurs against his lips as he pulls back.

"Professional dinner. Everything nice and civilized. Come on, now." One of his hands slips round to press, warm and controlling, at the small of John's back. "It's bad manners to keep a

client waiting."

A client. John can just about find an ounce or so of pity for the poor bastard. Judging by his mood, Jim's going to own the man's soul by the end of the night.

## Chapter 2

### iii.

John can't tell whether Jim's client is Yakuza or just corrupt. The dinner guests spend most of the evening speaking Japanese. Of the five men in the room, John is the only one who isn't fluent, and he doesn't matter. They all knew what he was the moment he walked through the door.

They watch him, though. John knows what they're seeing. He may not speak the language, but he knows all about what people think of carriers. Japanese literature paints them as half blood-brother and half possession—the perfect male lover, sexually submissive, valiant in battle, and loyal unto death. In the stories, they're usually tortured to death to punish the hero.

No wonder Jim brought him. John wonders idly whether the point is to flaunt his influence, or to addle the competition's minds with lust. Either way, it seems to be working. Men like these, they appreciate the kind of power that can buy and sell lives. Discreet as they are, John can feel their eyes on him, coveting him. Jim drinks it up like mother's milk, fingers lingering with casual possessiveness over John's thigh, waist, shoulder, the back of his neck, all while their dining companions lick their lips and can't keep their eyes off him.

While their soup is being removed, Jim leans in close. "Did you know the Japanese find the nape of the neck to be one of the most erotic parts of the body?" He puffs a breath across the back of John's collar. "I'm practically groping you in public." The hot wash of humiliation just isn't worth fighting, even when John looks up to find the man across from him struggling not to gape openly.

After the third course, the sake flows more freely and negotiation picks up. Watching the give and take across the table, the familiar sensation of being an object settles over John. He can follow the ebb and flow of power between the bodies of the men around him, but he still can't understand a word, isn't permitted to speak even if he did, and no one here sees him as anything but a thing to be looked at. At best he's a pet, some exotic animal Jim fought down and tamed to sit at his side and accept his absent stroking.

And that's true, isn't it? he thinks as Jim's fingers weave into his hair. That's how he's dressed, and that's what he is, a tamed captive thing. He can afford to forget that, sometimes, when Jim is away, but he risks everything if he forgets while Jim is here. He sighs and obeys the tug on his hair to curl into his husband's side, and wishes uselessly that this dinner could last forever.

### iv.

If either of them were anyone else, John would cheerfully, pragmatically and without compunction kill Jim. He has thought of countless ways to do it. There are days when he can hardly stop coming up with them. Shooting, beating, strangling with a lamp cord, shoved down the stairs, biro through the eye socket, choking on John's fingers, bleeding to death from a bitten-off cock, defenestration...

But Jim is Jim, and John is John. And if anything ever happens to Jim, anything that John can prevent, it's not only John who will pay for it. Because that's what Jim does. He finds the things or people that you love the most—the price you can't afford to pay—and then he makes you sell your soul to him to protect it from him.

In this, at least, John is no different from any other man or woman. It doesn't matter whether his marriage is legal or whether society considers him a man or a second-class citizen or whether he has any official recourse to the police. No matter who he was, if Jim Moriarty decided to keep him, then John would belong to him. He's been married to the man long enough to know that there's nothing he can do and nowhere he can go that can put him out of Jim's reach.

John is grateful for every day that he can call his own, because the days that aren't his belong to Jim Moriarty. And so does he.

Tonight, Jim is in a good mood. He's got that contract signed in blood (not literally, though John keeps waiting for the day), and roaring success always makes him...eager.

They're only just out of the restaurant when Jim reaches over to take John's jaw in his hand. He turns John's head this way and that; it takes a moment for John to realize he's admiring the eyeliner.

"So lovely," he murmurs.

John's stomach plummets.

"Egyptian princes used to paint themselves like this, you know. Gold and kohl for the eyes." John's eyes flutter closed as Jim tilts in to mouth at his lashes. His breath stirs them, feathery on John's face...and then his tongue.

"Jim..." John fights to steady his voice as Jim begins to wind around him. "We're in public."

"Mmmm, so we are." His tongue flickers like a snake's at the creases of John's eyelids. "Tell you what: your choice. You can have it here, or in the car, or at home." And he laughs at the way John's closed eyes screw up tight.

*Choice.* It's one of Jim's favourite games. Dangle the options so easily, so casually, as though the answer has any bearing on the outcome. John knows better than to show any strong preference. No, this is just another turn on the tightrope.

*Choice.* John's seen the snarky t-shirts the kids wear: *You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.*

"Car," he replies, after a split-second's thought. The middle ground. Never a safe decision, but Jim's never more indulgent than after a successful haul. On impulse, John leans in to press his cheek to his husband's. He pitches the words perfectly. "I'd love to spend the ride home with my face in your lap."

Jim hums low in his throat. "Feeling a mite peckish, are we. You didn't seem hungry at dinner." His hands wander from John's waist over his hips, slip round to cup John's arse, hitch him closer still. "I was beginning to think you weren't happy to be here."

"Maybe I was just saving room." John hears the restaurant door swing open behind him. A small knot of voices, chattering incomprehensibly. Japanese, heated, excitable. Jim's dinner guests. The clamor dies the instant they step outside, and John flushes to the ears. He can feel the envious stares boring into his back.

"Aren't you sweet," Jim croons softly, unconcerned by the scrutiny. He grasps John's tie and pulls him in for a hard kiss. "Lucky I'm feeling my wealth tonight, darling—they'd bankrupt themselves for a night with you."

A chill skitters up John's spine. He doesn't bother softening the edge in his voice. No point in hiding how much he hates being loaned out. "Has anyone ever actually paid for me, James?"

It gets him a bright chuckle. "Money's boring, babe." Jim licks John's lower lip benevolently. "But you've brought me some of my best returns. No worries." He lifts the tie in his hand and stuffs the fine silk into John's mouth, leaving the tails dangling against John's chin. "That should hold you for a moment. Go on, in the car with you. I'll be along in a moment."

John is dismissed with a proprietary pat on the arse. His face burns with humiliation as he marches to the limousine idling at the kerb, but he holds himself upright. He's a fool to pretend, he knows. Groped and gagged in full view of strangers, dismissed like any lowly servant; what does he know of dignity?



# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

Chapter-specific warnings: blowjobs, choking, comeplay

v.

By the time Jim joins him on the cool leather seat, John's lovely silk tie is a wet rag and his throat is horribly dry. Swallowing is beyond useless. He fists his hands in his lap. He knows better than to undo any of Jim's work without permission.

"That's a good look on you, you know," Jim remarks pleasantly after the driver shuts them in. "My guests seemed to like it quite well. But! Enough of that." He lightly claps his palms to his thighs. "Come here, we've not had our proper hello yet. Yes, yes, my own fault, I realize."

Chewing at the sodden gag, John shifts closer and allows Jim to pull him into his lap without complaint. He settles atop Jim's legs, shifting with the limo's movement over the road. He curls his fingers over Jim's shoulders. Smooths the expensive dawn-grey fabric there. Idly wonders how long the driver's going to have to circle this time.

"Mm, very pretty," Jim is saying, eyes dark and deceptively soft in the low lighting. He gently tugs the tie out of John's mouth and dabs it against John's lips, wetting them with his own stale saliva. "Pity about the silk, but you're worth every pound."

John clears his throat quietly. His voice is an uncomfortable, halting rasp. "The clothes are—nice. Very nice."

Jim beams at him, dropping the ruined tie in favour of grazing his knuckles down the side of John's face. His rings glint cool and polished: four of them, perfect mates for John's own. "There's something about you in that red, sweetheart. Akiyama-san said you reminded him of a bleeding heron." He chuckles. "It's more romantic in the Japanese."

"Hm. I'll take your word for it, shall I?" John's hands slide down to press flat against Jim's chest. He licks his lips as his tongue finally regains some moisture. "You always look good in your colours."

"Flatterer," Jim retorts. "Someone's awfully keen. I haven't been away all that long, have I?"

Twenty-three days and not long enough. John abruptly decides he's tired of the suspense. He lowers his gaze, deliberately fixes his sights on his husband's groin, shadowed in the V of John's legs. "You tell me," John sighs, low and longing. (Morning isn't so many hours away; Jim's next trip will come soon enough.)

Jim's hand suddenly closes around John's throat, forcing his head up. It's not quite constriction, but John's fingers curl briefly, reflexively in panic. Jim feels the twitch against his chest and smiles his serpent's smile. "Your face in my lap, wasn't it?" he asks coolly. "You want my cock down your throat, lovey?"

John holds perfectly still. "I do," he mouths near-soundlessly. Blinks a slow blink, all soft lashes and half-lidded eyes. "Please?"

"Oh, *baby*," Jim trills, head cocked. "You do know how to make a man feel wanted. No need to beg me twice." He lays a delicate kiss over John's lips and lowers his hand, fingers fluttering, vaguely dismissive. "Get to it, then. Give me a good show and I might let you swallow."

It's a rare spurt of hope. *Swallow—lower the odds later—he never lets me—* John ruthlessly quells all such thoughts. He slides to the floor of the car as Jim shifts his knees apart, making room. Fine-boned fingers card through John's hair, draw him in close. "Will you re-do your eyes if I smear them too much?" Jim asks gently.

As though in answer, John presses the heel of his hand to the growing prominence in Jim's trousers. Jim makes a soft sound of pleasure. "Anything you like," John tells him truthfully.

vi.

It should be on his resumé, John thinks sometimes. Trauma-theatre tested and approved; solid eye on the range; knows a hundred ways to please a man's cock. Christ knows, he has enough experience by now.

Experience which means precisely fuck-all, when giving pleasure isn't the point. He's a carrier, not a concubine. He has nothing to give; he's meant to be taken.

"Yes, yes," Jim hisses between clenched teeth. His hands have gone harsh, jerking cruelly at John's hair as he stuffs John's mouth full with short, furious strokes. "Fuck, yes. Take it, sweetheart. Take it all, there's a good lover..."

The brutality was swift in coming, this time. John had scarcely stroked Jim's erection to full readiness, no sooner suckled the fat glans from its sheath, when he'd found his face pinned, insistent hands forcing his head down. It's usually like this at the outset. A rough reminder. John doubts his is the only mouth Jim has enjoyed in the past three weeks, but their sex is no less fierce for it.

White flickers gather at the edges of his vision. He's gagging, little wet distress-noises gurgling high in his throat. Sore jaw, numbed lips, eyes burning with tears. Jim is pushing more frantically now. Snarling for John's tongue, John's hands. "What the fuck do I keep you for, you useless little bitch?" he snaps, and never mind that John is trying, *trying* to balance, to breathe, to stay out of Jim's way while he takes his fill.

Jim yanks him off with a harsh, sucking *schlupp*, spittle and pre-come flying loose. His hips cant forward. His fist is a blur over his cock. "Catch everything," he bites out. "Keep it. Swallow and you'll be sorry."

John shuts his eyes when the head pops past his lips once more, fat and eager. His neck hurts. His face is an utter wreck of sweat, snot, and drool. He's hard, aching against his will, and he hates it.

No swallowing. No lowering the odds. Jim won't waste a drop down John's throat, of course he won't—not at this time of the month.

He can't even be relieved when Jim finally grunts, moans, and spills himself into the hot hollow of John's tongue.

His hand is reaching before Jim finishes spurting into his mouth, flipping open the mini-bar to fish out a glass by feel. Jim lets him go a moment later so that he can spill the fluid from his mouth into the tumbler. No spitting; the less saliva that gets into the semen, the better. With Jim's eyes burning down on him, sabotage is out of the question.

Jim takes the glass and holds it up for study in the dim light. It's a good 15ccs. John wipes at the mess of his face with his pocket square—the tie is a write-off, may as well do for the matching accessory—and wishes for water. Jim's semen lays thick and bitter on his tongue, the pungent musky scent of it rising up the back of his throat to his nasal passages, and then plunging straight from there to his groin.

John hates biology.

The car slows and sways, road sounds changing as they turn off onto a quieter street. Almost home. John levers himself back into his seat next to Jim, whose lips part in a smile of reptilian promise. John turns away with a delicate shudder. Their night's only just begun.

# Chapter 4

## Chapter Notes

Chapter-specific warnings: non-con, anal masturbation, artificial insemination, mild medfet, bondage, choking

Also, [inspiration for the jewellery](#).

### vii.

At the door, Jim gives him a chuck under the chin and instructions to “Go get ready for me,” and then carries the tumbler to the kitchen.

John runs up the stairs. He doesn’t have much time and every minute will count.

What does having real choice feel like? The kind where you shape your own future. John gets to choose between cuisines; whether to watch television or read a book; whether he’d prefer to be fucked more often, or harder. Restaurant, or home? He washes his face and hands in their en suite and tries to decide whether Jim would rather strip the suit off himself or if he’d prefer John ready and waiting to be mounted.

The latter, he concludes as he dries himself. Jim will be impatient. There’s no percentage for John in drawing this out, and less in annoying his husband.

Hanging the suit is a rush job; Jim pays enough for his laundry service, let him get his money’s worth. John leans into the light over the vanity, granite top cold against his bare abdomen, to reapply the lines of gold and black to his eyes, and then pads out to the dressing room to select jewellery.

He has an extensive collection. Jim does love to dress him up. It’s the work of a moment to locate the set John is after; the pieces are hard to miss.

He pulls out the choker first, a solid two inch wide copper band that fits around his throat with a heavy silver clasp. Two hinged flaps at the back let it open enough to put it on. It’s a stunning piece, a handcrafted work of art. The metal is polished to the ruddy gleam of a new penny and chased with a design of ravens in flight, feathers drifting artfully around them. Jim bought it because, he said, he loved the way it contrasted against John’s sunny skin.

The set includes two cuff bracelets which match the choker. The cock ring only has the feather motif, but it’s accented with a moonstone cabochon. Each of them has a ring incorporated into their clasp. John has sometimes used them to attach other ornaments or medallions. Jim sometimes uses them to attach chains.

John puts them all on and checks the effect in the mirror. The red metal bands glint against the light tan of his skin at throat, wrists and groin. His eyes stand out against the warm tones of the rest of him, cool hazel-blue and accentuated by the cosmetics and the moonstone. He can feel his beauty.

Loathing rises in his throat. He shoves it right back down because it's an indulgence he has no time for right now. The most humiliating part comes next. Jim is not a big believer in foreplay.

John climbs up to kneel on the bed, thighs spread, and bends double over his knees so that he can reach himself more easily. Stretching an arm back, he closes his eyes and rubs at the tight ring of his entrance.

It feels great, like a wound-up spring in his body instantly easing. At this time of month, his body craves action, approaching the most fertile point in his cycle and hungry to take cock and get on with what it was designed for. He squirms a little, working his fingers in, letting himself melt into the welcoming warmth stirring in his pelvis while higher in his abdomen, the loathing returns and calcifies into glassy black horror.

His body wants what Jim wants. What Jim wants is something that makes John want to reach into himself and tear his organs out by the roots, and yet his biology—his own fucking *body*—is tripping over itself to fork over what small amount of free will John can manage to cultivate.

But then what's the point of blaming his body when none of the rest of him can do anything to stop this either?

He moans aloud as his fingers make contact with his prostate, and he feels his vagina begin to open and flow.

**viii.**

John's got himself wet enough to manage, by the time Jim comes in. He's still in his suit, carrying a long syringe filled with opaque white liquid.

"Arse in the air, pet."

This is why John wasn't allowed to swallow.

He complies, spreading his legs wider and arching his back when Jim presses down on the small of his back. When the syringe's snub plastic nose nuzzles into his opening, John lowers his head and fights back the hot prickle at his eyes.

The tube is hard and unyielding, forcing his body to mould to it. He arches his back a bit more against the discomfort.

Jim's hand presses down on him again. "Don't move." There's none of the playful lilt in his voice now, no wriggle room at all. The syringe shoves abruptly deeper into John's body,

deliberate and hard, then withdraws to thrust in again, and again. John takes it, breathing through the punishment and obediently unmoving.

When the tip prods at his fluttering vaginal sphincter, he whimpers. Jim's laugh is ugly. "You are such a little slut. What *would* you do without me?" The syringe waggles and forces its way through into his inner passage. John trembles, trying to stay still and silent against the uninvited pleasure of that intrusion, then has to redouble his efforts when Jim bends low across his shoulders. "You'd be chained to a bed in Thailand, most likely," he continues, low and intimate. "Hopped up on opium and Ecstasy, a writhing sodden mass for any sweating slob who pays enough to stick his dick into you. You wouldn't be able to tell the time of day or remember your own name, or stop these sweet hips," his hand slides over the curve of John's arse, "from dancing to the tune of anybody who wanted to put a *coin*," John keens at the thrust of the syringe, "into the *jukebox*." He gasps as the orifice of the syringe taps sharply against his cervix.

"There we go," Jim purrs, a smile in his voice, and John feels the flood of the cooling liquid inside him.

Then the syringe withdraws from him and Jim's hand is pushing John's head down into the covers by the back of his neck. "Now you just keep that rump up while I take care of this little problem of yours."

Jim has slender, clever fingers, when he feels like using them for pleasure rather than pain. John gasps as one hand trails down his cock while the other sinks into him almost without resistance to penetrate both his outer and inner sphincters. His hips rock instinctively between them on a ragged little moan.

This isn't good. It's not nice. Jim just wants to make him come to help draw his semen up into John's uterus. But John's fucking traitor body is buying what Jim's selling.

The cock ring keeps him sensitive and tight as his balls roll in the palm of Jim's hand...and then he yelps at the firm stroke of fingerpads across his prostate. Between the two, Jim's got him rolling like a whore between his hands within a minute, and John wants to hold back, keep it from happening, he really, really does but *oh god* he's so desperate to come...

He lets go and lets his orgasm crest with a sob of indrawn breath. Jim's hand closes on the back of his neck, a reminder to keep his position.

The echoes of his climax are still bouncing off his walls when Jim's weight settles in behind John and drapes in a waterfall down his back. His cock lies bare and hard along the cleft of John's arse. Jesus, when did he take off his pants? How did John miss it?

"How many times do you think you're good for?" Jim purrs in his ear. Those clever, slender fingers loop into the rings of his cuffs and then Jim's weight is lifting off him again, tugging his arms back, fastening them at the small of his back and forcing all John's weight down onto his chest and face. "'Cos I'm alllll about breaking records tonight."

His arms jerk up towards his shoulder blades, and then there's a tug at his collar as the choke chain is attached. John takes what'll probably be his last full breath of the night.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter Notes

Chapter-specific warnings: non-con, spousal abuse, bondage, gags, violent dream imagery

ix.

John knows how the world perceives his husband. He's heard the descriptors often enough. *Bloody brilliant*, they say, *and not a bit barking mad*. Genius, that's a popular one. Dangerous. Mercurial. *Inhuman*.

The last is absurdly funny to him. Surely it would never stand up to scrutiny, if the world could see James Moriarty in the context of his marriage bed. When he is not an empire in sleek silver threads, but a man of flesh and hot blood—as happy as any other to sate himself on the sweaty sheets.

"So-o sweet," Jim sighs deeply from somewhere above and behind. His shirttails tickle John's skin; he's stripped to his sleeves and loosened his tie, but otherwise remains clothed from the waist up. "So sweet. The way you twitch around me, it's like... *oh*." His hands are greedy on John's hips as he grinds home, slow and slick. "It's like fucking your beating heart, darling."

John has no idea what's turned Jim's mood to romance all of a sudden. He pants, open-mouthed, hot and dizzy, his cheek mashed into the mattress. "Be—" He coughs hoarsely and tries to shift his aching arms up further to relieve his throat. The wristcuffs scrape along his spine. "Be fine if you just... did my arse... love..."

It's a joke, every bit, and Jim's laughter shakes them both. John wheezes around a pathetic groan. His muscles tremble uncontrollably. He's sore and strained from holding the position this long, but it has little effect on the heavy ache between his legs. He can imagine the thin drool of pre-come unspooling onto the bed beneath. Jim's breeding him like a crated sow, and he's still so aroused it's painful.

Sometimes he doesn't know whether he prefers this to taking it dry and angry.

Jim pulls them flush and stills, his cock taut and pulsing all along John's slick inner walls. "Hmm," he murmurs contemplatively. "Pretty as this is, I fancy a change of pace." They both hiss when he pulls back abruptly, slipping free of John's body. "Tip over for me, sweetheart."

John slumps ungracefully onto his side and struggles with the choke chain. His arms are awkward and painful, twisted up against his back. There's a dim whisper of fabric as Jim sheds the rest of his clothes. He's all hot skin when he coils up behind John, leans over to drop a kiss on his shoulder. "Open your mouth, sweets."



Too distracted to be curious, John parts his lips. A blur of some dark, bruised colour sweeps over his head, and then a strip of fabric is tucked into his mouth and drawn tight, both ends fisted at his nape. Jim's beautiful silken tie, apparently gone the way of John's.

Jim tugs gently at the makeshift gag. "There you are. Beautiful." His other hand curls around John's inner thigh and coaxes his leg high up. "Bend your knee. Now, keep it up there, just like that..."

John bites down on the tie and tries not to squirm in discomfort. His arms burn with pain. His neck is chafing. More than that, he feels exposed. He's hard, utterly vulnerable, his leg cocked in the air like a dog taking a piss. He can't help a soft, aching sound when the plump head of Jim's prick nestles at his entrance once more.

"We'll hit the target proper this time," Jim promises brightly. He pushes in halfway and hooks his elbow under John's knee, opening him further, bracing him. "Make a real mess up there." Another little kiss grazes John's shoulder. "For luck."

**x.**

When they're finished, Jim unwinds the tie and (surprisingly) unhooks the chains. He presses his lips to John's wedding rings, one by one. "I'll be in my office, lovey," he coos. "Get some sleep."

Alone and sticky and sore, John manages the clasp on the cock ring and drops it on the bedside table. The collar and bracelets stay on for now. He desperately wants a shower. He won't get one. "Have to let things cook in there a while," as Jim likes to say. John's medical degree says otherwise, but he's not stupid enough to argue.

His hand presses flat to his abdomen without conscious thought. Hundreds of millions of sperm already, and he's only been fucked twice. When Jim bothers to be home for the peak of John's cycle, it's always with purpose.

*For luck*, Jim said. Jim doesn't believe in luck. He'll stack the odds until John bursts.

John glances at the clock, closes his eyes and stops thinking.

He's jerked from sleep two hours later. Jim flips him onto his back, pushes his knees up and roughly fingers him open. His anus is still slack and pliant, but his vagina keeps to itself when not in use. The strict muscle guarding that breach relaxes only when John is aroused—or, in this case, when Jim forces the issue.

John's mouth shapes a soft, uncomfortable moan as Jim's cock pierces him unready, the stretch eased by remnants of their earlier sex. He'll slick involuntarily in a minute or so. Jim will settle down to thrust in earnest, then. His orgasm will be quick and perfunctory. An impersonal deposit.

He won't do anything to encourage John's pleasure. John is not his sweetheart, nor his lovey, nor his darling. John is a machine with a pleasantly warm hole and pencil-smeared eyes. Worth the exact sum of his parts.

John bites his upper lip and pulls Jim down into his arms. Buries his face in Jim's neck. Rides it out. Sometimes it's better when it hurts.

**xi.**

He's dreaming of his wedding day. It's blurry and disorienting. There's a church. John knows it wasn't a church.

Harry is twirling in her outlandish yellow dress. She looks like an insane dandelion. She only wore it to make their parents crazy. Seventeen-year-old John thought it was hilarious. "I knew *you'd* laugh," she giggles with him in private.

He's missed his cue. Bloody hell. "Uh, yeah. Sorry. I do," John says nervously. Laughs a little. "Sorry."

The trim, sweet-voiced stranger kisses him and slides the rings on, one by one. "Till death do us part," he teases. His eyes are dark and lovely. He strokes John's abdomen gently through his shirt.

John's mother is crying. It's strange. It makes him furious for no reason he can comprehend. *What the fuck do you have to cry about?* he wants to ask her. But he's seventeen, embarrassed, and handing her a hankie instead.

A man-shaped thing is tied to a chair in the corner. His mouth gapes on a red, toothless scream. He can't be heard over Pachelbel's strings. *Shh*, John wants to tell him, *apparently there's a wedding on*. He checks the man's pulse. "Tachycardia," he says aloud, in a voice he doesn't recognize. "Hypovolemic shock. Shock in general. Why do you need me to tell you that?"

Over his shoulder, Jim laughs. Feathers kisses down John's neck. His fingertips dig possessively into John's abdomen. "They'll be so beautiful," he whispers. "Our babies."

*Our babies.*

**xii.**

When John opens his eyes next, the sun is halfway up. His mouth tastes old, sour. He's disgusting. His jewellery is cutting bloodless grooves into his skin.

The other side of the bed is empty. Unsurprising.

John pulls himself from the soiled bedding and goes about his morning routine unmolested. He showers and shaves. Brushes his teeth twice. The collar, cuffs, and cock ring are placed aside to be sent to the cleaner's. Jim insists on their proper care.

Just once, he peers at his throat in the mirror. The skin is chafed but not as bruised as he'd thought. The deep green turtleneck Jim gave him for Christmas hides the damage perfectly.

Jim himself is nowhere in sight when John pads into the kitchen. He's either holed up in his office or out of the house entirely. John can't bring himself to care before he's had his

morning cuppa. He'll have toast and tea, read the paper, catch up on the latest scores. Routine. Comfortable.

He sighs heavily when he spies the note propped up against the kettle. He won't be allowed to pretend for an instant, it seems.

*Meet me for lunch, lover? Le Gavroche, twelve-thirty.*

*P.S. Something blue wouldn't go amiss. Show off those pretty eyes. XOXO*

## Chapter 6

**xiii.**

They stroll along the Serpentine after lunch, arms round each other's waists like a pair of real lovers while Jim points out pedestrians and tells John their dirty little secrets.

It's one of their good days.

"With his sister-in-law?" John laughs. "You can't possibly tell. How?"

"Oh, but I can." Jim flashes him a devilish smile. "It's their rings, Johnny. Similar styles, similar tastes, but hers was two sizes too big for her. It's her sister's!"

John cranes his neck dubiously over Jim's shoulder at the couple walking away from them. "She lost weight."

Jim snakes in to steal a kiss. "She'd have got it resized, or she'd have it on a chain."

John turns that over in his head. "That's...kinky."

Jim laughs.

God, but he's beautiful like this; dark eyes flashing in the sun, that mind of his fired up and gleaming without, for once, being bent on raising hell. It sends John back to when they first met, to that painfully brief span when all John knew was that Jim was young and gorgeous, funny and brilliant, and he'd thought this was a man he might be able to love.

On days like this, John wishes that this were the man he'd married.

He tucks in close and lays his head on Jim's shoulder—if he's being gifted this, he'll take it while he can—and dares, "You've been in a good mood since you got back."

"Mmm." Jim kisses his hair. "New project in the pipeline. It's looking *very* promising. I don't think I've had this much fun with work in ages."

Snuggled up against Jim like this, John represses a shudder that'd undoubtedly spoil the mood. Jim's projects never bode well. The last one ended with a building on fire and John putting thirty stitches apiece into Moran and the man Jim had sent him in after. They'd looked like they'd each gone three rounds with a knife-wielding shark.

"Will I get to hear about it?" He's not sure whether he wants to.

Jim laughs again, low and ominous this time. "Oh, no worries there, love. You won't be able to miss it."

**xiv.**

John is hot and prickling with sweat, twisted up in the bed sheets again. He rolls over into a cooler part of the bed, vaguely startled to find that his arms follow along with the rest of him.

The hot flare of abused muscles that follows shocks the muzziness right out of his head. Fucking hell, his shoulders feel wracked. Right, he spent all night bound to the headboard. Fell asleep still tied to it, with Jim pillowed on his chest, petting at the soft fuzz beneath his belly button and describing how the baby would begin to take over John's body when it began to grow. How it would be like Jim was colonizing him.

John shudders and rubs his hands over his face.

Jim must've untied him, then, when he got up. His side of the bed is rumpled and cold, so he's been up for a while. The room is bright with morning light, and John's heart leaps when he realizes: it's Tuesday morning, and Jim's plane leaves in—John braves the pain of an abdominal curl up out of the bedding for a look at the clock—three hours.

He's probably already gone.

John throws the blankets back and sits up...and yelps. After three days of his husband's insistent attentions, he won't be taking any pleasure in sitting or walking for a while.

Jim gets a kick out of it. John can probably expect a solicitous phone call in a day or two so that Jim can check that his desk job isn't too much for him.

The house feels empty. John pads for the bathroom, body twinging as he stretches the kinks out as best he can, and yes, Jim's toilette is gone. A particular tension at the base of John's neck uncoils for the first time in days. His time is his own again. The knowledge of being blessedly, blissfully alone soaks into his battered body like a balm.

He uses the facilities, and then runs hot water over a flannel to clean off the worst of the mostly-dried bodily fluids he's streaked with. He's a sticky, itchy, foul-smelling mess. If anyone were here to see it, he'd feel humiliated. But they're not, so just at the moment, he can only be minimally arsed to care.

On the way back out, he grabs a robe from the dressing room to ward off the slight chill of the air on his drying skin, wrapping the silky thing around himself as he makes his way out to the kitchen.

There's coffee, still warm in the pot. Little slice of heaven. Puddle of heaven, whatever. He pours a mug, drinks half of it in one go, and does a quick turn around the fridge to root out the makings of a sandwich. He's not in the mood to manage anything more elaborate, but he's so hungry his stomach is cramping.

Once he gets the sandwich assembled, though, he just stares down at it on its plate, all appetite fled.

He's off work for another two days. Sarah may possibly be under the impression that he was in a minor car accident, which at this point doesn't feel like much of a lie.

His hands drift down from the countertop to wrap around his stomach. It's far too early to tell; even a pregnancy test won't show anything yet. But he knows anyway. After so many times...he just knows.

Tomorrow he'll meet Molly for lunch at Manicomio.

He looks down with a frown, where can feel his own hands warm through the thin robe. They're rubbing absently at his belly. He peels them away with careful deliberation, and turns away from the untouched sandwich, heading back to the master suite to take a hot bath.

He can spare a few hours before he has to face reality.

## Chapter 7

xv.

Jim leaves a sucking vacuum in his wake. It's always empty and lonely, this first day. John hates it as much as he lives for it. Their spacious penthouse closes in around him, slowly smothering in its silence.

Luckily, there are plenty of things to do after three days of Jim's purring shadow. Bathed and dressed, John chases his sandwich with tea and paracetamol before heading out.

He could help himself to a car and driver; hell, he could commandeer a limousine every day if he preferred. He's vaguely amused that, if he really wanted to, he could probably order up a private jet to the continent. John's husband is a man of near-limitless means.

John prefers to walk or catch a taxi. He's seen some of the blood feeding those means. And he gets enough of limousines and private flights when Jim's home, anyway.

He goes to the range first. It's a bit of a departure for him. Usually he takes himself to the pool or the gym to work off stress. Maybe he'll still do that, later on—right now he wants hot lead and the world soundproofed. He likes the contained precision violence of target practice.

Years of off-and-on practice have given John a casual comfort level around firearms. He's been told he has something of a natural eye, too. Enough to catch the attention of Jim's hired man, some years back.

*"Hell of a knack there, doc," Moran whistles, cigarette dangling lazily from his lip. It's the first time he's called John anything but the formal Doctor Watson Jim requires of his employees. "You sure you aren't a plant?"*

*"If I'm a plant, then I'm a rubbish one," John replies easily enough, checking over the next magazine. "Considering I've had a thousand chances to off my husband, and the most I've managed was tea spilled down the front of his favourite Kilgour."*

*Moran flicks ash aside and considers the targets at the far end. "I hear it's common for married people to fantasize about that kind of thing, though, yeah?"*

*"True enough," John concedes. He knocks the fresh mag home. "Jim might say marriage is all about not actually killing your spouse."*

*Moran snorts with laughter, and after a moment, John joins in. It's funny because it's true. Christ, they're all mental.*

John's already a bit more relaxed when he steps into the clean, well-maintained booth and begins unpacking the range duffel. No, he won't envision Jim at the end of his sights. He'll lose Jim in the smell of gunpowder and the slow burn of muscles vibrating with the recoil. He

won't think of the ache in his backside, the stinging abrasions at his throat, or the genesis no doubt bubbling in his middle.

He won't think.

**xvi.**

John makes for the shops after. He gets most of his groceries delivered, but he likes to pick up bread and tea and vitamins himself. Jim teases him about the tea, in particular. John just smiles and shrugs. He's an Englishman. He takes a keen personal interest in his tea.

He keeps the cupboard stocked with Jim's favourite teas, too. No room for complaint there.

Speaking of tea, this morning's beverages have caught up with him. He uses the public lavatory and washes his hands, taking the opportunity to be sure his shirt collar covers his neck. He's always a bit paranoid when Jim leaves him marked. Bruises out of sight. Moving on.

Tea and bread collected, John next finds himself stalled in front of the pregnancy tests. His palm rests over his abdomen. He chews the inside of his lip. He could just order one with the next delivery; he does that sometimes, when he doesn't fancy staring down a cashier.

He flexes his gun hand. He's feeling a mite combative today. Besides, Jim likes showing him off in public—this is just the sort of thing he'd make John do, if he were here. John picks out a mid-priced test and stacks it atop the tea.

The queue isn't long. He has a few minutes to idly scan the tabloid covers. Political scandal here, celebrity fashion commentary there. One headline snags his attention. Some Belgian singer is pregnant by her fiancé—who's apparently come out as a carrier.

John can't help a wry lip twitch. Most of the world ignores that other bit of a carrier's anatomy. His own experience with penetration has been extremely limited, but he rather likes his penis, thank you very much. Some acknowledgement is always appreciated.

The cashier is young and unfamiliar. A new hire, then. Marvellous. John can almost pinpoint the moment she connects the pregnancy test to the rings gleaming softly on his left hand. He picks out her surprise easily enough; Jim would be able to tell him whether she's repulsed or aroused. Involuntary muscle tics, pupil dilation, that sort of thing.

Revulsion is bad enough, but the other might be worse. John tries very hard not to know about things like Mills & Boon's carrier-centric *A Glowing Proposal* series. He spots the covers on display every once in a while. Pregnant blokes with chiselled biceps and soft doe-eyes. Christ, it's embarrassing.

John pays for his purchases quickly, ignoring the cashier's glances at his midsection. The brief flare of indignation simmers into a tired sort of calm. Right. He's gotten his fill of the open air. Off home for tea and a long, relaxing float in the pool.

The pregnancy test winks from within the bag. At least no one said *good luck!* this time.



Molly brings him a tin of homemade iced biscuits. She often does, when he mentions Jim's been home. It's a years-old habit. Neither of them is exactly sure when it started, but John won't ever turn down a good biscuit for tea.

They chat over lunch, mostly work-related with bits of family drama sprinkled in for spice. (Molly's mother is still pestering her about her love life; Harry is still Harry. John much prefers discussing St. Bart's corpse contingent and the clinic's latest charting nightmare. He feels only slightly like a heel.)

They're halfway into their salmon and risotto, respectively, when Molly brings up Jim. John lets her do the honours most of the time. Tacit permission, that.

"So," she says, overly casual. "How was it?"

John doesn't hesitate. "It was fine. Nice, actually—we went for a walk Tuesday after lunch."

"Yeah? That's good." Molly smiles. Tentatively hopeful. "And you're all right, are you?"

"I'm fine." He meets her eyes, gives her a faint smile in answer. "Really. It was fine."

Sometimes they're like this: delicate, dancing around shadows John won't admit to. Tucking the bruises out of sight isn't lying. It's just easier.

Molly's shoulders rise and fall on a heavy sigh, and then she plasters on that sweet smile of hers—the one that says, *Life sucks, but it'd be rude of me to tell it to piss off.*

John sputters, puts down his tea and starts laughing, because...yeah. Molly joins in after a moment. She's always had more steel to her than she's ever let on. It's why John likes her so much.

"Yeah," he says as their laughter dies down. "Yeah, alright. Well."

John still can't sit without discomfort, and there's a tin of biscuits on the table that may or may not be 'medicinal.' Whoever runs the English language really needs to change the official definition of *fine*. 'The state of existence achieved at midnight on New Year's, when spent alone drinking wine out of cartons'—he should pencil it in to Jim's copy of the OED. It'd make him laugh.

The conversation kind of fades off for a bit after they've had their laugh. Neither of them quite knows what to say. They've had this conversation too many times. John keeps the silence from becoming awkward through sheer force of will.

"Jim wants to take me to Hong Kong for Valentine's Day," he offers finally, mainly for something to get on with.

Molly's face lights up, a bit smitten by the notion despite what she knows about Jim's tendencies. "Oh! That sounds romantic."

He laughs. “Try parodic. Here, you can Google it. ‘Hong Kong Presidential Suite Valentine.’” He nudges his smartphone across the table to her, and nods when she eyes him dubiously. “No, really. It’s worth seeing.”

She obeys, and spends the next few minutes flipping through screens while he sits there, grinning expectantly, waiting for the moment when her eyes widen. “Oh. Oh, *really?*”

He rolls his eyes. “He says he wants to make love on a bed of a thousand roses.” Molly’s expression swings between sodden romanticism and appalled amusement, so he gives it a nudge. “I’m just saying, can you imagine the clean-up?”

From the way she’s staring blankly down at his phone, she actually is imagining it. She starts giggling. “That sounds like an amazingly bad idea.”

“I’ve discovered that the thing about geniuses is that they come up with a lot of terrible ideas.”

That sets her laughing so hard that her hands hit the table to keep her in her chair. John props his chin on his folded knuckles and raises a challenging eyebrow at the people who turn to stare from the nearby table. He’s not sure why it’s so funny either, but they can sod off if it makes Molly laugh.

“Oh my god, John.” Still shaking with little burbles of laughter, she flaps her hands at her reddened face to cool down her flush. “That reminds me, I have to tell you about Sherlock’s new project. You remember I told you about him, the one who whips corpses?” She doesn’t bother waiting for John’s nod; he can never remember the name, but the quackery rings a bell. Molly’s own personal mad scientist—as she tells it, complete with insane hair. John keeps it to himself, but he privately agrees a bit with her mother on Molly’s love life. “Well, the other day, he came banging in and said he needed to make a body explode...”

# Chapter 8

## Chapter Notes

Chapter-specific warnings: depictions of abortion and emotional impacts thereof

### xviii.

When they part ways for the afternoon, John is enriched with a tin of chocolate biscuits, and the knowledge of how to explode a corpse.

The biscuits are indeed ‘medicinal,’ bless Molly’s giving and devious heart. “Eat five today, and five tomorrow,” she tells him.

“I can see you worrying,” he teases her as he gives her a farewell kiss on the cheek. “Relax, will you? I’ve got this handled.”

More or less handled. Putting one over on Jim is like working in bomb disposal; you may know what you’re doing, but if your hand slips, you take out everybody in the blast radius along with you. Still, not trying is not an option.

He’s tried to warn Molly. She believes him when he tells her Jim is dangerous, but without being able to explain what Jim really is, John can’t get across to her just how big a risk she’s taking when she agrees to help him. If he were a good man, he’d turn her away, but desperation wins out over decency.

There are so many reasons it keeps getting harder to look himself in the mirror.

So he sucks it up, one more time. Goes home, brews up a cup of tea to go with his five biscuits, and indulges in yet another of those reasons.

The recipe is brilliant. Molly is a damned fine baker. The biscuits are dark bittersweet chocolate with a sugar glaze. They go fantastically with strong tea, and the combination of the two hides all trace of the birth control pills she’s ground up and mixed in with the icing.

Also they’re delicious, which feels like a terrible thing to think in the circumstances.

He arranges the biscuits attractively around the cup of tea in the centre of the plate—because why the hell not?—and takes the ensemble and a book up to the private terrace attached to the master bedroom. Even if Jim’s assigned someone to stalk him—he never can tell, it shifts with Jim’s level of paranoia and the amount of trouble he’s causing at work lately—they won’t bother him there.

Not that he’s doing anything they’d be able to spot, but he wants his privacy for this.

Five biscuits today, and five tomorrow, and that's another child he'll never get to meet. If he's lucky. Jim didn't give him much wiggle room, this time; he's cutting it awfully close to the point where emergency contraceptives lose any decent chance of working. If they don't, then...

He dunks a biscuit in lieu of covering his face and screaming. God. Another 'miscarriage.'

*On the phone with Jim, telling him he's miscarrying, begging him to come home, John can hear his own terror. It isn't fake. He's just spent ten minutes doubled over in the water closet, cramping so hard he couldn't find the breath to scream, and the first blood clot was the size of an apple. He'd been convinced that he'd killed himself along with the baby, all his knowledge to the contrary be damned.*

*That is, he hasn't necessarily killed himself along with the baby. Carefully as he prepared for the abortion, it's always a possibility. Just...oh god, no one warned him. He knew it would hurt, but this feels like dying. This feels like a life being ripped out of him.*

*By the time Jim arrives a few hours later, striding into the hospital room like he'd blow a hole in God himself and step through it if He were stupid enough to get in Jim's way, all John's got left in him is to grab his husband by the collar, pull him down and sob into his shoulder, "I'm sorry," over and over again. "I'm so sorry."*

*He doesn't know whether he's apologizing to Jim, his child, himself...Harry, the doctors, all of the above...*

*Jim ignores Molly slipping quietly from the room, just lets John keep him like that, awkwardly bent over and straining for balance, petting John's hair while another contraction wracks his body. "Shhhh. I'm here, love, shhhh. I know you tried. You tried your best for me, Johnny, that's what matters. I'm here now, I've got you."*

*He hadn't, though. He hadn't tried his best. He did this deliberately, and he wishes it would kill him.*

John snaps back to reality with a gasp when hot tea splashes into his lap. There's just...no addressing that memory, so he doesn't. He eyes his stained khakis, contemplates the sting across his thighs, floods his churning stomach with a big gulp of creamy tea.

He'll do it again, as many times as he has to.

The biscuit he dunked in the tea has gone sodden. He sucks the mush of it into his mouth and thinks with all the savagery he can muster, *It isn't alive.*

# Chapter 9

## Chapter Notes

Gratitude to hiddenlacuna for her graciousness and evil mind on betaing this chapter!

Chapter-specific warnings: rape, rape fantasies, sexual threats against others, fingering, discussion of abortion

### xix.

John doesn't spend a lot of time at home when Jim's away. The penthouse is big and silent aside from the music he puts on to keep him company, and he sure as hell isn't going to entertain guests here.

In the den, Jim's arranged a set of framed 'artistic' photographs from their stay at a private villa on Borneo. John features prominently, in various states of undress and compromising positions, including kneeling in the surf all but naked in a clinging sheer robe, and swaddled up to play merman to Jim's amorous sailor.

And then there's what Jim did to the sofa in the great room.

*"That Dr. Sawyer, Johnny, she's cute. And she likes you. Did you see those moon eyes she gave you?"*

*"She—ahhh—she wants me to bring you to the Christmas party." John can hardly think for the slow press of Jim's fingertips against his inner walls. Sarah... she's nice. Nice and sweet and she thinks it's lovely that he's with someone.*

*Jim chuckles. "You like her too, don't you? You were all smiles every time she looked in your direction."*

*John moans into the plush arm of the sofa and nods helplessly. Sarah is pretty and competent, all kind eyes and practiced hands, and she doesn't bat an eyelash over his rings. She's the kind of girl John used to dream of bringing home to his mum.*

*"Do you want to fuck her, Johnny?" John jerks. Danger. Danger in Jim's voice, but it's too late; Jim's free hand is gripping the back of his neck, shoving his face into the sofa while the fingers inside him stroke his prostate till he whimpers. "You dream of it, don't you? Getting her on her back and pounding away into that soft cunt."*

*John bucks in protest, wanting to get clear of the cushion so he can swear that no, no he doesn't want to touch her, she's a friend, he wouldn't—but Jim leans in to force him down, voice seductive in John's ear.*

*"She'd feel so good wrapped around a man's dick, Johnny. Soft and slick and hot inside. You could take whatever you wanted. Is that what you'd like? You don't get to use that useless little prick of yours for much besides pissing. Is it feeling neglected? Am I not enough for you?" John claws at the sofa and twists on Jim's fingers, instinct warning him to get the fuck away from the poisonous pleasure Jim's spewing over him. "Maybe you want us both, is that it? I could fuck you while you do her. Pound right into her till she's screaming, begging you to stop. My little favour to you, so you could pretend it wasn't what you wanted. That'd feel good, wouldn't it, lover? That'd feel powerful. Then you'd be more than a dripping slit."*

*Jim spreads his fingers, opening John's body wide around them, and pulls them slowly out. God, he is dripping. Jim knows just how to touch him to make him writhe. "You want to fuck her, come in her, knock her up with your shitty carrier spunk. Then you'd feel like a real man, wouldn't you? Maybe it would work—maybe you'd have a son. Maybe I should let you do it. Maybe your baby could give me a fucking baby."*

*Distantly, John can feel himself hyperventilating. He wants to be sick, but he needs to come too badly. Jim's fingers are buried deep inside him, skimming his prostate, teasing his sensitive vaginal entrance. John howls into the sofa and pounds a fist on the floor. "Oh, you want it bad, Johnny, don't you?" Jim whispers like velvet against his shoulder. "Look at you, squirming like a fish on a hook. So turned on you can't even count how many fingers I've got in you. My darling monster."*

*He kisses John's shoulder and works his wet hole till John finally comes, sobbing over the upholstery.*

The memory replays in John's head every time someone sits on that sofa. This is Jim's place. Nothing belongs to John here, not even his own mind. Nothing John brings here escapes without Jim's stain on it.

Going out is better. Out in London, he's his own person.

Catching up with Mike is always a breath of fresh air. They share a lot in common; it's nice to have someone to talk football and beer and medical news with. And Mike's a good soul. He knows as much as John can afford to tell anyone, and he frets when he goes too long without hearing anything, especially when he knows Jim's been home.

The profession being what it is, they spend five days playing phone tag and repeatedly failing to coordinate their schedules before they finally manage to meet for lunch downtown. When John orders ginger ale, it raises Mike's eyebrows. "Not having coffee?"

John smiles faintly. The bitterness is only visible from the right angle.

"Oh." Mike stares at him, nonplussed. "Are you... Erm. Are congratulations in order?"

John shrugs, and taps his straw against the side of his glass to knock the little bubbles off it. Poor Mike. He was born to be the kind of house call-making family doctor that doesn't exist anymore; his instinctive reaction to an announcement of pregnancy is to throw a party.

The irony is that John would love to agree with him. He always wanted to be a father. Just...not for Jim.

“It’ll be about a week before I know for sure,” he says once his straw is clear. Even that much of an acknowledgement leaves him feeling filthy.

If John is pregnant, then chances are Mike will provide the mifepristone. John won’t ask, Mike won’t offer, but the next time John stops to eat at the Orrery, the bartender will have an envelope with his name on it. By all rights, John should refuse it; Mike will hate himself for doing it, and John will spend the following week living out a horror film, in sick suspense of hemorrhaging during the abortion. Terrified that Jim will discover the truth, or just cut his losses and leave John to bleed to death.

He sucks down a quarter of his ginger ale to settle his stomach.

Mike’s watching him over his tea, worry etching unnatural lines in his round, pleasant face. Mike has made it clear that he thinks John should go to the police, but they’ve had that conversation, and it ended at “No.” He still doesn’t really get it, but then John can’t explain that he’s married to a criminal psychopath who’d kill Mike and Molly if they tried to interfere.

He may yet kill them anyway, one day, and that will be John’s fault, too.

The rest of lunch is taken up with talking football and the singular idiocy of med school students. They part ways, making noises about going to a rugby match in a couple of weeks.

At the end of the week, Sarah pokes her head into his office to invite him along on a pub crawl with their colleagues.

“I’m not really much for drinking,” John tells her. Which is true. He comes from a family of loose-lipped drunks.

She settles against the door jamb, eyes crinkling in that sweet smile of hers. “You can be the chaperone. We could probably use one.”

*You want to fuck her*, Jim hisses. John smiles politely. “Ah, no, it’s all right. Someone’ll need to hold down the fort here and mind the stragglers.”

Sarah’s disappointment is always tinged with a hint of confusion. Someday she’ll stop asking. It’s better this way, polite and professional. Safer all around to keep the lines drawn clearly.

Anyway, he’s not about to complain at having his weekend pushed back by a few hours. Once he gets home, he’s got nothing to do but fret. His period is late. He keeps telling himself it doesn’t necessarily mean anything—his schedule’s totally fried anyway, between his stress levels and the occasional emergency contraceptives—but still. He’s late.

He pisses on the stick the next day. It shows negative, but it’s still early days; it might not register yet.

On Tuesday morning, he gets a more definitive answer. His guts wake him up at 05:00 with a cramping, spasming need to void his bowels. When he's done, lower abdomen still aching with aftereffects, he looks at the bloody mess in the toilet bowl and then slumps back in relief against the tank, shaking hands pressed against his abdomen. His period, revolting and painful as ever. Oh, thank Christ.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter Notes

We're back! Apologies for the delay on this one—Bob's had RL wallops and the chapter itself fought us tooth and nail on semantics. Incandescent thanks to [HiddenLacuna](#), whose tireless dedication to evil was indispensable!

Special note of thanks from bobross: Many, many personal thanks to everyone who's commented with praise for this story and good wishes for my RL, too. I'm terrible about replying to each comment, but I am truly grateful.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**xx.**

By all rights, John should crawl back into bed, but between the nerves and the relief, there's no way he'll sleep any more. He stares at his own haggard reflection in the mirror, rubs his palm over his abdomen. There was probably an embryo in there, just days ago. A new human being unpacking itself. Utterly dependent on him to sustain its fragile development.

Even if it wasn't a person yet, it had potential. It didn't ask to be conceived, and it certainly couldn't choose its parents. It might have been something beautiful, and unique, and *his*—

—if only it weren't Jim's.

He pulls on a dressing gown and old pants, inserts a menstrual pad to catch any leakage, and shuffles to the kitchen for tea and painkillers. He ought to eat, but the idea of food makes his gorge rise. He's too miserable and queasy to want anything.

It's not going to be a good morning.

May as well start it off right. He's got one task left to put this horrible little panto to rest, and it's better to send the text sooner than later. He gathers up a book, a fresh cuppa, and his mobile, and trudges up to the rooftop conservatory. It's cozier there. More secluded. Doesn't hurt that a dip in the heated pool does wonders for the cramps.

John probably isn't the only carrier who actually looks forward to his period, but it still feels like a cosmic injustice. Four days of enthusiastic cramping, headaches, and menstruation via diarrhea, to say nothing of raging hormone imbalance. He supposes he should be grateful he isn't leaking all over the place; the internal vagina has that much going for it. But the mood flares are brutal. Good job Jim isn't around to antagonize him this time. They've lost entire sets of dinnerware to John's inflamed temper.

*The last tea saucer drops from limp fingers to clatter sadly atop the shattered remains of its fellows. It might be chipped. John won't bother to check. Doesn't matter, not when the far wall is a mess of dents and paint bruises and the floor is a postmodern collage of Meissen china shards.*

*John is still for a moment before he digs out his mobile. Jim only left half an hour ago, he won't be on the plane yet. John's jaw clenches at the memory of his husband's parting words. He was asking for broken teeth. John broke the kitchen instead.*

*He dials, puts the phone to his ear. Jim picks up on the second ring. "You've cost us the dishes again, you fucking twat," John snarls down the line.*

*Jim laughs, delighted. "Whatever makes you happy, honey. Order a clean-up and go relax. I hated that pattern anyway."*

John shoulders the conservatory door open with unnecessary force. The rattle of the glass brings him back to the present and makes him want to hear something break all over again. God *damn* Jim, sometimes. He'd had John cornered in the loo, hunched over and miserable while his body gurgled through its monthly paces, and—

*"More wasted endometrium, I see. Sounds extra chunky today...shall we pan for survivors, darling?"*

John sets down his tea and exhales, low and measured. He can't recall whether he'd liked that china set, either.

He drops his dressing gown and shimmies out of his pants before turning to the pool. Cruel bastard Jim may be, but converting the conservatory into a private grotto was one of the best decisions he ever made. It's a beautiful affair, all veined stonework and subtle lighting, with a tiny jungle of live plants enclosing a contoured pool and jacuzzi. A pair of plush chaise lounges sits alongside. John doesn't know why Jim bothered with two; they always end up tangled together in one. Sometime they'll get around to trading in for a double.

He ignites the firepots and dials up the underwater lighting. The soft blue glow erases the last trace of London's lights once he sinks into the water's warm embrace. Floating alone, naked and lazy, John might as well be the only man in the world.

He gives himself ten minutes in the illusion before he reaches for his mobile.

*"Sweet mother Mary," Jim murmurs. "Look at you."*

*John smiles and glides carefully down the stone steps into the pool. He's in red tonight, robed in a sheer, flowing peignoir that leaves little to the imagination. Translucent silk chiffon moulds intimately to him, an incarnadine second skin, and swirls in his wake like blood in the water.*

*Naked and wet, Jim stands waiting for him in the shallows, flanked by fresh white lilies that bob in the water with John's every movement. Jim reaches out with dripping hands, wedding rings glinting in the candlelight. John curls his fingers over his husband's.*

*"You're a vision," Jim breathes against his temple, gathering him in.*

*John believes it—he knows what Jim likes to see. He twines into Jim's lean body and drapes his arms over his husband's shoulders in a cascade of water and drenched silken sleeves. His lips ghost across Jim's cheek. "Happy anniversary," he says softly.*

*"Mm." Jim nuzzles in return, palms shaping John's body through the flimsy robe. "Remind me, why do I ever let you wear anything but this?"*

*It's a familiar threat. John can't help a wry smile. "Because the neighbours don't deserve a free show?"*

*Jim chuckles and kisses John's brow sweetly. "No such thing, dove."*

He composes a quick, simple text. Jim's told him not to call unless the news is good, which suits John just fine. He's feeling less than keen to talk to his husband just now, himself.

John finishes typing the message. After a moment's thought, he adds *I'm so sorry*. He begs forgiveness sparingly these days, to lend more weight to those times he does, but this is the third failed attempt this year. Jim's getting impatient, and impatient is not a long step from suspicious, for him. Maybe John needs to have an accident. The right sort of injury might excuse him from trying again for a while. Or maybe it's time for another 'miscarriage.'

The idea of deliberately conceiving just to miscarry numbs him through. He can hope it won't be necessary. Jim's wrapped up in his shiny new project. It's got him more excited than John's seen him in some time, and if that keeps up, he may not care about John or anything else for the duration.

With sick selfishness, John wishes for the havoc to go as planned. His little house of cards depends on the work keeping Jim pleasantly distracted. If the price is someone else's happiness, freedom, even life—well, John's long since given up on meeting his own eyes in the mirror.

*"Look," he says softly. He pulls himself up onto the stone lip at the pool's edge and parts his knees, chiffon lapping gently at Jim's hips as John draws him in. John strokes damp fingertips down his husband's cheek, touches the ties holding his robe closed. "Look."*

*He put a great deal of thought into this evening's ensemble. Clinging silk gives way to the glow of gold and burnished skin. A long, elegant chain loops round his neck and falls to join a belt of narrow links riding low around his waist. Delicate chains and garnets drip from navel to groin like frozen drops of blood. Metal bands clasp tightly behind his balls and around the head of his cock, with an intricate web of threads and gems laced between, binding him up.*

*His right hand is caught in the net of a costly slave bracelet. On his left, four plain wedding bands glint amid the extravagance.*

*Jim smooths the wet silk reverently down John's shoulders and stares up at him as if spellbound. "But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive," he murmurs, tracing the pale*

*streaks of scars he's left on John's skin over the years, "and, constant stars, in them I read such art as truth and beauty shall together thrive..." His hands stroke down over John's flanks, baring him till the robe puddles at his hips. "If from thyself, to store thou wouldst convert?" John can't look away from his eyes. A faint smile sparks in them. "Or else of thee this I prognosticate—thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date."*

John presses 'send' and then shoves the mobile well away from the pool's edge. He needs the distance, scant though it may be. He's bloated and aching despite the painkillers' blunted edge. If he can relax, the warm water will see to the rest. He might even catch an hour or so of sleep around dawn.

Christ, but the waiting is foul. Nine times out of ten, Jim doesn't bother texting back, but silence from him doesn't mean that he forgets. Every so often, he decides to take things personally.

One day, Jim will lose patience entirely. Worse, he'll figure it all out, and John will be lucky if Jim kills him outright. All he can do is keep Jim distracted.

John turns onto his back in the water, gazes up sightlessly at the skylights. Maybe this time he'll buy himself off with a leather gag and some vibrating silicone nightmare. He could ask one of the minions to tie him down and leave him for Jim to find, agonized and desperate, on his next homecoming.

Or maybe he'd better plan for that accident, after all. He's pushing his luck, lately; Jim gets more insistent with every failure. He may need to take a fall.

Still not a peep. It's 05:40. Jim's probably asleep.

*Turn by turn, stroke by stroke, Jim waltzes them deeper into the pool's seclusion. Red silk winds around them till they're tangled together, lilies caught in the drifting folds. Jim's fingers catch in John's chains, stealing his breath with each teasing graze.*

*Jim teeths a hot trail along the chain looped round John's neck. "Name your pleasure, sweetheart."*

*John growls indignantly. As though Jim hasn't taught John everything John likes best. "Your fingers," he manages finally. His hips squirm in tiny circles, his erection caught snug at the crease of Jim's thigh. "Just your fingers."*

*Jim smiles slyly and rubs their noses together. "Mm, simple needs." He hitches John up against the smooth side of a rock feature, brushing his lips over John's cheekbones and eyelashes. "Would that everyone were so easy."*

*"Who's easy?" John protests weakly. His fingers curl at Jim's nape as his feet leave the pool floor, the water buoying him between stone and warm skin. It earns him a low chuckle and a long, sweltering kiss. He melts into it. Easily, yes.*

*Jim hooks an elbow under John's knee, coaxing, spreading him. John digs his fingertips into creases in the stone, hanging on for dear life as Jim's hand slips between his legs, fingers*

*curling up and in with maddening patience. John whimpers with the first slick slide along his vaginal breach. His head falls back, baring his throat. Fucking Christ, but he needs this.*

*Jim ruts slowly against John's inner thigh, tracing the line of John's neck with leisurely nips. He can spend hours like this, getting off on John's helpless squirming.*

He's just kicked away from the wall again when the phone warbles and nearly stops his heart. By the time he scrambles over to it, it's gone to voicemail.

Not Jim. Molly. Probably just getting in to work for the day, at this hour. She wants to know whether he's free for drinks after her shift.

*He twists frantically in Jim's hold, straining for a faster rhythm just out of his reach. Jim nuzzles him and stills entirely. "Get comfortable, lovey. This is going to take a long, long time."*

## Chapter End Notes

Jim's "But from thine eyes..." quote is lifted from Shakespeare's Sonnet XIV.

# Chapter 11

## Chapter Notes

Bob here. Thanks so, *so* much to everyone who's reading, commenting, and encouraging us on this story! You can't know how much it spurs us on, especially when the beast just doesn't want to cooperate.

Shorter bit this time, but we're gearing up for actual plot, I promise. I'm posting this after a swift run-through and edit sans PA, so if it's crap, we can all blame me. (Theoretically it's all a draft version, anyway.)

Once again, [Lacuna](#) is our sounding board and a fine mind for horrible things. That's a compliment around these parts.

### xxi.

Rugby is back on the table, hallelujah. John knows better than to take risks if there's any chance he's carrying, but with his period come and gone, he can take as many wallops as he likes. On his own terms, even. Christ, does he need to kick the shit out of someone.

Saturday is glorious; John and his weekend mates spend a sunny afternoon ploughing each other into the sod. John scores a goal, wrenches his shoulder taking down two men in a single tackle, and chews earth on the bottom of a ruck—which is by far his best experience with men piled atop him, despite a few sound kicks to the kidneys.

Finally they call the game on account of being sufficiently filthy and exhausted. Murray slings an arm over their number eight's shoulder and smiles devilishly. "You lot know Aidan's getting hitched at the end of the month? I call pub crawl."

The trouble starts at their fourth stop: three young neds packed into a two-person table by the toilets, and obviously lagered up, judging by the volume and colour of their conversation. One of them glimpses John's rings when he brushes past. He calls out over the music, "Oi, sweetheart, my lap's cold. Wanna come warm it for me?"

John answers the lewd wriggle of hips with one eloquent finger and pushes open the door to the gents'. The whistles and catcalls follow him back up to the bar when he comes out, but they're hardly worth his time. He's got too much to celebrate, not even counting his mate's upcoming marriage.

Aidan calls it a night two pubs after. "Be a shame to get the wedding called off now!" Some of the lads want to keep going, but John begs off. He's up for a good time, but he's wary of drinking past a buzz. Too much of a risk that he might do or say something careless.

He's meandering home, a half-tipsy kaleidoscope of dirt, grass stains, and well-earned bruises, when he notices he's picked up a tail.

The anger shoots through him in a hot head-clearing flash. His tail could be anything from a mugger to a babysitter. Possibly somebody with an axe to grind against John's husband. He snags a glance behind as he rounds a corner. There's more than one of them; decent skulkers, but not professionals. Most likely muggers, then. Jim doesn't tolerate incompetence, especially not when it comes to John, and the most dangerous entries on Jim's laundry list of enemies wouldn't be so obvious.

The idea of being targeted by one of Jim's rivals, though—*again*—is enough to work up a froth. Jim might be murderously possessive, but John's hardly the chink in the psychopathic armour. Hell, every time some idiot kidnaps him, Jim gets to add another gleeful blood smear to the running tally. The smarter hubs of London's underground know better by now.

Still, that lesson's left its mark. John's weathered so many assaults, kidnappings, ransom and blackmail attempts, even an 'escape' offer or two... he just can't be bothered to sympathize with those blood smears anymore. Soft sentiment's been scoured away, leaving a grim tip of the hat to social Darwinism. Tangle with Jim Moriarty? Suffer the consequences. Anyway, most of the time they get handsy, which is a good way to stop John giving a shit. Even the rapes stopped feeling personal after a while.

The mugger-types are still on him. Properly, John should be calling the cavalry right about now, or making his way toward one of the heavily surveilled 'safe routes' Jim's people have mapped out for him. But he's as sick of being babysat as he is of being targeted. The safe routes feel like rat tunnels to him; claustrophobic paths carved through London's open air, promising a quick rescue at the expense of privacy. Like John needs one more concession there.

Fuck that. He'll leave it for a few blocks instead, just to see what he can suss out. What's the worst that could happen? Robbery? What a laugh. Rape? Not bloody likely. He supposes he could wind up shot and stuffed into a bin. Jim might even decorate his grave with pieces of his murderers. It's almost enough to make John smile.

Turning the next corner, John stops in the lee of the building and pretends to light a cigarette, to get a better look at what he's dealing with. When they pass under a streetlamp, he recognizes them: two of those loud little wankers from the pub. He doesn't bother hiding his disgust as they spot him and wheel round. For Christ's sake. *This* is his life right now?

They're a few years younger than him, reasonably attractive, and they're not just drunk, they're high. He can see it in their eyes, their elevated breathing, and the jerky way they move, like they're trying to go in too many directions at once. John considers his options. The little twats have been following him this long, not likely they'll leave off till they get what they're after. And they're making no secret of that, no: John's been stripped by enough lustful eyes to know the signs.

They spread out a bit, closing in on him from each side. John backs away, eyes wide, hands reassuringly low and spread. He's too irritated to bother playing stupid, offering his wallet. "Come on, lads, you don't really want to do this."

The right-hand one leers. "Oh yeah, sweetheart, we really do." John's back hits the wall, but he doesn't so much as glance away. He's no rookie, to take his eyes off a threat.

The one on the left steps past his friend. He's a couple inches shorter, but he carries himself with more confidence. John inhales evenly. "You can do better than me, boys. Hit a club, find some girls who want it."

They laugh, high pitched and careless. Short-arse's breath smells like rot. "Aw, you don't like us, baby?" He runs a shaky fingertip down John's nose, over his lips. John swallows and drops his gaze submissively. His hands alight delicately, helplessly at the man's hips.

It's textbook. John's grip firms in an instant, holding his target steady for a punishing knee to the groin. He wastes no time driving a sound left hook across the fucker's jaw, knocking him down and senseless. "I put up with enough of that as it is," he snarls. "I don't have to take it from *you*." One down, one to go.

There's a sudden scuffle-thump from behind, followed by a loud whinge. John whirls defensively, only to find the second kid already on his knees, cradling his arm. The big man standing over him nods coolly, displaced ash floating down from his cigarette. "Hey, doc. Thought I'd save you the trouble."

"Moran?" Just like that, John's mood sinks. Jim doesn't send his best man out on husband watch, not without very good reason. John lets out a heavy sigh. "All right. What's he done now?"



## Chapter 12

xxii.

*Milan ought to be beautiful at night. It probably is. Hunched awkwardly against the car door, shaking and shaken, John can see only streaks of yellow and white against the shapeless black.*

*The jacket cinched round his shoulders is too big for him. It reeks of cigarettes and exhaust. Not much use against the cold, either; he's utterly naked beneath, bare-arsed on the leather seat. Adrenaline's got him over-sensitive and prickly. He reeks of sex. He's probably flaking dried semen all over the inside of his escort's coat.*

*Gunshots crack somewhere behind. John flinches, and a big hand shoves his head down even further. "They're not after you. Don't give them a target."*

*John swallows the hysteria. Ten minutes ago, he was wrapped around Jim in their palatial hotel four-poster, the two of them warm and lazy in the afterglow. How the hell was that giving anyone a target? "Where's Jim?" he asks finally. His toes curl against the floorboard, carpet stinging against scraped feet. "Did he get out?"*

*Jim's hired man whips the car around a corner, handily controlling the drift. "As far as I know." The shrug filters into his tone. "They're supposed to meet us at the airstrip. My job's to get you there without any extra holes."*

*John pulls the jacket tighter around his shoulders. The driver doesn't sound like he's smirking, but that had to be a barb. Jim's people shield John for a price; they ferry him, cater to him, mister and sir him, and they're all completely unimpressed. Not that John has much use for most of them, either. He doesn't ask their names these days.*

*Most of them don't last long enough for it to matter, anyway. People die around Jim Moriarty. It's their fourth anniversary, for Christ's sake, and they were nearly assassinated in bed. There might be bodies back at the hotel by now. John can't help imagining red puddles cooling in the plush carpet, and his stomach turns. It's one thing to know Jim's conducting illegal business over his smartphone. It's another to hear the bullets slamming into the wall over his head.*

*The rest of the drive is quiet; no more shooting and no more talking, for which John thinks he's just as grateful. When they roll to a stop by the waiting jet, the driver signals John to stay down while he gets out for a recce. John tucks his hands under his arms and waits, shivering. He wants to go home. He wants a hot shower and a warm cuppa. Mostly he wants Jim.*

*A tap on the glass signals the all-clear. John climbs out when the door opens, the driver holding it for him like a bloody chauffeur. There's an awkward pause in which he's not sure whether to thank the man. Or what to do about the coat. His ears flush hot despite the cold air—the thing just about covers his arse, if he stands perfectly still, and doesn't hide the pale*

*smears across his thighs at all. Is he expected to give it back, and run bollocks-out for the airstair?*

*“Happy anniversary, Mister Watson.” The driver’s cigarette glows briefly, illuminating a face too hard, too bored to be amused. He jerks his head toward the jet. “Keep the jacket.”*

Moran wrangles a taxi as coolly as a man who hasn’t just broken some stupid kid’s arm. He’s not happy. His eyes are dark behind the mild expression, and John can see the violence lurking in his shoulders. Not sure he’d want answers even if hearing them weren’t likely to get the cabbie killed, he pushes the tension back with idle rugby chat for the short drive back to the penthouse.

Sebastian pays. John heads inside, breezing through the building’s double doors with a short nod to the doorman, and waits for Sebastian to catch up at the lifts. He doesn’t bother with the vacuous chatter this time; just lurks in the overhang of Moran’s silence till they reach the flat proper. He hangs both their jackets in the foyer closet. He doesn’t touch Moran’s bag.

Sebastian promptly vanishes into the depths of the flat; casing the place; updating himself on any changes they’ve made and pinpointing blind spots. Leaving him to it, John heads to the kitchen to put the kettle on, and then drops into his favourite armchair in the informal conversation nook to wait.

He gives Sebastian a dryly considering look when the man joins him again. “Just in the neighbourhood, were you?”

“Something like that.” Sebastian prowls the room for a minute, glancing over the furnishings and decor. “Strictly on the clock.”

Well, hell. That ramps Jim’s shiny new project from ‘dubious’ to ‘catastrophic.’ Sebastian’s only on husband-sitting duty when Jim is planning to piss off someone dangerous. “And I suppose the details are need-to-know.”

Sebastian spreads his hands easily. “Welcome to the club, doc.”

John rolls his eyes and glares at the empty fireplace. “You’re lying.” Sebastian spends more time running things for Jim than he does with a weapon in his hands. There’s no chance he doesn’t have at least some idea. “So Jim’s off bull-baiting and you’re playing stupid. I’ll have the handsy chavs back, thanks.”

Sebastian flashes him an arid grin and rests an arm atop the fireplace mantel. Still standing, John notes belatedly; he never sits before John invites him. He has manners from here to Dublin when he wants to use them.

John rubs his face with one hand, and flicks his other at the loveseat diagonal to his chair. Moran takes two steps and flops down into it with a graceful pivot. John squints at nothing in particular, letting the silence stretch for a minute. “I don’t like it,” he mutters finally.

Sebastian shrugs, stretching his arms across the back of the seat and flexing his fingers till the knuckles pop. “Neither do I,” he drawls. “But it doesn’t matter much what you or I think,

does it? We jump when he says jump.”

“Fantastic.” The word’s so bitter it burns on John’s tongue. He’s not even angry, really—hell, willful ignorance plays a big part in his continued sanity around here. It’s just irritating, the blatant reminder of his station. He hauls himself back to his feet, grimacing as the bruises twinge spitefully. “I’ll shake the dust off the duvet in the second bedroom. I assume you’ve brought kit?” He doesn’t wait for Sebastian’s nod. “Keep it to yourself. I don’t want to know.”

Moran throws him a sharp salute, making no move to get up. “Yessir.”

John just snorts. “Shut up.”

### **xxiii.**

It’s nice having someone around the flat who isn’t Jim. John doesn’t see Moran very often. Granted, he’s a psychopath in his own right, but he’s an amiable one. He’s also the only person in the world John can have an honest conversation with about the flaming crazy that is their lives.

John texts his husband once, a short request for proof of life and/or sanity. Sebastian takes a few calls, but he’s not crisp enough to have Jim on the other end of any of them.

John’s got nowhere to be till his shift tomorrow afternoon, so he and Sebastian settle in to play poker over a brunch of beer and cigarettes. John doesn’t get to indulge very often. Jim hates it when John tastes like cigarettes, and of course any doctor should know better. But John doesn’t get to roll around in manly stereotypes very often, and Sebastian can appreciate a decent game, especially while he’s holed up babysitting the boss’s bitch. He’s going to be stuck on like a barnacle until Jim stands him down, and God only knows when that will be.

The first hand John’s dealt is rubbish. Ace of diamonds, ten of spades, two red sevens, and a four. John flips ten quid into the pile and tosses the ten and four face-down. “How’s Ishan’s leg coming along?” he asks around his fag. It tastes horrible. It’s fantastic. “Is he keeping the boot on, at least?”

Sebastian snorts and taps ash off his cigar, flicking a new pair of cards across the table and switching out three of his own. “Takes it off every time I turn around. He’ll bloody well cripple himself at this rate. It’d serve him right, stupid bastard.”

John can’t dig up much sympathy. Ishan’s a leg-breaking heavy, himself. He must be a fairly useful one, if Jim bothered to get him patched up. How convenient that Jim’s married to a doctor; funnelling criminal lackeys through A&E had to be a security headache, back before John earned his stripes.

He snags the cards and eyes his new hand critically. Two pair now, aces high, plus the queen of hearts. The sevens aren’t much of a supporting cast. John exhales smokily and tosses in another tenner, reaching for his beer. “I’m not an orthopaedic surgeon. He buggers that leg up, he’s on his own.”

“Mm.” Moran squints at his cards, giving nothing away. He ups the pot by twenty. “Sascha’s face is getting prettier, now the swelling’s gone down. He’d thank you if he were less of a cunt.”

“I thought that was his job title.” John eyes Sebastian’s fingers with companionable suspicion. He’s toying with a few more notes, giving the impression he might go all in. A ploy, and a good one. Moran lies with style and subtlety when he wants to. John cocks an eyebrow and tosses in a matching note. “Planning to tell Jim about the kids from last night?”

“Nah.” Sebastian flashes a bright smirk. “Little twats. A broken arm and a busted face is good enough for them. Call.”

They drop their cards on the table, and John grins at Moran’s pair of queens. “And that’s good enough for me. Up the ante, shall we?”

#### **xxiv.**

Breakfast the next morning is companionable. Sebastian perches himself on one of the stools at the kitchen counter, drinking coffee while he does the Times crossword, while John’s stood over the hob, working on banana chocolate chip pancakes, the BBC morning news playing in the background.

He’s barely listening to a report about a utilities accident when he sees Sebastian glance up at the telly and then narrow his eyes.

“That wasn’t a gas main.”

“What?” John turns toward the television to watch, wide-eyed, as the camera pans over the rubble that used to be a block of flats on Baker Street.

Peoples’ homes.

“Oh, fuck,” John whispers. “Jim’s lost his sodding mind.”

## Chapter 13

**xxv.**

“He’s barking mad,” Sebastian growls, one hand braced around his temples like he’s trying to hold his head together. He folds the paper and throws it at John. “How the hell am I supposed to keep this circus running when he’s painting targets on our backs?”

John catches the paper before it can fall into his congealed breakfast. He glances over the grainy photos—a slumping pile of rubble and exposed infrastructure, the usual drama shots of caution tape and police, and one of a little cluster of plainclothes detectives—and shakes his head sharply. “Nobody will ever catch up to him. Targets or not.” Jim’s lightyears ahead of anyone on the right side of the law. Which is a hell of a thing to be glad for, come to think of it.

Sebastian’s grunt sounds suspiciously non-committal. John narrows his eyes at him briefly, but he might as well stare down a rock. He sets his jaw and scans the article more closely. Seventeen dead, dozens injured, and they’re still claiming it was a bloody gas main. John has to wonder whether that’s for the public’s benefit. If Moran can tell the difference through a television screen, surely someone on-site will suss out the truth sooner or later?

John folds the paper next to his cold plate and broods over the largest photo, wondering what the toff in the 1500 quid coat was saying to put that expression on the police inspector’s face.

Silence reigns till Moran finishes his tepid pancakes and leaves the table with a bare nod. He’ll probably turn up in the practice room if John heads up to start punching things. Which sounds like the best idea John’s likely to have today.

**xxvi.**

The rhythm of wrapping his hands is particularly satisfying when John’s seething. Thumb, wrist, palm, knuckles, palm, knuckles, thumb; he thinks comforting vulgarities into each turn of the bandage. He refuses to give the bag a face, though, even in his imagination. Moran says it helps; channels the bad shit into a focal point.

John tried it exactly once. Envisioned Jim’s smug smile at the end of a left hook, with a glimmer of that face crumpling in surprise, an imagined burst of red blood. He knows violence too well not to have seen every little detail, and it hadn’t helped. It’d left him feeling sick, like a rot setting in down deep. He’d kissed Jim passionately that night, and refused to explain why.

A few stretches loosen up his arms and core, and then he slaps his taped fists together and steps up to the bag. It’s easy to get lost in the hypnotic staccato and sway of jabs and swings. His mouth twitches with amusement at the recollection of his first time working a heavy bag. No tape, just bare flesh on leather. He’d had bruises between his knuckles for a week. These

days John's job demands more care with this kind of thing. He needs his hands intact and fully functional.

The bag responds to his impacts with a jolt like pistol recoil—a backlash that travels from his hand up through into his shoulder with each shot. With each blow, a bit of the angry tension crumbles away. He's got plenty to go around, and *fuck you for that, Jim*, but it still feels good. Clean.

"When's the last time you put in practice on your hand-to-hand?"

John glances over to see Moran standing in the doorway, studying his technique with cool eyes. He's barefoot in loose track bottoms, a worn grey tee belying the solid frame beneath. John blinks at him blandly. "Aside from last night's practical demonstration?"

Moran tosses his towel on the bench by the door and walks over to the mats, giving John a critical tilt of his head. "Doc, a five-year-old girl could've fended off those wastes of space."

"Fantastic. Have Jim hire one of those next time. Unless you can beat a penny-sweet salary." Ignoring the dry snort he gets in response, John catches the heavy bag to stall its swing, then starts prowling in a lazy circle in Moran's direction. He can always use more practice, it's true. Besides, the bag was starting to calm him down, and John doesn't feel like being calm yet.

Moran plucks idly at the hem of his shirt, settling into an easy stance and lowering his head ever so slightly in invitation. John rolls his shoulder, flexes his taped fingers at his sides. It's mostly a tease, a play at equal footing; they both know Sebastian could snap John's neck like a dandelion stem. If John is quicker and meaner in a fight, it's because he learned at a disadvantage.

This particular morning, though, he's in the mood to start shit. Moran slaps aside his first swing with an open hand and shoots John an annoyed look. He doesn't take John seriously when he's this sloppy. It grates on John's temper, curls his lip and drives him in closer, making up for finesse and focus with sheer persistence. He feels angry enough to batter down a brick wall, which is essentially what he's up against. It's a rush when he finally breaks through Moran's irritated defenses and slugs him hard enough to get a grunt out of him.

And then the world upends and he's hip-tossed to the floor like an unruly five year old. John lays flat and blinks, winded, re-orienting. Sebastian sets his hands low on his hips and raises his brows. "Got that out of your system?" he drawls.

John takes in a deeper breath and nods, accepting the hand up when it's offered. If there's embarrassment to be had, it doesn't register; the low end of John's humiliation scale starts somewhere around the nicest shit Jim pulls, and escalates from there. He mirrors Sebastian's stance, drumming his fingers on his hips a moment. "Right. Let's go again."

It's not exactly a reset button, but it'll do. Instead of building off his fury, his frustration, John tamps it all down into a stony core and goes after Moran with wide-open senses and muscle memory. It's gratifying when Sebastian closes his hands and engages for real.

They trade blows and blocks, circling, testing, more boxing than brawling. The gentility never lasts long. Moran backs off a lazy step or two, flickers a fighting grin, then charges him.

John turns with him and grabs, riding Moran's momentum to shove him into the near wall. An immediate dive and roll to the right is ingrained self-preservation—Sebastian runs a few steps *up the fucking wall* and throws himself back in John's direction. It's like winging a jaguar at a trampoline. John learned fast not to stay still, dealing with shit like that.

Impressive as it is, though, recovering from the landing takes Sebastian just long enough for John to close in and get a couple of good hits. Hammer fist to the ribs, cross to the hips, but he doesn't get clear fast enough to avoid Sebastian's forearm block turning into a grapple. John goes for his legs, trying to take Moran down first, and they tangle with each other. John's not sure which of them's got it till his shoulders hit the mat and Sebastian drops astride him.

John pants against the weight on his chest, obediently motionless under sudden pressure at his neck and dominant wrist. Moran's thin tee is dark with sweat, and his thighs are warm and tight against John's ribs. "Fight to kill," he says lowly, his hand cupped firmly round John's throat, "or you don't deserve to live." His grip on John's wrist tightens till the bones creak.

Moran's philosophy on survival; John's listened better than he knows. He sets his jaw and holds Sebastian's eyes, breathing hard, sweat prickling at the small of his back.

Anyone sane would be a little nervous, lying pinned beneath a paid killer with calluses a mile thick. John's just angry, brimming with endorphins, and his life is twisted enough that the paid killer is probably his best ally. It makes him reckless. He shifts a bit, flicks a glance downward, and gives Sebastian his best bored-Jim impression. "So... is this the bit where you shove your cock down my throat, or...?"

If Moran's at all startled, John can't see it. The weight abruptly lifts, and Sebastian flops down next to him in a controlled sprawl, laughing low in his chest. "Don't think I wouldn't, if Jim wouldn't murder me for it."

Content to stay where he is for the moment, John arches his spine and stretches out, groaning. "Yeah, well. I only keep you around for the scenery." Which brings him right back round to those blown-out flats, and oh, yes, he's still bloody furious. He huffs out a short sigh. "Go again?"

# Chapter 14

## Chapter Notes

Bob here! So many apologies for the delay on this update; my internet access at home is gone and real life prevents me from getting to a wifi hotspot a lot of the time. PA is so patient with me. ;\_;

Hope the long chapter makes up for the wait!

### xxvii.

Two days after, Jim blows in like a gale force wind, tossing his tailored jacket over a chair and singing out a greeting at the top of his lungs. “Hel-lo, darling!” He swings John into a warm, energetic kiss and pulls off with an exaggerated *mwah!* “I hope the help’s treating you all right?”

John processes the well-worn fit of Jim’s body to his own, the familiar cologne filling his nostrils, and skips from startlement to fury in two seconds. It’s as though the past three days of deliberate stress-release haven’t happened. “We’ve had wild shags in four rooms so far,” he snarls against Jim’s mouth, ignoring Moran’s strangled cough from the sitting room. He’ll have to buy the man a good bottle of apology whiskey, later.

“Only four?” Jim chirps. “Can I watch you christen the rest?”

“Don’t tempt me.” John sets his hands on Jim’s shoulders and pushes him away. Surprisingly, Jim goes without a fuss. “Are you out of your bloody mind?” John hisses, lowering his voice even though they’re well past caring whether Moran hears them fighting. “Blowing up bits of London? *Really?*”

Jim just chuckles, bouncing on his heels, thoroughly pleased. “My opening act. Suitably dramatic, I thought, considering.”

John stares at him, aghast. “Jesus, that wasn’t—opening act? Meaning, what, you’ve got more bombs set?”

It gets him a sweet smile, the kind that crinkles Jim’s eyes. “That would be telling,” Jim tuts, reaching for John’s hands. “Oh, honey, it’s going to get *so much better* before I’m done. Just you wait.”

Christ. It’s like having a cat—right down to the hissing, clawing, and dropping dead things at John’s feet like Father Christmas on delivery day. John wraps his fingers around Jim’s and squeezes hard, trying to get his attention. “Jim, please. Will you listen to me? Whatever game you’re playing, for whatever reason, you know I don’t care, just don’t do anyth—”



Jim stops him with a kiss. It's rubbish, just a quick mash of lips with no finesse. John splutters to an awkward halt mid-word, surprised and annoyed, even more so when Jim chucks him gently under the chin. "You really are adorable when you worry about me," he confides. And, to Sebastian: "Isn't he just?"

Moran's on his way out, bag slung over his shoulder. He shoots a dry look at John as he passes by. "Adorable," he deadpans. Somehow, it's not quite an insult. "Later, Doc. Jim."

The door closes, and Jim's already sliding one arm around John's middle, swaying them both whimsically to music that isn't playing. Light fingers trace the bruises stamped into John's jaw and neck. "I like your new paint job," Jim murmurs fondly. "Did you make him choke you out? My little tiger; you never stop fighting, do you?"

John swallows hard. He's angry, still. Jim's taking too many risks, erasing lives, hurting innocent people—and John can't even claim he's more concerned for those strangers than he is for his idiot husband. "I hate it when you're reckless," he mutters. "Nobody gets to you, isn't that what you've always said? What happened to the ghost in the wires?"

"Mm." Jim hums noncommittally. He slips his foot between John's, scrapes his short stubble over John's cheek and whispers warmth into his ear. "Do I feel like a ghost, Johnny?" His palm splays at the base of John's spine as he nudges them into motion, backing John with intent toward the nearest wall. "Maybe I am. I'd haunt you, you know."

John rolls his eyes, exhaling irritably through his nose. "That really isn't funny." He flattens himself against the wall and picks at Jim's tie, ignoring the slow rub of Jim's groin at the hollow of his hip. "What happens to me if you really do get caught? Or if somebody gets in a lucky shot?" He unravels the half-Windsor with a few short, frustrated tugs. "Does that factor in at all?"

Jim huffs in amusement and pushes John's hands away, plucking his collar and cuffs loose himself. "Someone's in a mood, hm?" He tugs his sleeves up halfway and crowds John into the wall, forearms braced to either side of John's head, hips grinding more insistently at the top of John's thigh. "Shh, lovely," he breathes distractedly. "Everything's going exactly to plan."

It's more aggravating than arousing. Jim must've been simmering at half-mast before he got in, if he's this wound up already. John turns his face to one side, resting loose hands at Jim's shoulders and doing nothing whatsoever to contribute. He can't stop his prick taking an interest, but he's really not in the bloody mood for this.

Fortunately for Jim, he doesn't seem to need much in the way of encouragement. He smears hot, aimless kisses over John's cheek and the corner of his mouth, hands skating from John's shoulders to his waist to his arse. John hisses despite himself as he's hitched into the rhythmic grind. His cock is filling out now, trapped in his jeans and beginning to ache with the rough stimulation. "Any day now, James," he growls.

Jim jerks against him with a desperate sound and tugs John's thigh up over his hip. "God, I want you," he bites out. "Later." He scoops up John's other leg, takes him off the floor

entirely and shoves him back into the wall, bracing them both while John scrabbles for purchase. “Later.”

Thrown off-balance, John digs his fingers into Jim’s shoulders and clamps his legs around his waist. Jim’s rocking them both quickly now, filthy swivels of hip and spine. He doesn’t mean to last. Definitely doesn’t mean to get John off, either, the bastard. John can’t stop the groan bubbling in his throat, the layers of fabric denying him anything more than a taunting pressure behind his balls as Jim ruts up into him. Jim’s going to come just like this, panting and wrecked in his thousand-quid trousers. Under other circumstances, John would be dazed with lust at the thought.

Something twists in John’s chest. He tangles his hand in Jim’s hair and bucks his pelvis forward, riding Jim’s thrusts spitefully. It’s gratifying, the way Jim’s breath gusts out in a shaky gasp. He loses his rhythm almost immediately, frantic shudders giving way to sharp, staccato shoves. The noise he makes when he comes is undignified, almost startled. John bites his tongue before he can voice anything like *was it good for you?*, because really, it always is.

Jim lets John down slowly, still breathing hard through the aftershocks. He nuzzles, drops kisses across John’s lips and nose and cheeks, and utterly ignores the swell of John’s erection against his front. “Sweet Jesus,” he murmurs huskily. “My John. Don’t know how I get on without you.”

John closes his eyes and allows the affection for a few moments. It’s nice to be missed, he supposes. He sets his hands on Jim’s chest, pushing gently to separate them and then cupping Jim’s face in his palms. “I am so fucking furious with you,” he says, low and serious. He kisses Jim’s mouth once, brief but deep. “Go have a shower.”

## xxviii.

When Jim finally comes back downstairs, John is already installed on the sofa, staring down at a library book. He’s ignored his erection into soft submission, and managed to stamp out the hottest bits of his temper. An uncomfortable knot remains coiled low in his gut. “Dinner’s in the fridge if you’re hungry,” he says, without looking up from the page.

Jim hums agreeably and pads off toward the kitchen. A few minutes later, he wanders back to the living area with a carton of cold Chinese and two glasses of wine. His hair is damp, and he’s wearing only his dressing gown. In for the evening, then, or at least part of it. He passes John one of the glasses and sinks down beside him, slouching and sighing in the manner of a man who hasn’t relaxed in a week. “If anyone calls me in the next three hours, you’re dealing with it,” he grouches.

John snorts, clinking his glass to Jim’s out of habit. “Right. ‘Jim Moriarty’s phone, John speaking. Sure, Operation Fence That Rubbish is a go. No, Mr. Moriarty’s indisposed, hasn’t even got any pants on, do you *really* want me to bother him?’”

Jim starts laughing somewhere around *fence that rubbish*. He leans over to kiss John’s cheek firmly. “Sweetheart, I wouldn’t trade you for ten good fences right now, and believe me—I

could use a few of those.” He digs his chopsticks into the carton. “What else did you get up to? Aside from shagging Sebastian rotten.”

“Not much.” John sets his book aside, hiking an elbow up on the sofa arm and watching Jim eat. “We played poker, watched some telly. I had to call off a shift and turn down another.” His lips take on a slightly sour tilt. “I’ll be annoyed if I lose my job, you know.” He’s lucky Sarah’s a forgiving employer.

“Mm-hm.” Jim deftly offers him a szechuan shrimp. “Can’t be helped. I’d be more annoyed if you put yourself in harm’s way.”

Which is rich, coming from Jim, but John knows there’s no point in wasting his breath. He nips the shrimp tidily from Jim’s chopsticks and washes it down with a swallow of wine, changing the subject. “You said you weren’t finished with whatever you’re doing. Should I bother stripping the guest bed?”

“Save yourself the effort.” Jim sips his wine and licks a stray drop from the rim. “I’m mid-move. I’ll call Moran off in a day or two, once the loose ends are snipped.”

John watches Jim’s chopsticks for a minute or so, black lacquer working with the quick efficiency of a hungry spider. “Sebastian doesn’t seem very happy with what’s going on,” he offers quietly. “I thought he had your ear.”

Jim quirks an indulgent smile and feeds John another bite. “Daddy still makes the rules. Don’t bring it up again tonight, all right?”

John eats his shrimp.

The food is good, even chilled, and they finish it in no time. John puts both the carton and Jim’s mostly-empty wine glass to the side. “Come on, then,” he says, shifting to the end of the cushion and patting his leg. “Lie down and have a kip while it’s quiet.”

Jim swells up and then sighs it out like a tired puffer fish. “I can’t. I’ve got a stray corpse and a deadline for making it creatively unrecognizable.”

Of course he does. John snorts. “Just blow it up.” He can’t help cracking a smile at the side-eye Jim gives him, as if James Moriarty has room to judge anybody else’s weirdness. “It was a story Molly told me. Some nutter with a mad Victorian name who visits her in the mortuary and explodes corpses for science.”

Jim considers in silence for a moment. His palm is warm on John’s cheek as he leans in for a thoroughly appreciative snog. He tastes like spices and wine. John isn’t too surprised by the sudden affection; Jim’s softened over much stranger things than talk of exploding corpses.

“You marvelous, marvelous thing,” Jim says lowly when he lets John go. His eyes are strangely intense. “My dear Doctor Watson. Hardly brilliant, not even terribly clever, but somehow you’re my best catalyst.” He grins, sharp and bright. “All right. I’ll blow it up, just for you.”

John wrinkles his nose, parsing the compliment. *Catalyst*. Brilliant, now he's Jim's crime muse. "Wonderful. Now that's settled..." He taps his leg again with a pointed lift of his eyebrows. "You'll get a headache if you don't sleep, and you always go out like a light with me. Come on."

Jim just chuckles, catching John's mouth for another szechuan-spicy kiss. "I suppose I could stand to spend more time in your lap," he murmurs, rubbing their noses together. He curls up on the cushions, yawns and nuzzles his cheek against John's thigh. "Mm. Dynamite, maybe. Classic. Like a clove orange, only with fuses."

John retrieves his book and strokes his fingers over his husband's cheek, rubbing the nape of his neck soothingly. "Go to sleep."

Jim's snoring before John turns the next page.

## **xxix.**

Somehow, Jim looks smaller when he sleeps; years younger and softer. Younger than John, these days. He looks so normal, like this, as if humanity is just a retractable skin he puts on and pulls off to suit himself.

John pets Jim's sleek hair till it dries, and generally fails to read his book. Seventeen people are dead, and the perpetrator is sleeping like a baby in his lap. Mourning anyone these days feels hypocritical, though. John can hardly pretend he hasn't made his choices.

*Three days of waiting, and John still doesn't know anything beyond what Moran's told him: Jim is missing. Not that anyone has to tell John the odds, when he's seen so much of the arena Jim commands. There's every chance that Jim's dead by now. Maybe in literal pieces. He can't decide whether he'd give anything to know, or anything not to.*

*He's been wound tight, waiting for the phone to ring, but when it does, he nearly bangs his head off the hanging pot rack.*

*"We found him," Moran says. "Get a medi-kit together and be ready when your ride gets there. Ten minutes."*

*The ride is a blur of street lights and traffic. When they arrive, John is escorted through the muted chaos of an operation wrapping up, heavily-armed ranks of hired killers parting before him with a few grunts of recognition. He hears the low murmurs as old hands educate new meat. Whether he's the doctor or the bitch, he doesn't really care.*

*Standing sentry at a nondescript door, knuckles and faded sleeves speckled with other men's blood, Sebastian Moran cuts a dangerous figure. He nods in acknowledgement as John approaches. "Doctor Watson." He jerks his chin toward the room behind him. "Haven't had time to move him. Figured you'd want to check for internal damage anyway."*

*It's vaguely reassuring that someone thought to keep Jim still. He squares his shoulders and ducks past Moran, trying to steel himself for the worst.*

*It's not the worst, but John's breath still catches. Slumped in a heavy wooden chair, arms dangling limp at his sides, Jim's stripped down to his trousers, cold white toes and the soft, vulnerable folds of his belly on display. His hair is a clumped mess of stale sweat and grime.*

*"Jim." John barely registers the pain as his knees hit the hard floor. His palm cradles Jim's bruised jaw, ginger fingers instinctively finding the beat in his neck. "Jim, talk to me."*

*Jim's chest rises and falls—harsh, tired, but Jesus, alive—and one dark eye finally peels open, the other too swollen to follow suit. He blinks blurrily down at John. "Mm?"*

*It's a hoarse, hurting sound, but John can't help a tiny smile. "That'll do. Hey." He leans up and presses his lips to Jim's mostly unmarked left temple. "Hi," he breathes again, more shakily. "It's all right now. I've got you."*

*Jim is shaking, too, little hitches in his shoulders and middle. John looks up, alarmed, and only recognizes the horrible little sounds when Jim lifts his arm to stroke stiff fingers over John's hair. Jim's laughing. "That face, sweetheart. Were you worried?" His voice is a mushy slur of baffled pleasure.*

*Christ almighty, John thinks, and dabs away the fresh bead of blood from Jim's lip. Apparently he should have worried more. Only near-death could bring Jim that close to a human emotion.*

*Jim doesn't speak again until much later, after he's clean and patched-up and lying on a safehouse sofa, his head propped on John's thigh. John strokes his shower-damp hair and fails to keep his eyes open. He's not been able to rest since Jim went missing. He can't remember the last time he was so tired.*

*He's nearly asleep when Jim's hand presses against his abdomen, medical tape catching on the soft, well-washed jumper. "You were worried," Jim murmurs roughly. "Johnny? Let's have a baby."*

**xxx.**

John's got less than an hour left at the surgery. It's been a day of sniffles, aches, and one unmentionable rash. He won't be sorry to get home. One more vague stomach complaint to go, and then he'll have to find some other distraction for the rest of the day.

He's needed distracting, lately. His fertile period started yesterday, and Jim hasn't shown his face since he took off three days ago. He should be glad. He *is* glad, he supposes grimly, except he nurses the niggling worry that he'll be made to pay for this bit of good luck.

Like hell he's going to text Jim, though. Proof of life can wait another day or two.

A blur appears in his periphery: his gastrointestinally distressed patient at the door. "Excuse me, Doctor?" Tall bloke. Dark fabric. Voice so spectacularly unassuming that it takes John a moment to focus. "The receptionist said to come in."

“Yes, take a seat, Mr Hudson.” Putting his mobile away, John stands to offer his hand, taking in his patient’s dramatic profile and peaky skin tone at a glance. “My husband has a coat just like that,” he remarks. “Only he wears the collar turned down.”

The man smiles like he doesn't know how his face works. “It was a gift.”

Something about him strikes John as familiar. Those cheekbones would be hard to misplace, at least. He nods at the coat rack. “All right. Coat off, please, and we’ll see what we can see.”

Hudson drops onto the exam table, long legs dangling, and suffers himself to be manhandled, prodded, and strapped into a blood pressure cuff while he answers John’s questions about his digestive history. “You seem a bit young for a doctor,” he comments as John steps in close to check his eyes and throat. “Have you been practising long?”

He quirks a wryly polite smile and cups a hand to that long neck. “A few years, yes. Open your mouth, please.” He doesn't look *that* young. Is Hudson flirting?

Fucking hormones. He always runs warm this time of the month. The stupidest things turn him on like a light switch. He can’t help noticing how strong and warm Hudson’s thighs are through his thin dress trousers. Or the thick, dark curls nestled behind the man’s ears, tickling John’s fingertips. *Get a grip, Watson.*

Something like annoyance or confusion flickers briefly at the corners of Hudson’s lips, but he obeys. John shines a light in his mouth, then palpates his throat, firmly ignoring the knees splayed wide to either side of his hips. John tilts his head gently to the right to check his glands, and then pauses. Between that not-quite-expression and the angle, it’s obvious. He does recognize those cheekbones.

It’s the toff from the newspaper. The one who’d been standing with a police inspector—at the site of Jim’s bombing. Christ.

“Um,” he says after a still, silent second. He quirks a polite smile and straightens up, his mouth moving automatically as his mind races. “Why, worried about my expertise?”

“Oh no.” Hudson flashes him another bright, shallow grin. “It’s just that you have a good touch for a young doctor.”

“Ah. Well. Thank you.” John turns to poke at his computer, ostensibly checking the man’s medical history while he very, very quietly panics. It could be a coincidence. It *has* to be a coincidence. Except that this bloke’s expression seems to slip like a mask, and John’s surgery is nowhere near Baker Street.

Coincidence or not, John hasn’t survived this long by taking chances. He loops his stethoscope back over his neck and pastes on an apologetic smile, turning back to his patient. “You know, Mr Hudson, you may be right. I might suggest a more experienced doctor for you. Possibly a GI specialist.”

As John voices his lies, Hudson’s smile fades to something harder, and his eyes narrow. It’s a more natural look on him. “I’m afraid there isn’t another doctor in the world quite so

qualified as you are, Doctor Watson.” A pause. “Or is it Watson-Moriarty, properly?”

## End Notes

We're both deeply, genuinely grateful for the talented souls who've gifted us with fanart for this story. You're *amazing*. ♥

Check out the works linked to AO3 accounts, and these, hosted on other sites:

- [Poor John](#) by xitenshiix-2 on DeviantArt
- [Illustration of part XX/Chapter 10](#) by deutexmycroft/archiaart
- [Cover inspired by part II/Chapter 1](#) by Sherlock'sScarf (now also on [AO3](#))
- [Cover illustration](#) by deutexmycroft/archiaart

Works inspired by this one

[Gold and kohl - fanart to Odalisque](#) by [kmary](#).

[Cover for Odalisque](#) by [moonblossom graphics \(moonblossom\)](#).

[Odalisque - cover for bobross and PrettyArbitrary](#) by [SherlocksScarf](#)

[The Grace of Him on a Divan](#) by [orphan\\_account](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!